

Q #1: It seems that at some point all theologies converge, and in so doing, they leave behind their individual forms and become pure Truth. I am having trouble dealing with this because - it implies that the Christian forms of the Course are ... (forgive me) ... disposable and temporary. Knowing this I sometimes find myself becoming impatient with the continuous anthropomorphism of the text, and wish it would be more direct. Needless to say, this interferes with my personal progress, though not with my reverence. In your experience is this a common phenomenon? Does it pass with time? Is it just an ego-strategy? How should I handle it?

A: The Course's Christian context has been a problem for students right from the beginning, and they have raised the same important question you have. To restate and slightly expand your question, why does a universal message have to come in such a specific religious framework? And does that not inevitably breed further separation, at the same time denying the universality of the specific religion?

Indeed, the Christian language of *A Course in Miracles*, not to mention the presence of Jesus throughout the material, can pose a great challenge to many students. If their ego is looking for a way to invalidate the material, or throw up obstacles to learning, then Jesus and Christianity can be helpful allies in this battle against the truth. On the other hand, asking the Holy Spirit for help can introduce yet another classroom in which forgiveness of our specialness can happily be learned.

While one would never want to restrict *A Course in Miracles* to a particular cultural group, it can nonetheless be said that in the main it is directed towards a Western audience. Its language, cultural expressions, and Freudian, Platonic, and Shakespearean elements, all speak to a reader comfortable within the Western tradition. And it can certainly be said that the predominant influence in the Western world for the past 2000 years has been Christianity, with Jesus clearly being the dominant figure, either as symbol of the love of Heaven, or the special love (and hate) of the ego. And so there could not be a Western student -- Christian, Jew, agnostic, or atheist -- who in one way or another has not been affected by Jesus or the religions that have evolved in his name. Thus the Christian framework of *A Course in Miracles* provides a natural opportunity for students to practice forgiveness of their past experiences.

In the end, of course, all specific symbols disappear into the Oneness of God. But until that day arrives, we need specifics to be the little steps of forgiveness we take towards attaining the non-dualistic reality that lies beyond all dualistic concepts and beyond all symbols. As the workbook says: "God will take this final step Himself. Do not deny the little steps He asks you take to Him" (W.pl.193.13:6,7). Thus, the Christian anthropomorphisms reflect our own anthropomorphic view of ourselves, since in truth we are not bodies or specific persons, but non-human thoughts in the mind. However, as long as we identify with the specific person whose image we see every morning in the bathroom mirror, then, again, we need a learning curriculum that uses specific symbols that meet us in the *condition in which we think we exist* (T.25.I.7:4). Christianity provides us with one of those sets of symbols, and for the opportunity it offers we should all be grateful.

Q #2: As a relatively new student of the Course, I miss the rituals I used to practice from my religious upbringing. Are there any things that a student can do without violating the teachings of the Course?

A: It is true that there are no rituals in *A Course in Miracles*, since its focus is always on changing our *minds* not our *behavior*. However, there is certainly nothing inherently "wrong" with students practicing anything that fosters their spiritual growth with the Course. There are very, very few *shoulds* or *should nots* in the curriculum. As we are told in the manual, "The curriculum is highly individualized" (M.29.2:6), and so students would do well to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The only caution would be not to have the ritual become a substitute for the inner work. As Jesus states in the workbook: "Rituals are not our aim, and would defeat our goal" (W.pl.rv.III.in.4:2). And in the

manual: "Routines as such are dangerous, because they easily become gods in their own right, threatening the very goals for which they were set up." (M.16.2:5).

Q #3: In my line of work, the degree of adherence to detail and precision make the difference between what is perceived as an amateurish job and a professional job. Yet, I have been told by a number of Course students that my line of work isn't important in the big scheme of things, so I should just "let it go" when it comes to administering the quality of the end product. I am confused. Could you please help me understand what I am missing?

A: What you are missing is that some Course students suffer from what we refer to "level confusion." This common error confuses the metaphysical teachings of the Course (Level 1) with the part of the Course that deals only with the illusory dream (Level II). In your question, Level 1 is represented by the "big scheme of things" i.e., "Nothing unreal exists" (T-in.2:3), and Level 2 is represented by you and your line of work, i.e., a body living in a world controlled by a standard of good and bad. As long as you believe you are in this world, it is important that you do the best you can in whatever roles you have chosen. Your specific roles are what constitute the classroom that the Holy Spirit can use to teach you forgiveness. Without the specifics, we can never get to the One Who is beyond the world entirely. Nonetheless, it is relieving to know that, in the end, the work you do does not matter. What matters is with whom you do it. And you can tell with whom you have worked by whether you are peaceful or anxious.

Q #4: After reading your Lighthouse Article "September 11th and the Aftermath" (December 2001), I wonder: Is it ever possible for a Course student to wage a war against terrorists and not be on the actual battlefield with the ego but to be with Jesus instead?

A: Yes, it is possible in principle, since *A Course in Miracles* is not a course in behavior, but rather a course in changing how we think; or better yet, with whom we think. To believe otherwise is to say that there is a situation in the world that the Holy Spirit or Jesus cannot use as an opportunity for us to learn forgiveness.

Considering it takes two people, each joined with the ego, to create a battlefield, one person choosing to think with Jesus would eliminate the battlefield. At that point one would not be waging a war, but rather, paraphrasing from the text, putting a limit on one's ability to miscreate (T-2.III.3:3). As stated in the article, "There is a way of halting aggression, whether it is on the individual or world level, that can be firm and resolute, and yet still be kind." This way is through joining with Jesus. With Jesus by our side, we would see the terrorists as fearful, rather than evil. Recognizing their call for help and love, we would perform whatever action, or inaction, Jesus' love would guide us toward.

Q #5: So what's with all of the male gender-specific language? So far I've not come across one reference to 50% of the world's population. Or are females just another illusion? I still love the Course, but this gender language thing is an annoyance.

A: This question is similar to #10 found in the Foundation's publication, "The Most Commonly Asked Questions About *A Course in Miracles*," authored by Gloria and Kenneth Wapnick. A slightly modified answer from this book is that Jesus does not practice the art of "political correctness." Rather, his Course is written linguistically within the male-dominated Judaeo-Christian tradition, and uses the patriarchal biblical

language on which that tradition is based. Consequently, the Course conforms to this religious culture by using terms that are exclusively masculine. Jesus himself speaks of his use of ego-oriented language:

This course remains within the ego framework, where it is needed....It uses words, which are symbolic, and cannot express what lies beyond symbols (C.in.3:1,3).

And so it is clear that the Course's *meaning* in using this masculine language lies elsewhere. While the *form* of the Course's words is the same as the twenty-five-hundred-year-old Western tradition, its *content* is exactly the opposite. This provides a good example of a principle enunciated twice in the text, that the Holy Spirit does not take our special relationships (the *form*) away from us, but instead transforms them (by changing their purpose -- the *content*) (T.17.IV.2:3,4,5,6; T.18.II.6). Therefore, the reader is given a wonderful opportunity to practice forgiveness by having whatever buried judgmental thoughts are unconsciously present be raised to awareness by the Course's "sexist" language, so that they may now be looked at differently with the Holy Spirit's help. In this way, a special hate (or love) relationship with patriarchal authorities -- religious or secular -- may be transformed into a holy relationship, the relationship now having forgiveness and peace as its purpose, instead of judgment and attack.

In like manner, we can understand the Course's usage of the term *Son of God*. For two thousand years, it has exclusively been used in Christian theology to denote *only* Jesus, the biblical God's *only* begotten Son, and Second Person of the Trinity. Moreover, Jesus' specialness was accentuated by St. Paul's relegating the rest of humanity to the status of "adopted sons" of God (Galatians 4:4). To accentuate the point that he is our equal, Jesus in *A Course in Miracles* uses the same term that heretofore had excluded everyone except himself. Now, however, it denotes *all* people: God's children who yet believe they are bodies and separate from their Source and therefore different from Him. And even more specifically, the term *Son of God* denotes the students who are reading and studying *A Course in Miracles*, a usage clearly made regardless of their gender.

This term is thus deliberately used to help correct two thousand years of what *A Course in Miracles* sees as Christianity's distortion of Jesus' basic message, in this case the perfect equality and unity of the Sonship of God. And so in the Course Jesus presents himself as no different from anyone else in reality (although certainly he is different from us in time). Therefore, to state it once again, the same term -- *Son of God* -- that was used only for Jesus is now used for all of us. Moreover, the term is also used to denote Christ, God's pre-separation creation, His one Son. Again, we see usage of the same *form* as in traditional Christianity, but with a totally different *content*. The phrase *Son of God* can also be easily understood as synonymous with *child*, a term which is also often used in the Course.

The reinterpretation of *Son of God* from exclusive to totally inclusive is crucial to the Course's thought system. And because of Jesus' reason for using this term, students -- men and women alike -- should be vigilant against the temptation to *change* the

Course's "offensive" language. While such practice is understandable, it does serve to undermine one of Jesus' pedagogical purposes. It would be much more in keeping with the teachings of *A Course in Miracles* to leave the form as it is, and change one's mind instead. In these circumstances, one would do well to paraphrase a famous line from the text: Therefore, seek not to change the course, but choose to change your mind about the course (T.21.in.1:7). Therefore, since the Course's form will not be changed, students would be wise to use their reactions as a classroom in which they can learn to forgive, not only Jesus, Helen, or *A Course in Miracles* itself, but also all those in the past (or present) who have been perceived as treating them or others unfairly.

One final note on the subject of the Course's masculine language: It has long been a grammatical convention that pronouns referring back to a neuter noun, such as "one" or "person," take the masculine form of "he." Clearly, since a central teaching of *A Course in Miracles* is that we are not bodies, the issue, once again, is merely one of form or style.

Q #6: Can you please explain how and why the Course is unlike any other spiritual path? I have studied other non-dualistic teachings but seem to always come back to the Course.

A: First, let us say that by non-duality we mean that *A Course in Miracles* recognizes only one dimension of reality -- spirit and the state of perfect oneness, what the Course refers to as the realm of knowledge. Everything else -- the dualistic world of separation and perception, of form and matter, of thinking and concepts -- is illusion, and thus does not really exist.

This non-dualism is what you find in the higher teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism, but rarely in the West. What makes *A Course in Miracles* unique as a spiritual system -- ancient and contemporary -- is its integration of this non-dualistic metaphysics with a sophisticated psychology, heavily based on the insights of Freud and his followers. This means essentially that at the same time that the Course teaches that the world is an illusion and is nothing but a dream, *outside* the Mind of God, we are urged to practice our daily lessons of forgiveness, paying careful attention to our everyday experiences *here*. Key to this integration is the Course's emphasis on *purpose*, the introduction of which idea sets *A Course in Miracles* apart from other spiritual paths. The Course teaches that not only is the world an illusion, but that it is a purposive illusion; the purpose being to make a world of bodies, thoroughly focused on solving the myriad number of physical and psychological problems that beset us daily, clamoring for attention and solution. In this way the *mind*, the true source of our problems, is kept hidden from awareness.

In addition, *A Course in Miracles* is unique among spiritualities in its insistence that we look at the ego -- *the dark side* -- as the way of moving beyond to the light. Its focus, therefore, is not on the truth, but on removing our ego's thought system of guilt, fear,

and attack, which allows the light of truth to shine. As Jesus teaches in one representative passage: "Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all of the barriers within yourself that you have built against it. It is not necessary to seek for what is true, but it *is* necessary to seek for what is false" (T.16.IV.6:1,2).

Q #7: How does one forgive oneself? I have a pen pal in prison who is new to the Course. He is in prison for assaulting his girlfriend. He says he is learning to forgive others but not himself. He is angry and ashamed of himself for hurting her. I can see his actions as a "call for love," a mistake to be corrected and not a sin to be punished. He no doubt was a victim who became a victimizer, and keeps reliving it now. I would tell him to let it go -- "Brother, choose again." But could I say this to myself? I have dealt with depression most of my life and guilt is a familiar companion. My ego's accusations seem overwhelming when I do one thing wrong. I see when I project my guilt onto others and I know it's not helpful to blame and accuse myself when I judge others. But what if I really hurt someone else in some way? I could try to make amends and move on, but I don't think my ego would let me off the hook that easily. I seem only to be able to release myself from guilt by experiencing pain for the length of time my ego dictates. I know there has to be "another way." Why am I kind to others and mean to myself? To top it all off, I seek my addictions to get some relief from the pain of the guilt, and then I feel guilty for indulging in the addiction. I need a way out of this. Can we project guilt onto ourselves as well as others? I know I will come to understand why I don't love myself and why I even hate myself at times. I am still learning. It is ironic that, as my friend in prison is trying to forgive himself, I am in my own prison trying to do the same.

A: It does seem that as we learn more and more to release others from the projections of our own guilt, we then feel stuck with the guilt ourselves. Jesus tells us that "as blame is withdrawn from without, there is a strong tendency to harbor it within" (T.11.IV.4:5). But he goes on to say, "It is difficult at first to realize that this is exactly the same thing, for there is no distinction between within and without" (4:6), and then, "Blame must be undone, not seen elsewhere" (5:3). So how do we do that?

The question you raise, "How does one forgive oneself?", is a good one, but it is actually the wrong question. Because we are still so strongly identified with our egos, we can not forgive ourselves, at least not by ourselves (i.e., on our own, which is the ego state). That is why we need Jesus or the Holy Spirit, or whatever nonjudgmental symbol of love and acceptance we feel comfortable with, to look with us at our "sins". We need someone outside of our guilt-based thought system who knows the truth about who we really are, to whom we can give our guilt, once we have uncovered it and recognized its purpose and its cost. We believe that we are bodies that can hurt and be hurt by each other. Jesus knows we are spirit, the guiltless Son of God who is incapable of attack. We don't believe that and in fact we don't want to believe it, because we still want the separation and our own individuality to be real. And so the forgiveness process must involve joining with someone or something outside of ourselves, such as Jesus,

who knows separation and attack and guilt are not real. We are incapable of this realization on our own, by definition.

The ego, as you are experiencing it for yourself, tells us that we need to atone for our sins through suffering and sacrifice. But that only reinforces our belief that our guilt is real and that God is a punishing God who seeks revenge for our very real sins. And all of our attempts then to gain release through expiation are just forms of magic that fail to address the real problem in the mind. We need to understand that the problem is not the guilt we believe we are experiencing for our transgressions here in the world. Those "sins" are really deliberate distractions, serving the purpose of keeping our focus here in the world, looking for magical solutions to release our guilt (e.g., making amends) or to avoid experiencing it (e.g., addictions). But these only prevent us from looking deeper into our mind to the real source of all of our pain and guilt (and everyone else's) -- the belief that we have not only separated ourselves from our loving Source, but that we have been willing to kill Him, to destroy Love, to be on our own. However, if we can join with a reflection of that Love, such as Jesus or the Holy Spirit, and look at our self-accusations with their loving presence beside us, we will have to realize at some level that we have not destroyed love. And in that recognition, real forgiveness -- for what has never happened -- is possible, dissolving all guilt and releasing us from our self-imposed prison. And then whatever action or behavior, if any, may be most helpful and healing in response to our so-called transgressions against others in the world will simply flow through us.

Q #8: When we try to look at our ego, shall we look without judgment at the problems of the world or shall we only realize, that we choose the ego? Or is this the same?

A: Your questions presuppose that one can choose the ego and look without judgment, which is only possible if one is in a state of denial. The ego knows only judgment, which is based on its fundamental mistake of making the error real. What you want to do is live your life by paying attention to what you think and how you feel. If you find yourself getting angry, fearful, gleeful, etc. from problems in the world, whether personal or general, recognize that you have chosen the ego. It is this recognition that is the "looking." You look at your ego's choices with Jesus beside you. You look without judgment as illustrated in this quote:

Call it not sin but madness, for such it was and so it still remains. Invest it not with guilt, for guilt implies it was accomplished in reality. And above all, *be not afraid of it* (T.18.I.6:7,8,9).

Remembering that the ego is a choice, you simply acknowledge the choice you have made without giving it power to take away your peace.

Q #9: If the ego destroys love like Jesus and his message, then why hasn't Mother Teresa been attacked if she is extending love?

A: The ego cannot "destroy" love, though it does seem to attack love's symbols in the world (Jesus and his message). In spite of the attacks on the historical Jesus, or any attacks on his true message since then, neither his love nor his message has been destroyed. The ego's attacks have no effect on the content. Mother Teresa's extension of love (or anyone's) is invulnerable to attack, whether she be attacked in form or not is irrelevant. She may indeed have been attacked or threatened during her lifetime. The particular form her love took during her life was in fact criticized. The theology and belief system that inspired her is also a form that has been attacked. None of these, however, has had any effect on the loving content of her work or her message. As the Course says: "How weak is fear; how little and how meaningless. How insignificant before the quiet strength of those whom love has joined! This is your 'enemy,' -- a frightened mouse that would attack the universe. How likely is it that it will succeed? Can it be difficult to disregard its feeble squeaks that tell of its omnipotence, and would drown out the hymn of praise to its Creator that every heart throughout the universe forever sings as one?" (T.22.V.4:1,2,3,4,5)

Q #10: We have received a number of questions on the theme of the ego's origin, examples of which are below ...

- i. If Heaven and the Love of God were completely satisfying, why would the Son choose to dream he left?
- ii. If God is perfect and unified, and has a perfect and unified Son, how could an imperfect thought of separation and division have possibly arisen within such a mind?
- iii. Once the Atonement is accepted, how do we know the ego won't be chosen again?
- iv. How can one achieve "an experience" which the Course says will resolve the ego paradox?

A: i, ii, and iii above, posed as questions, are actually statements made by an ego mind enunciating the following: I know the ego is real, and now I want you to explain how it happened and how you know it won't happen again.

The question "how did the ego happen," and all its variations, is undoubtedly the most frequently asked question of students of *A Course in Miracles*. This is only natural to an ego wanting to know where it came from, just as a child would question its parents about its origin. The problem is that the ego itself is not natural. The Course teaches us that in reality the ego never happened. Consequently, how could we ever find an intellectually satisfying answer to the ego's origin between the Course's covers? Those asking how the impossible could ever have happened must identify themselves as separate and individual beings, while anyone answering the question must also agree that the separation did indeed happen. Furthermore, if it happened once, it could happen ad infinitum, and in some respects it does. Day in and day out we are offered the choice of believing in the reality of ourselves as an ego or as a Son of God. Therefore, to wonder about the separation recurring is to make the same mistake of believing it happened in the first place. As the Course says:

"Who asks you to define the ego and explain how it arose can be but he who thinks it real, and seeks by definition to ensure that its illusive nature is concealed behind the words that seem to make it so.

There is no definition for a lie that serves to make it true" (C-2.2:5–3:1).

"The ego will demand many answers that this course does not give. It does not recognize as questions the mere form of a question to which an answer is impossible. The ego may ask, "How did the impossible

occur?", "To what did the impossible happen?", and may ask this in many forms. Yet there is no answer; only an experience. Seek only this, and do not let theology delay you" (C-in.4).

God's Love is the experience the Course speaks of in the quote above. This experience is attained through the process of forgiveness, which removes the blocks to the awareness of love's presence (T.In.1:7). Indeed, the purpose of *A Course in Miracles* is to help us attain this experience.

Q #11: In seeking the "Voice" of the Holy Spirit is there any particular method or practice that facilitates the hearing of this Voice? *A Course in Miracles* seems to say that few ever even hear it and this seems to inhibit the practice of forgiveness.

A: The greatest obstacle to hearing the Voice of the Holy Spirit is the ego's raucous shrieking. The Course tells us the Holy Spirit is "a still small Voice" (T.21.V.1:6). Rather than *seeking* this Voice (which is always with us) we can practice forgiveness by paying attention to the thoughts giving voice to the shrieking in our minds, which is drowning out the Voice of the Holy Spirit. The thoughts of separation, judgment, and attack can be seen for what they are; attempts to defend our ego identity, prove that we are right and God is wrong, guilt is justified, just to name a few. Recognizing these thoughts and accepting responsibility for having chosen them for the specific purpose of *not* hearing the Holy Spirit's Voice is the beginning of the practice of forgiveness *and* of hearing His Voice. If we want to, we then have the opportunity to choose to listen to the Holy Spirit's Voice, which may not actually be a voice, but perhaps the recognition that I am wrong about how I see a situation, person or event, and being willing to see it differently. In this moment then, the recognition, the willingness and the seeing differently *is* the Voice of the Holy Spirit. Everyone is called to hear the Holy Spirit in this way. Few may hear the Voice of the Holy Spirit as an actual voice, which is not necessary for the practice of forgiveness.

Q #12: I have been studying the Course for some years now, and being a psychologist would like to establish a workshop and/or a support group for people trying to live according to its principles. My idea is basically to help people see their projections on others and then make a group effort of asking for help to the Holy Spirit. Would this type of work be in accordance to the principles of the Course and do you have any more suggestions or opinions? I know I have to teach what I need to learn.

A: The bottom line answer to your question is that there are no guidelines in *A Course in Miracles* for behavior; i.e., "What should I do?" Jesus reminds us that his is a course in *cause* (the mind), and not in *effect* (the body, or behavior) (T.21.VII.7:8). Thus, our only function is to ask for help in getting our egos out of the way so that we may be free to be guided in whatever action (or non- action) would be most helpful and loving to *all* people involved in the situation. The following statement is representative of this all-important Course teaching: "Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all of the barriers within yourself that you have built against it. It is not necessary to seek for what is true, but it *is* necessary to seek for what is false" (T.16.IV.6:1,2). And so, before knowing how you should (or should not) proceed with your thought of starting a group, bring to the Holy Spirit any ego investment you might have in having such a group. When you are reasonably sure your ego is safely out of the way, then simply follow His guidance.

One other point: a temptation in any group, especially the kind that you envision, is to circumvent the difficult *individual* effort students are asked to make in order to bring their egos to the Holy Spirit, by diluting the process and displacing the "work" onto the group. At best, groups facilitate this individual work we are all asked to do; at worst, they depreciate the power of our minds to change our decisions and misperceptions, not to mention reinforce the ego's specialness. Good luck!

Q #13: What do you think the phrase "**purification is necessary first**" means?

A: Since this seventh miracle principle, "Miracles are everyone's right, but purification is necessary first" (T.1.I.7:1) comes on page 3 of the text, students of *A Course in Miracles* may believe that Jesus is speaking about purification of the body. Students' past experiences will bring to mind all of their beliefs about the meaning of the word "purification." To some, this may mean the cleansing of the "soul" through baptism, or the atonement of sin through penance and sacrifice. To others, "purification" may have the connotation of ridding oneself of human desires through meditation and disciplined practices. Whatever one believes, their belief forms the foundation on which they begin to build their understanding of the "purification process."

What a surprise to learn, as we make our way through the text, that Jesus is not speaking to us about purifying the body at all. He couldn't be since the Course teaches that the body is an illusion. And being an illusion, there is nothing that we have to do to it or with it. The body does not need to be purified because it is not impure. "It does nothing.... it is neither corruptible nor incorruptible. It *is* nothing." (T.19.IV.C.5:3,4,5). What is impure are our thoughts, which means it is our thoughts that have to be purified, not the body. And the Course's method of "purification" is forgiveness; forgiveness of the one thought of guilt which keeps us separate from the love of God. The Course's "purification process" is illustrated in this quote:

"Give Him your thoughts, and He will give them back as miracles which joyously proclaim the wholeness and the happiness God wills His Son, as proof of His eternal Love. And as each thought is thus transformed, it takes on healing power from the Mind Which saw the truth in it, and failed to be deceived by what was falsely added [guilt]. All the threads of fantasy are gone. And what remains is unified into a perfect Thought that offers its perfection everywhere (W.pl.151.14).

Q #14: Please explain the many passages about healing that seem to refer to healing of the body. It seems to me that, although the Course is very clear about the process of healing our minds of the misperception of our reality, it is equally clear that a healthy body is an effect of a mind that is healed. How does this translate into our personal lives as Course students? I would be satisfied to totally disregard my body and its condition were it not for these many passages. I am left wondering, that although the goal of a healed body is not the point of the teachings, it seems to be something that we can expect as we follow the voice of the Holy Spirit. Why does Jesus even bother to mention this, if it is not something that we should consider?

A: You are correct in saying that a healed body is not the point of Jesus' teachings, nor should it be the goal of our practice of the Course. Jesus talks about the body so much not because *he* thinks it is important or real, but because *we* think it is important and have not recognized its purpose in the ego's strategy of keeping us away from our minds. A major part of the ego's strategy is to have us think that our bodies are completely vulnerable to outside forces -- that both sickness and healing come from the outside. Jesus therefore is correcting this by teaching us about the cause and effect relationship between the mind and the body. That is the point of all of his references to a healed body. The focus really is on the power of our minds, not on having a healed and whole body: "The miracle is useless if you learn but that the body can be healed, for this is not the lesson it was sent to teach. The lesson is the *mind* was sick that thought the body could be sick; projecting out its guilt caused nothing, and had no effect" (T.28.II.22:6-7). This is his point.

But he is teaching us about the Holy Spirit's thought system in the context of what we know best and can relate to best; and for just about all of us that is the world of bodies. He thus uses our bodies to teach us, ultimately, that we are not our bodies. That awareness, however, comes at the end of a long process, which for most of us, takes many, many years to complete. To simply disregard our bodies, therefore, would be to deny ourselves a multitude of opportunities to learn and apply the principles of the Course.

Our physical / psychological needs and experiences constitute the curriculum that Jesus can use to teach us how to interpret and perceive our bodily experiences in a way that will help us undo the separation rather than reinforce it. As long as we still think that without oxygen and food we will die, then we still believe we are bodies, and it would be detrimental to our spiritual advancement to ignore or disregard what we still think is real. As Jesus cautioned us in this regard, "The body is merely part of your experience in the physical world. Its abilities can be and frequently are overevaluated. However, it is almost impossible to deny its existence in this world. Those who do so are engaging in a particularly unworthy form of denial" (T.2.IV.3:8,9,10,11).

The focus, once again, is always on the training of our minds and the way we think, so that at the end, we simply will no longer choose to be limited. This is quite different from merely disregarding the body. As he says in the section "Beyond the Body" in Chapter 18: "What really happens is that you have given up the illusion of a limited awareness, and lost your fear of union." He is teaching us how to get to this stage.

Q #15: I want to change my mind about death. I just had several loved ones "gently lay their bodies aside" yet it is grief that I am drawn to. Grief is not love, therefore it does not exist. Right? I must have made it? Can you articulate for me, based on various Course passages, a general response that would incorporate the Course's theories so that I may apply them to this experience of grief in the world of illusion. What about repression and denial of this experience?

A: The Course never asks us to repress or deny what we are experiencing, whether it be grief or anger or pain or fear or any other ego-based reaction. But before we can change our mind about our feelings, we need first to understand what purpose they serve and why we have chosen to experience them. The feeling of grief reinforces the ego's assertion that loss and death are real and that we can be and are deprived of love. Our experience cries out that Jesus is wrong, that we have been hurt and abandoned and left on our own. We are not being asked to deny that this is our experience. But that does not make it true.

In a graphic description of the world, Jesus says, "The world you see is the delusional system of those made mad by guilt...all the laws that seem to govern it are the laws of death. Children are born into it through pain and in pain. Their growth is attended by suffering, and they learn of sorrow and separation and death. Their minds seem to be trapped in their brain, and its powers to decline if their bodies are hurt. They seem to love, yet they desert and are deserted. They appear to lose what they love, perhaps the most insane belief of all. And their bodies wither and gasp and are laid in the ground, and are no more. Not one of them but has thought that God is cruel" (T.13.in.2:2,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11). And this is what we all believe. Would it not be better if we are wrong?

Jesus reminds us that his life, ending in apparent death, had the purpose of "teaching that communication remains unbroken even if the body is destroyed, provided that you see not the body as the necessary means of communication" (T.15.XI.7:2). But we still see the body as necessary for communication and believe that real communication ends with the death of the body, because we still want to see ourselves as a body. The body affirms our independent existence and its seeming experiences of loss and pain do not seem to reflect simply a choice in our minds. The ego does not want us to remember that the source of all our grief is the belief that we ourselves abandoned love and exiled ourselves from Heaven. Thanks to the ego defense of projection, it feels instead as if these are things that happen to us against our own will, that we are not responsible for how we feel. So we must begin by acknowledging that these are our feelings, but then we must also have a willingness to question whether our interpretation of the world and the events of our lives is correct.

The shift away from our pain and grief is a gradual process because we are afraid of the limitlessness of love, in which our individual lives, our personal selves with our unique personalities, have no meaning. And so Jesus gently reminds us both of the eventual outcome and the process: "Loss is not loss when

properly perceived. Pain is impossible. There is no grief with any cause at all. And suffering of any kind is nothing but a dream. This is the truth, *at first to be but said and then repeated many times; and next to be accepted as but partly true, with many reservations. Then to be considered seriously more and more, and finally accepted as the truth*" (W.pII,284.1:1,2,3,4,5,6, italics added).

These words are not simply to be used as a "holy mantra" proclaiming what is true in order to drown out our ego's interpretation and the accompanying feelings of loss and grief. Implicit in the process of changing our mind is the necessary but at times very unsettling task of looking at what we still want to believe and recognizing both its purpose -- to keep separation and guilt alive -- and its cost to us -- suffering and pain. It is from a growing recognition of what we inflict on ourselves when we accept the ego as our teacher that the motivation develops to ask for help from a different Teacher. With that help, we can begin to see the losses of our lives in a different light, realizing that we do have a choice about what we experience and that we are not the victims of circumstances beyond our control.

Q #16: When I tell myself in meditation that I'm not a body and I'm free I feel peace of mind. But once I open my eyes, there it is -- my body. This doesn't upset me as much as it confuses me. When I look at myself I feel I'm beautiful, but I worry that I might be just feeding the ego again rather than appreciating what I have. It's a puzzle. Any thoughts on this?

A: Although the Course tells us in many places that we are not a body (e.g., Lesson 199 and the following review lessons), it also recognizes that we have a strong investment in seeing ourselves as a body. Jesus observes, "Look at yourself and you will see a body....without a light it seems that it is gone. Yet you are reassured that it is there because you still can feel it with your hands and hear it move. *Here is an image that you want to be yourself. It is the means to make your wish come true.*" (T.24.VII.9:1,3,4,5,6 italics added).

We may have brief experiences where we seem to transcend our bodily identification, as you describe, but we are not likely to maintain this for any length of time because we really don't want to. Our "wish come true" is seeing ourselves as a separate, special, individual self and our body affirms that identity. The Course tells us that although we are the ones who have chosen and made this limited self as our identity (in fantasy but not in reality), we have not wanted to accept responsibility for that decision. And that is because buried deep in our unconscious is the (made- up) belief that we gained this separate self by attacking the Oneness of God and our true Identity as spirit, a horrendous sin of destruction and murder according to our ego. So once we seem to be bodies born to other bodies, our separate existence does not seem at all to be of our own making. Our parents made us. And we may even believe, much to our ego's delight, that somehow God has been involved in this special "creation" of our individual self, as many religions teach.

So the Course's goal, knowing how strongly identified we are with our body and how fearful we are of letting go of the protection we believe it affords us, is not to have us relinquish our bodily identification (that happens only at the very end). The Course is instructing us in how to give our body a purpose different from the ego's original purpose of sin, guilt and fear. With the help of the Holy Spirit, the body becomes a vehicle for learning our lessons of forgiveness, in the context of our relationships with our brothers and sisters, also seen as bodies. And we will continue to see ourselves and everyone else as a body until the forgiveness process is complete and we no longer have any guilt in our mind that we need our body as a defense against.

And as to seeing yourself as beautiful, there is nothing wrong with that, so long as you realize that when the Course speaks of how beautiful we are (e.g., W.pII.313.2:2), it is not speaking of our physical body or our personality. It is referring to the reflected beauty of the Christ in all of us, a beauty which we all share equally as spirit.

Q #17: I heard that in the real world the separation is seen, but separate interests are not. Is that true? What does that actually mean? Which came first the separation or the guilt? (I imagine the separation) Can the guilt be undone without undoing the separation or are they all tied together? You see I'd quite like to get rid of the guilt...and seeing my brothers interests as my own sounds good since it ends the terrible sense of conflict and competition...but losing my individuality does not feel like a price I am willing to pay. I would rather be a non-guilty non-conflicted non-competitive, non-frightened, happy, individual. Is that possible?

A: First, you are correct in concluding that the separation came before guilt -- guilt is simply the psychological experience of sin -- the feeling that results from being sinful.

Most students reach this same impasse that you have described. What you are feeling is quite normal and understandable, given the strength of our identification with our existence as specific individuals. For the most part, we know no other way of being and find it quite difficult -- to put it mildly -- to integrate Jesus' teaching that this identity is a replacement for our true Identity as God created us. So Jesus emphasizes throughout the Course, that this is a gradual, gentle process, and we can take as long as we would like to complete it with him. He comforts us by saying: "Do not fear that you will be abruptly lifted up and hurled into reality" (T.16.VI.8:1), because he knows well that we are terrified of letting go of this identity.

As we choose to forgive more and more -- to let go of grievances -- we will feel better about ourselves, and therefore we will want to do that more and more. And as that process continues, we will begin to identify more and more with Jesus' way of thinking and approaching our lives, which means that our point of reference for our lives will gradually shift from simply having our needs met to realizing that we all share a common interest, both in our wrong minds and in our right minds. As we become less and less preoccupied with using the world and other people to meet our needs -- i.e., as we see the purpose of our lives differently -- our self-concept will begin to shift, without our even having focused directly on that.

When we become totally identified with Jesus' way of thinking, our only attraction will be to his love. And when all of our thinking and perceptions flow from that love, our sense of individuality will be meaningful only to the extent that it can be a means of extending Jesus' healing love to other minds that are calling out for it. That is the state of mind known as "the real world." It is the natural outcome of the practice of forgiveness. So when we reach that advanced stage, we will no longer be thinking of ourselves as persons with needs and goals that have to be fulfilled. We will perceive from a vantage point "above the battleground" only people who are calling out for love, not knowing they are simply figures in a dream that they themselves are dreaming.

Q #18: The Course speaks throughout about will. It states that will is not involved in perception (C.1.7:2); that I have imprisoned my will (T.9.I:4.1); and that if I did not have

a split mind, I would recognize that willing is salvation (T.9.I.5:4). Just what is will as it is related in the Course, and what purpose, if any, does it serve in the dream?

A: When the Course speaks of "will" it is always referring to God's Will; "God's Will is all there is." (C.3.6:1). It is speaking on the level of the Mind where our will is one with God's, where truth is true and everything else is false (T.31.I.1:7). This is an example of the Course's non-dualism; there cannot be a will apart from God's, His Will is our salvation, our true will is one with His. We are "willing," i.e., exercising the power of our will, only when we choose to accept the truth about ourselves, and this is our salvation. The Course distinguishes between willing and wanting. When we choose to make sin real, to believe the ego's lie about who we are in the dream, we are "wanting" to make an illusory alternative to God's Will and to defend this made up self. This is the imprisonment of our true will; this is how we deny it, and this is the origin of perception -- we see what we want to see.

To help us in our learning, the Course uses a related term, "the little willingness," in reference to our experience in the dream. Being willing, in this sense, is agreeing to choose to see differently; to accept a different interpretation; to question the meaning and value we place on all our relationships, and our entire experience in this dream; to see the effects of the ego choices we have made, and consider their cost. This is enough, the Course tells us, to turn us around in our journey, heading back in the direction of our home in God and the one Will we share with Him; He is our Father, we are His innocent Son. In this way we can make choices in the dream, in the practice and application of the Course that put us in tune with the Will we share with God.

Q #19: The Course, as I understand it, says that at the base of all our suffering lies guilt, and that this guilt is repressed. The Course then seems to suggest that this guilt be dealt with through forgiveness of the external world (rather than by means of a process of uncovering it such as psychoanalysis). If so, of what use at all is the idea of guilt, if it appears to remain at a purely theoretical level?

A: The guilt the Course is talking about is an ontological guilt that comes from believing that we could separate from God but in so doing He had to be destroyed -- separate individual existence and total Oneness are mutually exclusive states that can not coexist. Since the separation from God is only an illusion, and a fragile one at that, a seemingly powerful defense was needed to maintain its seeming reality. All-consuming guilt over our lethal attack upon the All became that defense, burying the question of whether in reality we had or could have attacked. But this guilt is not simply a theoretical construct according to the Course. The Course says that the external world was literally made from that ontological guilt, as a seeming projection outward of what was too horrible to maintain within the mind. So when we practice the process of forgiveness with our external relationships in the world, we are actually addressing, albeit in a piecemeal fashion, aspects of that original ontological guilt. It is an indirect approach with a practical and direct effect on the underlying problem. By seeing what we have

made real in our external world as a projection of what is buried in our unconscious, we are actually making that buried guilt, over time, conscious. This undoes the ego strategy of distracting us from the guilt in our mind with the problems and associated guilt in the world. And it allows us to begin to recognize that the underlying premise, that we are separate and Love has been destroyed, from which that basic guilt has been generated, is simply not true.

The process of uncovering guilt within psychoanalysis, as generally practiced, actually plays into the ego's defensive game plan, although it could be directed to the same end as the Course's. The guilt it is seeking to uncover is still part of the external smokescreen of the world that the ego mind has constructed to keep us from getting back to the real problem in the mind. It is guilt still related to the body and its relationships to other bodies, and this guilt is still an effect and not the underlying ontological cause that the Course is addressing.

Q #20: I would like to understand why many of my relationships with men begin with a notion of romance but do not sustain themselves as friendships. I value the people I meet and I would like to develop and grow to the point where I can express brotherly love for women and men. As a single woman, I meet men who are often attracted to me, then we date or whatever, and then it ends. I'm responsible for what and how I am communicating. Is there a way to communicate "let's be friends" when something more was expected or desired and disappointment has set in?

A: Our egos are not proud and will use whatever forms of specialness work to get us involved in relationships that in the end do not meet our needs. Although we are usually not aware of this, we have an underlying goal of demonstrating that love can only fail us and that we are the unwitting victim of others' misleading and confusing overtures. The Course is unique -- and for this reason probably also not that popular -- among spiritual paths in identifying this underlying intent behind all our relationships in the world, no matter how good we believe our intentions may be at the start, until they are given over to the Holy Spirit for healing.

And, often to our disappointment, the Holy Spirit only works with content and not form, so that there can be no guarantee of what will happen in our relationships except that we will be given another opportunity to get in touch with our own buried guilt and feelings of unworthiness and self-hatred so that they can be healed. But if we are able to put the Course's principles of forgiveness into practice, we will find that over time we experience a sense of peace and joy in our relationships, regardless of whether our brothers or sisters reciprocate in any way on the level of form. And we will know that we are truly "friends" who have a shared purpose of healing the pain buried in our minds. But this is a process that can take time to achieve. So, in the meantime, just know that you are doing the best that you can and don't stop trying. Jesus needs our special relationships to teach us the other way. It is only fear that ever stops any of us from allowing ourselves to experience greater intimacy in any form.

Q #21: If the art may be seen as a form of special relationship the artist makes as a substitute for God's Love, are forms of art to be considered as a call for love? And how do these forms differ from the forms expressed through "channeling" like Mozart's music? Can we say that the "channeled" art more of expression of love rather than a call for love? And how can we "justify" human distinction between great and mediocre art on Level two of our experience here in material world?

A: First, we cannot judge whether the specific work of a specific artist is a substitute for God's Love, the manifestation of a special relationship. Only the artist would be able to discern that. We usually cannot tell just from the form whether it has come from the wrong (ego) mind or the right (Holy Spirit) mind. If the reflection of God's Love is the source of a particular work of art, then, yes, it is an expression of love. Our mistake would be, then, to venerate the work, rather than to identify with the content behind the form.

All special love relationships are defenses against the searing pain in our minds that comes from the guilt we all feel over having rejected God's Love in favor of giving ourselves existence on our own terms. Following the ego's counsel, our attention gets directed away from our guilt-laden minds to specific individuals, substances, or activities that can shut out the pain and fill up the loneliness that is in our minds. In essence, our special love relationships are telling God that we don't need His Love, and that we are perfectly capable of filling the void and experiencing completion and worth through relationships in the world. This is the *content* underlying the *form* of all special love relationships. The good feelings that come from these types of relationships hide the hatred that is their basis.

At the same time, in another part of our minds, we are longing to be told that this whole thing was just some silly mistake, that we have been forgiven, and therefore our guilt and our defenses against that guilt are no longer necessary. This is the "call" that is present in our minds that are split between these two attitudes or ways of thinking.

Any form can be used by the Holy Spirit to remind us of the truth about ourselves. One is not more or less inspiring than another, in this sense. In other words, once we believe the separation has occurred and we are here in the world as bodies, the world and our bodies are regarded as neutral. Therefore, anything at all in this world can become a means of leading us beyond the world, or more deeply into it, depending on whether we choose the ego or the Holy Spirit as our teacher. We can be enthralled with Michelangelo's statue of David and be reminded of our perfection and oneness with God; but the same experience can occur while we are looking at a diseased tree in our yard. When we become dependent on a particular form in order to have a "spiritual" experience, then we have gotten caught in a special love relationship.

Finally, there is nothing wrong with having preferences in this world, provided we don't take them seriously. We can say that one work of art is better than another, just as we

can say that a particular musical composition is better than another, one method of education is better than another, one medical treatment is better than another, based on criteria we have set up in those fields. From the Course's point of view, they all are equally illusory. Yet, it is natural to evaluate things in a somewhat objective way in the world. The lesson, though, is not to take seriously any conclusions we reach about things in the world -- we should do it with a gentle smile somewhere in our minds, because we know that it is all made up.

Q #22: Chapter 30 I. Rules for Decision: I'm not sure I understand this. Are the decisions referred to just simple every day decisions like what to eat, or what to wear? Or, are they more along the lines of what you feel and think?

A: In a sense, they are both. We begin with the decisions or choices we make on a physical level, because that is where we believe we are. However, as students who are now beginning Chapter 30, we are familiar enough with the Course material to know that ultimately Jesus is always talking to us about what occurs on the level of the mind; in other words, choosing between the *content* of love or fear, and not choosing among the many *forms* the world presents to us.

The seven "rules" for decision are not to be taken literally, but are useful in remembering that the "right" decision-making is a process. That is, learning we have a choice with whom we make decisions takes time and practice. And "right" decision-making does not necessarily mean choosing Jesus or the Holy Spirit. What it does mean, is that we recognize we have a choice of choosing either of them, or choosing the ego. As egos, we really have no motivation to choose Jesus or the Holy Spirit, other than the Course telling us that we will feel better if we do. And that's not reason enough to get us to choose them consistently. What *is* reason enough is to continually make decisions based on the ego, and becoming aware of the cost of such decisions. Rejecting the Love of God can only lead to guilt, since it is the shadowy fragment of our original decision to reject God by choosing to be separate from his Love, and be on our own. It is this guilt that is the source of all of our pain and suffering. As the Course says, **"Of all the many causes you perceived as bringing pain and suffering to you, your guilt was not among them"** (T.27.VII.7:4). Only when we link our pain with our decisions does choice become meaningful. And once we reach this point, the choice of whom to decide with becomes obvious: **"Who with the Love of God upholding him could find the choice of miracles or murder hard to make?"** (T.23.IV.9:8)

For a more in depth discussion of this important section in the Course, please see our [excerpt series](#) on the [Rules for Decision](#).

Q #23: Can one be a student of *A Course in Miracles* and still be a part of a mainstream religion?

A: Yes, if it is helpful, for as the manual teaches us: **"The curriculum is highly individualized, and all aspects are under the Holy Spirit's particular care and guidance" (M.29.2:6).** No one has the right nor the wisdom to determine what would be a help to someone on a spiritual path. That is why the Course always emphasizes the importance of asking the Holy Spirit's help. That being said, however, it is true that on the level of their actual teachings, the Course differs markedly from mainstream religions. Indeed, we could say that one of the characteristics of *A Course in Miracles* is the contrast of its teachings with that of traditional Christianity. At this level, therefore, conflict would be inevitable at some point in one's study; for example, other Western religions do not teach that **"the world was made as an attack on God" (W.pII.3.2:1),** and that our real terror is of redemption and not of crucifixion **(T.13.III.1:10,11).** It could become quite tempting to harmonize both thought systems, a compromise that could only be detrimental to both paths,

We are so filled with conflict as it is, that to intentionally build more into our daily lives seems an unloving act to ourselves. Taking an intellectual interest in mainstream religion for the purposes of comparing and contrasting such with the Course is one thing, but actually trying to live out both paths on a daily basis would be very difficult indeed. However, remembering the individualized nature of one's curriculum, participating in both the Course and mainstream religion is nonetheless possible. The question to ask oneself, therefore, would be: what is the purpose?

Q #24: *A Course in Miracles* seems to allude to reincarnation. If we truly don't die but instead just "lay this body" down, do we return in another or continue our lessons on another level?

A: Yes, in the Course, Jesus does seem to allude to reincarnation. But to understand what he is saying, and to address your question, we need to remember that in the Course, he is always speaking to us on the level of the mind, which is the only level where any true learning takes place. And specifically, he's talking to that part of our mind which has to choose between the ego and the Holy Spirit, between hate and love, between death and life.

"But remember that understanding is of the mind, and only of the mind" (T.15.VI.7:5).

He tells us in the Course that this "life" is a dream, that the world is an illusion, that the body doesn't die because the body doesn't live **(T.19.IV.C.5:2,3,4,5),** and that our experience of time is simply a part of that illusion. Our "dream" always and only reflects the choice that we have made for either the ego's purpose to reinforce our guilt and belief in separation, or the Holy Spirit's purpose of forgiveness and undoing the belief in

separation. Therefore, the form of the dream never matters, and when that form changes, the learning, or choosing, continues in the mind.

So when reading a passage that seems to imply reincarnation we could understand it not only on the level of our experience within the dream, but also as the idea of revisiting unforgivenesses. Perhaps it would be helpful to think of "simultaneous" dreams, or to use the model of a hologram where the whole is found in every part. When the mind "revisits" dreams or aspects of the hologram, this could be seen as experiencing different "lifetimes."

Jesus tells us in the manual that a belief in the concept of reincarnation is not a requirement for his Course. In fact, he says that it is only valuable to the extent to which it is "helpful" or of comfort to his students.

"In the ultimate sense, reincarnation is impossible. There is no past or future, and the idea of birth into a body has no meaning either once or many times. Reincarnation cannot, then, be true in any real sense" (M.24.1:1,2,3).

"Reincarnation would not, under any circumstances, be the problem to be dealt with *now*. It is certain, however, that the way to salvation can be found by those who believe in reincarnation and by those who do not. The idea cannot, therefore, be regarded as essential to the curriculum. There is always some risk in seeing the present in terms of the past. There is always some good in any thought which strengthens the idea that life and the body are not the same" (M.24.2:1,5,6,7,8).

When we can accept the fact that time is not linear, the concept of reincarnation becomes meaningless. But, as long as we believe we are separate individuals, the lessons continue in whatever form we can accept and understand until we truly learn that our reality is spirit and we have always been **"...at home in God, [only] dreaming of exile" (T.10.I.2:1)**. In that acceptance of the Atonement for ourselves, all dreaming ends.

Q #25: I have been a Course student for a long while now. I am discovering that specialness is hollow and am beginning to see through the ego's ploys, aversions and manipulations. I detect a sadness and/or fear, though, because of the void that is there when I let go of the specialness that wants to be maintained through material "stuff" or relationships, etc. What would you suggest to help one over the hump, or through the veil so one can see everyone with a healed perception? The void can seem wide and deep, hence fearful.

A. Trust is essential as you go through this. At one point Jesus pleads with us not to **"breathe life into your failing ego" (T.17.V.8.4)**; and he reassures us that **"the death of specialness is not your death, but your awaking into eternal life" (T.24.II.14.4)**. These, among many other passages, are helpful reminders when we are

going through rough times that, first of all, Jesus knows what we are going through, and second that everything will wind up okay if we just continue to practice forgiveness.

Most students go through what you have described. One person likened it to standing on a dock with one foot on the dock and the other on the edge of a boat that suddenly starts drifting away from the dock. Unpleasant, to put it mildly! Sometimes this experience reflects the well-known "dark night of the soul" spoken of in spiritual literature. This is discussed in the manual for teachers in the "Development of Trust" section, where Jesus describes the fifth stage as "a period of unsettling." You are no longer firmly rooted in specialness but have not gotten beyond it entirely, because deep within your mind you know that to let go of specialness means letting go of your identity as a separate, independent individual. That is the underlying fear. If you simply acknowledge that and bring that fear to the love of Jesus in your mind, you will feel better.

There is no way around this stage of the process, if you want to wind up in the "right place." You never want to force yourself to give up a relationship or something in the world you still enjoy, nor do you want to force yourself to see everyone with a healed perception. If you really wanted to get beyond the perception of separate interests, you would be beyond it. Thus, being honest about your reluctance to let go of specialness is extremely helpful. You also can ask yourself what it would feel like to relate to others without specialness. Sometimes that reveals an element in yourself that you weren't aware of, a source of resistance that you didn't know was there. Finally, just be patient and trust the process.

Q #26: Can you explain the Holy Instant in more detail?

A: As defined in our [Glossary-Index](#), the holy instant is the instant outside time in which we choose forgiveness instead of guilt, the miracle instead of a grievance, the Holy Spirit instead of the ego. It is the expression of our little willingness to live in the present, which opens into eternity, rather than holding on to the past and fearing the future, which keeps us in hell.

It is important to understand that the holy instant is outside time and beyond the body: **"At no single instant does the body exist at all" (T.18.VII.1.1)**. It is a term given to our experience of oneness with someone else that completely transcends anything of the body. There is no separation between you and this other person. The conflicting, separate interests that characterized the relationship before have completely dissolved in favor of the recognition that there are only shared interests. All sense of competition and comparison are simply non-existent in the holy instant, which is when you have deliberately chosen not to see your interests as apart from someone else's. There are many other ways in which this can occur, because there are so many ways in which we have expressed separation.

It is a chosen instant in which our fear has abated enough for us to accept the truth about ourselves and everyone else. It seems to be a fleeting instant that comes and goes only because our fear is still too great to allow ourselves to make this our permanent state. When that happens we are in the real world. Thus the term is also used to denote the *ultimate* holy instant, the real world, the culmination of all the holy instants we have chosen along the way.

Q #27: If consciousness was the first split introduced into the mind of the dreaming Son, what was the state of this mind before consciousness? Was the Son not conscious of His relationship with God or unaware of Unity with God? This may sound dumb, but it's like saying are we aware that we are not aware or unaware that we are aware.

A: This question arises frequently, and is a natural one to ask, not a dumb one! The trouble is the question makes sense only to minds that cannot conceive of non-dualistic reality. And we have this difficulty because, briefly stated, we, as one Son, rejected oneness and substituted independent, individualized existence in place of our true reality. That puts us at a distinct disadvantage in trying to make sense out of all of the statements in the Course that speak of reality as non- dualistic, as pure oneness. Jesus must use language and concepts that we can understand -- which is the language of dualism -- to begin the process of getting us beyond duality. And he often reminds us that there is much that we cannot yet understand, but will eventually understand as our identification with the body diminishes.

Therefore, to answer your question, before the Mind of God's Son seemed to split, i.e., before the separation seemed to happen, there was only a perfect unity between God and Christ: **"What He creates is not apart from Him, and nowhere does the Father end, the Son begin as something separate from Him" (W.pl.132.12).** The Course makes it clear that God created Christ, but this does not mean two beings in relation to each other, along the lines we are familiar with. Since it is a perfect unity, there cannot be consciousness. What this state without consciousness would be like is incomprehensible to us because of the present condition of our minds, and it is futile to speculate about it: **"...while you think that part of you is separate, the concept of a Oneness joined as One is meaningless" (T.25.I.7).** Similarly, in speaking about our function in Heaven of extending love as Christ, Jesus tells us that this also is meaningless to us, but what we can understand and practice is forgiveness: **"Therefore, you have a function in the world in its own terms. For who can understand a language far beyond his simple grasp?...Creation cannot even be conceived of in the world. It has no meaning here. Forgiveness is the closest it can come to earth" (W.pl.192.1,2).**

So we wind up humbly silent, yet hopeful that if we do what Jesus asks of us in his Course, we shall one day have the experience that will end all questioning and wondering.

Q #28: How do I forgive others for their horrible acts? How can I forgive the sniper? Is this not real? Is it the distraction of the ego? I also fear what is real. When I say, above all I want to see, I become terrified. I have a hard time giving up this world we created. I love some of my creations, like my family. Don't I need to die to return to my reality? Won't I be lonely?

A: The forgiveness the Course is teaching us is a process of looking at a situation such as the sniper killings and asking ourselves what this event is telling us about what we believe. We begin by looking honestly at our reactions to these killings which include all kinds of feelings and judgments about the victims and the victimizers. All these feelings and thoughts are useful in uncovering the hidden beliefs of the ego thought system; that the world is real, that we are bodies, that what we call death is the end of what we call "life", that we are vulnerable to attack...the list goes on and on. The Course then asks us to recognize that all these are feelings and thoughts about ourselves that we have projected on to the victims as well as the victimizers. We are learning that the feelings/thoughts along with the pain they cause were already with us before the event took place. The event only seemed to cause the feelings. This is why the Course says we forgive our brothers for what *they did not do*. **"Be willing to forgive the Son of God for what he did not do" (T.17.III.1,5)**. The snipers did not cause our feelings, our mistaken beliefs did. If we are willing to look at any situation in this way we are beginning to question the ego's lies. We are then in a position to ask for another way of seeing. This is sometimes very difficult to do, it takes practice and a lot of honesty, but it is the only way we can get in touch with the beliefs that are keeping us rooted in a thought system that is causing us a lot of pain. This pain is coming from believing the ego's lies and not from the situation, in this case the killings. It is very important that we practice this *without denying* any of the feelings or thoughts we do have about the outrageous events in this ego world of fear and hatred and without forcing ourselves to try to accept a new belief system that challenges our usual ego perspective. This will only entrench us in our mistaken views and make us more afraid. If we are willing to just say "maybe I'm wrong about this", then the world we've made and all our relationships, including those we "love", become our classroom for learning the Holy Spirit's interpretation of everything we experience rather than serving as a distraction. (Note: the Course uses the term "made" for the ego's world. "Creation" refers to God's extension of love on the level of the Mind only.) The Course tells us the Holy Spirit will not take any of our special relationships away from us but will instead give us a different interpretation and a different purpose for them. Without them we would not be aware of the mistaken beliefs about ourselves or the judgments (whether for good or for bad) that keep us in our deep sleep. We have made ourselves afraid of what is *real* and that is why we have a Teacher who is inviting us to take small steps with Him toward a new way of thinking. If we do this with Jesus or the Holy Spirit by our side we will not be lonely or *dead*. Eventually we will fully waken from the dream with the realization that we were in fact only dreaming, with no thought or need for dying. Meanwhile each step in forgiveness brings us more peace and takes us closer to our truth where our family will include everyone and we will not experience any sense of loss.

Q #29: When Jesus turned over the table in the Temple, it seemed to reinforce the ego thought system. He was angry, and ultimately was punished, by being crucified. I keep repeating in my mind, there must be a different way of looking at this, to speed up the healing I submitted this question to the Foundation.

A: In "Forgiveness and Jesus: The Meeting Place of *A Course in Miracles* and Christianity" and "A Talk Given on *A Course in Miracles*; An Introduction" (by Kenneth Wapnick, published by the Foundation for *A Course in Miracles*) this Gospel passage is discussed at length. The full explanation presented in these books is summarized here.

As you may know the Gospel accounts of Jesus' sayings and actions are not necessarily historical fact. It is likely that the incident in the Temple did not happen in the way that it is depicted in the Gospel. This view is accepted even by many Christian Scripture scholars. It is also important to note that the Gospel account does not say that Jesus was angry, although in the movies of Jesus' life he has been portrayed as angry. If something of this nature did occur in which Jesus appears to be angry, without truly feeling any anger, he would have been using this outburst as a teaching tool to make a point for the large crowd of people present in the Temple at the time of the Passover. In this case the point would have been that the "chosen people" had distorted the Old Testament teaching by using the Temple for purposes other than as a "house of prayer." This is close to the traditional interpretation of this incident by Christian scholars. As a good teacher Jesus acted in a dramatic way to more effectively draw attention to his message. One could also consider a final option; that Jesus was actually angry, having an "ego attack." If this were the case there are at least three conditions that would have to be present; Jesus would not be at peace, God would not be his in his awareness, he would perceive the money lenders as his enemy. It is inconceivable that Jesus, whose message and presence were filled only with love and peace, would have "lost it" in this way. It is also possible to believe that Jesus did have an ego attack, but if one chose to believe that, why would one then choose to identify with his ego, rather than with the love and forgiveness he teaches us in *A Course in Miracles*? Moreover, even if it were possible for Jesus to have such an ego attack, the Course tells us he would certainly not be punished for his "sin" by being crucified. **"There is no sin."** (T.26.VII.10:5) The central teaching of the Course is that God's Son is innocent; **"You are still My holy Son, forever innocent, forever loving and forever loved, as limitless as your Creator, and completely changeless and forever pure"** (WpII.10:5). Since there is no sin there can be no punishment. The Course's teaching on the crucifixion, therefore, is from a very different perspective. In Jesus' words **"The crucifixion is nothing more than an extreme example"** (T.6I.2:1), much like the example of the Temple incident, if it did in fact occur. Jesus says later: **"The message the crucifixion was intended to teach was that it is not necessary to perceive any form of assault in persecution, because you cannot be persecuted. If you respond with anger, you must be equating yourself with the destructible, and are therefore regarding yourself insanely"** (T.6.I.4:6). Jesus would not regard himself insanely, and since he knew he was not a body he remained at peace during the crucifixion, fully aware that nothing was happening.

As we learn our true identity as God's innocent Son, we also learn that we too can be at peace in the midst of seeming persecution. We, like Jesus, cannot be harmed in any way. This true identity is not to be confused with the ego identities we choose as bodies which do die. Since there is no real life here in the body, there is also no real death. This is what Jesus knew when his body was crucified. This is what he is teaching us.

Q #30: I play computer games, which I really like to do. I believe I have to quit playing these games one day, because I want the Holy Spirit's alternative. There is another distraction I cherish, which is even an addiction. The addiction pulls me completely out of right-mindedness; it is a kick, a thrill, but with many side effects, disadvantages, the burden of anticipation etc. When I really look at it with Jesus, I do not want it anymore. And this is still not what I choose (up until now). There is an unwillingness to let go of these things. That they conflict with the Course...[Jesus] went shoe shopping with Helen for awhile, but then also advised her to let it go.

A: Keep in mind that this is a process, and that it takes a long time for most of us. Patience and gentleness with ourselves are key parts of this process; otherwise, we fall into the ego's trap of making the error real. An important piece of advice Jesus gives us at the beginning of the "Rules for Decision" is: "**Do not fight yourself**" (T-30.I.1:7). Therefore, the most helpful approach would be to simply look at your reluctance to accept the Holy Spirit's alternative, and your feeling that Jesus' love is not enough for you, and then not condemn yourself for feeling that way. Just continue to be honest with yourself and with Jesus about how much you do *not* want to believe and accept what this Course is teaching you, and then don't judge yourself for it. You will be practicing the Course in a very effective way if you can do this. That is what forgiveness is all about. You will be learning that the "sin" you have accused yourself of has had no effect, and that it was only a "tiny, mad idea" that has not changed love in any way.

Jesus is always and only interested in *purpose*. Thus, Helen was ready to change the *purpose* of her shopping sprees. She no longer needed to "protect" herself from Jesus' love; therefore, she did not *need* to go shopping anymore. When our fear of accepting Jesus' love lessens, our involvement in our defenses against accepting that love will lessen as well. While the specific activities may still be a part of our lives, their *purpose* will have changed entirely. It is always *content*, not *form*. The experience of peace or conflict has nothing to do with the activity or object itself. Peace and conflict are the result of our having chosen our ego or Jesus as our teacher.

Finally, speaking in general with regard to addictions: It often is necessary to deal with the behavior first -- to take whatever steps can be taken to curtail or stop the destructive behavior. This would reflect the mind's decision to be more loving towards oneself and others. Then, when the behavior is more under control, the person can begin to deal with the cause of the addiction in the mind. Addictions most often are rooted in overwhelming self-hatred and guilt, which then gets projected onto one's own and/or another's body.

Q #31: Please explain how one is to interpret sin. What is it? Does it exist or not? Can one substitute the words "lack of love" when reading the text? Thank you

A: If you were to ask the ego to interpret sin, it's meaning would be death (**T.19.IV.A.17:3**), while the Holy Spirit's meaning would be a mistake to be corrected (**e.g., T.19.II, III**). The Course teaches us that to the ego sin is the death of God, or better yet the murder of God, and we are the murderers. Therefore, separation is a symbol of God's death. We are reminded of our sin daily, whenever we see ourselves and others as separate, which is the only way we can see because the ego made the body to "see" this way. However, our attitude can yet be one of unity, even though our bodies' eyes still see separation. This is one way the Holy Spirit can use what the ego made to serve another purpose (**T.28.I.2:8**).

Practically speaking, if we are identified with the ego, we interpret sin to be whatever takes away our peace, and the sinners we perceive outside ourselves are those who take it. No matter how big or small the situation, anything which "robs" us of our peace is called sin. It may even be ourselves who take away our own peace, but inevitably someone else made us this way, so we are once again made sinless.

As to whether sin exists or not, the Course teaches us that the separation never happened (**M.2.2:6,8**). And since separation is the entire foundation of the ego's meaning of sin, then indeed it does not exist.

Finally, substituting "lack of love" will not necessarily have the same impact on a student as "sin." We all have conscious and unconscious beliefs around the word "sin," and by substituting other words for it, we deny ourselves the opportunity of forgiving all the associations we have made. "Lack of love" as a substitute makes it sound as if we are "lacking in love," something which, of course, would not be our fault. Words such as "withholding," or "selfish," would be more in tune with what we really believe sin means.

Q #32: I have read that Freud said the point of psychoanalysis is to make the unconscious conscious. I know that the Course is based in some ways on concepts of Freudian theory, but doesn't the Course say that all consciousness is inherently illusory? Doesn't this clash, then, with the main objective of psychoanalysis? Or am I having a case of level confusion?

A: The Course does indeed identify consciousness with what is illusory, describing it early in the text as **"the level of perception, the first split introduced into the mind after the separation, making the mind a perceiver rather than a creator. Consciousness is correctly identified as the domain of the ego"** (**T.3.IV.2:1,2**). But like all things the ego has made to support and maintain the belief in separation, the Holy Spirit can give it a different purpose. And so later, Jesus observes

that **"consciousness has levels and awareness can shift quite dramatically, but it cannot transcend the perceptual realm. At its highest level it becomes aware of the real world, and can be trained to do so increasingly" (C.1.7:4,5).**

So yes, although consciousness metaphysically speaking is part of the illusion and so is not real, since we believe in its reality and experience it as an inherent part of ourselves, the Course provides us a way to use our consciousness in order ultimately to transcend it. The process of being trained to attain the real world is really a matter of making conscious what our ego has made unconscious through fear, so that the false perceptions of the ego can be healed and replaced by the true perception of the Holy Spirit, preparing us for our return to knowledge (the Course's term for Heaven), beyond all consciousness and perception.

We have made the split mind -- where consciousness resides -- unconscious, and instead believe that consciousness is an epiphenomenon of the body or, more specifically, of the brain. We have also made unconscious all the guilt in the mind that we have concocted as a defense of consciousness, projecting the guilt out into a world of form where we would never suspect its origin. So all of the ego's defenses must be made conscious -- or as the Course more eloquently describes it, we must **"be willing to bring the darkness to light" (T.18.III.6:2)** -- so that their unreality can be recognized. And so we use the consciousness of the split mind to do this until, in the end, all of our false perceptions have been made conscious and healed, and consciousness is no longer needed. At that point, we are ready to leave the realm of consciousness and perception and **"disappear into the Presence beyond the veil...not to be seen [perceived] but known" (T.19.IV.D.19:1).**

Q #33: When I am "stuck" and don't feel I am being completely willing to let go of a well-established defense, I very often ask Jesus to help me with my unwillingness in the situation. I have experienced what I believe is success with this tool from time to time. I must also say that it doesn't always work -- I still feel the discomfort and unhappiness of retaining the grievance even though I've asked Him to help me with my unwillingness. Is this some kind of sophisticated ego ploy?

A: Being totally honest with Jesus about your unwillingness to let go of a grievance is helpful in itself, especially since you are experiencing the effects of not letting it go. This stubbornness does not make you sinful and does not affect Jesus' love for you. So feeling like a failure, or any form of self-condemnation would be the only mistake at that point -- you already are aware of the price you are paying to hold on to the grievance. You can just stop with that, acknowledging that forgiveness is a process, and that when the underlying fear lessens, you will take another step. If you really wanted to forgive, you would. You might ask yourself what you would feel like, or what would happen, if you really did totally let go of the grievance. That might disclose the nature of the fear behind your unwillingness. Then you and Jesus could deal with that together. That would help to keep you honest, too.

There is no way of ever being totally sure whether you are listening to the ego or the Holy Spirit. After many years of experience, you become more familiar with your favorite means of self-deception, but usually you need someone who knows you well to help you discern. It's a difficulty most students experience, because of the tremendous fear we all have of returning home to God.

Q #34: From what I understand, anyone who reaches or experiences the state of the real world would not need or do anything external. Still, is it possible to "create" something artistic in this world (like a piece of music, a poem, etc.) out of pure need to share the state of happiness?

A: Being in the real world means that you know that you are not a body and that the physical world is not real. You know that your identity -- as well as everyone else's -- has nothing to do with either the body or the world. It is a state of mind in which the ego thought system is no longer present and therefore there is no decision-making aspect, because there no longer are two thought systems to choose between. The content of the mind is purely the Holy Spirit's thought system of love.

Consequently, in this state of mind there would be no *I* that would experience a *need* to do something. It is not that your body would not do anything, but that "you" would not be the agent of the "doing." The Holy Spirit's love would flow through you, and so your experience would be that "you" are not doing anything. Remember, our journey into "the far country" has been a journey away from the state of oneness and into a state of physical individuality. Therefore our journey back is a journey toward selflessness, characterized by our re-acceptance of the truth that God's Son is one and invulnerable. Just before the dream of separation disappears totally, we would reach the state of *knowing* once and for all that bodies and the world are totally unreal. They are nothing other than the dreams of a mind that has fallen asleep, and therefore nothing happening in the dreams truly matters. It matters only to the figures in the dream. But a healed mind would know that even the dream itself never really happened.

If that is your state of mind, how then could there be any *need* to be creative? The love of the Holy Spirit would extend through you to those who still think they are separate from that love, and in some way are calling out for it. But *you* would not direct that process. There no longer is that kind of a "you." If the artist's experience is "*I* am profoundly happy. *I* want others who are *not* happy to share what *I* am experiencing," chances are that that is coming from the ego, because there is separation in the perception. If you experience a *need* to share love, you are making the error real. If the artistic impulse is coming from the Holy Spirit or from Jesus, there would be no sense of urgency, and the artist would not experience himself or herself as the agent of the work produced, nor would there be any concern over whether and how it is received. Love naturally extends of itself, and that extension of love might be expressed through art in some form, but that is far different from "creating," as you stated, "something artistic in this world...out of pure need to share the state of happiness." That could well be the ego sneaking in the back door to retrieve part of its self-importance that was starting to slip away.

Q #35: It seems the more I study *A Course in Miracles*, I begin to think I am going backward instead of forward. My mind is more noisy than ever. Why is that?

A: The Course has a helpful perspective on this: **"Put yourself not in charge of this [wakening to knowledge] for you cannot distinguish between advance and retreat. Some of your greatest advances you have judged as failures, and some of your deepest retreats you have evaluated as success" (T.18.V.1:5,6).** The fact is we really do not know where we are in our progress; we do not even know if we are going backwards or forwards. It is important to remember this in our study of the Course so as not to waste a lot of time and effort judging or evaluating ourselves. Most likely the "noise" in your mind

that seems to be more than ever was there before your study of the Course; the difference is now you are aware of it. Now you know you have a mind and that it is a noisy mind, and that is exactly what the Course is helping us to learn. We begin our practice by learning not to deny that we are using our noise to drown out the **"still small voice" (T.21.V.1:6)** of the Holy Spirit. Since denial is part of our defense strategy as egos, beginning to hear our noisy minds is the beginning of undoing denial. As we deepen our commitment to study the Course, our noise may actually seem to get louder because of our resistance. Our ego identity feels threatened by what we are learning and puts up a fight in a variety of ways, one of them being a noisy mind. This is also a ploy of the ego to convince us to stop our pursuit of the truth, because it tells us we are "getting worse." Our task is to begin to pay attention to the chatter in our minds because it is telling us what we believe. The whole point of the mind training of the Course is to uncover the thoughts, judgments, beliefs and lies hidden in our minds causing us to feel guilty and fearful. The good news is that **"The still, small Voice for God is not drowned out by all the ego's raucous screams and senseless ravings to those who want to hear It" (T.21.V.1:6)**. We will hear His promptings when we have heard and forgiven all of our objections.

Q #36: Are "angels" illusion? *A Course in Miracles* mentions "angels" (T19.IV.C.9; T26.IX.7, and in the workbook), but what is not clear to me is whether they are made by ego or part of reality.

A: Angels are part of the illusion, whether we speak of them in the usual sense as ephemeral bodies or as they are spoken of in the Course. In the Course's teaching, reality refers only to the Oneness of God and His Son in Heaven, where there is only Unity and no distinction between Father and His one Son. There is no plural in this reality. According to the Course, everything else is part of the illusion of the dream. The Course speaks of angels as metaphor and symbol. They are symbols for the reflection of God's thoughts, which are always with us. It is a loving, poetic use of a term that is familiar to us to teach us about the Love God extends to the Sonship, since we may still be too fearful to have a direct experience of His Love. We generally understand angels to be benign spirits who are comforting and helpful to us. In the Course, Jesus uses this form because we have this positive association, and he is helping us to gently let go of our fear in terms we are able to understand. You may notice that wherever angels are mentioned in the Course the language is beautiful poetry, with terms that are comforting and uplifting. These are words of encouragement that reflect the truth of God's Love for us.

Q #37: This question is an edited combination of two separate questions that were submitted on the theme of choice and predetermination or destiny in *A Course in Miracles*:

As I understand it, in this dream of separation my only real choice is which teacher I choose in every situation I find myself: the ego or the Holy Spirit. As for the dream itself, we are told that the script is already written. But I wonder, can I, as the dreamer of the dream, change the dream in terms of the specific events that unfold. Or can I change the dream only in terms of my perspective on the situation? In other words, is everything that I'm experiencing predestined when it comes to situations and relationships, etc.? That would mean that I'm walking through an old dream of separation, like watching an old movie, that my marriage could never have lasted longer than it did, I could never have had more than the number of children I have now, and the relationship I'm in now is already fully defined in terms of time, etc. As I'm given the opportunity to 'save time' by choosing the Holy Spirit as my teacher, it would mean only that I'm allowed to skip certain parts of the story. Is it like this?

But it also seems that the Course encourages us not to exchange an unholy relationship for yet another unholy relationship with someone else, as we search for happiness we will never find outside of ourselves, but instead to make the relationship we are in a holy one. This seems to indicate that we *do* have choices in terms of the story, the people we're meeting, etc. So then there could be several possible versions of my lifetime. One might include two or more briefer marriages with different spouses

while another might involve remaining in the same marriage for many years. But Jesus says that nothing is left to coincidence and that every meeting is planned. Or does the form simply not matter and do I just see shadows, projecting my own images on them? But then why is it that the script of my life, if it is already determined, seems to have such a significant effect on other people's lives?

Jesus also says that what we see is the judgment we first passed on ourselves, and outside of that there is no world. Does that mean that, for example, if there is a war between the United States and Iraq, I could have done something to stop it? Did it already happen and was it corrected, so that if I'm seeing a war instead of peace, does that mean that my mind still needs to be corrected because I am still choosing the wrong teacher? Or could I have done nothing to avoid the war and do I just choose which teacher with whom to view the events. And would I see nothing but innocence on both sides if I choose the Holy Spirit?

A: To address completely all the questions and issues you've raised could take a book (and there is a book, *A Vast Illusion: Time According to A Course in Miracles* by Kenneth Wapnick, which you may find helpful to amplify some of the points that we'll address briefly here).

The Course does say that our only *real* choice is between the ego and Holy Spirit, the emphasis being on "real." But within the dream, there are nearly an infinite number -- although not infinite, only *nearly* infinite, because the ego can not make anything that is either infinite or eternal (**T.4.I.11:7**) -- of alternatives we can choose among at the level of form. But their underlying content is all the same -- sin, guilt and fear - and so the Course emphasizes that there is no real choice among alternatives that are really all the same. Meaningful choice can be made only on the level of content and so the only real choice is between the guilt and fear of the ego and the forgiveness and love of the Holy Spirit. So, yes, there are many different forms or sequences of events that our lives may take as a result of our seeming choices, but so long as we are choosing with the ego, believing that happiness can be found outside ourselves, nothing will really change, although our circumstances and relationships may alter significantly. By the way, the Course does not actually encourage us to remain *physically* in a relationship in order to make it holy -- it never advises us on the level of specifics or form. When it cautions us about "**getting rid of your brother**" (**T.17.V.7:2**), it is speaking of how we are *perceiving* our brother in our mind, including in particular all of the special fantasies we have associated with him that are no longer being fulfilled.

Now the Course also says, as you remark, that the script is already written (**W.pl.158.4:3**) and that everything in time has already happened, so that our lives are nothing more than seeing "**the journey from where it ended, looking back on it, imagining we make it once again; reviewing mentally what has gone by**" (**4:5**). And while Jesus says that nothing happens by chance, he is clearly attributing the responsibility for choice for all the experiences of our lives to our own mind (**T-21.II.3:1,2,3**). But this does not mean that everything in our lives is predetermined, that the sequence of events is fixed. We are always choosing from an array of many possible events that have all already occurred, but the unique sequencing and the vast number of past events we're choosing from, combined with our repressing any memory of any of them and our belief that time itself is both real and linear, add to the feeling that it is all new. And this is all part of the ego defense to mislead us into believing something new and meaningful is happening in our lives, reinforcing the foolish hope that somehow this time our ego choice in the world of form will have a better outcome.

To understand the seeming effect of our lives on each other, we need to step back and look from outside the dream of the world, and return our attention to the mind where all choices are really being made. The nearly infinite number of possible events in time was written in one instant by the one (collective) mind, joined with the ego, before the fragmentary projection out into the world of separate individuals and lives seemed to happen. As Jesus explains, "**time but lasted an instant in your mind, with no effect upon eternity. And so is all time past...The tiny tick of time in which the first mistake was made, and all of them with that one mistake**" (**T.26.3:3,4,5**, italics added).

Now my individual dream is separate and can not truly be shared with anyone else. But since all minds are joined, any decision that I make to interact as a body with you, or that you make to interact as a body with me, must always reflect an agreement we both have made together, at the level of mind outside of time and space, to replay certain events in time and space that have already happened. And this joint agreement must be kept buried in our unconscious if it is to be effective in supporting the ego's purpose of separation and victimization.

Jesus speaks of this joint decision, specifically in the context of our agreement to be hurt by each other, as **"the secret vow that you have made with every brother that would walk apart....Unstated and unheard in consciousness...it is a promise to another to be hurt by him, and to attack him in return....so that [the body] will suffer pain. It is the obvious effect of what was made in secret, in agreement with another's secret wish to be apart from you, as you would be apart from him. Unless you both agree that is your wish, it can have no effects"** (T.28.VI.4:3,6,7; 5:1,2,3). This hidden joint agreement to seem to be affected by each other must be the case, for otherwise we would be the victim of each other's decisions. While this joint agreement about form is true at a metaphysical level, at a practical level it is much more helpful to focus on the fact that in the world, as the physical self with which I identify, I am not able to control what others do, but I nevertheless always have a choice about how I will perceive what is happening in my life. I can decide which teacher I will invite in, and whether I will see my peace of mind as dependent only on my own choice -- as the Holy Spirit would teach -- or whether I choose to see others as having power to take away my peace of mind -- accepting the ego's teaching that I can be victimized and therefore am not responsible for how I feel.

As to whether or not a healed mind sees war and has any choice about it, it is apparent that Jesus recognizes the conflicts of our ego -- he spends a great deal of the Course pointing out the ego's sick dynamics to us -- but that does not mean his mind is not healed. What is important is that he is not judging us as he uncovers our ego's machinations. He sees everything as either an extension of love or a call for it (T.12.I.3:1,2,3,4). When we are joined with Jesus in our minds, we will see any conflict in the world, at either an individual or an international level, in that same light. We will not deny what our eyes see, but our interpretation will be different from the world's interpretation. In the context of sickness, the Course observes that **"the body's eyes will continue to see differences. But the mind that has let itself be healed will no longer acknowledge them. There will be those who seem to be 'sicker' than others, and the body's eyes will report their changed appearances as before. But the healed mind will put them all in one category; they are unreal"** (M-8.6:1-4). And this healed perception can arise only after our mind has released its belief in the value of conflict and war as a means for projecting the guilt of separation outside of our own mind. We may have agreed to participate in a collective dream where an external war is played out in order to reinforce the ego's perception of the world as one of victims and victimizers - but we can in any instant ask for help, first recognizing the ego's purpose for war and then deciding we no longer wish to reinforce that insanity in our own mind. And before we would see innocence on all sides of the conflict, we would first see the insanity on all sides, and recognize it is the same insanity we share with everyone else when we are identified with the ego.

Q #38: What is the Course referring to when it says: "There will be no assault upon your wish to hear a call that never has been made" (T.31.II.8.5)?

A: The "call that never has been made" refers to the "call" to be separate from God, heard constantly in our wrong minds. It is impossible to separate from totality, from everything; therefore, the call "never was made." That is another way of stating the Atonement principle that the separation never happened in reality. And we will not be punished for wishing to hear the call that tells us that our individual, separate identity is real. In a different context, Jesus says basically the same thing: **"Here is your promise never to allow union to call you out of separation"** (T.19.IV.D.3). But he never tires of reminding us that it is

not a sin deserving of retribution to prefer to exist as an individual being and make up a God in our own image rather than answer the call of the Holy Spirit to return to our true Identity as spirit, as Christ. This is what is meant by: "There will be no assault..." It corrects the traditional biblical views that an offended, vengeful God demands atonement through sacrifice for the sins of His children.

Q #39: I have heard you say numerous times that when we awaken, we don't go poof, that we don't disappear, etc. And yet, every time I seriously consider going home with Jesus, I think of the unfinished job I still have "here" and it stops me. I then remember you say that whatever needs to be done here would be done because my body would then be directed in the most helpful way, but that it wouldn't be my concern any more. In fact, if it were my concern, it would be my ego doing it. Is that right? How do I reconcile that with the example of bodhisattvas who choose to maintain an attachment to something in this world—be it a loved one or chocolate, in order to maintain the body and do the work of helping that they came here to do? That is an investment in what we do from the point of view of the Course, isn't it?

A: If I understand you correctly, you are saying that you believe you are here and would like to go home, but you haven't made that choice yet because you feel you are not finished here. That state of mind is distinctly different from the state of a mind that is healed, knows that it is not really here, but has become solely the instrument of the Holy Spirit's Love. The starting points, in other words, are very different. The healed mind has already "left," you might say, and is "here" in a totally different way from the mind that is still on the journey and considering the choice to go home with Jesus. A healed mind is beyond any bodily identity and thoroughly identified with non- dualistic love. To be present in an illusory state, therefore, requires a focus on something to help ground it. It could be anything at all -- from a love of chocolate to following a certain baseball team. But there would never be a reluctance or resistance to returning home, because the healed mind knows it is already there; there is nothing to attain, no journey.

I believe you are expressing something entirely different in *content* from this state of mind. In *form*, both might experience that they are not yet finished with what they are here to do. But for those still on the journey and learning how to lessen their investment in their bodily identity, there would be tremendous fear to let go totally of the only identity with which they are familiar. It is a gradual process over many, many years requiring the commitment to look fearlessly with Jesus at the contents of their wrong minds, which rest almost immutably on the defiant choice to leave Home and never return. As Jesus poignantly reassures us: **"I am leading you to a new kind of experience that you will become less and less willing to deny" (T.11.VI.3.6).** It is a process, and the final choice will be made effortlessly. In fact, the attraction to Love will be so strong, that it will not even be regarded as a choice. There no longer is a concern about going "poof"!

Q #40: I have heard and read from some that the Course is not for everyone and some Course authorities go so far as to say that it is intended for a more intellectual/educated audience. I find this claim to be very dangerous. Are these claims true or are they nothing more than a form of seeking salvation through separation and a desire to create a level of specialness within a certain demographic namely those educated enough to understand, comprehend, live the Course? How do we reconcile these claims with the text statement: All are called?

A: Anyone at all can benefit from the Course. One does not have to be an intellectual to learn from it and use it as a spiritual path. Nonetheless, it is obvious that it is written on a high intellectual level with sophisticated metaphysical, theological, and psychological concepts integrated into the teaching throughout the three books. Much of it is written in blank verse. Thus, a reader/ student who is not intellectually inclined and has no background in these areas would have difficulty understanding a great deal of the material. This does not mean, though, that such a person could not be helped by reading through it and doing the exercises in the workbook. If the person comes away from the Course being

more kind, more loving, and reassured of God's Love, and less angry, depressed, and fearful, then its purpose has been fulfilled. On the other hand, there have been many highly educated people who were not able relate to the Course at all, for a variety of reasons. They will find another path more suitable to their needs and inclinations.

Thus, to say that the Course is not for everyone is not to say that it deliberately excludes people. The Course says of itself that it is only one among many thousands of other forms of the universal course (M.1.4). It does not have to be for everyone. Some religions have claimed that theirs is the only true religion, the only way to be reconciled with God. *A Course in Miracles* does not do that. Rather, the implication throughout the Course is that everyone will eventually find a path that will lead them to God. It does not have to be this one.

Q #41: The events, activities and relationships of our "waking dream" comprise our classroom and are the vehicles for learning our lesson of forgiveness. Is there any particular significance or value of our "sleeping dreams" in the process of learning forgiveness and should our response to these images be any different from our response to our "waking dream" classroom?

A: It is the same mind that is dreaming both our waking and sleeping dreams. And it is one of the ego's many tricks to try to convince us that there is a real difference between the two so that we believe we are awake when we are really still asleep, just having a different form of the same dream of separation. One of the more important insights our sleeping dreams offer us upon our shifting to a seeming waking state is the realization that our mind has the power to make up a world in dreams that seems very real while we are experiencing it, a world made up solely to meet our own personal needs. Jesus elaborates on this aspect of our sleeping dreams in a very clear passage:

"Does not a world that seems quite real arise in dreams?...And while you see it you do not doubt that it is real. Yet here is a world, clearly within your mind, that seems to be outside. You do not respond to it as though you made it, nor do you realize that the emotions the dream produces must come from you...You seem to waken, and the dream is gone. Yet what you fail to recognize is that what caused the dream has not gone with it. Your wish to make another world that is not real remains with you. And what you seem to waken to is but another form of this same world you see in dreams. All your time is spent in dreaming. Your sleeping and your waking dreams have different forms, and that is all. Their content is the same. They are your protest against reality, and your fixed and insane idea that you can change it" (T.18.II.1:1; 5:2,3,4,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15).

In our sleeping dreams, we have the same choice of teachers that we have when we are "awake" and we may find over time that we can choose forgiveness while we sleep, recognizing that our judgments within the dream are not justified. We may even become a lucid dreamer, becoming aware, even as we are dreaming, that our sleeping dream is an invention of our own mind, presaging the awareness that will eventually come to us about our waking dreams. And our sleeping dreams also afford us the opportunity to understand the real meaning of forgiveness that Jesus is attempting to lead us towards, when we realize, upon awakening, that the source of any upset we experience in our sleeping dreams has nothing to do with what anyone else is doing to us. Our upset reflects nothing more than a decision in our own mind to be upset and then to attribute that loss of peace to a cause that seems to be outside of ourselves. The awareness that this is what we are also doing in our waking dreams is the foundation for the process of forgiveness as Jesus presents it to us in the Course: **"I am never upset for the reason I think...I am upset because I see something that is not there" (W.pl.5,6). "Forgiveness recognizes what you thought your brother did to you has not occurred" (W.pll.1.1:1).** When we can generalize this recognition from our sleeping dreams to our waking dreams, we will be well on the way to awakening from *all* of our dreams of separation.

Q #42: Does *A Course in Miracles* refer to "God" as an interactive god who makes changes and alterations to our physical and worldly existence in relation to our daily actions? The Course initially states that we are changeless but later refers to all the various changes which we make as we progress. I do not understand if we are capable of making any changes or not? If we are changeless, why bother doing anything at all because we are what we are anyway.

A: Although much of the Course refers to God in personal terms, as if He were a concerned Father, distinct from His children, who is watching over us, when we understand the basic metaphysical teachings of the Course on God, it becomes apparent that these kinds of personal, human references to God can not be meant literally. They represent the Course's attempt to **"use the language that this [finite] mind can understand, in the condition [of separation] in which it thinks it is"** (T.25.I.7:4) and to correct the misperceptions we hold of God from our ego interpretation of God as an angry, vengeful Father who seeks to punish us for our attacks on Him.

The Course spends very little time on the impossible task of describing to our limited, finite minds the true nature of God, His creations, and reality -- **"there is no symbol for totality"** (T.27.III.5:1) -- but there are a few attempts. For example, from the workbook, **"What He creates is not apart from Him, and nowhere does the Father end, the Son begin as something separate from Him"** (W.pl.12:4). And acknowledging the impossibility of capturing in words That Which is beyond all concepts and symbols: **"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 it is now aware of something not itself. It has united with its Source. And like its Source Itself, it merely is"** (W.p.I.169.5).

So God, Who is **"All in all"** (T.7.IV.7:4), can not act on a part of Himself, as if it were separate from Him. And even to refer to Him as "Him" is to attribute a personal nature to the Source of all that in reality is totally abstract. The Course therefore does not describe God as interacting with his children in the world. That role is given to the Holy Spirit as the Voice for God, providing the Holy Spirit a symbolic function, unlike the Father and the Son (T.5.I.4:1). But since the world is all a projection of the basic ego illusion, which has no reality, there really is no world in which the Holy Spirit intervenes, only a mind that believes there is a world. And even then the Voice for God has no active function in the mind -- **"It merely reminds"** (T.5.II.7:4) us of the truth about ourselves and God, which has never changed.

The Course also refers to God as **"the Changeless,"** (W.pl.112.2:2) and **"Formlessness"** (W.pl.186.14:1), Who creates **"only the changeless"** (T.6.IV.12:4). Consequently, it is inconceivable that He could be involved in making changes and alterations in a world of form.

And that brings us to the second question you raise about *our* changelessness. In our reality as spirit, nothing has changed and we remain sinless, perfect and at one with our Source -- this is the principle of the Atonement, repeated numerous times throughout the Course. It is in this sense that we are truly changeless. But clearly this is not what we believe or experience about ourselves. And so the Course does not simply assert what is real and true and leave it at that. That would not be of any help to us, trapped as we seem to be in the morass of our mistaken beliefs. So the Course accepts us where we think we are, acknowledging that we believe that we are each a separate physical being, living as a body in a world of time and space, struggling against forces that seem to be beyond our control. And it offers us the means -- forgiveness, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit -- to find the way out of this meaningless, senseless maze of beliefs in which we have imprisoned ourselves (T.26.V.4:1). Not because any of it is real, but only because we believe it is. And so long as we believe we have changed ourselves from our true reality as Christ, we will need to move through a seeming process of change that undoes all the changes we believe we have introduced into our identity, until we at last realize that in reality nothing has changed at all and we are back at home in the Heaven we never left, where we have always been. So this is a process of *undoing*, and not really *doing* at all. And any change we may seem to experience in the process of undoing our mistaken beliefs is as illusory as the initial thought of change that seemed to expel us from Heaven. But while we hold on to the belief that change is both possible and

real, then change will be our experience. And our only choice will be whether to seek for change that reinforces guilt and separation and seems to take us even farther from our true home, or change that results from the practice of forgiveness in the context of our worldly relationships, allowing us to return.

Q #43: How can you tell for certain that you are following the Voice of the Holy Spirit rather than the ego's voice? I know the Course says that we will feel peace when following the Holy Spirit but in practice I don't find it that simple. For one thing, I am often so filled with fear that I can't let go enough to feel the Spirit's peace. For another thing, my ego is quite capable of conjuring up such good facsimiles of the Holy Spirit's peace so that sometimes I feel I am following the Spirit, only to find myself badly mistaken. There are many examples today and throughout history of adherents of spiritual paths, committing fear and hate-based acts, all the while believing they are following the will of God, or the Voice of the Spirit. Course students are not immune to that mistake. Until we develop to the point where we can reliably tell which voice we are following, isn't it better to have some sort of outside framework, such as rules against killing, violence etc., by which we can judge our guidance?

A: In our experience, this is the second most commonly asked question, the first being, "How could the separation have happened in the first place?" Your question is everyone's question who practices the Course. We have addressed it in our book, *The Most Commonly Asked Questions about "A Course in Miracles,"* question 43, in which we comment on the section in Chapter 14 of the text, "The Test for Truth."

In general it can be helpful, as you conclude, to have an external framework or set of rules as a guide to keep our egos within certain boundaries. In addition, plain old common sense should never be lost sight of either. Unfortunately, and obviously, that does not stop people who appeal to God's Will or the Holy Spirit's guidance to justify whatever they do, thinking they are no longer bound by the world's laws and now follow a "higher" authority. But conforming to normal laws of civilized people is always advisable. Such conformity, though, should not be used as a measure of spiritual advancement.

What you describe as your experience over the years is typical of most students. The theory is simple, but the practice is anything but that because of our investment in our lives as individual, special, needy persons -- an investment we either overlook or sorely underestimate. We are entrenched in our defenses without even recognizing they are defenses. That is why Jesus stresses over and over again, especially in the workbook, that the heart of the practice of this Course is looking with him at all of the hatred and guilt in our minds. Consistently practicing this would enable us to recognize more clearly how our egos operate, what form our projections would most likely take, and how we defend against the fear of letting go of judgments, specialness, etc. Our focus should always be on letting go of the ego thoughts in our minds, and not behavior.

If we do this "right," which means look within with the love of Jesus as our "eyes," we would experience peace for more and more extended periods of time as we go along. But it usually takes the assessment of another person who knows us very well, to help discern whether the peace is genuine or not. Most people do not experience the Holy Spirit or Jesus as a voice speaking to them, such as was Helen Schucman's experience of Jesus. Her experience should not be taken as a criterion of what hearing the Holy Spirit should mean. That we are hearing the Voice for God is often indicated by our discovering that we have become less judgmental, less demanding that our specialness needs be met, less angry, less selfish, less depressed, etc. But again, this is not easy. We are masters of self-deception. Humility can go a long way toward keeping us honest.

Q #44: How do I act in the world of form before I have been able to forgive a situation? If I act lovingly without really feeling it I will feel resentment. If I act according to my true feelings I will feel guilty. Either way I lose!!!

A: The key is always to be aware of your motivation in a conflict with someone else -- the underlying purpose it serves, as you seem to struggle over how to act. **"What you do comes from what you think"(T.2.VI.2:7)**, as Jesus points out. **"It is only at this level that you can exercise choice...It is pointless to believe that controlling the outcome of misthought can result in healing....You must change your mind, not your behavior, and this is a matter of willingness....Change does not mean anything at the symptom level, where it cannot work" (2:6; 3:1,4,7).**

We are stubborn creatures, not prone to forgiveness, although it is the most natural thing we can do in this world. But the world is an unnatural place. And so we resist what really would be kindest and most helpful to *ourselves*. So long as I think that acting lovingly towards others is a charitable whim I bestow on an undeserving someone outside of myself (**W.pl.126.4:1**), I will resent not getting in my "justified" licks against you if I feel you have treated me unfairly. But if I can honestly look at how a retaliatory attack on you will really make me feel, I may be more open to a right-minded solution. If I can begin to recognize that my reaction to you has nothing to do with what you have done and everything to do with the guilt in my own mind, which is the cause of all my pain and for which I am always seeking a target on which to project it, I may think twice about reinforcing that guilt in my own mind by a further overt attack on you. Forgiveness is not a gift bestowed on someone else, unmerited and unjustified. It is a gift I offer first and foremost to myself. When I accept that gift for myself, then I will automatically know how to respond to you who had seemed to offend me, offering you the same gift I have just accepted for myself, in the form in which you will most likely be able to accept it. And I will have no sense of resentment or loss associated with it.

Okay, but what if I'm still too stubborn to believe and accept what is truly in my own best interest for a particular situation -- I am not ready to forgive because I still want to hold on to my grievance against you so that I can believe the guilt is in you and not in me? Then I would want at least to be able to acknowledge that I am still identified with my ego, where my "choices" seem to be limited to either overtly attacking you in retaliation or sacrificing my right to retaliation in a feigned "loving" show of "forgiveness" (still an attack). Either option will reinforce my guilt if I act without awareness of my underlying motivation. And so these are not really different choices at all, at the level of content. So now it will be important that I at least be honest with myself, and recognize that it is neither kindness nor righteousness nor any evil within me that is guiding me to act in whatever way I finally choose with my ego, since I have already decided against choosing at the only level that can really help. It is my own fear of love and of the quiet, gentle peace that accompanies the release of grievances that is behind my resistance to asking for help from a different Teacher. If I can recognize that and not judge myself for it, then I have at least minimized the guilt that I am reinforcing in my own mind for continuing to identify with my ego. And that is always a goal of the Course.

Q #45: My question refers to the process of helping others. In studying the Course, I realize that the world's salvation and my own is my only function. However, is there an accredited program or some kind of certification based on the Course that could be pursued, in a field such as psychotherapy or counseling.

A: To address the second part of your question first, sorry, but there can be no formal training based on the Course to prepare someone for the role of therapist or counselor because the Course has nothing to say about specific forms or roles. This does not mean that there may not be those who offer such a curriculum, but it is not really in line with the intentions of the Course as a spiritual teaching. You could be trained, for example, in psychoanalysis or behavioral therapy or Rogerian counseling, each of which employs a very different theoretical model and different techniques and practices from the other

approaches, and still utilize the principles of the Course in your work with patients. This is because the Course is intended to help you change how you perceive situations and relationships within your own mind and has nothing to say about how you behave or act with others. And so any form of therapeutic practice, even if it may have initially been made to maintain separation, can be used for a truly healing outcome when it is placed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The pamphlet, *Psychotherapy: Purpose, Process and Practice*, does provide a helpful application of Course principles in a therapeutic context, but a careful reading of it makes it very clear that Jesus is only talking about what is going on within the mind of the therapist and is never making recommendations for how the therapist should act with the patient or client. The insights a therapist develops from the Course about the nature of reality and the purpose of the world and the self -- first from the ego's perspective of the reality of sin and guilt, and then from the perspective of the Holy Spirit's healed perception -- may or may not be things that would be appropriate to discuss with a patient. But it would always be the content of forgiveness and not any specific words or concepts that the therapist would want to share with the patient. And the content is shared in any instant when the therapist has released all the judgments he may be holding in his own mind against the patient, which are nothing more than the projections of judgments he is holding against himself. The pamphlet describes this process: **"The therapist sees in the patient all that he has not forgiven in himself, and is thus given another chance to look at it, open it to reevaluation and forgive it. When this occurs, he sees his sins as gone into a past that is no longer here....The patient is his screen for the projections of his sins, enabling him to let them go"** (P.2.VI.6:3,4,6,7).

And to turn to your opening comments with just a few clarifications. When you speak of helping others, and observe that the Course speaks of the world's salvation and our own as our only function, you want to be sure that you understand what the world's salvation means. The workbook says that **"salvation of the world depends on me"** (W.pl.186.h). But the world's salvation does not refer to doing anything in the world or to having an effect on anything external, including others, in the world. The salvation of the world depends on my withdrawing the projections of guilt that I have placed upon the world, and then releasing those judgments from myself as well - - the same process that we have just read from the *Psychotherapy* pamphlet. In the end, having no further purpose, the external world will disappear, just as the guilt we have projected on to it vanishes in the light of forgiveness. In other words, **"there is no world"** to save (W.pl.132.6:2).

And so, in the meantime, before our mind is completely healed, we would not want any actions we take in the world to come from our own perception of what help others need -- we do not know. All of our perceptions are based on a belief in the reality of separation, scarcity, lack and loss, so our own interventions will only serve to reinforce that belief in ourselves and others. We cannot possibly know or understand what real help is, in a separated state of mind. But when we release our own judgments, grievances and guilt, then the part of our mind -- the Holy Spirit -- that does know is free to express Itself through us. And the help will then always be a reminder that sin and guilt and separation are not real, expressed in a form that can be accepted in another without increasing fear (T.2.IV.5). But we will have not made the decision on our own about how that is best done. As Jesus not so subtly observes, **"Your function here is only to decide against deciding what you want, in recognition that you do not know. How, then, can you decide what you should do? Leave all decisions to the One Who speaks for God, and for your function as He knows it"** (T.14.IV.5:2,3,4).

Q #46: What does the course say about feelings??? I know it says we shouldn't deny our feelings. Could you say more on this. Are we to listen to what our feelings are telling us?

A: *Feelings* is not used very often in the Course, since it's focus is on *thoughts*. But in order to access our thoughts, it is very important that we be in touch with our feelings. If we are not aware of how we feel, then we are that much farther removed from our thoughts. So one of the first practical steps a student of

the Course may take is that of becoming more and more aware of how they feel. This can often times be a painful process, since more often than not, our painful feelings are denied. Once we allow these feelings to arise within us, we are tempted to shove them back down again because they are unpleasant. For some of us, we may only deny particular feelings, such as anger, grief, or jealousy, etc. Society teaches us what we "should" and "should not" feel, and then the Course comes along, and as spiritual seekers, we impose additional "shoulds" and "should nots." It is no wonder no one knows how they feel!

Once we are in touch with how we feel, we can then begin the process of discovering what thought caused the feeling. We do not have to don our Sherlock Holmes hats and search and search for these thoughts, as over-intellectualizing the process simply becomes another obstacle. Search your mind as best you can, but more importantly, give Jesus or the Holy Spirit your willingness to know what the thought is. And in most instances, even those having to do with anger, you will find that your thoughts have to do with loss of some kind. Once you are aware of the thought you then have the choice to change the thought, or not. But at least you have found the true source of your pain. It is not anything outside of you, but rather the thoughts you hold within.

As Jesus tells us in the text:

This is the only thing that you need do for vision, happiness, release from pain and the complete escape from sin, all to be given you. Say only this, but mean it with no reservations, for here the power of salvation lies:

I am responsible for what I see.

I choose the [thoughts and] feelings I experience, and I decide upon the goal I would achieve.

And everything that seems to happen to me I ask for, and receive as I have asked.

Deceive yourself no longer that you are helpless in the face of what is done to you. Acknowledge but that you have been mistaken, and all effects of your mistakes will disappear (T.21.II.2:1,2,3,4,5,6,7).

Q #47: Seven months ago, I thought I made a decision in a peaceful and loving way. I had advice and support in my decision. Now, I have recently been given information that has made me question the action. At the time, I felt this was the most loving and kind thing. I find this very disturbing and have revisited the tapes on "Rules for Decision." I think I've never given up the guilt or the blame for taking the action. I know the Course is a process; I've been a student for 12 years, but when this happened I questioned that I've made any progress. I know that the Course is not about doing things in this world. Am I dealing with 2 different situations or am I still in the original one problem?

A: If you felt you did the most loving and kind thing, then you should stay with that. You know, we have limited ourselves so much, and have erected so many layers of defenses by choosing to think we are bodies, that we simply are not in touch with what is going on beneath the surface of our conscious awareness. We cannot see the larger picture at all; therefore, we do not know where we are on our Atonement path. So it is not helpful to question our progress. That is where having Jesus as our teacher is so helpful. By following his directions in his Course, we are led deeper and deeper into our minds, and we slowly begin to get in touch with the underlying motivations for our actions and thought patterns.

So the experience you had is not at all uncommon. We all can look back at decisions we've made that seem to have been the right ones, but now, because we have uncovered more of what we had kept hidden about ourselves in our minds, we realize that we had overlooked something or had simply

deceived ourselves. That is to be expected as we go along, but feeling guilty over it is not helpful. Feeling guilty will only reinforce the problem and keep the solution concealed.

The "proper" response is to feel grateful that you have learned something more about how your ego operates, so that you now can be more vigilant for those kinds of ploys. It is a humbling experience, but if you accept that your purpose is to journey -- with Jesus' love guiding you -- into the darkness in your mind, you will not be so surprised to discover these instances of self-deception. Ultimately, you will recognize that the whole thing is a defense against the light and the love that is there, and that is our true reality.

Q #48: I have been reading "The Power of Now" by Eckhart Tolle, and find it in line with *A Course in Miracles*. Have you at the Foundation come across this book? If so, would you comment on the ideas in the book, and how they do or do not coincide with the Course.

A: It has always been our Foundation's policy not to discuss the work of other authors and teachers of *A Course in Miracles*, or any work relating to the Course. One of our reasons has been the concern that this could very easily lead to divisiveness, which would override any potential usefulness to such discussion.

What we can say, however, is that *A Course in Miracles* is unique among spiritualities or spiritual approaches, both contemporary and ancient ones. This certainly does not mean that it is necessarily the best, but only that what it teaches, and the way in which it teaches it, is different from other paths. One can state this uniqueness in general terms as being the integration of a non- dualistic metaphysics, which states that only the non-material God is real, with a sophisticated psychological approach, heavily based on Freud's insights into the human psyche. This integration helps us live within the illusory world under the principle of forgiveness, taught to us by the Holy Spirit .

In general, we can also say that if a student of *A Course in Miracles* benefits from another spiritual path, and such integration helps the student become kinder and more forgiving, then that needs no justification or comment. It is always helpful to return to the basic Course teaching of *content* rather than *form*, and to recall the statement at the end of the manual for teachers: **"The curriculum is highly individualized, and all aspects are under the Holy Spirit's particular care and guidance" (M.29.2:6)**. Therefore, read and study whatever is helpful. What is most important is the degree to which you are able to *practice* forgiveness, rather than seeking to *understand* it.

Q #49: The Course says the world was made as an attack on God. It also says that the body is neutral. Since they are both illusions, should they not be seen as neutral?

A: The Course also says that **"the body is a limit on love....it was made to limit the unlimited" T.18.VIII.1:2,3)**. Everything of the ego, including the power to choose or decide, and all the defenses to protect and maintain the ego's survival, was made as an attack on the Love and the Oneness of God. But everything that the ego made to separate, the Holy Spirit can use for healing, if we are willing to offer it to Him. It always comes down to a question of purpose -- any illusion, once invested with our belief in its reality, can be used either for the purpose of the ego or for the purpose of the Holy Spirit.

So yes, both the body and the world -- made to defy God and His creation and prove that we are more powerful than He, but then covered over by the belief that we are our bodies, vulnerable and frail, victims of the overwhelming forces of a victimizing world -- now become neutral, awaiting our choice as to whose purpose they will serve. And that is what makes the Course's teachings so gentle, not seeing the body and the world as obstacles in themselves to be overcome on the journey back to God. Sacrifice of what

we think we cherish -- things of the body and of the world -- are called for by most other spiritual teachings. However, the Course asks only that we be willing to have their purpose transformed until, in the end, we willingly discard them as no longer of value to us, **"functionless, unneeded and cast off....to be replaced for greater good" (W.pll.294.1:9,10)**. But so long as the body and the world still have value to us, we are not asked to give them up.

It is our *beliefs* or *thoughts* about the body and the world that are not neutral. The Course makes this very clear: **"No belief is neutral" (T24.in.2:3); "You have no neutral thoughts" (W.pl.16.h)**. And so it is at the level of thought or belief that the Course teaches that change has to be made. It is our beliefs or thoughts that give everything in the world its purpose. And all thought comes from either the ego or the Holy Spirit. Accepting the ego's thought system reinforces our belief in the reality of sin, guilt and fear and their defenses -- the world and the body. Turning to the Holy Spirit's thought system undoes that belief, first allowing us not to take the things of the world, including ourselves, so seriously, and then leading us in the end to recognize that all of the ego's beliefs and their manifestations are unreal or illusory. Once we have recognized their unreality, they will no longer have any value for us and can be easily released.

Q #50: If the process of forgiveness is the basis of the Course, why does Jesus not just concentrate on that and give us all the techniques or advice in the most "practical" way possible? Any way do you have any techniques, advise or other? I am just desperate with the difficulty of the work!!!

A: First of all, you have a lot of company! Many, many people share your feelings about their work with the Course.

The Course is highly practical, but unfortunately, not in the way we would like it to be. We would like it to tell us *what to do behaviorally* in specific situations. It does not offer us practical advice or techniques on that level, though, because that is not its focus. It is a Course in changing our minds (*content*) not our behavior (*form*). It is a Course in *cause*, not *effect*, as Jesus tells us in a moving part of "The 'Hero' of the Dream" section in Chapter 27 of the text:

"In gentle laughter does the Holy Spirit perceive the cause, and looks not to effects. How else could He correct your error, who have overlooked the cause entirely? He bids you bring each terrible effect to Him that you may look together on its foolish cause and laugh with Him a while. You judge effects, but He has judged their cause. And by His judgment are effects removed" (T.27.VIII.9:1,2,3,4,5).

Therefore, the Course says nothing about behavior, which is what so many students find frustrating. We would like to be told exactly what to do as we go about interacting with people and having to make all kinds of decisions about our lives. It does tell us what to do, but not in the behavioral sense. The workbook lessons are very specific about what we should do when we become upset, angry, judgmental, fearful, sick, etc. But the instructions are geared exclusively to the decision-making capacities of our minds, from which our behavior flows. Our behavior emanates from the thought system we have chosen in our minds. So the work of the Course centers entirely on that dimension, because that is where the *cause* of all of our problems and distress lies. Our bodily states are just the *effects* of the *cause*. Therefore, we can be helped most effectively by working with the *contents* of our minds. That is the kind of help Jesus offers us in his Course. This is part of what makes the Course unique in its approach to spirituality.

Yet sometimes concentrating on behavioral changes is helpful and even necessary, especially when addictions are involved. Often, internal work cannot begin until one's emotional and physical status is fairly stable. But the relief from pain, anxiety, guilt, fear, etc. is usually not permanent when changes are made only on the behavioral level, with no corresponding change in the mind. The Course teaches us that we have concealed the deepest sources of motivation in our minds, so if we don't get to that level, we

will never have lasting internal peace, despite behavioral changes. By applying the teachings and principles of the Course, we are promised an end to *all* of our pain and *all* of our problems.

There are two striking passages, among others, that describe the Course's orientation and approach to healing the pain and solving the problems of our lives: **"Certain it is that all distress does not appear to be but unforgiveness. Yet that is the content underneath the form" (W.pl.193.4:1.1); "Of one thing you were sure: Of all the many causes you perceived as bringing pain and suffering to you, your guilt was not among them" (T.27.VII.7:4).** So Jesus tells us in these passages, as well as in dozens of others, that we know neither what our problems are nor their solutions. We had best, then, ask his help and follow his guidance, as he knows what our problems truly are, and how they can be solved.

One should not mistake its emphasis on content to mean that the Course advocates complete license to behave in whatever way one chooses. This is clearly not its direction. It does not focus on behavior because of its metaphysical premises, primary of which is the principle that the world is nothing but the projection of a thought in our minds. And since "ideas leave not their source," the world remains in the mind and therefore is not what it appears to us to be. Neither is the body. So by staying on a behavioral level, we are limiting the extent of healing that can occur. For some people, however, changing behavior is a helpful place to start the process of getting back in touch with the power of the mind that we have dissociated. It often would reflect the mind's decision to be more loving and kind to oneself, which is actually an application of Course principles. Having completed some other therapy or training, a person may choose to return to the Course, and then be better able to learn and practice what it teaches.

Q #51: I was intrigued by Ken Wapnick's phraseology in his discussion of *The Song of Prayer* and the use of language in the Course. It reads: "This...is...a wonderful portrait of the Course's path of forgiving the arrogant world of guilt, illusion, and specificity through looking at the ego with humility and without fear." How do I look at the ego with humility? I can hardly imagine looking at it without judgment, never mind with humility!

A: Looking at the ego without judgment *is* looking at it with humility. The ego in its arrogance would have us shrink back in horror when we realize the extent of its deception, scheming and viciousness. This horror comes from the arrogance of trying to fool ourselves into thinking we are egoless, more spiritually advanced than we actually are, or that we are capable of evaluating ourselves at all. To begin with, it takes humility to recognize just how much we don't want the peace of God, how firmly we cling to our belief system, the pursuit of our selfish interests, and our individual specialness. Reacting with shock and dismay in recognizing this comes from arrogance. The Course tells us it is our arrogance that has us hold a demeaning image of ourselves, thus denying our true identity: **"Arrogance makes an image of yourself that is not real. It is this image which quails and retreats in terror, as the Voice for God assures you that you have the strength, the wisdom and the holiness to go beyond all images" (W.pl.186.6:1,2).** One of the most frequently repeated lines in the Course is **"I am as God created me" (W.pl.94).** In our arrogance we deny this identity, deciding for ourselves who we are, what we do, and why. The ego even has us believe humility is looking upon ourselves as lowly and unworthy. The Course teaches us just the opposite. We are told: **"Humility consists of accepting your role in salvation and in taking no other" (W.pll.61.2:3).** It asks us to learn to see ourselves along with all our brothers and sisters as worthy of God's love. It does indeed take humility to look *honestly but calmly, without judgment*, at the arrogance of the ego, and then, as has often been stated, *smile at it*. We look at the ego with humility when we are willing to question our point of view, our interpretation and our definition of ourselves, of everyone and everything we encounter. If we are then willing to let go of our interpretation, we can step out of the ego's arrogant stance and accept the Holy Spirit's perception. This is true humility.

Q #52: Is it wrong to feel guilty about tragic world events, such as starvation in Africa, etc.? Often, when I see situations of people suffering in poorer countries, I feel guilty and think, "Look at the easy life I have. I really have nothing to complain about." Is my guilt in this situation really just an attempt to retain a sense of specialness and separateness?

A: Guilt and blame are never justified, according to the Course. But the guilt you are feeling more than likely is coming from a deeper source than you mention, and can be undone only on that level. All of us would feel a deep sense of guilt simply because we are here. Our existence in this world is at God's expense, so the ego has convinced us. We in essence stole God's creative power and conferred it on ourselves so that we could direct our own lives in a world that could give us the specialness and individuality that was not available in Heaven. The guilt associated with our existence here is enormous as a result, and is deliberately kept out of awareness through denial and projection.

This dynamic of projection requires that there be a world in which terrible things happen, so that we can perceive both victims and victimizers outside us, rather than in the bloody battlefield in our minds, where we are terrified that God will come storming after us and destroy us for our abominable attack on Him. So there is a second tier of guilt in our minds that comes from our *wanting* there to be suffering in the world to keep our defense of projection working, which in turn maintains this system of existence outside Heaven and God.

Even though the ego assured us that we would be free of guilt by projecting both ourselves and our guilt from the mind, we wind up feeling guilty as bodies in a world of bodies anyway. We feel guilty when we are doing well because deep within our minds we know we got it all illegitimately. And we feel guilty when we see others not doing so well, because on an unconscious level we feel responsible for their suffering and poverty. It reminds us of our complicity in a plan to have a world of affliction and unsolvable problems so that we would never remember that the only problem is that we made the wrong decision in our minds, and that we can simply go back to our minds, guided by Jesus or the Holy Spirit, and now make the right decision.

Finally, we have to be wary of our tendency to interpret events by *form* only. In other words, the external form cannot tell us what is going on in a person's Atonement path, the *content*. Perhaps suffering or poverty is the classroom that that mind is using to learn that the body is not our true reality. We don't know that, so we should be cautious about judging what appear to be unfortunate situations. We really cannot see the larger picture. We also need to remember that one of the central principles of the Course is that there is no hierarchy of illusions. The bottom line is that kindness and gentleness to all people, regardless of their situation, should be our guiding principle.

Q #53: Does being active in political and social programs inappropriately reinforce the dream from which we are trying to awaken? Should one work solely on the self? Isn't that the best way to address the world's ill?

A: First, the Course is exclusively about the healing of our minds, because that is where our one and only problem and its solution reside: our decision to be separate, and our capacity to undo that choice. **"Forget not that the healing of God's Son is all this world is for" (T.24.VI.4:1).** On one level, therefore, we can help the world most effectively by undoing the guilt in our minds, because the projection of this guilt is what made the world and all its problems, and what sustains it as well. The world, thus, is but an idea in our minds and has never left its source in our minds. If we could identify with this totally and then undo the guilt, the world would disappear back into the nothingness from which it came, and we would be back home in God. Then **"nothing you remember now will you remember" (T.19.VI.6:6).**

However, because we have not fully integrated this principle, our experience is that there is a world and we are influenced by it in many ways. It is a highly significant part of our dream and of our script.

Therefore, on this level we cannot ignore it or be indifferent or passive about what takes place in the world, just as ignoring or denying bodily conditions is an **"unworthy form of denial" (T.2.IV.3:11)**. Two principles that can guide us on this level are (1) there is no hierarchy of illusions, and (2) purpose is everything. Thus, being politically or socially active is no different than performing surgery, competing in sports, or eating and breathing in order to stay alive. In this sense, we cannot say that one reinforces the dream more than another. They are neutral once we identify with bodily existence. It is only when we consider *purpose* that we can begin to evaluate the helpfulness of what we do for our Atonement path. Being involved in political or social movements, or just stopping to help a person injured in an accident, can either reinforce the separation or undo it, depending on whether we have chosen the ego or Jesus as our teacher. It is not the behavior, in other words, that helps or hinders our spiritual advancement. The pivotal issue is whether we have chosen in our minds to see our interests as separate or the same as another person's.

None of this should be taken to mean that one *must* be involved in political or social programs. It is entirely a matter of how one is guided. It is neither inherently wrong-minded nor right-minded to be active in the world. We just need to be vigilant about using Course principles to justify aloofness or indifference. It is indeed a fine line to walk and requires considerable experience and maturity to both integrate the teachings of the Course and yet do what normal and compassionate people do who are citizens of a country.

Q #54: What is the definition of intelligence as it is used in the Course? Is intelligence a part of the ego or a glimpse of the Divine?

A: Intelligence is a function of the brain, it is therefore part of the operational system of the body, not to be confused with the mind, which is not in the brain and does not require intelligence. That is not to say that the mind does not make use of the brain, as it does the body, in our illusory experience of being in a body in this dream state. The Course statements regarding the body can thus be applied to the brain/intelligence. It is neutral, and can be used by the Holy Spirit or the ego for their respective goals. This is true of any ability or skill attributed to the body. The Course itself is an example of the use of the intellect as a form, using language, metaphysical principles, psychological terms, etc., to reflect a choice in the mind to turn toward the love and truth which is the content. It is one form helpful to the Sonship to learn to accept love, but it is not the only form. In the Manual we are told: **"This is a manual for a special curriculum, intended for teachers of a special form of the universal course. There are many thousands of other forms, all with the same outcome" (M.1.4:1,2).**

We easily become confused when it comes to the brain and intelligence because we still think **"that [our] understanding is a powerful contribution to the truth, and makes it what it is" (T.18.IV.7:5)**. We hold our intellectual abilities in high regard, failing to realize that the mind is the true home of thought, having nothing to do with the illusory thoughts that generate from our brains. The healing of the mind through forgiveness does not require intelligence, it requires willingness, which is a function of the mind. The mind can be willing and can in fact make a choice for healing without the need for intellect/intelligence. Otherwise intellectual ability and/or intelligence would obviously be a requirement for salvation and that would exclude a large segment of the Sonship (those who are mentally incapacitated, have brain dysfunctions, are comatose, etc.) We certainly have all had the experience of being completely baffled by a particular passage at one time only to have absolute clarity as to its meaning at a later reading. Our intelligence had nothing to do with the confusion or with the clarity. The confusion came from our resistance; the clarity from our willingness. A person with limited intelligence may come to the Course with little resistance and a high degree of willingness and thus be open to learning the content of the Course: its message of love and forgiveness. An intellectually gifted person, on the other hand, may be blocked by tremendous resistance and fail to grasp the true message of the Course, in spite of intellectually mastering the principles of its metaphysics. Although we are making use of our brains to read, study and even apply the teachings of the Course in our lives, the real activity is going on in the mind that is

choosing to turn toward the light and truth of the Course's message. The intellectual activity is the reflection of that choice, but it is not a requirement, and it is certainly not a glimpse of the Divine. Very intellectually limited persons have been brilliant reflections of light and love in the world, while intellectually gifted persons have remained entrenched in the ego's darkness.

In our study and practice of the Course it becomes apparent that however much we intellectually understand or do not understand the principles of the Course, it is the application of these principles with sincere willingness that makes them effective in bringing about our healing and the experience of peace. As we read: **"Salvation, perfect and complete, asks but a little wish that what is true be true; a little willingness to overlook what is not there; a little sigh that speaks for Heaven as a preference to this world that death and desolation seem to rule. In joyous answer will creation rise within you, to replace the world you see with Heaven, wholly perfect and complete. What is forgiveness but a willingness that truth be true?" (T.26.VII.10:1,2,3)**

Q #55-a: Can you help me understand why we must secretly hate those who have positive qualities that we ourselves do not possess, such as being very spiritual, unselfish, kind, etc.?

A: The ego would tell us this, based on its "law" that **"you have what you have taken" (T.23.II.9.10)**. This "law" rests on the fundamental ego belief in separation and differences. Differences are real and important, and need to be evaluated (the ego's hierarchy of illusions). The concealed origin of this in our minds is our belief that we got to be who we are by stealing our existence from God. He would not give us the special, individual existence we wanted, so we took it for ourselves and left Him behind, seemingly destroyed and "out of the picture." We justified this theft by projecting responsibility for it and declaring that God withheld from us what rightfully belonged to us. This is the Course's mythological rendering of the origin of our existence. There are many more dynamics and levels to this story, obviously, but this is the aspect that is relevant to your question.

It is this core belief about ourselves that is the lens through which we perceive each other. Thus, when we perceive others as having qualities that we lack and wished we had, we must automatically -- though unconsciously -- conclude that those qualities originally belonged to us and were stolen. Again, this is coming from the deeply buried belief that we took from God what rightfully belonged to us, a perversion of what we really believe, which is that we brutally "killed" God so that we could exist the way we wanted, not as He created us. This is the ego thought system. The other aspect to this is that even if we think we simply admire qualities in others, we are secretly upholding the ego's thought system of separation.

Jesus corrects these mistaken beliefs by helping us look at our *need* to see others as different from us, whether in a positive sense or a negative sense. When we see where this need is coming from and can begin to evaluate it as nothing but a "tiny, mad idea" worthy only of gentle laughter, we are ready to shift to Jesus' way of perceiving each other. He would have us learn to see one another as sharing a common interest, both in our wrong minds -- motivated by fear -- and in our right minds -- motivated by our willingness to join with him and undo our belief in separation. The differences we perceive then will have less and less significance to us, and we will be more and more inclined to see what makes us all the same. Our resistance to this is far stronger than we realize, though. The world intractably values "differences that make a difference," and so this invitation to shift our way of perceiving will be met with fierce resistance.

What all of this means ultimately is that you can never truly love someone who you perceive is different from you. That deserves a lot of thought. A prime example of this -- particularly relevant for students of the Course -- is Jesus. As we know, the Bible identified him as God's "only begotten Son," the innocent, sinless Son who had to be sacrificed for our sins. Thus, for thousands of years he has been portrayed as qualitatively, ontologically different from us. It is hard to feel truly close to someone who is so far beyond what we could ever be, and who was killed because of our sinfulness.

Jesus addresses this in so many ways in the Course, basically imploring us to see that image of him as having come only from the ego's obsession with separation, guilt, and sacrifice. It is simply not loving. This is one of the major corrections he presents in his Course. He says he is different, but only temporarily, and that **"walking with him is just as natural as walking with a brother whom you knew since you were born, for such indeed he is" (C.5.5:6)**. Jesus would have us see our sameness; the ego would have us see our differences.

Q #55-b: When the Course talks about the pearl of great price that we think was stolen by another, what does it mean?

A: This is discussed in the context of the fourth law of chaos **"you have what you have taken" (T.23.II.9.10.11)**. The "priceless pearl" is whatever we think is missing or lacking in us. Ultimately, on the ontological level, this would be the *innocence* we believe we sacrificed when we chose our individuality over our inheritance as God's one Son, from then on seeing ourselves as sinful and in conflict with God, Who we are sure will come after us to punish us for what we did. The "priceless pearl" can also be thought of as our *specialness*. This, too, is rooted in the sense of lack or scarcity that we all feel deep within, along with the ongoing feeling that we are at war with God.

We experience this guilt (lack of innocence, scarcity) in different forms, such as inadequacy, deficiency, inferiority, envy, etc. And "behind the scenes," we would always be blaming someone for what is lacking in us (projection). These dynamics rest ultimately on the ego principle of *one or the other*. If you are guilty, I am innocent. If I am guilty, you are innocent and I must do whatever it takes to get that "priceless pearl" from you, because it was mine and you unjustifiably stole it. This is the underpinning of the psychological cannibalism that we all engage in, and obviously the forms of physical cannibalism as well.

It is no wonder that Jesus uses the label "laws of chaos"!

Q #56: If on one level, as the Course suggests, we are responsible for our lives and our choices and deeds, why would I choose to be such a fool? Why wouldn't all of us or most of us choose to enter this world as children of loving, spiritual, intelligent, wealthy and genetically sound parents?

A: Yes, if it's really my choice, why indeed would I set things up so miserably for myself? The answer lies in understanding that my secret goal, kept hidden even from myself, is to be the victim of others in all of my relationships so that I never get in touch with the real cause of my misery. We think the world, beginning with our parents and continuing with all our subsequent relationships, is the cause of our pain and unhappiness. But it is not. The world and all of our relationships are only a clever, self-manufactured diversion to keep the real source of our unhappiness -- our all-consuming desire that the separation be real, at any cost -- hidden from ourselves. But why would we want to keep the real source hidden? The reason is that we value our individual, separate self more than all the love and happiness in the universe, and we'd even be willing to kill for it. But we'd rather not admit to that. Because if we did, then we might be more willing to let go of our identification with the ego and the special individual self that we each think we are. For what could our experience be but pain and unhappiness and lovelessness if we could in reality separate ourselves from Love?

We make up an external world, starting with our parents, out of all the guilt, pain, attack and murder that we have imagined in our mind -- thoughts that seem very real and frightening to us once we seek to make the separation real. As the Course describes it, **"The world you perceive is a world of separation. Perhaps you are willing to accept even death to deny your Father...it is governed by the desire to be unlike God...The world you made is therefore totally chaotic, governed by arbitrary and**

senseless 'laws,' and without meaning of any kind. For it is made out of what you do not want, projected from your mind because you are afraid of it" (T.12.III.9:1,2,5,6,7)

The world then is the effect and not the cause of how we feel, no matter how much we may have convinced ourselves otherwise. And so it follows, **"If the cause of the world you see is attack thoughts, you must learn that it is these thoughts which you do not want. There is no point in lamenting the world. There is no point in trying to change the world. It is incapable of change because it is merely an effect. But there is indeed a point in changing your thoughts about the world. Here you are changing the cause. The effect will change automatically" (W.pl.23.2).**

And so even if we could make the world and all of our relationships in any way we want, the building blocks are still the contents of the ego mind, and the goal remains the same -- to see myself as a victim, with anyone but myself responsible for all my problems and how I feel. And that is what determines our experience in the world, regardless of the form the world may take, so long as the ego thought system remains our choice. As a result, even if I set it up to be the child of "loving, intelligent, wealthy and genetically sound parents", I will still not be happy. And I will still find some reason to blame others, starting with my parents, for my unhappiness, until I'm ready to ask for another way. And that other way will involve looking within my own mind to uncover the blocks that I have placed there to the awareness of love's presence, so that they can be removed (**T.in.1:7**). And the happiness I will then experience will have nothing to do with anything in the external world, including my parents.

Q #57: I have recently entered a 12-step program for substance abuse. It seems to be making a positive difference. I know Ken has said that we have to deal with some problems on the world's terms, but only so that we can see them for what they are. Is there anything else I should know in trying to reconcile this program, which makes the problem very real, with my continuing study of the Course?

A: It is usually very helpful to attempt to resolve the symptoms of whatever illness we may be dealing with before we will be ready to address the deeper, underlying causes of our distress that the Course helps us get in touch with. If we are experiencing a medical crisis such as a heart attack or appendicitis, we would first want to get the appropriate medical attention to relieve the physical symptoms. Likewise, if we are trapped in some kind of addictive, self-destructive behavior, the first step would be to bring the addiction under control. And twelve-step programs are usually very effective for bringing about such changes. Now it is true that, from the Course's perspective, such programs do not resolve the underlying source of the distress, but developing some discipline and control around self-abusive behavior is often an essential first step in the process.

As a student of the Course, we would want to recognize that such interventions can be extremely helpful *and* that there are further steps then to be taken. Anything that attempts to solve a problem at the level of the world, rather than addressing the underlying cause of the problem in the mind, is what the Course calls magic. Most of us live our lives using magic much if not all of the time to deal with what we see as our problems. The interventions for the medical problems and addictions described above would all be considered magic, from the Course's perspective. Although the Course teaches that magic does not heal (**T.2.IV.4:3**) -- true healing comes only from releasing the guilt of self-condemnation in our own mind -- the Course should never be construed as taking a position against magic. In fact, Jesus recognizes that while our fear is still too great, **"it may be wise to utilize a compromise approach to mind and body, in which something from the outside is temporarily given healing belief" (4:6).**

Furthermore, since all form in the world is neutral and the Course teaches that our only real concern should be the purpose we give it (**T.4.V.6:8,9**), the key in using anything such as a 12-step program to deal with a problem like an addiction would be to be aware of how you are using it. If you use it to reinforce your belief in the reality of your weakness and limitations, and as a means to see yourself as separate and different from others, then it will be serving an ego purpose. But if you see it as a means of

being kind to yourself, of recognizing that you need help that comes from outside your ego self, and that you are the same as everyone else -- despite differences in the forms of our lives, we are all caught in the ego trap of believing in guilt and attack and fear -- then it will be serving the Holy Spirit's purpose. And it would not be unusual to find yourself vacillating back and forth between these two different purposes.

You are right, of course, that the Course and the 12-step program cannot in the end be reconciled as spiritual paths -- they are saying different things and any attempt to combine them will significantly diminish the efficacy of both. You may find it helpful to remind yourself, as you participate in the 12-step process over time, that the only problem is our addiction to the guilt in our mind, which we think keeps us "safe" from love. We project that guilt out into the various forms of conflict in our lives to avoid getting in touch with the real problem in the mind. And substance abuse is just one of the many forms of external conflict we set up for ourselves in the world to avoid looking at the guilt within. But once you understand what you made the problem of substance abuse for, you can give it a different purpose.

Substance abuse then, rather than being the real problem, is seen as a symptom or manifestation of the underlying problem of the guilt in your mind. By acknowledging the external problem, you provide yourself an avenue to get back in touch with the problem of the guilt buried deep in your mind. And by releasing the guilt and judgment that you have associated with your substance abuse, you will find that your need for a defense against the guilt in your mind, which the substance abuse has provided, diminishes over time. So the ultimate focus for your healing work is not on the external problem of substance abuse but on the buried guilt it is allowing you to get in touch with. However, through an in-depth examination of your substance abuse problem, including identifying those whom you may blame for driving you into the abuse and evaluating the effects of the abuse on your current and past relationships -- areas for which a 12-step program can be very helpful -- you will be able to trace your guilt through its "circuitous routes" (T.15.X.5:1) in form back to its origins in your mind, where it can then be undone.

Q #58: Recently while having a fight with my wife I turned to the Course for help by reading the passage about seeing only an expression of love or a call for love. Later I was able to reach out to her in a loving way. I find that I don't consider her small outbursts and annoying irritations "big" enough to qualify as calls for love. It seems best not to take them seriously, though I resent that they take away the feeling of success in practicing the Course that I had when I applied the Course to the fight. Is it better to shrug off these small irritations or should I see them as calls for love also?

A: The Course does in fact say that *everything* is either an expression of love or a call for love (see T.14.X.7). Therefore, when someone is having an outburst of any kind, large or small, it is always a call for love and the Course asks us to respond with love. If our response is anything less than love it is of the ego, and we are in the same insane situation as the other person: we too are calling for love. It is very important in our practice of the Course to be vigilant for *any* underlying feeling or reaction in our experiences and our relationships. Even when we seem to be shrugging things off or waiting for an outburst to blow over, there is probably some annoyance, irritation or judgment going on. As the Course so clearly states; **"The degree of the emotion you experience does not matter. You will become increasingly aware that a slight twinge of annoyance is nothing but a veil drawn over intense fury" (W.pl.21.2:4,5).** This puts all of our interactions in the same category: there is no distinction between "big" or "small," neither in the call for help nor in our reaction to it. The Course tells us that a choice to turn away from the light of the Holy Spirit in our minds, to throw our peace away by denying our unity with God, precedes that situation or interaction that seems to cause our reaction. The guilt and pain of that choice is the source of what appears as anger, annoyance, or irritation. Then a situation or an interaction with another person occurs, which we use to project our guilt onto, in the form of a reaction, or as the Course tells us "an interpretation": **"Perhaps it will be helpful to remember that no one can be angry at a fact. It is always an interpretation that gives rise to negative emotions, regardless of their seeming justification by what appears as facts. Regardless, too, of the intensity of the anger that is aroused. It may be merely slight irritation, perhaps too mild to be even clearly recognized. Or it may also take the form of intense rage, accompanied by thoughts of violence, fantasied or**

apparently acted out. It does not matter. All of these reactions are the same. They obscure the truth, and this can never be a matter of degree. Either truth is apparent, or it is not. It cannot be partially recognized. Who is unaware of truth must look upon illusions" (M.17.4). The truth that is obscured can be understood on two levels: 1) we have made a choice, as explained above, that is causing us pain, anger, or annoyance, and now we blame a person or situation; 2) neither the choice nor the guilt we feel about it can have any effect on the Father's love for us, nor our love for the Father; in other words, nothing has happened. It is clear that there are no degrees or distinctions in any of this; we are expressing love or calling for love, we are at peace or not at peace, we are with the truth or with illusion, seeing with the ego or with the Holy Spirit.

Our practice of the Course, therefore, is always optimum, whether we apply its teachings to something seemingly insignificant or to something we may judge as life threatening; nothing is too small or too big. It also means that every situation is important to our learning, and nothing should be overlooked or left to blow over. The decision to see differently, to listen to the Holy Spirit's interpretation, will bring us the same peace no matter what kind of a predicament we think we are in. It may also be helpful to remember: **"... the Holy Spirit's vision is merciful and His remedy is quick. Do not hide suffering from His sight, but bring it gladly to Him. Lay before His eternal sanity all your hurt, and let Him heal you. Do not leave any spot of pain hidden from His light, and search your mind carefully for any thoughts you may fear to uncover. For He will heal every little thought you have kept to hurt you and cleanse it of its littleness, restoring it to the magnitude of God" (T.13.III.7:2,3,4,5,6).**

Q #59: After all this time of studying the Course, I'm still not real clear on what forgiveness really is. Let's say my ego mind labels someone as being a jerk. Well, I know on one level that I can't possibly be right in that evaluation -- I don't really know this person and besides, I can't judge another even if sometimes I do. So, what's the next step? Not only have I made an unfair judgment; I've ended up feeling guilty for it.

A: When you take a minute or two to think differently about your judgment of another person, as you describe in your question, you have begun the forgiveness process, **"A light has entered the darkness" (M.1.1:4).** The first step is being willing to admit that we are wrong in our evaluation, and that there is another way of looking at the person. The next steps are being willing to let go of the original judgment, ask for another way of perceiving, and accept the new perception when it comes to you. This does not mean that you will no longer see people do foolish things. It means that you will not confuse the person's true identity with the foolish behavior, nor condemn him for it, nor consider it a "sin." People do and say foolish things; that is a fact. There are then two interpretations: one according to the ego, which says this foolish behavior makes this person a "jerk"; the other according to the Holy Spirit (forgiveness), which says the foolish behavior does not change the real fact that this person is not a "sinner," and does not deserve my condemnation. This applies as well to the judgment against yourself. We might say that calling another person a "jerk" is foolish behavior. This does not mean you are a sinner deserving of punishment, but that you have made a mistake, and are in need of a new perception, a correction, forgiveness. The guilt that seems to be at the end of the process, after judging a person as a "jerk," was actually already present in the mind prior to the "attack." The guilt was projected out to the "jerk" in the form of the judgment, which then seems to cause the guilt. This is an example of the Course teaching: **"Ideas leave not their source, and their effects but seem to be apart from them. Ideas are of the mind. What is projected out, and seems to be external to the mind, is not outside at all, but an effect of what is in, and has not left its source" (T.26.VII.4:7,8,9).** The origin of the process is a thought of separation in the mind, followed by a judgment against yourself for the thought, and guilt for having thought it. The guilt is then projected out to someone else in the form of an attack, and it then returns to the mind in the form of guilt for the attack. This is the circular thinking of the ego's game of guilt. Forgiveness asks that we recognize the original thought, and accept responsibility for the process. The way to forgive yourself for the original thought of separation is to offer forgiveness to the "jerk" by seeing him as no different from yourself; i.e., being in need of healing and of correction, and no different in his true identity as a holy Son of God: **"Let not the form of his mistakes keep you from him whose holiness is yours. Let not the vision of his holiness, the sight of which would show you your**

forgiveness, be kept from you by what the body's eyes can see. Let your awareness of your brother not be blocked by your perception of his sins and of his body. What is there in him that you would attack except what you associate with his body, which you believe can sin? Beyond his errors is his holiness and your salvation. You gave him not his holiness, but tried to see your sins in him to save yourself. And yet, his holiness *is* your forgiveness" (T.22.III.8:1,2,3,4,5,6,7).

Q #60: I seem to remember a passage that states the use of "white lies" may at times be appropriate in dealing with some relationships. What is Jesus saying here? I can only seem to relate it to the 12-step saying where we should always try to make amends except when to do so would cause more harm.

A: We have all experienced occasions when it is obvious that telling someone the truth on the level of form is simply not the loving thing to do. While there are no passages in the Course that specifically mention "white lies," there are two passages that address this issue, and that relate to the 12-step saying you mention: **"The value of the Atonement does not lie in the manner in which it is expressed. In fact, if it is used truly, it will inevitably be expressed in whatever way is most helpful to the receiver. This means that a miracle, to attain its full efficacy, must be expressed in a language that the recipient can understand without fear. This does not necessarily mean that it is the highest level of communication of which he is capable. It does mean, however, that it is the highest level of communication of which he is capable now. The whole aim of the miracle is to raise the level of communication, not to lower it by increasing fear"** (T.2.IV.5).

In another passage Jesus says, **"Recognize what does not matter, and if your brothers ask you for something 'outrageous,' do it because it does not matter"** (T.12.III.4:1). Importantly, he qualifies this later by saying, **"I have said that if a brother asks a foolish thing of you to do it. But be certain that this does not mean to do a foolish thing that would hurt either him or you, for what would hurt one will hurt the other"** (T.16.I.6:4,5).

The key element in the Course's approach is honesty, which is the second of the ten characteristics of a teacher of God, discussed in the manual for teachers (M.4). Jesus states there that honesty means consistency: **"There is nothing you say that contradicts what you think or do; no thought opposes any other thought..."** (M.4.II.1). In other words, there is a consistency between your words (form) and your thoughts (content). If we set aside any ego investment in the situation, then only love will flow through us, and it will be expressed in a *form* that would be appropriate in that specific situation. The emphasis is on the *content* in our minds. If we are kind within, we will be kind on the outside. Our attention, thus, should be on searching for any unkindness lurking in our *thoughts*, and asking for help to let that go. Once we have gotten past the unkindness, whatever we say or do will be kind, in a *form* that is appropriate to the circumstances.

Q #61: I'm studying special relationships at the moment and I am wondering -- if person 'A' feels anger, resentment, hate, etc., towards person 'B', is person 'B' likely to learn these feelings as part of himself, and feeling them, does he project them back onto person 'A' in either a passive or aggressive way? So now person 'B' would then see these same traits or similar ones in person 'A'. If this is so, is this now a circle of destruction? And if person 'B' doesn't project them back onto person 'A', is person 'B' (if he believes them to be true) likely to project them onto his own body? If he does, can this manifest through illness? Can illness then be a form of attack on both ourselves and on those with whom we are involved in special relationships?

A: Despite what our experience in the world seems to tell us, none of us has the power to cause anyone else to feel guilty or hated or attacked. These perceptions of ourselves are inherent in our own experience whenever we choose to identify with the ego, which seems to be our "natural" state until we remember

otherwise. So no one else teaches those perceptions to us, no matter how they may act toward us -- we have learned them *on our own* (the basic condition of the ego). That is because the ego thought system is predicated on the belief in our own sin and guilt, which we then try to protect ourselves from by projecting outside of ourselves onto others. The only effect we can have on others is to remind them of what is already present within their own mind. So I can be a reminder to you of your own sin, guilt and fear when I choose the ego as my teacher, or I can be a reminder of the love and forgiveness that are present in both of us when I choose the Holy Spirit as my teacher. But you first make your own choice as to which thought system you will identify with and then my choice can only reinforce the choice you have already made. But if you have made the choice for the ego and I have remembered the Holy Spirit, then I can serve as a reminder to you that there is another choice present in your mind as well.

Early in the text, Jesus explains that **"when you project... [on]to others you imprison them, but only to the extent to which you reinforce errors they have already made. This [their errors] makes them vulnerable to the distortion of others, since their own perception of themselves is distorted" (T.1.III.5:9,10)**. So in that sense, we do set up a vicious cycle of attack and counterattack with each other -- the "circle of destruction" as you call it -- that reinforces the perception of guilt in ourselves and each other.

But again, the origin of the guilt and its ramifications in my own mind never comes from anyone or anything in the world outside of myself, but only from my own decision. In fact, the only purpose of the world and all the figures in it is to serve as a smokescreen to hide that fact from us. And so then it appears that indeed others are the cause of my concept of myself **(T.31.V.5)**.

As for the second part of your question, the guilt over separation in my own mind -- which I have chosen - is intolerable and must be projected so that I see it as yours rather than my own. And I can project it either by a direct attack on you with whom I have a special relationship or by an attack on my own body, expressed as some form of illness. And yes, the latter represents an attack not only on myself, but on you as well, as Jesus graphically describes in **"The Picture of Crucifixion" (T.27.I) -- "A sick and suffering you but represents your brother's guilt; the witness that you send lest he forget the injuries he gave, from which you swear he never will escape. This sick and sorry picture you accept, if only it can serve to punish him" (T.27.I.4:3,4)**.

How do we break out of the seemingly endless circle of attack and counterattack? The solution has nothing to do with the other person and everything to do with a change in our perception of ourselves, within our own mind, with the help of the Holy Spirit. We have to recognize that the sin and guilt we have made real in our own mind as an attack upon ourselves by our belief that we could separate from God has never really happened. As the Course says, **"You will never realize the utter uselessness of attack except by recognizing that your attack on yourself has no effects. For others do react to attack if they perceive it, and if you are trying to attack them you will be unable to avoid interpreting this as reinforcement. The only place you can cancel out all reinforcement is in yourself. For you are always the first point of your attack, and if this has never been, it has no consequences" (T.12.V.3; italics added)**.

Q #62: I have been *A Course in Miracles* Student for many years, and I am now passing (or so I feel) from the "beginner stage." My question is: Can it be helpful to a student to reflect on positive thoughts rather than entertain the negative thoughts of the ego mind? I realize situations that trouble us should be looked at with Jesus or the Holy Spirit or even God, but it seems to me that the time our minds aren't in the holy instant have to be spent somewhere. I am not talking about affirmations here, but thoughts that have deeply moved us. I will appreciate guidance in this regard.

A: Our minds are either in the holy instant or with the ego. There are no other options; there is no in between. Our thoughts reflect the choice we have made either to think as the ego thinks, or as the Holy

Spirit thinks. The Course would not define these thoughts as positive or negative, it tells us rather that the ego's thoughts reinforce illusion, while the Holy Spirit's thoughts reflect the truth. When we have experiences that deeply move us, they reflect a choice made on the level of the mind to turn away from the ego toward the Holy Spirit, Who is the symbol of God's love in the dream. A beautiful musical work or a sunset can be symbols of the love and peace in our mind when we have chosen the Holy Spirit instead of the ego. What is truly helpful, however, is to be vigilant for the thoughts we think with the ego, to become aware of them, and to recognize their purpose. Since many of the ego's thoughts appear to be "positive," we can easily be fooled. Seemingly positive feelings can be insidious forms of spiritual specialness. The ego also comes up with many ingenious excuses for indulging its thought system and holding on to grievances. This may be what you refer to as "[entertaining] the negative thoughts of the ego mind." It takes a great deal of honesty and patience with ourselves to practice looking carefully at our thoughts without indulging them *and* without judging them. We do well to stay close to the guidelines the Course offers; **"Your task is not to seek for love, (what we may call "positive" thoughts) but merely to seek and find all of the barriers within yourself that you have built against it. It is not necessary to seek for what is true, but it *is* necessary to seek for what is false" (T.16.IV.6:1,2).** If we are honest in our search we will recognize the thoughts we are holding that interfere with our ability to be in the holy instant. It is then our choice to either hold on to these thoughts or let them go in exchange for the Holy Spirit's perception. When we try to be the judge of our thoughts -- deciding which ones are positive or which ones are negative -- attempting to fill our minds with what we have determined to be "positive" thoughts, we will be putting ourselves in charge of the Atonement, leaving little or no room for the Holy Spirit. It is His thoughts we seek, His perception, His judgment. Doing our part faithfully will allow Him to take us to the holy instant. The Course is clear in this regard and very specific; **"The Holy Spirit asks of you but this; bring to Him every secret you have locked away from Him. Open every door to Him, and bid Him enter the darkness and lighten it away. At your request He enters gladly. He brings the light to darkness if you make the darkness open to Him. But what you hide He cannot look upon. He sees for you, and unless you look with Him He cannot see. The vision of Christ is not for Him alone, but for Him with you. Bring, therefore, all your dark and secret thoughts to Him, and look upon them with Him. He holds the light, and you the darkness. They cannot coexist when both of You together look on them. His judgment must prevail, and He will give it to you as you join your perception to His" (T.14.VII.6).** In another passage the Course gives us a very encouraging follow up: **"And if I need a word to help me, He will give it to me. If I need a thought, that will He also give. And if I need but stillness and a tranquil, open mind, these are the gifts I will receive of Him. He is in charge by my request. And He will hear and answer me, because He speaks for God my Father and His holy Son" (W.pII.361.5:1,2,3,4,5).** Our hope lies in our dedication to searching our minds carefully, inviting the Holy Spirit to be our guide, our "judge" and our teacher. His perception will then lead us to the holy instant.

Q #63: We were discussing anger in our study group and it was suggested that to experience anger, we would not "express" it outwardly, but instead, as the Course encourages us, be "Above the Battleground" (T.23.IV), "Be lifted up, and from a higher place look down upon it" (5:1). This certainly sounds better than overtly abusing another with our anger. But what about the idea of yelling into a pillow or hitting a punching bag? Is that still considered attack? What if my anger is so intense that I am unable (unwilling) to "Be lifted up, and from a higher place look down upon it"?

A: Your question suggests a confusion that many students often make in their work with the Course. The Course, like the Holy Spirit, is only concerned with content (thought) and not form (behavior). If I am in conflict and am feeling anger, I am no longer at peace, whether I act on that anger or not. Anger and attack are in the mind and that is where correction is needed. Being disciplined enough not to act out the anger, or to direct it at an inanimate object (such as a pillow or a punching bag) rather than at a person, has certain advantages in that it does not set in motion a possible sequence of overt attack and retaliation at the level of behavior which will almost certainly serve to reinforce the guilt in both your mind and the mind of the person you are attacking back. But the attack is still alive and well in your mind and the problem of the anger will not be resolved until you address it at its source in the mind. This will involve

recognizing that your angry feelings and thoughts of attack have nothing to do with the other person at whom those feelings are directed and by whom they *seem* to have been elicited.

To "be lifted up, and from a higher place look down upon" your anger is to remember that you are a mind that has a choice whether to look at the conflict with your ego or with the Holy Spirit as your teacher. When you "look" with your ego, you will still believe that your angry feelings are somehow justified, that at some level you have been treated unfairly and that your reaction is a reasonable one, even if you choose not to act on it. If that continues to be your perception, no healing has occurred.

But when you look with the Holy Spirit, you will come to understand that the problem is not the other person but rather a choice you first made within your own mind to see yourself as separate from love. That choice, as it always does, produces guilt, which you find unbearable. And so the guilt must be projected outside yourself, onto someone else whom you will want to see as treating you unfairly, upon whom the guilt can then rest. And so the feelings of conflict that have come from your own decision to separate in your mind from love then seem to be caused by what this other person has "done" to you. And yet if you had not chosen guilt in the first place, their words or actions would have absolutely no effect on you. The fact that they seem to only tells you about your prior decision to turn to your ego and away from love. Once you have accepted this realization and the correction offered by the Holy Spirit -- that you are not separate from love and never have been -- the guilt vanishes, as well as the anger and the conflict that were its effect, and you no longer need to see someone else as your opponent, deserving of your attack (in self-defense, of course!).

By the way, although the Course says that "**anger is *never* justified**" (T.30.VI.1:1) -- and why that is true should be apparent from what we have just discussed -- the Course never says we should not get angry. In fact, much of the Course is addressed at telling us what happens when we do get angry and how it can be corrected, and this is only because Jesus understands that we will continue to become angry and will need the correction he offers us. And sometimes we may be able to put the brakes on acting out our anger and sometimes we may feel compelled to act it out, but the problem -- the guilt in our mind -- and the solution -- recognizing the choice of purpose we have in all of it -- remain the same. Rather than denying our anger, Jesus wants us to look at it with him so we can recognize its real source, rather than attempt to justify it based on our mistaken perceptions of our own victimization. Our justifications, quite simply, are always invalid.

Q #64: Do you think that there are some "contraindications" to practice exercises of the workbook year after year, continually? Do you know for example, if Bill or Helen had a specific practice of the 365 exercises constantly?

A: There may or may not be contraindications. It depends entirely on the purpose of repeating the lessons year after year. There is no right or wrong way to do the workbook, other than to do the lessons in order, as Jesus instructs us. Some people find it helpful to do the lessons over and over, but it is not necessary to do them more than once. It probably is a good idea to go back over them in order to study what they teach, but it is not necessary to do the exercises more than once, unless that is your guidance. Each person is guided individually, as we know.

A red flag to be alert to is developing a dependency on the lessons. For example, if you find that you cannot start the day without doing a lesson, or you find yourself empty or depressed if you don't do a lesson every day, year after year, then you know that you have formed a special relationship with the workbook. That is something you would want to look at, because the ego has more than likely jumped in and joined the process, and you will miss the essence of what the lessons are about.

Another thing to watch for is the need to keep doing the lessons until you do them perfectly. That, too, would be coming from your ego. It is far more in keeping with the spirit of the workbook, and Jesus' gentle

guidance of us, to do the lessons "badly" and then forgive yourself for forgetting or falling asleep, or whatever. The middle of Lesson 95 explains that it is much more helpful to approach the lessons that way, because that would reflect the bottom line of what we are learning, which is to remember not to take the "tiny, mad idea" seriously. That clearly is the way Jesus would like us to proceed.

The training largely involves our getting in touch with our resistance and fear of going ahead with the process of disidentifying with our ego. A little willingness is all that is ever asked. All that is important is that we would *want* to think of God or Jesus during the day. Remembering to say all of the statements exactly on time each day is not the point. That we would *want* to, though, is the point, regardless of whether we successfully complete all of the instructions as directed. The *content*, not the *form*, is what we should aim at. And the *content* is the forgiving love of Jesus.

Helen and Bill did the lessons together once; then they did them again with Ken Wapnick; and finally Helen, Bill, and Ken did them with Judy Skutch, at her request.

Q #65: Please describe "mind," the nature of "mind," and the experience of "mind".

A: There is no simple or easily understood definition for mind in the Course, because its meaning depends on the context in which it is used. Also, its true nature is abstract and it exists outside of time and space in all of its meanings, so we will not be fully satisfied with any explanation of it. For we will be attempting to understand mind with a limited (and illusory) part of it -- the split mind. And time and space are, in fact, miscreations of the split mind itself, rather than dimensions in which it operates.

It may be helpful to point out first that the Course's use of mind is different from the meaning given to mind in almost all other systems of thought, such as Eastern religions, for which mind is only the false ego self, caught in illusions; and various scientific disciplines, such as psychology and neurology, which take a reductionistic view of mind, reducing it to an epiphenomenon, or manifestation, of the physical/chemical/electrical activities of the brain. Even Freud, whose powerful insights into the mind are integrated into the Course's exposition of the ego, accepted its organic origins without question.

The most extensive discussion in the Course of the term is found in the first section of the Clarification of Terms, "**Mind-Spirit**" (C.1). There mind is initially defined as "**the activating agent of spirit, supplying its creative energy...Spirit is the Thought of God which He created like Himself**" (C.1.1:1,3). But since we cannot conceive of the nature of spirit or God, and creation has nothing to do with form, the definition sheds little light on the meaning of the term. Usually, when the Course refers to mind at this level -- our true reality as spirit -- the term is capitalized and it refers to either God or Christ, His perfect and wholly unified Son (C.1.1:2). There is little more to be said about mind at this level. Its experience is only of perfect oneness, with no awareness of differences or distinctions of any kind, because they are not real.

More can be said, although still not easily understood, when we move to the level of the split or "**individual mind**" (C.1.2:3), which seemed to arise when the Son of God seemed to fall asleep and dream that he could be separate from his Father. This "**part of the mind is entirely illusory and makes only illusions**" (C.1.4:1). At this level, mind experiences "**consciousness, the receptive mechanism**" (C.1.7:3,4), which necessarily implies a separation between perceiver and perceived, part of the illusion. It is only at this level that choice seems to exist, for there can be no choice in our reality as spirit, where, again, no differences or distinctions exist. It is within this illusory split mind that everything we believe is solid and external and real is experienced. The Course distinguishes between two parts of this mind, or two ways of thinking within this mind: Wrong-mindedness represents the choice to listen to the voice of the ego, or false self. Right-mindedness represents the choice to listen to the Voice of the Holy Spirit, the reflection of our true Self or Mind (C.1.5:1,2).

Although the Course attempts to make us aware that our true reality is Mind, its teaching is addressed only to the split mind. The Course's purpose is to train our split mind to remember that it contains a choice (C.1.7:1), for it has accepted the ego as its only reality and has forgotten that the ego is only a choice. So the Course helps us to recognize the consequences of a choice for the ego -- sin, guilt, fear, pain, loss, and death -- and reminds us that there is a different choice -- the Holy Spirit -- that opens the door to a completely different kind of experience, based on forgiveness -- peace, joy and love. Over time, the Course will lead our split minds back to the initial decision point where we made a seemingly irreversible choice for the ego. And now we can make a different choice, removing us from time and space as we become aware of the real world, the totally forgiven world. From here, it is only one final step, "taken" by God Himself, which returns us to the wholeness of spirit and the oneness of Mind that we never in reality left (C.1.5:2,3,4).

Q #66: I have been studying *A Course in Miracles* for one year, doing the lessons and participating in two study groups. I am also in a 12-step group. My question is on friendship and extending love to others. I have never been one that worked on relationships. In the past year I have been trying to extend love to my friends but feel in some instances their love is not being reciprocated. I know love is freedom and unconditional, and yet when I reach out to a friend via a phone call or an e-mail and don't hear from them, I'm disappointed. How can I get over this disappointment?

A: First of all, as a relatively new student to the Course, you need to know that you are doing the best that you can. The Course is a challenging process that takes time to master and it is not easy to undo the thought system of the ego to which we all have been so faithfully committed for nearly all of our time up until now. Your willingness to be taught a different way is all that Jesus is asking of you -- and it takes humility to acknowledge that you don't know the way yourself.

As you have been finding, the ego's maxim "**Seek but do not find**" (T.16.V.6:5; W.pl.71.4:2; M.13.5:8) continues to operate in our lives even after we have decided we want another way of relating to others. This is because we still do not understand the purpose for which we made the world and relationships. **"There is a tendency to think the world can offer consolation and escape from problems that its purpose is to keep...The world was made that problems could not be escaped"** (T.31.IV.1:1;2:6). And so, as long as we look for any satisfaction in the world and from others, we are setting ourselves up for disappointment. But, contrary to our conscious awareness, this setup in fact is intentional.

Our purpose in the world and in our relationships, which we keep hidden from ourselves, is to be disappointed, treated unfairly, and victimized, so that the pain that really comes from our own secret choice for separation now seems to be coming from somebody else's actions, or inaction. In Lesson 76, Jesus speaks of the various ego "'laws' we have believed we [and others] must obey. These include...**the 'laws' of friendship, of 'good' relationships and reciprocity**" (W.pl.76.8:3). These seemingly reasonable rules for relationships serve the ego purpose of establishing expectations for how we and others should act in order to be happy, thereby guaranteeing our disappointment and unhappiness when they are violated.

Now Jesus does not expect that we will suddenly stop seeking outside of ourselves for love just because he tells us it will not work (e.g., T.29.VII). His purpose in telling us is to help us gradually open our eyes to what we are doing to ourselves so that, over time, we will be more and more willing to make a different choice, to bring our pain and disappointment to him so that he can show us that the answer to what we are looking for is there inside of us, and always has been. We are the ones who have not accepted the love, and have kept pushing it away out of our fear of joining and losing our self in total, limitless love. And we will continue to resist that insight in our practice of the Course and its process of forgiveness. But Jesus does not judge us for that. He knows that we are just afraid, but that in time we will choose his alternative more and more of the time. And then we will come to recognize that our fear that prevented us from experiencing his love is no different from the fear that seems to stop others from reciprocating when

we allow his love to be extended through us. And since we know that the love is always ours to experience and share, we will no longer be disappointed when others do not recognize that for themselves. The love will simply continue to extend through us to them, offering them a reminder of the same solution we have learned for ourselves -- the love is already present within each of our minds. We need only undo " **the blocks to the awareness of [its] presence**" (T.in.1:7).

Q #67: I have a problem in achieving "right mindedness." During quiet meditation, I can usually think fairly clearly about the metaphysical teachings of the Course and am very much motivated by them. However, once I am back in the illusory dream, I seem to revert quickly to "wrong mindedness." The problem is that the whole world we see seems to be built on "wrong-mindedness," so it is hard to do or think anything here that is right-minded. In fact, achieving "right mindedness" often seems to me harder than contemplation of the metaphysics. I know that Jesus, or the Holy Spirit, is always there to help, if we just show a little willingness. I guess I need to keep trying and keep studying. Any suggestions would be appreciated.

A: It might be helpful to think of right-mindedness as looking at your wrong mind without judgment. You don't have to fight against wrong-mindedness; you just have to look at it without judging yourself for being in that state. If you can look at your wrong mind without judgment, if only briefly, then you have set your ego aside, because the ego would never look without judgment. This is the core of the healing process. You don't have to try to stop the wrong-minded thoughts; just don't get down on yourself for having them. The definition of forgiveness in the workbook helps us keep this in focus: Forgiveness "**is still, and quietly does nothing . . . It merely looks, and waits, and judges not**" (W.pll.1.4:1,4). Our focus, therefore, as students, is not on doing right-minded things in the world, nor is it on banishing wrong-minded thoughts. Our focus, rather, is on learning how to look at our egos without judging ourselves, or others, for having an ego.

It always seems as if that is not enough, and that we should be doing more than simply looking without judgment. But that would be the ego sneaking in to try to make things more complicated, and to shift our attention from the content of our minds to our behavior in the world. Jesus tells us again and again that we are involved in *undoing* a thought system that is entirely illusory. In this sense, he says of the miracle that "**it merely looks on devastation, and reminds the mind that what it sees is false**" (W.pll.13.1:3). So thinking in a right-minded way involves looking at the devastation that is our world, but without any sense of judgment or guilt. Practicing this as best we can will result in our gradually becoming less and less identified with our false self, and therefore less and less fearful of the path that is leading us beyond this false self toward accepting Jesus' love as our only reality. Judging ourselves, others, or the world is a defense that keeps our self and the world very real, and Jesus' love at a "safe distance" from us.

Ultimately, we are responsible only for the teacher with whom we choose to look at the world. If we look at the world through the ego's eyes, we will wind up feeling guilty. If we choose the love of Jesus to be our "eyes," we will not be upset by anything. When we are upset, we need only remind ourselves gently that we have chosen the wrong teacher, and that is not sinful. That is all we need to "do" to be right-minded.

Q #68: What happens to the mind after the demise of the body? Does the mind go home and re-join, although it never left? What happens to the ego? Where can I find this answer in the Text?

A: The answer to your questions lies in understanding the Course's teaching on life and death, contrasted with the ego's version. It is very important to remember that the Course refers to death as the choice in the mind to believe the ego's definition of who we are: sinful, fearful, guilty, separated individuals

imprisoned in bodies. This belief is the ego's way of dealing a death blow to our awareness of who we really are as God's innocent Son, and this is what the Course calls "death." When the Course speaks of "life" it is always referring to our life in Heaven with God. **"There is no life outside of Heaven" (T.23.II.19:1).**

With that in mind there are several passages in the Course that address death, the mind, the body and the ego that are helpful in understanding the points you bring up. 1)The Course tells us the mind is not in the body: **"It (mind) cannot make a body, nor abide within a body" (W.pl.167.6:3); "A mind and body cannot both exist. Make no attempt to reconcile the two, for one denies the other can be real. If you are physical, your mind is gone from your self- concept, for it has no place in which it could be really part of you. If you are spirit, then the body must be meaningless to your reality" (W.p.I.96.3:4,5,6,7).**

Therefore there cannot be any change to the condition of the mind due to the demise of the body, nothing happens to it and it does not go anywhere. This is difficult for us to understand because most of us identify with our bodies, but it is essential to understanding the Course's teaching. You are correct in saying that in truth the mind never left its home in Heaven, where it abides in Oneness. Our illusory experience in this dream is the result of a thought in the sleeping mind of the Son, who believes the separation actually occurred. The mind does not return home when the body dies. The mind returns home when it makes a final choice to accept the Atonement and no longer identify with the ego thought system. It thus awakens to the truth that it never left Heaven, never separated from its Source.

The ego is also not in the body; it is the thought of separation in the mind which does not change with the death of the body: **"The ego is the part of the mind that believes in division" (T.5.V.3:1).** The ego is not *in* the body but does *identify* with the body. We too identify with the body when we choose the ego thought system, which is why we accept the body's experience of death and believe in its significance. With the ego we see it as **"...the central dream from which all illusions stem...It is the one fixed, unchangeable belief of the world that all things in it are born only to die. This is regarded as 'the way of nature,' not to be raised to question, but to be accepted as the 'natural' law of life" (M.27.1:1,4,5).** Although the ego does not die with the demise of the body, because it is a thought in the mind, it is obsessed with death; fearing it, seeking it, using it to prove its reality and the reality of the body. It may be helpful to review **"The Attraction of Death" (T.19.IV.C).** Our experience in learning a new identity by questioning our beliefs of who we *think* we are, freeing ourselves to accept the Holy Spirit's message of who we *really* are, will enable us to see the death of the body differently and open our minds to a new perception and experience of the life the Course speaks of: **"When your body and your ego and your dreams are gone, you will know that you will last forever. Perhaps you think this is accomplished through death, but nothing is accomplished through death, because death is nothing. Everything is accomplished through life, and life is of the mind and in the mind. The body neither lives nor dies, because it cannot contain you who are life" (T.6.V.A.1:1, 2, 3,4).**

The following two questions, although different in form, share a common underlying theme and so will be answered together:

Q #69-a: I have been working on forgiving one particular person for quite a while now and I am finally getting there, very very close to total forgiveness, which should bring me peace. But now I find that I am missing seeing him and talking to him, which is very unpeaceful. This person is not deceased so there is a chance for physical interaction, although highly unlikely because we are both remarried. I want to be able to act differently with him and show him my unconditional love instead of my fear, which ruined our relationship in the first place. What's going on here? Is my ego still in charge even though I have forgiven him and am finally joyful and not resentful about our relationship? Is missing someone another confirmation of believing in separation? I can't believe I don't have the full peace I was expecting. My missing him has thrown a monkey wrench into this otherwise loving experience, which I guess I don't

want to experience alone. I have joined with this brother in my mind and would like to play it out in form. Is this wrong, and if so how can I finally get some peace about it?

Q #69-b: Forgiveness is such an important process in the Course, and it can be applied to just about everything in our daily lives. But what happens when someone is murdered and everything abruptly stops for that person. How can that mind process what has happened when it no longer exists as the person who was just murdered. I hope this isn't a stupid question and has some relevancy to the Course.

A: Forgiveness, central to the Course's teachings, is a very difficult concept for us to grasp while we continue to identify with our ego and with the individual self that we believe we are. Jesus cautions us that "the world cannot perceive its [forgiveness] meaning, nor provide a guide to teach you its beneficence. There is no thought in all the world that leads to any understanding of the laws it follows, nor the Thought that it reflects. It is as alien to the world as is your own reality" (W.pl.134:13,1,2,3).

And so it takes great humility to approach the study of the Course, acknowledging that we really do not understand. But in that acknowledgment lies the possibility of real learning. Forgiveness as the Course defines it really has nothing to do with the other person against whom we believe we hold a grievance. But it also has nothing to do with the person we believe we are who seems to be holding the grievance.

This is not to deny that we will experience apparent effects of true forgiveness in our external relationships, but that is not really what is happening. To understand what the Course means by forgiveness, we need first to understand the ego's purpose for the world and our relationships. And that purpose is always to see the guilt that is really in our own mind -- the original guilt over the thought of separation from God -- outside ourselves in someone else. The specifics of my grievance against you are not really important. What is important is that I can blame you for my own unhappiness. Forgiveness then is the process that allows me first to recognize that, yes, I am unhappy, I am not at peace, and you, against whom I have been holding a grievance, have helped me see that. But you are not really the source of my loss of peace and happiness. I am. And so when I withdraw my projection of guilt and blame from you, I can then take the next step with the Holy Spirit and recognize that my own guilt is not real. And peace flows from that recognition. So forgiveness allows me to release myself from the mistaken judgments I first held against myself and then accused you of, because I did not want to accept responsibility for them. And the forgiveness I experience takes place in my mind and has nothing to do either with the self I think I am or with the self I think you are.

With this brief explanation in mind, let's turn to the questions that have been raised. What we experience as forgiveness in our relationships with others can certainly reflect the real underlying process that is happening in our mind. As long as we are still identified with our egos, we will interpret the experience of release in our mind in the context of the specific form of our relationship with another person. This is unavoidable while we cling to our false identity as a body. It is a mistake, but it is certainly not a sin.

So, if my experience is that I am releasing you from the judgments I have been holding against you, and I am experiencing peace, it can only be a reflection of the fact that I am releasing myself from the guilt and judgments against myself in my own mind. This would have to be fear-inducing to my ego, which survives and thrives on guilt. And so a defense against the love and peace is now needed.

For the ego, switching the form of the relationship from special hate to special love is an ideal solution. The form changes, but the underlying content remains hatred and guilt, although now disguised and hidden. And so, rather than seeing you as the direct cause of my unhappiness, I now see you as somehow necessary for my happiness -- that I need to be with you to share the experience of peace and joy. But that in effect is the same thing, because if you are not available to me as I would like you to be, then once again you are contributing to my unhappiness. Either way, I am not at peace and my ego has won. The answer at this point would not be to try to change any of this, but simply to recognize what is happening. And then to ask myself, with Jesus or the Holy Spirit as my teacher, is this really what I would

have rather than the peace I was experiencing when I was able to release both of us from the chains of guilt and condemnation? If I have uncovered my ego's purpose, it is only a matter of time before I will be willing to make a different choice.

But what of the situation where the life of a victim has seemingly been ended by someone else's attack? To repeat what we said earlier, forgiveness, as well as holding grievances, really has nothing to do with the self that I think I am or the self that I think you are. Grievances are held in the mind and the body is not at all necessary for the mind to forgive. The mind has the same choice available to it, whether the body seems to remain alive or not. The projection of guilt onto someone else's body can either continue or the guilt can be withdrawn back to the mind that is its source, where the choice to release the guilt remains the same.

Any seeming difference in the process arises only if the choice is to continue to project the guilt, but this difference is on the level of form, not content. The mind then simply finds another lifetime with a different body to identify with -- a choice not really that different from what we do within a lifetime when we decide to leave one relationship and move onto another. The cycle of victim-victimizer repeats itself, until the mind is ready to make a different choice and accept complete responsibility for its pain and loss of peace. Murder is always first a thought in the mind, a self-accusation for what we believe we have done to God. We project it outside ourselves onto someone else in order to avoid the consequences we have told ourselves must follow from that choice. But the murder and the subsequent guilt, as well as the world we make as the repository for the guilt we want to escape, are all equally illusory. From this premise, forgiveness follows.

Q #70: What we see and experience are the forms of the mortal mind. Is it right to think about forms of beauty in nature and art and all lovable things, as the underlying content of divine Mind?

A: *A Course in Miracles* actually teaches something different. There is nothing in the world of form that comes from the divine Mind, including the underlying content. This is the strict nondualism that is the core of the metaphysics of the Course. It is uncompromising on this level. The extension of God's Love -- known in the Course as creations -- has no equivalent in the world. Therefore, to the extent to which we are identified with the world of form, we would not be able to understand what these creations are.

The world of form and everything we see and experience -- whether beautiful or grotesque, lovable or repulsive -- comes from the split mind, the post-separation mind that seems to have broken away from its oneness as a Thought in the Mind of God. This, of course, is all illusory, and is why the very first lesson in the workbook is "Nothing I see...means anything" and is followed by "I have given everything...all the meaning it has for me."

The focus of the teachings and exercises in the Course is the mind rather than the outside world. The training is geared towards having us recognize that our perceptions are directly caused by the choice we make in our minds to identify either with the ego (our wrong mind) or the Holy Spirit (our right mind). Thus, we are taught that the world **"is the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition" (T.21.in.1:5)**. This means that if we have chosen the Holy Spirit's thought system of forgiveness to direct our thinking, this will be the *content* of all our perceptions. Then anything at all could be a source of inspiration to us and remind us of the truth and beauty of God. But this would not be because of some quality inherent in the form itself. A work of art or a beautiful scene in nature could inspire us and lift us out of our finite world only because a choice has already been made in our minds to let go of our investment in seeing separation and limitation as reality. The *content* of the divine Mind is pure Love, pure oneness, pure formlessness. Within the illusion, within the dream, we can experience the *reflection* of this in our minds, but again only because we have first denied the denial of truth, which removes the barriers to the awareness of the love that is always present in our minds.

The key is to regard everything we perceive as a symbol of either the Holy Spirit or the ego, remembering **"that neither sign nor symbol should be confused with source, for they must stand for something other than themselves" (T.19.C.11:2).**

Q #71: I have a "pattern" of what seems to happen to me in relationships. I keep seeing the situations end up with me being alone and feeling like something has been taken away from me and that the other person has something I want and need. They get it and I don't.

I have been trying to ask for help in every way I can imagine. I end up seeing my Teacher as torturing me and I am afraid of Him. Lately I have been asking for all the things I want for myself for these other people. It seems to bring some relief but the underlying thought of my Teacher torturing me is still there. How do I trust someone that is torturing me?

A: It appears that the situation you describe in your relationships is one of being victimized by your partner, a situation that you have projected on to your Teacher. Since you capitalize "Teacher" and "Him" you must be referring to Jesus or the Holy Spirit. It may be helpful to make this assumption in answering your question. The Course tells us that while our minds are not healed all our relationships are marked with the victim/victimizer theme. This takes the form of feeling needy, unfairly treated and deprived. We blame others for causing our sense of scarcity. The Course invites us to see the real cause of this so it can be "undone". The real cause of feeling deprived is that we have denied our true identity and taken on an identity as separated individuals, being on our own apart from God. The guilt we feel for having made this choice to identify with the ego is too much to bear, so we project it onto others, *including Jesus*. We blame them for treating us unfairly. We are then caught in a vicious circle because the guilt is not undone by projecting it. It stays in the mind impelling us to continually find situations and people to project it onto. That is why you notice a pattern in your relationships. We do the same thing over and over hoping for different results. The Course asks us to accept responsibility for the choice we have made. This is the process of undoing that is the real solution to our predicament. Although we may still perceive our partners or Jesus as causing our feelings of victimization, there is a part of our mind that now knows that the feeling comes from within and not outside ourselves. This does dissipate some of the feeling and is the beginning step of the forgiveness process. This is what the Course means when it says **"Be willing to forgive the Son of God for what he did not do" (T.17.III.1:5).** Since we project the same feelings onto Jesus, He is obviously included in the forgiveness process as well.

There is another reason why it is normal for students of the Course to feel victimized by Jesus. The ego recognizes that by following His teaching in the Course the underpinnings of its thought system are being pulled out from under it and eventually our identification with it will be relinquished. This can indeed be experienced in a mild form as having something taken away, or in the extreme as "being tortured." The Manual describes this process: **"First, they must go through what might be called a period of undoing. This need not be painful, but it usually is so experienced. It seems as if things are being taken away, and it is rarely understood initially that their lack of value is merely being recognized" (M.4.I.A.3:1,2,3).** The very title of this section, "The Development of Trust," indicates that we are starting from a place of not trusting to be led through a process of developing trust. Our learning process with Jesus as our teacher may be viewed as similar to the healing relationship with a doctor or dentist. When we see a doctor or dentist we know that their help may seem to hurt us but they will treat our illness and eventually we will feel better. In this sense Jesus is our "doctor"; he is a teacher who is teaching us a new thought system to heal our sick minds. It seems to hurt because we are so confused and lost in our misperceptions about everything and we are attached to the thoughts of the ego that have actually made our minds sick and in need of healing. It may help to try to relate to Jesus as you would to a kind and loving doctor who is helping in the gentlest way possible. Just as the dentist or doctor would not take groans or complaining personally, neither does Jesus. In fact he expects that we have grievances against him and knows that we are just learning to trust him: **"Forgive me, then, today. And you will know you have forgiven me if you behold your brother in the light of holiness. He cannot be less holy than can I, and you can not be holier than he" (W.pII.288.2:1,2,3).** Our forgiveness then includes Jesus and

all of our brothers. It is the answer to our problem of separation and our feelings of deprivation. In the process it is important not to deny the negative feelings towards Jesus, but not to think they have any effect on his love or his ability to help in spite of our fear or lack of trust. The fact that you ask for help must mean that on some level you *do* trust him and you *do* know he can help you.

As we learn to see the ego dynamics at work in our relationships and understand their purpose, we learn to be willing to take responsibility for the way we feel and no longer believe the ego's interpretation or projection. It then becomes easier to accept that Jesus is not the cause of our dilemma; rather he is offering us a way out of hell through the teaching of the Course. He is not forcing us or rushing us, but nudges us gently along the path from the ego's dream of darkness to the light of his love: **"How can you wake children in a more kindly way than by a gentle Voice that will not frighten them, but will merely remind them that the night is over and the light has come? You do not inform them that the nightmares that frightened them so badly are not real, because children believe in magic. You merely reassure them that they are safe *now*. Then you train them to recognize the difference between sleeping and waking, so they will understand they need not be afraid of dreams. And so when bad dreams come, they will themselves call on the light to dispel them"** (T.6.V.2).

Q #72: The Course references "God's plan" in several places: "We will accept the way God's plan will end, as we received the way it started." (W.pII.in.10:6). Further in the workbook at the introduction to Section 10 it also states: "God's Final Judgment is as merciful as every step in His appointed plan to bless His Son, and call him to return to the eternal peace He shares with him. Be not afraid of love. For it alone can heal all sorrow, wipe away all tears, and gently waken from his dream of pain the Son whom God acknowledges as His." (W.pII.10.4:1.2.3). This seems to be in conflict with the claim that God is unaware of the physical world. So, why would God need a plan? It would appear from this that God is aware that His Son is sleeping. If not, how can it be so that God would have a plan to "call him to return" and to "gently waken from his dream of pain" if God is not aware of this need for His Son Whom according to Truth is not sleeping and therefore has no need in Truth to return to the Father? If as the Course states the physical world is an illusion and God is not aware of the illusion what is the need of a plan to awaken the Son? Do these passages not infer that God is in fact aware of that which is not real?

A: Your question is a very good one. One of the challenging but essential things to understand about the Course is how it uses language. If you can remember that the Course has come *only* as a correction for the thought of separation -- which is very real in our experience -- and so must use the symbols of separation to bring about the correction (T.25.I.7:4), everything will begin to become clearer. The ego's myth of separation, which we at a deep unconscious level believe, spins a wild tale of attack and counterattack between the Son and the Father, with the Father in the end seeking to destroy the Son for his malicious attempt to usurp the Father's position of superiority in the Kingdom (e.g., M.17.7). That this story is widely accepted is evident in Christianity's foundational belief that God's plan for our salvation requires His one and only Son to suffer and die an ignominious death in order to atone for our grievous offense against Him, a sin so heinous we ourselves are completely incapable of atoning for it. And Christianity's basic premise is only one specific expression of the ego's underlying myth, predicated on the reality of separation and sin. Parallels can be seen in the other formal religions of the world that emphasize the need for and value of suffering and sacrifice in approaching God.

The Course comes as a correction for the ego's false story, but it would hardly be helpful if the correction were nothing more than a statement that none of this is real, since we are convinced otherwise and are still desperately clinging to this sinful self that we believe the separation has made real. And so the Course tells a different story, a story of a loving Father whose plan for our salvation -- our happy return to Him -- has not a single element of violence or revenge in it, nor exacts any sacrifice or pain from His children. This corrective story of God's plan for our salvation uses the same dualistic symbols of separation as the ego's story, but as a metaphorical rendering rather than a literal account. And so the symbols are infused with a completely different content that reflects the unified Love of Heaven rather than the fragmenting hatred of the ego. The purpose of the Course's correction is to begin to undo some

of the guilt and fear that we have made real in our minds so that we can begin to approach the part of our mind where the Holy Spirit -- the Correction -- resides (even this is metaphorical) as a reflection of the unity and wholeness of our true reality as Christ. (The tape set, *Duality as Metaphor*, provides a much more extended treatment of this whole issue.)

Q #73: Why should I decide against pain?

A: Because it hurts, and because not to decide against pain keeps us in hell. However, there is really no obligation to decide against pain. As long as pain is tolerable, denied, or temporarily assuaged, it is conceivable that no decision against it will be made. The physical, emotional, and psychological pain experienced in the body is a reflection of the pain in the mind, which is the result of denying our identity as God's one Son by choosing to separate from Him. Pain, therefore, is the condition of the separated Son: **"Pain is the thought of evil taking form, and working havoc in your holy mind. Pain is the ransom you have gladly paid not to be free. In pain is God denied the Son He loves. In pain does fear appear to triumph over love, and time replace eternity and Heaven. And the world becomes a cruel and a bitter place, where sorrow rules and little joys give way before the onslaught of the savage pain that waits to end all joy in misery" (W.p.I.190.8).** Why then would we want it?

Since we have found numerous ways to adapt to the very painful experience of denying our true Self, and identifying with the ego, our pain often goes unrecognized. This adjustment to pain is compounded by our confusing pain and joy, as the Course tells us: **"You no more recognize what is painful than you know what is joyful, and are, in fact, very apt to confuse the two. The Holy Spirit's main function is to teach you to tell them apart. What is joyful to you is painful to the ego, and as long as you are in doubt about what you are, you will be confused about joy and pain" (T.7.X.3:4,5,6).** It is when the true depth and searing pain of the ego's thought system is recognized, and becomes intolerable, that steps are taken to decide against it. This is the goal of the Course. Until then, tremendous energy, time, and money are spent in making accommodations to live with the pain of being in this world.

The decision against pain is inevitable, because the decision for God is inevitable. We could paraphrase a very familiar line in the Introduction to the Text: **"It is a required decision. Only the time you make it is voluntary" (T.in.1:2,3; italics added).** From the moment of birth we seek to alleviate or avoid pain. This is a drive natural to physical bodies. Unless some specific pathology exists, we naturally seek relief from every imaginable physical, psychological, and emotional discomfort, whether we do so consciously or unconsciously. The Holy Spirit makes use of this natural aversion to pain to lead us gently to make another choice, which will end our pain and lead us out of hell. When we have had enough of the pain in our psyches caused by our destructive ego choices, we will be willing to accept His help and find the relief forgiveness offers: **"Do you not then begin to understand what forgiveness will do for you? It will remove all sense of weakness, strain and fatigue from your mind. It will take away all fear and guilt and pain. It will restore the invulnerability and power God gave His Son to your awareness" (W.pl.62.3:2,3,4,5).** Being without weakness, strain, fatigue, fear, and guilt would seem to be a convincing enough reason to decide against pain, not to mention the peace that will replace it, whenever we are ready to accept it.

Q #74: I read in *Absence from Felicity* about how Helen used shopping as a defense against Jesus. It almost totally preoccupied her, and succeeded in keeping Jesus safely away from her attention. My work and commitments are doing the same for me. Although I never thought I was using them as a defense -- only being normal. Can this be avoided?

A: A major focus of the teaching and training of the Course is to get us to think in terms of purpose. **"What do I want to come of this? What is it for?" (T.17.VI.2:1.2); "The test of everything on**

earth is simply this; 'What is it for?' The answer makes it what it is for you. It has no meaning of itself, yet you can give reality to it, according to the purpose that you serve"

(T.24.VII.6:1.2.3). There are only two purposes that are open to choice in our minds. Either we have chosen to reinforce our belief in separation or to undo this belief, and there is never an instant when we are *not* making this choice. Another way of stating this is that we are always choosing either to push the love of Jesus away, or join to with it. This means that it is never the activity that we are engaged in that is the problem or the reason we are not peaceful, it is the *choice* we are making to *use* the activity to keep us separate or in conflict, etc.

The Course teaches that we made the world to be a distraction and a smokescreen, so that we would forget entirely that we have a mind that at every instant is choosing to identify with the ego's or with the Holy Spirit's thought system. We become preoccupied with our work, our families, etc., never realizing the underlying purpose that has been chosen in our minds. We justify our immersion in our lives in the world by saying, "Everyone does that" or "It's normal." But it is all very purposeful, as reflected in this statement: **"Every special relationship you have made has, as its fundamental purpose, the aim of occupying your mind so completely that you will not hear the call for truth" (T.17.IV.3:3).** We, of course, are not aware that this is going on, which is why the Course is so helpful.

In view of this, your question regarding how to avoid using work, or anything else, as a defense against the love of Jesus in a sense is the wrong question, or focus. As the above quote indicates, that is the very purpose of our being in the world with all of our obligations and commitments -- to be preoccupied with what is outside our minds so that we will forget entirely that we have a mind that is choosing at every instant. In that sense, then, we can't avoid using the world as a defense, because that is why we are here! So what would help you most is simply to be honest about this as your underlying intention in being busy. The purpose is not what you think, just as Jesus informs us in Lesson 5 that we are never upset for the reason we think. Helen knew this clearly. She knew that her shopping was a way of keeping Jesus away. If you can be clear about that, the problem will not be worsened by guilt over the dishonesty. Being afraid to get close to love is not sinful, therefore, shame and guilt are not justified. Fear is not a sin, and it has no effect on Jesus' love for you. When Helen knew she was ready to accept Jesus' love, her experience was that he told her she didn't have to go shopping anymore, and there was no sense of sacrifice. She was always clear about the purpose of what she was doing. That is what we all need to aim for. We are never busy for the reason we think!

The correction comes when we first recognize the purpose we have chosen in our wrong minds, and then ask Jesus or the Holy Spirit to help us shift our purpose so that we would use everything as a means of undoing the separation and seeing our interests as shared with everyone else's rather than in conflict with them. The challenge is learning how to do both -- how to be aware of what is going on in our minds and at the same time conscientiously fulfilling our obligations and responsibilities in the world to the best of our ability. It is possible to do this, but it takes a great deal of practice. That is what the exercises in the workbook are designed to do. We learn how to function in the world effectively, while learning that we are not of the world.

Q #75: *A Course in Miracles* speaks of the "Great Rays." Could you explain what are the Great Rays?

A: The "Great Rays" is a term used to refer to the light that radiates from God, extending to Christ, His one Son. Symbolically, a spark of this light is present in the right mind of the separated son. Neither the "Great Rays" nor the spark are physical forms of light, but are symbols having nothing to do with the actual seeing of the body's eyes. The term is used to symbolize a reality that is spirit, not physical, in contrast to the ego's identification with the body. When we begin to identify less and less with the ego, we will be more aware of the truth of who we are as God's one Son, not limited to the body. This awareness is a form of seeing, and is symbolized by a spark of light and the "Great Rays." As we learn to "see" with the Holy Spirit, we grow from having a tiny suspicion, a spark of awareness that there is a reality beyond

what the body's eyes behold, to a clearer realization of the reality of spirit. We "see" that there is a light in our minds that reflects the truth, and represents the memory of God, the Oneness we all share. We will ultimately learn to dismiss any ego thought that darkens our awareness. When we do, only the light will be left: **"And from this light will the Great Rays extend back into darkness and forward unto God, to shine away the past and so make room for His eternal Presence, in which everything is radiant in the light" (T.18.III.8:7).** With terms such as this, it is important to remember what the Course says about words: **"Words can be helpful, particularly for the beginner, in helping concentration and facilitating the exclusion, or at least the control, of extraneous thoughts. Let us not forget, however, that words are but symbols of symbols. They are thus twice removed from reality" (M.21.1:8,9,10).** Just as we need to go beyond the symbol to learn the message the Course is giving us through it, we learn to go beyond the body to the light that is in everyone we see. **"As the ego would limit your perception of your brothers to the body, so would the Holy Spirit release your vision and let you see the Great Rays shining from them, so unlimited that they reach to God. It is this shift to vision that is accomplished in the holy instant" (T.15.IX.1:1,2).** This does not necessarily mean that we see actual rays emanating from anyone. It is a shift in our perception that will take place in our mind, when we allow judgment to be replaced by forgiveness in the holy instant.

Q #76: A number of philosophers and psychologists have noted that Western civilization, in the development of science and the growth of the self into an individual, autonomous ego -- the healthy and mature adult ego -- has been characterized by an acute split between body and mind (i.e., ego mind -- the brain). This division also shows up in the split between man and nature in our civilization. The psychological repression and alienation from nature has produced a lack of vitality, enthusiasm, and zest for living in our culture. Now the Course does not seem to deal with this problem and even appears to increase the alienation by saying the body and the world do not exist. It seems that in order to transcend the ego we will first need to recover much of what was lost. I think the Course is saying that as we look at our egos with the Holy Spirit and practice forgiveness, we begin to heal the repression and alienation. Is this correct? It seems that even if this is correct there is a real danger that people who study the Course will not realize the importance of having a strong, sensitive, alert, healthy body in order to have the vitality to transcend the ego.

A: There can be no doubt that the experience of the ego thought system, in whatever forms it may be manifested, will be one of profound repression and alienation. These are core elements of its basic premise -- the desirability of splitting off from the Whole followed by the denial of responsibility for the decision and its seeming consequences (T.6.II.1,2,3). And so what you describe as characterizing Western civilization is just one of the many different but inevitable consequences in form of the desire for separation.

While the Course does assert the unreality of the body and the world, for the most part our understanding of this will be only intellectual and not experiential until the very end of the journey. And this should not be a student's focus as we attempt to put the Course's principles of forgiveness into practice, or we will risk going even deeper into denial about what is buried in our unconscious mind. It will be much more important that we acknowledge the purpose for which we have made the world and our bodies -- to play the roles of victim and victimizer -- than that we simply deny that they exist.

And so if we practice forgiveness as the Course teaches us -- releasing the judgments we have been holding on to, thereby making the differences we have been perceiving between ourselves and everyone and everything else in the world no longer important -- we will no longer see our purpose as separate from everyone and everything else. This will inevitably reduce feelings of alienation and isolation between ourselves and all that we have seen as outside of ourselves.

And since the body is really neutral in all of this (W.pl.294), our focus need not be on the body but on our thoughts about the body and the purpose for which we choose to use it. That is not to say that while we believe that our body is real and we are so intimately identified with it that we may neglect or abuse it. But

our belief in its vulnerability and weakness and need for protection is nothing more than a displacement of our underlying belief about ourselves (our mind), separated from the Whole and identified with the ego. And it is that belief that needs correction and healing.

Q #77: Why does the Holy Spirit speak so softly? It seems it would be so much easier to follow His guidance if He could shout sometimes.

A: You join a chorus of many hundreds of Course students fervently pleading with the Holy Spirit to turn up the volume! Unfortunately, or rather *fortunately*, the problem is on our end, which means it has something to do with a choice we are making, which we can now change. It is the interference we generate that seems to make the Holy Spirit's Voice inaudible, just as radio transmissions often don't come through clearly because of static. There is nothing wrong with the signal. The problem is on the receiving end, not the sending end, Jesus tells us in what seems to be a gentle rebuke: **"What answer that the Holy Spirit gives can reach you, when it is your specialness to which you listen, and which asks and answers? Its tiny answer, soundless in the melody that pours from God to you eternally in loving praise of what you are, is all you listen to. And that vast song of honor and of love for what you are seems silent and unheard before its 'mightiness.' You strain your ears to hear its soundless voice, and yet the Call of God Himself is soundless to you"** (T.24.II.4:3,4,5,6). This is reinforced in the manual when Jesus says, **"only few can hear God's Voice at all"** (M.12.3:3).

This is hard to take, yet rather than be discouraged, we can be grateful that at least we know what the problem is, and that we can work hand-in-hand with our loving brother Jesus to restore the communication to full clarity. If we are truly honest with ourselves, we will nod in acknowledgment that his explanation for our not hearing the Holy Spirit is indeed the truth.

As we continue to work with the material, it becomes clear that the two requirements Jesus is insistent about are honesty and humility. It is profoundly humbling to run into passage after passage in the Course in which he tells us that we are wrong about everything we think and have thought, and that we are just spiritual children, even referring to us at times as babies (e.g., T.4.II.5:2). He talks as well about the methods he must use to get through to us, because we have erected so many blockades to truth in our minds. For example, **"How do you teach someone the value of something he has deliberately thrown away?"** (T.4.VI.5:1). And then there are many passages that speak specifically of the "damage" we have done to our own minds, one example being: **"what you have done to hurt your mind has made it so unnatural that it does not remember what is natural to it"** (T.16.II.3:1). It is just so easy to forget that we are the ones who banished the Holy Spirit from our minds. We conceal this and then wind up thinking that His absence from our awareness somehow has to do with a deficiency on His part, or even with Jesus' instructions. So we are ultimately thrust back to a very humble position, from which all our efforts must proceed.

Another important factor to keep in mind is that the Holy Spirit's guidance can come in many different ways. We should not expect it to be only in the form of words specifically telling us what to do. His Presence could very well be felt as an impulse to be kind or compassionate in a given moment. Often His guidance is in the form of an idea that suddenly occurs to us, or something that happens in a dream, or simply while we are talking with a friend. The Holy Spirit's correction of our wrong-minded thinking can come in any number of ways.

And finally, we always want to be careful that we have not defined the problem, and then expect the answer to come on terms we ourselves have set. This is an all too common form of interference on our part that makes access to right-minded thinking more difficult. **"Be willing, for an instant, to leave your altars free of what you placed upon them, and what is really there you cannot fail to see [hear]"** (T.21.II.8:1). Jesus has guaranteed that our efforts will meet with success, and in fact they already have. We need only accept this with no reservations and then the Voice for God will be the only Voice we hear.

Q #78: I recently watched a movie based on a true story of a prisoner in Alcatraz who was put in solitary confinement for over a three year period. In this time, he was in total darkness, had no contact with people, with the exception of ½ hour per year, at Christmas, and lived in the most horrendous conditions imaginable. Consequently, he went insane (based of course on what would be considered insanity in the world of illusions). I am having a great deal of trouble with how a person in his situation would apply the Course, with absolutely no contact with people or the outside world. How could he join with his brother? How could he practice forgiveness, or experience miracles? If it were Jesus stuck in there, what would he do? This type of scenario obviously brings up a great deal of fear for me, and I've been pondering this for days. I guess I am trying to figure out, that in even in this most horrific a situation, can one still find the peace of God?

A: Since the Course teaches that everything occurs in the mind, there is no need for contact with people in order to practice forgiveness: **"...there is no world outside....(T.12.III.6:7).** All of our relationships (thoughts) remain within, so we are able to practice forgiveness with those who are seemingly alive, as well as those who are seemingly dead: **"Like you, your brother thinks he is a dream....Think...of him as a mind in which illusions still persist, but as a mind which brother is to you. He is not brother made by what he dreams, nor is his body, 'hero' of the dream, your brother....Your mind and his are joined in brotherhood (T.28.IV.3:1,2,3,4,5,6).**

In the section, **"Shadows of the Past" (T.17.III)**, Jesus explains how we always see people in terms of the past, whether it be things we believe others have done to us or other people, or it be the needs we believed we had, which were not met. In essence, it explains that we don't ever really have a relationship with anyone in the present, since these "shadows" are always with us, until they are forgiven. This simply reiterates the teaching that you do not need a physical body present in order to join or forgive.

Regarding maintaining one's peace in such an extreme condition as you suggest, while it does seem formidable, it is nonetheless possible in principle. Otherwise, you are saying that the peace of God is limited to certain people, places, or situations. It would be very difficult to be a serious student of *A Course in Miracles*, practicing your lessons of forgiveness, all the while holding in the back of your mind the nagging doubt: "What if God abandons me now?" (Of course the ego would like nothing more than this, but that's another topic!)

Throughout history there have been many people who have maintained their peace in the cruelest of circumstances. Many such stories have come out of the concentration camps, like those involving the Ten Boom sisters, Victor Frankl, etc. From the point of view of the Course, all these people had right-minded experiences, wherein someone else's interests were not seen as separate from their own. This is difficult enough to do on a day-to-day basis here and now, let alone in such extreme circumstances. But it has, and can be done.

Q #79: The relationship I have with my 5 siblings is, for the most part, one of special hate. Our conflicts have been escalating around the care of my mom and the dispersal of her property. I find it easiest simply to disassociate myself from the family and the conflict. This does not give me peace but it does minimize the anxiety. I do know that this is my classroom but I feel like avoiding my family to the point of not attending my mom's funeral when the time comes. My question is: can I work on forgiveness with my siblings while I am choosing to avoid them?

A: You are wise to recognize that avoiding your siblings does not give you peace or eliminate your anxiety, but only minimizes it. The ego is very clever at offering us ways that seem to reduce the guilt and conflict and fear, through denial or avoidance, so that we never address the problem, thereby assuring

that the conflict remains and never is resolved. **"Minimizing fear, but not its undoing, is the ego's constant effort, and is indeed a skill at which it is very ingenious" (T.11.V.9:2).**

So it may be becoming apparent to you already that there is no way you can really avoid the conflict, whether or not you are actually in contact or in the physical presence of your siblings. That is because all relationships exist only in the mind and, believe it or not, the real conflict has nothing to do with your siblings. But it has everything to do with what they symbolize for you, because the real conflict also is only within your own mind. And so any changes in your relationships will have to begin first within your mind.

Alluding to this process, Jesus observes, **"Everyone makes an ego or a self for himself, which is subject to enormous variation because of its instability. He also makes an ego for everyone else he perceives, which is equally variable. Their interaction is a process that alters both, because they were not made by or with the Unalterable. *It is important to realize that this alteration can and does occur as readily when the interaction takes place in the mind as when it involves physical proximity. Thinking about another ego is as effective in changing relative perception as is physical interaction.* There could be no better example that the ego is only an idea and not a fact" (T.4.II:2; italics added).**

So, yes, you can work on your forgiveness lessons with your siblings without being in contact or around them physically, provided you are not also determined to avoid looking within your own mind at the conflict they represent to you, projected out into the world. Your siblings are providing you with the opportunity to get in touch with the guilt that is buried deep within your own mind that you have not wanted to look at, but have preferred to see outside yourself in others, in this case, your siblings. So once you recognize where the real problem lies, your siblings move from the foreground to the background in the forgiveness process.

What then is the next step in the process? Jesus tells us that **"there is a very simple way to find the door to true forgiveness, and perceive it open wide in welcome. When you feel that you are tempted to accuse someone of sin in any form, do not allow your mind to dwell on what you think he did, for that is self-deception. Ask instead, 'Would I accuse myself of doing this?'" (W.pII.134.9).**

To uncover the self-accusation, you simply need to identify, at the level of content rather than the specific form of what your siblings may be doing, what you are accusing them of. It will most likely be some aspect of putting their own self-interests above everyone else's, wanting to control or manipulate the situation to make sure that their own needs are met, with no real concern for anyone else. And so you need then to be honest with yourself in acknowledging that you at times operate in exactly the same way, even if you may not be in this particular situation involving your mother.

It is then that *self*-accusation that you will want to bring to Jesus or the Holy Spirit to heal, for Their perception of you will be different from your own. Theirs is a nonjudgmental acceptance that always perceives fear and a call for love in place of attack and sin. When you can share Their perception of yourself, you will release the guilt in your own mind, simultaneously releasing your siblings from the chain of guilt you've been binding them with. Now this release is not likely to be total and complete, once and for all, in a single attempt, for our own fear is too great to accept total release for ourselves. When we let the guilt back in, we will need once again to project it. And siblings with whom we have a long history of grievances make easy targets. And so the forgiveness process with your siblings will be a process that will most likely take time. But at least now you know where the real problem lie

Q #80: The more I read the Text, and continue to do the lessons, the more I realize that I am God's perfect creation despite what I see with my physical eyes. In the first three chapters in the Text, the theme to me is -- the only reality is -- that I have never been separated from God -- it is powerful, simple and it is

the truth. I KNOW this. Knowledge does not question. Only the ego does. Is this a type of intellectual experience or a 'real' experience -- the former being one disguised by the ego?

A: Your experience may very well be valid and real, a reflection of the knowledge that is present within all of us as the Christ, God's only Son. And the most useful perspective on the experience (unless you feel you have already transcended any need for the Course and its practice) may be this: If the experience is helpful in deepening your understanding and practice of forgiveness, which is at the core of the Course's teaching and purpose, then you can simply be grateful that you have allowed yourself to be open to it -- for that is all that really matters. In other words, if the experience has allowed you to recognize that your interests are not separate from your brothers and that any judgments you have been holding against either your brothers or yourself are without merit or justification, then you have taken a big step forward in your healing process.

As the Course says of itself right at the beginning of the text, **"The course does not aim at teaching the meaning of love, for that is beyond what can be taught. It does aim, however, at removing the blocks to the awareness of love's presence, which is your natural inheritance"**

(T.in.1:6,7). "Removing the blocks" is what forgiveness is all about, and this requires a willingness to look at our ego, in all its self-centered viciousness and guilty deceptions, so that, with Jesus' love beside us, we can then look beyond those blocks to the joyful truth about ourselves and our brothers. If your experience is providing you with a glimpse of the Course's final destination, then hopefully it can enhance your motivation for the means -- forgiveness -- the Course provides for arriving there. Bon voyage!

Q #81: I have read that all relationships are special, and that one can even have a special relationship with the Course itself. I often wonder if I myself have a special relationship with the Course. How can I know if I do or not? And is this really even a "problem" I should concern myself with? (One reason I suspect I may have a special relationship with the Course is because I often think that all the world's problems would be solved if everyone would just read the Course.)

A: Yes, all relationships are special, and that includes our relationship with the Course. What makes the Course "special" is individualized, and varies in form, but it usually involves perceiving the form of the Course as having special power to meet our special needs. Another form the specialness frequently takes for students is feeling "special," and often "superior" to believers of other traditional forms of spirituality. This specialness includes the reason you give -- that everyone should read the Course. And with that you have answered the first part of your question. As the Course itself tells us in the Manual: **"There is a course for every teacher of God. The form of the course varies greatly. So do the particular teaching aids involved....This is a manual for a special curriculum, intended for teachers of a special form of the universal course. There are many thousands of other forms, all with the same outcome"** (M.1.3:1,2,4:1,2).

Our relationship with the Course is no more or less a problem than anything else. It is an opportunity for forgiveness. The ego uses everything for its purpose of separation and judgment, including the Course. All of our relationships, without exception, need to be looked at in the light of the Course's teaching: **"...let us look more closely at the relationships the ego contrives, and let the Holy Spirit judge them truly. For it is certain that if you will look at them, you will offer them gladly to Him. What He can make of them you do not know, but you will become willing to find out, if you are willing first to perceive what you have made of them"** (T.15.VII.5:3,4,5). It is important to recognize the specialness, being very honest about the specific feelings and judgments involved in it, and see how you are using it to be separate and special. This applies whether the specialness takes the form of love or hate, because seeming special love for the Course is the same as special hate. The specialness with the Course reflects how we perceive other people; the people we "love" who follow the Course as we do, and those we "hate," who do not study it as we do, or do not study it at all. Behind the specialness with the Course stand all our brothers, thus is the world divided and our relationships defined to suit our needs. The Course therefore, fits in with everything else in our lives and in our world by reflecting back to us the

choice we have made to be separate. Jesus does not ask us to "love" the Course, or preach it. He asks us to study it, practice it, and apply its teaching to everything, including the Course itself: **"Teach not that I died in vain. Teach rather that I did not die by demonstrating that I live in you"** (T.11.VI.7:3,4).

Q #82: The Course says we are already Home. Then that would mean that we are already in Heaven now. Heaven has no outside or inside. It is everything. Does this mean that this world is in Heaven and Heaven is in this world? Is this similar to the Vedantic statement, Atman is Brahman?

A. The non-dualism of the Course is an absolute non-dualism that states that reality is infinite, formless, changeless, and eternal; nothing finite or of form is real in any way. That would mean that the finite, physical universe has no reality. It is entirely illusory. There are other non-dualistic systems that place the world within the being of God. These are the different forms of pantheism -- both east and west -- which give reality to the world, but not as a creation outside God's being. The Course's non-dualism is absolute, giving no reality to finite multiplicity. Thus reality is perfect Oneness, "nothing outside this Oneness, and nothing else within" (T.18.VI.1:6). And in stating that "the world was made as an attack on God" (W.pll.3.2:2), Jesus makes it clear that the world is not in God nor of God.

This is the metaphysical foundation of the startling statement that "you are at home in God, dreaming of exile but perfectly capable of awakening to reality" (T.10.I.2:1), and why Jesus asks "who is the you, who are living in this world?" (T.4.II.11:8). The entire Course is addressed to a mind outside time and space that has chosen to deny its true Identity as the formless extension of its infinite Source, and "become" instead an individualized entity limited by time and space. At the same time, this mind conceals the memory of its true Identity as the one Son of God. Only in a dream or a fantasy could this occur, but not in reality, as the Course teaches. Therefore, we, as we know ourselves in this world, have no reality. All that exists is God and the undifferentiated, eternal, changeless, and perfect extension of His infinite being, a reality having no counterpart in the world, nor can it be understood in this world.

"No one asleep and dreaming in the world remembers his attack upon himself. No one believes there really was a time when he knew nothing of a body, and could never have conceived this world as real. He would have seen at once that these ideas are one illusion, too ridiculous for anything but to be laughed away. How serious they now appear to be! And no one can remember when they would have met with laughter and with disbelief" (T.27.VIII.5:4,5,6,7,8).

Separating from infinity, from totality, is impossible, the Course teaches. God creates only like Himself. Therefore His creations share His being, but without ever being less than He is: "Yet could God's Son as He created him abide in form or in a world of form?" (C.2.2:4). In this sense, the Course's teachings are similar to the Vedantic statement, Atman is Brahman, as echoed in another passage: "What He creates is not apart from Him, and nowhere does the Father end, the Son begin as something separate from Him" (W.pl.132.12:4).

Q #83: Lessons 183, 184 focus on the Name of God. The lessons say it is one word and that it has such power that one should become oblivious to all other words as it will bring great healing even to the world. At the very beginning it suggests the concept of surname -- so assume from Jesus Christ that God's surname is Christ. A later lesson says God's Name is Love. I looked at the review lessons but still it doesn't say -- basically my question is: What is God's Name?

A: Lesson 183, "I call upon God's Name and on my own," is to be read like beautiful poetry, using words to remind us of what must lie beyond words. When it speaks of God as having a Name, this is not to be taken literally. A careful reading of **Lesson 184, "The Name of God is my inheritance,"** makes the figurative nature of Lesson 183 more apparent, as it describes the origin and purpose of names in the ego

thought system. And in fact, Lesson 184 asserts quite unequivocally, **"God has no name" (W.pl.184.12:1).**

The reality of God and Christ is beyond all words, all names, all symbols, all concepts. These are all the products of consciousness, which perceives dualistically, differentiating between a perceiver and a perceived, a self and an other, which are necessarily predicated on a belief in separation. Lesson 184 explains how names are part of the ego's plan to divide the unity of reality into separate, identifiable, segments -- each name assigned to each seemingly separate entity asserts its independent, discrete, and meaningful existence. But these divisions are all illusory **(W.pl.184.1,2,3,4,5,6).**

Now Jesus knows that separation and its effects are all we understand and so he acknowledges that we will need to continue to use its symbols for a while **(W.pl.184.9:1,2; 11:1).** But he wants to teach us to recognize their ultimate unreality by having us give words and names a different purpose. So calling upon the Name of God is a symbolic way of expressing the final learning that we are moving towards -- **"all things are one, and at this lesson does all learning end. All names are unified; all space is filled with truth's reflection. Every gap is closed, and separation healed" (W.pl.184.12:2,3,4).** By acknowledging that God's Name is our Name, we are accepting the Correction for all the little names we have given everything in the world, including ourselves, our brothers, and God. And so the one Name is used symbolically to undo all the ego's little names, until we are ready to move beyond all symbols to the reality that is beyond all names.

Q #84: I have heard it said that in order to remove guilt from our ego mind we must invite the Holy Spirit into everything we do and thereby cleanse the activity from guilt. For example, if we overeat we need to invite the Holy Spirit in every time we eat so that there is no guilt from the activity. It is the guilt that is the overweight not the activity itself. Well what about people who beat their spouse or murder other people? Surely you aren't saying that as long as they remove the guilt from these activities and invite the Holy Spirit into them that they will be absolved of the consequences of that activity? Then how is it that you learn to cease a detrimental activity? I know you cannot ask for help from the Holy Spirit to stop you from doing the activity because God doesn't know eating too many cookies or flying a plane into the World Trade Center. He only knows that his Son is sleeping and He wants him to awaken. Just as an example, how do I stop myself from eating too much or the "wrong" foods?

A. First, it is important to understand what inviting the Holy Spirit in means. If we invite the Holy Spirit into our minds, we are asking to share His perception of everything, and to have His purpose be ours in all that we do. If we truly accept that, then we would not see our interests as separate from anyone else's, we would never try to gain at another's expense, nor would we see sin within ourselves, and so there would be no motivation to attack either ourselves or anyone else. Since our minds would be free of all conflict and guilt, we could not see ourselves as needing anything from others, nor could we see ourselves as victimized by others. There is no unconscious guilt that would get projected onto one's own body or that of another.

Given this, it would hardly seem possible that someone sharing the Holy Spirit's perception and purpose would do something violent with the express intent of inflicting pain and causing harm to another or oneself. If we identified with the Holy Spirit's thought system and had no ego at all, it would be impossible to be cruel: **"There is no cruelty in God and none in me,"** as **Lesson 170** tells us. In this sense, "cleansing an activity of guilt," means cleansing our minds of guilt by choosing against the ego. Then whatever we do would be loving and kind.

It is also helpful to remember that we are all heavily invested in our identities as individuals, and that on an unconscious level, we have equated our existence with sin. It isn't that easy for us, as a result, to exchange our ego identification for the Holy Spirit's. So even though we may think we are inviting Him in, we have so many hidden reservations that we wind up listening largely to our ego, thinking it is the Holy

Spirit. After years of experience, however, most of us develop a deeper sensitivity to the strength of our investment in the ego's thought system, and know that if we truly, without reservation, wanted to let go of our ego, we would in an instant. But our fear is too great, and we therefore do it a little at a time, in holy instants. That means that we will be in our wrong minds most of the time, and then the healing process would be focused on looking at our wrong minds without judgment and without guilt. This is another way in which we invite the Holy Spirit in. We look at our ego without judging ourselves or others for having an ego, trusting that when we are less fearful, we will accept the correction.

In light of this, it is clear that the Course is *not* saying that we can do whatever we wish -- cruel or not -- as long as we don't feel guilty about it. Yes, guilt is always the problem, because guilt makes the error real and always gets projected, which leads to an endless guilt-attack cycle. But that does not translate into a license to do anything one wishes to do, as long as there is no guilt. The guilt is never in the activity; the guilt is in the mind, stemming from the decision to believe, for example, that our interests are best served at another's expense, which leads us to attack others, or in our belief that we deserve to be punished for our sin of separating from God, which leads to self-destructive behavior. The ultimate source of guilt is our belief that we have indeed attacked God by separating from Him, and therefore whenever we perceive separation as real, we are cultivating the breeding place of guilt. So that is where our attention needs to be directed, if we are to become guilt-free. This is a process that goes on in our minds.

On the other hand, if we already have done something to harm ourselves or another person, we can then remind ourselves -- without rationalizing or justifying what we did -- that feeling guilty over it is not helpful or healing: Only fearful people attack, and so I must have been identified with my ego when I attacked, or I would not have been fearful. Being afraid is not sinful, though, and therefore there is no need to feel guilty about what I did. It cost me dearly, because I am not peaceful; but it has had no effect on Jesus' love for me. I know that I cannot attack myself or others and feel his love at the same time: **"You cannot enter God's Presence if you attack His Son" (T.11.IV.5:6)**; but I also know that he will not stop loving me because of what I did. I have paid a high price, but that still does not justify feeling guilty. It was a mistake, and one day my fear will be diminished enough that I will be able to accept the correction. That kind of honesty is what heals and keeps us moving in the right direction. Being aware of the price of our attack on ourselves and others would provide the motivation for change as well, although the tolerance for self-inflicted pain varies from individual to individual. We must reach the point, though, where being happy is more valued than being right, before we will ever take that next step.

To direct this to your specific issue: If you continually hurt yourself by overeating or by eating the wrong kinds of food, you can at least tell yourself that you know that what you are doing is coming from your ego, because it is hurtful not kind, but that is the best you can do at the moment, and so you are not going to make it worse by judging yourself for it. You can further remind yourself that you must be very fearful of Jesus' love, and so you push it away in the form of this attack on yourself in order to prove that you are not worthy of his love. There would always be a grievance of some sort lurking in the background as well. (Our book and tape, *Overeating*, go into this topic in detail, if you haven't yet run across them.)

The reason we repeat destructive behavior is that we want the outcome it provides. Strangely, as Jesus teaches us in the **"Obstacles to Peace,"** we are attracted to guilt, and so we will keep doing whatever will leave us feeling guilty (**T.19.IV.A.i**). That is why the Course focuses so heavily on looking within at the thought system of guilt that we have allowed to rule our minds and motivate our behavior. Sometimes, though, the most loving thing one can do is accept behavioral therapy for eating disorders, as a reflection of a decision to be more kind and less cruel to oneself. It is a good starting point. But we must eventually get to the root of problem, if the behavioral change is to last.

Q #85: In Eastern Advaita/non-dualism there is no room for relationships like Cause- Effect, Father-Son, Creator-Creation. Why then maintain that *A Course in Miracles* is "non-dualistic" in essence? Isn't that confusing?

A: The Course uses dualistic terms in its teaching only because Jesus knows that the language of separation or duality is all that we can understand right now. Jesus is very clear about his intentions with language in the Course, so to answer your question we are simply going to let the Course speak for itself by providing a few relevant references:

The clearest is the following statement:

"Since you believe that you are separate, Heaven presents itself to you as separate, too. Not that it is in truth, but that the link that has been given you to join the truth may reach to you through what you understand. Father and Son and Holy Spirit are as One, as all your brothers join as one in truth. Christ and His Father never have been separate, and Christ abides within your understanding, in the part of you that shares His Father's Will. The Holy Spirit links the other part—the tiny, mad desire to be separate, different and special—to the Christ, to make the oneness clear to what is really one. In this world this is not understood, but can be taught....It is the Holy Spirit's function to teach you how this oneness is experienced, what you must do that it can be experienced, and where you should go to do it.

All this takes note of time and place as if they were discrete, for while you think that part of you is separate, the concept of a Oneness joined as One is meaningless. It is apparent that a mind so split could never be the Teacher of a Oneness which unites all things within Itself. And so What is within this mind, and does unite all things together, must be its Teacher. Yet must It use the language [dualistic] that this mind can understand, in the condition [separation] in which it thinks it is" (T.25.I.5; 6:4; 7:1,2,3,4; italics added).

There are many other places where Jesus makes it clear that the Course's metaphysical foundation is non-dualistic, despite the dualistic nature of the language employed. For example, in speaking of the Father and the Son, words which suggest two separate Beings, he says, **"What He [the Father] creates is not apart from Him, and nowhere does the Father end, the Son begin as something separate from Him" (W.pl.132.12:4).**

And later in the Workbook he says, **"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. 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. It comes to every mind when total recognition that its will is God's has been completely given and received completely. It returns the mind into the endless present, where the past and future cannot be conceived. It lies beyond salvation; past all thought of time, forgiveness and the holy face of Christ [which are all dualistic concepts]. The Son of God has merely disappeared into his Father, as his Father has in him. The world has never been at all. Eternity remains a constant state" (W.pl.169.5, 6).

And in the context of Cause-Effect relationships, one of the dualistic sets of terms you mention, Jesus begins in seemingly dualistic terms, but then makes its true non-dualistic nature apparent:

"Father, I was created in Your Mind, a holy Thought that never left its home. I am forever Your Effect, and You forever and forever are my Cause. As You created me I have remained. Where You established me I still abide. And all Your attributes abide in me, because it is Your Will to have a Son so like his Cause that Cause and Its Effect are indistinguishable (W.pll.326.1:1,2,3,4,5; italics added).

And so while much of the Course's teachings are presented in dualistic language, it must be understood that their purpose is to lead us past our belief in duality back to the oneness that is our only reality.

Q #86: If the world is just a projection from our mind, then why can't we just project something different when we want to? Why is it so difficult to change things in our lives?

A: If we were able to project something different in the world whenever we wanted to, it would mean that we would really know that we are the dreamer of our dream (**T.27.VII**) and not the dream figure in the world that most of us identify as ourselves (**T.27.VIII**). The fact that few of us are in touch with the power of our minds is a deliberate choice, a defense against the guilt that we have come to associate with that power.

Jesus discusses our fear of the mind early in the text: "**Few appreciate the real power of the mind, and no one remains fully aware of it all the time....The mind is very powerful...It is hard to recognize that thought and belief combine into a power surge that can literally move mountains. It appears at first glance that to believe such power about yourself is arrogant, but that is not the real reason you do not believe it. You prefer to believe that your thoughts cannot exert real influence because you are actually afraid of them. This may allay awareness of the guilt, but at the cost of perceiving the mind as impotent**" (**T.2.VI.9:3,5,8,9,10,11**).

The mind that we are not in touch with -- and *not* the self we think we are -- is where all the power to make any kind of change resides. In fact, the self we believe we are is just one of the many projections of the mind we are not in touch with. This little self has no power at all -- it is merely an effect and not a cause.

Furthermore, the real power of the split mind is not the power to project a world of form. That is only a defense against the power of the mind to choose -- the choice being between the ego and the Holy Spirit with their very different interpretations of the idea of separation. And it is that decision-making power that we are really afraid to get in touch with, although the ego's separate existence depends upon it: "**The ingeniousness of the ego to preserve itself is enormous, but it stems from the very power of the mind the ego denies....The ego draws upon the one source that is totally inimical to its existence for its existence. Fearful of perceiving the power of this source, it is forced to depreciate it**" (**T.7.VI.3:1,5,6**).

So to keep that power of choice deeply buried, we accept as real the power of our mind to make up a world as a place to hide in, and then just as quickly hide that power from our awareness as well. For if we really knew, and not just intellectually, that we are the ones who projected the world of form and are responsible for everything we see, the world could no longer serve as the prominent defense against the mind that we made it to be. If we are to be the victim of the world we see, we cannot remember that we are also the maker of that world. Once we remember our own part in making the world, the guilt in the mind over the decision for separation and attack can no longer be hidden. And once our guilt is uncovered, we can look at its unreality with the love of Jesus beside us and we will no longer have any interest in continuing to project it.

The Course's whole purpose is to help us remember that we are in fact the dreamer and not the dream figure, so that we can look upon our dreams and decide whether we want to continue dreaming or awaken. But most of us, without really understanding the nature and consequences of the choice to continue the ego's dream, want to continue dreaming -- dreaming what we believe would be a better dream with a different form that we think would make us happy. We do not realize that whenever we think we know what we want to happen in the world of form, we must be identified with our ego. Only the ego is concerned at all with form, so that the underlying content of hate and fear remains hidden. With the ego as our teacher, we are interested only in changing the form, thinking that it is the cause of how we feel, ignoring the underlying content, which is the choice for the ego rather than the Holy Spirit. And so, if we are identified with the ego, we have already made guilt and fear real in our mind and need a defense against it, which the world represents. And again, for that defense to work so that we don't look elsewhere

for the cause of our suffering, we must forget that we made the world, that we are the dreamer of our dream. So the power to project a different form in the world is not a power we will easily allow ourselves to be in touch with, so vital is its role as an unconscious defense.

The goal of the Course is not to make us aware that we are the dreamer of the dream so that we may project different forms into the dream whenever we want. That would serve no truly helpful purpose. The Course's goal is to lead us to turn to a different Teacher to guide us in our dreaming so that, over time, the choices we will make will lead us to awaken. This change in teachers from the ego to the Holy Spirit is beautifully expressed in the following passage: **"Accept the dream He gave instead of yours. It is not difficult to change a dream when once the dreamer has been recognized. Rest in the Holy Spirit, and allow His gentle dreams to take the place of those you dreamed in terror and in fear of death. He brings forgiving dreams, in which the choice is not who is the murderer and who shall be the victim. In the dreams He brings there is no murder and there is no death. The dream of guilt is fading from your sight, although your eyes are closed. A smile has come to lighten up your sleeping face. The sleep is peaceful now, for these are happy dreams"** (T.27.VII.14).

Q #87: "Swear not to die, you holy Son of God!" Just in case, I did that. But I need do nothing to make truth true. So, this phrase is meant more poetically? Like asking me to make a commitment to truth, going for it?

A: In this passage (T.29.VI.2:1), Jesus is talking about a promise that we have already made, by virtue of our having identified with the ego thought system. His "command" is therefore meant literally. He is telling us that we need to look at and reconsider our attraction to the **"holy" waxen image of death...you swore in blood not to desert**, as he so movingly describes it at the end of the fourth obstacle to peace (T.19.IV.D.6:3). In other words, we have already pledged our loyalty to the ego thought system, in which death -- including ours -- is the central reality. We have already taken this oath to believe that God's Son is *not* as He created Him, invulnerable and eternally present within the Being of His Father. It is part of the bargain we made with the ego, so that our individual, separate identity would be preserved. Here Jesus is asking us to undo that bargain.

This passage is often mistakenly understood to mean that Jesus is saying that we can be immortal as human beings -- as if the comma were placed after "Swear," thus meaning that we are going to swear that we will never die. But such an interpretation would contradict Jesus' overriding emphasis in the Course about the nature of the body. Why would we want to remain in what is not our home? It would be insane to want to stay in **the body**, which **was not made by love** (T.18.VI.4:7), and in fact was made as **"a limit on love"..."to limit the unlimited"** (T.18.VIII.1:2), and to embody the ego's wish to replace God (W.pl.72.2).

Q #88: I keep thinking of the error, the original thought, whatever it was that happened. This is a struggle for me. What could it have been for us to want to escape in fear? How could this happen? If we were created in the likeness of God then why did this error happen? How could we do this? I would think that we couldn't foul up. Everything about this course seems right to me. It is the only thought system that makes any sense, except I keep wondering about this error. I feel as though I failed, and that makes me harbor self hatred, today. Tomorrow I will feel differently as this happens so often, and I usually forget the whole thing in a matter of seconds.

A: The "error" to which you refer is the separation. The simple answer to your question is that the "error" did not in fact occur. In the Clarification of Terms the Course tells us: **"Who asks you to define the ego and explain how it arose can be but he who thinks it real, and seeks by definition to ensure that its illusive nature is concealed behind the words that seem to make it so"** (C.2.2:5). The question,

therefore, is actually a statement that implies a belief in the separation. The question cannot truly be answered: **"The ego will demand many answers that this course does not give. It does not recognize as questions the mere form of a question to which an answer is impossible. The ego may ask, 'How did the impossible occur?', 'To what did the impossible happen?', and may ask this in many forms. Yet there is no answer; only an experience. Seek only this, and do not let theology delay you" (C.in.4).** Separation from God is impossible: **"You cannot walk the world apart from God, because you could not be without Him. He is what your life is. Where you are He is. There is one life. That life you share with Him. Nothing can be apart from Him and live" (W.pl.156.2:4,5,6,7,8,9).** The Course's explanation of how we seem to be in bodies, walking around in a world of physical form, is that we are asleep **"dreaming of exile" (T.10.I.2:1).** This is the only "explanation" for a situation that does not really exist, a separation that did not and *cannot* occur.

However, we do seem to be very real in our experience in this dream, just as in our so called sleeping dreams all the characters seem to be real, until we wake up and realize we were only dreaming. The reason we seem to be so real in this dream is that we *want the dream to be real*. We are actively choosing to identify with the character we call ourselves in the dream, and by doing this *we are choosing the seeming separation*. Recognizing this choice is very important, and is basic to the Course's teaching, that we have a mind with the power to choose. The only possible explanation for making the choice for separation is our attraction to the initial "rush" that goes with the feeling of being independent individuals. But then we become instantly aware of a profound loneliness, which impels us to seek for completion to fill the void caused by the separation. In our insanity we seek outside ourselves: **"No one who comes here but must still have hope, some lingering illusion, or some dream that there is something outside of himself that will bring happiness and peace to him" (T.29.VII.2:1).**

This does not make us failures. It does make us badly mistaken. The guilt we feel for making this mistake, is overwhelming, and so we call the mistake a "sin," make it practically unforgivable, and hate ourselves for it. We then project this hatred out on to everyone and everything in the world. To compound our error, we make up a false god, so we can blame him for making such a painful world, and accuse him of trying to punish us for this terrible "sin." We go on and on in this endless cycle; choosing separation, feeling guilty, projecting, blaming, hiding, denying. This keeps the world in operation, makes the error real in our experience, and seems to be happening without any responsibility on our part. It is only when as we become acutely aware of the pain it causes us, and learn, through the Course's teaching, to make the undeniable association between the pain and its source, which is the separation, will we begin to "choose differently." But first we must accept responsibility for the choice. In our insanity, we repeatedly choose the separation, hoping that we can make it work without the pain. The Course is teaching us how wrong we are. Learning to choose differently is our only hope, and the way out of the dream of separation. As we are told in the Text: **"Trials are but lessons that you failed to learn presented once again, so where you made a faulty choice before you now can make a better one, and thus escape all pain that what you chose before has brought to you. In every difficulty, all distress, and each perplexity Christ calls to you and gently says, 'My brother, choose again'" (T.31.VIII.3:1,2).**

Q #89: The course says we are not our body. The Christ Self is in us and we are not in a body. The real Self the Christ is in Holiness. Where are we then? Everything is inside but not inside the body then where? Is it the place before I became a body? Where was I before I took a body form? Is that where the Christ and my real Self is? If individual consciousness does not exist there, how does one know the place when he is there? Or is (not knowing) real knowledge.

A: We are at a distinct disadvantage in trying to answer these questions, which are everyone's questions. The reason is that we have no way of conceptualizing or understanding what does not have physical (quantifiable) dimensions. And that is precisely what the Christ Self is -- beyond time and space entirely. Therefore "where" does not apply -- "where" always has spatial connotations, as do the terms *inside* and *outside*. We have no concepts nor a language that can encompass non-physical reality.

And to take this one step further, we are trying to understand a realm of reality which we have chosen to banish from our awareness, and/or have changed its true meaning entirely. Moreover, the body (i.e., the brain) was specifically made *not* to understand (T.18.IX.4,5). So we are really severely "disabled" when we start grappling with these issues, and yet they are vitally important to us.

Indeed, we can say that the Christ Self is nowhere, which is "where" we were before we took bodily form, and we will have no trouble recognizing it when we return because it is not a place, and besides, we never left. Okay, now that you are even more confused, let's see if we can unravel this a bit:

We are told that **"to be without a body is to be in our natural state" (W.pl.72.9:3)**, but that **"what you have done to hurt your mind has made it so unnatural that it does not remember what is natural to it. And when you are told what is natural, you cannot understand it" (T.16.II.3:1,2)**. This is our predicament. We have hurt our minds by denying we have a mind and thinking instead that we are bodies. We continue to do this -- although we are not aware that we are making these choices -- so that we can keep the separation going. Thus we think physical existence is real, and our true Self is an unknown and distant reality. When we no longer have a *need* to deny our true Identity as spirit, as Christ, we will simply be what we always have been. We never truly "became" a body. We remain decision-making minds simply fantasizing or hallucinating that we are something other than our Christ Self. As a result, there would not be a problem recognizing "where" we are when we no longer are "in" a body, because we are never "in" a body at all. The mind just chooses to think it is a body. Our body is just an idea in the mind, and since "ideas leave not their source," it has no reality outside the mind that thinks it. That is why Jesus concentrates so much on the need to look within our minds with him -- so that we would become aware of this thought system, which we have chosen to govern all of our thinking and perception.

The following quote nicely expresses some of these points: **"The journey to God is merely the reawakening of the knowledge of where you are always, and what you are forever. It is a journey without distance to a goal that has never changed. Truth can only be experienced. It cannot be described and it cannot be explained. I can make you aware of the conditions of truth, but the experience is of God. Together we can meet its conditions, but truth will dawn upon you of itself" (T.8.VI.9:6,7,8,9,10,11).**

The conditions Jesus is talking about of course pertain to forgiveness, which is why it is the central theme of his teachings. A major effect of practicing forgiveness is that our identification with the body automatically begins to weaken and is replaced by more frequent perceptions of our oneness with each other beyond the body. So as we continue to forgive ourselves and others, we gradually allow back into our awareness what we had been denying by believing we are individuals living in a physical world with separate and competing interests and goals. As we make our way back up the ladder separation led us down (T.28.III.1:2), our identity shifts slowly and the kinds of questions you raise begin to fade and ultimately disappear, because they have come from the perspective of bodily, individualized existence, and that perspective has now shifted.

Q #90: My questions refers to the section in the text entitled "I Need Do Nothing." It says that a lifetime of contemplation and long periods of meditation aimed at detachment from the body isn't necessary. I've studied the course for many years and have had moments of great peace doing the lessons or reading the text with an open mind and willingness to listen. I've also studied Buddhist meditation which is aimed not at detachment from the body but at being fully present. You can focus on the breath or on a feeling, and watch your thoughts. If you're doing this with awareness, the thoughts pass and you may get a feeling of spaciousness or at least peace -- calm from becoming still. I'm confused because many paragraphs in *A Course in Miracles* ask us to "be still," "sit silently," sit in silence and be still, and lay all thoughts aside. Is this not at least in part the same thing? Could you explain exactly how the Course wants you to be still? And is there any difference between the two?

A: The stillness or peace is the same -- that experience when we let go of all our thoughts of separation and judgment and the constant chatter of the ego subsides. Where the difference between paths lies is not in the experience itself but in the Course's focus on our resistance to that experience, and therefore the process through which that peace or stillness is attained.

The question really is, why do we not experience stillness all of the time? In the workbook lesson, **"I want the peace of God,"** Jesus observes, **"To say these words is nothing. But to mean these words is everything" (W.pl.185.1:1,2).** And he goes on to say, **"To mean you want the peace of God is to renounce all dreams....The mind which means that all it wants is peace must join with other minds, for that is how peace is obtained" (W.pl.185.5:1;6:1).**

And that is the reason for our resistance to the stillness. In that peace, the illusory dream self we believe we really are no longer exists -- we have renounced the dream of separation. Our dreams of judgment and attack are what maintain our illusory sense of a separate self, with others outside of that self with whom we seem to be in conflict -- the antithesis of peace. And when we "join with other minds" by releasing all judgments, our separate self simply vanishes, at least for an instant until our fear of the limitless becomes too great.

And so the Course, while speaking of the peace and inviting us in some of the workbook lessons to experience it through quieting our minds and becoming still, really emphasizes the problem of our resistance and asks us to look at that. And the resistance is to be found in all of our projections of guilt and blame for our lack of peace onto others, so that we never see the guilt we are harboring within our own mind that is the real obstacle to peace. As the section you refer to, **"I Need Do Nothing"** points out, **"Your way will be different, not in purpose but in means. A holy relationship is a means of saving time" (T.18.VII.5:1,2).** In other words, the Course process is one of forgiving our special relationships, all the external projections of our internal guilt that keep us in conflict and not at peace.

If we really wanted to be still and at peace, we would be. Peace, after all, is our natural inheritance **(T.3.VI.10:1,2).** But we allow ourselves only brief glimpses of the real peace, as you observe from your own experiences. We don't want to maintain that stillness because of our fear of it. And so the Course leads us on an indirect path to the stillness, focusing on the removal of the barriers we have placed between ourselves and the peace, rather than on a direct approach, such as meditation, which tends to overlook our resistance and its origins.

Q #91-a: I have been watching a TV show called "Crossing Over" by John Edward. This fellow appears sincere and loving and able to communicate with the "dead." How does this reconcile with the Course, or in other words how does the Course look at this? Just another illusion?

Q #91-b: Jesus talks about all Life as being part of God, and I can get a sense of that in humans, but what about dogs and cats for instance? They seem to have a soul and if you listen to people like Jonathan Edward he says that the people he contacts have old pets with them. Dogs and cats seem to be part of the Son of God. What about "lower" animals like a rat? I know that this is probably silly, but I'm curious about your thoughts.

A: These questions deal with both metaphysical and worldly (dream) levels. From a metaphysical standpoint, Jesus makes the Course's view of communication with the dead perfectly clear in the Laws of Chaos section: **"There is no life outside of Heaven. Where God created life, there life must be. In any state apart from Heaven life is illusion....Life not in Heaven is impossible, and what is not in Heaven is not anywhere" (T.23.II.19:1,2,3,6).** So there is only the illusion of life in this world.

Yet we who experience "life" in this world grapple daily with the **"hierarchy of illusions" (T.23.II.2:3)**; life, death, animate, inanimate, human, animal, etc. There are people who communicate with the "dead," with the "living" (from great distances), foresee the future, see the distant past, etc. These experiences, as well as innumerable others, are possible on this worldly level, or level of the dream, because they reflect the workings of the mind. And since we know the mind is one, then it should not be surprising that people can "connect" with each other. Just because we believe that we are separate and independent from everything else in this world does not mean that it is true. And having "forgotten" our origin, communicating in a way like Jonathan Edward does seems incredible to us. This type of communication however, reflects the property of the mind being one, and is our natural form of communication. So as you can see, there is no difference in communication between "live" bodies, "dead" bodies, or "live and dead" bodies. There are no bodies; only mind.

And questions about "higher" and "lower" are not silly, since we all want to know how the hierarchy of our world fits into the hierarchy of God's world. And that word, "hierarchy," should give us a clue as to the answer. The Course teaches that all forms of life here are the same; i.e., all are our projections of the ego thought of separation from God, and it also teaches that God's world has no hierarchy, no levels, no differences. God, and His One Son, Christ, are totally unified, which is a concept we are unable to understand with a brain that has been made to only understand duality. But we can at least intellectually understand that the thought of separation in the mind is one of *content*, not *form*. And so the form that this thought of separation takes, -- animate or inanimate, protozoan or mammal -- is irrelevant.

And finally, remembering that this world is a "dream," you undoubtedly know from your own experience that anything can happen in a dream. **"Does not a world that seems quite real arise in dreams? Yet think what this world is. It is clearly not the world you saw before you slept....Dreams...are the best example you could have of how perception can be utilized to substitute illusions for truth. You do not take them seriously on awaking because the fact that reality is so outrageously violated in them becomes apparent. Yet they are a way of looking at the world, and changing it to suit the ego better" (T.18.II.1:1,2,3.2:1,2,3,4).**

Q #92: I have studied the Course for over 10 years and have done the workbook 2 1/2 times. I realized I did them very much as a ritual the first time. The second time was probably the best, and though I would sometimes fall into a routine/ritual, the awareness of what Jesus was saying really hit home. The third time was many years later. I only made it 1/2 way through before I gave up. The reason I really wanted to try the lessons again is because the text is more theoretical and over the years what I've learned from the practical application of the lessons seems to have lost some of its impact. This is probably normal. What I want to do is apply the Course to my everyday experiences and the workbook did this so well. I have been reading the *Rules for Decision* and trying to start my day this way, then remember my purpose for the day when I've lost my peace. This has been wonderful. My question is should the lessons be attempted again or should they just be read and applied as seen fit? What have people said about doing the lessons again?

A: We addressed part of your question in **#64 (1/22/03)** -- whether the lessons should be done again. What you are experiencing is quite normal, as you have concluded. And since your practice of the *Rules for Decision* material is working for you so well, it makes sense to just stay with that. You just want to be sure that you are not caught in the ego trap of thinking you must apply the Course perfectly, 24 hours a day, or else you are not a good and faithful student. If there is any pressure or any sense of judgment at all, you can be sure that it is not coming from Jesus, and that you have attempted to direct your own process.

We all are resistant, or we would not need the Course at all. Looking more closely at your resistance might help put you in touch with the fear that must be present in your mind. Part of us recognizes the implications of our actually learning and fully implementing what the Course is teaching. Part of us knows

that we have been wrong about absolutely everything and that absolutely everything about us would change, and that is very, very frightening. Part of us wants to go on, another part is terrified to continue.

Once you recognize the connection between your fear and your forgetting to apply the Course, the next step is to forgive yourself. Fear is not a sin. As you know from our answer to #64, the lessons are best practiced by doing them "poorly" and then forgiving yourself, as opposed to ritualizing them and focusing on the form rather than the content. The fact that you sincerely want to apply the Course to your everyday experiences is the content, and that is sufficient. The form this takes is not the point. You can then be grateful for having made the choice to undo your belief in the ego thought system, trusting that as your fear lessens, you will experience further shifts in your thinking and in your relationships. Just don't try to evaluate your progress or try too hard to get results as you would define them. Trust the process.

Q #93: For several years of study I've tried to follow your thoughts about "looking within with Jesus" or "looking through his eyes." I was never really able to visualize this occurring. Recently, I've come to accept that "looking with Jesus" means the application of his teachings in *A Course in Miracles* to my ego perceptions. In other words, believing the teachings also means believing and accepting the teacher. This has provided me with a better understanding of what it means to have Jesus with me. Is this a good way to visualize my relationship with Jesus or should it be something more personal?

A: The process you describe of applying the teachings of the Course to your ego perceptions is indeed a very appropriate practice of looking with Jesus. Since Jesus is a symbol of the content of the Course, he is present in our minds when its teachings are brought to awareness. This is especially true when we are willing to apply these teachings to our ego perceptions, and question their validity in the light of Jesus' message. Because we identify with our perceptions, this is also a way of relating to Jesus in a very personal way. You have invited him to be with you in the form of the teachings of the Course, which can be symbolized as a lamp shedding new light on our darkened minds: **"I give you the lamp and I will go with you. You will not take this journey alone. I will lead you to your true Father, Who hath need of you, as I have" (T.11.in.4:5,6,7).**

Q #94: The Course alludes to reincarnation. Can you develop this in more detail? I am 67 years old and running out of time to learn forgiveness. I would certainly like to learn it in this lifetime because I'll be darned if I want to go through this world again if I don't have to. I wish we had the option to go poof from this world into the arms of God. I say I want the peace of God but obviously I don't because I don't have the peace of God. So I sometimes wish the option existed for people like me who profess a willingness to change to push a button and just make it happen. Then I could push it and learn forgiveness in spite of my "good intentions". Sometimes I think my whole problem is that instead of being grateful to God for my creation I resented being created because God was more than I. I know that sounds ridiculous but I have to learn otherwise.

A: So many jerks to forgive, so little time! But that's just your ego speaking -- things don't really work as you're supposing. And worrying that you won't learn forgiveness in this lifetime only keeps you trapped that much longer in the illusion of it all. Since forgiveness happens in the mind outside of time and space, it does not depend on time or space for your progress (e.g., **T.15.I.9; T.26.VIII.6:1,2,3,4,5**). It depends only on your willingness (in the mind) to practice the lessons of forgiveness as your external world seems to present them to you now, one by one. But to do that, you must understand what forgiveness is and what the purpose of the world is.

Resistance to the world only reinforces your belief that the world is real and that it is the source of all the problems that are upsetting you. The Course's goal is not to teach us how to escape the world but rather how to escape the thought system buried in the mind that convinces us that we want and need the world

and all its victimizers to be real. The world provides us an excuse to keep our focus outside our mind, blaming others for our loss of peace rather than looking at the guilt in our own mind which is the real cause. The world is quite literally the projection of the guilt hidden in our mind (T.20.VIII.9), so seeking to escape the world only plays into the ego's plan to have us look in the wrong place for the problem and its solution (T.27.IV).

And so, since you are not really here in the world even now, it would be more helpful to focus on the choice in your mind right now for the ego than to concern yourself about possible future (or past) lives, for that only serves the ego purpose of avoiding the present moment, the only time in which forgiveness can happen (M.24.5:6). But if you'd like a further discussion of reincarnation as presented in the Course, you may wish to look at Question #24.

Sincere as it may seem, wanting a button to push that would impose forgiveness on your mind is really just a way of trying to avoid responsibility for your present condition, of not looking at the choice you are making right now to be upset and in pain. In truth, forgiveness *is* the button you could push or select right now, but you don't really want to, and that's what you want to get more in touch with -- and why. Your thought about resenting God for being more than you -- what the Course calls the authority problem (T.11.in.2:3) -- is the kind of awareness that it would be helpful to develop further, for it is playing out in your life right now in your relationships here, a shadow of the real guilt which is hidden in the recesses of your mind.

As an antidote to your impatience with yourself, Jesus' words on forgiveness provide a gentle reminder: **"Forgiveness...is still, and quietly does nothing...It merely looks, and waits, and judges not" (W.pll.1.4:1,3).**

Q #95: I have become more and more confused about life and how to function. Although I have gone through periods like this before, this one has lasted a long time and is quite unsettling. It goes along with knowing that no fantasy or things I hoped for in the world will work to bring happiness. I don't know what I want anymore and have found it hard to know how to be in relationships, my job, making decisions, practicing *A Course in Miracles*, etc. There is fear involved in this state. I know this is part of the process and perhaps part of letting go of images of myself and what I think is true and an ego ploy to keep me in conflict. Could you please comment on working through this unsettled state and still trying to be normal in the world? Thank you.

A. Yes, more often than not, the state you describe is a normal part of the process of undoing our mistaken beliefs about ourselves and the world, and in that sense it is positive. In a way, it is not unlike the pain and disorientation of going through withdrawal from an addiction. We have indeed been addicted to our special identities as individuals, and so we can expect considerable discomfort when we make progress in **"dislodging [y]our mind from its fixed position here**, as Jesus says. But he assures us that **"this will not leave you homeless and without a frame of reference. The period of disorientation, which precedes the actual transition, is far shorter than the time it took to fix your mind so firmly on illusions" (T.16.VI.8:3,4,5).** This takes a lot of faith and trust. In the manual for teachers, as you probably know, Jesus talks about the stages in the development of trust, describing the fifth stage in particular as a **"period of unsettling" (M.4.I.A)**, which may go on for a while.

What can be helpful when going through this is to shift the frame of reference for your day-to-day living. Instead of the usual way of thinking about what you want in life and what the world has to offer you, you can approach the circumstances of your daily life as a classroom in which you are going to learn more about undoing what separates you from love. You then can become motivated by a desire to see shared interests instead of separate, competing interests, for example. In other words, *what you want* is what would shift, as **Lesson 129** tells us, **"Beyond this world there is a world I want" (W.pl.129).** You can become a **happy learner (T.14.II)** eager to learn more about forgiveness and what you are doing and

thinking that keeps you feeling separate from the people in your life, because you know that all of that is just a cover for the love that unites you with Jesus and with everyone in your life. Each day then can be seen as an opportunity to recognize more of the ways in which you keep love hidden: you must become aware of what you are choosing before you can choose against it. The focus of your day, in other words, would be the learning that takes place in your mind, and your joy would come more from your experiencing yourself and everyone else as sharing a common journey, rather than from an ego focus and the ego's version of joy, which is always getting our needs met at someone else's expense.

This can be done while at the same time focusing on your job and whatever other responsibilities you have in your life. It is like a split consciousness: part of you carries out your responsibilities with care and conscientiousness, and part of you views all of these interactions as a classroom, in which Jesus or the Holy Spirit teaches you how to undo the separation that you have made real and continue to make real. Rather than being discouraged and listless, therefore, you can use this time as an opportunity to shift the whole focus of your life in a way that you have not yet done. All of your practice with the Course has led you to this point, where a new level of functioning and relating is opening up.

Many times, this shift of focus can actually make functioning on an everyday level easier, because you no longer are thinking along the line of "what's in it for me?" which inevitably results in a great deal of tension and conflict. There is tremendous fear of making this shift, as you say, because the only self you recognize and identify with is fading in importance, and the self that is replacing it is not yet fully apparent to you. Trust in the process is extremely important at this stage, as is gentleness, and giving yourself permission to set the whole thing aside for a while if that would give you a sense of relief. At the very least, you can be assured that you are not going through this alone. At least intellectually you know that within your mind is the reflection of Heaven's Love, supporting you each step along the way.

Finally, it should not be overlooked that sometimes psychotherapy or some other form of professional intervention can be helpful in getting through a difficult period. It is never wrong, as we go along in our process, to avail ourselves of the help of a kind and compassionate therapist, and in many cases it can speed things along. It might also serve the purpose of helping us avoid the mistake of skipping steps in our process.

Q #96: Is praying for others beneficial to them? If so, what is the best and most helpful way to pray for others -- ones in difficult times and those in happy times -- our loved ones (those here and those who have passed on) and our "enemies" -- those we know and those we don't know in our community, our country and our world -- or should we pray for others at all?

A: *A Course in Miracles* does not ask us to pray for others in the usual sense, but rather to release our brothers from all our judgments of them, including the fact that we think they are in need of our prayers. We are told that our only function is forgiveness: **"Salvation of the world depends on you who can forgive. Such is your function here" (W.p.I.186.14:5,6).** The prayer the Course calls us to then, is forgiveness **"...the only meaningful prayer is for forgiveness, because those who have been forgiven have everything. Once forgiveness has been accepted, prayer in the usual sense becomes utterly meaningless. The prayer for forgiveness is nothing more than a request that you may be able to recognize what you already have" (T.3.V.6:3,4,5).** What we have, along with everybody else, is the identity God gave us as His innocent Son; an identity that has no opposite. Recognition of this identity in ourselves and in all our brothers, with no exclusion of distinction, is our prayer for them. Only this is truly beneficial to others, as well as to ourselves, and it applies to all persons in all situations.

Since all forgiveness is ultimately for ourselves for having misperceived, so all prayer is for ourselves: **"Let it never be forgotten that prayer at any level is always for yourself. If you unite with anyone in prayer, you make him part of you. The enemy is you, as is the Christ. Before it can**

become holy, then, prayer becomes a choice. You do not choose for another. You can but choose for yourself. Pray truly for your enemies, for herein lies your own salvation. Forgive them for your sins, and you will be forgiven indeed" (S.1.II.6:1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8). Forgiveness is not only our only function but our only need, and this is true for everyone. This is the prayer we may offer each time we think we see someone "in need of our prayers" or in need of anything: **"Let me know this brother as I know myself" (T.5.in 3:8).** When we encounter someone we think is in need of our prayer, our response is first to ask that our perception be corrected to perceive the person truly, so that we can be an example of one who has accepted the Holy Spirit's perception in our own mind. Thus we appeal to the power of the person's mind to choose the corrected perception himself. If we practice with sincerity we will come to know ourselves and everyone as sinless, whole, and healed of all misperceptions. No one could ask for or need anything else.

Q #97: Why did Jesus use Helen's body as the scribe for *A Course in Miracles*? Why didn't he come back into the world as a body himself? Once someone is in the real world and lays his body aside, would/could he come back into this world as another body? Would he then remember who he is, and his past lifetimes?

A: Although your questions make sense from the perspective of the world and the bodily selves we think we are, that is not the perspective from which the Course is coming and these are not the selves the Course is addressing. If you can shift your perspective from the world to the mind and recognize that we are the dreamer of the dream and not the figures in the dream, things may become a little clearer.

Jesus is a symbol in our mind of the Atonement -- the correction for our delusional thought system of separation, sin and attack. That symbol of love can take many different specific forms in the world, but the various forms, such as the man we call Jesus, **"a separate being, walking by himself, within a body that appeared to hold his self from Self" (C.5.2:3)** are all illusory. The love that Jesus represents takes whatever form can be most helpful to us, caught in believing in a dream of our own making that we've forgotten we have made. There really is no more definite answer as to why the message comes in whatever form it does.

We can still speculate -- perhaps, because of the specialness that has become associated with the physical being of Jesus in Christianity, obscuring his central message of forgiveness, it is more helpful for us to have the message come to us in the form of a book, so that we do not become so easily distracted by the specific form of the teacher. And Helen was always very clear that she was the scribe and not the source of the material, so that any confusion of her form with the Course's content could be minimized.

As to your questions about being in the real world, this is a permanent shift in perspective from the world to the mind, from the dream figure to the dreamer -- it has nothing to do with laying the body aside. Once you are in the real world, you know you are not a body, no matter what other minds still identified with the dream may think about you. And so it is not a matter of deciding to come or to go -- there is no coming or going but only a different kind of seeing. You may then become a symbol of love in the dream for others who still believe in separation, but you will not be identified with any dream figure and so will be unaffected by anything that happens in the world. You will know that none of it is real. Memory for past lives will have no value for you as you recognize their illusory nature. But if reference to any of those specific forms may be helpful to others in their own process of awakening, then your mind may share the correction using those symbols.

Q #98: *A Course in Miracles* seems to be saying very clearly that it is important for the individual reading the book (and each and every Son of God who believes he is separated) to fulfill the Holy Spirit's purpose

for the world and time by accepting the Atonement, that is, that the separation never happened, and that the Son of God is one (the Christ) and at home in God the Father.

My question is this: It appears from the above that it will make a difference when "I" or "All" the Sons of God accept the Atonement. Otherwise why would Jesus and the Holy Spirit and God go through all this trouble of bringing the Course into the dream and working with us daily in our struggle to recognize the truth? So what is that difference?

I realize our real Self never separated from the Father so nothing happened in reality. But still, here is the Course, telling us our realization of what the Course teaches is "required." I don't mean this facetiously, but very sincerely: What difference will it all make?

A: It may appear that Jesus or the Holy Spirit have some investment in our accepting the Course's message, but that is really only a projection of our own ego. The reference to the Course being "**required**" (**T.in.1:2**) was really intended only as a message for Helen when she was questioning whether she wanted to do what it was asking her to do, even though she in fact knew it was the answer to her and Bill's request for another way.

It may also seem that Jesus and the Holy Spirit -- God could not be involved because He is beyond all words and symbols, including the specific symbols of the Course (**M.21.1:7**) -- have gone to a lot of trouble to give us the Course and get us to practice it, but that is not in fact the reality. They simply are a presence in our mind that reminds us of the alternative to our ego's thought system (**T.5.II.7.1,2,3,4**) and it is our own split mind that gives form to that reminder, in a way that we can understand and benefit from. For a more detailed discussion of this, you may wish to refer to the section, "Helen and Jesus: The Illusion and the Reality," in chapter 17 of *Absence from Felicity* by Kenneth Wapnick.

Nevertheless, although there is no pressure or urgency as far as Jesus or the Holy Spirit are concerned to have us follow the Course's teachings -- they know nothing here is real even if we don't -- your question still calls out for an answer. What difference does it make when we accept the Atonement for ourselves? The only difference is how much time we spend in pain -- and that is our choice. As Jesus observes, "**Nothing is ever lost but time, which in the end is meaningless...Yet since you do believe in it, why should you waste it going nowhere....it is hard indeed to wander off, alone and miserable, down a road that leads to nothing and that has no purpose**" (**T.26.V.2:1,3,6**). And so the Course offers us a gentle process for undoing time and its effects, with no demand or insistence about it. Jesus only ever offers us gentle encouragement to look at the consequences of our choice for the ego, describing, in what we may experience as excruciating detail, how we are inflicting pain upon ourselves and how we can make a different choice.

Q #99: I'm currently dating a man who I've been seeing for about three months. I've known him for 3 " years and believe that I "love" him. The problem is that my feelings for myself include feelings of unworthiness and self-loathing because I'm overweight. I often feel jealous of his female friends even though I trust that they are just friends. I keep expecting this nice man to run away from me so I keep setting up tests where I tell him very negative things about myself and then ask if he still wants to remain with me. What advice would *A Course in Miracles* give me to help me to heal the pain of low self-worth and to develop a healthy, holy relationship with this person? He is very considerate of me and respectful toward me.

A: The Course can first of all help you to recognize the real source of any feelings of unworthiness and self-loathing. The cause is not your weight or any other feature or deficiency that you may think makes you less desirable. It also does not have anything to do with what others may think or say about you. All of this, of course, goes totally opposite to what the world tells us. But the world, and our relationships here, are what we have made to keep the real cause of our self-hatred hidden from ourselves. The real

source is our belief that we exist on our own, apart from love, because of our decision, buried deep in our unconscious mind, to separate from God, regardless of the cost to Him and to ourselves.

We are convinced we are loveless and unlovable because we have chosen against love, which is our reality. But rather than question the premise that we in fact can separate from love, which the Holy Spirit tells us is impossible, we maintain our sense of a separate identity and then proceed to look for love and affirmation of our value from sources outside of ourselves, never remembering that what we want -- love -- has remained there within us all the time. And so we look to others to give us what we believe is missing in us, which only reinforces our underlying belief that we are lacking and empty to begin with. And once we embark on that search, we are lost, for we have chosen to look everywhere but where we can find love **(T.29.VII)**.

There is nothing we can do on our own that will undo our feelings of unworthiness and offer us the love we so desperately desire. But that is in fact the good news, because the truth is there is nothing that we *need* do to establish our value. **"Your worth is established by God. As long as you dispute this everything you do will be fearful, particularly any situation that lends itself to the belief in superiority and inferiority....nothing you do or think or wish or make is necessary to establish your worth. This point is not debatable except in delusions" (T.4.I.7:2,3,6,7).**

Now Jesus doesn't expect that we will recognize our worth simply because he tells us so. So our relationships become the classrooms in which over time we learn to recognize our worth as the guiltless Son of God. And we learn by recognizing all the ways in which we try to convince ourselves otherwise, with a growing awareness of what we are really up to. We want to see others as holding the key to our happiness so that we don't have to accept responsibility for our own choice to be separate and miserable. The Course provides no specific guidelines on how to make a relationship work in the world's terms. But it does provide a means for healing our perceptions of ourselves and others, no matter what form the relationship takes over time. And so the fear, guilt, shame and anger that seem almost universal in the special relationships of the world now become the signals to us that there is another way of looking at ourselves and others.

Q #100: I wonder about the passage T.27.VIII.6:2. I know my ego is quite resourceful and finds ways to delay progress, which is why I have grown to walk over this passage. Now, with all my basic human understanding, the only way to remember not to laugh is that at one time, for some reason, prior to this event, we had also not laughed; for it is not possible for a mind to "remember" or to "re-call" what has never entered the mind. And at this section, Jesus is not talking about us reliving that instant, hence, creating our world and its constancy. If we understand oneness, perfection, Love, how can something that is not oneness, perfection, Love be remembered? How could it had been part of our existence?

A. The language of *A Course in Miracles* can be a stumbling block for many people, which appears to be the case here. In one sense, your analysis of the function of memory is logical; but logical analysis can often get in the way of truly understanding Jesus' message. The Course is not written as would an academic or scholarly treatise, in which precision and consistency in language is essential. While intellectually on a high, sophisticated level—with a clearly recognizable, internally consistent metaphysics—the Course is nonetheless expressed in more of a poetic fashion, where the meanings of words and concepts are permitted to be stretched, and as a result are not always consistent. There are several other instances of seeming inconsistency, in addition to the one you point out.

Anticipating this type of question no doubt, Jesus explains in the introduction to the clarification of terms: **"This is not a course in philosophical speculation, nor is it concerned with precise terminology. It is concerned only with Atonement, or the correction of perception...All terms are potentially controversial, and those who seek controversy will find it. Yet those who seek clarification will find it as well. They must, however, be willing to overlook controversy,**

recognizing that it is a defense against the truth in the form of a delaying maneuver....A universal theology is impossible, but a universal experience is not only possible but necessary. It is this experience toward which the course is directed. Here alone consistency becomes possible because here alone uncertainty ends" (C.in.1:1,2; 2:1,2,3,4,5,6,7).

As these passages indicate, the Course does not lend itself to the kind of logical analysis you engaged in, as that is not its purpose. It was not meant to be approached that way, and if it is, one will not get very far with it before being tempted to dismiss it because of the looseness of its language and apparent changes in meaning. What is also helpful is to recognize that the meaning of words is often relative to the point that Jesus is making, or to the essence of what he is teaching in that particular passage, which could differ when he is making some other point. This can be frustrating to readers, without a doubt. On the other hand, though, it is purposeful, in that it forces readers to pay very careful attention to what they are reading in order not to miss the point Jesus is making.

Moreover, the Course makes it clear that the human intellect itself is often an impediment in the quest for truth: **"You are still convinced that your understanding is a powerful contribution to the truth, and makes it what it is" (T.18.IV.7:5).** It is a paradox that we must learn, by first using our intellectual powers, that our intellectual powers are a defense against the truth, which goes along with the Holy Spirit directing us to use the world and time as a means of learning that the world and time are illusory. We are just challenged on every single level to examine the premises and the values and expectations we bring to our study of the Course, so that we can identify exactly what we are thinking and doing that keeps love and truth out of our awareness.

For some further study of this issue, you might want to consult our tape album, "Duality As Metaphor in *A Course in Miracles*" and Chapter 2 "The Course's Use of Language -- I" in *Few Choose to Listen*, Volume II of *The Message of A Course in Miracles*.

Q#101: I would like to know if anyone who has practiced *A Course in Miracles* has become enlightened. Do you know of anyone who feels/knows that they are in absolute connection with God and therefore, never out of a state of peace?

A: We don't have any reports of this nature, but that does not mean anything. A truly enlightened person would have no need to let others know of his or her having totally transcended the ego. In fact, that might be a helpful way of evaluating someone's claim to having achieved enlightenment. If such a person goes around announcing it, that is almost a sure sign that there is still some ego left. As the Course portrays the state, there is basically only one characteristic that might stand out, which is that the person would smile more frequently: **"There is a way of living in the world that is not here, although it seems to be. You do not change appearance, though you smile more frequently. Your forehead is serene; your eyes are quiet. And the ones who walk the world as you do recognize their own" (W.pl.155.1:1,2,3,4).**

There are numerous accounts of students, though, who have experienced significant shifts in their thinking and in their reactions, so that what formerly had "pushed all their buttons," for example, no longer evokes the same reaction. Forgiveness works, in other words, and so that should be the focus of each day.

Finally, with reference to someone being in "absolute connection with God," we refer you to the section in the manual, **"Can God Be Reached Directly?" (M.26).** There Jesus tells us: **"Sometimes a teacher of God may have a brief experience of direct union with God. In this world, it is almost impossible that this endure. It can, perhaps, be won after much devotion and dedication, and then be maintained for much of the time on earth. But this is so rare that it cannot be considered a realistic goal. If it happens, so be it. If it does not happen, so be it as well. All worldly states must**

be illusory. If God were reached directly in sustained awareness, the body would not be long maintained" (M.26.3:1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8).

Thus, direct union with God is not the goal of the Course's curriculum. Reaching a state of peace is its goal, where we rise above the battleground with Jesus and look back down with compassion for everyone. **"This Course will lead to knowledge, but knowledge itself is still beyond the scope of our curriculum. Nor is there any need for us to try to speak of what must forever lie beyond words....It is not for us to dwell on what cannot be attained. There is too much to learn. The readiness for knowledge still must be attained" (T.18.IX.11:1,2,5,6,7).**

Q #102: I am really into self-help books. I have read that psychotherapy and counseling can be helpful for the student of *A Course In Miracles* because it can help reveal the ego's blocks to the awareness of love's presence. Is this the case for self-help as well? Or do self-help materials hold more potential than formalized counseling to enmesh readers in their own problems?

A: An advantage of psychotherapy and counseling over self-help books is that there is someone else to observe your ego, hopefully in a non-judgmental way, and point out its dynamics in areas you may be very effectively keeping hidden from yourself. It is usually easier to recognize someone else's defenses rather than our own. But self-help books still can be of value in helping you identify your own maladaptive patterns of behavior and underlying thoughts, if you're willing to be honest with yourself.

For any self-improvement tool that you're considering, including therapy, you may want to ask yourself the following questions in evaluating its usefulness:

Is this helping me to take more responsibility for my thoughts and feelings and actions or is it reinforcing the ego dynamic of seeing and holding others responsible for my dysfunction and unhappiness (although uncovering a dynamic of blaming others can be an important *first* step in the healing process if we have not allowed ourselves to be in touch with that before)?

Is this likely to help me uncover my hidden motivations or is it more likely to help me keep them buried in an emphasis on changing form, such as behavior and appearance, rather than underlying content, such as thought and purpose (although sometimes an important early step that indicates a willingness to change at a deeper level is to modify maladaptive and destructive behavior, such as addictions)?

One of the limitations of nearly every therapeutic approach in the world, regardless of whether it involves a therapist or work on your own, is that its purpose is to make the dream better, rather than to lead you along the path of awakening, which is the Course's goal. And *self-help* is really about helping make a better ego self. Not that there is anything bad about that, but it won't take you where the Course is leading you and it could end up leading you in the opposite direction. The only truly healing practice is forgiveness, and we may find clever ways to avoid it for as long as we can stand the pain. But in the end, we will find that releasing our judgments to the Help of the only real Therapist is the only way to find the Self we are really looking for.

Q #103: What does Jesus mean when He refers to our "creations"?

A: Our creations exist only on the level of spirit. They are not things or beings, and are not part of the illusory world of form. The term is used in the Course to refer to the love that is present in the mind of the Sonship. Our creations are the loving thoughts in the Christ Mind. The term is used as a symbol to help us understand that in truth we are the Father's creation, and like Him we "create" by the Thoughts of love

that extend throughout the Sonship and return to the Father. They are **"the extensions of our spirit...as extensions of Christ, our creations are part of the Second Person of the Trinity; creation is ongoing in Heaven, beyond time and space, and independent of the son's lack of awareness of it in the world"** (*Glossary-Index for A Course in Miracles*, Kenneth Wapnick). When we fully let go of our ego identity, and accept who we really are as God created us, we will know and accept our creations. This occurs outside of the dream, where we are at home in God. That is where we find our creations. The Course uses this beautiful image to encourage us to seek our truth; **"Heaven waits silently, and your creations are holding out their hands to help you cross and welcome them. For it is they you seek. You seek but for your own completion, and it is they who render you complete...Acceptance of your creations is the acceptance of the Oneness of creation, without which you could never be complete"** (T.16.IV.8:1,2,3,6).

Q #104: A question about "to forgive" or "to give over." I am studying *A Course in Miracles* in German, my native tongue, but am also using the English version as a cross reference. An identical semantic problem arises in both German and English. In the Text I found three places where Jesus is using "to give over" instead of "to forgive." They are T.3.VI.9.1; T.13.VII.6.6 and T.15.IV.4.2.

I have been studying the Course for nearly 10 years and always had a difficulty with "to forgive" because the dictionary definition for it is "to give up," while "to give over" seems much more to the point particularly when we come to the place where Jesus is asking us to forgive him. This is something I can only understand in the sense that we should give over to him our critical thoughts we have about him. Could you please explain why "to give over" is hardly ever used, and "to forgive" so frequently?

A: It is always helpful to remember that the Course has come as a correction -- first as a correction for our ego, but then also as a correction for some of the ego's specific expressions, including its distortion within traditional Christianity of Jesus' original message of love and forgiveness. So the Course uses the words of traditional Christianity, such as *crucifixion* and *resurrection*, *Atonement*, *miracle* and *forgiveness*, but gives them a different meaning. This reflects the Course's basic approach to all of our special relationships -- keeping the same form but providing it a different content, as a reminder that the problem is not the form (in this case, the word) but the ego content we have given it. It is our ego that always focuses on form so that we overlook the content.

So it is important to develop an understanding of how Jesus is using these concepts in the Course and not rely on our prior understanding of their meaning or dictionary definitions, which will reflect the meaning our egos have given those terms. In the case of forgiveness, the ego has told us that to forgive means to give up our need to right the wrongs of others through punishing them or extracting some kind of payment from them, all the time holding on to the reality of their transgressions, or sins. Contrast this with the Course's use of the term: **"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"** (W.pII.1.1:6; italics added).

In the Course's use of the word, we are not really talking about anyone else when we are speaking of forgiveness. We are speaking of releasing ourselves from the very same judgments that we had projected on to our brothers, including Jesus, believing that we had relieved ourselves of that burden of guilt by placing it on them. The Course teaches us that blame can not be gotten rid of by seeing it elsewhere (T.11.IV.5:3). It must be undone at its source, in our own mind. And that involves simply a letting go, a releasing, a giving over, or a giving up, to the light of forgiveness, in which the unreality of sin and guilt becomes apparent.

Q #105: What is the best method to study *A Course in Miracles*? In my experience, study groups bear little resemblance in content to what is expressed by the Foundation, so I do the work alone. Should the text be read first, before beginning the workbook, or hand in hand? If I begin the workbook and miss several days or weeks, do I need to begin again or pick up where I left off? Does it matter? I would prefer to work with other people, but most of them I've spoken to aren't even aware of the non-dualistic nature of the Course. I find when I try to explain that aspect, generally people are not willing to hear it and try to convince me that I have it wrong. Also I've heard people say they like the Course because they can combine it easily with their other spiritual practice - - I find it nearly impossible to do that and have moved away from spiritual teachings I used to hold dear. I'm beginning to wonder if I'm the one who is confused. Please advise.

A. (1) In keeping with the actual theory of the Course, there actually is no best method for studying it. It in essence is a curriculum undertaken by the student under the guidance of the Holy Spirit or Jesus. The **"training is always highly individualized" (M.9.1:5)**. Jesus advises us to study the text very carefully and not proceed too quickly lest we plunge unnecessarily into overwhelming fear **(T.I.VII.4,5)**, and he also explains that the **"theoretical foundation....the text provides is necessary as a framework to make the exercises in this workbook meaningful" (W.in.1:1)**, so he clearly expects his students to spend time with the text at some point in their process. But he does not say which should be done first. So if you are comfortable studying the text while you are doing the lessons, that is what you should do.

He also tells us not to do more than one workbook lesson a day **(W.in.1:6)**. The middle of **Lesson 95** might be helpful in answering your question about what to do if you miss several days or weeks in your practice of the lessons. The instruction there focuses on recognizing the ways in which the ego creeps into the process, and that we ought to respond to **"our lapses in diligence, and our failures to follow the instructions for practicing the day's idea"** with forgiveness **(W.pl.95.8:3)**. That is the key. Jesus does not keep track of how punctual we are in following his instructions for the day; his interest is only in helping us train our minds to think more and more in terms of forgiveness. It makes the most sense, though, to pick up where you left off, rather than begin all over again.

(2) The Course says nothing about groups. Some people find it helpful to study with others; some do not. It depends entirely on the preference of the individual. In our experience, it is more common than uncommon that people find the uncompromising nature of the Course's non-dualism intolerable and fear provoking, which then causes them to dilute its message to make it say something that it does not, or to mix it with other systems, thereby doing justice to neither. One of the Course's strengths is the manner in which it integrates a metaphysics of non-dualism with living in the world. This is quite a challenge, but the Course gives us all the support we need in our journey back to our home in Heaven, the state of perfect Oneness.

Q #106: Over the past five years I have been studying *A Course in Miracles* in unison with my study of the ethics of Nonviolence as taught by Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Cesar Chavez. I had at one time considered the two philosophies -- *A Course in Miracles* and Nonviolence -- to be almost identical in aim (this appraisal of mine was aided by the fact that even some authors have mentioned the similarities of the philosophies). Both paths teach that everyone is connected, that we are not victims, and that we should be gentle with one another. But lately I am considering that the two paths may be quite different in emphasis.

A: If we focus on the *religious or spiritual foundation* of Mahatma Gandhi's ideas on nonviolence, based on some of the highest teachings of Hinduism, there are many striking parallels with the teachings of *A Course in Miracles*. Ideas shared in common, for example, include viewing the world as an illusion or a dream, seeing the nature of reality as one so that separation and separate interests are not real, and focusing on internal decision-making about one's intention rather than on external outcome.

But these religious underpinnings of Gandhi's ideas on nonviolence are generally not the focus of most studies of his contributions to the field. And Martin Luther King and Cesar Chavez grounded their philosophy and practice of nonviolence in a more traditional Christian perspective that views the world and its inhabitants as created by God, a significantly different assumption from the Course's basic premise that **"the world was made as an attack on God" (W.pII.3.2:1)**. With this premise, we see the Course departing significantly as well from the Hindu teachings guiding Gandhi.

The study and practice of nonviolence, as a philosophy for action and for political and economic change, often then becomes concerned with outcome in the world. The Course, in contrast, encourages us to choose to change our mind about the world rather than seeking to change the world itself **(T.21.in.1:7)**. If we look at *gentleness* and *defenselessness*, two of what the Course identifies in the manual as characteristics of an advanced teacher of God, they certainly share something in common with what is meant by nonviolence. But a careful reading of the Course's discussion of both traits **(M.4.IV,VI)** makes it apparent that the emphasis is on thought or state of mind and not behavior, and the only outcome of concern is in the mind -- there is no investment in the outcome in the world. Changes may or may not follow in the world, but they are irrelevant to the goal of inner peace, which can be attained irrespective of external circumstances.

So, as you remark in your question, there is simply a different emphasis with the Course and with nonviolence. That is not to say that one is any better than the other, for in fact the spirituality from which they both spring is quite similar. But the Course is not concerned with how we act in the world. Nevertheless, when we act in the world, guided by the principles of *A Course in Miracles*, our actions may be very similar to the actions of those guided by nonviolent principles. It is the emphasis that is different.

Q #107: I have a question regarding the idea: "It is impossible that anything be lost, if what you have is what you are?" (T.26.VII.11:4) This statement is in the context of describing our true Identity. Is this also true of our experiences as an ego? My work environment brings out a lot of my guilt, either projecting onto others or internalizing it. I can think of many times when an idea I have is challenged and I become very offended, hurt, angry, etc. It seems I have become that idea, that it represents me. So, is this the same idea, meaning, what I have is my decision to choose the ego so that is what I am? I become or reflect what I choose? Therefore, if I could step back and look with Jesus at these work situations and choose vision then I would become that vision? Is that right?

A. Yes, you are on the right track with this. Each step in our descent from the state of oneness entailed a choice, then becoming what we chose, but denying that we chose it. The goal right from the beginning was to acquire and maintain our individuality but not to take responsibility for it. Therefore the prevailing experience of human existence is victimization, which reinforces the internal belief, "I am not responsible." Considering only our ego-identification, not our right minds, our lives here cannot be anything other than one experience after another of feeling offended, angry, resentful, fearful, shameful, etc., because the world is nothing but our thoughts of sin, guilt, and fear projected outward, **"the outside picture of an inward condition" (T.21.in.1:5)**. We *need* to take things personally, otherwise we cannot hold others responsible for our condition. We have become the thought system of the ego, in other words; and so learning forgiveness would be initially perceived as tremendously threatening. That is why what the Course calls *forgiveness-to-destroy* is the commonly accepted version of forgiveness in the world. Sin has been made real and there is still a separation between the forgiver and the forgiven, directly antithetical to what the Course teaches.

The lessons in the workbook emphasize over and over the importance of stepping back and looking with Jesus at what we are doing and thinking. We need the help of a teacher who is outside the thought system with which we have identified so thoroughly, otherwise we would have no way of getting beyond it. So you are quite correct in concluding that looking with Jesus, and choosing *against* the ego would automatically give you the same vision as Jesus. The key is remembering that we always have a choice;

the ego's efforts are directed towards keeping us mindless. Who we truly are, God's one Son, has never changed, and has never been affected by the dream of separation. We need only deny our denial of that truth (T.12.II.1:5), and then what we have made invisible will once again, through our joining with Jesus or the Holy Spirit, be all that we see (T.12.VIII.3). In the words of a lovely prayer, "I have nothing, I want nothing, I am nothing but the love of Jesus."

Q #108: As I continue to study *A Course in Miracles*, I am beginning to understand that the emotion that is commonly called "love" in this world is not at all the same as the "love" referred to in the Course. In fact, I have discovered that in many cases, my ego uses the idea of "love" to cover up a lot of very dysfunctional thinking and behavior. What is the relationship between love as we understand it in the world, and love as expressed in the Course, and how can we use that to guide our lives?

A: The distinction you make between the "love" the Course is referring to and what is called "love" in this world is correct. They are not the same thing. The love of this world is always what the Course calls "special love," and it is the foundation of the "special relationship." It not only has properties that are in direct opposition to the love the Course refers to, it is actually a mask for hatred: "It is in the special relationship, born of the hidden wish for special love from God, that the ego's hatred triumphs. For the special relationship is the renunciation of the Love of God, and the attempt to secure for the self the specialness that He denied" (T.16.V.4:1,2). We are secretly saying to anyone or anything we have a special love relationship with: "God did not love me with the specialness I want, so I will use you to get the special love I think I cannot live without." What we call "love," therefore, is our substitute for God's love. Furthermore, the Course tells us it is hate: "...any brother with whom you have a limited relationship, you hate" (T.21.III.1:3). This "hate" is based on the misperception that we are different, incomplete, and needy. In the special love relationship an agreement is made for mutual needs to be met, and thus we seek to fill the void left by our seeming separation from God. And, true to the ego's mandate "seek but do not find" (T.16.V.6:5), this substitute for God's love will never satisfy our need, no matter how we try to make it work. Even the most fulfilling "love" relationship will eventually end in death.

What the Course is inviting us to do is to look at our special love relationships from this new perspective, as shocking as it may seem to be, so that we will become willing to open ourselves to a new purpose, and a new interpretation: "A holy relationship starts from a different premise. Each one has looked within and seen no lack. Accepting his completion, he would extend it by joining with another, whole as himself. He sees no difference between these selves, for differences are only of the body. Therefore, he looks on nothing he would take. He denies not his own reality *because it is the truth*" (T.22.in.3:1,2,3,4,5,6).

The important thing to remember is that it is normal, not sinful, to have special relationships, and they will not be taken away. In fact, they can be useful in our lives if we give them to the Holy Spirit to be transformed into holy relationships: "I have said repeatedly that the Holy Spirit would not deprive you of your special relationships, but would transform them" (T.17.IV.2:3). In this way, the love we experience with another person becomes a reflection of the love of God in the dream, not a substitute for it.

Q #109: My question is about the mind. My understanding is that we are spirit, mind, and body, and that the body is not real, and is a product of the mind. Mind, as I understand it, has the function to create and to let our spirit (or soul) come to know itself experientially, which is the ultimate goal of all spiritual development. The mind mediates experience between the body and the soul, but it has become confused because of our experiences living in the world, and so it must learn to remember who it is -- which is the Atonement -- by being re-educated. In that way,

the soul, having experienced itself in the physical realm, mediated by the mind, can reunite with God and integrate back the experiential knowledge of what it means to be perfect. But if this is the case, why is the mind needed at all? Why can't the soul control the body in order to gain all the experience it needs, bypassing any need for the mind?

A: Your question suggests that you are attempting to blend some of the teachings of the Course with teachings from other spiritual paths with which the Course is not really compatible. So, to clarify, we will look at what the Course says, in light of your question, including a consideration of how it uses its terms, different from other paths, and what it says about the purpose of the mind and the body.

The Course sees only spirit, or soul, as real (preferring to use the term "spirit" rather than "soul") (C.1.3). Mind has several different levels of meaning in the Course (for a more in depth discussion of *mind*, you may wish to look at Question #65). Mind, when it is capitalized, refers to either God or Christ, His One Son (C.1.1:2), and in this sense is really equivalent to spirit. When lower case, mind refers to the split mind of the Son (C.1.2:1,2,3) after he has seemingly fallen asleep and is dreaming a dream of separation, believing that he has split off or separated from God, thereby attacking Him. This mind is illusory and has no reality outside of our mistaken belief in it, and it is the birthplace of sin, guilt and fear.

As a defense against this made-up guilt and fear in the mind over the attack upon God, the split mind under the guidance of the ego then makes up a body to hide in and a world outside of itself onto which all the attack and guilt in the mind can be displaced. Again, none of this is real, according to the Course. But we believe in it because we want the separation to be real but we do not want to be responsible for it.

The Course sees no positive or Divine purpose in the thought of separation that has led to the split mind and its defense, the body and the world. And so any experience that comes from them has no value in itself. The Course does make further distinctions within the split mind and it is through an understanding of these that we can see how the body and our experiences in the world can come to serve a useful purpose. But the purpose again is not to do anything positive but rather to undo the negative by allowing all of our errors or mistaken beliefs about ourselves to be corrected. The Course calls this process forgiveness.

The split mind is home not only to the ego, the wrong-minded aspect of the post-separation self, but also to the Holy Spirit, who remembers our reality as God's One, true Son, and so is able to correct all of our mistaken beliefs about who we are and what the world is (C.1.5,6). Basically, He reminds us that the separation never happened and that we never attacked God -- which is what the Course means by the Atonement principle (M.2.2:2,3). And so, as the seemingly separated Son, we have a choice as to whether we are going to listen to the harsh and strident lies of the ego, which can only take us deeper into the morass of sin and guilt, or to the gentle corrections of the Holy Spirit. His corrections allow us to undo our mistaken beliefs about who we are and return to the Home we never left.

For this process of undoing to happen, we have to pay attention to our experiences as a body in the world, becoming aware of what interpretations we are giving to those experiences -- usually some variation on seeing ourselves as victims and others as victimizers so that the guilt resides outside ourselves. And so it is in this sense that the Course would say that our experiences are of value. For we can then bring these mistaken thoughts to the Holy Spirit for correction. The only real purpose for the world and our body then is to teach us that they are not what we have believed them to be. When we let go of those false beliefs, we then remember Who we really are as the Christ, whose reality as spirit has never changed at all, being as changelessly perfect as our Source. At that point, the body, the world, and the split mind have simply disappeared, as darkness disappears when light shines upon it, for they have no reality.

Q #110: It was in this site that I read about "Jesus" saying or teaching this or that in the *A Course in Miracles* for the first time. Is his name mentioned in the Course at any point and if not, how did you start using his name that otherwise would be "the Christic voice," "the Christ," or something like that?

A: Jesus is mentioned in the Course; in the Manual for Teachers (M.23) and the Clarification of Terms (C.5). These more lengthy passages may completely answer your question. Also, in the Text there are several first person passages (notably T.1.II.3,4) which refer to Jesus, although his name is not mentioned. Helen Schucman knew the inner voice she heard was that of Jesus, just as we know the voice of a family member on the phone without asking: "Helen incidentally was well aware...that the Voice belonged to Jesus..." (*Absence from Felicity*, Kenneth Wapnick, p. 179).

It is important to remember, however, that in the dream Jesus is a symbol for one who has fully identified with the Christ, and that this identity is not exclusive to Jesus. On the other hand, the term Christ, as used in the Course, refers to the "totality of the Sonship" as defined in the *Glossary-Index for A Course in Miracles* by Kenneth Wapnick. Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, remains at one with the Father in Heaven, and is not present in the dream. It would, therefore, not be appropriate to refer to Christ as the messenger or "voice" of the Course.

Belief that Jesus is the voice who speaks in *A Course in Miracles* is not necessary to our work with it. Nor is it necessary to develop a relationship with him, but it *is* helpful. As a symbol in our dream, Jesus is with us to teach us to do as he did in accepting the Atonement: "Jesus has led the way...This course has come from him because his words have reached you in a language you can love and understand. Are other teachers possible, to lead the way to those who speak in different tongues and appeal to different symbols? Certainly there are. Would God leave anyone without a very present help in time of trouble; a savior who can symbolize Himself?...Jesus has come to answer yours. In him you find God's Answer. Do you, then, teach with him, for he is with you; he is always here" (M.23.5:1,6:1,2,3,4,6,7,8). The Course is a very loving message that comes to us from the memory of God's love reflected in the mind symbolized in the "person" of Jesus. The form this love takes is not important, it is only important that we hear the message and accept the love. Hearing Jesus speak the words of the Course to you as you study is a very helpful way, not only to relate to Jesus, but to accept the love the Course reflects.

Q #111: Would you please clarify a question about the world being an illusion? Is the physical world we see with our eyes an illusion, or is the way we interpret the world we see an illusion, or both?

A: The entire physical universe is an illusion, not just our interpretations. This is the absolute non-dualism of the Course's metaphysics. The Course is clear that what is real is changeless, without limit, formless, perfect, and eternal. Therefore anything that changes, that is limited, that has form, that is not perfect, and that is temporal cannot be real. Some passages to look at are the following, although there are many, many others that speak of non-dualism:

1) Lesson 132: "There is no world! This is the central thought the course attempts to teach" (W.pl.132.6:2; as well as other parts of the lesson).

2) "True Perception -- Knowledge": In this section in the clarification of terms, Jesus uses the phrase "the world you see"; but what follows makes it quite clear that he is referring not to our interpretations, but to the entire physical world that our eyes look upon. "The world you see is an

illusion of a world. God did not create it, for what He creates must be eternal as Himself. Yet there is nothing in the world you see that will endure forever. Some things will last in time a little while longer than others. But the time will come when all things visible will have an end" (C.4.1).

3) "Forgiveness and the End of Time" (T.29.VI). This entire section describes anything of time and change as unreal.

4) "Time and space are but one illusion" (T.26.VIII.1:3).

We hope this sampling of references will help to clarify the confusion and will make reading *A Course in Miracles* a little easier.

Q #112: I have recently experienced the loss of my second of two beloved pets. I found myself trying to use *A Course in Miracles* to "save" him prior to his death. I did not want to give him up and I became very angry when nothing I tried worked. In particular, I was reading lesson 320 in the workbook: "My Father gives all power unto me." I understand that maybe I am confusing levels, but I wonder if someone can explain this to me to add more understanding of where my error lies. How can I use the Course to walk through this process of grief? The pain is so intense; I do not know how to ask for help.

A: It is quite understandable, in your desire to keep your beloved pet in your life, that you would try to use all means you see available to save him. And unless you read Lesson 320 in the context of the whole Course, it is very easy to see it as telling you that you should have the power, among other things, to save your pet's life. But that is not what this lesson means. As with so many other words in *A Course in Miracles*, power has a specific meaning that is different from how we think of power from our ego-based perspective. To the ego, power refers to the capacity to change and control things in the world. But since the world, from Jesus' perspective if not yet ours, is illusory, then this is no real power at all.

The Course says there are really only two kinds of power: the power to create and the power to choose or decide. The power to create, which involves simply the extension of the love that is our only reality, was given to us by God in our creation and remains within our mind even though we have covered it over and forgotten it. But this power functions only in the realm of spirit and has nothing to do with the ego world of bodies and form that we think is our reality.

When we seemed to turn our back on the power of creation out of our desire to be separate, the power we made for ourselves in its place was the power of decision (T.14.VI.5:6) -- the power to turn away from the love of God and choose the ego in all its many expressions as our teacher and guide. But once we have made this power of decision real for ourselves, Jesus tells us we can give it another purpose (T.14.VI.5:6.7) -- we can learn to choose the Holy Spirit instead of the ego as our Teacher and Guide, helping us to awaken from the nightmare dream of death and loss and grief that we have made our reality. For once we believe we are trapped within the world, the power to choose how we look at what we've made is the only real power available to us (T.12.VII.9:1.2). All the so-called powers of the world simply keep us rooted in the illusion, continuously reinforcing our belief in limits and loss, reflecting our choice for the ego and all its ramifications.

So when Lesson 320 says, "Your [God's] Will can do all things in me, and then extend to all the world as well through me" (W.pII.320.2:1), it means that when we choose the Holy Spirit as our Teacher, all the guilt that we experience as a result of our choice for separation can be undone through forgiveness. That forgiveness can then extend through us to other minds that also believe they are trapped in a body in the world. In the context of your beloved pets, this would

mean that you would first recognize your own choice to make suffering and death real, and would then bring those thoughts and the guilt that accompanies them to the Holy Spirit for release. And in that moment when you allow your own mind to be healed, the peace within you will extend to those around you, including your little friends who may still be experiencing pain and fear in their own minds. And you will know in that moment that separation is not real and no one and nothing, including death, can deprive you of love.

For a further consideration of how the Course looks at death and grief, you may also wish to look at Question #15, from November 13th, 2002. The important thing is to allow yourself to be gentle with the process of grieving

Q #113: I seem to have this recurring problem of never making enough money or never getting enough work for my business, especially during these periods of recession, although I am a highly-educated professional. Although over the years of practicing the process of forgiveness on this, I now have more and more peace when this problem occurs, I still get irritated and wish that I could get rid of this problem altogether and not have it occur again. From the perspective of *A Course in Miracles*, is there anything I else I can do to "cure" this issue? Will looking at the guilt or the origins of the guilt help in any way? What do you suggest?

A. We can only comment in general about the type of situation you have described, but it may be of help nonetheless. First, the purpose of the world is to be a place where we have an endless number of problems to solve. It is a smokescreen designed to hide the real problem, which is the decision we are constantly making in our minds to live separately, apart from God, as individuals, and to hold others responsible for our condition. Whether we are plagued by one recurring problem or by a multitude of problems does not matter. Problems come up in our lives because we *need* them to be there -- obviously, on an unconscious level. Therefore, if we are unaware of the real source of our problems (the decision in our minds) it would be fruitless to hope for a problem-free life; we would just be fighting against ourselves. Moreover, part of the ego's strategy is to have us keep hoping that our problems can be solved, and that the day will come when we can live problem-free in the world. The objective of this strategy is to keep us focused on our lives in the world, because that ensures that we will never remember that we are really minds intent on keeping ourselves apart from the oneness in which we were created as Christ, and that that is just a silly, mistaken thought which we can choose against at any instant.

Second, the Course's very gentle -- and practical -- approach to a situation such as the one you described, is to have us learn that the peace of God is within us and can never be affected by anything that appears to be going on in our lives. Being in a state of peace is always a matter of choice. No matter what the circumstances of our life may be, we can still choose to be peaceful. Jesus asks us to take him as our model in this. In the midst of circumstances seemingly far more traumatic, he said that he did not see himself as persecuted, and so he is saying to us that we can learn how to function that way, too (**T.6.I.5,6**). In a sense, you are saying that you are a victim of this recurring situation in your life, and we all have situations like this in some form or other. So the first thing we can learn is how to "disconnect," we might say, our inner state from external situations. Not easy, but that is an essential part of the mind-training aspect of the Course. It is a major step in the process of recovering the power of our minds, which the ego would never want us to do.

Third, when what appear to be negative situations keep recurring, it often is the case that the person is projecting his unconscious guilt onto his personal life -- many times it is projected onto the body, resulting in illness -- in an attempt to punish himself and ward off punishment by God, which is regarded as deserved and inevitable. Recurring failure or unhappiness often reflects the unconscious belief that if I am unsuccessful or unhappy, God will have pity on me and will go easy on me when it is my turn to stand before Him and give an accounting of my life. So if there is such a belief lodged in our minds, then we need there to be situations in our lives that will ensure that we are unsuccessful and unhappy. To fight against it would be self-defeating. The solution is obvious. As the workbook lessons constantly remind us,

we need to go within and uncover the ego thoughts of sin, guilt, and fear that are directing everything we do and think as individuals and bring that darkness to the light.

The goal of this process, though, is not to be free of problems in our lives, but to learn that it is the guilt we do not want, because the pain and turmoil from our external problems is nothing compared to the internal pain and bondage of our guilt. We do not have to try to change anything; we need only look with Jesus' love next to us at how we constantly attribute our unhappiness and failure to something other than our own decision, and then not judge ourselves for doing that. That is a giant step in the direction of finally restoring to our minds one day the peace of God that is our true inheritance. When we are immersed in that peace and know it to be our shared identity, then it would make absolutely no difference whether our business is successful or not, just as it made no difference to Jesus whether there were nails in his hands and feet or not. Sometimes the external situation changes when we change our minds, but that no longer would matter to us, because our perception of ourselves and the world would have changed entirely.

Q #114: There are two questions I have relating to true empathy and false empathy. I think I understand how A Course in Miracles is defining the difference between the two, but what I don't understand is how can you be loving, compassionate and kind to your brother without falling into the trap of the ego? The second question is, when your brother is sick or has lost his job or a loved one, as I am understanding, is Jesus telling us to "Do Nothing"? This is difficult for me. If I say or do anything I am joining with the ego. How do I look at this differently?

A. True empathy comes from your right mind, which means you have joined with Jesus or the Holy Spirit. In that instant, you are beyond your ego, and therefore everything you do will be loving. You cannot fall into the trap of the ego when you are one with the love of Jesus in a holy instant, because that joining is a decision against the ego -- the two states are mutually exclusive. Of course most of the time we jump right back into our wrong minds and into the ego trap of making the error real.

When Jesus tells us we need do nothing, he means that we should do nothing on our own. He is not advocating passivity. He is teaching us that if we do not ask his help, or the help of the Holy Spirit, we almost certainly will fall into the ego trap. Then, in our wrong minds, our perception will be that the other person truly is an unfortunate victim, and that the kind and caring thing to do is to extend a helping hand to fix the problem and make him feel better. In that perception we have totally lost sight of the truth about our brother and about ourselves as well. We have fallen into the ego trap of making our brother mindless, which means we no longer see him or ourselves as minds that have chosen to reject our true Identity as Christ, and then project responsibility for that choice. Wrong-minded perception always sees victims and victimizers, not minds with the power of choice to reverse mistaken decisions and accept back into awareness the love that had been pushed away. If I am perceiving you that way, I cannot be truly helpful, even if I do fix the external situation and make you feel better. I have actually attacked you and myself, because the message I am giving is that I have something you do not have, and you are helpless. I have seen us as separate and have empathized with your weakness, thus confirming the ego's view of you, not Jesus' view of you.

The correction of this faulty perception comes through asking for help to see through Jesus' eyes, or to share perception with the Holy Spirit. We bring our perception of victimization to Jesus or the Holy Spirit, because if I see you as a victim, then I am the one in need of healing. My perception needs to be corrected before I can be of help. Now we are not talking about what my physical eyes see. Objectively it may be the case that you have lost your job or a loved one; but to then conclude that you are a victim is an interpretation. That is where I make my mistake. Once I perceive you as a victim, I am implying that there is a victimizer, and that you are not responsible for your condition. That is the ego trap I have fallen into. When I first became aware that I was seeing you as a victim, I should have stopped right there and asked for help to look at the situation differently, to ask for help to empathize with the strength of Christ in you, rather than the weakness of the ego in you. If I make that shift from my wrong mind to my right mind, then I would automatically be guided to do whatever is most loving in the circumstances. That may be to

do something or to do nothing, to say something or to say nothing. Whatever is most helpful would happen automatically, with no deliberation, and with no investment in the outcome.

Q #115: I am 50 and going through menopause. There are physical changes going on, especially with my brain chemistry. My emotions are more intense than ever. I have been a student of A Course in Miracles for several years and had felt as if I had reached a certain level of peace and understanding, but now I find myself feeling a victim of my body and more insane than ever. Is this just another level of “development of trust,” and is even menopause about guilt?

A: The answer to your question lies in understanding the body and the role it plays in the ego thought system. Although we are told repeatedly in the Workbook: **“I am not a body” (W.pl.84.1:4)**, the fact remains we do believe we are bodies, and we have conditions like menopause to prove it. Obviously the ego is the author of this belief. It tells us we somehow ended up in these bodies through no fault of our own, and now we are doomed to fall victim to all its ailments, until in the end we decay, die, and decompose. This message from the ego is purposeful. Its plan is to convince us that the body is real, and the mind is the illusion: **“The ego uses the body to conspire against your mind....The ego, which is not real, attempts to persuade the mind, which is real, that the mind is the ego’s learning device; and further, that the body is more real than the mind is” (T.6.IV.5:1,2,3)**. The ego has first used the body to house the guilt for having separated from God. Guilt is therefore built into all aspects of the body’s functioning, including menopause. The body is then programmed to provide endless needs, as well as physical, emotional, and psychological conditions that very effectively serve as distractions, and convincing proof of its reality. The inevitable outcome is that we feel victimized and even attacked by the body. This insanity characterizes our relationship with the body, but only when we have chosen to identify with it, seeking to keep ourselves separate, believing all the ego’s lies about who we are. Having made some progress in experiencing peace, it is understandable that the ego would find in menopause a great opportunity to strike again. This is nothing to be concerned with, and definitely nothing to feel guilty about. It is important to remember, however, that it is not helpful to deny any of the distressing symptoms of menopause, and it is certainly appropriate to seek professional medical treatment and support in any way that is helpful. In the process of learning to seek healing in our minds there is the comforting thought that menopause will end, and a beautiful passage in The Song of Prayer that applies especially for women in menopause: **“The universe is waiting your release because it is its own. Be kind to it and to yourself, and then be kind to Me. I ask but this; that you be comforted and live no more in terror and in pain. Do not abandon Love. Remember this; whatever you may think about yourself, whatever you may think about the world, your Father needs you and will call to you until you come to Him in peace at last” (S.3.IV.10:3,4,5,6,7)**.

The Course offers an alternative to the ego’s use of the body, and an alternative to our definition of ourselves. This is where the “development of trust” enters the picture. You can see clearly the tricks the ego is up to, and make a decision to look at menopause differently, believing that what the Course is teaching is in fact true and worthy of trust. All of the symptoms related to menopause can be used as an opportunity to question the ego’s interpretation of this, or any bodily condition. We turn to the mind for true healing in the process of dealing with menopause, monitoring all the thoughts you mention and any others that arise, so they can be given to the Holy Spirit for reinterpretation: **“The Holy Spirit, as always, takes what you have made and translates it into a learning device. Again as always, He reinterprets what the ego uses as an argument for separation into a demonstration against it. If the mind can heal the body, but the body cannot heal the mind, then the mind must be stronger than the body. Every miracle demonstrates this” (T.6.V.A.2:4,5,6,7)**.

Q #116: I am somewhat at odds with the whole idea of God intervening in the world of form. I know that the Foundation’s view is that since the world of form is an illusion, it is inconceivable that He could be involved in making changes and alterations in a world of form. I also know it is all about changing our

thoughts about the world to bring us closer to waking. But in lesson 71 "Only God's plan for salvation will work" it actually has the separated mind ask God, "What would you have me do? Where would you have me go? What would you have me say, and to whom?" Isn't this asking God what direction you should take in the world of form? I also know that when I relinquish my ego thought and ask God to direct my thoughts then my world of form DOES change. Also how does A Course in Miracles reconcile Jesus being immaculately conceived? Wouldn't that be considered intervention into the illusion?

A: As discussed elsewhere in these Questions, it is important to recognize that much of the Course is written in metaphorical language, reaching us where we believe we are (e.g., see Question 72). And so God is described throughout the Course in ways that suggest He is concerned about us here in the world, only to provide a correction for our ego belief that God is an angry Father intent on our destruction. And so, rather than as our enemy, the Course is trying to help us view God as our Friend, Who will help us do what we need to do. In addition, it is very common in the Workbook lessons that God is used when the real meaning is God's Voice, or the Holy Spirit.

As always, the larger context of the Course and, in this case, the lesson itself make the deeper intent of lines such as those you quote clearer. This lesson first describes the ego's plan for salvation -- holding grievances against others so that the guilt in our mind seems to rest on them rather than on ourselves -- the blame game (**W.pl.71.2**). Clearly, this "solution" is the problem, because it in fact keeps the guilt alive in our minds rather than undoing it. And so God's (that is, the Holy Spirit's) plan, although not described specifically in this lesson, will have to involve being willing to release those grievances. Since our anger and judgments are triggered by our interactions with others, the direction to ask God for specific help that you refer to really means that we do not continue to act -- doing, going, speaking, etc. -- on our own, that is, with the ego's guidance. If we can carry the memory of God's Love with us as we move through our day, we can be sure that we will be just where we need to be to learn the lessons of forgiveness that will bring us the peace we seek.

Now when we release ourselves from the ego's dictates and open ourselves up to the guidance of God's Voice, we may experience shifts in our external world, as you mention, although this may not always be the case. These changes occur not because God or the Holy Spirit has literally intervened but rather because we have been willing to make inner choices (often unconscious), aligned with love rather than hate. External projections of our guilt may then very well change, although this is never the purpose, from the Course's perspective, for changing our teacher. That becomes a trap, rooting our focus back in the world as we look for external changes to validate our inner shift.

Virgin births and immaculate conceptions do suggest divine interventions in the world of form, but the Jesus of the Course never makes any of these claims about himself. The Bible and traditional Christianity represent a very different spiritual path from the Course and it is best not to confuse the two or try to integrate them in any way.

Q #117: *A Course in Miracles* states that sickness is anger taken out on the body. What would cause a baby to become sick? For that matter, do animals have egos when they also become sick? Or is this all part of the dream which the ego has us waste our time trying to figure out?

A: A baby or an animal can become sick for the same reason that an adult human becomes sick. We think there should be a difference because we confuse the brain with the mind. Clearly, there are differences between the brain of a baby and the brain of an adult, or the brain of an animal and the brain of a human. But, despite what we all believe about the power and nature of the brain to control the body and behavior, Jesus tells us we are mistaken: **"You...believe the body's brain can think. If you but understood the nature of thought, you could but laugh at this insane idea. It is as if you thought you held the match that lights the sun and gives it all its warmth; or that you held the world within**

your hand, securely bound until you let it go. Yet this is no more foolish than to believe...the brain can think" (W.pl.92.2).

It is not the brain but the mind, outside of time and space, that makes all decisions that seem to affect the body. And since the seemingly separate minds that are dreaming all the figures in the dream are really nothing more than fragments of the one split mind that is the source of all mistaken thought (T.18.I.3,4,5), their structure and content (sin, guilt and fear) are all the same. So it is the mind, not the brain, that experiences guilt and anger and fear and looks for defenses against those thoughts and feelings. And the sickness of the mind -- the thought of separation -- is projected out onto the body, whether it be the body of an infant, an adult or an animal, so that it appears that something is happening to the body for which that individual is not responsible.

Now just as the decision for sickness is made in the mind, so too is the decision for healing, which then may be reflected in the disappearance of symptoms and recovery from illness in the body of the infant, the adult or the animal. For every fragmented split mind contains not only the ego but also the correction for the ego, which the Course calls the Holy Spirit.

Q #118: My questions are prompted by my seeming experience of "retaliation" from my ego, which inevitably follows times when I have sincerely tried to look at my ego and asked for correction. The specific forms this takes can be severe enough to shut me down physically, as well as mentally. Should we expect this to occur?

I know the Course talks about the ego vacillating "between suspiciousness and viciousness" shifting to viciousness if I try to seek relief from it, offering me then "the illusion of attack as a 'solution'" (T.9.VIII.2:7,9,10). So if my ego offers me the "illusion of attack," then I am off the hook. I've not really chosen the attack and I'm not responsible for it -- my ego did it to me. But I don't really believe this at all. I think the decision making part of my mind is choosing attack to protect my ego identification -- my special, separate identity -- and that things are going to get a whole lot worse if I continue to go against it. At these times there is no way that I can look at my ego and simply smile at it. I just have to back off. I will be grateful for your answers and comments.

A: Yes, you are right -- the ego has no power to attack you except for the power you give it. Jesus clarifies this early in the text: **"Only your allegiance to it gives the ego any power over you. I have spoken of the ego as if it were a separate thing, acting on its own. This was necessary to persuade you that you cannot dismiss it lightly, and must realize how much of your thinking is ego-directed. We cannot safely let it go at that, however, or you will regard yourself as necessarily conflicted as long as you are here, or as long as you believe that you are here. The ego is nothing more than a part of your belief about yourself" (T.4.VI.1:2,3,4,5,6)**

As the passage you cite indicates, self-attack is not uncommon when we seek relief from the ego. And that is a reflection of our fear of accepting the limitless love in which the self we believe we are has no meaning, as you suggest.

So your question really is, what do you do now, knowing that your fear is still so great. The part of ourselves that remains identified with the ego does not want us to take even a single step in the direction of forgiveness and healing if it can prevent it. And anything that increases rather than reduces our fear really serves the ego's purpose. So Jesus counsels us that if our resistance is strong, we should not fight ourselves because we are just not ready (T.30.I.1:6,7). The most kind and loving thing we can do then is to be patient and gentle with ourselves -- there is no urgency about the process of forgiveness. We may not yet be ready to bring the darkness of our ego to Jesus, but we can at least bring our fear to him, acknowledging that we need his help. And if Jesus is part of the problem, we can use the less threatening symbol of the Holy Spirit, or any other symbol of love to whom we relate that brings us comfort.

The important thing is to develop an awareness of the loving, nonjudgmental presence within your mind, with whom you can look at the darkness of your ego together. If you look by yourself, you will almost certainly frighten yourself. But if you look with love beside you, the seeming seriousness of what you are uncovering will gradually dissipate. And then you will be able to smile at it.

Q #119: First of all, thank you for the answers to my two former questions: the one about addiction and the one about seeing calls for love. I was glad with these answers and still read them over sometimes. My friends still tell me that I should not undertake behavioral changes, but only look at what my ego is doing. On some level, I trust that I will learn my lessons. Since I began studying *A Course in Miracles*, I feel like I am not truly seeking anymore. I have found, and need to practice now. My greatest barrier, or stumbling block still is worldly distractions versus God, the ego-offerings versus God. I know that the peace of God is all I want. And at the same time, apparently, I do not want the peace of God. Sometimes, when I have a glimpse of the peace of God, I have a sort of friendly sadness because then I know it is such a gift already, so much better and lovelier than all these worldly distractions.

A. Trust and gentleness are essential in the practice and application of the Course, which you seem to be learning. This means getting more and more comfortable with your inner teacher and developing more and more of a personal relationship with Jesus or the Holy Spirit, so that in those instants in which you are beyond your ego, you would know clearly what the most loving thing for you would be -- to make a behavioral change or to simply continue to watch your ego in action, fully aware of what you are doing and what it is costing you, and then not judging yourself for being so resistant.

We all have a split mind, and we all go back and forth between the ego's offerings and Jesus' offerings. This is normal, and we should not be surprised that we do this. This is the way we learn that we are mistaken, but not sinful: **"Son of God, you have not sinned, but you have been much mistaken. Yet this can be corrected and God will help you, knowing that you could not sin against Him" (T.10.V.6:1).** We are learning that the world is a projection of our own thoughts, **"the outside picture of an inward condition" (T.21.in.1:5).** So the point is to welcome that learning, to welcome each opportunity to learn that you only imagine that the world has the power to take away the peace of God. Being afraid of "worldly distractions" only gives them power; and then you will never learn that it is made up. The goal is to achieve a state of inner peace that nothing can disturb, no matter what happens. If you stay isolated and secluded, you are implying that something outside you has power to take away the peace of God. That is foolish. It would be more helpful to go to Jesus after a period of indulging your ego and tell him about everything you thought and did, and that you realize you chose against him, but that you also realize that his love for you has not been affected, and that one day you will not be so afraid to have his love for you, and yours for him, be the center of your life. The pain of excluding that love from your life eventually will become too much to bear, and so the amount of time you spend indulging your ego will grow less and less. Again, though, this does not mean that you may not be guided to make a behavioral change as a way of diminishing the pain you are inflicting on yourself. The behavioral change then would not be perceived as sacrificial, but an expression of gentleness toward yourself.

Q #120: Did Jesus ever discuss giving up meat during any of his talks with Helen? In the Essene Gospels, he talks quite a bit about not eating meat. What's your view on this?

A: In scribing *A Course in Miracles*, Helen Schucman did not receive any instruction regarding eating meat -- the topic was not discussed. The Course is not the same teaching as the Essene Gospels. It is a Course on content, not form, and so there are no directives for behavior, as in the Essene Gospels.

There are two very important principles of the Course that may be helpful to consider in response to your question, both are stated in the same passage: **"There is no life outside of Heaven. Where God**

created life, there life must be. In any state apart from Heaven life is illusion" (T.23.II.19:1,2,3). If no life exists outside of Heaven, and any other state is an illusion, it would be very inconsistent with the Course's teaching that any kind of behavior in the dream be awarded significance. The Course is teaching us to become aware of the interpretation we give to everything, thereby becoming aware of the thoughts, beliefs, and judgments that make up our ego thought system. In this way we will be able to learn to see the true connection between cause and effect, and understand that the source of all our pain is in the mind. Therefore the only thing the Course asks us to do is pay attention to our thoughts, see them as the cause of any condition we may find ourselves in, and bring them to the Holy Spirit so they can be transformed. Beyond this the Course does not give any specific behavioral directives for choices made in an hallucination: **"What if you recognized this world is an hallucination?" (T.20.VIII.7:3)** Based on these important principles of the Course it is not in keeping with its thought system to abstain from meat because it means killing a "living" creature, or because it is a "spiritually superior" thing to do. With regard to this, as to any specific situation or problem we may have, the Course instructs us to ask but one question: **"This is the question that you must learn to ask in connection with everything. What is the purpose? Whatever it is, it will direct your efforts automatically" (T.4.V.6:8,9,10).** Everything serves the purpose of the ego or that of the Holy Spirit. Whether we eat meat or refrain from eating meat, the important thing to remember is that we do not make decisions by ourselves: **"You will not make decisions by yourself whatever you decide. For they are made with idols or with God" (T.30.I.14:7,8).** Our choice will reinforce the ego's thought system, that the world is real, and what we eat makes a difference, or the Holy Spirit's thought system, that the world is an illusion, and the only thing that matters in the dream is healing our mind of the thought that we believe we separated from God. Regarding specific behavior, Krishnamurti offered very helpful advice to one of his followers in reference to having sex, which we can paraphrase to apply to your question: "Eat meat, or don't eat meat, but get on with it."

Q #121: It has been said that we created the body after the separation. With all of the beauty that is of this earth that can be seen, as well as the incredible variety of life that thrives here, did God create the physical earth, or did we?

A: Before answering your question, we must clarify that in *A Course in Miracles*, the term "create" is used only in reference to God's ability to create. His creation is His Son who abides with Him in Heaven. When speaking about the physical world in the dream illusion, including the body, the Course uses the term "made" or "miscreate." It is unmistakable in its teaching regarding the origin of the physical world: **"The world you see is an illusion of a world. God did not create it, for what He creates must be eternal as Himself" (C.4.1:1,2).** Thus, neither the world nor the body exists in reality. Since our experience of being physical bodies living in a physical world seems so real to us, it is important to keep in mind, as we speak of the world, that none of this could ever actually occur.

In this dream of separation the world is the place where the sleeping son, consumed with guilt at having seemingly separated from God, comes to hide from the imagined wrath of a punishing God. *A Course in Miracles* teaches that the ego, gone mad with guilt, made the world, along with the body, not only to hide from God, but to keep God out of awareness: **"The world was made as an attack on God. It symbolizes fear. And what is fear except love's absence? Thus the world was meant to be a place where God could enter not, and where His Son could be apart from Him" (W.pII.3:1,2,3,4).** Clearly then, according to the thought system of the Course, God did not make the world. It is the effect of the thought of separation, and is maintained by the ongoing guilt of that thought: **"The world you see is what you gave it, nothing more than that....It is the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition" (T21.in.1:2,5).** This does not mean that we should seek to see the good and the beautiful in the world, as opposed to the evil and the ugly. It refers to the choice we have of seeing the ego's interpretation of the world, or the Holy Spirit's.

The ego looks at the beauty and variety in the world as proof that the world is real, that God "created" it, and that our pursuit of enjoyment in this world is blessed by Him. In accord with this thinking, God also

made the devastating natural disasters that afflict the world, the so called "acts of God" found in our insurance policies. God must then be cruel indeed. The ego's thinking makes God responsible not only for the beauty, but for all the various forms of physical, psychological and emotional suffering we find in this world. The apparent beauty of the world captures our attention as a ploy of the ego to keep us engaged in its lie -- that happiness is possible outside of Heaven. For further thoughts on our experience of beauty in the world, please see our answer to question #70.

Q #122: In the book *Absence from Felicity*, Jesus told Helen to purchase a gold star pendant as a gift from Him. Did Jesus explain the significance of the star, and was it a five or six pointed star? Jesus mentioned the star(s) a few times in *A Course in Miracles*, but never went into detail. Would you be kind enough to give me your interpretation of the meaning of the Star.

A: Since for Helen a five pointed star was a symbol of Jesus, there was no need for him to discuss its significance with her. As is explained in *Absence from Felicity* (and the page numbers are 96 and 433 in the second edition; 107 and 453 in the first), Helen experienced Jesus' suggestion that she buy the gold star (five pointed) as a personal gift from him to her. It meant a great deal to her, and she wore it often as a symbol of their love for each other.

Incidentally, in the Christian tradition Jesus is also symbolized by a star, as in the morning star mentioned in The Book of Revelation and cited at the end of the epilogue to the Clarification of Terms.

Q #123: I'd really appreciate elaboration on P.2.VI.5.1,2,3. My specific question is: will the body part I am presently projecting my unforgiveness onto give me an insight into the particular issue that I need to undo at this time? How will analyzing the form of my sickness enable me to better understand what issue is at the "tip of the iceberg"?

A: To begin, let's take a look at the full passage, the first three sentences of which you refer to:

"Sickness takes many forms, and so does unforgiveness. The forms of one but reproduce the forms of the other, for they are the same illusion. So closely is one translated into the other, that a careful study of the form a sickness takes will point quite clearly to the form of unforgiveness that it represents. Yet seeing this will not effect a cure. That is achieved by only one recognition; that only forgiveness heals an unforgiveness, and only an unforgiveness can possibly give rise to sickness of any kind" (P.2.VI.1,2,3,4,5).

As this asserts, there should be a clear correspondence between the specific thought of guilt in the mind and its shadow -- the symptom -- in the world. Freud made a similar kind of claim in his analyses of hysterical symptoms. However, your conclusion can only be as good as the honesty of your introspection and as accurate as your willingness to uncover what anger, fear and judgments may be buried in your unconscious. And there is no set of fixed rules that leads inexorably from specific thought to specific symptom.

For example, a sprained ankle may reflect a real ambivalence about stepping forward on a certain fearful career or relationship path for one person. But for another person or for the same person at another time, the sprain may be evidence of guilt over the desire to kick someone else when he is down. And for someone else, the fear of going forward could be manifested in laryngitis -- losing one's voice -- rather than in spraining an ankle. There may even be some kind of so-called past life associations to the present symptom which are even more difficult to uncover. Nevertheless, there will be times when the correspondence is quite apparent.

Seeing such links between an unforgiving thought and a specific symptom can be especially helpful as you first begin your work with *A Course in Miracles*, for it reinforces the recognition the Course is attempting to develop in our awareness of the true cause-effect relationship between mind and body. We incorrectly see a false relationship between external agents or events as causes and bodily changes as effects (e.g., a virus and flu symptoms), rather than the true relationship between the thoughts of the mind as cause and changes in the body as effects (e.g., guilt and flu symptoms).

But, as the above passage from the Psychotherapy pamphlet points out, seeing such connections is not enough in itself to bring about true healing. Only forgiveness can do that. And as you continue with your study of the Course, the good news is that you do not need to uncover the link between a specific form of guilt and a specific symptom. Any symptom of disease or dis-ease in the body is a projection of the guilt in the mind that is the self-hatred we all carry inside ourselves over our belief that we attacked and destroyed love when we chose the thought of separation. And every symptom, regardless of its form, represents nothing other than the ego's attempt to persuade you that your problems are in the world and in your body, and not in your mind. So once the ego's ruse is recognized and the real association between the guilt in the mind and effects on the body is acknowledged, most of your work is completed. The next step is simply to turn to your internal Teacher for help in undoing your belief in that guilt. Your part in the forgiveness process is now complete. External symptoms may or may not shift at this point, but they will no longer concern you, as you have identified the real source of your discomfort and pain. As Jesus observes in the manual in the section on healing, **"What do guilt and sickness, pain, disaster and all suffering mean now? Having no purpose, they are gone. And with them also go all the effects they seemed to cause. Cause and effect but replicate creation. Seen in their proper perspective, without distortion and without fear, they re-establish Heaven"** (M.5.II.4:7,8,9,10,11).

Q #124: What does the term "magic" mean when used in *A Course in Miracles*?

A: Magic is **"an attempt to solve a problem where it is not....guilt is projected outside our minds onto others (attack) or our bodies (sickness) and sought to be corrected there, rather than being undone in our minds by bringing it to the Holy Spirit..."** (Glossary-Index for *A Course in Miracles*, p.143, Kenneth Wapnick). The ego uses magic in its interpretation of any problem or conflict; it sees the problem as outside of the mind, and seeks to solve it by external means. When we choose to believe this ego version, and identify with the ego thought system, we use magic to solve our problems, and it does seem to work. For example, when we take an aspirin for a headache and the pain goes away, we believe the aspirin took the headache away. The Course is telling us that what actually happens is that there is a decision in the mind to experience pain in the form of a headache, and then a decision in the mind against pain, which is symbolized by taking an aspirin: **"Special agents [i.e., medicine] seem to be ministering to him, yet they but give form to his own choice. He chooses them in order to bring tangible form to his desires. And it is this they do, and nothing else. They are not actually needed at all"** (M.5.II.2.8,9,10,11). Of course, there is nothing wrong with using "magic" forms -- money, clothing, social contacts, medicine, etc. In fact, we cannot function in this world without them, and we should not feel guilty or "unspiritual" when as we use them. But we can do so without endowing them with the power to make us truly happy or meet our real need, which is joining with the Holy Spirit, the memory of God, in the mind.

The same magic principle is at work whenever we think we can effect change in the world by resolving conflicts through changes in behavior, never realizing that the conflict originates in our mind and only there can it truly be solved. The Course asks us to learn to recognize the problem where it is, in the mind, so it can be healed: **"...decisions are of the mind, not of the body. If sickness is but a faulty problem-solving approach, it is a decision. And if it is a decision, it is the mind and not the body that makes it"** (M.5.11:4,5,6).

A Course in Miracles also tells us there is only one problem -- the thought of separation from God. Believing this thought is the cause of tremendous guilt and feelings of emptiness, despair, and need. This drives us to seek to fill our need and assuage our pain externally through magic, making the whole world a "magic show": **"In this world, you believe you are sustained by everything but God. Your faith is placed in the most trivial and insane symbols; pills, money, 'protective' clothing, influence, prestige, being liked, knowing the 'right' people, and an endless list of forms of nothingness that you endow with magical powers" (W.p.I.50.1:2,3).** Whatever form of magic we choose it will not truly work. The Course is asking us to undo our belief in magic by recognizing the problem: **"If you could recognize that your only problem is separation, no matter what form it takes, you could accept the answer because you would see its relevance. Perceiving the underlying constancy in all the problems that seem to confront you, you would understand that you have the means to solve them all. And you would use the means, because you recognize the problem" (W.p.I.79.6:2,3,4).** The "means" we have is the power of our mind to choose, and our choice is always between magic or the miracle; between seeking outside ourselves in the illusion, or going within to the mind where our decisions can be changed.

Q #125: I have been studying A Course in Miracles for about 3 years. I have two questions. First, where are you at, as far as the Course goes, in other words, is there a point at which it all comes together? Second, I feel as if I am and have always been in "a waiting mode" -- I want to say a state of anticipation, but not really. I'm tired of "waiting" my life away. Can you give me some advice on this?

A: We are not quite sure of what you mean by "a point where it all comes together." The Course works, if that is what you mean. It is an individualized curriculum (**M.9.1:5**), and therefore the specifics of the process vary from student to student. Our learning is always in the context of the relationships and circumstances in our lives, and the goal of the exercises in the workbook is generalization, so that as we go along, we would gradually learn to apply the principles every minute of every day, without getting stuck in specifics. That is when "it all comes together." Our habitual response to all happenings in our daily lives would be to bring our ego thoughts to the love of Jesus in our minds; and then as our resistance is brought to light and relinquished, we would choose against the ego and allow our minds to be healed, thus restoring to them the awareness of love's presence that we had banished. Our lives then would be directed from this quiet center of peace: **"And you will be more aware of this quiet center of the storm than all its raging activity. This quiet center, in which you do nothing, will remain with you, giving you rest in the midst of every busy doing on which you are sent. For from this center will you be directed how to use the body sinlessly. It is this center from which the body is absent, that will keep it so in your awareness of it" (T.18.VII.8:2,3,4,5).**

It is difficult to respond to your second question without knowing more about you. So we will just speak in general about the pattern you describe, which is not all that uncommon. The Course speaks a great deal about fear -- and even terror -- that is the consequence of our having listened to the ego instead of the Holy Spirit. We are not consciously aware of the fear at this level of our minds, and the fear of which we are aware is always attributed to something in the world or in our physical/ psychological experience, both of which are outside the mind. But the fear that Jesus talks about accounts, in part, for the different patterns our lives take. The fear is related to our expectation of punishment by God for having separated from Him, and is also related to the promise we made to the ego to be faithful to it no matter what. Our very existence as individuals, therefore, is associated in our minds with fear and dread on a scale that nothing in the world can approximate.

Instead of bringing the fear to Jesus who would help us realize that it is totally unjustified, we listen to the ego who warns us that we had better do something about it. Then our lives are essentially constructed as a defense against this fear. This manifests in different ways; but one way would be to never get your life going -- like waiting at a traffic light that never turns green. Unconsciously, the fear would be that no matter what you do, you are doomed. The maladaptive solution to that fear is to stay in neutral so that you never have to take responsibility for anything, because deep within your mind is the thought "I set out

on my own once before, and look what I did. I killed love off so that I could exist. I'm a terrible person, so I'll see to it that I never make anything of my life, so that I will not be caught and held to account for the awful thing I did."

Nothing can change in such a situation until the internal state of terror is acknowledged and looked at. Sometimes this requires the assistance of a compassionate therapist, but not always. Jesus encourages us to take this step with him by our side: **"We are ready to look more closely at the ego's thought system because together we have the lamp that will dispel it, and since you realize you do not want it, you must be ready. Let us be very calm in doing this, for we are merely looking honestly for truth" (T.11.V.1:3,4).** We need the help of someone outside this thought system of sin, guilt, and fear, who sees its unreality, but who sees as well the destructive effect it has had in the minds of those who have forgotten that it is all just a made-up fable.

Q #126: Did Jesus heal by simply seeing the "Christ" in another?

A: Since you use the past tense "did" in your question, we should first clarify that the teachings of A Course in Miracles on healing are not based on, nor related to, the Gospel accounts of healing by the historical Jesus. This is an important clarification, because the Course interpretation of "healing," "Christ," and "Jesus" differs from the traditional Christian interpretation. With that in mind, we begin by recalling that the Course tells us healing is always of the mind: **"Since only the mind can be sick, only the mind can be healed. Only the mind is in need of healing" (P.in.1:2,3).** Therefore, no one, including Jesus, actually heals another: **"Healing does not come from anyone else. You must accept guidance from within" (T.8.IV.4:5,6).** By the same token, anyone whose mind is healed, including Jesus, serves as a reminder to someone who perceives himself as unhealed; that he too can make the choice for healing by accepting the truth about himself. A "healed healer," one of whom is Jesus, thus serves as a reflection of the truth for anyone who is truly willing to be healed. This may be what you refer to as "seeing the Christ in another." It means looking without judgment, without difference, and seeing the other as sinless. This is what heals the mind.

Accepting the truth about ourselves, which is healing, inherently means accepting ourselves as joined with the entire Sonship. Thus when we accept healing for ourselves, we accept it for the entire Sonship. This is what the Course means when it tells us we are not healed alone -- the truth of who we are is the same truth for everyone, and includes everyone. **"That is why it makes no difference to what part or by what part of the Sonship the healing is offered. Every part benefits, and benefits equally" (T.5.in.2:6,7).** We are not separate individuals seeking individual healing. There is no "individual" to be healed. Therefore, when Jesus accepted the Atonement for himself we were all with him, and were healed along with him. Only our acceptance is required for us to bring this healing to our awareness. Since all sickness is separation, all healing is joining: **"Healing is the effect of minds that join, as sickness comes from minds that separate" (T.28.III.2:6).** We are healed when we choose to join with Jesus in accepting our healing. This is how the Course tells us healing is accomplished.

Q #127: Can you help me reconcile the fact that there is only One Self or One Mind and that I perceive myself as a unique consciousness? Is my perception of having a unique consciousness an illusion?

A: As real as it seems to us, our unique individual consciousness is in fact part of the ego's bag of illusions. In fact, consciousness is the first trick the ego pulled out of that illusory bag. A Course in Miracles tells us early in the text that **"consciousness, the level of perception"** is in fact within the illusory ego realm, and that it is **"the first split introduced into the mind after the separation."** If you think of the fact that perception necessarily involves a self that is perceiving and an other that is perceived, you may be able to understand why the Course says that consciousness necessarily involves

a separated mind and so can't be real. In Heaven, the realm of knowledge or One-mindedness, on the other hand, there is no separation and so there can be no perception, that is, no self to perceive an other (T.3.IV.1,2,3).

Near the end of the book, the Course refers to the illusory nature of individual consciousness, observing that **"in this world, because the mind is split, the Sons of God appear to be separate. Nor do their minds seem to be joined. In this illusory state, the concept of an 'individual mind' seems to be meaningful" (C.1.2:1,2,3).** And in case we have still not gotten the point, it adds that **"consciousness has levels and awareness can shift quite dramatically, but it cannot transcend the perceptual realm. At its highest it becomes aware of the real world [totally healed perception], and can be trained to do so increasingly. Yet the very fact that it has levels and can be trained demonstrates that it cannot reach knowledge" (C.1.7:4,5,6).**

So consciousness will be left behind, or transcended, when our mind is completely healed of the mistaken thought of separation and returns to the realm of knowledge or One-mindedness. It is this seeming loss of individual, unique consciousness that is at the root of all the fear we ultimately associate with the practice of forgiveness. Yet we will never be called upon to relinquish this false self and will let it go only when it no longer has any value or meaning for us. So the ego's fear of annihilation is just one further trick it pulls from its illusory bag to keep us rooted in its thought system.

For further discussions of mind and consciousness, you may wish to review Questions #27, 32, and 65.

Q #128: I have struggled with clinical depression for the last five years or so. When I do not take medication I become very tired and am not able to concentrate. I find this condition difficult to live with. However, when I do take the medication I am able to concentrate and I do not feel tired. My question is: A Course in Miracles says that we are not bodies. Our bodies are projections made by the ego. If there is something wrong with the body, the ego caused it. What do I have to do to heal this depression on a spiritual level so that I will not have to take this medication anymore?

A: Forgive. That's all you have to do.

In case that answer seems too flip, a few more words may be helpful. Everything we do here in the world to address our bodily limits and needs is what the Course calls magic (for a further discussion of magic, in the context of addictions and 12-step programs, see Question #57). It's all magic because we are not addressing the real problem and source of all of our symptoms, including experiencing ourselves as a body. The real problem is always and only the guilt in our ego mind. And the only way to address that problem is through practicing forgiveness, which means learning, with the help of Jesus or the Holy Spirit, not to judge the projections of our ego so that they can be withdrawn and healed in the mind where they originated.

Now there may be a stigma associated in your mind with taking medication for depression and that may in fact be where you want to begin with your forgiveness process. The fact is, eating and sleeping are also forms of magic we use to cope with what otherwise would be unpleasant or dysfunctional states. But most of us do not ask what we would have to do to heal our hunger or weariness on a spiritual level so that we would no longer need to take food or to sleep anymore. And the Course tells us that all illusions are the same -- there is no hierarchy in reality (T.26.VII.6). So you may first want to learn to forgive yourself for your limitations, that is, learn not to judge yourself for the fact that you perceive yourself as a body, with all the needs that accompany seeing yourself in a bodily state, including taking medication for depression. Jesus gently reminds us, **"Do not despair, then, because of limitations. It is your function to escape from them, but not to be without them" (M.26.4:1,2).**

Then, rather than attempting to find a spiritual means to wean yourself from your antidepressant, it may be much more beneficial to ask for help in getting in touch with the underlying guilt that is triggering the symptoms of depression, so that can be healed. All symptoms are simply signals that we still want the separation and all its ramifications to be real. But that desire has a cost and that cost is what we want to begin to get more in touch with. Seeing ourselves as eternally separate from love, with no way home, is the most depressing state we could possibly experience.

But the good news is that the separation is not really true. As we see the cost of believing in the separation -- which includes depression over the perceived hopelessness of our present "reality" -- the desire for a different way of seeing will gradually grow within us, until that becomes all that we want. For we will have learned that the only place of real hope is in our mind, where the presence of love is always available to us to lead us back home.

Q #129: I have been a student of A Course in Miracles for over 20 years, and in that time I have noticed that my active involvement waxes and wanes significantly. I find that my ego is once again getting the upper hand, and apart from some very useful self-insight, I'm more or less back to where I started. I sometimes wonder if my little willingness perhaps is a bit too little. I understand that our investment in our egos is far greater than we realize, but I sometimes get frustrated that after all these years my mind still wanders so easily after so much effort to train it. In the end, I'm still looking for even an inkling of the peace of God. Do you have any comments, or advice, or encouragement to help me (and perhaps other students like me) see this from a broader perspective, and maybe get back on track?

A: There are several thoughts that might help you "get back on track" and put your experience in a positive perspective. First of all, you are not alone in this experience, it is "normal," and the process of forgiveness is difficult. It may not seem particularly comforting, but we are clearly told that we are learning impaired, and so we should not be surprised when we have difficulty in our Course practice. **"You have learning handicaps in a very literal sense. There are areas in your learning skills that are so impaired that you can progress only under constant, clear-cut direction, provided by a Teacher Who can transcend your limited resources. He becomes your Resource because of yourself you cannot learn. The learning situation in which you placed yourself is impossible, and in this situation you clearly require a special Teacher and a special curriculum" (T.12.V.5:1,2,3,4).** Please remember that this message applies to all students of the Course, and the obvious implication is that the training program the Course teaches is difficult for us. It is simple and clear, but it is not easy. The Course teaching ultimately leads to the undoing of everything we believe about everything, including, and especially, about ourselves. It is very understandable that we would be inconsistent, and even quite resistant, in applying its principles to our lives. As has been stated on many occasions, if the Course were easy we wouldn't need it. It is designed by a very wise Teacher as a life-long study, with good reason. In the process, it is very important not to judge yourself for apparent "failures," as this will certainly result in more guilt, and would accomplish the ego's plan to defend itself against the learning of the Course.

It might be helpful to consider all the thoughts you have about the degree of your willingness, and your feelings of frustration, as typical ego plays to keep you off track (or off course, if you'll pardon the pun). If you think it would be helpful, you might introduce some structure into your study, either by using the guidelines in the Workbook Lessons, or setting aside a specific time of the day to read a passage of the Course. Sometimes it is helpful to make a practice of reviewing the day before going to bed -- to identify the thoughts that caused any discomfort, or often stronger emotions. These thoughts and feelings represent the judgments that are making peace impossible. The review also seems to help keep us in tune with ourselves, and keep us more vigilant the next day. Any attempt is worth the effort, as it will rekindle the tiny spark of willingness.

Another important thing to remember is that our usual understanding of time does not apply to our practice of the Course. Since all there is is the present moment in which I choose either to listen to the

Holy Spirit or the ego, in one sense we are always at the starting place. Furthermore, whenever we apply any of the Course teaching to our lives, or to our relationships, however "little" it may seem to be, time becomes irrelevant. It may be heartening to realize that whether 20 years, or 20 minutes have passed since the last practical application, the time lag has no effect on the efficacy of our learning. No doubt you are aware that the entire thought system of the ego can be undone in an instant. And when you make the mistake of turning again to the ego, it is possible to start over, free of judgment, and confident that One goes with you as you wax and wane, unconcerned with your detours or meanderings.

When the ego proffers its interpretation and evaluation of our progress it is helpful to remember that the Course does not qualify "little willingness." No willingness is too little, and we are not equipped to judge our progress in the first place. We do well to remember: **"Your little effort and small determination call on the power of the universe to help you, and God Himself will raise you from darkness into light. You are in accord with His Will. You cannot fail because your will is His" (W.pl.69.7:2,3,4).**

Q #130: What is "true empathy," as opposed to "false empathy," and how can one practice it?

A: The "true empathy" described in A Course in Miracles is perceiving the real need that is in all parts of the separated Sonship, which is the need for healing the thought of separation in the mind, no matter what form it takes. It sees the problem where it is, which is in the mind. It is an application of one of the basic principles of the Course: **"Ideas leave not their source, and their effects but seem to be apart from them. Ideas are of the mind. What is projected out, and seems to be external to the mind, is not outside at all, but an effect of what is in, and has not left its source" (T.26.VII.4:7,8,9).** This means seeing beyond the circumstances of the situation that seem to be the problem -- sickness, scarcity of any kind, emotional or psychological turmoil, natural disasters, etc. -- and recognizing that none of these has any effect on the true Self. They do not have the power to take peace away, and their solution lies in the individual's ability to also recognize this, and to make a choice for peace instead of distress. True empathy comes from a choice in the mind to look with the Holy Spirit's true perception, which sees only an expression of love or a call for love (T.14.X.7). The response then is to let the Holy Spirit's love flow to the person "in need" in whatever form would be most helpful and loving. Most likely it would not mean verbally telling someone that they have made a wrong choice and can choose again, which could be an attack, increasing fear and anxiety. Once the choice is made to see with the Holy Spirit, and not to believe the ego's interpretation of a situation, the specific response will come through naturally. The intent is to join with the other person on the level of the mind where the answer to the problem lies. This does not preclude helping someone find specific solutions or external help with a problem, but the content of the mind, the Holy Spirit's true perception, would be clear. The real cause and the real solution lie in the power of the mind to choose.

"False empathy" is the ego's perception of victimization. The ego sees a victim who is being attacked by some outside force, whether it be a disease, another person, or some catastrophic event, and believes the person is in need of an external solution to the problem. False empathy can be the motive for some people to see themselves as the "rescuers" who can offer help to a victim in resolving their predicament, with no awareness of the mind's choice. From this perspective, the two people agree that there is a victim and a victimizer, and a solution external to the mind can be found. It is an agreement made from madness. The Course is very clear that false empathy, because it denies the power of the mind, is actually an attack. It will not only not solve the problem, it actually operates in a way that exacerbates the problem because it reinforces separation: **"The clearest proof that empathy as the ego uses it is destructive lies in the fact that it is applied only to certain types of problems and in certain people. These it selects out, and joins with. And it never joins except to strengthen itself" (T.16.I.2:1,2,3).**

A clear indication of false empathy is when a distinction is made between those who are deserving of support or help, while excluding others. This is true especially when those who are excluded are identified as the "victims" who are not only undeserving of sympathy, but merit punishment of some sort. When

we find ourselves seeing victims and victimizers, as when disaster strikes, we have an opportunity to step aside from the ego's initial interpretation and consider what the Course tells us: **"You do not know what empathizing means. Yet of this you may be sure; if you will merely sit quietly by and let the Holy Spirit relate through you, you will empathize with strength, and will gain in strength and not in weakness" (T.16.I.2:6,7).** Our practice of true empathy begins with the recognition of our false empathy, and our usual confusion about cause and effect. That is why we do not know what empathizing means. Once we are honest about our misperceptions, the full extent of our belief in the ego's thought system begins to reveal itself. This recognition, along with questioning the validity of the ego's interpretation, will allow our perception to gradually shift, and our response to be transformed by the Holy Spirit. His true empathy will then meet our real need, and everyone's real need, for the healing of the mind. This is the real answer to the real problem.

Q #131: I have been a follower of A Course in Miracles for many years. My questions are: God must know the pain and suffering we are having. He is God, how can He not hear the cries of His child? Why has He forsaken us? Surely there must be a better way.

A: The Course's path is different from the traditional biblical paths that are characterized by prayer and supplication to God to do something about our plight. A Course in Miracles presents itself as a correction of traditional biblical spirituality. Its distinctive approach is to teach us that the problem in our relationship with God is entirely on our end, and that our lives reflect the thought system in our minds that we are choosing to uphold. God simply is (W.pl.169.5), and knows nothing of this world of separation. It is we who are blocking the awareness of love's presence in our minds (T.in.1:7). Therefore, the thrust of the Course is to explain to us how we are blocking love and what we can do to restore it to our awareness: **"Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all of the barriers within yourself that you have built against it" (T.16.IV.6:1).** It teaches that salvation is our responsibility and within our grasp. It centers on the practice of forgiveness in the context of the Atonement principle, which states that the separation from God never occurred; it was just **"a tiny, mad idea"** that never happened in reality. We are simply dreaming a dream of sin, guilt, and fear that have led to lives dominated by suffering and death. The role of Jesus or the Holy Spirit is to help us view our lives through their eyes and with their help eventually awaken from this nightmare dream. The starting point in this process of awakening, though, is to take responsibility for the conditions that prevail in our lives, because they are the direct result of the thought system of the ego in our minds, to which we have secretly vowed eternal allegiance.

The "other way" is to turn to Jesus for help in looking at our secret wish to be separate from God and each other. He reassures us: **"I will never leave you or forsake you, because to forsake you would be to forsake myself and God Who created me. You forsake yourself and God if you forsake any of your brothers. You must learn to see them as they are, and understand they belong to God as you do" (T.5.IV.6:5,6,7).** The Course teaches us that the Holy Spirit is present within our minds as both the memory of God that we took with us into the dream, and the bridge that we will cross when we have chosen against the ego and have seen our interests as the same, not separate from God or others: **"His memory has not gone by, and left a stranded Son forever on a shore where he can glimpse another shore that he can never reach. His Father wills that he be lifted up and gently carried over. He has built the bridge, and it is He Who will transport His Son across it. Have no fear that He will fail in what He wills. Nor that you be excluded from the Will that is for you" (T.28.I.15:56,7,8,9).**

Q #132: In section VIII of the excerpt series 'Jesus-The Manifestation of the Holy Spirit,' Ken discusses Helen's experience of having an eyelash in her eye. And, using the analogy of videotapes, he says there is a tape of Helen with the lash in her eye, and a tape of Helen with the lash outside of her eye. I

understand that these two situations reflect her decision to separate and then to join with the love of Jesus. But I am confused as to how I can apply this to my own life.

I gather that there is a videotape wherein I get what I want, and one where I do not. I have lived in apartments for years and have begun to think it would be better for me to have my own home because it would help me to feel more secure. I can see that my "homelessness" would reflect my feeling that I have left God. But I don't quite get how joining with Jesus would result in my finding a home of my own.

To cut to the chase, how do I switch from the one tape of the problem to the other tape of its solution? Is this a matter of belief, or of will? I don't understand the dynamics, or the mechanics, of this. I also am unsure about how I can know if it is in my best interests to have a house. Could you elaborate a bit more on just WHAT is actually happening when we change our minds and join with Jesus' love? How does the problem become resolved on the level of form? I do realize form is not the essential thing; that it's the change of mind that matters.

A: To clarify, it is important in the example of Helen's eyelash, and so in its application to your own life, to appreciate the difference between content and symbol. With Helen, the content was either separating or joining with Jesus' love. And the discomfort of an eyelash in her eye was only the symbol she used at the level of form to represent her decision in her mind to separate from Jesus. The problem was not the eyelash, but the decision to separate. So the solution was to join again with his love. When she did, the eyelash in her eye, which was a projection of the guilt for separating from him, was no longer projected, for the guilt behind it was gone. And so the eyelash appeared to be outside her eye. But Helen's mind, not Jesus, dictated the form of the symbol in both cases and Jesus had nothing to do with anything that was happening to her body.

Now if you feel that you are separated from Jesus' love, or as you mention, you have a sense of "homelessness" for believing that you have left God, there must also be guilt, for the ego tells us that separation always involves attack. And guilt inevitably leads to fear of retaliation -- a very insecure feeling. One form then that you may use to symbolize the separation is to live in an apartment that seems to make you feel insecure. But the apartment itself is not the problem. It is only a symbol for the guilt in your mind. So the solution is not to buy a home but to heal the guilt in your mind over separating from Jesus by joining with him again. Then, if your apartment is only a symbol of your guilt over the separation, your living circumstances may change, although obviously, in the world of form, with its "laws" of time and space that we all accept, this relocation would not happen with the speed that Helen's eyelash was relocated from her eye to her cheek. In addition, your living situation is certainly a more complex symbol than Helen's eyelash, possibly representing both ego content and the content of love, and so external shifts will most likely be less direct and immediate. But Jesus would have nothing to do with those changes. Rather, it would be a decision in your own mind to choose a form or symbol that no longer reinforces your own belief in the need to suffer for your sin of separation and to see the source of your insecure feelings as outside yourself. But changing the content in your mind and not the symbol in the world would be your focus.

However, if your primary goal is to switch from apartment living to owning your own home, thinking that will help you feel more secure, you will be caught in the ego ploy of believing that something external will provide you with the feelings of safety and peace that you seek. And you will not be addressing the real problem in the mind and so will not be open to the real solution, which is also in the mind (W.pl.79). That is not to say that owning your own home is not a reasonable goal to hold for yourself. It is just that it would be a mistake to believe that this would bring you any kind of lasting happiness or security. As you remember the real problem in the mind -- guilt -- and its solution -- joining with Jesus, or forgiveness -- the external circumstances will increasingly be less of a concern to you as you find the peace and security within your own mind.

Jesus understands your search for that home of safety and comfort and he certainly must be including you among those he is addressing when he observes, **"We speak today for everyone who walks this world, for he is not at home. He goes uncertainly about in endless search, seeking in darkness**

what he cannot find; not recognizing what it is he seeks. A thousand homes he makes, yet none contents his restless mind. He does not understand he builds in vain. The home he seeks can not be made by him. There is no substitute for Heaven. All he ever made was hell" (W.pl.182.3).

By the way, if you re-read the section from the excerpt series that you refer to, after reading this, you may find that it provides even further clarification to your questions.

Q #133: If -- as A Course in Miracles claims -- thinking precedes emotion, such as anger, what about people with epilepsy or Tourette's syndrome who apparently seem to have anger attacks without prior thought, i.e., the reaction seems to be physiological rather than psychological?

A. The thinking that is always meant in the Course is a function of a mind that is outside time and space. The body, which is comprised of both physiological and psychological dimensions, is a projection of this mind; therefore, all physical and psychological conditions are the result of a choice made by the mind. Mind in the Course is not the brain, nor is it the human mind, as theorists commonly speak of it.

In a section in the manual about sickness and healing, Jesus teaches us that sickness is **"a faulty problem-solving approach,"** and as such is a decision made in one's mind. He continues: **"The resistance to recognizing this is enormous, because the existence of the world as you perceive it depends on the body being the decision maker. Terms like 'instincts,' 'reflexes' and the like represent attempts to endow the body with non-mental motivators. Actually, such terms merely state or describe the problem. They do not answer it" (M.5.II.1:56,7,8,9,10).**

Generally, the Course's discussion of anger is not aimed at the type generated by epilepsy episodes or Tourette's syndrome. However, those physiological conditions themselves are the outcome of a choice made in the mind, as is true of any disease or disability: **"Sickness is anger taken out upon the body, so that it will suffer pain" (T.28.VI.5:1). "Sickness is a defense against the truth" (W.pl.136).** As difficult as this is to accept, it is a source of genuine hope, because by turning to Jesus or the Holy Spirit, we can be helped to look at the pain in our minds, from which all bodily states emanate as maladaptive attempts to defend against the enormity of that pain. Once we are back in touch with our decision-making ability in our minds, we can then make the choice that will restore to our awareness the eternal love and peace in which we were created.

Q #134: Recently, at a seminar, Ken discussed the illusion of a sheet of glass breaking into a trillion parts, each piece representing a person in our insane dream of this world. Are our pets also a part of this sheet of glass? Are they, too, a part of the Sonship?

A: Yes, the Sonship includes anything of form. We are so accustomed to using our human experience as a reference point that it seems strange to think of our pets -- dogs, cats, snakes, frogs, birds, plants, rocks, etc. -- as parts of the Sonship. We would have to step outside our human experience to comprehend it. Jesus alludes to this in speaking of the original separation in the context of the Son making a substitute for the truth: **"You....made but one substitution. It has taken many forms, because it was the substitution of illusion for truth; of fragmentation for wholeness. It 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" (T.18.I.4:1,2,3).** And in another passage, Jesus refers even to **"the smallest grain of sand"** as part of the Sonship (T.28.IV.9:4).

The perception of qualitative differences is merely part of the ego's strategy to sustain the illusion of separation.

Q #135: The following four questions all address the issue of suicide and so will be answered together:

- i. Could you please comment on the Course's view on suicide?
- ii: What is the "right" way to cope with suicide, seen through the eyes of *A Course in Miracles*?
- iii: My grandfather committed suicide. Death, our separation from God -- it's all an illusion. So is suicide wrong? Or is it the state of mind -- feeling separated from God -- while committing suicide that is wrong? What happens if one does commit suicide? Do people automatically become one with God when they are not in the illusion of the world?
- iv: My wife recently committed suicide. She and I were students of *A Course in Miracles*. Sometimes I wonder, if all this is an illusion, what is the purpose of our staying alive? Why should we struggle with this life that is not part of the real world anyway? What is the purpose of any of this?

A: From the perspective of the Course, every death is really suicide. For, as Jesus explains, **"No one can die unless he chooses death" (T.19.IV.C.1:4)**, and again later, **"No one dies without his own consent. Nothing occurs but represents your wish, and nothing is omitted that you choose" (W.pl.152.1:4,5)**.

But the Course also makes it clear that death is a thought in the mind that has nothing to do with the body (**e.g., W.pl.163.1:1; W.pl.167.2:1,2,3**). For the ego itself has its origins in an insane but illusory thought of death -- the belief that we can attack God in order to wrest a separate individual self from Him. Such a thought represents not only murder -- the death of God -- but also suicide -- the death of our true Self as Christ. And so whatever follows in the world of bodies and behavior from this initial insane thought can be no more real or sane.

Because the Course always asks us to focus on content and purpose rather than form and appearance, all death in the world that comes from an ego thought will be viewed in exactly the same light. The ego's purpose in all death is to prove that the separation is real and that, in the end, God triumphs over us by taking back from us the life that we have stolen from Him. We can either resist until we finally succumb to more powerful external forces, or we can resign ourselves to our fate and yield to death by our own hands. What form death may come in then does not matter, for the content is always the same -- our puny, painful life is ours only for a limited time before we inevitably must lose it.

On the other hand, looking with Jesus or the Holy Spirit, we would see all death, including suicide, as no different in content, but only in form, from every other choice we ever make here in the world that is based on our perception of ourselves as separate and alone, in pain, vulnerable and victimized. And yet we would know that that perception is false, based as it is on a faulty premise about ourselves, that we are this body, trapped in a harsh, cruel world, not of our making, desperately battling against insurmountable odds to find a little peace and happiness in a hopeless situation over which we have no control.

From most of the world's perspective, suicide has a stigma and a negative moral judgment associated with it, but that is simply part of the ego's defense which insists that both life as a separate self and death of that self are real. From the Course's perspective, the thought behind suicide, if it is ego-based [Jesus also makes clear that death can be chosen with the guidance of the Holy Spirit (**M.12.5; S.3.II**)], is a mistake, an error, but that is all. It is not a sin, nor does it entail any negative consequences any different from any other decision we make with the ego as our teacher -- they all reinforce the guilt we unconsciously are wanting to keep alive in our mind to prove that the separation is real. And so suicide is no more of a mistake than the mistake we made in choosing to be born into the world. In both cases, we are trying to deal with the problem of the guilt in our mind by focusing on the seemingly external world and our body, guaranteeing that we will not find a solution. We are attempting to solve the problem of separation in the world, as if the world were the problem, rather than in the mind, where the real problem - the insane thought of separation -- is buried.

And so, whether we commit suicide or we die in any other way, believing that death is real, we will remain trapped in the self-imposed ego belief in separation. Death does not deliver us from the ego thought system, nor from the world that is its defense. Only looking at the ego thought system with the nonjudgmental presence of Jesus or the Holy Spirit beside us and deciding once and for all that the idea of separation holds no value for us can return us to the experience of our oneness with God. For the world is not depriving us of anything -- only our choice to be separate is.

Even though this world is an illusion, as are our individual lives here -- a life we feel is bracketed between birth and death -- we don't believe it. If we did, and truly knew the world's purpose was to attack God and therefore our Self, then of course we would never think of ourselves as being in bodies. But the fact that we all live that way -- breathing, eating, drinking, recreating, etc. -- proves that while we might intellectually believe what *A Course in Miracles* tells us, it is certainly not our experience.

Therefore, the Holy Spirit's purpose for our being here, once we have been born, is to have us learn His lessons of forgiveness, including the ultimate lesson that death is unreal. The world then becomes a classroom in which we happily learn what He is teaching us. Wanting to leave the world simply reinforces its reality for us. After all, who would want to leave a place unless he first believed it were real and unpleasant. That is why Jesus tells us in the text: **"There is a risk in thinking death is peace" (T.27.VII.10:2)**. True peace comes not from leaving the physical world, but only through the practice of forgiveness that undoes the mind's guilt that is the only cause of pain and suffering, as well as the belief in the reality of death. And so, as we are willing, at the pace we choose, we take the small steps of forgiveness that will return us to the glorious eternal Self that we could never destroy, the Self that has remained our Identity despite our foolish digressions into the illusions of death.

Q #136: In the text, Jesus states that "God is lonely without His Sons" (T.2.III.5:11). In light of the theology of *A Course in Miracles*, how is this explained as true?

A: Jesus uses these words as a comfort to us, correcting our ego belief that God is angry at us and wants to punish us for attacking Him to establish our separate self, torn from the totality of Heaven (**T.5.V.3:10,11**). Since the Course says over and over again that the separation never happened in reality -- that's the Atonement principle -- the line you refer to can not be literally true. But what a reassuring thought, while we still believe in separation, to hear not only that God is not seeking vengeance against us, but He misses us and only wants us to come back to Him! If we can allow ourselves to hear that, we can begin to heal the guilt that we have made real in our mind over our supposed assault on Love.

You may also wish to refer to [Question #72](#) in this series for a further discussion of Course language about God, as well as [Questions #42](#) and [#85](#), which discuss the reasons for the metaphorical, dualistic language of the Course.

Q #137: I would like to understand the following quote from the Text, T.16.IV.9:6 "In any relationship in which you are wholly willing to accept completion, and only this, there is God completed and His Son with Him." How do I accept completion? I know that the ego level seeks special relationships. I also know that the preface says we are already "complete, safe, loved and loving." So how do I distinguish the ego's search for completion from the completion referred to in the above quote?

A: The key to answering your question is to include the preceding sentence: **"In the Name of God, be wholly willing to abandon all illusions. In any relationship in which you are wholly willing to accept completion, and only this, there is God completed, and His Son with Him" (T.16.IV.9:5,6)**. The first sentence speaks of "illusions," which contrasts with the "completion" of the

second sentence. Briefly stated, the way to completion is by undoing all illusions. It may be helpful to review the basic ego set up: We believe we have separated from God. Consumed with guilt for this "sin," we feel terribly lonely and empty. The ego tells us we can fill the void left by the separation by having all kinds of relationships -- with our "selves," other people, events, things, even our thoughts. In other words, we use all illusions in the dream, seeking to find in them a substitute for our truth. This vast array of substitutes is the ego's definition of completion. The problem is the substitutes do not work. That does not stop the ego, however. It insists that if only we find the right combination of perfect substitutes we *will* find happiness and completion in the dream, thereby succeeding in making a perfect replacement for God and Heaven. When the plan still does not work, the ego tells us keep looking, try again, never mentioning that the real deal is **"seek but do not find" (T.16.V.6:5).**

The pursuit then is endless, which fulfills the ego's purpose of keeping us hopelessly locked in the illusions of the world. This is the driving force behind every special relationship. We use others to meet our needs, and fill the void left by the seeming separation. In other words, seeking completion in illusory substitutions -- what the Course calls idols: **"All idols of this world were made to keep the truth within from being known to you, and to maintain allegiance to the dream that you must find what is outside yourself to be complete and happy" (T.29.VII.6:1).**

The ego seeks for completion in the external, while the completion the Holy Spirit is leading us to is internal. When we have become sufficiently disillusioned with the world's offerings and the ego's claims, we suspect that there must be another way. We can then look in the right direction (the mind) for our real completion, and begin to let go of our investment in the illusions. If we are dedicated to the process of letting go of all the useless substitutes, we begin to identify less and less with lies of the ego. This is accomplished through the training program the Course offers, which is to remember that we are either experiencing peace or conflict, and that the cause of our experience is nothing external. Rather, it is a choice made in the mind. As peace becomes more appealing than conflict, we will more frequently choose it, until eventually we will choose nothing else, and identify fully with the part of our minds that remembers our truth. When this happens, we "accept completion." In that moment, all of our relationships will be "blessed" by this awareness, and we will have joined fully with our truth, which is everyone's truth. God is not literally "completed" in this, since obviously He cannot be incomplete. This is the Course's way of saying He will be remembered, and in this sense, brought into our completeness. The important thing is that this requires truly wanting *nothing* else, and abandoning *all* illusions. As long as there is one illusion we would interpose between ourselves and our truth we will not know our completion, because by clinging to the illusion we are actively denying the truth about ourselves. Since we do in fact spend great energy in pursuit of our idols, we do well not to judge ourselves for this mistake, but also to keep in mind: **"It is vain to worship idols in the hope of peace. God dwells within, and your completion lies in Him" (T.29.VII.6:2,3).**

Q #138: If it is inevitable that we will wake up, or at least remember our true Identity, then behaviorally would it be logical to do whatever one feels is most peaceful in the world? And so in many ways it doesn't really matter what others do or say. In fact, *A Course in Miracles* itself is quite irrelevant, if the waking process is inevitable. I mean isn't it just a matter of hanging around doing what one likes doing best and not being naive to the fact that the ego will jabber on nonsense regardless of our seemingly worldly activities?

A: While **"the outcome is as certain as God" (T.2.III.3:10)** and **"the acceptance of the Atonement by everyone is only a matter of time" (T.2.III.3:1)** -- simply because we could never really separate ourselves from God -- we are still making a deliberate choice right now to remain asleep in our dream of time. And for all of us, the pain of the thought of separation behind the dream will eventually become so intolerable that we will all at some point want to make a different choice, the choice to awaken (**T.2.III.3**). So the only question any of us needs to ask ourselves now is, how long do I want to remain in pain, asleep in time? If we do not want to be conscious of and accept responsibility for our choice to see ourselves as separate, Jesus tells us we can continue to temporize and procrastinate for a

time period at least as long as the time across which the separation has already occurred, that is, "millions of years"! (T.2.VIII.2:5).

Granted, all of this is illusory, and, from Jesus' perspective outside of time, it matters little: **"Nothing is ever lost but time, which in the end is meaningless. For it is but a little hindrance to eternity, quite meaningless to the real Teacher of the world"**(T.26.V.2:1,2). But Jesus also recognizes that this is not our experience here in time: **"Yet since you do believe in it [time], why should you waste it going nowhere, when it can be used to reach a goal as high as learning can achieve?...it is hard indeed to wander off, alone and miserable, down a road that leads to nothing and that has no purpose"** (T.26.V.2:3,6).

So we have a choice about how we want to use time and how long we want to remain in the experience of time. Yes, in the end, it won't matter, for we will have to remember who we really are -- that has never really changed. But while we still believe all of this is real, Jesus in his Course is telling us that the length of our time in time can be **"greatly shortened by miracles, the device for shortening but not abolishing time"** (T.2.VIII.2:6). But this means, if the Course is our path, that our relationships with our brothers are of central importance, for it is upon others that each of us has projected all the guilt and responsibility for the pain of separation that we don't want to see within ourselves. And so, as students of the Course, we will care what others do or say, not because we want to change them, but because our reactions to them can direct us to the unhealed places within our own mind. To avoid looking at our reactions to others, dismissing them as irrelevant to our waking process, would be to engage in denial, which is just another way of saying we are refusing to accept responsibility for our own decision to be separate. In the end, we will all see this, but the choice we have now is whether we want to acknowledge any of these projections now.

As difficult as looking at our brother to see our own **"secret sins and hidden hates"** (T.31.VIII.9:2) may seem to be, Jesus wants us to understand that not looking leads to even greater pain, for there is no hope for healing then. And so he encourages us, reminding us that this is a path we take *with* our brother: **"Think not the way to Heaven's gate is difficult at all. Nothing you undertake with certain purpose and high resolve and happy confidence, holding your brother's hand and keeping step to Heaven's song, is difficult to do"** (T.26.V.2:4,5; italics added).

Q#139: I listened to the tape set *Form vs. Content: Sex and Money*. It said that you project out from inside your beliefs about money. How do you find out exactly what your beliefs are so that you can change them?

Before considering how you may identify your beliefs about money, a little clarification of *A Course in Miracles* approach to all of our ego thoughts and beliefs may be helpful first. We want to become aware of them so that we can accept responsibility for choosing them, but not so that we can change them. That would put us in charge of the process of Atonement, a surefire formula for failure. The goal with the Course is that we make our unconscious thoughts conscious, accept responsibility for choosing them, recognize what purpose they serve in the ego's scheme, and then release them along with the guilt they necessarily entail to the healing light of the Holy Spirit or Jesus. But we don't want to try to change them! For that would make them real and would involve substituting one ego belief for another.

Money is simply an external form or symbol onto which we project our beliefs about ourselves. So what are your attitudes and feelings about money? By the way, there are no right or wrong, good or bad, answers to the questions that follow. All answers will reflect basic ego beliefs about yourself and others, of either a special love or special hate nature. In the end, we will realize they are neither right nor wrong, good nor bad, but simply untrue. But we first have to look at them, because we do believe them, and look with Jesus or the Holy Spirit beside us so that we can look openly and honestly.

Do you feel you never have enough? Are you afraid of losing the money you have? Does having money make you feel better or more secure about yourself? Do you save it as a symbol of security and safety against unforeseen dangers and obstacles? Or do you tend to spend it as quickly as you get it and are always in debt? Do you see having money as a symbol of status and success, a measure of your worth? If you don't have much money, do you try to pretend you have more? Or do you wear your poverty as a badge of specialness? If you have lots of money, do you like to flaunt it? Or do you try to keep a low profile about it? How do you feel about sharing your money with others or giving it away? Are you jealous or resentful of those who have more money than you? How do you feel your parents have been towards you with money? If you are in a relationship with someone else which involves joint management of money and resources, is there conflict around handling it? What is the nature of the disagreements you have and what judgments do you find yourself making about how the other handles money?

As you reflect on your answers to these and other related questions about money that may come to mind, you want then to get in touch with the underlying thoughts, feelings and beliefs that these represent. These may be thoughts and feelings of inadequacy, scarcity, deprivation, limitation, insecurity, fear, victimization, irresponsibility, shame and guilt, pride, triumph, superiority, generosity, power, control, and so on. The important recognition that you want to foster is that these are basic feelings about yourself that have nothing to do with money, or other people, or anything of the world. These are repercussions from seriously entertaining the thought of separation in your mind and wanting it to be true. For the thought of separation is nothing less than the desire to be separate from love, including a willingness to attack and destroy love in order to establish an individual self. And in that process we believe we have destroyed our own value. And so all of the accompanying feelings of worthlessness, which become too painful to hold in our mind and acknowledge, become projected out onto a world of our own making, with many convenient targets and repositories for those feelings, including money. And then those external symbols seem to be the problem, rather than the thought of separation in our mind through which we devalued our true Self. At that point, the ego thought system is well protected from the Holy Spirit's Atonement principle, which says separation is impossible except in illusory dreams and nothing has really happened to deprive us of the love that we are. But once we understand the ego's purpose for the world, including money, we can look at all of it differently, and know it is a window to our own unconscious mind. And now we can make a different choice, remembering our true Value as God's holy Son.

Q #140: I have been studying *A Course in Miracles* for a few years now and I am aware of the importance of the practice of asking for help. I am also aware of wanting and needing help. Whenever I attempt to ask for help, however, I become aware of the strong specialness component to my asking. For example I am now teaching again after many years of doing something entirely different. I am nervous about doing the job well, and try to ask for help so that I will be able to do a good job but am aware that the main reason for asking is that I want to be special both to my students and superiors. I try to talk to Jesus about this issue but have a lot of difficulty with talking to him and wonder how important it is to be able to have complete conversations with him. They usually seem to evaporate -- maybe I don't really trust that he is there. I would appreciate any suggestions that you have in dealing with this block that I have to this essential tool of the Course.

A: First of all, you should acknowledge yourself for recognizing the specialness thoughts that are behind your requests for help. That is a very big step. And then don't try to change them. Just allow yourself to see where they are coming from -- a concept of an inadequate self that feels it needs to enhance its status by projecting a good image. It's pretty clear which voice is speaking at that point. But if you can watch yourself doing this without judging yourself, then you are looking with Jesus at your ego, and this is the kind of help that he wants us to ask from him.

In our beginning practice with the Course, we usually want to ask Jesus for help with specific problems and concerns in our lives and this is only natural. That kind of asking can be helpful in developing a positive relationship with Jesus in our mind, no longer seeing him as the angry Judge who will call us to account for ourselves on the Day of Reckoning, as traditional Christianity portrays him. But you are

already beginning to see the limitations of this kind of asking -- it is fueled by a desire for specialness. That is a major insight and it can help you get more in touch with the genuine help that Jesus is holding out to us -- a help that allows us to look at the limitations we believe about ourselves without judging ourselves or feeling guilty about those thoughts, so that we can look beyond them to the truth about ourselves. The first section in *The Song of Prayer* pamphlet addresses the steps we take up **“the ladder of prayer”** as we progress in our practice of asking for help (S.1).

So your conversations with Jesus will change over time, and what you bring to him will shift as you grow into the teachings of the Course. Your present difficulty in sustaining your focus on him is simply a reflection of your fear of him and what he represents, for a part of you knows that he is leading you beyond your ego and the special self you are so identified with. You may find it helpful to dialogue with Jesus by writing down your thoughts as if in conversation with him, addressing him very specifically about what is on your mind and asking him in the process for help in recognizing the purpose behind your thoughts and how to uncover them without reinforcing the guilt in your mind. The process of writing may be helpful in maintaining your focus and exposing your ego thoughts, especially as you become more familiar and comfortable with the process. You may even want to keep the writing as a journal so that you can refer back to helpful conversations when the fear level becomes too high and you can't remember what you already know -- a common experience when our ego feels threatened. What is most important is not to become overly concerned about your resistance -- it is to be expected. Acknowledging it without fighting it will allow it to dissolve in your mind over time.

Q #141: Not to sound petty or like I'm whining or even that I have any regrets about hooking up with A Course in Miracles, but I have friends who, it seems, will never have to go through all the stuff I'm going through with the Course. This is not this easiest journey I could have picked. It seems like others can move through this journey with ease: they light a few candles, do some yoga, say a chant or two, and they're in bliss central, while I find myself in a scary Godzilla movie. I get centered and the fear goes away; but then it returns, again and again. It seems to be a long movie. But the Course is set up for a year. Will there ever be an ending to all this (like before my death) or maybe just an intermission? Any input will be very much appreciated.

A: No, it is not an easy journey, and you echo the sighs of many other students. Sometimes we just have to lighten up and learn how to sit back and enjoy the show. It is, after all, the undoing of what never happened. It doesn't feel like that, for sure; but we are simply choosing to watch reruns of the same old movie. When we are less afraid to approach the whole thing that way, and have not yielded to the temptation to deny our feelings, our internal experience will change for the better. We cannot judge where we are in the process, or where anyone else is either; time is part of the ego's trick to keep us clothed in our false identities. And the sin, guilt, and fear that have turned our minds into torture chambers which we vowed never to go near again, are just silly thoughts that we have invested with tremendous power. We would do well to accept Jesus' invitation to share his vision in seeing the seeming power of our egos as **“not strong enough to stop a button's fall, nor hold a feather”** (T.18.IX.6:4).

Just keep the faith! **“Have faith in only this one thing, and it will be sufficient: God wills you be in Heaven, and nothing can keep you from it, or it from you. Your wildest misperceptions, your weird imaginings, your blackest nightmares all mean nothing. They will not prevail against the peace God wills for you”** (T.13.XI.7:1,2,3). The only power Godzilla has is the power you give to him. He can be a monster or, like the Wizard of Oz, a cute little thing using amplifiers to convince you that he is something to be feared. It is your choice, and you probably know which choice Jesus would support. This would be the intermission. **“The outcome is as certain as God”** (T.2.III.3:10).

One final point: When we have completed the 365 lessons, we think we have finally “done the Course,” only to read the first line in the Epilogue: **“This course is a beginning, not an end”** (W.pII.ep.1:1). It is not set up as simply a one-year course, therefore. When we begin to “get it”; that is, when we begin to see clearly where it is leading us, we dig in our heels usually, and then settle in for a very long journey,

but only because we are too frightened to let go of our ego all at once in a given instant. It is a process that will take as long as we need it to take.

Q #142: I have been a keen student of *A Course in Miracles* for a good 12 years and find it the most appropriate spiritual path for me. Thinking of Jesus and his teachings has become a part of my life, a way of consciously forgiving myself and thus of course others as well. I also accept fully that all pain is some form of unforgiveness ("Certain it is that all distress does not appear to be but unforgiveness" [W.pl.193.4:1]). Now regardless of my practice, which is almost on a continual and absolutely unforced basis, parallel to whatever else I may be occupied with, various aches and pains and other ailments do occur at a level which makes me question the efficacy of my practice -- my only choice then remaining the same old magic, usually a pain killer. Even ardently repeating a maxim like "I am not a body. I am free. For I am still as God created me" [W.pl.rVI.3:3,4,5] during an attack seems quite ineffective. Is it basically still a very fearful subconscious that is at the bottom of this, or is it the ego taking me for a ride and having me believe that I have forgiven myself more than I really have?

A: You're trying so very hard, but you also want to be gentle and patient with yourself. It would be helpful not to try to evaluate your progress based on any feedback you feel your body is giving you. Aches and pains always reveal unhealed areas in the mind, and in that sense it is helpful to pay attention to them, but not as a yardstick against which to judge how well you are practicing forgiveness and whether you are passing or failing the Course.

Yes, there is still fear, as well as guilt, buried in your subconscious mind, and yes, your ego will always want to fool you about your progress, but also your lack of progress (**T.18.V.1:5,6**). All of that is to be expected while you still identify yourself as the body which has the name you answer to. For seeing yourself as a body means you still believe that the separation and its accompanying guilt are real and you still believe you need a defense against that guilt, which is the purpose the body serves. The pain, apparently in the body, is intended to distract you from its real source in the mind. So if you are willing to make the connection back to the mind and see the cause -- unforgiveness -- that is all you really need do.

If there is a pain killer that seems to be helpful in relieving your pain, by all means continue to use it. So what if it is not the ultimate healing? Know that Jesus is not judging you for what you may see as your weakness and inability to forgive completely. Taking medication is a gentler and more loving way of dealing with your pain than trying to persuade yourself that the pain is not real by using words from the Course as affirmations to shout down the ego and cover over what you still believe about yourself -- that you are a body. It will always be more helpful simply to get in touch with what you still believe and why, knowing, as you suggest, that it is only fear that holds you in those beliefs. By acknowledging and looking at the fear, you will be doing your part in its healing.

For a further consideration of issues related to the questions you raise, you may wish to look at [Question #128](#).

Q #143: I know that *A Course in Miracles* is not aimed at the level of behavior and it indicates that depression is an attempt to attack God. Therefore, I have been angry with myself for being depressed about the war with Iraq, thinking that I should be "above" that. Was it wrong that I had hoped that peace would prevail on a physical level? Is it an indication of my specialness that I am depressed that it hasn't?

A: It is quite normal to hope that peace would prevail on a physical level; and many other people have also felt depressed about the war and about the world situation in general. The only mistake you are making is being angry with yourself and thinking that you should be beyond depression.

In connecting depression with blasphemy (**T.10.V**), Jesus is calling our attention, in a dramatic way, to the effects in our minds of giving our allegiance to the ego (specifically the god of sickness), rather than to his healing love. When you become depressed, all that you have done is identify with your ego's view of things. But, more than likely, you identify with the ego in many other ways throughout the day. So why would you be surprised by this form? It is easy to forget that simply feeling scared when your supply of oxygen is cut off is an ego reaction. We have ego reactions all the time, and it is a mistake to have a hierarchy among them. Any time you are tempted to judge yourself by feeling you should be beyond a, b, or c, you should stop right there and remind yourself that that judgment is coming from your ego, and therefore should not be taken seriously. In his kind and gentle guidance of us, Jesus would never utter those words of judgment.

Wanting there to be peace in the world is quite normal, to repeat; but it can also be viewed in the context of your special relationship with your identity as an individual in "your" world. In this sense, your identity as an individual would be more secure and less problematic if there were no conflicts in the world. The impatience and depression about the turmoil might be reminding you of the profound insecurity you feel on a deep level, because, somewhere in your mind, you know that your existence as an individual is not authentic. In your wrong/ego mind you believe (as we all do) that your existence came at God's expense. A world without major upheavals thus can be a defense against that insecurity, which is always present in the mind that believes it has separated from God. Also, since we are the ones who made the world to replace our true home in Heaven -- thereby saying that we could get along without God just fine -- then when the world "doesn't work right," we would feel as if we had failed. Depression would be one response to that sense of failure, for once again we have been reminded that we have denied God (blasphemy).

On the other hand, for some people, being preoccupied with the chaos and strife in the world protects them from having to deal with the chaos and strife in their minds. But this defense, as is the case with all defenses, reinforces their unconscious guilt, because they would then want there to be calamities in the world to serve their own need for protection from their minds.

The good news that Jesus imparts to us in the Course is that true peace is not dependent on anything external in order to be what it is. He helps us realize that peace in the world, even if it were achieved, would always be a fragile peace, and therefore would not bring us the comfort we long for. It would depend on the presence of specific conditions, and it would require guardians, or a "peace-keeping force," as governments typically describe them. The peace of mind that Jesus offers us is simply restored to us; it is not something we must earn. And, thankfully, it is restored simply by our choosing against the interferences to its presence, which means that we must first become aware of how we interfere with it, and how we defend against it. This would be our own personal "peace-keeping force" -- our ongoing vigilance for our attacks against our Self. Once these interferences are gone, peace will flow through us naturally, but we then would have no investment in how it is extended, or whether it is received by others when offered.

Q #144: How would one deal with anxiety from the perspective of *A Course in Miracles*? If you've used cognitive behavioral techniques to deal with feelings of anxiety, and you've looked at your anxiety from a psychotherapeutic angle, and you also approach it as a student with the Course's principles but still find yourself anxious in a particular situation, what are you doing wrong?

A: You don't say how specifically you have approached your anxiety using the Course's principles. But the fact that you are continuing to feel anxiety does not mean that you are doing anything wrong other than continuing to identify with your ego thought system. Maintaining a false separate identity is very anxiety-producing as we have set it up in our mind.

The Course refers to the source of anxiety in several passages: "**When you are anxious, realize that anxiety comes from the capriciousness of the ego**" (**T.4.IV.4:1**). "**The ingeniousness of the ego to**

preserve itself is enormous, but it stems from the very power of the mind the ego denies. This means that the ego attacks what is preserving it, which must result in extreme anxiety" (T.7.VI.3:1,2). "If you...distort reality you will experience anxiety, depression and ultimately panic, because you are trying to make yourself unreal" (T.9.I.14:4). By establishing a false ego self, we believe we have set ourselves up in opposition to God, Whom we perceive as an insurmountable force Who will in the end seize back what we have stolen from Him -- our separate, individual existence. So trying to maintain that identity has to arouse intense anxiety.

You also don't say what the particular anxiety-arousing situation is, but it must be a symbol in your mind for the separation, which means that it is a situation in which you are perceiving your interests as separate from, and so in competition with, others. It does not matter who you perceive as right or justified in the situation, the fact that you're not recognizing your shared interests at a deeper level with everyone else in the situation is the source of the anxiety. For it is a reminder of your initial attack on God, when you perceived your interests as separate from His.

The first step in dealing with your anxiety is to recognize that you have displaced this existential anxiety on to an external situation so that you do not remember its source in the mind, where you could do something about it. Jesus points out how we deceive ourselves: **"Even if he is fully aware of anxiety he does not perceive its source as his own ego identification, and he always tries to handle it by making some sort of insane 'arrangement' with the world. He always perceives this world as outside himself, for this is crucial to his adjustment. He does not realize that he makes this world, for there is no world outside of him" (T.12.III.6:5,6,7).**

Once we return our focus from the outer to the inner, where Jesus or the Holy Spirit are waiting for us, we can ask for Their help in seeing the real source of anxiety -- the belief in separation -- differently. By joining with Them and asking for Their help, we have moved beyond separate interests. For we are now joined with their love, which reminds us that the Love of God that we thought we had attacked and destroyed remains unchanged and available in our mind.

Q #145: In answering Question #74, the statement was made that "either we have chosen to reinforce our belief in separation or to undo this belief, and there is never an instant when we are not making this choice." It is really difficult to deal with a decision you have made when you don't even know what it is you have done. What is a simple way of knowing that we are making the choice to undo separation?

A: If you are perceiving another's interests as the same as yours, you are undoing the separation. If you respect another person's choice for the ego, do not take his attacks personally, and see only a call for help mirroring your own, you are undoing the separation. If you would rather be happy than right, you are undoing the separation. In most cases, though, it is easier to recognize when we are upholding the separation, because that is what we do most of the time. For example, it is almost second nature to us to perceive other people's interests and goals as clashing with ours, as it is almost second nature to us to get upset over what other people are doing, and then oppose them and try to get them to "see the error of their ways." We are right and they are wrong! So when we *don't* see another's interests as separate from our own, when we *don't* take sides, when we *don't* oppose, we are undoing the separation. We are speaking here, though, only about what takes place in one's mind. We are not talking about behavior. Perceiving others' interests as the same as ours means recognizing that we all share the same insanity (the wrong mind) and the same sanity (the right mind). The forms become irrelevant. We all share the same hell of the ego, and we all share the same longing to go home and be met with love not punishment.

We think we truly want to get beyond all thoughts of separation and return to our home in Heaven; but our fear of totally undoing our belief in separation is far more intense than we normally realize, because on a deep level we know that to undo the separation is to undo the individual identity we work so hard to

sustain. Most students experience strong resistance to letting go, as witnessed to by the recurrence of grievances and conflict. By not judging ourselves for these thoughts, and being more and more consistent in bringing them to the love of Jesus in our right minds, we gradually undo the guilt that is the source of our perceptions of ourselves and others.

Q #146: I have been a student of *A Course in Miracles* for a little over a year. I thought I had only loving feelings towards Jesus, and therefore I have been perplexed about another part of me that seems to be fearful of Jesus' love and closeness -- especially since my goal of being a student of the Course is to join with him and practice forgiveness. Also, I was thinking that since the decision making part of my mind had already decided there must be another way (i.e., choose Jesus as my teacher instead of the ego), why would part of my mind now tell Jesus to stay away from me and not to hurt me? Can you help me understand this?

A: This is a good example of the split mind spoken of in the Course. One part is sane, reflecting Heaven's love; the other part is insane, filled with the hatred of the ego. We all -- as part of the one Son of God -- have both parts, and our decision maker is always choosing one or the other. Jesus reminds us time and time again in the Course that there are only these two choices open to us. We can usually tell by our experience whether we have chosen the ego or the Holy Spirit as our teacher, but we are generally not consciously aware of making the choice. Jesus teaches us, however, that even though our decisions seem to take place out of our awareness, that really is not what happens. See for example, **Lesson 136, paragraphs 3,4,5.**

While other factors may be responsible for the fear in individual cases, in general we can say that the ego part of our minds would have to be intensely afraid of Jesus and also hate him because of what he represents. What sustains the ego is guilt, and therefore someone such as Jesus who represents the end of guilt would be hated and feared. Thus, **"to the ego, the guiltless are guilty" (T.13.II.4:2).** Jesus represents the end of our identity as an ego, so to the extent to which we identify with our egos, we will fear and hate him. Of course that is not our total identity, but that is what we must learn, and what Jesus goes to great lengths to teach us. So until we can let go of our identification with the thought system of the ego, we will want to keep Jesus at a safe distance, at the very least, and at other times we will experience outright hatred of him. The idea is not to feel guilty about this fear and hatred, but to understand where it is coming from, so that we can give ourselves a chance to make a different choice. Jesus already knows about it, which is why he asks us in the Course to forgive him **(T.19.IV.B.6)** and why he talks about the **"bitter idols [that] have been made of him who would be only brother to the world" (C.5.5:7,8).** We project our own guilt on to him and give him our own ego-based traits. This is largely the image of Jesus portrayed in biblical Christianity. But in essence, the true Jesus, the Jesus of *A Course in Miracles*, stands for the opposite of everything we are -- as egos. That engenders tremendous conflict in our relationship with him. We both love him and are drawn to him, but we also fear him and would rather he be more like us so that we do not have to change.

The only mistake we can make is to deny these "blasphemous" (to the ego) thoughts and hide them, and then attempt to replace them with lovely, beautiful thoughts of our dear sweet Jesus. This defense will never work; it will lead only to further guilt, which will lead to an endless cycle of projection and attack. The most helpful approach is to look calmly at these thoughts, not be horrified by them or ashamed of them, and bring them to the true Jesus in our right minds. He will lovingly and gently teach us where they came from, and help us distinguish clearly between the gifts the ego offers us and the gifts he offers us.

Q #147: How can I approach Jesus to bring peace to someone else's troubled, fearful, restless mind while not being able to practically communicate with this other person (either verbally or otherwise)? Is it at all possible, because it is often (to put it mildly) hard enough to bring peace to one's own mind?

A: Since *A Course in Miracles* tells us that peace is the result of choosing to identify with the Holy Spirit or Jesus in our minds, it is not really possible to ask Jesus to bring peace to someone's mind (**M.5.III.1:1,2,3,3:6**). Moreover, Jesus does not bring peace to our own minds. The Course teaches that a lack of peace is the result of having made a choice in the mind to identify with the ego thought system in some way. This results in a feeling of guilt, which replaces peace in our awareness. This person's fearful, restless mind is calling for help. To be helpful to them, we must first recognize that this is the choice they have made, and acknowledge the ability of their mind to choose differently. We then review our own mind for any judgments we are holding against this person, and any disquiet we may be experiencing, thus recognizing our own need for healing. Our "prayer" for someone else begins with our asking the Holy Spirit or Jesus for help in letting go of our judgments and misperceptions about ourselves and the other person. This is because if we perceive another person as in need, or lacking peace, we have first perceived this lack in ourselves, as you point out. If we do let go of our misperceptions and accept the Holy Spirit's correction, we will experience peace. The peace in our mind is then extended throughout the Sonship; it joins with the peace that is present in everyone's mind, whether or not they choose to be aware of it. This is the process by which we "offer" peace to a brother. The real action is always in our own mind. There is no need to communicate externally with the other person. By choosing peace ourselves, we are a reminder of the peace that is theirs, but neither we nor Jesus can choose for someone else, as He tells us: **"I cannot choose for you, [or someone else] but I can help you make your own right choice" (T.3.IV.7:11)**. Once we have allowed the Holy Spirit's thoughts to replace ours, he will guide us to act in a way that would be loving toward this person, or not to act at all. This will be the under the guidance of the Holy Spirit if we have in fact done our own "homework," as outlined above. This is how we can live the following prayer from the Text, which holds the answer to your quest for peace as well as your friend's: **"I desire this holy instant for myself, that I may share it with my brother, whom I love. It is not possible that I can have it without him, or he without me. Yet it is wholly possible for us to share it now. And so I choose this instant as the one to offer to the Holy Spirit, that His blessing may descend on us, and keep us both in peace" (T.18.7:3,4,5,6)**.

Q #148: If we were all in a state of Oneness with God how could we have had the thought of separation in that "tiny, mad moment"? What would have possessed us to leave that oneness which was peace and bliss? And how could it have happened? What was the scenario do you think?

A: This is the "famous" question. It is famous because it is the most frequently asked question of students of *A Course in Miracles* (please see [Question #10](#)). The "famous" answer is that it is not really a question, but a statement that the separation did in fact occur (**C.in.4**; see also *The Most Commonly Asked Questions About A Course in Miracles*, Kenneth Wapnick, pp.17-22)—that is the assumption behind the question. The Course teaches us that the separation never did occur. In fact, it is impossible for the Son to separate from the Father. With this as the starting point, the Course goes on, at great length, to explain how we "got here," since we believe we are here. The explanation it gives us is a kind of myth, explaining something that could never happen. It tells us that the Son of God fell asleep, and dreamed a dream of separation: **"You are at home in God, dreaming of exile but perfectly capable of awakening to reality" (T.10.I.2:1)**. Our experience as bodies in the world is a dream. Nothing has happened, and we are in truth still at Home in God.

What *A Course in Miracles* tells us "happened" in the mind of the sleeping Son is a wish for more than everything: **"No one who comes here but must still have hope, some lingering illusion, or some dream that there is something outside of himself that will bring happiness and peace to him. If everything is in him this cannot be so. And therefore by his coming, he denies the truth about himself, and seeks for something more than everything, as if a part of it were separated off and found where all the rest of it is not" (T.29.VII.2:1, 2,3)**. Enticed by the "rush" of being autonomous individuals, thinking this will bring a happiness beyond the "peace and bliss" you mention, the Son chooses this thought of being separated from his Source. Although this seems to have occurred millions of years ago in some distant forgotten past, it is actually occurring instant by instant each time the choice is made to believe the separation is real. This is the only "explanation" for how we seem to be here, so

real, so "alive," so identified with bodies. It is a choice, and the Course tells us this choice is purposeful. It establishes our separate identities, which we have learned to prefer to the truth of who we are. We prefer this made up identity because we very mistakenly believe this will give us happiness. We have convinced ourselves that the ego is right and God is wrong about who we are. Clinging to this belief keeps the separation "alive and well" in our minds. This is what makes it happen, over and over in our minds. Again, the thought that drives us is that autonomy is better than unity, God is not enough, and the ego will give us the "more" that we seek.

In summary, the foundation of the Course's teaching rests on this very important recognition of the power of the mind to choose. We are told that we chose wrongly by choosing to believe the separation occurred, and we are urged to **"choose once again" (T.31.VIII.)**. In every situation where we find ourselves in conflict, pain or uneasiness we find the opportunity to question our experience in the light of this teaching and choose again: **"The images you make cannot prevail against what God Himself would have you be. Be never fearful of temptation, then, but see it as it is; another chance to choose again" (T.31.VIII.4:1,2).**

Q #149: If one is terribly ill and in pain with cancer and, as a student of *A Course in Miracles*, strives to have the Holy Spirit help with forgiveness and peace in the matter, but still suffers physically, what does this mean? The Course indicates that when our mind is healed we will feel no pain.

A: You already know the answer to your question! When our mind is healed, we will feel no pain. Until our mind is healed, we will feel pain. And because our mind is not healed, we will experience pain as if it were in the body, caused by factors outside of our control, rather than recognizing that it is in the mind that has thought it could separate itself from love -- a very painful state. And that is how we protect the thought of separation in our split mind.

We use pain to convince ourselves that the body is real, for we still want the body to be real. Jesus tells us that **"pain is a wrong perspective. When it is experienced in any form, it is a proof of self-deception... Pain is but witness to the Son's mistakes in what he thinks he is... The body is the Son of God, corruptible in death" (W.pl.190.1:1,2; 2:3; 3:7).**

What is most important though is that, while we continue to experience pain -- whether it's the pain of cancer or the pain of a broken leg or the pain of emotional abuse or any other form of pain we experience -- we do not judge ourselves for feeling it. That would serve no purpose but the ego's. Because of our fear of losing ourselves, we heal the pain in our mind through forgiveness in small steps.

And in those moments when we accept that we do not know the truth about ourselves but there is a Comforter Who does, with Whom we are always joined in perfect peace and joy, then the seemingly painful concerns of the body will fade from our awareness. Because of our fear, we will most likely not be ready to embrace fully the healing in the mind and release our limited bodily identity, and so we will turn again back to pain for the defense that it provides. But with each moment of recognition, shared in the holy instant of healing, our investment in guilt and pain will diminish. And we will never again be totally convinced that the world, or anything outside our mind, can cause us pain.

For a consideration of some other issues related to the question you raise, you may also wish to look at [Question #142](#).

Q #150: I attacked someone but the next day I imploringly asked for forgiveness and truly forgave all that had hurt me and made me attack. Since then, however, because of the attack, the other person has

broken off all communication. I have tried to renew it but without success. Keeping in mind that it was my attack in the first place that brought this situation about, how can I look at it with Jesus and regain my peace of mind? Obviously I have caused irrevocable pain.

A: You may first want to begin by looking at the thought that you have caused "irrevocable pain." Believe it or not, it is arrogant to claim such power for yourself. You may have reinforced a perception of pain that your friend already held, but you can not be the cause of it. To believe that you could is to deny the power of your friend's mind to choose its experiences, and to see your mind as more powerful. And that is the arrogance.

This is not to say that you may not have been unkind, even cruel, in your attack. But none of us can feel attacked unless we want to feel attacked (**T.28.VI.4:3,4,5,6,7**). And we all want to feel attacked so that the guilt we carry in our own mind over the separation -- believing we have attacked and destroyed God (another arrogant thought!) -- can be projected on to someone else.

The pain is already there in each of our own minds, by our own choice, caused by our own thoughts (**W.pl.190.5:1,2,3,4,5**). When we think we feel pain over someone else's attack, the pain that has always been there in our mind is just brought to the surface so that we can attribute it to someone else -- *always* the ego's goal.

So, in genuine humility, let yourself off the hook for how your friend feels. If you can recognize that this friend simply shares the same ego-based thought system that you do, and that you both have been calling out for the help that only forgiveness can offer, then you can become a reminder to your friend that you both have the same choice to see the situation differently. And that is all that you need to do. That recognition in your mind reinforces the power of decision in your friend's mind to make a different choice about how to perceive the situation. Whether you at this point say or do anything else with your friend will not be your concern. Nor will your friend's readiness to accept what you are offering be your concern. For you will have placed the Holy Spirit in charge of the forgiveness process, knowing that whatever is needed for healing has already been provided.

Q #151: This is in reply to the answer for Question #70 concerning beauty and form. If there is only Divine Mind of God, shared with all of creation; then how does the responder explain the limitation of Divine Mind within the use of man in the co-creation of his world of form? I believe that each of us uses this Divine Mind though its potency or efficacy is not as great if left untainted by our ego insane applications. *A Course in Miracles* is a work which cannot be strictly taken in singular quotes; as it is a conversation of the Lord attempting to raise the level of the mind (now dualistic) into a singular higher divine aspect with the assistance of the Holy Spirit so the minds fullest potential can be realized while it still exists on this plane. God, knowing that it was unreal and nonthreatening to His Kingdom, allowed His Sons the lessons of miscreation so that wisdom and knowledge could achieve more prudent activities within their growth and return home.

A. The Course makes it clear throughout that anything of form could not come from God, and therefore must be illusory. God creates only like Himself, which is not something we can understand in our separated state. All of the references in the Course to *co-creation* pertain to Heaven. This is also true of the term *creations*.

There is no life outside Heaven. Where God created life, there life must be. In any state apart from Heaven life is illusion. At best it seems like life; at worst, like death....Life not in Heaven is impossible, and what is not in Heaven is not anywhere. Outside of Heaven, only the conflict of illusion stands; senseless, impossible and beyond all reason, and yet perceived as an eternal barrier to Heaven. Illusions are but forms. Their content is never true (T.23.II.19).

Jesus' purpose in the Course is help us get in touch with the part of our minds that is deliberately choosing to reject and deny our true Identity, replace It with a false identity, and then project the responsibility for this onto others in our lives whom we perceive as victimizing us. This has nothing to do with the Divine Mind, Who knows nothing of this journey into madness.

You need not agree with what the Course teaches about the Divine Mind, a term that actually never appears in the Course. Its purpose is to lead us back home to God, and if you resonate more with the way another system presents this journey, then that is the path you should follow. We are all children of one Father.

Q #152-a: In a few places in the text and in the lessons, Jesus says that we will "dissolve into God" at the end of time. To be straight up, I don't like the idea of dissolving into God. I know that this is my ego speaking for me, and I accept that we are just dreaming this whole thing, that I have already dissolved into God, and I must not have gone away, because I'm still here, so to speak. Yet in my heart of hearts, I'm really afraid of loosing everything when I stop dreaming. This is probably the reason I have not stopped the dream. I understand that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are gently awakening me through Atonement and this feels right. Yet, "dissolving into God" feels, sounds, like going into nothingness. Can you help me with my fear?

#152-b: According to *A Course in Miracles*, does the world and all that I love in it disappear when I awaken from the dream? I ask because I don't see life only as the source of sin, guilt, and fear. I would not want to lose the memories of loved ones and the moments of beauty, courage, creativity, etc., that I've known in my existence, illusory as it might be.

A: (a) Most people who practice the Course feel the way you do. They are afraid that "disappearing into the Heart of God" means oblivion and nothingness. Feeling this way is quite normal; and you don't want to try to talk yourself out of it. That being said, though, it is obvious that it could only be the ego voicing its own fear of extinction in the presence of love, however. Therefore, when we identify with the ego -- which we do whenever we value our individual existence -- we definitely will fear our return to the Oneness of Heaven. But Jesus is aware of our dilemma -- though it is a false dilemma -- and so he reassures us in many, many places in the Course that we will awaken from this nightmare dream only when we are ready to. It is a process that is mindful of our fear and moves in accord with our readiness. As you have recognized, his is a gentle, comforting approach: **"Fear not that you will be abruptly lifted up and hurled into reality" (T.16.VI.8:1; see also T.27.VIII.13).**

There is an interim stage before we awaken in which we continue our lives here, but with less guilt, less anxiety, less anger, etc. We become more and more comfortable with a different way of being here, as we learn that we feel better when we forgive than when we are boiling inside with hatred and grievances and the pain of competing interests and goals. We gradually let go of our identification with the values the ego has held out to us and identify instead with the values of forgiveness that Jesus holds out to us. In other words, it is not that we lose our self and then just disappear; but rather, we shift in what we choose to identify with, and then that is what we become.

This process could be likened to a journey with many planned stops, but no exact timetable. You stop at various places along the way and get used to the new climate and vista. And as you continue the journey, you get to know your tour guide better and become more at ease with him. He never forces you to leave a place you don't really want to leave, and stays there with you until you are ready to move on. He has no timetable that he makes you adhere to. When he tells you that the next stop will be even better, you more than likely would choose to continue the journey because everything he has shown you so far has been rather nice. Your trust in your guide grows, even though sometimes you get annoyed because he rouses you out of bed too early in the morning; but then you realize he did it only because he couldn't wait to get on the road and show you the next beautiful place. The ride is often bumpy, but you forget about that

once you are comfortably settled in at your next stop. You even begin to think that your guide actually knows you well and that he knows exactly what will make you happy.

That is the way Jesus leads us. He knows that we will not lose anything and that we will be happier than we ever thought possible when we complete the journey with him; but he also sees how frightened we are of plunging into what we think is the unknown and our certain oblivion. So he gently takes us by the hand and patiently lets us go at our own pace, assuring us again and again that we will lose nothing and regain everything. Until that is our own perception, we can stay wherever we are, and know that Jesus is loving us at every instant. We cannot experience the fullness of that love, though, because we are still resisting it out of fear. But we will experience as much of his love as we let in. Time is illusory, so how long this takes is irrelevant. Jesus' love is not conditional on time or place.

(b) When we awaken from our nocturnal dreams, we usually forget what we dreamt about, because we know "it was just a dream." The same thing will be true when we awaken from the dream of our lives as individuals apart from God and Heaven. Preceding this awakening, of course, will be a period in which we experience ourselves as the dreamer of the dream, and we will recognize that all bodily existence, including our own, amounts to nothing but figures in the dream. We will know that we are not our bodies, nor are our loved ones their bodies, and that we are all joined now on another level that reflects our true Identity. Our attraction then will be to the radiant beauty of our sinlessness as God's Son. The love in which we are all joined and which transcends anything that could be experienced on a bodily level would totally fill our minds. Nothing else would be in our awareness, for we would have gladly let go of whatever had blocked love's presence from our awareness.

Q #153: In "To Be Or Not To Be," Ken stated that we all attempt to cheat death in various ways, only to preserve our individuality. Within the illusion doesn't reincarnation do the same thing? We "live," we "die," only to "live" again, just to keep the ego alive and well. At some point we must choose the right-minded tape....Could you please comment on this.

A. Yes, reincarnation preserves our individuality, as well as the illusion of time. However, the purpose of multiple reincarnations -- as traditionally defined in the different systems -- is to have as many opportunities as are needed to complete one's learning, so that the cycle of birth and death may be ended permanently. In *A Course in Miracles*, as you probably know, Jesus states that **"in the ultimate sense, reincarnation is impossible. There is no past or future, and the idea of birth into a body has no meaning either once or many times. Reincarnation cannot, then, be true in any real sense. Our only question should be, 'Is the concept helpful?'" (M.24.1:1,2,3,4).** And in the discussion that follows, he concludes that any belief that leads to progress in accepting the Atonement for ourselves should be honored **(M.24.6).** Thus it comes down to *form* and *content*.

Q #154: After studying *A Course in Miracles* for 4 years, I am currently volunteering for a Catholic organization in the Philippines, living in a small religious community and working in the slums of Manila. I was conscious of the differences between the teachings of the Course and Christian Catholicism before going to Manila, from reading Ken Wapnick's *A Course in Miracles and Christianity: A Dialogue*, and *Forgiveness & Jesus*. However my desire to join this Christian organization was strong and I thought that it would not prevent me from studying the Course and applying its principles on my own. However, I find that I am getting more and more disturbed by joining the prayers or readings when it is proclaimed that Jesus suffered and died for our sins, etc. Even though the teachings are so different, I don't want to use the Course to separate myself from the Christians, and I am asking you how is it possible to be faithful to the Course and to my community and avoid compromise?

A: You have placed yourself in a very challenging situation, but one in which, if you are willing, there is much you can learn on your path of forgiveness. If you can remember that the Course is only concerned about content or purpose and not form or ritual, you can use your circumstances to deepen your understanding and practice of the Course's principles. It is only your ego that would want to make the differences in beliefs and practices a matter of judgment in order to separate yourself from the rest of your community. You are already aware of this temptation in yourself, and that is very helpful, for that is an obstacle within your mind to the experience of the love that is already present within you. You can respect your friends' choices for their spiritual path without having to accept and embrace those beliefs for yourself. At the same time, since the Course's focus is only on your own inner thoughts and beliefs, there is no reason that you can't ask for the Holy Spirit's help in using all those rituals and forms in which you are expected to participate simply as opportunities to join with them in the form in which they can accept you. For once you are able to release the judgments about the differences in beliefs that you are holding on to, all that will remain is the love within your mind that you wish to share with them. You do not describe any external conflict with the others, but only an internal conflict, and there really is no need to make them aware of your differences in belief, unless you were to feel strongly guided to do so. For your goal is not to change them but simply to accept them as they are (T.9.III.6:4).

Q #155: I have been a student of *A Course in Miracles* for a little under a year. I would appreciate clarification on something that I just read in the text. Jesus speaks of the "immediacy of salvation," and that the reason someone will not experience this immediacy is because there is still a small desire to be separate, and to hold onto guilt and unforgiveness. I have suffered with very disabling panic attacks for ten years, and I can completely accept and acknowledge that I have created this condition, and that my desire to be separate, guilty, and unforgiving are the erroneous thoughts that I have held onto. It is my deepest yearning to heal and release these misperceptions, because the pain of suffering this anxiety is completely unbearable and unacceptable to me. As great as my acknowledgment of my responsibility and my willingness to have my misperceptions corrected, I continue to suffer. Where is my error? Why has my deep acknowledgment and willingness not been enough to create the miracle, the immediacy of salvation promised by Jesus?

A: In the section you refer to, Jesus speaks of the space that we would maintain between ourselves and our brother as little, but because the space is small does not mean we should minimize the tremendous investment we have in keeping that distance intact. Our whole identification with this self we believe we are is maintained by keeping the thought of separation real in our mind, along with its projection into the external world as space between our body and our brother's. And so we have a tremendous fear of losing our self if we let go completely of all of our grievances and thoughts of attack now. Jesus comments on this fear: **"Salvation would wipe out the space you see between you still, and let you instantly become as one. And it is here you fear the loss would lie" (T.26.VIII.3:4,5).**

So you want to learn to respect the depth of your fear, reflected in your panic attacks. The goal is to join with Jesus in looking at your fear, asking for his help in understanding its deeper source and purpose, buried in the part of the mind that wants to maintain its individual, separate existence. Patience with yourself, acknowledging that this is a process that will almost certainly take time, is also important. Resisting the feelings only pushes them down and maintains their intensity.

Salvation is immediate in the sense that in any instant, if you are willing to let go of your investment in sin and guilt and fear, even temporarily, the peace that is ever-present in your mind can be your experience - until you make the choice for guilt again as a result of re-identifying with the ego and fear. With repeated practice, as you are ready and willing, you will come to realize that that is no sin, but only a mistaken choice that will become increasingly conscious in your mind.

You do not say whether you have sought any kind of professional help for your panic attacks. Looking for outside agents (e.g., doctors, therapists, medication) to assist you in dealing with your symptoms can in

fact be one expression of your willingness to no longer see yourself as separate and alone. It is only kind to be willing to open yourself to the help you need, in whatever form you are presently willing to accept (**T.2.IV.4,5; M.5.II.2,3**).

For other questions that are relevant in various ways to the question you raise, you may wish to read Questions #[128](#), [142](#) and [148](#).

Q #156: I am very new to *A Course in Miracles*, and have read the introduction several times in hopes of having this question answered: Who is authoring the book? Is it the Voice, the Holy Spirit, Christ? Helen states that it is the "Voice" who dictates the text. How is the Voice different from God if it's God's Voice? I'm just having problems when the text switches to first person. Mentally, whom do I address? As I'm reading and feeling inspired, my comprehension or absorption of what is being read gets detoured by my mind asking, very loudly, "Who is this?"

A: Helen Schucman identified the "voice" she heard as that of Jesus. There was no doubt in her mind about this as she scribed the Course. (See Question #110) Therefore, the first person statements in the Course do refer to Jesus. The voice is not the voice of God, however. Neither does Jesus state that he is speaking for God. According to the Course, God does not speak words to us in the dream, nor does He "hear our prayers." The "voice" is different from God because it is part of the dream. It is a reflection of truth, but it is not truth. As so clearly stated in the in the workbook **"God is" (W.169.5:4)**, and in His Being knows only our truth, which is that we are His one Son, who never left Heaven.

The answer to your question lies in understanding the Course's use of symbols. These symbols include "persons" such as Jesus, the Holy Spirit, as well as images, words, and the Course itself. All are symbols for that part of the mind of the Sonship that remembers God. They reflect the truth of who we are, and in somewhat different ways, they are the reminders of our truth, and the guides who will help us return to God. Specifically, the Course refers to the Holy Spirit as the "Voice for God," meaning -- the Voice that speaks *for* God, and as "God's Voice." Clearly this is a metaphor, since God does not have a voice and, as noted earlier, does not speak to us in the dream. When the Course invites us to "ask" -- whether Jesus, the Holy Spirit, or God -- it is actually inviting us to turn to our own right mind for guidance. It uses symbols and metaphors, because we are so out of touch with the fact that we have a mind. In its wisdom, the Course has used all its symbols carefully and purposefully. It meets us on our level, using dualistic language for a teaching that reflects nondualism. It seems to imply that God is a person Who hears our prayers, answers us, even "weeps," yearning for our return. These are all metaphors used to help us understand that we are loved, not condemned for our seeming sin, as the ego would tell us. You may use whichever is most helpful for you.

It is helpful for us to use these images and symbols until we learn that we do indeed have a right mind, and can access it directly. By then we probably will have no need for any symbol and no need to "ask." We will have accepted the truth about ourselves as spirits, not bodies; innocent, not guilty. The right-minded loving response to any situation will flow through us. It is important, however, to be aware of any resistance, as apparently you have been in your study so far. Our goal in studying and practicing the Course is to learn that we do have a mind, that we do have a choice, that there is another way of looking at any situation in the dream, that *our* way is based on the belief that separation is real, and that the Holy Spirit and Jesus are here to teach us that there is no separation. Again, it does not matter to whom we address our asking, or what mental image we use. The important thing is that we ask, and not rely on our usual ego interpretation.

Q #157: In his teaching, Ken Wapnick says that God doesn't even know that we exist; that we are here in the world. Where in *A Course in Miracles* does it say that, or what passage implies that? I don't have a

problem with the statement, because I understand that in the Course "existence" refers to our belief in the ego, the belief that we are bodies, and "being" refers to our state of oneness in Heaven. So it would make sense that God does not "know" us in our ego state. But can you clarify where it comes from? Also, where in the Course does Jesus make reference to the "decision maker" that Ken refers to so often?

A: The statement that God does not even know that we exist, as you suggest, follows from an understanding of the Course's metaphysics. The self we believe we are, here in the world, is an illusory projection of an illusory thought in an illusory split mind. It has no reality. God, Who is total Oneness, can not know anything that is not a part of that total Oneness, and His knowing cannot involve a separate observer and an observed. If God knew of our existence in this world, the separation would be real. But the Course asserts over and over again that the separation never happened in reality -- the principle of the Atonement (e.g., T.2.I.4:4; T.2.VII.6:7,8,9).

Although the specific wording you ask about is never used in the Course, there are a number of passages that clearly imply that God does not know of our existence here. Among them are the following: **"God and His creations remain in surety, and therefore know that no miscreations exist" (T.3.IV.7:1). "God did create spirit in His Own Thought and of a quality like to His Own. There is nothing else" (T.3.V.7:3,4).** A little later, speaking of our self and God's Self, Jesus observes, **"They are fundamentally irreconcilable, because spirit cannot perceive and the ego cannot know. They are therefore not in communication and can never be in communication" (T.4.I.2:11,12).** And in the next section: **"The ego's ceaseless attempts to gain the spirit's acknowledgement and thus establish its own existence are useless. Spirit in its knowledge is unaware of the ego. It does not attack it; it merely cannot conceive of it at all" (T.4.II.8:5,6,7).**

The word *decision maker* as Ken has used it in his teaching is not found in the Course itself. The Course's one use of that phrase speaks of our resistance to recognizing the power of decision that resides in the mind, preferring instead to see **"the body... [as] the decision maker" (M.5.II.1:7).** Although that one instance is not describing the mind, the point being made is that the mind and not the body *is* the decision maker. The word *decision maker* thus is a convenient shorthand for referring to the part of the split mind that the Course is addressing throughout. It clearly can not be addressing the self that we believe we are, for the Course repeatedly reminds us that that self is not real and that the brain that we believe makes choices has no power at all. For example, in the workbook Jesus, with some amusement, observes, **"You also believe the body's brain can think. If you but understood the nature of thought, you could but laugh at this insane idea." W.pl.92.2:1,2).**

That the focus should be on the decision making power of our mind is most appropriate when we consider that Jesus emphasizes that **"the power of decision is your one remaining freedom as a prisoner of this world. You can decide to see it [the world] right" (T.12.VII.9:1,2).** And later, **"Each day, each hour and minute, even each second, you are deciding between the crucifixion and the resurrection; between the ego and the Holy Spirit. The ego is the choice for guilt; the Holy Spirit the choice for guiltlessness. The power of decision is all that is yours" (T.14.III.4:1,2,3; italics added).** The centrality of the concept of choice or decision to Course teachings is evident when we consider that variations on the words *choose* and *decide* are used well over a thousand times across the three volumes of the Course. And the concluding section of the text, **"Choose Once Again" (T.31.VIII),** is a beautiful paean to choice.

Q #158: I have difficulty understanding this section in the text of *A Course in Miracles* on attack: "Attack could never promote attack unless you perceived it as a means of depriving you of something you want. Yet you cannot lose anything unless you do not value it, and therefore do not want it. This makes you feel deprived of it, and by projecting your own rejection you then believe that others are taking it from you." (T.7.VII.8:1,2,3) Please can you help?

A: The fourth law of chaos says that **"you have what you have taken" (T.23.II.9:3)**; and we know that projection is one of the ego's "laws." Therefore, we are always suspicious of others, believing that they are plotting to take something from us. And ultimately what we believe they are out to steal from us is the peace of God. This, again, is a projection of the treachery of which we accuse ourselves. The point of the teaching is that the peace of God within us can never be taken from us unless we allow that to happen, which could be only because we do not really value it. And the reason we don't value it is that part of us knows that if we totally identify with it, our self as we know it would disappear and be replaced by our true Self which is beyond all individualized existence in this world. The defense against this is to blame others for depriving us of our inner peace, rather than take responsibility for throwing it away ourselves.

Q #159: In my job my role is to be a helper, I notice that I reinforce my specialness by having a sense of importance and superiority toward those I help, while also hating them. I am also invested in having the things I do make things better. When there has been joining with another, I take credit for it. It seems that I am using all this to reinforce my individual identity in the world, and my guilt, so as not to move beyond specialness. Is it enough to be honest about my arrogance, trusting that Jesus can work with the honesty if I am willing?

A: Looking honestly at the specialness and hatred that we bring to all our relationships is certainly the first step in the forgiveness process. *A Course in Miracles* is asking us to do just that, so that we recognize the ego dynamics in operation. You also recognize the motives for the special love or special hate, which is very important. The same motive you mention is always in operation, keeping our specialness intact, so as to reinforce our belief in our separate identity, and in the world. The result, as you mention, is guilt, and that is our real attraction. As long as we feel guilty, we can keep the peace of God at a safe distance, stay in conflict, and keep our individuality. This is clearly the situation you describe. Looking at it honestly certainly moves you out of the denial that is so basic to the ego's sick scheme. Healing can begin when the sickness is recognized. The next step is to make the connection between this choice in the mind to reinforce specialness and thereby reinforce and cling to guilt, and all the pain experienced in the dream of separation. It is very important to make this cause and effect relationship. In it lies the key to undoing our belief in the ego thought system and its painful consequences. If the specialness and its ensuing guilt is a choice in the mind, this must mean that there is another choice that can be made, that will have a different result. Therein lies the logic of the thought system of the Holy Spirit as presented in the Course. Once this association is made, the next step is to ask Jesus for help in making another choice. Looking is not the end of our part in the healing relationship with Jesus. We must go a bit beyond that to asking for, and truly desiring, "another way." This is not always as easy as it seems. We are often quite willing to let Jesus replace our pain with his peace, until we realize this means letting go of a lot more than we bargained for. It requires a willingness to let go of the investment in our specialness and the purpose it serves, which ultimately leads to the undoing of the entire thought system of the ego. Since the ego finds this threatening, it has an endless supply of inviting forms to keep us engaged. Our part is to remain vigilant for all its tricks and recognize them as all the same, so they can be brought to the Holy Spirit to be transformed. Remember, the Course does not ask that we be without our special relationships: **"I have said repeatedly that the Holy Spirit would not deprive you of your special relationships, but would transform them"(T.17.IV.2:3)**. This is where the "willingness" you speak of comes in. It does not have to be perfect willingness; **"Your willingness need not be perfect, because His is. If you will merely offer Him a little place, He will lighten it so much that you will gladly let it be increased" (T.11.II.6:6,7)**. The little willingness suffices, as long as we are not actively holding out by hiding our "secret sins and hidden hates," denying them, justifying them, or calling them by other, less gruesome names. If you remain faithful to the process you have begun, you will surely find it will have significant results in your learning and healing.

Q #160: Is there a difference between waking and sleeping dreams as an indication of which thought system and teacher you've really chosen, the ego or the Holy Spirit? During my waking dream, I study the principles of *A Course in Miracles* for hours each day, and try to be in my right mind, willing not to judge myself and others or judge that the world and the body still seem real to me. And so I very often find peace, or the willingness to find peace. But once I go into the sleeping dream, it seems like the ego's home turf. None of the mind training I've been studying and practicing shows up. The dreams are nonsensical, crazy, scary, and have no reflection of any holiness in them. So are my night time dreams really defining what beliefs are in my mind? Do these dreams negate and override my waking dreams? When my mind is healed will the content of both my day and night dreams be the same? Also, would listening to Course-related audio tapes prior to falling asleep and while asleep allow ideas to penetrate into your mind more easily than while awake?

A: If you can remember that the ego's purpose is always to make differences seem real, you can begin to recognize that your question of differences between your waking and sleeping states is merely another arena in which the ego is attempting to confuse you so it can maintain a grip on your mind. And all the better if it can lead you to question the value and validity of what shifts you are already experiencing in some aspects of your life.

It will be more helpful, rather than believing that there is a qualitative difference between waking and sleeping dreams, to recognize that in some circumstances you remember that you have a choice and in others you forget that you do. For some people, this may be reflected in differences in the intensity of their reactions and their willingness to forgive between their relationships at home and those at work. For others it may be differences in how strong their ego reaction is with one parent in comparison to the other. And in your case, it is a difference between remembering the Holy Spirit during your waking state and your sleeping state. Regardless of the specific circumstances in which the ego seems to have the upper hand, the solution will always be the same. As soon as you recognize that the ego has taken over and that you also have a choice of teachers - - no matter whether it's in the middle of an ego reaction or sometime later -- all you need do is ask for the help that the Holy Spirit offers. And so in your case, whether you remember while you are still asleep or only after you wake up does not matter. All you need to do is recognize that it's your ego and you can now make a different choice.

Over time, we learn to generalize our lessons of forgiveness to more and more relationships and situations and states of mind. But we need not concern ourselves with why there are differences along the way. Our only concern is to recognize where we are still holding back and then, when we are ready and willing, apply the principles of forgiveness to those thoughts. Clearly, with your sleeping dreams, after you awaken, you know you are only talking about thoughts in your mind and not events that seem to have any reality and long term consequences. The fact that they can still seem to have power simply demonstrates the desire for the ego to be real. So generalizing after you are awake should become easier and easier, and in time you may find yourself beginning to remember the choice you have during your sleeping dreams as well. But whether you remember during the dream itself is not a critical concern, except in your ego's view. For further discussion of waking vs. sleeping dreams, you may wish to read Question #41.

As to whether there is more of a willingness to learn Course principles when falling asleep or during sleep, there can be no definitive answer, individual differences being what they are. Some students in fact find listening to tapes a great way to help themselves fall asleep!

Q #161: Why is the message of Jesus in *A Course in Miracles* so different than that of His mother the Virgin Mary in all her apparitions throughout the last century? In her message God is aware of what goes on in this world, and does punish the unfaithful.

A: The people who have experienced apparitions of Mary have heard a message that is compatible with their religious beliefs. In many cases, they are fervent believers with traditional theological views. The two points you mention, that God is aware of happenings in this world, and punishes the unfaithful, are beliefs held by many Christians. For believers, a religious experience such as an apparition by a spiritual being like Mary, deepens and validates their faith. Love would not challenge their belief system, by introducing unfamiliar concepts from a different path, such as *A Course in Miracles*. As you may know, the Course is a spiritual teaching that is not based on the Bible or traditional Christian or Catholic theology. Although it uses Christian terms, their meaning in the Course is different. However, both Mary's message, and the message of *A Course in Miracles* can be experienced as loving and helpful teachings for their respective followers. They may be similar in content though not at all similar in form. In form they are, as you say, very different. That is because they are two very different spiritual thought systems with different theological beliefs. It is important to remember that thoughts and beliefs are not truth; they are expressions or reflections of it. Jesus and Mary represent a truth that is beyond any of the forms that may give it expression. Truth uses different forms, at different times, for different people. This does not contradict the content of the message, the purpose of which is to lead us back to our home in God. As we are told in the Course: **"Helpers are given you in many forms, although upon the altar they are one. Beyond each one there is a Thought of God, and this will never change. But they have names which differ for a time, for time needs symbols, being itself unreal" (C.5.1:3,4,5).**

Neither the theological views nor the specific beliefs is what is important. What matters is the love that is being expressed by a spiritual teacher, and the helpfulness of the teaching. If our concern is that God be sure to punish the unfaithful, we are missing the point ourselves. The important thing is that we be faithful to the beliefs taught by our spiritual path, with a fervent desire to return to God. If a person accepts the love that inspires their specific religious belief system and learns to truly live that love themselves, in the end it does not matter whether they began their journey out of fear of God's punishment, or because they were seeking God's peace. It is the experience that is important. The Course tells us: **"A universal theology is impossible, but a universal experience is not only possible but necessary" (C.in.2:5).** There are many paths, many faiths, many forms of expression, but one truth, one God.

Q #162: What does *A Course in Miracles* mean when it says the "mind cannot attack" (T.18.VI.3,4)? I seem to have attack thoughts directed at others, in fact hateful thoughts. If this is not my mind attacking, what is it?

A) The meaning of this statement, in the context of the entire section, **"Beyond the Body,"** is that attack is possible only in fantasy or in a delusional state. God cannot be attacked in reality. The separation would have to be a fact in order for the mind to be able to attack. That is why there is so much emphasis in the Course on bringing the illusion to the truth, and bringing the darkness to the light. We bring our attack thoughts to Jesus or the Holy Spirit in our minds, where we can learn that they come from an illusory thought system and have no effect outside this illusory thought system.

Q #163: In the section "Rules for Decision" of *A Course in Miracles*, it says, "It needs but two who would have happiness this day to promise it to all the world." (T.30.I.17:1). Does this refer to the reader (me) and the Holy Spirit? And if so why would "two" not be capitalized if referring to the Holy Spirit? Could it also mean the "two" is reader (me) and the ego who thinks it's a happy day?

A: Earlier in this section Jesus speaks of the nature of the happiness -- counterfeit or real -- you experience as depending on **"the friend whose counsel you have sought" (T.30.I.15:2)** -- the ego or the Holy Spirit. But here in the concluding paragraph, Jesus is referring to the real happiness that comes from our joining with a brother through Jesus or the Holy Spirit in the recognition that our interests are not

separate but shared and that our minds are not split but joined. If this recognition is truly shared in our mind with any brother, it must then be extended to all the world, for it is all one.

And this joining has nothing to do with bodies, neither mine (as the reader) nor my brother's. So my brother's body need not be present for this joining to be experienced and no words need to be exchanged. Jesus explains earlier in the text, **"Like you, your brother thinks he is a dream. Share not in his illusion of himself, for your identity depends on his reality. Think, rather, of him as a mind in which illusions still persist, but as a mind which brother is to you. He is not brother made by what he dreams, nor is his body, "hero" of the dream, your brother. It is his reality that is your brother, as is yours to him. Your mind and his are joined in brotherhood"** (T.28.IV.3:1,2,3,4,5,6).

Q #164: My view with A Course in Miracles has shifted considerably after listening to Ken's tape "The Meaning of Judgment." The thrust of this tape is looking at your ego with no need to change it. In other words looking at our thoughts without judgment and realizing ultimately that what we believe has no effects on reality. Our powerful thoughts seem to be defused as we realize reality is not impressed nor shaken by them. However, Ken keeps reminding us not to judge someone else. It seems if that were the case then we would need a defense against those thoughts. For by saying we should not judge another have we not made judgment real? We are supposed to look at our egos without judgment. Wouldn't that include looking at our judgment of others without giving reality to it? Some of our judgments may be quite intense, but if we can look at these with the realization that nothing is happening, haven't we made progress?

A: You may have misunderstood. The tape you refer to makes the point that the goal, contrary to what many students believe the Course to be saying, is not to stop making judgments of ourselves and others, but rather to learn not to judge ourselves for making those judgments. By resisting them and trying to change them, we are making them real in our mind, and that continues to give them and the ego power, as you observe. So the goal is to look upon our ego's judgments without taking them seriously, that is, without guilt, and without attempting to justify or rationalize them in any way.

A very important part of the looking process is to recognize that our judgments have a cost to us. Judgment keeps the thought of separation real in our mind, banishing peace and inviting pain and guilt to remain. As we recognize the cost of our judgments over time, our motivation increases to join with Jesus or the Holy Spirit and release our investment in judging. So the point is not that we should not judge, but rather why would we want to if we really understood what accompanies it?

By the way, reality is not simply unimpressed or unshaken by our judgments -- it can not even see or recognize them! For our judgments have no reality. And so that is why, near the end of the Course, Jesus points out, **"It is necessary for the teacher of God to realize, not that he should not judge, but that he cannot. In giving up judgment, he is merely giving up what he did not have. He gives up an illusion; or better, he has an illusion of giving up....Recognizing that judgment was always impossible for him, he no longer attempts it"** (M.10.2:1,2,3,5).

Q #165: I was sitting in my living room with my six month old son in my lap when a question occurred to me. I was thinking how the Holy Spirit does not even know about me or my son, but only loves the dreamer of the dream. My question is, is the dreamer the same for all seeming people in the universe? Is it one dreamer or billions of dreamers projecting their guilt onto the world? Do my son and I share the same wrong mind and right mind?

A: Whenever we speak of ideas predicated on a belief in separation and duality, regardless of whether we are speaking at the level of the split mind or the level of its projections into the world of form and bodies, we are speaking in terms of myths and illusions. So the dreamer of the dream and the Holy Spirit are ultimately no more real than the selves you think you and your son are. Any answer to your question therefore should not be considered a description of reality but ought to be evaluated only in terms of its usefulness in helping us in our practice of forgiveness -- the only illusion that does not lead to further illusions (**C.3.1:3,4**).

In A Course in Miracles' version of the myth of separation, everything began with the one mind of God's only Son seeming to fall asleep and dream a dream of separation. And that one mind was split into the wrong mind (the ego) and the right mind (the Holy Spirit), along with the part of the mind that had the power to choose between the two (the decision maker or the dreamer). In the dream, there is only that one split mind. But as part of the ego's defense against its own guilt and anxiety, to hide from God so that the life the Son stole from Him would not be seized back, the Son adopted the ego's strategy of further seeming separation into billions and billions of seemingly unique fragments that would be experienced as independent, individual minds. But each fragment, as a split off part of the one split mind of the Son, shared the same basic content: a wrong mind, a right mind and the power to choose between them.

The phenomenon that has been called multiple personality disorder or dissociative identity disorder -- dramatically illustrated in such films as *The Three Faces of Eve* and *Sybil* -- provides a useful model for thinking about this fragmenting process. Seemingly separate, independent personalities result from a splitting off of the one mind in order to protect itself from intense anxiety and guilt usually associated with a parental figure.

While this illusory fragmenting was the ego's defensive strategy against God, it may also be used to serve the Holy Spirit's purpose of forgiveness. Since each seemingly separate mind has the same basic choice fully represented within itself, its choice for salvation through the practice of forgiveness is not affected by or dependent upon any other separate mind. In other words, each fragmentary mind cannot be victimized by any other mind - it is totally responsible for its experience. And by accepting responsibility for that experience and learning to recognize that it represents a choice, each fragment can learn over time to make the choice for the Holy Spirit rather than for the ego. When, in the end, the decision for the Holy Spirit is made once and for all, then the seeming fragment recognizes that there is no separation and that the mind is one, as it has been all along.

The parallel with therapeutic interventions for individuals with multiple personalities is again illustrative. The goal is what is called integration: the various personalities are in time integrated as the barriers to awareness of the separate components are removed so that the mind recognizes its wholeness again.

To answer your specific question then, there is only one mind dreaming the dream of separation and projecting its guilt upon a world it made for that purpose. But our experience while we believe that we are each a separate fragment is that my mind is independent of yours, that I am dreaming my own separate dream of separation, and that I can choose the ego or the Holy Spirit independent of what you may be choosing. And with that understanding, genuine forgiveness now becomes possible.

Q #166: In Workbook Lesson 39 of A Course in Miracles ("My holiness is my salvation") it reads:

"Specific situations, events or personalities you associate with unloving thoughts of any kind are suitable subjects for today's exercises. It is imperative for your salvation that you see them differently. And it is your blessing on them that will save you and give you vision."

I'm not sure how the idea "It is imperative for your salvation that you see them differently." reconciles with some of the major themes of the Course including the ideas that we let everything be the same and that

there is no hierarchy in an illusion, not to mention that there is no order of difficulty in miracles. It seems to me it should say: It is imperative for your salvation that you not see them differently. What am I missing?

A: What you are missing is the use of the word “differently.” The idea is not to see the specific situations, events or personalities associated with unloving thoughts as separate or dissimilar within themselves, but rather to see the specific situations, events or personalities with loving thoughts (differently from how you have seen before). In the past, your sight (unloving thoughts) was through the eyes of the ego. Now you are encouraged to see through the eyes of the Holy Spirit (loving thoughts). Another way of putting it is that seeing through the eyes of the Holy Spirit is “different” from seeing through the eyes of the ego.

Q #167: I've often had experiences of déjà vu, that sense of having been there before, that have turned out to be genuinely significant. The circumstances in which the experience has occurred have varied from pleasant enough to downright unpleasant or stressful, but often have not seemed to have any obviously direct bearing on the experience. But in retrospect the outcome of the situation has come to be something of a relief or possibly a blessing in disguise. I'm aware from my reading of A Course in Miracles and publications of Dr. Wapnick that, although time is an illusion and “this world was over long ago,” we experience and believe we still have choices to make, seemingly new. But we are really only “reviewing mentally what has gone by.” My question is, how does the experience of déjà vu relate to the choice for either the ego's tape or timeline, or the Holy Spirit's for us? Is déjà vu a reflection of the collective ego-mind? Or can it be a reflection of having made the correct choice through “the decision-maker,” outside of time and space and the ego's dualistic world of limitations, however unpleasant or pleasant the circumstances seem to be at the time? And could the sense of familiarity then be an echo of our “distant” or subconscious memory of God before the separation, when we were all one with him as Christ, as we still are in reality? And so could déjà vu be a reminder or reflection in this world that we are on the “right track” or still in our right minds? Or am I just reading too much into these experiences? And related to this, what is the role of coincidence or synchronicity in the everyday, if still illusory, world?

A: Experiences of déjà vu are neutral in themselves. Since, as you remark, we are only ever **“reviewing mentally what has gone by” (W.pl.158.4:5)**, all of our experiences potentially could be viewed as familiar. These would include both the ego's scripts of specialness and the Holy Spirit's correction scripts. Now most of the time, it will be in the ego's best interest to keep that recognition from our awareness, for its defenses depend on a belief in linear time, flowing in only one direction, from past to future. Nevertheless, much as with psychic powers, reincarnation and past lives (**M.24;25**), it is the interpretation and purpose that we give to those experiences that determine whether they reinforce the ego's specialness or the Holy Spirit's forgiveness. If you have found that your experiences have ushered in opportunities for release of your judgments and guilt, then there has been a willingness on your part to allow them to serve that purpose. But they can just as easily be used to foster a preoccupation with the past, and specific and special relationships.

With respect to coincidence or synchronicity, since only one mind has written all the scripts, everything is interrelated and connected. Only because of our continued investment in seeing separation and differences do we fail to recognize the common threads running through all of our experiences. When coincidences are recognized, they can be used for the purposes of either the ego or the Holy Spirit. The choice is always ours. When serving the Holy Spirit's, they are a reminder that decisions are being made at a level we are not usually conscious of and therefore they challenge the ego view that our reality is limited to this physical world. But a preoccupation with them can once again serve the ego's purpose of specialness.

And so, whether we are dealing with déjà vu, synchronicity, past lives or psychic powers, in every situation and circumstance, **“the first thing to consider, very simply, is ‘What do I want to come of this? What is it for?’” (T.17.VI.2:1,2)**. If our purpose is to see beyond the petty specialness and judgments of the world, the Help we need will lift us above the self-imposed limits of our ego to a place

where we can recognize our shared purpose with every brother and experience the joy of our interconnectedness with the entire Sonship.

Q #168: I have tremendous guilt over a relationship with a loved one who passed away recently. I feel I need his forgiveness. I know A Course in Miracles says that he has “gone” nowhere. But for all practical purposes, in this world that I perceive, I will never see him again. At times, the thought of this is unbearable. How do I deal with this? Also, his death brought up all kinds of guilt and self-hatred that doesn’t even seem to be related to him. Why is this?

A: Our experience of the grieving process is indeed a complex one, whether or not one is a student of the Course -- perhaps *especially* if one is a student of the Course. The process brings on the feelings you describe, and *more*, because death is one of the ego’s most important defenses -- if not *the* most important defense. It inevitably brings up feelings, all of which are related to what we have projected onto our loved ones. A deep sense of loss is normal and it is very important to be gentle with yourself in the process of dealing with your loss. Denying your feelings, or using the principles of the Course to invalidate them, will not help, and may hinder your progress in accepting the loss of your loved one. At the same time, much of what the Course teaches is applicable to the situation you describe and can be very helpful. Since you are in the midst of experiencing grief at this time it may be wise to review these considerations at a slow pace, coming to them when you feel you need to see beyond your sense of loss, setting them aside for the times when your normal feelings can rise.

One of the most comforting aspects of the forgiveness that the Course teaches is that we never lose the opportunity to forgive. That is because what we perceive as an unforgiveness in a relationship is actually a projection of some form of unforgiveness of ourselves, since **“All attack is Self attack”(T.10.II.5:1)**. Therefore, it is never too late for the forgiveness process, and it does not matter that the person we seem to need forgiveness from is no longer with us. Whatever the specific circumstances in the relationship may have been, it is the judgment that some “sin” was committed against the other that needs to be viewed differently. The Course tells us that through our special relationships we seek to assuage the guilt and self-hatred we feel for having separated from God. These relationships are based on the projection of this guilt and self-hatred, no matter how this is camouflaged. What seems to be vicious hatred perpetrated against another in some form of attack, is only a projected version of our own self-hatred. That is all it ever is. This self-hatred was underlying the interaction in the relationship in the first place. The attacks, seemingly directed outward toward others, are attacks on ourselves. This explains why you would experience the guilt and self-hatred directly, now that your loved one is no longer with you. For now they are being projected onto yourself. What the Course teaches us is that an attack directed toward ourselves or toward another does not matter, since every part of the Sonship including ourselves remains inviolate regardless of our attacks. **“The betrayal of the Son of God lies only in illusions, and all his “sins” are but his own imagining. His reality is forever sinless. He need not be forgiven but awakened. In his dreams he has betrayed himself, his brothers and his God. Yet what is done in dreams has not been really done” (T.17.I.1:1,2,3,4,5)**. The only thing remaining is to forgive yourself for thinking that you could have truly hurt your loved one, or that your feelings of self-hatred in any way diminish the truth about yourself. They have no effect. The mistake is to believe the ego’s interpretation -- you have done something sinful that is deserving of punishment, you should feel guilty about it, and your self-hatred is justified because of it. When the Course tells us **“to forgive the Son of God for what he did not do” (T.17.III.1:5)**, it refers to ourselves, as well as to our brothers.

Again, it is very normal to miss the person you love, and the Course is very clear that we should not deny our feelings. Even after death, the Holy Spirit can transform a special relationship into a holy relationship. We need only be willing to recognize the unholy self interest we acted out in the relationship, forgive ourselves for it, and allow the Holy Spirit to reinterpret the relationship in our minds. The relationship can thus be healed. It is this healing that will alleviate the sense of loss and grief. This may be easier to practice than to try to convince yourself that death does not exist, when in fact you are feeling

intense loss. It is the thought of separation that causes pain in our relationships, not the actual physical presence or absence of another person. Forgiveness of yourself for what you did not do to your brother, and acceptance of both his and your sinlessness, brings the peace that will replace your grief and loss.

Q #169: In the past, I have had problems in gaining employment. I used to think life was too short to work, or money is not worth the time involved. I came to realize my excuses had to do with my inferiority complexes, shyness, inequality, etc., and I could not handle the expectations of an employer or social pressure within the workplace. Although I have made great advances with *A Course in Miracles*, and with forgiveness, I can't seem to distinguish between ego or Holy Spirit with regard to employment. It seems that there is no point in working, and I could devote my time to forgiveness. Or maybe by working I could learn my Biggest lesson in forgiveness. Which is ego? Which is Holy Spirit?

A: Discerning between the ego and the Holy Spirit can be a daunting task at times, and yet one of the most important, if not the most important, to master in your study of *A Course in Miracles*. Until such time comes as your certainty that all your thoughts and actions come from the Holy Spirit (the real world), the best one can do is do the best one can do, and then observe the "fruits of one's labor," or as the Course would call it, "The Test of Truth": **"You have one test, as sure as God, by which to recognize if what you learned is true. If you are wholly free of fear of any kind, and if all those who meet or even think of you share in your perfect peace, then you can be sure that you have learned God's lesson, and not your own"** (T.14.XI.5:1,2).

While you have experienced forgiveness in various areas of your life, it seems incomplete with regard to employment due in part to your seeming ambivalence toward it. Before you can become aware of what the Holy Spirit would have you do (or not do), you must be willing to hide nothing: **"You will not be able to accept perfect communication as long as you would hide it from yourself. For what you would hide is hidden from you. In your practice, then, try only to be vigilant against deception, and seek not to protect the thoughts you would keep to yourself. Let the Holy Spirit's purity shine them away, and bring all your awareness to the readiness for purity He offers you."** (T.15.IV.9:6,7,8,9). In other words, examine all of the thoughts you hold in your mind regarding employment. Make a list of "good and bad," "for and against" -- just let whatever is there come into your conscious awareness. Once all of the "chatter" about this topic has been voiced, then you are more able to hear the Voice which will guide you. You will find that your focus on the answer in form will recede as the content of being with or without guilt becomes more important. An exercise such as mentioned above will help you practice shifting your focus from the form to the content, from the effect to the cause. And remember too the important lesson Jesus teaches us about purpose: **"In any situation in which you are uncertain, the first thing to consider, very simply, is "What do I want to come of this? What is it <for?>"** The clarification of the goal belongs at the beginning, for it is this which will determine the outcome. In the ego's procedure this is reversed. The situation becomes the determiner of the outcome, which can be anything. The reason for this disorganized approach is evident. The ego does not know what it wants to come of the situation. It is aware of what it does not want, but only that. It has no positive goal at all" (T.17.VI.2). But now you have a definite goal, and by making room within your mind to hear the gentle guidance of the Holy Spirit, you are ensured of reaching that goal.

Q #170: It seems to me that there are cloaked allusions to the sexual drive as made by the ego in *A Course in Miracles*. I may be completely wrong but I don't know where to turn to find validation for this idea, as well as many more questions I have about ego strategies and forms relating to Course material. Is it possible that the sex drive is an evolution of the desire to kill God and create the son of the ego? There is discussion in psychology circles about the inherent aggression in the act of sex, especially in rape and forms of physical abuse. Perhaps the most benign or "loving" act would be loving impregnation of a spouse in a holy relationship. Can you help me out with this?

A: Sex is just one of many manifestations in form of the ego's obsession with meeting its own needs, with little or no concern for anyone else. But in the hierarchy of illusions we believe in, it is one of the more potent, as well as guilt-inducing. Yes, it all began with God and our desire to seize the power to create life from Him, and to be the author of our own reality (T.3.VI.5:8; 8). That conflict is then projected out into a world of form, including sex with all its complicated interpersonal ramifications. And then, in an ambivalent contradiction that only the ego is capable of, we attribute the power to "create new life" -- the so-called "miracle of birth" -- both to God and to ourselves.

Aggression is inherent in all acts inspired by the ego, more apparent in some expressions than in others, but always present in the underlying content. And it is not much of a stretch to see sexual connotations in some of the Course's more graphic descriptions of ego activity. The fourth law of chaos, for example, describes how we believe we must seize the "priceless pearl" that our brother has stolen from us and hidden in his body, tearing it from his body as we lay claim to what is rightfully ours (T.23.II.11,12). Melanie Klein, a student of Freud's, observed just such violent and destructive fantasies, with explicit sexual overtones, acted out in doll play by very young children in therapy with her.

Although sex was made for ego purposes, like everything of the ego, it is possible to give it another, holy purpose. But this is not as simple as it may seem, because the world does not understand what love is, often confusing and equating sex with love. Early in the text, Jesus speaks of our confusion of physical impulses with miracle impulses (T.1.VII.1:2,3). In the original dictation, the reference was actually to sexual impulses (*Absence from Felicity*, p. 246), but the final edited text extended the context to all bodily impulses.

It is not the form of the act nor the specific nature of the relationship itself that determines whether sex is loving, but the content or purpose held in your mind. If you experience guilt in any form, the ego has joined you and has assured that the focus is only on the body. But when you recognize shared rather than separate interests, and your goal is not simply your own physical satisfaction, you have invited the Holy Spirit to bless the union and have recognized that the real joining is between minds, not bodies.

For a more extended discussion of issues related to sex from the Course's perspective, you may find the recent audio and videotape set, *Form vs. Content: Sex and Money*, helpful.

Q #171: The more I seek to understand *A Course in Miracles*, some teachings become even more difficult. To wit, I thought I had at least come to terms with how the Son could have had a mad idea about resenting being a second-rate creator, God being THE Creator because the Son was an autonomous being created by God. But I now think that GOD IS, period. The Son was a Thought in the mind of God, an integral self-contained part of God. There was absolutely no distinction. So then the impossible could not have even been a tiny mad idea. Does this mean that there are two entities -- one we call Real and the other unreal? The unreal is existing with the permissive Will of God, but outside of His positive Will? When the Course says God is not aware of the ego, is it speaking just as metaphorically as when it says God weeps for His Son? It makes more sense to say GOD IS and stop musing because nothing could have happened. But something seemed to happen. What is this seem?

A: This is everyone's question, the most frequently asked question, in fact. And there is no intellectually satisfying answer to it. Let it suffice to have Jesus respond in his own words:

"It is reasonable to ask how the mind could ever have made the ego. In fact, it is the best question you could ask. There is, however, no point in giving an answer in terms of the past because the past does not matter, and history would not exist if the same errors were not being repeated in the present" (T.4.II.1:1,2,3).

“The ego will demand many answers that this course does not give. It does not recognize as questions the mere form of a question to which an answer is impossible. The ego may ask, ‘How did the impossible occur?’, ‘To what did the impossible happen?’, and may ask this in many forms. Yet there is no answer; only an experience. Seek only this, and do not let theology delay you.” (C.in.4)

“Who asks you to define the ego and explain how it arose can be but he who thinks it real, and seeks by definition to ensure that its illusive nature is concealed behind the words that seem to make it so” (C.2.2:5).

In light of these passages, it can be concluded that the idea that God has both a permissive Will and a positive Will would not be consistent with the absolute non-dualism of the Course’s metaphysics. Jesus is definitely speaking metaphorically when he says that God is not aware of the ego, as well as when he refers to the separation as a “tiny, mad idea” -- and many, many other terms. Jesus does not refer to this as a divine mystery, or something like that, which we will understand one day. There just is no way that our understanding can achieve closure on this issue. We are left with the option of taking Jesus at his word, that an experience will come to end all doubting (**W.pl.158.4:4**), and that we will be better off than we are now if we apply the principles and exercises of his Course to our daily lives. If that does not turn out to be the case, there will always be another spiritual path that we can turn to that will bring us the peace of God.

Q #172: What is the end result from studying *A Course in Miracles*? Should I be able to make life go in the direction I want it? On page 448 of the Course it states:

I am responsible for what I see.
I choose the feelings I would experience, and I decide
upon the goal I would achieve.
And everything that seems to happen to me
I ask for, and receive as I have asked.

This is obviously not a new idea and many people have heard it but few if any have been able to realize it or make it work in their lives. Is there something these people as well as myself have been doing wrong?

A: Peace -- and the release from all guilt -- is the end result of studying the Course and applying its principles (**M.28.3:4,5**). Although an initial reading of many of the passages of the Course, including the one you quote, would appear to suggest that the Course’s purpose is to show us how to make our lives become what we want them to be, as you study the Course over time, it will become apparent that this is not its intention. In the above passage, the Course is speaking about the choice of feelings and experience only at the level of content, not form: will our experience be one of love or fear, peace or conflict, happiness or pain?

There are many passages that make this clear. Among the early workbook lessons are two that admonish us: **“I do not perceive my own best interests” (W.pl.24)** and **“I do not know what anything is for” (W.pl.25)**. The Course is asking us to acknowledge that we are not in a position to make decisions about what will bring us happiness or joy or peace. That is up to our Guide, the Holy Spirit. **“He does know all the facts; past, present and to come. He does know all the effects of His judgment on everyone and everything involved in any way” (M.10.4:8,9)**. And so, **“Ask and He will answer. The responsibility is His, and He alone is fit to assume it. To do so is His function. To refer the questions to Him is yours. Would you want to be responsible for decisions about which you understand so little? Be glad you have a Teacher Who cannot make a mistake. His answers are always right. Would you say that of yours?” (M.29.2:7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14)**.

Even these line are open to misunderstanding and misinterpretation, for it is easy to conclude that they mean that the Holy Spirit will provide all that we need in our world to experience happiness here as we define it, which usually means having our needs met. But again, this is not the intent of the Course. Its focus is to bring about a change at the level of mind, so that we will become increasingly less affected by the things that happen or don't happen around us and to us. A sentence in the text makes this clear: **"Seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world" (T.21.in.1:7)**. The kind of change that the Course is attempting to bring about within each of us is a shift from judgment to forgiveness. For, as the Course reminds us, **"those who have been forgiven have everything" T.3.V.6:3**), not in a material sense, but in the sense that we remember that lack and loss of the love that is our natural inheritance is impossible. And we will look out on the world and see only peace, no matter what battles seem to be raging.

Q #173: What is thought and what is thinking?

A) There is no definition of *thought or thinking* in *A Course in Miracles*. We get some idea of what these terms mean from the way they are used. But it is important to keep in mind that Jesus is using the language generated by the Son in his separated state, which is illusory. These terms and concepts, therefore, are inherently limited. Jesus is consistent in the *meaning* of what he is teaching us, but not in his use of terms and words; so sometimes it is difficult to pin down a precise meaning for a specific term. The Course is not meant to be, nor is it presented as, a philosophical or scholarly treatise, though there are profoundly rich and even provocative theoretical statements throughout.

When capitalized, *Thought* always refers to the content in God's Mind; and when not capitalized, *thought* always refers to the content in the mind of the separated Son. Jesus sometimes uses the term *idea* to express the unlimited nature of our true reality: **"...you recognize, however dimly, that God is an idea, and so your faith in Him is strengthened by sharing. What you find difficult to accept is the fact that, like your Father, you are an idea. And like Him, you can give yourself completely, wholly without loss and only with gain" (T.15.VI.4:4,5,6)**.

In the last chapter of the text, *conceptual thinking* is singled out as the main problem, reflecting the earlier statement that **"consciousness, the level of perception, was the first split introduced into the mind after the separation, making the mind a perceiver rather than a creator. Consciousness is correctly identified as the domain of the ego" (T.3.IV.2:1,2)**. In the last chapter, Jesus states that **"salvation can be seen as nothing more than the escape from concepts. It does not concern itself with content of the mind, but with the simple statement that it thinks" (T.31.V.14.3,4)**.

We hope this is helpful in some way. We were not entirely sure of the direction your question was taking, so we chose to answer it in this way. There is no "text-book" answer, unfortunately.

Q #174-a: How does *A Course in Miracles* deal with severe woundedness? For many years, I have struggled with the inequality of parents and children, focused on abuse I received on all levels, resulting in impoverished development even though I am very bright. I have two questions:

#174-b: How can I forgive evil? What happened to me is evil, sourced in escape of responsibility and outright violation -- emotionally, spiritually, mentally, personally.

#174-c: What am I? What does it mean to be a spiritual creature (my body is light) while living in a world made of hate, conflict, and power?

A: The world is a desperate, cruel place, filled with the effects of evil thoughts. People can be unconscionably vicious and brutal to each other, abusing those over whom they have power, much as they have been abused by those who have had power over them. It is a vicious cycle from which no escape seems possible. Yet escape is possible, if we are willing to look beneath the surface of our ready judgments of good and evil and our facile distinctions between the guilty and the innocent.

Now there may be a way of understanding what motivated your parents to treat you as they did, but that does not mean there is any justification for it. Yet you also are recognizing that holding on to the judgment and the pain only keeps you trapped in mental anguish that paralyzes you and prevents you from experiencing the joy and peace that we are assured is our God-given inheritance (**W.pl.104**).

The Course recognizes that **"frightened people can be vicious" (T.3.I.4:2)**. This awareness holds the key to releasing ourselves and everyone else from the grips of evil. It is fear that motivates all of us to act out our evil thoughts, and not inherent evil. No one in the world is immune from having thoughts of evil -- that is the nature of the ego thought system that we all share. Some of us may have become better than others at curbing our overt behavior. But rage bordering on the murderous simmers within each of our minds until we learn how to uncover the guilt that fuels the rage and allow it to be healed in the light of the Holy Spirit's forgiveness. The ego is complete and total darkness -- there is no light within its tightly sealed boundaries -- and we all grope for our way, stumbling without hope while we remain identified with its evil purposes.

We are all one in sharing the wrong-minded ego, although we may differ in how we give it expression in our lives. But until we acknowledge its presence within us, we will be caught in dysfunctional attempts to defend against the guilt and self-hatred that are the inevitable companions of our belief in the darkness within. We will seek to project that guilt outside ourselves and on to others. And so we will lash out, wanting to hold others responsible for the pain that comes from feeling separated from love. Some find socially appropriate but still ego-motivated ways to channel this overwhelming experience of pain and guilt. Others direct it out with little or no concern for its effects on others. And so these become the rapists, the murderers, the child abusers. And it becomes easy to see the sin and guilt within them, as a testament to our own "innocence." Yet what drives them is no different from what drives all of us who have not uncovered these unconscious dynamics in order to begin to heal them. And so the first step in our own healing -- after acknowledging our judgments against the murderer, the rapist, the abuser -- is to recognize the common "humanity" that we all share -- a desperate, pain-filled identity that places self-interest and self-preservation above everything else. We all do it, but our cover may just be better.

If we can begin to get in touch with the fact that our own pain is the same as everyone else's pain, and it is only that pain which leads all of us to act in insane ways, we have opened the door to a more merciful and compassionate view of both ourselves and everyone else. For we will have begun to see that whatever cruelty any of us acts out is only a defense against the guilt and pain within -- the same guilt and pain that we all experience.

This is not to say that our own experiences of abuse should be denied. But there is a step beyond acknowledging the pain that we have felt at others' hands that we will take when we are ready to move beyond the pain. The problem in the present is not the events of the past themselves but the interpretation we are continuing to give them. And the Course provides us a different way of looking at those past events, helping us to understand what at a deeper level motivated the abusive actions, and how we share that same deeper motivation in our own life as we have been living it with the ego's guidance. Only then can we recognize the choice we have in the present to be released from the pain of our own self-judgments.

We are all looking for a way out of our pain, but we blindly think and act in ways that continue to inflict pain upon ourselves -- judgments and attacks against others that only reinforce the belief in separation that is the foundation of the ego thought system. When we begin to recognize the content of fear behind the ego's cruelty -- either someone else's or own -- the judgments we have been holding onto can begin to dissolve. We will have begun to shift from the self-interest of the ego to the shared interest of the Holy

Spirit, Who recognizes that we are all joined in the same need for release from the guilt and pain of the ego thought system. That recognition of shared interests is a reflection of the love that we all yearn for and the Oneness that we all share as the holy and innocent Son of God, an Identity that transcends the shared ego and its manifestations, from which the illusion of evil has arisen.

Q #175: The following three questions all address the issue of death and so will be answered together:

i: I would like to know more about "death solves nothing."

ii: It is common for us to say when a person dies that he or she is finally "at peace." Does death of the ego not release us from it's fear based thinking and grant us peace?

iii: Would you kindly explain what *A Course in Miracles* teaches regarding finding peace after death?

A: Since everyone in this world suffers the excruciating pain of believing they are separated from their true Home and their Creator, there are times throughout one's life that the thought of escape from this pain would seem to be a blessing. In this instance, death represents escape from our pain. And yet, *A Course in Miracles* teaches us that we are not our bodies: **"The body is the symbol of what you think you are. It is clearly a separation device, and therefore does not exist (T.6.V.A.2:2,3).** Therefore we need not escape from our bodies, whether they be physical, psychological, emotional, astral, etc. What we do need to escape from, however, is the thought of separation, and this is accomplished through the process of forgiveness. If the mind has not been totally healed of the thought of separation once the body "dies," the unforgiveness that it holds will be played out in other times and other forms until forgiveness is perfected.

"When your body and your ego and your dreams are gone, you will know that you will last forever. Perhaps you think this is accomplished through death, but nothing is accomplished through death, because death is nothing" (T.6.V.A.1:1,2).

At other times, we may believe this world to be a spiritual testing ground, and death symbolizes an end to our testing, and our ticket back Home. Or we may believe that once we die, our egos are automatically transcended, and we will be at peace. Beliefs such as this tempt one to want death to come sooner rather than later. **"There is a risk of thinking death is peace, because the world equates the body with the Self which God created" (T.27.VII.10:2).** It is important to keep in mind that the "death of the ego" does not come from the body's death, but rather from the process of forgiveness, which only occurs within the mind. And, our bodies may die with or without completing this process.

You can see in any of these instances how we are tempted to attribute pain to our body rather than to our mind. Once we have learned where the real problem lies, the Holy Spirit can begin to use our body to teach us our true identity as a mind: **"The Holy Spirit, as always, takes what you have made [the body] and translates it into a learning device....He reinterprets what the ego uses as an argument for separation into a demonstration against it (T.6.V.A.2:4,5).**

So death (which is nothing) of the body (also nothing) solves nothing (the thought of separation, another nothing). Nothing plus nothing equals nothing!

Q #176: I am reviewing the workshop on "Separation and Forgiveness" from 1989. Could you please go over the second and third splits. It's almost like they overlap one another.

A: The second split represents the split mind dividing into the right and wrong minds, the thought systems respectively of the Holy Spirit and the ego.

The third split occurs *only within the wrong-minded ego*, and expresses the ego's attempts to keep its separation intact by first splitting off from the right mind, and then splitting its sinful separated self (what we call self A) into two components: selves B and C. Self C is the projected repository of sin (formerly part of self A), which leaves the separated self B as sinless. In other words, the separated and sinful self A, minus sin (self C), leaves a separated and sinless self (self B): $A - C = B$.

All this is explained in much greater detail (along with the first and fourth splits) in Kenneth's book, *The Message of A Course in Miracles: All Are Called*, Chapters 2 and 3. Keep in mind that this schema is merely a symbolic attempt to portray the dynamics of the ego thought system that *A Course in Miracles* sets forth. These dynamics focus on the ego's strategy of having us keep our separated self, but without the sin that would bring God's punishing wrath upon our heads. Now the sin rests in another (self C), who deserves the punishment we secretly believe we deserve.

Q #177: Is it necessary to comprehend the mythology in order to begin study of *A Course in Miracles*, and to use the principles of the Course properly? I have great trouble with the metaphysics of the Course surrounding the origin of guilt yet the practical applications of the Course (i.e., choosing the ego or Jesus as your teacher) seem logical and helpful. Can I truly practice forgiveness as the Course defines it if I don't really accept the Course's mythology surrounding the origin of the world?

A: The benefit of practicing forgiveness is that we will feel better, because we will be letting go of the pain of self-deception involved in blaming others for our problems. It is practical in that sense. And it is very comforting to know that there is a loving, wise teacher within, of whom we can always ask help. We can go along nicely with that for quite some time, and even stay on that level indefinitely if we so choose. The Course can be used that way, and be of tremendous personal benefit and comfort. The metaphysical principles of the Course are not needed to experience the gentle guidance of Jesus, and to withdraw our projections of guilt onto others. If staying on that level brings one closer to God, what could be wrong with it?

But since you specifically mentioned "forgiveness as *the Course defines it*," it is necessary to go further. And so we will. The beginning and the end of the Introduction to the workbook shed some further light on this. Jesus begins by talking about the relationship between the text and the workbook: **"A theoretical foundation such as the text provides is necessary as a framework to make the exercises in the workbook meaningful. Yet it is doing the exercises that will make the goal of the course possible. An untrained mind can accomplish nothing. It is the purpose of the workbook to train your mind to think along the lines the text sets forth" (W.in.1).**

At the end of the Introduction to the workbook (**W.in.8,9**), Jesus acknowledges the problems of credulity and resistance we probably will run into regarding the ideas and concepts presented in the lessons. And his advice to us is to concentrate only on using and applying the ideas exactly as he directs us to do, without judging them or evaluating them, because their meaning and their truth will be manifested to us through our using them.

The implication would seem to be that somewhere along the line, the student is going to come face-to-face with the theoretical principles of the Course. For example, as it becomes clear that forgiveness means forgiving the other person for what he did *not* do -- a truly startling, deeply challenging statement -- we are led ultimately to question the reality of guilt itself. That would take us directly to the metaphysical dimension of the Course. Indeed, the Course's view of forgiveness cannot be fully appreciated without being aware of its metaphysical underpinnings. It would be too easy to slide into the traditional view of

forgiving what truly happened if the illusory nature of sin and guilt were not an integral part of one's thinking and approach to grievances.

The answer to your question, therefore, is both yes and no. One can benefit from practicing forgiveness and turning to Jesus for guidance; but the process of forgiveness as presented in the Course would be short-circuited and not fully appreciated if the Course's theory of the origin of guilt were ignored. If this theory were explicitly not accepted, it would make the practice of the Course's version of forgiveness impossible.

Q #178: In *A Course in Miracles*, we are constantly reminded that to dispel the ego we must simply "look" at its machinations without judgment. In other words, with the Holy Spirit or Jesus. It is this process of looking that is a stumbling block for me. Does the Course provide a "mental" formula in the guise of a prayer, phrase or verse that I may employ when I recognize my ego is at work (which is, of course, all the time)?

A: Recognizing your ego is at work is a major component in its undoing, since the ego itself would never allow you to look at its shenanigans. The stumbling block arises because as quickly as you "see" your ego (the right-minded choice), you just as quickly become afraid, and then judge what you have "seen" (the wrong-minded choice). Your fear really then has come from your ability to look with the Holy Spirit's or Jesus' nonjudgmental gentleness and patience at your ego thought system, and that is why you run away. So you want to be gentle with yourself over your not being gentle with yourself. Since it has been determined that you have already become afraid, you certainly do not want to make yourself more fearful by punishing yourself for your lack of gentleness. At the end of Chapter 5 in the text is a lovely prayer you may employ whenever you experience this stumbling block:

I must have decided wrongly, because I am not at peace.

I made the decision myself, but I can also decide otherwise.

I want to decide otherwise, because I want to be at peace.

I do not feel guilty, because the Holy Spirit will undo all the consequences of my wrong decision if I will let Him.

I choose to let Him, by allowing Him to decide for God for me (T.5.VII.6:7,8,9,10,11).

Q #179: I just recently began studying *A Course in Miracles*. I would like to incorporate the Course's teachings into my parenting. I primarily try to guide my children through the natural consequences of their choices, which seems to me the way God teaches us. However, sometimes it seems I must exert my will over theirs for their own best interest. For example: bedtime is bedtime on school nights; or if you have pneumonia and need a shot, there is no other option. In these situations, I am forcing my will on another, which kind of seems like an attack. Do you have any suggestion for parenting in alignment with the Course's teachings?

A: What will help is to focus always on the *purpose* of what you do, not so much the *behavior*; the *content* rather than *form*. Distinguishing between *content* and *form* is essential in applying the Course principles. Second, as students of a spiritual path, we should never lose sight of common sense. Thus parents are parents and children are children; they are not equals. And parents do know better than their children what is best for them.

Exerting your will over your children's wills is an attack only if you mean it that way. If you are angry, punitive, tyrannical, demeaning, etc., then the *content* is attack. But if you are simply being firm with undisciplined children, then that is not an attack. It is not at all loving or helpful -- as many studies have confirmed -- to let children have their own way in everything. They would not grow up as healthy individuals, able to cope in the world, if they had no sense of limit, etc. It is entirely possible to set aside one's ego needs in order to discipline and train children. Parents' behavior might appear to be aggressive, behaviorally, when they are simply responding to the child's aggression in a way that is needed in those circumstances. Thus the behavior itself is not enough to determine what the *content* is. Obviously, though, if a parent is beating a child into a bloody heap, chances are pretty good that it is an attack.

So the point is to practice discerning in yourself the distinction between form and content. Then bring the ego content to the love of Jesus in your mind and ask for help to shift to his content. When the content in your mind is loving, the message your children will be getting when you discipline them is that they are loved and cared for, and that they can trust you always to take care of them. We teach the principles of the Course to children by demonstrating them in our relationships.

Q #180: I am in love with someone who is not in love with me. He cares for me only as a friend. I realize I have chosen this relationship as a form of an attack on myself in order to prove that I am unworthy of love. Would the most loving thing be to stay in this relationship and ask Jesus to heal my perceptions or leave the relationship entirely?

A: We choose *all* of our relationships to demonstrate that they will fail us, that they will not meet our needs, and that love simply can not be trusted, whatever form it seems to take. Special relationships which involve a romantic component only seem to be different because the intensity of emotions elicited seems so much stronger. But the content or the purpose is always the same.

The belief that this self in the world that I think I am is unworthy of love is only a cover over the rage we all feel that we do not have the love that we feel we rightfully deserve. And that rage in turn is a defense against the self-accusation buried deep in our minds that we have rejected love by wanting something else. But the guilt and pain associated with that thought of betrayal are too great and so we project the responsibility for our lack of love outside of ourselves. If no one finds me lovable, it's not my fault. It's someone else's, starting with God, then my parents, and everyone else who has not given me the love that would prove to me I am worthy.

The focus of *A Course in Miracles* is never on how to deal with the external relationship. So the Course would never counsel you on whether to stay in or leave a relationship. Rather it will help you to heal the buried guilt over attacking love that has been buried in your mind. The value of the relationship is that it has helped you get in touch with that hidden self-hatred. But if you do the inner work of healing the guilt in your own mind, the uncertainty you are experiencing over the form of the relationship will dissipate. The healing of your relationship with Jesus' help can proceed whether you remain in the relationship or not. For that has never really been the problem at all, but only a distraction from the real problem of the guilt buried in your own mind.

For a related discussion, you may wish to review [Question #20](#).

Q #181: When I worked the lessons in Part II of the workbook of *A Course in Miracles*, my experience of God's Love was very profound. It felt very sensual. Even now, sometimes, during meditation, I experience

the same warm, sensual feelings. I find myself feeling guilty. Is it wrong for God's Love to be experienced as sensual?

A: While it is true that any genuine experience of God's Love is beyond all feelings, sensations, thoughts and symbols, a couple of things are still true while we continue to see ourselves as existing apart from that Love:

For one, our minds, still believing we are specific and concrete, will want to contain that limitless experience in a form or experience we can identify with, to avoid feeling overwhelmed by the immensity of it. So our minds may translate the experience into something familiar and comforting, even pleasurable, such as you describe. Early in the text, Jesus speaks of **"the confusion of miracle impulses with physical impulses"** and adds that **"all real pleasure comes from doing God's Will"** (T.1.VII.1:2,4).

And another thing that is true is that our ego will seize upon whatever it can to sabotage the experience of love and peace to sow seeds of conflict. But that is only because it is threatened by the limitlessness of love in which it ceases to have any existence.

So the wisest thing is simply not to judge what is happening, acknowledging that your ego may have its agenda with the experience, but its counsel need not be sought. Allow yourself the experiences you are having without judgment, without making them into a big deal in any way. And remember that the experience of God can and should be the most natural experience we could possibly have. And if we're not having it, it certainly is not because He is withholding anything!

Q #182: Chapter 2 in the text of *A Course in Miracles*, has a passage that says "Illness is some form of external searching. Health is inner peace" (T.2.I.5:10). Does this refer to physical illness and physical health? The first 100 pages or so in the text seem to associate physical health with a healed mind. If so, then it is directly relating the body -- which doesn't exist -- with the spiritual being we all are. Also would it follow then that someone who has cancer or some other form of physical sickness can still be totally at peace and have no guilt in their mind? Our discussion leader has said that having complete inner peace and cleansing the mind of guilt have no correlation to physical health, because God does not know the body or sickness. This seems to contradict much of what is written in the Course about only the mind creating, because if you are completely at peace and free of guilt in your mind, how can the body respond with some sort of suffering or illness? I am so confused on this question!

A: 1) One thing that might be helpful is to keep in mind that one of Jesus' purposes in his Course is to correct our faulty thinking, insofar as we have identified with the ego thought system and therefore are always interpreting everything from that perspective. Following the ego's strategy, which has left us mindless, we normally associate sickness and healing with bodily conditions (physical and/or psychological): both the causes and remedies are found in the body and the world. This is the thinking that Jesus is helping us to correct, which is why he uses the terminology that the health of the body reflects the health of the mind. He is correcting the belief we all hold that the body's health is related to conditions and factors in the world. The more we think that way, the less likely we are of ever getting back in touch with the power of our minds. So he teaches us in a number of different ways that the body and its conditions are nothing but expressions of thoughts in the mind. This is all part of the plan of "thought-reversal" in the Course. We have reversed effect and cause, and he is teaching us how to get them back in their proper relationship.

Taking us to the next step, he tells us later in the text: **"Thus is the body healed by miracles because they show the mind made sickness, and employed the body to be victim, or effect, of what it made. Yet half the lesson will not teach the whole. The miracle is useless if you learn but that the body can be healed, for this is not the lesson it was sent to teach. The lesson is the *mind* was sick**

that thought the body could be sick; projecting out its guilt caused nothing, and had no effects" (T.28.II.11.4,5,6,7).

We usually do not instantaneously accept and integrate these teachings into our lives. So our gradual shifting to Jesus' way of thinking would be reflected in our learning to break the connection between our internal state of peace and our bodily states. In other words, we learn that the internal experience of peace is not dependent on freedom from physical/psychological symptoms. This is one of the rungs of the ladder that helps us avoid denying what we are feeling. It is an interim stage, while we still go back and forth between the wrong and right mind. So we are not free of guilt entirely, but in instants of right-minded thinking we can experience peace while the body has symptoms of disease. That experience of peace is what attracts us more and more, and we gradually become less and less identified with bodily conditions; we become less and less identified with the body in general, and become re-acquainted with our minds.

3) Now if the cause of the symptoms is guilt, then when the guilt is gone, the symptoms would disappear as well. BUT, symptoms can be present that do not originate with guilt. They might be chosen in the mind as a means of teaching others that the body is really nothing. There would be no internal suffering in these cases, because there is a clear awareness in that mind that it is not the body. Jesus, for example, did not suffer during the crucifixion because he knew he was not his body. The lesson in this is not to judge by *form*. In other words, just because there are physical symptoms, we cannot conclude that there is guilt.

Now it is possible as well that a person (a mind outside time and space) has chosen to learn the lesson of the Atonement by means of what appears to everyone else to be a horrendous, tragic physical condition. We cannot see the full span of our own or another's Atonement path, so we need to be cautious in drawing conclusions about what our eyes see.

Q #183: In *A Course in Miracles* we are asked to change our perceptions and see peace instead of chaos. But theoretically if I saw everything as loving then what is to stop me disregarding physical danger or emotional danger from others (because I am of spirit and nothing can harm me). How does one perceive correctly, taking into account our physical necessities while we are in the world.

A: I think you are confused about your responsibility, and that of the Holy Spirit's. **"Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all of the barriers within yourself that you have built against it. It is not necessary to seek for what is true, but it is necessary to seek for what is false" (T.16.IV.6:1,2).**

At some point in time, we do realize that mouthing words of defenselessness while feeling completely vulnerable is not helpful. So we must begin to develop honest communication with ourselves. Focus your attention on all the ways you do not see things as loving, i.e., judgments of yourself and others, feelings of anger and hurt, disquiet of any kind. Once you are honest with yourself about what you are doing or how you are feeling, you can then bring this to Jesus or the Holy Spirit so they can fulfill their part: **"My control can take over everything that does not matter [your ego], while my guidance can direct everything that does, if you so choose" (T.2.VI.1:3).** Bringing our ego to Jesus' truth allows him to guide us in ways that are most helpful. Needless to say, as long as we believe we are bodies, he would never guide us to do anything that is harmful or hurtful to ourselves, or others.

And while the choice to bring your ego to Jesus or the Holy Spirit is an important one, an equally important choice occurs prior to this decision -- that is the choice to look honestly at yourself. Because of your guilt and shame, you may think that you are keeping your **"secret sins and hidden hates" (T.31.VIII.9:2)** from Jesus, but you are really keeping them from yourself. This is why self honesty is such a crucial characteristic to develop. The simple act of acknowledging your fear, dread, hatred, etc. can work miracles.

Q #184: I had a moment of clarity recently. I suddenly became aware that all my forms of specialness are based round the body and so they are all doomed to fail along with the body. Strangely this was not depressing -- what I felt was mostly relief. The moment didn't last though, as peaceful as it was, and the fear returned. What I feel I want from you is reassurance that there is nothing to fear so that I can go back to the peace.

In the "Rules for Decision" section of *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus says that I can have the day I want. I consistently refuse to follow the steps he lays out though because I don't believe he will give me what I need. Can one take him at his word here? If the day I want contains my being happy and unafraid will he give me that? If the day I want contains being surrounded by people I love will he give me that? What if I feel I need other things, like food, sex, warmth and water? Will he give me them? I am frightened that Jesus, not being a body, will not because he doesn't think I need them. These are not things I think will make me happy, but they are things I do not think I could be happy without.

I understand from the story about Helen and her eyelash that it is not Jesus who gives parking spaces to me -- it is my own mind. But may I still think of Jesus as giving these things to me, for a little while longer anyway? It is easier for me to accept when presented like that. Certainly I wouldn't want to have to provide my own happiness since it is so plain to me that I don't know how.

A: You certainly have put yourself in a bind! You know you don't know how to provide for your happiness but you don't trust Jesus to either. There is nothing wrong with continuing to want to see him as providing for your needs, but since you doubt that he is willing to, you really are setting up both yourself and him for failure. Because then when you feel deprived of anything, you can blame him.

Jesus points out that **"only you can deprive yourself of anything" (T.11.IV.4:1)**. It is we who believe we need to sacrifice and punish ourselves for the sin of separation and attack we accuse ourselves of. So long as this belief underlies our thinking, we will project evidence of scarcity and lack onto the various forms of our lives. But the goal of the Course is not to teach us how to provide for ourselves physically and emotionally, but rather how to uncover the love buried deep within our minds so that we know that real abundance -- love -- is ours.

When Jesus tells us in **"Rules for Decision" (T.30.I)** how to have the kind of day we want, he is speaking only about content and not form. And so that is why he is encouraging us to make all of our decisions joined with him, or the Holy Spirit, rather than with the ego, which is the source of our belief in scarcity, lack and deprivation. For then our own judgments of what we need and what will make us happy will not get in the way. But while we still think we are a body, it will be difficult not to believe we know what at least some of our needs must be.

Whenever you join with Jesus in your mind, even when it is in the form of asking him for help with specific needs, you have in the moment of joining set aside your belief in lack and limitation. Now Jesus in reality has nothing to do with form -- it is always our minds that decide about that. Nevertheless, early in your experience with the Course, you may find that your mind translates that experience of his love into the forms of what you believe you need. And so you have the experience of Jesus helping you in the world. There is nothing wrong with that and it can be very helpful in allowing you to develop trust in him. But over time, you will begin to realize that your real need and desire is for peace, as you experienced with your insight about specialness. And so what is happening in the world of form and your body will become less of a concern and what is happening within your mind will increasingly become your focus.

This certainly does not mean that your body's needs will no longer be met, for if you are releasing the need to punish yourself, your body will over time become simply a neutral instrument that functions without concern or fear on your part (**W.pII.294.1**). But if there are still lessons of forgiveness to be learned, your mind will continue to project the guilt out into the world as a physical problem or a bodily

need. But you will now see the world, not as a prison in which you are deprived, but as a classroom in which you are being presented with opportunities to uncover the guilt buried in your mind that is being projected as scarcity and lack. And your goal will be to heal the guilt in your mind and not concern yourself with the form it takes in the world. And that is where Jesus can really be of help. For he knows that the guilt is not real and deprivation is impossible. And in that shared realization, peace is yours.

For a related discussion, see [Question #172](#).

Q #185: If the world that I perceive is not real, does that not mean all who dwell within that world, including myself, are not real, and then would that not also mean that only God is real, and it is God who is having the dream?

A: The first three points of your sequence are correct; the world is not real, everyone in the world is not real, only God is real. What does not follow is that God is having the dream. God is not part of the dream precisely because He *is* real and a dream is an illusion. "Real" and "illusion" are mutually exclusive. The "missing person" in your equation is the mind of the separated Son who is the dreamer of the dream. This is the *you* the Course is addressing, and is teaching us to identify with. We have mistakenly identified with the "figure in the dream" -- the you you think you are -- the you that is not real. This has caused us much confusion. *A Course in Miracles'* explanation of how this has happened is that when the mind chooses to believe that separation from God is not only possible but real, it is as if the mind falls asleep and dreams a dream of separation. In this dream, the mind that is dreaming becomes identified with the figure in the dream. Everything is now turned upside down. The world becomes real to us. It is no longer perceived as the dream that it is, and we become lost in its illusions, totally unaware that we are dreaming. This is the power of denial in operation. What is denied is the choice in the mind to separate from God, and then dream this dream where God is absent and can enter not. The identity as dreamer of the dream is denied or forgotten, replaced by an identity as the figure in the dream. This identity crisis is the ego's goal. It keeps us free of responsibility for the original choice in the mind to separate, and the decision to deny the choice. The goal of the Course is to teach us that we are in fact the dreamer of the dream, whereby we have the ability to become a lucid dreamer, aware that we are dreaming, and that we also have the power to make another choice. If, as a lucid dreamer, we are aware we are dreaming a nightmare of separation that is the source of all our pain, we will eventually realize we can awaken from this dream. The Course tells us: **"You have chosen a sleep in which you have had bad dreams, but the sleep is not real and God calls you to awake. There will be nothing left of your dream when you hear Him, because you will awaken. Your dreams contain many of the ego's symbols and they have confused you. Yet that was only because you were asleep and did not know. When you wake you will see the truth around you and in you, and you will no longer believe in dreams because they will have no reality for you. Yet the Kingdom and all that you have created there will have great reality for you, because they are beautiful and true" (T.6.IV.6:3,4,5,6,7,8).**

It may be helpful to relate this to the experience of a child having a dream. His parents are not in the dream, and are unaware that the child is having a nightmare. The nightmare seems real and frightening to the child while he sleeps. It is only when the child awakens that he realizes he was dreaming, and that he is safe in his bed with his parents there to comfort him, assuring him that the dream was not real.

Q #186: In Chapter 31 of *A Course in Miracles*, Section V, "Self-Concept vs Self," Jesus says, "The role of the accuser will appear in many places and in many forms. And each will seem to be accusing you" (T.31.V.16:5,6). Can you explain what is meant by this?

A: As earlier parts of this section make clear, each judgment we hold against another is really a deeply buried self-accusation. Perhaps most graphic is the following; **"No longer does it matter what he does,**

for your accusing finger points to him, unwavering in its deadly aim. It points to you as well, but this is kept deeper in the mists below the face of innocence" (T.31.V.6:4,5).

The section then goes on (T.31.V.15,16) to discuss how we will assume various concepts or roles for our self-identity over time (e.g., child, sibling, student, lover, spouse, parent, employee, boss) -- all the while believing that we are a victim in these various relationships, treated unfairly by a world of evil that exists outside ourselves. But all the accusations we hold against others as we assume the various roles of our lives (i.e., "the role of the accuser...in many places and in many forms") really represent the hidden accusations of guilt and sin over the original separation thought and all its seeming ramifications that we hold against ourselves. And so as we accept and put into practice the Course's teaching on projection, it will now *seem* that the finger we have pointed at others is, in each case, now pointing at ourselves. But the reality of our true Self is beyond all these roles and concepts And so Jesus reassures us, **"Yet have no fear it [each role] will not be undone" (T.31.V.16:7).** For none of the images of good or evil that we have made of both our brother and ourselves is real. And when we no longer want any of them, we will know Who we truly are (T.31.V.17).

Q #187: So what happens when one is finally able to let go of one's ego? Does one, as an individual, cease to exist? I know I am attached to my individuality. I like my life, basically. I don't want to disappear into....what? I like the world and think it is beautiful. I don't want the world to disappear. What happens when our bodies die? What happens when we awake from the dream? Do we awake from the dream when our bodies die?

A: You can rest assured that so long as you want an individual self and the world to be your reality, they will be. Jesus makes this clear in a number of passages. Speaking of the world we see, he says, **"...you invented it. You can give it up as easily as you made it up. You will see it or not see it, as you wish. While you want it you will see it; when you no longer want it, it will not be there for you to see" (W.pl.32.1:2,3,4,5).** And later in the workbook, **"There is no world apart from what you wish, and herein lies your ultimate release....It is not pride which tells you that you made the world you see, and that it changes as you change your mind" (W.pl.132.5:1,5).** And earlier in the text, he assures us, **"Fear not that you will be abruptly lifted up and hurled into reality" (T.16.VI.8:1).**

So you are not at this point looking for release -- that is fine. Jesus has no judgment about that. He may question your sanity (T.23.II.13:4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13). But he does not judge you for preferring the world to his love. Most of us do not recognize or believe that this is the choice we are making. And so one of the purposes of *A Course in Miracles* is to help us see that we are choosing the world and our individual self, and that choice represents a choice against love and peace. Genuine love and peace can only be found in unity, not in separation and differences.

If the world still holds great appeal for you, the Course will be less desirable as a spiritual path. It will teach you the value of letting go of your judgments and, as a result, of having less pain, guilt and anxiety in your relationships. But the metaphysics that is the Course's foundation for forgiveness asserts the unreality of the separation, the individual self, and the world. Such a teaching runs counter to your expressed preference for the world and at some point you may experience conflict. But the truth is, none of us would find ourselves here in the world if it were not our preference and our choice, as the passages cited above make clear.

So what is most important is that you are honest with yourself and Jesus about what you want right now and how you feel. If, over time, you come to accept that the choice you are making has a cost to you, you can reconsider your decision at that point.

When you are ready to release completely your identification with the ego self and the world, which is its defense, nothing really will happen. You will simply experience a profound shift in perception. Death has

nothing to do with this shift anymore than birth has. The death of the body does not change the decision being made in the mind to be separate -- it may in fact reinforce that choice, if the death in any way feels like a punishment or a deprivation or an escape. And then we will simply choose another lifetime to continue our experience of individuality and specialness.

Everything is happening in the mind and when your mind lets go of the ego, you will simply awaken to the fact that you have only been dreaming a dream of separation, And so there is no separation, no separate self and no external world. The dream may appear to continue, but you will not take it seriously, knowing it is simply a fantasy or illusion that has no real meaning or effects. You will know you are limitless mind and not a limited bodily self. And the joy that comes from the realization that the mind is truly one will make whatever joy and beauty the world seemed to offer you before seem like a pale, lifeless shadow in comparison.

See also [Question #68](#) for a discussion of the relationship between the mind and death of the body.

Q #188: After studying *A Course in Miracles* for 11 years, I'm only now beginning to understand how much I don't want to learn it. I know this really means how much I fear it, and that I might need to be more "gentle" with myself. But trying to take things less seriously would seem to undermine the Course's attempt to show us just how deeply we are committed to the ego thought system. Thank you for any suggestions on this, from a student who still loves being the dream figure amid glimpses that he is not.

A: Apparently, trying to take things less seriously has in fact shown you "just how deeply we are committed to the ego thought system". Taking things less seriously is not as easy as it may sound. Any attempt to do so leads us to realize that we *do* take things very seriously. In studying the Course, we soon become aware that if we begin to take some aspects of the ego thought system less seriously we will end up taking the whole thing less seriously. In the end, rather than undermining the Course's teaching, this will actually undermine the ego's thought system. This is why we *don't* do it. And this is why we don't want to learn what the Course teaches. This in itself is an important and helpful realization. It means that you have some understanding of what the Course is saying about who we are (the dreamer of the dream), and more importantly, who we are *not* (a figure in the dream). A clear recognition of our resistance to learning this gives us an appreciation for the process and, as you say, the need for gentleness in applying the teachings of the Course.

It is not surprising that it is difficult to take things less seriously. The Course does not discount how seriously we have taken our mistaken beliefs about ourselves and our world. **"No one believes there really was a time when he knew nothing of a body, and could never have conceived this world as real. He would have seen at once that these ideas are one illusion, too ridiculous for anything but to be laughed away. How serious they now appear to be! And no one can remember when they would have met with laughter and with disbelief. We can remember this, if we but look directly at their cause. And we will see the grounds for laughter, not a cause for fear"** (T.27.VIII.5:5,6,7,8,9,10).

Our learning process requires that first we recognize just how seriously we take ourselves. Trying to force ourselves not to take things seriously probably won't work. The only way we can learn to do this is mentioned in the quote above. We need to learn to look at the cause of our beliefs. The cause is the decision in the mind to separate from God, and then believe it is an accomplished fact. The Course is telling us this is ridiculous, and eventually we will laugh at it. This will happen when we have let go of our guilt over having taken it seriously in the first place. Obviously we are not laughing yet. You may find it helpful to practice not taking your resistance too seriously, and not judging yourself for your love of being a figure in the dream. Our resistance and unwillingness do not change truth, or justify our fear, and we are not banished from Heaven because of them. Furthermore, full acceptance is not required for us to practice what the Course teaches. As the Introduction to the workbook tells us: "Remember only this; you

need not believe the ideas, you need not accept them, and you need not even welcome them. Some of them you may actively resist. None of this will matter, or decrease their efficacy" (W.in.9:1,2,3). If you continue to remind yourself that what you see and experience in the dream is not real and has no effect on the *real* you, it will become increasingly easier to take things less seriously. Each remembrance strengthens belief in the Holy Spirit's thought system and diminishes our "seriousness." As with God, the laughter is inevitable.

Q #189: What does *A Course in Miracles* refer to as "all" in the sentence "To have, give all to all." (T.6.V.A:13)? I have heard Ken say that it doesn't mean to give everything away in this world and go live on a mountain top. What does it mean?

A: First, Jesus is correcting the ego's version, which is "to have, take all from all." To the ego, the only way of having something is to *get it* from somewhere or someone. Therefore, Jesus tells us, **"the first step in the reversal or undoing process is the undoing of the getting concept" (T.6.V.B.3:1)**. This is directly related to our learning to prefer shared interests instead of separate, competing interests; and that by seeking to take something from someone, we will wind up as the loser, because we will have once again denied that God's Son is one and that as His creation we already have everything (**W.pl.133.7**).

So this has nothing to do with form or with behavior; it has to do with our attitude or inner orientation: the *content*, not the *form*. It has to do with undoing our inclination to exclude others and to acquire what we want at another's expense. It has to do with looking at how we value uniqueness and specialness, and how that leads to more conflict instead of peace. We would begin to question the value of something that cannot be shared with everyone -- why we would want something that cannot be shared with everyone. Again, this has to do with our *attitude*. Obviously, as you said, we are not being asked to buy enough for everyone in the world whenever we go shopping. Jesus is working with the premises that govern our thinking.

This first lesson of the Holy Spirit, then, is essentially about undoing our concept of *getting* as the means of having: **"You must learn first that *having* rests on giving, and not on getting" (T.6.V.C.6:1)**.

Q #190: A two-part question regarding the 'script' of our lives:

i: If I choose my parents, nationality, sex, time I live in before I'm born, what contingencies are there in my life? Many or none? Is it all spelled out beforehand so all I'm choosing at each moment is crucifixion or resurrection? What, in other words, is not written beforehand?

ii: What role does the right mind have in choosing all of the above beforehand?

A: We set certain seemingly unchangeable parameters for each lifetime, including those you list above. But even some of these can shift as the mind chooses: one learns as an adult that he or she was adopted; someone opts for a sex change operation, etc. Part of the ego's seductive allurements is that we do have choice at the level of form and this is the great distraction. For we believe the problem of our guilt over separation, which remains buried in our mind, can be resolved **"by making some sort of insane 'arrangement' with the world" (T.12.III.6:5)** -- what *A Course in Miracles* calls magic (**M.16.8,9,11**). So the ego maintains the illusion of choice at the level of form, keeping hidden from us the fact that we are always choosing the same content: separation and guilt. And we never address the real underlying problem of the guilt in our mind.

Now it is true that the Course teaches that everything has already happened and that linear time is not real -- everything *is* already written beforehand (**W.pl.158.3,4**). But that does not mean that everything in an individual lifetime is predetermined. The pool of possible events is predetermined, but we have a moment-by-moment choice about which relationships and events we will access and review (for a more extended discussion of this, see [Question #37](#)).

Despite all these options, the most helpful frame of reference we can adopt is to remember that, regardless of the possibilities on the level of form, the only *real* choice we are confronted with in each moment is the one between crucifixion and resurrection.

Since we always have a right mind while we still believe in the reality of separation, we have the option of turning to our right mind about any decision we are making, including how to approach a new relationship, a new career, or a new lifetime. The distinction between *before* and *during* a lifetime is really an arbitrary one that our ego mind wishes to reinforce, making the state of our mind seem somehow qualitatively different during this lifetime from the state of the mind when this lifetime is still only an option being considered. And so, as with every choice, we can make it with either the ego or the Holy Spirit as our teacher. And as most of us do, we may vacillate between the wrong mind and the right mind, sometimes making choices based on our desire for specialness and sometimes choosing in order to learn our lessons of forgiveness. This is true, from the perspective of illusory linear time, both before and during each lifetime. Again, whether we are choosing the parameters for an upcoming lifetime or the parameters within a current lifetime, the options and the process in the mind remain the same.

Q #191: I would like to know your opinion on "special relationships." Is every relationship in which there is love a special one? The relationship with your children for instance? Is it enough that only one in the relationship have knowledge about *A Course in Miracles*?

A: The Course tells us that every relationship, whether we define it as a love or hate relationship, is special. The ego uses every relationship to project guilt onto another for our decision to separate from God. Using the relationship for purposes of projection is an attack, which the Course calls hate. Every special relationship is therefore actually a hate relationship, camouflaged in some cases as "love." The ego identifies every person as a body, and relates to each one as a body, which according to the Course is another form of attack on the Son of God, who is *not* a body. The projection of guilt and perception of body identity are fundamental characteristics of the special relationship. Although we may be unaware of them, these are the dynamics at work in every relationship. It is difficult to apply this concept to our relationships with our children because the world has glorified parenthood, and we use children and family relationships to express "love" as defined by the ego. The care, concern, and attention that is given to children is not love as the Course defines it; they are part of the dynamic the ego has set up as "pseudo love," which is actually a substitute for God's love. This substitution is another important characteristic of the special relationship. Anyone or anything that is used in an attempt to fill the void left by our seeming separation from God is what the Course calls special. Children fit the ego's plan perfectly because they come into the world totally dependent on the care of others, having been given "life" by parents who will hopefully meet all their needs for growth and sustenance. Part of the parenthood dysfunction is the belief, on the part of parents, that children will meet their needs as well. This mutual dependency, in which each agrees to sacrifice in order to have their own needs met, is the "bargain" that the ego claims will keep everyone safe and "happy." It sometimes seems to work, frequently it is beset with great pain and conflict, driven by intense feelings of guilt. The Course gives us a vivid description: **"All special relationships have sin as their goal. For they are bargains with reality, toward which the seeming union is adjusted. Forget not this; to bargain is to set a limit, and any brother with whom you have a limited relationship, you hate. You may attempt to keep the bargain in the name of "fairness," sometimes demanding payment of yourself, perhaps more often of the other. Thus in the "fairness" you attempt to ease the guilt that comes from the accepted purpose of the relationship. And that is why the Holy Spirit must change its purpose to make it useful to Him and harmless to you" (T.21.III.1).**

In this, as with everything the Course teaches, it is enough that only one person in the relationship be a student of the Course. The practice of the Course's teaching requires only that the individual look carefully at all the thoughts of judgment in any relationship, and recognize the ego's purpose at work in all of them. The purpose is always to make the separation real, and strengthen our belief that we can make a world of our own that will meet our needs better than God ever could. We do not do this for anyone but ourselves. When we recognize the ego's ploys, and begin to realize that our pain is actually coming from our alliance with the ego's thought system of separation, guilt, and attack, we have the opportunity to turn to the Holy Spirit, whose thought system reinterprets everything the ego has made, and ask for help. The help is not to change anyone else in the dream, but for ourselves to accept His purpose. Although this may not bring about any change in form in our relationships, the purpose will be transformed: **"...the Holy Spirit would not deprive you of your special relationships, but would transform them. And all that is meant by that is that He will restore to them the function given them by God. The function you have given them is clearly not to make happy. But the holy relationship shares God's purpose, rather than aiming to make a substitute for it. Every special relationship you have made is a substitute for God's Will, and glorifies yours instead of His because of the illusion that they are different"** (T.17.IV.2:3,4,5,6,7). Eventually, as this is practiced more and more the pain of special relationships will be replaced by the peace of the holy relationship.

Q #192: "I do not choose God's channels wrongly" (T.4.VI.6:3). This line has always had a strong emotional impact on me (it made me cry, boosted my confidence, etc.), but sometimes I think this line perhaps was meant only personally for Helen?

A: It must always be remembered that *A Course in Miracles* came for Helen and Bill in response to their joining together to find a better way of relating. Therefore, many of the comments -- especially in the early chapters -- were meant for them; but clearly they can be seen as applying to all of us who struggle with the same issues with which they struggled. The statement you refer to, therefore, in no way implies that they were special, a meaning our egos would immediately see in it, as the ego knows only of separation. Helen did not see herself as specially blessed in any way, and very quickly corrected anyone who regarded her as special.

Connecting this statement with two other key statements further clarifies the meaning: **"All my brothers are special"** and **"All are called"** (T.1.V.3; T.3.IV.7). While using the language of the Bible, Jesus clearly corrects the traditional view that singles out certain special people: "many are called, but few are chosen," or groups of people: "the chosen people." He is basically telling us that we are not mistaken in thinking that we are dear to him.

At the beginning of **Lesson 93**, he describes the horribly negative self-concept we harbor deep within our minds -- sometimes not very far beneath the surface. And then he tells us that we are so convinced that this is the truth about us that it is difficult for him to help us see that it is all based on nothing (**W.pl.93.1,2**). That explains why we would tend to think that Jesus was referring only to Helen and Bill, not us, a trend of thought he later calls arrogant. When we think that way, we ought to stop and reflect on where those thoughts are coming from, and how in feeling unworthy we are really telling Jesus he is wrong about us.

Then, too, we must remember that although our experience at first may be that of being chosen, that is not the reality. As we get further up the ladder, our experience will be that we are really allowing ourselves to experience love more and more, and resisting it less and less.

Q #193: The Lord's Prayer, supposedly given directly from Jesus, seems to make the world and sin real and request God's involvement in our life. From the Course's perspective, how would we explain this and what would be an example of valid prayer in the "dream"?

A: Since the Gospels were written down approximately 50 years after the historical Jesus' death, there is no certainty that any of the accounts accurately report what he actually said. In fact, Scripture scholars have established that Jesus probably did not say most of the things that are recorded in the Gospels. The Lord's Prayer, therefore, would not necessarily have come directly from Jesus. It is compatible with the entire teaching of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, which, as you say, make sin and the world very real. From the perspective of *A Course in Miracles*, the only explanation for this is that the teaching of the Bible is not the teaching of the Course. They are not similar and can be compared only in contrast, since the Course uses terms found in the Bible but with a different interpretation.

Prayer in the dream is ultimately a reminder to ourselves that we have a mind with the power to choose. In the face of any conflict or distressing situation, our prayer can be simply stated: **"brother, choose again" (T.31.VIII.3:2)**. Implicit in this prayer is the recognition that we have already made a choice. It is this choice, not the situation, that is the real cause of our distress, and we can "choose again." This is a very simple prayer, but to say it sincerely, with acceptance of the implications noted above, can meet with strong resistance. It requires taking full responsibility for our choices, as well as the predicaments we find ourselves in. Although this is the process involved in prayer as the Course teaches, the Course meets us on the many different levels of our learning. Because we have a need to experience the power of our own minds in symbolic form, we find prayers addressed to God our Father, or the Holy Spirit. Many of these are very beautiful "prayers" which actually speak to our hearts rather than to God, who does not hear prayers (**T.16.VII.12**). They are given to us to help us get in touch with the true desire of our hearts, and to encourage us to make another choice. This is the prayer of the heart that the Manual refers to, in contrast to the "prayer for specifics" (**M.21.2:3**). This prayer of the heart refers to what we truly desire.

The Course also tells us our prayer is heard, and we that we *do* receive what we ask for. Our "prayer" is always for only one of two things -- the ego's interpretation, or the Holy Spirit's. We will receive the one we truly desire. This obviously occurs on the level of the mind where the choice is made. The effect of our prayer will be experienced in the dream in the form of peace (reflecting our choice for the Holy Spirit) or in some form of conflict (reflecting our choice for the ego). The specifics do not matter. It is always the disposition of our hearts, our willingness, that is most important. We "pray" when we look within with willingness to recognize whose voice we have chosen to listen to. Engaging in this process indicates that we have already chosen to listen to the ego. We then have the opportunity to ask ourselves if this is truly what we want to hear, and, as stated in the beginning, we can now choose again. We will know if we are in fact listening to the Holy Spirit by the peace we will eventually experience: **"The part [of your mind] that is listening to the Voice for God is calm, always at rest and wholly certain. It is really the only part there is. The other part is a wild illusion, frantic and distraught, but without reality of any kind. Try today not to listen to it. Try to identify with the part of your mind where stillness and peace reign forever. Try to hear God's Voice call to you lovingly, reminding you that your Creator has not forgotten His Son" (W.p.I.49.2)**. Our "prayer" is this listening.

Q #194: You explain in many places that *A Course in Miracles* is uncompromising about the fact that this world does not exist. Could you list the passages from the text and/or the workbook that explain that this is so?

A: We are listing a number of references here, and we also refer you to Q #111. This is an important issue, which actually is the foundation of the whole thought system of *A Course in Miracles*. You might also find our *Glossary-Index for A Course in Miracles* helpful -- under "world." When the main principles are identified, then you can see how they are expressed in many different ways. For example, if only what

God creates exists, and God creates only what is eternal and infinite, then anything not of God does not and could not exist, i.e., the changing, limited cosmos.

A sampling of statements:

1) **"Perception is not an attribute of God. His is the realm of knowledge....In God you cannot see. Perception has no function in God, and does not exist" (W.pl.43.1:1,2; 2:1,2).**

2) **"There is no world! This is the central concept the course attempts to teach" (W.pl.132.6:2,3).**
There are other statements within this lesson that state the unreality of the world; e.g., **"How can a world of time and place exist, if you remain as God created you?" (9:4); "There is no world because it is a thought apart from God, and made to separate the Father and the Son, and break away a part of God Himself and thus destroy His Wholeness. Can a world which comes from this idea be real? Can it be anywhere?" (13:1,2,3).**

3) **"I am as God created me"; "What has been given you? The knowledge that you are a mind, in Mind and purely mind, sinless forever, wholly unafraid, because you were created out of love. Nor have you left your Source, remaining as you were created" (W.pl.158.1:1,2,3).**

4) **"Sin is the home of all illusions, which but stand for things imagined, issuing from thoughts that are untrue. They are the 'proof' that what has no reality is real. Sin 'proves' God's Son is evil; timelessness must have an end; eternal life must die. And God Himself has lost the Son He loves, with but corruption to complete Himself, His Will forever overcome by death, love slain by hate, and peace to be no more" (W.pll.4.3).**

5) **"What if you recognized this world is an hallucination? What if you really understood you made it up? What if you realized that those who seem to walk about in it, to sin and die, attack and murder and destroy themselves, are wholly unreal?" (T.20.VIII.7:3,4,5,ff.)**

6) **"There is no life outside of Heaven. Where God created life, there life must be. In any state apart from Heaven life is illusion...Life not in Heaven is impossible, and what is not in Heaven is not anywhere" (T.23.II.19.1,2,6).**

7) **"God's laws do not obtain directly to a world perception rules, for such a world could not have been created by the Mind to which perception has no meaning. Yet are His laws reflected everywhere [through the Holy Spirit]. Not that the world where this reflection is, is real at all. Only because His Son believes it is, and from His Son's belief He could not let Himself be separate entirely. He could not enter His Son's insanity with him..." (T.24.III.2).**

8) **"This world is causeless..." (T.28.II.6:1).**

9) **"They [your eyes and ears] were made to look upon a world that is not there; to hear the voices that make no sound" (T.28.V.5:4).**

10) **"What seems eternal all will have an end. The stars will disappear, and night and day will be no more. All things that come and go, the tides, the seasons and the lives of men; all things that change with time and bloom and fade will not return. Where time has set an end is not where the eternal is" (T.29.VI.2:7,8,9,10).**

11) **"Can what has no beginning really end? The world will end in an illusion, as it began" (M.14.1:1,2).**

12) "The world you see is an illusion of a world. God did not create it, for what He creates must be eternal as Himself. Yet there is nothing in the world you see that will endure forever. Some things will last in time a little while longer than others. But the time will come when all things visible will have an end" (C.4.1).

13) "What is false is false, and what is true has never changed" (W.pII.10.1:1).

14) "How simple is salvation! All it says is what was never true is not true now, and never will be. The impossible has not occurred, and can have no effects. And that is all" (T.31.I.1:1,2,3,4).

Q #195: As an athlete, competition is how bills get paid. How do you reconcile beating an opponent and striving daily to get better at beating your opponents as, say, a boxer or football player would? I'm a musician myself and if I allow my skill level to drop below a certain point I lose work. So how do we deal with the challenges of competition and everyday survival and not be aware of dualism?

A: The focus of our work with *A Course in Miracles* is not on getting beyond our awareness of dualism; it is in becoming more aware of which teacher we have chosen to guide us in our daily life: the ego or Jesus, and therefore whether we are learning how to reinforce our belief in separation or to undo it. Since there is no hierarchy of illusions, we can learn our lessons of forgiveness in any occupation at all. Competition permeates just about everything in this world, because the world is nothing but the outside picture of the ego thought system of competition in our minds. The ego is in a perpetual state of competition with what it senses as a threat to its very existence. Hence, "kill or be killed" describes practically every dimension of physical and psychological existence in the world that is rooted in that thought system.

Your role as a musician (*the form*), thus, can now be seen as a classroom in which -- if you choose Jesus or the Holy Spirit as your teacher -- you can learn how to undo the separation you ordinarily perceive between you and your colleagues (*the content*). So you would practice and do whatever you need to do to maintain your competence (*the form*), but you would do it with Jesus or the Holy Spirit (*the content*). Your purpose would not be to beat others for a position -- although the form would look like that. Your purpose would be to learn that your interests are not separate from anyone else's, and that gaining or acquiring something at another's expense is truly valueless. Thus you could learn how to compete for first chair in the orchestra -- for example -- while at the same time learning that the only thing of real value is perceiving yourself and every other person in the orchestra as part of the one Son of God. You would go about it differently, in other words. Your *attitude* or the *content in your mind* is what would have changed. Ultimately, it makes no difference whether one person is a better musician than another

In principle, we can practice the Course in any role whatsoever. **"There is no order of difficulty in miracles. One is not 'harder' or 'bigger' than another"** (T.1.I.1:1,2). So it is perfectly possible to learn the Course while playing football or being a boxer. There have been many examples of professional athletes who played their sport in a "gentlemanly" manner, and were still ranked among the best.

Finally, we always need to guard against judging our own or another's spiritual progress based on *form*, as it is impossible for us to see in its totality our own or anyone else's Atonement path. Perhaps being a defensive lineman on a football team is the role a mind has chosen in which to learn the valuelessness of victory or the insignificance of the body. In principle, we cannot rule this out. Analogously, the Bhagavad Gita tells the story of Krishna advising Arjuna to be the best warrior he can be, because that is his dharma. "How can the immortal die?" Krishna reminds Arjuna, who was troubled by his having to kill others.

Q #196: Do people really most of the time feel like victims of an outside world? Having been abused as a child, it seems to me that life wasn't tolerable until I put the sin and guilt on to myself, feeling like the victimizer. How can this be explained?

A: Your question seems to be open to at least two interpretations. You may mean that you have assumed the victimizer role later in life in your relationships as an adult. But you may also mean that you have reinterpreted your victim experiences as a child and have chosen to see yourself as having some responsibility, even control, in those situations so that in some sense you have victimized your abusers (e.g., unwanted pregnancy, difficult childbirth, chronic childhood illnesses). Or perhaps there is yet another meaning you intended. But regardless of your specific meaning, the answer is basically the same.

When we see ourselves acting as the victimizer, we are always feeling at some level that our attacks are justified as a defense against the victimization we have suffered at those times when we have been more helpless, less powerful. Our desire is to seize power as a protection against those outside forces so that what has happened to us in the past can not happen again, even at the risk of seeing the sin and guilt in us as well. But always, at least at an unconscious level, we are continuing to identify with the victim role for, as *A Course in Miracles* says, "**All defenses do what they would defend**" (T.17.IV.7:1). Whether we are arrogating power in the present or reinterpreting the past to claim that power in retrospect is all the same -- our goal is to defend ourselves against feeling vulnerable and at risk. But we never question the assumption that we are vulnerable and at risk, which can only come from a case of mistaken identity -- seeing ourselves as this limited physical self.

This dynamic is described in the section "Self-Concept vs. Self," which comes near the end of the text. In talking about the face of innocence, Jesus observes, "**This aspect never makes the first attack. But every day a hundred little things make small assaults upon its innocence, provoking it to irritation, and at last to open insult and abuse. The face of innocence the concept of the self so proudly wears can tolerate attack in self-defense, for is it not a well-known fact the world deals harshly with defenseless innocence?**" (T.31.V.3:3,4; 4:1).

We all defend against the sin and guilt of separation buried deep in our minds with a variety of strategies. To understand how these strategies work, we must recognize that the goal with each is to keep ourselves mindless. That is, we keep our focus on the world we seem to live in and our reactions to it, rather than ever getting in touch with the real guilt buried deep in our mind, which has nothing to do with the external world. Being abused as a child is one part of the strategy, but striking out against others as a defense against the powerlessness we feel over having been abused is simply another. But once we uncover the truth that they are flip sides of the same ego coin, we can now be open to another choice, at a completely different level. Victim and victimizer are both false roles we assume to keep the separation alive and real in our mind. But when we look on both of them as equally untrue, the truth of Who we are -- the innocent Son of an All-loving Father -- can at last dawn upon our minds.

Q #197: What is the soul? Is it Jesus, the Holy Spirit, or the process of forgiveness?

A: To quote from the clarification of terms of *A Course in Miracles*: "**The term 'soul' is not used except in direct biblical quotations because of its highly controversial nature. It would, however, be an equivalent of 'spirit,' with the understanding that, being of God, it is eternal and was never born**" (C.1.3:2).

The term soul can also be equated with mind in the Course, the split mind. Jesus frequently refers to our spiritual process as a journey on which we have embarked, and that it surely encompasses more than one lifetime. We can say in this sense that our "souls" move on.

Q #198: Why did God create the Oneness in the first place?

A: It's not so much that God created Oneness, but that Oneness is the nature of God. In other words, He couldn't help Himself. And this is impossible to understand by a brain programmed by the ego to only understand duality. The only way to understand God is through experience, and that will come in time as you practice more and more your lessons of forgiveness.

Q #199: Yesterday I experienced something that probably could be termed existential fear; fear without any external cause, but so intensive that it made me physically sick. I was able to look at it for a second or two and go beyond it and sense a great release. These brief moments brought a lot of pain followed by a feeling of freedom, so that I tried to evoke this cycle again and again. Today I realized that sensing this fear was very important, but I cannot do it myself any more, I cannot go through this threshold alone. Also, I realized that I never seriously asked Jesus or the Holy Spirit for help. They do not exist within my reach. How can I ask for help if I see them as total abstractions (opposed to how I see myself -- specific individual!)? I wonder if in such situations it would be possible to seek for help from other people without getting my ego involved?

A: The experience you describe, especially since it included a release from the fear, is a helpful one. And the fact that you experienced release means you were not going through this process alone, whether or not you *consciously* invoked the Holy Spirit or Jesus for help. Your ego mind will want you to dismiss their accessibility to you, especially after such experiences as you describe, so that you will not trust that you have help already available. You may see Jesus and the Holy Spirit as total abstractions, but they can be as specific in your mind as you want and need them to be. You only need to ask them. Jesus himself, at the end of the workbook, assures us, **"Of this be sure; that I will never leave you comfortless"** (W.pII.ep.6:8).

There is also nothing wrong with seeking help and support from another specific individual person as long as that is how you perceive yourself. You would want to be sure you ask someone who is open-minded and nonjudgmental and who can recognize the value of what you are experiencing -- and that need not be a student of *A Course in Miracles*.

But a caution to consider, that you don't make repetition of the experience a goal in itself. The lessons of forgiveness can take many different forms, and this kind of experience is only one of them. If it will be helpful and you are willing, more opportunities will present themselves. But in the meantime, any of the more specific forms of fear -- which may show up as anxiety, anger, pain, stress, depression, etc. -- are just as valuable in the process of healing your mind and releasing the fear.

Q #200: I am in my first year with *A Course in Miracles*. I was sexually molested as a child. The severe shame I feel from this has made relationships difficult. With each new failure to keep or maintain a relationship, they seem to become progressively more difficult. I don't mind being in the constant process of forgiving the perpetrators. But my life struggle seems to be in sustaining forgiveness of myself. Is there any way I can address this specifically in my renewed relationship with God?

A: It is your ego that has convinced you that the shame you feel now is the result of those traumatic and shameful abusive experiences of your childhood. That way, the problem remains in the past, never really capable of being undone. But you are not alone in thinking this way. This is the purpose of the world, to keep our focus away from the real problem in the mind, the original and only source of guilt and shame, and on events in our lives that have happened to us and cannot be reversed.

This is not to say that those childhood experiences were not horrific or that you don't continue to be haunted by thoughts related to those experiences. But what the Course offers you now is another way in the present of looking at all of that so that it need not maintain the grip on your life and your mind that it has up until now.

The guilt buried deep in our mind over the thought that we would want to and could separate ourselves from love is the real source of all of our shame. And it is a shame so severe that we believe that we do not deserve to be loved, that a lifetime beginning with abuse by those who are responsible for us is a fitting punishment for our "crime" of assaulting love. We carry the belief that we are somehow fatally flawed and that is the real cause of our shame.

But we never go back and look at that source of shame in our mind, where with the gentle support of Jesus, God's symbol of love in our mind, we might begin to question the validity of that original self-accusation. Instead, we shift our focus to the world of bodies and the shame associated with being helpless and abused by others over whom we have no power or control. And then this seems to be the shame that poisons our whole life, and all the relationships we embark upon in search of the love that is missing that we yearn for. But the good news of the Course is that the problem is not where we are seeing it, in the world of bodies, but rather in our minds, where the solution -- forgiveness -- is as well.

And so this is where your renewed relationship with God and His representative, Jesus, and his Course, offers hope. For as you are willing to uncover the deeper ontological guilt and shame that your lifetime of personal shame is pointing to, looking at it with Jesus' love beside you, you will gradually allow yourself to recognize that there is nothing to be ashamed of. For with his love there with you, you will begin to recognize that you have not abandoned or betrayed love, and love has not abandoned or betrayed you.

For a discussion about forgiving the perpetrators, see also [Q#174](#).

Q #201: Regarding the prayer for the "Decision for God", (T.5.VII.6:7,8,9,10,11), how do we "return our thinking to the point at which the error was made" when our decision to separate from God is unremembered....or unconscious?

A: The journey of our "return" is a process of walking backwards, starting from the place where we think we are, which is in the body, in the world, in the dream. Though the original choice to separate from God is indeed unremembered, we seem to be experiencing the very real effects of that choice. Looking clearly and directly at the effects will indicate the true nature of the mistaken choice of believing in the reality of the separation. Our return begins when we are willing to look at any situation differently. Any person, event, condition or situation that seems to cause us pain, discomfort, or lack of peace is an opportunity for us to question what is really going on. *A Course in Miracles* tells us that the conflict experienced here in the dream is really caused by the guilt in our mind which is being displaced from our mind and projected onto the body or the world. The purpose of the projection is to free us of the responsibility for having made the choice to separate. The ego, on the other hand, tells us that persons and events outside of us are to blame for our misery. We have been victimized by outside agents and cannot be held responsible. Through the process of forgiveness we learn to identify the cause of our problems as a choice in the mind rather than to blame others. This is one level of returning to the point at which the error was made. In this way, the people we hold grievances against are cleared of responsibility; thus they are forgiven for what **"they did not do"** (T.17.III.1:5). When we have been able to practice forgiveness with everyone, and every situation in our lives, and have disidentified sufficiently with the ego's belief in separation, we will identify fully with the mind rather than the body. We will no longer believe in victimization, but in the power of our mind's ability to choose. This will free us to make a different choice. Instead of the error of believing that the separation was real and has had serious consequences, we will laugh gently at the absurdity of such a thought. This is the final return to the "point at which the error was made." We will then awaken from the dream of separation.

Meanwhile, every time we are willing to recognize any situation, or the dynamics of any relationship, as the direct result of a choice made in our mind, without projecting blame onto others, we are strengthening our belief in our true identity as mind, and weakening our belief in the ego's tale of separation and identity with the body. We are thus led to the point of final choice, and the decision to return no more to the darkened world of illusion and separation.

Q #202: I am a professional who works with kids. I have wondered what are some basics of *A Course in Miracles* that you all talk about when it comes to working with children, as a parent, teacher, counselor, coach, or whatever role is in use. I use "what do you want to come out of this?" Unfortunately, most kids are not conscious enough to answer that question with much wisdom. I also emphasize the role of "choice." What else?

A: We addressed this issue in [Q #179](#) in the context of parenting. It is always a good thing to help children (as well as adults) to accept responsibility for their behavior, and to help them realize that choices are available to them; but the concepts and principles of the Course are far beyond what children and most adolescents are capable of grasping. Children must first learn to become strong, healthy egos in order to function effectively and to cope with the many challenges in world. A basically sound level of psychological stability is necessary before anyone can "safely" begin to deal with the concept of the world and individuality as illusions. Immature or psychologically fragile people can be thrown into a panic, or far worse, if they are inappropriately confronted with such topics.

The best way to teach the Course to children is to demonstrate it in our own lives. The focus should always be on the *content* in our minds -- watching for, and then bringing to the love of Jesus, all of our ego thoughts and dynamics: for example, our need to control, dominate, or cannibalize (psychologically) others; our need to manipulate and use others to get what we want and then dispense with them. When we humbly acknowledge that we have been wrong in our choice of teachers, and then choose the teacher of forgiveness in our right minds, we will automatically manifest the message of the Course in our lives. The words we say do not matter, because if we are centered in the love of Jesus, then whatever we do or say will be loving and the most helpful to the children in our care. Children will connect with the *source* of our words or actions, and consequently they will feel safe and accepted regardless of what they do. When discipline is called for, if we have let go of our ego for just an instant, our behavior will be conducted in a manner that is appropriately firm and effective, but not punitive, retaliative, judgmental, condescending, nor triggered by anger or by fear. Again, the message the children will get -- after their normal period of pouting -- is that they are cared for and accepted, even though what they just did was not acceptable. We all can attest to the fact that the teachers and adults who stand out in our memories of our childhood are those who were kind and caring and accepting of us, or were just the opposite. The words they said have probably been forgotten -- except for those perhaps that manifested acceptance or rejection. Children immediately tune into the message being transmitted through the adult's words and behavior.

Jesus asks us to be like him, to take him as our model. And therefore the way we teach our children is to be a model for them of our right minds. A helpful paragraph to study in this regard is under "The Function of the Teacher of God" in the manual (M.5.III.2).

Q #203: A group of friends and I are reading *A Course in Miracles*, and we want to know whether the lessons must be strictly done daily, or if you may stay with some of them for a week or two, until you grasp them deeply?

A: The only specifications for the Workbook practice are given in its Introduction. It does not say not to repeat a lesson, it only says: "**Do not undertake to do more than one set of exercises a day**" (**W.in.2:6**). It is therefore not out of keeping with the Workbook instructions to repeat a lesson. If it is a

particularly meaningful or difficult lesson, it might be a good idea to stay with it for a couple of days. However, there is a risk in thinking that a lesson needs to be done perfectly, or even "grasped deeply" before moving on to the next lesson. This would be a trap, because it is unlikely that many of us will ever do one of the lessons perfectly. If we could, we would have reached such an advanced state of spiritual growth that we would not need the lessons at all. The best thing is to try to do what the lesson asks as best you can, being aware of the resistance that comes up. Resistance is what makes the lesson impossible to remember; it is behind our forgetting the repetitions, and our difficulty in understanding the lesson. It is important to recognize this, as a demonstration of our unwillingness to learn the thought system the Workbook teaches, and of our refusal to allow our minds to be trained **"to a different perception of everyone and everything in the world" (W.in.4:1)**. If we mistakenly believe we can master a lesson in a few days, we are underestimating our attachment to the ego's thought system, and this will hinder our progress rather than help it. The important thing is to be sincere in our attempts to study and practice what the Workbook teaches, aware that we are full of resistance, and willing to forgive ourselves for our often mediocre efforts. As long as we continue to study and apply the lessons as we are instructed, we will make progress. It may be helpful for your group to occasionally reread the Workbook instructions together. It keeps us on track to go back to the beginning once in a while.

Q #204: Is happiness the goal of *A Course in Miracles*?

A: It all depends on your definition of the word happiness. If your definition is "a state of well-being and contentment" based on getting what you want, whenever you want it, no matter what the cost, or to whom, then the answer is *no*. If, however, your definition is "a state of well-being and contentment" based on the *knowledge* of who you truly are, then the answer is *yes*. As you can see, one definition relies on external sources, while the other relies on internal sources.

Imagine every grievance you now have completely washed away. Imagine "gliding" through your day, with no impingement from outside sources. Imagine freedom from conflict, of any kind. Imagine knowing you are without sin and released of guilt. Imagine finding the innocence you thought was surely lost. Imagine everyone you meet as a brother you dearly love. Such a life comes from the peace of mind you will have once forgiveness has become perfected within you. This "happiness" is the goal of the Course.

Q #205: I may be wrong in this interpretation, but *A Course in Miracles* seems to be saying that none of us will enter into Heaven alone. Does this mean that every soul that thinks it is separate must accept and live the Atonement before anyone goes to Heaven? What happens to the souls that have not accepted the Atonement when the body is laid aside?

A: Yes, *A Course in Miracles* does say that **"no one can enter Heaven by himself" (W.pl.134.17:7)**. But this does not mean that "every soul that thinks it is separate must accept and live the Atonement before anyone goes to Heaven." Jesus is correcting our faulty thinking that we are separate, autonomous individuals, and that we can, for example, condemn others without having that judgment affect ourselves. Thus, preceding the above quotation, he says **"In everything you do remember this: No one is crucified alone" (W.pl.134.17:7)**. Similarly: **"Brother, you need forgiveness of your brother, for you will share in madness or in Heaven together. And you and he will raise your eyes in faith together, or not at all" (T.19.IV.D.12:7,8)**.

The point of the teaching is that we are joined as one Sonship, so that we are mistaken anytime we think: I am worthy of passing through the gate of Heaven, but this other person or group is not and never will be; or, this other person is worthy and I am not. Jesus is helping us restore our minds to their original state as Christ, the one Son of God. He is using our language to get us beyond our usual way of perceiving, which is always grounded in separation, division, individuality, and linear time. The process is

not linear. There is no "waiting." That is how we would envision the process from *our* perspective in time and space; but the process is entirely outside our temporal framework, and therefore not something we can fully understand. There is only the *illusion* of many unhealed minds. There is only *one* mind that is in need of healing, and that is yours. If you can keep that as your focus as you practice the Course, you will indeed learn its lessons and integrate its message.

Finally, it is not necessary to lay the body aside in order to accept the Atonement. The body would just be properly perceived, i.e., as a thought that has never left its source in the mind. Jesus knew he was not his body, and therefore never suffered. Things happened to his body, but they did not happen to *him*. That is why he asks to take him as our model. He did not perceive himself as victimized. His mind was healed. **Lesson 226** describes this from a different angle, but it is the same idea: **"If I so choose, I can depart this world entirely. It is not death which makes this possible, but it is change of mind about the purpose of the world. If I believe it has a value as I see it now, so will it remain for me. But if I see no value in the world as I behold it, nothing that I want to keep as mine or search for as a goal, it will depart from me. For I have not sought for illusions to replace the truth" (W.pl.226.1).**

Q #206: *A Course in Miracles* seems to suggest that we watch our thoughts every day. Can you give examples of how to put into practice forgiveness on a daily basis?

A: In general, practicing forgiveness involves looking at your ego thoughts without judgment, and becoming increasingly aware of the price you are paying to hold onto these ego/wrong-minded thoughts. The kinds of thoughts Jesus asks you to watch for are thoughts of judgment or condemnation; thoughts of anger/rage/annoyance; thoughts of vulnerability, victimization, fear, guilt, anxiety, depression; special love or special hate thoughts; any specific thoughts that keep you feeling separate from others. The lessons in the workbook give specific instructions about how to practice searching your mind for these thoughts, and then what to do once you become aware of them -- this varies according to the theme of the day's lesson.

Some examples: (1) If you are angry or annoyed with someone, you might simply remind yourself that your anger is not really about what you think it's about -- **"I am never upset for the reason I think" (Lesson 5)**. Then you might continue with: I rejected the love of Jesus again, judged myself for it, felt guilty over it, and then rather than smile at such foolishness, I listened to my ego and projected the guilt onto X. That is why I am feeling angry. Regardless of what this other person has done, my anger is an interpretation. Now I have a choice. I can simply ask for help to let go of my guilt and strive to see shared interests, or I can continue to blame this person for my being upset and feel that my anger is justified. And if I choose to continue to judge and blame, that's okay. I will never feel peaceful or happy for very long if I do that, but that does not make me sinful or unworthy of Heaven's Love. In Lesson 134, Jesus asks us to **"briefly consider all the evil things you thought of him [the person at whom your anger is directed], and each time ask yourself, 'Would I accuse myself for doing this?'" (W.pl.134.15:3).**

(2) If you find yourself anxious or fearful about your own or a loved one's well-being (e.g., physical, psychological, financial problems, or any form of victimization), ask for help from the Holy Spirit or Jesus to see the problem as it is, not the way you have set it up **(T.27.VII.2:2)**. In other words, you could remind yourself again that you must be looking through the ego's eyes, which are programmed to see innocent victims; because if you had chosen the Holy Spirit or Jesus as your Teacher, you would not be anxious or fearful, regardless of what is going on. *Perception is always interpretation*. The miracle **"merely looks on devastation, and reminds the mind that what it sees is false" (W.pil.13.1:3)**. So you look on devastation -- you do not deny what your eyes are seeing nor how you are feeling -- but then you just remind yourself that you have chosen to ask the ego instead of Jesus to interpret what you are looking on. A wonderful way of going about this is described in the last paragraph of Chapter 5 in the text, which concludes with a series of statements Jesus asks us to think of whenever we are not wholly joyous. It begins with **"I must have decided wrongly, because I am not at peace" (T.5.VII.6)**. Forgiveness always involves our admitting that we are wrong, and that we are willing to make a different choice. We

need not make the other choice; but we must at least acknowledge that we are wrong in how we are seeing things. When our fear lessens over a period of time, we will gladly and quickly make the right choice as soon as we become aware of our wrong-minded thinking.

(3) If you are caught in a special relationship, feeling completely dependent on something or someone, and terrified of being without this source of comfort, pleasure, assurance, companionship, conflict, etc., then once again you can start by being honest about what is going on. Jesus asks for complete honesty with ourselves and with him: **"Watch carefully and see what it is you are really asking for. Be very honest with yourself in this, for we must hide nothing from each other" (T.4.IV.8:1,2).** The honesty would come in your acknowledging that you are not yet ready to accept the love of Jesus in your mind as your only reality; and therefore you have latched on to something outside your mind to supply the lack, and satisfy your needs as you have defined them. Not judging yourself for doing so would help you move along in your process of undoing your guilt. Being completely honest with yourself about the *purpose* of the relationship with the other person, object, or conditions is an essential part of the forgiveness process. When you focus on the *purpose* of the relationship, you are helping yourself prepare for the shift in purpose from the ego to the Holy Spirit, when you are ready to ask for His help. In other words, right now you are seeing yourself as limited and needy -- not as God created you -- and you are seeing this other person, substance, etc., as there to fulfill your needs, which constitutes an attack. The separation is thereby being reinforced. That is the purpose of the ego; so whenever you identify with the ego, because you are too fearful of the Love of God, that is what you will do. That does not make you a sinner, however! Heaven's Love cannot be changed by our insanity.

Q #207: Does the very fact that we have questions and need answers just play into the hands of the ego and perpetuate it? But, also, isn't it unrealistic to live under the premise of *A Course in Miracles* that we don't know what anything means and we need do nothing, when all we ever do is question and want to do something?

A: Yes, it is true that our questioning and need for answers perpetuates the ego. There is a powerful section in the text that discusses this: **"The Quiet Answer" (T.27.IV).** There Jesus explains why this is so: **"All questions asked within this world are but a way of looking, not a question asked...The world asks but one question. It is this: 'Of these illusions, which of them is true?'...Thus is all questioning within the world a form of propaganda for itself" (T.27.IV.4:1,4,5; 5:3).** But he does not say *not* to ask questions; he just wants us to ask an *honest* question, which can occur only when, for an instant, we have set aside our arrogant presumption that we know what our problems are, e.g., our diminishing savings, our diseased body, our disabled car, our devastated environment, etc. Practicing the Course does not mean that we would not attend to these areas of our lives; it means, rather, that we would realize that we are not upset or in distress for these reasons. Our distress -- our *only* problem -- is our willingness to continue to believe that we are truly separate from the Love of God; and our defense against our ever changing our minds about that -- lest we forego our special identities as individuals -- is to see a multitude of problems outside our minds and then ask Jesus or the Holy Spirit to join with us in *doing* everything possible to solve those problems, instead of asking Them to help us to change our minds about the thought system we have chosen to guide us.

In this context, then, it is not unrealistic to live under the Course premises. In fact, we would be far better off and far more peaceful if we did. Those premises are simply re-orienting our thinking; they are helping us to step back from what we are so convinced is reality, so that we can acquire a different perspective on our lives and all of our seeming problems. If we stepped back with Jesus, as he asks that we do, we would see with him that all of our problems are made up; their purpose is to serve as defenses against our ever getting back to the truth that is concealed in our minds. Once we are willing to view our problems that way, we would approach them entirely differently. But as long as we think we know what everything means and act automatically on that basis, we will be stuck forever in an unending cycle of problems that are never totally solved, or are solved and then immediately replaced with other problems. The ego's strategy to keep us mindless would have worked.

So Jesus is training us to recognize that we have already chosen a set of premises on which to base our lives, and that it has resulted in unhappiness, frustration, and death. He is therefore teaching us that there is another choice available to us in our minds, which will lead us back home to eternal life and peace in God. The starting point in this reversal is our humble acknowledgment that we have been wrong about everything, and that it would be in our best interests to do nothing on our own, and to ask for help to see all things as he does. If this is done correctly, with gentleness and with trust, we can continue to carry out all of our responsibilities and obligations in the roles we have chosen, so that no one would notice any difference in us, except that we would be more peaceful and we would smile more frequently.

Q #208: T.2.VI.4:9 says, "Before you choose to do anything, ask me if your choice is in accord with mine." When I first began studying *A Course in Miracles* I thought this statement meant that before we did anything in this world we were to ask Jesus whether or not we should. Now, with some growth, I don't really know what the statement means (or much of anything else for that matter.) Can you elaborate?

A: The Course teaches us that since we have a split mind, there are two ways of perceiving in the dream: the ego's and the Holy Spirit's. They are referred to as our "teachers" or as "voices" in our mind. It also tells us that everything serves one of two goals: the ego's or the Holy Spirit's. Every choice we make, therefore, is in accord with one of these two perceptions, and serves one of these two goals. The statement you quote is asking us to be aware, in everything that we choose to think or do, which "teacher" we are listening to, and what purpose, or goal, our choice serves. This refers to the choice we are making in the mind, not in form. Choosing with the ego will always reinforce the belief that the separation, the world, and the body are real, and will result in some degree of conflict. The ego's goal is to keep us in our deep sleep in the world of illusion. Choosing with the Holy Spirit will always bring peace, and strengthen our awareness that we are mind, not body. This choice leads us to the mind, so that we can learn to make the only real choice -- accepting the separation thought as real or not real. This process has nothing to do with the "choice" we seem to be making in the world of form. Needing to make choices and decisions in the world is a helpful reminder to us that we are always choosing between the lies of the ego and the light of the Holy Spirit. The other important factor is that we *must* choose, there is no in between: **"Vision or judgment is your choice, but never both of these" (T.20.V.4:7).**

In a statement such as the one you quote, the Course is asking us to ask ourselves whether we are seeking to further our progress on our journey home to God, or whether we are seeking to reinforce our identity as a separate self. In a later chapter we are told: **"In any situation in which you are uncertain, the first thing to consider, very simply, is "What do I want to come of this? What is it for?" The clarification of the goal belongs at the beginning, for it is this which will determine the outcome" (T.17.VI.2:1,2,3).** In other words, "whom am I listening to?" The outcome of peace or conflict reveals who the teacher is, and also reflects what we truly want. The ultimate outcome brings us closer to the decision *not* to deny God or, to remain entrenched in the illusion of separation. It is important to remember that *A Course in Miracles* is never referring to form, and is always addressing the mind, not the body which is the figure in the dream.

Q #209: I've been a student of *A Course in Miracles* for one year. Recently I had a disturbing experience during my morning practice and meditation with my workbook lesson. Sometimes I do feel Jesus' presence, both in meditation and in other everyday situations. Now instead I felt the presence of the Dalai Lama. I had been reading a book by him the day before, so coming to think of him should not have been surprising. But it scared me -- I didn't dare to explore this further. After that I decided to take it easy with practicing -- not doing lessons, only meditating morning and night. But then a couple of days ago, while watching a movie, I was reminded of Marianne Williamson, and felt her presence. I didn't want to explore this either. Both incidents I think of as not true in the sense that I do not think that either the Dalai Lama or Marianne Williamson were really there.

i: Is this kind of experience something you have run into? What does it possibly mean? How can one handle it?

ii: If I feel this need, which I do, to dismiss these "presences" as fantasies, why should I not just as easily dismiss the presence of Jesus? I mean, I don't, not in truth. But I still feel that dismissing one experience reflects on the other, and I'm not sure how to handle it.

A: Your experiences are not the problem, but your interpretation that they are somehow unnatural and undesirable is what is causing you your problem. Your wily ego is only doing what any self-serving ego will want to do -- undermine any experiences that may reflect a different reality. And, of course, distract you from practicing the Course and its workbook lessons.

If, as the Course teaches, we are all thoughts or ideas (**T.15.VI.4:5**), and minds are all joined (**e.g., T.18.VI.3:1; T.28.III.3:1; W.pl.19.2:1**), then everyone is present to us all the time. What is artificial and unnatural is the belief that we are bodies, separated by time and space. But to question that assumption is to begin to question the basic assumptions of the ego thought system that keep this world in place and ultimately keep us mindless.

And so whether you experience the presence of Jesus, the Dalai Lama, Marianne Williamson, or someone else, if you have accepted the guidance of the Holy Spirit, you will know that, as symbols of love, they are all the same, for we are all one. In the words of one of those workbook lessons you have recently been avoiding, **"One brother is all brothers. Every mind contains all minds, for every mind is one. Such is the truth" (W.pl.161.4:1,2,3).**

Q #210: There seems to be a conflict between the ego consciousness and God consciousness that ebbs and flows. I've been studying *A Course in Miracles* for three months and am able to observe the "struggle" almost as a spectator would. Comments appreciated.

A: Our minds are split between the part that identifies with the ego thought system of separation (wrong-mindedness) and the part that identifies with the Holy Spirit's thought system of forgiveness (right-mindedness). We are constantly choosing between the two thought systems, although we generally are not aware of making this choice. That is the point of the training in the Course: first, to help us catch the thoughts that precede our experience, which, in the workbook lessons, Jesus refers to as the process of mind searching, where we would observe what is going on in our minds. Then eventually, we would be able to catch ourselves choosing either the ego or the Holy Spirit as our teacher. This is a process that continues throughout our lives.

You perhaps are referring to the fear that we experience when we ask for help to change our teacher from the ego to Jesus or the Holy Spirit. That could be perceived as a struggle in which we are attracted to the healing love in our right minds, but are still reluctant to let go of everything else. We always are identified with one or the other, though, and over a period of time we would become more and more clear about which one we have chosen. We go back and forth between our right mind and our wrong mind, but there is no neutral state. If we are observing our inner state with the ego, then we would be fearful, judgmental, or self-glorifying. If we are observing our inner state with Jesus, we would be peaceful, non-judgmental, and patient, knowing that we are in the process of undoing something that never happened, and therefore we would not take any of our thoughts all that seriously.

Q #211: Is it possible to get a disease if you have no knowledge of its existence, and therefore no fear of it?

A: Yes, it is. And if you think about it, you can see that it happens all the time, from the very first cases of new diseases such as AIDS or SARS, before they are identified in the media, to illnesses that affect children congenitally or very early in life, before we would see them as having any "knowledge" of the disease. So how does this happen, in light of *A Course in Miracles'* teachings on how we choose our illnesses?

All diseases and illnesses in the body are the effects of a decision made in the mind (**W.pl.136.2,3,4,5**), not the brain. Like every other decision about what happens to us in our lifetime, these decisions are made outside of time and space. The brain that we believe -- incorrectly -- is the seat of consciousness and decision-making is only an effect. Much of what is contained in the mind remains out of our conscious awareness, but at a deeper level we do know all of its contents. It is our fear of the power of our mind however that keeps it all buried (**T.2.VI.9**), so that our defenses can work and we do not seem to be responsible for the things that happen to us -- we can see ourselves as victims of forces beyond our control. In that way, the pain that comes from our choosing the thought of separation seems instead to come from what others do to us. And our guilt over separation remains buried and protected, along with the thought of separation.

Having said this, we also need to be clear that the goal is not to make the unconscious conscious so that we can make better choices for our body's health and well-being. It is not really fear of the illness itself that causes us to choose it -- we actually want the illness for its value as a defense. Our goal is to learn over time to forgive ourselves for the illusory guilt over separation. For it is this guilt that we believe calls for punishment, which in turn demonstrates that the guilt and separation are serious and real. And that punishment can assume many different forms, disease being just one among many. So the problem is not the punishment, whatever form it may take, but our mistaken belief in our guilt. And that is what we want to make conscious. For that is where the only real healing can occur.

For a related discussion, see also [Question #117](#).

Q #212: I have a question about judgment. Let's say I walk by a home which has dogs behind a fence and the dogs bark at me and I recognize they believe I am a threat; yet I do not feel resentful, but wish they knew I mean them no harm. Am I still judging them? Is there a difference between a "mechanical judgement" and a judgment based on emotion? Is a "mechanical judgment" the same as resentment, even if I feel no malice? How should I view such distinctions about judgment?

A: The kind of judgment that *A Course in Miracles* focuses on, almost exclusively, is the judgment in which we condemn ourselves or another person in some way, or the judgment that presumes that we know everything and therefore can reach valid conclusions about everything. If you find yourself insisting that you are right about something, or feeling superior or inferior, better or worse than someone else -- any comparative judgment along those lines -- then you have gotten involved with the kind of judgment that needs to be addressed through the process of forgiveness, because your perception is grounded in separation. If you do not feel resentment, if you have no investment in the dogs' accepting your invitation to join with you, and you are feeling only kindness and compassion towards them, then you have not judged. Simply sizing up the situation, i.e., that the dogs are threatened by you even though you mean them no harm, is not the kind of judgment that Jesus wants us to be vigilant about.

We all are engaged in judging all the time: for example, judging what outfit is best in terms of the weather forecast; which route to take in order to arrive at our destination on time; which doctor to go to, etc. We cannot avoid judging, and Jesus never tells us not to judge. His emphasis is always on changing our teacher from the ego to him or the Holy Spirit, which would then put us in a position where judgment *through* us rather than *by* us can occur (**M.10.2:7**). This would mean that we would be free of all attack thoughts and thoughts of separation, and we would *not* be perceiving our interests as separate from everyone else's.

Q #213: I am having difficulty with someone. I know that the hatred I feel for her is a projection of the guilt and self-hatred in my mind, and I know that we are both a part of a larger whole. I know that this situation is allowing me to see the hatred in my mind. I have asked Jesus for help to see her differently, but nothing happens. I then ask for help with my resistance to seeing her differently and sometimes I have a shift, but the hatred comes back later. It feels like a solid rock in my heart. I can feel my resistance to letting it go. I know this process takes time and I am continuing to work with it, but meanwhile I am having trouble containing my hatred and hostility toward her on the level of form. Help!

A: You have a good intellectual understanding of at least part of the process, but there is another step or two you need to consider. You keep asking for help to change your perception of this other person, but that is not the real problem. The change you want help with is in your perception of yourself. For the hatred that you continue to displace outside yourself onto this other person is really directed at yourself. But until you allow yourself to acknowledge and accept this, you will continue to try to direct the hatred outside yourself and will be unwilling to see the other person differently.

Once you have acknowledged where the real problem lies -- with the guilt within your own mind -- the other person will have served the Holy Spirit's purpose of leading you back within yourself and will no longer be your concern. You hate *yourself* for what you accuse yourself of doing. You believe that you have attacked and destroyed love out of total self-interest, leaving yourself abandoned, hopeless, and bereft of love. And it is with this self-hatred that you really need help.

Turning to that presence of love within -- Jesus or the Holy Spirit, using symbols of *A Course in Miracles* -- will have to begin to undo your self-accusation. For how could you have destroyed love if it is still there within you? And so, through joining with that love, you will begin to question the justification for your self-hatred over destroying love. That is the shift in perception with which you need the help, for you can't make it on your own. And as the self-hatred within your own mind begins to dissolve, you will no longer need to project it. And then you will see those outside of you as simply caught in their own attempts to project their own self-hatred outside themselves. But rather than reacting from your own guilt, if you have released it, you can only respond with compassion and kindness. If you fail to look within, you will not be addressing the source of the resistance to releasing your judgment and condemnation. The key is, whatever you first see within yourself is what you will then see outside yourself, and so your focus for change only needs to be within.

Q #214: When *A Course in Miracles* refers to the "many thousands of other forms" of the universal curriculum in the Manual, what does it mean, exactly? Since there are not that many religions, does it count such "paths" as music, or the love of nature, as possible ways home?

A: "Many thousands" is not meant to be taken literally, it simply means "a large number." It is also not necessarily referring to religious paths in an inclusive way. Religion may be a path for some, it may be a deterrent for others, and it may even be used as an attack. The important message in this section is that there is only one outcome -- God; only one content in our learning -- undoing our belief in the thought of separation from God, but many, many forms, for accomplishing this. In fact, *any* form can reflect this choice made in the mind. What actually occurs is a decision in the mind to no longer choose the ego, which is a choice not to deny God. This choice is then manifest in the dream, in all the forms that make up an individual's life situation. It begins with an awareness that there are no separate interests. This can come about in "thousands" of different ways. A good example of this is Helen Schucman and Bill Thetford's decision to "find a better way" of relating with their colleagues at Columbia Medical Center *together*. They were not consciously seeking a spiritual path to God. They were *truly* no longer interested in continuing the discord and conflict in their work environment, *and*, they were sincere in their

decision to seek *together*. This decision was made in the mind and became manifest for them in the dream in this form, and ultimately in the form of *A Course in Miracles*.

The section in the manual that you are referring to speaks of this in the definition of the teacher of God: "...**somehow, somewhere he has made a deliberate choice in which he did not see his interests as apart from someone else's**" (M.1.1:2). It is this *content* that is the path to return home to God, regardless of the form it may take in the dream. It is very important to make this distinction between form and content in order to understand the rest of the description: "**He has entered an agreement with God even if he does not yet believe in Him...They come from all over the world. They come from all religions and from no religion. They are the ones who have answered. The Call is universal. It goes on all the time everywhere**" (M.1.1:6; 2:1,2,3,4,5 *italics added*). Clearly then, neither religion nor belief in God are required for one to be on the path to God. "Many thousands of other forms" can actually be restated as "*any form*," because the form does not matter. It merely reflects a decision made in the mind. When the decision for God is made completely: "**There is no path that does not lead to Him**" (T.31.IV.11:7). On the other hand, however beautiful, or religious a form may be, without this content it will lead nowhere.

Q #215: The *Song of Prayer*, p. 6, says that praying for material things is not what prayer is. This is only a call for hiding our guilt and a call for enemy (our own). Then is the correct way of praying a prayer of gratitude only? How do we deal with our internal desires? If our only goal is knowing God, how do I pray? Should I be in silence? Praying with others is then both looking to God? How do I deal with wishful thinking?

A: This beautiful scribed piece, *The Song of Prayer*, came in response to the way in which students of *A Course in Miracles* were using the Course. Many students thought that the Course was telling them to ask Jesus or the Holy Spirit to heal their bodies, fix things, solve problems in the world, and get them what they wanted. So Jesus teaches us in *The Song of Prayer* what true prayer is. He tells us, first, that it is not wrong to ask for material things; and in fact, as long as we think we are individuals living in the world, we cannot avoid praying that way (1.1.2:3). Prayer, he says, is like a ladder that we are climbing, and as we make our way up, our prayer will take a different form, because our needs will change. We will have less and less guilt as we practice forgiveness, and "**without guilt there is no scarcity. The sinless have no needs**" (1.1.3:5,6). Thus, at the top of the ladder -- when we are advanced teachers of God -- we will not experience lack of any kind, we will not perceive separation, and therefore our prayer will be just a song of gratitude. But that is at the top of the ladder.

On the lower rungs of the ladder, we experience all kinds of needs and desires. That is normal. We need to be gentle about that and not deny them. If we are honest, and we acknowledge that they are coming from a faulty perception of ourselves, we will not be held back by them. Asking for specifics is not wrong; and feeling guilty about the fact that we have needs and desires is never helpful, nor is fighting against them. We need only say "That is where I am right now; and when I am less fearful, I will allow more love to come in, and I will not experience lack or scarcity." It is so important to remember that this is not a course in sacrifice or asceticism. This is a slow process, a gentle one, and we do not jump from the bottom of the ladder right up to the top. There are many steps in between, and if we are doing the best we can wherever we are, nothing more is ever asked of us. As we practice forgiveness, the form of our prayer will change of itself.

Our prayer on the lower rungs is always to ourselves, that we would ask the help of Jesus or the Holy Spirit to look gently and without judgment at our ego thoughts, and to see our interests as shared with everyone else's. When we have "enemies," we have already seen our interests as separate from, and in conflict with, others. That is when we need to ask for help to have our own minds be healed through forgiveness. When our *need* to have an enemy is recognized and then healed, we will have advanced closer to our true state of oneness, and then praying with someone will simply be a joyous

acknowledgment of our Oneness as Christ, and the Oneness of Christ and God. Asking-out-of-need will no longer have any meaning.

Q #216: During the 12 years that I have been a student of *A Course in Miracles*, I have seen a very unsettling pattern. I achieve a temporary state of being that I have yearned for, experiencing real happiness, absence of pain, a wondrous sense of connectedness. Then something really tiny happens in time and I suddenly experience being invaded. Before I know it, all the happiness and sense of balance and love are totally gone. The guilt that follows is more unsettling, and any return to the previous state of mind has become impossible, resulting in a feeling of deep loss. I seem to flow into states of mind of either bright or gentle light, to find myself suddenly thrown back into darkness. Even the darkness emits rays of light. The whole of the pattern is like traveling through a series of experiences that cannot be explained in terms of the world: from black to white and back to black. The effect of the experiences however is to lose respect for myself and others, since my attitudes seem to be swinging to diametrically opposed points of the 'compass'. My question then is: if the goodness I think I experience can be punctured so easily, how real is it, really?

A: The pattern you describe is not really an unusual one, although the specific form it is taking may be somewhat unique to you. Until we accept the Atonement for ourselves (**T.2.V.4:4; T.9.VII.2: T.14.III.10:1,2**), we will continue to alternate between our right mind and our wrong mind. The real problem is not the vacillations you experience but your judgments of them. Certainly, the shifting is likely to be experienced as unsettling, especially while you see yourself as at the mercy of the returns to darkness. What will be helpful to recognize, even if it is just intellectually at first, is that it is your own fear of the light and peace and happiness that plunges you back into the darkness. Jesus knows that this will happen to all of us, observing that **"as the light comes nearer you will rush to darkness, shrinking from the truth, sometimes retreating to the lesser forms of fear, and sometimes to stark terror" (T.18.III.2:1)**. There is a decision that you are making, buried deeply in your unconscious, to invite in "something really tiny" to disrupt your experience of happiness. For if you allow yourself to continue with this experience indefinitely, all boundaries around the self you think you are will dissolve and you will no longer identify with that self. And that "loss" of self is terrifying to any ego-identified mind. Fear and judgment and guilt are the ego's favorite antidotes to experiences of peace and love, for they reinforce our identification with the separate self. After all, it is only a separate self with its self-imposed boundaries that can experience "being invaded."

A key in all of this is to recognize that the state of happiness is not something that you need to "achieve" and that your yearning for it only denies the power of your own mind to choose against it. If you can ask for help in uncovering your own fear of the light, and begin to observe your vacillations without judgment, without imposing the categories of desirable and undesirable (for all polarities are from the oppositional ego thought system), the power that these negative experiences seem to hold over you will begin to subside.

As we travel along the path of forgiveness, we will allow ourselves glimpses of the real unchanging happiness that comes only at the end of our journey. But only when we truly know that we are not the self we now think we are, only when we know we are not in this world and so can not be its victim, will we be open to the real happiness that never changes and the real peace that can never be disturbed.

Q #217: Given that the prose of *A Course in Miracles* is not always logical, as in a scientific text, and that the reader must be willing to "decipher" so to speak intentional ambiguity -- even apparent contradictions - in its message, I have problems sometimes even understanding basic tenets of its teachings. To wit, Lesson 128, "The world I see holds nothing that I want." Should I take this literally or not? If so, should I take this to mean that I have nothing to learn or benefit from existing on this plane? Do I not benefit from

seeing kindness, humility, compassion in fellow Sons of God? If, as is stated in paragraph 2, sent. 3 "The only purpose worthy of your mind this world contains is that you pass it by, without delaying to perceive some hope where there is none" why don't we all just commit mass suicide and "move on" to His palace, so to speak? If not taken literally, it appears there is a built-in conundrum of being told to "move on," yet being trapped in this three-dimensional existence. Could you kindly elaborate?

A: This is one of those statements that Jesus means quite literally. When he says that passing the world by is the only purpose worthy of our minds, he is simply stating a fact, because he holds our minds in much higher esteem than we ourselves do. And when he says there is no hope in the world, he again is simply stating a fact -- we are setting ourselves up for repeated failure and depression if we continue to try to find our happiness in the world. None of this is intended to coerce us or shame us into giving up the world, although the ego would want us to perceive his statements in that light. It is that Jesus simply can offer us no compromise that in any way honors or validates the ego and its effects, when he sees through all its duplicitous deceptions and knows the desolate and desperate outcome that following its dictates must bring to us. That is only kindness on his part, even if we don't perceive it that way yet. Jesus points to the truth, but he always acknowledges the power of our minds to decide for ourselves whether or not to accept his words. And he does not judge us if we do not **(T.8.IV.6)**.

So Jesus is not telling us that we must give up the world -- he knows we're not yet ready to let it go, although not for the reasons we think we still want it. It's just that from his perspective, which he is trying gently to lead us toward, the world, as an illusory projection of an illusory thought of guilt and attack in the mind, can have no value in itself. Its only value comes from the purpose that we give to it. And so while we believe our reality is on this illusory plane of existence, the world can serve the purpose of providing us our lessons in forgiveness, for it is made of the projected guilt in our minds, now seen outside ourselves.

You have suggested there is value in seeing a brother's acts of kindness, humility and compassion, and that is consistent with the Course's view that, while we think we are bodies, they are the means we seem to have for communication with each other. But nevertheless, seeing your brother's acts as kind or humble or compassionate is an interpretation you give to his intentions and not anything intrinsic in the behaviors themselves. Someone else may observe the same behaviors and perceive them in a completely different light -- the point being that it is our intentions that affect how we see the world. The only real communication occurs between minds, contrary to what our experience seems to tell us **(T.8.VII.2,3,4)**. Always, Jesus' goal is to lead us away from a focus on the world and back to the mind, where everything is happening, since ideas do not leave their source **(T.26.VII.4:7,8,9; W.pl.132.10:3)**.

As for mass suicide as a way to leave the world, the Course makes it clear that death is not an answer, since "life" in the body in the world is not the problem -- guilt in the mind is (see [Question #135](#) for a much more in depth discussion of suicide from the Course's perspective). And so it always to the mind and its beliefs that Jesus attempts to direct our attention. For there is no trap except the one we have set and ensnared ourselves in, by our own false beliefs about who we are. And by practicing forgiveness -- of the world and of ourselves -- we can, over time, release ourselves from the chains of guilt we seem to have made to imprison ourselves.

Q #218: The discussion of light episodes in Lesson 15 seems anomalous in that it is virtually the only time in which *A Course in Miracles* uses a physical phenomenon to measure spiritual progress. (The other examples, such as Lesson 122 2:3 and Lesson 155.1:3, are obviously meant to be poetic.) In fact, people I know, including myself, who feel they have made great progress with the Course do not recall such experiences. Is it possible that this was a result of Helen's ego coming through temporarily during early resistance to the scribing process?

A: The reference in **Lesson 15** pertains to a problem with some religious experiences that a friend of Bill Thetford's was having. It was put in by Jesus specifically to alleviate this friend's anxiety about visions of light that he was finding quite frightening; thus, **"Do not be afraid of them" (W.pl.15.3:3)**. (See *Absence from Felicity*, p. 306, under "Bill's Journal.")

Although the reference suggests that all students may have these "light episodes," it was not meant to be a criterion of progress with the Course. It can be understood as a symbol of the non-material light of forgiveness.

Q #219: How does *A Course in Miracles* view the issues of demon possession which some religious organizations treat as real? Does the Course really claim that evil does not exist? Does the Course claim that there is no battle between Good and Evil? And, I am sure it states somewhere in the Course, if my memory is correct, that we do not heal but God does. How then does the Course explain faith healers? I am referring to the legitimate cases supported by the Catholic Church, cases involving individuals that have the stigmata. If the crucifixion is not important they why would these people be afflicted with the wounds of the crucifixion?

A: One of the fundamental differences between Christian theology and *A Course in Miracles* is the Course teaching that sin is not real. In Christianity, the belief that sin *is* real is at the root of its entire belief system; it is synonymous with evil. These are, therefore, mutually exclusive teachings, and the beliefs and practices that follow from them are also mutually exclusive. In Christianity, the idea of sin is given different expressions in form, one of which is demon possession. In Christian thought, both sin and evil represent a will in opposition to God's. This is the nature of sin. The Course, on the other hand, teaches that there is no sin, and no opposition to God's Will is possible: **"...sin is not real, and all that you believe must come from sin [e.g. demon possession] will never happen, for it has no cause. Accept Atonement with an open mind, which cherishes no lingering belief that you have made a devil of God's Son. There is no sin" (W.pl.101.5:2,3,4). "What is opposed to God does not exist...." (W.pl.137.11:3).**

Clearly what does not exist cannot do battle with what is real. According to the Course, only God is real. What appears to do battle in the world is the ego's made-up idea of what is "good" conflicting with the ego's made-up idea of what is "evil." This is the battleground that is home to the ego thought system, but the Course tells us that it is not *real*. The Course teaching in this regard can be summed up: sin is not real, and so there can be no demon personifying sin; evil does not exist, and so there cannot be a battle between good and evil.

For a Christian believer, the crucifixion and the wounds of the crucified Jesus are very real. Inspired by devotion to these beliefs, a person with a very deep desire to share the sufferings of the crucifixion as a way of identifying with the historical Jesus could experience the physical manifestation of the wounds of the crucifixion, known as the stigmata. However, even the Catholic Church acknowledges that these physical marks can be caused by an intense psychological state, not divine intervention. This neither negates nor proves the person's devotion. The stigmata has been experienced by persons who were psychologically imbalanced, as well as by those, such as St. Francis of Assisi, who are believed to be saints. As with everything, the Course brings our focus to the *content*, never the form. All form, stigmata included, can be the result of the ego's choice to separate, or, the choice to join in the mind with the Holy Spirit, Who reflects God's love in the dream. The Course does not say the crucifixion was not important; it reinterprets it: **"The message the crucifixion was intended to teach was that it is not necessary to perceive any form of assault in persecution, because you cannot be persecuted" (T.6.I.4:6)**. Christianity teaches that God's innocent Son, Jesus, died to atone for the sins of humanity, and thus reopened the gates of Heaven that were shut when Adam and Eve committed the original sin. The Course teaches that the gates of Heaven were never shut, and there is no sin. God's one Son is made up of the entire Sonship, including Jesus (not exclusively Jesus). This one Son cannot be harmed,

cannot suffer, and cannot die. All this is true, according to the Course, because the separation never happened, and the world and the body are not real. The events that occurred in the life of the historical Jesus have been interpreted by those who wrote down the Gospels, and by the leaders of religious institutions in accord with their belief system. We who identify with our bodies and believe in suffering and death bring these beliefs to our view of the crucifixion of Jesus. We assume that what would be true for us, if we were crucified, was true for him -- that he felt betrayed and victimized, suffered agony, and died. Since Jesus did not identify with the body, and knew his true identity as a Son of God, this was not his experience of the crucifixion.

The Course teaches that true healing is of the mind, and only of the mind. This is accomplished through forgiveness, and leads to the undoing of the belief in the separation. This healing will result in peace, and may or may not have any manifestation in form. If true healing of this nature occurs, whatever happens in form is irrelevant. The mind that chooses to believe in the separation and the reality of the body can also choose to make the body sick. The Course is teaching us that another choice is also possible -- the mind can choose against sickness. When a person seeks help in healing from a faith healer and the body is healed, it is because a choice for healing was made in the mind. The person then joins with the faith healer in the shared purpose of healing. This is true even when no physical contact occurs (**M.5.II.2,3,4;III.1,2**). The choice in the mind of the individual is the only explanation for any healing that occurs. The ultimate healing is awakening from the dream of separation, which is accomplished by undoing our belief in separation. Nothing really happens except that we will no longer be asleep, and will know ourselves in our true identity as God's one Son. This is what is referred to when the Course says: **"Healing does not come directly from God, Who knows His creations as perfectly whole. Yet healing is still of God, because it proceeds from His Voice and from His laws" (T.7.IV.1:4,5)**. What proceeds from His Voice and from His laws is the truth of who we are. It is healing in the sense that the mind will no longer be made sick or insane by the thought of separation.

Q #220: I was taught that Jesus had to die for us to be forgiven for our sins. That never made any sense to me. If God is just, why would he make an innocent man die in order to forgive me? Why couldn't he just forgive us in the first place? What does *A Course in Miracles* say about this?

A: The Course reinterprets the crucifixion, as well as the idea of sin and forgiveness. You were taught the meaning of the crucifixion that Christianity holds sacred, as were all Christians. It is the story of redemption according to Christianity. The message the Course teaches is not based on the forgiveness of sin, to the contrary: **"...the content of the course never changes. Its central theme is always, 'God's Son is guiltless, and in his innocence is his salvation.'"**(**M.1.3:4,5**). There is no need for forgiveness from God, much less for redemption through crucifixion. Forgiveness, as taught by the Course, is a process of undoing the belief in separation. It is the means by which we learn to no longer identify with the ego, which eventually leads to our awakening from the dream of separation. It has nothing to do with sin, because as the Course tells us, there is no sin: **"God's Will for you is perfect happiness because there is no sin, and suffering is causeless" (W.101.6:1)**. Since the thought of separation is an illusion, and God knows only our wholeness as His one Son, He would not "make an innocent man die in order to forgive" anyone. He would be a cruel God indeed if He required the death of His Son to appease His anger. The Course tells us that not only does God not require crucifixion or sacrifice, He does not even judge His Son: **"God does not judge His guiltless Son. Having given Himself to him, how could it be otherwise?" (T.11.VI.7:6,7)**. Clearly it is not possible to follow the thought systems of both Christianity and *A Course in Miracles*, for they are not compatible, nor comparable teachings. It may be helpful for you to read the sections **"The Message of the Crucifixion" (T.6.I)** and **"Atonement without Sacrifice" (T.3.I)** for the Course's teaching on the crucifixion and innocence.

Q #221: As I understand it, all things of form in this world, both animate and inanimate, are part of the Sonship, and all parts of the Sonship need to be in the real world for the Second Coming to occur. I know there really is only one mind, but within the illusion of separation there seems to be many split minds. Also, since I need only be concerned with the healing of my own mind, there seems to be a direct relationship between my body and my mind. Does each thing of form in this world of separation have a mind that needs to be healed? How can this be? I know some form of this question has been asked before, but I still don't get it.

A: Yes, *A Course in Miracles* teaches that there really is only one mind, but we have the illusion of there being many split minds. The Second Coming is the collective return to awareness of our reality as the one Son of God; it is the complete healing of the mind of the Sonship.

This is extremely difficult to understand. In fact, it is impossible to understand if you are identified with your individual existence as a human being, because that identity was set up by the ego to block all understanding of the mind that is outside time and space, and which contains the key to understanding the origin of our existence as separated, fragmented beings. Very little in the Course will make sense if you try to relate it to your experience in the world. We all try to do that, of course, because that is our only reference point for understanding anything. That is why Jesus starts us out on that level, but if we stay on that level, where we still think of ourselves as physical/psychological beings in the world, we will not get very far with the Course. Once again, that is because we always try to understand it from a perspective within time and space, and Jesus is teaching us that that perspective was made to block us from getting back to our minds. It was made to proliferate problems and mysteries that would grab our attention and then occupy our attention completely, so that we would never realize it is all a defense against the truth.

Jesus is outside this limited perspective entirely, and he is training us -- through the exercises in the workbook -- to gradually let go of *our* way of perceiving, and replace it with his. As we get further along the path of this thought-reversal, these types of questions will disappear, because we will identify less and less with our separated existence, and therefore we will have first-hand experiences of a shared identity. We will be more attracted to oneness than to division and separation.

Q #222: For some time now I have been studying the "human relations" techniques as taught by Dale Carnegie in his best selling books and famous seminar. Carnegie teaches that I should always talk in terms of others' interests, that I should never tell others they're wrong (but should call attention to their mistakes indirectly), and that the only way to win an argument is not to have one. I had avoided using these techniques until quite recently because I had considered them to be quite manipulative. In the language of *A Course in Miracles*, I believed it could even be stated that such techniques are attempts to murder other people because they are attempts to control others and get from them what I want. But over the last few weeks I have been using these techniques consistently, and I have been stunned at how well they have worked!

It recently occurred to me that Carnegie's human relations techniques ultimately reveal the investment most of us have in maintaining our specialness and our separateness. In fact, such techniques seem to be geared toward helping others reinforce their own specialness and separateness as well. But there have also been times I realize when I could not have dealt in a civil manner with some people without using the Carnegie techniques. For some people (myself among them, I'm sure), the idea that they are not special or separate is a fearful idea. Could it be that in some cases the Carnegie techniques could actually be a form of forgiveness, just as taking medication for an illness is a form of forgiveness?

A: What you are recognizing is a fundamental teaching of the Course: that purpose is everything (**T.4.V.6:8,9,10,11; T.24.VII.6:1,2,3**). One of the most significant contributions of the Course to the world's spiritualities is that, rather than advocating denial and rejection of the ways of the world, it teaches that we can use what the ego has made for separation and attack to serve a different purpose --

forgiveness. The key is to be willing to allow the specific forms to serve the Holy Spirit's purpose rather than our own (T.6.V.A.2:4,5).

You have recognized that tools of manipulation and murder in the hands of the ego can become the means for seeing both your brother and yourself in a different light. But first, you must have made a decision to see both of you differently -- as having shared rather than separate interests. Your intent has shifted from having your own needs met through controlling your brother to recognizing at some level that you both have the same need to be forgiven, to be seen in the light of true charity. So now, what was made to reinforce separation and specialness becomes a means for undoing them. As always, the value lies not in the specific technique or form, but in the purpose you are giving it.

The issue of purpose is addressed further in [Question #57](#).

Q #223: I would like an understanding of "Entering the Ark" (T.20.1V). This section seems to indicate that we have one special person with whom we work out our salvation, whereas my understanding is that every seemingly separate individual out there is our brother and so we must see the face of Christ in every living thing. I am in a marriage where my wife does not study *A Course in Miracles* and, in my perception, is afraid of what it is teaching us. I have also encountered a Course teaching institution that tells us we must have one special buddy with whom we can really study and work out our salvation. Can you resolve this confusion for me?

A: You seem to be raising two related questions: the first is whether there is only one relationship or many in which we must practice forgiveness; the second is whether we can really practice the Course and learn our forgiveness lessons if our learning partner is not a student of the Course.

For the first, you are no doubt referring in particular to the sentence in "The Ark of Peace" that says, **"To each who walks this earth in seeming solitude is a savior given, whose special function here is to release him, and so to free himself" (T.20.IV.5:3)**. Jesus then adds, **"In the world of separation each is appointed separately, though they are all the same" (T.20.IV.5:4)**. You are correct, as this second sentence suggests, in observing that forgiveness must come to rest upon every seemingly separate brother until we see them as all the same. But it is also usually the case that, at any point in time, there is one particular person with whom we are struggling, who provides our most challenging lessons in forgiveness. Who this other is may or may not change over time. But even though the faces may change, the underlying lessons will remain the same, until we are willing to look at and then release the guilt that we have projected on to them because we have not wanted to acknowledge it is in our own minds. So every relationship provides opportunities to practice forgiveness, but those that seem to push more of our buttons are the greater symbols of our own buried guilt and so provide the maximal opportunities for learning our lessons. Jesus speaks in the manual of these different levels of learning opportunities in the context of teacher-student relationships (**M.3**).

As for your second question, a careful reading of the section you refer to should make it clear that Jesus is only talking about how we *perceive* our learning partner and not about what specifically happens at the level of behavior or form between the two of us. It is our ego that wants to bring the focus to what we do with our partner at the level of bodies. According to the Course, relationships exist only in the mind and not between bodies in the world (**T.28.IV.3**). And so my healing in any relationship is completely unrelated to how you as my learning partner may or may not participate in the study and application of Course principles. If I were dependent on your involvement in any way, I would be at the mercy of your choices, and not simply dependent on my own internal decision about how to perceive you. Now in some cases, it may be helpful if a partner is also studying the Course and there are opportunities for sharing and discussing on the level of form. But this can in no way be necessary for my salvation or Jesus would be selling us the same bill of goods that the ego has been trying to pass off on us from the beginning -- victimization of myself by another would be alive and well and inescapable.

Furthermore, whether you as my learning partner are in your right mind or your wrong mind in any of our interactions, if the Holy Spirit is my Guide for how I perceive you, my response will always be the same. For, accepting the Holy Spirit's judgment rather than my own, I will know that you are only either extending love or giving a call for love, and my response is always the same -- I allow myself to be an instrument of the Holy Spirit's Love (**T.12.I**). My resistance to accepting the Holy Spirit's perception of you in any aspects of our relationship simply points to those areas where my forgiveness lessons remain unlearned. And that is how you, as my learning partner, are really my savior, for you direct me to the unhealed thoughts of darkness in my mind, so that now I can make a different choice about how to see myself.

Q #224: Does the concept that this world was over and done in the same moment mean that everything in this world is predestined, that we have no power to make happen what we want?

A: From a traditional viewpoint of predestination, according to *A Course in Miracles*, what happens in the world is not predestined. The scripts of our lives have been authored by the "decision maker," not by God, and they do not follow a temporal sequence, upon which predestination is based. A quick reminder: the decision maker is that aspect of the split mind which chooses either the ego or the Holy Spirit as its teacher. While we experience ourselves in time, and review mentally the scripts that have already gone by (**W.pl.158.4**), we do have the capacity to choose -- at any given instant -- which teacher will guide us through our daily lives. And remember that this "we" is not the self we call ourselves by name, but rather the decision maker in our mind, which is outside of time and space.

If you want to "stretch" the definition of predestination, you could say that there is one of the Course teachings which would fall under this category, as stated here: **"The acceptance of the Atonement by everyone is only a matter of time. This may appear to contradict free will because of the inevitability of the final decision, but this is not so. You can temporize and you are capable of enormous procrastination...but the outcome is as certain as God (T.2.III.3:1,2,3,10).**

And finally, while it may not seem this way, we all have the power to make happen what we want: **"Besides your recognizing that thoughts are never idle, salvation requires that you also recognize that every thought you have brings either peace or war; either love or fear" (W.pl.16.3:1).** Take a good look at you life, and realize that whatever the circumstances -- now, in the past, and to come -- are a result of getting what one wants. This is hard to come to grips with since most of us, at least at one point or another, have experienced painful lives. And yet this is exactly what the ego wants. And we, being identified with the ego, are getting exactly what we want. The good news is that once we totally shift our allegiance from the ego to the Holy Spirit, we will get happiness and peace, which is secretly what we have wanted all along.

Q #225: I am reading *A Course in Miracles* for the second time and I am having trouble with Lesson 135. Does it mean that if someone physically attacks you or verbally attacks you, you should just do nothing? Should you allow someone to physically "beat you up"? I don't think this is what it means. I just want to make sure I am interpreting this correctly. Does the practice of martial arts conflict with the Course's teachings?

A: You are correct with regard to **Lesson 135 "If I defend myself I am attacked."** It does *not* mean that you should allow yourself to be beaten up or abused, or to watch someone else being abused without intervening. This is one of the most misunderstood and misapplied concepts in the entire Course. It is important to remember that the Course is never talking about *behavior*, and that the practice of the Course should never exclude common sense. The Course is always focusing on the *content in our minds*. Thus, you can be in your right mind and forcibly stop another person from hitting you, or you can be in

your wrong mind and do that. You can be in your right mind and do nothing, or you can be in your wrong mind and do nothing. If we can get past our ego for an instant, then anything we do or do not do would be "right."

Throughout the Course, Jesus is always teaching us that our thinking flows from either the ego's thought system or the Holy Spirit's, whichever we have *chosen*. Thus in this lesson he is specifically teaching us that whenever we perceive ourselves attacked and we feel a need to defend ourselves, we have reinforced a self-concept of fear and vulnerability, which means we see ourselves as a body, *not* as God created us. Only if we are afraid would we have need of defenses. That is helpful information, for it lets us know which thought system we are identified with. But we cannot correct our faulty self-concept simply by allowing ourselves to be abused or violated in some way. That would not advance us spiritually, just as removing all locks from our doors and canceling insurance policies would not advance us spiritually. As long as we experience ourselves as bodies, then we need to respond to and respect our bodily needs, both physical and psychological.

Jesus is speaking to us from his perspective as a healed mind, which knows with certainty that bodies and this world are totally illusory. He is simply saying that we, whose minds are *not* healed, should pay careful attention to the thought system we have chosen to identify with, and then ask his help to look through his eyes to see what this world is really like, and what its purpose is. Then we would have a basis for choosing differently. He is helping us realize that there is an inherent fear in everyone, and that it is coming from our *minds*, not from hostile elements in the world or the body, which are all part of the ego's strategy to keep us mindless. A defense against the fear and guilt in our minds is not necessary, because they are made up by the ego. We need only ask his help to correct our mistaken choice to identify with the ego thought system of sin, guilt, and fear. And we know that we have made that mistaken choice every time we experience ourselves as vulnerable and attacked. Again, that does not mean that we do not protect ourselves in whatever way is appropriate in the world, including the use of martial arts.

Finally, Jesus does not mean in this lesson that we should never make plans; he means only that we should consult with him first, because as unhealed minds we have no idea of what is in our best interests, or in anyone else's best interests. We must even be vigilant about presuming to know what our problems are, lest we fall into the ego trap of telling Jesus or the Holy Spirit how They should solve our problems. Our energies and efforts would be much better placed in asking for help to forgive, for that alone will remove the barriers to our truly hearing the Voice for Love, Whose wisdom would gently guide us in all our words and actions. Guilt is the problem, forgiveness is the answer. We need never get more specific than that.

Q #226: If our lives are determined by a decision made outside of time and space, i.e., a choice about which teacher to listen to, then what is the sense of trying, with our personality self, to change anything? Why even do the workbook as that is done with the small self? I guess I am asking what role does the self I believe I am play, in the big scheme of things?

A: Hey, it's not as hopeless as all that! But the first thing you want to understand, even though it is not your experience, is that *nothing* is attempted or done by the self in the world that we think we are -- it's nothing but a shadow of thoughts in the mind. Everything is done by the mind -- all power rests there. It's just that we have deceived ourselves about who we are and so think that we are the shadow rather than the light without which there could be no shadow. So everything we find ourselves doing in the world is a shadow or projection of a choice we have made in our mind, often unconsciously, as to which teacher to listen to. And for a long time, since we don't know there is any teacher but the ego, even our choice for the ego is forgotten. And that, of course, has been the ego's goal, for we now seem to be mindless. We believe we do our thinking with the brain -- a masterful deception (**W.p.92.2**) -- and are no longer aware that we have a mind, even though awareness is only of the mind. And if we don't know we have a mind, it's going to be a lot more difficult to change it, which of course is also the ego's goal.

Consider the example you give of doing the workbook lessons. They are not really done by the self I think I am -- my experience of reading and practicing them in the world is a reflection of a choice I have made in my mind, which has then been projected out as behavior performed by my illusory self in the world. All learning takes place in the mind. But while we are still too fearful to see ourselves as mind, we will continue to experience everything as being chosen and carried out by the self we think we are in the world. What is helpful about our seeming experience in the world is that it can be used as a barometer to help us recognize which teacher we have in fact turned to in our mind. The choice to do the workbook lessons, made in the mind, is in most cases a decision to turn away from the ego and to turn toward the Holy Spirit. So learning is going on -- it's just that it's not my self here that is learning -- that self is only ever an effect and never a cause of anything. But again, while our reality as mind is too fearful to accept, we will experience the learning as if it were happening on this plane by the little self we think we are.

So by all means continue to do the workbook lessons. And practice forgiveness in the classrooms of your seeming life here. These are the opportunities Jesus is asking us to give to him so he can help us change our minds while we still think we are bodies, until such time as guilt no longer has a hold on our minds and we no longer need the body and the personality self as a defense against the guilt.

Q #227: *A Course in Miracles* mentions the existence of a specific brother. Should that be interpreted as the partner in the current relationship that the reader is involved in? It seems to me that the Course clearly states that happiness is linked to the development of this relationship. Is that correct?

A: Jesus was "speaking" to Helen Schucman and Bill Thetford about their relationship and other relationships in their lives, and so the teaching and discussion is expressed in that context. Jesus was trying to help Helen realize how much happier and more peaceful she would be if she let go of her judgments of Bill and other specific people in her life. But when practicing, we can use anyone at all, whether living or not, currently in our lives or not. It is not always the case that the relationship you are currently involved in is the one you need to work on most, although it could be. There might also be some powerful unresolved issues with a child, a dead parent, a sibling, or some other relative, a friend, or even a public figure.

Usually someone comes quickly to mind when we are doing the exercises in the workbook or applying what we are reading about in the text. It does not really matter, though, because this is all about the *content* in our own minds, and all relationships are in the mind. The *content* is always the same, regardless of the *form* of the relationship. All of our relationship problems stem from our projected self-hatred, guilt, and agonizing sense of lack. If we were to heal any one relationship totally, we would have healed them all, and we would be completely happy, because, once again, the *content* is always the same, time is not real, and all minds are joined.

Q #228: In *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus says that: 1) We are all part of a single formless being which has been created by another formless being; 2) Time concepts are illusory. Isn't *before* a time concept? How is it possible for a being to create another being and not come before it?

A: It is helpful to realize that whenever Jesus in the Course attempts to convey anything about creation and our true reality in God, he must use words and concepts that will have to fail in the end to do anything more than *suggest* a state that we cannot comprehend. For it is not possible to describe what is beyond description, and what is unlimited and infinite can not be defined in finite terms. Jesus must use the language of perception to talk about what is beyond perception, beyond time and space.

But the Course also has a purpose in attempting to explain the unexplainable. And that is to provide a correction for the mistaken concepts and beliefs of the ego thought system. Grounded in a perceptual duality, these concepts and beliefs assert, albeit now unconsciously, that we have separated from God, usurped His power to create, and in fact are the creator and source of all existence (**T.11.in.1:6,7,8; 2**).

And so the correction Jesus offers also uses dualistic words, such as Father and Son, which imply both spatial and temporal dimensions to the relationship. But these words are used only to undo our belief that we can be the cause of ourselves, returning to God the role of Source of all being. That Jesus does not mean these explanations literally becomes apparent when we read passages which attempt to provide insight into the true nature of God and reality, a reality beyond time and space, in which there are **not** two separate beings called God and Christ.

So, for example, Jesus observes, while still using the dualistic language of the ego thought system, that **"God...makes no distinctions in what is Himself and what is still Himself. What He creates is not apart from Him, and nowhere does the Father end, the Son begin as something separate from Him (W.pl.132.12:3,4).** And time-based concepts, such as *before* and *after*, or *first* and *last*, simply do not apply to God in the usual sense. God **"does nothing last, because He created first and for always. It must be understood that the word 'first' as applied to Him is not a time concept. He is first in the sense that He is the First in the Holy Trinity Itself. He is the Prime Creator, because He created His co-creators. Because He did, time applies neither to Him nor to what He created. (T.7.I.7:3,4,5,6,7; italics added).**

If you are not satisfied with what must be a dissatisfying account for what can not be understood by us, take comfort in the fact that you are not alone. In attempting to describe the nature and condition of true creation, Jesus concludes, **"To no one here is this describable. Nor is there any way to learn what this condition means. Not till you go past learning to the Given...is it understood" (T.24.VII.6:8,9,10).** And so, we simply can accept with humility that we do not understand. But the good news is that, despite our belief that we need to understand, we don't have to understand in order to find our way back home (**T.18.IV.7:5,6,7**). We can practice our lessons of forgiveness, confident that if we do our part, the rest will be ours when we are ready to accept it.

For additional discussion of the dualistic nature of the Course language in relationship to its non-dualistic metaphysics, see [Question #85](#).

Q #229: I am confused by a passage from Lesson #140 in *A Course in Miracles*: "Only salvation can be said to cure." It says, "So do we lay aside our amulets, our charms and medicines ...We will be still and listen for the Voice of healing, Which will cure all ills as one...." I believe that we create our own sickness. I have had hypothyroidism for the past 24 years or so and have also been diagnosed with depression. I do believe in the absolute faith in God and His truth. Do I stop taking my medications? I realize that I have an underlying fear of the consequences of untreated hypothyroidism. Can my faith remove these conditions? Is the healing referred to here physical, spiritual, or otherwise. I feel very lost about this.

A: *Please do not stop taking your medications.* That is not the goal of this workbook lesson. Jesus would never ask us to give up anything in the world of form that still seems to help us feel better, that controls our bodily symptoms and reduces our pain and fear (**T.2.IV.4:5,6,7,8,9,10; 5**). He is only trying to get us to look beyond our tacit assumptions about sickness and cures.

Specifically, the purpose of this lesson is to help us begin to understand that it is not the body that is sick or that should be our focus for healing. Rather it is the mind that believes that separation and guilt are real. That is the idea behind the lines: **"Atonement does not heal the sick, for that is not a cure. It takes away the guilt that makes the sickness possible. And that is cure indeed" (W.pl.140.4:4,5,6).** And later in the lesson, **"Let us not try today to seek to cure what cannot suffer**

sickness [the body]. Healing must be sought but where it is [in the mind], and then applied to what is sick [the mind], so that it [the mind] can be cured" (W.pl.140.7:1,2). This idea is asserted with great clarity in the text: **"The body needs no healing. But the mind that thinks it is a body is sick indeed!" (T.25.in.3:1,2).**

This lesson is not attempting to bring about any change in our behavior, such as having us stop our medications. Rather, we are being invited to open up to a different way of thinking about what is sick and why. And once we begin to accept that illness is in the mind and comes from our unconscious but illusory belief in guilt -- guilt over thinking we have separated ourselves from and attacked our Source -- we can then begin to understand that healing simply involves a process of undoing these beliefs -- what the Course refers to as forgiveness. So keep taking your medications, but at the same time, invite Jesus in to look with you at the guilt in your mind that has led you to believe not only that you are a body, but that you deserve to suffer. Jesus accepts neither of those beliefs about you, but you still do, and so you need his guidance.

As a point of clarification, the Course's meaning of faith is different from traditional uses, such as in *faith* healing. God does not heal our sickness -- the Course is not asking us to place our faith in Him to take away all our illness and pain. By faith, the Course is referring to the allegiance we give to either the ego or the Holy Spirit to guide our thinking, with the inevitable outcomes that follow putting our faith in each teacher (**T.13.IX.2:3,4,5,6**). Place your faith in the ego's interpretation of yourself and others and you are guaranteeing yourself guilt, fear, pain, illness and death. Place your faith in the Holy Spirit's interpretation and you are guaranteeing yourself peace, love, joy and life. And to place your faith in the Holy Spirit means that you are willing to replace judgment and attack upon yourself and others with the healing balm of forgiveness.

For related discussions on healing and illness, see also [Questions #57](#), [#128](#) and [#142](#).

Q #230: During the several times that I have worked with the workbook of *A Course in Miracles*, I find I have left things undone that belong to earlier lessons, e.g., meaning and meaninglessness. The instructions clearly say that only one lesson per day is to be worked. My intuition tells me to go back to the beginning, in order not to confuse the sequence of the workbook. I wonder if others have asked this question before, but have not been answered yet?

A: It is not necessary to begin the workbook again. You can always go back and do a lesson again or concentrate on a specific concept that you skipped over; but that does not mean that you should start all over again. Jesus does not expect us to do a lesson perfectly before we move on to the next one. He is far more aware of our resistance and fear than we are, so he knows we will misinterpret what he says, not do everything he asks, and when we do it, we will do it imperfectly. He is interested only in our willingness and humility as we practice the lessons. The middle of **Lesson 95**, in particular, discusses the attitude we should have when we run into problems in our work with the lessons. You might also wish to look at [Questions #64](#) and [#92](#), which pertain to the workbook.

Q #231: My question pertains to the world we see as an illusion. Is it safe to say that if we find "enjoyment" here we must keep in mind it is still only an illusion, otherwise we become attached to it in a negative way? Does this sort of parallel what the scriptures say that we are not of this world but only in this world? This makes for a tug of war within us because when we seem to desire something, we ask: which part is doing the desiring? At that point, can we justify the desire by keeping in mind that it really does not matter because it is only illusion and then go on and enjoy? Is justify the wrong word? Are we on the right track with this reasoning?

A: Your reasoning is partially correct. Anything we desire in the world of form is only an illusion, but we should not dismiss our seeking or desiring it too quickly. Although *A Course in Miracles* does not ask that

we relinquish enjoyment in the dream, it does ask that we recognize the real motives for our pursuit of pleasurable experiences. It tells us that we are seeking to fill the void left by our seeming separation from God with substitutes for His Love that never fully satisfy us. This is at the root of all our seeking in the dream. The Course uncovers our motives in the hopes that we will learn *not* to seek outside ourselves for what will never truly bring us happiness. As long as we make the mistake of believing that the cause of our "enjoyment" is something or someone external to ourselves, we will seek in vain, in keeping with the ego's maxim: **"Seek but do not find" (M.13.5:8)**. The Course tells us that the only enjoyment possible in the dream is a peaceful state of mind, and that is achieved only by the choice to join with the Holy Spirit in the mind, and accept His interpretation of every experience or relationship we have. That is not to say that we cannot enjoy a pleasurable experience in the world. The point is that if our mind is at peace, it does not matter whether we are enjoying a beautiful concert or are stuck in hot traffic -- our peacefulness remains undisturbed. This is not the same as indulging our desires for pleasure by saying it is all an illusion and it doesn't matter. If we were at the point in our spiritual journey where we truly believed that this is all an illusion, we would not need *A Course in Miracles* to help us see how real we think the world is, and, we would not be in pursuit of enjoyment in the world. Meanwhile, all the things in the world we *do* seek are important reminders of how attached we are to our identity as bodies and the ego thought system, which makes separation and the world very real. Both negative emotions (pain) as well as positive emotions (enjoyment) which are evoked by our experiences are our "proof" that the world is real. We are learning to be aware of how desperately we seek this.

The only part of our mind that desires anything, no matter how lofty it may seem to be, is the ego: **"Appetites are 'getting' mechanisms, representing the ego's need to confirm itself. This is as true of body appetites as it is of the so-called 'higher ego needs.' Body appetites are not physical in origin. The ego regards the body as its home, and tries to satisfy itself through the body. But the idea that this is possible is a decision of the mind, which has become completely confused about what is really possible" (T.II.7:5, 6,7,8,9)**. The Course is a mind training process because we are so confused, have taught ourselves upside down thinking, and do not know what makes us happy: **"You no more recognize what is painful than you know what is joyful, and are, in fact, very apt to confuse the two. The Holy Spirit's main function is to teach you to tell them apart. What is joyful to you is painful to the ego, and as long as you are in doubt about what you are, you will be confused about joy and pain" (T.7.X.3:4,5,6)**. This does not mean we should feel guilty for seeking enjoyment. It is no different than any of the other things we do to take care of ourselves in the illusion. While we still believe in our identity as bodies, we will find "enjoyment" in the world. Though the ego uses this to support the belief that the separation is real, the Holy Spirit can use it as part of His classroom to teach us that there is no satisfaction in this world, and that our only true happiness is found in God. We may also have experiences that are truly joyful because they reflect a choice in the mind to identify with the Holy Spirit. As we continue to practice what the Course teaches, we will eventually have truly joyful experiences that reflect the choice made in the mind to identify with the Holy Spirit. This joy comes from the content in the mind rather than anything in form.

Q #232: The ego thought system teaches us that being a mother or a father is something noble. In other words, having children is "good." But as far as I understand, *A Course in Miracles* has something else to say about this. Is this just another illusion? Maybe something "wrong," because it makes us believe in this world and reinforces our bonds to this reality?

A: Jesus does not say that there is something "wrong" in being a parent; nor does he say it is something noble. Any role in this world is part of the ego's plan to make its world the only reality. So in that sense, parenting is part of the whole illusion that there is life outside Heaven. Any role in this world is a substitute for our true role as God's one Son, Christ. Parenting in particular, though, may have more guilt associated with it -- even though there really are no degrees of guilt -- because of its connection with producing "life," i.e., bringing babies into the world. Within the ego thought system, this is a way of competing with God, a way of saying that we are just as powerful as He is, and therefore that He no longer is needed. The ego now can produce life, and end it. Many religions bless this process by describing it as co-creation, i.e.,

human parents are the co- creators, with God, of life. In *A Course in Miracles*, however, life is the pure abstract oneness of Love in Heaven. All bodily life and parenting is therefore illusory. Given the Holy Spirit's purpose, though, the role of parent can become a classroom in which a person can learn how to be a loving, kind, compassionate authority figure while carrying out the responsibilities of a parent appropriately and conscientiously. The lesson of shared interests can be very effectively learned, while the parent keeps the boundaries between parent and child clearly defined. ([Questions #179](#) and [#202](#) might be of interest to you.)

Q #233: In answering Question #79, you quoted a statement that I would like you to elaborate on and explain: "Everyone makes an ego or a self for himself, which is subject to enormous variation because of its instability. He also makes an ego for everyone else he perceives, which is equally variable." Does this mean that I am responsible not only for my own thoughts and actions, but also for the things you do to me, and that I choose the manner in which you play them out? Is this included in the script I write -- exactly, in detail, how you will treat me?

A: To make sense of this passage, we need to be clear that Jesus is speaking to the dreamer of the dream and not to the figure in the dream that we mistakenly identify as ourselves (**T.27.VII;VIII**). At the metaphysical level, we have assigned all the roles and actions to all the figures in our life -- our waking dreams -- just as we have done in our sleeping dreams at night. But most of us are not in touch with this initial level of decision-making. These are all the possible ego scripts, written by the single, collective mind before the fragmentation into billions of separate, individual minds seemed to occur.

At the next level of seemingly fragmented, independent minds, we reach agreements with other minds about how we will play out our respective dream roles, that is, which scripts we will review. And, while we choose from the ego-based scripts, these are always some variation on the theme of victim and victimizer. We select the events of our life in conjunction with other minds, but again we have no conscious memory of making the choices, an essential repression for our victim defense to work (for a further discussion of this, see [Question #37](#)).

The above passage, however, can also be considered from a more immediate psychological level, which is relatively easy to become conscious of and so more practical to work with. We simply recognize our propensity to attribute ego motivations to others, based on our interpretations of our own ego needs. Your purpose may or may not be to manipulate me in any given situation, but I will ascribe ego intent to your actions and act as if my interpretation is valid. Jesus makes it very clear that this kind of analysis is hazardous to our own peace of mind (**T.12.I.1,2**). And he also gently reminds us of the unreliability of our observations of others: **"Remember how many times you thought you knew all the 'facts' you needed for judgment, and how wrong you were! Is there anyone who has not had this experience? Would you know how many times you merely thought you were right, without ever realizing you were wrong?" (M.10.4:1,2,3).**

Yet we continue making "an ego for everyone else" as a way of seeing the guilt of the ego thought system outside of ourselves rather than accepting responsibility for its existence within our own mind. So Jesus' purpose is to lead us to recognize not only what a barrier our projections are to our own happiness but **"the tremendous release and deep peace that comes from meeting yourself and your brothers totally without judgment" (T.3.VI.3:1).**

Q #234: Since everything in this world of form is the fragmented Son of God, and the Son's purpose is forgiveness and accepting the Atonement for one's self, how would anything non-human (*A Course in Miracles* is written specifically for humans) work on

that? How does a mountain, a chair, a book, a machine, a tree, an ameba, a grain of sand, a hurricane, etc., learn a spirituality? Does my choosing to appear as a human with the ability to learn mean I am choosing to have the ability to wake up now rather than later? Since every Son of God in the Sonship has to wake up before oneness is achieved, won't we be waiting an infinity for the inanimate things and the lower creatures on the "evolutionary scale" to perceive all this or is it even possible?

A: It would be very difficult, if not impossible, for us to understand how non-human entities can learn a spirituality. But there must be one, because the Sonship will return to its natural state as spirit, as one Son. We are at a distinct disadvantage, though, because *our* reference point is always our own "human" experience in which we see ourselves at the top, or close to it, on the "evolutionary scale." This reference point is purposefully established -- by the ego -- so that "reality" can be viewed hierarchically -- "the great chain of being," as it is commonly labeled. Thus we try to understand everything from this ego perspective, which is designed to conceal the true nature of reality. We are falling right into the ego's trap, in other words, when we situate the Course's teachings in the human framework. Surely, there is no other framework or context in which we can work; but it is essential that we realize that it is an ego setup to keep us from ever getting back into our minds beyond our spatial-temporal experience. That is what Jesus is helping us to do, so that we may share *his* vision of everything. Getting bogged down with questions such as these, which are good ones, would further the ego's purpose of validating our existence. If we practice forgiveness day in and day out, we will be shedding our limited view and moving closer to where Jesus is. Our interests then would shift as well, and more than likely, we would not be preoccupied with these issues, intriguing as they are.

Q #235: Question #116 asks whether God intervenes in this world of form for us. Your answer was beautifully stated but was left wanting in my opinion. By its very title, *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus is telling us that He will indeed intervene in this mad dream we're having. There is no problem that cannot be answered by a miracle, whether it be in finances, health or emotional turmoil, or anything in between. That is the whole reason Jesus took the time to come to us in this form. All the work we do to undo our ego identification results in the undoing of all our problems. Every problem is answered. Our Light shines away all the darkness. So to put this in a question form: why is not more emphasis put on the realization of one's happiness by following the Course?

A: Why not more emphasis on finding happiness through the Course, you ask? Because none of us wants the happiness that the Course offers us. We all want *our* definition of happiness, which means having our personal needs met, whether they be financial, health, emotional or whatever. But that is not what the Course offers. It is inviting us through the practice of forgiveness to let go of all our judgments and grievances until, at the end of the process, we also release our identification with this personal self that we believe has all these problems and needs. The happiness the Course holds out to us comes from awakening from the dream of pain which we call our

lives here in the world, a dream in which there is no hope of real happiness. But we don't want that. And so Jesus says he must first teach us the difference between joy and pain, between freedom and imprisonment (**T.7.X; T.8.II.4,5**). Otherwise we will continue to seek pain, believing it is joy, and strive to maintain our imprisonment, insisting it is freedom. We need a lot of help, but not with the "problems" of the world.

To answer your unstated question -- neither God nor Jesus intervenes in the world. Nor do they intervene in our minds. To intervene and fix problems at any level would be to make the error of separation real (**T.26.VII.12**). And the correction, which the Course calls the Atonement principle, says the separation never in reality happened. So it would make no sense for God or Jesus to intervene in our insane world. We made up all of our worldly problems so that we could cover over and not have to look at what we believe is the real problem -- the guilt in our mind over separating from God. The only help we need is with changing our minds about that guilt and, although we can't do this on our own, Jesus tells us he can't change our minds for us. He can only show us what we have made real and its consequences, in the world and in our minds, in the hope that we will recognize our insanity and be willing to make the same choice he has already made (**T.2.VI.4; T.2.VII.1; T.3.IV.7; T.5.II.9,10,11:1; T.8.IV.4,5,6**).

The thing is, none of us really minds being unhappy, so long as we don't think we're responsible for that unhappiness. We want a world and relationships with problems that victimize us so that we don't have to see that our choice for separation and individuality is the real cause of all our pain. And until we can recognize and accept that fact, we will have no interest in the happiness that following the Course offers us. We will find real happiness by following Jesus' teaching, but not because all of our problems in the world will be resolved as a result of his intercession. We have no problems in the world that need resolving. Yes, all the darkness will disappear in the light of who we are -- and that includes not only all of our problems in the world, but the world itself and the self we think we are within the world, as well as the guilt within our mind that is the source of all of our projections into a world of form. Because for most of us, that thought is fearful, Jesus assures us in many places in his Course that the path is a process and we will progress along it at our pace, as we are comfortable (e.g., **T.16.VI.8:1,2,3**). But at least now we can understand our resistance to practicing his teachings of forgiveness. As Jesus reminds us, **"Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all of the barriers within yourself that you have built against it. It is not necessary to seek for what is true, but it *is* necessary to seek for what is false"** (**T.16.IV.6:1,2**).

For further discussion of why God does not intervene in the world, see [Question #42](#).

Q #236: One of the things I find hardest to accept about *A Course in Miracles* is its apparent dismissal of humanity's "higher strivings," as embodied, especially, in art and science. Clearly what the Course understands by our "creations" is something entirely different from "creativity" in the artistic or scientific sense. The latter, it would seem, generates nothing more than illusion within illusion (shades of Plato?), rather than

pointing Man to a higher and more beautiful reality. Does this mean that artists and scientists should pack it in, and the rest of us dismiss their efforts as part of the big ego-distracted?

A: You raise an important question, one that has troubled many students and observers of *A Course in Miracles*. On the one hand, it is indeed possible to concentrate on learning and practicing forgiveness while setting aside for a while this dimension of the Course's theory. On the other hand, this issue cannot be ignored if one is to attain a comprehensive understanding of what the Course is saying about our world and ourselves.

Examining this issue in the light of the two levels on which this Course is written, along with the distinction between form and content might help with your concern.

Although it is true that artistic and scientific "creativity" "generates nothing more than illusion within illusion," this does not mean that "artists and scientists should pack it in, and the rest of us dismiss their efforts as part of the big ego-distracted" -- any more than the fact that the body is part of the ego's plan to attack God means that surgeons, chiropractors, dentists, physical therapists, etc., should "pack it in." The Course would indeed not be the practical, gentle, and kind course that it is if this were what it advocated.

First, throughout the Course, Jesus is trying to help us see things from his point of view, to step outside the entire world to view its origin in the thought system we maintain in our minds, and to see what we have given up in exchange for our individual, separate existence, so that we may have a better basis for understanding and evaluating what we have. He appeals to us in many ways to recognize that even the best of what we have in this world is unimaginably minuscule when compared to the glory that we rejected in our choice to prefer separation over oneness.

Jesus consistently teaches us that nothing *in* this world, or *of* this world, is of God, and therefore it has no reality. On this level of absolute truth, which we call Level One, *all* human activity is futile and meaningless. The only genuine creativity is in Heaven, in the extension of infinite Love: **"True giving is creation. It extends the limitless to the unlimited, eternity to timelessness, and love unto itself. It adds to all that is complete already. . . by letting what cannot contain itself fulfill its aim of giving everything it has away, thus securing it forever for itself"** (W.pl.105.4:2,3,4,5).

Moving from Level One of the Course to Level Two -- which is the level of teaching in which Jesus communicates in a framework that is meaningful to us, and which he can use to start us back up the ladder our choice to be separate led us down (**T.28.III.1:2**) -- he tells us that we have a split mind, and that when we left Heaven (an impossibility of course), we took with us the memory of all we left behind, but buried it far beyond awareness. Since it is still there in our split minds, however, it can be evoked. Practicing *A Course in Miracles* is one way of bringing this memory back into

awareness. In fact, anything at all may be utilized toward this end, including the work of artists and scientists. But it is not the *form* that is decisive, although the form may be the starting point. It is what the form reminds us of that is relevant, its *content*, in other words. The perfection of Michelangelo's statue of David, for example, can transport one from the physical realm to the non-physical, abstract perfection of God's creation in Heaven. The same inspiration can come from viewing a distorted body, however. It is entirely conditional on the viewer first choosing to shift from the wrong mind to the right mind, from identifying with the ego to identifying with the Atonement principle, that the separation never happened in reality.

From another angle: since our minds are split, we are not totally insane; and therefore we are sometimes motivated by selflessness, defenselessness, and a willingness to see our interests as shared with everyone else's. Thus, the efforts of a scientist or doctor to relieve pain and reduce human misery can serve as a reminder of our ego-free state in our right minds, the reflection of our pure innocence and oneness as Christ. Jesus would never simply dismiss our efforts as meaningless in and of themselves -- whether they be the "higher strivings" of humanity, or the humble efforts of a street cleaner to keep the neighborhood looking nice. Jesus looks only at the *purpose*, which can transcend self-centeredness, self-aggrandizement, or be limited solely to them. The value of our activities is associated only with their *purpose*, which is always the result of a decision made in our minds to see either shared or separate interests. We therefore can serve each other best by being reminders of the truth and flawless beauty of our immaculate Identity as Christ, which is reflected in our right minds, and which we witness to by our willingness to see all people as the same. Again, this may come through the work of scientists, artists, poets, or welders in a factory. It is always a matter of *content*, not *form*.

Q #237: The prayer from the "Third Obstacle to Peace":

i. "Take this from me and look upon it, judging it for me.

Let me not see it as a sign of sin and death, nor use it for destruction.

Teach me how *not* to make of it an obstacle to peace, but let You use it for me, to facilitate its coming"

asks us not to use our perceptions as obstacles to peace but as facilitators of peace. Correct?

ii. Does this mean even war? Is it possible that war, which we have chosen to hurt ourselves and others with, can become the means for our salvation?

A: i. Yes, you are correct. In fact, this prayer is a very clear statement about the process of forgiveness as taught in *A Course in Miracles*. As soon as we become aware of

disquiet within, we recognize that we have judged wrongly and ask the Holy Spirit to judge the situation (or person) for us. It is in this way that our perceptions, which caused the disquiet and obstructed our peace, become facilitators of our peace.

ii: Your uncertainty is met with an unequivocal response of **yes**, this means even war. Any behavior in this world can become the means for our salvation: **"...His use of what you made, to heal instead of harm" (T.25.VI.4.1)**. This is why the focus of *A Course in Miracles* is *not* on behavior, but rather on changing our thoughts. Or more specifically, on changing *with whom* we think. Trying to change our behavior (or that of another), is actually trying to usurp the function of Holy Spirit: **"Correction is not your function. It belongs to One Who knows of fairness, not of guilt. If you assume correction's role, you lose the function of forgiveness" (T.27.II.10:1,2,3)**. Once again, a very clear statement. Any ambiguity which arises in our practice of the Course must come from our fear of disidentifying with the ego, as Jesus could not state any more clearly the necessary steps for peace to be in our awareness. This being said, before "going to war," one must be really clear that the ego is not involved.

Q #238: I have been a student of *A Course in Miracles* since 1982. I have been experiencing insomnia for about 18 years. I read and reread the "Sickness is a defense against the Truth" lesson. I have so much extra information in the form of Excerpts and Ken Wapnick tapes. I am aware that the ego is doing this to keep me off balance and have me constantly identify with the body, making it very, very real. I wake so early and just lie there and try to stop the negative thoughts coming through. I ask the Holy Spirit to undo everything I have done to bring this on. I ask Jesus to take my hand and help me. But I always wind up falling in with the ego, and getting so angry that it makes my life much more difficult. It keeps me so worn out that it makes it difficult to remember to keep listening for the still, small voice. If only it were a big, booming voice.

A: You do not mention whether or not you are taking measures to help with your insomnia on the level of form. This is of course the place to start the healing process, since we do believe we are bodies and, as you say, we take the body very seriously by making it real. One can be faithful to the Course process of recognizing the ego at work, while using whatever remedies may help in treating the illness. As with so many of our problems the ego gets us coming and going. As you point out, your insomnia serves the ego in several ways -- as an initial distraction, as a way of causing conflict, and as a great way to drown out "the still small voice," not to mention the guilt at having engaged so vigorously with the ego in the whole process. It is indeed an exhausting situation which certainly exacerbates the effects of insomnia.

Have you tried listening to your ACIM tapes? If they don't put you to sleep, this would then be a useful way of spending the time you are awake, and would defeat the ego's goal of distraction and conflict. If, with this little willingness to hear the message of the Course during these early morning hours, you are no longer interested in trying to get to sleep, maybe the ego would give up using insomnia as a weapon. It is a particularly ingenious weapon since *A Course in Miracles* is teaching us how to awaken from the dream, and the ego chooses the "lack of sleep" as an attack device.

In the ego's arsenal insomnia becomes the victimizer. Using the body in this way is the usual ego strategy designed to produce feelings of victimization, seemingly dissociated with the mind. The Course, on the other hand, tells us that the problem originates in the mind that made a choice to identify with the ego's world of separation and specialness prior to the insomnia and the ensuing anger. Although magic works to bring the problem into the dream in form, it does not work to bring about the correction. The Holy Spirit's help relies on our willingness to take responsibility for this choice in order to have the error undone. The negative thoughts you mention will not disappear without this willingness to take responsibility. Very often the honest recognition of saying; "I am in this predicament (insomnia, or whatever) because *"I want to be an angry victim"*, takes some of the punch out of it. At least it clears up some of the clutter in our confused minds and makes way for the beginning of healing.

Feeling guilty about it will only add to the ego's scheme. What the Course advises with regards to the laws of chaos applies to the ego's goals in your insomnia, as with all ego schemes: **"Let us, then, look upon them calmly, that we may look beyond them, understanding what they are [ego lies that have no real effect], not what they would maintain [that the separation and the body are real]" (T.23.II.1:4).** "Calmly" is a very important word here; it means looking without judgment, without adding more guilt to the ego's fire. This process of looking honestly is how we wake up to the truth the Course is teaching us, and in this waking we find our rest: **"Rest does not come from sleeping but from waking" (T.5.II.10:4).**

Q #239: I have a question regarding the March 2003 *Lighthouse* article. The beginning, about "regime change," made sense to me, and had me laughing. But at the end I was frustrated -- I didn't know how to formulate how to act, or what actions to support. If the only sane response is forgiveness, does that mean we shouldn't try to stop people who are hurting others? Can we stop them lovingly? What if we have to kill them to stop them -- can that be loving?

A: The answer to your questions lies in understanding the teachings of *A Course in Miracles* on forgiveness, which is not the same as the ego's version of forgiveness. Forgiveness, according to the ego, rests on seeing sin, and then forgiving it. It then esteems some "sinners" as deserving of forgiveness, and some as not. The important thing for the ego is making the error real by believing some harm has been done by one part of the Sonship to another, and that its effect is real. These beliefs are in full operation in a situation, such as the war in Iraq. It is a perfect opportunity to see the ego thought system in action -- not on the battlefield of the Iraqi desert, but in our mind, which is where forgiveness is needed. It is also a perfect opportunity for forgiveness, as stated in the *Lighthouse* article. Forgiveness, as taught by the Course, begins by looking at the world, and events like the war in Iraq, paying attention to all the judgments and feelings that come up in us, and recognizing their source, which is the mind: **"It [the world] is the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition"(T.21.in.1:5).** The real war, therefore, is in our mind. The judgments

and feelings are projections of the guilt in our own mind which is caused by our choice to identify with the ego's belief in the separation. The mind then becomes a battleground, and the war in the world merely reflects the conflict in the mind. Since this is an activity of the mind, it needs correction on the level of the mind, not on the level of form. As a student of the Course our part in "ending the war" lies in this forgiveness process.

The next step in the Course's forgiveness process is the recognition that no true harm is done by the war: **"There is nothing to forgive. No one can hurt the Son of God" (T.14.III.7:5,6)**. Any *perceived* damage is based on the belief that the separation and the body are real. Though in truth they are not, our belief makes them real in our awareness. As we watch the devastation of war on television we realize how much we *do* perceive damage and we *do* believe the body is real. All our reactions to the war come from this belief, along with so many other beliefs about how the world should work, who is responsible for the war, who are the victims, and on and on. The list of misperceptions is very long, particularly in an extreme example, such as war. It is this belief system that causes our upset, not the events of the war. And it is this belief system that brings about war in the world in the first place. That is why the *real* solution to war is forgiveness, not negotiation, or any specific action. However, while we turn within to see the turmoil in our own minds and seek help to undo our misperceptions, it is still possible to take action in the world. Just as we continue to take normal care of our bodies as we learn to undo our belief in them, so too we can do whatever we think may be helpful to resolve conflicts in the world. The decision is not whether or not to act, or what action to take, but with whom we make the decision: **"And make no mistake, nowhere in A Course in Miracles does Jesus suggest that we *not* act in the world; only that we not act alone" (The Lighthouse, Vol. 14, No. 1, p. 5)**. Is the purpose of taking action to reinforce the ego's belief in victims and victimizers, taking sides with those who are "good" against those who are "evil", or are we willing to ask the Holy Spirit to help us see that everyone in the war is a brother calling for help, rather than a sinner, and that their truth remains inviolate no matter how insane their ego behavior is? Whatever form the action takes will then reflect the belief system of the teacher we have chosen: the ego or the Holy Spirit. Choosing to accept the Holy Spirit's perception is the only loving response in any situation, including war. When these steps are taken it *is* possible to stop an aggressor from physically hurting someone else without attack. If the only way to do this is by killing another, and *if* a person has clearly chosen to identify with the Holy Spirit, not the ego, in principle the killing can also be done without attack, without judgment, and without guilt. There are probably very few people who would fall into this category. It may indeed be more loving to stop someone from killing another (although not necessarily), but that would only be clear if you are coming from the right mind, having chosen the Holy Spirit, and not from fear. In applying the principles of the Course to any situation in the world the only important thing to remember is the content of the mind, not the form. The mind is what we are being trained to be aware of, and it is the mind that is in need of healing.

A last consideration, but certainly not the least, is the Course teaching that there is no death: **There is no death because what God created shares His life. There is no**

death because an opposite to God does not exist. There is no death because the Father and the Son are One" (W.167.1:5,6,7). It is when we perceive ourselves and others as separate that the Son of God is "murdered." It follows that a person who claims to support peace and brotherhood, but is filled with judgment against political leaders responsible for war, inflicts a death penalty on the Son of God, while a soldier who fully identifies with the Holy Spirit's perception and knows his oneness with all brothers, can perform his duty, which includes killing, with the Holy Spirit's love that flows through him. This is possible only by joining with the Holy Spirit in the mind: **"He brings forgiving dreams, in which the choice is not who is the murderer and who shall be the victim. In the dreams He brings there is no murder and there is no death" (T.27.VII.14:4,5).**

Q #240: In the course of a recent Tantra workshop I experienced a powerful "goddess" energy, which immediately provoked a conflict, as I thought, "Hey, there aren't any goddesses in *A Course in Miracles*!" Would you say the notion of god or goddess energies, of Shiva and Shakti, is incompatible with ACIM, or could the fusion of these sexual polarities be seen as analogous with the overcoming of duality as envisioned by the Course?

A: Although -- with only one exception (**C.2.8:2**) -- all the gender references in the Course are masculine, the only reality according to the Course is a genderless one. Any polarities, whether they be male-female, good-bad, hot-cold, in-out, etc., must be a product of the ego thought system, originating as it does in a belief in opposition -- against God. Given that we experience them, the only question worth asking, according to the Course, is for what purpose shall such polarities be used? (**T-24.VII.6:1,2,3,4**). To reinforce the thought system of sin, guilt, fear, differences and specialness? Or to serve as a classroom for our forgiveness lessons that leads us beyond the perception of differences and specialness?

The Course process does not involve any fusion of polarities -- that would be more in line with the Jungian approach of reconciling opposites, where both poles are afforded reality, but a higher level of experience is arrived at by their integration. In the Course, even such seeming dualities as love and fear, or light and darkness, are not really opposites for, as the Course observes at the very beginning, **"The opposite of love is fear, but what is all-encompassing can have no opposite" (T.in.1:8).** Fear and darkness have no reality and so there is no possibility to integrate them with their "opposite." Rather, we need to step back and look at the fear and the darkness with the Holy Spirit until, over time, we come to recognize their illusory nature. And in that recognition is the realization that there is nothing to overcome. There is no war to be waged against duality. All that is needed is a shift in perception that produces a totally different perspective, from above the oppositional battlefield.

As for your specific experience of a powerful "goddess" energy, the Course would make no specific judgment except to have you ask yourself: Was this experience of power in

any way associated with seeing yourself in opposition to anyone else, as having separate interests, such as a female-male split? If so, it would have reflected an alignment of your thinking with the ego thought system. If however, the experience was one of shared, mutual possibilities for yourself with everyone else, excluding no one, it would be a reflection of right-minded thinking. For it is your interpretation of that experience of power that determines what you have used it for, as we noted above.

Q #241: Jesus, for me, is a symbol of God's Love in my mind, that I use interchangeably with that of the Holy Spirit, for looking at the blocks (grievances) in my mind. I do not proselytize *A Course in Miracles*, and indeed feel that everyone must choose their own spiritual pathway. Recently however I read where someone on the internet suggested that any one using the Course or Jesus, had formed a special relationship with both. I do not see it that way. Could you give me your opinions on this?

A: As long as we have any belief that the separation is real, and as long as we identify with the body to any degree, all of our relationships begin as special: **"...every relationship on which the ego embarks is special" (T.15.VII.1:7)**. In *A Course in Miracles*, the term "special" refers to the belief that since we are separate individuals in bodies, we are incomplete, and have need of persons, things, and events outside of ourselves to be made complete. In other words, anyone who perceives any need in themselves (this means just about everyone) brings specialness to all their relationships. Only those who have accepted the Atonement for themselves do not relate with specialness. The fact that Jesus (or the Holy Spirit) is perceived as different, in that he symbolizes the memory of God's love in the mind, makes him special. In truth, we are not only one with the symbols of the memory of God, we are one with God at home in Heaven. Only this is *not* special. For the sake of clarity, it might be helpful to substitute the word "separate" for special. Wherever perceived separateness or differences are, there specialness is. It is the inevitable outcome of belief in separation. When the Course says **"The Holy Spirit knows no one is special" (T.15.V.5:1)**, it means no one is *separate*, also meaning not in need of anything or anyone. When we identify fully with the Holy Spirit in our minds, we will no longer have a special relationship with Him, with Jesus, or with the Course, because we will no longer perceive ourselves as separate. Meanwhile, we still perceive ourselves as incomplete, and in need of help to accept the Atonement for ourselves, and, we establish special relationships with everything. Again, **"For every relationship on which the ego embarks is special" (T.15.VII.1:7)**. Only by recognizing this can the special relationships become a classroom the Holy Spirit uses to transform them. We initially turn to the Course and to Jesus out of a sense of need. This does make them special. It is necessary to recognize this so we can allow our relationship with them, along with everyone else, to be transformed. If we deny this, we deny ourselves the opportunity to look at the beliefs that underlie our sense of need and incompleteness, thus withholding them from the power of healing. In the end, we will learn that we have no need. Until then, remember that **"This course is a beginning, not an end" (W.ep.1:1)**. Jesus knows we come to him with our specialness intact. In fact, he tells us we must forgive

him: **"Forgive me, then, today. And you will know you have forgiven me if you behold your brother in the light of holiness. He cannot be less holy than can I, and you can not be holier than he" (W.pII.288.2).** As long as we perceive ourselves as different than Jesus -- separate from him -- we bring specialness to our relationship with him, and need to "forgive him" for our mistaken beliefs.

Q #242: I am confused by *A Course in Miracles'* use of the word *conditions*. We are not to ask for help with the "release of fear," but rather to ask "for help in the conditions that have brought the fear about." Would you say it's also appropriate to ask for help in bringing "proper learning conditions" about?...for help in bringing about the conditions for peace?...for help in bringing about the conditions for love?...etc. I assume it's talking about conditions of mind.

A: Yes, the term *conditions* always refers to a choice made in our minds, which accounts for our lack of peace, for our not being aware of love's presence, etc. The point of the passage you are referring to (**T.2.VI.4**) is that Jesus was helping Helen and all of us to learn to take responsibility for our thoughts and feelings, so that we can get back in touch with the power of our minds to choose. We essentially chose to repress this power and become mindless instead when we gave our allegiance to the ego. So Jesus is saying that it really would not be helpful to us in the long run, if he simply took our fear away from us, without our having learned that it is there only because of our ongoing choice to prefer separation to oneness (the conditions that led to the fear). He tells us several paragraphs later: **"You may still complain about fear, but you nevertheless persist in making yourself fearful. I have already indicated that you cannot ask me to release you from fear. I know it does not exist, but you do not. If I intervened between your thoughts and their results, I would be tampering with a basic law of cause and effect; the most fundamental law there is. I would hardly help you if I depreciated the power of your own thinking. This would be in direct opposition to the purpose of this course. It is much more helpful to remind you that you do not guard your thoughts carefully enough" (T.2.VII.1:2,3,4,5,6,7).**

So Jesus is emphasizing the importance of guarding our thoughts very carefully, just as the entire workbook comes back over and over again to the importance of our being *vigilant* about our thoughts. That is what he wants to help us with: looking at how willing we are to keep ourselves separate and special, how willing we are to see others as the sinners and ourselves as innocent victims. These are the conditions that result in our fear and our lack of peace, etc.

Thus is it very appropriate to ask for help in bringing about the conditions that would facilitate our learning, and that would bring about the conditions for peace and love, etc. If we were to look with him at all of our ego thoughts, and then let them go, fear and guilt would vanish forever, and then the love that had been blocked by the fear would be our only reality. All fear and guilt rest on our willingness to choose *against* the love of Jesus and *for* the ego, which ensures our survival as separate individuals.

Finally, if we ask him to help us look at our choice to keep him away, then we have already begun the process of correcting that choice. That is the kind of help that would benefit us most.

Q #243: Some verses in the New Testament seem to speak of an "unpardonable sin" against the Holy Spirit. What is *A Course in Miracles*' view of those passages?

A: The Course always views sin as part of the illusory ego thought system. It has no basis in reality. Therefore there are no pardonable or unpardonable sins, parallel to the principle that there is no hierarchy of illusions. The ego attempts to keep sin real in our minds because that is what keeps its own existence real. Without a notion of sin, there would be no need for dynamics to cope with its effects.

Jesus talks about this in the Course by teaching us that we have done nothing in reality that would warrant the label sin. What we would be inclined to call sin -- our attack on God by separating from Him -- is simply a "tiny, mad idea," easily corrected by making the choice to accept the Atonement principle, which states that the separation never happened; and therefore there is no such thing as sin.

Q #244: Is happiness the goal of life?

A: *A Course in Miracles* states that **"there is no life outside of Heaven" (T.23.II.19:1)**; so what we call life here is really illusory. But since we think we are here as individuals in a world, Jesus talks to us on that level in order to help us begin the process of awakening from the dream we call life. In that context, Jesus says that our goal is to achieve a state of abiding peace in our minds, which is the natural outcome of the practice of forgiveness. "Happiness," he says, "cannot be found apart from Your joint Will [with God]," which is reflected in our choice to see our interests as shared with everyone else's, not separate from them. We might say that no happiness the world offers can match the happiness we would experience when we experience the oneness and sinlessness of God's Son.

Q #245: In many groups studying *A Course in Miracles* that I have attended, people mention that atonement and at-one-ment are the same thing. I consider at-one-ment to be a new age euphemism that actually has nothing to do with Atonement as it is used in the Course. I don't find the word at-one-ment anywhere on the Course CD. Please give me your thoughts on this subject.

A: You are right. At-one-ment is not the same as Atonement as it is used in *A Course in Miracles*. **"The Glossary-Index for *A Course in Miracles*"** by Kenneth Wapnick

defines Atonement as **"the Holy Spirit's plan of correction to undo the ego and heal the belief in separation" (p.32)**. The term at-one-ment is not used in the Course.

The Course tells us **"the sole responsibility of God's Teacher is to accept the Atonement for himself" (M.18.4:5)**, meaning to no longer believe that the separation is real. The term oneness in the Course refers to the unity of the Father and the Son in Heaven, and is reflected in the dream by joining with another through forgiveness. Neither of these principles of the Course's thought system is expressed by the term at-one-ment.

Q #246: I've been studying and practicing *A Course in Miracles* for almost six years, usually on a daily basis. It has helped me a lot, but I still need help to understand and deal with addictions. According to my ego, I am addicted to alcohol and cigarettes. According to God, I am His beloved daughter. How to deal with this? Don't tell me to stop hearing my ego, it sounds like a green light to addictions. I feel there's a deeper ground to think about. Professional advice seems to reinforce sickness, guilt and sacrifice. The Course tells me I don't have to do anything, to put it in the Holy Spirit's hand. But I need further help in letting it be, in opening myself to a lesson I don't quite understand, in not paying so much attention to the world's point of view. Please, let me know if there is something in *A Course in Miracles*, or elsewhere, I am overlooking.

A: First, it is difficult for us to understand the nature of the specific lessons we have in our lives. We cannot see the whole picture in our minds, because we are still so fearful of regaining that part of our identity that we have split off and concealed from ourselves. In one sense, though, we don't have to know why we chose the conditions we did, because the remedy the Course provides is so clear. Whatever the condition, the only relevant issue is whether we choose to have Jesus or the ego guide us through it. If we choose Jesus or the Holy Spirit, we will wind up feeling more peaceful, regardless of whether the condition changes or not; and we will be more inclined to be gentle and kind with ourselves and others. If we choose the ego, we will wind up feeling more guilty or hopeless; we will continue to have thoughts of self-blame and self-pity, and to hold others responsible for our plight. We will remain preoccupied with the body and will be anything but peaceful.

Putting yourself in the Holy Spirit's hands, as the Course views this, involves accepting responsibility for whatever state you are in, and letting go of any thoughts of blame -- either self-blame or blaming others -- and then adopting a kind and gentle attitude towards yourself. The lesson the Holy Spirit or Jesus would help you with is learning that peace of mind is not conditional on physical/psychological health, or on anything external to your mind and Their loving presence in your mind. As you concentrate on learning that lesson, the thoughts that oppose it would come to the surface, and you would then bring those ego thoughts to the loving presence in your mind, where you could choose either to hold on to them or let them go. The patience and gentleness would be manifest in your assurance that when you are ready to let go of the addictions, you will, and that holding on to them is not something sinful, nor something you need to be ashamed of. Nothing we do with or to our bodies can have any affect on the love that is held for us in our right minds.

Thus, putting yourself in the hands of the Holy Spirit does not mean that it is then up to Him to do something about your addictions. Rather, it means that you have made a decision to use the Holy Spirit's way of looking at what is going on instead of the ego's way of looking, which will always leave you believing that you are a vulnerable, victimized body.

Finally, the choice to seek professional help many times can be a loving response to the call for help that is behind the self-hatred and guilt; it can be an expression of kindness toward oneself as a way of

undoing that self-hatred. You seem to imply, however, that you have tried traditional methods of treatment, and that they have not been helpful to you. We have addressed this in previous questions asked of us: #30, #57, and #119.

In case it might be of help, we are summarizing the explanations the Course gives us that can be applied to conditions such as addictions. Although the term is never used in the Course, an addiction is nothing more than a special relationship, and there is a great deal in the Course about special relationships.

Addictions frequently are the result of overwhelming feelings of self-hatred and guilt. The pain is so great that it must be neutralized in some way. Overindulgence in alcohol and cigarettes (or any number of other forms -- food, sex, wealth, luxury, etc.) is often chosen as a means of dulling this pain.

Abusing your body through addictions can also be a way of punishing yourself for being such a "bad" person, a belief that your self-hatred and guilt testifies to. It could also be a means of punishing someone else: you could be pointing an accusing finger at someone and saying, "It's your fault that I am an addict. You made me this way." Paraphrasing a line from the text: Behold me brother, at your hands I am an addict (T.27.I.5:6); also, **"I am the thing you made of me, and as you look on me, you stand condemned because of what I am" (T.31.V.5:3)**. We all have a need to get rid of the pain of our self-hatred and guilt, and so we would even be willing to suffer intensely just so that we could blame it on someone else. The payoff is that we would feel like the innocent victim of what someone else did to us.

As with any form of sickness -- physical or psychological -- being addicted reinforces the belief that the body is real, and can be victimized. When we are preoccupied with the body in any or all of these ways, we more than likely have made a prior decision to keep from our awareness our true identity as spirit. Any form of preoccupation with the body is a defense against the truth. The truth about ourselves can be so frightening to us -- when we allow it into awareness even for a split second -- that we then do whatever would most effectively banish that truth from our awareness. So we make ourselves mindless in the sense of being at the mercy of some force not under our control. Our real beauty and strength as God's Son can be so frightening to us that we substitute an identity of weakness and dependency, and then repress the real origin of it and attribute it to some factor in our own body, another's, or some condition in the world.

To sum up then, the real issue is: Now that the addiction is there, what do I do about it? And as Jesus reminds us, we need only think in terms of purpose, or **"What is it for?" (T.17.IV.2:2)**. We know that to the ego, the purpose of addictions is to reinforce guilt; and to the Holy Spirit the purpose is changed to a means of undoing guilt. **"The Son of God can make no choice the Holy Spirit cannot employ on his behalf, and not against himself" (T.25.VI.7:5)**. So it comes down to discerning whether you are choosing the ego or the Holy Spirit as your teacher.

Q #247: Many denominations of "traditional" Christianity prohibit homosexual relationships, while promoting heterosexual ones. With *A Course in Miracles* being provided within the context of Christianity, are "same-sex" relationships similarly prohibited?

A: To begin with, the Course comes in a Christian context, but it is not simply another form of Christianity, or another denomination. Second, the Course says nothing about this issue. It neither forbids homosexual relationships nor promotes heterosexual ones. In fact, it says nothing about any form of behavior, because that is not its focus. The focus of the teaching is always on our thinking and our beliefs, which are the source of our behavior. One of its major teachings is that the world and the body, along with the multitude of issues connected with them, serve mainly as smokescreens to keep us from looking into our minds, where the source of all our problems and dilemmas are located. That is the purpose of the world and the body. Ultimately, of course, both are illusory. So the focus of the Course is always on correcting the thinking going on in our minds that leaves us preoccupied with what is essentially illusory. That is

where the help is needed, and therefore that is the whole orientation of the Course. In brief, then, when we choose *against* the ego's thought system of hate and separation, and *for* the Holy Spirit's thought system of love and shared interests, our behavior would always be an expression of that love and oneness with which we have identified.

Finally as with anything in our lives, the only relevant aspect is purpose: **"In any situation in which you are uncertain, the first thing to consider, very simply, is "What do I want to come of this? What is it for?" The clarification of the goal belongs at the beginning, for it is this which will determine the outcome (T.17.VI.2:1,2,3).** Thus, both homosexuality and heterosexuality can be used either to reinforce guilt (the ego's purpose) or to undo guilt (the Holy Spirit's purpose). That is why directing our attention to our choice of teachers is absolutely central to our work with the Course. Concentrating on that will help to keep things simple.

Q #248: I am studying the section "Healing as Release from Fear" in the text of *A Course in Miracles*. Can you please help me understand what is meant when Jesus says that "the mind, the only level of creation, cannot create beyond itself" (T.2.IV.2:10). I am unclear about the meaning of "cannot create beyond itself."

A: In the context of the discussion in this section, the meaning of the passage is that the Christ Mind was created by God and that Mind cannot create something totally different from itself, such as a body. There can be ideas or thoughts in the mind, but they never leave their source in the mind to become something else. The point Jesus is making is that a great deal of our confusion would clear up if we understood that the body and the mind are not two separate entities, and that the body is only an idea in the mind; it has no autonomous capabilities and therefore cannot be sick.

Q #249: Can you please clarify the following passage from the text of *A Course in Miracles*: "Unholy values will produce confusion, and in awareness" (T.22.III.9:2).

A: The meaning is that when we see our interests as separate from another person's (an example of "unholy values"), we will become confused, and we will be aware of that confusion: **"and in awareness"** was a common psychological term at the time of the scribing of the Course.

Q #250: In Kenneth Wapnick's book *Forgiveness & Jesus*, he says on page xv in the Preface: "Jesus and the Holy Spirit do not operate in the world, and certainly do not send people as if they were operating a giant chess board, moving us around according to the evolution of the plan of salvation." However, the manual for teachers of *A Course in Miracles* says: "There are no accidents in salvation. Those who are to meet will meet, because together they have the potential for a holy relationship" (M.3.1:6,7); and then later it says, "Remember that no one is where he is by accident, and chance plays no part in God's plan" (M.9.1:3). This indicates that meeting certain people is part of God's plan, and as I have understood the Course, the Holy Spirit is operating in the illusion to help us, just as the Course is made within the framework of the illusion. Meetings are part of God's plan -- there are no accidents -- so how can this be interpreted?

A: There are no accidents because everything has already happened, and we are simply reviewing mentally what has already gone by: **"The script is written....we but see the journey from the point at which it ended, looking back on it, imagining we make it once again; reviewing mentally what has gone by" (W.pl.158.4:3,5).** In "The Little Hindrance" Jesus tells us: **"To you who still believe you live in time and know not it is gone, the Holy Spirit still guides you through the infinitely small and**

senseless maze you still perceive in time, though it has long since gone. You think you live in what is past" (T.26.V.4:1,2). So people are in our lives only because that is what our scripts involve. We have no recollection of our having written these scripts (a metaphor, of course), which is part of the ego's strategy to keep us from remembering that we are decision-making minds. You might wish to consult Kenneth's *A Vast Illusion: Time According to "A Course in Miracles,"* which is an in-depth study of this intriguing part of the Course's theory.

We are inclined to view what the Course says from our perspective, which is that the world and linear time are real. And that is why we would think that the Holy Spirit and Jesus actually do things, such as direct us to specific people so that we can learn our lessons of forgiveness. But that could not be, since there is no world, and time is not real, either. It is helpful to review the levels of language in the Course, and why Jesus speaks to us as if our experience in the world and linear time were real. Earlier answers to questions have developed these topics, and we refer you to them for further study: **Questions [#72](#) and [#116](#).**

Q #251: With world conditions the way they are, I am reminded of a section in Robert Skutch's book, *Journey Without Distance* (p.60), regarding Helen's asking Jesus what *A Course in Miracles* was for, and the answer she received: "The world situation is worsening to an alarming degree. People all over the world are being called on to help, and are making their individual contributions as part of an overall prearranged plan. Because of the acute emergency, the usual slow, evolutionary process is being by-passed in what might best be described as a 'celestial speed-up.' "Helen could sense the urgency that lay behind this 'explanation,' and strongly sensed that what was being conveyed to her was that time was running out." What does this mean exactly? What is the absolute worst that could happen? Even if we destroyed every living thing on the planet wouldn't we still be alive in spirit? Is there, in reality, anything to worry about?

A: First, a clarification of the "celestial speed-up." This was Helen's personal experience; it was a way for her to understand the unsettling experiences that were occurring in her life at that time (1965), without increasing the fear that was already present. She had not yet come across the theory of time as totally illusory, which Jesus would explain much later; that would have been far too upsetting to her in those early months. And so the *content* of Jesus' message was expressed in a *form* that was meaningful to Helen and with which she could be reasonably comfortable. Most likely, Helen would not have expressed the meaning in that form years later, after she had seen the complete picture. Forgetting about this form/content distinction has led many students to take Helen's "celestial-speedup" explanation literally. When the unreality of time is brought into the discussion, it is obvious that there could not *literally* be a need to speed things up. The situation in the world can worsen and be cause for concern only if the world is real, and time also is both real and linear. (See *Absence from Felicity: The Story of Helen Schucman and Her Scribing of A Course in Miracles*, pp. 464-65)

Secondly, destruction of any kind can emanate only from the ego thought system. Just because Planet Earth might no longer exist does not mean that we would have returned to our true Identity as spirit. The pain in our minds tortured with self-hatred does not disappear simply because the planet has been blown up. If we ("**Who is the 'you' who are living in this world?" [T.4.II.11:8]**) destroyed the planet, we might be very much "alive," but in the guilt of our wrong minds, not in the innocence and purity of spirit, as Christ. We would still be caught up in the dream of sin, guilt, and fear, and their projection. In other words, as minds, we would be perceiving a destroyed planet, and our guilt, which we have not let go of, would then manifest in some other form.

Understanding that the world is not real and that we are not our bodies is a step in the right direction -- a major step; but our healing is not yet complete. It is very comforting to be assured that the world and bodies are not real, because we would no longer fear that the end of the planet is the end of "us." That dimension of our terror subsides, fortunately, which then frees us to move to the next step, which is

experiencing ourselves as decision-making minds that are constantly choosing to identify with either the ego's or the Holy Spirit's thought system.

We must look at our investment in upholding the *purpose* served by our belief in sin, guilt, and fear. Ultimately, we must reach the level of readiness to let go of all sense of individuality, consciousness, and specialness before we return to our existence as spirit. The interim stage, though, is the right-minded awareness that we are the dreamers of the dream. This is the stage in which we consistently choose to perceive everything from "above the battleground," confidently assured that all destruction and suffering, all pleasure and excitement, are but the outcome of a mind dreaming it has separated from the Oneness of Heaven.

Q #252: In the Course, Jesus says that the Atonement works in time, and in all the dimensions of time. Does this mean that there is a "redeemer" figure in different worlds in every dimension of time? I've heard of this idea many years ago, but still know nothing about it. So as well as Jesus appearing in different forms in the Sonship's dream of living on another world, could this also mean *A Course in Miracles* has, or will appear in other forms, in other worlds also, not excluding the fact it could also come again into this world in another, even more sophisticated form!

A: You've got it! Rather than seeing time in a linear way, picture it holographically (the entire history of the whole physical universe contained within each of our minds), and you can better understand how it is that a "redeemer" figure can be in all places at all times. As the Course states: **"The tiny tick of time in which the first mistake was made, and all of them within that one mistake, held also the Correction for that one, and all of them that came within the first" (T.26.V.3:5).** There is a hologram of "error," which contains every possible "sin," and the ramifications thereof. There is also a hologram of "Correction," along with its ramifications (redeemer figures, spiritual teachings, etc.). At any time, at any place, we are choosing one of these two holograms.

Gloria and Kenneth Wapnick deal with the nature of the separation and the Course's view of time in Question 16 of *The Most Commonly Asked Questions About A Course in Miracles*: "...when the thought of separation is projected "far away" from the mind of the Son, it is expressed in the dimension of time: The past, the seeming present, and the future do appear to reflect the huge gap of billions of years the ego wishes to introduce between the mind's decision to be separate from God and the Holy Spirit, and the Son's experience of himself as a body. When the thought of separation is experienced between an individual and another person -- i.e., closer to his experience of himself -- then it is known as space, the physical gap we experience between ourselves and others in our special relationships. To state this another way, time (and therefore space as well) was specifically made by the ego to keep cause (the mind and its thoughts) and effect (our pain and suffering) separated."

And yes, this does mean a more sophisticated form of teaching may appear in the world, and this is dependent upon the Son's mind being more fully healed. As healing takes place, and a clear understanding and appreciation of the ego's strategy is accepted, higher teachings are then possible.

Q #253: I understand that we made the world outside to appear real, based on error. Also, in *A Course in Miracles* it mentions that every time a problem arises we do not look at the problem itself (which will make it "more real"). Instead, we look within. It is like saying if worldly things (including obligations) are all unreal, then we can simply "drop it" or "let go" (let God). It is like saying -- forget about taxes, or bills, or the whole world, because they are not real. However, in the Course Jesus teaches, or at least mentions, how to look (outside or inside) without judgment (because there is nothing to judge). Please share your kind guidance to clarify this delusion.

A: *A Course in Miracles* is a spiritual path designed as a learning program. In this context, the world, and all the circumstances of our lives, become the classroom for learning and applying the Course principles. Everything in our lives is therefore very important to our learning, and is not meant to be merely "dropped." It is meant to be examined, reinterpreted and transformed.

Although in truth the world is an illusion (**W.155.2:1**), it is *very* real to those who perceive themselves as separate from God, which includes most of us. In order to apply the principles of the Course to our lives, it is important not to confuse levels of teaching. The Course does not ask us to stop doing any of the things we do in the world as bodies. This is not a Course in behavior -- it is a Course in mind training. *A Course in Miracles* is addressing the mind, and is concerned only with the content of the mind. Dealing with a perceived problem in the world is not what makes the error real. It is believing that the perceived problem is the cause of our upset and has an effect on the truth of who we are which makes the error real in our awareness, though not in truth.

When the Course asks us to look within, it does not say ignore or disregard the problem as it is perceived in the world. In fact, it tells us we must look at what we have made: **"No one can escape from illusions unless he looks at them, for not looking is the way they are protected. There is no need to shrink from illusions, for they cannot be dangerous...The "dynamics" of the ego will be our lesson for a while, for we must look first at this to see beyond it, *since you have made it real. We will undo this error quietly together, and then look beyond it to truth*" (T.11.V.1:1,2,5,6; italics added).** Thus, the steps involved in applying the Course's teaching begin with seeing the problem as we have made it up in the world, dealing with the problem in the normal way (i.e., paying taxes and bills), while learning to recognize that the problem is made up as a smokescreen for the *real* problem, which is the choice in the mind to take the thought of separation seriously. Recognizing the purpose the ego assigns to the world's problems is what the Course means by "looking within." Since we believe the world with its bills and taxes is real, we do have judgments which need to be acknowledged because they reveal our hidden beliefs in scarcity, victimization, etc. This is part of the process of looking within. The world and our feelings are showing us the **"dark secrets"** (T.22.VI.9:5) our minds contain. They cannot be dispelled if we are unaware of them.

In the same way, belief in the body cannot be undone by denying it and then ignoring the specific conditions of life in a body. Not paying bills or taxes would certainly bring on an avalanche of other problems. The exacerbated situation would reinforce the ego's smokescreen, and would not facilitate healing. Only when the *real* problem -- belief in separation -- is recognized can we turn to the Holy Spirit in our minds to seek the *real* solution -- undoing the belief in separation through forgiveness. Once this is accomplished, we will be ready to believe that the world with all its "problems" is not real, and move beyond it to the truth.

Q #254: My question has to do with judgment. Since I have been studying *A Course in Miracles*, I have been very careful to see everyone beyond the body, as myself, as the Son of God. I know they are exactly the same and sinless just like me and I don't let their, or my, behavior cloud this knowledge. With this filter always in the forefront of my mind, is it wrong to make observations about myself and others, and then label the behavior? For example, my mother was acting selfishly and with prejudice in my presence; or admitting to myself that I was acting selfishly and with prejudice. It seems impossible not to have some kind of physical reaction to what is in front of us, whether a person or a situation. I am not judging them badly; I am just noticing something and then letting it have no effect on my thoughts about them or me.

A: You are on the right track. The thrust of our practice is to **"deny the denial of truth" (T.12.II.1:5)**, which means we must first observe the ego, and then choose to deny that it has any power to affect the reality of God's Son. This world is the manifestation of a choice within our minds to attack and reject the Love of God; therefore it would be impossible not to see expressions of hatred, specialness, selfishness, and fear all around us all the time. Jesus is teaching us that we need to bring these perceptions to him, and then ask his help to look at them with him, so that we will get beyond judgment and condemnation. He ultimately wants us to be able to experience ourselves and everyone else as the same. Our starting point, though, is looking honestly at how attracted we are to seeing differences, to judging, and to condemning others for their faults and sins. We would not be experiencing ourselves as bodies in the world if we were not attracted to that. It is second-nature to us; but it is not sinful. So that is where the process of healing must begin.

Then we can learn that beneath our hatred, fear, selfishness, and all of our neediness, is a call for mercy, and a plea to be told that we are wrong about ourselves. We are all the same on both of these levels. As we learn how to approach everyone and all situations from that perspective, we will become kinder and more compassionate, and we will share Jesus' vision of ourselves and everyone else. This is not accomplished through denying our reactions and our observations, however. Our reactions and observations are the classroom into which we invite Jesus, who will then teach us how to share his loving, kind perception.

Q #255: I am from Brasil, and have been practicing *A Course in Miracles* for the last 21 years. I have gone through it about three times completely, and I am going through it again now. This time I have felt the real presence of the Light, of the Christ that exists in me when I do the exercises; the absence of the physical body, the real joy of being. But, on the other side, my life is so complicated now, and it seems that the multiplication (things to do, people to care for, responsibilities of the day-by-day life, with all those magic things to organize, calculate, pay for, etc.) is getting to an unbearable state. It seems that the ego is trying to make my way difficult. What do you think? What can I do to reach, constantly, all the time, the state of mind that we get when doing the exercises -- of total peace and joy?

A: It is difficult to know the specific reason for your life becoming more complicated. It could well be a reaction to your getting closer to letting go of your ego; but there really is no way of knowing that for sure. That does not really matter, though, because the solution would always be the same. The solution is to focus on the *purpose*, which you can discern by the results. In other words, the increased complications have resulted in your loss of inner peace and joy; therefore, that must be the *purpose* of these recent occurrences. That really is all you have to know. Somewhere in your mind, you (the decision-making part of your mind) became afraid of being peaceful, and so you came up with a way of "protecting" yourself from that peace and all that it represents. The preferred defense of most of us is to become preoccupied with our lives as bodies. That quickly does away with any thought that we might be something else.

All that you need to do is to take responsibility for the state you are in and bring it to Jesus or the Holy Spirit in your mind, which means that you would not judge yourself or feel bad about it. When you no longer need the defense, you will just deal with your obligations and responsibilities the best you can, with the love of Jesus guiding you. They would no longer be experienced as "unbearable," because you would see them as classrooms in which you are learning that the peace and joy in your mind has nothing to do with anything external. If you truly knew that everything of the body and the world is intended to keep you from finding out that the source of all your distress is a choice you are making in your mind, then you would eagerly turn to Jesus or the Holy Spirit to help you give your experience a different purpose. **"The world was made that problems could not be escaped" (T.31.IV.2:6).**

Rather than seeing them as burdens, your day-by-day responsibilities could be seen as the means you are using to restore to your awareness the love that is your true and eternal Identity. Each interaction could then be regarded as an opportunity to learn that your interests are not really separate from anyone else's, despite the appearance of major differences. The specifics of each situation (the form) then become less important than the meaning (the content), which is to undo your belief in separation, and accept back the identity we all share as one. Your day-by-day life is your "laboratory" in this sense. It was originally intended to keep you from the truth; now with the help of Jesus or the Holy Spirit, it becomes the means of your return to God.

Q #256: In my relationship with my boss, I am having difficulty knowing the difference between the right and wrong mind. I try to practice the principles of generosity, tolerance, and patience described in the Manual for Teachers, but we have communication problems regarding my salary. My earnings change at his whim, making me feel powerless and underpaid. I am afraid that I will lose my job if I ask for what I think is really my due. Though money is not everything to me, I read in the *Psychotherapy* pamphlet that an unhealed healer may demand money where the Holy Spirit might guide otherwise.

I seem to be afraid of everything and always at fault somewhere. Is this the pain of a special relationship? Can you tell me if I am trying to be too good? Am I trying to apply the principles of *A Course in Miracles* with the ego, fearing the true guidance of the Holy Spirit? Do I suffer from an inverse form of poverty, which expresses itself in false generosity?

A: In studying the Course, it is important to remember that it speaks to us on different levels. We are learning to undo the ego thought system with which we have identified, while learning an entirely new way of perceiving. We seem to have a foot in two worlds and this can be very confusing. The wrong mind sees the problem as outside of the mind caused by an external agent, in this case your boss. The right mind recognizes that the cause is in the mind and the world of form is the effect. It does not blame any situation on anything outside of the mind. An easy way to distinguish which part of the mind has been chosen, is to ask if you are attributing the cause of your upset to something outside of yourself. This is a simple way of distinguishing the wrong mind from the right mind. Recognizing that the cause of any upset is a choice in the mind is the beginning of right minded thinking. It is not the whole story, but it is a beginning.

Since we still believe we are separate, individual bodies in the world, we have to deal with the world and our relationships accordingly. We continue to do whatever we must do to meet our perceived needs in the body. There is nothing wrong with working out an agreement with your boss about your salary. You can be honest about what you feel would be a just wage, and perhaps request a schedule for changes so your salary doesn't fluctuate unpredictably, if that is possible. This is no different from any of the things we do to take care of the body. The Course does not give any guidelines for behavior on the level of form. Rather, it is teaching us to expose the thoughts and judgments we hold about ourselves and others in our minds, so the mind can be healed. Only then will the characteristics of a teacher of God, described in the Manual, flow naturally from the healed mind. They are not meant to be "exercised" or "practiced" while there are underlying beliefs that oppose them. The practice of the Course rests in finding all the hidden beliefs that are in operation in your relationship with your boss, and with everyone. These are the beliefs in separation, scarcity, and victimization that do in fact make all our relationships special. The way to undo the specialness is to expose the beliefs by recognizing them and bringing them to the Holy Spirit to be transformed. We are not being asked to practice holy qualities that we do not in fact possess, such as detachment from material wealth or other "virtuous" mind sets. We are not being asked to be "good" at all (by the way, neither are we expected to go out of our way to "bad"). We are asked only to look at our beliefs with a willingness to have

them transformed. That is not always as easy as it seems, because we have such a desire to hold on to them. We are asked to become aware of our attachment to these beliefs and how much we do not want them to be changed. We cling to them in spite of the guilt and pain they cause. Actually it is *because* of the guilt and pain that we *do* cling to them. This is what the Course refers to as the attraction of guilt: **"The sick attraction of guilt must be recognized for what it is. For having been made real to you, it is essential to look at it clearly, and by withdrawing your investment in it, to learn to let it go" (T.15.VII.3:1,2).**

This is the guidance the Holy Spirit gives. There is no imposition of His thought system, and no behavior in the world that is required. Behind all concerns about money, poverty, and injustice is the feeling of lack and deprivation that comes from the belief that our separation from God has truly been accomplished. That is the fundamental belief that the Holy Spirit is inviting us to question. It is the belief that underlies all the conflict with your boss. While you work with your boss toward reaching an agreement about your salary, you can apply the teachings of the Course by being very honest with yourself about what you are feeling, and the thoughts of judgment that occur to you. These thoughts and feelings represent the choice to identify with the ego's thought system in the mind, which is where healing is needed. When they are brought to the light of the Holy Spirit they are gradually transformed and replaced with His peace. Only then will the issue of more or less money be irrelevant, and generosity, tolerance, and patience will replace all fear. Until that point is reached, honesty with yourself about your perceived needs, and honesty with your boss in searching for an agreement is the best place for practicing the Course. Believing that an agreement is possible is already a recognition that to some extent you and your boss do not have separate interests. And that is the beginning of healing.

Q #257: In Question #128, you state that by practicing forgiveness, one could stop taking medication for antidepressants. While this may ultimately be true, I have seen the physical and mental anguish that accompanies depression, and I believe that someone, if they are clinically depressed, would be a much better student of *A Course in Miracles* while taking their antidepressants than by not taking them. Clinical depression wrecks the brain's ability to function. Yes, it seems to be related to an overemphasis on guilt and punishment -- yet when in this condition, one's ability to function or think clearly is severely impaired. As long as we perceive ourselves in a body, should we not seek medical attention to make us think and behave clearly? Is it not easier to address our real problems in a state of sound mind? In fact, knowing that one might solve their depression through total forgiveness might even cause more depression when one fails and remains depressed. Is it not true that what we do here on earth, in our physical bodies, is an illusion? Is a body that takes anti-depressants any different from a body that does not? Aren't they both illusions? There is no hierarchy of illusions. Is seeking spiritual help to make us a better "body" -- i.e., no antidepressants, really a worthy spiritual goal with the Course?

A: Oh no, you misunderstood! The "flip" answer "Forgive" at the beginning was qualified in the rest of the response. The goal, as you say, is not to stop taking the antidepressant, any more than it would be to stop eating or sleeping. The Course never advises us to change our behavior, only our mind (**T.2.VI.3:4**). The things you say are true and are in line with the point being made in the answer to Question 128. It makes much more sense to continue taking the antidepressant and to get in touch with the implicit judgment about taking the medication, than to have a goal of getting off the medication.

It is true that forgiveness is the way to move beyond any of the world's magic, but so long as we see ourselves as bodies, we will depend on magic- - including breathing oxygen! -- to keep the self we believe we are alive and functioning. Only at the very end of the forgiveness process, when we have accepted the Atonement for ourselves, do personal needs disappear, and with them the need for any form of external interventions. But that is not the goal of the Course. Peace is (**T.8.I.1:1,2**). And that can be found at any step along the way through the healing practice of forgiveness.

Besides perhaps reading the answer to Question 128 again in light of the above comments, it may also be helpful to look at Questions #57, #142, and #229.

Q #258: I have been trying to forgive a major person in my life for some time now, both prior to starting *A Course in Miracles* and, with more focus, since beginning it. As a result, there have been times when I seem to have let go of much of my grievance, but then something triggers the hurt, and it all comes raging back again. Sometimes it feels like I'm just lopping off the top of this poisonous weed of grievance, rather than pulling it out by the roots. What advice would you have in such a situation? Should I see forgiveness as a process, or is it an either/or, once and for all decision? And if the latter, how do I finally make it?

A: Your metaphor for how you are pulling weeds is an apt one. You're not yet getting to the root of the problem so long as you keep your focus on the other person, for that is playing into what Jesus refers to in the *Song of Prayer* pamphlet as **"forgiveness-to-destroy"** (**S.2.II**). The ego's version of forgiveness is to make sin real in someone else and then attempt to "forgive" it. As you're finding, this just does not work. But that of course is always the ego's goal -- **"Seek, but do not find"** (**T.16.V.6:5**).

The Course, in contrast, is attempting to lead you towards an experience of true forgiveness in which you recognize that **"what you thought your brother did to you has not occurred"** (**W.pil.1:1**). In the metaphysical sense, this is true at the level of the actual behavior you are holding against this other person, since we are the dreamer of our dream and we assign the roles to the figures in our dream. But the more practical level to understand Jesus' meaning is to recognize that it is your *interpretation* of what this other person has done that is the cause of your anger and your grievance, and not what the person actually has done (**M.17.4**). You are blaming this person at some level for robbing you of your peace, love, joy, security, etc. But no one can deprive us of any of these experiences unless we have first chosen to give them away (**T4.IV.3:3**). So the good news is that we don't have to change what the other person has done, which, of course, we can't do anyway. We only need help with changing our interpretation of what has happened. How do we do that?

What most of us are not in touch with is that we carry within our minds a huge burden of unacknowledged guilt that unconsciously controls our interpretations of all our interactions by dictating that we seek and find guilt in everyone but ourselves (**T.19.IV.B.i.12**). The source of our guilt is the mistaken belief, which

we cling to, that we have established a separate individual existence apart from God, at His expense. And the cost to Him has been His total annihilation. Guilt at such a horrendous offense is unimaginable, and so our defense is to project it outside of our minds. Our anger at someone else then is always our attempt to justify seeing the guilt of separation outside of us, thus obscuring the projection we are making (T.6.in.1:2).

All of us are trying to do exactly the same thing. We are all walking around with intense guilt, covered over with a seething rage that is our attempt to deny the guilt within and see it outside. We may try to put a nice, socially appropriate face of innocence on all of this (T.31.V.2), but the anger, and the guilt fueling it, are always bubbling just below the surface. And there they will remain, affecting all our interactions, sometimes subtly, sometimes not so subtly, until we are willing to do the challenging and difficult work of looking within, past the anger to the guilt buried beneath it. So forgiveness then really has nothing to do with the other person, which explains in part our resistance to practicing it. For, rather than justifying our anger, if we really want to heal, Jesus is asking us to recognize that our grievances are nothing more than a cover for our guilt. Anger then becomes a signal that there is a dark place within our mind. And Jesus helps us see that our guilt, like our anger, is not what it appears to be. It only seems real and heavy and serious while it remains shrouded in darkness. Its unreality becomes apparent when we allow the light of true forgiveness to shine upon it. This is the release we seek and yet, while we remain identified still with our ego, it is also a cause for fear.

We resist looking within, preferring to hold on to our anger and to continue to project our guilt, because these are the layers of defense that we unconsciously see as protecting our individual self (T.21.IV.1,2,3). And so beneath the anger and the guilt is fear -- fear that if we forgive we will disappear, that God will seize back the life we stole from Him. For all these reasons, forgiveness will be a process for us, as you suggest, and not simply a once-and-for-all decision -- until the very end of the process, when we are ready to let go completely of our ego identity.

The more we are willing to uncover our own guilt and allow it to be healed, the more we will come to recognize that those against whom we have been holding our grievances are only in need of the same release that we have been seeking. And their guilt is no more real than our own. With that recognition, we can experience real forgiveness, for the interpretation of what has happened between us is now the Holy Spirit's and no longer our own.

For further discussions of the process of forgiveness, you may wish to look at Questions [#44](#) and [#69](#).

Q #259: This question has two parts. The first starts from an observation. As I have been advancing through the workbook, I have often found that the daily lesson corresponds uncannily with a need or preoccupation which has only just begun to make itself felt in my mind -- as though some subtle synchronicity were at work between the unfolding Course and my own changing inner state. (This has also happened on occasions when reading the text). Do you think this is a frequent experience among students of *A Course in Miracles*? Maybe my first question goes some way to answering my second, but I'll ask it anyway. In the workbook, Jesus frequently tells his student about how he or she is responding at that particular point. For example, in Lesson 123, he says, "Today let us be thankful....There is no thought of turning back, and no implacable resistance to the truth. A bit of wavering remains, some small objections and a little hesitance..." (W.pl.123.1:1,3,4). But how can Jesus make such general pronouncements when referring to thousands of individuals, each with their own way of responding to and progressing with the Course?

A: With regard to the first question: Occasionally, we have had students relate experiences similar to the kind you described, but we have no way of knowing how common this type of experience is. Many students have said that when they were reading certain parts of the Course, they felt that Jesus was speaking very personally to them.

Second, as we know, most of what is written in the Course was given specifically to Helen Schucman and Bill Thetford for their personal spiritual process, and so the wording reflects that context. Jesus was helping Helen, in particular, with undoing what was left of her ego; so he would include comments, observations, gentle rebukes, emphatic directives, etc., that pertained to her personal process. At the same time, though, the Course can easily be understood as reflecting the more general pattern of spiritual advancement that applies to everyone. An excellent example of this are the six stages in the development of trust described in the manual for teachers (**M.4.I.A**). This discussion of the development of trust is meant to give us a general sense of what occurs during the process of undoing our ego.

It is not surprising that you would experience the kind of synchronicity that you describe. Recall that (a) time is not linear or real; (b) the content of the split mind never changes: the wrong mind is 100% ego -- innumerable ways of expressing the one content of separation and sin, guilt, and fear; the right mind is 100% Holy Spirit -- innumerable ways of accepting the Atonement through forgiveness; (c) having acceded to the ego's strategy of making ourselves mindless, we are not aware of the full dimension of the content or dynamics in our minds. And we surely are not aware of the full content of each lesson Jesus gives us.

Thus, what we actually experience is almost always just a miniscule portion of what is going on in our minds, and is almost always in a defined form, rather than its original abstract nature -- the tip of the iceberg, to switch metaphors. To simplify, as Jesus does, there is **"only one problem, one solution"** (**W.pl.80.3:5**); and we are either calling out for love or extending love. Therefore, our readiness and openness to learn from Jesus reflects the call for love in our minds, and it has already been answered. We would experience this process as something new that is happening as we read words in the workbook, when all it is is our mind's decision to stop blocking the truth that is always there. It is a perfect match, you might say, between our call for love and the answer to that call, experienced in the only way that would be intelligible to us at that moment. It is a process that happens in our minds outside time and space; but because we are still identified with a body that seems to exist in time and space, that is how we will experience it. Jesus did not know "ahead of time" how his students would respond and what they would be ready for at any given instant. To think that is to make time real. The process is experienced in time, because that is the only form in which we (the decision-making part of our minds) can accept the truth about ourselves. We are still too invested in our identities as separate, special beings, and too frightened to get beyond them. That is quite normal, and as we continue to practice forgiveness, we will be drawn more and more to the love that inspired the words of the Course that are so meaningful to us.

Q #260: "The curious belief that there is a part of dying things that may go on apart from what will die, does not proclaim a loving God nor re-establish any grounds for trust. If death is real for anything, there is no life" (M.27.4:1,2; 1st edition, p. 63). Please explain the verse. Does the body "die" or is that only illusion?

A: Death is an illusion, but so is birth, aging, and losing vitality, as the beginning of this section states (**M.27.1:2**). If **"there is no life outside of Heaven"** (**T.23.II.19:1**), then the body neither lives nor dies. Jesus is really talking about the thought system of death with which we identify when we choose the ego as our teacher instead of him or the Holy Spirit. If we choose the ego, we will believe that the separation from God really happened, and that will lead us to believe that we are bodies that were born and will eventually die. The ego will try to soften the cruelty of its thought system of death by saying that even though we have to die, part of us (our souls) will survive the death of the body.

But Jesus is teaching us that there can be no compromise in this at all. **"If death is real for anything, there is no life"** (**4:2**). God did not and could not make death, any more than He could make fear. **"Both are equally meaningless to Him"** (**4:9.10**). This is a Level One statement. The ego's god is responsible for fear and death. And so Jesus is teaching us that when we identify with the ego (Level Two), death will

be a reality for us, and many people will believe that God is merciful because He takes our souls to Heaven after we die.

So the process of *A Course in Miracles* is to ask for help from Jesus or the Holy Spirit to begin to disidentify with that thought system, and to perceive death as just a thought in our minds that we have chosen to make real. **“Ideas leave not their source,”** as Jesus reminds us numerous times throughout his Course. We can gradually begin to get comfortable with the thought that nothing happens to us when the body “dies,” because we are decision-making minds outside time and space that have just chosen to believe that we are autonomous bodies, as a defense against the truth that we are the one Son of God, Who never truly left His home in Heaven.

Q #261: I am a Buddhist and feel more comfortable using Kwan Yin, rather than Jesus, as the "Christ"-like figure. Kwan Yin is a female Buddha of compassion and healing. Any suggestions for those of us who use a different "Christ" figure?

A: Any symbol that represents a presence of love outside of yourself is suitable. The only caution is to be mindful of specific resistance to having it be Jesus. Avoidance of him as the “Christ figure” may reflect unforgiveness, which another symbol will not evoke in you. However, don’t worry. If this is the case, you will have to forgive him before the process is completed, and so he will “show up” in one way or another. Other than this caveat, use whatever symbol makes you feel loved and protected.

Q #262: Could you please further explain “Swear not to die, you holy Son of God!” (T.29.VI.2:1). Someone told me that it means that we literally don’t have to die. We do die, but we don’t have to die by the conventional means; we can simply choose to de-materialize. Is this true? Also speaking about death of the body, why do many enlightened beings such as Jesus, Ghandi, Peace Pilgrim, to name a few who have only peace and love in their minds, choose to die violently? I thought what is in the mind will manifest in the world. Wouldn’t their death be a peaceful passing? I guess you could argue that they physically didn’t feel pain, but as far as an example to others viewing their life, why wouldn’t the peace pervade unto their last breath to teach what is within is what happens without, and also to lessen the fear of death to their brothers who want to live as they did.

A: In our answer to Question #91, in which we commented on this passage, we stated that we have already pledged our loyalty to the ego thought system, in which death -- including ours -- is the central reality. We have already taken this oath to believe that God’s Son is *not* as He created him, invulnerable and eternally present within the Being of His Father. It is part of the bargain we made with the ego, so that our individual separate identities would be preserved. In this passage, therefore, Jesus is asking us to undo that bargain. He is not talking about the physical process of dying. He is talking about our decision to support what the ego says is reality, rather than what the Holy Spirit says is reality.

We refer you also to Question #135, in which we discuss the topic of death in the context of the all-important distinction of form and content, or purpose. We are always choosing at every instant to identify with either the ego’s or the Holy Spirit’s thought system. And so, in that sense, death is no different from any other thought in our minds. It can be directed by either of those thought systems. It is up to us as to how we shall die: as guided by the ego or by the Holy Spirit. The overriding emphasis in *A Course in Miracles* is on the mind’s decision-making capacity to choose a teacher. Jesus is interested always and only in whether our thinking is blocking his love or accepting it. The *form* of the body’s “death” is not relevant to our spiritual progress. The *content* in our minds is.

Focusing on purpose and form and content can also help to answer your question about the death of enlightened beings. Most of the time we do not know the reasons behind people's choices, and we should be very cautious about judging solely on the basis of form, or what we see with our eyes. **"Nothing so blinding as perception of form" (T.22.III.6:7)**, Jesus reminds us. What appears to us to be "violent," therefore, may not be experienced by their minds that way. For example, when you experience yourself as having been victimized, you (as a decision-making mind) have *interpreted* an occurrence in the world; you (as a decision-making mind) have given a meaning to that occurrence or event. Jesus knew he was not his body, and so if nails were hammered through his feet, he would not have experienced himself as a victim of someone else's cruelty. He no longer had an ego, and so he could not experience himself as vulnerable in any way. Moreover, he would have seen the call for love beyond the people's anger. So to say he chose a violent death might be how we would interpret the event, because we have a *need* to see it that way, but it would not be how he experienced it. He teaches us about this in Chapter 3 **"Atonement without Sacrifice" (T.3.I)** and also in Chapter 6, **"The Message of the Crucifixion"** in which he says:

"There is a positive interpretation of the crucifixion that is wholly devoid of fear, and therefore wholly benign in what it teaches, if it is properly understood. The crucifixion is nothing more than an extreme example. Its value, like the value of any teaching device, lies solely in the kind of learning it facilitates. It can be, and has been, misunderstood. This is only because the fearful are apt to perceive fearfully.... You are free to perceive yourself as persecuted if you choose. When you do choose to react that way, however, you might remember that I was persecuted as the world judges, and did not share this evaluation for myself" (T.6.I.1:5; 2:1,2,3,4; 5:2,3).

Finally, Jesus helps us rise to his level by asking of us: **"Teach not that I died in vain. Teach rather that I did not die by demonstrating that I live in you" (T.11.VI.7:3)**. The Course helps us to learn that our perceptions are interpretations informed either by the projection of guilt in our wrong minds, or inspired by the love in our right minds.

Q #263: I know that it isn't necessary, but is it possible to get in touch with the original thought of separation? Are there students of *A Course in Miracles* who have been aware of that thought in their mind?

A: The first important consideration, in answer to your question, is the fact that the separation never really happened: **"The full awareness of the Atonement, then, is the recognition that the separation never occurred" (T.6.II.10:7)**. No one can get in touch with an ancient moment of actual separation from God, because there is no actual separation from God. The only explanation for our seeming existence in the world is that we are dreaming a dream of separation. Even here in the dream the ancient memory is not accessible: **"Time really, then, goes backward to an instant so ancient that it is beyond all memory, and past even the possibility of remembering" (M.2.4:1)**. It is a dream in which the choice to make the thought of separation real is being continually relived. In this sense, there is only one thought of separation. Each time we choose to identify with the thought of separation that same original thought is being played out: **"Each day, and every minute in each day, and every instant that each minute holds, you but relive the single instant when the time of terror took the place of love [the choice to believe that the separation is real]" (T.26.V.13:1,2)**. One of the most poignant ways to recognize the separation thought in action is to see ourselves insist on being right. The specific forms vary, and do not matter; *any insistence* in defense of any belief is the result of having taken the thought of separation seriously. It is the ego's tantrum making a declaration of separation in that very moment. It is this thought acted out in the present that we need to get in touch with, so it can be healed. This is what the Course asks us to practice by asking us to **"question every value that [we] hold" (T.24.in.2:1)**. Every thought or belief we have has its roots in the thought of separation. The separation is undone as we learn to see it reflected back to us in the "rightness" of our judgments, with the willingness to take responsibility for them and question their validity. Doing this will open the way for us to seek and to accept the Holy Spirit's correct interpretation of the separation thought, which is that it is not real, and has had no effect: **"The**

tiny instant you would keep and make eternal, passed away in Heaven too soon for anything to notice it had come...not one note in Heaven's song was missed" (T.26.V.5:1,4).

Q #264: A clear picture of the theoretical foundations of *A Course in Miracles* for me is an essential base to get into practice. Therefore I'm studying the chart on your Web site <http://www.facim.org/acim/theory.htm>.

[1] I see the realms: one-mindedness, wrong-mindedness and right-mindedness. Which realm is the "decision maker" in? Does it dwell somewhere between wrong- and right-mindedness? Or do you see it more as a "part" of one of these realms?

[2] It is irritating to see the Holy Spirit between truth and illusion and to see the Holy Spirit in the following description of the Trinity as belonging to one-mindedness. I have more a picture in my mind that sees the Holy Spirit as a part of the illusory world -- namely the right-mind -- pointing out of it towards truth -- or perhaps just being this right-minded world -- and thus fulfilling a mediating role between wrong-mindedness and one-mindedness. Looking at the Trinity I see God and Christ in the one-minded realm and the Holy Spirit in the right-minded realm. That view makes it possible for the "me that lives in duality" to accept the idea that the Holy Spirit is a part of me. These ideas seem to contradict what is shown on <http://www.facim.org/acim/theory.htm>. Can you help me in clearing up these thoughts?

A: 1) The decision maker is the part of the mind that chooses to identify with either the ego's thought system or the Holy Spirit's thought system. It is never neutral; it is always choosing one or the other. On the chart it would be located on the Level Two section right in the middle, above the wrong mind / right mind boxes.

2) Within the illusion, the Holy Spirit represents the Atonement principle in our right minds. He is described in many ways by Jesus, who shares His function of helping us climb back up the ladder separation led us down. When you, as a decision-making mind outside time and space, choose once and for all to let go of the ego and identify completely with your right mind, then you become the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, the same as Jesus. You would know that this is your only identity and the ego thought system of separation and individuality would be seen as totally meaningless. So the Holy Spirit is most definitely part of you, the part of your mind that contains the memory of God and your true Identity as Christ, with which you (as a decision-making mind) can choose to identify at any given instant.

There are two passages in particular that indicate that the Holy Spirit is part of the Trinity and also functions as mediator: **"And then the Voice [the Holy Spirit] is gone, no longer to take form but to return to the eternal Formlessness of God" (C.6.5:8)**. Similarly, in the text, he tells us: **"The Holy Spirit is the Christ Mind which is aware of the knowledge that lies beyond perception. He came into being with the separation as a protection, inspiring the Atonement principle at the same time. Before that there was no need for healing, for no one was comfortless. The Voice of the Holy Spirit is the Call to Atonement, or the restoration of the integrity of the mind. When the Atonement is complete and the whole Sonship is healed there will be no Call to return. But what God creates is eternal. The Holy Spirit will remain with the Sons of God, to bless their creations and keep them in the light of joy" (T.5.I.5:4,5,6,7)**.

Finally, it is helpful to keep in mind when studying the chart that we are trying to diagram what is illusory (the mind that separated from God), and also what lies totally beyond form (God, Christ, and His creations). So while charts are useful teaching aides, they can never perfectly depict the thought systems discussed in the Course, which themselves are illusory.

Q #265: Although I really love your questions and answers I have such issues with the blonde blue eyed Jesus picture you're selling. As a black woman I do not identify with it at all. Why do you sell it -- wasn't he Mediterranean anyway!

A: The picture of Jesus that the Foundation makes available is not meant to be the likeness of the historical Jesus. Obviously no image of him is available. The voice that Helen Schucman heard and identified as Jesus' voice is not associated with a body at all. So in neither case is the Foundation offering an image that can be said to actually portray Jesus in form. The image you refer to was used as the cover of one of the Foundation's publications *"Forgiveness and Jesus"* by Kenneth Wapnick, and was made available to the public by request. The original painting by Howard Chandler Christy was later given to the Foundation. Some people like it, though it is certainly not appealing to everyone. You may find there is another representation of Jesus in form that you find inspiring and helps you to relate to Jesus in a more personal way. However, it is important for students of the Course not to confuse the voice Helen Schucman heard and identified as Jesus', with the Jesus of traditional Christianity, nor to associate it with any particular image in form. The Course uses the term Jesus and the Holy Spirit as symbols reflecting the part of the mind of the Sonship that holds the memory of God. They are not real persons: **"The name of Jesus is the name of one who was a man but saw the face of Christ in all his brothers and remembered God. So he became identified with Christ, a man no longer, but at one with God. The man was an illusion, for he seemed to be a separate being, walking by himself, within a body that appeared to hold his self from Self, as all illusions do"** (C.5.2:1,2,3). However, as long as we believe we are individuals in bodies, it is helpful for us to relate to these symbols as persons in any specific form that is meaningful. This is what the Course refers to when it tells us: **"You cannot even think of God without a body, or in some form you think you recognize"** (T.18.VIII.1:7). Jesus himself joins with us in our perception of the body: **"Reach, therefore, for my hand because you want to transcend the ego"** (T.8.V.6:8, italics ours).

Q #266: What exactly is the script and what part does choice play in it? Are all events fixed because these are lessons we have chosen to learn and the choice is only in seeing everything with the Holy Spirit? Or is there a further choice in which we can actually change the script, i.e., avoid, accelerate, rearrange, omit, reorder, add situations, events, relationships, etc.? And, if the mind has been healed in certain aspects, would it then mean that certain corresponding events in the script would not come up? And would we know it? And does this have anything to do with forgiveness?

A: The script (W.p.I.158.4:3) refers to all the seeming events that could possibly be played out on the ego's screen -- the world of time and space. All these events are fixed in the sense that they are already written. In fact, they have already happened although, *A Course in Miracles* tells us, in reality they never even happened at all, since the thought of separation and the consequent guilt from which they all originate is itself a fiction. In that instant of separation, everything -- every dream, every possible ego choice -- occurred and instantly was corrected by the Holy Spirit. But we who seem still to be caught in time and space have not yet accepted that correction into our minds and so, as fragmented parts of that one ego mind, continue to project our specific scripts of guilt out onto the world we made as the screen for those projections (M.2.2,3,4).

And so we now seem to have a choice as to which of all the myriad, nearly infinite number of ego events we shall review, although we generally accept certain constraints on our choices once we select a specific identity in a specific lifetime. But there are still many choices on the level of form that can be made in each moment. This range of options (from the fixed pool of possibilities) is all part of the ego's seductiveness, as it tries to persuade us to continue to believe that if we can only choose the right forms in the right combination -- the right relationship, the right career, the right place to live, the right investment, the right lottery numbers, etc. -- we can be happy. What the ego always attempts to keep hidden is the underlying content of those choices, which must be sin, guilt and fear, based as they all are in the belief in separation and separate interests (T.29.IV.2,3).

It is the Holy Spirit's task to teach us that the only really meaningful choice we can make in time is to allow His purpose to guide us in each of our moments of decision, so that we will use them to awaken from the dream rather than to continue dreaming in search of the "perfect" ego dream in which all our specialness needs are met. And that means we are willing to release our own judgments about how things should be, which is what it means to practice forgiveness (**T.29.IV.5,6**).

Generally, in any one lifetime, there is a specific victimization theme that recurs within or across relationships. It may be a theme of betrayal or abandonment or rejection or abuse or neglect, etc. Since each theme represents nothing more than the specific form of projected guilt over our buried self-accusation of how we attacked God in the moment of separation, it must recur in our lives until we are willing to withdraw the projection and heal that aspect of guilt in our own mind, rather than seeing it outside ourselves. And that is what the Course means by forgiveness.

Once the guilt behind a specific form of victimization has been uncovered and released, we will no longer need to project it outside our mind. We may or may not be aware of this inner shift as mirrored in our external relationships, although we may at some point have a realization that we are no longer being triggered by external happenings in the way we had been in the past. There would certainly no longer be any ego-based motivation to select such specific victim scripts anymore to hide our guilt.

For further related discussions on scripts and choice, you may also wish to review Questions [#37](#), [#190](#), and [#233](#)

Q #267: I am on Lesson 240 in the workbook of *A Course in Miracles*. In my words, it says that fear, in any case, is never justified. I am wondering about the people in the jets on September 11th, being aware that they were going to crash against the towers. Couldn't they feel panic or fear, anyway?

A: Yes, by all means. It would be strange if they did not feel panic or fear. To say that fear is never justified is not the same as saying we should not feel fearful. Similarly, Jesus says that anger is never justified (**T.6.I.4**), and that we are never justified in perceiving ourselves unfairly treated (**T.26.X.3,4**). The essence of his gentle teaching is that when we become aware that we are feeling fearful -- to stay with your example -- we should not try to justify it by attributing the cause to something external, even though that is our experience. As we practice our lessons of forgiveness over a period of many years, we will become more comfortable in acknowledging that fear always comes from ego identification, regardless of what is going on externally. When our minds are healed -- when we let go of the ego entirely -- we will never experience ourselves as vulnerable or under threat, because we will have perceived the body correctly -- as simply the projection of a thought of guilt and fear in our minds. We will know that we are as God created us, and that nothing can alter that Identity. These ideas are also found in **Lesson 160, "I am at home. Fear is the stranger here."**

So when Jesus says in **Lesson 240** that "**fear is self-deception**," he is speaking from the perspective of a healed mind. When we truly know and accept that "**not one thing in this world is true**," we would never again be afraid or even upset, regardless of the circumstances. This is a slow, gentle process that begins with our simply saying the words we have read in the Course, "**next to be accepted as but partly true, with many reservations. Then to be considered seriously more and more, and finally to be accepted as the truth**" (**W.pII.284.1:5,6**).

Finally, it may be comforting to remember that Helen Schucman experienced intense fear long after she completed the scribing of the Course. One episode in particular led to the sublimely beautiful and instructive prose poem, "The Gifts of God," which appears as the final piece in the collection of her published poetry called *The Gifts of God*. This poem actually was a special message from Jesus meant to help Helen with her fear. (See ***Absence from Felicity*, pp. 402, 403,404** for a detailed account of the circumstances surrounding this message.) Nowhere in this poem does Jesus tell Helen that she has

failed in some way because she is experiencing so much fear. In some of the most inspiring and moving material Helen received from Jesus -- which obviously applies to all of us -- Jesus helps her to understand the true nature of her fear and how to get beyond it.

Q #268: I finished reading the text and started the workbook of *A Course in Miracles* about two weeks ago. I haven't experienced any great resistance that I am aware of and most of the ideas of the Course ring true to me. However, there does not seem to be much apparent progress with my feeling peaceful and not taking the illusion seriously. I suspect I may be accepting *A Course in Miracles* only on a superficial intellectual level, missing its goal in the mind. Would you recommend anything to me other than proceeding with the exercises and hoping that it will eventually work?

A: Jesus acknowledges uncertainty such as yours, **"You are very new in the ways of salvation, and think you have lost your way" (T.17.V.9:1)**. But he also reassures all of us, **"The outcome is as certain as God" (T.2.III.3:10)**. Your uncertainty is not surprising in light of the fact that the Course is attempting to help us unlearn a massive defensive system upon which our complete false identity as an individual physical self with its own unique personality is both based and protected. The fact that you may be willing to hear and accept at an intellectual level what it is teaching does not mean that your mind is totally aligned with putting all of what it says into practice. It would be very unusual, in fact, if you had that total willingness and, if it came that easily for you, you probably would not need the Course.

You may not have intellectual resistance to the Course's radical ideas, but you no doubt have resistance to its practical application at a deeper level since you are not yet experiencing the greater peace this path promises. But again, that is not unexpected. So simply be patient with yourself and allow yourself to hear Jesus' message more deeply as you practice his workbook lessons. And recognize that this almost certainly will take time for, as Jesus says at the end of the workbook, **"This course is a beginning, not an end" (W.ep.1:1)**.

The exercises should help you begin to see the many different forms in which your resistance shows up. Just noticing how much of the day you spend judging and condemning yourself and others can be very helpful in identifying the resistance, as your recognition of the purpose of those separation thoughts deepens, as well as their consequences -- the guilt and lack of peace (e.g., **W.pl.21, 22, 23, 26, 34**). A key will be that you not simply evaluate the ideas in terms of whether they make sense to you and you accept them, which is a part of the process, but that you consider how they are actually reflected in your thinking as you experience your day. This is one of the goals of the workbook lessons, bringing the Course out of the realm of the theoretical to the level of application (**W.in.1**).

And as you look more deeply, uncovering the buried guilt in your mind, it will be helpful to remember that there is also a loving Presence within your mind -- the Course uses the names Jesus and Holy Spirit for this Presence -- that you will want to remember to invite to be a part of the looking process. Increasing your awareness of that presence, reflecting a choice for forgiveness rather than judgment, is another very practical purpose of the workbook (e.g., **W.pl.30, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50**).

And, perhaps most importantly, do not try to evaluate your progress with the Course -- none of us is in a position to do that (**T.18.V.1**). All the Course asks of us is a little willingness, promising us that if we will do our part, which is simply to look at what we have made real in our minds and its cost, the rest will be provided (**T.18.IV**). What more could we ask for?

Q #269: In reference to Question #134 about pets being part of the Sonship, since pets, whatever form they take, are incapable of reason, how do they get back to the Oneness of God. Are we responsible for their return?

A: The question you ask makes sense to us, self-identified as bodies. But the question is based on a faulty premise, that it is the brains in our bodies that understand and reason and decide. It is the collective mind -- of which our individual mind is a fragment -- outside of time and space that is projecting the figures that we each identify as ourselves within the dream of the world, And that same mind is projecting the figures of the animals, as well as the plants and the rocks, etc.

An analogy may help. When you watch a movie, you are looking at one single picture (actually a series of individual pictures in succession, creating the illusion of movement, time and causality on the screen, but that is another subject) projected onto the screen in front of you from the film running through the projector. But your mind separates out figures on the screen and generally focuses on those that may be seen as human and makes the idea of individual bodies real in front of you, even though the total screen image is a single projection. Any figures of animals, or bushes and trees, or furniture, or buildings and other scenery that are also being projected onto the screen are really no different from the figures you identify as human. They are all simply shadows of varying colors and shapes, made by the film blocking the light that is extending from the projector, producing various patterns on the screen that you interpret as real. It is the interpretation that you give your perception of those images that gives them their meaning to you.

If you want to make any changes to the figures that are being projected on the screen, the process is always the same. None of the seemingly separate figures on the screen have any more or less power than any others to effect changes on the screen. They are all the effect of what is being decided by the projectionist in the projection booth -- it is there that the power of decision rests for what will be seen on the screen. If you are the projectionist in the booth, you can decide on a different film, or you can decide you are no longer interested in the projections on the screen and want to return to your life outside the movie theater. Now it makes no difference which figure you may have been identifying with on the screen -- an image of a human, or a dog, or even a rock -- when you pull your attention back from the screen to the film and the projector, you realize that it is all one projection. And all the figures that seemed separate and alive on the screen just disappear into the light when they are no longer being projected. The equivalence of all projected forms in the world is reflected in Jesus' observation: **"How holy is the smallest grain of sand, when it is recognized as being part of the completed picture of God's Son! (T.28.IV.9:4).**

Now there are certainly limits on the analogy, but the point is that no decisions are being made by figures on the screen of the world that we see ourselves in -- neither humans nor animals nor plants nor minerals. Thinking we are here on the screen rather than back in the mind is simply a trick we are playing on ourselves to convince ourselves that the separation is real. But the mind, when it no longer wants to project the shadows of guilt out onto the screen of the world, can pull back the projections and allow the light that has always been there in the mind simply to extend. And that is the return to Oneness. And since minds are joined, when we make that decision for ourselves, we make it for the whole Sonship (T.14.III.9:3,4,5). And the realization is that none of us ever left in reality, and so return has never really been necessary.

For further related discussions on mind-brain, animals, and choice, see [Questions #117](#) and [#211](#).

Q #270: The answer to Question #10 does not feel as right to me as the rest I have read on this site. It says that to answer questions i-iii justifies the ego's existence and I agree. But if you give that answer to this specific question, I believe that answer should then be given to all the questions submitted, and to any question on *A Course in Miracles*. Just by typing words or acknowledging the Course you are acknowledging the ego's existence, since words and all things of this world never are 100% truthful (or knowledge) and must then be "not God."

My point is that everything "here" is not valid so why not try to answer this question when other equally invalid questions are being answered. The Course says there is no difference in the magnitude of any

beliefs "here" -- they are all of the same illusion. But the ego seems to get some sort of extra importance which is not to be questioned and answered in the same manner as other parts in the book. My feeling is that the Course simply does not give as clear an answer about the ego's existence as it does to other issues, and it should just be acknowledged that we do not know about the origins of the ego -- it is unclear

A: Did your nonexistent ego put you up to that? Very clever! But the Course is very explicit about the ego's origin and existence -- it can have no origin because it doesn't exist, it is not real. The Atonement principle, upon which the Course's forgiveness process is based, asserts the unreality of the ego -- the thought of separation -- in very definite terms. Consider the following:

"The full awareness of the Atonement, then, is the recognition that *the separation never occurred*. The ego cannot prevail against this because it is an explicit statement that the ego never occurred" (T.6.II.10:7,8; italics in original).

"Atonement corrects illusions, not truth. Therefore, *it corrects what never was....*The instant the idea of separation entered the mind of God's Son, in that same instant was God's Answer given. In time this happened very long ago. *In reality it never happened at all*" (M.2.2:2,3,6,7,8; italics added).

The Course would not be true to its basic metaphysical principles about what is real and what is illusory if it provided any answer that accepts and affirms the ego's existence. However, from that it does not follow that every answer to any other question addressing aspects of the ego must also be affirming its existence. The key, as the Course emphasizes repeatedly (e.g., T.IV.5.6:7,8,9; T.17.VI.2:1,2), is what is the purpose: does the answer further reinforce a belief in the ego, or does it in some way begin to undo that belief? Clearly, to explain the ego's origins, or even to say its origins are clouded in mystery, would be to affirm its existence.

But to explain what a belief in the ego entails and how that belief can be undone through the practice of forgiveness is not an affirmation of the ego's existence. It is simply a very practical way to begin to undo the illusion. Here we find a major contribution of the Course to the world's spiritualities. For it does not ask us to deny our experience of ourselves as separate but it nevertheless offers us a way out of our conundrum of mistaken beliefs. All of us, by the very fact that we believe we are here, are screaming, "The ego is real and I am my ego!" Jesus knows he has to meet us where we believe we are and use what we have made real to show us in the end that none of it is real. If he did not, we could not bridge the gap between false belief and truth on our own.

The Course never attempts to change the ego (T.22.V.1:1,2,3,4,5,6), because it does not acknowledge its existence. But it does attempt to change our *belief* in the ego. The only thought that does not reinforce belief in the ego is forgiveness. Forgiveness, as noted above, rests on the Atonement principle, which uses the ego's own words to state that the separation, the ego, never happened.

And true to its metaphysical underpinnings, the Course makes no claim that forgiveness has any more reality than the ego. In fact, Jesus explicitly includes it within the domain of the illusory: **"Forgiveness might be called a kind of *happy fiction*; a way in which the unknowing can bridge the gap between their perception and the truth....they need *an illusion of help* because they are helpless" (C.3.2:1;3:1; italics added).**

So the whole practice of the Course is never directed at modifying the ego -- that would make it real -- but rather at stepping back and looking at the ego and all the consequences of believing in it, until we come to recognize that none of it is real. And then the question of where the ego has come from can no longer even be asked. But while we believe it is real, Jesus will gently help us see it all differently.

Q #271: How can we develop our relationship with Jesus or the Holy Spirit, and perceive them as a reflection of Love, so we can look, with them, at our ego thought system without judgment?

A: A relationship with the Holy Spirit or Jesus begins with the honest recognition that all our efforts to make ourselves truly happy and to find peace on our own terms have failed. As long as we think we can find our way back home to God by our own devices, we will not truly seek the help of those who represent the memory of Him in our minds. When we are willing to acknowledge our failure, we come to the point where we can say sincerely: **"I do not understand the world, and so to try to lead my life alone must be but foolishness. But there is One Who knows all that is best for me" (W.242.1:2,3).** This is the birth of the relationship with Jesus or the Holy Spirit. They are the symbols of the part of our minds that reflects the memory of God, but because we believe we are separate bodies we perceive them as "persons" who are separate from us, and we relate to them accordingly. This is necessary as long as we continue to identify with the body.

Since *A Course in Miracles* comes from the same part of the mind of the Sonship that Jesus and the Holy Spirit represent, studying and applying the Course teaching is also a way in which we relate to Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Our relationship with them develops as we deepen our understanding of the true nature of the ego thought system in all its apparent devastation, and we realize that we cannot embark on its undoing without help. From this acknowledgment comes our cry for help. It comes to us in the form of Jesus or the Holy Spirit reminding us that we are mistaken, and in need of a different way of looking at every situation and relationship we find ourselves in. The effectiveness of the help is commensurate with our willingness to seek and accept their perception. This is what is meant by listening to the Holy Spirit's voice rather than the ego's, and in doing so we practice what the Course asks: **"Resign now as your own teacher" (T.12.V.8:3).** The Course tells us later in the text: **"Remember nothing that you taught yourself, for you were badly taught" (T.28.I.7:1).** It is clear, therefore, that in order for our relationship with Jesus or the Holy Spirit to be meaningful and have results, it must be based on the willingness to unlearn everything we have taught ourselves. This is what we find so difficult, and it is what limits our relationship with Them. Looking at what we have taught ourselves with Them means looking at the beliefs we hold with willingness to first question them, and eventually let them go. Looking with the intent to uncover what was hidden so it can be healed is looking without judgment. We are not asked to do this perfectly; only to do it as best we can. In itself it is loving because it initiates the process of undoing the ego thought system, which is what will lead us back home to God. With this as our goal, Jesus and the Holy Spirit become kind and loving guides on our journey.

Q #272: As a newcomer to *A Course in Miracles*, I am sure you have answered this lots of times. When the Course speaks of forgiveness it refers to: (my paraphrase) what you think has happened, has not. No one has ever hurt anyone or done anything terrible. My mind goes on tilt. Are the facts of a past situation just illusions? If there is a clear written pamphlet or paper on the subject, I would appreciate a reference.

A: Forgiveness, as it is presented in *A Course in Miracles*, can be understood only within the framework of the metaphysics of non-dualism; otherwise it will make no sense, and its meaning will be distorted and made indistinguishable from the more traditional meanings. It cannot be detached from what the Course teaches is the origin and purpose of the world and our seeming presence in the world as individual bodies with a past, present, and future. The Course's understanding of forgiveness is unique and follows logically from this base, but it is difficult to put into practice because our lives and experience are based on premises that are the opposite of what the Course teaches.

In order to "forgive your brother for what he has *not* done," we must -- at least intellectually -- begin to accept that all anger and all feelings of victimization are projections of our own unconscious guilt, which itself comes from a belief that we have sinned by attacking God so that we could have our own individual lives. All of that is illusory, of course; but because we think we are individuals, those premises are still present in our minds. Having made that sinfulness real, and not wanting to give up our individual identities and return to the oneness of God, we then deny the sin and project responsibility for it onto something

outside us. Thus, the guilt that we projected is now in others who are perceived as mean, hateful, violent, insensitive, selfish, etc., and we are the innocent victims. The "we" in all of this is always the decision-making mind outside time and space, which has been forgotten and replaced in our awareness by a self that seems to exist in time and space.

That in barest outline is the origin of our perception and feeling that we or others have been unfairly treated, victimized, etc. There obviously is a lot more to these dynamics, but this at least begins to give you some idea of how the Course's theory of forgiveness evolved. We can see from just this much, though, that the only reason we would experience ourselves as unfairly treated is so that we would be able to say that someone else is guilty. This does not mean that we are to deny the "facts" of the external events. The Course is talking exclusively about how we *experience* them. That is the key. Perceiving yourself as unfairly treated is an interpretation coming from an unconscious need to perceive the situation that way. (**Question #262** discusses this in the context of Jesus' own view of the crucifixion.) We are not aware of those dynamics, but not being aware of them is an integral part of the ego's strategy of projection.

The *first step* in the process of forgiveness, therefore, is reversing the projection and its effects. This means recognizing that what we have attacked and judged in someone else is what we have first condemned in ourselves. It is recognizing that our projected anger is a decision we made to avoid our own guilt by seeing it in someone else. Again, this does not mean denying what someone else has done, nor does it mean that you should not do something about it. The *second step* entails understanding that the guilt, too, represents a decision, which is now brought back into our awareness and reconsidered. Instead of choosing to identify with the ego's thought system of guilt, we choose instead to identify with the Holy Spirit's thought system of guiltlessness. This paves the way for the *third step*, which is the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the first two steps of forgiveness represent our decision to allow the Holy Spirit to do His healing work within us. But the Holy Spirit can take away our guilt only when we have withdrawn our investment in it. Once our guilt is gone -- even for just an instant -- we are identified only with love and kindness, and we would not take anything personally. That love and kindness alone would flow through us as we respond behaviorally in the situation, and therefore our response would automatically be what is most loving for all concerned. Behaviorally, it might appear the same as anyone else's response; but the content would be love. In terms of our spiritual progress, that is all that matters.

These steps are described in two places in the Course: **T.5.VII.6:7,9,10,11; W.pl.23.5:1,2,3,4.**

Brief summaries and explanations of the Course's approach to forgiveness are found in two of our publications: *Forgiveness and Jesus: The Meeting Place of "A Course in Miracles" and Christianity*, Chapter 2; *A Talk Given on "A Course in Miracles: An Introduction,"* Chapter 4: "Anger-Forgiveness." Finally, if you have had a chance to read some of the other questions and answers, you probably have run across several applications of these principles.

Q #273: In the Bible it speaks of Lucifer the fallen angel. Is that a symbolic expression of our separation from God? When the Bible speaks of hell is that also another symbolic expression of our living in this nightmare on earth that we think is real?

A: Neither the Bible, nor traditional Christianity, refers to Lucifer or hell as symbols. In Biblical terms Lucifer was the leader of the angels who refused submission to God, and hell is viewed as an actual place of punishment where those who reject God are doomed to an eternity in God's absence. The teaching of the Bible is based on beliefs that are not similar to the principles of *A Course in Miracles*. Since the Course teaches that the separation never really happened (**T.6.II.10**), it follows that it cannot have any symbolic expression. The separation is a thought in the mind of the Sonship of something that could never occur in reality. It becomes a "reality" in our awareness when we choose to take it seriously and to believe it is real. Guilt over this choice is then projected out of the mind in the form of the physical universe, which is made to keep God out: **"Thus the world was meant to be a place where God could**

enter not, and where His Son could be apart from Him" (W.pll.3:4). Since hell is defined as the absence of God, the world becomes hell in our experience; not a symbolic expression of it. The Course is very clear that God cannot be found in this world of form. However, when an individual chooses to identify with the part of the mind that holds the memory of God, the world becomes a reflection of that choice, and is no longer perceived as hell: **"The world becomes a place of joy, abundance, charity and endless giving. It is now so like to Heaven that it quickly is transformed into the light that it reflects" (W.249.1:5,6).**

The important distinction for students of the Course to make is that because separation from God is not possible, there is no hell, there are no "fallen angels," nor a world where God can enter not. The sick mind that believes in separation makes them real; the healed mind knows they are not.

Q #274: Do you think that, in the view of *A Course in Miracles*, there could be a point in some scripts where suicide would be considered in keeping with the "gentle laying aside of the body" when use for it is done?

A: It seems unlikely that suicide would be the means for the **"quiet choice" (S.3.II.2:1)** for death when **"the end has come for usefulness of body functioning" (S.3.II.1:10)**, if by suicide you mean deliberately directing an action against the body for the purpose of causing its apparent death. If the "choice" represents the simple recognition of the end of the body's purpose in the world of form, the body would simply no longer seem to be infused with "life" and a whole variety of so-called natural or accidental causes could be seen in the world's view as the cause of the death. But any action seemingly taken by the body against itself for the purpose of intentionally bringing about its death would only serve to reinforce the belief that the body is real and is a cause and not an effect, not only in the mind of the individual committing the suicide, but also in the minds of others learning of the suicide. This is not likely to be a helpful lesson for anyone. Furthermore, if the one committing suicide has any sense of the death as an escape from physical or emotional limitations and problems, there would remain lessons unlearned in the mind that would still need to be addressed in another lifetime, since limitations never originate in the body or in the world.

Now it is also true according to the Course that *everything* that seems to happen to us, including our seeming death, is chosen by the mind (e.g., **T.21.II.2:3,4,5; W.pl.152.1**). And each decision may be directed by either the ego or the Holy Spirit, either to reinforce guilt or to help undo it through the relinquishment of judgment and attack thoughts. And so there may be circumstances in which a choice for suicide could reflect a right-minded decision -- although it would *not* be the simple laying aside of the body when its usefulness is over. Suicide is after all simply another form of magic intended to change the dream and take away pain, similar in content if not form to taking aspirin to get rid of a headache. So, for example, one who still believes in the reality of the body and its pain, who is racked with a physically devastating illness, might choose, without judgment or guilt, to commit suicide in order to escape the apparent pain of the disease-ridden body. It is not the final lesson that could have been learned, but there is no sin in choosing to postpone the lesson when the fear level is too high, which the intense physical pain would reflect. And if the suicide were done with the recognition that it is not God's Will that we suffer and that death is not final, the experience could reflect further steps along the Atonement path. Purpose, after all, is all that ever matters in every choice we make (**T.4.V.6:7,8,9**).

See also **Question #135** for a much more in-depth discussion of suicide from the perspective of *A Course in Miracles*.

Q #275: I am struggling with the exact meaning of the verb "to extend" in *A Course in Miracles*. I learn in the *Glossary-Index* and on page 114 of the text that the laws of mind in the world are

different from the laws of mind in the Kingdom: the mind of the world projects and perceives and cannot go beyond this, while the Mind of spirit only extends. Since I am from a non-English-speaking culture, I am struggling to understand what seems to be a very fundamental concept. I would really appreciate your help.

A: As you may have noticed in the *Glossary-Index*, *to extend*, or *extension*, has two levels of meaning in the Course. At the level of knowledge -- the oneness and totality of Heaven or the Kingdom, which the Course says is our only reality -- extension is synonymous with *creation* (e.g., T.11.I.3:4,5; T.14.V.3:4). But the meaning of neither of these words is comprehensible to our finite minds, since they refer to a totally abstract activity or process of Mind/spirit that has nothing to do with time or space or bodies -- all illusory dimensions of the physical world made by the false ego mind. In Heaven, we are God's extensions or creations, and like Him, we can extend or create. But even this statement cannot be taken literally, for it suggests that we and God are separate, that He has somehow brought us into being as an entity separate from Him. Because our non-dualistic reality is one, unified, perfect and eternal, extension of that reality cannot involve adding more to it or increasing it in any way that our limited minds would understand (W.pl.105.4:2,3,4,5). And so there is little more to be said about the meaning of extension at this level that would be helpful.

The Course's other meaning of extension refers to the level of perception, the level of the illusory, dualistic, split mind. The meaning is still somewhat abstract, but a little more comprehensible than at the completely abstract level of knowledge or Heaven. Our experience in the world of time and space and separate bodies is based on the law of mind that governs all thought at this level, the inevitable dynamic that leads us to perceive outside of ourselves the content within our minds that we have chosen to see as real. And there are only two contents to choose between within the split mind: the ego's guilt or the Holy Spirit's forgiveness. We see outside ourselves whatever content we have chosen within. If we have chosen the Holy Spirit as the guide for our thoughts, the Course refers to the process as extension. If the ego is our guide, the process is called projection.

The ego seeks to use the dynamic of projection to place the guilt outside of our minds and then to deny its origin in our minds. In other words, rather than seeing the guilt outside us as an extension of the same guilt in our minds -- which it is -- the ego wants us to believe that we can literally project the guilt outside of our minds so that it is now separate from us, thereby supposedly regaining for us the innocence we believe we lost with the thought of separation. And for this defense to work, we have to forget that we projected the guilt from our own mind. Of course, this is not how mind works, for denial does not alter the fact that the mind is indeed the source and "ideas leave not their source" (T.26.VII.4:7,8,9).

The Holy Spirit's goal, in contrast, is to teach us to recognize the correspondence between what we perceive outside and what content we have chosen in our mind so that we can make an informed choice about what we will extend or project until our split mind is healed. The ego desperately attempts to hide this dynamic from us, for the success of its projection depends on our failing to recognize that we project or extend only our own thoughts (W.pl.30.2). And the ego's strategy is very successful most of the time, for our anger and judgment reflect our belief that the outside world is indeed independent of us. So the Holy Spirit seeks to reinforce our awareness of the continuity between within and without as a result of extension, while the ego always seeks to deny the source in our mind and assert that what we see outside of ourselves -- guilt -- exists separate from and independent of us. The Course's purpose is to help us see that the choice of what we extend or project is ours alone -- each with its own consequences for our peace of mind.

Q #276: I belong to a group that meets weekly to study *A Course in Miracles*. It is essentially a leaderless group, in that we meet at each others' homes, and the host(ess) sets the form and tone

of the meeting. Overall, there is an agreement that we will study the Course, and that to understand and practice it is our purpose. However, over the years, it has regularly happened that someone will bring up the ideas put forth elsewhere. Sometimes these thoughts are brought up, discussed, etc., and we're back to the main theme again. Other times, the meeting gets quite sidetracked and the theme becomes decidedly un-Course-like. What to do then? Sometimes one of us will make a comment to get things back on track, and that works fine, but sometimes that comment is clumsy, and others don't make any indication that they support it. Other times no one says anything at all. We have tried, over the years, to make a better definition of our purpose, but our egos have a field day with that, and we have really argued with each other, and at one point part of us split off and formed another group. So, the question I think is, "How can I practice the loving lessons of the Course, when I'm still in the process of learning those lessons?" I will appreciate your comments.

A: Readiness does not mean mastery, Jesus tells us (T.2.VII.7). You simply practice as best you can; then review what happened, bring your mistakes to the love of Jesus, and ask his help to forgive yourself for not being perfect. There actually is no more effective way to learn this Course. The *willingness* to apply whatever you have learned is all that counts in the end, not how well you applied it. The ego would be thrilled if you put the practice of the Course on hold until you thought you had learned everything. Jesus, on the other hand, just asks that we turn to him and ask his help every step of the way, without judging ourselves. The essence of the process is learning how to trust, and identify with, his loving presence in our minds. He asks us to "trust implicitly your willingness, whatever else may enter. Concentrate only on this, and be not disturbed that shadows surround it. That is why you came. If you could come without them you would not need the holy instant. Come to it not in arrogance, assuming that you must achieve the state its coming brings with it" (T.18.IV.2:3,4,5,6,7).

There is nothing in the Course about how to conduct group study, and it is not essential to be part of a group in order to learn and practice the Course. If you want to be in a group, however, it can be an excellent opportunity to practice what you have learned about special relationships and the authority problem. You can be there with the Holy Spirit or Jesus guiding you, in which case you would be learning how to perceive your interests as the same as everyone else's, despite the differences in form and behavior. Or you can be there with the ego, in which case you would be reinforcing the ego's view that your interests conflict with others' interests and that the differences among you are serious and meaningful. It is no different than any other special relationship in that sense. You may choose to leave the group and form another one with the ego guiding you -- which will result in condemnation, resentment, frustration, specialness, etc., or with the Holy Spirit or Jesus guiding you -- which will result in your being peaceful, and without judgment of yourself or anyone else.

Q #277: The following answer combines responses to two different but related questions:

a) Since one person's life has many relationship connections, when something devastating happens to that person, many family members' and friends' lives are affected. So whose projection of guilt caused this, since many experienced the outcome? Is it everyone's in their life projections or just the person directly involved with the devastating experience? Also, with something like the attack on the World Trade Center, is everyone in the world responsible for this projection of guilt?

b) When *A Course in Miracles* students, including myself, go to a Course student I know to counsel with him about our problems and dramas, he tells each of us that we are the only one here. I know that there is only one Son of God, but which one is he? It seems confusing that I should think I'm the only one here and yet others also think they're the only ones here. So am I in your dream or are you in mine and who is affecting whom?

A: All events in the world reflect a level of joint decision to experience them among the seemingly separate minds that are apparently affected. But the interpretation of any event in each individual mind is what determines the nature of the experience for that mind. Two individuals can go through the same external event together and one can feel victimized and the other remain at peace because of how they choose to see the event in relationship to themselves, and perhaps, more to the point, how they view themselves. If guilt is real in the mind, external events will be taken personally. If guilt has been released, events can be observed without any personal reaction. This is true whether we are speaking of minor events involving just two people or major world events, such as the attacks of September 11th or the recent war in Iraq.

All that is important in any situation is my own reaction to the events I am experiencing. For this reason, it can be very helpful to eliminate anyone else from the equation and realize I need only be concerned about my own interpretation of what is going on. The one Son of God is not anyone in the world, but the one mind that seems to have fallen asleep and fragmented into billions of seemingly separate, individual dreamers. When you are analyzing one of your night dreams, you are not concerned with what was going on in the minds of the other figures in your dream, for they all simply reflect different aspects of your own mind -- you're the only one here, but it's your mind that is the only one here, not your body. And *here* is not in the world, but in an illusory state of separation. As all of this becomes clearer in your mind, dealing with the so-called events of the world becomes increasingly simple, for the only solution is to turn to the Teacher of peace within, leaving the teacher of separation and guilt behind.

For additional discussion of some of the issues related to joint decision-making in the dream and the levels at which choices are being made, see Question [#37](#) and [#233](#).

Q #278: It has been said that the ego is not real, it is a mouse roaring like a lion, it is just our belief in it that gives it power. So why then when we decide to change our teacher to the Holy Spirit, has it been said the ego becomes vicious? This makes it sound like its an entity that is striking back, like it has a life of its own. Once we change our mind, why does it not render the ego gone? How can the ego become any more vicious than it already is? This makes me confused as to how much power the ego really does have and makes me a little afraid of it getting back at me for wanting to ignore it.

A: The ego is the thought of separation. Though it is not real, it is a thought that is both weak and powerful. It is weak because it is a thought of separation from God that could never happen, and what can never happen has no effect. Yet, it is powerful because belief in it keeps us rooted in hell with love blocked from our awareness, and our minds darkened by guilt. Attachment to our identity with the ego thought system is very strong, which is why the decision to identify with the Holy Spirit is perceived as a threat and causes us to become fearful. It is this fear that motivates attack, as the Course tells us: "... frightened *people* can be vicious" (T.3.I.4:2, italics ours). Since it is nothing in itself, the ego does not actually become vicious, it does not do anything: "...the whole separation fallacy lies in the belief that the ego *has* the power to do anything. The ego is fearful to you because you believe this. Yet the truth is very simple: All power is of God. What is not of Him has no power to do anything" (T.11.V.3:3,4,5,6,7). We cannot do anything worse than what we have already done by taking the thought of separation seriously, thus denying the truth about our Self.

When we choose the Holy Spirit the ego *is* gone, because we cannot hold two mutually exclusive thoughts in our minds at the same time. The part of the mind that identifies with the ego realizes that if identity with the Holy Spirit is chosen permanently, belief in the separation is no longer possible, and the separated self disappears. Being unwilling to allow the disappearance of the self, the separation thought is chosen once again in the insane belief that it will have a different outcome -- that happiness will be found in separation and specialness. There is nothing more

painful or more vicious in our experience than the repeated choice for separation. It is important to remember that this is a choice we make. It is not something that the ego does to us.

We are not asked to ignore the ego or this choice; we are asked to look at it and uncover all the ego's schemes. Only by looking will we become aware of our responsibility for choosing to believe the ego's lies, and realize the price we pay for this choice. The Course tells us this is the source of all pain: "The cause of pain is separation, not the body, which is only its effect" (T.28.III.5:1). Although it is a death blow to the ego and may be perceived as painful, choosing the Holy Spirit, whose thought system undoes the separation, is the only way out of pain. When the confusion you mention comes upon you it may be helpful to consider this beautiful reminder from Jesus: "Ours is simply the journey back to God Who is our home. Whenever fear intrudes anywhere along the road to peace, it is because the ego has attempted to join the journey with us and cannot do so. Sensing defeat and angered by it, the ego regards itself as rejected and becomes retaliative. You are invulnerable to its retaliation because I am with you" (T.8.V.5:4,5,6,7).

Q #279: I know that, as *A Course in Miracles* says, all illness is a defense against truth. Are you aware of any case of someone who, after many years of continuous study and practice of the Course, started to feel an abstract fear of this apparent reality, like losing his mind -- agoraphobic-like symptoms?

A: It is not surprising that fear may *appear* to become more intense as we work with the Course over time. We are after all in the process of removing all the many defenses we have constructed to minimize fear in our awareness and to disguise it as other seemingly more manageable feelings, such as anger or excitement.

Jesus is well aware that our fear will seem to increase over time as we study and apply his Course: "You have not yet gone back far enough, and that is why you become so fearful. As you approach the Beginning, you feel the fear of the destruction of your thought system upon you as if it were the fear of death. There is no death, but there *is* a belief in death" (T.3.VII.5:9,10,11). And later in the text: "As the light comes nearer you will rush to darkness, shrinking from the truth, sometimes retreating to the lesser forms of fear, and sometimes to stark terror" (T.18.III.2:1).

The form that our increased fear may take will in most cases keep our focus on the external world and on threat to the body's life and well-being, since that is the identity as egos we are trying to maintain. Agoraphobia is certainly a specific form in which the fear could be expressed, as the experience of oneness that the Course is leading us towards is one of no limits or boundaries -- the ultimate spaciousness, if you will.

No matter what form the fear takes, the answer is always the same. All fear ultimately comes from the belief that we have attacked and destroyed love and that we will be attacked and destroyed in return. If we can quiet our minds just enough to ask for help, joining with the presence of love that has remained always there despite our beliefs, we will know that love cannot be destroyed, and so neither the guilt of attack nor the punishment we have believed it calls for are true. In the words that conclude the introduction to the text, "Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists. Herein lies the peace of God" (T.in.2:2,3,4).

You do not say whether this is simply a theoretical question you are asking or whether you are describing your own or someone else's actual experience. If the latter is the case, should the symptoms persist and continue to be unsettling and problematic, it is always a wise course of action to see a professional therapist for help in alleviating the symptoms.

Q #280: Is there a positive form of denial? Would denying the countless, tiny, fearful, negative thoughts that bombard me throughout the day be one way of applying, in practical terms, what Jesus calls, “Denial of Error”?

A: It depends on what you mean by *denying*. If you mean that you are aware that they are there and that you (as the decision maker) are responsible for them, but then you deny their power to take away your peace or change your reality as God’s Son, then you are using denial in a helpful, positive way. Then you would be denying the error, or denying the denial of truth (T.12.II.1:5). The mistake we all made was to take the “tiny, mad idea” of separation seriously, instead of smiling at the silliness and insanity of believing that we could exist as separate individuals apart from God (T.27.VIII.6). We repeat this mistake every time we judge our ego thoughts to be so awful and so bothersome that we need to repress them or escape from them. We correct that mistake every time we look squarely at our ego thoughts, and remember that the only power they have is the power we give to them by our belief that they define us and that they can truly affect us. So that we don’t skip steps, then, we first must deny their seeming power. And we can do that most effectively by looking at them with the love of Jesus next to us. As that love becomes more and more real to us, our ego thoughts will become less and less real to us. And then one day we will simply regard them as meaningless, as we will have finally accepted the love of Jesus as the only reality in our minds.

Q #281: My question pertains to responsibility. I understand that I am responsible for what I think, and that by choosing to agree with the ego, I am making the world real. In the text of *A Course in Miracles*, chapter 5, section V, The Ego's Use of Guilt, paragraph 7, “Guilt is inescapable by those who believe they order their own thoughts...This makes them feel responsible for their errors without recognizing that, by accepting this responsibility, they are reacting irresponsibly”. Please clarify.

Secondly, regarding making the world...I understand making the world real, or the mistake real, but literally making the physical world is difficult to wrap my head around experientially. If I am upset at some other car hitting my car in an accident, am I responsible for making it real by getting upset, or am I responsible for making the accident happen so I would have something to blame my anger on. To clarify, do I go out and find an excuse to be upset, or do I literally make the excuse happen. Did I cause that car to hit my car, or am I just using this occurrence as an excuse to be upset instead of choosing to be at peace looking at the whole accident with the Holy Spirit.

A: In order to understand *responsibility* as meant in *A Course in Miracles*, it is essential that you first understand just who it is that the Course is addressing. It is never the self we believe we are, living in the world, that Jesus is speaking to. That self has no power to do anything, for it is only the effect of thoughts in the mind. And it is to the mind that the Course is addressed. It is just this distinction that Jesus is making early in the text when, in the context of our learning to heal our perception and ultimately come to realize that “**all perception is unnecessary,**” he observes: “**You may ask how this is possible as long as you appear to be living in this world. That is a reasonable question. You must be careful, however, that you really understand it. Who is the “you” who are living in this world?**” (T.4.II.11:3,5,6,7,8; italics added). Since, as the Course states repeatedly in Lesson 132, “**there is no world**” (W.pl.132.5:1,6:2,7:1,10:3,13:1), there can be no “you” that is living in this world. There is only mind in which the seeming world is contained. We have an experience of this when we awaken from a sleeping dream and recognize that a complete world seemed to exist in which we moved about and acted, yet both the world and the self we thought we were while we slept both remained completely within the dreaming mind.

To understand the Course’s teaching on responsibility then, it is important to allow a shift in our perception of who this responsible self is -- mind, not body. We may understand this only intellectually at first, but it is helpful to be willing at least to begin there. And so, to consider the Course lines you quote: In

this particular paragraph, Jesus is using the word *responsible* in the ego's sense of *guilty*. We believe that we really can think apart from God and order our thoughts independently of Him, and then we assume responsibility, or blame, for having done that, never calling into question the reality of our belief that we can separate ourselves from God. And on our own, apart from God's Help, there is no escape from the awful burden of this responsibility, because we cannot question its reality on our own. And so to accept responsibility for sin is to buy the ego's lies, thereby acting irresponsibly. Jesus is not asking us to deny that it is our own decision that brings about this experience of guilt (**T.5.V.8:1**), but he does not want us to associate blame or guilt with that choice or we will not believe it can be undone.

As for how we could possibly have made the world and everything that seems to happen in it, remember that it is not the self you think you are but the mind of the Son, which we are all a part of, that is responsible for falling asleep and dreaming of a world of separation. Again, that the mind has the power to make up a world is apparent from our sleeping dreams (**T.18.II.5**). Still, this is usually not the most helpful perspective from which to consider the events of our lives, including such things as car "accidents." To focus on how we are choosing the events of our lives is usually not helpful because the choice is far from conscious awareness for most of us most of the time, and such a focus is more likely to induce feelings of responsibility in the ego's sense of guilt or blame.

The more helpful and healing perspective is to recognize that it is our interpretation of the events of our lives that we always have a choice about, in every moment. And while events can not be undone, interpretations of those events can be undone in an instant, if we so choose. We *never* become upset at external circumstances, but rather make the choice for separation and guilt in the mind first and then look for something external to which we can attribute our upset. This serves to keep ourselves mindless and beyond the hope of any real solution to our loss of peace. The self we think we are in the world is never the cause of anything, so it becomes irrelevant to ask whether we choose the events of our lives, so long as we see ourselves as "**living in this world.**" The only helpful choice to be in touch with is our choice of how to interpret what we believe is happening to us. The ego's interpretation is always that we are victims, and not responsible for how we feel. The Holy Spirit, in contrast, says all events in our lives are the opportunities for learning to make a different choice -- releasing guilt and fear rather than reinforcing them.

For additional discussion of some of the issues related to joint decision-making in the dream and the levels at which choices are being made, see Questions [#37](#), [#233](#), and [#277](#).

Q #282: In addition to being a student of *A Course in Miracles*, I am also a Buddhist. I find that Buddhism and the Course fit very well together. I am considering taking up robes and becoming a Buddhist nun, in order to further my spiritual understanding. By letting go of a "normal" lifestyle of having a job, paying bills, etc., am I postponing lessons that I will need to learn, or is the adoption of a monastic lifestyle a great step forward in letting go of my attachment (forgive my Buddhist terminology) to the world of illusions that my ego has created?

A: *A Course in Miracles* focuses only on the content in our minds, not form or behavior. And that content is either of the ego or Holy Spirit. So whether you are in a monastery or in a corporate office makes no difference from that point of view. What makes a difference, spiritually, is whether you see your interests as different from everyone else's or as the same. The Course encourages us to see our life circumstances and settings as classrooms in which we can choose to learn either the ego's curriculum, which is based on separation, or the Holy Spirit's curriculum, which is based on the undoing of separation. It teaches us to think always in terms of purpose: Are we using the world and our relationships to reinforce our belief in separation or to undo it? The world and the body, thus, are not the problem; the way we use them is the problem. And that always is the result of the choice we make in our minds to be taught by the ego or by Jesus. Thus, what would be most helpful in your situation is to ask for help in undoing any specialness that might be involved in the decision you are making. That would go a long way toward removing the doubts and conflicts you experience.

Q #283: I have been a student of *A Course in Miracles* for six years now and practice at it daily. Every time I have a questions to ask it gets answered in some form by you. so thank you for all the help. Now I am a little confused on how to handle this situation. The last eight years I have gained 30 lbs and being 69 years of age it is a concern because the additional weight can lead to many diseases and I am not comfortable with it. So I went on a diet of healthy eating and exercises. I am comfortable with my game plan but I am confused because I know that all the illnesses, aches and pains are only my own guilt about the choice I made on leaving God and that guilt is projected on to my body. So, if I stay aware of this fact and continue on my plan will that be OK? How do we handle following the Course and doing what we think is necessary in this world. This question could be used in many different situations. Again thank you for all your help.

A: You are correct. This question can be applied to many different situations regarding behavior.

As you undoubtedly know, the focus of *A Course in Miracles* is not on changing our behavior, but rather on changing the teacher who will guide us through our daily lives. And yet, we have to start somewhere, and that somewhere is basically where we find ourselves right now. It doesn't matter that yesterday I was *practically* sitting at the right hand of God when today I'm a hateful, spiteful, blankety-blank!

So, we start where we are. As you stated, you know your ailments come from your guilt. This recognition alone gives you more knowledge than 99.9% of the population. You are off to a good start right there! You want to lose weight to live a longer and healthier life, and as an aside, to perhaps feel better about your looks as well (although you didn't say so). You have a plan, which seems complete and well thought out. You imply that you have implemented your plan, at least for a little while, and then you became confused -- about your plan, about your guilt, etc.

Sounds like you made a right-minded decision to take better care of yourself, to love yourself a little more, to "let go" of some of your guilt, and to be worthy of good health and happiness. It also sounds like once you started implementing your plan, a tiny voice began to whisper in your ear -- the content of its message, no matter what the words, being "who will I be without my guilt?" Once heard, you began to get confused. Should I? Would I? Could I? All of this a direct response to your right-minded decision.

This is a perfect example of what we all do in various aspects of our lives. We make right-minded decisions, become afraid of them (and their implications) and jump right back into the arms of the ego until we tire of its insanity and begin the entire process again — over, and over, and over. We continue this way until our fear is totally diminished and we make the final right-minded choice, at which point we are in the real world, and the tiny voice of the ego is heard no more. And, if you can generalize this process to your entire life, you'll be able to more quickly and easily recognize signs of fear as they creep into your thoughts, no matter what form they take. This will help you take your doubt and self-sabotage less seriously than you have in the past, simply stating:: "Of course, I've gotten afraid again. So what else is new?"

Q #284: I have been a police officer for over six years. Since joining the police force, I have become interested in various spiritual teachings, including hatha Yoga and *A Course in Miracles*. As a result, a few years ago, I decided to resign from my police job and try to find a job more in line with living a spiritual lifestyle. The police work seemed to become more difficult as I tried to come more and more from a place of love and non-judgment. I felt as if I was becoming too vulnerable for that type of intense work.

But then I returned to the police job after taking about a year off, having concluded that I could not run away from my projections because they followed me wherever I went. Only the form changed. I went back to the police force for about two years before again feeling a strong desire to leave. I am currently on a leave of absence from my job, studying to become a certified Yoga teacher. I have almost finished the program and must make a decision on what to do next. I have thought a lot about becoming a monk in the Vedanta order since this seems to me to be the closest to what I believe to be the Truth, but I think this might just be another escape mechanism. I have continued to study the Course along with Yoga,

even though in many ways these two practices seem contradictory, since Yoga focuses on using the body as a means to cultivate stillness.

My main question is, from a Course perspective, is police work a more difficult path to walk while trying to wake up, since it involves dealing so often with very intense situations and seeing egos at their worst? Is this conducive to practicing forgiveness? What about monastic life? Since the Course's focus is on forgiving relationships, it might not agree with monastic life, i.e., renouncing the world. If I could only be willing to hear the voice of Jesus or the Holy Spirit and stop confusing myself. It's a bummer to have the awareness that I am doing this to myself, but not enough willingness to stop doing it.

A: Although you say you have one main question, it would appear that you really have two distinct, but nevertheless interrelated questions. And the prior question is to which spiritual path, Yoga or the Course, do you want to commit yourself? You recognize that they are not the same, but if you attempt to maintain a foot on each path, as they diverge more and more in your experience over time, you will feel increasingly split and confused. So this is the first question you may wish to answer, at which point an answer to the second question -- what line of work or career should you choose -- may be more readily apparent. Although the deeper metaphysical teachings of the Course and the Vedanta -- both assert the non-dualistic nature of reality -- are the same, the means to remembering that reality and awakening are different.

Jesus, *addressing the student who has made a commitment to the Course*, points out how the Course differs from other paths: **“Nor is a lifetime of contemplation and long periods of meditation aimed at detachment from the body necessary. All such attempts will ultimately succeed because of their purpose. Yet the means are tedious and very time consuming, for all of them look to the future for release from a state of present unworthiness and inadequacy. Your way will be different, not in purpose but in means. A holy relationship is a means of saving time. One instant spent together with your brother restores the universe to both of you.”** (T.18.VII.4:9,10,11;5:1,2,3).

In other words, the Course's process to awaken is forgiveness -- not meditation -- practiced in the context of all of our relationships in the world. Some relationships are more intense than others, but all provide opportunities to heal our projections of the guilt we have sought to place outside our minds, by withdrawing those projections and seeing them within, where they can then be released.

And so which path you wish to pursue is the first decision you may want to address. The Course makes no claim to being the only way -- **“There are many thousands of other forms, all with the same outcome (M.1.4:2).** The only basis for decision is listening to your own inner teacher and becoming clearer with which path you really resonate. Should you decide that Yoga is your path, the choice to become a monk and renounce the world may then be the next step.

Should you on the other hand decide that the Course is your path to awakening, you may look at your choice about work differently. Police work is no doubt very challenging and for this reason provides tremendous opportunities to practice forgiveness, as you increasingly recognize that any reactions or feelings of vulnerability you experience are only projections of your own thoughts. But the Course would never insist that only one line of work or only certain specific relationships will afford you those learning opportunities. As you said, your projections will follow you wherever you go. So relax. Perhaps you can find some comfort in the fact that the confusion you feel is not over which line of work to pursue. That is only ever a distraction from your real choice, since salvation does not depend on anything that happens in time, but only on what happens in your mind, outside of time and space. Choosing between the ego and the Holy Spirit, between reinforcing guilt or accepting healing and forgiveness, is the only choice that ever really matters. Even if it is simply resistance to your lessons of forgiveness that is impelling you to turn away from police work, the most important thing would be to get in touch with the resistance, not to force yourself to stay in the job.

Once you are clear what your goal is, the rest will follow (T.17.VI). For if your goal is forgiveness, *everything* can be seen to serve that end. And then you can simply sigh a huge sigh of relief, for you don't really have to figure anything else out!

For some relevant previous answers, you may wish to look at Questions #90 and #141.

Q #285: Sometimes when I ask the inner voice (Holy Spirit) to guide me, I think I get an answer and later I find out it was the ego who answered disguised as inner voice. How can I know when it is the real inner voice that is answering and not the ego?

A: The answer to your question lies in another question: What is it you truly seek, and of whom? Much of our asking comes with hidden beliefs, goals, and desires, that we are not aware of. We are thereby seeking to make our bodies and the world real, and the ego responds enthusiastically. We can be sure the ego has answered because the response never truly satisfies our perceived need, much less our *real* need. In the situation you refer to, it is quite likely that the ego answered because the ego was asked. This is nothing to be upset about or afraid of. It is just that we are more deeply identified with the ego thought system than we think. As *A Course in Miracles* tells us: **“You retain thousands of little scraps of fear that prevent the Holy One from entering...I wait in love and not in impatience, you will surely ask me truly. I will come in response to a single unequivocal call” (T.4.II.7:2,9,10).** The very important words in this passage are “truly” and “unequivocal.” This means being clear, unhindered by diverse interests, unambiguous. As long as we believe in our identity as bodies, and believe that our problems are all the situations in the world that need to be resolved, we will ask with a hidden agenda, seeking something specific to allay our sense of lack, meet some need, or make life in the world more “heavenly.” Even our requests for the peace of God often hide our desire for happiness on our own terms. If the Holy Spirit were to respond to these requests, He would be reinforcing our belief in the separation.

The Holy Spirit's guidance is always on the level of content and not form. His goal is to teach that our only problem is the separation, and the only solution is undoing the thought of separation. If, in our imperfect asking, we are willing to join with the Holy Spirit's goal, we will be able to make decisions in this world, while recognizing the “the scraps of fear” and ego interests we retain. We can learn that although decisions have to be made, our salvation does not rest on these decisions. This opens us to the Holy Spirit's perception, and thus His guidance, without reinforcing our mistaken belief that the world and the body are the problem.

Your question is discussed in *Forgiveness and Jesus* by Kenneth Wapnick. It is posed in yet another way: **“The crucial question, however, should not be ‘How do I know when I am hearing the Holy Spirit?’ but ‘Why don't I do what He tells me to do so that I can hear His Voice better?’” (Part III, “The Test for Truth,” p. 318).** We are still unwilling to do what He tells us to do, and are still afraid of His guidance. If we were not it would be blazingly clear to us. While we are still afraid we do need to ask for help in seeing the hidden beliefs we hold on to in our perceived needs. Undoing our belief in the ego's thought system takes patient practice. Meanwhile, our less than perfect asking is a preparation for the time when we will want only the Holy Spirit's answer. The truth is we *have* called and He *has* answered. It is our fear of this that impedes our hearing. His answer for now is to show us the fear that keeps us clinging to our insane belief in the separation, the body, and the world. When we are ready to let them go we will know, and we will hear only His Voice: **“His is the Voice that calls you back to where you were before and will be again. It is possible even in this world to hear only that Voice and no other. It takes effort and great willingness to learn. It is the final lesson that I learned, and God's Sons are as equal as learners as they are as Sons” (T.5.II.3:8,9,10,11).** This will come when we are convinced that our only problem is the thought of separation, and the only answer is the Holy Spirit's correction, which is undoing the belief in the separation.

Q #286: "There are no accidents in salvation." I am puzzled by two apparently contradictory perspectives on this:

(1) Anything in the world of form can be used by the Holy Spirit as a means for salvation, i.e., I can use any circumstance or event to practice forgiveness. So, in the flow of events -- which could be random and meaningless in themselves -- I can use anything for the purpose of self-transformation.

(2) The Holy Spirit provides me with particular events so that I can learn specific lessons. This would suggest that the Holy Spirit makes at least certain aspects of the world: a view which appears to contradict the notion that the ego alone makes forms.

It is my impression that commentators on *A Course in Miracles* do not favor option number two. Yet this seems to be implied in the quote. Please comment.

A: In answering your question, it is helpful to realize that even in the illusory split mind, of which the world is only a shadowy projection, neither the ego nor the Holy Spirit does anything. And so neither is responsible for the forms that our lives may take and the events that seem to happen to us. Although the Course's separation myth personifies them as if they were separate entities acting independently, the ego and the Holy Spirit only represent alternative interpretations or symbolic thoughts within our mind about the tiny mad idea of separation from God. It is the sleeping mind of the Son that gives form to the thoughts in his mind, using either the ego or the Holy Spirit as his guide for choosing and then interpreting those seemingly externalized forms.

A few passages from the Course itself may help make the passive nature of both the Holy Spirit and the ego clearer. Early in the text, Jesus says, **"The Holy Spirit is *one way of choosing....The Voice of the Holy Spirit does not command, because It is incapable of arrogance. It does not demand, because It does not seek control. It does not overcome, because It does not attack. It merely reminds. It is compelling only because of what It reminds you of. It brings to your mind the other way, remaining quiet even in the midst of the turmoil you may make*"** (T.5.II.6:7;7:1,2,3,4,5; italics added). In the next section, Jesus observes that **"the ego is the symbol of separation, just as the Holy Spirit is the symbol of peace"** (T.5.III.9:4). The symbolic nature of the ego is described again later in the text when Jesus notes that **"all that the ego is, is an idea that it is possible that things could happen to the Son of God without his will"** (T.21.II.6:4; italics added).

That the ego has no power in and of itself to do anything is apparent from this early passage in the text: **"Only your allegiance to it gives the ego any power over you. I have spoken of the ego as if it were a separate thing, acting on its own. This was necessary to persuade you that you cannot dismiss it lightly, and must realize how much of your thinking is ego-directed....The ego is nothing more than a part of your belief about yourself"** (T.4.VI.1:2,3,4,6).

So when the Course asserts that **"there are no accidents in salvation"** (M.3.1:6), it means that everything reflects a choice -- our own! Our sleeping mind makes all the decisions about what to experience and how to interpret those experiences. The "flow of events" is never "random and meaningless" because all things are chosen by us to serve either the ego's purpose of separation and guilt or the Holy Spirit's purpose of forgiveness and peace. Among the many passages in the Course that speak of the power of our minds, consider just the following two:

"Your holy mind establishes everything that happens to you. Every response you make to everything you perceive is up to you, because your mind determines your perception of it" (T.10.in.2:6,7).

"It is impossible the Son of God be merely driven by events outside of him. It is impossible that happenings that come to him were not his choice. His power of decision is the determiner of every

situation in which he seems to find himself by chance or accident. No accident nor chance is possible within the universe as God created it, outside of which is nothing. (T.21.II.3:1,2,3,4).

And so, while we may initially choose -- almost always unconsciously, out of our awareness -- an experience to reinforce our perception of ourselves as victims of a world over which we have no control, once the choice has been made we can make another choice and ask for the Help within to see our circumstances differently. And so we begin to learn that we are never the victim of the world we see (**W.pl.31**) and that no one or nothing else -- neither the ego nor the Holy Spirit nor Jesus nor God Himself -- intervenes within the dream we call our lives. For we alone are the rulers of our universe (**W.pII.253**).

For further discussion on the power of decision, you may also wish to review [Question #281](#). As to whether God or the Holy Spirit intervene in the world and our lives, you may want to look at [Question #235](#). And on the Course's metaphoric or mythical use of language, see [Question #72](#).

Q #287: One section in the text of *A Course in Miracles* that is of particular interest to me is "The Last Unanswered Question" (T.21.VII). Could you comment on the meaning of this section?

A: The main theme of this section is the power of our minds to choose -- ultimately, against the ego. Paragraph 7 makes it abundantly clear that this is a course about changing our minds not the world. It is a course in cause (the choices we make in our minds), not effect (behavior).

Jesus explains that when we experience ourselves as powerless or helpless, we are giving witness to our denial of our true identity as a Son of God, who could never be powerless. Once this dissociation has been effected, the authentic power of our minds then is feared as the "enemy," and an "army of the powerless" arises to do battle with this mortal threat. Jesus, of course, is describing the battleground in our minds, of which we are not aware because of the ego dynamic of denial and projection. Hatred seethes within us, but is always attributed to some form of evil without, which we then feel justified in attacking and destroying. Jesus is also referring to the ultimate futility and silliness of the seemingly powerful armies in the world. We must perpetuate this system in order to ward off an even worse fate, which is to acknowledge that there is no enemy outside, and that we made ourselves powerless by choosing to believe in the thought system of separation and sin. Reason would tell us that, if only we were to choose to consult it (consult our right minds).

The three questions stated in paragraph 5 have to do with our choice to exist in this world in which we seem to be the innocent victims of forces beyond our control. Our feeling powerless to do anything about the conditions in our lives is purposeful. It keeps us from ever experiencing the true power of our minds to make another choice and deny our denial of the truth. Hence, the fourth question -- the last unanswered question -- is: **"Do I want to see what I denied because it is the truth?" (T.21.VII.14)**. When we answer in the affirmative to the first three questions, we are saying that we have changed our minds and we really do not want to be victims of the world anymore. But the last question has us confront our decision for guilt and the reason we uphold it. Unless we reverse that decision for guilt, we will continue to deny the presence of love, and we will continually project that guilt. In addition to saying that our lack of peace or happiness is not the world's fault -- it is our own fault -- we must realize that the guilt within us is a deliberate choice to deny the truth of the Atonement and then choose against it. Until we make that choice, we will vacillate all the time. To answer yes to the last question **"must mean 'not no'"**; it is to decide that I no longer want to be who I think I am: separate, unique, autonomous, independent, free, and special. I no longer want to see myself as distinct from the Love of God.

Q #288: What is a miracle? Although they are carefully described, I am still wondering what they are. Do they resemble what we commonly think of as miracles? Do we know when they occur, or do they happen constantly without us being aware of them? Can you give any examples of miracles?

A: First, a miracle has nothing to do with anything external. Miracles pertain only to what is going on in our own minds. In that sense, they are not at all what traditional religious systems have thought of as miracles. Traditionally, conditions in the body and the world have been viewed as the problem; and therefore miracles, simply put, were viewed as the healing or removal of those conditions, usually through some kind of divine or supernatural intervention. *A Course in Miracles*, on the other hand, teaches that the body and the world are projections of thoughts in our minds: **"It [the world] is the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition... Therefore, seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world" (T.21.in.1:5,7).** Now, if you could really accept that the world is merely a projection of a thought of sin and guilt in your mind, you would realize that trying to alter things in the world or the body is ultimately futile, and that changing your mind about the reality of sin and guilt is truly healing. That is why the workbook states: **"A miracle is a correction. It does not create, nor really change at all. It merely looks on devastation, and reminds the mind that what it sees is false" (W.pII.13.1,2,3).** The miracle corrects our thinking, not a condition in the world or the body. Yet this passage also implies that we are not to blithely dismiss our perceptions of the world either. Rather, we are to look at the devastation in our lives, or the world-at-large, and bring that perception to the loving presence of Jesus in our minds. There, in our choosing to join with that reflection of truth, we will remember that what we are perceiving is but the content of a dream, not reality. **"The miracle establishes you dream a dream, and that its content is not true" (T.28.II.7:1).** Once we are joined with the reflection of truth in our minds, we would be guided solely by that in responding to the situations in our lives.

This takes a lot of practice, which is why we have a workbook with 365 lessons, at the end of which Jesus tells us that we are just at the beginning stages of this process of thought-reversal. The entire Course is about this. Our thinking right now is the reverse of what the truth is. What we are so used to calling *causes* are really *effects*. A miracle occurs when we remember and accept -- for just an instant -- that the *cause* of our and others' lack of peace, sickness, deprivation, etc., is not something of the body or the world, but rather a choice we are making in our minds to identify with the thought system of separation and sin, guilt, and fear. **"The miracle is the first step in giving back to cause the function of causation, not effect" (T.28.II.9:3).**

A miracle occurs when we do not take another's attack personally, recognizing instead that we all share the same needs and goals; we all share the same insanity of the ego, and we all share the same sanity of Christ's vision. Sometimes we are not aware of having made that shift in our minds, sometimes we are. Miracles occur as frequently as our willingness allows them to.

Q #289: I hear over and over that I am to hold an attitude of "I need do nothing." I believe it is to allow the Holy Spirit to take it over. Can I stay in bed and be a saint, or am I good only when I am sleeping.

A: The main point of "I need do nothing" is to help us change the pattern of our thinking. Practically all of the time, we think we know what our problems are, and then we just go about trying to solve them on our own. We define both the problem and the solution. We tell the Holy Spirit how to help us. Jesus is helping us to retrain our minds so that we will more consistently remember that all of our problems in the world and our bodies are made up by our decision-making minds in order to keep our attention away from the "real" problem, which is our choice to have the ego be our teacher instead of Jesus. We cannot make this shift if we do not stop and ask for help to perceive ourselves and our lives differently. Therefore, "I need do nothing" because there is no problem that needs attention.

However, the point is not to be inactive, but rather to shift the *purpose* of everything we do from the ego's to the Holy Spirit's purpose. We want to train ourselves to think about the new purpose for our lives,

which is to learn how to perceive our interests as the same as everyone else's -- to concentrate on the content, not the form of what we do. Our interactions with one another provide many opportunities to practice this, and they reflect back to us whether we have chosen to undo separation or to reinforce it. So withdrawing from interactions and activities is not usually helpful. It may be that you would have to stay away from specific people or groups for a while, just as a person involved with substance abuse might have to make behavioral changes at first. So "to do nothing" also means to do nothing on your own. Don't automatically assume that your perception of your problems is correct.

When you identify with the reflection of truth in your right mind, you might still be very active in the world, but you would not experience yourself as the one who is acting. The love that is in your right mind would flow through you as the source of all you do, and you would experience everyone as the same, both on the level of the ego and on the level of the Atonement.

Q #290: I would like to know the meaning of the word "unacceptable" in relation to body impulses in T.4.V.2:5. I do not understand what this is trying to convey.

A: It refers to anything the ego says is unacceptable. Examples would include sex and food -- whatever we tend to think is "bad," "harmful," "socially repulsive," "unethical," "unspiritual," etc.

Q #291: My question is on differences between *A Course in Miracles* and *The Pathwork*, a series of lectures channeled by Eva Pierrakos from a spiritual entity referred to as the Guide. I've been trying to apply the Pathwork teachings to my life for five years. The Guide's teachings, I believe, emphasize too much the importance of accepting ourselves exactly as we are -- not perfect. He says we are here (on Earth) to try to improve ourselves but we should never deny the fact that we are not perfect. In other words, accepting this fact is the first step on the way to become perfect. The Guide says that trying to identify ourselves with God without facing (or accepting) our shortcomings means to fool ourselves. If we want to get lost in God we must find ourselves first. These teachings have helped me know myself better but I don't think I have become a better person so far.

The Guide also mentions reincarnation in almost all his lectures. But when I found *A Course in Miracles* I became very confused and disappointed that the Jesus of the Course states that there is no reincarnation. Not because I wanted reincarnation to exist but because Jesus is denying something which the Guide speaks of so naturally, so sincerely, with such a wisdom, that I find it almost impossible not to believe in him. I think the same about Jesus (of the Course) but their teachings about reincarnation are exactly the opposite. I believe that truth is truth. How can I trust in Jesus or in the Guide if one of them is not speaking the truth?

A: Before addressing either of your concerns, it may be helpful to clarify what Jesus in the Course means when he speaks of the truth. There are really two levels of meaning of the truth that are important to understand if you are going to make sense of the Course. At the highest level of the teaching, Jesus asserts in the Course quite unequivocally that the thought of separation, as well as anything that follows from that thought, including the world of time, space and form, is illusory. Only the formless, unlimited Love of God is real and true. And Jesus means this quite literally.

But while this is ultimately true, Jesus also knows that this is not our experience, and so he speaks of what is true at a different, more practical level. Basically, any interpretation of any aspect of the world of time and space that helps us to practice forgiveness is true, while any interpretation that keeps us feeling guilty and fearful is false. Once we believe we are separate, individual selves, the issues that concern us, although ultimately illusory, are very real in our experience and need to be addressed in ways that are helpful to our healing.

Almost all other spiritual teachings only address concerns at the level of our experience in the world and do not make the ultimate distinction that Jesus does between what is real and what is illusory. They represent different paths from the Course, and it can become quite confusing to attempt to integrate their teachings with Jesus' teachings in the Course. At the level of form and concepts, spiritual paths may be different from and even contradict each other, but the only real truth is God, toward which all genuine spiritualities are leading, regardless of the specific forms and concepts they employ to lead one back.

So let's consider your second concern first -- about the difference between the Course and *The Pathwork* on reincarnation -- since that seems to have the more disturbing implications for you. **"In the ultimate sense,"** as we have just discussed, Jesus does say in the manual for teachers that **"reincarnation is impossible," (M.24.1:1)**, because it is a time-based phenomenon, and the Course says time is illusory. But if you read this same section in the manual carefully, you will see that Jesus does not deny the validity and usefulness of the concept of reincarnation at the level of our experience within time and space. That he does not simply dismiss it as untrue should be apparent from his other comments here. For example, in the same paragraph, in speaking of how the concept of reincarnation may be helpful, he observes that **"if it is used to strengthen the recognition of the eternal nature of life, it is helpful indeed" (M.24.1:6)**. But he also cautions that it can be misused to foster **"preoccupation and perhaps pride in the past"** and **"inertia in the present" (M.24.1:8,9,10)**. Later in the same section, Jesus also counsels against getting involved with unnecessary controversy around the concept **(M.24.3,4)**. But perhaps most helpful to resolve your personal conflict about Jesus' position on the concept is the explicit question he raises and addresses towards the end of the section: **"Does this mean that the teacher of God should not believe in reincarnation himself, or discuss it with others who do? The answer is, certainly not! If he does believe in reincarnation, it would be a mistake for him to renounce the belief unless his internal Teacher so advised. And this is most unlikely" (M.24.5:1,2,3,4; italics added)**.

So on the level of our experience in the world, Jesus and the Pathwork Guide may not be in such terrible disagreement about reincarnation as you have supposed. It is just that Jesus in the Course is attempting to lead us ultimately to a level that transcends any concern with linear time and individual lives. And it is because of this goal that many students have resistance to his teachings and continue to find it so difficult to practice forgiveness. But along the way, Jesus will use whatever concepts have meaning and significance for us in order to help us find our way back home. And so his focus with reincarnation, as already alluded to, is on how we use it to go beyond the body and this lifetime and not simply as a tool for exploring aspects of ourselves in relationship to other lifetimes.

Now to your initial concern about what you felt is the Pathwork's overemphasis on accepting ourselves as imperfect. In many ways, the Course's focus is similar and many students express a similar dissatisfaction with its emphasis on the ego -- it repeatedly encourages us to identify the negatives of the ego in our minds so that, with the Holy Spirit's help, they can be undone and released. The Course does say that we are already perfect -- as Christ -- but not as the ego selves we think we are. And so while we are not here to *improve* ourselves and *become* perfect, Jesus is asking us to uncover all the ways in which we continue to insist that our imperfections are real -- the sin, guilt and fear that we have made very real, first in our minds, and then in our world and our lives, to prove that the illusory thought of separation is in fact real. In Jesus' own words from his Course, **"Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all of the barriers within yourself that you have built against it. It is not necessary to seek for what is true, but it *is* necessary to seek for what is false" (T.16.IV.6:1,2)**.

For further discussion of the Course's perspective on reincarnation, you may wish to review [Questions #24](#) and [#153](#).

Q #292: What does *A Course in Miracles* say about loneliness? I have been feeling lonely very often in my life. Even in love relationships. I felt lonely as a child in my family and still do feel lonely very often in other family-like systems. How could I change my mind about feeling lonely?

A: The Course describes loneliness as an inevitable outcome of the thought of separation (**T.13.III.12:1; M.10:6:1,2,6**). Jesus adds emphasis to this causal relationship by describing God, as well as His Son, as lonely as a result of the separation -- in four different passages (**T.2.III.5:11,12; T.4.VII.6:7; T.7.VII.10:5,6,7; T.15.VIII.3:2**). Obviously, Jesus is using poetic license -- his purpose being to provide an alternative view of God's reaction to the thought of separation, in contrast to the ego's fearful assertion that God is *angry* because we left Him (see [Question #136](#) for more on this point). For God is unchanged by our insane thoughts and remains forever One and undivided.

If we are honest with ourselves, all of us who truly believe we exist in the separated state of individuality, limited by and contained within our bodies, and isolated from everyone else, must feel lonely. For who could not feel he is apart from love and not experience loneliness? In the words of the Course, **"As long as you perceive the body as your reality, so long will you perceive yourself as lonely and deprived"** (**T.15.XI.5:1**).

The ego insists that we can overcome our loneliness through the companionship of other bodies. But the joining we seek through physical proximity and intimacy in our special relationships can at best only dispel the painful feelings of isolation temporarily, for bodies can not really join, and the ego's real but hidden agenda is always to reinforce our belief in our guilt (**T.15.VII.12**). For seeking to be with others to take away our loneliness only gives support to the ego's lie that the separation is indeed real and that the body is our reality. For most of us, most of the time, the resulting loneliness is too excruciating, and so we seek to cover it over through denial, employing various distractions to keep us mindless. But we never question its premise -- the reality of the separation.

It is only through raising that question that the only solution to our loneliness can be found (**W.pl.41.1,2; W.pll.223.1**). And the answer is found through experiencing the joining of minds, not bodies. Then we learn that we are not really separate, for that joining is always available to us. Jesus, in the following very comforting passage, reminds us that he is always with us, and so loneliness cannot be real: **"I am come as a light into a world that does deny itself everything. It does this simply by dissociating [separating] itself from everything. It is therefore an illusion of isolation, maintained by fear of the same loneliness that is its illusion. I said that I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. That is why I am the light of the world. If I am with you in the loneliness of the world, the loneliness is gone. You cannot maintain the illusion of loneliness if you are not alone"** (**T.8.IV.2:1,2,3,4,5,6,7**).

Now we may doubt that the solution could be so simple, but Jesus assures us that it is. However, that does not mean that it is easy. Yet as we become more willing to see that our interests are not separate from our brothers and to release each of our judgments against both ourselves and others, Jesus and the love that he represents will become more real in our minds, and we will come to experience the truth of his words.

Q #293: In the text of *A Course in Miracles* it says: "Once you accept His purpose as the only one that you would fulfill, there is nothing else the Holy Spirit will not arrange for you without your effort..."; and in another place: "Leave all your needs to the Holy Spirit. He will supply them with no emphasis at all upon them"; and in the manual: "All the help you can accept will be provided, and not one need you have will not be met." I have been struggling to understand this in the context of the world in which I cannot make clients call, students sign up for workshops, or books to sell, yet need greater income. The challenge is in needing to "do nothing" in Course language, leave my needs to the Holy Spirit, and trust that "just" by forgiveness and a willingness to be at peace, my bills will be paid, particularly when I am surrounded by hundreds of people who slave for 40 hours a week or more. Am I copping out to just let the Holy Spirit take care of my needs, send me clients or sell my books, while I meditate and be happy?

A: There are other spiritual paths that teach and advocate that approach, but that is not what the Course teaches, even though the words you quoted, if taken literally, seem to mean that. The key idea is to

concentrate on the content, not the form. The content is that there is a loving, caring, comforting presence in our minds, not the punitive Divine Judge religions have taught us about, nor a Merlin-the-magician type presence conferring miracles on those he deems worthy. At the end of the clarification of terms in the section on the Holy Spirit, Jesus helps us take a step beyond that -- as he does in dozens of other places in the Course -- by teaching us to distinguish between form and content, experience and reality, and symbol and reality: **“He seems to be a Guide through a far country, for you need that form of help. He seems to be whatever meets the need you think you have. But He is not deceived when you perceive your self entrapped in needs you do not have. It is from these He would deliver you. It is from these that He would make you safe” (C.6.4:6,7,9,10).**

It is a question, then, of defining ourselves and our needs, and we will always be misled and entrapped if our starting point is that we truly exist as bodies in a physical world. However, if we remember that our seeming bodily life is a false identity having the purpose of concealing our true Identity as spirit, then our needs will be defined differently. We will recognize that our only real need is to awaken from the dream of separation and reunite with our true Self in Heaven, and that all the help we need to do that is already present within us. Forgiveness, then, becomes our only meaningful function while we still believe we are here **(T.25.VI.5:3)**; and the only meaningful prayer we could ever utter would be for forgiveness, because, as Jesus tells us, **“those who have been forgiven have everything” (T.3.V.6:3).**

So to accept the Holy Spirit's purpose means to see every aspect of your life as a classroom in which you can learn to identify what you are doing to block your awareness of love's presence, and then ask help of your Teacher to make another choice. Sharing His purpose, you would deal with the details and obligations of your life responsibly, while at the same time learning that the peace of God within you cannot be affected by anything that is going on externally. Attending to the details of our daily lives affords us endless opportunities to get beyond the form of our lives and to learn that we all share the same interests; we all share the same ego thought system and its correction in our right minds. This is our special function, and because of the way we have set up our lives, it is the most effective way of undoing the thought system of separation in our minds that is the ultimate cause of all our misery and unhappiness. To ask the Holy Spirit to fix what is wrong in our physical/psychological lives is to abdicate our responsibility for our unhappiness and thereby deprive ourselves of the only means we have of ever undoing our mistake and reuniting with the glorious Self of Christ that we all are.

The sections in the **“Song of Prayer”** pamphlet might give you additional help, especially the first one, **“True Prayer.”** Also, we have addressed similar issues in [Questions #72](#), [#116](#), [#259](#), and [#266](#).

Q #294: At some point do you see an elementary version of *A Course in Miracles* coming out? I would like to see children be able to read this Course, since being so young, they have less baggage to release. And children grasp ideas easier and have a clearer, purer understanding of things. Since this is a life-long course, why not start early learning the truth?

A: It's a common ego trap to fall into the thinking that this Course could be or should be for someone other than myself, whether it's a spouse, friends, politicians, children, etc. The trap is that it distracts me from simply applying its principles of forgiveness to myself and to all my relationships. If I do my part in the plan, releasing all my judgments, everything else will follow in whatever way is most helpful. But the plan is not of my own making, and even my best intentions to help others in their healing is really a subtle -- and sometimes not so subtle -- ego ploy for seizing control of the plan and putting myself in charge, thinking I know what needs to happen.

You are making a few assumptions about children that would not be consistent with the Course's metaphysical teachings. All of us, adult and child alike, share the same ego thought system. A child's mind is no purer than an adult's and no less burdened with the baggage of sin and guilt. The only difference is in the expression in form, not in the underlying content. So the Course would attribute the same full-blown ego to an infant, a child, a teenager and an adult. Each developmental stage simply

expresses the ego's underlying content in a different way -- generally more disguised and covertly as we "grow up" and are socialized to restrain our ego impulses. But the guilt that underlies the form is always the same until we are at a point where we begin to recognize that the world and all that it offers is not really anything we truly want. Usually, although not necessarily, this realization comes only with age and with disillusioning experience after disillusioning experience, as the world fails us in our expectations and we feel repeatedly victimized by forces outside of our control and want another way of being in the world.

The Course process is one of looking at all the judgments and hatred in our mind that we project out onto the world to keep ourselves mindless, accompanied by a willingness to release them to the light of forgiveness that interprets all those external situations differently. And the judgment and hate have their origins in the mind, before any individual life has begun, and not in our experiences in the world, no matter how much the world and our individual experience seem to insist to the contrary. Once we have done our part in getting ourselves out of the way, then we are available to be an instrument of forgiveness for all those other confused minds that see themselves as if they were at various stages in the process of human development.

When you speak of a more "elementary version of the Course," I assume you mean a version that minimizes the Course's more abstract metaphysical principles. But a teaching that does not use the Course's metaphysical foundation as an explicit and integral part of its message would no longer be the Course. There are many spiritual paths that may lend themselves to the kind of simplification you speak of, but the Course is not one of them. It is written very deliberately in the form that it is because it is intended for adults. Adults can best teach it to children by demonstrating its principles through how they live their lives and raise their children, without ever necessarily even mentioning any of its principles.

Q #295: My question concerns being there for family members and friends when they are attached to victimhood and ailments (a judgment, I know). I think I understand what true empathy is: to comfort on the level they are, not to speak to them of Course teachings, but also not to reinforce their pain by validating it and making it real. For some family members, illness equals attention.... What is the stance of *A Course in Miracles* on distancing ourselves from family and friends who are clearly not a supportive, positive influence on our lives? What do we do when they are in so much pain and so miserable and so attached to victimhood that they think it's everybody else's responsibility but theirs to change that? I'm stuck, please help.

A: One thing that might help you get unstuck is to try to get beyond the specifics and see that you share the very same ego that your friends and family do, but that you also all share the same right mind as well. Perhaps you express your wrong-minded thoughts in a different form; but the content is identical. They resort to a specific form of magic to ease their inner pain, but you would use a different form of magic. In view of that, your response to them would reflect how you must be responding to your own ego. You would be learning either that the ego is repulsive and has power to block love and peace, or that it is nothing but a "tiny, mad idea" having no power to change our reality as the invulnerable Son of God, and therefore it is deserving only of a gentle smile.

If you could get beyond the form of their complaints just for an instant -- **"Nothing so blinding as perception of form" (T.22.III.6:7)** -- you would hear their call for help and know that it is an echo of your own call for help. And then if you clearly knew that that call has already been answered with love, your ego would be out of the way, and you would just naturally -- and effortlessly -- do whatever is best for all concerned. There is no way of knowing ahead of time what that would be specifically, but it would just flow through you, and you would experience it as not coming from *you*. It might be that you would be guided to stay home and not visit, or to go and assist in some way. But you would take nothing personally. You would have no investment in their changing or being appreciative of your help; and you would feel energized, not drained and drenched with negativity afterward. Whenever you feel drained you have become personally involved -- identifying with victimization -- and more than likely have crossed over into sacrifice, which is always of the ego, because it expresses separation and a one-or-the-other

attitude. If there is conflict within you, then the message you are giving is that they are right about themselves, thus confirming their worst fears.

And finally, in that holy instant in which you are joined with the love of Jesus, you would not fall into the ego trap of thinking some illusions are more serious than others; you would clearly recognize that all illusions are the same in content.

The ideal that Jesus, our model and teacher, holds out to us is to be able to regard everything as either a call for love or an expression of love. If you could do that for your family and your friends, you would be doing it for yourself. The Course teaches us in many different ways that giving and receiving are the same. This takes a great deal of practice and a great deal of patience and gentleness with yourself, because it is a complete reversal of our usual thinking and behavior. But if you believed that each interaction had the potential to bring you closer to being one with the love of Jesus, you would approach them enthusiastically, not with dread. Do the best you can knowing that, in the end, your success in this is guaranteed. If you make a mistake, it doesn't matter; Jesus will help you correct it later.

For further study, you could look at the subsection **"The Function of the Teacher of God"** in the manual for teachers, under section 5, **"How Is Healing Accomplished?" (M.5.III)**.

Q #296: How do I know if I have crossed the bridge into the real world? Is it possible to cross over and come back? Can I get stuck half way across? Sometimes it seems like I am there. Sometimes not. Is there any sure sign, or sure signs, that I am there? How can I know without doubt or question that I am there? From what I know of ACIM, Jesus got there. Are there any other generally known people who have crossed to the real world?

A: When you have crossed the bridge into the real world, you will simply *know*, without doubt or question. Until such time, you go back and forth between the wrong-mind and the right-mind. That is why it may sometimes feel as if you are there, and sometimes not. And no, you cannot get stuck halfway across. However, you can certainly procrastinate, which may feel like being "stuck."

Regarding other people having crossed into the real world, it is almost impossible to tell on this level. Our guilt determines what we "see," so unless we are guilt-free, we would not recognize, with certainty, someone in the real world. Imagine being a witness to the crucifixion of Jesus, watching him go through the situation, and "seeing" him did so without pain, suffering, anger, or attack. Undoubtedly there were very few, if any, who "saw" the event in this way, because their guilt demanded they see it as has been written in the various gospel accounts. You may also want to refer to [Question #101](#) for further discussion on this subject.

Q #297: I found workbook Lesson 4 of *A Course in Miracles* difficult in that I have some very loving thoughts. For instance, if I walk down the street and see a stranger who for a moment looks in my eyes and there is a sudden feeling of "real" connection am I to tell myself that this thought means nothing? Isn't this a moment of true reality? I'm confused.

A: First, the early part of the workbook is primarily about helping us undo our wrong-minded thoughts, which is not to say that we do not have right-minded thoughts. The focus, though, is mostly on our wrong-minded thoughts. The thrust of these early lessons is to have us understand that there is an inner world and an outer world, and that the outer world is the projection of the inner world. Jesus is helping us begin the process of learning that we are not who we think we are, and reality is not what we think it is. He does not want us to settle for anything less than our true inheritance as God's Son. Thus, he says in **Lesson**

4 that our “good” thoughts are “but shadows of what lies beyond, and shadows make sight difficult.” Our “real thoughts” are being covered by both our “good” and “bad” thoughts. The shadow would become meaningless if we were to value only that of which it is the shadow; and that is where Jesus is leading us.

You do not describe that “feeling of ‘real’ connection” in any detail, nor do you say anything about what followed the experience. Speaking in general, then, that feeling could be of the ego (specialness) or of the Holy Spirit (we are all one). As a right-minded “connection,” it would be a shadow of your real thoughts, which have nothing to do with this world or this body. In the holy instant when we no longer perceive separation, we experience a *reflection* of true reality, but true reality is only of Heaven. Again, that is where Jesus is leading us. Why would we want a reflection or a shadow, when we can have the reality itself?

Q #298: Why have lilies become the symbol for forgiveness and not any other flower?

A: Lilies traditionally are associated with Easter -- the time of resurrection and awakening. And as white, they have symbolized purity and innocence. Therefore, they make a wonderful symbol of forgiveness, which restores to us the awareness of our innocence, the prerequisite for awakening from the ego's dream of death.

Q #299: Do you know anything more about the experience of the happy dreams in life? Is this a kind of process reversing our life, leading us out, undoing and healing of what has led us into the ego-experience? Can one damage or destroy this process and entirely return back to the ego or another ego? Does one recognize the end?

A: These are questions that many students think about. It is helpful to remember that we are always involved in undoing something that never really occurred, and therefore the journey on which Jesus is leading us will conclude in our acceptance of that. So even though he maps out a strategy with various steps and stages, he knows that all of it is totally illusory. The *happy dreams* spoken of in the Course refer to the experience in our minds of no longer being identified with the world and bodies; we would be identified with the Holy Spirit's correction of our mistaken thoughts and choices. We would take nothing seriously in our personal lives or in the world, in the sense that we would know that our peace could never be affected by anything external. We would know -- experientially -- that there is no reality other than the love of Jesus in our minds, which would then be the source of all that we do. In that respect, we would be at the end of the process of reversing our choice to be separate, thereby undoing and healing what led us into the ego experience. In that state, we would not be vacillating anymore, which means there is no wrong mind, nor even a decision-making part of the mind. We revert to an ego state only when we still value separate interests over shared interests. It is always a question of what we truly want and whether we are willing to pay the price of being separate. Our true Self is never affected by our choice to deny that Identity and instead be a self in the world, but we will be paying a heavy price to take on and maintain that false identity. Jesus helps us see that our lives are a result of a choice and that it has been a costly one -- to us.

Q #300: When I give an antibiotic to a patient, I may be joining with this patient on the level which he can accept. But in doing this I am attacking the germs (who made him sick, so he believes). Attacks are never justified. Sometimes it seems to me that joining with one person (the patient) means attacking someone else (the germs). What then can I do?

A: A good question, suggesting that you desire to consider fully the implications of separate vs. shared interests, not merely limiting your focus to *homo sapiens*. And to add to the apparent dilemma, consider that with every breath we take, we are inhaling untold numbers of microorganisms to certain death. And that with each hand-washing or shower, whether we aggressively use antibacterial soap or not, we are inflicting large-scale slaughter on uncountable numbers of tiny organisms that apparently just happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. And of course, to keep ourselves alive with food and drink, innumerable lives have to be sacrificed daily in the vegetable and animal kingdom. The way of the world is death, and murder seems to be unavoidable. The world of form has been made from the belief in conflict in the mind, giving apparent reality to the principle of “one or the other.” At the level of form, bodies and the world, conflict is unavoidable, despite our best intentions to eliminate or minimize it.

That is why *A Course in Miracles* invites our focus to be on purpose or content and not form. When we act from an ego-based orientation that sees separate interests, our purpose is always attack -- regardless of our overt behavior -- which always reinforces the guilt in our minds. When we shift to the Holy Spirit's perspective of shared interests, joining with the Sonship as a whole becomes our purpose, regardless of the actions we seem to be taking. And that is why Jesus asks us to join with him in our minds (**e.g., T.14.V.9; T.15.III.11; T.15.VI.6:10; 7:1,2,5,6**) -- before we seek to join with our brothers whom we still see as bodies -- whatever form of life they may seem to be. On our own, we always join from a belief that we are separate, while joining with Jesus in our minds helps us develop the recognition that we have never been separate -- a statement that can only make sense on the level of mind and ideas. Jesus knows what we believe, but he also knows that everything we believe we see is all made up and that death and destruction are not real. And so Jesus teaches us that we need to change our minds, not our behavior (**T.2.VI.3**). With that shift from the ego to Jesus as our teacher, we will know that nothing that is real is ever affected by changes in the inconstant world of bodies, including death. And thus the guilt we have been holding onto over our belief in separation diminishes over time, allowing each of us to be an increasingly clear channel of forgiveness for the mind of the Sonship as a whole, encompassing all the seeming fragments that we have experienced as individual “living” entities.

Q #301: What does it mean to give something a name? Could you explain why one then gets power over it?

A: To give something a name is to establish its identity. It is a way of bestowing “reality” on someone or something. In other words, if I determine who you are, I make that definition of you real in my mind, which means *I make you who you are*. That is the power of giving something a name. It is the nature of the separation to name everything and everyone, herein lies the power of naming: **You have made up names for everything you see. Each one becomes a separate entity, identified by its own name. By this you carve it out of unity. By this you designate its special attributes, and set it off from other things by emphasizing space surrounding it. This space you lay between all things to which you give a different name; all happenings in terms of place and time; all bodies which are greeted by a name” (W.184.1:2,3,4,5,6).** This is the ego's misuse of creative power. Naming things and people in this way is actually denying their true identity. It is a way of saying: “You are who I say you are, not who God says you are.” *A Course in Miracles* tells us that whatever names the ego uses to identify all things it makes, unless they are seen in the light of truth they remain nameless.

One of the most important goals we have as students of the Course is to allow our definition of ourselves to be undone. We have all given ourselves the same name: “sinner.” When we are willing to question this, and recognize that we do not know who we are, we realize that we do not know our name. As we let go of all the names we call ourselves, and ask the Holy Spirit to teach us who we are, along with everyone and everything in the dream, we will become open to accepting that it is God's creative power that establishes our identity. We are who He says we are, and so we have another name: “God's innocent Son.” His Name is the Name we share: **“A father gives his son his name, and thus identifies the son with him. His brothers share his name, and thus are they united in a bond to which they turn for their**

identity. Your Father's Name reminds you who you are, even within a world that does not know; even though you have not remembered it" (W.183.1:3,4,5).

Q #302: In chapter two of the text of *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus says. "...it is almost impossible to deny its (the body's) existence in this world. Those who do so are engaging in a particularly unworthy form of denial." Then in the workbook, lesson 199, he says to tell ourselves today and every day "I am not a body. I am free." How can I do the lesson, keeping in mind the statement from the text? Also Ken says that awakening from this dream is a process and we should not try to skip over steps. It seems saying "I am not a body. I am free." is trying to skip over steps. What is Jesus up to here?

A: There are some points to keep in mind so that we can recognize Jesus' purpose in saying things and asking us to do things that may seem to contradict each other in different parts of the Course. He knows our resistance to his message is still great and that we will not be open to everything he has to say. Yet it would be a disservice to us if he were not, at the same time, very direct about just where he is attempting to lead us and did not exhort us to join him in his way of looking at things, for he knows so much more than we do.

That Jesus knows we will resist his more radical teachings is evident near the end of the introduction to the workbook when he observes, **"Some of the ideas the workbook presents you will find hard to believe, and others may seem to be quite startling. This does not matter. You are merely asked to apply the ideas as you are directed to do. You are not asked to judge them at all. You are asked only to use them. It is their use that will give them meaning to you, and will show you that they are true. Remember only this; you need not believe the ideas, you need not accept them, and you need not even welcome them. Some of them you may actively resist. None of this will matter, or decrease their efficacy" (W.in.8:1,2,3,4,5,6; 9:1,2,3; italics added).** And earlier, towards the end of the text, as he instructs us on how make decisions to have the day we really want, he cautions us, **"If you find resistance strong and dedication weak, you are not ready. Do not fight yourself (T.30.I.1:6,7).**

And so Jesus presents us his uncompromising and challenging teachings while at the same time acknowledging that we may not be ready to accept them and that it will take time (e.g., **W.pII.284**). But he also knows that if we will just allow him to get his foot in the door to our closed mind, before we know it, we will be on the other side with him. And that is because there is already a part of our mind that knows and has accepted what he is leading us toward, but if we felt we really had no choice, our resistance would be that much greater. So a lesson such as Lesson 199 should be seen as an invitation to accept a different perspective on ourselves and the world, but never as a call to deny what we continue to experience as our reality, false as it may be.

Q #303: My question is about grace. I'm working on Lesson 168-9 of *A Course in Miracles*...which says grace is not learned and grace is not the goal this course aspires to attain....grace is the means to get vision first with knowledge but an instant later...I'm just trying to understand exactly what grace is and how one should try to attain it.

A: In the **"Glossary-Index for A Course in Miracles"** by Kenneth Wapnick, grace is defined as **"our natural state as spirit"** and **"an aspect of God's love in this world" (p.46).** It may be helpful in reading passages in the Course which use the term grace, such as the Lessons you mention, to remember it is referring to the truth of who we are as spirit, and the reflection of God's love present in our minds: **"Spirit is in a state of grace forever. Your reality is only spirit. Therefore you are in a state of grace forever" (T.1.III.5:4,5,6).** Grace is not, therefore, something that needs to be attained, nor can it be taught or learned. It is simply the truth that will be revealed of its own when we no longer believe in our guilty, sinful selves identified with the body. Our goal is to become aware of our true identity as

spirit because it is what God created us to be. God's grace, His gift, is the identity we share with Him. The process of forgiveness, whereby we uncover all the hidden beliefs about ourselves that are in opposition to this truth, is what will lead us to the awareness of this identity and acceptance of His grace.

In other places, however, grace is spoken about somewhat differently. Grace is vision in that it is awareness of our natural state. In the passage you refer to, the Course tells us that the vision of who we are in truth will be followed instantly by knowledge of our Oneness with God, and in that instant awareness of the world disappears. That is our goal, that is grace. It is **"an aspect of God's love in this world" (Glossary, p.46)** because our minds hold the memory of God's love and the memory of our true identity as spirit, God's innocent Son. Whenever we are willing to choose to identify with this part of our minds, rather than with the ego, we accept the grace that is ours: **"Grace is acceptance of the Love of God within a world of seeming hate and fear" (W.pl.169.2:1).**

Q #304: I keep thinking about what *A Course in Miracles* refers to as the "authority" problem. I understand it to mean that there is a constant struggle within me between what I believe is the "reason" for being here and for my life, and what God "believes" is the reason for my being here and for my life. Unfortunately -- like most concepts the Course teaches -- I have a feeling my understanding is missing the mark. Am I even close?

A: Actually, you are not far off the mark at all. Someone once said: "If God is your co-pilot, switch seats!" Jesus tells us that the problem is much deeper than that: **"The authority problem is still the only source of conflict, because the ego was made out of the wish of God's Son to father Him. The ego, then, is nothing more than a delusional system in which you made your own father" (T.11.in.2:3,4).** This obviously is insane, as Jesus himself remarks in the continuation of that passage; yet we continue to allow this conflict to rage in our minds and to project itself out all over the place in many forms, because we believe that to submit to God as our Author and Source would be a sentence of death. Or at the very least, we could not exist as we would like to.

Jesus explains: **"The projection of the ego makes it appear as if God's Will is outside yourself, and therefore not yours. In this interpretation it seems possible for God's Will and yours to conflict. God, then, may seem to demand of you what you do not want to give, and thus deprive you of what you want....You are afraid to know God's Will, because you believe it is not yours. This belief is your whole sickness and your whole fear" (T.11.9:1,2,3; 10:3,4).**

So to the extent that you value an individual, autonomous existence, you will unconsciously believe that you usurped God's power in order to get and keep that existence and that He is coming after you to get it back. This is the one-or-the-other principle at the heart of the ego thought system, and fear is its unfortunate consequence. **"To deny His Authorship is to deny yourself the reason for your peace, so that you see yourself only in segments. This strange perception is the authority problem" (T.3.VI.10.6,7).**

Q #305: Does "I need do nothing" mean that it's not OK to consciously try to develop new habits to replace the old fear based ones, like avoiding eye contact or speaking softly or giving up too soon, etc....How can I get over these things if I don't do anything about them? Lesson 135 in *A Course in Miracles* says that planning for things is a defense and should be avoided. However, I feel that if I don't plan or practice ahead of time I won't be able to function: I won't know what to say or do when the moment arises. I am really quite stalled here. Perhaps I am misinterpreting all of this. Can you somehow clear this up for me?

A: When *A Course in Miracles* says: **“I need do nothing except not to interfere” (T.16.I.3:12)** it is telling us primarily *not to interfere*, because that is what we do. It is not telling us to do nothing in the world or with the body. We need do nothing to be who we are (God’s Son), except remove all the beliefs that oppose that truth. That is why the Course describes the ego thought system in all its diverse forms and expressions. Lesson 135 of the workbook is a very good example of this. It exposes the defense system that is set in motion when the mind chooses to identify with the body. In no way does it suggest that any of the defenses or behaviors should be changed or avoided. That is not its goal. The goal of the Course is clearly expressed in the following instruction: **“...seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world”(T.21.in.7:1).** We can paraphrase this important line replacing “the world” with “the body,” “your behavior,” “your habits,” “your defenses.” This is a Course in mind training, and *nothing else*. Understanding this distinction is essential to understanding, and more importantly, applying the principles of the Course.

Whenever the Course describes all the things we do as bodies, and the beliefs we hold, it does not tell us not to do them, nor not to believe them. It teaches by showing us the contrast between the effect of the ego belief system (pain) with the effect of the Holy Spirit’s thought system (peace). It tells us that what we do on the level of form neither causes nor resolves the problem of the separation on the level of the mind. Therefore, changing your behavioral habits because it will make you feel better about yourself is just as acceptable as any of the things we do to take care of our bodies, our houses, or our cars. As long as we believe we are bodies living in the world these things must be maintained in working order, and taken care of as best we see fit.

Until our minds are healed of all belief in the separation and in our identity as bodies, our only goal must be to uncover all our hidden beliefs so they can be exchanged for the belief system of the Holy Spirit. Then the mind that is free of guilt will use the body, as described in this lesson, without defenses. This does not mean that the body will then be perfect, or not need food, or sleep, or eye glasses. It means the mind will not confuse itself with the body and will not look to it for safety or for anything. In the process of healing, we are not asked not to plan, or to try to live as if our minds were healed while they are still sick. It is always important in reading the Course to remember that it is addressing the decision making part of the mind. We are asked to choose which teacher we will consult in making our plans. The Holy Spirit tells us that as we make our plans we can remember to search our minds for all of the insane beliefs that interfere with our being able to allow His wisdom to lead us to our truth.

Webmaster’s note: see also questions [#293](#) [#289](#) [#90](#).

Q #306: I have been studying *A Course in Miracles* for about 14 years now and lately I keep thinking about dying. It comes to my mind all the time. It’s not particularly scary; but why all this preoccupation with death?

A: It is not unusual to have thoughts of death become more frequent as you diligently work with Jesus in undoing your ego. The part of you that is identified with the ego -- and has been for ages -- will experience itself as “dying.” Actually, all that is happening is that you are withdrawing your belief in the ego thought system. **“As you approach the Beginning, you feel the destruction of your thought system upon you as if it were the fear of death. There is no death, but there is a belief in death” (T.3.VII.5:9,10).** A major part of the process involves shifting your sense of who you truly are, so it would be evident that the “you” that is withdrawing the belief and has chosen Jesus as its teacher is not what is “dying.” That decision-making part of your mind is simply choosing to identify no longer with a false identity, but with the reflection of its true Self represented in your right mind by the Atonement principle.

The preoccupation with death should diminish and finally disappear when there is no more fear of letting go of your identity as an individual. Without knowing more about you, though, we do not know whether this is the only source of the thoughts. In general, we would recommend consulting with a professional if these death thoughts persist for an extended period of time.

Q #307: I have been studying *A Course in Miracles* for over a year now. For the last few months, I have been having this strange and wonderful feeling -- my body starts physically vibrating during my morning and night meditations. I feel like something inside me is about to take off, like an airplane, a kind of inner weightlessness. After my meditation, I feel great and full of energy. But sometime this feeling that I am experiencing makes me think and think again. I wonder if other students are or have experienced the same thing I am. I also wonder if it is okay to feel that way.

A: Although a variety of explanations could be offered to account for your experience with your body, all you need to know is that our own minds translate any experience of abstract love, such as we may experience in meditation, into a form that we can accept, since our ego-identified minds fear the abstract. At times the form may be, as you are experiencing, sensations in your body that you find pleasant, even pleasurable. What will be most helpful to remember as you have such experiences is that you want to be willing to let go of any judgments you may have about them as either good or not good. Or any thoughts to make a big deal out of them. If you enjoy the experience, there is certainly nothing wrong with that. You just don't want to make an altar to the experience and then seek after that, for, as wonderful as it may seem, it still falls far short of what Jesus is holding out to us in his Course. For it is still only a specific symbol, a temporary form, through which you are allowing yourself to feel his healing comfort and unlimited love.

For a related discussion, see [Question #181](#).

Q #308: I'm not sure how to present this question, because anything I say will most likely be projection and/or an area of my own unrecognized guilt, some unconscious need for drama, to be a victim or martyr, some call for help in me. But please elaborate the Course's position as to why there is hatred and often times cruelty from others when the *A Course in Miracles* becomes one's path. This has been my path since 1986 and I don't thrust it upon others. If I am asked, I will talk about it. When I ask for help I often don't hear the answer or I'm too upset and caught up in fear.

A: First of all, it will be helpful to distinguish others' feelings and reactions from your own. For your own reactions are all that you ever really need to be concerned with. Any thought system which so uncompromisingly threatens the ego thought system, as the Course does, will have to be perceived as threatening to anyone who is still identified with the ego. So, as you work with the Course, whether you speak to others of its principles or not, they at some level will have to recognize the difference in you in those moments when you are practicing forgiveness and are identified with your right mind. And if they are threatened by that, then hatred and cruelty -- among a variety of ego reactions -- are "natural" and not unexpected responses to protect their ego identity. As Jesus points out, **"frightened people can be vicious" (T.3.I.4:2)**.

None of this really has anything to do with you or your own lessons in forgiveness, unless you in turn react to their reactions to you. For you are now in your wrong mind and are identifying with the guilt there over separation and attack on God that you believe is real. But this is nothing to feel embarrassed or apologetic about. All of us who still believe we are here in this world in the body have unhealed minds that believe in the reality of our own guilt. And any experience that allows us to get in touch with that guilt -- which will automatically be projected outward onto others if we are not aware of its origin in our own mind -- can be very helpful. So bless your brothers for being the screens for your own projections, for when you react to them with upset and fear, feeling like a victim or a martyr, you are uncovering what your ego has wanted to keep hidden from you, if you are willing to look at it that way. And whenever you remember and are ready, you can look at the no-longer-buried guilt with Jesus or the Holy Spirit, who will remind you that it is all made-up. You may initially be unable to access this help when you are in the middle of the confrontation with someone else, but the only thing that matters is that, at some point in time, you

remember you have a different choice about how you can perceive that interaction. And that opens the door to the help that is always available to us.

Q #309: It keeps being emphasized in the answers here that we need to bring our ego thoughts to the love of Jesus in our right minds. How do we know we are doing that? What I mean is that it's not like talking to someone in human form where you can see them and hear them and speak directly with them and know you are doing it.

A: Although we can never be certain in any moment if we have turned our minds away from the ego and joined with Jesus, one of the clearer indications is when we feel a release from the heaviness and strain of the judgments we have been holding onto. For that in the end is all that forgiveness is and, whether or not we are conscious of joining with Jesus, we have when we let go of our thoughts of condemnation and attack. When we are honest with ourselves, we can always be aware of the tension we are holding (in our minds, projected onto our bodies) when we are judging, whether it is the negative judgment of hatred and repulsion or the so-called positive judgment of desire and attraction -- the feeling that someone or something outside of us is what we want and need. Tension in all its myriad manifestations is always a signal of conflict and separation, whether we interpret it as good or bad.

Jesus is not really a separate entity or being like your mother or a best friend, but rather is simply a presence we can experience, whom we can relate to in our minds, at a personal level, while we still believe we are persons. You perhaps have had the experience as you read his words in *A Course in Miracles* that Jesus is there with you and that he really is speaking to you. Don't let your ego fool you into believing that is only your imagination. That experience is more real than all the experiences with other bodies that we seek after to stave off our loneliness. Joining and peace occur in the mind, and not between bodies. That is why we can feel very lonely despite being surrounded by others, if our thoughts are of separation and isolation. And we can feel quite content and complete just thinking of someone who is not physically present whose love and acceptance we are sure of. Jesus wants us to know that, no matter the vagaries and vacillations of worldly love, his love is always constant, always there. In those moments when we doubt it, we can simply pick up his book and read his words and his promises. There are many, but consider this one passage from the very end of the workbook: **"You do not walk alone. God's angels hover near and all about. His Love surrounds you, and of this be sure; that I will never leave you comfortless"** (W.ep.6:6,7,8).

Q #310: I have been a student of *A Course in Miracles* for over 10 years, and I recently entered a Doctoral Program in Clinical Psychology. One of the difficulties I have is that I am learning psychological material that is often at odds with the Course. On an intellectual level, I understand and can accept the distinctions. However sometimes I can't, and this causes me some frustration. I worry about how to help another, although I also recognize where the answer lies -- to turn and trust in the Holy Spirit. I even understand that much of what I am learning can be helpful if placed under the direction of the Holy Spirit -- the problem is that I often forget. I guess my question is: if I'm inclined toward a particular psychological orientation and practice, say psychoanalysis or narrative therapy, is it okay to follow my interest, but with the Holy Spirit as guide?

A: It is never the form but only the content that can ever conflict with the Course. In other words, it is the purpose for which you use the particular psychological orientation and practice that determines whether or not it will be at odds with the Course, and not

its particular theoretical model of mental illness and health, with its specific applications. Use it for ego purposes, and you will judge and attack the differences it helps you identify between yourself and your clients. Use it for the Holy Spirit's purpose and you will see it as a means for uncovering the ego's patterns and plots and schemes and connivings, both in your client and in yourself, so that they can be released to the healing light of forgiveness.

So study whatever therapeutic model appeals to you and become as good at its practice as you possibly can. For training in the symbols of the world enables you to accept a teaching role in the plan for the healing of the Son's mind (**W.pl.184.9:1,2**). Just never forget that the only true healing comes from the one Therapist Who knows no healing is necessary. Your role is to become an instrument for that healing by first allowing your own guilt and attack thoughts to be healed. When your own blocks have been removed, the healing love can then simply flow through you (**T.9.V.7,8**).

Q #311: It is obvious that Helen and Bill had specific, individual purposes in bringing *A Course in Miracles* to the world, besides the purpose we all share, which is to forgive and to wake up to knowing ourselves as the one Son of God. I can presume, as the Course says, that we all have an individual part to play in God's plan for salvation; but does that also mean a part in the world?

A: Since the Course teaches that the world is an illusion, made by the mind of the separated Son as an attack on God (**W.pl.155.2:1, W.pll.3.2:1**), it follows that it would *not* tell us that God's plan for salvation means we have a specific role to play in the world as individuals. It is important to remember that the Course is addressing the mind; specifically, the decision making part of the mind, because nothing exists outside of it: **"Mind reaches to itself. It is *not* made up of different parts, which reach each other. It does not go out. Within itself it has no limits, and there is nothing outside it. It encompasses everything. It encompasses you entirely; you within it and it within you. There is nothing else, anywhere or ever"**

(**T.18.VI.8:5,6,7,8,9,10,11**). Every reference to our role or function in the world, therefore, must be interpreted with these metaphysical principles in mind. There is only one role assigned to us by God: to be His innocent Son. The Holy Spirit's function is healing the mind of the thought of separation, and our only function is accepting this healing through forgiveness. Many passages in the Course seem to imply that each individual has a specific and unique role from God: **"To each He (the Holy Spirit) gives a special function in salvation he alone can fill; a part for only him"** (**T.25.VI.4:2**), (See also: **T.25.VI.7**). However, this "part" is to accept the Atonement *for himself*. It is "special," in other words "specific," because we have chosen to identify with our individual bodies in the illusion, and have assigned different roles to ourselves, and to every body. Although these specifics (being a son, daughter, parent, teacher, nurse, CEO) are irrelevant to the outcome, they are important because they make up the classroom the Holy Spirit uses to teach us the truth about ourselves. Each part of the

Sonship, therefore, has to play his part by accepting the Atonement "as an individual" in his specific classroom and, as you mention, by ultimately accepting his only role and identity as God's Son.

Q #312: I just finished a meditation on why I haven't had an intimate relationship for so long. Most of the reasons that occurred to me were ego-based. The one I didn't think was ego-based was that I'm just too lazy to put in all the effort it takes. I don't know if this is an appropriate question to be asking, but I think about relationships a lot and I don't seem to be able to help it. I know the Course says that special relationships are just a device to keep you away from the truth and I notice that the *A Course in Miracles* never addresses the issue of sex or sexuality directly, but I must ask for some guidance here. I have these desires and I don't feel like they're being met. It's hard for me to believe that it's wrong to have these feelings. I'm becoming very frustrated with my life and with this Course. Am I misinterpreting something? I think I must be missing something? Can you help?

A: Yes, it does sound like you're doing some misinterpreting. By the way, you don't say what the other thoughts were that came to you in your meditation about having an intimate relationship, but the one you mention still sounds ego-based -- like someone's mother making a judgment! Rest assured, Jesus or the Holy Spirit do not sound like our mothers' nagging! And the truth is that fear is more likely the reason you're not experiencing an intimate relationship, whatever answers you think you heard.

It's true special relationships were made by the ego to distract us from the Holy Spirit's answer -- the Course refers to them as **"the ego's most boasted gift" (T.16.V.3:1)** -- for they hold out the hope that we can find in someone else the special love that God could never give us **(T.16.V.4)**. But once we seem to find ourselves in the world of separation, the Course does not teach that special relationships are to be avoided or given up. On the contrary, they become the necessary classrooms in which we learn our forgiveness lessons. In Jesus' own words, **"I have said repeatedly that the Holy Spirit would not deprive you of your special relationships, but would transform them (T.17.IV.2:3).**

So while the Course is telling us that our special relationships -- and that would include ones involving sex and physical intimacy -- won't bring us the joy of Heaven, nowhere in the Course does Jesus say that those feelings are wrong or bad or sinful. And furthermore, through our participation in those relationships, we have the opportunity to heal the guilt in our minds that we have projected on to them. It could be that we feel victimized either by the special relationships we are in or have been in, or by the fact that we are not now in the ones we believe we want. In the end, the different forms are all the same, but along the way, our part is merely to be willing to be open to the relationships that are already a part of our lives. For each one, whether or not it involves physical intimacy, will offer us an opportunity to find the love that has always been ours, just buried and hidden beneath the guilt and sin in our own minds.

You may wish to ask then, not for a specific relationship, but for help in releasing the guilt and the fear that seem to be preventing you from experiencing love. You may be surprised at what opportunities show up in your life when you have that willingness, but don't make the mistake of deciding and defining in advance what those opportunities should look like. Trust that we always find what we need to practice our forgiveness lessons, as we are ready to take our next steps.

You may find Ken Wapnick's recent tape on "Form vs Content: Sex and Money" of value in thinking about your issues around relationships. You may also wish to take a look at [Question #184](#) for a related discussion.

Q #313: I have just realized, with somewhat of a shock, that a series of events that happened in my life -- loss of friends, my job, my home -- about five years ago seems to be playing itself out again in the same way, under similar circumstances. Everything seems to be falling apart.

I don't want to repeat this because what followed five years ago was the bleakest, loneliest, poverty-stricken period of my life. I feel like I'm the victim of some big reality con and there seems to be nothing I can do to stop it and I'm terrified. It seems that my ego is trying to protect itself by massively intensifying its attack in order to stop me from letting it go by creating bad circumstances in my life. Is there anything I can do to stop what is happening? A friend has suggested that the first time this happened, maybe I should have chosen to go in a particular life direction but didn't and so now circumstances are repeating themselves so I can make the right choice this time. Maybe I'm getting carried away over nothing but if things do fall apart again and I can't change them, it would be nice to have some inner peace with what is happening.

A: You do not say whether you are a student of *A Course in Miracles*, but your hunch as to what your ego may be up to suggests you have more than a passing knowledge of the Course's principles. The Course itself says that **"trials are but lessons that you failed to learn presented once again, so where you made a faulty choice before you now can make a better one, and thus escape all pain that what you chose before has brought to you" (T.31.VIII.3:1)**. But it is always and only ever talking about the *content* of our own perceptions of others, and the pain those judgments bring, and *not the specific form* of events as they seem to play out in our lives. And there is nothing in the Course that says you must repeat the cycle of pain and suffering until you get it right, as if there were some kind of karmic debt to be paid. This may be true within the ego thought system, but the whole purpose of the Course is to expose the insanity of the ego so we can make a choice for sanity against that thought system.

So what is to be done? What we all must learn to do is to make conscious our own inner decision to see ourselves as guilty sinners who deserve to be punished for all of our transgressions, beginning with our supposed attack on our Father Who only extends His Love to us. That we believe down deep that we have attacked love is true, but we need

to bring that belief into our awareness so we can question its validity, as well as the suffering and pain we believe it calls for. For there is no inevitability to the events of our lives. And even more to the point, there is no inevitability to the interpretation we give to the events of our lives. In other words, we may feel victimized by what seems to be happening to us in our lives, but that interpretation of victimization is nothing but that -- an interpretation. And if we're willing to accept our role in giving that interpretation to external events, then we can join with Jesus and allow him to offer a different interpretation in which no one is guilty, including, and especially, ourselves.

So if you can begin to recognize that it is your ego that is fanning your fears about the future, based on a faulty premise about yourself, you can begin to question whether you want to continue to listen to that voice. For that voice never wishes any of us well (**T.15.VII.4:3**). But there is another Voice, once you dismiss the ego's, that only ever wills your perfect happiness (**W.pl.101**).

Q #314: A problem that will not go away, no matter what I do, concerns evil in people in my life: abuse, neglect, selfishness. I want to forgive, but in all honesty I cannot, because inside I am angry and I hate evil. Prayer gives me lots of affirmation of love. I want this love from people. I am also afraid of people. How can I pass through this wall that obstructs my peace?

A: This type of situation is usually difficult to work through. It requires a great deal of patience and gentleness with yourself. Forgiveness, of course, never means that you deny the "objective facts" -- the abuse, neglect, and selfishness. It asks that you bring your anger and your feelings of victimization to the loving, non-judgmental presence within you, and just observe yourself holding others responsible for your lack of peace. If you try to forgive when you really don't want to, you are fighting yourself and you will wind up feeling more guilty, which is not a kind thing to do to yourself. Holding on to blame and anger is not sinful and has no effect on Jesus' love for you; it just prevents you from being peaceful and experiencing that love, as you already know. That is all.

When you are in touch with your feelings about evil, you might remember Jesus' advice to us concerning the original choice to separate ourselves from God: **"Call it not sin but madness, for such it was and so it still remains. Invest it not with guilt, for guilt implies it was accomplished in reality. And above all, be not afraid of it"** (**T.18.I.6:7,8,9**). If you hate evil, you are afraid of it and have forgotten that when love looks on it, it sees only a tiny, mad idea having no power to affect love in any way. That means that the truth about you has been untouched by what you have perceived as evil in others. The part of you that is afraid of that truth continues to see evil as real and powerful, and capable of making you weak.

Finally, a therapist or counselor might help you recover some of your inner strength and work with you on your fear of relationships. You could then look at the deeper issues and apply the principles of *A Course in Miracles*.

Q #315: I have a problem relating to other people. When I speak with them I feel like a stone and the situation seems to be so unrealistic. I feel embarrassed when people speak to me, or they want anything, or when I believe that I did something wrong. How can I deal with this situation? I perceive that it is my fear of Jesus and a defense against my inner guilt, but I feel so helpless.

A: Yes, your difficulty relating to other people is probably coming from your inner guilt. Guilt results in a poor self-image that makes you feel inferior to others and afraid of them. Just keep working on your lessons and ask for help in releasing your guilt. Be gentle with yourself and be confident that there is a loving, healing presence within you that sees beyond your guilt and fear. Manage your anxiety as best you can. Then, as you feel better about yourself, the anxiety will gradually disappear.

You might also consider getting help from a professional counseling service. They often have effective ways of helping you with your self-esteem and self-image.

Q #316: Lesson 184 paragraph 8 begins with: "Think not you made the world. Illusions, yes!" I have been studying *A Course in Miracles* for sometime and was under the understanding that God did not create the world, but we did as the ego. We, the ego, made (*miscreated*) the world in which to express our separateness. Paragraph 8 seems to say that we did not make the world, but we make the illusions we see that are not like God (the pain, suffering, lack, even love, etc.). What is the Course referring to as the world and what did God create and what did the ego create?

A: God creates only like Himself. Therefore His creations are the extension of His infinite Love and eternal Life. They are in Heaven, which is the state of perfect Oneness, and they have nothing to do with this finite world, nor can they be understood in terms of anything in this world, because this world was generated by the thought that God has been destroyed (an impossibility, of course).

The world we did *not* make is the real world. The Holy Spirit is the maker of the real world, which is the summation of His teaching us that the world is a classroom in which we learn that all this is an illusion. In the section called "**Perception and Choice**" in the text, Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as the "**Maker of the world**," with a capital M (**T.25.III.4,5,8**). In those passages, it is unmistakably clear that the "**Maker of the world**" is the Maker of the real world. And the Holy Spirit is called Maker, not creator, because He makes an illusion. The real world is an illusion, but it is a helpful illusion. Thus when Jesus says, "**Think not you made the world. Illusions, yes!**" he is not talking about the illusion that forgiveness is. The point he is making is that we would recognize that the shift in perception that allows us to see the world as a classroom does not come from us. The source of that shift is the Holy Spirit.

Q #317: As I read about the SARS virus the other day and how it attacks cells, my thoughts went to the attack in Iraq and then to my personal victim story of attack by neighbors (and my subsequent attack/defense). Will you please comment on forgiveness as it relates to any one of these situations and the relationship between them?

A: You are correct in associating the three different forms of attack you mention. Forgiveness applies to each situation equally, because they are all the same in content. In each case, there are seemingly

innocent victims being attacked by outside forces (victimizers), which cause suffering. All the victims may make the ego's righteous cry their own: "**Behold me brother, at your hand I die**" (T.27.I.4:6).

Forgiveness, as taught in *A Course in Miracles*, asks us to become aware of the feelings and judgments that arise when we consider each of these attack scenarios. Our reactions show us the beliefs we hold about ourselves as innocent victims, and our judgments against the victimizers. We are asked first to recognize these beliefs, and then learn to look beyond the external appearances to the real source of suffering, which is a decision in the mind to make the separation real. Forgiveness begins by taking responsibility for this choice and its effects (feeling attacked and victimized), without blaming anyone or anything external to the mind. This is what the Course means by: "**...forgive the Son of God for what he did not do**" (T.17.III.1:5). Any perceived attack, whatever form it may take, is always a reflection of the prior attack on our identity as God's Son by choosing separation in the mind. This is true for ourselves, and for anyone else we perceive as suffering at the hands of others. The "others" include military forces, viruses, neighbors, natural disasters, etc. Our responsibility as students of the Course is to acknowledge in ourselves and in others the power of the mind to choose. Once we have done this, we then acknowledge that we all can use this same power of the mind to make another choice. Meanwhile, we do not deny the thoughts, feelings, and judgments about the situation as we perceive it, and bringing them to the Holy Spirit, our minds are free to be guided to act in the most loving way.

Q #318: In C.1.3:2 it says that the term "soul" is only used in direct biblical quotations. Yet I've found that Jesus does use the term several times throughout *A Course in Miracles* without directly quoting the Bible. "The more 'religiously' ego-oriented may believe that the soul existed before, and will continue to exist after a temporary lapse into ego life" (T.4.II.9:5).

A: You are right in pointing out that the references to the term "soul" in the Course are not direct quotations. All but one of the references, however, do refer to well known Biblical statements regarding the soul, such as "losing your soul" (T.12.VI.1). In the Clarification of Terms it is used to contrast the Course's use of the term "spirit." In this section it is not referring to any specific Biblical passage, but reflects traditional religious views of the soul, including Christian belief which is based on the Bible's teaching. Hopefully, finding these imperfections is not an impediment to learning the message of the Course and practicing its teachings. That would certainly not profit the man or the soul.

Q #319: In "Jesus: the Manifestation of the Holy Spirit" excerpt, on page 6, you state "The goal however is ultimately to realize the hand we hold is our Own." And, later, "Eventually we would realize that when we reach out for help, we are really reaching out to ourselves." Could you please elaborate on these statements?

A: *A Course in Miracles* teaches that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are symbols which represent the part of our minds which holds the memory of God and reflects His love. When it speaks of taking Jesus' hand, or asking for help, it is making use of these symbols because we, who have dissociated ourselves from our minds and are mistakenly identified with the body, need them. This is best described when the Course tells us: "**You cannot even think of God without a body, or in some form you think you recognize**" (T.18.VIII.1:7).

Since we believe we are bodies living in a world of form, the Course uses form to make its message personal and relevant to us. It meets us on the level of form because that is where we think we are. It is also more direct, i.e., in passages that clearly describe the nature of the mind and our true identity (See: T.18.VI.8). There is nothing outside the mind, and therefore, no hand to take (neither ours nor Jesus'), and nothing but the mind itself to choose the truth or the ego's lie of separation.

Both of the statements you mention are based on this level of the Course's teaching. Key words in the statements are "ultimately" and "eventually." They point to the time when we will have learned that our true identity is the mind. Only *then* will we realize that the power of choice is ours, and all of our asking has been a reminder to ourselves that we can return to the mind to choose our oneness with God rather than separation. Until then, we need to use any symbol that is helpful to us, such as holding Jesus' hand and asking the Holy Spirit's help, to let go of the fear of the power of our minds.

Q #320: What does *A Course in Miracles* teach about having a Soul Mate? Is this considered a special relationship?

A: Dear Mate: The Course has nothing against having a soul.

Seriously, the Course does not refer to "Soul Mate" specifically, but insofar as the term means that there is one special person who is meant to fill all your needs and whose needs you are meant to fill, yes, it would be considered a special relationship. If the context is needs, completion, and dependency, then the ego is involved. Special love relationships have their roots in the belief in scarcity -- that there is something lacking in us that can be filled only by some special person, upon whom we then depend for our own sense of well-being, happiness, security, etc. Most romantic relationships start out this way, but they can be transformed by exchanging this ego purpose for the Holy Spirit's, which would be to see that both partners share the same wrong mind and the same right mind, and that their interests are shared, not separate.

On the other hand, there can be an intense attraction to another person because on a deep level there is some recognition that this is the person with whom you are going to work out your forgiveness lessons (**M.3.5:2**). The attraction is really to the deeper call of the Holy Spirit's Love, which then would become the center of the relationship. Unlike the ego's notion of completion, which reinforces separation through dependency, the completion in a relationship centered in forgiveness is simply the manifestation of the wholeness of our true Self, which we no longer choose to split off.

Q #321: How can a being create a being with the ability to create if that original being was itself not created?

A: Creation cannot be understood from our reference point as human beings, because it has nothing to do with the world of separation and individuals, and therefore has no counterpart in that world. It has meaning only within the Godhead, which by its very nature extends itself eternally in creations. Our human conceptual framework was intentionally established as a substitute for the truth of the Kingdom of God and to keep reality forever concealed from our awareness. Therefore our unhealed minds cannot comprehend what we have deliberately sealed off. Jesus speaks to this at the beginning of Lesson 192: **"It is your Father's holy Will that you complete Himself, and that your Self shall be His sacred Son, forever pure as He, of love created and in love preserved, extending love, creating in its name, forever one with God and with your Self. Yet what can such a function mean within a world of envy, hatred and attack? Therefore, you have a function in the world in its own terms. For who can understand a language far beyond his simple grasp?...Creation cannot even be conceived of in the world. It has no meaning here. Forgiveness is the closest it can come to earth"** (**W.pl.192.1;2:1,2;3:1,2,3**).

Jesus describes creation, but only briefly, as he knows that it is virtually meaningless to us in our present condition. A similar glimpse of the nature of creation is presented earlier in the workbook: **"True giving is creation. It extends the limitless to the unlimited, eternity to timelessness, and love unto itself. It adds to all that is complete already, not in simple terms of adding more, for that implies that it was**

less before. It adds by letting what cannot contain itself fulfill its aim of giving everything away, securing it forever for itself" (W.pl.105.4:2,3,4,5). These descriptions points us to a reality that has no counterpart in this world. Creation is extension, yet it is completely non-spatial, non-linear, and non-quantitative.

The dilemma you expressed, of course, has been the subject of many a philosophical/theological treatise over the centuries. Interestingly, some medieval thinkers in the Franciscan tradition spoke of the "self-diffusiveness of love." Love is not love unless it is extending itself. And in the Thomistic tradition (St. Thomas Aquinas), the reasoning put forth is that unless there is at least one self-sufficient being, nothing would exist. That self-sufficient being would have to be infinite (without limitation), and therefore can extend its being in any way. We can get only so far with this type of speculation, though, because our limited perspective would always cause us to anthropomorphize whatever we conceive of.

It might be of help to read through the introduction to the clarification of terms, which addresses the terminology in *A Course in Miracles* and its exclusive concern.

Q #322: One section in Chapter 21 of the text of *A Course in Miracles* which has particular meaning to me is "The Responsibility for Sight." It illustrates the discomfort that comes from realizing that decisions which appear to be made by me are actually being made on another level, a level I am completely unaware of as the decision-maker. "I" and the decisions "I" appear to make are merely the effects in form of decisions for guilt or innocence made on another level. The statement, "It is as needful that you recognize you made the world you see, as that you recognize that you did not create yourself. They are the same mistake," touches on this issue, and I would appreciate any comments or elaborations on its meaning.

A: In particular, these two sentences are telling us that we need to accept that we, as the split mind, are *cause* and not *effect* within the ego thought system, so that we can let go of the world as a defense against our true Identity and recognize that, in reality, within Heaven, we are *Effect* and not *Cause*. We see here, as clearly as anywhere, the insanity of the ego thought system. The separation has seemed to come about because we have resented being the created and not the Creator -- Effect and not Cause, Son and not Father.

And so we seek to make a new, separate identity for ourselves on God's slain corpse -- clearly here we are into a delusional thought system that believes separation from our Source is possible and murder and death are real. Delusions are unstable (**T.19.4.A.8:4**) and need constant protection in order to be maintained, and so, in cahoots with the ego, we concoct a wild tale of vengeance and defense, and make a world to hide in, as well as a further false identity -- a physical self with its own distinct personality -- to hide behind. We forget completely that we are the mind that has dreamed this insane hallucination and instead believe that we are at its mercy -- effect rather than cause. Hence, the insanity of it all, because we had set out to be our own cause and have convinced ourselves that we have pulled it off. But then we relinquish awareness of that "power" and accept instead a view of ourselves as effects of the world we made, in order to protect our individuality and to cover over the real source of the pain of separation -- our own choice to see ourselves as apart from Love. We see the world as the cause of all of our pain so that we never get to the source in our own mind -- of both the world and the pain -- where we could make a different choice about ourselves and the guilt we believe is so real.

As the statement you cite points out, denying that we are the cause and not the effect of the world is nothing more than a cover over our desire to make a world of our own outside of Heaven and deny our true Identity as God's creation, Christ -- each is just a different aspect of the same mistake. But, as your question emphasizes, the shift in perspective back to the mind is not easily made, for our identities are well-entrenched in the world and we have sought to see ourselves as mindless effects or victims of that world. And so Jesus leads us out of our self-imposed prison by inviting us to take small, gentle steps along the path of forgiveness, where we learn to see our interests and our goals as shared with all our

brothers rather than as separate. Those little steps will gradually undo the fear and the guilt in our minds so that we will be able first to recognize the "power" of our mind to dream of a world that seems powerful and real while we remain in the dream, and then to recognize that, since it is only a dream and we are the dreamer, we have been the cause of nothing real. And so we have remained forever the loving Effects of a Father Who has never changed His Mind about His Love for us.

For more on the decision-making power of the mind, you may wish to look at Question [#226](#).

Q #323: In talking about *A Course in Miracles* I tell people that we are all children of God. Why is Son of God always used and not the unisex child of God. The term Son of God is not so familiar to the daughters of God, whereas child of God is for us all. If the Course comes from God, why exclude half of the human race?

A: It is important to clarify, first of all, that *A Course in Miracles* does not come from God. It comes from Jesus who symbolizes the part of the mind of the Sonship that remembers God, and knows our true identity as innocent Sons of God. God does not know about the world or our illusory separation from Him.

For a complete answer to your question regarding the use of masculine language in the Course please see Question [#5](#).

Q #324: I sometimes feel that choosing to see peace, for me, is a kind of denial. I know I can look at a situation and choose to see peace. And often I do, and the tension alleviates and my thought of peace brings a peaceful feeling. But sometimes I am surprised by an onslaught of fear and anger and guilt feelings in an ongoing difficult situation that I thought was close to being healed, and then I feel like I had just been denying those feelings in seeing peace. It seems to me that to heal them I have to be in the feelings for a while, not try to see peace but really feel the fear and be un-peaceful for a while. I feel if I try to see peace the instant I feel anxious, I will just be covering up the fear and will not be clear about just what I am bringing to the light to be healed. I am not at the point where I can really look at the fear and be peaceful at the same time. Is this in keeping with the path of *A Course in Miracles*?

A: A very honest, thoughtful question. It is true that our egos can fool us at times into believing we have made a choice for peace when all that has really happened is that we have discovered how to get our own way. Nevertheless, you don't want to dismiss all your moments of peace as fraudulent, simply because they are not yet permanent. As a result of our fear of what genuine peace brings with it -- a disidentification with the self we think we are -- we will vacillate between peace and conflict as our learning proceeds. The fact that the fear in a particular, recurring, difficult situation seems as intense as ever does not invalidate any experience of peace we may have had in a similar situation in the past.

Each thought system -- the ego's and the Holy Spirit's -- is total, and whichever one we choose, when we have chosen it, in that moment we are completely identified with it, regardless of our choices in the past, and we may experience the full range of feelings that accompany that choice. It is helpful to remember also that it is never the external situation that causes our loss of peace -- the situation is nothing more than a symbol onto which we choose to project our buried guilt. So the fear is really coming from a perception from within that we are sinful and guilty for attacking God and deserve to be punished. Any external situation can become the screen onto which we project that thought -- some are simply more powerful, forgiveness-resistant symbols!

Now having said all that, it is important to add that, yes, we do need to look honestly at our guilt and fear before we can release them to the light. Choosing peace is not simply a formula to be chanted whenever

our guilt and fear come close to the surface in order to push the feelings back down. And the truth is, there remains a part of us that does not want peace so long as we are identified with the ego. Jesus makes this very clear in the opening lines to Lesson 185: **"I want the peace of God. To say these words is nothing. But to mean these words is everything" (W.185.1.h,1,2).** We learn to want peace by looking at what we have chosen instead and acknowledging the cost. And over time, as we allow ourselves to look honestly at what we have chosen without judging ourselves for that choice, the real alternative will become increasingly desirable.

Q #325: On page 172 of the text of *A Course in Miracles* (T.9.V.6:3) Jesus states: "Can you find light by analyzing the darkness..." My question is: If we are to look at our egos as a process, isn't that the same thing as finding light by analyzing darkness?

A: The context of that statement is the unhealed healer who sees the darkness as real and not as a defense against the light, an expression of the only "sin" in the Course: making the error real. As Jesus tells us in the **"Song of Prayer": "Do not see error. Do not make it real" (S.2.I.3:3,4).** In the section in the text to which you refer, Jesus is pointing out the limitations and mistakes of therapists and theologians who attempt to heal others without first having seen their own mistakes and brought them to the healing presence in their right minds. They therefore know nothing of that true corrective process, and as a result they wind up having their egos direct them as they attempt to heal others. If you know that the ego's darkness (the wrong mind) is simply a defense against the Holy Spirit's light (the right mind) and that we can choose between these states, then analyzing the darkness can be helpful in identifying the choices we make. We can then reconsider our decisions. But if we are unaware of the light and the decision-making capacity of our minds, then analyzing the darkness would be fruitless, ultimately. There may be some relief from the pain, but there would be no true healing. In that sense, you cannot find light by analyzing the darkness.

Q #326: Do you know of people who in the year of taking *A Course in Miracles* have achieved the experience of the holy instant?

A: We direct you to Questions [#26](#) and [#104](#), which address this topic. The essence of the experience is recognizing and accepting the love of Jesus as the only reality in your mind. This comes about through choosing against the ego's way of perceiving, which always emphasizes differences and separation, and instead seeing your interests and needs as the same as everyone else's. It is a choice made in the mind, and of course can occur at any time. In the manual for teachers, Jesus speaks about different levels of relationships, the first level being **"... what seems to be very casual encounters; a 'chance' meeting of two apparent strangers in an elevator, a child who is not looking where he is going running into an adult 'by chance,' two students 'happening' to walk home together.... Perhaps the seeming strangers in the elevator will smile to one another, perhaps the adult will not scold the child for bumping into him; perhaps the students will become friends. Even at the level of the most casual encounter, it is possible for two people to lose sight of separate interests, if only for a moment" (M.3.2:2,5,6).** The holy instant is that moment. There are many other expressions of it as well. It may occur at any time during one's spiritual process, and one need not be a student of the Course in order to have this experience. Many, many students have done so.

Finally, even though there are 365 lessons and the Course is presented as a one-year program, it is important to take note of what Jesus tells us in the very first sentence after the last lesson: **"This course is a beginning, not an end" (M.ep.1:1).** The training is completed when the holy instant becomes our *only* experience. We no longer see any value in choosing the ego rather than the love of Jesus in our minds. We go back and forth that way until we have let go entirely of all belief in the reality of separation, and sin, guilt, and fear.

Q #327: I would appreciate some clarification of the concept of oneness and the following excerpt from the text of *A Course in Miracles*: "God, Who encompasses all being, created beings who have everything individually" (W.4.VII.5:1).

A: Jesus is simply using the words of our symbolic, dualistic thought system to reassure us that releasing our investment and identification with the ego will not result in any real or meaningful loss. The concept of a hologram can be helpful here, for Jesus in essence is saying that the whole is contained in every part. In reality, any experience of oneness must be beyond all concepts we may employ to attempt to describe it. It is simply an experience of total love that knows no limits, no differences, no perception of an other. That it does not encompass individuality in any real sense becomes clear in Jesus' words later in the Course:

"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. It has united with its Source. And like its Source itself, it merely is" (W.pl.169.5).

But Jesus is also aware of our desperate desire to cling to a sense of a separate identity, and so he reassures us, **"Fear not that you will be abruptly lifted up and hurled into reality" (T.16.VI.8:1).** In other words, any shift towards releasing the ego is completely our choice. If it were not, we would be a victims of forces beyond our control, a situation totally antithetical to the Course's gentle teachings on forgiveness.

See Question [#17](#) for a related discussion on releasing our sense of individuality.

Q #328: Two questions dealing with existence:

i I was recently introduced to *A Course in Miracles* by a friend, but remain confused by statements, i.e., "the entire physical universe is an illusion." If true, then the Course doesn't exist, and if it doesn't exist, then no one could study the Course or be helped by it. But if it does exist, then the Course is incorrect because something in the entire physical universe is not an illusion. Does *A Course in Miracles* exist?

ii Since God does not know of our existence in our current state, why then does prayer to Him do anything? Further, if the Holy Spirit was created to take care of this challenge, then the existence must have been known.

A: The answer to these questions lies in understanding what the Course teaches regarding reality and illusion. Reality refers to God and the life we share with God as His one Son in Heaven. Only that is real and only that truly exists. The metaphysics of the Course tells us that: **"Into eternity, where all is one, there crept a tiny, mad idea, at which the Son of God remembered not to laugh" (T.27.VIII.8:6).** The "tiny mad idea" is the thought that the one Son can be separate from God. Choosing this thought results in what we are experiencing as our lives as bodies in the physical universe. The Course tells us it is an illusion, a dream: **"You are at home in God, dreaming of exile but perfectly capable of awakening to reality" (T.10.I.2:1).** This is the Course's "explanation" for the *seeming* existence of the physical universe; this is the illusion. Yet, because the Son cannot be separate from the Father, he carries with him into the dream the memory of God in his mind. The thought of separation and the memory of God are the two parts of the split mind of the dreaming Sonship. It is very important to remember that this is *all* part of the dream. It is therefore not *real* and does not truly exist. Although we have chosen to identify with our bodies there is a part of our mind that remembers who we truly are. The Course refers to this part of the

mind of the Sonship as the right mind. Since we have dissociated ourselves from our minds altogether our right mind is symbolized in the Course by Jesus or the Holy Spirit. They are our teachers in the dream and *A Course in Miracles* is Their curriculum that we may **"Learn that even the darkest nightmare that disturbs the mind of God's sleeping Son holds no power over him. He will learn the lesson of awaking" (T.13.XI.9:5, 6).** So, although *A Course in Miracles* does not exist in reality and is part of the illusion, its message reflects the memory of our reality and leads us to our awakening from the dream of separation.

The prayers in the Course that address God the Father are beautiful expressions of the content of the part of our minds that remembers God. They are formulated in a way that helps us to remember God, and to learn that in spite of our belief in the separation we have not truly left our Source. You are correct in saying that God does not actually hear these prayers. They are gentle reminders to ourselves in a form that comforts us, because we need to know that God has not forgotten us though we seem to have wandered off and forgotten Him.

Q #329: I'm having a difficult time understanding how marriage isn't considered a special relationship, or that you could truly have a sacred relationship with someone.

A: Most marriages start out as special relationships, but they need not remain on that level. The specialness resides in the purpose or the content, as opposed to the form; and the purpose or content comes from the teacher we have chosen in our minds -- either the ego or Jesus. That is the key. Thus you can be married to one person and spend most of your time with that one person, but if the content behind the form is rooted in the healing love of Jesus in your right mind, then you would be excluding no one from your love, or from your kindness, generosity, caring, etc. This obviously does not mean that you have to include everyone else in the world at your dinner table, or in your bedroom, or at the bank when you cash your paycheck. It is important to remember always that relationships are in the mind, and that we cannot usually discern the content just by observing the form. The relationship is made "sacred" by shifting from the ego's purpose for the relationship to the Holy Spirit's purpose, and your partner does not even have to be aware of this. The ego's purpose is to reinforce separation and specialness, and the Holy Spirit's purpose is to undo all of that.

Marriage, thus, can be an excellent classroom for learning how to relate without a sense of exclusion or specialness. The form might not change at all, but your motivation and interpretations would. You would still do all the same things, have the same intimacy and the same focus on family, or whatever, but you would ask for help to shift from the ego's purpose to the Holy Spirit's. You would then look with the love of Jesus next to you at all of the manipulation, the specialness, the guilt, and the victimization that are a normal part of relationships in the ego's world. And when you look at all of that without judgment, your mind then would be freed to let the love of Jesus flow through you as the content of all your thoughts; and then these thoughts would direct all of your interactions.

Q #330: Please explain and demonstrate "Iambic Pentameter" as used in *A Course in Miracles*.

A: Iambic pentameter is a way of positioning the sounds of syllables in a rhythmical pattern, and is the most common of all meters in English poetry.

This poetry form groups five "iams" together for a total of ten syllables per line, putting stress on the second syllable, and every other one after that (i.e., weak STRONG weak STRONG weak STRONG weak STRONG weak STRONG). An "iam" is one of the "weak STRONG" units, and "Penta" means five (as in the Pentagon, which has five sides). It breaks into five "feet," like this: weak STRONG / weak

STRONG / weak STRONG / weak STRONG / weak STRONG. A foot is one of the repeating segments that is used to build a line of poetry. In the case of iambic pentameter, one iamb = one foot.

Much of *A Course in Miracles* is written in unrhymed iambic pentameter, and this is called blank verse. Examples include the following:

This will / not tempt / me to / de lay / myself.

The world / I see / holds noth / ing that / I want (W.pl.128.8:3,4).

God is / but Love, / and there / fore so / am I (W.pl.rvV.10:8).

In joyous welcome is my hand outstretched to every brother who would join with me in reaching past temptation, and who looks with fixed determination toward the light that shines beyond in perfect constancy (T.31.8.11).

**In joy / ous wel / come is / my hand / out stretched
to ev / ery broth / er who / would join / with me
in reach / ing past / temp ta / tion, and / who looks
with fixed / de ter / min a / tion toward / the light
that shines / be yond / in per / fect con / stan cy.**

Q #331: Krishnamurti, in one of his books, says that all fear comes to an end the instant all psychological authority including our own ends in the mind. With no authority how can there be fear? He also mentions that all fear comes to an end the instant you realize you are the author of it. He said this doesn't even take a day. Maybe only ten minutes to see it clearly. Can you comment on the above ideas? Lastly, if there are no specialness thoughts why do we have to give them up? Doesn't that reinforce the ego by making it real?

A: Krishnamurti and *A Course in Miracles* are not saying anything very much different from each other. The Course simply adds a mythology of the ego to illustrate the origins of the "dynamics" of fear. With the belief in separation, the Course says we have made the idea of a separate superior judgmental authority - the ego god, which is really nothing more than a projection of our own desire to seize authority/authorship from God our Source (**T.3.VI.7,8**) -- very real in our minds. And we remain at odds with this authority so long as we seek to maintain our own individual existence and so to see this controlling authority as separate from ourselves. Fear then is inevitable, for the illusory, fragmentary self we believe we are must seem very vulnerable if we are to deny our role in first seizing the authority for ourselves. We project responsibility for the attack outside ourselves in order to assuage our guilt.

The only real Authority is the wholly benign God of Love in Whom we find our being beyond any concepts of separation and individuality. And fear is impossible in this perfect state of Oneness in which there can be nothing apart from Self to fear. And so, in any moment when we release our belief in separate interests and conflicting authority -- our own and anyone else's -- and we see our own role in making up the conflict in the first place, all fear must simply vanish. This need not take time, since nothing except our own thinking needs to shift. It is only our own resistance to love, which is how we maintain our separate self, that will make the release from fear seem difficult and likely to take a long time.

As for specialness thoughts, you are right, they are not real and they are not the problem. It is our *desire for* and *belief in* specialness, and not the thoughts themselves, that must be released, but not by fighting or resisting. We are only ever asked to look at what we have made real in our own minds and acknowledge the consequences of that illusory choice to our peace of mind. When we no longer want

specialness and what it brings, the thoughts will simply dissipate **"into the nothingness from which [they] came" (M.13.1:2).**

Q #332: A few months ago I remember reading a passage in *A Course in Miracles* that I'd love to find again. At the time, I labeled it the "anti-karma clause," because it seemed to indicate when one forgives/accepts atonement, the actual event is remembered differently -- it is as if the perceptual past is changed in memory for all involved. I know I'm not explaining this well. Maybe you have some suggestions.

A: Two lovely passages come immediately to mind, one of which perhaps is the one you are looking to rediscover. Both communicate the Course's beautiful teaching that forgiveness lifts us up outside of time and so can release us from all the seeming effects of the time-bound ego. If the Course taught otherwise -- that the undoing of the ego must necessarily take time, as the idea of karma entails -- then the ego would have to be real and the separation from God would have had to happen. But the fundamental premise, upon which the Course's central practice of forgiveness rests, which is the statement of the Atonement principle, is that the separation never happened in reality. So, in truth, nothing but illusions need to be undone.

And so here they are, in the order in which they appear in the text:

"How can you who are so holy suffer? All your past except its beauty is gone, and nothing is left but a blessing. I have saved all your kindnesses and every loving thought you ever had. I have purified them of the errors that hid their light, and kept them for you in their own perfect radiance. They are beyond destruction and beyond guilt. They came from the Holy Spirit within you, and we know what God creates is eternal" (T.5.IV.8:1,2,3,4,5,6).

"There is no escape from fear in the ego's use of time. For time, according to its teaching, is nothing but a teaching device for compounding guilt until it becomes all-encompassing, demanding vengeance forever.

The Holy Spirit would undo all of this *now*. Fear is not of the present, but only of the past and future, which do not exist. There is no fear in the present when each instant stands clear and separated from the past, without its shadow reaching out into the future. Each instant is a clean, untarnished birth, in which the Son of God emerges from the past into the present. And the present extends forever. It is so beautiful and so clean and free of guilt that nothing but happiness is there. No darkness is remembered, and immortality and joy are now.

This lesson takes no time. For what is time without a past and future? It has taken time to misguide you so completely, but it takes no time at all to be what you are. Begin to practice the Holy Spirit's use of time as a teaching aid to happiness and peace. Take this very instant, now, and think of it as all there is of time. Nothing can reach you here out of the past, and it is here that you are completely absolved, completely free and wholly without condemnation. From this holy instant wherein holiness was born again you will go forth in time without fear, and with no sense of change with time" (T.15.I.7:6,7; 8; 9).

Q #333: How does *A Course in Miracles* view competition, as in sports, work, speaking (Toastmasters) etc., and how do I apply that view to this dreamlife?

A: Question #203 discussed the topic of competition. Competition permeates every aspect of our lives in this world because that is the ego's DNA, you might say. **"The ego literally lives by comparisons" (T.4.II.7:1).** Its very existence is rooted in the competition for ultimate authority over life, and it senses itself always in constant competition with a rival force that is determined to defeat it. As fragments of the ego, we thus share in those properties. The world that emerged from the ego is inherently a world of competition, comparison, and conquest **(M.8.1).** It is fairly common to hear people say that they thrive on competition and would find life pretty boring without it. As "offspring" of the ego, how could it be otherwise, unless we are aware of "another way"?

Purpose is one of the most important concepts in the Course. Our lives can serve either the purpose of the ego or the purpose of the Holy Spirit. There are no other choices for us to make. If we choose to share the Holy Spirit's perception of ourselves and everyone else, we will be focused on seeing our interests and needs as the same as everyone else's. That would allow us to carry out our roles conscientiously and competently -- as an athlete, business person, speaker, etc. -- but without ego-based motivations. We thus can learn how to compete without being vicious or cruel or intent solely on destroying the other person, team, or company. The world is set up so that one team/business wins and the other loses, but that does not have to be our focus or motivation, or the reason for our happiness or unhappiness.

We can always ask Jesus for help to identify how we support the ego's thought system of divisiveness and kill-or-be-killed. We can become aware of how we delight in watching another individual, team, or company go down to defeat, for example. Then we can bring those thoughts and feelings to the love of Jesus in our minds, understand where they come from, and then choose to follow him instead of the ego. We can then go back into the same situation, but with a new motivation.

It is interesting to note that our effectiveness in our roles often is enhanced when we let go of the ego's thirst for victory at the cost of another's defeat. The guilt-attack cycle that is the inevitable consequence of following the ego's kill-or-be-killed approach is a tremendous mental and emotional burden that affects all of our perceptions and judgments. Objectivity is impossible when our minds are caught up in those dynamics. When we are free of that burden, we often function more effectively. Thus you can be skillful and mentally keen in a business deal or on a basketball court, for instance, while at the same time the intent in your mind is recognizing the meaninglessness of all that seems to separate you from the person on the other side of the desk or the other team. The Holy Spirit can use all of our skills -- made originally to act out the ego thought system -- to teach us about the oneness we share with each other.

The following teaching of Jesus can be helpful in redirecting our motivation before we engage in activities that, in form, are competitive.

I said before that the ego's friend is not part of you, because the ego perceives itself at war and therefore in need of allies. You who are not at war must look for brothers and recognize all whom you see as brothers, because only equals are at peace. Because God's equal Sons have everything, they cannot compete. Yet if they perceive any of their brothers as anything other than their perfect equals, the idea of competition has entered their minds. Do not underestimate your need to be vigilant *against* this idea, because all your conflicts come from it. It is the belief that conflicting interests are possible, and therefore you have accepted the impossible as true. Is that different from saying you perceive yourself as unreal? (T.7.III.4)

Q #334: One the most common questions students of *A Course in Miracles* ask is about forgiving Jesus. For many of us it's a lifetime challenge to forgive ourselves for every dark thought that, still uncovered, rules our mind. So, how would you best encourage us to forgive Jesus?

A: We must clarify first of all that your question implies that the Course asks us to forgive the negative thoughts we have, i.e., "dark thoughts," as opposed to other "good thoughts." This would mean that we have some unacceptable thoughts that are "sinful" and need to be forgiven in the traditional sense. This is not the meaning the Course gives to forgiveness. What the Course asks us to do is to uncover all our "dark thoughts," meaning any thought that has the *one* thought of separation as its source. This basically means any ego thought about anything. These thoughts have our specialness at their root -- the same specialness that we bring to our relationship with Jesus, and it is this that needs to be forgiven, not because it is a sin, but because it makes the separation real. The specific form the specialness takes may vary, but in the end it is always based on the belief that Jesus (and everyone else, for that matter) is separate from us, and in Jesus' case, he is not only separate but "better" than us.

Just as in all our relationships, our relationship with Jesus is marked by the dynamics that inevitably follow our choice to identify with the ego thought system. One of these is the belief that for someone to gain someone else must lose: **"All choices in the world depend on this; you choose between your brother (including Jesus) and yourself, and you will gain as much as he will lose, and what you lose is what is given him" (T.31.IV.8:4).** This is referred to as the scarcity principle. Some very common thoughts about Jesus are based on this principle, i.e., if Jesus has something we don't have, such as holiness, Atonement, etc., it must be because he stole it from us, and we hate him for it. This often takes the form of believing that Jesus has a special place of privilege in the Sonship, and so God must love him more than He loves the rest of us. What he has can never be ours. Most of us share this believe, yet it is in direct opposition to what Jesus is teaching us in the Course: **"There is nothing about me that you cannot attain. I have nothing that does not come from God. The difference between us now is that I have nothing else" (T.1.II.3:10,11,12).** Our forgiveness of Jesus lies in learning this, as does the goal of the Course. It is not that we lack anything that he has, it is that we have given ourselves the burden of all our thoughts and judgments against him, which also means against ourselves. We are asked to learn that we, with Jesus, are the innocent Son of the Father. Our practice of forgiving Jesus then, begins with the uncovering of all the hidden thoughts and beliefs we have that separate us from him, making him *and* us special. This is how we do what he asks: **"Forgive me your illusions, and release me from punishment for what I have not done" (T.19.IV.B.8:1).** Our thoughts and beliefs about him are our illusions, made up for the purpose of making the separation real and proving we are right about who we are, and God is wrong. What Jesus did not do is make himself separate from us, nor does he share our mistaken belief about ourselves. He is forgiven, therefore, as we learn the truth about ourselves.

Q #335: When I have unkind and attacking thoughts and do not immediately catch them, is it necessary that I recall those thoughts in detail before I can release them to the Holy Spirit or Jesus to cleanse and reinterpret them for me? Most of the time, I realize only afterwards that my thoughts were unkind and I cannot remember the specific thoughts anymore. So I tell the Holy Spirit or Jesus that those thoughts reflect a goal that prevents me from accepting my true function. This approach has given me a tool that I can generalize to almost all the selfish, ego-based thoughts I have most of the time. They all seem to pass rapidly by and sometimes I just put them all in one bunch and offer them. Can you help me here?

A: In the end, it does not really matter what specific form our attack thoughts take. It is their purpose, or goal, that we are concerned about, and that purpose is always to reinforce our own guilt and sense of separation. And so it is the purpose in our mind and not the particular thoughts and words and actions we've employed for that purpose that we want to be in touch with.

However, before we can reach that level of generalization of our lessons, it is important that we not skip over any of the specific steps that lead us to the recognition of the sameness of all of our ego judgments. And so you would want to ask yourself as honestly as you can whether your difficulty in remembering the specifics may be the result of a sense of fear and guilt about those thoughts that is saying to you, "Don't look! These judgments and attack thoughts are too awful to look at. Just accept that you've sinned and then get rid of it by offering the heavy burden to Jesus or the Holy Spirit." This is not quite what Jesus is

asking us to do (T.13.III.1:1,2)! But only you can answer for yourself whether it is your own fear that is keeping the specific thoughts out of your awareness.

Now if this is in fact the case, you don't want to make a big deal about it. So you're afraid, but who isn't? All you want to do then is to begin to develop a willingness to look at your ego and perhaps at first begin to remember how it has trapped you in its shenanigans in your recent past. And over time, with practice, you will learn to recognize your choice for the ego while you're in the middle of it. The value of this is that you will then know you have a different choice in the moment when you've chosen to identify with your ego and you won't have to prolong the suffering and pain that accompanies identifying with your ego. So don't try to force anything or make yourself remember, but simply offer that little willingness to look at your ego together with Jesus or the Holy Spirit (T.12.II.10) so that you can see its nothingness.

Q #336: *A Course in Miracles* asks us to not bring truth to illusion, not to ask the Holy Spirit to do things for us in the world. In one of Ken's tape on judgment he says that it may be our experience that the Holy Spirit seems to do things for us in the world but it is not the reality. He gives the analogy that in our experience the sun sets and rises, whereas the reality is that the earth spins on its axis and rotates around the sun. Even though it seems as though the Holy Spirit does things for us in the world what is the reality of that experience? What is the correct view of seeing the situation when, for example, improvement in the world manifests after asking/praying to the Holy Spirit?

A: A change in the external situation could be the result of a decision in your mind not to punish yourself any more -- meaning that a dominant belief in the ego part of your mind is that you do not deserve to be happy because of your "sin" against God. Therefore, that belief could be expressed in form as suffering, victimization, misfortune, etc. in your personal world. But as you bring your guilt and your ego thoughts to the healing love of Jesus in your right mind, the guilt disappears, and then you would no longer seek to hurt yourself. Thus the external situation would seem to have changed, but your decision against the ego was the real change. Praying to the Holy Spirit could be the form you chose to shift from wrong-minded thinking to right-minded thinking. This applies both on the individual level as well as the collective level. So it is not as if the Holy Spirit changes things in the world. The Holy Spirit is not an agent who acts in the world in response to the requests made of Him, even though the language in the Course suggests that at times. A major part of the mind-training of the Course involves teaching us not to confuse symbol with source. It is hard for us to think of everything as symbols, because we have identified with the ego's way of perceiving, which is to deny that there is only mind and its contents, and that "ideas leave not their source."

It is helpful to remember a few points when thinking about this topic: Our minds are very powerful; the body does only what the mind directs it to (the body is not autonomous); and we cannot affect another person's mind or condition without there being mutual consent. If there is one principle that Jesus stresses again and again, it is the power of our minds to decide. The final section in the text, as you know, is "**Choose Once Again**" (T.31.VIII). And very early in the text he tells us that the purpose of his course is to teach us that our minds are very powerful and that we are responsible for our thoughts and feelings: "**The correction of fear is your responsibility. When you ask for release from fear, you are implying it is not....You may still complain about fear, but you nevertheless persist in making yourself fearful. I have already indicated that you cannot ask me to release you from fear. I know it does not exist, but you do not. If I intervened between your thoughts and their results, I would be tampering with a basic law of cause and effect; the most fundamental law there is. I would hardly help you if I depreciated the power of your own thinking. This would be in direct opposition to the purpose of this course**" (T.2.VI.4:1,2; VII.1:1,2,3,4,5,6). Thus our work with the Course should be aimed at restoring to our awareness the power of our minds to choose, and to perceive others as having that same power. The cause of all of our problems (the effect) is that one wrong choice we made in our minds to accept the ego thought system as the truth instead of thought system of the Holy Spirit. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are present within our minds to help us get back to that decision-making level in our

minds, which is why Jesus tells us that **"this is a course in cause and not in effect" (T.21.VII.7:8)**, and **"Seek not to change the world; but choose to change your mind about the world" (T.21.in.1:7)**.

Q #337: What are errors and mistakes? Are they physical actions or ways of looking? Why does the ego always remind us of how we hurt people or ourselves, or if something wasn't fair. Why does the ego seem right and why does it seem logical? Is it the ego or the Holy Spirit pointing out my faults? If the Holy Spirit helps one correct the error does that mean the ego is right in its judgment of the so-called "error"? How do you know if it's an error and why does the ego demand "correction" of it as well? Also it states a few times about how a Son of God will not murder yet animals murder all the time to live. Is nature wrong and how are we exempt from it?

A: It could take a book to answer your litany of questions satisfactorily, but we will try to suggest a few ideas here that will hopefully point you in the right direction. Since, from the perspective of *A Course in Miracles*, there is only mind, errors or mistakes can be only of the mind. Jesus clarifies this very early in the text when he explains that **"only the mind is capable of error. The body can act wrongly only when it is responding to misthought" (T.2.IV.2:4,5)**. And, as you suggest, errors are really mistaken ways of looking or, to be more specific, mistaken ways of looking at the world, our brothers, and ourselves with the ego as our guide rather than with Jesus or the Holy Spirit. And ego-directed looking is always judgmental. It is only the ego that points out our faults. The Holy Spirit will gently invite us to recognize how our thinking is misguided when we listen to the ego, but His purpose would never be to accuse us or to induce guilt in us over our mistakes **(T.9.III.1)**.

Now our original error was the thought that we could separate ourselves from God and that we have in fact succeeded in establishing a separate identity for ourselves independent of Him. Every error that has followed since in our thinking comes from that initial thought of separation. But we have deliberately compounded the errors in our mind in such a way that we have quite intentionally confused ourselves and lost sight of that original error. So all of our errors since the initial one are really subterfuges that keep us unaware of the original mistake and focused instead on addressing all the other seeming mistakes and problems in our life. And so that is why the ego, as you observe, is always reminding us of how we hurt others or have been hurt ourselves -- this is the cover for the real problem, so that we never call the belief in separation into question.

Just because the ego is based on a mistaken thought, an insane premise -- that we could separate from God -- does not mean that the thought system built on that premise does not have a very definite and persuasive internal logic to it, once we accept its premise. Jesus in the Course says, **"The ego's logic is as impeccable as that of the Holy Spirit, because your mind has the means at its disposal to side with Heaven or earth, as it elects" (T.5.V.1:4)**. And in fact, logic has its origins in the ego thought system, for there is nothing to decide or deduce or prove in Heaven. But having once accepted the ego's logic, which seems to condemn us to hell for eternity, the good news is that we can let go of our guilt-reinforcing use for it and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us in its application, with very different results: **"The Holy Spirit uses logic as easily and as well as does the ego, except that His conclusions are not insane. They take a direction exactly opposite, pointing as clearly to Heaven as the ego points to darkness and to death. We have followed much of the ego's logic, and have seen its logical conclusions. And having seen them, we have realized that they cannot be seen except in illusions, for there alone their seeming clearness seems to be clearly seen. Let us now turn away from them, and follow the simple logic by which the Holy Spirit teaches the simple conclusions that speak for truth, and only truth" (T.14.in.1:4,5,6,7,8)**.

Correction in the Holy Spirit's thought system is different in every way, including purpose, from the ego's. The ego sees error as sin to prove its own existence and to convince us that we can see the guilt we have made real over that error in others rather than in ourselves. In contrast, the *only* error the Holy Spirit corrects is our belief in the ego. Clearly this is an error the ego cannot correct, since its own existence

depends on our belief in separation. The ego corrects through attack and punishment, the Holy Spirit through the gentle process of forgiveness. And the Holy Spirit begins to undo our belief in separation by leading us toward a recognition of shared rather than separate interests with our brothers. For more on the contrast between the Holy Spirit's and the ego's correction of error, you may wish to look at "**The Correction of Error**" in the text (T.9.III).

The Son of God cannot attack or murder in reality. But that he can *believe* he can is apparent when you pick up a newspaper or watch the news on TV, or simply examine your own thoughts when you are angry. It is not nature that leads humans or other animals to kill. Nature is just an aspect of the illusory world, which is an effect of our mistaken choice in the mind for separation. It is the desire to protect our individual illusory self at any cost that leads to murder first in thought and then in action. And yet, contrary to what the ego, the world and our senses may tell us, correction is not needed at the level of behavior, but only in our feverish imaginations that believe that all of this is real. **"What if you recognized this world is an hallucination? What if you really understood you made it up? What if you realized that those who seem to walk about in it, to sin and die, attack and murder and destroy themselves, are wholly unreal? Could you have faith in what you see, if you accepted this? And would you see it?" (T.20.VIII.7:3,4,5,6,7).** This does not mean that we are asked to deny what our eyes seem to show us, but rather to be open to a different interpretation of what we see, through the miracle. The miracle brings our focus back from the world to our minds, where we can acknowledge the purpose we have given the world -- to be the projection of our error outward, so blame rests elsewhere. Having taken this step, we can then invite the Holy Spirit to give the world His purpose -- the recognition that the error in truth never really happened and our guilt is not real.

Q #338: I know that if I attack another I will feel guilty and I should ask the Holy Spirit for help if I feel I've been attacked. Would this apply equally if I have a behavior such as an addiction that I feel guilty about? If I continue with the behavior I am sure to feel guilty. If I stop the behavior I may not feel guilty, but I really haven't fixed the problem. What would be the best way to handle this situation? The specific problem I am talking about is overeating.

A: Yes, whether I am attacking another, feeling attacked by another, or attacking myself -- which is what an addiction represents -- the only appropriate response is to ask the Holy Spirit for help. An addiction is an attack on myself because it says, over and over again, that I am incomplete and must seek outside myself for my completion, a repeated denial that I am the Christ, forever one with Its Source (T.29.VII.2,3,4,6).

All attack, no matter how it is expressed, is nothing more than the projection of the hidden guilt in our minds that the ego insists we must bear because of our (imagined) attack on God at the moment of separation, when we denied our reality as Christ. We've convinced ourselves that our guilt is real, but then have attempted to avoid responsibility for it. And so we seek to project the guilt outside our mind so that it seems to reside instead in bodies, our own and others. We keep this dynamic hidden from ourselves, so that the guilt remains protected. But when we ask for help from Jesus or the Holy Spirit, we are really indicating a willingness to accept responsibility (but not blame!) for the way we feel, seeing the external situation now, not as the problem, but rather as an indicator of the guilt that would otherwise remain unconscious in the mind.

And so, as you observe, focusing on changing or controlling the behavior, such as overeating, does not address the real problem. For we are only modifying an external symptom, or effect, of the guilt without addressing the cause, the guilt itself, which, remaining unexamined, we will continue to believe is real. Consequently, we will look to project the unbearable but nevertheless illusory guilt onto some other external form, perhaps another addiction. Early in *A Course in Miracles* Jesus speaks of how controlling or changing behavior, without addressing the mind, simply produces strain, which is intolerable, leading usually to rage and further projection (T.2.VI.5).

Now this does not mean that there is no value in developing some discipline and bringing out-of-control behavior under control, especially if the addiction is physically or emotionally damaging to us, thereby reinforcing the guilt in our minds. And the choice to bring about a helpful external shift may certainly reflect a real but still perhaps unconscious desire for an inner shift from the ego to the Holy Spirit as our teacher. But at some stage in our learning, we will come to recognize that guilt in the mind is always the only problem. Only through recognizing its inevitable projection out onto the world of form do we begin to become aware of it in our mind, where we can make a meaningful choice for its release.

A single tape by Kenneth Wapnick, as well as a small book transcribed and edited from the tape, both titled *Overeating: A Dialogue*, explore the issue of overeating in greater depth. The material, while addressing food addictions, can be applied to any addiction, since the content is always the same. There is also additional discussion of addictions from the Course's perspective in Questions [#30](#) and [#57](#).

Q #339: There are two quotations (among many) in the workbook of *A Course in Miracles* which have puzzled me for a very long time. I would appreciate some clarification. (1) "You will begin to understand it when you have seen little edges of light around the same familiar objects which you see now. That is the beginning of real vision.....As we go along, you may have many 'light episodes'" (W.pl.15.2:2;3:1). I have been doing this material for years and know a great many people who have also, and no one I know has had such an experience, although I have had some wondrous experiences. (2) "The time will come when you will not return in the same form in which you now appear, for you will have no need of it." W.pl.157.7:3. I assume this means when we leave the body, but in what form will we reappear?

A: (1) This passage has been troubling to many students. It seems to suggest that a mark of spiritual progress is seeing edges of light around objects, such as auras. If this were the literal meaning, it would go against everything else the Course teaches. Jesus, as we know, stresses that all perception is unreal. In the text he says that however holy visions may be, they do not last because they are based on perception (**T.3.III.4:6**). *Light* is a symbol; it is not a perceptual thing. Perceiving light outside you symbolizes the release of some of the darkness in your mind and allowing more of the light to come through. When the Course talks about the light in us, it is not talking about an electric light bulb, an aura, or anything that we actually perceive. *Light* traditionally has been a symbol used in spirituality to denote God, life, truth, etc. So *A Course in Miracles* uses that same imagery. *Darkness* refers to the darkness of guilt and of being separate from God; *light* refers to the undoing all of that, along with feeling God's Presence and His love.

This passage originally had nothing to do with the Course itself. Helen Schucman and Bill Thetford had a close friend who worked with them at the Medical Center -- he was the only person they shared the Course with right from the beginning. From time to time he would wake up in the middle of the night and feel and see light all around him. He was terrified by these episodes. So this was Jesus' way of telling him that everything was all right when he had those light episodes. (See *Absence from Felicity*, p. 304.) That is why this passage appears. Kenneth has felt that there should have been a footnote or some explanation to that effect. In any case, it should not be taken to mean that if you don't see light that you are a spiritual failure. It can be taken to mean rather that when you forgive more, there will be more "light" in your mind, which means that that light will be extended. Then you will perceive the world as a "lightened" place, in the sense that the burden of guilt will no longer be upon it. Some people actually perceive light physically. But that should be understood only as a symbol -- one of many, many symbols -- of the process of healing within their own minds.

(2) Similarly, the passage in **Lesson 157** was originally meant for Helen Schucman herself. Kenneth comments in *Absence from Felicity*: "On a number of occasions Helen mentioned to me that Jesus told her that the 'next time you come you would be different,' reminiscent of the lines in Lesson 157...Incidentally, this was one of Helen's favorite lessons. Her understanding of these lines, even though the subject of reincarnation usually made her very uncomfortable, was that the next time she 'came' -- her next life -- she would be ego-free, as was the priestess of her vision" (p. 476).

So this passage can be understood to mean that when the purpose of forgiveness is fulfilled, we shall have no further need of the body as a classroom. We shall have remembered who we are as God's one Son as we enter into the real world. When we next appear in the body, we would obviously be different because the thought in our minds would be different. The body would not be our classroom but solely a means through which the Holy Spirit can communicate His message of healing and forgiveness. Jesus speaks of "Teachers of teachers" in this manner: **"...although they are no longer visible, their image can yet be called upon. And they will appear when and where it is helpful for them to do so" (M.26.2:2,3).**

Q #340: I am very confused about something. This idea of "pets" being part of the Sonship really has me. You mean a pet, my dog for example, has a Self just like I do and is capable of accepting a miracle? If one leaves this body and comes back to learn his or her forgiveness lessons, we can come back and learn this as a dog or a cat? Is that really so?

A: The simple and direct answer to your question is that neither you nor your dog accept a miracle. Nothing happens on the level of form in the dream. It is in the mind of the sleeping Son that a miracle is accepted and lessons are learned. Neither human beings in bodies, nor cats, nor dogs learn lessons. The mind that projects itself into the illusion gives form to all aspects of the physical universe, including dogs and human bodies, none of which has any ability to choose a miracle **(T.28.IV.9)**. The world and everything in it takes form as a result of the mind of the Sonship choosing to believe that separation from God is possible, thus denying its true identity as spirit. That single thought in the mind is projected outward, giving rise to the world of form. However, one of the most important metaphysical principles of *A Course in Miracles* tells us: **"Ideas leave not their source" (T.26.VII.4:7; see also W.pl.132)**. Therefore nothing happens outside of the mind. What we think is solid and real is an illusion **(W.pl.155.2:1)**, which is why human bodies, dogs, and cats do not accept miracles, forgive, or learn lessons. It is not that your dog has a Self, it is that the separated self denies its truth as spirit. It then splits off into the billions and billions of forms that make up the illusory world, and then identifies with that world. **"There is no world!" (W.pl.132.6:2).**

The Son remains asleep, dreaming about human bodies, dogs, trees and oceans, and believing that the dream is real. In truth there is only the mind and nothing else. Part of the dream is that bodies die and return in different form. This dream continues as long as the mind continues to choose to believe in the separation. None of this has any effect on the truth, however, and will end when the mind chooses to forgive every form of mistaken identity in every aspect of the dream. Meanwhile, our task is to recognize all the ways we seek to make our mistaken identity real through unforgiveness, so we can then bring them to the Holy Spirit to be corrected through forgiveness.

Q #341: What does *A Course in Miracles* mean when it says that all who have met before will meet again?

A: All the separated fragments of the Sonship, seemingly dispersed when the thought of separation was taken seriously will, through forgiveness, return to full awareness of the Oneness that was never truly shattered.

We perceive ourselves as separate from each other, housed in bodies that interact and communicate through bodies. The Course tells us that this perception is the result of a choice in the mind to *be* separate: **"The gap between you and your brother is not one of space between two separate bodies. And this but seems to be dividing off your separate minds. It is the symbol of a promise made to meet when you prefer, and separate till you and he elect to meet again. And then your bodies seem to get in touch, and thereby signify a meeting place to join. But always is it possible**

for you and him to go your separate ways. Conditional upon the "right" to separate will you and he agree to meet from time to time, and keep apart in intervals of separation" (T.29.I.4:1,2,3,4,5,6). The "'right' to separate" refers to the choice we make when we identify with the body. We meet when we accept the Holy Spirit's correction for this mistaken belief, thereby acknowledging our oneness with all our brothers. Although this takes place in the mind, it may be reflected in the dream when "bodies seem to get in touch."

Q #342: Lately, I have noticed that I experience a lot of rejection in life. I have difficulty belonging and increasingly cannot see how to navigate a world which seems so shallow. Everything seems, especially now, to be reliant on privilege, money, looks, age, class, race, influence, brains or ability. I feel a lot of love, but feel no incentive to get nearer to people's egos. I feel safe this way. Nothing to date can really convince me to be otherwise. Nevertheless this has become painful. I have a few friends yet it is lonely. I must be misinterpreting *A Course in Miracles*. Also, I thought it was good to have boundaries (walls). Any ideas?

A: You're recognizing how painful, empty and meaningless the world of our egos is, and this can be a helpful but nevertheless very disconcerting realization. But you don't want to stop with this insight without taking the next step, for you have not yet completely switched teachers. For it is only the ego that judges and fears other egos. While you remain where you currently find yourself, differences still seem very real and rejection based on those differences almost unavoidable. And so it seems safety can be found only in withdrawal from the world. Yet isolating yourself only reinforces the belief in differences and separation in your mind, which must be experienced as very painful. It makes the error real -- very serious and threatening -- which is the ego's only goal.

And so you want help in seeing the world of differences differently, and above all, in coming to recognize the real source of the meaning your own mind is giving to those differences, so that you can be open to a different, more gentle way of looking at the world and yourself. As contrary to our conscious beliefs about ourselves as it may seem, the truth is that we all unconsciously want to be rejected, so that the responsibility for rejection rests outside of ourselves (**T.7.VII.8**) and we don't have to look at the choice for rejection that we have first made and then buried in our own minds.

The initial rejection was our rejection of God through our desire to be separate and apart from Him and His All-Encompassing Love. As a result of that choice, we seem to have deprived ourselves of love, a very painful state. We have rejected not only God, but our true Self, the Christ, Who is forever one with the Father. Without separation, rejection would be impossible, for there would be nothing outside to reject. In fact, **"the separation is the notion of rejection.... Any split in mind must involve a rejection of part of it, and this is the belief in separation" (T.6.I.18:4; T.6.II.1:1).**

Now, in reality, we can neither reject God nor ourselves, but we can believe that we have and convince ourselves that we are very sinful and guilty for that choice -- and vulnerable to counterattack as punishment for our choice. And so we made up a world onto which we project the attack and guilt, as well as a self that can be rejected by that world, never remembering where the thought of rejection originated. And now we can protest our innocence, for clearly it is others who are doing the rejecting (**T.7.VII.9**). The Course's purpose is to get us in touch with this self-deceiving dynamic, where we project responsibility for rejection on to others.

And so it is not with our external relationships that we want to seek changes, but rather with our internal relationships. We want to learn to reject the ego and its erroneous interpretations of what seems to be happening to us and turn instead to Jesus or the Holy Spirit, Who will help us understand what our ego has been up to. Those external relationships that seem to be the cause of feelings of rejection are nothing more than the effects of an inner decision to continue to hold on to the belief in separation and rejection. And so they are helpful triggers for directing us inward to where the real healing work needs to happen.

So to avoid relationships in the world would be to avoid the opportunities to uncover and heal the guilt within -- exactly what the ego wants!

Now this does not mean you should force yourself to be in situations that you find uncomfortable or painful, where rejection by others is certain. Before we remember that we are really a part of the boundless Love that created us as Christ, boundaries in our external relationships can be very helpful as we learn to trust our inner Teacher and become more comfortable at looking at our judgments of ourselves and others. But as the willingness to look within and heal the darkness there increases, the fear of rejection from outside must diminish, as will the need for boundaries. For **"only those who give over all desire to reject can know that their own rejection is impossible"** (T.3.VI.9:1).

Q #343: Since it is my body's brain that is thinking, then in turn asking questions, listening to Ken/others and acting out in this world, isn't it quite unlikely that we will ever "get it?"

A: Now who told you that your brain thinks? It must have been your ego! Your question, which you are not alone in asking, only reflects how effectively we have accepted the ego's ruse that we are a body and not a mind, and how totally identified we are with this false self, even though it is not our reality and it is not where our thinking originates. Jesus is aware of our confusion, for he observes, **"You also believe the body's brain can think. If you but understood the nature of thought, you could but laugh at this insane idea,"** adding that it is **"foolish... to believe the body's eyes can see; the brain can think"** (W.p.I.92.2:1,2,4).

As further evidence of our confusion, in speaking of those of us who believe we are born into this world, he notes, **"Their minds seem to be trapped in their brain, and its powers to decline if their bodies are hurt."** (T.13.in.2:7; italics added).

Our mistaken beliefs about ourselves in no way change the fact that *all* thinking, *all* consciousness (T.3.IV.2), *all* judgment, *all* choice, happen in the split mind and not in the body's brain, which is nothing more than an illusory shadow of the mind's guilt over the seeming separation. But we have deliberately set up our mistaken identity, in league with the ego, so that we no longer remember that we are a mind that has a choice about this whole bungled state of affairs, thereby assuring the ego's continued unquestioned existence.

But our goal in the Course is not to undo our identification with the body and our belief in the brain's thinking powers. Rather our goal is to undo our belief in the reality and value of guilt and attack in our relationships -- experienced between bodies in the world, although they are happening only in the mind. Jesus never asks us to do any more than what he knows we are capable of. We may not be capable yet of releasing our identification with this body, but we are quite capable of forgiving our special relationships, *with his help*. And that's all we need to "get." The rest, if we do our part, Jesus assures us, will take care of itself. We are not responsible for the effects of the miracle -- we are only responsible for choosing it (T.27.V.1:2,3,4,5). And it does not matter whether we think we are making that choice with our brain or with our mind. Our willingness to forgive, that is, to release our judgments and our insistence that we know what we need, is all that matters.

For further discussion of the relationship between mind and body, you may wish to review Questions #89, #117, #226 and #322.

Q #344: In *A Course in Miracles* T.1.VII.1 it reads..." Your distorted perceptions produce a dense cover over miracle impulses, making it hard for them to reach your own awareness. The confusion of miracle impulses with physical impulses is a major perceptual distortion. Physical impulses are misdirected

miracle impulses. All real pleasure comes from doing God's Will. This is because *not* doing it is a denial of Self." I read a similar question/answer already posted around sexual impulses...but my questions are slightly different and I need some help understanding these series of phrases referenced above: Is this a different way of saying that the decision-maker constantly is choosing between the right-mind and the wrong-mind, the Holy Spirit and the ego? If a miracle is forgiveness, or a reminder that what the body's eyes see/perceive is false, then is a miracle impulse part of a corrective thought process from the Jesus/Holy Spirit in our mind?

A: Yes, your explanation is a good one. It may still be helpful to clarify why Jesus refers to "**physical impulses**" as "**misdirected miracle impulses**" and how our "**distorted perceptions... cover over miracle impulses.**" We were created to be in perfect joy without ceasing, and the split mind, despite its mistaken beliefs about who it is, still remembers that state of happiness indirectly, primarily through its acute awareness that it is desperately unhappy. And so it is impelled to seek to return to a state of peace and joy, our natural state.

The miracle impulse, or the tendency to choose a miracle, is motivated by the recognition that we are unhappy in our current state of apparent separation and deserve more than what we are presently experiencing. But more than that, the miracle leads to a recognition that the deprivation that we feel is self-imposed, that is, it reflects a choice we have made. The miracle is a natural tendency of the mind, for it is a step in returning the mind to its original state of wholeness and peace, with all conflict left behind. The miracle reminds the mind that it *is* mind, or cause, and not a body, or effect (**T.28.II.9:3**). So miracle impulses are thoughts of the Correction, which the Holy Spirit represents to us in our right mind, that remind us that what we think has happened -- the separation from love and all the accompanying pain and guilt -- has not really happened at all. And that recognition, when fully embraced, must spell the end for the ego and its symbolic expression, our individual self.

So the ego, unable to remove what motivates the miracle impulse -- our desire to return to our natural state of peace and joy -- must distort and disguise the impulse so that we fail to remember our role in what we are experiencing. For if we truly remembered, we would not remain identified with the ego and separation for long. And so, to prevent our changing our mind, the ego does not ask us to deny our state of unhappiness, but through its distorted perceptual lens, convinces us that our unhappiness has nothing to do with any choice we have made but rather is the result of being born a helpless body into a world over which we have no control. And so the ego acknowledges our unhappiness and the conflict we feel, but guides us to look outside ourselves -- to others, to the world -- rather than within to find the joy and the peace and the love. And the search is destined to fail because it denies Who we really are and what our real Source of happiness is. Nevertheless, when we seek for pleasure in any form for the body, which we mistakenly identify as ourselves, the seeking is still motivated by a recognition -- albeit unconscious -- that happiness is our natural state. This is the same recognition from which the miracle impulse arises, but the seeking is misdirected. And all seeking in the world, because it reinforces our belief in separation, denying the only Identity in which real joy can be found, must in the end result in pain. Thus, Jesus concludes that "**all real pleasure comes [only] from doing God's Will.**"

Q #345: Sometimes in *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus seems to be encouraging us to let go of the simple physical pleasures of this world (for example, a really good cup of coffee), not because they are sinful of course, but because they reinforce our belief in sin and death. Do you see in the Course's teachings evidence of the possibility of truly reaching the peace and joy of God while still enjoying that good cup of coffee. Put another way, is it possible to really experience "I am not a body. I am free" without giving up the body's simple pleasures?

A: Yes, it is entirely possible to enjoy a good cup of coffee and still know that you are not your body. But your experience of inner peace would not change if that cup of coffee were not there as expected, or if the cup broke when you picked it up and the coffee spilled all over the floor. When you truly accept and experience that you are not a body, you are no longer dependent on anything of the body or the world as

a source of fulfillment or well being. You could enjoy the "simple pleasures of the world," but you would have no *investment* in either having or not having them. Enjoying a good cup of coffee can neither bring you salvation nor deter it. When your mind is healed, your real pleasure comes from the experience of shared identity with everyone else as Christ.

Jesus teaches us that we will be happiest when we fulfill our function of forgiveness (**W.pl.121; T.1.VII.1:4**), and he helps us distinguish between the truly valuable and the valueless (**W.pl.133; M.4.I.A.**). But he never asks us to give up -- in terms of sacrificing -- what we still want and feel is important in our lives. Honesty about what we desire is always a helpful approach to take in this, as is being free of judgment about it. This is not a course in asceticism; the body and the things of the world are not the problem, as many other spiritualities teach. The purpose for which we use them is the only meaningful aspect.

On one level, taking pleasure in anything of the world represents an attack on God and our true inheritance as His Son. However, since we are too frightened to simply let go of our mistaken belief that the world and the body are real, Jesus gently teaches us how to use the world and the body in a way that would facilitate the healing of our minds. He counsels us to see our lives as classrooms with either him or the ego as our teacher -- the choice is ours to make. So if we join with Jesus and view our lives as classrooms in which we are learning how to awaken from the nightmare of separation from God, then our focus will be on identifying how we reinforce the separation in our interactions and relationships. In this context, enjoying a good cup of coffee is irrelevant, unless we make it into a big deal, which we easily could by allowing it to make or ruin our day, and then hold someone else responsible.

Q #346: After years of searching and studying many religions, I have found *A Course in Miracles* provides the answers I crave. My husband has a copy of the Course, which I gave him, but has not paid much attention to it. Recently he was baptized and joined the Baptist Church here in the South. Wanting to support his need for spiritual nourishment, I also joined the church. However I find that I am extremely uncomfortable during bible study or services when they ask you to confess to being a sinner, that Jesus died for your sins, that Satan is real, hell is real, etc. I find myself struggling between 'joining' my husband at his church of choice so as not to separate our spiritual relationship, and doing what I'd like to do, which is to attend Unity Church, which provides a forum for Course students and a more 'open minded' theology. But the last thing I want to do is create separation of any kind in our marriage. Would I be abandoning my husband spiritually if I send him off to Baptist Church by himself and I go to Unity? Your advice would be greatly appreciated.

A: The seeming dilemmas of our lives are really only ever covers for the underlying conflict in our minds, which is always the same conflict -- shall I judge or shall I forgive? Despite what may seem to be the compelling nature of any external situation which is calling out for resolution, its only real value is what blocks it helps us uncover within our own ego thought system that prevent us from seeing shared rather than separate interests.

You seem genuinely concerned for your husband but you also seem to be torn over a sense that the choice is between your own spiritual progress and your husband's. Or, as the ego likes to put everything - it's one or the other, that is, for one of you to gain, the other must lose. And this can only ever be the ego speaking. And it is this way of perceiving the situation, rather than the situation itself, that you want to look at and bring to Jesus or the Holy Spirit for help in seeing differently. It is only the ego that ever calls for someone to sacrifice.

The Course is a self-study program whose workbook lessons lead to a recognition over time that *all* situations and circumstances are conducive to learning to practice its principles. You have opportunities to put forgiveness into practice no matter which church you attend, or whether you attend no church at all, whenever you are with others, or whenever you are thinking about others, no matter who

they are. The egos that we encounter, whether it be at the Unity Church or the Baptist Church or the grocery store, are always fundamentally the same, and we are only ever called upon to learn forgiveness, no matter what form our ego projections may appear to take. Learning to watch our own and others' egos in action, without judging, is all that Jesus ever asks of us in any situation.

Now, lest you think that this is an endorsement of your attending the Baptist Church with your husband rather than Unity Church by yourself, it is also helpful to remember that joining has nothing to do with what bodies do and whether they are together or not. The only concern is with which part of the mind we are joining -- the ego or the Holy Spirit -- and choosing as our teacher. The joining occurs first in the mind and only then is reflected in the external relationships, which may or may not then involve bodies being together.

The important thing will be for you to uncover all the judgments and investments you have in each of the alternatives you currently perceive and take those thoughts to the Holy Spirit for help. Once you have released your own investments in any particular outcome, the important healing will have happened and the external solution will be only of secondary concern. For, joined with the right teacher and free of your own perceived needs, you will be acting in whatever way is most loving, whether you end up attending the Baptist Church, the Unity Church, both churches, or neither church!

For a consideration of how to be in a religious situation that you feel is inconsistent with the Course's teachings, you may find [Question #154](#) helpful.

Q #347: As a student of *A Course in Miracles*, I am finding the Christmas holiday season more and more difficult and depressing with each passing year. How do I reconcile the desire to want to take part in and be joyous and of good cheer during this time of the year which to me only seems to validate the special message and the meaning my ego has given to this season? It's like a tug of war: on the one hand wanting to make Jesus special for his "holy birth," and on the other hand wanting to make me special for not wanting to take part in the holiday. I am trying not to judge the holiday but rather feel apathetic towards it. Can you help me see this differently?

A: As our understanding of the Course deepens, we begin to see the meaninglessness of the world's values and beliefs, including those most "sacred," such as Christmas. To the ego this *is* depressing, for the ego wants nothing more than to have "divine" validation. What greater proof that the world is real and we are in it, than to have God send His Son into the world to redeem it? Challenging this belief, therefore, is extremely threatening to the ego. The conflict you describe is very common, and is inevitable as long as meaning is sought in the meaningless. If the Christmas holiday celebration were not endowed with any "holy" significance (it has none), nor seen as any different from other simple pleasures one may enjoy in the world, there would be no need to respond to it any differently than an enjoyable day at the beach. Engaging in the activities of the season is not the problem, and being apathetic to them is not the solution. It is the desire that the ego's insanity be true, and that salvation be found in the multitude of substitutes made up specifically to exclude God and deny truth, that reinforces guilt and causes the conflict you describe. Learning this is a process, and Christmas is a perfect classroom in which to recognize the deep investment we have in defending our identity as bodies and proving we are right. Thinking we are bodies in the world, and that Christmas, among many other things, will make us happy, is what actually makes us deeply miserable. Our true hope lies in accepting that *we do not know* who we are, nor what will make us happy. We may then be willing to accept the Holy Spirit's definition of Who we are as God's one Son, and find happiness in *knowing* our true Identity.

In themselves, the gifts, lights, and symbols of Christmas made by the ego to glorify specialness are nothing. In fact, Jesus uses many of these same symbols in the Course to teach us the opposite of the ego's message of separation and specialness. The mistake is believing they themselves have the power to make us truly happy or give us the peace we seek. It is this belief that causes the distress you

describe. Hope for a peaceful holiday lies in the willingness to look at these illusory beliefs, without judging them as anything *but* illusory.

We give ourselves a true gift when we do what Jesus tells us: **"This Christmas give the Holy Spirit everything that would hurt you" (T.15.XI.3:1)**. What hurts us is identifying with the ego thought system. "It's the thought that counts" is a common refrain in reference to holiday gift giving. It applies aptly here since it is indeed our mistaken thoughts that are transformed when given to the Holy Spirit, thereby bringing us immense relief from the madness of the ego's lies. It is thus possible to take part in the holiday celebration, seeing it as yet another classroom to learn the Holy Spirit's lessons of forgiveness rather than to reinforce the ego's specialness. In this spirit we *can* find peace this Christmas season, while participating in the celebrations in whatever way seems fitting.

Q #348: I first discovered *A Course in Miracles* in San Diego ten years ago, and I believe was initially drawn to California due to what I perceive as an incredible spiritual energy. It's been approximately two years since I moved to a mid-western state, and although I know on an intellectual level that my sense of peace and connectedness to God has nothing to do with where I am, I cannot seem to get over the fact that since moving away from California, I can't find the same sense of spiritual awareness, closeness to God, and peace that I felt while there. Could it be that this so-called "connectedness" that I felt in San Diego was yet another ego tactic that was easy to find in such a vibrant place, or could it be that San Diego truly is where I belong?

A: You are correct in saying that your peace has nothing to do with your location. Where you happen to be living neither gives you peace nor takes it away. Nor is a geographical area imbued with spiritual energy. The only "place" where we get in touch with our true nature as spirit is in the mind. Therefore, if you are not feeling at peace in your new home it cannot be due to your surroundings. It is a reflection of the loss of peace experienced as the result of a decision to leave your *real* home. The guilt for having "run away" from God is the source of the feelings of sadness and loss you are experiencing.

Needless to say, in this dream of exile it is very normal for us to develop a special relationship with a geographical area that we love, and that suits us. It is our belief that we are incomplete that compels us to endow certain people, places, or things with the power to meet our needs in some way. When they fail us or are no longer "ours," we then experience a deep sense of loss. They become our "idols," taking the place (pardon the pun) of where we truly belong, i.e., at home with God: **"You are at home in God, dreaming of exile but perfectly capable of awakening to reality. Is it your decision to do so?" (T.10.I.2:1,2)**. When you feel homesick for San Diego, it is important not to deny all that you appreciate and love about it, nor to deny your feelings of loss. At the same time, you may recognize the real source of your pain and ask the Holy Spirit for the correction so that the process of healing the specialness can begin. Only in this way will the sadness and loss gradually dissolve.

Q #349: I am only on Lesson 36 in the workbook of *A Course in Miracles*, but I want so much to assimilate it all and grow this way.... FAST! Anyway... I am currently unemployed, running out of money very quickly with none coming in, facing mold issues in my rented house, unable to lose weight due to a newly recognized thyroid problem... all physical illusions I want to and am very willing to give up, but... how does one stop "perceiving" these body/physical/survival issues and deal with them?

A: The Course will, perhaps to your disappointment, not tell you what to do to get rid of your problems, but rather it will teach you how to look at them so that you may be as peaceful as you're willing to be, regardless of what seems to be happening. Now that does not mean that you won't make any effort or take specific steps to resolve the problems, just as any "normal" human being might. By all means, determine the best way to take care of yourself and your body. But wouldn't it be preferable to proceed

without a sense of urgency, fear or anxiety? Now that will more than likely take time to achieve, and patience is one of the characteristics of an *advanced* teacher of God (**M.4.VIII**)! So don't get discouraged if shifts in your perception do not happen as quickly as you think you'd like them to.

You may wish to have a focus on developing a relationship with your inner teacher -- Jesus, the Holy Spirit, or whatever you're comfortable with calling that presence -- which the workbook lessons should be helping to facilitate. For developing that relationship in your mind can go a long way towards offering you the comfort of knowing, as you address your life challenges, that there is Someone who genuinely cares for you Who is always available to you so that you know you are never alone.

To get an idea of how questions raising some concerns parallel to the ones you have identified have been addressed, you may wish to review Questions [#128](#), [#142](#), [#229](#), [#235](#), and [#313](#).

Q #350: Since God is only concerned about eternal things (unconditional love, etc.) and did not create, recognize, nor is concerned about anything outside of the eternal -- material, bodies, earth, etc., I would like an answer to the following question: Since we were all God, "One Mind," originally, that means that there could not have been anything else. That would mean that there could not have been a "dreamer to dream any dream" nor could there have been any separation from God (through any autonomous desire to create ourselves) because there was nothing else. God would have had to be the dreamer and, thus, He would have had to separate from Himself. In other words, to say that "anyone" is an illusion could not be true and would have to be an illusion in itself because it could not have happened! After months of struggle this was revealed to me a few days ago. Please let me have your thoughts!

A: I believe you've got it! What makes such issues ultimately impossible to address satisfactorily is that we are attempting to make sense of an illusory state from within that illusory state. It's enough to make you crazy, but we already are, for believing we're in that illusory state. Only a split mind can have a question, for within perfect Oneness, there can be nothing that is unknown, hidden or forgotten. And "anything outside of the eternal" can only be nothing, although we make much ado about it. To say that an illusion is an illusion is to operate still within the illusion, but it has the advantage of not perpetuating further illusion. That, in a nutshell, is what forgiveness is (**C.3.1:3,4**).

For further discussion of the ego and its origins, see Questions [#10](#), [#88](#), and [#171](#).

Q #351: Regarding the phrase, "The memory of God comes to a quiet mind," which "mind" is this referencing? If it's the "brain mind" we use in the daily dream, does this mean that it is helpful to find and use ways to try to quiet the brain, for example, meditation? If the phrase refers to the one Mind, how is it possible to "quiet" that Mind through the interference of our "Brahmanic"?

A: The mind *A Course in Miracles* refers to here is the right mind, not the brain. This mind *is* quiet. It is only when the mind chooses to identify with the thought of separation that awareness of the memory of God is blocked and the quiet is replaced by the ego's "raucous shrieking." The Course tells us that the purpose of the ego's shrieks is to keep us anchored in its thought system, unaware that we have a mind at all, much less a quiet one.

Meditation may be helpful to keep us focused on our goal, and there are several meditative exercises in the workbook to help us. However, neither meditation in itself nor quieting the brain is the means the Course uses to bring about the mind's healing of the thought of separation. It is asking us to *look* at the thoughts, beliefs, and feelings that flood into our awareness from the mind through our brains, not to try to silence them: **"Our task is but to continue, as fast as possible, the necessary process of looking straight at all the interference and seeing it exactly as it is" (T.15.IX.2:1).**

The beliefs we hold about ourselves as separate, sinful and guilty, and our attack thoughts that are projections of our guilt onto others keep the awareness of God's Love blocked. They have been purposefully chosen in defense of the decision to be separate, and must be recognized as the cause of all the devastating effects we experience in the ego's nightmare. Looking in this way leads us to question the value we place on our beliefs: **"To learn this course requires willingness to question every value that you hold. Not one can be kept hidden and obscure but it will jeopardize your learning. No belief is neutral. Every one has the power to dictate each decision you make"**

(T.24.in.2:1,2,3,4). We will eventually learn that our beliefs have no value; only then will we be free to let them go so they can be replaced by the thoughts of the Holy Spirit Who brings healing to our minds. This healed mind is the quiet mind where the memory of God returns to awareness.

Q #352: I have been reading the text and doing the lessons in *A Course In Miracles* for the last six months. At this point I am deeply unsettled and in a lot of pain. As a veteran of the 12 steps of AA, I am used to looking at my uglier perceptions honestly, but I seem to be feeling a deeper level of rage and hate and it is not pretty. I feel neither the ego's pleasure nor the peace of the Holy Spirit. I really do feel of two minds and my decision as to which one to follow feels random and confusing. I feel like I have no idea who I am and what I am doing. I am recently unemployed and have no idea what to do for work now. I have no lover or intimate relationship in my life and haven't for a long time. My friendships are solid and supportive but I am torn between feeling depressed/angry on the one hand and grateful on the other. I have felt genuine gratitude for the events in my life, even though from a cultural perspective, I may appear not to have much going for me at this time. I am now sinking into a depression over externals and am afraid of being stuck there. I could use some advice.

A: The Course assures us that it can be a gentle path (e.g., **T.6.V.2:1; T.14.IX.3:2; T.15.XI.1:5,6; T.19.IV.A.11:6; T.21.I.3:1,2**). However, our egos, frightened of the prospect of losing control and being dissolved in love, seem determined to allow the process to be anything but gentle. For the ego thrives on gravity and seriousness and would never want us to take its antics lightly. Know that you are not alone in the struggle you are experiencing.

You speak of feeling that you are of two minds, with your choice between them as random and confusing. One helpful step in your process may be to understand what the Course is calling us to do when it asks us to choose between those two minds -- the ego and the Holy Spirit. For most of us, for much of the time, and certainly especially when we are first embarking on this journey, choosing the Holy Spirit will mean very simply learning to look at our ego and all its ugliness without judging it. We are not being asked to deny it, for we still believe it's real. But if we can look at the ego very honestly, without judging it, it will begin to lose some of its seeming power. Rather than overwhelming, it will begin to appear merely pathetic, even silly. And we will begin increasingly to recognize that our ego does not really make us all that different from everyone else. We all share its insanity and if we feel ashamed of it, it can only be because we are denying that commonality with all our brothers and sisters.

Now obviously, this looking is not something we can do on our own, as you are experiencing. For when we look on our own, which really means looking with our ego -- the ego, by definition, *is* what it means to be on our own -- the result can only be pain and despair. They are the ego's defense against our decision to become willing to lighten up with the help of Jesus or the Holy Spirit. Jesus has asked us to join *with him* in the process of looking at our egos (e.g., **T.11.V.1**) because without that gentle presence alongside us, we can only deceive ourselves into believing the horror of what we see in ourselves. Yet Jesus simply smiles at all of it, and perhaps that is why we hesitate turning to him, for we may not be ready to have our egos, while we remain so intimately identified with them, dismissed so lightly.

It is also good to remember that there is no need to force the process, no need to insist on looking more deeply when our fear is too great, for then we only succeed in frightening ourselves, another of the ego's goals to keep itself alive and kicking. In Jesus' own gentle, undemanding words, **"If you find resistance strong and dedication weak, you are not ready. Do not fight yourself"** (T.30.I.1:6,7).

Depression is yet one more weapon in the ego's arsenal of defenses against the truth about Who we really are. The Course attributes depression to the fact that we are trying to learn an impossible curriculum -- finding happiness on the ego's terms (**T.8.VII.8**). Yet while we are caught in its downward spiral, it may be that seeking support from others, such as a gentle, accepting therapist, can provide the helping hand we need to pull ourselves out of the quicksand of ego judgments. If you find yourself sinking in your interpretations of your life situation, by all means please consider looking for someone who can help you find a different way of dealing with your circumstances. Again, what is important is to recognize that you are not alone. It can only be your ego that wants you to believe that you are alone and trapped, and the ego is capable only of lies.

You may find some additional thoughts that could be of help to you in your situation in Questions [#95](#) and [#313](#).

Q #353: Please explain to me how I can recognize "my purpose" in life. I don't get an intuitive feeling that I have found it, nor do I know what clues to look for. I have been told several times that once it is revealed to me, my whole life will just fall into place! I would appreciate your input.

A: From the point of view of *A Course in Miracles*, your purpose is to practice forgiveness in every area of your life, so that you would awaken from the dream that you have a life and a will separate from God, your Source. The Course is not about success or fulfillment in the world, because it teaches us that the world was made to hide our true purpose and therefore to prevent us from ever experiencing the happiness that is our inheritance as God's Son. On the other hand, the Course is not against pursuing a career or being successful in a role in the world. For example, it is especially important for young people just out of school to devote themselves to their work and relationships. It is not usually helpful for young people starting out in life to be confronted with the idea that the world is a defense against the truth. That should come later when a deeper level of questioning comes naturally from within themselves.

The Course's view actually is quite liberating in the sense that you can fulfill your special function of forgiveness in any role, in any career, at any time, and in any place, because it has to do only with the content in your mind, not the form your life takes (**T.25.VI**). You thus can view your life as a classroom that presents one opportunity after another to recognize whether you have chosen the ego or Jesus as your teacher, and then to make another choice if you discover you have chosen the ego. You would know which one you have chosen by your experience. With Jesus or the Holy Spirit guiding you, you would see your interests as less and less in conflict with others, which means that you would realize that you share the same wrong mind and the same right mind with everyone else. You would be more inclined to relate to yourself and others in the context of sharing the same needs and dynamics of the ego and the same attraction to undoing separation. Growing into this way of relating to others is your function. The lessons in the workbook, combined with study of the text, are designed to facilitate this training.

Q #354: It is my understanding that the ego is nothing more than an erroneous thought system, and is in actuality dead. I see it as a cast aside useless balloon that we choose to pick up, infuse it with the life of our magnificent minds and give it instructions to play havoc with our lives, bodies, relationships and circumstances. Is my assessment of the ego, and our total responsibility for its employment in our affairs correct and in keeping with the teachings of *A Course in Miracles*?

A: Yes, your assessment is very much in keeping with the Course's teachings. It is very simple, not complicated at all. As Kenneth once said: we keep betting on a horse that dropped dead at the starting gate. The problem is that we have constructed many layers of defenses to prevent ourselves from ever getting to this point of clarity, and especially of remembering that there is an alternative for us to choose. A major thrust of the Course, therefore, is to help us identify the nature of those defenses and how they

operate in our lives. The *purpose* of our choosing the ego thought system is also a key consideration; and that purpose, of course, is so that we can have our own special lives, apart from perfect oneness. **"By definition, an illusion is an attempt to make something real that is regarded as of major importance, but is recognized as being untrue. The mind therefore seeks to make it true out of its intensity of desire to have it for itself. Illusions are travesties of creation; attempts to bring truth to lies. Finding truth unacceptable, the mind revolts against truth and gives itself an illusion of victory" (M.8.2:3,4,5,6).**

Knowing intellectually that it is erroneous and totally illusory is a major step; but the integration of that understanding into our experience is where the hard work comes in, because integral to this thought system that we have allowed to program our thinking and behavior is the terrifying threat of annihilation if we change our minds about its validity and then choose a different thought system. That is why we need to develop a relationship with an internal Teacher who stands outside that entire thought system and who sees us as we truly are. That is why there is *A Course in Miracles*.

Q #355: I have been a devoted student of *A Course in Miracles* (as well as Ken Wapnick) for the past 10 years; I truly try to live my life by its principles. For the past 4-5 years I have been living in what I can only describe as "mental hell". My mind is constantly filled with terror, a fear of impending doom and extreme anxiety. Since my external world is relatively problem-free, I do not even have anything onto which to project this terror. How do I deal with living in this "circle of fear"?

A: The terror, when it has us in its grip, can seem almost palpable. And it is in the ego's complete self-interest to convince us that the terror is inescapable, no matter what we may know intellectually about its origins and the process of release. Not to underestimate or minimize the intensity of what has been your experience for the past four or five years, but the ego would prefer nothing more than to have you believe that terror has been your *only* experience. In other words, the ego is invested in the denial of any right-minded experiences you may have been having during this seemingly bleak period. Discouragement and despair are just as effective weapons in the ego's arsenal as anger and hate, for they are all simply various forms of the same underlying content of guilt, screeching that the separation is real.

While it is certainly true that our responsibility is to uncover and acknowledge the darkness within our minds so it can be released, that does not mean we should overlook or negate the experiences of light that offer the correction for the darkness, brief as they may at times seem. Do not deny them, for it is in their acknowledgment that the lifeline to peace is reinforced in your awareness. It may at first seem like the most fragile thread, barely to be trusted to bear the weight of your heavy guilt as you try to climb out of your self-imposed quagmire. But as you recognize and accept those fleeting episodes of peace, the thread becomes a string, the string a cord, the cord a rope, and the rope a ladder of forgiveness that you can climb, confidently and sure-footedly, one step at a time, until you reach the top, rising above the "circle of fear," the quicksand of guilt, and the abyss of despair. And never forget the gentle hand that is always outstretched to help you with each step, for this is a climb you need not make on your own, nor can you. And that hand may come in a form you least expect, as a brother who offers you another opportunity to remember the truth about the both of you.

You do not indicate that the anxiety and terror are so disabling that they disrupt your functioning in the world. Nevertheless, there is nothing in the Course that says you should not seek help from outside yourself, in the form of a kind and supportive therapist who can help you uncover any of the symbols of terror that are buried in your mind, still exerting a strong unconscious effect on your recognition that you deserve to be happy and at peace. The journey is not an easy one through the heart of darkness, but your vigilance and perseverance will be paid off increasingly in a light-heartedness that will surprise you. You need only be open to it and it *will* be yours. Do not forget that although patience may be a characteristic of an *advanced* teacher of God (**M.4.VIII**), it nevertheless is a quality we can all begin to acquire now.

Q #356: I have seen in print *A Course in Miracles* referred to as "a Christian teaching." It is not, of course. However, I am hard pressed to find an appropriate adjective to describe the Course. It is a non-dualistic, psychological, philosophical, channeled teaching. Is there an easier way to say it?

A: Sometimes it is sufficient to describe the Course simply as a spiritual path that focuses on peace and forgiveness. Often, that is enough. If people want to know more than that, they will ask, and then you can expand as much as is appropriate. You could add, for example, that it is not a religion; there are no rituals and no clergy; it is a course of individual study and practice that helps us to remember God through forgiveness. If you are asked whether it is Christian, in addition to saying that it is not a religion, etc., you might say that there are many biblical terms in the Course, but they have a very different meaning, not the traditional meaning as presented in the Bible -- expanding, again, as appropriate. Depending on the questions and those who are asking, you can then get into the psychological and metaphysical dimensions of the Course, and how it came.

Q #357: Can you clarify what Kenneth means in *The 50 Miracle Principles* when he says that my "gift of peace will be given to the other person; whether that person chooses to accept this is between that person and Jesus." What if the other person I am working with is not a student of *A Course in Miracles*, and not in touch at all with their hidden love? Implicit in this question is my frustration and fear concerning the fact that I have given gifts to my ex-girlfriend with whom I had a bad breakup. I am seeing her less and less through the eyes of fear and more and more through the eyes of love, but I have not gotten the response that I had hoped for. I am confused about the meaning of: "As you begin to recognize the gifts you have so freely given your brother" and I have and I am growing and excited; but I guess my dream is for her to come up to me and say "Oh by the way I experienced this new way of looking at you." (LOL) Can you offer me a little insight here?

A: The distinction between form and content is important when working with these teachings. The "gift of peace" comes from the decision you make in your mind not to see your interests as apart from your girlfriend's. That is the content. It is no different from the "gift of peace" you give to anyone else. It means rising above specialness, which always involves separate interests: seeing yourself as lacking and seeing the other person as having what you want and need. Once you rise above specialness -- if only for an instant -- the separation between you and the other person will be gone; you will be at peace; and your experience will be that that peace enfolds you and the other person as one. In that instant all needs and expectations simply disappear; it truly does not matter whether the other person responds or not. The form or expression of the content would vary from individual to individual, but that is not what is important. That is the ideal that we want to grow into. A lesson that is helpful in this context is **"When I am healed, I am not healed alone" (W.pl.137).**

From the world's point, the purpose of the relationship is to get what you want -- to have your girlfriend in your life so that you will feel complete and fulfilled. It is natural to feel that everything will be wonderful if only your girlfriend would respond the way you want her to. That is how we approach relationships in the world. But that approach is coming from our wrong minds -- which does not make it sinful or bad, nor does it mean that you should not pursue a romantic relationship. If you are working with the Course, you just want to be completely honest about the purpose of the relationship for you now; then ask for help if you would like the relationship to have a different purpose.

From the Holy Spirit's point of view, the purpose of any relationship is to be the means by which we undo our own belief in separation. It is a process that takes place in our own minds. **"The Holy Spirit, ever practical in His wisdom, accepts your dreams and uses them as means for waking. You would have used them to remain asleep. I said before that the first change, before dreams disappear, is that your dreams of fear are changed to happy dreams. That is what the Holy Spirit does in the special relationship. He does not destroy it, nor snatch it away from you. But He does use it differently, as a help to make His purpose real to you. The special relationship will remain, not as a source of pain and guilt, but as a source of joy and freedom. It will not be for you alone, for therein lay its misery. As its unholiness kept it a thing apart, its holiness will become an offering to everyone" (T.18.II.6).**

This, obviously, is quite different from the world's approach, where our focus is on making our lives in the world better. This shift in our approach to everything is the object of the training in the workbook lessons. It takes a long time for most of us, because it seems to go against what has become natural to us. It seems normal to think that we will be just fine as soon as the external condition changes -- as soon as this particular person responds the way I want her to. But Jesus is teaching us that this attitude simply reinforces our problem rather than solving it. It reinforces our belief in the reality of our lack and our anguish and unhappiness. Again, that does not mean that you cannot have a relationship. It means that the purpose would be different.

Q #358: It has been two years since I started to study *A Course in Miracles* and, though I was really scared in the beginning, I've kept going in spite of all my fears. Some days when I'm feeling guilty, everything seems to go wrong and I just want to die. I realize I am being egotistic, but I'm such a drama queen. I stay in deep depression for hours feeling sorry for myself, playing the martyr, thinking of how the person I feel guilty about will feel guilty after my death. I always find my way back to peace because that is what I really want. But why do I behave like such a spoiled little girl? What can I do to stop this insane "my way or the highway" behavior?

A: Ah, yes, **"Death seems an easy price, if they can say, 'Behold me, brother, at your hand I die!'" (T.27.I.4:6).** The ego is really the king (or queen) of drama, and we all deserve Tony's for our so very convincing performances as victims of the world, day after day after day, *ad nauseum*. If nothing else, we have convinced *ourselves* of the parts we're playing, although we may be getting more suspicious that things are not as we have imagined them to be. You have made a big step by being honest with yourself in identifying what your ego is up to, without trying to justify it.

The goal, however, is not to put an end to the drama, for that would give the events of our lives a role in dictating how we feel that they simply do not have. They are only ever external cues that point to an inner choice to continue to identify with the conflict and guilt of the ego thought system rather than the peace of the Holy Spirit's alternative, and then to project responsibility for the effects of that choice outside ourselves onto someone else. It is within our own minds that the change needs to happen. And it begins by looking nonjudgmentally on our choice for the ego and the accompanying consequences, the desire to keep ourselves separate from everyone else, beginning with God, Whom we believe we sent packing when we decided we wanted our way at any cost.

We behave like spoiled little children because we still identify with the ultimate spoiler, the ego, which has actually convinced us that we could spoil the perfection of God's heaven and make an impermanent world in which everything will in the end spoil. Jesus assures us that this is all insanity, but we stubbornly cling to our false identities, convinced that a miserable false identity is better than no separate individual identity at all.

So continue looking at what your ego is up to, acknowledging the effect it has on you when you choose to align your thinking with it, and you will find that its appeal will simply fade over time. For the ego can only continue to exert its control in the dark, as we willingly agree to continue to fool ourselves about what it is up to. But as its agenda of guilt and pain and blame becomes increasingly clear through our nonjudgmental looking with Jesus or the Holy Spirit, the choice against conflict and guilt, and hence for peace and guiltlessness, will become simpler and simpler to make.

Q #359: I have a friend who thinks that I am in love with him even though he knows that I have a spouse and children. I do have affection for him because he has helped me to learn how to get myself through some trying times. Perhaps he has misunderstood my affection; I don't know. I feel very discouraged and tempted to start anew somewhere else.

I have this nagging feeling that this relationship mirrors a recurring pattern in my life: a real ambivalence toward joining with anyone, as *A Course in Miracles* defines joining. I seem to create relationships in which I can eventually justify pushing the other person away, both emotionally and physically, while at the

same time I have a need to be liked by the person. I'm assuming that these attributes of mine are just two more forms of self-hatred --- and complicated forms at that. In a recent, similar question (#180), you advised a student to focus on healing the underlying guilt in her mind that her unrequited "love" relationship had uncovered, and that once she had accomplished the healing, her uncertainty over the relationship would dissipate.

Can I assume that the answer to my dilemma might be the same as for the student in Question #180?

A: Yes, although the form of the relationship you describe is different from the relationship described in the earlier question, the content, as well as the solution, is no different. In fact, it's always the same! The recurring pattern you identify in your relationships reflects an ambivalence that necessarily characterizes *all* ego-based relationships. The problem is not ever the form of the relationship but the purpose that we give it -- to reinforce our belief in separation and guilt -- although of course we keep that purpose hidden from ourselves. The following passage from early in the Course describes quite explicitly our self-hatred, and its origins in our ego's denial of God, as the dynamic that underlies all our relationships in the world:

"You who identify with your ego cannot believe God loves you. You do not love what you made [the ego] and what you made does not love you. Being made out of the denial of the Father, the ego has no allegiance to its maker. You cannot conceive of the real relationship that exists between God and His creations because of your hatred for the self you made. You project onto the ego the decision to separate, and this conflicts with the love you feel for the ego because you made it. *No love in this world is without this ambivalence*, and since no ego has experienced love without ambivalence the concept is beyond its understanding. Love will enter immediately into any mind that truly wants it, but it must want it truly. This means that it wants it without ambivalence, and this kind of wanting is wholly without the ego's 'drive to get'" (T.4.III.4; italics added).

In other words, if God our Source is only Love but we seek to be something other than a part of that Love, we are choosing against the love that we are and must believe that we have deprived ourselves of it. The ego self we make as a replacement for God and our true Self must therefore be the opposite of love, or hate. Although we are attracted to what we have made because it is our own, we also blame it for the loss of love we feel. And so any "love" within the ego thought system of separation must be an ambivalent combination of attraction and hatred. Since we identify with the ego, this is really self-hatred. Finding this self-hatred intolerable, we make up a world and separate brothers to hold responsible for the lack of love we feel. And then we search for that love in others, at the same time blaming them for taking it from us and depriving us of what we insist we rightfully deserve, denying all the time that it was our own choice that brought us to this sorry situation. All relationships in the world, whether they involve a romantic component or not, must have this ambivalent dynamic, so long as we continue to choose the ego -- the belief in the reality of the separation -- as our guide and teacher. For they are always predicated on the assumption that something is missing in me and must be found outside of me. But it is inevitable that the other will fail in the end to meet my needs. And so there seems to be no alternative but to terminate this relationship and go in search of another, hoping that perhaps the next one will be the one that really works. But it never will. For the ego's maxim, that underlies all its efforts, is **"Seek, but do not find"** (T.16.V.6:5).

Love need not be found nor earned nor seized -- in fact, it cannot be. It can only be remembered. And we remember it by wanting it truly, which means we want nothing else -- none of the special trappings of the ego, which are all nothing more than disguised guilt. We must relinquish "the drive to get," whatever form it takes, including the need to be liked or valued or appreciated. But before we can relinquish the ego's seeking, we must look honestly at what it involves and acknowledge what the underlying content really is -- loss, anger and attack -- or we will not be willing to release it and in fact will feel like we are being compelled to sacrifice something we want and need.

And so the problem is always guilt, or self-hatred, and the solution is always uncovering that inner seeming blight so that, through joining with Jesus or Holy Spirit -- the reflected Presence of love in our minds -- its unreality can be recognized. For if love is there with us looking on our judgment against ourselves for turning our backs on love and attacking it, then the case against ourselves can simply be dismissed (T.5.VI.10). In those moments when we accept the healing, we can be a reminder to others -- those with whom we are in various relationships -- that they too can make the same choice to look within rather than to seek outside themselves. And it will not be the words we speak but simply the unambivalent love and acceptance that flow through us -- love that neither looks for nor demands anything from anyone -- that will remind them and reinforce that recognition within us.

Q #360: Is the following correct?

If the ego does not exist and this world is of the ego, then logically speaking, this submission to the Foundation's Question and Answer Service is not really happening either, except in a dream or illusion. And if I, the writer of this submission, do not exist except as a character in a dreamer's dream, and God is Mind, and God is All That Is, then *all* of this world and *all* of its inhabitants are the entire cast of characters in this dream of God's.

A: You're in good company with Hindu teachings, which also speak of the world as God's dream. But *A Course in Miracles* takes a very different position on the origins and nature of the illusory world, derived from its totally uncompromising non-dualistic metaphysics. The Course teaches that once you *seem* to have a thought of separation, you are outside of the Mind of God, which is total Oneness. Consciousness, perception and dreams, all predicated on the reality of a self and other, are outcomes of a thought of separation that has never happened and so are also outside the Mind of God. They are all illusory and only God is real, so they can not be contained within His reality -- nor ours, as His undifferentiated Son (even our words here betray the limits of our ego framework for discussing any of this, for we seem to have slipped into a dualistic description of our reality in God).

The thought of separation and the dream that follows from it to protect and defend its existence have nothing whatsoever to do with God. However, once believing in the illusion, we have two ways of looking at it: 1) as proof that we have wrested a separate existence from God at his expense, or 2) as a dream from which we need the help of the sane part of our split mind to awaken. For even within our split (separate) mind, we carry the memory of Who we really are as a part of that Oneness, which enables us to use the illusory symbols of the world for a purpose other than separation and its concomitants of sin, guilt and fear. And that purpose is forgiveness, the release of all the judgments of the ego, which will transform our perception of the world from one of separate interests to one of shared interests.

And so you are correct in describing your experience as a writer and submitter of questions to the Question and Answer Service as all part of the illusory dream, but it has nothing to do with God. Yet your purpose can be one of acquiring true or healed perception, still illusory but not reinforcing the belief in illusions. And that is a necessary step before you can return to the total abstraction of knowledge -- the Course's term for our reality with God in Heaven -- beyond all perception and dreams.

Q #361: One of my favorite passages from *A Course in Miracles* is "To forgive is merely to remember all the loving thoughts you gave in the past and those that were given you....ALL THE REST MUST BE FORGOTTEN"...Sorry but I can't tell you where it is found in the text. I would like your comment on this passage. I have never heard anyone else mention it...maybe I'm missing something...and I wouldn't want to do that!! Maybe the "merely" doesn't really mean "merely"...maybe my approach should be more complex...anyway...it's a beautiful passage...!

A: This passage is from "**Shadows of the Past**" (T.17.III.1:1,2). This is the heart of the forgiveness process. There is a parallel passage occurring earlier in the text: "**Do not, then, be deceived in your brother, and see only his loving thoughts as his reality, for by denying that his mind is split you will heal yours**" (T.11.VIII.9:1). The practice of this is not easy because of the investment we all have in

seeing other people as the cause of our problems. As a result, our resistance to complete forgiveness will be quite strong, or in our zeal to be holy and spiritual, we will simply cover over all the pain and hurt inside so that we will see only what is loving in ourselves and others. The pain and hurt remain, though, and forgiveness then is not sincere. This is a process requiring complete honesty and patience with ourselves, and asking for help to look at how tempting it is to hold on to grievances and to blame others for our distress. That is why Jesus says **"Do not, then, be deceived in your brother..."** He knows that we have been deceived because we see ourselves as the innocent victims of others' wickedness or viciousness. So we must first look at this tendency within ourselves, recognize where it is coming from, and then ask for help to be guided by the Teacher of forgiveness.

Q #362: The workbook of *A Course in Miracles* says "forgiveness looks, and waits, and judges not." I understand the looking and the not judging, but what exactly are we waiting for?

A: This is a way of saying that we will awaken from the dream when we no longer are afraid of letting go of the false self we made, and are ready to accept back our true Identity as the one Son of God. Our fear is so great that we progress towards awakening through instants of forgiveness; but these are quickly followed by fear of what total forgiveness means for us. So the gentleness of forgiveness is expressed through patiently accepting where we are, and not being hard on ourselves when we find ourselves right back in the thick of the ego's insanity.

Q #363: I see some profound similarities between *A Course in Miracles* and Advaita Vedanta philosophy. Both state that this world (the physical universe) is an illusion, or, in Hindi, "maya". However, in Vedanta philosophy there is a strong emphasis on karma (action), which would be the Western equivalent of sin if the karma is "negative." In other words, we reap what we sow. I was very comfortable with this doctrine for many years, as it made logical sense to me....until the Course. Now it seems that even the belief in karma is an illusion, according to the Course's metaphysics. Do I have to completely deny *everything* regarding this temporal experience? No matter how intellectually satisfying the Course is in the abstract, I have a hard time with it on a day-to-day basis. Any solutions?

A: The desire to believe in karma, in particular bad or negative karma, is the desire to make sin real, in particular, the sins of others, whom we still believe should face the music for their sinfulness, even if it is nothing more than an impersonal universe meting out its "impartial justice" for violations and transgressions against its natural laws -- the seemingly inevitable and unavoidable consequences of hate and attack. This is always the ego's version of justice, because sin has a price that must be paid and the scales of justice must always be balanced between good and evil, clearly a dualistic proposition based on a belief in opposites.

Yet this can only be a desirable governing principle if we genuinely believe that others are separate from us and that you can merit punishment while I maintain my innocence. And so this is nothing more than the ego's veiled desire that guilt be real -- especially others' guilt. Yet if my brothers' guilt is merely the projection of my own unconscious guilt, then I am unconsciously saying I want my own guilt to continue to be real. What if I really knew that the only way I can be let off the hook for my own so-called sins is to be willing to see that every "transgression" -- others' as well as my own -- has been nothing more than a call for help? Clearly, this is something that, as you are experiencing, is impossible to do on your own as you realize you are being called to move beyond the Course's theoretical principles to its actual application in your life through the practice of forgiveness. And it will continue to be impossible so long as we continue to believe that our interests can be separate from anyone else's.

The Course is never asking that we deny our temporal experience in the world, but it is asking us if we are willing to question our interpretation of that experience. The ego's interpretation will always see separate interests and demand "justice" that rights every so-called wrong, rather than questioning the premise that insists that every wrong is a sin. Of course, the bottom line is that karma and guilt are merely

different ways of attempting to say that the separation is real in order to keep my individuality intact. And that is why the resistance to the Course's gentle correction for all mistakes -- our own and others' -- is so difficult to accept. **"The miracle minimizes the need for time" (T.1.II.6:1)**, but our egos can continue to exist only in time. Karma is the world's law of cause and effect, asserting that cause is real and has real effects and so it will take time to reverse or undo any of its effects. Sin thus calls for suffering to undo the transgression. This means that time is required for eventual release to be earned -- some time in the future, if not in this lifetime then in some future lifetime. But the effect of the miracle is *now*, in a holy instant outside of time and space, transcending the laws of the physical world and its underlying ego laws. In Jesus' own gentle and reassuring words:

"How foolish and insane it is to think a miracle is bound by laws that it came solely to undo! The laws of sin have different witnesses with different strengths. And they attest to different sufferings. Yet to the One Who sends forth miracles to bless the world, a tiny stab of pain, a little worldly pleasure, and the throes of death itself are but a single sound; a call for healing, and a plaintive cry for help within a world of misery. It is their sameness that the miracle attests. It is their sameness that it proves. The laws that call them different are dissolved, and shown as powerless. The purpose of a miracle is to accomplish this. And God Himself has guaranteed the strength of miracles for what they witness to.

Be you then witness to the miracle, and not the laws of sin. There is no need to suffer any more (T.27.VI.6:3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11; 7:1,2).

Q #364: If I am spirit and my body is not real is it wrong to feed it well, exercise it, have it massaged, dress it with care, make it up, etc., or is all this seen as being gentle with myself as long as I perceive myself as being a body? Will these activities not reinforce this false idea?

A: The activities of feeding and exercising your body, having it massaged, dressing it with care, and using cosmetics are neither holy nor unholy in themselves. It would not advance you spiritually simply to stop doing things just because they make you feel good. These kinds of bodily activities contradict your desire to awaken from the dream of separation *only* if your motivation is connected to specialness in some way or to keep the body at the center of your attention. The idea is to discern whether you are using your body to make yourself different and special (the ego's purpose) or to learn that we are all the same as fragments of the one Son of God, sharing both the same wrong-minded thoughts of the ego and the same right-minded thoughts of the Holy Spirit. Our attitude towards our bodies, thus, should be centered on using them so as to uncover the hidden agenda of separation that we are constantly upholding in our minds. It is because of that hidden agenda that Jesus at one point refers to the body as **"the engine of destruction" (T.20.VIII.4:7)**. That is the original purpose of the body.

On the metaphysical level, the level of absolute truth, *A Course in Miracles* teaches us that the body was made to attack and replace our true Identity, and to limit love (**T.18.VIII.1**). (An impossibility, and therefore totally illusory of course.) So on that level, anything we do to our bodies supports that purpose. But since we are not yet ready to identify completely with that truth, Jesus prepares us to move in that direction by having us first regard the body as neutral (**W.pII.294**). In this sense, our bodily lives are classrooms in which we gradually learn to recognize which teacher we have chosen to guide our activities -- the ego or the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we don't change our bodies or how we fix them up, etc., but rather we change the *purpose* we have given them.

Q #365: What is the role of the ego of a child when he/she is tortured and/or abused by an adult?

A: First, the difference between the mind and the brain must be recognized. The brain develops, but the mind does not. The mind is always "mature," we can say, and the body-brain complex is part of the ego's defensive strategy. In this sense, it can be misleading to speak of the "ego of a child." If the decision-making mind (outside time and space) chooses to identify with the ego, it will be seeking to keep the separation real, but to project the sin, guilt, and fear associated with it. Its strategy is centered on shifting the battle it perceives between God and itself from the mind to specific situations in an external world, which is its motive for having a world in the first place. The ego's goal is to keep victimization outside the mind, so that it would not have to confront the fact that it is the original victimizer and sinner. (All of that is illusory, of course; but we have not yet accepted that.) One specific form this could take is the victimization of a child by an adult. In such a case, the decision-making mind splits off its identity as mind and takes on the identity of an innocent child in a relationship with an abusing adult. Thus, the ego achieves its goal of innocence, while the sin and guilt is clearly seen outside.

Another ego motivation for a script containing torture and/or abuse of a child is to provide a means of atoning for the "sin" of attacking love. The ego has convinced the Son that punishment by God is inevitable, but that God's wrath might be tamed if the Son were to suffer in his stolen identity.

It is essential to understand that this is not saying that the child is responsible for the adult's behavior, or that the child, as a child, "asked for it." That is not at all what *A Course in Miracles* teaches. This must be seen from the perspective of the mind outside time and space, not the brain or physical existence. Nothing in the world is as it appears to be, but we have split off the part of our minds that is aware of the ego dynamics responsible for this limited awareness. The Course is the means we are using to restore to our awareness the power of our minds to choose either the ego's or the Holy Spirit's thought systems.

Q #366: I have identified the fear that is keeping me from embracing the teachings of *A Course in Miracles* fully: I am afraid I will leave behind those I love in the dream -- not only in this lifetime, but in all time. I understand this as separateness, and accept that we are all dreaming but for a moment. Yet the nagging fear I have remains and I just can't seem to get past it. Does the Course address this?

A: You are certainly not alone in experiencing this fear. For it can feel that we will have to give up all those who mean so much to us as we follow along the Course's path, forgiving and releasing our special love relationships on our return to oneness. But it can be helpful to recognize that it is merely one of the ego's deceptions that leads us to believe that we are being called upon to sacrifice what we value if we listen to the Holy Spirit (**T.21.III.9:1**). This mistaken belief comes from a mistaken sense of who we are, what is of value, and how the choice is made to forgive. Initially, recognizing these errors may not seem to bring us much comfort, but over time, we will begin to see all of this differently as we move beyond any perception of the possibility of loss.

We think we are specific individual bodies who, in order to experience love, need relationships with other individuals who also are or have been or will be bodies. Nothing in the Course says we must give up any of this while it remains our perception. In fact, Jesus says, **"I have said repeatedly that the Holy Spirit would not deprive you of your special relationships, but would transform them. And all that is meant by that is that He will restore to them the function given them by God"** (**T.17.IV.2:3,4**).

To understand what your ego is up to in throwing up this smokescreen to avoid committing yourself fully to the Course, it may be helpful to look at the purpose for which we have made our special love relationships, as well as the different function they can serve when we give them to the Holy Spirit, as alluded to in the above quote. In alliance with the ego, we made special love relationships as a substitute for God's Love (**T.17.IV.2:7**), which we believe we threw away when we chose the thought of separation from God. Consequently, it is "natural" that we feel -- so long as we believe we are bodies -- that we are separate from love, that we find love in relationship with other bodies, and that we can be separated from those we love. None of these thoughts is a sin, but all of them serve the ego's purpose of convincing us

that we are indeed separate and on our own. And although the content of these relationships seems to be love, this substitute love is really a cover over the hatred that is buried deeply in our mind. That is why we can so easily experience disappointment, frustration, irritation, annoyance, anger, and even rage at those we believe we love. The seeming love is there so long as our perceived needs are being met. Once they are threatened, the mask over the hatred comes off.

Yet this does not mean that there is no real love in these relationships. It is simply buried even deeper in the mind, below the hatred. And that is the key to the Holy Spirit's purpose for our relationships -- to help us get in touch first with the judgment and anger in our own mind, so that they can be released, allowing that love that has been there all along *within us* to flow through our mind to the minds of those with whom we are in relationship.

The truth is, all relationships exist only in the mind, no matter what our experience tells us about relationships being between bodies. And the experience that we all ultimately are searching for in our external relationships is the experience of real love, with no conditions or limits. But the love can not be found outside ourselves (**T.29.VII**). Yet those seeming external relationships can become reminders of where to search to find the love we really desire, and where the obstacles are to that experience -- in our own minds. And so, as we allow the Holy Spirit to heal all our relationships, both the special hate and the special love, we will experience, more and more of the time, the love that we yearn for. The meaning of our relationships with others will be transformed from symbols of hatred and attack to symbols of forgiveness and love. And we will use those symbols just as long as we need them, while we still believe we are separate individuals. But there will be no moving beyond our experience of relationships with others outside ourselves until we decide we are ready for that next step. In the end, when we know we and all our brothers are the love we have been seeking, we will no longer need the external symbols, for we will have accepted the experience that they have come to represent. And the love itself will be all that matters.

Q #367: One of the experiences that have led me to *A Course in Miracles* is separation and divorce. Even though I try to bring my daily Course lesson with me throughout my day, I find myself in a pity party too often. I release whatever I'm feeling to the Holy Spirit as soon as I realize what I'm doing, but sometimes I'm not able to regain peace for quite some time - - even days. This only happens with issues surrounding my ex-husband -- everything else comes under control very easily. Any suggestions?

A: Releasing your feelings to the Holy Spirit really means first looking at how much you do not want to let the other person off the hook. And if you find that you cannot budge on that, then just acknowledge it in all honesty, without judging yourself in any way. That would help immensely, because you would not then be fighting against yourself, or pretending that you are forgiving when you really don't want to. Being able to accept where you are, without judging yourself for it, is where real progress is made, because you would be learning that the "tiny, mad idea" had no effect on reality. And that is what we are all trying to learn.

Surely, though, as your experience confirms, you can never be at peace when you hold on to a grievance. So if you take that into consideration each time you feel that you just can't let go of your feelings of victimization, or whatever you are feeling, you will be reminding yourself of the cost of being right. The process, then, is to be completely honest with yourself and the Holy Spirit or Jesus, not to judge yourself, and to be aware of the cost to yourself of not forgiving. The truth of your reality as Christ never changes; but your experience and awareness of that peace and love is blocked by grievances.

Q #368: I have been studying your "Rules for Decision" workshop for 3 weeks. My daily goal for the last week has been to learn forgiveness. I just did not understand "Who to forgive?" and "What to forgive them for?" What obstacles are in the way of my experiencing the true love that is mine? I have learned that a

very deep hate is in me. I did not believe there was hate in me, until I started to analyze all my thoughts and remarks and realized that many or most of them were hate based. I have forgiven myself for this, and I believe I can forgive others, as I forgave myself. What comments and advice can you give to help me. My instinct is to erase this letter because it is all ego based. What is that all about?

A: As your experience indicates, the first step in forgiveness is the recognition of the hatefulness that permeates the ego thought system, and how it is expressed in our lives, in all our relationships. Your choice to learn forgiveness has led you to the very place where forgiveness must take place -- your self. The process involves looking honestly at your thoughts and judgments, as you have been doing, and seeing them as the effect of a choice in your mind to be separate from God (and therefore all your brothers). Though we judge ourselves as sinful for this and feel guilty, *A Course in Miracles* tells us we are mistaken, and need to be corrected. We are asked to give these judgments to the Holy Spirit so they can be transformed. So we forgive our brothers for what they did not do, because everything we accuse them of is a projection of our own guilt: **"Be willing to forgive the Son of God for what he did not do" (T.17.III.1:5).** We also forgive ourselves for what we did not do, because neither the separation nor the guilt is real.

The obstacles to experiencing love are all the beliefs we hold about ourselves as sinful, guilty, separated selves, living in bodies and deserving of God's punishment. Practice of the Course teachings leads us first to recognize these beliefs, then to question their validity and see their enormous cost: the loss of peace, and loss of the awareness of our true Identity, as well as the experience of love which you speak of. As the pain of holding on to the hatred and the beliefs in guilt becomes more and more intense, we will be more willing to let them go, and then the truth of who we are will return to awareness: **"When every concept has been raised to doubt and question, and been recognized as made on no assumptions that would stand the light, then is the truth left free to enter in its sanctuary, clean and free of guilt" (T.31.V.17:5).**

The part of the mind that clings to the belief in separation resists any effort made in undoing this belief. Your decision to understand and practice forgiveness threatens the ego thought system, which explains the "temptation" to erase your question. Luckily you resisted the temptation, and not the choice for forgiveness.

Q #369: What is the reverse of the Golden Rule (T.1.V.6:4)?

A: The reverse of the Golden Rule is the ego's norm of separate interests: I get what I want regardless of the cost to others. One of the unfortunate consequences of this approach to life and behavior is that we become suspicious of others' motivations. If that norm is embedded in our own thinking, then it must direct everyone else's thinking as well. Instead of questioning the foundation of that type of thinking, we find ways of justifying it instead, thus sustaining the ego. It is only when we question the sanity of relationships based on separate interests that we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit's healing principle of shared interests.

Q #370: I've always had a problem with accepting that I truly deserve love, believing I have to earn it or pay for it. I recently married a younger man I had been helping financially, whose intentions I didn't trust for a long time. Since the wedding, I now see he is only using me. So do I have this right? I subconsciously closed a deal: love for money and security, to shut out the love of God. The evidence I now perceive, I invited in: the man I married is taking advantage of me and does not love me. This reflects a decision and a judgment I have made about myself. As Jesus says in *A Course in Miracles*, / am doing this to myself, and there is no exception to that rule, right? I'm engineering the whole story to stay separate: first to close a marriage and then to get out of it and be a helpless victim? I see my own

manipulations, but my perceptions don't change. How do I change them? I believe I'm doing this to myself, but I don't feel it. I feel all I want is love. If I stay in this marriage and refuse to believe my perceptions of his hurtfulness, would they change so I would see my love reflected in this person? I do not know what to do.

A: While it is true that your mind has set up the situation in which you seem to find yourself -- and that means your decision-making mind outside of time and space, and *not* the self that you think you are here in the world -- this is almost never the most helpful level on which to focus. The more practical level is to accept that both you and your husband have egos that each seek to have their needs met by making a special love bargain as the basis for the relationship. And this makes you both exactly like everyone else in the world, even though the specific terms of your negotiated agreement may look different! So don't be too hard on yourself for the choices you have made.

The other thing to remember is that the Course is never going to tell you whether to remain in or leave any relationship, because from Jesus' perspective, that is never the problem. The only real concern is, for whatever relationship you seem to be experiencing in the present, who are you going to choose to be your teacher -- the ego of the Holy Spirit? Or put another way, Jesus is only concerned with what is going on in your mind and not what seems to be going on in your world, since from his perspective, there is no world! Granted, that's not how you see things now, but over time, with his help, that is the direction you will be heading, as you learn not to take yourself and your mistaken decisions quite so seriously and to be gentler with yourself.

So, in terms of your marriage, what does this mean and what does it not mean? You are correct in acknowledging that whatever you experience in this relationship reflects an inner decision about how you see yourself. But you want to be clear that the external situation is not the reason you have these feelings. The relationship with your husband is only a smokescreen to hide the real problem of the guilt in your own mind, the same guilt we all share over the belief we have separated from love. The problem is not that you set up a marriage in order to feel used and unloved. That is the cover to keep your focus away from the real problem in your mind. So long as your focus is on the external relationship and how that seems to be making you feel, you are continuing to accept the ego as your teacher. If your experience is one of being victimized by your partner in some way -- and you do need to start with that interpretation -- you will want to ask Jesus for help in recognizing that such a perception can come only from your own projected guilt -- and the guilt was there before you ever entertained the idea of entering into a dysfunctional relationship with your husband. In fact, the focus on that relationship and changing your experience of it is the sure way to make sure the real problem of the guilt in your mind is never addressed.

Now that does not mean that your husband is not acting from his own ego in an unloving way. And even if you heal the guilt in your own mind, that does not mean that you will simply then see him as a reflection of the love that is within you. But it will mean that you will look on him with the true perception of the Holy Spirit and you will know that your husband is either extending love or calling for it (**T.12.I.3**). And if he remains identified with his ego, he will be calling for love. Since you will be joined with the love inside of you, you will know that his own manipulations and attempts to meet his needs through the relationship have nothing to do with you or your own value as a child of God. And you will not need to use him to meet your own personal, ego-based need to feel loved.

Bringing your decision to turn your back on love in your own mind to Jesus and being willing to offer your perception of your husband and yourself to him in exchange for his healed perception is all that you need do, acknowledging that your own has brought you only pain. And the real value of the relationship with your husband is that it has helped you uncover those buried self-accusations in your mind, if you are willing to allow Jesus to be your gentle teacher. Whether you remain in the marriage or not, your relationship with your husband need no longer be used to reinforce the guilt in your own mind. And that is the Course's path to self-acceptance and love.

Q #371: In my profession I have to deal with child-abuse. I understand that it is the ego that wants to see victims, pain and suffering. But does this mean that child-abuse did not happen, is that what *A Course in Miracles* is saying? Is this abuse not real? How does right-mindedness view child abuse and what would be right professional behavior according to the Course?

A: You are getting caught in a confusion that is common for many Course students -- not distinguishing between the two levels on which the Course is written. It is true that, on a metaphysical level, the Course is saying that the world and everything that seems to happen within it, including child abuse, are illusory and in reality have never happened. But what makes the Course so practical is that much of it is written at a level that acknowledges our experience in the world but provides us with a different way of looking at that experience that helps us, over time, to disengage our minds from the illusion and to remember our reality, while not denying what we seem to be observing. (You may find Questions [#3](#) and [#253](#) helpful for further discussion of the issue of level confusion.)

And so in your professional role, it would not be helpful to anyone involved, including yourself, if you were to deny the abuse that is presented to you. In this world as we've set it up, bodies interact with other bodies, and sometimes direct physically and emotionally violent actions toward one another. And the actions can seem particularly outrageous and horrific when they are directed by an adult at a child. What the Course would ask of you is to be willing to recognize all the ways in which you may be tempted to take sides, to pass judgment or to feel pity, sadness, disgust, anger, or any other emotion that the situation may trigger in you. And then to recognize that, whatever you are feeling, you have made an interpretation *and are wrong!*

Now judgment is unavoidable when we look at a situation like child abuse from our ego perspective of separation and guilt. For we have made the world so that we can see sin and attack outside ourselves, and situations such as these are ideal screens on which to project our guilt (e.g., **T.13.IX.3:1**; **T.18.I.6**), since nearly everyone else will agree with our interpretation. But Jesus is asking us to question our conclusions, for he knows what we do not yet know, that all the violence and pain is happening only in the mind and not in the world, and that it has nothing to do with bodies (**T.28.III.4:6,5:1**; **W.pl.135.9**). And so, if you join with Jesus, over time you will come to recognize the pain that everyone involved in the abuse shares, and that everyone is making unconscious choices out of this pain -- abuser, abused, silent accomplice, angry accuser. And if you are judging any of them, you are reacting from this same pain as well. Over time, with this growing realization, your judgments will diminish and you will feel compassion for everyone involved, regardless of their role.

And you will also begin to understand that the pain is really a call for love, and the love is always there, within the mind, accessible to all of us if we are willing to release our own interpretations and accept Jesus'. For it is only our interpretations and judgments that block the love and keep differences and separation from love real in our minds. In the end, as we come to recognize that the love is always there, we will also recognize that the pain and guilt are not real (**W.pl.284.1**), and the abuse that seems to mask their source in the mind is unreal as well. But that realization only comes at the end of the process. And it will not mean that you necessarily behave any differently with the families you are working with. You will continue to act in ways that will help determine responsibility and appropriate consequences within the system for the abuse, as well as protect the child from further abuse -- but you will do it all without judgment. And you will have become a reminder for everyone involved that there is another way of looking at what has been happening that does not involve attack and blame.

The Course has nothing to say about behavior -- professional or otherwise -- for its concern is only with the contents of our minds. But rest assured, if you do the inner work of release as you become aware of the projections of guilt arising within your own mind, you will know how to relate to everyone in a way that can only reflect healing. And you will know that you are only ever an instrument of that healing, and never its Source.

Q #372: My father is a strong practicing Christian Scientist, and we often have discussions on the differences in theology between it and *A Course in Miracles*. One particular aspect of these differences is the world -- the Course teaching that everything in the material universe is material and *not* created (or even known) by God, while in Christian Science, things such as trees, streams, and mountains are ideas of God, but not matter.

I believe what it boils down to is that in Christian Science they don't believe we escape from the world because we never left perfection. It seems to me that in the Course we are trying to escape the thought system on which the world is based and don't see nature as ideas of God but as distractions of the ego thought system.

Another seeming difference in the two is that Christian Science believes that as you withdraw your belief in matter or the illusion the world of form will get better -- guaranteed! Because it is all about thought. But I believe the Course's view is that form may or may not get better, even when you begin to see the unreality of it.

Can you clarify these differences for me? Also do you know of other differences in these two philosophies because at their core they sure seem the very same to me?

A: You are correct in the differences between *A Course in Miracles* and Christian Science that you point out. In themselves they are enough to establish that these two thought systems are fundamentally different. *A Course in Miracles* teaches not only that the world was not created by God, Who has no knowledge of it, but that it does not exist at all. We are not asked to escape the world or the ego thought system as such, but to learn to let go of our identity with that thought system through forgiveness (**W.pl.23**). You are right, the world will not get better when we no longer believe the thought of separation from God is real; it will disappear in our awareness. Since the Course teaches there is no hierarchy of illusions (**T.26.VII.6**), all form in the physical universe is equally unreal, no part of which is an idea of God, Who is pure spirit with and beyond form.

The Course's teaching on forgiveness also distinguishes it from other spiritual paths. As you may know, it tells us: "**Be willing to forgive the Son of God for what he did not do**" (**T.17.III.1:5**). We are asked to live the Course by applying the process of forgiveness to all our relationships. This involves looking at the hatred, anger and judgments of the ego thought system in operation in our lives, so they can be released and replaced by the Holy Spirit's thought system. This is not central to the teaching of Christian Science. If you are a student of the Course, it may be helpful to remember that it is this application of its teachings that is important rather than the intellectual understanding of its metaphysical principles. Discussions with your father probably provide you with many opportunities for this. *A Course in Miracles* asks us to acknowledge all the judgments we may have during our interactions, recognize that they are projections of guilt at having chosen to identify with the thought of separation, and give them to the Holy Spirit so they can be reinterpreted. As a Christian Scientist, your father may have a very different practice.

Another significant distinction is the importance of the role of Jesus and the Holy Spirit in the practice of the Course's teaching. We are encouraged to ask Jesus or the Holy Spirit for help in choosing our right minds rather than our wrong minds, so our perception can be transformed.

Q #373: How is it possible for someone who seems very naive spiritually to have much more self-esteem and self-love than someone who has studied *A Course in Miracles* for many years? I'm speaking of one of my older siblings, a Christian. Some of the things he tells me about his religion sound silly (and even wrong sometimes) to me, and yet it's evident (I think) from his success in life regarding work, home, family, and his warm and loving personality and the way everybody loves him (including me) that deep inside he holds himself in much higher regard than I hold myself. I'm a little jealous. In Course terms, how do I reconcile this within?

A: Well, it seems pretty apparent from what you say that God just likes your brother better. But seriously, you have fallen into a couple of common traps that the ego likes to ensnare us all in. First, you are judging by appearance or form between yourself and your brother. And secondly, you believe you can compare spiritual paths and determine that one is better, more sophisticated or more nearly correct than another.

Let us consider the second issue first. While from your perspective, your brother's spiritual beliefs may seem naive, silly and even wrong, there is a good chance that, from his perspective, the Course may seem just as naive, silly and wrong. The Course makes no exclusive claim to the truth (**M.1:4:1,2**). We each need only be concerned that we have found the path that is right for ourselves and not worry about whether someone else's path makes sense. As Jesus says in the Course, and this would apply to various spiritual paths as well as to different people's experience with the Course: **"The curriculum is highly individualized" (M.29.2:6).**

As for your brother's greater apparent self-esteem, we never know for certain what someone else's inner experience is. But self esteem is not the goal of the Course, peace is. And that peace has nothing to do with apparent success in life, according to the world's terms. A helpful passage early in the Course describes the trap you've fallen into with your brother -- the ego game of judging and comparing, employing its criteria for what is of value, based on form, rather than the Holy Spirit's criteria based simply on distinguishing what is true from what is false:

The ego...always evaluates itself in relation to other egos....Its whole perception of other egos as real is only an attempt to convince itself that *it* is real. "Self-esteem" in ego terms means nothing more than that the ego has deluded itself into accepting its reality, and is therefore temporarily less predatory. This "self-esteem" is always vulnerable to stress, a term which refers to any perceived threat to the ego's existence. The ego literally lives by comparisons (T.4.II.6:5,7,8,9;7:1).

Now none of this is meant to say that your brother does or does not have an experience of inner peace. But that is not your concern, for it simply becomes one more external distraction that prevents you from making the choice for peace within yourself now. And when you remember that choice, you will also remember Jesus' loving reminder to all of us who are tempted to compare ourselves to our brothers: **"The specialness of God's Sons does not stem from exclusion but from inclusion. All my brothers are special" (T.1.IV.3:5,6).**

Q #374: According to *A Course in Miracles*, would it be correct to say that to forgive in any situation is the same as seeing the truth in any situation?

A: Not exactly. Truth cannot be experienced nor "seen" directly in the dream, because everything here is an illusion, including forgiveness: **"Forgiveness, then, is an illusion, but because of its purpose, which is the Holy Spirit's, it has one difference. Unlike all other illusions it leads away from error and not towards it" (C.3.1:3,4).** Our minds hold a memory of truth that is brought to our awareness through the process of forgiveness, it is **"...an earthly form of love" (W.pl.186.14:2).** True forgiveness shows us the unreality of every situation and only in this sense does it reflect the truth. It enables us to perceive everything with the Holy Spirit as either a call for love or an expression of love (**T.14.X.7**). It thereby leads us toward the truth, which is our oneness with God as His innocent Son. Through the practice of forgiveness, all the unconscious beliefs we hold about ourselves that contradict the truth are brought to awareness so they can be given to the Holy Spirit to be transformed. When we have forgiven every thought and belief in this way, we will no longer block our awareness that: **"...truth stands radiant, apart from conflict, untouched and quiet in the peace of God" (T.23.I.7:10).**

Q #375: What is the meaning of "correction must be introduced vertically from the bottom up" (T.1.VI.3:3)?

A: In several places in the Course, Jesus uses the metaphor of a ladder to talk about our separating from God and then the process of undoing that separation. Our choice to separate from God initiated a series of dynamics that led us all the way down to the bottom of the ladder, which is what we now experience as our selves and our lives. Our return, therefore, must begin with where we are, and then with the Jesus gently guiding us, we go back up the ladder step by step until we reach the top: **"...salvation will proceed to change the course of every step in the descent to separation, until all the steps have been retraced, the ladder gone, and all the dreaming of the world undone....What waits for you in perfect certainty beyond salvation is not our concern. For you have barely started to allow your first, uncertain steps to be directed up the ladder separation led you down. The miracle alone is your concern at present. Here is where we must begin"** (T.28.II.12:7; III.1:1,2,3,4).

Thus the correction is focused on our present experience as bodies in a physical world. That is why we need to be vigilant about not skipping steps by denying our bodies or our physical experience in an attempt to jump from the bottom of the ladder right to the top. Any healing we would experience if we did that would be short-lived, because the underlying guilt would remain. The healing process starts with our experiences as individual physical beings because that is what we believe we are, otherwise we would not be having those experiences. **"The Holy Spirit takes you gently by the hand, and retraces with you your mad journey outside yourself, leading you gently back to the truth and safety within"** (T.18.I.9:3).

Q #376: My question involves the "Rules for Decision". Because I do want to have the dream of judgment undone I want to understand these rules but I'm not sure I do. I would be truly helped by an example applied using the rules or something to make the concept clear.

A: First of all, you want to understand that *how* we experience everything in our daily lives represents a choice or decision. Then, you want to be clear that there are only two alternatives we are ever deciding between, no matter how many choices our lives and the world seem to present to us -- the ego and the Holy Spirit. Each one represents a thought system and a way of looking at the world that is diametrically opposed to the other, leading to effects that are mutually exclusive.

Now, so long as we are not aware that we have a choice that determines how we experience our lives, we will continue to make an unconscious and unrecognized decision for the ego, with all the consequences that follow from that choice, including guilt, fear, anger, pain, anxiety, depression, distress and conflict. It is the Course's purpose to help us recognize that not being aware of the choice is really a choice in itself, so that we can decide otherwise -- for the Holy Spirit rather than the ego.

Once you understand that it is only this level of choice that the rules for decision refer to, the rules should become clearer. The day we really want, despite what our ego may

tell us, is not one in which we get our own way and all the things we think we want, but rather one in which we do not identify with the guilt in our own mind and therefore have no need to project that guilt outside ourselves onto others and the world around us. And so the rules then describe ways in which we can learn to decide that we do not want to be the judge of what our day should look like, for that is a choice to follow the ego's rules, based on a belief in our own separate interests, rather than the shared interests the Holy Spirit leads us to recognize.

Jesus knows us well and recognizes that, despite our apparent best intentions to accept him as our teacher, we will become afraid many times during our day and once again will identify with the ego and its guilt and believe we know better than Jesus what we need. We will then need another rule to help us out of the ego fix we have chosen for ourselves. And so as we progress through the section, Jesus offers us ways to undo our unhappy choices and return our mind to his gentle guidance, which will allow us to use everything that seems to happen to us during our day as an opportunity to practice forgiveness. But if we have become entrenched in our ego choice and our own need to be right, then we may need further gentle persuasion that leads us to acknowledge that our own self-centered choice does not make us happy, opening the door to asking for help again.

And so, for a specific example: I may begin my day by expressing a willingness to recognize my judgments as soon as they arise in my mind so that I may ask for help in releasing them and returning to an experience of genuine peace. And I may be moving through my day, periodically getting caught in thinking, for example, that finding a parking place near where I want to shop will make me happy or completing a project without any interruptions will allow me to be at peace. And then I find my irritation level rising as my goals are frustrated. At this point, I want to be able to recognize that I have accepted the ego as my teacher again and have defined my happiness and peace in terms of mastering external situations, thereby setting myself up as their potential "victim." If that recognition comes quickly, I can also then just as quickly abandon the ego and return to Jesus' gentle guidance.

But perhaps I have a run-in with someone I especially don't like and we end up butting heads. And there is no way I'm going to back down on this one, because I know I'm right. At some point, I may at least be willing to hear Jesus gently asking me if I like what I'm feeling now. And if I can have enough honesty and humility, I may be able to admit that I don't. And once again, that opens the door for another way of looking at the situation, one that doesn't place my own self-interest ahead of everyone else's and that allows me to see my own call for love being mirrored in the reactions of my "antagonist." And so, as I practice these rules for choosing the Holy Spirit to guide my perceptions of my experience rather than the ego, increasingly I will find that I can have the kind of day I really want -- one filled with a sense of peace and ease and joy -- no matter what seems to be happening on the "outside."

You may find the tape set, *Rules for Decision* by Kenneth Wapnick, which addresses this section in depth, helpful. Portions of this tape set are also included in our Excerpt Series on our Web site.

Q #377: "Whenever your thoughts wander to a special relationship which still attracts you, enter with Him into a holy instant, and there let Him release you." (T.16.VI.12:1) But how? How do I "enter with Him into a holy instant" -- and then "let Him release me"? "He needs only your willingness..." (next sentence). I sincerely want to be released from this relationship because I find it ridiculous anyway -- but to date I have been failing miserably and do not know how to get out of it.

A: You have found the key to answer your question in the next sentence: "He needs only your willingness..." However, the willingness required here is not the same as wanting to get out of a relationship because it is ridiculous or in some other way undesirable. It is the willingness to recognize and take responsibility for the ego's use of the relationship, which is always to make the separation real and hold on to guilt.

Any relationship that attracts you, whether you characterize it as special love or special hate, holds a multitude of thoughts, beliefs, and judgments about yourself and the other person, all based on the belief in separation, thus giving rise to guilt. You enter the holy instant with the Holy Spirit through the process of forgiveness. The first step in this process is to be willing *to recognize all the beliefs and judgments you bring to the relationship*, and then *to question them in the light of the teachings of A Course in Miracles* to whatever extent you understand them. This changes the purpose of the relationship from the ego's goal to the Holy Spirit's. If you are willing to have these beliefs and judgments transformed by the Holy Spirit, you will be released of them, and His perception will replace yours; thus you enter the Holy Instant.

"Never approach the holy instant after you have tried to remove all fear and hatred from your mind. That is *its* function. Never attempt to overlook your guilt before you ask the Holy Spirit's help. That is *His* function. Your part is only to offer Him a little willingness to let Him remove all fear and hatred, and to be forgiven" (T.18.V.2:1,2,3,4,5). Your release is the release of guilt. The relationship will fall away when you no longer have any attraction to the beliefs, judgments and their ensuing guilt in the specific form that this relationship represents.

Q #378: I have a question for you about "looking". I am stuck on what I perceive as contradictory statements in *A Course in Miracles* and with what Ken says. The Course encourages us to look within and we will see the unreality of sin, guilt, and fear. Ken instructs us to get in touch with how much we don't want to look within and how much we don't want forgiveness and to ask the Holy Spirit for help in undoing this. I have done this but am struggling to find peace as a result. I am stuck on how long to look. How clearly do I look, how directly do I look, etc.? Early in the text we are encouraged to deny the denial of truth, by first accepting responsibility, then quickly asking the Holy Spirit for help. Further on in the text we are asked to look clearly at the ego, and our hatred "even if it frightens you." Then in T.9.IV.4, I understand this passage to mean that the ego's plan would have us go through a similar process by looking clearly at the error.

A: A point of clarification to begin with: "the ego's plan" that you mention from chapter 9 is not referring to looking at error *within ourselves*. The ego's plan is to have us see error very clearly *in someone else*, who is therefore deserving of our judgment and condemnation, and then attempt to forgive that -- what *The Song of Prayer* pamphlet

refers to as **"forgiveness-to-destroy" (S.2.II)**. In fact, this is the ego's major defense, one intended to keep us from looking within by focusing on the guilt in everyone else. We see the sin and guilt outside ourselves in our brothers, never recognizing that it is nothing more than a projection of our unconscious belief in our own sin and guilt. The ego would never encourage us to look truly within our mind at our sin, for if we truly look, as the Course says, we would recognize its unreality. But the kind of looking the Course is referring to is not the ego's guilty, fearful, furtive glances within, which assume the guilt is real and seek only to affirm its reality by not really looking. Rather it is a calm and gentle viewing of the contents of our mind with Jesus or the Holy Spirit as our Guide for seeing, for they know that what we see as heavy and repulsive is nothing more than shadows that vanish in the light of true forgiveness.

However, this looking within is also not simply a reviewing of our past, inventorying all the self-accusations we harbor against ourselves as this self we believe we are, with its history of transgressions and omissions. For those "sins" and their accompanying guilt are as much covers over the guilt Jesus is inviting us to examine as are our projections of blame and attack against our brothers, for they also distract us from looking within our minds to the real source of guilt. But that does not mean that identifying and becoming aware of our judgments against both ourselves and others can't serve a different purpose from the ego's purpose of reinforcing rather than releasing guilt.

We are fearful to look within because we have accepted without question the ego's assertion that we are **"the home of evil, darkness and sin" (W.pl.93.1:1)**. But even that is a defense, for at a deeper level, our resistance to looking within is really our fear of losing our individual identity. Your struggle with looking within is really your ego's attempt at self-preservation. While you remain identified with the ego, you believe your own survival is at stake. Yet it is not the Course's purpose to take away our sense of self but only to help us undo the guilt that we have associated with it. At the very end of the process, we will see no value in saving the false individual self, and that will be a choice we will make most willingly, when we are ready.

In the meantime, to help us release the guilt, the Holy Spirit very cleverly turns the tables on the ego, using what the ego has made as a defense against looking within as the means now for uncovering what is in our unconscious. In other words, the error or sin we see in our brother that so arouses our anger and judgment, or the failures we hold against ourselves for not living up to some ego ideal of how we should act and think, can be given another purpose when we begin to understand their origins. No other judgment is necessary or even possible without the initial self-judgment of the ego that we have sinned by seeking to separate ourselves from God and establish our own separate identity. The very self we believe we are is predicated on a crime so horrendous, we believe, that it can never be forgiven and always calls for God's vengeance. So anything we accuse ourselves or anyone else of is, in contrast, a pale shadow of that primal guilt. Yet each accusation is literally a shadow or projection of that initial accusation and, if we are willing, we can use every ego reaction to anything that seems to be outside our minds as a means of remembering the ontological guilt that is always necessarily underneath the reaction. If we are willing to withdraw our projections from all bodies -- ours as well as our brothers -- what we are left with is an experience of the guilt we have tried to keep hidden within our mind. And that is what we want to look at with Jesus or the Holy Spirit. Not that we will remember or need to remember our so-called original attack on God, but that guilt, stripped of any interpretation that attributes its origin to bodies, will be the naked guilt of the ego thought system. It will be a guilt that says: I matter to me more than anyone or anything else, and I hate everyone and everything that prevents me from having my way. There is nothing beyond that recognition to look at or examine. But if we are able to join Jesus in looking

within at that guilt, we will simply not take it seriously. For we will have joined with the part of the split mind that knows that the split is not real and that love can not be attacked or destroyed. And in that recognition we will experience the peace that depends on nothing outside itself, for there *is* nothing outside it.

Q #379: I experience myself as being told to review all I can of the "authority problem." I have Ken Wapnick's set on the authority problem, but the world of the ego is preventing me from having the time to listen to it. I am wondering if you would have some other words of wisdom concerning this subject or any writings to which you could direct me.

A: We recommend that you set your ego straight! Work things out with your ego and listen to the tapes.

Question #304 summarized the key ideas involved in the authority problem, which Jesus tells us "***is the root of all evil***" (T.3.VI.8:3). It is understandable that there would be intense resistance to this topic, because it pervades all wrong-minded thinking, and to delve into it stirs up our ultimate fear that in some way or other, we are going to lose the battle of existence with God. Concealed in a dark corner of our minds is the "truth" that our existence as individuals is not authentic and can be extinguished the instant our defenses are exposed and demolished, which is inevitable. This ontological doubt about our very existence then seeps into all levels of our experience, so that we wind up challenging every single authority in our lives -- either secretly or overtly. Or we go in the opposite direction and become completely submissive to authorities, secretly resentful, though, of their power over us. Either way works in the ego's service, because the separation is maintained.

A Course in Miracles teaches us that the healing of this conflict begins when we ask for help to look at our wish to be autonomous individuals rather than part of the one Son of God, and we will be motivated to ask for help when we have recognized that wanting and defending a life of separate interests has not made us happy. The ego would have us believe that it is always one-or-the-other: either a tyrannical God is in charge or we are. Jesus corrects this erroneous thinking by assuring us that when we let go of our imagined need to be independent, we will feel as if we have just been released from imprisonment, and we will then experience the unending peace that is our inheritance as God's Son (T.3.VI.10).

Q #380: I thought I have been quite a consistent student recently. Thinking, reading, applying, uncovering all my negative thoughts. And (exactly with a scenario Ken described on one of the tapes) finally I got so mad about my special relationship person. Just couldn't stop blaming him! When I felt that a storm is coming, my first reaction was to read something from the text of *A Course in Miracles* or from a workshop (usually it helps to calm down). This last time it didn't work for me, so I "indulged" myself with a fury! But strangely enough, I felt such a relief, no guilt at all! I know I did wrong, but there is no need to "correct" my mistake, to apologize, or something. I know this outrage can stop our relationship altogether, but there is another thought behind all of that -- I had to do it to stop pretending I can "stuff" my feelings, get beyond mistakes I perceive

in this person! I don't know where this will lead me to. Is there any hope that I wasn't with my ego one hundred percent?

A: First, what you want to look at is your concern that you were one hundred percent in your ego. A key part of the forgiveness process is learning not to fear the ego or to feel ashamed because you indulged yourself in a full-blown attack. We are trying to learn that the ego is really nothing but a "tiny, mad idea" we forgot to laugh at. So when we judge ourselves for indulging our egos, we are implicitly affirming that it is real, not just a "tiny, mad idea." It would be more healing to just be honest about the attack, saying "I attacked and it felt great!" Period. It was "wrong" only in the sense that attack will never restore peace to your mind and will never lead you home to God. But that does not make it sinful. It just points out to you the cost of indulging your ego. When you no longer feel the cost is worth it, you would ask for help to go about things differently. The measure of progress with the Course is not whether you still have ego attacks, but rather, over a period of time, how quickly you remember not to justify them. Whenever we identify with the ego, we will be hateful, judgmental, fearful, etc., because the ego never changes. The amount of time we spend with it is what changes.

Second, the process of the Course does not force you to choose between forgiveness and stuffing your feelings. Rather, it helps you learn *why* you attack -- where your feelings are coming from. Thus, early in the workbook we are taught, "**I am never upset for the reason I think**" (W.pl.5). The practice of the lessons involves looking squarely at our negative thoughts and feelings, recognizing their source in our decision to reject love and then project responsibility for that, and, finally, asking for help to change that decision if we are so inclined. So stuffing our feelings and pretending that we are forgiving is not helpful. Our anger, hatred, jealousy, fear, anxiety, and whatever else we are feeling is our curriculum. These feelings are indicators of what teacher we have chosen and are usually our only means of surmising our mind's decision. Therefore, we need to be in touch with what we are experiencing. Otherwise, as our teacher, Jesus would have nothing to work with. He never judges us when we have ego outbursts. He just asks that we learn to recognize the ego dynamics behind them so that he can help us make the correction.

When your ego is out of the way, you would relate to your special partner without defenses. You would experience both of you as sharing the same wrong mind, the same right mind, and the same ability to choose. Anger would be impossible in that state, because you would clearly see the origin of that person's pain and the healing of it as well, and you would know that it reflects yours. That is the state of mind Jesus is helping us to attain. It is not stuffing our feelings; it is attaining an ego-free state in which such negative feelings would never develop. We would share the perception of the Holy Spirit, Who sees either a call for love or an expression of love (T.12.I).

Finally, anger is not bad. Jesus never tells us not to get angry. He teaches us not to justify it -- an important distinction.

Q #381: In the answer to [Question #58](#), it was stated that *A Course in Miracles* asks us to respond with love to someone having an outburst of any kind, and if our response is anything less than love, it is of the ego. What would be a response of love to a supervisor who is yelling at you in front of others while demeaning you and slamming papers on the desk? It was also stated in that same answer that we are to

be vigilant for any underlying feeling or reaction. I feel I need specifics to do while this outburst is taking place. I am certain that I have the small willingness to help both him and myself, yet I am not sure of what to do to help us.

How responsible am I for having someone like him in my life? How responsible am I for having bad things happen to me?

A: One of the first things it may be helpful for you to do is to understand that the Course teaches us on different levels. Although Jesus is aware that we that we are dreaming of a multitude of experiences in form, he is speaking to the mind; specifically the power of the mind to choose. This is a Course is *content* (mind), not *form* (bodies). However, while we are still convinced that we are bodies in the world interacting with other bodies, it is never helpful to try to respond to a specific situation in our lives on the metaphysical level of the Course's teaching. The principles of the Course that you refer to from a previous question is the Course's explanation of what is occurring on the level of the mind. It is the *real* reason why you feel all the things you feel when you are being yelled at, i.e., the effect of a choice in the mind to identify with the ego's thought system, rather than with the love of the Holy Spirit. It is true that the ultimate goal of *A Course in Miracles* is to teach us to perceive only a call for love or an expression of love, but that is at the end of the process. Meanwhile, it is important to be honest about what you feel, without judgment, and without trying to come from a place in the mind with which you do not yet fully identify. The Course does not ask us to behave in any way that is not normal, on the level we believe ourselves to be. Your feelings during your supervisor's attack are certainly normal. As long as you have them, they should not be denied, ignored, or judged. That is not to say that you might still be willing to review them when you are studying the Course, to learn how its principles apply to this situation. It is very important, however, not to dismiss or diminish your feelings. They are indications that what the Course says is true -- that we have a strong attachment to our identities as bodies. This is not a sin; it is a mistake in identity, and needs to be corrected by the Holy Spirit. Our function is to recognize that all the feelings we have when being attacked, as normal as they may be, do in fact come from this mistaken identity. During the actual attack it may be possible for you to ask for help. The help you may *want* is to feel better and not be attacked. The help you *need* is to learn to interpret the experience differently: **"You are not coerced, but merely hope to get a thing you want. And you can say in perfect honesty: I want another way to look at this" (T.30.I.11:2,3,4).** As we are told in the very beginning of the Workbook: **"I am never upset for the reason I think" (W.pl.5).** Even though you may not believe this during the attack, remembering to ask for help by recalling one or both of these thoughts when you are being attacked, gets you in touch with the part of your mind that *does* believe them. This is the beginning of the forgiveness process, and although it may not seem like much, it is a very important step.

At first, you may remember these ideas only long after the actual attack takes place, and you have already been very upset. This does not matter, if you are willing, and try to be faithful to remembering, the time between the attack and your remembering will eventually shrink. It is not your function to try to think or feel differently, or to help your supervisor or yourself in any way; that comes from the Holy Spirit. With His help, your thinking will gradually shift, and you will no longer be upset in the same way by an attack. Until then, it is important not to judge yourself in any way for being upset, for forgetting to ask for help, or for any reaction you may have to the attacks. Only your honesty and willingness are required. It may be helpful for you to re-read the instructions in the Introduction to the Workbook **(W.in.8,9).**

In answer to the second part of your question, it is important to remember that since the world was made as an attack on God, it is filled with conflict, pain and "bad" things. *A Course in Miracles* is not a program for learning to control the form of our lives and our environment so as to avoid suffering. The goal of the Course is to train our minds **"in a systematic way to a different perception of everyone and everything in the world" (W.in.4:1).** We are learning to interpret ourselves, our experiences, and all our relationships differently. "Bad" things are bound to occur in this world, because it was made by the ego as **"a place where God could enter not" (W.pll.3:2).** As students of the Course, our goal is not to have a life free of difficulties, but that we learn they need not take our peace away. In the Holy Spirit's classroom, these difficulties are opportunities to recognize our mistaken perception about who we are, so

we can ask for, and be willing to accept a new way of perceiving. This learning process is the way to remember that we are in fact home.

Again, the Course is addressing the mind. When it tells us that the figures in the dream act out our projected guilt it is because everything in the dream reflects a choice made in the mind to identify with the ego or the Holy Spirit. The figures in the dream speak and act according to what we want to hear and see, just as the figures do in our night dreams. They reflect back to us our choice to for shared or separate interests. You are not responsible for having a supervisor who attacks, you are responsible for the choice in the mind to identify with a body that seems vulnerable to attack. You are also responsible for all the steps you are taking in practicing the Course so as to learn gradually, gently, and patiently that you are *not* a body with separate interests.

Q #382: I just started reading *A Course in Miracles*. For the last two years I've looked within and discovered some not so pleasant things about myself as well as some beautiful things about myself and others. My question is, are signs valid? I ask for signs on specific things and always receive positive signs giving me hope, encouragement and reassurance, which all lead me to feel secure and peaceful. Being that there are no coincidences in life, wouldn't that mean that they are valid? Maybe the signs are supposed to happen to get us to believe in ourselves, which will make us more likely to believe in others. People are less judgmental when they are happiest as a person.

A: It really is difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate another person's experiences. We all have different ways of experiencing the Holy Spirit's guidance, as well as the ego's. If you are more peaceful and secure and are being kinder to yourself and others, what can be wrong with that? If there are any lessons that you have not learned, they will become apparent to you in your interactions with others at some point. The only caution to observe, perhaps, is with regard to any specialness you would be tempted to feel because you receive positive signs that other people might not receive. Also, depending on these signs or taking them as a measure of your spiritual progress would not be helpful on your spiritual journey. In the "**Song of Prayer**" pamphlet, Jesus stresses early in his teaching that what we want to learn to want is the *song* itself: "**It is the song that is the gift. Along with it come the overtones, the harmonics, the echoes, but these are secondary**" (S.I.3:2,3). And in the text, he similarly points out the need to go beyond symbols to what they represent, if we are to advance spiritually (T.19.IV.C.11:2,3,4). If these signs are coming from the love that is in your right mind, then by identifying more and more with that *source*, your need for encouragement, reassurance, and security will diminish and eventually disappear. But this is a process that happens gradually. Having that as your goal, however, will help you recognize potential ego snares.

Q #383: What does Ken mean when he says "Say not no to the ego" I believe this was said in an audio-tape series.

A: We are not saying "not no" *to the ego*. If it was stated this way on the tape, it was misspoken. The ego can be understood as a "no" to God, and to the Identity that God has given us as His innocent Son. Saying "not no" is a way of saying that we deny the reality of the ego's thought system, and accept the truth of who we are as God's Son. It means we do *not* say no. This is related to the idea that *A Course in Miracles* is a process of unlearning who we are not, so that who we are can return to our awareness. The truth does not require any affirmative response on our part to be what it is -- it only requires that we say "not no."

The Course tells us that God established our identity as His innocent Son: "**I am your Father and you are My Son**"(W.pII.10.5:3). We have responded: "No, I am not; I am who I say I am." And we have a long list of who we say we are. The process of forgiveness is teaching us to let go of all these concepts of the

self, attributes of our made up identities, in this process we are saying “not no.” When we have said “not” to all of our no’s, we will have cleared our minds of all the obstacles that blocked awareness of our true selves: **“When every concept has been raised to doubt and question, and been recognized as made on no assumptions that would stand the light, then is the truth left free to enter in its sanctuary, clean and free of guilt. There is no statement that the world is more afraid to hear than this: I do not know the thing I am, and therefore do not know what I am doing, where I am, or how to look upon the world or on myself. Yet in this learning is salvation born. And What you are will tell you of Itself” (T.31.V.17:5,6,7,8,9).**

Q #384: I experience a free-floating anxiety or unsettled feeling sometimes after I read *A Course in Miracles*. This awareness doesn’t seem to have any content other than since I believe the truth of what I read, I should feel peaceful, not unsettled. Yet, what I read doesn’t seem to “stick” in my memory as something I can draw on. My life has been filled with beliefs that have filled my time with worldly concerns about who I am in relation to others and why I am afraid of money, etc. Since I started studying the Course again, I know my fears are not real and I don’t experience fear very often. I’ve experienced some deep feelings of peace and clarity lately and I wish this would become more frequent. I think perhaps I’m trying too hard or that I’m too focused on ME as being solely responsible to learn and not asking the Holy Spirit to help me learn what I need to learn. I’ve felt alone all my life – believing in God but as somehow separate from me.

A: To your right mind, the Course’s message is one that opens the door to peace. But to your ego, or wrong mind, the Course’s message will at some level be experienced as a threat, for the purpose of the Course is to teach us how to undo the ego. So long as you remain identified with your ego in any way -- as all of us here continue to do -- it is not surprising that you may at times experience anxiety or other unsettled feelings as you read the Course. And you are certainly not alone in finding your memory failing you when you want to be able to apply the Course’s principles, which you may have just been reading and studying five minutes earlier and now find you haven’t a clue as to what you were looking at. Anyone who has attempted to do the workbook lessons and remember them at various intervals throughout the day has found these lapses all too familiar. But again, the “forgetting” is simply an ego defense to protect itself from being undone. The preoccupation with the things of the world --our personal and bodily needs and concerns -- is yet another form of defense that keeps us rooted in our ego identity, oblivious to the actual choice such a perception of ourselves represents.

We may know intellectually that our fears are not real and experience some peace as a result of this realization. But there are layers to our fear, so while we may move beyond fear of some of those old familiar monsters under the bed, we find there are others still lurking behind the shut doors of the closets of our minds, continuing to affect us until we are willing to open the doors and let the light shine on their nothingness. But there is no need to be concerned that they still linger for, again, that is to be expected until we get to the bottom of the layers of fear and release all the guilt that is concealed beneath them. And that is a process that for most of us will take time. So be patient with yourself and yes, please don’t forget that you are not alone in this process, that in fact you cannot do it alone, and that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are ever present in your mind, available to help you remember the way back home, which is where we have been all along, simply with the covers pulled over ourselves so we can’t see beyond the darkness we have hidden ourselves in **(T.11.VIII.13,14; T.12.II.4,5).**

Q #385: My partner was diagnosed with lung cancer in early March. Last Wednesday they surgically removed the tumor only to discover that not only was the tumor not in her lung but it was benign. Everyone is saying it was a miracle....prayer changed the tumor. As a student of *A Course in Miracles*, I’m ashamed to tell you that I think the doctors misdiagnosed the tumor in the first place. I think that doctors are always looking for cancer and so they find it everywhere. I feel guilty for my lack of faith. Do you have any words of comfort or wisdom for me?

A: There is an assumption implicit in your question that you may not be aware of. And that is that it is somehow more spiritual to believe that prayer changed the tumor than to believe that there was a mistake in the diagnosis from the beginning. From the Course's perspective, neither is true! Except for very rare exceptions in those who have healed their minds, symptoms of illness in the body are only ever shadows of guilt in our mind, projected onto the body. Illness always reflects a choice in the mind to see oneself as the victim of forces beyond one's control. And we all make the choice to be victimized repeatedly through our lives -- illness being only one particular expression of that choice -- and then forget we ever made the choice, as a defense against the truth of who we are as spirit (**W.pl.136.2,3,4**).

Since each symptom represents a choice within our mind in each instant, we can make a different choice at each subsequent instant as well. The initial choice for illness is made with the ego. The choice for a different experience may be made with either the ego or the Holy Spirit, depending on our purpose. If we identify the guilt in our mind behind the symptom and bring that to the Holy Spirit for healing, then the symptom will diminish or vanish, for we will no longer feel a need to punish ourselves. It is possible for this shift to happen without our being fully aware of it, although the goal of the Course is to make our decision-making more conscious.

The alternative is that we simply make a different ego choice, never really addressing the buried guilt, and so one symptom disappears, at some point to be replaced by another symptom, perhaps similar, but perhaps not. That is how we all experience our lives when we are identified with our egos, moving from one problem to another, seeming to lose our peace over each problem, feeling a sense of relief when it apparently is resolved, and then losing our peace apparently over the next problem, never in touch with the real cause of our loss of peace -- the ongoing decision to see ourselves as separate from love.

What hopefully is apparent from this explanation is that God and faith have nothing to do with the healing of physical symptoms. The decision-making part of our mind that most of us are rarely in touch with is responsible for the appearance and disappearance of symptoms. In light of this then, it may also be apparent that whether the symptom at the level of form was cancer and then changed or was never really cancer at all is really beside the point. The only question we want to ask ourselves, as students of the Course, when we are aware of reacting to symptoms in either ourselves or others, is: "With which teacher do I want to learn the lesson this symptom brings with it?" If I choose the ego, my lesson will be that guilt and punishment are real. If I choose the Holy Spirit, my lesson will be that I now have the opportunity to make a different choice about the guilt that I believe is buried in my mind, releasing it to the healing light of forgiveness rather than continuing to hold on to it and projecting it in some disguised form.

Q #386: Does physical healing require complete and final acceptance of the Atonement? If so, why do people who have never heard of *A Course in Miracles* and have never practiced forgiveness experience physical healing many times during their lives? I have a serious vein disease, which I've been trying to heal by following the Course. One time, for a very short while, I was able to see myself as not being my body. I experienced a wonderful feeling in my legs and for about 2 hours they seemed to be healed (at least they were pain free). Was this the kind of physical healing the Course talks about? Later the pain returned. Now, I cannot find my way back to that awareness of not being my body. But perhaps this is not necessary, because the Course says that the Holy Spirit will guide me if I only give my "little willingness." I am not sure I understand the "little willingness" that I must give to the Holy Spirit. The Course says that if I give this "little willingness," I will receive very specific instructions that will lead me out of my illusions and pain. The Course says that I should not try to free my mind from fear and pain because that is the Holy Spirit's role. I tell the Holy Spirit that I am willing to follow His way, but nothing seems to happen. Perhaps my understanding of the "little willingness" is not accurate. How can I give the Holy Spirit my "little willingness" in the right way?

A: First, final acceptance of the Atonement is not required for there to be a change in a physical condition. Our minds are extremely powerful, and they can both bring about physical symptoms and remove them, whether we have undone our belief in separation or not. A major teaching in the Course is

that our bodies are not autonomous; they do only what our minds tell them to do. We cannot judge by observing physical states whether a person has identified with the wrong mind or the right mind. (See **“How Is Healing Accomplished? M.5.”**)

Second, *A Course in Miracles* is not really about healing the body or any condition in the world, even though there is a great deal in the Course about healing. Healing in the Course is equated with forgiveness. One of the key guiding statements in this context is: **“Therefore, seek not to change the world, but choose rather to change your mind about the world” (T.21.in.1:7)**. Jesus is teaching us how to shift our focus from conditions in the world and our bodies to the thoughts in our minds that lead us to believe that the world and our bodies are the cause of our problems and our unhappiness. It is natural to want painful physical symptoms to be removed, and we should use whatever remedy we can to alleviate the pain and correct the condition. But ridding the body of all symptoms is not the goal of our work with the Course. Achieving a state of inner peace regardless of external conditions is the goal. Ultimately, of course, we will awaken from the dream of separation, but the more accessible goal for us is to learn that our inner peace is not dependent on anything external. The peace of God is our true Identity, and so if we are not peaceful, then somehow we have dissociated ourselves from that Identity. Thus, the way to reverse the dissociation is to choose Jesus or the Holy Spirit as our Teacher -- not in order to have the symptoms removed, but to help us change our perception and our purpose. Then, as we go along, we will be more and more content with inner peace, and as a result we will automatically begin to disidentify with our bodies; but it is usually very, very difficult to try to “not be a body.” We are very much attracted to being a pain-free, problem-free body, but not to be a body at all is a terribly frightening thought to most of us.

That is why Jesus teaches us to concentrate first on the *purpose* for which we use our bodies, and why his help is directed at helping us break the connection between external conditions and our internal state of mind. We have used our bodies primarily as a way of proving that duality, not oneness is reality; so he helps us turn that around through our gradually and gently learning that nothing can truly disrupt the peace of God that is our natural state of being. So physical or psychological healing (removal of symptoms) is not the focus of the Course, although it never says it is wrong to treat the symptoms. In fact, denying our bodily experiences would hamper our progress spiritually **(T.2.IV.3:8,9,10,11)**. We usually need to alleviate pain and discomfort so that we can feel more free to work on the inner process. The point, though, is that if the underlying conditions are not dealt with, then other symptoms will arise to take the place of those that are healed, which is the experience of almost everyone. **“Thus is the body healed by miracles because they show the mind made sickness, and employed the body to be victim, or effect, of what it made. Yet half the lesson will not teach the whole. The miracle is useless if you learn but that the body can be healed, for this is not the lesson it was sent to teach. The lesson is the *mind* was sick that thought the body could be sick; projecting out its guilt caused nothing, and had no effects” (T.28.II.11:4,5,6,7).**

Finally, one essential aspect of willingness involves looking at our certainty that we know what our problems are and what their solution should be. The reason for our lack of peace often seems so obvious to us, and we feel so sure that we would be peaceful and happy again if only that condition or situation were removed or cured. Jesus is teaching us, however, to let go of that tendency to think that we know, because it is basically blocking access to our right minds where true healing is. And sometimes we could be setting ourselves up for failure if we concentrate exclusively on asking for help with a physical condition. It is not wrong to do so, as Jesus point out in the **“Song of Prayer”** pamphlet, where he speaks of a **“ladder of prayer” (S.1.I,II)**, but the temptation would be to be disillusioned and then blame someone if there is no change, or to confine Jesus in our minds to the role of physical healer. The change that Jesus truly wants us to have as our goal is the experience of sharing his mind, which knows only of invulnerability, love, and peace.

For related discussions on healing and illness, see Questions [#57](#), [#128](#), and [#142](#).

Q #387: I have begun reading *A Course in Miracles* and find that I'm very attracted to its teachings. I believe it has practical application to this world. My dilemma is that although I'm not new to spirituality and I believe in God -- I have studied the Bhagavad-Gita for many years and believe it was spoken by God (Krishna) -- I have great difficulty in following the Holy Spirit's directions. My problem is that I work a mind-numbing job as a janitor, which I dislike most of the time. I feel stuck and grudgingly accept my lot in life. I work much on my own and that of course allows my "little self" to indulge in all sorts of judgments and criticisms, bitterness and anger at my position, etc. I also use tobacco to attempt to diminish my "awful" condition. I want to change. I know I'm doing wrong by my thoughts and the tobacco use but my "little mind" tells me that this is the only way I can get through another day of "drudgery." Please give me some constructive advice.

A: Arjuna may have been on an external battlefield in the Gita as he turned to Krishna for guidance, but it sounds like you're beginning to recognize your battleground is in your own mind. Fortunately, that is where you'll also find the Holy Spirit's guidance. Now since the battleground is in your mind, that is where the Holy Spirit will help you to make changes, and not in the external world -- the job, the tobacco, etc., -- which are only ever projections of the inner battle. This is not to say that changes won't happen on the "outside" as well, but that is never the Course's focus or goal. Those externals are only symbols or symptoms of internal conflict and guilt, and it is only within the mind that meaningful shifts can occur. The inner conflict is always the battle that your ego is waging against the quiet truth that the Holy Spirit represents. And when you are identified with your ego, you can expect to have difficulty even hearing the Holy Spirit's direction, let alone accepting it and following it.

The challenge you feel in listening to the Holy Spirit may be two-fold -- there is often difficulty in understanding just what He is asking of us, although it is very simple, and then, once we understand, being willing to follow-through on His counsel. You may believe that it is your lot in life, trapped in a dead-end job that you don't like, which is the reason you are so unhappy. But the Holy Spirit wants to help you see that the problem is that you are trapped in a dead-end thought system in your mind, and that is what He wants to help you free yourself from. And any addiction to nicotine is nothing compared to the addiction to guilt. All those thoughts of judgment and criticism and bitterness and anger merely keep you going around in your mind in the cycle of attack and guilt. But the Holy Spirit is not asking you to stop those thoughts. Rather He wants you simply to step back from them and look at them, being honest with yourself about the feelings that accompany them and the purpose that they serve. They keep you trapped in the belief that it is your external situation that dictates how you feel. This kind of thinking assures that you remain mindless and that the guilt in your mind -- the real cause of your unhappiness -- is never undone. You want to learn that the guilt in your mind is not real, but you'll never know that if you don't look at it, instead seeing the external situation as the cause of your misery and grief.

So, once you understand the very simple request that the Holy Spirit is asking of you, all you need do is put it into practice. And that means nothing more, but also nothing less, than being willing to pull back your projections of blame on things outside yourself and accept complete responsibility for how you feel. And then ask for help that your perception of yourself as one who deserves to suffer be changed. This is the process, to be remembered and then put into practice as we are willing. And none of this means you should not look for or take a better job should you have the opportunity, or seek support that may help you give up smoking. But you want to remember that changes only at this level will not bring you the real happiness and peace you seek and deserve.

Q #388: I have been thinking and meditating a lot on the concept of prayer. It seems to me that the only thing we can do in prayer is to give thanks. Because God does not and cannot enter the human form, we cannot ask for anything, but it seems that many people say that they prayed and God did this or that for them and thus their "miracles." What happens here in these instances? Tell me more about prayer. I understand it seems silly to ask God to do what is already being done. What would Jesus say?

A: "The Song of Prayer" pamphlet may answer many of your questions regarding prayer. It describes different levels or steps, and uses the image of a ladder reaching up to God. The prayer you describe, whereby people ask for certain "things" (material, psychological, or emotional) for themselves or others, is at the bottom of the ladder. It is a form of magic, in that it seems that someone or something outside (in this case, God), granted a wish. What actually takes place is a process in the mind. A person wants something and uses the power of the mind to obtain it. But, because the person is unaware or afraid of the power of their mind, it appears that a petition is made and then granted by God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit. This is then called a "miracle." As you may know, the miracle *A Course in Miracles* teaches (which is a change in perception), has nothing to do with anything external. Since the Course is teaching us that we do in fact have a mind and that it has the power to choose, it certainly would not want us to think that God grants prayers in the way described above. It tells us that true prayer is the prayer of the heart, and it is always answered because in the dream we have and experience anything we truly desire. A very important principle of the thought system of *A Course in Miracles* explains this: **"There is no world apart from what you wish, and herein lies your ultimate release. Change but your mind on what you want to see, and all the world must change accordingly. Ideas leave not their source"**(W.pl.132.5:1,2,3).

The simple prayer of the Course then would be our willingness to change our minds. All of our efforts in practicing and applying the teachings of the Course -- forgiveness, letting go of grievances, paying attention to our thoughts and beliefs, seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance to have them transformed, remembering our goal as often as we can -- is the form our prayer takes. It is the expression of our willingness to accept the healing of our minds, the desire of our hearts, as we look honestly at all the forms our resistance and opposition take in our interactions and pursuits throughout the day. This prayer will eventually lead to the awareness of what we truly want, the top of the ladder of prayer when: **"You have understood that you forgive and pray but for yourself. And in this understanding you are healed. In prayer you have united with your Source, and understood that you have never left. This level cannot be attained until there is no hatred in your heart, and no desire to attack the Son of God"** (S.3.IV.4:3,4,5,).

Q #389: a. According to *A Course in Miracles*, God is O.K. and we are not O.K. Very similar to the biblical point of view: sin of Adam, etc. We have God Who is always right on the one hand, and deluded, deteriorated mankind on the other. The old religious cliché?

b. We are not we at all. We are ego and ego is bad, unreal, does not exist at all, so we do not exist. Ego is an illusion so we are in the illusion. But who is deluded? The mind of the Son of God is? Why does that mind prefer to abide in illusion? It doesn't like truth? It doesn't endure truth?

c. It seems to me that the Course wants to blame every natural human thing like love relationships, the drive to know things, to ask questions, to explore. All these are the ego's things, bad things and they do not even exist. What is this powerful Monster-Ego that, although it does not exist, holds all of humanity in its grasp and even God can do nothing about it?

d. Can it be that the separation is a part of the natural process of the Son of God's evolvement? And conceived by God purposely? And ego is just a natural thing? And not opposed to God? It's written "the body is just a learning device". Maybe the ego is just another learning device?

A: It may seem as if the Course and Jesus are saying the negative things about all of us that you state. But they are not -- we are! The Course is simply trying to help us get in touch with all the false beliefs we hold about ourselves, but these certainly do not represent how Jesus views us. According to the Course, in reality we are more than OK, we're perfect (e.g., T.1.I.32:4; T.1.II.3:3; T.2.I.1:3; T.2.II.5:7; T.2.III.5:6,7; T.6.IV.10; T.9.I.13:1,2; T.10.IV.1:4). But we are the ones who keep denying that we are (e.g., T.6.III.2:3; T.15.III.4:9,5:6; T.21.II.13:1,2). The Course, unlike the Bible, is very clear that sin is

not real (T.19.III). Again, we are the ones who keep insisting, with the ego, that sin is real (T.21.IV.1,2,3). The Course does not say that we are the ego but rather that we have chosen to identify with the ego, which is *not* who we are (T.4.III.3,4; T.4.VI.1;3). The Course also does not assert that the ego is bad -- the ego says the ego is bad, in order to have us take it seriously. And although we are not the ego, we believe we are and so we think we are bad or sinful (T.5.V.3:1,2,3,4,5,6;4:1,2,3). Again the ego's view of us is certainly not Jesus' view of us. He is trying to help us see what we believe and what accompanies it so we can decide whether we want to continue believing it. But he takes none of it seriously for he knows none of it is real (e.g., T.2.VII.1:2,3).

As to why the mind of the Son of God has chosen to abide in illusion, as compelling as that question seems to be -- you are assuming that it is true that we do abide here, and certainly that seems to be our experience. The Course and Jesus' position is that it's not true, but so long as we believe it is, he'll speak to us in the only language we allow ourselves to understand right now (T.25.I.7:4), about the things we think are real, in a way that will lead us to understand that they are not. It is not that God can do nothing about the illusion but rather that there is nothing to be done! There only seems to be much *for us* to allow to be undone. The Course passes no condemnation or blame against the inventions of the ego -- all its questions and seeking and relationships. We are the ones who make the accusations. The Course merely attempts to help us see the consequences of our choices and beliefs. But it never attacks them, for that would mean they are real and have to be dealt with. It is only the ego that sees itself -- or tries to persuade us -- that it is big and powerful (T.22.V.4).

Now the Course is not insisting that we accept its particular symbolic myth of the origins of the world and the cause of our pain and unhappiness. And you do seem to have some pretty strong objections to its particular logic and arguments. The Course says what it says quite emphatically and without compromise, and it is helpful to understand what it is saying in order to evaluate whether it speaks to you personally or not. But if it does not make sense to you, that is O.K. too, and there will be another path that uses other symbols that is more suited to your own particular needs. Other teachings, including many New Age paths, speak of duality and the world as creations of God and describe the soul as evolving and developing through its experiences in the world of form. If you resonate more to these teachings, it would be foolish for you to keep butting heads with the Course. It makes no claim for the universality of its form, only its content. In its own words, **"There is a course for every teacher of God. The form of the course varies greatly. So do the particular teaching aids involved. But the content of the course never changes. Its central theme is always, 'God's Son is guiltless, and in his innocence is his salvation' (M.1.3:1,2,3,4,5).** So know that peace will accompany you wherever you go, and trust that you will find what will serve you well on your path to God.

Q #390: I have been studying *A Course in Miracles* for a little over a year now. Your insights regarding the following would be greatly appreciated. I am undergoing a severe financial loss due to a disability that has left me unable to work. I am my only financial support. I feel that my willingness to atone is greatly present, and I feel that I am totally willing to accept responsibility for my experience. Clearly I need the Holy Spirit's help with the undoing of the extreme guilt and separation I obviously feel, but as much as I ask for help in this regard, I neither see nor experience any semblance of change in my experience. I don't feel any peace in my thoughts, only growing fear as my savings dwindle. I am facing eventual homelessness in my earthly existence. I don't know how to "rise above" this outcome. I don't know how to feel peace without an experience of help from the Holy Spirit. I understand that my ego is fighting my choice to follow the Holy Spirit, but at what point does the Holy Spirit take over and actually bring me the experience of peace. I thought that this was what Jesus is promising in the Course.

A: First, it is entirely in keeping with the teachings of the Course to do everything you possibly can to get financial assistance of some kind and to get help in finding a place to live if it becomes necessary for you to move. And it is also quite normal to feel fearful as you see your savings dwindle and face losing your home. This is a difficult lesson; but you are moving in the right direction in the process of restoring peace to your mind -- the goal of the Course -- by not blaming someone else for your circumstances, which is

not easy to do. Hopefully, you are not blaming yourself, either. Our first inclination usually is to pin the blame for our conditions on other people, or on the "system," or even on God. And if we don't do that, we usually blame ourselves, but, still, we are always tempted to hold someone else responsible, even for blaming ourselves. So to get beyond blaming is a major step.

The next major step -- not easy to do at all -- is to let go of any investment in the outcome -- that the only acceptable outcome is a means of income and not losing your home. Your pleading with the Holy Spirit seems to be pointed in that direction, and your peace seems to be conditional on that outcome, which is how most of us would react in these circumstances. But that assumes that that solution would be the best one for you. In the world's terms, yes, it would seem to be. Yet, there is no way of your knowing what your spiritual path is, and what would help you most on that level. Perhaps -- but also perhaps not -- these extreme circumstances are the means you (a decision-making mind outside time and space) have chosen to learn the lesson that nothing can truly take away the peace of God from you; nothing external to your mind has any power over you. In the words of **Lesson 190: "It is your thoughts alone that cause you pain. Nothing external to your mind can hurt or injure you in any way. There is no cause beyond yourself that can reach down and bring oppression. No one but yourself affects you. There is nothing in the world that has the power to make you ill or sad, or weak or frail" (W.pl.190.5:1,2,3,4,5)**. Clearly the "you" Jesus is referring to is not the self we are aware of. But how freeing it would be to have this experience, and surely the whole Course is directed towards helping us attain this state. Thus it is not that we petition the Holy Spirit and then He decides when to give us the gift of peace; it is we who do the work of identifying and then dismantling the barriers to peace that we have erected in our minds.

So the help Jesus offers is to be with you, as a loving brother who sees you as you truly are, as you work your way through these difficult circumstances, assured that his love for you and your love for him is all that matters. **"My trust in you is greater than yours in me at the moment, but it will not always be that way. Your mission is very simple. You are asked to live so as to demonstrate that you are not an ego..." (T.4.VI.6:1,2,3)**. That does not get bills paid, to be sure; but to know and experience that your real security and safety lie forever invulnerable beyond anything this world could provide would more than sustain you through this part of your journey. With fewer interferences, without guilt, anxiety, and conflict, it will easier for you to know what to do. **"Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all of the barriers within yourself that you have built against it" (T.16.IV.6:1)**

Q #391: I'm having difficulty understanding the difference between what you refer to as "brain thoughts" and "thoughts in the mind." Even though I am still almost completely identified with my body, I cannot conceive of the brain thinking at all, but only the mind. And so to me, "brain thoughts" are simply the thoughts of the ego mind identified with the body, which is ascribing those thoughts to the "thinking organ" of the body -- the brain. In the answer to Question #54, you say: "Intelligence is a function of the brain, it is therefore part of the operational system of the body, not to be confused with the mind, which is not in the brain and does not require intelligence." Has the ego mind then "made" intelligence?

A: The ego doesn't have a mind, but rather, it is the belief (in the mind) that the separation is real. Yes, this belief made intelligence, since intelligence is of the brain, which is part of the body (the home of the ego). And yes, you are correct in your description of "brain thoughts." The distinction between brain and mind is difficult, because we have such high regard for the brain, and because we do not know we have a mind. Although the ego made intelligence, the Holy Spirit can use it to serve His purpose rather than the ego's. *A Course in Miracles* itself is a good example of using words, ideas, and concepts, as seemingly understood by the brain, to reflect a choice that is made in the mind to "unlearn" our belief in the separation. The Course offers a very sobering description of the brain: **"You also believe the body's brain can think. If you but understood the nature of thought, you could but laugh at this insane idea. It is as if you thought you held the match that lights the sun and gives it all its warmth; or that you held the world within your hand, securely bound until you let it go. Yet this is no more foolish than to believe the body's eyes can see; the brain can think" (W.pl.92.2)**.

The mind doesn't actually think either. The Course uses the word thought, or thinking, in reference to the mind because this is a way for us to understand. We are cautioned, however, to remember that the form is limited: "...**words are but symbols of symbols. They are thus twice removed from reality**" (M.21.1:9,10). The mind chooses between two beliefs, two "thoughts" (the separation is real or it is not), or two teachers (the ego or the Holy Spirit). You might also say the mind says either "no" or "not no" to the truth of the Identity given to us by God, which is His innocent Son. So it does not think -- it chooses -- that is all. When it chooses the ego, the illusion of thinking, judging, feeling, and acting in the dream goes into operation. When it chooses truth, it is still and rests in quiet certainty.

Q #392: Reading the following passage in the text of *A Course in Miracles* brought up a question I've had for some time now: "Fear not that you will be abruptly lifted up and hurled into reality. Time is kind, and if you use it on behalf of reality, it will keep gentle pace with you in your transition. The urgency is only in dislodging your mind from its fixed position here. This will not leave you homeless and without a frame of reference. The period of disorientation, which precedes the actual transition, is far shorter than the time it took to fix your mind so firmly on illusions" (T.16.VI.8:1,2,3,4,5).

Some three years ago, I was doing selected workbook lessons and had reached a state of mind quite different from my "normal" functioning in the world. I was experiencing myself as at one with everyone and everything and aware that the mind is only one. This lasted for quite a while. But it was followed by a period of most intense and vicious ego attacks and I felt completely out of control - seemingly unable to prevent my ego from hurting me in all kinds of ways - sickness, finances, inner state of turmoil, attacking others, attraction to death, etc. I'm now doing the workbook again. How do I know whether I'm being gentle? And how do I sincerely attempt to do what Jesus asks in the workbook without holding back? My prior experience was that doing any one lesson could take me home if I did it wholeheartedly. How does one know that one's head is far enough above the water to withstand the inevitable return of fear as long as one's mind is split?

A: The "retaliation of the ego" is really the eruption of the part of your own mind that does not want to relinquish its independence, which would have happened had you continued to identify with oneness. If all at once in a flash you could accept oneness without reservation, chances are you would not be here in the world in the first place. So your response should be respect for the depth of your fear of oneness, but also gratitude for your willingness to return to the pure oneness of Love. Now it's a matter of patience with yourself and trusting in the process that has begun. It is a gradual process of growing into what seems to be a new identity, but is really just accepting back your natural state of being, which you swore you would never do (T.19.IV.D.6). The strength of our resistance and our fear usually takes us by surprise. One of the most commonly asked questions is how to tell if one's head is far enough above water to withstand the inevitable return of fear. There really is no way of knowing; but being too concerned about that can detract from our work of forgiving right now.

There is a way of acknowledging and respecting your fear without giving it power over you or denying it either. As you go along, a sense of balance should develop between these two extremes. You never want to force yourself to work with the lessons or to study the text. Any need you might feel to do the lessons perfectly and as quickly as possible always comes from your ego, as time is nothing to Jesus. He's big on patience and gentleness, not perfection. Readiness does not mean mastery, he tells us (T.2.VII.7:8,9); and being too serious about the lessons just makes the error real. After all, we are undoing something that never happened, and "**the outcome is as certain as God**" (T.2.III.3:10).

The practice of forgiveness itself will gradually reduce your fear and sense of disorientation. Specifically, the more you practice seeing your interests as not different from anyone else's -- and feeling comfortable with that perception -- the more you are undoing the underlying belief in separation, which is the source of all fear. Jesus clearly knows what is involved in this process, and he instructs and reassures us many times, such as in the passage you quoted.

Q #393: I have a serious medical condition in which the blood in my legs will not flow upward to my heart properly, which doctors say will just progressively get worse. *A Course in Miracles* says my fear, guilt and attack are causing the problem. I need to heal my legs (mind) soon because as they get worse, my fear is increasing, to intense levels that I have not experienced before in my life. As my fear increases, my legs get still worse. I need to break this vicious cycle soon or it is sure to end in death. If I die or go mad, how can I learn the Course, be healed and find peace?

Text 556, 12, 5 "This world is an attempt to prove your innocence while cherishing attack. Its failure lies in that you still feel guilty, though without understanding why." I am not even aware of feeling guilty. Is it important for me to understand why I still feel guilty? If so, how can I find that understanding so that my mind and body will be healed? Or is all of this unnecessary? Can I just give it all to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to heal my mind and body? If so, how can I do this? I have tried many times to give Him the "little willingness" that he asks. My legs continue to get worse. One time, for a short while, I was able to see myself as not being a body. A wonderful feeling seemed to come over my legs. They seemed to be healed for about two hours (or at least pain free). Was this a holy instant? Or was this just an illusion of mine?

Text 557, 14, 1 "The miracle is possible when cause and consequence are brought together, not kept separate. The healing of effect without the cause can merely shift effects to other forms. And this is not release." Does this mean I must be aware of the cause before I can bring it together with the consequence? I meditate deeply on this, but am unable to find the cause so that my mind and body will be healed. Or is this all the role of the Holy Spirit? If so, my efforts at giving Him the little willingness He asks for seem to have been unsuccessful. How do I proceed? Another thing that really concerns me is that I am unable to hide my fear from my wife. This is causing her to become afraid as well and she is starting to experience physical symptoms of her own. How can I stop this fear from spreading out like this in our "world of illusions"?

A: First of all, you may want to be sure that you are doing everything you possibly can medically for your condition. Are you satisfied with all the medical opinions you have received and are you convinced that there are no other medical interventions, traditional or alternative, that can help arrest or reverse the deterioration? There is nothing in the Course that would preclude seeking answers in the world, if that can help ease your fear (**T.2.IV.4:5,6,7**). In addition, you and your wife may wish to seek some counseling or therapy to help you both address your fears over your condition.

The goal of the Course is not to help us change anything external in the world or in our bodies, although changes may occur as a result of practicing its principles. Would you be satisfied with an outcome in which you are at peace, regardless of what seems to be happening to your legs and your body? This is the invitation that Jesus is extending to all of us through his Course. It may not be what we think we want, for we are still focused on the world of form and believe that our peace depends on controlling conditions and situations that seem to be causing us pain and fear. Jesus views our circumstances differently, and joining with him in our minds will allow us eventually to see things the way he does.

We *all* share the same underlying guilt that is the cause of all our symptoms and all our fears. It is not a specific guilt over a specific action or inaction in this lifetime, but rather a self-accusation that is at the core of our being -- that we exist as separate individuals because we seized our life and independence from God, a vicious, deadly attack on Him. Very few are in touch with the guilt over this mad idea, which the Course assures is nothing more than an illusory self-deception to keep the separation real in our minds. Yet that is what we unconsciously believe and keep choosing to believe.

We in fact made the world and our bodies with all their seeming problems to keep that guilt buried in our minds. So now it seems that things happen to us over which we have no control and we no longer see all of our pain as coming from a choice to see ourselves as separate from the Love that is our Source. Conditions in our bodies seem to be the cause of our pain and fear. Everything seems very serious to us because it is a symbol of what we unconsciously believe God is now going to do to us for our attack on

Him -- punish us by making us suffer before He finally seizes back the life we stole from Him, not leaving us a leg to stand on.

The real cause -- the guilt over separation -- would remain forever buried in our minds if we didn't have the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Not that we simply give Him our pain and fear and He takes it away. For that would undermine the power of our mind -- which has chosen the pain and guilt in the first place -- to make a different choice, for peace, once we remember that the choice is ours (T.2.VII.1). The Holy Spirit turns the tables on the ego by teaching us how to use what we have made as a cover for our guilt -- the physical symptoms -- as a means to recognize the guilt, at least indirectly. With the help that Jesus or the Holy Spirit offer us, we can begin to question the truth of our underlying belief about ourselves that says we deserve to suffer for our sinfulness. As our relationship with Jesus or the Holy Spirit develops over time, as we practice turning to them for their interpretation of our situation once we recognize we have been listening to the ego's, we will find that we are allowing ourselves more of the time to experience the love that has always been there within us but that has been covered over by the guilt and the fear.

Concern with the body will also begin to recede. Symptoms may or may not shift, but in those moments when we are joined with Jesus' love, the physical symptoms will not matter. It is certainly possible that, in your experience of no pain in your legs when you were open to the idea that you are not a body, you allowed yourself to join with Jesus' love and experience a holy instant. What is helpful about that experience is that it demonstrates that nothing needs to change but the beliefs in your mind. Pain returns when we become afraid of love, but as we learn that it is not a sin to be afraid of love, we will recognize that we do not need to punish ourselves for believing once again that we have separated from love.

Now the temptation will be strong to use the status of the condition in your legs as a measure of your success or failure in applying the Course's principles of forgiveness and joining with Jesus, but this is simply an ego trap to bring your focus back to the world of form rather than the choice in your mind for peace. The experience of peace is the only criterion you want to employ (T.14.XI).

A few additional points of clarification: Rest assured that the death of the body has no effect on our learning the Course, but only seems to be a limiting factor while we still identify ourselves with the body. It is the mind that learns the lessons of the Holy Spirit and the mind does not depend on the body's existence to retain those lessons. In truth, the body is contained in the mind and not the other way around, as we have fooled ourselves into believing. This will become clearer over time as you practice forgiveness.

The passage on the miracle that you ask about means that we want our focus to be on the cause (the guilt in the mind) rather than on the consequence (the symptom in the body). For if our goal is only the healing of the physical symptom rather than the real problem in the mind, even if we find a way to eliminate the physical symptom, it will simply be replaced by another symptom if we have done nothing about healing the guilt over the separation in the mind. And, as Jesus notes a little later in the text, **"The miracle is useless if you learn but that the body can be healed, for this is not the lesson it was sent to teach. The lesson is the *mind* was sick that thought the body could be sick; projecting out its guilt caused nothing, and had no effects"** (T.28.II.11:6,7). Now this is not intended to make us feel guilty if we still want the body to be healed -- a natural desire while we remain so identified with it -- but only to remind us that so much more is ours than what we are asking for (T.15.III.1,2).

Q #394: We learn to know ourselves in *A Course in Miracles*. Gnostic gospels teach the same. I am practicing the lessons, but is this enough to find my true self? For example, is meditation necessary to hear the true Voice.? Or will I get there anyway? I don't understand.

A: Although mediation is not essential to the practice of the Course it does encourage us to have quiet time in which to reflect, practice specific exercises of the Workbook, to become mindful, or remember the

lesson of the day. Long periods of meditation are not needed: **"Nor...[are] long periods of meditation aimed at detachment from the body necessary" (T.18VII.4:9)**. As long as meditation does not become an end in itself, or a substitute for applying the Course teachings to all relationships and situations in your life, it may be a helpful exercise for you. For clarity regarding what *is* required, it may be helpful to reread the instructions in the Introduction to the Workbook. Basically, the only requirement is that we do what the lessons ask.

The goal of the Course is the healing of our minds of the thought of separation. The process for achieving this is forgiving every thought and belief we hold that reinforces the thought of separation. They are forgiven by first becoming aware of them, and then being willing to give them to the Holy Spirit (the part of our minds that remembers God) so they can be transformed. Remember, the Course is about mind training: **"It is the purpose of this workbook to train your mind to think along the lines the text sets forth"(W.in.1:4)**. We are being asked to become mindful of our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs throughout the day. It is through awareness, forgiveness, and transformation of these thoughts and beliefs that we will find ourselves. The Course curriculum *is* enough for us to find our true selves and to hear the Voice for God. It is that Voice we hear each time we are willing to question the ego's thought system with which we have identified, with willingness to let it go. We hear the Voice each time we practice a lesson, or apply a teaching, as best we can.

Q #395: "God, Who encompasses all being, created beings who have everything individually, but who want to share it to increase their joy. Nothing real can be increased except by sharing (T.4.VII.5:1,2). Does this mean that the Christ is actually a corporate being consisting of individual entities who share all their thoughts? The reason I pose this question is that the concept of sharing seems to be inherently dualistic, while *A Course in Miracles* is based on non-dualistic metaphysics. What am I missing?

A: This passage came early in the dictation of the Course, and Jesus was using words that reflect the Oneness of Heaven but come in a form that Helen and Bill, as well as all of us, might more easily be able to understand and accept. It is a correction for the ego's foundational belief in separate interests. Any concept as we usually use it, including *sharing*, *extending* and *creating*, will necessarily have a dualistic meaning, made as it was by a dualistic mind. But Jesus uses these words and gives them a different meaning from the ego's, to help our limited minds begin to grasp what cannot truly be grasped and to begin to undo our faulty beliefs about where joy and happiness lie. So, despite the use of words that suggest multiple entities and individuality, we need to recognize Jesus' intent here, and consider these words in the context of passages that come later in the Course that make it clear that the nature of God and Heaven is only perfect Oneness (e.g., **T.25.I.5; W.pl.132.12:3,4; W.pl.169.5,6**).

See also Questions #72 and #85 for further discussion of the Course's use of dualistic language.

Q #396: I understand that attacking others is a projection of the guilt in myself, but what is the underlying reason for my *obsessively* wanting to help others in the sense of telling them about the thought system of *A Course in Miracles* I know it could change their whole life, like it did mine.

A: This tendency is all too common, but understandable, given the fact that so many of us feel that the Course "rescued" us in some way or other. But a red flag should go up every time we feel an *obsessive need* to introduce the Course into someone else's life, or to spread it around our floundering, failing world. There are several points to consider when such a need develops.

(1) Whenever we feel a *need* to help others, we have always identified with the ego. The Holy Spirit can certainly help others through you, but in that case, you would not experience *yourself* as the one who is

helping, and you would have absolutely no investment in the outcome. This is what Jesus means in saying that the extension of holiness and the miracle is not up to us (**T.16.II.1; T.27.V.1**).

(2) Deeply embedded in our unhealed minds is the belief that we are in competition with God, and therefore there would always be a need to prove that we can do at least as well as He, if not better. Consequently we would tend to think that we know what is best for ourselves and others, and so we thrust ourselves, armed with *A Course in Miracles*, into other peoples' lives, convinced that we know what would help them, and equally convinced that our motives are pure and holy. We somehow have lost sight of the first 25 lessons in the workbook, which help us undo such faulty and burdensome perceptions. Our inability to know what is best is further elaborated on in the manual in the section **"How Is Judgment Relinquished?" (M.10.3,4)**.

(3) Also deeply embedded in our minds is the desperate need to validate our belief that separation and duality are real -- that there is indeed a world in need of saving. A very effective way of reinforcing the belief in separation is to see people as fragile, deprived, vulnerable, helpless, victimized, and dependent on some outside source to help them. If you perceive that you have just the thing they need, then you have seen yourself as separate -- you have something they do not have. And not far behind that is the thought that someone or something is responsible for the plight of these poor innocent people: blame, the ego's favorite means of maintaining conflict and banishing peace.

(4) If you perceive yourself and others who seem to be struggling as sharing the same ego beliefs as well as the same right-minded beliefs, you would not charge in to fix them, because as a good *Course in Miracles* student you would know that accepting the Atonement for yourself is your only responsibility (**T.2.V.5:1**), which you would be practicing by not seeing your interests as separate from theirs. If you charge in anyway, then you have become frightened of the implications of undoing the separation and have switched to your wrong mind, which automatically sees separate interests. When you are in your right mind, you would empathize with the strength of Christ in them, and you would respect the power of their minds to decide whether to listen to the ego or the Holy Spirit, and in so doing you would be reinforcing in yourself, the power of your own mind. In that holy instant, you would be guided to do something, or to do nothing; but it would not be coming from you as an individual self perceiving other individual selves.

Q #397: My question relates to a sense I have that we have reached a critical mass and are on the rush side of salvation. Though we may have had millions of years to go, from the contribution of *A Course in Miracles* alone, I think of all the people, since the book was published, who have done the lessons, which, if I remember correctly, can save a thousand years.

I think maybe we are much further than we might think because of this theory: For a single act of malice (which we can assume was initiated by a thought of separation) there are hundreds of simple acts (and thoughts) of kindness, such as smiles and opening of doors and so forth. In order to keep the illusory world alive, our egos feed on stories, whether they are reported in the press or shared at home or in the workplace as gossip, which amplify the one act of malice. Almost everyone who hears of the negative story responds with a separating thought, thus amplifying the negativity. If we have, in fact, awakened appreciably, might this explain why the press has grown in its coverage and lunacy? How simple salvation might be now. How helpful to simply abstain from gossip, personal and press. What do you think?

A: An interesting idea, but there are some assumptions you are making, which you may wish to consider. For one, you may be overestimating the ratio of acts and thoughts of kindness to malicious acts. Every thought of irritation, frustration, annoyance, exasperation, etc., no matter how trivial and seemingly neutralized by covering it over with a smile and a nice word or two, shares the same content as the act of malice you mention that gets all the air time. And how many of those "minor" ego attacks do we each

experience in a day, if we are honest with ourselves? Remember, there is no hierarchy of illusions -- all are equal in their power to deprive us of our peace.

In addition, it is a common belief -- but not the Course's position -- that a major obstacle to the experience of peace is any *expression* of negativity or attack thoughts, by oneself or by anyone else. And therefore anything that perpetuates the awareness of the negativity, such as the media or personal gossip, is contributing to and magnifying the problem. But the negativity is not simply generated by hearing or repeating gossip or reacting to reported acts of violence in the news. These are only outpicturings of the negativity buried in the mind that has been there all along and remains there until a deliberate choice is made against the ego thought system and for the Holy Spirit. That is the real problem. As such, if looked at with the Holy Spirit, these expressions of negativity and our reactions to them can actually serve a helpful purpose in healing the mind.

The problem is never the specific expression but its purpose. And expressions of negativity reflect the desire to project the guilt within our minds onto someone else. What needs to be changed are not the external expressions of negativity but the inner decision to keep one's own guilt real but hidden by projecting it on to others. Stopping the external expression of attack, or avoiding exposing oneself to others' expressions of negativity, will accomplish nothing if the inner guilt that motivates the projection is not acknowledged and released to the Holy Spirit. Changing the external form without recognizing what is behind it only pushes the guilt deeper into the unconscious, where it continues to have unconscious effects, perhaps in the form then of illness or extreme rage when it is finally projected, as it must be so long as it is denied. The negativity exists in the mind and the external event merely elicits it out from under the veils of denial. It may be helpful to remember that a healed mind has no reaction to the so-called negativity of the world, whatever form it may take, because it has no guilt within that it needs to project.

Now there is certainly nothing wrong with abstaining from gossip, especially once we understand the hateful purpose it serves. For gossip reinforces the ego's hidden reservoir of guilt. But again, merely curbing the activity without a corresponding inner shift that chooses against the ego, which always looks to see the guilt outside the mind in others, does not undo the guilt that lies buried there. If I find myself in judgment of the media or the gossipier, I have accepted the same ego purpose.

And finally, your opening comments suggest there is a kind of momentum that builds as more and more people embrace the Course and practice forgiveness. There can be a kind of wishful thinking behind this idea, almost as if I will not have to make the choice, moment by moment, against my ego and for the Holy Spirit, because the collective mind is going to bring me and everyone else along in the inevitable flood of forgiveness. And the special danger here is that we will underestimate the wiliness and the tenacity of the ego and overlook the subtle ways in which it continues to keep itself alive through reinforcing specialness and separation, albeit in seemingly more acceptable "spiritual" forms. My only responsibility, as the Course reminds us repeatedly, is to accept the Atonement for myself. So long as the guilt over separation remains real in my own mind, that is the only thing I need be concerned about. For, as Jesus reminds us, only one teacher of God -- myself -- is needed to save the world (**M.12**).

Q #398: Would you please address the difference between the idea of return, as discussed in "The Temple of the Holy Spirit" section of *A Course in Miracles*, and reciprocity in the sense discussed in the paragraph below? What is a right-minded view of reciprocity in our relationships in the world?

A: The two ideas actually are not related. Their meanings differ, as the following answers explain.

(W.pl.76.8:1,2,3) "We will begin the longer practice periods today with a short review of the different kinds of 'laws' we have believed we must obey. These would include, for example, the 'laws' of nutrition, of immunization, of medication, and of the body's protection in innumerable ways. Think further; you believe in the 'laws' of friendship, of 'good' relationships and reciprocity."

The term *reciprocity* in this context refers to special relationship bargains. The premise of this type of relationship is that we must give in order to get, even though we would much rather -- if we were truly honest with ourselves -- just take what we wanted without having to give something in return. But in the world of special relationships, *bargaining* is the name of the game and it is always reciprocal. That is, A does it with B, and B in turn does it with A. Our buried guilt and self-hatred lead us to believe that no one would just give us what we want -- we don't deserve it - - so we must always engage in sacrifice and make compromises in our relationships. I will sacrifice for you, and then you will sacrifice for me. This dynamic pervades all special love relationships, and is thought of as the nature of loving relationships in the world.

Right-minded reciprocity is grounded in our understanding that God's Son is one, which is reflected in our experience here of seeing everyone as sharing the same interests. We all share the same wrong mind and the same right mind. We all are part of the one Son who believes he attacked Love and rejected his true Identity by choosing individualized existence apart from the perfect Oneness of God, and who can undo that choice by accepting the Atonement right here and now. This oneness is the basis of the Course principle that giving and receiving are the same, which negates the need for bargaining of any kind (we are speaking on the level of *content* only). The reciprocity in a holy relationship, thus, is just love extending to itself. **"For if love is sharing, how can you find it except through itself? Offer it and it will come to you, because it is drawn to itself" (T.12.VIII.1:5,6).** This, of course, pertains only to what is going on in our minds, and it can be our perception whether we are talking to an inmate on death row, a beloved friend, or are simply thinking about someone who died twenty years ago.

(T.20.VI.6:1,2,3,4,5) "You cannot make the body the Holy Spirit's temple, and it will never be the seat of love. It is the home of the idolater, and of love's condemnation. For here is love made fearful and hope abandoned. Even the idols that are worshipped here are shrouded in mystery, and kept apart from those who worship them. This is the temple dedicated to no relationships and no return."

If we maintain our identification with the body, believing it is reality -- and a sacred reality at that -- we will never return home, because we will never return to our minds where we would become aware of, and then be able to reverse, our choice to replace our true home in God with a self-made home in the body. We must at least be willing to question the reality of the body (T.24.in.2:1); we do not have to give it up. Once we allow ourselves to take that first step, we begin the process of shifting the *purpose* of bodily existence, and we are on the path back to our true home, comforted and helped by Jesus each step of the way.

Q #399: My question has to do with the question in the teacher's manual of *A Course in Miracles* titled "What is the role of words in healing?" (M.21). As I have been going

along in my forgiveness path, I am learning to let the Holy Spirit speak through me to others. My answer to my brother is often something that I realized I needed to hear as well, or something that I needed to have reinforced that I already learned. Sometimes I feel guided to say something that truly has nothing to do with the situation at hand. Why would Jesus want me to say it? Sometimes I say something and I feel like everyone looks at me like I am crazy! Please, advice would be so greatly appreciated!

A: There really is no way of knowing why you are prompted to say certain things. In our present state we cannot see into our minds where all the choices and dynamics take place. It might help you, though, to shift your attention away from *what* the voice says, to doing what it tells you to do so that you can hear it better. As we have come to realize, the emphasis in *A Course in Miracles* is always on undoing the interferences to our hearing the Voice of the Holy Spirit. This is something that Jesus stressed with Helen, the scribe of the Course: **"Remember you need nothing, but you have an endless store of loving gifts to give. But teach this lesson only to yourself. Your brother will not learn it from your words or from the judgments you have laid on him. You need not even speak a word to him. You cannot ask, 'What shall I say to him?' and hear God's answer. Rather ask instead, 'Help me to see this brother through the eyes of truth and not of judgment,' and the help of God and all His angels will respond"** (*Absence from Felicity*, p. 381).

So as Jesus helped Helen to learn, our goal ought always to be to perceive ourselves and others through the non-judgmental eyes of forgiveness, which we approach by first looking at our readiness to judge and find fault. We all are eager to have our egos out of the way so that the love of Jesus or the Holy Spirit would speak through us to others, and then we would be truly helpful. But that is usually a long, long process because we have so many defenses in place and we are not aware of our tenacious need to maintain these defenses (the many forms of judgment, specialness, and bodily concerns). When the ego is gone, there is only one Voice, and there is no other self to wonder about its meaning. But that is the end of the process. Jesus just asks that we take the little steps right now that lead in that direction (**W.pl.193.13:7**), not so that we will always say the right things to others, but so that we would no longer want to be other than as God created us.

An article called "Learning to Listen" appeared in the September 2003 edition of "The Lighthouse"; we have also published an audio tape album called "Healing: Hearing the Melody." Both are helpful sources in working with this important topic of listening.

Q #400: I have difficulty understanding "looking without judgment." In one of the answers, you said "to observe your vacillations without judgment, without imposing the categories of desirable and undesirable...(Question #216)." Could you please elaborate on this "without categorizing of desirable and undesirable?" Thank you!

A: The problem with all of our judgments is not that they are bad in themselves, but that our belief in them makes the error of separation real all over again in our minds. When we identify some experiences as good or desirable and others as bad or undesirable,

we have fallen into the ego's trap of opposites, or opposition, which necessarily is an invitation to conflict. While we have a split mind, we are almost certainly going to vacillate between right-minded thinking/ experiences and wrong-minded thinking/experiences. In reality -- that is, the oneness of Heaven -- neither is real or true. In the context of the earlier question you refer to, to impose categories of desirable and undesirable on them is to give them a reality they do not have. The Holy Spirit's only judgment is that wrong-mindedness is false and right-mindedness, although still an illusion, is a *reflection* of what is true.

Now it is true, from our perspective within the split mind, that the Holy Spirit is attempting to lead us toward a recognition that wrong-minded thinking brings us pain and right-minded thinking brings us joy, for in our confused state of mind we believe just the opposite (**T.7.X**). And only a fool, once we understand our confusion, would deny that one of these states is preferable to or more desirable than the other. But if we begin to judge the ego state as undesirable in the sense that we want to resist it, and condemn ourselves for experiencing it, then we have played right into the ego's hands, for now there is something real that we need to direct our efforts against.

That is why Jesus emphasizes over and over again in *A Course in Miracles*, that all we need to do is look with him at what our egos have made without trying to change it (e.g., **T.4.III.7,8**; **T.11.V.1,2**), while recognizing its cost. If we try to change it, then we say the ego itself is the problem, when the only problem is our belief in it. And we can't undo that belief on our own, for that *is* the belief -- that we are on our own. And so we want to look at our ego with Jesus or the Holy Spirit beside us, and share their vision of the unreality of the ego, not judge it as undesirable and attempt to change it or fix it in some way that will make it more acceptable to us -- and our ego!

So the goal is not to be judgment-free, for that comes only at the very end of the forgiveness process, but rather to learn more and more not to judge ourselves for having our ego judgments. A helpful tape that elaborates on this learning process is *The Meaning of Judgment* by Kenneth Wapnick.

Q #401-a: *A Course in Miracles* urges us to give our minds back to God. I suppose that means having Him in our minds all the time. Is that correct? Is there anything we can do to get it without further delay?

Q #401-b: Jesus commended His Spirit to God, while he was nailed to the cross, and he tells us to do it as well. Can you explain this and how to do it?

Q #401-c: The Course says that if we apply all our abilities to a single unified purpose for a long time, they will become unified. How can we do it?

A: i. To give our minds back to God means that we would first realize that we somehow preferred to be to separate from Him and that we are actively maintaining that separation in our everyday lives. So Jesus helps us identify (especially in the workbook lessons) how we are doing that, so that we can then decide whether it is still worth it to

continue on the path of separation, which is the path of specialness and separate interests. If we decide it is not worth it anymore, then we can simply decide *against* our deciding to be separate. This is done by being willing to practice seeing everyone as sharing the same wrong-minded thought system and the same right-minded thought system, and that the differences we perceive are not ultimately of any importance. Giving our minds back to God is giving our minds back to oneness, our natural state. What "delays" us is our tremendous resistance to this shift, because it means deciding against the special, individual self we have come to know as our only identity. Therefore the only motivation for making that shift is that we have recognized that this self is false and does not lead to happiness, and something else now appeals to us more. We need not let go of this self, just give it a different purpose now. Instead of using it to maintain separation and differences, we can now use it to undo the separation. That is how we begin the process of giving our minds back to God.

ii. Commending our spirit to God is really the same as giving our minds back to God -- it is our willingness to undo all sense of separation from each other, acknowledging first that it is there because we wanted it to be there. **"Nothing can prevail against a Son of God who commends his spirit into the Hands of his Father. By doing this the mind awakens from its sleep and remembers its Creator. All sense of separation disappears"** (T.3.II.5:1,2,3). See also T.5.VII.3.

iii. By consistently practicing seeing our interests as the same as everyone else's, we gradually eliminate conflict from our minds, and then they become more unified. The differences among us recede in importance, and our peace is found more and more in the acceptance of our oneness. If we use our lives and our everyday interactions as a means of undoing the separation, then we will no longer suffer the strain of having to face every day as if we were on a battleground filled with rivals and predators -- a "kill or be killed" environment. When we rise above the battleground with Jesus, our perception will be unified: we will perceive either calls for love or expressions of love in all happenings. And this will be our permanent state of mind because it will reflect the true oneness of Heaven's Love. We will want nothing else, having fully accepted that there is nothing else.

Q #402: My question concerns some past and present events in my life as well as questions on some of the other questions presented here. First, my question relates to Questions #215, #195, and #3. All of which say that it is important to "do your best." When I look back on specific past events there is a voice that judges them and says I didn't do my best and therefore don't deserve the prosperity I have now. I succeed in seeing past these judgments as cries for love, yet something just never lets me free of the intense guilt they produce. When I see "do your best" written here at the place I seek refuge, it makes me wonder if that statement "do your best" is a law reflected in my mind that accuses me of not doing my best. Is it part of forgiveness that I re-enact these past events and live them according to what I bitterly think of as "the best I can do?" What if I want to do the worst I can do? Does this exclude me from the prosperity I seek in my life?

A: Guilt over prosperity, or anything symbolizing success in the world, most often stems from the belief buried in our minds that we stole what we have attained and therefore it

is not legitimate. Our very existence as individuals in the world, we believe, is not legitimate because it came by means of stealing God's power, making it our own, and in the process killing Him off. Therefore success and prosperity in the world would be associated with that "crime" (illusory of course) of which we accuse ourselves. A terrible sense of guilt and unworthiness would automatically follow, which is why we are taught in many different ways in *A Course in Miracles* that our only responsibility is to accept the Atonement -- the principle that the separation from God never happened. When these self-accusations are seen as unjustified, then all guilt would simply disappear; and if there is no longer any guilt in our minds, then we would be instruments for the extension of love, which would occur regardless of our financial status.

So the voice that continually reminds you of your unworthiness is the voice of the ego, for guilt is its life blood: no guilt, no ego. Thus the first obstacle to peace is the attraction of guilt (**T.19.IV.A.i**). And since another name for guilt is self-hatred, the shrieks accusing you of not doing your best might well be self-judgments haunting you over your (all of our) stupidity and viciousness in thinking you could get away with killing God and granting to yourself what He would not grant you. That is always the bottom line of our guilt. Being critical of our less-than- commendable efforts in the world is a smokescreen intended to keep our attention away from the real cause of our agony, which is our ongoing decision to prefer a special separate existence apart from God and the unity of the Sonship.

The correction of this madness begins by regarding everything in the world -- including everything about bodily existence -- as neutral, and then focusing only on the *purpose* for which we would use everything: to reinforce the separation (following the ego's guidance) or to undo the separation (following Jesus' or the Holy Spirit's guidance). In this sense, then, wealth is neither holy nor unholy. The purpose for which we would use it gives it its meaning. Making this kind of a shift in our minds is usually a long and gradual process because of our defenses and our resistance, both of which are hidden from plain sight in our terrified minds. In that sense we just do the best we can. Our denial is so massive and the fear behind the denial is so intense that it is a wonder that we make any progress at all in extricating ourselves from the ego's pernicious web. To use an experience common to all of us: If you wake up in the morning a little groggy, you may be unsteady on your feet, and your vision may be blurry. You do the best you can until you are fully awake and feeling normal again. You can't do more than that, and no one who is kind and gentle would expect you to do more than that. Given our groggy, fearful state of mind and blurred vision, Jesus as our kind and gentle teacher knows that we are doing only what we are capable of doing and he would never reprimand us for not doing our best, for that would serve only to make the error real, and above all he is helping us to remember that we, with him, are the eternally sinless Son of God.

Q #403: My brother and I were having a conversation many years ago about forgiveness. He said he'd always felt that he could be forgiven for anything. I said I'd always felt I could be forgiven for nothing. Does that simply reflect different interpretations of the separation? And was my interpretation based on fear more so than his? And, if so, does that mean he's more spiritually advanced than I am?

A: Anyone who even asks a question is behind the spiritual eight-ball, Jesus doesn't hesitate to point out to us (**T.27.IV**), so to ask which version of forgiveness is more spiritually advanced probably would not attract very much celestial attention. Nevertheless, if the *content* is that God loves us without reservation, then the way that gets expressed in form is irrelevant. As Jesus states: "**A universal theology is impossible, but a universal experience is not only possible but necessary. It is this experience toward which the course is directed**" (**C.in.2:5,6**). Jesus would always direct our attention to our need

to see differences that keep us separate from each other in our perception. That he would want to help us correct, for it is far more important to him that we work with him in removing the barriers to seeing our oneness with each other, than having us get his terminology straight. Strictly speaking, though, the view of forgiveness in *A Course in Miracles* is that there is nothing to forgive because nothing ever happened that is in need of forgiveness.

Q #404: My question has to do with my understanding about my choice for the separation. I have known all my life since I was very little that I actually chose to come here, and further, that I chose to come to my mother. Now that I am reading *A Course in Miracles*, I wonder about it. It has always felt as though I left "Heaven" consciously to come here and that everyone does. I never saw it as a choice against God. I have always felt very connected to God. I am struggling with this. I understand from the Course that I do not need to understand things, just be willing to follow the path the Holy Spirit shows me. That seems very right. But I keep coming back to my question of how I could choose to separate from God. Was I supposed to? Is that part of salvation? I am learning that my mission here now is forgiveness -- that seems right. But why did I come here in the first place? Is there temptation even in Heaven? I *know* I was in Heaven before I came. I *know* I will be there again after this life -- why did I leave there in the first place? Jesus chose to come, but he did not choose against God, did he?

A: Your confusion is understandable. It arises at least in part from superimposing the world's conception of Heaven and earth on the Course's language. For the memory of the choice that you recall making to "come here" into this lifetime is a memory, from the Course's perspective, that would still be from within the ego thought system of separation and duality. In other words, the Heaven you think you remember leaving to have the experience of this lifetime is not what the Course means by Heaven. It is the mind, not the body, that seems to exist outside Heaven in its choice for separation, and our bodily existence is simply a symbolic representation of that choice for separation, and not the choice itself.

There is a conscious, seemingly separate or split mind that makes choices about bodily experiences and lifetimes. It is to the ego's advantage to convince us that the contrast between these two seemingly different levels of existence -- separate mind outside of time and space, and body in time and space -- is real. And to persuade us that once this life in this body is over -- as if life in this body *is* the separation and the problem -- that we will be back in Heaven. But until we make the decision to release all *judgments* based on the belief in individuality and specialness, which are thoughts in the mind independent of bodies, we as split mind will continue to choose experiences that seem to provide us evidence that the separation is in fact real. And we will continue to find ourselves believing we are outside of Heaven.

With respect to Jesus, you are falling into a similar kind of confusion, based on the world's commonly held beliefs about the nature of Jesus. There is no Jesus in Heaven, for he is simply a symbol in our split mind that we have given form, who represents the true memory of our home in Heaven, where all is one and individuality has no meaning. Now, while we still believe we are separate from the oneness of Heaven, there is nothing wrong in using these symbols, such as Jesus, to help us learn our lessons of forgiveness. In fact, we need to if we are going to benefit from the Course as our spiritual path back home (**T.27.III.5**). But it would be a mistake to take the symbols for reality, for the reality of Heaven is beyond anything we can comprehend with our split minds.

Q #405: My question arises out of learning I'm wrong. I thought for a long time I was following guidance and doing what I perceived to be significant work. This point may not be so much wrong as something I can't judge. Even so I am concerned I've misled people. I feel responsible for this. I was practicing *A Course in Miracles* but people I dealt with didn't understand that even when I told them. Is there a reason, perhaps, to declare that I may not have been practicing the Course, if I am wrong? It seems related to ask what happens with the concept that I need what others need, or that I should do what anyone else would do, if what in fact occurs is that what I end up doing is quite unusual? I acted based on what I thought I needed. Now I see how very important it is to the Course to comprehend what it is to need nothing, even if I still have a long way to go. I find it very very difficult to do everything right, even for a short time.

A: If I understand your question correctly, you are saying that in the past you have felt you were following guidance on how to act based on the Course's principles and have, as a result, done unusual things, which you have justified to others as coming from your practice of the Course. And now, since you are not sure if you have really understood and may have been mistaken about what the Course is asking of you, should you acknowledge that to others whom you believe you may have misled about the Course? Furthermore, isn't it possible that you may be called upon to act in unusual ways as a result of your perception of your needs and your guidance?

It is very easy to get ourselves all tied up in knots when we become concerned about our behavior, and what is right and what is wrong. The focus on behavior, or form, is one of the ego's clever tricks for keeping us in conflict, pondering what *seem* to be reasonable questions. And so it is helpful to understand that the Course is never really concerned with modifying or directing our behavior, but only our thoughts (**T.2.VI.2,3**). And the only distinction the Course makes is whether a thought has its origins in the ego thought system, which would be something that reinforces the belief in separation, differences and guilt, or the Holy Spirit's thought system, which would recognize the common purpose we all share of finding a way out of our confusion and pain, despite all of our differences on the level of form.

So the question no longer becomes am I doing everything right or not, but am I looking with my right mind or my wrong mind at whatever I am thinking and doing? If I am feeling guilty and conflict-ridden and confused, I can recognize that's my ego. But if I am clear that the only thing I really need to learn is to look on all choices, both my own and others, without judgment or fear or attack, then I am looking with my right mind. If I make that my focus, the question of what specific behaviors I should carry out will begin to recede in importance. Not that I won't continue to get caught from time to time in focusing my attention on my behavior and its consequences rather than on my thoughts and their consequences. But I will begin to recognize the ego conflict that always underlies that focus on form, and I will begin to ask for help more frequently in looking at the situation differently.

There is nothing in the Course that says that you need to acknowledge your mistakes to others. You need to acknowledge your mistakes to yourself and Jesus or the Holy Spirit, so that no guilt is involved. Once you do that, you may or may not be guided to

acknowledge them to others. But the latter will not be your focus or concern, when you truly ask for help with releasing your judgments.

Now it is possible that, at times when you have done your part to recognize your ego and step back from your identification with it, you may be guided to do something that the world perceives as unusual. But this will not be based on your own needs, as you have identified them, for the Course tells us that our only need is for forgiveness. And in general, it's helpful to know that, with the Course's focus on thought and not behavior, if you are practicing its principles, you will look pretty much like everyone else most of the time. For the only significant work to be done is in our own minds. In the Course's own words, **"There is a way of living in the world that is not here, although it seems to be. *You do not change appearance, though you smile more frequently. Your forehead is serene; your eyes are quiet. And the ones who walk the world as you do recognize their own. Yet those who have not yet perceived the way will recognize you also, and believe that you are like them, as you were before* (W.155.1, italics added).**

Q #406: In question #3, it was stated that if one believes he is still in this world that he should do his best in his role in it. This has bothered me quite a bit. I have been bothered by a voice that began in college that dictated to me what I should do in any situation. As I noticed it I would do the opposite of what it said and follow my gut. I was most surely not "doing my best" and was careless in my actions. Others made me feel guilty for this. Over time the guilt became horrible every time I would not listen to the "reason" of the voice. I began looking in my past with this voice and I still am haunted constantly with my mind bringing up my actions to this day. *A Course in Miracles* has been such a release from this torment and this tyranny. Does not the Course say be careless in all things but in forgiveness and love? Doing the best you can to me only implies judgment. Even though I did not do the best I could, in my mind and other people's minds, I have been carried to safety and have been very successful. Please help me to understand this because the Course is my refuge and I don't understand what you mean. It scares me to think the Course might not mean what I think it means.

A: First of all, rest assured that the statement you refer to from Question #3 is not meant to be taken as an admonition to evaluate your past and present performances and judge your adequacy or inadequacy in meeting the roles you have assumed. For the Course is never concerned with the specific forms that our lives take and our actions in the world. And it is also not concerned with cataloguing the errors of the past as a means of reinforcing our guilt. Its focus is on correcting only one error, which we are making in the present -- our ongoing choice for the ego. And everything you describe of your voice for "reason" and your reactions to it are nothing more than your ego's attempt to keep you in conflict within yourself and deprive you of peace in the present.

Having said that, let's clarify what that statement in Question #3 about doing your best means. As that question points out, the forms or roles of our lives -- although initially chosen to make separation, differences, specialness, and guilt real -- become the classrooms in which we learn our forgiveness lessons, once we accept the Holy Spirit as our Teacher. In other words, our roles as student, employee, spouse, parent, etc., are the forms onto which we have projected our unconscious guilt, which now become the means, if we pay attention to our thoughts and reactions to them, for getting back in touch with that buried guilt in our mind.

Now it is not that there is some ego-ideal or standard that we should be striving to meet, against which we should be measuring ourselves in terms of fulfilling our roles -- that's an ego trap with all its trappings of grandiosity. The point being made here is that it is only a very practical concern with being true to the classroom *that we have chosen for ourselves* so that we can move more swiftly on our journey back home to the Role God has assigned us as His only Son. If we now or in the past have failed to meet our responsibilities in the world, it is not a sin and should not be employed as a means for reinforcing guilt -- that would serve no helpful purpose.

But it is helpful to be honest with ourselves -- rebelling against the so-called responsibilities of our roles is as much an ego ploy as slavishly trying to conform. Lack of attention or concern about those responsibilities at the level of form is almost always an expression of our authority problem -- with the authorities of this world who, in our minds, represent the ultimate Authority, God, from Whom we have attempted to steal our independence and autonomy. And resistance to accepting the responsibility of our roles represents our resistance to uncovering the hidden guilt so that it can be released. Jesus is only asking that we be honest, but he will never condemn us if we're not yet ready to look deeper.

As for the quote in the Course about being careless that you refer to, let's look at it in the context of the whole passage:

You may wonder how you can be at peace when, while you are in time, there is so much that must be done before the way to peace is open. Perhaps this seems impossible to you. But ask yourself if it is possible that God would have a plan for your salvation that does not work. Once you accept His plan as the one function that you would fulfill, there will be nothing else the Holy Spirit will not arrange for you without your effort. He will go before you making straight your path, and leaving in your way no stones to trip on, and no obstacles to bar your way. Nothing you need will be denied you. Not one seeming difficulty but will melt away before you reach it. *You need take thought for nothing, careless of everything except the only purpose that you would fulfill.* As that was given you, so will its fulfillment be. God's guarantee will hold against all obstacles, for it rests on certainty and not contingency. It rests on *you*. And what can be more certain than a Son of God? (T.20.IV.8; italics added to complete sentence).

You may notice that this passage begins by commenting on how much must be done in time. In particular, this is referring to all the special relationships that we must forgive, which include all the roles our lives assume. The key to taking "thought for nothing, careless of everything" comes earlier in the paragraph: "Once you accept His plan as the one function you would fulfill." In other words, we will experience no resistance to anything we may seem to be called upon to do in the world because we will know that our only purpose is to forgive. And we will learn to welcome all the seeming challenges our lives present us, recognizing that each, looked at through the eyes of forgiveness, brings us one step closer to home. And so, we need not have care or concern for the form of our lives, because we will know that we are doing the only work that really matters.

Q #407: The following two questions address the topic of miracles and so will be answered together:

i. Jesus did many miracles while he was here on earth, such as raised the dead, made the blind see, etc. Can we, Sons of God, do miracles in this world as well?

ii. What does *A Course in Miracles* mean when it says we should offer miracles to others?

A: Scripture scholars differ in their understanding of the historical accuracy of the Gospel accounts of what Jesus did during his lifetime. However, regardless of the accuracy of the Gospels, the Course teaches a different meaning of miracles. What the Course means by a miracle is a change of mind. It is a course in miracles because it is a course in learning to change our minds from thinking with the ego to thinking with the Holy Spirit. It is a process of undoing the ego by learning a new perspective that reverses the ego's view on everything and everyone. The ego tells us we are bodies, separate from God and from each other, subject to change by external forces. The Holy Spirit tells us we are minds, one with our Father and with each other, subject to change only by the power of the mind to choose. We accept miracles for ourselves to the extent that we accept this teaching, and apply it to all events, situations, and experiences in our lives. We offer miracles to others as we recognize the same power of their minds to choose. As Jesus tells us in the text: **"The miracle extends without your help, but you are needed that it can begin. Accept the miracle of healing, and it will go forth because of what it is. It is its nature to extend itself the instant it is born. And it is born the instant it is offered and received. No one can ask another to be healed. But he can let *himself* be healed, and thus offer the other what he has received"** (T.27.V.1:3,4,5,6,7).

A further extension of this principle is the process of forgiveness, whereby we recognize that nothing external to our minds can cause us to feel anything positive or negative, and therefore, no one is responsible for how we feel. That is what is meant by Jesus' invitation: **"Be willing to forgive the Son of God for what he did not do."** Thus forgiveness is the miracle we offer to our brothers. In recognizing that our experience is the result of a decision in our minds to identify with the ego or with the Holy Spirit, all our brothers are released from blame, and their innocence is brought to our awareness. This is the miracle of the healing of the mind, given and received.

Q #408: I am almost through with the workbook and with reading through the text of *A Course in Miracles*. While I see a dramatic difference in my level of peace and perceptions from when I started, I realize that reading all the way through the text and teacher's manual and going through all the lessons in the workbook isn't the end of working the course. But I don't know where to go from there. Should I start back at the beginning of the text again? Do I simply meditate and listen to the Holy Spirit? What should I do to fully realize the Atonement?

A: The workbook epilogue agrees with you: **"This course is a beginning, not an end" (W.ep.1:1)**. Accepting the Atonement is a process that requires the mind training that is the purpose of the workbook (W.in.1:4), and, as with any training program, patience and perseverance will serve to ensure progress. Once the principles of forgiveness are understood, their effectiveness lies in applying them to every situation, event, and

relationship in your life. As long as there is anything that causes any form of upset or distress, no matter how seemingly insignificant it may be, there is need for forgiveness. And so, what follows the initial reading of the Course is a lifetime of practice, practice, practice.

Since we are deeply attached to our identities as bodies, and therefore to the thought system of the ego, it does indeed take time and effort to train our minds to think with the Holy Spirit. We are reminded frequently in the Course that our resistance to learning its teachings is considerable. In this regard, we may generalize the message in Lesson 44 to the practice of any of the teachings of the Course: **"...you may find that you will encounter strong resistance. The reason is very simple. While you practice in this way, you leave behind everything that you now believe, and all the thoughts that you have made up. Properly speaking, this is the release from hell. Yet perceived through the ego's eyes, it is loss of identity and a descent into hell" (W.pl.44.5:2,3,4,5,6).** Our practice, therefore, requires careful attention and vigilance in monitoring our minds for every thought and judgment, along with the willingness to let them be transformed by the Holy Spirit, which is how they are undone. Although no structured practice for this is established, once the workbook has been completed, any of the instructions it offers can be used as helpful exercises. Certainly it would be good to do anything that helps you "stay tuned" to your thoughts; quiet time, meditation, rereading any part of the Course. Several re-readings of the text are helpful, as its subtleties become clear only when our layers of guilt are removed through the daily practice of forgiveness. As you become familiar with the workbook lessons, they will come to mind during the day. Their effectiveness, however, lies exclusively in your willingness to *apply them* to whatever situation or relationship in which you find yourself. It is this specific application, in every relationship and event of daily life, that is the true work of a student of the Course. And again, this takes practice, as well as patience and perseverance. A review of the instructions in the introduction to the workbook may be helpful: **"...do not allow yourself to make exceptions in applying the ideas the workbook contains, and whatever your reactions to the ideas may be, use them. Nothing more than that is required" (W.in.9:4,5).**

Q #409: I understand how the ego's script plays out and that the Holy Spirit's correction script plays out simultaneously. We can choose the Holy Spirit's script at any time. Is the essence of the Holy Spirit's correction script that it shows us the decision we made for the ego is wrong? Is that how it undoes the ego?

A: Yes, the Holy Spirit's correction script shows us that our decision for the ego is simply a silly, foolish mistake and has had no effect on what is real -- spirit. The Atonement principle, which is another word for the Holy Spirit's correction, simply says the separation never happened **(T.6.II.10:7,8; M.2.2:2,3,4,5,6,7,8)**. The Atonement does nothing but undo our mistaken belief in the ego thought system of sin, guilt and fear. Our minds may translate this gentle principle into a form that we can accept and understand, such as *A Course in Miracles*, while the thought that the separation and our individuality -- and hence the self we think we are -- are all illusion is too frightening to embrace. Yet, as we practice the correction over time, we will find more and more that a certain light-heartedness is our experience, as we become increasingly grateful to learn that we have been wrong about sin, guilt and fear.

A lovely passage from the workbook, describing the process of salvation, which is yet another word for the correction, expresses this clearly:

This is the way salvation works. As you step back, the light in you steps forward and encompasses the world. It heralds not the end of sin in punishment and death. In lightness and in laughter is sin gone, because its quaint absurdity is seen. It is a foolish thought, a silly dream, not frightening, ridiculous perhaps, but who would waste an instant in approach to God Himself for such a senseless whim? (W.156.6).

Q #410: Do you think practices that focus on the physical body (like yoga and other more conventional forms of exercise) are leading me further away from the truth? It seems like these things help me feel better, but am I just deluding myself? Is it just the ego that is feeling better?

A: There is nothing wrong with doing anything with the body that makes you feel better, whether it's yoga, or walking or other physical exercise, or going to a movie, having a beer, or sex, etc. And the Course would never ask you to give up anything that seems to help you. All that Jesus asks of us is to recognize that, if the Course is our path, the only practice that will truly make us feel better is forgiveness, because it is the only practice that gets to the root of our unhappiness -- our belief that we are separate from love, from God, and from each other.

We all have to do something with our bodies while we believe we live in them, and it can be a kind and loving thing to care for them in a way that we believe maintains their health and well-being. But the bottom line will always be - what is our purpose? If we are focusing on our body to reinforce our specialness, we are setting ourselves up for pain and suffering. A sobering passage towards the end of the text makes this clear:

Ask yourself this: Can you protect the mind? The body, yes, a little; not from time, but temporarily. And much you think you save, you hurt. What would you save it for? For in that choice lie both its health and harm. Save it for show, as bait to catch another fish, to house your specialness in better style, or weave a frame of loveliness around your hate, and you condemn it to decay and death (T.24.VII.4:1,2,3,4,5,6).

The reason for this is not punitive, as the ego would want us to believe, but simply the inevitable consequences of identifying with a thought system that reinforces the belief in loss and limitation as a result of separation, as the following explains:

Whenever you attempt to reach a goal in which the body's betterment is cast as major beneficiary, you try to bring about your death. For you believe that you can suffer lack, and lack is death (T-29.VII.4:1,2; see also T.19.IV.B.12).

The problem is not with taking care of the body as we think we need to. It would be foolish, for example, to stop eating or drinking simply because they happen to be the imagined needs of a mind that believes it is separate and housed in a body. The problem arises when our focus on the body is to maintain it for the purpose of attack -- either for special love or for special hate -- that is, as a means to meet our own needs at someone else's expense, seeing our interests as separate from everyone else's. And an honest starting point would be to acknowledge that, for most of us, most of the time, that in fact is our focus.

But the correction would not be to eliminate the physical activity we are engaging in to help improve our body, but rather to ask for help in looking at the mental activity that we are buying into that tells us that using others can bring us happiness. If we look honestly, we will see the lie beneath that argument and it will diminish in its appeal to us. And then, with a different Thought behind our actions, one that points to the genuine benefits that come from recognizing our shared interest with all our brothers, our body can then become a medium for sharing that message with others, not through any specific words or actions, but through our attitude of love and peace.

Q #411: In *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus says, "You can not make the body the Holy Spirit's temple, and it will never be the seat of love. It is the home of the idolater, and of love's condemnation. For here is love made fearful and hope abandoned" (T.20.VI.6:1,2,3). And previous to that he states of idols, specifically referring to the body that "The body is the ego's chosen weapon for seeking power through relationships"

(T.20.VI.4:3). The other day I saw a woman who was pregnant and it made me think of birth, pregnancy, the separation, and what purpose birth serves. Is not the birthing of another body extending the thought of separation since the body is "the ego's chosen weapon for seeking power?" Aren't we just making the thoughts of separation greater and the illusion/dream more so through the birth of a body?

A: It would seem so; but in the passages you have cited, Jesus is speaking to us on what we refer to as Level One: the contrast between reality and illusion. On that level, the body symbolizes only the ego's murderous nature and its ongoing intention to perpetuate separation and conflict; and therefore in and of itself, the body can never be anything holy or loving. But on another level (Level Two), speaking to us within the framework of what we think is real, Jesus teaches us that "love does not condemn it [the body] and can use it lovingly, respecting what the Son of God has made and using it to save him from illusions" (T.18.VI.4:8). His gentle means of helping us is to teach us how to use what we regard as real (even though he knows it is not real and was made to attack truth) to undo the sense of separation we feel within ourselves and in relation to everyone else. He thus tells us to regard the world and the body first as neutral (W.pII.294), and then to concentrate on the *purpose* of what we think and do; and that purpose will always be a variation of one of two themes: the reinforcement of our belief in separation or of the undoing of that belief through forgiveness. As we progress in this way of thinking, we will gradually and naturally begin to disidentify with the body, until we finally accept its total unreality. Thus our lives become classrooms in which we choose either the ego or Jesus as our teacher. Seen from this perspective, then, birthing -- as with anything else -- can be in accord with the ego's purpose for us or with Jesus' purpose: a wrong-minded choice or a right-minded choice. This is what we refer to as Level Two: wrong-minded versus right-minded choices within the dream of separation.

So when you see a pregnant woman, just watch your own thoughts, remembering that you do not know what her specific Atonement path involves. That could be the classroom she has chosen in which to learn her specific lessons of forgiveness. In that sense, your thoughts could be along these lines: "We both believe we are here, which means we both believe we rejected our true Identity and left our home in Heaven in order to establish an independent separate existence of our own; and we both have within us the means and all the help we need to correct our mistake and return Home. The specifics of our lives may be different, but our purpose is the same, and Jesus' loving help is equally present to both of us."

One last thought. To think that separation can be made worse is to make the error real -- the cardinal "sin" of Course students! Linear time is one of the ego's cleverest tricks to make us think that our experience is fresh and real. It is just another way to validate our existence as individuals. Orienting us in the right direction, Jesus tells us that we **"but see the journey from the point at which it ended, looking back on it, imagining we make it once again; reviewing mentally what has gone by"** (W.pI.158.4:5). In that sense, we cannot make the separation greater or increase the illusion. Our awakening from this dream of separation, however, is dependent on the *purpose* for which we use the world and our bodies. In that sense, we can reinforce in our own minds our false identity as individual selves, or we can gradually undo this false identity with help from Jesus or the Holy Spirit in our practice of forgiveness. Giving birth to a baby is inherently neutral -- it the *purpose* behind that decision that establishes its Atonement relevance. Pardon the pun, but you don't want to throw the baby out with the bath water, a temptation practically all students of the Course fall prey to, when their egos blind their eyes to the two distinct levels on which Jesus speaks to us.

Q #412: I am in a state of confusion that I think borders on depression at times. I completed *A Course in Miracles* two months ago. I now wonder, due to my reactions to things, whether I completed it correctly -- whether I paid enough attention to the lessons. I am ashamed to have these thoughts for I know that it goes against the aims of the Course. I still get angry and when I am not getting angry I am stuffing my anger down. It seems as though I have just missed the whole point because my reactions and actions are way off. How do I deal with my children's outright disobedience and still follow the Course? It seems that I am required to let them get away with everything because none of it is real, but it feels very real to me. I don't know whether it is me being petty or them requiring discipline and guidance. I also become very

scared when I think about living my life as the Course instructs. I wouldn't know what choices to make; I wouldn't know what was important anymore. Should I care about money, my house, myself, my husband, etc. What is real?

A: "This course is a beginning, not an end" is how Jesus concludes the workbook (W.pll.ep.1:1). The workbook is a one-year training program that basically orients us and gives us what we need to continue our learning and practicing for the rest of our lives. Thus, at the end of one year, we have really just begun our work, as dismaying as that thought might be. We are not expected to have transcended our egos and mastered the Course after just one year, although Jesus says things that would lead us to think that. Jesus stands outside time and space altogether and sees us from a completely different perspective than we do. He knows that on one level we have already "made it"; and so sometimes he speaks through that vision. But by and large, his message to us is to see our lives now as classrooms in which we will spend all of our days learning how to look at our ego in action without judging it -- how to take our ego less and less seriously. It is true that none of this is real, but we do not believe that -- especially after only one year of working with the Course -- and so Jesus teaches us how to go about our lives in such a way that we will reach that ultimate point of realization, after many, many, many years of practice.

This is not a Course in denying our perceptions and feelings. Jesus wants us to see our perceptions and our experiences as the curriculum *he* can work with to help us. It is only through our daily experiences -- what we perceive as real -- that he can gradually and gently lead us beyond them; so it would be detrimental to your spiritual progress to pretend that you believe the world is not real, because the Course says it isn't, when you really do not believe that at all. Many students confuse these levels in the Course and wind up in the same kind of anguish and confusion you are experiencing. Please remember that the goal of the Course is not to be without an ego. The goal is to escape the burden of guilt we have placed upon ourselves for our murderous, vicious, and hateful ego choices (M.26.4:1,2). That is the primary way in which we will eventually learn that our original decision to leave God was nothing more than a "tiny, mad idea." Denying our experiences and how we truly feel leaves Jesus or the Holy Spirit with no means of helping us. We must be aware of what is in need of correction before we can accept Their gentle, loving correction of our mistaken thoughts. Jesus talks to us about this very early in the text: **"The body is merely part of your experience in the physical. . . . it is almost impossible to deny its existence in this world. Those who do so are engaging in a particularly unworthy form of denial. The term 'unworthy' here implies only that it is not necessary to protect the mind by denying the unmindful (T.2.IV.3:8,10,11,12).**

Specifically, this means that when -- *not if* -- you get angry or upset with your children, you would know that the *least* helpful thing you can do is judge yourself or feel that you are failing the Course. Getting angry is not the problem. Feeling guilty because you got angry is the problem. That is the mistake you are making, because you are giving the ego a reality it does not truly have. Jesus never asks us not to get angry; he asks only that we not justify it by claiming "I couldn't help it; look what happened!" or something along those lines. When we condemn ourselves for having ego attacks, we are playing right into the ego's hands and preventing ourselves from taking the one step that would free us from the ego forever, which is to realize that our anger is a projection of our self-hatred, which itself is a defense against the love that is the only true reality in our minds. So, again, your practice should involve stepping back as best you can and observing your ego without judging it. That is how you will begin the process of rejoining the love in your mind, for you will be deciding *against* the ego by not being ashamed of yourself for still having an ego. Then you are being a good Course in Miracles student. There is no way to flunk this Course -- except one, that is: you flunk this Course by thinking that flunking this Course is possible! The thought that you can be a failure in Jesus' eyes is deserving only of laughter.

You might want to look at [Question #179](#), which discusses normal parenting in the context of Course principles.

Q #413: i. Recently a friend suggested I read the Urantia book, and said it was a continuation of *A Course in Miracles*. I am wondering if the two books/theories support or contradict one another?

ii. Also, I am wondering if ACIM supports the theory of angels on earth?

A: i. Without being a student of the Urantia material, one can still observe that it is different in two important respects: It does not share the same non-dualistic thought system that sees the entire physical universe as illusory, and its view of Jesus also differs significantly from that of *A Course in Miracles*. The Course says that its path is only one among many thousands (**M.1.4:1,2**), but that if it is your path, then you should use it, rather than use a path that has "served others well," thereby "neglecting what was made for *you*" (**T.18.VII.6:5**). In view of this, it would seem to be more helpful spiritually if one were to follow one or the other of these systems.

ii. In *A Course in Miracles*, angels are regarded as extensions of God's Thought. They can be thought of as symbols of the light and protection of God that always surrounds us, since in truth we have never left Him. This view has nothing in common with the popular idea that angels are celestial beings, which from the Course's point of view are illusory.

Q #414: Please comment on the similarities and differences in the terms "belief" and "faith" as used in *A Course in Miracles*.

A: Simply put, what you put your faith in you then believe. Faith thus precedes belief. We never lack faith, for we always place our faith in either of two teachers: the ego or Jesus; and then we will believe what that teacher says. **"It is impossible that the Son of God lack faith, but he can choose where he would have it be. Faithlessness is not a lack of faith, but faith in nothing. Faith given to illusions does not lack power, for by it does the Son of God believe that he is powerless. Thus is he faithless to himself, but strong in faith in his illusions about himself. For faith, perception and belief you made, as means for losing certainty and finding sin. This mad direction was your choice, and by your faith in what you chose, you made what you desired" (T.21.III.5).**

Q #415: In the past, I have found ways to misuse *A Course in Miracles* for the purpose of conflict avoidance, and this has had the effect of demonstrating to some people that they hold power over me. Could you please explain the difference between allowing yourself to be used as a doormat, and what the Course is trying to teach in regard to dealing with situations where it's necessary to be assertive, to acknowledge yourself as an equal in accord with God's will?

A: Misusing the Course to avoid conflict is a common mistake among its students. This is a form of denial, and is in direct opposition to a very important goal of the Course, which is to teach us to pay attention to the conflict in our lives. This is one of the ways in which *A Course in Miracles* is a unique spiritual path. It tells us that by looking at conflict we learn to recognize the hidden, unconscious beliefs we hold about ourselves and others, all of which stem from the belief that the separation is real. Our conflicts are generally riddled with judgments, feelings, and thoughts, reflecting the conflict in our minds caused by the choice to believe the ego's lies about who we are as bodies, thus denying our true Identity as God's innocent Son. As long as we are unaware of this conflict in the mind, it cannot be brought to the Holy Spirit for healing. This is the

purpose the Course gives to conflict in our lives, and it is the only way it can truly be resolved.

Because the Course is showing us the real source of conflict is the unhealed mind, it does not tell us how to deal with it on the level of form, to which you are referring. We are asked to be willing to recognize all the thoughts, beliefs and feelings that come up in any situation, seeing that they reflect the choice in the mind to identify with the ego thought system, and be willing to question them in the light of the Course's teachings. We are not asked to do anything on the level of form. Trying to act in a way that seems spiritual or appears to be in accord with the metaphysical principles of the Course (i.e., keeping silent when mistreated) while still identifying with the ego's thought system, is unproductive, and leaves you feeling like a doormat. That is certainly not the experience to which Jesus is leading us. Moreover, if you are a victim, there must be a victimizer, thereby reinforcing separation.

The Course tells us we are not only "equal"; we are *one*. We will know this when all the forms by which we perceive ourselves to be separate and different from one another have been forgiven. Until then, we continue to practice forgiveness. It is possible to assert yourself and remain faithful to the Course, because it is no different from doing any of the things you do to take care of yourself physically, emotionally or psychologically. Asserting yourself without attack is a way to acknowledge your need to be treated respectfully, as well as the other's need for the same treatment, thereby reinforcing the belief that we have no separate interests. As long as we do believe we are bodies, we interact with others according to normal behavioral standards. This means not denying any of our feelings or perceived needs, which would only deprive us of opportunities to learn and to forgive. The Course cautions us very early in the text: **"The body is merely part of your experience in the physical world...it is almost impossible to deny its existence in this world. Those who do so are engaging in a particularly unworthy form of denial"(T.2.IV.3:8,10,11).**

Q #416: In the past two years, I have been involved in three automobile accidents, none of which was "my fault." As a result, I continue to suffer from the effects of whiplash, which physiotherapy and medication have eased, but I cannot seem to return to my healthy previous condition. I do believe there is more here than meets the eye and that healing is within my control/power. I would appreciate any insight you can share on the "reason" for apparent accidents, and healing from accidental injuries. Can you possibly shed some light on this issue, from the viewpoint of *A Course in Miracles*?

A: This is one of the more difficult aspects of the Course's theory to both understand and accept, the primary reason being that we always attempt to comprehend what the Course says from the perspective of homo sapiens, forgetting that the ego's purpose for homo sapiens is to keep the Son of God mindless and forever oblivious to the dynamics that sustain and motivate "life" in the world, ensuring that he would never realize that his experiences are the outcome of his own choice. The world **"never was, nor is, nor yet will be what you imagine"** Jesus once told Helen (*The Gifts of God*, p. 117) -- echoing Plato, perhaps. So it is important to remember that the Son of God does not equate with homo sapiens or the brain; the Son of God equates with *mind*.

In **"The Responsibility for Sight"** Jesus states: **"Deceive yourself no longer that you are helpless in the face of what is done to you....It is impossible the Son of God be merely driven by events outside of him. It is impossible that happenings**

that come to him were not his choice" (T.21.II.2:6;3:1,2). And then in that same section, he offers us some insight into why we (as decision-making minds outside time and space) would choose suffering: **"Suffer, and you [as mind] decided sin was your goal. Be happy and you gave the power of decision to Him Who must decide for God for you" (T.21.II.3:5,6).** Sin, which is always equated with separation in *A Course in Miracles*, therefore is a motivating factor: all suffering proves that separation is reality. Another motivating factor is given several paragraphs later: **"Nothing created not by your Creator has any influence over you. And if you think what you have made [the body] can tell you what you see and feel, and place your faith in its ability to do so, you are denying your Creator and believing that you made yourself. For if you think the world you made has power to make you what it wills, you are confusing Son and Father; effect and Source" (T.21.II.11:3,4,5).** Any time we feel we are victims of accidental happenings, we are being motivated by this ancient and concealed quest to usurp God's role as Creator and claim His power as our own. That sounds monstrous and there usually is nothing about our experience that validates this. But Jesus says in many ways throughout his Course that we should not trust our perceptions or our experience, until they are no longer ours but his from outside the dream. So, insanely, we (as mind) confirm our existence and autonomy by subjecting ourselves to forces seemingly beyond our control.

Once again, the decision-making mind outside time and space is not a human self or brain. This is impossible for us to envision, but as such, the mind can express its intention in any number of different forms, one of which is as seemingly different entities collectively involved in events and situations. Question #37 explains this in depth, specifically the "secret vow" we make to be hurt by another **(T.28.VI.4,5)**. Ultimately, "accidents" involving several people are the outward picture of a decision made in the mind. The ego's strategy to keep the separation from God real, while projecting responsibility for it, is effectively carried out in these human scenarios where people suffer as innocent victims of accidental happenings. Without minimizing people's pain, seen from a perspective outside the dream of separation, accidents, tragedies, and hideous catastrophes are still only smokescreens meant to obscure our identity as decision-making minds so that we would never realize that we are but following the way we chose **(W.pl.166.6)**, and therefore we can make another choice.

Healing from "accidental injuries" would proceed along the lines of any other type of healing; namely, that you would focus on which teacher you are choosing to guide you through your recovery. True healing is always the acceptance of the Atonement -- that the separation never truly happened. And we make our way toward that final stage by searching our minds for all the ways in which we uphold separation and separate interests. Interacting with your doctors and others who are helping you provides a wonderful opportunity to join in terms of sharing a common interest. And because all forms of sickness and pain are also defenses "protecting" you from your Identity as spirit, you also would want to be a patient patient, respectful of your fear of returning to the Home you never truly left. You just want to be gentle with yourself, with the love of Jesus beside you, accepting where you are and letting go any blame that tempts you to judge yourself or others.

Q #417: Is a desire or expectation or agreement for sexual fidelity in a relationship a hallmark of the ego's special relationship – a kind of possessiveness that seeks to own the other person and limit the expression of universal love? I have always avoided infidelity, not only for health reasons, but also because it seems to churn up disruptive and painful emotions. My partner comes from a background in his young adulthood where sex was considered a way of achieving union with others in his spiritual circle in addition to his spouse. And in relation to this, is it possible to truly forgive someone as a spiritual being, and believe the sincerity of their vow to act differently, and yet still feel insurmountable doubts about the person's moral appropriateness as a life partner? Or is such a feeling the product of fear and being stuck in the past? My inner voice advised me that he was not the right person for me and that I was resisting that fact and that he would never be the right person for me and to end the relationship. How can I tell if this is the Voice of the Holy Spirit?

A: While the expectation/desire for sexual fidelity could express the ego's version of love, which is characterized by possessiveness and exclusion, it could also express the Holy Spirit's purpose for the relationship, in the sense that this is the person with whom you are going to learn your lessons of forgiveness. Having sex only with this one person, therefore, could symbolize that commitment to heal the separation with this specific learning partner. And since the *content in your mind* is the healing of the separation, no one would be excluded from that healing. To avoid confusion and reduce the potential for self-deception, it is essential to distinguish between form and content. The content in our wrong minds is always generated by the ego's goal of keeping the separation intact, which it does primarily by devising ways to keep the body and its behavior (form) real in our perception. Sex fits nicely into this strategy, especially when it is spiritualized, for then a function of the body has been sanctified, and the ego's triumph thus assured. This is why Jesus reminds us that **"minds are joined, bodies are not"** (T.18.VI.3:1). We do not have to *achieve* union with others, we simply have to recognize how we are blocking awareness of that union, which is the eternal, unchangeable nature of our oneness as God's Son.

On the level of absolute truth, the body and everything about the body is totally illusory. But since we continue to believe we are real as bodies, Jesus helps us correct that mistaken belief by having us regard the body as neutral, so we can then concentrate as much as possible on the *purpose* for which we use the body: to separate or to heal the separation. Thus nothing of the body can be holy or unholy; the act of sex is neither holy nor unholy, even though many people tend to spiritualize it. The content in the mind is the critical factor. It is often difficult to discern the purpose or the content, though, because of the intense emotional and psychological aspects of sex, rooted ultimately in our guilt-ridden separation from God and the usurping of His creative power, manifested in the "pro-creative" dimension of sex. All of our problems and preoccupation with sex are linked with these ontological associations.

The process can often be simplified, however, by divorcing sex from its physical expression. Thus, issues of infidelity should be dealt with on the deeper level of content, rather than the behavioral level. It is not having an affair with someone else that is

wrong; the question of right or wrong in this regard needs to be addressed at a much deeper level. There needs to be complete clarity on the level of content; this cannot be decided simply by assessing behavior. The content that defines the relationship needs to be looked at with complete honesty and objectivity. (The wrong-minded content would be guilt, control, or any other aspect of specialness.)

Finally, how can you tell if you are truly being guided by the Holy Spirit, and not by the ego masquerading as a divine source? The way to discern this is, as best you can, get all of the interferences out of the way -- all the anger, fear, feelings of betrayal, jealousy, etc. You need not be free of them permanently, but just for an instant let them go, because your holding on to them is the cause of the disruption of the communication between you and the Holy Spirit.

The topic of sex is discussed in depth in our audio tapes and video tapes of Kenneth's workshop, **"Form and Content: Sex and Money"**; and also in **Chapter 4 of *Forgiveness and Jesus: The Meeting Place of A Course in Miracles and Christianity***.

Q #418: What does the statement "reflection of Love" mean? If there is no love in this world, how can you tell what is a reflection of love? Many students of *A Course in Miracles* I know run around saying they are "extending" love. They do this by acts and deeds and thoughts. This doesn't seem to be what the Course is saying. If there is no love in the world, how can one extend love in the world? I can understand there being no love in the world since God is Love, and God knows not of this world. But this reflection thing seems to hang me up. Can you help?

A: It is important to remember that when the Course speaks about the extension or the reflection of love, it is addressing the mind that chooses to identify with the part of the mind that remembers God, not the separate individual who identifies with the body in the dream. In reality, the Son cannot be separate from the Father and cannot obliterate memory of Him; therefore, a part of the mind holds the memory of God. It is this part which is a reflection of God's Love. When the mind chooses to identify with this love, it flows through the figure in the dream and is thereby extended. It is not limited by form of any kind, but takes the form which is most helpful in any situation and to anyone. This is not an act of will, nor a choice on the part of an individual to perform specific "loving acts," as we may define them.

It is unlikely that those who identify with the part of the mind that reflects God's Love would run around saying they are "extending" love. If they do, hopefully they are aware that "they" are not the ones doing the extending. The figure in the dream does nothing. We are not asked to use *our* judgment to evaluate any situation or to determine what is or is not a loving response. As the Course reminds us clearly and repeatedly, our function is forgiveness. It is practiced by recognizing all the *unloving* thoughts and judgments we may have, asking for them to be transformed by the Holy Spirit. We then do what the Course invites us to do: **"Step gently aside, and let healing be done for you. Keep but one thought in mind and do not lose sight of it, however tempted you may be to judge any situation, and to determine your response by judging it. Focus your mind only on this: I am not alone, and I would not intrude the past upon my Guest. I have invited Him, and He is here. I need do nothing except not to interfere"** (T.16.I.3:8,9,10,11,12). Once we have arrived at this noninterference, all that is left is the reflection of love.

Q #419: Sabotage is a big issue with me. It doesn't matter what the form is, I just ruin things for myself. Needless to say, the consequences of continually sabotaging myself are always regretful and sad and the more they are recalled in my mind the more guilty I feel. I have grown very weary of my self. Can you please elaborate on the subject of sabotage.

A: Speaking in general, because we do not know you personally, self-sabotage is usually motivated by hidden ego dynamics, such as: (1) The need to punish yourself for the "sin" of attacking Love in order to have your own existence. This would cause you to think that you do not deserve to be happy for any extended period of time. And, further, following the ego's story, you would think that God would be more pleased with you if He saw that you had a rough life. Thus you would be willing to pay for your sinfulness through a life filled with failure and misfortune. (2) The need to prove that your life as an individual is real and is the truth about you. Thus, being weary of being you says you are still you, and you are *not* as God created you. (3) The need to hold someone else responsible for your miserable life. If you dig beneath the surface, more than likely you will find yourself blaming your self-destructive pattern on something in your past, or some other factor for which you are not responsible. That would again fulfill the ego's aim of sustaining the separation but not taking responsibility for it.

The application of forgiveness to this painful condition involves first acknowledging that there must be an unconscious need within you to reinforce this self-concept, and that it obviously is coming from your identification with the ego. In that sense, you (the decision-making mind identified with the ego), are simply carrying out your own strategy. Gentleness in looking at these thoughts within yourself is essential if you are to begin the process of healing, and asking help of Jesus or the Holy Spirit would ensure that you would look without judgment. Being weary of yourself is already a judgment, because it is saying this is who you truly are, and to some extent you are a helpless victim. To get beyond that, all you need to do is say and feel as objectively as you can: "This is where I am, and for some insane reason I must believe that this is helping me achieve something of value. This does not make me a bad person or a sinful person, just mistaken. I clearly have chosen the ego as my teacher and am simply following its guidance." If you could do that without any judgment whatsoever, you would be making progress in lessening your investment in the ego thought system, and you would not be worsening the situation by trying to fight yourself. This patient acceptance of yourself would then give you some "breathing space," and then at some point you would be able to get in touch with these deeper layers of motivation and ask for help to see them differently, from a healing perspective in your right mind.

Finally, it is never wrong or out of keeping with your commitment to *A Course in Miracles* to seek help from a therapist. Sometimes successful behavioral changes lessen psychological pressures enough so that you can then work on the underlying dynamics such as the ones outlined above.

Q #420: In *A Course in Miracles* Jesus says: "I have great need for lilies, for the Son of God has not forgiven me. And can I offer him forgiveness when he offers thorns to me? For he who offers thorns to anyone is against me still, and who is whole without him? Be you his friend for me, that I may be forgiven and you may look upon the Son of God as whole" (T.20.II.4;1,2,3,4). I am not entirely sure what Jesus needs us to forgive him for. What has he done? Is it not we who should be asking him to forgive us that in our insane wrong- mindedness we were and still are mistaken about his and our identity?

A: First, in the passage you quote, Jesus is teaching us again that the Sonship is one: we cannot attack another person without simultaneously attacking ourselves and him. Now with regard to forgiving Jesus... We will give a brief answer here and then suggest some references for an in- depth study of this important topic. There are two levels on which we need to forgive Jesus -- all based on what he tells us in the Course. The first level pertains to our projections onto him, the "**bitter idols**" he mentions in the clarification of terms at the end of the manual for teachers (**C.5.5:7**). On the one hand, we (the world) have made him into a figure of judgment and punishment who demands suffering and sacrifice. On the other hand, we have made him into a magical savior who will solve our problems, and reward us for our faith and our good deeds. These two images, of course, are prominent in the New Testament, and have been throughout the history of Christianity.

On this first level, then, we need to forgive Jesus for what he has never done and for what he has never been. This really is a defense against the more basic underlying level, which is our need to forgive Jesus for who he *truly* is, as he reveals himself in *A Course in Miracles*, thus correcting the distorted and mistaken descriptions given in most religions for the past two thousand years. If Jesus is indeed present within our minds as the reflection of God's Love -- the pure expression of the Atonement principle -- then our entire identity as a separated physical and psychological being is undone. He is the living proof within our dream that we are wrong about everything, that our individual lives and the entire world are made up. He has not come to help us make our lives in the world better. When we allow ourselves to look honestly at who Jesus truly is and what he truly represents, we could not but react with fear and even hatred. So it is because of who he *truly* is that our forgiveness of him is needed. In this sense, we can all relate to the profound feelings expressed in Helen's poem "Stranger on the Road," in which she portrays her fear of confronting the truth of Jesus' reality.

There is much more to say about this aspect of our relationship with Jesus, but space limitations prevent us from doing so here, and so we refer you to some of our publications for further study:

Question #54 in *The Most Commonly Asked Questions about A Course in Miracles*; "Why Must We Forgive Jesus?" in Chapter 15 of *Forgiveness and Jesus: The Meeting Place of A Course in Miracles and Christianity*; The Afterword in the second edition of *Christian Psychology in A Course in Miracles*, and "Forgiving Jesus: Stranger on the Road," an audio tape album.

Q #421: I have been studying *A Course in Miracles* for some months now, and I learned that mistakes are undone by looking at them. To become aware of my mistakes, I try to be aware of phrases like "They shouldn't do it this way" or "You should behave like this". I believe that as I become aware of wanting to control others around me, these phrases will disappear. Is this technique helpful in suspending judgment, or do they themselves imply judgment?

A: Paying attention to the things you think and say is a very good way to practice the vigilance the Course teaches. It is a very important part of the mind training of the Course. What these thoughts and words reflect are the beliefs and judgments of the ego thought system which is based on the belief that the separation is real. This belief is the original mistake, which gives rise to all subsequent mistakes in judgment. Becoming aware of the specific form the thought of separation takes in all of our relationships is how we get in touch with the choice which has been made in the mind. In the example you give, wanting to control others reflects the desire to "control" ourselves by deciding who we are, rather than accepting the Identity given to us by God. Because we have dissociated ourselves from the power of

choice in our minds, the only way for us to know what we have chosen is through its effects in our relationships and interactions in the dream. They show us whether we have chosen to believe the ego's interpretation of our identity (separated and guilty bodies) or the Holy Spirit's (God's one innocent Son). This is why becoming aware of them is an important step in their undoing. However, it is not the end of the process: **"In order to heal, it thus becomes essential for the teacher of God to let all his own mistakes be corrected. If he senses even the faintest hint of irritation in himself as he responds to anyone, let him instantly realize that he has made an interpretation that is not true. Then let him turn within to his eternal Guide, and let Him judge what the response should be" (M.18.4:1,2,3).**

Once we are aware of our mistaken beliefs and judgments, they do not automatically disappear. We have an important choice to make: we either keep them, or exchange them for the Holy Spirit's correction. The first choice reinforces the ego's thought system, which is the source of all the pain experienced in the world of illusion. The second leads to the undoing of the ego's belief in separation by weakening our investment in it. As we begin to realize the tremendous cost of maintaining our mistaken belief in the separation (pain and conflict), we become more willing to choose the Holy Spirit's correction: **"Heaven is chosen consciously. The choice cannot be made until alternatives are accurately seen and understood. All that is veiled in shadows must be raised to understanding, to be judged again, this time with Heaven's help. And all mistakes in judgment that the mind had made before are open to correction, as the truth dismisses them as causeless. Now are they without effects. They cannot be concealed, because their nothingness is recognized" (W.pl.139.9:1,2,3,4,5).**

Q #422: Reading the text of *A Course in Miracles* (T.7.VI.2), I am getting the impression that the words *mind* and *thinking* (the thing that thinks) are interchangeable. Right or wrong?

A: Yes, the mind can be thought of as the thing that thinks. It is outside time and space, as distinguished from the brain, which is an organ in the body. The mind's thinking affirms, through its decision-making power, either the ego's thought system or the Holy Spirit's. And it must always be remembered that this kind of thinking is a function only of the mind of the separated Son, and therefore is illusory, because the Son never truly separated. We therefore could say that the Mind of Christ, in Heaven, has nothing to think about! There is no counterpart in our human experience to the perfect oneness of reality, as some mystics have observed.

Q #423: Does anyone feel some sense of alienation in everyday life from studying *A Course in Miracles*? I thought all of my relationships would be strengthened by following this path. Instead I've had more turmoil in that area than I ever have had in my life. It hurts when you are not invited to the party because you have chosen to "see things differently."

A: Choosing the Holy Spirit's perception instead of the ego's should result in your feeling more peaceful, and that is all that should be "noticeable" to others. As Jesus states in **Lesson 155: "There is a way of living in the world that is not here, although it seems to be. You do not change appearance, though you smile more frequently. Your forehead is serene; your eyes are quiet. And the ones who walk the world as you do recognize their own. Yet those who have not yet perceived the way will recognize you also, and believe that you are like them, as you were before" (W.pl.155.1).** Smiling more frequently and being more peaceful should not result in a feeling of alienation. However, if *all* that you and your friends did together was criticize and judge others, and you have chosen not to do that any more, then the form of the relationship might change as well, if you are being guided to leave the relationship. This should not result in a feeling of alienation, though.

On the other hand, the politics and judgment that are inherent in almost all relationships in this world do not necessarily mean that you cannot be friends with these people any longer or that you need to move on. You can be silent and not indulge in the attacks and still be very much present to your friends.

The *content* in your mind can change, without the form of the relationship necessarily changing. You could approach a get-together, for example, as a classroom in which you are going to learn that you and your friends share the same interests on a deeper level. So when the judging starts, you can say within your mind: "That is what egos do. They judge. I may not be engaging in the judging right now, but I have the same ego and am expressing it in other ways. That makes us all the same. And they and I share the same right mind, too, along with the power to choose. All of us attacked God or we would not be here, and we all want to return home, but are afraid to." By seeing that as the constant *purpose* of your being with your friends, you would learn how to be with them without supporting their egos, without feeling superior to them (an attack), and without feeling alienated. It is your laboratory, you might say, for applying what you have learned.

Q #424: You say that if Jesus were active in the world today he would be as silly as we are. Now, surely he wasn't silly 2,000 years ago when he was very active in this world. So why can't we assume that he is as active today for us as he was then, except with the huge advantage that today he can be so everywhere, simultaneously. Or is my assumption wrong that Jesus was active in the world 2,000 years ago? Was it only our faith in him that brought about all the miracles, practically without his interference? But he says that he raised the dead, so he must have been active on the level of form to some extent. In other words, would he be as active for us today as he was then, if we had the same faith in him today, as we had then? Please help me in this confusion because I do feel that he is active in this world today and that is contrary to what you are saying.

A: Your confusion is understandable, because the Bible and *A Course in Miracles* have completely different views of the nature of the world and of Jesus, and you seem to be combining them. From the point of view of *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus could not be active in the world, because he himself emphatically states, "**There is no world! This the central thought the course attempts to teach**" (W.pl.132.6:2,3). His theory and his training of us through the lessons help us move toward acceptance of that truth by focusing on the world as but a projection of a thought of guilt in our minds, and as such it has no reality of itself. That is the significance of these principles: ***ideas leave not their source*** and **"the world is the outside picture of an inward condition"** (T.21.in.1:5). We therefore are deluded when we take anything of the world or the body seriously. In fact, many times Jesus uses the term *insane* in reference to us, because we are always reacting to something that is not there. So if Jesus were active in a world he says does not exist, he would be as silly as we are.

Even as a presence in our minds he is not active. We may experience him as active -- as doing things -- but that is only because of our limitations and our need to make love more manageable by us, as Jesus gently chided Helen Schucman for doing. The Course teaches us that Jesus is in our minds only as a reflection of the presence of Love that we rejected when we decided that we wanted to be on our own, rather than be part of the pure Oneness of God's Being. His love is present in our minds for us to accept back or to continue to reject, but it will always be there, regardless of our choosing against it. So Jesus does nothing except love us unconditionally. How we experience that love depends on our own inner dynamics. As our fear lessens and we allow ourselves to identify with that love more and more, we will realize it is but our own Self, not a separate person with the name "Jesus." Love is one. God's Son is one. And miracles pertain only to our minds -- the choice we make in our minds to reverse our decision to make separation our reality.

The Bible's accounts of Jesus' life and activities have been studied by scholars for quite some time, and one conclusion widely accepted is that these accounts should not be taken literally. Of course there are many Christians who believe the opposite. But as one Catholic scholar put it: "I would swear that Jesus performed miracles, but I would not swear that he performed any of the miracles described in the gospels." In the Course, Jesus alludes to some of his "activities" when he was on earth, but he also says:

"The name of *Jesus* is the name of one who was a man but saw the face of Christ in all his brothers and remembered God. So he became identified with *Christ*, a man no longer, but at one

with God. The man was an illusion, for he seemed to be a separate being, walking by himself, within a body that appeared to hold his self from Self, as all illusions do. Yet who can save unless he sees illusions and then identifies them as what they are? Jesus remains a Savior because he saw the false without accepting it as true. And Christ needed his form that He might appear to men and save them from their own illusions" (C.5.2).

Now you don't want to throw the baby out with the bath water, as the saying goes. Jesus himself urges us to relate to him as a dear and loving brother, who wants to help us. And he can help us because he is wiser than we are, and motivated only by love. He speaks of walking with us and taking our hand as we journey along the path of forgiveness with him. **"Walking with him is just as natural as walking with a brother whom you knew since you were born, for such indeed he is" (C.5.5:6).** And as long as we think we are individuals living in the world, then we ought to relate to him that way. But he does not want us to remain on that level, because we would be limiting ourselves to only a very small portion of the gifts he offers us. He wants to help us let go of our identity with a false self that has led us into an alien world filled with immense suffering, conflict, and hatred, along with temporary moments of happiness and pleasure. He wants to take us Home, and the way we will get there is by learning how to see everything the way he does. Seeing him only as a kind and caring person who will fix our lives and the world—though that is not a bad place to start one's spiritual journey—is to severely limit the joy and peace that is our inheritance as God's Son, and that is immeasurably beyond any joy and peace we might experience in the world.

Your question touches on the very purpose of *A Course in Miracles*, and we recommend further study of what we have briefly outlined here. See Questions [#93](#), [#97](#), [#184](#), [#241](#), [#420](#); [Absence from Felicity](#), Chapter 17; and [The Message of A Course in Miracles](#), Chapter 4.

Q #425: My question is about compassion. According to Buddhism, compassion is the most divine feature and one of the means leading to enlightenment. But according to *A Course in Miracles*, suffering and pain are illusions. So from that point of view compassion seems to play on the ego's side, enforcing the illusion. But what would our world be without compassion?

A: First, as a clarification, the Course's teachings come on two levels. On the level of absolute truth, suffering and compassion are both illusory, because God alone is real in the perfect Oneness of His infinite Love, extended in Christ, His creation, and in the creations of Christ, forever within the unity of God's Being. All but this eternally extending Love is illusory.

Succinctly stated, the second level of the Course's teachings addresses us as minds erroneously thinking that reality is defined by existence separate from and outside the Being of God: separate, autonomous beings with separate interests. The purpose of these teachings, thus, is to help us undo these mistaken, delusional beliefs that we are separate from one another and have conflicting interests and goals. On this level, the Course would agree with Buddhism in its high regard for compassion. The terminology would be a little different, but learning to be compassionate is a vital part of any student's work with *A Course in Miracles*. In fact, a workshop given at the Foundation in 2001 was called "The Compassion of the Miracle," and our newsletter, *The Lighthouse*, has featured several articles on compassion and kindness (see Teaching Materials on our Web site). Compassion, when extended to all people and circumstances without exception, is spiritually healing because it reverses the separation we perceive among us. It reinforces the illusion when it is offered only to those deemed worthy of it, and is withheld from those judged as undeserving of our love and kindness.

The compassion in our world today all too often is laced with unkindness because it is exclusionary. Not uncommonly, the very people who would spend considerable time, energy, and money helping one group, would turn a cold shoulder to another group suffering the same plight, only because this second group espouses a different political or religious view or a different life style. Our compassion pours out to the suffering, but rarely extends to those who have inflicted that suffering. From the Course's point of

view, if we were to get beyond the behavior (form) to the *content* in people's minds, we would find that we are all identical. Even those responsible for the most hideous of crimes share the very same thought system as those who devote their lives to helping the victims, which of course does not make hideous behavior acceptable. What appear to be separate, autonomous beings are but fragments of the one thought of separation, along with the guilt and fear inherent in that thought. All cruelty, brutality, and savagery are ultimately traceable to the dynamics resulting from this belief. We all share in that thought system; but we all -- without exception -- share in the correction of that insanity as well. Both thought systems -- with the power to choose between them -- define the mind of every single seemingly individual being. Undoing our belief in separation thus involves a growing perception that there is only one Son of God, and therefore if we condemn one person or group, we are really condemning ourselves. That is the basis of the Course's view of compassion. Finally, if we keep form and content distinct, we will avoid the simplistic conclusion that the Course's teachings on compassion invalidate judicial systems and accountability for behavioral activities.

Q #426: I am a bodybuilder. How can I reconcile this with the position of *A Course in Miracles* that I am not a body? Since beginning the Course I have always felt a little conflicted about being so body conscious. It seems incongruent to be a bodybuilder, while trying to cultivate the belief in the body's insignificance. I don't want to give up bodybuilding because I enjoy doing it. But everything the Course says makes sense to me too. I feel like I'm being forced to make a choice that I'm not ready to make yet! Can I still be bodybuilder and practice the Course?

A: Yes, you can still be a bodybuilder and practice *A Course in Miracles*, just as you can continue to breathe, and do all the things you do to take care of your body. The Course tells us we are not bodies because it addresses the mind, our true identity. However, it cautions us early in the text not to deny that we do believe we are bodies: **"The body is merely part of your experience in the physical world. Its abilities can be and frequently are over evaluated. However, it is almost impossible to deny its existence in this world. Those who do so are engaging in a particularly unworthy form of denial" (T.2.IV.3:8,9,10,11).** The Course is also very clear that we are not to force ourselves to believe anything we are not ready to accept. Our belief in the body is very strong. It is an identity we have chosen in order to blot out all awareness of the mind and its power to choose, so we can convincingly perceive ourselves as victims.

One of the important goals of the Course is to teach us that we *do* have a mind. In the Introduction to the workbook we are told: **"The purpose of the workbook is to train your mind in a systematic way to a different perception of everyone and everything in the world" (W.in.4:1).** So, while you do your bodybuilding to your heart's content, the Course reminds you gently that there's more to you than the body, and ultimately that you are not a body at all. It invites you to a "mind building" program, where the goal is to become aware of all the thoughts and beliefs you hold that oppose the truth of who you truly are, and ask for help to have them be transformed gradually, to whatever extent you are willing. This is the meaning of forgiveness -- letting go of grievances.

Just as bodybuilding takes time and practice, so does it take practice to undo the thought system of the ego with which we have identified. The Course tells us that we have managed to learn what is not true (that we are guilty, individual bodies), and that we are therefore capable of learning to recognize the truth (that we are spirit, God's one innocent Son). In this learning is salvation, which requires no strain or force.

Q #427: Will you please compare and contrast the meaning of to "make" and to "create" in accordance with the teachings of *A Course in Miracles*.

A: As the *Glossary Index* for "A Course in Miracles" by Kenneth Wapnick states: **"spirit creates, while the ego makes" (p.144)**. What the spirit creates is true and therefore real, what the ego makes is false and therefore unreal. Whenever the Course speaks of creating, it is referring to God's power of creation, which He shares with His Son. Creating takes place only outside of time and space, on the level of the Mind. Nothing on the level of form is created. The *Glossary Index* states further that **making can be referred to as miscreating (p.144)**. The thought of separation is a miscreation that is the ego, and is responsible for making the illusion that we experience as the world of form. The ego "makes" this world and the body as a substitute for the truth of God's creation, which is spirit. However, nothing that is "made" exists in reality. It is illusory, because there *is* no substitute for God's creation.

Depending on its choice to identify with the truth of spirit, or the lies of the ego, the mind has the power to create or to miscreate. Believing that what the mind miscreates ("makes") is real introduces conflict into the mind of the Son. The mind is then faced with the choice between sanity or insanity, truth or illusion, healing or sickness: **"The fundamental conflict in this world, then, is between creation and miscreation. All fear is implicit in the second, and all love in the first. The conflict is therefore one between love and fear" (T.2.VII.3:13,14,15)**. This conflict is resolved through the process of forgiveness, whereby we learn to accept the Holy Spirit's correction of all the ego has made as a result of taking the thought of separation seriously.

Q #428: From the accounts of many people who have had near-death experiences, we can conclude that the material world and our planet are very important and designed for spiritual learning, training, and evolving. There are no futile things in them and everything has meaning. On the contrary, from view of *A Course in Miracles*, our world is meaningless and designed by the ego to keep the illusion of separation and to control the guilt over the separation. The contradiction is obvious. I perceive the accounts of people having had NDE as evidence from the spiritual world. How can you explain the contradiction?

A: If the separation from God never happened, then in reality there is no world. **"This is the central thought the course attempts to teach" (W.pl.132.6:3)**. However, since we think the world is real, then *A Course in Miracles* teaches us how to use the world -- **"made as an attack on God" (W.pl.3.2:1)** -- to learn that ultimately it is illusory, and further, that the self that thinks it exists in the world is also illusory. In that sense, the world is our classroom, until with the Holy Spirit's help we change all of the mistaken beliefs in our minds. Thus, on the level of absolute truth, the world is totally illusory; but on the level of our dream of separation, we can learn to use our interactions in the world to help us awaken from the dream, at which point the world would disappear back into the nothingness from which it came.

The world is meaningful or important, thus, only to the extent that our experiences in the world can tell us whether we have chosen to reinforce the ego's purpose or Jesus' purpose. Choosing the ego as our teacher would serve to keep us rooted in the world and forever apart from the peace of God. Choosing Jesus as our teacher would serve to remind us of the absurdity of wanting to exist apart from our true home in Heaven as aliens in a world of separate beings always involved in life-and-death struggles on some level.

A near-death experience can be extremely valuable in helping people realize there is something beyond bodily existence; but the same experience can occur -- and has occurred many, many times -- apart from a NDE. In a section in the text called **"Beyond the Body" (T.18.VI)**, Jesus describes the body as a **"limit imposed on the universal communication that is an eternal property of mind" (8:3)**, and then he discusses the experience of being liberated or transported beyond the body. In part Jesus explains, **"What really happens is that you have given up the illusion of a limited awareness, and lost your fear of union" (11:7)**. Then at the end of the section, he invites us to **"come to this place of refuge, where you can be yourself in peace. Not through destruction, not through a breaking out, but merely by a quiet melting in. For peace will join you there simply because you have been willing to let go the limits you have placed upon love, and joined it where it is and where it led you, in answer to its gentle call to be at peace" (14:5,6,7)**.

From the perspective of *A Course in Miracles*, thus, NDE's can be helpful, not as evidence of a spiritual world beyond the physical world, but as evidence of another dimension in one's own mind that can be chosen any time the value of a separate, individual existence is called into question. How that is experienced (the form) varies from individual to individual. But coming close to death is not a condition for having it.

Q #429: It has been stated many times that it is not the goal of *A Course in Miracles* to help us get what we want in the world. But doesn't it sort of do that anyway? What I mean is, if we are having problems with health or money, and through the Course we remove the guilt that underlies those projections, then don't our circumstances improve?

A: A basic principle of the Course teaches that **"Ideas leave not their source" (W.p.I.132.5:3)**, which is the mind. Whatever occurs in form in our experience is a reflection of a choice in the mind to identify with the ego or the Holy Spirit. Our experience in the world involves a myriad of seemingly different situations, which are neutral in themselves. It is our interpretation of them that gives them power to take away our peace, or leave it unaffected. The interpretation is based on a belief about ourselves. When the mind chooses to identify with the ego thought system, thus with separation and the body, it interprets sickness or lack of money as a threat or attack. When the mind chooses to identify with the Holy Spirit, having a sickness or lack of money is not perceived as attack, and has no effect on a person's peacefulness. Any physical condition is then irrelevant; it may or may not change. Although the power of the mind may be used to change physical conditions, unless the choice for the Holy Spirit's healing is made, the problem will continue in one form or another. It is the mind that is sick and therefore in need of healing: **"The body needs no healing. But the mind that thinks it is a body is sick indeed!" (T.25.in.3:1,2)**

You are correct in saying that the goal of the Course is not to make things better in the world: **"...seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world" (T.21.in.1:7)**. It is a mistake to believe that the source of distress is anything external to the mind, such as physical sickness or lack of money. The Course tells us that the cause of all conflict is a choice in the mind to believe that the separation is real. Its goal is the healing of the mind of this thought, teaching us our true identity is mind, *not* the body, whether it be a healthy, sick, wealthy, or poor one. This is the important lesson we are asked to learn. Only this will bring us the peace we seek, and the ultimate awakening from the dream of separation.

Q #430: In the Manual for Teachers of *A Course in Miracles* the question is asked, "How many teachers of God are needed to save the world? The answer to this question is --one." Wasn't Jesus already that one teacher? If we are all one mind, then why would there need to be another "wholly perfect teacher?"

A: You are right, we are all one mind, and there is not another "wholly perfect teacher." Jesus *is* the one teacher, along with all of us. The Course tells us that when the mind of a separated one accepts the Atonement, awareness of our true Identity as the one, innocent Son of God returns to the mind. With that awareness comes the recognition that separation is impossible and thus the world is "saved." However, the world does not actually need to be saved; first, because **"there is no world" (W.pl.132.6:2)**, and secondly, being already accomplished, salvation merely returns truth to awareness. In the healing of the mind of any "one," the entire Sonship is healed. That is because the healed mind no longer identifies with the separate individual. As the Manual states in the section to which you refer: **"Thus does the son of man become the Son of God" (M.12.2:1)**. The acceptance of our Identity as God's innocent Son includes everyone because we all share this Sonship. Every "son" becomes the same "Son," who is the one teacher. This must be so since salvation is the healing of the thought of separation, it is not complete as long as anyone is held apart as somehow separate. That is why whenever the Course refers to healing or salvation, it reminds us that we are not healed or saved alone. In one of the most clear and inclusive

statements of this, Jesus says: **"And as you let yourself be healed, you see all those around you, or who cross your mind, or whom you touch or those who seem to have no contact with you, healed along with you. Perhaps you will not recognize them all, nor realize how great your offering to all the world, when you let healing come to you. But you are never healed alone. And legions upon legions will receive the gift that you receive when you are healed"** (W.pl.137.10).

Q #431: I have been studying and trying to practice *A Course in Miracles* for 13 years and have had moments of peace. Lately, I have noticed that I have a dialogue that goes on inside. For example, I will be in a situation where I suddenly find myself getting ticked off, and before I react, I consciously stop and go into a dialogue of what the Course would say, like "anger is never justified in any form" or "I must have chosen wrongly." That gives me a pause to "think" what to choose. The anger may remain for a while, but I am probably giving it a lot of energy, and then after a while it goes away and I'm more peaceful. That constant dialogue is "hard" on me even though I have had successes. I just don't know what's going on.

A: From your description, it sounds as if you are simply doing what is asked of you in the Course. This is a Course in mind-training after all, a Course in thought-reversal. And so there will be changes in your way of reacting to situations. That is positive. The re-training of your mind involves becoming aware of which teacher you have chosen to follow and that your reactions directly follow that choice of teachers. Becoming aware of a Course principle or phrase does not necessarily mean you will choose it. But, on the other hand, the fact that you ask yourself what the Course would say indicates that at that instant you are not totally identified with your ego. That is progress, and as you continue to do that more and more, it will become more natural to you. This is a gradual process of letting go of one way of thinking and reacting, and replacing it with another. That can throw off your equilibrium for a while, which is why you never want to force anything. Just be patient and gentle, and remind yourself that you are undoing something that never happened in the first place. You are in the process of replacing your wrong-minded self with your right-minded self, a self that will be less angry, judgmental, and arrogant, and more compassionate, calm, and humble. As the lessons say again and again, asking the help of Jesus or the Holy Spirit in the continual monitoring of your mind, and observing -- not changing -- your ego thoughts in action is your only responsibility. **"What you are will tell you of itself"** (T.31.V.17:9).

As you progress in this, you can then take the next step of questioning *why* you get angry in the first place. As you know, anger is a defense. We become angry over what someone else has done as a way of keeping our attention focused outside ourselves. Our real problem is the guilt and self-hatred from our self-accusation of having destroyed love in order to gain our own existence in our own world apart from Heaven. To avoid dealing with that, we project the guilt and self-hatred and then see it in others, feeling perfectly justified in our anger. **"Learn this, and learn it well,"** Jesus says, **"for it is here delay of happiness is shortened by a span of time you cannot realize. You never hate your brother for his sins, but only for your own. Whatever form his sins appear to take, it but obscures the fact that you believe them to be yours, and therefore meriting a 'just' attack"** (T.31.III.1:4,5,6). So until you begin to ask for help to deal with the real *cause* of the anger, the pattern of it coming and going will not change. When the guilt in your mind is gone, only peace will remain; and then nothing anyone else says or does would affect this peace.

Q #432: In the 1960s there were experiments with LSD and other psychedelics in treating autism, schizophrenia, and other mental disorders. The results of the experiments were fascinating, and helpful in improving mental health through the metaphysical experiences some patients had. This is how transpersonal psychology emerged. So would the using of psychedelics be helpful in removing the ego and in spiritual evolvment? What would be the view of *A Course in Miracles* on this subject?

A: The Course distinguishes between the brain, which is a physical organ, and the mind, which is outside time and space. A further important distinction is that the body, of which the brain is a part, is not autonomous, despite our experience. The body is a projection (an effect) of a thought in the trans-temporal/spatial mind (the cause), and therefore is but an expression of the choices made in the mind to support either the ego's thought system or the Holy Spirit's. Adapting a passage from the text, we can say that the body thus **"is the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition" (T.21.in.1:5)**. When the body appears to be sick (physically or psychologically), what has happened is that the mind has followed the ego's guidance, and healing therefore can occur only when the mind recognizes that this was a mistake and then chooses against the ego and for the Holy Spirit or Jesus instead.

In view of these Course principles, psychedelics, since they affect only the brain, really would not be a means of removing the ego or furthering one's spiritual progress. All healing -- which is not simply the disappearance of symptoms -- according to *A Course in Miracles* is the result of a shift in perception in one's mind: **"the recognition that sickness is of the mind, and has nothing to do with the body" (M.5.II.3:1)**. This would be true of autism, schizophrenia, or any other mental disorder, as well as all physical conditions. This points out the importance of the Course's teachings on cause and effect -- the mind is always the cause, and the body is never anything other than an effect. If the cause changes, the effect will change accordingly. If, therefore, an observable change follows the administering of drugs, it could only mean that the mind chose differently, as Jesus explains in the same section of the manual just quoted: **"Special agents seem to be ministering to him, yet they but give form to his own choice. He chooses them in order to bring tangible form to his desires. And it is this they do, and nothing else. They are not actually needed at all. The patient could merely rise up without their aid and say, 'I have no use for this.' There is no form of sickness that would not be cured at once" (M.5.II.2:8,9,10,11,12,13)**.

This view is not meant to diminish the importance and value of the field of transpersonal psychology. Clearly many, many people over the years have found it to be an effective approach to both understanding human dynamics and treating a variety of conditions. *A Course in Miracles* has a different set of premises and a different orientation. Whatever path leads one to be more kind and less guilty is the path one should follow.

Q #433: In your book *The Most Commonly Asked Questions About A Course in Miracles*, you stated that Course students would be falling into the trap of specialness if they insisted that their partners be "spiritually like minded or more specifically students of the Course." Now, I understand that. How wonderful it be, though, to have a romantic partner who was also going through the same process, someone with whom I could share things like the Course and forgiveness. This path of self-discovery is so exciting and I am learning so much that I find it impossible to date people who I consider small-minded and petty and have no conception of a spirituality. What do you think?

A: There might appear to be an advantage in having an intimate partner with whom you could share and discuss your spiritual process, but that really assumes that you know what is best for you. It could be that *for you* the most effective means of staying with the *content* of being a student of the Course, is to be associated most of the time with people who are not students of the Course, or not even interested in spirituality. There is no way of knowing, because we have no idea of the part any relationship plays in our Atonement path. In a larger context, Jesus states that we cannot really judge anything at all. The aim of the Course's curriculum **"is the recognition that judgment in the usual sense is impossible. This is not an opinion but a fact. In order to judge anything rightly, one would have to be fully aware of an inconceivably wide range of things; past, present and to come. One would have to recognize in advance all the effects of his judgments on everyone and everything involved in them in any way. And one would have to be certain there is no distortion in his perception...Who is in a position to do this?" (M.10.3:1,2,3,4,5,6)**. The *content* in being a student of this Course has largely to do with our shifting from the ego's judgment of differences to Jesus' perception that the differences among us are

unimportant relative to our equality as anguished minds reaching out for healing and for help in finding our way back to the home we believe we left. That lesson can be learned with or without an intimate partner, with or without a partner devoted to spirituality. Similarly, learning not to take another person's attack personally can be done in any circumstances, on any level of relationships.

Your feelings about the desirability of a "Course partner" are understandable, but at the same time, in a way you are defining the terms and conditions of what a relationship for you should be. You are basically putting yourself in charge, saying that you cannot be happy unless...And the problem with the criterion you are giving is that it is exclusive. That is always a red flag, a path with many consequences you want to consider carefully before committing to. It isn't easy to let go of the tendency to think that we know what is in our own best interests, and then **"step back and let Him lead the way" (W.pl.155)**. But given our track record, that probably is a wise thing to do.

Q #434: I seem to be, for the most part, right-minded. However, occasionally, with a vengeance, I slip back into wrong-mindedness and my behavior seems to set the seeds for a very difficult return; i.e., a major argument. Is this disturbing "shift" part of the process? Have you any advice or passages to aid in a speedy "shift" back?

A: Yes, frequent trips to the wrong mind are part of the process. In a nutshell, the only way to the right mind is to accept responsibility for the choice to be separate, and to choose not to be separate. This usually involves a long, hard look at a deep desire to continue to identify with the body, and to see ourselves as separate, different, and generally better than everybody else. The best place to start is not to judge yourself for choosing the wrong mind, and then be glad that you realize you have done so and are not in denial. This means you can effectively apply what *A Course in Miracles* asks us to do: **"Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all of the barriers within yourself that you have built against it. It is not necessary to seek for what is true, but it *is* necessary to seek for what is false. Every illusion is one of fear, whatever form it takes"**(T.16.IV.6:1,2,3).

Since the wrong mind is the problem, and the belief in the separation is what needs healing, being aware of the specific form it takes in our individual lives is a very important part of the process. It provides us with the opportunity to expose the thoughts and beliefs hidden in our minds so they can be corrected by the Holy Spirit. An ego attack can be a very helpful exposure of hidden beliefs, so they can be looked at. The most effective thing you can do when you find yourself in your wrong mind is to take a good look: **"You cannot lay aside the obstacles to real vision without looking upon them, for to lay aside means to judge against. If you will look, the Holy Spirit will judge, and He will judge truly. Yet He cannot shine away what you keep hidden, for you have not offered it to Him and He cannot take it from you"**(T.12.II.9:6,7,8).

Q #435: I have been studying *A Course in Miracles* for about 4 years. Within the past year it seems that all my relationships have failed me. Close relationships have chosen to distance themselves from me with no explanation after I have asked. Others have betrayed me. No return phone calls, no follow up meetings, no interest in me anymore. That said, I feel that there is something wrong with me and that the reason for all this abandonment has to do with something that I have done wrong. Can you help me understand what it is that I am going through? It is obvious to me that this is something that I have a

wonderful opportunity to learn from this and it is so blatant and in my face I can't help but notice it. But at the same time I have these feelings that I described that are not peaceful.

A: This may or may not have anything to do with your being a student of the Course; it is difficult to draw a conclusion just from the information you have provided. You might find Question #423 relevant to your concerns. You can at least learn to stay peaceful inside, even though the external situation is troublesome. Search your mind for any judgments or grievances you are holding onto, and then bring them to the forgiving love of Jesus in your mind, where you will let them go when you no longer want to pay the cost of holding onto them. There is not much else you can do when you suspect you may have done something wrong but don't know what it is, and no one is willing to answer your questions. If you can let go of any investment you have in fixing the situation or doing something to win back the other people's friendship, then you can simply trust that you will have many other opportunities to correct any mistakes you may have made. Judging yourself or the other people will stand in the way of your making progress with this, however.

Q #436: *A Course in Miracles* says to laugh away the ego, as it never was or will be real. But I find that I have to really work hard on my "lower emotions" to be able to get rid of them. Work hard, means: cry, write about them, tell them to another person, have temper tantrums with myself, or any other form of expressing them. Otherwise I feel that it is very easy to negate or repress them and keep on acting as if nothing had happened, but keep running around full of resentments. After doing all this, then I can look at my projection and forgive my brother, and then ask for help in forgiving myself. Am I making the error real? Why does Jesus not say anything about this process?

A: First, and most importantly, you can "laugh away the ego" only when you experience it as unreal. If you try to get rid of something, you must be perceiving it as real; and the Course never asks us to get rid of what we think is real. That would be sacrifice, and Jesus reminds us often that sacrifice is not loving. The only way your feelings or emotions can change is by getting in touch with the *cause* of them, and then deciding whether you wish to uphold that anymore. You cannot simply will yourself to be kind instead of hateful, for example, or will yourself into not having bodily needs.

The Course's approach is a gentle one, which means it is far more helpful to forgive yourself for your lapses and resistance, than to force yourself to give up what you still are heavily invested in. That is why so much of the focus of Jesus' teachings is on *purpose*. It is just about impossible for us to let go of our identity with the body and all of its needs and impulses. We simply cannot do that, because they are defenses protecting us from an overwhelming terror in our minds. But what is well within the range of possibility is to learn the difference between the ego's purpose for the world and the body and Jesus' purpose -- and then to choose one. That is much more in keeping with the overall message of the Course, which is that the world and the body are not the problem; the choices we make in our minds are the problem. So rather than forcing yourself to get rid of emotions, which are not the problem, you might try shifting your focus to the purpose for which you use your body: to reinforce differences and separation, or to help you learn that your interests are the same as everyone else's.

Q #437: There is one aspect of being a student of *A Course in Miracles* that just keeps nagging me. In answering Question #235 you stated that neither God nor Jesus intervenes in the world to fix problems. Does this mean that we are just on our own within the dream and have no one we can turn to for help? I understand the ultimate goal of the Course is to undo the dream, but while we are working toward that goal we are "stuck" within the dream and have things we have to accomplish just to be able to continue working with the Course. Is there really no help from within to assist us in doing what we need to do within

the dream? A child may believe there is a monster under his bed, and he is terrified. An adult knows there is nothing under the bed, but he doesn't just dismiss what the child believes and leave him comfortless. The adult does everything it can to make the child feel safe. I just find it difficult to believe that if I need something within the dream, even though to Jesus it may be just as unreal as the monster under that child's bed, that I can't get any help from him to accomplish what I need to do just to be able to continue within the dream.

A: Helen Schucman's experience was that Jesus helped her with very specific things in her life, even with things that were not essential to her being able to "continue within the dream," as you expressed it. There is nothing wrong in asking Jesus or the Holy Spirit for help with specifics, as Jesus explains in the "**Ladder of Prayer**" section in *The Song of Prayer* pamphlet. There he helps us understand what "**asking-out-of-need**" is all about. In fact, he says that "**no one who is uncertain of his Identity can avoid praying in this way**" (S.II.2:3). He just does not want us to stay at that level of relationship with either ourselves or him, because there is so much more that awaits us. He wants us to value his love above any specific form in which it may be reflected. In asking for help and comfort within the dream, you will not get stuck as long as you remember, among other things, that "**the world was made that problems could not be escaped.**" (T.31.IV.2:6). Our egos are sly and always seeking ways to join us in our study of the Course. And this would be one of its favorite ways: in the guise of prayer to reinforce our identity as real individuals with real needs in a real world, rekindling hope that we will yet be happy here. What will help you avoid this trap is to keep in mind that we are always dealing with symbols, symbols for dynamics in our minds that are outside time and space entirely. This is brought to light in Chapter 17 of Kenneth's book, *Absence from Felicity*.

Having said this, though, it is still true that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are not active in the world. That is the importance of understanding the metaphysics of the Course, particularly the symbolic nature of everything we experience within the illusion of separation, as is made clear in the chapter in Kenneth's book just referred to. Our *experience* of Jesus, as well as of ourselves, will change as we identify less and less with the body, and as we take the differences we perceive among us less and less seriously. Jesus' love will be associated less and less with answers to prayers for specifics, and more and more with the "song": "**Therefore, it is not the form of the question that matters, nor how it is asked. The form of the answer, if given by God, will suit your need as you see it. This is merely an echo of the reply of His Voice [the Holy Spirit]. The real sound is always a song of thanksgiving and of Love....In true prayer you hear only the song. All the rest is merely added. You have sought first the Kingdom of Heaven, and all else has indeed been given you**" (S.1.I.2:6,7,8,9; 3:4,5,6).

Finally, sometimes it helps to remember his reassuring words and simply trust that we will get through what seems like a very trying existence in this world: "**You do not walk alone. God's angels hover near and all about. His Love surrounds you, and of this be sure; that I will never leave you comfortless**" (W.pII.ep.6:6,7,8).

Q #438: I have been wondering about a passage in *A Course in Miracles* that says that a conflict arises because a voice demands we obey. If we do obey, rage will follow because we will feel coerced, and if we don't, that part of the mind will be outraged. Either way, rage will result. The Course says that this state is caused by a lack of love. My question regards my own experience. I have usually disobeyed that voice because of its cruel demanding way. I feel intense guilt because this voice reminds me that I hurt someone because I didn't follow its instructions. So how should I feel about this voice that tells me I am wrong or I don't deserve what I have because I didn't follow its decree? I really need to know if I need to do anything to right the wrong because I really desperately want to get rid of all this and replace it with forgiveness.

A: The only voice that would cruelly demand obedience, or judge you in any way belongs to the ego. It is a voice that will always reflect the painful effects of having chosen to believe that the separation is real, that such a belief is a sin, guilt is justified, and punishment is inevitable. There is no resolution to this through retribution, or behavior of any kind. For a student of the Course, the only way out of its circuitous system of judgment and condemnation is to apply its principles as carefully and consistently as possible. There is no need to "do" anything else. That is how to listen to the Voice of the Holy Spirit in a practical way, and only this will lead to freedom from guilt.

The passage you refer to, **T.2.VI.5**, is speaking about the conflict in the wrong mind. It is not contrasting the wrong mind with the right mind. It describes the insanity that follows a choice to identify with the ego thought system, and then to attempt to assuage the inevitable fear by controlling behavior, without making another choice in the mind. It is one of the ways the ego tries to have its cake and eat it, too: keep the thought of separation real, but get rid of the guilt and fear that go with it.

The passage says that "**conflict is an expression of fear**" (**T.2.VI.7:1, italics ours**); in other words, conflict is telling us that we have become afraid. In the same paragraph the Course goes on to say: "**Fear arises from lack of love**" (**T.2.VI.7:6**). Thus, fear is the result of the choice to be separate from love. Conflicted behavior and rage are the outcome when we choose separation, and then try to behave in a way that seems loving, convinced that in this way we will appease a punishing god. The bottom line in all of this is that it doesn't work. The only thing that *does* work is to be honest about what we want. The process the Course leads us through can be effective only if learn to recognize all the ways our thoughts, beliefs, and acts show us the choice we have made in the mind to be separate, and then recognize the heavy price we pay (all the pain, anguish, and conflict experienced in our individual lives, and in the world). Jesus invites us to ask ourselves if we really want to pay this price for our individual, separate, and meaningless existence in the world. The process takes practice because we are so strongly attached to belief in our identity as bodies.

The Course is clear and uncompromising, but coercion of any kind is completely inconsistent with the gentleness and love of Jesus' message. When the Course speaks of "obeying" the laws of the mind, it is not referring to a choice to be obedient or not, especially not forced obedience. It means that because "**ideas leave not their source**" (**T.27.VII.13**), a choice in the mind will have certain inevitable

effects. In other words, the effect "obeys" the cause. The choice for separation always produces guilt and fear. It reinforces the ego thought system and belief in the identity of the body. The choice for the Holy Spirit's correction (not coercion) results in peace, and allows the extension of love, which reinforces the truth of who we are. Eventually this will be all we truly want.

Q #439: I have rediscovered Christianity, which I had abandoned before finding *A Course in Miracles* 14 years ago. When I read your discussion on Christianity, I wondered why you consider anything the Bible has to say as irrelevant to the Course. (Perhaps that's paraphrasing too much.) My understanding of the meaning behind Jesus' teachings have now become much clearer since studying the Course, which brings more meaning to Christianity, not less. Should I regard all Christian teaching as mistaken thereby "throwing the baby out with the bathwater"?

A: You should do whatever you are comfortable with, whatever helps you feel loved and forgiven. If the Bible and Christianity help you achieve that, it would be foolish not to follow that path. However, the theologies and practices of traditional Christianity and other biblically-based religions do not revolve around the purpose of Jesus' life as you see it. Christianity teaches explicitly that God created the world; sin and death are real; Jesus was the only-begotten Son of God; his sacrificial death was his Father's Will; and through his sacrifice, we all are saved. If you interpret the Bible as saying something else, that's fine; but it would not be the traditional Christian interpretation. From the perspective of *A Course in Miracles* these are all mistaken beliefs, the correction of which is one of the major purposes of the Course. That is why we say the two thought systems are mutually exclusive. You would not be doing justice to either one by trying to combine them. But, again, if you are guided to follow biblical teachings, that is what you should do. The Course itself says that there are thousands of forms of the universal course (**M.1.4:1,2**).

If you have not already done so, you might have a look at our book, *A Course in Miracles and Christianity: A Dialogue*, coauthored by Kenneth Wapnick and W. Norris Clarke, S.J., a Catholic priest. The decisive differences between Christianity and *A Course in Miracles* are clearly identified and discussed in the loving spirit of friends who respect their differences, and agree to disagree.

Q #440: For years now I study and do my utmost to practice the principles of *A Course in Miracles*. But how on earth do I forgive a person like Saddam Hussein? Have I not forgiven myself in total that I seem not to be able to forgive leaders like him? They always seem to be people I do not know personally, but who are capable of allowing in their governments the most horrible things to happen to their fellow men. It comes down to the question: How do I forgive totally and completely?

A: When the mind chooses to believe that the separation is real it gives rise to intolerable guilt that must be projected out. It is first projected onto a made-up god of vengeance (victimizer), who will punish the Son (victim) for the imagined separation thought. This ego dynamic of an "innocent" victim pursued by an angry, vicious

victimizer runs through every authority relationship in the world, in many different forms. In the following passage this dynamic is described: **"Suffering is an emphasis upon all that the world has done to injure you. Here is the world's demented version of salvation clearly shown. Like to a dream of punishment, in which the dreamer is unconscious of what brought on the attack against himself, he sees himself attacked unjustly and by something not himself. He is the victim of this 'something else,' a thing outside himself, for which he has no reason to be held responsible. He must be innocent because he knows not what he does, but what is done to him. Yet is his own attack upon himself apparent still, for it is he who bears the suffering. And he cannot escape because its source is seen outside himself" (T.27.VII.1).**

Several important principles of the Course's teaching of forgiveness are presented here, and are meant to be applied precisely to the situations you describe. The Course tells us that the source of all victimization is in the mind that has attacked itself by believing that it can be separate from its Source (God). The choice to believe this thought of separation and the ensuing guilt are forgotten, and then appear in some form of conflict in the world, with the victimization theme running through it. There is no resolution in the world. There is obviously an endless supply of Hitlers, Husseins, or other less dramatic examples of victimizers. This is because, as the Course tells us, the problem is in the mind and not in the world. The first step in the forgiveness process then, is recognizing that guilt in the mind is the cause of all conflict, pain, and victimization experienced in the world. This is a very difficult step because the situations in the world are so convincing. On the ego's terms projection works; it keeps the suffering of the world in operation. This guilt lies buried in all of us, and thus is unnoticed and unhealed. When a particular form of "evil-doer" comes along and we judge him or her, we are provided with another opportunity to forgive this unconscious guilt. Incidentally, this does not mean that you approve of the cruelty of others, but it does mean that you do not have to condemn the person.

If you could forgive totally and completely you would not need *A Course in Miracles* to lead you through the gentle steps of letting the Holy Spirit transform all the beliefs of the ego thought system. It is enough to be willing to question your interpretation of the situations you describe, by remembering the true source of the conflict and asking for a new interpretation: **"The Guest Whom God sent you will teach you how to do this, if you but recognize the little spark and are willing to let it grow. Your willingness need not be perfect, because His is" (T.11.II.6:5,6).**

Q #441: Why is every sentence and paragraph in the text, workbook, and manual for teachers of *A Course in Miracles* numbered?

A: There are two basic reasons: (1) To make it easier to refer to passages in all languages and all editions. For example, in the English edition, the third paragraph in the section **"I Need Do Nothing"** is on page 388; in the German edition, it is on page 389; in the Spanish, on page 432; in the Dutch, on page 397. The numbering system thus eliminates the problem of different pagination in different editions. (2) The numbering system made possible the *Concordance of A Course in Miracles* (similar to that of the Bible and Shakespeare).

Q #442: God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are characters of the holy Bible with definite roles in relationship to the human race. So, why does *A Course in Miracles* use these same characters instead of original ones or generic ones like "higher-self"? And, can you define, "God, Jesus & Holy Spirit" according to ACIM?

A: 1) While the basic message of the Course is universal, its form is not, nor is it meant to be. Its curriculum is clearly intended for a special audience: the Western world that has grown up under the powerful influence of Christianity, an influence that has not been very Christian nor spiritual, one could argue. That is why its conceptual-linguistic framework is that of the Western world and Christianity in particular, and also why one of its major purposes is to correct what in its view are the mistakes of traditional Christianity. It uses concepts and language common to biblical religions to lead its students to an experience that transcends the limits of all conceptual thought. And in its continual emphasis on the *content*, rather than the *form* of its message, it avoids the inevitable conflict of institutions overly bound to ritual and form.

From the Introduction to *Forgiveness and Jesus: The Meeting Place of Christianity and A Course in Miracles* (pp. 9,10,11):

"...Jesus' identity as the source of the material so explicitly manifest...has posed problems for many of the Course's students and would-be students. This group has included not only Jews who grew up midst Christian anti-Semitism, but large numbers of Christians for whom Jesus has become a strong, anti-religious symbol. The answer to this question [the reason for the Christian framework] is found in the *modus operandi* of the Holy Spirit, Who corrects our errors in the forms in which they appear, for forgiveness can only heal in the form in which the unforgiveness was expressed. By joining us in the world of our mistakes, the Holy Spirit gently corrects our illusions and leads us beyond them to the truth.

.....

[Christianity] preserved for centuries the memory and example of Jesus -- the purest expression we have known of the Love of God -- including his gospel of forgiveness, as well as benefitting mankind with its many cultural and ethical contributions. On the other hand, Christianity has been a religion of sacrifice, guilt, persecution, murder, and elitism, with Jesus its primary symbol -- he whose gospel was only love, forgiveness, peace, and unity. As the Course states: **'Some bitter idols have been made of him who would be only brother to the world' (C.5.5:7)**. The development of Christianity can be seen in part as the history of a people who, though believing in Jesus and his message, often unwittingly brought tragedy instead of comfort and salvation to the world. Instead of uniting all people under God as one family, it has divided and sub-divided this family. Before we can fully accept Jesus' radical message of forgiveness,...the errors of the past must be undone. Within this context, it can be said that one of the goals of *A Course in Miracles* is to correct these mistakes of separation that entered into traditional

Christian teachings, distorting Jesus' central message of God's love for *all* people, and our need to forgive each other as the means of restoring this love to our awareness.

.....

Before we can transcend the separatisms of religion and know our oneness in God, the religions of the world must be purified of their errors. *A Course in Miracles* has been given to the world as one means of such purification."

Another source you may wish to consult for an explanation of the Course's view of Jesus and the New Testament accounts of the meaning of his life may be found in the Afterword to Kenneth's *Christian Psychology and A Course in Miracles*, second edition.

2) From our *Glossary-Index for A Course in Miracles*:

GOD: the First Person in the Trinity; the Creator, the Source of all being or life; the Father, Whose Fatherhood is established by the existence of His Son, Christ; the First Cause, Whose Son is His Effect; God's essence is spirit, which is shared with all creation, whose unity is the state of Heaven.

HOLY SPIRIT: the Third Person of the Trinity Who is metaphorically described in the Course as God's Answer to the separation; the Communication Link between God and His separated Sons, bridging the gap between the Mind of Christ and our split mind; the memory of God and His Son we took with us into our dream; the One Who sees our illusions (perception), leading us through them to the truth (knowledge); the Voice for God Who speaks for Him and for our real Self, reminding us of the Identity we forgot; also referred to as Bridge, Comforter, Guide, Mediator, Teacher, and Translator.

JESUS: the source of *A Course in Miracles*, its first person or "I"; the one who first completed his part in the Atonement, enabling him to be in charge of the whole plan; transcending his ego, Jesus has become identified with Christ and can now serve as our model for learning and an ever-present help when we call upon him in our desire to forgive. *Note*: not to be exclusively identified with Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity.

Q #443: Nothing in *A Course in Miracles* says we can't have preferences. This is consistent with the concept of forgiveness, because accepting a preference is clearly a way of temporarily accepting and forgiving the perception of degrees of illusion. Therefore, if I like French-fries but hate carrots, I should not be concerned about it because that would just validate the illusion. I understand that -- for now -- I've dreamed up a body, which needs food, and prefers certain types of food. It is all just orders of magnitude of illusion, so just forgive it, right? Obviously, to feel guilt about my "tastes" simply feeds the cycle of guilt/projection/attack.

What if I like white people but hate people of other color? Or vice-versa? Would Course theology not advocate forgiving ourselves this kind of perception of differences also? We cannot say this is "more important." No illusion is "more important." We cannot say that people are our "brothers" and French-fries are not: they are all just forms in a world

of forms. Granted I should not project hate and guilt onto people of any color. But I should not project hate and guilt onto vegetables of any color either. Both call for forgiveness, neither is "greater" or "more important" ... Is it?

A: Yes, you are quite right. There is no difference between a carrot and a human being, except in the meaning we have given each. Think back to the earliest workbook lessons and how we are asked to apply the idea for the day indiscriminately to everything in our field of vision or in our mind, not excluding anything (**W.p.I.1,2,3,4**). You even might say, when it comes to vegetables, we are kinder to the ones we hate, because we're much less likely to eat them than the ones we like. But, of course, it's the people we "love" whom we cannibalize as well, so we can feel better about ourselves and fill the emotional hole in the center of our being, at least temporarily -- much as food satisfies our hunger only for a short time before we need to go seeking for more.

It is hard not to allow the "accepted moral judgments" of the ego to creep into our understanding of the Course's teachings. The Course in fact does not say that we should not hate our brothers, be they *homo sapiens* or carrots. Rather, its goal is to help us uncover our guilt, wherever it may be projected, so that it can be undone. So we don't want to try to stop hating certain people or overlook our strong feelings of dislike towards certain vegetables, but rather to be honest with ourselves about our hatreds so we can ask for help in seeing, not only the other but ourselves differently, since we are observing only our own self-hatred projected outward.

I apparently can lose my peace of mind as easily over a carrot as I can over a person I don't like whom I see as different from me. And yet it is not the other that has upset me - - **"I am never upset for the reason I think" (W.pl.5)** -- they simply become the scapegoat to blame for the consequences of the decision I have made within my own mind to see myself as separate from love, convince myself I really have pulled that off, pile the guilt on, and then look to find someone or something else to blame for my unhappy state of mind. A carrot or a different-colored person can serve that purpose equally well.

The distinction you make at the beginning of your question is a helpful one. We all have preferences and that is simply part of the experience of living as a body in the world. But if the preferences become emotionally invested, that simply means we have given greater meaning to those particular symbols in our experience, so that they seem now to be the cause of our dissatisfaction. But with the Holy Spirit's assistance, they can become instead the mirrors that direct us back within our own minds to the real source of dissatisfaction, our choice for the very empty and unfulfilling ego thought system. And it is that choice we want to forgive ourselves for, with the help of Jesus or the Holy Spirit.

Q#444: I have questions about the nature of guilt. *A Course in Miracles* uses many psychological terms, including "guilt". But in psychoanalysis as I understand it, guilt is something secondary to fear and based on the energy of fear. When used in the Course, this term has a very different meaning. Ontological guilt in the Course is the source and cradle of all aggression and fear. Aggression is based on the will to destroy. Fear is based on the will to escape or to hide. But what is this "guilt" based on? Why does separation cause "guilt"? Has the ontological "guilt" of the Course anything to do with psychological guilt? Would it be more precisely called "inferiority feeling" instead, since, in exploring free will, the Son would

have to see himself as inferior to God once he sees himself as separate from God and cut off from perfection?

A: You want to keep in mind first of all that any linear description of the process and dynamics of separation and the accompanying feelings of guilt and fear, etc., should only be viewed heuristically, that is, as a means to understand better the process of forgiveness, or the undoing of the ego. For everything of the ego happened simultaneously and not in sequence -- since time is not real -- and, in reality, the thought of separation never happened at all. The only value in any discussion of this kind is whether it serves the purpose of helping us learn to forgive.

Yes, the Course offers a different ontogenesis for the ego's guilt and fear from traditional psychoanalysis. For Freud was not speaking of mind as the Course uses the word, as an abstract function operating outside of time and space. His system is postulated on life as an organic process in which the body with its brain and its relationships are real, regardless of the fantasies and delusions that may underlie the dynamics of the psyche as it develops through infancy and childhood. In contrast, all psychological guilt, according to the Course, is a pale projected shadow of the underlying guilt over separation in the mind. And in fact, psychological guilt is meant to keep attention focused on externals -- one's own body and others' bodies -- so that we never look to the guilt within the mind that we have made up to protect the made-up thought of separation.

From the Course's perspective, the thought of separation is not the problem, but the fact that we have taken it seriously (**T.27.VIII.6:2,3**). In alliance with the ego, this was a purposive but now unconscious decision. From the ego's perspective, to make separation real and serious in our mind, it must be equated with attack, and hence guilt, which in turn leads to fear. The following passages describe the ego's thinking that brought this about.

From the text:

If the ego is the symbol of the separation, it is also the symbol of guilt. Guilt is more than merely not of God. It is the symbol of attack on God. This is a totally meaningless concept except to the ego, but do not underestimate the power of the ego's belief in it. This is the belief from which all guilt really stems.

The ego is the part of the mind that believes in division. How could part of God detach itself without believing it is attacking Him? We spoke before of the authority problem as based on the concept of usurping God's power. The ego believes that this is what you did because it believes that it *is* you. If you identify with the ego, you must perceive yourself as guilty. Whenever you respond to your ego you will experience guilt, and you will fear punishment. The ego is quite literally a fearful thought. However ridiculous the idea of attacking God may be to the sane mind, never forget that the ego is not sane. It represents a delusional system, and speaks for it. Listening to the ego's voice means that you believe it is possible to attack God, and that a part of Him has been torn away by you. Fear of

retaliation from without follows, because the severity of the guilt is so acute that it must be projected (T.5.V.2:8,9,10,11,12; 3).

And later, in the workbook:

When parts are wrested from the whole and seen as separate and wholes within themselves, they become symbols standing for attack upon the whole; successful in effect, and never to be seen as whole again. And yet you have forgotten that they stand but for your own decision of what should be real, to take the place of what is real (W.pl.136.6.3,4).

The thought of separation and the accompanying guilt may be experienced in many different ways, including the feeling of inferiority you mention. For separation is always based on a belief in differences -- how could any separation be perceived otherwise? Whether we assert our superiority or our inferiority to God, the key is that we are different. While the Course uses the word *inferiority* only once (**T.4.I.7:3**), it does describe the feelings of inadequacy that are inherent in the ego's thought of separation (e.g., **T.9.VII.5; W.pl.47.5; M.7.5**). But no matter what form the guilt may appear to take in our mind, our release from it will be brought about by the recognition that it is not real, a recognition that we can never come to on our own. And so that is why the Course offers us help in the form of Jesus or the Holy Spirit, Who represent the recognition of our guiltlessness, that is, of our unity as God's Son, completely at one with His Father. And this recognition is the basis for all forgiveness.

Free will, by the way, is part of the ego's delusional thought system and part of its cherished array of "gifts." There is no free will in Heaven, for free will implies choice, and choice implies alternatives that can be differentiated among, an impossibility within the Oneness of spirit that Jesus reminds us is our reality.

Q #445: *A Course In Miracles* says that anger is nothing more than an attempt to make another feel guilty. Is the opposite true? Is feeling guilty nothing but an attempt to make someone else feel angry? Are guilt and anger therefore the same thing?

A: Cute logic. In some cases, feeling guilty may indeed have an intended effect of making another angry. This is because seeing another's guilt can be a reminder of one's own guilt, an unsettling recognition. And the only ego-based solution for dealing with one's own guilt is to project it, with anger a common form that projection takes.

At other times though, feeling guilty and expressing it may be a manipulation to try to make another *stop* feeling angry. Consider how criminals who admit their guilt and express remorse may receive more lenient sentences. If you admit your guilt, and we are different, as the ego insists, then I must be innocent, something each of us is eager to prove at the other's expense when we play the ego's guilt-swapping game.

But in the end, yes, guilt and anger are the same in that they both express the same underlying content, that is, they are merely different expressions of the underlying belief in separation and sin. Guilt is the experience of sinfulness and anger is the projection of that guilt, in an attempt to avoid responsibility for the sin and see it in someone else. **"Anger but screeches, 'Guilt is real!'" (M.18:3.1).** And because they are both manifestations of the same illusory thought, they can both be easily dismissed with the

recognition that we experience them by our own choice and for no external reason. Anger dissipates as I recognize it as nothing more than a defense against and a reminder of my own guilt, And my guilt, in turn, when looked at with Jesus' love beside me, merely disappears like a wisp of fog in the morning sun.

Q #446: The text of *A Course in Miracles* talks about two worlds. Our ability to see the real world is dependent on having real vision and also dependent on what we cherish. Seeing one world is possible because we deny the other. This I understand. But then it goes on to say that..."Both are not true, yet either one will seem as real to you as the amount to which you hold it dear." Is not the real world true? Would you kindly explain this to me.

A: Ah yes, words. They can be so confusing and confounding. There are actually two levels of answer to your question. In the context of this particular passage, when Jesus says, "Both are not true," implied but not expressed is the additional thought that only one of them is true. Yet even the false world of the ego will *seem* true to us based on our desire for it. This distinction is similar to the one Jesus makes elsewhere in the Course between true and false perception (e.g., **C.4:3**). The real world is the effect of completely healed perception so that the mind is never again taken in by the ego's deceptions. The real world is not a place or a world with its own independent existence. It is merely the correction for the ego's misperception of separation and attack, replacing it with the unified perception of the Holy Spirit, which recognizes that differences are meaningless.

Having said that, let's consider the other level of answer to your question. From the perspective of knowledge or Heaven, all perception -- both true and false -- is temporary (**C.4.3:2,3,4;7:1,2**), and so illusory. Therefore, the real world -- the outcome of true perception -- must be temporary and illusory as well. Its only purpose is to undo what is not real. And so, by its very nature, it must -- while reflecting non-duality -- come within an illusory dualistic framework. Its purpose of healing once fulfilled, no need remains for it to continue.

Towards the end of the text, a beautiful section, called "The Borderland," describes the real world, its function, and its transitory nature. Two paragraphs in particular are relevant to our discussion:

There is a borderland of thought that stands between this world and Heaven. It is not a place, and when you reach it is apart from time. Here is the meeting place where thoughts are brought together; where conflicting values meet and all illusions are laid down beside the truth, where they are judged to be untrue. This borderland is just beyond the gate of Heaven. Here is every thought made pure and wholly simple. Here is sin denied, and everything that *is* received instead.

This is the journey's end. We have referred to it as the real world. And yet there is a contradiction here, in that the words imply a limited reality, a partial truth, a segment of the universe made true. This is because knowledge makes no attack upon perception. They are brought together, and only one continues past the gate where oneness is. Salvation is a borderland where place and time and choice have meaning still, and yet it can be seen that they are temporary, out of place, and every choice has been already made (**T.26.III.2,3**).

Q #447: I feel that I have a fairly good understanding of *A Course in Miracles*. It has certainly changed my entire mindset. However, I find myself in a frustrated state. I have learned how to look upon the world, but worries of the world still trouble me constantly. For me, worries about money -- how I am going to pay the bills seem to be my only setback. Where in the Course should I look to bring myself to peace with this problem? I have called upon the Holy Spirit for some answers, but am impatiently awaiting his response! Perhaps an inappropriate need of advice rather than a true question about the Course, but would appreciate a response all the same.

A: If you have "learned how to look upon the world," you know then, at least intellectually, that it is **"the outside picture of an inward condition" (T.21.in.1:4)**. Jesus therefore wants us to use our experiences and reactions to the world as a way of learning what we are thinking in our minds. If you are worried about something in the world, then there is a desire within your mind to have the world be real and to be the cause of your lack of peace. There is a thought in your mind that says, "I don't want to go back home and be with God; I want to be an individual on my own, but I don't want to be held responsible for this decision to separate from God." Worries about situations in the world serve that purpose nicely, which is why **Lesson 5** states, **"I am never upset for the reason I think" (W.pl.5)**. Rather than look in our minds at the sin and our guilt over destroying love so we could have our own existence, we deny it because the ego has us terrified that we will be destroyed in return. Then we project it out and wind up seeing ourselves as victims of all kinds of things, such as financial problems. The problem, thus, is no longer our guilt over the separation and our wish to stay separated, but something external to us. The self-accusation of being the victimizer is gone from our awareness. We no longer even think we have a mind.

So what would be helpful is for you to step back from your worrying, as an observer, and try to see the problem as a smokescreen hiding the real problem, which is the guilt in your mind. You don't have to stop worrying or being concerned. You need only look squarely at the *purpose* the problem serves, and then ask Jesus or the Holy Spirit to help you with that. Problems are defenses or smokescreens; they represent a decision to stay away from our minds and become absorbed in the world and our bodies so that we would never know that all of our experiences are the effects of decisions we are currently making in our minds and that we can change. And only two decisions are possible: to reinforce separation, or to undo it.

Finally, always keep in mind that nothing in the world can ever affect the inner peace that is a permanent part of your identity, unless you give a person or situation in the world the power to do so. That would be nothing more than a simple mistake that is open to instant correction by asking Jesus to help you see it differently.

Q #448: Killing animals for food and clothes has always bothered me. When I try to see this issue from the perspective of *A Course in Miracles*, I cannot see any problem at all. What is the Course's attitude to vegetarianism and the whole issue of killing animals for food and clothing?

A: The principles in the Course that apply to this issue have been discussed in [Question #120](#).

A few brief thoughts to expand on that: Although the world itself is illusory, we still experience it as real, and so Jesus teaches us in that context to concentrate only on the *purpose* we give the world and our bodies: to reinforce our belief that there is life here, or to learn that **"There is no life outside of Heaven" (T.23.II.19:1)**. If this world is fundamentally illusory, then nothing here is either holy or unholy. So if you were to concentrate on the *purpose* for which you use the world and the body, you would not get caught up in the kinds of issues that are bothering you.

Moreover, a careful examination of our world would reveal that its basic operating principle is *kill or be killed*. It is a murderous system through and through. Survival of both "living" and "non-living" things in the world is always at the expense of something else. Even breathing results in the death of microorganisms; we kill insects, fungi, viruses, and bacteria all the time in order to stay healthy and to produce healthy fruits and vegetables, etc.; we never feel sorry for the thousands of termites we destroy to prevent our homes from being destroyed. And, to bring in the metaphysics of the Course again, if everything is just a fragment of the one ego (a thought, actually), then it does not matter whether you devour an apple, a lobster, alfalfa sprouts, or an animal; nor does it make any difference whether you cut down trees in order to have lumber for your house, or use the wool from sheep to make clothing. Nothing here is real; there is no hierarchy of illusions.

The ego's first law of chaos is that there is such a hierarchy, which results in a very complicated life for all of us: different and competing standards and values and, above all, constant preoccupation with issues in the world and our bodies. That is the ego's secret motive for promoting a hierarchy of values in the world. It keeps the world and our existence in it quite real, which means the ego's existence is guaranteed. Issues such as vegetarianism are smokescreens produced by the ego to keep us from going back to our minds, where the one and only problem and its solution exist.

Thus, if you bring everything back to *purpose*, you will be able to work with your concerns more effectively. *Purpose* is the only meaningful aspect of these issues that you should consider. Concentrating only on that will help you get in touch with the ego's secret strategy, which is always to keep you from your mind where you always can choose conflict or peace as your identity -- the ego or Jesus as your teacher.

Q #449: Recently I had a realization that love and fear are based on the same "energy" (or the same "vibration"). And what ego perceives as fear the right mind perceives as love. It is like two sides of one medal. Is my realization right? If so, would the state of anxiety be more valuable than the state of indifference from a spiritual perspective? Would this state of anxiety be the eve of awakening?

A: While your realization has been helpful to you in stepping back from your ego's fear and recognizing there is another way of looking at things, your description would not, strictly speaking, be consistent with the Course's approach. Within the framework of *A Course in Miracles*, only love is real and fear does not exist (**T.in**), and so they can not share a common origin or basis. A slight modification in one of your statements, however, would be consistent with Course principles: What the ego perceives *with* fear, the right mind perceives *with* love. But whenever we speak of anything as being perceived, we are discussing the illusory realm of duality from which love has, by its very nature, been excluded.

So what would be the basis for your insight, from the Course's perspective? It may be a reflection of the recognition that always, beneath the fear, is the memory of love. As a result, whatever the ego has made to maintain the reality of guilt and fear in our mind, when seen through the Holy Spirit's gentle perception, becomes a reminder of the love that it was made to conceal (**T.12.I.9,10**). And so the purpose of everything can always be transformed from the ego's to the Holy Spirit's.

With respect to your closing questions, no ego state in itself is more valuable than another. The key to practicing forgiveness, the Course tells us, is to be able to identify our ego in whatever form it appears, whether it be anxiety or indifference or any of its other myriad manifestations (**T.15.X.4:2,3,4,5; 5:1,2,3; T.23.III.1,2**). Only then can we ask for help in acknowledging the underlying guilt that is fueling these projections, so that it can be released. For to be in denial of our ego reactions is to deny ourselves the opportunity for healing. Any recognition that the ego is controlling our thinking opens the door to the possibility of awakening from our nightmare dream.

Q #450: Given the title of the book, I'm surprised to see so little discussion in this Q&A of the exact meaning and nature of the usage of "miracle" in *A Course in Miracles*. What is the relationship between a holy instant and a miracle? It seems to me that the holy instant is a more mature understanding of the real meaning of "miracle," as that term is used in the Course.

A: These two terms are defined in Kenneth's *Glossary-Index* as follows (in part): A **miracle** is an occurrence in the mind, nothing external. The term refers to the change of mind that shifts our perception from the ego's world of sin, guilt, and fear, to the Holy Spirit's world of forgiveness. It reverses projection by restoring to the mind its causative function, allowing us to choose again. The **holy instant** is that instant outside time in which we choose the miracle instead of a grievance, the Holy Spirit instead of the

ego, forgiveness instead of guilt. The holy instant is the expression of our willingness to live in the present, which opens into eternity, rather than holding on to the past and fearing the future, which keeps us in hell. (See [Question #26](#) for an expanded description of the holy instant.)

The two terms are distinct, as Jesus uses them to address two distinct misperceptions in our minds that resulted from our decision to believe that the separation from God actually happened. Jesus is thus emphasizing different aspects of the correction needed in our thinking to get us back to our natural state of oneness. His teachings about the *miracle*, in general, are meant to correct our tendency to think that our fundamental problems and their solutions are outside us -- in the world and the body. And in speaking about the *holy instant*, in general, Jesus is correcting our habitual focus on the past and the future to justify our unforgiveness and our fear.

In one sense, the meanings of all terms coalesce, as they refer to a single mistaken thought and the correction of that thought, and so while Jesus would be emphatic about the *meaning* of his message, he would give his students some latitude with the terms he has chosen. The *content* -- his message and our acceptance of it -- is far more important to him than the *form* -- the terms in which he expresses his message.

Q #451: What is your understanding of, "And they will appear when and where it is helpful for them to do so?"

A: The "they" referred to in the above quote from the manual for teachers are what *A Course in Miracles* refers to as the Teachers of teachers, those who have transcended all worldly limitations and have remembered their Identity perfectly (**M.26.2:1,2**). From our ego-based perspective as figures in the dream, they would seem to be other figures in the dream who have awakened, such as Jesus. However, we must remember that we are the dreamer of the dream, not the figure in the dream, and so it would be more accurate to say that such Teachers are symbols within our dream of the Answer, pure manifestations of the Holy Spirit -- egoless thoughts that remind us of the truth of ourselves. The thought behind each such symbol is abstract, but the form they may appear to take will be whatever form our own mind gives to them that allows us to hear the message of correction without increasing our fear. And so, while we still believe we are separate, they will also seem to us to be separate (**T.25.I.5:1**), because that is what will be least threatening and most helpful to us. The form could be an intuition, an inner voice, a book, music, a person, etc. The specific form is always irrelevant to the purpose. All that matters is the message of love, which will be a reminder to ourselves to forgive, regardless of the form it appears to take.

Q #452: Since everything is purpose and not form, is it possible that we can be guided to scream loudly at someone and it can be coming from the content of love?

A: Yes, we can be guided by love to yell at someone. If we are identified with love and our ego is not involved *at all*, then the love would be expressed in whatever form would be appropriate in the situation. The key, though, is to get our egos out of the way, which is not that easy to do. The ego is very shrewd and deceptive, and always wants nothing more than to perpetuate its own existence, but make it appear as though something else is going on. So, often it disguises itself in the form of love and concern, which in many cases is but a means used to justify attack. We all have had the experience of realizing much later that what we thought was a right-minded interaction was only a veiled attack. So we must exercise extreme caution with this kind of approach. With much practice, we can become familiar with our favorite means of self-deception, and then we can be more alert to the kinds of traps we are apt to fall into.

Surely, there are many people who can be reached only by being yelled at -- adolescents and immature young adults being prime examples. But proceed with caution! The ego will seize any opportunity to unload guilt and hatred onto someone else and make it look as if it is a charitable act.

Q #453: "Forgive your Father it was not His Will that you be crucified" (T.24.III.8:13) to me is one of the most important statements in *A Course in Miracles*. It contains the key to our release, yet it shows the main reason for our resistance to this release. Your comments on this statement would be most welcome.

A: Well said! Leading up to this grand conclusion, Jesus says, **"Forgive the great Creator of the universe, the Source of life...for your illusions of your specialness. Here is the hell you chose to be your home. He chose not this for you. Ask not He enter this....Forgive the Holy One the specialness He could not give, and that you made instead" (T.24.III.6:1,2,3,4,7).** The ego has tried, from the very beginning, to implicate God in the horrors and suffering in the world, and in our personal lives. How wonderful it would be, *for the ego*, if God were held to be ultimately responsible for everything, which of course is exactly what is proclaimed in the Bible and the religions and philosophies based on the Bible.

Here in *A Course in Miracles*, and specifically in the passage you cite, Jesus is correcting that eons-old belief. God has nothing to do with the vicious world of specialness and crucifixion. He *could* not. Love can only love. That is why we have to forgive God; He is not part of our insanity, despite our desperately wanting Him to be.

Therefore, if crucifixion is in our lives, we are the ones who put it there, and want it there. That is a bitter pill to swallow for most of us, and we would resist it with all our might, because we would then have to admit that we have been wrong about every single thing we have ever thought. Our lives -- our thoughts and emotions -- are turned upside down, and we break out in a cold sweat in the face of such an awesome accusation. To hold others -- ultimately God -- responsible for our perceptions of crucifixion thus protects us from the deeply buried belief that we are the ones who crucified infinite love so that our own need for specialness could be satisfied. Jesus is exposing this deception, while assuring us that looking with him at this deep, dark secret is the only way we will ever be liberated permanently from all the pain and death that mark our lives in this world. There is nothing that stands in the way of this freedom other than our own choice to be right rather than happy. And that is not sinful -- just silly.

Q #454: I would like to help my family gain inner peace. I discuss what I can with my wife and kids (ages 9 and 11), and I am much more at peace with God since I began the Course. I know that we have no separate selves, and I want to help my family regain the knowledge I have found through *A Course in Miracles*. Are there any books or tapes that I can use with my boys?

A: We have addressed other questions along these lines: [#179](#) and [#202](#).

The Course is best taught by example. If you are centered in the love of Jesus, your boys would sense something about you that would help them learn forgiveness without ever realizing what was happening. Your *attitude* towards them -- when the love of Jesus is doing the parenting, not your ego -- would give them the only thing they truly need, which is to know that they are loved and forgiven, and that their mistakes have had no effect on your love for them, and never could. *Your* inner peace would be the teacher, and they would recognize it, even as you maintain your authority as their father. From that they

would be learning how to interact with their friends and with each other. Perhaps later on, when they begin to question on a deeper level, you can introduce some of the concepts of the Course to them. But their primary goal at that young age -- and for many years to come -- is to learn how to successfully function in the world as egos. They need your loving help to grow to be strong, confident *individuals*, who can get along in the world and are enthusiastically looking forward to careers in the world. It would not be helpful at all for them to be told that the world and they themselves are illusions and were made to attack God. Most adults can't handle that!

Q #455: My country is currently on the path of honouring its Treaty between the indigenous people and the English and is attempting to correct its "wrong-doings." They have been going about this by handing back land, by way of monetary funds and the expectation that every organization acknowledge the Treaty in their workplace. This is dividing our country (separatism). I work in the social service arena and one third of my colleagues are Maori. We are constantly being reminded that this is "their land" and if we are finding it difficult to adjust to change, how must it have felt for them all those years ago. Our agency is putting a huge amount of time and money into fostering this separatism as is the rest of the Country. How can one view this from a micro to a macro level, according to *A Course in Miracles*?

A: How you perceive this situation in terms of the *content* in your mind is the key to getting past your dilemma. As soon as you catch yourself perceiving in "we-they" terms, you know you have chosen the ego thought system; the same is true if you perceive victimization. Ego solutions always wind up with separation or division, both in form and content. Its version of justice is that someone must win and someone must lose.

If, in your mind, you can rise above the battleground and perceive the situation from a right-minded perspective, the differences you perceive in form would not affect your inner conviction that we are all the same as God's Son (the content). **"Nothing so blinding as perception of form" (T.22.III.6:7).** Both Maoris and English share the same interests; they share the same wrong-minded thinking and the same right-minded thinking, as well as the capacity to choose between the two. You can keep yourself from drifting away from this by concentrating as much as you can on *purpose*, as *A Course in Miracles* teaches us to ask: **"What is it for?" (T.17.VI.2:2)** This will simplify your approach to all of your interactions during the day. You can ask yourself frequently what you want to come of all this: to continue to see conflict, division, and winners and losers; or to see a common sharing beyond the outward appearance of differences. **"The principle that justice means no one can lose is crucial to this course. For miracles depend on justice. Not as it is seen through this world's eyes, but as God knows it and as knowledge is reflected in the sight the Holy Spirit gives....Everyone is equally entitled to His [the Holy Spirit's] gift of healing and deliverance and peace" (T.25.IX.5:4,5,6; 7:4).**

This requires some rather hard work -- internally -- because we are so accustomed to thinking and perceiving in terms of *one-or-the-other*, winners and losers. One group is up, the other is down; then it gets reversed. But there is still separation. There is no way around this unless we ask for help from the source in our minds that is beyond all perception of separation, and where justice has been returned to love **(T.25.VIII).**

Q #456: This is a three part question:

i. My understanding of the teachings of *A Course in Miracles* is that eventually we realize we are all one spirit. Do we then lose our awareness or memory of the experiences we had as individuals? Jesus figured out the truth while here on earth, yet seems to interact with those of us still experiencing the dream of individuality as the individual Jesus. So will the rest of us, after we realize the truth, still retain our individual selves? I realize I am asking this question as someone who likes my "self" and the other selves I interact with, i.e., family and friends.

A: Your awareness of yourself as an individual will last only as long as you value that identity. It is never taken away by Jesus or the Holy Spirit. The focus of our study and practice is learning that our interests are really the same, not separate; and that would lead us to the next step, which is recognizing that not only do we share the same interests, but we share the same self as well. We all share the same ego thought system, and we all share the same right-minded thought system of forgiveness, as well as the power to choose between the two. As long as we are attracted to an identity as an individual self, though, we will resist this teaching rather strenuously. There would have to be some motivation to move beyond individuality, and what Jesus teaches us is that if we looked deeply and honestly at our lives as individual selves, we would conclude that we are paying a heavy price to sustain that existence. That does not mean it is bad or wrong to enjoy existing in this world. He asks only that we look openly at the picture, and not be deceived by the glitter of the frame (**T.17.IV.8,9**). **"The body is a limit on love" (T.18.VIII.1:2)**. So valuing bodily existence is valuing limited love. That is the connection Jesus wants us to make, just so that we could be aware that we are deliberately (once we remember we are decision-making minds) cutting ourselves off from the totality of the love that comes with the memory of our oneness as God's Son. Again, liking your self and your family and friends is not wrong or bad; just be aware that this is not all *you* are or *they* are. If living in this world is working for you and you are happy and content with it, then it would be foolish to change it. Recall that the Course came to two people who were no longer content with the way things were going and were determined to find a "better way."

Jesus stands outside the dream of individuality gently helping us to awaken from it. He appears to be an individual relating to us as individuals, but if you consider the above quote about the body being a limit on love, you can begin to understand that he appears that way because *we choose to see him that way*. Love is abstract -- formless -- but our perception conforms to our identity. Were we to let go of the *need* to limit love, we would experience Jesus quite differently -- and ourselves as well. The trouble is, we don't consciously realize that this is what we are doing, which is why so much of the Course is directed at helping us realize that we have a mind and that practically everything we do is a defense against our realizing that. We don't want to remember we are decision-making minds, because on some level we know where that realization would take us. We would eventually see clearly what individuality is all about, and it would not be a very pretty picture. To avoid those consequences, we try to make Jesus like us, but that will never square with what he spends so much time teaching us in the Course. It is much more helpful, and would reduce the internal conflict, to state simply and honestly, that you like being a self amidst other individual selves, and that some day you may have a reason to reconsider that choice, but

right now you don't. Period! That's where you are, and it's okay. Jesus' love for you is not lessened in the least.

ii. What are our real creations? Are they what are left when we awake from the dream? Are we creating even as we dream?

A: Please see [Question #103](#) for the definition of *creations*. Nothing real ever takes places in the dream. The Self that never left Its Source continually creates, which means simply that love always extends itself.

iii. If it only takes one to awake from the dream for all to awake and one cannot find Atonement alone and Jesus achieved this, why are the rest of us still dreaming?

A: From our perspective within the dream, there is no way of our comprehending this process; it cannot be solved through logical reasoning. Our framework for understanding is severely limited, because we believe we are actually here, and that belief is intended to push truth away and replace it with another system of thought that is entirely false. Very humbling! It is virtually impossible for us *not* to think in terms of separate bodies in time and space, but Jesus is not referring to bodies in time and space. Nevertheless, we can say at least this much -- that there is one mind, and the illusion of many minds, all asleep and dreaming. When you are in the real world you know there is only one mind. So the only mind that needs to awaken is *yours*.

Q #457: I have been studying *A Course in Miracles* since 1977, and although I understand the theory, I unfortunately cannot translate the theory into my life situations. By a series of circumstances I am at the point of ruin and bankruptcy. I read the Lesson that tells me to step back and let the spirit lead the way. How do you do that? How do you know that it is the spirit? I try to let it lead yet I must be doing something wrong because here I stand at the edge.

A. We easily fall into the trap of believing that the Holy Spirit's answer to our call for help would be a change in the external situation -- the world or the body. We forget that problems in our bodies and the world are the *effect*; and the *cause* is our belief that we separated from God and destroyed love to achieve that separation. Thus in **Chapter 27**, Jesus reminds us that the Holy Spirit **"looks not to effects....He bids you bring each terrible effect to Him that you may look together on its foolish cause and laugh with Him a while. You judge effects, but He has judged their cause. And by His judgment are effects removed. Perhaps you come in tears. But hear him say, 'My brother, holy Son of God, behold your idle dream, in which this could occur.' And you will leave the holy instant with your laughter and your brother's joined with His" (T.27.VIII.9:1,3,4,5,6,7,8).**

Understandably, this may not be very consoling when you are on the verge of ruin, and you would much prefer that the Holy Spirit intervene to make things better for you in the world. He can't, because He doesn't see a world. He would help you get to the point where you share that perception with Him, so that you would be at peace regardless of what seems to be happening outside you. The problem is we don't realize -- and probably don't believe -- that what Jesus and the Holy Spirit say is outside us is really outside us. We think that this is really *us*. *They* know it's not! How better could He help

us, then, than to teach us how to begin the process of disidentifying with our identities as part of the world; and what better time to do that than when we are deeply troubled by problems in the world and our bodies. Challenging, yes; and seemingly impossible, yes. But that is what this Course is about. And that does not mean that you should not do everything you possibly can to rectify the financial situation -- consulting a financial advisor, etc.

Jesus assures us many times, that if we walk our path with the willingness to grow to value nothing but his love, and to accept that as our identity, we can go through the most horrendous (from the world's point of view) situations and still be at peace within. That is not easy, and it means letting go of any investment in having the problem in the world be solved in a particular way.

Q #458: Is the "afterlife" an ego-based concept? How does one continue practicing the concepts of *A Course in Miracles* when we are no longer in physical form?

A: Yes, it is an ego-based concept, simply because it implies "life" that begins, changes, and ends. A primary principle of *A Course in Miracles* is that **"there is no life outside of Heaven. Where God created life, there life must be. In any state apart from Heaven life is illusion... Life not in Heaven is impossible, and what is not in Heaven is not anywhere"** (T.23.II.19.1,2,3,4). In addition, in the manual for teachers Jesus addresses the idea of a soul or other entity that continues after the body dies: **"The curious belief that there is part of dying things that may go on apart from what will die, does not proclaim a living God nor re-establish any grounds for trust. If death is real for anything, there is no life. Death denies life. But if there is reality in life, death is denied. No compromise in this is possible"** (M.27.4:1,2,3,4,5). Thus anything that appears to die in any way cannot be real. These statements are part of what we call Level One of the Course.

On the other hand, there are many places in the Course where Jesus strongly implies reincarnation -- our coming back many times until we complete our forgiveness lessons. This is the other level of the Course - Level Two. The emphasis, though, is always on the mind, not the physical form. Jesus is helping us to realize that there is no life in the physical form, or in any form, for that matter. There is only a mind that *thinks* it is a body so that it can forget it is a decision-making mind, because it has associated being a mind with sin, guilt, and fear of annihilation by God from Whom it stole its life. It is always the *mind* that practices the Course; Jesus is always addressing us as decision-making minds, not bodies. As we practice forgiveness and learn more and more how to perceive ourselves as all sharing a common interest, our identification with the body (form), begins to diminish, and we re-establish our identities as minds. Part of this process involves reorienting our thinking about death -- as a thought in our minds, not a physical event, though it appears to be a physical event. **"We know that an idea leaves not its source. And death is the result of the thought we call the ego, as surely as life is the result of the Thought of God"** (T.19.IV.C.2:14,15). So the more we learn to think of ourselves as minds, the less identified we are with our bodies (homo sapiens). We will reach the point when we realize that nothing happens to our minds when the body dies, because we were never in the body to begin with. The body was simply a projection of the mind. If our minds are not yet healed, we will continue that process in whatever form we choose that will be most helpful. We are never not in our minds.

Q #459: Jesus speaks to us (who believe we are in this world) of the Holy Trinity as if Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were separate. He also states that the Trinity is One, in Truth, which is beyond our understanding. Within the illusion, I can accept that God "knows absolutely nothing" about His Son's dream, while the Holy Spirit obviously does know about it in order to correct our perceptions. In reality -- which we cannot possibly comprehend -- I prefer not to speculate about or assume what God "knows" or "doesn't know." This makes sense to me. Am I confused?

A: One of the major purposes of *A Course in Miracles* is to correct what it sees as the mistakes of Judaeo-Christian theology. And the cornerstone of that tradition is that God not only knows about the world -- He is its Creator -- but He is integrally involved in it. So by stating that God knows nothing of what is not His Being -- because it is impossible that there be anything other than His Being -- Jesus is correcting all biblically-based theologies, as well as any others that hold that God is involved in the world. The implications of this correction are far-reaching, to put it mildly. Obviously, religious practices flowing from those theologies would no longer have any foundation. But most devastating of all is the clear implication that our so-called lives as individuals do not have a divine origin or destiny, and, worst of all, have no reality.

Reality, according to *A Course in Miracles* is non-dualistic; it is the pure oneness of Love, God's Being, which extends eternally, though not in any sense that is comprehensible to us in our separated state. It would seem that in a strict non-dualism, "knowing something" is an impossibility, as there is no knower and known. There is no "what" for God to "know." In fact, the meaning of the term *knowledge* in the Course is equated with Heaven, the state of perfect Oneness -- radically different from its conventional meaning, which is based on a subject-object dichotomy. Although there are many statements in the Course with profoundly rich theoretical implications, its emphasis is always on the practical goal of reversing our journey into the hell of separation back in the direction of our home in Heaven as God's one Son. **"This is not a course in philosophical speculation, nor is it concerned with precise terminology. It is concerned only with Atonement, or the correction of perception. The means of the Atonement is forgiveness" (C.in.1:1,2,3).**

In oft-quoted passages from Lesson 169, Jesus gives us a sense of the ineffability of God's Being and how we may re-unite with our Source:

"Oneness is simply the idea God is....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. 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. It comes to every mind when total recognition that its will is God's has been completely given and received completely.... This is beyond experience we try to hasten" (W.pl.169.5:1,4,5,6,7; 6:1,2; 7:1).

And so you are quite correct in not wanting to speculate about God' Being. Jesus refers to such inclinations as "senseless musings" (W.pl.138.8:5), and he would much rather have us spend our time practicing forgiveness.

Q #460: In this world, the more one's pain, fear, guilt, mistrust, etc., were reinforced during early childhood, the less psychological health one has as an adult. Therefore the greater that one distorts what Jesus teaches in the Course, or worse, ignores it. Yet, it is true there is no hierarchy of illusions, no order of difficulty in miracles, and the miracle makes no distinction among degrees of misperception. My experiences relating to other Course students for 23 years have led me to value psychological health in the dream. Yet, I would like to question this value I still hold onto. Please help me to clarify?

A: The temptation is strong to see our own and others' difficulties in the present as a result of experiences in the past. Yet we never really understand what anything is for (W.pl.25) and we are not in a position to judge what is or is not helpful (M.10.3), or how well any of us are progressing along our spiritual paths (T.18.V.1). The only solution needed to any perceived problem is available now, in the holy instant, when we recognize that our interests are not separate from our brothers. **"Even at the level of the most casual encounter, it is possible for two people to lose sight of separate interests, if only for a moment. That moment will be enough. Salvation has come" (M.3.2:6,7,8).** Psychological health, which our egos have taught us to value, is, in the end, irrelevant to the decision to join in the present.

Q #461: Since *A Course in Miracles* teaches that the world we see is an illusion, I often wonder where the life force of animals, plants, etc. come from. Obviously from God. But how can God be in this illusion?

A: God cannot be in the illusion, as you suspect. That would make no sense. Likewise, there is no life force within the illusion, either. **"There is no life outside of Heaven" (T.23.II.19:1)**, as the Course teaches uncompromisingly throughout. What appears to us to be living bodies are projections of our minds, which have made the decision to identify with the ego's thought system of separation, and thereby do everything possible to keep us from remembering that life is only the perfect oneness of God in Heaven. There is only one thought that fragments over and over and over (T.18.I.4). Throughout *A Course in Miracles* Jesus tries to help us realize that everything we are perceiving are figures in a dream we (our minds) are dreaming. **"There is no world apart from what you wish. . . Ideas leave not their source" (W.pl.132.5:1,3).** Referring to the body Jesus says, **"What you have given 'life' is not alive, and symbolizes but your wish to be alive apart from life, alive in death, with death perceived as life, and living, death" (T.29.II.6:2).** If this sounds confusing, it is because it is confusing, as Jesus further explains: **"Confusion follows on confusion here, for on confusion has this world been based, and there is nothing else it rests upon" (T.29.II.6:3).** That is why we need help from someone outside this delusional system, and why we cannot rely on our perception to tell us what is real and what is not real. We are too mixed up to know!

Jesus heads us back in the right direction by training us to focus on the *purpose* of how we think and behave. We are too terrified and too invested in having separation be real to immediately cease our hallucinations of physical life, although in principle we could (T.20.VIII.7,8,9). So Jesus launches us on a

mind-training program that gently helps us to reverse our course into insanity (seeing something that is not there). And the heart of that process is learning first to identify the ego purpose that is behind most of what we do -- seeing our interests as separate from others and always in conflict with them -- and then asking for help to accept the Holy Spirit's purpose, which is to see our interests as the same as everyone else's. As that becomes more and more natural to us, our identification with the body will grow less and less, and we will become more comfortable first thinking and then experiencing ourselves as minds. At the end of that process, which takes many, many years, the unreality of physical life will dawn on us. We do not have to force ourselves to stop perceiving as we do. The shift will happen of itself, as we concentrate on purpose and motivation.

Q #462: Some time ago I really understood that there can never be peace if my interests really would differ from those of other people. It was not just an intellectual understanding, but an understanding that seemed to fill my whole being. It seemed so very, very simple at the time and it made me so happy. But now confusion again has started, because on the level of form, my interests are not the same as those of others. I always took care of people and I am beginning to feel so tired, and I long for a quiet place to call my own, to meditate, be quiet, relax, and be alone. I now have such a place, an extra room in the house, but it's as if I see homeless people everywhere -- refugees who are told to leave the country but cannot go back to their own country; and I feel so bad. What is loving action? I have an extra room; they have no room. If I would really let go of my personal interests, I could give that room to someone, but I'm not sure if I would be able to cope. I feel as if I'm torn apart here: if I want something for myself, I'm hurting another human being. And if I help someone else, it's as if I'm hurting myself. This cannot be right. There does not seem to be a solution where everybody feels peace.

A: "This cannot be right." Absolutely! The ego has snuck into your work with the Course, which it is ingenious at doing to us all. Whenever you feel trapped in the conflict of sacrifice -- *one or the other*, "damned if I do; damned if I don't" -- you know for sure that you have wandered out of Jesus' classroom into the ego's. In the ego's classroom, students are programmed to pay attention only to *form* and to forget all about *content*. In Jesus' classroom, content is everything; in fact it is the only aspect of our lives that is truly meaningful and relevant to our Atonement process. So seeing your interests as the same as everyone else's refers only to the content in your mind. Loving action flows from the content of experiencing everyone as sharing with you the same wrong-minded thought system and the same right-minded thought system, as well as the power to choose between the two. When in a holy instant you are identified with that content alone, you could be guided to take in a homeless person or not to. And whether you do or you don't would not matter to you. It would not be an issue. The act of taking in a homeless person can be right-minded or wrong-minded; it is not automatically a holy and spiritual act. That is where the ego always gets us -- in its exclusive emphasis on form and behavior. There is nothing in *A Course in Miracles* about behavior, because Jesus is interested only in what takes place in our minds, the seat of all of our problems, and also their solutions. It takes a great deal of retraining of our minds to shift from our focus on behavior to the content in our minds. That is the process of thought-reversal that is the burden of the lessons in the workbook. It does not seem loving to turn away

those in need, especially if you seem to have the means to help them; but, again, that is a page from the ego's manual, which programs its students to focus on victims and victimizers in this world of separate, needy individuals.

The ego is behind the sanctification of sacrifice, as it deceptively fulfills the ego's purpose of keeping us rooted in guilt and conflict. Thus, lurking beneath the dilemma you are experiencing -- whether to help another or yourself -- is the insidious *attraction* to guilt. That is the "real" problem, which remains concealed by the smokescreen of external conflicts (both physical and psychological). So the part of you that remains committed to upholding the ego thought system of guilt will secretly delight in having dilemmas in your life, because they seem so genuine and they keep your attention away from the real source of your anguish, which is your decision to turn away from love once again. That decision preceded the homeless-person dilemma. You could not experience guilt and anguish if you did not want to. If that is where you wind up, it must have been your goal at the outset. (T.5.VII.6; T.21.II.2) And that therefore is what you want to ask Jesus or the Holy Spirit to help you with -- not whether or not to take in a homeless person. Contrary to the world's thinking, that is not the important factor: you either do it or don't, but that is not the problem. The guilt that you are holding on to in your mind is the only factor that is of interest to Jesus or the Holy Spirit. And that is not a cruel or heartless approach when you remember the cardinal principle of the Course: the world is but the **"witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition"** (T.21.in.1:5). The world was made to present us with endless dilemmas that appear to be outside us, so that we would never remember that the real dilemma is our terror that if we are guilt-free, love will be all that is left; there will no longer be a self that can be consumed by guilt and anguish. Strange! But then, Jesus never said we are all that sane.

Q #463: The answers to the questions in this forum often refer to "Jesus or the Holy Spirit." The writings of Ken Wapnick do as well. In studying *A Course in Miracles*, I have always been more comfortable with the term "Holy Spirit" than with the term "Jesus." While I do not question the authority of Jesus, or his authorship of his Course, I do have a problem using Jesus -- a physical person -- as a visualizing device for receiving guidance. Somehow, to me, this goes against what we are trying to achieve in the Course, which is to see ourselves as a part of God's mind, connected to God, and not as a separated body. I recognize that as long as we perceive ourselves as a separate body, we need to have a separate "higher power" to guide us. But I am more comfortable with an abstract notion of the Holy Spirit, which is in our minds, than I am with the notion of a physical body called Jesus, who is obviously separate from my physical body. Even drawings of Jesus, when they are associated with the Course, bother me a bit, because a body is pictured, and a body stands for separation. I know the body is neutral, and not to be hated or loved. But my question regards whether my feelings are justified. Is the "Holy Spirit" a more refined, and perhaps better way to perceive and experience our connection with God, than to visualize a human body named Jesus? On the other hand, could my feelings relate to some kind of resistance to accepting Jesus? Or am I making a mountain out of a molehill here?

A: This is an important question, one which many other students have grappled with over the years. Some people find it easier to relate to the Holy Spirit as an abstract presence; and some people can relate better to the more personal presence of Jesus -- both of course are in our minds. It does not matter which you choose, as they are identical in function; Jesus is the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. What alone is important is to experience a relationship with some symbol that reflects the loving

source behind the symbol of Jesus, some symbol that helps you experience love as oneness as intimately as possible. **"The name of Jesus Christ as such is but a symbol. But it stands for love that is not of this world" (M.23.4:1,2).** And obviously, if you choose Jesus you need not have pictures or images all around. It is interesting to observe how, even with the "abstract" Holy Spirit, many people still use an image of some kind -- usually a dove or other kind of bird. The Course itself uses bodily symbols: the Holy Spirit is referred to as He, a Teacher, a Voice, and a Mediator, for example.

As you suggest, it might be helpful for you to look into the possibility that you are harboring some feelings about Jesus (or the body) that could be causing you to keep your distance. Relating to him as a separate person does not really go against what we are trying to achieve in the Course. In fact, as you know, he encourages us to do just that. To cite just two of many passages: **"Try to pass the clouds [of guilt] by whatever means appeals to you. If it helps you, think of me holding your hand and leading you. And I assure you this will be no idle fantasy" (W.pl.70.9:2,3,4).** **"Walking with him is just as natural as walking with a brother whom you knew since you were born, for such indeed he is. Some bitter idols have been made of him who would be only brother to the world. Forgive him your illusions, and behold how dear a brother he would be to you" (C.5.5:6,7,8,9).**

If we do this "right," we would not confine our relationship with him to the physical realm, because he would never want us to, given his evaluation of the body (for example, **T.19.IV.A.17:5,6; T.19.IV.B.14**). Unfortunately, though, that is what has happened in most mainstream Christian religions. Lesson 151 is a particularly helpful lesson to study in this context. It illustrates so well how Jesus teaches us. He starts with what we know best -- what our senses tell us and how we believe what they tell us with **"stubborn certainty"** -- and then he leads us beyond that so that we can be free of conflict and **"pain, disaster, suffering, and loss" (W.pl.151.5,10)**. What a loving, gentle way to teach!

Thus the focus of a relationship with Jesus is not so much on him as a body, as much as it is on *the love he represents*, because that is the way we will regain our awareness of love's presence which we have strenuously and determinedly sought to block by choosing the body as our reality. When we near the end of our journey, the last stage in the development of trust (**M.4.I.A**), we realize that there is only *one* love; there is no "Jesus and me"; there is no separation. But of course that is our greatest fear -- the disappearance of our individual selves. Yet that happens only when we accept, like Jesus, that our only identity is love. Then we are safe and loss is impossible. **"Love is your safety. Fear does not exist. Identify with love, and you are safe. Identify with love, and you are home. Identify with love, and find your Self" (W.pll.5.5:4,5,6,7,8).**

So you might want to dwell more on what you pointed out in your question; that is, that as long as we perceive ourselves as a separate body, we need to have a separate "higher power" to guide us. The reflection of Heaven's Love comes to us in bodily terms in the Course purposively. It would be impossible for us to get even the faintest hint of that Love without it being represented -- at least in the early stages of our journey -- in bodily form. Our investment in believing that the physical realm is reality is far too strong, and our terror of it *not* being reality even stronger. Relating to Jesus as someone just like us, therefore, is extremely helpful in avoiding the common mistake, often having disastrous consequences

both physically and spiritually, of skipping steps -- of denying our physical experience, bodily needs, etc., and jumping right into the realm of spirit. Jesus asks us, "**Can you who see yourself within a body know yourself as an idea? Everything you recognize you identify with externals, something outside itself. You cannot even think of God without a body, or in some form you think you recognize (T.18.VIII.1:5,6,7).**" So the gentle path of the Course is to have us be fully present to our bodily experience as long as we think we are bodies, but to ask Jesus to help us use those experiences to get to the pain in our minds coming from our ongoing decision to choose our own limited version of love rather than accept our true Identity as part of the oneness of unlimited Love, symbolized in our minds by the loving presence of our brother Jesus.

Q #464: How can I get release from jealousy? For years I have been in denial concerning this emotion. I have recently come to realize that I will not get very far with *A Course in Miracles* if this issue is not addressed. I have tried asking God for forgiveness but when I ask for forgiveness it is my ego speaking and not the true me, whoever that may be. My own ego mind lulls me into a false sense of security by saying I do not have to do anything about the issue of jealousy. Can you please help me apply the Course to this issue?

A: Jealousy is addressed in the same way every other ego emotion is. The first step, which you've taken, is acknowledging that it is there. The second step is recognizing that jealousy is not really the problem. As Jesus tells us early in the workbook, "**I am never upset for the reason I think (W.pl.5).**" And he goes on to say, "**This idea...can be used with any person, situation or event you think is causing you pain. Apply it specifically to whatever you believe is the cause of your upset, using the description of the feeling in whatever term seems accurate to you. The upset may seem to be fear, worry, depression, anxiety, anger, hatred, *jealousy* or any number of forms, all of which will be perceived as different. This is not true. However, until you learn that form does not matter, each form becomes a proper subject for the exercises for the day. Applying the same idea to each of them separately is the first step in ultimately recognizing they are all the same (W.pl.5.1, italics added).**"

And so what are we upset about if not what we think the problem is? We believe unconsciously that we have attacked love by separating from it. And this attack arose because we jealously believed that God had what we lacked, and had been keeping it from us. The guilt over our attack is so unbearable that we had to make up a world to hide that guilt from ourselves. The complexity of the world, with all its various problems and accompanying emotions, becomes our preoccupation, assuring that we never get back to the simplicity of the problem of the belief in separation in our mind. Although you do not mention the specific forms that your jealousy takes, it is an expression of the thought that someone else either has what we want or will take it away from us. No matter the specific expression, it is always simply the thought of separation in disguised form, with responsibility for its consequences projected outside ourselves.

We want to acknowledge the jealous feelings, recognizing what they represent and how they keep the feeling of deprivation and lack alive in our minds, with its painful cost. And jealousy of course serves the ego purpose of seeing the responsibility for our lack as resting outside ourselves, in others whom we see as having the power to take and keep what rightfully should be ours. The problem of jealousy then is addressed by returning responsibility for our feelings of fear and lack back to ourselves, within our own

minds, where the Answer also lies. Only then can we recognize that the love we have jealously sought to gain and maintain has been ours all along, with no need for any pursuit or defense.

Q #465: I always understood that in *A Course in Miracles* Jesus never asks us to do anything in the world, except in how to do the workbook lessons. Then I rediscover in Chapter 12: "Recognize what does not matter, and if your brothers ask you for something 'outrageous,' do it because it does not matter" (T.12.III.4:1). I have also read your question and answer #60. This does not answer why he is telling us to "do something in the world." If there is no world, why do something that my brother wants me to do?

A: The context of this statement appears in the preceding two paragraphs, and it is essential to realize that Jesus is not talking about form or behavior, but about the content in our minds. Thus he explains that the other person's **"very insistence should tell you that he believes salvation lies in it. If you insist on refusing and experience a quick response of opposition, you are believing that your salvation lies in *not* doing it. You, then, are making the same mistake he is, and are making his error real to both of you"** (T.12.III.2:2,3,4). The content Jesus is pointing out to us is the error of believing that what we do or do not do in the world is important and in some way related to our salvation: **"Insistence means investment, and what you invest in is always related to your notion of salvation"** (2:5). Even though he knows the world is not real, he shows us how to use our experiences in the world as a classroom so that we can discover the specific mistakes we are making in our *thinking*, why they occur, and what to do about them. He is always teaching us about the content in our minds, not our behavior. His teachings will always be misunderstood if this distinction is not recognized. Therefore in the context of adamantly refusing to do what another asks of us, Jesus is saying that what will help us undo the separation and learn that salvation has nothing to do with the world is to join with the other person by doing what seems "outrageous," remembering of course that **"this does not mean to do a foolish thing that would hurt either him or you, for what would hurt one will hurt the other"** (T.16.I.6:5).

Q #466: For many years I tried every conceivable method to give up my nicotine addiction. After my last failure, I decided I would not put myself through the ordeal of stopping ever again, resigning myself to being a smoker for the rest of my life. One morning I awoke at my usual time, but I did not open my eyes. Something was so very different. I felt like I was in heaven. Such peace and tranquillity as I've never before felt led me to think I was dead. It was as if the ego had been taken away from me: I was nothing but I was everything. When I opened my eyes everything looked so different: pristine bright but gentle to the eyes. Nothing seemed physically real. I had no cravings, no desires and no thought of a cigarette. Over time the peace went away as I got back into ego mode, but I still have no interest in cigarettes. Today, I really do believe that a power far greater than my ego released me from my addiction to nicotine while I slept. Can you please apply the teachings of *A Course in Miracles* to this miracle of mine?

A: Contrary as it may seem to your experience, the Course would not attribute divine intervention to a happening such as you recount. The Course's metaphysics makes it clear that God has nothing to do with the world (T.11.VII.1, W.pl.166.2; C.4.1) -- our own minds determine the form of our experiences (W.pl.325.1:1,2,3,4). Now that is not to deny that your experience -- a very powerful one for you -- may be a reflection of God's Love for you. But nevertheless it is your own mind that has set up the events that you found yourself experiencing, including the release from the addiction to nicotine -- much as it determines the events of your dreams at night.

At a level that you are not conscious of, your mind made the choice to accept peace rather than conflict. Your conscious decision to stop battling your addiction may have in part represented this shift. And your

experience of egolessness when you awakened suggests that you allowed yourself to be in enough of a fear-free state to open your mind to experience symbols of the unitary, non- physical nature of mind and the illusory nature of the world and your body -- fundamental teachings of the Course. In such a state, personal needs do not exist (T.28.I.3:2). That you have carried over this recognition into your daily life in relationship to cigarettes simply means that you no longer need the defense against love that the nicotine has represented, as one in a large array of ego substitutes for love (T.16.V.12). For it is a decision of the mind that establishes an addiction to a particular form, and so it is a decision of the mind to release that particular addiction. In the end, when all our fear and guilt is gone, we will not need any ego substitutes for the love we really seek. Your experience has provided you with a helpful glimpse of where the Course is leading us, where we are all heading.

Q #467: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" is thought to be the core of western morality and one of the most important messages of Jesus. From the perspective of *A Course in Miracles* it is a really confusing message, considering we do not know what is our own best interests when identifying with ego. Is there some rule within the Course's teaching that would reinterpret this golden rule?

A: There is only one place in the Course where Jesus mentions the Golden Rule, and that is in the first chapter: **"The Golden Rule is the rule for appropriate behavior. You cannot behave appropriately unless you perceive correctly. Since you and your neighbor are equal members of one family, as you perceive both so you will do to both. You should look out from the perception of your own holiness to the holiness of others" (T.1.III.6.4,5,6,7).**

As you say, when we identify with the ego, we cannot know our own or anyone else's best interests. What is in our best interests is forgiveness and the undoing of the separation, which pertains only to the content in our minds, not behavior. Thus when we look on ourselves and others without judgment, and we see our interests as the same, not in opposition to everyone else's, then we have chosen against the ego and are in our right minds. We then share the perception of the Holy Spirit Who sees us all as one Son, and for that instant, at least, our actions will be guided solely by love. Jesus wants so very much for us to recognize the unfortunate consequences of our having fallen for the ego's teaching that our judgments and condemnations of others have no effect on us. The correction of that fallacy is at the core of his teaching, as explicitly found for example in these two lessons: **"It can be but myself I crucify" (W.pl.197)** and **"When I am healed I am not healed alone" (W.pl.137).**

Q #468: i. At work, there is someone I find very difficult and impossible to like in any way. However, all the other people in my department feel just as strongly about her, some even stronger. If she is my teacher/savior and reflects back to me where I am at in the process and what I still hold in my unconscious about myself, how does it fit into the *A Course in Miracles*' philosophy that all the others in the department are having the same experience?

ii. In *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus speaks about how when we let go of our grievances against someone that the Holy Spirit extends this gift through us and the other person "will realize his error." I have noticed as I have gone on that after I let go of a grievance against someone that they often seem renewed in their attitude toward me and I have been guided to feel that they receive a new interpretation toward me and a correction for the guilt that they have projected onto me. But if the person is not a psychological sophisticate, how can they have a deep understanding toward me?

A: i. It is not uncommon at all to have many people react negatively to the same person, as is readily apparent these days with public figures and celebrities. We all share the same ego thought system, which means we are all sending out the messengers of fear that Jesus talks about in the first obstacle to peace to find "bad" or obnoxious people onto whom we can project our unconscious guilt (**T.19.IV.A.i**). So it is not surprising that other people in your department react the same way to your co-worker; we are all engaged in the same ego dynamics all the time, since we are all split-off parts of the same ego mind.

But it is also true that we share the same right-minded thought system of forgiveness and the same decision-making capacity to choose between the two systems. So each of you could ask for help with your judgments and condemnation of this other person. You could try to identify the *meaning* behind the *form* of the behavior that you find objectionable and then ask yourself **"Would I accuse myself of doing this?" (W.134.9:2)**. Then you would know what you find unforgivable in yourself, and you would have another opportunity to look at that non-judgmentally with Jesus. The instant you look within *yourself* without judgment, you would be able to look at your co-worker engaging in the same ego behavior and feel nothing but compassion. When you are free of fear and self-condemnation for an instant, you would perceive only the call for love behind the ego hatred and meanness. But right-minded perception does not mean, as you know, that you would not take appropriate action in that type of situation. If correction or discipline is called for, you would do it without repulsion, anger, fear, or judgment. This leads to the next question:

ii. Our grievances toward others are usually *bargains* we make with them to maintain the reality of sin, guilt, and fear -- the life blood of the ego -- so that we can continue with our lives as individuals while not accepting responsibility for that separation from our Source. In **"The Secret Vows"** in Chapter 28, Jesus talks about the agreement we make with one another to secure our identities as separate individuals. That section is mainly about sickness, but the dynamic would apply to grievances as well. There he tells us that we make a promise to another person, which we keep out of our consciousness, **"to be hurt by him, and to attack him in return. . . . It [sickness] is the obvious effect of what was made in secret, in agreement with another's secret wish to be apart from you, as you would be apart from him" (T.28.VI.4:7; 5:2)**.

As with all our defenses against love and oneness, we choose to keep guilt alive and then immediately hide that choice from ourselves and are left feeling hostility and repulsion towards the other person and perfectly justified in feeling that way. But on another level in our minds we are always upholding that bargain with the other person to be in a victim-victimizer relationship. Thus, if you were to change your mind and choose against that original ego decision to see the other person as the sinner, that person might make the same decision not to keep the bargain with you. That happens frequently. It has nothing to do with psychological sophistication, except perhaps in the language used. It is all happening on another level.

On the other hand, the other person may be too afraid of letting go of the defense and therefore would not change, even though *you* have let go of the grievance. But that should have nothing to do

with *your* decision. If you truly let go of the grievance, you will see how terrified the other person is to be without his/her defenses, and then you would feel only genuine compassion and understanding of where he/she is coming from. When you perceive through the eyes of forgiveness in your right mind, you become the reminder to the other person that he or she can make the same choice that you have made. You would then allow that person as much time as is needed to accept the Atonement, knowing that the ego's hatred and fear has no power whatsoever to change love, and therefore there has been no change in that person's true Identity.

Q #469: I am wondering about my grandmother who has Alzheimer's Disease. What does *A Course in Miracles* say about this situation? She is not the same person, it just seems to be her body and not her soul. I was wondering if she was already in Heaven and her body was just left here on earth for the rest of us to learn some sort of lesson? Please help me understand this.

A: Watching someone deteriorate from this form of disease is not easy, and we hope that you are able to experience the peace deep within you and in your grandmother as you go through this. The Course's teachings about sickness are very difficult for most people to accept and relate to because it tells us that despite all appearances, the body is never sick, anymore than a puppet is sick because the puppeteer makes the puppet move and appear a certain way. The clear teaching in the Course is that the body does only what the mind tells it to do, and, more deeply, that the body is not an entity separate from the mind. Other systems teach that the soul leaves the body and goes to Heaven, but that is not what *A Course in Miracles* teaches. Sickness is made by the ego to reinforce our belief that we are bodies and not spirit; so all forms of sickness (there is no hierarchy among them) are a defense against the truth of Who we truly are as Christ (**W.pl.136**).

We can never know the specifics of someone else's Atonement path (nor our own most of the time), but it is possible that your grandmother (as a decision-making mind) chose the condition of Alzheimer's to help others learn that they are not bodies and that this world is not our home. We don't know this. The condition of the body is not a clear indicator of what is going on in the mind since the identical bodily condition can reflect either a wrong-minded or a right-minded choice. So to apply the teachings of the Course in this type of a trying situation you first would simply respect her choice, and then try to see the situation as a classroom, focusing only on which teacher you are choosing to guide you through it: either the ego or Jesus. The ego would have you see your grandmother's deterioration as a terrible, unfortunate tragedy for which someone is to blame. Jesus would help you deal with your feelings and judgments and see beyond them to the light and love that define both you and your grandmother, as well as everyone else: **"It [the miracle] merely looks on devastation, and reminds the mind that what it sees is false. . . it paves the way for the return of timelessness and love's awakening, for fear must slip away under the gentle remedy it brings" (W.pll.13.1:3,6).**

Q #470: In your answer to Question #231, you explain so fittingly: "We are seeking to fill the void left by our seeming separation from God with substitutes for His Love that never fully satisfy us." Although intellectually I fully accept this, I sometimes seem to experience this void to such an extreme and with such intense psychological pain that it makes me feel almost physically sick. Sometimes the ego makes me try to compensate it by such foolish means as over consumption (i.e., food, music, learning, etc.), almost to the level of greed. How do I go about filling this big black hole (that is not even there) with His Love? Saying there is no hole does not disperse the illusion. Although Jesus teaches us the Love of God is everything I am, the illusion of the void is still there, and I am not at peace. Should I just accept that

God takes me where I am and welcomes me? Or am I just taking it all much too seriously because nothing in this world is real anyway?

A: The pain of the deep sense of emptiness that you describe is the inevitable result of the choice for separation and is present, in some form, at the core of every separated one. It may be camouflaged, temporarily anesthetized, or denied, but it is the force behind every pursuit of relief and pleasure in specialness. Your awareness of this is an important step in the process of undoing the belief in separation, and learning to identify with the loving Self that is also present in everyone.

You are correct in saying that while in the grips of separation's agony, it is no comfort to know that there is no void. You have a lot of company in that. There is nothing you can do to fill the void because it cannot be filled. There *is* no substitute for our true Identity, because there cannot be an opposite to truth. When it is denied, what is left is nothing; this is the void. The only way to heal the pain of separation is not to choose it. Only this obliterates the experience of the void, and is accomplished through forgiveness:

"Forgiveness is the healing of the perception of separation"(T.3.V.9:1).

Acknowledging the pain and its true source is a good beginning. Taking responsibility for having chosen separation in some form of specialness is another important step. *A Course in Miracles* is not teaching us to fill the void, only to practice forgiveness. The answer to your question may be found in the questions Jesus asks us: **"How willing are you to forgive your brother? How much do you desire peace instead of endless strife and misery and pain? These questions are the same, in different form. Forgiveness is your peace, for herein lies the end of separation and the dream of danger and destruction, sin and death; of madness and of murder, grief and loss" (T.29.VI.1:1,2,3,4,5,6).**

Q #471: Since I have turned my relationship over to the Holy Spirit I have noticed that the content is not totally aligned with *A Course in Miracles*. The other person is now dating someone else. Jesus says in "The Healed Relationship": "Many relationships have been broken off at this point. . . and the pursuit of the old goal re-established in another relationship" (T.17.V.3:8). But he also tells me to "accept with gladness what you cannot understand" (8:1) and that "the means will surely fall in place because the goal is sure" (14:8). Just because my experience is not totally aligned with the Course doesn't mean that the Holy Spirit forgot about me, right?

A: You couldn't be more right! The entire Course is about our learning that sin has no effect, and that nothing we do or think can affect the love we have for Jesus or the love he has for us. When we don't take our egos seriously, we are learning that **"not one note in Heaven's song was missed" (T.26.V.5:4)** just because we have insane thoughts. We need to apply that to ourselves when we realize we are not perfect in our practice of the Course. It is for most of us a very long process, and Jesus clearly is not expecting perfection of us -- just honesty, humility, and willingness. If you are still desirous of a romantic relationship that makes you feel special, that is not wrong or sinful.

Also, in the section you quoted, Jesus is talking about the *content* in our minds of moving beyond the specialness that is the mark of most romantic relationships. And when the goal of specialness is replaced by the goal of shared interests, sometimes it can feel as if the bottom has fallen out. All of the rituals of specialness are now empty and without meaning -- and it can feel as if there is nothing left. That is when the temptation sets in to leave the relationship and find another one with the old form. The Holy Spirit helps us, not by getting us new romantic partners to fill our needs, but by helping us learn that our real need -- our only need -- is to get in touch with the painful cost of the special relationship. The *content* in this sense is forgiveness of our special relationships.

Q #472: I am having a very difficult time practicing forgiveness as *A Course in Miracles* teaches. I have gone back and re-read the questions that have to do with forgiveness and I understand that the reason I am having a difficult time is that I am unhappy. I keep on asking for help to let go of these angry feelings, but my mind goes back to a certain person and I begin to feel angry again. I really want to let it go and stop thinking about the situation and the person.

A: It is not helpful, nor gentle, to try to force yourself to stop thinking about something, or to stop being angry. "***Do not fight yourself***" Jesus reminds us (**T.30.I.1:7**) in his characteristically gentle way of guiding us. You would be making progress if you were to say, simply and honestly, that you refuse to forgive this person, and then to forgive yourself for not wanting to forgive, knowing that Jesus loves you no less. Just accept where you are right now without making it into a big issue. The ego will try to get you one way or another; and one of its favorite tactics is to encourage you to beat up on yourself when you find forgiveness impossible. The end result of that is that the ego stays in business, and you remain in conflict. One day the cost to you of holding on to the grievance will be painful enough to motivate you to consider letting go. And even then you need not let it go; you need only consider how much more peaceful you would feel if you did. The ego will throw up all kinds of reasons to justify your continuing to condemn the other person; but in the end your attraction to the love and peace of Jesus' presence will allow that grievance to simply melt away. And you will be thankful to see how wrong you have been in blaming this other person and yourself. You will be at peace.

Q #473: i. In *The Most Commonly Asked Questions About A Course in Miracles*, Kenneth and Gloria Wapnick said that Jesus was an expression of the Son's letting light in. But can it be said that Jesus himself once believed in illusions? Was Jesus, before he became perfect with his Christ Self just like us, in that he was filled with illusions and he needed the Holy Spirit too in order to correct his thoughts?

A: i. There are many people who would agree with you that Jesus once believed in illusions; and there are passages in the Course that appear to support that. It certainly is one view that can be taken. Our view is that when the thought of separation happened in that one instant (the "tiny, mad idea"), just as quickly did Jesus accept the correction of it; and therefore he has always been outside the dream, available to help us make the same choice not to take the tiny, mad idea seriously. Much more space is needed than we have available here to develop this idea adequately, so we recommend further study in *The Message of A Course in Miracles*, Vol. One, Chapter 6, and Chapter 17 in *Absence from Felicity*.

Your conception of time is most important in resolving this issue for yourself. The Course teaches that all of time, and therefore history, is illusory -- a smokescreen.

So *when* Jesus accepted the Atonement is irrelevant and not at all the point of what Kenneth and Gloria were saying in their book. As Jesus once said to Helen Schucman, scribe of the Course, "**Even My personal history is of no value to you except as it teaches you that I can help you now** (*Absence from Felicity*, p. 287). That is what his course is all about -- that we would see in him *right now* the reflection of our own true Self, and humbly and gratefully admit that we have been wrong about everything and he has been right. We would then have the best perspective from which to understand and apply his teachings. We will miss his point entirely if we view his teachings through the lens of our own human experience as individuals with real histories in time and space. Jesus is helping us learn how to view our human experience from his perspective *outside* time and space so that we can, first, recognize that our very selves were born of our decision to take on the identity of the ego thought system, which regards the world and time and space as real and negates the truth; and, second, have another opportunity to change our minds about that decision, accepting instead his love as our only reality, shared with everyone. Thus, if we focus only our practice of forgiveness, questions such as yours (which is a good one!), would fade in importance to us.

ii. I have a problem with your answer to Question #265 in which you advise: "... not to confuse the voice Helen heard and identified as Jesus', with the Jesus of traditional Christianity. . . "But if this voice refers to itself in the first person and says: "I was persecuted as the world judges..." (T.6.I.5:3) and "I was betrayed, abandoned, beaten, torn, and finally killed." (T.6.I.9:2), (and many other such references), then surely it is referring to itself as the (voice of the) Jesus of traditional Christianity. How else can these references be interpreted, even if as Lesson 240 states: "Not one thing in this world is true."?

A: ii. Building on the preceding answer. . . the Jesus of traditional Christianity depicts the way the world *had* to see him, given the nature of the world as an attack on God and as a defense against the truth (**W.pII.3.2:1**). The spiral of dynamics issuing from the Son's decision (illusory, of course) to annihilate the pure, abstract oneness of Love so he could have an autonomous existence could conclude only in a world of separate beings constructing theologies and Christologies that would validate this new thought system of separation, which breeds sacrifice, hatred, and murder. *A Course in Miracles*, as we know, has come as a correction for this misguided journey away from the unity and oneness of Heaven.

Helen saw Jesus through the lens of the Bible because of her attraction to it -- she loved to read it, while at the same time never accepting its theology or Church doctrine. And therefore, the *form* of the Course is very much a factor of her affinity for the Bible, as it is of her affinity for Shakespeare's plays, Plato's philosophy, and Freudian psychology. In this sense we can say that Jesus speaks the world's theological language as a connecting point with us, so that he can gradually lead us beyond it to a different viewpoint, which we would more than likely reject were we not first prepared by this

basic level of communication, along with some degree of readiness on our parts for something qualitatively different from traditional approaches.

As the larger picture of the Course's thought system emerges, it becomes clear that Jesus is not really a person like us, but is a representation or reflection in our minds of Heaven's Love *outside the dream*, experienced by us, who know not we are dreaming, in the only way we can conceive of love and hear its message: as a figure *in the dream*, conforming to the images from the Bible that for over two thousand years have defined him in our minds. If truth and love are outside the dream entirely, then it is essential that we strive to rise to that level, which means allowing the Course to speak to us from *its* source, instead of our reading it and hearing it from our perspective within the dream. **"Think you that you can bring truth to fantasy, and learn what truth means from the perspective of illusions? Truth *has* no meaning in illusion. The frame of reference for its meaning must be itself. When you try to bring truth to illusions, you are trying to make illusions real, and keep them by justifying your belief in them. But to give illusions to truth is to enable truth to teach that the illusions are unreal, and thus enable you to escape from them" (T.17.I.5:1,2,3,4,5).** We simply cannot read the Course as we would a theological treatise or another comparative account of Jesus' life and message. If we do not suspend our belief in the validity of our experience as humans, we will always wind up with a distorted understanding of the Course and its profound message. This is so tremendously threatening that, as a defense against this terror, people will allow the Course to say to them only what they are comfortable hearing.

Ultimately, then, the first-person biblical references in the Course are to be understood as an exigency on *our* part, to avoid a terrifying mental rupture that might abruptly halt our transition to a state of mind that has nothing in common with what we currently experience as our reality. **"Fear not that you will be abruptly lifted up and hurled into reality" (T.18.VI.8:1).** It is not wrong or unhelpful to relate to Jesus as a person; indeed, he urges us to do so, and for most of us there is no other form in which we can experience a love that is not of this world. Thus the Course refers not only to Jesus, but to God, and the Holy Spirit as well, in familiar biblical terms—God's Plan, His Hands, His Arms, and His Heart. But the Course clearly is telling us that this language is metaphorical: **"This course remains within the ego framework, where it is needed. It is not concerned with what is beyond all error because it is planned only to set the direction towards it. Therefore it uses words, which are symbolic, and cannot express what lies beyond symbols. . . . The course is simple. It has one function and one goal. Only in that does it remain wholly consistent because only that can be consistent" (C.in.3:1,2,3,8,9,10; see also T.25.I.5,6,7).** Again, it is only the starting point of our journey back to God, Whose Being knows of no differentiation or limitation whatsoever. As we proceed along this path, which for us as students of *A Course in Miracles* is the path of forgiveness, our experience of ourselves *and* Jesus will gradually change. As our fear of love abates, we will allow more and more of the reality of love into our minds, and we will recognize then that it is beyond the images and accounts of the Jesus and God of traditional Christianity.

Finally, this important issue is also addressed in Question #52 in *The Most Commonly Asked Questions About A Course in Miracles*, and in our *A Course in Miracles and Christianity: A Dialogue*.

Q #474: In reference to Question #258, how does one "look within" specifically? Can you give a specific example of the "looking within" process using the example in that question? Do we talk with Jesus? What do we do? How do we "allow the light of true forgiveness to shine upon our guilt"?

A: Perhaps the process of *looking within* may become clearer when you consider what it is a correction for and what it is to be contrasted with. The ego would always have us look *without* -- to see all of our problems as related to externals -- our own body and personality in relationship to other bodies and events, in the past, present or future. And so then "forgiveness" is always focused on what someone else has or has not done to us. Even our own guilt, according to the ego, arises from things we or others have done or have failed to do (including Christianity's notion of original sin, which we all have supposedly inherited as a result of the sinful disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve). All of this kind of looking outside is the ego's defense to keep us unaware that we have a mind to look within. So it is not surprising that you ask for clarification of what it means to look within.

Although they are not the real problem, our seeming reactions to the externals, such as our anger at what someone else has done to us, are helpful first steps in the process of looking within, for these are the signals that alert us to the fact that there is something within to look at, if we are willing to release the ego as our teacher and accept the Holy Spirit as our Guide. Looking within means that we withdraw all of our projections for responsibility for how we feel from outside ourselves, including from the other person as well as from our own body. And then we look at our willingness to accept that everything we feel is coming from guilt over a decision hidden within our minds to value ourselves more than anyone or anything else, no matter what the cost. It is some variation on this specific thought that we want to get in touch with.

It can be helpful to talk to Jesus or to think of him or the Holy Spirit or some other nonjudgmental presence as there beside us, looking with us as we look to uncover our selfish self. We can describe how we are feeling and what it is that we believe is there, acknowledging the guilt that would have to be associated with such egocentric thinking, or we can simply say, "Help." The words are not important. What matters is that we do not attempt to look within on our own, for we are sure to frighten, even terrorize ourselves. Allowing "the light of true forgiveness to shine upon our guilt" is just a more poetic way of saying we are no longer judging ourselves for the decision to see our own needs as coming first. Notice that this says nothing about stopping these thoughts or denying we still feel we have such needs, but speaks only of learning to acknowledge them and the feelings that accompany them without condemning ourselves for holding on to them.

This is our part in the *looking within* process, as we allow what we uncover to be released and healed. And what awaits us, but which is not our responsibility to produce, is the peace and the love that are also within, but have been hidden under the layers of guilt we have placed there to keep the love concealed.

So the problem, the solution, and the goal of the process all lie within our own mind. But there will be no hope of any resolution until we learn to look there rather than outside ourselves. And this comes with both willingness and practice over time. For the desire to blame the world and the resistance to looking within are great -- in fact, they are the same obstacle. But when we choose a different Teacher within, the world that we see without will be transformed from a place of hatred and attack to a place of forgiveness and love (T.12.VII.5,12).

Q #475: I hear so much about the power of tithing 10% of earned money as a way of undoing a lack or scarcity consciousness, especially when it seems one can't afford to, as an act of faith that abundance is my natural position. What thoughts can you give on this?

A. From the point of view of *A Course in Miracles*, this is a confusion of form and content, although there is nothing wrong in tithing if that is what you choose to do. The Course's focus is always on changing the content in our minds, because that is the cause of our problems. Thus, a feeling of scarcity, lack, or need comes from our guilt over having rejected our true abundance -- our Identity as part of the Wholeness of God. **"Without guilt there is no scarcity. The sinless have no needs" (S.1.II.3:5).** Therefore, the undoing of feelings of scarcity can occur only by our acceptance of the Atonement, the principle stating that the separation from God could not and therefore did not happen. And that acceptance is reflected in our choosing to see our interests as the same as everyone else's, which means looking non-judgmentally at the expressions in our lives of the opposite: competitiveness, rivalry, *one or the other* thinking, and all the forms of specialness that reinforce our sense of being separate from one another. Sacrifice is not necessary, nor is it considered helpful according to the Course. **"Sacrifice is a notion totally unknown to God" (T.3.I.4:1)**, a principle with which biblical and other religious traditions obviously would strongly disagree.

"Only you can deprive yourself of anything. Do not oppose this realization, for it is truly the beginning of the dawn of light" (T.11.IV.4:1,2). Since we ourselves are responsible for our feelings of deprivation, we ourselves are the only ones who can heal that, by looking within at our decision to withhold love and be separate from Jesus or the Holy Spirit, and then asking Their help to reverse that decision through the practice of forgiveness in our relationships. This is entirely a matter of the content in our minds, not behavior. You might wish to look at the following paragraphs that pertain to scarcity and abundance: T.IV.3; T.4.II.6,7.

Q #476: Are drugs like marijuana just neutral miscreations of the ego that I can now use for a holy purpose, or is this just another ego trap to make me "think" I am getting a deeper understanding of *A Course in Miracles*, which I seem to do when I smoke marijuana? Are the effects of any drug all in your mind, and if so, which mind? Or are they all in the brain? When we alter our brains with some form of magic, what happens? I deeply appreciate the insight I "seem" to have on this particular drug but I am not thrilled with the idea of using magic in order to access this insight, especially in a country where this particular form of magic is illegal. Where am I "going" and how can I get there without magic?

A: You can simplify your dilemma if you think of the mind as a puppeteer and the brain as the puppet. A puppet does, and can only do, what the puppeteer makes it do. It has no ability to act or react on its own. Similarly, a computer is limited to what it is

programmed to do. The Course teaches that the brain (as part of the body) does only what it is directed to do by the mind. Further, the entire body is just a projection of the mind and never leaves its source as an *idea* in the mind, despite our experience that our bodies seem to have a life of their own. That is extremely hard for us to grasp and even harder to accept; but when you understand the full thought system of the ego and its dynamics, then it begins to make sense. Remember, the ego never wants us to get back in touch with our identities as decision-making minds outside time and space, and so it has set up an elaborate system of defenses that constantly reinforce our belief that we are autonomous physical organisms affected by forces outside us. We are no longer in touch with ourselves as decision-making minds, which is why Jesus has so many exercises in his workbook designed to train us to regain that awareness of ourselves.

Thus, if drugs or any other outside substance affect you, it is only because your mind has chosen to dissociate itself from its identity as a mind and believe instead that it is a body/brain complex in a physical universe governed by laws of physics, chemistry, etc. **"Special agents seem to be ministering to him, yet they but give form to his own choice. He chooses them to bring tangible form to his desires. And it is this they do and nothing else" (M.5.II.2:8,9,10).** This instructive statement comes from a section in the manual on sickness and healing, but it can be applied to your situation as well. You might wish to read that whole section. The point of Jesus' teaching there, as elsewhere, is that we are continually reversing the proper sequence of cause and effect, meaning we think the cause of our experience is something of the world or the body, when it is the exact opposite. All bodily states and conditions are the effect of a decision made in our minds (the cause) to have that experience. (Purpose is key to understanding this -- the mind's decision to reinforce its belief in separation or undo that belief.) Therefore, by doing what Jesus directs us to do in the text and workbook, we will gradually get cause and effect back in their proper sequence, and consequently will have less and less need for magic. We will not have to work so hard at understanding and practicing the Course, as we will be experiencing it from within.

Questions #[124](#) and #[246](#) may shed additional light for you on these issues.

Q #477: I am having trouble accepting that Jesus does not care, or is unwilling to help, with everyday problems and issues in my life. I know this represents the bottom rungs of the ladder of prayer, but that seems to be where I am. In reading *Absence From Felicity*, I am excited about some of the specific help Jesus gave Helen Schucman and Bill Thetford with personal issues. Isn't Jesus also instructing me to incorporate these revelations into my own life when they seem to fit? For example, recently I could not find three important keys I had lost. Occasionally, I found myself saying, "Jesus, where are those keys?" Then I found what I considered a gold mine on page 235 in *Absence From Felicity*, where Jesus told Helen, "Prayer can be very specific in little matters." Just before I fell asleep that night, Jesus told me where the keys were. I found them the next morning in a purse I hadn't used in a while. How can Jesus not care about these worldly things when I seem repeatedly to get answers like this? Was Helen's relationship with Jesus more "special" than mine?

A: Jesus' help is always available to us at the level we are willing to accept it. It is only our own guilt and fear that keeps us in a state of upset, seemingly triggered by external

situations. So, by all means, continue to ask Jesus for help with the little things if that is what you feel you are needing right now. It is not simply that Jesus does not care about our everyday concerns. Rather, he understands what we do not yet understand -- that these little problems are not really the problem. What would be most helpful then is if, while asking Jesus for the specific help, we can keep a "split mind" about it, that is, acknowledge that we know at another level that the specific problem is not what we are really upset about. In fact, our minds have generated the specific problems to avoid getting in touch with the real problem. One of the clearest statements of the nature of the relationship between problems in the world and the one problem in our mind can be found in the workbook lesson, **"Let me recognize the problem so it can be solved" (W.pl.79)**. So, in the end, it would not be at all helpful if Jesus encouraged us to see him simply as a caregiver who helps our everyday lives run a little smoother. He's inviting us to wake up to our reality as spirit, not to get more cozy and comfortable in our dream of denial as bodies.

But while we still need to learn to trust him and to undo some of the more fearful images we may hold of him as a critical and punishing judge, it can be helpful to see his love taking the form of help that we are ready to accept, as you are experiencing. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that. But this is not really a personal intervention on Jesus' part, as the passages you refer to in *Absence from Felicity* may seem to suggest at a first reading. You may wish to read a discussion later in the book (chapter 17, pp. 456,465) on the nature of Jesus' help in the world, which makes it clear that it is our own minds that give form to his abstract love. And when we understand that, it becomes apparent that Jesus can have no favorites. His love, to be truly love, must shine on all of us equally.

Q #478: What exactly is the Will of God, and is the reason we don't get what we want because it is against His Will?

A: As defined in the *Glossary-Index* by Kenneth Wapnick, the Will of God is "the expression of God's being" (p.222). Because the Son is united with the Father, the Sonship shares one Will with God. In truth there is no opposition to the Will of God, because the Son cannot be separated from the Father. However, in our illusory experience of separation we have made up a seemingly separate will that wants a myriad of things, all of which only reflect the choice to be separate. When we identify with the ego by choosing separation, we *do* get what we want; i.e., separation. This choice is behind all the special relationships with people, things, and experiences, which we seek as substitutes for God: **"Every special relationship you have made is a substitute for God's Will, and glorifies yours instead of His because of the illusion that they are different" (T.17.IV.2:7).**

In *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus tells us that we do not really know what we want, and what we think we want does not bring us peace or happiness: **"...ask not of yourself what you need, for you do not know, and your advice to yourself will hurt you. For what you think you need will merely serve to tighten up your world against the light, and render you unwilling to question the value that this world can really hold for you" (T.13.VII.11:5,6).**

This world holds no value, and everything we seek in it brings us pain. The very desire for things in this world in itself brings us pain because, as you mention, we often do not get what we think we want. We are then left with feelings of deprivation, frustration, resentment, jealousy, etc. More significantly, the desire for substitutes for God results in guilt, which we then project onto Him, interpreting the fact that we did not get what we want as a punishment for choosing not to identify with the Will of God: **"The projection of the ego makes it appear as if God's Will is outside yourself, and therefore not yours. In this interpretation it seems possible for God's Will and yours to conflict. God, then, may seem to demand of you what you do not want to give, and thus deprive you of what you want"** (T.11.I.9:1,2,3).

It is very important to recognize that the source of all pain is the choice to separate ourselves from God's Will, thus denying our true identity. The emptiness caused by this denial impels us to seek to fill the void with the things we think will make us happy. They won't. We will find peace and happiness only when we accept the one Will we share with God: **"There is no peace except the peace of God, because He has one Son who cannot make a world in opposition to God's Will and to his own, which is the same as His"** (W.pl.200.7:1).

Q #479: Throughout *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus speaks to us in the first person. Yet in the clarification of terms, Jesus is spoken of in the third person. Who is the party speaking about Jesus?

A: This is merely a stylistic factor that has no bearing on the content of the teaching -- it occurs in the manual as well (**M.23**). It is not actually a second voice. Helen, the scribe, heard only one Voice throughout the dictation. But as the Course itself says, **"Helpers are given you in many forms, although upon the altar they are one. Beyond each one there is a Thought of God, and this will never change. But they have names which differ for a time, for time needs symbols, being itself unreal"** (C.5.1:3,4,5).

Q #480: If nothing really happens at the level of form or to bodies, but rather at the level of mind, then why is it even necessary to interact with other bodies? Can't a person simply forgive other minds from the comfort of their home? Couldn't a person be a hermit and still perform miracles?

A: It depends on whether the purpose of staying at home or becoming a hermit is inspired by the ego or the Holy Spirit. The point of our study and practice of *A Course in Miracles* is to learn that we are *never* interacting with bodies; it just appears that way because that is what we (as minds) want to be the truth. The body is a projection of the mind -- an idea in the mind that never leaves its source in the mind, just as the world is **"the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition"** (T.21.in.1:5).

Although the Holy Spirit could certainly guide one to be a hermit; but to speak of the comfort of home and being a hermit, if the intent is ego based, is very much about form. It sounds as if it is a way of interacting with your own body to avoid the hassles and complications of dealing with other bodies. And that sounds like a trick of the ego, a way to keep form real while appearing not to. The danger in this is that it can easily lead to a denial of your experience, which Jesus cautions us about: **"The body is merely part of your experience in the physical world. Its abilities can be and frequently are overevaluated. However, it is almost impossible to deny its existence in this world. Those who do so are**

engaging in a particularly unworthy form of denial" (T.2.IV.3:8,9,10,11). The method Jesus uses to help us get beyond the body and the level of form is to first become aware of how seriously we take the body -- how thoroughly our lives are based on satisfying its psychological and physical needs -- and then to ask for help to learn how to take it less seriously. And this is done in the context of our interactions with our own bodies as well as the bodies of others. Were it not for these interactions, which evoke all kinds of reactions in us, it would be just about impossible for us to get in touch with the choices we are making in our minds, and those choices are the basis of miracles.

Q #481: Is it possible that I can hold a grievance against someone who would not be holding grievances against me? The extreme example right now would be Jesus: I obviously have not forgiven him yet and he loves me unconditionally; so is it possible that in this world I have hatred for someone and that person could have nothing really specific against me?

A: Yes, it is entirely possible. That is the importance of remembering that relationships are only about what goes on in our minds. The ego cannot survive without grievances and hatred, so if you still identify with the ego thought system, you will find reasons to justify a grievance against another person, even if you have to make them up. And of course that has nothing to do with the other person. It has to do only with *your* belief (usually unconscious) that you are a guilty sinner and deserve to be punished. If you turn to the ego instead of Jesus to help you deal with that awful situation in your mind, you will be directed to project your guilt in order that you be free of it; and then you will quickly find fault with another person. You will have blocked from your awareness this dynamic of denial and projection and therefore will not realize that you are seeing your own guilt in another. As *A Course in Miracles* states: **"Only the self-accused condemn. . . . You never hate your brother for his sins, but only for your own. Whatever form his sins appear to take, it but obscures the fact that you believe them to be yours, and therefore meriting a "just" attack" (T.31.III.1:1,5,6).**

The lure of this dynamic is the ego's guarantee that it will prove our own innocence. That is the whole point of projection, and that is why we find it almost impossible to let go of grievances. Following the ego's teachings, I believe that if you are guilty, I must be innocent, because the ego's system is ruled by the principle of *one or the other*. Our salvation thus depends on seeing others as guilty. The other person may be holding absolutely nothing against you, but if there is still guilt in your mind, you will have an overpowering *need* to find something to hate in that person. That is why Jesus is an extreme example. He has no guilt and therefore he cannot hate anyone. That means our not forgiving him has no effect on him. But yet we continue try to perceive him as guilty of something -- our own guilt demands this.

His role as our teacher, however, is to help us look at the self-accusation of sin in our minds and learn that it is all made up -- it is not based on fact, because it is impossible to attack God. The belief in sin testifies to the opposite -- that God has been attacked, and we ought to feel good and guilty about it (original sin, as this is known in biblical traditions). If you accept what Jesus is teaching you in the Course, you will become free of any sense of sinfulness and therefore guilt, and so you will not have a need to hate and attack others, regardless of what their behavior may be. You will no longer have a need for grievances. **"The innocent release in gratitude for their own release. And what they see upholds their freedom from imprisonment and death. Open your mind to change, and there will be no**

ancient penalty exacted from your brother or yourself. For God has said there *is* no sacrifice that can be asked; there *is* no sacrifice that can be made" (T.31.III.7).

Q #482: What does the Introduction to *A Course in Miracles* mean by "It is a required Course?" Isn't the Course supposed to be just one of the "ways" to regain truth?

A: The specific context for this phrase is related in *Absence from Felicity: The Story of Helen Schucman and Her Scribing of A Course in Miracles* by Kenneth Wapnick. In a somewhat humorous dialogue between Helen and Jesus, Helen expresses some resistance to the Course by calling it an "elective." Jesus responds that no, "it's a definite requirement" in both form and content for Helen (p.215, second edition).

What is universally required is the *content* of the Course's teaching, not the form. The many "ways" or paths to truth are different forms. Everyone will ultimately accept the truth and return to God. There *is* nothing but the truth, and nowhere else to go but to our true home in Heaven. However, how we get there may vary. The manual offers a helpful clarification: **"There is a course for every teacher of God. The form of the course varies greatly. So do the particular teaching aids involved. But the content of the course never changes. Its central theme is always, "God's Son is guiltless, and in his innocence is his salvation ... This is a manual for a special curriculum, intended for teachers of a special form of the universal course. There are many thousands of other forms, all with the same outcome" (M.1.3:1,2,3,4,5,4:1,2).**

It may be helpful to remember that the different forms do not necessarily refer to what are usually considered to be religions or spiritual paths. As stated in the manual, there is only one requirement for someone to embark on the path to truth: **"...somehow, somewhere he has made a deliberate choice in which he did not see his interests as apart from someone else's" (M.1.1:2).**

Q #483: In *The Most Commonly Asked Questions About A Course in Miracles* you said that it would be an expression of specialness if we thought ourselves superior to be a student of a "sophisticated book that comes from Jesus himself." But I feel very proud and good about myself that I have been working through such a difficult thought system; I feel very brave. What do you think?

A: That's fine, as long as you do not think you are better than others who accept a different spirituality, or none. **"Comparison must be an ego device, for love makes none. Specialness always makes comparisons" (T.24.II.1:1,2).** It is quite contradictory to the whole message of the Course -- the Son of God is one -- to judge oneself superior to another for *any* reason whatsoever. Then, too, it is rather humbling when you realize that Jesus is saying in a number of different ways throughout the Course that we are here (or at least we *think* we are here in this world) because we attacked Love and banished it from our minds, and then we made up our own version of love as a substitute. He addresses us as little children, and even babies at times, in essence telling us that we are just beginning to take our first steps on the path of salvation. That is humbling indeed -- nothing to brag about. But we can indeed be grateful that we have accepted a loving teacher who gently and patiently teaches us how to recognize our mistakes and then choose again: **"If you want to be like me I will help you, knowing that we are alike. If you want to be different, I will wait until you change your mind. I can teach you, but only you can choose to listen to my teaching (T.8.IV.6:3,4,5).**

Q #484: My question is regarding jury duty. Can a serious student of *A Course in Miracles* serve on a jury and be true to the principles taught in the Course? The use of active judgment regarding another is required in being a juror, and the effect of one's judgment can have consequences to the accused -- and to ourselves, being one with the accused. I wonder if serving on a jury would represent a conflict of Course principles in terms of a "right-minded" approach to the illusion of the world we live in. Should a Course student who believes in forgiveness, and sees his brother as himself, seek to be a conscientious objector to serving as a juror?

A: Variations on your question are among the most frequently asked ones about practicing the Course (see Question 31 in *The Most Commonly Asked Questions about A Course in Miracles*, by Gloria and Kenneth Wapnick). Although the concerns you raise seem very legitimate, they come from a common confusion that most students make as they attempt to apply the Course's principles to their lives -- the confusion of form and content (**e.g., T.14.X.7,8; T.23.II.16:5**). The Course never takes a position one way or another on form, that is, on specific activities or behaviors. Jesus is only ever concerned with content -- whether our mind is listening to the voice of the ego or the Voice for God. And that is the distinction between coming from a place of anger and attack or a place of gentleness and peace in your mind. Sometimes one of the most helpful classrooms for learning the Holy Spirit's lessons of forgiveness is one in which the ground rules seem most blatantly to represent the ego's arena of judgment and guilt. For whatever the ego has made for separation and attack, the Holy Spirit can use for healing (**T.25.VI.4:1**).

A courtroom can be transformed in your mind from a place of condemnation and punishment to one of genuine compassion and recognition of shared interests, regardless of the specific verdict -- guilty or not guilty -- that the jury, including yourself, delivers. How is this possible? The key, as already noted, is to focus on the content of your mind and not the specific form you are participating in. And this is usually a process in which you first become aware of all the ego judgments that the situation is bringing up for you -- your reactions to the defendant, the plaintiff, their lawyers, the judge, your fellow jurors -- there are just so many opportunities to pass judgments here! And your ego, very cleverly, in the name of the Course, would have encouraged you to avoid jury duty so as to avoid engaging in the "forbidden" activity of judging a fellow man or woman. But we all do it all the time, wherever we seem to find ourselves. There is no hierarchy within the illusion (**T.23.II.2:3**) -- no ego judgment is worse than another for all lead to the same unhappy experience of separation.

It is also very helpful to distinguish between judgment as condemnation and judgment simply as discernment. To evaluate the facts and circumstances of a case and to draw conclusions about whether a defendant has in fact done what he or she has been accused of need not involve condemnation. To find someone "guilty" in a court of law is simply to conclude that the person is responsible for the charges brought against him or her. Any interpretation about the unworthiness and sinfulness of that individual as a function of the decision is the gratuitous addition of the ego.

Jesus provides a good demonstration of the use of judgment as discernment when he speaks of the ego. Specifically, he says, **"Judgment, like any other defense, can be used to attack or protect; to hurt or to heal. The ego *should* be brought to**

judgment and found wanting there" (T.4.IV.8:7,8). This is simply a statement of fact and should not be read as a condemnation of the ego -- why would Jesus condemn an illusory thought that he knows has no power?

The fact that certain actions may have consequences in the world, e.g., breaking the law leads to sentencing to jail or prison time or to a monetary fine, need not be regarded as punishment. It is the purpose that we give to the consequence in our own minds that determines whether we are reinforcing a belief in separate or shared interests, not only with the convicted individual, but with all our brothers and sisters. And the way we are able to come from a place of shared rather than separate interests is once again to acknowledge any feelings of anger and condemnation that we may be harboring towards the convicted person, which would naturally lead to a desire to seek revenge and to punish. Being honest with ourselves about our ego reactions allows us to ask for help to see both ourselves and the ones we are projecting our own guilt onto in a different light. When we have released our own investment in any specific outcome, we can then become a presence in the courtroom for another way of judging that recognizes everything any of us ever does as either an extension of love or a call for it (T.12.I).

Q #485: i. I have been confusing myself on what is real and what is not real. If this world is *not* real and I have made it up in my mind and I am "dreaming," if you will, then as the dreamer I should be able to control the "dream," correct? If it is a dream then why don't all my thoughts manifest? I do a lot of lucid dreaming and am very good at controlling the dream, so then why can't I do the same here? Is it because I still believe I am this body and believe it is real?

A: i. All of your thoughts *are* manifesting, in terms of the *content* you have chosen in your mind. That is all that our seeming lives here are, despite our experience to the contrary. The world, Jesus tells us, **"is the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition" (T.21.in.1:4).** The problem is that part of the dreamer's strategy is to deny its identity as the decision-maker and take on instead the identity of an innocent figure in the dream to whom things happen. Because of this denial, we do not experience ourselves as figures in a dream, much less dreamers of the dream aware of *why* we are in that state of mind. The objective of Jesus' mind-training exercises in *A Course in Miracles* is to help us deny this denial and become lucid dreamers -- not so that we can then make our seeming lives in the world better, but so that we can decide whether we wish to continue dreaming or awaken from this dream, which in essence is a dream of exile from God: **"You are at home in God, dreaming of exile, but perfectly capable of awakening to reality. Is it your decision to do so?" (T.10.I.2:1,2).**

That is why Jesus comes back to the idea of *purpose* over and over again. The dissociation is purposive, and so if we can get that out into the open, we can then decide whether to maintain or change our decision. The purpose of the dissociation -- as a reaction to our underlying self- concept as the ones who attacked God in order to exist as individuals -- is to be able to fix blame on other people in the world to ensure its (the decision-making dreamer's) own innocence: **"The 'reasoning' by the world is made, on which it rests, by which it is maintained, is simply this: 'You are the cause of what I do. Your presence justifies my wrath, and you exist and think apart from me. While you attack I must be innocent. And what I suffer from is your attack.'"** (T.27.VII.3:1,2,3). The strategy thus is to become part of someone else's

dream to avoid the devastating punishment that is sure to happen, the ego warns us, if we take responsibility for the decision to separate from God. In the section called **"The Basis of the Dream,"** Jesus explains that in dreams, the world, **"clearly within your mind. . . seems to be outside. You do not respond to it as though you made it, nor do you realize that the emotions the dream produces must come from you. It is the figures in the dream and what they do that seem to make the dream. You do not realize that you are making them act out for you, for if you did the guilt would not be theirs, and the illusion of satisfaction would be gone"** (T.18.II.5:3,4,5,6).

Also, speaking about this same idea, but in the context of hallucinations, Jesus states: **"One thing is sure; hallucinations serve a purpose, and when that purpose is no longer held they disappear. Therefore, the question never is whether you want them, but always, do you want the purpose that they serve"** (T.20.VIII.8:6,7).

As long as we continue to choose to be faithful to the ego thought system, it is in our best interests *not* to become aware of ourselves as dreamers of the dream. Only when we are willing to consider, with Jesus, that the price we are paying to keep ourselves oblivious to our true identity is no longer worth it, will we truly begin the process of thought-reversal that will culminate in our *experience* of ourselves as decision-making minds. The goal, though, is not to change or control the dream, because that is fixed -- the ego script has already been written along with the correction of it (the Holy Spirit). Then, too, why would we want to change something that is unreal? So when we regain our awareness of ourselves as decision-making minds, the choice open to is whether to continue to re-live the ego's version or to accept the Holy Spirit's correction instead. If we choose the Holy Spirit's, eventually the only *content* in our minds will be the love of Jesus or the Holy Spirit; there will be no "I," as we will have let go of the attraction to specialness and separate interests. Our lives will be free of needs, especially to control outcomes. Love will just flow through us. Speaking in God's name, Jesus lovingly appeals to us: **"Dream now of healing. Then arise and lay all dreaming down forever. You are he your Father loves, who never left his home, nor wandered in a savage world with feet that bleed, and with a heavy heart made hard against the love that is the truth in you. Give all your dreams to Christ and let Him be your Guide to healing, leading you in prayer beyond the sorry reaches of the world"** (S.3.IV.6:3,4,5,6).

All of this is powerfully spelled out in two sections in Chapter 27 of the text: **"The Dreamer of Dream"** and **"The 'Hero' of the Dream"** (T.27.VII, VIII).

ii. What is the Will of God? I have been told that it is not a choice that He makes, but rather it is His creations.

A. ii: God's Will can have nothing to do with choice, because choice implies duality. As stated in our *Glossary-Index*, the Will of God is "the expression of His Being, which can only create; though seeming to be split by the separation and the ego's wishes, its wholeness and unity with the will of the Sonship remain unchanged and unbroken." This isn't anything that we can fully understand in our condition of separation, but we can reflect it through our willingness to see our interests as the same as everyone else's: **"You and your brother are the same, as God Himself is One and not divided in His Will. And you must have one purpose, since He gave the same to both of you. His Will is brought together as you join in will, that you be made complete by offering completion to your brother"** (T.25.II.11:1,2,3).

Q #486: Is turning away from the ego equivalent to turning toward the Holy Spirit? I ask this because I can't say that I really know what the Holy Spirit is or how to recognize it. But I do want to turn to the Holy Spirit as my teacher. Yet I wonder if my lack of clarity is really a lack of willingness. Am I unwilling to acknowledge the Holy Spirit? Or am I already turning to the Holy Spirit as I practice forgiveness in my mind and withdraw my investment from the world of guilt and attack?

A: If you truly turn from the ego thought system, yes, you would be turning to the Holy Spirit. There is no other direction toward which to turn: **"There are two teachers only, who point in different ways. And you will go along the way your chosen teacher leads. There are but two directions you can take, while time remains and choice is meaningful" (T.26.V.1:7,8,9).** The process of forgiveness begins with the willingness to look differently at the thoughts, feelings, and judgments we have in all the relationships and experiences in our lives. This willingness reflects a choice in the mind to listen to the Holy Spirit. We cannot know nor understand what the Holy Spirit will show us when we let go of our judgment. That is not our responsibility. As *A Course in Miracles* tells us many times and in many ways: **"Forgiveness is the only function meaningful in time. It is the means the Holy Spirit uses to translate specialness from sin into salvation" (T.25.VI.5:3,4).**

It is in recognizing the true nature and purpose of our unforgiveness that we invite the Holy Spirit's reinterpretation of our misperceptions, whether or not we know Who He is. The ego would not have us recognize nor question our judgments. The questioning then, is what tells us that a choice has been made to listen to a different interpretation of what we experience. That is the evidence we are looking for, and it is how we know that what Jesus tells us in *A Course in Miracles* is true.

Q #487: In your tape set "Form vs. Content: Sex and Money," you state that when we have issues with money -- the lack of or an obsession with it -- that there is usually someone in our past that needs forgiveness. I am confused here because I thought we always dealt in the present and not in the past. How do we go about forgiving the past? Do we just simply turn it over to the Holy Spirit and let a healing take place and in so doing let go of any attachment to the past, any anger and resentment?

A: We almost always think that our problems, issues, and conditions are caused by someone or something outside ourselves -- something that happened in the past, whether that is ten minutes ago or ten years ago, or the beginning of time. **"I am the thing you made of me, and as you look on me, you stand condemned because of what I am" (T.31.V.5:3).** That is our theme song as egos, even though it may not be in our awareness; so delving under the surface a bit often reveals the culprit -- the one we are blaming for our present plight. Examples abound of people who believe they are not worthy of wealth, and that self-image usually has a connection to a parent or some other person who had a formative influence in their lives -- school, church/temple, etc. An obsessive need to amass a fortune is a symbol of something else -- it could be way of dealing with an agonizing, painful sense of spiritual or psychological poverty, which, again, undoubtedly is being blamed on some figure from the past.

If someone comes to mind when you think about money issues, then all you need to do is ask for help to recognize that you have projected your own guilt onto this person and are falsely accusing him/her of being the cause of your current problems. If there is blame, then the relationship is very much alive in your mind, even though it outwardly appears to be a thing of the past. That is all Jesus is ever referring to when he teaches us about relationships -- it is always about what is going on in our minds, not what seems to be going on between two bodies. The ego uses the past to reinforce our sense of victimization -- how can we change what is already over? Jesus corrects this by teaching us that time is just part of the ego's strategy to limit us and our ability to forgive. Both blame (projecting our guilt) and forgiveness are entirely activities or dynamics in our minds, and therefore time is irrelevant. The body, too, is simply a smokescreen thrown up by the ego to thwart and complicate an otherwise simple, clear process.

Now it is not necessary to pinpoint the specific person or persons in the past whom we are holding responsible for our present condition. It may be helpful, but that insight alone is not forgiveness. It is sufficient to assume that we are blaming someone, and that that same guilt is being projected onto someone currently in our lives; so if we were able to *completely* forgive that person in the present, then everyone else we have held grievances against would be forgiven as well.

Finally, it is important to notice that this is all about *problems and issues* with money. One can be perfectly at peace with little or no money, or with billions of dollars. The peace of God, our natural inheritance, is not conditional on our financial status, or anything else that has to do with the world or the body.

Q #488: From what you have said in previous answers, I understand that the world of form may or may not change for the better when you begin to give up belief in the illusion and choose the Holy Spirit as your teacher. But in Question #273 you state "Since hell is defined as the absence of God, the world becomes hell in our experience; not a symbolic expression of it. *A Course in Miracles* is very clear that God cannot be found in this world of form. However, when an individual chooses to identify with the part of the mind that holds the memory of God, the world becomes a reflection of that choice, and is no longer perceived as hell: 'The world becomes a place of joy, abundance, charity and endless giving. It is now so like to Heaven that it quickly is transformed into the light that it reflects'" (W.pII.249.1:5,6). So, are you saying that when you choose the Holy Spirit as your teacher the "world of form" will be this place of joy, abundance and so on? Or are you referring to the world as the "real" world that has nothing to do with form? How do I put into practice the idea of seeing everything outside of me as a reflection of God?

A: The answer to your question lies in understanding one of the most important principles of the Course's teaching: **"There is no world apart from what you wish, and herein lies your ultimate release. Change but your mind on what you want to see, and all the world must change accordingly. Ideas leave not their source"** (W.pl.132.5:1,2,3).

"What you wish" is either the ego's thought system or the Holy Spirit's. Thinking with the ego makes our seeming existence in the world hell *in our perception*, because we have chosen against God. Thinking with the Holy Spirit makes it like Heaven *in*

our perception, as stated in the passage you quote. These are the "ideas" that do not leave their source in the mind. The world of form is *perceived and experienced* according to one of these two thought systems. When we change our mind from the ego's thought of separation to the Holy Spirit's thought that the separation is not real, our perception changes. This results in a change in our experience of the world of form, but not necessarily a change in the form itself. What was perceived as a place of conflict, hatred, and pain, becomes a place of beauty, joy, and peace, *in our perception*. For example; where others were judged as vicious sinners, they are now seen without judgment as mistaken brothers calling for love. This also explains why two people may be in the same situation in form, yet experience or perceive it in very different ways. From the ego's perspective, adverse circumstances are always perceived as unjust victimization (hell). The Holy Spirit's perception, on the other hand, tells us that no matter how apparently catastrophic our situation may be, it cannot take away our peace ("like to Heaven"). The important difference emphasized in Question #273 is that hell does not actually exist; Heaven does.

The change in perception takes place through the process of forgiveness, whereby our judgments are recognized and released to the Holy Spirit to be transformed. Only this is what we need to practice, and only this will change our experience of the world of form. The Holy Spirit's perception replaces ours, once we have done our part. We are not the ones who generate a new perception. Because the Holy Spirit is the symbol for the part of our minds that holds the memory of God's Love, when we choose His thought system it is this Love that is reflected in the love and beauty that is *perceived* in others and the world. It is perceived equally in everyone without exception, not just in those whom we love and see as "innocent" by the ego's standards. And yes, seeing only with the eyes of the Holy Spirit's perception is the real world's vision: **"Can you imagine how beautiful those you forgive will look to you?... you will see the Son of God. You will behold the beauty the Holy Spirit loves to look upon, and which He thanks the Father for. He was created to see this for you, until you learned to see it for yourself"** (T.17.II.1:1,6,7,8).

Q #489: Does my mind review only one script at a time? Also, is there only one script in which I accept the Atonement for myself and obtain the real world, or is there a place in each of my scripts where this could happen?

It is important to keep in mind when pondering these kinds of questions that we are talking about a process that is really illusory. *We* believe that time is real and meaningful and that our lives as individuals are real and meaningful, so Jesus must talk to us using words and concepts that correspond to those beliefs since we would not understand any other language. But he is using that terminology to help us correct our erroneous beliefs and accept his thought system instead. Jesus speaks of our lives in terms of scripts that we are living out because that is a concept we can understand, but not because there are scripts in reality.

Within this framework, then, we can say that we review only one script at a given time, in order to prevent an overloading of our circuits -- seeing all scripts all at once would cause us to blow a fuse, so to speak. Remember, too, that a single lifetime could include multiple scripts. This is more understandable if you view time as holographic rather than linear; that is, all we are ever doing is reinforcing our choice to believe the

ego, or choosing against that and accepting what Jesus is teaching us instead. The specific ways in which we express these beliefs are our scripts. And as we all know, we can change our minds several times a minute! Thus, there are many, many scripts. But there is one in which we deny our denial of the truth once and for all; our forgiveness is total and our minds are totally without guilt. Since, again, time is not linear, that choice is always open to us. We can always, at any instant, choose that script; then all other scripts would disappear. We would realize the illusory nature of *all* scripts, and we would identify wholly and only with the love and peace of Jesus.

Kenneth has written at length about this intriguing topic, and has also given workshops on it, the last now one of our audio-tape publications, "The Time Machine." His book is called *A Vast Illusion: Time According to A Course in Miracles*. And there is also a helpful section called "The Purpose of the World of Time and Space" in Chapter 3 of *The Message of A Course in Miracles*, Vol. One. Jesus reminds us, though, that we in this world cannot understand what he tells us about time: **"There is no need to clarify what no one in the world can understand. . . . Now we have work to do, for those in time can speak of things beyond, and listen to words which explain what is to come is past already. Yet what meaning can the words convey to those who count the hours still, and rise and work and go to sleep by them?" (W.pl.169.10:3,4).** He always comes back to the practical: forgiveness.

Q #490: I understand that when we (the decision maker) make a decision to identify with the ego mind, that we forget that we have another part of our mind with which to identify with. If accessing the right mind requires that we are first aware that another mind exists, and second that we understand the defenses the ego puts up in order to insure that we don't go there, what mind was I identifying with when I made the decision to begin to read and study *A Course in Miracles*? I understand now that during all my years of learning ego management skills, that I was probably always coming from the ego's thought system, so how did my ego mind ever choose to pick up a book that could be the undoing of it? When we come to the conclusion "there has to be another way" is the ego obliged to get out of the way? Please enlighten me.

A: First, approaching the mind in terms of three parts certainly corresponds to the way Jesus speaks of it in the Course, but we need to remember as well that he is describing a process that in the end is illusory. So we should not regard this description of the separated (therefore illusory) mind and its dynamics as a blueprint or schematic for an actual mind that exists in reality. It should be regarded more as a teaching aid, and all teaching aids, while serving a useful purpose, have limits. So compartmentalizing the mind in this fashion is a way of helping us undo the mistaken way in which we have thought about ourselves, as well as helping us understand why we function in the world the way we do.

Perhaps the key point in answering your question is Jesus' reassurance that we are not wholly insane and that there is a limit on our ability to miscreate **(T.2.III.3:3)**. Moreover, he tells us that **"tolerance for pain may be high, but it is not without limit. Eventually everyone begins to recognize, however dimly, that there *must* be a better way" (T.2.III.3:5,6)**. The decision maker can continually uphold its decision to conceal the Holy Spirit's thought system and its own decision-making capacity, but that does not mean that there no longer is a right mind or a decision maker. They are just

concealed, and well concealed, as we all can attest to. Nevertheless, the decision maker is always functioning as a decision maker, while trying to pretend that it is not.

Furthermore, continuing to speak in anthropomorphic terms, the ego always senses a threat to its existence, as would anyone involved in faking something. And therefore somewhere in our minds there would be the thought that things aren't what they appear to be, and we are not what we appear to be. For most people it seems, that thought does not surface until something horrendous happens, or they reach a stage where they throw up their hands in despair or frustration in a way they never have before. The motivation, again, is a level of pain that becomes intolerable. (Obviously, many people just go right back into the ego thought system for a solution.) It is not the ego, though, that does this -- remember, the ego is just a belief that the decision maker has accepted. So it is as if the decision maker responds to its own dimly perceived misgivings about the beliefs it has identified with. And in that instant, it has disidentified with the ego and allowed itself to see just a glimmer of the light beaming from the right mind. The expression of that shift may take any number of forms, one of which would be the appearance in one's life of *A Course in Miracles*. But it could be anything that would help heal the mind of its belief that separation from God is a reality.

Q #491: *A Course in Miracles* says I must choose between teachers: the Holy Spirit or the ego. I choose the Holy Spirit, but how do I actually do this? Since I don't know what anything means, how do I know when the Holy Spirit is teaching me?

A: We choose the Holy Spirit by being willing to look honestly at our attack thoughts and judgments, with willingness to let Him transform them. This requires that we recognize the defenses we employ to maintain our fierce attachment to our belief in the separation and the reality of the world and the body. Although the Course tells us we do not really know what anything means, we think we do know. We have agreed with the ego that our attacks, along with our feelings of anger, resentment, and victimization are justified. We believe in our identity as bodies. We believe that situations that are external to the mind can have an effect on us by taking away our peace. Questioning these beliefs and our interpretation of our experiences, allowing that perhaps we are wrong, invites the Holy Spirit to offer His interpretation. This new interpretation is the forgiveness process. We accept His teaching with every application of forgiveness in our relationships, and the events of our lives.

The first step is to pay attention to any upsetting feeling, acknowledging that its true source is a choice in the mind to be separate, and not whatever external situation *seems* to have caused the upset. Because we are so fiercely attached to our beliefs it is not easy to do this. Fortunately, Jesus tells us we do not have to do it perfectly: **"Your willingness need not be perfect, because His [Holy Spirit] is" (T.11.II.6:6)**. However haltingly you may take the first step in questioning your interpretation of your relationships and experiences, it is enough to allow the Holy Spirit to enter. We are asked only to do our part: **"Call not upon the ego for anything; it is only this that you need do. The Holy Spirit will, of Himself, fill every mind that so makes room for Him" (T.14.XI.13:5,6)**.

Q #492: My question has to do with forgiving Jesus. And I realize that I have much forgiveness of him to work through. I was thinking the other day that I never saw a smiling Jesus in any picture. Is this one of the ways that the world has promulgated this image of him: by him always looking stern and unhappy? Why is he never smiling?

A: You may find several "smiling Jesus" images on the Internet. In "Google," key in "smiling Jesus" and click on images. Also please refer to Question #265 for more information relating to Jesus as a symbol in form.

However, more important than the imagined images of Jesus smiling or not is your recognition of the need to forgive him. This is especially worthy of your attention. In *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus himself tells us: **"Forgive me, then, today. And you will know you have forgiven me if you behold your brother in the light of holiness. He cannot be less holy than can I, and you can not be holier than he"**

(W.pII.288.2:1,2,3). In just this short passage we find the entire circle of projection. The guilt we feel for having chosen to believe the thought of separation is projected on to everyone else in our lives, in some form or other. On an even deeper level, guilt for being unwilling to accept the Atonement principle (which is that separation is *not* possible) is projected on to Jesus, who represents the part of our minds that *does* accept the Atonement. It is understandable then that Jesus, and anyone else we may choose to attack would be perceived negatively.

Forgiveness of Jesus, along with all our brothers, begins with the recognition that they are not the ones who are responsible for our choice to believe in the separation. As the Course tells us, they did nothing: **"...forgive the Son of God for what he did not do" (T.17.III.1:5).** Willingness to take responsibility for our choice releases Jesus and our brothers from our projections, which frees us to see them *and ourselves* in a different light. Though the difference is actually a shift to more quietness in the mind, it may be symbolized in a smile as so beautifully expressed in this prayer in the workbook addressed to the Father: **"I am he on whom You smile in love and tenderness so dear and deep and still the universe smiles back on You, and shares Your Holiness" (W.pII.341.1:2).** It is difficult to imagine Jesus or ourselves saying this with a stern, unhappy expression.

Q #493: We have a person who comes to our meetings who is very hostile and angry. It is obvious that she has mental problems. She has been asked to leave one ACIM group and has been forcibly removed from an AA meeting by the police. We have tried to think of her as our greatest teacher and welcome her. No one tries to provoke her and rarely does anyone argue with her. It just elevates the situation. We let her have her say and say thank you and go on with the meeting. Rarely can anyone follow her train of thought. The other week, she was very angry and started yelling at the group. I had this vision of a three-year-old pulling a temper tantrum. I was not angry as I would not be angry at a three-year-old. I would however leave the room or remove the child. I don't believe spiritual is being a doormat and saying it's okay because that is the way you are and it is all right to treat me like this. I do believe the Course wants us to come from a place of love and not anger. Is it unreasonable to ask for a certain type of decorum from her at the meetings? Would it ever be appropriate according to *A Course in Miracles* to ask someone to leave if they refused to abide by the rules?

A: This type of situation is more common than not in groups, and it is one that has led to distortions and misinterpretations of Course teachings. Yes, it is entirely in keeping with the spirit and message of *A Course in Miracles* to ask someone to leave a group. Depending on one's inner guidance, it can be the *only* loving thing to do, for all concerned. Your analogy with a three-year-old having a temper tantrum is a good one. It does no good for either the parent or the child to condone that type of behavior; the child needs to know that there are limits and that the parent is in control, however much the behavior signals the opposite. This applies to adults as well. Somewhere deep within our minds we are absolutely terrified that we might be right in thinking that the ego is all there is -- that all is chaos and we can never return to our true Home. We desperately want to hear that we are wrong about that. We may not choose to turn in that direction, but there is at least some comfort in knowing we are not caught in a black hole of chaos and despair, that there is a way out if we choose to go in that direction.

But the key idea, as you say, is to learn how to stop hurtful, aggressive behavior in a way that is firm and resolute, yet kind. This requires some insight in our own tendencies to project our guilt onto others and then judge them so that we will come out on top -- the innocent ones. If that tendency, along with all fear and feelings of victimization can be set aside, if only for an instant, then the way for love to respond has been cleared. And then we can **"step back and let Him lead the way" (W.pl.155).**

For a study of compassion as taught in the Course, you can consult our tape album, "The Compassion of the Miracle," and Kenneth's article in the December 2001 issue of *The Lighthouse*, which addresses this issue in the context of the 9/11 attacks.

Q #494: Brothers that become not identified with bodies through death, where do they go until they return once again, to have the opportunity to choose correctly?

A: The apparent death of the body does not necessarily mean that someone has chosen not to identify with it. It is only when the mind chooses to identify fully with the truth of who we are as God's innocent Son, that identity with the body will be set aside: **"When your body and your ego and your dreams are gone, you will know that you will last forever. Perhaps you think this is accomplished through death, but nothing is accomplished through death, because death is nothing. Everything is accomplished through life, and life is of the mind and in the mind" (T.6.V.A.1:1,2,3).**

Since the mind is not in the body, it does not go anywhere when the body dies. The part of the mind that identified with a particular body for a time continues in its "mind state" which, of course, is not a place. The mind does not need a body to choose correctly. In fact, if it truly chooses correctly, it does not need a body at all, since choosing to identify with the body is an incorrect choice in the first place.

One of the important goals of *A Course in Miracles* is to teach us that we are minds, not bodies. The mind is where all the action is; and the only "action" is choosing. Since the mind does not need a body to choose, there is no change in the activity of the mind when the body "dies." The body is merely the seeming effect of the mind's mistaken choice to believe the thought of separation is real. The body does nothing. **"The body no more dies than it can feel. It does nothing...It is nothing" (T.19.IV.C.5:2,3,5).**

For more on this topic, please refer to Question #68.

Q #495: I have read and re-read the following passage from the manual of *A Course in Miracles* about prayer. I still cannot understand what Jesus is trying to say. Can you help?

"The prayer for things of this world will bring experiences of this world. If the prayer of the heart asks for this, this will be given because this will be received. It is impossible that the prayer of the heart remain unanswered in the perception of the one who asks. If he asks for the impossible, if he wants what does not exist or seeks for illusions in his heart, all this becomes his own. The power of his decision offers it to him as he requests. Herein lie hell and Heaven" (M.21.3:1,2,3,4,5,6)

A: To speak of the "prayer of the heart" is another way of saying "this is what my mind wants." If my prayer (as a decision-making mind identified with the ego) is to prove that I am right and God is wrong -- that separation is reality and oneness is illusion -- then I will have experiences that will validate that, because that is what I have asked for. And of course this requires that there be a world in which separation can be expressed in innumerable forms -- of victimization, especially. So my perception of suffering, death, conflict, oppression, etc., as real is coming from my secret wish that they be real, in order to fulfill my underlying objective of proving God wrong. My ego then reigns supreme. Herein lies hell! But it is here by my own choice. In this sense there are no "innocent victims." In my wrong mind I want separation to be the truth, so my experience in the world will be that my interests are in conflict with almost everyone else's. I have thus sought for the things of this world and therefore that is what I now experience: separate interests as some form of pain or pleasure.

But when my prayer is for the recovery of my memory of my true Self, which embraces all people, then my eyes may still see the same scenes in the world, but my *experience* of them will be entirely different. To put this in the context of form and content, I will still perceive separate interests in terms of form, but the content in my mind will always be the same, which is that we all share the same interests. I have looked on the "tiny, mad idea of separation" and simply smiled at it, judging it as silly and not to be taken seriously. This means that nothing at all can disturb or change my inner peace. I will now see through the eyes of forgiveness. In the words of **Lesson 122**, I will experience **"a quietness that cannot be disturbed, a gentleness that never can be hurt, a deep, abiding comfort, and a rest so perfect it can never be upset"** (W.pl.122.1:6) -- and all this regardless of what is going on in the world.

Q #496: Does Jesus have a sense of humor?

A: Yes and no. As one who has accepted the Atonement for himself and is a symbol of the part of the mind that remembers the truth of who we are, Jesus does not need, nor have a sense of humor. He reflects only the love that extends through him. However, as our teacher, this love takes the form that best suits our need. One of those forms is *A Course in Miracles*, which does indeed have passages that can be considered humorous. Part of the definition of humor itself may apply to the Course: "the ability to perceive, appreciate, or express what is funny, amusing, or ludicrous" (Webster's Unabridged Dictionary). Since ludicrous is something that is "laughably absurd" (Webster's Unabridged Dictionary), it is aptly applied to the separation thought, which Jesus describes as ridiculous in several passages in the Course. Indeed, the very foundation of the Course's metaphysics is set in the context of humor: **Into eternity, where all is one, there crept a tiny, mad idea, at which the Son of God remembered not to laugh. In his forgetting did the thought become a serious idea, and possible of both accomplishment and real effects. Together, we can laugh them both away, and understand that time cannot intrude upon eternity. It is a joke to think that time can come to circumvent eternity...**(T.27.VIII.6:2,3,4,5).

Thus, Jesus is inviting us to laugh at our absurd belief in separation. In the end, we will see that our journey into seeming darkness and terror was in fact nothing but a silly, laughable mistake. He gives us a somewhat humorous description of fear: **"How weak is fear; how little and how meaningless...This is your "enemy,"--a frightened mouse that would attack the universe. How likely is it that it will**

succeed?...Which is the stronger? Is it this tiny mouse or everything that God created? You and your brother are not joined together by this mouse, but by the Will of God. And can a mouse betray whom God has joined? (T.22.V.4:1,3,4,6,7,8,9).

He who sees how foolish it looks for God's Son, thinking he has destroyed Heaven, to be masquerading as a miserable sinner in a body must indeed smile. However, since we take our insanity very seriously, Jesus is not laughing at us. He is offering a path that leads to where we can laugh at ourselves, and forget our ridiculous belief in sin, guilt, and fear: "**The time has come to laugh at such insane ideas**" (W.pl.190.4:2). Jesus must think we are ready to have a sense of humor.

Q #497: I am curious about prophecies and their relationship with our "time" here -- being a review of the master tape, so to speak. Both the Tibetan and the Hopi/Navajo prophecies have paralleled each other for 3,000 years, and end "soon." Since "time" is already over, could there be a connection? Are prophecies indicative of having a good memory?

A: First, let's consider the phenomenon of psychic powers as it is addressed in *A Course in Miracles*. In answer to the question "Are 'Psychic' Powers Desirable?" Jesus explains that they can be of value in demonstrating that "**communication is not limited to the small range of channels the world recognizes**"; yet in the end, "**the only important consideration is how they are used. . . . to strengthen the ego. . . . [or as] a great channel of hope and healing in the Holy Spirit's service**" (M.25.2:2; 3:4; 6:5,6). He further, and importantly, points out that to transcend the limits the world places on communication is simply to achieve our natural state -- it is nothing special nor is it a special gift from God (2:5,7,8).

Prophecy, thus, could be related to the transcendence of the limits most people have on reading the "script," to use one of the Course's metaphors for the ego's span of existence, which amounts to every conceivable form of separation. As part of its strategy to fragment wholeness, to splinter it, divide it, and subdivide it over and over again (T.18.I.4), the ego makes up linear time, so that the one substitution for wholeness appears in our minds as epochs, ages, eras, and even parallel universes, which physicists have been speculating about for a few decades now. (Incidentally, there is nothing in the Course's theory that would preclude the possibility of there being parallel universes.)

Whenever we (as decision-making minds) identify with the ego, we automatically perceive time as linear, as going in one direction. But it is not really that way; and somewhere in our minds we know that. We always retain the ability to disregard these arbitrary limits and see several different parts of the script at the same time. Our lives represent the mind's choice to review selected portions of this script, and since this script has been written in its entirety and time is not linear, then prophecy is merely the lifting of the limits on "seeing" that we have chosen as part of our bargain with the ego to remain oblivious to this script, and therefore to the real nature of the world of time and space. This lifting of limits does not necessarily mean that one has transcended the ego, and it is not necessarily a spiritual event. It could simply be that the "prophet" is

viewing time as holographic rather than linear, which we are all capable of doing. (A popular saying is that time is a plot to keep everything from happening all at once!) It is just so hard for us to conceptualize non-linearity, to say nothing of timelessness. But only because to do so would threaten the very foundation of our existence as individuals.

In the end, all issues of this nature are inherently illusory since linear time is inherently illusory, despite our experiences to the contrary. The world of time and space is governed entirely by the mind and its choice to use time either to conceal truth or to negate that concealment and then transcend time entirely. The mind is always outside time and space, but it can convince itself that it is not. In a similar vein Jesus tells us, **"You are not sick and cannot die. But you can confuse yourself with things that do" (T.10.V.8:3)**. The only thing we know for certain is that we can be at peace right now and that forgiveness is the means of removing everything that stands in the way of our being at peace.

For further study of time, see Kenneth's book, *A Vast Illusion: Time and A Course in Miracles*; and his audio or video tape, "The Time Machine." Question [#167](#) also discusses relevant aspects of this issue.

Q #498: I have been receiving inner voice/intuition for some time (before studying *A Course in Miracles*) The information it has given me by gut feelings and actual thoughts/voice that interrupt mine has nearly always been correct. I have tried to get back together with my husband, from whom I have been separated for a while, but his lack of trust and fear keep us apart. The answers I receive seem, feel, and sound as if they are from the Holy Spirit. I am consistently told "no" and to have faith. The voice says, "Would I have lead you to the truth, then lead him away from you now?" I know that special relationships are the greatest tool of the ego. How can I be certain that the voice is the Holy Spirit, not a trick of the ego?

A: It is not really possible to comment on individual experiences of hearing the Holy Spirit, such as the one you have shared. As a general rule we can say that issues pertaining to specifics tend to be colored by ego investments that we are not fully aware of, and because of that, our focus ought to be on getting the ego out of the way, rather than on what we are hearing. Helen Schucman, the scribe of the Course, was advised by Jesus: **"You cannot ask, 'What shall I say to him?' and hear God's answer. Rather ask instead, 'Help me to see this brother through the eyes of truth and not of judgment,' and the help of God and all His angels will respond" (Absence from Felicity, p. 381)**. Also of interest is the fact that Helen was not always consistent in hearing when it came to specifics. When she was emotionally involved in an issue, she was frequently "off" in what she thought she heard: the dates of Bill Thetford's and her husband Louis' deaths, for example.

So our emphasis, thus, is on asking for help to let go of any judgments in our minds. Then, in a holy instant in which we are free of fear and judgment and have no investment in the outcome, love will flow through us, and we will do whatever seems best at that moment. We all would love to have specific answers come to us when we are dealing with critical issues, and we would love to have the answers accompanied by

the certainty that they have come from the Holy Spirit or Jesus and therefore everything will work out just fine; but the process generally does not work like that -- again, because of the many ego factors still concealed in our minds.

Finally, the section in the text called "**The Test of Truth**" provides clear and compelling guidelines for discerning whether or not one is in touch with the Holy Spirit. This issue is the topic of Question #43 in our book, *The Most Commonly Asked Questions About A Course in Miracles*. We quote one portion: "**You have one test, as sure as God, by which to recognize if what you learned is true. [1] If you are wholly free of fear of and kind, and [2] if all those who meet or even think of you share in your perfect peace, then you can be sure that you have learned God's lesson, and not your own**" (T.14.XI.5:1,2).

Other students have asked about this as well -- in fact it is the second most frequently asked question. We have addressed it in other Questions on this service that you might wish to review: [#11](#), [#43](#), [#309](#), and especially [#285](#).

Q #499: "Forgiveness looks and waits and judges not" What is the meaning of "waiting"?

A: Forgiveness does not demand that anyone, including ourselves, be in any way different at any given time. When someone is perceived to be in a fearful state, forgiveness recognizes the power of the mind to make a different choice and "waits" for the other's readiness or willingness to choose differently. Forgiveness is thus patient, in the way the manual describes one of the characteristics of the teacher of God: "**Those who are certain of the outcome can afford to wait, and wait without anxiety. Patience is natural to the teacher of God. All he sees is certain outcome, at a time perhaps unknown to him as yet, but not in doubt. The time will be as right as is the answer**" (M.4.VIII.1:1,2,3,4).

This applies to oneself as well. Any sense of impatience in achieving the goal of *A Course in Miracles*, or experiencing the peace of forgiveness, indicates that the ego has been put in charge of the Atonement plan, which means it is no longer truly the Atonement plan. It makes the error real ascribing power to the ego, the exact opposite to the meaning of Atonement. The forgiveness process that Jesus is teaching in the Course is gentle. It invites us to *wait*, rather than try to fight off resistance, or force ourselves to think or behave in a way for which we are not truly ready. We wait by doing what Jesus tells us we should do: "**Step gently aside, and let healing be done for you...Focus your mind only on this:...I need do nothing except not to interfere**" (T.16.I.3:7,9,12).

Our part in the process is very simple; we are asked to *look* at the ego in operation, recognizing its vicious thoughts and judgments as the expression of fear, *wait*, which means not try to fix it, change it, or impose our solutions, and *not judge* it as sinful. We then let the Holy Spirit do His part, which means to share His perception. Since we are very skilled in making our insane lives work according to the ego's upside-down strategies, it is very difficult for us "not to interfere." Most of us are great "doers," and need to learn from Jesus to wait patiently.

Q #500: Am I in your dream or are you in mine?

A: Both and neither. I am in your dream if you react to me in any way, and you are in my dream if I react to you in any way. Strictly speaking -- remembering we are talking about an illusory process -- there is only one dreamer dreaming a dream of separation from God that involves denying responsibility for that choice to have a special, individual life of its own, which has become equated with sinfulness deserving of punishment. The means of carrying out this objective of keeping individuality while avoiding responsibility for it is to have a multitude of individuals in some form of victim-victimizer relationship. The internal sense of sinfulness can then be projected onto someone else who then is perceived as the guilty sinner. So if you and I are in a relationship, it is because a larger self has split off into this relationship between two people to conceal what is really going on in its mind.

Q #501: How can one perceive forgiveness correctly, in Jesus' eyes, after suffering years of verbal and physical abuse?

A: First, true forgiveness never involves denying that something terrible happened. It focuses entirely on *your* thoughts and which teacher you choose to help you: the ego or Jesus. To the ego, your situation can be seen only through the eyes of separation: an innocent victim and a sinful victimizer. And the ego may support forgiveness, but it would still be in the context of an innocent victim forgiving a sinful victimizer. This is the common approach of the world and most religions of the world -- that sin actually takes place but is forgiven. Jesus calls this false forgiveness or "forgiveness-to-destroy," for despite the appearance of piety, it supports the thought system of separation, and therefore can never lead to lasting, true peace.

Forgiveness seen through Jesus' eyes is marked by an absence of judgment or condemnation. Again, it does not deny attack or pain; and it does not mean that criminal prosecution cannot be pursued. The basis of this approach is our learning that the peace of God is in our minds because we are His Child. Because it is God's peace, nothing whatsoever has power to take it away. We can choose to turn away from it, but we cannot destroy it. Nothing can. Therefore to blame someone or something else for our lack of peace is to engage in a form of self-deception. Casting blame denies the truth about the peace in our minds. The other dimension of this is that in our wrong minds we always carry the unbearable burden of guilt over our choice to separate ourselves from God. The pain of this guilt, as well as the expectation of extreme punishment for our sin, causes us to deny it in ourselves and project it onto someone outside us, who would then be seen as deserving of condemnation. Therefore, in our wrong minds we would use situations in the world for this purpose of getting rid of our guilt. Jesus teaches us that that strategy does not work, for the guilt just stays in our minds and is reinforced by the deception. **(T.13.II.1:1,2; X.3:1,3,5,7)**

Jesus would have us turn to him when we feel we have been victimized so that he could help us use the very same situation to *un*learn what the ego taught us. Without denying the objective events that took place, Jesus would help us recognize our projection and then withdraw it, so that we can see the original mistake we made, which is judging

ourselves guilty of having destroying love. He would help us realize the impossibility of that; and if we could accept it, we would be free of guilt and consequently be at peace, recognizing at the same time that that is the truth about everyone. In that state of mind, there is no way we could ever condemn ourselves or anyone else, regardless of what has been done behaviorally. The facts are still facts. But our reaction or interpretation would have changed completely. That is why Jesus explains that in true forgiveness we forgive what was *not* done to us.

From this place of love and peace in our minds, we would then do and say what is most loving for all concerned. What that would look like in any given situation cannot be determined ahead of time. It could mean having no further contact with the attacker, pursuing prosecution, talking with the person, going to therapy with the person, or any number of other things. But the perspective would no longer be that of victim and victimizer. Through the gentle eyes of Jesus, we would see that an attacker is a Son of God, too, and shares the same wrong and right mind and the ability to choose between them that we do. He would help us see that concealed beneath all viciousness is tremendous fear and a call for love. It cannot be stressed too much, though, that this does not involve the denial of the objective facts of the attack, or the pain one is feeling.

Finally, Jesus would help us learn that when we judge others as deserving of condemnation, we are doing the same thing to ourselves. He is always teaching us that we are all really one, and so because of this oneness, we cannot condemn another person without at the same time condemning ourselves. **"Forgive and be forgiven. As you give you receive" (W.pl.122.6:3,4).** This undoes the ego's main principle that it is always *one or the other*: my innocence is bought at your expense. But Jesus does not underestimate the difficulty of our accepting this, or its importance in achieving our goal of inner peace. He states that this idea, **"completely alien to the ego and the thinking of the world, is crucial to the thought reversal that this course will bring about. If you believed this statement, there would be no problem in complete forgiveness, certainty of goal, and sure direction. You would understand the means by which salvation comes to you, and would not hesitate to use it now" (W.pl.126.1).**

Surely, comprehending *A Course in Miracles* metaphysics of non-dualism is necessary in order to relate to these ideas fully and avoid misinterpretations; so further study may be helpful. Also there are some other Questions on this Service that have addressed this area of the Course's teachings: [#174](#), [#200](#), and [#481](#).

Q #502: I participate in a martial art that over the years has caused me a lot of pain. *A Course in Miracles* says that the pain is in the mind and that the body, being a neutral thing, can not feel any pain. That is, my mind projects upon my body the pain that only the mind is aware of. Yet do I not have a choice? Can I not choose to practice my art and not feel any pain. Is the reason that I feel the pain because I want to punish myself.

A: Whenever we experience pain in relationship to anything in the world, it is always because that person, thing, event, or activity is a projected symbol of the guilt and pain in our minds. And it is our minds that have deceptively placed responsibility for the pain

and the guilt on the external symbols. We all share the same pain in the mind, but it will be experienced through different symbols for each of us. The symbols themselves are never the cause of the pain. But our belief that they are is what keeps the ego in business, with the thought of separation real, for we are now oblivious to the choice for pain we have made in our minds. We remain mindless, seemingly at the mercy of events and forces outside -- separate from -- ourselves, for which we bear no responsibility.

You have begun to recognize the role of the mind in your own experience with the martial art. If you wish to have a different experience, the first step is to identify the purpose you've given it. Why do you value it? There are a range of possibilities, such as feeling more powerful, more in control, more disciplined, safer, more protected, more in tune with your body, etc. Whenever we value anything of the world, it is for ego reasons. This does not make it bad, but if we do not recognize the ego motivations, the ego will be in the driver's seat and we won't know it. And that means whatever decisions we make about the things of the world that attract us will be double-edged, that is, they will be sources of both pleasure and pain **(T.19.IV.B.12:1)**. To the ego, this is proof that the separation and sin are real, that there are things outside of ourselves that can affect us and cause us pain -- for who would choose pain for himself?

At one level we believe that pain is God's punishment for our selfish pursuit of our own pleasures, and at a deeper unconscious level, we believe that the pain is a self-inflicted punishment to atone for our attack on God. Yet Jesus makes it clear that pain **"is not really punitive at all. It is but the inevitable result of equating yourself with the body, which is the invitation to pain" (T.19.IV.B.12:3,4)**. In other words, believing that we are separate from love is a thought of limitation and deprivation, which by its very nature brings pain with it. Our belief in pain as punishment, either God's or ours, is a smokescreen that covers over the real source, our choice for separation.

The key then is not to give up the external expressions of the ego -- that only reinforces the ego's demand for sacrifice, another seemingly external cause of pain, which it would want us to attribute to God -- but to become more aware of their underlying meaning and purpose as the ego's symbols. If we use them to support our belief in separation, to reinforce our acceptance of the ego's goal of self rather than shared interests, then pain will inevitably be associated with them. But if we become willing to look at our investment in the ego's purpose for pain, and realize it has to do with our thoughts and not the external symbols, the ego's unconscious hold on our decision-making will begin to weaken. For once we become aware of what we are choosing in our minds and why, we will begin to see more readily through the ego's lies and deceptions. And then we can give the symbols of our world, such as your martial art, a different purpose. They can then become the Holy Spirit's classroom in which we learn to undo our guilt and release our internal pain, rather than the ego's prison in which we continue to reinforce our guilt and cling to the pain, but fail to recognize its source.

Q #503: I have been studying *A Course in Miracles* for about 90 lessons, and sometimes I get the feeling that I'm missing something. I think I should have had a revelatory experience in the previous lessons as part of my learning process. So I feel like I'm missing part of the foundation of the learning plan. When the Course instructs me to listen or let me be guided to my Self, I have absolutely no idea what to do. I sit quietly trying to clear my mind and listen to something that could indicate I'm doing the exercise correctly.

But I don't hear/feel anything. My question is: Is it necessary for a student to have experiences of right-mindedness during the exercises? Is it normal for a student to miss experiences? Do they come with later lessons?

A: What you have discovered in your efforts to practice the lessons is exactly what the workbook would like us to learn: we "have absolutely no idea what to do." That is a very important discovery and, in one sense is a "revelation." This insight and your honesty give you a very firm foundation for the learning process. As Jesus tells us in the text: **"I am leading you to a new kind of experience that you will become less and less willing to deny" (T.11VI.3:6).** We can only be led if we are willing to follow, and that requires the recognition that we do not know where we are going. If not knowing means letting go of any judgment of what an experience is, what the outcome of the lesson should be, and willingness to let the Holy Spirit be in charge of the process, then it may indeed be a right minded experience in itself.

The Course is a gentle process that asks only that we have "a little willingness" in practicing forgiveness: **"Your part is only to offer Him a little willingness to let Him remove all fear and hatred, and to be forgiven" (T.18.V.2:5).** Continued practice of the instructions given in the workbook will lead eventually to seeing things differently. Small, but significant insights, such as you describe, are very helpful in this process. It is common for students to miss the small, important steps. Spectacular experiences are not necessary, some may even be subtly disguised ego devices, more harmful than helpful. We need not strive for experiences. It is dedication to the practice and application of what the workbook teaches, which leads to the experience that will occur naturally. As the Introduction to the workbook tells us: **"You are merely asked to apply the ideas as you are directed to do... it is their use that will give them meaning to you, and will show you that they are true" (W.in.8:3,6).**

Q #504: I understand that we have made the decision to forget. My question is, why did we reject a state in which we clearly enjoyed peace of mind, in order to enter into time and space? Who in their right mind would feel dissatisfied with the original peace of mind?

A: No one in his right mind would choose to forget who he is, which is why no one in his right mind *does*. Your question is asked very frequently. It is actually a statement framed in the form of a question, because the question implies that the separation did in fact occur, and that time and space do exist. *A Course in Miracles* provides the ultimate answer: **"...the separation never occurred" (T.6.II.10:7).** Jesus tells us we cannot forget our true Identity as God's innocent Son, but can misuse the power of our minds by choosing separation and believing in the illusion of a separate identity. The very important principle at work here is the power of the mind to choose. The choice is always between truth and illusion, what is real and what is not. Since there is no substitute for God, and no alternative to reality, choosing not to believe in truth is really choosing nothing. However, the belief that it *is something* results in guilt for having obliterated God and His Son from awareness, replacing them with the made up ego self. The effects are all the devastating, painful experiences of "life" in the body and the world, which lead us to ask ourselves how we got here and why we came. Since Jesus knows we believe in our identity as bodies, he offers an explanation we can understand and work with: we believe we are bodies in the world because this is what *we want to believe*.

The "original" moment of separation, that *seems* to have occurred in the past, is actually an ongoing choice for separation that is evident in the daily experiences in our lives. The clues are there for us to see in our energetic pursuit of selfish interests, at the expense of others' interests, not to mention our devotion and dedication to being right. To paraphrase an often quoted phrase from the text; we would rather be right than peaceful (**T.29.VII.1:9**). It is this which motivates us, here and now, to choose our little selves and little lives over God.

Thus, in its important goal of teaching us that we have minds with the power to choose, the Course itself is the answer to your question. Our hope lies in following Jesus' clear and direct invitation: **"My brother, choose again" (T.31.VIII.3:2).**

For more on this topic please see [Question #10](#).

Q #505: Could you give a simple explanation of the crucifixion and the resurrection?

A: As you know, the crucifixion and resurrection are the foundation of traditional Christianity. At its core are beliefs about sin, atonement, sacrifice, redemption, and death. In *A Course in Miracles* Jesus reinterprets each of these concepts. The Course teaches that the separation never truly happened, and therefore the world does not exist. Our experience in the dream, including the crucifixion and resurrection of the historical Jesus, is part of the illusion. That is the simplest explanation the Course offers. On another level, however, since we do believe in the separation and the reality of the world and its "history," Jesus reinterprets the "events" that we believe occurred, and the concepts on which they are based. In the text he tells us: **"The real meaning of the crucifixion lies in the *apparent* intensity of the assault of some of the Sons of God upon another. This, of course, is impossible, and must be fully understood as impossible. Otherwise, I cannot serve as a model for learning" (T.6.I.3:4,5,6).** As a symbol of the part of our minds that accepts the truth of who we are, Jesus does not identify with the body, accepts his identity as God's innocent Son, and knows that his life is in God alone. This is what the Course refers to as acceptance of the Atonement. It is not achieved through sacrifice, nor death, but through this recognition. The crucifixion then becomes what Jesus tells us in the text: **"...nothing more than an extreme example. Its value, like the value of any teaching device, lies solely in the kind of learning it facilitates" (T.6.I.2:1,2).**

Put very simply, it is meant to teach that Jesus seemed to die and seemed to rise from the dead to teach us that we are not bodies, that nothing is accomplished through death, that *nothing happened*. When we accept this we are "resurrected" in the sense that we rise from the death of the ego's lies to the life of truth: **"Very simply, the resurrection is the overcoming or surmounting of death. It is a reawakening or a rebirth; a change of mind about the meaning of the world. It is the acceptance of the Holy Spirit's interpretation of the world's purpose; the acceptance of the Atonement for oneself. It is the end of dreams of misery, and the glad awareness of the Holy Spirit's final dream" (M.28.1:1,2,3,4).**

Q #506: In T.19:D:1:4 of *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus refers to the Divine Abstraction as: "The Creator of life, the Source of everything that lives, the Father of the universe and of the universe of universes, and of everything that lies even beyond them...." I would appreciate your helping me to understand why this particular wording of "universe of universes" has been chosen, since the universe and everything that appears to 'live' is a fabrication of our minds.

A: Throughout the Course, Jesus uses symbols and the language of duality because that is what we understand. Since he knows how terrified we are of God and of our truth, his use of specific words is a loving and gentle way to lead us beyond our fear. He speaks to us of bodies, toys, houses, cities, money; all the things we believe are real and to which we cling. He uses words to describe the indescribable: Heaven, God, totality, oneness, timelessness. He speaks in poetic terms of experiences that are beyond words. While the form varies, the content is always a loving message.

The passage you quote is a poetic way of telling us that as Father of the universe of spirit, of Christ and His creations, God is everything. If we were ready to accept the truth of who God is and who we are, we would not need *A Course in Miracles*, or it would be sufficient to say: **"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.pl.169.5:1,2,3,4,5).**

Because we are fiercely attached to our belief in separation and our identity as bodies, we need the truth to be presented to us in a variety of ways, over and over, so we can grasp its meaning and find our way through the labyrinth of confusion our upside-down thinking has fabricated. That is why the basic principles of the Course are repeated in many different ways, and the message of God's Love for us is expressed in poetic, inspiring words intended to help us past our fear.

Q #507: Am I correct in saying that every judgment, every instance of anger...every time we turn to the ego (the wrong mind), is a cry for pain and suffering and identically a cover against a cry for love, of going to the right mind?

A: Yes, anger, judgment, and choosing the wrong mind are all attacks; and yes, each one is a call for love. They are the effects of having chosen the separation, thereby identifying with the ego, which is the ultimate attack on the Son of God because it is a denial of our true Identity. What inevitably follows is a profound sense of loss and emptiness. What is lost is awareness of love's presence. This loss is experienced in the feelings of deprivation, scarcity, need, and incompleteness that are at the root of every attack, whereby we seek to take from others what we think we lack. It is a desperate attempt to get back the love that was lost in the choice to separate. The choice is forgotten and denied, while the guilt for having made it is buried and projected out to everyone who is now perceived as having stolen the love and wholeness that are rightfully ours. Born of a deep sense of deprivation, attack is believed to be the only way to get what we need from everyone and everything outside of ourselves. In this search, whether it takes the form of special love or special hate, the ego seeks to fill the void left

by the separation. Attack expresses the fear that what was lost will never again be found. It is therefore, an expression of fear.

By thus reinterpreting attack, *A Course in Miracles* teaches us a new way of perceiving it. It can now be seen as a way of "looking for love in all the wrong places," as the song goes. The attacker is desperately seeking the "lost love." However, no matter how perverse an attack may seem to be, it has not obliterated the part of the mind that holds the memory of God's Love. If we are willing to let go of the ego's judgment and accept the Holy Spirit's interpretation, we acknowledge the right mind of the attacker and allow the Holy Spirit to respond with love. Thus the wrong mind is not reinforced, the attack is not perpetuated, and the love that was sought is found in the right place: the part of the mind of the attacker that remembers love, whenever he or she is ready to accept it.

As Jesus tells us in the text: **"This is what recognizing fear really means. If you do not protect it, He [the Holy Spirit] will reinterpret it. That is the ultimate value in learning to perceive attack as a call for love" (T.12.I.8:8,9,10).**

Q #508: According to the teachings of *A Course in Miracles*, how do I understand what is the lesson I have to learn from a situation that keeps coming over up and over again, which is more difficult each time? Is it that I have not been successful in getting the point, or might it be better to consider this a lifetime lesson and give up hoping not to repeat it?

A: Any situation that seems be a difficult one that recurs in our lives is simply a lesson in forgiveness that we have yet to accept. And what does that mean? That there is a guilty self-accusation that we are not yet willing to look at and so must keep projecting outside of ourselves so that it seems that the cause of the guilt and the pain is external rather than internal. The forms that these projections take are the specific relationships in our lives that seem to bring us distress and pain. But rather than seeing them as situations to get over and hopefully avoid in the future, the Course invites us to look upon them as our special function, the particular form in which we learn that our brother is guiltless and that therefore we are innocent as well **(T.25.VI.4,5,6,7; T.25.VII.7,8,9).**

Now the specific form of the lesson is **"suited to your special needs, and to the special time and place in which you think you find yourself"** although **"the content is [always] the same" (T.25.VII.7:3,2).** And this simply means that the form is the one that the ego originally made in order for us to feel at the mercy of someone or something else, so that responsibility for how we feel seems to rest on the outside situation. And if we have managed in our lives to escape from the situation at one time or another, it will simply reappear in a somewhat different form (a "new" relationship), for it is always mirroring what remains to be healed within.

The specific situation represents a particular expression of whatever specific belief about the separation from God we are unconsciously holding onto -- betrayal, abandonment, rejection, loss, inadequacy, etc. And behind each of those thoughts stands the self-accusation -- for this is what we believe we did to God when we chose our individual self over His Love. So if we can identify the unforgiveness or judgment

associated with each recurrence of the difficult situation, the next step is having the willingness to accept responsibility for that thought without self-condemnation, that is, **"with the Holy Spirit's kind perception of specialness; His use of what you made, to heal instead of harm" (T.25.VI.4:1)**. And it is in that process of looking without judgment that we are released from the inner guilt that has been fueling the external projections. Does this mean that the external situation will no longer occur? Not necessarily. But it will mean that we will no longer interpret it in personal terms, that is, we will no longer feel in some way victimized by it or at its mercy, as we are learning to recognize that nothing outside ourselves can affect us.

In Jesus' words from the end of the text: **"Trials are but lessons that you failed to learn presented once again, so where you made a faulty choice before you now can make a better one, and thus escape all pain that what you chose before has brought to you. In every difficulty, all distress, and each perplexity Christ calls to you and gently says, "My brother, choose again." He would not leave one source of pain unhealed, nor any image left to veil the truth. He would remove all misery from you whom God created altar unto joy. He would not leave you comfortless, alone in dreams of hell, but would release your mind from everything that hides His face from you" (T.31.VIII.3:1,2,3,4,5).**

Q #509: I have almost succeeded, when not in my body but in spirit and thus one with the Sonship, in feeling love when reading about accounts of GI's being killed in Iraq. But I have difficulty when I put myself, as one with the Sonship, in the place of the mothers and fathers of those killed and injured. Please help me.

A: The ego doesn't care if we are able to be peaceful about one difficult situation, so long as there remain other situations over which we lose our peace. To the ego, it's all the same. For its unstated goal is to keep us in conflict. The ego thrives on the belief in victims and victimizers. And it does not matter whether we see ourselves or someone with whom we identify as the victim -- including our country's soldiers and their families. It's only critical that the dynamic of victimization be real for us. Can we also feel at one with the victimizer -- such as the Iraqi insurgents or the so-called terrorists -- and still feel love? There is a way, but it is not something we can do on our own, and we need first to understand all the obstacles we've placed between ourselves and peace.

We made the world with all its battles and wars, from the interpersonal to the international level, to convince ourselves that the separation thought is real but that we are not responsible for it. And so it seems that there are forces outside ourselves -- separate from us -- that affect us in ways over which we have no control. In other words, there are victimizers and victims. Our investment in this thought system is much deeper than most of us even begin to comprehend. For it keeps the guilt over our pain and suffering resting outside our own minds so that we never see our own role in deciding for pain by deciding for separation. Yet the two choices -- separation and pain -- are intrinsically and unavoidably linked. In fact, they are the same choice. But it is the ego's goal, and the world's purpose, to keep that relationship forever obliterated from our awareness.

We will never be able to be truly at peace and experience the genuine love of the Sonship until we recognize that link and ask for Help in undoing our belief in separation and the reality of our own guilt over it. For ultimately we accuse ourselves of separating from God and setting in motion a world of pain and suffering. But so long as we do not wish to accept that responsibility so that the choice can be undone, we can only struggle and fail to find peace and love in situations that appear to be anything but peaceful and loving.

The key to healing our perception of pain in the world is to learn to recognize that the external situation is never the cause of our loss of peace. It is always the decision within our own minds to be separate from love. And we can not overcome this decision on our own simply by choosing to see ourselves at one with others. We first must look at our investment in seeing ourselves as separate but not responsible for it, in whatever form we may make that real in our lives. By joining in our minds with Jesus or the Holy Spirit, we will accept without guilt the correction for our belief in separation, for they hold no judgment against us for the insane but impossible thought that we have attacked love through our desire to be separate. If the guilt of our own mind is healed, which is the source of our pain, we will no longer see the pain and suffering of the world as anything more than the delusional result of false decisions each fragment of the Sonship is making about itself, just as we have been doing.

There is a beautiful prayer that comes early in the text of *A Course in Miracles* that can serve as a helpful reminder of what this process of choosing between the ego and the Holy Spirit is always about:

***I must have decided wrongly, because I am not at peace.
I made the decision myself, but I can also decide otherwise.
I want to decide otherwise, because I want to be at peace.
I do not feel guilty, because the Holy Spirit will undo all the consequences of my wrong decision if I will let Him.
I choose to let Him, by allowing Him to decide for God for me
(T.5.VII.6:7,8,9,10,11).***

For other answers related to how to perceive the war in Iraq and war in general, see the last paragraph of Question [#37](#), as well as Questions [#143](#) and [#239](#).

Q #510: Considering "The Test of Truth" that Jesus talks about in chapter 14 of the text of *A Course in Miracles*, how could Jesus be crucified? I can understand his being free of fear during those "attacks" on his body, which is a potent example of forgiveness. But it seems clear to me that torturing and crucifying a brother is not a manifestation of perfect peace, which is what everyone who met him (or even thought of him) should have felt. Is it that Jesus tried at times to learn his own lesson and not God's?

A: It may be helpful first to look at the specific line you are referring to in that section: **"If you are wholly free of fear of any kind, and if all those who meet or even think of you share in your perfect peace, then you can be sure that you have learned God's lesson, and not your own" (T.14.XI.5:2).**

There are certainly a number of different ways of looking at this passage in relationship to the crucifixion. The first question we could ask ourselves is whether the crucifixion is fact or fiction. It is after all our dream and Jesus does not perceive himself to be a part of it, so perhaps the story is merely the imaginings of followers who were attempting to make his seeming life here seem bigger than life, concocting a story of physical death and physical resurrection.

However, Jesus does discuss the crucifixion in chapter 6 as if it were an historical event in his earthly life, so we can consider what this passage may mean in light of such a happening. One possibility, as you suggest, is that Jesus perhaps was still identified with his ego up until the time of his crucifixion and so was not in perfect peace. The attacks by others against him then were simply part of his own lessons in forgiveness.

However, since the crucifixion, and with the coming of his Course now to the world, few would reasonably deny that he is a manifestation of perfect peace. Yet even today, there are many in the world who know of him and think of him who are not at peace, who feel anger at times towards him, even as students of his Course. Is this proof that *he* still has dark, unlearned lessons? This seems most unlikely. In fact, earlier in the Course, Jesus remarks on people's unpeaceful reactions to him when he seemed to be among them, although his words apply equally to his students today: **"Many thought I was attacking them, even though it was apparent I was not" (T.6.V.B.1:5)**. He goes on to explain that when we do not share another's thought system, we are weakening it, and as a result we will be perceived as attacking, even though we are not. For each of us sees outside what we have first seen within **(T.6.V.B.1:7,8,9,10,11)**.

Perhaps the problem is that we are misunderstanding Jesus' meaning with this passage. The line in fact says that all "who think...of you *share* in your perfect peace." But it does not say that everyone *accepts* this perfect peace and *is* at peace. If my mind is healed, I know that everyone whom I know and who knows me must share this perfect peace with me for it to be perfect peace, no matter how their minds may choose in any moment in time to deny the reality of that experience.

However, if I find others reacting to me and judging me and I react to that in any way, then I am not in perfect peace and I still have my own dark lessons to be learned. And since, in the end, there is really no one else out there, I am only ever concerned with the state of my mind, and how I may be in reaction to what I perceive to be other minds separate from me. For once I truly know we are all one, my experience in relationship to all the aspects of that one self -- all the seemingly separate fragments -- can only be one of perfect peace, which must be shared with every aspect as one, whether or not they are manifesting that peace at any particular moment in time.

Q #511: The idea of separation is one huge, elaborate and childish temper tantrum, which although insane is a reflection of how clever we are. My question is, once I remember who I really am and am back in that experience of myself, what then? Would it not be eternal boredom that drove us to this way of thinking? Also, how can we be so self-deceived by one guilty thought to create a need for this world and its dark and lengthy history? It seems to me that knowing the reality of God's Love exists on a knife's edge. Who's to say that once a complete Atonement of the Sonship has occurred that we will not fall into this experience of ourselves again?

A: In truth, it is only from our self-deceiving, self-aggrandizing perspective, identified as a seemingly tiny self in a seemingly infinite and overwhelming universe, that the idea of separation and its consequences seem huge or elaborate or clever or dark or temporally and spatially vast. From Jesus' perspective, it is all absolutely nothing. He only describes the layers of complexity that seem to have spun out from the initial illusory thought because we believe in them and have made them very real in our own minds and so need help in extricating ourselves from the confusing labyrinth of our imaginary beliefs.

Truly, this world and our so very important lives are "much ado about nothing," to quote the Bard. Nothing has happened, which is the simple statement of the Atonement principle. So how can nothing happen again? And if nothing happens again, it will still be nothing. Nothing multiplied by nothing, no matter how many times you multiply it, is still nothing. Nothing divided and subdivided, over and over again, remains nothing. And nothing repeatedly added to nothing always yields the same result -- nothing.

As for eternal boredom motivating the split from eternal Love, that makes perfect sense -- from the delusional, illusional ego point of view. If we genuinely are convinced that having conflict and pain because we believe we lack all that we truly need is preferable to knowing that we have all that we truly need, then perhaps the thought of separation is a sane alternative to Heaven. But it is only an ego-based perspective with extreme tunnel vision that could possibly believe that the excitement of uncertain, yet inevitable, loss and the occasional, unpredictable release from agonizing suffering is to be preferred to the quiet certainty of eternal bliss.

For further discussion of the issue of repeating the mistake of separation, please refer to [Question #10](#).

Q #512: Two questions have been submitted recently on the theme of Christian Science. Both are noted below and the answer addresses the two of them together:

i. Compared with *A Course In Miracles*, how does Christian Science "heal" with mind?

ii. I have been a student of *A Course In Miracles* for thirteen years but have been frustrated that my study and practice did not seem to be helping me with some practical problems. I discovered that Christian Science also teaches that we are spirit and not a body, so I recently started attending a Christian Science church, and was healed of some long standing physical problems and a smoking addiction. The Christian Science church says that Jesus said: "By their fruits ye shall know them," and that his followers would do greater works than his. This is the basis for their emphasis on healing, which seems to work. What is the Course's view on this? Does it say anywhere that we will heal and be healed? I am uncomfortable with some of Mary Baker Eddy's writings on sin and punishment, and much of the Bible, and feel much more comfortable with the teachings of the Course. Is there any way I can get the practical healing of the Christian Science way, but by study of the Course rather than Christian Science?

A: There are many striking parallels at the metaphysical level between the teachings of Christian Science and the Course. Both proclaim the reality of spirit and the unreality of sin and sickness. Both see the latter as errors of a mind that has forgotten its true nature and only Life in God, Who is only Love and Who can be the source of nothing unlike Himself.

But at the level of purpose and practice they may be seen to diverge. Christian Science has a major focus on healing the illnesses of the body as a demonstration of the truth and validity of its principles. The Course, as you have been aware, has no concern for bringing about change at the level of form, or the body. Its purpose is to teach and accelerate the process of forgiveness in the mind as a means of awakening from the dream, and not simply for the "healing" of its effects as experienced in the body.

The process of healing articulated by Christian Science reflects principles similar to the Course's: that all physical healing comes from a decision of the mind and that the ministrations of physicians and healers in the realm of medicine and other material interventions have an effect only because of the beliefs in the mind of the one who is sick. But Christian Science advocates going to the source of illness in the mind in order to bring about the physical healing, rather than turning to the physicians of the world, while the Course bypasses concern with the *effects* of the mind's error and advocates changing the mind so that the mind itself can be healed of its guilt. Along the way, the body may very well be healed, and the Course suggests that in several passages (e.g., **W.pl.136.17**; **M.5.II.2**). But that is never the goal. Jesus remarks in one passage, which may be seen as a correction for Christian Science's emphasis on the

body's healing: "Thus is the body healed by miracles because they show the mind made sickness, and employed the body to be victim, or effect, of what it made. Yet half the lesson will not teach the whole. The miracle is useless if you learn but that the body can be healed, for this is not the lesson it was sent to teach. The lesson is the *mind* was sick that thought the body could be sick; projecting out its guilt caused nothing, and had no effects" (T.28.II.11:4,5,6,7).

Because Mary Baker Eddy was concerned with defending the validity of Christian Science against its detractors, she emphasized its greater effectiveness in bringing about release from symptoms in comparison to traditional medical interventions, which she perceived as only reinforcing the erroneous belief in the power of matter in the minds of physician and patient alike. As a result, there has been a strong tendency for many of her followers to take the position that seeking medical intervention is somehow wrong, even sinful. The Course, because of its emphasis on awakening from the dream, accepts that the mind may need to use whatever means it can accept, including doctors and medicine, to allay its fears that are being manifested as physical symptoms. But over time the mind will come to accept its power of choice in all matters, as its fear of acknowledging that power, as well as the accompanying guilt, diminishes through the practice of forgiveness (T.2.IV.4,5).

There is nothing wrong with using the teachings of Christian Science to help resolve physical symptoms and problems you may be experiencing. But it may be helpful to keep in mind Jesus' words, noted above. For if your only purpose is to heal your body, you will have missed the tremendous opportunity for healing the guilt in your mind over the separation that the physical symptoms always point back to. But as you remember the Course's purpose, the application of the principles of Christian Science may become a helpful classroom in which to deepen your understanding of the Course's teachings on forgiveness, as you appreciate the similarities as well as the important differences between the two paths.

Q #513: Is it correct that the Holy Spirit, of *A Course in Miracles*, and the witness/watcher in Eastern teachings, are similarly defined?

A: It would be more accurate to say that the decision-making part of the mind, when it is aligned with the Holy Spirit and observing the ego without judgment, is similar to the witness in Eastern teachings. While the Course speaks of the Holy Spirit as if He were a distinct entity that performs certain functions, such as Guide, Comforter, Interpreter, Teacher, and Voice for God, as we progress with the Course, we will come to see that these are only useful symbols or metaphors for a mind that still believes in duality and so still believes Help is needed from a Source outside itself (for further discussion on the Course's symbolic or metaphorical use of language, see Questions #72 and #156). The Holy Spirit plays no active role in the mind but is simply a Thought or a Presence that reminds. It reminds us of the other way, the peaceful, conflict-free, alternative to the ego (T.5.II.7:1,2,3,4,5,6,7). And it is that reminder that allows us to look at our ego without guilt or fear or condemnation.

Q #514:

i. What *A Course in Miracles*' teaching regarding karma?

A: Although *A Course in Miracles* does not use the word *karma*, which is the term found in Eastern spiritual teachings for the law of cause and effect, the Course certainly addresses the concept in many passages. Linear time is a central aspect of karma, or cause and effect, in the ego's world. In the Course, Jesus tells us that cause and effect are not separate (T.26.VII.13:1) and it is only in the thought system of separation that the two can seem distinct. And it is only in the world of separation and time that karma, or the world's law of cause and effect, can operate. Once we find ourselves (by our choice) within the world's belief system, karma becomes neutral, although initially the ego developed the notion of cause

and effect to establish the reality of separation, including the consequences of guilt and punishment for our attack on God. None of this of course is real, from the Course's perspective. But given that we believe in the law of cause and effect -- a by-product of our belief in the reality of the separation -- Jesus shows us a gentler application of the principle.

The ego would have us believe that there are inevitable consequences for all our acts and failures to act within the world. Good acts beget good consequences and bad acts beget bad consequences. And there is a dualistic balance that needs to be maintained, or a debt that has to be paid, as a result of all of our choices in the world.

Jesus, however, shifts the focus from the world to our mind, where he helps us learn to recognize that the only choice we are ever really making is in our mind, between the ego thought system and the thought system of the Holy Spirit. And it is only within the mind that cause and effect have any real meaning. Each thought system has consequences in terms of whether or not we experience peace of mind. And our peace in the present depends only on our choice in the present, having nothing to do with any decision we have made in the past. This understanding has the potential of releasing us from the karmic cycle that seems to require that we experience the consequences of our actions in time and space. And forgiveness is the Course's practice for releasing us from any so-called karmic debt. For additional discussions on karma from the perspective of the Course, see Questions [#332](#) and [#363](#).

ii. Why are some words italicized and some capitalized in *A Course in Miracles*?

A: Words italicized in the Course are ones Helen underlined in the scribing process because, in her experience, Jesus had placed greater stress or emphasis on those words or phrases when he dictated the Course to her. An excessive number of words had been underlined originally, and so they were reduced to include only those that seemed to require added emphasis (*Absence from Felicity*, p. 354)

Words in general are capitalized when they refer to God, Christ or the Holy Spirit. Son in *Son of God* is always capitalized, at Jesus' request, even when it refers to the Son in the separated state (and so, not Christ), "to emphasize the inclusion of all of us as part of God's one Son" (*Concordance of A Course in Miracles*, p. ix) as a correction for traditional Christianity's use of the term only for Jesus. For further discussion of the rules of capitalization in the Course, see the "Guide to the Use of the Concordance" at the beginning of the Concordance.

Q #515: A friend of mine has recently started studying the Kabbalah. Do you believe that *A Course in Miracles* and Kabbalah are compatible?

A: On the level of *form*, spiritual paths are not really compatible with each other, since they reflect different approaches both to understanding and realizing truth. That is why there are *different* paths. On the level of *content*, however, since their goals are the same, differing paths are compatible in purpose. As the Eastern saying states: "Truth is one; the sages know it by many names. And in *A Course in Miracles*: **"There are many thousands of other forms [of the universal course], all with the same outcome" (M.1.4.2).**

In speaking about *A Course in Miracles* and the Kabbalah, we can make the same observation. Their goal is truth, or God, yet they are different in theology and in practice. The Course's metaphysics is non-dualistic, while the Kabbalah -- not an integrated body of teaching, by the way -- is not. Forgiveness, the central focus of *A Course in Miracles*, is not primary at all in the Kabbalah; nor is the role of the Holy Spirit. Both thought systems, however, emphasize the importance of reuniting God's fragmented creation. *A Course in Miracles* would see this fragmentation as illusory, a point the Kabbalah does not recognize.

In the end, however, if one's spiritual path is enhanced by *both* the Kabbalah and *A Course in Miracles*, then who is to say that is a mistake? "By their fruits you shall know them" remains the only criterion that matters. If the combined practice of these two spiritualities leads to a life of peace and love, then one would be a fool not to pursue it.

Q #516: For years I studied about reincarnation, past lives, hypnotic regression, soul mates, communication with spirit guides, guardian angels, and deceased loved one, etc. I learned how divine friends help us plan each lifetime -- selecting our family, country, trials and tribulations, etc. -- in order to balance our karma and progress spiritually by overcoming our problems here. Now *A Course in Miracles* tells me that the ego has set up our lives, not to experience spiritual growth, but to continue to be victimized and victimize others. If all these guides and helpers are miscreations of our egos, can they serve a holy purpose? Are past life memories stored in the brain or are they in the ego mind? I also studied the power of thought to attract all the worldly things we may want. Is this the brain or just our ego mind miscreating by wanting something? I learned through religion to pray to God through Jesus for help and received many, many answers, for which I thanked them. Now the Course tells me they weren't listening. So how were all those prayers answered -- the ego mind again, or the brain?

I see now what a distraction all this was for me. Some of what I was sure was the "gospel truth" (according to the ego) certainly kept me from looking elsewhere. But through it all many truths showed up that prepared me for the Course. So how should I look at all this?

A: Perhaps it would be most helpful simply to remind you that everything, including *A Course in Miracles*, comes within an ego framework (**C.in.3:1**). And the only criterion for evaluating anything in the world of form (which includes everything you've listed in your question) is to ask whether it has been helpful in learning to forgive ourselves and our brothers and sisters. And what is helpful depends on where we are in our process of remembering who we are (**M.25**).

It is only the ego that would want to judge whether the manner in which we have spent our time in the past has been helpful or not. If what we have done has prepared us for accepting the truth of who we are at a deeper level, that is surely enough. And if it has provided us comfort in knowing that we are loved and that guilt serves no useful purpose, it has been a reflection of the one Love that joins us all, in a form that our fearful minds could accept.

Yes, if we remain stuck in any particular form, it is likely that we will fall into the trap of using it to reinforce specialness and separation. But anything that leads us to recognize that there is more to us than the limited reality of our meager lives in this world of conflict and pain is helpful. And anyone or anything, although appearing separate from us -- be it angels or guides or ascended masters or whatever -- that helps us learn that we deserve to escape from our limitations has served a holy purpose.

No matter what the form of our lives as we have set them up, they always have two possible purposes, depending on which teacher we choose to learn from. The Holy Spirit, in contrast to the ego, will never direct us to do anything that will deliberately cause us pain. Rather He will support our choice to learn from our experiences that there is an alternative to pain and suffering. And so guidance from the Holy Spirit, whether it seems to occur prior to or during a specific lifetime, may direct us to participate in certain relationships -- not to be victimized again, but to heal them by learning that victimization is impossible.

It is the mind -- and never the brain, which only follows the programming of the mind -- which determines what our experiences will be. And the mind, not the brain, holds all the memories that it can choose to access as either past, present, or future lifetimes. In the "reality" of the split mind, they are all simultaneous.

No doubt more questions will continue to arise in our minds, curious to know how this illusory world and the self that we made and still seem to love work. And yet, in the end, all of our questioning will cease and our need for all forms, including the Course itself, will subside. And then we will be ready to accept Jesus' gentle suggestion:

Simply do this: Be still, and lay aside all thoughts of what you are and what God is; all concepts you have learned about the world; all images you hold about yourself. Empty your mind of everything it thinks is either true or false, or good or bad, of every thought it judges worthy, and all the ideas of which it is ashamed. Hold onto nothing. Do not bring with you one thought the past has taught, nor one belief you ever learned before from anything. Forget this world, forget this course, and come with wholly empty hands unto your God (W.pl.189.7).

Q #517: i. Would something like mathematics be a language of God, or would it be what would seem a faultless creation of the ego in order to prove that the world and everything in it does indeed have a sensible and coherent structure and thus is real?

A: The view of reality as presented in *A Course in Miracles* is that it is non-dualistic, a perfect Oneness, and therefore anything pertaining to form cannot be of God. The "beauty" of mathematics may indeed be used as a reminder of the beauty of oneness, but as a language of quantity, mathematics can only have come from the ego. The concept of coherence, for example, implies duality: parts sticking together. The language of God could never be understood by minds that believe they are individualized, which Jesus tells us many times in his Course, most notably and eloquently in Chapter 25 and Lesson 169: ". . . **for while you think that part of you is separate, the concept of a Oneness joined as One is meaningless**" (T.25.I.7:1); "**We say 'God is,' and then we cease to speak, for in that knowledge words are meaningless**" (W.pl.169.5:4).

ii. My second question is concerned with what is happening in Iraq and the rest of the world at the moment (or maybe throughout history really). Millions of the casualties of wars and sanctions have been children. Would *A Course in Miracles* be saying that in some way these people have imposed this suffering on themselves?

A: To answer your question adequately, we would have to explain the metaphysics of the Course and the entire thought system of the ego, which we obviously cannot do here. So we will just answer briefly, and then refer you to answers we have given to some other Questions that might help you.

The Course does not teach that we, as individual human beings, impose suffering on ourselves, mainly because "we" (infants as well as adults) are the effects of the mind's choice to project its guilt outside itself. Indeed, the world itself is the effect of the mind's projection of its guilt. This is very difficult to comprehend, let alone accept, because we do not experience ourselves as having a mind -- a brain, yes, but not a mind outside time and space. That lack of awareness is a direct result of the ego's "success" in achieving its goal of making the Son of God mindless and having the conflict and forces in the world be the cause of victimization. And so Jesus' objective in his mind-training exercises, especially in the early lessons of the workbook, is to help us recover this dimension of ourselves. There is no hope for our release from suffering until we make progress in this and bring the hatred in our minds to the gentle presence of Jesus, where it can be dissolved in his love, for the ego would always seek to keep us bound to its merciless thought system by having us continually look outside ourselves for the causes and solutions of our problems and suffering. So despite the seeming escalation of brutally destructive forces in the world, the ultimate cause of suffering is still the mind's choice to absolve itself of its guilt over having rejected Love (an illusory rejection, of course) by projecting it onto a world that then embodies that guilt in the form of an endless series of victim-victimizer relationships.

It is important to keep in mind as one works with these teachings and principles that none of this means that one should not be active in the world or act to prevent cruelty and oppression. That would be a serious misunderstanding of what this Course teaches and advocates. We are encouraged only to become more and more discerning as to whether we are proceeding with the ego or Jesus directing us.

A review of these Questions might be of further help: [#239](#), [#365](#), [#371](#), and in Kenneth and Gloria's book, *The Most Frequently Asked Questions About A Course in Miracles*, " #27 answers the question "Are babies born innocent?"

Q #518: I have been a student of *A Course in Miracles* for the past two years, and I recently read a book called *I Am David*. In the book the young boy is imprisoned for a period of months. He asks God why has this happened to him. After a sleep he wakes up and realizes that it was his own hatred of another boy that has imprisoned him. Now as I understand it, God showed him in his sleep the reason for his imprisonment. On waking, he understands this and writes a letter to this boy apologizing to him. He then finds a way to escape. Would it be correct to understand that Lesson 198 "Only my condemnation injures me" (W.pl.198) is saying exactly this? When things go wrong for me I try to see where I have done this, and then put it right. When I do this am I making my errors real? Should I just understand them, hand them over to the Holy Spirit, and just not do it again or should I try to put it right?

A: The lesson you refer to teaches us that our belief that we can in truth judge and condemn others or ourselves is the problem. The belief that we can rightfully judge and condemn makes us feel vulnerable, because we would then believe that others have that same ability and can use it against us to injure us. But Jesus is helping us realize that attack is impossible in reality; it can not be a part of us as God created us, and therefore it can only be part of an illusory existence: **"The stillness of your Self remains unmoved, untouched by thoughts like these, and unaware of any condemnation which could need forgiveness" (8:1).** So Jesus is talking about a deep layer of belief in our minds, which can be undone just by our forgiving ourselves for ever having thought it could be true -- it is just a silly thought.

The application of this in our everyday lives involves first recognizing the cause and effect relationship between our unforgiving thoughts (our judgments and condemnation) and our suffering (9:5), and then the healing power of forgiveness (9:6). Forgiveness may or may not extend to behavior (making things right in form). The important aspect of this process is the perception of separate, conflicting interests -- seeing our own interests as separate from another's. If that perception is not first present in our minds, attack and condemnation would be impossible, regardless of what has been done in the world. Thus if behavioral corrections are undertaken without a corresponding correction in perception, nothing of real value has been accomplished, even though relationships may seem to have been repaired externally. Further eruptions are inevitable if one's perception has not been corrected. And that is done simply by bringing the unloving thoughts of separation to the loving presence of Jesus or the Holy Spirit in our minds, where they will be seen as meaningless and without effect.

One final observation. You say "when things go wrong for me I try to see where I have done this, and then put it right." What you mean by "things going wrong" is not clear. All kinds of things may go wrong in a person's life -- for example, being robbed or cheated, losing a job, being wrongfully accused -- but that does not necessarily mean the person is holding onto grievances or judgments. (Jesus' life did not seem to go all that well in the end, but his mind was totally without guilt.) The world was made to be a place where things go wrong, and egos can be quite vicious. However, if you do not perceive yourself as a victim, then you will not experience suffering. So we must be very cautious about judging simply on the basis of form or external appearances.

David's experience therefore should not be taken as the norm of forgiveness. If you are aware of having attacked another person, it is always best to ask for guidance as to what is best for everyone involved before going to apologize. In other words, don't take it for granted that a literal apology is always the best

expression of forgiveness. On another level, David's story could also be taken as symbolic of the Son's need to forgive himself for having accused himself of committing the "unforgivable" sin of destroying the Oneness of Heaven in order to have his own special existence as an individual. Forgiveness as taught in the Course is radically different from the world's version, which always sees sin as real but pardonable in certain instances and under certain conditions. The concept of sin is entirely an invention of the ego, and so our inner work is ultimately aimed at exposing and then letting go of this faulty belief.

Q #519: I'm aware that my special relationship is standing in the way of my relationship with God and I know I must therefore "really" want the relationship with God more than the special relationship. Do you have any hints about how to deal with the moments of crisis when I can't seem to think clearly?

A: The first thing to recognize is that this is not an either-or situation. It is the ego that tells us we must give up or sacrifice our special relationships, as if we have to appease God's need that we have no false gods before Him. That is only the ego's foolishness. *A Course in Miracles* is very clear that it is not our relationships that we need to give up, but the purpose that we have given them (e.g., **T.17.IV.2:3,4,5,6,7; T.21.III.6**).

The second point to remember is that it's not a sin to want a special relationship more than God. Jesus would tell us it's pretty foolish, because we're giving up everything for a little bit of nothing. But it's no cause for feelings of sinfulness and guilt, as the ego again would have us believe.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, you don't want to forget that it is through our relationships with our brothers that we in fact find God (e.g., **T.4.VI.7,8; T.19.IV.D.11**). The Course's means for us to remember God is to practice forgiveness in our special relationships, which allows them to be experienced as holy (**T.18.VII.5:1,2,3**). If they were already holy, we would not need to forgive them. And if we were to give them up, we would have no classroom in which to learn the Holy Spirit's lessons of forgiveness. As Jesus reminds us, **"Only appreciation is an appropriate response to your brother. Gratitude is due him for both his loving thoughts and his appeals for help, for both are capable of bringing love into your awareness if you perceive them truly. And all your sense of strain comes from your attempts not to do just this. How simple, then, is God's plan for salvation"** (**T.12.I.6:1,2,3,4**).

Q #520: My sister has been treated for cancer for the last two years. It has a hold over the whole family. This is her illusion of herself, but we have all joined in with her. I am very judgmental about how the rest of the family reacts: some don't ever want to hear anything bad. I am dealing with my feelings of going to Jesus constantly and trying to understand that he is my teacher, and this is the classroom I have chosen. I don't get any relief from my anxiety about her condition. I just say to myself that I need do nothing, for really there is nothing I can do. It is difficult to go on with my daily life, many miles away from the situation, without thinking of this situation constantly, even waking up in the earliest morning hours thinking about it. I feel that it is the ego saying to me, "So you think you are going to be peaceful now and relax and let others live their lives and not be bothered by it. How about this new situation!" How can it be that the ego seems more real than Jesus. Though I know it is not.

A: The process of having the ego become less real and Jesus more real usually extends over many, many years. A great deal of patience is required, a process he describes in the manual of *A Course in Miracles* in the section called **"Development of Trust" (M.4.I)**. When we first start asking for help, we are not all that aware of what is involved, especially the depth of our fear of letting go of the ego totally, and having the love of Jesus be the only reality in our minds. It seems as if we truly want that more than anything, but there must be something in the way, otherwise the ego would just vanish. So as we go along, we begin to get in touch with the obstacles, and how we probably are secretly asking for a compromise: we want the love of Jesus, but we also want a happy, problem-free life here in the world,

where things like cancer don't happen or are cured quickly. That is why Jesus so often in the early workbook lessons directs us to search our minds for thoughts we have covered over or locked away beyond reach. We all say we want to develop a relationship with Jesus, but we have secretly set up our own terms for the relationship instead of coming to him with empty hands and altars cleared of all expectations and demands.

Jesus would want you to bring to him your judgments about your family and all of your anxiety and sense of helplessness about your sister, so that together you can look at it all quietly and calmly from a perspective above the world's complexity and despair. You shift from the seeming reality of the ego to the love of Jesus simply by learning to look at the ego without judging it, being afraid of it, or trying to drown it out with right-minded thoughts. The ego becomes less real as you practice more and more being at peace within yourself (without denying your feelings) whatever the outcome of your sister's situation. This is a very difficult lesson to learn, and no one finds it easy. But Jesus assures us that we cannot fail to learn it, and that his love is totally unaffected by whatever the ego throws up at us -- its seeming power cannot even stop the fall of a button, he tells us **(T.18.IX.6:4)**. Hear him say to you and your sister: **"Have faith in only this one thing, and it will be sufficient: God wills you be in Heaven, and nothing can keep you from it, or it from you. Your wildest misperceptions, your weird imaginings, your blackest nightmares all mean nothing. They will not prevail against the peace God wills for you" (T.13.XI.7:1,2,3)**. What is so extraordinarily helpful about this passage, besides its comforting reassurance, is that Jesus is telling us that he knows about our thoughts, our discouragement, our craziness, and our resistance, but none of that matters to him. The lesson is that we learn to trust that all of our mad ego attacks are nothing but attempts to hide the love underneath that is our permanent identity. The more we approach the ego this way, the more we are telling Jesus that we know his love is more real than the ego.

Q #521: Are we one mind with many spirits? Or are we just one mind that has gone mad and believes it is many? If the second part is true then I am really asking myself this question and would get the answer back from myself. This can make one feel nuts, you do know that, don't you? Or, again, am I a spirit, which God created and infused part of His Mind into me? If that be the case then I can understand the word Sonship -- it is many personalities that are actually ONE together which would mean that yes we are our own expressions of God individually but we can not be that without each other. Or have I totally lost track of the whole thing? Please help.

A: There is no really satisfactory way to answer your question because it is like trying to understand what sanity is from within the insane asylum. Everything we see is a good demonstration of what is not reality, but none of it can give us even a glimpse of what the truth in fact is. We can speak in symbols and metaphors, but the truth of Who we are is beyond all such feeble-minded attempts to portray what is beyond portrayal. There is no relationship between our experience here within the split mind and our reality as God's one Son, complete and whole and undifferentiated, in Heaven. There is a memory of oneness, which at best allows us to recognize that something is not right here and that there is Something else to which we yearn to return. But even the notion of return is an illusion, since we have never in reality left **(T.6.II.11:1,2)**. How then can we possibly understand reality when our experience so clearly seems to contradict the truth?

The one Mind has not gone mad -- It remains unchanged. What seems to be many is only illusion, a dreamlike state that creates a cacophony of discordant notes that seem to have replaced the harmonious single note of Heaven's pure melody but have only covered it over, or *seem* to have covered it over. There is no path that will allow us to trace our experience here as seemingly separate fragments back to

the oneness that is our reality because they are totally discontinuous states, one real and one false. Reality has not changed and the separation bears absolutely no relationship to it. In the end, we will simply release all of our thoughts and questions and concepts, and truth will for a fleeting moment seem to fill the void. And our one Life will continue on, uninterrupted and uninteruptible, as it always has.

Q #522: Many things in this world are pleasurable yet clearly at odds with what *A Course in Miracles* teaches. I like calculus and physics and find myself working on problems for the joy of the exercise. It is one of the pleasures of the illusion and, yes, it keeps me rooted very much in this world. Yet there is the promise of oneness but it does not motivate me enough to practice the silence on a regular basis.

A: It sounds as if you may be confusing the Course with other spiritual paths. There would be nothing within the disciplines of calculus or physics that in themselves would be at odds with the teachings of the Course. All the forms of the world, once we find ourselves within the illusion, are neutral. The only question the Course encourages us to ask is what purpose will we give them (**T.4.V.6:4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11**). And there are only two alternatives: the ego's purpose of separation (**T.11.V.7**) and the Holy Spirit's purpose of forgiveness (**T.25.III.5:1,2,3**).

So, for example, if you use working on calculus or physics problems as a way of avoiding someone with whom you are having difficulty, escaping into the mental activity to push away uncomfortable or unpleasant feelings, your purpose would be to maintain the separation. In contrast, if you saw the simple elegance of the solution to a particular calculus or physics problem as a reminder of the simplicity that we all share as God's one Son, your purpose would be forgiveness or healing.

The primary practice of the Course is not meditation or contemplation, but forgiveness (**T.18.VII.4,5,6**). The Course more clearly than most other spiritual paths not only acknowledges but explains our resistance to the oneness, and does not judge us for it. It is not that God has chosen to keep Himself hidden from us but that we have chosen to hide from Him, out of fear of His retribution for our perceived sinfulness. And so, rather than a direct approach to the truth and oneness that many other paths embrace, represented by meditative and contemplative practices, the Course offers an indirect approach that focuses on undoing -- forgiveness -- rather than doing (**T.14.I.4,5**). So simply recognizing your resistance to the oneness and not judging yourself for it would be putting the Course's principles into practice. And becoming more aware of the purpose you have chosen for everything in your life, including but not limited to your favorite pursuits, will allow you to make a different choice when you recognize you have given them the ego's purpose.

Q #523: i. If I can convince you in my surety of being sinless or communicate to you that you are sinless, and that in no way do I see you other than perfect, then, a healing of the mind is assured and forgiveness is the outcome. Both of us are healed. Is this true?

ii. "I am as God created me" is a fact. This means that I am an Effect of God's creation. Therefore the self that claims to be me could not be real. If an effect can make a cause then it may be possible. But what is an effect cannot produce a cause if the cause is not

real, and if the cause is over long ago. I may believe that I exist and am conscious of my self, but how can "self-consciousness" make the Self? For example, there's on the one hand self and on the other, awareness of self (consciousness). The self, cause, produces the effect, awareness of self. BUT, the self in truth is an Effect of God's creation, being an effect it cannot become a cause.

Therefore, my consciousness is an effect and not a cause. To make it cause would be thinking in circles. If the ego is self conscious then it cannot be real. It is impossible. What is an effect cannot become a cause, therefore my self-consciousness must be an illusion and not real. Is that correct?

A: With respect to your first point -- that by your convincing me of our sinlessness and perfection, forgiveness and healing will result -- *A Course in Miracles'* position would actually be the reverse. Our sinlessness and perfection are beyond convincing but we don't believe it. Forgiveness is the process that allows us to remove all the obstacles to this conviction -- remembering our sinlessness and perfection is the result. If we had to convince each other that we are sinless, starting as we do from the perspective that we are separate and that there is someone outside ourselves whom we need to convince, we would be placing ourselves in charge of the Atonement. The outcome likely would be no more auspicious than the seeming results of the ego's tiny mad idea.

With respect to your second point, if I am understanding your statement correctly that an effect can not be a cause, the Course again would disagree. In fact, Jesus asserts that God as our Source and Cause has shared all of His power with His Son, giving him the same ability to create (i.e., to be a cause) that He has -- God would withhold nothing from His Son. And so the Son, as the Effect of God Who is his Cause, in turn causes his own effects or creations through the extension of the love that God had extended to him in his creation (**T.8.III.3; T.8.VI.6; T.28.II.1; W.pII.326.1**). The only difference is that the Son can not be the first Cause. And it is God's primacy as the Source of all to which the ego objects (**T.11.in.1,2**).

Your conclusion -- that nothing is real in the realm of consciousness and the self that we believe we are -- is true, but not for the reasons you present. The cause of consciousness is the ego, but the ego -- the thought of separation -- is not real, and so therefore anything that seems to follow from a cause that is not real -- causelessness -- cannot be real either (**T.28.II.3:1,2,3,4,5**).

And one final point of clarification may be helpful. Whenever the Course refers to the self, it is referring to illusion. The true Self that we are (always capitalized in the Course) is the Christ, continuous with Its Source and knowing nothing of consciousness or individuality. The self (always lower case in the Course) refers to the fictional individual, conscious identity that has seemed to emerge simultaneously with the thought of separation. It is illusory and, although originating in wrong-mindedness (the ego), can be trained to achieve a right-minded level of perception culminating in what the Course calls the real world -- a reflection of the One- mindedness of Heaven (**C.1.5,6,7**). But it has no reality and no relationship to our true Self in Heaven.

Q #524: I have been unemployed for almost a year now and am not having much luck finding a job. A *Course in Miracles* says that everything happens as a result of thought and not action. I believe that my

true work is in something that I have always loved and it has never left me! Could it be because I haven't found a "regular job" that I am supposed to go do my dream work? That if I just start doing it and trusting in the Holy Spirit for guidance that it will manifest? I am feeling rather lost and frustrated and like a loser because nothing has come about yet, but many small things regarding what I really want to do have shown up. Lesson 64 states that God just wants me to be happy because that is my function. I guess the question is, if I keep thinking about what I want, will it actually manifest itself?

A: The Course does teach that **"all thinking produces form at some level" (T.2.VI.9:14)**. But its purpose is not to teach us how to use our thinking to control or produce the forms we think we want. Rather, the Course's goal is to help us learn that we can find no real happiness in anything of the world **(T.31.IV)**. Now if you feel drawn to a certain type of work, and events seem to support your heading in that direction, by all means go for it, for there is nothing to be lost by pursuing your dreams. However, what is to be gained may not be quite what you're thinking it is. Contrary to most people's beliefs about their experience in the world, the Course's position is that nothing in the world can make us either happy or unhappy. And whatever dreams we are drawn to more than likely represent some form of specialness that will allow us to cover over, at least temporarily, the guilt we all carry buried in our minds over our belief in separation, so that it can't be healed. But such situations also provide valuable opportunities to learn our lessons of forgiveness if we accept the Holy Spirit's guidance.

This does not mean you should not take whatever joy or pleasure you may find in following what you believe to be your true work. But as a student of the Course, you want at least to be aware that all things of the world are double-edged; that is, they can seem to be the cause of pain as well as pleasure. And this is where the Holy Spirit's guidance can be most helpful. For His role is not to direct us in our life's decisions but rather to help us learn how to use whatever our life circumstances are to practice forgiveness. This is what Lesson 64 means when it says **"that the Holy Spirit has another use for all the illusions you have made, and therefore He sees another purpose in them. To the Holy Spirit, the world is a place where you learn to forgive yourself what you think of as your sins. In this perception, the physical appearance of temptation becomes the spiritual recognition of salvation" (W.pl.64.2:2,3,4)**. In other words, His purpose is to help us awaken from the dream, not make it a happier dream, by using what we have made for separation and specialness as a means for healing.

So when you say that God wants us to be happy, it is important to be clear that this lesson is saying we can be truly happy only if we forgive and do not seek for happiness in situations and circumstances outside ourselves. As Lesson 64 clearly states, **"The purpose of the world you see is to obscure your function of forgiveness. ...Only by fulfilling the function given you by God will you be happy. That is because your function is to be happy by using the means [forgiveness] by which happiness becomes inevitable. There is no other way. Therefore, every time you choose whether or not to fulfill your function, you are really choosing whether or not to be happy."** (W.pl.64.1:2, 4:1,2,34, italics added).

Q #525: Recently a friend of mine did something that really hurt my feelings. I've been trying to forgive him but I can't seem to get the incident out of my mind. So I went to the workbook section that begins with "What is Forgiveness" for a remedy. I didn't get beyond the first sentence: "Forgiveness recognizes what

you thought your brother did to you has not occurred." Would you please try to clarify what is meant by "never occurred" or "what didn't happen"?

A: Whatever occurred in *form* between you and your friend did take place. The workbook is not advocating denial of our experience in the dream. What your friend did *not* do is take your peace away, nor cause the feelings you may have. That can happen only as the result of a choice in the mind to choose against peace, by choosing to believe the separation is real. This means choosing the ego as teacher, accepting the ego's interpretation of what occurs in the dream of separation. Basic to the ego thought system is the belief that external circumstances are the cause of internal conflict. *A Course in Miracles* calls this magic and upside-down thinking. The miracle, on the other hand, is recognizing that nothing external has any effect on our peace.

One of the most important goals of the Course, if not *the* most important goal, is to teach us that we have a mind with the power to choose. It is this power to choose that is the foundation of the cause and effect principle. The line you quote from the workbook is one of the many ways the Course teaches this principle. You thought your brother caused you to be upset, by hurting you. That is not what happened. What did happen is that prior to any external event with your friend, you made a choice in your mind to identify with the ego by believing you are a separate individual in a body, rather than an innocent Son of God who is spirit, as God created you. That is where you really were. Guilt at having made this choice is projected outside of the mind in the form of reactions to all the upsetting situations encountered in relationships and the world.

When we attack our true Identity as the Son of God by identifying with the ego, we cannot *but* be hurt by everyone and everything in the dream. We are literally "under attack," but it is our own attack, as Jesus tells us in the text: **"All attack is Self attack. It cannot be anything else. Arising from your own decision not to be what you are, it is an attack on your identification. Attack is thus the way in which your identification is lost, because when you attack, you must have forgotten what you are" (T.10.II.5:1,2,3,4).** If a choice in the mind is the cause of how we feel, then we cannot be the victim of people or circumstances outside of the mind (**W.pl.31**); we cannot be hurt by anything external. Therefore: **"There is nothing to forgive. No one can hurt the Son of God" (T.14.III.7:5, 6).** Forgiveness begins with the willingness to recognize this process and see the mind as the true cause of your hurt, not your brother. Accepting that you cannot be hurt is the kindness of forgiveness offered to yourself, as well as to your friend.

(webmaster note: see also questions [272](#) [472](#))

Q #526: I recently read a book in which the author, a revered yogi, says that God told him that He (God) is projecting the world for His own purposes. Yet in *A Course in Miracles* Jesus says that we are projecting the world. With so many people, past and present, claiming to "hear God" or "channel Jesus" how can we know who to believe, especially when, in spite of their apparent sincerity and good will, they say diametrically opposite things, as cited above?

A: It is always a mistake to look for consistency at the level of form or symbol across various spiritualities. Only content can be consistent, and that has nothing to do with

theology or metaphysics. Even Jesus is inconsistent through his Course in the things that he says about forgiveness, healing and the miracle, and about the body and the mind. But his content is unwaveringly pure. And he acknowledges that those seeking controversy within the Course's teachings will find it **(C.in.2,3)**.

So a spiritual teacher, coming from a tradition and a set of symbols and myths very different from the Course's, inevitably will assert things inconsistent with or even contradictory to the Course's teachings. And what are we to do about these seemingly paradoxical assertions? The answer lies not within an analysis of the various forms of the teachings but rather with an honest assessment of your own response to the teachings, recognizing that not everyone will have the same response. The ego thought system is one of fragmentation and differentiation. Since the Holy Spirit uses for healing what the ego has made for separation, we will each work within the set of differentiated symbols that are personally most meaningful to us. Jesus recognizes this at the beginning of the manual when he observes that **"this is a manual for a special curriculum, intended for teachers of a special form of the universal course. There are many thousands of other forms, all with the same outcome" (M.1.4:1,2)**

For the key in one's search for a spiritual path is not to find the truth out there -- it's not out there (with apologies to *X-files* aficionados) -- but to be open to finding and following the path to which you personally resonate, that speaks to you in the symbols and metaphors that make sense to you. None of them is real, so all that matters is that you recognize the path that will serve *you* as a means ultimately to move beyond all form and symbols, even if you do not recognize that purpose when you first come to the teaching. For this reason, it makes no sense to try to persuade anyone else of the truth or falsity of any spiritual teaching. In the end, the only thing that can be true is that which transcends all symbols, all theologies, all metaphysical systems. Many paths lead to the same experience of oneness, but that does not mean that they are interchangeable for the individual. So respect rather than judge other paths, but don't forget that your goal is to find what will serve *you* best and then follow it. Anything else, including debating different theologies, is **"a defense against the truth in the form of a delaying maneuver" (C.in.2:3)**.

Q #527: What is the distinction between paragraphs in regular type and paragraphs in italics in the workbook of *A Course in Miracles*? Many of the lessons in the latter part of the workbook have one paragraph in regular and one in italics.

A: Beginning with Lesson 221, the italicized paragraphs are all prayers from us to God, our Father, and the other paragraphs contain the teaching. It is purely a stylistic matter.

Q #528: If I gave myself a name and an identity, is that the reason that I feel myself so terrible, worthless and unreal? Is it only necessary to look at it and accept it?

A: It's not only because you gave yourself a name and an identity, but what you believe you had to do to God in order to accomplish it, that explains why you -- and everyone else here -- feels terrible, worthless and unreal. In Heaven, there are no individual names and everyone shares the same Identity as Christ, God's only Son. It is the desire for something else and the willingness to do whatever it takes to bring that something

else about -- including the destruction of God and His All-encompassing Love-- that is the origin of our guilt and self-hatred. But in reality, God and our true Self remain unaffected. So even the feelings of worthlessness are nothing more than part of what we have chosen to experience to convince ourselves that we are separate. Making up a self with its own individual identity and name is just one further step in our insane attempt to prove we've done the impossible. But down deep we know it's all a lie, and so feelings of fraudulent deception and unreality must lie underneath our sense of self here in the world. Everything we then attempt to do in the world to counter our feelings of unworthiness and falsity only serves to reinforce those underlying, unquestioned beliefs about ourselves. The ego is indeed very clever!

This is why we need help from outside our thought system to be released from our self-imposed delusions. You have part of the answer when you ask if we need only to look at what we have made. Anything more than looking, any attempt at intervention, makes our attack on God real and only reinforces the ego's purpose of maintaining guilt and separation. So we look, not by ourselves, but with the part of our mind -- *A Course in Miracles* calls it Jesus or the Holy Spirit -- that knows our self is a lie but it is not a sin. And through that joined looking we can begin to question those underlying beliefs about ourselves and decide whether they really are serving our genuine best interests. The answer -- if we look honestly and nonjudgmentally -- is that they are not. Once we have begun to examine and then release those false judgments, we can then ask the Holy Spirit to replace them with a different perception of ourselves and everyone else, a true reflection of our reality as Christ.

Q #529: Lately, I have found myself dealing with many problematic areas in my projects at work, which also put pressure on my staff and vendors. Surprisingly, I find myself always remembering that "this, too, will pass" and I just do my level best to cope. With this in mind, I can see situations at the far end of it, being solved and forgotten. In the same way, I remind my staff to discuss and handle problems with the vendors' right mind with their own right minds. I hear how thankful they are about the new approach I suggested. My question is, how can I sustain handling problems this way, with little worry and faith that all will be well at the end? How can this faith be lived by, without waiver, canceling out all other needs, living in me for the rest of my life in this classroom? Does my thinking I'll have difficulty sustaining it mean that I still have little faith? Or must I continue to meet more "problematic situations" like these while believing that I have real problems to solve?

A: As *A Course in Miracles* itself alludes to in many places, mastery of its principles and their application is a process (e.g., **W.pII.284**; **M.14**). Our understanding of its teachings will necessarily progress through a series of levels as we develop a deeper sense of what it is telling us about the nature of forgiveness and who we truly are, which are closely related. This progression to deeper levels proceeds as we undo false concepts and beliefs about ourselves through practicing forgiveness at whatever level we are ready to understand and accept it.

So be patient with yourself. How the process appears to you in this present moment may not be how it will seem to you at some point in the future. Yet there is great value in continuing to step back and release your judgments about how things in the present should be. And you may ask yourself if there are other situations, perhaps outside the work setting, in your personal life, from which you may be withholding the application of these principles. For, when Jesus reminds us that we don't really know our own best interests (**W.pl.24**), he is including our entire life as we experience it. He is asking us simply to trust the process of forgiveness and generalize it to all areas of our lives. The rest will follow. As he clarifies in the introduction to the workbook, which can be applied to the process of forgiveness, which

after all is what the lessons are attempting to teach us: **"You are merely asked to apply the ideas as you are directed to do. You are not asked to judge them at all. You are asked only to use them. It is their use that will give them meaning to you, and will show you that they are true....But do not allow yourself to make exceptions in applying the ideas...and whatever your reactions to the ideas may be, use them. Nothing more than that is required"** (W.in.8:3,4,5,6; 9:4,5).

Q #530: *A Course in Miracles* states "seek not to change the world, seek to change your mind about the world"(T.21.in.1:7). Does this mean not to take a political or environmental stance? For instance, should we not sign a petition that opposes practices that are damaging to the environment, or work for political causes that are in opposition to the current political agenda? If the world is illusion, should we not care, or should we try to create a "happy dream"?

A: In *A Course in Miracles* Jesus teaches on different levels. Since the Course tells us the world does not exist, **"There is no world! This is the central thought the course attempts to teach"**(W.pl.136.6:2,3), it would be inconsistent with this teaching to give any instruction regarding behavior. The Course neither encourages nor discourages any specific form of activity in the dream. However, while it gives us a whole new perspective on the world, not the least of which includes the fact that the world does not exist, it also tells us: **"You dream of a separated ego and believe in a world that rests upon it. This is very real to you. You cannot undo it by not changing your mind about it"** (T.4.I.4:4,5,6). Thus the Course acknowledges that we *do* believe in our experience as bodies in the physical world, and it is very clear in cautioning us not to deny this experience: **"...it is almost impossible to deny its [body] existence in this world. Those who do so are engaging in a particularly unworthy form of denial"** (T.2.IV.3:10,11). It is precisely this belief in our identity as bodies in the world that needs to be healed through forgiveness.

Participating in political and environmental causes is no different from any of the other things we do: caring for the body, working at a job, playing golf. All these things make up the classroom where we practice forgiveness. If you are interested in political causes and feel inclined to some specific action, there is no reason not to pursue your interest. The difference for those who practice the Course is to have any activity, and the relationships that go with it, transformed to serve the Holy Spirit's purpose of healing, rather than the ego's goal of specialness. This process requires the willingness to look at all the judgments we bring to everything that we do. It is important to see all the ways we take sides, judge those who do not share our concerns, and find the "sinners" in any situation so they can be blamed for the mess we seem to be in. In these observations we have the opportunity to see how we make the world real by trying to fix it, instead of taking responsibility for the thought of separation that perpetuates it in our awareness. That is how we are meant to "change our minds about the world." It is also important to remember that none of the activities or causes we may engage in is more worthy or spiritual than any other. The only "spiritual" thing we do is forgive.

The "happy dream" is experienced in the mind, not in the world. While still in the dream, it is an awareness that it *is* a dream and not reality. Then, whether you get involved or not, whether the whales are saved or not, you remain at peace in the knowledge that your truth has not been affected by the insanity of the ego's lie of separation.

Q #531: Can you comment briefly on the meaning of a line in the prose poem, *The Gifts of God*. The line appears in the first section, "The Dream of Fear." The section's fourth paragraph talks about how the world and God differ in all respects: "Does God deceive or does the world? For it is sure that one must lie. There is no point at which their thoughts agree, their gifts unite in kind or purpose. What you take from one the other will obscure. There is no hope of compromise in this." I'm having trouble understanding the meaning in the line, "What you take from one the other will obscure."

A: This line simply means that the effects of a choice for either God or the ego can not be experienced in the presence of the other. The ego will obscure or hide from our awareness the gifts of peace and love that God offers us. But likewise, a choice for God will replace the ego's offerings of sin, guilt and fear with His gifts of love and peace, banishing the ego along with its gifts back into nothingness. We can only hold one in our awareness in any moment and the choice is ours. God and the ego are mutually exclusive and the choice is between one or the other. Near the end of the next paragraph in the poem, this idea is expressed again: **"Do not think that fear can enter where His gifts abide. But do not think gifts can be received where fear has entered...There are no scraps of dreams. Each one contains the whole of fear, the opposite of love, the hell that hides the memory of God...and hell is total."** And this same idea is reflected in Jesus' statement in *A Course in Miracles* that **"you cannot give up Heaven partially. You cannot be a little bit in hell" (M.13.7:3,4).**

Q #532: The Manual for Teachers of *A Course in Miracles* says that sometimes we are guided to say something from the Holy Spirit that may "confront the teacher with a situation that appears to be greatly embarrassing." I have had this experience lately and more and more as I practice forgiveness and learn to give up judgment I am able to let Jesus speak through me and sometimes I am indeed guided to say something that really is totally irrelevant and has nothing to do with what is going on in the situation. My question is: Why would the Holy Spirit want to put us in a situation that is embarrassing to us? Why would he want us not to feel comfortable? I sometimes feel like people look at me like I am crazy when I say something from my right mind, something that I don't even understand until later. I am seeing as time goes on that the Holy Spirit will say something through me and then I will not understand the depth of what I just said until later! But how does this relate to others?

A: This is one of those passages our egos would like to run with and interpret as evidence that the Holy Spirit does not really have our own best interests at heart. After all, you ask, why would the Holy Spirit want to put us in a situation that is embarrassing to us? But that is not really what this passage is saying. Embarrassment is an ego reaction that comes when our separate self feels threatened because we are not defending and protecting it.

It is not the Holy Spirit's intention to place us in embarrassing circumstances, although we may feel embarrassed when we set our ego aside momentarily and are willing to practice forgiveness, which is a thought of nonjudgmental defenselessness. That thought is first accepted into our minds and then may be expressed in words (or actions) that reflect a recognition of our shared interest and basic equality with all our brothers and sisters. This kind of acknowledgment can be embarrassing to an ego that always wants to come out on top, even when it adopts a false humility that seems to place us below others.

If you re-read this passage, you will see that Jesus says that what we hear "**may also seem to be quite irrelevant to the presented problem as he perceives it, and may, in fact, confront the teacher with a situation that appears to be very embarrassing to him. All these are judgments that have no value. They are his own, coming from a shabby self-perception which he would leave behind (M.21.5:3,4,5; italics added).**" In other words, the embarrassment is not in any way intrinsic to the situation but comes from our ego-based interpretations of who we think we are and what we think is acceptable for maintaining our self-esteem. And self-esteem is nothing more than an ego function that we believe is necessary to defend against our underlying sense of shame and guilt -- our "shabby self-perception."

As for whether we are hearing and speaking the words of Jesus or the Holy Spirit, it is probably best not to spend much time assessing whether the source in any specific situation is our right mind or our ego. Our ego, after all, can get pretty good at offering its own imitation of the Holy Spirit, expressing the form of "spirituality" but the content of separation. If you keep your focus on being aware of your own judgments and asking for help in releasing them whenever you are aware that they have arisen, then you will have done your part in getting yourself out of the way so that Jesus can manifest his loving presence through you. And should you find yourself embarrassed at anything you find yourself saying or doing, simply know that your ego's interpretations and judgments have again supplanted the Holy Spirit's gentle forgiveness in your awareness and you simply need to ask for His help again. It is not so much that the Holy Spirit will guide us to make deep and profound statements but that we will be speaking words that will remind us that we are all truly the same, that the differences between us that the ego would like to emphasize, the Holy Spirit sees as irrelevant. Remembering that is what is truly helpful to everyone, and not the specific words we may find ourselves speaking.

Q #533: I have been studying *A Course in Miracles* for over 10 years now, with a few extended breaks from it. I am doing the lessons again for a second time and they seem to be stirring the mud more than the first time as regards experiencing fear. You have answered many questions about fear and I am hoping you would have some tried and true responses in dealing with it.

A: Perhaps one of the most helpful things to remember in dealing with our fear is that it is always a result of our choice, no matter what our experience may tell us to the contrary. Here are a few of the many passages in the Course that make this clear (italics added): In speaking of the ego and the Holy Spirit, "**there are no other guides but these to choose between, and no other outcomes possible as a result of your choice but the fear that the ego always engenders, and the love that the Holy Spirit always offers to replace it**" (W.pl.66.7:5). "**No one can grieve nor fear nor think him sick unless these are the outcomes that he wants**" (W.pl.152.1:3). And "**Is not the escape of God's beloved Son from evil dreams that he imagines, yet believes are true, a worthy purpose? Who could hope for more, while there appears to be a choice to make between success and failure; love and fear?**" (W.I.200.6:5,6).

Most of the time, the choice is unconscious, but one of the goals of the Course is to help us become more aware of the decision, so we can make a different one. And one of the ways to make the choice more conscious is to understand why we would choose fear. Fear serves a very important ego purpose, validating the reality of the separation in our

experience. Fear affirms my existence as a separate being, threatened by forces outside myself. The feeling denies that I could possibly be one with my Source, beyond which there is nothing else. It really does not matter what I attribute my fear to, so long as I do not seriously question the reality of the danger to myself.

Although we experience fear towards all sorts of seemingly external forces in the world outside of us, the Course makes it clear that these are merely the result of the projection of the fear buried in our mind over the punishment -- certain death -- we believe we deserve for attacking God and destroying Heaven. But the deeper fear -- once we begin to accept that we've made up the fear of punishment and death in alliance with the ego to keep us mindless and are really attracted to it **(T.19.IV.B,C)** -- is the fear of love. For in the presence of total love, there are no differences, no distinctions and no individual identities.

Our fear of love is addressed in a number of passages, but no where is more clearly presented than in the beginning of **The Fear of Redemption: "We have said that no one will countenance fear if he recognizes it. Yet in your disordered state of mind you are not afraid of fear. You do not like it, but it is not your desire to attack that really frightens you. You are not seriously disturbed by your hostility. You keep it hidden because you are more afraid of what it covers. You could look even upon the ego's darkest cornerstone without fear if you did not believe that, without the ego, you would find within yourself something you fear even more. You are not really afraid of crucifixion. Your real terror is of redemption.**

Under the ego's dark foundation is the memory of God, and it is of this that you are really afraid. For this memory would instantly restore you to your proper place, and it is this place that you have sought to leave. Your fear of attack is nothing compared to your fear of love. You would be willing to look even upon your savage wish to kill God's Son, if you did not believe that it saves you from love. For this wish caused the separation, and you have protected it because you do not want the separation healed" (T.13.III.1:4:2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11; 2:1,2,3,4,5).

So to acknowledge the depth of our fear is helpful, but we also want to recognize that in our minds it serves as a powerful defense, protecting the identity that we cling to while we are too afraid to let go. And there is no pressure to let go. As Jesus assures us, **"Fear not that you will be abruptly lifted up and hurled into reality" (T.16.VI.8:1).** So as you move through the layers of your fear, remember to include Jesus in the looking process, for his presence is a reminder that fear is a choice, that it serves a very useful ego purpose, and, most importantly, all the seeming reasons for our fear are made up and have no basis in anything real. We don't believe that yet, but he knows it's true.

You mention that many questions have already addressed the issue of fear. Here are some of them: Questions [#95](#), [#242](#), [#267](#), [#355](#) and [#384](#).

Q #534: I have heard it said that *A Course in Miracles* says that we should "bring the illusion to the truth" rather than try to create a better illusion by trying to "bring the truth to the illusion." However, I was reading yesterday in the Text, Chapter 18, Section VIII, The Little Garden, which may be saying something different. In Paragraph 9 it says, "The Thought of God surrounds your little kingdom [ego illusion], waiting at the barrier you built [separation] to come inside and shine upon the barren ground. See how life springs up everywhere! The desert becomes a garden, green and deep and quiet, offering rest to those who lost their way and wander in the dust...." This seems to suggest that when we offer up our lives to the Holy Spirit for guidance, the desert of our lives becomes a garden? Could this process be thought of as "bringing truth to the illusion", resulting in an experience of what the Course calls a happy dream? Is this what the Course asks us to do?

A: Sorry, but much as our egos would like to have us believe it's so, Jesus is never saying anything about changing the external world or our seeming lives as separate bodies in that world, since there is no external world. As he says elsewhere, this world is an hallucination (**T.20.VIII.7:3**), so it's unlikely that he would want to help us make a better hallucination. Jesus is only speaking of mind and, in this passage, the little part of the mind we believe we have barricaded from God and set up as our own autonomous kingdom. When we are willing to stop "protecting" the little self that we believe we have split off from God through our thoughts of judgment and attack, then the love that is always there can flow through, shifting our perception from one of desolation and lack to one of joy and abundance.

When we offer our judgments (not our lives) to the Holy Spirit, we drop the barriers around our separate self. And to release those judgments to Him, we must first have looked at them and acknowledged our investment in them. And this is the process of bringing our illusions to the truth (**T.17.I.5**), so the truth can shine on the illusion and allow the love to replace the sin and guilt and fear. It is this kind of inner shift that Jesus is describing metaphorically through the imagery of the garden replacing the desert. Whether there will be some kind of corresponding shift in the images we are projecting from the mind will not matter to us, for we will share Jesus' understanding that none of it is real.

Q #535: I have a question about something I read in "The Guiltless World" in Chapter 13 of *A Course in Miracles*, in section VI, "Finding the Present". In paragraph 4 it says: "Past, present and future are not continuous...." Then it says: "You would destroy time's continuity by breaking it into past, present and future...." This is confusing to me. First it says past, present and future are not continuous. Then it says that I would destroy time's continuity. How can I destroy time's continuity if it is not continuous? Or, am I misreading this paragraph?

A: The key is in understanding that the ego and the Holy Spirit perceive the purpose of illusory time exactly the opposite (**T.13.IV.7:1,2**) and so each focuses on different aspects of time: the ego on the past and future; the Holy Spirit on the present. The ego wants to keep us trapped in the illusion of time for that keeps the ego alive. And so it attempts to establish an artificial continuity or link between the illusory past and the illusory future through guilt and fear, which makes time real in our experience. The ego literally ignores the present except as a fleeting moment in time that links the past and the future, with the future a fearful and inevitable continuation of the sinful, guilty past, with no hope of escape (**T.5.VI.2:1,2,3,4; T.13.I.8; T.13.IV.8**).

The Holy Spirit, in contrast, seeks to help us move beyond the illusion of time and so uses the present, the only aspect of time that approximates eternity, to extend to the infinite (**T.13.IV.7:3,4,5,6,7; T.13.VI.6**). The past's only value is that it can be undone through forgiveness, transforming it and purifying it so that it no longer conflicts with the present (**T.17.III.5**). For the Holy Spirit, the holy instant, the present moment, is one continuous instant without interruption or ending, which is the bridge between time and timelessness. If we do not experience its continuity, it is only because we have accepted the ego's interpretation of time, which attempts to impose an artificial continuity between a sinful past that has never happened and a future of punishment and pain that is nothing more than a sick fantasy (**W.pl.135.16**).

Q #536: Many times *A Course in Miracles* tells us to let go of our judgments and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us. It says that if we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us, all of our needs will be met. It also explains that "needs" means seeming needs that we perceive while we are still in illusion. It also says that we must awaken in peace. By this I understand it to mean that we cannot awaken from a dream of terror but first we must allow the Holy Spirit to guide us from our fearful dream to a "happy dream." Then, we can awaken. Do I understand this correctly? How can we be sure we are not following the guidance of the ego's judgments and mistaking them for the real Holy Spirit's guidance?

A: Your understanding is basically correct, provided you do not mean that you expect all your seeming worldly needs to be met so long as you follow the Holy Spirit's guidance. For if you do, you will be setting yourself up for certain disappointment. There are a few passages in the Course where the language seems to suggest this kind of Providential provision for our needs (e.g., **T.20.IV.8**, but see also Question #293), but these are intended as comforting passages to reassure us that God loves us and does not want to punish or hurt us in any way, as the ego would have us believe. As we come to understand the level of mind at which the Course is written, it becomes apparent that Jesus is referring to the obstacles and perceived needs in the mind, not in the body, which after all is only a lifeless projection of the thoughts of scarcity and need in the mind.

As for your question about hearing the Holy Spirit, His guidance is always and only to forgive (**T.25.VI.5:3,4,5,6; W.pl.99.9:6,7,8; W.pl.1.5:1**). And that does not require us to *do* anything. Rather it asks us to *undo* our judgments of attack and condemnation. Anything specific that we might say or do following that release of judgment is simply the form that our own minds, joined with the Holy Spirit, then give to the experience of love and peace that flow through our minds when we are not restricting their extension by our desire for something else. So long as you accept that your role is simply to recognize your ego's judgments and be willing to let them go, you need not concern yourself with anything else. You will be following the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Your concern about distinguishing between the ego's and the Holy Spirit's guidance has also been addressed in other Questions, including [#43](#), [#285](#), and [#309](#).

Q #537: As you probably have heard, the medical profession advises patients with the sexually transmitted disease (STD) of herpes -- which is claimed to be contagious forever -- to tell their sexual partner, and to use protective devices against transmitting the STD to his or her partner. And *A Course in Miracles* teaches disease is the effect of our belief of our guilt. So while guilt couldn't be contagious, how could a student of the Course think rightly about, talk rightly about, and act rightly about the STD of herpes?

A: While guilt is not contagious, it inevitably leads to the expectation of punishment. Following the ego's plan, as a defense against the agony over this guilt and fear in our minds we deny the mind and its contents and wind up believing we are bodies in a world with laws of its own. (See **W.pl.76.8** where Jesus lists some of these laws.) By choice, then, we (decision-making minds outside time and space) subject ourselves to these laws and block any awareness of the dynamics going on in our minds, which are the foundation of our experiences in the world. The whole thing is a setup, but if we are convinced that we are bodies, we had better pay attention to these so-called laws. Yes, it is true that disease is ultimately caused by our belief in the reality of guilt, but while we are working on that level, which is a step in the right direction, we cannot ignore or deny our bodily experiences, nor does Jesus think it is a good idea to do so (**T.2.IV.3:8,9,10,11**).

You single out herpes, but would you drink from a cup just used by someone with the flu? Would you accept blood from a donor known to have the AIDS virus? Would you allow your child to play with another

child who just came down with the measles? Would you eat at a restaurant where the food preparers have hepatitis? The point, again, is that if you believe you are a body, it is just common sense to do what normal people do in the world to protect themselves and others - - but without making a big deal about it. This is the compromise approach Jesus himself recommends (the reference to Chapter 2 above).

Q #538: A student has raised the question of whether we have a specific role to play in this world, and your answer was: not in the world, but in our minds. However, the Holy Spirit does help us "in the illusion," and there are several references in *A Course in Miracles* to specific roles and certain people we are supposed to meet, etc. The Course is also made within the framework of the illusion. I think you are doing a great job -- always giving wise answers, but in this case I do think you should discuss it further within your organization.

A: We are aware of the passages you refer to and that the Course comes within an ego framework (**C.in.3:1**). There is no doubt that people receive very specific guidance -- Helen Schucman, scribe of the Course, did. It is not wrong or harmful, as Jesus says in **The Song of Prayer**, but he clearly says that we will do much if we can get beyond that level, which he invites us to do (**S.I**). Helen learned that later, and then no longer related to Jesus that way. (Chapter 17 in Kenneth's book *Absence from Felicity* contains a very helpful exposition of this dimension of Jesus' teaching and Helen's transition to this level.) Then, too, Jesus is emphatic about our always taking into consideration the purpose of what we do. He tells us early in the workbook that we do not know what anything is for (**W.pl.25**); the purposes we recognize are all at a superficial level, where purpose cannot really be understood, he states, using the example of contacting someone by telephone (**4:2,3**). The relevance of this to your question is that we would not know what specific roles or relationships are truly for, and therefore we would impose our own meaning on them, which more than likely would be of the ego -- whereas the only meaning of value in anything we do is forgiveness. Therefore, the Holy Spirit's guidance would be exclusively for the content of forgiveness. The form in which that content is expressed then becomes essentially irrelevant. Our recorded workshop "**Making the Holy Spirit Special**" provides a detailed exposition of this crucial issue.

Interest in specifics is the stage of spiritual childhood, the beginning of a very long spiritual process that is aimed at helping us reach the top of the ladder where specifics become meaningless, including our specific identity as individuals. Referring again to the first section in the companion pamphlet to the Course, Jesus says that what we truly want is the *song itself*, nothing but God's Love. That is the real content of the answers we experience as specific guidance. He is training us to gravitate more to that content, rather than the form of the answer. We tend to fall in love with the specialness of receiving specific guidance and thereby miss the content, which is what would make us happy and peaceful all the time, regardless of external conditions. It is in this spirit that Jesus asks the rhetorical questions: "**What could His answer be but your remembrance of Him? Can this be traded for a bit of trifling advice about a problem of an instant's duration? God answers only for eternity**" (**S.I.4:5,6,7**). Granted, Jesus' perspective far transcends ours when he appeals to us this way, but all he is doing is inviting us to join him there because he knows how much more at peace we would be, and because that is where we truly belong.

So these two levels of Jesus' teaching must be kept in sight if one is to learn and use this Course as it was meant to be learned and used. When we focus on specifics it is as if we are holding up a thimble to receive the love that cannot be contained by any form. We are not aware that what we are secretly doing is trying to make love conform to our specifications, when the reality is that "**its total lack of limits is its meaning**" (**T.18.VIII.8:2**). Jesus thus appeals to us not to stay on the level of specifics, not because it is wrong or sinful to stay there, but because we are selling ourselves short. This world is not our home, he tells us in many ways throughout the Course, so why would we want to limit his help to our problems and aspirations in the world? He wants rather to help us identify the ways in which we keep ourselves alienated from our true Home and our true Identity. We did not even know that this is what our lives here were all about; now we do, and we have a teacher who will be with us each step of the way, from the beginning of the journey when we are interested mainly in his help with our lives in the world, to the

completion of the journey when we experience our oneness with each other: **"And thus you joined with me, so what I am are you as well" (W.pll.14.1:3)**. So when we see Jesus only as the one who can help us with our problems, unbeknownst to ourselves, we are limiting the relationship with him that he would so dearly like us to have.

Q #539: I have recently reviewed some of the sites on *A Course in Miracles* and wonder if it is they who are misunderstanding the Course or I. I understand that God created the universe and the heavens and earth and within that the Garden. Sin could be seen as a result of Adam and Eve's lack of love and their sense of shame for actions they did. This shame was the first illusion followed by many misunderstandings and illusions for many generations, the creation of the world as we know it, but not as God knows it and wants us to know it. Out of compassion God entered the "world of our illusions" through the human Jesus who was born seeing as God sees, and he taught us the Way out of our illusion "back" to the Kingdom of Heaven. If those statements are true then he was saying that we cannot see the world as God sees so we must follow the WAY he has taught us and change our hearts. Is that what the Course teaches or am I mistaken? If it is, then I really can't see the conflict with the Course and the biblical teachings of Jesus in the Gospels.

A: Although the Course uses the language of the Bible, including references to Adam and the Garden of Eden (**T.2.I.3:1,2,5,6; 4:5; T.3.I.3:9**), the symbolism behind its use of these words is very different from the Bible's. The Course aims to correct the basic teachings of Christianity and Judaism found in their scriptures, predicated as they are on the reality of sin and the need to do something about it; i.e., God sends His only Son into the world to make the perfect sacrifice. The Course's uncompromising position is that we could only seem to dream that we have acted against God and therefore there are no actions that could in any way be misconstrued as sin or attack. Direct corrections of biblical statements and principles can be found in a number of text sections, including **"Atonement Without Sacrifice" (T.3.I)** and **"Time and Eternity" (T.5.VI)**.

But the fundamental difference is that the Bible -- and this characterizes your understanding as well, as you present it above -- teaches that God created the world as something apart from Himself, and breathed life into separate beings with individual forms distinct from Himself. The Course, in contrast, teaches a pure non-dualism that says that God can only create or extend like Himself (e.g., **T.24.VII.7**) and that anything that is not like God -- which includes the world of form and everything contained within it -- can not be His creation and therefore cannot be real. Nothing in the universe, as vast as it may seem to be, is eternal or infinite (**T.29.VI.2**). And therefore God could not have made it. In the Course's own words, **"The world you see is an illusion of a world. God did not create it, for what He creates must be eternal as Himself" (C.4.1:1,2)**.

Within non-dualism, there can be no perception, for there is neither an observer nor an observed. So there can be no "seeing as God sees," for there is nothing outside of God for God to see. Now the Course may at times use language that seems to suggest otherwise, but none of this should be taken literally, for the Course is merely attempting to reach us in a language we can understand (**M.23.7:1**), caught as we seem to be in a finite world of duality and limitation.

For more on God and the world, see Questions [#121](#) and [#157](#). And for more on the metaphoric language of the Course and God, see Question [#42](#). And for further, in depth discussions of the differences between the Course and the Bible, the book *A Course in Miracles and Christianity: A Dialogue*, by Kenneth Wapnick, Ph.D., and W. Norris Clark, S.J., Ph.D., and the tape set *The Bible from the Perspective of A Course in Miracles*, by Gloria and Kenneth Wapnick, can be helpful.

Q #540: Could you please explain the difference between images and visions? The reason I ask is that what I see physically is what I am physically, and what the mind sees is my projection on the world. In the

other part of my mind as I pray I see also images of a different nature, like receiving an answer to a question to the Holy Spirit in symbolic form. My ego tempts me to disbelieve all images but that leaves me rather comfortless. Often these inner 'visions' have multiple interpretations, for which I have developed the habit of asking for the Holy Spirit's interpretation.

A: From the perspective of *A Course in Miracles*, all images or visions, whether they seem to be external in the world outside ourselves or to exist only within the mind, are the same. They are illusions projected by a split mind that believes it is outside of (separate from) God and Heaven. That is why the early workbook lessons alternate between having us focus on what we seem to see with our physical eyes and what we see with our mind's eye -- our thoughts and inner images -- for the inner and the outer are the same (e.g., **W.pl4**; **W.pl.31.2**; **W.pl.32.2,5**; **W.pl.33.1**).

The important difference is not in the form of the image nor in its seeming source in the world or in the mind, but in the purpose it serves, as you have been trying to determine. The same image can serve either an ego purpose or the Holy Spirit's purpose. If it leads you in the direction of fear, guilt, judgment, attack, specialness, self interest, etc., it is serving the ego's purpose of separation and sin quite effectively. And if it helps you to remember that your only aim is to release judgment and recognize shared interests, the Holy Spirit's purpose of forgiveness is the source of inspiration. These two alternatives are clearly articulated in the workbook lesson, "**All things I think I see reflect ideas**" (**W.pl.325**):

This is salvation's keynote: What I see reflects a process in my mind, which starts with my idea of what I want. From there, the mind makes up an image of the thing the mind desires, judges valuable, and therefore seeks to find. These images are then projected outward, looked upon, esteemed as real and guarded as one's own. From insane wishes comes an insane world. From judgment comes a world condemned. And from forgiving thoughts a gentle world comes forth, with mercy for the holy Son of God, to offer him a kindly home where he can rest a while before he journeys on, and help his brothers walk ahead with him, and find the way to Heaven and to God (W.pl.325.1).

And what this passage hopefully will help you see more clearly is that what we see reflects our own choice. Nothing we see comes to us uninvited. So if you find that you do not like what you are seeing, simply accept that you have made a mistake and would like the Holy Spirit's help in seeing differently (e.g., **W.pl.20,21,22**).

Q #541: I've been having trouble with chapter 12, section III, The Investment In Reality. Jesus says that if someone asks something "outrageous" we should do it because it does not matter. This causes me great fear because all my life I've been unable to say no and this is something I need to do for my own mental health. I thought that we were under no laws but God's and he never demands anything. This seems like a demand to me. It makes me feel like I am under anyone's control if they feel like asking me to do something and get mad if I don't. I must be interpreting this wrong because it causes fear in me unlike the rest of *A Course in Miracles*. How could God expect us to bow to others wishes like this. Does this not contradict all the rest?

A: Your confusion with this passage is a common one among Course students, because of our strong ego-based inclination to confuse form with content. Rest assured that Jesus is never talking about behavior but only our underlying thoughts and attitudes. Let's look at the sentence in the larger context:

"Recognize what does not matter, and if your brothers ask you for something 'outrageous,' do it because it does not matter. Refuse, and your opposition

establishes that it does matter to you. It is only you, therefore, who have made the request outrageous, and every request of a brother is for you. Why would you insist in denying him? For to do so is to deny yourself and impoverish both. He is asking for salvation, as you are. Poverty is of the ego, and never of God. No 'outrageous' requests can be made of one who recognizes what is valuable and wants to accept nothing else.

Salvation is for the mind, and it is attained through peace. This is the only thing that can be saved and the only way to save it. Any response other than love arises from a confusion about the 'what' and the 'how' of salvation, and this is the only answer" (T.12.III.4:1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8; 5:1,2,3).

In this particular passage, our tendency is to focus on the part of the statement "do it" although the words Jesus is emphasizing, indicated by the italics, are concerned with our interpretation of the request and our motivation. His focus is not on "do it" but on "*because it does not matter.*"

Jesus is asking us to look at our resistance to our brother's request. If we are in our right mind, we will hear the real request that is beneath the specific words and we will be willing to respond, for, in the words of this passage, "he is asking for salvation." Our response may or may not be in the form of what he is asking for -- not refusing our brother's request does not mean that we do exactly what he asks behaviorally. But our attitude will not be one of resistance or rejection but an openness to respond with what he is really asking for -- the love he does not know is his.

Jesus knew we would misinterpret this passage through our ego confusion of form and content and so he adds a clarification several chapters later:

"I have said that if a brother asks a foolish thing of you to do it. But be certain that this does not mean to do a foolish thing that would hurt either him or you, for what would hurt one will hurt the other. Foolish requests are foolish merely because they conflict, since they always contain some element of specialness. Only the Holy Spirit recognizes foolish needs as well as real ones. And He will teach you how to meet both without losing either" (T.16.I.6:4,5,6,7,8).

Once again, Jesus shifts the focus from the specific behavior to the underlying content and asks us to turn to the Holy Spirit for help, because our own interpretation will view our brother's request as an attack rather than as a call for love. That's why we need to ask for help for ourselves first before we can respond to our brother's real request. So long as we see ourselves as limited and vulnerable, we will view our brother's request as an unreasonable demand upon us and we will inevitably respond defensively, as if we can be diminished by our brother's demands. But if we are in our right mind, we will be able to hear our brother's request for what it really is -- a fearful call for love from one who does not believe he deserves love. And we will know that the only response that is called for is love (T.12.I.3,4,5), of which we are not the source.

Through our willingness to be a channel for the love he is calling for, we are saying we are willing to experience the love ourselves. That is why, as Jesus says in the earlier passage, to refuse a brother's request is to impoverish yourself as well. The anger and the resistance you feel are the cues that the ego is running the show. So while you feel that you may need to keep boundaries to protect yourself, Jesus is saying that it is still possible to respond to your brother's underlying request for love. For Jesus would never ask us to do anything that we believe would hurt ourselves -- we are always the ones who demand that of ourselves.

Q #542: The answer to Question [#324](#) contains a line that deals with an aspect of *A Course in Miracles* that still eludes me: "It is never the external situation that causes our loss of peace." For whatever reason I just don't get this concept. This seems to be saying that if I break a leg, it's not the broken leg that is causing me distress, or if someone in the apartment above me is playing really vulgar music extremely loud and driving me crazy with it that it's not what the people are doing that is upsetting me. How does one look at something that is annoying or hurting the heck out of them and not be distressed by it?

A: Your perplexity, which most students of the Course share as they begin to learn of this principle, is understandable. *Not* getting it is what keeps the ego in business and that is why we have such difficulty understanding it. But the Course is saying exactly that: a broken leg or people playing loud vulgar music upstairs is not the cause of your upset or distress. Perhaps if you can recognize how the same event can trigger different reactions in you at different times (e.g., sometimes you may not get upset by the loud music), or how different people do not have the same reactions to the same external event, you may begin to get a glimpse at the truth behind the statement you quote. It is the meaning we give to an event, and in particular the degree to which we personalize it, and not the event itself that determines how we react.

The Course, speaking of anger -- but the principle applies equally to any type of upset or distress -- says, "**Perhaps it will be helpful to remember that no one can be angry [or distressed] at a fact. It is always an interpretation that gives rise to negative emotions, regardless of their seeming justification by what *appears* as facts**" (M.17.4:1,2). You may not have realized it, but this is the principle behind the early workbook lesson, "**I am never upset for the reason I think**" (W.pl.5).

Although this workbook lesson does not articulate the real reason for our upset, the cause lies in our mind's decision to see ourselves as separate from love, with the guilt that inevitably accompanies that decision. That is the only reason we ever experience distress and upset, but the cause is buried deeply within our unconscious mind so that we are not aware of it. That amnesia is a major aspect of the ego's strategy, so that we then can project the buried guilt onto anyone or anything that seems to be outside ourselves and hold them responsible for how we feel. If we really knew this is what we are choosing to do, we would not do it for very long. For then it would become clear that how we feel has nothing to do with anyone else and nothing to do with what seems to be happening to our bodies.

One of the clearest statements of this relationship between our guilt and how we feel is found in the following text passage: "**Once you were unaware of what the cause of**

everything the world appeared to thrust upon you, uninvited and unasked, must really be. Of one thing you were sure: Of all the many causes you perceived as bringing pain and suffering to you, your guilt was not among them. Nor did you in any way request them for yourself. This is how all illusions came about" (T.27.VII.6:3,4,5,6).

Jesus' challenging task is to help us undo the false associations we have built in our minds between what seems to happen outside of us and how we feel. This is the essence of forgiveness, as we release our judgments and condemnation against others and begin to accept that we are the only ones who can deprive ourselves of our peace of mind.

While this means accepting responsibility for how we feel and not placing the blame elsewhere -- a difficult acknowledgment while we remain identified with our egos -- it also provides us with the way out of our pain and distress. For now no one and nothing else needs to change. We only have to change our minds and accept a different Teacher to interpret what we are experiencing. From the manual section we quoted from earlier, **"If anger [or distress] comes from an interpretation and not a fact, it is never justified. Once this is even dimly grasped, the way is open. Now it is possible to take the next step. The interpretation can be changed at last" (M.17.4:1,2;8:6,7,8,9).** And that is why we need a different Teacher, Who will provide us with a different way of looking at our situation, while we remain so invested in blaming others.

So it is even possible to break a leg and not only not become upset, but feel no pain, as over time our identification shifts from our body to our mind through practicing forgiveness. For we will no longer need the defense against the guilt in our mind that the body has been made to provide. This underlies Jesus' powerful teaching in **"The Message of the Crucifixion" (T.6.I.3,4,5)**, where he emphasizes that **"assault can ultimately be made only on the body"** but that **"if you respond with anger, you must be equating yourself with the destructible [the body], and are therefore regarding yourself insanely" (T.6.I.4:1,7).** This is where the teaching, with Jesus' help, is ultimately leading us. As he reminds us, **"I am like you and you are like me, but our fundamental equality can be demonstrated only through joint decision" (T.6.I.5:1).**

Q #543: Would you kindly elaborate on the potential meanings and implications of these sentences from the text of *A Course in Miracles*: "God's laws hold only for your protection, and they never hold in vain. What you experience when you deny your Father is still for your protection, for the power of your will cannot be lessened without the intervention of God against it, and any limitation on your power is not the Will of God" (T.11.IV.2:3,4).

A: When we identify with the ego thought system we will experience ourselves as separate beings, with interests that conflict and compete with others. This is not the truth, but if we acknowledge that everything we experience here is a consequence of that choice for the ego, we can at any time change that decision and choose *against* the ego, thereby regaining awareness of the oneness of the Sonship. In the paragraphs preceding and following the one you cite, this is what Jesus is talking about. He thus says explicitly, **"Never forget that the Sonship is your salvation, for the Sonship is your Self" (1:1).** And in speaking of our choice to judge certain people as not worthy of sharing the gifts God gave His Son, Jesus teaches us that we are thereby diminishing our own participation in these gifts, and it is the law of God that they be shared without limit: **"Would you cut off a brother from the light that is yours? You would not do**

so if you realized that you can darken only your own mind. As you bring him back, so will you return. That is the law of God, for the protection of the Wholeness of His Son" (3:4,5,6,7).

God's Son is One -- that is His law. So even if in our delusional state we experience ourselves as separate, God's law still holds. Nothing can prevail against it. Our obstinacy in maintaining that we are right is therefore futile, and all of our attempts to abdicate responsibility for our separated state by blaming others for our suffering and problems are futile as well. If it is God's Will that the Sonship be whole, then it is our will too. That is the principle of the Atonement, which is represented in our right minds. Thus, in the next chapter (**T.12.I**), Jesus teaches that our denial of our Identity as part of God is a call for help, which means that if we are denying something, it must be there. That is our protection; the Atonement is our protection. We can never truly separate ourselves from our Source, nor from the oneness in which God created us.

Q #544: A comment about Question #[328](#), which asked: If everything is illusion, how can *A Course in Miracles* exist?

The Course does not exist. It is part of our illusion. The Holy Spirit's job is to use various aspects of our illusions to guide us gently back to reality. So the Holy Spirit has used not only paper and ink (illusion) but also our concept that "something is wrong and needs to be corrected" (illusion) and has turned them to a holy purpose, that of gently guiding us back to reality. The Holy Spirit is manipulating part of our dream to guide us to a happy awakening. Is this a correct understanding?

A: At a very practical level, your understanding is quite correct. The Course teaches us that the Holy Spirit can use everything the ego has made for separation as a means for healing (e.g., **T.6.V.A.2:4,5; T.7.IV.3:3**), if we will offer it to Him for His purpose. And this is a very helpful way to see our Guide and Comforter -- the part of our split mind that remembers both God and Who we are -- while we remain trapped in the illusions of our own making. For it offers a correction to how the ego would have us view God and His Representative within the dream -- as the vengeful enemy.

But there is another level of understanding that, as we progress with the Course, will lead us beyond even this very helpful mythology. Not only is the Course illusion, but the Holy Spirit, as a separate Helper Who manipulates illusory ego symbols, is illusion as well.

Speaking of the Holy Spirit near the end of the book, the Course explains, **"His is the Voice for God, and has therefore taken form. This form is not His reality, which God alone knows along with Christ, His real Son, Who is part of Him....He seems to be a Voice, for in that form He speaks God's Word to you. He seems to be a Guide through a far country, for you need that form of help. He seems to be whatever meets the needs you think you have (C.6.1:4,5; 4:5,6,7).**

All of these and the other many functions ascribed to the Holy Spirit are useful fictions while we believe we are separate and alone. But when time is over and we have awakened from the dream, we will no longer have need for such helpful symbols: **"And then the Voice is gone, no longer to take form but to return to the eternal formlessness of God" (C.6.5:8).**

Q #545: *A Course in Miracles* speaks about the "incorruptible body" (T.19.IV.C.i), saying that it is possible to "keep the body incorruptible and perfect as long as it is useful for your holy purpose." Is the Course actually telling us that we can achieve a state (within the world of illusion) in which our body will remain in perfect physical condition as long as we remain here? Is this part of the condition we are able to achieve as we move closer to the real world, perhaps one of the characteristics of what the Course calls the "Happy Learner" in chapter 14, ii? If we had a completely disease free and healthy body, then we could be drawn toward reality motivated by a genuine desire to regain our awareness of our Father rather than being "driven" by physical pain and fear. Would you please comment on all this?

A: Sorry, but that's not what Jesus means here. It could appear to happen that way in form in some individual cases, but you can never judge anything real by form. If you read the next few sentences after the line you cite, it is clear that Jesus is not describing what happens to the body itself: **"The body no more dies than it can feel. It does nothing. Of itself it is neither corruptible nor incorruptible. It is nothing" (T.19.IV.C.5:2,3,4,5).** He is simply saying that we will no longer see our bodies serving the purpose of corruption. The body will no longer be corrupted by the guilt of the ego thought system, for we will know that the ego's guilt is not true. And even though the body may change in form, appearing to age and even become disabled or diseased, if there is no thought of sickness or death -- guilt -- in the mind, these changes in form will have no connotations of death and sickness to us -- **"The body can but serve your purpose. As you look on it, so will it seem to be" (T.19.IV.C.6:3,4).**

What happened to Jesus' body at the end of his earthly "life" illustrates this principle. His body did not represent any thought of death or disease or pain in his mind, since his mind was free of guilt. He did not use his body to reinforce a belief in sin and victimization in his mind (T.6.I.5) -- and so it remained incorruptible in his perception, despite how its form may have seemed to change. He did not allow it to be corrupted in his thinking by making it a symbol of accusation against others.

We can also see the Course's discussion here of the incorruptible body as a correction for the glorified, resurrected body that Christian doctrine teaches Jesus' physical resurrection has assured all of his faithful followers. As he says of his own body earlier in this section: **"Yet would I offer you my body, you whom I love, knowing its littleness? Or would I teach that bodies cannot keep us apart? Mine was of no greater value than yours.... To think you could be satisfied and happy with so little is to hurt yourself" (T.19.IV.A.17:5,6,7,12).**

One final point of clarification: it is not physical pain or fear that drive us either toward or away from an awareness of our Father. The body, as nothing, feels nothing, as we noted above. All pain and fear are in the mind and it is here that they must be addressed and released. The body only returns to the mind the messages that the mind first wants and then sends out (T.19.IV.A.10,11,12,13,14,15).

Q #546: i. In the Bible it says the meek shall inherit the earth, how does this figure in *A Course in Miracles*?

ii. Why did Jesus say the meek shall inherit the earth in the Bible, but tell us that the earth is not real in *A Course in Miracles*?

A: In the Course, Jesus not only reinterprets many of the specific teachings of the Bible; he presents an entirely different thought system. For this purpose he has used familiar biblical quotes, terms, and events; e.g., atonement, forgiveness, and crucifixion. This is because of the strong feelings and beliefs associated with them. The meaning given to them in the Course supports the new way of thinking about *everything* that Jesus is teaching. "The meek shall inherit the earth" is a very good example of this. It does not actually have anything to do with the earth.

In the section "**The Atonement as Defense**"(T.2.II) Jesus quotes this biblical passage, reinterpreting it in the light of the important principle of defenselessness the Course teaches. Here, meek is understood as defenseless. The Course tells us that all defenses are made up by the ego to defend against the truth of who we are (T.22.V.2:1, 2): God's one Son. Being spirit as God created Him, the Son needs no defense, lacks nothing, and is invulnerable to attack, which is His strength. As Jesus tells us in the text: **"What merely is needs no defense, and offers none.... You [Son of God] are the strong one in this seeming conflict. And you need no defense" (T.22.V.1:7, 10, 11).** It is in this sense that we are defenseless (meek), strong, and beyond attack

However, when we identify with the ego as bodies, instead of with our truth as spirit, we also identify with the world. We see ourselves as part of it, make it real, and perceive ourselves as vulnerable to the attack/defense cycle that is the modus operandi of the world. What was invulnerable is now vulnerable, and requires defense. But because the ego identity is not true, its defenses do not work to protect it, and it is therefore weak. Feeling weak, the ego scrambles to build better defenses, which still do not work, and the cycle goes on and on, until finally admitting this really does not work, we ask the Holy Spirit for another way. The other way is the Holy Spirit's plan of Atonement, whereby each time the choice is made to accept to remember Who we truly are, this true Identity is strengthened, while identity with the ego and the world is diminished. Thus the world is "overcome," which is another way of saying we "inherit the earth."

Q #547: Before I came to know *A Course in Miracles*, I was studying the Rosicrucian Cosmos Conception and I can put together some of the illusions that we created. We didn't create Christ and the archangels. And I do believe that there are other paths to return to God. Are those who don't believe in Christ, Mother Mary, the Saints etc. on the right track?

A: Since the separation never occurred (T.6.II.10:7) and we **"are at home in God dreaming of exile" (T.10.I.2:1)**, the true answer to your question is that there is no track, because there is nowhere to go: **"The journey to God is merely the reawakening of the knowledge of where you are always, and what you are forever. It is a journey without distance to a goal that has never changed" (T.8.VI.9:6,7).**

However, since we *do* believe that our experience in the dream is real, we think we need a path to return to God. We are set on this path when a choice *for* God and *against* the ego is made in the mind. This choice is the "right track." The specific form in which this choice is experienced or expressed in the dream of separation is not

important. For some people, belief in Christ, Mary and the saints is the form the choice for God takes. For others, the choice may not take religious form at all. In the Manual (M.1.3) the Course refers to this choice as answering the Call of the universal course. The "answer," or the "right track," that sets us on the path to God is seeing someone else's interest as the same as one's own (M.1.1). Once this happens, the outcome is certain for, as we are told in the text: **"There is no path that does not lead to Him [God]" (T.31.IV.11:7).**

An important principle of the Course's teaching is the distinction between form and content. The passages cited above clearly indicate that the Course teaches that form varies significantly, and is unimportant. It is the content in the mind that establishes the goal, which, as stated earlier, is always either a choice for God or a choice for the ego. Just as the choice for God may be experienced and expressed in many forms, some of which are not religious in nature, so, too, the choice for the ego may use religious forms for its purpose of separation. This explains why there are so many individuals and groups who attack and destroy in God's name, or may use their belief in Christ to keep themselves separate from those who do not share their belief. Again, it is the choice for God in the mind that matters, not the form. As Jesus tells us in the Manual: **"...it is all a matter of time. Everyone will answer in the end" (M.1.2:8,9).**

Q #548: This question is a combination of questions from two students:
Jesus did many miracles while he was here on earth, such as raised the dead, made the blind see. Can we, Sons of God, do miracles in this world as well? What does the *A Course in Miracles* mean when it says we should offer miracles to others?

A: Scripture scholars differ in their understanding of the historical accuracy of the Gospel accounts of what Jesus did during his lifetime. However, regardless of the accuracy of the Gospels, the Course teaches a different meaning of miracles. What the Course means by a miracle is a change of mind. It is a course in miracles because it is a course in learning to change our minds from thinking with the ego to thinking with the Holy Spirit. It is a process of undoing the ego by learning a new perspective that reverses the ego's view on everything and everyone. The ego tells us we are bodies, separate from God and from each other, subject to change by external forces. The Holy Spirit tells us we are minds, one with our Father and with each other, subject to change only by the power of the mind to choose. We accept miracles for ourselves to the extent that we accept this teaching, and apply it to all events, situations, and experiences in our lives. We offer miracles to others as we recognize the same power of their minds to choose. As Jesus tells us in the text: **"The miracle extends without your help, but you are needed that it can begin. Accept the miracle of healing, and it will go forth because of what it is. It is its nature to extend itself the instant it is born. And it is born the instant it is offered and received. No one can ask another to be healed. But he can let *himself* be healed, and thus offer the other what he has received" (T.27.V.1:3, 4, 5, 6, 7).**

A further extension of this principle is the process of forgiveness, whereby we recognize that nothing external to our minds can cause us to feel anything positive or negative, and therefore, no one is responsible for how we feel. That is what is meant by Jesus' invitation: **"Be willing to forgive the Son of God for what he did not do."** Thus forgiveness is the miracle we offer to our brothers. In recognizing

that our experience is the result of a decision in our minds to identify with the ego or with the Holy Spirit, all our brothers are released from blame, and their innocence is brought to our awareness. This is the miracle of the healing of the mind, given and received.

Q #549: Once having met the conditions of a miracle, and entering the state of miracle readiness and union with God, does that mean that the miracle is done and just a matter of time? Is it possible to do something to negate it?

A: The conditions for a miracle to occur begin with the realization that our interests are not separate from our brothers' or sisters' (M.1.1:2). This experience of joining is a pale reflection of our true reality at one with God, outside the world of time and space and bodies. Any enduring experience of union with God, the Course tells us, is so rare in this world **"that it cannot be considered a realistic goal"** (M.26.3:1,2,3,4).

With repeated recognition of shared interests, we will begin to understand that it is not the world but our own mind that is the source of all our unhappiness, and so it is the source of all happiness as well. This understanding produces a state of miracle readiness that will become easier and easier to access over time, as we become increasingly willing to shift our attention from the world outside to the decision in our mind to choose between the ego and the Holy Spirit. This is a process in time for, in *A Course in Miracles'* own words, **"The miracle does not awaken you, but merely shows you who the dreamer is. It teaches you there is a choice of dreams while you are still asleep, depending on the purpose of your dreaming. Do you wish for dreams of healing, or for dreams of death?"** (T.28.II.4:2,3,4).

There is a level at which it is true that, once we have chosen the miracle, there is no other choice to be made. But this will not be our experience, as we seem to vacillate between right-minded and wrong-minded thinking, while completely releasing our identification with the illusory ego remains too fearful.

Once experienced, we can not negate the miracle. But we can forget it as we allow our focus to shift back to the seeming concerns of the world and our illusory self, engaging in judgment and attack as we now perceive our interests as separate from everyone else's. In the context of the holy instant -- another term for the miracle -- Jesus explains: **"The experience of an instant [miracle], however compelling it may be, is easily forgotten if you allow time to close over it.... The instant remains. But where are you?... To attack your brother is not to lose the instant, but to make it powerless in its effects. You *have* received the holy instant, but you may have established a condition in which you cannot use it. As a result, you do not realize that it is with you still. And by cutting yourself off from its expression, you have denied yourself its benefit. You reinforce this every time you attack your brother, for the attack must blind you to yourself. And it is impossible to deny yourself, and to recognize what has been given and received by you** (T.17.V.12:1,3,4,6; 13:1,2,3,4,5).

Q #550: i. In the illusion (the absence of God), Jesus, also an illusion, returns to God, why didn't this cancel out the illusion immediately? Why hasn't the one mind woken up after Jesus' perfect attainment of the Atonement principle? I thought it takes only one mind to change the world and if all the billions of fragments have to wake up that would

seem to be an indication that one isn't the magic number, it makes it seem as if there is separateness.

ii. How come Jesus knows completely about God and God doesn't know anything about Jesus?

A: These are perfectly reasonable questions. The trouble is they arise from an illusory perspective. **"One brother is all brothers. Every mind contains all minds, for every mind is one. Such is the truth. Yet do these thoughts make clear the meaning of creation? Do these words bring perfect clarity with them to you? What can they seem to be but empty sounds; pretty, perhaps, correct in sentiment, yet fundamentally not understood nor understandable. The mind that taught itself to think specifically can no longer grasp abstraction in the sense that it is all-encompassing. We need to see a little, that we learn a lot" (W.pl.161.4).** Obviously this is not intended as an answer to your questions, nor is it an attempt to evade answering them. It is just so vitally important to be aware of these limitations so that the issues you raise do not come to stand in the way of your practice of forgiveness, which would eventually lead to an experience in which all questions would simply dissolve. Of course we can blame our perplexity on Jesus for having raised the issues in the first place and then leaving us to figure it all out on our own! Yet, he has anticipated our frustration and addresses it in different parts of his course, being especially explicit about it in the Introduction to the clarification of terms **(C.in.2,3:1,4:1,2)**. In view of this, it is necessary to accept that there can be no answer that corresponds perfectly to the expectations of human logic, as Jesus implies in the quote above. There is an inherent inability of minds identified with separation and individuality to grasp the full meaning of what he teaches. The difficulty is on our end, not his.

What follows is somewhat of a repetition of our answer to #430, which is on the same topic as your first question. The one mind has awakened, and, in truth, it never even fell asleep. There is an illusion of billions of fragments asleep and dreaming, each of which must accept the Atonement, which has already happened; but it is still an *illusion* of many minds needing to awaken. That is why Jesus stresses the importance of focusing exclusively on accepting the Atonement for oneself. Once your mind is healed of all belief in separation, then *you* know that there truly is only one mind and that what appear to be individual unhealed minds are really part of that one healed mind. Believing we are individual minds among billions of other individual minds is a defense against the truth, and therefore every time we attempt to understand what *A Course in Miracles* is saying from that point of view, we reinforce the defense and will remain in the dark. Jesus transcends this human point of view entirely, while at the same time speaking to us within that framework in order to establish communication with us. But all of his teaching and training of us is for the purpose of getting us beyond it, to where he is. It is in this vein that he tells us: **"When experience will come to end your doubting has been set. For we but see the journey from the point at which it ended, looking back on it, imagining we make it once again; reviewing mentally what has gone by" (W.pl.158.4:4,5).** So the only way to work through your question is to work on your

forgiveness lessons so that you will have the experience that ends all doubting and questioning.

Finally, the healing of the mind does not change the world, as you state in your question. The mind simply stops attributing to the world a power it does not have, nor ever had. Thus Jesus appeals to us: **"Therefore, seek not to change the world, but choose rather to change you mind about the world" (T.21.in.1:6).**

This is a helpful background for answering your second question. If all separation is illusory, then there is nothing outside God, perfect Oneness, that can be known: **"Life not in Heaven is impossible, and what is not in Heaven is not anywhere" (T.23.II.19.6).** How can God know what is impossible and what is not anywhere? So to those asleep and dreaming the illusory dream of separation, Jesus symbolizes or reflects this Oneness within a framework that is meaningful and understandable. When our fear of Oneness subsides and then disappears entirely, only the reality of love remains. Nothing else remains, because nothing else ever was! Jesus does not "know" about God; he is a reflection or symbol in our minds of the Love that is God. Again, the Course comes within an ego framework; it uses the language of duality because that is what we can understand. But its whole intent is to get us beyond duality to the state of perfect Oneness.

Q #551: I know two people who are attracted to *A Course in Miracles* but have too much difficulty specifically with statements such as anger is never justified. I explain that this does not mean that one should not get angry, or would become guilty by being angry -- apparently Jesus knows we are angry and will get angry. And I explain that this is so on a metaphysical level, since anger can only be projection, etc. But still they both think this statement about anger makes the student feel guilty and unfree. Could you comment on this?

A: There is much in the Course for egos to object to, regardless of whether or not it is one's path back home to God. From the Course's perspective, these disagreements are simply the ego's self-protective defenses against the truth. As students of the Course, we all have our different excuses for not accepting or doing what Jesus asks us to do -- forgiving, which means looking at our ego and all its judgments and then letting them go. Yet he never judges us for our resistance.

What you may first want to get in touch with for yourself is any investment you have in others' getting and accepting the Course's message. This is a wonderful distraction to keep the focus away from our own forgiveness process. Yet honestly looking at any investments we have becomes yet another opportunity to practice forgiveness. Our egos would much prefer that we focus on convincing others about the Course than about putting its principles into practice in our own minds. We need not be concerned with persuading anyone else of the truth or rightness of the Course. Our only responsibility, if the Course is our path, is to accept the Atonement for ourselves, as the Course repeatedly reminds us (e.g., **T.5.V.7:8; M.7.3:2,3,4,5,6; M.22.1:10**).

In terms of the specific issue of anger you raise, Jesus is simply making a statement of fact -- anger could only be justified if sin and guilt were real. Since sin and guilt are illusions of the ego thought system whose only purpose is to convince us of the ego's existence, anything that follows from them can not be real either. But since we take ourselves and our egos very seriously, we certainly will continue to experience anger -- to deny that we do would not be at all helpful. From Jesus' perspective -- outside the ego thought system -- there simply is no real reason or justification for experiencing anger. Our egos may defensively insist there must be a judgment behind such a statement, but that is not at all Jesus' intention. If we can recognize that in the Course's use of terms, anger is equated with attack -- as thoughts, they

are both the same (e.g., T.7.VIII.5:4; T.30.VI.1:1,2, W.pl.21.3) -- the statement that *attack* is never justified may be easier to accept and recognize as true. In summary, Jesus doesn't say not to get angry, just not to justify it when we do.

Q #552: I have been practicing *A Course in Miracles* now for over four years and have experienced forgiveness on many levels and have been finding this journey exciting but very, very, painful. I have also experienced some wonderful insights and growth and love to share my learning with others when the opportunity presents itself. But sometimes people are so happy or impressed with what I said or so helped by it that they will say "Where do you get this stuff?" I have not told many people about the Course or what I am doing but I feel funny saying "Well the Holy Spirit told me." Some of my buddies (I am 26) would look at me like "What in the world are you talking about?" What would you advise?

A: Are you comfortable in simply stating that the ideas have come to you as a result of studying and practicing *A Course in Miracles*? And if your friends ask what that is, could you not just say it is a spiritual path that focuses on forgiveness and peace? Then leave it up to them to pursue it or not. If you are joined with the Holy Spirit when you are talking with your friends, you would be peaceful and have no investment in saying anything, and if you do say something, you would have no investment in how your friends react to it, because the love and peace of the Holy Spirit would be being expressed *through* you, and you would know the "message" is not coming from you. All sense of specialness and self-importance diminish to nothing in the holy instant. Yet, you would appear as perfectly normal to others, in the sense that you would not stand out, aside from being more peaceful and happy.

Q #553: "The Healed Relationship": In my relationship with my new girlfriend, I think I am fairly consistent in wanting only what is not at her expense. I also think I'm consistent in wanting it be a classroom for the Holy Spirit's purpose, and in trying to observe with Jesus my thoughts and my interaction with her. Yet I believe this is definitely a special relationship in that I do the things with her that lovers do for my own emotional and physical gratification, but being careful that she, too, is getting the same. And I pray that the Holy Spirit uses the relationship for His purposes. So I'm wondering if I should necessarily expect the relationship to "seem disturbed, disjunctive and even quite disturbing" (T.17.V.3:3), as it would be if there were no intent to use it to learn the Holy Spirit's lesson.

A: Sounds like you're trying to be as honest as you can about your new relationship, and that is very helpful. The line you quote from *A Course in Miracles* is referring to an ongoing special relationship in which the purpose has been *changed* from the ego's purpose of guilt to the Holy Spirit's purpose of forgiveness. It would appear that you have entered into this special relationship with your eyes open, as well as your mind to a different purpose from the beginning -- shared and not separate interests. So long as you are willing to look honestly at how a part of you still wants to use the relationship to meet your own specialness needs, making special love bargains to try to assure that they continue to be met, and you can do that without guilt or fear while recognizing the cost to you, the distressing aspects Jesus refers to need not be inevitable.

But it is helpful to remember that special relationships are made from the projections of our own buried guilt and we most likely will not be aware of all the guilt that has been projected except over time, as the relationship seems to develop and different expectations about how we want our needs to be met arise. When we are in the so-called "honeymoon period," there is much that we overlook in the other without being aware of it. That is not to say that you should expect things to become difficult but only that it will be helpful to be vigilant for your own ego and how it will attempt to trip you up, finding ways -- sometimes

subtle, sometimes not so subtle -- to place blame outside yourself for how you are feeling (T.17.V.8:2). That is an inevitable dynamic of the ego and the best way to deal with it is to be aware of it. For those are the forgiveness lessons that the special relationship offers, when we are willing to have the Holy Spirit as our Teacher.

Q #554: On a tape from an academy given last summer, I heard Ken say: "When you are upset, you pray to yourself that you will ask help of the right teacher (the Holy Spirit)." I assume that "yourself" refers to the decision maker, but to whom does each "you" refer?

A: "Only minds communicate" (T.7.V.2:1), so each "you" refers to the mind. Just as in *A Course in Miracles* Jesus is always speaking to the mind, in the Academy Ken, too, speaks to the mind, because no other communication is possible. However, since we believe we are in bodies, the body is used as a means for the communication that is occurring in the mind. The experience of being upset is the reflection of a choice in the mind to listen to the ego. The correction, then, is for the mind to remember that it has the power to choose, and then to choose to listen to the Holy Spirit. That is what is meant by "pray to yourself that you will ask help of the right teacher."

Because we identify with the body, we make the mistake of thinking it is the body (brain) that has the ability to choose, to ask, or to decide. What actually occurs is the mind chooses to identify with the ego, splits off from its true Identity, and then confuses itself with the body. The body is the *effect* of choosing the ego; it only "thinks" it is the *cause* of what seems to happen in the dream. We then experience each "you" as different. This confusion of cause and effect, mind and body, is the upside-down perception Jesus speaks about in the workbook: **"Your upside-down perception has been ruinous to your peace of mind. You have seen yourself in a body and the truth outside you, locked away from your awareness by the body's limitations" (W.pl.72.8:3,4).** Herein lies the real source of any upset. In the Course Jesus is teaching us to turn to him, or the Holy Spirit, to correct our perception. Seeing everything in the dream as the result of having chosen the ego or the Holy Spirit as teacher, is the first step in healing the mind of misperception, and is itself the result of having agreed to accept the Holy Spirit's teaching. The mind then has the opportunity to do as Jesus invites: **"In every difficulty, all distress, and each perplexity Christ calls to you and gently says, 'My brother, choose again'" (T.31.VIII.3:2).**

Q #555: In Rules for Decision in the text of *A Course in Miracles*, chap 30 paragraph 4, it says: "tell yourself again the kind of day you want; the feelings you would have, the things you want to happen to you, and the things you would experience" It sounds like you should ask for specific things (e.g., feelings, experiences), similar to the "song of prayer's" bottom of the ladder from "The Song of Prayer." For example, "I want to have a good day at my sisters house; help me be kind to the patients at work," etc. If you answered from the highest level, the feelings you could ask for would be love, peace and joy, but what experiences would you ask for at this highest level? Or would I not ask for anything because I already have it? I'm trying to apply this to my life and I usually ask for specific things because I feel more connected with Jesus and I can walk through the day with him. What level should I be asking from, could you please clarify?

A: It's easy to read this line by itself and interpret it as you are doing. And there is nothing wrong with asking for specifics if that is where you feel you are on the ladder back home. Most of us, if we are honest with ourselves, would have to admit that we are at the level of believing and experiencing that we have specific needs most of the time.

But in the context of the whole section, which emphasizes the need for not making decisions on our own, Jesus is inviting us here to have a day free of judgment. And that means we would not give *our* interpretation to any of the events or experiences of the day, thinking that we are in a position to judge what we want and need. And knowing that we will of course more than likely fall into the trap of judging what seems to happen, Jesus provides us with the steps to remember what we really want (peace of mind) and to change our minds again about Who we will let interpret our day.

Whenever I identify a specific need in terms of how I want events to occur that I believe will make me happy, I am usurping the role of the Holy Spirit and setting myself up for disappointment and failure, which of course is exactly what my ego wants me to do. For then I can blame my unhappiness and loss of peace on external people and events rather than on a decision I made in my mind to be and to choose on my own -- in other words, a decision for separation. That is why, although specifics may be the form in which I am at present comfortable in limiting and accepting infinite love, they are always a double-edged "gift" that keeps me identified with the illusion and reinforcing its reality in my own mind.

Again, this is not to say we should not ask for specifics, but Jesus wants us to be aware that he is offering us so much more than the limited gifts we are willing to accept right now. If we don't at least recognize that, we will not be able to grow into the higher levels of asking that lead us up the ladder back home.

Q #556: What is the meaning of gratitude according to *A Course in Miracles*? Lesson 195 says to be grateful to God/Jesus because we are not separate, and that is the only thing to be grateful for. I was wondering about gratitude lists that people do (e.g., I'm grateful for my husband who understands me; I'm grateful for the nice person I met in the store today, I'm grateful for the nice walk I took today) Is there any place for lists like these?

A: Your question reflects the two ways of experiencing gratitude: the ego's and the Holy Spirit's. The gratitude the Holy Spirit leads us to is clearly described in Lesson 195, as you point out. We learn through the Course that we are not bodies; we are minds, one with our Father and with each other. For this we are *truly* grateful. The ego, with whom we identify as bodies, is "grateful" when its specialness needs are met, and when it gets what it wants.

When we make the mistake of believing that we are separate bodies, cut off from our true Identity as mind, a deep, pervasive sense of emptiness and need is inevitable. We are then compelled to seek to fill the perceived emptiness with relationships, things, and experiences. When we find them we are "grateful," because they seem to meet our need. The things you mention, along with *anything* that we are "grateful" for, meet a perceived need or fulfill some expectation of how we judge things should be. These perceived needs and expectations all have their source in the choice to listen to the ego and believe in the body. The mistake is to believe that someone or something external to the mind will heal the feeling of loss and emptiness caused by belief in the body. The pursuit of these external solutions is endless because they do *not* meet our real need, which is to accept the truth toward which the Holy Spirit is leading us. That is not to say that we should not enjoy the things we value in the dream, nor seek the things we think we need. They are the special relationships that the Course tells us can be transformed by the Holy Spirit through forgiveness, which removes from the special relationships the power to take away our peace or make us happy. We are then grateful to ourselves for not perceiving anyone or

anything outside our own minds as having this power, and for this same reason we are grateful to them. We thus experience the true gratitude the Course speaks of; no matter what happens nor what others do or do not do: **"When your forgiveness is complete you will have total gratitude, for you will see that everything has earned the right to love by being loving, even as your Self" (W.pl.195.8:6).**

Q #557: I sense that it's all an illusion; however, within the playing of the illusion it sometimes seems that the thoughts and ego-type stuff isn't really mine and are on some occasions coming from other entities or others spaces. When I recognize that, they sometimes go away. Didn't Jesus go to the desert to release some of those type of influences? What if anything does *A Course in Miracles* say about this matter?

A: First, the Bible talks about Jesus going to the desert to get rid of negative forces, but as with any other account of his life, most biblical scholars are of the opinion that there is very, very little in these accounts that can be regarded as factual. Second, a major emphasis in *A Course in Miracles* is on helping us recover the power of our own minds, so that we can be healed of the erroneous belief that we are at the mercy of forces outside us over which we have no control, which would include the belief that there are entities talking to us. Carrying out the ego's strategy, we wound up essentially *mindless*, thinking we are victims of what is done to us. And so the help Jesus gives us through his message and the exercises in the workbook lessons is to train us to gradually accept more and more responsibility for our thoughts and perceptions until we finally have no thoughts or desires that are not perfectly in accord with his, which are perfectly in accord with God's.

Jesus never mentions the word *demons*, and he uses the word *devil* in Chapter 3 of the text, where he says that the very concept makes no sense: **"The 'devil' is a frightening concept because he seems to be extremely powerful and extremely active. He is perceived as a force in combat with God, battling Him for possession of His creations. The devil deceives by lies, and builds kingdoms in which everything is in direct opposition to God. Yet he attracts men rather than repels them, and they are willing to 'sell' him their soul in return for gifts of no real worth. This makes absolutely no sense" (T.3.VII.2).** Jesus continues with his correction of traditional biblical teachings and then provides us with a new definition: **"The mind can make the belief in separation very real and very fearful, and this belief is the 'devil'" (5:1).** Stated briefly, the ego and anything of the ego is rooted in our own thoughts and beliefs, for which we are completely responsible. That is what our work as students of the Course centers on: learning to recognize how we are defending against this truth and how we are protecting ourselves from ever getting back into our minds. Jesus is training us to identify these defenses so that we can then identify the fear within our minds that led us to believe we needed defenses. When we are back in our minds and realize that the ego is nothing but an erroneous belief we accepted, we will simply smile at the silliness of our ever having taken it seriously and believing that there are forces and entities that could adversely affect us. So the heart of Jesus' teaching is that we would learn how to look with him at our ego -- nothing more than that -- just look, and if we are doing it with him, there would be no fear. The Course's approach therefore is very simple: there is only the ego or the Holy Spirit, and the ego rests on nothingness. Finally, since the ego is ultimately only a belief, it will go away when we no longer value that belief. There is no need to fight against it or try to banish it. Simply look at it with Jesus and smile gently; it has no existence other than our belief in it.

Q #558 : I am looking at quieting my mind and observing all my suffering from a new point of view. *A Course in Miracles* says my only function is forgiving It speaks to me of choosing that which is of value. It says I must look first at what I made in order to see what is and isn't of value. My question is how do I

look straight into all my ego-generated drama and hold on to that which is of value. I know that if my only function is forgiving, then that which is of value comes from that premise. But I get very caught up in the drama and find it hard to discern the valuable from the valueless. I am also looking at letting go of judgment, which I am beginning to see as valueless. I could use help in finding coping skills and daily meditations to help me through this change.

A: Yes, the Course is inviting us to take a look at our lives and all our suffering and pain from a completely different perspective. All of our categories and criteria up until now for sorting out what is valuable and helpful in our lives suddenly lose their validity, as the basic premise for deciding shifts from meeting our needs to letting go of our judgments, which is what the Course means by forgiveness. Two broad, all-encompassing generalizations follow from this new premise for deciding -- *nothing* of the ego is of any value in itself, but *everything* of the ego provides us with the opportunities we need to practice forgiveness.

This also means that our focus shifts from the seemingly endless process of evaluating the ceaseless flow of external events in terms of their potential impact on our physical, emotional, mental, and psychological well-being, to a continuous monitoring of our own inner thoughts to ascertain whether or not they are helpful for recognizing our genuine well-being (sinlessness), which has already been guaranteed by God (**W.pl.93.6,7**).

So in practical terms, what does this mean? First of all, it means that you need not change anything external in terms of your routines and practices and daily activities, other than perhaps beginning the Workbook lessons, if you have not already. For the Workbook exercises provide the very specific instructions and meditations you are asking for to help bring about the shift from the outer to the inner focus -- that is their purpose (**W.in**). But all the other things in your life -- your relationships, your job, your struggles, all the ego drama -- now become the classrooms in which you learn to practice forgiveness. This is their value, for these are the situations you have set up in your life onto which you have deliberately but erroneously projected responsibility for determining how you feel about yourself and whether or not you are happy.

Whenever you find yourself making judgments about anything in your life, it is because you have made it a screen for your own guilt over the thought of separation, so that it can now be seen outside you. The first step in the forgiveness process then is to withdraw that projection from outside and acknowledge the guilt's source in your own mind. And then, with the help of Jesus or the Holy Spirit, you can release the guilt into the light of true forgiveness, which sees none of it as true.

Having described all this, it may be helpful to acknowledge that the resistance to this simple process is tremendous. So don't be surprised if much of the time your thinking seems oblivious to this correction, mindlessly proceeding along its well-worn path of projecting responsibility for how you feel onto everyone but yourself. Gradually over time, with gentleness and patience, the awareness of how you want to sabotage the process and yourself will become more apparent. And the choice you have in each situation between the ego and the Holy Spirit will become increasingly obvious, as your willingness grows through the practice of forgiveness and the experience of its joyful effects.

Q #559: With regards to Question #288: "What is a miracle?", would you clarify how the following verses relate to your answer?

T.1.1.24:2 *You* are a miracle, capable of creating in the likeness of your Creator.

T.3.V.6:7 You have lost the knowledge that you yourself are a miracle of God.

T.3.V.8:9 To know God's miracle is to know Him.

T.3.V.9:7 But God's miracles are as total as His thoughts because they *are* His thoughts.

T.3.V.10:5,6 God and His miracle are inseparable. How beautiful indeed are the thoughts of God who live in His Light.

T.13.VIII.5:2 This is the miracle of creation: *that it is one forever*.

T.13.VII.6:5 The only miracle that ever was is God's most holy Son, created in the one reality that is his Father.

T.13.VIII.9:4 The miracle that God created is perfect, as are the miracles you establish in His Name.

T.16.II.5:4,5 Miracles are natural to the One who speaks for God. For His task is to translate the miracle into Knowledge which it represents, and which is hidden to you.

T.26.VII. 11:4,5 It is impossible that anything be lost, if what you *have* is what you *are*. This is the miracle by which creation became your function, sharing it with God.

A: There are two important points to consider when tracing a term throughout the three books of *A Course in Miracles* and the two companion pamphlets: Jesus is not always consistent in his use of terms and he often indulges the liberties we all graciously accept in the works of great poets and teachers; but if you stay focused on the *content* of his teaching, the conflicts arising from the *form* of his teaching will be eliminated, or at least greatly minimized.

The statements you list are examples of the inconsistency on the level of form. Strictly speaking, a miracle is a correction, and therefore pertains only to the illusion. But in some of the passages you list, a miracle is linked to God and creation, which of course could never be the case, as God knows nothing of error in need of correction, and creation is a function only within the Oneness of Heaven. Moreover, the inconsistency occasionally appears to be more of a contradiction if you stay only on the form level. Jesus emphatically states early in the text, for example, that **"to speak of 'a miracle of healing' is to combine two orders of reality inappropriately. Healing is not a miracle" (T.2.IV.1:3,4)**. Yet in five other places in the Course he speaks of a **"miracle of healing" (T.19.I.14:5; T.27.II.5:2; T.27.V.1:3; T.28.IV.10:9; M.22.4:4)**.

Thus, if a reader/student is not tuned into his meaning (content), Jesus' loose use of words (form) could be a major problem, especially if conceptual precision is expected. But if the content of his teaching is your primary focus, then the inconsistencies would not have any effect on your spiritual progress. Kenneth has discussed this issue at length in "Inconsistent Form and Consistent Content" (Chapter 2) in *Few Choose to Listen*, Vol. II of *The Message of "A Course in Miracles,"* and in his tape album "Duality as Metaphor."

To return briefly to your examples . . . **T.3.V.6:7 "You have lost the knowledge that you yourself are a miracle of God"** illustrates the poetic license Jesus takes at times. He is completing the thought begun in the preceding statement, **"In electing perception instead of knowledge, you placed yourself in a position where you could resemble your Father only by perceiving miraculously" (6:6)**. If you can hear Jesus appealing to you and feel his love drawing you to return to your natural state in the Heart of Love, it would not matter that he is using the term *miracle* inconsistently. In sentence 6 he is using it properly, so to speak, to mean a correction of our misperception; while in the following sentence, he takes the same term and gives it a different twist simply to make his point, as would a lyrical poet or dramatist. So while his terminology may be inconsistent, there is no mistaking what he is trying to get across to us. And this would also be true of the other examples you give. If you focus on what he wants you to hear and to learn, the seeming mistakes in form will lessen in significance.

Q #560: I came to learn about *A Course in Miracles* through my church. About the same time that I was learning the Course's principles I was also making a commitment to be a Chaplain for my church. In my capacity as a chaplain I am to pray with congregants about issues that they request prayer about. Many of the requests I receive are ego-based problems. Knowing that the ego is an illusion makes it difficult for me to pray with others from an honest place. Is this a typical experience for people that learn *AC/M*? It is my desire to help others. Through *AC/M* I know that the only true help that I can lend is to see things rightly. How can I still help, and possibly pray with others, and yet remain true to the Course's principles?

A: If the content in your mind is love, then you will not be in conflict, even though the theologies (the form) of these two systems differ. In other words, if you feel guided to be a Chaplain, and you feel that you can be truly helpful to others and yourself in this role, then you should follow that guidance. It takes a lot of practice to be able to minimize differences in form and concentrate primarily on the content in your mind, but if you can do that, you will realize that the greatest value in praying with others is the joining with them through sharing a common interest. The words do not matter, as the first section of *The Song of Prayer* pamphlet helps us understand.

The fact that the form of the prayer pertains to ego-based problems would not lead to conflict if you are clear within yourself about the *purpose* of your praying with your congregants -- that it is a means of expressing the love in your right mind. Early in the text Jesus explains that **"the value of the Atonement does not lie in the manner in which it is expressed. In fact, if it is used truly, it will inevitably be expressed in whatever way is most helpful to the receiver. This means that a miracle, to attain its full efficacy, must be expressed in a language that the recipient can understand without fear. This does not necessarily mean that this is the highest level of communication of which he is capable. It does mean, however, that it is the highest level of communication of which he is capable now. The whole aim of the miracle is to raise the level of communication, not to lower it by increasing fear" (T.2.IV.5).**

In his discussion of the characteristics of God's teachers, Jesus defines *honesty* as "consistency" (**M.4.II**), another example of the primacy of content over form. Again, if you desire only to be loving, then the forms in which that love is expressed may conflict or be inconsistent with one another. But that would not

matter. The ego would have us judge everything by form so that we would constantly reinforce our differences. Jesus is training us to get beyond our perception of form so that we would recognize that we all share the same interests, and ultimately that we are all same: the one Son of God. Thus, the role of Chaplain in your church would be a means of learning this, if you feel guided to take on that role.

Q #561: My question is: who is the "me" that the ego wants dead but not itself (T.15.I.4:3)? My own understanding is that it is the real me, the Christ, that the ego wants dead. And my understanding of the idea that the ego pursues us even after death (T.15.I.4:4) is that our desire to be different, to be an individual, to be special is still with us after death if we have not consciously changed our mind and let it go and that this is the meaning of our ego not wanting itself dead.

A: A little background on the nature and "reality" of the ego before answering your question: The ego is nothing more than a mistaken belief about ourselves in the separated state that we seem to have given inordinate power to dictate our options and experiences (**T.7.VIII.4:6,7**). It is a choice to see ourselves as limited, alone, sinful, guilty and in pain. And it is a thought that is totally focused on self preservation (**T.7.VI.3:1**) at any price, including death. To protect it, we must deny that it is merely our choice and that we could just as easily make a different choice. This is such a tremendous threat to its continued existence that we must deny the power of our mind to have chosen it (**T.7.VI.3**). So when we are identified with the ego thought, we wish to deny or kill off the decision-making part of our split mind.

A Course in Miracles speaks of the ego as a separate entity acting on its own as part of the myth to explain how we find ourselves trapped in illusion, but it also serves the purpose of helping us not minimize how pervasive the ego is in our thinking (**T.4.VI.1:2,3,4**). And it also enables us to begin to take steps to disidentify from it and reclaim the power of our mind to have chosen it. For we are not our egos.

So, in the context of the ego myth, the "you" that the ego wants dead is the decision-making self, still a part of the split mind, and not the Christ. The ego self can not be aware of either God or Christ, for Limitlessness is beyond its finite grasp (**T.4.VI.4**).

And yes, since physical "death" is merely a symbol in the dream of separation and has no effect on either the thought of separation or our choice for it as a decision-maker, both aspects of the split self seem to continue on after death (**T.15.I.4:13,14**). And so the same dynamic of guilt and attack must continue to play itself out in the split mind, until we make the choice to awaken from the dream of death. For at least unconsciously, we are aware that physical death is an illusion and ends nothing (**T.15.I.4:5**), and so denial of the decision-making part of our mind -- seeking its death -- must be pursued down every corridor and through every dimension of the split mind. That its death is never accomplished is irrelevant to the ego goal, for so long as running from death remains such an obsession and preoccupation, we will not stop to question whether it is real. And the ego thought's continued existence is assured, at least for the time being.

Q #562: In chapter 17 of *A Course in Miracles*, Section IV, The Two Pictures, the text explains how defenses work. It says: "It is essential to realize that all defenses do what they would defend. The underlying basis for their effectiveness is that they offer what they defend. What they defend is placed in them for safe-keeping, and as they operate they bring it to you. Every defense operates by giving gifts,

and the gift is always a miniature of the thought system the defense protects, set in a golden frame. The frame is very elaborate, all set with jewels, and deeply carved and polished. Its purpose is to be of value in itself, and to divert your attention from what it encloses. But the frame without the picture you cannot have. Defenses operate to make you think you can." Would you kindly elaborate on this. If my defense is, for example, eating out of fear, how does this relate?

A: We choose defenses in an attempt to handle our fear and make ourselves feel better and safer. And yet, the defense is only there because of the underlying fear that we are attempting to manage. So the defense, no matter what form it takes, becomes a constant reminder -- conscious or unconscious -- of the underlying fear. This is inherent in the dualistic thought system of the ego, which always operates on the assumption of polar opposites, such as safe and unsafe. We never question the underlying premise that we can be threatened, but instead accept danger as true and then seek to protect ourselves from it (**W.pl.135.1,2,3**).

In the specific case of eating out of fear, food becomes equated in our mind with comforting ourselves, or filling the gaping hole that makes us feel empty and vulnerable. But giving food this purpose only reinforces our belief in discomfort and emptiness and vulnerability. Food offers us something flavorful and satisfying (the frame), which seems to make us feel better, perhaps distracting us from the gnawing feeling inside, at least temporarily. But the purpose we have given it to rescue us establishes it as a symbol of the very thing we are trying to avoid or escape -- the underlying guilt and fear. And so, as a symbol of what is underneath, it becomes a reminder of what we have intended it to save us from, offering us the very same "gifts," only obscured.

However, once we recognize the purpose we have given food to comfort us in our fear, as with all the special gifts of the ego, we can now invite the great Comforter to join us and give food a different purpose. The correction the Holy Spirit offers would not be to stop eating but rather to use food instead as a means to remind us of the fear underneath that we have attempted to keep hidden and at bay by eating. We can bring the fear into our awareness with the Holy Spirit and question the source of that fear. For the fear is nothing more than a projection of our own guilt, represented by a gaping hole within our very being, accompanied by a devastating feeling of emptiness, because we believe we have destroyed the only thing that can truly make us feel complete and full and safe -- love. With the Symbol of Love beside us, we can begin to question the premise of our emptiness, rather than continuing to try to fill it -- thereby making it real -- with all of our "substitutes for love" (**W.pl.117.1:3**), such as food.

Q #563: We have received several questions recently about the movie, "The Passion of the Christ," and the subject of the crucifixion and *A Course in Miracles*. We will address all of the questions in a single answer.

i. The movie, "The Passion of the Christ," has gotten a lot of attention. Could you discuss the Course's view of the crucifixion and how it differs from the view held by traditional Christians?

ii. Mel Gibson's picture, "The Passion of the Christ," has created quite a stir. How does the Course speak to the movie's theme that Jesus came to prove God's love. Did he have to die for that proof or is that just a convenient sleight of hand the Christian church has developed to perpetuate a belief in guilt and separation?

iii. Based on the teachings of the Course, how would you assess the Mel Gibson movie, "The Passion of the Christ"?

iv. A question about the crucifixion that I have had on my mind for a long time: Why did Jesus choose the crucifixion as a teaching device? In T.6.I.9:1, we read: "I elected, for your sake and mine, to demonstrate that the most outrageous assault, as judged by the ego, does not matter" -- meaning Jesus staged his own crucifixion.

Then I read in the Excerpt Series "Jesus: Manifestation of the Holy Spirit", Part VIII on <http://www.facim.org/excerpts/s4e8.htm>: "For Jesus, his crucifixion served a purpose of love. For most of us, being crucified would not serve a purpose of love. But we cannot judge by the form. The form of what happened to Jesus at the end of his life was not loving or safe -- it was murderous. But because there was a thought of love in his mind -- and only a thought of love -- his crucifixion was an act of love from his point of view, although not from the point of view of someone who did not share his thought system."

As hardly anyone who attended the crucifixion -- or later heard about it -- was/is without an ego, it seems they could see the incident but as a catastrophe. For who wants to live a loving life to be caught and killed like Jesus? How could Jesus expect people not to judge the crucifixion by the form when in everyday life we judge but by form? Therefore it almost seems to me, the crucifixion could cause nothing but fear and bewilderment and also about the fact that a holy man would let so many people see his crucifixion and so few his reappearance after his "death" and his ensuing ascension. I know I am wrong somehow but have a feeling that my reasoning is quite logical. Please help me sort this out. Thanks.

A: Setting aside for a moment the issue of whether the crucifixion is indeed an historical fact, we can see very clearly one of the basic differences between the Course and traditional Christianity by contrasting their views of the meaning and significance of the crucifixion. Christianity -- and much of the world -- asserts that selfless love is demonstrated through sacrifice, and that there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends (John 15:13). And since, according to Christian theology, Jesus, totally sinless and innocent and undeserving of any condemnation, laid down his life for *all* his brothers and sisters -- so long as they are willing to accept his sacrifice on their behalf -- the crucifixion becomes the greatest demonstration of love that the world has ever seen. Supporting this line of thinking, the recent movie emphasizes how great Jesus' suffering and pain and humiliation on our account must have been, as further demonstration of how much he and his Father must love us. His Father's Love is demonstrated in His willingness to offer up His only Son that our sins might be forgiven. Generally, there is little questioning of the premise behind this belief, that God the Father is the One Who set the conditions that demand such a sacrifice of His only Son -- that our sins could be so heinous that God could only be appeased by the Perfect Sacrifice of His Perfect Son.

The Course, on the other hand, asserts, **"Sacrifice is so essential to your thought system that salvation apart from sacrifice means nothing to you. Your confusion of sacrifice and love is so profound that you cannot conceive of love without sacrifice. And it is this that you must look upon; sacrifice is attack, not love" (T.15.X.5:7,8,9).** The contrast is almost startling. Earlier, in the section **"Atonement without Sacrifice,"** Jesus explains, **"Sacrifice is a notion totally unknown to God. It arises solely from fear, and frightened people can be vicious. Sacrificing in any way is a violation of my injunction that you should be merciful even as your Father in Heaven is merciful" (T.3.I.4:1,2,3).**

So what of the selfless love that is willing to sacrifice the self? This is one of the ego's cleverest ploys, for its "selfless love" glorifies the self that has been sacrificed and destroyed through death. The Course, in contrast, teaches that genuine selfless love comes, not from the denial of the self -- which very conveniently makes the false self real -- but from the denial of the *belief* in the self, which is a statement of the Course's Atonement principle, that the separation never happened. And this kind of selflessness the ego cannot tolerate.

The issue of the historical nature of the crucifixion ends up being a red herring from the Course's perspective. What is important to recognize is that the story has been an important part of the ego myth that perpetuates our belief in sin, guilt and fear. Jesus in the Course simply provides an alternative way of looking at the grim story that we have for so many, many eons accepted as true -- that our guilt is real and God demands sacrifice. He offers us a **"wholly benign" "positive interpretation of the crucifixion that is wholly devoid of fear" (T.6.I.1:5)**. His death has nothing to do with atoning for sins, it is merely an **"extreme example" (T.6.I.2:1)** of the basic Course teaching that persecution is not real and no one can be a victim -- turning the traditional Christian interpretation completely upside down! We can only believe in persecution and assault if we equate ourselves with the body -- which Jesus makes clear he did not **(T.6.I.4)**.

So, even if within the dream there had been a physical crucifixion, it would have been a part of *our* dream, not Jesus' dream, since he knew he was not the figure in the dream that everyone else saw him as. The scripting of the events that seemed to play out in the world would come from the collective ego, but the alternative interpretation of the meaning of those events would come from the mind joined with the Holy Spirit, which Jesus represents. The events themselves are only ever neutral symbols, which can represent either the projections of guilt of the ego or the extensions of love of the Holy Spirit. And that is the only choice Jesus is trying to teach us about the crucifixion. Which interpretation we choose will determine whether we continue to see ourselves as crucified symbols of our brothers' guilt, or gentle reminders of their innocence as well as our own **(T.27.I)**.

For additional helpful discussion on the nature and reality of Jesus, see Question #473, and on the crucifixion specifically, see Questions [#219](#) and [#220](#).

Q #564: Question # 341 refers to our right to separate -- "conditional upon the 'right' to separate will you and he (your brother) agree to meet from time to time, and keep apart in intervals of separation." My question is, surely there must be a divine purpose for this illusion of separation, which is, after all, ubiquitous? Surely it must be a meaningful error. Is its purpose so that we may become conscious of and appreciate the oneness, which is the opposite of separation? Does it go: oneness...then illusion of separation...then awareness of oneness? Is the purpose of illusion so that God may know Himself?

A: No, sorry, your line of reasoning may be found in the explanations for the separation and the world offered by other spiritual teachings, but not *A Course in Miracles*. It is uncompromising in its position that God and Christ, in complete and absolute Oneness, are perfect (e.g., **T.11.IV.7:5; P.3.I.1:10**), to which nothing different or new need be nor can be added (**T.10.in.2:1,2,3,4**). So it is impossible for God or His Son to gain anything from an experience of separation -- it is a contradiction of His Reality and therefore can be of no value. The thought of separation and its seeming effects are nothing but a co(s)mic mistake of infinitesimally small, nondimensional proportions, despite our experience to the contrary.

The Course explains early in the text that consciousness is the domain of the ego (**T.3.IV.2**), since it establishes a false duality of observer and observed, as if there were two differentiated and differentiable entities. Once we speak of an experience of anything other than the one Self, we are functioning in the realm of illusion and error. There is nothing to be gained from within this state, except its undoing.

Now the correction of the error will, of course, come in dualistic terms, within the realm of consciousness as it shifts from false to true perception (**C.1.7**). But it will be a reflection of the perfect oneness of God and Christ. Forgiveness, **"a kind of happy fiction" (C.3.2:1)**, is the process that undoes the perceptual mistakes of the ego thought system, grounded as it is in separation and differences, leading to judgment and attack. Through our practice of forgiveness, we will come to know again that **"there is nothing outside you. That is what you must ultimately learn, for it is the realization that the Kingdom of Heaven is restored to you. For God created only this, and He did not depart from it nor leave it separate from Himself. The Kingdom of Heaven is the dwelling place of the Son of God, who left not his Father and dwells not apart from Him. Heaven is not a place nor a condition. It is merely an**

awareness of perfect Oneness, and the knowledge that there is nothing else; nothing outside this Oneness, and nothing else within" (T.18.VI.1).

You may also find the discussion presented in Question #[109](#) of relevance to your question.

Q #565: As a student of *A Course in Miracles*, my goal is to accept the Atonement for myself and live above the battleground in the real world until my body fails and then exist in oneness with God. Will I be aware of, or be able to influence those loved ones left behind who still consider themselves separated individuals living lives, or is this beyond what we can know now. Also, when people die who have never heard of the Course and/or are completely invested in their bodies, lives, individuality and separation, can they still choose to reject oneness after "death" and long to return to bodies and "life"? Is this an explanation of reincarnation? OR-- Whether or not they study the Course and whether or not they believe that they are separated individuals, do they still become one with God automatically after death? Once you are one with God, why would you long for a body again and choose to reincarnate!

A: The way the Course views death is quite different from the way we ordinarily view it and the way religions have traditionally viewed it. Unlike practically all traditions east and west, the Course teaches that we do not have to wait for the body to die to become one with God -- death of the body has nothing to do with whether or not we are one with God. That is solely a matter of the decision our minds make -- to continue to believe that we are *not* one with God, or to deny that denial of the truth. The purpose of the miracle is to reverse the ego perception that the body is a real, independent entity that houses the soul that is released upon the death of the body. The miracle helps us realize that the body is a thought that never leaves its source in the mind and does nothing other than represent the mind's decision ("**the outside picture of inward condition**" [T.21.in.1:5]). The critical factor therefore is the decision we make in our minds to be or not to be as God created us.

When we accept the truth of our oneness, and reject the illusion of separation from God, our minds, now free of guilt are guided solely by love, and that may or may not result in the laying aside of the body. Death in this state of mind is simply a decision; there is no waiting for the body to die so that one can return home. (See *The Song of Prayer* [S.3.II] for a discussion of death as a right-minded choice.) Love may need the body as a suitable form of expression for other minds still frightened of abstract love. But if you are in the real world, you would already know that the body is not your identity -- you are fully present to love, and love is fully present to you. The body has nothing to do with that. Moreover, in the real world there would be no *you* (a separate identity) that would decide whether to help others "left behind." There is only the perception of the Holy Spirit: love is either being expressed or called for. And those calling for love await but their own decision to accept what is already within.

Finally, to ask why, if you are one with God, would you long for a body again and choose to reincarnate is to fall into one of the ego's favorite traps, for to ask the question is to assume that it happened once before; and the Atonement principle is a statement of the impossibility of that ever happening at all. Moreover, it makes the body into the enemy . . . and therefore real.

Q #566: I understand that *A Course in Miracles* teaches that God does not know about the world, and as far as He is concerned we are one with Him dreaming of exile and separation. I am not clear how the decision was made to send us Jesus and the Holy Spirit; Jesus in charge of the Atonement and the Holy Spirit as our Voice, Comfort, and Guide. How did our Teacher even know we had and are continuing to make such a mess of things?

A: A reasonable question, asked by almost every student in one form or another. The statements in the Course pertaining to the Holy Spirit as being sent by God as the Answer to the separation are among

those meant metaphorically. Other statements are meant literally; and if this distinction is not recognized, the Course can seem to be saying contradictory things, leaving a reader feeling rather baffled. The account of the separation and its undoing are presented as mythology, specifically within a framework that is meaningful to people in Western philosophical and religious traditions. The language used in the Course to present its teachings reflect these heritages; and further, a considerable part of its teachings are clearly corrections of what it views as the mistakes of biblically based religions. Its basic metaphysics is a strict non-dualism, which means therefore that it is not quite accurate to say that as far as God is concerned, "we are one with Him dreaming of exile and separation" -- that is dualism. If that were true, then a state other than that of perfect Oneness is possible, which would be contrary to what is maintained throughout the Course. We return to these points frequently in our answers to students questions, because of their critical importance in students' work with the Course.

We refer you to ***Love Does Not Condemn* (pp. 419,420,421)** for a full discussion of the Holy Spirit in the context of the metaphysical basis of *A Course in Miracles*. Briefly, the Course teaches that the Holy Spirit is really the memory of God's perfect love that remained in the Son's mind when he fell asleep; and therefore the Holy Spirit is not a person, but rather a Presence within each seemingly fragmented mind -- a Call or a Voice, not of a separate being, but simply a part of the mind that retains the memory of its true Identity. The language used is biblical; thus, terms like *Comforter*. In keeping with the strict non-dualism of the Course, we would therefore have to say that God's "Answer" is really, to quote from ***Love Does Not Condemn*: "His own unchanging and eternal love that forever shines in our split minds, as does a beacon of light shine out into the darkness. God's love does not do anything; it simply is: an ongoing state of love's presence which we call the Holy Spirit" (pp. 420,421).**

Jesus, then, is the manifestation of the Holy Spirit -- a symbol in our minds that have become so identified with specifics that we can relate most comfortably and meaningfully only to specifics. Thus, in his loving gentleness as our teacher, he ultimately reflects to us the love that we have split off from our awareness. We relate to him as a separate person at first, but as we grow to trust him more and experience his love more and more, the differences between ourselves and Jesus fade until we, like him, are totally identified with love. Our individuality lessens in significance and meaning as this process takes place, which begins with our feeling that he has been sent and ends with our complete transcendence of that and all other concepts of separation.

Q #567: Is it possible to be in a sales position and still be a teacher of God? It seems that sales positions are all based around manipulation and selling techniques. I am kind of stuck in that I feel that the only way that I can begin to make some money is to get a job with commission. What would you advise?

A: Purpose is everything! If the *content* in your mind is that your position in sales is a classroom in which you can be guided by Jesus or the Holy Spirit to undo the separation, there will be no conflict. You will then do whatever competent sales people do, but for a different purpose -- not to intentionally manipulate others to get what you want, which could only result in guilt and conflict. Your purpose, as you carry out your responsibilities conscientiously, would be to recognize more and more that the only aspect of value in your interaction with your customer is your learning that you both share the same interests: you both have a split mind and a decision maker that can choose to follow either the ego's thought system of separation or the Holy Spirit's thought system of forgiveness. That is the content; and that is what makes you a teacher of God, not the form (the role), as Jesus states in *A Course in Miracles*: "**A teacher of God is anyone who chooses to be one. His qualifications consist solely in this; somehow, somewhere he has made a deliberate choice in which he did not see his interests as apart from someone else's**" (M.1.1:1,2). The Holy Spirit can use anything we made to harm (everything in the world!) to heal our minds of their mistaken belief in sin, guilt, and fear (T.25.VI.4,5,6).

Other students have had similar concerns about other roles: see for example Questions [#3](#), [#179](#), [#195](#), [#284](#), and [#560](#)

Q #568: The answer to #390 says that "*A Course in Miracles* teaches that once you seem to have a thought of separation, you are outside the Mind of God . . . Consciousness . . . all predicated on the reality of a self . . . are outside the Mind of God. They are illusory . . . so they can not be contained within His reality -- nor ours, as His undifferentiated Son . . ." I have (at least) two questions:

1) I, as the undifferentiated Son, cannot even *seem* to have a thought of separation. So, who is this "I" that *seems* to have the thought of separation (even though he may not even have such a thought)? To *whom* does it seem that he does? It seems to mean that the dreamer and the dream arise as one, together, where the dreamer is part of the dream itself, that the dreamer himself is an illusion -- that is, that since the dreamer is an illusion, does not exist, that the fact that he dreams or even seems to dream is an illusion; that is, that the illusion itself does not exist, is an illusion. That is, to say that both the dreamer and the dream which includes the dreamer is a contradictory statement and thus has no meaning; that is, it itself is an illusion.

2) If one claims that something is an illusion, then that something cannot be in the Mind of God. Thus, the ego, et al, is an illusion, does not exist and is not in the Mind of God. Thus, it is *true* that the ego is an illusion. But the fact that it is an illusion is itself *not* an illusion, since then the ego would exist. Thus the illusion is real -- the ego does not exist. Thus, although the ego is not in the Mind of God, it must be that the *illusion*, being true, and thus real, must be in the Mind of God, since all that is true, and therefore real, is in the Mind of God.

A: Our answer to your questions is founded on the guidelines Jesus presents in the Introduction to the clarification of terms at the end of the manual: **"This is not a course in philosophical speculation, nor is it concerned with precise terminology. It is concerned only with Atonement, or the correction of perception. The means of Atonement is forgiveness. . . . The ego will demand many answers that this course does not give. It does not recognize as questions the mere form of a question to which an answer is impossible" (C.in.1:1,2,3; 4:1,2).** The *message* of the Course cannot be grasped through the use of logical reasoning alone, and it cannot be made to fit into categories that assume the reality of time and space. The *source* and *content* of the Course transcend discursive reason entirely. While logical reasoning may be a useful and necessary beginning, it cannot divulge the *content* of the words in the Course, which Jesus says **"are but symbols of symbols" (M.21.1:9).** It is necessary somewhere along the way to recognize the uselessness of all human structures for achieving the goals of the Course. Many mystics, paradoxically, have written about experience that is ultimately ineffable. There is no conceptual/linguistic system that can adequately express what is beyond all subject-object dichotomy: the immediacy of pure oneness; **"a oneness joined as one" (T.25.I.7:1). "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" (W.pl.169.5:1,2,3,4).** While these statements are of profound metaphysical interest, the reader has not connected with their *content* if they do not resonate with an internal state, however dim that may be. Recall that the Course came in response to the request of two people to find a way of relating to people that got beyond hostility and divisiveness. It did not come as theological, metaphysical treatise, although its discourse is on a sophisticated intellectual level. The unmistakable implication of much of what is said in the Course, however, is that discursive reasoning is a defense against the truth, and therefore can be an interference. This, even though the Course is replete with compelling "arguments," and one might justifiably object that this answer has done the same. We are to use its words and logic, in a spirit of humility, to get beyond words and logic. Similarly, Jesus says of time: **"It should be emphasized, however, that ultimately no compromise is possible between everything and nothing. Time is essentially a device by which all compromise in this respect can be given up. It only seems to be abolished by degrees, because time itself involves intervals that do not exist" (T.2.VII.5:10,11,12).** As all students are aware, the exercises in part I of the workbook rely heavily on clock time -- but only as part of Jesus' program of thought-reversal, not because time is real. This training leads to the restoration of our minds to the state of complete abstraction, **"the natural condition of the mind" (W.pl.161.2:1).**

And, finally, Jesus reigns us in, protecting us from harming ourselves even further by reminding us, "**You are still convinced that your understanding is a powerful contribution to the truth, and makes it what it is. Yet we have emphasized that you need understand nothing**" (T.18.IV.7:5,6).

Q #569: In Kenneth's commentary on the Text of *A Course in Miracles* (Chapter 12), he states the following: "I interpret your attack on me as unjustified, which secretly means I know it is justified because I attacked you first, in my mind." Would you please clarify this dynamic?

A: Any interpretation our mind joined with the ego gives to external circumstances inevitably implies a belief in its opposite as well, because the ego thought system is a dualistic system predicated on the belief in opposition. Whatever we experience consciously is only half of the oppositional "whole" that the ego has split apart through projection to make differences and attack real. And so we do not recognize that the two halves are really the same (T.6.II.1,2,3; T.27.II.12,13,14).

Because of the dynamic of projection, I can only see attack in you if I have first seen it within myself. In fact, metaphysically, you exist solely as the projection of my attack thoughts so that I do not have to accept responsibility for them myself. My anger at you for your "unjustified" attack is merely the defense against the unconscious guilt over my self-accusation that I am the attacker, deserving of punishment and attack in return. The paradoxical nature of the ego thought system is such that whatever I protest most vociferously about against you is always a projection of what I secretly believe about myself -- that is *always* the case, with no exceptions (T.6.in.1). And that is one of the uncompromising teachings of the Course that makes it so difficult for students to accept, if not in principle, certainly in practice.

In reality, from the Holy Spirit's perspective, neither ego interpretation -- about you or about myself -- is true. The Holy Spirit does not take sides but rather first helps us to recognize that both halves are the same -- my brother and I are one. And then He dismisses both interpretations as false because they are based on the faulty premise that separation, differences, and attack are real (T.5.VI.10; T22.VI.12,13; T.27.II.15,16). In other words, the oppositional "whole" of the attacking ego is an illusion, so no matter how it is sliced, nothing real or true can follow from it.

Q #570: I've been married for eight years and during this time my wife has been drinking on and off and sometimes using pills at night. I believe she is an alcoholic. Recently we had a baby girl. I'm thinking of leaving so my child will not be subject to this behavior and I would have left already if it wasn't for our new baby girl. We have been going to counseling but it seems we just keep going over the same old issues. Since reading *A Course in Miracles* I'm not sure what is the right thing to do. I'm not sure when the Holy Spirit speaks to me or what would be the most loving thing to do. Can you help me with this?

A: Our lives present us with many dilemmas for which it seems critical that we make the right decision so that we don't make mistakes with serious consequences and can minimize the pain and suffering for ourselves and others. And from the world's perspective, this concern for choosing the right alternative seems eminently reasonable. But the Course turns the "logic" of the world upside down and invites us to take a very different approach to our problems (T.27.VII.1,2).

The problem is not the external relationship and its conflicts. The problem is that we have defined for ourselves the parameters of the conflict and the possible solutions for which we seek guidance. And our approach to the situation, by focusing on the external relationship, ends up excluding ourselves from the only meaningful solution (W.pl.79). I can only experience conflict with others when I am identified with my ego, and that identification is the problem with which I need help. In other words, the Holy Spirit's only purpose is to help me heal the unforgivenesses in my own mind that are being projected onto the external

situation. Once I have accepted that help, which has nothing to do with the other person or persons, then I will simply know the most loving and peaceful action to take to address the external situation. But so long as I keep my focus on the relationship with others and am not willing to look at my inner conflict, I am asserting my unwillingness to be open to the real solution.

So, in practical terms, what does this mean in terms of the specific relationship with your wife that you describe? You would want to begin by looking at all the judgments you may be holding onto about your wife, the ways in which you see her as somehow responsible for your unhappiness, the investment you have in wanting her to be different from how she is before you can accept her. This is an internal inventory of your thoughts and feelings and it has nothing to do with any decision about separating or staying together. The goal is simply to acknowledge the judgments you are projecting onto her and then to ask yourself whether you would accuse yourself of these same things (**W.pl.134.9**). Not that the specific actions will necessarily be the same, but you want to get to the underlying meaning or content. Are you accusing her of being irresponsible, unavailable, unwilling, thinking only about herself, etc., and could that ever be said about you? The truth is, we could never be upset at someone else's actions or inactions if we didn't first believe those things about ourselves. And that is where the healing is really needed, to get in touch with and then let go of the guilt in our own mind so that we don't need to project it onto anyone else.

Now this is not to deny or excuse or justify any of your wife's shortcomings. But you want to release yourself from the self-condemnation so that you can release her from any condemnation as well. Through this process of forgiveness, you would then come to recognize the fear underneath your wife's defenses, and the call for love in both of you (**T.12.I.3,4,5,6,7**). From this place of acceptance and peace, you would recognize the most loving next step for all of you. And whether you and your wife separate or remain together, you would be able to act without guilt or attack.

Several earlier questions, [#11](#), [#43](#), and [#77](#), on hearing the Voice of the Holy Spirit, may also be helpful to review.

Q #571: *A Course in Miracles* teaches that the world I see is the world that I have projected with my mind. It also says that once all illusions have been brought to the Holy Spirit for forgiveness, I will see a beautiful world, not unlike Heaven. Jesus reached this state, but the world he was seeing was still one in which he was nailed to a cross and murdered, hardly representative of the "real" world referred to the Course.

A: When the Course speaks of the real world it is referring to the content of the mind, rather than the physical world seen with the body's eyes. As you point out, Jesus saw the actions of those who crucified him and saw himself on the cross, but he knew these things did not mean anything because he did not identify with the body. While the ego tells us the crucifixion is the height of victimization, Jesus calls it a **"useless journey"** (**T.6.I.2:60**). That is the view from the real world; it does not mean wearing rose colored glasses, changing what the body is doing or feeling, or being surrounded by physical beauty. Knowing who he is as God's innocent Son, Jesus sees only wholeness and does not see himself as a victim. He is defenseless because he knows he cannot be harmed, and he is therefore free to see things as they really are. Thus, not mistaking illusion for truth is what constitutes the real world. Since what is illusion has no effects, the events of the illusory world are seen as meaningless. For students of the Course this is accomplished through the Atonement process, in which every relationship is transformed through forgiveness. The real world escapes us as long as we cling to our identity with the body, and choose to believe that the world holds something (*anything*) that we want. **"The real world can actually be perceived. All that is necessary is a willingness to perceive nothing else"** (**T.11.VII.2:6,7**).

When a choice is finally made to accept only the true perception of the Holy Spirit, which is a choice not to believe the ego's lies about who we are, the seeming pain and terror of the world as the body sees it

will disappear from awareness. Thus is the goal of learning accomplished; love replaces fear completely and the real world is attained. It is this awareness of love's presence that is not unlike Heaven, and precedes it in our experience: **"Perceiving only the real world will lead you to the real Heaven, because it will make you capable of understanding it" (T.11.VII.3:9).**

Other related Questions: [#17](#), [#28](#), [#34](#), [#80](#), [#97](#), and [#296](#).

Q #572: I have been studying *A Course in Miracles* for several years, but I am still perplexed by some things. Recently there was a news program describing the benefits of prayer on healing the body. It was one of the "so called double blind" studies where neither the participants nor the controllers knew which patients were being prayed for. But the study proved that the group being prayed for improved dramatically over the patients not being prayed for. What I don't understand is, what is going on here? If God does not work in this world and the Holy Spirit or Jesus does not heal the body in this world, how can this be happening to such a degree that people believe that they are healed by prayer. I understand the ladder of prayer in the "Song of Prayer" pamphlet, and it appears that this is asking out of need, the lowest level of prayer. Is this just another ego trick or am I missing something here?

A: Without getting into the irrelevant issue of whether or not the specific study reported was "good science," drawing sound conclusions from empirically sound research design and procedures, we'll assume the validity of the findings for the sake of discussion. From the Course's perspective, the improvement of bodily symptoms is always the result of the mind's own decision to bring about physical change in its projected bodily form (**M.5.II.2**). God, the Holy Spirit and Jesus have nothing to do with physical recovery. And no other mind brings about the change -- it is only ever the result of the willingness of the patient's own mind. Whether or not, as part of the research design, information about who is praying for whom is conveyed to the patients is irrelevant, since minds are joined and it is only at this level that any kind of communication takes place. And as to whether these findings are an ego trick or the result of right-minded release of guilt through an experience of joining really depends on the mind of each individual patient -- either avenue to the release of bodily symptoms is possible.

For more on the relationship between prayer and healing, you may wish to refer to Question [#385](#).

Q #573: In regard to Question [#356](#), I am curious about what Biblical terms in *A Course in Miracles* have different meanings from the traditional ones? I am Christian and love the messages of the gospel. I also love the messages in the Course. I don't see the differences or a conflict as I believe they are both from God. I do believe some traditions have corrupted the original message of Christ. Is that what you are referring to? If that is the case, how do YOU discern between the traditions?

A: The short answer to your question is that most the terms in the Course have different meaning from the Bible. That is because they are based on a thought system that is different from the belief system of the Bible.

The foundation of both the Old and New Testaments is the belief that sin is real and requires some form of retribution or atonement through sacrifice to earn salvation (Heaven) and thus avoid punishment (hell). The crucifixion of Jesus is the highest expression of this thought system. Jesus' death on the cross atoned for the original sin of Adam and Eve and reopened the gates of Heaven for all Christian believers.

In the dualistic belief system of the Bible, God, as Creator, is a being distinct from His creation, which is understood to be the physical universe, including human beings endowed with a spirit or soul. These basic beliefs hold true whatever other interpretations or distortions are introduced by the many sects and

churches professing Christianity. *A Course in Miracles*, on the other hand, is a non-dualistic thought system that teaches "**There is no separation of God and His creation**" (T.8.V.2:8), "**There is no sin**" (T.26.VII.10:5), and "**There is no world!**" (W.pl.132.6:2). These fundamental principles of the Course are what give different meaning to the biblical terms that Jesus uses. In the Course, salvation/Atonement is a process of accepting the truth of these statements, recognizing that it is only the choice to believe in separation that makes it real in our experience and is the cause of the guilt that makes the body and the world *seem* real. Because there is no sin, there is no need for atonement through sacrifice, but only correction.

The Course teaches that, rather than a means of redemption, the crucifixion is an extreme example of Jesus' teaching that we are minds not bodies, and cannot be harmed in any way by anything external to the mind. This is what is meant by the section in the text where Jesus speaks of the crucifixion: "**The real meaning of the crucifixion lies in the *apparent* intensity of the assault of some of the Sons of God upon another. This, of course, is impossible, and must be fully understood as impossible**" (T.6.I.3:4,5).

Thus, the terms used in the Bible and the Course are not in conflict. They simply represent fundamentally distinct thought systems. That is not to say, however, that the Bible does not have passages that reflect the loving content of the right mind, just as followers of the Bible could recognize right minded passages in the Course. Like everyone else, scripture writers had access to the Holy Spirit, Who is the part of the mind that holds the memory of God. An example of this is the beautiful Gospel story of the Prodigal Son, which Jesus uses in the Course (See:T.8.VI.4). For our learning process, the important thing is to choose a thought system that helps us get in touch with the loving content of the Holy Spirit in our minds. In *A Course in Miracles* that would be through the process of forgiveness (See: Question #206). The form (words, terms) is not important.

More information regarding the Bible and *A Course in Miracles* can be found in "*A Course in Miracles and Christianity: A Dialogue*" and "*The Message of A Course in Miracles*" by Kenneth Wapnick.

Q #574: I understand Jesus' remarks in his section from *A Course in Miracles*, "What is the role of words in healing?" (M.21); he says that over time we learn to let our words be chosen for us and that a major hindrance to this aspect of learning is our "fear about the validity" of what we hear. I am training now to be a teacher and I let Jesus speak through me and am learning how to discern more and more and sometimes what I hear is indeed startling and "has nothing to do with the situation" as I perceive it. Sometimes I am embarrassed but I usually calm down. I guess implicit in this question is me "second-guessing" God and thinking that I know better than He does but sometimes I am just startled at what I said and the other person is too. Can you help offer some insight here?

A: To the Holy Spirit (and Jesus as His manifestation), everything is either an expression of love or a call for love. He sees the larger picture of everyone's Atonement path and is not limited by what we normally see as the boundaries of our lives in the world. Form is completely irrelevant to the Holy Spirit. And therefore His response to calls for love would be in terms of where people are on their Atonement paths, which is not something we ordinarily are in touch with. That is why what we hear may be startlingly different from what we think we should say. In the section you refer to, Jesus explains that our doubts and discomfort when this happens come from a "**shabby self-perception**," which we would do well to "**leave behind**" (M.21.5.4,5). So that is what Jesus advises us to do in this aspect of our training. It means that we need to develop our ability to recognize our underlying self-images -- specifically the ones that include a sense of inadequacy, neediness, specialness, and being unfairly treated. The more we hold onto self-images such as these, the less likely we would be to accurately discern the Holy Spirit's Voice from the ego's voice, because our holding onto them implies that we know better than Jesus who we *really* are, even after hearing him say again and again, "**you are as God created you.**" Thus, the trouble we have in humbly accepting Jesus at his word leads to the difficulties in our ability to hear accurately.

See also our answers to Questions [#11](#), [#43](#), and [#77](#).

Q #575: With respect to Question [#365](#) re the child's role in child abuse, what is the adult role in such a relationship? Clearly, the adult is not telling God "look at how I suffer."

A: As is well known, many abusing adults were once themselves abused, and probably would be sustaining an unspoken accusation against their own abusers: "I can't help doing what I'm doing; it's not my fault. After all, look what happened to me!" This is another way of keeping separation real, yet having someone else be responsible for it. Moreover, anyone who attacks another person (whether child or adult) is harboring a self-accusation of unforgiveable sinfulness that is so tormenting that it must be projected from the mind and seen in a body and attacked there.

The ego's ultimate strategy is to keep us focused on the body -- one of its favorite means being the perception of victimization -- so that we would rarely, if ever, suspect that the mind is the source of both sin and salvation from sin. This ego strategy, thus, is at the root of the need to find fault with what other bodies do and then punish them through habitual abuse, whether physical or psychological. Jesus has described this strategy in the section of *A Course in Miracles* called "**The Self-Accused**" (**T.31.III**). So in some way, the abusing adult is pleading with God, saying, "I know I'm mean, vicious, and cruel, but it's not my fault!" The ego has achieved one of its major goals in this process insofar as the process validates the reality of the victim/victimizer cycle. The foundation supporting the entire thought system of the ego is *sin*: that there is a guilty victimizer and an innocent victim. This is the cycle the ego seeks to perpetuate in our relationships in the world, lest we hear another Voice within our minds calling us to remember the truth of our innocence with respect to our relationship with God our Source. If there were no accusation of sin on that ultimate level, the concept of victimization would never have arisen, and obviously there would be no need to project it onto bodies. So an abusing adult is one of the outcomes of the need to do something about the excruciating pain of self-hatred (sinfulness) thought to be the core of our identity (**W.pl.93.1**). This, in effect, defines the ego's purpose for life in the body -- it is the chosen route of escape from the pain and fear in the mind. The source of victimization thus is always in bodies (psychological or physical), never in the mind's acceptance of the ego's made-up story of ontological sin, guilt, and fear.

Q #576: Let me see if I have this right -- all of this world and everything in it is a thought we are all having -- part of a tiny, mad idea that slipped into the sleeping Son's mind for just one tiny instant. In fact my identity as the person I think I am is just a fragment in the dream of Christ -- and everyone in the dream is also a fragment in the dream and we are all dreaming, or rather One of us is dreaming he is many yet in truth he is not -- just for an instant dreaming but still dreaming. So my big question is -- how did Jesus get into the dream and know that it was just a dream? If it's true that it must have been the "right" part of the Christ-mind that sent him -- which I think means in truth the Oneness of the Sonship sent him -- how did he get here without being affected by the illusion. I mean how did he come with the knowledge that it was not real? I can understand that perhaps one can figure it out but it seems that he came with it figured out - - how is that possible?

A: First of all, a point of clarification. *A Course in Miracles* does not refer to Christ as having fallen asleep and dreaming. Christ is the extension of the Mind of God that has never forgotten Its true Identity. The Course uses the Son of God to refer both to the Christ and to the illusory part -- the split mind -- that seems to have fallen asleep and had a dream of separation from God. But in reality, the dream has never happened and Christ remains unaffected (**W.pil.6:1,2,3**).

As for your "big question" -- it is helpful to remember that the story of the Son of God falling asleep and dreaming of a world of separation from his Father is a myth, a set of symbols to correct the story the ego has told us of sin, guilt and fear, and an angry Father bent on destroying His Son for his attack on Him.

The Mind outside the dream is not acting on the dream to awaken the sleeping Son and all the fragments that he has seemingly splintered into. And there is no Jesus from outside the dream who could be "sent" into the dream.

There is a memory of oneness that remains in the mind of the Son after he seems to have fallen asleep. And that memory can be symbolically represented either more abstractly by the Holy Spirit or more specifically and concretely by the figure of Jesus (among other figures who represent awakening). But both are symbols for that memory we carried into the dream, which is present in each separate fragment - all our various individual identities.

Just as when you are sleeping and dreaming at night and some figures in your dream may represent your ego guilt and fears, and others may be symbols of your right-minded sanity, so too the figures in our collective waking dream may serve the same functions. And just as there is no one outside our mind sending figures into our sleeping dreams, it is the split mind itself manifesting symbols in our waking dreams to represent the only two choices that are available to us -- continuing to sleep and dream or moving towards awakening.

You may also find Question [#473](#) on Jesus helpful, as well as Kenneth's tape set, *Jesus: Symbol and Reality*.

Q #577: What does *A Course in Miracles* say about karma, particularly in regard to healing?

A: You may wish to look at Question [#514-i](#), as well as [#363](#) for more in-depth discussions of the Course and karma. Karma is the impersonal law of cause and effect, which operates within the world of time and space, where every thought and action has a consequence. It has its origins in the thought of separation, where cause and effect are split off from each other and seem to proceed in a linear fashion over time, so that the past has implications for the present and the future. Since time is an illusion, karma, even separated from any judgmental implications, must remain within an ego framework. And so healing, from a karmic perspective, would involve releasing a past debt through some kind of payment (e.g., sickness or suffering) now or in the future.

The Course view of healing is very different from this linear process. Nothing from the past can be the cause of what I am experiencing in the present, because there is no past. The cause is always a thought that I am holding in the present. Thought alone, according to the Course, is the cause of whatever we experience. If we wish a different experience, all we need do is change our thinking (or the guide we have chosen for our thinking). And this change does not take any time. As Jesus explains in "**The Laws of Healing**," **"All sickness comes from separation. When the separation is denied, it goes. For it is gone as soon as the idea that brought it has been healed, and been replaced by sanity"**(T.26.VII.2:1,2,3).

But for this change of mind to occur, we must become aware of what we unconsciously believe about the cause of sickness. The Course uses the word sickness to encompass more than physical symptoms -- seeing the body as sick in the first place means the mind is sick (T.28.II.11:7). And in fact, the Course asserts that it is not the body that is sick (T.29.II.8:1,2).

And so Jesus continues, **"Sickness and sin are seen as consequence and cause, in a relationship kept hidden from awareness that it may be carefully preserved from reason's light"**(T.26.VII.2:4). This relationship is one we accept and believe, but it operates only because we choose to believe it. This is true whether we are speaking of karmic laws or the ego's "laws." **"Guilt asks for punishment, and its request is granted. Not in truth, but in the world of shadows and illusions built on sin. The Son of God perceived what he would see because perception is a wish fulfilled"** (T.26.VII.3:1,2,3).

Now for most of us, our investment in the ego thought system and the individual identity it offers us prevents us from experiencing the immediate release that this shift in thought offers. And this lag is one the ego would interpret as proof that time is necessary to heal. But it is only our own fear that prevents us from accepting the healing now. The reason for our resistance and fear is very clearly spelled out in the section on healing in the manual:

The acceptance of sickness as a decision of the mind, for a purpose for which it would use the body, is the basis of healing....There is no form of sickness that would not be cured at once.

What is the single requisite for this shift in perception? It is simply this; the recognition that sickness is of the mind, and has nothing to do with the body. What does this recognition "cost"? It costs the whole world you see, for the world will never again appear to rule the mind. For with this recognition is responsibility placed where it belongs; not with the world, but on him who looks on the world and sees it as it is not. He looks on what he chooses to see. No more and no less. The world does nothing to him. He only thought it did. Nor does he do anything to the world, because he was mistaken about what it is. Herein is the release from guilt and sickness both, for they are one. Yet to accept this release, the insignificance of the body must be an acceptable idea (**M.5.II.2:1,13; 3**).

We see in here the Course's correction to the law of karma -- the world does nothing to us and we have done nothing to the world. There is no world, only a dream of a world, and so there is no debt to be paid, except in dreams.

Q #578: I have had some very strong feelings about one presidential candidate in particular, but now realize that that is ego running wild. I have asked to see differently, and now realize that he is running frightened and asking for love. My feelings are becoming more peaceful, and I am able to bless this person some of the time, but I am confused by the idea of voting. Since this is indeed an illusionary world, why should I bother to vote at all? How should I look at the coming elections in November?

A: Since we believe we are bodies living in the world, the fact that the world is an illusion does not stop us from taking part in any of the normal activities we engage in: sleeping, eating, working, exercising, watching movies, or participating in elections. We do these things because we think we are here, and they are part of our experience as bodies. Jesus tells us early in the text that we should not deny that we have chosen to identify with the body (**T.2.IV.3**). In fact, doing so means denying ourselves the learning opportunities that are essential to the Holy Spirit's curriculum of healing. The political arena, especially elections, affords us a very interesting opportunity to look at a vast array of judgments so they can be given to the Holy Spirit for correction. Very few people escape the charge of feelings around elections. These feelings range from a strong determination not to be involved, to strong judgments in favor of, or against candidates or groups. One may choose to vote or not to vote for many reasons, but it is not the metaphysics of *A Course in Miracles* that provides the guideline for this behavior. The Course is teaching us only to change our minds through the process of forgiveness, not to change our behavior. This means recognizing, not denying, the ego thought system that underlies our beliefs and judgments, so it can be transformed by the Holy Spirit.

The Course teaches that the world is the domain of the ego, that it was chosen as a substitute for Heaven. We have established its political structures as the foundation of organized society governing the way we live in the world. It is understandable, then, that politics is a very powerful symbol of the ego's thought system, and politicians are significant authority figures. Both politics and politicians are, therefore, fertile fields for a very important cornerstone of the ego: the authority problem.

When we choose to believe the separation is real, we make this choice because we want to create ourselves; to "be our own person." In doing so we believe we are usurping God's power: **The issue of authority is really a question of authorship. When you have an authority problem, it is always**

because you believe you are the author of yourself and project your delusion onto others. You then perceive the situation as one in which others are literally fighting you for your authorship. This is the fundamental error of all those who believe they have usurped the power of God" (T.3.VI.8:1,2,3,4). We decide for ourselves who we are (separate bodies), rather than accept who God tells us we are (His one innocent Son). Guilt for committing this "sin" is projected on to authority figures, whom we accuse of all kinds of "sins": lying, abandoning us, betraying us, neglecting our needs, stealing from us. These are all recognizable accusations hurled at politicians and governments, along with other significant authority figures. In every accusation we find the victimization theme, and all the feelings we associate with authority. This is the projected version of our authority problem with God. It is the **"root of all evil" (T.3.VI.7)** because it has its birth in the original decision to separate from God and identify with the ego. Thus it is our conflict with God over authorship of our identity that is behind all thoughts and feelings associated with elections, politicians, and politics in general. No wonder political debates and discussions are heated. All parties (pardon the pun) are "right." The ego tells us we are right about being bodies, being in the world, being liberal or conservative, being different in millions of ways, and right about voting or not voting. The Holy Spirit tells us we are wrong about who we are, and the only thing we can be right about is learning to identify with His definition our Identity. As we experience the next few months of election activity, we can look at all the feelings and judgments about candidates and voters alike, recognizing in them our own cherished choice for separation. This is the way we see differently, and is the first step in forgiving ourselves for our mistaken judgment. However right we may be about a candidate's superior suitability for office, if we judge the "other guy" as the sinner responsible for our distress, we are wrong. That is the important thing for us to learn at the polls in November, and in everything else as well.

Q #579: Over the past two years or so I have made a conscious effort to remember the moments and periods during my life when I actually feel peaceful. They are far and few between and always seem to be swallowed up as my familiar fears, concerns, etc., come flooding back in. One of the answers [\[Question #355\]](#) used the analogy that each of these moments can be thought of as a golden thread. As you have more and more of them the thread becomes a string, the string a rope, until you can climb out. This is my favorite image and has greatly helped me during difficult times. I have come to realize the enormity of my resistance to having these experiences but have also realized it is all right. These moments are always associated with forgiveness of some darkness in my mind, if only for a little while. However, there are certain seemingly minor events in my life that evoke such feelings of self-hatred and shame that have more recently come back to me from the distant past. Could it be my ego is "fighting back" as my separate identity is challenged?

A: The ego will always pull out all the stops in an attempt to preserve itself, and that certainly can explain at least in part your experience. But it may also be helpful to think of these old memories as resurfacing now because you are increasingly willing to look at the darkness and bring all of its various expressions in your mind up into your awareness so you can make a different choice about them.

Although the thoughts seem to be about events from the past, they are simply symbols of guilt, which you are still holding onto now, that are buried in your unconscious, where they continue to operate out of your awareness, robbing you of peace. By allowing them to come up into your conscious awareness, you are giving yourself another opportunity to release them into the light. The feelings associated with these thoughts, as you remember the past, may not be comfortable, but if you can learn to begin to welcome both the thoughts and the feelings as the opportunity for forgiveness that they present, they will increasingly lose their power to disrupt your peace. Nor will they continue to operate at a subterranean level in your mind, like seismic forces that affect you on the surface without your feeling as if you have any choice about the effects.

In *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus introduces a discussion of ego "dynamics" with reassuring words that can just as easily be applied to your specific experiences: **"No one can escape from illusions unless he looks at them, for not looking is the way they are protected. There is no need to shrink from**

illusions, for they cannot be dangerous. We are ready to look more closely at the ego's thought system because together we have the lamp that will dispel it, and since you realize you do not want it, you must be ready. Let us be very calm in doing this, for we are merely looking honestly for truth. The "dynamics" of the ego will be our lesson for a while, for we must look first at this to see beyond it, since you have made it real. We will undo this error quietly together, and then look beyond it to truth" (T.11.V.1).

Q #580: How does one develop a personal relationship with Jesus? Is there any way of "speeding up" the process of accessing, and more importantly being continuously aware, of the loving presence in one's mind? Is there anything else to do other than working on letting go of the ego and then waiting patiently for that inner peace to appear?

A: Since Jesus is the symbol of the part of the mind that remembers God, and *A Course in Miracles* is one of the forms he has given us to help us awaken from the dream of separation and realize that we are at home in God, one meaningful way to develop a relationship with him is by reading, studying, and most importantly applying its teaching to our lives. The relationship becomes personal by applying Jesus' message of forgiveness to the specific relationships and events of our lives. [For more on forgiveness see Question #59] Jesus asks *only* that we be willing to do this, and it is this willingness that determines the "speed" of the process of **"removing the blocks to awareness of love's presence"**(T.in.1:7). The degree to which the relationship with Jesus is real, love's presence is kept in awareness, and inner peace is experienced is commensurate with the degree of our willingness to practice forgiveness. Jesus himself gives us the guidelines for our relationship with him: **"If you are willing to renounce the role of guardian of your thought system and open it to me, I will correct it very gently and lead you back to God" (T.4.I.4:7)**. Although this process is clear and simple, it is not easy. That is because we are very attached to the ego's thought system of separation. We cling to our belief in the body and to our judgments about everything. However, as soon as we are willing to question our interpretation of any event in the light of the Course's teaching, we have reached out to take Jesus' hand. The forgiveness process begins with this questioning. The correction Jesus offers is another way of looking at every experience, interaction, thought or judgment we may have. The important thing is to apply the forgiveness Jesus teaches as often as we can. Each step we take toward letting go of our own judgment deepens our relationship with him, making him real to us. The speed of our progress is not our concern; in fact, we are told we have no idea how to evaluate our progress: **"Put yourself not in charge of this, for you cannot distinguish between advance and retreat. Some of your greatest advances you have judged as failures, and some of your deepest retreats you have evaluated as success" (T.18.V.1:5,6)**. We are thus relieved of any sense of urgency on our journey. [For more on our relationship with Jesus see [Question #271](#).]

Q #581: After a dry and desert time, I have come back to *A Course in Miracles* and find that I can more easily distinguish between my own projection and expectation of connections with the Holy Spirit and the unexpectedness of help from the Holy Spirit, because I can hear His Voice again. But I still am often unsure if the voices or thoughts in my mind are real or illusory. For example, when I connect to this Forum over the Internet, I experience a deep heartfelt love. And immediately my mind responds by interpretations and assumptions and guesses. How do I know that what I experience is true, or would it be an illusion of goodness that my mind has made up, imitating the real stuff from God? I feel that I am not trusting at all even trying to ask you this.

A: Listening to the misgivings and suspicions of the ego is a wonderful way to tie ourselves up in "nots." The most helpful thing to remember as all the doubts and questions arise is that it's not necessary (or even helpful!) to take all of this as seriously as you find yourself doing. Is it my ego or is it the Holy Spirit, our egos desperately ask, guaranteeing that our experience is anything but peaceful. But that's okay, it's just fear and fear is only temporary.

If you can begin to recognize that the volley of thoughts that ricochet through your mind is nothing more than the voice of the ego and it doesn't have to be taken seriously, but it also doesn't have to be changed in any way, perhaps you can begin to allow yourself to relax a little more about the process. All we need to do is recognize our ego and then release any judgments we have about it. The Rest will follow naturally on its own without our needing to be concerned or figure out anything. But once you find your mind heading again in the direction of needing to know and understand, all you have to do is acknowledge that your ego has stepped back in and would like to regain control of your mind to protect itself. If you can recognize your ego again, without trying to change it, it will begin to lose its ability to persuade you that it ought to be taken seriously. All it really merits is a smile of amusement.

Q #582: Having been raised as a Catholic with a belief in "original sin," I already believe I am "guilty" and "defective" as a human being. Furthermore, I have feelings of low self-esteem, shame, and I know I want to be liked by others. Are these feelings and this belief system equivalent to what *A Course in Miracles* describes as the guilt that arises from my ego's decision to be separate from God? I'm having trouble understanding the metaphysical principles of the Course as they apply to my understanding of guilt. I want to know if these two forms of guilt are "identical" because I am uncertain that I can identify the specific forms of guilt that I am trying to cover up. In my conscious self I already know that I feel guilty. In fact I take more responsibility for mistakes than is warranted. If these two forms of guilt are equivalent, perhaps I can reach the love and forgiveness the Course says lies underneath. Can you help me here?

A: Rather than equating the ontological guilt of the Course with "original sin," it would be more accurate to describe the Course's teachings on guilt as *correcting* the Christian doctrine of "original sin," as well as explaining the doctrine's origins in the ego thought system. The biblical story of Adam and Eve that recounts the original sin of the first parents in the Garden of Eden could be considered a symbolic outpicturing of the ego's myth of sin, guilt and fear. One of the major differences between Christianity and the Course is that Christianity asserts, whether it views the story as literal or symbolic, that sin -- attack on God -- is real and has had serious negative effects on our relationship with Him. The Course, in contrast, teaches that sin is not real, that our relationship with God has not been disrupted in any way, and that the only problem is our *belief* in sin. And so the correction or atonement for sin would be very different within each system. Christianity needs a savior figure to be sacrificed to God to undo the effects of our sinfulness, which we have inherited through the decision of our original parents to disobey God at a point distant in time. The Course says we ourselves are choosing in our minds right now to embrace a false belief in sin and separation and the only solution to this problem is to change our minds now about what we believe (more about this later).

So within Christianity, guilt is very real -- the result of the sinful acts of mankind against its Creator. The nature of the original sin is discussed and debated in various theological circles, but its reality is not really questioned. Within the Course, guilt is made up and is simply part of the ego's defense to prove to us that sin is real. God is not angry because nothing ever happened and so He does not need to be appeased. Furthermore, the world and our experiences as bodies in that world are not the outcome of God's creative activity but are the results of our feverish imagination to convince ourselves that the separation and attack on God are real. Any misdeeds by first parents or any guilty sins of omission or commission that we accuse ourselves of are simply part of the ego's smokescreen to keep us unaware of the decision we have made in our minds, and not in the world, to believe in sin and guilt.

The Course would say that it is our acceptance of the ego's myth of sin, guilt and fear in our mind that has resulted in everything else: the story and the doctrine of original sin, the world of separate bodies with separate thoughts that can seem to make choices in opposition to God, and the feelings of guilt that seem to result from all those choices. So at a practical level, when you are in touch with all the feelings of guilt you describe, you are experiencing the effects of your choice to see yourself as separate, but the cause is buried deep within your mind and has nothing to do with the self you believe you are, which is only its effect. To repeat, that self is not God's creation but our mind's own miscreation, meant to distract us from the source of the problem, the decision for separation within our mind. But the feelings of guilt that we

experience in relationship to this self in the world nevertheless can be used to direct us back to an awareness of that choice in our minds, if we do not impose our own interpretations on the meaning and cause of the feelings.

Since not only the guilt and sin, but the self we believe we are, are all part of the illusion, it is not that easy for us to accept that the guilt and sin are not real, for then we are accepting that we are not real as well. That is why, in practicing the Course's process of forgiveness, we need the help - - Jesus or the Holy Spirit -- that comes from outside our thought system to release the guilt that we have made real. And that help is a reflection of the love that down deep we truly seek. So when we are willing to accept that help, we are already joined with the love and forgiveness that is buried underneath the belief in sin and guilt. And that joining is what allows us to know that the sin and guilt are not real and that nothing therefore must be done about them.

Q #583: Re: T.2.VII.5:14 -- "The statement 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life' needs only slight correction to be meaningful in this context; 'He gave it to His only begotten Son.'" I do not understand how God loved the world and gave it to His only begotten Son if, as *A Course in Miracles* teaches, God does not know about the world.

A: Taken by itself, this is a puzzling passage. It is important to note, however, that it is being discussed in a specific context: Jesus is talking about the temporary need for corrective procedures in order to restore to our minds the awareness that **"fear is nothing and love is everything"** and that **"God has only one Son"**; no compromise in this is possible (**T.2.VII.5:3; 6:1**). Therefore "world" in this reference is the *real world*, the state of mind reflecting the transcendence of the ego, the healing of all belief in separation. Jesus refers to this passage again in Chapter 12, where he states explicitly that he means *the real world* (**T.12.III.8**). In this larger context, thus, Jesus is saying that the Atonement principle, the correction for our belief in fear and separation, is already in our minds. **"He gave it to His only begotten Son"** is a metaphorical expression of the Atonement principle. So Jesus is assuring us that we will not perish because of our perceived attack on God. We are already saved from this insane way of thinking about ourselves and God, and need but choose the correction already in our minds -- this is the **"world"** God gave **"to His only begotten Son."** That is the *content* behind the words.

Q #584: In Question #[371](#) you write the following: "You will continue to act in ways that will help determine responsibility and appropriate consequences within the system for the abuse, as well as protect the child from further abuse -- but you will do it all without judgment. And you will have become a reminder for everyone involved that there is another way of looking at what has been happening that does not involve attack and blame."

What exactly is attack and blame? If I determine responsibility and appropriate consequences, is this not judgment and am I not blaming someone and is this not attack. Or am I confusing levels. At one level, the true mind, I judge no one as there is nobody and nothing to judge. In the illusion I act out the part as determined by the situation that I am in but being aware of the nonjudgment in the true mind. Is this correct? If this is so, why can I never do this although I have known this fact for a while.

A: First of all, it may help to clarify that "without judgment," as it is used in the above quote, means without *condemnation*. Even within the Course itself, judgment is used in two ways, one wrong-minded, which involves attack and blame, and the other right-minded, which involves discerning between what is true and what is false (e.g., **T.4.IV.8:7,8**). The ego's judgment reinforces the belief in separation, sin, and guilt, by seeing the accused as different from ourselves. Right-minded judgment always undoes our identification with the ego by helping us recognize how, at the level of content, we are all basically the

same, struggling with the same ego thought system, although our specific ego expressions may look different.

Jesus repeatedly tells us in *A Course in Miracles* that we are responsible for the choices we make and the consequences that follow from them (e.g., **T.4.IV**; **T.21.II.2:3,4,5,6**), but he is never condemning us for choosing our egos -- there is no blame or attack involved in that judgment. But only if we can begin to recognize that we are responsible for what we experience can we begin to make a different choice. It is the ego, with its belief in sin, guilt and fear, that equates responsibility with blame, and consequences with punishment and attack. Jesus is trying to help us look at the consequences of our decisions without getting caught in the moral judgments the ego would want us to make about good and bad. He does use words like silly (e.g., **W.pl.156.6:4,5**) foolish (e.g., **T.21.I.2:1**; **W.pl.65.7**) and insane (e.g., **T.27.VI.6:3**) to describe our choices for the ego, but it is our own projection if we believe that he is condemning us.

It is not that you are confusing levels, but that you are confusing form and content. It is not the specific action of evaluating another's responsibility in a situation and delivering consequences for transgressions that constitutes condemnation and attack. Always, we want to look honestly at our purpose behind our decisions and actions. Perhaps it would be helpful to think of how we might hold a young child responsible for an aggressive act, such as hitting a younger sibling, and then provide a consequence, such as a time out from his regular activities, to reinforce in the child's mind the importance of considering his actions more carefully. All this can be done without attack or blame. If we are acting from our right mind, our purpose could be to help the child understand and make a different choice in the future about how to deal with frustration and anger.

The situation with the abuser can be viewed in exactly the same way. We can conclude that an adult is indeed an abuser who has hurt a young child, but we can reach that conclusion without anger or blame. Yes, at another level, the mind of the child has invited victimization, as all ego-identified minds do, and at a deeper level still, none of it is real. But Jesus is not asking us to deny our experiences here in the world. He is simply asking us to be willing to let go of our own ego judgments in a situation where we are ready to condemn and ask him for help in seeing everyone involved in a different light.

And so we could also support giving an abuser a sentence to serve without our goal being to punish. To know our purpose requires an honest assessment of the thoughts in our mind about the abuser. To repeat, it is not the form of our decision that is important but the underlying content -- do we see the abuser as sinful and different from us and deserving of punishment or as the same and simply in need of help. If we can not see the aggressive child and the abusing adult as the same, it is only because we are still identified with our ego, which asserts there is a hierarchy among illusions (**T.23.II.2**).

Now most people in the world *would* see a difference between the child who has hit his sibling and the adult who has abused a child, but that only demonstrates how most of us are still identified with the ego thought system. And the shift to a different perspective is not something we can do on our own. We must turn to that gentle Presence in our mind that sees us all as children who believe we can deal with our own guilt and anger by hurting others in some way. We are all in need of help and that is what makes us all the same. And in my willingness to release all my brothers and sisters from condemnation, I learn how to release myself as well (**T.12.I.4,5,6,7**).

See also Question [#484](#) for a related discussion on judgment and form and content.

Q #585: If we are all *one*: *one* with Jesus, *one* with God, *one* with each other, and we are told if just *one* accepts the teaching of *A Course in Miracles* completely, we will all awaken from the dream, why aren't we awake? Isn't that what our *one* elder brother did? It seems as though each one of us, as so called individuals, are called to come to that point as individuals. I have been told that when we accept all that the Course teaches, we will stand at the end of the "carpet," look back on this illusory world, and wait

for all others to meet with us as we take that final step, with God reaching out to help us cross into Heaven (a state of being, not a place). Am I incorrect in my understanding of the process?

A: We have addressed the first part of your question in [#430](#) and [#550-i](#). With regard to the second part, "understanding the process" includes taking into consideration that Jesus does not mean this *literally*; after all, the separation never really happened and time is illusory. So there really is no waiting, no carpet to be rolled up, and no final step that needs to be taken. Jesus is trying to reassure us that we will all be fine and everything will turn out all right. There is nothing to fear, as we might have been led to believe by the teachings of Judaism and Christianity. No one will be left behind, and no one will wind up in any other place but our eternal home, for we have never truly left it.

Q #586: Growing up I had a minimal exposure to religion and wonder if you'd care to address the terms "witness" and "witnessing"? For example, it seems witnessing in religion is often related to preaching rather than witnessing one's own thoughts. Also, although the primary use of witness is clear in *A Course in Miracles* (aka, the observer, "you," or decision-maker) there is one paragraph (T.1.IV.4) that uses witness and witnessing in a manner that is not clear to me. Also, what "law" is Jesus referring to in this same paragraph?

A: Webster's definition of witness applies to the term as used in the passage you refer to: "...to be or give evidence of." This is also the usual meaning given to the term in the Course. In saying "**I will witness**," Jesus tells us he is himself the evidence, or proof, that there is no death, no "hell- fire." He does this by demonstrating that the crucifixion had no effect; though his body was killed, he did not die. To whatever extent we are willing to listen and learn from him, he will give us more evidence that what he teaches is true: "**I will witness for anyone who lets me, and to whatever extent he permits it.**" Witness in this sense is used in much the same way as teaching. We are told later in the text: "**Remember always that what you believe you will teach**" (T.6.I.6:10). If we believe the Holy Spirit, we will teach, or "witness to" His message. This is not accomplished through any special form of preaching or direct teaching. By the very fact that we believe it, it will be perceived by others (consciously or unconsciously). In like manner, if we believe the ego's lies we will witness to the ego, thus reinforcing the separation thought in our minds and in our lives. Witnessing, in this sense, is the recognizable effect of a choice that is made in the mind to believe the ego or the Holy Spirit. Since we are always choosing either the Holy Spirit or the ego, we are always witnessing to one or the other. That is what Jesus means when he says we are always teaching: "**...you cannot not teach**" (T.6.III.4:1).

According to the Bible, the Messiah was to come in fulfillment of the law and the prophets. His coming was "law" in that it was a *promise* that a redeemer would come to atone for our sins. Jesus is referring to this scriptural phrase, saying he does indeed fulfill the law, or promise, but by reinterpreting it. He does so by teaching in *A Course in Miracles* that "**there is no sin**"(T.26.VII.10:5), and that redemption lies in accepting this truth.

Q #587: I am having trouble understanding attack as a call for love. If an attack is meant to push love away because it was getting too close, how is it calling for it at the same time?

A: Attack ultimately is a reaction to guilt and the fear of destruction by a vengeful God. No one would ever attack if there were no underlying self-accusation of sin (we first attacked God). This sinfulness results in overwhelming guilt that is projected and then seen and attacked (judged) in others. But coupled with this dynamic is a desperate plea to be told that God is not out for blood in retaliation for sin, and further, that the perceived attack on God itself never took place. In that sense, the attack is a call for love, and a call to be told we are wrong. We are all looking for some convincing evidence to prove that we are not "**the home of evil, darkness, and sin**," as we believe we all are (W.pl.93.1:1). That is why in *A Course in*

Miracles we are being trained to ask for help to perceive "differently": **"There is but one interpretation of motivation that makes any sense. And because it is the Holy Spirit's judgment it requires no effort at all on your part. Every loving thought is true. Everything else is an appeal for healing and help, regardless of the form it takes" (T.12.I.3:1,2,3,4).** We rise to this level of perception through our practice of forgiveness.

Q #588: I have always prayed to God for guidance and help. Today I'm thinking, if God did not create this world, He would not help me in this world. How do I pray? Do I ask to die? I really don't want to leave what I created, even though it is not perfect in any way, shape, or form. I still love my creations and extensions (do I call people in my life extensions?). When I turn to right thinking, I become terrified. I am afraid of Heaven! How crazy is this?

A: Your thinking is no more, but just as, crazy as the thinking of all the rest of us who continue to want this world to be our reality and fear our true reality. *A Course in Miracles*, by the way, would refer to everything we have made with our egos as our *miscreations* (T.2.VII.3:8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15). And it is not the self we believe we are here in the world that is responsible for miscreating. This individual self is just one of the miscreations of our split mind, which has seemed to fall asleep and dream of a world separate from God. So it's not the self we think we are in the world that needs help, despite our experiences to the contrary, but the mind that is identifying with this illusory self and continuing to deny its real power to create by extending love, which has nothing to do with anything we seem to experience here in the world. So seeking the death of this illusory self we think we are would resolve nothing, for the death of an illusion does nothing to change our mind, which is the source of the illusion.

You are right in concluding that God has nothing to do with this world since He was not involved in making it. But that does not mean we are not without a Source of Help -- the Holy Spirit -- Who represents God's Love for us while we believe we are here. It's just that the true help He offers us is not about changing anything about our illusory world and our personal circumstances, but rather is a help for reducing our fears about remembering who we really are. And that help is called forgiveness, which simply is a process of acknowledging that we don't really know what is going on, since we don't even know who we are! And so Jesus says that **"the only meaningful prayer is for forgiveness" (T.3.V.6:3).**

Practically, this means that whenever we find ourselves wanting to judge a person or a situation or a circumstance, our prayer would simply be to ask for help from the part of our mind -- the Holy Spirit or Jesus -- that knows what the real problem is -- that we have fallen asleep and are dreaming of a world that has nothing to do with who we really are. And each time we do that, our fear lessens a little more, the world seems just a little less serious for this is the happy dream, our sleep is not quite so deep, and we become just a little more willing to hear the Call to awaken (T.5.II.10:4,5; T.27.VII.14).

Q #589: Before *A Course in Miracles*, I thought that psychic powers or abilities were spiritual gifts from God and that the good people used them for good things and the bad people used them for evil. The discussion in the teachers manual gives me more understanding but I still have some questions. Can you explain what exactly are psychic powers and how they work in relationship to our split mind and the body? And if someone is aware of having psychic abilities, how is it best to use them? I have a few psychic abilities and the Course says these are strengths the Holy Spirit wants and needs. I think I understand the ego traps one could fall into but could you give me some suggestions or examples of how one could use psychic powers for a holy purpose?

A: If you remember that the Course says we are mind, existing outside of time and space, and that all minds are joined, or are seeming fragments of the one split mind, psychic powers lose some of their mystery. The only reason we think they are so special is because we mistakenly believe we are bodies,

part of the ego's clever plan to keep us mindless (T.20.VI.11:1,2,3). Time and space are illusory constructs of the split mind that have been projected into an illusory world of form to keep us unaware of our minds and focused on the world and our bodies instead (T.1.VI.3:4,5,6; T.26.VIII.1:3,4,5).

Most psychic abilities involve accessing information that seems to be at a distance from where we see ourselves in time and space. But since time is not truly linear and everything in the split mind actually exists simultaneously (T.26.V.3:3,4,5,6,7), everything that has happened, seems to be happening now, or could happen in the future, is potentially available to each seemingly separate fragment. It is only a decision of each individual mind, often based on fear, that keeps all the information in the split mind from being accessible.

The body and the brain have nothing to do with psychic powers, since they themselves are nothing but the projected images of the split mind. Information about bodies -- past, present and future, dead or alive, born or unborn -- is simply information about the images contained in the holographic mind, whether or not they appear to be projected into the world of form at any particular point in time and space (T.28.I.5:3,4,5,6,7,8,9). The mind is holographic in the sense that the whole is contained in each part. So then, reading past lives, talking to dead friends, relatives, and spirit guides, predicting the future (always a probabilistic venture since there are always options at the level of form from which the mind can choose), having awareness of what exists or is happening at locations at a distance or invisible to the eyes, are all easily understood once we recognize the holographic nature of the mind.

Other less common psychic powers, such as psychic healing and altering things physically within the dimensions of time and space, that seem to "defy physical laws," simply involve the ability of the mind to access and project changes in projected images in the hologram without seeming to follow the conventional "law of cause and effect" in the world, which is illusory anyway (T.28.I.6:1,2,3,4). For it is always a decision at the level of the mind and not anything in the world that leads to changes in the world, but most of us are not in touch with that ego-based choice in the mind. If we easily allowed ourselves to recognize the power that rests in the mind, the world would soon lose its value as a defense, for we cannot be victims of a world that our minds control (M.5.II.1,3). And the ego's only but hidden purpose for the world and the body is to convince us that our pain does not come from a choice for separation in our mind but rather from a world over which we have no control, which victimizes us despite our best efforts as bodies to protect ourselves.

So all psychic powers are ego-based, but we keep most of them out of conscious awareness because of their potential for challenging our belief in the reality of the illusion. The ego warns us of the dangers of psychic powers because its goal is to keep us mindless. But even if we discover we have such abilities, the ego will gladly provide interpretations of their "special" value that can minimize our recognition of what they mean about the mind so that we use them instead to reinforce our belief in magic, differences and specialness, as if they are special gifts divinely "conferred" on the special ones, as you once believed.

A psychic power has been given to the Holy Spirit for His use when we do not decide ourselves how it should be used. Anything that can help us to expand our perspective beyond the limited time/space dimension we seem to be restricted to as bodies can be helpful, provided we use it as a means and not an end in itself (M.25.3:5), as the ego would have us do, for then it becomes an object of specialness. As Jesus observes in the section on psychic powers you refer to: **"Communication is not limited to the small range of channels the world recognizes. ... The limits the world places on communication are the chief barriers to direct experience of the Holy Spirit, Whose Presence is always there and Whose Voice is available but for the hearing. These limits are placed out of fear, for without them the walls that surround all the separate places of the world would fall at the holy sound of His Voice. Who transcends these limits in any way is merely becoming more natural. He is doing nothing special, and there is no magic in his accomplishments"** (M.25.2:2,5,6,7,8).

The only way to be confident that we have offered such abilities to the Holy Spirit -- as with any talents we may possess -- is first to be honest with ourselves about the ego-based reasons we personally would seek to display them. These could include accessing information to enable you to get what you want for

yourself, impressing others with your spirituality, offering help to others for their problems as *you* perceive them, and so on. When you can identify your ego investments, you are in a position to release them and will also be more likely to recognize them when they may once again tempt you to seek after specialness.

Any examples of the right-minded use of psychic powers must necessarily focus on the purpose and not the specific situation, since it is only ever the purpose that makes anything holy. And so a word of caution -- if you think you know *specifically* the purpose of what you may find yourself doing or saying, there is a good chance that your ego has stepped in and is directing the process. And that is not a sin, but it is not likely to be truly helpful to yourself or to anyone else.

And so sharing insights about someone's past lives could help them release a judgment they may be holding onto in the present against themselves or someone they know. Providing information from a deceased family member may allow someone to know that they are not being condemned for something they did or failed to do. Anything that facilitates the process of forgiveness -- and you may have no idea yourself what that might be and in most cases would not -- would reflect having offered a power to the Holy Spirit for His use. Similarly, anything that allows someone not to take this life and the world quite so seriously or to recognize shared rather than separate interests, would be serving the Holy Spirit's purpose of helping us to awaken from the dream of separation and sin.

Q #590: After several months of being unsuccessful, I have surrendered my search for a job to God and have asked for peace instead. Yet I feel very attacked by the ego which constantly tells me I am not good enough to find a job and I feel afraid. I have also asked the Holy Spirit to help me see this situation differently. Is there something else I need to be doing? I understand that God needs me to overcome the fear in order for a miracle to take place. Is this true?

A: You've got it partly right, but let's see if we can help you get a little clearer about the process. You do not say what you mean by surrendering your search for a job to God, but strictly speaking, the notion of surrender is not a concept of *A Course in Miracles* -- the word is never used anywhere in the Course for it implies a battle in which we in the end allow our own will to be subjugated to a higher authority's will. The Course, in contrast, leads us to the recognition that our separate will is an illusion and our true will is the same as God's Will (**T.2.VI.6:4; W.pl.74**) -- we just don't believe it yet.

In Course terms, a more helpful way to think about what you are describing is that you have decided to resign as your own teacher (**T.12.V.8:3**), which also means you are willing to dismiss the ego as your guide, accepting guidance instead from the part of your mind -- the Holy Spirit -- that knows that finding a job is not the real problem. Now you may not yet believe that, and the fact that you still feel attacked by your ego about your self-worth means its dismissal is not yet complete. But this is after all a process, so that should come as no surprise.

As for what else you want to do, your part is simply to continue to be aware of whenever your ego tries to step back in again and take control -- for its voice can seem to drown out the Voice for peace. This means recognizing all the feelings of anxiety, apprehension, anger, and alarm, which may *seem* to be coming from failure to find a job, but are coming from failing to carry out the only job assignment we have in this world -- forgiveness. And that means that we are taking ourselves and our attack thoughts seriously, whatever form they may take, whomever they may be directed against, including ourselves. And that's the real cause of our fear, for unconsciously we anticipate retaliation, from God, for those attack thoughts. So bringing them into conscious awareness allows us to look at them and their source -- the ego -- and, with the Holy Spirit's help, dismiss them back into the nothingness that is their source.

And that is the miracle. Notice that it has nothing to do with getting a job. Obviously, in practical terms, we all need to have a means of support for ourselves so we can address our physical, bodily needs while we believe we are here. But the process of doing that need not be fraught with fear. The fear, again, is only

ever an indication that we have turned away from the Holy Spirit and put our ego back in charge of the process. And as soon as we recognize what we have done, we can change our minds by changing our teachers once again.

Q #591: I have been doing a lot of reading on the conditions for learning *A Course in Miracles*. What I am stuck on is: "A good teacher must believe in the ideas he teaches; but he must meet another condition; he must believe in the students to whom he offers the ideas" (T.4.I.1:4). To me this means that if I believe in this Course it then becomes an "idea" in my mind, and I teach this idea. I interpret the second part to mean: (1) Jesus believes in us and is teaching us; and (2) at the level of the world we are all teachers and students. If I (the Son of God) am doing the teaching, would the student be anyone I meet, knew (in the past), or will know (in the future), or those I just think about? And would this mean that we have given up all judgment of these students or everything? Or do we not know when we are teaching?

A: Jesus is saying that to be a good teacher, not only must you believe in what you are teaching, you must also know that your students are capable of learning, and that in a very real sense they are ultimately the same as you. If you believe in the Course, you teach more than ideas. Teaching ideas is a good starting point, but if the *content* behind the ideas is not at some point conveyed through you, then you are not really teaching it. This comes through in paragraph 6, when Jesus lovingly reassures us: "**I will teach with you and live with you if you will think with me, but my goal will always be to absolve you finally from the need for a teacher**" (T.4.I.6:3). In other words, he is inviting us to become like him so that eventually there would be no difference between him and us, and he asks that we do this with each other. So as you are teaching others the ideas in the Course, *you* are learning that, on the only level that counts, you are not different from those you are teaching: all separation is an illusion, which makes judgment meaningless. That is the content that would eventually be expressed through your words as your practice of forgiveness progresses. You do not have to be in a formal teacher-student setting to do this. We teach all the time because we are always "broadcasting" in some way or other the decision we have made in our minds to identify with the ego's thought system of separation or the Holy Spirit's thought system of forgiveness, and others are always "scanning" for a signal that will somehow tell them that they are wrong in their self-condemnation and the projection of that on to others through judgment.

Q #592: I have been a student of *A Course in Miracles* since the age of sixteen, but I am still having trouble releasing myself from the fear of hell that my over-zealous Baptist relatives imposed upon me when I was younger. I was taught to "pray" before I would eat a meal, and I find myself doing this every so often when I am stressed out, as if I was "sucking up" to God. Sometimes I find it easier to revert back to the rituals and idol worship when it seems my awakening is unattainable. My wife was recently deployed to Iraq, and even though I can contain the fear early in the day, later I start to feel overwhelmed and powerless, often performing the Baptist rituals out of desperation. It seems as if I am trying to communicate with two very conflicting ideas of God. What is the most effective method of prayer?

A: You express an experience common to many students who were raised with strong religious beliefs. You also have a lot of company in practicing rituals and idol worship, since that is the sum and substance of life in a body once the separation is taken seriously: "**The world believes in idols. No one comes unless he worshipped them, and still attempts to seek for one that yet might offer him a gift reality does not contain**" (T.29.VIII.8:4,5). Identifying with the body necessarily entails a vast array of rituals and idol worship in the form of physical, emotional and psychological care. Though not religious in nature, they are no different from religious beliefs in that they are used as substitutes for God and to defend the ego thought system based on the belief in separation. The underlying belief in our pursuit of comfort in rituals and idols, whatever form they may take, is that something external to the mind has caused our pain, and therefore something external can bring healing. It does not matter whether it be a prayer to a made-up notion of God, a favorite food, or a day at the beach. Having sided with the ego's belief that the separation is real, we seek escape from the terrible pain of our guilt by hiding in the body and the world.

Because we have made them our "friends," we think they will shelter us from pain and bring us peace. We are mistaken; they won't. But we are not completely convinced, because our strong attachment to our beliefs makes it difficult for us to reverse them. That is why the Course is a gentle learning process.

It is no more a sin to say a little prayer to a god that doesn't exist, than it is to relax with enjoyable music: **"You do but dream, and idols are the toys you dream you play with" (T.29.IX.4:4).**

The important thing is to be aware of the fear, that causes the stress, that results in the ritualistic behavior. It can be very helpful to see this dynamic in operation and to acknowledge to Jesus or the Holy Spirit that you are afraid, concerned for your wife's safety, and unsure of what to do to feel better. That would be an effective prayer. If then you sincerely invite him to be with you as you say your "Baptist" words, or do whatever you find comforting, they will not make you feel guilty. More importantly, the part of your mind that knows they are not the real answer, and are not what you truly believe, will be strengthened.

You may find it helpful to read "*The Song of Prayer*," which is one of the Course supplements. It offers a very beautiful and comprehensive view of prayer in accord with the teaching of the Course.

Q #593: I have a question regarding the process of *A Course in Miracles*. I have episodic rhythm disturbances of my heart. Not something real serious but enough that I have a cardiologist and am taking all kinds of pills. These episodes come and go every few days but over time seem to be getting worse. Whenever I get these arrhythmias I immediately get angry and frustrated because it is happening again despite my best efforts on the level of form to prevent them. However, I have felt at times, buried beneath the anger, a secret glee that I am suffering. As soon as this thought arises I can feel myself cringe and want to look away. I continue to try just to step back with Jesus holding my hand and look at my feelings and reactions and ask for help. I know Jesus can't take away my fear of dying or suffering but I pray for Him to help me with the conditions that have led to that fear. During those moments when I am most afraid I tend to drop Jesus' hand and run back to my old ego security blankets. Do you have suggestions to help students not to run away from Love, maybe even certain sections from the Course that might be helpful? Why do I feel like a failure at times when I try to apply the Course?

A: First of all, please remember to be gentle with yourself. Failure is an ego term -- it's not in the Holy Spirit's or Jesus' vocabulary. So you know how much stock you can put in that judgment! You feel like a failure only when you've accepted the ego as your teacher. And that's the only problem. And so the solution is to turn to a different Teacher. Jesus gently reminds us that we are simply unable to **"distinguish between advance and retreat. Some of your greatest advances you have judged as failures, and some of your deepest retreats you have evaluated as success" (T.18.V.1:5,6).**

Perhaps it would be helpful to realize that Jesus is not asking you to choose between him and your ego -- he knows you're still too fearful to let go of the familiar supports. He only asks that when you become afraid of his love and go running to your "old ego security blankets" that you remember that he is still with you, smiling lovingly like an older brother who only wants to reassure you that the bogeyman you're afraid of is just in your mind and isn't real.

That you have allowed yourself to recognize the secret glee that you feel in your suffering is proof that your ego is no longer in complete charge. That you are afraid to stay very long with that recognition is not surprising, for it can lead us to question the ego's purpose behind all those unfortunate and painful things that seem to happen to us, beyond our control. And as we begin to do that, our ego's days are numbered. So please don't be hard on yourself for your reluctance to stay with those thoughts. Simply trust that you will be able to, with greater ease, as you are ready. And the readiness comes from being kind to yourself and not from any effortful striving on your part.

Q #594: I realize that content is more important than form, yet in this dream of form, I have to have some form in which I appear; thus since duality is meaningless -- sickness/health, abundance/poverty, happiness/unhappiness, etc. -- is it wrong to desire one over the other while I'm on the road to awakening? While five years ago I was at the bottom of the barrel grovelling around with emotional sickness and also serious financial lack, the last thing I had time for was spiritual contemplation, but in the last three years I've found myself in a relationship where I didn't have to work, and consequently found *A Course in Miracles* and could spend five or six hours a day devoted to learning it. So choosing abundance and health has helped to speed me up the Atonement ladder. But now I'm wondering if I should stop consciously desiring these conditions and just focus on content of mind and not even concern myself with my body, my lifestyle, etc., and just know that as I heal my mind more and more, everything for my highest good will manifest anyway. Are we supposed to get to the point where not one thought we have is about anything concerning who we think we are in this body?

A: At the very top of the ladder, you know you are not a body, and you know the body is nothing; therefore, as nothing, the body would have no appeal to you at all. As you make your way up to that level, though, you never want to deny the physical and psychological needs you experience as real. On these intervening levels, duality is not *experienced* as meaningless, though intellectually you believe that it is. Therefore it is important to be honest about that, accept where you are in that respect, and not fight it. It would not be spiritually helpful to simply stop yourself from wanting your life in the world to be a certain way. That would lead you into sacrifice, which Jesus helps us realize is never loving. The concealed guilt in your mind is the problem, not your body or your lifestyle. That guilt would not go away just because you give up the desire to have a healthy body and financial security. It would not be reinforced either by your continuing to desire them, as long as you are willing to learn that they cannot give you the peace of God. You might also think of the abundance and health that came into your life as a reflection of a decision you made not to attack yourself any further. That would help you get in touch with the content in your mind and you would be less inclined then to regard health and abundance as something meaningful in themselves. As you make your way towards the top of the ladder, you would experience peace as who you are as God's creation, and that that inner state has nothing to do with external conditions. But in the meantime it's okay to still desire them. Judging yourself for desiring a healthy body and financial security is the only mistake you can make; and you can avoid that ego temptation by learning to smile at yourself and not making your Atonement path into something so serious. Gentleness and kindness towards yourself is always the best approach to take.

Q #595: As I get more and more into *A Course in Miracles* I find so many things meaning less and less: like being popular, being noticed for some achievement, being appreciated, or just being in other people's company. I truly enjoy being by myself, studying the Course, working on healing my relationships in my mind rather than actually being with these people physically, with whom I need to work on forgiveness. Is this wrong and is it also wrong to want to be around certain people in the flesh, with whom I have more of a spiritual mind set, while at the same time knowing that I am one with everyone whether I connect with them on the physical level or not? I sometimes feel guilty, since I'm wanting to exclude certain people and situations from my physical space, and then I try to feel innocent again when I know that I'm one with everyone and everything in my mind space.

A: The key word in your question is *exclude*, and the key principle in solving your dilemma is the distinction between form and content. The defining characteristic of authentic love as Jesus presents it in the Course is that it is "all-inclusive." This is in sharp contrast to the special love of the ego that singles out certain people or groups as deserving of our love and forgiveness, as opposed to others who are not. But Jesus is always talking about the content in our minds, our attitude. He is not talking about form: what our bodies do, our behavior. You cannot be with everyone all the time; but you can be clear within your mind whether or not you are withholding love from specific people or groups, or are judging that spiritual people are better than those who are completely focused on things of the world. If you are judging some

as better than others, then you no longer believe that the Sonship is one and are furthering the ego's cause of making separation reality. You would also be caught in the trap of believing there is a hierarchy of illusions: that there is a meaningful difference between spiritually advanced people and non-spiritual people. A person on the top rungs of the ladder is just as illusory as a person on the lower rungs, because the ladder itself is illusory.

From another perspective, we all have preferences and limitations. That is normal within the dream of separation. It is not wrong or unspiritual to have preferences. Preferring to spend time with certain people is no different from having food preferences, music preferences, decorating preferences, and so on. As long as these preferences do not become a big deal, that is! If you have not made your preference into a big deal, you would not feel guilty. The key factor is what is going on in your mind: whether you are judging against certain people because they do not meet your criterion of "spiritual." If you are kind in your mind toward everyone, you would never experience conflict about whom you are spending time with.

Other students of the Course have had similar experiences -- see Questions [#433](#) and [#480](#).

There are many comforting passages in which Jesus reassures us that he is always available to us, awaiting only our invitation (e.g., **T.19.IV.A.16:3,4,5,6**; **T.31.VIII.7,8,9,10,11**; **M.23**). We leave you with passages from chapter 12 of the text and the epilogue from the manual for teachers:

Remember what was said about the frightening perceptions of little children, which terrify them because they do not understand them. If they ask for enlightenment and accept it, their fears vanish. But if they hide their nightmares they will keep them. It is easy to help an uncertain child, for he recognizes that he does not understand what his perceptions mean. Yet you believe that you do understand yours. Little child, you are hiding your head under the cover of the heavy blankets you have laid upon yourself. You are hiding your nightmares in the darkness of your own false certainty, and refusing to open your eyes and look at them.

Let us not save nightmares, for they are not fitting offerings for Christ, and so they are not fit gifts for you. Take off the covers and look at what you are afraid of. Only the anticipation will frighten you, for the reality of nothingness cannot be frightening. Let us not delay this, for your dream of hatred will not leave you without help, and Help is here. Learn to be quiet in the midst of turmoil, for quietness is the end of strife and this is the journey to peace. Look straight at every image that rises to delay you, for the goal is inevitable because it is eternal. The goal of love is but your right, and it belongs to you despite your dreams...

A little while and you will see me, for I am not hidden because *you* are hiding. I will awaken you as surely as I awakened myself, for I awoke for you. In my resurrection is your release. Our mission is to escape from crucifixion, not from redemption. Trust in my help, for I did not walk alone, and I will walk with you as our Father walked with me. Do you not know that I walked with Him in peace? And does not that mean that peace goes with *us* on the journey?...You do not walk alone. God's angels hover near and all about. His Love surrounds you, and of this be sure; that I will never leave you comfortless (**T.12.II.4,5,7**; **W.ep.6:6,7,8**).

Q #596: I experience myself as a victim of unconscious decisions made in the mind, because I definitely do not choose bad things consciously. If I have no contact with this unconscious decision-making mind, how I can take responsibility for what happens to me in the world? If I experience myself as body in the world, not as a mind, how can I look at something in my mind with Jesus?

A: It is difficult to accept that there is another part of us that we are not aware of that is the source of what we feel and what we do in the world. Yet Freud taught that many, many years ago, and that is what Jesus explains to us in many different ways in his course. In fact, one can say that that is one of the most

important aspects of *A Course in Miracles* as a mind-training program. The lessons in the workbook, especially in the first part, are designed to help us begin to get in touch with this part of our minds. Lesson 5, for example, says we are never upset for the reason we think (**W.pl.5**). That means that something other than what we are consciously aware of is going on within us. And early in the text as well, Jesus tells us that if we are not feeling peaceful, we must have "**decided wrongly**" (**T.5.VII.6:7**) -- he is talking about a decision deep within our minds to reject truth.

In his teaching, Jesus makes it clear to us that the reason this part of our minds is unconscious is that we have intentionally split it off from our awareness so that we would not have to deal with all the guilt and fear we think is there, which would surely lead to our destruction, we believe. The ego told us that we would be much better off being mind-less, and so we followed that advice and then convinced ourselves that we are just bodies, not minds. But we are really minds choosing to believe we are not minds! The purpose of the Course, therefore, is first to help us realize what has happened, and then to help us regain the power of our minds to choose, so that eventually we would correct our choice to believe the ego rather than the Holy Spirit. We would then be at peace all the time.

What we need to do to achieve this goal is to regard everything in our lives as somehow reflecting the decisions we are making in our minds, for as Jesus tells us, the world "**is the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition**" (**T.21.in.5**). Our lives, then, take on a whole new meaning as we shift our focus from external circumstances to the internal state they reflect. As we view our lives this way more and more (as classrooms), we would gradually be allowing ourselves to get back in touch with our minds. We need Jesus' or the Holy Spirit's help with this, though, because of the fear we have of looking within (**T.21.IV**). Fortunately, the healing process is not complicated, since there are only two choices we can ever make: to continue to believe that separation is reality or to undo that belief and accept once again the truth of our oneness as God's Son. Every single thing we do or feel in the world reflects one of those choices.

The second part of Question #157 has additional commentary on the nature of the decision- making mind.

Q #597: *A Course in Miracles* states that "the crucifixion did not establish the Atonement; the resurrection did." I understand that the Atonement is the realization that nothing happened, that there was no split and that we are still part of God and always have been part of God. It is easy to see that the resurrection showed that the body was meaningless and could be "displayed" any time. Also the fact that God would give his only begotten son as a sacrifice for the sins of the world is such a ridiculous statement that it staggers the mind to believe that any intelligent person, for 2000 years, could believe this of a loving God.

What I do not understand is how the resurrection established the Atonement. Did not Jesus show many people that the body was nothing with all of his miracles particularly in raising Lazarus?

A: As you point out, traditional Christianity teaches that Jesus' death on the cross atoned for our sins and reopened the gates of Heaven. God then raised him from the dead as *proof* that Jesus was the Son of God, and that his sacrifice bridged the gap that occurred between God and His children when Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden. The Gospel account tells of the resurrection of the body and establishes that fact as a fundamental belief for many Christian sects. In the Course Jesus reinterprets both the crucifixion and the resurrection. He teaches that not only is the body nothing, but death is nothing as well. If the death of the body is nothing, the crucifixion could not accomplish anything. It is, as Jesus tells us in the text, only a teaching device (**T.6.I.2**).

The phrase you quote must be understood in terms of the principles of the Course's teaching of the Atonement, and the *content*, not the form, of the historical resurrection. In this light the essential message of each is "nothing happened!" They both teach: "**there is no death**" (**W.pl.163**), "**there is no**

sin" (T.26.VII.10:5), "attack has no effect" (T.12.V.2:2). In this sense Jesus' resurrection, along with ours, is awakening to the awareness of our true Identity as God's innocent Son, which the Course teaches is the Atonement. In the statement you cite, Jesus gives us the message intended in his resurrection. It is the message of the Atonement, beautifully expressed with Easter symbols in the Holy Week section of the text: **"This week begins with palms and ends with lilies, the white and holy sign the Son of God is innocent. Let no dark sign of crucifixion intervene between the journey and its purpose; between the acceptance of the truth and its expression. This week we celebrate life, not death. And we honor the perfect purity of the Son of God, and not his sins" (T.20.I.2:1,2,3,4).**

It is important to remember that Christianity teaches the resurrection of Jesus' *body*, while in the Course Jesus tells us it is the condition of the *mind* when it accepts the Atonement: **"Very simply, the resurrection is the overcoming or surmounting of death. It is a reawakening or a rebirth; a change of mind about the meaning of the world. It is the acceptance of the Holy Spirit's interpretation of the world's purpose; the acceptance of the Atonement for oneself" (M.28.1:1,2,3).**

Q #598: I feel I have an addiction to masturbation and although I often talk to Jesus about it, it still seems to be a problem. What can I do?

A: It is only our ego that wants us to believe that we have a problem with what we do with our bodies. But that is never the problem. As Jesus repeatedly encourages us to do, the only question we should ask ourselves about anything is, "What is it for? What purpose does it serve?" (e.g., **T.4.V.6:6,7,8,9,10,11; T.17.VI.2:1,2,3; T.24.VII.6:1,2,3; W.pl.96:6).**

We all also have "addictions" to breathing and eating and drinking and it is our ego that would want to make differences among our various behaviors important. Sex is one of the more powerful symbols of guilt in the dream and very effectively keeps the mind preoccupied with the "sins" of the body so that the mind can remain in conflict and never look at the underlying false belief in sin in the mind -- the sin of separation. Anything that seems to give pleasure, the ego tells us, is simply further proof that we have stolen what we do not really deserve from God. Why do you suppose our language commonly pairs the word *pleasures* with such descriptors as *secret*, *guilty*, *stolen* and *forbidden*?

Now if compulsive behavior -- sexual or otherwise -- is interfering with your relationships or with fulfilling basic responsibilities in your life, you may want to look then at the purpose you are giving that particular behavior -- to be a justification for reinforcing your underlying belief in your inadequacy and unworthiness and guilt. But again, it's not the behavior itself that is the problem but the purpose you are giving it in your mind. So that's where you always want to begin. Once you get in touch with the purpose and the cost to your peace of mind, you may find yourself motivated to make changes at the behavioral level, but not out of any sense of guilt or fear or coercion -- that kind of motivation is always only ego-based. Jesus does not want to deprive us of any of our special relationships and little pleasures. Through *A Course in Miracles*, he teaches that he wants us to recognize that the only **"real pleasure comes from doing God's Will" (T.1.VII.1:4)**, which in this world means practicing forgiveness -- of ourselves and others.

Q #599: I have clearly gotten the idea in reading *A Course In Miracles*, as well as the many answers in the Question and Answer Service, that this world we seem to experience is not real. I am now studying lesson 166 in the workbook and it does indeed say, "This world is not the Will of God, and so it is not real." The previous lesson also teaches us that what makes this world seem real is our denial of the truth, the truth being that we are already in Heaven with God now. I find these thoughts very comforting, especially when this world seems to disappoint me. But I get the feeling that if this world is not real, then there is no point in scientific investigation, is there? I find myself confused because I'm appreciative of all the scientific discoveries about nature, especially those that have improved our lives. Is *A Course in*

Miracles discouraging us from investigating nature? I'm envisioning a future world where if everyone adopted the teachings of the Course, scientists would give up research to find cures for health problems, we'd stop space exploration, we'd stop trying to save the rain forests, etc., because none of these things are real and therefore unworthy of our belief in them or our attention. As a student of *A Course In Miracles*, how should I think about scientific investigation of our so called natural world?

A: It would be a mistake for any of us to give up anything we're drawn to or interested in simply because the Course tells us it is not real. Yes, in the end, that is the realization we will all come to, but along the way we are asked to use the symbols of the world (**W.pl.184.9:2**) -- and that certainly could include the symbols of scientific investigation -- as important elements of our classroom. Most minds are simply not ready to hear and learn the truths of the Course at the level at which it offers its healing message and so the world's symbols become an important means for communicating the content of the Course in terms the world can hear and accept.

In Jesus' own words, **"It would indeed be strange if you were asked to go beyond all symbols of the world, forgetting them forever; yet were asked to take a teaching function. You have need to use the symbols of the world a while. But be you not deceived by them as well. They do not stand for anything at all, and in your practicing it is this thought that will release you from them. They become but means by which you can communicate in ways the world can understand, but which you recognize is not the unity where true communication can be found"** (**W.pl.184.9**).

And so the goal is not to deny the world's symbols but to give them a different purpose. The ego made the world and all its symbols in order to keep us enmeshed in the thought system of scarcity and sickness and victimization. All of our human endeavors are predicated on the assumption that our problems are out there in the world and that we need to direct our talents and efforts and resources to overcoming the challenges that those problems present to us. But Jesus is asking us to recognize that the problems we identify out in the world that seem so critical are only symbols of the one problem in our mind -- the belief in separation and sin (**W.pl.79**).

Recognizing what the real problem is and where it lies does not mean that we simply abandon all of our activity and efforts to solve problems in the world. But we can now have a different approach to those concerns, one that no longer is motivated by anger or fear or guilt or sadness. With a right-minded identification, we will no longer be invested in all the obstacles that can prevent us from uncovering solutions at the level of form. For the fact is, the seeming problems of the world -- including disease, drought, famine and pollution -- are there only because our ego mind wants them to be there, so that we keep our focus on the world, feeling victimized by it, and never looking to the real problem within.

So, as students of the Course, we may continue to seek after solutions in the world, using, among other things, the tools of scientific investigation -- as Helen Schucman and Bill Thetford, the instruments for bringing the Course into the world, continued to do until their retirements (see *Absence from Felicity* by Kenneth Wapnick). But that does not mean that we believe that the world is where the real problem lies. There will be others who still believe in the reality of the world and its problems and for them, the kindest approach would be to attempt to reach them at the level at which they believe they need help. Jesus describes this process early in the text: **"The value of the Atonement does not lie in the manner in which it is expressed. In fact, if it is used truly, it will inevitably be expressed in whatever way is most helpful to the receiver. This means that a miracle, to attain its full efficacy, must be expressed in a language that the recipient can understand without fear. This does not necessarily mean that this is the highest level of communication of which he is capable. It does mean, however, that it is the highest level of communication of which he is capable now. The whole aim of the miracle is to raise the level of communication, not to lower it by increasing fear"** (**T.2.IV.5**).

And so our words and our actions may seem to express a belief in the world, but our thoughts and our underlying attitudes will reflect a different level of understanding, which sees no separate world and no separate interests. And this awareness will be communicated effortlessly to all minds, since minds are joined in a reality that transcends all the so-called laws of the world.

Q #600: I am very confused now that my wife is pregnant again after 40. Even knowing that this is not real I think it is wrong to even consider abortion. I feel responsible for this new soul coming to be part of our dream, just like my other two daughters. What is your advice to people raising children of early age? How can we educate them to help them awake like we are trying to do?

A: As is everything in the dream, parenting is a classroom filled with opportunities to see the ego's separation and specialness in operation *in ourselves*, so they can be given to the Holy Spirit to be transformed through forgiveness. This is the only meaning *A Course in Miracles* gives to every relationship, including parenting. We are asked to monitor our minds for all the thoughts of judgment in every relationship. The goal is healing our own mind of the thought of separation. We need not take responsibility for anyone else's healing or awakening. Since the Course is about changing our minds in this way, there are no guidelines for specific behavior such as abortion or parenting.

What the Course does offer is a different perspective. It always distinguishes between form and content, and asks that we do the same in applying its teachings to our relationships. Though children are not fully developed persons on the level of form, they *are* minds with the same power to choose as any other part of the Sonship. To the extent that we are willing to learn this about ourselves, it is communicated to others; not in words, but by every application of forgiveness. It is this that furthers the healing of the separation, and is the only truly loving *content* a parent shares with a child, as well as with every one else: **"Every loving thought held in any part of the Sonship belongs to every part. It is shared because it is loving" (T.5.IV.3:1,2).**

In parenting this takes the *form* of all the things parents do in caring for children. Fulfilling this role to the best of your ability, while paying attention to the thoughts in your mind, with willingness to release them to the Holy Spirit, is the way to learn and teach the message of the Course. In this way belief in the Holy Spirit's perception is strengthened, while belief in the ego's lies is weakened, thus leading us closer to the Sonship's awakening.

It is important to remember that parents do need to teach children to make wise decisions in the dream for that is their role. As *The Song of Prayer* states: **"There are decisions to make here, and they must be made whether they be illusions or not" (S.1.I.2:4).** However remember that the choice the Course is teaching us to make is in our minds, between the ego and the Holy Spirit. And again, that choice is communicated, thereby taught, by the mere fact of our making it.

Q #601: The Bible culminates in Revelation. *A Course in Miracles* is designed to further us along the path to our revelation in the holy instant of divine knowing of ourselves as the Christ. Is this what the Course means by revelation? And if so, is this experience possible while still embodied; is it perceived in Christ Consciousness?

A: What the Course means by revelation is not the same as the biblical teaching. The Book of Revelation in the New Testament speaks of a future event associated with the Second Coming of Jesus and the end of the world. It is based on belief in the reality of world, the body, and redemption from sin. In *A Course in Miracles* revelation is understood to be the experience of God's Love which is always being communicated to the Son and has never changed.

Revelation can be experienced while still *in* the body, but it is not *of* the body. It is communicated from God and is therefore *experienced* by the mind, rather than *perceived*: **"It proceeds from God to you, but not from you to God" (T.1.II.5:5).** Revelation is possible because the separation is not real and we are, in truth, one with the Father. In this sense revelation is our natural condition, which we have blocked from awareness by choosing against it: **"You taught yourself the most unnatural habit of not**

communicating with your Creator" (T.14.III.18:1). The Father, however, is always communicating to His Son (us): **"God created every mind by communicating His Mind to it, thus establishing it forever as a channel for the reception of His Mind and Will" (T.4.VII.3:7).**

Therefore, since communication with God has never been broken, our function is not to strive for or seek revelation, **"...but merely to seek and find all of the barriers within yourself that you have built against it [love, also revelation]. It is not necessary to seek for what is true, but it *is* necessary to seek for what is false" (T.16.IV.6:1,2).**

As always we come back to our only task, which is forgiveness. This means being willing to recognize in all our thoughts of judgment and attack, our own fear of love's revelation. We then have the opportunity to allow the Holy Spirit's perception to replace ours; what has been blocked is then revealed. The important thing is faithfulness to the process of forgiveness as Jesus teaches in the Course. Only in this way is the thought of separation healed, fear diminished, and we become, as Jesus tells us, **"less and less willing to deny" (T.11.VI.3:6)** the experience to which he is leading us. **"The revelation that the Father and the Son are one will come in time to every mind" (W.p.I.158.2:8).**

As discussed in earlier questions, the term Christ Consciousness is not used in the Course. Consciousness is the condition of the separated or split mind, which perceives. Our identity as Christ is our truth which is *known*, not perceived, and is beyond the realm of consciousness altogether. (See: **T.3.IV.2, T.3.III.1:10, T.11.VIII.8:9**)

Q #602: *A Course in Miracles* says that consciousness is "the domain of the ego." I understand that ego-bound human beings, being self-conscious, perceive the world through limited consciousness. What about Jesus who was not ego bound, but who walked among people relating to us while consciously aware of Himself in all with whom He related? Being aware, was He not conscious? And if so, could we term this limitless level of awareness, unbound by ego, Christ Consciousness that we can aspire to? Or am I just confused about the definitions of consciousness?

A: Since, as the Course tells us, **"Consciousness, the level of perception, was the first split introduced into the mind after the separation" (T.3.IV.2:1)**, it is, as you point out, **"the domain of the ego" (T.3.IV.2:2)**, and thus of the separation and the unhealed mind. When the Atonement is accepted the mind is healed, and returns to knowledge rather than consciousness. The important distinction to be made, then, is between consciousness and knowledge. Jesus, who is a symbol in the dream of the healed mind, *knows* he is God's innocent Son. This state of mind is accomplished when there is no awareness (consciousness) of any other identity. While the mind is split by belief in the separation and is thus unhealed, it perceives; either falsely with the ego, or correctly with the Holy Spirit. It does not know, since knowledge, as it is understood in the Course, refers only to the truth. What is true is known, not perceived: **"True perception is the basis for knowledge, but knowing is the affirmation of truth and beyond all perceptions" (T.3.III.1:10).**

The term Christ Consciousness is not used in the Course. The Course tells us **"Christ is the Son of God Who is in no way separate from His Father, Whose every thought is as loving as the Thought of His Father by which He was created" (T.11.VIII.8:9).** Christ simply *is*, and knows as He is known. This is not the realm of consciousness, which, as we have seen, is the result of the separation and the condition of the unhealed mind. What we are learning through the Course is to forgive ourselves for every thought of judgment that keeps us rooted in the belief in the separation. This process will allow our minds to eventually accept only the truth of who we are as God's Son, just as Jesus has. We will then join him in the real world and: **"Together we will disappear into the Presence beyond the veil, not to be lost but found; not to be seen but known" (T.19.IV.D.19:1).**

Other Questions related to consciousness: [#27](#), [#32](#), [#65](#), [#127](#), and [#174](#).

Q #603: You say, "If I choose the Holy Spirit, my lesson will be that I now have the opportunity to make a different choice about the guilt that I believe is buried in my mind, releasing it to the healing light of forgiveness rather than continuing to hold on to it and projecting it in some disguised form" (Question #385). Do we have to be conscious of the particular guilt or reason behind the situation? Or do we simply look at the guilt and punishment the Course speaks of because we have denied our real Self and rejected our Father -- always the same reason -- and ask the Holy Spirit to look at this with us? Is that enough or do we have to wait for a specific answer about a specific situation, guided by the Holy Spirit, and then ask Him to join us? When I ask how should I look at various situations, no matter how different they are, I only bring to my memory the same words I had read from *A Course in Miracles*. I never obtain a specific answer, such as "you are punishing yourself because you've been mean or selfish (or whatever) on this or that occasion." In other words, I never identify reasons from the world of form. So then, when a situation comes up again, I feel I did it wrong and don't feel confident in obtaining any results or progress from what I'm doing, at either the level of mind or the level of form. Can you help me with this?

A: The underlying ontological guilt in the mind over our belief that we have separated from God, attacking and destroying Him in the process, is the only problem we ever need to address. How we get in touch with that guilt, however, depends on how our mind has disguised it through projecting it outside the mind onto our body or other bodies in the world. Usually, we begin with our reactions to specific situations or events, or our memories about them, which the ego has cleverly but deceptively set up to be perceived as the cause of our feelings, so that we don't look to the mind for the cause.

This is where the Holy Spirit turns the tables on the ego. What was made in the world as a subterfuge and a smokescreen to keep the guilt in the mind hidden becomes instead a symbol of that hidden guilt and so a means for returning attention to the mind, where we can get back in touch with it. But for this reversal (**T.28.II; W.pl.11.1**) to work, we must be willing to accept the Holy Spirit's interpretation of events rather than our own, which means acknowledging that we are wrong in our conclusions about what has happened.

Now the ontological guilt in our mind can be projected into many different forms -- e.g., illness in our own body (as Question #385 is addressing), anger at others for hurting us in some way, or guilt over what we believe we as a body have done or failed to do. All of these serve the ego's goal of mindlessness, because they keep our focus on the world outside rather than within our own mind. But once we can accept that they are merely symbols of the underlying guilt in our mind, projected out from within, we can return to the source of the problem in the mind and, through joining with Jesus or the Holy Spirit in our right mind, release the illusory guilt that has been covering the love underneath.

So, to answer your question, it is not necessary to be in touch with the specific thought or judgment behind the guilt you may be experiencing in a particular situation. The fact that you are feeling guilty (or angry or sick, etc.) is all that you need to recognize and acknowledge. But you do want to be honest with yourself that you are not somehow unconsciously refusing to look at the specific reasons for the guilt because you believe that would be too painful or difficult (see Question #335 for a related discussion). Jesus addresses this issue, in the context of fear, but it applies to guilt as well, in the following passage: **"It is not necessary to follow fear through all the circuitous routes by which it burrows underground and hides in darkness, to emerge in forms quite different from what it is. Yet it is necessary to examine each one as long as you would retain the principle that governs all of them. When you are willing to regard them, not as separate, but as different manifestations of the same idea, and one you do not want, they go together"** (T.15.X.5.:1,2,3).

In other words, you don't want to use what could be only an intellectual understanding of a Course principle as a way of avoiding getting in touch with what you believe to be the ugliness of your ego. But if you allow yourself to feel the unworthiness, the self-loathing, the sense of inadequacy, or some other variation of the guilt, and do not shrink back from those feelings but look at them openly and honestly, then the specific reason the ego may want to give for why you feel that way is not really important.

The fact that you feel that you are repeating the same mistakes and are not really making progress at any level could reflect a number of different things. As already noted, if you are using the idea of the less specific, more abstract guilt in the mind as a way of avoiding looking at what you really believe about yourself, you may wish to be as honest with yourself as you can about your willingness to uncover the darkness -- a very frightening process indeed for any ego-identified mind.

But you may also be being unreasonably impatient with yourself -- Jesus after all admonishes us that we are in no position to judge our progress (**T.18.V.1:4,5,6**). Simply because I find myself losing my peace in a familiar old situation right now does not mean that I was a failure earlier when I thought I was able to release my guilt in a holy instant. But my ego would want me to believe that about myself. For then there is little reason for hope and good reason to despair, an outcome the ego relishes.

So you want to remember that your part is simply to uncover the darkness -- identify the occasions of sin and guilt in your own mind as they are projected in various forms out onto your body and into the world -- and that it is the Holy Spirit's gentle love that will release you from them if you offer them to Him. If you will do merely this, you can trust that you are climbing the right ladder that will lead you home and you need not be concerned with how many rungs there are or how many steps you will have to take.

Q #604: If the ego invented the concept of afterlife, and nothing happens when the body dies, since it never lived, my question is: as long as I am not yet in the real world, hence identify with the self I think I am, what will be my experience after the "death" of my body?

A: When the body dies, the person you identify with as a body will no longer seem to exist. If the mind is not healed at that time, the thought of separation that identified with this body continues as a thought. Since the mind is not contained in the body, it does not change with the death of the body. It changes only when it chooses the Holy Spirit instead of the separation. It is this choice that eventually undoes the separation, and leads us to awaken from the dream of death where bodies *seem* to live and die. As long as the mind chooses to believe in the thought of separation, this thought, along with the guilt that inevitably accompanies it, will be projected out in some bodily form (physical, esoteric, energy, etc.). The result is the ongoing experience of the birth- death-rebirth cycle, until a different choice is made *in the mind*. The mind, therefore, is the place where the action is, and the only action is *choosing*.

While we remain asleep in the dream, our only purpose or goal, whether in the body or out of the body, is to learn to make another choice. Therefore, to answer your question more directly, your experience after the death of your body will be the same as it is now: learning to choose.

In *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus tells us we are always learning, because we are always teaching: "...**to teach is to learn ...teaching is a constant process; it goes on every moment of the day, and continues into sleeping thoughts as well**" (**M.in.1:5, 6**). We may thus paraphrase "learning continues after the death of the body as well." The important thing Jesus is teaching us is that we are not bodies, but minds with the power to choose.

Q #605: *A Course in Miracles* says that we project what we do not want to another person. I have a friend who is extremely intelligent, IQ was tested at Berkeley and recorded as 240. This is obviously a quality that everyone would want and not something to project. I guess the same applies to being wealthy. Everyone wants it but only a few are actually wealthy. This does not make sense.

A: When the Course says we project what we do not want, it is referring specifically to the guilt in the mind. And the ego's real but hidden purpose in projecting the guilt is to keep it, although it tells us projecting it is how to get rid of it (**T.7.VIII.1,2,3; T.13.II.1,2**). The other half of the ego's game of guilt,

which it also keeps hidden from our awareness most of the time, is that we want to be victims so that it's very clear that the guilt rests outside of us. In order to have this wish fulfilled, the ego has made up a world of differences, where we all differ from each other in many different ways, including intelligence, wealth, beauty and health, to name just a few.

If we were all completely the same at the level of form, there could be no victims. And so, it meets our ego's hidden objective that some of us are smarter or wealthier than others, so that those of us who have less can feel somehow unfairly endowed by God or our parents or fate. But this does not mean that those who have more may not also feel the burden of greater responsibility or awareness or expectation for their greater "gifts." That is the beauty of the ego's game of differences -- no one ends up being happy and everyone feels somehow deprived and victimized.

It is Jesus' purpose through his Course to help us understand the ego's disguised intentions so that we can make a different choice. For it is only our decision that gives power to the ego (e.g., **T.7.VIII.5**). And when we truly understand that we are giving up everything in order to have a little bit of nothing, Jesus is confident that we will make a different choice.

Q #606: I have been studying *A Course in Miracles* since 1989. My lesson more and more is that differences do not matter. Obviously this is a process and not easy. My experience is that I feel a bit shut down when I "quietly smile and do nothing". I still feel superior to others when I identify with what the Course teaches and hear what some others espouse. On the other hand, I also feel inferior when I speak with those who are on a different path, as they tend to sound very together and peaceful. I understand the Course would say that nothing needs to happen and I just need to look with Jesus on this. There certainly is a struggle between the right mind and the wrong mind, and I find that I am still predominantly in my wrong mind. It seems like such a long process. But at least I am aware of that. Could you speak to this experience? Am I mixing levels?

A: It does not sound as if you are mixing levels. Practicing the Course can at times feel like a very long process. But time is relative and fifteen years is not very long, when you consider all the lifetimes it took to get you this confused! And comparing your experience with that of others, whether they are on the same path or different paths, is a sure-fire ego way to catch yourself in irrelevant differences! We are simply not in a position to judge anything that is going on for ourselves or others, insulting as this fact may be to our egos. But in our right minds, that awareness can be a relief, for it releases us from the burden of responsibility for trying to understand what is happening -- nothing is happening (**T.18.IV.7**)!

Realize too that the struggle between the right and wrong minds is a one-sided one. Only the ego struggles. The Holy Spirit never struggles (**T.14.VII.5:2,3**), for He knows the powerlessness of the ego and that there is truly nothing to battle. That realization can help you to relax and allow the process simply to unfold. Nothing needs to be forced or moved along.

Because our part in the process is so simple -- which is not to say easy -- we may be inclined to dismiss the power of the simple act of looking at our egos without judgment. Our ego, feverishly geared toward ceaseless activity at any cost, crusading to right wrongs and make the world -- its home, not ours -- a better place, is pleased when we make such an underestimation. But as the manual for teachers points out, a teacher of God can afford to be patient when he knows that the outcome is certain (**M.4.VIII.1:1,2,3,4**).

Q #607: In your answer to Question [#388](#), you say that *A Course in Miracles* "tells us that true prayer is the prayer of the heart, and it is always answered because in the dream we have and experience anything we truly desire." Why then, do we suffer? Your answer, I assume, is that we want to reinforce

our guilt because we unconsciously believe that would save us from God's wrath. This is a very unsatisfying answer. Why don't we just always select pleasure in the world as a defense, and leave out the pain altogether?

A: The Course offers a clear and simple answer: **"It is impossible to seek for pleasure through the body [or the world] and not find pain" (T.19.IV.B.12:1).** That is because when the mind chooses to identify with the body, it simultaneously denies its true Identity, and pain is the inevitable outcome. Our prayer is thus answered by the power of the mind to choose. By choosing to believe that the body and the world are real, and then defending that belief, we do get what we desire: a body in the world that proves that our individual and special self is real. The problem is, in making this choice, we have thrown away the only thing that can truly bring us happiness: the Identity God gave us as His Son. We are then left with a painful sense of emptiness and loss that nothing in the world can fill. All seeking of "pleasure" in the world is actually an attempt to ease the pain of this loss. However, the pleasure we seem to find in this world does not last and does not truly meet our need. We are thus bound to seek further in an unending and exhausting cycle of attempting to heighten pleasure and minimize pain.

As long as we believe there is something in this world that can truly satisfy us, we remain confused about who we are and will experience pain. We are not only confused about who we are, we are confused about what makes us happy and what causes pain. Jesus tells us in the text: **"Anything in this world that you believe is good and valuable and worth striving for can hurt you, and will do so. Not because it has the power to hurt, but just because you have denied it is but an illusion, and made it real. And it is real to you. It is not nothing" (T.26.VI.1:1,2,3,4).** This is a very important and difficult lesson for us to learn because we cling to our specialness as bodies, and fiercely defend our belief that happiness can be found in the world. While we seek endlessly to make the world real and pleasurable, Jesus tells us in the Course that it is *not* real and our experience here is hell. We are being taught through the Course that our choice is not between pleasurable or painful experiences in the dream; it is between awakening from the dream by identifying with the Holy Spirit, or remaining in hell with the ego. We are offered another clear and simple response: **"Reason will tell you that there is no middle ground where you can pause uncertainly, waiting to choose between the joy of Heaven and the misery of hell. Until you choose Heaven, you are in hell and misery (T.22.II.7:7,8).**

The question then is: why do we continue to choose hell? That is where your observation is correct. Having chosen to identify with the ego, we are consumed with guilt and a feeling of unworthiness. We believe we do not deserve God's Love in Heaven because of our sin. And yes, we banish ourselves to hell to punish ourselves, before God (the ego's God) gets His chance which we believe means total annihilation. Our suffering and victimization serve very effectively to prove we are right about our sinfulness. Just as the credit card ad tells us, "we cannot leave *Home* without them." Our "prayer" for separation has been answered. Our hope lies in the fact that our prayer for the peace of God is just as easily answered through our choosing *it*. We experience this peace each time we are willing to question the value we place on the world and turn to the Holy Spirit in our minds for the prayer we share with Him: to **"...accept yourself as God created you, [and] ...be incapable of suffering" (T.10.V.9:5).**

Q #608: i. I don't love everyone I meet. I try, but then I feel like a liar inside because I know I am being phony. Then I think maybe I should try to love myself (I don't love me either right now). The kinds of things that make me feel better are things that do not include anyone else (drawing, for example). I have found since reading *A Course in Miracles* that I am less and less comfortable around people, especially judgmental people. I will say things I wouldn't ordinarily say just so I fit in. And if I don't say anything, they think something is wrong. It is so much easier being alone. This leads me to think I am not really loving myself and am catering to my ego, because if I were loving myself, then I would want to be around lots of people and I would love all my brothers. I make up lies now so I don't have to be around my family. I have forgiven them (tried) for the way they hurt me in the past, but I am still hurt, so I must be lying about forgiving them.

ii. I don't want to do anything or go anywhere since I have gained a lot of weight. I feel like perhaps God wants me to be like this and love people anyway, but I don't want to be around other people. I feel guilty for wishing I were thin again and for hating my body. Maybe my real lesson is to learn to be as comfortable with myself fat as I am when I am not fat. I feel like I am betraying God because I do not love myself the way I am now.

A: Many people feel the same kinds of things you have been feeling, both in terms of finding it harder to be with other people than to be alone, and in hating the way their bodies look. It is not uncommon at all, and, like you, these people make the same mistake of feeling guilty because they feel that way. If you think about how we got to be individuals in this world, it would make sense that we would find it hard to love others, and even ourselves, and that our bodies would be a huge source of conflict for us.

To state briefly what requires a lengthy presentation, Jesus explains in his course that in our minds we all carry with us the thought that we (as one Son) chose to reject and then leave the presence of Perfect Love in order to exist as separate, special individuals (an illusory thought, of course). Our existence in this world thus began with an act of selfishness and an abhorrence of oneness, not caring that our existence was acquired at another's expense. We immediately judged what we did as hideously sinful and deserving of punishment. There followed a whole series of dynamics culminating in our experience of ourselves as vulnerable bodies amidst a multitude of other vulnerable bodies, all seeking to preserve -- by whatever means is necessary -- their specialness as individuals. We have no awareness of ourselves as decision-making minds desperately trying to protect ourselves from the overwhelming guilt and fear in our minds (which hides the love in our minds) by focusing exclusively on our lives as bodies in the world. As we all know, we are faced with one problem after another needing our attention, and that is the ego's purpose for the body -- it wants to keep us from ever suspecting that we are something else, and that our bodies and their problems are a defense against the truth of who we are. It is not surprising therefore that our relationships with one another are fraught with tension and conflict, and that our bodies make us crazy because they never seem to be what we want them to be. That is why we are here! (See summary 5 "**What Is the Body?**" in the second part of the workbook -- **W.pII.5.**)

So the most loving and gentle thing you can do for yourself is to simply acknowledge all of this, and *not* be surprised or alarmed that your life and your body are the way they are. They are fulfilling the ego's purpose of keeping you alone and separated, in conflict, and without peace -- and always looking to something external as the cause of it all. If your body's appearance causes you to want to stay away from people, then that is the ego's secret purpose behind your weight gain. Just know that you have chosen as your own the ego's purpose of maintaining the separation. What's new about that? Everyone who believes he or she is alive in this world does the same thing! The Course helps us realize, however, that there is another purpose in our minds that we can choose in place of the ego's, and that is the Holy Spirit's or Jesus' purpose of forgiveness. We can ask for help to use our body and our relationships to serve the purpose of awakening from this dream of separation, and the key to that shift is letting go of judgment, especially judging yourself for your limitations and imperfect forgiveness. All you need do is bring those judgments of yourself to the kind presence of forgiveness in your mind, where they will disappear in the light and love that reflects Heaven's perfect Oneness. And forgive yourself if you feel you are not ready for this.

Jesus tells us that the miracle "**merely looks on devastation and reminds the mind that it is false**" (**W.pII.13.1:3**). That is the gentle approach of the Course. We just bring what appears to be the devastation of our lives to the presence of love in our minds, and we will then learn how not to judge our life or take it so seriously, because it is the false, meaningless identity the ego made, not the invulnerable, limitless Identity that God created. There is no need to change it or fight against it. We do not have to force ourselves to love everyone, or to pretend that we do. Jesus just asks us to invite him in to look with us at our hateful thoughts and our wanting to exclude certain people from our lives: "**Forgiveness . . . is still, and quietly does nothing. . . . It merely looks, and waits, and judges not**" (**W.pII.1.1,3**). If we are looking with Jesus, we will not feel any guilt, and if we do feel guilt, then we should look at the guilt with him. Being in your right mind simply means looking at your wrong mind without guilt or judgment. The unloving, judgmental thoughts towards others are not the problem. Feeling guilty about them is the

problem -- just as the "tiny, mad idea" that we could separate from God is not the problem, but taking it seriously and then feeling guilty about it is. Guilt gives the separation a reality, and it will always lead to projection and then attack. There is no way out of that vicious cycle unless you stop and ask for help to look at your guilt, and then accept Jesus at his word when he tells you that you are never justified in judging yourself that way. It is true that you will never be at peace if you are unloving, but that is not cause for self-hatred and guilt. You need only join Jesus in smiling gently at the silliness of it.

Finally, love is never about form -- quantity or numbers. The content in your mind should be your focus. You can spend time with one person or be by yourself, and at the same time know that you are excluding no one from your love; you are not loving one at the expense of another.

Q #609: I am interested in how multiple personality disorder (MPD) fits in to the concept of the ego. To my way of thinking, it would be an ego that is splintered in some way. Also, is it possible for a person to experience MPD as a result of traumas in past lifetimes?

A: The ego *is* the thought of splintering and dividing off. The mind of the Son when he seemed to fall asleep and dream a dream of separation was (and still is) one mind. But as part of the defense against the guilt and terror in the mind over having destroyed love and fearing retaliation for his sin, the Son's mind seemed to splinter into billions of seemingly separate little fragmentary minds, in order to hide from God.

The following lines from "**The Substitute Reality**" (T.18.I) in *A Course in Miracles* present this idea: **"Fear is both a fragmented and fragmenting emotion. ...You who believe that God is fear made but one substitution. It has taken many forms, because it was the substitution of illusion for truth; of fragmentation for wholeness. It 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. That one error, which brought truth to illusion, infinity to time, and life to death, was all you ever made. Your whole world rests upon it. Everything you see reflects it, and every special relationship that you have ever made is part of it"** (T.18.I:3:3; 4). And so each of us could be considered one of the personalities in the Son's multiple personality disorder that has resulted from the splintering of the initial thought of fragmentation or separation (this relationship has been discussed previously in [Question #165](#)).

If this process can produce what seem to be separate individual minds, as we each experience ourselves, each identified with a single body (or multiple bodies across different lifetimes), there is no reason that the process of splintering could not also produce multiple personalities split off from one individual mind that seem to share the same body. The Course makes it clear that the mind is not in the body (e.g., T.27.VIII.7:1; T.28.II.2:8; W.pl.167.6:1,2,3) -- the body is nothing more than a projection of the mind. So a fragmentary mind further fragmented into multiple personalities can project a single body with which the multiple fragments all identify.

It may seem as if events in the life of the body are the catalyst for the splitting process in MPD, but those events are really only specific symbols for the fear and guilt in the mind that seemed to result from the initial insane idea of separation. And so it is not really events within one lifetime or from past lifetimes that would cause the splintering, but rather the traumatic initial attack on love which they remind the mind of, which triggered the defense of further separating or splintering within the split mind. And all the splintering happened in that single instant of attack, at which time the separation was also healed. So now all of us are only choosing to bring into mind again what is already over (W.pl.158.3,4; M.2.2,3).

And healing, whether we speak of MPD within an individual mind or the mind of the Sonship as a whole, will be the same -- a reintegration back into the one mind of the seemingly separate fragments that have believed they exist in isolation with independent existences. As part of the process, the illusory nature of the seemingly separate fragments is recognized and they are released, no longer needed as a defense against the guilt and the terror in the mind. Those diagnosed with MPD will sometimes express sadness

or fear over the impending loss of some of their personalities. This reflects the same fear that we all experience that the self we identify with and call by our given name will disappear when we truly forgive. But when we have reached that point in our forgiveness process, we will no longer be identified with this false, illusory self, and we will realize we are giving up nothing **(T.16.VI.11:1,2,3,4)**!

Q #610: Please explain "Ideas leave not their source." I'm having a hard time understanding it.

A: *A Course in Miracles* twice refers to this principle as one of the basic or central thoughts in its teachings **(W.pl.156.1:3; W.pl.167.3:6,7)**, so it's good to understand it. It's a foundational thought in understanding both the Atonement principle and the process of forgiveness.

In the *Glossary-Index for A Course in Miracles*, Kenneth Wapnick restates this principle as "an idea cannot leave the mind that thought it." So at the level of Heaven, this means that we, as Ideas or Thoughts created, or thought, in God's Mind **(T.6.II.8:1,2)**, cannot separate from Him -- the separation cannot happen. We must remain as Ideas in the Mind that thought us -- we cannot leave our Source. Another way of thinking about this is that if God is All That Is and there can be nothing outside Him, then we can not be anywhere except where He has placed us, within His Mind. This is the basis for the Atonement principle, which asserts that the separation never happened **(T.6.II.10:5,6,7,8; M.2:2)**.

Now the ego, which is the illusory thought of separation, would like us to think differently, and the body and the world are what it offers as proof that we are indeed separate from our Source. And certainly our experience is that there is a world external to us that operates on each of our separate bodies, independent of our own thoughts. But the Course, drawing again on this principle and applying it to the Son's seemingly split mind, asserts otherwise. The thought of separation, and the guilt that the ego tells us must accompany it, cannot leave the ego mind that thought them. The ego's plan to escape guilt by projecting it outside the split mind is a doomed venture, for our desire to see guilt outside of ourselves constitutes an attack, both on ourselves and on what or whom we want to see as outside ourselves, which only serves to reinforce and maintain the guilt in our own mind, and not escape from it.

To help us understand how something which seems so very real and separate from us can still be within our mind, Jesus uses the metaphor of the dream to describe our experience in the world **(T.10.I.2,3; T.18.II)**. Certainly, when we are asleep at night, dreaming, we seem to be a body, and a world seems to exist separate from the self in the dream we think we are. But that is only because our mind has mistakenly identified ourselves with one specific figure in the dream, to which the rest of the dream world seems external. And yet, upon awakening, we recognize that the self we thought we were and the world in which that self moved and all the other figures in the dream were all contained within our dreaming mind -- the ideas of which we were dreaming never left their source in our mind. There was nothing outside our mind, external to us, despite what our experience while we slept and dreamed seemed to be. Our waking world, Jesus tells us, is no different **(T.10.I.2)**. Although it appears to be outside, it has never left its source -- the guilt over separation within our split mind. And this is the basis for the Course's process of forgiveness.

For if all the other figures in my life who seem to attack me in various ways and cause me pain are really nothing but projections of the guilt that has never left my own mind, then I am not really needing to forgive anyone but myself. And my brothers, who only *seem* to be outside of me, are simply giving me the opportunity to get back in touch with that buried guilt in my mind, which I have made them symbols of.

Now, even with an intellectual understanding of what the Course means and how this process works, our resistance to putting it into practice is going to be tremendous. That resistance, for example, would explain why you would have found yourself having such difficulty understanding what the phrase itself, "Ideas leave not their source," means. For it turns our whole world upside down and inside out, or perhaps more accurately, outside in!

The gentle steps that Jesus is leading us along do not require that we accept totally what he is teaching us here, but only that we have the humility to acknowledge that perhaps our interpretations of what seems to be happening to us are mistaken, and perhaps we will be happier acting from a recognition of shared interests with all our brothers, rather than from separate, competing interests. For, in the end, we will each come to realize that not only are we and our brothers the same, but we are one. And so, to quote another Course principle that depends on this one as well, **"All that I give is given to myself" (W.pl.126).**

Q #611: When I was fifteen, I started a "want" list because my mother told me that she had read some wild claim that if you just wrote down what you wanted and read it a few times you would get "it." I tried it and it worked on almost everything I put on paper and focused on. Over the next 30 years I added other "ways" of getting what I wanted to this secret my mother had told me about. I have been studying *A Course in Miracles* for 18 months now and I have much more clarity about the power of the mind to create and miscreate. But having studied and learned how to use the power of my mind to attract "things" to me for so many years without having all the truth, I have a couple of questions. Is the ego threatened when we learn about visualization or how to "create" whatever we want through a variety of practices? Or as long as we are miscreating things to keep us more identified with the world, does the ego care? And can you tell me where we visualize or make pictures in our head? Is it strictly a function of the brain or is the mind involved?

A: In one of the clearest statements of the process you refer to, the Course says in Workbook Lesson 325, **"All things I think I see reflect ideas":**

"This is salvation's keynote: What I see reflects a process in my mind, which starts with my idea of what I want. From there, the mind makes up an image of the thing the mind desires, judges valuable, and therefore seeks to find. These images are then projected outward, looked upon, esteemed as real and guarded as one's own" (W.pll.325.1:1,2,3).

Although beginning to recognize the power of the mind to choose and control its projections can be threatening to the ego, for it suggests that the world does not operate according to the "laws" we generally have believed and we are not simply its effect, or victim, the ego is always very clever at giving any of our experiences its own *special* interpretation.

In particular, so long as we continue to believe that it is this individual self that we identify as ourselves, living in time and space, who is mastering these techniques, the ego has little to worry about. We think we are making "pictures in our head" and that our brain is somehow involved, but that is all merely part of the ego's delusion to keep us mindless, that is, unaware that our reality is truly mind and not body. But because of the ego programming that we have all very willingly accepted, we allow ourselves to be easily deceived about where such powers reside and how they are accessed, never realizing that our minds are literally miscreating the entire world, and not simply the specific parts of it that we believe we can master to meet our specific personal needs. The Course's metaphor of the dreamer is helpful in understanding this. With our sleeping dreams at night, it is not difficult to recognize, when we awaken in the morning, that it is not the figure in the dream that has any effect on the events in the dream. It is our mind as the dreamer, and it is making up the entire dream world (**T.18.II.5**), and not simply certain aspects of that world. And similarly, with our waking dreams, it is the split mind of the Son, of which we are all a part, that is producing the entire illusory world.

As you mention, so long as our purpose with such techniques is to meet our perceived needs and remain identified with this self and the world, we remain hooked on the ego's way of thinking. Only by an honest evaluation over time of whether our mind's ability to project certain forms to meet our self-identified needs is really making us happy will we come to recognize that we are not. For the underlying premise behind the use of such techniques is always the belief that we have needs, which means something is missing or lacking in us, which unconsciously reaffirms the thought of separation in our mind and the accompanying guilt (**T.1.VI.1,2**).

Jesus' purpose in having us recognize the power of our mind to make up a world is not so that we can make up a better world. Rather, he wants us first to accept responsibility for our experiences so that we do not continue to perceive ourselves as victims of a world outside us. We will then be more willing to turn to a different part of our mind to be in control of the process -- the Holy Spirit, Who helps us learn what we really want. With the choice of a different Guide through the illusion, Who teaches us our only need is forgiveness, we will begin to take the gentle steps from sleeping and dreaming to awakening to our true reality as spirit, in which there are no needs.

Q #612: In the section "The God of Sickness" the first sentence states, "You have not attacked God and you do love him." Although I do believe in the teachings of A Course in Miracles, and this statement, I have difficulty in understanding, appreciating, accepting -- whatever word is appropriate -- that I love God. These are just words to me. Is the solution to love everyone I meet, see, or think of?

A: In the Course, Jesus is always addressing the mind, and in this case the right mind, which is the part of the mind that remembers God's Love for His Son and the Son's love for His Father. This passage refers to the true relationship between the Father and the Son that remains unchanged by the ego's insane belief in the separation. It speaks of a love we have forgotten by choosing to believe we are separate from God. It is not saying that the individual who identifies with a body in the dream loves God. There is no love for God (or anyone) in this world: **"The world was made as an attack on God. It symbolizes fear. And what is fear except love's absence? Thus the world was meant to be a place where God [Love] could enter not, and where His Son could be apart from Him" (W.pII.3.2:1, 2, 3,4).** "Love" in the world is special love which is based on having our needs met by persons, objects, or events. (See: **T.16.IV**)

The answer to your question requires distinguishing between the two levels of teaching found in the Course. Level one reflects the truth of our oneness with God in the reality of Heaven. Passages such as the one you quote are level one statements; they reflect the changeless reality outside of time and space, and refer to our true Self. However, because Jesus knows we believe the separation has actually occurred, and we believe we are individuals in bodies, he also speaks to us on the level of our experience in the dream; level two. On this level our experience may be that we are "religious" or "spiritual" and therefore "love" God, or, as you mention, have no thought of loving God. Neither the "loving" nor the "not loving" is the love to which Jesus refers.

When the Course speaks of love it is always referring to level one; the love that belongs to the changeless reality of our true Identity as God's one Son. We are not asked to learn this love, **"for that is beyond what can be taught" (T.in.1:6).** Therefore, trying to love everyone in the dream is not the solution, because not loving them is not the problem. The problem is believing the separation and its ensuing lovelessness are real, and the solution is healing the mind of this insane thought.

The way we get in touch with the part of our mind that remembers God's Love for us, and ours for Him, is to recognize our fierce defense against this love, which shows itself in all the ways we separate ourselves from one another with our judgments. Whenever we become aware of any judgment, we have the opportunity to see that we have made a choice whereby we prefer to be separate in a body rather than one with God in His Love. Guilt over making this choice is then projected out to others in the form of attack: **"If you did not feel guilty you could not attack [judge], for condemnation is the root of attack. It is the judgment of one mind by another as unworthy of love and deserving of punishment" (T.13.in.1:1, 2, italics ours).** It is this thought underlying our relationships that needs to be transformed by the Holy Spirit through forgiveness. (See: Questions [#59](#), [#206](#), and [#272](#).)

Q #613: I am new to *A Course in Miracles*, and have just begun reading/study. Is it wrong to have ambition, ideas for improvements, better ways to do things? In your job, at home etc.?

A: The Course teaches that nothing we do in the world is either right or wrong. The only "wrong" thing we do is making a choice in the mind to believe that the thought of separation is real. We then confirm this thought by believing that the world and the body are real. We are wrong about these beliefs. Though Jesus teaches us in *A Course in Miracles* that the separation never occurred (**M.2.2:6, 7, 8**) and the world does not exist (**W.pl.132.6:2**), he understands that we believe our experience in the illusory world is real. He tells us, therefore, not to deny our experience (**T.2I.V.3:8, 9, 10, 11**), but to allow the Holy Spirit to use it as a classroom whereby we can learn that we have been mistaken about who we are. We do this, not by changing our behavior in the world (form), but by changing the purpose (content) of everything in our lives, from the ego's goal of separation and judgment to the Holy Spirit's goal of healing our minds of the thought of separation. If we try *not* to have ambition, ideas, or any of the things with which we fill our lives, we are denying ourselves the very classroom the Holy Spirit needs in which to teach us. It is precisely these experiences of being "functioning" bodies in the world that are the learning tools for the forgiveness process. The goal is to have them transformed by the Holy Spirit. Jesus tells us in the text: **"The ego made the world as it perceives it, but the Holy Spirit, the reinterpreter of what the ego made, sees the world as a teaching device for bringing you home" (T.5.III.11:1).**

Our first task is to recognize the ego's purpose in our seemingly "normal" thoughts, daily activities, and most especially, our relationships. They are all designed to make our bodies and the world real, and to keep us rooted in the illusion of separation. It is very important in this process not to deny any part of our experience, and *not to try to change it on the level of form*. Doing so only makes it real, by convincing us that the form has real effects. No form can be the cause of any effect, because it is itself an effect, not a cause. It is the effect of a choice in the mind to believe the separation is real, as we stated earlier. This thought is what we are being taught to recognize, so it can be corrected. It is the one "problem" the Course speaks of (**W.pl.79, 80**).

Sensing that there is something wrong with our behavior, or with the ideas and values we hold, is very helpful. They are clues that part of the mind is aware that there *is* something wrong; only it is in our minds, not in the world. When we mistakenly believe that having a more comfortable financial situation, more status, better ways of doing things in the dream, will bring us true happiness, we want to remember that we are wrong, and ask the Holy Spirit to teach us what will truly make us happy. We may then pursue these ambitions, without expecting them to give or take away our peace and happiness, and most importantly, without judging ourselves as sinful for having them, since **"The Holy Spirit can use all that you give to Him for your salvation" (T.25.VIII.1:1).**

Q #614: I have been a student of *A Course in Miracles* for about 10 years. Does a man compromise his masculinity if he honors, or surrenders to the spirituality of the Universe? Can a man be a man in the world with Spirituality as his guide rather than the male ego? Recently, I have come to terms with what most people think of when they think of my personality....Mr. Nice Guy....too nice. I have to admit that growing up in a family with a dominating mom and a father who appeased her did not bring strong masculine traits to the forefront. Now, however, I am attempting to reclaim my masculinity with the hope that this does not mean I have to abandon the spiritual progress I have made during my study of the Course. I feel a man can be a man in the world and still honor love within and express it in a masculine way!

A: To answer your question, it may be helpful first to clarify that it is not part of the Course's teaching and practice that we are to surrender to the Universe, to God, the Holy Spirit, Jesus, or anyone else. In fact, the word *surrender* is never used in the Course, for it implies submission of one's will to another's, as if they are different and in conflict. The Course teaches that our will and God's are one and that they are not in conflict (**W.pl.74.1,2,3,4**), although we have forgotten that and have made up an illusory will that *seems* to oppose God's Will (**T.7.IV.6:1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8**). The ego would want us to believe that God

requires surrender, for that means the ego is both real and alive. The Course process instead is one of releasing our own interpretations and judgments to the light of true forgiveness, where their meaninglessness can simply be recognized.

The Course would not have anything specific to say about whether you should attempt to reclaim your masculinity and become more assertive in your relationships with others, but there is no reason that those efforts would have to be incompatible with the Course's teachings. It certainly is possible to learn to take a position on various issues and concerns in your life and set limits without attacking others. The Course in fact could be very helpful in supporting you in doing that in a nonjudgmental, accepting way with both yourself and others. The challenge would be not to apply your developing assertiveness in a rigid, rule-bound way, for then you would simply be trading one set of self-imposed restrictions for another. Instead, you would want to be able to identify any thoughts of fear or guilt, as well as any investment you may have associated with particular actions and outcomes that concern you. If you can bring those judgments to the Holy Spirit and release them, you will then be able to act with both confidence and kindness, for your ego will not be the source of your decisions.

The Course can also shed some light on why you have adopted the role of "Mr. Nice Guy" up until now in your life, which ultimately has nothing to do with dynamics in your family when you were growing up. It is simply one variation on what the Course calls the "face of innocence" (**T.31.V.2**), the ego's attempt to present a non-threatening, guiltless face to the world in order to keep hidden what we each really believe about ourselves -- that we are the guilty murderer who destroyed love. Now that guilty secret is not really true either, but it *is* what we believe about ourselves, covered over by all our defenses. Until we can look directly at the self-accusation with the nonjudgmental, loving presence of Jesus or the Holy Spirit beside us and release it, it will operate at an unconscious level to sabotage all of our relationships, no matter how good and honest our intentions may seem to be. But as your mind is healed, you will find "**the strength of gentleness**" (**M.4.IV.2**) will be increasingly accessible to you in all your interactions with others.

Q #615: About three weeks ago I had a very unusual meditation. My heart started to race and beat very heavy. I was very scared. "I trust in you Holy Spirit, whatever is happening is okay", I prayed. I kept going and my body felt like it was expanding and contracting. Also, I became aware of my body as a fluid, not solid. This has happened four or five times since then. I feel very scared when it happens, but I think it is part of the process. Is this kind of thing normal?

A: Everything that our bodies seem to experience is a symbol of a thought in the mind, where the experience is actually occurring. And, as with all things that seem to happen to our bodies and in the world, what you are experiencing is neutral (**T.26.VIII.3:7; T.28.II.10:6; W.pII.294**) but your perception of it depends on which teacher you have chosen to interpret it for you. Because you have a split mind, it is possible, even likely, that you will vacillate between the two interpretations, shifting from fear to acceptance and back to fear again.

The ego's interpretation begins from the premise that you are your body and anything that challenges its solidity and defined boundaries is to be feared, for it threatens *you* and the separate, individual self you believe you are (**T.26.I.2,3**). The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, begins from the premise that your reality is mind, not body, that the separation is an illusion and the body is not real, and anything that supports and reinforces that recognition is helpful (**T.6.V.A.2,3**). Quantum physics asserts that matter is not solid and that what we perceive as solid is nearly all empty space, but this kind of recognition, despite its widespread dissemination in our culture, is certainly not something that has been incorporated into our everyday consciousness yet.

The symbols that each of us experience in our lives are highly individualized, as is our learning curriculum (**M.29.2:6**). So whether, as you compare your meditation experiences with others, you find

some who share specific experiences similar to yours is not really relevant. It is at the level of content that the experience can be universal, as all of us, in our own individual ways, are returning to the realization that perception lies and that the world and our seeming selves are not what they appear to be. So whether you continue to have your specific fluid meditation episodes is not so important as that you are willing to use them to learn that we truly have no solid grounds for making our judgments in the world (**T.23.II.13:4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13**) and only the gentle, accepting perspective of the Holy Spirit's forgiveness makes any sense at all.

For some other Questions that address some of the various experiences encountered in meditation, you may wish to refer to [#181](#) and [#307](#).

Q #616: *A Course in Miracles* states that God has no inkling of our dreaming of separation from Him; yet it also makes it apparent in the Course that God gave us the Holy Spirit as a Bridge to lead us out of our insane beliefs. Why would God have a need to give us help from the Holy Spirit Whom He created for this specific purpose, if He didn't sense a need to help us and therefore know about this world and our agony in it, which would then make it real?

A: A frequently asked question, and a logical one! Once you discern how Jesus uses language in the Course and are able to distinguish between metaphorical meanings and literal meanings, the consistency of his content will become clear. It is also necessary to take into consideration the fact that the Course came, in part, to correct what it conceives of as the mistakes of traditional biblical religions, especially their portrayals of God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus. We have addressed these points previously in several other questions. Rather than repeat those replies, we direct you to them: [#72](#), [#116](#), [#131](#), [#328](#), [#459](#), and [#566](#).

Q #617: Three different questions from the same questioner:

i. Can you explain the following sentence (W.pl.13.1:4) "However, it does not follow that you will not think you perceive something that has no meaning." There are 3 negatives in this sentence which I do not understand.

A: The sentence means: you *do* perceive things that have no meaning. In the early lessons of the workbook Jesus is teaching us to distinguish between what has meaning (what exists) and what is meaningless (what does not exist). By choosing to believe the separation is real, we dream a dream in which we perceive the world and the body as real, and give them all the meaning that they have for us (**W.pl.2**). Nothing outside of Heaven has meaning because it does not truly exist. Since we cannot obliterate the part of the mind that remembers this, the choice against this memory causes intense conflict in the mind, which is experienced as fear and anxiety, as this lesson explains. The choice to give meaning to the meaningless puts us in competition with God as paragraph three describes. Fear that the meaning we ascribe to *all* things, including (and especially) ourselves, will be challenged, causes us to expend tremendous energy defending ourselves and our beliefs. This is the effect of our choosing to believe the world is real, thus perceiving things that have no meaning/existence.

ii. Regarding Question [#377](#) concerning special relationships, what does it mean when you say "the relationship will fall away?"

A: In any relationship with people, objects, or events, healing occurs when the mind chooses to identify with the Holy Spirit's Love instead of the ego's thought of separation. Guilt and its projection are thus diminished, thereby transforming the relationship from serving the ego's purpose of separation to the Holy Spirit's purpose of healing. What then "will fall away" is the specialness. The relationship is initially

marked by specialness needs due to the sense of lack that accompanies the choice to deny our true Identity by listening to the ego. This is true for all relationships. Through the healing process of forgiveness, relationships with persons become a classroom for learning that we have no separate interests. Relationships with other things "fall away" in the sense that they cease to be important. They are no longer sought after to fill the void left by the separation; having or experiencing them has neither a positive nor negative effect.

iii. In "Right Teaching and Right Learning" I would like clarification on the following: "a good teacher....must meet another condition; he must believe in the students to whom he offers the ideas." On one level, I understand Jesus is telling us he believes in us. How does this relate to someone teaching the Course? Does it refer to a non-judgmental attitude?

A: The Course tells us that in all our relationships we are both teaching and learning/teacher and student. The passage you quote is not referring exclusively to a teacher actually teaching the Course to students. It applies to each encounter we have with others. One of the most important goals of the Course is to teach us that we are minds with the power to choose, and are therefore responsible for our choice. This is the lesson we are asked to learn for ourselves and apply to everyone, whether or not they are students of the Course. It is the foundation of the forgiveness process, whereby we recognize that every experience in the dream, as well as every judgment concerning others, is the result of a choice in the mind to listen either to the voice of the ego, or the Voice of the Holy Spirit. The ego tells us we are bodies, and are guilty sinners deserving of punishment for believing this. The Holy Spirit tells us we are God's innocent Son. What we choose determines what we believe about ourselves and others. We then teach it by the mere fact of believing it: **"Remember always that what you believe you will teach. Believe with me, and we will become equal as teachers" (T.6.I.6:10,11).**

When we perceive others as anything less than wholly deserving of God's Love and ours, it is because we have believed the ego's lie about our identity, judged ourselves as sinful, and believe the same about everyone else. We believe in students [others] by recognizing that they are not victims imprisoned in bodies; they are minds with the power to choose, just as we are.

Q #618: My sister was diagnosed with cancer about a year ago and was given six months to live. At that point my husband and I joined in helping her with alternative therapy. She could not work so she has become financially dependent on us for help. She has obviously had some success but continues to look for negative signs of health conditions. We feel she could do more for herself in that she continues to smoke, not exercise, and depends on magic too much. Her dependency on us keeps growing and we feel she is losing sight of her own power. How can she become independent of us while we are still helping her? Can we have expectations of her?

A: In *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus tells us, **"It is not up to you to change your brother, but merely to accept him as he is" (T.9.III.6:4).** And his words apply equally to sisters! Now, before you decide you don't want to read any further, know that these words are not speaking about what you should or should not do with your sister, but only about your attitude toward her. The point is, and the section on **"The Correction of Error"** from which the above line is taken clarifies this, we can do nothing but reinforce our own ego and the egos of those with whom we are in relationship if we make our decisions on our own. For in situations such as you are experiencing with your sister, we will inevitably feel put upon, taken advantage of, and used. And those simply are not right-minded feelings. Any action we take based on them will not be loving to anyone.

It may very well be that the most helpful thing for your sister is for her to become more independent of you. But so long as you have a personal investment in her becoming independent, anything you do will be an attack, not only on her but on yourselves as well. And it could also be that the most helpful thing would be for her to remain dependent on you. You are in no position to judge what will be most helpful for her,

because you do not know what is most helpful for yourselves. These may seem like strong words, but that is Jesus' point when he asks each of us to consider, in the very earliest workbook lessons, that **"I do not understand anything I see" (W.pl.3)** -- notice he doesn't simply say we don't understand a *lot* of what we see! -- or **"I am never upset for the reason I think" (W.pl.5)**, and **"I do not perceive my own best interests" (W.p.I.24)**. He means all of these statements quite literally, although our egos have their rationalizations and justifications for what would simply have to be unreasonable extensions of these principles!

Now you may simply find yourselves unwilling to tolerate your sister's apparent manipulations any further and you may feel compelled to establish some limits or set up some conditions with her for your continued support. Although such feelings and actions may not be without your own ego investment, it is still possible at least to acknowledge how far along the path you are willing to go with Jesus at this point, and where you feel you need to take over in the decision-making process. For if, on the other hand, you proceed to "tolerate" your sister, seemingly against your will, and end up feeling self-sacrificing and resentful towards her, that also is not loving to any of you. The key would be to be aware of whatever guilt you may feel in the situation, which could be projected as anger toward your sister, and bring that to Jesus to release before proceeding.

Identified with our egos, we are always concerned about what others are doing and what we should or should not do about it. And Jesus is not asking us to release our egos but for an instant. For in that moment we can find the clarity we are looking for, which has nothing to do with what we do and everything to do with how we see -- ourselves and others. Remember, he only ever asks of us a **"little willingness"** and he promises the rest will be provided (**T.18.IV; V.2**).

Q #619: I have been diagnosed with a rare form of cancer. And I know *A Course in Miracles* would say that's a perfect way for the ego to get you. There is no cure as of yet. But I am doing other things to help in my healing, alternative things, praying for my highest good, asking what the lesson is I am supposed to learn in all this. Does it all go back to guilt? I ask Jesus and the Holy Spirit to help me see this differently. My father died four months after I was diagnosed. My brother gives me no emotional support. I have prayed for a healing between my brother and myself, and it only seems to get worse. Sometimes I just can't take it anymore. I have been sober for 16 years. Have I not learned anything? I feel so alone sometimes. But the cancer has taught me compassion, that I already thought I had. I want to be a channel for God's Love. I have my skin-care license. That's what I love, and wanted to use that as my way of giving back. How can I be a channel if I am sick?

A: *Compassion* is the key word in what you have said. But you must apply it to yourself, which means being more gentle: specifically, lightening up on the judgmental thoughts against yourself, such as "Have I not learned anything?" I am sure you would never say that to another person with a serious problem. Why be so hard on yourself? Our perception is too limited to know why this condition is in your script, but it need not be looked upon as totally negative. The lesson you can learn is that the only important aspect of it now is which teacher you will choose to help you through it: the ego or Jesus. The ego would "guide" you in such a way that you would wind up feeling alone and guilty for somehow failing this Course. Jesus would help you see this differently by guiding you to the peace deep within you that is untouched by anything of the body or the world. Surely, a difficult lesson, but Jesus and the Holy Spirit would help you approach your condition as a classroom in which you can begin to recover a sense of your true Identity outside the dream of separation.

This does not entail denial of your physical and emotional pain. And it does not mean that you should not pursue whatever treatment you want to, including psychological counseling for your intense feelings. There are truly kind counselors available for people who, like yourself, are undergoing a life-threatening illness. The kind, gentle approach of the Course combines both levels: doing whatever is helpful to alleviate the physical/emotional condition, and doing the inner work of bringing all your anger and grievances to the loving presence in your right mind, where you will feel that you are not being judged, but

only loved. Your interaction with doctors and other medical people would then be an opportunity to choose against the ego's goal of separate, conflicting interests, and for the Holy Spirit's goal of shared interests. Our guilt prevents us from experiencing that love, so that is the importance of being open and honest about unforgiveness toward yourself and others. Learning how to look with Jesus -- which means non-judgmentally -- at the contents of our wrong mind puts us on the right path to healing and peace.

Finally, resuming skin-care work could very well be an expression of kindness toward yourself, since that is what you love to do. But rather than doing it "as a way of giving back," which sounds a little sacrificial, you might consider approaching it as a wonderful classroom -- a means of joining with others through sharing a common interest. That would help you gradually to go to a deeper level of joining, where you recognize more and more that you and your clients are joined both as the separated Son of God journeying back to your true home in Heaven as God's eternally innocent Son. Your work then, combined with your "little willingness," would be the means the Holy Spirit could use to heal your mind of all thoughts of separation. So it is a matter of doing whatever you can for your body, and at the same time in some part of your mind knowing that the cancer in your body is not really the problem. Your belief that you are separate from the Love and peace of God is the problem.

Q #620: A web search on *A Course in Miracles* produces many anti-Course articles -- everything ranging from the view that the Course is Satan-inspired, to opinions that those who are involved with it are anti-Christian, anti-Biblical cultists. As one who came to the Course after having validated its principles of forgiveness and peace in real life before ever reading a word of them in print, I perpetually wrestle with the fact that I believe in my heart the Course is valid but that its Jesus does contradict the Bible. This is starting to cause me much anguish, as the Bible itself says there will be many false prophets in the end times and to test their words against the Scriptures. I can certainly understand differences in interpretation, but all of the direct contradictions are causing me to have serious doubts.

A: Many students have anguished over this issue, some returning to their prior religious affiliation, and others remaining with the Course. There is no doubt that the theology of the Course and that of the Bible are mutually exclusive. No one can make this decision for you. You should follow whatever path brings you closer to God, and leaves you feeling peaceful, and with love for all people. To make your decision based on fear, though, would seem to be counter-productive, as it would be hard to feel love for a God Who binds you to Himself and His Word out of fear. Fear and love cannot coexist. And there would also continue to be conflict if part of you still believed the Course to be a valid spiritual path.

Some people have said to themselves as they continued with the Course still with lingering doubts and fear that they could be making the wrong decision: What is the worst that can happen? I can always go back -- the Course will always be there for me. And what's wrong with becoming more compassionate, more kind, less judgmental, and less guilty? Suppose I spend the rest of my life undoing my guilt, my hateful thoughts, my fear of love, the obstacles to peace? Would God be upset with me because I got the theology wrong? What do *you* think???

What might interest you is our book, co-authored by Kenneth Wapnick and Norris Clarke, a Catholic priest/philosopher, ***A Course in Miracles and Christianity: A Dialogue***.

Q #621: My wife and I are both in the army. We got married last July and haven't been able to spend more than a month total together since, because I just spent a few months in Korea. I returned in November, we were stationed far away from each other during the time before she got sent to Iraq in January, a day before her birthday. I tried really hard to get sent there to be with her, but it's just not going to happen. I did receive word, however, that I'm going to Afghanistan in a couple months... it's a lot more dangerous there and my safety isn't guaranteed. My father, who introduced me to *A Course in Miracles*, tells me to just smile because everything is as it should be. I am so frustrated and angry at the current

situation and I'm not really sure whom I'm supposed to forgive. My wife and I are both students of the teachings of Jesus, but can't really seem to figure out why our love is constantly being tested. It's been a long time now since we have seen each other, and this is a constant burden on the both of us. It has been a constant battle with the military since we got married. Why do I feel like we are being attacked? What is your advice for us?

A: Although the Course reminds us that there is no hierarchy among illusions (**T.26.VII.6:5**), that does not mean that we will not experience some of the times and circumstances of our lives as much more difficult, frustrating and painful than others. Your father meant well, but his advice is not strictly in line with the Course's teachings. Only through forgiveness can we be certain that we are where we are supposed to be -- in our right mind -- learning the lessons of forgiveness that we have, on a level we are rarely in touch with, given to ourselves. And we can't force a smile on ourselves over situations where we still feel unfairly treated and victimized.

So being honest with yourselves, as you are doing, about how you are feeling -- not denying what feels like the injustice of it all -- is an important first step. But of course you don't want to stop there. The answer to your question that you're not sure whom you are supposed to forgive in fact holds the key. For the Course is telling us that we really only ever need to forgive ourselves. We need to forgive ourselves for believing that we can be bereft of love. And our lives, sometimes in subtle and other times in more blatant ways, are set up, by our unconscious choice, to prove to us that we will never have the love we need and deserve. Your repeated forced separations from each other certainly must reinforce that belief that all of us who find ourselves here in the world share.

Many times, we are in situations where we are simply not in control of what happens to us. The army would be a prime example. But the one choice we always have, no matter the external circumstances, is which teacher we will choose to be our guide in interpreting what happens to us. If we choose the ego, we will believe that we are the victim of other people's choices, which are robbing us of our happiness. If we choose Jesus as our teacher, we will be expressing a willingness to learn that the love and peace we want is always available to us within our own minds, regardless of external circumstances. This is not an easy lesson to learn, and our lives have been set up to prove just the opposite, but the willingness to consider that possibility opens the door at least a crack to a different experience. It is only natural to want to be together, but because you are not together physically does not mean that you're not still together in the thoughts in your mind. And the Course tells us the mind is where the only genuine experience of joining can be found (**T.18.VI.11,12,13,14**). In those moments when you can allow yourself this different experience that transcends time and space and the body, you will know that you can never be deprived of what you truly want, regardless of where you find yourself. And over time, with practice, this awareness can grow in your experience until you will want nothing else (**W.pl.231.1**).

Q #622: My partner and I have been together for a while. He is a teacher of *A Course in Miracles* and I am recently challenged with something I need guidance with. My partner would like the "freedom" to have sexual affairs with other women because he says it is 'his nature' to be able to do that and not feel guilty about it. He is not willing to relinquish that freedom, and he told me so that he will not feel guilty when it happens. I love him and we share an incredible relationship in which we both have agreed to build a future together to help other people and ourselves grow. But I can't help but feel nauseous and wonder why he would want to do this. Is this a fantasy that he can't relinquish or am I wrong in not wanting him to explore "his nature," for I don't have the same desire to seek out other men for sex or companionship. I am so confused on what the Course would have me do or think and can't help but ask myself, am I wrong to want a partner who would want the same things as me. I love him dearly but I am afraid this will end us and if so -- so be it -- but I need to know first if there is another way?

A: Rather than focusing on your partner and his expectations for the relationship and how those may conflict with your own, the Course would invite you first to get in touch with your own ego purpose for the relationship. We of course consciously seek out special love relationships in order to have our needs met

and so have implicit and explicit expectations for how we would like the other person to be so that we can get what we want. And both partners have their own set of expectations based on their own needs as they perceive them. We see our own happiness and satisfaction in the relationship as dependent on whether or not the other fulfills our expectations. This is why everyone in the world seems to enter into relationships.

However, the deeper, usually unconscious purpose the ego has for all special love relationships is to prove that love cannot be trusted and that we will in the end be betrayed, abandoned, or in some other way victimized by our special love partner. And the love will then turn into hate -- demonstrating from the Course's perspective that it wasn't ever really love (**T.16.IV.4:1,2,3,4**) but dependency. And yet such feelings, regardless of how justified they seem to be, have nothing to do with the other's behavior but only with our own deep-rooted sense of guilt and unworthiness and our overwhelming desire to project responsibility for those feelings outside ourselves on to someone else. This is the real ego purpose behind all of our relationships.

Now there is nothing wrong with each of you being clear about what you want in the relationship and then looking to see if there is a match. The only mistake would be in believing that what either of you wants and would insist on having has anything to do with anything spiritual. As egos, we all want what we feel is best for ourselves and we do not really care about anyone else. So conflict is inherent and inevitable in all special relationships, and it's just a matter of time before the conflict surfaces. Justifications *for or against* faithfulness at the level of behavior are all ego-based (see [Question #417](#) for a further discussion of the issue of fidelity).

So should you stay or leave? Jesus would like you to recognize that that is not really the question. The question he would have you ask is are you willing to give the relationship a different purpose, and that would be the other way you are asking about. The different purpose would be to use the relationship as a mirror rather than as a screen, that is, as a reflection of what is buried within your own mind but projected outside rather than as a way to see the selfishness and guilt in someone else and not in yourself. And this you can do whether you remain in the relationship or not. For we are all accusing ourselves down deep of having been unfaithful to God and of looking for love and satisfaction outside of that one Relationship. And the guilt we feel over the self-accusation is enough to make anyone feel nauseous!

So be gentle with both yourself and your partner in this process of self-examination, which has been facilitated by acknowledging the conflicting aims for the relationship that you are experiencing with him. Any attempts to change another in order to find our own happiness are doomed from the start (**W.pl.71.2,3**). But every attempt to change our mind about how and with whom we are perceiving a challenging situation, if we are willing to release our own investment in any specific outcome, is assured of success.

Q #623: I have just begun reading *A Course in Miracles* and I'm finally getting answers I've long been searching for. However one thing continues to plague me. I was raised Catholic and became a born again Christian at age sixteen and began speaking in tongues. I've done so ever since. The bible says when you come together let two or three pray in tongues at most unless there is an interpreter. I've had someone in the Course explain to me the concepts of content and form. From this I've concluded that the content is the Holy Spirit and the form is tongues, so that must mean (since traditional prayer has no real purpose) that tongues are merely the product of the awareness of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. When I'm speaking this language, I'm being edified or enlightened to awareness of my natural spiritual, eternal self. Then if there is an interpretation, the church has become spiritually aware (so to speak). Is this even remotely correct? Also recently, I prophesied over a dozen people whom I had never met, telling them things I could not know about them. The bible also speaks of this as a gift or manifestation of the indwelling spirit. Again I know what the bible says about what prophesying is and its applications, but I

don't entirely trust this information. I'm hoping that someone could clarify based on the principles of the Course, so I can maximize my use of these wonderful gifts.

A: Sorry, but the Course does not offer any specific interpretation for such abilities or gifts as speaking in tongues and prophesying. Comments and recommendations about them in the New Testament, such as Paul provides in his first letter to the Corinthians, come in the context of a completely different spiritual teaching, which sees both sin and the body as very real, and to try to integrate them with the Course's teachings will most likely lead only to greater confusion with both sets of teachings. This is because the Course offers no explanation for what specifically the body does, no matter how common or unusual, or what the body may seem to do or say in relationship to other bodies, since one of the Course's basic premises is that the world of bodies is illusory.

The Course is concerned only with purpose and not with behavior -- the distinction between content and form you mention. There is nothing inherently spiritual, and nothing that in itself would represent the Holy Spirit's influence or indwelling, from the Course's perspective, in speaking in tongues or prophesying. What would determine whether such activities at any particular time are spiritual or not is *how* they are used in that moment, which means they are no different from any other activity we might engage in. And the only two purposes they can serve are the ego's or the Holy Spirit's. In other words, speaking in tongues or prophesying would serve an ego purpose if, for example, the speaker sees them as special gifts from God that make him or her different from others, blessed by the Holy Spirit in a special way. And they could serve the Holy Spirit's purpose of forgiveness if they are used to remind *everyone* that we are all equally blessed and loved children of God.

You may find a couple of questions that address the Course's perspective on psychic abilities of help as you attempt to reconcile your own understandings and experiences with the Course's teachings (Question #497 on prophecies and Question #589 on psychic abilities).

Q #624: i Aren't all philosophies, belief in the Bible, *A Course in Miracles*, the Koran, etc. just opinions? What moves or motivates someone to be a Christian, Buddhist, or a Course student, etc.? Surely no one could be so presumptuous to lay claim to absolute truth. So why would anyone follow any religion when it is totally impossible to know truth? Why would you want to spend a lifetime studying *A Course in Miracles* when it is just another opinion? I just meditate every day and ask for direction and guidance in the most humble and honest way I know how.

ii. How did we ever get here in the first place? How did we get thrown to the bottom? Anything other than perfect love, perfect bliss is a problem. I think the explanation given in *A Course in Miracles* regarding the dream is, and please excuse me for using this term, a cop out. If it cannot be said that God was the cause of the dream, then Jesus must have produced it. Are we asked to believe that Jesus conjured up this dream out of nothing so as to doom himself and all of mankind to this horrible and unbelievable slaughter house? In the midst of pure goodness, the dream emerges from nowhere. Can't buy it. *A Course in Miracles* is just another opinion. I'm not criticizing it but at this time in my life I'm not ready to accept it either.

A: We cannot speak for other spiritual paths, but many, many students of *A Course in Miracles* have said that when the Course came into their lives (and the circumstances of how that happened vary greatly), it felt as if they had finally found what they had been looking for -- some adding that they didn't even know they had been looking for anything. Others have said that what attracted them to it is that it offered an alternative to traditional biblical religions, some stating specifically that it was the Course's teaching that God is not the creator of the world nor is He responsible for the evil in it. The Course itself came in response to the mutual commitment of two New York psychologists to find a way of relating to each other and their colleagues that was not filled with hostility and strife. Importantly, they humbly admitted that they did not know what that way was, but they would join together in finding it. In other words, *A Course in*

Miracles did not just appear out of the blue as a full-blown theological treatise. It was the answer to a call for help. Its theology, metaphysics, and psychology are the theoretical grounding for its practical teachings on forgiveness, which is the Course's one-word answer to the quest for a better way of relating to others -- and, it turns out, to oneself as well. Waiting for something to turn up that would have the mark of absolute truth on it would seem futile, as you yourself correctly point out.

A Course in Miracles does not present itself as the absolute truth. It says of itself that it is only one among many thousands of paths to God (**M.1.4:2**). It does have roots, though, in Platonism, Gnosticism, and non-dualistic Vedanta, as well as other traditions that speak of the physical world as a shadow of reality or an illusion. Tomes have been written about the problem of the imperfect coming from the perfect. The Course's answer is that it is impossible; thus its absolute non-dualism and consequent need to rely on mythological and symbolic discourse (the dream, the ladder of separation, the carpet of time, etc.). Kenneth's scholarly study of the Course from that point of view is contained in his book, *Love Does Not Condemn: The World, the Flesh, and the Devil According to Platonism, Christianity, Gnosticism, and A Course in Miracles*. Jesus addresses this by explaining that **"this course remains within the ego framework, where it is needed. It is not concerned with what is beyond all error because it is planned only to set the direction towards it. Therefore it uses words, which are symbolic, and cannot express what lies beyond symbols. . . . The ego may ask, 'How did the impossible occur?', 'To what did the impossible happen?', and may ask this in many forms. Yet there is no answer; only an experience. Seek only this, and do not let theology delay you" (C.in.3:1,2,3; 4:3,4).**

Echoing the plaintive appeal of countless others, St. Augustine cried out, "My heart is restless, O God, and it will find no rest until it rests in Thee." The psalmist, too, expresses his soul's pain: "Like the deer that yearns for running streams, so my soul is yearning for you my God." Something is missing; something that belongs there is not there. We all share that deep sadness in one way or another. Again, *A Course in Miracles* is just one set of symbols that communicates with our mind's and heart's plea for truth and forgiveness. If you do not find the answer by following the Course's path, we hope you will find it in some other way. Godspeed!

Finally, the view of Jesus implied in your question does not really correspond to the Course's view. You seem to equate Jesus with the Son of God. Jesus is presented differently in the Course. The section in the clarification of terms called "Jesus -- Christ" defines Jesus as **"one who was a man but saw the face of Christ in all his brothers and remembered God. So he became identified with Christ . . ."** (**C.5.2:1,2**). Christ is the Son of God in Heaven.

Question #526 pertains to the same kind of perplexity you have expressed; also, Question #566 explains the use of metaphor, symbol, and the two distinct levels of discourse; and Question #10 addresses, from different angles, the question of how the separation could have happened.

Q #625: Could you please define or describe for me in detail what it is that you mean when you use the word "God". My purpose for asking this question is that for many people the word "God" means many different things. When you see the symbol "God," you sometimes think of a man with white hair or an energy source, or your higher self. At this point, I am very familiar with the illusion I have been creating. Considering the fact that many of us are so very bored here in this illusion, I would say we have pretty much mastered the state of fear. It's everywhere. I thought perhaps if I might get an idea of "God" and focus my attention on that, I would begin to live in that world.

A: Although words are used to identify God as our Creator, Source, and Father, *A Course in Miracles* does not define or describe God. One of the important things it teaches us about God is that we cannot use words or ideas to describe Him: **"words are symbols, and nothing that is true need be explained" (T.7.I.6:4)**. Furthermore, words and ideas are of the body, which belongs to the world that **"was made as an attack on God, ...[and] to be a place where God could enter not, and where**

His Son could be apart from Him" (W.pll.3.2:1,4). None of the images, ideas or words we associate with God has any real meaning. It is not ideas about God, but the *experience* of His Love that will lead us home.

The best we can do to explain the unexplainable, is to quote the following passage: **"Truth [God] can only be experienced. It [God] cannot be described and it [God] cannot be explained. I [Jesus] can make you aware of the conditions of truth, but the experience is of God. Together we can meet its conditions, but truth [the memory of God, and our Identity as His Son] will dawn upon you of itself (T.8.VI.9:8,9,10,11).** Although God cannot be explained and love cannot be taught (T.in.1:6) the good news is that we do not have to understand God, and love extends naturally when fear has been removed. As the above passage indicates, our goal is but to join with Jesus (who represents the part of our minds that remembers God) to meet the conditions of truth. The truth is that we are not the bodies we have identified with, but are minds with the power to choose. The choice we make is between accepting that we are as God created us (T.23.I.7), or rejecting the truth, thus identifying with the ego (the thought of separation) and the body. Since clearly we have made a choice to identify with the body, we must begin our "journey" where we think we are, and retrace our steps back to our minds to make a different choice. We do that by becoming aware of the blocks that we have put in place to keep God away; i.e., all the judgments that keep us separate from others. Once we have taken responsibility for these judgments, we have the opportunity to allow the Holy Spirit to transform them through forgiveness, which is **"... but a willingness that truth be true" (T.26.VII.10:3).** This willingness to let our mistaken beliefs be transformed is all that is required. That is what we need to focus on if we truly want the memory of God's Love to replace fear.

Q #626: In the manual for teachers of *A Course in Miracles* we are told, "the name of Jesus Christ as such is but a symbol" (M.23.4:1). Why isn't it revealed earlier in the text that Jesus is purely symbolic in the curriculum? The Course truly takes on a different meaning when one realizes that Jesus' role in the Course is purely symbolic.

A: The simple answer to your question is that the statement indicates the *name* is a symbol, reflecting the earlier statement in the manual that **"words are but symbols of symbols. They are thus twice removed from reality" (M.21.1:9,10).** The statement can also be understood on a deeper level, where Jesus is seen as a symbol of love, just as we are symbols of the ego's thought system of separation. On that level, everything is a symbol, since everything is taking place in a mind that believes it exists outside the perfect Oneness of God, the only reality, for which there is no symbol and which is **"ultimately known without a form, unpictured and unseen" (T.27.III.5:2).**

There are not real, separate entities existing in a physical cosmos, even though that is what our senses tell us. Lesson 184 begins by saying, **"You live by symbols. You have made up names for everything you see. Each one becomes a separate entity, identified by its own name. By this you carve it out of unity" (W.pl.184.1:1,2,3,4).** Jesus is addressing the decision-making mind outside time and space, as he always does in the Course. Yet, in that same lesson he makes it clear that he is not expecting us to go beyond all symbols; but he also cautions us not to be deceived by the symbols of the world: **"They do not stand for anything at all, and in your practicing it is this thought that will release you from them. They become but means by which you can communicate in ways the world can understand, but which you recognize is not the unity where true communication can be found" (W.pl.184.9:4,5).**

"Jesus," then, is a symbol, not of the world of separation, but of the real world of love and unity. As we identify more and more with the mind and less and less with the body, we will be better able to relate to this. In the meantime, we should go right on relating to him and ourselves as individuals as long as that is our experience, keeping in mind, however, what he is teaching in this lesson in particular. He is teaching us how to use the names of things in the world to get beyond them to the **"one Name, one meaning, and a single Source which unifies all things within Itself" (11:3).** Our starting point, which will take us a

long way, is to ask help of Jesus or the Holy Spirit to see beyond the separate, competing interests that divide us to the common purpose we all share of restoring to our awareness our unity as God's one Son. This process of forgiveness is wonderfully described in the section in the text called "**Beyond All Symbols**" (T.27.III). Also, Chapter 17 in Kenneth's book, *Absence from Felicity*, explains Helen Schucman's experience of Jesus on these two levels. It helps to resolve the confusion that practically all students run into when they begin to deal with this aspect of the Course.

Q #627: If last year, I read all of the book except for the last one hundred pages and now have completed the book, is it a problem to then begin the lessons, or do I need to reread the book?

A: Aside from the specifications in the Introduction to the workbook, there are no instructions for studying *A Course in Miracles*. It is not necessary to reread the text to begin practicing the workbook lessons, although it usually takes more than one reading to understand the fundamental principles of the thought system the Course teaches. The only requirement for the workbook is clearly stated in the Introduction: "**Remember only this; you need not believe the ideas, you need not accept them, and you need not even welcome them. Some of them you may actively resist. None of this will matter, or decrease their efficacy. But do not allow yourself to make exceptions in applying the ideas the workbook contains, and whatever your reactions to the ideas may be, use them. Nothing more than that is required**" (W.in.9). It is important to focus on the content, rather than the form. What matters is making a sincere effort to follow the instructions as carefully as you can, without judging yourself when you fail. Since Jesus knows our resistance to the Course's message is quite strong, he leads us gently. What he tells us in the text aptly applies to our workbook practice: "**And if you find resistance strong and dedication weak, you are not ready. Do not fight yourself**" (T.30.I.1:6,7). We are asked for a little willingness, nothing more.

Q #628: I feel kind of confused about prayer. I have understood that forgiveness means to see something that you desire to change as being something that has been made by the ego. You accept and recognize this as true. Then you ask the Holy Spirit for true perception regarding this thing. I understand that prayers of supplication are not answered by the Holy Spirit. Is not the very asking for true perception a type of prayer of supplication?

A: *A Course in Miracles* teaches that forgiveness is a process, whereby we recognize that any grievance we have against any person, event, or thing is the result of a projection of guilt. Guilt originates in the mind when a choice is made to be separate from God and from others. The mind seeks to free itself from this guilt by projecting it onto something external to itself. It then dissociates itself from responsibility for choosing separation, denies the guilt, and blames something or someone for causing its discomfort. The forgiveness process begins with the willingness to look at our grievances in the light of this teaching. Whenever we find ourselves blaming something or someone for our feelings of anger, victimization, abandonment, etc., we are asked to remember that the source of our feeling is the guilt in our minds for choosing separation, not the situation or person we are accusing. That is what the Course means when it tells us we "**...forgive the Son of God [our brother] for what he did not do**" (T.17.III.1:5).

Because we have denied our identity as minds and have a strong attachment to our identity as bodies, this is not an easy process to practice. That is where "prayer" comes in. The Course does not tell us that the Holy Spirit does not answer prayers of supplication. All prayer begins with supplication. Because we perceive Jesus and the Holy Spirit as separate from us, our experience is that we ask them to help us. They represent the part of our minds that remembers our true Identity as God's innocent Son. The prayer is actually a way of reminding ourselves that we do have a mind with the power to choose "another way" of looking at any situation. The very fact of recognizing misperception as a mistaken choice is already another way of looking, and is in itself the answer to a prayer to see differently. It is not the whole story,

but it is a good beginning. Once we have come this far in the process, we have the opportunity to accept that the Holy Spirit's perception is true, and we would be happier if we let it replace *all* the judgments about ourselves and others that we have used to keep ourselves rooted in the illusion of separation. This, too, is a prayer, in that it expresses our desire to remember this process each time we find ourselves judging, and becoming upset with the people and circumstances of our lives.

Our prayer then, is to remember, and the answer is our remembering. This is how we join with the Holy Spirit in our minds, and allow Him to teach us to eventually remain there with Him. It is the prayer described in *The Song of Prayer* (supplement to *A Course in Miracles*), whereby we **"Ask...to receive what is already given; to accept what is already there"** (S.1.I.1:7).

Q #629: "The loving thoughts his [the Son of God's] mind perceives in this world are the world's only reality." If all the apparent kindness and thoughtfulness in the world is the result of the mind's malevolent manipulation, how can loving thoughts be perceived in this world? I can't see anything in the world to be happy about although others perceive me as happy, kind, loving, etc. – a perception I do not share. I'm sure that if and when I ever learn what *A Course in Miracles* is teaching I will know what happiness is. But I need to see something that reflects love in the meantime. Help!

A: Within the illusory world of separation from God, the mind of God's Son is divided between the part that expresses the ego thought system (the "wrong mind") and the part that expresses the Holy Spirit's thought system (the "right mind"). This split mind is completed by a decision- making aspect that is always choosing between the two. What emanates from the right mind is truly loving in contrast to what emanates from the wrong mind, which has the appearance of love but is always some form of special love and therefore not really loving at all. The world reflects one or the other to us, since the world **"is the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition"** (T.21.in.1:5). The concept of cause and effect, specifically the idea that the inner is the cause of the outer is a major aspect of the mind-training dimension of this Course. Since that is the exact opposite of what the world teaches, it is a most difficult concept for us to grasp, let alone practice. The core message of the Course will be misunderstood if this aspect of its theory is passed by. That is why Jesus places such great emphasis on it throughout his course, but especially in the early part of the workbook, where he says again and again that our inner and outer worlds are the same (e.g., **W.pl.32.2:1**)

When you look out from your right mind, you are looking with Jesus -- what is known in the Course as *vision*, or *true perception*. With Jesus as your "eyes," you would see only what is loving or what is calling for love, both in yourself and others. The process Jesus guides us through in his course is this kind of gradual, gentle transition -- from depending on what our physical senses perceive to tell us who we are and what the world is to turning more and more to him as our inner teacher to help us perceive truly.

Q #630: I remember hearing Ken Wapnick, on a workshop tape, say that as the wrong mind splits the right mind also splits. Would you review these right-minded splits?

A: The right-minded splits are not splits *per se* but are simply the Holy Spirit's corrections for the deceptions of the ego's wrong-minded splits. Since we find ourselves self-identified as bodies in the world, at the end of the series of splits the ego has led us along to take us as far away as it possibly can from the truth of Who we are as spirit, the right-minded answer is simply the undoing of those splits, in reverse order.

Briefly, the ego's first split is what seems to cast us out of the oneness of Heaven, beginning the dream of separation which seems to establish us as a separate mind that has consciousness and independence from its Source. At this point, our illusory independent existence is very vulnerable, very fragile, since it

takes very little to remember our reality as God's only Son, perfectly joined with Him and perfectly at peace, which is what the Holy Spirit in our mind represents. And so to protect our individuality, the second split involves our choice to identify completely with the ego and split the Holy Spirit off from our awareness, thereby forgetting that the ego is a choice we have made and not our reality.

The third ego split encompasses the ego's ingenious myth of sin, guilt and fear, in which we view the separation not only as real, but as a sinful attack on God, destroying Him as a consequence of having disrupted the perfect unity of Heaven in which God has His Being. The guilt over this sin is overwhelming and our only defense against it, if it is real, is to split the sin and guilt off, projecting them outside ourselves onto a made-up God, Who becomes the wrathful avenger, intent on vengeance against us for our sin against Him.

But, as with each of the ego's splits, this leads to its own set of problems, requiring yet another defensive split. For if I exist in the mind with this maniacal God, bent on my destruction, I need to escape. And so the fourth and final split involves projecting my own identity out into a world of form and bodies, escaping my mind and hiding in the world. But what the ego has failed to tell me is that this solution involves the projection of *all* the contents of my wrong-mind into the world of form, so that I now live in a world of fear. For the sin and guilt are all still around me, but now external to me in the world and in all my relationships. And so the original vulnerability and fragility of the thought of separation in my mind is now the basis of my identity as a body in the world. Of course, the advantage of this final arrangement is that I am still an individual, but it seems that forces beyond my control have brought about my existence. And if I am the innocent victim of the sinful, guilty world, how can I be held accountable for that original attack on God. How could I possibly be that powerful? Just look at this pathetically weak self I am, despite my best efforts to strengthen and protect myself physically, psychologically and emotionally against a hostile world!

And so it is here we find ourselves, as far removed from our true Identity as spirit as the ego could possibly entice us to go. And it is with this fourth split that the right-minded correction must begin. We are not asked to deny our experience of ourselves as bodies in the world -- the result of the fourth split -- but to be open to a different interpretation of that experience. Rather than focusing on differences as the ego has encouraged us to do -- seeing my innocence as dependent on proving your guilt -- *A Course in Miracles* is inviting us first to begin to recognize that we are all the same, struggling with our feelings of guilt by trying to project them on to everyone else. In other words, we all share the same guilt and the same need to be released from it. As we begin to accept this idea of shared interests, we will become more aware that we are a mind that is making choices to see the world and others in certain ways, rather than simply a victimized body, although we will almost certainly continue to experience ourselves as victims much of the time. And so we gradually begin to undo the final split.

As we begin to see the world and our relationships differently, we will be more willing to look at the sin and guilt buried in our own mind, recognizing its real source in our identification with the ego, thereby beginning to reduce our investment in the third split. And the right-minded correction for this willingness to look honestly will be the recognition that there is an alternative in our mind to the sin, guilt and fear that up until now we have felt the need to split off and project outside of ourselves. And that alternative is the Holy Spirit, the Reminder of the true innocence we share with everyone else, as we let go of the need to make differences real. And so the wall between the right mind and the wrong mind that we have attempted to make impenetrable with the second split begins to become more porous, allowing more of the light of the right mind to shine on the darkness of the wrong mind, revealing increasingly its illusory nature.

The undoing of these three splits is the focus of the Course's teachings and it involves a process that will require great willingness on our part over time, for the self we are identified with in the world -- the result of the fourth split -- will lose its meaning and appeal to us over time as we practice the forgiveness that healing the splits requires. But along the way, that shift engenders tremendous fear so long as we still have an investment in the separation and in our separate, unique, individual self being real.

At the end of the process, once we have allowed the barrier we have imposed between the right mind and the wrong mind to dissolve completely in the light of total forgiveness, we will be in the real world, still aware of the dream of separation but completely unaffected by it. And it is from this place of complete healing that we are ready for the undoing of the first split, accomplished by what the Course metaphorically refers to as God's last step (e.g., **T.7.I**), in which He lifts us up out of the illusion of duality and returns us to the absolute oneness of Heaven, which in reality we have never left.

Although the process of undoing the splits is described here as if it were linear, in reality it is not, as the miracle, or the holy instant, which is involved in undoing the second, third and fourth splits, occurs outside of time and space. And so our experience will be that we will be moving back and forth between the various levels of the splits over and over again, over time. For example, the Holy Spirit may seem to be a part of our healing process almost from the beginning of our work with the Course, yet we will not really understand the nature of His reality until we have come to understand the nature of the split mind more fully. And despite our increasing recognition that our only real choice is made in the mind, we will continue to get caught in our victim scripts in the world and will need to remind ourselves that we are really the same as all our brothers and sisters.

Those interested in a more in-depth exploration of the four splits may find the tape set, *Separation and Forgiveness: The Four Splits and Their Undoing*, and volume I, "All Are Called," from the two-volume book set, *The Message of A Course in Miracles* (both publications by Kenneth Wapnick) helpful.

Q #631: I've been a student of *A Course in Miracles* for over 13 years. In the past year, I've become the caregiver for my parents. They both have dementia/Alzheimer's. I see their blurring of time, "reality" and past grievances that seemed to be dealt with that are now as "real" as they were then. The calendar reads 2004, but the anger is 1944. Caring for my parents makes me question is forgiveness possible?

A: One of the big traps of the ego is to judge by form. Jesus pointedly reminds us, **"Nothing so blinding as perception of form" (T.22.III.6:7)**. It is so difficult for us to accept that the mind is not the brain, and that all physical conditions are expressions of thoughts in the mind. Since we continually protect ourselves from recovering our awareness of ourselves as decision-making minds outside time and space, we depend almost entirely on our senses to tell us what is going on. That is the ego's goal -- to keep our perception and judgments rooted entirely in the body and the world so that we would never return to our minds and discover that we can choose to see things differently.

What would be helpful therefore is to go within and first realize that you are seeing through the ego's eyes, which blind you to anything other than form, and then ask for help to see through Jesus' eyes, which would help you get past the form to the content in the mind. Then you would know that forgiveness is not only possible but guaranteed: **"When you unite with me you are uniting without the ego, because I have renounced the ego in myself and therefore cannot unite with yours. Our union is therefore the way to renounce the ego in you. The truth in both of us is beyond the ego. Our success in transcending the ego is guaranteed by God, and I share this confidence for both of us and all of us" (T.8.V.4:1,2,3,4)**.

Q #632: I am a part of the population who supported Kerry in this last election. The religious right seemed to have a big say in the re-election of President Bush. There appears to be a fear by many that we are losing our old-fashioned values, such as marriage, church, and God. Even in this dream we are living in, there are consequences for believing you hold the absolute truth and all others are wrong. Do you believe this could be the final stretch where fundamental Christianity in the U.S. finally takes its logic to cataclysmic results, and they will be forced to look deeper inside for the truth, as we are all trying to do, recognizing the ego's lies?

A: It is almost a truism that it is easier to see the egos in others than in ourselves, and what all too often follows is a sense of superiority for the greater understanding our recognition of others' foolish egos would seem to imply. But all this does is play into the ego's plan in our minds to keep the separation alive and real out there in the world. For it is the ego's goal that we see others' egos clearly so that we forget to look at our own, perhaps minimizing it or even denying its hold still on our own minds.

Now this is not to deny the facts as you present them, in the world's terms. But possibly implicit in your question is the hope that others will use the probable effects of the seemingly disastrous choices we are making collectively as a nation as an eventual call to awaken. Perhaps that could be so, but still that would never be my concern in the present moment, when I have aligned myself with the only real Leader worth casting my vote for. For the choices the world seems to offer, no matter how different they appear to be, *if I believe they really will make a difference*, only mean that I continue to cast my lot with the ego. For there can be no hope in the world and to believe the outcome of any political election can make a difference in any real sense is to forget where the only real choice lies -- in the mind.

The polarization or split between voters in the United States so frequently described in the media these days and alluded to in your question is only an external projection of the split within our own mind. And nothing needs to be done about the seemingly unbridgeable gap between voters in their values and beliefs about what is important in the world. But as students of *A Course in Miracles*, we do want to take an internal inventory of every value we continue to hold (**T.24.in.2**), and question whether that value reinforces our belief in differences and separation, no matter how noble or seemingly inclusive the value may seem, if others are judged in any way for not sharing that value.

So if there is one lesson that can be taken from the recent elections, it is that we can hold it up to our mind's eye as a mirror into the state of our own minds. For every reaction we have to something on the outside is in fact pointing to an area of hidden guilt within our own mind. And it is to those internal spots of seeming darkness that we can most fruitfully direct our attention, shining the shared light of forgiveness with the Holy Spirit, which allows us to recognize that we are truly the same as *all* our brothers and sisters, no matter what values we share or do not share.

Q #633: Why do we keep creating multiple outer selves that seem to punish us?

A: Because we're insane but we don't yet really accept that we are!

Your question suggests that you understand at some level that we create or, to be more accurate, *miscreate* the world and everyone in it, but that you can't make any sense out of just why we would do this, considering what our experience in the world and in our relationships seems to be. And *A Course in Miracles'* answer to your question is perhaps *the* major insight it offers that is not found in other spiritual teachings -- its explanation of the purpose of the world.

To understand that explanation, we need to be clear first of all that the miscreative "power" rests in the mind joined with the ego, outside of time and space, and not in the self in the world that we believe we are. For that self, along with the world and all the other "outer selves," is a projection of the ego mind, made for a very specific purpose that the ego wants to keep from our awareness.

We also need to be clear that the cause of everything we experience exists only in the mind and not in the world, contrary to what our experience seems to tell us. In fact, the world is an effect and not a cause. And more specifically, all the pain, guilt and fear, in whatever form we experience it -- physical, emotional, psychological -- is an effect of our choice for separation in the mind -- the cause (**T.28.II.7,11,12**). If we really perceived that cause-effect connection in the mind, we'd soon choose against the thought of separation and the ego's days would be numbered. But the truth is we love the ego and its seeming gifts

of individuality and specialness -- different words for the idea of separation -- and are willing to pay almost any price to keep those "gifts."

And that price is a grand self-deception. We want to see the cause of all our pain, guilt and fear as outside ourselves rather than as a result of our own choice in the mind, so that we don't have to take responsibility for how we feel (T.26.X.4;5; T.27.I.1,2,3,4). And we avoid taking responsibility, not because of the guilt that the ego tells us this would force us to confront, but because our "ignorance" protects our concept of ourselves as separate, special individuals. To use this defense, however, we need a world and other bodies -- external to a separate limited and weak self that we can believe we are -- on which to pin the blame for how we feel. And so all of our relationships in the world ultimately have the purpose of shifting our focus away from the mind -- essentially making us mindless -- and to the external world, so that we never uncover the true cause-effect relationship in the mind. And we still have our individuality and specialness, but any pain or guilt or fear associated with that is not our own fault. In other words, we need others "to punish us" so we can hold them responsible for our pain and never have to look inside to the real cause of the pain. It's insane, because essentially we are choosing to remain in pain and deny ourselves access to the only remedy for the pain. And we do not allow ourselves to remember what we are doing.

But the hopeful news is that, once we can begin to realize, however dimly, what we in fact are doing to ourselves, we have made a choice for a different way. And that different way will involve now using each of our "victim" experiences as an opportunity to recognize that we have simply sided with the ego once again and made a choice for separation, and then have tried to deny responsibility for that choice and its consequences. The resistance to this acknowledgment is great, but as we practice looking honestly at what we are doing without judging ourselves, the defense will become increasingly transparent. We are making a choice to be unhappy that has nothing to do with anyone else, but we have become experts at finding someone else to hold responsible for how we feel so that we don't have to look any deeper. Over time, we will begin to see that, although we still may become angry and upset with others, it becomes more difficult to justify our feelings as we have in the past. And as this recognition grows, the investment in the anger and upset will recede. And we will see that all those other "outer selves" are really the same as we are, doing exactly what we have been doing, perhaps not in the same form but with the same content, calling desperately for love as they push it away.

Q #634: When I have a conversation with family or friends, it may become a real discussion in which we give our opinion about a particular subject. Since I am a student of *A Course in Miracles*, I feel insecure about giving my opinion, especially when mine is different from others. I realize that the separation is there. I am aware that I don't need to convince my friend. Should I keep my mouth shut?

A: This situation could be a wonderful opportunity for you to practice what you have learned. As a Course student, you never want to forget to be normal, and normal people express opinions. So you can approach your conversations as a kind of laboratory in which you are going to learn how to disagree with someone without perceiving yourself as separate, without judging, and without the need to be right. This will happen if you show your ego the exit door, and choose Jesus or the Holy Spirit as your lab director instead. You would then look forward to these occasions, and there would be less and less tension or conflict because you would have chosen the right teacher and the right purpose. **"The Holy Spirit is the perfect Teacher. . . . The ego made the world as it perceives it, but the Holy Spirit, the reinterpreter of what the ego made, sees the world as a teaching device for bringing you home" (T.5.III.10:1; 11:1).**

Q #635: You wrote this reply to a previous question: "As the Course reminds us clearly and repeatedly, our function is forgiveness. It is practiced by recognizing all the unloving thoughts and judgments we may

have, asking for them to be transformed by the Holy Spirit. We then do what the Course invites us to do: 'Step gently aside, and let healing be done for you. Keep but one thought in mind and do not lose sight of it, however tempted you may be to judge any situation, and to determine your response by judging it. Focus your mind only on this: I am not alone, and I would not intrude the past upon my Guest. I have invited Him, and He is here. I need do nothing except not to interfere'" (Question #418).

For me the above paragraph completely summarizes the entire message of *A Course in Miracles*. My question/problem/dilemma is: How do we "do nothing" and "not interfere"? To say, as Ken does, that we should concentrate upon "getting ourselves out of the way" is meaningless without some idea as to how. I suspect that if the above instruction from Jesus could be mastered, salvation would rapidly result. There would be, quite simply, nothing left to do! I just do not know how, in "practical" terms, to go about "doing nothing" and "not interfering."

A: Our own individual identity is so tied up in acting and doing with our body that we are likely to misinterpret what Jesus is asking of us here. He is not at all concerned with what our body may or may not do, since that is only ever an effect of thoughts in the mind. But he is very concerned with our mind (**T.4.IV.2:9**), for this is where all power to choose rests.

And so the answer to getting ourselves out of the way is actually contained in the lines you have quoted above: "It is practiced by recognizing all the unloving thoughts and judgments we may have, asking for them to be transformed by the Holy Spirit." This is our part -- to recognize our ego thoughts, which always involve our own interpretation of situations, based on our perception of our personal needs and whether they are being met. This would encompass nearly every thought we have during our day! And so that is where the challenge lies -- in recognizing those thoughts and then having the humility to acknowledge that we may be mistaken about what we need. For all of our thoughts of personal need are specific expressions of our decision to continue to make the past -- the thought of separation -- alive in our minds so that we believe that we are alone and lacking.

Now obviously, so long as we identify ourselves with our bodies, we will have needs, and we're not being asked to deny them. But when we hold a thought that justifies anger, attack or upset when our needs are not met, or feelings of triumph and satisfaction when we get what we want, we are making an interpretation that actively interferes with the expression of the truth within us of Who we really are. So this is the kind of "doing" that Jesus is asking us to set aside within our minds, so that we can be open, unblocked channels for his love. When we have released all of our investment in the ego's interpretations of who we are and what we need, salvation will be ours. And only our own resistance to letting go will delay its arrival.

Q #636: How many planes or levels of consciousness are there? All of us are familiar with the physical, since that's where we are focused, and many of us are also familiar with the astral plane, since it seems to be 'right next door', and it appears that we just bounce back and forth between these two states. But what is the significance -- within the illusion, of course -- of the mental and causal planes (and even other planes of existence way beyond these) spoken about by so many metaphysicians? Is there a hierarchy -- again, within the illusion -- of consciousness? Is finding our way back to God like climbing Mount Everest, where we have to establish several base camps in each plane of consciousness that we sometimes have to return to before we can reach our final destination?

A: However many planes or levels of consciousness there may be is not the concern of *A Course in Miracles*: "**The structure of 'individual consciousness' is essentially irrelevant because it is a concept representing the 'original error' [separation] or the 'original sin' (C.in.1:4).** The Course tells us our problem is that we believe the thought of separation that introduced consciousness (*all levels and planes*) in the first place (See:**T.3.IV.2**) is real. The goal of the Holy Spirit's curriculum, as set forth in the Course, is to heal the mind of this thought. This healing is accomplished through the process of

forgiveness, whereby the ego's perception is replaced by the Holy Spirit's. These principles are the foundation of the Course's teaching and provide us with the steps we are to take if we choose it as our path back to God.

In studying the Course it is helpful to remember that whenever it refers to the body or the world it includes *every aspect* of each (including astral bodies, energy fields, consciousness, and planes of all types). They are all equally part of the illusion of separation, and are therefore not real. Jesus asks us some very unsettling questions in this regard: **"What if you recognized this world is an hallucination?" (T.20.VIII.7:3)** and **"Is it harder to dispel the belief of the insane in a larger hallucination as opposed to a smaller one? (M.8.5:2)** This greatly simplifies things for us. However, we have great resistance to learning this important message of the Course, due to our attachment to identifying with the body. One way to make the separation and the world real is to establish a hierarchy of values, by which we measure the worth of all parts of the illusion. (See: **T.23.II.2:1,2,3**) The mind that is addressed in the Course is *outside of time and space*, beyond all levels of consciousness, mental planes, or astral bodies. It is the mind choosing to identify with the Holy Spirit, Who represents the memory of God, that will enable us eventually to disidentify with every part of the hallucination.

In this process it is not necessary to unravel, nor travel the winding "circuitous routes" of the ego's complexities: **It is not necessary to follow fear through all the circuitous routes by which it burrows underground and hides in darkness, to emerge in forms quite different from what it is. Yet it is necessary to examine each one as long as you would retain the principle that governs all of them. When you are willing to regard them, not as separate, but as different manifestations of the same idea, and one you do not want, they go together" (T.15.X.5:1,2,3).** This passage contains not only the principles that respond to your question, but important information regarding the process of undoing the thought that put consciousness on the map, so to speak. The thought of separation has taken a multitude of forms. We are asked to become aware of how we use these many forms to disguise this single thought, so we can learn that they are all the same. We use them all to prove the world and the body are real. The Holy Spirit uses them to teach us they are nothing and will never give us what we truly want. Learning to identify more and more with the Holy Spirit in our minds instead of with the body is what leads us home. The only camp we need to set up is in our minds. That is where we find the light that will dispel the darkness of consciousness and the separation that gave it birth

Q #637: Can you address a couple of issues I'm having difficulty grasping about the Course?

i. *A Course in Miracles* claims that anger is simply a manifestation of the ego, based on fear. Yet scripture often talks about God's anger -- e.g., the Great Flood, Sodom and Gomorra, the Israelites' idolatry in the desert. If God has no ego, how could He show anger? Or was it really something else? If it wasn't anger, what was it?

ii. I am beginning to realize that the Course deals only with thoughts, not behavior. Yet the age-old behavioral questions still remain. If we treat the traditional concept of "sin" as merely an illusion of the ego self, how does one determine right from wrong? If sin is not real then I can do anything I want without fear of punishment or disciplinary action. If the justice system was governed by the Course, does that mean that there would be no punishment because the "attack" was only an illusion of the ego acting through the body? Does the Course mean to imply that society's response to criminal acts should be to forgive the offender rather than punish or otherwise "discipline" them? How are we as a society supposed to function without agreed-upon rules of conduct and the means to enforce them?

A: 1) Your confusion about God is not surprising -- many students new to the Course, coming from traditional Jewish or Christian backgrounds, share in it. But it can be easily addressed, although you'll have to decide for yourself on which side of the issue you'd like to settle. Quite simply, the God of the bible is not the God of *A Course in Miracles*. The Course does describe and offer a correction for a "God"

who gets angry, condemns and punishes, and demands sacrifice to appease His anger (e.g., **T.3.I.1,2,3,4**; **T.9.V.3**; **T.23.II.4,5,6,7,8**; **W.pl.170**; **M.17.5,6,7**). But according to the Course, this is the ego's made-up God, a major character in its elaborate myth, which asserts that the separation from God is real and actually happened, that it involved an attack on God, and that He is angry about that attack and is seeking retribution. None of this, according to the Course, is true, since the separation never happened in reality and God would no longer be God -- perfect Love -- if anger could be a part of Him. But this, the Course tells us, is what our ego wants us to believe, to assure its own survival. For the ego thrives on conflict -- it literally is a thought of conflict -- and it requires an enemy to maintain its own existence as something separate and apart.

The real God of the Course is perfect Love and perfect Oneness, incapable of anger or condemnation, and completely unaffected by the Sonship's illusory thought of separation and attack. From these distinctions it follows that the God of the bible can not be the same as the Course's true God, but rather bears a striking resemblance to the ego's made-up, angry, wrathful God. And there are many other differences between the bible's God and the Course's God. In the bible, God creates the physical world and everything that inhabits that world, including man and woman. He condemns and punishes Adam and Eve for their sin of disobedience against Him, and eventually sends His only Son to be sacrificed so that the otherwise irreversible effects of that sin that we all inherit can be atoned for. As you study the Course, it will become increasingly apparent that this God and the God of the Course share nothing in common. Jesus in the Course makes it clear that God did not create the world or bodies (e.g., **T.4.I.11:6,7**), has never been affected by our belief in separation and sin (e.g., **T.30.III.10**), and so could never demand sacrifice (e.g., **T.3.I.4**; **T.11.VI.5**). Furthermore, the Jesus of the Course is not God, but rather an aspect of the Sonship, equal to all his brothers and sisters, who has remembered the truth of Who he and all of us are as the one perfect Christ (**T.1.II.3**; **C.5.2,3,4,5**). Although each student should follow whatever path or paths he feels guided to, these differences in the nature of God are at the base of our position that the Course and traditional Christianity are mutually exclusive spiritual teachings that cannot be reconciled. Question #439, as well as the audiotope set, *The Bible from the Perspective of A Course in Miracles*, also address the issue of the relationship between the Course and biblical teachings.

2) Out of context, it may seem that to say sin is not real means it does not matter what we do. And at an ultimate metaphysical level, this is true. But the problem is, all of us who believe we are here in the world must also believe in sin and its laws of pain and punishment, and so to think that we can behave in any way we want with no consequences to ourselves would be foolish at best and tragic at worst (**T.5.VI.1:3,4**). The Course is never making any statements about what is or is not acceptable behavior, and for most minds, not ready to accept the complete responsibility for our own experience that the Course teaches we must eventually learn to accept (**T.21.II.2**), rules governing external behavior are a practical necessity. There is nothing in the Course that says these should be ignored or eliminated. And it is possible to provide consequences for behavioral transgressions with the intent of restraining harmful and destructive behavior, but without the intention of punishing (you may wish to review Questions #371, #484, and #584 for further discussion of the issues around setting limits and making decisions within the illusion). However, behaving "appropriately" will not in itself lead to salvation. Change must occur at the level of mind, from which "appropriate" behavior will then follow.

The Course, while not concerned with right and wrong *behavior*, does distinguish between right- and wrong-minded *thinking* or perception (**T.3.IV.4**), asserting that thought is the level at which the distinction needs to be made, since behavior is only ever an effect or result of the thoughts in the mind. Jesus makes this point several times early in the Course:

"You cannot behave appropriately unless you perceive correctly" (**T.1.III.6:5**).

"I have said that you cannot change your mind by changing your behavior, but I have also said, and many times, that you *can* change your mind" (T.4.IV.2:1). .

"I have enjoined you to behave as I behaved, but we must respond to the same Mind to do this. This Mind is the Holy Spirit, Whose Will is for God always. He teaches you how to keep me as the model for your thought, and to behave like me as a result"(T.5.II.12:1,2,3).

"We have learned that behavior is not the level for either teaching or learning, since you can act in accordance with what you do not believe" (T.7.V.2:4).

And later in the text, **"Seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world" (T.21.in.1:7).**

In perhaps the clearest discussion of this point in the Course, Jesus says:

"You would not excuse insane behavior on your part by saying you could not help it. Why should you condone insane thinking? There is a confusion here that you would do well to look at clearly. You may believe that you are responsible for what you do, but not for what you think. The truth is that you are responsible for what you think, because it is only at this level that you can exercise choice. What you do comes from what you think. ... It is pointless to believe that controlling the outcome of misthought can result in healing. ... You must change your mind, not your behavior, and this *is* a matter of willingness. You do not need guidance except at the mind level. Correction belongs only at the level where change is possible. Change does not mean anything at the symptom [behavioral] level, where it cannot work (T.2.VI.2:2,3,4,5,6,7;3:1,4,5,6,7).

Wrong-minded, or ego-based, thinking is always predicated on the belief in separate interests, which must produce pain and guilt for the wrong-minded thinker, who is identifying with the ego. For in his own mind he is making sin -- the separation -- real, and the ego thought system has been set up in such a way that pain and guilt inevitably follow. So it would be self-destructive and self-defeating to believe that we can act any way we want with impunity. If we fully understood and appreciated the Course's teachings on the cause of our own pain and suffering, we would never consider using any of the Course's principles as justification for attacking anyone.

The recognition that sin is not real is not simply an intellectual understanding. We will know that we truly have accepted sin's unreality when we are no longer identified with the physical self and personality we now we believe we are. Until then, since the world is literally a projection of our own guilty self, any seeming attack on the world outside ourselves must be an attack on ourselves, with all the painful consequences (e.g., **W.pl.196**). So whatever you may have been thinking of doing, don't do it!

Q #638: "Let me perceive forgiveness as it is" is a prayer from the student's workbook (W.pl.134). In the text we learn that forgiveness is a kind of selective remembering (T.17.III.1:3). This refers to the mind. In my opinion perception takes place on the material plane using our senses. Following this: How can we then perceive forgiveness in any way?

A: This is extremely difficult for us to comprehend, but the teachings of *A Course in Miracles* always pertain to the mind, because the body with its senses, along with the external world in which it seems to exist are nothing but the projection of thoughts in the mind: thoughts of separation and the sin, guilt, and fear associated with separation from God. The body is the embodiment of these thoughts, not something autonomous. This is the basis for some very radical -- shocking, to many -- statements in the Course, such as: **"Yet sights and sounds the body can perceive are meaningless. It cannot see or hear. It does not know what seeing *is*; what listening is *for*. It is as little able to perceive as it can judge or understand or know. Its eyes are blind; its ears are deaf. . . . They were made to look upon a world that is not there . . ."** (T.28.V.4:4,5,6,7,8; 5:4). The Course uses the term *false perception* for this.

So forgiveness is part of the process of replacing the ego's purpose for the body (to reinforce the belief in separation) with the Holy Spirit's purpose, which is to restore true perception to our minds, where we perceive everyone as the same, sharing the same goal of returning home to God. We thus learn how to remember only what reflects the truth of our oneness as God's Son, and forget all else, because all else is meaningless. This is the function of true perception, the correction for false perception (C.4).

Q #639: I've had a troubled marriage and my question is how do you know when to end a special relationship? Is there some part of the Course I could read to help me with this issue? My wife and I have been to counseling, but I wanted to look at it through *A Course in Miracles'* view which is altogether different.

A: The Course says nothing about staying or leaving a relationship, since its message is not about behavior. It is only about the thought system and the teacher we have chosen in our minds. There does not have to be a conflict between marriage counseling and the Course approach to relationships, just as there need not be a conflict between practicing the Course's approach to healing and using traditional medicine for health problems at the same time. Jesus, as our kind, wise teacher, encourages us to use this compromise approach as we progress along our spiritual path with him. Eventually, we will not need the "magic," but most of us are not that far along yet. There is nothing wrong in pursuing marriage counseling while you are studying the Course's view of relationships. In essence, the advice of the Course is that your decision to leave or stay be made in a state of peace within your mind. It never advocates "sticking it out" for the purpose of forgiveness even though you find the pain of staying unbearable. Whatever lesson is not learned can be learned in another relationship; we never have only one chance to learn forgiveness. The Course, above all, is a gentle path, and Jesus as our teacher, above all, is patient, as he knows time is unreal and in the end we are undoing something that never happened.

Looking at relationships from the Course's view means asking for help to look within your mind at your thoughts of specialness, judgment, victimization, guilt, and fear, and then observing how these influence the way you relate to your spouse. If you are coming from your wrong mind (the ego thought system of separation), you will always experience your interests as conflicting with your spouse's in some way, and that in order to have your needs met, your spouse must sacrifice, and vice versa. In the ego thought system, it is always *one or the other*. That is the source of a great deal of the tension in relationships; and as long as the relationship is rooted in the ego thought system, that can never change. The good feelings usually are a result of having one's needs met. That is the core of the special love relationship, because all special love is based on the need to fill the emptiness and lack within that is a result of our having split off the love that is our true Identity. There is something missing, and we turn to someone outside us to make us complete. So special love involves taking something from someone and giving in return -- which supposedly makes it a "happy" relationship.

True happiness, however, can be achieved only when the *purpose* of the relationship shifts from specialness (having one's needs fulfilled) to the holiness inspired by the Holy Spirit's or Jesus' purpose of forgiveness, which means that the value of the relationship is now seen to lie solely in its potential to be a means of learning that you and your spouse ultimately share the same interests: You share a wrong mind contaminated with the self-centered goal of specialness and separation, a right mind infused with the selfless goal of inclusiveness and unity, and a decision-making mind that always chooses one of these. So the question Jesus asks us to ask ourselves in relation to another person is **"Do I wish to see my brother sinless?" (T.20.VII.9:2)**. That forces us to look deep beneath the surface at the *purpose* of the relationship. If it is grounded in the *one- or-the-other* ego principle, the relationship would have as its purpose your maintaining your innocence at the expense of your spouse's sinfulness, so you would tend to put the blame for problems on your spouse. Fault-finding is very important to the ego! If it is grounded in the Holy Spirit's principle of oneness, the relationship would have as its purpose your willingness to look with Jesus at the interests you share in common with your spouse, so that you would wind up saying nothing about your spouse that you would not be willing to say about yourself. There would be a growing

sense of the sameness you share, and the differences would decrease in importance. This holds for *you*, regardless of what is going on with your spouse.

The readings we recommend are: "**The Healed Relationship**" and "**Setting the Goal**" (T.17.V,VI).

Q #640: I have always had difficulty with special love relationships, searching for a partner who matched certain ego criteria such as intelligence, similar aesthetic sensibilities, and a sense of adventure. Needless to say, none of them lasted. Then three years ago I met someone who did not match my criteria, but I was struck by his kindness, and what appears to be the closest thing to unconditional love that I have found. Although I find my love for him to be very deep, it did not originate with the bells and "GA GA I am so in love" drama that I have experienced before. And I have had one foot in and one foot out for the duration, causing him much harm. I experience great bouts of fear and the majority of the time I feel overwhelmed and guilty for not being able to develop a stronger internal peace that would make this relationship a more joyful and fulfilling experience. I have been willing to recognize all the beliefs and judgments and to question them in light of *A Course in Miracles*' teachings in order to change the purpose from the ego's goal to the Holy Spirit's. I am clearly fighting myself, but giving up seems like a cop out. Many times, I have told my partner that I can not continue, and that we need to part ways. What unfolds then is peace, where I feel settled again in my own skin, and do not feel trapped. I then see all kinds of possibilities for making it work, and none of my concerns have any power. This is very short lived, and then I am right back where I started.

A: Ambivalence, or conflict, is the hallmark of the ego's special love relationship (T.4.III.4:6), as you've experienced with the romantic relationships you describe, including your current one. The real problem however is not in the relationship with the other person but in your relationship with yourself in your own mind. Your experience with your partner only symbolizes the conflict in your mind about accepting the love that you really want but that your choice to identify with your ego denies you. Your observations suggest you have some awareness of this dynamic, but let's elaborate on it.

The desire to get something from the other must pervade our perception of romantic relationships, for the desire for any form of special love relationship means we are operating from the ego premise that something is missing in us that we need to seek outside ourselves to find (T.29.VII). This perception only reinforces the ambivalence, for in wanting something from others, we must at some level resent that we have to try to get it from them. And this is all part of the ego's setup to make certain that we are never happy. The fact is there is no one outside of ourselves who could ever fulfill our need for love -- in reality there is no one outside of ourselves! All that we truly need is within, awaiting but our invitation.

That you did not use your ego "criteria" to evaluate your current partner before deciding to enter into the relationship does not mean that those expectations are not still operating and reinforcing your ambivalence. For you have to resent that you are settling for something less than what you believe you really want and need. And your ego would have you believe that if those specific needs are not somehow being met, you are sacrificing something. But the external criteria are only the ego's diversionary tactics to make sure that you don't address the real ambivalence within. If we don't feel complete and fulfilled and loved and loving, it has nothing to do with the other person. We are continuing to refuse the love within that Jesus holds out to us in every moment, insisting instead that we must have it on our own terms, in a form we have defined as acceptable. And so we remain unhappy and empty -- by our own choice. The real value of the special love relationship, under the Holy Spirit's guidance, is that it serves as a reminder of the choice within that we stubbornly keep making against love, which, when we acknowledge it, leaves the door open for a different choice and a different Voice. So you want continue to look at all the judgments and beliefs about the relationship and your partner and recognize that, whatever form they take, they all reflect the same recurring decision to identify with the ego and its dedication to lack.

Whether we remain in any particular relationship or decide to leave it is, in the end, irrelevant to the solution. If the choice within remains for the ego and its belief in lack, each future relationship will be as fruitless and unsatisfying as the present one. But the opportunity to welcome a different inner Teacher is always available. We can delay as long as we want but, as Jesus implores, **"How soon will you be ready to come home? Perhaps today? There is no sin. Creation is unchanged. Would you still hold return to Heaven back? How long, O holy Son of God, how long?" (W.pII.4.5:3,4,5,6,7,8).**

For more on the ego's ambivalence in special relationships, see Question [#359](#).

Q #641: Please explain "The Healed Relationship" and the subsequent sections in *A Course in Miracles*. This section states that when we turn a relationship over to the Holy Spirit that "many relationships have been broken off at this point, and the pursuit of the old goal re-established in another relationship" (T.17.V.3:8). Yet it continues that we must have faith in our brother and that eventually we will have peace in this relationship. I find these sections quite confusing especially if the relationship was broken off. How long must we wait to get peace in the relationship if we stay?

A: Turning a relationship over to the Holy Spirit means that you consciously decide that you will ask for help to use the relationship to undo the thoughts of separation in your mind. You get in touch with those thoughts by observing your reactions to your partner: the inner and the outer are the same, as Jesus teaches in several early lessons in the workbook. All of our relationships begin as special relationships -- that is normal -- so we would be expressing the ego thought system in our interactions. We thus would be using relationships to have our needs met (which leads to ritualistic gift giving, celebrations, etc.), to get rid of our own guilt (feeling justified in pointing out faults in our partner), to validate our worth as individuals (what would I do without you?), and to reinforce our belief in the reality of victimization, sacrifice, and conflict.

When the ego's purpose is replaced by the Holy Spirit's, your experience would change accordingly, as is obvious from the ego attributes just listed. What would it be like to have all of that shift to but one goal: to desire to perceive only what makes you one with your partner, with all else rendered meaningless? That scares many people off, as at that point the relationship seems **"disturbed, disjunctive and even quite distressing" (T.17.V.3:3)**. Out of fear, then, many people would just turn to someone else with whom they could have a relationship the old way, with the old meaning.

There is no way of knowing how long it would take to experience peace if you stay in the relationship once you begin to make the shift in purpose. All that Jesus says is that **"this is the time for faith" (T.17.V.6:1)**, which means that you trust, with good reason, that his way is better than yours. You would not have asked for help if you were satisfied with the way things were going; so, like Helen and Bill, you must have concluded that there is a better way of relating than you are aware of. It is not easy to go through these stages of disorientation and distress, but there's no way around it because of our fear and resistance to what seems unfamiliar -- even though we are really just reverting to our natural state of oneness, reflected in our seeing shared interests instead of separate interests.

None of this should be taken to mean that you should not do things that normal people do in relationships, nor does it mean that you should stay in a relationship that has become intolerably painful. Peace is the goal, and that has nothing to do with what your body seems to be doing. It has to do only with which teacher you have chosen in your mind to teach you the meaning of your relationship. When you become concerned about how long the shift seems to be taking, you can be sure that you have turned to the ego, for Jesus is totally unconcerned with time and cares only about your trust in his unconditional love for you -- a love that excludes no one.

Q #642: I'm trying to understand exactly what is meant by looking at the ego without judgment. When I attempt to do this, two options seem to come up: (1) I feel I have to exert my will to do this, but then the non-judging feels forced and intellectual, or (2) I leave it to the Holy Spirit to show me how to look at the ego without judgment, but I'm not getting much help from that quarter; I feel as guilty and unhappy about what my ego does as I ever did. Am I misunderstanding something? Am I simply impatient? Am I doing it wrong?

A: Your experience is a very common one for students of *A Course in Miracles*. However unsuccessful we may seem to be, every effort to do as the Course teaches is an expression of a **"little willingness" (T.26.VII.10:1)**, and is a step in the right direction. In fact, one of the ways to look at the ego without judgment is not to evaluate progress with the Course. As we are told in the text: **"Some of your greatest advances you have judged as failures, and some of your deepest retreats you have evaluated as success" (T.18.V.1:6).**

Looking at the ego without judgment is a process that takes practice because it is not easy to do. The very life of the ego is based on a judgment; i.e., believing the separation is a real and serious sin, that has cost us our innocence and peace, and we will never get them back. The guilt and fear that follow this judgment give rise to all the antics of the ego, experienced in the world in a myriad of forms. When the ego's ploys are uncovered and projections are recognized for what they are, there is a tendency to feel more guilty and miserable: **"... as blame is withdrawn from without, there is a strong tendency to harbor it within. It is difficult at first to realize that this is exactly the same thing, for there is no distinction between within and without" (T.11.IV.4.5,6).** Just as light is initially painful to one who has been blind, uncovering the ego can be painful. Resistance to looking is an expression of the desire to be right about the ego's interpretation of who we are, in direct opposition to the Identity God gave us. The judgment, guilt, resistance, and insistence on being right are all made in defense of the choice to be separate. They are purposeful and accomplish their goal of making the separation real. It is not surprising this is difficult to look at.

The Course does not ask us not to judge, but rather to recognize the judgments we do make, *including* the judgment against ourselves for judging. This recognition is an important step in the process of undoing the ego's defense strategy, so another choice can eventually be made. Willingness to see the ego in operation, and not call it by any other name, justify it, nor blame anyone else for it, *is* a way of not judging, as well as an invitation to the Holy Spirit to transform our perception. As the One Who represents the part of our minds that does not believe the ego's lie of separation, it is He Who actually looks without judgment. Recognizing our mistaken judgments about ourselves and the world, and being willing not to decide for ourselves what anything means, weakens the ego's defense and allows us to begin to hear the Holy Spirit's **"still, small Voice" (T.21.V.1:6)** telling us we are wrong about the "sin" of separation. This does not happen by anything external to ourselves, nor by any special work of the Holy Spirit, but by the choice in our minds to decide against the ego's interpretation. The Holy Spirit's perception then automatically replaces ours.

Since we are undoing a belief in something that doesn't truly exist, we have no need to panic. Jesus tells us many times and in many ways that we should proceed gently in this process. He tells us in "Rules for Decision Making": **"Do not fight yourself" (T.30.I.1:7)**, and in the manual: **"...God has sent His Judgment [the Holy Spirit] to answer yours. Gently His Judgment substitutes for yours" (M.11.3:4,5)** [italics ours]. Again, all that is required is a "little willingness" to recognize that what the Holy Spirit represents is true, while the insane judgments of the ego, no matter how vicious and hateful they may be, are not.

Q #643: I am going through an extremely stressful period of my life and "need" to believe that God is helping me through it and will make sure I'm okay. Yet, I realize this is not what *A Course in Miracles* teaches, as God doesn't even know we exist; it says that we only need to see our circumstances differently so we will feel at peace. I am finding that difficult to be at peace with whatever comes of my

situation and want to believe that God is helping. How do I find comfort that all will work out? I guess I need to know that I am not alone in solving my issues and facing challenges each day.

A: First, there are probably very few Course students who do not feel this way at some point as they go through trying circumstances. It is perfectly normal to want the assurance that things are going to work out, and to want to be comforted during periods of extreme stress. It would be a little strange if you did not have such feelings and expectations. In fact, you would not need the Course if you did not react that way.

Near the beginning of *The Song of Prayer* pamphlet, Jesus talks about prayer as a ladder, the bottom rungs representing the stages in our lives when, for whatever reason, we are focused on our physical and psychological needs as a body in the world. And he never says this is wrong or spiritually harmful. We need only be honest in acknowledging that we are spiritual children and are not at the top of the ladder yet. Thus we will experience God's Love in a form that suits our need. It is not the fullness of love because of our fear of accepting the fullness of our Identity beyond the body. But that does not mean that we cannot experience the comforting and reassuring presence of Heaven's reflection in our right minds: the Holy Spirit or Jesus. Jesus makes it clear throughout the Course that he knows what we are going through, and that his (and the Holy Spirit's) guidance and comfort are ever-present. Your confidence that God is all-loving and would never seek to punish or attack His creations is a significant step forward -- which leads to the further reassurance that all will work out because His unchanging Love is our only reality.

It is a very advanced state to be completely without investment in how things work out in our lives. We just need to accept where we are on our spiritual journey and not judge ourselves because we have not fully integrated into our experience what we know to be the truth intellectually. That is a gradual process that gently unfolds over a period of time as our fear of accepting Jesus' answer without compromise lessens more and more. Thus, journeying along our spiritual path we need but recall his loving assurance, **"You do not walk alone. God's angels hover near and all about. His Love surrounds you, and of this be sure; that I will never leave you comfortless"** (W.ep.6:6,7,8).

See Question [#538](#) for some additional commentary.

Q #644: Could you comment on psychic powers? If someone says they are asking for guidance from the Holy Spirit, are they always right or can what they predict be changed? How can someone predict something years prior to it happening? And can what they predict be changed? For example: a psychic predicts that your child would become ill, or your marriage will end or even on a positive note, you will finally meet your dream person and get married. I have friends that really believe in what these people say because what they say comes true. How can I become my own reliable source to questions I refer to the Holy Spirit?

A: A good rule of thumb to follow is that when you receive specific answers, such as the ones in your example, you should be suspicious. In general, the Holy Spirit does not answer in specifics, primarily because He is trying to help us move beyond the specifics of the ego's world to the contents in our mind. Our decision to believe that the contents in our wrong mind (separation, sin, guilt, fear) are the truth, is the real problem. Our personal problems in the world are all smokescreens intended to keep us away from our mind so we will remain forever wedded to the ego thought system, without ever knowing that that ongoing decision is the real source of our unhappiness and lack of peace. So your asking for help of the Holy Spirit should be in the context of your desire to look at the contents in your mind that are the cause of all your seeming problems in the world. **"The Holy Spirit takes you gently by the hand, and retraces with you your mad journey outside yourself, leading you gently back to the truth and safety within. He brings all your insane projections . . . that you have placed outside you to the truth. Thus He reverses the course of insanity and restores you to reason"** (T.18.1.8:3,4,5). A very helpful explanation of the roles of Jesus and the Holy Spirit can be found in chapters 4 and 5 in *Few Choose to Listen*, Volume Two of Kenneth's book, *The Message of A Course in Miracles*.

We can provide only a brief response to your question about psychic phenomena. The topic of time raises complex issues, which have been addressed at length in some of our publications -- especially Kenneth's book, *A Vast Illusion: Time According to A Course in Miracles*. Briefly, then, within our dream of separation, Jesus tells us that time is not linear, even though that is how we experience it, owing to the ego's strategy of convincing us of the reality of sin (the past), guilt (the present), and fear (the future). Every conceivable form of separation already exists, as if in a video-tape library, to use one of the analogies in Kenneth's book. We (our decision-making mind outside time and space) have access to all of them all the time (pardon the pun). So "prediction" amounts simply to the mind's choice to view a particular video tape. This is understandable, again, only if time is viewed as holographic, not linear.

Now, the contents of the tapes do not change; but there exists another library, the Holy Spirit's corrected version of the ego's script, to which we also have unlimited access. Thus, to choose one of these tapes is to choose His interpretation of the events in our lives. That is what can change, not the ego's script. In other words, guilt demands punishment, and so many things would happen in our lives that express (by our own choice) our belief that we deserve to be punished for our sinfulness and that we are unworthy of a peaceful, happy life. If, however, we call that belief into question and choose Jesus or the Holy Spirit as our Teacher, then our choice of video would be from the "corrected script" of the Holy Spirit. The *need* to experience victimization would have changed, and we would then not have victimization experiences at all, or we would go through them peacefully, knowing that our true self is not defined or affected by what goes on in the body or the world. Jesus is our model for that shift: he did not perceive or experience himself as a persecuted victim even though his body had been nailed to a cross.

What would help the most is to keep in mind is that it is not the psychic ability *per se* that is important, but rather the *purpose* that it serves. Jesus reminds us again and again that we have but one purpose, and that is forgiveness, or undoing the blocks to our awareness of love's presence in our minds. If you can keep that as your primary objective, you will recognize and then not be led astray by the ego's use of psychic ability, which is always to reinforce our sense of specialness and to make the world of time and space real.

Q #645: Are there any elements of the physical resurrection of Jesus as depicted in the Bible and popular movies that are consistent with *A Course in Miracles*?

A: The Course does not give any account of the physical resurrection of Jesus. What it refers to in speaking of Jesus' and our resurrection is awakening from the dream, by making a choice in the *mind* to identify with the *mind* of the Sonship as it was created by God. Jesus knew, as we all know in some part of our minds, that he was God's innocent Son. The difference between him and us is that is *all* he knew. He did not identify with the body. If he did in fact appear in bodily form to his disciples after his crucifixion, it would have been no different from his manifestation in form prior to the crucifixion. In other words, he was not a body *before nor after* his death and resurrection. The Course, therefore, clearly differs with biblical teaching. In fact, the fundamental principles of traditional Christianity and *A Course in Miracles* are mutually exclusive. While belief in the world, the body, and sin are essential to Christian theology, the Course tells us they do not exist. (See: **W.pl.132.6:2**; **W.pl.167.6**; **T.26.VII.10:5**.) These essential differences are the foundation of the Course's reinterpretation of Christian biblical teaching.

There is no accurate historical evidence of the events of Jesus' life 2,000 years ago. Scripture scholars agree that the Gospels are unreliable reports, and so we cannot be sure that anything about the crucifixion or resurrection stories is true. We *can* be certain of the *content* of Jesus' message in the Course. Since there is no sin, there are no grounds for the guilt that is the bedrock of belief in victimization through crucifixion. Jesus tells us in the text: **"The message the crucifixion was intended to teach was that it is not necessary to perceive any form of assault in persecution, because you cannot be persecuted" (T.6.I.4:6)**. The innocent cannot perceive persecution, and the Course is teaching us we *are* innocent, because the separation (for which we feel guilty) never

happened. (M.2.2:7,8) Our resurrection is our acceptance of innocence: "**That [the resurrection] is the symbol of the release from guilt by guiltlessness**" (T.14.V.10:3). This is what is meant by accepting the Atonement (T.2.V.5:1).

Simply put, the crucifixion of God's Son occurs when a choice is made in the mind to identify with the body by believing that separation from God is real, and the resurrection is a choice in the mind to accept that He is innocent, because the separation never happened. This is the "**...tiny change of mind by which the crucifixion is changed to resurrection**" (T.21.II.1:2).

Q #646: If I were to perceive someone as a "blissninny," would that be an ego projection/ judgment on my part? Is perceiving someone as a "blissninny" a value judgment on my part as a way to see myself as more spiritually advanced, or is there a healing aspect to this perception?

A: Seeing someone as a blissninny because they see the positive aspect of all things and deny the dark side of the ego, could be a simple observation. However, if a judgment is made that because they are blissinnies they are inferior beings, or "Course sinners" who should be cleansed of their sinful, blissy ways, then certainly this is the ego projecting guilt by standing in condemnation of a brother. The ego's motive could be to perceive yourself as more spiritually advanced, as you suggest, which only means being as fearful as the blissninny. A blissninny is not a sinner because of blissinniness, any more than anyone is a sinner for projecting and judging. In different form they are the same mistake. The blissninny says: "I fear I am such a miserable sinner that I must deny the darkness within, and cover it over with sugar and spice." The "spiritually advanced" person says: "I am such a miserable sinner, that I must find others who are bigger sinners so they will be punished instead of me." The healing aspect of this perception is that it uncovers the error so it can be healed through forgiveness.

It is important to remember that the practice of forgiveness has nothing to do with changing anyone's behavior, including one's own. It means recognizing that the projection and judgment occur as the result of guilt in the mind for having chosen to believe the separation is real. This belief is the sin we accuse ourselves of and feel guilty about. We then become fearful that we will be found out and punished by God. Once we embark on this insane spiral of the ego's logic, we are compelled to seek and find other "bigger" sinners to take the rap for us. The ego is particularly fond of "spiritual" sinners like blissinnies, whom we accuse of the grievous sin of misinterpreting and misusing the Course. This is an example of the ego's trick of disguising itself in spiritual specialness to justify attack on "lesser" beings. Many such attacks have been "excused" by students with the claim: "At least I know what I'm doing," or "At least I'm not in denial." The simple solution is a return to the practice of forgiveness. If, in fact, I *do* know what I'm doing, and *am not in denial*, then, if I choose to, I can see that I have identified with the ego, and projected the guilt for doing so on this unsuspecting "happy" person. The next step is to ask for help to make another choice. Healing is now possible because the guilt and fear, judgment and attack, have been uncovered, and recognized for what they are. Therefore, they no longer need to be projected outward. Any judgment about ourselves or others can be transformed by the Holy Spirit through this process of forgiveness. Only the willingness to give Him every mistaken perception is required: "**The Holy Spirit asks of you but this; bring to Him every secret [judgment] you have locked away from Him. Open every door to Him, and bid Him enter the darkness and lighten it away**" (T.14.VII.6:1,2).

Q #647: As I have moved through the material in *A Course in Miracles*, I feel that I have gained insight into others' behavior more and more, and their specialness motives are more and more transparent to me. It makes me depressed sometimes when I see people whom I used to respect and admire coming from a space of specialness; and what I used to regard as their "kindness" and "thoughtfulness" are seen for what they are: manipulation. Can you comment on this? Is this just me letting idols go and becoming disillusioned?

A: There are two ways of looking at specialness: through the harsh, judgmental eyes of the ego, or the gentle, forgiving eyes of Jesus or the Holy Spirit. If you choose the ego, you would see specialness primarily in others, condemn it there rather than in yourself so you would not have to deal with the guilt, and then justify feeling even more separate from these formerly nice people than you were before. The ego thus would have snared you and achieved its objective of making separation and sinfulness real, binding you to itself through depression and disillusionment.

If you choose to look with forgiving eyes, however, you would be joined with Jesus in realizing, first, that *everyone* is involved in the same self-deception for the same reason, and that everyone shares the same solution in their right minds and the same ability to choose it. Second, you would also realize that the ego has no power over love, and so there would be no reason to react negatively to the specialness that is the mark of ego identification. It is just part of the tiny, mad idea that it is possible to change the eternal Oneness of God's Being into separated fragments, and to replace Love that extends Itself eternally without limits with a pseudo-love that involves limitations, competition, sacrifice, and loss. Jesus advises us that we ought only to laugh at such a ridiculous thought. Thus, specialness is spawned by an idea that the impossible is possible. So you would judge and get depressed over specialness only if you think it is real in some way.

Then, too, as you suggest, the special love relationships you have formed with those you have admired for their kindness, thoughtfulness, etc., have been substitutes for the only real relationship, which is with God or with His reflection in your mind, Jesus. When you begin to see the falsity of special love, it comes as a disillusioning shock because you were not aware of the role it played in covering your guilt for having separated from your Source. But if you now perceive it with the forgiving eyes of Jesus, you will see only a silly mistake that has had no effect on truth and reality. By not judging others for indulging in specialness, you will be releasing yourself from a damning self-accusation that has been kept in concealment. And by seeing past the choice for specialness in others to the fear that motivated that choice, and past that to the love the fear is hiding, you will finally reach the place within where you perceive your oneness with everyone else. Judgment then is replaced by compassion and peace.

Q #648: Ken is very diligent about reminding us of *A Course in Miracles'* teaching regarding bringing the darkness to the light. That being case, what do you say about: "...I am...alert to the revelation-readiness of my brothers. I can thus bring down to them more than they can draw down to themselves." [T1.II.5:1,2]. Also, "I have said already that I can reach up and bring the Holy Spirit down to you...." [T5.I.3:2].

A: Bringing the darkness to the light means bringing all the thoughts of guilt in our mind to the light of Jesus' or the Holy Spirit's true forgiveness, where they can be released back into the nothingness that is their source. In contrast, bringing the light to the darkness means trying to bring Jesus or the Holy Spirit (the light) into the world (the darkness) to solve our problems here, as we have defined them and believe they exist. Since the problems of the world are only ever projections of the guilt in our mind, our approach is doomed to failure because we are never addressing the underlying problem of the guilt, falling instead for the ego's smokescreen in the world, in our external relationships. But if we can begin to recognize that those external problems are simply symbols of the guilt in our mind, we can reverse the process and return our attention to the underlying problem, the choice for guilt in the mind. However, the temptation will remain very strong to see our problems as outside of ourselves -- hence the need for great diligence on our part.

The lines you quote, which come early in the Course, when the language was a little less precise and the style somewhat affected by Helen's fear, are not inconsistent with this. The *bringing down* that Jesus refers to does not mean bringing the Holy Spirit or God into the world, but must be understood in light of the distinction Jesus makes, in the previous paragraph in the first section you cite, between the horizontal axis (in time, which is illusory) and the vertical axis (in the mind). Jesus is making clear here that on our own, we can not bridge the vertical distance in our mind between the limited self we believe we are and our perfect and limitless reality as God's Son. And so we need a help, symbolized specifically by Jesus in

our mind, to cover that otherwise uncrossable gap, who can bring a qualitatively different kind of experience to our mind if we are willing to join with him. These references have nothing to do with anything in the world and are speaking only of an experience of complete and total oneness that can barely be sustained while we cling to an identity rooted in the world of time and space.

Q #649: I am new to *A Course in Miracles* and totally fascinated with its concepts. I've been trying to do the lessons one per day as the Course instructs. Sometimes it is not possible for me to do the 3 to 4 times daily exercises of each applicable idea and I find myself going back to the previous lessons to make sure "I got them right." Today, for example, I went back to lessons 1 through 8, and I found in them things I did not notice before. It elated me for a while, but now I feel kind of depressed. Am I doing something wrong? Am I overdoing? Can you explain?

A: It is not at all necessary to do the lessons over because you realized you missed important aspects of them the first time. It is quite normal to miss things -- even after the third or fourth reading. There are layers of meaning, and you will comprehend only what you are ready for at any given moment. Your continued study and practice of the Course will prepare you to go more deeply into the teachings; but it is important to remember always that this is a process that will extend over many, many years. So you need not be concerned that missing something now will seriously affect your spiritual progress. We assure you that you will meet up with it again later. The ego would have you view the process as strictly linear, whereas the more you turn away from the ego and toward Jesus or the Holy Spirit to help you, the more gentle and kind you will be with yourself, as you will realize that the process is not restricted by time at all. The whole purpose of the workbook exercises is to reduce your guilt and eventually enable you to let it go entirely, so if you are feeling any sense of guilt or pressure, you know that the ego has sneaked in and is attempting to steer you back in its direction. Just smile gently when you become aware of that ploy and remind yourself that Jesus' way is the way of gentleness and calmness -- never any pressure.

Other students have had similar concerns and so you might benefit from reading our answers to Questions [#64](#), [#92](#), and [#230](#) in this Question and Answer Service. We refer in these answers to Lesson 95, where Jesus tells his students what to do when they become aware that they have been remiss in their practice of the lessons. His discussion of this concern is quite important and helpful.

Q #650: I would like to encourage my study group to address the metaphysics of *A Course in Miracles*. I thought one way to introduce it would be to find the references for the "observer" or the "decision maker" in the text. Could you give me perhaps five places in the text to study that would allow my group members to begin the process of watching their minds?

A: In a sense, the whole Course is about learning to recognize our ego, stepping back from it and observing it, and growing in understanding of what the consequences are of choosing it, so that we can make a different choice, for and with the Holy Spirit or Jesus (**T.11.V.1,2**). And it is only the mind that chooses to deny and hide or to look and release. Jesus in the Course is always addressing our minds as the decision maker, encouraging us to choose differently -- against the ego. Nevertheless, there are some sections and passages that perhaps make this important aspect of the Course's teaching even clearer, and here are a few of them:

Very early in the Course, in the section "**This Need Not Be**" (**T.4.IV.1-8**), Jesus tells us that our state of mind -- our attitudes, our feelings, and our behavior -- reflect a choice we are making. And we can recognize that we are choosing the ego whenever we are not joyous, when we are sad, depressed, anxious, guilty. And yet, Jesus reassures us, for each ego feeling, this need not be, if we are vigilant in watching our mind "for the temptations of the ego" (**T.4.IV.6:1**). For our mind joined with Jesus' mind can

shine the ego away. The prayer in the closing paragraph of chapter 5 makes this same point very clearly again (T.5.VII.6).

In "**Looking Within**" (T.12.VII.5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15), Jesus further elaborates on the nature of the choice we are always making within our own minds that determines how we see the world and seem to be affected by it. He also addresses the fear that looking within arouses within us because of the guilt we believe is there.

Later in the text, in "**The Responsibility for Sight**" (T.21.II), Jesus again emphasizes the power of our minds in determining what we see and experience. Although at a deeper metaphysical level, Jesus is telling us that our own thoughts are literally the cause of everything we see, at a more practical, day-to-day level, we can understand this section as helping us to see that it is our choice how to see or interpret events in our world that determines our reactions to the events, and not the events themselves (T.21.in.1).

In "**The Dreamer of the Dream**" (T.27.VII), Jesus first describes how we see ourselves as innocent victims of the world. He then shows us that we can escape our suffering simply by looking upon the problem as it is - a choice we have made in our own mind for sin and guilt -- and not as we have set it up, so that it appears that we are not a mind but a body at the mercy of a world outside itself. Towards the end of the section, Jesus asserts, "*You are the dreamer of the world of dreams. No other cause it has, nor ever will*" (T.27.VII.13:1,2). He is encouraging us to understand that our perceptions of victimization are a deliberate attempt to see ourselves as a body rather than a mind, so that the decision in our mind behind our experiences remains forever obscure and therefore beyond examination or change. The subsequent section, "**The Hero of the Dream**" (T.27.VIII), further elaborates on this self-imposed, self-deceiving ruse, while disclosing that "the secret of salvation is but this: that you are doing this unto yourself" (T.27.VIII.10:1). This invitation to look honestly at what we are really up to with our ego requires often painful self-observation of our own internalized guilt, which we wish to see in everyone and everything but ourselves.

"**Dream Roles**" (T.29.IV) continues with the helpful metaphor of the dream, asking us to look at how our anger at others always reflects our judgment that they have failed to fulfill the role we have assigned them in our dreams -- meeting our own needs. And yet, at a deeper level, they *have* fulfilled the role we have given them, for they are now clearly the "cause" of our pain and unhappiness, rather than any choice we have made within our own mind for sin and guilt. The ego's existence is thereby safeguarded. Again, the honest self-examination that recognizing these motivations within ourselves requires can be very painful, especially as we first begin to uncover them.

Near the end of the text, "**The Savior's Vision**" (T.31.VII) asks us to look at the concepts we have made of both ourselves and of our brothers, including our belief that we are bodies that can hurt and be hurt and die. As we become willing to see that we and our brothers are the same and not different, we will no longer be invested in seeing ourselves as good and others as bad, attempting to purchase our own innocence at the cost of everyone else's guilt. And the buried concept of a sinful and evil self that we hold of ourselves can then be exchanged for a self concept of gentleness and forgiveness, as we give the guilty self concept, which we have made on our own, to One Who is not deceived by the ego's lies.

Q #651: One of the most prominent ways my ego defends itself against the Love of God is through obsessing about past relationships. As I've continued to study *A Course in Miracles* and viewed this situation as my specific forgiveness classroom, the viciousness of the ego thought system has increasingly come to light. While jogging yesterday, I had a visceral image of attacking and killing my ex-girlfriend, feeling that "she betrayed me" by moving on to another relationship and, therefore, will never give me what I want -- my innocence, which I believe she stole from me. I recognize that the thoughts about this relationship are a reflection of the ontological moment when I thought I killed God for what he would not give me. That being said, the intensity of the thought system still terrifies me.

I've looked at [Question #377](#), which provides an outline of how I should practice forgiveness in the relationship. Would you comment on the dynamics of this special relationship and my fear of looking at it in terms of the metaphysics of the Course, and thereby how this relates to my relationship with God? Do you have any readings that specifically address the dynamics of special relationships you think would be helpful?

A: It no doubt can be unsettling, but nevertheless very helpful, to get in touch with the thought of murder at the foundation of every special relationship (**T.23.IV.1:10,11**). The thought is not so apparent in the earlier stages of the special love relationship when we believe we are getting what we want. But when our needs change, or our partners no longer seem to be interested in meeting our needs in order to have their own needs met in return, our "true" feelings can surface from the darker recesses of our mind. They have always been there, covered over with a facade of special "love" and "concern" and "care," as we want to hold on to the relationship, using the specialness in order to keep a lid on our own feelings of guilt and unworthiness (**T.16.IV.3,4**).

What a burden of responsibility we place on our special love partners, to keep the vicious hounds of guilt at bay! Eventually, they have to fail us in some way, and then we get what our ego really wants -- our relationship partner becomes a victimizer whom we can now hold responsible for our pain and fear (**T.16.V.1**). You've conveniently assigned your current ex-girlfriend that role for the present moment. As long as we continue under the direction of the ego, there will always be others to give the part of cruel betrayer, deserving only of death! The hope is that, once we begin to recognize the ego-reinforcing pattern of our relationships and the painful consequences to ourselves, we will be open to accepting a different Director for our relationships, Who will assign a different role to both ourselves and our partners, other than victim and victimizer (**T.27.I**).

It is not necessary to get in touch specifically with that thought of murderous assault on God for not giving us what we want, choosing then to seize it from Him and destroying Him in the process, which is the foundation of the ego's thought system. Our brothers and sisters are more than satisfactory stand-ins for experiencing the same underlying content, which is all that matters. The rest is merely differences in symbols and our concern is only with the underlying source of those symbols -- the belief in sin and guilt. Our special relationships with each other were made to reflect the same dynamic as that original special relationship, but in a seemingly more manageable form. For the outcome, according to the ego's story line, of our seeming attack on God is not His final demise but rather His return from the dead, hell-bent on retribution for our sinful choice against Him. The terror associated with that is overwhelming. And so the world and all of our relationships here are the defense against that terror. The defense includes holding others responsible for our pain and loss and fear, rather than looking within our own minds to uncover the choice we believe we made against love.

When we understand the underlying content that the special relationship is intended to defend against, it is not at all surprising that the resistance to looking honestly will be great. And that is why we do not want to look by ourselves alone but to remember to invite Jesus to be a part of the looking process with us. In fact, we really want to be able to look *through* his eyes or we will scare ourselves unnecessarily. If we attempt the undoing process on our own, we will believe there actually is something terrible -- the ego and its thoughts of attack and murder -- to be undone. Jesus knows better, not confusing illusion with truth, and that is why the looking process with him is so gentle. But we do first want to look at what we believe about ourselves so that, with Jesus, we can make a different choice about who we really are (**T.11.V.1,2,3,4**).

Some sections in the Course on special relationships, especially relevant to the issues you raise, include **"The Illusion and the Reality of Love" (T.16.IV)**, **"The Choice for Completion" (T.16.V)**, **"Shadows of the Past" (T.17.III)**, **"The Christ in You" (T.24.V)**, and **"The Picture of Crucifixion" (T.27.I)**. These are not the easiest sections in the Course to read and personally reflect on so, again, be sure to invite Jesus to be a part of your reviewing process.

Webmaster note: See questions [71](#), [108](#), [213](#), [471](#),

Q #652: From my study, I have come to learn that we must look within, at our thoughts. I have also come to learn that what we see as external is really a projection of what was first internal, and that our brothers can be seen as mirrors of ourselves. Is it necessary that we analyze the thoughts or do we just surrender them? For example, if I am envious of another, do I just look at the thought and "hand it over," or do I question it? e.g., Why am I envious? What is this a projection of? What does envy really mean? Have I given this to 'someone' else because I feel unworthy? etc.?

A: *A Course in Miracles* does not ask that we analyze our thoughts (See: **T.15.X.5**), but that we look at them carefully and question them. They show us the specific ways we are defending the ego's choice for separation, and are choosing purposefully to make the world and the body real in our awareness. Looking at them honestly, therefore, provides us with very important information about the beliefs we hold about ourselves, others, and most importantly, God. Since one of the ego's most effective dynamics is denial, being willing to *look* at its thought system is an important part of its undoing. That is why we are asked in the text to: **"Bring ...all [our] dark and secret thoughts to [the Holy Spirit], and look upon them with Him. He holds the light, and you the darkness. They cannot coexist when both of You together look on them" (T.14.VII.6:8,9,10).** Looking with the Holy Spirit means looking beyond the thought to the purpose it serves. Hiding behind each thought is a decision to identify with the ego. Our thoughts show us everything the Course tells us about the ego's strategy: its dynamics, its goals, its "laws," and its painful effects.

The questions you pose to yourself in the example of being envious are precisely what we are asked to do: **"To learn this course requires willingness to question every value that you hold. Not one can be kept hidden and obscure but it will jeopardize your learning. No belief is neutral" (T.24.in.2:1,2,3).** Again, the important thing is to look and question *with the Holy Spirit*, which means looking with willingness to have the thoughts and judgments healed, rather than to prove that you are a miserable sinner. As the early workbook lessons tell us, our thoughts do not mean anything in themselves (**W.pl.10**). It is the importance we give to them by judging them as sinful and keeping them hidden which gives them power over us. In reality they have none. As you look closely at your judgments and feelings, such as envy, you will see the hidden beliefs you hold about yourself as unworthy of God's Love. Every judgment projected on to others has its source in the deeply felt unworthiness that follows this mistaken judgment of ourselves. As we look, the revelations can be surprising and often painful, but until we are willing to look at every obstacle we have interposed between ourselves and God's Love so they can be healed, we will not see the truth about ourselves nor our brothers. It is important to remember that Jesus invites us to proceed gently in this process: **"We are ready to look more closely at the ego's thought system because together we have the lamp that will dispel it, and since you realize you do not want it, you must be ready. Let us be very calm in doing this, for we are merely looking honestly for truth" (T.11.V.1:3,4, italics ours).**

Q #653: I live in the ego world and I know there is an internal light within that connects me to God. Yet in this ego world I always choose to listen to the ego from which there is no escape using the ways of the ego world. How did I ever find the light and how did *A Course in Miracles* come into my consciousness if my thoughts are always edited by the ego?

A: The Course could not have come into your life if you had not chosen *against* the ego. There is no other explanation. The part of your mind that is aware that you have chosen the ego is the decision-making part, which, as you know, can also choose to listen to the Voice in your right mind that reminds you that this world is not your home. It is unlikely that you have never had a truly loving thought, wouldn't you agree? Jesus assures us that we are not totally insane, which means we always have access to the sane part of our minds. The problem is that, because of the dynamics of denial and projection, we have no direct awareness of what is going on in our minds, and therefore we have to reason backwards, as it were. For example, **"I must have decided wrongly, because I am not at peace" (T.5.VII.6:7).** We are

not aware of deciding wrongly, but Jesus is saying that that is the only reason we are not at peace, and, as that series of important statements continues, he teaches that we can "**decide otherwise**," and that feeling guilty because of the wrong decision is not justified.

Thus, the fact that the Course is in your life means that, in one instant at least, you "decided otherwise." You must have been willing to listen to the Voice of Love in your mind, however surrounded by shadows that willingness may have been (T.18.IV.2). The internal light is always there, as you state, for there is a limit on our ability to miscreate (T.2.III.3:3), which means the ego can never entirely drown out that Voice of Love in our minds. The clarity will come as you trust the process more and more. The key is to remember that you always have a choice. That is Jesus' plea in the closing pages of the text, and his gentle encouragement to Helen Schucman: **"Choose once again' is still your only hope. Darkness cannot conceal the gifts of God unless you want it so" (The Gifts of God, p. 117).** So you must have decided that you *want* the light, or the Course would not be helping you.

Q #654: I recently spent six weeks with a man who describes himself as an enlightened being. I saw in him a vacillation between littleness -- the desire for the worldly, power, property and prestige -- and grandiosity -- he believed his almost constant image-enhancing repetitive words about himself as to what it was like to be enlightened. I have since done some soul-searching about whether I had a responsibility to help the others there see what looked to me like a very effective enlistment activity for building a cult. But possibly I was helpful merely by holding consistently to the view that both he and I are simply equally valuable human beings.

After this adventure, I came upon a prayer of Thomas Merton's that begins "I cannot know, Father, if I am doing your will." My joy is tentative and rests on the possibility that, in just being myself, in being authentic, the consistency of the Holy Spirit *has been* demonstrated -- the truth being the equal value of all of us -- and I have done my Father's Will and have been of help. As I look back, I can see that if my ego had become involved at all in trying to help, in a willful way, that my actions would have been more like a misguided attempt at rescuing. I never argued against the magical I saw around me, but simply recognized that people caught up in this type of thought system cannot make sense.

A: Perhaps one of the most difficult lessons Jesus attempts to teach us in his Course is that he is not at all concerned with our words and actions -- or anyone else's -- but only with our thoughts (Question #637ii for an in-depth discussion of this important issue), and this is where he wants our focus to be as well. It is a wonderful ego device to have us deliberate over whether our action or inaction in any particular situation has been ego-based or guided by the Holy Spirit.

Now it does sound as if you deported yourself admirably in difficult and challenging circumstances. *A Course in Miracles*, however, always invites us to focus on how well we are able to recognize external circumstances as a screen for the projection of any unhealed thoughts of separation and guilt within our own minds -- thoughts and feelings of judgment, irritation, annoyance, defensiveness, anger, etc., regardless of whether we act upon them. And one of the measures of whether we have been successful in recognizing and releasing our own ego thoughts is that we will come to a recognition of shared rather than separate interests with all our brothers and sisters, despite all the differences in form. In the end, this means recognizing our equality with each other, not as human beings -- for we are very different from each other in many different ways as human beings, with different talents and skills and limitations -- but as minds that are all ensnared in ego illusion, sharing the same need to be released from the pain of belief in separation and to awaken.

This is not to make any judgment, one way or another, about the validity of your observations of what you perceived as cult-like activity, or to justify anything that anyone else may have been doing. It is just that Jesus cautions us that "analyzing the motives of others is hazardous to you" (T.12.I.1:6) because it is

"never without your own ego involvement. The whole process represents a clear-cut attempt to demonstrate your own ability to understand what you perceive" (T.12.I.2:1,2).

And so the only way we can be certain that we are doing the Father's Will is to be willing to look at our own ego judgments and reactions, bringing them to the healing light of the Holy Spirit, Who can then teach us that there are only calls for love and extensions of love -- and that our own reactions are our own calls for love (T.12.I.3,6,7,8). Recognizing whether a brother is extending love or giving a call for love is not a distinction we can make on our own, for on our own we will only succeed in making separation and differences real. But if we succeed in releasing our own ego blocks, then whatever comes through us will simply be a reflection of the love that is shining within our mind -- and everyone else's.

Q #655: I have discovered that my form of attacking the Sonship is overeating. I felt that I was ready through reducing what I eat to look at the guilt and hopefully reduce the fear of God's Love and not use that particular form of attack any more. What I have found is that it is INCREDIBLY difficult to do this, even though I know exactly what purpose my overeating serves -- to attack God's Son and keep God's Love away, or to reinforce separation.

I was hoping you could help me with this process. When I reduce what I eat, there is a very strong feeling of "hunger" that overwhelms me. I think at that point I want to turn to the Holy Spirit and "look" at the guilt in my mind so that I can see that it is not real. When I do this I am not getting any clear thoughts about how to do this. The strong thought is the hunger and need to eat a bunch of junk so the feeling will go away. What does it mean to "look at the guilt"? Do you have any suggestions for how I can get past this block that I have to the awareness of love's presence? What are some of the "truths" I can use to help me become less afraid and get past this form of attack?

A: You've got part of it right, but there's an important aspect of your current approach to food that you may want to reconsider, in light of the teachings of *A Course in Miracles*. There's nothing wrong with trying to get a guilt-based, addictive behavior, such as overeating -- or drinking, or gambling, etc. -- under control, and that can sometimes be a very helpful first step. But if that is your primary goal, even if you acknowledge that it is a form or symbol for your attack on the Sonship, you've put the cart before the horse, from the Course's perspective! That puts you in good company, since most students want to try to change their behavior rather than their minds. And this is only a "natural" desire, while we are more identified with the body in time and space than with the mind outside of time and space. But it's playing right into the ego's grand design of keeping our attention focused on effect (the body) and relegating cause (the mind) to a secondary role.

An alternative approach, which reflects the Course's emphasis on thought rather than behavior, would be to shift your goal from reducing your food intake to merely watching the thoughts that accompany your cravings and your eating binges. We believe the problem is our destructive behavior, but Jesus says that the behavior is only ever a symptom of the underlying destructive thought of guilt in the mind (T.2.VI.3). The behavior helps us recognize that the guilt is there in the mind, but our purpose, believe it or not, is not to change either the behavior or the guilt, but merely to acknowledge the guilt and ask for help in seeing ourselves differently. You see, the overeating in itself is not the attack. The thought that motivates the overeating is the attack -- and that thought is not real. And if our goal is to change either, we are saying both the thought and its effect -- the overeating -- are real. Obviously, since both feel very real to us, we cannot be the ones to undo them.

The thought of guilt may be experienced as anxiety, fear, neediness, scarcity, inadequacy, self-loathing, etc. The ego wants us to make the specific interpretation -- that we are hungry and craving food and the way to address the problem is to eat. The Course invites us to dissociate the thought from the specific context and recognize that the underlying thought is really a statement we are making about ourselves, that we are empty and missing something inside -- the love we unconsciously believe we have thrown away (T.30.III.1,2,3). And this thought is the source of our guilt. Whether we eat something or not is

irrelevant as we allow ourselves to get in touch with the underlying thought, which may bring up both fear and pain. We don't want to minimize this step, but we also don't want to stop with it.

And so the Course process of looking with the Holy Spirit or Jesus means that we take what seems very real and powerful to us -- our guilt, in whatever form it seems real for us -- and look at it with Their gentle, nonjudgmental presence beside us. If we are successful in joining with Their love in this process of looking, we will experience some level of reduction in the intensity of our guilt-based feelings. Our continuing investment in the ego and the self we think we are, which are protected by the guilt, will determine how willing we are to release the guilt in any particular moment. So we do not want to judge ourselves if the feelings do not seem to diminish, but just continue to look as honestly as we can and ask for the help to see ourselves in a different light. For what we believe about ourselves -- that we are sinful, guilty, weak, limited creatures -- is an ego-based lie. And the presence of Jesus and the Holy Spirit in our minds is proof that it is a lie, for our minds could not be home to Their gentle presence if we were the limited selves we have up until now insisted we are. This process of looking at and releasing our guilt is likely to take time so it is important that we be patient with ourselves. Over time, the need to use food to push away those unpleasant, even terrifying thoughts, may also diminish, and food itself will recede in importance as a focus of concern.

A more in-depth discussion of this process and these issues can be found in "Overeating: A Dialogue" (published in both a small book and a single tape format), which presents a discussion Ken Wapnick held with three students around issues of food addiction and preoccupation with weight.

Q #656: In one answer you wrote, "*A Course in Miracles* teaches us that the body was made to attack and replace our true Identity, and to limit love (T.18.VIII.1)." If that's the case, what on earth are we doing here then? That seems like an incredibly cynical view of humanity. If being incarnate means that we are inherently attacking each other, why do we even come here?

While I think the Course has a lot of great points and insights, I think, like all spiritual texts, it can be interpreted so literally that it becomes fundamentalist and basically useless to individual people and where they are in life. For years I have stayed in bad relationships with different people while I tried to see their "innocence" and to see our oneness. Recently, I have decided to just stay away from people who hurt me (I no longer care if it's an illusion or not) and I have to say I feel a tremendous amount of power in myself and forgiveness for them. If the Course assumes that we have common sense, it's sadly mistaken. Many of us born into insane, addicted families have no common sense, and for people like me, using texts like this can be dangerous. If Jesus really meant to heal us with this text why didn't he take into account those who literally can not differentiate between joy and pain, guilt and love, let alone realize that the pain is an illusion. For years I honestly thought that guilt was love. How do you explain the Course to someone who believes that?

A: The Course, like any written teaching, is certainly open to misunderstanding, misinterpretation and misapplication. And since its purpose is to completely reverse, undo, and replace our whole thought system, it is even more likely to be misunderstood -- for we all have a strong investment in *not* understanding it. Its passages are all too easily taken out of context, if we do not understand the teaching as a whole, which will be most students' experience as they begin to study the Course and attempt to put its principles into practice. And while the Course says nothing about common sense specifically, it is clear that Jesus does not overestimate our ability to understand and make sense of our experiences (T.18.IV.7:5,6; 8:1), for he repeatedly describes us as insane (e.g., T.4.III.10:3,4; T.10.V.10:4; T.13.in.1:7; T.14.I.2:6,7; T.14.XI.2:2; W.pl.53)!

He knows and describes in great detail the confusion we all share between pain and joy (e.g., T.7.X), imprisonment and freedom (T.8.II), and guilt and love (e.g., T.15.V.2,3,4,5; T.15.VII.2,7,8,9,10; T.15.X.5,6; T.15.XI.4; T.16.IV.3). And he knows his challenge as our teacher is to help us recognize our

own confusion -- he is very aware that we have great resistance to accepting the truth of what he says (e.g., T.7.X.3,4,5; W.pl.44.5; M.5.II.1).

One of the more common mistakes students make with the Course is thinking that it is advising them how to act and behave. And so your belief that the Course is asking you to remain in abusive relationships and see the other's innocence and your oneness with them is, unfortunately, one of the more common misinterpretations of its teachings. Jesus' primary goal is to help us look at our own ego thoughts, and our relationships are merely the means for helping us identify those thoughts, which we can do whether we physically remain in the relationship with another or not. The relationship in the mind goes on regardless, and that's where Jesus wants us to focus.

The Course's teachings on the ego's purpose for making the world and the body, central to understanding what it means by forgiveness, are, as you remark, quite challenging and uncompromising. And yet the Course also offers us another purpose for our "coming here." With the Holy Spirit as our Teacher, the world and our bodies can become the classroom in which we learn our lessons of forgiveness, in the context of all of our special relationships, so that what we made to harm can now be used by the Holy Spirit to heal (T.25.VI.4:1). Nevertheless, not everyone will be drawn to this particular expression of "the universal course" -- it is but one path among many thousands (M.1.4:1,2). And if you can not accept the Course's teachings on this pivotal point, rest assured there will be another path to lead you back home that you may experience as a gentler road to travel. That is a decision each of us can make only with our own internal Teacher, Who knows what we each truly need to heal the thought of separation and pain in our minds. So please, be gentle with yourself. The last thing Jesus is intending for any of us is to reinforce our pain and guilt. His goal is only to help us make the choice, in a form that we can find most comforting, that will truly alleviate our pain.

Q #657: I am beginning to feel times of peace and feeling good, sometimes most of the day. However, the times that I don't, hurt even worse. I get headaches, depression, all sorts of signs of extreme tension. How do I go from the ego to the Holy Spirit? How can I more easily experience these times of choosing the ego?

A: At the beginning of Chapter 18 in *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus talks about our mistake of choosing to be separate from God, and how the world became the screen on which we projected that mistake (T.18.I.6). He tells us that truth remains within our minds **"in quiet"** and is not part of **"the mad projection by which this world was made."** Then he tells us how to respond to the insanity of the ego world: **"Call it not sin but madness, for such it was and so it still remains. Invest it not with guilt, for guilt implies it was accomplished in reality. And above all, be not afraid of it."** That is how you can make the process easier for yourself. Whenever you become aware that you have chosen the ego, try to remember Jesus' advice: **"Be not afraid of it."** Try to be nonchalant about it: "Oh, there you are again." The only power the ego has is what we give it. That is what Jesus is trying to get across to us, and obviously by being afraid of it or fighting against it we are acting as if it had tremendous power over us. Then just be patient. Let the process take as long as it needs, and know that the seeming passage of time has no effect on Jesus' caring love for you. Jesus knows the ego is nothing, and by your being nonchalant about its appearances, you will be joining with him above the ego's battleground. Over a period of time then it will have less and less an effect on you.

Finally, if the physical/emotional symptoms persist, it would be a good idea to have them checked out by a doctor or therapist. Combining attention to your body with attention to the thought system in your mind is the most effective way of practicing the gentle message of this Course as we make our way up the ladder of healing.

Q #658: I have a sibling whom I loved dearly for many years and considered the epitome of truth and honesty. Now that we live near each other and I see her often, the pedestal I kept her on for so many years has been steadily eroding. Mostly, her demeaning attitude towards our elderly father often sends me into a blind rage. Knowing what I know now about projection, perception, forgiveness and so on, I've been trying to see it differently. To my surprise and dismay, the negative feelings became even worse. Can you tell me why?

A: If you try to "see it differently" when you are in a rage, you are fighting against yourself, and that is never helpful. It is far more helpful to just watch yourself being angry or not being able to let go of your negative feelings, and then not judge yourself. It is part of the healing process to become aware of the part of you that does not want to see it differently. One way of defining right-mindedness is: looking at wrong-mindedness without judgment. That in fact is the first stage of learning to "see it differently," which many students tend to skip because they think that hatred is sinful and they therefore want to get rid of it right away. Looking at the hatred without judgment, and then realizing that you cannot hate and be at peace at the same time is what will eventually spark the shift. So when you ask for help to see the situation differently, all of that comes into play. Patience and gentleness with yourself is extremely important. Specialness has deep roots, and it takes a while to work through all the layers to the love underneath.

Special love (the pedestal) is deceptive, we are taught in *A Course in Miracles*, because it always conceals hatred. That is why it is harder to work with than the more up-front, blatant special hate relationship. If you had your sister on a pedestal, you must have been feeling separate from her the whole time; and, given the ego dynamics involved in comparisons, you must also have been secretly accusing her of having stolen her saintliness from *you*! These are not conscious dynamics, but they help explain the worsening of your negative feelings, because the hatred that was hidden inside the pedestal of special love has been exposed now that the pedestal has been shattered. **"In looking at the special relationship, it is necessary at first to realize that it involves a great amount of pain. Anxiety, despair, guilt and attack all enter into it, broken into by periods in which they seem to be gone" (T.16.V.1:1,2).**

It is not unusual at all for things to get worse before they get better when specialness is involved, as special love is a defense, and a defense is needed only if there is fear -- intense fear! So when the defense of special love is threatened, *you* would have to feel tremendously threatened because a crucial layer of self-protection has been weakened, if not destroyed. Until you realize that you do not need a defense at all, you will react to the threat, which results in increased agitation -- the attack-defense-attack cycle. Perhaps, too, realizing that the saintliness of your sister is not the truth about her (in your mind) is reminding you of the same thing about yourself. This would intensify your anger toward her. The first half of **"The Two Pictures"** section in the text (T.17.IV) describes the purpose of special relationships in relation to our determination to keep ourselves separate from God; it is particularly clear about our *need* for special relationships as a means of self-preservation.

Q #659: *A Course in Miracles* is a self-study course by its own definition. What would be your view about Course-based psychotherapy?

A: Although the Course has been written as a self-study course, there would be nothing in its teachings that would preclude seeking out therapy for help along the way. Every relationship provides the opportunity to practice forgiveness and the therapist-patient relationship is no exception. Now it is true that nearly all the world's forms of psychotherapy are concerned only with helping us make better ego-based adjustments to our life circumstances (P.2.in; I). And some may reinforce the belief in the dynamic of victim and victimizer, as experiences of abuse from the past may be uncovered or focused on. Nevertheless, therapy with a non-judgmental, accepting therapist can provide a useful context for identifying ego patterns and feelings that may be difficult to recognize on one's own.

That Jesus is not opposed to psychotherapy as a supplement and support for his teachings is apparent from the pamphlet, *Psychotherapy: Purpose, Process, and Practice*, scribed by Helen Schucman from Jesus in a manner similar to how she took down the Course. However, a study of the pamphlet also makes it clear that, as a form of therapy, there is really no such thing as Course- based therapy. Jesus' focus is only on the thoughts and attitudes in the mind of the therapist in relationship to the patient. He never makes any specific suggestions or recommendations about what the therapist should say or do with the patient -- that is not his concern for that is not what brings about true healing. Healing only occurs when the therapist releases every judgment being held about the patient, recognizing that the two of them are really the same, walking together on the same path back home, with the same problem and the same need, to release the insane belief in the reality of separation.

For more extensive discussion of these issues, please look at Question #45 and #102.

Q #660: I have this ongoing pattern in my life that I was hoping you could comment on. If you asked two different friends to define their relationship in separate rooms they would probably describe the relationship the same way -- "We are good friends or acquaintances, etc." But I have this pattern of seeing my relationships with other people differently from how they do. It seems that I think that I am better friends with people than they see me to them. Can you comment on this?

A: Without knowing more about how you experience these differences between yourself and others in perceiving your relationships, we can only offer you some general points to consider. From the Course's perspective, the only question we need ask of anything is, "What is it for?" (**T.24.VII.6:1,2,3**). So for the pattern you have identified, you need only ask yourself what purpose it is serving in your life. And to answer that, you will want to look honestly at how these differences between yourself and others in valuing the relationships seem to make you feel.

Now if you don't have much reaction one way or another, then you can just chalk it up as further support for the ego's first law of chaos, "**that the truth is different for everyone**" (**T.23.II.2:1**). In this world of differences we all see through our own special set of filters and so differences in perception are inevitable and unavoidable. However, since the pattern has gained your attention sufficiently that you are inquiring about its significance, it seems more likely that you are having some reaction to the difference. We can suggest a few possible reactions and their implications, but you will have to decide for yourself what is going on for you.

You may feel disappointed, perhaps even taken advantage of, that your feelings are not being returned. Jesus speaks of the "'laws' of friendship, of 'good' relationships and reciprocity" (**W.76.8:3**) that we believe must be obeyed, which are all part of the ego's deliberate plan to keep us looking outside ourselves to have our needs met and find happiness through our special love bargains (e.g., **T.7.I.4**, **T.21.III.1**). And these rules also allow us to gather the ammunition we need to demonstrate that we are victims of others' lack of appreciation and care and concern. Of course, these defenses are merely the smokescreens that keep us from looking within ourselves to the guilt that is the real cause of all of our feelings of unhappiness and lack.

Or perhaps you feel that you are just not good enough and that, despite your best efforts, others will simply not be interested in getting to know you better. This may seem to be a step closer to acknowledging the guilt within yourself than the previous reaction, which blames the other. But so long as we are still harboring blame against anyone, including ourselves, Jesus tells us (**T.11.IV.4,5**), we are still trapped in the throes of the ego thought system. For it is not the self in the world that we each believe we are that is the problem, but the mind that thinks it needs this self as a defense against the guilt it is holding onto.

On the other hand, you could perhaps feel a certain sense of superiority because you are more open to experiencing intimacy and are not afraid of getting more involved and caring more deeply about others than they do towards you. If this is your reaction, it would be helpful to acknowledge the specialness that necessarily underlies this feeling. And then to recognize that this too is a defense against the guilt in your own mind for choosing against the loving Intimacy that we have all turned away from when we sought to be on our own, independent and autonomous, not needing Anyone else. For we always accuse others of what we have first accused ourselves (T.31.III.1,2).

Now there may be other reactions you are having to this pattern in your relationships, but perhaps it is clear from the three examples just described that the path will always bring us back to our own guilt, if we're willing to take it where it leads. And while the ego purpose for all of our relationships is to reinforce unconsciously our own guilt while trying to see it outside of ourselves, our relationships can all be given another purpose when we are willing to recognize them as the vehicles for getting in touch with our belief in our own guilt. For it is only when we can acknowledge that guilt within our own mind that we can make a different choice about it, with the Holy Spirit or Jesus as our Guide for looking rather than the ego.

For further discussion on issues related to reciprocity in relationships, see Questions #66 and #398.

Q #661: Could you please comment on the recent tsunami in Southeast Asia? As a Course student, how should I view it?

A: The short answer is, *with the Holy Spirit*. But let's explore what that means. *A Course in Miracles* teaches us that everything we go through is something we have scripted. If life is our dream and we are the dreamer, then it is our mind that has chosen what to dream about. Shared events like a tsunami are ones that collectively we have chosen to experience. In terms of *why* something happens, or *where* it comes *from*, we don't need to go any further than that. It isn't the dream figure, or individual self we're identified with that made the choice. So we don't need to feel personally responsible (in fact, doing so would only serve the ego's purpose of reinforcing our guilt). What we do need to do is use our *reaction* to an event such as this to help us awaken and return to the part of our mind that can make a different choice.

Remember that the entire purpose of the Course is to remind us that we can change teachers and change thought systems. We can shift our focus from the voice of the ego (that tells us the world is real and we are its victim) to the Voice of the Holy Spirit (that tells us this is all made up and we are still at home in the safety of God's Love). Once you know that's true, you can say, as Jesus does in the Course **"There is no order of difficulty in miracles. One is not 'harder' or 'bigger' than another."** (T.1.I.1:1,2)

Jesus can make a statement like that because he is coming from outside of time and space -- from outside the dream in which all the events of the world seem to be happening. So from his perspective, a tsunami, a war, or a holocaust is no more important or serious than a schoolyard fight, an unkind thought, or a stubbed toe. To him, they are all the same.

Of course, for us (who think we're bodies) to pretend we share his perspective would be ludicrous. But what we can do is realize that, on the level of the mind, the process of dealing with any of these situations (in other words, getting to the point where we can experience the miracle -- the change from the ego's view to the Holy Spirit's) is the same.

As Course students, in whatever situation we're confronted with, we need to ask Jesus or the Holy Spirit to help us honestly look at all the thoughts and feelings we're experiencing. That means observing our own reactions in the nonjudgmental light of compassion that recognizes our underlying guilt and fear. The world is truly a blank screen onto which we project everything we don't want to see in ourselves. So

looking at our reactions to the events of our lives and the world is the only way to take back our projections and eventually see that they are simply covers obscuring God's Love in our mind.

From that perspective, a dramatic event such as the recent tsunami offers us an excellent opportunity. Virtually anyone learning of an event that has claimed over 150,000 lives would have a strong reaction. Generally our reactions will be some sort of affirmation of the belief that we are victims. Perhaps (despite being Course students) we wonder if this catastrophic event is punishment from God. Maybe it scares us to be reminded that we live in an unpredictable world in which our body, or the bodies of loved ones could be struck down at any moment. We might feel guilty that others are suffering and dying while we remain physically unaffected. Or possibly we feel angered by the thought that more should have been done before or after the event to help its victims.

But when we take the Holy Spirit's Hand and truly look, we'll see that, tragic as this event was on the level of form, ultimately what it's bringing up is simply a variation of what we feel about everything -- again, an affirmation that we are bodies being victimized by external sources. The Holy Spirit's Voice will teach us that the exact opposite is true; that external sources cannot hurt us because, regardless of what happens in our personal or collective worlds, *nothing* can take the peace of God away from us.

Once we've really learned that lesson, our thoughts, words, and actions will automatically reflect the love it inspires. Then in any situation, we'll know how to respond lovingly to our brothers -- whether they look like victims or villains, and whether they're half a world away in an actual tsunami, or standing right in front of us.

Q #662: Would you comment on the idea "all thinking produces form on some level" (T.2.VI.9:14)? Maybe give a couple of examples and how it may relate to working with *A Course in Miracles*.

A: The meaning of this important statement is that thinking and its effects are simultaneous, as Jesus repeats in Lesson 19: **"Thinking and its results are really simultaneous, for cause and effect are never separate" (W.pl.19.1:4)**. As the preceding sentences in the paragraph indicate, Jesus was trying to teach Helen, and all of us, that we deal with our fear of our mind's power by believing that we can have "ineffectual" or "idle" thoughts. So Jesus is correcting that by saying that *all* our thoughts have effects. He emphasizes this same teaching in **Lessons 16 and 17** in the workbook. Most of us are accustomed to thinking that our thoughts have no effect if we do not share them or act on them. That is because we do not believe we are minds, or if we do believe we are minds, we believe the mind is in the body and so if the body does not act on a thought, the thought has had no effect. Jesus is saying that our thoughts always have effects. A thought of hatred, for example, even if kept totally "private," has an effect in the mind of the person who has the thought, because it is a thought of separation and that thought banishes peace because it banishes the truth. This does *not* mean, however, that if you have thoughts of anger toward someone and that person has a heart attack that your thoughts caused the heart attack. No one can choose for another, as Jesus explains in Lesson 152, **"The power of decision is my own" (W.pl.152)**.

Taken on the metaphysical level, the statement means that every thought is expressed in the dream in terms of a "script," analogous to a video-tape library, where the expression of each thought would be represented by a video tape. Portions of Lessons 158 and 169 refer to this notion of "script" (**W.pl.158, 169**). Our book ***A Vast Illusion: Time According to A Course in Miracles*** also discusses in detail these as well as other aspects of time found in the Course.

Q #663: I would like some clarification on the decision maker. Is there one for each of us or is there just one? Can I contact the decision maker through my thoughts? What will happen to the decision maker once I (we) am (are) healed?

A: Before answering your specific questions, it is important to understand that when we say anything about the split mind, we are talking about illusion. And that means we are operating within the symbols of the ego thought system of separation and duality. And while we can not avoid using symbols in our present state of mind, we do have a choice about the purpose they will serve -- they can be used either to maintain and reinforce our belief in separation and guilt or to lead us beyond that belief.

In *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus tells us that, in the whole Mind in Heaven, our only function as God's Son, the Christ, is to create, or extend, the Love that we are **(T.9.III.8:4)**. But once we seemed to entertain the thought of differences and separation, we forgot our function or power to create **(T.7.IX.3)**, replacing it instead with the power to choose **(T.12.VII.9:1)**. And the choice is simply whether to continue to listen to the ego, the voice for maintaining the separation, or to the Holy Spirit, the Voice for healing the separation. This basic power of the split mind to choose between these two alternatives is what, for ease of discussion, we have referred to in our teaching at the Foundation as the "decision maker." In other words, there is no separate entity that exists that is the decision maker -- it is the fundamental power or function of our own mind in its seemingly separated state, where differences and alternatives seem real and therefore choice between the alternatives seems real as well. The decision maker, as such, is an illusory symbol, but it can be a helpful one to use in our process of undoing the thought of separation, serving as a powerful, alternative identity to the victimized self the ego holds out to us.

It is not in the best interests of the ego that we remember that basic function of the split mind to choose, for it makes the ego very vulnerable to the power of our mind to make a simple choice against it. And so the ego has concocted a complex list of other imagined powers and functions to distract us with, and a world and a body to become identified with, so that we forget our initial choice for the ego and separation, no longer remembering that it was our mind's own choice that has brought us to our current condition and circumstances in the world.

The Course's primary purpose is to help us remember that one basic function of the split mind -- to choose **(T.31.VIII)**. But to understand what this basic choice is all about, we need to learn that all the seemingly different choices we make and functions we have in the world are nothing more than different forms of the same one choice for the ego **(T.31.IV)**. We don't believe that yet, believing instead that that the choices we make here in the world will make a difference in whether we are happy or not. So we have not really forgotten the power of our mind to choose, but we have forgotten the only real choice in the split mind -- the Holy Spirit and His function of forgiveness.

Now part of the ego's diversionary tactic to distract us from this single, unitary choice is the seeming fragmentation of the split mind into all the billions of seemingly separate individual minds, each with its own body and identity. But all the fragments remain a part of the one split mind, which never loses its power to choose between the ego and the Holy Spirit.

And so returning now to your questions: Each of us maintains our own capacity to choose while we each continue to think that we exist separate from one another, although we share that same function to choose as part of the one mind. In that sense, we each have our own separate decision maker. The decision maker is not a separate entity to be contacted, but a function each of us needs to remember. And it's not really that we need to remember that our minds have the power to choose. We need to remember what the only real choice is about, which we recall in any moment when we recognize our ego and know that we are not our ego. When we have released all of our fear over losing our ego identity and have made the choice, once and for all, for the Holy Spirit, we will no longer need the power to choose, for we will know with certainty that only one of the alternatives is real. We will be just one step away from Heaven and return to our one true function as God's Son -- sharing in creating. And so with nothing to choose between, the power of choice will disappear and the decision maker will no longer seem to exist, its function and purpose completed.

Q #664: I know that the goal of *A Course in Miracles* is to realize that all the world we see is an illusion and to eventually give up our ego to be in the reality of union with God. My question is has anyone ever reached the goal and actually done it? If so how did they describe the experience. Are there signposts along the way that the illusion is nearly dismissed or have I missed the point and there is another goal?

A: Your question is a version of the "famous question" of how the separation could have ever happened if we were happy and at peace in God. It implies that the separation is real and the question can then only be answered in some form that supports this belief. The truth is that we have all "done it," because we have not "undone it" (See **T.6.II.10:7,8**). However, we *believe* we have accomplished the impossibility of separating from God and are in need of help to learn that we are mistaken. We have chosen to believe the dream of separation and have identified with the ego. This mistake includes identifying with the body, and makes the world real in our experience. We then seem to experience a learning process whereby we gradually accept the Holy Spirit's truth and learn to identify with the part of the mind that holds the memory of God's Love, rather than with the body. It is the healing process of forgiveness that provides glimpses of the Love that has been forgotten, described in the Course as holy instants. Gradually we learn that the peace of the holy instant is preferable to the pain of clinging to the ego, and begin to choose it more frequently and easily, until it is the only thing we choose. That is how the "goal" is accomplished.

Jesus represents for us one who has chosen to identify only with the Love in his mind, and has thus reached the goal. His "experience" is expressed throughout *A Course in Miracles*, and is, in fact, its source. The important thing to remember is that it is also *our* experience. As he tells us in the text: **"Believe in the resurrection [the "goal"] because it has been accomplished, and it has been accomplished in you. This is as true now as it will ever be... For we ascend unto the Father together, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, for such is the nature of God's Son as his Father created him" (T.11.VI.4:6,7,9).**

The signposts along the way need not be earth shattering experiences. They are simple moments like the sense of relief when we finally let go of a grievance, or realize that we do not have to be right, letting someone else have the final word. A moment of peace, however fleeting, points the way to the lasting peace we seek. It is important to recognize these little signs, rather than to expect lightening bolts to flash into our lives. Being true glimpses of the final goal, they lead us more surely to its realization. We return always to the practice of the forgiveness the Course teaches as the sure guide to our own awakening. **The necessary condition for the holy instant does not require that you have no thoughts that are not pure. But it does require that you have none that you would keep" (T.15.IV.9:1,2).** So our goal is only to do our part in looking at all our judgments, which are the blocks that prevent our awareness of God's Love. As the blocks are removed, the truth of our oneness with His Love, which seemed to have been forgotten, will be remembered.

Q #665: What does *A Course in Miracles* mean by "form" and "content?" How does one know that one is experiencing Christ's Love or the Holy Spirit's Answer? I have been working with the Course for 10 years and am a bit frustrated with the lack of progress. I simply cannot think of anyone or anything to forgive. I truly believe I am holy and I "see" the illusion in which I dwell. Yet, Heaven eludes me. Must one die a physical death in order to dwell in the promised Heaven? I am really curious to hear how others are experiencing Love.

A: The first thing we need to understand about form and content is that they are part of the Son of God's dream, and do not exist in reality. While the Son sleeps he appears to have a mind separate from God's. This mind has only two possible "contents" or thoughts: the thought of separation, or the memory of oneness with God. It has only one activity: the power to choose between these two thoughts. Once the mind chooses one of these two thoughts, the thought takes form. The form may be a specific behavior, a "thought" or a judgment that expresses the original thought. As the Course tells us early in the text: **"All**

thinking produces form at some level" (T.2.VI.9:14). When the content of the mind is the choice for the Holy Spirit, Who represents the memory of God's Love in the mind, whatever is done or not done in form will be a reflection of that Love. The Love/content is communicated in some form because it has been chosen. If the content of the mind is the choice for separation, it is governed by the ego. Therefore, no matter how sweet and loving the form may appear to be, it will be an attack because it expresses the ego's denial of God.

If Heaven eludes us, we are not at peace, and if we are not at peace there is room for forgiveness. As Jesus tells us in the text: **"Whenever you are not wholly joyous, it is because you have reacted with a lack of love to one of God's creations" (T.5.VII.5:1).** The initial "lack of love" occurs in the mind when we choose to identify with the ego, rather than with the part of the mind that remembers who we truly are (God's innocent Son). This is what the Course teaches is unloving toward oneself, as well as all our brothers who are God's one Son, and it is what needs to be forgiven.

The goal of the Course is to teach us to become aware of the content of our minds so that it can be healed of the thought of separation, and we can make another choice. Meanwhile, because our minds are unhealed, we are not the ones to judge whether we are truly experiencing or expressing the loving content of the Holy Spirit. We also are not qualified to evaluate our progress. When we are discouraged about our progress it is helpful to call to mind the passage at the end of the text: **"I do not know the thing I am, and therefore do not know what I am doing, where I am, or how to look upon the world or on myself" (T31.V.17:7).** Jesus also tells us **"Some of your greatest advances you have judged as failures, and some of your deepest retreats you have evaluated as success" (T.18.V.1:6).** This may not seem like good news on a "good" day when we're having a "good time," but it does free us of the burden of evaluating ourselves. Ultimately it is very good news because we are not the miserable sinners we thought we were. We need not know anything, we need only to be willing to do our part by paying careful attention to any judgments that are *not* loving, so they can be healed, then **"...What you are will tell you of Itself" (T.31.V.17:9)** and that will be our final experience.

Attachment to our ego is what keeps us from the awareness that we are home with God in Heaven. This block to our awareness is not removed by death, it is undone through healing the thought of separation. Since the Course itself is a reflection of the part of the mind that holds the memory of God's Love, the forgiveness it teaches is also an experience of love: **"Forgiveness [choosing the Holy Spirit] is the healing of the perception of separation. Certain it is that all distress does not appear to be but unforgiveness [choosing separation]. Yet that is the content underneath the form. It is this sameness which makes learning sure, because the lesson is so simple that it cannot be rejected in the end" (W.pl.193.4:1,2,3).** Though not the final experience, the small glimpses of Love's reflection when we let go of judgments against ourselves and others will lead us to it. As we are promised in the text: **"I am leading you to a new kind of experience that you will become less and less willing to deny" (T.11.VI.3:6).** We have great resistance to this healing, which is why the study of *A Course in Miracles* is a lifetime process. Our patient, persistent and gentle practice of forgiveness will lead us home.

Q #666: After reading some of your answers I've got a picture that there is some mind outside time, space and partly consciousness that creates situations, conditions, even determines place and time of birth, and gets you to particular places and people — all this according to the content of that mind. Is this impression true?

A: Yes, it is. The mind of the Sonship that has chosen separation is asleep; dreaming of a world where it is in charge, and making all things in this world reflect its choice for separation from God. It is outside of the time and space it fabricates because the mind is thought not form, and cannot "be outside itself." As *A Course in Miracles* teaches, its thoughts can be projected into form, but do not leave the mind: **"Ideas leave not their source, and their effects but seem to be apart from them. Ideas are of the mind. What is projected out, and seems to be external to the mind, is not outside at all, but an effect of**

what is in, and has not left its source" (T.26.VII.4:7,8,9). God shares His creative power with His Son who is one with Him, and when the mind chooses separation the son projects the guilt for making this choice, which is a misuse of this power. This projected guilt is the origin of the circumstances of our lives that you refer to. They are effects of the mind's choice to separate. Their purpose is to prove to the mind that it is right in believing that the separation is real and has had real effects. The strategy works, because when we choose separation we do in fact experience ourselves in bodies having all kinds of relationships, and finding ourselves in situations that seem to be out of our control. The immediate specifics that occur, such as plumbing breakdowns or car accidents, are inevitable effects of the mind's choice to identify with the ego thought system. All kinds of breakdowns are built in to this system because it is founded on an important ego rule: **"Seek and do not find"(T.12.V.7:1).** We can be certain that whatever circumstances occur, or whatever experiences we have in the world, they will never satisfy us nor meet our real need. We will not find what we seek; the world will always fail us. We can also be certain that life in the world will always succeed in fulfilling the ego's goal to make us feel victimized by forces beyond our control.

Denial is one of the important tricks the mind plays on itself to make its plan work. Once the mind chooses separation it denies that it has made the choice and dissociates itself from its creative power. This does not mean that there is a power external to ourselves that is manipulating events, like the Wizard of Oz behind the curtain. It means that the mind agrees to subject itself to the ego's laws by identifying with the body, thus believing that life begins with birth and ends with death. The laws of God are thereby denied, and an insane reversal of these laws seems to make us victims of things beyond our control. That is precisely what the mind intends for us to believe in order to support its claim that the separation is real. In choosing separation the collective mind of the Sonship has filled the world with accidents and an endless barrage of events. This is not the work of the individual mind. When the individual mind chooses victimization, we can be sure some "accident" will happen to "make us feel victimized." This does not mean that we put a truck in our path to hit us, it means we were looking for a truck to hit us, actually *hoping* one would come along to hit us, to give form to our chosen (and cherished) victimization theme.

The limits that time and space impose are "real" in our experience of them: the body will in fact die, and we cannot stop the sun from rising. Since we are asleep and believe our dream is real, we are not asked to disbelieve these occurrences, but to question our interpretation of them. We interpret them according to the ego or the Holy Spirit. The ego sees these occurrences as proof that the world is real and we are powerless victims of its whims. The Holy Spirit, Who represents the part of the mind that knows it is a mind, teaches that they prove that we have a mind, with power that can be misused by making a physical world where God can be excluded so we can carry on with our separation scripts. Those are the two possible thoughts/content that the mind chooses between. Although the specific form involved in any situation may be the same, it can be used for the ego's purpose (the separation/world is real) or the Holy Spirit's (separation is impossible/the world is an illusion).

Q #667: *A Course in Miracles* says, "Heaven is not a place nor a condition. It is merely an awareness of perfect Oneness, and the knowledge that there is nothing else; nothing outside this Oneness, and nothing else within" (T.18.VI.1:5,6). Regarding this, I read in the book, *The Disappearance of the Universe*: "If there is nothing else, then there are no obstacles, and no friction to impede your extension." What does that mean? If there is only oneness who are we extending to? Would you talk about extension?

A: Jesus uses the term *extension* in two ways. First, he uses it to describe the ongoing process of creation in Heaven, wherein spirit extends itself: God creating Christ. Since Heaven is beyond time and space, *extension* cannot be understood as a temporal or a spatial process. Therefore, there is no "from" and "to." Jesus also uses the term in reference to the Holy Spirit's or Christ's vision being extended in the form of forgiveness or peace. Forgiveness and peace extend naturally, just as love naturally extends itself. Our part in that process has only to do with removing the blocks to that extension; and the blocks are mainly our insistence on seeing our interests as separate from others, rather than the same. Thus we exclude others (in our minds) from the all-inclusive embrace of forgiveness and peace.

In this second sense of *extension*, Jesus is contrasting the Holy Spirit's use of the law of mind with the ego's use, which is always projection. Since *ideas leave not their source*, what is extended remains in the mind, where it is reflected in the world of illusion. This is difficult for us to understand because we are so identified with our physical experience in a world of time and space that we think is real. Extension is always of the mind and is never between two separate entities.

Q #668: Has Christ chosen an individual named Peniel to be his spokesperson exclusively? I have been observing his claims and am concerned about not recognizing him as Christ's direct voice!

A: There is nothing in *A Course in Miracles* about this person. He apparently is associated with Edgar Cayce's predictions, which would represent a thought system different from the Course's. Yet, the Course recognizes that the universal course can come in thousands of forms -- *A Course in Miracles* is "**a special form of the universal course**" -- and that "Helpers" may appear in many forms as well: "**Jesus is the name of one who was a man but saw the face of Christ in all his brothers and remembered God**" (see **M.1.3,4; C.5.1**). Jesus is saying in the Course that people are guided in different ways, and so you should follow your own guidance, discerning that as best you can.

Q #669: I have been drawn to dowsing Bach flower remedies, which are said to work energetically, with helpful results for friends, myself, my son, and my cat. I recently had an experience in which the remedies I offered another were perfect for me. And once I had realized this, it seemed then that none of the specific remedies were needed any more by either of us. I felt a rush of gratitude that, while I was dowsing for others, I also was benefiting energetically from the remedies. My sense is that I have glimpsed the difference between the healed healer and the unhealed healer, which now makes a lot of sense. I cannot heal anyone other than myself.

If any further remedy dowsing is to be done by me, rather than my offering my ego-invested services to others, I guess it'll be because someone else has come to me as my healer. That is, so I can gratefully receive the message of whatever remedies come up for them for myself too. Perhaps this explains why two different people dowsing for remedies for a third person could come up with different remedies? It doesn't make dowsing inaccurate -- it, along with everything (and everyone!), is simply here as a messenger for/of love. In a word, we are each others' healers, and knowing that helps us to laugh at the ego-concept of ourselves, helps us to recall that there is no threat. Can you comment?

A: It sounds as if you've had a genuinely helpful experience around healing, coming in the specific context of Bach flower remedies. To clarify further the nature of your experience, it can be helpful to remember that everything (and everyone) is actually a symbol within our mind. And their meaning -- as either a messenger of love or a messenger of guilt and fear (**T.19.IV.A.i**) -- depends, not on anything about them, but on which teacher we have chosen to view them with.

The healing *A Course in Miracles* is speaking about happens when we recognize that our interests are the same as our brother's or sister's -- we are all looking for a way out of the painful, fearful, guilt-ridden thought system we have been embracing and operating within all of our lives. With that recognition, we will then experience the healing in some specific form that will have a special meaning for us -- the Bach flower remedies, for example, in the situation you describe. But again, the specific form is nothing but a symbol of the underlying content in the mind. As you observe, if you were to be identified with your ego, you would see yourself as having a special gift with the Bach flowers that you give to others who are separate and different from you, with their own special needs, different from your own -- you would be acting as the unhealed healer (**T.7.V.7:1,2,3,4, S.3.III**). And so the same form or symbol can be used as either an instrument for separating or an instrument for healing, depending on our choice of teachers. And when we recognize that, it becomes clear, as you note, that the specific forms or remedies become secondary, or irrelevant, to the real healing in the mind.

Q #670: My question is about miracles. Lesson 345 in the workbook of *A Course in Miracles* says, "I offer only miracles today, For I would have them be returned to me" (W.345.pII). When I am offering a miracle, am I offering love and forgiveness? Jesus says, "Ask me which miracles you should perform. This spares you needless effort..." (T.1.III.4:3,4) What does that mean?

A: Lesson 345, like all the lessons in part II of the workbook, is a beautiful prayer to ourselves to remember the important teachings of the text and first part of the workbook, and to apply them in our lives all through the day. In this specific lesson we are reminded to see everything that happens as an opportunity to have the hateful judgments of the ego transformed to the miracle of forgiveness. The miracle occurs when we remember that nothing external to the mind has any effect. This means that nothing others do or say, nor anything that happens can take our peace away. Our loss of peace is caused *only* by a choice in the mind to believe the separation is real, instead of joining with the Holy Spirit, Who represents the part of the mind that remembers we are one with our Father. Offering miracles then, means not blaming anyone or anything for the lack of peace we experience, and remembering that it is the effect of the choice we made in the mind. We thus forgive others by releasing them of responsibility for our state of mind and for our experience in the dream. That is how we learn to **"...forgive the Son of God for what he did not do" (T.17.III.1:5).**

We are not asked to deny that others may do hurtful things to us, but we *are* asked to accept responsibility for the choice in our minds that causes the feelings of hurt and betrayal that *seem* to come from others' behavior toward us. The recognition that we are responsible for the choice we make in our minds is the most loving thing we can do for ourselves and for others. Acknowledging that everyone has a mind, and that we are all the same in the power we share to choose to listen to the ego's lie of separation or to the Holy Spirit's message that we are one with our Father, is the miracle we offer *and* receive. When we are willing to practice forgiveness in this way, we invite the Holy Spirit to respond with love through us. It is He Who is in charge of extending love. That is what is meant by the lines you quote **(T.1.III.4:3,4).**

Jesus tells us to ask him for guidance because he, along with the Holy Spirit, represents the part of our minds that remembers our oneness with God. Because we have dissociated ourselves from that part of our minds, it is helpful for us to have a symbol such as Jesus or the Holy Spirit to serve as guides to the right minded perception that does not see the distortions of the ego. Turning to them for guidance reflects our willingness to let go of our judgments and to see as they see, and is the heart of the forgiveness process whereby the blocks of our judgment are removed.

Asking which miracles to perform means not deciding on our own how to perceive any situation, nor how to respond to anyone, because we do not know. This requires that we first be willing to see the judgments we make with the ego and then, with willingness to let them go, ask for a new perception. This clears the way for the extension of love, which is effortless because it is natural: **"Learning of Christ is easy, for to perceive with Him involves no strain at all. His perceptions are your natural awareness, and it is only the distortions you introduce that tire you" (T.11.VI.3:7,8).** The only "effort" we are asked to put forth is a "little willingness" to question our interpretation of our identity and our experiences. It is enough to introduce a slight suspicion that we may be wrong in our belief that we are separate from our Source and from each other: **"Salvation, perfect and complete, asks but a little wish that what is true be true; a little willingness to overlook what is not there; a little sigh that speaks for Heaven as a preference to this world that death and desolation seem to rule" (T.26.VII.10:1).** Each time we make this little effort, our belief in the ego's thought system lessens and our fear of the Holy Spirit's loving perception diminishes. This is the miracle we offer to ourselves and to the entire Sonship.

Q #671: Ghosts? Prevalent belief in the world, indeed. Consider the parallels -- the lost soul, living in a dream world, no physical presence, refusing to realize the death of the body, and not wanting to leave the world they know. It seems like there's something to that idea of ghosts -- a widely held belief made up by the ego to explain away our remembering reality and the separation?

A: One of the more common deceitful tricks of the ego is to take an aspect of its thought system and give it a more circumscribed definition within our experience so that we don't see it as a pervasive part of our "reality" under its malevolent reign. And so it requires someone outside of this thought system, or at least not completely identified with it, to see beyond the veils of deception and confusion that have been interposed between this false "reality" and our true Identity.

So, for example, we seem to experience differentiated states of sleeping and waking, with dreaming apparently an accompaniment of the sleeping state. And so we believe we know the difference between sleeping and waking, and dreams and reality. We never question whether the various states of mind we experience in the world might not be meaningless shifts within a single continuous dream, while we sleep on and on. Because we think there is a difference between our waking state and our dreaming state, we never question our assumption that we know what it is to be awake. But Jesus does (**e.g., T.10.I.2,3; T.18.II.5**).

We also have definitions of insanity and mental illness that apply only to some people, but not to others, believing that we know and experience sanity within this world. And so, because we think we know what insanity is, we never even consider the possibility that all of our thinking here is insane. But Jesus knows otherwise (**e.g., T.9.VII.6; T.10.V.10; T.23.II.14**).

And then we believe we know the difference between life and death, which to us are obviously mutually exclusive states of the body. We know we are alive and we can identify by very objective criteria who is dead. And so we never question whether our entire existence may not be a form of death predicated on the belief that we can separate ourselves from Life. But Jesus can lead us to a different conclusion (**e.g., T.23.II.19; W.167**).

And of course, we think we can tell the difference between love and hate, because we believe we can recognize the forms of each so easily. And so we never question whether what we call love may not simply be a disguised form of hatred. But Jesus is not fooled (**e.g., T.16.VII.5; T.23.II.17; T.23.III.1,2; T.29.I.6,7**).

And so, yes, ghosts become another distraction of the ego -- are they real, is there individual life after death? -- hiding a deeper truth. After all, ghosts, were they to exist, we know would be something other than what we are -- alive and solid and real. And so we never consider whether in fact the self we think we are is nothing but a shadowy ghost of our real Self. And again, Jesus knows otherwise, and he tries to help us see the ghostly nature of this ghostly existence we call life.

And so he notes the consequences of our choice for the ego, against our true Self:

Deny your own Identity, and you will not escape the madness which induced this weird, unnatural and *ghostly* thought that mocks creation and that laughs at God. Deny your own Identity, and you assail the universe alone, without a friend, a tiny particle of dust against the legions of your enemies. Deny your own Identity, and look on evil, sin and death, and watch despair snatch from your fingers every scrap of hope, leaving you nothing but the wish to die (W.191.3, italics added).

Yet Jesus does not leave us caught in that ego trap, but recognizing how like small children we are, he reassures us:

Children perceive frightening ghosts and monsters and dragons, and they are terrified. Yet if they ask someone they trust for the meaning of what they perceive, and are willing to let their own interpretations go in favor of reality, their fear goes with them. When a child is helped to translate his "ghost" into a curtain, his "monster" into a shadow, and his "dragon" into a dream he is no longer afraid, and laughs happily at his own fear.

You, my child, are afraid of your brothers and of your Father and of yourself. But you are merely deceived in them. Ask what they are of the Teacher of reality, and hearing His answer, you too will laugh at your fears and replace them with peace. For fear lies not in reality, but in the minds of children who do not understand reality. It is only their lack of understanding that frightens them, and when they learn to perceive truly they are not afraid. And because of this they will ask for truth again when they are frightened. It is not the reality of your brothers or your Father or yourself that frightens you. You do not know what they are, and so you perceive them as ghosts and monsters and dragons. Ask what their reality is from the One Who knows it, and He will tell you what they are. For you do not understand them, and because you are deceived by what you see you need reality to dispel your fears.

Would you not exchange your fears for truth, if the exchange is yours for the asking? For if God is not deceived in you, you can be deceived only in yourself. Yet you can learn the truth about yourself from the Holy Spirit, Who will teach you that, as part of God, deceit in you is impossible (T.11.VIII.13,14,15).

Q #672: *A Course in Miracles* teaches that the Holy Spirit does not speak to us and does not interfere with the things of the world. It teaches that the Holy Spirit does not guide or direct us, but sometimes it feels like I am being guided and directed. Where do hunches and intuition come from? Are these messages of the ego? Are we totally alone here to make our own decisions? When we free ourselves from guilt and judgments are we more open to receive ideas and thoughts that are more loving and more helpful on our journey here on earth? Where do these thoughts come from?

A: The fact that the Holy Spirit does not intervene in the world does not mean that He is not present in our minds as a Guide and Teacher. The entire Course really is about learning how to correct our original choice to be guided by the ego rather than the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, we have identified with the ego thought system to such an extent that we no longer experience ourselves as being directed by it, and for the most part never experience the other part of our minds (the Holy Spirit) that contains the memory of what we were and where we came from before we made that foolish choice to hear only the voice that speaks for separation. So Jesus is teaching us throughout the Course that we are always choosing to be guided, and that the guide we have chosen is insane (the ego), but there is another Voice in our minds that we can choose to listen to: the Voice of sanity (the Holy Spirit). Hunches and intuitions therefore can come from either of these two thought systems in our minds.

In light of this, you are correct in saying that as we let go of guilt and judgments through the practice of forgiveness, we are more open to the truly loving and helpful thoughts and ideas coming from our right minds. It is so important to remember, though, that we are *a/ways* choosing to be guided by either the ego or the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the loving and helpful thoughts and ideas inspired by the Holy Spirit are not directed at making our lives in the world work better. Rather, by choosing against the ego, we are removing the interferences to our awareness of love's presence (**T.in.1:7**), which means that our perception of ourselves and the world will shift from a self-centered/separate interests orientation to one in which there is a growing realization that we all share the same interests, and ultimately the same Identity. It is also true that we would tend to function better in the world -- that is, make fewer self-destructive choices -- when we are not motivated by the unconscious need to project our guilt and to be special, but that does not necessarily mean we will be more successful in the world (as the world typically views success).

Jesus urges us to turn to the Holy Spirit as frequently as we can, not for help to improve our lives in the world, but to be **"absolved of guilt. . . [for] following the Holy Spirit's guidance . . . is the way out of hell . . ."** (M.29.3:3,10,11). We must first realize that our lives in this world are "hell" because of our selfish choice to leave our true home and take on a false identity, which has burdened us with unending needs, limitations, and problems. The only meaningful help, consequently, would be what would lead us home and restore to us our true Identity as God created us. Jesus instructs us that **"the Holy Spirit**

knows the truth about you. The image you made does not. . . . To ask the Holy Spirit to decide for you is simply to accept your true inheritance" (M.29.4:6,7; 5:4). Thus, our natural state as we journey home is to be joined with the Holy Spirit, meaning we are never alone. Indeed, thinking that we are on our own and need to make decisions our own is the fundamental error that Jesus is helping us to recognize and correct, as the concluding section of the manual stresses.

Unfortunately, because of the many tangled layers of self-deception resulting from our choice to substitute illusion for reality, and then blot that decision from our awareness, it is not readily apparent to us most of the time whether we have chosen the ego or the Holy Spirit as our teacher. In fact, that is the topic of one of the most frequently asked questions since the publication of the Course, and one we have addressed in our book *The Most Commonly Asked Questions about A Course in Miracles* (#43). In general, it seems that only after a great deal of experience and feedback from trusted friends or family members can we begin to trust our own discernment. "The Test for Truth" section in Chapter 14 of the text offers guidelines that will help in this process. Most important is focusing on asking Jesus' or the Holy Spirit's help in setting aside the ego thought system, rather than asking for help with things in the world. By denying the validity of the ego thought system we affirm the truth of the Holy Spirit's thought system of Atonement.

Q #673: No one has satisfactorily explained the need to sleep and dream. The phenomenon of night dreaming is common and it is the one aspect of our experience that can question the reality of our world. We know the sayings of the Chinese philosopher Chuang Tzu about his dream of being the butterfly. Also, hallucinating is very rare and thought to be abnormal. Did the ego make a mistake? Or on the contrary, are sleeping dreams an intervention of the right mind to give us a hint about the unreality of our world? Or perhaps an expression of compromise between them?

A: Everything of the body -- physical and psychological -- is part of the ego's plan and strategy to keep the separation from God real. *A Course in Miracles* does not explain the bodily phenomena of sleeping dreams and hallucinations; rather it points out their value in teaching us about the power our minds have to distort reality to suit our own purposes. This is the central point in "**The Basis of the Dream**" in Chapter 18 of the text (T.18.II), where Jesus describes some of the characteristics of our dreams; for example: "**Dreams are chaotic because they are governed by your conflicting wishes, and therefore they have no concern with what is true. They are the best example you could have of how perception can be utilized to substitute illusions for truth. . . . They provide striking examples, both of the ego's inability to tolerate reality, and of your willingness to change reality on its behalf. . . . Dreams show you that you have the power to make a world as you would have it be, and that because you want it you see it. And while you see it you do not doubt that it is real. Yet here is a world, clearly within your mind, that seems to be outside**" (T.18.II.2:1,2,5; 5:1,2,3).

Since we all can relate to what Jesus is saying about our dreams, he can then use these examples to teach us about the dynamics going on in our minds all the time, but that we are not aware of. Thus while sleeping and dreaming are aspects of the ego's miscreations, they can be used to help us let go of our belief in the ego thought system: "**The Holy Spirit has another use for all the illusions you have made, and therefore He sees another purpose in them. To the Holy Spirit, the world is a place where you learn to forgive yourself what you think of as your sins**" (W.pl.64.2:2,3).

The point that Jesus stresses is that there is no difference between our waking dreams and our sleeping dreams; they are different *forms* of the same dream of separation, and therefore they can be either right-minded expressions or wrong-minded expressions. "**All your time is spent in dreaming. Your sleeping and waking dreams have different forms, and that is all. Their content is the same**" (T.18.II.5:12,13,14).

Q #674: What advice would you have for a teacher of God whose own healing depends on the change of mind of the patient? My mom was given a miracle through me, but it is waiting on her acceptance of it. This miracle will heal me just the same. The healing is not of an illness but rather of a lack of abundance. I feel healed because of revelation, but the continuation of symptoms is hard to ignore at times. I turn to the Holy Spirit as much as I can, and He helps me remember that I have an agreement with God, and that God does not change His Mind. Still, what is my role here? Can I do anything to speed up her change of mind? So far I have simply watched her progress and gave her the word of God when I felt she needed to hear it. Is there anything else I can do?

A: If we believe that our own healing depends on someone else's change of mind, what we really need is a change of mind ourselves! Your intentions around your mother's accepting the healing seem well-meaning enough, but Jesus cautions, **"Trust not your good intentions. They are not enough (T.18.IV.2:1,2).** For while you remain concerned about her acceptance of the miracle, or feel a need to help her progress in her acceptance of it, your mind is also not accepting it! Hard as this may be to believe, Jesus makes this point in the most uncompromising terms, in the section **"Should Healing Be Repeated?"** in the manual for teachers: **"One of the most difficult temptations to recognize is that to doubt a healing because of the appearance of continuing symptoms is a mistake in the form of lack of trust. As such it is an attack. Usually it seems to be just the opposite. It does appear unreasonable at first to be told that continued concern is attack. It has all the appearances of love. Yet love without trust is impossible, and doubt and trust cannot coexist. And hate must be the opposite of love, regardless of the form it takes. Doubt not the gift and it is impossible to doubt its result. This is the certainty that gives God's teachers the power to be miracle workers, for they have put their trust in Him" (M.7.4).**

Specifically, what does it mean that her symptoms are hard for you to ignore at times? Her continued symptoms are reminding you, at least unconsciously, of unhealed places within your own mind, and that is where Jesus would ask you to direct your attention, rather than to your mother's continuing resistance. For if we are affected by someone else's inability to accept a miracle, we are making the error of their thinking real in our own mind, believing that the ego is a real problem rather than merely a mistaken perspective based on an illusory belief in separation. Believing the ego is real is the only problem we need to address. And while we believe that someone else is in any way responsible for our lack of peace, we are missing the opportunity to heal our own misperception. For if we could really be affected by another's choice, then we could be victimized by forces beyond our control. Yet Jesus makes it very clear, early in the workbook, that we are not victims of the world we see **(W.pl.31).**

In the same section in the manual for teachers cited above, Jesus goes on to say: **"The real basis for doubt about the outcome of any problem that has been given to God's Teacher for resolution is always self-doubt. And that necessarily implies that trust has been placed in an illusory self, for only such a self can be doubted....Conflict about what you are has entered your mind, and you have become deceived about yourself. And you are deceived about yourself because you have denied the Source of your creation. If you are offering only healing, you cannot doubt. If you really want the problem solved, you cannot doubt. If you are certain what the problem is, you cannot doubt. Doubt is the result of conflicting wishes. Be sure of what you want, and doubt becomes impossible."** (M.7.5:1,2; 6:3,4,5,6,7,8). The illusory self is one that believes it is separate not only from others but from God and His All- encompassing Love. That is the misperception that needs to be healed within our own mind before we can be of genuine help to anyone else.

Now this does not mean that you will not offer support to your mother in her process of healing, but it will not be done out of any sense of need that she change. Your only role or responsibility as a teacher of God, which Jesus emphasizes in many places in *A Course in Miracles*, including this section, is to accept the Atonement for yourself **(e.g., T.2.V.5:1; M.7.3:2).** And he further elaborates: **"The teacher of God is a miracle worker because he gives the gifts he has received. Yet he must first accept them. He need do no more, nor is there more that he could do. By accepting healing he can give it. If he doubts this, let him remember Who gave the gift and Who received it. Thus is his doubt corrected. He thought the gifts of God could be withdrawn. That was a mistake, but hardly one to stay with.**

And so the teacher of God can only recognize it for what it is, and let it be corrected for him (M.7.3:3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11; italics added).

Q #675: What does *A Course in Miracles* say about a person who has tried to be loving, kind, and giving to someone, and trying to use the Course's principle of seeing the Christ in them, and having that person treat you with anger, rudeness, unkindness, and just plain nastiness? I know that this is not who he truly is; but his darkness has affected our relationship and his toxic behavior has gotten the best of me. I have reacted in unkind ways myself. I feel as if I have failed the lessons the Holy Spirit has presented me. How many times do I have to forgive myself? How can I justify someone's poor behavior? I want to see this person as a loving brother, and I want to be seen as a loving brother in return. How can a miracle happen when there is so much separation?

A: You may be trying too hard! You just have to monitor your ego reactions and bring them to the non-judgmental love of Jesus in your mind, and do nothing else. You do not have to work at seeing the Christ in this other person. When you have let go of your judgments and specialness needs, you will automatically perceive the Christ in him and yourself as well. That is the meaning of the powerful statement in the text, **"If he speaks not of Christ to you, you spoke not of Christ to him. You hear but your own voice, and if Christ speaks through you, you will hear Him" (T.11.V.18:6,7).** For most of us, the process of getting to this level develops gradually over a period of time because of our resistance to being permanently without judgment and specialness needs. That is why your focus should be on not judging yourself for getting angry and being judgmental, rather than on trying to stop yourself from getting angry and being judgmental. There's a big difference between the two approaches to forgiveness. When you tire of forgiving yourself, you can be sure that the ego has snuck into the process and therefore self-condemnation and guilt have crept in as well, for you could never tire of turning to the gentle love of Jesus that sees the complete meaninglessness of your ego and invites you to remain forever in that quiet center in your mind instead of the ego's turbulent prison of perpetual conflict.

Your inner peace, as you are already aware, does not depend on whether your friend is kind to you or not, or whether you maintain the friendship or not (in form). Perhaps associating with one another is not in either of your best interests -- you cannot see the entirety of your or your friend's Atonement path. Leaving a relationship can be a right-minded decision or a wrong-minded decision, just as the decision to stay in a relationship can be right- or wrong-minded. The *content* in your mind is the only important factor. It is normal to expect a friend to be respectful and kind to you, but that should not be a condition of your love for him, reflecting the unconditional love of God for His Son. The *behavior* of not continuing the relationship may still be bound to the *content* of love in your mind, in which case you would only feel peace.

While forgiveness never condones or justifies unloving behavior, it does perceive its roots in overwhelming fear and guilt, which is why condemnation is never an appropriate response. Yet, forgiveness never requires that a person stay in an abusive relationship simply to learn lessons. The ego, of course, would encourage that, for then you would always have a reason for feeling separate and not at peace: "I tried, but my friend's toxicity infected me. It wasn't my fault." Our unconscious and overwhelming fear of love is typically defended against through that kind of ego dynamic. That is why trying to stop your reaction will never be successful for long. Not judging yourself for your ego reactions will be successful in the long run, though, as you allow yourself to see what it is costing you to hold on to your judgments.

Q #676: The process of forgiveness in *A Course in Miracles* is to remember, each time an unpleasant thought comes to awareness, that the anger, worry, fear or other troubling thought originated in the mind and was projected out to the seemingly external situation. However, often I find myself going a step further. I picture myself as the "decision maker" actually choosing the situation. So, for example, if I think I'm angry because I believe someone cheated me, I picture myself actually inventing the entire situation

out of whole cloth. This immediately defuses the situation in my mind and removes any anger or feeling of being put upon by someone else. While this is certainly in keeping with the Course's metaphysics, it implies that each of us, as seeming individuals, is responsible for the bad acts of others. However, I find the process more useful in reestablishing peace in my mind than the other process of just thinking that the feeling originated in my mind and not the entire situation.

A: One of the most important teachings of the Course is that we are minds with the power to choose. It also tells us clearly that our choice is always between the ego's thought that the separation is *real* and the Holy Spirit's thought that it is *not real*. It is very important to remember that the "decision maker" only chooses between the ego and the Holy Spirit, not among specific circumstances in the world of form. **"The power of decision is all that is yours. What you can decide between is fixed, because there are no alternatives except truth and illusion"(T.14.III.4:3,4).** The process you describe (seeing the specific circumstances as made up) may not be helpful because it obscures the real choice that was made in the mind and, most importantly, its purpose. *Everything* (good and bad, positive and negative) in the world was made to keep us focused on our identity as bodies in direct attack on the Identity God gave us as minds. Our goal is to get in touch with the mind that is actively choosing the ego *instead* of the Holy Spirit, and to take responsibility for that choice. If we are going to learn to make another choice, we cannot skip this step. Diffusing the negative effects of the choice by using mental imagery will not get us to the heart of the matter. It may bring temporary relief, but it will not lead us back home.

The goal of the Course is to awaken from the dream of separation, not to have a more pleasant dream. The process of forgiveness, which leads us to awakening, requires that we become more and more sensitive to our negative reactions (and positive ones, for that matter). They are the important clues to the activity of our minds. We are asked to shift our focus from the circumstances of the situation entirely, and to focus on the thoughts in our minds. In this practice it does not matter that the situation was made up and ultimately means nothing. The important thing is to recognize that it *means something now* in the experience of it. If you find this exercise helps you begin the process, it is a very good way to get started. Jesus does tell us the world is all made up. It is also important to recognize the actual "chain of events" in the mind as the Course explains them, so as not to short circuit the process. The Holy Spirit needs us to give Him all our twisted misperceptions in the specific form that we have made them up. **"All things you made have use to Him [the Holy Spirit], for His most holy purpose. He knows you are not separate from God, but He perceives much in your mind that lets you think you are" (T.14.VI.5:3,4).**

He needs our mistakes and we need His help. Our feelings, reactions, and perceptions are useful to the Holy Spirit because they make up the classroom where He teaches us the forgiveness that leads to true healing. Only then will the effects of the belief in separation be dispelled along with the thought of separation which gave rise to them: **"When the thought of separation has been changed to one of true forgiveness, will the world be seen in quite another light; and one which leads to truth, where all the world must disappear and all its errors vanish. Now its source has gone, and its effects are gone as well" (W.pII.3.1:4,5).**

When we have learned through forgiveness that we are, in fact, as God created us, and no longer fear this truth, we will *know* that the world and our experience of it is made up. Then we will not react at all to its insanity. That is the true peace we seek.

Q #677: Would you kindly assist me in understanding section VIII of Chapter 27, titled "The 'Hero' of the Dream," in particular, the meaning of the following quote:

"Though the dream itself takes many forms, and seems to show a great variety of places and events wherein its 'hero' finds itself, the dream has but one purpose, taught in many ways. This single lesson does it try to teach again, and still again, and yet once more; that it is cause and not effect. And you are its effect, and cannot be its cause."

A: This passage is saying that the ego's purpose for the dream is to deceive us into believing that we are each a single, lonely figure in the dream of the world, each with our own separate interests and needs, rather than the dreamer of the dream of the world and all the figures in it. If we are a figure -- a body -- in the dream, then we are the dream's effect and the dream is our cause. But if we are the dreamer, we are the cause and the dream/world is the effect.

To help understand this passage further, consider what is really happening in the split mind and what the ego wants us to believe, described in the sentences you quote. The "you" Jesus is addressing and is always referring to in *A Course in Miracles* is our mind, outside of time and space and outside the dream. It is the split mind of the Son of God, after we have seemingly fallen asleep and begun to dream of separation. Much like what we experience in our nighttime dreams, we do not remember that we are the dreamer but think instead that we are one of the figures in the dream, a body, the "hero" of the dream. So we have accepted the body as our identity and believe that all of the rest of the dream -- the world -- is outside of ourselves, beyond our control, exerting its influence on us against our will. And yet all along, we, as the dreaming mind, are making the whole thing up.

But this confusion about our identity is exactly what the ego wants us to believe in order to achieve its purpose -- to keep us asleep and dreaming the dream of separation, without ever realizing that it is our dream. So the world we seem to be experiencing outside of our physical selves, which includes our parents and their parents, etc., seems to be the cause of the self we think we are -- the body. In other words, the ego has convinced us that we, as a body which contains a brain which reacts and thinks and feels, are the effect of the world, and how we feel is a result of our interactions with that outside world and all the people in it. So we never consider the possibility that we, as a mind, are not the effect but rather the cause of the world, of the dream. And this subterfuge serves a very deliberate purpose, for now the cause of all of our unhappiness and pain and loss seems to be the world/the dream, rather than the decision we are making within our mind to see ourselves as separate from love. If we really knew our own choice is the cause, we would not remain asleep and dreaming much longer, and the ego -- the thought of separation -- would then simply disappear.

Think again of your dreams at night. We may have all kinds of experiences in the dream that we attribute to the other figures and the "outer world" of our dream while we are still asleep and dreaming. But upon awakening, we recognize that all those feelings were not caused by anything in the dream itself but rather by our mind that was dreaming the entire contents of the dream, including both the dream figure we thought we were and everything seemingly separate from it. The dream is one, single, unitary illusion that continues to fool us about reality while we remain asleep. So one of Jesus' primary objectives with the Course is to help us understand the real nature of cause and effect, so we can undo our confusion and eventually remember Who we truly are, beyond even the illusory split mind.

In a lovely passage early in the text, Jesus calls to us: **"Hear, then, the one answer of the Holy Spirit to all the questions the ego raises: You are a child of God, a priceless part of His Kingdom, which He created as part of Him. Nothing else exists and only this is real. You have chosen a sleep in which you have had bad dreams, but the sleep is not real and God calls you to awake. There will be nothing left of your dream when you hear Him, because you will awaken. Your dreams contain many of the ego's symbols and they have confused you. Yet that was only because you were asleep and did not know. When you wake you will see the truth around you and in you, and you will no longer believe in dreams because they will have no reality for you. Yet the Kingdom and all that you have created there will have great reality for you, because they are beautiful and true"** (T.6.IV.6).

Q #678: Can you please explain paragraphs 3 to 8 in the section "Looking Within" in Chapter 12 of *A Course in Miracles*? (T.12.VII)

A: We are not able to comment on these paragraphs line by line because of space limitations, so we will highlight the main ideas. In paragraphs 3 and 4, Jesus builds on the first two paragraphs in the section, teaching us that the Holy Spirit is not a physical or tangible presence as a person, but that miracles witness to His Presence and to where and what He is. This is because miracles transcend **"every law of time and space, of magnitude and mass" (T.12.VII.3:3)**, and therefore the source of miracles must be the mind, which is outside time and space, and specifically, the part of our mind that contains the correction for all the errors of separation. Prior to these two paragraphs, Jesus referred to the process of generalizing and learning thereby that **"there is no order of difficulty in miracles" (T.12.VII.1:2,3)**. Miracles, thus, are not bound by any of the laws that operate in the world -- they cut across all of time and space, magnitude and mass. The Holy Spirit, as the source of miracles in our minds therefore transcends the world and its laws in every way.

Paragraph 5 is extremely important and is at the heart of what Jesus is teaching us throughout his course. It overturns completely what we usually think perception is all about; namely, that it begins with external stimuli affecting our senses. Quite to the contrary, Jesus instructs us, perception is a result of a choice our minds have made to manifest an internal thought system we have identify with: **"You see what you expect, and you expect what you invite. Your perception is the result of your invitation coming to you as you sent for it....Two ways of looking at the world are in your mind, and your perception will reflect the guidance you have chosen" (T.12.VII.5:1,2,6)**. This foreshadows the important principle: *projection makes perception*. We first look within, decide whether hate or love is real and then we project out what we have made real inside. Thus we expect to find hatred outside because we put it there; importantly, this does not mean that our decision is responsible for what other people *do*. This is solely about our internal experience. In that sense, we (as decision-making minds) invite either the ego or the Holy Spirit to direct our thinking. We will know which choice we have made by looking at what we are perceiving outside, because, again, what we perceive and make real outside is coming from what we first made real inside. The manifestation of forgiveness will be our growing perception that we all share the same interests, and so we will be less and less attracted to the one-or-the-other/kill-or-be-killed mentality: competition, comparisons, sacrifice, getting what we want at someone else's expense. The manifestations of the rule of guilt in our minds will be perceptions of victimization, clashing interests and goals, insatiable needs, accompanied by feelings of anger, fear, triumph, etc. Note again that this is not about the objective forms in the world, but about our perception or interpretation of them. That is why Jesus says there are "two ways of looking" -- we can look at (perceive) the same form in two different ways, depending on the "guidance" we have chosen.

This is the basis for what next appears in paragraphs 6 through 8. In addition to reinforcing the principles of perception in paragraph 5, Jesus addresses the conflict in our mind's seeking and its maladaptive solution to that conflict. The conflict arises from our decision to maintain our separation and our individuality (with all the guilt and self-hatred connected with that) and seek for love at the same time. But the two are mutually exclusive (love and specialness). So we attempt to be loving without sacrificing specialness, thus keeping the split, but suppressing it by appearing to have one goal, **"the illusion of integrity" (T.12.VII.7:9)**: love. This internal split between the wrong mind (the thought system of hatred) and the right mind (the thought system of love), if not resolved in the mind, must get projected out, meaning that the good and bad will be seen outside, not within one's own mind, where we always have the opportunity to accept the illusory nature of the wrong mind. The world, both personal and collective, will then be perceived as a battleground with ceaseless conflict between opposing forces. Thus, "good" people will seek to destroy those they think are evil, and feel justified, even divinely sanctioned in doing so. How many examples have there been throughout the centuries of condemnation and death conferred in the name of love? -- out of their love for God and Jesus, people have judged and killed others, the slaying of pagans and heretics by Christians being but one prominent expression. Martyrdom and sacrifice witness to the same projection: the pure and innocent suffer and die at the hands of the evil and wicked. The split within the mind is thus seen and dealt with outside the mind. Religions give voice to this in their teaching that suffering and death are both demanded and blessed by God. This is the love born of the mind that has chosen to keep separation real and seek for love at the same time. Separate, conflicting interests prevail.

When the conflict of wanting both specialness and love remains unresolved in the mind, our seeking after love will always be contaminated by our desire for specialness, which unfortunately means that more often than not we will think we are coming from love, when we are really driven by the selfishness of special love, as the examples above well affirm. That is the purpose of Jesus' teaching: to help us recognize what we are doing so that we can heal the split in our minds, not continue to project it. Thus, in paragraph 8 he tells us, **"when you want only love you will see nothing else" (T.12.VII.8:1)**. Nothing in the world may have changed, but when we have looked within our minds and have chosen against the ego, we will then perceive only love: shared interests, extensions of love or calls for love, without exception.

Again, if you want to know which teacher you have chosen, pay attention to how you perceive what appears to be outside you -- how you react to it. Perception is interpretation. Do you see evil and sin all around you calling out for the ego's version of justice (punishment and vengeance)?-- or do you see frightened calls for love? Which you see will be determined by which teacher you chose inside.

Q #679: I have always enjoyed the whole idea that the journey, *A Course in Miracles*, the return to God, is not an *if* but a *when*. The journey is sure because once the idea of separation entered our minds, time "rolled out" and then the journey to return began with time "rolling up" along a path that takes us nowhere but back to our Father (ultimately, though the path is wide and offers room to wander). However, in the Epilogue (C.ep) I see for the first time in the Course an element of uncertainty; namely, "Our new beginning has the certainty the journey lacked till now." Further, the Epilogue hints strongly that we started this journey before and got lost...that it is an "ancient journey" leading to an "ancient door" that is held open by the "Holy of Holies." But for some reason, our path was not sure. I'm confused about this; can you please shed some light on this?

A: Take heart! It is still *when* not *if*. Jesus is speaking (singing, really) from where he is outside time and space, his vision encompassing the entire Atonement path. Symbolically, metaphorically, and with the use of biblical imagery, Jesus is telling Helen (and all of us) that in truth, nothing happened and we never truly separated from God: **"Not one note in Heaven's song was missed" (T.26.V.5:4)**, and so we have no cause to fear God; hatred has not triumphed over love; we are not guilty of unforgivable sin. We may have tried different paths in other lifetimes, but our decision finally to accept his love (in the form of *A Course in Miracles*) will resolve our ambivalence completely, meaning we have at last accepted that **"what is false is false, and what is true has never changed" (W.pII.10.1:1)**. The references to reincarnation are unmistakable, but from Jesus' perspective, what appears to us as a linear process, a journey with multiple roads, paths, and detours, is really not that: it is all one to him. How impossible it is to use words to convey what transcends words and physical existence entirely! To us, it is a process in which we switch back and forth between the ego and Jesus, between judgment and forgiveness, but with the confidence that we cannot fail to reach our goal of peace (**W.pl.131**).

Until we recognized his message (**"God's Son is guiltless, and in his innocence is his salvation" [M.1.3:5]**), we had followed the ego's compromise approach: truth and illusion; love and fear; sin and innocence; spirit and body. The "new beginning," thus, is the commitment to awaken from the dream of separation and duality by resigning as our own teacher (**T.12.V.8:3**), gladly accepting that we have been wrong about everything, and gratefully allowing ourselves to be taught by our new teacher. That is what Jesus means by this journey, which may seem new, but is not, because we are simply denying our denial of the truth (**T.12.II.1:5**), and therefore accepting ourselves as God created us. We lost our way by substituting a false identity for our true Identity and wandering into a world of separation and individuality. Therefore, **"the journey to God is merely the reawakening of the knowledge of where you are always, and what you are forever. It is a journey without distance to a goal that has never changed" (T.8.VI.9:6,7)**. In this sense, there is neither *when* nor *if*, because there is no temporal journey. We are **"at home in God, dreaming of exile" (T.10.2:1)**. With this clarity of purpose, uncertainty is nothing more than a defense that will weaken and then dissolve completely.

Q #680: Jesus often says in *A Course in Miracles* that I am only to trust in my willingness. At various times I thought I couldn't have been more willing, but instead it seems I took the route of choosing a more vicious ego. I have understood since then, with your helpful service, that references like these refer to my mind (outside time/space). The same goes for Jesus' comment about the Course not offering practical advice -- what could be more straightforward than being told to ask for help. So again, since I thought I had asked for help before reading that, the only calm way I can understand it is that it is referring to metaphysical me. I need clarification, though, that waiting in faith that the answers will come is not ego-based itself. I have tried to make it in the world while having faith that my trying would come to be replaced with following the Holy Spirit. Obviously I wasn't willing enough, and now I can't even make it in the world. I have tried professional help, but it seems I would need Guidance to make that worldly decision now too as much as any other decision. To ask here is difficult, too, because the answers I know are simply to observe myself and to see what smokescreen my ego dynamics are serving and to turn them over. Your service has been helpfully calming, though, so I ask, Do I (try to) try again in my own way (I would probably pick somewhere to volunteer), or would this be interfering (and lead to another "failure")?

A: Jesus is always talking about the decision maker in the mind. This is not the Mind (capital *M*) of Christ, though, if that is what you mean by the "metaphysical me." It is the part of the split mind that can decide for or against the ego. Our experience is the direct result of that choice, which is why Jesus is always addressing the decision maker; there is no independent self in the world apart from the mind. That self is simply the projection of the decision maker; Jesus would not be talking to a projection.

The "little willingness" that he asks of us is the willingness to be proven wrong -- that our experience of separation, attack, and separate interests -- even our self-concepts -- are really *misperceptions*. When we side with the ego, we are saying: I am *not* as God created me! We do that by identifying with a self that is limited, imperfect, and always struggling to survive in a world of victims and victimizers. So Jesus tells us that **"to learn his course requires willingness to question every value that you hold" (T.24.in.2:1)**. We need to bring our misperceptions to his truth, our darkness to his light, where they can be replaced with true perception. But we must first be willing to acknowledge that we have been wrong in how we have been perceiving *everything*. Then authentic change can occur. The change, though, would be in our choice of teachers in our mind, not necessarily in circumstances in the world. And that willingness need not be perfect, he assures us: **"...be not disturbed by the shadows that surround it. That is why you came. If you could come without them you would not need the holy instant" (T.18.IV.2:4,5,6)**.

In view of this, how your life is going in the world cannot be used as a measure of your willingness to be led by the Holy Spirit or Jesus. The *content* of one's mind cannot be judged by the *form* of one's life. Jesus' life in the world did not go all that well in the world's terms; yet he tells us that his internal experience of peace never changed, and he asks that we follow his example in the trying circumstances of our own lives (**T.6.I**). Our lives, then, become classrooms in which Jesus as our chosen teacher can help us use all relationships and circumstances to get in touch with the blocks to that peace in our minds. They mirror back to us the thought system or teacher we have chosen in our minds, not by *what* is going on, but by how we *perceive* what is going on -- our internal reactions. Thus, as you commented, problems in our bodies and the world are "smokescreens" concealing the real conflict in our minds. They are a means of proving that we are right about ourselves and reality. That is what we must get in touch with, and why Jesus places so much emphasis on *purpose*. That is what he helps us with.

Professional help can be supportive of the process of letting go of your ego. A kind therapist could help you get in touch with some of the specific expressions in your life of the ego's dynamics of separation, even though that vocabulary may never be used. It is not an easy process because of the layers of defenses we usually all have, and so a skilled therapist can be quite helpful in that regard.

Finally, do whatever you feel you would like to do; if assisting as a volunteer is appealing to you, then why not follow that? That is not the central issue. Your focus should be internal -- your willingness to be

proven wrong about your self-perception, so that the truth about you can emerge from concealment. When you are joined with Jesus or the Holy Spirit in your mind, any situation or interaction (regardless of the form) can be a joyful one in terms of its *purpose*: another opportunity to release the pain of separation and accept the peace of an identity of love shared by us all. As that remains your focus more and more, you will depend less and less on things going well externally in order to be happy and peaceful. And that in turn means that your (your mind's) identification with the body will lessen as well -- even as you continue to attend responsibly and maturely to its normal needs.

Q #681: I frequently ask the Holy Spirit to guide my life and purpose, which seems to have coincided with offers to work as a "Healer" (hands-on or touch therapy). My aversion to participate in these forms of "healing" is that as a student of *A Course in Miracles*, I understand that only the mind needs healing and that the body, and sickness for that matter, are illusions. I also understand that I cannot offer healing to/for others. However, in my quest for answers I came upon the manual for teachers and its references to the "patient" of the teachers of God (M.5,6). What does this mean? Is it really just as simple as accepting healing for my own mind and then just knowing that that has transferred to all of my brothers? If so, why the word "patient," as if there is someone outside myself to focus healing upon?

A: It really is as simple as you describe, as Jesus explains in Lesson 161: **"One brother is all brothers. Every mind contains all minds, for every mind is one. Such is the truth."** But he continues: **"Yet do these thoughts make clear the meaning of creation? Do these words bring perfect clarity with them to you? What can they seem to be but empty sounds; pretty, perhaps, correct in sentiment, yet fundamentally not understood nor understandable. The mind that taught itself to think specifically can no longer grasp abstraction in the sense that it is all-encompassing. We need to see a little, that we learn a lot"** (W.pl.161.4). Therefore Jesus must use our language and our experience of duality and specifics as the starting point of a process that will end with our sharing his vision of oneness. Our experience is that we live in a world with other people, relating to them in various ways. We all find ourselves at some time or other in the presence of someone who is sick or suffering; so Jesus is teaching us how to approach these situations in a truly helpful way. In the *Psychotherapy* pamphlet, he does this in the specific context of the therapist-patient relationship.

The heart of this process is our learning to focus more and more on the *purpose* of what we do, and that there is no hierarchy of illusions -- there are no degrees of truth among them (T.23.II.2,3). This means that there is nothing *unholy* in the world, and certainly nothing holy either. Thus, "hands-on" or "touch" therapy is no different from anything else in the world. The *purpose* for which it is used is all that is important for one's spiritual progress. The Holy Spirit can use anything we made (all forms of individuality and special relationships) to help us *unlearn* what the ego taught us and learn His lessons instead: that we all share the same interests and in that sense we are not different in any meaningful sense. That objective can be achieved in any role in the world: parent, healer, patient, attorney, musician, fire fighter, astronaut, etc. A very liberating approach! An aversion to a specific form of the illusion means that you believe some illusions are worse than others -- a favorite means of the ego to validate separation and keep us away from the content in our minds.

So, yes, you are correct about the nature of the healing process according to the Course; but remember that because you still think you are specific, healing must take place in a specific context. The specifics of your life are the classroom in which you learn to undo your belief in separation. **"The Special Function"** is an especially helpful section to read in this regard (T.25.VI). Don't lose sight of the form-content distinction. It is not *what* you do that matters, but the *purpose* for which you do it. If you were to engage in touch therapy, for example, you could use that *form* to learn the *content* that you and your patient are not separate and that you both believe you left Heaven; you both have the same wrong mind, the same right mind, and the ability to choose between them; you both long to return to God but are afraid that you will not be welcomed back and will be punished instead. In this sense, you would not be there to give your patient something you have that he lacks, which is how the ego would have you think of your

purpose, and how others and your patient might see it. All that is important is what is going on in *your* mind, because that is where both the mistake and the correction are, as well as the Help.

Q #682: What is Jesus referring to in *A Course in Miracles* when he talks about "abilities"? In Chapter 7 in "Healing as the Recognition of Truth" and in "Healing and the Changelessness of Mind", abilities are mentioned several times, and also in the Teachers Manual #25: "Are Psychic Powers Desirable?"

A: The Course tells us that the only meaningful ability is the mind's ability to choose between the insanity of the ego (separation) and the Holy Spirit's healing (undoing separation). Jesus tells us in the text: **"Healing is the one ability everyone can develop and must develop if he is to be healed" (T.7.V.3:1)**. In the curriculum of the Course, this healing is accomplished through forgiveness. Forgiveness, therefore, is the only ability we truly need to develop and practice, practice, practice. It won't get us to Carnegie Hall, but it will eventually get us to our home where we belong, and never truly left.

When the mind chooses the ego and identifies with the body, it misuses the power it shares with God by projecting it into a variety of "abilities" that mimic the mind's true function. The ego thus develops its own logic with "abilities" that serve its goal of separation. What appear to be the use of reason, e.g. thinking, learning, imagination, memory, are actually functions of the body's brain. They serve the ego well by using the logic of its "reason" to support and defend the belief that the separation is real and life outside of Heaven is possible. In the section **"Healing as the Recognition of Truth" (T.7.IV)**, as in many sections of the Course (**T.9.III.8, T.14.VI.5, T.21.III.6, W.pl.64**), we are told that the Holy Spirit can use everything the ego has made for His purpose of healing. Indeed, the study of the Course requires many intellectual abilities. It is, in itself, an example of how the Holy Spirit uses the ego's abilities for the purpose of learning His curriculum. He uses the ego's distortion of the mind's power to return it to its only meaningful ability, which is to choose, then guides it in learning to make the only real choice, which is to accept the Identity God gave us as His innocent Son. We are not asked to deny that we think we are bodies with specific abilities. In fact, a very important part of the learning process is seeing how impressive and important we think our abilities are. But Jesus tells us in the text: **"The body is merely part of your experience in the physical world. Its abilities can be and frequently are overevaluated" (T.2.IV.3:8.9)**. "Overevaluated" is an understatement, considering Jesus tells us elsewhere in the text: **"At no single instant does the body exist at all" (T.18.VII.3:1)**. It is only our belief in it and its abilities that requires the Holy Spirit's help and the curriculum the Course sets forth to show us the way out of the ego's thought system, using the specifics it made. And so we are told: **"Abilities must be developed before you can use them. This is not true of anything that God created, but it is the kindest solution possible for what you made. In an impossible situation [belief in the separation], you can develop your abilities to the point where they can get you out of it. You have a Guide to how to develop them, but you have no commander except yourself (T.6.IV.9:1,2,3,4)**. In other words, only we can decide whether our "abilities" will be used by the ego or the Holy Spirit.

Awareness of abilities may be heightened as they are given to the Holy Spirit for His purpose of healing. This explains why a person may seem to have new psychic ability as fear of the mind's power is diminished: **"Those who have developed "psychic" powers have simply let some of the limitations they laid upon their minds be lifted" (M.25.6:7)**. The ability has always been there and is the same for everyone. Once it is discovered, like any ability, it can be used to strengthen belief in the ego or the Holy Spirit. It is important to remember that the ability is nothing in itself. It is the purpose it serves that is extremely important: **Only two purposes are possible. And one is sin (separation), the other holiness (undoing separation). Nothing is in between... (T.20.VIII.9:1,2,3)**. However impressive they may be, these abilities are only shadows of the mind's ability to remember **"the glorious surprise"** of Who we are (**M.25.1:5**). Our concern remains, as always, to apply every ability we may have to the process of forgiveness (healing) that it may serve ultimately to undo our belief in the body and all its "abilities."

Q #683: I am working as a Hospice Nurse, since I began living the Course I am finding it difficult to "help people die." In *A Course in Miracles* it says that by believing in sickness and in death, I am denying God, since He did not create these illusions, and that by believing in these illusions I have created another god. I do not believe in what I am doing, however I am unable to change vocations due to money issues. How can I live by the truth and still be involved with "magic" and illusion?

A: The Course teaches that **"there is no death" (T.3.VII.5:11)** because **"there is no life outside of Heaven" (T.23.II.19:1)**. This truth applies to our reality as minds. However, when a choice is made to believe that the separation is real, identity with the ego and the body follows. In this choice is God denied, and sickness and death become part of the illusory experience that is the effect of this choice. The goal of the Course is to teach us that we are minds with the power to choose between truth and illusion. What we choose then determines our experience in the dream. We are not asked to try to change the beliefs that make up the thought system of the ego, nor to deny that we do believe them. Doing so makes them real, thereby giving them power over us. We are asked to pay attention to our beliefs and judgments, because they show us the choice made in the mind that has been denied and forgotten, so we can choose again. Though in truth sickness and death are not real, and thus have no effect, to bodies they seem to be real indeed. Their purpose is to make the body real, and to keep us rooted in the belief that the separation actually occurred. Belief in sickness and death is relinquished as the mind is healed of the thought of separation. This is not something we can do by trying to convince ourselves that what we see and experience is not real. In fact, Jesus tells us gently, but clearly that we should not deny our belief in the body: **"The body is merely part of your experience in the physical world. Its abilities [including sickness and death] can be and frequently are overevaluated. However, it is almost impossible to deny its existence in this world. Those who do so are engaging in a particularly unworthy form of denial" (T.2.IV.3:8,9,10,11).**

What we are asked to do is recognize that we do believe we are bodies in the world, that we get sick and die. The very fact that we experience ourselves as bodies in a dream of death is a magic trick. It occurs when the mind that chooses separation projects the guilt for this choice outward on to the body and world. The hope that Jesus' loving message in the Course offers is that all the magic we believe in can be transformed by the Holy Spirit through forgiveness. **"The body was not made by love. Yet love does not condemn it and can use it lovingly, respecting what the Son of God has made and using it to save him from illusions" (T.18.VI.4:7,8).** Fortunately for us, this applies to every illusion we experience in the dream, including sickness, death, jobs, and magic. Learning to forgive ourselves for our mistaken beliefs helps us bring more compassion and understanding to all our relationships, since everyone shares these beliefs. This is how any job, as well as every aspect of our lives, become a classroom for applying the Course's teaching of forgiveness. Seeing that nothing external in our lives needs to change, because it is part of our classroom, corrects the ego's first law of chaos the there is a **"hierarchy of illusions" (T.28.II.2:3).**

In our interactions with people at work or in our personal lives, all our thoughts and judgments based on differences show us the choice for separation we have made in our minds. Being willing to recognize that whatever we experience is the result of a choice taking place in the mind, rather than the circumstances of our lives, is the first, and very important, step in the transformation from magic to miracle. It is a process of bringing illusion to truth, and is the way to "live by truth" while being "involved with 'magic.'"

Q #684: I am new to *A Course in Miracles* and I would like to ask about remaining in the present moment. If I remain present, is that when I will feel the peace of mind that I am seeking? I have experienced brief moments of inner peace and calm when I remain present with the Holy Spirit. I just don't know how to remain present for longer than five minutes.

A: Until the mind is fully healed, the experience of peace is limited to our willingness to choose it. Meanwhile, the mind is split, and in conflict between two mutually exclusive "realities": belief in the separation (ego) and the memory of Oneness (Holy Spirit). Early in the text we are told: **"The separation is merely another term for a split mind. The ego is the symbol of separation, just as the Holy Spirit is the symbol of peace" (T.5.III.9:3,4).** The unhealed, split mind experiences itself in the dream, in conflict with itself. While seeking peace, it fears that total peace will mean the disappearance of the specialness of being a body with a unique personality. This split in the mind causes us to have divided goals: **"The ego's goal is as unified as the Holy Spirit's, and it is because of this that their goals can never be reconciled in any way or to any extent. The ego always seeks to divide and separate. The Holy Spirit always seeks to unify and heal" (T.7.IV.5:1,2,3).** Choosing the Holy Spirit and the holy instant results in the moment's peace you refer to, while the choice to cling to separation brings this peace to an end. How little time we spend in peace shows us the degree to which we are attached to our identity with the ego and afraid of peace. Healing the mind of this split is the goal of the Course. It happens gradually through the process of forgiveness, which begins with the recognition that the separation is a choice made in the mind, and everything we experience in the dream is an effect of that choice.

Denial is key to the ego's success in convincing us of the reality of separation. The mind forgets/denies its choice in order to defend it. It is then possible to believe the ego's story that we are not minds, but bodies vulnerable to attack by external forces beyond our control. That explains why it seems that peace comes and goes, and we are at the mercy of its whims. The Course tells us that we are anything but victims, and that we can learn to recognize the mind's choice by paying attention to our feelings and judgments in the dream. Loss of peace in its myriad forms (anger, depression, anxiety, irritation, excitement ...) makes us aware of the choice the mind has made. Paying attention/looking is the key to undoing denial, which is the beginning of salvation, because it tunes us in to the fact that we have a mind with the power to choose. Only by recognizing the painful effects of choosing to identify with the ego will we be motivated to make another choice. Otherwise, we remain unaware of the mind's activity, puzzled by the feelings that seem to come upon us from "nowhere."

Though they may be of short duration, moments of peace are very important to the Holy Spirit's curriculum, which makes good use of contrast for teaching and learning. It becomes increasingly obvious that feeling truly peaceful is preferable to the turmoil of unforgiveness. What is difficult is learning to associate the lack of peace with the judgments that we are engaged in constantly. Peace just seems to disappear for no reason. What actually occurs is that our minds have chosen to identify with the ego and our specialness. Guilt follows that choice, and is inevitably projected in some form of judgment against ourselves and others. This happens very quickly and, thanks to denial, imperceptibly. In the Course, Jesus is asking us to pay very careful attention to our thoughts, to become aware of the judgments. They show us the choice for separation we have made and have forgotten.

Both the peace and lack of it are useful experiences. One shows us how it feels to be free of judgment, the other the pain of choosing the ego. The important thing is to remember that when we are not at peace, it is for *no other reason* than our choice to be separate. We have chosen to identify with the ego rather than with the Holy Spirit, and preferred guilt to peace. We now have the opportunity to consider the cost of our mistaken choice and choose again. This mindfulness is how we remain in the present, and how not being peaceful becomes a useful tool to lead us back to peace. We also need to remember not to judge ourselves for long periods of forgetfulness and short periods of peace. Allowing the Holy Spirit to heal our minds of the thought of separation is a process. Our function is to be mindful of every judgment so it can be forgiven. Gradually the balance will shift to longer experiences of peace, until that becomes our only choice.

Q #685: In the workbook of *A Course in Miracles*, I was engaged with Lesson 122, and a very beautiful lesson it is, when a word in paragraph 10 caught my attention: "We are close indeed to the appointed ending of the dream" (W.pl.122.10:4). Could you please elaborate on "appointed?"

A: In this context, the ending of the dream is "appointed" because it is certain, and in reality it is already accomplished, because "... **the separation never occurred**" (T.6.II.10:7). Everyone will come to this realization in his/her own time, and will awaken from the dream: **"Forget not once this journey is begun the end is certain. Doubt along the way will come and go and go to come again. Yet is the ending sure. No one can fail to do what God appointed him to do"** [accept the identity God has given to His Son] (C.ep.1:1,2,3,4).

The "appointed" moment does not refer to a specific time in the dream, but refers to a decision in the mind that is outside of time and space. However, Jesus knows that we believe we are actually separate from God, living in time and space, and so he speaks to us on the level of our experience in the dream. He tells us throughout the Course that to end the dream all that is required is for us to remember the truth that we have denied, to forget everything else, and in an instant we would awaken. That is why the ending is "close"; it is always only an instant away.

While we continue to choose separation, however, we use time as a delay mechanism to defend our choice: **"Delay is of the ego, because time is its concept"** (T.5.III.5). Time is one of the ego's best defenses for its tale of sin, guilt, and fear. Only in time can we defend our belief in the punishment from God we think is our due for the terrible "sin" of choosing against Him in the *past*. The ego insists that one of these days God will get us. We also use our concept of time to project salvation outside of ourselves to a distant moment in the *future*, because we are afraid of accepting it in the *present*. Thus, contrary to the popular saying "time waits for no man," time is actually under the command of the ego. For its purpose of refusing to accept our oneness with God, which would end the dream, we have all the time in the world. Time will indeed wait for us to choose again, because we made it up explicitly to serve our delay tactics. That is why, in our experience, the dream seems to be lasting eons. In the insanity of our split minds, we both *fear* it will last forever, and *hope* it will. In his kindness, Jesus assures us it *will* end, but not abruptly: **"Fear not that you will be abruptly lifted up and hurled into reality. Time is kind, and if you use it on behalf of reality, it will keep gentle pace with you in your transition"** (T.16.VI.8:1,2).

The "appointed" end of the dream, therefore, is as certain as the Holy Spirit tells us it is, and only as close as we want it to be. In the text, we are told **"Time is your friend, if you leave it to the Holy Spirit to use. He needs but very little to restore God's whole power to you. He Who transcends time for you understands what time is for"** 15.I.15:1,2,3). The dream's concept of time serves the Holy Spirit's purpose when we use it to heal our minds of the thought of separation, seeing each moment as an opportunity to choose forgiveness rather than judgment *in the present*. Thus the past "sin" and future punishment are released of their power to delay us on our journey, bringing the truth closer to our awareness.

Q #686: In the end of the text, Jesus says that all walk the world "uncertain, lonely, and in constant fear" (T31.VIII.7:1). I know that this may seem silly, but I just don't believe that sometimes. I look at someone like Donald Trump; rich, secure, seemingly happy, and it doesn't seem that he feels the way Jesus describes. I know enough now that this question probably reflects my fear that *A Course in Miracles* is asking sacrifice of me, but some people seem so happy without the Course.

A: It is important to remember that in the Course Jesus is addressing our minds; more specifically, the part of our minds that remembers the truth of who we really are (the right mind). However, since we have dissociated from our minds and identified with the ego, and thus with the body, we hear his words as applying to the body. He is not speaking to our bodies. It is the mind that identifies with the ego/body that walks the world **"uncertain, lonely, and in constant fear."** Though they may not be apparent, the loneliness, uncertainty and fear that underlie everyone's existence in the world are the motivation for everything that we seek: money, power, friends, and family. Having believed we are separate from our Source, we feel bankrupt and therefore compelled to fill our physical, psychological, and emotional warehouses to the brim with wealth, health and "happiness." The ego is ingenious in making

up *its* interpretation of "happiness," "success," "achievement," even "love," based on the deep sense of loss that inevitably accompanies the choice for separation. The world offers the illusion of happiness, and on its terms it seems to "work" for some people. They seem to "have it all." It is possible to experience the satisfaction of getting what we want, or what we *think* we want, and it is this that the world calls happiness. However, as it turns out, it is never enough, not even the "perfect life" here in the world, and so we seek for more. No doubt Donald Trump, along with many other wealthy, and successful people, would admit that there are more fortunes and more power to be had: "You never can be too rich or too thin."

Jesus tells us in the Course, that in choosing to identify with the body and seeking everything the world has to offer, we have short-changed ourselves. **"To identify with the ego is to attack yourself and make yourself poor. That is why everyone who identifies with the ego feels deprived. What he experiences then is depression or anger, because what he did was to exchange Self-love for self-hate, making him afraid of himself. He does not realize this. Even if he is fully aware of anxiety he does not perceive its source as his own ego identification, and he always tries to handle it by making some sort of insane 'arrangement' with the world"** (T.12.III.6:1,2,3,4,5, italics ours). The insane arrangements are all the things we do to avoid feeling the self-hatred, this is what compels us to seek outside of ourselves for comfort and fulfillment. Every value the world holds has its source in the pervasive feeling of emptiness that is the effect of choosing the ego instead of God. Yet nothing ever fills that void. Jesus tells the Donald Trump in all of us that the world/ego is a bad investment: **"The ego is trying to teach you how to gain the whole world and lose your own soul. The Holy Spirit teaches that you cannot lose your soul and there is no gain in the world, for of itself it profits nothing. To invest without profit is surely to impoverish yourself, and the overhead is high. Not only is there no profit in the investment, but the cost to you is enormous. For this investment costs you the world's reality by denying yours, and gives you nothing in return"** (T.12.VI.1:1,2,3,4,5).

A close look at the satisfactions and "happiness" the world offer reveals that they are short spent and *do not last*. Every enjoyment is shadowed by the knowledge that it will end, not to mention that it is nothing but an illusion: **"Illusions will not last. Their death is sure and this alone is certain in their world. It is the ego's world because of this"** (C.2.1:1,2,3). We cannot effectively extinguish the gnawing sense that everything we seek and achieve has an end, including this "life" in a body, and thus we become imprisoned by the relentless pursuit of pleasure, comfort, and meaning in the world. This often extends to the search for meaningful religious experience and fulfillment, in an attempt to calm our fear that we are, in fact, wrong about who we are, and wrong about everything we believe is true and meaningful. As the very first lesson in the workbook tells us: **"Nothing I see...means anything"** (W.pl.1). How, then, can what is meaningless bring us happiness, comfort, or peace? Not only is it meaningless, everything the world offers is actually a defense against recognizing what *is* meaningful, since it is the place made by the ego, **"where God could enter not, and where His Son could be apart from Him"** (W.pll.3.2:4).

There is no need to worry that we will have to sacrifice or be deprived of anything we think we need as long as we think we need it: **"Only the Holy Spirit knows what you need. For He will give you all things that do not block the way to light. And what else could you need? In time, He gives you all the things that you need have, and will renew them as long as you have need of them. He will take nothing from you as long as you have any need of it. And yet He knows that everything you need is temporary, and will but last until you step aside from all your needs and realize that all of them have been fulfilled"** (T.13.VII.12:1,2,3,4,5,6). Let's not be fooled by anything else.

Q #687: I have been a student of *A Course in Miracles* now for a year and a half. I do a great deal of study of other religions, in an effort to understand others better, seek common ground and connectedness, and to find what feels most "right" for me. I have come to realize that there is a number of metaphysical based religions, such as Christian Science, New Thought, Unity, and Religious Science. I am wondering what organized religion do you see as being most closely identified with the teachings of

the Course? I feel my purpose, or calling, is toward ministry, but not in the traditional sense. Can you offer any suggestion for direction?

Also, I am a reader of various authors who write from the perspective of the Course, and I have varying reactions to their teachings. How can one be certain that a teacher, who proclaims to understand the Course, has the correct interpretation, given that so many have interpreted the bible in opposing ways?

A: Although, as you observe, the Course shares some principles in common with other religious teachings, it really has its own unique contribution to make to facilitating achievement of the objective of any true spiritual teaching -- to lead us along the path to egolessness. And so we would suggest that it may be more helpful to understand how it differs from other teachings -- so one can make an informed choice about whether this is the path to embrace for oneself -- than to identify its similarities with them.

So, while the Course, for example, shares an emphasis on forgiveness with many other teachings, including Christianity and the metaphysical religions you mention, it defines forgiveness and its practice in a unique way, based on the metaphysical principles that the world and the self we think we are illusory, projected symbols of guilt (**W.pII.1**). And although it shares with other paths an underlying assumption about the primacy of mind, its purpose in understanding the "power" of the mind to manifest in form is not to access that power in order to control it but rather to demonstrate how painful the results ultimately are if the power is guided by a belief in need and limitation. And while the Course shares the basic premise that the world is an illusion with other spiritualities, including some Eastern religions and New Age teachings, it attributes no divine purpose to the illusion and offers a unique explanation for the world's origin -- that it is the result of an ego-based conspiracy promulgated in opposition to God, including a seeming attack on love in order to exclude it from the mind and the mind from it (**W.pII.3**).

The Course is also unique among the world's spiritualities in its blending of the practical and the sublime, in a beautifully integrated whole that never lets us forget where we are heading, at the same time not asking us to deny where we believe we are. It does this through its use of a sophisticated psychodynamic understanding of the ego thought system -- drawing on the insights of Freudian psychology with its analysis of guilt, denial and projection as they play out in our special relationships -- presented within the uncompromising framework of its non-dualistic metaphysics, which holds that the thought of separation, as well as all its seeming consequences, is an illusion.

In response to your feeling of being called toward non-traditional ministry, the Course offers a relatively unique perspective on that as well (**M.in;1**). It would never advocate any specific role for any of us in the world, but rather would ask us whether we are demonstrating its principles of forgiveness in how we live our lives, whatever we may be doing. And this demonstration has nothing to do with our words and actions, and everything to do with our underlying thoughts and attitude. Are we choosing to remember in each moment that genuine happiness and peace come only from a recognition of our shared interest with *all* our brothers and sisters, rather than from a belief in separate, competing interests based on meeting our own personal needs? And the way we remember is to become vigilant for all of our ego motivations, so that we can recognize them and then choose a different teacher -- the Holy Spirit -- to guide us in our thinking. And that is the most powerful ministry we can embrace, for it will serve as a reminder to all our brothers and sisters that the same choice for peace lies within their own minds as well.

Jesus invites us to be a part of his ministry by sharing in his peace. In his own words, "Teach not that I died in vain. Teach rather that I did not die by demonstrating that I live in you" (**T.11.VI.7:3,4**). And we demonstrate this by recognizing that our only responsibility is to choose forgiveness. The extension of the peace that follows from this choice is not our concern (**T.16.II.1:3,4,5**). We are not the ones who extend peace or persuade others to change their minds. The Holy Spirit does that through us, when we are His willing instruments. And again, we become his channels by getting ourselves out of the way, through practicing forgiveness.

As for discerning genuine teachers of the Course, it is always the underlying content that defines the real teacher, regardless of the specific form they present. Just as we have described the nature of a real ministry being defined, not by the externals, but by the underlying thought of forgiveness, so any authentic teacher of the Course will be committed to a consistency across every level of thinking, with a willingness to step aside from the ego in every moment and let the love and gentle wisdom of the Holy Spirit flow through. This may not be easy for us to discern since, so long as we remain identified with our own egos, our own projections of guilt will interfere. But so long as we maintain a willingness to recognize our own ego, we can trust that our ability to discern the help we really need will become increasingly accessible to us (e.g., **T.11.V**). The true teacher will be one who always directs us to our inner Teacher, with no interest in establishing himself or herself as our teacher.

Q #688: In your response to Question #[457](#), you say that it is a trap to believe the Holy Spirit's answer to our calls for help would be a change in the external situation. Yet you quote from "The Hero of the Dream:" "*You* judge effects, but *He* has judged their cause. And by His judgment are effects removed" (T.27.VIII.9:4,5). This has confused me much of the time in my last eleven years of working with *A Course in Miracles*.

Further in the same answer you advise: "And that does not mean that you should not do everything you possibly can to rectify the financial situation -- consulting a financial advisor, etc." Does this mean you split up the situation and ask the Holy Spirit for help with finding peace and seek out a financial advisor to solve your money problem? Didn't Jesus help Helen Schucman find shoes and coats? Are we not worthy as well?

I am at my wits' end because after all this time I feel like it's such a futile effort. I hear no voice, I see no change in the destitution I perceive, and I have no way of knowing that Someone hears me at all. How do you ask Jesus and the Holy Spirit for help? How do you "bring each terrible effect to Him that you may look together on its foolish cause and laugh with Him a while" (T.27.VIII.9:3). Please answer me and guide me to other sources of reading if possible.

A: The only reason we ever experience a sense of upset or lack, whatever external form it may seem to take in our lives, is because we believe we are unworthy of love (**T.4.IV.7**). And so we repeatedly make the unconscious, and at times perhaps conscious, choice to keep love out of our awareness. We believe there are many external things that we need and that we are unhappy because we don't have them. But they are all only symbols for the *experience* we all want -- truly knowing that our guilt is not real and that we are loved without any reservation. And, believe it or not, that experience is in no way dependent on having any of our external needs met.

When we bring each "terrible effect" to the Holy Spirit, you will notice that Jesus says that we will look together at the *cause* -- the thought of guilt in our mind -- and not the effects -- the external situation in the world and, in particular, our thoughts and feelings about it. And His judgment is that the cause is silly, for our sin and guilt are not real (**W.pl.156.6**). When we share His perspective on the cause, all its effects -- our fear and upset and concern -- simply vanish. The external situation in the world may or may not change, but we will no longer be concerned about it, since in that moment our mind is healed and we have no needs. It is possible to have this experience of release in any instant, but it is our own fear of love that prevents us from accepting it all of the time. And we are fearful of love because there is no place for our limited self with all its seeming needs and desires in that place that reflects the boundless joy of the Infinite.

Now there is nothing wrong with asking Jesus or the Holy Spirit for the specific things we think we need, as Helen did for a while, although if our requests seem to be answered, it will not really be because Jesus or the Holy Spirit have intervened in our lives and delivered some of the goodies we want, as Helen seemed to experience (see a discussion of what is really happening in such situations in *Absence From*

Felicity, the section in chapter 17, "Helen and Jesus: The Illusion and the Reality," by Kenneth Wapnick). But what Jesus is trying to help us see is that having such needs met does not address the underlying guilt in our mind, which we still believe is real and which is the real cause of such feelings as futility, desperation, and depression. So when we are not blocking the love, we may indeed find that some of our specific needs are met. But again it will have nothing to do with Jesus or the Holy Spirit but rather with our own decision to allow ourselves to experience love in a specific, limited form that we can accept without increasing our fear.

Seeking out help in the world from those who offer help in the form you think you need, such as a financial advisor, a therapist, a doctor, a lawyer, etc., can be done in a state of peace if you have first asked for help from the only real Help in your mind. So this is not really an either-or situation in terms of who offers what kinds of help, but rather a way in which we can learn to approach all of our seeming challenges in the world in a peaceful way, remembering where the only real problem and its only solution lie -- in our own mind, and turning there for help first before we return to our busy activities in the world (**T.18.VII.7,8**). Of course, this may be easy to describe, but it can be very difficult to put into practice. But again, it is only our own resistance to the experience of love, because we feel unworthy, that makes the most natural thing in all the world (**T.7.XI.1:1,2,3,4; W.pl.41.8:1,2,3**) seem difficult!

In addition to the section from *Absence from Felicity* cited above, you may find the discussions about asking for specifics presented in Questions #538 and #555 helpful in clarifying the process, as well as Question #86 on the power of the mind to project.

Q #689: I have been a student of *A Course in Miracles* for twenty years and have never been able to help myself much. I just read it over and over and think that I am applying it, but I don't get results. For over a year I have had a painful condition in my shoulders, and the pain just doesn't go away. Recently I have been drawn to these statements about sickness in the manual: "It is the choice of weakness, in the mistaken conviction that it is strength" (M.5.I.1:5); "One need but say, 'There is no gain at all to me in this' and he is healed" (M.5.II.1:2). Could it be that I don't really know how to give up the sickness even though I keep saying all of the word's on the page, and really think that I believe them?

A: Yes, more than likely that is what is going on. As this section in the manual goes on, Jesus explains why we will strenuously resist his teaching that sickness is a decision of the mind and has nothing to do with the body. Our acceptance of this, he advises us, "**will cost the whole world [we] see, for the world will never again appear to rule the mind**" (**M.5.II.3:4**), meaning we could no longer justify thinking that the world affects on us in any way. That is a major shift, to put it mildly. Thus, he is not simply talking about getting rid of physical pain so that we can go on with our lives pain free. He is talking about a decision to change the very thought system in our minds that governs all our thinking and actions. You can see, then, why reading these words again and again, while a good start, will not alone do the trick.

In the workbook, Jesus opens the lesson about wanting the peace of God by stating, "**To say these words is nothing. But to mean these words is everything**" (**W.pl.185.1:1,2**). That could well be said of the statements about sickness, too. Later in the workbook he tells us that acceptance of these truths is a process that unfolds in stages: 1) we first repeat statements again and again; 2) we then accept them, but with lots of reservations; 3) we move on to a more serious consideration of them; and finally 4) accept them fully without reservation (**W.pl.II.284**). In other words, in one part of our minds we are clearly aware of the radical changes we would have to make in our thinking if we were to accept fully what Jesus is teaching, and we are not entirely sure we want to go that far. We would much rather compromise with him and have him just fix things for us, so that we could carry on business as usual without so many encumbrances. That is fine, as long as we realize that when we do that we are only on the first rung of the ladder, and that he has invited us to go all the way to the top with him. Honesty with ourselves and him about this is terribly important, as is being gentle with ourselves and not judging ourselves for our fear and resistance.

What you can do therefore is focus not on getting rid of the pain (although we hope you have sought medical advice and treatment), but on learning the important lesson that your inner state of peace is not conditional on your being without physical pain. That is what Jesus teaches throughout his course. The peace of God is permanent; it does not come and go depending on what is happening in our bodies and the world. Jesus means quite literally that we are not bodies; and how best to learn that than when we are most tempted to believe that is all we are. We are thus asked to learn how to identify with the peace that is our true Identity as God's creation, while not denying that we are experiencing something else as real. That means far more than we realize, which is why we need help from a gentle Teacher. It is a gradual process of getting more deeply into our minds where our secret purpose is concealed, as the two statements to which you have been attracted reveal.

Q #690: I am having great difficulty with one phrase that keeps recurring in *A Course in Miracles* and it has shown up in Question #453, which centers on the statement, "Forgive your Father it was not His Will that you be crucified" (T.24.III.8:13). The troublesome statement is: "That is why we have to forgive God; He is not part of our insanity..." In the common use of *forgive*, I would forgive someone for some wrong that they have done to me and I hold no grudge against them. How can I forgive God? He has not done anything to my detriment. I find this use very confusing.

A: What He has done "wrong" is that He does not notice us -- the ultimate affront! God (the true God) is completely unaware of our existence, and therefore is not involved in our lives to bless our many sacrifices and efforts done in the name of goodness and innocence, and to justify our judgments of those who have treated us unfairly. Jesus teaches us it is insane to think that for one to win another must lose (**T.25.VII**), and that it is possible for love to be exclusive. But these principles are at the core of the thought system that governs our lives, and, indeed, are the very source of our existence as individuals. God, as perfect Oneness and Love, could not give rise to this insanity, which means it is not real. Our existence as individuals consequently is exposed as not linked to God in any way. Suffering, pain, and death, as well as heroism and triumphs are not His Will.

A massive system of deception and lies is thus uncovered, shattering the foundation of our existence and the universe in which we appear to live, and forcing us to face what we swore we would never again look upon (**T.19.IV.D.6:1**). Everything that goes on in our personal worlds as well as the world at large is *our* will, not God's. The implications of this recognition are staggering, which become the focus of Jesus' teachings throughout his course. It seems far more tolerable to have God's blessings on our struggles and suffering, justifying our perception of sin and victimizers "out there," rather than to have to accept responsibility for all of it ourselves (as the one Son). It is for this that we need to forgive God. He gives no credence or validity to what is so real and meaningful to us: **"Not one Thought of His makes any sense at all within this world. And nothing that the world believes as true has any meaning in His Mind at all"** (**T.25.VII.3:3,4**). Therefore, since does God not support our thought system, He does not support *us*, either, as we know ourselves. What means so much to us is nothing to God. The same is true for Jesus, as well. He sees everything of the body and our individual identity as meaningless -- all the events of our lives, which seem to have so much significance, are without meaning. We are presented with this in the very first lesson of the workbook, and many times in many ways throughout the rest of the lessons -- Lesson 93, for example: **"The self you made is not the Son of God. Therefore, this self does not exist at all. And anything it seems to do and think means nothing. It is neither bad nor good. It is unreal, and nothing more than that"** (**W.pl.93.5:1,2,3,4,5**). This realization is bound to stir up some profound emotions in us -- fear, anger, confusion, etc. Who likes to be told that they are unreal?

This is not the end of the story, though, because at some point in our work with the Course, we will find ourselves relieved to be unburdened of our guilty secret. We will be glad to have been proven wrong in all we thought to be the truth. But before reaching that stage comes the anger that God did not buy our story. It is not all that pleasant to be caught in a lie, and this is especially devastating when the deception involves our very identity. We suddenly become aware of the massive self-deception we have engaged in, and without the help of Jesus and his course, or some other loving reflection of truth outside our

thought system, we would have a most difficult time coping with this situation and all the guilt and fear it arouses. All that supported us now is revealed as but strategic ways of keeping us from the truth about ourselves and reality -- defenses against the truth. It is as if the bottom has fallen out. But Jesus helps us realize we need only have the willingness to change our choice of teachers in our minds from the ego to him, and peace will be restored in our awareness. We are merely awakening from a nightmare dream of separation from our Creator and Source.

Q #691: Discerning the Voice of Holy Spirit is a most important but very ambiguous issue in practicing *A Course in Miracles*. Helen heard this Voice clearly and unambiguously. I'm inclined to think that many lessons of the workbook took this capability of Helen into account. The designed short period of practice (one year) reinforces that in my opinion. One year seems to be too short for radically reversing the thought system of the average person. What made Helen so sensitive and attuned to this Voice? Could we be helped by inquiring into this, so that we might develop this capability?

A: Kenneth talks about Helen's "hearing" ability in his biography of Helen, *Absence from Felicity*. Her hearing was somewhat "rusty" at first, he reports, but then the interferences that were there initially cleared up and the Voice was heard in its purity from then on. The lessons began about three and a half years after the scribing commenced in 1965. What made Helen "so sensitive and attuned to this Voice" was her willingness to set aside her ego completely and be in her right mind. She did not regard this as anything exceptional that she alone could do. She always told people who were tempted to see her as spiritually blessed that they could do exactly what she did; all that was required was the willingness to set aside their ego, if only for an instant. The abstract presence of love is part of everyone's mind and hearing the Voice is only one form in which that love can be experienced. Each of us will experience it in the form we can best relate to and accept without excessive fear. The form is illusory and will fade when enough fear subsides to allow the full experience of that love into one's awareness. Therefore, it would not make sense to make the form into a big deal.

Moreover, there is no way of our knowing where we are on our Atonement path, or where anyone else is, either. Comparisons therefore are not likely to be spiritually beneficial. Learning and practicing this Course is carried out in the context of the relationship between the student and the Holy Spirit or Jesus. The events and circumstances of our lives are meaningful, thus, only to the extent that they reflect back to us whether we have chosen the ego or Jesus as our teacher.

Finally, there certainly are lessons and parts of lessons that assume an advanced spiritual state, yet there are many others that explicitly refer to a process of learning and practice that could extend over many years, even lifetimes. And then at the very end of the workbook Jesus tells us that **"this course is a beginning, not an end" (W.ep.1:1)**. Similarly, toward the end of the text, the beginnings of chapters 30 and 31, Jesus is basically telling Helen that she is moving along well but has not yet reached the end of her process. The ability to hear the Voice of the Holy Spirit is simply the process of learning to let go of one's ego, as Jesus so clearly states in this passage, to single out one of many such passages: **"You can defend your specialness, but never will you hear the Voice for God beside it. They speak a different language and they fall on different ears" (T.24.II.5:1,2)**. That was the essence of Helen's process and is ours as well.

Q #692: Relating to Question #465 "If someone asks you to do something outrageous, do it because it does not matter." Yet, "Do not do a foolish thing that would hurt either." We are constantly bombarded by telemarketers and could almost literally change phone or other services daily at their request. This too wouldn't matter though it may continue to disappoint yesterday's salesman and induce unnecessary busyness into today's buyer. Ultimately, neither the salesman nor I can be hurt no matter what the decision; so I guess I'm asking for clarification of the meaning of "hurt" in this context.

A: It probably is safe to say that when Jesus was talking about this issue to Helen, the scribe of *A Course in Miracles*, he did not have telemarketers or other solicitors in mind. Common sense dictates that we not respond to every request made by a salesperson. On the other hand, an egoless person may be guided to buy what has been offered because the interaction is helpful to the seller's Atonement process, not because there is any need for the item. But that advanced state is not what Jesus is referring to in these passages. He is talking about an immediate, strong reaction of opposition -- a stubborn refusal to even consider the request. That extreme reaction means something is going on beneath the surface that needs to be looked at. With telemarketers, we can quickly but kindly decline the call, and that would be the end of it, just as we might decline solicitors outside a supermarket or other kind of store. There is no issue.

Q #693: Where is Evil? Does it exist in all of us? Does it exist only in our perceived enemy? If our enemy no longer existed would evil follow? If evil no longer existed would our perceived enemy follow? Why do we destroy to honor our faith in God? Why do we bargain to gain more good than the evil we allow? Is evil fear? Is fear evil? Does fear and love control all we do? Do we have control on deciding between them?

A: These simple and direct statements from the text are the foundation for responding to your queries about evil: **"The truth is true. Nothing else matters, nothing else is real, and everything beside it is not there" (T.14.II.3:3,4).** This is another way of stating the fundamental principle of *A Course in Miracles*, found in the Introduction to the text: **"Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists" (T.in.2:2,3).** What is true and real is our Identity as God's innocent Son. Everything else is part of our experience in the illusion, which rises in our awareness when we choose to believe the separation is not only real, but a sin, deserving of punishment. This fundamental belief of the ego thought system breathes life into every thought of evil, pain, hatred, and despair that darkens our lives in the nightmare of "life" apart from God. The dream itself may be considered "evil" in the sense that its source (the thought of separation) is an attack on God and on His Son. The way into the dream is to deny God and our oneness with Him, choosing the illusion of the body and the world instead. Jesus gives us a clear exposition of the ego's substitution for reality: **"Sin is the home of all illusions, which but stand for things imagined, issuing from thoughts that are untrue. They are the "proof" that what has no reality is real. Sin "proves" God's Son is evil; timelessness must have an end; eternal life must die. And God Himself has lost the Son He loves, with but corruption to complete Himself, His Will forever overcome by death, love slain by hate, and peace to be no more" (W.pII.4.3:1,2,3,4).** Not a great place to be. Although it is not real, evil enters the illusion as a haunting force following the mind's choice to identify with the ego. However, it is a force with no power, because it is an effect, not a cause. That is not to say that once we believe we are in the world as bodies we do not have some experiences that seem pleasant and others we call "evil." This is in keeping with the ego's endless array of qualifications to differentiate every experience in the dream. We are not asked to deny these distinctions, but to recognize them as the ego's scheme to make the dream real, and then acknowledge that they are powerless.

As an ego concept, evil is fear's product. Fearful that God will punish His Son who has denied Him by choosing separation instead of oneness, the Son invents a myriad of evil "monsters" who are out to get him; just as a child believes his imagined monsters are poised to attack: **"A madman's dreams are frightening, and sin appears indeed to terrify. And yet what sin perceives is but a childish game" (W.pII.4.4:1,2).**

The world filled with evil, fear, sin, guilt, enemies, danger and attack is the madman's dream. Once we are caught in this thought system, it does not matter where evil lurks, nor in whom. The "good" and "evil" of the ego are the same because they serve the same purpose: to keep us rooted in the belief in separation. "Escape" from this system is possible only by learning to identify with the memory of God's Love that remains in part of our mind. The paths may be different, but everyone will eventually accept this Love. For students of the Course, it is by bringing every ego misperception to the light of the Holy Spirit's true perception, allowing His interpretation of our experience in the world to replace ours, that we are

gradually freed of the ego's "evil shadow." This requires only our willingness to see every experience as a projection of the guilt in our minds for having chosen to identify with the ego, as we mentioned earlier.

Though we are wrong about our ego identity, we are not condemned to the punishment of evil forces, nor have we succeeded in changing reality by our mad imaginings: **"Correction has one answer to all this, and to the world that rests on this: You but mistake interpretation for the truth. And you are wrong. But a mistake is not a sin, nor has reality been taken from its throne by your mistakes. God reigns forever, and His laws alone prevail upon you and upon the world. His Love remains the only thing there is. Fear [evil] is illusion, for you are like Him"** (M.18.3:6,7,8,9,10,11,12).

No destruction honors God. In fact, God does not require that we honor Him at all, but the ego's God does. And since the ego's God is a destroyer (T.23.II.7:8; T.26.VII.7), to honor Him is to be like Him. Yet the only possible honor we could offer God would be to accept that we are as He created us; nothing more than that, but also nothing less. The non-dualistic theology of the Course teaches that God does not know His Son as separate from Himself; He *is* only oneness. Our split minds cannot truly understand this, but we can learn what it is not: it is not fear, evil, or destruction.

Our goal in studying the Course is not to try to avoid, abolish, or transform evil, but to undo our belief in separation through forgiveness, so that eventually we will forget our evil dreams and remember only God's Love. The only decision we need make is between the ego's lie of sin, guilt and fear, and the Holy Spirit's message that we remain innocent, as we were created. Nothing has happened to destroy the Love the Father extends to His Son. That is what we seek to remember. **"Nothing else matters, nothing else is real"** (T.14.II.3:4).

Q #694: Is *A Course in Miracles* true? And does it really matter? Now, I'm aware of the teaching that we must believe everything the Course teaches one hundred percent, presumably, for it to then be able to deliver upon its one and only promise. But does it matter whether or not any of it is actually true?

A: The short and simple answer to your question is: the Course is part of the illusion and therefore, cannot be the truth: **"Nothing unreal (anything outside of Heaven) exists"**(T.in.2:3). On the other hand, its content, which is a loving message from Jesus, our teacher who represents the part of the mind that remembers the truth, is a reflection of the truth. The Course is also "true" in the sense that it accurately describes for us the dynamics of the ego's insanity, tells us we have been mistaken in choosing to believe the thought of separation, and teaches us how to undo this thought through forgiveness. On some level, we recognize that the Course's teaching is right about our ego shenanigans, and, most importantly, we resonate to what it tells us about our true Identity as God's innocent Son. In other words: "it rings true." This explains why we find ourselves in the Course, especially in poignant passages that express what we have always sensed but have been unable to articulate: **"This world you seem to live in is not home to you. And somewhere in your mind you know that this is true. A memory of home keeps haunting you, as if there were a place that called you to return, although you do not recognize the voice, nor what it is the voice reminds you of. Yet still you feel an alien here, from somewhere all unknown"** (W.pl.182.1:1,2,3,4,5; italics ours).

If we choose the Course as our path, we would do well to ask ourselves what part of its teaching do we suspect is *not* true. Perhaps a close examination of our doubts about the Course will reveal that when in doubt, we are actually disbelieving the whole thing. Though we may try very hard to keep the parts we like, and discard those that make us uncomfortable, we do, in fact, throw the baby out with the bath water. As you mention, Jesus tells us in the text: **"This course will be believed entirely or not at all"** (T.22.II.7:4). This is because the mind holds only *one* of two possible thoughts. It chooses either the ego's thought of separation or the memory of God's Love, symbolized by the Holy Spirit. In the same section he goes on to say: **"Reason will tell you that there is no middle ground where you can pause uncertainly, waiting to choose between the joy of Heaven and the misery of hell. Until you choose**

Heaven, you are in hell and misery" (7:7,8). We can at least agree that if there is a Heaven/God, this world is not it. If what is not Heaven/God is hell, it follows that this is hell. Moreover, if Heaven/God is true, this world/hell is not true. That is what we do not want to hear, because our greatest fear is that what we believe about ourselves (that we are bodies in the world) is not true. From this fear comes our resistance to accepting the Course's teaching, which takes the form of doubts about its veracity. On some level we know that *our* baby (specialness, the body, the world) will have to go out with the bath water. We cannot drag Heaven into hell, we cannot make the illusion true, and the separation cannot be real. These are all variations of the same theme: **"...truth is true"(T.14.II.2:1),** whether we believe it or not. It is this simplicity of the Course's teaching that we find hard to believe and to accept: **"...Nothing is so alien to you as the simple truth, and nothing are you less inclined to listen to. The contrast between what is true and what is not is perfectly apparent, yet you do not see it" (T.14.II.2:5,6).** Apparently Jesus thinks his message is true, so it may be a good idea for us to take his word for it. Ultimately the truth reflected in the Course will come to every mind in some form: **"There are many thousands of other forms, all with the same outcome" (M.1.4:2).** Jesus speaks his message to all of us: **"We speak today for everyone who walks this world, for he is not at home... The home he seeks can not be made by him. There is no substitute for Heaven" (W.pl.182.3:1,5,6).** Thus, it is the world, and the ego that made it, that is not true.

Q #695: This is about your answer to Question #465 regarding T.12.4. *A Course in Miracles* teaches us that the world is a reflection of your mind ("the outside picture of an inward condition" [T.21.in.1:51]), why would someone ask a highly enlightened being to do something outrageous? Does that mean that someone like Sai Baba could never be asked an outrageous question? Second, if my mind is free from guilt then how could someone even ask for something "outrageous." A guilt free mind wouldn't reflect guilt even in the form of a question. I thought that when you "get it" it won't even show up. That is why I find this to be contradictory of the teaching of love or fear, light or dark; if they are polarities then how could love and fear be present at the same time

A: First, Jesus is directing this teaching to unhealed minds, those that are still projecting guilt. A guilt-free mind, as you say, would never attack or *feel* attacked. Within the dream, a healed mind could be the object of an attack by someone else, as was the case with Jesus who perceived that others were attacking him, but did not himself *experience* it as an attack. It could be for a teaching purpose that a healed mind would choose to be in that kind of situation.

As an example of what Jesus is teaching, let us say that you *insist* that I go to the store to buy something you need. I immediately lash out at you and angrily refuse to go, saying, "That's outrageous! The nerve of you to insist that I go to the store for you. Go yourself, and quit bothering me!" Jesus is talking about that kind of extreme reaction to another person's request. If I had switched from my wrong mind to my right mind, I would not have judged your insistence that I go to the store for you as outrageous, and then attacked you in return, for I would have recognized what you were really asking for: to be saved from your self-hatred and fear of punishment by God for your "sin" of separating from Him. You were asking for love, and I would have responded with love to that request by my inner peace and non-opposition. The specific form that love would have taken would not be of concern to me; that is, I would do what you asked or not do it. There would have been no sense of being imposed on or deprived of my own needs. That is what Jesus means in saying **"no 'outrageous' requests can be made of one who recognizes what is valuable and wants to accept nothing else" (4:8).**

Jesus is helping us to become clear about **"the 'what' and the 'how' of salvation" (5:3).** Your *insistence* that I go to the store means that you believe your salvation lies in getting what you want. My forceful opposition would mean that I believe salvation lies in my *not* giving you what you want. That is the problem Jesus is identifying in this kind of interaction. I, as an unhealed mind, have simply forgotten that *my* salvation as well as yours lies in the power of our minds to choose against the ego and for the Holy Spirit's thought system of forgiveness.

Q #696: We host *A Course in Miracles* study group. Recently, someone approached me, imploring me to let them attend our Friday night group, and I agreed. One of the original members of the group was vehemently opposed to letting the new person in. This person cited the Holy Spirit as her guide and said she felt that it would ruin the intimacy of the current group. This is not the first time that the Holy Spirit has been used to defend a position and I remain confused. I am having a hard time forgiving this group member for insisting on this type of control, yet I am constantly reminded of my own control issues and feel frozen as to what to do. My search for help from the Holy Spirit keeps guiding me to confront this member of the group with honesty and compassion but I can't tell if I'm doing this so I can have my way. Can you offer guidance that can get my head on straight? I am open to your being the voice of the Holy Spirit for me since my ego is being particularly loud at this time.

A: Before you can get any kind of clarity about what would be the most kind, loving and helpful way to respond to this situation for everyone involved, it is helpful first to remember that whatever we experience as the outcome of any decision we make must be what we want. In the Course's own words, **"I choose the feelings I experience, and I decide upon the goal I would achieve. And everything that seems to happen to me I ask for, and receive as I have asked" (T.21.II.2:4,5).** And so if conflict is what we seem to be experiencing, it can only be that conflict is what we have chosen. And the seemingly external situation is never the cause of the conflict. The choice to see ourselves as separate from love is. The so-called problem in the world, no matter how holy or important the issues may seem, is only there to distract us from the underlying problem in the mind and to convince us that the external situation is what needs our attention. But so long as we keep the focus outside our mind, our ego will be the architect of the solution, regardless of how appropriate and kind the form of the intervention may seem. For we will not have addressed the guilt in our mind that is fueling the conflict.

Now this is not to say that the other group member's invocation of the Holy Spirit as the authority behind her opposition to your decision is justified. All of us are looking for a celestial ally to support our ego-based choices. But if you see yourself as the one who needs to offer correction to your brother or sister's ill-conceived opinions, you will have fallen into the ego's favorite trap of making the error real, preferably in someone else, as if there were truly something serious that needed fixing **(T.9.III.6)**. The inner work of releasing our own guilt by recognizing in our conflict our own call for help is all that we are ever responsible for. And it is only from that place of perfect honesty with ourselves that the Holy Spirit can help us see in our brother's or sister's conflict that same call for help **(T.12.I.6:10.11;7:1,2,3,4,5)**. But once we accept forgiveness for ourselves for desiring conflict and attack, the external problem will no longer seem like a serious concern, and a helpful solution at the level of form may present itself. Perhaps you will then say something to the group member, or perhaps you won't. But if you do say something, you will have no investment in being heard or in seeing the other person change, for that will no longer be your concern. You will recognize that your only function is to accept forgiveness for yourself so that, through that acceptance, you may be an instrument of forgiveness for others as well.

Q #697: I read your answers about the sex drive and special relationships. Although I understand the metaphysics of *A Course in Miracles*, I sometimes find the sex impulse is overwhelming and therefore I might in those vulnerable moments go to the extent of soliciting call girls despite my being married with kids. I try not to make things a big deal and that's how I have repeatedly committed the same mistake over again. I know what is right from wrong and in those dark moments I ask the Holy Spirit for help but I guess that I choose not to listen and do what I will. How do I wean myself out of this when I enjoy what I do -- the rush of adrenaline and the secret guilt The girls I treat with respect and dignity -- an oxymoron -- while they are being used as objects of pleasure in the last analysis. How do I apply the Course to this practical problem?

A: The world makes distinctions between socially acceptable and socially unacceptable forms of using others, classifying the latter as wrong, sinful or even criminal. And it allows us to think that guilt is only

associated with some forms of using others, but not other forms. The Course's purpose is to help us see that *all* ego-based decisions to meet our needs at the expense of others cause us pain and reinforce our guilt. If we could really get the connection between the thought of separation implicit in self-interest and the pain that follows, we would soon learn to choose against the ego. But we still believe that some of our ego choices bring us more pleasure than pain.

The ego wants us to think of our *actions and behavior* in such moralistic terms as right or wrong, good or bad, with guilt always accompanying our wrong, bad actions. Jesus is encouraging us instead to think of our *thoughts and decisions* as either helpful or hurtful, wise or foolish, with unnecessary pain rather than guilt as the consequence of foolish, hurtful choices (see Question #637 for an in-depth discussion of the Course's focus on thought rather than behavior).

So rather than thinking that you know what is right and what is wrong in the situation you describe, and that you keep doing the wrong thing, it would be more helpful to consider that you are simply making the more foolish, hurtful decision. But not just when you choose to solicit call girls, but whenever you decide to put your own needs above others, whether it be your family or anyone else. Now of course some actions run the risk of having greater negative consequences in the world's terms than others, which nicely plays into the ego's insistence that there is a hierarchy among illusions (**T.23.II.2:3; T.26.VII.6:5**). But all guilt is the same and it does not come from what we do with our bodies but only from what we think with our minds.

So seeking sexual satisfaction outside your marriage is not the cause of the guilt in your mind but an effect. And its purpose, which you keep hidden from yourself, is to distract you from recognizing where the real problem lies -- the choice to see yourself as separate from love. Yet this is the decision that leads all of us to believe that we need to seek for satisfaction outside ourselves, in stolen moments of pleasure which the ego seduces us into seeing as more pleasurable simply because they are stolen. And that foolish reasoning lies at the foundation of the ego's thought system, predicated as it is on the belief that the scraps of "love" we could steal from God are better than the complete and total Love He offers us freely (**T.1.V.3:3**).

You mention trying not to make your infidelities into a big deal, but the problem is, in your own mind, they already are. And the goal is not to be able to continue to engage in hurtful activities without making a big deal of them, but rather to come to a recognition that they are not really the problem and that to continue to feel guilty about the external actions guarantees that you'll never address the underlying, inner problem and see it differently. It is true that, as egos, we are all selfish and concerned about meeting our own needs at everyone else's expense. This is simply the nature of the ego thought system. But despite the selfishness that is at its roots, what Jesus is asking us to recognize is that it's not a sin, it's not evil. It may be foolish and hurtful and unkind, both to ourselves and to others in our life. But it is not a sin. It is our belief that it is sin rather than merely a mistake that keeps us caught in the repetition of any self-destructive pattern. Without the guilt we impose on our decisions, but rather with a thoughtful, nonjudgmental examination of what we've been choosing, seeing it only as error and not as sin, we will find it easier to make the choice for a different Teacher within our mind (**T.19.III.1,2,3**). And the most helpful and kind behavior will naturally follow.

You may find the discussion of compulsive sexual behavior in Question #598 and sexual fidelity in Question #417 of help as well.

Q #698: Please share your understanding of the following sentence from Lesson 133 in the workbook of *A Course in Miracles*: "If you feel any guilt about your choice, you have allowed the ego's goals to come between the real alternatives" (W.pl.133.11:2).

A: As decision-making minds we are always choosing only between what is real (therefore valuable) and nothingness (therefore valueless). If we choose to pursue the ego's goals (specialness, separation, individuality, sin, etc.), that choice will be expressed through our choices in our everyday lives. The choice for the ego gets denied and buried in our minds, and we then think we are making meaningful choices in the world. When we feel guilty about a choice, that is telling us we must have chosen the ego first, which means from that point on all we have been choosing between are different forms of nothingness -- what is valueless.

Q #699: David Hawkins has written of the calibration of the body impulses to their spirit or mind source. Jesus mentions that the ego and the spirit are unaware of each other and the body in nothing. How relative are the calibration levels regarding the spirit? I find his work very informative and it helps put the ego/mind/Self in line with the way Jesus explains truth in *A Course in Miracles*.

A: We do not comment on the work of other teachers, but we can address your question about the relationship among body, mind and spirit. The Course teaches that the mind is not contained in the body/brain. Spirit is real, the body is not (See: **T.6.IV.5**). As you mention, the body is nothing. However, while belief in the body's reality is maintained, it is used either by the ego or the Holy Spirit: **"The ego uses the body for attack, for pleasure and for pride... The Holy Spirit sees the body only as a means of communication" (T.6.V.A.5:3)**. We are told in the Course that our problem is that we have identified with the ego, and thereby with the body, and the correction is for us to learn to identify with the mind. This does not involve levels, but rather a simple choice between the thought system of the ego based on belief in the separation, or the thought system of the Holy Spirit based on the truth that separation from God is impossible. The choice is then communicated to other minds through the body, reinforcing belief in either the ego or the Holy Spirit. That is what is meant when Jesus tells us we are always teaching. There are no varying degrees in this teaching/communication. Either the ego or the Holy Spirit is chosen, and then communicated in some form. Both thoughts cannot be held in the mind at the same time. Thus the line you refer to: **"The ego and the spirit do not know each other" (T.4.VI.4:1)**. By recognizing the thoughts, judgments, and feelings that arise in our interactions and activities, we teach ourselves, as well as others, the choice we have made in our minds of which we are not aware. The mind thus communicates to itself through the body, which is the only useful purpose the body serves.

When the body is at the service of the Holy Spirit (by the choice made in the mind), it is not driven by the needs that arise from identification with the ego. We must remember, however, the fundamental Course teaching that action occurs only in the mind, where learning resides: **"...only the mind can create, ...correction belongs at the thought level" (T.2.V.1:7)**. Practicing the Course, therefore, involves focusing our attention on our thoughts and judgments, rather than body impulses.

When the mind chooses to believe in separation, the choice is defended by judgments and grievances. The inevitable negative effects of this choice (deep pain and misery) can then be used as further proof that the separation/body is real, or as an opportunity to see them for what they are (effects of a choice), so another choice can be made. By the same token, experiencing the deep peace and quiet that results from choosing the Holy Spirit strengthens identity with the His thought system, which heals the mind of the thought of separation. The body is then freed of ego driven impulses, although it need not be what we consider a "healthy" body. The content of the mind is unaffected by the physical condition of the body. When the mind's healing is our only goal, the body will serve the Holy Spirit's purpose no matter what form it takes: **"...it [the body] becomes a beautiful lesson in communion, which has value until communion is" (T.8.VII.3:4)**.

Q #700: I was introduced to *A Course in Miracles* two years ago and took a few sessions at a local center. At the time, I was working 60-70 hours a week and found it impossible to combine both. 2003 was

a bad year: I lost my job, my beloved pet, and my mother. My father fell apart; my resentment toward my sibling intensified dramatically; my depressions returned with vengeance. I tried to deal with everything the best I could. Needless to say, my best was not my best at all.

Yet my attachment to the Course is creating a financial dilemma. Since I lost my job, I've been basically living off my savings of which not much is left by now. I need to go back, but I am afraid that being a workaholic by nature, I will again get so involved with work, there will be very little room left for *A Course in Miracles*. I read your answer to Question #[169](#) several times. On an intellectual level I am beginning to get sparks of understanding about the shift from form to content; effect to cause. But on the practical level, I am in a limbo. I hope very much to get your answer and your guidance that would allow me to handle this situation as peacefully as I can.

A: There are a few more aspects of your situation that you might want to look to help break up the log jam. It seems that you have no choice regarding whether to work or not. If you need the money, then you have to go back to work if there is no other source of income in your life. But you can do it differently this time. Do you recall Jesus' helpful reminder in that lovely final chapter of the text, "**Choose Once Again**"?: "**Trials are but lessons that you failed to learn presented once again, so where you made a faulty choice before you now can make a better one, and thus escape all pain that what you chose before has brought to you**" (T.31.VIII.3.1,2). If in your wrong mind you were using work to keep you from the quiet peace that defines you in your right mind, you can now look upon your return to work as an opportunity to "**choose once again.**" You can decide that you will see your job primarily as a means of learning that you are as God created you, which means that you will look first at your conviction that you are *not* as God created you; that is, that you are "a workaholic by nature," a victim of your makeup, which your ego would tell you can't be helped -- it's just who you are! Jesus sees you differently and invites you to join him, confidently acknowledging with him that "**the images you make cannot prevail against what God Himself would have you be. Be never fearful of temptation, then, but see it as it is; another chance to choose again, and let Christ's strength prevail in every circumstance and every place you raised an image of yourself before. For what appears to hide the face of Christ is powerless before His majesty, and disappears before His holy sight**" (T.31.VIII.4.1,2,3). The idea would be to consider this not only for yourself, but for everyone else you associate with as well. In relating to others this way (in your mind, not verbally), you would be practicing forgiveness by seeing that we all share a common purpose.

In focusing on this new *content*, your job would no longer be an impediment to your learning the Course. It would be just the opposite. Many students think -- erroneously -- that they must be off in seclusion somewhere with nothing but the Course in front of them, or be with "Course-minded" friends and colleagues all the time in order to study and practice effectively. Nothing could be further from what Jesus intended his course to be. This course is best learned in the midst of our daily routines -- work, family, civic responsibilities, etc., for in those circumstances we, thankfully, are presented with innumerable opportunities to have reflected back to us what thought system we have chosen; if we are not aware of that, we have no basis for changing our minds. And in learning to forgive ourselves when we discover that three, six, or thirty-six hours have passed since we last thought of the lesson for the day, we are learning perhaps the most important lesson of all: that the tiny, mad idea had no effect: Jesus' love for us is not lessened one iota because we forgot all about him. If we truly, truly believe that, we will be saving thousands of years on our Atonement path, to use Jesus' perspective of time.

And if you could also practice raising yourself above the "battleground" (in your mind) -- all of the victim-victimizer situations and tragedies of 2003 -- and look back down on it through the eyes of forgiveness, which is what it means to join with Jesus or the Holy Spirit, you would recognize the ego's purpose in having your life be filled with that kind of pain. You would see yourself as a figure on that battleground, weak and battered, depressed and despairing -- exactly where the ego wants you to wind up, because then you are obsessed with your body, problems, and tragedies, and the love and peace of Jesus are nowhere in sight. But above the battleground (in your mind), you would be able to re-evaluate your acceptance of this ego purpose and know that another choice is available.

Finally, it may be helpful to you to work with a kind therapist who is skilled in dealing with addictions such as workaholicism. This compromise approach is actually recommended by Jesus to ensure that we will be gentle with ourselves and not deny our bodily and psychological needs as we do our inner work of learning and practicing forgiveness. (See **T.2.IV.3,4,5.**) Other students have had similar work-related concerns, which are voiced in Questions #74 and #246.

Q #701: I gave my special relationship -- a friendship -- over to the Holy Spirit a while ago, and have been dealing with problems as they have been developing as best I can according to *A Course in Miracles*. I recently discovered that my friend also has a severe problem with compulsive lying. This man was severely abused as a child, and I had felt, up until now, that given someone who would/could show him unconditional love, maybe he could come to know the Love of God, and learn that love and forgiveness really could exist for him. It seems that the more loving and forgiving I am to him, the worse he becomes and the more and harder he tests in order to make me go away and prove that the world and everyone in it is as horrible as he believes it to be. I'm beginning to feel that I have taken on a task that is beyond me, and that maybe I should leave the relationship all together. Does the Course have any suggestions as to how I might handle this predicament?

A: There is nothing in the Course that would tell you to leave the relationship or to stay. What it teaches is that before you make a decision you become aware of whether you are in a state of peace or conflict and whether you have any investment in either staying or leaving. It is true that your friend could be helped by recognizing and accepting unconditional love; that is true of all us, whatever our emotional/psychological state might be. But you can be most helpful by focusing on your own mind, which means, in part, letting go of any investment you might have in your friend accepting your help. Perhaps he is not ready to take this step right now -- there is no way of your knowing. Therefore, just set your ego aside as best you can for an instant and allow the love in your right mind to direct your thinking. It seems as if you have tried to do this; but it also seems as if you may have skipped some steps. Yes, compulsive lying is ultimately a "cry for help"; but that does not mean it should be tolerated. This reflects the Course distinction between form and content: the distinction between behavior and the content in the mind. Thus, as we have often said in our answers, being kind and forgiving (the content) does not preclude firmness and discipline: you can be loving and peaceful while at the same time holding firmly to standards of acceptable behavior. When you are in your right mind, having set aside your ego for an instant, you will automatically do what is most loving to you and your friend, even if that is not apparent at the moment.

Q #702: I feel like I want to make a difference in the world. Yet Jesus says: "Seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world" (T.21.in.1:7). I feel like I am making my career decisions based on being in others' lives in a meaningful way, and want not to be associated with those who are only out to "make money and don't give a damn about others." (My thoughts, i.e. judgments) I know that I have no way of knowing how I can help others or "the role that is best for me," as Jesus says but I cannot stop second-guessing the Holy Spirit. Can you comment on this?

A: The Course teaches that the only difference we need to make in the world is to allow our minds to be healed by the Holy Spirit through the process of forgiveness, which is what is meant by accepting the Atonement (See: **T.2.V.4,5; M.7.3; M.18.4**). Although this is ultimately good news, many times it seems it would be easier to change the world than to change our minds about it, or about *anything* for that matter. That is because, choosing to believe in separation and identifying with the body entails a strong attachment to specialness and to the ego's interpretation of everything in the world. That is why the Course asks that we question *everything*: **"To learn this course requires willingness to question every value that you hold"(T.24.in.2:1)**. This includes what we think are the needs of the world, along with the ways it could and should be changed. Since we do not know what else to do, we have the Course to tell us.,

We are asked to look at the judgments about careers, people's needs, those who don't give a damn, and those who do, and see in these judgments the opportunity to apply forgiveness as the Course teaches. That is the "career" of a student of the Course. Business is very good indeed, since we have numerous opportunities in our lives to forgive ourselves for our misperceptions. Whatever work or associations you choose can be given to the Holy Spirit to be used for the purpose of healing through forgiveness. In this way, your life and the world become a classroom for learning. This process involves recognizing how much we think we know what is best for ourselves, as well as for everyone else. In our identity as spirit the world is alien to us, and is the domain of the ego. We are very familiar with its dynamics. We are also very resourceful in identifying and solving its problems (or at least trying to). Everything we think we know is based on the ego's interpretation, and is the source of second guessing the Holy Spirit. For, as bad as it is, we do like being masters and mistresses of the universe. However, considering the disastrous results of following the ego's plan for the world, it seems reasonable to second guess the ego's decisions, as long as we're second guessing. It is worth our while and our little willingness to ask if the ego has ever given us what we truly sought, or even what it promised. In light of the painful effects of siding with the ego and being "right," Jesus poses some very helpful questions: **"Under the circumstances, would it not be more desirable to have been wrong, even apart from the fact that you were wrong? (T.13.IV.3:1), and "Do you prefer that you be right or happy?" (T.29.VII.1:9).** It may be helpful to keep these questions in mind when choosing whose guidance to follow in making any decisions.

Knowing our resistance to shifting from the familiarity of the ego's guidance to the Holy Spirit's, Jesus asks for just a **"little willingness" (T.18.IV).** Second guessing may be a good opportunity to remember that we do not know and, after putting forth our doubts, to ask the Holy Spirit to correct our mistaken perceptions about the world. Whatever doubts arise, or however many times we think we know what to do, we can simply return to the practice of forgiveness and remember Jesus' promise: **"All that is given you is for release; the sight, the vision and the inner Guide all lead you out of hell with those you love beside you, and the universe with them"(T.31.VII.7:7).** What more could there be to offer the world, when Jesus' love offers the rest?

Q #703: What is view of *A Course in Miracles* on black magic/voodoo? Specifically the belief that another can harm you through the use of black magic. Can another control or guide your thought to cause you physical harm?

A: Jesus tells us in the text: **"If you will recognize that all the attack you perceive is in your own mind and nowhere else, you will at last have placed its source, and where it begins it must end. For in this same place also lies salvation" (T.12.III.10:1,2).** This is the foundation of the Course's teaching on forgiveness and the answer to your question. No one can control or guide another's thought to cause harm to the body. The mind that chooses to believe either the ego or the Holy Spirit is the *only* source of our experience in the dream. When the mind chooses to identify with the body, it attacks itself. The attack is a denial of the true identity of God's Son as mind, and is therefore an attack on God. The inevitable guilt that follows this attack is projected on to the body. Identification with the body, which is alien to the mind's natural condition as spirit, is the real source of all pain, anxiety, and every form of suffering that the body experiences. The mind has filled the entire physical universe with weapons to defend the choice for separation, and convince itself that the body and the world are real. The arsenal includes both positive and negative external agents that have been given power over the body's physical condition, and seem to have the ability to give peace or take it away. When the mind chooses to identify with the ego rather than the Holy Spirit, the choice is expressed by an "agreement" with something (germs, viruses, car accidents), or someone (doctors, voodoo masters, politicians) in the world of form to be the seeming cause of all types of physical, emotional, or psychological distress. That is the ego's version of cause and effect, and is the magic principle as Jesus explains it in the Course: **"The body cannot create, and the belief that it can, a fundamental error, produces all physical symptoms. ...The whole distortion that made magic rests on the belief that there is a creative ability in matter which the mind cannot control" (T.2.IV.2:6,8).**

This means that neither black magic nor any negative experience can take our peace away, any more than a beautiful sunset can bring us peace. By the same token, when the mind chooses healing the choice may be reflected in the world through joining with a physician or other healer. The important thing to remember is that it is always the *mind* that chooses attack (the ego) or healing (the Holy Spirit).

Our learning begins with our willingness to recognize how much we believe in our identity as bodies and prefer the ego's reversal of cause and effect, which supports our need to perceive ourselves as unfairly treated victims, rather than minds with the power to choose. The body was made to be vulnerable to attack. It gets sick, ages, decays and eventually dies. None of this matters nor has any effect on the mind's true identity. One of the important goals in studying and practicing the principles of the Course in our lives is to learn to identify with the mind, rather than with the body. This learning is a process that takes time, and the willingness to bring everything in our lives, positive as well as negative, to the Holy Spirit to be transformed through forgiveness.

Q #704: We are a husband/wife team who began studying *A Course in Miracles* in 2004. If the Course is supposed to be based on universal principles and its goal is teaching we are all one, why is there so much Christian terminology -- words like *Easter, Christmas, crucifixion, Christ, Son of God* -- along with a Christian underpinning not recognizable to approximately two-thirds of the world? If the message is universal, why then is the language not universal? How will people around the world who have not been born into Christianity ever pick up the Course and "get it"? Is anyone working on a Course language that is universal in nature? How can we all unite as long as religious undertones continue to divide us? We wholeheartedly believe what is being taught by the methods of the Course, and we can see a *bigger* message within it: a message that impacts all races and peoples and religions. But how can that message be communicated through the language of the Judaeo-Christian biblical tradition?

A: Just about everyone who picks up the Course wonders about this. In fact, it is the topic of the very first question posted on this Service, and it is addressed most directly in the clarification of terms (the end of the manual for teachers) in the context of form and content: **"A universal theology is impossible, but a universal experience is not only possible but necessary. It is this experience towards which the course is directed" (C.in.2:5,6).** This universal experience is love, of course, and *A Course in Miracles* is but one form of regaining it. The form is not universal, nor was it meant to be: **"The form of the course varies greatly. So do the particular teaching aids involved. But the content of the course never changes. . . . It can be taught by actions or thoughts; in words or soundlessly, in any language or in no language; in any place or time or manner. . . . This is a manual for a special curriculum, intended for teachers of a special form of the universal course. There are many thousands of other forms, all with the same outcome" (M.1.3:2,3,4,6; 4:1,2).** Not very different from the ancient Hindu saying that truth is one, but sages know it by many names!

The intended audience for this special curriculum is the Western world that has developed under the strong influence of Christianity and 20th-century psychology, "an influence that has not been very Christian nor spiritual," as Kenneth and Gloria note in their book *The Most Commonly Asked Questions About "A Course in Miracles"* (Question #67). That accounts, in large measure, for the Christian and psychodynamic nature of the Course's language. To quote from another section in the clarification of terms: **"God knows what His Son needs before he asks. He is not at all concerned with form, but having given the content it is His Will that it be understood. That suffices. The form adapts itself to need; the content is unchanging, as eternal as its Creator" (C.3.3:2,3,4,5).** Thus, an important focus of the Course is clarifying and correcting the misunderstandings and distortions found in biblical religions and psychology. Interestingly, the masculine language in the Course was never an issue with Helen Schucman, the scribe of the Course. The sexist objection arose only after its publication, and our experience has been that this objection generally tends to fade for most students as they become more involved in the spiritual process of the Course's content. (See Kenneth's *Absence from Felicity*, p. 416, for a summary of this issue.)

Moreover, practically speaking, at this stage of human evolution (to stay within an ego framework) a universal language is impossible. Translations of the Course already exist in 11 languages, with many more in progress. Translators themselves have attested to the impossibility of a universal language -- just in working with the Course alone they have come across concepts for which there is no equivalent in their own language, and this has nothing to do with religion. The ego's ongoing intent is to supplant oneness and unity, replacing them with separation and conflict, the crowning principles being *one or the other* and *kill or be killed*. The unbridgeable gulfs in language and culture are but means to this pernicious ego end. The choice of God's Son to follow the ego's thought system of separation instead of the Holy Spirit's thought system of forgiveness is what led to the divisive symbols of religions. Religions therefore just give form to the ego -- *they* are not really the problem, for they but symbolize the ego dynamics in our minds that we continually reinforce and protect through defenses we no longer even recognize as such. The Course's emphasis therefore is on training us to get back to this level of decision in our minds, which we have blocked from our awareness. That is the only source of hope for ourselves and the world.

What all of this ultimately comes down to is that when *you* are completely one with your Identity as God created you (which could be for just an instant), you then represent the universal content of the Course, namely that **"God's Son is guiltless, and in his innocence is his salvation" (M.1.3:5)**. This content then can be communicated through you to a person from a completely different tradition, in a form that could be recognized and accepted by that person (although the form may not even be recognized by you). So the emphasis is always on *your* acceptance of the Atonement through the practice of forgiveness, for when your mind is healed, the perfect oneness of love is reflected through you, and you would know that *all* minds share in that healing, so there would be no concern for "spreading the word" -- that concern itself reinforces the belief that the separation is real and needs to be healed, a subtle ego trap. Love simply extends itself eternally, and the "how" is not our concern -- that takes all the pressure off us. It is not necessary for us to understand how the entire Sonship benefits from our tiny willingness to change the teacher in our mind from the ego to Jesus, thereby seeing only shared interests instead of separate, competing interests. Indeed, we *cannot* understand this if we are not in the holy instant beyond the body and beyond time and space. **"The Power of Holiness" (T.16.II)** is one section in the text that discusses these ideas.

Q #705: I am a sexually active gay male. I know that my sexual partners are all quite happy to encounter me. I thus feel that the sex is fine. I wonder if I should be thinking about whether my sexual activity is in line with the Holy Spirit and what *A Course in Miracles* has to say about it.

A: Sex, like anything else we do with the body, such as eating or drinking or breathing, is neutral in itself, as far as the Course is concerned (**W.pII.294**). The Course would only ever ask us to be aware of the purpose we are giving it (e.g., **T.17.VI.2:1,2**), which means being tuned into our thoughts about what we are doing and why.

Now it is likely that sexual relationships, no matter how circumscribed, are simply a form of special relationship, which, if both partners feel that their needs are being met, would be a special love relationship. So long as the special love relationships seem to be working, there will be no apparent problem and little motivation to examine the guilt that may be fueling any of the interactions. You may want to ask yourself whether you would be any less happy if your sexual outlets for some reason were not available to you. For the happiness that Jesus is inviting us to experience has nothing to do with meeting our personal needs. It is also likely that, at some level, the ego would be telling us that we are guilty for whatever pleasure we may be experiencing, because the hidden assumption is that whatever we have we have stolen from God. And so at an unconscious level there could be the belief that we deserve to be punished.

But there is certainly no need to go looking for problems where, in your experience, none currently exists. Usually, our lives present us with enough obvious opportunities to practice forgiveness without the need to uncover others. We can rest assured that, if any area of our lives is in need of healing, which simply

means that it is a symbol upon which we have projected our unconscious guilt, that need will become apparent when we are ready to look deeper.

Q #706: How can I overcome a feeling of growing incompetence in my work? All I want most of the time is to read *A Course in Miracles* and related works. I have been employed 22 years in my company and retire the end of this year. Am I just too tired of its "rewards" even though I am at its helm, an expatriate in a lively city outside of my country, paid handsomely? However, sometimes I have this ambivalence about leaving my work. I have chosen the Course as my path and I want to learn to forgive a lot of things, including the situation I am describing here with my work.

A: Ironically, spending time studying the Course can be used as a way to avoid dealing with our current classroom. Now it is not surprising that a part of us, when we find the Course, will want to devote as much time as we can to learning this new way of thinking and seeing, since we know at some level, if it is our path, that it offers an answer that can be found nowhere in the world. But nevertheless there is a danger that we will want to retreat into the comfort of its words in order to avoid applying its principles to the very real lessons of forgiveness our external lives may be presenting us. The ego, after all, is very clever, and it will always attempt to co-opt the Voice of the Holy Spirit for its own purpose of self-preservation (**T.4.V.1:6**).

So the key, as in all things, is awareness -- recognizing our thoughts and feelings and how they are serving the ego thought system, not attempting to change anything about the external situation to meet our own perception of our needs, but only allowing the light of nonjudgmental perception to shine upon these darkened recesses of our mind. Now it would not be unusual that, after more than two decades with the same company, you would be ready for something else. But it would be your ego that would have an investment in sabotaging your final days with the company so that your performance may be less than satisfactory. And it also would not be unexpected that you would have mixed feelings over an impending life change of such magnitude, since change has become fearful to the mind that feels guilt over the first change that seemed to be introduced when the thought of separation was taken seriously (**T.4.I.2:2,3,4**).

It is always helpful to remember that internal change is the only change that matters, and efforts to change the external situation are really only ego attempts to avoid first learning the lesson the situation is offering us, as an external projection of our internal guilt. But if we avoid the lesson being offered in the present moment, it will re-present itself to us again in the future, perhaps in a somewhat different form, but always with the same underlying content (**T.31.VIII.3:1**). So missed opportunities are never a cause for concern.

Q #707: My right-wing, born again, father imposed severe restrictions on me in my childhood, which left me bitter and resentful of the Christian God. I am open to God as advocated by the Tao, *A Course in Miracles*, or Eckart Tolle. However, I fear that I will burn in hell, as punishment from God, if I do not accept the Christian God and go to church. I also fear that since the Course teaches that separation from God is the cause of all my unhappiness, I must accept God as the Course teaches, and become a Christian. I am also angered by Christians like Bush and Blair whose ideas cause the poverty, teen pregnancy, etc. that they attribute to Satan. I find this very confusing, am I going crazy?

A: You are probably not going crazy. It is the ego's use of religion, belief in sin, and a punishing God, who sends people to burn in hell, that are insane. *A Course in Miracles* is the right place to look for correction of the sin, guilt and fear taught in fundamentalist Christianity. The foundation of Christianity is the belief in sin, which is atoned for only through the crucifixion and death of Jesus. Salvation then means accepting Jesus and the Bible, as taught by organized religion. Biblical teaching is based on the belief that the world and the body are not only real, they were made by God. These teachings are what make Christianity

and *A Course in Miracles* mutually exclusive. The Course teaches: "**God's Will for you is perfect happiness because *there is no sin*, and suffering is causeless**"(W.pl.101.6;1; italics ours), "**There is no hell**"(T.15.I.7:1), "**There is no world!**"(W.pl.132.6:2), "**The escape [from fear] is brought about by your acceptance of the Atonement, which enables you to realize that your errors never really occurred**"(T.2.I.4:4), "**Salvation is the recognition that the truth is true, and nothing else is true**" (W.p.I.151.3:1). Clearly these teachings put any fear of burning in hell to rest. They comprise the truth we are asked to recognize for salvation to be realized. Thus, salvation is not won by the suffering of the crucifixion, but by the simple acceptance of our innocence and our oneness with God, which has never been affected by the ego's thought of separation.

Although the Course's message is simple, it is not easy for us to accept, because our attachment to the belief in sin and guilt is strong, as is our belief that we are bodies living in the world. We do not easily let go of these beliefs. In fact, we put up fierce resistance. Lured by the "thrills" of specialness, we have chosen to believe the ego's lie of separation. It is *only this choice* that keeps us from the awareness of our oneness with God. And it is this choice that we see reflected in our relationships. Thus it is the practice of forgiveness in our relationships that is the means the Course teaches for undoing the belief in separation. We are asked to see our judgments and attack thoughts as the expression of our desire to be separate, different, special, and most of all, better than others. Guilt for choosing separation in the first place is compounded by our attacks on others, and then projected back out in still more judgment/attack, in a seemingly endless cycle. This is the source of all pain and misery in our lives. Healing the mind of the thought of separation begins when we seek the Holy Spirit's help in letting go of these judgments. [This applies to judgments about the government leaders (see: [Question #578](#)).] Through forgiveness guilt and fear are diminished, to disappear eventually, thus allowing the light of our innocence to replace the shadow of guilt that darkens our minds. Only this is required. In this process, the moments of peace we experience, not the fear of punishment in hell, become the motivation to continue on our path of forgiveness. Jesus tells us: "**This course requires almost nothing of you. It is impossible to imagine one that asks so little, or could offer more**" (T.20.VII.1:7,8). In the light of the rules, regulations, and prohibitions of many religious paths, this is indeed encouraging.

Q #708: Several days ago, I had an astonishing experience. I drove to a post office, dropped off a letter in the box outside and went inside where I bought stamps. When I left the building, I was suddenly struck by a realization that I had no memory whatsoever (and still don't) of my actions between exiting my car and entering the building. I did not remember locking my car, going to the box, dropping the letter in the box and heading for the door, all of which I must have done, because the letter was no longer in my hand and my car was locked when I returned.

I had a clear sense that NOTHING happened in a period of no more than 10 seconds, from the time I stepped out of my car till I opened the post office door. But something DID happen. What was it? I was not frightened by the experience. On the contrary, I felt a sense of tranquility. Did I make contact with nothingness? Was I influenced by all the reading I've done of late? Am I making much ado about nothing?

A: It's not possible to give a definitive answer to your "amnesiac" experience, just as it's rarely possible to be certain that any specific experience is right-minded. But if the experience were an expression of right-mindedness -- and since you describe your reaction as one of tranquility rather than fright, that certainly is possible -- we can consider what may have been going on for you.

Contrary to what seems to be our experience, the truth is that nothing is actually happening any of the time! It actually takes effort to see ourselves as bodies, doing things in the world. Our true natural state has nothing to do with bodies and the world. Yet for most of us, this realization is still too frightening. And so we continue to hold on to this bodily identification as a defense against the guilt in our minds and the love beneath that guilt, which is our true Identity.

In the section "**I Need Do Nothing**" in the text (T.18.VII) of *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus comments on the unreality of the body, as well as our resistance to allowing ourselves to experience anything else:

There is one thing that you have never done; you have not utterly forgotten the body. It has perhaps faded at times from your sight, but it has not yet completely disappeared. You are not asked to let this happen for more than an instant, yet it is in this instant that the miracle of Atonement happens. Afterwards you will see the body again, but never quite the same. And every instant that you spend without awareness of it gives you a different view of it when you return.

At no single instant does the body exist at all. It is always remembered or anticipated, but never experienced just *now*. Only its past and future make it seem real. Time controls it entirely, for sin is never wholly in the present. In any single instant the attraction of guilt would be experienced as pain and nothing else, and would be avoided. It has no attraction *now*. Its whole attraction is imaginary, and therefore must be thought of in the past or in the future (T.18.VII.2,3).

The experience you describe could recur, or it may not. But whether it does or not does not really matter. Any preoccupation with it could become a distraction from the Course's primary process of forgiving our special relationships, which is what undoes the guilt in the mind that we use identification with the body to defend against. If your experience has provided you with a glimpse of what lies ahead -- or perhaps beyond is the more accurate way to put it -- that can be helpful. The best thing is not to make a big deal of it but simply to accept it as a reminder that whenever we interpret anything that we perceive, we are certain to be wrong, for we have no idea what is real and what is illusion. And with that recognition can come the willingness to allow the Holy Spirit to be the Interpreter of whatever our eyes seem to behold.

Q #709: In *Absence From Felicity*, Jesus talks of taking on a human form to Helen. But if you look at the tenor of his argument that may not be really so, and it may have well been Helen's fearful state of mind as Kenneth states. After all the body is an illusion and the resurrected mind recognizes an illusion as an illusion. I should think that Jesus' resurrection meant that his body identity disappeared and hence the physical body, as we also (apostles too) recognized it, disappeared from his mind. To have recognized Jesus after the crucifixion and death of his body, we need to be in an equally enlightened mind-frame to behold him lovingly in a state of vision. His body miraculously disappeared from the tomb due to this paradigm shift. But the resurrection meant that we discern him at another level. Please comment.

A: In Chapter 17 of *Absence From Felicity*, Kenneth discusses the illusion and the reality of both Helen and Jesus. *All* form is illusory and therefore ultimately meaningless, its value lying solely in our (the mind that believes it is separate from God's Mind) use of it to get to the content beyond the form, just as symbols are useful only in pointing us to what they symbolize -- their source. Only the abstract, formless Love of God is real. Within the dream, however, this abstract, formless Love is reflected in the split mind in a form that can be recognized and accepted by that mind. Thus, in Helen's mind, this Love took the *form* of Jesus giving his course to her. *In reality*, there is no Jesus or Helen. Again, Chapter 17 discusses these levels, which are quite difficult for us to grasp.

In *A Course in Miracles*, *resurrection* is not defined in relation to the crucifixion; it is entirely different in meaning from the traditional biblical view, in which a dead body is resurrected. *Resurrection* in the Course pertains only to awakening from the dream of separation from God: **"the awakening from the dream of death; the total change in mind that transcends the ego and its perceptions of the world, the body, and death, allowing us to identify completely with our true Self. . ."** (*Glossary-Index*, p. 176; see also M.28.1:1,2). In view of the Course's definition of the body as simply a projection of a thought within the mind, this awakening can occur *only* in the mind. Thus, **"given Jesus' perfectly egoless reactions at the end of his life (see T.6.I), it would be safe to conclude that his resurrection preceded the crucifixion. It is that healing of the mind, therefore, that he asks us to take as our model for learning (T.6.in.2:1; T.6.I.3:6; 7:2), and forgiveness is his great teaching message that brings about the mind-reversal that alone can heal"** (from our *Christian Psychology in "A Course in Miracles,"*

pp. 74,75). This is why Jesus implores us, **"Teach not that I died in vain. Teach rather that I did not die by demonstrating that I live in you"** (T.11.VI.7:3,4).

The meaning and significance of Jesus' life as presented in the Course is radically different from that of the Bible, and its metaphysics is radically different as well (there is no world created by God, for example). It is essential that these irreconcilable differences be recognized if one is to understand and then be able to put into practice the teaching in *A Course in Miracles*. You may be interested in consulting the dialogue between Kenneth and a Catholic priest, which brings these differences clearly into the light (**"A Course in Miracles" and Christianity: A Dialogue**).

There also are several other Questions on our Service that discuss these important issues; see for example numbers: [1](#), [97](#), [439](#), and [505](#).

Q #710: Can the following be said to be true: that it is God we desire or a substitute for Him; that everything we desire (in persons, places, things, events, situations, activities) falls into either one of these two categories; one is true; the other an illusion; one leads to liberty; the other to suffering. Also, that all our doubts and fears all boil down to being those about God, ultimately.

A: Yes, it is true. The unique contribution of *A Course in Miracles*, however, is that it does not advocate avoiding or renouncing the substitutes for God -- much less calling them sinful -- even when we become aware that that is what we are involved in. Thus, there are two levels of discourse in the Course. On Level One we find statements of absolute truth, such as your first statement. On Level Two we find statements and discussion about living in this world (though illusory) in such a way that we would gradually accept its illusory nature, as well as the illusory nature of our identities as separate individuals. **"The body was not made by love. Yet love does not condemn it and can use it lovingly, respecting what the Son of God has made and using it to save him from illusions"** (T.18.VI.4:8).

Thus, on this second level, the Course addresses the decision-making mind outside time and space that chooses between the wrong-minded and right-minded *use* of the world and our bodily identities. When we accept the Holy Spirit's *purpose* (forgiveness) for our lives, we gently grow into the ideal of always being peaceful no matter what is going on in our personal worlds or the world at large. That is the meaning of *liberty* in the Course -- being freed of the ego's tyrannical domination of our *thinking*, which is the source of all suffering and fear. All of our fears and doubts about our lives in the world are shadows of what is really going on in our minds, as the world is but **"the outside picture of an inward condition"** (T.21.in.1:5; T.25.VIII.12:3). The process of attaining liberty, therefore, is the transition from wrong-mindedness to right-mindedness, and finally to the restoration of the One-mindedness that is our natural state.

The section in the text called **"Beyond All Idols"** (T.30.III) is a lovely reflection on this theme.

Q #711: Recently I had lunch with a friend and found that after we had talked about issues that were bothering us (which led to talking about other people we knew) I began to feel very sick. I knew we had begun gossiping and I just felt ill. If I have harmed someone by gossiping how do I make up for it? When I was growing up I had a cousin I adored, but she apparently didn't adore me or so the gossip in the family went. In recent years I have tried very hard to heal with her, and a couple of months ago I went to visit her for 10 days but before I went to her home I said some things to another relative. I now have the feeling that she has been told what I said (or a modified version of it) and I can tell you she might be very hurt by it. Could you address the issue of gossiping and would stopping gossiping be my way of forgiving myself, or what do I have to do to make up for this. I am very serious about seeing this differently.

A: *A Course in Miracles* teaches that the only thing that can have any seeming effect on anyone is a choice made in the mind to identify with the ego/body. That is the only "harmful" thing that anyone can do to *themselves*. In the light of this teaching, it is impossible for anyone to do harm to someone else. Although it may seem that someone's hurtful behavior is the cause of another person's upset, the Course tells us the true source of any feeling is a choice in the mind. Finding yourself feeling sick after gossiping about others is the result of a choice in the mind to identify with the ego, which is a choice for separation. It is this that elicits profound feelings of guilt, which are then experienced in the world in a situation such as the one you describe. There seems to be an association related to the behavior of gossiping, but in fact the sickness is an expression in form of the guilt in the mind. It is the content of the mind that is the focus of the Course. What we are asked to see differently is this distinction between the seeming cause of feelings in a situation in form, and the real cause which is the content of the mind. This is a very important distinction to keep in mind as we train our minds to become aware of the judgments and attack thoughts that we experience in our relationships. This applies equally to your experience as a child, as to the recent incident of gossiping with your friend.

The Course does not teach anything about changing behavior or the need to make amends. We are asked only to look at our judgments, recognizing in them the choice to be separate from others, which reflects the choice to be separate from God. When you find yourself gossiping, you may stop to remember it is coming from a mistaken choice in your mind to identify with the ego by choosing separation. This places the origin of the situation in the right place (your mind), rather than on your behavior (the effect) or the behavior of those you are judging, and this is the beginning of the forgiveness process. We **"forgive the Son of God [anyone] for what he did not do" (T.17.III.1:5)** by recognizing that the true cause of sickness/gossiping is the mind's choice for separation, without blaming past events or others. This would be the Course's version of "making up." It is also the only way to heal the real sickness that resides in the split mind that has chosen separation. All that is required is willingness to release our judgments. Even being willing to see how we want to hold on to them is a step in the right direction, because at least we won't be blaming others for our sickness, distress, or misery. The important thing is to be vigilant in looking for the thoughts and judgments that reveal the mind's choice for separation. When the cause is returned to the mind, judgment can be given to the Holy Spirit to be transformed. Under His guidance, any behavior will then change accordingly, without any effort or control on our part. In this regard Jesus tells us in the text: **"When you are willing to accept sole responsibility for the ego's existence you will have laid aside all anger and all attack, because they come from an attempt to project responsibility for your own errors. But having accepted the errors as yours, do not keep them. Give them over quickly to the Holy Spirit to be undone completely, so that all their effects will vanish from your mind and from the Sonship as a whole" (T.7.VIII.5:4,5,6).** Thus, projection is replaced with the recognition that the mind is the true cause of all feelings, behavior, and judgment and ultimately the need to gossip **"will vanish from your mind."**

Q #712: What is to give Love?

A: To answer your question we must first understand that the love we speak of in the world is what *A Course in Miracles* calls "special love." This "love" is the ego's **"shabby substitute" (T.16.IV.8:4)** for God's Love, which was denied when the mind chose separation. In contrast to the Father's Love, it is limited to certain people, changes, and is replete with expectations based on mutual bargains designed to meet individual needs. Special love is the key ingredient of **"...the special relationship [which] is the renunciation of the Love of God, and the attempt to secure for the self the specialness that He denied" (T.16.IV.4:2).** Clarity about the nature of special love is important because it is so familiar to us, and so easily confused with the love that Jesus speaks of in the Course. This ego version of love is as different from God's Love as truth is from illusion. In the choice to be separate and special we have forgotten Love. This is the sad and painful condition of the separated.

However, our hope, along with the more direct answer to your question, can be found in Jesus' comforting words in the text: **"Love is not special. If you single out part of the Sonship for your love,**

you are imposing guilt on all your relationships and making them unreal. You can love only as God loves. Seek not to love unlike Him, for there is no love apart from His. Until you recognize that this is true, you will have no idea what love is like" (T.13.X.11:2,3,4,5,6). This passage may not seem comforting at first, but it tells us several significant things: special love is not love, we do not know what love is, and it is possible to love **"as God loves."** Here we also find the instructions we need to move from special love to God's Love: we must *accept* that we do not know what love is, and we must *recognize* that there is no Love but God's. These truths seem simple enough. However, we are firmly convinced that we do know what love is, and we are deeply attached to the ego's substitute for love. These are very effective defenses of our decision to identify with the body. And, to the extent that we identify with our bodies, we withdraw from Love, thereby denying it to ourselves and to others. Bodies do not love; in fact, they do nothing: **"It [the body] does nothing... It is nothing" (T.19.IV.C.5:3,5).** If we desire Love then, our concern must be focused on the process of undoing our belief in our ego/body identity. This is accomplished through forgiveness, which we may say is how we love in the dream. The Course does not ask that we give love, for to do so implies that someone who has it gives it to someone who does not. Rather, the Course teaches that the process of forgiveness leads to the removal of **"the blocks to the awareness of love's presence"(T.in.1:7),** and then: **"Love extends outward simply because it cannot be contained" (T.7.I.3:4).** In other words, when the obstacles of guilt and fear are removed, the reflection of God's Love that remains in our minds is free to extend without any effort on our part. The only active participation that is required is that we diligently apply ourselves to the practice of forgiveness in our relationships. That is what transforms the special love of a special relationship to a holy relationship, and brings us closer to Love's presence in our minds. In this process, the purpose the mind gives to a relationship changes from the ego's goal of making the separation/bodies real to the Holy Spirit's goal of healing the mind of the thought of separation.

A *Course in Miracles'* version of a well known biblical passage would read "greater love than this no one has, than to forgive his brother for what he did not do" (**See:T.17.III.1**). This reflects one of the most important teachings of the Course; i.e., no one outside of us is responsible for the choice we made to be separate, or for the misery we experience as a result. Learning this restores the power of our minds to our awareness, so we will be free to make the choice for real love: **"Beyond the poor attraction of the special love relationship, and always obscured by it, is the powerful attraction of the Father for His Son. There is no other love that can satisfy you, because there is no other love. This is the only love that is fully given and fully returned" (T.15.VII.1:1,2,3).**

Q #713: I checked the other two Q's & A's on the decision maker and hope I can still get some more feedback. It would seem that it would have to have some connection to the Holy Spirit in order to choose forgiveness for example, which is choosing "against" the ego. Would it be equivalent to awareness of both ego and the Holy Spirit? Is it neutral and if so is there any truly neutral thing? When attention is on this awareness and the impulse is to see my brother's innocence why would this not be the Holy Spirit mediating in the dream with its answer of forgiveness? For example "who" is reading *A Course in Miracles* for help in remembering freedom is my natural condition? Is this the I of Self enquiry that Ramana Maharshi teaches one to ask "who am I" and continue to allow one's attention to go deeper and deeper into that awareness knowing the answer is ultimately enlightenment? Is cracking this mystery the big One that gives us our ultimate release? Please help.!

A: First, the term *decision maker* does not appear in the Course except for one occurrence in the manual, where it is used in a different context (**M.5.II.1:7**). But it is clear throughout the Course that Jesus is talking about a capacity of the mind that is outside time and space to choose between the ego and the Holy Spirit -- depicted in various ways: e.g., crucifixion and resurrection, murder and love, guilt and innocence, separation and Atonement. It can identify with either thought system, but it is never *not* identifying with one or the other. In that sense it is never neutral. It can be thought of thus as a third part of the mind, which is the point of Jesus' asking us to consider: **"Who is the 'you' who are living in this world?" (T.4.II.11:8).** The "you" that is "reading *A Course in Miracles* for help in remembering freedom is my natural condition" is the decision maker that has chosen to identify with

the *content* of its right mind in the *form* of being a student of the Course. The Holy Spirit can be thought of in this context as the *memory* in our minds of our true Self. The impulse to forgive, then, is a reflection of our choice to remember our true Identity by denying our denial of It. The Holy Spirit is a Mediator, but only in the symbolic sense of representing in our minds the Love we chose to reject but that remains unaffected by our choice and always inviting us to rejoin our oneness with It.

There are two important points to keep in mind in any discussion of this nature: *First*, we are talking about symbols—essentially a mythological characterization of a process that occurred (not in truth of course) *before* there ever was a human intellect or brain (the effects of our wish to be who we are *not*), and therefore our attempts to fit the concept into human intellectual categories, while helpful to some extent, can never be successful. Moreover, because the separation is unreal, we are describing something inherently illusory. *Second*, the core of the ego's strategy is to suppress this awareness of ourselves as minds outside time and space and keep us convinced that we are limited physical entities instead. This is important because it means that our efforts to gain a precise understanding of this decision-making capacity will fall short to the extent to which we are still identified with the ego -- we would be fighting against ourselves. The focus of our work with the Course, therefore, should be on undoing this identification. That is the Course's path, in contrast to other paths. Understanding takes us part way on our journey, but it is not the goal of our work -- there is no "mystery to be cracked" in this sense.

In view of what has been said thus far, it would seem that there are differences between the Self described by Ramana Maharshi and the Course's notion of the decision maker, though there are some similarities insofar as the decision maker is also an "observer." We all will wind up in the same place, we can rest assured, but the spiritual roadmaps are different, which does not make one superior to the other. The lessons in the first part of the workbook begin the process of restoring our awareness of ourselves as decision-making minds, but recovering that awareness is not enlightenment from the Course's point of view. We need to reach that level of self-awareness so that we can recognize *that* we are always choosing, *what* we are choosing, and *why* we are choosing it. Stated briefly, the goal of this process is that we would see clearly that we are ultimately choosing insanity, *why* we are choosing it, and that there is an Alternative for us to choose. As our trust in Jesus develops, we would have little difficulty choosing against insanity: **"Who with the Love of God upholding him would find the choice of miracles or murder hard to make?" (T.23.IV.9:8)**. When that choice is made once and for all -- i.e., there is no returning to the ego -- the decision-making capacity is no longer needed, and our mind is restored to its natural state of One-mindedness. This is the Self that is beyond individuality and perception -- not understandable to us who are still identified with specifics.

Q #714: I have asked this before in a different form but my forgiveness path seems to be a little different from others'. Most of the time we have a problem of guilt and then we realize that the wrath we directed at ourselves was wrong-minded. But I also find that I tend to over-idealize others' abilities and good intentions and then when I forgive I see their true motives at times. Can you comment on this?

A: This is the flip side of being overly critical and only seeing flaws in others. There is a middle ground of acknowledging that we all have a wrong mind, a right mind, and the capacity to choose between them, and that until our minds are healed, we will be motivated by the ego most of the time. This means that we are all looking out for our own interests so that we can protect our specialness and get what we want. The process of forgiveness involves first recognizing hatred, greed, selfishness, etc., not denying it or trying to pretty it up. Then, by not judging these ego manifestations, you will be less and less personally affected by them and finally able to see beyond them to the love they hide.

Idealizing people's abilities and good intentions is a form of special love: you see these people as different and fulfilling a specific need of yours. But special love always covers hatred, which is why you would then tend to see their ego traits when you have a right-minded moment. In that state of mind you no longer are compelled to see others as you (your ego) need them to be. You therefore would be more

objective in seeing what is there -- both the wrong and right minds. And there would be no fear of looking at the darkness in your own mind or in others.

Q #715: I can't quite comprehend how Jesus talks to us on a seemingly individual level but we're all considered one and illusory. If I'm stepping back and watching my ego do its thing and everybody else is doing the same thing, how does it all tie together at the decision maker. How does this all tie together into oneness? I realize that we are all illusory, that everything germinates from the decision maker and everything from that point is not real. But I just can't seem to put it together. I understand that Jesus is really talking to the decision maker when it sounds like he's talking to us on an individual level. What if I'm going through the right process but somebody else isn't? What's happening here?

A: There is a point over which you seem to be confusing yourself -- believing that there is only a single decision maker making decisions for all the seemingly separate individuals with which we each identify. At one level, this is true, but at a practical level it is not particularly helpful, and leads to the kind of muddle you describe finding yourself in. It is more helpful, and more in line with our personal experience, to think of each of us as having our own individual decision maker, which really means we each can choose between the ego and the Holy Spirit, independent of what anyone else may be choosing. In the beginning, when the Son first seemed to fall asleep and dream a dream of separation, there was only one illusory sleeping mind, which had a choice between going deeper into the dream and awakening. When the Son chose to go deeper into the dream, as part of his defense against awakening, the one mind seemed to fragment into billions and billions of separate, individual minds. But each fragment is holographic, that is, it contains exactly what the single, illusory mind contained before the fragmentation -- the right mind (the Holy Spirit), the wrong mind (the ego) and the power to choose between them (the decision maker).

In *A Course in Miracles*, when we speak of Jesus as talking to the decision maker, we mean that he is addressing our individual decision maker, in the mind, and not the individual physical self we each believe we are here in the world. In other words, the distinction being made about who/ what Jesus is addressing is not between individuality and oneness, but between the body and the mind. Forgiveness, although a reflection of the oneness of Heaven, is experienced in the mind at an individual level, while we still believe we are separate from each other.

It is only when I have completely accepted the Atonement for myself and, as an individual decision maker, made my final choice against the ego and for the Holy Spirit, that I identify completely with the oneness that the Holy Spirit represents in the right mind and no longer identify with the individuality that the ego represents in the wrong mind. And with that final choice, the wrong mind disappears, there is no longer anything to choose between, and so the decision maker vanishes as well.

We've addressed variations of your question in Questions [#165](#) and [#277](#), which you may find helpful to review, for a more indepth discussion of how to move between notions of unity and multiplicity.

Q #716: I am going to have surgery on my shoulder in a month. I have been dealing with this situation for about a year, and am now finally facing the facts. I kept hoping for a different outcome and put off even finding out about the true nature of the problem. I kept trying to hold Jesus' hand, but I actually kept buying into the ego's plans. Because I am in pain I don't know how to get out of it. I remember hearing on a tape or reading here that you should just use the magic it takes to heal your condition so you can get on with studying *A Course in Miracles*. I read in the teacher's manual: (pg. 17) "Who would choose suffering unless he thought it brought him something, and something of value to him. ... For sickness is an election; a decision. It is the choice of weakness in the mistaken conviction that it is strength." After pondering this really seriously I have come to believe that I have used this as an excuse to "not do" lots of things I had

been doing for years, such as weekly aerobics classes -- I started walking every day instead. I guess it is a martyr's complex. I have told people about my condition at various times for a year now, until now they just ask, "How are your shoulders?" So I see what I have done, but that hasn't taken the pain away. Can you please comment?

A: It looks like you've identified some of the secondary gains that you're reaping from your condition. That's always very helpful to see, for it unmasks the ego's true intentions a little more clearly so we can begin to see what it is up to. And there is a gain -- "something of value" -- at a deeper level, to which the section you quote from is also alluding (**M.5.I,II**). As you can begin to get in touch with that hidden value, you will understand why there is such resistance to letting go of the pain.

But the fact that you're willing to seek help outside yourself on the level of the body through the surgery can be seen as a reflection of your willingness to acknowledge that you can not resolve this on your own, as the ego would like you to believe you can. And that belief -- that we can be and act on our own -- is actually the cause of the pain. Sometimes, as you've discovered, we think we are asking for help from Jesus with our pain, when we are actually using our asking as a cover for our own fear of looking at what we believe is buried in our minds -- the horrible guilt and pain over separation.

The primary but unconscious "value" of sickness and disability is that they place responsibility for our pain outside the mind, in the body, as a victim of forces in the world beyond its control. And this apparent relationship denies that our pain has anything to do with a choice we have made in our minds to see ourselves as separate from God and His Love. In other words, bodily sickness protects our concept of ourselves as individuals, trying to cope with a world that exists independent of us. And the resistance to recognizing that all our pain comes from our own decision, that we have made this all up, is "enormous" (**M.5.II.1:7**), for it threatens the existence of both the world and the self we think we are.

Accepting responsibility at the level of mind for all of our experience (**T.21.II.2**) is not something that most of us can simply do all at once, once we have an intellectual understanding of what we are doing. Because the resistance is so great, it is likely for most of us to be a process -- of practicing forgiveness, releasing the judgments we are holding against ourselves and others -- that will seem to take time.

In the meantime, congratulate yourself for taking the next step and acknowledging your pain and recognizing that you can not resolve the condition by yourself. Allowing yourself to join with the medical professionals who are there to help you address the pain in your shoulder can be a symbol of your willingness to join with the all-encompassing love in the mind that removes all pain and guilt and experience of separation.

Q #717: What does one do when a loved one is behaving very self destructively, and possibly endangering other loved ones? I want to "let go and let God," but feel a desperate need to do something to stop this situation. There are legal proceedings I can and am considering taking. When I read *A Course in Miracles*, it seems to say one should just apply the principle of loving the other and not react negatively. Should I do what is necessary but focus on the love rather than the anger, anxiety, despair etc. that I can so easily slip into? This is so hard to deal with.

A: Your dilemma is understandable. It is very painful to see a loved one in conflict and endangering others. The Course does not ask us *not* to do whatever we can to stop someone from hurting himself / herself, or hurting others. It is certainly possible to practice forgiveness as the Course teaches while initiating legal proceedings, if that is what you think you should do. Since the foundation of the world is the belief in the ego's thought system of attack and counter-attack, everything and everyone in it engage in destructive behavior to some degree. That is the inevitable expression of the separated son's desperate call for help. What we are asked to do is look at any judgments we may have toward the person, seeing in them the projection of our own desperate call for help. Once we recognize how our fears are mirrored in

the other person, we have the opportunity to forgive ourselves, asking the Holy Spirit to replace our judgments against ourselves and our brother with His. This process establishes that whatever we do or don't do with regard to another's behavior will be guided by the Holy Spirit rather than by the ego. Filing legal suits is an appropriate course of action in certain circumstances, it does not mean, however, that the other party is a guilty sinner, worthy of God's punishment, as the ego would have us believe. The choice, therefore, is not what course of action to pursue, but whose counsel we seek: the ego's or the Holy Spirit's. In this light we may paraphrase the oft quoted line from the text: **"seek not to change your brother, but choose to change your mind about your brother" (T.in.1:7).**

The anger, anxiety, and despair that you feel are normal. Jesus tells us kindly in "Rules for Decision": **"Do not fight yourself" (T.30.I.1:7)**, which means not denying your feelings, nor judging yourself for having them. Though their cause seems to be the conflicted relationship, they are in truth the result of the mind's choice to believe that separation from God has been accomplished and love has been destroyed. Acknowledging them, with willingness to recognize their true source in the mind, is the beginning of the forgiveness process, and thus **"A light has entered the darkness" (M.1.1:4)**. It may be a tiny spark, but it is enough to redirect the mind toward the Holy Spirit and away from the ego. This same spark is present in everyone's mind. At the same time that we recognize the power of our own minds to choose, we strengthen our belief in it in others. The healing power of forgiveness is thus communicated to all the loved ones concerned, whether or not it is recognized. It is **"... the light that brings your peace of mind to other minds" (W.pl.108.3:2)**. This the kindest thing you can do for yourself *and* for your loved one, whatever else you feel you must do in form to appease the situation.

Q #718: The answer to Question [#459](#) stated: "Our so-called lives as individuals do not have a divine origin or destiny, and, worst of all, have no reality." How then can the Course have anything to say to me as its reader, when I am but an illusion, since there is *no* communication between an illusion and the truth? Why would the Course try to call back to Heaven *an illusion*? Is it a lie that the Course often calls us, in my opinion you and me, Sons of God (27 times)?

A: A commonly expressed concern, and among the most challenging dimensions of the theory of *A Course in Miracles*. What helps is discerning that the Course is written on two levels. The first presents statements of absolute truth that affirm its uncompromising non-dualism. The second is the level that addresses us as though we were real -- contrasting the wrong-minded and right-minded ways of living in this illusory world with an illusory identity, so that we could begin the process of restoring to our awareness the truth of the Atonement; namely, that the separation from God never truly happened, and we remain as God created us, His one Son. Thus, while in reality there is only one Son, we experience ourselves as individuals, and therefore Jesus sometimes uses the term *Son* and sometimes the terms *Sons*. We get a good sense of this in the summary in Part II of the workbook called **"What Is Creation?"**: **"We are creation; we the Sons of God. We seem to be discrete, and unaware of our eternal unity with Him. Yet back of all our doubts, past all our fears, there still is certainty. For love remains with all its Thoughts, its sureness being theirs. God's memory is in our holy minds, which know their oneness and their unity with their Creator. Let our function be only to let this memory return, only to let God's Will be done on earth, only to be restored to sanity, and to be but as God created us" (W.pll.11.4).**

We are thus taught that we took with us into the dream of separation the memory of our true Identity as one with our Source, and our return to this memory is the objective of all Jesus' teaching in his course, as for example, in this passage from the text: **"Father and Son and Holy Spirit are as One, as all your brothers join as one in truth. Christ and His Father never have been separate, and Christ abides within your understanding, in the part of you that shares His Father's Will. The Holy Spirit links the other part -- the tiny, mad desire to be separate, different and special -- to the Christ, to make the oneness clear to what is really one. In this world this is not understood, but can be taught" (T.25.I.5:3,4,5,6).**

Thus, Jesus uses our "tiny, mad" belief that we are real as individuals to teach us that we are not (W.pl.93.5). He asks us to acknowledge: "***I do not know the thing I am, and therefore do not know what I am doing, where I am, or how to look upon the world or on myself***"; but as fearful as these admissions may be, "***Yet in this learning is salvation born. And What you are will tell you of Itself***" (T.31.V.17.7,8,9). There is no judgment or condemnation in this -- only the relief of letting go of a false identity so that the memory of our true Self can dawn upon our healed minds. "***Let me not forget myself is nothing, but my Self is all***" (W.pl.358.1:7).

Questions #3, #72, #85, and #116 have additional pertinent commentary, and our Web site also provides a full explanation and diagrams of the two levels of the Course's discourse: [click here](#) to visit that page. This topic is addressed as well in Question #9 in our book *The Most Commonly Asked Questions About A Course in Miracles*.

Q #719: In Workbook Lesson 136 of *A Course in Miracles*, what does the phrase "make plans against uncertainties to come" (19:2) mean? It sounds as if you shouldn't even plan a trip in case you can't get the time off.

A: The message this lesson teaches rests on two of the Course's principles regarding the body. The first is that the body itself is nothing: "***The body no more dies than it can feel. It does nothing. Of itself it is neither corruptible nor incorruptible. It is nothing***" (T.19.IV.C.i.5:2,3, 4,5). And secondly: "***... apart from the mind the body has no purpose at all***" (T.8.VII.13:6). It is the mind that chooses whether the body is used for the ego's purpose or the Holy Spirit's. A choice to identify with the ego places the body under its laws of sickness and death. The body then becomes vulnerable to attack, serving as a projection of the guilt in the mind that results from choosing the ego. It is this identification with the ego that is the drive behind all our bodily concerns. It is why we exhaust ourselves caring for the body, ensuring its safety and protection in countless ways by *planning*. The goal of this lesson, as with the entire Course, is to teach us that we are not bodies, but minds with the power to choose. When the mind chooses to identify with the body, it then directs the body to become sick, and eventually to die, as proof that the body does in fact exist and that the mind is subject to its laws, instead of the other way around. This insane reversal of cause and effect is the ego's strategy to prove that truth can be obliterated, and that "***...the body is more powerful than everlasting life, Heaven more frail than hell, and God's design for the salvation of His Son opposed by a decision stronger than His Will***" (W.pl.136.9:2). Because this belief denies everything that is true, it results in our feeling weak and vulnerable in spite of any display of imagined strength. Fearful that we will be annihilated by forces beyond our control (ultimately God), we unceasingly plan and strategize to protect ourselves. This is what the lesson refers to. It does not mean that we should not make plans in our lives, but that we recognize the ego's belief system at work in the thoughts that motivate our restless seeking, and our desperate need for protection.

In the previous lesson, Jesus tells us "***A healed mind does not plan*** [italics ours]. ***It carries out the plans that it receives through listening to wisdom that is not its own.*** (W.pl.135.11:1). Because the healed mind no longer identifies with the body, it no longer perceives itself as vulnerable and therefore needs no defense nor protection. Fully identified with the part of the mind that remembers the truth of who we are, it is free to be guided, rather than driven to plan. That is the goal we seek. Meanwhile, we continue to make all the plans we feel we must, looking clearly and without judgment at how much we believe in our identities as bodies and our need to plan. We might do as Jesus suggests in the previous lesson: "***... pause to ask, as you elaborate your plans and make your armor thicker and your locks more tight, what you defend, and how, and against what***" (W.pl.135.3:5). That is all that is required to invite the Holy Spirit to lead us to healing; not to heal us of the little plans we make, but to heal our minds of our mistaken belief about ourselves.

Q #720: Over the past several weeks, I have begun to notice how often I am clamoring for attention, trying to make myself superior, trying to put someone else down, trying to be noticed, and on and on. All, it seems, being driven by the need to feel "special." The fact that I notice this so clearly makes me very happy, and the fact that I do not berate myself when I notice I am doing it makes me feel even happier. My question is: what do I do once I notice it? I feel like I need to do something to "change" it, but I'm guessing this is actually what I shouldn't do. If so, what do I do with this awareness?

A: Stay with it. You are right, it is not necessary to change anything. In fact, we cannot change the illusions the ego puts forth, and trying to do so gives them a power they do not have in truth. The only requirement is willingness to recognize the ego's antics for what they are (effects of the mind's choice for separation), see the purpose they serve in keeping us attached to our identity with the body, and ask the Holy Spirit's help to make another choice. This is simple enough. The problem of our fierce attachment to specialness means we do not always want the Holy Spirit's help, because we want our specialness more. However, if you keep noticing/looking you will see how this specialness is the cause of feelings ranging from mild uneasiness to intense guilt, in spite of the fact that you are not judging yourself for the specialness. As the pain of these feelings becomes unbearable it awakens in us a deeper desire for healing, which shifts us away from the darkness of our attraction to specialness toward the light of who we truly are as God's innocent Son.

It is important to remember that your increased awareness does not mean that you cherish your specialness more, now that you notice it. It means that you now know what the ego is up to, and that is very significant. When the mind chooses to identify with the body, it denies its true identity as spirit, thus obliterating it from awareness. That is why we are not aware of the choosing activity of the mind, but can become aware, as you describe, of the effects of the choice the mind makes. This awareness, brought about and fostered by *looking* at the specific form the choice for separation takes in our relationships, is the only way for us to learn to identify with the mind rather than with the body. Only by learning we are minds can we use the power of the mind to not choose separation. The awareness you speak of is a very important step out of the denial that is the ego's cornerstone. If "not seeing" keeps us rooted in the problem of separation, "seeing" is clearly the beginning of the solution. The ego thrives on denial; the Holy Spirit offers us awareness. To ultimately become aware of the memory of God's Love present in our minds, we must first become aware of all the defenses we have raised against that Love. So, the only thing to do now is *keep looking* without judgment, but with the vigilance that is required: **"...vigilance is essential. ... [it] is not necessary for truth, but it is necessary against illusions" (T6.V.C8:6,9).**

The important "sequence of events" to remember as you continue to look vigilantly is: 1. what you see (specialness, judgment, projection) is the *effect* of the mind's choice for separation, 2. This choice is the true *cause* of all the pain and anguish in our lives and our world, 3. The mind has the power to choose differently. Awareness is thus the "pearl of great price" in the curriculum *A Course in Miracles* has set for us leading us to finally make the choice for God.

Q #721: I sometimes think that *A Course in Miracles* is for everyone but me and I cannot figure out why. It is like I want to tell everyone about it, and think that they are worthy of it but I am not. I know that Jesus says that "excluding yourself from the Atonement is the ego's last ditch effort...." but why do I do this? Can you comment on this?

A: Only resistance keeps us from personally accepting Jesus' loving message and from applying the Course's teachings of forgiveness in our relationships. This resistance is experienced in some form by everyone who studies the Course. The reason for the resistance is fear. We are afraid that if we accept Jesus' love, which is the reflection of God's Love, we will lose the special individual selves we cherish. They were chosen to replace the Identity God gave us as His innocent Son, which was denied when the separation thought was taken seriously. Believing this was a terrible "sin" makes us feel unworthy of God's Love, and it is this Love that is reflected in the Course, which is why you feel it is for everyone else, but you are unworthy of it. The fact is, we are unworthy of the false identity as bodies that we tenaciously

cling to. Having seemingly lost our true treasure (our Identity as God's innocent Son), the ego tells us we will be left with nothing if we lose the specialness of our identity as bodies. We believe this and then refuse to listen to the Holy Spirit's interpretation of who we are, or to practice His lessons of forgiveness. However, **"The ego does not know what it is trying to teach. It is trying to teach you what you are without knowing what you are. It is expert only in confusion. It does not understand anything else. As a teacher, then, the ego is totally confused and totally confusing"** (T.8.II.1:4,5,6,7,8).

Its confusing message tells us the body/brain has the power to choose and make decisions about everything, including who we are. Once we choose to believe this, it is not easy to reverse our upside-down thinking regarding the body and the mind, because learning we are minds means everything we believe about ourselves and the world is false: **"The resistance to recognizing this [that the mind makes decisions] is enormous, because the existence of the world as you perceive it depends on the body being the decision maker"** (M.5.11.1:7). Our hope lies in the power of our minds to make another choice. We can choose to believe the Holy Spirit's teaching by allowing Him to gradually replace our mistaken beliefs about ourselves with His perception. We need not do battle with our resistance to His teaching once we become aware of it. That only makes it real, and gives it more power to keep us defended against hearing His Voice. It is enough to begin by recognizing the sneaky forms resistance takes to confuse us, and then not take it seriously. We are led gently, just as we would gently lead a child to peek into the closet where the "monster" hides. **"The Holy Spirit does not seek to throw you into panic. So He merely asks if just a little question might be raised"** (T.31.V.11:5,6). Whenever we are overcome with feelings of unworthiness or guilt, we may ask, "And what if I were wrong?" Raising just this little doubt about our "rightness" allows a ray of the Holy Spirit's healing light to enter the darkness of our confusion and lessens our belief in the ego's madness.

Q #722: I am certain that I have read and heard Ken say that our lives here (in the dream) are the constant acting out of what we believe happened to cause the separation from God -- that we wanted to be special and because God cannot give special favor, we killed Him and usurped His place. In that moment the mind split. The facilitator in the group I attend often defines the separation as something that happened to us when we were very young -- usually by a parent whom we loved and trusted, and that parent did or said something that was not love, and so we gave it an interpretation other than love, and that was our introduction to the "ego". Can you comment on these interpretations -- they seem to be saying the same thing. I see my relationship with my parents as being the acting out of my relationship with God. I chose autonomy from God and continue to do so and I chose autonomy from my parents as all children do in this dream.

A: The separation, as it is spoken of in *A Course in Miracles*, has nothing to do with the body. The body is simply the projection of a thought of guilt in the mind -- it embodies that thought, if you will. The separation began, as you say, when the Son of God believed he had killed God and gave himself existence as a separate mind (not in reality, of course). The process of fragmenting what once was one continued, culminating in our experience right now of there being multitudes of separate, individualized beings. All that we are doing, however, despite appearances, is reliving **"the single instant when the time of terror took the place of love"** (T.26.V.13:1). So, yes, our interactions with our parents -- and everyone else as well -- would reflect the ego thoughts in our minds or, in a holy instant, the love in our minds. What is so hard for us to fathom is that the mind (not the brain) of the infant or child is a mature mind containing both the thought system of the ego and the thought system of the Holy Spirit along with the capacity to choose between the two. The separation is already a "reality" for that mind. It projects itself into the form of a body, which appears to begin as an infant and then develops through various stages into adulthood. But since *ideas leave not their source*, this is all going on only within the mind, which is outside time and space.

Q #723: Is it right that from the viewpoint of *A Course in Miracles* we are already "saved" and have always been, and isn't that the humorous part in all of the book that we ask so many questions and struggle and struggle and it's all already done for us? If someone from outside were watching us, wouldn't that be good stuff for a comedy? Aren't love and humor closely linked? How can we express that love in this world without being absorbed by it? By letting ourselves be absorbed?

A: As Jesus tells us in the text: **"It is a joke to think that time can come to circumvent eternity ..."** (T.27.VIII.6:5). This means that when viewed from the Holy Spirit's perspective we find ourselves in a humorous situation as you indicate. In the end, just before God reaches down to lift us to Himself, we will smile at the foolishness of the entire dream. Meanwhile, that smile can be experienced in the dream in the holy instant and the real world (T.19.III.10; 27.VII.14; W.pl.153.14; T.15.V.11). For one who knows that separation from God is impossible, the belief in separation is preposterous and perhaps comical. For one who believes separation is real, its effects seem real as well, and are experienced as disastrous and painful (T.27.VIII.8:4,5,6,7). You are correct in saying that we are saved and have, in truth, never left our home in God. We certainly would not need to struggle and question if we accepted this truth as true. The problem is that we think we are here and *do not* believe the truth about ourselves. As Jesus tells us in the text: **"This is a very simple course. Perhaps you do not feel you need a course which, in the end, teaches that only reality is true. But do you believe it? When you perceive the real world, you will recognize that you did not believe it"** (T.11.VIII.1: 1,2,3,4 italics ours). This means that until we reach the real world, we do not believe reality is true. We have chosen to believe instead the ego's lie of separation, which is why we take ourselves and the dream of separation seriously, and are not smiling the smile the Course speaks of, nor laughing **"... at pain and loss, at sickness and at grief, at poverty, starvation and at death"** (W.pl.187.6:4). Our resistance to learning what is true is the source of our struggle with the Course's teaching, and of our inability to smile peacefully at everything in our lives and our world.

Resistance is undone through the process of forgiveness, whereby we look at all the judgments that issue from the choice to identify with the ego, with a little willingness to offer them to the Holy Spirit to be transformed. The process begins with the recognition that our interpretation of every experience is a projection of guilt for having chosen to believe the separation is real. As forgiveness becomes a way of life, guilt and the fear of punishment diminish and the love that is always there slowly dawns upon the mind. This does not happen abruptly. Slowly, fear lessens and glimpses of love's reflection take its place. Gradually it becomes easier and more attractive to identify with the love. When we identify with love, we are "absorbed" in it in the sense that it is the only thing we choose. In the text, Jesus tells us: **"When you want only love you will see nothing else"** (T.12.VII.8:1). Love then extends itself naturally with no interference from the ego. Until then, the many other things we think we want keep us holding on to the ego's guilt and fear, which block love from our awareness. Very early in the text, Jesus tells us we are the same as he, but allow other interests to obscure our awareness: **"There is nothing about me that you cannot attain. I have nothing that does not come from God. The difference between us now is that I have nothing else"** (T.1.II.3:10,11,12). Our goal is to seek the Holy Spirit's help through forgiveness to remove **"the blocks to the awareness of love's presence"** (T.in.1:7). We will then truly see the humor in the dream, smile gently at our foolishness, and be "absorbed" *in* love.

Q #724(i): (The following answers are in response to different questions posed by the same person.) Why does Jesus say that we hate the Self that we have made (T.4.III.4)? I thought that the Self (which is one with Christ and God) would have "made" separation and thus "the ego" would have come into existence?

A: In the paragraph you cite, *self* is spelled with a lowercase s, not uppercase. The self Jesus is referring to was **"made out of denial of the Father"** (T.4.III.4:3), as distinguished from *Self* with an uppercase S, Christ, *created by God* as an extension of Himself. Christ always remains Christ in Heaven. Once the "tiny, mad idea" of separation was taken seriously and became a reality in the Son's *mind* (not the Mind of Christ), the ego was "born," and the dream of separation from God began. At that point, God's Son,

became a decision-making mind that could choose either to remember his true Identity, or choose to deny that and instead be a separate, individualized, limited, vulnerable self. How could we love a self that we made to replace our invulnerable, innocent Self that exists eternally one with infinite Love? How could we truly love something we produced through the rejection of infinite Love, and which we equate with sin? That is why there can never be love in this world. We can *reflect* the love of Heaven through forgiveness, but love is only in Heaven, which is the **"awareness of perfect Oneness" (T.18.VI.1:6).**

Q #724(ii). Isn't it a paradox that we should live in a world that is "not-God"? Isn't that the prime illusion of separation? How can we think something that God would not have thought?

A: We *cannot* "think something that God would not have thought." That is the point of the Atonement principle: the separation from God never happened because it *could not* happen. Only when the mind dissociates itself from reality and therefore thinks insanely can there be a sense of being alive "in a world that is 'not-God'." And that clearly would be an illusion, because it is impossible to be what you are not (**W.pl.191.4**). All of this is very baffling to us because we feel so sure we actually exist as individuals outside Heaven and God. Jesus does not demand that we stop believing this; rather, he teaches us that we can use our lives to carry out the ego's purpose in the world, or to identify with the Holy Spirit's purpose, which will gradually and gently put us back in touch with the sanity in our minds (**W.pl.199**), where, in a moment of readiness to relinquish what is false and accept only what is true, we will awaken in Christ and return to our Identity as God created us.

Q #724(iii). I am puzzled by the fact that a Jesus Christ would come channeling through but a Buddha wouldn't. "Hi, I'm Buddha, and I'm going to channel through now!" Is this the basic difference between Jesus and figures like Buddha, Zarathustra etc. that he is still "around there" somewhere, thus showing he cares? Why is Jesus doing this "now," and could this be compared to the "coming of the stillness"? In the "original" New Testament Jesus speaks in parables very often, why does he not use this "technique" in *A Course in Miracles*?

A: This could easily turn into a book-length answer, which of course we are unable to do here -- so we will answer briefly and then direct you to some readings. Of utmost importance is your starting point: your understanding of channeling, perception, time, the New Testament, and above all, Jesus. In many ways throughout *A Course in Miracles* Jesus informs us that we basically do not understand anything. Thus he uses terms like *thought-reversal*, *upside-down thinking*, and *insane*, among others. There are layers and layers and layers of defenses in our minds blocking our access to the truth -- and it is our choice that it be this way. So Jesus starts with what we perceive reality to be and then gradually helps us -- respectful of our fear and resistance -- to dismantle the whole edifice we have built as a substitute for the truth so that we will once again be as God created us. One of the foundation stones of this edifice is that perception tells us what is really "out there" -- external reality impinges on us and then we have various internal experiences that make us who we are and our lives the way they are. Jesus explains that we have it all wrong, however: **"It is essential it be kept in mind that all perception still is upside down until its purpose has been understood. Perception does not seem to be a means. And it is this that makes it hard to grasp the whole extent to which it must depend on what you see it for. Perception seems to teach you what you see. Yet it but witnesses to what you taught. It is the outward picture of a wish; an image that you wanted to be true" (T.24.VII.8:5,6,7,8,9,10; see also Section 8 in the manual, M.8).** What could be more radical or disturbing!

Jumping from this introductory phase of the book we are *not* writing to its closing chapters -- meaning our perception has been corrected and we have *experienced* the unreality of the separation, of time and all things physical (limited/quantitative) -- we realize Jesus and his course represent in form the abstract, formless truth and love that have always been present our minds, but that we erroneously convinced

ourselves were lethal to our existence. As separate, individualized existence has become meaningless and without value to us in this advanced state, we realize there is only *one* Identity, the Son Who is perfectly one with His Father. Perception had simply been a means of convincing ourselves that something else was true as well as this ultimate truth. We had believed that Jesus was an individual, highly evolved being who spoke to and through other individual beings to help them reach his state. That was not wrong, but it was only the bottom rungs of the ladder of spirituality. Making our way up the ladder involves learning to relate to everything in terms of symbols. Anything of form symbolizes a thought or dynamic in the mind, and those thoughts and dynamics are what we increasingly learn to focus on -- not the symbol, but what it symbolizes.

Thus, any enlightened, historical figure can be thought of as a symbol of the love and truth that are beyond form. That love and truth come in whatever form we can accept and understand, and in the Western world, Jesus is that symbol. Because of our fear of love without limit, we will allow ourselves to experience it only in forms that are acceptable to *us*; and so the mistake we typically make is to mistake symbol for source. *A Course in Miracles* is here to help us recognize these mistakes and accept the correction for them so that lasting, unconditional peace may be restored to our awareness.

For further study: *Absence from Felicity*, chapter 17; *The Most Commonly Asked Questions About A Course in Miracles*, #50 (Buddha); 52, 56 (Jesus and the Bible); and on this Question & Answer Service numbers: [97](#), and [473ii](#).

Q #725: Are all egos separate little consciousness in their own right or is there just one mind/ consciousness dreaming figures in the dream which have no sentience of their own? In other words, am I the only consciousness that exists and all the persons and animals I see are just unthinking, unseeing, unknowing cardboard cutouts in my field of vision that I have sketched out myself and who are not aware at all? Or, do "I" give them their consciousness?

A: In the "reality" of the split mind, there is only one dreamer, the sleeping Son of God, in which consciousness resides. And his dream is one seemingly complex yet seamless whole, encompassing all of time and space. But with the defense against the guilt over separation in this one mind -- the seeming fragmentation into billions and billions of seemingly separate minds -- each fragment seems to have its own "individual consciousness" (**C.in.1:4**). And so each individual mind seems to be a separate dreamer, identifying with only a certain specific figure in the larger dream, for particular coordinates of time and space -- an essential arrangement in order to experience victimization, the final step in the ego's line of defense to preserve itself. This specific, narrowed focus is readily apparent with our sleeping dreams at night, where our mind identifies with only one of the characters, although the whole dream, including the figure we think we are in the dream, is coming from the sleeping mind.

So it is not simply all the other figures in the world that are like cardboard cutouts with no consciousness or life, but also the particular self with which my mind is identifying, which thinks it has eyes and a field of vision. This self is not different from buildings and trees and rivers and mountains and grains of sand (**T.28.IV.9:4**). Everything in the world is a projection of the one dreaming mind, much like a movie on a screen is a projection of the one piece of film running through the projector. Even the animation of the seemingly separate figures on the screen/in the world is a trick of the mind to make what is a lifeless unitary whole seem to be composed of multiple, separate, and alive figures. Again, it is perhaps easier to recognize that none of the figures in our sleeping dreams has consciousness, including the figure we think we are, and that consciousness resides only in the mind that is asleep and dreaming, but this exactly parallels the nature of our waking dream. There is no consciousness *within* any seemingly separate aspect of the dream, but there is consciousness *behind* every aspect, both the so-called animate and the inanimate.

Although the experience of individual consciousness is really an ego sleight of mind, it can serve a helpful right-minded purpose. For it means we can each learn to choose between the ego's and the Holy Spirit's way of looking at the dream, and my decision is not dependent on what may seem to be going on in the other fragments of the mind. In other words, none of us can be a victim of others' wrong-minded choices. And so, as Jesus reminds us repeatedly throughout *A Course in Miracles*, our only responsibility is to accept the Atonement for ourselves (e.g., **T.2.V.5:1**; **M.7.3:2**).

Q #726: I have been getting counseling for the last seven months. Recently, the process has become rather painful. I have done a great deal of reading on the subject of transference and I guess I am not the first client who has (or thinks he has) fallen in love with his therapist. I have spoken with her about this, but I am trying to make sense of all my feelings from *A Course in Miracles*' perspective. Is transference simply the same projection that happens in everyday life? Is it significant that I know very little about her? Is this another example of a special love relationship? Aside from the obvious (a married man falling in love with a woman), what is the role of forgiveness in this situation? Whom do I forgive? I don't even know whom I'm transferring from.

A: Yes, whenever we feel someone else has something that we don't have -- peace, love, insight, answers, etc. -- the situation is ripe for specialness and all the pain that accompanies it. For it reminds us of the guilt and lack we feel within and desperately want to cover over with our fantasies surrounding the new relationship. And this is why the projection works better the less we know about the new person, since the reality of that person will interfere with our fantasy (**T.17.III.4:5,6,7,8**).

Within psychoanalytic theory, transference involves projecting thoughts and feelings associated with other people from the client's past, beginning with the parents, onto the relationship with the therapist. The Course, however, would say that even the parental relationships are not primary, for we have projected the experience of our initial special relationship with God onto our parents. So, in Course terms, transference involves bringing our ego fantasies about God into the relationship with the therapist. And these fantasies would include both special love and special hate, because we have seen God as having what we lack and we have been willing to attack as well as seduce Him in order to attain what we desire. And we must resent Him for not simply giving us the specialness that we want (**T.16.V.4:1,2**; **T.24.III.6**).

And so the therapist simply has become the current screen onto which these feelings of unrequited specialness are being projected. It is an easy trap to fall into, with the nonjudgmental acceptance and focused attention the therapist most likely offers each visit for that well-defined, circumscribed period of time. And there could be latent if not overt resentment that the time is indeed so limited. And so, yes, the relationship does offer another opportunity to practice forgiveness. But it is not really the therapist, nor any of the shadow figures from your past that you are bringing into the relationship (**T.17.III**), including God, who need your forgiveness. For each of them is really nothing more than a symbol for the guilt and sin you believe is real in your own mind, from which you believe you need to be saved. And so that is where the forgiveness is really needed, within your own mind. And the Therapist -- the Holy Spirit -- also there in your mind, is available to you at any time, in any place or circumstance you need Him, to help you remember the truth about yourself, that you remain God's wholly perfect and innocent Son (**T.10.V.12**), no matter what foolish beliefs you cling to about who you really are and what you need to be happy.

Q #727: I just read an introductory book on the Kabbalah. It said that it is impossible to escape the ego while we are on this earth in the form of a body. This makes sense to me. The Kabbalah talks about achieving a balance of giving and receiving in order to achieve harmony. What do you think?

A: *A Course in Miracles* takes very different positions on both of the issues you raise, because it holds a radically different view of who we are and where the world and bodies have come from. Reversing the world's teaching, the Course says we will continue to *believe* we are in this world in a body until we escape our identification with the ego in our mind, since the experience of the body and the world is the ego's defense to prove that the separation -- and the ego -- is real (T.4.I.4:4,5; T.4.V.4:1,2,3; T.6.IV.5; T.7.VI.8:1,2,3,4,5,6; T.23.I.3:3,4,5; W.pl.68.1:3,4; W.pl.72.2). That is, the world and bodies are the outcome of choosing to identify with the ego -- they are simply part of its illusion to convince us that we have indeed separated from God and left our true home in Heaven. And they have worked so well that most of us are now convinced that the body is the problem, that it is the source of our feelings of limitation and pain and unhappiness. In other words, the ego has very cleverly persuaded us to reverse cause and effect in our mind (T.28.II.8,9). The body, according to the Course, is neutral, and our experience depends simply on what purpose we give the body -- either to reinforce our guilt over the separation or to undo it (T.26.VIII.3:7,8; W.pl.294).

From the Course's perspective, giving and receiving must always be "in balance" because "giving and receiving are the same" (e.g., T.25.IX.10:6; T.26.I.3:6; W.pl.108:6:1; M.2.5:5). This simply reflects the fact that mind is one, so that whatever is given, is given to oneself (W.pl.126). And so this principle applies both to the wrong mind and to the right mind. If we attempt to give guilt to others through projection, we reinforce it in our own mind, receiving what we have attempted to give away or get rid of (T.13.II.1). And if we allow the Holy Spirit to extend His Love through us to others, we too must experience that joy and peace. So any experience of harmony comes not from any balancing act on our part between giving and receiving, but simply from releasing the ego, with its dedication to sin and conflict and pain, and accepting the Holy Spirit as our Teacher. While it is true within the world of form that what we give in terms of objects, money, time, etc. we no longer have (T.5.I.1:10,11,12,13,14), the Course would consider these simply as symbols representing the purpose we hold in our mind, depending on which teacher we have chosen. *Giving* under the ego's direction will always represent the desire to get rid of our guilt, whatever form it takes, while *giving* under the Holy Spirit's guidance will always reflect the desire to share love by undoing guilt through forgiveness.

Q #728: Can affirmations assist in re-learning our relationship with God? I will give some specific examples to make myself clear as to what types of affirmations I am speaking of: "I am safe in God's love," "I am light and love," "The Christ within me is my peace and abundance," "My brother stems from perfection, he is the Christ" and so forth. So, in affirming our relationship with God can we come to know Him more?

A: Although these beautiful statements reflect some of the teachings of *A Course in Miracles*, their repetition has no real effect on our relationship with God for one very important reason: our true relationship with Him has not been changed in any way by the belief in separation. We are one with God, as we have always been, and will forever be. However, we have forgotten this truth as the result of choosing separation. Since forgetting is the result of choosing separation, remembering comes from not choosing it. This is the simple solution to a simple problem, which we make very complicated by our resistance. If we truly wanted to experience our oneness with God, we would. We resist because, although we think we want to remember God, we are not totally convinced that we want to forget the ego. This is the reflection of the split mind that follows the choice to deny God by choosing the ego. As Jesus tells us in the text: **"Your mind is one with God's. Denying this and thinking otherwise has held your ego together, but has literally split your mind"**(T.4.IV.2:7,8).

When the workbook suggests we repeat some of its statements, the intent is for us to train our minds to be attentive to our thoughts and to apply the new thought system we are learning to everything in our lives. The goal of the repetitions is, therefore, the training of our minds **"... in a systematic way to a different perception of everyone and everything in the world. The exercises are planned to help [us] generalize the lessons, so that [we] will understand that each of them is equally applicable to everyone and everything [we] see"** (W.in.4:1,2). The Course is teaching us to uncover

our guilt and bring its darkness to the light of truth, rather than bringing the light to the darkness through affirmations, which conceal the guilt. If our guilt remains hidden it cannot be undone by the truth of our innocence. Thus, the repetitions the Course teaches do not serve the same purpose as affirmations used in other spiritual teachings. Again, one of the most important goals of the Course is to teach us to become increasingly aware of our thoughts of judgment, and to identify their source as the original thought of separation. This training program is necessary because, along with forgetting our oneness with God, we have forgotten that we have a mind that chose to forget. This forgetting is purposeful, since remaining mindless is the ego's great defense. We cannot undo all this purposeful choosing followed by purposeful denial, nor learn of our oneness with God, by affirmations: **"You cannot learn of perfect love with a split mind, because a split mind has made itself a poor learner" (T.12.V.4:3).** Healing the split mind, then, is what we seek in order to remember our immutable relationship with God. The Course teaches that this healing is accomplished through the process of forgiveness, whereby we learn we have a mind and then learn to choose the Holy Spirit rather than the ego. First we must become aware that we have, in fact, chosen to deny God, which is covered by affirmations. Taking responsibility for our choice is the way we learn we have a mind with the power to choose, so we can then make a choice not to deny Him. We learn to recognize this choice reflected in our lives in all the thoughts of separation that flood our days with judgments and attack. Our willingness to see in these thoughts our decision to be separate from God is the beginning of forgiveness, whereby we ultimately accept the release of guilt and fear that block our memory of God. Forgiveness is thus the path the Course teaches to restore our relationship with God to our awareness, by undoing the thought of separation that is the source of our seeming exile in the illusion of the world and the body. If we are clear about these steps in our practice of the workbook, we will not make the mistake of thinking we can bring truth/God to the illusion by having a relationship with Him as bodies. Or, if we do make this mistake, (as we all do), we can quickly return to the practice of the workbook in keeping with the Holy Spirit's curriculum.

You may find affirmations helpful as a way to remember to practice the workbook lesson, or to make specific applications of forgiveness during the day, but in themselves they cannot restore God's Love to our awareness. The important thing is learning to be vigilant in observing the thoughts of judgment that reflect back to us the choice to be separate that we have denied. Since it is this denial that keeps **"the blocks to awareness of love's presence" (T.in.1:7)** in place, it is in recognizing the choice we have made and the pain it entails that we will learn we have the power to choose differently and be motivated to do so. That is the path the Course sets forth for us, leading us back to the awareness that we never left our home in God in the first place: **"The journey to God is merely the reawakening of the knowledge of where you are always, and what you are forever. It is a journey without distance to a goal that has never changed" (T.8.VI.9:6,7).**

Q #729: Are Buddha and Christ the same, and is Enlightenment some kind of amnesia?

A: From the point of view of A Course in Miracles, the difference between Buddha and Christ is that Christ always remains part of God in Heaven as **"the perfect Son of God, His one creation and His happiness, forever like Himself and one with Him" (C.5.3:1).** Buddha would be considered, as would any other enlightened being, a symbol within the dream of separation representing the healed mind; that is, the separated mind that has accepted the Atonement and therefore knows the separation to be illusory. Christ, however, was never part of the illusion, but we retain within our minds (the right mind) the memory of our true Identity as Christ. Enlightenment, thus, is a remembrance, not a forgetting (amnesia), unless that were to mean forgetting everything that is not true. In the workbook Jesus explains his idea of enlightenment: **"Why wait for Heaven? Enlightenment is but a recognition, not a change at all. Light is not of the world, yet you who bear the light in you are alien here as well. The light came with you from your native home, and stayed with you because it is your own. It is the only thing you bring with you from Him Who is your Source. It shines in you because it lights your home, and leads you back to where it came from and you are at home" (W.pl.188.1).**

See [Question #261](#) for further comments about the path of Buddhism.

Q #730: Is there any method Jesus teaches in the Course about how we can deal with the fact that, while we may have mentally understood that forgiveness and waiting, etc., are the prime tools of “reaching” Christ consciousness/God/coming home (whatever you want to call it), the emotional body/ego may not want to oblige with this? Is there a method to “heal” the emotional body? Reading the Course or books by the Dalai Lama, which are all about love, has a very positive effect on me, and I seem to be touching that “undoing” moment every now and then, but is there any “method” that would make it easier to keep these feelings/attitudes up throughout the day? I found that telling these things “mentally” to me, won’t always do the job. Neither does “re-programming” or any of these “methods”. Would regular meditation (with the Course) do? Does Jesus recommend meditation?

A: The approach of A Course in Miracles to resistance is different from what one would normally expect. Jesus teaches us that what would be most helpful is just to be aware of our resistance and not to fight it or force ourselves -- via affirmations, for example -- to say and think what we are “supposed” to think and say (the exercises in the lessons). An essential part of the healing process is the humble acknowledgment that in one part of our minds we are terrified of accepting the truth about ourselves and therefore strenuously resisting learning and practicing the Course. We do not want to lose this self, though false, that we have made such an effort to sustain; we do not want to have to admit that we have been wrong about everything. Those fears would account for our “forgetting” or not being able to keep the experiences of the holy instant when we have for the moment set aside our egos.

Thus, while this is a course in mind training, the focus of the training is largely on searching our minds for ego thoughts and then looking at them without judgment, while recognizing at the same time that these thoughts are costing us the awareness of the love and peace that also reside in our minds: **“Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all of the barriers within yourself that you have built against it. It is not necessary to seek for what is true, but it is necessary to seek for what is false” (T.16.IV.6:1,2).**

The lessons in the workbook are carefully designed to start us off where we are -- namely, strongly identified with a physical/emotional self -- and gradually lead us inward to the identity we have repressed, that of a decision-making mind that lucidly chooses every minute of every day to reinforce its belief that it is separate from God or to undo that belief through recognizing that we all share the same interest and goal. In general, this is Jesus’ approach to resistance. There is nothing wrong in your meditating, if that is helpful to you, but meditation is not a major aspect of the Course’s mind-training process.

Your concern is shared by most students, and we have discussed it in several other Questions -- see, for example numbers: [35](#), [92](#), [125](#), [129](#), [210](#), and [302](#).

Q #731: I was brought up to believe that God is omnipotent and omniscient, knowing everything that is, that has been, and that ever will be. So before God created the world, He must have known what exactly was going to happen -- who was going to go to hell and who wasn't. So if, as A Course in Miracles says, the world is a dream that I am making up, then is what I have written just my ego strategy to hold God responsible for my sin and not myself, to say that I cannot be a sinner because I never really had a choice anyway since it was all pre-ordained in God’s Mind? Thus when I stand before God to be judged and my name is not in the book of life, I can present this as my defense to God before being cast into the lake of fire, to avoid damnation or at least to try to. But if God knows everything in advance, then God is powerless to change the future and He cannot be omnipotent. Is this my get-out- clause to avoid an imaginary punishment from God, my ego’s attempt to be innocent, to see itself or me as just an innocent victim not responsible for its own sin at all, putting the guilt on God and not myself?

A: You can look at what you've described, as you say, simply as your ego's efforts to shift blame outside yourself onto an unfair, victimizing God, if you note these apparent contradictions but do not seriously question the basic premises you seemed to learn as a child. But you can also look at what you're thinking as the beginning of a right-minded realization that there is something wrong with this traditional concept of God that is found in most religions of the world, where God is the Creator of the world, Who put you here along with everyone else. For there are some logical contradictions in this traditional view of an infinite and perfect God as the Creator of a finite and imperfect world, that many of the greatest religious and spiritual thinkers and philosophers across the ages have not been able to reconcile.

The Course is relatively unique among the world's spiritualities in asserting that God has nothing to do with and can in no way be responsible for the limited world of time and space -- some of the Gnostic teachings of two thousand years ago held to a similar position and presented arguments much like the ones you offer above (for a comprehensive presentation of these issues as found in the Western spiritual tradition, see Kenneth Wapnick's *Love Does Not Condemn: The World, the Flesh, and the Devil* According to Platonism, Christianity, Gnosticism, and *A Course in Miracles*). And of course, the Course goes one step further to assert that this world is an illusion and does not exist in reality (e.g., **W.pl.132.6:1,2,3**), despite our experiences to the contrary.

If there were any force, personal or impersonal, outside of our own minds, that could be held responsible for any aspect of the world and our experience in it, then we would indeed be victims. But the Course's position on this is uncompromising, presented clearly early in the workbook: **"I am not the victim of the world I see" because "I have invented the world I see" (W.p.I.31,32)**. And so it is central to the Course's teaching that neither God nor Jesus nor the Holy Spirit can intervene in either the world or in our minds (e.g., **T.2.VII.1:4,5,6**). For if they could, we would not have complete responsibility for our experience, and we could legitimately feel victimized by their failure to intervene. It is the purpose of the Course to return to our awareness the power of our mind to choose, and not to look outside of ourselves to find someone else either to blame or to supplicate.

In the Course's own words, **"Let us today be truly humble, and accept what we have made as what it is. The power of decision is our own. Decide but to accept your rightful place as co-creator of the universe [of spirit], and all you think you made [the world of bodies] will disappear. What rises to awareness then will be all that there ever was, eternally as it is now. And it will take the place of self-deceptions made but to usurp the altar to the Father and the Son" (W.p.I.152.8)**.

Q #732: I can't seem to get past the first lesson in the workbook. I can practice the idea by rote, but I'm just saying words that don't seem to sink in. Every time I try to actually think about what I'm saying, I become very resistant. For example, if I am driving and I see a sign in the road that says "STOP", and I say to myself, "This sign does not mean anything", I have trouble taking that statement seriously. If I truly believe the sign does not mean anything, then I might keep driving and cause an accident. Do you have any suggestions on how to study this lesson?

A: The workbook lessons, along with everything *A Course in Miracles* teaches, are directed to the thoughts we hold in our minds, which derive their meaning in support of the thought system of the ego or that of the Holy Spirit. Belief in the ego gives rise to the world, and gives meaning to everything in it in defense of the separation, while the Holy Spirit's meaning serves to heal the mind of the thought of separation. However, since the separation never happened, everything in the world is meaningless, which is the message of this lesson. In the light of truth a stop sign is meaningless, in the world of the ego, the world we think we inhabit, it means stop. Since the Course is not about changing behavior in the world, the important thing to do at a stop sign is stop.

An important goal of the Course is to teach us that truth, not illusion, is meaningful, and that we have a mind with the power to choose between them. Meaning, as it is used in the Course, refers to content, not

form. It is very important to keep this distinction in mind in practicing the workbook and studying the Course. Otherwise, we fall victim to level confusion, making it impossible to progress through the training program the workbook sets forth.

Your question covers many of the common stumbling blocks found in practicing the workbook lessons. Fortunately, foreseeing our predictable resistance, Jesus has covered all the bases in his instructions in the introduction to the workbook: **“Some of the ideas the workbook presents you will find hard to believe, and others may seem to be quite startling. This does not matter. You are merely asked to apply the ideas as you are directed to do. You are not asked to judge them at all. You are asked only to use them. It is their use that will give them meaning to you, and will show you that they are true” (W.in.8).** A careful review of these instructions will no doubt help you to move along in your practice. We are **“not asked to judge”** the lessons **“at all.”** Therefore, it is not only not necessary to think about them, it is not helpful to do so, as you have discovered. In fact, our thinking has gotten us into a lot of trouble (the dream of separation), which is why the workbook is teaching us a completely new thought system based on what is truly meaningful. Furthermore, we need not judge the lessons, because we *cannot* judge them due in our upside-down thinking, whereby we have decided what everything is for and think we know what everything means. The workbook lessons, on the other hand, are a puzzle to us; we do not know what they mean. They are specifically designed to teach us that we have everything backwards, since we have taught ourselves (and insist on believing) that illusion is true, and truth is false. This does not mean we should deny the meaning that we have given everything. In fact, part of the answer to your question has been waiting for you in Lesson 2: **“I have given everything...all the meaning that it has for me.”** Here, Jesus acknowledges our strategy to make the world real by deciding for ourselves what everything is for. We are asked simply to recognize our beliefs and to question them in the light of the teachings of the Course, which tell us we give meaning to everything in the world to defend our belief in the separation and to make the world real. That is the purpose/content the ego assigns to everything, as it is the purpose/content that changes through the practice of forgiveness. Even a stop sign can remind us how attached we are to our belief in the world, which is why the workbook lessons are meant to be applied to everything without intentional exclusion. It can also remind us that we are willing to learn a new way of looking at everything; i.e., seeing its purpose as serving the ego or the Holy Spirit. We thus shift our attention from the form to the content. But until we no longer hold any belief in our identity as bodies in the world, we should stop at stop signs and abide by all the other rules of the world. In fact, even if we were to remain in the body, no longer believing it is who we are, we would still stop at stop signs until we finally put the body down for good.

In practicing the workbook, it is very important to remember that Jesus does not expect us to accept or understand its teachings without stumbling and making mistakes. He is considerate of our fear and resistance with his gentle reminder: **“Remember only this; you need not believe the ideas, you need not accept them, and you need not even welcome them. Some of them you may actively resist. None of this will matter, or decrease their efficacy. But do not allow yourself to make exceptions in applying the ideas the workbook contains, and whatever your reactions to the ideas may be, use them . Nothing more than that is required” (W.in.9, italics ours).** If we waited until we were able to do a lesson perfectly, not many of us would get past the first lesson. The important thing is to **“use them”** with willingness to notice the ingenious devices we invent to resist using them. However, **“none of this will matter,”** for, as Jesus tells us in the text: **“Your part is only to offer Him [Holy Spirit] a little willingness...” (T.18.V.2:5).** Just this **“little willingness”** will lead you from lesson to lesson.

Q #733: I often hear Ken recounting the mythological tale of sin, guilt and fear the ego tells the Son of God (decision maker). Ken describes the ego as if it were a separate entity. I realize he does this for pedagogical reasons. My understanding is that, once we choose the ego, however, we become the ego. Are we not, at that point, really telling the story to ourselves in an effort to 1)stave off the overwhelming guilt and to 2) preserve our chosen specialness?

A: Yes, we not only become the ego, we become the “story.” However, rather than stave off the guilt, we actually seek it to use as fuel in defense of the belief in sin and to justify fear: “ **The attraction of guilt is found in sin, not error. Sin will be repeated because of this attraction...As an essential part of what the ego thinks you are, you will always want it**” (T.19.III.1:1,2,7). Thus, the story goes: “I do not remember the sin, but since I feel guilty I must have sinned, and am therefore deserving of punishment by an angry God. My fear, therefore, is clearly justified.” In the insanity of the ego’s “logic,” the guilt is then projected out in an attempt to be free of it, while at the same time it is preserved as the ego’s foundation.

To make matters worse, beyond the attraction for guilt and seeming fear of punishment we find the fear of love: “**The attraction of guilt produces fear of love, for love would never look on guilt at all...As love must look past fear, so must fear see love not. For love contains the end of guilt, as surely as fear depends on it...Fear looks on guilt with just the same devotion that love looks on itself**” (T.19.IV.A.10:1,3,4,9). So, guilt is attractive and must be preserved, while love is fearful and must be defended against. What makes love fearful is the realization that in love’s presence specialness disappears, and, as you point out, we are dedicated to its preservation. The goal of this psychotic arrangement is to make sin real, which keeps the illusory world of separation real in our experience. Thus the whole story, which has its origin in the choice for separation, is justified, defended, and cherished.

The ego predicament is further compounded by the heavy layers of denial that camouflage this story. The best disguise/defense is the projection of these ego dynamics onto God, making Him the One Who hurls His wrathful condemnation upon us for cutting ourselves off from Him. We then seem to have no choice but to protect ourselves through our vast variety of special relationships, designed to project all responsibility for our dilemma out into the world of bodies. The “story” thus twists around itself in a seemingly inescapable maze. As bodies, we have no life apart from this dirge. Escape is possible only by undoing this thought of separation/ego, which is the goal of *A Course in Miracles*. It is accomplished by forgiving ourselves for our madness, beginning with seeing this “story” in operation in our lives. Every recognition of the mind’s choice for the ego’s insanity is an acknowledgement of the power of the mind to choose, and lessens belief in the body/ego identity, even if only slightly and for a brief moment. Willingness to be vigilant in recognizing the ego story without justifying, judging, or defending it is what will eventually lead us beyond it. It is, after all, a lie, and herein lies the hope Jesus offers us in the Course. Forgiveness unravels the story and leads us out of it: “ **It looks on lies, but it is not deceived. It does not heed the self-accusing shrieks of sinners mad with guilt. It looks on them with quiet eyes, and merely says to them, “My brother, what you think is not the truth** ” (W.p.I.134.7:3,4,5). Although it is not easy to see that we do believe we are “sinners mad with guilt,” shrieking accusations at ourselves, we must *look* at this madness as Jesus tells us in this passage. Only then will we learn to accept that this is not our truth, and the lie will be undone.

Q #734: I was told by a friend who completed *A Course in Miracles* that we “should not” do the lessons in the workbook more than once, as that will give voice to our ego. I would like to do the workbook lessons, text, and manual for teachers for the rest of this illusion of a life here on earth. Please advise.

A: While there is no need to do the workbook lessons more than once, there is nothing wrong with doing them more than once if you feel so guided. And there certainly can be great value in reading them through more than once. About the only strict guideline the Course offers for how to use its material is not to do more than one workbook lesson a day when you are putting the lessons into practice the first time (W.pl.in.2:6) .

As with all things, the form of what you are doing is not what is essential, but rather the purpose for which you are doing it -- “**what is it for?**” (T.17.VI.2:1,2). Your friend’s prohibition may come from a misunderstood but nevertheless legitimate concern that repeating the workbook lessons represents an attempt to do them until you “get them right,” which would be falling into the ego’s trap of focusing on form rather than content (T.14.X.7:3,4,5; 8:1,2,3). Past religious training may have urged repetition of prayers

until the offering is purified and pleasing to God, but that is not the goal of the workbook lessons. Their purpose is twofold: to help us realize that we have a right mind as well as a wrong mind, and to learn to desire and thus choose the right mind over the wrong mind more and more of the time, all the while forgiving ourselves when we don't.

Another way the ego could be seeking to join your use of the workbook lessons that's helpful to recognize would be any attempt to turn their practice into a ritual -- a recurring form from which you seek to gain comfort and relief. As Jesus observes in the workbook, **"Rituals are not our aim, and would defeat our goal" (W.r.III.in.2:4)**. This is in fact the ego-based tendency that can be observed in most formal, organized religions -- to turn a form, which was only meant to symbolize a living inspiration, into a "sacred" or "holy" ritual in itself, believing it can be imbued with the content that it was only intended to point to. While it is not a sin to make the workbook lessons into a comforting ritual, it does reduce them to the level of magic and this is certainly not their purpose. In fact, that is why the later lessons have less and less structure built into them, directing us to turn increasingly to our Inner Teacher for guidance. That is their ultimate purpose, so a continuing reliance on the lessons for their own sake can become self-defeating.

The Course for most of us is likely to be a process for the rest of our lives, so take with a grain of salt advice that comes from anyone who may claim to have completed it. For as long as we believe our life is here in this world, in the body we think is our identity, regular study of its words, if the Course is our path, will continue to be of value. But rather than simply committing ourselves to a lifetime of regular reading of its text and repeated practice of its 365 lessons, the deeper commitment is to the lifelong practice of its principles in our daily lives, as reflected in the process of forgiveness.

The issue of how to do the workbook lessons and whether to repeat them has also been addressed in Questions #64 and #92.

Q #735: I understand perfectly how the ego tries to keep us away from our Creator, my question is what is the nature of the ego? What kind of entity is it? Why are we born with egos? Can it be compared with Satan or evil forms? What is the test to distinguish each voice (the ego's and the Holy Spirit's)? Does the ego have any useful purpose in our lives?

A) The ego is not an entity of itself. Jesus speaks of it as if it were a separate, autonomous thing in order to **"persuade you that you cannot dismiss it lightly, and must realize how much of your thinking is ego-directed" (T.4.VI.1:4)**. It is, though, **"nothing more than a part of your belief about yourself. . . . the part of the mind that believes your existence is defined by separation" (T.4.VI.1:6; VII.1:5)**. Interestingly, Jesus redefines the traditional biblical notion of the devil to mean this belief in separation **(T.3.VII.5:1)**, which he expands on by saying that this belief **"is powerful, active, destructive and clearly in opposition to God, because it literally denies His Fatherhood. Look at your life and see what the devil has made. But realize that this making will surely dissolve in the light of truth, because its foundation is a lie" (T.3.VII.5:2,3,4)**. Thus, we only deceive ourselves when we believe we have separated from God, and in so doing bring a great amount of pain into our minds. All that we need do about this is bring that lie to the truth in us and it will be dissolved. This is Atonement without sacrifice **(T.3.I)**.

Why are we born with egos? The assumption here is that there is a self that is born, an assumption *A Course in Miracles* teaches is false and that it sets out to correct. In fact, we are advised to have the willingness to question every value we hold if we are to learn this course **(T.24.in.2:1)**, and that includes all of our beliefs about who we are and how the world works. Briefly, thus, the Course teaches us that it is the mind that decides to split off from its identity as a mind and become an individualized bodily self in order to keep the separation a reality. That is the origin of all bodies; in other words, bodies are the outcome of the mind's strategy to preserve its existence as a separate entity. But since *ideas leave not*

their source , the body is never anything other than a thought in the mind, and an expression in form of the mind's dynamics of self-preservation and salvation from guilt. Because of space limitations, we cannot go into this any further, but recommend that you have a look at Question #354 , and then perhaps study the first five paragraphs of **“The ‘Hero’ of the Dream” (T.27.VIII)** and the first two paragraphs in **“The Secret Vows” (T.28.VI)** , sections that help fill in some of the details of the Course's view of the body.

Many, many people ask how to distinguish the ego's voice from the Holy Spirit's. While this discernment can be a problem, Jesus talks explicitly about it in several places. Since specialness is one of our most powerful defenses against awareness of our oneness with each other, he points out that our demand for specialness is one sure way to block out the Voice for God: **“You can defend your specialness, but never will you hear the Voice for God beside it. They speak a different language and they fall on different ears” (T.24.II.5:1,2)** . This is pretty clear, but still there are times when we will not know for sure. We have responded to this concern in Questions #285, #309, #486, and #536, all of which we hope will be helpful.

Finally, the ego is useful to us to the extent to which we see our lives as classrooms in which we are being taught, if we choose Jesus or the Holy Spirit as our Teacher, how we can awaken from the nightmare of separation from God. In that sense, we can redirect the use of everything of the ego to serve the Holy Spirit's purpose. He will use everything that we made to harm for the purpose of healing our minds **(T.25.VI.4)** . See also **T.24.VII.6** and **T.29.VI.5** .

Q #736: As I've progressed on my spiritual path, my only worry now is that I will fall back into thinking as I used to before. These moments are less and less frequent. But what is the best way to overcome these feelings, to manage the moments of anxiety? When I feel I've passed almost all the ego's tests, my weight becomes an issue, and any perfection I feel I've reached is meaningless because I'm not good looking or thin. How can I deal with that? I feel I have tried everything.

A: *A Course in Miracles* would say the problem in the end is not what we think of our bodies or our personalities or other aspects of our individual selves, but that we think of ourselves as bodies at all. Our perfection has nothing to do with the body, for perfection is only of the spirit, which is already perfect **(T.2V.1:8)** and can never be lacking in any way. Now, obviously, most of us still identify with this individual self and Jesus is not asking us to deny our experiences and feelings -- that would serve no helpful purpose. But it is helpful to recognize that his Course ultimately is leading us beyond any bodily identification **(e.g., T.1.I.29:3;)** , so that we can begin to put our anxieties and concerns in a greater context.

Our anxieties and bodily concerns keep us anchored in the ego's thought system **(T.29.II.9,10)**. There is really nothing to be done about them, except to acknowledge the feelings when they arise and recognize that their purpose is to reinforce the belief we all hold that we are separate, vulnerable, and unlovable. Our perception of our body will shift as we change under whose guidance we place our mind -- and this has nothing to do with any physical changes in the body itself but only the purpose we see in it. As Jesus explains, **“The body is beautiful or ugly, peaceful or savage, helpful or harmful, according to the use to which it is put....If the body becomes a means you give to the Holy Spirit to use on behalf of union of the Sonship, you will not see anything physical except as what it is. Use it for truth and you will see it truly. Misuse it and you will misunderstand it, because you have already done so by misusing it. Interpret anything apart from the Holy Spirit and you will mistrust it. This will lead you to hatred and attack and loss of peace (T.8.VII.4:3,5,6,7,8,9).**

And by misusing the body, Jesus means that we see our own body as the means of having our individual specialness needs met, while we see our brothers' bodies as the cause of all our suffering and unhappiness, either for their attacks that inflict pain directly, or for what they fail to do that we would have them do for us. In contrast to the ego's use, the Holy Spirit would have us recognize that the body is only

the screen onto which we have projected our mind's guilt over our belief in separation and attack. And with that recognition we can then release the guilt in the mind to the Holy Spirit, so that our body can now become an instrument for communicating His Love and forgiveness.

In the paragraphs preceding the lines just quoted, Jesus observes: **“Remember that the Holy Spirit interprets the body only as a means of communication. Being the Communication Link between God and His separated Sons, the Holy Spirit interprets everything you have made in the light of what He is. The ego separates through the body. The Holy Spirit reaches through it to others. You do not perceive your brothers as the Holy Spirit does, because you do not regard bodies solely as a means of joining minds and uniting them with yours and mine. This interpretation of the body will change your mind entirely about its value. Of itself it has none.**

If you use the body for attack, it is harmful to you. If you use it only to reach the minds of those who believe they are bodies, and teach them *through* the body that this is not so, you will understand the power of the mind that is in you. If you use the body for this and only for this, you cannot use it for attack. In the service of uniting it becomes a beautiful lesson in communion, which has value until communion *is*. This is God's way of making unlimited what you have limited. The Holy Spirit does not see the body as you do, because He knows the only reality of anything is the service it renders God on behalf of the function He gives it” (T.8.VII.2,3) .

You may also find either the cassette tape or the small book, both titled *Overeating: A Dialogue* , by Kenneth Wapnick, helpful with your issues around weight and the body's appearance.

Q #737: If all love relationships are a defense against the pain that comes from rejection of God's Love, then is it bad to get married? Am I wrong in thinking of having a holy family as I always dreamt of?

A: It is not wrong to get married or have a family, just as it is not wrong to do any of the things we do in the world. In fact, it is important that we do all the things we want to do, precisely because we dream of them. Having chosen separation and identification with the body, everything we do is part of the dream of separation. *A Course in Miracles* does not ask that we deny ourselves any of the things we think we want, nor that we change our behavior in any way. Rather, its goal is to help us understand the purpose the ego has given to everything (to make the separation real), and to teach us to allow the Holy Spirit to use what we have made for a different purpose (to undo the thought of separation). The world we dream about is the classroom in which we learn to awaken from the dream, and family life in particular is a very important part of the process. It is the home of the special relationships we think we need to fill the void left by the separation. The Holy Spirit needs these special relationships so they can be transformed: **“In His function as Interpreter of what you made, the Holy Spirit uses special relationships, which you have chosen to support the ego, as learning experiences that point to truth. Under His teaching, every relationship becomes a lesson in love” (T.15.V.4:5,6).** To deny that we want them is to deprive ourselves of the very conditions the Holy Spirit needs to teach us forgiveness.

Everything we seek in the world is a defense in several ways: a defense of the belief that the separation is real, a defense against God's Love that we have rejected and now fear, a defense against the pain of rejecting Love by seeking comfort in our special relationships. Jesus asks that we recognize that this defense strategy of the ego is the result of the mind's choice for separation without justifying it, or judging it as “bad.” It is not bad or sinful, because it has no real effects. This means that however much we believe we are bodies living in the world, the truth of who we are remains unchanged. We begin the forgiveness process by not denying that we believe we are bodies wanting to do all kinds of things in the world. Then our only function is to be willing to look without judgment at our beliefs, seeing in them all our thoughts of specialness, based on the insatiable feeling of need engendered by the separation that we project onto all our relationships. By the very fact of being willing to see the ego thought system in operation in our “dreams” and desires, they become the Holy Spirit's classroom: **“However unholy the**

reason you made them may be, He can translate them into holiness by removing as much fear as you will let Him. You can place any relationship under His care and be sure that it will not result in pain, if you offer Him your willingness to have it serve no need but His” (T.15.V.5:3,4). That is our goal in studying the Course. It is how what we have made to defend the belief in separation can be used to undo it. Thus, it is not only not bad to get married and have the family you have always wanted, it is important that you do so. What will bring healing to these special relationships is inviting the Holy Spirit to be with you as you marry and have children, as well as willingness to apply His lessons of forgiveness in your family life. It is the Holy Spirit Who will make it a holy family: “ [He] **knows no one is special. Yet He also perceives that you have made special relationships, which He would purify and not let you destroy... All the guilt in it arises from your use of it. All the love from His. Do not, then, be afraid to let go your imagined needs, which would destroy the relationship. Your only need is His”** (T.15.V.5:1,2,5,6,7). Best wishes for a happy marriage.

Q #738: In your answer to [Question #332](#), you quote two passages from the text of *A Course in Miracles* to demonstrate that the law of karma does not exist, because in this illusory world of space and time, past thoughts and actions can have no real bearing on the eternal present. How does this square with another oft-quoted passage from near the beginning of the text: “I have already indicated that you cannot ask me to release you from fear. I know it does not exist, but you do not. If I intervened between your thoughts and their results, I would be tampering with a basic law of cause and effect; the most fundamental law there is.” (T.2.VII.1:2,3,4)

A: Since you submitted your question, a couple of answers, [Questions #514i](#) and [#577](#), have been posted that respond to the issue you raise (see also [Question #363](#)). But we will address your specific question briefly here and you can look at those other answers for further explanation.

The key is the temporal aspect of karma inherent in its law of cause and effect. The Course does not deny the law of cause and effect in the mind, outside of time and space. In fact, its whole teaching on forgiveness, with the contrast between choosing the ego and the Holy Spirit, is based on the premise that each decision has very different consequences (**T.8.I.5:1,2**) . Where the Course differs from the world's law of karma is in its assertion that cause and effect occur simultaneously (**W.p.I.19.1:4**) *in the mind* and do not require time to unfold in the world. The world in fact was made by the ego to interpolate an apparent delay between our thoughts and their effects, merely a deception to convince us that time, space, and the separation are real.

In the passage you cite, Jesus is emphasizing this point, that we are responsible for the effects of our decisions *in our mind* and he would be going counter to everything the Course is teaching if he were to intervene *in our mind* and take away the fear that is the immediate result of our choice for the ego. Jesus is not referring to anything that is happening in the world, where the law of karma operates, because from his perspective, the world is not real (**W.pl.155.2:1**) .

Q #739: Is *knowledge* in *A Course in Miracles* the same as, or similar to, “enlightenment” in Eastern mysticism? Is it instant and irreversible? And given that we appear to be bodies as a consequence of our separation from God, wouldn't the attainment of knowledge be incompatible with our continued existence as human beings?

A: The meaning of *enlightenment* varies in different mystical traditions; but for the most part, Eastern notions would be what the Course defines as “the real world” -- when the mind is totally healed of all sense separation and therefore of sin, guilt, and fear.

In *A Course in Miracles* knowledge belongs exclusively to the pre-separation world of God and His unified creation in which there are no differences or forms. It therefore has nothing to do with the world of perception. It refers only to the pure experience of non-duality, with no subject- object dichotomy. Strictly speaking, it is not a state we attain. Rather, we gradually come to recognize the means we have been using to deny our natural state of oneness with our Source. We realize the frightful cost of that, and then we choose against that denial. When we make that choice once and for all without reservation, we are simply choosing to be as God created us, One Son, perfectly united with God. Is this state incompatible with existence as a human being? Jesus answers that by stating: **“If God were reached directly in sustained awareness, the body would not be long maintained” (M.26.3:8)** . Those who have this awareness are the “Teachers of teachers,” so named **“because, although they are no longer visible, their image can yet be called upon” (M.26.3:2)**. Thus, we need reflections of perfect love to appear to us in a form we can understand and relate to; and for most of us that is a human form.

Q #740: *A Course in Miracles* can be seen as lying within the Judeo-Christian monotheistic tradition, characterized by considering God as outside of the earthly system. This tradition, which originated with the patriarchal sky/mountain God of the Hebrews, became dominant over the preceding religious systems as much as anything else through violent imposition. In earlier “pagan” polytheism, God/Goddess was/were considered present within the earthly realm in multiple forms, such as tree or river Gods, etc. It is obvious that a believed presence of God within the natural world produces a respect for its resources, whereas an earthly realm in which God does not lie openly invites their violation. In this way, Judeo-Christian monotheism can be seen to have played a huge part in environmental degradation, and so this can also be viewed as a weakness of the Course.

How would you answer this criticism?

A: While we remain identified with our egos, we can use anything we want to justify and rationalize our self-centered thoughts and subsequent actions, including any spiritual teaching, no matter how profound and all-inclusive its message of love may be. And so it is true, we could choose to use the Course's teachings on the unreality of the world and God's total lack of involvement in it -- He's not even the world's creator, as the Judeo-Christian theologies would maintain, so there's nothing at all sacred about it! -- to justify treating the illusion in any way we please, using it to meet our own personal needs at everyone and everything else's expense.

And yet such an interpretation would require a total misreading of the Course, for it would go completely counter to everything Jesus is saying, since the Course's aim at the very beginning of our study of it -- the most preliminary step along its path -- is to lead us to a recognition of shared rather than separate interests **(M.1.1:2)** . And this sharing, through the process of forgiveness, is to be extended to every aspect of the Sonship, even the tiniest grain of sand **(T.28.IV.9:4)** , and not only to fellow *homo sapiens* , or our own family or ethnic group or country, or some other grouping based both on exclusion and inclusion.

While it is true in one sense that the Course comes within the Judeo-Christian tradition, it must be understood that it does for solely one purpose: to provide a gentle and loving correction for all the ego-based errors of that other system of thought. It does not build upon nor extend that tradition, but rather takes its central concepts, which have been used unfortunately for hatred and attack and murder, and allows them to be given a different purpose -- the healing of the mind of the Sonship. It would be a serious confusion to equate the Course's non-dualistic theology of the oneness and guiltlessness of all with the dualistic teachings of sin and guilt enshrined in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Q #741: I recently watched a video of “The Silent Scream” which is a documentary that purports to show that abortion is the killing of a living human being. I was watching it and these feelings and thoughts started running through me like wanting to raise money so that people will not feel that they are bereft of hope, wanting others to see this so we can at least look abortion right in the eye. I also began contemplating what we would do if a fetus began to fight back. Then another part of me said what does it matter if we are all going to die anyway? Is not abortion murder? Is it okay and in keeping with the message of *A Course in Miracles* that I want abortions to be minimized?

A: The Course simplifies the many moral dilemmas we encounter here in the dream of separation by reinterpreting everything we believe about everything, including, and *especially*, “life” and “death.” We are told: “ **There is no life outside of Heaven . Where God created life, there life must be. In any state apart from Heaven life is illusion. At best it seems like life; at worst, like death (T. 23.II.19:1,2,3, italics ours).** The body (dead or alive), like the world, is an illusion. The mind that shares life with God does not reside in the body, and is outside time and space. Whatever happens to the body, then, has no effect on the mind, which means it has no effect. Illusion cannot have any effect on reality. These important teachings of the Course make it clear that neither abortion nor anything else in the dream is morally right or wrong. It is nothing, because the body is nothing : “**The body no more dies than it can feel. It does nothing. Of itself it is neither corruptible nor incorruptible. It is nothing” (T.19.IV.C.5:2,3,4).** It is inconsistent with the teachings of the Course to use its principles to support or reject any specific behavior in the world (form). The Course addresses itself to the mind, and its teachings apply to the thoughts in the mind (content), not the body. The only real murderous act that the Son of God commits is to choose to believe that separation from God is possible. Once that choice is made, identification with the ego’s thought system of sin, guilt, and fear follows. With or without abortion it’s all downhill from there.

If the thought of fetuses dying is fearful, and you feel moved to protect them, it is not wrong to do so. It is no different from taking precautions against disease and sickness, or protecting the environment. Since we believe we are bodies living in the world, and take ourselves very seriously, it is important to look at all the judgments around certain behaviors such as abortion, war, and other acts of violence and aggression. They show us the beliefs we hold in our minds about ourselves and others, and they are the specific forms we have chosen to reflect the mind’s choice for separation. The form thus becomes the classroom for the forgiveness lessons whereby the separation thought is undone. A situation such as abortion offers a multitude of opportunities to either reinforce the ego’s guilt, or strengthen the mind’s identification with the Holy Spirit. It is the choice made in the mind to identify with the ego or the Holy Spirit that is important, not the specific behavior. One could make a loving and peaceful choice with the Holy Spirit to have an abortion, just as it is possible to choose the ego and organize against abortion filled with judgment, condemnation, and “murderous” thoughts against those having abortions or performing them. The specific behavior may vary; it does not matter. What matters is making a choice that lessens guilt, and strengthens identity with the Holy Spirit. A peaceful decision can only be made when the fear, guilt, and judgment in the mind has been recognized and released, to whatever extent possible. It is helpful to remember an important message Jesus gives us in the text: “**You do not know the meaning of anything you perceive. Not one thought you hold is wholly true. The recognition of this is your firm beginning” (T.11.VIII.3:1,2,3).** To truly ask the Holy Spirit for help means not having decided ahead of time what the answer should be, which means letting go of every judgment and value that we hold. If we cannot let them go, we can at least question them and admit to ourselves and to the Holy Spirit that we *think* we know what is best, not only for ourselves but for everyone else. Jesus repeats in many passages in the Course that we *do not know* . One of our biggest mistakes is believing that life in a body is of supreme value, and one of our greatest fears is that we are wrong. Since we hold tight to this belief and to our fear, we do well to proceed gently through the process of learning to make decisions with the Holy Spirit rather than with the ego. It does not help to deny how much we value our identity as bodies. While we do whatever we feel we must to protect our version of life, we can remember the early workbook lessons: “**I do not perceive my own [or anyone else’s] best interests” (W.pl.24)** , because “**I do not know what anything is for” (W.pl.25).** Willingness to keep these thoughts in mind is an invitation to the Holy Spirit to be with you in whatever you do with regard to abortion or anything else. It also opens the way to the part of the mind where the memory of true life, ours and everyone’s, resides.

Q #742: In *The Most Commonly Asked Questions About A Course in Miracles* Ken and Gloria stated the desire to be thought of and seen as a “spiritual person” or a “loving” person is an expression of specialness. But, on the other hand I feel I am wearing a mask for others when I hide my love for Jesus and God and *A Course in Miracles* . Do you understand? I WANT people to know how much I love Jesus and to know how much this sometimes torturous path is a part of my life. I read Ken somewhere saying that if you really love someone you do not have to go around announcing it, but Jesus said in the Course that we “will be as eager to share our learning” as he is. Can you comment on this please?

A: The distinction between form and content might be of some help in resolving your dilemma. Avoiding the trap of specialness does not mean that you must hide the love you have for Jesus, God, and *A Course in Miracles* . That love is the content in your mind. When you are identified with that love, and that is what motivates you, *you* do not choose the form in which that content gets expressed. You are not concerned with form at all. Love will automatically flow *through* you in the form that is most helpful to everyone. In that sense, you just step back and let love lead the way. In fact, when you are identified with love, the sense of *you* as a person with needs, desires, and demands disappears; you are just more peaceful; you take nothing personally; and you smile more frequently (see Lesson 155 -- **W.pl.155.1**). This is not a mask. Jesus asks of us: “**Teach not that I died in vain. Teach rather that I did not die by demonstrating that I live in you**” (**T.11.VI.7:3,4**) . In the Introduction to the manual for teachers, Jesus discusses further this approach to teaching; namely, that we teach by demonstrating (**M.in.1,2,3**) . Sharing what we have learned is not necessarily done through words, as the passages cited explain.

It is perfectly normal to feel enthusiastic, but if you feel a *need* to talk about your love for Jesus -- that you *must* -- then you have slipped back into your ego, for when you truly love him, you are completely quiet inside; you rest content in that quiet center in your mind, knowing that your love for him and his for you is the only reality. Nothing else compels you. On the other hand, “this sometimes torturous path” can produce conflict and fear; and then it could be helpful to turn to someone who would be understanding and compassionate. We all need that at times, until we have set aside our egos. But that is quite different from *wanting* others to know how important this spiritual path is to you. That could be a way of making yourself different from others: “Look how spiritual I am and how hard I work at this.” The ego sneaks into the process in rather subtle ways at times.

Q #743: Why does the textbook say God feels lonesome if we do not share communication/ creativity with “him”? I thought that God does not even know of this world of separation, then how can he feel lonely? Is this again a question related to the two levels *A Course in Miracles* is written in? -- Which level is the “real” one, and why should we bother with level two (the dream-world)? Doesn't the request for joining God raise feelings of guilt in the ego? Does ACIM say anything positive about why we are “here”?

A: The Course uses metaphors, and in form has many contradictory passages. That is why it cannot be read and understood exclusively on an intellectual level. Its content and loving message of forgiveness can only be understood with the willingness of the mind that opens to the truth that it reflects. The Course's teaching that the world is an illusion and the separation never happened is seemingly contradicted by the very fact that the Course itself exists in form. Clearly then, from its inception the Course lovingly accommodates its form to be helpful to the terrified, guilt-ridden part of the mind of God's Son who believes he is irretrievably lost because of his terrible sin. According to the ego's logic, the guilt that follows the “sin” of separation engenders tremendous fear of punishment from an angry God. When the Course tells us God weeps and is lonely without us (**T.5.VII.4; T.2.III.5**), the message is that He is not an angry, vengeful God, but One Who loves us and misses us. These symbolic images are helpful to us who are able to relate to the concept of a loving father more easily than the abstract nature of God. As Jesus tells us: “**You cannot even think of God without a body, or in some form you think you recognize**” (**T.18.VIII.1:7**). This single line explains the metaphors used in the Course, as well as the

levels of teaching. Since we believe we are in the world, Jesus teaches us from our level of experience. Having chosen to identify with the body, we think and act and “reason” like bodies, so the Course comes to us in a form we can understand, and uses numerous metaphors, poetic imagery, and symbols to speak to us of the Love we have denied and forgotten.

From the ego's perspective, everything is guilt provoking. Its “life” issues from the thought of separation and depends on the guilt that ensues to sustain it. The ego interprets the call to return home to God as proof that the separation is real. It does not accept the real message that tells us we never left our home in God. If the Course is read with the ego as interpreter, there is much that can be used to instill fear and increase guilt. That is the ego's goal in every experience, and the Course is no exception. In fact, the Course tells us that is how the ego functions: “ **Whenever you respond to your ego you will experience guilt, and you will fear punishment**” (T.5.V.3:6).

Only what is true is “real.” Since “**the world is an illusion**” (W.155.2:1) i.e. , not real/true , everything in it is also not real, including us, as bodies. It is only our belief that we are bodies in the world that makes it necessary for Someone from outside the illusion to lead us out of it by meeting us on our “level.” The only reason we should bother with the world, which we made to keep ourselves separate from God, is as a classroom to learn the Holy Spirit's curriculum of forgiveness. The Holy Spirit needs what we have made to lead us back to Him by teaching us that not only will our world/body not make us happy, it is not real. So the only positive things the Course says about our *seeming* existence in the world, is that it is an illusion that can serve as a classroom . With understanding of what we think is our reality and loving respect for the part of our own minds that knows otherwise, Jesus gives a hope-filled answer to why we are here: “**Nothing the body's eyes seem to see can be anything but a form of temptation [to believe the separation is real] , since this was the purpose of the body itself. Yet we have learned that the Holy Spirit has another use for all the illusions you have made, and therefore He sees another purpose in them. To the Holy Spirit, the world is a place where you learn to forgive yourself what you think of as your sins. In this perception, the physical appearance of temptation becomes the spiritual recognition of salvation**” (W.p.I. 64.2).

Q #744: Why does *A Course in Miracles* sometimes seem absurd to me? I do read it with great pleasure every evening (one chapter and one exercise). Still, I wonder why I should do these exercises at all when the Atonement is already done and it never existed? After all with “separation/sin” came also its remedy (Holy Spirit)? Why if we are guiltless in our divine nature, the Son(s and daughters) of God, Christ consciousness, should we do these exercises? Why does Jesus invest so much into this our dream world? Doesn't he invest in something that is not real, and thus makes it real for us? Shouldn't we then wake Jesus and tell him it really isn't necessary? Is that what Jesus talks of if he asks us to forgive him?

A: The continued practice of the Course helps us move from the *intellectual* acceptance of the Atonement to the *experience* of it. Those of us who still are personally affected by what goes on in our world -- both personal and the world at large -- clearly do not believe that these occurrences are illusory or simply segments of a dream. We would take nothing seriously if we did. In making this transition, though, Jesus advises us not to attempt to deny our bodily experiences. For one thing, he says, “**it is almost impossible to deny its [the body's] existence in this world**” ; and “**those who do so are engaging in a particularly unworthy form of denial**” (T.2.IV.3:10,11) .

Ultimately, Jesus is a symbol of the part of our minds that contains the memory of our true Identity. He represents the love that we have split off and replaced with the identities we have as individuals. Since we are convinced that we are individuals living in a real physical universe, then he must communicate to us on that level -- but only in order to teach us that we are mistaken, and that there is a way of living in this world that will enable us to recognize its illusory nature and that we are minds choosing to believe that we are not. Jesus is not the problem, our tenacious hold on the ego's belief system is the problem. He is present to us in the most gentle way possible: a loving, non-judgmental presence in our minds

inviting us to choose his love instead of the ego's specialness, and to recognize that everyone else shares in that love as well. That joining is what undoes our belief in separation, which is the only thing interfering with our returning to the home where God would have us be.

Question #98 provides further commentary and also suggests a few readings that might be of help.

Q #745: Please comment on the relationship between time and forgiveness, according to the teachings of *A Course in Miracles*. Understanding that time is not linear, we do sometimes experience a lessening of hostilities against another with the “passing” of time, much like the “time heals all wounds” adage. Is this just another part of the self-deception that makes time appear real? Or, is it an indication that we have chosen to truly forgive on the level of mind, which then becomes manifest in this way? Thank you for any help you can provide.

A: There would be no way of knowing for certain with a particular person, where the anger and condemnation seem to have lessened over time, whether the apparent shift is the result of genuine forgiveness or merely symptom substitution, that is, the guilt originally projected onto that person simply being redirected onto somebody else. In the latter case, the experience may be more that this old special hate partner is just not worth the energy it takes to hate anymore, for we have more immediate special hate partners who demand our attention now!

On the other hand, if we have been practicing forgiveness with other relationships in our lives, even if our focus has not been on somebody specifically whom we'd judged without forgiving in the past, we are in effect reducing our identification with the guilt in our own mind. And that is where the only real problem lies, for we are never really angry at others for what they have done, but only for what it reminds us we secretly accuse ourselves of (**T.31.III.1:5,6; 2:1,2,3**). And so it is possible, without any active attempt to generalize forgiveness to this specific special hate partner, that we would simply find that we have no need any longer to hold this person responsible for our own pain and unhappiness. It would not be the passage of time but rather the practice of forgiveness over time in other contexts that has released this old special hate partner from our projections.

Q #746: If the Holy Spirit knows everything, which Jesus assures us that He does, then why cannot He guide me to help all those suffering in the world. Let us say for example a child has been kidnapped and is missing. Why can't I ask the Holy Spirit to tell me where the child is so I can help return the child to her family? Surely, the Holy Spirit knows exactly where the child is.

A: Yes, the Holy Spirit is the *only* One who knows exactly where the child is: at home in God where he never left, and from where he never was kidnapped. If the Holy Spirit were to intervene in the way that you describe, it would mean the separation did in fact occur, the world and the body were real, and the ego was right all along. That is not what we want the Holy Spirit to do. The Holy Spirit also knows that we are *all* suffering in the world, and He *has* come to help us end our suffering by showing us the way out of the world of illusion. When the mind chooses to identify with the ego/body, it becomes totally confused. Not only is our true Identity as God's innocent Son denied, identity with the mind is forgotten in the bargain. Thus we are all lost, kidnapped by the belief in the separation. That is the real problem, for which the Holy Spirit offers a real solution: the undoing of the thought of separation through forgiveness.

Since the Holy Spirit is not part of the dream of separation, He does not know specifically where anyone is in the illusion. He knows everything we *need* to know, but nothing that is not true. He could not, therefore, tell anyone how to find someone in a world that doesn't exist. His concern is only with the mind that thinks the world is real, and has the ability to choose to defend this belief or accept His perspective.

However, the Holy Spirit knows that we have identified with the body, and knows the pain we experience for having left our true home by choosing the world: “ **Here [the world] is the only home he thinks he knows. Here is the only safety he believes that he can find. Without the world he made is he an outcast; homeless and afraid. He does not realize that it is here he is afraid indeed, and homeless, too; an outcast wandering so far from home, so long away, he does not realize he has forgotten where he came from, where he goes, and even who he really is**” (W.pl.166.4:1,2,3,4). This describes the lost child in all of us. For by choosing to believe the ego and identify with the body, we have lost our home, our Identity, and our Source. Moreover, we have no idea how to get Them back. This is where the Holy Spirit enters with His plan of salvation. Helping us find our way back to our true home and Identity is the goal of His curriculum in *A Course in Miracles* . He does this by teaching us that we have a mind with the power to choose against separation, just as we chose for it. This change is the miracle He teaches. We who believe we are in the world, on the other hand, are more interested in fixing things in the world: magic. Driven by the desire to make the world real, the mind's power is used to manipulate form, rather than to choose to see differently. Because we are unwilling to take responsibility for the power of our minds and are afraid of it, we deny it and blame external events on external causes, instead of recognizing that it is only the mind that is truly active. Thus, the mind that chose to be lost can choose to be found, and the mind that experiences anxiety due to the choice for separation can turn to the Holy Spirit to find peace. We must first recognize our fear of losing our identity as bodies, which is the ego's “lost child.” Then we can turn to the Holy Spirit to find our “lost” identity as God's Son, through forgiveness of all our thoughts of judgment and attack.

The symbol of a lost child applies as well to the thoughts of judgment we have projected out to make our separation from God real in our experience. This leaves us feeling lost, abandoned, and hopeless. The Holy Spirit invites us to “come home” to our minds by retrieving these thoughts: “**We take our wandering thoughts, and gently bring them back to where they fall in line with all the thoughts we share with God. We will not let them stray. We let the light within our minds direct them to come home. We have betrayed them, ordering that they depart from us. But now we call them back, and wash them clean of strange desires and disordered wishes**” (W.pl.188.9:2,3,4,5,6). Our “strange desires” to be special and separate are thus healed, and we are found at last.

For comment on the Course's language that seems to suggest the Holy Spirit does intervene in the world please see: Questions #42, #235, and #457. Also, “The Message of *A Course in Miracles* , Vol. II, Few Choose to Listen, and the tape set Duality as Metaphor (T-39).

Q #747: I am still having a little doubt as to the nature of the ego. Is it such an evil entity always attempting to separate us from God? Isn't it better just to think of a corpus of wrong ideas we have created of ourselves that serves the simple purpose of giving wrong answers when facing a situation? Isn't it just a point of reference with which to compare the divine peace of Heaven? Why do we have to see it as such an entity? In my case this idea contributed to building a new kind of fear I had to deal with.

A: In *A Course in Miracles* , Jesus tells us exactly what the ego is : “**What is the ego ? But a dream of what you really are. A thought you are apart from your Creator and a wish to be what He created not. It is a thing of madness, not reality at all. A name for namelessness is all it is. A symbol of impossibility; a choice for options that do not exist. We name it but to help us understand that it is nothing but an ancient thought that what is made has immortality. But what could come of this except a dream which, like all dreams, can only end in death?**” (C.2.1:4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11, italics ours) The ego cannot then be an entity; it has no substance. It is the thought of separation, which is given power only by a choice in the mind to believe that it is true. The ego/thought exists in our experience because we want it to. We choose it over the Holy Spirit because we prefer our specialness as separate bodies to our truth as God's innocent Son. We fear it because we fear the power of our minds that would recognize the nothingness of the ego. If the ego is nothing, so is the world and so is the body. That recognition is terrifying to those who cling to specialness in a body.

The world and the body arise in our experience as the result of choosing to identify with the thought of separation (ego) in the mind. Thus, the ego is not a thing outside of ourselves that exists on its own, acting as an agent that can tempt us to anything. We alone are responsible for bringing it into existence by believing in it and allowing it to thrive on the guilt that inevitably follows the choice to be other than the Son that God created. We would prefer to believe that the ego has a life of its own so we could dissociate from it. That would allow us to have our cake and eat it too; i.e., have an ego-free life as bodies outside of Heaven. However, Jesus tells us in the Course that neither the ego nor the body exists, because nothing exists outside of Heaven: “ **Life not in Heaven is impossible, and what is not in Heaven is not anywhere**” (T.23.II.19:6). To ears that cling to “life” in a body this is not good news, and does indeed seem to instill fear. The fear, however, comes only from unwillingness to accept that truth be true. Yet in this same statement lies our hope for escape from the nightmare of separation. It tells us the ego has no life, and therefore no power and no effects. In another passage we are told: “ **It [the ego] has no meaning. It does not exist. Do not try to understand it because, if you do, you are believing that it can be understood and is therefore capable of being appreciated and loved. That would justify its existence, which cannot be justified**” (T.7.VI.11:6,7,8,9). That *is* good news. We are free to fix our attention on the path of forgiveness that is our only function here, and let the thought of separation be gradually undone. The ego, like the world, will then “**fade into the nothingness from which it came...**” (M.13.1:2)

Q #748: If time is money, can we save it by spending less on our investment in the ego thought system. Will Jesus show us how to write this off? Could He be viewed as our ultimate financial advisor? Just wondering.

A: A helpful perspective! Sounds like a reflection on the section in the text of *A Course in Miracles* called “**The Investment in Reality**” (T.12.III) . Yes, we have invested heavily and almost exclusively in the ego thought system, and our losses have mounted accordingly. A diversified portfolio is always a wiser approach! And, yes, Jesus is showing us how to write off this bad debt. We could not find a better financial advisor. Unfortunately, we have not been listening to what he has been telling us for eons. Thankfully, he's still saying it, and we will never run out of chances to change our minds and turn back to him as our advisor. Essentially he is showing us how we got into trouble and how to get out of it, without losing anything of value. What a deal! The only condition is that we muster up the humility to question our own judgment and agree to learn how to judge everything *with him* , which should not be hard to do, given our dismal performance thus far. Accepting him as our advisor is the best decision we could ever make, because it will give us everything we truly have longed for, and no sacrifice will ever have been asked. A no brainer!

Q #749: The field of quantum mechanics has finally reached a point (string theory) where it acknowledges that nothing exists except energy -- and that this world is in fact an illusion. Is approaching the unreality of the world through this avenue still an example of the ego trying to make it real (if only in an energy format)? And is seeing it as a “field of intent connected to the Source”, as Dr. Wayne Dyer proclaims, really only one more mistaken way to explain the illusion of the world? Or are these two, pure physics and metaphysics, actually getting close to the truth as the *A Course in Miracles* would see it? And will their approach ever lead them to the Course's view?

A: Each mind will go only as far as it is ready to at any point in time in accepting the truth about itself. The various symbol systems of the world, whether we are speaking of physics or metaphysics or any other form of thinking, are in the end only neutral symbols. The mind can choose to use them to reinforce belief in either the guilt or the innocence of God's Son. Truth is not in any of the symbol systems themselves but only in the mind, awaiting its choice. The symbol systems can point towards the truth, but the mind has to be willing to look.

And yet there may be differences in how explicit the various symbol systems are in directing attention to the truth beyond themselves. So it is not likely that the field of quantum physics, while concluding that the world is an illusion, will ever come to a recognition that the “energy” on which the illusion of the world rests is guilt, which in itself is also illusory (T.18.IX.4,5 ; T.19.II.6:1,2,3,4,5) . And yet one can read *A Course in Miracles* and not accept its message of healing and wholeness. And one can read a text on quantum physics, or a Hindu text, or the Bible, or a telephone book, and come to the realization that all is one and that sin and separation are not real. So whether various paths will converge on the level of form in the end becomes irrelevant (M.1.3:1,2,3,4,5,6) . If we believe that we have found a path that will lead us home -- and we want to go home -- it would behoove us to follow its directions. And if that path is the Course, all we need to do, with the help of Jesus or the Holy Spirit, is forgive ourselves and all our projections.

Q #750: In Lesson 73, “I will there be light,” the shorter practice periods say to repeat “I will there be light. Darkness is not my will” several times an hour. Then it says, “It is most important, however, to apply today's idea in this form immediately you are tempted to hold a grievance of any kind” (W.pl.73.11:3,4,5,6). That sounds to me as if Jesus is telling me to pray the anger down. Could you please explain?

A: It could be taken to mean that, and there are many other instructions along those lines. But if you take into consideration the teaching that precedes this specific instruction, you probably would not be inclined to use his instruction to “pray the anger down.” Notice also that in concluding, he says: **“This will help you let your grievances go, instead of cherishing them and hiding them in darkness.”** This means that in our practice we would become aware that we had been cherishing grievances and hiding them, and that we no longer *want* that. This is typical of Jesus' teaching method: he contrasts what we think we want with what we truly want. So in repeating, **“I will there be light. Darkness is not my will,”** we are really saying, “I have been choosing darkness in holding onto grievances. That was a mistake, and now I choose light instead. I no longer cherish grievances.” This parallels the theme of bringing the darkness to the light that runs throughout *A Course in Miracles* . We first acknowledge the darkness of the ego thought system that we had chosen, and then we bring that to the light, where it disappears.

Q #751: Does self-esteem have anything to do with spiritual enlightenment? In other words, does high self-esteem reflect more spiritual advancement than low self-esteem? And, does one need a “healthy ego” before one can advance spiritually?

A: No matter how we slice it, the ego is healthy on its own terms. It uses high *and* low self esteem for its purpose of making the body and the world real, thus keeping us grounded in the dream of separation. The forgiveness path that *A Course in Miracles* teaches does not require that our self esteem be high *or* low. When the Course tells us we are not bodies (See :W.91.pl.5), it refers as much to the psychological and emotional body as the physical body. As we are told early in the text: ” **‘Self-esteem' in ego terms means nothing more than that the ego has deluded itself into accepting its reality...**” (T.4.II.6:8). We are asked to see whatever inflated or deflated perceptions we have about ourselves as the reflection of our choice to identify with the body and make it real. In this sense, high and low are the same: there is no hierarchy of illusions (T.20.VIII.8) . All are opportunities to forgive ourselves for who we *think* we are when we deny who we *truly* are. Jesus tells us that in our chosen identities as bodies we have decided to esteem ourselves in the lowest possible form: **“You think you are the home of evil, darkness and sin. You think if anyone could see the truth about you he would be repelled, recoiling from you as if from a poisonous snake. You think if what is true about you were revealed to you, you would be struck with horror so intense that you would rush to death by your own hand, living on after seeing this being impossible (W. pl.93.1:1,2,3).** The goal of the Course is to teach us that we have been mistaken and are not the despicable creatures we think we are.

The fact that Jesus has us repeat “I am as God created me” more often than any other phrase in the Course indicates our great need to hear it. He knows we don't believe it. We are much more devoted to our identity as creatures of the ego, which is why we need a Teacher Who leads us to our highest Self-esteem by teaching us to exchange our miserable selves for our true identity. That is not to say that we should not “give the devil his due” by taking steps to enhance a low self- image. This is not a Course in behavior. In fact, coming to terms with deep feelings of worthlessness may be the just the ticket to seeking “another way” such as the Course teaches. Thus, low self-esteem can open the door to the healing Jesus offers in the Course, while high self- esteem may delude a person into believing all is well or lead him to seek beyond the ego when its fulfillment proves shallow. Low or high, well adjusted or maladaptive, all may serve the Holy Spirit's purpose; we cannot judge by form. As the manual tells us: **The curriculum is highly individualized, and all aspects are under the Holy Spirit's particular care and guidance. (M.29.2:6).** Moreover, high self-esteem may be nothing more than the grandiosity the text tells us “... **is always a cover for despair. It is an attempt to counteract your littleness, based on the belief that the littleness is real**” (T.9.VIII.2:1,3). The important thing is to bring every concept of the self to the light of forgiveness. Each must be raised to doubt that we may eventually learn we do not know who we are: “...**the reason for the course is that you do not know what you are**” (T.9.I.2:5). As we look at the many lofty and lowly ideas we have about ourselves, it is helpful to keep in mind these words and ask the Holy Spirit to replace our false self-concept with the truth He brings: “**I do not know the thing I am, and therefore do not know what I am doing, where I am, or how to look upon the world or on myself**” (T.31.V.17:7).

Q: #752: T.1.IV.4:6,7,8 says, “I assure you that I will witness for anyone who lets me, and to whatever extent he permits it. Your witnessing demonstrates your belief, and thus strengthens it. Those who witness for me are expressing through their miracles, that they have abandoned the belief in deprivation in favor of the abundance they have learned belongs to them.” Having grown up in the Baptist church, we were taught that to “witness for Jesus” meant telling everyone about him and about our belief in him. What does Jesus mean with these statements in *A Course in Miracles* ?

A: In the Course, to witness has the same meaning as to teach. It means to attest to the thought system we have chosen in our minds (the ego or the Holy Spirit). It does not refer to any specific words or behavior that are the domain of the body, for as we are told in the text: “**The body is a limit imposed on the universal communication that is an eternal property of mind**” (T.18.VI.8:3). Therefore, it is the state of mind that follows the choice to believe the Holy Spirit, rather than the ego, that witnesses to Him, to Jesus, and to the part of the mind that reflects the true Self.

Jesus, who is a symbol of the part of our mind that remembers our identity as God's innocent Son, witnesses/teaches only our truth because he sees nothing else. He does so to whatever extent we are willing, as the first sentence in the passage you quote states. His witness is accepted by a choice in the mind not to believe the ego. Practicing forgiveness by recognizing thoughts of judgment and attack, seeing in them the projection of our own guilt for choosing separation, is how we teach/witness to Jesus. It strengthens belief in the Holy Spirit in ourselves and in the whole Sonship. Likewise, our attack thoughts teach/witness to our belief in the separation, and strengthen identity with the ego. We are always choosing the ego or the Holy Spirit, and are therefore always witnessing to one or the other. That is what is meant when Jesus tells us in the text: “**Everyone teaches [witnesses] , and teaches [witnesses] all the time. This is a responsibility you inevitably assume the moment you accept any premise at all, and no one can organize his life without some thought system. Once you have developed a thought system of any kind, you live by it and teach it**” (T.6.in.2:2,3,4).

Unlike the directives of the Baptist Church and many other Christian Churches, Jesus does not tell us to speak about the Course. We are asked only to study, practice, and apply its teaching. Its application in our own lives witnesses to it, whether anyone else is consciously aware of it or not. Although we may in fact discuss the teachings of the Course with others, we do so to further our own understanding, not to convince anyone else that they should study or practice the Course. Traditional Christian proselytizing

usually includes pointing out to the sinner his/her sinful ways with a call to convert to appropriate behavior. The Course teaches a very different view: **“Any attempt you make to correct a brother means that you believe correction by you is possible, and this can only be the arrogance of the ego” (T.9.III.7:8)**. We are thus relieved of any need to say or do anything on the level of behavior with respect to Jesus' message in the Course. Our goal is to allow our minds to be healed of the thought of separation through the practice of forgiveness. Belief shifts gradually from the ego to the Holy Spirit, and then because **“The power of witness comes from your belief” (T.27.II.5:4)**, we bear witness to His peace and love with no effort on our part .

Q #753: This is more of a “grammatical” question, I first read this passage in the German translation of *A Course in Miracles* and thought perhaps it is a translation mistake, but I checked with the original English version and the passage is equally confusing. Lesson 1 of the workbook says: “That is the purpose of the exercise. The statement should merely be applied to anything you see. As you practice the idea for the day, use it totally indiscriminately. Do not attempt to apply it to everything you see, for these exercises should not become ritualistic” (W.pl.3:2,3,4,5). Can you explain the difference between applying things to anything you see but not to everything? In German it is clearly the same...what do I “have” to do, I look at things and say they are nothing but should not look at everything I see and say the same? Is this some kind of “loose” viewpoint, nothing matters anything but please do not apply this idea as a doctrine (because then it would matter)?

A: Sentence 6 holds the key to what Jesus is getting at: **“Only be sure that nothing you see is specifically excluded.”** He is very much aware of the cleverness of our egos -- how we all would attempt to compromise and make bargains with him so that we don't have to change too much -- how we try to get him to accept *our* terms and conditions for our relationship with him as our teacher. Thus, in the context of this lesson, he is alerting us to this tendency to put ourselves in control of our work with his course. He knows that we would attempt to exclude certain parts of our experience from the application, and so he is saying, “Don't do this. It will not help you to achieve the goals of this course if you make exceptions to my instructions.” This is what he means in the statements he makes about achieving the holy instant: **“The necessary condition for the holy instant does not require that you have no thoughts that are not pure. But it does require that you have none that you would keep.... In your practice, then, try only to be vigilant against deception, and seek not to protect the thoughts you would keep to yourself” (T.15.IV.9:1,2,8).**

While Jesus wants us to be disciplined in our practice -- because our minds are typically so *un* disciplined -- he wants us to stop short of ritual, only because turning a practice into a ritual usually means we no longer do it in a meaningful way that would produce the desired effects. He tells us in the manual for teachers: **“Routines as such are dangerous, because they easily become gods in their own right, threatening the very goals for which they were set up” (M.16.2:5)** . Our *willingness* to do what he advises, even if we forget to do it, is what affects our spiritual process, as opposed to the mere repetition of what he tells us to say at exactly the times he tells us to say it.

Q #754: My question is if we made up this world and God doesn't know about it why are we asking for His guidance?

A: We seek guidance because we have forgotten Who we are, and we need help to remember. In the clarification of terms we are told: **“There is no need for help to enter Heaven for you have never left. But there is need for help beyond yourself as you are circumscribed by false beliefs of your Identity” (C.5.1:1,2)**. The help does not come from God for, as you mention, God does not know about us as bodies and therefore does not hear prayers nor give us guidance: **“God does not guide, because He can share only perfect knowledge” (T.5.II.5:1)**, **“God does not help because He knows no need**

(C.5.1:7). The ego, on the other hand, has us believe that the world is real, which entails the belief that God made it and the body, and is therefore in communication with it. This cannot be, for God, Who is real, cannot know a body that does not exist: “ **At no single instant does the body exist at all**” (T.18.VII.3:1) . However, we who are deeply attached to our belief in the body find it difficult to understand that God does not know bodies, and does not hear our prayers. In fact, we cannot help but identify God with the body. As Jesus tells us in the text: “**Everything you recognize you identify with externals, something outside itself. You cannot even think of God without a body, or in some form you think you recognize**” (T.18.VIII.1:6,7). Therefore, he uses language, terms, and images that are familiar to us to gently teach us that we are minds, not bodies. Thus, the form takes into consideration our fear and our mistaken beliefs, while the content gradually leads us beyond our fear. Having dissociated from our identity as minds, we have become oblivious to the mind's power and fearful of it. That is why, for example, the beautiful prayers in the second half of the workbook are addressed to God, even though we are told He does not understand words (M.21.1:7) . We are actually addressing the part of our minds that holds the memory of God. The inspiring words reflect the principles taught in *A Course in Miracles* , and praying them helps us join with the part of our minds that believes them.

This same process holds true for all the ways we seek guidance. While we are still afraid of our true Identity, we need a symbol that we perceive as “outside” of ourselves who represents our right mind. Consulting with someone whose wisdom and example we respect, praying words to God, or meditating, reflect the mind's choice to return to the Teacher/Holy Spirit within Who speaks to us from beyond the insanity of the ego. We may ask the wrong questions and even seek guidance for things pertaining to the ego that would hurt us if we achieved them, yet the simple acknowledgement that there is a Teacher other than the ego to Whom we can turn, strengthens our belief in Him. It is important, therefore, that we continue to ask for help for every need we think we have, until we learn that “ [we] ...**need only truth. In that all needs are satisfied, all cravings end, all hopes are finally fulfilled and dreams are gone**” (W.P.II.251.1:5,6) .

Q #755: I have been studying *A Course in Miracles* for many years. From the first time I read it, I got interested in it and thought I understood it. However, I still read it, feeling as if I read it for the first time. I wonder if I am increasing my level of understanding.

A: The study of *A Course in Miracles* is a process that usually requires several readings and rereading because its teachings reverse everything we believe about everything: “**To learn this course requires willingness to question every value that you hold**” (T.24.in.2:1, italics ours) . This is not an easy task because the choice to identify with the body has led to a multitude of seemingly diverse values and beliefs. The fear of letting go of this identity with the body keeps the belief system that supports it in place. Frequently questioning our beliefs begins with those experienced as painful, since it is relatively easy to let go of unwanted beliefs. With time we discover that *everything* we believe about ourselves as bodies causes us pain in some way, and that nothing we do to alleviate the pain really works. That is usually when we begin our study all over again, seemingly for the first time. It takes years of study and practice to train our minds to recognize our hidden thoughts, beliefs and values. The more we practice, the more understanding we bring to our reading of the Course, which often means realizing we did not previously understand, or do not now understand.

Your experience is shared by many, if not all, students of the Course, and it is an important part of the process. Accepting the fact that do not know or understand is the beginning of wisdom, as this striking passage in the text tells us: “ **When every concept has been raised to doubt and question, and been recognized as made on no assumptions that would stand the light, then is the truth left free to enter in its sanctuary, clean and free of guilt. There is no statement that the world is more afraid to hear than this: I do not know the thing I am, and therefore do not know what I am doing, where I am, or how to look upon the world or on myself. Yet in this learning is salvation born**” (T.31.V.17:5,6,7,8). This is a good example of how the Course reverses our thinking. Progress in “understanding” is evidenced by awareness of our lack of understanding. In an earlier passage Jesus

makes the same point: **“You are still convinced that your understanding is a powerful contribution to the truth, and makes it what it is. Yet we have emphasized that you need understand nothing” (T.18.IV.7:5,6).** In view of our difficulty in understanding the Course, this is a great relief; to the ego, it is insulting. The ego is convinced of its own brilliance, never suspecting it **“...cannot know anything” (T.6.IV.3:1)**. Though our understanding is not required, our willingness is. Only this enables us to practice the forgiveness Jesus teaches in the Course. Practicing forgiveness leads to healing our minds of the thought of separation, and it is this we seek more than understanding.

Q #756: I would like to know why the world of form gets so difficult to deal with when one starts to understand the concepts of *A Course in Miracles*, practice forgiveness, and get in contact with the Inner Light, the Holy Spirit. I've been going through difficult times in the outer material (non existing) world, while the inner, peaceful world manifests itself. What could I do to find the peace of God and still act in this world? How can we see this world with the eyes of the Holy Spirit, and avoid dealing with such a vicious ego and its attacks? In my case these attacks come in the form of economic difficulties that I've never gone through before.

A: Most of us, when we first come to the Course, do not understand what we are opening the door to -- the locked vaults of sin and guilt in our own mind **(T.31.V.6:6)** ! We think we are simply asking to have a more peaceful and loving experience in the world by getting in touch with the Teacher of Love and peace within. At one level, that is true, but the process in coming to that experience of peace involves forgiveness, which none of us really understands in the beginning **(S.2.I.1)**. For we think we are going to learn how to forgive all the bastards in our life, not realizing that there is really only one bastard to forgive -- ourselves!

The reason we are ever not at peace has nothing to do with our external life circumstances but only with the choice we have made to identify with the ego and its thought system of sin and guilt and fear and scarcity within. But for most of us, it is too fearful to look directly within and so the Course's process is an indirect one **(T.14.I.4,5)** -- we look at the projections of the ego from our mind out onto the screen we call the world, which seems to be outside us. As real as the external problems outside us may seem, the Course is leading us to a recognition that the problem is only our *interpretation* of those situations **(M.17.4:2)**, which is coming from our belief in our own sin and guilt, for which we believe we deserve punishment.

And so the lessons begin -- not orchestrated by the Holy Spirit but brought by our own mind into our awareness so that the spots of guilt within can now be healed, rather than continuing to fester, hidden and unrecognized in the dark recesses of our own mind. The goal is not to avoid the ego and its attacks but rather to learn to welcome the opportunity for healing that each challenging situation offers us. And so a relationship may suddenly seem to become more difficult, or some shift in our life circumstances -- health, financial, career, etc., -- may seem to arise. Now, an initial interpretation of such challenges is that the ego is trying to sabotage us in our efforts to make a different choice, and certainly these problems can have the initial effect of riveting our attention even more in the world. But with the Holy Spirit as our Teacher we can begin to recognize that these are just the opportunities to practice forgiveness of ourselves that we have at some level invited in.

In your own case, the new economic problems can be seen as opportunities to uncover your beliefs about yourself in terms of scarcity, lack and unworthiness. And as you can come to share the Holy Spirit's perception of yourself, you will begin to open up to a different interpretation of those financial challenges. As your own guilt is released, the external circumstances will merely be situations to be addressed, but not indictments of yourself. And so whether the external situation shifts or not will be irrelevant to your own peace of mind. Now this is the process, described very briefly, and you may find your resistance to accepting the Holy Spirit's interpretation strong, especially at the beginning. But that is why Jesus presents forgiveness in the Course as a process, requiring practice over time.

Further discussion of how to look at issues related to money and financial challenges from the Course's perspective can be found in Questions #113, 139, 349, and 487.

Q #757: Is the “inner child” an aspect of the ego's composition? Is healing the inner child actually helpful or just more of the ego's smokescreen?

A: The *inner child*, as typically spoken of and worked with in some therapeutic contexts, would be an aspect of the ego from the perspective of *A Course in Miracles*. As with everything, its helpfulness as a concept depends on how it is used. It may be used, and typically is, to reinforce the perception that one has been victimized as a child. Now it is true that most of us in various ways feel we were treated unfairly, perhaps even abused, when we were younger and more helpless, and may also feel we carry the scars of those past experiences into our present lives, preventing us from feeling worthy of love and achieving our full potential now. And the Course would not want us to deny that these are our experiences and perceptions.

Therapeutic interventions based on the concept of the *inner child* may then encourage the individual to nurture his or her inner child, providing oneself the adult support and love that was not provided by the adult figures, typically the parents, during childhood. In that way, one can now take responsibility for one's life and not feel condemned to continue playing out the victim scripts in the present. And certainly, from the perspective of functioning in the world, this can all be very helpful. However, if we go no further than this with the idea, from the Course's perspective we would merely be serving the ego's purpose of keeping the roles of victim and victimizer real and never getting to the real source of the pain and feelings of unworthiness in the mind (T.27.VII.1 , 2,3,4,5, 6,7,8,9) .

On the other hand, using the concept of the *inner child* to identify the victim dynamic within oneself can be a very helpful first step in uncovering the ego's defenses, especially for anyone who may have a tendency to deny difficult feelings and sugarcoat the past, out of guilt and fear over confronting very negative repressed feelings towards family and others. For any genuine healing, as the Course speaks of it, to occur, we need to be able to acknowledge the many ways in which we feel we have been and are being victimized, for only then can we begin to identify the strong attraction we in fact have to such feelings, for they are the great preservers of guilt, seen in someone other than ourselves. And this projection is always the ego's intent in every relationship (T.19.IV.A.10,11,12,13) .

And so, if we see getting in touch with our victimized *inner child* as a necessary first step in the forgiveness process, but only a first step -- since in the end it is only ourselves we need to forgive for wanting to believe we can be deprived of love by anything other than our own choice (T.4.IV.3:3) -- the concept can be of great value. For then it will be possible to get in touch with our real inner Child (W.pl.182) !

Q #758: I am working as a secretary and organizing and “planning ahead” is an important part of my job. *A Course in Miracles* states that we should not “plan the future.” How can I follow the Course without having to, drastically speaking, quit my job?

A: The essence of this teaching is that we should not make plans *on our own* , which almost always means *with the ego* . Similarly, when Jesus says in the text, “**I need do nothing,**” (T.18.VII) , he means that before we act or make plans, we should bring our perceptions to his or the Holy Spirit's loving presence in our minds, so that we would be able to purify them of the ego's purpose. This is evident from the statement that follows Jesus' saying that “**a healed mind does not plan**” (W.pl.135.11:1) . Note that he is talking about a *healed mind* , which simply “**carries out the plans that it receives through**

listening to wisdom that is not its own.... It does not depend upon itself for anything except its adequacy to fulfill the plans assigned to it" (W.pl.135.11:2,4) . This is the ideal we are growing toward. Thus, Jesus is really not saying that we should not make plans. No one could function with making plans of some kind. The point is that our plans are normally based on unquestioned assumptions about who we are and what we ought to be doing with our lives; we rarely question our definitions of our problems and their solutions. And those assumptions are almost always part of the ego's strategy to keep us mindlessly bound to its plan to maintain the separation from God. This is what Jesus is getting at. He is helping us release our perceptions from the bondage of the ego, thus freeing ourselves to switch to the Holy Spirit's purpose for our lives. We might wind up making the exact same plans as before, but the purpose would have been changed and we would not take what we are doing quite so seriously.

This has been of concern to many students; see also Questions [#90](#), [#289](#), [#293](#), and [#305](#).

Q #759: I am just beginning my studies in *A Course in Miracles* , and have some basic questions. I have a hard time releasing myself from the thought system of the world and accepting that it is an illusion. It seems that ever since I've started studying the ideas in the Course, I've had nightmares, but at the same time it feels so right to me. I know these things written in the Course are true, but I don't know how to rid myself of my old way of thinking, so that I can see the truth. I have been diagnosed with schizophrenia, which has relevance since I've accepted some crazy thought systems in the past which have proven themselves to be wrong. Basically, I'm afraid to throw myself into something again, being that I've been so wrong in the past. Please try to look at this from my point of view, for the things that are problems to me, are truly real problems to me in my mind. Please try to understand what it would be like not to be able to control your thoughts and emotions, and at the same time, to yearn for truth and God's Love.

A: Perhaps you will find it reassuring to know that, despite the problems you've encountered in your life and the world's diagnosis for those problems, the Course would say that, at a deeper level -- the only level that really counts -- you are not any different from anyone else. We all share the same ego mental illness, or illness of the mind, believing things that aren't real (**T.13.V.6:1,2**) and mounting defenses against the truth that are completely dysfunctional. For, as Jesus says, "all illness is mental illness" (**P.2.IV.1:1**) -- we all simply express our illness in different ways.

That is not to minimize the particular set of challenges you personally have been confronting and the special concerns they raise for you as to whether you can trust your judgment about the validity and value of the Course's teachings for you. And yet again you are not alone in raising these questions. If you can set aside for a moment any consideration of the Course's metaphysical premise that the world is an illusion and simply focus on the one problem that we seem to share universally, that we are often immobilized by guilt and fear -- and it is with that problem we all seek help -- you may be willing to accept the Course's antidote to that guilt and fear -- forgiveness.

Forgiveness means nothing more than being willing to accept that your judgments about the world and others may simply be wrong. You do not have to begin by denying the reality of the world. You only need to be willing to deny the validity of your *interpretations* of the world. Considering your experiences so far in your life, you may not find this a difficult premise to accept. And this step will help you begin to release yourself from the fear and the guilt in your mind that leads you to question both yourself and the Course's value for you. As you can step back from the fear and the guilt, you may then begin to get greater clarity as to whether the Course is the appropriate path for you. Whether the Course ends up being your path is not something you need to know at the outset, nor is it necessary for you to know that in order to benefit from its gentle teachings on forgiveness.

Among the many implications of its teachings is that it is not necessary for you, as you say, "to rid myself of my old way of thinking, so that I can see the truth." By simply looking honestly at your old way of thinking without shrinking back from it, but acknowledging the painful limitations and consequences of

judgment, you will begin to value it less and less as a mental tool. No active resistance or struggle against the old way is necessary. In fact, the resistance simply gives the old way of thinking power, for it says it is real and must be overcome. But a gentle looking allows it simply to dissolve into nothingness, which is all it really is.

You do not say whether you are currently getting treatment or taking any medications for your condition, but there would be nothing in the Course that would counsel against seeking help from outside yourself. Recognizing and acknowledging our limitations and then seeking help at the level and in the form in which we are able to accept it is very consonant with the Course's teachings (T.2.IV.4,5) .

Q #760: In speaking with a rabbi's wife, I mentioned forgiveness. She immediately reacted and asked if I meant "the golden rule," or what the Buddha once taught." She did not care to talk anymore. I later wondered whether the term compassion would be easier to mention?

A: Forgiveness, as Jesus teaches it in *A Course in Miracles* , involves a recognition that perceiving oneself as "sinned against" or victimized is the projection of guilt that is the result of the mind's choice to be separate from God and to identify with the body. This teaching is unique to the Course, which tells us **"There is no sin" (T.26.VII.10:5)**. However, what is usually understood as forgiveness, particularly in the Judeo-Christian tradition, rests on the belief that *sin is real* and must be atoned for to be forgiven. It is almost impossible to speak of forgiveness without evoking thoughts of sin. It generally means that someone who has inflicted harm must be released of blame, and a "legitimate claim" to retribution must be relinquished by the "victim." This can be threatening no matter what beliefs one has about it, as your experience demonstrates. And so the question becomes whether to talk about forgiveness at all. As Jesus tells us so often in the Course, it is the content of our minds that "teaches" both forgiveness and the compassion that flows from it.

The words we use **"are but symbols of symbols" (M.21.1:9)** , and are therefore irrelevant. It is helpful to remember that our only purpose is the healing of our minds: **"Let yourself [mind] be healed that you may be forgiving, offering salvation to your brother and yourself... What you would prove to him you will believe. The power of witness comes from your belief. And everything you say or do or think but testifies to what you teach to him...It is this testimony that can speak with power greater than a thousand tongues. For here is his forgiveness proved to him" (T.27.II.4:7; 5:3,4,5,8,9)**. In all of our encounters, therefore, the only thing we are asked to do is practice the forgiveness we are taught, which means being willing to monitor our minds for any thoughts of judgment, and then give them to the Holy Spirit to be transformed. Only then will our words reflect His message that the other person's fear or defensiveness has had no effect and there is nothing to forgive. Thus we **"...forgive the Son of God for what he did not do" (T.17.III.1:5)**. This is the most compassionate thing we can do for ourselves and for others. It is also the only way we are asked to express forgiveness.

We are thus relieved of the burden of searching for words to reflect the love that is in our minds when we join with the Holy Spirit. As Jesus tells us in the text: **"...love is content, and not form of any kind" (T.16.V.12:1)**. Thus, if while speaking with someone about any subject, including forgiveness, a choice to identify with the Holy Spirit has been made, whatever words are used will reflect the love that He represents. Our goal in learning this course is to forgive ourselves for all our judgments and listen to the Holy Spirit in our minds, Whose words will replace ours: **"The Holy Spirit speaks to you . He does not speak to someone else. Yet by your listening His Voice extends, because you have accepted what He says" (T.27.V.1:10,11,12)**.

Q #761: If God is "absolute" and "one," there cannot be anything but Him. How then can there be a Son, and why? Is God dreaming or is the Son? What link if any is there between God and the world -- the Holy

Spirit or the Son? If this world is an illusion and God hasn't made it, do angels and other spiritual beings also "not exist"? Do we exist if time was but a moment in our mind and is long gone by, what are the practical implications for our daily lives? Even if we recognize this fact, I don't feel that this makes any difference in our normal lives. The world does not cease to exist, even if we try.

A: From the perspective of absolute truth, you are right, there can be no Son distinguishable from God (**W.pl.132.12:4**). It is only within the seeming dream of the sleeping Son that there appear to be two entities, God and the Son. And, unlike some Eastern spiritual teachings, the God of the Course does not dream and the world is not the effect of His dreaming but of the Son's. The Course speaks of the Son because it is addressed to a mind caught in the misbelief of duality and separation, and so uses the split mind's symbols to correct the misbelief, while we still believe we are separate (**T.25.I.7:4**). See also Questions #27, #72, #85 and #228 for further discussions of how *A Course in Miracles* comes to us in dualistic language, despite its nondualistic metaphysics.

There is no link between God and the world, for the world is only a shadowy projection of an illusory thought of guilt in the mind. There is however a Link between God and the *mind* of the Son that seems to have fallen asleep, which the Course calls the Holy Spirit (**T.6.I.19:1** ; **T.10.III.2:5,6**; **T.13.XI.8:1**; **C.6.3,4**) . This link is not a separate entity -- although the Course often speaks of the Holy Spirit in this way -- but is only the memory of God (**T.10.II.2:3,4,5,6**) that we would have had to carry with us in our mind into the dream, since we can never separate from God in reality.

Nothing within the realm of duality and separate beings, including angels, has any real existence from the Course's perspective. The Course does use the concept of angels in a number of places, but only as a symbol of God's Love (see also Questions #36 and #413ii). That realm of duality also includes the selves we think we are. The "I" is the false self of the ego, the illusory individual self we all cling to as our identity. The Course's goal, through the process of forgiveness, or letting go of our judgments, is to lead us to a readiness to release all the concepts we hold about ourselves, including, at the very end of the process, the concept that we are an individual self, an "I" -- ego is, after all, the Latin word for "I."

Although the Course's metaphysics teaches that time is already over, Jesus acknowledges that, as you point out, this is not our experience: **"For those in time can speak of things beyond, and listen to words which explain what is to come is past already. Yet what meaning can the words convey to those who count the hours still, and rise and work and go to sleep by them?" (W.169.10:3,4)**. And yet, in practical terms, as we can allow ourselves to accept the possibility of the idea, even if it is not our immediate experience, it may perhaps help us over time begin to take the specifics of our lives and ourselves just a little less seriously, to have a little less concern about how things turn out, and to be more open merely to watching ourselves move through our lives without trying so obstinately to control the outcomes. All of these would be reflections of a deepening peace that flows from the acceptance of all that is, which forgiveness brings about. And what could be more practical?

Q #762: Can you comment on these feelings I have? I sometimes get insight into someone's behavior that I originally was very judgmental about it and the insight usually makes me more compassionate in that I understand that it was really a call for help and a reflection of a problem with themselves and their lives. But I feel guilty that I was told this information about them. I feel like it is an intrusion on their privacy.

A) Without knowing more about you and the situation, it is difficult to respond. Knowing someone's background does not necessarily have to result in guilt, so there must be an issue related to how you got the information and/or what you are doing with it in your mind. The guilt could also be related just to your having judged that person in the first place -- guilt always results from seeing another person's interests as separate from your own. The need to find fault with others, as distinguished from an objective observation about behavior, comes from the underlying need to project our guilt over having rejected the

call to set aside our ego and join with the love of Jesus instead. Because of this we would always feel guilty about condemning others, as part of us knows that we are using that judgment to get ourselves off the hook. This is the ego's principle of *one or the other* : if you are guilty, I am innocent.

Forgiveness, on the other hand, is grounded in the perception of shared interests and shared identity: we all share the same mind -- the same ego and the same Holy Spirit, along with the ability to choose between the two. Your guilt will vanish, thus, when you choose against separate interests and instead share perception with the Holy Spirit.

Q #763: The following two questions address related issues about the Holy Spirit and the ego and so are being answered together:

i. *A Course in Miracle* states that, since the ego and the Holy Spirit are irreconcilable orders of reality, it is impossible for each to know of the other's existence. Ken often refers to the fact that the ego is only aware that there exists a power greater than itself: that of the "decision maker" to make another choice. That implies, however, that the ego is at least aware that there is an alternative to its thought system. Furthermore, in recounting the myth of the birth of the ego, Ken often states that the ego implores the Son not to listen to the Voice of the Holy Spirit; that He is an "avenging angel" sent by God (another entity of which the ego cannot possibly be aware) to destroy us. Could you please clarify the nature of the "awareness" of the ego vis-a-vis the Holy Spirit and vice versa.

ii. The American healer Chris Griscom describes the Higher Self in her books as "the megaphone of the Soul", a kind of communicator between the "ego" and the soul. I wonder, can the Holy Spirit that the Course talks of be equated to the Higher Self as it "bridges the gap" between God and the ego-world?

A: To begin with, a point of clarification. It is not simply that the ego and the Holy Spirit are "two irreconcilable orders of reality." From the Course's perspective, the Holy Spirit represents the *only* order of reality, while the ego is a symbol for *unreality* . They are mutually exclusive thoughts and only one -- the Holy Spirit -- is true (T.14.IX.2) . Now our choice to believe in the ego makes the ego true for us, and so the Course often speaks to us as if the ego were real, but only to help us get in touch with what we believe, so that we can make a different choice about that belief (T.4.VI.1; T.7.VIII.4:5,6,7) .

Inherent in the ego thought is the idea of something other than itself. For the ego, as the thought of separation, in order to exist, must exist apart from something else -- that is where it came from (W.pII.223.1) . And so its very identity presumes there must be something other than itself, from which it is separate. And so it must contain a recognition that there is "an alternative to its thought system."

While the ego's existence presumes there is something outside itself, it is impossible for the ego to contain any knowledge or understanding of what that alternative is, since the ego's existence depends on the denial of the alternative (T.4.III.4:1,2,3,4; T.9.I.10:2,3,5; T.11.V.16:6,7,8,9) . And so implicit in the ego's illusory existence is the thought that it exists at the other's expense. The alternative then can only be identified with danger and rejection and retaliation, but nothing of its true nature can be known from an ego perspective (T.4.II.8:1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8) . And so while the ego defenses include fabrications about the nature of God and the Holy Spirit as cruel, vengeance- seeking dictators, nothing can be known of Their true reality as all-encompassing Love and Its reflection.

Because the ego represents an *alternative* "reality," implicit in its supposed existence is the notion that its existence is inextricably dependent on an exercise of choice between the alternatives (T.14.III.4; T.17.III.9) . And since choice lies at the foundation of the ego's fragile existence, the only real ego fear can be that the power of choice that has brought about its seeming existence can also be used to choose against its existence. That is the only genuine "threat" that can be recognized from an ego perspective.

The Holy Spirit, in contrast, is the thought of correction to the ego, which simply states that there can be nothing other than God, no alternative to God (**T.24.in.2:8**) , that the separation never happened (**T.6.II.10:7,8**) . The Holy Spirit, as the symbol of God's perfect Oneness, does come within an ego framework, using the symbols of the ego framework, but only to teach that the ego is not real. The Holy Spirit can be said to be aware of the ego only in the sense that He is the correction for it, but that correction does not presume that the ego has any reality. The correction is simply that the ego is not real (**T.9.IV.5; T.9.V.2:1**) . While choice between alternatives (only one of which is real) seems to be real in our split mind, we can say that the Holy Spirit is the choice for the only Alternative.

Now having said all this, it is also apparent from the Course's discussion of the Holy Spirit that we will experience the Holy Spirit as having many specific functions, such as Comforter (e.g., **T.11.III.1:1,2;7:1,2**) , Guide (e.g., **T.14.III.14**) , Mediator (e.g., **T.5.III.7**) , and Teacher (e.g., **T.12.V.5,9**) . These are all metaphoric descriptions that reflect how we will translate this abstract symbol of perfect love into specific forms that we can identify with and be reassured by, while we still believe we are separate. But it is important to recognize that, from within the Course's metaphysical framework, the Holy Spirit is not the Bridge between God and the *ego world* , but rather the Bridge between the *split mind* and the one Mind, from perception to knowledge (e.g., **T.5.III.1; W.pl.96.8:3**) . Now we may experience the Holy Spirit as communicating specific thoughts and ideas to us, but these would only be our own transformation of the Holy Spirit's correction for the ego thought system into a form we are ready to accept in order to experience love. So, since these functions are only metaphoric in the Course, it would not be accurate to equate the Holy Spirit of the Course with the Higher Self of other spiritual teachings, which operate from the premise that the world is real.

Q #764: Is God not in the trees we see, the sun, etc.? I'm having a hard time deciphering created forms with the spirit of God in them vs. ego-made things. Are our beloved animals, pets, creatures of God, or merely forms which the ego has made? I'm deeply committed to the goal of *A Course in Miracles* , yet when I see the beauty of the mountains and trees I'm having a difficult time understanding that this physical beauty is not a manifestation of spirit on this "earth." Did God not say "Let there be heaven and earth and the waters, etc.," which would mean to me that these are of creation, not ego made.

A: The Bible teaches that God made the world and everything in it, which is the meaning of the biblical passage you quote. *A Course in Miracles* not only does not teach that God made the world, it teaches that **"The world was made as an attack on God"** (**W.pl.3.2:1**, italics ours). In the text, Jesus makes an even more striking statement: **"You cannot behold the world and know God. Only one is true"** (**T.8.VI.2:2,3**). These statements, along with many other similar statements, are what distinguish the Course's teaching from traditional Christian theology and the Bible. In fact, they are mutually exclusive. Jesus leaves no room for doubt regarding the origin of the world and its seeming beauty: **"God made it [the world] not. Of this you can be sure"** (**W.pl.152.6:2,3**). The Course teaches that guilt for having chosen to believe separation from God is possible gave rise to the world. Its purpose is to hide from the imagined punishment of a God filled with wrath over the Son's choice. In other words, the world is a projection of guilt: **"The world you see is the delusional system of those made mad by guilt"** (**T.13.in.2:2**).

When the dream of separation is taken seriously, the Son is left feeling homeless and seeks in the world a "home away from Home." Just as our homes are filled with comforts, the ego uses the mind's ability to miscreate to infuse the world with enough beauty to make life in exile tolerable and at times even enjoyable. However, because the dream is one of separation from God, God cannot be part of it and is "banished" from awareness. Then, in order for this scheme of separation to work in the mind of the Son, responsibility for the choice to be separate *must* be denied/ forgotten. The best form of denial is projection. So the backwards ego version of the story goes: "I did not choose to be here, God put me here. It is not my fault!" This choice for separation that has occurred in the mind is "acted out" in the story of Adam and Eve, the "highest" of God's creatures, who turn from God by their disobedience. Now God, rather than the guilt-ridden Son, judges this as a grievous sin, and inflicts a severe punishment: suffering

and death. Life in “paradise,” no matter how beautiful it may seem, is now overshadowed by the doom of death. **“Look carefully at this world, and you will realize that this is so. For this world is the symbol of punishment, and all the laws that seem to govern it are the laws of death. Children are born into it through pain and in pain. Their growth is attended by suffering, and they learn of sorrow and separation and death” (T.13.in.2:2,3,4,5,6).** Everyone here receives this death sentence. It is just punishment for the sin of disobedience: “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

Jesus tells us in the Course that the thought of separation is not a sin, it is actually impossible: **“...the separation never occurred” (T.6.II.10:7).** The world and the entire experience of life in a body is an illusion. God, Who is real, does not know illusions. If He did, He would share in the Son's nightmare, and thus the nightmare would be true.

Motivated by the deep loneliness and pain that accompanies belief in the separation, we seek comfort in beautiful things in the world. Although there is perhaps some temporary enjoyment in beholding them, neither the enjoyment nor the beauty lasts, which is why the greatest beauty of the world ultimately fails to satisfy the longing of our hearts for our true home. Nothing in this world fills the void left by the separation. In fact, all seeking ends in disappointment and pain: **“It is impossible to seek for pleasure through the body and not find pain. It is essential that this relationship be understood, for it is one the ego sees as proof of sin. It is not really punitive at all. It is but the inevitable result of equating yourself with the body, which is the invitation to pain” (T.19.IV.B.12:1,2,3,4).** Having employed the ego's skillful denial and avoidance tactics, our pain may not always be apparent, but a careful inventory of our deepest feelings reveals the hidden anguish of life apart from God. That is why we are told so often in the Course to pay attention to our feelings and to search our minds for thoughts of judgment. They are used to cover over the pain, and healing the thought of separation begins with realizing how painful it is. As the mind is healed, the peace that eventually replaces anguish is not contingent upon the beauty of a sunset, nor is it disturbed by ravishing storms. This peace is the goal of the forgiveness Jesus teaches in the Course. We forgive ourselves for believing we can find happiness outside of Heaven. However, since we believe the world and our bodies are real, we proceed gently through the process, enjoying the “beauties of nature” until we learn the real beauty of our truth. Art or beautiful things in nature can serve as reflections of the right mind when a choice is made to turn toward the Holy Spirit rather than the ego. The important thing is to enjoy them without confusing reality and illusion, by thinking we can bring God into the illusion: **“Seek not for [the completion of God and His Son] in the bleak world of illusion, where nothing is certain and where everything fails to satisfy” (T.16.IV.9:4).**

Q #765: I refer to the Q&A for [#521](#). I accept that the Oneness of God, and the Oneness of the Sonship/Christ cannot be understood here. However, the Course does mention Sons, parts, beings, individuality, in context of the one Son, and in the context of creation (which can only occur in Heaven as I understand), and that the “Sonship in its Oneness transcends the sum of its parts” (T.2.VII.6:1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9, T.4.VII.5:12,3,4,5,6,7). Therefore, although we can't now understand how this all fits together, or understand if what we see now as individual minds equates to such parts or sons, the Course clearly identifies parts to the Sonship. Is not that your understanding?

A: Although, as you note, there are passages early in *A Course in Miracles* which seem to suggest that there are individual beings within Heaven, taken in the context of the teachings of the Course as a whole, this conclusion simply can not be supported. These passages are more readily explained as initial explanations about the nature of reality provided to Helen and Bill early in the scribing of the Course, when Jesus was attempting to describe that reality to them within a conceptual framework that they could more easily understand and relate to.

But statements Jesus makes later in the Course make it clear that he could not have meant these early words literally. Two passages in the workbook make this especially clear:

"God shares His Fatherhood with you who are His Son, for He makes no distinctions in what is Himself and what is still Himself. What He creates is not apart from Him, and *nowhere does the Father end, the Son begin as something separate from Him* ." (W.pl.132.12:3,4, italics added).

"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*. It has united with its Source. And like its Source Itself, it merely is." (W.169.5, italics added).

Jesus' few references to consciousness also make it clear there can be no individuality in Heaven. For if even but two differentiable beings (e.g., Father and Son) exist, then consciousness must exist as well, for there to be any awareness of one other than oneself. Yet very early in the text, Jesus observes: **"Consciousness, the level of perception, was the first split introduced into the mind after the separation, making the mind a perceiver rather than a creator. Consciousness is correctly identified as the domain of the ego (T.3.IV.2:1,2).** In other words, consciousness depends on separation, so that there can be a perceiver and a perceived. And the Course repeatedly describes perception as ego-based, while knowledge is possible only in Heaven (e.g., T.3.III, IV) . Near the end of the Course, Jesus emphatically asserts: **"The structure of 'individual consciousness' is essentially irrelevant because it is a concept representing the 'original error' or the 'original sin'" (C.in.1:4).** So there is no consciousness in Heaven, and therefore there can be no experience of individuality.

It can be very helpful to recognize that the desire to hang on to our individuality -- which is what is really behind your question -- is at the root of our resistance to practicing the Course's gentle principles of forgiveness. When we realize how strong our investment remains in maintaining a sense of individuality, which is the ego's compelling "gift" to us and nothing other than the desire for separation, we can at least begin to appreciate the power that we have given to our egos. And if we can be gentle with ourselves about our resistance, we will have taken a major step in forgiving ourselves for wanting this all to be real. For we cannot hold even one aspect of the ego thought system dear within our mind without making it all -- the sin, the guilt, the pain, the fear, and death -- real.

You may wish to review Question [#327](#) for a related discussion on individuality and oneness.

Q #766: Lately I have been waking with thoughts, ideas or concepts from *A Course in Miracles* fresh in my awareness. For example: recently the thought has reoccurred that "He knows what you have made and can transform this from a dream of hate to one of peace." It's not so much that I "hear" any kind of a voice but more that I have these thoughts with me as I wake up in the morning or during the night. It is probably impossible for you to determine what is going on here, but how do I know that this is not a trick of the ego or the intercession of Course principles in my right mind? There must be some level of the mind that the Course reaches/works with us on that does not require our conscious awareness or involvement, no? Could this be the "little willingness" that Jesus speaks of?

A: Although we are unable to comment on your individual experiences, we can say in general that it would not be unusual for ideas or passages from the Course to stay with people and just be there when they awake in the morning or at night. Other students have spoken of this and have also said that ideas sometimes just pop into their minds -- a kind of "hearing" -- while they are going about their daily activities, not even thinking of the Course. The processing of our study and practice is carried on largely, as you suggest, beneath the level of our conscious awareness; the contents of both the wrong and right minds are for the most part unconscious. Therefore, it would not be surprising that thoughts or words could seem to appear out of nowhere. Our "little willingness" to have Jesus be our teacher has mighty effects in our minds, of which we are mostly unaware.

It may take many, many years of diligent practice before we are able to discern consistently what is coming from our ego and what is from the Holy Spirit or Jesus. If what you hear helps you become more kind, forgiving, and less guilty and judgmental, then just leave it at that. What is most important is not to make it into a big deal, which would happen if you felt a need to run to other people and tell them what happened. This need could well be manifesting the attraction to spiritual specialness. That, of course, is different from asking a question, such as you have done here. This Course is about *your* relationship with Jesus or the Holy Spirit, and bringing your ego to that light and love in your mind. That is where the focus of every student should be. Your trust in the process will develop gradually.

Q #767: I want my cake and eat it too! Can I live in this world and still have the peace of God? Can I keep this creation as a form of amusement?

A: Sorry, no. And the reason is simple: this is what got us into trouble in the first place. Having our cake and eating too is another way of saying separation can work, that we can have Heaven and hell, specialness and peace, individuality and God, wholeness and a split mind. What's more, even a fleeting look at the world tells us that is it not very amusing. It was made as an attack on God (**W.pII.3.2:1**), and it shows: **"Anything in this world that you believe is good and valuable and worth striving for *can hurt you, and will do so* . Not because it has the power to hurt, but just because you have denied it is but an illusion, and made it real. And it is real to you. It is not nothing. And through its perceived reality has entered all the world of sick illusions. (T.26.VI.1:1,2,3,4,5, italics ours).** In a simple and clear statement in the text of *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus also tells us: **"It is impossible to seek for pleasure through the body and not find pain"(T.19.IV.B.12:1).** However, in accord with the insanity of the ego's thought system, we have taught ourselves that there are pleasurable things in the world that are preferable to Heaven. The universally acclaimed favorite is specialness, which, in spite of causing us great misery and tribulation, we find superior to the Identity God gave us as His One Son. We have taken great pains (literally) to contrive ingenious ways of convincing ourselves that there is happiness in the illusion. What we actually find in the "beauty" of some aspects of nature and some personal relationships is the satisfaction of having our needs and expectations met, and living "proof" that the world is real. However beautiful these things and relationships may seem to be, their purpose is a vicious attack on God's Son, in that they have been chosen as a substitute for the Father's Love. By choosing to identify with the ego, and therefore with the body, we have turned away from His Love. This can only lead to deep pain, which is covered over by the endless pursuit of comfort and joy on the world's terms. It is endless because it does not satisfy the longing for our true Identity, which lies buried beneath the guilt for choosing the separation.

So it is a bitter cake we bake when we seek for meaning in the meaninglessness of the illusion. We *do* have it, we *are* eating it, and it has made us sick. We have done this, just as children who overdose on sugar, because we are confused about our identity, and therefore confused about pain and joy: **"What is joyful to you is painful to the ego, and as long as you are in doubt about what you are, you will be confused about joy and pain" (T.7.X.3:6).** Our real "cake" is learning that we are minds, not bodies, that the world is not our home, and we will never be happy here. "Eating" it means accepting that we are God's innocent Son at home with Him.

Since Jesus knows we are afraid of this truth, he offers us great comfort: **"Fear not that you will be abruptly lifted up and hurled into reality. Time is kind, and if you use it on behalf of reality, it will keep gentle pace with you in your transition" (T.16.VI.8:1,2).** Nothing in the process of learning is forced upon us, for no one truly learns under duress. Our healing, therefore, keeps pace with our fear. As fear decreases healing increases to whatever extent we are willing and never without our consent. The things we seek in the world, fear of losing them, and fear of accepting our truth all serve the same purpose of keeping us grounded in the belief that the separation is real. It is not a sin to eat and enjoy the ego's cake, but it will not bring us the happiness we seek. When tempted to indulge it may be helpful to remember that to turn to the Holy Spirit is an alternative that will not hurt: **"The Holy Spirit will direct you only so as to avoid pain. Surely no one would object to this goal if he recognized it"**

(T.7.X.3:1,2) . The peace Jesus promises is not found in the world. It is the true peace found in the forgiving mind, that is not contingent upon our cakes.

Q #768: I have been advised by a magistrate and a lawyer to request that a psychological evaluation be done on my ex-husband because his anger over our divorce continues to escalate. We are not able to communicate regarding our daughter and have been through domestic violence court, and through several hearings where my ex-husband continues to try increase his visitation to the point where she would eventually live with him. In studying *A Course in Miracles* , I have learned to pray for myself, to recognize that we are all children of God, that there is a divine spirit within all of us, and yet I am fearful for myself and my daughter and my ex because of his volatile anger. Is taking legal action against him the right thing to do?

A: The teachings of *A Course in Miracles* are focused on changing our minds, and therefore do not provide specific guidelines for behavior. Although Jesus invites us to leave behind the ego's perspective and allow it to be replaced by the Holy Spirit's, he does not tell us to deny our experience on the level of form. We therefore take care of our bodies in the normal way, keeping them healthy and safe. This often means taking steps to keep someone from hurting themselves and/or others, which can sometimes be accomplished through legal action. It is certainly possible to practice forgiveness as the Course teaches while initiating legal proceedings, if that is what you think you should do. Since the foundation of the world is the belief in the ego's thought system of attack and counter-attack, everything and everyone in it engage in destructive behavior to some degree. That is the inevitable expression of the separated Son's desperate call for help. What we are asked to do is look at any judgments we may have toward the person, seeing in them the projection of our own desperate call for help. Once we recognize how our fears are mirrored in the other person, we have the opportunity to forgive ourselves, asking the Holy Spirit to replace our judgments against ourselves and our brother with His. This process establishes that whatever we do or don't do with regard to another's behavior will be guided by the Holy Spirit rather than by the ego. Taking legal action is appropriate in certain circumstances; it does not mean, however, that the other party is a guilty sinner, worthy of God's punishment, as the ego would have us believe. The choice is not what course of action to pursue, but whose counsel we seek: the ego's or the Holy Spirit's. In this light we may paraphrase the oft quoted line from the text : **“seek not to change your brother, but choose to change your mind about your brother” (T.21.in.1:7).**

Recognizing someone's volatile behavior as a call for help does not mean not paying attention to the form the call takes. This is true for everyone involved in your family's crisis. As Jesus tells us in the text: **“...frightened people can be vicious” (T.3.I.4:2).** While steps are taken to protect yourself, your child, and your husband on the level of form, you may remember that these steps are the expression of your call to the Holy Spirit for help. It is important not to deny the fear that underlies the perceived need for protection, or any other need. What is not denied can be transformed by the Holy Spirit, so that whatever happens you will experience peace in your mind. It is to this peace, rather than any specific behavior, that the Holy Spirit guides us.

Q #769: *A Course in Miracles* states that all creations of us are protected by God “and kept for us” until we return (where we never left; i.e., when we wake up). My question is: i. Has anyone ever returned after they did?; ii. If the ego is but a branch of our Soul-tree then is it not protected as well, and all our attempts to counteract / undo it are all in vain? Should we pay attention to it, and thus give it “energy” and “reality”?

A: i. We do not have an answer to your first question, as there is no way of knowing this. Our creations are only in Heaven; they are the eternal extension of the Love shared by the Father and the Son, and are “protected” in the sense that they are eternal and can never be other than they are. This, of course, is not understandable to us in our separated state, as Jesus tells us in one place in the workbook: **“Creation**

cannot even be conceived of in the world. It has no meaning here” (W.pl.192.3:1,2) . In the manual for teachers, however, he refers to **“those who have reached God directly, retaining no trace of worldly limits and remembering their own Identity perfectly. These might be called the Teachers of teachers because, although they are no longer visible, their image can yet be called upon” (M.26.2:1,2)** . Jesus also speaks of the “real world,” which is the state of mind reached by those with the clear awareness that the world and all bodily states are illusory. They no longer go back and forth between the ego thought system and the Holy Spirit's. These states, perhaps, are what you were referring to in your question.

ii. The Course does not speak of the ego as “a branch of our Soul-tree”; that is from a different spiritual system. The ego, in fact, is not even an entity. It is **“nothing more than a part of your belief about yourself. . . . the part of the mind that believes your existence is defined by separation” (T.4.VI.1:6; T.4.VII.1:5)** . Therefore “undoing the ego” simply means changing your mind about the ego's reality; you accept the truth that the separation from God is not real; it is totally illusory. When you accept the truth about yourself without any reservations -- namely, that **“I am as God created me”** -- then the ego just disappears: **“This terrible mistake about yourself the miracle corrects as gently as a loving mother sings her child to rest” (C.2.8:2)** . A *miracle* in the Course is this shift in our perception of who we are; it is the light that dispels the darkness of the ego, as Jesus explains in the clarification of terms: **“Where there was darkness now we see the light. What is the ego? What the darkness was. Where is the ego? Where the darkness was. What is it now and where can it be found? Nothing and nowhere” (C.2.6:1,2,3,4,5,6,7)** . Thus, we give reality to the ego only when we fear it, fight against it, or deny it. We need to pay attention to it only so that we can bring it out of the dark hiding place we provided for it and into the light of Jesus' love in our minds, where it simply is no more. That is why he emphasizes that the miracle **“looks on devastation, and reminds the mind that what it sees is false” (W.pll.13.1:3)** ; and in the text he also makes the point that the only way to get past the ego is to look at it with him: **“No one can escape from illusions unless he looks at them, for not looking is the way they are protected. There is no need to shrink from illusions, for they cannot be dangerous. We are ready to look more closely at the ego's thought system because together we have the lamp that will dispel it . . .” (T.11.V.1:1,2,3)** .

Q #770: I understand that Jesus tells us to take the Course once and then leave it at that. But many people are working with *A Course in Miracles* for ten or more years, does it not have any effect? I also understand that “once” is completely and full-heartedly, at the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps that is the reason why doing it “in parts” does not have the desired effect of completeness?

A: The workbook, which is not the whole Course, is formatted as a year long practice period, but there are no other time frames or specific instructions in the Course for learning its curriculum: **“...the time you take it is voluntary. ...you can elect what you want to take at a given time” (T.in.1:3,6)**. Although it is not necessary to practice the workbook more than once, the application of the fundamental principles of the Course found in its lessons are meant to be incorporated into a life long practice: **“As you perceive more and more common elements in all situations, the transfer of training under the Holy Spirit's guidance increases and becomes generalized. Gradually you learn to apply it to everyone and everything, for its applicability is universal” (T.12.VI.6:5,6)**. This suggests a long term training process reaching beyond the workbook year. The goal of the workbook is, in fact, a “timeless” process: **“to train your mind in a systematic way to a different perception of everyone and everything in the world. The exercises are planned to help you generalize the lessons, so that you will understand that each of them is equally applicable to everyone and everything you see” (W.in.4:1,2)**. The “different perception” means the reversal of the ego's thought system, which, even if one were very highly motivated, would take time. Remember Jesus' statement in the epilogue at the end of the workbook: **“This course is a beginning, not an end” (W.ep.1:1)**.

Everything we believe about the world and the body is false, because it is based on the belief that the separation is real. Given the high level of fear and resistance to accepting that this is true, we can expect

many years of study and practice to undo this belief. It is unlikely that anyone would shift from identifying with the body to full awareness of the true Self in one lasting instant. In the Course, Jesus has given us a large volume of material to accommodate the volume of our fear and resistance. This enables us to proceed gently, over a period of time, questioning every belief we hold about everything, including, and especially, ourselves. We have so convinced ourselves that what we see, feel, and experience is real, that it is difficult to accept that we are wrong: **"It is difficult for the untrained mind to believe that what it seems to picture is not there. This idea can be quite disturbing, and may meet with active resistance in any number of forms(W.pl.9.2:2).** All these forms of resistance can gradually be unraveled by careful, consistent study of the many different ways Jesus presents the simple message at the heart of the Course: **"...what is false is false, and what is true has never changed"** (W.pl.10.1:1). It takes willingness and patience with ourselves to learn to recognize what is false, so that truth can be revealed. Jesus tells us in the text: **" Nothing is so alien to you as the simple truth, and nothing are you less inclined to listen to. The contrast between what is true and what is not is perfectly apparent, yet you do not see it. The simple and the obvious are not apparent to those who would make palaces and royal robes of nothing, believing they are kings with golden crowns because of them"** (T.14.II.2:5,6,7). We do not usually perceive ourselves as emperors with no clothes, yet we must learn this before we can be led to the awareness that not only does the emperor have no clothes, there is no emperor.

Although they may not be what we think are spectacular results, there are immediate and significant effects to every step in learning to accept the healing Jesus offers in the Course. The mind is trained to see the ego's dynamics in operation, and then ask the Holy Spirit to transform them. In this process lies the recognition that Someone is with us Who represents the truth. Belief in the part of the mind where He abides is strengthened with each application of the Course's teachings, while belief in the ego is weakened. It is enough that we be willing to practice this: **"Your willingness need not be perfect, because His is. If you will merely offer Him a little place, He will lighten it so much that you will gladly let it be increased. And by this increase, you will begin to remember creation"** (T.11.II.6:6,7,8). It is great comfort that this will be the certain outcome for everyone, however slow or partial the practice of the Course may be.

Q #771: I came across a really disturbing passage in *A Course in Miracles* that I have not found addressed anywhere on the Internet, including on your site. It comes in "The Justification for Forgiveness" (T.30.VI). The first two sentences are clear: "Anger is *never* justified. Attack has *no* foundation." Since this world is but a delusion made by ourselves, it would be a joke to take it seriously and get annoyed over something that bothers us (yet we do!). Yet a few sentences later, it says, "You are not asked to offer pardon where attack is due and would be justified." Isn't that a plain contradiction to the previous sentences? And the next paragraph continues this line of thought: "You do not forgive the unforgivable, nor overlook a real attack that calls for punishment. Salvation does not lie in being asked to make unnatural responses which are inappropriate to what is real," etc. So is attack justified or not? What does the Course include under a "real attack that calls for punishment." I thought attack is never in line with God's reality?

A: This probably ranks up there among the most misunderstood passages in the Course! Our egos read this as Jesus saying that there are those times when attack is justified, when the action of others is so evil that it is unforgivable, and he's not going to ask us to offer forgiveness in those instances, for that would be unnatural and inappropriate. But Jesus' point is just the opposite. He is correcting the world's form of forgiveness, which he calls "false forgiveness" in the third paragraph of this section, and "forgiveness-to-destroy" in the *Song of Prayer* pamphlet (S.2.II) .

Most of us have been brought up with the idea that, no matter how horrible and cruel an act another may have committed against us or one of our loved ones, the truly loving, Christian (if we were raised Christian) thing to do is to "forgive" the other person. It may be such a heinous act that nearly everyone agrees that some form of punishment would be only fair and just, yet the Christian thing would still be to

“forgive.” But this is not the kind of “forgiveness” Jesus in the Course is asking of us -- that we should forgive anyway, regardless of how unfair such a demand may feel. His point instead is that, because there is no act for which attack in response is ever due, forgiveness is therefore *always* justified. So, correcting what 2000 years of Christianity has taught about forgiveness, Jesus is saying that that we are never “asked to offer pardon where attack is due and would be justified,” for attack is *never* due and justified, regardless of our perception of the “crime.” The problem is never, Jesus asserts over our ego's protestations, the “crime,” but our perception of it.

In other words, if you re-read these paragraphs with the understanding that Jesus is saying that seeing attack, either in others or in ourselves, is a misperception of the ego and is not real, and therefore attack in response can never be justified., then it becomes clear that Jesus is saying that forgiveness or pardon as the Course defines it -- releasing judgment -- is always justified. We are not asked to “overlook a real attack that calls for punishment” because there are no real attacks that could ever call for punishment when we are in our right mind. That is not to deny that people do insane things that they intend to be hurtful to others, but nevertheless it can only be my own ego-based interpretation that would lead me to perceive them as attacks against me personally.

One of the clearest statements of this correction can be found in Jesus' discussion of the crucifixion in the text: **“Assault can ultimately be made only on the body. There is little doubt that one body can assault another, and can even destroy it. Yet if destruction itself is impossible, anything that is destructible cannot be real. Its destruction, therefore, does not justify anger. To the extent to which you believe that it does, you are accepting false premises and teaching them to others. The message the crucifixion was intended to teach was that it is not necessary to perceive any form of assault in persecution, because you cannot *be* persecuted. If you respond with anger, you must be equating yourself with the destructible, and are therefore regarding yourself insanely (T.6.I.4).**

Jesus did not need to forgive those who crucified his body, because he was not identified with his body. And he did not see the body as himself because there was no guilt in his mind that he needed to project outside his mind to defend against it. We though who still see ourselves as bodies do need to learn to forgive. But we do not need to learn to forgive others. When we feel we are attacked, it is only because guilt is still real in our own mind, and that is where the forgiveness is truly needed. Perceiving others as attacking is only ever the result of our own projected guilt. So when we feel attacked, we need to forgive ourselves. To believe that we need to forgive others for their attacks against us makes forgiveness as the Course teaches it impossible. It is what the Course refers to as making sin real and then trying to forgive it, described beautifully in the following passage:

“The unhealed cannot pardon. For they are the witnesses that pardon is unfair. They would retain the consequences of the guilt they overlook. Yet no one can forgive a sin that he believes is real. And what has consequences must be real, because what it has done is there to see. Forgiveness is not pity, which but seeks to pardon what it thinks to be the truth. Good cannot *be* returned for evil, for forgiveness does not first establish sin and then forgive it. Who can say and mean, ‘My brother, you have injured me, and yet, because I am the better of the two, I pardon you my hurt.’ His pardon and your hurt cannot exist together. One denies the other and must make it false.

To witness sin and yet forgive it is a paradox that reason cannot see. For it maintains what has been done to you deserves no pardon. And by giving it, you grant your brother mercy but retain the proof he is not really innocent. The sick remain accusers. They cannot forgive their brothers and themselves as well. *For no one in whom true forgiveness rests can suffer. He holds not the proof of sin before his brother's eyes. And thus he must have overlooked it and removed it from his own. Forgiveness cannot be for one and not the other. Who forgives is healed. And in his healing lies the proof that he has truly pardoned, and retains no trace of condemnation that he still would hold against himself or any living thing*” (T.27.II.2,3; italics added) .

Q #772: I was wondering if it is possible that the Holy Spirit's guidance does not make rational sense to us. I feel that I am being guided toward a job that pays me far less money than others that I have been offered. Now, I am an avid reader of some of your materials and in *The Most Commonly Asked Questions About A Course in Miracles* you said that "common sense" is important to keep in mind when practicing the Course. Now, common sense would tell me that the more money job that would help make my financial life easier is the better route to take. Is it possible that the Holy Spirit's guidance could make no sense to us at the time?

A: The use of reason is a faculty of the intellect, which is not the home of the Holy Spirit. He abides in the mind, not the brain, and is the symbol of the part of the mind that remembers the truth. The Holy Spirit reflects a thought system that is outside of time and space. Therefore, we may say that the Holy Spirit is never "rational." His goal in *A Course in Miracles* is healing our minds of the thought of separation, so His guidance leads us to our minds, where we choose to identify with Him or with the ego. It is not focused on behavior, or decisions made on the level of form. This reflects the important distinction the Course makes between form (the body/behavior) and content (the mind).

In the text Jesus gives us his common sense approach to resolving problems: **"In any situation in which you are uncertain, the first thing to consider, very simply, is 'What do I want to come of this? What is it for?'"** The clarification of the goal belongs at the beginning, for it is this which will determine the outcome" (T.17.VI.2:1,2,3). This focuses our attention on the content while dealing with the situation as we perceive it in our experience. In asking the questions Jesus suggests, there are two goals to choose between: either to strengthen belief in the ego's message of separation or in the Holy Spirit's message of healing. The choice for healing means willingness to recognize all the fearful thoughts and judgments (confusion, uncertainty, expectations, perceived needs) involved in making decisions in the world. They reflect back to us the ego's perspective, revealing the choice for separation that was made so we can make another choice. In this way, what appeared to be merely a career opportunity becomes an opportunity to learn to forgive ourselves for our mistaken choice. Once this shift to the Holy Spirit's curriculum (content) has occurred, the job options can be considered without the pressure of believing that salvation lies in either of the jobs. Then the common sense that belongs to the level of form can be applied, while the mind remains peaceful.

If the goal in everything is to learn the Holy Spirit's lessons of forgiveness, even when a choice on the level of form appears to be a mistake (the job is not what we thought, the salary goes up or down, benefits come and go, etc.), the content of the mind is not altered, nor its peacefulness disturbed. To the ego that is indeed irrational. Every situation becomes a classroom that serves the goal of healing. Thus, following the guidance of the Holy Spirit it is possible to remain peaceful whatever job is decided upon. As Jesus tells us in the text: **"What [the Holy Spirit] enables you to do [change our mind about the purpose of everything] is clearly not of this world, for miracles violate every law of reality as this world judges it. Every law of time and space, of magnitude and mass is transcended, for what the Holy Spirit enables you to do is clearly beyond all of them"** (T.12.VII.3:2,3).

Q #773: In answering Question #538, you mentioned that Jesus stated the ultimate answer to all our questions about our little problems was that God only wishes for us to remember Him. Does He need us? Does God have an ego? What was His motivation to Father a Child? Was He lonely? Is He growing weary of our insanity? Have we overslept? I doubt He's "concerned" about our little illusion we call "life." But is He amused?

A: Let's begin by quoting the lines from Question #538 that you refer to: **"What could His answer be but your remembrance of Him? Can this be traded for a bit of trifling advice about a problem of an instant's duration? God answers only for eternity"** (S.1.I.4:5,6,7). The point Jesus is making here is not that God needs us to remember Him, but rather that we need to remember Him so that we may

experience true happiness and joy. Nothing but perfect Love can satisfy us. And only by remembering God will we remember Who we truly are.

A Course in Miracles, as discussed elsewhere (e.g., see Questions #72 and #156, as well as the tape set *Duality as Metaphor* and chapter 2 of *The Message of A Course in Miracles: Few Choose to Listen*, both by Kenneth Wapnick), uses metaphorical language to describe God so that we can have some glimmering of understanding, but only the very slightest, of our true reality as part of perfect Oneness. And while one could certainly conclude that the God of the bible has an ego, since He makes separation and sin real by reacting to them and first punishing man, then offering him salvation through His Son's death, the Course uses biblical language, such as the Father and the Son, only to provide a correction for the bible's -- both Old and New Testaments -- theology of sin, guilt and sacrifice (e.g., see Question #473ii). And so God is described in the Course in more comforting terms that can help undo our unconscious and conscious beliefs that God is an angry Judge Who demands suffering and ultimately death for all our many transgressions.

But the reality of the God of the Course is beyond all words, symbols and descriptions, and beyond all consciousness and perception (e.g., **T.27.III.4:4,5,6,7,8; 5:1,2 ; W.pl.43.2:2; W.pl.198.11:3,4,5,6**). And so He can not possibly be aware of our insanity, nor concerned about our sleeping and dreaming this illusion we foolishly call life. To God, none of what seems like such a big deal to us, *especially ourselves*, has any meaning -- good, bad, silly, or indifferent. And of course, when we're identified with the ego, which constantly strives after acknowledgment and recognition, we don't like that at all! But at some point, we will begin to think more sanely, and All of Everything will have greater appeal to us than the little bit of nothing we're trying to content ourselves with now (**T.9.I.10; T.12.VIII.6; T.14.V.1:8,9**).

Q #774: I understand that the basic goal of *A Course in Miracles* is to reorient perception, and from there, experience. However, while I can get a handle on this intellectually, I feel like I'm emotionally handicapped on this one. There are a number of things from my past which are still present in my mind, causing me severe bouts of depression at times, and I have a great deal of trouble releasing them. How can I let go of them? Do I simply "not think about them" anymore? Do I ignore them as "non-existent"? Every so often, these issues seem to pop back up, and I seem unable to recondition my own responses. They are making me extremely tired, and they have unpleasant effects in my relationships. Help!!!

A: Bringing *purpose* into the picture is important for understanding what is happening. Jesus tells us, "**The memory of God comes to the quiet mind. It cannot come where there is conflict, for a mind at war against itself remembers not eternal gentleness**" (**T.23.I.1:1,2**) . Part of us wants to remember our true Identity in God, and part of us is terrified of letting go of our false identity so that we would remember the truth. That fear causes us to do things that would prevent our minds from being quiet, as Jesus indicates in the quote. These are our defenses, and we all have a grab bag full of them that we pull out the instant this fear arises to threaten us. One very effective defense is to recall painful events from the past -- this is a "favorite" of many students. (How curious that we would resort to something painful to cope with fear!) Recalling the past thus is purposeful, for we then begin to obsess about what happened years ago, as if it were happening right now, and that leaves us with no doubt that we are bodies, the innocent victims of what has been done to us -- or we could remember how we cruelly victimized others. We don't realize that this is a defense that is consciously chosen, as are all defenses -- an important dynamic that Jesus describes at the beginning of Lesson 136 (**W.pl.136**) . He also points out in a thought-provoking section in the text, "**The Present Memory,**" that "**remembering is as selective as perception, being its past tense**" (**T.28.I.2:5**) . Why are only certain events of the past brought into awareness, when so many other things happened as well?

The section in the text called "**Shadows of the Past**" (**T.17.III**) is likewise enlightening with respect to how the ego uses the past to reinforce in our minds our belief that we are separate. Elsewhere in the text Jesus teaches us about the ego's use of time in contrast to the Holy Spirit's. For the ego, time "**is**

nothing but a teaching device for compounding guilt until it becomes all- encompassing, demanding vengeance forever. The Holy Spirit would undo all of this now . Fear is not of the present, but only of the past and future, which do not exist” (T.15.I.7:7; 8:1,2). The context of the discussion is the ego's ferocious need to keep alive its doctrine of sin, guilt, damnation, and hell. Linear time was devised by the ego for this purpose. The Holy Spirit, however, uses time to teach us how to learn only from Him so that we would have **“no cares, no worries, no anxieties, but merely to be perfectly calm and quiet all the time” (T.15.I.1:1) .**

Once you realize the purpose of recalling the past, you can simply look at that and then dwell more on the *purpose* of these recollections, than on the past hurts. When you no longer want the purpose served by your remembrance of these hurts in the present, they will be easier to let go. But you never want to try to convince yourself that something is non-existent when it is still causing you pain. That will only worsen the situation. **“ Do not fight yourself ,”** Jesus emphasizes **(T.30.I.1:7) .** It is fine to have defenses. They are not the problem; the problem is our thinking that we need them. But that takes years of practice to undo, along with patience and gentleness with yourself: **“ Defenses, like everything you made, must be gently turned to your own good, translated by the Holy Spirit from means of self-destruction to means of preservation and release” (T.14.VII.5:8) .**

Finally, it is sometimes a good idea to seek help from a therapist when events from the past are so painful and compelling that you are unable to function well. This would be no different from getting medical help for an ankle injury that prevents you from walking.

Q #775: Could you talk a little about the process that *A Course in Miracles* seems to set into motion? Why, even after working with the Course for a long period, is it so difficult to let go of the addiction to this world (i.e., sin, fear, etc.)? Could it be that a part of ourselves (the real Self) has long done so and simply left the remnants of the "ego" playing about there "in darkness" and doesn't take any interest in it any longer? Is it not simply an illusion that we are still involved here, as God does not teach nor bother with what seems to happen "down here"? Will the ego be either healed or destroyed once Atonement is achieved?

A: You might say that there are two processes that the Course “sets in motion,” although both in fact represent very deliberate and conscious choices on our part: forgiveness, and resistance to practicing that forgiveness. Our mind, joined with the Holy Spirit, joyfully embraces the Course's teachings on forgiveness and strives to make its promises **(W.pl.122)** our reality. Our mind, joined with the ego, resists the release from pain and guilt and fear that forgiveness offers, every step of the way **(W.pl.121.2,3,4,5; W.pl.1.2,3) .** This is because we have convinced ourselves that we are the ego, and we believe forgiveness will annihilate who we are. And so we fight desperately to maintain its existence in our mind, not wanting to recognize all the cruel outcomes its thought system condemns us to.

Our true Self, the Christ, has never even been aware of the false ego self, and for It there are no remnants or fragments existing anywhere in the mind. So yes, it is nothing more than an illusion that we seem to find ourselves still caught in the world of separation, sin, guilt and fear. But nothing will happen to the ego once we accept the Atonement for ourselves, except that it will no longer seem to exist and, for one brief instant, we will realize that it never has existed. And nothing but this recognition needs to occur for the ego and all its effects to return to the nothingness from which they came **(T.10.IV.1:9; M.13.1:2) .**

Q #776: In “The Justification for Forgiveness,” Jesus states: “You are not asked to offer pardon where attack is due, and would be justified. For that would mean that you forgive a sin by overlooking what is really there. This is not pardon. For it would assume that, by responding in a way which is not justified, your pardon will become the answer to attack that has been made. And thus is pardon inappropriate, by

being granted where it is not due”; and later he says, “You do not forgive the unforgivable, nor overlook a real attack that calls for punishment” (T.30.VI.1:6,7,8,9,10; 2:3). What does this mean? What would be considered unforgiveable? Could you present a few instances or examples that illustrate your answer?

A: This section presents *A Course in Miracles'* distinctive view of forgiveness. The world's view, which Jesus in this same section calls *false forgiveness* (T.30.VI.4:1) , is that while we at times pardon sinners, we never forget that they have sinned (T.30.VI.3:7) . In this sense, they do not really deserve our forgiveness, but we grant it anyway. This kind of pardon is inappropriate, Jesus is saying, for we are attempting to overlook what we think is real, and that simply cannot be done -- at least not without sacrificing our rights (T.30.VI.2:6) . If we judge an attack as contemptible and deserving of punishment, but then forgive because that is what we think we are supposed to do, we would think that we have forgiven the unforgiveable -- an “unnatural” response and “inappropriate to what is real” (T.30.VI.2:4) . An example of this would be forgiving the 9/11 terrorists even though you think what they did was unforgiveable; or less dramatic, forgiving the person who stole your money through a clever scam. In both cases you would think that you have to overlook what was done in order to forgive.

Jesus is teaching us that true forgiveness is quite different. This cannot be understood, though, without knowing the metaphysics of the Course. Jesus begins the section with two very important principles: “**Anger is never justified. Attack has no foundation**” (T.30.VI.1:1,2) . When people attack, they do so as a reaction to their own state of fear. They have rejected love and identified instead with the ego thought system, which rests on nothing real. This is a mistake or an error, not a sin. Jesus is asking us to learn to see beyond the behavioral attack to its origin in the mind. This does not mean that we deny what our eyes see; it means that we learn how to give the situation a different interpretation. This is only about what goes on in our minds. Instead of the “normal” inclination to retaliate and punish, we learn how not to take personally what anyone else does, for we would know that we (in our right minds) are invulnerable and can never lose the peace that is our natural inheritance as God's Son, and we know the same is true for everyone else as well. If these principles are the basis of our perception, then it would be impossible to condemn the “attacker,” regardless of what was done. (Again, this does not rule out prosecution, etc.) We would be aware that this act has come from the profound terror in the person's mind, the result of his having made the wrong choice. How can that be condemned? Thus Jesus says, “**you are merely asked to see forgiveness as the natural reaction to distress that rests on error, and thus calls for help. Forgiveness is the only sane response. It keeps your rights from being sacrificed**” (T.30.VI.2:7,8,9).

If you shift from your wrong mind to your right mind, in other words, you would perceive *everyone* as sharing with you the same wrong mind, the same right mind, and the ability to choose between the two. In that vision, terrorists are the same as those they attack; scam artists are the same as those they cheat. That is the only sane way of perceiving each other and what goes on in this world. Forgiveness, then, is meaningful and completely honest. The behavior is not denied; it is seen at its point of origin in the content of the mind. (See also [Q#771](#))

Q #777(i): (The following two questions were posed by the same person.) *A Course in Miracles* tells us that love and fear are content; not form. How do we distinguish between form and content?

A: One of the most important teachings of the Course is that we are minds, not bodies. This is the fundamental distinction between form and content. Our experience as bodies (form) is an illusion; the projection of a thought in the mind (content). The content is either love (identifying with the Holy Spirit) or fear (identifying with the ego). The way we are able to determine whether the mind has chosen the ego or the Holy Spirit is by the presence or absence of judgment. Judgment of any kind means the ego's thought of separation has been chosen. We can also be certain that the ego has been chosen whenever we perceive differences; i.e., any form of specialness. Thus form reveals to us the content of the mind, which is the body's usefulness. That is why in the Course, Jesus asks us to pay attention to our thoughts,

not behavior, which can look very “good” even when the mind is filled with thoughts of judgment and attack: **“Be not deceived when madness takes a form you think is lovely”(T.23.II.17:10).**

While belief in the body is held, form can be used to undo the belief in its reality, which is the goal of forgiveness, the promise of the Holy Spirit's curriculum in the Course. As we are told in the text: **“Forgiveness is an earthly form of love, which as it is in Heaven has no form. Yet what is needed here is given here as it is needed. In this form you can fulfill your function even here, although what love will mean to you when formlessness has been restored to you is greater still. Salvation of the world depends on you who can forgive. Such is your function here”(W.p.I.186.14:2,3,4,5,6).** Fulfilling this function means being willing to look beyond all form to the content, uncovering any hidden thoughts of judgment, specialness, and difference. In the section “The Two Pictures” (T.17.IV), Jesus uses the symbol of a frame (form) containing two pictures (content). The picture is a portrait either of the ego's thought system or the Holy Spirit's. One offers death, the other life, while the glitter and “beauty” of the frame distracts from the ego's message. Jesus' instruction to us is clear: **“Look at the picture. Do not let the frame distract you”(T.17.IV.9:1).**

Q #777(ii): Does the ego know the truth that God loves His Son?

A. The ego cannot know truth because it owes its existence to the denial of the Love God has for His Son. It does, however, have an awareness that there is something beyond itself that it perceives as a threat to its existence. Its very life depends on defending against this something (God's Love): **“The ego therefore opposes all appreciation, all recognition, all sane perception and all knowledge. It perceives their threat as total, because it senses that all commitments the mind makes are total. Forced, therefore, to detach itself from you, it is willing to attach itself to anything else. But there is nothing else. The mind can, however, make up illusions, and if it does so it will believe in them, because that is how it made them. Do not let the frame distract you.”** (T.7.VI.5:1,2,3,4,5). This explains the incessant, feverish activity of the ego, its devotion to form and its focus on the frame. As the maker and protector of form, it is incumbent upon the ego to avoid the memory of truth that resides in the mind, and to avoid the mind altogether for that matter. It literally keeps us out of our minds. To heal us of this insanity the Holy Spirit enjoins us to return to our minds so another choice can be made. Thus, the distinction between form and content, truth and illusion, is at the heart of the message of the Course, as learning to distinguish them is the core of the practice of the Course. We are asked to see in every relationship and situation an opportunity to choose to look at the frame or the picture, and to remember that we always choose between truth and illusion (T.16.VII.10:1), God and the ego (T.17.III.9:5), miracles or murder (T.23.IV.9) .

Q #778: The section in the manual for teachers of *A Course in Miracles* “What Are the Levels of Teaching?” (M.3) speaks about specific contacts and encounters, and very specific contact to be made for each teacher of God -- that their level of teaching is exactly what those specific contacts need. Then it goes on to talk about the levels of encounters, such as a brief meeting, a relationship that lasts a few years, and finally those that last a lifetime. I'm confused about the emphasis on people coming together that is spoken about in this section.

A: The essence of Jesus' teaching in this section is that people come together to learn that there is only one problem (separation) and one solution (forgiveness), regardless of the form of the relationship. It does not matter whether one is involved in a superficial encounter or a lifelong relationship. The potential for learning this lesson is present in any form, because whatever the level, it is always possible to see another's interests as *not* separate from one's own. We practice this on all different levels until we generalize in *all* forms that there is one problem and one solution.

Questions [#72](#), [#116](#), and [#250](#) also relate to this section in the manual.

Q #779: I am currently working through “Many Forms; One Correction” (T.26.II). In this section, *A Course in Miracles* states what I have been thinking of the Course from the start, that from the perspective of the Holy Spirit, it is the most irrelevant exercise. But the ego might be drawn into the Course in its desire to “undo” “sin” and find “deliverance” from something it never did.

The passage I am referring to is: “This one mistake, in any form, has one correction. There is no loss; to think there is, is a mistake. You have no problems, though you think you have. And yet you could not think so if you saw them vanish one by one...” (T.26.II.3:1,2,3).

So is the Course trying to bait the ego into greedily biting on its offerings, so that the ego will invariably be drawn out of its natural living circumstance and die, devoured by the great spirit of One? Why should I want to do the Course at all, other than to have a laugh? Is it not all a joke by the Holy Spirit, playing with the idea of “sin” that our egos made, offering the ego resolution to its “problems” in the form of “deliverance.” Isn’t deliverance impossible?

A: You are indeed correct in your final observation -- deliverance ultimately is impossible. For nothing has happened in reality and so there truly is nothing we need to be delivered from except our own mistaken beliefs -- the separation never happened. And that is the statement of the Atonement principle, which is repeated over and over again in various forms throughout the Course. This principle is the basis for the Course's teachings on forgiveness -- “**a happy fiction**” (C.3.2:1) , “**an illusion [which] , unlike all other illusions...leads away from error and not towards it**” (C.3.1:3,4) .

Early in the text, in the context of the idea of *return* -- but we could just as easily substitute the word *deliverance* -- Jesus says, “**The ego can accept the idea that return is necessary because it can so easily make the idea seem difficult. Yet the Holy Spirit tells you that even return is unnecessary, because what never happened cannot be difficult. However, you can make the idea of return both necessary and difficult**” (T.6.II.11:1,2,3) .

There is certainly some truth to the idea that Jesus presents his message in the Course in a way that can sound appealing to the ego -- offering us release from pain and suffering, and escape from guilt (e.g., **W.pl.195.2**) . And most of us, when we first come to the Course, are attracted to it because we think it will help us lead happier lives in the world, healing our relationships with all those difficult people “out there” whom we must deal with. By the time we have begun to understand what Jesus' intention really is -- to help us awaken from the dream rather than simply make it a better dream (**T.29.IV.1**) -- it is almost too late to turn back. For we know too much and we are beginning to recognize our own part in all of it!

Now, from our perspective as egos, it may appear that Jesus is ensnaring us in a giant cosmic trap which will, in the end, lead to our demise. But that can only be our perception if we continue to identify with this false self, the ego. Jesus' intent rather is to help us shift our identification from the ego and its manifestation as a body, to our identity as a mind with the power to choose between judgment and forgiveness in the dream, and ultimately, to our true Identity as spirit. And with this shift, no loss is possible, since we are speaking only of the disappearance of illusions.

And so one conclusion you draw cannot go unaddressed. Identified with the ego, it may seem to us that the Holy Spirit is playing a game with us, manipulating illusory symbols to entice us into seeming self-annihilation, perhaps out of some warped sense of humor. But that would mean that we could somehow be a victim of a mind outside ourselves that views us only as a means for its own entertainment. And again, we could only view the situation this way if we are identified with the ego. For we are spirit, although we have forgotten. And Jesus and the Holy Spirit are only symbols of our own making, available

to us while we still believe we need help from outside ourselves. The help They represent is simply our own right-minded choice to release the ego and remember Who we are. There is no mind separate from our own, no Jesus, no Holy Spirit, Who has developed a plan to give us the Course and either save us or play with us. We have given ourselves the Course, but we have forgotten that we have. And so that is why we may want to “do the Course,” because the alternative is the continuing ego belief in the reality of sin, guilt, fear, and pain, which are then our experience. But if we already know the world is a joke that we're playing on ourselves, and our only response is to laugh at everything within it (T.27.VIII.6) , then we certainly would not need the Course!

Q #780: *A Course in Miracles* is quite clear that the body is nothing, feels nothing, and that pain is a fabrication of the mind. Having said this I come back to my question. In answering Question #542, you wrote: “So it is even possible to break a leg and not only not become upset, but feel no pain, as over time our identification shifts from our body to our mind through practicing forgiveness.” And to Question #545: “What happened to Jesus' body at the end of his earthly ‘life’ illustrates this principle. His body did not represent any thought of death or disease or pain in his mind, since his mind was free of guilt. He did not use his body to reinforce a belief in sin and victimization in his mind (T.6.I.5) -- and so it remained incorruptible in his perception, despite how its form may have seemed to change.”

If I break my leg, I would feel extreme pain even though the Course says physically this is impossible, because there is no leg to break. Question #542 says that a shift from body to mind comes only through practicing forgiveness, which I understand means to forgive my brother for what he has not done. That is, nothing happened and no reaction is required.

History speaks of Jesus dying horribly upon a cross, which must mean that my mind did not accept his thoughts of himself but rather chose to destroy him for reasons that you have mentioned many times in this forum. Therein lies the frustration. Intellectually I understand what I do to him I do to myself, yet after many years of practice I remain deeply rooted in the world.

A: You're being so hard on yourself! It can be helpful to understand the Course's metaphysical principles and to know where in the end Jesus is leading us, but not if we use its explanations of what will be the *final* steps in our healing as a measuring stick against which to judge ourselves now, as it sounds as if you're doing. The fact that Jesus knew he was not his body (T.6.I.4) in no way means that he expects us right now to accept and experience ourselves as anything other than bodies, as we begin to put his teachings on forgiveness into practice. He is not asking us to deny that the pain we seem to experience in our bodies feels very real to us, nor to deny what our brothers seem to do to us also seems to be very real and to have effects on us.

Jesus is only asking that we begin to question our interpretation of everything we experience and be open to an alternative explanation, which must come from outside our ego/body-based thought system. And to be able to begin to make the shift, we must first understand the purpose behind the interpretations we give to all of our experiences as bodies now. We want the pain to be experienced in our bodies and we want to see others as attacking us so that we can remain victims of forces outside of our control. And consequently, we remain unaware of the real cause of our pain -- our decision to see ourselves as separate from love. But again, Jesus is not asking that we embrace his interpretation of our lives, but rather that we be willing to question the validity of ours. He offers his, not so that we try to force ourselves to look at situations in the same way he does, but just so that we can come to recognize that there may be a very reasonable alternative to our interpretation.

If I think my immediate goal is to see the body as nothing, pain as unreal, and my brother as doing nothing to me, I will find the Course a very frustrating and self-defeating process. And Jesus would be an unreasonable teacher if those were his expectations for me. But they are not. The Course is intended to be a very gentle process that begins by asking us to accept ourselves where we think we are. And it also

is asking us to be willing to be honest with ourselves about what the outcome has been while we have continued to put ourselves in charge of our own happiness. For if we are honest, we will have to admit that we have not been doing a very good job. It is through recognition of our own failure to attain peace and happiness that we become willing to allow Jesus to be in charge of the thoughts in our mind. And that is all that forgiveness is really about -- letting go of our own judgments and interpretations of the events and people in our lives so that Jesus can offer us an alternative interpretation that does not reinforce separation and guilt.

Over time, as part of a lifetime process of practicing forgiveness, we will have less and less of an investment in our own interpretation of what is happening to us and, in particular, who and what should be held responsible for our unhappiness. Increasingly, we will be willing to turn away from the belief in guilt in our mind and, as a result, will have less of a need to project guilt outside our mind onto others and onto our own body. Very gradually, as a secondary effect of the forgiveness process, although not our focus, we will find we are less identified with the body and its needs, and we will increasingly come to recognize that all pain comes from a thought in the mind and has nothing to do with the body. But this understanding is not where we begin, nor will it be our experience until we are well along our path of forgiveness.

By the way, most New Testament scholars agree that the accounts of Jesus' death in the gospels were not written by eye witnesses to the events of his life. And so the narratives, to the degree that they were intended to portray actual happenings, most certainly were colored by the projections of the narrators, who believed in the reality of sin, guilt, pain, suffering and the body, as their theology clearly demonstrates. And to the degree that we accept the same theology of the ego, we too will believe that Jesus must have suffered in his crucifixion and that we are somehow responsible for it. The fact that he lives in our mind (T.11.VI.7:3,4) , unaccusing and completely accepting, suggests otherwise, and his words in the **"The Message of the Crucifixion"** (T.6.I) provide that alternative interpretation. And so, while you may believe that what you have done to Jesus you do to yourself, his message is that we have done nothing to him, and so therefore, over time, as we learn to forgive, we will come to realize that we have done nothing to ourselves.

Q #781: Is it correct to say that since God is all there is, all else is a lie, illusion, hypnotism, a nothingness; and that error is never a person, but rather the person is a victim of the belief of good and evil? In other words, all error is coming from an impersonal source that uses us, and we unknowingly become its victim?

A: Absolutely "yes," and absolutely "no." Yes, God is, and nothing else is. There is only perfect Oneness, **"nothing outside this Oneness, and nothing else within"** (T.18.VI.1:6) . No, we are not the unknowing victims of an impersonal source of all error. *A Course in Miracles* teaches us that "we" are decision-making minds outside time and space that choose, erroneously, to believe that we have successfully separated from God. We are victims only of our own thoughts, fortunately, because we, then, are the ones who can change our minds about that decision and choose instead to accept the correction that is always in our minds. Ultimately, though, not even this occurred; if God alone is real, there could not even be a thought of separation.

Two helpful lessons on this topic are: **Lesson 152 "The power of decision is my own"** and **Lesson 253 "My Self is ruler of the universe"** (W.pl.152; W.pl.253) .

Q #782(i): Lesson 190 "I choose the joy of God instead of pain" states: "For pain proclaims God cruel. How could it be real in any form?" (W.pl.190.1:5,6) (1) If pain is caused by other human beings, could that

be real? Jesus, in his Passion, tortured by other human beings, was in great pain before he died. Was his pain real or was that an illusion?

A: Sometimes in *A Course in Miracles* Jesus is speaking only about absolute truth, where he is contrasting truth and illusion. On that level (Level One), only God and the realm of Heaven is real; all else is illusory. That is the level Jesus is speaking on in the statements you refer to. Another example of Level One occurs in paragraph 3: **“If God is real, there is no pain. If pain is real, there is no God” (W.pl.190.3:3,4)** . So Jesus is saying that in no sense could pain be real. If it were real, then God could not be God.

Jesus also talks to us on another level (Level Two), because **we** think there is reality outside Heaven. We think we are real and that we exist in a real physical universe. Even though Jesus knows that existence outside Heaven is not real, he talks to us as though it were real, because that is all that we can understand. The lesson he wants to help us learn is that we could never experience pain unless we made a decision in our minds to feel victimized, and that would be only because we would be trying to project our guilt out of our minds onto something external. Thus, nothing in the world or the body is the way it appears to be. Everything is the effect of a cause, which is always a decision made in the mind.

With regard to the Passion, Jesus explains in the text that the biblical accounts of his crucifixion are not accurate: **“Atonement without Sacrifice”** in Chapter 3 (T.3.I); **“The Message of the Crucifixion”** in Chapter 6 (T.6.I) . He did not perceive himself as a sacrificial lamb or as persecuted. What is so radical about the Course is that it teaches us that everything happens in our minds. There was no guilt in his mind; therefore he could not experience pain, despite what appeared to be happening to his body. Likewise, he teaches us that the *resurrection* had nothing to do with his body. *Resurrection* refers to our awakening from the dream that we are separate from God and that we are guilty sinners deserving of punishment. In that sense, the resurrection took place *before* the crucifixion.

You may wish to read our book *A Course in Miracles and Christianity: A Dialogue* , co-authored by Kenneth Wapnick and a Catholic priest philosopher/theologian. This dialogue between two friends shows the important differences between traditional biblical Christianity and what the Course teaches. From beginning to end, the two systems are shown to be mutually exclusive thought systems. It is not as if you cannot practice both, but it would help to be aware of how the two systems differ.

Q #782(ii): I am a new student and I have started from Lesson 181, the lesson of the day when I received my book in the mail. I am a Catholic and my mother tongue is Chinese. Is there a specific way to learn *A Course in Miracles* ? I find listening to the lesson while I am looking at the text helps me to understand better. Is there a way to listen to other lessons besides the lesson of the day?

A: It also would be helpful for you to read the Introduction to the workbook and then begin with the first Lesson instead of continuing with the later ones. There is nothing wrong with starting where you did, but since the later lessons build on the earlier ones, your learning and practicing could be even more effective if you were to go back and start with Lesson 1. The numbering of the lessons does not correspond to the days of the calendar year, so it does not matter what day of the year you begin the lessons.

We are not sure of what you mean when you say you look at the text as you are listening to a lesson from the workbook. It is fine to read and study the text during one part of day, and during another part of the day listen to a lesson, if that is what you mean. In the very first paragraph of the Introduction to the workbook, Jesus points out that his teaching in the text make the exercises in the workbook meaningful, and also that the workbook's purpose is **“to train your mind to think along the lines the text sets forth” (W.in.1)** . You do not have to complete the lessons before you begin studying the text, nor do you have to finish reading the text before you begin the workbook lessons. Just don't put pressure on yourself as you proceed. The only thing Jesus emphasizes is that you not do more than one lesson per day. His

main objective is that you grow in experiencing his love and trust: that is the message or the content of his course. The lessons are training exercises for our very undisciplined minds, but only so that we will be better able to recognize the message and then integrate it into the way we live our daily lives. So it would be a mistake to get too caught up in rituals or form.

We have many books and tapes that you might find helpful in your study and practice, along with material on our Web site, under "ACIM teaching materials." In addition, some other questions on this Service discuss the language of the Course and the relationship between Christianity and the Course: Questions [#709](#) and [#710](#).

Q #783: I notice many similarities between *A Course in Miracles* and *The Infinite Way* teachings of Joel S. Goldsmith. Would you please comment on this?

A: Because all authentic spiritual teachings are leading in the same direction -- towards an experience of oneness which transcends the false self, the finite ego -- it is very likely that similarities and parallels in content can often be identified between paths. Certainly that can be said for the teachings of Joel S. Goldsmith and *A Course in Miracles*. Both, for example speak of our real existence as spirit, that the material world is an illusion and the body is merely an idea that expresses what is in the mind, that error or sickness is in the mind and not in the body, and that healing is the result of correcting a false belief in the mind.

And yet there are differences. For example, Joel Goldsmith speaks of God as Consciousness expressing itself. The Course, in contrast, speaks of consciousness as **"the first split introduced into the mind after the separation" (T.3.IV.2:1)**. The Holy Spirit, the Voice for God in the dream according to the Course, is more nearly equivalent to the concept of Consciousness that Goldsmith refers to in his teachings. In addition, Goldsmith speaks of God as the life, mind, body, and substance of individual being, and of the body as existing as the idea of God. And therefore, we will never be without conscious awareness of the body, nor without the body. The Course, in contrast, views the body as the embodiment of the ego's wish that the separation be real (**W.pl.72.2:1,2,3**), and teaches that the body nevertheless can be give a different purpose, that of healing and forgiveness, under the Holy Spirit's guidance. The body then will simply disappear from the mind once its usefulness to the Holy Spirit for healing is complete. And the emphasis of the Course, therefore, on looking at the ego and its thoughts of hatred and attack and guilt, is simply not reflected in Goldsmith's approach.

This is not to say that one is right and the other is wrong -- they are merely different. For as Jesus reminds us near the end of the Course, **"A universal theology is impossible, but a universal experience is not only possible but necessary. It is this experience toward which the course is directed" (C.in.2:5,6)**. To the extent that both teachings lead us to release all of our preconceptions about how things should be, what our physical and emotional lives should be like, and any effort to control the external to achieve our personal goals, they are both fostering a nonjudgmental acceptance, which is what the Course means by forgiveness. And so both would be leading us toward the same universal experience.

Although addressed to the issue of different teachings on the Course itself, Question [#48](#) provides a helpful perspective on thinking about the relationship of the Course to other spiritual paths, such as Goldsmith's.

Q #784: I am struggling with getting my head around the simplicity of *A Course in Miracles*, as every time I read a piece of the text or other material, I am hearing different instructions on how I should 'do it' and

assist my journey home. Would there be one single definitive line or instruction that I could post around my daily environments (work/home/car) which I could stick to and which would ensure that I am 'doing the right thing' by the Course? I am desperate for some clarity.

A) First, the most helpful thing you can do for yourself is to stop worrying about “doing it right.” If there is one thing that stands out in the Course it is that Jesus is interested only in the content in our minds, not in what we do or how perfectly we carry out his instructions. It is only our *willingness* to do what he says that has a bearing on our spiritual progress -- that we would *want* to do what he says. Thus, he says “ **trust implicitly your willingness, whatever else may enter. Concentrate only on this, and be not disturbed that shadows surround it. That is why you came. If you could come without them you would not need the holy instant**” (T.18.IV.2:3,4,5,6) . The “shadows” would be our resistance and all the concern, confusion, and complexity in our minds; and because of these shadows in *our* minds Jesus must say the same thing in many different ways. But, as he teaches us in Lessons 79 and 80, there is only *one* problem -- separation -- and it has been solved (W.pl.79, 80) . Concern and confusion arise only because we have not yet accepted this. Thus Jesus counsels us: “**Only be certain you do not forget that all problems are the same. Their many forms will not deceive you while you remember this. One problem, one solution. Accept the peace this simple statement brings**” (W.pl.80.3:3,4,5,6) . What would help you therefore is to learn to see the common *content* behind the different *forms* of the instructions in the Course.

Second, it is important to realize that by trying so hard and being so intent on “doing it right,” you are making the error real, and in that sense, working against your desire to return home. Although it is a paradox to us, we must recall that we are really undoing something that never happened. That is what the journey home is about: simply realizing that we never did anything that we need to undo; we just think we did. So whenever you feel pressure about this journey, you have dropped Jesus' hand and are allowing the ego to accompany you instead. Granted, we must learn which is which, but one thing is for sure, Jesus is very gentle and very patient, and he would never pressure us to “get it right.”

In view of all this, your one definitive line could be something like: Remember to smile when you find yourself trying really hard to be serious.

Q #785: I am fairly new to *A Course in Miracles* and presently find myself in an uncomfortable “no-man's land” spiritually. My previous approach to God and Jesus led to a major spiritual awakening, that resulted in a seeming limitless upward spiral into peace, joy and a profound shift away from fear, worry, resentment, judgment and depression, for three years.

Recently I stumbled upon the Course, and found it not only intriguing, but resonant. However, in the process of moving the furniture around in my head, it “pulled the carpet out” from underneath my previous model of relating to my dear, sweet, ineffably beautiful Teacher. To confront the fact that there is no interaction in this life; indeed no Jesus or Holy Spirit in “reality,” has left me bereft and more than a little confused. Was my peace and certainty somehow a sham, a forgery, an hysterical foray into false spirituality? I am still committed solely to grasping what is Truth, not some magic words or a formula to restore my previous “bliss.” I'm just a little disrupted and uncoordinated in my efforts get through these next steps.

A: The Course tells us: “...teaching [which, is the same as learning] is a constant process” (M.in.1:6). The helpful word here is *process*. Awakening from the nightmare of separation is a process taking place in the mind, where a decision is made not to choose the ego. This decision takes place in stages described in the manual in the section “Development of Trust,” and is expressed and experienced in different forms made up of symbols, until at the very end of the process the mind decides to choose *only* the truth. Your experience is described in the fourth stage Meanwhile, because belief in the body is maintained we have need of symbols, which change along the way: “...we need a many-faceted

curriculum, not because of content differences, but because symbols must shift and change to suit the need” (M.23.7:5). Thus, a symbol or form that was helpful at one stage of the journey may no longer be needed or suitable at another time. Religious beliefs and practices, figures such as Jesus and the Holy Spirit, words, *A Course in Miracles*, are all symbols. When a symbol changes, it does not mean that it was false, it simply means that it has changed. Your experience, therefore, was not a forgery; it was an important step in the process. The choice made in your mind remains with you as you come to the Course. Nothing is lost, as Jesus assures us in the text: **“I have saved all your kindnesses and every loving thought you ever had. I have purified them of the errors that hid their light, and kept them for you in their own perfect radiance” (T.5.IV.8:3,4)**. He also tells us in the manual that on the journey there are periods of rest and reasonable peace for the teacher of God. Yet there are further steps to take, and **“....when he is ready to go on, he goes with mighty companions beside him”(M.4.I.A.6:11)**.

When the mind makes a decision against the ego, the specific religious context in which it is made is irrelevant, in fact, a religious context is not even necessary. The effect of the experience is the lessening of fear. As layers of fear are removed, light enters and is again experienced in some form in an upward spiral toward the truth, each step facilitating the next. This is the gentle process of awakening that makes use of symbols to lead us beyond them. Although the symbols are not real, while we are asleep, **“dreaming of exile” (T.10.I.2:1)**, they are useful when given to the Holy Spirit for the purpose of healing. In this regard, the Course simplifies the process by teaching that *everything* is helpful. There is nothing that the ego made to support belief in the separation that cannot be used by the Holy Spirit to undo it.

Intellectually we may understand that spirit is formless and nothing outside of Heaven exists, but as Jesus tells us in the text, **“Everything you recognize you identify with externals, something outside itself. You cannot even think of God without a body, or in some form you think you recognize” (T.18.VIII.1:6,7).** Therefore, as long as the choice for a separate self is maintained, there is need for a figure, perceived as separate from the self, to represent the Self that has been denied. A relationship with such a figure is very helpful. So although the Course teaches that ultimately nothing in the illusion is real, Jesus invites us to have a relationship with him. He uses the loving image of himself as an older brother **(T.1.II.4)** who meets us where we believe we are, and leads us gently to where he is: **Let my relationship to you be real to you... Be not separate from me, and let not the holy purpose of Atonement be lost to you in dreams of vengeance... Let me enter in the Name of God and bring you peace, that you may offer peace to me” (T.17.III.10:2,6,8).** There is no need, therefore, to feel bereft of a loving teacher. Through the words of the Course and in every step of the practice of forgiveness, Jesus is with us representing the part of the mind that remembers God's Love: **“Jesus has come to answer [your need]. In him you find God's Answer. Do you, then, teach with him, for he is with you; he is always here” (M.23.7:6,7,8).** When we finally learn from our experience (not intellectual understanding) that we are the Self that he symbolizes, we will no longer perceive ourselves as separate from him or anyone else. Only then will formlessness replace all symbol. Until then, we may be grateful that we do have a brother, a teacher, and a Course to guide us to the happy dream that precedes full awakening: **“Helpers are given you in many forms, although upon the altar they are one. Beyond each one there is a Thought of God, and this will never change...Thank God for them for they will lead you home”(C.5.1:3,4,9).**

Q #786: Is the intention of the *A Course in Miracles* to have us face our darkness until we achieve a sudden shift to love and oneness? Will I eventually make a snap decision for love once and for all? After studying the Course for a while I began to experience the negative things I had previously kept hidden from myself. This made me feel like abandoning the Course. I am not sure what to do. If I focus only on love, will I be denying the anger, lust, greed, etc.?

A: When the mind chooses separation, the first thing it does as a follow up is to deny having made the choice. This denial is key to the ego's success in making the illusion of separation seem real. Denial is

therefore the foundation of the ego's thought system. It follows that one of the most important steps in undoing belief in the ego is to uncover what has been denied. If it is exposed, it is no longer denied. That is why Jesus tells us: **“No one can escape from illusions unless he looks at them, for not looking is the way they are protected. ...We are ready to look more closely at the ego's thought system because together we have the lamp that will dispel it, and since you realize you do not want it, you must be ready. Let us be very calm in doing this, for we are merely looking honestly for truth. The ‘dynamics’ of the ego will be our lesson for a while, for we must look first at this to see beyond it, since you have made it real. We will undo this error quietly together, and then look beyond it to truth” (T.11.V.1:1,3,4,5,6)** . The looking begins, as your experience shows, with an acknowledgment of the suppressed hatred that masks fear and guilt, which are the effects of choosing to believe the separation is real and specialness is preferable to oneness.

Deeper within, and hidden beneath the guilt and fear, is the memory of God's Love that Jesus tells us is what we truly fear: **“You are not seriously disturbed by your hostility. You keep it hidden because you are more afraid of what it covers. You could look even upon the ego's darkest cornerstone without fear if you did not believe that, without the ego, you would find within yourself something you fear even more. You are not really afraid of crucifixion. Your real terror is of redemption” (T.13.III.1:7,8,9,10,11)**. All the ego's schemes, therefore, are designed to defend against Love's memory/our redemption. They make up the layers of denial and defense that the Course leads us to uncover through the study and practice of its teachings. Resistance to looking at the darkness within is a camouflage for resistance to looking at the light within, which frequently is experienced by Course students as a desire to get rid of the book. You have a lot of company in your dilemma.

It is important to proceed gently through the process of uncovering, and very important to remember what Jesus tells us emphatically: **“ Do not be afraid of the ego ” (T.7.VIII.5:1)** . Nevertheless, our focus must be on looking at what it has made: **“You cannot lay aside the obstacles to real vision without looking upon them, for to lay aside means to judge against. If you will look, the Holy Spirit will judge, and He will judge truly. Yet He cannot shine away what you keep hidden, for you have not offered it to Him and He cannot take it from you” (T.12.II.9:6,7,8)**. In order to allow the Holy Spirit to judge what we look upon we must look without any judgment of our own. When we become afraid or distressed by what we see of the ego's antics, it is because we have judged them as sinful and taken them seriously. This perpetuates the guilt that keeps us rooted in the illusion, guarantees a firm grip on specialness, and keeps the Holy Spirit out of the picture. Thus, guilt and fear are kept alive and well, and love's presence is blocked from awareness.

Love need not be sought, for it is not lost. Our focus is in the removal of fear, which lets love's light dispel the darkness. Love then replaces fear because it was always there: **“You who have tried to banish love have not succeeded, but you who choose to banish fear must succeed... When we have overcome fear– not by hiding it, not by minimizing it, and not by denying its full import in any way– this is what you will really see” (T.12.II.9:1,5; italics added)**. As fear recedes and the ego's specialness becomes less attractive, it becomes easier not to choose it. This is a gradual learning process, rather than a sudden “snap” into the right mind. The judgments, grievances, and accusations that serve as obstacles are removed by choosing not to hold on to them. But first they must be recognized. Love cannot be revealed if anger, greed, or any form of fear is denied. Again, denial keeps fear in place, which blocks love from awareness. We need focus only on what Jesus teaches: **“Do not leave any spot of pain hidden from His [the Holy Spirit] light, and search your mind carefully for any thoughts you may fear to uncover” (T.13.III.7:5; italics added)**. And a little later in the text he tells us: **“You need but leave the mirror clean and clear of all the images of hidden darkness you have drawn upon it. God will shine upon it of Himself” (T.14.IX.5:5,6)**.

Q #787: If, as you have said already when answering questions on this Web site, that the need to tell others about *A Course in Miracles* is a crafty ego device to avoid following your own forgiveness path or however you want to phrase it, then why did Helen feel the need to publish it so other people would read

it? Could the decision to publish the Course “to help others” then not also be a crafty ego device so that Helen would avoid practicing forgiveness?

A: Helen never felt a *need* to have the Course published. The publishing of the material was a thought that did not come from her; it was part of the whole process of taking down the Course and being personally guided by Jesus. There was never a compulsive *need* on her part to get it into print.

Q #788: Is it okay and possible to truly forgive someone but still not want to spend time with them simply because you do not want to? I know that, in the extreme, forgiveness would not mean that we have to spend time with a murderer simply because he/she is a child of God. The crux of what I am getting at is that I feel that I have forgiven a certain person in my life, but I do not like spending time with him because his idea of relating is much different than mine. I do not return his phone calls and just want him to go away.

A: It is quite normal to have preferences as long as we believe we are bodies. Having a preference with regard to the people we spend time with is in that sense no different from having a preference with regard to the flavor of ice cream we select. If it is just a matter of preference -- as opposed to a burning issue that is disruptive to your peace of mind -- then you just leave it at that. Sometimes, though, it is much more than a preference, what Jesus refers to as an *investment* -- in the section in the text of *A Course in Miracles* called “**The Investment in Reality,**” (T.12.III) . If there is a real charge to your decision not to associate with this person, you have gone from a preference to an investment, meaning you have linked your salvation to *not* associating with him or her, and you would then be withholding love from this person. The decision then would have come from the ego, and judgment would be involved. The lesson in the section referred to is that salvation is attained only through peace, which is in your mind, not in having a situation or relationship in the world be a certain way.

Question #595 speaks to this issue, as do pages 24 and 25 in Vol. I of our *The Healing Power of Kindness* .

Q #789: “Projection makes perception. The world you see is what you gave it, nothing more than that. But though it is no more than that, it is not less. . . . It is the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition. As a man thinketh, so does he perceive.” (T.21.in.1,2,3,4,5,6). Question: Was the crucifixion of Jesus the witness to his state of mind, the outside picture of his inward condition? Or does the passage above mean something different than what it says?

A: *A Course in Miracles* teaches us that perception is always an interpretation -- coming from our identification in our minds either with guilt (the ego) or with love (the Holy Spirit). Perception is not simply a fact based on what our physical eyes see (T.21.V.1:7; M.17.4) . The crucial point with regard to the issue you raise is that there was no guilt in Jesus' mind -- no thought of attack - - and therefore he perceived his being crucified simply as his brothers' call for help. With only love in his mind, he could perceive only calls for love or extensions of love. No other *interpretation* is possible when there is only love in one's mind. This is evident when he discusses the crucifixion in Chapter 6 in the text. In speaking of our freedom to choose to perceive ourselves as persecuted, Jesus advises us, “**When you do choose to react that way, however, you might remember that I was persecuted as the world judges, and did not share this evaluation for myself. . . . I therefore offered a different interpretation of attack. . . .**” (T.6.I.5:2,3,5) . He explains further: “**I elected, for your sake and mine, to demonstrate that the most outrageous assault, as judged by the ego, does not matter. As the world judges these things, but not as God knows them, I was betrayed, abandoned, beaten, torn, and finally killed. It was clear that this was only because of the projection of others onto me, since I had not harmed anyone and had healed many**” (9). And finally: “**The message of the crucifixion is perfectly**

clear: Teach only love, for that is what you are. If you interpret the crucifixion in any other way, you are using it as a weapon for assault rather than as the call for peace for which it was intended” (13:1,2; 14:1) .

Thus, again, Jesus did not *perceive* himself as assaulted or persecuted even though nails were hammered into his body, etc. His “inward condition” was one of love and invulnerability, and therefore the “outside picture” for him was fearful brothers calling for love. What the body's eyes see is only form, and that is not the basis of perception according to *A Course in Miracles* .

Q #790: I have been the victim of an attempted fraud by a medium sized profitable company and although I have resisted their civil claim which they finally dropped, my legal expenses and stress levels have been considerable. As I have hard evidence, and in the light of the teachings, should I now report them to the police? I agonize as much over this question as I did over the spurious court claim. Even if this attack is illusory, should I not prevent its repetition for the sake of future “victims” who also suffer in a world of illusion?

A: The forgiveness *A Course in Miracles* teaches is directed to a change of mind, not to any type of behavior. It is therefore possible to apply its teachings while reporting a crime to the police, filing legal suits, or doing any of the normal things involved in living in the world. The important thing is to be aware of the judgments based on differences that arise in any situation. For this purpose, the instructions in workbook lesson 21 are meant to be generalized and applied to every circumstance in which we find ourselves : “... **search your mind carefully for situations past, present or anticipated that arouse anger in you. The anger may take the form of any reaction ranging from mild irritation to rage. The degree of the emotion you experience does not matter. You will become increasingly aware that a slight twinge of annoyance is nothing but a veil drawn over intense fury” (W.pl.21.2:2,3,4,5).** When this simple exercise is practiced diligently, hidden emotions, thoughts, and judgments are brought to awareness, revealing the unconscious choice, made in the mind, to believe the separation is real. Bringing this choice to awareness is the first step in the process of undoing the thought of separation that is the goal of the Course. The next step lies not in changing behavior in any way, nor in trying to change the judgments, but rather in accepting responsibility for the choice and acknowledging there is another choice that can be made.

While we believe we are in the world, we generally “give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's” i.e., obey the rules of the world *in form* (file law suits, police reports, etc.). At the same time, we practice the Course by paying attention to the thoughts and judgments that arise in every situation. They reflect back to us the choice for separation that was made in the mind (*content*), and has been denied. It is important to remember this distinction between form and content whenever a decision about behavior must be made. A situation such as you describe is replete with opportunities to see many of the ego's favorite themes in operation; not the least of which is the victim/victimizer plot. Again, the important thing is to pay attention to our thoughts, all of which are based on perception of differences that stem from the one thought of separation that is held in the mind. In this way, everything from rooting for your favorite baseball team to filing a police report is an opportunity to become aware of the choice for separation that has been hidden, denied and protected. Only when this choice is brought to awareness can the process of its undoing through forgiveness begin.

To the ego, the differences it perceives in all our experiences are important and purposeful. They support its belief system and prove it right. These differences make life complicated and keep us thoroughly involved. Yet it is only belief that the illusion is real that makes it seem that some situations are more serious than others, or some form of behavior is more spiritual than another. In the Course, Jesus tells us: “**No illusion has any truth in it. Yet it appears some are more true than others, although this clearly makes no sense at all. All that a hierarchy of illusions can show is preference, not reality” (T.26.VII.6:3,4,5).** This clearly relieves us of having to make the “right decision” on the level of form.

Whatever course of action is decided upon, the only question worthy of consideration is whether to choose the ego or the Holy Spirit as teacher. Choosing the ego keeps attention focused on the drama of the situation as it appears in form, while the Holy Spirit brings the content of the mind into focus. Thus, the only thing that makes any specific behavior “right” or “wrong,” helpful or useless, is which teacher is chosen as guide. In this regard Jesus asks: **“Would you be hostage to the ego or host to God?” Let this question be asked you by the Holy Spirit every time you make a decision. For every decision you make does answer this, and invites sorrow or joy accordingly” (T.15.III.5:1,2,3).**

Q #791: As we live from day to day, our mind creates events that cover all possible outcomes to a situation that we are presented with. If the events are ego-based then the Holy Spirit “simultaneously” creates events that are diametrically opposed to what the ego has created. From all of these possibilities the decision maker then selects a particular event for us to experience. How is it that the decision maker can pick an event that does not bring us happiness? I have had many situations where I am faced with a decision and I decide that a particular scenario is what I want – yet it does not work out as I had imagined. I know *A Course in Miracles* says that we do not perceive our own best interest but in some situations it is not difficult to decide on a happy outcome but often, such is not the case.

A: I'm afraid the ego may have you hoodwinked! For the Course's explanation of how events seem to unfold and how choices are made in our lives is not quite as you have described it. And when you hear the Course's explanation, you may have a better understanding of why the outcomes you believe will make you happy do not always turn out as you expect.

First of all, a clarification of terminology. Jesus makes a distinction between *creating* and *making* (T.3.V.2) , reserving the term *creating* for the extending activity of the Father and the Son as spirit in Heaven. Creating in the Course has nothing to do with anything in the world of time and space. *Making* is used for the activity of the split mind, whether it comes from the ego or the Holy Spirit. The ego mind makes, or miscreates, the world and all the events of our seeming lives, and the Holy Spirit provides their correction (T.25.III.4:1,2,3; 5:1,2,3) .

The Course also teaches that time is not linear and that everything that can possibly happen has already happened all at once in the mind in that single, unholy instant, when the thought of separation was taken seriously (T.26.V.3) . And what we see as a fresh new event is simply a preexisting thought in the mind, waiting to be selected by the decision maker, projected outward, and re-experienced (W.pl.158.4; M.2.2,3) . And for every ego-based thought, predicated on the belief in separation and attack, the Holy Spirit holds the correction, which is not a specific event in response to the ego's error, but rather a different way of looking at the ego's error that basically says, “This is not real. Separation and attack have no reality.”

Now the story becomes interesting, as we uncover the ego's hidden motivation that explains why the events we choose so often result in outcomes that are other than the happy ones we have anticipated. The ego has made up its entire library of possible events as a smokescreen, to hide the underlying content they all share. And that content is the guilt over the thought of separation, which the ego says is ours for wanting to attack love and have something other than the perfect Oneness of Heaven.

The ego does not want us to see that, by choosing separation, we are excluding ourselves from love and have already made a choice for unhappiness and pain. The choice could not have any effect in reality (T.13.VIII.3:3,4,5) , but it seems to as a result of our dedicated belief in separation. Rather than allowing us to accept responsibility for the pain and unhappiness that come from choosing against love, the ego wants us to see the cause of our unhappiness as lying anywhere but in our own decision. And so the thought of separation was splintered into all the possible events of all the possible lives that could possibly be experienced by all the possible fragments of the split mind (T.18.I.4) . But their content is always some representation of limitation and loss and emptiness, because of their source. And so the

ego's choices will always end up producing some sense of disappointment (**T.13.VII.3**) , which we will attribute to the external situation or condition, rather than to the thought of separation in our own mind. And that is exactly the ego's goal for the world, that we will think that the world is disappointing us -- we are its victim -- rather than recognizing that the feelings of unhappiness are coming from our own inner, hidden decision (**T.27.VIII.7,8,10,11**) .

So whenever we think we are a body with needs, who is unhappy in our present state, we are identifying in our mind with the ego's thought of separation. Then, whenever we think we know what needs to happen in the world outside of ourselves in order to have our needs met and be happy, we have simply reinforced unconsciously the thought in our mind that we are separate, which is by definition an unhappy thought. And so, as long as we leave ourselves in charge of the decision of determining what we need to be happy, we are doomed to failure (**T.12.V.8:1,2,3,4,5**) . Perhaps not always in the short run, for the ego is no fool, and knows that an intermittent schedule of reinforcement, such as the payoff for gambling, is the surest way to maintain a high level of participation. But the outcome eventually must be recognized as unhappiness, for the ego's "rewards" are always temporary, and down deep we always know that.

That is why Jesus invites us in the Course to give control of our thinking to him or the Holy Spirit (e.g., **T.2.VI.1**) . And this does not mean that we are letting them choose the events of our lives. Rather, it means that we are willing to look at our belief in our present state of need through Their eyes, and realize that our sense of lack is not coming from anything that is truly missing either inside or outside of us, but rather is coming from a mistaken belief about ourselves (**T.4.IV.3**) . And it is this false belief that we need Their help in correcting, rather than the provision of something external to meet our perceived need. Once we make this shift to Their way of perceiving, we may in fact find external events shifting in such a way that we believe our happiness is resulting from getting what we think we want. But this is where we have to be especially vigilant, for this is nothing more than the ego's trick to bring us back into its thought system of lack and loss.

So when our choice for what we think we want in the world seems to disappoint us, it is only because we have surrendered our thinking once again to the ego's agenda. And that is always an unconscious choice for unhappiness, with the responsibility for that unhappiness projected outside our own mind onto external events over which we seem to have little or no control. And the good news, of course, is that our happiness does not depend on anything outside ourselves, but is always available to us simply by our own choice to change teachers in our mind (**W.pl.64.1,2,4,5,6**) .

The book *A Vast Illusion* by Kenneth Wapnick addresses many of these issues about the decision maker, choice and time in greater depth.

Q #792: *A Course in Miracles* ' non-dualistic metaphysics defines the physical universe and everything in it as illusory, a defense against the truth of Heaven's undifferentiated oneness. But if the physical universe is a defense, sharing none of the characteristics of Heaven, how then do we explain what physicists tell us about the interconnectedness of everything on the quantum level? Is this not exactly what the Course defines as Heaven? And does it not indeed exist in this world, even if you *really* have to squint to see it?

As I understand it, Jesus seems to be saying that he or the Holy Spirit can use the world of illusion for Their holy purpose. Nonetheless, inherently these defenses (the material world) are still illusory -- a big, fat lie -- and share nothing whatsoever in common with the truth as God created it. And yet we have physicists and a number of New Age teachers speaking about the perfect, undiluted oneness just below the surface of consciousness! If the "tiny, mad idea" projected a world of lies to disguise its hideous inward condition, why did it include a spark of truth?

A: There are a couple of things you may want to keep in mind. First of all, the ego is one, single, unitary, illusory thought, and no matter how much deceptive complexity it may try to impose on that one thought through seeming division and fragmentation, it remains one thought. Jesus makes this point in 'The Substitute Reality:'

You who believe that God is fear made but one substitution. It has taken many forms, because it was the substitution of illusion for truth; of fragmentation for wholeness. It 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. That one error, which brought truth to illusion, infinity to time, and life to death, was all you ever made. Your whole world rests upon it. Everything you see reflects it, and every special relationship that you have ever made is part of it* (T.18.I.4 ; italics added) .

So complexity is an illusion, and everything in the seemingly vast physical universe comes from that single thought of separation and guilt. Despite the ego's frantic and furious efforts at disguise, its simple origins, which are so easily dismissed by the simple solution of the Atonement principle -- the separation never happened -- can never be completely concealed. The difference between the oneness of Heaven and the ego's oneness is that Heaven is truly one, while the ego is truly nothing. However, before we can recognize that the ego is nothing, we first have to look at the thought of sin and guilt that it insists it represents. But of course neither of these propositions for the universe's foundation -- sin and guilt, or nothingness -- is something that most quantum physicists or New Agers are considering. And it is not interconnectedness that defines Heaven, for interconnectedness still implies differentiable parts that may ultimately be connected at a deeper level. In Heaven, there are no differentiable parts.

The other point to remember is that the so-called physical universe exists *within* the split mind. And it's the split mind that retains the spark of truth, the memory of God's Love, and not the physical universe, since there is no physical universe. And that mind, when joined with the Holy Spirit -- the right mind which holds the memory of true oneness -- can see the ego illusion in a completely different light, and begin to see past the deceptive complexity it has attempted to impose on our perception.

Without a perspective such as the Course offers, which comes from completely outside the ego thought system, it will seem as if the simplicity of consciousness at the core of the universe is itself real. And yet it is only the split mind when it first fell asleep, before any of the diversionary fragmenting, that gave birth to consciousness, a single unitary ego state (T.3.IV.2:1,2) . Most spiritual paths, other than the Course, see consciousness, which necessarily implies the duality of a perceiver and a perceived, as real. We find that only the very highest teachings of such spiritual traditions as Hinduism see that even consciousness remains in the realm of duality and must therefore ultimately be illusory.

Q #793: I am dating someone who lost his wife in an accident twenty years ago. He then re- married and divorced after fifteen (unhappy) years of marriage. He says that since his first wife died, he has not loved another woman. I want him very much, but feel very uncomfortable being with someone who doesn't love me. According to *A Course in Miracles* , there is either love or fear. Since there is no love, I guess it is fear. I can understand where his fear comes from. My question is: what is the Course's advice for me. How can I feel good in this situation, and not take it personally. Am I supposed to love him unconditionally without expecting anything? How can I do it without being afraid of being left? Emotionally I feel worse now than I did before I met him and was not in any relationship.

A: Is it possible to love someone who does not love us in return and who does not provide the things we think we are looking for in a relationship? From the world's perspective, no, at least not without a feeling of sacrifice and loss, with anger and resentment buried beneath that, rising to the surface from time to time. And while the Course is leading us toward the possibility of that kind of love without conditions, it is not asking that of us now as its students. If we were capable of that kind of love, we would not need the

Course, for our minds would already be healed and we would not be looking to anyone outside ourselves to meet our needs, including the need to be loved. We would know with certainty that the love is already there, present within our own mind.

Jesus knows we are not yet capable of that kind of love and so through his Course invites us to learn the lessons of forgiveness that will lead us to this kind of love. The lessons come to us in the context of our special relationships and do not depend, by the way, on whether we physically remain in the relationship or not. The Course's concern is not with what we do but with how we look at what we do. Relationships bring us up against the *self-imposed* limitations we've accepted to restrict our experience of love. But we seek to put the blame for any lack we feel on our relationship partners -- that's actually the ego's purpose for all of our relationships. Yet others are not the ones who make us feel deprived -- we are **(T.4.IV.3:3)** !

And so each relationship in which I find myself ready to judge the other for how I feel or for what I believe is lacking in me can be used for a different purpose. With the Holy Spirit's help, it can become the mirror that allows me to look deeply within my own mind to see the accusation I am holding against myself -- that I am the one who has limited love by putting my own needs above everything and everyone else. While I want to see the guilt in the other, there is nothing I can do about it. But once I see it within myself, I have a choice about whether I want to continue to make it real by keeping love away. If I am willing to let the love in by joining with Jesus in looking at my guilt, the self-accusation will disappear, replaced automatically by the experience of love. And from this place of perfect joining, I will recognize in my partner's fear of love that same need for healing that I have just recognized within myself. And from that place of wholeness within, there is nothing to be done but to let the love flow through me and encompass my partner as well as myself in the love that we are all already truly a part of. Whether he is willing to accept that love right now will not be my concern, for I will see the two of us in the same light of forgiveness and know that the outcome is certain, regardless of what our bodies may do.

A beautiful passage in the text describes this process : **“Make way for love, which you did not create, but which you can extend. On earth this means forgive your brother, *that the darkness may be lifted from your mind* . When light has come to him through your forgiveness, he will not forget his savior, leaving him unsaved. For it was in your face he saw the light that he would keep beside him, as he walks through darkness to the everlasting light (T.29.III.4; italics added)**.

Q #794: You often say the ego thought system is based on perceived separate interests, while the Holy Spirit's thought system, in contrast, is characterized by our all sharing the same interest in undoing the dream of separation. Now it is surely the case that the social system that currently dominates the world expresses, and in turn reinforces, the dog-eat-dog mindset of the ego, thereby undermining any sense of shared interests, except when these are mobilized against some "external" threat.

Given the illusory nature of the world, it must of course follow that any and all social systems that man has devised are illusory as well. Even so, it does seem to me that some forms of social organization might be more conducive to the perception of shared interests – and that, conversely, the present world system is particularly well suited to the promotion of the fear, vulnerability and aggression on which the ego thrives. Or does any of this really matter in the end?

A: In the end, it does not really matter. But it is not simply because the world, and all the social systems within it, are illusory. For the value of everything in the world, while we still believe the world is real, depends only on what purpose it is given. Anything used for judgment and attack is valueless, for it being used to reinforce a meaningless thought system. Anything used for forgiveness and joining has the only real value anything in the world can hold.

Each of us always has the choice to see either separate or shared interests, regardless of what appears to be happening in the world around us. And as much as the ego may wish us to believe that form affects

the content of the mind, which is what is behind your question, the world of form only ever reflects the collective content of the Son's split mind. Any shift must first occur in the mind, whether we are conscious of that choice or not, and only then can it be reflected in the world of form. The purpose of *A Course in Miracles* is to help make that choice conscious. That is why Jesus tells us in the Course, "**seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world**" (T.21.in.1:7).

It is in fact worth quoting the entire paragraph in which this admonition occurs: "**The world you see is what you gave it, nothing more than that. But though it is no more than that, it is not less. Therefore, to you it is important. It is the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition. As a man thinketh, so does he perceive. Therefore, seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world. Perception is a result and not a cause. And that is why order of difficulty in miracles is meaningless. *Everything looked upon with vision is healed and holy. Nothing perceived without it means anything.* And where there is no meaning, there is chaos**" (T.21.in.1; italics added).

In other words, the only meaningful question is which teacher have we chosen to guide our perception. If we choose the wrong teacher, we can *only* see some form of specialness -- either special love or special hate -- around us. But if we choose the right Teacher, we will be guided to see in everything around us either an extension of love or a call for the love that we each believe we have thrown away (T.12.I.3:1,2,3,4). There are no other alternatives, which is what makes the Course so simple. Once we become concerned with form in the world, we are caught in the ego's web of complexity, and the possibility of healing and release will seem daunting, if not hopeless.

It is even possible that when the forms of the world, such as specific social systems, appear to be encouraging what we may believe to be shared interests, they may in fact simply be reinforcing the very deceptive special love relationship that the ego holds out as its "most boasted gift" (T.16.V.3:1). For they may be simply covering over the ugliness of the ego's thought system, keeping a lid on the guilt, but doing nothing about undoing it in the mind. The point is, we can never judge what is most helpful with any confidence based on form.

For example, was the politeness and civility of the first half or so of the 20th century, at least within the United States, which some folks speak so nostalgically about, really bringing the Sonship closer to awakening from the dream than the uncivility and overt attack that seems so pervasive in today's world? We may have our opinions about what is more helpful, based on our perspective of ourselves as bodies in the world who want to feel safe and secure, but we are simply not in a position to judge. Perhaps yes, but just as likely, perhaps not.

Unfortunately, it does appear that fear and pain are the greatest motivators for asking for another way. And the ego is eager to foster the complacency that comes from having one's life function smoothly and comfortably, with everyone "helping" everyone else. The point is not that we should value pain and attack, but that we want to be vigilant in every situation and circumstance for the choice we always have between the ego and the Holy Spirit. And that choice becomes clearer only as we become increasingly aware of our ego in all its subtle and not so subtle expressions.

Q #795: I have a question about the following passage from the manual on the holy relationship between two people: "As with the first level, these meetings are not accidental, nor is what appears to be the end of the relationship a real end....Yet all who meet will someday meet again, for it is the destiny of all relationships to become holy" (M.3.4:4,6). Does this imply the idea of karmic relationships until total forgiveness on both sides has been learned?

A personal example: I became friends with someone who seems very similar to me. But over time she became hostile towards me and as a result I became hostile towards her. I found myself quoting A

Course in Miracles when things got worse between us, but then I was accused of being crazy and even mentally ill. The more I opened myself, the more it seemed I was accused and attacked. I honestly started doubting my own sanity after a while.

It feels that we had to part in hostility. But it is a horrible state of affairs, and I find myself blaming the Course rather than my ego for the outcome. Yet I strongly feel deep regret and a willingness to end the dispute now and make this a good relationship again. But I don't see how I can do this and forgive myself without her. It seems we have to wait for "a next life" repetition. Is there another approach I do not see?

A: There is another approach that offers you an answer right now, but you would have to be willing to set aside many of your assumptions about what has happened in this relationship and why, and what the Course has to say about it. And none of this requires that you deny your experience, but only that you be open to a different interpretation of the situation and the problem.

To begin with -- the passage you cite does seem to suggest future lives and karmic relationships and, on the level of how we experience our lives, this may certainly be true. But there is a deeper level of meaning, which becomes clearer as we begin to grow in our understanding of the Course's teachings -- on the nature of who we are as mind and how we defend against the truth in our mind. Every difficult, hostile relationship we see outside ourselves reflects an unhealed spot of guilt and hatred within our own mind. And until that spot of darkness within is healed, we will continue to deny it in our own mind and project it outside ourselves in the form of difficult, conflictual relationships, so that we don't have to heal the spot within -- in other words, the projection of the guilt is very deliberate, if still unconscious (**T.6.II.1,2,3**). But at some point we must come to the realization that the inner and the outer are the same (**W.pl.31.2:5; W.pl.32.2:1**), and that the relationship that truly needs healing is within our own mind -- the relationship with our wrong mind, and not with anyone who seems to be external to us.

The "meeting again" that the passage refers to is in fact a meeting with the part of our own mind that we have denied and projected outside ourselves so that we don't have to accept responsibility for it. And so it is inevitable, and no accident, that we will meet that unhealed thought again (and again), projected onto a seemingly external relationship, until we realize that it is only ever ourselves that we need to learn to forgive. In other words, the other person is simply holding up a mirror for us that allows us to see the contents of our own mind reflected back at us (**T.7.VII.3:9,10; T.24.VI.8; T.31.VII.8:4; W.pl.73.5:1; W.pl.304.1:3,4**). Since the mind of the Son is one, it is inevitable that we will heal all our projections so that our holiness and oneness can dawn once again upon our mind -- "it is the destiny of all relationships to become holy"

With this view of the manual passage you cite in mind, let's turn to the personal example you provide and consider an alternative way of thinking about how that relationship developed and how it can be healed. It is interesting that you have a sense that you and your friend are very similar, or at least perhaps felt that way when you first met. Since every external relationship must represent a split off part of ourselves, a sense of similarity is not at all unexpected, although we more often choose to focus on the differences rather than the similarities, a favorite ego device that provides the foundation for either special love or special hate (**T.15.V.8:2,3,4; T.18.I.2**).

Your experience then was that she changed and became hostile, which in turn caused you to become hostile. That of course is exactly how our egos would like us to perceive the shift to special hate, that our feelings are triggered and elicited by the other's attacks. But the Course suggests a very different explanation -- that we would never react with anger and hostility to someone else's hostility unless we believed the guilt within our own mind was real and were looking to defend against it by holding someone else responsible for our feelings of hurt and upset (**T.27.VII.1,3,4,7**). Another's hostility can have no effect on us if we do not first believe we are guilty. Now most of us do believe we're guilty, at least unconsciously -- guilty of attacking God and separating from love -- and so we experience others' attacks as real and deserving of attack in return. But that is all just part of the insanity of the ego thought system

Your reaction, by the way, of trying to use the Course as a defense against her attacks is a natural one, but almost never helpful. The Course's purpose is only to help us look within and see ourselves differently, after which we will see others differently. It is not intended as a method for changing someone else's behavior towards us. So employing it for any purpose but healing our own perceptions will invariably serve the ego's purpose of increasing conflict. If someone else is already identified with the ego, it is likely they will perceive a verbal defense based on the Course as crazy, even "mentally ill," as you learned in your dealings with your friend. In most situations, the words of the Course are best kept to yourself, as a guide and support to your own inner thinking, and not to be used as a tool for attempting to change anyone else's perceptions.

Another common, related error students make with the Course is to see it as a guide for behavior rather than for thinking (**T.4.IV.2:1**; **T.21.VII.7:8**). Your observation that you blame the Course rather than your ego for the outcome of the relationship suggests you have fallen into that trap. Now this is not to say that there may not be valuable forgiveness lessons in your experience with your friend, but forgiveness lessons only ever present themselves *after* we have first turned to our egos for guidance. So long as we remain under the Holy Spirit's direction, our egos will not be involved, there will be no anger or guilt, and no need for practicing forgiveness. Of course, this is the ideal that we are striving for, but it is likely to be our experience only intermittently as we progress over time with putting the Course's principles into practice. Your own experience may have not been so conflict-filled and painful if you had been able to recognize from the beginning that all your reactions to your friend represented projections of your own guilt and really had nothing to do with her hostility towards you. Granted that is a very difficult lesson to learn, and not one that the ego will readily allow us to accept. Most of us will first try to "fight the good fight" before we become willing to look at and begin to deal with the consequences, and then perhaps ask if there is another way, as you are asking.

The final point to be made, which may perhaps be apparent from what we have discussed already, is that since the healing that the Course is attempting to bring about is a healing of the thoughts of guilt and anger within our own minds, which our external relationships only bring into our awareness, it is not necessary that your body and the body of your friend, in this lifetime or in any other lifetime, physically come together again, despite what the ego may teach (**T.15.VII.8**). Now it may seem easier to uncover that buried guilt in the "presence" of its projection onto an external relationship, but you can still continue to work on healing the relationship by looking at the guilt in your own mind with Jesus or the Holy Spirit, independent of what your friend chooses to do in relationship to you. If it really required the physical presence of someone else for healing to occur, then we would genuinely be at the mercy of others in our forgiveness process. But the Course makes it very clear that we are never the victim of the world we see (**W.pl.31**) and so, rest assured, any further healing awaits only your own willingness. It is even possible that some change with your friend at the level of form could follow your change of mind from judgment to forgiveness, but this would only ever be the effect of the inner shift, and never a cause or a prerequisite for it.

Q #796: As I learn to draw distinctions between the ego's voice, and that of the Holy Spirit, it actually becomes more difficult to view the ego without judgment -- that is, as a value-neutral illusory effect. The ego has intelligence. The ego has an agenda. It is desirous of and intent upon self-preservation, and as such -- a thinking, choosing, "intelligence" with an agenda for its own survival -- it is very difficult for me not to see it as an "entity". A pretty darn "non-neutral" entity. I can still choose against the ego, but I suspect that my ability to really "choose again" in the sense that Jesus calls us to, will be divested of the miracle if I am unable to "choose for forgiveness."

A: The ego is a thought. It is the name given to the thought of separation taken seriously, and it is the cause of the illusory world. When the mind chooses separation, the tremendous guilt that results is projected out, and does indeed seem to give the ego a life of its own as an entity, giving rise to the entire physical universe, which certainly seems real. This attests to the power of the mind to misuse its creative ability, rather than the power of the ego as an entity. The ego does not have any power of its own; it is

merely the expression of the mind that chooses separation. This repeated choice of the mind sustains the "agenda" of the ego. In *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus clarifies for us the true characteristics of the seemingly "intelligent" ego, and gives us several good reasons not to take any judgments regarding the ego seriously: "...the ego knows nothing,...is nothing,...is incapable of understanding content,...makes no sense" (T.8.II.1:9, T.11.II.7:6, T.14.X.8:1, T.9.III.3:3). Nothing it makes means anything, because it makes illusions (T.9.III.3:4, W.pl.332.1:1). We would accept these statements and dismiss the ego without another thought, but for our fear of identifying with the power of the mind that makes the ego's nothingness seem powerful, intelligent, and substantial. Fear of the mind indeed makes the ego seem ominous. Thus, we do not understand the ego or the mind, and fear them both. Fortunately, we are not asked to make choices for or against what we do not understand, but rather to take small steps in the practice of forgiveness in our everyday lives.

The ego is divested of its seeming, autonomous existence as an entity by our remembering that the mind is the active agent, and is responsible for choosing. Recognizing the ego's dynamics as the inevitable effect of the mind's choice for separation is how to look at both the ego and its antics without judgment. This important principle is the foundation of the Course's teaching of forgiveness. The mind must be recognized as the real source of every experience in the illusion, including the perception of the ego as a force to be reckoned with. It may be tempting to translate the old excuse to avoid responsibility: "the devil made me do it" to "the ego made me do it." However the power of the mind that gave rise to the ego in the first place, is thereby negated, the choice for separation is camouflaged, and hope for any real change is lost. What Jesus tells us toward the end of the text applies until the Atonement is complete: **"What waits in perfect certainty beyond salvation is not our concern. For you have barely started to allow your first, uncertain steps to be directed up the ladder separation led you down. The miracle (forgiveness) alone is your concern at present"** (T.28.III.1:1,2,3). A choice is made for forgiveness and against the ego each time we are willing to look at a relationship differently, by recognizing in it the judgments that reflect the mind's choice for separation, instead of limiting our perception to what the eyes see. That is the miracle. And, as Jesus tells us, this is our only concern for now. Our hope lies in taking these small steps that will lead us to the final choice, and then back home to God.

Q #797: Does the true Self know about the dream?

A: The true Self, God's Son, knows only the Father's Love, and knows not an identity apart from Him. In that unity with God, he is not aware of the dream, just as God is not aware of it. In the workbook, Jesus describes the true Self in terms that make it clear It cannot know about the dream of separation: **"This Self alone knows Love. This Self alone is perfectly consistent in Its Thoughts; knows Its Creator, understands Itself, is perfect in Its knowledge and Its Love, and never changes from Its constant state of union with Its Father and Itself"** (W.rv.in.4:4,5). Thus, one with Its Source, whole, and certain of Its Identity, the true Self cannot ask the questions, "Who am I?" or "Am I dreaming?" It knows Its Identity and is awake in that knowledge, not asleep dreaming of a false, separate self. The dreamer of the dream (the mind) holds the memory of the Self, rather than the Self knowing about the dream.

The question of the dream arises only when the mind has already chosen to believe that the dream of separation has indeed occurred. In this choice, the mind actively chooses against the Self and falls asleep. The dream thus begins with a profound dissociation from our true Identity, experienced by the mind as a vast, dark, void, which is then filled with a false identity that does not really exist at all, just as the figures in a nocturnal dream are not real. The conflict at the core of the dream of separation is, therefore, an identity crisis: **"There is no conflict that does not entail the single, simple question, 'What am I?' Yet who could ask this question except one who has refused to recognize himself?"** (W.pl.139.1:6,2:1)

The mistaken-identity dilemma is compounded by the belief that the true Self actually belongs to the dream figure “self,” and is somehow identified with it. This is the source of much of the confusion in understanding the message of *A Course in Miracles*, which is addressed to the mind, not to the individual identified with a body. In fact, the right mind of the Sonship that remembers God and is symbolized by Jesus is the source of the Course. This is the part of the mind that is aware of the dream.

The mind's choice to return to its true Identity is reflected in the process of learning the Course's important teaching that we are dreaming a dream of separation, from which we can awake: “**Nothing at all has happened but that you have put yourself to sleep, and dreamed a dream in which you were an alien to yourself, and but a part of someone else's dream**” (T.28.II.4:1). Through the practice of forgiveness, we attribute our experience in the dream to the power of the mind, not to anything external to it. In so doing, we gradually learn to identify with the mind rather than with the figure in the dream. This returns to our awareness the power of the mind to choose differently and ultimately to awaken from the dream. In a single, simple answer to our question of identity, Jesus defines our true condition, our dream state, and the power of the mind to take us from one to the other: “**You are at home in God, dreaming of exile but perfectly capable of awakening to reality**” (T.10.I.2:1). Each application of the principles of forgiveness in our relationships leads us closer to full acceptance and the awakening he promises.

Q #798: I have recently been exposed to prophecies about impending doom to the earth within the next decade. Global warming, earthquakes, volcanoes, storms, pollution, nuclear war. If one isn't ready through prayer and meditation, apparently after death I could be in danger of being unconscious for a long time. I know my thoughts are not pure, I struggle with the clouds, when I do meditate and invite God, I don't feel this huge presence, however I do feel comforted in knowing that He is there even though I don't feel Him there. How should I view these prophecies?

A: The prediction of catastrophic events are certainly true since they are already well underway in our world. Our concern, therefore, is not with the veracity of the predictions, but rather with our interpretation of them. As Jesus tells us in the text: “**The test of everything on earth is simply this; “What is it for ?” The answer makes it what it is for you. It has no meaning of itself, yet you can give reality to it, according to the purpose that you serve**” (T.24.VII.6:1,2,3). We are also told that there are only two possible answers to the question: everything serves either the ego's thought system or the Holy Spirit's. The ego interprets everything in support of the belief that the world is real and has an effect on us. The Holy Spirit interprets everything as an opportunity to learn through forgiveness that the world is not real, and that nothing external to the mind has any effect on it. Given these two choices, the only truly catastrophic event is choosing to believe the ego. This choice takes place in the mind and gives rise to the guilt that is the *only* cause of fear, which is then experienced as fear of disasters, feelings of impending doom, and countless other forms of upset. The true cause of these feelings is in the mind's choice for separation, whereby the Son of God obliterates from His mind all awareness of His true Identity, and identifies with the body. The world with all its conflicts and disasters is the result. The message Jesus gives us in *A Course in Miracles* is : “**Nothing at all has happened but that you have put yourself to sleep, and dreamed a dream in which you were an alien to yourself, and but a part of someone else's dream**” (T.28.II.4:1). The dream is a nightmare in which natural disasters are inevitable. In fact, life in the world is itself a disaster; an *unnatural* disaster for God's Son who was created one with Him: “**It [the world] symbolizes fear. And what is fear except love's absence? Thus the world was meant to be a place where God could enter not, and where His Son could be apart from Him**” (W.pII.3:2,3,4). This world, therefore, cannot be anything but a fearful place, with or without predictions of catastrophic events.

Our goal in studying the Course is to awaken from the dream by learning that we are not the bodies that inhabit this world, it is not our home, nor can we find in it any hope for peace. Our hope lies only in accepting that we have a mind that can be healed of the thought of separation by choosing to look differently at the world. Thus, as students of the Course, we hear Jesus saying: “**...seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world** (T.21.in.1:7). This is accomplished by

seeing the world as a classroom to practice the forgiveness Jesus teaches in the Course, which makes every experience the same, whether it be judged on the world's terms as good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant. A catastrophic event is an opportunity to get in touch with the tremendous fear generated, not by an earthquake or volcanic eruption, but by the eruption of guilt for having chosen to be separate from God. Salvation lies in healing the mind of this thought, and forgiveness is the prayer that makes it possible. This process is not an activity of the body, and therefore does not begin with its birth nor end with its death. There is no prolonged state of unconsciousness to fear after the death of the body because the body does nothing: **“The body neither lives nor dies, because it cannot contain you [the mind] who are life” (T.6.V.A.1:4).** The death of the body, therefore, has no effect on the mind's choice for separation. More importantly, the mind's choice to believe the separation is real has no effect on the truth. Jesus makes this clear by telling us : **“Sleep is no more a form of death than death is a form of unconsciousness. Complete unconsciousness is impossible.” (T.8.IX.4:7,8).** Thus our only need is to pay attention to the thoughts of judgment that reflect the mind's mistaken choice to be separate, keeping us rooted in the dream, so we can eventually accept that in truth “ [we] **can rest in peace only because [we] are awake” (T.8.IX.4:9).**

For the Course's teaching regarding psychic abilities see the manual for teachers **(M.25)** .

Q #799: My question is about having a certain level of comfort and abundance in the physical world. I am aware now that money and possessions and such really don't mean anything and cannot be counted on to make one happy. At the same time I am in this world for the foreseeable future and it is a bit of a drag not having the money to make the journey a little more comfortable. I have tried without success to attain financial abundance through many different New Age programs. I wonder why I just don't seem to be able to master this area. Can you direct me to anything in *A Course in Miracles* that might address this? So money cannot make you happy, but not having enough is not the answer either. Am I wasting my time with affirmations and such? Lack seems to be in my mind all the time. How can I reverse this? I mean I know the world is an illusion but my bills don't seem to be. I'm sure there is a way of following the Course and not having to live in lack.

A: Your observation that lack seems to be in your mind all the time actually holds the key to the solution. You see, you're not experiencing lack because you don't have enough money -- you're experiencing lack because you're identified in your mind with the ego, which is a thought of lack **(T.3.V.2:2,4,5)** . And whether you accept this or not, nothing at all in your external financial circumstances needs to change for your experience to shift from a sense of lack to a sense of abundance **(T.1.IV.3)** . That is the change the Course can help you with -- and not with how to have more money in your life. Sorry.

Now if you are interested in having a different experience, regardless of your financial situation, the first step in undoing the experience of lack is *not* through affirmations of abundance, as you have been attempting. For affirmations deny the fact that we actually want and are choosing to experience lack in our lives. And it is with that acknowledgment that we must begin. For, as the Course so uncompromisingly puts it: **“I am responsible for what I see. I choose the feelings I experience, and I decide upon the goal I would achieve. And everything that seems to happen to me I ask for, and receive as I have asked ” (T.21.II.2:3,4,5)** .

But why, you may reasonably ask, would we be choosing to see lack in our lives? The choice is a defense, serving the ego's purpose of keeping our focus on the world, rather than on the thoughts in our mind. We joined the ego in making the world and these “needy” bodies with which we identify so that we would not look within at the underlying belief in lack and limitation in our mind. And that belief comes from our choice for the ego, the thought that we could be separate from Love, the only true Abundance **(T.12.III.6)** .

And why would we not want to look at the underlying thought of lack in our mind? The ego tells us, don't look within, because the lack in the mind is a reminder of our sinful attack on God, which left us on our own, deprived of love, in a state of loss and scarcity. And He remains there in our mind, seeking to take away what little we still have, as vengeance for our attack, if He can ever find us. But Jesus exposes the ego's lie in all this: the ego does not want us to look within because it will be evident to us if we do that the lack and loss are made up, and that God's abundant Love remains always available, awaiting only our acceptance. And with that recognition, we would let go of our allegiance to the ego and our investment in loss and lack (T.21.IV.1,2,3) .

Although it is true that our mind has chosen the events and circumstances of our lives, it is more helpful -- while we still believe we are bodies in the world rather than the mind that is dreaming the world -- to acknowledge that we have chosen our *interpretation* of those events and circumstances. It is our interpretation after all that determines how we experience what seems to happen to us (M.17.4:2) . And there are only two possible interpretations of everything in the world. With the ego as the interpreter of our lives, we can only experience lack and limitation, regardless of our external circumstances. In other words, we could have all the money in the world, but we would still feel empty and impoverished if our allegiance remains with the ego. And so the next step, after we have accepted responsibility for choosing to experience a sense of lack, is to recognize that there is a different Interpreter of our lives, Who can help us begin to remember the truth about ourselves, that we have never attacked love and that we have always continued to exist in the abundance and fullness of God's Love, despite our ego beliefs to the contrary (T.1.IV.4:8; W.pl.165.6:5,6) .

Now coming to this recognition is likely to be a process for most of us, as we become afraid of love and its limitlessness, and return to the ego and its interpretation of who we are and how little we deserve. But once we begin to accept the truth about ourselves, we can never be completely fooled by the ego again. And the possibility of interpreting our circumstances differently will be an increasingly accessible option, to see in them only an opportunity to practice forgiveness, as our willingness to ask for help grows.

Q #800: Please comment on the Christian dictum that we should hate the sin but not the sinner, that we should condemn the wrong but forgive the wrongdoer.

A: It is important first of all to clarify that this is, in fact, a dictum (saying), not a teaching found in scripture. It is based on the Christian teaching that sins can be forgiven. From the Christian perspective, the highest expression of this forgiveness would be to treat a sinner with kindness, mercy, and compassion, in the hopes that he/she will "repent and sin no more." Fundamental to Christianity is the belief that sin is real, and that salvation requires repentance as well as abandonment of the sinful behavior. This perspective is, no doubt, the origin of the dictum.

A Course in Miracles has a different message. Jesus tells us in the text: "**There is no sin**" (T.26.VII.10.5). Therefore, there can be no sinner, no wrong, no wrongdoer. There is nothing in the Course about behavior of any kind, because the Course is teaching us to change our minds, not our behavior. The basis for this is one of the Course's fundamental principles that thoughts remain in the mind, where they originate: "**Ideas leave not their source, and their effects but seem to be apart from them. Ideas are of the mind. What is projected out, and seems to be external to the mind, is not outside at all, but an effect of what is in, and has not left its source**" (T.26.VII.4:7,8,9). Thus everything is a projection of a thought in the mind. Every judgment is the expression of a judgment against ourselves, made in the mind. We cannot, therefore, dissociate the sinner from the sin, because we cannot dissociate ourselves from the thought in the mind that gives rise to the judgment. The only source of the perception of sin/sinner is the mind's judgment that the idea of separation is a sin and has had real effects. This is the original attack on the Son of God. He is deemed to be a grievous sinner for refusing to accept His only true Identity as God's one Son. The world and all its "sinners" is the projection of that attack thought. However, since the thought in the mind has been denied, and the Son's Identity

replaced with the identity of the body, we need to look at the projected version in the world to see in it what the mind has chosen to believe: **“The world you see is what you gave it, nothing more than that. But though it is no more than that, it is not less. Therefore, to you it is important. It is the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition” (T.21.in.1:2,3,4,5).**

The form of the projection is not important, it is the content that reflects the state of mind. Though you may not accuse yourself of a specific sin or wrongdoing (murder, rape, etc.), there has been an accusation of sinfulness made in the mind that is reflected in the judgment against another in the dream. The recognition that everything is a projection of the mind is how the Course teaches us to distinguish the “sinner” from the “sin.” It is, however, a reversal of the dictum you quote, in that the “sin” (thought in the mind/cause) is where attention should be focused, and the “sinner” (projection of the thought in the body/effect) is merely a reflection in the illusory world. Because nothing and no one external to the mind has any effect on us, Jesus' message to **“Be willing to forgive the Son of God for what he did not do” (T.17.III.1:5)** leads us beyond the Christian dictum mixed with condemnation and forgiveness, whatever the alleged “sin” may seem to be.

Q #801: What is the cause of “natural disasters” -- “acts of God” (earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, etc.)?

A: *A Course in Miracles* teaches that the world and all events in the world have the same cause: the choice of the decision-making mind outside time and space to identify with the ego thought system. This choice initiates a series of dynamics involving denial and projection that reinforce the belief that the separation from God has really happened, but that the responsibility for it lies elsewhere. The ego wants us as far away as possible from our reality as minds, lest we realize that being separate from God is not a good idea, and we decide to change our minds about being separate. The ego's strategy, thus, is to make us mind-less, which it does by convincing us that, for our own survival as individuals, we should project ourselves out of our minds, forget that we did that, and then believe we are bodies in a world ruled by the forces of nature, or whatever. Our new identity requires that we become the innocent victims of what is done to us. Earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, etc., are thus a necessary part of the ego's strategy, for if we are victimized by what is external to us, then we can in no way feel responsible for what happens, and we would be safe forever from our minds with all the guilt and fear residing in them. The ego's plan for our salvation thus requires that we experience ourselves, not as minds, but as vulnerable bodies subject to forces that do not appear to be of our own making.

God, of course, has nothing to do with this. Jesus, though, as the reflection of God's Love within our otherwise deluded minds, helps us to question our beliefs and open our thinking to another way of perceiving ourselves and the world. He does this throughout his course, but to focus on one place in particular, he tells us in Lesson 14: **“The world you see has nothing to do with reality. It is of your own making, and it does not exist” (W.pl.14.1:4,5)** . In the exercise in this lesson he asks us to **“think of all the horrors in the world that cross your mind. . . . Say, for example: “God did not create that airplane crash, and so it is not real. God did not create that disaster . . . and so it is not real” (4:1,4,6,7)** . As he continues, he teaches us that the world's horrors are only in minds that believe they are separate from God's Mind, and are therefore meaningless **(6:6)** .

Q #802: I was wondering how to speak to children? My granddaughter is 6, The other day she said to me “everything is my fault.” I didn't know what to say. Her parents are not followers of *A Course in Miracles* , although I think they will be sometime as they are reaching the age of questioning their thought system.

A: In the light of the Course's teaching, your granddaughter is right *and* wrong, and she speaks for all of us. Her declaration reflects the part of the mind that knows it has the power to choose, has some awareness that a "bad" choice has been made, and feels guilty about it. This describes the universal angst at the heart of **"...everyone who wanders in the world uncertain, lonely, and in constant fear" (T.31.VIII.7:1)**. Her hidden guilt and its companion fear are the source of her call for love, as they are in countless forms for everyone. She rightfully expresses the painful effects of the mind's choice for separation and identity with the ego: **"Depression is an inevitable consequence of separation. So are anxiety, worry, a deep sense of helplessness, misery, suffering and intense fear of loss" (W.pl.41.1:3)**. This may seem to be an overstatement for a six-year-old's frustration, but it is in fact, at the root not only of her discomfort, but of every conflict in the world, however insignificant or monstrous it may seem to be.

On another level, in your granddaughter's statement we hear her longing (also shared by everyone) to be told that she is wrong; that there is nothing to feel guilty about because her "sin" has had no effect. This is as true for anything she thinks is her fault in the dream, as it is for the "original sin" of believing that separation from God is possible and has been accomplished. Jesus' response in the Course gives her the ultimate reassurance and comfort that we all seek: **"God's Son will always be as he was created. ...for his eternal guiltlessness is in the Mind of his Father, and protects him forever" (T.13.I.5:7,8)**. Thus, although we and your granddaughter are right about the feelings of guilt that follow the choice for separation, we are wrong in believing that the great sin of separation has destroyed our oneness with God.

A Course in Miracles does not give guidelines for behavior, since it only addresses the mind of the Sonship, and its goal is to teach us to use the power of the mind to choose the Holy Spirit instead of the ego. Because the mind is not the body, there is also no age distinction in the Course, so "your brother" refers to everyone, whether they be 6 or 66. We are asked, therefore, to apply its teaching equally in every relationship because in it we recognize our own need of healing: **You have learned your need of healing. Would you bring anything else to the Sonship, recognizing your need of healing for yourself? For in this lies the beginning of the return to knowledge... In whatever part of the mind of God's Son you restore this reality, you restore it to yourself. You dwell in the Mind of God with your brother, for God Himself did not will to be alone" (T.11.I.1:1,2,3,5,6)**. Therefore, in response to any call for help we first remember our own desperate plea that is joined with the call for love shared by all the Sonship. If something in another's behavior sparks fear in us, we see our own need for help and can then turn to the Holy Spirit in our minds, Who answers that call. That is all we are asked to do. Although this may not seem like much of a response, it has great significance. It reinforces belief in the power of the shared mind by hearing the content rather than the form, and acknowledges the presence of the One Who speaks for God to us. Returning to the mind in this way is how to teach and learn what Jesus advises: **"Look gently on your brother, and remember the ego's weakness is revealed in both your sight. What it would keep apart has met and joined, and looks upon the ego unafraid. Little child, innocent of sin, follow in gladness the way to certainty" (T.21.IV.8:1, 2,3)**. This process in our minds is how we practice the Holy Spirit's curriculum in any relationship when fear is perceived. If we adhere to this practice, the content of whatever we say will communicate comfort and reassurance. In the role of an authority figure for a young child, setting limits and offering guidance concerning the choices that must be made on the level of form will then be guided by the Holy Spirit, Who will not reinforce guilt. For your granddaughter, for everyone, whatever form it takes, the content of His message remains: **"God's Son is guiltless, and sin does not exist" (M.10.2:9)**. That is what we want to teach and learn.

Q #803: I would like clarification of [Question #190](#). I have always been under the impression that the "choice" is up to our decision maker. I lost my wife of 31 years just recently and have been overwhelmed by grief and guilt. I turned it all over to the Holy Spirit and I have suddenly had more peace than I ever felt before in my life. Also, I asked Jesus to please send help, and suddenly people are showing up for me to help. Now my question is: Is this what is meant by the right-minded choice? Is it that what I am now

perceiving as peace and help a manifestation of right-mindedness? Or is it just the ego projecting out to soothe the pain a little to keep me from rejecting myself totally.

A: As much as our egos would like to know the answers to questions such as the ones you raise here, there really is not much to be gained by trying to determine whether specific events in our lives reflect right-minded choices or ego deceptions. If your experience is one of peace and relief from guilt and grief and pain, the best thing is simply to accept the shift without trying to judge or evaluate what it means. Since we all have split minds, it is likely that our reactions to any event will vacillate between right- and wrong-mindedness. In the end, everything is a symbol projected from the mind, and its value depends only on what interpretation we give it. From a right-minded perspective, symbols lead us gently and gradually towards awakening. From a wrong-minded perspective, the same symbols will keep us rooted in and identified with the dream. Beyond that, there is little more that we need to know.

Q #804: Why does the dream have to look so real and the real so much like a dream?

A: The dream fulfills our (the separated Son) *need* to be as God did *not* create us. We *need* the dream to be real so that what is real vanishes from our awareness. Thus: **“When you made visible what is not true, what *is* true became invisible to you” (T.12.VIII.3:1).** We rejected what is real (Oneness), believing we could produce a substitute more to our liking (separate, individualized existence). So to make this work for us, we had to do whatever would convince us that what is real is not real and what is not real is real. Once we believed we had accomplished this, it became imperative for our continued survival to keep the denial going and believe the illusion is reality. If you decide that it is necessary for your own protection to deny a fact and pretend something else happened instead, then that is what you would do, especially if you think it is a matter of life or death. And if your defense is going to be effective as a defense, it must convince you that you are safe from the threat. **“To the ego illusions are safety devices, as they must also be to you who equate yourself with the ego” (W.pl.13.3:3) .**

This is why Jesus places so much stress on *purpose* throughout *A Course in Miracles* . Referring to the world as an hallucination, he tells us that **“one thing is sure; hallucinations serve a purpose, and when that purpose is no longer held they disappear. Therefore, the question never is whether you want them, but always, do you want the purpose they serve?” (T.20.VIII.8:6,7).** The dream thus serves the purpose of sustaining our existence as individuals and assuring us that we are not responsible for the separation from God.

Q #805: Why is it that in one place Jesus says “A teacher of God is anyone who chooses to be one. His qualifications consist solely in this; somehow, somewhere he has made a deliberate choice in which he did not see his interests as apart from someone else's” (M.1.1:1,2), and in other places is says that in order to be a teacher of God one has to do the workbook lessons?

A: It is not unusual to come across this kind of thing in *A Course in Miracles* . The reason has to do with pedagogical (teaching) methodology. Jesus is making different points in different places in his teaching. In the statement from the manual that you quoted, he is speaking more generically about a teacher of God; whereas elsewhere he may be speaking about specific aspects of the process that unfolds once one has made this choice to see shared rather than separate interests. In this sense doing the lessons is an integral part of the mind training and thought reversal that is Jesus' teaching objective for all his students.

Q #806: I am struggling with the concept from *A Course in Miracles*, “ *Do not fight yourself* .” (T.30.I.1:7). It appears that the ego certainly would not want to easily let go of any its beliefs, so I am having difficulty in accepting this is where I am now, and when I am ready I will more fully be able to embrace a holier vision. What does a parent do who has a challenged child and feels overwhelmed by what they perceive as a tremendous burden? I realize that at an advanced stage in one's development they would be able to see the miracle behind this, but what if they are struggling to get there, and simply can not? You cannot get rid of a child.

A: What helps to lighten the sense of being burdened with an overwhelming responsibility such as you describe, is to see the situation now as a classroom in which you can choose which teacher you will learn from. You can proceed with the ego as your teacher, in which case you would always be tempted to see you and your child in a victim-victimizer relationship, suffused with conflict and sacrifice. With Jesus as your teacher, however, you can see this as an opportunity to learn that the peace within you cannot be affected by this or any other external situation. That would be the ideal toward which you would strive, while not denying your present feelings to the contrary. The process involves bringing your perceptions and feelings of frustration, impatience, and victimization to his love, where you would know that you are loved and accepted as you are. His love would not judge you -- love and condemnation are mutually exclusive -- and so you would learn not to judge yourself or your child. It is not wrong to have these feelings, and it does not mean you are failing the Course. Your patience with yourself would reflect the caring gentleness of Jesus, who knows that ultimately the ego is nothing, and therefore we should not be upset by ego attacks.

This attitude of gentleness could direct you to seek help with caring for your child so that perhaps you could have time away from the stress of the situation. There is no particular spiritual advantage to remaining in a stressful condition when relief is possible. It is just normal to seek relief from emotionally and physically draining situations, just as one would seek relief from the pain of a sprained ankle or a burned finger. Jesus encourages us, actually, to use such an approach as we work our way up the spiritual ladder (see T.2.IV.4,5) . Following this gentle approach would help you avoid the temptation to “ *fight yourself* .”

Q #807: Three questions that have been received about the recent hurricane on the Gulf Coast will be answered together:

(i) What would *A Course in Miracles* say about the hurricane which has, and still is devastating New Orleans and the surrounding area? As a person living here in "the dream," I see race and class as big elephants in the room. I am also experiencing sadness and fear.

(ii) Can you give us some words of wisdom about responding to Hurricane Katrina, especially on the level of the world we believe is real? Initially, I joined in the blame game but then it occurred to me no one seemed to be accepting any responsibility, personally or officially. And then I remembered there is nothing outside of my mind and everything I see in someone else, I projected onto him or her because I wanted to get rid of it, so the other person would be guilty and I could be innocent. But everyone is doing the same thing -- the Katrina "victims," and all the officials from the bottom up. Perhaps the most loving thing we can do is to join with all our brothers and sisters in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast -- the victims and the victimizers, the rescued and the rescuers, government officials and private citizens -- in our right minds and embrace each other in unconditional love, remembering that we are all united in Christ.

(iii) With all the pain and suffering going on in the Gulf states hit by Katrina, how is it decided what "dream" or "illusion" we enter into. Some are born as kings and queens, others are living a life so horrible, such as those in Sudan, and now the hurricane victims. Is there an answer somewhere in the Course?

A: It can be very difficult to remember that there is another way of looking at the world, when we are so strongly self-identified as “person[s] living here in ‘the dream’” and when our body’s eyes have been and will continue to be confronted in the days and weeks ahead with such powerful images of devastation and death -- in our newspapers and magazines, on our TV and computer screens and, for those of us who may live or have lived close to the area of impact, before our very eyes. And the ego’s insistence that there is a hierarchy of destruction seems hard to argue with, as so many speak of the effects of this natural disaster as being of “biblical proportions” (the Course suggests a deeper meaning and source for that common expression to describe horrific cataclysmic events!). And so our collective reactions run the gamut from disbelief and horror to sadness and fear, as well as frustration and anger. That Jesus is fully aware of how we mislead ourselves, so long as our focus remains on the effects in the world without truly understanding their illusory cause in the mind, is apparent from his words: **“It is not easy to perceive the jest when all around you do your eyes behold its heavy consequences, but without their trifling cause. Without the cause do its effects seem serious and sad indeed. Yet they but follow. And it is their cause that follows nothing and is but a jest” (T.27.VIII.8:4,5,6,7).**

But the only way to learn that there is another way of looking at the world is first to acknowledge that we are seeing the world -- and this particular corner of the world along the Gulf Coast -- the way we do now because we *want* to see it this way. For the way we are seeing it serves a very important function in the ego’s plan to maintain the separation. These events and all the afterimages and aftershocks, with their multitude of geographical, economic, medical, political and societal reverberations, continue to convince us that the separation is real, and very, very serious. And just how does the ego build its case? The events seem so clearly to demonstrate that pain and suffering come from causes beyond our control, outside ourselves. And, despite the fact that the event itself was an “act of nature” that produced victims, much to the glee of many, it appears that there are those who may be responsible for failure to respond in ways that could have ameliorated the destructive and deadly consequences of the hurricane and its aftermath. In other words, clearly there are poor, helpless, homeless victims and careless, unfeeling, insensitive and incompetent victimizers. Focusing on differences is the ego’s lifeblood, so long as the differences make guilt real and assignment of blame a matter of utmost importance, whether it’s because of differences in race or social class or political party, or whatever else works. And so we must begin by acknowledging that this is all very much what we want to see, for it serves not only the ego’s purpose, but it serves *our* purpose. No doubt as more facts rise to the surface as the flood waters recede in the days and weeks ahead, the opportunity to project guilt and assign blame for all the apparent pain and loss and death will present itself over and over again.

And the only question we have to ask ourselves is, do we really like how we feel as we look through the eyes of judgment, fear and attack? As the second questioner observes, we are all doing everything we can to demonstrate our innocence by pointing the finger of blame and guilt elsewhere. But if we could begin to recognize that deep sense of shame and guilt that we all collectively share for our unconscious beliefs about our betrayal of love, for deliberately choosing to see ourselves as homeless and bereft of our Father’s Love, we would then be able to have a little more compassion for all the actors on the stage, each playing the part he or she has willingly chosen, no matter what role it may be in the unfolding tragedy.

The Course, incidentally, offers no explanation for why we have chosen the specific lives and roles we find ourselves experiencing, other than that we continue to want to make differences between ourselves and others, no matter what the form, and hence, separation and guilt, real. Sometimes that may involve playing the victim, other times the victimizer, but those are the only real choices in the ego’s dream (T.27.VII.14:4) . To be concerned about why the differences exist in the world of form is to play right into the ego’s game of making all those differences important and real. And the bigger mistake would be to believe that this apparent hierarchy at the level of form truly reflects differences in the degree of pain and guilt that each mind is experiencing. For *everyone* who believes this world is his home is in great pain, no matter what defenses he may employ to keep that recognition out of his awareness (W.pl.182.1,2,3) . For pain and guilt never come from the world -- the effect -- but only from our interpretation of the world, which is determined by which teacher we have chosen to listen to in our

minds -- the ego or the Holy Spirit.. And nothing in the world can release us from the pain and guilt in the mind -- only forgiveness can do that.

The pain in the mind associated with the guilt over our betrayal and attack on love is beyond comprehension, and we are all struggling in our own inadequate and nonfunctional ways to deal with it, never questioning its reality. And choosing to see ourselves as a victim, regardless of the form it may take, is simply one of the ways we attempt to atone for that imaginary guilt. And so, before we can embrace everyone in unconditional love, we will need to be able to learn to look on everyone, beginning with ourselves, with compassion for continuing to make the wrong choice, for still wanting to believe that destruction and homelessness and death are real, for believing that our salvation depends on seeing something or someone else as responsible for all the pain and suffering -- that is, for needing to see the cause outside ourselves, outside our own minds.

And so in the face of such apparent suffering and loss and need, what should our response be? Jesus asks only that we learn to forgive and everything else that is needed will follow. Our responsibility is not to change the world, but only to change the teacher who guides our perception of what our eyes behold in the world (**T.21.in:7,8,9,10,11,12**) . There are of course many different ways in which we can express our support and concern for all those directly affected by the storm, whether they have lost family, their homes, their livelihood, their possessions. Jesus however is not concerned with the particular form of our response to the events we are witnessing, but the content with which we do whatever we may feel drawn to do in the world to offer help. What is essential to hold in mind is that, no matter what we do, if it comes from an ego perspective that continues in particular to see victims and, therefore, victimizing forces and folks, it will be an attack that keeps the thought of separation alive. But if we act from a right-minded perspective, whatever we think or say or do will have a healing effect, because we will have set aside our own need to be separate and special and "innocent."

Drawing on the beautiful imagery of the Course, it may be a helpful reminder of what our role is from Jesus' perspective, and where our safety lies, to close with some relevant lines from various sections of the book, holding in mind that our brother is *everyone* , and not only the apparent victims:

"Your home is built upon your brother's health, upon his happiness, his sinlessness, and everything his Father promised him. No secret promise you have made instead has shaken the Foundation of his home. The winds will blow upon it and the rain will beat against it, but with no effect. The world will wash away and yet this house will stand forever, for its strength lies not within itself alone. It is an ark of safety, resting on God's promise that His Son is safe forever in Himself.... I am in danger nowhere in the world. Your Son is safe wherever he may be, for You are there with him. He need but call upon Your Name, and he will recollect his safety and Your Love, for they are one. ... No storms can come into the hallowed haven of our home. In God we are secure. ... 'I rest in God.' Completely undismayed, this thought will carry you through storms and strife, past misery and pain, past loss and death, and onward to the certainty of God. There is no suffering it cannot heal. There is no problem that it cannot solve. ..You rest in God, and while the world is torn by winds of hate your rest remains completely undisturbed. ...There will always be this place of rest to which you can return. And you will be more aware of this quiet center of the storm than all its raging activity. This quiet center, in which you do nothing, will remain with you, giving you rest in the midst of every busy doing on which you are sent" (T.28.VII.7:1,2,3,4,5; W.244.h; 1:1,2; 2:2,3; W.109.3:1,2,3,4; 4:2; T.18.VII.8:1,2,3).

Q #808: In answering Question # [566](#), you stated that the separation is presented in *A Course in Miracles* as mythology that is meaningful within a framework of Western philosophy and religion. What curriculum is available within a framework of Eastern philosophy and religion? In other words, is there a correction to the *Koran* , *Torah* , *Bhagavad Gita* , etc.?

A: To clarify, the *Torah* (from Judaism) and the *Koran* (from Islam) are also part of the dualistic Western religious tradition, with a theology that sees God as the Creator of the entire physical universe, and sin and guilt real. However, unlike Christianity, Jesus is either not a spiritual figure (Judaism) or not the central spiritual figure (Islam) in these two other Western religions. Despite this difference, persons raised within one of these other Western religious traditions certainly may find the Course helpful in addressing limitations they may experience with their own religious training. If they also have a background in Western philosophy (e.g., Plato and neo-Platonic thought) and/or psychology (e.g., psychodynamic theory and process), the Course's principles may have even greater appeal.

Within the highest teachings of Eastern spiritual and philosophical traditions (e.g., Advaita within Hinduism), there already exist many of the concepts and principles that the Course offers as an alternative, and a correction, to traditional Christianity's dualistic emphasis on sin and guilt and a punishing God. The idea that the world is a dream is a common Eastern theme. The observation that the realm of perception, with the dichotomy between perceiver and perceived (or subject and object), is illusory, and that reality is One, is also well-represented within Eastern traditions. In other words, although the most common practices of these religions by the majority of their adherents may represent an emphasis on form and ritual, and supplication and sacrifice (basic tenets of the ego's universal "religion," according to the Course), their scriptures also contain a deeper and more profound perspective on the nature of reality for the genuine seeker. And teachers have arisen from within their communities (e.g., Shankara in Hinduism) across the centuries to provide corrections that have brought dedicated followers back to the deepest spiritual roots of their traditions.

The wisdom of these traditions, like that of the Course itself, is ageless. But from the perspective of illusory, ego-based, linear time, the Western world is in the infancy of its awakening in comparison to the Eastern religions and philosophies. And yet the Course comes in a context that is especially suited to the needs of the Western world, which also allows it to offer some fresh new spiritual insights, building on its particularly Western intellectual tradition, that are not contained in any other of the world's spiritual teachings -- such as an explanation of the mind's motivation to make up a world and continue dreaming, despite all the suffering and pain that seem to result.

In the end, the good news is that we need not be concerned with anyone's spiritual path but our own, for there are thousands of genuine paths (**M.1.4:1,2**), as the Course points out, but we need only the one that will serve us best (**T.18.VII.6:5**). And if the Course is our path, it only makes sense to dedicate ourselves to understanding its principles of forgiveness and putting them into practice.

Q #809: From the perspective of *A Course in Miracles*, what might a "separated" mind experience upon finally fulfilling the ego's promise -- the "death of the body"? Since the mind is always active, always choosing, what does the ego then say to continue the illusion of its own reality? It can't really say, "Oops, sorry buddy, guess we were wrong." Most of us, who to some degree must still think we are here, are not prepared for what the transition of "not being here" would present us with. And since those still believing in the illusion of guilt and separation will still be in the dream, how does the ego get itself out of that one, not to mention eventually persuading this mind that it would indeed be a great idea to go "corporeal" again?

Also, does the separated mind still have the option to choose for the Holy Spirit during this supposed time between "lives"? And would learning, choosing the Holy Spirit and undoing the effects of the ego still progress during this time for students with willingness?

A: What allows the ego to continue to maintain its smoke-and-mirrors illusions is the defense of repression or denial (e.g., **T.11.II.3**). Being the master of confusion and forgetfulness, the ego never lets us maintain any awareness of all its deceptions, *so long as we still don't want to see through them*. The ego, after all, is only a name for our own decision for self-deception and Self-denial. So long as we want

to continue to fool ourselves about who we are, each seeming bodily death will have no more effect on our self-identity and our awareness of our ego machinations than any of the seeming events of the “life” of that body.

For “between” lives is not an interval of time when we are non-corporeal, since we are never *in* bodies. It is simply a brief instant when our mind is no longer consciously identifying with one particular ego identity and script, and is shifting our conscious identification to an already existing alternative victim script. There is really nothing linear about this process, although while we remain identified with time and space, we speak of it as if it were. All possible lives are simultaneous and in fact have already happened in that single unholy instant when we, as one Son, took the tiny mad idea of separation seriously.

Since learning happens only in the mind, and has nothing to do with bodies, you are right, the possibility of choosing the Holy Spirit as our Teacher is always available to us, regardless of what aspect of the ego's myriad deceptions we happen to be identifying with in any one instant.

For more on the nature of time, our seeming lives, and the choices available to us, *A Vast Illusion: Time According to A Course in Miracles*, would be helpful. You may also wish to review the answers to Questions [#68](#), [#187](#), [#494](#) and [#604](#) for further discussion of issues related to your question.

Q #810: Why are the concepts in *A Course in Miracles* so complex, and the answers so elaborate?

A: The Course has to meet us where we are, and where we are is in a world that is very complex. But this is because our world has come from a very complex thought system, the thought system that dominates our minds. Therefore, if Jesus is going to be able to help us, the context of his teaching has to be this immense complexity of both our outer and inner worlds. That is what he means when he says, “**This course remains within the ego framework, where it is needed**” (C.in.3:1). Complexity is the name of the ego's game, he tells us in the text (T-15.IV.6:2). His teachings must address this complexity in order to undo it.

Thus, when we start out with the Course, it can indeed appear to be hopelessly complex, but, again, that is because it is meeting us where we are. Its purpose, though, is to lead us out of that complexity to the “**simplicity of salvation**” (T.31.I), when we will all finally realize that “**what is false is false, and what is true has never changed**” (W.pII.10.1:1). That is the simple truth, hidden behind the vast complexity of both the ego thought system in our minds and the world that has come from it.

Question #40 discusses the high intellectual level of the Course, and also that even though it is on a high level, everyone can find something in it that will help them become less guilty and fearful, and more kind and peaceful.

Q #811: How would *A Course in Miracles* explain a negative intuitive/gut feeling I get when I meet a certain person? A new neighbor recently moved in and I get a strong negative feeling about this person -- that he may be socially deviant and someone I need to be worried about. Clearly there are misperceptions here in that I am not seeing this person as a perfect child of God and that I am seeing myself as vulnerable. How would Jesus have me deal with this situation? What is this intuitive feeling? Is it just an extension of my ego?

A: In *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus teaches that the fundamental attack thought is the mind's decision to proclaim: “I am a body.” Identity with the body is thus established, along with guilt for the “sin” of having

taken the thought of separation seriously. In order to preserve body identity and escape responsibility for the attack, the mind erases the memory of making the choice. It does so by projecting guilt and seeing attack outside itself. This is the true source of everyone's attack and fear of attack in the world, including your intuitive feeling: **"Because your attack thoughts will be projected, you will fear attack. And if you fear attack, you must believe that you are not invulnerable. Attack thoughts therefore make you vulnerable in your own mind, which is where the attack thoughts are"** (W.pl.26.2:3). The deep feeling of vulnerability is a reflection of the guilt for having chosen the ego. Fear thus becomes the force at work in the world, which is why it is filled with attacks ranging from the seemingly innocuous to the vicious. From fear comes the ego's vast arsenal of defenses spurred by guilt's battle cry **"killed or be killed"** (M.17.7:11). Therefore, like the rest of the animal kingdom, humans are trained to sense danger (sometimes with "gut feelings"), defend against it, and attack the perceived enemy. The important thing to remember, from the perspective of the Course's teaching, is that the source of all fear and vulnerability is guilt in the mind for choosing to believe the separation is real. The guilt is projected in many different forms of attack, some of which the world judges to be more deleterious than others. However, the attacker and the victim's fear have the same source in the mind. In content, they are both equally insane. Recognition of this sameness is a good place to start in dealing with those whose insanity sparks fear in us in a more obvious way. In the Course, Jesus teaches that the source of fear is not the potential harm of someone else's attack on the body, but the mind's choice for separation.

However, although he tells us the **"mind cannot attack or be attacked"** (T.7.VIII.4:3), he also tells us thoughts are dangerous to bodies. (T.21.VIII.1). Therefore, it is wise to be careful in dealing with the world, and especially with those whose fear is expressed in physical attack upon others. Neither their fear, nor the harmful form it takes, diminishes their true Identity as a perfect sons of God, but it can make them dangerous bodies to be around: **"frightened people can be vicious"** (T.3.I.4:2). As long as any belief in the body is held, there is nothing wrong with being cautious when the threat of physical harm is perceived. This is no different from seeking medical help when the body is sick. We are not asked to deny our belief in the body, our fear, nor the potential for actual attack. What Jesus does ask us to do, is observe the feelings of vulnerability, fear, or defensiveness that arise, recognizing in them the mind's forgotten choice to identify with the thought of separation and the body, thereby denying the true Identity of God's Son; ours and the neighbor's. Recognition of fear's true source is an expression of the **"little willingness"** (26.VII.10:1) that is required. It takes the blame off our neighbors for the source of our fear, and returns our attention to our own mind's need of healing. At least, then, we are at the root of the problem and can ask the Holy Spirit's help to make another choice. That is all that is required.

Q #812: I have a question regarding the subject of "conflict" described in *A Course in Miracles*. The Course says that everything we are hiding must be looked upon and given to God before we can finally return to our true state of being. Is that the reason things seem to get worse for a lot of people when they start doing the workbook and studying the text? The Course also states that it is not meant to describe what is of God but what hinders us in seeing Him and us in our true state.

Could you advise anything on how to do the Course so that it might be easier for people to handle what comes up when they begin to get in touch with "what they are hiding from God"? From the postings you get, is there a tendency for people to have similar experiences when doing the Course, or is everyone different in what problems they describe when encountering their "dark spots"?

A: The issues you raise highlight the importance of having a relationship with Jesus or the Holy Spirit, and why that is stressed so much throughout the entire Course. One could not possibly go through the process of exposing and then letting go of one's ego without having an inner source of guidance, strength, and comfort to turn to. The words *terror* and *fear* come up in the Course far too often to be ignored. In one passage, Jesus tells us that the Presence of the Holy Spirit accompanies us always, and that if we were to accept His Presence, **"fear would be impossible"** but our continuing to choose to be separate from God blocks our awareness of that Presence: **"If you knew Who walks beside you on the way that you have chosen, fear would be impossible. You do not know because the journey into**

darkness has been long and cruel, and you have gone deep into it” (T.18.III.3:2,3) . In another passage, Jesus speaks about the inability of the body to take us beyond it to **“what lies underneath”** ; yet, he says we can get there **“if you are willing to follow the Holy Spirit through seeming terror, trusting Him not to abandon you and leave you there. For it is not His purpose to frighten you, but only yours. You are severely tempted to abandon Him at the outside ring of fear, but He would lead you safely through and far beyond” (T.18.IX.3:5,7,8,9)** . Thus, an essential part of our process is learning to trust in the presence of an internal Teacher -- either Jesus or the Holy Spirit -- for then we would avoid the temptation to judge ourselves for our decision to separate from Love and then make it appear as if it is someone else's fault.

Although it does not have to be this way, for practically all of us, things get worse before they get better in the process of undoing our egos. Jesus alludes to this several times (see for example, **T.9.VII.4:5,6,7; T.18.III.2:1**). We have built layer upon layer of defenses to protect ourselves from the contents in our minds -- what we believe would totally overwhelm us, if not destroy us, if we ever allowed ourselves to face it. Even the first step of recognizing our defenses as defenses is painful, for more than likely we did not even know that we were defending ourselves against massive internal calamity. Thus, understanding the thought system of the ego and its correction through the Holy Spirit's thought system will help enormously as we go through this, for then we will at least have a general idea of what the undoing process is all about -- why we undertake it and where it is heading.

What is also important to keep in mind as one proceeds is that we are undoing something that never really happened, although it does not seem that way. The Atonement principle, after all, is the acceptance of the fact that the separation from God is an illusion. Recalling this frequently will help one avoid the common pitfall of taking the process too seriously and trying too hard to get through it, forgetting that time as well is illusory.

We are all one mind, and so we all share the same basic thought system of sin, guilt, and fear; but the specific expressions of that vary from person to person, as do the expressions of forgiveness that undo that thought system. In that sense, each person's process is different, which means we must take care not to compare ourselves with anyone else. We have no way of knowing where we or anyone else is on their Atonement path, so we ought not make comparisons of that nature.

Finally, some people have found it helpful to have their favorite reassuring passages close at hand when things get rough -- passages that remind them that they are not alone and that **“the outcome is as certain as God” (T.2.III.3:10; T.4.II.5:8)** . Turning to a kind friend, teacher, or therapist can be an important source of help as well.

Q #813: The idea of love's symbols being attacked in our world really intrigues me and is something that I am trying to understand better and put into everyday practical language. Can you tell me if this assessment is correct? People are very competitive and enjoy finding people to compete against and feel better than. When loving people like Jesus or any of us coming from a loving space come along who teach unity and are not competitive with these people, these people feel threatened because they are seeing something that goes against everything they believe in. Are you saying that people's egos are threatened by people who are not threatened by them or are they threatened by self-love? What does the ego see exactly about loving symbols that it wants to attack them? It seems perplexing to me that someone would feel threatened by someone who is being kind more than someone being competitive. Can you help me understand this?

A: Jesus answers your question in the following way: **“An insane learner learns strange lessons. What you must recognize is that when you do not share a thought system, you are weakening it. Those who believe in it therefore perceive this as an attack on them. This is because everyone identifies himself with his thought system, and every thought system centers on what you believe you are .**

If the center of the thought system is true, only truth extends from it. But if a lie is at its center, only deception proceeds from it” (T.6.V.B.1:6,7,8,9,10,11; italics added).

In other words, my false identity as a separate, individual self is threatened by you when you represent the thought that separation and differences are unreal, which is what is always behind any genuine, right-minded symbol of unity, love and forgiveness. Now, if I am willing to consider the possibility that our interests are shared rather than separate -- the latter being at the root of all the ego's competitiveness -- then I may be able to accept at least a tentative inner shift of teachers from the ego to the Holy Spirit (not that I would necessarily represent such a shift to myself with such symbols). And in that moment I would be able to experience the love that is being offered through you without feeling threatened. However, when I do feel threatened, it is not you who are threatening, nor is it my self-love, unless by self-love you mean the boundless, unlimited, universal love that we all share. For that is the love that says that neither of us exists as a separate individual, and that again is what is so threatening.

However, even if I remain entrenched in my wrong mind and tightly defended against the love being reflected in your mind, going so far as to reject it and attack you in some way to “protect” myself, so long as you remain identified with the Holy Spirit in your right mind, you will not experience this reaction as an attack, but only as a call for love. If you experience it as attack, which would not be an unexpected reaction for most of us who are still learning our lessons of forgiveness because guilt is still real in our minds, you too would have become wrong-minded and your reaction would be your call for help as well. And so you would simply want to turn once again to your inner Teacher for help in seeing yourself differently before you could again become a reminder to me that the same choice is available to both of us.

It may be helpful to recognize that this ego dynamic of attacking love operates within our own mind, and we may direct it against ourselves after we have chosen to listen to the Holy Spirit and see ourselves as He does, rather than accept the ego's puny judgment of ourselves. If we attack ourselves for identifying with the Holy Spirit, it can not be so surprising that others' egos react in the same way. This self-attack is clearly described a little later in the text of *A Course in Miracles* , when Jesus observes: **“You, then, have two conflicting evaluations of yourself in your mind, and they cannot both be true. You do not yet realize how completely different these evaluations are, because you do not understand how lofty the Holy Spirit's perception of you really is. He is not deceived by anything you do, because He never forgets what you are. The ego is deceived by everything you do, especially when you respond to the Holy Spirit, because at such times its confusion increases. The ego is, therefore, particularly likely to attack you when you react lovingly, because it has evaluated you as unloving and you are going against its judgment. The ego will attack your motives as soon as they become clearly out of accord with its perception of you. This is when it will shift abruptly from suspiciousness to viciousness, since its uncertainty is increased. Yet it is surely pointless to attack in return. What can this mean except that you are agreeing with the ego's evaluation of what you are ?” (T.9.VII.4; italics added).**

Whether the seeming attack then comes from within or without, if we react defensively we are making the same mistake. And we are as identified with the ego as our competitive brother is. And so, in Jesus' words from the text, **“You who are not at war must look for brothers and recognize all whom you see as brothers, because only equals are at peace. Because God's equal Sons have everything, they cannot compete. Yet if they perceive any of their brothers as anything other than their perfect equals, the idea of competition has entered their minds. Do not underestimate your need to be vigilant against this idea, because all your conflicts come from it. It is the belief that conflicting interests are possible, and therefore you have accepted the impossible as true. Is that different from saying you perceive yourself as unreal?” (T.7.III.3:2,3,4,5,6,7).**

And so before we can accept that we are all the one, guiltless Son of our Father, equally sharing in the unity of His Love, and therefore could not possibly be in competition with each other, we must first acknowledge that, as egos, we are really all the same. For that alone is what opens the door to forgiveness and true healing of the guilt within our minds.

Q#814: The body/brain cannot choose the Holy Spirit or the ego; it can only bear witness to the choice of the decision maker in the mind. Jesus' Course appears on the level of the illusion, and seems to be mentally processed within the illusion by a brain. *A Course in Miracles* exhorts students reading it to choose again, yet the Course states throughout that choice on the level of the illusion is impossible! Is the Course asking the mind, of which the student is unaware by the Course's own admission, to choose again? What a riddle!

A: It is helpful to be clear that the reason the body/brain cannot choose the Holy Spirit or the ego is because everything happens in the mind and nothing happens in the brain, no matter how it may seem, for the brain and the body are only shadows or projections of thoughts of separation in the mind. We are the mind, falsely identifying with its unreal thoughts, believing we are the projections of those thoughts rather than the thinker of those thoughts. We are the decision maker, choosing to accept a very limited false identity rather than to acknowledge all the seeming power of our mind to miscreate. While it is true that all choice is illusion, while we continue to believe we have a choice to see ourselves as separate from God, Jesus works within the illusion of our misbeliefs to help us make a different choice. So even the split mind and the decision maker are illusory, but the power of our belief has made them real in our experience.

There is certainly a very real sense in which we seem to operate in the world as if we were mindless, for we are truly unaware of the power of our mind to have chosen to make the world and this physical self real. But everything we seem to think and do as a body is really a result of the exercise of the power of the mind to choose - and it's a choice for the ego, over and over and over again. We are always experiencing ourselves as mind, for nothing is happening in the brain, but we simply have chosen not to recognize that the mind does not depend on the brain, the brain depends on the mind. And so, since we are in that sense aware of our mind through all of the thoughts we experience, it is perhaps more accurate to say that we are unaware of the real power of the mind rather than to say that we are unaware of the mind. We use its power of choice to make that same blind choice for the ego repeatedly, all the while disguising the uniform content of that choice in a myriad of seemingly different forms.

And so, although we may believe Jesus is addressing us as the self in the world we think we are, he is always and only addressing us as a mind that seems to have a choice. And that choice is only between the hurtful illusion of the ego and the helpful illusion of the Holy Spirit. And so, while we may experience ourselves making the choice from within the world, Jesus knows it is only ever our mind, outside of time and space, that is making the choice. And so, once we understand that, the seeming riddle is easily solved.

For further discussions of related issues on the mind and the decision maker, see Questions [#663](#), [#713](#), and [#715](#).

Q #815: Two different questions from the same questioner, with a combined answer: a) Every time I read info related to *A Course in Miracles* I seem to get agitated. I love the words but always come away with "so what in the hell am I supposed to do?" b) With the illusory nature of this world how is one to function? I post the quote "you are asked to act as if you had no ego." But to live a life free of judgment seems to be a blissniny way to go.

A: The agitation you experience when you read the Course is probably not coming from *not* understanding what it is saying, but *from* understanding. You are not alone in feeling agitated by its message, and with good reason. The goal of the Course is the undoing of the ego's thought system, which ultimately means undoing all belief in the world, the body, and separation. It is not an easy message for the ego to hear, considering its investment in keeping us rooted in the world, its treasured

home. The first thing to do is not to try not to be agitated, but to understand where the agitation is coming from: a choice in the mind to believe the separation is real, and resistance to learning a thought system that teaches that it is not. In this regard, Jesus offers us clear advice: “ **Do not fight yourself** ” (T.30.I.1:7). What we are supposed to do is follow his instructions to look calmly at the ego in operation without fear, and without judgment: “**No one can escape from illusions unless he looks at them, for not looking is the way they are protected. There is no need to shrink from illusions, for they cannot be dangerous. We are ready to look more closely at the ego's thought system because together we have the lamp that will dispel it, and since you realize you do not want it, you must be ready. Let us be very calm in doing this, for we are merely looking honestly for truth**” (T.11.V.1:1,2,3,4).

Since the introduction to the text tells us our goal in studying this course is to remove “...**the blocks to the awareness of love's presence**” (T.in.1:7) , it is reasonable to conclude that the blocks must be seen before they can be removed. That is why we are asked to *look* for them: “**Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all of the barriers within yourself that you have built against it. It is not necessary to seek for what is true, but it *is* necessary to seek for what is false**” (T.16.IV.6:1,2). *That is what we are supposed to do* . The instruction to look is repeated frequently in the Course, because it is the correction for the ego's strategy of defending its thought system by keeping its origin (the mind), its goal (mindlessness), and its effects (pain) hidden. When we find the blocks (e.g., any judgment, all forms of specialness), we then are asked not to be deceived by their disguises, but to see in them the mind's choice to collude with the ego's scheme to keep the world real.

To no longer identify with the ego's judgment is the ultimate goal of the Course. That is how we will eventually live “as if we had no ego.” Daily practice of the Course will lead us there, but it is not yet fully accomplished. We can easily avoid the blissniny approach through vigilant observation of the many judgments that flood into awareness during the course of the day. The ones we catch are enough to keep us humble, not to mention those we miss. Since blissniny's mother is denial, not denying our judgments and feelings keeps us focused and headed in the right direction. The Holy Spirit is here to tell us there is another way of looking at everything in our lives. As we are told in the introduction to the workbook: “**The purpose of the workbook is to train your mind in a systematic way to a different perception of everyone and everything in the world**” (W.in.4:1) . This “**different perception**” is not the ego's. So, as we develop this new way of thinking and learn to live under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we “live as if we had no ego.” It does not mean the ego disappears, nor that it is denied. It means that when the ego makes an appearance, it does not have to be given the best seat in the house. When it is recognized, and its secret agenda is exposed, it no longer carries the weight it previously did. Even the simple fact of knowing there is another Guest to Whom we can turn diminishes the ego's hold . Yes, in truth the world is an illusion, but as long as we believe it is real we continue to function normally. The only difference is we learn to interpret everything in the light of the Course's teaching of forgiveness, and its goal of removing the blocks to love's awareness. When resistance in the form of agitation presents itself, it may be helpful to remember only a “little willingness” is required, and it “...**need not be perfect, because His [Holy Spirit] is. If you will merely offer Him a little place, He will lighten it so much that you will gladly let it be increased. And by this increase, you will begin to remember creation**”(T.11.II.6:6,7,8).

Q #816: If it's true that we are all one then why is not Jesus' return to God ours as well?

A: It is. We are with him at home in God. The only difference between Jesus (as well as others who have awakened) and the rest of us is that he is aware *only* of his oneness with God's Love. We have chosen to forget it, dream of separation, and only catch a glimpse of love's reflection when we are willing to forget the dream for an instant. Knowing we perceive him as different from us, Jesus explains the seeming difference in the first chapter of the text: “ **There is nothing about me that you cannot attain. I have nothing that does not come from God. The difference between us now is that I have nothing else. This leaves me in a state which is only potential in you**” (T.1.II.3:10,11,12,13).

What we have, that he does not, are all our illusions of specialness that keep us separate from him, from one another, and from our Selves. By choosing the **“tiny mad idea” (T.27.VIII.6:2)** of separation, we keep awareness of our oneness with God blocked. This insane thought did not truly shatter our oneness; it is only our choosing it that makes it real in our experience: **“The tiny instant you would keep and make eternal, passed away in Heaven too soon for anything to notice it had come ...Yet in each unforgiving act or thought, in every judgment and in all belief in sin, is that one instant still called back, as if it could be made again in time. You keep an ancient memory [the thought of separation] before your eyes. And he who lives in memories alone is unaware of where he is” (T.26.V.5:1,5,6).** We do not know where we are; Jesus knows where he is. We dream of being bodies in a world of form, which literally takes us out of our minds.

Our hope lies in the fact that we cannot completely obliterate all memory of the truth of our oneness from our minds. This is witnessed to by the very fact of having Jesus come to us in the form of *A Course in Miracles* to awaken us from the nightmare of exile. His message of forgiveness reflects the part of our minds that remembers oneness. The practice of forgiveness that he teaches gently wakens us by leading us back to the mind; the source of every experience. Each step in forgiveness strengthens our identity with Jesus and weakens identity with the body. Eventually, his identity and his experience will become ours because we will have accepted what was always there.

Q #817: I have read your response to Question #317, which relates to physical disease, and understand that *A Course in Miracles* teaches that I need to question the idea that anything outside myself can disturb my peace, including illness. Can you please explain to me why the Course uses the following phrase when dealing with physical illness: “Behold me brother, at your hand I die” (T.27.I.4:6). Is the word “brother” being used figuratively? Is the Course suggesting that we address a virus thus?

A: Although you could read this line you quote from “The Picture of Crucifixion” to refer to viruses, in most passages, including this section, when Jesus speaks of our brothers, he is speaking of our relationships with others whom we perceive to be human beings like ourselves. And behind every illness and disease - in fact, behind all our pain and suffering, no matter what the perceived immediate cause in the world -- can be found an accusation that one of our brothers or sisters is somehow to blame.

Sometimes the accusation is explicit: e.g., “You gave me your cold.” Or “If you hadn't made me work so hard, I wouldn't have gotten so stressed and worn out and caught this flu bug.” Sometimes the accusation is less direct: e.g., “Both my mother and my grandmother died of breast cancer, so I guess it was only a matter of time before I was going to be diagnosed with it myself.” Or “I'm just sure my lung disease is the result of all that secondary smoke I was exposed to all those years I worked in that small, crowded office.” And sometimes the accusation can be very subtle: e.g., “I know I just didn't have all the opportunities for advancement that my friends had, with my parents not financially well off. And so I ended up with less education and a lower paying job. As a result, I just could not afford the kind of preventative medical care that could have helped me maintain better health.”

The point of the answer to Question #317 you refer to is that, at the level of content in the mind, it does not matter what form the victimizer seems to take in the world, whether it's another person, a virus, an accident, a catastrophic meteorological or geological event, or anything else. The purpose is always to find someone or something outside myself that I can point a finger at and hold responsible for my suffering and pain, rather than to look within my own mind at the real cause -- my decision for separation and attack. The purpose, in other words, is always, whatever the seeming expression of suffering in my body, to demonstrate my innocence by accusing my brother of the sin and attack I secretly accuse myself of.

By the way, when Jesus speaks in “The Picture of Crucifixion” of our use of our brother to prove our innocence, he is not addressing us as human beings, nor is he referring to our brothers as the bodies we

perceive. Perceiving ourselves and our brothers as bodies is central to the ego's plan to demonstrate our victimhood (e.g., **T.21.VIII.1:1,2**) . Jesus is always addressing us as minds, albeit minds who happen to believe we are the bodies we seem to inhabit. That he is also regarding our brother as a mind and not a body is apparent from his observation later in the text: **“Like you, your brother thinks he is a dream. Share not in his illusion of himself, for your identity depends on his reality. Think, rather, of him as a mind in which illusions still persist, but as a mind which brother is to you. He is not brother made by what he dreams, nor is his body, “hero” of the dream, your brother. It is his reality that is your brother, as is yours to him. Your mind and his are joined in brotherhood. His body and his dreams but seem to make a little gap, where yours have joined with his”** (T.28.IV.3 ; italics added) . And so, in the end, we will come to realize that sickness is really a condition of guilt in the mind -- only its nonsubstantial shadow seems to be expressed in the body (**T.28.II.11:7**) . From this realization, it follows that we are never the victim of anyone else's actions, but only of our own thoughts.

Q #818: The preliminary diagnosis is that there is a malignant tumor in my esophagus where the esophagus enters the stomach. The result is a severe constriction making swallowing very difficult. I have seen questions asked about praying and relieving or eliminating malignancies. My question is, what prayers should I use to relieve and remove the growth? My wife will help me pray.

A: First of all, you want to continue to seek out and follow whatever medical advice and treatment is available to help you with your condition. It is important to be clear that it is never an either-or proposition between medical interventions and *A Course in Miracles* . And then you should say whatever prayers bring you comfort and reassure you that it is not God's Will that you suffer or experience pain or fear, using words that are personally meaningful to you and your wife. The specific words are not so important as the decision you make to allow your mind to be joined with your wife's in a shared purpose of healing.

The Course's focus is on healing the thoughts of unforgiveness we are holding against ourselves in our minds and not on changing the symptoms in our bodies, which it considers to be the effects of those thoughts. Still, there is nothing wrong with asking for help with physical conditions and Jesus recognizes that for most of us, still identified with our bodies, that will continue to be our focus of concern (**S.1.II.2**) . Perhaps you would be willing to consider your symptoms as the external expression of a thought of illness -- the ego, to be specific -- in your mind. Then you can bring the thoughts of fear and pain in your mind to Jesus or the Holy Spirit or God, or whatever loving presence you find most comforting. The value in focusing in your prayers on any thoughts of pain or guilt or fear in your mind, as well as your bodily concerns, is that then you are including, from the Course's perspective, the underlying cause of the suffering and pain, as well as the effects -- the physical symptoms.

There are many passages in the Course that you may find of help and comfort as you deal with the ramifications of your diagnosis. One in particular, which recognizes the process that we all must go through as we commit ourselves to putting the Course's principles of forgiveness into practice, is workbook lesson 284, **“I can elect to change all thoughts that hurt.”**

“Loss is not loss when properly perceived. Pain is impossible. There is no grief with any cause at all. And suffering of any kind is nothing but a dream. *This is the truth, at first to be but said and then repeated many times; and next to be accepted as but partly true, with many reservations. Then to be considered seriously more and more, and finally accepted as the truth.* I can elect to change all thoughts that hurt. And I would go beyond these words today, and past all reservations, and arrive at full acceptance of the truth in them. (W.p.II.284.1, italics added) .

These words are not meant to be used to deny or suppress whatever you may be experiencing in your body, but rather to offer the hope that, as a result of acknowledging the pain and the fear and their deeper source in the mind, the real potential for healing the underlying thoughts becomes possible.

There are a number of questions, as you note, addressing issues of prayer and healing. Two that may be particularly relevant to your concerns include Questions [#149](#) and [#215](#).

Q #819: A question on the metaphysics of *A Course in Miracles*, please. My sense of the teachings is that 1) We are “at home in God dreaming of exile...” (or continuing to review and identify with the dream that lasted but a moment and was over long ago), and that 2) God does not know “about” this dream, since it is by definition unreal. My question is whether God knows even that there was a dream, and that we -- in Heaven and at home with Him -- continue to engage (review and identify) with that dream, though He does not know all the sin-guilt-fear machinations of the dream itself? The image I keep getting is that we are sort of “missing-in-action” if you will, at home in Heaven, but not fully there -- asleep. Does God know us as asleep, but not what we dream while asleep? Or are “we” a sleeping part of a larger Sonship, the other part of which is “fully present” in the song of prayer with God.

A: There is no dream; the Son never fell asleep. That expresses the absolute non-dualism of the Course, a non-dualism that allows no compromise. Heaven (reality) is “**an awareness of perfect Oneness, and the knowledge that there is nothing else; nothing outside this oneness, and nothing else within**” (T.18.VI.1:6). If even part of the Sonship were asleep, perfect Oneness would no longer be perfect Oneness; imperfection would coexist with Perfection, and limitation with Wholeness. From the Course's point of view, this is impossible. So, as humbling and as baffling as it is to us, the Son as *not* eternally sharing the Perfection of His Father and Source is a complete impossibility. To say, therefore, that God knows “some part of the Sonship to be ‘asleep,’” is to give reality to a dualistic state. That would be inconsistent with the strict non-dualism of *A Course in Miracles*.

Q #820: The first miracle principle in *A Course in Miracles* is that “there is no order of difficulty in Miracles.” Does that not mean, if I did the workbook “properly”, I would be able to be “enlightened” with each and every exercise I am doing in the Course (so 365 chances to reach God)? Do they not mean all the same (i.e. point at the same unspeakable “thing” that the Course can but lead us to but never explicitly say)? The lessons 70-75 seem quite crucial to me, what else is there to learn after “the light has come” and I can “celebrate the ending of the long dream of disaster”? Once I have forgiven the world completely (albeit theoretically), does it not disappear and with God's vision in me...why is this passage not at the end of the workbook?

A: If you did just one lesson perfectly, you would have completed the goal of the Course.

However, the reason there are 31 chapters and 365 lessons is summed up simply in one of the lessons: “**To say these words [of any lesson] is nothing. But to mean these words is everything. If you could but mean them for just an instant, there would be no further sorrow possible for you in any form; in any place or time. Heaven would be completely given back to full awareness, memory of God entirely restored, the resurrection of all creation fully recognized**” (W.pl.185.1:1,2,3,4). If we have not had the experienced described in this passage, we may conclude that we have not meant these words *completely*, not even for an instant. Commitment is still weak, resistance is strong, and willingness wavers. In other words, we are afraid of awakening to the truth. And so we have at least 365 *thousand* opportunities to learn to accept that we are home in God. On the journey, there are glimpses of the light that has come, and if the light were the *only* thing we wanted, yes, it would be enough. However, attraction to guilt and attachment to specialness drop a veil to obscure the light, lest it remain to replace the individual autonomy that is still cherished. That is why there are lessons after 70-75, and why the workbook ends by telling us we've only just begun: “**This course is a beginning, not an end**” (W.ep.I:1).

Forgiving the world theoretically does not accomplish the Course's goal of removing the blocks to love's awareness (T.in.1:7) . The world must *actually* be forgiven, which means not seeing in it the cause of anything that is experienced in the dream of separation. And you are correct; in this there is no hierarchy. Thus, we are taught in the Course to **"question every value that you hold. *Not one can be kept hidden and obscure but it will jeopardize your learning.*" (T.24.in.2:1,2; italics added)**. The values and beliefs that sustain the ego thought system are, for the most part, hidden under layers of denial. It therefore takes time, lessons, starts and stops, to bring them to the light. The process is gradual and gentle because fear and resistance are great: **"It is difficult for the untrained mind to believe that what it seems to picture is not there. This idea can be quite disturbing, and may meet with active resistance in any number of forms"** (W.pl.9.2:1,2). A brief review of how real the world, the body, and the drama of life seem to be reveals the intensity of this resistance. That is why there is still work to be done, forgiveness lessons to be learned. The workbook is done "properly" by following the instructions, which simply tell us to just *do* the lessons (W.in.9) . We are told only willingness is necessary. Most likely that is because Jesus knows we will do them "badly," and he assures us that our imperfection is not a problem: **"It is [the Holy Spirit's] task to atone for your unwillingness by His perfect faith, and it is His faith you share with Him there. Out of your recognition of your unwillingness for your release, His perfect willingness is given you (T.16.VI.12:4,5).** Thus, each sincere application of the principles of forgiveness in our relationships, however imperfect it may be, brings us closer to the ending of the dream. Our concern in practicing the Course, therefore, is to be vigilant for every spot of darkness (judgments) and every illusion we choose to make real, that they may be questioned and found wanting. Until we are convinced none of them will meet our real need to accept the truth about ourselves instead of the ego's lies, we need the lessons of the workbook and the many pages of the text to turn to for guidance, instruction, and comfort.

Q #821: I am at a place in life in which I am experiencing overwhelming fear. My husband and I have been married for a few years and together for nine. Over time, the outward dramas have lessened and now that there is a certain sense of outward stability in my marriage, I seem to be assailed on all sides by fears: is this situation one in which I can grow? Am I denying part of myself by staying in this relationship? Do I feel like I would be better off alone, with someone else, or with a woman? All these questions come to mind. More than anything, it seems that I have reached a place where I am now forced to take responsibility for my own thoughts -- that I am encountering my shadow side. I want to run. Is there anything in *A Course in Miracles* that might speak to this level of fear and specific steps to take to deal with it?

A: While we remain closely identified with the ego, it can feel as if we are being forced to take responsibility for our thoughts, as you describe. True, the Course is encouraging us to accept this responsibility as central to progressing on our path of forgiveness. But if there is any sense of coercion, the ego has joined the process in an attempt to subvert and derail it. And that feeling of coercion itself only adds to the anxiety and the fear. So the first step in addressing the fear is to recognize and accept that any sense of pressure is coming only from yourself. And if the overwhelming fear persists, Jesus gently advises, **"Do not fight yourself" (T.30.I.1:7)** . It is okay to wait until you are ready.

The ego revels in the thought that there is something terrible within that we must force ourselves to examine. For that reinforces the belief that the ego -- and the separation -- are real. And so, for this reason, when we are ready to look within, Jesus invites us to look with him, for he does not share our horrible evaluation of ourselves and he certainly does not take the ego seriously. One of his clearest invitations to us, which also acknowledges our fear, is found at the beginning of **"The 'Dynamics' of the Ego,"** in which he reminds us that this is something we do *together* : **"No one can escape from illusions unless he looks at them, for not looking is the way they are protected. There is no need to shrink from illusions, for they cannot be dangerous. We are ready to look more closely at the ego's thought system because together we have the lamp that will dispel it, and since you realize you do not want it, you must be ready. Let us be very calm in doing this, for we are merely looking honestly for truth. The 'dynamics' of the ego will be our lesson for a while, for we must look first at**

this to see beyond it, since you have made it real. We will undo this error quietly together, and then look beyond it to truth” (T.11.V.1).

You are wise to recognize that the real issue of your fear involves examining your own thoughts, but you also acknowledge having thoughts of running away from your relationship with your husband. Now these thoughts are not surprising if, as you say, you are experiencing less drama and conflict in your external life, which may very well reflect an inner shift away from the ego and towards the peace within that Jesus is offering. And you can be sure the ego is not going to take this change of allegiance lying down. External drama and conflict conveniently serve the ego's purpose of keeping our focus outward and away from the mind, where the only real hope of finding lasting peace lies. If the ego begins to sense that our present relationship is no longer serving its purpose, it will counsel us to pull up stakes and go in search of someone or something else -- anything other than remaining in peace and beginning to look within.

Two passages from the text describe the ambivalence we can experience around this dual process of moving towards the light while at the same time beginning to use that light to look more deeply and eventually beyond the darkness of the ego. The fear that is aroused by approaching the light, as well as the process of looking together with Jesus at the darkness, are aptly described in the following:

“As the light comes nearer you will rush to darkness, shrinking from the truth, sometimes retreating to the lesser forms of fear, and sometimes to stark terror. But you will advance, because your goal is the advance from fear to truth. The goal you accepted is the goal of knowledge, for which you signified your willingness. Fear seems to live in darkness, and when you are afraid you have stepped back. Let us then join quickly in an instant of light, and it will be enough to remind you that your goal is light. (T.18.III.2).

And the fear that is associated with uncovering the ego's layers of sin and guilt in the mind, as well as the process of recognizing its unreality, is powerfully described in the following:

“The closer you come to the foundation of the ego's thought system, the darker and more obscure becomes the way. Yet even the little spark in your mind is enough to lighten it. Bring this light fearlessly with you, and bravely hold it up to the foundation of the ego's thought system. Be willing to judge it with perfect honesty. Open the dark cornerstone of terror on which it rests, and bring it out into the light. There you will see that it rested on meaninglessness, and that everything of which you have been afraid was based on nothing” (T.11.in.3:5,6,7,8,9,10).

Additional readings from the text that may help you get a clearer picture of what the fear is all about and what the process of releasing that fear involves, in the context of our relationship with our brother, joined with Jesus, include **“Light in the Dream” (T.18.III)** and **“The Fear to Look Within” (T.21.IV)** .

Q #822: I saw the new movie, “What the Bleep Do You Know?”. I found it very powerfully presented, and I was struck by how much it sounded like *A Course in Miracles'* teachings. Please give your comments.

A: There is a strong similarity between the theories presented in the movie and what the Course teaches. Both say the world of matter is a product of thought. The difference, though -- and it is a decisive difference -- is that *A Course in Miracles* says *the thought itself is illusory* ! As far as we know, no physicist has ever taken this step, and probably could not from his stance as a scientist. The integration of this theory that matter is a product of thought with practical living in the world is one of the major contributions of the Course.

Q #823: I am currently in the midst of legal proceedings to gain access to my two and a half year old grandson. We have had significant input in his upbringing until July this year when his mother (not our daughter) withdrew our access to him because my son (his father) has developed a new relationship. I am having enormous difficulty seeing these events in other than worldly terms. How do I need to think about this special relationship in order to get past the considerable pain this is causing me.

A: A situation such as you describe can only be experienced as heart-rending and painful while we remain at the level of the world in thinking about it. For the ego-directed mind can only think in terms of victims and victimizers, and those roles can seem all too clearly defined and assigned in our minds as we continue to listen to the ego. But then that is exactly what we *all* would have agreed to do as we would come together to play out this particular script. And *all* includes parents, grandparents, and child, as well as anyone else caught up in the tugging drama.

Once we have chosen to see ourselves and others as bodies -- which is inevitable once we find ourselves in the world -- the game of assigning blame and swapping guilt must be set into motion. And in order for the game to work, we all must feel, each from our own perspective, that we have been or are being unfairly treated, which then justifies our thoughts of attack in return. This hidden agreement to be victimized, which lies behind all our dealings with everyone else, is explicitly described in *A Course in Miracles* in "**The Secret Vows**" (T.28.VI), where Jesus explains the role of the body in this self-deception: "**The body represents the gap between the little bit of mind you call your own and all the rest of what is really yours. You hate it, yet you think it is your self, and that, without it, would your self be lost. This is the secret vow that you have made with every brother who would walk apart. This is the secret oath you take again, whenever you perceive yourself attacked. No one can suffer if he does not see himself attacked, and losing by attack. Unstated and unheard in consciousness is every pledge to sickness. Yet *it is a promise to another to be hurt by him, and to attack him in return***" (T.28.VI.4; italics added).

It seems crazy when stated so clearly and directly, yet this is what we are all unconsciously engaging in all the time. And why would we accept such an insane arrangement with all our brothers and sisters? To understand the motivation for this insanity, we need to recognize that the real source of the pain we experience in such situations in the world comes from the belief we hold in our mind that we are an ungrateful Child who has lost our love and innocence by turning away from our eternal Father. But such a self-accusation is too painful to hold for long in our awareness and so we have made a world that can disguise the "truth" of our attack on God so that we can see the guilt outside ourselves. The form of the projected attack will vary across circumstances, but in situations such as yours, it will seem that a child -- who symbolizes our lost love and innocence -- is being taken away from us, it is clearly not our fault, and that is the cause of our pain.

And yet everyone caught up in the drama feels somehow similarly victimized and justified therefore in their thinking and acting. This recognition actually holds the key to our own escape from pain. For when we can begin to see that everyone is really the same, ensnared in the same deceptions of the ego -- looking to project their own painful guilt over seeing themselves as loveless, believing that the special love relationship requires that bodies be together (T.15.VII.8:2) -- we may then be able to begin to release the judgments we are holding against the others, which are keeping us separate from them in our mind, which is the real source of the pain. If we could know and accept that the love we want is already present within us, no seeming loss on the outside could have any effect on us.

It is important to emphasize that everything we have been discussing here refers only to the level of thought or content, and has no specific implications for what actions you are taking. In other words, it is possible to continue with the legal proceedings you have initiated without it being an attack on your grandson's mother. The proceedings can be a classroom in which you have the opportunity to observe how strong your desire to project your own guilt onto your ex-daughter-in-law may continue to be. And in those moments when you are in your right mind, you will know that it is possible to continue to take legal action without condemning or attacking her for her own need to project guilt and to attack in seeming self-

defense, and you will feel nothing but love for everyone who is involved in the court battle, for you will be above the battleground.

"Those with the strength of God in their awareness could never think of battle. What could they gain but loss of their perfection? For everything fought for on the battleground is of the body; something it seems to offer or to own. No one who knows that he has everything could seek for limitation, nor could he value the body's offerings. The senselessness of conquest is quite apparent from the quiet sphere above the battleground. What can conflict with everything? And what is there that offers less, yet could be wanted more? Who with the Love of God upholding him could find the choice of miracles or murder hard to make?" (T.23.IV.9).

Q #824: How does Course material deal with programming or treating for positive results?

A: The mind training that the Course teaches is not the same as the use of affirmations, or replacing negative thoughts with positive ones to achieve positive results. *A Course in Miracles* teaches that we must look at the negative, the darkness of the ego, with the Holy Spirit's light to dispel it: **"No one can escape from illusions unless he looks at them, for not looking is the way they are protected. There is no need to shrink from illusions, for they cannot be dangerous. We are ready to look more closely at the ego's thought system because together we have the lamp that will dispel it..." (T11.V.1:1,2,3).** Looking means recognizing the mind's choice for the ego and the purpose it serves. It is this recognition of responsibility for a purposive choice in the mind that distinguishes the Course's teaching. It is not aimed at improving our experience in the dream with positive thinking for positive results. The goal of the Course is to lead us out of the dream entirely by undoing the thought of separation. Changing thoughts within the ego's thought system will not lead to this awakening.

Programming for positive results without recognition of the active choice for the ego in the mind leads to further suppressing the guilt that gave rise to the negative thoughts in the first place. It supports the belief that the body is real and that happiness can be found in the world with the right programming. While it is true that it may seem more pleasant to have positive results rather than negative ones, the best the ego has to offer will not bring release from the devastating effects of believing separation from God has been accomplished. In case we are tempted to minimize the effect of choosing the world, Jesus spells it out for us: **"The sense of threat the world encourages is so much deeper, and so far beyond the frenzy and intensity of which you can conceive, that you have no idea of all the devastation it has wrought" (W.pl.153.4:3).**

Training the body's "thoughts" to avoid pain and conflict works as temporary relief. It will not heal the real source of the problem, which is the mind's mistaken choice to believe the ego and identify with the body. This choice produces guilt, which is then projected into the world in a multitude of forms, none of which is truly positive. The correction is to choose the Holy Spirit's curriculum of forgiveness that has us look at the hidden negative thoughts and judgments that underlie the ego's thought system. This training leads beyond the body (its emotions, psyche, intellect, and "thoughts") to the mind. If we do not see how everything in our lives is set up to serve the ego's goal of separation, and the heavy price we pay to be in this world, we will not choose against it and return to our true home, the ultimate positive result. That is why Jesus invites to look with him at the ego: **"The 'dynamics' of the ego will be our lesson for a while, for we must look first at this to see beyond it, since you have made it real. We will undo this error quietly together, and then look beyond it to truth" (T.11.V.1:5,6).**

Everything in this world becomes "positive" because it is useful to the Holy Spirit. We are thus freed of the need to judge for ourselves what is positive or negative. As Jesus tells us in the text, it is best to let the Holy Spirit decide: **"Put yourself not in charge of this, for you cannot distinguish between advance and retreat. Some of your greatest advances you have judged as failures, and some of your deepest retreats you have evaluated as success" (T.18.V.1:5,6).** Forgiveness is the only

"programming" the Course offers, and applying it to our lives is our only function and our only need, it leads to peace. Until we awaken fully from the dream of separation, the real positive result is a peace undisturbed by anything in this world, positive or negative.

Also see Questions related to forgiveness.

Q #825(i): (The following three questions were posed by the same person). Can we apply the teachings of Jesus in our daily life (work, home, family, friends, social relationships, etc.) without being trapped by the ego, in the sense of unconsciously reinforcing the ego's goal of specialness?

A: A good question! It takes a great deal of effort over a period of years to become aware of the devious means we use to uphold specialness. In one sense, it is almost safer to assume that we are doing this almost all the time than to think that we are beyond such self-deception -- especially in the early stages of our work with *A Course in Miracles*. Specialness is like oxygen to the ego: without it, there is no ego! Therefore, to the extent to which we still identify with the ego, letting go of specialness is like letting go of our oxygen supply. It feels as if we will not survive. That is why Jesus has to reassure us that **"the death of specialness is not your death, but your awaking into life eternal. You but emerge from an illusion of what you are to the acceptance of yourself as God created you"** (T.24.II.14:4,5).

What would be helpful is to remind oneself frequently of the purpose of specialness, which is to substitute a false identity for our true Identity as God created us; specialness serves the purpose of drowning out the Voice in our minds that is calling us back to God. These are major themes in the sections on specialness in the text, but especially the first two sections of Chapter 24 (T.24.I,II). Second, you also need to see how the **"pursuit of specialness is always at the cost of peace"** (T.24.II.2:1). Specialness feels so good. But there is a tremendous cost involved, which we must be willing to allow ourselves to see and feel. If you become aware of the *burden* of specialness, you would be more motivated to be vigilant for the ways in which you hold on to it.

Q #825(ii): Is it possible to be free of fear and at the same time not be in perfect peace?

A: Since fear is a barrier to peace, if you are completely without fear, there would be nothing stopping you from being completely peaceful. Now the fear that is talked about in *A Course in Miracles* is not the fear the world talks about, such as the fear of flying, fear of cancer, fear of criticism, etc. It is really the fear that sustains the entire thought system of the ego, and thus our existence as individuals. It is the fear deep in our minds that we have stolen life from God and that He is coming after us to punish us and take it back. This fear branches out in many forms, but ultimately it is the fear that our defenses are not adequate to protect us forever, and that we will be caught, punished, and painfully reduced to nothingness. It is the fear that right now our existence is meaningless -- we are meaningless. When we let go of that level of fear, we will also have let go of what led to it: the false belief that we attacked God by separating from Him and we would be at peace.

Q #825(iii): Why do I still feel that the activity of the mind is connected with the activity of the brain? Is it normal? How can we overcome this illusion?

A: Yes, it is normal to feel that way. It is extremely difficult to break the connection, for what you are really doing is shifting your identification from the body to the mind, which is accomplished gradually as you separate from your ego through the practice of forgiveness. If you spend some time imagining what it would feel like to have an identity as a mind that is outside time and space, you will begin to get in touch with your resistance. Your sense of "you" would change radically, and that would obviously be perceived as threatening. To perceive your body with its brain as merely a puppet-like figure is usually not a welcomed perception. That is why this process is not accomplished overnight, and why you must take as much time as you need to make this shift.

Q #826: If Christ is the one and only Son of God, would that make us the soul or being that occupies each form on the physical plane, the one and only son of Christ?

A: *A Course in Miracles* teaches something different. Nothing in the realm of form shares anything of the realm of spirit. Christ dwells only in Heaven and is not present in any way in the illusory world of form. We carry within our minds (not our brains), the memory of our Identity as God's one Son, and therefore the teaching objective of the Course is to help us learn how to perceive each other as having the same interests, as opposed to separate, conflicting interests, as the means of restoring to our awareness our oneness as Christ, the one Son of God.

Q #827: *A Course in Miracles* refers to our "attraction" to guilt and suffering as being responsible for our difficulties in this world of perception. At first hearing, this would appear to be the opposite to what we experience. To be attracted to suffering of any kind sounds undesirable with nothing to recommend it at all. However we do seem to be attracted to hearing news of disasters happening to others, but not to ourselves. I guess if there are really no "others" and only me, then that is the hidden attraction, to prove to myself that there are others around separate from me. The downside to that is that if they suffer, then I am a candidate for the same. I think I've just answered my question. If all is one in the real world, no separation or suffering, as promised in the Course, that sounds okay to me. What I like about the Course is that it insists that we/I really have no real choice other than to be joyful, in spite of appearances and feelings of despair. Please comment on this tricky bit of detective work.

A: Your observations are valid, as far as they go. What limits them is your perspective, which all of us who believe we are here in the world share, that begins from the premise that we know who we are, and that our identity has something to do with being a body in the world. For seeing ourselves this way, we believe a reasonable goal is to attempt to maximize our body's pleasure and minimize its pain as we make all of our careful plans and adjustments to the world. We don't seem to know that we are minds that have chosen to see ourselves as bodies, just so we don't remember that we are minds! And so the Course's teachings on guilt and suffering are hard to grasp when we operate out of our mistaken bodily identity (T.27.VI.1:1,2,3,4;2:1,2) .

Yes, as you point out, we all seem to be fascinated by disasters in the world, but not simply because they demonstrate that others exist outside of us. More importantly, they seem to validate one of the ego's central tenets, that victimization is real (more on this shortly). And most people relish the opportunity to recount the catastrophic events they've personally lived through, never tiring of sharing all the excruciating details that demonstrate their specialness through their good luck or bad luck, survivor skills, etc. And the media, demonstrating the principle that ego minds are joined, seem increasingly committed to broadcasting these very dramatic tales of loss and triumphs against overwhelming odds. But beneath these more obvious examples of our attraction to guilt and suffering at the level of the world is a sinister motivation that few of us allow ourselves to be in touch with. But as we begin to grasp the purpose our false identity as bodies serves, these hidden layers become more visible.

The lie behind our conscious belief that we don't want to suffer and see guilt is easily recognized, once we are willing to accept the Course's premise that our identity is mind, not body. If we really did not want to suffer and experience guilt, we would give up the charade that we are bodies at the mercy of forces outside ourselves that we cannot control. The desire for most of us may be unconscious, but we all want to seem to suffer as bodies to prove that guilt and attack thoughts reside anywhere but in our own mind. If your body can cause my body to suffer, either directly or indirectly, clearly the guilt and responsibility for my pain is yours and not mine. I am the victim and you are the victimizer, the ego loudly proclaims. We don't want to get rid of guilt, for guilt says the separation and attack on God are real. And we want the separation to be real (T.13.III.2:4,5) because we want our individuality, which comes from the belief in

separation, to be real. We each just want to see the guilt in someone else. And in order to see it in someone else, we must suffer at someone else's hands (e.g., T.26.X.3,4; T.27.I.3,4) . And to suffer at another's hands, we must believe that we are all separate, individual bodies, and not simply related aspects of one mind.

The suffering and pain, although they seem to be experienced in the body, are only experienced in the mind (T.19.IV.C.5:2,3,4,5; T.28.VI.2:1,2,3,4) . It is part of the ego's ruse to keep us mindless that convinces us that it is our bodies that suffer. It is the mind that thinks it can limit itself that suffers, and not the body (T.25.in.3:1,2) , which is nothing more than the ego's symbol for limitation (T.15.IX.2:3,4; T.26.VII.8:7,8,9,10; T.28.VI.3:10) . And so your opening observation, that the Course teaches that our attraction to guilt and suffering is responsible for our difficulties in the world of perception is true, but not in the way that you are thinking. Our attraction to guilt is responsible for our decision to believe that we have difficulties and suffer in the world so that we never look to where the suffering is really occurring, in the mind, where we could do something about it (W.pl.76.5) . We have fooled ourselves into believing that we have difficulties in the world so that we don't have to look at our attraction to guilt and suffering -- the ego's only offerings -- in our mind.

And so, while everything of the ego, including all its projections into the world of form, is illusory, until we look at what we have chosen to make real in our own mind, we will continue to believe that joylessness and despair are our only lot. Jesus knows that the only real choice is for joy, but we stubbornly refuse to accept his word and continue to believe that we can choose guilt and suffering. If we are first honest about the pain that we are each in and are willing to accept complete responsibility for our own suffering (T.11.III.1:4) , we can then make a different choice (T.28.II.12) . And we make a different choice by inviting a different Teacher to look with us at the foolish choice we have been making, so we can recognize that we don't need to continue to suffer.

Q #828: “The Substitute Reality” in Chapter 18 states, “That one error, which brought truth to illusion, and infinity to time, and life to death, was all you ever made” (T.18.I.4:4). This seems backwards to me. I don't understand.

A: Jesus is describing for us in this section what we have accepted in place of reality as God created it. Truth, infinity, and life are all characteristics of Heaven; but when, as one Son, we decided to leave that state of Oneness in Heaven, we came up with a substitute world of our own, which we then believed was reality and truth. This world that consists of billions of individual entities is an illusory world, of course, because separating from Infinity and Totality is impossible -- that is what the Atonement principle states.

So in the sentence you quote, Jesus is saying that by believing we live in a world that is not Heaven, we have made illusion, time, and death the truth, instead of what is “truly” true. By identifying with the ego, we brought truth to the illusion. *A Course in Miracles* corrects that error by bringing the illusion to the truth, where it is undone.

What seems so real to us is not real at all -- it is an illusion that we sustain in our minds by denying the truth and believing in what we have made up instead. The way we undo this illusion is to bring it back to the truth, which is also in our minds, just as darkness disappears when you turn the light on.

Q #829: There is a passage in the text (T.2.VI.4; VII.1) of *A Course in Miracles* where Jesus tells us that we are making a mistake when we ask him to release us from our fear. The correction of fear is *our* responsibility, he states; he cannot take it away, as that would be “tampering with a basic law of cause and effect, the most fundamental law there is. I would hardly help you if I depreciated the

power of your own thinking. This would be in direct opposition to the purpose of this course.” Is it correct to say that the law of cause and effect exists only within this world, as part of a dualistic world and belief in separation? Our only responsibility to accept the correction for the error, the Atonement, and forgive, and that once we accept the only cause, God, as causing us, we will recognize that everything else is an unreal effect of an unreal cause, the ego. Are we bound by cause and effect only to the degree that we fail to accept, or defend against, the Atonement, and to the degree we think sin and guilt are real? One particular workbook lesson comes to mind: **“God’s Will for me is perfect happiness. There is no sin, it has no consequence” (W.pl.101.6:6,7).** This seems to break the cause and effect connection, saying that if we forgive in this moment and accept that we are inflicting the perceived pain on ourselves and accept God’s happiness again, we are free of the illusory effect because we gave up the illusory cause, the ego. Does Jesus mean there is cause and effect in that we willingly have to participate in forgiving the illusory cause, ego and accept the only Cause again?

A: You are definitely heading in the right direction. We have devoted an entire tape album to this topic because of its centrality in the Course’s thought system, and to do justice to your question we would have to say far more than we have space for here. But we will try to cover the key points.

First, the principle applies to Heaven as well as to this world. In Heaven God is the First Cause and the Effect is His Son, beautifully rendered in the Lesson **“I am forever an Effect of God” (W.pll.326)** . The text also describes this cause-effect principle in a poetic way: **“The cause a cause is made by its effects; the Father is a Father by His Son” (T.28.II.1:2)** . In the world the cause-effect principle is commonly defined as “every action will have a reaction.” The essence of it is that for a cause to be a cause, it must have effects; if there are no effects, then it cannot be said to be a cause. An effect requires a cause, and if there is no cause, then it cannot be said to be an effect.

The relevance of this to our personal work with the Course -- to state it in the briefest way possible -- is that our belief that we separated from God (our “sin”) is the cause of our being here in the world and of all our problems here as well; therefore, if we can show that that cause has had no effects, then the cause will have been nullified as a cause. In other words, we will have “undone” the separation (our “sin”), and then the awareness of love’s presence will have been restored to our minds. The world and our individual selves would have disappeared back into the nothingness from which they came. We would once again be our true Self, Christ, God’s one Son. Thus, **“I am forever an Effect of God” (W.pll.326)** .

Abbreviating, again, what would take many pages to unfold, forgiveness is the way we learn that sin has had no effect. And that, of course, is what the entire Course is about. So you are correct in saying that our only responsibility is to accept the Atonement for ourselves, and that forgiveness is the means of our doing that.

In the passages you referred to, the main point Jesus is making is that we are decision-making minds -- very powerful minds -- and that he will never interfere with that power, for if we do not recognize and respect the power of our minds to choose the ego, we will not be able to call upon that same power to correct that mistake. The entire Course rests on this -- its whole purpose is to get us to respect the power of our thinking, not to depreciate it. Thus, when we ask the Holy Spirit things like getting us a parking space, or to heal cancer, bring about world peace, or to do anything in this world, we are asking Him to tamper with the law of cause and effect and thus to depreciate and deny the power of our minds. He will not do that.

“This is a course in cause and not in effect,” Jesus reminds us (T.21.VII.7:8) . And the cause he always brings us back to is that we believe we live as individuals in a world outside God and Heaven -- the **“tiny, mad idea”** he describes in the text (T.27.VIII.6:2) . In one paragraph in the section called **“The ‘Hero’ of the Dream,” (T.27.VIII)** , Jesus essentially presents us with a model of the gentle process of forgiveness as it is meant to be. We do not deny how terrible we feel; we just bring these terrible *effects* to him or the Holy Spirit, where we will *look together* at them, and then beyond them to their cause. And when we realize the cause is just a silly thought not deserving of our belief any longer, we will simply smile and then be at peace:

“In gentle laughter does the Holy Spirit perceive the cause, and looks not to effects. How else could He correct your error, who have overlooked the cause entirely? He bids you bring each terrible effect to Him that you may look together on its foolish cause and laugh with Him a while. You judge effects, but He has judge their cause. And by His judgment are effects removed. Perhaps you come in tears. But hear Him say, ‘My brother, holy Son of God, behold your idle dream, in which this could occur.’ And you will leave the holy instant with your laughter and your brother’s joined with His” (T.27.VIII.9).

Q #830: I would like to know if you think *A Course in Miracles* and Transcendental Meditation are compatible spiritual disciplines? I am studying the Course but enjoy the centeredness from my meditation time. I am asking about TM in particular and not meditation in general.

A: If you find Transcendental Meditation useful as a technique for helping you relax and become more peaceful and centered, by all means, continue to use it in your life. But if you want to use it as a spiritual discipline, integrating it with the practice of the Course, you may be introducing some confusion and potential conflict into your life. Now there is some disagreement as to whether Transcendental Meditation is simply a meditation technique or an actual spiritual discipline. Its proponents generally present TM in a non-spiritual framework in an effort to make it accessible to people of all ages, cultures, and religious backgrounds. But it has been developed by the movement's founder, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, from principles of the ancient Hindu Vedic tradition of India.

The expressed purpose of the practice of TM is to achieve a state of consciousness called transcendental consciousness, which through repeated practice leads one towards what Maharishi calls enlightenment. However, enlightenment as defined within TM circles would not be considered a spiritual state from the perspective of the Course. For example, in a 1998 interview, Maharishi is quoted as saying: “‘Enlightenment’ means lack of darkness, absence of darkness. And ‘absence of darkness’ means no mistake, no weakness, no shortcoming—success everywhere, fulfillment of desire everywhere—that is enlightenment . One is living in full accord with Natural Law” (italics added).

While the Course does provide a kind of mind training that leads to higher levels of consciousness (e.g., **C.1.7:4,5,6**) , its purpose is to lead us ultimately beyond any perceptual-based consciousness and beyond any concern with the quality of our lives here within the world. In other words, from the Course's perspective, enlightenment involves a process of gradually awakening from the dream and not simply making the dream better. So the two paths, to the degree that there is an intended spiritual direction implicit in TM, have very different purposes. From the Course's perspective, TM would be like any technique or practice that provides some relief from the tensions and anxieties of seeming life in the body. The Course teaches that only the practice of forgiveness leads to the undoing of the guilt over separation buried deep in the mind that is the real cause of all tension and anxiety (e.g., **W.pl.41.1:2,3; W.pl.194.2:1**) .

Q #831: What aspect of our mind(s) truly understands "seeing through the illusion"? It is obvious we cannot see through the illusion from within the illusion. To say merely that we "see it with Jesus" implies another separation between subject and object; i.e., there's a "me" and a "Jesus." Can we use the duality to undo the duality? In a way, I think that is what the Course is "doing."

Still one is almost helpless in the face of the forces one faces here. We have continued, from a linear perspective for "millions of years," to actively delay our recognition of oneness, with an almost total underestimation of the extent of our denial. There was only one denial but it has taken a million billion forms. As a seeming individual who wants neither to be a victim nor a victimizer anymore, the dream itself still appears virtually to force an either/or orientation to any given situation. If there is "another way of

seeing this," is there a corresponding symbolic shift in the world we still see, or is this just another delusion?

To learn *A Course in Miracles* and finally and totally "renounce the ego in oneself" appears to be a goal almost completely impossible, due to the duality inherent in the illusion, which seems to prevent the renunciation itself. Despite forgiving over and over again, I still get caught up and trapped in the illusions of the world. What would you recommend that may or may not be reflected in the Course to deal truthfully and effectively with this recurring nightmare, once and for all?

A: You are right in that, so long as our attention remains focused on the world and all its many challenges and complexities and limited either/or choices, there is no way out. But the Course does offer us something to help us extricate ourselves from this quagmire we have placed ourselves in -- it's called a miracle. The miracle quite simply involves a shift in our attention from the world back to our mind. And rather than denying the world, the Course invites us to use the world itself to facilitate this shift. For the Course teaches that the world is nothing more than the projection of the contents of the mind. And at the level of mind, the choice is really quite simple - there are only two alternatives, the ego's content of attack and guilt and fear, or the Holy Spirit's content of love and joining and forgiveness. And we can tell quite easily which we have chosen by looking at how we are experiencing our world. Now this choice obviously is still within the realm of duality, but in the end we will come to recognize that there is after all no duality, for only one of the alternatives -- love -- is real.

We are not being asked to try to stop seeing duality, nor to recognize that duality is unreal and the world is an illusion. Nor is it our responsibility to try to see beyond the illusion of duality to oneness. The Course's approach is an indirect one (**T.14.I**). Duality is not inherent in the world but in the split mind. The illusion can reinforce nothing unless we still want it to be true. We are being asked to look at all the ways we block any experience of oneness, which really boil down to one -- our judgments, which keep separation and differences real and alive in our mind. In other words, nothing must be done to achieve a state beyond duality except to become aware of our continuing investment in duality, and in particular, in the judgments that maintain it, and then to recognize that each of our judgments has a cost. Forgiveness is the Course's process that allows us gradually to release our investment in duality and separation -- this investment is the real obstacle and not the world, which is its effect. And you are right that it is a mistake to underestimate the extent of our denial. But it is critical that we understand that we are *not* forgiving the world and all of our external relationships, but our own choice for the ego.

In other words, there is nothing that has to be done -- only undone. And so our part is to continue to look at and beyond all the obstacles we have placed in our minds between ourselves and the awareness of love's presence. This does require patience, and while it is true that our belief in linear time can make this seem like a daunting process, that is why the Course invites us to use Jesus or the Holy Spirit to help us join in a holy instant outside of time.

The conundrum you feel is in a sense part of the problem, for it simply continues to reinforce in your own mind the density and reality of the illusory ego. We cannot imagine how we can possibly get out of this nightmare because we still think that we have to get out of it. And the point is that the very self that is trying so desperately to understand and let go is in itself the obstacle. The self that wants to understand is part of what must simply be looked at and smiled at and *in the very end* released.

There are steps in the process of coming to recognize the world, as well as the self we think we are, is illusory. Since we can't imagine what it's like not to get caught in the illusion, Jesus simply asks us to take the little steps that first allow us to begin to take the world and our problems and issues less seriously. This is the symbolic shift in how we see the world that you ask about, away from the oppositional roles of victim and victimizer. We begin with a change in the purpose that we give to the world and to our bodies, reflected in the recognition that our interests or purpose are shared with, not separate from, all our brothers and sisters. Acknowledging our one shared purpose begins us on the journey to recognizing our one shared Self.

In the meantime, yes, as you observe, Jesus and the Course are using duality to undo duality rather than maintain it. While we continue to believe we are separate, we need a thought within the illusion, even if it seems separate from us, that reminds us of oneness. So Jesus, or the Holy Spirit, symbolize the part of our mind "that truly understands 'seeing through the illusion,'" as you put it. As Jesus tells us in many different ways through the Course, we must learn to *separate* from our ego. And so he uses the idea of duality or separation to help us begin the process of separating ourselves from the ego. Once we begin to release our investment and identification with the ego, our willingness to recognize its illusory nature will gradually increase and we will no longer need the defenses that the world and our bodies provide against experiencing the oneness that is our reality.

Consider the following examples in the Course of how Jesus uses the language of duality and separation to facilitate this process, giving the words another purpose (*italics added*):

"The reason you need my help is because you have denied your own Guide and therefore need guidance. My role is *to separate the true from the false*, so truth can break through the barriers the ego has set up and can shine into your mind. Against our united strength the ego cannot prevail" (T.4.III.2:4,5,6).

"You have regarded the separation as a means for breaking your communication with your Father. The Holy Spirit reinterprets it as a means of re-establishing what was not broken, but *has been made obscure*. All things you made have use to Him, for His most holy purpose. *He knows you are not separate from God, but He perceives much in your mind that lets you think you are*. All this and nothing else would He separate from you. The power of decision, which you made in place of the power of creation, He would teach you how to use on your behalf. You who made it to crucify yourself must learn of Him how to apply it to the holy cause of restoration" (T.14.VI.5).

"*He* [the Holy Spirit] *will separate out all that has meaning, dropping off the rest* and offering your true communication to those who would communicate as truly with you" (T.14.VI.7:4).

"It is the body that is outside us, and is not our concern. ...*To see our Self as separate from the body is to end the attack on God's plan for salvation, and to accept it instead*" (W.72.9:2,5).

We are simply asked to trust a process that will gradually lift us out of the dualistic quagmire we have made real in our minds. But while we remain too fearful to let go of duality, Jesus simply uses the dualistic symbols of separation to undo our belief in separation. And he promises us release from the pain of our self-imposed conceptual prison if we allow him to guide our perception, as we look with him.

Q #832: There are many questions in the index regarding the loss of individuality/identity. I think what people are wanting to hear is that even though they no longer exist as an individual, they still exist. I had a dream in which I was waiting in line at the motor vehicle bureau to get my driver's license renewed. I was idly looking around at the crowd of people waiting along with me, at the officials behind the windows, etc. Suddenly I became aware that the air was charged and as I looked at people's faces it dawned on me that we were all the same, one person, although we all still had different physical features. My sense of identity, even though I was no longer just me, did not diminish. It expanded--it felt completely safe, completely full, because there was no sense of separateness. But there was still a sense of *being*.

My question is this: Is this sense of oneness of being, but still of *being*, what is meant by giving up one's separate ego identity? If it is, I can say that there is nothing to lose... because we have only one Identity, and it belongs to all of us. We lose nothing by sharing in it.

Does it follow then that only the ego can fear loss, because only it equates *being* with *having*, and with having a body? So that when you have a fear of loss of your identity, it's just the ego panicking in its

dualism, and in truth, you have nothing to lose? You cannot in fact lose your identity, because you *exist*, just not as the person you think you are?

A: You can think of your dream as a helpful symbol reflecting the oneness of spirit. It is of course difficult for us to understand what it means to be spirit while bodily thoughts so dominate our awareness, but then that of course is their purpose. They are there only by our choice, to affirm a false identity and deny our true Identity. And so symbols such as your dream give a reassuring glimpse of the reality beyond the illusion.

Yes, only the ego can fear loss, because it is the belief that loss is possible and it is in fact the desire for loss. For the ego originated from the belief in separation, that we can take only what we want from God -- our separate, individual self -- and not accept the All that He is offering us. And that is a choice for limitation, which *is* loss -- loss of the All that we have excluded from our individual self. It is in Heaven that *having* and *being* are equated, for there is no difference between them (**T.4.VII.5:7**). In contrast, the ego asserts that we have only what we have taken -- a dynamic spelled out clearly in the fourth law of chaos (**T.23.II.9**) -- as if there were someone other than ourselves that we can take from. And so, ironically, the ending of limitation, which is really an *expansion* of our awareness, is experienced as loss of self so long as we remain identified with the ego. And it is not simply the body, but the personality and all the many ways in which we define ourselves as different and special and unique that are part of the false self we release when we identify with our true Self.

If you consider the underlying nature of your dream, you can see that it is really no different from any other dream, except that you had an experience, much like a lucid dreamer, of what was really going on, incorporated into the dream itself. For in our dreams, all the characters are us -- it is our sleeping mind that is dreaming all of them and giving them their seeming existence. But there is only one dream and one dreamer. And the self you thought you were in the dream was as much a figment of your mind as all the other characters in the dream. So it's not the figures in the dream that are one and share a single identity, but the mind that is asleep and dreaming of all the figures that is one and has a single identity. And when we awaken, nothing is lost and nothing real is taken away.

And so it is with our waking dreams, as Jesus refers to our lives (**T.18.II.5**). All of the seeming separate individuals that seem to people this dream world, including the one we identify as ourselves, are really the projections of the single, sleeping mind of the Son, of which we are all a part. And so it is not the self that we think we are in the world that awakens, but rather the mind that is asleep and dreaming it is a figure in the world. And yes, its being does not depend on having a body.

In your question, you seem to use the words *existing* and *being* interchangeably. In a couple of sections in the text of *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus makes a distinction between the words, with *existence* pertaining to the ego and *being* to spirit:

"The ego arose from the separation, and its continued existence depends on your continuing belief in the separation. The ego must offer you some sort of reward for maintaining this belief. All it can offer is a sense of temporary existence, which begins with its own beginning and ends with its own ending. It tells you this life is your existence because it is its own. Against this sense of temporary existence spirit offers you the knowledge of permanence and unshakable being. ... Existence as well as being rest on communication. Existence, however, is specific in how, what and with whom communication is judged to be worth undertaking. Being is completely without these distinctions. It is a state in which the mind is in communication with everything that is real. ...Remember that in the Kingdom there is no difference between *having* and *being*, as there is in existence. In the state of being the mind gives everything always (T.4.III.3:2,3,4,5,6; T.4.VII.4:1,2,3,4; 5:7,8).

In other words, our true being is always unaffected, but when we awaken, we will not seem to continue to exist as we experience ourselves now. Your dream, while not representing being, nevertheless reflects a

helpful bridge between the two experiences, one illusory and one real. For it still is experienced in the realm of consciousness, which is an ego state, and an experience of being is beyond all dualistic consciousness. (For more on the ego nature of consciousness, see Questions #27, #127, and #636.)

Q #833: I have begun the lessons in *A Course in Miracles*. My question is, is it good to do any kind of meditation during this time when I am doing the Course? Last week I went to a meditation group, and since then I have had a pain in my back, like having a knife inside my body. How can I bring the pain to the Holy Spirit, or is there something else I should do or not do? Does the Course bring me automatically into the present to stay all the time mindless? Sometimes I feel like something from outside of me --it feels like a bad energy -- is coming inside my body. In these moments, fear always comes up in my mind. Is this normal? In these moments also, a person comes into my mind whom I want to blame for these attacks. What should I do in these moments to be still and practice forgiveness?

A: It is enough to know that the ego is always ready to do battle any time we make the decision to find peace, using whatever forms it can to distract us from our purpose. These can include bodily symptoms and pain, energetic shifts and fear, and thoughts of anger and blame, as you are experiencing. All of these are not uncommon and are normal reactions of anyone still identified with the ego -- which includes just about all of us! Once we recognize where the distractions must be coming from, all we need to do then is to acknowledge that the ego is their source and, as best we can, not become too concerned about the forms of its various attacks. We are simply afraid of the peace and it will not be helpful to try to fight ourselves, for that only gives power to our egos. And the Course's purpose is to help us learn how to withdraw that power from the ego -- of itself it has none (**e.g., T.4.IV.8:9; T.7.VIII.4:6; T.8.I.2:1**).

As for practicing meditation while doing the workbook lessons, there is nothing wrong with doing that if you find it helpful. But there is also no need for any specific meditation practice other than the meditation-like exercises presented in the workbook lessons themselves. The Course's practice is forgiveness -- releasing judgments in the context of our relationships -- and not meditation (**T.18.VII.4:9,10,11;5:1,2,3**). The workbook's meditative-like exercises are provided simply to help us become more aware of the two different contents present in our mind -- the ego's and the Holy Spirit's -- so that we can become clearer just what the Course is inviting us to choose between as we learn to practice forgiveness (**W.in.3:1;4:1**).

The Course itself does not automatically do anything for us -- nor does Jesus or the Holy Spirit. Each is a symbol that reminds us of the choice that only we can make to release the ego's past and bring our mind into the peace of the present instant (**T.5.II.7:1,2,3,4,5,6,7**). This present state, by the way, would not be called mindlessness in the Course, for mind has a different meaning in the Course from other spiritual teachings that equate the ego with finite mind and its constant idle chatter. The Course in contrast uses mind (with a lower case *m*, since Mind with an upper case *M* refers to God or Christ [**C.1.1:2**]) to refer to all the capacities of the split mind, including consciousness, perception and decision-making or choice (**T.3.IV.2**). From the Course's perspective, we are mindless when we are identified with the ego, for we believe all of our problems come from our body and the world around us, rather than from our choice to identify with the ego in our mind. And so we forget that we have and are a mind that has a choice about how to look at our experiences and begin to choose against the false perceptions of the ego in our wrong mind, allowing them to be replaced in our consciousness by the gentle and healing perceptions of the Holy Spirit in our right mind.

So be kind to yourself as you proceed with your study and practice of the Course. The process can be a very simple as well as gentle one, if we don't try to force anything and simply learn to step back and watch the silliness of our ego as it attempts to convince us to continue to take ourselves and our lives seriously. As we are able to disengage our mind from the ego's endless strivings and manipulations, we will find ourselves smiling more of the time (**W.pl.155.1:1,2,3**), if only in our minds.

Q #834: The idea presented in *A Course in Miracles* that "Only what you have not been giving can be lacking in any situation" (T.17.VII.4:1) is something that I am very resistant to. I feel that I am not getting the proper respect I deserve from certain people. Is the Course saying that at some level I am not giving them proper respect? I feel that I am! I feel that I have been overly respectful in content and form and some people are still disrespectful back. Can you explain the meaning of this phrase?

A: The passage you quote is understood in the light of one of the Course's fundamental principles of salvation: "...**giving and receiving are the same**"(T.26.I.3:6). This rests on the fact that all minds are joined (T15.XI.7:1), and therefore everyone is included in the individual mind's choice to receive, and thereby give, the ego's message or the Holy Spirit's. These are the only two thoughts the mind can choose between. Only one of them can be held/received at one time, and only what the mind holds can be given. Allied with the ego and driven by the emptiness it fosters, we will not give or receive true respect in any relationship, because the love that the Holy Spirit brings will be lacking, no matter how seemingly respectful the behavior may appear to be.

Choosing to listen to the ego's tale of separation means denying one's true Identity, and is an attack on the Sonship. The result is a profound feeling of lack. Special relationships with people and things are then sought to fill the void left by separation. A multitude of specialness needs are brought to these relationships: e.g., the need for respect, acceptance, recognition. Relating to others in order to have individual needs met is truly a lack of respect, even when the behavior is courteous and seemingly "respectful," because its origin is the attack thought in the mind. The respect that is not being given is thus lacking, as the line you quote indicates.

The mind receives the respect it deserves when it chooses the Holy Spirit. In the moment that His Love is received it is given to the entire Sonship, just as the separation attack included everyone. Only then will there be no need to seek respect or anything else from others, for nothing will be lacking. In fact, any show of disrespect will be perceived as a call for love (T.14.X.7). If someone's behavior evokes any other response or reaction, it means the mind has decided to put out receivers for the ego's message. The only thing that will correct the judgments and feelings that follow this decision is to decide differently. That is accomplished through forgiveness, which begins with acknowledging that the feeling of being treated unfairly/disrespectfully comes from a choice in the mind, not someone else's behavior. The ego's message was received and given because it was chosen. The Holy Spirit's Love is therefore lacking. The true respect we owe ourselves and everyone is to recognize that the source of one's feeling deprived of respect, and the other's attack of disrespect, is the mind of each, and then to see in both a call for help. As Jesus tells us in the text: "**I have emphasized that the miracle [forgiveness], or the expression of Atonement, is always a sign of respect from the worthy to the worthy**" (T.2.VI.8:1). Choosing respect in this way guarantees that what is received is given, and nothing will be lacking in any part of the Sonship. Awareness of this fullness may be blocked, but it nevertheless remains true.

That is not to say that someone could not be kindly asked to discontinue some form of discourteous or disrespectful behavior. If guided by the Holy Spirit there would be no attack in the request, no judgment, and, most importantly, no expectation that the behavior change. The important thing to remember is that the respect we all seek is found in our minds, where we choose it by choosing the Holy Spirit instead of the ego. In the instant of choosing it, it is given to ourselves and everyone: **Its [forgiveness'] offering is universal, and it teaches but one message: What is God's belongs to everyone, and is his due**" (T.25.IX.10:9,10).

Q #835: Forgiveness comes relatively easily to me when it involves the interaction of myself and another, but I am having difficulty in forgiving attacks against a child of 14. My ability to forgive my husband for attacks levied against my son (his step-son) has been only partially successful, as they recur even when I believe I have done my best to appeal to the Holy Spirit to let me see the situation differently. How can I change?

A: Perceiving another as unfairly treated is the same as perceiving oneself unfairly treated. It is the projection of guilt for attacking the Self by denying Its true Identity as God's Son, and choosing identity with the ego instead. In the ego's version of who we are (separate bodies), everyone in every relationship is projecting, attacking and defending. That is how the **"game of guilt" (T.26.X.4:7)** is played, and in it everyone loses. What is lost originally is the awareness of innocence in the mind. This is then experienced in the world as the loss of peace, which seems to be caused by the attacks of one person upon another. It does not matter who is perceived as victim or victimizer, the result is the same: identity with the body is established, defended and maintained. This in turn serves to keep belief in the reality of the separation alive. The first step in changing the perception of victimization is to acknowledge that this is, in fact, the dynamic that is in operation, regardless of the judgments and feelings you may have about the situation, or what the circumstances may be. The judgments and feelings are not denied, but their true source (beliefs held in the mind) must be acknowledged for change to occur.

An important goal of *A Course in Miracles* is to teach us that everyone has a mind (including children), and that attack against oneself occurs in the mind when the ego is chosen. Recognition that the mind is the source of guilt for choosing the ego, which is then projected on to someone else, is already a change in the way one views the situation. A little willingness to recognize projection in operation is enough to begin the process of forgiveness, which is the only meaningful change. It is willingness to forgive your husband **"for what he did not do" (T.17.III.1:5)**. He has attacked your son, but he has not taken away his peace or yours. That can only be done by each one's choice in the mind. When this is understood, it becomes clear that forgiveness is total, applying equally to your husband, your son, and others.

When an attack occurs, the Holy Spirit can help if we are willing to recognize that we have already judged the situation and that we are wrong in our interpretation. Only then can the Holy Spirit replace our perception with His. Any belief that the attack has had a real effect blocks the Holy Spirit's message, because a decision has already been made to listen to the ego which tells us the body is real and that attacks external to the mind are the source of pain and conflict. In lesson 24 of the workbook, we find a way to clear the ego's static by generalizing its message to all relationships. Slightly paraphrased it tells us: **"We do not perceive anyone's best interests" (W.pl.24)**. We must therefore question all the expectations we bring to relationships, and all the things we think bring happiness and well being to others. They are all based on the belief that we are bodies. If we are at least willing to introduce doubt in this belief system, the door opens to receiving the Holy Spirit's perception of a situation that seems to have only the interpretation the ego assigns to it. In the Course, Jesus teaches that in all relationships everyone acts out the same choice, the same guilt, and the same fear. That is what relationships are for, it is what we came to the world to do, and what the Holy Spirit needs us to see so He can reinterpret them for us. Although the attacks may not stop, the way they are perceived will change with the Holy Spirit's help.

It is always difficult to see loved ones attacked. The choice to invite the Holy Spirit's light into the conflict will ease the burden of trying to fix it, and His peace will gradually ease the pain and tension. There could not be any greater comfort than the acknowledgment that the body is not our true identity, and that attack need not abolish peace. Whether or not your husband's behavior changes, on some level the peace that you experience as a result of accepting the Holy Spirit's definition of who we are and His interpretation of attack will be communicated to him as well as to your son. One of you will have chosen sanity by choosing the Holy Spirit/the right mind. You, your husband, and your son will thus know (again, on some level not necessarily consciously) that the original attack of believing in the separation has had no real effect. With this mindfulness, whatever you choose to do to help your husband and your son, your peace will be your comfort and theirs.

Q #836: Though a longtime Course student, I am asking the following question from a "normal" or "worldly" perspective -- finding it useful to step outside of the Course, and its own internal assumptions. It has sometimes been suggested that the Course's message -- that the world we seem to inhabit is not actually real -- will appeal particularly to individuals who happen not to be happy in their relationship with

the world. Stating this in an extreme way, for the purpose of clarifying what is meant, there could be seen to be some similarity with suicidal thinking, in terms of the wish for escape.

Conversely, it might be the case that individuals who have a healthier psychological relationship with the world will be less drawn to *A Course in Miracles*, as its suggestions of escape are of little interest to them. The Course might thus be viewed as an unhelpful, even damaging, affirmation of the reality-avoiding thoughts of unhappy people. How would you answer such a criticism "from the outside"?

A: In attempting to step outside of what you refer to as the Course's internal assumptions, you may be getting yourself tangled in some faulty assumptions that could trip you up in some perhaps not so helpful ways! Probably the most questionable assumption is that the Course's purpose is to provide an escape from the world, which would therefore make it especially appealing to those who are quite miserable and, in the extreme, considering suicide. That is a misreading of the Course's intent, which in turn reinforces one of the ego's cherished defenses -- that the world outside is the problem. Although occasionally the words of the Course may on a superficial reading seem to suggest it -- for example, Workbook Lesson 23, "**I can escape from the world I see by giving up attack thoughts**" -- the Course's purpose is not to help us escape from the world, for the world is not the problem, as the text of this lesson makes quite clear (**W.pl.23.2; 4:2,3**). And so anyone drawn to the Course, thinking and hoping it will provide an escape from the world and all its problems, will be sorely disappointed. The Course also makes it clear that death -- and this is true no matter what form it seems to take, including suicide -- offers no peace or escape (e.g., **T.3.VII.6:11; T.27.VII.10:2; M.20.5**).

Yes, the Course does teach that the world is not real (e.g., **W.pl.3:1**). But if the world is not real, why would we need to escape it? The belief that escape is necessary only reinforces the belief that the world is real and is the problem, that it is something that needs to be escaped. It may be more accurate to say that the Course teaches us how to escape from the ego thought system that is the source of the world. But even that is not quite right. Rather the Course teaches us how to escape from our *belief in* and *desire for* the ego thought system, since the ego thought system itself is no more real and no more of a problem than its shadow -- the world.

The Course addresses a pivotal question: if the world is not real and can not victimize us, why do we believe that it is real and that it can hurt us and cause us unhappiness? And to accept the Course's answer to that question requires an honest self-evaluation that most of us are not yet willing to engage in, and certainly not anyone who is seeking simply to escape from the pain and suffering of the world. Believing that the world is real serves a very specific and deliberate purpose in the ego thought system -- it is the smokescreen that keeps our attention rooted outside on the seeming externals of the world so that we never look at the thoughts of separation, sin and guilt within our own mind that are the real cause of our pain and suffering (e.g., **W.pl.3:2,3**). And so we conveniently believe that sin and guilt exist outside us in the world -- in others and not in ourselves, thereby keeping us from ever examining our own thoughts and thus protecting the fragile ego and all its (our!) cherished beliefs.

And so the Course does not ask us to deny the ego's effects -- the body and the world -- for we still find safety and comfort and our personal identity in those beliefs. Instead the Course teaches us how to use our body and the world for a different purpose -- the Holy Spirit's rather than the ego's (e.g., **W.pl.3:4**). Again, we joined with the ego in making the world to prove to ourselves that the separation is real, along with its effects of attack and sin and guilt, so that the world, rather than our choice for separation, would seem to be the cause of all of our unhappiness. And so the Holy Spirit teaches us how to use our body and the world to uncover those thoughts buried in our minds and eventually to learn how to demonstrate that the ego and the world can have no effect on us unless we want them to. In other words, the world and the body are transformed from prison house to classroom, where we can learn the Holy Spirit's gentle lessons of forgiveness.

Rather than suggesting that we can ignore the world because its not real, the Course teaches us to look very carefully at the world and our reactions to it so that we can get in touch with the buried contents of our split mind. And of course, once we can look at and beyond our belief in sin and guilt in the wrong

mind, we will find the peace and the memory of God's Love that is reflected in the right mind. But we cannot get to that happiness and joy without first allowing the contents of the wrong mind to be undone. And that means getting in touch with our unhappy thoughts, which we do by looking honestly at their projections onto the screen of the world and all our painful and difficult relationships. This is no mindless denial or escape and in fact most people have great resistance to this looking process, not because there really is anything horrible there, but because we *believe* there is.

Now it is true that the Course will have appeal to many who are not particularly happy in their relationship with the world. Most people do not seek another way if they are content with the road they are already traveling along. However, most people who are drawn to the Course, at least initially, are looking for a spiritual path that will make their experience *in the world* and their relationships *in the world* better, and perhaps make the world itself a better place. In other words, most Course students are not looking to escape from the world but rather to make it work better for them in meeting their specialness needs. And of course, as students progress in their understanding of the Course's teaching, they struggle with their growing realization that the Course does not offer this kind of help. Rather, it is attempting to help us recognize how unhappy we really are so that we will be willing to choose, not against the world, but against the ego thought system. Since the problem is our belief in and desire for the ego thought system, the Holy Spirit's task is to help us become clearer about the ego's expressions and costs, so that we will gladly allow our desire for and belief in it to diminish (T.14.II.1:1,2,3,4,5).

As to whether those who have “a healthier psychological relationship with the world” might be less drawn to the Course, that may or may not be true. It can however be said with certainty that it is not the purpose of the Course to help us develop a healthier psychological relationship with the world. True, one of our developmental tasks as we mature as human beings is to learn how to adjust to the world and all its demands so that we can successfully meet all our needs as best we can at the various levels, from physical to social and emotional and psychological. And those who are considered well-adjusted and healthy tend to be those who have mastered the various skills to make their way through the world, dealing with both the positive and the negative with a certain degree of equanimity. But the Course has a different definition of health: **“Health is seen as the natural state of everything when interpretation is left to the Holy Spirit, Who perceives no attack on anything. Health is the result of relinquishing all attempts to use the body lovelessly. Health is the beginning of the proper perspective on life under the guidance of the one Teacher Who knows what life is, being the Voice for Life Itself” (T.8.VIII.9:8,9,10).** And later, **“Your health is a result of your desire to see your brother with no blood upon his hands, nor guilt upon his heart made heavy with the proof of sin (T.27.II.7:7).** Few therapists or psychological self-help books offer this kind of direction and perspective! Health from the Course's perspective is really a reflection of the wholeness or oneness that is our true reality in Heaven. And so in the split mind, health is represented as the outcome of forgiveness, where differences are not seen as important and guilt and sin are not real, because we are allowing the Holy Spirit to heal our perception.

The psychologically healthy may have reached a compromise with the world that allows them to function with some degree of satisfaction, as well as a certain level of acceptance of their personal and the world's limitations. But there is a quiet desperation that must lie beneath the surface, for life in the world is like a house of cards, always on the verge of falling apart. On the other hand, many who have successfully negotiated their way through the world and could be perceived as having a healthy psychological relationship with the world may come to the very honest recognition that they are still not happy, not really happy, and so will be open to another way (e.g., T.31.IV). They may at last be coming to the recognition that their attraction to the world and all its special relationships is causing them pain rather than joy.

Interestingly, recent psychological research suggests that those who have *less* accurate self-perceptions are less likely to be depressed. Or alternatively stated, those who have more accurate self-perceptions are more likely to be at least mildly depressed. So the price of experiencing happiness in the world seems to be denial, which can be an effective defense only temporarily. And that of course is the case for all happiness that depends on our relationship with the temporal world. We will eventually have to recognize

that the world cannot make us happy, but not because the world is the problem, but only because that recognition will reinforce our willingness to look for and ask for another way of thinking about the world.

And so Jesus and his Course are leading us to a place of healing within our minds that will allow us eventually to be in the world, fully present to everything that seems to be happening to us and around us, without taking it seriously and without getting caught in the ego's reactive, judgmental mode. Clearly, this in no way can be construed as an escape from the world, but rather represents accepting a different perspective on the world -- the Holy Spirit's rather than the ego's. The path of the ascetic or the monastic or the hermit who withdraw from the world is the path that would have greater appeal to someone who is seeking an escape. The Course in the end will lead us out of the world's thought system, but only as a result of participating in the world fully, so that we can recognize its meaninglessness (**W.pl.155**).

If our motivation for studying the Course remains to escape the world, we will sabotage its process by never allowing the world to serve the purpose the Holy Spirit would give it in place of the ego's. For the ego would have us see ourselves as victims at the mercy of the world, but the Holy Spirit would have us recognize the ego's unspoken purpose for the world as the vehicle for fulfilling our secret wish to see ourselves unfairly treated. And the world serves that purpose well so long as we see ourselves as separate from the world, with the world existing outside ourselves.

We will never leave behind the thought system that made the world until we first look honestly at the world and our reactions to it, and then use those reactions as an opportunity to uncover the thoughts of ugliness and guilt and sin that we harbor within our own minds. For to reiterate, the world is not the problem from which we need escape -- in fact there is nothing that truly needs to be escaped. Rather we need to look honestly at our own thoughts which are mirrored in the world outside until we can come to recognize that they actually have no power at all and can be released, not because they are miserable and wretched and unhappy, but because they are truly nothing.

Q #837: My daughter's father abandoned us when I was three and a half months pregnant. He has offered no financial or emotional support since this time. He has had no contact with his daughter either. He has chosen to turn his back on the both of us. His family however continued to be interested in our lives. I found this situation extremely frustrating as his family would continually bring up my daughter's father (as if reminding me he had chosen to abandon us).

I since cut communication with the family, as I was overwhelmed with the situation. Over six months has passed and I am asking to see everyone involved in this situation differently (i.e., without judgment). I would like to heal the relationship with the family and my daughter's father. However, when I go to call or write a note or make some contact with them, I am reminded of all the pain I went through while I was in contact with them. I don't know how to heal this situation. It doesn't seem to go away.

However I just can't bring myself to swallow my pride and try again at having a relationship with my daughter's side of the family. Can I find peace with this situation without physically making contact with these people again? How do I know that I did the right thing in severing the relationship with the family? I still feel somewhat haunted by my decision, but really don't know how to move on and find lasting peace in my mind with all of the above mentioned people. How can I look at a man that abandoned his/our child in a "different light."

A: Perhaps one of the hardest lessons to accept and learn as a student of *A Course in Miracles* is that our upset and pain, regardless of what our experience seems to be, is never the result of what someone else has or has not done to us (**W.pl.5**). Everything in our experience seems to shout otherwise, and it is usually not difficult to find allies who will support us in our perception of ourselves as victims. But if we genuinely want to heal our relationships and release ourselves from the conflict and hurt and anger, the

Course asks us to shift our focus from the external situation to our own inner decision to invest in the belief in sin and guilt and attack and abandonment. For that is the only source of our pain (**W.pl.23**).

This is not to justify what anyone else does or fails to do, but rather to clarify that we have always first made a decision within our own mind to perceive ourselves as a victim in order to defend against the pain of our own choice for guilt, or we could not be affected by what the other person does. This of course contradicts all the counsel the world offers, but that is simply because the Course is offering us a radically different way of perceiving ourselves, our lives, our relationships, and our world -- one that affirms that we alone are the rulers of our universe and our destiny (**W.pl.253**). How loudly and vehemently does the world -- and our ego mind -- protest this acceptance of total responsibility for our experiences (**T.21.II.1,2,3,4,5**).

The Course will not advise you on the particulars of your situation, such as whether you should or should not have cut off contact with his family, or whether you should re-establish it. Helpful answers to those questions are only possible after you have addressed your own need to see yourself unfairly treated (**T.26.X.3,4,5**), a need by the way which you share, regardless of the form it expresses itself in your life, with *everyone* else who seems to walk this earth. So you don't want to judge yourself for choosing the victim role -- all of us who find ourselves here, in our own specific ways, have made the same choice.

And so until you are able to release the judgments of unworthiness that you hold against yourself for abandoning your true Self, everyone else will only continue to be a symbol of that inner choice, and contact with them will necessarily continue to be painful. As inadequate as it may seem to us to be, the truth is we are all only ever doing the best we can, given our belief in our limitations and the guilt that naturally accompanies those perceptions. And that blanket generalization applies to the father of your daughter as well.

Are you aware that you do not refer anywhere in your question to the nature of your relationship with this man, other than to identify him as the father of your daughter? It appears that you so want to avoid acknowledging his relationship to you that you even refer to his family as your daughter's side of the family. Perhaps he has been your husband or lover, but the real nature of the relationship that you want to deny is that he is your brother, a brother who is just as self-accusing and guilt-ridden as you may feel, regardless of what face he presents to the world. But you will only come to such a forgiven perception of him by first recognizing the mirror to your own self that he is holding up to you (**T.7.VII.3:9; T.24.VI.8**). And so to release him from judgment is only to release yourself. And in that release you will necessarily perceive the both of you in a "different light."

Q #838: I would like to know if you think *A Course in Miracles* and Transcendental Meditation are compatible spiritual disciplines? I am studying the Course but enjoy the centeredness from my meditation time. I am asking about TM in particular and not meditation in general.

A: If you find Transcendental Meditation useful as a technique for helping you relax and become more peaceful and centered, by all means, continue to use it in your life. But if you want to use it as a spiritual discipline, integrating it with the practice of the Course, you may be introducing some confusion and potential conflict into your life. Now there is some disagreement as to whether Transcendental Meditation is simply a meditation technique or an actual spiritual discipline. Its proponents generally present TM in a non-spiritual framework in an effort to make it accessible to people of all ages, cultures, and religious backgrounds. But it has been developed by the movement's founder, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, from principles of the ancient Hindu Vedic tradition of India.

The expressed purpose of the practice of TM is to achieve a state of consciousness called transcendental consciousness, which through repeated practice leads one towards what Maharishi calls enlightenment.

However, enlightenment as defined within TM circles would not be considered a spiritual state from the perspective of the Course. For example, in a 1998 interview, Maharishi is quoted as saying: "'Enlightenment' means lack of darkness, absence of darkness. And '*absence of darkness*' means *no mistake, no weakness, no shortcoming—success everywhere, fulfillment of desire everywhere—that is enlightenment*. One is living in full accord with Natural Law" (italics added).

While the Course does provide a kind of mind training that leads to higher levels of consciousness (e.g., **C.1.7:4,5,6**), its purpose is to lead us ultimately beyond any perceptual-based consciousness and beyond any concern with the quality of our lives here within the world. In other words, from the Course's perspective, enlightenment involves a process of gradually awakening from the dream and not simply making the dream better. So the two paths, to the degree that there is an intended spiritual direction implicit in TM, have very different purposes. From the Course's perspective, TM would be like any technique or practice that provides some relief from the tensions and anxieties of seeming life in the body. The Course teaches that only the practice of forgiveness leads to the undoing of the guilt over separation buried deep in the mind that is the real cause of all tension and anxiety (e.g., **W.pl.41.1:2,3; W.pl.194.2:1**).

Q #839: How can one use the perspective of *A Course in Miracles* to look at a person who is verbally abusive and to become more peaceful within?

A: The first place the Course asks us to look in a relationship is at ourselves. Our feelings, judgments, and thoughts show us the unconscious content of the mind, i.e., the forgotten choice to deny the Self that God created and to identify with the ego instead. Guilt, along with feelings of emptiness, vulnerability, and unworthiness, are the inevitable result of that choice. When the guilt is projected out, it is experienced in relationships characterized by victimization scripts. Although victim/abused and victimizer/abuser have different roles in the relationship, both are acting out the fear that innocence has been irretrievably lost by the mind's attack on the Self. And so, motivated by a deep feeling of worthlessness, the victimizer feels compelled to attack in some form such as verbal abuse. The distorted thinking is that making another look bad makes the attacker look better. Thus, someone else's loss is his gain. This is an expression of the fourth law of chaos found in chapter 23 of the text: **"This seeming law is the belief you have what you have taken. By this, another's loss becomes your gain, and thus it fails to recognize that you can never take away save from yourself" (23.II.9:3,4)**. The victimizer convinces himself that his accusations are truly justified. The underlying belief is that he has taken the other's innocence and now has it for himself. The victim believes the victimizer is to blame for his loss of peace and for his feeling unfairly treated. He is the innocent victim and many witnesses can be found to support this view. The true source of this feeling, however, is the mind that chose to throw peace and innocence away by identifying with the ego. The victim-victimizer plot is an ideal scenario for the ego to keep the mind's power to choose from awareness, by focusing attention on the external dynamics of the relationship.

As with every relationship, peace is found in forgiveness. It begins with willingness to apply the above mentioned principles of the Course's teaching to the example you give, which releases it from the ego's interpretation of every victim/victimizer situation. It is now seen in a different light and for a different purpose. While the feeling of victimization may remain and should not be denied, the source is no longer seen as another's attack, but as the mind that chose to deny its true Identity as God's innocent Son. The attack then becomes an opportunity to see the guilt engendered by this choice in its projected form. Early in the text, Jesus gives us a process to help us practice forgiveness in any situation: **".... the first step in the undoing is to recognize that you actively decided wrongly, but can as actively decide otherwise... Your part is merely to return your thinking to the point at which the error was made, and give it over to the Atonement in peace. Say this to yourself as sincerely as you can, remembering that the Holy Spirit will respond fully to your slightest invitation: I must have decided wrongly, because I am not at peace. I made the decision myself, but I can also decide otherwise. I want to decide otherwise, because I want to be at peace. I do not feel guilty, because the Holy Spirit will undo all the consequences of my wrong decision if I will let Him. I choose to let**

Him, by allowing Him to decide for God for me" (T.5.VII.6:3,5,6,7,8,9,10,11). Because the true source of victimization is a decision in the mind, this format addresses the problem with no mention of the "attacker." The important thing is taking responsibility for the mind's choice without judging this mistaken choice as a sin. When this occurs, peace is possible no matter what kind of attacks may be hurled at us. Then, with the Holy Spirit's help, you may choose to take steps to improve the relationship in some way or discontinue it altogether. When the Holy Spirit has been chosen, whatever follows will be loving for both you and the other person.

Q #840: If the world I see is the guilt in my mind projected outwards, then does that not make me responsible for the suffering I see in this world? Jesus healed the sick with his right perception, so how can I practically apply that to the suffering I see in this world?

A: We do not know whether or not the historical Jesus healed the sick. There are no historical documents of his life, besides the gospel accounts, which were written many years after his death and whose factual accuracy is disputed by scripture scholars. The Course does not teach that Jesus heals our minds or our bodies. The healing Jesus teaches in the Course is accomplished by a choice in the mind. The mind that chose to identify with the ego thought system is sick, and is healed as it learns to choose against the ego by choosing the Holy Spirit. Neither Jesus nor the Holy Spirit makes that choice for us. As Jesus tells us in the text: **"I cannot choose for you, but I can help you make your own right choice" (T.3.IV.7:11).** That is the ultimate healing goal of *A Course in Miracles*. It is achieved through a process of exposing the sickness of the ego's thought system: its dynamics, purpose, goal, and painful effects. Since the ego's greatest defense is denial, its exposure is the beginning of its undoing/healing. Exposing the ego weakens it, just as some forms of bacteria cannot survive in the dry warmth of sunlight. Thus, bringing the darkness of the ego's sickness to the light of forgiveness is the healing Jesus teaches in the Course.

What we are directly responsible for is the mind's choice for separation, which is the source of guilt and the world's suffering (including our own). The suffering we perceive is the reflection of our own pain, perception is interpretation. The problem lies not in seeing suffering in the world, but in seeing those who suffer as different from ourselves. We are taught in the Course that *everyone* who chooses separation is sick and in need of healing: **"A sick person perceives himself as separate from God" (M.22.6:5).** Sickness is thus equated with separation, and so healing is the undoing of separation. Everyone who identifies with the body is suffering, whether the pain is obvious, or camouflaged as pleasure. In the insanity of the ego's plan for "life" apart from God in the body, pleasure and pain are the same: **"Pain compels attention, drawing it away from Him (the Holy Spirit) and focusing upon itself. Its purpose is the same as pleasure, for they both are means to make the body real. What shares a common purpose is the same" (T.27.VI.1:3,4,5 italics added).** It is not our responsibility to determine who is in need of help, not to mention the fact that we could not make the distinction if we wanted to. In the ego's upside-down thinking we are confused about everything, especially pain and pleasure. **Sin [separation/sickness] shifts from pain to pleasure, and again to pain. For either witness is the same, and carries but one message: 'You are here, within this body, and you can be hurt. You can have pleasure, too, but only at the cost of pain'" (T27.VI.2:1,2,3).** Given this predicament, our only responsibility is to allow the Holy Spirit to heal our minds through the practice of forgiveness. Whenever we find ourselves upset about anything in the world, Jesus would have us see an opportunity to remember that we have chosen to believe the ego's message that the body is real and, reminiscent of Pogo's claim, we are "it." The healing Jesus offers in the Course is focused on this belief, which is the true source of everyone's pain. The ego's lie has made us sick, and the Holy Spirit's truth will heal us.

If you choose to do something to alleviate a specific form of suffering in the world, the real goal remains allowing the Holy Spirit to heal your mind of the thought of separation. Choosing this as the purpose of your work is a truly meaningful contribution to the Sonship. At the end of the text, Jesus' healing message to all of us is the same: **"In every difficulty, all distress, and each perplexity Christ calls to you and**

gently says, 'My brother, choose again.' He would not leave one source of pain unhealed, nor any image left to veil the truth" (T.31.VIII.3:2,3).

Q #841: Are we in the process of the Last Judgment? Is this the Apocalypse?

A: Many people view the disasters that have occurred and are still occurring around the world as heralding the Apocalypse and the Last Judgment, as described in the Bible. According to the Bible, the Last Judgment is the final phase of God's punishment of sinners. The Course's definition of the Last Judgment is radically different. In *A Course in Miracles*, the Last Judgment is the end of the process of creation, not of punishment: **"It is a final healing rather than a meting out of punishment, however much you may think that punishment is deserved. Punishment is a concept totally opposed to right-mindedness, and the aim of the Last Judgment is to restore right-mindedness to you. The Last Judgment might be called a process of right evaluation. It simply means that everyone will finally come to understand what is worthy and what is not"** (T.2.VIII.3:3,4,5,6). The true meaning of the Apocalypse flows from this; it is solely connected with the process of freeing our minds to **"choose to preserve only what is good . . . [and] inevitably disown its [the mind's] miscreations which, without belief, will no longer exist"** (T.2.VIII.4:3,5).

This is why Jesus assures us that the world will end not in a conflagration but rather **"with the benediction of holiness upon it. When not one thought of sin remains, the world is over. It will not be destroyed nor attacked nor even touched. It will merely cease to seem to be"** (M.14:2:9,10,11).

From the perspective of *A Course in Miracles*, thus, the Last Judgment pertains to life and love, not to death and fear (T.2.VIII.5). It is the merciful call within our own minds beckoning us to return to the eternal peace in which we were created by God (W.pl.10.4:1). Correcting the traditional view, Jesus therefore assures us that God's Final Judgment is not to be feared, but gladly welcomed: **"You are My holy Son, forever innocent, forever loving and forever loved, as limitless as your Creator, and completely changeless and forever pure. Therefore awaken and return to Me. I am your Father and you are My Son"** (W.pl.10.5:1,2,3).

Q #842: Is this correct? The only thing that can hurt you are the thoughts you have right now. Nothing external or in the world can hurt you; only your interpretation of it can hurt you. The thoughts in your mind will try to convince you that what is happening in the world *is* you and is happening *to* you. In light of this, can I go through my entire life as a body in the world with paranoid and angry thoughts and still know -- even though it seems otherwise -- that all this has nothing to do with *me*?

A: The core message Jesus conveys to us in many ways throughout *A Course in Miracles* is that nothing other than our own thoughts can hurt us. **"I can be hurt by nothing but my thoughts"** is the title of a workbook lesson (W.pl.281), echoing what he said in an earlier lesson: **" . . . once you understand it is impossible that you be hurt except by your own thoughts, the fear of God must disappear"** (W.pl.196.8:3; see also W.pl.75.5; W.pl.190.5; T.20.IV.1). Yet, in the end, even our own hurtful thoughts are nothing. We have never stopped being the invulnerable, perfect Son of a perfect Father. Imperfection of any kind is impossible in reality.

Importantly, what Jesus adds to this teaching is that **"I can elect to change all thoughts that hurt"** (W.pl.284), which means that if you go through your entire life with paranoid and angry thoughts, you have elected not to change them. Note, though, that Jesus does not say *"I must elect . . ."*; just *"I can elect . . ."* Granted, these thoughts are coming from your ego self, not your true self, but they would not be there at all unless you had a reason for not letting them go. That really should not be

ignored, given the craftiness of the ego in sustaining its presence. Because our minds are split, we can be aware of terribly hateful, judgmental thoughts, yet know they have nothing to do with who we truly are. But if you are not *experiencing* your true, right-minded self, then, as a decision-making mind, you must have chosen to identify with your wrong-minded self instead. As minds, we can observe our ego thoughts, which is what Jesus strongly urges us to do; but the purpose of the observing is to enable us to take the next step with him and realize that the decision to hold onto these thoughts is a decision *not* to be peaceful.

Thus, you just want to be sure that your ego is not sneaking in the back door in your practice of this principle. Recalling the old saying that the devil can cite Scripture for its own purpose, we can say something similar about the Course: the ego can use Jesus' teachings in the Course as a means of sustaining itself **(T.5.VI.4)** .

Q #843: I have a question regarding the fear of being rejected, ridiculed, etc., when quoting or even referring to *A Course in Miracles* . I have never read any other spiritual book that leaves me with such fears, but also with such calmness and protection. Does this mean that the Course is my path or should I rather turn away and find something that "lifts me up" easier? I sometimes am quite afraid that what the book does is manipulate and brainwash me into a stupid numbness. Is this just the resistance to "learning"? Personally I do feel a very strong sense of relationship with Jesus, but that looks quite a bit different, and is much easier. Does Jesus mean to "crack us open" and cut us out of the eggshell we have surrounded us with? I find this definitely frightening. I seem to be losing all the people that I love and/or depend upon. Will this ever be getting any better?

A: The Course stirs up fear in most of its students. This is normal, but temporary, because it is bringing to the surface of our minds some awful stuff we have been afraid to look at. Jesus' purpose, though, is not to make us more fearful, but rather to help us see that our fear of what is within us is not justified. It has all been based on false beliefs about God and ourselves. When you look within with Jesus' comforting love next to you, as he asks us to do, your fear would begin to subside, or at least stay under control. If you already have a nice relationship with him, which you seem to have, why not just stay with that? After all, that is the whole point of working with the Course -- to develop a trusting, close relationship with Jesus, so that you would feel less guilt and fear. You would be practicing the Course if you did just that, and shared only that with others. You needn't talk about the Course's teachings at all. And it would be perfectly fine to bring in the other spiritual books and paths that help bring you closer to God's Love.

Q #844: In the answer to Question #589 on psychic powers, you told the questioner that if he or she thinks they know the specific purpose for something that they are doing or saying to be helpful to someone, then they are probably coming from their wrong mind. Could that be a general rule of thumb for all of us following this path even if it does not concern psychic powers, that we really do not know why what we say or do for someone may be helpful?

A: Yes, that is a pretty safe bet. And the reasoning behind this is that nearly every reason we may come up with for what is helpful about what we are doing will come from the perspective of seeing ourselves and others as bodies, with specific needs **(T.1.VI.1,2)** . But from the perspective, of *A Course in Miracles* , there are only two possible reasons for doing anything. Either we are wanting to reinforce our investment in the ego thought system or we are wanting to release that investment through forgiveness. And when our focus remains on bodies, to the exclusion of the mind -- where the only problem and the only real choice reside -- we are maintaining our commitment to the ego and its belief in the reality of the separation and all its effects. That is not to say that this is our conscious intention, but then the ego never wants us to be aware of what we are really up to when we are listening to its voice.

Using the Course's metaphor of the dream for our lives, our reasons for doing things always come from the perspective of the dream figures, and not from the perspective of the dreamer, which is who we really are within the split mind. And so all our seeming reasons for doing things continue to make the dream and all its figures real and keep us asleep and dreaming, which of course is the ego's purpose. But when we are in our right mind, all of our choices will be leading us to identify increasingly with the dreamer, so that our understanding will grow that we are only ever choosing between continuing to dream and waking up (e.g., **T.4.I.4:4,5,6,7**; **T.10.I.2,3**; **T.18.II**) .

And so that is why Jesus tells us very early in the workbook that we are never upset for the reason we think (**W.pl.5**) . We think we are upset because of what seems to be happening to the dream figures in the world, but Jesus is trying to help us see that we are upset because we are choosing to dream a dream that represents the ego's content of sin, guilt and fear, so that we do not have to take responsibility for our choice in the mind for the ego. And so if none of us is ever upset for the reason we think, and our upset has nothing to do with what is happening in our lives -- the dream -- how could we know what specifically would be truly helpful for ourselves or anyone else?

We are only ever truly helpful to ourselves and others when we are remembering the only meaningful choice we ourselves have -- to which teacher shall we listen, to guide our perception of what seems to be happening to ourselves and others -- the ego or the Holy Spirit (**T.26.V.1**) . And our remembering of that choice serves as a simple reminder to others that they have the same choice (**M.5.III.2**) . That is the only real reason for doing anything. The form of what we do will then reflect an appreciation of shared rather than separate interests, but the form itself is never what is helpful. It is always the underlying content, which will be leading us all gently out of the dream of separation, toward an awakening to the glorious Self that we all share, and are (**T.22.IV.7:8**) .

Q #845: In one of your statements you said imagine walking through this world loving everyone you meet, which would be a state of complete forgiveness. However, I have not known or heard of anyone who has ever reached this state no matter how long they study *A Course in Miracles* . In fact, I read about people who have been studying the Course for twenty years who are still at square one, carrying hate, envy, etc., for someone. And I'm around Course students all the time who have been studying for years and they don't seem different from anyone else. More knowledgeable concerning the Course, yes -- more capable of forgiving, no. I don't know any Course students who have moved up the ladder in any real sense. Why continue studying the Course if after 15 or 20 years one is still losing one's temper, not being able to forgive, still begging for help in seeing these difficult life situations through the eyes of Jesus? What's the point when the Course teaches it's already over and no one is left behind? Why put all this time into something so difficult to understand when it gets you nowhere? The Course is beautiful but it does not seem to have any practical value.

A: You sound pretty frustrated with your experience with the Course. Jesus never says it's an easy path and it does require a great deal of patience with ourselves (and others!), as we uncover all the various aspects of the ego thought system and become increasingly aware of the connection in our beliefs between our judgments and attacks and our need to preserve the self we believe we are.

In one sense, because the ego is a total thought system, which in itself is not mitigated nor modified in the least by our study and practice of the Course, we are always back at square one when we are identifying with it. The ego is pure, unadulterated hatred, attack and murder and this does not change, no matter how long we have been studying the Course. What hopefully changes is how long we continue to give life to the ego before we are willing to ask for a different Teacher, for the Holy Spirit too is a total thought system -- one of pure, unadulterated love. So it's not that we stop getting angry and judging and hating, but the periods of time when we choose against that anger and hatred gradually increase, as we begin to recognize sooner when we have chosen the ego and can acknowledge its cost to our peace and joy. Yes, at the very end, at the top of the ladder, we will no longer get angry or hate or judge. But to expect

ourselves -- or others -- to be free of judgment and anger as we progress up the ladder is not a realistic expectation. After all, Jesus nowhere in the Course tells us not to get angry -- he just asks us to accept that it is never justified (e.g., **T.30.VI.1:1**; **M.17.8:6**) .

It is helpful to remember that we are simply not in a position to judge anyone's progress with the Course, including our own (**T.18.V.1:5,6**). When we judge others, we rely on external behavior -- form -- and we simply do not know how another's mind may be vacillating between right-minded and wrong-minded content. If we can have compassion for the fear and resistance that others may experience in this process of letting go of judgment, we will also be able to be gentler with ourselves when the resistance is great. Again, it is helpful to remember that the judgment and hatred serve a purpose -- self-preservation of the ego, and therefore, of the self we believe we are. And so the resistance will be tremendous and the progress may at times seem snail-like in its pace. But again, we are not in a position to judge anyone's progress on this path, including our own.

It may also help to consider a larger context for the healing process that the Course is attempting to foster, acknowledging at the same time that using a linear temporal framework can be a bit misleading. The Course has been available for about 25-30 years. We are attempting to undo a thought system that we have spent thousands, even millions of years investing in and making real (**T.2.VIII.2:5**) . Twenty years of attempting to understand the ego's thought system as well as the Course's thought system of correction and then applying its principles, which will necessarily shift in terms of their application as our understanding of the Course deepens, is nothing in comparison. Of course, it's not really the amount of time studying and practicing the Course but the level of guilt and fear we allow ourselves to get in touch with so that they can be undone that determines our progress. And for most of us, the fear of losing the self we cherish as real is what secretly motivates us to continue to judge and hate and attack and justify those perceptions. And because of the many levels at which the Course is written, which really reflect corrections for the many layers of the ego thought system, we can fool ourselves into believing we are practicing its principles when we are subtly reinforcing our egos.

And so each of us who sees the Course as our spiritual path must ask ourselves honestly -- am I putting the Course's principles into practice or am I simply studying the Course, attempting to keep it as primarily an intellectual exercise? It can take many years of study before our fear level subsides enough to allow ourselves to hear what Jesus is really saying. The Course's purpose is not simply to teach us to stop judging and hating, but to learn to recognize at deeper and deeper levels what the costs of that judgment and hatred are. For that is what motivates us to let go of our judgments and hatreds and release the fear that maintains that forgiveness will lead to self- annihilation.

Your experience with the Course and its students sounds quite negative, but there are many who, although not claiming to have reached the top rung of the ladder, do report experiencing major shifts in their perceptions of others and themselves as a result of applying the Course's principles of forgiveness. And many students also report that others -- friends and family -- have observed big changes in the Course student without knowing just what exactly may have brought it about. It is only the ego that would want to deny any shifts in allegiance away from the ego and toward the Holy Spirit.

You may also wish to consider that *A Course in Miracles* may just not be your own particular spiritual path, and that certainly has to be okay. There may be some other form of spirituality that will help you to release your own anger and judgments and take the steps that will lead you back home, where we are all heading, no doubt stumbling and falling at times along the way, but still progressing surely towards that inevitable outcome, when we will truly know that "it's already over and no one is left behind."

Q #846: Can you please advise me how to look at the darkness with Jesus or the Holy Spirit? Sometimes my ego wants me to feel inferior or worthless, especially when my wife is telling me that she thinks I am a

cheat, a sneak, a thief, a hypocrite etc. A part of me tells me she is right because I love someone who can't love me and uses me for her own needs. I need to forgive both women and myself.

A: *A Course in Miracles* teaches that the way we look at the darkness with Jesus or the Holy Spirit is through the process of forgiveness. This means recognizing the real source of the problem (the mind) so it can be healed. The attack against the Self originated in the mind when it chose separation and identified with the ego. It was then intensified when the mind chose to forget the choice it made for separation, thus refusing to take responsibility for it and projecting blame onto persons, things and situations external to itself. The result is profound guilt, and feelings of *being* a cheat, thief and hypocrite, as well as *having been* cheated, robbed and deceived. These feelings are then projected out and experienced in some form, such as the situation you describe. In this activity of the mind lies the source of every conflict in the world, as well as in our personal lives. Looking at the darkness with Jesus through forgiveness begins with a little willingness to accept that this is true, and that we are wrong about our interpretation of every situation. We need not strive to see innocence, beauty or light in others. Rather, we walk in forgiveness by seeing the layers of judgment we have used to cover the innocence, beauty and light that is theirs and ours. It is our denial of these judgments that keeps them in place and casts a shadow on the light preventing us from seeing the Christ in anyone including ourselves, which accounts for feelings of unworthiness and inferiority.

Although these feelings have their real source in the choice for separation outlined above, they find their justification in the dream in some specific form, such as the extramarital affair you describe. The specific circumstances provide the opportunity to be both victim and victimizer, thus accomplishing the true goal of the special relationship, in which guilt is projected, defended and justified. This is certainly not what the goal seems to be, but it is what the teaching of the Course reveals is the true nature of all of our relationships. Every special relationship also serves as the means for satisfying the seemingly endless needs that arise from the deep sense of lack the separation thought evokes. Practicing forgiveness means seeing these hidden dynamics for what they are: the ego's dance of guilt and specialness underlying all the feelings you describe. This is the first step in bringing the ego's darkness to the light of forgiveness. It has nothing to do with changing behavior. The miracle/forgiveness is seeing differently; in other words, a shift in perception. The shift is from the body/behavior to the mind/thought. The following passage from the manual expresses both the simplicity of the process and its "difficulty" due to our identification with the body: **"What is the single requisite for this shift in perception? It is simply this; the recognition that sickness is of the mind, and has nothing to do with the body... For with this recognition is responsibility placed where it belongs; not with the world, but on him who looks on the world and sees it as it is not. He looks on what he chooses to see. No more and no less. The world does nothing to him. He only thought it did" (M.5.11.3:1,2,5,6,7,8,9).** The term "body" refers not only to the physical body but the psychological and emotional body as well. "World" includes everything we believe makes up the world of bodies, such as relationships. A careful reading of the passage tells us that what you are feeling has nothing to do with the women in your life, nor with the nature of your relationships with them. The feelings and judgments come from a choice in the mind to identify with the ego which precedes the experience of the relationships. Willingness to recognize this and accept responsibility for the choice brings the cause back to the mind where Jesus and the Holy Spirit abide as symbols of the part of the mind that does not identify with the ego/body. It is then possible to hear Their voice guiding all relationships in keeping with our oneness rather than specialness. The only thing required at this point is not to interfere with judgments about what or who is right or wrong, or how to see or feel differently. Jesus gives us clear instructions and a beautiful prayer to help us in our process: **"Keep but one thought in mind and do not lose sight of it, however tempted you may be to judge any situation, and to determine your response by judging it. Focus your mind only on this:**

*I am not alone, and I would not intrude the past upon my Guest.
I have invited Him, and He is here.
I need do nothing except not to interfere"* (T.16 . I.3:8,9,10,11,12).

Q #847: Is the soul a unit of Christ?

A: *A Course in Miracles* does not use the term soul except in reference to the Bible: **“The term “soul” is not used except in direct biblical quotations... It would, however, be an equivalent of “spirit,” with the understanding that, being of God, it is eternal and was never born” (C.1.3:2,3).** The Course also uses the term mind to refer to the true Identity of God's Son. In this Mind, God and His Son, Who is the Christ, are one: **“Christ is the Son of God Who is in no way separate from His Father, Whose every thought is as loving as the Thought of His Father by which He was created (T.11.VIII.9:4).**

We are taught in the Course that the dream of separation began when : **“Into eternity [the eternal mind] , where all is one, there crept a tiny, mad idea [separation] , at which the Son of God remembered not to laugh” (T.27.VIII.6:2).** When the thought of separation is taken seriously, the Son falls asleep and dreams a dream of separation in which there seem to be individual fragments of the one Son. This split off part of the mind, which seems to have a separate existence, could be considered a “unit of Christ.” In reality Christ is a whole that cannot be split into separate units. By choosing to identify with the thought of separation, however, the wholeness of the Identity of Christ is “forgotten,” but it is not shattered. Thus, while part of the mind sleeps and dreams it is a body, there is a part that does remember the truth.

Meanwhile, each seeming “unit” is responsible for recognizing the choice the mind makes to remain asleep when it chooses to identify with the body in the dream of separation. By teaching us that we pay a heavy price for this choice (losing awareness of our true Identity as Christ), Jesus motivates us to learn to make another choice. This is learned gradually through the practice of forgiveness, whereby we learn to see in every experience in the dream the reflection of the mind's choice to identify with separation (the ego) or with truth (the Holy Spirit).

When a final choice is made to identify only with the Holy Spirit, separation will be forgotten and the wholeness of Christ will be remembered. This will occur when every illusion has been forgiven, and every belief that there is something outside of oneness is relinquished. In this awakening the dream will end, and the wholeness of Christ will be restored to awareness.

Q #848: Our belief in time, within the ego framework of separation, means that we experience an unfolding not just of our own lives, but also of a whole historical process, making us appear to be dependent on the achievements and failures of our forebears. While teaching that time does not exist in the Mind of God (and therefore does not exist at all), the Course nevertheless inserts itself into the historical, i.e., temporal, sequence – illustrated by the fact, which you have pointed out before, that the “psychological approach” of the Course is “heavily based on Freud's insights into the human psyche.” The point is made even more explicitly in one of the *Lighthouse* articles, which asks, “Why this insane fear of the truth?” And answers: “It is one of *A Course in Miracles*’ important contributions to world spirituality that it supplies the answer in a way that Saint Paul’s famous problem, for example, was never really answered – an answer, incidentally, that was incapable of being understood or accepted in a pre-Freudian age.” Doesn't this suggest that human consciousness evolves through history, and that the message from eternity that is *A Course in Miracles* is in some way dependent on that evolution?

A: While believing we are in time, we will necessarily use the symbols of time, both to assist us in understanding relationships that are not truly temporally linear, but from our perspective seem to unfold in some logical sequence across time, and to communicate to others who have no reason yet to even question the reality of time and space (**W.pl.184.9**) . But it would be a mistake to give explanations based on time any more reality than we give to any other aspect of the ego thought system. Time is an illusory conceptual filter through which we process shifts in our understanding that happen in the mind outside of time and space, while we still want to believe the world and our individual selves are real.

If we consider that there truly is no linear time and everything that can possibly happen within the world of time and space all exists simultaneously in the mind as potential experience that is already over (T.26.V.3) , then we can begin to grasp that there can be no truly causal relationship between events "in time." If we consider the mind as holographic, then any moment in time simply represents the totality of thoughts that we are choosing to allow into our awareness at that one moment. And each moment in time as our ego mind has set it up seems to contain memories of what has come before, an experience of what is happening now, and thoughts and musings about what may happen in the future. But these distinctions are simply tricks of the ego mind to make sin, guilt and fear seem to have a multidimensional reality as past, present and future (Kenneth Wapnick's audiotope, *From Time to Timelessness* , elaborates on this translation from the concepts of the ego mind to the seeming external reality of the world of time and space). For sin rests on a belief in a past that is already over, that cannot be undone, that is having consequences in the present, with the certainty of an even worse hell off in the future (T.15.I.6) . And yet it is only the choice in the present moment in the mind that makes any of this seem real to us, and that is a choice that can just as easily be undone in the present by asking for a different Teacher in our mind (T.15.I8.9) .

To return to the specific issues raised in your question in light of this understanding of the holographic, nontemporal, nonspatial nature of the mind -- there is a moment experienced in time that includes the thought that there was a distant past when Jesus walked the earth, and also the thought of a less distant past when Freud elaborated his understanding of the nature of the mind, including its defenses of denial and projection. But these events do not exist in the past as causal antecedents to the present day Course, but are only thoughts we hold in our mind now to explain in a less fearful way in time how we seem to be coming to an understanding of the principles of forgiveness that are reflected in the Course.

Jesus remains always outside of time and space, offering the correction for the ego thought system, but we interpose conceptual filters, including time, between ourselves and his message of pure love, to keep him and his love at a safe distance. The hologram of the mind may just as likely contain a thought of a present moment that includes a recent past in which Jesus has explained everything we need to know about our blocks to his love and we have willingly embraced his teaching, forgiving all our brothers and accepting the Atonement for ourselves, without the thought of a distant past with a crucified Jesus, without the thought of a more recent past with the brilliant insights of a Sigmund Freud, and without the thought of a book called *A Course in Miracles* . Salvation does not depend on anything that happens in time! It only depends on our willingness to look at and let go of the blocks to the awareness of love's presence that we continue to cling to in our minds right now. And the forms in which we may choose to experience that only reflect the symbols that are personally most meaningful for us in our undoing process right now, and nothing more (M.2.3) .

Kenneth Wapnick's book, *A Vast Illusion* , provides a much more extensive discussion of the nature and uses of time, from the perspective of both of the teachers in our mind.

Q #849: In *The Most Commonly Asked Questions about A Course in Miracle* , it is said in several different places that the mind is never in the body, and that it is impossible to answer "where it is." This is very confusing to me. Does the mind not temporarily reside in a body while it is animated (alive) and where our lessons are being learned? Is it not the mind that animates a body? Isn't the life force and the mind one and the same? If not, WHAT animates a body for a while until its demise? Is it not the mind which chooses to inhabit a body for learning purposes?

I once had an experience during which my mind (or was it my consciousness?) seemingly left the body and merged with what felt like the All, where I felt whole, and no more questions were needed. I no longer felt like an "I" but an indescribable sense of "neutrality," like nothing and everything at once. What was that? Did this have anything to do with the mind?

A: The body is simply an illusory projection of the mind, but it remains a thought *within* the mind, animated by the mind's desire for that thought to appear alive, just as in a dream (e.g., **T.27.VIII.1:1,2; W.pII.5.3:1**) . In fact, the parallel with our night dreams can be very enlightening. When you dream at night, does your mind inhabit the body of the figure you think you are while you are dreaming? No, the dream figure is simply a thought playing out across the mind's screen, as long as your mind chooses to continue to sleep and dream. The body of the dream figure is not alive, it only seems to be alive and real while you continue to dream (**T.27.VIII.4**) . Upon awakening, it vanishes, as if it never existed at all, although it may be held in your memory, perhaps for only a fleeting moment. Jesus is telling us that our waking "life" is as much a dream as our sleeping dreams, and the self we think we are as much an imaginary figure as the self in our sleeping dreams, existing only in our mind (**T.10.I.2; T.18.II.5**) . Granted that may not be our experience, but neither is it our experience while we are dreaming at night, believing we are that figure in our dream.

What is experienced as an out-of-body experience, such as the one you describe, using the dream metaphor again, would be akin to some glimmering recognition while you are still dreaming that you are not a figure in the dream but are the mind (or consciousness - they are the same) that is dreaming the entire dream, that everything within the dream is your projection and thus you are identified with the whole rather than with any of the seeming fragments within the dream that have their own seeming separate interests, in conflict with the other fragments and forces within the dream (**T.28.II.7:1,2,3,4**) . And so, identified with the dreamer and its total projection rather than any figures within the projection, there can be no questions or needs, replaced instead by a sense of neutrality or peace, for there are no sides to be taken. This whole remains as a symbol within the split mind, but if it is not being used as a defense against the guilt in the mind, it can symbolize the wholeness that is our true reality beyond the split mind.

Q #850: What does the successful completion of *A Course in Miracles* look like? I was disappointed to read that Helen did not make it. When I was reading *Absence from Felicity* , I was horrified to read about the nature of Helen's death; it seemed gruesome. How could this be? One year ago I read about the illusion of sickness and what it means. I was a chronically sick person, but once I believed that sickness was an illusion like the Matrix, I never was never sick again. This made quite an impression on me. How could Helen have died that way when I could remove sickness with a minor revelation?

A: It appears that you are confusing form and content by concluding that Helen "did not make it" because of the nature of her death. Most people would look to that as a kind of criterion of her spiritual advancement; but it would be a mistake to do so. Kenneth also stated in his account of her death that there was a totally peaceful look on her face. Jesus had told her that he would come for her when she died, and her peaceful countenance seemed to confirm that.

When we use the nature of a person's death as a criterion, we would have to ask ourselves, Well, what about Jesus? His death was rather gruesome if you judge entirely by what appeared to happen to his body. Yet he tells us in the Course that he did not experience it as a gruesome event at all (**T.6.I.5**) . That was the lesson he was passing on to us and asking us to demonstrate as well: **"Teach not that I died in vain. Teach rather that I did not die by demonstrating that I live in you"** (**T.11.VI.7:3,4**) . The condition of one's body (the form) is not necessarily an indicator of the content of one's mind -- of whether or not Jesus lives in us. In this sense, there is no way of saying what the successful completion of the Course would look like, perhaps other than to say that an inner state of undisturbed peace would somehow radiate through a person who would appear to be "normal" in every other respect. This could be a person paralyzed from a spinal cord injury, the plumber who just fixed a broken pipe in your kitchen, or the surgeon who just transplanted a liver. The beginning of Lesson 155 says of such a person that he or she would **"smile more frequently"** (**W.pl.155.1:2**) . That is all that would stand out, so to speak.

There is no way we can know the whole of another person's Atonement path, anymore than we can know our own, and therefore we should not judge where we think a person is, spiritually. As we move along in our journey back to God and our true Self, Jesus encourages us to approach everything in our lives as classrooms in which we can gradually and gently learn that everything outside Heaven, including our individual selves, is an illusion. Thus, when we are sick or even dying, Jesus can guide us through that experience to help us learn that the peace in our minds cannot be affected by anything of the body. What a valuable lesson! He starts with wherever we are at, whatever the condition of our bodies, and he just invites us to ask him in as our teacher. That is the way most of us learn.

As your experience testifies, though, we can also learn in one instant that our bodies are completely under the control of our minds, and then there would no longer be any symptoms, unless the mind chose to use the body that way. That is not necessarily an indicator of spiritual advancement, though. We do have very powerful minds, and our bodies do only what our minds tell them to do; but the completion of our Atonement path involves much more than that.

Question #262 discusses the suffering and death of enlightened beings, along with other pertinent issues about death.

Q #851: It seems that what I experience as “anxiety attacks” have gotten much worse since I started working with *A Course in Miracles* again (after a 10-year hiatus). These attacks are so intensely frightening and so difficult to describe in words; they are utterly paralyzing. It's as if I am totally engulfed by the blackest of clouds; or standing in a sea of black morass pulling me down into an abyss of despair. The Course feels like insanity itself; it feels as if I am going crazy. My brain seems to quit working. Cries to the Holy Spirit for help seem to be unheard; then I get angry at Him and am convinced that this is all one big hoax -- an exercise in supreme denial of what's happening in this world, and to me. The confusion is so total and I can't seem to regain my bearings. These episodes can last anywhere from hours to days (sometimes weeks, months, even years); medical intervention (antidepressants, therapy) has never helped me for long. I have never gotten to the bottom of this no matter how often I ask to show it to me; that I am willing to look at it. Nothing. Just continuously more of it. And doing the lessons feels like a joke. Is it really possible that the ego is fighting for its survival in this manner? I keep assuring it that it's not going to be killed, just its role will be reversed (“be the ego's master, not its servant”). Makes no difference.

A: Anxiety, intensely uncomfortable as it may be, is simply one of the ego's many defenses to preserve itself. It's really no different in purpose from anger, depression, boredom, guilt, or any of the other myriad of emotions we experience in our lives as bodies (e.g., **W.pl.5.1:3,4**) . A few things to consider. Although your experience is that you have the willingness to get to the bottom of the anxiety but that your pleas to be shown are to no avail, there is really no one other than yourself who can bring the buried thoughts into your awareness -- not Jesus, not the Holy Spirit, not anyone. The role of Jesus or the Holy Spirit is to look with you at what *you* allow into your awareness, but they play no active role in uncovering the contents of the unconscious.

Your part in this process, as well as the Holy Spirit's, is clearly described in the following passage: **“The Holy Spirit asks of you but this; *bring to Him every secret you have locked away from Him* . Open every door to Him, and bid Him enter the darkness and lighten it away. At your request He enters gladly. He brings the light to darkness if you make the darkness open to Him. But what you hide He cannot look upon. He sees for you, and unless you look with Him He cannot see. The vision of Christ is not for Him alone, but for Him with you. *Bring, therefore, all your dark and secret thoughts to Him* , and look upon them with Him. He holds the light, and you the darkness. They cannot coexist when both of You together look on them. His judgment must prevail, and He will give it to you as you join your perception to His” (T.14.VII.6 ; italics added).** You must uncover the

dark and secret thoughts yourself and bring them to His Light, where you can then look upon them together and see them vanish.

So it may be helpful to acknowledge that you are the one who is responsible for bringing the darkness to the light, and that experiencing anxiety attacks is more preferable to you right now than getting in touch with what you believe lies beneath the anxiety. There is nothing wrong with this and it would simply be an honest acknowledgment that the power of decision, as always, is yours and no one else's (T.8.IV.5:7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14 ; T.14.III.4:3) .

Another thing to consider is that the Course is leading to much more than a role reversal for the ego, and whether you are consciously aware of this or not, at some level your ego is. If you continue to follow the path that the Course is leading you along, at the very end of that journey the ego will not simply become more amenable to your control, but it will literally disappear, and with it the self that you currently believe you are. Now this does not happen until the completion of the forgiveness process, but the ego, with which you are identified, believes it is literally fighting for its life, although, as you say, it is not that the ego will be killed or annihilated. You will simply come to recognize its nothingness (C.2.2:1,2) . But while you remain identified with the ego, you too must experience great anxiety or fear at what the are the implications of the Course's message.

Finally, you want to be sure that you're not pushing yourself to study the Course if you are simply not ready for it yet. Near the end of the text, Jesus cautions, **"And if you find resistance strong and dedication weak, you are not ready. Do not fight yourself"** (T.30.I.1:6,7) . The Course should be a gentle process, but our resistance can make it seem frightening, even painful. So first of all, be gentle with yourself.

A couple of previous Questions, #155 and #355, addressed the issue of panic attacks, which have some observations that could be helpful. In addition, Question #144 offers some thoughts on anxiety from the Course's perspective.

Q #852: Referring to "Redemption must be one" (W.pII.295.1:4), I ask how Jesus or any "individual" can be outside the dream while the rest of us are inside the dream. It seems that Jesus' success in relinquishing his "ego" would have been accomplished for all of us. Yet here in the dream we remain.

A: Yes, "here in the dream we remain," as long as we choose to stay asleep. Meanwhile, the truth is we are all awake with Jesus, who represents the part of the mind that is "outside the dream." The difference for him is that he identifies only with this part of the mind, while those who sleep choose to identify with the ego. Moreover, there is no "individual" who is awake, because awakening means acceptance of the oneness of God's Son. It is a choice for the truth of oneness rather than for the separation of the ego. Neither is anyone actually "inside the dream." For example, although you may dream of roaming the hills of Tuscany during a nocturnal dream, you know as you awake that you were not in Tuscany at all. The problem is not that we dream, but that we identify with the figure in the dream and all the events of the dream. This is a purposeful choice, the goal of which is to be separate and special, reflecting the mind's decision to say no to the Identity God gave His Son.

In reality there is no distinction between Jesus and "the rest of us." Oneness is oneness and *there* we all remain. What keeps this from awareness is the decision to believe that separation offers **"...something more than everything, as if a part of it were separated off and found where all the rest of it is not"** (T.29.VII.2:3). The "something" is specialness. That is what is chosen, cherished, and preferred to redemption, and what distinguishes us from Jesus. He did not actually relinquish the ego. He is the name given to the part of the mind of the Sonship that never bought into the idea of the separation in the first place : **"The man [Jesus] was an illusion, for he seemed to be a separate being, walking by himself, within a body that appeared to hold his self from Self, as all illusions do... he saw the false without**

accepting it as true” (C.5.2:3,5). When the **“tiny, mad idea” (T.27.VIII.6:2)** seemed to occur, part of the mind knew all along that it was impossible. This part of the mind was not obliterated by the sleep of separation. That is why Jesus tells us: **“When I said ‘I am with you always,’ I meant it literally. I am not absent to anyone in any situation” (T.7.III.1:7,8).** Thus, returning to the example of the nocturnal dream in Tuscany, you carry into the dream a sense (memory) of who you are. You do not dream that you are Napoleon roaming the hills, nor do you leave your bed for the trip. Nothing actually happens, although during the dream it seems very real: **“ You recognize from your own experience that what you see in dreams you think is real while you are asleep. Yet the instant you waken you realize that everything that seemed to happen in the dream did not happen at all. You do not think this strange, even though all the laws of what you awaken to were violated while you slept” (T.10.I.2:3,4,5) .** Our analogy ends with the significant distinction that the dream of separation is the result of a choice in the mind, and the projection of guilt for that choice. To defend its choice for separation, the mind denies its power by making a body where external agents seem to be the cause of everything that happens from birth to death. The dream's script, therefore, begins with the cry: “I don't know how I got here, and it is not my fault that I'm here!” Jesus' message from outside the dream is to tell us, first of all, that we are not really here, and secondly that it is our choice to believe that we are. It is resistance to hearing and accepting his message that leads to diversionary considerations, such as the “unfairness” of Jesus' envious position as the first to make it out of the dream, leaving us behind. Most likely he is aware of our “mild irritation” with him for this, and so he tells us: **“There is nothing about me that you cannot attain. I have nothing that does not come from God. The difference between us now is that I have nothing else” (T.1.II.3:10,11,12) .** Our goal, therefore, is to join with Jesus in our oneness by undoing our belief that we have what does not come from God, i.e., separation/ specialness. His loving message in *A Course in Miracles* that the mind that chose separation can choose differently is all the help we need to reach beyond the dream to the truth of our awakening. Jesus quiets every fear that we have been left out of his redemption: **“My mind will always be like yours, because we were created as equals. It was only my decision that gave me all power in Heaven and earth. My only gift to you is to help you make the same decision” (T.5.II.9:1,2,3).**

Q #853: Chapter 4 of “All Are Called”, volume I in *The Message of A Course in Miracles* , goes through a lengthy description of our three selves. I got bogged down several times trying to “cut to the chase.” Please tell me if I got it right: self A is the holy Son of God who for a brief moment freaked out and thereby was no longer a whole. As a result, self A realized that he was now in the land of good and evil and felt guilty for that. Next, self A figured out that if he blamed somebody else -- self B -- then he wouldn't feel guilt any more. So self B became an innocent victim of self A. Self C becomes the victim of the body and hates everybody. And around and around it goes?

A: A valiant effort, but let's see if we can get a little more clarity on this central part of the ego's myth of separation and sin, as uncovered in the Course. The description of the three selves you refer to in Chapter 4 of *The Message of A Course in Miracles, Vol. I*, is actually an extension to the level of the world and individual bodies of what was presented in Chapter 2 to explain the initial A-B-C split at the level of thought in the mind, prior to the projection of bodies and the world. And so it is there, in the mind, that we need to begin, if what you refer to in Chapter 4 is going to make any sense.

Beginning then at the level of mind, self A is not the holy Son of God, but an illusory thought of a separate self that we as the sleeping Son believe we have wrested from God when we wanted the separation from Him to be real. It is a fiction we have made up in our feverish ego dream and identified with, calling it ourselves. And this separate self is the original home of sin and guilt, according to the ego's story, because its life came selfishly at God's expense, destroying His Oneness to bring itself into a separate, autonomous existence.

At this point in the Son's delusional mind, there is nothing else -- no land that self A seems to occupy, no world, and no other self. Now to deal with the immense guilt his ego says is real over destroying God Himself, yes, the Son as self A would like to blame someone else, to dump the guilt elsewhere. But there

is no one else to blame, no other self. So the solution, drawing on the only dynamic available in the Son's split mind -- the thought of separation -- is to separate self A into two selves, B and C, identifying with self B and pushing all the guilt onto self C. Self C, in the Son's insane imagination, now becomes the angry wrathful God who is going to punish the Son, self B, for his sin against Him. But of course, the sin and guilt in self C, now seen as separate from self B, are nothing other than the sin and guilt of self A, split off. But this is what enables the Son, now identified with self B, to believe that the guilt is no longer in him, that he is now "innocent." All of this is as much a delusional fantasy as the initial making of self A.

And so self A has seemed to vanish from the scene, leaving only self B and self C in the mind. As the Son we are now identified with the "innocent" self B, who is the potential victim of self C, in whom all the sin and guilt now reside. Again, this is all happening only at the level of thought. For the drama to play out and allow us to convince ourselves that we are truly "innocent" victims, we need a world of time and space and, in particular, bodies. For bodies are vulnerable and weak, and demonstrate quite convincingly that we are powerless to change in any significant way what happens to us -- clear-cut criteria for victimhood. And so the mind seems to fragment into millions of pieces, but each fragment retains that same progression from a guilty self A to an innocent self B, with all the guilt now residing in a guilty self C, the self split off from self A that we no longer identify with. And every fragment in the Son's mind seems to play out this conflict, now projected from the mind onto the screen of the world, each desperately attempting to affirm its innocence by demonstrating everyone else's guilt. And you need a body to be able to point the finger of blame. Except that every fragment is trying to play the same blame game. And so to ourselves, we are each an innocent self B, but to everyone else, we're another victimizing self C. And the guilt is swapped back and forth, but its reality is never questioned.

It is only when we can shift our identification away from the B-C split in the world back to the guilty but forgotten self A in the mind that we can begin to look at our own guilt, which has nothing to do with the seeming relationship between B and C in the world. For they are only shadows of the thought of guilt in the mind. And when we return our attention to the illusory self A in the mind, we can at last begin to question the reality of the guilt. It is through this process of recognizing first where the guilt originates, and then questioning its reality, which is what the Course means by forgiveness, that we begin to remember the truly innocent self A' that we all share (see chapter 5 of volume I of *The Message*). At the same time, while we still remain identified with the body in the world, we will begin to see self B' and self C' as the same, rather than as different -- both caught in an insane thought system, believing that guilt is real and desperately looking to escape it. Over time, as we practice forgiveness, we will identify more and more with the innocent self A', a reflection of our true Self as Christ, Who has nothing to do with any As or Bs or Cs.

For additional discussion of the splits in the mind which are expressed in the world, see Questions [#176](#) and [#630](#).

Q #854: I come from a completely non-religious background and was never "involved" with God in any way, form or fashion until I "met" *A Course in Miracles* (for which I am so grateful). I am "stuck" on Lesson 41 "God goes with me wherever I go." I've been doing this lesson daily for about a week now because the concept fascinates me so, but despite the diligent practicing as set forth, I have not "reached" God in any sense, although the Course tells me that it is quite possible to do so. It also says: "The way will open, if you believe that it is possible." (8:4) I want to believe, but how does one do that?

A: Another way of stating the content of this lesson is: "the separation never happened, and we remain with God." We cannot truly be anywhere else, and that is why God is with us. However, there is a very important message in the first line in the fifth paragraph: "**We understand that you do not believe all this**" (W.pl.41.5:1). With this single statement, Jesus explains the "stuckness" almost everyone experiences in the practice of the workbook. The first goal of the lesson, therefore, is to help us realize that we do not believe what it says. We learn by contrast just how much we do believe the ego and do not

believe the Holy Spirit, which is one of the important goals of the workbook. A necessary part of the learning process is arriving at precisely the dilemma you describe: the message of the Course inspires us, yet despite diligent practice nothing seems to happen, but we are assured it can be accomplished. The usefulness of this situation is learning to appreciate the intensity of resistance and the full scope of attachment to the ego's belief system. Without this clear recognition, real progress is impossible because the ego's best game is denial. Its life depends on the belief that the body is our true identity, which in turn rests on the denial of the mind's existence, not to mention its power to choose. Jesus tells us early in the text: **"Few appreciate the real power of the mind, and no one remains fully aware of it all the time. However, if you hope to spare yourself from fear [guilt, separation] there are some things you must realize, and realize fully. The mind is very powerful, and never loses its creative force"** (T.2.VI.9:3,4,5).

Finding it difficult to experience God with you is a way to get in touch with the choice in the mind to believe in the reality of the separation, and to identify with the ego thought system. This choice has made the world and the body real in our experience, thereby making God unreal. The mind cannot hold the thought of separation and the thought of God at the same time. Thus, identity with the ego/body and the guilt that accompanies this choice keep the memory of God from awareness. In fact, it is an attack on God: **"If the ego is the symbol of the separation, it is also the symbol of guilt. Guilt is more than merely not of God. It is the symbol of attack on God"** (T.5.V.2:8,9,10). When guilt is gone, God is there.

Guilt is relinquished through the process of forgiveness, which begins with the willingness to look at the ego in our lives in light of the principle of projection of guilt. This important principle of the Course tells us that everything we experience in the world is the result of the mind's projection of guilt for choosing to be separate, and to identify with the body. This means that nothing outside of our mind is responsible for how we feel. Learning to look at every relationship in this way takes patient practice, because it is not the way we have taught ourselves to interpret our relationships or our experiences in the world. Doing so teaches us that others are not to blame for our condition, they are guiltless. Seeing others as guiltless is how we learn that we, too, are guiltless, which opens the way for us to remember that we are God's Son and He goes with us: **"Unless you are guiltless you cannot know God, Whose Will is that you know Him... He cannot be known without His Son, whose guiltlessness is the condition for knowing Him"** (T.14.IV.7:1,4).

The instructions for practicing the workbook lessons do not ask that we believe the lessons, nor that we practice them perfectly. It asks only that we do them (W.in.8,9). It is important to honestly recognize that we do *not* believe them, and then forgive ourselves for being afraid of the Course's truth. If we truly knew that God was with us, we would not need the workbook, nor the Course for that matter. The fact that you have become aware that this truth is not your experience means that you have achieved one of the important goals of the workbook lessons: to appreciate the contrast between what you have learned from the ego, and what the Holy Spirit is teaching you in the Course. You then realize how much you need the Holy Spirit's help to unlearn the ego and learn His lessons instead. Practicing each day's lesson as sincerely as you can is sufficient to make steady progress, for that is all you are asked to do. In this is the way made open, because it reflects and strengthens the part of the mind that *does* believe .

Q #855: In *A Course in Miracles*, I am currently doing Lesson 24 "I do not perceive my own best interests" (W.pl.24) where Jesus asks us to say all that we would like to happen in each situation, and that some of the goals we have in each case would conflict with each other. I did my lesson and in each subject my goals did seem to be unified. Now I know that Jesus is correct, and I am not questioning that, but I would like to understand the lesson better, especially when it says our goals are not unified.

A: First, we do not perceive our own best interests because we have split off the part of our minds that does know and that contains the memory of our true Identity. Our goals therefore almost always have to

do with preserving and enhancing our lives in the world, because the fundamental goal of the ego is self-preservation. Most of us think that is in our best interests. Now you might say that is a unified goal, but conflict is bound to erupt because bodies are inherently limited and always changing. Our needs are always changing -- I might need something from you today, but not tomorrow or next week. What I want from you may conflict with your needs and goals, or with what someone else wants. Today my need might be to alleviate my guilt by forgiving you; other days my need would be to alleviate my guilt by attacking you (projection).

Jesus returns to this theme later in the workbook, discussing it in the context of the functions we believe we have in the world -- our "self-made roles" -- these in contrast to our *only* function, which is to accept the Atonement for ourselves through the practice of forgiveness: **"We will accept the function God has given us [forgiveness] , for all illusions rest upon the weird belief that we can make another for ourselves. Our self-made roles are shifting, and they seem to change from mourner to ecstatic bliss of love and loving. We can laugh or weep, and greet the day with welcome or with tears. Our very being seems to change as we experience a thousand shifts in mood, and our emotions raise us high indeed, or dash us to the ground in hopelessness. . . . The images you make give rise to but conflicting goals, impermanent and vague, uncertain and ambiguous. Who could be constant in his efforts, or direct his energies and concentrated drive toward goals like these? The functions which the world esteems are so uncertain that they change ten times an hour at their most secure" (W.pl.186.8:2,3,4,5; 10:2,3,4).**

In the exercise in Lesson 24, Jesus asks us to think of unresolved situations that concern us and to uncover the outcome we want in these situations, then recognizing there are several goals implicit in the outcome we want -- **"these goals are on different levels and often conflict" (W.pl.24.4:3)** . As an illustration let us say the unresolved situations are: (1) I am looking for a job; (2) My son is having problems in school; (3) I am having a dispute with contractors about your house.

The different goals and the conflicts could be as follows: (1) I want a job so I can eat. But on another level, I *don't* want a job so that I can continue to feel unfairly treated. (2) I don't want to see my son having such a hard time; but on another level, there's an ego payoff to seeing him victimized. There might also be authority issues: I would feel severely threatened if my son did better than I did in school -- my self-worth would diminish. (3) Authority issues usually flare up in disputes with contractors or anyone else you hire. You want your house to look nice and be free of defects, so you will be comfortable and others will think positively of you, but it must be done *your* way; you will have no regard for anyone who stands in the way of your achieving what you want. Everything is to be done on your terms. Moreover, your ego would love the fact that the contractor did a poor job -- another victimizer, another innocent victim!

What Jesus is helping us to recognize is that adopting forgiveness as our one and only goal would unify every aspect of our days -- in fact, our entire lives. Conflict would gradually dissolve and we would go about our daily lives more calmly and peacefully.

Q #856: Give me a good meaning of Atonement. I know it means at-onement, no separation, but I need a stronger explanation.

A: At-onement is not a term used in *A Course in Miracles* to define Atonement. Neither does Atonement have any of the meaning traditional Christianity applies to it, which is reparation for sin. In one word the Course gives a new meaning to the term Atonement: sinlessness. As simple as this is, it is in fact a very strong message to the ego whose thought system rests entirely on the belief that the Son of God is guilty for having taken the separation thought seriously. Accepting the Atonement means listening to the Voice of the Holy Spirit, Who speaks for God and tells us that the separation thought is not only not a sin, it never even happened. This is the heart of the Holy Spirit's teaching of Atonement in the Course. Accepting this truth is a process by which guilt is relinquished through forgiveness; the Holy Spirit's

correction for the mistaken belief in separation. In the "Glossary-Index for *A Course in Miracles*," Kenneth Wapnick defines the Atonement as "the Holy Spirit's plan of correction to undo the ego and heal the belief is separation." Our function in this plan, and what makes it meaningful in our daily lives, is the practice of forgiveness: **"Forgiveness is the only function meaningful in time" (T.25.VI.5:3)**.

Atonement, therefore, is not just an intellectual concept to be understood. It has life and becomes our life, to whatever extent we are willing to apply the principle of forgiveness in our relationships. This means seeing in every judgment the projection of our guilt for the mind's choice for separation. That is our only responsibility in the Atonement process: **"The sole responsibility of the miracle worker is to accept the Atonement for himself [learn complete forgiveness]" (T.2.V.5:1)**. Since the choice for separation in the mind is the cause of what we feel, no one/nothing external to the mind can be blamed. Releasing others in this way is how we learn that we, too, are sinless. In that recognition is the Atonement accomplished.

What makes the Atonement a process are the heavy layers of guilt that accompany the choice for the ego and block the Holy Spirit's light. **"It [Atonement] is perfectly clear because it exists in light. Only the attempts to shroud it in darkness have made it inaccessible to those who do not choose to see (T.3.I.6:6,7).** In the ego's twisted thinking, guilt is the justification for not accepting the Atonement. It would have us believe that we are not worthy to be God's innocent Son, and are thus doomed to remain cut off from our Source. What the ego does not tell us is that this is the means by which the separation thought is maintained, the ego is protected and guilt is perpetuated. This vicious circle of the ego is undone only by the mind's decision to choose the Holy Spirit, Whose message is that the belief in the separation has had no effect and the Son of God is innocent. This is stated very simply in the text: **"Everyone has a special part to play in the Atonement [accepting it for himself], but the message given to each one is always the same; God's Son is guiltless" (T.14.V.2:1).** Every encounter is an opportunity to choose between judgment or forgiveness. As forgiveness becomes the goal in every relationship the Holy Spirit's inclusive circle of Atonement gradually replaces the ego's vicious guilt circle of separation and exclusion. Jesus puts the choice before us in the section "The Circle of Atonement:" **"Each one you see you place within the holy circle of Atonement or leave outside, judging him fit for crucifixion or for redemption. If you bring him into the circle of purity, you will rest there with him. If you leave him without, you join him there" (T.14.V.11:1,2,3).**

Q #857: I am currently facilitating an ACIM group and was wondering if there is a guide available which relates chapters in the text to lessons in the student workbook! If there is, could you identify it, and /or let me know how to get one.

A: There really is no one-to-one correspondence between chapters and lessons. The structure of the text is more along the lines of a musical composition with themes, sub-themes, and variations rather than the more traditional text book with subject matter progressing in terms of difficulty and complexity. In that sense, the same ideas are developed in different ways depending on the context of the discussion. Therefore, sections, paragraphs, and even passages could apply to several lessons or parts of lessons.

We are preparing for publication (as of February 2005) an eight-volume commentary on the workbook -- lesson by lesson -- that includes references to the text, the manual for teachers, the two pamphlets (*Psychotherapy* and *The Song of Prayer*), and the poetry of Helen Schucman (*The Gifts of God*). This work is based on the transcript of our tape albums on the lessons in the workbook. This certainly would not be an exhaustive listing of all conceivable cross-references, but we hope it will help students of *A Course in Miracles* gain a more comprehensive grasp of its thought system and the means of implementing it in their daily lives.

Q: #858: You often refer to projection, that is, getting rid of what we do not want by assigning it to someone or something else. In actual fact there is no one out there so projection is just a term that is used to describe an activity of the mind where a fragment of "creation" is catalogued under a heading -- such as the ego. I assume the ego knows that time does not exist as the ego "creates" continuously and holographically to develop multiple responses which address all sorts of causes. We, in our illusory state as human beings, can then access and "live" any of these responses and we actually believe that what we are experiencing is actually happening for the first time. If, as the Course states, we are all one mind, then are my ego-based thoughts only accessible to me or can other minds also "live" my dream? I know that Heaven is the state where all minds are joined and sharing is natural, but what are ego thoughts?

A: We'll address your points more or less in the order you present them:

Projection began ontologically with an attempt to place the made-up guilt over the separation outside of the one ego mind (**T.7.VIII.4:2,3,4, T.13.II.1:1**). Since nothing or no one else existed as a separate entity outside the ego mind, we as the one Son needed to make up something separate to become the repository of that guilt. And so we split the one guilty self we had identified with into a separate guilty self, called "God", and an "innocent" self with which we continued to identify (see [Question #853](#) for further discussion of this split). This basic dynamic involving a made-up self and a made-up other has been the basis for all further projection, which becomes increasingly complex once the shattering of the ego mind into billions of fragments is undertaken as a defense against the made-up angry God in the split mind. But simply stated, projection is nothing more than a defense to avoid taking responsibility for our own ego thoughts (**T.6.II.1,2**). To make the distinction clear between reality and illusion, the Course refers to anything that seems to result from our activity with the ego as a miscreation (e.g., **T.2.II.2:5; T.2.VII.3:13,14,15**).

Although for teaching purposes the Course speaks of the ego as if it were a separate entity that knows and does things, it is really nothing more than an illusory thought system or set of beliefs that our split mind activates when we want to believe the separation from God is real (**T.4.VI.1**). Time and space are among the concepts of this illusory set of beliefs (**T.26.VIII.1:3**). At some level, we know that none of this is true, but we have deliberately decided to deceive ourselves to maintain our individual existence. Ego thoughts are nothing. Our seeming lives are based on reviewing and identifying with aspects of these ego thoughts, and while we review them, we have a choice of teachers, or thought systems, to guide our interpretation of what we are reviewing. The only real value in examining them is to come to a recognition of their ultimate meaninglessness. But while we believe ego thoughts are real, we can seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit or Jesus rather than the ego, enabling us to use them to undo rather than reinforce our belief in their reality.

In principle, there is no reason any of the seeming bits of separate consciousness that we each identify with could not experience the whole of the ego hologram, except that we have set it up so that we each seem to have our own isolated experiences and perceptions to maintain the reality of separation and individuality. So-called psychic experiences often represent the ability to step beyond these self-imposed barriers within the ego mind. So, for example, some psychics report experiencing what other seemingly separate minds have experienced or are experiencing, as if they were living it themselves. We see this as unusual, but from the perspective of the Course's metaphysical teachings, there should be nothing surprising about it. The psychic ability in itself is neutral, its helpfulness dependent only on what purpose it serves (**M.25**) -- guilt and separation or forgiveness and joining, the latter a reflection of the state of Heaven you refer to, where all that is shared is love, for there is nothing else.

Q #859: Lesson 183 asks that we call upon God's Name, and to repeat His Name while sitting silently. I need to have a Name to do this lesson.

A: It is not unintentional that God's Name does not appear anywhere in this lesson, although we are asked to call upon It repeatedly. This helps us realize something we don't want to miss about Jesus' teaching: everything in the world of specifics symbolizes in some way the content we have chosen to identify with in our minds, which is either that of the ego's thought system or the Holy Spirit's thought system. Applied to this lesson, this means that to call upon God's Name or to repeat His Name means to call upon the thought system that reflects His Love. And for us as students of *A Course in Miracles*, that love is symbolized in Jesus. Speaking in the third person in the manual, Jesus discusses calling on *his* name: **"The name of Jesus Christ as such is but a symbol. But it stands for love that is not of this world. It is a symbol that is safely used as a replacement for the many names of all the gods to which you pray. It becomes the shining symbol for the Word of God, so close to what it stands for that the little space between the two is lost, the moment that the name is called to mind" (M.23.4:1,2,3,4).**

So calling upon God's Name shifts our perspective from specialness, specifics, and the offerings and demands of the world, to the perception of our shared interests and our oneness as God's Son -- and that everything other than this is of no worth or meaning.

Jesus does not want us to turn our calling upon God's Name into a ritual or magical incantation of some kind, or to use it as a mantra or a formula for success. Set in the context of the entire Course, "calling on God's Name" could have no meaning other than to be a means of helping us bring everything of our egos to the loving presence in our minds, beyond the world and the body, and back to our selfless identity as expressions of that Love.

Q #860: My question comes from two sentences in chapter two of *A Course in Miracles*.

"There *are* no idle thoughts. All thinking produces form at some level." (T.2.VI.9.13,14).

And this seems to coincide with what quantum physics is saying. However I have also heard Ken say the following: "Everything that this world teaches is false. And even what the new quantum physicists are teaching. The quantum physicists end up falling into the same trap. Because they say that the material world is an illusion, but the thought that underlies it is real. Well the thought that underlies the material world is separation. So that thought is illusory as well."

Could you explain the above quotation, and how it relates.

A: Once we have made the separation real in our minds, there are certain things that inevitably follow, among them the fact that whatever thoughts we entertain will have consequences. The entire fragmented world we see and the separate, individual selves we believe we are have followed from the tiny, mad idea of separation in a deliberate progression, serving a very specific purpose to maintain the reality of the separation in our mind. However, since the initial premise is unreal, everything that follows from it can not be real either. We may experience it all as real, but according to the Course, only the Oneness of Heaven, the unified Mind of the Father and the Son, in which no division or difference exists, is real. And since Heaven is formlessness (e.g., **W.pl.186.14; C.6.5:8**), it is apparent that the above lines from the Course can only be referring to the illusory split mind -- all thinking produces form at some level *within the split mind*.

The Course is helping us understand the laws of mind that we believe we operate under, but only so that we can come to recognize their painful consequences and in the end choose against the basic premise of separation, from which everything else has followed. Jesus knows that once we truly understand the starting point for the thought system of separation, we will no longer want to keep it real in our thinking.

Quantum physics, in contrast, while uncovering some of the operating principles of the split mind, and recognizing that the material world is really a projection of thought, is still entrenched in the thought system of separation. And so, from within that limited and limiting perspective, this approach would have little if any inclination to consider whether the thought that provides the impetus for manifestation in form is any more real than its illusory projections. Impressed with the world -- what the Course would regard as our ingenious and complex illusory miscreation -- these theorists, if they offer any metaphysical speculations, are more likely to believe they are getting glimpses into the mind of the Creator God, with whom we are then co-creators. And so, the likely outcome is that, rather than seeking to awaken from the illusory dream, we will seek to master ways of "co-creating" that can bring about a world which we believe will be more to our liking. And the ego is still safe and protected, for we have not uncovered the thought of attack always implicit in any thought of separation (**T.5V.2:8,9,10; T.11.V.13:4,5,6; T.15.V.2:5,6,7; W.pl.56.5:2**).

Q #861: In terms of people who have not developed psychological soundness due to inadequate parenting and childhood traumas (drawn to study *A Course in Miracles* in order to heal their minds), what psychological phenomena could they be projected to experience as a result of working toward understanding the concepts presented in the Course?

A: There's a very common assumption implicit in your question that it would be good to take a look at first before we can offer a satisfactory answer. And that is the belief that how we are as adults is a result of how we were treated as children. At one level, in the world's terms, this is certainly true. But the Course does not address anything in the world's terms, except as a jumping off point for recognizing what our minds are always choosing, so long as we remain identified with our egos.

It is pretty much the nature of being human that we all experience inadequate parenting and childhood traumas as we're growing up, although the number and degree of severity at the level of form can vary widely across individuals. Until we become aware that there is another way of looking at our situations and our lives (e.g., **T.25.VII.8:4, 9:1**) , we all pretty much feel that many if not most of our problems and limitations as adults are the direct result of what happened or didn't happen to us as children. It may be helpful at first to explore psychologically how we seem to carry the wounds of abuse and neglect that were inflicted many years earlier, when we were pretty much helpless and unable to defend or protect ourselves. There is real value in developing a certain degree of ego strength, or psychological soundness, that allows us to cope with the many challenges of living as a separate self in a demanding and at times menacing world.

But getting in touch with all of these thoughts and memories and perceptions is, from the Course's perspective, only the first step in the forgiveness process we are invited to join. For things are not really as they appear! This common childhood experience of some level of feeling unfairly treated or victimized in fact is quite deliberate and serves a definite purpose from the ego's perspective. Now when we say it's deliberate, we are not attributing choice or intention to the young child, but rather to the mind that has chosen to experience itself as a child, physically weaker and emotionally more vulnerable than most of the people around it, including especially the parents.

You see, we all want to believe our pain and unhappiness come from what others have done to us. And a major goal of the Course is to help us get in touch with the real source of that pain (**T.27.VII.7; T.27.VIII.10,11, T.28.III.5:1**) -- a decision in our own mind, outside of time and space, that we seemed to make in the past but are still making right now, which is the only real problem, to see ourselves as separate from love. Each of our lives as individual bodies in this world is predicated on the assumption that the separation from God is real, but that someone else is responsible for it -- perhaps God, or maybe our parents who decided to give birth to us. And Jesus is telling us in his Course that we are *never* victims (e.g., **W.pl.31; 57.1**) , and how we feel right now is a direct result of the choice we are making in our minds right now for the ego, and not the consequence of things that happened to the selves

we believe we are, in either the distant or more recent past. This is a radical statement, with revolutionary implications for our thinking, if we are willing to take it seriously. And, by the way, this does not mean that we then should ignore or deny what we remember as having happened to us in the past but rather, we want to begin to recognize that there is another way of looking at all those painful memories, so that Jesus can help us understand what purpose they have served for us in keeping us mindlessly oblivious to the power of our own minds to choose between happiness and pain right now.

And so, to answer your question about what psychological phenomena those of us who have experienced inadequate parenting and childhood trauma are likely to encounter as we study the Course, high on the list for most of us would be resistance. For the Course threatens all of our cherished ego beliefs and defenses that ironically make us feel safe and secure in the role of victim. And so we will not want to hear the Course's very challenging message that will turn our whole world upside down. And closely related to our resistance would be fear, fear that we may be punished for all of our selfish decisions to project guilt and blame outside of ourselves, believing with the ego that they are sins. And then a still deeper fear that we are about to lose the self we still so strongly identify with. None of this is true, but the ego will use any deceit to keep us away from a genuine experience of peace and love. Anger would be expected as well, perhaps at the Course, perhaps at Jesus, perhaps at ourselves, as we will want to dig in our heels and not have to accept full responsibility for how we feel.

But with the willingness to begin to look within our own minds rather than outside ourselves for the cause of our unhappiness, we will also be drawing closer to the love that we all genuinely seek, despite having turned our backs on it. And so there will also be experiences of release and relief and peace and joy, as we begin to awaken to the recognition that the sin within that we have thought we must defend ourselves from is not real and has no effect, unless we want it to **(T.17.I.1)** .

Q #862: What is the meaning of salvation as used in *A Course in Miracles* ? What is meant by the body?

A: The Course uses the term salvation to refer to the Holy Spirit's correction for the ego's thought of separation. Early in the text, Jesus defines salvation for us: **“Salvation is nothing more than “right-mindedness,” which is not the One-mindedness of the Holy Spirit, but which must be achieved before One-mindedness is restored” (T.4.11.10:1).** When the mind of the Sonship chooses separation, it becomes split and experiences itself in conflict between the thought of separation (the ego) and the memory of truth (the Holy Spirit). These two parts of the mind are also referred to as the wrong and right minds. An important goal of the Course is to teach us that we have a mind, with the power to choose between these two thoughts. As the above passage tells us, salvation lies in choosing the right mind, and learning to do so gradually heals the mind of the thought of separation, which is the ultimate goal of the Course. In reality, salvation is already accomplished because the separation never happened. Nevertheless, it is experienced as a process because the mind continues to choose to believe in the illusion of separation. Thus, we are “saved” each time we are willing to choose the Holy Spirit/right mind. When the ego is no longer chosen, the mind's oneness is restored.

Jesus gives us several statements to define the body: **“It is nothing. It is the result of a tiny, mad idea of corruption that can be corrected (T.19.IV.C.5:5,6).** “ [It is] **an isolated speck of darkness; a hidden secret room, a tiny spot of senseless mystery, a meaningless enclosure carefully protected, yet hiding nothing”(T.20.VI.5:2).** And even more to the point: **“At no single instant does the body exist at all”(T.18.VII.3:1)** . However, that is not our experience because along with the choice for separation, and imperative for its defense, comes the choice to identify with the body. In answer to the mind's loss of identity when it decides to split itself off from its Source, the ego proclaims: “I am a body.” It is important to remember that although this cannot actually be accomplished, the power of the mind makes the impossible seem true. The mind seeks to escape the guilt for choosing separation by denying its true Identity. It convinces itself that the separation is real because the body, which it conveniently forgets it fabricated, is obviously real. So goes the “logic” of the ego. Thus, the split mind is the source of

the experience of finding ourselves in bodies, wondering how we got here. It is also the real answer to what the body is, beyond the obvious physical composition. As Jesus tells us in the text: **“Although you are one Self, you experience yourself as two; as both good and evil, loving and hating, *mind and body* . This sense of being split into opposites induces feelings of acute and constant conflict, and leads to frantic attempts to reconcile the contradictory aspects of this self- perception. You have sought many such solutions, and none of them has worked. The opposites you see in you will never be compatible. But one exists (W.pl.961:1,2,3,4,5, italics added).** The “one” that exists is the mind. And it alone is the source of everything the body seems to experience.

The fact that **“I am not a body” (W.pl.84,91,136,199,201 through 220)** is the most frequently repeated phrase in the Course (47 times) is an indication of our intense attachment to the body and the need to unlearn this identity by learning to identify with the mind. This is accomplished through willingness to see in the body, and in every relationship with other bodies, the reflection of a choice in the mind to identify with the ego or with the Holy Spirit. The body, which of itself is nothing, thus becomes an instrument for communicating the ego's message or the Holy Spirit's. (See: The Body as a Means of Communication **T.8.VII**). Through its pain, “joys,” suffering and death, the body is used by the ego to prove that the separation was accomplished. To the Holy Spirit, it is the means whereby the mind is healed of the thought of separation through the practice of forgiveness. Thus, what the ego made to keep us separate from our Source and from each other can be used by the Holy Spirit to undo the separation. By its choice for or against the ego, the mind imbues the body with purpose : **“The body will seem to be whatever is the means for reaching the goal that you assign to it. Only the mind can set a purpose, and only the mind can see the means for its accomplishment, and justify its use. Peace and guilt are both conditions of the mind, to be attained (T.19.IV.B.10:7,8,9)** . Recognizing the negative effects of choosing separation (guilt) experienced through the body, the mind is motivated to choose the Holy Spirit (peace) instead. When the mind decides to see in everything an opportunity to make another choice, the body becomes an instrument of salvation.

Q #863: Is it not possible that the original “tick in time” (sorry to be harping on the famous question, but I can't seem to get past it) occurred not out of a sense of discontent (would not discontent require duality and perception?) but out of a playful kind of “what if” feeling on the part of the mind of the Son? Sort of like a six-year-old getting into mom's car in the driveway and while pretending to drive, inadvertently releasing the emergency brake, putting it in drive, and sending the car rolling into a busy street. It just seems to me that inherent in the original impulse could *not* have been an element of wanting to attack God. I feel that the belief that we *had* attacked God, and the attending birth of guilt and the ego mind came once we were out in the middle of traffic in a vehicle we couldn't drive, with no memory of how we got there! In other words, the belief in the attack on God came only after we were hurled into the dream by our own inadvertent misuse of creativity. Or is there something I am not understanding?

A: There have been many, many mythologies throughout the centuries, and in practically all cultures, about the origin of life. Your notion of a “playful kind of ‘what if’ feeling” sounds similar to some aspects of Hindu theology. The myth presented in *A Course in Miracles* , however, consistently ascribes the ultimate origin of life in this physical cosmos to the thought in the mind of God's Son that being part of God's perfect Oneness was not acceptable. This is articulated in different ways in the Course: for example, God did not grant His Son the special favor he desired (**T.13.III.10:2**) , the quest for **“something more than everything” (T.29.VII.2)**, **“a power past omnipotence, a place beyond the infinite, a time transcending the eternal” (T.29.VIII.6:2)** .

The Course is equally clear that this was all just a silly thought, **“a tiny, mad idea at which the Son of God remembered not to laugh” (T.27.VIII.6:2)** . Sin, guilt, and fear came *after* the “tiny, mad idea” -- the consequences of taking it seriously. And therefore the Course's entire spiritual path centers on training us to return to this choice point in our minds in order to give ourselves the opportunity to choose again, this time remembering to laugh, which means accepting the Atonement for ourselves -- the thought that we never truly separated from God. While there are many profoundly rich and inspiring theological and

metaphysical concepts in the Course, that is not what Jesus would want us to be focusing on, however. **“Theological considerations as such are necessarily controversial, since they depend on belief and can therefore be accepted or rejected” (C.in.2:4).** His purpose is to teach us about how and why we are blocking awareness of the Love that defines us, so that we may consciously decide whether or not we wish to continue on that way.

Q #864: Why do I not feel any different after I ask the Holy Spirit to see my anger through His eyes? I still feel the same angry emotions that I felt before I asked. It doesn't seem to get any better. Every day is the same, feeling very angry, asking the Holy Spirit for help, and still feeling all the anger and emotional disturbance that I felt before I ask. There seems to be no relief from my anger and negative emotions. All the promises in *A Course in Miracles* don't seem to have any practical value. Studying the Course is a very uncomfortable, disturbing, and mentally unhealthy way to go through life, so it seems.

A: Seeing your anger through the eyes of the Holy Spirit means, above all, that you not feel guilty about not being able to let it go. By being upset about your anger and negative emotions you are giving the ego a power that it does not really have. Yes, anger is an ego thing, but nowhere in the Course does Jesus say that we should not be angry; he asks only that we not justify the anger. So practicing this course means learning how to be more gentle with yourself when you discover that you cannot let go of grievances. You have a lot of company! It is not easy, and we are not asked to do it perfectly. Your *willingness* to let go of the anger is what is spiritually helpful. That there are “shadows” surrounding it is normal and to be expected (**T.18.IV.2**) . If you could do everything the Course asks of you instantly and perfectly, you would not really need the Course.

We all have tremendous resistance to letting go of grievances because they serve the ego's purpose of hiding the love that is in the other part of our minds, just as any form of bodily preoccupation serves to block awareness of ourselves as spirit. We are intensely afraid of the pure love in our minds and of our true identity as spirit because we know that acceptance of that means the end of our identity as individuals. So Jesus leads us slowly and gently along his path, which focuses on reducing our guilt and fear as much as we are able to at any given time. That is why it is so important that you not be hard on yourself -- or on Jesus and his course -- because you are still angry. Inviting Jesus or the Holy Spirit to look at it with you will help you be less frustrated and upset. That is the goal -- simply to watch your ego in action without being disturbed by it. That should lead to more peace and internal comfort, for you would be spending your time in the presence of one whose love for you does not depend on your letting go of your anger.

Q #865: In [Question #608](#) you responded to the questioner by saying that if their weight was keeping them separate from other people, then that was indeed the ego's underlying purpose for the extra weight. Can that principle be used as a general rule for other bodily insecurities or conflicts? For example, if someone avoids dating with the opposite sex because of self-consciousness about or self-hatred of their height, eye color, hair color, etc., can it then be said that they actually may have chosen, on some level, to be born with these qualities to keep them separate from the opposite sex? Am I understanding this correctly?

A: Generally speaking, our experience in the present reflects the goal we have chosen to pursue on another level in our minds. Note that we are talking about our *experience* -- an internal state, not *behavior* . We need to be very cautious about using the *form* a person's life has taken as a direct indicator of the content in that person's mind. We cannot judge content using form as the criterion. Crucifixion is a normally thought of as a hideous form; but Jesus' mind was never *not* in a state of total peace; no one was ever excluded from his love.

If your internal experience is that you feel alienated and separate from others, then that has to be what you first desired in your mind, otherwise you could not feel that way, whatever your bodily characteristics happen to be. A two-fold strategy (the ego's of course) unfolds from that decision to ensure that you will not be held responsible for the separation and punished as a result (all of this being part of the ego's tale of separation, sin, guilt, and fear), and that you will totally forget that you have a mind that is deliberately upholding the thought system of separation and rejecting the thought system of unity and oneness. So once you make the choice in your mind to reinforce your underlying belief in separation, you would then use the world and your body for that very purpose. You would be intent on showing that separation is reality and that you are an autonomous individual, subject to victimization by others and/or by your own body. We all do this.

There are many ways of demonstrating this, but bodily insecurities and conflicts would be high on the list, for you would be preoccupied with your body -- keeping you from remembering that the real source of insecurity and conflict is in your mind -- and you would have a reason to keep yourself separate from others and be able to blame your problem on your genes, your hormones, your dysfunctional family, society, Hollywood, etc., etc. It is quite possible, thus, that you (as a mind) would produce a body with the kinds of characteristics that could be used to achieve that purpose. Always remember, though, that the *purpose* chosen in the mind is the critical factor, for another person could have the same height, hair color, eye color etc., and not be self-conscious about it at all. There are plenty of examples of that, just as there are examples of people who have the "ideal body" but are still plagued with insecurities and conflict.

The solution to the insecurities and conflicts is to shift from focusing on the body to the purpose being upheld in the mind. And that means shifting from the ego as your teacher to Jesus or the Holy Spirit. Whenever there is shame, conflict, and separation, it means that you are following the ego's guidance. So you would just step back from that and ask for help to now use your body to learn the exact opposite of what the ego wants you to learn. With Jesus or the Holy Spirit guiding you, you can learn to perceive yourself and everyone else as sharing the same interests -- all having the same wrong mind, right mind, and decision-making ability. Eventually, what you look like would diminish in importance, as you would recognize your preoccupation with the body as a defense against realizing you are a mind, as is everyone else. That may or may not improve your dating life, but even that would cease to matter as you progress, for you would know that your self-worth has nothing to do with your life in the body.

The major lesson Jesus would help you learn is that you can be peaceful regardless of your bodily condition or your dating life. That is what we are all trying to learn -- that the peace of God is always shining in us (**W.pl.188**) , and, without falling into denial or blissninnyness, nothing of the world or the body can change that. We have to *un*learn what the ego taught us, which is that our inner peace is conditional on external circumstances meeting our needs as we have perceived and defined them.

Finally, if the self-loathing does not abate, then the kind and loving thing to do for yourself might be to turn to a professional therapist for help.

Q #866: I have been married for ten years and we have four boys under ten. My wife is separating from me, with a view to divorce. I have betrayed her in my mind out of spite but would never dream of actually doing it as I love her tremendously. I am afraid my wife will betray me by loving someone else, that she will not love me. I have dedicated my life to her and our children, our family, and I do not want to lose her!

Isn't marriage a sacred contract that should be worked through, a Holy Relationship with vows taken in the eyes of God in Church? I have asked Jesus and the Holy Spirit to look at my thoughts, feeling, actions, and words to help forgive me and to undo all those mistakes I have made and the ones that I feel in my gut now. I have asked Jesus and the Holy Spirit to be in my mind to bring peace, light, joy, forgiveness, love and understanding, but I still feel terrible and scared. How do I get to feel at peace and joyful with life and see my wife without feeling hurt, pain, guilt, betrayal, and jealousy?

How do we or the Holy Spirit undo the mistakes we have made? Do I try to tell my wife everything I'm recognizing? Near the end of "Practicing the Holy Instant" (T.15.IV), *A Course in Miracles* talks about communicating all thoughts pure and unpure so that the Holy Spirit's purity can shine them away. Does this mean communicating my thoughts to the Holy Spirit in my mind or communicating them to the person whom the thoughts are about, my wife, so she can realize I have learned from my mistakes? I would like our relationship to be a success as I really want a family forever. I feel sorry that our children may not be living together with both their mother and their father as I did. Is there hope for our relationship?

A: There is always hope for every relationship, if you look at it from Jesus' perspective. In fact, the outcome is certain (**W.pII.292.1**), for in the end every relationship will be healed. But the form of the relationship may not be what we think we want and need, while we remain identified with the ego and concerned with our own special interests. For the healing occurs in our mind, at the level of thought, and that may or may not be reflected in anything that seems to be happening in the world between two bodies. It is only in the mind where any real hope can be found.

The pain you've been experiencing as you've been confronted with a major shift in your relationship with your wife comes through your words very clearly, as does your desire to do whatever you can to maintain the marriage. However, from the Course's perspective, you have set up the problem and its solution in your mind in a such a way that you are assuring yourself of conflict and pain, no matter how things turn out. For you see your peace and joy as dependent on what you have no control over -- your wife's decision either to leave or return. Now this is very much the way of the world -- to see our experience of love and happiness as coming from outside ourselves -- and it is doomed to failure (**T.29.VII.1**). And so even your pleas to Jesus or the Holy Spirit for help are attempts to bring about changes so that your wife will decide to remain with you.

The relationship you have established with your wife, like all of the world's so-called love relationships, is what the Course would call a special love relationship or bargain (**T.16.V.6,7,8; T.21.III.1**). We come to such relationships out of a feeling of lack or emptiness (**T.16.V.9:2**), never questioning the reality of the lack we're experiencing. We all seem destined as human beings to have to seek for love and, if we are lucky enough to find a relationship that seems to meet that need, do what we can to cling to it so we will not have to experience the feelings of lack and emptiness again. But, beneath all such relationships are ambivalence and resentment for being dependent on the other, and so conflict such as what has pervaded your relationship with your wife over the years is almost inevitable. But this is how we have all set up our lives. And so, when confronted with the possibility of the loss of such a relationship, as you have been, the feelings of desperation, loss, pain, guilt and anger can seem quite intense.

And yet Jesus assures us that none of this need be (**T.4.IV.1,2,3,4,5,6**), if we are willing to change our thinking about ourselves, which we can only do by changing from the ego to Jesus or the Holy Spirit as our Teacher and Guide for looking at our lives and our relationships (**T.4.IV.7,8**). For it is the ego who is the arbiter of the conditions for all special love relationships. And special rituals and "sacred contracts" are all part of its offerings (**T.16.V.11:4,5,6,7,8; 12:1,2,3**), to obscure the guilt and fear and emptiness that are at the core of its gifts. Now there is nothing wrong, and there can be great practical value in making commitments to another through a marriage contract but, from Jesus' perspective in the Course, there is nothing sacred or holy about such contractual agreements. The only thing that can make anything sacred or holy is its purpose, and the only purpose that confers holiness on any of the symbols of the world is forgiveness, which must begin truly with ourselves. Whether you and your wife remain together or not, the relationship can always be made holy by being given the purpose of forgiveness in your mind. And this simply means that you are willing to withdraw judgment and blame from both of you and forgive yourself for wanting to see her as somehow responsible for your happiness. True love and happiness can only be found by joining in our minds with Jesus or the Holy Spirit and releasing our investment in the guilt and lack of the ego.

And this is how all our little mistakes are undone with the Holy Spirit. For the only mistake that ever has to be undone is our choice for the ego, however that choice may be expressed in the relationship. The specific mistakes and self-judgments can be brought to the Holy Spirit or Jesus for healing, where they

can be recognized simply as faulty choices and not sins deserving of punishment (T.19.II.6; T.19.III.4) . Once you have released the underlying guilt associated with all your self-condemnation, you may or may not be guided to share some of the specifics with your wife. But you will have no need to use any of it to try to change the nature of your relationship with her. For in your mind, as you continue to practice forgiveness, you will become increasingly aware that you already have the love that you thought you had needed to seek from her. And if you should feel guided to say anything to your wife, it would be only because it could be helpful to her. For we are never the ones who can judge what is truly helpful for anyone, including ourselves (M.29.2) .

And so, regardless of the form of the relationship in the world, Jesus assures us that every relationship can become holy. And it does not depend on what the other person says or does or thinks, but only on which teacher we have chosen in our own mind. And given the gifts the Holy Spirit holds out to us, how could we want anything else?

“Before a holy relationship there is no sin. The form of error is no longer seen, and reason, joined with love, looks quietly on all confusion, observing merely, ‘This was a mistake.’ And then the same Atonement you accepted in your relationship corrects the error, and lays a part of Heaven in its place. How blessed are you who let this gift be given! Each part of Heaven that you bring is given you. And every empty place in Heaven that you fill again with the eternal light you bring, shines now on you. The means of sinlessness can know no fear because they carry only love with them” (T.22.VI.5) .

Q #867: If I am focusing on bringing my problem to the Holy Spirit for a long time (hours, months) as opposed to a short time (minutes), am I making the error real? Or am I seriously looking at the guilt? I often get confused about this. Also, being a 12-step program attendee, if I talk about the problem I seem to be having in a meeting so I can look at it, is that making the problem real? Or, again, am I seriously looking at the guilt? My intention is to use that forum to look with the Holy Spirit at the problem. Hearing myself say it out loud in front of other people seems to help look at it. It begins to seem trivial and lose its power there, I think.

A: If you're spending that much time on the perceived problem, more than likely, you're focusing on the wrong problem or, more accurately, the pseudo-problem rather than the real problem. You see, whatever seems to be a problem in our lives upon which we lavish so much concern and attention is always a smokescreen, to keep us from getting in touch with the underlying problem in our mind (W.pl.79) . And this is true regardless of whether the focus is on someone else or on ourselves, that is, the self we think we are. Our problems can seem so complex, with so many angles to consider, so many layers to work through, so many insights to pursue, before we can really understand and let go, release, “forgive.” And yet, we are remaining entrenched in the ego thought system, never really stepping outside it, simply rearranging the furniture on the Titanic, as one of our staff members once so aptly put it.

Because Jesus is well aware of our tendency to try to solve problems at the wrong level, in *A Course in Miracles* he cautions us , **”If you believe you understand something of the ‘dynamics’ of the ego, let me assure you that you understand nothing of it. For of yourself you could not understand it. The study of the ego is not the study of the mind. In fact, the ego enjoys studying itself, and thoroughly approves the undertakings of students who would ‘analyze’ it, thus approving its importance. Yet they but study form with meaningless content. For their teacher is senseless, though careful to conceal this fact behind impressive sounding words, but which lack any consistent sense when they are put together (T.14.X.8:4,5,6,7,8).**

The temptation is almost unavoidable to perceive our problems as being the result of our relationships in the world. But that's no surprise since we, as the collective Son, established the world and relationships among bodies for the very purpose of keeping ourselves unaware of the underlying problem in the

mind (**W.pl.64.1:2,3,4; 2:1**) . And so we can spend hours, days, months, even years, going around and around over the same or similar territory, analyzing the specifics to death.

One form this can take is to trace all of our relationship issues back to our parents. At one level, this is true, for the dynamics of our relationships with our parents are repeated in all of the relationships we experience throughout the rest of our lives. But if our focus is on how the limitations of the parenting we experienced as children are at the root of all our problems in later life, we have not really gone far enough back, or more accurately, deep enough (for more on this, see Question #861). For even our initial relationships in this lifetime with our mother and father are symbolic of, or split-off fragments of, our initial primary special relationship with God. And that relationship is an insane hallucination that we have made up to maintain our belief in the separation, while holding someone else responsible for the guilt and pain that follows from it. And the specific problems and issues in our lives are only illusory shadows of that underlying imaginary ego dynamic with God.

So our focus on ourselves and our relationships in the world is, from Jesus' perspective, really misplaced. Not that our problems in the world can not serve a different purpose, when brought to the Holy Spirit (**W.pl.64.2:2,3,4**) . For they can become the portals to the darkened vaults of our mind, where the hidden ego beliefs will continue to wreak havoc on our peace until we shine the light of true forgiveness on them so that they can dissolve into the nothingness that is their essence. But so long as we maintain our focus only on the world and our lives here, those disruptive unconscious beliefs remain securely hidden and locked away from our awareness, but still festering in the recesses of our mind, infecting and affecting our every perception.

Having said this, please don't think it follows from this answer that you should stop doing whatever you are doing, if it seems to help you resolve issues and conflicts in your life. You just want to be aware that until you identify and address the underlying issue or content -- your choice for separation and guilt in your mind -- you are not resolving the real problem (**W.pl.79.6**) . And you will find only temporary relief, much as an aspirin can briefly relieve the symptoms of an underlying chronic systemic problem in the body but is not addressing the source of the pain, which will return once the palliative effects of the drug wear off.

Q #868: How do the principles of A Course in Miracles apply to an older adult who is unable to psychologically attach or bond to any other person, including his initial primary caregiver? This seems to be the most separate state of existence possible in this world! To me, this means that he can never experience what most of us know as special love. There isn't much, if anything, that can be done for him at the level of form, since a safe and secure base from which to explore this world and develop a "healthy" ego was not provided at the critical stages of development. I will continue to ask to fulfill my function for him in my mind, which is the highest service I can render to him. It's very difficult to remember that this is the only thing which I can do, but I sincerely believe that it is truly everything. I need your encouragement, but more than that I need you to join with the Christ in me.

A: We are never in a position to know the reasons others have chosen the particular life experiences they have, no matter what form they may take. Usually, we do not consciously remember for our own lives either. About all we can say with any certainty is that there are wrong-minded reasons, based on fear and guilt, for the specific forms our lives take, and there are right-minded reasons, based on a desire to learn forgiveness and heal. And we can never judge why others have chosen what they have, nor whether or not they are learning their forgiveness lessons. For we see only external form and not the content beneath, at the level of mind.

And one more thing is certain -- no one needs our pity because of their life situation for, as Jesus reminds us, **"it is impossible the Son of God be merely driven by events outside of him. It is impossible that happenings that come to him were not his choice. His power of decision is the determiner of**

every situation in which he seems to find himself by chance or accident” (T.21.II.3:1,2,3). To understand what this means, we must recognize that Jesus is referring to the decision making part of the mind -- the dreamer of the dream -- and not to the figures in the world with which we all mistakenly identify, which seem to vary so in their level of insight and awareness. These selves, on which we lavish such attention and care, are powerless, ineffectual shadows of the thoughts in our minds. And the mind never sleeps (T.2.VI.9:6), regardless of how limited or inadequate the body, the brain, and the personality may seem.

And so there is no specific answer to why the person you know is living his life in what feels to you like some kind of empty, emotional wasteland. It could be providing his mind with just the opportunities for forgiveness that he needs -- you will never know for sure. But regardless of what purpose his life may be serving him, your relationship with him need not be any different, at the deeper level of content, from what your relationship is with everyone else you know. For all of us, identified with our egos, are trapped in our own emotional wastelands, feeling cut off from God and love and each other. The Course has come to let us know that none of this is true. For all minds are truly joined and can never be alone or in need of special love. Our only responsibility is to remember that our only meaningful choice is between the ego and the Holy Spirit as our guide through the maze we call our lives. And when we remember for ourselves, we are remembering for everyone. For we are all already joined with the Christ in us -- we've just chosen to forget that reality. And each of our minds has the power to choose to remember at any moment that we want, no matter how limited we may appear to be as figures in the dream.

Q #869: Recent events have made me very bitterly disappointed in my country. I see lots of hatred and brutality where others might see righteousness. I see murder where others might see a just cause. While others might cheer the courageousness of our leaders, I see deception and cowardice. My peace has been destroyed and now I am involved in a moral battle that does not bode well. I know that A Course in Miracles says “seek not to change the world,” but how can one live in such a world without doing something about it? How can I “change my mind” without capitulating to what I believe is the worst in our human nature?

A: There is nothing in the Course that says you shouldn't do something about a situation in the world. It is saying that having righting the wrongs in the world as your goal will not lead to inner peace; and peace is the goal of the Course. Moreover, to say that focusing only on changing your mind about the world would lead to “capitulating to the worst in our human nature” is to miss the point of the teaching, and really of the whole message of the Course. The Course, unlike some other spiritual paths, does not advocate withdrawing from the world or condoning the hateful acts of others. It is trying to help us see that the way we have been going about solving problems in our lives and in the world has been counter-productive -- we are really doing nothing to eliminate the conditions that are the real source of pain, conflict, despair, guilt, etc. We ameliorate and mitigate, and we do the best we can to cope with the pressures and struggles of life -- sometimes asking help of a divine source to make things better. But the longing in everyone's heart is for inner peace. And that longing is what Jesus is speaking to in this course.

He is telling us how to go about living in the world in order to restore that peace in which we were created. But that requires trusting in his way, which means letting go of our belief that we know what is wrong and how to fix it. **“To learn this course requires willingness to question every value that you hold” (T.24.in.2:1).** That is the challenge. So rather than encouraging us to withdraw from the world and abandon the obligations and responsibilities of our roles in the world, Jesus is telling us that we need to withdraw from and abandon the ego's purpose for our lives and the world, and accept his instead. That is what has skewed our perception of the cause of our problems and their solutions. We first need to be sure that we can distinguish between the ego's purpose and the Holy Spirit's purpose, and then with that clarity decide which to accept. Following the ego may deliver some of what we want in the world, but never peace. Following the thought system of forgiveness, on the other hand, guarantees true and lasting healing of the pain in our minds. The path of forgiveness teaches us that the world and the body are not the cause of our lack of peace, but that a prior decision in our minds to project responsibility for that lack

is the cause. The guilt in our minds causes us to look for something in the world that we can blame for our feelings of distress and fury (**see T.19.IV.A.i**). That decision is the problem, which is readily solved by withdrawing the projection and accepting the truth that our sinlessness is guaranteed by God (**W.pl.93**).

So being a student on this path does not at all mean that you would never be actively involved in the world. The difference would be in how you are involved -- in other words, your purpose, which can be wrong-minded or right-minded. If the events in the world, and your country in particular, anger you and destroy your peace of mind, then you can be sure that you chose the ego's interpretation, the premise of which is that the separation is real, the duality of good and evil is real, and the perpetrators of evil should be punished and destroyed. You have forgotten that your only responsibility is to accept the Atonement for yourself, which means you have also forgotten that the world **"is the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition"** (**T.18.in.1:5**). Acting out of outrage makes the ego's error real, thereby ensuring the continuation of conflict and pain. Regime changes do not end the madness and insanity in the world, as is all too evident today. **"The world was made as an attack on God"** (**W.pl.3.2:1**), and all of us are here because we rejected the eternal peace of life in God. Why, then, would we expect the world to be different from the horror show it is most of the time? What can be different, though, is how we react to it, which is dependent on the thought system we have chosen in our minds.

The point of the Course teaching you cite is that when you choose to change your mind about the world, you would then be viewing it with Jesus from above the battleground, and consequently would not take the events in it so seriously, a prelude to accepting the full truth, which is that there is no world. You would first see clearly the world's purpose in the ego's strategy to blind you to the oneness we all share as God's one Son. Then, centered in Jesus' love, which you would know is your own, shared with everyone else, you would then do or say whatever love's extension through you dictated, which might be doing or saying nothing. The key part of this process, though, is that you would not be the focal point. Your feelings and needs would simply have dissolved in your acceptance of your shared identity with the love of Jesus, and then whatever is most loving and helpful to all would automatically come through you.

If you were to side with one group against the other, you would be making the same mistake as those you oppose, thus fragmenting the Sonship. You then become part of the problem instead of the solution. The healed or right-minded perception acknowledges the different opinions and viewpoints but does not judge against anyone. Both sides are seen as part of the Sonship. With the help of Jesus or the Holy Spirit, we can learn how to disagree with others without engaging in judgment. Even if we were to take action, we could learn how to do so without it turning into a battle to defeat or unseat the "bad guys." That is our only hope for real and lasting healing and peace.

Q #870: I'm in the position of having to accuse somebody in court, because (on the level of form) he has made a mistake. I know that it doesn't matter if I do this or not, the only thing which matters is how I do it, with love or with guilt. Life certainly would be different for this person, if I wouldn't say anything. So I feel quite guilty for having to do this. How can I get to be able to accuse him with Jesus and not with my ego? I'm sure this is possible.

A: In order to apply the principles of A Course in Miracles to any situation in the world, it is essential to distinguish between form and content. Whatever this person has done on the level of form does not change the content of the Identity he shares with all of the Sonship, as God's innocent Son. As you point out, it is possible to proceed with litigation in the right mind. The criminal justice system is surely one of the clearest examples of the ego's thought system in action. From the authority problem to a vast array of victimization plots, its form is solidly based on judgments of guilt and innocence, victim and victimizer, and above all differences. There is nothing surprising about this, nor is it any worse than any other institution or relationship made up by the ego to prove the reality of the world in defense of its belief in separation. Thus, the principles of forgiveness Jesus teaches apply in the same way to testifying in court as to

anything else in our lives. Neither criminals nor the court system has the market on insanity. All people are equally insane in their wrong mind, and equally capable of choosing the right mind.

From this perspective, one whose behavior is correct, legal, and socially acceptable may have a mind filled with vicious attack thoughts making him a "content murderer": **"What is not love is murder. What is not loving must be an attack. Every illusion is an assault on truth, and every one does violence to the idea of love because it seems to be of equal truth" (T.23.IV.1:10,11,12).** This is another way of saying there is no hierarchy of illusions (T.26.VII.6). Therefore, there can be no hierarchy of crimes. The ego would have us believe otherwise, along with the belief that criminal behavior has a deleterious effect. Of course there are effects in form; bodies can be hurt, but nothing external to the mind can have any effect on it.

While the world concerns itself with form, behavior, crimes and punishment, Jesus' teaching in the Course is concerned only with the content of the mind. Consulting with Jesus in the courtroom, therefore, means seeing it as a classroom for forgiveness by looking honestly at the judgments about oneself and the accused, all of which are based on differences and separation. In this classroom there are no front row seats, and the witness stand is for questioning one's own judgments. Any guilt you may feel comes from these judgments rather than from filing charges. If an illegal act has been committed, there are legal consequences. That is a simple fact that entails no judgment. The facts of a legal proceeding do not produce guilt. Guilt comes from already having chosen the ego in the mind, and judgments are the projection of that guilt onto oneself and others. With attention focused on the mind's judgments, the spotlight is off the accused. This is the beginning of forgiveness, which is how to proceed with the accusation with Jesus instead of with the ego. Thus, in the courtroom, as everywhere in our lives, the goal is to ask Jesus to help us look at every judgment so it can be healed. We will share the Holy Spirit's vision of those we accuse when every judgment has been brought to awareness and given to Him to be transformed. **"If you will look, the Holy Spirit will judge, and He will judge truly. Yet He cannot shine away what you keep hidden, for you have not offered it to Him and He cannot take it from you" (T.12.II.9:7,8).**

Q #871: A Course in Miracles makes it very clear that in order to undo the ego and its illusions, one needs to be vigilant only for God's Kingdom and renounce all false idols and worldly goals. As I've begun taking this idea more seriously and applying it diligently in my life, I find that I have little or no motivation to do anything except meditate and read. If one is truly committed to renouncing all worldly goals and being vigilant only for God, then how can one function normally in this world with a job and responsibilities? What would be the purpose of doing anything in this world, if all "doing" is motivated by worldly goals and thus the ego? Please help.

A: Renouncing all false idols and worldly goals is a matter of content, not form. Renouncing the ego thus means to renounce its purpose in your life, which means your responsibility is to look with Jesus at how you fulfill the ego's purpose of separation in your daily activities and responsibilities. The activities and responsibilities are not the problem; your mind's decision to use them to reinforce separation is the problem. That decision is what needs to be changed, as opposed to changing what you do during the day. So being vigilant only for God means being vigilant for all the ways in which you are choosing against His purpose -- mainly in seeing separate, conflicting interests rather than shared interests in your relationships and interactions. Your job, activities, and relationships provide the curriculum Jesus can work with to help you identify your ego choices. Your daily experiences reflect back to you your mind's decisions, which you would otherwise not know about. So to curtail or cease your normal family and business life would deny Jesus the only means he has of helping you get in touch with what is buried in your mind. Meditation is not the primary means the Course uses, although it is certainly not wrong to meditate.

One of the sections that addresses this issue is in the manual for teachers: **“Are Changes Required in the Life Situation of God’s Teachers?” (M.9)**. Jesus’ answer to that question is that very rarely is anyone asked to make significant life changes, because this is a course about changing your mind about your life, specifically your purpose; it is not about behavior. He is trying to help us learn how to go to the quiet center in our minds beyond the demands of the body, where we can be **“directed how to used the body sinlessly” (T.18.VII.8:4)** -- not to leave the world, but to be nourished in the kindness and gentleness of love, which would then flow through us in our everyday life activities. Jesus discusses this approach again in Lesson 184, where he tells us that the Holy Spirit can use all of the world’s symbols to get us to the reality beyond the world. And thus he asks us to do the same -- to relate to our daily life and activities in terms of symbols through which we can learn that we all share the same interests, and that our reality is beyond the separate identities we seem to have. We are God’s one Son. (**W.pl.184.9,10,11**)

Q #872: I am a practicing hypnotherapist, and I work with people primarily on things such as weight loss and smoking cessation. Recently, I began studying the Psychotherapy pamphlet and I have a question about a couple things that Jesus says in there. He says about goals, **“It is impossible to share a goal not blessed by Christ ...” (P.2.II.6:7)**, and then later, **“Each one must share one goal with someone else, and in so doing, lose all sense of separate interests” (P.2.II.8:4)**. I’m assuming here that he means any goal ... such as losing 50 pounds? I realize that ultimately, all worldly goals must be renounced to the Holy Spirit, but if a client comes to see me for weight loss and has no interest in enlightenment, then on a practical level, how should I perceive my role and proceed in therapy? I’m assuming that I am simply to help her on a practical level in the way I normally would, but while at the same time forgiving us both in my heart and asking the Holy Spirit for guidance. Is there something else I’m not understanding?

A: Just stay focused on the purpose of getting beyond “all sense of separate interests” -- that is the point of what Jesus is teaching. Any interaction at all can be used for that purpose, and all that matters is your willingness to accept that as your purpose. The other person’s motive is irrelevant in this context. The content in your mind is to learn that you are not separate from your client, and the form in which you are learning this lesson is your joint participation in the weight-loss project. All that is truly meaningful in this interaction, though, is the joining -- that you would realize that you are both the same in your wrong minds, your right minds, and in having the power to choose between the two. That healing of the separation is what you both are calling out for -- you share the same problem at this level. At this time in her life, your client may be able to accept healing only in the form of a bodily change, but whether or not that happens is not your concern.

Further on in the Psychotherapy pamphlet Jesus says that the goal of all psychotherapy is reached when **“the therapist sees in the patient all that he has not forgiven in himself, and is thus given another chance to look at it, open it to re-evaluation and forgive it. . . . The patient is his screen for the projection of his sins, enabling him to let them go” (P.2.VII.6:3,6)**. That is quite different from the approach normally fostered in the world’s training. But Jesus is helping us to realize that our perception of problems and solutions has been guided by the ego, and that we need to see that that was our choice and it has never led to peace and real healing. Jesus thus is training our minds to perceive in accord with his vision, which sees us all as the same.

Q #873: Re Question [#613](#): I am confused about the sentence **“It is very important in this process not to deny any part of our experience, and not to try to change it on the level of form.”** We cannot deny what we experience in our illusion because we actually do believe that it exists. If I see a dangerous situation then I will try to do whatever I can to make sure that no one is harmed. I also realize that I can not change anything that I perceive because it is something that has already happened in the past and I am just reliving it. Now how is that for a Catch-22? So, on level 1 I have created a scenario which on level

2 I then decide to experience. If on level 2 I try to change the experience which had previously been created on level 1, then all I am doing is feeding the illusion because what I create on level 2 is ego based and just keeps me apart from my true identity. Is that about it?

A: The sentence you quote is based on the phrase found in the text: “...**seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world**” (T.21.in.1:7). In A Course in Miracles, Jesus is teaching us that we are minds, not bodies. For that purpose, the Course focuses only on the mind. Remembering this when applying the Course to everyday experiences helps to avoid the confusion of form and content. The statement “...**not trying to change it on the level of form**” does not mean not to rescue a drowning person or not to make home improvements. It means not believing that changes in form have any effect on the mind; an illusion is an illusion is an illusion. Therefore, there is no creation within the illusion. The past that is being relived is the choice for separation, projected out in a multitude of made up forms which vary within the same moment, the same lifetime, or from one lifetime to another. As we are told in the text: “**Each day, and every minute in each day, and every instant that each minute holds, you but relive the single instant when the time of terror took the place of love... Such is each life; a seeming interval from birth to death and on to life again, a repetition of an instant gone by long ago that cannot be relived** (T.26.V.13:1,3). A thousand times zero is zero, no matter how good the form may be, nor how “helpful” certain activities seem to be. Saving a body from physical harm does nothing, because bodies do nothing (See: T.19.IV.C.5, T.24.IV.2). Neither does the body impede the mind’s ability to choose between the ego and the Holy Spirit, which is the only decision that can be made. Once the ego is chosen, any experience will be interpreted in support of the ego’s thought system of separation. It is not the experience that is chosen, it is separation. That is why we are told we need to change our minds, not the world nor the experience. Thus, the reason you cannot change what you perceive is that it exists only as a projection of a choice in the mind.

It may be helpful to identify these levels as the level of the mind and the level of form. Salvation is not found in form, because nothing external to the mind has any effect on it. This is the direct opposite to the ego’s belief that salvation/happiness, and relief from the misery of separation can be found in the world. This explains the ego’s endless and exhausting search for solutions, changes, and improvements in everything from a house to a relationship, in an attempt to fix the problem where it is not. In this we find a good example of the ego’s maxim: “**Seek but do not find**”(T.16.V.6:5). Nothing in the world of form offers happiness or peace. In looking to our minds, not the world, as the source of our interpretation of every experience in our lives, we learn to accept what Jesus tells us in the text: “**Anything in this world that you believe is good and valuable and worth striving for can hurt you, and will do so. Not because it has the power to hurt, but just because you have denied it is but an illusion, and made it real. And it is real to you. It is not nothing** (T.26.VI.1:1,2,3,4). Simply remembering this whenever we are tempted to look outside ourselves to resolve conflict by fixing the world, reflects the mind’s willingness to choose the Holy Spirit instead of the ego, and will inevitably change our perception of every experience.

Q #874: Could you explain what seems to be a contradiction between what Jesus says in the text of A Course in Miracles about special love and special hate relationships being an attack, and what he says in the manual for teachers about “special learning partners?” -- “**These are teaching-learning situations in which each person is given a chosen learning partner who presents him with unlimited opportunities for learning.**” In one of your responses to another question, you said there might even be a special attraction, which the Holy Spirit uses for teaching. It appears then that some special relationships are even encouraged and guided by the Holy Spirit.

I think I am involved in such a relationship. After three years of close friendship, we are now going through the hostile stage, which does seem like it is going to last forever. I know that it is not the Holy Spirit who is causing the hostility, but rather our own egos, but it still does seem like you are saying that the Holy Spirit has had some role in bringing us together. But how could this be if the Holy Spirit does not act in the world? I have forgiven her as the Course teaches, but I just want her out of my life, because her

personality has really changed for the worse. But she keeps coming back into my mind, almost as if our learning experience is not over. Would the Holy Spirit still want me to keep her in my life, even though she is causing me so much pain? She used to be a kind, moral, and good person, but now she has become dishonest, and cruel to just about everyone.

A: Although the language of the Course can at times seem to be saying conflicting things, there really is no contradiction here. Every relationship between two seemingly separate brothers or sisters has been made outside of time and space with our choice for the ego. Every relationship is always made as an attack so that the guilt and sin are not seen within our own minds but outside us, reinforcing the belief in separation and victimization. But once made, that special relationship provides the perfect opportunity with our special learning partner to learn the Holy Spirit's lesson of forgiveness. And so there is a sense in which, although every relationship begins as special, we may feel guided for right-minded reasons as well to enter into and play out in the world of form the dynamics of the special relationship, so that the guilt we are projecting from within our own mind onto our brother or sister can be recognized and released. For we most likely are not even aware of the guilt within our own mind until we allow ourselves to experience the specific form of that special relationship, seemingly between our body and another's body. And that can be very helpful, regardless of how unsettling the interactions may at times become, if we are willing to remember the purpose the Holy Spirit would always give to all of our relationships -- to heal the guilt within our own mind so that we can recognize that our interests are the same as all our brothers and sisters.

The Holy Spirit does not in reality intervene and bring persons into our lives, although Jesus' words, as you note, at times seem to suggest that, and our experience can seem to support such an interpretation. But the dualistic language of the Course is always metaphorical, and Jesus presents ideas in such terms because he knows they will be reassuring and comforting to our fearful, guilt-ridden mind. A number of previous questions have addressed both the Course's use and purpose for metaphoric language (e.g., see Questions #72 and #116) and the issue of whether God, the Holy Spirit, or Jesus intervene in our lives and the world, sending us both people and lessons (e.g., Questions #42, #235, #250, #286, and #336). The answers will elaborate on what we have touched upon only briefly here.

As for your relationship with your friend, it would be very difficult for most of us, identified with our egos, not to have judgments about what your friend is doing and not to want to avoid further contact. But the mistake would be to feel that the judgments and the desire to avoid are justified, based on the other person's behavior. This is one of the hardest lessons Jesus is inviting us to learn. Our feelings of upset and pain in truth never have anything to do with other persons and how they may be behaving, but only with our own unhealed self-accusations. And so we will not truly forgive any of our special relationships until we have looked without judgment at the guilt within our own mind that is fueling our reactions. The Holy Spirit is not concerned with whether we physically include or exclude anyone in our lives. Rather He is asking us to be honest about whether we are including them or excluding them in our minds, for they represent split off parts of our own mind that we have not wanted to accept responsibility for. And so by excluding them in our thoughts, we are excluding ourselves from healing and from the peace that will naturally follow. Would that be the choice we would want to continue to make, once we recognize the consequences?

Q #875: I seem to be the target of a special hate relationship with my ex-partner, the father of my infant child. A previous relationship is a major factor in this situation. Even though I send my love and pray for forgiveness of myself and my ex-partner, I still see no proof of healing our relationship in the world of form. I send him love in my actions and words; I make no demands on him; but he has made no effort to see his child. How do I deal with this pain? How do I overcome someone who is hating me, despite my love for him?

A: A key part of forgiveness involves trying to let go of the need to have the other person change. This is extremely difficult, as most students would testify -- especially in the kind of situation you have described. The pain must be intense at times, with many regrets about the past. But what would truly help everyone, including your daughter, is for you to be at peace, which means seeing this situation as a classroom with Jesus as your teacher. The curriculum is the external circumstances, and the lesson is that the peace within your mind cannot be disturbed by what has happened. The importance of learning this lesson -- which is a process that takes time -- is that all of your thinking and actions would then come from that center of peace and love, and you would no longer be preoccupied with the outcome. You would continue to function in your roles as mother, etc., but with less tension and anxiety.

This is quite different from sending love and praying for your ex-partner to let go of his hatred toward you so he will be a part of your daughter's life. From the world's point of view that would seem to be the best and only solution. Yet, from the perspective of our Atonement paths, we really don't know that. So what would help you most is a willingness to let go of your judgments and your investment in having him change. True forgiveness is not between two people perceived as separate. It has to do only with the relationship in your mind between you and your ego. Shifting that allegiance is really your purpose in life; and through the Holy Spirit's eyes your current situation can be seen as a means of doing that. This does not mean that you would be indifferent to your daughter's needs or your own; it just means that you would approach the situation differently -- not from the perspective of victims and victimizers, but from the perspective of people caught up in the ego thought system, looking for a way out of it. A giant first step for you, then, is to trust that by no longer wanting your ex to change, you are freeing yourself to be guided by the love that knows what is in everyone's best interests.

Q #876: I recently began reading *A Course in Miracles*. I am trying to stay sober from alcohol and fall off the wagon often. Although I am having difficulties, I have continued to seek for a God of my own understanding. Although I do not understand all that ACIM teaches, I do feel that God led me to this book. I frequently practice being an angel, but sometimes my short temper flares up and I don't act very angel-like. I want to be like an angel all the time so that others will see that God is really a miracle worker. Will your book help me to learn to be this kind of person? What can I do for myself that would help me to achieve this point. If miracles are possible, can God perform this kind of miracle for me?

A: Fortunately, what the Course would consider "angelic" is precisely the honesty about temper flare ups such as you describe. If you were an angel all the time, you would not need ACIM. Its teachings are for all who are aware that tempers (egos) are alive and well. A temper flare up reveals the mind's hidden choice for separation, and its need for healing. In this lies the foundation for the Course's teaching: the problem is the mind's choice for separation, not unangelic behavior and the solution is healing the mind of the thought of separation through forgiveness, not angelic behavior. The Course takes the focus off behavior and returns it to the mind. Thus, watching yourself have a temper flare up is useful only in that it shows you what the mind is up to.

The miracle Jesus teaches in the Course is recognizing that the true source of a temper flare up is guilt in the mind for having chosen to be separate from God, and from everyone else. The guilt is then projected out, and another person or one's own bad temper is mistakenly blamed for the outburst. Seeing the mind, rather than a bad temper, other people, events, or situations, as the true source of any upset is the first step in the forgiveness process, which is the miracle the Course teaches. It involves a decision made in the mind, and therefore can only be the responsibility of the one who decides. As used in the Course, the term "miracle worker" or "teacher of God" is anyone who is willing to take responsibility for the mind's power and choose the Holy Spirit instead of the ego. Agreeing to see everything as the reflection of a choice in the mind is the way to accept the Holy Spirit. This is the only true "angelic behavior."

God cannot make a new choice for us because He does not know that His Son has chosen the insane thought of separation. The Psychotherapy pamphlet tells us: **"God does not know of separation. What**

He knows is only that He has one Son” (P.2.VII.1:11,12). This means that God does not know about the world and does not perform miracles. When the Course speaks of God helping, it is referring to the Holy Spirit, Whom we perceive as helping us because we think we need help. What actually occurs is the mind that chose separation decides to choose against it. In the clarification of terms, Jesus tells us: **“God does not help because He knows no need. But He creates all Helpers of His Son while he believes his fantasies are true. Thank God for them for they will lead you home” (C.5.1:7,8,9).** When you find yourself behaving in a way that you consider unangelic, the important thing to do is to see this as a window to your mind where you have mistakenly chosen to identify with the ego. You then have the opportunity to ask the Holy Spirit's help to make another choice. With attention focused on your mind rather than your behavior, or the behavior of the person who ticked you off, you will have gone to the source of the problem. It will become increasingly clear that others are not the cause of your irritation. If you are not blaming them, your temper flare ups will gradually diminish and peacefulness will increase. Each time you are willing to remember the power of your mind in this way you are strengthening belief in it, and weakening belief in the ego for yourself and for everyone. That is how the miracle is shared, whether others are consciously aware of it or not. You will have chosen the miracle for everyone.

Q #877: *A Course in Miracles* teaches: “A healed mind does not plan. It carries out the plans that it receives through listening to wisdom that is not its own. It waits until it has been taught what should be done, and then proceeds to do it. It does not depend upon itself for anything except its adequacy to fulfill the plans assigned to it. . . .” (W.pl.135.11).

I have trouble accepting this passage completely. To me it appears like “slavery” or treating human beings as machines rather than sentient beings with a will of their own. Of course, you would say, we really have no will of our own but God's. But what puzzles me is the fact that we should listen to wisdom that is not of our own, i.e. outside ourselves? How can this be if we are God's Sons and thus His and our will are one? We can but listen to ourselves and follow that. Hence, surrendering to something outside ourselves (something “not our own”), seems somewhat unacceptable if not wholly impossible to me. Hence, the whole passage makes me turn my head, I feel it should read rather “listen to your inner guides and follow that” rather than “wait and see and be guided by some force outside yourselves”? I feel the whole passage is without love and understanding for the human situation.

A: This entire lesson, not just this passage, is presented as a *correction* of the ways we typically go about our lives in terms of protecting ourselves and shoring up what we judge to be our vulnerabilities. Jesus is helping us get at the *unquestioned assumptions* that are at the basis of all of our planning for the future -- e.g., that we are real as bodies in a physical universe that is real, and that we are capable of defining our problems and solving them. Getting us to look at those assumptions is one of Jesus' objectives in this lesson.

A major objective of the lessons in Part I of the workbook is to train us to turn our attention inward to the decision-making part of our minds, so that we would gradually realize that everything we experience originates with the choice we make to follow either the ego's direction or Jesus' direction. So when Jesus says in Lesson 135 that the healed mind listens to a **“wisdom that is not its own,”** he means that that mind that had formerly identified with the ego no longer chooses the ego as its teacher and now listens only to the Holy Spirit. When finally our minds are fully healed, the Holy Spirit's Voice becomes our own -- there is no difference -- we hear only the one Voice at all times. But it is also true at that stage that the self that could choose between the ego and the Holy Spirit is gone, and then there is but a single Will. The “human condition” would have been totally transcended -- not through surrender to some outside force, but by our own choice to deny our denial of the truth of Who we are **(T.12.II.1:5)** .

We have to try to connect with the point that Jesus is making at any given time in the Course, because he uses language and concepts loosely. The content is always consistent, but the language is not. Sometimes, for example, he is emphasizing our having deliberately split ourselves off from our true Self,

and so he will speak as if Christ were different from us. This is reflected in a later lesson when he has us say, **“A while I work with Him to serve His purpose. Then I lose myself in my Identity, and recognize that Christ is but my Self” (W.pll.353.1:4,5)** . Jesus thus assists us with the process -- which can take many, many years -- of disidentifying with the human self we chose as a defense against our true Self, so that we would regain our invulnerable, innocent Identity as God's one Son. It is a gentle process, providing all the help we need to reach this goal: **“Our Love awaits us as we go to Him, and walks beside us showing us the way. He fails in nothing. He the End we seek, and He the Means by which we go to Him” (W.pll.302.2)** . Love is our goal and we are one in that Love; but at the same time, the reflection of that Love is here to meet us in our human condition so that we could gradually realize that it is that Love beyond all humanness that we truly want.

You might be interested in Question #225 that also comments on Lesson 13 5 .

Q #878: Ever since starting to practice the workbook more seriously I seem to have become increasingly more aggressive, outspoken in situations where I should keep my mouth shut, unable to put my thoughts together properly, especially in written form, and all kinds of other “horrible” if not even frightening things for the ego. Is this a normal process of “breaking loose” and could you advise on how to proceed with the workbook to make the process more smooth and less hurting to other people? Frankly speaking, since *A Course in Miracles* arrived in my life “hell broke loose” so to speak, although I can laugh about it every now and then. But this leaves me somewhat puzzled, annoyed and frankly speaking helpless. Could you advise?

A: Something must be working, since it sounds like the lid that concealed the ego's can of worms is off. Although it is frightening, it is a good thing, because healing cannot occur if the sickness is denied or concealed. Having made a decision to study the workbook more seriously means you have chosen the Holy Spirit as your Teacher, which is the most loving thing you could do for yourself and everyone else. It is also the most terrifying thing for the ego. Therein lies the explanation for all hell breaking loose. The choice for the Holy Spirit is a choice for the ego's undoing, which means hell is indeed breaking loose. Jesus describes this dynamic in the text: **“The ego is deceived by everything you do, especially when you respond to the Holy Spirit, because at such times its confusion increases. The ego is, therefore, particularly likely to attack you when you react lovingly, because it has evaluated you as unloving and you are going against its judgment. The ego will attack your motives as soon as they become clearly out of accord with its perception of you. This is when it will shift abruptly from suspiciousness to viciousness, since its uncertainty is increased” (T.9.VII.4:4,5,6,7)**. The ego knows it is no longer ruling at the head of the class and naturally feels threatened. Thus, the part of you that identifies with the ego feels threatened and is striking out. Although the ego does not have the power to truly hurt anyone, your aggressions against others have the unhappy result of adding to your discomfort and increasing guilt. This is not the purpose of the workbook, nor the goal of your decision to practice it more seriously. While it is not necessary to change your behavior, understanding the ego's confusion and revolt takes some of the heat off, and may lessen the impulse to attack. More importantly, appreciating the significance of having chosen the Holy Spirit takes the focus off the attack behavior that has ensued. Seen in this light, the ego's reaction is not such a big deal, which will probably make you feel better and attack less.

An appreciation of the intensity of the ego's resistance also helps keep a clear perspective on the process. Earlier in chapter 9, Jesus tells us: **“The ego believes that all functions belong to it, even though it has no idea what they are. This is more than mere confusion. It is a particularly dangerous combination of grandiosity and confusion that makes the ego likely to attack anyone and anything for no reason at all. This is exactly what the ego does. It is unpredictable in its responses, because it has no idea of what it perceives” (T.9.IV.7:2,3,4,5,6)**. No wonder practicing the workbook seriously sends the ego into a tizzy. Obviously, Jesus knows the full intensity of his students' fear and resistance, which is why the lessons proceed gently, one day and one small step at a time. For good reason we are told: **“Fear not that you will be abruptly lifted up and hurled into reality. Time is**

kind, and if you use it on behalf of reality, it will keep gentle pace with you in your transition” (T.16VI.8:1,2).

The urge to attack can be viewed as a reminder of the decision you have made to choose the Holy Spirit, with the ego responding as “...**a frightened mouse that would attack the universe**” (T.22.V.4:3). It is then your choice whose guidance you will follow. Be grateful when you choose the Holy Spirit, and forgive yourself when you decide to be a roaring mouse.

Q #879: I seem to have an inescapable problem in following the Rules for Decision (T.30.1). I try to follow the preparation, “a quiet moment for reflection” during the day for “the kind of day you want” (T.30.4:1) so that “I will make no decisions by myself” (T.30.2:2). But because I seem to be continually caught up in unexpected situations in which I must respond immediately with no time to go inward and, “sit by and ask to have the answer given,” (T.30.5:3) later, upon reflection, I realize that I made up my mind and then decided (T.30.3:2), but only then do I have time to ask and listen for Jesus' guidance. In any situation in which I have prior time to prepare, e.g., making a phone call, visiting someone or receiving a visit, I do, “sit by and ask”(T.30.5:3) and try to prepare my mind. But my days are full of the unexpected: how do I handle this? At this point all I can say is, “Jesus -- help,” and hope his wisdom guides me.

A: Jesus does not expect that we will have time to sit quietly every time we have a decision to make during a busy day. This could cause serious traffic problems, to say the least. The quiet time spent at the beginning of the day is intended to help us set the purpose of the day in terms of content, not form. The question is: will this day be spent in learning the Holy Spirit's lessons of forgiveness, or serving the ego's goal of making the separation real by having all the ego's specialness needs met? Jesus knows that because of his students' intense identification with the ego we will spend a good part of the day doing the latter. That is why the formula in the Rules for Decision includes a corrective measure for the inevitable opposition that will arise from the ego, once a decision has been made to follow the Holy Spirit.

Jesus does not expect or require perfection. In fact, in the very beginning of this section in he tells us: “ **Do not fight yourself** ” (T.31.I.1:7) . He knows that by the time we say “ **Today I will make no decisions by myself** ” (T.30.2:2) we have probably already made a hundred. The point is to become aware of how “natural” it is to think and decide with the ego because we have learned its lessons so well. That is why Jesus' directives are gentle and considerate of our resistance. The important thing is to learn to pay attention to our thoughts and remember the morning's question “...**any time you think of it**” (T.30.4:1) . Remembering the goal in this way, if only for an instant, is enough to bring a different perspective to everything that happens, for it means the ego is no longer supreme ruler of the day.

There is no need for anything in form to change; it is the purpose/content that is of concern in the practice of *A Course in Miracles*. The only decision we make is between the ego and the Holy Spirit. When Jesus tells us to ask ourselves what kind of day we want, it is assumed we want a day that will make us happy. He goes on to tell us we can have the happiness we seek if we learn that our happiness lies in choosing the Holy Spirit instead of the ego, not choosing between A or B in form. That is the message in these rules, as well as the goal in applying them throughout the day. In lesson 64 we find the same message in another format: “ **Prepare yourself in advance for all the decisions you will make today by remembering they are all really very simple. Each one will lead to happiness or unhappiness. Can such a simple decision really be difficult to make? Let not the form of the decision deceive you. Complexity of form does not imply complexity of content. It is impossible that any decision on earth can have a content different from just this one simple choice. That is the only choice the Holy Spirit sees. Therefore it is the only choice there is**” (W.pl.64.5:3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10).

To help us through the confusion and complexity of the insanity of separation we are told in many different ways throughout the Course that there are only two choices: the ego or the Holy Spirit, illusion or truth, fear or love. In our experience, the choice is camouflaged in the seemingly diverse and

multitudinous events that occur in our lives. Applying the rules for decision means being willing not to be deceived by the form of the disguise, but to remember each time there is a decision to be made that the true choice lies in the mind and the two options are always the same. That is how to avoid what seems to be an inescapable problem in practicing the teachings of the Course.

It is also helpful to remember that the choice for the ego is reflected in just such complex dilemmas that are intended to impede the accomplishment of the Holy Spirit's curriculum. If the situation seems complicated, we know the ego has been put in charge. The Holy Spirit's perspective simplifies every situation, as seen in the workbook passage quoted above. His guidance is concerned only with the content of the mind, not with decisions related to behavior or form of any kind. Having overlearned the ego's lessons, it seems natural for us to think we know what will make us happy, and being right is high on the list. In this section, Jesus makes it very clear that we will be happy when we learn that we have been wrong in choosing to identify with the body, wrong in deciding to listen to the ego, wrong about being right. Earlier in the text, he asks us: **"Do you prefer that you be right or happy?" (T.29.VII.1:9)**. Probably the best part of the day to remember this question is when all the unexpected things pop up and catch us unprepared. These are the things we have not decided upon already, have not braced for with defenses about how things should be. The truth is we don't know how things should be, nor what will make us happy. That is why Jesus tells us **"... any time you think of it" (T.30.4:1)**, no matter how much we think we know what we're doing, we should remember to say: **"I want another way to look at this" (T.30.11:4)**. That is all we are asked to do.

Q #880: In *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus states that we would be too shocked and frightened to find out that there is no dream at all, so the interim solution would be to live a "happy" dream with positive attitudes etc. I wonder how can we be shocked at finding out that even the "happy dream" has been an illusion, if there isn't anything to cling to or split from? If we are pure consciousness, the realization must surely be natural? What is shocked and frightened must still be a part of the dream.

A: Yes, the frightened figure in the dream is part of the illusion along with consciousness, the happy dream, the real world, and the process of awakening. This is because **"In reality [the separation] never happened at all" (M.2.2:8)**. Although we are too frightened to believe him, Jesus does in fact tell us there is no dream **(T.18.II.9:2)**, no world **(W.pl.136.6:2)**, no body **(T.18.VII.3:1)** and no ego **(T.9.IV.5)**. This does not stop us, however, from believing in the existence of the whole package, and actively choosing *not* to believe the true and natural. Jesus tells us several times that we do not believe his message: **"Perhaps you do not feel you need a course which, in the end, teaches that only reality is true. But do you believe it? When you perceive the real world, you will recognize that you did not believe it" (T.11.VIII.1:2,3,4)**. The only explanation for this insanity is that we are too afraid to accept the Course's message and awaken to the truth. When we are no longer afraid of love and no longer devoted to the ego's specialness, it will indeed be natural to awaken from the dream entirely. Meanwhile, both attachment to specialness and fear of our true Identity as God's one Son keep the dream very real in our experience.

Because falling into the sleep of separation was a choice, awakening requires our willingness to make another choice. The very fact that we choose to remain entrenched in the ego thought system is simple proof that Jesus is right about our fear of accepting the true and natural. Our fear is such that we do not just cower and hide from the truth, we are quite actively opposed to it: **"You attack the real world every day and every hour and every minute, and yet you are surprised that you cannot see it" (T.12.VIII.1:3)**. In keeping with the ego's upside-down thinking, we have become very good at doing the unnatural and avoiding what is most natural; i.e., our identity as minds with the power to choose. However, in order to defend its choice for the unnatural (the ego and the body) the mind conveniently denies its power and projects the separation thought, making it look like events external to the mind are the cause of the body's seeming existence. The mind then becomes afraid of the natural in order to further support its belief in the unnatural. It has identified with the body and is terrified that it will be destroyed if it accepts its true identity. That is why we need the gentle process of forgiveness that Jesus

teaches in the Course. Its central message is that nothing external to the mind has any effect on it, and everything in the dream is the reflection of a choice in the mind. The goal is to restore to the mind awareness of its power to choose, so it will decide to make another choice, motivated by the pain of choosing separation. Guilt for this choice is what keeps the figure in the dream in a deep sleep wherein the call to waken is but dimly heard. Each time we are willing to see judgment against others as the projection of our own guilt for having chosen the ego, we loosen its grip and fear lessens. As fear and guilt are gradually undone in this way, the dream lightens and becomes a happy dream, until the attainment of the real world that will end all dreaming. Only then will the illusion of separation be forgotten and the knowledge of oneness (our natural state) restored.

Q #881: I have studied *A Course in Miracles* for many years, but still find it hard to believe that if someone goes out their way to intentionally undermine, attack, abandon, betray me, etc., that my natural reaction to get angry or fearful from the perceived attack is unjustified and merely a symbol of my own guilt. This for some reason doesn't wash with me. I consider myself a genuinely loving and tolerant person, and if I am attacked for no apparent reason, I am hurt by these actions, which makes me fearful, which leads to anger. Where in this cycle does the guilt from being separate from the Love of God fit in?

A: The Course's teaching on this subject is quite radical. There may be no other system that teaches that we are responsible for absolutely everything we experience -- not for what other people *do*, but for our *reaction* to what other people do. The basic reason is that before we react, we first choose to identify either with the ego or with the Holy Spirit in our minds. Then our *reaction* to what others or we ourselves do -- the *interpretation* of actions and behavior -- flows from the thought system we identify with in our minds. Thus, if you are identified with the love and forgiveness thoughts in your right mind, you could not be angry at another's attack, even if the attack had serious consequences in your life. You would not deny the objective facts in the world and in your life, and you could pursue legal action if that were warranted; but your internal state of peace would not change to anger. That is the main point. This is an advanced state, to be sure; but this is what Jesus is teaching us. When the ego thought system is gone from your mind, you would experience everyone else as either calling for love or expressing love. No other interpretation is possible if there is only love in your mind (**T.12.I**; see also **W.pII.347,348**). Again, this is a very advanced state -- the top of the ladder. Lesson 284 describes the gentle process of attaining this ideal (**W.pII.284**).

Anger is thought to be a normal human emotion; and it *is* normal on the human level. But the human level derives solely from the ego; it is a defense against our natural state of invulnerability as spirit, God's creation. When we choose against our true Self, we will feel guilty and will have to do something about that self-hatred and the threat of punishment automatically connected with it. That choice is not usually conscious -- although the object of the mind training of the Course is to have it become conscious -- so it seems unreasonable to be told that our anger is never justified, and even that we are deceiving ourselves when we feel victimized (**T.21.II.2:6**). Note, however, that Jesus never says *not* to get angry, and that when we do become angry, he says we should not judge ourselves for it. But if you look at the full spectrum of ego dynamics, especially its goal of keeping us mindless as bodies in space and time -- you can see why Jesus would teach that anger is not justified. The ego's major strategy is to keep us thinking we are innocent victims of what others have done to us. That way, we would never think to look within for the source of our problems and pain, and the ego's existence consequently would be secure, as would be its doctrine of separation: I am angry at *you* -- two separate persons!

Jesus is helping us to see the insanity of the ego's system of "protection" -- that we must suffer at the hands of vicious, cruel people or forces in order to be protected from the pain of the guilt we feel deep in our minds -- *they* are to blame, and *they* deserve to be punished. That is where the ego always wants us to wind up. Our lack of peace is thus always attributed to something else -- anything but our own decision to cherish our individual, special existence at the expense of our oneness, our true Identity as God's one Son in Heaven.

It is really important to see this teaching as ultimately liberating and merciful, not some kind of spiritual admonition that squelches human emotions. We are not aware of the thought system of fear that spawns all of our reactions to seemingly outer events. That is what Jesus is helping us with in this course so that we will be *permanently* free of fear and pain, and rest peacefully in our oneness. **“I am affected only by my thoughts. . . . in this single thought is everyone released at last from fear” (W.pll.338.title; 1:2)** . This is the ideal, once again, and we need to grow in trust that he is right -- that we will be okay without anger and judgments. We don't need anyone to remind us that we are not peaceful when we are in a state of anger -- that is obvious. But at the same time it seems unreasonable -- risky at the very least -- to accept Jesus' way to peace. That decision is ours alone.

Q #882: What becomes of the unforgiven? Hell?

A: Yes. However, the unforgiven are not those whose sins are unforgivable, and hell is not a place of punishment to which the condemned are banished to suffer untold agony for having sinned. Hell is the belief that God's Son can be separate from Him, living and dying in a body. It is guilt for choosing separation, and fear that God will retaliate with wrathful vengeance. It is the experience of refusing to forgive oneself for the “sin” of believing that separation is preferable to oneness. Thus, whenever we choose separation, cling to the ego's lie of specialness and judge this to be a sin, we are unforgiven and in hell. Both unforgiveness and hell are reflections of a choice made in the mind. The choice is to accept the ego's version of who God's Son is: a separate individual, abiding in a body; sinful, guilty, and afraid of being cast into hell at some unknown future time.

The goal of the Course is to teach us that there is another way: the Holy Spirit's. He represents the part of the mind that remembers the truth about God's Son, and through the Course's teaching brings release from hell. He does so by teaching that the mind has the power to choose between Heaven or hell, God or the ego, forgiveness or unforgiveness. In reality, **“there is no hell” (T.15.I.7:1)**, only the experience of searing pain that follows making the wrong choice. Release from this pain/hell lies in learning that the mind that chose wrongly can choose again.

Q #883: i. *A Course in Miracles* talks about the illusory world disappearing once we realize that we have never left God. How is this possible? If I have a thought then that thought stays with me forever. It may fade into the background, but it never disappears and can be recalled at any time when triggered by a specific stimulus. The same should apply to all my thoughts that I have had in this illusion.

ii. We project our fear onto someone else and then become afraid of what that person will do to us. There are a couple of billion people in this world and who knows whatever else exists in other illusions that are different from our universe. Nothing exists in the illusion. Does this mean that I have projected my fears onto the billions that are on this planet?

A: i. The self that has the thought will disappear as well, for that is just as illusory as the world. That is difficult for us to grasp, to say nothing of the terror we feel when confronted with that fact. But as Jesus says, when the veil is lifted and the world is gone, **“Nothing that you remember now will you remember” (T.19.IV.D.6:6)** . Similarly, **“You will not remember change and shift in Heaven. You have need of contrast only here” (T.13.IX.6:1,2)** . In God, there is no consciousness, no individual self with memories or individual thoughts: **“Nowhere does the Father end, the Son begin as something separate from Him” (W.pl.132.12:4)** .

As we practice our forgiveness lessons and find perceptions of separation and differences less and less useful and appealing, we will gravitate more toward what binds us all as one. Over time, we will lose

interest in anything that reminds us of separation and conflicting interests. This is what Jesus refers to as the **“attraction of love for love” (T.12.VIII)** , when the vision of Christ that sees us all as one becomes irresistible. This will grow in our awareness, and then one day we will awaken and thankfully realize that nothing else has ever been. The thoughts we held as individuals will have disappeared into the nothingness from which they came. This is a process that naturally and gradually occurs when our only focus throughout the day is forgiveness.

ii. This is a process that takes place entirely in the mind, which is outside time and space. That makes the mind's process rather difficult for us to comprehend, because we always think about things in terms of linear time and space. Yet, Jesus emphasizes that the world is nothing other than **“the outside picture of an inward condition” (T.21.in.1:5)** ; **“It still is true that nothing is without. Yet upon nothing are all projections made. For it is the projection that gives the ‘nothing’ all the meaning that it holds” (T.20.VIII.9:7,8,9).**

The point of this is that the mind is in such fear over its guilt -- thanks to its decision to listen to the ego instead of the Holy Spirit -- that it makes up a world filled with multitudes of objects onto which it can project its guilt. This is all going on only in the mind, though. There is not first a world and then a mind that projects its guilt and fear onto it. The strategy of projection, importantly, includes severing that connection, so that we wind up being aware only of a world of discrete things, having blocked out the fact that they are being generated by a mind seeking to unload its burden of guilt. Given this dynamic, you can project your fear onto anything at all. Usually, however, only certain people will trigger a reaction in you, not everyone. Remember, *A Course in Miracles* defines perception as *interpretation* -- it is not what you physically see that constitutes perception; it is how you *react* to what you see. So when you react strongly to someone -- and the person need not be physically present -- you want to see that as an opportunity to go back to the decision-making point in your mind and ask for help to look at your guilt and fear with Jesus or the Holy Spirit. As you do that more and more, you will project less and less. Then, finally, you will let go of the guilt and fear all together.

Q #884: Is extending gratitude to the ideas which joined me in my physical, illusory play in the form of body cells and tissues, trees, animals, insects etc., bringing truth to illusions? Or does keeping in mind that the reality of everything is a loving idea, if seen from the Holy Spirit's vantage point, allow the illusion to be brought to Truth? Is focusing on the ideas beyond the form the way to remember, that “God is in everything I see” (W.pl.29)?

A: Guilt for having chosen the separation and identity with the ego are the thoughts that made the body. These are certainly not thoughts for which to be grateful. The body is nothing to be grateful for, because of itself it *is* nothing **(T19.IV.C.5:5)** . In fact, there is nothing in the illusion of form that merits gratitude, precisely because it is illusion, not reality. Moreover, the world is the projection of the insane thought that the Son of God can be separate from his Source. Therefore, there is nothing inherently loving about it.

What's more, in *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus tells us: we do not know what anything is for **(W.pl.25)** , we do not know who we are **(T.9.I.2:5)**, what we really want **(T.11.II.3:7)**, or what love is **(T12.V.6:1)** . In this state of confusion, how could we possibly know what to be grateful for? Hope lies in accepting what Jesus tells us: **“ You do not know the meaning of anything you perceive. Not one thought you hold is wholly true. The recognition of this is your firm beginning” (T.11.VIII.3:1,2,3).** The beginning is willingness to be taught to see everything differently by looking through the eyes of forgiveness.

The practice of forgiveness, whereby every judgment is recognized as the projection of a choice in the mind, is the only way to bring illusion to truth. The important focus in this process is being willing to remember that nothing external to the mind has any effect on it. This is the foundation of forgiveness and the perspective the Holy Spirit brings to every experience in the dream. We can then be grateful to everything and everyone by acknowledging that none of them is responsible for anything we feel. That is

what is meant by the workbook lesson, **“I am not the victim of the world I see” (W.pl.31)** . This gratitude extends to oneself as well, in recognition of the mind's power to choose the Holy Spirit or the ego as interpreter of every experience in the dream. We can be thankful that our happiness does not depend on anything outside our minds, and requires only that we choose it, by choosing the Holy Spirit.

The first step is learning that the “happiness” we seem to experience in the world is the ego's specialness, not true happiness. This means looking honestly at all the things we think make us happy, and seeing them as tawdry substitutes for the real happiness we seek. As mentioned earlier, we don't know what that is, but we can learn that it is not anything the world offers. This requires a little willingness to question every value that we hold **(T.24.in.2:1)** . Every value means **“...all thoughts of what you are and what God is; all concepts you have learned about the world; all images you hold about yourself. ...everything [the mind] thinks is either true or false, or good or bad, of every thought it judges worthy, and all the ideas of which it is ashamed” (W.pl.189.7:1,2)**. To question these values we must first recognize them, and so our function is only to: **“...seek and find all of the barriers within yourself that you have built against [Him] ” (T.16.IV.6:1)**. We need not strive to see God in everything. When every value is questioned and found wanting, nothing will be held up to block the memory of God's Love in our minds, and then He will be in everything we see. This does not mean that He is present in the dream in any way. It means that when the memory of His Love is not blocked by the ego's specialness, everything is perceived through the lens of love's reflection.

Q #885: Why do I sometimes feel that the words spoken in *A Course in Miracles* are unkind? Is this a projection of the ego which is trying to steer me subtly away from the Course's purpose? What is the Course's purpose anyhow?

A: The goal of *A Course in Miracles* is to uncover what lies hidden within the ego thought system, so that it can be exposed to the light of truth to be healed. Exposure of the ugliness of the ego may seem unkind, just as patients cringe when the dentist probes to examine an aching tooth. The pain of the infected tooth is unbearable, but the helping hands of the dentist may be perceived as yet more painful. Careful examination of the Course's graphic descriptions of the ego reveals Jesus' kind and comforting diagnosis: we are not the gruesome ego in need of a root canal, we only *think* we are. He introduces descriptions of the ego's insanity with phrases such as: “you think you are....” “you believe you are....,” “you see yourself...”. Never does he say these beliefs are true. In fact, the only purpose for exposing these thoughts is to teach us that they are *not* true, and that we believe them because we have chosen them to support belief in the reality of separation and sin. The sickness of separation must first be exposed in order for it to be healed. The goal of the Course is healing the mind of the thought of separation, which Jesus helps us do by teaching us that just as we chose the ego, we can choose against it by choosing the Holy Spirit.

Yes, focusing on the Course's strong negative words in reference to the ego is a wonderful way for to halt progress in your study of the Course. The truth is, we have no problem believing that we are egos living and dying in bodies, with no hope of ever returning to our true state of oneness with God; the most unkind thing the Son of God could believe about himself. But we do have tremendous resistance to believing the message Jesus offers: we are God's innocent Son **(W.pl.95.12:2,3)** , the separation never happened **(T.6.II.10:7)** , the world is an illusion **(W.pl.155.2:1)** , and **“At no single instant does the body exist at all” (T.18.VII.3:1)** . Jesus adds insult to injury by telling us that this world is hell **(W.pl.182.3)** , every attack is murder **(T.23.III.1)** , guilt is projected from the mind in the form of hate **(T.18.VI.2)** , and finally, **“...a slight twinge of annoyance is nothing but a veil drawn over intense fury” (W.pl.21.2:5)** . To the part of the mind that identifies with the ego/body these words are indeed unkind; certainly not things we want to hear. In fact, the ego works very hard at keeping these thoughts from awareness, thereby defending the mind's continued choice for separation. The devastating consequences of choosing separation are hidden behind the world's seeming loveliness. In the text, Jesus uses the example of a framed picture to show us the ego's use of denial and deception. The ugly picture of the ego's specialness is **“...surrounded by a frame so heavy and so elaborate that the**

picture is almost obliterated by its imposing structure” (T.17.IV.8:2) . The ego uses both the positive and negative experiences of the world in fabricating its frame of deception. The positive experiences are diversions meant to convince us that the world is not such a bad place. The pain and misery of negative experiences prove the world is real. We have so overlearned the ego's message and adjusted to the heavy layers of denial, that Jesus spells things out using striking contrast between the ego's darkness and the loving message of the Holy Spirit's truth. Jesus urges us to **“look at the picture” (T.17.IV.9:1)** , not the frame. Unless we see that choosing the ego is the source of all the world's anguish, we will not move beyond the veil of illusion to awaken to the light of truth. That is the ultimate goal of the Course.

Q #886: How can the conscious mind, the mind of illusion, grasp the unconscious mind, the mind of truth, or the Mind of his Father, and consciously know that it is free of illusion? Is there a way to know you have been in truth?

A: Jesus tells us in the text that **“if you are wholly free of fear of any kind, and if all those who meet or even think of you share in your perfect peace, then you can be sure that you have learned God's lesson, and not your own” (T.14.XI.5:2)** . We all would readily admit that we are quite good at deluding ourselves into thinking we have gotten past the illusions of the ego, but it is more difficult to fool people who are part of our daily lives. So Jesus adds the second criterion to his test for determining which teacher we have followed. But this evaluation should extend over a long period of time, not just a given instant, because we are so capable of fooling both ourselves and others as well. A discussion of this may be found in our book *The Most Commonly Asked Questions about “A Course in Miracles,”* Question #43; see also on this Service Questions #43, #285, #309, #486, #498, and #536 . Practically every student of the Course has wondered about this same issue.

The lessons in Part I of the workbook are directly aimed at helping us get in touch with what we have concealed in our minds, so that we can -- with the help of Jesus or the Holy Spirit -- make a better decision. Again, though, this is a long process, for as Jesus tells us at the conclusion of the 365 lessons, **“This course is a beginning, not an end” (W.ep.1:1)** . We need to continue to apply the lessons in our daily lives with patience and gentleness, remembering always Jesus' assurance that we cannot fail. **“Forget not one this journey is begun the end is certain. Doubt along the way will come and go and go to come again. Yet is the ending sure. No one can fail to do what God appointed him to do. When you forget, remember that you walk with Him and with His Word upon your heart. Who could despair when hope like this is his? Illusions of despair may seem to come, but learn how not to be deceived by them. Behind each one there is reality and there is God. . . . The end is sure and guaranteed by God” (C.ep.1:1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10).**

Q #887: According to *A Course in Miracles*, since everything in this world is a means of seeing either the Holy Spirit's purpose or the ego's purpose, I do hope you can suggest some possible opportunities for forgiveness in my recent choice for a new job. Many feel that my having chosen to be the delinquent tax collector for our county means that I will be promoting the idea that taking from others is acceptable, since my job will involve enforcing laws that require a person's property to be taken and sold at public auction if taxes are not paid. Some call this legal theft. In spite of the guilt feelings this brings up, I prefer to see this job as another way to learn that there is no order of difficulty in miracles. I welcome your perspective and thank you for your comments.

A: You are correct, **“there is no order of difficulty in miracles” (T.1.I.1:1)**. The companion to this principle, there is no hierarchy of illusions **(T.23.III.2)**, further substantiates the equality of every classroom with any other classroom, your job with any other job. It would be a mistake to think that the choice for a job is dependent upon its not contributing in some way to the perceived victimization of other people. If that were the case, a lot of people would have to quit their jobs and a lot of work would not get

done. Moreover, for this world to work on its terms, taking from others is not only acceptable, it is required. Life in the body depends on taking life from other organisms; animal and vegetable. From the womb to the tomb survival means someone or something must die that I may live. This is a **“kill or be killed”** world (M.17.7) . The foundation of the ego's world and of every form of employment is the specialness bargain, wherein needs are met in exchange for some form of payment. Taxes are part of the deal and tax collectors are needed to get the job done. If your friends use roads, stop lights, bridges, or any of the multitudinous things paid for by taxes, they may thank you for doing your job. Meanwhile, it is your classroom for uncovering the guilt induced by the belief that in choosing separation we stole life and power from God, and are illegal aliens in a world of our own making.

It is also a mistake to think that some jobs are more spiritual, just, valuable, or important than others, or that “holy” people are tax exempt. As we all know, two things are certain in this world: death and taxes. The ego would have us believe that in both cases we are ripped off by very powerful, vicious authority figures (God and the government). The Holy Spirit tells us this is the projection of the mind's insane decision to rip itself off by identifying with the thought of separation, rather than accepting its true Identity as God's Son. Seeing the guilt and victimization feelings that arise with regard to taxes, politics, and governments is a perfect opportunity to see the reflection of the split mind's conflict. It is important to remember that this conflict is present in every relationship, as well as every job, no matter how cleverly it may be disguised. All the pain and misery experienced in this world are the taxes we pay for the mistake of choosing the ego. These taxes must be paid until a decision is made to identify with the Holy Spirit instead. Only then will we accept the inheritance we are entitled to as God's Son: **“ awareness of love's presence”** (T.in.1:7). And this inheritance is tax free.

Q #888: I've been wondering about the dispensing of our sense of guilt. In many therapies, the recognition of our feelings, especially negative ones such as envy, guilt etc., is important so that we can let the feelings go. Yet *A Course in Miracles* states that ultimately guilt isn't real and that we should not recognize it as “truth.” Then again, it states that as long as we believe in the body's truth, we would have to obey its laws that we set up ourselves.

So wouldn't it be an easy cop out to say, “Oh, those negative things aren't real anyway, so why bother with them?” At the same time, they are part of our physical selves and might come out secretly at the other end and be harmful to us. We are also living in a human body and -- as the Course states, too -- to deny that would be an even greater denial of the truth. So if we keep on recognizing the body and its attached sense of guilt, then how can we ever get out of here and return to the true state of mind that is still ours? It seems to be some kind of trap where the door has disappeared. Can you advise?

Also, Jesus tells us that we must first live a “happy dream” before we can realize that there is no dream at all. However, does not every “happy” thing include its opposite by definition? How can we live a happy dream when that implies that there must be something sad as well? Isn't that an illusion? Is that what Jesus means when he says that when we really come across living a happy dream, “God will bow down to us” and the bridge to “real life”/truth will be there for us to cross? So once we recognize the illusion of distinguishing between happy and sad, good and bad, there is no dream at all. We cross the bridge to truth and the Self that is one with God. Is that all there is to it?

A: *A Course in Miracles* does not ask that we deny feelings. They are an important key to recognizing the choice that has been made in the mind. In fact, the goal of the mind training the workbook teaches is to make us increasingly aware of what we are thinking and feeling. The thoughts and feelings that are experienced in the dream are the reflection of a decision made in the mind that is outside time and space. When the mind decides to identify with the body, it then denies the choice and dissociates itself from its true identity as a mind. Jesus tells us our feelings and hidden thoughts are the guide to recognizing the forgotten choice the mind has made: **“How can you know whether you chose the stairs to Heaven or the way to hell? Quite easily. How do you feel?”** (T.23.II.22:6,7,8). He goes on to tell us that certainty

and peace accompany the decision to turn toward Heaven by choosing the Holy Spirit. Any other feeling tells us we have chosen the ego's road to hell. Therefore, our feelings should not be dismissed. That would be, as you say, a cop out, driving them further under cover and burying the mind's choice in deeper darkness.

What makes the recognition of feelings part of a healing process, rather than a trap, is looking at them without judgment, and being willing to see them for what they are, not as the ego interprets them. The goal is not to justify them, blame others for them, or indulge them, but to see them as the inevitable and desired result of a choice in the mind. Acknowledging the mind as the source of every feeling means that the feelings change as the mind is healed. Part of the healing process may involve working with a therapist to bring the feelings to the surface and to identify the persons or situations that were their projected source. What makes practicing the Course a different kind of therapy is attributing every experience to the mind's decision, and not to anyone else nor to anything in form. This means no one else is responsible for how one feels. Neither are feelings caused by anything the body has done to itself. They come only from having decided for the ego and then judging it as sinful. Looking beyond the feelings to their source is how to practice the forgiveness Jesus teaches in the Course. Not only is it not a trap, it is the escape route out of the ego's trap because it makes the power of the mind real in our awareness and diminishes the seeming power of the body and its guilt. When guilt is seen as a purposive and not so desirable choice, rather than a powerful force, its unreality gradually becomes apparent and it will eventually disappear for lack of nourishment. A little willingness to see feelings in this light is all that is required to set us in the right direction with the Holy Spirit by our side to **"...give [us] certainty of where [we] go" (T.23.II.22:13) .**

Being certain of where we go (out of the dream), with Whom we go (the Holy Spirit) and how we go (forgiveness), is what makes us happy in the dream. It is not really about the dream; it is the **"fixed determination" (T.31.VIII.11:1)** to go beyond the dream that makes it "happy." This reflects the mind's decision to hold Jesus' hand and walk with him out of the illusion. It has nothing to do with the distinctions we make as bodies about what is good, bad, happy, or sad. These all reflect the ego's judgment based on the belief in separation and the reality of the body. The happy dream is the reflection of the part of the mind that chooses to identify with the Holy Spirit, Who is the memory of what lies beyond illusion. In this, as always, it is helpful to remember that the Course is using words that **"...are but symbols of symbols... twice removed from reality" (M.21.1:9,10) .** Its use of symbols and images is necessary to reach us who believe we are irretrievably lost in the dream.

The only distinction we must learn to make is between the ego's voice and the Holy Spirit's. This is accomplished through the process of forgiveness described above. That is all there is to it. It is a simple process, but one that takes quite a bit of practice due to the resistance to letting go of identity with the body. When we do, we will return to the oneness with God that we never truly left, symbolized in the Course by the image of God reaching down: **"And then your Father will lean down to you and take the last step for you, by raising you unto Himself" (T.11.VIII. 15:5).**

Q #889: A person I socialize with is in the habit of reciting the rosary when someone travels with her and expects the other person to recite it with her. As a student of *A Course in Miracles*, would it be dishonest to recite "Hail Mary...pray for us sinners now...." or would it rather be a loving thing to do and in accordance with the Course teaching: "Recognize what does not matter, and if your brothers ask you for something 'outrageous', do it because it does not matter." (T.12.III.4:1)? Would this exhortation apply to the situation I am talking about?

I am a non-practicing catholic and have been a student of the Course for the past 6 years. Some of the women I socialize with attend church on a regular basis. I have been asked what church I attend. I didn't like being asked about that, as there is only one church in our parish. So, the first time I ignored the

question. The second time, I spontaneously answered: "Good question!" I don't feel like answering that my spiritual path is *A Course in Miracles*. What would be a loving, honest way to answer that question?

A: You have given yourself a very good answer to your question. It may certainly be a loving thing to say Hail Marys with your friend. There is nothing dishonest in being willing to meet your friend on her turf and on her terms. While your friend practices her beliefs, you can also practice yours by focusing on the content (the thoughts in your mind), not allowing the form (rosary) to come between you and your friend. This could make for a very relaxing ride.

Similarly, there is no need to tell anyone that you are a student of the Course. The important thing from the perspective of the Course, is to pay attention to the discomfort you experience with your friends' inquiries, because it reflects the mind's conflict. The goal of the Course is to help us become aware of just such discomfort, so that the beliefs and judgments that are hidden beneath it can be exposed. That is the only focus the Holy Spirit brings. If you are willing to look at whatever judgments you have regarding your friends' catholic practice and your identity as a non- practicing catholic / student of the Course, you may be surprised to find beliefs you were not aware of. These beliefs and judgments are what make it difficult to discern what to say to your friends about church attendance. Every judgment is some form of unforgiveness and unforgiveness blocks communication. As Jesus tells us in the workbook: "**Certain it is that all distress does not appear to be but unforgiveness. Yet that is the content underneath the form**" (W.pl.193.4:1, 2). With this in mind, it is possible to find the way out of every dilemma: "**...only forgiveness heals an unforgiveness, and only an unforgiveness can possibly give rise to sickness [distress, discomfort, uneasiness] of any kind**" (P.2VI.5:5).

When forgiveness of one's judgments becomes the goal in the relationship, the relationship changes, and on some level all who are involved perceive the shift. Questions and answers may change, but it is the change in content that truly matters. In some form, the message that your friends' inquiries are not upsetting to you will be communicated to them. Releasing them of any responsibility for your feelings makes every interaction lighter. Whatever you say will be free of judgment. If you remain a kind and loving friend in this way they probably won't care what church, if any, you are attending. If they do care, it won't be an issue for you. You can't lose.

Q #890: In addition to the valuable changes in perception that practice *A Course in Miracles* provides, are there any Course students who have had some degree of enlightenment experience? Are the Course's teachers mainly talking from the perspective of belief and conceptual understanding (as opposed to direct experience of non-duality)? Given Zen's emphasis on a human teacher (who has experienced some degree of enlightenment) to ensure that the student doesn't confuse progress with ego milestones, how is this avoided in the Course?

A: We don't know whether or not any Course students or teachers have had direct experiences of non-duality. There would be no need to announce, really, that one has had such an experience, and having that experience is not the immediate objective of the lessons in *A Course in Miracles* (see T.8.I.1,2; T.24.in.1; M.26.2,3). There is only one qualification that Jesus gives for becoming a teacher of God. In his somewhat startling definition he states: "**A teacher of God is anyone who chooses to be one. His qualifications consist solely in this; somehow, somewhere he has made a deliberate choice in which he did not see his interests as apart from someone else's**" (M.1.1:1,2). That is the only qualification, which actually is one of the major themes running through the entire Course. Learning to perceive each other and relate to each other in the context of the common purpose we all share as God's one Son -- now fragmented, but desirous of returning home to our oneness in God -- is the means of approaching the non-dualism of reality. The perception that we all share the same mind -- wrong mind, right mind, and decision-making power -- reflects the ultimate ontological non-dualism of reality.

We are both drawn to the truth and terrified of it; attracted to union and terrified of being without our individual identity. Believing we are individual, separate human beings, we would have to be terrified of pure Oneness; and if we weren't, we would not need the Course or any other spiritual path. Therefore, abstract Oneness must be represented and taught in a form that we can understand and accept. We need teachers who can communicate to us on our level, recognizing our tremendous fear and resistance to letting go of our individual self. They must use the language and symbols of the world of separation and individuality to gently and gradually lead us beyond it (see **T.25.I.5,6,7; W.pl.184.9,10,11**) . One form in which that need is met is Jesus and this course.

Teaching in *A Course in Miracles* is thought of in an entirely different light from what is typically thought of in the world as teaching. In the manual for teachers Jesus tells us that his course **“emphasizes that to teach is to learn, so that teacher and learner are the same”** ; and he continues with this important description of teaching: **“To teach is to demonstrate. There are only two thought systems, and you demonstrate that you believe that one or the other is true all the time. From your demonstration others learn, and so do you” (M.in.1:5; 2:12,3)** . The Course says virtually nothing about the formal classroom-type situation, but a great deal about the *content* that is taught, and how it is taught: **“... the content of the course never changes. Its central theme is always, ‘God’s Son is guiltless, and in his innocence is his salvation.’ It can be taught by actions or thoughts; in words or soundlessly; in any language or in no language; in any place or time or manner” (M.1.3:4,5,6)** . A student, therefore, does not have to be in a formal classroom to learn this course. Jesus stresses only the need to develop a relationship with the Teacher within our minds Who reflects to us the abstract truth of Heaven.

In view of all this, if you are in a class on *A Course in Miracles* , you are going to learn either that separation is reality or that oneness is reality; that separate interests are valued or that shared interests are the only value. That is what will be communicated, regardless of the words, teaching aids, and techniques used -- and regardless of how well versed the instructor/facilitator is on the thought system of the Course. In the text, Jesus talks about **“right teaching and right learning” (T.4.I)** , and there he warns about the **“ego-oriented”** teacher who **“is concerned with the effect of his ego on other egos, and therefore interprets their interaction as a means of ego preservation. I would not be able to devote myself to teaching if I believed this, and you will not be a devoted teacher as long as you believe it” (T.4.I.6:4,5,6)** . This is a helpful guideline that alerts us to the ways in which specialness can creep into the teaching/learning situation. But it is only after considerable practice in monitoring our minds and observing our reactions in our daily lives that we will be able to discern the message we are giving and receiving. This is why in the text Jesus cautions us about putting ourselves in charge of our own spiritual process: **“Some of your greatest advances you have judged as failures, and some of your deepest retreats you have evaluated as success” (T.18.V.1:6)** . This does not mean, however, that we need to turn to an external teacher because of our deficiencies, although it would not be wrong to do so. The process is primarily an internal one between ourselves and the Holy Spirit, Who holds for us the memory of the truth of Heaven.

Q #891: I find that I'm only willing to honestly look at my thought system when things are going badly. When I'm comfortable, when all seems “right with the world,” I have very little motivation to make the kind of extraordinary commitment to change as is necessary for learning the course. That said, I feel as though on some level I make things in the world bad so that I will be willing to learn. For as long as I believe the world is real (and obviously I am very invested in that belief), I feel that studying *A Course in Miracles* equals discomfort in every day living. I realize intellectually that Jesus is not punishing me, but I do react that way. How would you recommend that I think about this differently?

A: Part of the ego's scheme to convince us that there is life outside of Heaven, and we are enjoying it, is to make a vast array of enticing substitutes for the true happiness that is our inheritance as God's innocent Son. When all seems “right with the world,” it can only be due to the fleeting pleasure of having all the ego's specialness needs satisfactorily met. Your experience of wavering motivation in practicing the Course is common. As long as we are satisfied with a life filled with the exhausting effort of finding the

“happiness” the ego offers, only to have it vanish without notice in an instant, we will not change our minds and awaken from the dream. The ego does a clever job of disguising and denying the pain that permeates its thought system, which is why we need the Holy Spirit’s help to uncover the misery that lies beneath the ego’s “good times.”

One of the important goals of the Course is to help us see the inevitable and unavoidable pain of identifying with the ego. As Jesus tells us in the text: **“Anything in this world that you believe is good and valuable and worth striving for can hurt you, and will do so. Not because it has the power to hurt, but just because you have denied it is but an illusion, and made it real” (T.26.VI.1:1,2).** The goal is not to look for ants at every picnic, but to not be fooled by the meaningless glitter of what does not truly satisfy and does not even exist. The ego would have us believe that when things are rosy we have found a wonderful substitute for Heaven, and when they’re not so rosy it’s not our fault; God must be punishing us. Thus, the ego gets us coming and going. And just to be sure all the bases are covered with no escape possible, the ego cleverly claims that the only way to learn the Course is to be miserable. This exemplifies its fool-proof case for dismissing the Course altogether **(T.5.VI.10:6)**, or at least delaying progress by strengthening the belief that the world is real. The Holy Spirit uses all the distinctions between rosy days and gray days to teach us they are all the same, in that they serve as a classroom to practice forgiveness.

Jesus straightens our backwards and upside-down interpretation of everything: **“You who are steadfastly devoted to misery must first recognize that you are miserable and not happy. The Holy Spirit cannot teach without this contrast, for you believe that misery is happiness” (T.14.II.1:2,3).** You are not actually making things bad, but are seeing that the world does not work as a substitute for Heaven, no matter how convincing the ego’s story seems. If that serves as motivation to follow a path that leads out of the dream of separation to our true home, a bad day takes on a very useful and positive purpose. And that’s not so bad. In fact, it can be seen as evidence that the mind has decided to turn away from the ego toward the Holy Spirit, which gives a happy ending to a bad day.

What makes the happiness of this world misery is the fact that it will end (not to mention that it is not real in the first place), and what does not last cannot bring happiness. Jesus takes this a step further: **“You can be sure indeed that any seeming happiness that does not last is really fear” (T.22.II.3:5).** This means that when we think we are happy about anything in this world we are really afraid, and when we are *not* happy we are afraid. Obviously we do not know what happiness is. The only way to see this differently is to learn that nothing in this world will make us truly happy. As long as anything in this world is perceived as desirable, misery is inevitable. Keeping this in mind will provide a steady motivation to practice the forgiveness that will lead us out of the nightmare of separation where nothing is truly “right.” We need not be totally free of our mistaken ideas about happiness and pain, it is enough that we be willing to admit that we do not know what will make us happy. This is easier said than done since identity with the body depends on being right about who we are. That is why resistance is so great and motivation to learn this Course can be sluggish. Jesus thus tells us what we need to hear more than anything else: **“Step back now, teacher of God. You have been wrong. Lead not the way, for you have lost it” (M.22.5:7,8,9, italics added).** When all seems “right with the world,” it may be helpful just to gently remind yourself of this, without trying to change anything. This introduces doubt, which weakens belief in the ego’s version of what is right or wrong, or good or bad, and opens the way to a different interpretation. When the obstacle of the ego’s “rightness” is removed, the Holy Spirit’s is revealed.

Q #892: I've read much about “near death experiences” over the years and have found these accounts almost always inspiring and reassuring. The nature of many of these experiences would seem at odds with the ego's purpose to keep us attached to our bodies. I have read many accounts of NDEs where the experiencer is ecstatic to be free of the body; and most are angry/sad/disappointed at finding themselves back in their bodies after the event. I read an earlier reply to an NDE question where you said that they are sometimes given a 'special' mission to carry out on their return (pandering to the ego); however I have never read one where the returnee felt this experience made him feel 'special'. Mostly they feel extremely

grateful to have been given a glimpse of, what they now think, is their true state; and the experience often makes them much better people. I'm wondering how the wonderful feeling of liberation from the body and sense of oneness with everything that many NDEers experience actually serves the ego?

A: If there is a feeling of oneness with everything -- without the slightest *need* to let others know of it, or the slightest hint of specialness over having had the experience -- then it would *not* be an ego event. From the point of view of *A Course in Miracles*, however, the person's mind would not be fully healed if the feeling of liberation and all-inclusive love is diminished or changed upon "finding themselves back in their bodies after the event." The Course teaches that love is our reality, not the body; and therefore when your mind is fully identified with that Love of Heaven, you would clearly see the body -- as did Jesus -- as simply a vehicle through which that Love flows. You would see either that expression of love everywhere or else calls for it; and therefore there would be no sense of sadness or disappointment, as you would know you are not *in* the body. Your identity remains as it is -- apart from the body. The love in your mind would be expressed in bodily form, so that others still identified with their bodies could recognize it and accept it in a way that would not overwhelm them with fear. An NDE, thus, can be a non-ego experience; but that same experience of being beyond the body can occur at any instant we choose against the ego. In other words, it is always accessible to us, as it is solely a matter of the choice we make in our minds, and has nothing to do with the condition of our bodies.

A Course in Miracles teaches that the body is a projection of the mind and has no reality in and of itself. In this sense, the mind is the cause and source of all bodily conditions and experiences; the body is only an effect of the mind's decisions. The mind is split between the ego thought system and the correction of that, which is the Holy Spirit's thought system of forgiveness. Thus, all seeming bodily occurrences -- physical and psychological -- can be understood as symbols reflecting to us our mind's decision for either the ego or the Holy Spirit. This is not our "true state," but true perception, or right-mindedness, leads us there, as Jesus explains: **"It cannot be emphasized too often that correcting perception is merely a temporary expedient. . . . accurate perception is a steppingstone towards it [knowledge]. The whole value of right perception lies in the inevitable realization that *all* perception is unnecessary"** (T.4.II.11:1,2,3). Our true state is as Mind (capital *M*) -- pure spirit, pure oneness, beyond all perception entirely. We experience the reflection of our true state whenever we do not perceive our interests as apart from anyone else's, the consistent practice of which leads to the perception that we *are* the same.

Q #893: That we are "asleep" and dreaming makes sense to me. I understand that I'm not alone in the creation of this dream and the real me is not what I think it is. I feel I'm making real progress.

Then there's the concept of "being somewhere" -- which I understand is an idea limited by the necessary use of language of time and space, caused by the belief in separation. And each lifetime is already over, so we are only reviewing. We are in fact not asleep, we are in a state outside of time. And we're being enthralled by guilt? by addiction? by what? causing us to keep compulsively reviewing what has already finished. But why the compulsive rehashing? Is it like wanting to dive back into a dream when you begin to awaken in the morning? If we are the observer, the sleeper, the reviewer -- is there actually *no self* in the dream at all? So it's not so much that "we are all one" here, but that our Self is one, and no one is here? I've had a flash that this is true, but then I got scared or excited, and lost the thread.

So is it that here there are just two patterns -- like energy patterns structuring thought, creating projections: the Holy Spirit's and the ego's? And that infusing those two movies with identity is the observer, sleeper, dreamer? And that by identifying with the thought system closest in vibration to the real one, we begin to resonate with the observer and remember that we actually aren't in the dream?

A: You are right -- there is no self in the dream, only projected images with which we each have chosen to identify. And the fragmented self or mind that has chosen to identify with only a certain image in the dream is simply an aspect of one self that we all share. However, that self we all share is not our true

Self, but the illusory self of the split mind -- the observer you've referred to above. It is this self, outside the dream of time and space, that *A Course in Miracles* is asking us to recognize increasingly as our identity, through the practice of forgiveness. This self has the choice either to continue to identify with the false ego thought system of sin and guilt, or the Holy Spirit's true thought system of forgiveness and peace -- the two energy patterns you refer to. The Holy Spirit's thought system is still an illusion, because it is a correction for the ego's lies and deception, but it is a reflection of the oneness of our true Self, which has been completely unaffected by the imaginings of the split mind.

The reason for the "compulsive rehashing" from the perspective of the ego thought system is that identifying with the dream figure and relishing our various roles in the dream are what keep us unaware that we are the mind reviewing and not the figure acting in the dream. This confusion guarantees that the separation will not be healed, for we keep our focus on the projected dream, where no real change can be effected, rather than on the projecting part of the mind, where a different choice can be made. In other words, we *want* to remain identified with the ego and we *want* to maintain the separation (**T.4.VI.4:2,3,4; T.13.III.2:5**), and reviewing what is already over and past merely keeps the thought system underlying those dreams alive in our mind, with no apparent opportunity to make a different choice.

We reinforce our identification with the observer role in the mind through the practice of forgiveness, which is simply the releasing of our judgments. Judgment keeps us rooted in the rehashing, believing that something of import and significance is happening here, with some outcomes to be preferred over others. So long as we value our judgments, we will value the dream, and we will not be open to the process of awakening. And while we fear awakening, our insights into the unreality of this world can be both exciting and frightening.

Q #894: My younger son traveled to Senegal a while ago and joined a Muslim community, in search of his spiritual roots (his biological father is black American, I am white German). He and my husband never got along too well, causing me many hardships. Furthermore he had a rather difficult time here in Sweden, where we live, because of his ethnicity, and developed a negative attitude toward what he calls europe-centricity. Is all this my own projection? My concern is that the community he joined now might have a more or less fanatical side to it. On the other hand I am fully aware that he must choose his own spiritual way. And even *A Course in Miracles* tells us that there are many ways. So who am I to judge? I was mothering him long enough, but still have difficulties in completely letting him go. How can I meet him without being afraid, without trying to convince him that the way of the Course might be better for him. How can I ask the Holy Spirit for help?

A: It is a very difficult lesson for a mother to watch her child making choices that she does not agree with, especially if she believes the choices could place her child in danger. The Course does not offer any specific answer about what if anything to say to your son, or whether to intervene in any way. It does ask -- as it asks every student of the Course -- that you be honest about *your reactions and judgments* in response to your son's choices and actions, for these are your projections. And once you have acknowledged and released your own projections, then whatever you say or do, or not, will be loving and helpful.

What is critical to recognize is the interpretation you may be making based on whatever form in the world you are observing. Certainly, it can simply be an honest evaluation of the facts that leads you to conclude that there may be a potential for violence in the situation your son has become involved in. But if you experience anxiety or fear or any other form of upset as you consider that possibility, you must be making an ego interpretation (e.g., **T.4.IV.4**) . For you are viewing the situation in terms of actual or potential victims and victimizers, and once that distinction has become real in your mind, you can be sure that projection is involved. Granted, the perception of victims and victimizers is very difficult to avoid while we remain identified with our separated selves, but that is only because the projection of our inner guilt,

which is not real, is what in fact maintains the belief that there is danger outside of us (e.g., **W.pl.121.2,3,4**). But such a perception is neither accurate nor justified.

That we have been caught in the ego's interpretation of a situation is evident if we become involved in evaluating the relative merits of each position in the conflict, as the ego would have us do (e.g., **T.12.I.2**). For the only real problem is the very fact that we are perceiving the situation in terms of victims and victimizers, thus denying the power of every mind to choose what its experience shall be (**T.28.II.5**). The world and people can be unkind and cruel, and apparent victims can feel justified in striking back. But unless we can step back and look from above the battleground, any perception we have will only reinforce our belief in victims and victimizers, no matter how hard we try to be fair and reasonable.

So you can ask the Holy Spirit or Jesus for help in looking with you at your fears and concerns and judgments. And they will remind you that nothing is at it seems, and the only reason you are in fear and conflict is because you continue to want to believe in the reality of the separation (**T.2.VI.4:1,2,3,4**). For that is what keeps the self you want to believe you are, including all its various roles, such as mother, alive in your perception and your experience. Peace will never be found in any of the specific roles, but only when we can begin to take all of our roles less seriously, and recognize that we are *all* simply brothers and sisters to each other, with the same Father.

Q #895: I have a mental illness, which means that I am very unstable. I understand that part of my problem is actually an underdeveloped ego. The first half of my life I was intensely searching for a faith, probably largely because I felt so insecure, and I was not interested in worldly things. Now it seems that I need to get more earthed and I wonder whether letting go of my ego is a sensible thing for me to do, given my difficulties. On the other hand, I feel very drawn to *A Course in Miracles* and it makes a lot of sense to me in general. My development was arrested when I was very young and in reading someone's e-mail regarding children and that didactic teaching of the Course is not appropriate for them, I was wondering whether this might also apply to me.

A: Since letting go of the ego is the very *end* of the process that the Course is leading us along, and along the way, especially at the beginning, the focus is simply on recognizing our ego and not condemning ourselves for having one, the Course could in fact be a helpful part of your healing. For your description of your earlier flight from the ego suggests that, while overtly attempting to rise above worldly things, you were actually making them very real in your perception and were therefore reinforcing your ego, their source. But now, with the Course, you can begin to learn how to look at your ego and all its various expressions without fear or self-condemnation.

It is important to remember that the Course's process is not ever one of giving up anything, including the ego, but rather one of learning to use whatever we have already made real in our lives for a different purpose -- for forgiveness rather than for separation and attack and guilt and fear. For no matter what the various forms may have been, the ego has been in charge of all of our lives, until we learn there is a different choice for how we will use all our life experiences. And while we are identified with the ego, we all suffer from the same disease. As Jesus clarifies for us, **“Sickness is insanity because *all sickness is mental illness, and in it there are no degrees. One of the illusions by which sickness is perceived as real is the belief that illness varies in intensity; that the degree of threat differs according to the form it takes. Herein lies the basis of all errors, for all of them are but attempts to compromise by seeing just a little bit of hell* (P.2.IV.8:1,2,3; italics added).**

Certainly, given your experience up until now, you will want to be careful that you do not simply focus on those parts of the Course that describe the end of the forgiveness process, trying to jump over the steps that it is attempting to lead you along that involve looking directly at the ugliness of the ego without taking it seriously. For this looking is a central part of the process of learning to accept yourself and others just

where each of you happens to be on your Atonement path (T.9.III.6:4) . And that is really what forgiveness is all about.

Although parallels have been suggested to you between your arrested development and a child's, you have the benefit as an adult of being able to reflect on where you have been and where you are going. Certainly, much like a child, you may have to expend more effort learning how to cope with the world and its demands, but you have a capacity for self-observation that will enable you to recognize when you have chosen your ego as a way of avoiding dealing with the world, and what the costs are, so that you will be able to make a different choice, if you want to.

Q #896: While studying *A Course in Miracles*, I am really struggling with “not struggling” during the workbook practice periods. In other words, I can't seem to quiet my mind. Any suggestions?

A: Your struggle is addressed in lesson 9 of the workbook: “ **It is difficult for the untrained mind to believe that what it seems to picture is not there. This idea can be quite disturbing, and may meet with active resistance in any number of forms (W.pl.9.2:1,2).** Jesus tells us here that, to the ego, the message of the workbook (the Course itself) is disturbing. The busy chatter of a noisy mind is one of the forms that resistance to its message takes. It is the ego's way of insisting that the thoughts and experiences of the body are real, and have the power to obliterate from awareness the memory of God. The strategy works, because to whatever extent the noise is taken seriously, it is given the power to keep the memory of God's Love out. Struggling not to struggle is struggling, which is another form of resistance that gives power to the noise.

Because trying not to resist will not work, Jesus gives us another helpful instruction in the “Rules for Decision”: “**...if you find resistance strong and dedication weak, you are not ready. Do not fight yourself**” (T.30.I.1:6,7) . The first thing to do in practicing the workbook, therefore, is to stay calm. Since Jesus tells us we will resist, we should not be surprised by the noise that seems to intrude on the quiet. The noise is saying: “I am afraid to be quiet.” As you have observed, struggling against this only compounds the fear and the noise, in a seemingly hopeless battle, wherein the busy mind is judged as sinful and thus made real, to serve as an obstacle to the quiet. Thus, the ego is safe as long as you struggle. Moreover, thinking that the struggle can be won further strengthens the ego's belief that it is in charge of the Atonement, which guarantees the continuance of noisy thoughts. Recognizing this is the beginning of quieting the mind, because the source and purpose of the noisy chatter have been rightfully acknowledged.

It is possible to train the mind to observe the invasion of thoughts without judging them, reminding yourself gently: “I am too afraid to be quiet.” This gentle, non-judgmental reminder takes the edge off the struggle. It is preferable to look honestly at how fearful and resistant we are without judgment for a brief instant, than to spend long periods struggling to be quiet. In this practice, less is definitely more. In fact, in several places in the workbook we find reminders to stop whenever there is any sense of strain (see, for example, W.pl.12.6:4) .

The split mind has over learned forgetting, and it takes patient unlearning to remember. The patience that is one of the characteristics of God's teachers (M.4.VIII) rests on certainty of the outcome. So when your mind is full of thoughts, it may be helpful to remember that the quiet and the memory of God remain undisturbed by all the “**toys and trinkets of the world**” (W.pl.258.1:3) . The memory of God will return to awareness because it never left the mind. When Jesus tells us to remember that this is our goal, he does not establish a required time span, it is enough to remember for an instant at a time: “**All that is needful is to train our minds to overlook all little senseless aims, and to remember that our goal is God. His memory is hidden in our minds, obscured but by our pointless little goals which offer nothing, and do not exist**” (W.pl.258.1:1,2).

(For more on this topic see Questions [#35](#), [#90](#), and [#351](#).)

Q #897: I continue to have problems with *A Course in Miracles'* teaching about the unreality of the world, problems which recent issues in the news help to bring into focus. As an example, most people now are aware that governments all over the world are not honest with each other nor with their own citizens. If we accept that the world as we experience it is merely a dream generated by guilt and attack, it presumably follows that any particular act of deception -- even a real whopper -- can be nothing more than illusion within illusion. And since the Course tells us that there is no hierarchy of illusions, the conclusion presumably must be that it makes no difference whether governments are honest or not, since the very world in which they govern is itself an ego fabrication. As a student of the Course with a lingering attachment to the notion of objective truth within the world, I would welcome any guidance on how to respond to this kind of issue.

A: Recognizing the two levels on which the Course is written can be helpful. Your description expresses what we refer to as Level One teachings -- the absolute contrast between truth and illusion. On that level, anything and everything that takes place in the world is illusory. That should be the end of the story for us. But because we are too frightened to accept that without any reservations, and therefore still think the world is real and react to it accordingly (including our own bodily existence), Jesus continues the story. This is Level Two: Jesus talking to us in terms of what we still think is real, even though we know intellectually that **“there is no life outside of Heaven” (T.23.II.19:1)** . Mercifully, and gently, Jesus teaches us how to go about our lives in the world so as to undo our belief that we exist independently apart from God -- rather than to reinforce that strenuously defended belief. This is the “thought-reversal” dimension of the workbook lessons and exercises.

Being able to count on people's truthfulness is a normal expectation, and would certainly ease the strain of daily life in this incredibly complex and challenging world. Unfortunately, that expectation meets with disappointment far more often than most of us appreciate. Yet, this should not be surprising, given the origin of the world and its inhabitants: that it is the projection of a thought of attack, generated by a mind fierce in its determination to get what it wants regardless of the cost, ready to kill to keep what it has thus gotten but not take any responsibility for the resulting mayhem. Everything that goes on in this world comes from that thought, which is why Jesus tells us that the world is **“the outside picture of an inward condition” (T.21.in.1:5)** . Everything here is ultimately based on a lie -- that the oneness of pure Love can be splintered into self-centered, competing individuals. The value therefore of a strong negative reaction to deception perceived in others is that it reveals the deception in ourselves, thus giving us the opportunity to forgive it.

The Course thus teaches us to regard the world as a classroom, with the curriculum being our daily experiences and relationships. Our objective is ask for help to shift our focus from the world and the body to our minds -- specifically, the *purpose* infusing our thoughts and actions, stemming from our choice of teachers. This is the **“inward condition”** in need of attention. On this level, then, our function is to turn within to get some sense of whether we are proceeding from the ego thought system or the Holy Spirit's thought system. We practice asking for help more and more frequently to set aside our egos, so that our interactions in the world would be truly helpful in advancing us to the only goal worth pursuing: returning home hand in hand with *everyone* .

We are never asked to resign from our normal roles in the world as citizens, parents, employers, employees, etc. We are asked, though, to resign as our own teacher (**T.12.V.8:3**) , meaning we (as identified with the ego thought system) should turn to Jesus or the Holy Spirit for help in defining our problems and their solutions. The application of this to a situation such as the one you describe is that you would bring to the place of ego-free love in your right mind all of your judgments and feelings of anger, despair, and victimization. In that holy instant of looking at your wrong mind with your right mind, you would automatically get a sense of whether to do or say something or nothing. There would be no

investment in having things change, even if you voiced your opinion or supported a group working toward change. The main point that Jesus is trying to help us learn is that nothing of value has been accomplished when the desired external change has been effected, while internally one feels triumphant over having defeated the "enemy" -- no matter how beneficial the change is to the world. **"Forget not that the healing of God's Son is all the world is for. That is the only purpose the Holy Spirit sees in it, and thus the only one it has. Until you see the healing of the Son as all you wish to be accomplished by the world, by time and all appearances, you will not know the Father nor yourself"** (T.24.IV.4:1,2,3). This is the right-minded approach to every situation that confronts us in the world. We need to grow toward this -- that this would become our sole motivation in everything we think and do.

See Questions [#53](#), [#455](#), [#484](#), and [#599](#) for a discussion of issues and principles that have a bearing on your query.

Q #898: I feel that I am beginning to grasp the principles of *A Course in Miracles* fairly well, although I do wonder if it is the ego mind fooling me! My question is this: are the people with whom I interact and I all in the same dream? I have read the question about "you in my dream and I in yours", but that doesn't answer it. If we are not in the same dream, how then can I impact their spiritual situation/awareness? Ah, but it's about impacting my own, isn't it? The forgiveness I learn to practice is not for "them," it's for me, which is all the same. So have I answered part of the question myself? I am still puzzled about who is in which dream, though.

A: You've got it! This course is about one person -- *you* and the healing of *your* mind! As Jesus states, **"you can interact but with yourself"** (T.31.V.15:5) . If we persist in thinking we can have an impact on others -- and wanting to -- we are missing Jesus' overall message, which is that *the Son of God is one* . We cannot relate to that on an abstract level, but we can reflect that truth by perceiving our interests as the same as everyone else's. We learn this by practicing it in our daily interactions with each other -- especially when tempted to focus on changing someone else. That should always be a red flag telling us that we have succumbed again to the ego's never-ending effort to convince us that separation is the truth. This approach does not lead to indifference or passivity with regard to others, however. The point is that when *you* choose against your ego, you *are* the love that is the only reality in your mind, and it will then flow through you in a form that can be understood and accepted by anyone calling for it. Love is in the director's seat now, not *you* as an individual. It makes things much easier!

When you spend a lot of time trying to figure out "who is in which dream," you are in danger of falling into the ego's trap of making the error real. You would be trying to come up with a schemata explainable in human, logical categories for a process that is non-human and inherently illusory. Jesus is using metaphors and symbols for *our* benefit, as a means of getting us started with the process of restoring sanity and truth to our minds. Struggling to understand the nature of dreams and scripts can be a neat ego trick to distract you from what would really help you in your quest for peace: the practice of forgiveness.

Q #899: My question seems to have been addressed somewhat in Question #417, but having read your answer, I'm still unclear on how to separate form from content. I am unmarried but have had a monogamous 14 year "special" relationship. We do not live together. Almost a year ago, I met someone else and began an affair. Shortly thereafter I confided the affair to my boyfriend who has chosen to remain with me. I feel very strongly that for some reason, I'm *supposed* to know this other person. And for some reason I'm supposed to be going through all of this as part of the process to extricate the "specialness" out of my primary relationship. I'm confused about whether this is part of the forgiveness process or ego insanity or both, depending upon what day of the week it is. It seems insane to everyone

around me who are all unfamiliar with *A Course in Miracles*. And as mentioned in your response to Question #417, you advise it's helpful to remove interferences such as guilt if only for an instant. How do I do that? My guilt over hurting my "special" partner is enormous and growing. I cannot imagine ending my relationship with the other person and all this feels as though it is destroying my primary "special" relationship.

A: It is not clear what you mean by "extricating specialness" from the relationship. You describe the form of the relationships, but not the content. Specialness, as taught in *A Course in Miracles*, is always about content, and never about form (behavior), nor are relationships. The Course talks only about asking Jesus or the Holy Spirit to help you change the *purpose* of the relationship from specialness to holiness. Many students have wrongly interpreted this to mean that they should not have an exclusive relationship on the level of form, because a holy relationship excludes no one. Yes, that is true, but it applies solely to the *content* of the holy (non-special) relationship; but this content of all-inclusiveness is perfectly consistent with a monogamous relationship. The transformation of content involves evaluating the purpose of the relationship. In a special relationship, the purpose is always related to what you can get from the relationship and how it serves your interests; therefore, it always involves dependency, expectations, bargaining, compromise, sacrifice, manipulation, and deception. Separation and separate interests become reinforced over and over. All relationships start out that way.

By inviting Jesus into the relationship, you would gradually shift its purpose from maintaining separation to learning that you and your partner share the same interests, and that this extends to everyone else as well. Your focus would be on learning to recognize that you both share the same wrong mind, the same right mind, and the same decision-making capacity to choose either the ego's or the Holy Spirit's thought system. The relationship's primary focus, thus, is not on filling each other's needs in order to make your lives better in the world, but on having *your* mind be healed of all thoughts of separation -- learning that your completion is achieved only through recognizing that your need for completion stems from having rejected your wholeness as the Self of Christ, and that this is a decision that can be changed at any instant (see **T.16.V**) . It remains unclear why you would *need* to have an affair to learn this, especially one that has engendered such conflict. In general, we can say that when guidance comes from the Holy Spirit, there would be a growing sense of peace about it, not increasing guilt and conflict. Guilt and conflict should be a red flag indicating that something is not quite right, and perhaps the prevailing opinion of those who know you well is in accord with that. The ego is very skillful in using spiritual teachings to further its own plan of keeping separation real.

Another sure sign that a relationship is centered in specialness is the feeling "I cannot imagine ending my relationship with the other person." Now, that might also be right-minded in the sense that this is the person with whom you have chosen to learn your forgiveness lessons. But, again, there would be a growing sense of peace about it, as forgiveness always leads to an increasing awareness that both you and your partner are centered in the one same Christ Self, not in each other as separate individuals. The dependency on bodily togetherness lessens, as you gradually realize you are the same as minds. The spiritual journey in *A Course in Miracles* is toward oneness.

Q #900: What about solipsism [the theory that nothing exists or is real but the self]? For me the greatest fear is that of cosmic aloneness. I sometimes wake up feeling, "It's true! There is no one else." The philosophers witter on about "private language," but their arguments don't stand up to the experience, horror, and the conviction. *A Course in Miracles* talks a lot about unification and how the split will return to being whole. Doesn't that sound kind of lonely? Why "we"? Why not "I"? If I'm dreaming the perceived world, why aren't I dreaming other people? When unification happens, the "Returning" as they say in Zen, why should this be good? Why not awful? Is it because bliss is a non-dual emotion, as against any kind of fear which is dualistic? That may be true, except the fear we call "horror" has a frozen feel to it, a sort of resignation.

A: Cosmic aloneness is probably one good definition of hell. But "aloneness" implies a self that experiences itself as a self, as does fear. And that is not what *A Course in Miracles* means by unity or oneness, which is a state transcending consciousness all together. Jesus tells us that in our present state there is no way we can understand **"a Oneness joined as One"** (T.25.I.7:2) . But he assures us often in the Course that when our minds are healed of all separation thoughts, we will be indescribably happy and peaceful, as in one instance he exclaims: **" O my brothers, if you only knew the peace that will envelop you and hold you safe and pure and lovely in the Mind of God, you could but rush to meet Him where His altar is. Hallowed your Name and His, for they are joined here in this holy place. Here He leans down to lift you up to Him, out of illusions into holiness; out of the world and to eternity; out of all fear and given back to love"** (C.4.8:1,2,3). No solipsist has ever spoken like that! Egoless love and solipsism are mutually exclusive: **"For it is the function of love to unite all things unto itself, and to hold all things together by extending its wholeness"** (T.12.VIII.7:11) .

We need to learn -- through the process of forgiveness -- that we are the dreamers of our own dreams so that we can recover our mind's power to choose. When we come back to that, we will clearly see what we chose *against* -- a love embracing all creation as one -- in order to have our individual existence. We will also realize the pain involved in maintaining that existence through denial and projection, and that will cause us to be less and less attracted to it, especially because we will have remembered it was a choice based on fictitious premises (the Course's myth of the ego).

At the beginning of **Lesson 107** , Jesus uses our language and familiar experience to give us a hint of what awaits us when our minds are healed:

"Can you imagine what a state of mind without illusions is? How it would feel? Try to remember when there was a time, -- perhaps a minute, maybe even less -- when nothing came to interrupt your peace; when you were certain you were loved and safe. Then try to picture what it would be like to have that moment be extended to the end of time and to eternity. Then let the sense of quiet that you felt be multiplied a hundred times, and then be multiplied another hundred more.

And now you have a hint, not more than just the faintest intimation of the state your mind will rest in when the truth has come. Without illusions there could be no fear, no doubt and no attack. . . . all pain is over . . ." (W.pl.107.2; 3:1,2,3).

The practice of forgiveness leads to the recognition of how painful it is to exist in a state of separation, a pain we have been denying. As that becomes clearer to us, our hold on separation decreases, realizing that it is a most unnatural state, and then we are attracted more and more to our natural state as the extension of God's Love. We sacrifice nothing, feeling only gratitude for being home at last.

Q #901: I have been studying *A Course in Miracles* for more than 15 years. When I try to change my mind -- that is, choose the Holy Spirit and not the ego -- inevitably I refer to my brain, but the Course teaches that the brain doesn't think. I am a very visual person and seem to need to "see" something. I picture my mind outside and above me. So my question is, where is the mind? And how should we think of it when we are trying to make a better choice? If the mind uses the brain to project its message, can we just visualize the brain as a receiver from the mind?

A: Yes, that is one place to start, as long as you regard the mind as the source of the brain and the body - - something concocted by the mind as a way of convincing itself that it is not a mind. The fact that you -- and most people -- need to "see" something indicates the extent to which this dynamic has worked. The mind has no physical/quantifiable dimensions to it, so it not anywhere. That seems inconceivable to us, and for the most part it is -- we cannot conceptualize it. The mind is not in a place. A mystic once described God as He whose center is everywhere, and whose circumference is nowhere. Meaningless to

a brain! Similarly, Jesus asks, **“Who is the ‘you’ who are living in this world?” (T.4.II.11:8) --** encouraging us to question the reality of the self we think we are.

So when you are trying to make a better choice, you might visualize going from the brain back to the mind, which has a decision-making center; and from that center it can choose to make the ego part of that mind its reality or the Holy Spirit part its reality. That choice then is expressed in form through the body. Then as the mind identifies more and more with the Holy Spirit's thought system, it gradually realizes it is only a mind and that the body/brain really has nothing to do with that identity.

Q #902: What does *A Course in Miracles* say (if anything) about the historical Jesus (the person that died on the cross)?

A: There are many places in the Course where Jesus points out how his life and teachings have been misinterpreted. Here is a sampling; we recommend that you read each of these in their full context in the Course. For a discussion of the nature of the biblical Jesus versus the Jesus of *A Course in Miracles*, see our *The Message of “A Course in Miracles” -- Vol. One: All Are Called*, Chapter 6; and for additional references see our *Glossary-Index for “A Course in Miracles,”* under Jesus.

“Is he the Christ? O yes, along with you. . . . Some bitter idols have been made of him who would be only brother to the world. Forgive him your illusions, and behold how dear a brother he would be to you” (C.5.5:1,2,7,8).

“. . . I was persecuted as the world judges, and did not share this evaluation for myself. And because I did not share it, I did not strengthen it. I therefore offered a different interpretation of attack, and one which I want to share with you. If you will believe it, you will help me teach it” (T.6.I.5:3,4,5,6).

“I am the model for rebirth, but rebirth itself is merely the dawning on your mind of what is already in it. God placed it there Himself, and so it is true forever. I believed in it, and therefore accepted it as true for me. . . . My brothers slept during the so-called ‘agony in the garden,’ but I could not be angry with them because I knew I could not be abandoned” (T.6.I.7:2,3,4,6).

“I elected, for your sake and mine, to demonstrate that the most outrageous assault, as judged by the ego, does not matter. As the world judges these things, but not as God knows them, I was betrayed, abandoned, beaten, torn, and finally killed. It was clear that this was only because of the projection of others onto me, since I had not harmed anyone and had healed many” (T.6.I.9).

“If the Apostles had not felt guilty, they never could have quoted me as saying, ‘I come not to bring peace but a sword.’ This is clearly the opposite of everything I taught. Nor could they have described my reactions to Judas as they did, if they had really understood me. I could not have said, ‘Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?’ unless I believed in betrayal. The whole message of the crucifixion is that I did not” (T.6.I.15:2,3,4,5,6).

“As you read the teachings of the Apostles, remember that I told them myself that there was much they would understand later, because they were not wholly ready to follow me at the time. I do not want you to allow any fear to enter into the thought system toward which I am guiding you. I do not call for martyrs but for teachers. No one is punished for sins, and the Sons of God are not sinners” (T.6.I.16:1,2,3,4).

“I am made welcome in the state of grace, which means you have at last forgiven me. For I became the symbol of your sin, and so I had to die instead of you. To the ego sin means death,

and so atonement is achieved through murder. Salvation is looked upon as a way by which the Son of God was killed instead of you. Yet would I offer you my body, you whom I love, *knowing its littleness*? Or would I teach that bodies cannot keep us apart? Mine was of no greater value than yours; no better means for communication of salvation, but not its Source. No one can die for anyone, and death does not atone for sin” (T.19.IV.B.17:1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8).

Q #903: I am having trouble with joining with the Holy Spirit before looking at my guilt. How do I know I've joined first before looking? I recall hearing that we should try to catch the thought of guilt and separation before it is projected out into the world. The problem is that I think it's already out there. I then recall reading that when I am dealing with specifics that I am with the ego, so I try not to enumerate my specific problems as I see them, instead trying to "see the problem as it is, so it can be solved." When I do sit quietly and try to be honest, my mind goes nuts. I know a part of me says this is simple and easy, because I've experienced it as such. But another part says it's very hard. Problem is I feel guilty when I experience this as hard; it's like my ego won't let me experience the pain, saying this is wrong, it should not feel this way. Also, just how many "dark nights of the soul" are there anyway?

A: There is no way of knowing for sure that you have joined with the Holy Spirit before looking - - this is every student's complaint. Clarity comes only after a great deal of practice, and having caught yourself again and again fooling yourself into thinking you have joined with the Holy Spirit, only to find yourself craftily indulging your ego. We all have to learn just how committed we are to upholding our specialness and victimization and how terribly frightened we are to be without it. That kind of honesty is a condition for making progress with this course, but we resist it strenuously because we still fear we will be punished if we face up to our "sins." Jesus assures us, though, that all that is needed is our "little willingness." He tells us to trust and concentrate only on that willingness, and to **"be not disturbed that shadows surround it. That is why you came. If you could come without them you would not need the holy instant. Come to it not in arrogance, assuming that you must achieve the state its coming brings with it"** (T.18.IV.2:3,4,5,6,7) .

In general, if you are looking at your guilt with the Holy Spirit, you would find yourself easing up on your judgments and self-hatred. You would learn how to smile gently at it instead of beating yourself up all the time and feeling you have failed somehow because you chose your ego. This kind of practice will lead you to the next step of catching the thought before it gets projected. But we are attracted to guilt, as Jesus tells us (T.19.IV.A) , which means we will find it hard to simply smile at our guilt and not take it so seriously. Guilt is the cornerstone of the ego thought system, and therefore it will fight hard to hold on to it. It can be helpful to recognize how we support this effort in our daily lives.

It may not seem like it, but you are making progress just recognizing your projections of guilt and separation. That is the first step in the forgiveness process. Most people can learn to do that without much difficulty. And if you can do that consistently -- *without judging yourself for projecting* -- then you will be preparing yourself to take the next step -- looking *without judgment* at the guilt in your own mind. This is the process that will lead you finally to be able to catch the thought before the decision is made to project it. The key, though, is learning how to be patient and gentle with yourself. Forcing yourself in any way is not in keeping with the gentleness of Jesus' approach throughout the Course. Taking it so seriously is to forget that this process is about undoing something that never happened. Therefore, when a part of your practice drives you "nuts," you probably have lost touch with the gentle content of what you are supposed to be doing. Jesus never expects us to become slaves to the form he suggests for our practicing -- the purpose of all our practicing is to be able to experience his love with less and less interference. In Lesson 70, he reminds us that we will have to go through the clouds that surround the light before we can reach the light. He encourages us as our loving brother: **"Try to pass the clouds by whatever means appeals to you. If it helps you, think of me holding your hand and leading you. And I assure you this will be no idle fantasy"** (W.pl.70.9:2,3,4) . If you feel pressure as you walk this path, it can only be from your ego, and therefore should not be taken seriously. In the sense that these

clouds of guilt constitute our journey, one can say that we repeat the "dark night of the soul" in many variations -- until we emerge into the light.

Q #904: As I understand it, *A Course in Miracles* teaches that our ego created the world and it is all just an illusion. I have always seen nature and the work of creation as the biggest proof of God's existence! When I look at all the beauty in nature, the intricacy, the multitude, and the magnitude -- from the vastness of space to the unbelievable complexity of DNA -- it seems only God could have created something like this! How can I believe that the human mind is capable of conceiving such greatness?

A: There are really two parts to your question; how could the mind have made the world, and how could God not have created it? The Bible and our western religions define God as the creator of the world. But *A Course in Miracles* tells us that the Bible's God is a product of the ego. It seeks to help us remember that the true God is a God of eternal, perfect, changeless love. The Course teaches that this real God could not possibly have created anything that doesn't share his quality of being eternal and changeless (**C.4.1**) . Since *everything* in this physical universe (even that which seems eternal to us, such as the stars) will eventually perish, nothing on the level of form could possibly come from God.

From the Course perspective, qualities such as intricacy, multitude, magnitude, vastness, and even physical beauty, have nothing to do with God. Anything with these qualities then, must have come from another source. As you stated, the Course tells us that we made the world up (**T.20.VIII.7:3,4,5**). But the Course isn't teaching that the world was conceived by the human mind. The Course's view of the human or individual mind (which we generally think of as being controlled by the brain) is that it, like the physical world, is entirely illusory (**C.1.4:1**) -- it's just another part of the dream. Within the dream, we are all split minds, containing the thought systems of both the ego and the Holy Spirit. Therefore we can experience the world as a symbol of either thought system. Thus the beauty of nature can serve to help us remember the Holy Spirit's beautiful love in our mind.

The mind that made up the world however, is outside of time and space. It's the one mind of the Son of God, which appeared to fall asleep and dream that it was separate from its source. Obviously, this is a mind that none of us who think we're bodies can begin to comprehend. From within this dream of physical, individual human existence, none of this makes any sense. But think of the dreams you have at night. While you're having them, they seem absolutely real. Only after awakening can you look back and know that they were made up.

Understanding this phenomenon, the Course doesn't require us to begin by accepting or understanding that the world is our dream. Indeed, if we could do that, we would be awake and wouldn't need the Course. Instead we are merely asked to consider that maybe we are wrong about the world and how we got here. To help us develop the willingness to do that, the Course exposes our motivation for choosing this dream of separation and the pain inherent in doing so.

Q #905: For years my husband has expressed uneasiness about my assertive personality. As a student of *A Course in Miracles* , I've asked the Holy Spirit to help me look at my feelings about this issue. This process has made me more accepting of myself and less concerned about other people's opinions. But recently I had to make some difficult business decisions. My decisions seemed to make my business partners uneasy (my husband is one of my business partners). Now I sense that they're all judging me for being overly assertive. I'm having tremendous guilt about this and am not sure how to deal with it.

A: Since all of us who think we are here have chosen to drown out God's Voice and listen to our own instead, you might say that we all have overly assertive personalities. The Course teaches us that the one

cause of all our guilt is the decision to see ourselves as separate from God's Love. Further the Course states, **“As long as you believe that guilt is justified in any way...you will not look within, where you would always find Atonement. The end of guilt will never come as long as you believe there is a reason for it.”** (T.13.X.6:1,2).

In other words, our ego continually makes up reasons for our guilt in order to make sure we never recognize that the guilt itself is made up and that our minds have the power to let it go. So whenever we think that our guilt comes from something we have said or done, we have (once again) been tricked by the ego's smokescreen. Remember too that the ego doesn't care whether we see others or ourselves as guilty. The ego is happy as long as we believe that guilt is real and remain focused on the effect our ego has on other egos.

As a Course student, you probably realize that the judgments of your husband or your business partners would not be causing you guilt if you had not first accused yourself of something. The fact that your recent business decisions triggered your guilt is undoubtedly because, at some point in the process, you saw your interests as separate from others. Thus your decisions (whether you feel you made “the right” decisions or not) have become symbols in your mind for the original decision to see your interests as separate from God's. Therefore in your thinking, your decisions now equal attack.

The Course doesn't give us any guidelines for behavior -- you may or may not, for example, be assertive as the world judges it. But the Course does make clear that we are always listening to either the voice of the ego or the Holy Spirit. So the way to “deal with” guilt is to ask the Holy Spirit for help before we make decisions or take actions (and of course, recognize that our ego- driven actions of the past were merely mistakes calling for correction not punishment). As we learn more and more to join with Jesus or the Holy Spirit in our mind, the choices we make will increasingly reflect God's all-inclusive Love. When our actions become reflections of love rather than symbols of attack, our guilt will automatically disappear.

Q #906: I have been a Course student for many years. I know to turn problems over to the Holy Spirit in my mind and to ask the Holy Spirit to change my mind about the problem rather than change the form of the problem. But I am having a challenge with releasing a perceived problem that I created. How do I let it go if I feel responsible for it? I am truly tired of playing this game.

A: It is very common for Course students who have understood intellectually that guilt is not real and recognized how guilty they feel, to develop guilt about feeling guilty. This is just another clever ploy of the ego to insure it remains intact and in control. As *A Course in Miracles* says, **“The ego seeks to ‘resolve’ its problems, not at their source, but where they were not made. And thus it seeks to guarantee there will be no solution.”** (T.17.III.6:1,2)

You don't want to deny your guilt, let it go, or make it go away. You simply want to observe it. Watching the ego's vicious judgment without judgment is the way to learn that you are not the ego and thus not guilty. Remember, no matter how long you study the Course or how often you ask the Holy Spirit for help, your ego does not change. It is the voice of guilt and will always seek to convince you that your guilt is real and justified. What does change is your ability to take the ego's voice less seriously and to listen to the Holy Spirit instead (which is, after all, the one thing the Son of God needed to do in the original instant when the tiny mad idea occurred).

So again, don't despair about having feelings of guilt; just watch them. Eventually when the ego screams at you (yet again) that you've made an awful mess and should feel good and guilty about it, you'll be able to just gently smile at your ego as you think, “There it goes again.”

When you truly look with the Holy Spirit's Love at whatever problem you feel responsible for, you'll think something like, “Well of course I did that silly thing, that's what egos do.” In that place of love, you'll

understand the fear that must have caused your ego to act up and you'll automatically know what words to say or actions to take (if any) to bring a loving resolution to the perceived problem.

Q #907: Recently I ended my relationship with my boyfriend based upon his lying about his drug addiction problem for the third time. Now he says he would like to make contact again. I love him as my brother in this world and I honor the lessons he showed me; I learned some very valuable things; but is it still loving and forgiving to not want any physical, verbal, or electronic contact with him, since I know he still has his drug addiction problem and I know it is his way of calling for love? In my mind I honor him for who he is and still practice seeing him and myself as a holy innocent child of God every time my ego seeks some kind of justification or revenge. What is the best and highest and most loving way to say that I do not want any contact? I just want to do what is best for the both of us; and is it true that sometimes the most loving thing to do is to just end it all and walk away and say no?

A: There is nothing in *A Course in Miracles*, as you know, that would tell you what you should do behaviorally -- to stay or to leave. Its focus is always on the content: whether your thinking reflects the ego's principles or the Holy Spirit's principles. One principle that is frequently misapplied -- with sometimes tragic results -- is the idea that a person is either expressing love or calling for love. While it is true that destructive behavior is ultimately a call for love, nothing automatically follows from that in terms of behavior. For instance, just because a pedophile is "calling for love," does not mean that you allow him to take care of your children if he asks you to. But you can say "no" without separating yourself from him on the level of content -- you can realize that you both are calling for love and are joined in that respect. Don't confuse form with content. From that place of non-judgment you will know what to say. This is essentially how Jesus replied to Helen's questioning him about what she should say to people; he said to her, "ask instead, 'Help me to see this brother through the eyes of truth and not of judgment'" (*Absence from Felicity*, p. 381).

Staying in the relationship thus can be a right-minded decision, just as leaving the relationship can be a right-minded decision. Your seeing this man as a "holy innocent child of God" is independent of the form of the relationship; and, again, from within your quiet center, the Holy Spirit will gently guide you to the most loving response in form.

Q #908: How can we stop ourselves from becoming part of other people's negative thoughts? For example, sometimes I see someone and get flooded with nervousness and an inability to speak in a normal way. I'm sure that some people use their mind to create negativity, like I do to create positive effects. I don't hold it against them, though I try my best to show them that I am not this negativity intentionally, so that, hopefully, they may experience less guilt.

A: The guilt in our minds always leaves us with a feeling that bad things are going to happen to us; and so certain situations will trigger a reaction such as the one you describe. If your mind were healed of its guilt, then no matter how powerful the other person's negativity might be, it could never have any effect on you. Your inner peace -- which guilt conceals -- would not be disturbed in any way. By siding with the ego thought system of sin, guilt, and fear, we make ourselves vulnerable -- we make ourselves mindless, which is the ego's goal. We then think we are at the mercy of people and forces beyond our control, forgetting completely -- and intentionally -- that it was our own decision that led us to that self-concept.

There is a helpful discussion of this mistake in the section in the text of *A Course in Miracles* called "**The Responsibility for Sight**" (T.21.II). There Jesus helps us realize that we are responsible for how we *interpret* external events and situations, meaning we do not have to see ourselves as victimized. We do not cause others to behave badly, nor do we cause catastrophes; but we are responsible for the way we react to these externals. This is why the early lessons in the workbook focus so heavily on training us

to recognize that the outer and the inner are the same. Our reactions always come from a prior decision we have made in our minds to uphold the thought system of guilt or the thought system of guiltlessness. Jesus is asking us to let him help us to look at our guilt and then to let it go. What other people think and do, then, would have no effect on our state of mind. In Lesson 70, "My salvation comes from me," Jesus summarizes this by saying, **"The seeming cost of accepting today's idea is this: It means that nothing outside yourself can save you; nothing outside yourself can give you peace. But it also means that nothing outside yourself can hurt you, or disturb your peace or upset you in any way"** (W.pl.70.2:1,2).

Q #909: What do you think of those (many) other sources that claim to have channeled the words of Jesus Christ these days? Some of them seem to be authentic, though very often less complicated in its use of language, albeit less poetic in tone than *A Course in Miracles*. I found that some material seems to channel an "authentic" Jesus Christ.

A: Since everything here can be thought of as a symbol, the only concern is whether the channeled material symbolizes hatred or love. *A Course in Miracles* says of itself, as you know, that it is only one among many thousands of forms of the universal course (**M.1.4:1,2**). There are any number of ways in which our minds can be healed of the belief that we are separate from God and therefore sinners deserving of punishment. So the question is whether the message coming through is loving and helpful in this regard. We can easily delude ourselves into thinking a system of belief is loving when it really isn't; and so a helpful guideline to follow in evaluating any thought system or course of action is that love, compassion, and forgiveness are always all-inclusive. To exclude anyone (content, not form) from your love, compassion, or forgiveness is never loving.

Q #910: I seem to be at a place where I now recognize that I hate everyone -- that my special love relationships are really special hate. So, now I "see everyone the same." Am I on the right track?

A: *A Course in Miracles* tells us that relationships are really bargains we make with others to get them to fill a lack we perceive in ourselves. When we think another is meeting our needs, we experience special love. When we feel someone has failed to meet our needs, we experience special hate. But underneath, as long as we perceive others as separate from us, different from us, and in possession of something we want but don't have, we must secretly hate them. Further, because our sense of lack really comes from our believed separation from God (and the guilt that it engenders), no one can actually meet our needs. Thus, eventually everyone must fail to live up to our expectations and, at times even on a conscious level, become the object of our hate (which can look like anger, disappointment, and a number of other emotions).

If your work with the Course has helped you realize that you are playing the same game in every relationship, then in a sense, you are on the right track. However, it is important to make a distinction between recognizing that you are *doing* the same thing with everyone, versus actually *seeing* everyone as the same. You may be feeling the same hate for all of them. But again, that hate comes from the belief that they are separate and therefore different from you.

When Jesus speaks in the Course of "seeing them all the same," he really means recognizing that you and all your brothers share the same single need -- the need to awaken and remember that we aren't separate and haven't killed, or left God's Love. He is trying to remind us that we are all the same in the insanity of the ego and in the sanity of the Holy Spirit. We are all guilty within the dream, but innocent in the reality of Heaven. And finally, we are all equally capable of calling upon the Teacher within us who will help us awaken to that reality.

So when we truly see everyone as the same, there will be no hate. The only way to get there is to observe without judgment (by calling upon the Holy Spirit's help) as our ego plays the same awful games again and again. At some point we'll realize that the hate we feel for others isn't about them at all. It's merely a defense our ego invented to keep itself going. When we understand that projecting our hate only keeps us miserable, we'll be several steps closer to reuniting with the Love of God in our mind -- the one and only thing that can truly fill our imagined lack. Filled with that Love, with no sense of lack, we'll know that the differences our bodies perceive mean nothing.

For further discussion about special relationships, see Questions [#191](#) and [#377](#).

Q #911: In the Manual for teachers, in the section, *What Is the Role of Words in Healing*, the Course says "...words are but symbols of symbols. They are thus twice removed from reality. (M.21.1,9,10)" Could you please explain what this means?

A: In *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus makes the case that everything we experience in our *entire* life (waking and sleeping) is a dream. Like a psychotherapist telling a patient that everything in his nighttime dream is a symbol, Jesus tells us that everything in this world of form is a symbol. If we perceive or experience something, it is because we put it there (not as the individual we think we are, but rather as the one mind of God's Son that dreamed it could separate and exist in a world outside of Heaven).

Now, obviously every word represents something within this world (be it a physical object, an emotion, or an idea). Thus, every word symbolizes a thing that is itself a symbol. To elaborate on this a bit, the wrong mind (the voice of the ego) begins with a concept of separation. From there, it projects a world of form filled with objects. So to the ego, everything in the physical world is a symbol of that initial concept of separation. Finally, listening to the wrong mind, we use words to symbolize those symbols of separation.

The same principle holds true for the right mind (the Voice of the Holy Spirit). Starting with our memory of God, it creates a concept of what God and love are. Then we use words to symbolize those concepts.

Jesus says words are twice removed from reality because reality is beyond all symbols. Reality is the oneness of Heaven, the totality of God. It is our real home at one with God, Whom we never left. The Course tells us that **"As nothingness cannot be pictured, so there is no symbol for totality. Reality is ultimately known without a form, unpictured and unseen. (T.27.III.5:1,2)"** It states that forgiveness (our path to awakening to reality) causes **"symbols to fade"**, and leaves nothing that **"the eyes have ever seen or ears have heard ...to be perceived. (T.27.III.7:1,2)"** So, at the very end of the journey, we are left with no symbols to perceive and no need of further symbols to communicate our perceptions.

Q #912: *A Course in Miracles* teaches us to ask the Holy Spirit or Jesus to look with us at our misperceptions. My understanding is that by a "miracle" the Course means the shift from the ego's perception to the Holy Spirit's perception. Am I correct then that the moment of "shift" is what the Course refers to as the "holy instant" and that the "little willingness" is the willingness to ask for help to correct our perceptions? If this is correct, then does the process only "count" in the moment we have a particular perception and ask for correction, or would it also "count" if we were to review a past perception or something that occurred in the past?

A: First, yes, your understandings are essentially correct. The "miracle" is our shift from the ego's projection of sin, guilt, and fear, to the Holy Spirit's extension of forgiveness and love. The miracle is the happy result of our little willingness to be wrong about the world we see and to let go of our projections by asking the Holy Spirit or Jesus to look at them with us.

The "holy instant" is the moment outside of time and space in which the decision making part of our mind chooses the Holy Spirit's correction script of healing in the present, instead of the ego's script of a guilty past and a fearful future. The Course also uses the term "holy instant" to refer to the "real world," a state of mind in which we see exclusively through the Holy Spirit's forgiving eyes. In that state, we are always experiencing the holy instant. This is why the Course says, **"You could live forever in the holy instant, beginning now and reaching to eternity... (T.15.IV.6:3)"**

Within that statement is the answer to your second question. The holy instant is when your mind chooses the Voice of the Holy Spirit or Jesus rather than the ego's. It refers exclusively to the present choice of *your mind* and has nothing to do with the external events that may have inspired that choice -- be they five seconds ago, fifty years ago, or something you're anticipating will happen in the future.

Basically, we made one choice for the ego (which caused us to fall asleep and dream up this world) and so, in a sense, anytime we listen to the ego we are reviewing the past. From Jesus' perspective, the only purpose anything in our life (past, present, or future) *can* serve is to help us recognize the pain choosing the ego has caused us and thus motivate us to choose differently.

For further discussion about miracles and the holy instant, please see Questions [#26](#), [#288](#), [#450](#), and [#559](#).

Q #913: I've been a student of *A Course in Miracles* for about 12 years. I know Course students often find that as they ask for the Holy Spirit's help to look at the workings of the ego, things in their lives seem to get worse instead of better. What I am finding quite disturbing in my own process as a student, is the appearance, or perhaps the surfacing, of a great deal of anger. Sometimes in everyday situations, my thoughts become downright vicious and murderous. I would say that I have a pleasant personality, and am overall a likeable, friendly individual. My thought is that perhaps lots of repressed anger is surfacing as I am looking within more and more with the Holy Spirit's help. I know I should ask the Holy Spirit to look at this issue with me too. But I'm almost scared to delve into what else might be lying below the surface of my otherwise soft-spoken, quiet personality. Is this a "normal" sort of development for a long-term Course student?

A: Yes, what you are describing is a very normal experience for Course students. As you know, the Course process is one of asking the Holy Spirit to look with us at the workings of the ego. In so doing, we are bringing to light that which we've always struggled very hard (albeit unconsciously) to keep in darkness. Often, as we become increasingly willing to take the Holy Spirit's hand and bring to awareness that which we'd buried, we see more and more of how hateful and vicious the ego really is.

When the ego senses its game is up (realizing we've found a voice besides its own to listen to), it typically becomes louder and more dramatic. As the Course says, **"The ego will attack your motives as soon as they become clearly out of accord with its perception of you. This is when it will shift abruptly from suspiciousness to viciousness, since its uncertainty is increased" (T.9.VII.4:6,7).**

As we become more adept at shifting our inner teacher, fear often compels us to make a sharp turn back toward the ego's familiar voice. But the Course reassures us that this tendency has no effect on our ultimate ability to complete the journey we've begun: **"As the light comes nearer you will rush to darkness, shrinking from the truth, sometimes retreating to the lesser forms of fear, and sometimes to stark terror. But you will advance, because your goal is the advance from fear to truth" (T.18.III.2:1,2).**

Whatever games the ego plays, the important thing is to just continue looking at it while holding the Holy Spirit's hand. Of course, on the level of this world, it's generally preferable (and more helpful to you and those around you) not to act out the ego's insane attack thoughts. But you don't want to pretend they're

not there. Doing so doesn't make them go away, it just sends them back into the darkness of the unconscious. And a basic psychological principle is that which is repressed gets projected. So, to truly become less hateful and vicious, we have to admit that we are those things and gradually learn not to take the ego's voice seriously. Again, that means watching the ego without judgment, no matter how intense or embarrassing its internal nastiness becomes.

Remember that the ego -- everyone's ego -- is 100 percent hate. A more socially acceptable personality does not equate to having an ego that is better or more acceptable than another. Jesus tells us **"The degree of the emotion you experience does not matter. ...a slight twinge of annoyance is nothing but a veil drawn over intense fury" (W.pl.21.2:4,5)**. At first, that statement can sound grotesque and deeply disturbing. But ultimately, it is quite reassuring. From Jesus' perspective, we are all the same.

Each of us can choose to listen to the 100 percent hateful voice of the ego, or to the 100 percent loving Voice of the Holy Spirit. Each of us, regardless of the personality traits we display in this lifetime, is both a Hitler and a Jesus. At those times when our thoughts or behavior are more Hitler-like, we have merely become afraid, dropped the Holy Spirit's hand, and once again made the error of listening to the wrong voice. This is a mistake calling for correction not punishment. And happily, our ego's cruel and insane ranting has no effect on reality.

For related discussions about anger and attack, see Questions [#63](#) and [#587](#).

Q #914: *A Course in Miracles* mentions a longitudinal and a horizontal plane. Would you please explain these terms?

A: The passage in *A Course in Miracles* to which you are referring states, **"The miracle minimizes the need for time. In the longitudinal or horizontal plane the recognition of the equality of the members of the Sonship appears to involve almost endless time. However, the miracle entails a sudden shift from horizontal to vertical perception" (T.1.II.6:1,2,3).**

That passage comes just after Jesus has told us **"No man cometh unto the Father but by me' does not mean that I am in any way separate or different from you except in time, and time does not really exist. The statement is more meaningful in terms of a vertical rather than a horizontal axis" (T.1.II.4:1,2).**

Jesus uses the terms longitudinal and horizontal to refer to our experience of linear time within a world of form. He chooses these words because they imply something that spans a distance and follows a path from one point to another.

We believe that we were born into a world of form that existed before we did and that will continue to exist after we die. It's a world in which events seem to follow one another and in which the past led to the present, which in turn will determine our future. Further, we seem to live as bodies, separate from each other with distance between us. So the "horizontal or vertical plane" is our seeming everyday reality -- a linear, sequential, physical experience, characterized by differences and separation.

But the Course tells us that **"Time is a trick, a sleight of hand, a vast illusion ..." (W.158.4:1)** and that **"...space is as meaningless as time" (T.1.VI.3:5)**. Jesus helps us remember that we can listen to an internal teacher -- the Holy Spirit -- who comes from outside of this spatial, temporal dream world we think we are in. The moment we turn away from the ego and turn toward the Holy Spirit as our guide (the miracle), our mind becomes a reflection of the oneness and timelessness of Heaven. That instant is what Jesus means by "the sudden shift from horizontal to vertical perception."

The word "vertical" means to rise upright. So the "vertical plane" symbolizes our rising above the world we think we are in (or, as Jesus says, "above the battleground"). This entails returning to the non-linear mind.

The idea that Jesus is no different from us *except in time* is hardly reassuring from our perspective in which the gulf between our consciousness and his seems insurmountable. To us it seems like we would need millions of years of learning to go from where we are to where he is. But in fact, all we need is an internal shift from the ego, which tells us to move backward or forward (but either way keeps us firmly planted in this world) to the Holy Spirit, Who will gently help us reach the light that lies beyond this illusory world.

A final note; any term Jesus uses in the Course to describe where we are, or the process of returning to our true home in Heaven, is only a symbol. In truth there is no horizontal or vertical plane, just as there is no world. But since virtually every symbol we have placed in this dream world serves to keep us asleep, Jesus uses symbols we can relate to that will help us to awaken.

For an in depth discussion of the concept of time from the Course's perspective, see the book *A Vast Illusion: Time According to A Course in Miracles* by Kenneth Wapnick .

For related discussions about the mind, time, and space, please see Questions [#228](#) and [#666](#).

Q #915: I am a builder, and practicing the forgiveness process while I work has helped me greatly in taking the pain and frustration out of much of my work. I can actually go to work and instead of feeling that I have to 'attack' the day aggressively and fight with my work and materials, the work just gets done peacefully one step at a time now, and I'm very grateful for that important change. Another problem my activity causes me, however, is regular physical pain, hunger, and fatigue. And so I wonder to what extent forgiveness could help me there. The pain, hunger and need for rest and sleep seem like normal by-products of my activity, but if everything here is just a reflection of what is in the mind, and if all body needs and reactions are the manifestation of guilt on some level, then I imagine I should be able to do something about them. Am I off on the wrong track?

If I see these physical symptoms as other manifestations of ontological guilt, then conceivably I could allow even more peace in my daily activity, whether or not that translates into physical changes -- would that be right? And would I be right in assuming that 'anything' that is a mental, emotional or physical reaction within me is a sign of guilt and a request for forgiveness, because in the real world there are no more reactions as such since there is no real 'me' anymore? If so, that would give me a lot more to work on while at the building site.

And another little side question -- I rarely come into contact with other people in my work since I work alone and live in an isolated part of the country. And so I wonder if I can fulfill the forgiveness process fully because we are supposed to have encounters with others and that just doesn't happen in my life. I would like that to happen, and would like to be with people, but that's just not the way things are for the moment. Forgiveness can be complete nevertheless, because all minds are joined, no?

A: Wherever you seem to find yourself, that's your classroom, and, rest assured, there your lessons will be. So your particular situation, despite its physical isolation from others, still provides you with the opportunities to practice forgiveness, as you have surmised. Physical pain certainly is an indication that there remains an unhealed, projected thought of guilt in the mind, and so your suggestion that you could use such symptoms as a reminder to look within is a good one. And the goal and the focus of your practice, from the perspective of *A Course in Miracles* , would be to release the guilt, and not to relieve the bodily pain -- although that certainly could be an after- effect of the forgiveness.

The “normal” reactions of the body, such as hunger and fatigue, indicate simply that you are still identified with the body, which will be the case for each of us until the very end of our individual Atonement process. Likewise, if you see what you believe to be yourself staring back at you from a mirror, you still must be believing that you need a defense against the buried guilt in your mind. So it may be helpful to remember that the body, once we have made it real in our experience, becomes a wholly neutral thing (**W.pl.294**) . And all of its normal functions, including eating and sleeping, are simply limitations that will in general seem to accompany that bodily experience.

What determines the body's meaning is the purpose we give it (**T.26.VIII.3:7**) , and that may be a further fruitful focus for your attention. Specifically, how do you see yourself in relationship to others? Their bodies do not have to be present for you to have “encounters” with your brothers and sisters in your mind -- which in reality is where all encounters occur, with all the accompanying forgiveness lessons. During all your time by yourself, do you find that you spend some of that time thinking about others in your life -- family, friends, acquaintances -- both past and present? And what is the nature of those thoughts? Are there still grievances, irritations, annoyances, etc., in relationship to others that come to mind? Are there feelings of special love associated with certain ones? All these will be projections of your own guilt, and hence opportunities once again to look within and acknowledge and release the buried guilt.

Your willingness to use everything that your ego presents to you (always presented by your own choice!) is all that Jesus is asking of any of us. Each of your reactions, as you note, at every level, provides another opportunity to choose again. A passage from the workbook describes very clearly the kind of shift you are alluding to, which will become permanent only at the end of our journey back home, although there will be glimpses and then greater lengths of time where this will be our experience, in those moments when we have suspended all thoughts of judgment and attack:

“Now is the body healed, because the source of sickness [the mind] has been opened to relief. And you will recognize you practiced well by this: The body should not feel at all. If you have been successful, there will be no sense of feeling ill or feeling well, of pain or pleasure. No response at all is in the mind to what the body does. Its usefulness remains and nothing more.

“Perhaps you do not realize that this removes the limits you had placed upon the body by the purposes you gave to it. As these are laid aside, the strength the body has will always be enough to serve all truly useful purposes. The body's health is fully guaranteed, because it is not limited by time, by weather or fatigue, by food and drink, or any laws you made it serve before. You need do nothing now to make it well, for sickness has become impossible” (W.pl.136.17,18) .

Q #916: I have been wanting for so long to have some peace, some love in my life and I am so sad. I am so hard on myself and I don't know how to be anything else. I am trying so hard to do what the Course says, about looking at my ego with Jesus. I have been doing this again today and I was reading an answer you wrote to someone (Question #387) about if they were identified with their ego they would have difficulty hearing Jesus' direction, let alone accepting and following it. I would like to say that I am no longer identified with my ego but I am, so is there hope for me? I am not looking for an easy way out. I do believe that every word in *A Course in Miracles* is the truth. I want it to work, I want to let go of my self-hatred and my fear and guilt. What would you suggest that I do?

A: You first want to learn to be gentle with yourself. And this begins with accepting yourself exactly where you are, identified with your ego, feeling unhappy, miserable, alone, frustrated, filled with guilt and self-hatred. And this genuine self-acceptance can seem like one of the hardest things in the world to achieve, for we believe when we have such feelings, that we have to do something to change them, as if the feelings were the problem. But they are not -- they are only the effect. The real problem is that we *want* to feel however we are feeling, and so saying we want to change how we feel is denying the power of our mind to have chosen to feel that way in the first place. We still believe there are external circumstances,

such as lack of love in our lives, that are the cause of how we feel. And then no matter how willing we believe we are to look within for the answer, we keep looking for the external to change.

The next step is to ask yourself why you would want to feel the way you do. Believe it or not, we all take a certain comfort in our so-called bad feelings. They are very familiar, and a lot of how we identify ourselves is tied up in those feelings. Who after all would I be without my sadness and self-hatred and hopelessness? And if I choose to keep myself in pain and despair, how angry can God really be at me for stealing my miserable little life from Him. Now these thoughts generally are not conscious, but they nevertheless continue to dictate our decision for unhappiness until we become more conscious of them. So after beginning to accept how you feel without trying to change your feelings, you may want to begin to ask for help in seeing how those feelings are really your choice. The awareness may be fleeting, or it may hit you like a ton of bricks, but your part is only to be willing to allow it to come to the surface. They are really very silly thoughts, but while we continue to keep them buried, they can seem quite dark and serious.

Did you know that you are setting yourself up for failure with the Course? In commenting on the answer to Question #387, which says it's difficult to hear Jesus when you are identified with your ego, you conclude that you will only hear him when you are *no longer* identified with the ego. That is not what this answer is saying -- that would be a nearly impossible, hopeless state to attempt to achieve, for it would mean you could only hear Jesus once you no longer needed his help! The answer to Question #387 simply means you will vacillate between moments of being identified with your ego, when Jesus will seem miles away, and moments when you have temporarily disidentified with your ego, and are able to observe it without judgment. In such moments, Jesus' help will be available, until you become fearful again and push his love away. And it could only be your ego that would deny that you have ever had such experiences of Jesus' love and guidance!

The Course is not something that you should have to work hard at. Jesus only asks us to have a little willingness, and that willingness is simply the willingness to look at what we have chosen and wanted to make real in our lives, without judging ourselves for having made that choice. As we look with Jesus at our foolish choice for the ego, we will begin to be able to smile with him at how silly we are, and in those moments, the effects of having chosen guilt and sin and pain will simply dissipate. It really is that simple, and only our own resistance, because we do not want to believe we are worthy of love, makes it seem at all difficult.

Q #917: The Course's separation myth emphasizes the making of the world as a defense mechanism against the guilt and fear that God would take away the separate existence the Son desired (and the result is billions of fragments). I don't see how this relates to what I think is the most basic fear: the fear of death. And I wonder why this separateness didn't produce individuals that could last forever.

A: From our perspective as separate bodies in the world, it does seem that the fear of death is one of our most basic fears. And yet, from Jesus' perspective, our problem is not our *fear* of death but our *attraction* to it, as discussed in great detail in the third obstacle to peace (**T.19.IV.C**). For the belief in death is the cornerstone of the ego's thought system -- our seeming separate life came at God's expense, requiring His death, the destruction of Oneness, according to the ego myth. And the belief that God eventually is going to steal back the life we stole from Him, culminating in our death and the end of our individual existence, is simply further proof that the separation is real, a sin punishable by God.

The irony of all of the ego's defenses, including the fragmenting of the mind and the seeming projection of those fragments out into a world of form, is that none of them works, in terms of the purpose the ego has promised us they will serve. While we remain identified with the ego, nothing can make us safe, nothing can protect us from God's wrath, except temporarily, for in the end death is inevitable, and it is this we believe we fear.

But what the ego defenses in fact do accomplish, which we do not allow ourselves to see or accept, is to keep our focus outside ourselves, on the world and the body and death, so that we do not see that we have made up the entire situation, from the beginning to the end in death, and none of it is true. Bodies may seem to die, but we are mind, created eternal by God, and the death of the body has nothing to do with us, unless we want to believe that it does. And we only want to believe that it does if we want the thought of separation and death to be real and we want to remain identified with the ego -- which we do! And so that is why Jesus speaks of our *attraction* to death, conveniently hidden by our apparent fear of death.

Nearly all of our conscious thinking is upside down and backwards, and our conclusions seem quite justifiable because they seem to be all that we know. And so Jesus, through *A Course in Miracles*, is attempting very gently to peel back the layers of defense that we have embraced to keep our real attraction to death out of our awareness, so that we can see what we really believe and are choosing. As it becomes clearer to us that we are really choosing to believe in death, Jesus knows that we will be willing to make a different choice -- for life, which has no opposite in death (**W.pl.167.1**) and has nothing to do with bodies.

Regarding your final question, while there are many different forms and stories that the ego could have produced, individuals who live forever is not among them. For the separation was made to be the opposite of God and Heaven, which alone are eternal, and so the ego can only attempt to mimic infinity and eternity (e.g., **T.4.I.11**; **T.4.V.6:1,2**). Even today's scientists see its apparently most impressive accomplishment, the expanding universe of time and space, as eventually collapsing back upon itself.

Q #918: I dabble with one line that we are supposed to repeat/meditate on: "The world I see holds nothing that I want" (W.pl.128). Of course, I know that this is not true. I live in a body and denying things I want/strive for seems to hold down my life energy and makes me feel depressed. Of course, the Course goes on with the additional statement, "Beyond this world there is a world I want" (W.pl.129) but I find that, as the Course also states, I want both worlds. Why do I have to decide between the two when true Heaven "holds no opposites"? I am somewhat puzzled by that. Also, in a channeled book by Doreen Virtue, the Angels advise not to worry too much about the "afterworld" but to go on enjoying our lives here in this world (of illusion). Now isn't that a more direct path toward living a "happy dream" rather than rejecting this world, even if it is an illusion and transient and ending as it is? I can't stop living in a body other than by just dying, can I? But dying is, according to *A Course in Miracles*, a sign of wrong-mindedness as well, just a way out by not deciding at all -- is my understanding correct? I find the more I do the Course, the worse and more confusing things get.

A: Jesus knows that the world we see holds nothing that we truly want, but he's not so naive as to think that we don't believe there is value in the world. That is the reason he is presenting us this lesson, as he makes his case for encouraging us to accept and believe this thought, knowing all the while that we do not believe him. He challenges us to question the real value of all that we seek after in the world, knowing they are only projections of a thought of guilt and lack in the mind and could never truly satisfy us.

But it would be a misreading of these lessons to think that Jesus is asking us to reject the world or to deny ourselves anything we think we need or want. The world, once we have chosen it, is neutral, and can serve either the ego's or the Holy Spirit's purpose. What Jesus is inviting us to do is to reject the ego thought system and its purpose for the world, which is to reinforce our belief in lack and deprivation, all the while holding someone else responsible for how we feel. The world is nothing more than a projection of an inner choice of what we wish to see, and we will perceive it differently depending on which inner teacher we turn to -- the ego or the Holy Spirit.

While it is true that Heaven has no opposite, it is apparent that we can *believe* that we have made an opposite to Heaven, as witnessed by our seeming experience here in the illusory world of time and space

and bodies. And while we continue to believe in the reality of that thought of opposition and its effects -- the tiny mad idea of separation and the world that came from it -- Jesus will work with us within that system of opposites to help us recognize more clearly the consequences of our choice for separation, so that we will be more willing to accept his correction for that choice -- the true perception of the Holy Spirit, acquired through forgiveness. Not that the world of true perception is any more real than the world of false perception, but it does *reflect* the reality of Heaven's oneness, where there are no opposites.

These lessons are not comparing the world of our experience to an afterworld that comes after death -- that would still be a part of the ego thought system according to the Course (e.g., **M.27.4:1,2**) -- but to a different way of perceiving the world now! And as we practice that new perception, through forgiving all of our judgments, we will come to recognize more and more clearly that we are not living in this body we have thought of as our self. And we will then know that the body and the world are not escaped by death, but merely by changing our mind about who we think we are.

You will almost certainly confuse yourself if you try to reconcile the Course's teachings with other spiritual paths and channeled works, for they are based on different explicit or implicit theologies, using different sets of symbols, and the steps they will lead you on may very well contradict, at least at the level of form, the specific steps the Course would invite you to take. This does not make either of them wrong, only different. And if you are more drawn to another form of teaching, which makes more sense or is less confusing to you than the Course, then, by all means, follow it.

Q #919: Are there still minds deciding to separate from God, thus making new splitoffs which appear here in this illusion where we think we are currently?

A: A question such as this makes sense from within the perspective of the illusion, where we all still believe we are, but it assumes aspects of the illusion, such as number and space and time, as well as the reality of the separation, which simply are not true. *A Course in Miracles* says that the separation seemed to happen in a single instant, and just as quickly was over (**M.2.2,3**) , and now we only seem to be “**reviewing mentally what has [already] gone by**” (**W.pl.158.3,4**) .

And so, the decision that seemed to be made once in an ancient past by one mind, and all the fragmenting that seemed to follow from that choice, only happened in a single unholy instant (**T.20.VI.8:6,7,8,9**) , and “**in reality it never happened at all**” (**M.2.2:8**). So there can be no new splitoffs, recently deciding to separate from God, because time is not real and the separation never happened in the first place!

Q #920: This is in regards to your answer to Question [#622](#). I felt that the reply was well thought out and brought up some very good points about ego needs in any relationship. However, on a different level, I felt that the answer might be perceived, incorrectly, as an endorsement, or at a minimum, a free pass to not remaining faithful in marriage. Many people have committed relationships, and this can be a source of strength and stability to them, even given the points you addressed. Asking someone to stay in a relationship when the other person has permission to fool around is hard to take by many standards. And in many relationships people do change their behavior, in order to build a stronger relationship.

You do state that there is nothing wrong in bringing up what each expects in a relationship. However, when you dismiss the spiritual aspect of this (which is correct to do) in the very next sentence, then this can be used by another as a reason for not staying committed (my fooling around has nothing to do with Spirit or *A Course in Miracles* ! Stop being so egotistical!) It can make one feel guilty about not wanting their partner to be faithful.

It is recognized how difficult it is to give advice on practical matters in this forum.

A: Sorry, you make a good case in the world's terms for the value of fidelity, but the Course does not take a position one way or another on what bodies do. Its concern is only with the mind, and which teacher it has chosen, and so it endorses neither fidelity nor infidelity, as traditionally defined. But neither does it reject nor condemn either. And so the answer was not intended as advice on "practical" matters but a clarification of the only thing that is important in any relationship -- the purpose I am giving it, which has nothing to do with the other person in the relationship. That other person may be thinking and behaving in a very self-centered, hurtful way, even using the Course, or answers from the Question and Answer Service, to justify ego-based decisions! The devil, after all, can cite scripture for his purpose.

Now it is certainly true that many people find value in making a commitment to monogamy in their relationships and this could provide a foundation for recognizing and undoing many aspects of their ego thought system that they would not have recognized otherwise. But, if the commitment is based only on ego need, it could simply reinforce, consciously or unconsciously, specialness and feelings of inadequacy, control, fear and guilt.

Likewise, some people may feel that sexual fidelity is not important to their relationship, and if the decision has a right-minded component, they too may find that having other intimate relationships provides opportunities for uncovering aspects of their egos that they may not have encountered had they remained within the parameters of a monogamous relationship. But just as easily, if the decision for multiple partners is ego-based, they may simply be reinforcing their own feelings of specialness and with that, their guilt.

The point again is, the Course is only concerned with what the mind is doing, not the body, for the body's actions are only an effect of the mind's decisions. This is Jesus' meaning in the following:

"It is pointless to believe that controlling the outcome of misthought can result in healing. ...You must change your mind, not your behavior, and this is a matter of willingness. You do not need guidance except at the mind level. Correction belongs only at the level where change is possible. Change does not mean anything at the symptom [body/behavioral] level, where it cannot work (T.2.VI.3:1,4,5,6,7).

And so if two people in a relationship have different ideas about monogamy, it would be a mistake to assume that either position is more or less ego-based than the other. But the use of guilt by either partner to manipulate the other would clearly give away the ego's hand, for the Holy Spirit would never use guilt to influence any choice. If, as the answer to Question [#622](#) noted, the purpose of all ego-based relationships is to foster conflict and see one's partner as the cause of one's own unhappiness, it does not matter on which side of the fidelity question one falls, if there is a difference of opinion, that is all the ego needs to stay in business.

Q #921: It is often said that the function of the Holy Spirit is to act as a cap on our capacity to miscreate, and in fact the Course says: "you cannot depart entirely from your Creator, Who set the limits on your ability to miscreate" (T.2.III.3:3). First and foremost is the implication that the ability to miscreate at all is an endowment from the Creator, against which some kind of insurance is necessary. No matter how I think about it, it suggests an Achilles heel in the perfection of Creation, which is an oxymoron.

Second, exactly how does this limit manifest itself? I used to think it meant that even the most blatantly ego-driven person would stop short of total destruction or total self-destruction. But this obviously is not true: one need only look at Hitler to see this.

But if there is no self-restraint, there is always restraint by the Sonship. Perhaps this is what is meant. Perhaps we should not look within any particular individual or timeframe for evidence of the Holy Spirit at work. The words of Gandhi seem helpful: "When I despair, I remember that all throughout history the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants and murderers and for a time they seem invincible but in the end, they always fall -- think of it, ALWAYS."

Corollary to my earlier question: I am pretty much commenting on my own question about miscreation. When reading it over it is easy to see the trap I have fallen into. Hitler is not miscreating. It is the miscreating mind that is dreaming up an illusion in which these phenomena are necessary. Any cap or limit on the ability to miscreate does not consist of reigning in nonexistent madmen. The illusion which contains such madness can (and does) become insane without limit, the product of an insane mind. The cap or limit lies in the ultimate effect, power, and meaning of such miscreation -- all nothing.

A: You've gone a long way toward answering your own musings. To that, a few further thoughts can be added. It cannot be overemphasized that the dualistic language of the Course is always metaphorical, as has been repeated many times throughout these answers (e.g., Questions #42, #72, #85 and #156). So when *A Course in Miracles* speaks of God placing a limit on our ability to miscreate, it's a metaphor. God *does* nothing, He simply is (**W.pl.169.5:1,4**). But it is the nature of the split mind that it must contain the memory of its oneness -- identified as the Holy Spirit in the Course -- because we can forget but we can never destroy our link with our Source. So the illusory ability to miscreate has nothing to do with God and is not something that He in any sense has even allowed, since in reality He is not aware of the illusion. For if He could be, the illusion would be real. But the correction for that illusory ability, also an illusion -- the memory of oneness -- is inherent in every seemingly fragmented mind, no matter what ego-driven insanity it may be projecting. And so that is one aspect of the limit on our miscreating -- there is a part of each mind, outside of time and space, that knows otherwise.

In addition, a limit on our ability to miscreate follows inevitably from the fact that everything of the ego is finite, that is, with an end, since it was made to be the opposite of Heaven, which is eternal and infinite. It's not that God has imposed any limit on us. It is simply inherent in the ego thought system, limited as it is by its very nature. Were the ego capable of miscreating infinitely or eternally -- and the ego would like us to believe that it is -- then God would have been replaced. And so the ego, as a thought of limitation, must be limited. We can play -- relationship after relationship, lifetime after lifetime -- in the illusion, but the number of possible relationships and lifetimes, finite as it is, will at some point be exhausted.

The Course offers the miracle as a means for shortening or limiting that finite amount of time (**T.1.I.47; T.1.II.6**), by helping us to see that, despite all the different forms the ego offers, their content is always the same -- sin, guilt and fear. And although the ego would like us to believe there is a hierarchy of illusions, Jesus is leading us to recognize that, at the level of content, a Hitler and a Gandhi are the same, for they reflect the same split mind, with both a wrong-minded and a right-minded component, and the power to choose between them. And we all share that same split mind, simply expressing its conflict as well as its healing in different, ultimately meaningless forms.

In the end, it is our intolerance for the pain and guilt of the ego thought system that will lead us each eventually to limit the miscreative capacity of the mind and turn to the miracle for relief. As Jesus says a few sentences after the lines you quote above, "**Tolerance for pain may be high, but it is not without limit**" (**T.2.III.3:5**). And it is our memory of oneness that helps us undo our belief in the reality of the separation and its effects, as we learn not to take them so seriously, no longer needing to defend against the guilt, but rather seeing through it.

By the way, an alternative perspective to the Gandhi quote about evil in the world, suggesting instead the ultimate hopelessness of the world, might be the following: "When I am hopeful, I remember that all throughout history the way of lies and hate has always re-emerged. There have been benevolent philosopher kings and saints for a time who seem to have made a difference, but in the end, they always fall -- think of it, ALWAYS." Jesus is encouraging us to look for real, meaningful change within our minds, not within the world (**T.21.in.1:7**) !

Q #922: Recently, I read yet another article debating whether or not *A Course in Miracles* was actually channeled by the "historical Jesus." I've always found this argument to be 1) irrelevant and 2) a classic example of the form vs. content error. It is my contention that when Helen and Bill agreed to "find another way," Helen accessed the part of her mind whose content is pure, formless Love. Helen, however, being fearful of that Love (as we all are), could only accept it in forms with which she was comfortable and familiar. Her interest in Jesus, specifically within the context of Catholicism, as well as her scholarly background would naturally produce a spiritual "course" in "Christian" terms. What if Helen were a Buddhist chef? Conceivably, the document scribed could have been a spiritual "cookbook" channeled by the Buddha. I state the former only half in jest. It serves as a constant reminder for me to remember that, although form is important, it is nothing more than a means to an end...to the formless Love behind it. Any thoughts?

A: We have discussed this issue in Questions [#110](#) and [#156](#), where we emphasized the importance of regarding everything in the illusion as symbols, along with distinguishing between form and content. It is understandable that controversy has arisen over Jesus being the author of *A Course in Miracles*, as its message and teachings are radically different from those presented in the Bible. Even so, we remain faithful to its content by not using these differences as a means of making the Course special, nor we as its students. This theme is frequently addressed in our publications -- perhaps most prominently in Chapter 17 in *Absence from Felicity*, which penetrates deeply into the form-content dimension of Helen and her relationship with Jesus. In fact the chapter is entitled, "Helen and Jesus: The Illusion and the Reality." Our abiding, unconscious commitment to the "sanctity" of individualized, bodily existence is the main stumbling block to getting beyond the worship of form at the expense of content.

Q #923: How can one determine what should be taken literally while reading *A Course in Miracles*? I understand that words are symbols for things, and that "things" are symbols of thoughts in the dualistic mind, thus "twice removed from reality." When reading the Course, it is crucial to distinguish what is meant to be figurative from literal statements of fact. For example, the statement "God is," is a literal fact. But "the Father weeps" is obviously a figure of speech. What principle of interpretation determines this important distinction?

A : At the top of the list is this principle adapted from a passage in the manual for teachers: *Teacher of God, your one assignment could be stated thus: Accept no compromise in which duality plays a part (M.27.7:1)*. Similarly, in the text we find this succinct principle: **"Yet the truth is you and your brother were both created by a loving Father, Who created you together and as one. See what 'proves' otherwise, and you deny your whole reality" (T.21.II.13:1,2)**. The only statements that should be understood as true and therefore taken literally are those that reflect the unified reality of Heaven and God and Christ. We can thus say that anything that relates to a body or bodily activity is within the realm of duality, and therefore can express either the ego's thought system of separation or the Holy Spirit's thought system of forgiveness. Moreover, the Course's unique approach to forgiveness and the holy relationship will inevitably be misconstrued if its non-dualistic metaphysical basis is not recognized.

A full analysis and discussion of this topic may be found in chapters 2 and 3 of our book, *Few Choose to Listen* -- Volume Two of *The Message of "A Course in Miracles"*. Another comprehensive discussion is contained in our tape album, "Duality as Metaphor in *A Course in Miracles*"; and, finally, brief summaries may be found in Questions [#6](#), [#85](#), and [#105](#) on this Service.

Q # 924: What does it mean to "choose outside of time and space"? How can a mind that is outside of time and space choose anything? Doesn't choosing require time -- a time before the choice and a time after it when something has changed?

A: Your question is a logical one and one that must occur to virtually every student of *A Course in Miracles*. The problem with the question is that it starts with the assumption that time, space, and the choices we make are real. The Course informs us that they are in fact all just elements of a dream. While we *seem* to be making lots of choices, the Course tells us that we really only have one meaningful choice to make -- and it gets made on an entirely different level.

The choice the Course is concerned with is our choice between the ego and the Holy Spirit as our teacher. Therefore, the mind that the Course is aimed at -- the one that can make that choice -- is not the mind we generally think of as our own.

We usually think of our mind as analogous to our brain. We see it as the storehouse for all the thoughts, memories, and perceptions that add up to our unique, individual psyche. But in the Course, Jesus informs us that that mind (along with the concepts of time, space, and everything else about our physical existence) is just part of a dream. It is a dream that we are having as the one split mind of the Sonship.

As one mind, we had the idea that we could separate from God. In that instant, we could have listened to the Holy Spirit and laughed at the idea, or we could have listened to the ego and taken it seriously. Unfortunately, we listened to the ego. Then, filled with the fear our seeming triumph over God had to engender, we followed the ego again. It sought to prolong its existence by directing us to fall asleep, and make up a world in which we seem to be separate individuals with separate minds.

That is how our world and individual existences were made. As a result, nearly everything we experience, think, and do here, reflects the choice of that mind -- outside of time and space -- to follow the dictates of the ego. The Course is aimed at that mind, which continues to listen to the ego's voice and remain asleep, though it could at any moment choose instead to follow the Holy Spirit's guidance and awaken.

It might be helpful to visualize that one mind as a programmer, and your individual mind within the dream as the program or software. The programmer can direct you to be run by either the ego or the Holy Spirit.

But we don't remember that that mind and that choice exist. So the Course reminds us. While we think we are here, our process as Course students seems to be to make the choice to study the Course and do (or not do) what it says. It asks us to consider that maybe we are wrong about who we think we are. It urges us to question every value that we hold. But Jesus realizes that that is all we can do. The ultimate choice to change our internal teacher from the ego to the Holy Spirit (the "miracle") comes from a decision in the mind outside the dream.

Once we have experienced that choice, we'll know that it came from an entirely different level of thought than the one we're accustomed to.

For related discussions about the mind, choice, and time, please see Questions [#37](#), [#228](#), and [#666](#).

Q #925: I have to watch every little thing I eat or else I gain weight. Meanwhile, I have friends who can eat whatever they want and not gain an ounce. I believe that they were blessed with a faster metabolism than I have. But according to the Course, could I have chosen my slow metabolism as a projection of my unconscious guilt?

A: According to *A Course in Miracles*, our entire physical existence is a dream we are having in order to escape the guilt producing (though erroneous) thought that we killed God, destroyed His Love, and deserve to be punished. Therefore, *everything* about our selves and the world in which we seem to live is a cover for the guilt in our mind. Just as our nighttime dreams are filled with symbols of our unconscious thoughts, our lives are nothing more than a collection of symbols reflecting that one guilty thought that compelled us to fall asleep and make up this world.

The Course informs us that in reality, we are still at home in Heaven and that our natural state is as a **"Oneness joined as One" (T.25.1.7;1)**. Elsewhere, the Course tells us that in truth, **"nowhere does the Father end, the Son begin as something separate from Him" (W.132.12;4)**.

But we cannot even begin to fathom the idea of oneness because every aspect of this world seems to attest to the reality of separation. And there is no greater symbol of separation (and thus our guilt) than the body. In the Course, Jesus refers to bodies as **"instruments of separation" (T.18.VI.5;1)** and tells us that **"Minds are joined; bodies are not" (T.18.VI.3;1)**. In other words, our continued existence as individuals separate from God (the ego's one and only goal) hinges upon our being bodies not minds.

The ego's greatest fear is that we will remember we have a mind that is capable of changing internal teachers -- a realization that could turn us away from the ego and toward the Holy Spirit. To ensure that never happens, the ego needs us to not only believe we are bodies but to keep us constantly focused on them. And what could be better at keeping us focused on the body than a body that has endless needs and problems?

So, to answer your question, yes, we possess our physical and psychological traits because we listened to the ego and chose them. And we only did such a silly thing because we were compelled to do so by guilt. With very few exceptions, no one would choose to have physical or psychological traits at all (rather than stay at home in Heaven) if he were not **"made mad by guilt" (T.13.in.2;2)**.

That means all our problems really only serve one purpose; to keep us distracted so we can never return to the Love of God that is still in our mind. And, fortunately, that means that what we think of as our problems really are not our problems at all. In fact, our only problem is that we are too busy making a big deal about nothing to look at the guilt in our mind and discover it is all made up.

But because what is really nothing -- our lives, our bodies, and our problems -- seems to us like everything, we cannot just move beyond these symbols. So, we have to give them a different purpose. And that means asking the Holy Spirit to reinterpret them for us. He will turn them into classrooms for rediscovering the power of our mind to choose differently. While we cannot know why our bodies are the way they are, with His help we will see that we can be at peace regardless of our bodily state (**Lesson 34**).

Guided by the love and compassion of the Holy Spirit, we will at long last know that we are responsible for the lives we have scripted and also be able to forgive ourselves for them. And with the peace of Heaven as our goal and a Teacher to help us get there, we may even stop pining for a faster metabolism.

For an in depth discussion about weight and food issues from the Course's perspective, please see the book or listen to the audio tape *Overeating: A Dialogue* by Kenneth Wapnick.

Q #926: As a Catholic and a student of *A Course in Miracles*, how do I pray now?

A: Whether as a student of the Course or a Catholic, true prayer is always what the Course refers to as the prayer of the heart. This means it is the content that matters, not the form. Any form can serve as an

expression of the mind's willingness to hear the Holy Spirit's **"still small voice"** that is **"... not drowned out by all the ego's raucous screams and senseless ravings to those who want to hear It (T.21.V.1:6)**. It may be very helpful for you to use Catholic forms of prayer that are familiar to you, to remember that the Holy Spirit holds the memory of God in your mind and that the ego's voice is not the only option. The content is the willingness to keep this in mind and choose the Holy Spirit, regardless of what form the prayer takes.

In the Course, prayer is understood as an expression of the mind's choice between the ego or the Holy Spirit. In the manual, Jesus refers to this choice as the **"prayer of the heart" (M.21)** . The prayer/choice is always answered because the mind has the power to make its choice "real" in its experience. Thus, the mind gets what it wants. It has chosen and received separation, and until another choice is made it is compelled to seek outside itself for relief from the pain of having decided to be separate from its Source. It then "prays" to a magical god to be saved from the hell of its own making. Yet, there is no real relief in the ego's plan, because nothing outside the mind has any effect on it. It is impossible for the mind to receive what it has chosen against. As Jesus tells us in the text: **" It is impossible that the prayer of the heart remain unanswered in the perception of the one who asks. If he asks for the impossible [separation] , if he wants what does not exist [the world] or seeks for illusions in his heart, all this becomes his own. The power of his decision offers it to him as he requests. Herein lie hell and Heaven (M.21.3:3,4,5,6)**. Thus, the answer to the mind's prayer/decision in favor of the ego is hell (the misery of this world), while the prayer/decision for the Holy Spirit leads to Heaven (peace in the dream).

Praying as a student of the Course means paying attention to the thoughts, feelings and judgments in relationships that reflect the choice the mind has made. The choice otherwise remains hidden behind layers of denial and projection. Willingness to recognize the mind's projection instead of blaming others for how you are feeling is the first step in forgiveness, which is the prayer we are taught in the Course : **"...the only meaningful prayer is for forgiveness, because those who have been forgiven have everything. Once forgiveness has been accepted, prayer in the usual sense becomes utterly meaningless" (T.3.V.6:3,4)**. Thus, the form of prayer, as it is understood in the Course, is distinct from the form of Catholic prayer in that it is addressed to oneself, for oneself, in forgiveness of oneself for having taken the **"tiny mad idea" (T.27.VIII.6)** of separation seriously. It is remembering in every situation and relationship that everything is a reflection of the mind's choice, *and nothing else* . To pray always means to be mindful always, thus fulfilling the Christian injunction. The goal of this mindfulness/prayer is to learn to not choose separation: **"The sleeping Son of God has but this power [of decision] left to him. It is enough. His words do not matter" (M.21.3:7,8,9)**. No rituals, words, sacraments, or celebrations are required for the simple practice of forgiveness. However, if they serve as reminders to apply it to your relationships and daily experiences, they can indeed be helpful. The goal of returning home to the Father we never left can be reached by many paths.

(See also: Questions # [23](#), [104](#), [437](#), [505](#), [563](#), [597](#), and [645](#).)

Q #927: I'm wondering about Kundalini energy experiences in relation to *A Course in Miracles* . I have had these experiences and found them to be in opposition to the Course's direction. This has led me to believe that Kundalini is of the ego.

A: *A Course in Miracles* tells us that the entire world is false perception (**W.pII.3.1:1**) and was made as an attack on God (**W.pII.3.2:1**) . The source of this false perception and attack is the ego. Therefore, *everything* that seems to be in this world is ego based. This includes our bodies and all the things they seem to think, feel, and do.

Thus, you are correct that Kundalini energy experiences are of the ego. But this makes them no different from anything else the body appears to do including breathing, eating, and sleeping. In this dream world

we think we inhabit, the body is the primary symbol of the ego's thought that we can be separate from God. When we listen to the ego, everything the body does symbolizes the ego's belief that, not only are we separate from God, but we need something more than God's Love to sustain us. And of course, as bodies we do have many needs.

Because we are so thoroughly convinced that we are bodies, the Course does not ask us to deny any of our bodily needs. Nor does Jesus want us to feel guilty about what our bodies do. To the contrary, he seeks to teach us that we do not have to continue looking upon this world through the guilty, scared, and vicious eyes of the ego. He wants us to know that we can let go of the ego's clawed and gripping hand and turn instead to the Holy Spirit as our gentle internal Teacher.

When we do that, the Holy Spirit will give everything we do a different purpose. The Course explains, "**The ego made the world...but the Holy Spirit, the reinterpreter of what the ego made, sees the world as a teaching device for bringing you home.**" (T.5.III.11:1).

As Course students then, our only job is to change internal teachers. With everything we think, say, or do, we need to ask *what is it for* (T.24.VII.7:1) . Or, more precisely, we need to begin with the premise that it was born of the ego's desire for attack and separation and ask the Holy Spirit to transform its purpose to one of forgiveness and remembering God's Love.

The tricky part is, while we can be certain that this will lead us to an internal shift, we cannot be the judge of what this will or should look like on the outside. In other words, we do not know what love will lead us to say or do. Love might look like a kundalini energy experience. Or, it might look like letting go of striving for kundalini experiences.

Remember that the Course does not address behavior. This is because from Jesus' perspective, behavior is totally irrelevant. He knows that in and of itself, behavior has *no* meaning. So, his concern is the mind that gives our actions all the meaning that they have for us.

Jesus wants us to know that without the Holy Spirit's help we cannot judge anything the body does because we do not even know our own best interest (W.pl.24) . When we recognize this, we open the door for the Holy Spirit to direct us. He will then teach us that because we chose the meaning of everything the body does, we can choose again. He will show us how, by changing our minds, all the things we made to keep us rooted in this world can become joyous reminders of our true home in Heaven.

Q #928: For about three years, I've been obsessed with the corruption of our government and the poverty, terrorism, war, etc., that America has caused. This obsession has led to health problems for me. I find some comfort in writing about it and discussing the issue with certain people. I feel like I am accomplishing some little benefit, perhaps. *A Course in Miracles* teaches us to look at what we've done with a smile that says these thoughts have no effect on who I am, and "Forgiveness ... is still, and quietly does nothing" (W.pll.1.4:1:1). Ken has also said that a Course student could validly be involved in a situation, such as a war, and still be practicing the Course teaching. The main issue is which teacher we are following. I believe your answer to Question #[873](#) addresses this issue, but it sure is frustrating.

A: Questions [#509](#) and [869](#) are also helpful with these issues. We will be brief in answering you, so as not to simply repeat our previous discussions. The lesson is, undoubtedly, a difficult one, perhaps the most difficult one of all. Applying the Course means being able to see corruption and dishonesty, etc., and to be able to disagree with the policy makers, while at the same time recognizing that these leaders are part of the same Sonship that you and everyone else are part of. To extend compassion to the "victims" of injustice and not to the "victimizers" is to indulge the ego's version of compassion and justice. And the inevitable result of that will always be conflict, guilt, and unhappiness. Exclusion is very costly to one's

peace of mind, because it is a denial of truth and reality. The Love of God is all-inclusive, and, therefore, as a reflection of this Love, Jesus enfolds everyone in his love, with no exceptions. He asks us to do the same, so that we will finally know who we are as God's Son: **"Come therefore unto me, and learn of the truth in you. The mind we share is shared by all our brothers, and as we see them truly they will be healed. . . . You can appreciate the Sonship only as one. This is part of the law of creation, and therefore governs all thought"** (T.7.V.11.1,2,7,8). This is also the central theme of Ken's recent book, *The Arch of Forgiveness*, where he states: "If you think of Jesus as total love and innocence, in whom shines the resplendence of Christ's light, you must be willing to share the same thought with those who seem to embody the ego's evil, darkness, and sin. If the light of Christ does not shine in all, it shines in none" (p.13; this is also the theme of a tape set and the article in the Sept. 2004 *The Lighthouse*, both entitled "The Arch of Forgiveness").

The only way to do this is to try to rise above the battleground for an instant, beyond the perception of victims and victimizers (T.23.IV). You would then see that *everyone* shares the same agony of feeling orphaned and hopelessly stranded in a place that is not home. This is the content in the mind of *everyone*, government and military leaders, so-called evildoers, the seemingly downtrodden, and everyone else. The memory of our glorious Self as Christ is also in each mind, but it will remain concealed by the decision to condemn or exclude even one person. That is the importance, to the ego, of having enemies -- we are kept apart from one another, and from our minds, where we would see both the shared pain and the memory of the love that binds us together as the one Son of God. Anger and accusations, thus, are very purposive -- they are the effects of our choice to remain in a state of separation, but have it appear to be someone else's doing: the corrupt, incompetent leaders; the indifferent, selfish citizenry, etc.

Jesus invites us to look at the price we are paying to hold onto the anger we feel is so justified, and then at some point ask ourselves whether it is worth it. He assures us that attacking others through condemnation is not sinful; but it is insane, and most importantly, is not really our will (T.23.IV.3:3; 4:6). The ego tries to convince us that we can feel justified in attacking others without hurting ourselves: **"For it is the ego's fundamental doctrine that what you do to others you have escaped. The ego wishes no one well. Yet its survival depends on your belief that you are exempt from its intentions. It counsels, therefore, that if you are host to it, it will enable you to direct its anger outward, thus protecting you. . . . the more anger you invest outside yourself, the safer you become"** (T.15.VII.4:2,3,4,5,6).

Thus, Jesus asks that we look at this content in our minds with him, so that we will recognize the thought system we have chosen to identify with, and then honestly evaluate its worth in the light of the thought system of forgiveness he offers. Why would we withhold our forgiveness and love from even one person once we realize that by doing so we are excluding *ourselves* from the experience of Heaven's love and peace? That is the question he wants us to keep in the forefront of our minds, along with his assurance that we cannot drive him away should we continue to hold onto our anger and grievances. His love for us is unaffected by our choice for insanity.

Q #929: *A Course in Miracles* states the ego "sees no difference between miracle impulses and ego-alien beliefs of its own... [and] ...makes no distinctions between these two very different kinds of threat" (T.9.VIII.3:1,2). I know this is comparing grandeur and grandiosity and the fact that the ego is aware of something else, greater than it "out-there" (or actually, in-there). But we are confused about what may indeed be the ego's own alien (not of or outside of itself?) beliefs. Is it accurate to say that the ego is constantly aware of this "other" presence? We know that it is not aware of the Holy Spirit (Voice for God) *per se* so would it be us as the decision maker? Exactly what are the two very different threats?

A: Miracle impulses of course emanate from the right-mind, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and their purpose is to undo our belief in the ego. It is apparent why the ego would perceive such impulses as

a threat, even though it cannot really understand them. Ego-alien beliefs, on the other hand, have their origins in the ego thought system, but represent the split off thoughts of the ego that it is attempting to deny responsibility for, including thoughts of attack and guilt and weakness and limitation, which, while inventions of the ego, need to be seen as outside itself to work as defenses. And so thoughts of revenge and destruction attributed to forces outside itself ironically trigger as much a sense of threat to the ego, even though paradoxically they are part of the ego's scheme for self-preservation. And it is these threats, as much as the fear of the unknown represented by miracle impulses, which incite the ego to self-inflating delusions of grandiosity.

There is a very simple explanation for the single, common ego perception and response to both sources of threat. The ego is very simply a thought of attack, and so its only reaction to anything perceived to be outside itself -- real or imaginary -- must be to attack, either now or later (**T.9.VIII.3:4,5,6**). The attack may be either direct (special hate) or indirect (special love), but attack is all that the ego is capable of. With special love, or where the balance of power seems overwhelmingly against it, the attack may be disguised, but the content is nevertheless nothing other than attack. And so the ego does not and cannot distinguish between the content of any thought that it attacks. Much as the Holy Spirit's judgment, seeing everything as either an extension of love or a call for love, responds only with love (**T.12.I.3**), so the ego, regardless of the nature of the content it encounters, sees everything only as a threat to its continued existence and responds only with hate and attack.

So, to the ego, the enemy is both any right-minded thought that reflects the truth of who we are in our unlimitedness -- the grandeur of our true Self -- as well as any ego-based thought, including the body, which challenges or undermines the ego's imaginary "autonomy" and "supremacy." Ironically, as already noted, the other ego thoughts it attacks are merely split off parts of itself, but the ego is capable of perceiving only threat from anything seen as outside itself (**T.4.V.2,3**).

A third source of perceived threat, as you have observed, is the power of our mind to choose between those right-minded and wrong-minded thoughts for, as much as the ego may hate us, it is dependent on the power of our mind to choose it for its continued existence (**T.6.IV.4:1,2; T.7.VI.3**).

And so, we can say unequivocally that **"the ego is quite literally a fearful thought"** (**T.5.V.3:7**). So long as we remain identified with the ego, we can only vacillate between various forms of fear and attack, or suspiciousness and viciousness (**T.9.VII.3:4,5,6,7,8,9,10**). If we could look very honestly at all of our reactions to everything around us when we are in our wrong-mind, we would recognize that this is really the only content we are capable of experiencing as an ego.

The insanity of the ego's defenses is most clearly seen in the self-inflation of its own grandiosity, which is always an attack on a made-up other as a defense against the ego's intrinsic sense of littleness and vulnerability. The other must be held responsible for the feelings of inadequacy, rather than seeing them simply as a result of our choice for the ego itself in the first place.

Q #930: Some people are giving psychotherapy training based on *A Course in Miracles*. Is that really necessary or should I just stay with the Course itself?

A: People are free to do whatever they choose with the Course, either treating it as a total and complete thought system within itself -- which it is -- or attempting to combine it with whatever other teachings they are already familiar, whether they be alternative spiritual paths, self-help techniques, or various therapeutic models. Almost without exception, however, any attempt at integrating the Course with these other practices will involve some compromise of the Course's radical principle of nonduality, as people, often without consciously realizing what they are doing, end up bringing its profound teaching down to their own level of understanding and comfort. There certainly is nothing bad or "sinful" about these kinds of integrative efforts, but they will almost certainly dilute the Course's message and mix levels of

teaching in an unhelpful way, confusing the student and reducing the value of both the Course and what it is being combined with.

Confusion arises because the Course is never saying anything about behavior, and almost every other teaching at some level addresses the issue of how we are acting in the world and relating interpersonally with others. And the Course is simply not concerned with *inter* personal issues, except as they are a mirror of what is happening at an *intra* personal level, that is, with decisions being made at the level of mind, where the illusory experience of being a separate, individual person originates. Changes may in turn be reflected at an interpersonal level, but that would never be the Course's focus or concern.

And so you will do well simply to direct your efforts at understanding and applying the forgiveness principles of the Course as it stands on its own, recognizing that its only purpose is to bring about a change in how you see, or interpret, the world, and not to change the world that you see. Other approaches, such as psychotherapy, may certainly also have value and serve a very useful purpose in your life. The only mistake would be to attempt to combine them with the Course's principles, rather than simply accepting their helpfulness at their own level.

Q #931: I have a question about judgment. In your answer to Question #642, you state "The Course does not ask us not to judge, but rather to recognize the judgments we do make, including the judgment against ourselves for judging." I understand the context in which you made this response, meaning that one should not beat oneself up or feel guilty when we succumb to judgment, as this just fuels the ego. However, I need some clarification about the first part of your response. It seems that *A Course in Miracles* specifically asks us not to judge in several places. In the Manual for Teachers it states: "He must learn to lay all judgment aside, and ask only what he wants in every circumstance" (M.4.I.A.7:8). Also in the manual is an essay on being non-judgmental, starting with the line: "God's teachers do not judge" (M.4.III.1:1). So my question is: should I strive not to judge, or strive only to observe when I am judging? The answer is probably to try to do both. Can you provide any additional perspective on this issue?

A: The Course comes to us in the dream of separation from the part of the mind of the Sonship that is outside of the dream. The need for its curriculum of teaching us non-judgment rests on our decision to identify with the body and the world, having already "judged" that separation is preferable to oneness by choosing it. The answer you quote is correct in that we will not learn not to judge if we deny that we have judged already, and continue to make judgments about a multitude of things all through the day, every day. When Jesus says God's teachers do not judge, he is referring to the fact that the only activity of the split mind is choosing, not judging. The goal of the Course is to teach us that we are minds that choose, not bodies that judge. In fact, Jesus tells us we cannot judge: **"You have often been urged to refrain from judging, not because it is a right to be withheld from you. You cannot judge. You merely can believe the ego's judgments, all of which are false"** (W.pl.151.4:2,3,4, italics added). Thus, learning to "lay all judgment aside" means learning to see in the ego's judgments the reflection of the mind's choice for separation, instead of struggling with the judgments, or worse, believing they are true. Moreover, doing battle with the ego's judgments is a lost cause. The ego will always judge. The important thing is to be willing to recognize the judgments and the purpose they serve, and to remember that they are always false. Their only usefulness is in revealing the mind's choice for separation and the need for forgiveness.

Rather than struggle with judgments, what we are asked to do is be vigilant for the ego's judgment in every situation with willingness to "lay it aside" by questioning it and remembering that there is another way of looking. In doing so, we make room for the Holy Spirit to reinterpret everything according to His perception. Everything then becomes a classroom to learn that the ego's judgment is not our only option. Moreover, it is wrong about everything. In this classroom, the teacher of God learns to choose between the ego and the Holy Spirit, rather than to judge. Awareness of judgment is the first step in the right direction, while striving not to judge short circuits the whole process. The ego presents itself in the form of

judgment; the teacher of God departs from business as usual by seeing judgment as the reflection of the mind's choice with an opportunity to choose again. Thus, the teacher of God does not judge (M.4.III.1:1) ; he chooses.

Q #932: How are we certain that it was Jesus that was the inner voice that Helen was hearing? What if she heard a voice but it wasn't Jesus? I'm not saying it wasn't, for I highly believe in *A Course in Miracles* and all its aspects. But shouldn't one know how the Course began? There are many possibilities of how the voice Helen heard was not Jesus. I find it hard to understand why she would think it is Jesus. Could you kindly explain to me how it is the great savior who she was hearing?

A: Helen knew this for certain. There was never any question in her mind about the identity of the voice she heard, as is chronicled in Kenneth's book *Absence from Felicity*, which presents a wealth of information about Helen and her scribing of the Course. There probably are very few people who have not wondered about the same thing, but many have found that it ceases to be an issue for them as they continue to practice the lessons and see the results in their lives. In the end, however, certainty about this must come only from within you. Our answers to Questions #110, #156 and #922 address this same subject.

Q #933: I know that students are discouraged from mixing approaches, so I hope you will bear with me and see the sincerity of my question. It is this: Advaita Vedanta, also a nondualistic view, seems to insist that I have no choices; what will happen will happen at its appointed time, and in its appointed way. The "goal" of this view is the ultimate realization of choicelessness: seeing that there is no one to exercise choice. *A Course in Miracles* also seems to work towards this point, but it has as its chief practice the repeated exercising of the choice for forgiveness until we realize this choice was illusory, but by then it has done its job and delivered us to the gates of heaven, where, presumably, choicelessness is the rule. Is there a way these two views can be reconciled? Might it suggest that forgiveness is not within my power, and will happen when it happens? If so, then what are the implications for the Course student? Are we possibly merely witnesses to awakening, rather than doers of any kind?

A: The Course is written on two levels, as has been discussed elsewhere in these questions (e.g., Questions #3, #291, #612, #710, #782i): the level of nondualistic truth, where only Love is true and nothing else is real, and a second dualistic level, where the perception of the Holy Spirit, while illusory, is true (a reflection of truth), and the perception of the ego, based on belief in sin, guilt and fear, is false. This makes the Course unique among the world's spiritual paths for, while coming from the highest level, like the Advaita teachings, it nevertheless acknowledges what we mistakenly believe to be true and provides a framework for using the ego's symbols of sin and attack and guilt -- illusory but nevertheless very real in our experience -- for a different purpose (e.g., T.14.VII.5 ; T.24.IV.3) . This allows us to lessen our experience of sin, guilt and fear while we still remain identified with the dualistic thought system of the ego -- making the Course a very compassionate teaching indeed. For while all of our suffering is illusory, the fact is to us it still seems very real. And so a teaching that can help us to minimize the pain while we continue to believe that we have some choice over our experience -- at the same time pointing us to something beyond these false beliefs -- can be much more helpful than simply insisting to ourselves that it is not real.

A possible danger for many students of a practice such as the Advaita Vedanta -- and this is an error made by many students of the Course as well, who fail to make the distinction between the two levels of the Course -- is that it can lead to denial of what we are experiencing because it is not real, pushing our conscious feelings and beliefs out of awareness and simply prolonging in time -- unreal as time ultimately may be -- our experience of duality (T.26.V.2) . Now in the end, we will recognize that the power of choice must be meaningless (e.g., T.5.II.6:4 ; T.27.III.7) , if the options are Everything and nothing. And the

outcome is inevitable, so that if we were to deny the reality of any choice and simply witness all the events we have "chosen" on another level to experience, the time will come when time will cease (T.29.VI) .

But even simply witnessing events represents a choice from our current level of experience. And accepting the role of the unbiased witness who observes without judging is in fact what the Course means by forgiveness -- for there is nothing to be done, only undone -- we are not doers in the forgiveness process, which happens in the mind outside of time and space. In Jesus' words, **"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"** (W.pll.1:4:1,2,3). The only meaningful choice while we believe choice is possible is how to view the events we are witnessing -- either with or without judgment. Judgment always reflects a dualistic perspective, where there is both a good and a bad outcome, or a desirable and an undesirable one. Simply observing without judgment reflects nondualistic reality. And so the choice to forgive that the Course is holding out to us is none other than the choice to see ourselves as the witness -- the mind -- rather than as the doer -- the body in the world. In that sense, despite using different words which seem to point to different practices, the Course and Advaita are really saying the same thing.

Q #934: To learn *A Course in Miracles*, a student needs to form a relationship in his mind with Jesus or the Holy Spirit. The Course tells us this repeatedly. But it offers hardly any practical advice about how to contact them. Helen Schucman, the scribe of the Course, clearly had a personal relationship with Jesus. She knew how to commune with him. But what do the rest of us do?

A: Undoubtedly, many students of *A Course in Miracles* have at some point envied Helen's experience of hearing Jesus' voice. It is easy to feel that Jesus must have had a special love for Helen that he is withholding from the rest of us. This is exactly what the ego would like us to think because it justifies its claim that we did not abandon God's Love; God's Love abandoned us. But believing that Helen had something we do not because we cannot literally hear a voice misses the Course's entire point.

It is not the words Jesus gave Helen that we need in our own mind; it is the love that inspired them. It is not Jesus as an historical, human figure, nor the Holy Spirit as an Entity whom we need; it is the abstract love they represent.

The Course tells us that the body is but a figure in a dream (T.27.VIII.4:3) . That means *every* body -- including Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and ourselves as the individuals we think we are. Anything we perceive as having an individual identity and physical existence is but a symbol in our dream.

But because we are so completely convinced of the reality of our symbols, a book that only spoke of abstract love without personalizing it would not be of much help to us. We have no way to grasp abstract love on the level of human thought. So, when that abstract love that comes from outside of this dream entered Helen's mind, she experienced it as the voice of Jesus -- a potent symbol for her. Fortunately, Jesus is a potent symbol for most of the rest of us in the Western world too. So, the happy result is a book that gives us a way within the dream of conceptualizing the love that comes from outside it.

As students of the Course, we should note that we have probably never told ourselves that we cannot follow the dictates of the ego because we do not hear its voice. On one level, we know that the ego is just a symbol. Yet, when the Course talks of the ego's "senseless shrieks" (T.25.V.3:5) we do not protest that we have never heard them. Rather, we feel an at times painful sense of recognition. And so we accept the ego as a useful symbol, both real and unreal.

However, when the Course tells us the Holy Spirit is "a still small Voice" (T.21.V.1:6) , we think we need to literally hear a voice. And there is a reason we instantly decide that. On a level we are not aware of,

we *do* know that this Voice of Love is really a thought of love that still remains within our mind. We also know (again, unconsciously) that we could turn to it at any time and that terrifies us. So, in the blink of an eye, the part of our mind that is afraid (symbolized by the ego) finds this clever setup that will once again allow us to seek but never find.

Because we are so skilled at keeping ourselves firmly rooted in this dynamic and in this dream, it is very helpful to have the image of an older, wiser, gentle, and loving brother as our guide. But again, it is only in our mind that we need him. He is not coming to us. Rather, we are symbolically coming to him by making a choice for a different thought system.

Furthermore, we do not even need to look for this thought system. As the Course says, **"Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all of the barriers within yourself that you have built against it" (T.16.IV.6:1)**. And so, all we have to do is watch our unloving thoughts and actions without justifying or judging them. Ultimately, this will teach us that our pain is self-inflicted and that we would be much happier if we made a different choice. This is what it means to reach for Jesus' hand to transcend the ego (T.8.V.6:8) . To do this requires no special attributes or abilities -- only a little willingness (T.18.V.2:5) .

For related discussions about listening to Jesus and the Holy Spirit, please see Questions #11, and #401a.

Q #935: How do we choose or end up with the life we appear to lead?

A: *A Course in Miracles* does a brilliant job explaining *why* we ended up with the experience we seem to be having. But it really does not provide an intellectually satisfying answer as to *how* this happened. This is because there is no intellectually satisfying answer to that question.

The Course tells us that our entire physical existence is an illusion -- a dream. So, it is helpful to think about how we would work with an upsetting nighttime dream. We would not ask *how* it happened. Instead, we would examine the content of the dream and ask ourselves *why* it would be in our mind and what we might learn from it.

This is exactly the process the Course asks us to undertake with our *entire* life. Though we obviously do not yet believe life is merely a dream (and certainly should not pretend that we do), we must work with it as if it were. Fortunately, the Course makes doing this relatively easy by letting us know that all of us wrote the scripts of our lives to serve one simple purpose: *to maintain our individuality but get rid of our guilt* . Every aspect of ourselves, every experience we have, and every person, creature, or object we encounter, is a symbol we made up to validate our declaration that "I am here but it is not my fault!"

Jesus tells us in the Course that all this began with the tiny, mad idea that we could be separate from God (T.27.VII.6:2) . Up to that point, we were one with our Creator. But this thought filled us with both glee and guilt. The ego told us we could keep the glee and lose the guilt if we would just listen to it and forget everything else. We took the ego up on its offer, which led us to fall asleep, seem to shatter into a billion fragments, and wind up in this world of form.

Course students invariably ask, "But how could that happen?" And again, there is no intellectually satisfying answer because it did not really happen. The very fact that we think there is a *me* who needs to understand something is the barrier that makes understanding impossible. This is why Jesus makes statements like, **"This course will lead to knowledge, but knowledge itself is still beyond the scope of our curriculum. Nor is there any need for us to try to speak of what must forever lie beyond words" (T.18.IX.11:1,2)**.

So, clearly, we cannot know how we chose the scripts that make up our individual lives. From our limited perspective, we cannot understand what determined our specific choices for families, genders, and so forth. But what we can know essentially makes such concerns irrelevant. We can be sure that while the forms in our scripts differ, the content for all of us is the same -- again, to prove that we exist as individuals but that it is someone else's fault.

Returning to the image of fragmenting into a billion pieces, we can think of ourselves as fragments of a mirror. Each of us is capable of reflecting either the ego or the Holy Spirit (in other words, God's Love). We are used to reflecting the ego and letting our lives serve its goal of separation. But we could instead reflect the Holy Spirit, Who will turn our lives into classrooms for remembering that we all share the same need -- the need to know that God is not angry with us and that it is safe to awaken and be at peace at last.

In every moment, we make a choice between these two options. We are always holding either the ego's hand or the Holy Spirit's. Within this dream, which hand we choose determines what our lives will be like. Therefore, this is the only choice we need to understand *how* to make now.

And so Jesus tells us , **"The emphasis of this course always remains the same; it is at this moment that complete salvation is offered you, and it is at this moment that you can accept it. This is still your one responsibility. Atonement might be equated with total escape from the past and total lack of interest in the future. Heaven is here. There is nowhere else. Heaven is now. There is no other time" (M.24.6:1,2,3,4,5,6,7).**

Q #936: A few years ago, my brother got involved with a Unity Church and now he wants to be a minister. He has also studied *A Course in Miracles* for the last two years. Recently, he told me that he thinks the Jews contributed nothing to world society before Jesus came along. He stated, "It's very cut-and-dried, the Jews were warriors and never promoted peace, love, and brotherhood. That all started with Jesus." I am dumbfounded by his view and know he is hugely misinformed. Are his statements representative of Unity Church? Is this what the Course teaches?

A: While we are not affiliated with Unity Church and therefore certainly not experts on it, in our experience, the attitudes you have described are in no way representative of its teachings.

As for *A Course in Miracles* , its central purpose is to help us undo our faulty belief that some of us are more capable and worthy of love than others. It seeks to help us realize that we all play the same game. We tell ourselves that another person or group is the guilty one, but this is a cover for our hidden belief that the guilt is in us. Deep down, each of us knows we play this game. And the only way we could know we are playing it (and indeed play it at all) is by having two opposing thought systems in our mind. These are the thought systems of the ego and the Holy Spirit.

The ego is a thought system of 100 percent hate. It seeks to maintain our individuality and existence no matter whom it has to attack in the process. Its motto is "kill or be killed" (M.17.7:11). This does not usually look like physical murder. It more often looks like judgment -- the ongoing murderous condemnation in our minds of our fellow human beings. In terms of our own spiritual growth, we need to know that it makes no difference whether we are condemning an entire race of people or the individual who just cut us off on the freeway. When we make a judgment about a person or a group that we would not apply to the whole Sonship, we are reinforcing our own guilt and self-hatred. We are ensuring that we remain asleep with our belief in this painful world of separation and death intact. This is true no matter how justified our judgments might seem.

This does not mean we should not recognize unkind behavior, or, for example, hold criminals accountable for their actions. It simply means that we should do so without hate. It also does not

mean that we should deny or suppress our less than loving thoughts. Rather, the Course asks us to become more and more honest about them. By actually looking at them, we can finally stop projecting them and begin to take them less seriously.

Jesus sums up the entire process of being a Course student in this one simple statement: "**All that is needed is you look upon the problem as it is, and not the way that you have set it up**" (T.27.VII.2:2). Our eyes will always tell us that we have many problems in this world and the source of them is outside of us. But we set up a world, a body, and a brain to convince us that this is so. We can only move beyond our pain by saying to ourselves, "maybe I am wrong."

The process for doing this is to turn to the Holy Spirit in our mind and ask Him to help us look at all our judgment, anger, and hatred honestly and without guilt. The Holy Spirit is our memory of God's Love. The Course teaches that we are still at home in Heaven, joined with our Creator. But we had a tiny, mad idea that we could be separate. This idea provoked guilt, which caused us to fear retribution from an angry God. To escape from that, we fell asleep and dreamt up this world. And so our goal from the beginning was to make a world in which we would see the lack of love in everyone but ourselves.

And yet, despite this goal, we retain the memory of God's Love in our mind. At any moment we can turn away from the ego and toward the Holy Spirit. He will tell us that "**The problem of separation, which is really the only problem, has already been solved**" (W.pl.79.1:4). It has already been solved because it does not actually exist. The problem is only in our mind and so is the solution. This same dynamic -- the conflict producing coexistence of the ego's and the Holy Spirit's mutually exclusive thought systems -- has existed in the mind of virtually every human being who ever appeared to live in this world: Jew or Christian, Muslim or atheist. Jesus is the Western world's most potent example of one who chose to hear only the Holy Spirit's Voice. But the choice he made is available to all of us.

Our job therefore is to make that choice. Whether others have made it is not our concern (and in fact, there is no way for us to know since we cannot know what is going on inside another person's mind). If we find ourselves trying to make determinations about how spiritually advanced another is, we can be sure it is simply a tactic of our ego -- brought on by our own fear -- to keep God's Love away from us. And when we get caught up in all of this silliness, the Course can help us return to sanity by reminding us that "**You do not believe the Son of God is guiltless because you see the past, and see him not. When you condemn a brother you are saying, 'I who was guilty choose to remain so.' You have denied his freedom, and by so doing you have denied the witness unto yours. You could as easily have freed him from the past, and lifted from his mind the cloud of guilt that binds him to it. And in his freedom would have been your own**" (T.13.IX.4:3,4,5,6,7).

Q #937: I keep coming across the idea of *shared interests* (as opposed to *separate interests*). Could you explain what this means and give examples?

A: First, let's start with *separate interests* . *A Course in Miracles* lets us know that because God is perfect Oneness, if we believe in the reality of our individual, physical existence, we must believe that we destroyed both God and Heaven. Convinced that we are bodies and are cut off from God's Love, we are filled with physical and psychological needs. These needs compel us to get them met *no matter what* . In this state of mind, we can hardly care about other people -- they only matter to us to the extent that they meet our needs. This is what it means to have separate interests, and it is the mindset in which most of us spend nearly all our time.

Anytime we feel angry (or even slightly irritated) with anyone, it is a reflection of this mindset. In truth, we only get upset with another when we believe he or she has failed to meet one of our needs. It is easy to come up with examples to illustrate this. The tricky part about giving examples when it comes to the Course is that the Course is never about behavior. Rather, it is a guide to help us change our mind. The

Course tells us that in every moment, we are always listening to one of two internal teachers -- the ego or the Holy Spirit. Of course, which teacher we listen to will be reflected in our behavior and experiences. But what this looks like is not up to us to decide. With that caveat, let's consider an example.

Imagine you get into your car in the morning to go to work. You have a particularly important meeting to get to and know that even if traffic is light, you will just barely arrive in time. You start your car and notice that it is almost completely out of gas. You realize that your partner used it the day before, did not fill the tank, and forgot to tell you it was empty. Now you will definitely be late to your meeting.

In the above situation, you could listen to the ego -- again, as most of us do nearly all the time. The ego always begins with the premise that we are guilty and deserving of punishment because we exist at God's expense. But it does not want us to become aware that we believe this about ourselves because if we did, we might begin to question it. And that would spell the beginning of the end of any power our ego has (not to mention our individual identity as we have come to define it). So the ego tells us that our problems are in the world rather than in our mind, and that something or someone else is to blame for them.

In the scenario just described, the ego would tell you that terrible things are likely to happen if you are late to your meeting and that it is your partner's fault. You would probably be filled with anger and anxiety. You might have the desire to let your partner know what a terrible, selfish thing he or she has done. Certainly in that moment, you would not feel like being loving or kind.

On the other hand, you could listen to the Voice of the Holy Spirit. He would remind you that God's Love is real, has not been destroyed, and is totally unaffected by whatever happens with your meeting. He would tell you that you are perfectly safe because your reality is outside of this world of lack and separation. Further, He would inform you that your only need is to awaken from this painful dream by realizing that this is true. And then it would dawn on you that if this were true for you, it would have to be true for everyone. This is what the Course means by *shared interests* -- the recognition that the one and only need every single one of us has is the need to realize that this world is just a bad dream, and that we are still safe at home in Heaven, enveloped in God's Love.

Recognizing this, you would have no desire to make your partner (or anyone) feel guilty, and all your anger would disappear. The only thing you could possibly want for him or her is to awaken along with you. Again, this could play out in many different ways in terms of behavior. You may very well let your partner know that in the future, you want him or her to handle things differently. But you would do so knowing you have not been hurt and thus with no desire to be hurtful.

Basically, when we think anything in this world has the power to give us peace or take our peace away, we believe in separate interests. When we know that peace and true happiness come from God and are always available to us, we will automatically shift to a belief in shared interests. Then we will know that everything we perceive is either an expression of love or a call for it. And it will become impossible for us to express anything but love to others or to ourselves.

Q #938: I am finding it extremely difficult to deal with the sudden death of my child. I know that death is an illusion, but there seems to be no end to my feelings of anguish and grief. Are there any words from *A Course in Miracles* that are helpful in such a situation. And why would God allow such a meaningless and horrific event to take place?

A: If you are comfortable thinking of death as part of the illusion, perhaps you would find it helpful to dwell on its purpose and importance in the ego thought system, which might then help you better understand your anguish and grief. The section in the manual for teachers, "**What Is Death?**" (M.27) , describes death as "**the central dream from which all illusions stem**" (M.27.1:1) , and adds that it is not God's Will: "**He did not make death because He did not make fear. Both are equally meaningless to Him**"

(M.27.4:9,10). Death, thus, is rooted in the thought system of separation, which has nothing to do with God, meaning that God does not “allow” death. Letting go of the belief in the reality of death and that God is ultimately responsible for it is not at all easy, because as Jesus explains in that section, **“Without the idea of death there is no world. All dreams will end in this one. This is salvation’s goal; the end of all illusions” (M.27.6:3,4,5)** . Deep within our minds we know that if we let go of this belief in death, the foundation of our very existence as individuals will be undermined, and that fear is the huge obstacle that stands in the way of our letting go. We are not conscious of this, of course, but that is why it is so hard to get over grief. Once we grasp the truth that Jesus teaches us, we then must spend the rest of our lives processing it and applying it to the specifics of our daily lives. As we discussed in Question #15, this must be done with gentleness and patience, respecting the depth of our feelings, and never denying them in our attempt to be “good students” of this course.

Another aspect to consider: The sudden death of a child is almost always thought of as a tragedy, with no other description even conceivable to most people. Yet, within the thought system of *A Course in Miracles* that is a judgment that assumes an understanding of both the child's and the parents' Atonement scripts. But we really do not know what our own or anyone else's full path involves. And so we must consider the possibility that this event has been chosen by the mind of the child as part of its Atonement lessons. As the parent, then, you might ask for help to see it the same way -- not as a lesson sent by God or the Holy Spirit, but as part of your script that the Holy Spirit can help you use to gently learn that loss and grief are connected with the ego's image of you and your child, and do not come from your true Self-image as God's creation **(W.pII.284)** . Finally, in a section called “False versus True Healing,” ***The Song of Prayer*** offers a comforting view of death as a healing alternative to the way the world usually regards it **(S.3.II)** .

Q # 939: *A Course in Miracles* says that physical medications are forms of spells. Would you explain what this means? Didn't God say he gave us everything we need, including the herbs to make medications?

A: While the Bible and our Western religions are based on the premise that God created the world and everything in it, *A Course in Miracles* is not. According to the Course, the world is **"false perception" (W.pII.3.1:1)** , was **"made as an attack on God" (W.pII.3.2:1)** , and **"meant to be a place where God could enter not, and where His Son could be apart from Him" (W.pII.3.2:4)**. Nothing in this physical world could have come from God because He is perfect oneness while this is a world of separation and multiplicity. So clearly, God is not in this world and does not even know about it. This entire world, our individual identity, our body, and all of our problems, only exist in our mind. We made all of this up precisely to keep the Love of God away. We made up everything that seems to help us or give us pleasure for the same reason.

In one sense, whenever we seem to be helped by something external, we are telling God that we do not need His Love because we found something better. This is what the Course calls *magic* -- the attempt to solve problems externally by changing something in the physical world. We practice this type of magic virtually all the time. When we feel upset by people's words or actions, we want to change *them* . When we have physical discomfort, we treat the body. The trouble with this approach is that it can never lead us to a lasting state of peace. If we do manage to get someone else to change, there will always be another person who upsets us. If we take a pill for our headache, sooner or later another part of our body will act up.

Jesus gave us his course to help us realize that our attempts at magic do not yield lasting or satisfying results because they do not address our one real problem -- the guilt provoking belief that we separated from God and destroyed His Love. The Course informs us that this self- accusation is false and urges us to make our reawakening to the peace of God our singular goal. The method it lays out for doing so involves changing internal teachers. This is the Course's definition of a *miracle* -- the shift in perception from the ego's thought system of sin, guilt, and fear, to the Holy Spirit's thought system of forgiveness.

When we are willing to ask for this shift again and again, we will be led through a gentle process of awakening in which we ultimately realize that all our problems are made up and have no power to take away our peace or happiness.

Our choice in any seemingly problematic situation is very simple. We can attempt magic by trying to change the outward picture of our life. Or, we can choose the miracle by asking for help to change the inner condition (our thinking) that lead us to view the picture as a problem. The passage your question refers to states, **"Magic is the mindless or the miscreative use of mind. Physical medications are forms of 'spells,' but if you are afraid to use the mind to heal, you should not attempt to do so" (T.2.V.2: 1,2).** In other words, because we still fear God's Love and the power of our own mind, there are times when choosing magic is the best we can do. Jesus wants us to know that this is okay. While it will not give us what we truly want, using magic is not bad, evil, or sinful.

So if you have a physical problem and believe that a medication will help you, you should take it and not feel guilty. The medication will not bring you closer to the peace of God. But we can get closer to that peace by taking our medicine with a gentle smile that says, "I'm scared right now and that's all right."

Q #940: I just started reading and studying *A Course in Miracles* and my question is: Do I understand correctly that Jesus dictated the book? I've had problems accepting Jesus, for the way I have been taught, and the importance given to the fact of his crucifixion to free us from all our sins. It just didn't sound right to me. Now I'm baffled watching me accept this wonderful opportunity to join this brother offering me a hand so openly to walk the walk to God.

A: Yes and no. In Kenneth Wapnick's book, "Absence from Felicity: The Story of Helen Schucman and Her Scribing of *A Course in Miracles*," he relates that the voice Helen heard dictate the Course identified itself as Jesus. Thus, Helen's experience in *form* was that she heard Jesus' voice dictating the Course. Like all of us, Helen had a split mind, part of which identified with the ego (wrong mind), while the other part held the shining light of the memory of God's love (right mind). The nature of a split mind is such that one part of the mind dissociates from the other. So when the mind chooses to identify with the ego, it cannot recognize the right mind as part of itself.

It was too fearful for Helen, as it is for most of us, to identify fully with the right mind, shared by all the Sonship, which is the source of the Course's loving message of forgiveness. However, she was able to receive the message as long as she perceived its source as the symbolic figure of Jesus, who had been an important figure for her throughout her life. He is also a significant figure for the western world, Christian and non-Christian alike, and since one of the goals of the Course is to correct the distorted teachings of traditional Christianity, it is important that Jesus be the identified source of the Course. Although **"Some bitter idols have been made of him who would be only brother to the world" (C.5.5:7)** and we must learn to forgive him our illusions of him **(C.5.5:8)**, his authority as "spokesperson" of the Course's loving message of forgiveness is readily recognized.

The authorship of the Course, therefore, can be seen as trinitarian: Helen's right mind, the right mind of the Sonship, and Jesus as the symbolic figure representing both. Its content, that the world is an illusion, the separation never happened, and God's innocent Son is at home with Him in Heaven, is beyond any form including the Course itself. Helen Schucman and William Thetford's joint decision to find a better way to relate to each other and to their colleagues reflected their choice to accept the content of the right mind. This decision found expression in the form of the Course.

Belief in the crucifixion of the historical Jesus is not a requirement for the study of the Course. In fact, the traditional Christian teaching that Jesus' crucifixion atoned for Adam and Eve's sin and reopened the gates of Heaven for everyone is presented in the Course as one of Christianity's mistaken beliefs in need of correction. Every basic principle of the Course refutes the teaching that Jesus died for our sins; e.g.,

there is no sin (T.26.VII.10:5) , no guilt (T.14.V.1:12) , no world (W.pl.132.6:2) , no death (T.3.VII.5:11) , no separation (T.8.V.2:8) . Jesus is not the savior of the world; rather, salvation is accepted when the mind that mistakenly chose to identify with the ego (wrong mind), chooses instead to identify with the memory of God's love (right mind), symbolized by the Holy Spirit and Jesus. Helen's fear of identifying fully with her right mind is everyone's fear. Thus, while we remain dissociated from our true selves, we need a symbolic figure such as Jesus, who dictates the Course and whose hand we hold in the process of learning we are one with him. Jesus himself encourages us to do so: **"If it helps you, think of me holding your hand and leading you. And I assure you this will be no idle fantasy"** (W.pl.70.9:3,4). Remembering that Jesus is the name we give to one who represents the right mind of the Sonship, and comes to us from outside the dream in a form that we can relate to, will help keep him real to you without being baffled.

Q #941: Please explain the Holy Spirit, specifics, and *A Course in Miracles* ' ultimate goal.

A: Jesus tells us in the Course that the Holy Spirit " **is the Christ Mind which is aware of the knowledge that lies beyond perception**" (T.5.I.5: 1) and " **is in your right mind, as He was in mine**" (T.5.I.3). In other words, the Holy Spirit is the memory of God's Love that remained in our mind when we fell asleep and dreamt up this world of separation. We can think of Him as an internal Teacher to whom we can turn for guidance. He will correct our painful thoughts of separation with forgiving thoughts, which reflect the truth that we are still **"home in God, dreaming of exile but perfectly capable of awakening to reality"** (T.10.I.2: 1) .

Of specifics, the Course says, **"The Holy Spirit will answer every specific problem as long as you believe that problems are specific"** (T.11.VIII.5: 5). Then it goes on to tell us that **"Problems are not specific but they take specific forms, and these specific shapes make up the world"** (T. 27.V.8: 1). So, the Course lets us know that there is a loving presence to which we can turn for help with the specific challenges we seem to face in our lives. At the same time, it sets out a curriculum that will lead us to realize that the multitude of specific problems we think we have are just reflections of our one real problem -- our belief that we exist at God's expense and deserve to be punished for it.

Jesus wants us to use the specific problems in our lives as classrooms that will ultimately help us to awaken. The first step in this process is to bring our problems to the light of the Holy Spirit in our mind so He can reinterpret them for us in a loving way. This will not necessarily change a problem on the level of form, but it will take away all our pain and conflict about it. Over time, all our specifics will begin to seem more and more alike and we will automatically stop asking the Holy Spirit for help with our specific problems and instead ask Him to help us (to paraphrase the Course) *change our mind* about our problems.

This brings us to the Course's ultimate goal. The rather ambitious goal of the Course is to teach us that this world is nothing more than an **"outside picture of an inward condition"** (T.21.in.1: 5) , that this condition is making us miserable, and that -- with the Holy Spirit's help -- we have the ability to change it. The Course would have changing this inward condition become the central focus of our lives. We could think of studying this Course as taking the initial step on a lifelong journey of forgiveness and ever-increasing self-awareness.

As Course students, it is important to remember that **"This course is a beginning, not an end"** (W.ep.1: 1) . The end of the journey -- the real world -- will be when we, like Jesus, have *nothing but* the Holy Spirit in our mind. Happily, *when* that happens and *what* it looks like is not our concern.

Q # 942: I don't understand how *A Course in Miracles* views the use of personal effort in advancing oneself or in helping others. Is making an effort to do anything worthwhile in terms of the Course? For instance, I do volunteer work with children. Is this worth doing? What about donating money to help others who have less than I do? Is doing so just a reflection of my guilt? How about getting an education? According to the Course, is this just my ego trying to better itself and bring accolades and a bigger salary? Finally, what about exercising and living a healthy lifestyle? By my understanding of the Course, attempts to improve physical health only reaffirm an attachment to the ego. So why bother trying?

A: Undoubtedly, many students of *A Course in Miracles* have asked themselves those questions. But it is important to remember that the Course is not a guide for behavior. It is only concerned with motivating us to exchange the ego for the Holy Spirit as our internal Teacher. This is why Jesus never says anything in the Course about what we should *do*. Rather he tells us to ask of everything, **"What is the purpose" (T.4.V.6: 8,9)**. He also tells us that we give everything we see all the meaning that it has for us **(W.pl.1)**. In other words, nothing here has any inherent meaning -- things mean whatever they symbolize in our mind.

Now, it is true that we initially fell asleep and dreamt up this world because we listened to the ego. So on one hand, everything here is a symbol of our apparent separation and triumph over God. On the other hand, now that we are having this dream, we can choose to reinterpret it with the Holy Spirit as our Guide. When we do that, everything becomes a symbol of forgiveness, helping us to get closer and closer to reawakening to God's Love. That is what the Course urges us to do -- use this world as a classroom in forgiveness until we do not need it anymore.

It is very helpful to realize that the Course is written on two levels. On level one -- the level of absolute truth -- this world is a dream. But on level two -- within the dream, where we all believe ourselves to be -- this world can either be a prison or a classroom. And so Jesus does not want us to pretend we think this world is an illusion. Rather he advises us to **"Use all the little names and symbols which delineate the world of darkness. Yet accept them not as your reality" (W.pl.184.11:1,2)**. That means we should keep doing everything so called normal people do, but do so with a different purpose. Were we to stop all activities that we judge as wrong minded, we would be denying the Holy Spirit the only arena He has for correcting our thinking. And so again, we do not change *what* we do, only *how we think* about what we do.

You asked whether giving money to others and getting an education are worth doing from a Course perspective. The answer is: From a Course perspective, extending love is worth doing, while projecting guilt is not. Whether or not you should engage in a specific activity depends upon what it symbolizes to you. This is why Jesus says **"The curriculum is highly individualized" (M.29.2:6)**. If you suspect you are drawn to doing something for the wrong reasons, that is the perfect time to simply ask the Holy Spirit to look at it with you. He will bring love to the situation and then you will know what to do.

You also asked if attempts to improve the body reaffirm an attachment to the ego. The Course informs us that the **"body is a wholly neutral thing" (Lesson 294)** and that to deny its existence is to engage in **"a particularly unworthy form of denial" (T.2.IV.3: 11)**. Clearly, Jesus does not want us to stop caring for the body as a path to letting go of the ego. This is because denying the body is merely the flip side of indulging it. As long as we are identified with the body, we should simply give it the care and attention it requires while asking for help to recognize that it does not have the power to affect our mind.

The fact that you are wondering, "why bother trying," makes it seem likely that you have fallen into one of the ego's classic traps. We adopted the ego as our guide because it convinced us that to do otherwise would destroy us. Then along comes the Course telling us we would be much better off if we chose the Holy Spirit as our internal Teacher. The ego knows that if we believed that message, its gig would be up. So it sends out a warning signal telling us, "If you accept Jesus' message of love and forgiveness, you will lose!" It does not tell us that we will lose only our pain and guilt, and that we will gain the lasting inner peace and true happiness we have always wanted.

When you feel a gnawing sense of loss or despair in relation to being a Course student, it is because the ego slithered its way into becoming your study partner. Rest assured, our journey back to Heaven and into God's Loving Arms is not predicated on sacrifice. And neither Jesus nor the Holy Spirit will ever make us give up anything we really want.

Q #943: I notice that when I practice the Course, my life seems to get worse. I realize that "things seem as though they are being taken away from us," and I do feel that this is happening because of *A Course in Miracles*. Ken has often said it's like the ego telling us that if we continue down this path, we will be destroyed. And yet, we must work through our fear. I know that in psychotherapy things often seem to get worse before they get better; and I know you say this course is gentle, but that is not my experience, and it seems very insulting. Again, I believe this is the process.

A: The feeling that things are being taken away is a common feeling among Course students, and it stems in part from our confusion about who we are and what truly belongs to us -- **"I do not perceive my own best interests" (W.pl.24)**. We have chosen (a choice we immediately concealed from our awareness) to take on a false identity as individuals in order to have the specialness we thought we could not have in our true Identity as God's one Son in Heaven. *A Course in Miracles* thus is helping us reverse this insanity of maintaining a false identity; but since it has become our identity and we no longer know of any other, we will go through a stage in the correction process of feeling as if something valuable is being taken from us -- it is like an identity crisis: **"Now must the Holy Spirit find a way to help you see this concept of the self must be undone, if any peace of mind is to be given you. Nor can it be unlearned except by lessons aimed to teach that you are something else. For otherwise, you would be asked to make exchange of what you now believe for total loss of self, and greater terror would arise in you."**

Thus are the Holy Spirit's lesson plans arranged in easy steps, that though there be some lack of ease at times and some distress, there is no shattering of what was learned, but just a retranslation of what seems to be the evidence on its behalf" (T.31.V.8:3,4,5; 9:1).

This process is really only about shifting the *purpose* of everything you do; it is not about behavior -- ending relationships or getting rid of material possessions. It is about going through daily life now with Jesus or the Holy Spirit as your Teacher, so that you will use your life in the world to teach you that you are not a limited, vulnerable body, and that everyone else is joined with you on the journey and learning the same lessons. That will lead to peace and joy as you realize that following the ego has cost you true peace and joy. Thus, what we lose by following the Course's path is guilt, anxiety, fear, loneliness, hatred, etc.-- all the effects of separation. And the conflict we feel will lessen, because we will have a unified purpose, in accord with our true nature.

This sometimes can be difficult, for our fear is: Who would I be if I never felt guilty or fearful ever again? We made a secret vow to be faithful to the ego, and so if we are not aware of that, we will experience tremendous conflict in practicing the Course's principles -- we will be fighting against ourselves, basically. Trust therefore is essential as we proceed -- that we are being led out of desolation and into abiding peace. In the manual for teachers, Jesus outlines six stages in the development of trust (**M.4.I.A**), and the experiences you have related correspond to the first three. The process continues from there, and ends in a state of real peace, where we realize **"in glad astonishment, that for all this [we] gave up nothing!" (T.16.VI.11:4)**. This process is rarely pain-free, but only because of our concealed commitment to the ego, and our fear that we will be nothing without it. Jesus understands this and encourages us accordingly: **"... you believe that without the ego, all would be chaos. Yet I assure you that without the ego, all would be love" (T.15.V.1:7)**.

Once you realize that all this course is doing is helping us all let go of what has brought us only pain -- because of the mistaken choice we made in our minds -- it would be hard not to feel grateful. And we find

assurances from Jesus all along the way: **“How light and easy is the step across the narrow boundaries of the world of fear when you have recognized Whose hand you hold! Within your hand is everything you need to walk with perfect confidence away from fear forever”** (T.30.V.8:1,2) .

Finally, in the Index to Topics on this Service there is a category called Process/Progress, which you might wish to look at -- we have responded to other students having similar concerns. Also in the Index, under *A Course in Miracles* , there is a category called Study and Practice of, and under that is the topic “practice is causing fear and discomfort.”

Q #944: I am a recent student of *A Course of Miracles* and I had to end a relationship with a man because I found him always pulling away from me. Since then I have found myself in a deep depression which has been so intense I have had to put away the Course until I am more stable. Unfortunately, my family is currently in crisis. My eldest sister is suicidal and far more entrenched in depression than I am. She is living with my parents, getting a divorce, has no income, and has lost custody of her kids. At the same time, my father recently had a stroke and is being hospitalized.

About a month ago, I was at my parents' house when my sister made another suicide attempt. I was the one who pulled the plastic bag off her head. I realized that this incident with my sister that day only weakened my own mental state -- and I went home virtually unable to leave my bed. Since then I decided it was urgent to stay clear of anxiety-provoking situations in order to build my strength up and pull out of this depression. This means I have not paid a visit to the hospital to see my father or taken calls from my mother regarding issues around my sister or father. Right now -- as I write this, the phone keeps ringing. The first call was my sister asking desperately for my help; the second is my mother. I hear the call for help, but I know it is not in my interest to answer it. I feel guilt, anger, and powerlessness.

My mental clarity is not all that it should be. Can you please help me with how to approach this situation given the principles of the Course.

A: Given all the difficult situations you are presently dealing with, it's not surprising that you're feeling guilty, angry, and powerless. Few people in your situation would be feeling any differently. Good for you for recognizing your feelings and being honest about them. Getting us to look at what's really going on inside ourselves and to be honest about the ego is one of the fundamental goals of *A Course in Miracles* . Only by being honest about the ego can we get past it to the truth.

Putting the Course away until you feel more stable sounds like a good decision. Right now you need to do whatever you feel will support you through your depression and family crises. Please remember that from Jesus' perspective, it doesn't matter whether you derive comfort from studying his course, talking to a therapist, watching a sunset, or taking a pill. So seek whatever help you need to get through this difficult time.

The main message of the Course is that we are not guilty. We just mistakenly think that we are, and have made up a world that seems to reinforce this belief. One of the ways our made up world does this is by constantly providing us with difficult situations that tempt us to feel guilty and miserable. Ultimately, the Course would have us recognize that our guilt and misery are just defenses that keep us from the Love of God, which is also in our mind.

Many of us studying the Course however, get caught by inadvertently using it to reinforce our guilt. First we learn that we made up this world and scripted all the events in our lives (though we did this on the level of the mind of God's one Son who fell asleep, not as the individual whom we now seem to be). Then we begin to feel guilty about feeling guilty, or having special relationships, or judging family members when we should be "hearing their call for love."

This is a cruel thing to do to ourselves and is the last thing Jesus would want. He knows that if we were able to not judge, have holy relationships, and only perceive love in our brothers, we wouldn't be here. He seeks only to help us remember that all the painful situations we encounter here can serve to teach us that there is another way (and ultimately to remind us that in fact, we are not the individual -- separate, lonely, and scared -- with whom we have become fully identified).

All we really need to do to apply the Course to any situation we're in is to continue doing what we do, but ask Jesus or the Holy Spirit in our mind to help us watch ourselves as we do it. That means letting ourselves be crazy, angry, sad, and so forth and neither judging nor justifying what we feel and do. If we are able to do this, ultimately, we will see *our own* underlying fear and call for love. And we'll feel the compassion of the loving presence in our mind that isn't judging us. Filled with that love, we'll be able to ask the Holy Spirit what is the loving response to any situation we encounter.

So, as you look upon your own grief and the suffering of your family members, remember that in back of all of it is the shared belief (shared by all of us) that we can be deprived of love. The suffering any of us feels stems from the original thought that we have indeed separated ourselves from God's Love -- depriving him of our love -- and can never get it back.

So again, as you work through the many challenges you face right now, on the behavioral level, do whatever you need to do to help yourself and your loved ones. Remember that the Course is not about behavior but about our thinking (in other words, which teacher we ask for help), and so there is nothing in the Course to use as a guide for behavior. But there is everything in the Course to help us choose the right teacher. Therefore, ask Jesus or the Holy Spirit in your mind to hold your hand as you do what you need to do. Bring your current darkness to their light, which is still in your mind. Let them show you how to look upon yourself and your family with compassion. They will teach you (without making you wrong) a new way to look at the losses and hardships in your life. You will see that neither you nor your family members have to feel like victims of circumstances beyond your control. And in those moments when you do feel that way, a part of you will still know that God's Love hasn't gone anywhere nor have you, and you remain perfectly safe.

Q #945: My question has to do with following the idea from *A Course in Miracles* of "not asking the Holy Spirit for parking spaces," as Ken puts it. Although I tend not to ask for help in the physical world for things for myself, I do find myself getting guidance from a source that has clearly morphed from taking Jesus' hand. The guidance is loving and leads to many holy instants where I see my brother as sinless, but it also does advise me in physical matters, such as where to live, where to go, what to say and who to say it to, etc. Is this an interim guidance that understands that I am not quite ready to walk next to Jesus in equality. Or perhaps is it equality manifesting itself in the world that I have not yet let go of? Am I getting the point sufficiently that I am supposed to accept this guidance as it leads me up the ladder? Or am I deluding myself by accepting what has been fairly accurate guidance in the physical world?

A: We cannot say definitively what the source of your guidance is. It could be right-minded, reflecting your choice to switch from the ego to Jesus as your teacher. As a way of "protecting" herself from the full radiance of the love in her mind, Helen Schucman most of the time allowed love into her awareness only in the form of a voice telling her where to shop, where to wait for a cab, etc. (see *Absence from Felicity*, chapter 17). But when she no longer needed this defense, that phase of her relationship with Jesus ended; she no longer limited his love in an attempt to make it -- and him -- more manageable by her.

If your experiences are originating from a right-minded choice, they will advance you spiritually to the extent to which you do not get caught in the *form* of the guidance and make it into something special in your life. Try to stay with the *content* -- the loving source in your mind -- aware that your function is to reverse your choice to be separate from that source. You make progress in fulfilling this function by

asking for help to let go of your judgments of yourself and others, and instead to see yourself and others as joined in the journey to our home in Heaven, where only Oneness is true and real.

Q #946: It's my understanding that in *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus is speaking to our mind not to our brain. It's also my understanding that there is only one mind. So how can we collectively do anything if there is only one mind and we don't exist? For example, how do we collectively dream a tsunami or any other disaster such as war?

A: To answer your questions, let's start by thinking about how nighttime dreams work. In nighttime dreams, there seem to be various people interacting with each other. But when you wake up, you realize that it was all going on inside your head. All the characters in your dream were created, scripted, and directed by your imagination. No matter how many characters appeared, or how real they seemed, in the morning you open your eyes and find that there is still only one of you.

Similarly, *A Course in Miracles* makes it clear that in reality, outside of this dream of time and space, we remain in Heaven as a "**Oneness joined as One**" (T.25.I.7). Unfortunately, we have covered this truth over with several layers of illusion, making it virtually impossible for us to understand how this could be so. But the Course helps us understand it by explaining that it all began with one thought of separation. That thought seemed to birth a mind that was separate from its Creator -- a state the mind found both thrilling and terrifying. These feelings pushed the one mind to fall more deeply asleep, seeming to fragment into billions of pieces and wind up in this world of multiplicity. But each fragment, born of a single thought, retained the entire thought system of the one mind from which it came. And so, as fragments, we can have individual (and quite different) experiences of being in this world. Yet, fragmented from the same Source, we share an experience of how this world works, and the events that take place within it.

You are correct that in the Course, Jesus is addressing our mind not our brain. But he is not appealing to the one mind which, being already one, does not need the message of the Course. Instead, Jesus speaks to our individual split minds. As the Course makes clear, each of us has three parts to our mind: the ego, the Holy Spirit, and the decision maker, which chooses between the two. Jesus' purpose in writing his course was to remind us that we can shift from the ego to the Holy Spirit as our internal Teacher. And so he is really speaking to the decision making part of our mind because that is the part that can make the shift. Like the one mind, the decision maker is outside of time and space. But the choices the decision maker makes determine whether we will use this dream world as a prison or as a classroom for awakening to our true home in Heaven.

When the decision maker chooses the Holy Spirit, we automatically begin to reflect the oneness of Heaven in our thoughts, words, and actions. This is because, as the Course says, "**It is the Holy Spirit's function to teach you how this oneness is experienced, what you must do that it can be experienced, and where you should go to do it**" (T.25.I.6:4). And so the process the Course lays out for us is really one of gradually awakening to our oneness. At the very end of the journey, we will find that even the one mind is an illusion as we at last accept that "**nowhere does the Father end [and] the Son begin as something separate from Him**" (W.pl.132.12:4).

For a related discussion about the paradox of one mind and separate consciousness, please see Question #127: [If there is only one Mind, why do I perceive myself as unique?](#)

Q #947: *A Course in Miracles* tells me to withdraw from my ego goals, that the ego self is not my real self, and that to disengage from the ego is the only road to peace and joy. I want to do this, but I also want the money. How do I reconcile the two?

A: We will answer your question, but whom should we bill for the service? :-)

Seriously, though, believe it or not, you do not have to reconcile the two. The Course does not ask us to give up anything we are still attached to. In fact, it states, **"It would indeed be strange if you were asked to go beyond all symbols of the world... You have need to use the symbols of the world a while" (W.pl.184.9:1,2)**. Certainly money is one of the most potent symbols in this world. The fact that you have a special relationship with it hardly places you in a unique position. But the fact that you are willing to be honest about it gives you a wonderful opportunity to do what the Course actually advises. That means inviting the Holy Spirit to simply look at it with you. In other words, ask Him to help you watch all your financial transactions without judging or justifying them.

Remember that the Course tells us **"the Holy Spirit uses special relationships, which you have chosen to support the ego, as learning experiences that point to truth. Under His teaching, every relationship becomes a lesson in love" (T.15.V.4:5)**. So you do not want to give up special relationships because they are the very things the Holy Spirit can use to heal your mind. Where there is a special relationship (in other words, a history of the ego running the show), there is always the presence of guilt and fear. And that certainly describes the feelings most of us have - - consciously or unconsciously -- around money. So the first *lesson in love* the Holy Spirit might give you about money could be to have compassion for your own fear-based attachment to it. And since guilt and fear are the ego's bread and butter, that is the beginning of withdrawing from the ego. As that happens, you will gradually find yourself feeling a greater sense of ease around money, regardless of what is happening externally.

So to summarize: When it comes to switching from the ego to the Holy Spirit, you do not have to make any withdrawals until you lose interest. And when you cannot find your balance, let Jesus reconcile the difference.

Q # 948: I have been in a troubled love relationship for five years. Sometimes when we're in conflict, I accept what is being mirrored back to me as my own lack and wrong mindedness, and I feel at peace. At other times, I feel resentment toward my partner and envy other couples that I perceive as having more of a joint vision. *A Course in Miracles* teaches not to seek outside yourself and not to try and find another relationship that my ego would like better. Soon we will be seeing a counselor to help us with our issues. I know that the objective for the counselor will be to help us create more ego-based congruence. So how do I do this and stay true to the teaching of the Course? And if my goal is ego-based anyway, why not just find another relationship with someone who is more compatible with me?

A: *A Course in Miracles* is a guide that helps us shift from the ego to the Holy Spirit as our internal Teacher. It is not a guide to behavior. Thus, staying true to the teaching of the Course is solely a matter of what goes on in your mind. From the perspective of the Course, then, going to see a counselor for help with your issues is no more right or wrong than drinking water when you feel thirsty. The water is not healing. But it would be neither loving nor helpful to deny your body the liquid it requires to function and feel healthy. Similarly, counseling may not heal your mind. But if it can help alleviate your mental anguish, then it would be silly not to partake in it. In addition, all of our physical and psychological issues are, in reality, barriers we created to keep the Love of God out of our mind. Therefore, taking whatever actions will lessen their effects can be a helpful first step toward ultimately remembering God's Love.

In the pamphlet *Psychotherapy: Purpose, Practice and Procedure*, Jesus states that **"It is in the instant that the therapist forgets to judge the patient that healing occurs" (p.3.II.6.1)**. Clearly, Jesus is not

opposed to therapy. Moreover, we could replace the words *therapist* and *patient* with any two people who have a relationship. Healing occurs when we do not judge another -- or ourselves. Thus, from Jesus' perspective, *whether* you stay or leave a specific partner is irrelevant. What matters is *how* you stay or leave. This is why the Course urges us to ask the Holy Spirit for help questioning the purpose of all our thoughts and actions. The Holy Spirit knows that though they wear a million disguises, there are only two purposes we can have. We are always either projecting guilt or extending love. The Holy Spirit will always let us see which one we are doing.

Happily, He is an internal Therapist Who will always forget to judge us. So, if we hold His Hand, everything we do will become a healing classroom in forgiveness. Filled with His forgiveness and Love, you will recognize that neither you nor your partner is guilty -- you are both simply afraid of love. It might be helpful for the two of you to work on this issue together, or it might be better to do it apart. But whether you stay together or break up, you will do so with a gentle kindness -- a kindness that wants only what is best for both of you.

For a related discussion about special relationships, please see Question #701 [What does the course say about leaving a relationship?](#).

Q #949: Recently my cat, whom I loved dearly, died. I know that animals are a projection of the collective mind just like the self that I identify with is. So, I take it that my cat's mind and my mind are joined. I feel that my cat tried to stay alive longer than she wanted to, just for me, because she could feel that I truly loved her. I can still feel her presence now telling me that she had a peaceful transition and that she knows I tried my best to help her. There is nothing in *A Course in Miracles* that would invalidate my experience; is there?

A: No, there is nothing in *A Course in Miracles* that would invalidate your experience. The Course tells us repeatedly that minds are joined, and it means *all minds*. It does not matter whether we appear in this dream as human beings or as animals, we are all fragments of the same one mind that fell asleep and dreamed up a world in which we appear to be separate from each other and from God.

It sounds like the connection you continue to feel with your cat is providing you with great comfort. In case you -- like many pet owners -- are tempted to feel guilt over her death, let's take a quick look at this issue. Because pets are dependant upon us for their very survival, owning them places us in a God-like role. After all, they do not appear to need God; they appear to need *us*. Unfortunately, along with the God-like role we play in our pets' lives comes the agonizing sense that we are not up to the task and will destroy them -- revealing ourselves as the murderers we judge ourselves to be. So relationships with pets (just like all relationships) are generally fraught with guilt. And indeed, there usually does come a point at which we have to decide when and how our pets will die. It would be difficult to imagine a more potent trigger for ontological guilt than this. But this can also provide a great opportunity for changing our mind.

The Course tells us that the body "**neither lives nor dies**" (T.6.V.A.1:4) and that "**In the holy instant the condition of love is met, for [in that instant] minds are joined without the body's interference, and where there is communication there is peace**" (T.15.XI.7: 1). Clearly, from Jesus' perspective (outside of this dream world), the body is nothing. To him, physical existence is irrelevant to the expression of love between minds.

So, crazy as it sounds from our perspective, your relationship with your cat is no more or less real now than it was when she appeared to be physically present. Either way, she is nothing more than a symbol in your mind. And either way, if you hold the ego's hand she becomes a symbol of guilt, while if you hold the Holy Spirit's Hand, she becomes a symbol of love and forgiveness.

If she has become a reminder to you that you do not have the power to hurt another and that there is a love in your mind that remains constant and unaffected by outside events, then that is a very helpful thing. Let her help you remember that no matter what happens between bodies, not one note in Heaven's song will be missed (**T.26.V.5:4**) .

For related discussions about pets, please see Questions [#134](#) and [#340](#).

Q #950: I have been working with *A Course in Miracles* for 10 years, and I feel stuck. In [Question #655](#) you say there's nothing wrong with trying to get guilt based addictive behavior under control, I have tried for 30 years without success. My classroom is overeating and being overweight. When I eat or think about food, or I think about exercise I feel guilty. It seems no matter what, I feel guilty. I would like to know where the Holy Spirit fits in this. Do I just say help me with this; do I think about Him? I don't know how to recruit His help since I am always guilty no matter what.

A: At the center of the problem, as you describe it, is guilt, not food or weight. It is not only the problem, it is the goal. Seeking to change form (even for 30 years) without relinquishing guilt is the mind's way of having its cake and eating it, too. The missing link in the equation is the hidden desire to hold on to guilt. In the text, Jesus tells us the first obstacle to peace: **"The Desire to Get Rid of It" (T.19.IV.A)** is fueled by the **"attraction of guilt" (T.19.IV.i)**. Although it may seem that cake, pasta, or potato chips, are the big attraction, the real draw is to the guilt seemingly engendered by the food. Guilt is the ego's nourishment, so when the mind chooses the ego as its teacher, it will seek for guilt and find it, in order to sustain its belief in the reality of the ego. Therefore, used as a classroom, being overweight is a very helpful tool to get in touch with guilt, which in turn reveals the hidden choice the mind has made to identify with the ego. Being willing to see being overweight and the body itself (large or small) in this light is the first way the Holy Spirit steps into the picture. Weight loss programs do not identify the mind's choice for the ego as the source of the problem. Nor do they offer a guilt-reducing regime to help solve the problem, as the Holy Spirit does.

The Holy Spirit's diet begins with the distinction between form and content, whereby the true source of addiction is recognized as the mind's choice between the ego and the Holy Spirit (content), rather than the body's choice (form) between chips or carrots. The Holy Spirit's goal is to teach us to recognize the source of the problem, so it can be healed. When the body says "I want potato chips," it is reflecting the mind that says "I want guilt to feed my belief in the separation." All the bad feelings that come with eating (or obsession with thinness) keep attention focused on the choices the body makes, which keeps the mind's power to choose between the ego or the Holy Spirit from awareness. Efforts to solve the eating addiction on the body's terms will fail, as your 30 years have proved, because the addiction is in the mind that wants to feed on guilt. Asking the Holy Spirit for help in undoing guilt means accepting, first of all, that this is indeed the problem, which is not as easy as it sounds. In fact, the reason we look for solutions in the body and its behavior is precisely because we do not want to let go of identity with the body. When the body thinks it can sneak in a few potato chips that won't show up on the scale, it mirrors the mind's sneaky thought that it can get away with seeking happiness in a thin body and God won't notice. The truth is God does not notice, but the mind will inevitably feel the pain and guilt that come from seeking from the ego/body what it cannot give, and turning away from the real happiness of oneness with our Source.

Overeating is just one of the endless forms the ego uses to camouflage content and act out its tale of sin, guilt, and fear. Every special relationship has this same goal. *Anything* serves as the subject for a special relationship. At the top of the list is the body with its multitudinous needs, and its crowning triumph -- death. The death of the body is the ego's final proof that the separation did occur and guilt is real, justified, and inescapable. With this belief firmly held, no wonder food looks good. The guilt of identifying with the body is severely painful. Jesus uncovers for us the insanity of the ego's attraction to pain and guilt: **"Under fear's orders the body will pursue guilt, serving its master whose attraction to guilt maintains the whole illusion of its existence. This, then, is the attraction of pain. Ruled by this**

perception the body becomes the servant of pain, seeking it dutifully and obeying the idea that pain is pleasure. It is this idea that underlies all of the ego's heavy investment in the body. And it is this insane relationship that it keeps hidden, and yet feeds upon. To you it teaches that the body's pleasure is happiness. Yet to itself it whispers, 'It is death.'" (T.19.IV.B.13:2,3,4,5,6,7,8). Just as weight loss programs usually ask clients to pay attention to eating habits so they can be changed, the Holy Spirit asks us to recognize the thought system the mind has chosen and its devastating effects, so another choice can be made. His solution to the body's being overweight is to undo belief in the guilt that keeps the mind frozen in its mistaken choice. His curriculum offers release from guilt and a new perception of the body, whether its form be large or small: "...the reality of guilt is the illusion that seems to make it (the body) heavy and opaque, impenetrable, and a real foundation for the ego's thought system. Its *thinness* and transparency are not apparent until you see the light behind it. And then you see it as a fragile veil before the light" (T.18.IX.5:2,3,4, italics added). Herein lies the real thinness we all seek.

Q #951: I have been living in my car because I have no money and no job; and I have lost confidence in my ability to provide for myself. What have I done wrong to be left in this situation? I am a good person and I envision a world of love and beauty; but I find myself living here in hell. What kind of act of God does it take to leave this behind and move on? I would gladly (I think) trade all this madness for a place of beauty and love; I just can't find it here anymore. What do I do? I still believe in asking the Holy Spirit for help; yet I still live in this illusory madness.

A: As strange as it may sound, it is still possible to be at peace even though your external situation is so bleak. If there is one lesson Jesus is trying to help us learn, it is that peace is not conditional on anything other than our choice to accept it as our natural state as God's Son, which means nothing external can either give us peace or take it away. Most students find this principle terribly difficult to apply. That is why it can be very helpful to approach your life situation as a classroom in which you can choose to be taught either by the ego or by Jesus. The ego would urge you to see the world as a hell that ceaselessly victimizes you, and then to blame others or yourself ("what have I done wrong?") for being in that state. Jesus or the Holy Spirit in your right mind would encourage you to use the world to help you free yourself from the limited self-concept you have developed -- as a prisoner of the world, from which you seek to escape. The ego offers you one way of interpreting your situation; Jesus and the Holy Spirit offer you a radically different one; the ego's further imprisons you in the world of separation; Jesus' helps free you from those chains by having you shift the purpose of everything you do, and to learn to see your interests and your purpose as the same as everyone else's.

With regard to your dire financial situation, you might consider finding a shelter for the homeless, where you more than likely would be put in touch with sources of financial aid and job opportunities. To go in that direction could reflect a right-minded choice to identify with healing rather than defeat and the need to escape. If you keep in mind that you want Jesus, not your ego, to accompany you in your search for financial help, then you will be peaceful and advance spiritually, regardless of how things turn out. This, you might say, is the "act of God" you are asking about, and this is how you "move on." As long as you see the world as hell, you can never escape from it no matter what you do, for you would be giving it a power it does not really have. That is the advantage of seeing the world as a classroom in which Jesus can teach you how to use it to heal your mind of its mistaken thoughts about who you are and what the world is. The world of love and beauty you desire is in your mind (your right mind), unaffected by external events -- and that is what you can learn as you go about finding a source of income and a place to live.

Q #952: Does God know that we are here in this so-called dream?

A: *A Course in Miracles* tells us that, "**God does not know of separation**" (P.2.VII.1:1,11) . Because this is obviously a world of separation -- separate bodies, with seemingly separate interests, leading separate lives -- such a statement means that God could not possibly know about this world, nor us as the individuals we think we are. At first, the concept that God does not know about all this can be very frightening. But this turns out to be good news once we realize that God does not know that we are here because we are *not* here. The Course teaches us that we are "**at home in God, dreaming of exile**" (T.10.I.2:1) . In other words, this is *our* dream. God, being *outside* of this dream, cannot know about this world, any more than one person could know the contents of another's sleeping dreams at night.

The process of the Course is one of gradually discovering that we are not the individuals we think we are, and that God is not a being who is separate from us. Jesus informs us that in reality "**nowhere does the Father end [and] the Son begin as something separate from Him**" (W.pl.132.12:4) -- we are a "**Oneness joined as One**" (T.25.I.7:1) . But Jesus knows that this is virtually incomprehensible to us from where we *think* we are inside this dream. He realizes that the first step of our journey to awakening must consist of replacing our fearful image of God with one that can be a source of comfort. For this reason, more often than not, he speaks to us in the Course as if God were a separate being Who knows about us. And as long as we believe that we are individuals, we really cannot help but think of God in this way.

So the most helpful thing we as Course students can do for ourselves is to simply follow the process Jesus lays out for us. That means increasingly choosing Jesus or the Holy Spirit instead of the ego as our internal teacher. As we do so, we will come to know that God's Love is real and available to us, despite our inability to fully understand its source -- an understanding that we can rest assured will come to us when we are ready for it.

Q #953: My husband and I run a small business. Lately we've had a rash of experiences in which suppliers send us damaged goods, or behave in slightly hostile ways. I understand that these experiences are symbolic of my fear of God, resulting in guilt and a belief in punishment. What is new is that I feel as though I can't bear to argue with any of this -- to be angry with the suppliers, to worry about the money, or to do anything about it at all! It's as though I just can't do it any more. "In my defenselessness my safety lies" has become my motto. I just can't bear to defend myself in most situations. It hurts too much. And yet there's the (ego?) fear that I am using the Course to avoid confrontation, or misinterpreting the guidance I seek but am never sure I'm hearing correctly. I feel as though in this life I've overcharged, or delivered defective goods in any number of ways. Why should I defend myself against, or be angry about, such treatment from others when I want to forgive them. I'd prefer to just ignore it and let it happen. I just want to let it go and forgive everyone, even if it costs me money or causes me inconvenience. This seems a small price to pay for peace of mind. Am I deluding myself?

A: Because *A Course in Miracles* is a guide to changing your mind not your behavior, there is no *right* or *wrong* way to handle things as a Course student. However, it may be helpful to clarify what Jesus means by *defenselessness* . The Course's concept of defenselessness has nothing to do with behavior. It is strictly about what happens in the mind. When we choose the ego as our internal teacher, we begin with the premise that we are guilty for having stolen our very existence from God. Then we repress that thought and project it onto others, convincing ourselves that they stole the peace of God from us. On the level of form, we reflect these dynamics whenever we get upset with another person. Whether we are annoyed that they cut us off on the freeway, or furious that they stole our money, underneath our upset is the accusation that they stole the peace of God.

On the other hand, when we choose the Holy Spirit as our internal Teacher, no matter what we experience in the world, we know that God's Love is still in our mind. And since it is there, all the things of which we accuse ourselves clearly have had no effect, and therefore must be made up. That means we

are innocent, and if we are, so must everyone else be. With that awareness, it is impossible to do anything but extend love. This then is Jesus' definition of defenselessness: *when we feel no need to defend because nothing has the power to take away our peace* .

Obviously, very few of us can claim to have achieved that state (and the last thing we should do is pretend that we have). Indeed, the purpose of the Course is to give us a roadmap for getting there. It sends us on an inner journey, which consists of turning every experience in our lives into a classroom in forgiveness. Unfortunately, because of our conditioning to decide everything based on form rather than content, many students inadvertently get off course (pun intended) by assuming that forgiveness means - as you stated -- ignoring everything and letting it happen. Jesus is not asking us to do that. In fact, letting events in which we appear to be victimized simply happen, as we try to forgive the perpetrator, often leads us right into a vicious ego trap. Not only do our feelings of victimization remain in place (and certain to be projected elsewhere), but we also get to feel superior to those who appear to have wronged us.

For example, you said that you want to forgive *even if it costs you money and causes you inconvenience* . That might be okay, but be sure that you are not implying a causal relationship that does not exist. Do not think that letting another take something from you -- in other words, sacrificing something -- is a necessary part of your experiencing forgiveness. In reality, there is no link between sacrifice and forgiveness. Nor do you deserve to be mistreated now because you overcharged or delivered defective goods in the past. Like sacrifice, suffering and payback play no part in forgiveness.

It is the ego that loves these setups because they mean that you get to be a hero in your own mind (and perhaps the eyes of the world) while the other person remains a villain. Furthermore, you maintain your belief in separate interests. The other person has done something apparently dishonest or unkind and you have decided that it is in your best interest to simply accept it and in his or her best interest not to look at it at all. This could very well be denying both of you your classrooms.

The chances are good that you would get the greatest healing from doing what so called normal people do, but giving it a different purpose. In other words, take the appropriate action to prevent others from taking advantage of you, but do so without hating or mentally attacking them. That, of course, requires that before you do anything, you ask the Holy Spirit to look with you at the guilt, fear, and anger that are still in your mind. This will always lead you to discover the course of action that would best serve the interest you share with your brother -- awakening from this dream. And then you will feel a true sense of peace that makes it clear you have not deluded yourself.

Q #954: *A Course in Miracles* says that it is only one of many paths home. Yet I've heard that the only way home is to leave the dream. But since no other paths say this world is a dream, or explain how we got here, or the ego thought system, or ontological guilt, or that bodies don't exist, or that there's only one of us here not billions and billions, etc., etc., how can there really be other paths that lead us to peace and then home? The metaphysics is so essential that in my opinion, the Course is *the only way home* . Please explain what other paths the Course refers to in the aforementioned statement. And can we really get home without understanding our own psychology and why we act the way we do? It seems to me that the Course was written because no other path had awakened us to these ideas.

A: You are correct that the metaphysics and psychology of *A Course in Miracles* are unique. And it is almost inevitable that if the Course speaks to you, it will feel like the only possible way home. But followers of most paths would make exactly the same assertion -- and, as world history attests, all too often do so in very unkind ways. The certainty that ours is the one and only way is a result of confusion between form and content.

When we consider spiritual paths, we could think of the *content* as being synonymous with the *purpose* or *goal*, and the *form* as being *the method for achieving that goal*. The Course tells us that the holy instant, the holy relationship, and the Holy Spirit's teaching **"are all but aspects of the plan to change your dreams of fear to happy dreams, from which you waken easily to knowledge"** (T.18.VI.1:4). Indeed, that is an excellent summation of the purpose of the Course itself. It seeks to help us shift our mind from our imagined guilt (symbolized in the Course by the ego), to the memory of God's all-inclusive Love (symbolized in the Course as the Holy Spirit). Within this dream world, once we have made that shift, we will go from projecting guilt everywhere, to extending love. How and when that shift leads to our awakening from the dream is neither our concern, nor the concern of the Course -- which tells us that God Himself will be responsible for that final step (T.18.IX.10).

The Course, then, is not our way home. Rather it is a tool for creating the conditions in our mind in which we can find our way home. While the Course can lead us to truth, we should not confuse its words, metaphysics, and psychology, with truth itself. As the Course says, **"words are but symbols of symbols. They are thus twice removed from reality"** (M.21.1:9,10). So while the love that inspired the Course is real, at some point we must realize that the Course itself is still part of the illusion.

If it is the part of the illusion that helps us awaken to what lies *beyond* the illusion, then that is a marvelous thing. But that does not mean that it is the *only* thing in this dream that can serve that purpose, or that it will serve that purpose for *everyone*. To some, the Course's explanation of how we got here and why we do what we do might make no sense at all. But that certainly does not mean that they cannot awaken to the Love of God. A person could have a right-minded experience while reading the Course, watching a sunset, reading the Bible, thumbing through the phone book, in the middle of a war zone, or in a million other scenarios. This is why the Course says that there are **"many thousands of other forms, all with the same outcome"** (M.1.4:1,2). In statements such as that, Jesus is really saying that form is irrelevant -- it is the meaning, or purpose, that we give the form that matters. Therefore, Jesus is not referring to other *specific* forms. Rather he is acknowledging that the prerequisite to awakening is *not* any specific knowledge, form, or world-view, but rather a single *decision*. And what leads anyone else to make that decision, or why it does so, is beyond our comprehension and not our concern.

In this regard, it is helpful to remember that: **"A teacher of God is anyone who chooses to be one. His qualifications consist solely in this; somehow, somewhere he has made a deliberate choice in which he did not see his interests as apart from someone else's"** (M.1.1:2).

Q #955: So many of the new writings from the world's spiritual teachers talk about the importance of the heart, love and compassion in the path to ascension. There is much talk of the "wisdom of the heart". A *Course in Miracles* really only mentions the mind. When it speaks of the mind, how does that relate to the concept of heart used by other authors?

A: The love and compassion that are considered attributes of the heart reflect the mind's choice to identify with the Holy Spirit. They flow naturally, unimpeded by the ego's judgment when the mind is no longer blocked by the guilt and fear of choosing separation.

As you mention, the Course tells us that only the mind exists and there is nothing outside of it, including wisdom of the heart. The Course is very clear in this, indeed the foundation of its teaching rests on this principle: **"It [the mind] does not go out. Within itself it has no limits, and there is nothing outside it...It encompasses you entirely; you within it and it within you. There is nothing else, anywhere or ever"** (T.18.VI.8:7,8,10,11).

Heart is used symbolically in the Course as a term we are familiar with and relate to more easily than the term mind. However, it can only be understood as referring to the mind. In the many passages where the term heart is used, it means the part of the mind that holds the memory of God's Love. In a very beautiful

passage Jesus uses the symbol of the heart and the body to describe the peace filled state of the right mind: **"I place the peace of God in your heart and in your hands, to hold and share. The heart is pure to hold it, and the hands are strong to give it. We cannot lose. My judgment is as strong as the wisdom of God, in Whose Heart and Hands we have our being"**(T.5IV.8:10,11,12,13).

In these terms we find not only the true condition of the mind when it chooses against the ego, but the all-inclusive extension of this truth that is true compassion. The compassion the Course teaches is to see everyone in the light of the memory of our oneness with the Father. Everyone is thus included in this compassionate perspective, and seen as remembering or forgetting, choosing oneness or separation, whatever the form may be. In this wisdom of the right mind all other interpretations, judgments and perceptions cease. This is accomplished through the practice of forgiveness, which is both the wisdom of the heart and compassion as taught in the Course. Wisdom is generally understood as good judgment, but as with everything understood generally, Jesus takes it a step further in the Course. He tells us in the manual: **"Wisdom is not judgment; it is the relinquishment of judgment"**(M.10.4:5). Thus, we find wisdom of the heart in the Course through the process of forgiveness. Indeed, the heart of the Course is learning the compassion of forgiveness, whereby we relinquish judgment and become truly wise.

Q #956: I understand that I really do not want the peace of God, and that I need to ask Jesus to help me look at this fact without guilt or judgment. Yet my life still seems to be one conflict after another. I am aware that I do not want to let my specialness go and I ask for help with this. But I just seem to be stuck in the victim mode. What should I do?

A: One of the things studying and applying *A Course in Miracles* does for us is to reveal just how deeply split our mind is. On one hand, the Course helps us see that despite our vastly differing scripts, basically everyone's life (with very few exceptions, such as Jesus') can be boiled down to three rather miserable acts: we are born, we struggle, and we die -- hardly a storyline any sane mind would choose for itself, and certainly one in which we are a perpetual victim. On the other hand, the Course tells us that we have the power to change this experience -- that by changing internal teachers, we could see peace instead of this (W.pl.34) . If we believe that we have this power -- and part of us must, or we would not be drawn to the Course -- then it is natural to wonder why we do not just make this internal shift, feel better, and get on with it.

But the Course answers that question when it tells us that **"No one who sees himself as guilty can avoid the fear of God"** (T.30.VI.4:4) . In other words, we will be afraid of God (and of the internal shift that would bring us closer to Him), as long as we have any guilt left in our mind. And as long as we retain any belief in the reality of our physical existence and of this world, our mind will contain guilt -- the unconscious conviction that we stole our existence from God and deserve to be punished for it. This is why our journey as Course students can seem so slow, difficult, and filled with setbacks.

While we have found clever ways to disguise this fact, our entire lives up to this point have been elaborate schemes to keep us in the victim mode, precisely so that we will never return to the peace and Love of God, which we perceive as our greatest threat. As we begin to do what Jesus asks of us and question every value that we hold (T.24.in.2:1) , we start to feel how desperately we *do* want to return to God's Love, and how much we have suffered in our seemingly separated state. Yet it takes time to undo an entire thought system and we cannot expect the ego to just give up without a fight.

So your experience of being stuck in the victim mode, while undoubtedly painful, is certainly not unique, nor is it really the problem. Rather, it is simply a reflection of the fact that you still fear God's Love and your mind's ability to choose it. Thus, you do not need to *do* anything about it. Rather, you could just view it as helpful information. In fact, whenever we find ourselves feeling like victims, we can simply notice it and say, "Aha, I am still scared and that is all right." In this way, we will be practicing the forgiveness with ourselves that will ultimately loosen the ego's chokehold. One of the keys to progressing on our journey

home is the discovery that, despite its slippery cleverness, there is one thing the ego cannot pervert to serve its own means: *our failure to make a big deal about something* .

Q #957: It's almost as though I am my own worst enemy. After some upset happens, I find a place of peace. Then, almost immediately, I say something that completely obliterates any peaceful feelings. Am I supposed to try to get better at this, or just notice that I keep doing it and ask for a "holy instant"? Are these non-peaceful actions and words unavoidable, or are they proof that I'm doing it wrong? I want this to be my last time here. This world seems very hard to me.

A: You are not doing it wrong. While it may be unpleasant, the fact that you are *noticing* yourself quickly and consistently pushing away virtually all experiences of inner peace is actually very helpful. Developing this awareness is a critical part of progressing as a Course student. *A Course in Miracles* tells us that **"The ego will attack your motives as soon as they become clearly out of accord with its perception of you. This is when it will shift abruptly from suspiciousness to viciousness, since its uncertainty is increased" (T.9.VII.4:6,7)**. In other words, whenever you have an experience of peace, the ego will sense that its days could be numbered and come roaring back, louder and more ruthless than ever. Thus, virtually anyone who honestly does what the Course asks will come to the realization that there is a part of his or her mind that does not want anything to do with the peace or Love of God.

In an odd way then, you could feel reassured by what you have observed in yourself. Again, your awareness is a crucial step on the journey the Course asks us to take. Fortunately, the Course does not ask us to "try to get better at this." Rather, it encourages us to ask Jesus or the Holy Spirit to help us simply watch *without judgment* everything we say and do. By simply watching ourselves through the eyes of a loving internal teacher, we can begin to see that our less-than-kind actions do not make us sinful, evil, or horrible -- they simply indicate that we are terrified. And being born of the guilt-inducing belief that we exist at God's expense, our terror can only be healed through gentle forgiveness that gradually lets us know we are the **"maker of a world that is not so" (T.25.IV.3:1)** .

Therefore, it is very helpful to discover that we truly are our own worst enemies. Only we have the power to seemingly cut ourselves off from God's Love. But we also have the power to recognize that God's Love has not gone anywhere and is still available to us whenever we are ready for it. And as we feel God's Love more and more, we will come to know that this world is merely an element of our own misguided imaginings—not a place we need to escape from or worry about returning to.

Q #958: In what way does studying and applying *A Course in Miracles* save us time? Will it cause us to live fewer lives? Does this idea imply a belief in, or recognition of, the phenomenon of reincarnation on the part of Jesus? Doesn't the Course also say that we could be with Jesus *now* , if we only saw (as in vision)? Does this mean that there is no shortcut to enlightenment? No direct access to God?

Also, what is the ultimate definition of *miracle* in the Course? I know that there are 50 miracle principles, and the term *miracle* is used frequently in the text. But I find that these are just hints pointing to the real meaning of *miracle* . The Course doesn't seem to be referring to what we usually describe as a miracle.

A: Jesus tells us in the Course that **"The miracle substitutes for learning that might have taken thousands of years" (T.1.2.6:7)** . So let us start by examining what he means by *miracle* . He means a shift of internal teachers in our mind. It is a choice to listen to the Holy Spirit's or Jesus' guidance (which will always lead us to extend love) rather than to the ego's raucous shrieking (which will always compel us to project guilt). Notice that the miracle is not the *extension* of love -- the extension is a *reflection* of the miracle that occurred in the mind, and it can take many different forms. The miracle, as defined by Jesus

in the Course, has nothing to do with bodies, physical phenomena, or anything in the world. It is solely a shift in thinking. However, it is a shift so profound that it automatically transforms us from a mindset of trying to get our perceived needs met at any cost, to one of knowing that our only real need is to remember God's Love -- a need we share with everyone else who believes that they are here. As a result, in the moment when we truly experience the miracle, there is no way we could say, do, or think anything that is not motivated by love. The aim of the Course is to help us set up the conditions in our mind to experience the miracle more and more.

One of the ways Jesus motivates us to listen to his message is by promising to save us time. And it is true that doing what he asks of us will *seem* to save us time. Using this world as a classroom in forgiveness will gradually decrease our compulsion to repeat painful and destructive patterns in our lives. So, for example, rather than spending an entire life unconsciously drawing experiences to us in which we feel like victims, Jesus or the Holy Spirit will help us remove (through forgiveness) the ontological guilt from our mind that compelled us to use victimization as a defense against God's Love. In this way, we can actually use our time here to get closer to awakening to our true home in Heaven rather than as an indefinite prison sentence.

This does not mean, however, that Jesus believes in time. He tells us that "time but lasted an instant in your mind, with no effect upon eternity" (T.26.3:3) and that truth is "far beyond time" (T.15.II.1:9). **Thus, it is clear that he speaks about time in the Course only because he knows we believe in it. It is one of the symbols in our dream that Jesus must use in order to motivate us and help us grasp what he is talking about.**

In keeping with his knowledge of the unreality of time, Jesus tells us, **"In the ultimate sense, reincarnation is impossible. There is no past or future, and the idea of birth into a body has no meaning either once or many times. Reincarnation cannot, then, be true in any real sense" (M.24.1:1,2,3).** But he also says that **"the way to salvation can be found by those who believe in reincarnation and by those who do not" (M.24.2:8)**, and that **"There is always some good in any thought which strengthens the idea that life and the body are not the same" (M.24.2:8).** There are passages in the Course in which Jesus seems to imply that reincarnation is a real phenomenon. But that would make it *real* only in that it happens *within the dream*. Jesus' primary message is that *nothing* that happens within this dream is real. And so, ultimately, Jesus and his course are not concerned with reincarnation or anything involving bodies. Like the concept of time, if reincarnation is a meaningful concept to *us*, Jesus is happy to work with it. But he does so only as part of his strategy for helping us move beyond all concepts that obscure our reality as **the one changeless Son of God.**

Finally, about your question of being with Jesus *now*, direct access to God, and a shortcut to enlightenment: The Course states, **"Sometimes a teacher of God may have a brief experience of direct union with God. In this world, it is almost impossible that this endure. It can, perhaps, be won after much devotion and dedication, and then be maintained for much of the time on earth. But this is so rare that it cannot be considered a realistic goal. If it happens, so be it. If it does not happen, so be it as well. All worldly states must be illusory. If God were reached directly in sustained awareness, the body would not be long maintained" (M.26.3:1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8).** We must read this passage with awareness that (despite its frequent use of anthropomorphic language to describe Him) the God the Course refers to is not a being but a state. It is **"a Oneness which unites all things within Itself" (T.25.I.7:2)**. Were we to fully understand what this means and achieve sustained awareness of it, we would not be here long because we would have awakened to the fact that we are *not* here. Knowing that we are **safely at home in Heaven, most of us would no longer have any purpose for continuing this dream.** But that is the end of the journey the Course takes us on. As such, it is really not our concern.

Far more helpful to us at this point, is to focus on the Course's emphasis that Jesus, as a teacher, is in our mind, and that if we choose to listen to him *now*, we will experience the Love of God, which is also in our mind *now*. Therefore, we already have direct access to everything we need for enlightenment -- the Course's curriculum for embracing it *is* the shortcut.

For related discussion of miracles see Questions [#288](#) and [#559](#). For more about reincarnation, see Question [#24](#). And for more about direct access to God, please see Question [#101](#).

Q #959: I'm quite concerned about something that I have just read. Professor Persinger is a man who has conducted many experiments on people in relation to the brain and God. Some of his subjects reported that they connected with God, saw God, saw Jesus, went to a place of space like emptiness and some even saw ufos. He claims that when we have a divine union with God, or anything that seems to be out of the ordinary, it is merely parts of the brain being activated in different ways than normal. It makes me feel really sick to know that everything I have read on the mind and God could just be a product of our imagination. How do you really know that God is real, not just our imagination? You say that you are at an advantage because you stand outside time and space, how do you know that you haven't just activated a different part of the brain?

A: First, mind and brain are two entirely different entities in *A Course in Miracles*. Since mind has no physical/quantitative dimensions, it cannot be studied or experimented on; and therefore the teachings of the Course are not empirically verifiable, as they pertain only to the mind. The brain -- which is real only within the illusion -- simply carries out the mind's wishes, and in that sense does not control our existence. The brain can simulate an experience, but that does not mean it *is* the experience. For example, a part of your brain can be stimulated so you will not feel hungry, even though you have not eaten; but that does not mean your body is getting nourishment. Indeed, after a while, you would die, even though you do not feel hungry. In other words, the brain lied. Likewise, one can have an experience of God's Love or Oneness through brain stimulation, but this certainly will not lead to the peace of God, awakening from the dream, or necessarily being a kinder or more loving person. This is the point of "**The Test of Truth**" section in the text (**T.14.XI**). The discussion there teaches us that while we can never know for sure at any given moment whether we are listening to the Holy Spirit or the ego, or that God is real or imagined, in the long run we can; for although we can fool ourselves, after a while, we cannot fool those who live or work with us, or those who know us well.

Q #960: In reference to a statement you made in the answer to [Question #372](#): "You are right, the world will not get better when we no longer believe the thought of separation from God is real; it will disappear in our awareness." Here's my question: when this dream of the world disappears in my awareness, what will be the experience of those in this dream with me? I believe there is one, if not several, who are "really" here with me, sharing my dream. To them, will I just dematerialize and be gone, or will I seem to die, or what? Or do we have the option of lucid dreaming, in other words continuing to operate here to help other fragments to awaken, all the while being fully aware and awake in God? Certainly this question is premature, as I don't expect to reach that condition any time soon, but I would hate to work so hard to reach a point where I would bring such pain and grief to those who love me.

A: A phrase in the workbook serves as a foundation to respond to your question: "**There is no world apart from your ideas because ideas leave not their source, and you maintain the world within your mind in thought**" (**W.pl.132.10:3**). The specific application is clear if we understand "world" to include the body, yours and everyone else's. This is the fundamental principle of *A Course in Miracles* which underlies its teaching that the world and the body do not exist (e.g., **W.p.I.132.6:2; T.18.VII.3:1**). It means you cannot dematerialize because you have not materialized, any more than the images you see in nocturnal dreams materialize in your bedroom while you sleep. It is the insistence that the illusion of the dream is real that makes the dream figures seem to have life outside the mind of the dreamer. The specialness "rules" of the dream of separation do not apply to awakening, by the very fact that the dream requires being asleep. One rules out the other.

The mind that chooses to remain asleep and identify with the figure in the dream has dissociated from its true identity as mind. This dissociation causes the identity confusion in which the dream figure (body) thinks he is the dreamer (mind) and will awaken somehow and disappear from his and everyone else's dream. Jesus tells us in the text: "**You [mind] are the dreamer of the world of dreams**"

(T.27.VII.13:1). Thus, when you awaken fully, no longer choosing separation, the world will disappear just as when you wake up from a nocturnal dream the images in your dream disappear. This occurs when not one ounce of credence is given to "**the tiny, mad idea**" of separation **(T.27.VIII.6:2)**. Meanwhile, the journey to awakening lies in the practice of forgiveness, in which nothing happens to the body because forgiveness occurs in the mind.

Those who share your dream are the special relationships that intermingle in the collective dream of the mind of the Sonship. These relationships are designed according to the ego's thought system to support belief in the separation. The ego's "proof" that bodies are real is that they can be affected by others in positive and negative ways, thereby negating the power of the mind and giving it to the body. Thus, others seem to be responsible for the way one feels. This is the ego's best defense strategy to convince itself that the dream is reality, the separation happened, and the world is real. Central to this thought system is the ego's theme of victimization filled with tales of betrayal, abandonment, and unfair treatment. In these relationships death, the ultimate abandonment, is inevitable, as are the feelings of loss and grief that accompany it. The mind sleeps dreaming of "life" and "death," pain and loss. Within this dream, no one escapes the pain of death. Freedom from pain and grief are found only in allowing the mind to be healed of all thoughts of body identity, and to know itself as mind with the power to choose the illusion of the world / the dream of death, or the truth of oneness with God/awakening from the dream. Therein lies the only escape from the pain of death and all awareness of the world.

Q #961: In your answer to [Question #673](#) regarding dreams, you quote, "Your sleeping and waking dreams have different forms, and that is all. Their content is the same" (T.18.II.5:13). If I find the "content" of my sleeping dreams less forgiving, more fearful, etc., does it follow that that reflects my true state more accurately than my daytime dream content? During my waking dreams I appear to be capable of making choices to forgive and listen to the Holy Spirit; I seem to be more aware that I do, indeed, have a choice. In other words, until my sleeping dreams are governed by this same ability to exercise choice, am I not truly getting to the root of guilt and healing my mind?

A: Your sleeping dreams could simply be telling you that there is still some buried guilt that has not yet come to the surface -- that there is still more work to be done. But you probably knew that already. Still, it can be helpful to get that kind of a nudge from dreams, since we can lull ourselves all too easily into thinking we are pretty good at this forgiveness stuff and don't have much further to go. In truth, though, we are deeply fearful of seeing the process through to the end, because "the end" is a state of selflessness, where we have let go of the self that we thought we were: a self that chooses to forgive. This conflict in our minds -- wanting to go forward, but terrified of doing so -- can show up in dreams as battles, struggles, torment, etc. It is not necessary to analyze the dreams, just to get a sense of what they signify -- which you seem to have grasped very well. As you get more and more in touch with your fear to go all the way with forgiveness, you will become more aware of the conflict in your mind. Then as you look at that resistance calmly and without judging yourself, your dreams will reflect that new state of mind.

Q #962: You often encourage people to seek out some form of counseling or psychotherapy when they are feeling discomfort or depression, whilst working with Course, to get back to the real source of this disquiet, which is the guilt in their mind. How does a therapist achieve this?

A: I think you may have misunderstood. Therapy is like a good aspirin, or some form of medical intervention, or a meditative walk in the woods. It's all magic, but at the level of the world, it can be very

helpful. And so, at times, when people are struggling with various life issues, it can be beneficial for them to have the opportunity to get another perspective in the world's terms on what is happening for them, and perhaps learn some techniques that will enable them to get unstuck or free of their pain. But it's not that the therapist achieves anything for the patient. The therapist can point to and even help open doors, but it's the patient's or client's decision whether to walk through those doors.

Now there could be times when a therapist helps a patient uncover buried sources of guilt hidden in the recesses of the patient's mind, but in nearly every case, these would still relate to past memories from this lifetime. It is very unlikely that most therapists would be helping the patient get in touch with the ontological guilt, for that is not their purpose. Nor is that necessary for the purpose that therapy is being recommended to some questioners in this forum. If the therapist is open and non-judgmental, willing to join with the patient in finding a better way to cope with emotional and psychological problems, that is enough (**P.2.II.8; P.2.V.4; P.3.II.6**). There is a joining and a healing in that openness that is being held out to the patient, if the patient is willing and so chooses to accept it.

And the patient can use the therapy sessions to identify projections of the buried ontological guilt, regardless of the awareness or intention of the therapist, who may know and need know nothing about *A Course in Miracles*. It is, after all, the patient who decides what purpose everything in his or her life shall serve, and if the patient has an understanding of the purpose and practice of the Course's principles of forgiveness, any situation, including but not limited to therapy, can serve that purpose.

Q #963: I have been studying *A Course in Miracles* for a little over two months now. Not only do I see no appreciable change in my outlook on life, but I am increasingly aware of feelings of irritation and depression. Sometimes these feelings are about nothing in particular, but lately I find myself feeling especially agitated when I do the exercises in the Workbook. I believe everything I read about God's gifts to me, and instead of feeling grateful, I feel restless and annoyed, and wish God would just leave me alone. Of course, I don't really wish He'd leave me alone. I'm pretty sure my experience is not that unusual, but what specifically can I do to get through this and not give up?

A: You are absolutely correct that your experience is not unusual. Most of us are initially drawn to *A Course in Miracles* because when we read it, we sense that a loving presence is speaking to us. We recognize that the path Jesus lays out for us offers true hope of escaping from the painful conditions with which we are accustomed to living. But a crucial component of Jesus' curriculum is that we become very aware of just how unhappy we really are in this world. After all, why would we be motivated to accept that this world is just a dream -- let alone do the challenging inner work that leads to awakening from it -- unless we realized that it is a nightmare?

And so, between the many beautiful and inspiring words in the Course, Jesus takes every opportunity to let us know that this is **"a dry and dusty world, where starved and thirsty creatures come to die"** (**W.pII.13.5:1**). On day one of the workbook, he asks us to concentrate on the idea that nothing that we see means anything (**W.pl.1**). Given the fact that we have spent our entire lives up to this point believing that this world holds much that we want and that our perceptions are very meaningful, how could we not feel irritated and depressed by what Jesus is telling us?

The good news though, is that what he is saying is only irritating and depressing to the ego. And contrary to what we have believed up to now, the ego is not the totality of who we are. It is but one of two internal teachers in our mind. At any moment, we can ask Jesus or the Holy Spirit within our mind, to be our guide. When we do this, we get in touch with the fact that God's Love is still available to us and is totally unaffected by the apparent darkness and misery in this world. In working with the Course, this means asking one of them to help us simply watch all the resistance we have to it (such as our irritation or depression) without judgment.

Jesus and the Holy Spirit reside in that part of our mind that knows we made up all this darkness and misery precisely to obscure the Love we are now being urged to embrace. They are aware, therefore, that while Jesus tells us that forgiveness offers everything we want (**W.pl.122**) , we think forgiveness will lead to our destruction. They see that the many negative emotions we go through in working with the Course are all merely covers for the terror that grips us when we ponder returning to a God Whom we think is filled with rage towards us -- a terror that makes it inevitable that we will wish He would just go away. But Jesus and the Holy Spirit know that God is *not* angry with us. Thus, they see our terror as simply a silly mistake. As Course students, we should ask for their help to cultivate that attitude as well -- to see our irritability and depression as understandable reactions to fear, and to not make a big deal about them. They are simply indicators that our fear of accepting God's Love and being at peace is still quite great. This is a fear that we cannot expect to just disappear after two months -- or any particular amount of time -- spent working with the Course. It will, however, dissipate gradually if we are willing to just let it be and have faith that Jesus is leading us through our pain because he knows that there is something much better for us on the other side of it.

Q #964: I'm having a bit of a philosophical dilemma which I'm hoping you can help me resolve. A contemporary view claims that the purpose of this relative world is to be able to experience our divine nature, rather than just knowing it; and that only by having the possibility of an opposite can one experience what one truly is. This seems to imply that this world, while a dream of separation, is somehow still necessary for God to "know Himself experientially." I realize that this contradicts what Jesus teaches in *A Course in Miracles* , which is that the world is totally meaningless and serves no purpose whatsoever, but this alternative explanation seems to make sense. I mean if Heaven is eternal peace and joy, and nothing *but* peace and joy, forever unchanging, then wouldn't it soon become meaningless since there would be nothing to compare it to? For example, if you throw a touchdown pass on the first try, it would be exhilarating. But if you threw nothing but touchdown passes, they would become meaningless and empty. So isn't this illusory world actually a "good" thing -- as long as we know it's just an illusion and we're using it for the purpose of knowing ourselves as the Son of God? Isn't it, in fact, necessary to experience ourselves as That?

A: This point of view is actually common to *process theologies* , of which Alfred North Whitehead is one notable representative.

There are two levels here that need to be kept distinct. *A Course in Miracles* teaches that in Heaven there is no separate self or mind that can evaluate its state in relation to another self or state: **“What He creates is not apart from Him, and nowhere does the Father end, the Son begin as something separate from Him” (W.pl.132.12:4)** . By definition, there can be no lack in infinite Perfection, so there is nothing to learn and no potential to be fulfilled. Likewise, being bored or tired of seeing the same thing presupposes the existence of time and space, and God and Heaven transcend the limitations of time and space completely. To the ego, peace is boring, and conflict and challenge exhilarating, for the ego constantly seeks to make its own world of separation and differences real. Therefore to the extent to which we identify with the ego, we will find life without contrast and opposites inconceivable and certainly not appealing.

The perfect, eternal Oneness of Heaven is beyond our comprehension, having nothing in common with the dualistic experience of our world, which consists of separate, imperfect individuals limited by space and time. You cannot take the principles of dualistic experience and apply them to non-dualistic experience. They are mutually exclusive states. The mistake so many of us make is to use our human experience as a reference point for understanding the realm of pure spirit -- God and Heaven. This is part of the ego's strategy to annihilate the true God and make another god that validates its own thought system; and therefore we forget that human beings are the effect of the separated mind's decision to obliterate the truth from its awareness, and substitute another whole thought system -- false from beginning to end -- in its place. If that is our foundation, then how can we possibly understand anything? That is what Jesus is trying to tell us in his course -- that we are confused about everything: **“When you**

made visible what is not true, what *is* true became invisible to you” (T.12.VIII.3:1) . So we need to be extremely cautious about drawing conclusions from our experience -- other than that we have been totally wrong, and there must be a better way.

Yet this is where *A Course in Miracles* is so helpful. While it tells us that we made this world **“as an attack on God” (W.pII.3.2:1)** , and that **“the body was not made by love” (T.18.VI.4:7)** , it also tells us that we retain in our split minds a memory of the truth, and therefore we can use the world and the body to restore that truth to our awareness by choosing against the ego's wrong- minded purpose of reinforcing separation and for the Holy Spirit's right-minded purpose of undoing our belief in separation. On this level, the world serves an important purpose: it can lead us from mindlessness back to the power of our minds to choose the truth rather than the ego's lies. And on this level our learning occurs primarily through contrast: **“Contrast and differences are necessary teaching aids, for by them you learn what to avoid and what to seek. When you have learned this, you will find the answer that makes the need for any differences disappear. Truth comes of its own will unto its own. When you have learned that you belong to truth . . . you will need no contrast to help you realize that this what you want, and only this” (T.13.XI.6:3,4,5,6)** . Thus, when sanity and truth have been restored to our minds, the world will disappear back into the nothingness from which it came, for it has no value in itself: **“ . . . if I see no value in the world as I behold it, nothing that I want to keep as mine or search for as a goal, it will depart from me. For I have not sought for illusions to replace the truth” (W.pII.226.4,5)** .

Q #965: I am becoming more sensitive to my thoughts, and seeing the world more as an observer. But I have lost a sense of love. If everything is a dream, the world is insane, and our only purpose is to awaken, then what is there left to do? For example, I used to enjoy playing music, but now that doesn't even make sense to me. I feel sad that my experience of being here doesn't seem to contain love anymore. What has happened?

A: *A Course in Miracles* asks us to question every value that we hold **(T.24.in.2:1)** . If we truly do this, while we still in fact hold these values, how could we not go through a period of disorientation and loss? Jesus expects us to go through this and repeatedly reassures us about it. He tells us that the process of undoing we have undertaken **“need not be painful, but it usually is so experienced” (M.4.I.A.3:2)**.

One of the central, and for the majority of students, most difficult teachings of the Course is that our concept of love is entirely false and misguided. What we have called love until now is really the ego's substitute for love. The ego defines love as getting our special needs met. That means finding an external source to fill up the lack we perceive in ourselves (caused by our belief that we separated from God, destroying Him and His Love). We can seek to be filled up by -- and form special love relationships with -- other people, substances, or activities. But doing so is a set up because we are asking something outside of us to save us from our own self-hatred and nothing can actually do that.

Through practicing the Course, it gradually dawns on us that our notion of love makes no sense and that we do not know what real love is. At that point, we start to understand that this world offers nothing we want, but we do not yet comprehend what we do want. Jesus understands the despair this engenders, telling us that **“Men have died on seeing this, because they saw no way except the pathways offered by the world. And learning they led nowhere, lost their hope” (T.31.IV.3:4,5)**.

But then Jesus continues, **“ And yet this was the time they could have learned their greatest lesson. All must reach this point, and go beyond it. It is true indeed there is no choice at all within the world. But this is not the lesson in itself. The lesson has a purpose, and in this you come to understand what it is for” (T.31.IV.3:6,7,8,9)**.

In other words, Jesus has a purpose in helping us to see the futility of searching for love in this world. He wants us to stop settling for the ego's "shabby substitute" for love and to reawaken to the grandeur of the Holy Spirit's Love that is still in our mind.

That means, no longer seeking for love outside ourselves but rather asking the Holy Spirit to teach us what love really is. From reading the Course, we can understand intellectually that real love means reflecting God's Love through forgiveness (in other words, taking back the projections of guilt we have placed upon ourselves as well as everyone and everything else). But only by holding the Holy Spirit's hand can we actually find out how to do that. And that means we need a classroom in which to practice.

You are correct that the Course informs us that the separation never happened and this physical life we think we are living is a dream. But that doesn't mean there is no point to what we do here. Because we believe we are here, our activities and relationships are the classrooms in which we can learn what love really is. This is why Jesus states, **"the Holy Spirit would not deprive you of your special relationships, but would transform them" (T.17.IV.2:3).**

So, as Course students we do not want to drop our special relationships or daily activities. Rather, we want to ask the Holy Spirit to guide us through them. We want to engage in them with Him as our Teacher. Doing this turns everything into an opportunity to shift our purpose from attack and separation to forgiveness and joining.

Approached in this way, our daily activities make perfect sense and acquire great meaning. Then something like playing music can become a symbol of God's Love in your mind and a source of great joy. And this is how (is in fact the only way) we begin to awaken from this dream. Happy Music Making!

Q #966: "Miracles you are not asked to perform have not lost their value" (T.1.III.8:3). I cannot seem to grasp the meaning of this sentence, although I feel the meaning of the rest of the text in 8 and 9.

A: The basic idea is that the content is always there in our minds; it may not find expression right now, but it is never lost. There is a beautiful song-like rendering of this idea later in Chapter 5 -- the first one of its kind in *A Course in Miracles* : **"I have saved all your kindnesses and every loving thought you ever had. I have purified them of the errors that hid their light, and kept them for you in their own perfect radiance. They are beyond destruction and beyond guilt. They came from the Holy Spirit within you, and we know what God creates is eternal"** (T.5.IV.8:3,4,5,6).

Q # 967: My high school reunion is coming up and the thought of going to it is causing me intense anxiety. I really don't want to go, but feel like the Holy Spirit is making me because circumstances are aligning themselves so that I almost have no choice. I guess I kind of feel coerced by the Holy Spirit. Why can't He teach me without sending me into a situation where I am going to be uncomfortable? Why can't He say, "Okay, since you do not want to go, let's learn the lesson that you have to learn in another, more comfortable way"?

A: Your anger over feeling pushed to do something that you would rather not do is very understandable. But feeling coerced by the Holy Spirit comes from a basic misunderstanding of what the Holy Spirit is. *A Course in Miracles* talks about the Holy Spirit and the ego as if they were separate entities that control our thoughts. But in reality, they are merely two exclusive thought systems, each of which can be boiled down to one core thought.

The ego is a thought system born of the belief that our separation from God really happened and is very serious. As a result, our ego thoughts always reflect the premise that we destroyed Heaven, are very guilty, and deserve punishment. For most of us, the ego directs 99.9% of our thinking since we almost always think we are really here in a body, within a world.

The Holy Spirit meanwhile, is the memory of God that we brought into this dream that reminds us of our true Identity as God's one Son. More specifically, the Holy Spirit is the knowledge (completely forgotten by most of us on a conscious level) that we never separated from God and are therefore still at home in Heaven and merely "**dreaming of exile**" (T.10.I.2) . All thoughts that follow this one core thought reflect the love, forgiveness, and compassion that an awareness of our own innocence inspires.

In the Course, Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as if He were a teacher who will do things for us. But Jesus is simply using metaphorical language to help make the Holy Spirit something we can relate to. Because we believe we are individuals living in a world of form, it is nearly impossible for us to relate to abstract ideas. So Jesus personalizes the Holy Spirit for us. He knows we need this in order to conceptualize a source for the right-minded thoughts we've forgotten we can choose.

The Holy Spirit can't do things in this world because there is no world. Ultimately, choosing the Holy Spirit as our Teacher will awaken us to that reality. But before that happens, the Holy Spirit (in other words, our choosing the thought system of the memory of God's Love) will reinterpret everything we do here, giving it a loving purpose. That is why the Course says the Holy Spirit "**uses everything for good, but He does not believe in what is not true**" (T.6.II.10:2).

As Course students, when we begin to feel victimized by the Holy Spirit, Jesus, or his course, we can be certain that the ego has taken charge of our studies (again speaking metaphorically of the ego as an entity). Remember that the ego's mission is always to prove that we are victims, but that it is somebody else's fault. For example, if we work, the ego will turn our job into an opportunity to resent our boss. If we are married, the ego will turn our marriage into an opportunity to resent our spouse. So why would studying the Course be any different? We should expect the ego to be even louder if it senses we've come upon something that might cause us to question its authority. So the ego sees us working with this Course and says, "Okay, fine, I can turn this into a win for me. I can turn the Holy Spirit into just one more enemy trying to tell me what to do."

But in truth, the Holy Spirit doesn't care what we *do* . He doesn't care whether you go to your reunion or not. He only cares about the love in your mind, whatever choice you make. Similarly, the ego doesn't care whether you go, either. It just wants you to be miserable and guilty, whether you go or stay home.

So before deciding whether to go or not, ask the Holy Spirit to help you determine what is the kindest, most loving thing you could do in this situation. If not going to your reunion would be the gentler, more loving choice, you can be sure that the Holy Spirit will help you "learn the lesson that you have to learn in another, more comfortable way."

In the end, all we can do is attempt to listen to the Holy Spirit as best we can and not take it too seriously when we return to the ego. We know we're listening to the ego when we think the issues in our lives are serious, and to the Holy Spirit when we realize they are just silly. And the Holy Spirit can help you change your thinking about yourself and the world equally well, whether you're at your high school reunion or at home watching television.

Q #968: I feel as if I am being guided to start facilitating *A Course in Miracles* group. I must confess that I do not feel worthy of this and feel that I do not have the credentials, worldly accomplishments, or the spiritual advancement to be doing this. On the other hand, I remember Jesus' statement in the Course that "**readiness is not mastery**," and I realize that this could be a good teaching/learning process for

me. Since all of you at the Foundation have experienced teaching the Course and are certified psychologists, are there any tips that you could give me on making sure that I do the right thing?

A: Just as a clarification -- in addition to Kenneth Wapnick, there is only one other psychologist on our staff.

Facilitating a Course group should be approached the same way you would approach any other role in your life -- primarily as a means of accepting the Atonement for yourself. In this sense, it would be a "good teaching/learning process" for you, as you suggest. Jesus tells us that the qualifications for being a teacher of God **"consist solely in this; somehow, somewhere he has made a deliberate choice in which he did not see his interests as apart from someone else's" (M.1.1:2)** . The Introduction to the manual for teachers as well as the first section in which this quote appears explain the Course's unique view of teaching and the student-teacher relationship. Our tape album "What It Means to Be A Teacher of God" can be particularly helpful in this context as well.

The level of one's formal education is basically irrelevant. The Course presents a sophisticated thought system, and it is therefore helpful to have a good general grasp of its principles in order to structure discussions and answer questions from group members; but this does not require advanced academic status. Our books and tapes are offered as study aids for this purpose, as well as to help students with their individual spiritual process.

Finally, the only way you can know if you are doing the right thing is to try to recognize any ego involvement and then set that aside as best you can and ask the Holy Spirit for guidance. Our answer to [Question #12](#) also address this issue.

Q #969: *A Course in Miracles* says that it is just one expression of the "universal curriculum," and allows for many other paths of equal validity. Many of these other paths, however, seem to be in contradiction with the Course on at least one fundamental point -- they understand human experience as playing some kind of creative role in a larger cosmic design. The Course, by contrast, teaches that our apparent existence in the world is merely a mistake to be corrected, rather than an experience with some kind of inherent value. Might it not be the case, when grasped through some higher-level understanding, that somehow both are true? That we have a purpose here, and yet don't have a purpose? Or could it be that our purpose here is merely to realize that we have no ultimate purpose as human beings?

A: You are correct that *A Course in Miracles* stands in stark contrast to the many spiritual paths that view human existence as part of a cosmic design. Most of them begin with the premise that the world was made by God. The Course, on the other hand, tells us that this world **"was made as an attack on God...to be a place where God could enter not" (W.pll.3.2:1,3)** . Further, it lets us know that attacking God is not possible because God is Love and **"The opposite of love is fear, but what is all-encompassing can have no opposite" (T.in.1:9)** . And so, according to the Course, this physical world and all that it contains -- including our physical and psychological selves -- are merely the result of our dreaming a dream, the content of which is not true **(T.28.II.7:1)** .

Like a nighttime dream, the purpose of the experience we seem to be having here lies not within the dream itself, but rather within the mind that is dreaming it. Thus, we must return to our mind to find that purpose. The Course lets us know that our purpose will always be one of two things. Either we will be following the ego's mandate to use everything here to prove that our illusions about ourselves (that we are guilty and separate from God) are real **(W.pl.55.5:2)** , or we will be following the Holy Spirit's guidance to find and extend the peace of God that still remains within ourselves **(T.19.IV.3:6)** . The ego's purpose keeps us asleep with our guilt and fear firmly in place, while the Holy Spirit's purpose gradually leads us to awaken to our home in Heaven, which in truth we never left.

Having made this world to serve the ego's purpose, the Course teaches us how to let it become our classroom for learning to follow the Holy Spirit instead. Indeed, as long as we believe that we are here, this world is the only classroom we have for learning this lesson. When we use it in this way, our human experience becomes quite valuable -- not to God or the cosmos, but to our own process of spiritual maturation.

Q #970: I have been a student of *A Course in Miracles* for two and a half years. Lately, a lot of issues have been coming up at work. I'm having trouble seeing everyone as calling for love. I just feel overwhelmed -- physically and mentally tired from trying to act from my higher mind and keep my ego out of the way. Because I am in a supervisory position, there are situations in which I am being asked to judge others. I believe these judgments are incorrect and won't actually help in getting the desired behavior. How should I approach this?

A: That studying *A Course in Miracles* has made you want to be kinder and more loving is potentially very helpful. However, it sounds like the approach you are taking to achieve this admirable goal may actually be increasing the level of frustration and guilt you feel about your work. If this is the case, then you can be sure that you are not doing exactly what the Course advocates.

It may be helpful to consider the following passage from the text: **"You may wonder how you who are still bound to judgment can be asked to do that which requires no judgment of your own. The answer is very simple. The power of God, and not of you, engenders miracles. The miracle itself is but the witness that you have the power of God in you" (T.14.X.6:7,8,9,10).** Further explaining the futility of trying to achieve miracles on our own, Jesus says, **"The only judgment involved [in miracles] is the Holy Spirit's one division into two categories; one of love, and the other the call for love. You cannot safely make this division, for you are much too confused either to recognize love, or to believe that everything else is nothing but a call for love" (T.14.X.7:1,2).**

In other words, the Course does not ask us *to force ourselves* to move beyond judgment. Rather, it asks us to connect with God's Love in our mind, which will radically and completely change our perception. To help us do that, it lets us know that in addition to the ego's voice of judgment, we also have another Teacher in our mind -- the Voice of the Holy Spirit. When we listen to the ego (as most of us do nearly all the time), we *automatically* see and hear everything as an attack calling for attack. When we listen to the Holy Spirit, we *automatically* see and hear everything as either love or a call for love. Thus, when we follow the dictates of the ego, we cannot help but be judgmental and attacking. When we let the Holy Spirit guide us, we become kind and loving *without any effort on our part*.

So again, the Course process is not about willing ourselves to see the world or other people differently. It is about using life as a classroom that will teach us that we would be better off if we changed internal teachers. The loving, nonjudgmental presence we become once we have made that change is neither the Course's nor our concern. What *is* our concern, is asking the Holy Spirit to hold our hand and help us watch ourselves without judgment as we continue to fill the roles that we are used to playing exclusively under the ego's guidance. In other words, we ask the Holy Spirit to help us watch our judgments, without judgment. In so doing, He will show us that our judgments are merely manifestations of our own fear of the Love of God. And every time we come to this realization about ourselves, we will recognize that the same fear must be what is motivating whomever we are currently judging.

In this way, the Holy Spirit will gradually and gently teach us how to fill our roles in such a way that even as we judge someone in form (as your job requires you to do), the *content* will be love. It may seem to take quite some time until we really know how to do this and are able to do it consistently. This does not mean we are failing, or that we need to try harder. It simply tells us that we are still afraid of God's Love.

If you recognize this struggle as both your own and the universal human condition, who could be a better choice than you to be a supervisor?

Q #971: After studying and practicing *A Course in Miracles* for over 20 years, my life has changed significantly in terms of how and where I live, how I spend my time, and how I approach conditions on this planet. Sometimes I feel so much love within that I think I will burst. However, since "the world I see holds nothing that I want," I can't relate to most of what people do to stay busy. I often wonder "What is the point?" Increasingly, I feel bored, and except for witnessing the occasional miracle, I don't see much reason to stay in the physical. Sometimes I have visions that fill me with joy that exceeds anything I've experienced in normal waking consciousness, but this is a rather recent development. What does the "real world" feel like? What does one "do" there? Am I maybe stuck somewhere in between?

A: It sounds like you may be superimposing other thought systems onto *A Course in Miracles*. The Course is not concerned with what we *do* -- in this world or in any other. This is because Jesus knows that we are *not* in this world. We are merely dreaming that we are here because of our intense fear of awakening to find ourselves at home in God. Thus, Jesus sees this world and our experiences in it as nothing more than reflections of what goes on in our mind -- not our mind as the person we think we are, but rather the decision-making part of our mind that exists outside of time and space. That mind has the power to choose between two teachers -- the ego and the Holy Spirit. Which voice we listen to will determine whether we are filled with love or guilt and fear. And this will, obviously, profoundly change our experience of this dream we are having. So Jesus' goal in the Course is to help us shift *our purpose* from using the world to keep us ever more firmly planted in the ego's guilt, to using the world as a gentle classroom that constantly lessens our fear of our reality in Heaven.

But before we can truly awaken, we must learn to listen exclusively to the Voice of the Holy Spirit -- as Jesus demonstrated. At some point, once we have achieved this, we will consistently experience life through His eyes of forgiveness. Then we will be incapable of projecting guilt, and will be in a continual state of peace. The Course's symbol for this state of mind is the real world. *Nothing external will have changed and we will not have gone anywhere*. We will simply have changed the purpose of the dream we are having. The Course tells us that **"the world is the belief that love is impossible" (T.8.IV.3:7)**. We could say then, that the real world is *the knowledge that love exists, therefore the world is impossible*.

What will gradually take us from the state of mind we are currently in to the one symbolized by the real world is the mental shift that the Course refers to as the *miracle*. Like the real world, the miracle has nothing to do with any physical phenomenon. It is solely the shift in our mind from the ego's thought system of sin, guilt, and fear, to the Holy Spirit's thought of forgiveness.

You mentioned "experiencing the occasional miracle." Remember, though, that the only miracle the Course is concerned with is the change of teachers in your own mind. This is the key to solving the conundrum of why we would want to continue functioning like so-called normal people in this world, even though we know it holds nothing that we want. While it is true that nothing in the physical world can give us lasting peace or happiness, this world is the classroom in which we can learn that we threw away those qualities and that they still exist in our mind -- the mind we have worked so hard to obliterate from our awareness. And the way that we learn this is, again, by asking the Holy Spirit to help us watch all our thoughts and actions through His gentle eyes of forgiveness. This forgiveness is the closest thing we can experience to love in this world. It is not God's all-encompassing Love, but it is a reflection of it through forgiveness for ourselves and the world we think we see. This would not typically make us feel like we want to burst or are filled with visions of joy. Rather, it is generally more of a calm, inner smile that arises when the veils of our guilt and judgment fall away and our compassion emerges.

The Course process, then, is not usually one of highs and lows, but rather of experiences of inner peace, and experiences of knowing that our fear caused us to abandon that peace. This is a process that can actually make it *easier* to relate to what others do to stay busy. Not because we relate to their activities, but because we understand both the fear and the unrealized longing to return home that motivates us all. And when such understanding occurs, we will no longer feel trapped in this world. We will derive all the comfort we need simply from being in the right place in our mind.

Q #972: Do you think that people experienced physical healing in the presence of Jesus two thousand years ago? If so, what would be the explanation of that experience, from the perspective of *A Course in Miracles* ?

A: There is no way of knowing this for sure, as most scripture scholars have concluded. It would not be surprising, however, if people were healed in Jesus' presence. In fact, it would be surprising if they were not. The basis in the Course for this is that all sickness is of the mind, specifically the guilt in the mind, and it has nothing to do with the body (see for example, **M.5.I,II**) . Physical symptoms are simply expressions in form of the mind's content. The message that would have been emanating from Jesus' mind to everyone is that their guilt is not justified, or in his own words in the Course: **"God's Son is guiltless, and in his innocence is his salvation" (M.1.3:5)** . Simply stated, those who recognized and accepted this message would have let go of all their guilt and been healed accordingly. They would have responded to the invitation of his unconditional love for them to let go of all the barriers they had placed in its way -- and that he was merely reflecting to them the love in their own minds that they had denied. This is the idea Jesus conveys in speaking of God's teachers as **"symbols of salvation,"** standing for the **"Alternative" (M.5.III.2:4,6)** . Those who were able to get past their fear of accepting his love would have been healed, as is still and always will be the case.

The discussion in [Question #126](#) is also relevant to this topic.

Q #973: I have been reading *A Course in Miracles* for over twenty years and have never directly experienced the Holy Spirit or Jesus. I never had any visions or heard any voices. The only time I have any experience of Jesus or the Holy Spirit is when I read the words in *ACIM* . The Introduction to the clarification of terms at the end of the manual says "A universal theology is impossible, but a universal experience is not only possible but necessary" (C.in.2:5). I feel my focus is on what I am not experiencing like not being angry, fearful, or guilty. I recognize not to use the ego thought system to judge or value anything in this world. Can you explain what is meant by a universal experience?

A: The universal experience Jesus refers to is that all people would experience in some way that God loves them and has never condemned them. Earlier in the manual, he expressed it this way: **"God's Son is guiltless, and in his innocence is his salvation" (M.1.3:5)** . Because of all the cultural, linguistic, and other differences among the people and nations in the world, it is unlikely that there could ever be a theological expression of this that would be accepted by everyone; but that does not matter in the end, Jesus is saying. All that matters is that we experience in whatever way we can, our innocence in God's sight, and that this innocence extends to everyone, without exception. This does not have to be experienced as a vision or a voice; it could simply be an awareness or a feeling. But Jesus teaches us that we should not try to force ourselves to have this experience. He teaches us, rather, to recognize our commitment to the exact opposite -- our concealed investment in seeing ourselves and/or others as sinful, which is the basis of our guilt, fear, and anger. This investment -- coming from our identification with the ego -- is the interference to our awareness of our eternal innocence; and therefore the focus of the Course's teachings and exercises is on forgiveness. For students who have accepted *A Course in Miracles* as their path, the practice of forgiveness is what will bring about the universal experience of love. Everyone will eventually arrive at the same place, but the means and paths may all differ.

Q #974: I have recently begun therapy sessions for my obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) problem. Others in the class who share the same affliction readily tell me that the cause of OCD is a chemical imbalance in the brain. I recently voiced my opinion, hopefully in accordance with *A Course in Miracles*, that the cause of the distress exists in the mind and that not only do I have a brain, of course, but I also have a mind. I gave an analogy to explain that certain thoughts do trigger a host of chemical reactions in the body or brain. For example, the thought of sex (pleasure) can and does fire off chemical reactions in the brain that bring about arousal, but if I didn't have a mind such a thing would not occur at all. Several people shook their heads in disagreement, even the psychotherapist intern.

I have a number of questions. Was I correct in my assessment, based on the principles of the Course? How should I handle myself during the classes while remaining true to the concepts of the Course? Should I remain silent about my ideas? Often people speak of "body over will," meaning they see the body as the cause of strange, unwanted thoughts or tendencies over which they have no control. When they do, the psychiatrist usually suggests either medication or downplaying these strange, new thoughts by acknowledging their absurd meaning. Isn't the doctor's suggestion to use medication simply a preoccupation with the effect, which gives it power? On the other hand, I know the Course promotes medication for those overwhelmed with their symptoms. Still, I say to myself that it's just the mind doing what it's supposed to -- making that ongoing experience of symptoms because the individual believes in it.

However, I do find myself considering medication. My plan was to take it temporarily until I have a "change of mind," but what if I become dependent on it while I am waiting around, so to speak, for a miracle to occur? I have asked the Holy Spirit so many times, whom do I need to forgive "to see this differently," but I feel I have not heard an answer.

Recently, I was trying to use a lot of what the Course says on the dynamics of the mind for my own personal purposes with my condition. As a result, I decided to stop the workbook lessons for a while, because I was getting too distracted with my condition and I was feeling a little guilty for using the book in this way. But if the Course's purpose is healing, isn't this okay?

I am thinking that I may be on a bit of an ego-trip in the therapy sessions, because I am applying or "projecting" my Course-based beliefs on to the others, even when I'm in silence. I don't think they have ever heard of the Course. I feel at times, when I'm reading the text, that I have to give up my ego completely in order to be finally rid of this disease. And that seems like too great a step. Can you comment?

A: Your observation that the cause of OCD is in the mind is in line with the teachings of the Course. From its perspective, the mind is always the cause and the body and its symptoms are always the effect (**T.24.V.2:2; T.28.II.8:2,3,4,5,6,7,8; 9:1,2,3; T.28.III.5:1**), despite the world's thinking to the contrary -- the world and the body after all were made as defenses against remembering that we have a mind. However, the specific example you offered, that the thought of sex is the cause of the subsequent arousal in the body, although valid as far as it goes, does not really get to the heart of the Course's causal explanation. Thoughts about the body are still defenses against and covers for the deeper underlying cause in the mind. It is the mind's choice for separation and guilt that is the underlying cause of the world and the body and all its symptoms (**T.27.VIII.7:2,3,4,5,6,7; 8:1,2,3,4,5,6,7**). And all of our defenses, whether they be physical or emotional conditions, addictions, routines, rituals, distractions, etc., are simply means we employ in our futile attempts to keep the underlying guilt and fear at bay, rather than looking at the guilt and fear with the Holy Spirit or Jesus so they can be undone.

However, it is not likely to be very helpful to yourself or to others in your therapy group who are not students of the Course to engage in this kind of discussion, for the Course offers a radical alternative to the thinking of the world that most people are not really open to. It is radical both in the sense that it goes to the *root* or source of all our problems in the mind and that it asks us to accept complete responsibility for all of our experiences (**T.21.II.2:3,4,5,6**), a step that most people are not yet ready to take. And so it is best to think of the Course simply as providing you with a framework for observing your own thoughts and

feelings about what seems to be happening around you. But there is generally no need to share these observations with others, especially those who are not familiar with the Course's challenging principles. That could end up simply serving the ego's purpose of making you seem different and separate from everyone else. In contrast, the purpose of healing is served by being open to recognizing and accepting the ways in which we are all really the same. Acknowledging that you and the others in your therapy sessions share the same condition as well as the same need for help in coping with its effects can become a basis for experiencing joining with them. Remembering this purpose may also help you recognize what your ego is up to when you find yourself wanting to use the Course's principles to compare and judge the others for not understanding what you have begun to learn for yourself from the Course.

A helpful way to think about participating in the therapy would be to remain open to what is being offered there as an explanation that does work and make sense at the level of the body. After all, unless you are ready to release completely your identification of yourself with your body, it is very likely that you continue to operate under and accept the usefulness and practicality of most of the other "laws" of the body that the world accepts, such as the value of breathing and eating and drinking, wearing protective clothing depending on the weather, not stepping out in front of oncoming traffic, taking the stairs or an elevator rather than stepping off a balcony to get to the ground, etc.

The point is, we all still operate within the belief system that the body is real and the outcomes could be disastrous at the bodily level if we tried to deny those beliefs by acting counter to them. Jesus makes it clear he is not asking us to deny the body (**T.2.IV.3:8,9,10,11,12,13**). And so part of our belief system includes believing that taking things into our body can be beneficial to our health, whether it be food, vitamins or medication. Yes, all of it ultimately is magic, the Course teaches, but there is also no hierarchy among illusions (**T.26.VII.6**), and no illusion is more or less acceptable, or more or less spiritual, than any other. We simply need to be honest with ourselves about what we personally believe will be helpful for us and then accept the particular form in which that help comes, not denying that we still need help. Your fear of becoming dependent on any form of magic, such as medication, is simply another trick of the ego to keep your mind in conflict. Whether medication may be helpful for you in your particular situation is something you would want to discuss with your doctor, leaving your thoughts about the Course's view of the relationship between the mind and the body outside the office.

Perhaps most difficult to accept, while we still see ourselves as bodies, is that the Course's purpose is to help us heal our minds, not our bodies (**T.28.II.11**). While we keep our focus on the symptoms and their amelioration, we miss the opportunities for real healing. You say you have asked, without receiving an answer, for help in identifying whom you need to forgive, to see differently, so that you may experience a miracle and move beyond this condition. And you are thinking it must be about someone else. And so you don't see the answer that is staring you in the face!

The place to begin is to learn to accept without judgment your OCD, recognizing that it is merely a defense you have unconsciously chosen to handle your fear. And at some level, it has worked in making the anxiety and conflict more manageable, which is always the ego's goal (**T.7.VIII.2:2,3,4**). But rather than wishing the OCD away when, unconsciously, you really want it and are choosing it, it would be much more helpful to look at it and see what you can learn from it. For whenever the symptoms appear, this is simply an indication that you have become afraid of the limitless love that embraces us all and are feeling guilty and fearful of your desire and decision to be apart from that love. That is all that is ever happening and, if you can begin to recognize that, ever so slightly, you will begin to find the symptoms more tolerable, even if they are not going away. The helpful goal is to be able to look at the symptoms without judgment or fear, rather than change them. Gradually, the symptoms may then begin to lose their seeming power over you. And then, whether they go away or not will be much less your concern. Perhaps they will remain until you release your ego completely, perhaps not -- it will matter little to you. But for as long as they remain, they can come to serve as simply a reminder that here's another opportunity to practice forgiveness, which is all the Holy Spirit ever asks of us.

The Course does provide insight into the operation of the ego mind, and if you have found any of its clarification of the dynamics of the ego helpful in gaining greater understanding of the nature of your OCD, there is certainly nothing wrong with that -- no need for any guilt here. However, understanding is not the same as healing, and only forgiveness -- accepting all of what seems to be, without judgment or condemnation -- heals (**P.2.VI.5**) . So don't forget, as you engage in fascinating analyses of your mind's machinations, that there is another step to take.

Q: #975: *A Course in Miracles* says there is an ego mind, and a real, Holy Spirit mind, which is part of God's Mind, where Heaven lies. What confuses me is this: How could the ego mind actually make us think with it instead of the one real mind that we all have? When something horrible happens to me, I try to remember to forgive. But instead I let all my anger out, and then feel terrible about it later. I blame the innocent mind because I don't think the evil mind has any strength at all compared to the real mind. I'm sure I'm misunderstanding something. Would you please clear this up for me?

Also, I don't read the Course as much as I used to because I feel like I know everything about the Course now. I want to continue reading it, but I just don't have the motivation for it that I used to.

A: Although the language of *A Course in Miracles* often makes it sound like we have two minds that are in opposition to each other, this is not really the case. In fact, what we have are two opposing thought systems in the separated mind. One, inspired by our misplaced ontological guilt, keeps us firmly planted in this dream of a physical existence filled with suffering. The other, inspired by our memory of our reality in Heaven, brings forgiveness to this dream and thus will gradually lead to our awakening. Neither thought system is true, for truth is impossible within a dream. However, dreams always reflect the thinking of the dreamer. Thus, the Course addresses us not as the individual we think we are within this dream, but rather as the dreamer of the dream. We could envision that dreamer as the mind's decision-maker, outside of time and space. It is always choosing between the loving truth of the Holy Spirit and the made-up guilt of the ego.

The ego does not actually *make* us do anything. Rather, our own decision-maker *chooses* to listen to the ego. Once that decision is made, the ego *appears* to be running the show. But, as you stated, the ego itself has no power. The ego's apparent power comes only from our own choice to take it seriously and follow its dictates. Like the tiny mad idea at which we remembered not to laugh, the ego is merely a tiny mad thought system at which we continually remember not to laugh. Therefore the ego has no strength and is not evil. It is, once again, just the thought system of guilt -- that demands punishment -- which we grab onto whenever we become afraid (a state that most of us, unfortunately, live in the vast majority of the time).

So, given that all our ego-driven thoughts and behaviors are really nothing more than reflections of our intense fear, feeling terrible for choosing them is not helpful. Indeed, feeling terrible only deepens the conviction that we are guilty, which is the very thing that led us to choose the ego in the first place. The way out of this vicious circle is to ask the Holy Spirit to help us watch our thoughts and actions through His loving, non-judgmental eyes. He will teach us that our inability to forgive another is a reflection of our belief that we are unforgivable. And as we learn that this is untrue, we will increasingly extend forgiveness rather than projecting attack and blame.

That is the process that *A Course in Miracles* lays out for us. Ultimately, this process is the real Course -- not the word-filled pages that comprise the book. Obviously, if the Course is our path, we should study it and learn to understand what it is saying. But there are no rules about how many times or how often we should read it. Sometimes not reading the Course is a defense against it, but, on the other hand, obsessively reading it can be a defense too. The important thing is to internalize its message and, in a sense, *become* the Course. The journey to achieving this will be different for all of us.

Q #976: I have read that the goal of *A Course in Miracles* is not Heaven but the real world - - the state of mind in which we have forgiven everything and everyone. That must include forgiveness for ourselves -- forgiveness of the self-image (the ego or "I") that we made as part of our separation from God. But if we completely forgave the world and ourselves, wouldn't the ego disappear too and along with it, any kind of separateness that made reflection possible? Who would be left to notice that there was a real world (consisting only of forgiveness) if there were no "I"? In other words, if I forgave the world totally, wouldn't it simply disappear? Is this why the Course says it is very easy for God "to take the last step" -- because basically we will have already taken it?

A: One of the difficulties in trying to understand *A Course in Miracles* is that we use our linear brains to analyze a process that is not linear. Basically, the Course speaks to us as if the process of awakening consisted of discrete steps because that is the only way we can conceptualize it. But in reality, it does not work that way. And from our perspective, within this dream of separation, we cannot even begin to comprehend the final step or what it means to be fully awake. Jesus lets us know this is so when he states **"while you think that part of you is separate, the concept of a Oneness joined as One is meaningless" (T.25.I.7:1).**

For this reason, the Course does not aim to get us back home. Rather, it strives to help us set up the conditions in our mind that will facilitate our return -- conditions the Course refers to as the *real world*. That means returning our mind to a state of total forgiveness. Having taken back all our projections of guilt, we will be free from the fear that compelled us to fall asleep and will have no more need of this world. At that point, it will no longer matter to us whether we seem to be here or elsewhere because outer conditions will have no effect on our inner peace. The world will not have disappeared but its ability to affect us in any way will. What happens from there -- our awakening -- will involve no effort on our part. And so, happily, we need not concern ourselves with it. Jesus states this symbolically by telling us that God will take this final step -- a poetic way of putting our mind at ease about it **(T.17.II.4:4-5)**.

We could think of the real world as coming just before our total awakening and being similar to a lucid dream. While we will still experience ourselves as here in form, we will know that it is just a dream and that we are not the I we thought we were but rather the dreamer of the dream. This awareness will have allowed us to choose the dream's content. Thus, we will have chosen to make it one of love and forgiveness. We may still see all the cruelty and pain in this world, but we will see it through eyes that extend a continuous blessing. From that point, our awakening will be as easy and natural as waking up spontaneously after a good night of sleep.

Q: #977: I'm totally new to *A Course in Miracles*. So far my understanding is that we are pretty much lost and confused, wandering in the fields of illusion but not aware of it. I gather that the Course is our guide out of these illusions or more precisely, a guide to help us become aware of them. Is that what the Course means by the Atonement? And with Atonement, can we experience the illusion at will without becoming lost and confused again. Can we enter the illusion simply to be at play in it or to provide guidance to others? Would individuals who can do this be the Ascended Masters I've read of elsewhere?

A: It is tempting to try and understand *A Course in Miracles* by relating it to other spiritual teachings. But while the language of the Course does bear a resemblance to other spiritualities, its metaphysical and psychological teachings are unique.

In the Course, Jesus gives us the following advice for getting in touch with God's Love in our mind, **"Do not bring with you one thought the past has taught, nor one belief you ever learned before from anything" (W.pl.189.7:5).** This same statement (though a rather tall order) provides an excellent guideline for approaching the Course itself.

So, in order to answer your questions, we first need to take a brief look at what the Course actually teaches. It is true that, as a number of spiritual paths do, the Course tells us our entire physical existence is an illusion. The Course also informs us that this world came from an attack thought and therefore is not a nice place. Jesus refers to this as **"a dry and dusty world, where starved and thirsty creatures come to die" (W.pil.13.5:1)**. Of course, Jesus wants us to know that we did not really come here at all. But we came here in our mind in an effort to escape the terror of the thought that we could separate from God and destroy His Love.

Uniquely, the Course teaches that this world was the ego's answer to the conflicted and terrorizing belief that we had killed God and that God will somehow rise back up and strike us down in punishment. The ego lulled us to sleep with its promise that if we just accepted it as our teacher, we could banish all memory of God from our mind and thus be safe from such horror.

But the Course further teaches that despite the ego's best effort, the memory of God and His Love remains in our mind. From the ego's perspective this memory of God's Love is an awful thing that, should we ever get close to it, will be its demise. And since we are almost fully identified with our egos, we think God's Love will be the end of us.

However, the Course lets us know that there is another part of our mind. Jesus aims his message at the decision-making part of our mind that *chose* the ego. He reminds us that there is another internal Teacher still available to us -- the Holy Spirit. He informs us that choosing the Holy Spirit instead of the ego will result not in our destruction, but rather in our gradually waking up and finding ourselves at home in Heaven, still safe within the Love of God.

The Holy Spirit represents the memory of God's Love that we brought with us into this dream. If we turn to the Holy Spirit for help, He will transform any situation in our lives into a classroom in forgiveness. He does this by reminding us that we have not separated from God's Love nor have any of our brothers. As we begin to know this more and more, we will see that we all share the same attacking ego (that dreamed up this attacking world) and the same loving thoughts inspired by the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, we will recognize that there is nothing to forgive because we are not separate (from each other or from God) and so nothing has really happened. At that point we will know that this is all an illusion.

This is what the Course means by Atonement -- the undoing of the ego and the healing of the belief in separation (facilitated by our turning to the Holy Spirit for help).

At the very end of the journey we will awaken and know this was all a dream. But the end of the journey is not our concern. Our task is to turn toward the Holy Spirit and let Him transform our life into a classroom. In so doing, we will become more loving and less filled with anxiety and pain. Increasingly, we will come to know that our body (physical and psychological) is nothing more than an idea in the mind that never left its source. As we recognize this, the love in our mind will naturally extend to all we encounter.

The idea of entering this illusion to be at play does not make sense from Jesus' perspective. Only the ego thinks that there is fun to be had here. After all, if we knew we were at home in Heaven and perfectly safe, why would we go looking for fun in a world that was made to keep us feeling "barren and separate" (T.19.15:1) ?

Likewise, the Course does not concern itself with the concept of Ascended Masters. It does inform us that anytime you come from the Holy Spirit's Love instead of the ego's attack, you are a Teacher of God. But that does not make you ascended. It just makes you sane for however long your right-minded thinking lasts.

Basically, anyone who thinks he or she is here has the same lesson to learn. We all desperately want to know that the separation never happened, we are not guilty, and we are just **"dreaming of exile but perfectly capable of awakening to reality" (T.10.1.2:2)**.

Somebody like Jesus would be an example of what the Course calls a *Teacher of teachers* (M.26.2:2). Jesus *seemed* to be here but knew he was not. He only appeared in order to serve as a reminder of truth for the rest of the Sonship. But again, Jesus represents the end of the journey and that really is not our concern (other than to let him serve as our guide and inspiration).

The Course helps us recognize that we are at the beginning of the journey. If we study it sincerely and with an open mind, we will realize that this is a journey worth taking and that there is a strong and loving hand we can hold along the way.

Q #978: The manual for teachers section of *A Course in Miracles* discusses three different *levels of relationships*. But what specifically does Jesus mean when he says that we "learn" from another person? For example, he says that the second level of relationship is a more sustained one in which two people enter into an intense relationship and then appear to separate. When he says that we *learn* from the other person, this does not necessarily mean that he or she verbally teaches us something, right? Does it mean that we learn to not project our guilt onto the person and that there is no separation between us? Does it mean, as Jesus implies earlier, that we learn not to see the other person as separate and then watch the artificial demarcations between us disappear? Or can it be any and all of these?

A: Your understanding of what Jesus means by *learning* from another person is essentially correct. In *form*, the learning Jesus refers to could look many different ways. It is the *content* that he is concerned about. And that content will always consist of an internal shift from guilt to forgiveness, and from the perception of separate interests to the knowledge of shared interests.

The Course teaches us that the purpose behind the Son of God's decision to dream up this world of separate bodies and separate interests was to have others onto whom we could project our guilt. To the ego, projecting our guilt is the one purpose of every relationship - - regardless of the form the relationship takes. In the section of the manual for teachers to which you refer, Jesus emphasizes that just as the ego has one unified purpose for every relationship, so does the Holy Spirit. His purpose is to use all of our relationships (again, regardless of their form) as opportunities to help us shift our minds from the projection of guilt to the extension of love. Thus Jesus tells us, **"Each teaching-learning situation involves a different relationship at the beginning, although the ultimate goal is always the same; to make of the relationship a holy relationship, in which both can look upon the Son of God as sinless" (M.3.1:1,2)**.

Because our learning is really about a single shift from guilt to love, Jesus states that **"levels of teaching the universal course is a concept as meaningless in reality as is time" (M.3.3:1)**. In other words, in reality there can be no levels of learning because there is only one lesson we need to learn. But this is not our experience. And so Jesus returns to our level of experience and tells us that because **"each person involved [in a relationship] will learn the most that he can from the other person at that time"** we can speak of levels of teaching (M.3.4:1,2). Then he identifies the three types or levels of relationships (teaching-learning situations) as: apparently casual encounters, relationships that are more intense and circumscribed, and lifelong relationships in which the partners offer each other unlimited opportunities for learning.

Again, the main point of this passage is that with the Holy Spirit as our internal Guide, *everyone* -- from someone we see briefly on a bus, to a lifetime partner, to leaders we see on television, to deceased loved ones who exist only in our memories -- offers us a teaching-learning opportunity. And this is so, because in reality we do not learn from the other person at all. We simply allow others, whether we perceive them as loving or hateful, to be the impetus for our decision to once again take the Holy Spirit's Hand and remember that His Love still exists within our own mind. Therefore, other people are teachers for us not because of who they are or what they say or do, but because of a decision *we make*. This is why Jesus can confidently tell us that we cannot fail to find the help we need (M.3.5:8).

Q # 979: I am the managing director of a company with 290 sales consultants. While many of them do their jobs well, others produce unsatisfactory results. Some of the less successful consultants do things such as work only a few hours per day, fail to visit all their customers, fail to follow company rules, take many sick days, and even embezzle money or goods. These cases are often reported to me and I am expected to do something about them. Being a student of *A Course in Miracles*, in every case I ask myself what the appropriate action or non-action would be. Can you help me?

A: The Course does not give us any specific guidance about what we should do on a behavioral level. It does, however, tell us the one thing we need to do *in our mind* to resolve every problem: *remove the blocks to love's presence (T.in.1:7)*. Again, it is important to remember that Jesus is not telling us what to do behaviorally. Rather, he is teaching us how to change our thinking. Once we have done this, our actions will automatically reflect the loving kindness of our thoughts.

Jesus speaks to us from the perspective of a healed mind, which knows that despite the apparent complexity of this world and of our lives, there is really only one problem and one solution. The problem is our choosing the ego's thought system of sin, guilt, and fear. The solution, therefore, is to turn away from the ego and choose instead the Holy Spirit's thought system of love and forgiveness. With this in mind, Jesus first has to make us aware that most of the time we listen to the ego, and that as long as we do so we will be unable to solve our perceived problems. He tells us "... **in your state of mind, solution is impossible... You are in conflict. Thus it must be clear you cannot answer anything at all...**" (T.27.IV.2:2; T.27.IV.1:5,6). Then he lets us know where the true hope for solution lies: "**Therefore, God must have given you a way of reaching to another state of mind in which the answer is already there. Such is the holy instant. It is here that all your problems should be brought and left. Here they belong, for here their answer is. And where its answer is, a problem must be simple and be easily resolved**" (T.27.IV.2:3,4,5,6,7). The holy instant, of course, is the moment we choose the Holy Spirit as our internal Teacher -- something we want to do because "**Only the Holy Spirit can resolve conflict, because only the Holy Spirit is conflict-free. He perceives only what is true in your mind, and extends outward only to what is true in other minds**" (T.6.II.11: 8,9).

What is true in our mind and in the minds of others is that the memory of God's Love remains there, and we are simultaneously terrified of it and desperate to remember it and awaken from this guilt-induced dream. Because of this conflicted state, we live our lives unconsciously at war with God. And since it is unconscious, the dynamics of this internal battle with God get projected outward onto other people and objects, which serve as substitutes for the ego's "real" enemy. This then explains what drives people to do the many unconscionable things they do in this world, such as lying to, and embezzling from their place of employment -- a potent symbol of authority and therefore a worthy opponent to the ego.

So, to answer your question, the first thing you would want to do when confronted with unethical behavior by your consultants is to recognize that their actions reflect "**the delusional [thought] system of those made mad by guilt**" (T.13.in.2:2). And since guilt caused their behavior in the first place, the answer lies in recognizing that they are *not* guilty. Of course, on the level of behavior, they are guilty -- as are we all. But on the mind level, they have simply made the mistake of first misperceiving themselves as guilty and then acting in accordance with that misperception. So your job becomes to ask the Holy Spirit to help you see past the guilt in your own mind, so you can look at them without judgment and know the most helpful action to take.

The tricky part is to be sure to genuinely ask the Holy Spirit for this help and not to prejudge on your own what a loving or "spiritual" person should do. As a director, paid to ensure the quality and integrity of your company, it is likely that the appropriate actions for you to take would be exactly the ones expected of anyone in your position. The difference would be the attitude with which you do them. Rather than doing them with anger or a desire to punish, you would do them in order to help your consultants stop hurting others and themselves.

Q #980: The answer to [Question #689](#) stated: "We are asked to learn how to identify with the peace that is our true Identity as God's creation." Is peace our true Identity? Since I cannot find this in *A Course in Miracles*, can you explain it to me? Is not peace "the condition of knowledge?"

A: Both are correct. To say that "peace is our true Identity" is a way of emphasizing Jesus' point that nothing at all can change our natural state as God created us. As His creation, we share fully in His eternal peace. In that sense, it is part of our true Identity. On the other hand, within the dream of separation from God, we can believe that peace of mind is conditional on things being a certain way in our lives -- that some conditions and circumstances can give us peace and some can take it away. That is one of the major misperceptions that Jesus is helping us to correct in his teachings and lessons on forgiveness. One way of avoiding the difficulties that language inevitably produces is to try to discern the content or the message -- the point that Jesus is making in any given place in the Course -- and then stay with that. Consistency in form is just about impossible. We are sorry if we caused some confusion.

Q #981: There is a line in *A Course in Miracles* (T.25.VI.6:8): "His special hate became his special love." This line appears to say that special love is something good or positive. I was under the impression that for the Course "special love" was just as ego driven, and therefore just as "bad," as "special hate."

A: This is a good example of how the Course sometimes gives a term a different meaning. In this case, "special love" is not referring to the specialness of the ego's love. It refers to a relationship transformed by the Holy Spirit. The passage tells us that the mind that chose hate and sin can choose love and grace. It thereby illustrates Jesus' teaching that the Holy Spirit uses what the ego made to condemn as a means of salvation. That is not to say that the ego's use of special love becomes "good." As with everything of the ego, the special relationship is neither good nor bad. It merely reflects the mind's choice to identify with the thought of separation and the belief that illusion is real. When the mind chooses the Holy Spirit instead of the ego, the special love or hate relationship is reinterpreted by Him as a classroom to learn to undo the belief in separation. Thus the relationship becomes the means of salvation.

The passage you refer to is further clarified in the text where we are told: **"In His function as Interpreter of what you made, the Holy Spirit uses special relationships, which you have chosen to support the ego, as learning experiences that point to truth. Under His teaching, every relationship becomes a lesson in love" (T.15.V.4:5,6).** When a relationship is transformed by the Holy Spirit and becomes a "lesson in love," it is then "special" in a new sense. What makes it special is that its purpose has been changed. The ego's goal of using it to establish differences and make the separation real is changed to the Holy Spirit's curriculum of undoing separation through forgiveness. Forgiveness uncovers the exclusiveness of the ego's love that is used to defend specialness. While the ego bids us use special love to find one's own completion, the Holy Spirit teaches wholeness expressed in love that is inclusive, not special. Our goal is not to see the special relationship as positive or negative, nor to try not to have them, but to let the Holy Spirit use them to lead us beyond the ego's specialness to the reflection of love for all the Sonship that He represents.

Q #982: I try to listen to the Holy Spirit all the time, and especially to ask Him to speak through me when I'm talking to others. I am often amazed at the gentle, encouraging words that come out of my mouth. I attribute this to just being willing to let Christ talk for me, not to any special abilities of my own. But last week, while I was talking to a new thought minister, something happened that bothered me. I told him that instead of encouraging his flock to listen to God for themselves, he tries to keep them dependent on him and to make them believe that they have to go through him to reach God. I spoke very authoritatively to him. Then, afterwards, I quickly apologized and ran out. This is bothering me because I wasn't teaching love. I barely knew this man! I did open up to spirit before speaking with him, so why would something so

harsh come out? I guess I must have been projecting in some way, for some reason. Please give me your insight.

A: First, we need to be clear that we cannot necessarily judge whether or not we are teaching love by the words we say. Jesus tells us in *A Course in Miracles* that what we hear when we listen to the Holy Spirit **"may indeed be quite startling" (M.21.5: 2)**. Thus, it is possible that our words could sound harsh or even outlandish, but still be motivated by an underlying intention to be loving and helpful. So, with nothing but a description of external events to go on, we could not say whether you were in fact being unkind to that man.

You are correct that whenever we say, feel, or think anything that is not an extension of love, we are projecting. If that is indeed what you were doing in that instant, we could only guess the reasons why. Without knowing more about you, we could only speculate why you might have been triggered at that *specific* moment, by that *particular* individual. But it might be helpful to ponder the following statement from the Course: **"projection, occurs when you believe that some emptiness or lack exists in you, and that you can fill it with your own ideas instead of truth" (T.2.I.1:7)**.

In other words, if you were attacking him, the chances are that he reminded you of something of which you accuse yourself. (This does not necessarily mean that you accuse yourself of exactly what you reprimanded him for, though this could be the case.) Then, before that guilt came to consciousness, your ego jumped in and said, "Ah, I know how to get rid of this guilt. I'll focus instead on what *he* is doing wrong." As the Course says, **"Projection makes perception... you attacked your brother, because you saw in him a shadow figure in your private world [your mind] . And thus it is you must attack yourself first, for what you attack is not in others. Its only reality is in your own mind..." (T.13.V.3:5,6,7,8)**.

If guilt led to the incident in the first place, rather than continuing to feel guilty about it, it would be more helpful to instead use it as a valuable source of information. Because **"What is not love is always fear, and nothing else" (T.15.X.4:5)**, you could recognize that, despite your frequently successful attempts to connect with the Holy Spirit's Love, part of your mind is still fearful. In fact, as long as we retain any belief in the reality of this world and our individual existence within it, a part of our mind will remain afraid. It is only at the very end of our spiritual journey that we will be entirely guilt free and consistently filled with love. Until then, it is virtually inevitable that we will have both right-minded moments in which we extend love, and wrong-minded moments in which we project guilt.

The fact that you recognize that you may have projected guilt, and have a sincere desire not to do so, is very helpful. At this point, you could simply stop right there and ask the Holy Spirit to help you look at the incident you described (and any future situations which trigger your guilt) through His compassionate, non-judgmental eyes -- allowing Him to give the same gentle encouragement to you that you have felt Him help you direct toward others.

Q #983: Is there any way we can learn knowledge without reading it from a book or from any other "normal" means? If there is, how can we get in touch with it? The information I want to learn is about the body and diet. The darkness in my mind has almost gone, and I feel that my body needs to be completely refreshed for me to feel the full benefits of it. I know that this isn't in line with the teachings of *A Course in Miracles* ; however, I am convinced that it should be. So before I embark on a journey of reading a lot of books about nutrition and many other things; is there a shortcut to this knowledge already stored in the mind?

A: Within this world, there are certainly many ways to learn about such things as how to take optimal care of our bodies. However, the Course gives us a shortcut to knowledge that does *not* come from within this world. Its purpose is to teach us that we *made up* this world and to return us to the part of our mind that

contains the guilt that compelled us to do so in the first place. Jesus seeks to help us remove the fear that we have foolishly attempted to obscure by inventing bodies and sickness. This is why he tells us that **"Sickness is a defense against the truth" (W.pl.136)**. The same could be said of anything else that reinforces our experience of being separate bodies living a physical existence. Jesus also lets us know that **"Health is the result of relinquishing all attempts to use the body lovelessly . Health is the beginning of the proper perspective on life under the guidance of the one Teacher Who knows what life is, being the Voice for Life Itself" (T.8.VII.9:8,9,10)**. In other words, from Jesus' healed perspective, neither sickness nor health is about bodies. The state of our body simply reflects what we have chosen to do with our mind.

It is important to remember that this is a choice we make on a level of the mind of which we are not aware -- as decision makers outside of time and space. Thus, making a different choice requires us to get in touch with a new internal Teacher -- the Holy Spirit. He will gently awaken us to the power of our mind in a way that allows us to access it without becoming afraid. Of course, this is a process, and it is only at the very end of our spiritual journey that we will truly understand that our bodies are nothing more than puppets carrying out the dictates of our mind.

Until then, while we believe that we are here, we should certainly do whatever we think will keep our bodies healthy and safe. Not doing so usually only serves to reinforce guilt and to allow the body to become even more of a distraction than it already is. At the same time, it is helpful to recognize that in a sense, we are fighting a losing battle. *We made bodies to break down, feel pain, and die.* We may be able to delay these things, but eventually they will happen. So if in fact we needed a "completely refreshed" body in order to feel the full benefits of a healed mind, it would mean that the benefits of a healed mind were fleeting.

Fortunately, this is not the case. The state of our mind is in no way dependent upon the state of our body. Indeed, once our mind is fully healed, the state of our body becomes irrelevant. We could be nailed to a cross, or lying in bed, our bodies riddled with cancer, and still be completely at peace. After all, what could be more peaceful than knowing that that which is being threatened is unreal and has nothing to do with us? Simply trusting that such a state is possible and approaching life as a classroom to help us get there is the shortcut Jesus has given us to achieving true knowledge.

Q #984: I read your answer to a question a couple of years ago about grief. It's difficult for me to wrap my mind around what you had to say. I'd like to ask again, using my real life situation. My only child, a young woman, has been diagnosed with "final stage" cancer. I am praying to see beyond these appearances to her perfect Self in Christ and most often I can do that. But even though she is not her body, should her body cease to exist in this illusory world, how can I deal with the loss? I cannot seem to find peace with this situation. The thought of a world without my child seems impossible. I trust *A Course in Miracles* but sometimes find it's abstractions difficult. Can you help me understand, please?

A: Your words express very poignantly your feelings of fear and pain and grief over your daughter. Such personal losses are very difficult to look at and accept from within the world's thought system, for it can feel as if our hearts are being torn apart and it can seem that nothing is able to offer any real comfort. And it is essential to the healing process that you do not try to deny these feelings, or to attempt to make them go away, or to cover them over with "healing" spiritual platitudes. But you can at least begin to step back from them and recognize that they are not who you are.

You see, the ego thought system may be one of pain and loss and grief (**T.13.IX.2:3**) , but we are not our egos. Now so long as we remain identified with its tenets of separation and limitation, these feelings will continue to be a significant part of our experience. But to the degree that you are able to begin to observe them without using them to define yourself, you may begin to experience some relief. Yet there will likely

be a great deal of resistance to disidentifying with them, for who will you be if you are not a grieving mother faced with the loss of her daughter?

You say that you have prayed to see beyond appearances to your daughter's perfect Self in Christ, beyond her body. But have you considered that you too, in your reality, are perfect in Christ, and not your body? It seems that you are making that difference real, that somehow she, despite illness, is perfect, but that you remain a body that can be abandoned by her death. And it is a basic teaching of the Course that we can only ever see another as we have first seen ourselves (**e.g., T.8.VII.5:1,2,3,4; T.15.V.6:5,6**) .

Now any real healing will come, not from determining how to make you see both your daughter and yourself as perfect, but rather from uncovering all the reasons why you would choose to see yourself as a limited body that can experience loss and pain, and then forgiving yourself for those choices. The ego would want you to believe your pain is all the result of what has happened with your daughter, and the intensity of your feelings would seem to argue convincingly that that is the case. But Jesus in his Course is very gently telling you, as he is telling all his students, that we are wrong. He is trying to help us see that all our feelings of grief and pain and loss come simply from choosing to embrace the thought of separation, which, were it true, would mean quite literally that we are now separate from love (**T.16.V.4:4**) . And that is a painful loss beyond all words, triggering a grief that we can not even begin to imagine. And our special love relationships are the screens on to which we project such feelings, so that we are never in touch with their real source in the mind.

Instead, it seems that our special love relationships prove that we are obviously incomplete and that genuine love and happiness lie outside ourselves in others (**T.29.VII.2,6**) . And our relationships with our families and our loved ones provide powerful demonstrations of this ego "truth." Jesus is asking only one thing of us with respect to our feelings: do not try to justify them based on our interpretation of what we believe is happening or has happened. For that is where we are mistaken. If we insist that our interpretation is right, we will never be able to hear the alternative interpretation that Jesus is offering us. And so the first question we may wish to ask ourselves is, "Am I willing to consider that I may be wrong?" (**T.30.I.9,10**) If the answer is no, that's okay, for Jesus always remains available, waiting patiently, until we are willing to reconsider (**T.8.IV.6:3,4,5**) .

The release of such intense feelings, projected on to your daughter, may happen only gradually over time, as a process. But if you can allow yourself even brief glimpses of the love and the truth that lie within, experienced in those moments when you join with Jesus in looking gently and nonjudgmentally at what you have made real in your mind, you will begin to understand that you have indeed found your ultimate path out of the pain and grief. But above all else, be gentle with yourself in the process. For Jesus is only trying to persuade all of us that we are deserving of love and, regardless of what seems to be happening in our lives and in the world around us, nothing but our own decision can make us feel bereft of it (**T.4.IV.3**) .

Q #985: In the manual for teachers it says: "There are many thousands of other forms, all with the same outcome. They merely save time" (M.1.4:2,3). I thought it was the Course that saves the most time. Is that a misprint or a grammatical error or am I missing something. They merely saves time seems to be referring to all the other forms out there.

A: You are correct, the manual does say that the many forms of the universal course save time. The reason for this is that the universal course is one of content, not form, and time belongs to the world of form. When the mind decides to accept the universal truth that the separation never happened, and God's one Son is innocent, the concept of time disappears. That is how it is "saved."

Also, students of *A Course in Miracles* "save time" by not wasting it in pursuit of other forms that are very helpful, but are not their path: "**You are not making use of the course if you insist on using means**

which have served others well, neglecting what was made for you ” (T.18.VII.6:5). We escape the laws of time through the practice of forgiveness by returning to the thought in the mind that is outside of time. The ego's perception of grievances and its use of projection are concepts bound by time. The Holy Spirit's perception is a view from beyond time's boundaries because it perceives only two timeless thoughts: the separation that never happened, and reality that never changed. Learning to see with His vision thus removes all experience from the chains of time. That is the Course's "fast track." It is not a linear process. Time is meaningless in the instant the mind chooses the Holy Spirit, regardless of the way time was used on the path that led to the choice. It is only the mind's choice (content) that matters. Each choice against the ego is what saves time and saves us *from* time.

Q #986: I've begun to understand the relationship between guilt, projection, and blame. Since beginning to see this mechanism, two things have happened. One is that I've become incredibly irritable. I sometimes seem to be projecting a low level of guilt all over everyone and everything, which I then experience as a constant buzz of irritation. I can stand back and listen to the litany of blame (this is too loud, he's chewing funny, she should just shut up, etc.) and I usually say "Jesus please join with me in looking at this situation. I can't stand feeling this way." But the whole thing is sometimes so exhausting I feel like I'm just going to jump out of my skin. I have a hard time smiling at it when it reaches that sort of crescendo. Although, I will say that if I can tell my husband about what's going on when this is happening, and just sit with it, it passes.

The other thing that's happening is that I've become afraid something bad is going to happen to my son. It's like the ego is saying "well, since you don't seem to be worried that something bad will happen to *you*, how about if we consider punishing you by hurting your child." It scares me! I know, intellectually, that this is just my guilt and my fear of God and of love. I repeat to myself "I am at home, fear is the stranger here." I try focusing on the Atonement. I also try asking for Jesus or the Holy Spirit to join with me and help me understand my innocence. Do you have any other tips for dealing with all this?

A: Your heightened sense of irritation and fear sounds like the normal reaction of an ego threatened by the message of *A Course in Miracles*. As you stated, your understanding of the dynamics of guilt and projection seems to have led you to project guilt in an even more obvious way. Meanwhile, the apparent easing of your fears about yourself has led you to focus your fear on an even more potent subject than your own body -- the body of your child. Obviously, your ego knows its game could be up and it is fighting to maintain its hold on you. It sounds as if you have a clear understanding of this. That brings you to what is, at some point, virtually every Course student's million dollar question: Now that I know *why* I am in pain, *how do I get out of it*?

Here is the good news: You came very close to answering your own question! You stated that when you tell your husband what is happening and *just sit with it*, it passes. Reading between the lines, it would seem from your statement that your husband does not express judgment about what you describe to him. Rather, he simply listens to you and allows you to be with your feelings. A slight alteration in your internal process would make this same comforting companionship available in your own mind. Instead of deciding that you should focus on the Atonement or your innocence, try simply asking the Holy Spirit to help you look at your pain *without judgment*. Come to Him without any preconceived ideas about how your conflict should be solved.

He knows that when we are in the midst of pain, Atonement and innocence generally feel like distant and even aggravating intellectual concepts. He recognizes that we cannot jump from where we are directly into the Arms of God. Instead, we need to gradually learn that all our projecting of guilt has **"caused nothing, and had no effects" (T.28.II.11:7)**. Through the Holy Spirit's eyes, we slowly discover that not only does all the ego's kicking and screaming have no effect on reality, but in fact, it need not even affect us. This is where Jesus is taking us when he urges us to **"be more aware of this quiet center of the storm than all its raging activity" (T.18.VII.8:2)**. Indeed, watching the ego without justifying it or feeling

guilty about it is the one thing it cannot use to further its own cause. In contrast, struggling against the ego in order to achieve lofty spiritual goals can fan the ego's flames just as effectively as funny chewing.

Q #987: Are Gloria and Kenneth Wapnick married? If they are married, doesn't this mean that they still have egos'?

A: To answer your first question: Yes, they are married. Your second question seems to imply a couple of misunderstandings involving assumptions about what we can tell about others from the external facts of their lives, and possibly about what is required to be a teacher of *A Course in Miracles* .

Many students of the Course have erroneously reached the conclusion that marriage -- or even intimate relationships of any kind -- is a form of special relationship and that therefore it is more spiritually advanced not to be in them. However, this is absolutely not what Jesus is trying to teach us in his course. He is not concerned with the *form* of our relationships. After all, how could he be concerned with something that he knows is not really happening? As Course students, we could avoid a lot of errors if we remembered this central teaching: "**All [our] time [here] is spent in dreaming**" (T.18.II.5:12) . In other words, nothing is actually happening *here* . So Jesus seeks to help us return to where the action is: *our minds* .

He defines the special relationship as our attempt to get from outside ourselves that which we think we lack. It is an effort to find a substitute for God's Love, which we think we have destroyed and lost forever. Note that this could be a description of our relationship with another person, but it could just as easily describe our relationship with such things as food, air, and water. And Jesus certainly is not telling us to stop breathing (nor to feel guilty about it). Rather, he wants us to gradually recognize that the special relationships we seem to have within this world are but reflections of the one special relationship we have with the dream itself. He would have us learn that we do not need to continue dreaming of exile because our guilt is made up.

The process he gives us for achieving this goal involves changing internal teachers -- dropping the ego's hand and taking the Holy Spirit's. He tells us that, "**In His function as Interpreter of what you made, the Holy Spirit uses special relationships, which you have chosen to support the ego, as learning experiences that point to truth. Under His teaching, every relationship becomes a lesson in love**" (T.15.V.4:5,6) . And so any relationship may be special or holy. What makes them one or the other is not the form our relationships take, but simply whether we use them to project guilt or to extend love. And again, this is an internal choice and not something we could judge about another person. Furthermore, as we attempt to follow Jesus' curriculum, most of us will go back and forth between a right-minded and a wrong-minded purpose in all our relationships, as long as any guilt or fear remains in our mind.

In case you asked your question because you think that a teacher needs to be ego free in order to teach the Course, remember the statement from the manual that "**A teacher of God is anyone who chooses to be one. His qualifications consist solely in this; somehow, somewhere he has made a deliberate choice in which he did not see his interests as apart from someone else's**" (M.1.1:1,2) . So, rather than focusing on whether a teacher is ego free (which again, we could never know about another person), it is much more useful to ask ourselves whether someone's teaching triggers our guilt or helps us to feel more loving. Ultimately, we need not concern ourselves with where others are in their process or even with where we are in ours. What matters is whether we are choosing love *now* .

Q #988: I have a friend who is being "cleared" of her karmas and is having what I consider to be great results, such as having the ability to heal others. Could you please comment on what Jesus' message might be about this? Would *A Course in Miracles* consider this subject to be beyond its scope?

A: Your question raises two issues: what is the Course perspective on karma, and where does it stand on being able to heal another. You are correct that neither of these topics is the focus of the Course. So let us explore why this is so.

Perhaps the most cogent description of Jesus' stance on healing can be found in the following passage: **"Whom you attack you *cannot* want to heal. And whom you would have healed must be the one you chose to be protected from attack. And what is this decision but the choice whether to see him through the body's eyes, or let him be revealed to you through vision? How this decision leads to its effects is not your problem. But what you want to see must be your choice. This is a course in cause and not effect"** (T.21.VII.7:34,5,6,7,8).

We will examine the last sentence of that passage first: **"This is a course in cause and not in effect."** By *cause*, Jesus means the *mind* -- specifically the part of our mind, which has the power to choose to listen to either the ego or the Holy Spirit. When we listen to the ego (which tells us we exist at God's expense), our mind fills with guilt and fear, causing us to project anger and attack. This is the dynamic that compelled us to fall asleep and dream up a world of separate bodies in the first place -- our unfortunate response to the ego's cunning proclamation that we could remove all the guilt from our mind if only we had bodies onto which we could project it. By *effect*, Jesus means the *world*, which is nothing more than a nightmare we are having because we continually choose to dream with the ego rather than awaken with the Holy Spirit.

To Jesus, then, physical sickness is simply one more element of our dream, which reflects the guilt in our mind. Thus, since sickness is but an effect, Jesus and his course are not concerned with physical healing. Rather he wants to help us make the shift in our mind that **"takes away the guilt that makes the sickness possible"** (W.pl.140.4:5). This is the shift Jesus refers to in the passage quoted above when he speaks of the choice whether to see another "through the body's eyes" (meaning the guilty eyes of the ego) or by letting him be "revealed through vision" (meaning the loving vision of the Holy Spirit). When we choose the body's eyes, we will always have an underlying motive of attack. When we look with the Holy Spirit, we will see the innocence we share with our brother that remains hidden in the mind, beyond our seemingly separate physical identities. This will automatically lead us to extend love, thus protecting our brother from attack by rejecting rather than reinforcing his guilty perception of himself.

Jesus tells us that how this decision leads to its effects is not our problem. But making this choice is. In other words, we do not need to worry about how our state of mind gets reflected in this dream. We need only concern ourselves with changing internal teachers so that we can experience the Holy Spirit's Love regardless of what appears to be happening in the physical world.

When we achieve that, we will be able to be with others whose bodies appear to be sick and know that their physical illness can have no effect on the reality of who they are. There may be times when our knowledge that they are not guilty allows others to release the fear that created their need for physical symptoms. There will also surely be times when both their fear and their illness seem to remain unaffected by our love. Again, this is not our concern. Our concern is only with our own mind and the thought system with which we choose to align it. (For more about this, see Chapter III of the *Song of Prayer* pamphlet.)

This focus on the present state of our mind is why the Course does not address karma. From Jesus' perspective, what we did lifetimes ago or five minutes ago is all the same -- part of a dream from which we need to awaken. What matters is not our past, but the internal teacher we are choosing *right now*. This does not, however, negate the fact that dealing with past life issues could be very useful for some people. And if your friend has found a process that facilitates her letting go of guilt, then this is very

helpful. But from a Course perspective, this is not really due to her karma being cleared. Instead, it is the result of her finding a symbol that finally allowed her to accept forgiveness and let it wash away the imagined guilt for her imagined sins of her imagined past.

Q #989: Since studying *A Course in Miracles* , my life has changed in many wonderful ways. In the last five years, I have been eating nothing but fruits and vegetables. Also, being married since 1978, I have become celibate with my wife's blessing. I was wondering if anyone else has changed their diet and other forms of lifestyle?

A: We have not run across this very often, as the focus of the Course's teachings is exclusively on changing our thinking -- it says nothing about behavior. However, in general, people do find themselves becoming more compassionate as they practice forgiveness over a period of time and get in touch with the inner pain they realize everyone else shares with them. This leads them to be less judgmental of themselves and others.

The primary focus of the Course's teachings is on changing the *purpose* for which we use the body and the world, which means becoming aware of whether we have chosen the ego or Jesus as our teacher. Since Jesus recognizes the fundamental unreality of the body and the world, our lifestyle and the food we choose to eat is essentially irrelevant to him. His concern is only with our minds -- whether our thoughts reflect the ego's doctrine of separate interests or his doctrine of shared interests. He therefore teaches us to see the world as a classroom in which everything of the body becomes a means of learning that we all share the same wrong mind, the same right mind and the same decision-making power to choose between them, and that our common purpose is to awaken from the dream of separation. This lesson can be learned whether you are a vegetarian or not, whether you are celibate or not. Since the world is illusory, nothing in it is inherently holy or unholy -- holiness is associated only with our mind's choice to share the Holy Spirit's perception of all things. For further discussion of these issues, you may wish to look at Questions [#120](#), [#170](#), [#247](#), [#430](#), and [#448](#) on this Service.

Q #990: It seems to me that the more deeply I move into *A Course in Miracles* , the less I feel in touch with God. Here my ego has trapped my spirit in a body and I spend my life choosing between higher-self and lower-self reactions to supposed others, while God is blissfully unaware of what I believe is my existence. So God becomes more and more an amorphous and theoretical concept to me. There are even periods when I entertain the thought that there is no God. What keeps me going is that I cannot see how the Course could come from any being of this world. I also cannot find any better explanation for the craziness of this world or "existence," or any better path than the Course for dealing with it. Part of me knows that all of this could just be one great - - and I wish, last ditch -- ego defense to stop me from moving through the Course. Do you have any ideas about this paradox and how it can best be dealt with?

A: While painful, your sense that you are feeling less in touch with God is a normal and perhaps even critical stage of working with the Course. After all, the Course *is* telling us that the God most of us grew up with does not exist. Unlike the God of the Bible, the Course's God "**does not know of separation**" [i.e., this world] (*Psychotherapy Purpose, Process and Practice* P.2.VII.1:11) . Fortunately, however, Jesus' message does not end there. His real goal is to help us to understand that "**nowhere does the Father end, the Son begin as something separate from Him**" (W.pl.132.12:4) . We remain as a "**Oneness joined as One...at home in God, dreaming of exile**" (T.25.1.7:1, T.10.I.2:1). Thus, God is not unaware of us because He is ignorant or uncaring. He does not know about us because we -- as the separated beings we think we are -- *do not exist* . This is *our* dream not His.

Despite its Christian language, which refers to God as a being with thoughts and feelings, the Course's underlying message is that God is *not* a being and *neither are we* . To our sleeping mind, under the

tutelage of the ego, this concept is both incomprehensible and very threatening. So the ego acts quickly to annihilate this threat and maintain its grip on us. It perverts the Course's potentially mind-altering message by telling us, "You see, you thought God was angry at you. But it's even worse than that. He doesn't even care about you at all!" This defense lets us remain firmly rooted in this dream with our one-or-the-other mentality perfectly intact.

However, as you stated in your question, there is a part of our mind that recognizes a loving presence in the Course, which could not possibly have come from within the thought system of this world. And part of us knows that if we recognize something, it must be within us. We grasp - - perhaps faintly at times -- that there is something within us to which we long to return. But Jesus knows that although we long desperately to feel God's all-encompassing Love, we cannot understand it or make sense of it from within this dream. And so he does *not* attempt to teach us what God or His Love is. Rather, he focuses on teaching us what they are *not*.

He does not ask us to believe in God. Rather he strives to help us gradually come to *know* God by letting forgiveness take the place of all the guilty illusions that block His Love from our awareness. Perhaps Jesus' best summation of this point comes in the pamphlet *Psychotherapy Purpose, Process and Practice*. In the following passage, Jesus is referring specifically to psychotherapy. But what he says reveals his perspective on the entire spiritual journey that he asks us to take. **"It would be unfair indeed if belief in God were necessary...Nor is belief in God a really meaningful concept, for God can be but known. Belief implies that unbelief is possible, but knowledge of God has no true opposite. Not to know God is to have no knowledge, and it is to this that all unforgiveness leads. And without knowledge one can have only belief" (P.2.II.4:3,4,5,6,7).**

And so, happily, conflicted thoughts about the existence of God, and confusion about what God is, are neither personal shortcomings nor impediments to our progress as students of the Course. The best approach is to simply watch them make their inevitable appearance as we continue on our journey of questioning every value that we hold (T.24.In.2:1).

For a related discussion about the nature of God according to *A Course in Miracles*, please see Question [#625](#).

Q #991: Once forgiveness is complete, and we have regained the awareness of our oneness with God that we never really lost, will we retain our individualized memories of the ego-based illusion that we decided against? Does union differentiate, or are we destined to become a holy thought in God's mind with perfect communion with the Sonship?

A: Choosing the separation means deciding against oneness in favor of the ego.

Oneness/union and separation/differentiation are mutually exclusive thoughts and cannot be entertained by the mind at the same time. Thus, when we remember our oneness with God, we will not retain a memory of the ego identity of separation. As we are frequently reminded in *A Course in Miracles*, the problem of separation is one of forgetting the truth of our identity as God's one Son: **"Here is your promise never to allow union to call you out of separation; the great amnesia in which the memory of God seems quite forgotten..." (T.19.IV.D.3:4).** The solution lies in forgetting the separation and remembering the truth of oneness.

By its very nature, union does not separate or differentiate. Differentiation is the essence of duality, at the expense of oneness. It is expressed in individuality/specialness, which cannot be maintained when oneness is chosen. Just as oneness is forgotten when the choice is made to identify with the ego, the illusion of individuality will be forgotten when oneness is chosen and the Atonement is complete. Fear of accepting our oneness with God underlies the intense attachment to specialness that keeps oneness

forgotten. The Holy Spirit's curriculum of forgiveness takes into account our fear of oneness and attachment to specialness by transforming the multitude of differences the ego made to separate, into a classroom to learn that the separation never happened (**T.6.II.10:7**) . This answers the last part of your question; we already *are* a thought in the Mind of God; a Mind we have never left. We are destined only to remember that this is who we truly are, and to forget the illusion of being anything else. Forgiveness is the path that makes this possible. It is the process of seeing every grievance as a projection of the guilt that accompanies the mind's decision to choose separation rather than oneness. Each time we are willing to look at grievances in this way, our identity as minds is strengthened/ remembered and belief in the body is diminished/forgotten. As Jesus tells us in the text: **"It is as sure that those who hold grievances will forget who they are, as it is certain that those who forgive will remember"** (W.pl.68.3:1,2,3) .

While fear of oneness remains, we take the small steps of forgiveness in which the pain and anguish of holding grievances disappears and fear is lessened. We take these small steps at a "gentle pace" until we are ready for oneness. As Jesus assures us in the text: **"Fear not that you will be abruptly lifted up and hurled into reality. Time is kind, and if you use it on behalf of reality, it will keep gentle pace with you in your transition"** (T.16.VI.8:1,2). These kind words deflate the ego's argument that "fear of losing our individual identity" is just cause for not accepting Jesus' loving message. In the end, everything will be forgotten, for now it is enough that we be willing to forget one grievance at a time through forgiveness.

Q #992: I have a question related to Lesson 16. It says "I have no neutral thoughts" and that "Every thought you have contributes to truth or to illusion." When I began the first practice period, I started to feel intense fear that every thought I have contributes to the awfulness I perceive in this world, to making things worse instead of better, and to furthering the illusion. I am certainly not adept at controlling the content of my thoughts --likely I'm not even aware of many of my thoughts. I guess that's what's frightening me -- since I'm not aware of many of my own thoughts, let alone of their content, I don't know what they are causing! And I just wanted to stop thinking, but I couldn't. I suppose this is an example of my self-protective ego in action? Until today, I had not experienced fear like this in relation to *A Course in Miracles* . In fact, I have been finding in it a completeness or wholeness that no other spiritual road I have explored -- as much as they contributed to my spiritual growth -- seemed to possess. I need some advice.

A: You are absolutely right that this is an example of your ego trying to preserve itself. Your description makes it clear that Lesson 16 brought up guilt for you, which in turn led to feelings of intense fear. We can think of the ego's relationship with guilt as being similar to the body's relationship to oxygen -- take away guilt and the ego is finished. So the ego will do anything it can to ensure itself a steady supply of guilt. The Course tells us that **"The ego will attack your motives as soon as they become clearly out of accord with its perception of you. This is when it will shift abruptly from suspiciousness to viciousness, since its uncertainty is increased"** (T.9.VII.4:6,7) . It sounds like, for whatever reason, Lesson 16 was the point in your study of the Course at which your ego decided to make that shift -- instantly seeming to turn what had been a source of spiritual inspiration into a source of guilt.

To further complicate matters, one of the ego's key principles, repeated in various forms throughout the Course, is that guilt demands punishment. And so you fell into a trap that nearly every Course student's ego sets at some point. Having become aware of the darkness in your mind, you took the ego seriously as it told you that this newly-discovered darkness proves its evaluation of you as a vicious destroyer of Heaven (and, by implication, justified in your guilt and deserving of punishment).

However, in that very lesson, Jesus lets us know that despite the seeming power of our thoughts, we have *not* destroyed Heaven. He tells us that they give rise to the *perception* of a whole world (**W.pl.16.2:2**) . In other words, they do not *actually* make a world; they merely cause us to *think* one exists. Our thoughts are not neutral because they have the power to either keep us asleep (if we choose

the ego's thoughts), or lead us to awakening (if we think with the Holy Spirit). Within this dream, the choice we make will *seem* to bring us either peace or war. But this has no effect on reality, which is entirely outside of this dream. Thus, we do not need to feel guilty about the effects of our thoughts on the external world because in reality there is no external world. Furthermore, since love can have no opposite, our attack is not real either. As the Course says, **"if all condemnation is unreal, and it must be unreal since it is a form of attack, then it can have no results" (T.8.VII.15:8)** .

So when we find ourselves worrying about the *results* of our thoughts, we do not need to stop thinking (which, as you found out, is impossible). Rather, we need simply recognize that we have once again grabbed the ego's hand and encountered the pain that comes from placing value in its raucous shrieking. Then we can ask the Holy Spirit to help us discern the one and only thing we need ever know about the content of our thoughts -- whether they reflect love or are calls for it **(T.14.X.7:1)** . Better still, regardless of the answer to that question, we can ask Him to help us respond to our own thoughts, be they fearful or loving, with love -- the only response that is ever justified or helpful.

Q #993: In [Question #48](#) you state that “ *A Course in Miracles* is unique among spiritualities or spiritual approaches, both contemporary and ancient ones.” I have found remarkable parallels between the Course and the ancient Gnostic writings, in particular that the world was made in error, not by God. While there apparently was never one organized creed of Gnosticism, it does appear that its teachings and gospels were part of early Christian thought, and then stamped out, as the Christian Church that we know today established its formal creed. Kenneth Wapnick's book *Love Does Not Condemn* deals with the subject of Gnosticism and its relation to the Course. It might be helpful to readers of this forum to provide a brief explanation regarding the relationship, similarities, and differences of the early Gnostic writings to the principles contained in the Course.

A: Interestingly, Ken's original intention was to write a brief article on this topic; but he found his “article” expanding rather quickly as he read more of the Gnostic and related literature, until finally he decided a full-length book would be needed in order to do justice to this important dimension of Course. Thus, his six-hundred-page book. So to ask for a “brief explanation” is quite a challenge. At the risk of oversimplifying a complex topic -- there were several schools of Gnosticism, with differing views among the schools, and within each school as well -- we will give it a try by presenting some general contours.

The Course and Gnosticism are similar in maintaining that the world was not created by the true God, but by a false god. In the higher teachings, primarily the Valentinian school, which differed significantly from others, the world was regarded as an illusion. Valentinus called it a fantasy or “Sophia's folly.” This resulted in a generally negative attitude toward the world; in fact, Gnostics despised the world and sought to avoid being “contaminated” by it. So, while they said the world was not real, they made it real in their minds by seeing it as the locus of sin -- which led many Gnostics to avoid involvement with the world and the body. The behavioral and practical implications of the metaphysics varied greatly among the different groups, some of which were shared with early Christians.

This is where we see a major difference between Gnosticism and *A Course in Miracles* . The Course's position is inherent in the title of Ken's book: *Love Does Not Condemn* , which comes from a passage about the body, but implicitly includes the world: **“The body was not made by love. Yet love does not condemn it and can use it lovingly, respecting what the Son of God has made and using it to save him from illusions” (T.18.VI.4:7,8)** . The entire physical universe is seen as illusory -- as part of the ego's defensive war against God -- but it is not judged inherently evil or sinful, as it now can serve the Holy Spirit's purpose of correcting *our* purpose in having made it. Thus, the problem is not the world or the body, but our *use* of it, which is entirely a function of our decision-making minds. This is why the Course says nothing about behavior, much to the frustration of many of its students. It teaches us how to be in the world but not of it; but the focus is exclusively on bringing out of concealment the purpose we have chosen in our minds: namely, to use the world and the body to keep the separation real, while not

accepting responsibility for it. Our salvation comes, therefore, not in avoiding involvement with the world, but by seeing it as a classroom in which we learn how to use it to undo our belief in separation through forgiveness. The non-dualism of the Course's metaphysics is thus maintained.

Q #994: If God doesn't know we exist, who the hell have we all been praying to for thousands of years? Have we been choreographing our own answers? If our prayers were not answered, was it because we couldn't create properly? Is this why millions of people were killed during the Holocaust although they were devout, prayerful people -- because there was no one to hear their prayers and help them? Has everyone that thought there was a God who cared about them, guided them, and loved them been duped? Am I interpreting all of this correctly?

A: No, you are not quite interpreting the message of *A Course in Miracles* correctly. The Course does give us a way of thinking about God and the nature of this world that is radically different from what western religions have taught for centuries. However, its central message is not that we suffer because God cannot hear us or because we cannot "create properly," but rather that we suffer because we *actively choose* to experience suffering instead of the Love of God. The Course informs us that we have been wrong about God because we have been so very wrong about ourselves. Let us take a closer look at how it explains these dynamics.

Jesus tells us that God does not know we are here *because we are not here*. In the original instant, filled with imaginary guilt, we *wanted* to escape from God -- simultaneously believing that we had killed Him and that He would rise again and give us the punishment we thought we deserved for daring to consider the idea of separation. So we chose to listen to the ego, fall asleep, and dream up this world. Having been birthed by a thought of guilt, this is a guilt-filled world in which *everyone* appears to lead lives that overflow with punishing pain. While, as you mentioned, Holocaust victims provide an example of extreme physical and psychological anguish, we need hardly look to them to find proof of human suffering that one would expect a Loving God to alleviate. Indeed, simply living as a body is a set up for almost continual pain -- the pain of material need, illness, aging, loss, dependency, and so on. The Course asks us to look honestly at this and admit that, as much as we may profess to love Him, if we believe that God created and controls the events in this world and our lives, a part of our minds must hate Him for not doing more to improve things.

And yet, ultimately, the Course's message is a happy one, which lets us know that God's Love is much closer than most of us ever imagined. We do not need to beseech God, please Him, or struggle to earn His Love because, in reality, we remain safely enveloped in it, at home in Heaven. As the Course says **"Life not in Heaven is impossible, and what is not in Heaven is not anywhere. Outside of Heaven, only the conflict of illusion stands; senseless, impossible and beyond all reason, and yet perceived as an eternal barrier to Heaven"** (T.23.II.19:6,7).

So all we need do to begin to awaken to that reality is undo the one mistake that we have made from the moment time seemed to begin -- choosing the thought system of the ego rather than the Holy Spirit (Who represents the memory of God's Love in our mind). When we choose the Holy Spirit's Love, we will be happy regardless of whether the circumstances in our lives are ones that the world would judge to be pleasant or miserable. Likewise, when we choose the ego, we will be unhappy no matter how good or bad our external situation appears to be. For this reason, we cannot judge someone else's life as being fair or unfair. While certainly the outer life of virtually every human being seems filled with gross injustices, we cannot know why each of us chooses a particular script or the lessons we may be learning as a result of our choice.

Those who have believed that God cared about them, guided them, and loved them have not been duped *if* this belief helped them to get in touch with His Love in their mind. In the end, it does not really matter how we conceptualize God or our relationship to Him, so long as we find a way of doing so that

helps us replace our guilt and fear with love and inner peace. Basically, Jesus just wants to help us find our way home and has given us the Course as a tool to help us make the journey. But this does not make the Course any more or less true than other tools people have used for the same purpose. Remember, nothing in this world is true, and anything in this world can help us move closer to truth (love) in our mind if that is the purpose we give it. This is why, after establishing the illusory nature of the physical world and the body, Jesus can make a statement like, **"If it helps you, think of me holding your hand and leading you. And I assure you this will be no idle fantasy" (W.pl.70.9:3,4)** . Similarly, if people throughout history have felt God's Love even while conceptualizing it in a way that is clearly at odds from how it is presented in the Course, this has been no idle fantasy.

Q #995: You have said that if we really understood the Course's message that we do not exist, we would feel terror. But I don't feel terror, just uncomfortable and sometimes afraid. I have a friend who is doing *A Course in Miracles* , too, and she says she feels happiness when she thinks of losing her individuality and joining with God. I suspect that there is a degree of blockage in both of us, and perhaps in all of us. This is our denial, our non-acceptance of the truth. Is this true?

A: Yes, anyone who believes that he or she is here is in denial of the truth. If we were ready to fully accept the truth, we would no longer have any need for this dream and would awaken to our true home in Heaven, where we are still one with our Creator. The fact that we do not do so tells us that we must have a motivation for choosing this world of separation and pain over the peace of God.

A Course in Miracles lets us know what that motivation is. It states that we made up this world of murder and attack because it is a picture of what we think we are. We believe that we are murderers, deserving of death as punishment for what we have done **(T.20.III.4)** . And what we accuse ourselves of doing is usurping the place of God; thus, in essence, killing Him off. At the same time, we believe that God is not *really* dead and will come back to give us our punishment. So, the ego's only conception of God is as an angry father pursuing His guilty son **(M.17.7: 10)** . These terrifying dynamics motivate us to continue listening to the ego, and keep dreaming that we are in this world of individuality and separation, which God can enter not **(W.pll.3.3:4)** . In other words, as bad as this world can be, we think it is our protection.

However, another part of our mind -- symbolized in the Course as the Holy Spirit -- retains the memory of the true God's Love. It knows that the angry, vengeful God is a fiction of the ego. And so, we have two competing thought systems in our mind: the ego's, which is literally scared to death of losing our individuality, and the Holy Spirit's, which knows that we have nothing to fear and that our recognition of this fact and resultant awakening would give us everything we truly want. The Course is aimed at the part of our mind that chooses between these two thought systems. On one hand, it asks us to look at the terror, which we miscreated an entire world to avoid facing. On the other hand, it tells us that this fear is made up and gives us a method for finally letting it go and being at peace at last.

Not surprisingly then, we are likely to experience many shifting and conflicting emotions as we work with the Course. In addition, because our terror is deeply buried, we may not have a direct emotional experience of it -- and certainly not consistently. The Course tells us that **"What I call 'my' thoughts are not my real thoughts" (W.pl.51.4:3)** . It would make the same statement about feelings. Feelings lie because they are virtually always the result of thoughts about some aspect of our illusory existence as individuals within this physical world.

Of course, feelings *can* be helpful if they motivate us to ask the Holy Spirit to look with us at the thoughts behind them and, in the process, let His Love take the place of the ego's guilt. If we can do just that with our feelings -- learning to simply watch them without judging them, over-analyzing them, or worrying about them -- they will gradually lessen in intensity and seeming importance as our capacity to feel the peace of God increases.

Q #996: Given *A Course in Miracles'* distinction between form and content, it seems to me that Jesus' words [that we will (can) do "even greater things" than he did] refer to content and not form (e.g., moving mountains, walking on water, raising the dead). But as I puzzle over his words in the context of content I wonder what "greater things" are.

A: In the Bible Jesus is reported to have made this statement, though scripture scholars have found no historical data to support most of the Biblical sayings of Jesus, nor the miracles he is said to have performed. If he did say and do the things that are recorded in the Gospels, you are correct in distinguishing form and content. Whether as a historical figure, or the author of the Course, Jesus is a symbol for the part of the mind that chooses God's Love rather than the ego. He does not identify with the body and would therefore never refer to form. In the Course, Jesus does not make any statement about our doing greater things than he. In fact, every reference to our relationship with him and with one another speaks only of the equality of the Sonship (**e.g. T.8.IV.6, T.1.II.3, T.5.II.9, T.6.I.5**). There is nothing greater than to accept the Atonement for oneself just as he did. The perfect equality of the Sonship reflects the Course's non-dualistic teaching that there is one Son in union with the Father. Equality and sameness, therefore, are very important concepts in the Holy Spirit's curriculum. They are corrections for the ego's use of difference, inequality, and comparison to establish and maintain belief in the separation.

Jesus asks that we make the same choice he did: to listen *only* to the Voice that speaks for God. He tells us: "**I have assured you that the Mind that decided for me is also in you, and that you can let it change you just as it changed me**" (**T.5.II.10:1**). There is no real difference between him and us. There is only a difference in our experience while we continue to choose separation. When the mind chooses the Holy Spirit, Who represents the memory of God's Love, there are no comparisons, no degrees of greater or lesser. The choice is complete in the instant it is made, and it is the same for everyone. It is the same and only choice Jesus made. As we are told in the workbook: "**Love makes no comparisons**" (**W.p.1.195.4:2**). We are learning to make love the only choice we make by seeing how painful it is to choose the ego. When we are ready, we will make one final choice for God; the greatest, and only true thing we can do.

Q #997: Toward the beginning of the text, Jesus says that miracles are directed toward those who can "use them for themselves" and he also comments that only he is in a position to know "where they can be bestowed." What I don't get is: Aren't they needed everywhere? Couldn't everyone walking this earth in pain use miracles for themselves? Jesus seems to hint that only some people need miracles. Can you explain?

A: When reading *A Course in Miracles*, it is very helpful to remember that Jesus frequently speaks to us in a poetic, symbolic way. Taken out of context, his words can, at times, seem to contradict the overall message of the Course. However, the more we study the Course, the clearer it becomes that he is not contradicting himself but rather restating the same themes over and over again with slight variations, hoping that, at some point, what he is trying to tell us will sink in. With that in mind, let us take a look at the two statements you asked about.

Both of these statements come in Chapter 1 when Jesus is explaining what he means by the term *miracle*. Most of us have always thought of miracles as an extraordinary event in the external, physical world. Jesus lets us know that in the context of the Course, a miracle is solely a shift in perception from the ego's thought system of sin, guilt, and fear, to the Holy Spirit's thought system of forgiveness. In other words, a miracle is an entirely internal event happening only in the mind and having nothing to do with the world. Miracles may seem to have results in this world, but this is a *reflection* of the miracle, or changed thinking, not the miracle itself.

You are right that anyone who believes that he or she is here could use a miracle. That, in fact, is exactly what Jesus is trying to tell us. When he says, "**Miracles are selective only in the sense that they are directed towards those who can use them for themselves**" (T.1.III.9:1), he is not implying that miracles are available only to some people. Indeed, he implies exactly the opposite by beginning the sentence with "miracles are selective *only* in the sense..." He is letting us know that there is just one sense in which miracles are not universal, and that is in the *form* the miracle or correction takes within our thinking.

While the content of a miracle is always a shift from thoughts that project guilt to thoughts that extend love, the specific correction thought will always show up in our mind in a way ideally suited to remedy the specific thought that made correction necessary. For example, I may need to forgive an abusive parent while you may need to forgive a partner by whom you felt betrayed. Both of us, in the midst of our pain, could turn to Jesus or the Holy Spirit in our mind and ask to see things differently. Both of us would then find ourselves accessing forgiveness thoughts that applied to our specific struggle. If we wanted to get technical, we could say that even within our own thinking, the form the correction seems to take is really the *reflection* of the miracle or shift, not the miracle itself. But this is more technically precise than Jesus needed to be at this point in the text.

Jesus also states, "**That the miracle may have effects on your brothers that you may not recognize is not your concern. ... the action aspect of the miracle should be controlled by me because of my complete awareness of the whole plan. The impersonal nature of miracle-mindedness ensures your grace, but only I am in a position to know where they can be bestowed.**" (T.1.III.8:1, 4, 5). He is not implying that there are people who do not need miracles. He is simply telling us that although the miracle is a shift in *our* mind, we should not try to control miracles, decide when they are needed, or determine how they will express themselves. We should ask him, as our wiser internal teacher, to make such decisions.

Again, *A Course in Miracles* becomes much easier to understand if we approach it like poetry or a symphony rather than a precise, scientific report. When we focus too heavily on the words, the Course can seem (to borrow Jesus' imagery) like nothing more than scattered threads of melody. But when we join with him -- moving beyond its words to connect with the love that inspired them -- we will see how those scattered threads of melody form one inclusive chorus (T.31.VIII.11:5) .

Q #998: I have recently done something for which I am deeply ashamed, not because it hurt anyone else -- it didn't -- but because I thought I was a better, more spiritual, more evolved person who would not stoop to this level. I am upset and disappointed to find out that this isn't so. I also feel tons of guilt. I don't seem to be able to forgive myself for taking this action. How does one work with "sinful" or "wrong" actions, as a student of the Course?

A: As students of *A Course in Miracles* , when we recognize that we have done or said something that did not come from love, we should remember the following statements: " **The world was made as an attack on God. It symbolizes fear.... frightened people can be vicious**"(W.pII.3.2:1,2; T.3.I.4:2). In other words, this world symbolizes the fear of God's Love, and any person who believes that he or she is here must be afraid of love and, therefore, vicious. Because of these dynamics, we could safely say that, with rare exceptions, spiritual or evolved people do not come here. If we were highly spiritual and evolved, we would have no need of this dream and would remain awake in Heaven.

When we feel ashamed about something we have done and upset that we are not more spiritual, we can be sure that we are analyzing the situation with the same inner teacher that led us to take the misguided action in the first place: the ego. The ego wants only to maintain our certainty that we are individuals who exist in a very real world. It does not care if we think we are spiritual or sinful, as long as we think there is a separate, autonomous "I" to analyze.

The only way out of this hopeless and circular thought system is to change internal teachers -- dropping the ego's hand and asking the Holy Spirit to help us look at our troubling actions through His loving and non-judgmental eyes. He will always help us to see that we are neither sinful nor spiritual; we are simply fearful and thus make mistakes that are really calls for the love we think we do not have inside of us. Through this process, we gradually come to the realization that we are not who we think we are. There is no "me" to label as spiritual or guilty. Rather, there is an illusion of an individual who always reflects the mind's choice between the guilt of the ego, or the Love and forgiveness of the Holy Spirit.

To hold on to guilt about what we think we did wrong, whether it was five minutes ago or fifty years ago, is really the ego's cruel way of cementing our guilt in place forever. This is so because, obviously, we will never be able to change the past. Thus, we are predicating our ability to be at peace upon something that is impossible. Fortunately, the Course teaches us that we can undo the cause of the error *now* by letting go of the guilt *now* -- again, simply by changing internal teachers.

Once we have learned to do this every time we begin to feel ashamed of ourselves, our reaction to our own mistakes will start to be something like, "So, I got afraid again -- what else is new?" At that point, we will begin to understand Jesus' healed perspective of our lives and how he can tell us that, **"All [our] past except its beauty is gone, and nothing is left but a blessing" (T.5.IV.8:2)** .

Q #999: Why does *A Course in Miracles* raise so many conflicts? I have never come across any spiritual or psychological practice that focuses so much on our resistance. I understand why the Course does this, but I find it personally unbearable. I guess as even Helen Schucman (the Course's scribe) was unable to fulfill the Course's high goals, I can also let it slip by. But is there not another way? I find the Course is a detour into battle. Surely this was not Jesus' intention!

A: You are correct that Jesus did not intend the Course to be a detour into battle. However, he did mean for it to be a tool that leads us into looking directly at the battle that is *already* raging within our mind -- the battle between our longing to return to God's Love and our desire to maintain our identity as an individual, autonomous being. For this reason, the Course can *seem* to cause us to experience more conflict. In reality, it is simply causing us to recognize our own internal war to keep the memory of God's Love from our awareness.

The fact that we believe we are actually in this dream world shows that we have chosen to align ourselves with the ego and its insistence that we are safer and happier here than we would be in our true home in Heaven. Therefore, it is not surprising that students typically struggle with the Course's message that nothing in this world will ever make us happy. To the ego, nothing is more unbearable than facing the fact that all the roads of this world **"but lead to disappointment, nothingness and death" (T.31.IV.2:3)** . However, Jesus is not appealing to us as egos -- he is really speaking to the decision making part of our mind that chooses between internal teachers. He is laying out a process for shifting from the ego to the Holy Spirit as our internal guide. Every time we do that, we automatically go from projecting anger, guilt, and attack, to instead extending love and forgiveness.

The goal of the Course, however, is actually not that high or lofty. It is not meant to get us to permanently make that internal shift and become radiant beams of light. Rather, it is meant to help us see that this shift is possible -- that the Holy Spirit does exist in our mind -- and to motivate us to watch how our own choice against making this shift, rather than anything in the external world, keeps us miserable. This is why the Course states that it is **"a beginning, not an end" (W.ep.1:1)** . When we approach the Course this way, we will experience it differently -- as a source of inspiration rather than guilt.

This also means that we cannot know or judge how another person has been affected by the Course. You brought up the example of Helen Schucman. Certainly the book *Absence from Felicity: The Story of Helen Schucman and Her Scribing of A Course in Miracles* , makes it clear that she seemed to

experience resistance to Jesus' love. It also makes it clear that she was aware of this resistance and, more often than not, continued to follow his guidance. In that sense, we, as Course students, could view her life as quite inspiring.

One final note: If you find working with the Course to be continually and consistently unbearable, it is possible that it is not the right path for you. Remember that the Course says, **"There are many thousands of other forms [i.e. spiritual paths], all with the same outcome" (M.1.4:2)** . Ultimately, it is not the form of the path you take that matters; only that you find one that helps you awaken to God's Love for you and yours for Him **(T.4.III.6: 3)** .

Q #1000: From "There is no world!" (W.pl.132.6:2), to "What the world is, is but a fact" (M.11.1:9). Certainly in the illusion the world seems to us a fact and we experience it as a fact. I was surprised to find this reference to the world as a fact in the manual. Is this a reference merely to the natural world (grass, mountains, trees, etc.)? After all the references in *A Course in Miracles* to the world as an illusion, is this but one more example of another contradiction in words in the Course? Or is it an emphasis on informing us we must deal with the world we made as a fact? I am thinking here of: "There are decisions to make here, and they must be made whether they be illusions or not" (S.I.1:2:4). I found myself rather unsettled and somewhat confused after reading the statement in the manual.

A: Yes, Jesus is making different points about the world in different places in the Course. This is why we stress the need to distinguish between the two levels on which the Course is written. Level One contrasts truth and illusion, wherein only God and Heaven are real (including His Son, Christ and the creations of Christ). All else is illusory and not real: **"There is no world!"** But since we are too fearful of accepting that and living accordingly, Jesus talks to us about the world as though it were real -- because we think it is. This is not really contradictory, as the sentences preceding and following the one you cite about decisions explain: **"You have been told to ask the Holy Spirit for the answer to any specific problem, and that you will receive a specific answer if such be your need. You have also been told that there is only one problem and one answer. In prayer this is not contradictory. . . . You cannot be asked to accept answers which are beyond the level of need that you can recognize"** (S.I.1.2:1,2,3,5) . Jesus is letting us know that this is a process -- like climbing a ladder. He thus gently and gradually helps us change our minds about the reality of the world by having us see that our perceptions are really interpretations emanating from the prior choice we make in our minds to take either the ego's hand or his as we go through our day. This is the other level on which the Course is written -- Level Two, which contrasts the wrong-minded (the ego's) and right-minded (the Holy Spirit's) ways of looking at the world.

The process involves bringing our wrong-minded perceptions to the truth of Heaven reflected in our right minds. And when at last our perceptions are all right-minded -- meaning we listen only to the Voice of the Holy Spirit -- our minds will no longer be split, and then love will just flow through us directing us in all we think and do. In that state of mind -- what the Course calls the real world -- we know the world is illusory and we will see all people as either calling out for love or expressing it. Jesus is gently leading us in that direction in all of his teachings and lessons.

Q #1001: I am a high school drop-out. I have made an ego that never was able to make an adult life for herself. I feel so isolated and helpless to change the loneliness that I want to die. In my 55 years I have failed at everything that I have tried to do. Mental illness and emotional disturbance are what my life has been and I see no hope out of this living hell. But this is just the ego I made up. Jesus says I could see peace instead of this because I am not this wretched ego! I know that intellectually, but it doesn't make any difference -- it doesn't stop the pain. Can you please point me in the right direction as I try to accept God's help and experience peace?

A: It may be of some comfort for you to know that you are not alone. The pain you describe is the inevitable experience of everyone when the mind chooses to believe that separation from God is possible and has been accomplished. The anguish is often denied, covered over, and camouflaged, but it is universal for all the separated ones. The pain of separation cannot be dismissed with an intellectual understanding of its origin as taught by the metaphysics of *A Course in Miracles*. In fact, using the principles of the Course to try to squelch the pangs of pain only exacerbates the problem. The Course's teachings are meant to be applied gently, beginning with the kind acceptance of oneself, no matter what the ego's baggage may look like in one's life. The Course's message of forgiveness is that the thought of separation is not a sin, whatever form it takes, nor is anyone a sinner who comes here seeking what cannot be found here.

Jesus acknowledges the feelings the separation engenders when he tells us in the workbook: **"You think you are the home of evil, darkness and sin. You think if anyone could see the truth about you he would be repelled, recoiling from you as if from a poisonous snake. You think if what is true about you were revealed to you, you would be struck with horror so intense that you would rush to death by your own hand, living on after seeing this being impossible"** (W.p.I.93.1:1,2,3,) . Notice he does not say *some* of you *may* think this. These words apply equally to those who view themselves as failures and to those who consider themselves great successes on the world's terms. Everyone holds this secret (or not so secret) thought about themselves. The key words in this statement are: "you think you are..." Jesus is not saying that we are these things, but he acknowledges, without judgment, that we perceive ourselves in this way. This is a very important distinction and a very important passage. In it we find recognition of the condition in which we seem to find ourselves, acceptance of it as our experience, and most importantly, no judgment in its regard. This is one of the many ways Jesus provides us with a model for our learning. He does what he asks us to do: look honestly at how we truly feel, accept that these are our feelings, and not judge them as sinful. The real anguish does not come from being a failure in the world, but in the judgment that this failure is proof that you are a miserable sinner who deserves to die. It is always the interpretation of a situation that gives it meaning. These interpretations are what Jesus asks us to question so we may determine whether we have chosen to think with the ego, which fills our lives with conflict, or with the Holy Spirit, Who fills us with peace. Finding peace then requires willingness to exchange the ego's perception for the Holy Spirit's, which implies willingness to let go of the ego's interpretation.

The Holy Spirit sets a standard for success and failure in direct opposition to what the ego teaches. The world bombards us with the message that we can, and must find happiness in this world, and our success is measured by this happiness. Our judgments against ourselves are founded on this belief. The Course teaches that this belief system is backwards and is based on the belief that the separation has not only occurred, but has been a smashing success. The ego views mental and emotional distress as failure; the Holy Spirit sees it and every aspect of our lives as a classroom in which to reinterpret everything according to His message. He is teaching us that the sickness we all suffer from is in the mind that believes it is a body which suffers emotionally and psychologically because it identifies with the thought of separation. The problem is not that we think monstrous things about ourselves, it is that we believe they are true, take them seriously, and more significantly, judge them to be sinful. The ego tells us that someone with mental illness is more in hell than someone who is emotionally balanced. Hell is hell. While the world offers many different Band-Aids with the illusion of relieving the pain of separation, none of them contributes to true healing. A successful life does not bring healing, and emotional distress does not prevent it. The only way to set yourself in the direction of peace is to be willing to accept that what you believe about yourself is not true, and to put your faith in the practice of forgiveness as the Course teaches. In the text, Jesus gently calls us to faith: **"Have faith in only this one thing, and it will be sufficient: God wills you be in Heaven, and nothing can keep you from it, or it from you. Your wildest misperceptions, your weird imaginings, your blackest nightmares all mean nothing. They will not prevail against the peace God wills for you."** (T.13.XI.7:1,2,3).

If the pain and misery of your life have led you to the teachings of the Course, they have served a useful purpose. There remains only the choice to accept the hope it offers by taking the first small step of acknowledging that the mind that chose devastation can make a different choice. Since the ego has failed

you, you now have the opportunity to succeed by pursuing the Holy Spirit's curriculum with an open mind. This requires only that you consider that maybe you have been wrong about who you are, maybe you are not a hopeless failure, and maybe the Holy Spirit is right. You have already set yourself in the right direction in seeking Jesus' message in the Course and are therefore “...no longer wholly insane, nor no longer alone” (T.17.VII.10:2). This in itself is no small comfort.

Q #1002: I am new to the Course and am confused about how to forgive, how to continue to work as a massage therapist since the body is an illusion, how to practice another belief system while learning the Course. I was intensely abused by someone who believed that their system was the only way and I was to go against my nature and be part of them. I am afraid that I may be misled again. Are there things here that can help us in our learning, even though we do not know where we are going?

A: Since *A Course in Miracles* is a thought system that completely reverses the ego's thinking, it is important to be gentle and patient in applying its teachings to our lives. This reversal means allowing the Holy Spirit to transform every judgment we have about everything. Obviously this is a process that takes time, not because time is real, but because we believe it is real, along with everything else in the illusory world. The first change from the ego's perception to the Holy Spirit's is to see one's life as a classroom for learning the lessons of forgiveness. This lays the foundation for all subsequent steps in reversing our thinking. Each step requires that we not skip steps. Remembering how invested we are in identifying with the body helps to set the gentle pace of looking at everything differently. While learning to apply the principles of the Course to our lives, we continue to live and work as usual. It is not helpful to deny our experience as bodies, nor to try to believe that our perceived needs, experiences, and relationships are illusory, since we still believe they are real. The Holy Spirit needs them as teaching tools in His classroom for learning forgiveness.

We are not being coerced or pressured in any way to do anything we are unwilling to do. “...**God's Will cannot be forced upon you, being an experience of total willingness**” (T.8.III.2:3). In fact, there is a safeguard against coercion in the Course, for it tells us we will not learn anything we do not want to learn. Our practice and learning is therefore commensurate with our willingness. Willingness is the only requirement for our practice of the Course. Neither perfection nor complete understanding is required. It begins with willingness to look at every grievance as the projection of the mind's guilt for having chosen to believe the separation is real. Thus every relationship, indeed everything in our lives, is useful in the practice of forgiveness. Anything that is not perfect peace, from a slight annoyance to raging anger (**See W.pl.21:2**), reflects back to us the mind's decision to listen to the ego's tale of separation, rather than the Holy Spirit's truth of our oneness as God's Son. Forgiveness means recognizing that this decision is the true source of all pain and conflict in our lives and in the world. Thus, the problem is in the mind, not in other people or the world, or even one's own body. The solution, therefore, is found in the mind as well. The goal of the Course is to train us to look at everything in our lives from this perspective (**See W.in.**), and to gradually learn that nothing external to the mind has any effect on it.

The Course is not the only spiritual path that leads us back home. As we are told in the manual, it is one among many forms (**See M.1.3,4**). Every mind will eventually choose to accept the truth of our oneness with each other and with God. That is the content at the heart of the Course's teaching. As you familiarize yourself with its fundamental principles, you will find that they are distinct from the teachings of other spiritual paths. In many cases they are in striking contrast to most theological and spiritual disciplines. Trying to follow another belief system while learning the Course will eventually introduce conflict in your practice and impede progress. And since the ego already presents us with a vast array of distractions and obstacles, another conflict is an unnecessary burden. If you resonate to the Course's teaching and choose to take it as your spiritual path, you will find that it requires only that you proceed gently and patiently, one step at a time, at a pace set only by your own desire and willingness. This may mean combining the Course with other paths for a time. The Holy Spirit will never take them away from you. If we are willing to question our interpretation of things, and ask for help, the Holy Spirit will use everything as a learning tool, and “...will respond fully to [the] slightest invitation” (T.5.VII.6:6).

Q #1003: I work in a bookshop that carries all sorts of new age/spiritual books. We have had books about demons, vampires, werewolves, ancient Egyptian gods, and so forth. The authors usually claim to have seen and experienced these entities and to have evidence that proves they exist. I've seen so many of these books that I'm starting to believe them. But even if these things do exist, according to the Course, wouldn't they still be illusory just like the rest of the world of form, having all been created by the ego? Wouldn't it say that the real God has nothing to do with any of them, despite whatever seeming power they may have, and that their belief in their own power represents a failure to realize they are just ego fragments?

A: Yes, everything you have said is correct. *A Course in Miracles* tells us that form is not reality, it is an illusion, and **"if you see it you must be mistaken" (T.III.27:4,5)**. From a Course perspective, it does not matter whether we see the entities you mentioned with our physical eyes or only in our thoughts. Either way, if we perceive them as individual beings, separate from ourselves and from God, they are illusory. As a Course student, it could be very helpful to realize that whether they exist only in stories someone made up or in this physical world we all made up, vampires and werewolves are no more or less real than any of the other people who seem to inhabit our lives or even than our own individual identity.

As you stated; people, animals, or combinations thereof who believe in their own power fail to recognize that they are split off fragments of God -- the only true source of power. But remember: It is only *you* who needs to recognize this. Generally, vampires and werewolves find the Course a bit too threatening .

Q #1004: I have been emotionally disturbed all my life. I was not liked, and learned to avoid people to avoid being rejected. Now I am 55, alone, and no idea how to connect to people. I study and practice *A Course in Miracles* and the Holy Spirit says I can be free of this miserable ego any time. I am so lonely! Jesus says I could see peace instead of this. What would he have me hear? What would he have me to do? What am I doing wrong?

A: Jesus is teaching us all that we can be peaceful regardless of our limitations. Thus he says in the manual, **"Do not despair, then, because of limitations. It is your function to escape from them, but not to be without them" (M.26.4:1,2)** . Escaping from our limitations means not giving them power to take away the inner peace that is always present in our split minds. If we follow the ego part of our minds, we will see our limitations as a prison and then compare ourselves with others, winding up in the painful jaws of judgment. If we choose against the ego, however, we will see our limitations as a classroom, and as we take Jesus' hand instead of the ego's, we will develop compassion toward ourselves and others, and learn how to smile gently at the ego and not take it as seriously as we once did. The key is to be able to distinguish between form and content. Anything of the body -- including emotional conditions -- is the form. The content is the decision you make in your mind as to how you will interpret the form. Choosing the ego results in feelings of victimization, guilt, judgment, anger, despair, and hatred of the body. Choosing Jesus or the Holy Spirit results in patience, compassion, and kindness towards yourself and others, and acceptance of the world and body as the curriculum Jesus or the Holy Spirit can use to help your mind be healed of its thoughts of sin, guilt, and fear. These themes are developed in our book, *The Healing Power of Kindness -- Volume Two: Forgiving Our Limitations* .

You did not say anything about having sought help from a therapist; that would not conflict with your work with the Course and might in fact help free you from the ego's uses of your limitations.

Q #1005: I studied *A Course in Miracles* in the '80s, but only within the past year did I start applying the workbook lessons. For the past several years, however, I have had awarenesses of God's presence. I know that love is the only truth in this illusion. Recently, I realized that I've forgiven all the people that I thought had wronged me, simply because I know that these wrongs never happened in the first place.

When I read the daily lesson, I feel a sense of peace that stays with me throughout the day. This evening as I was bathing there were a few seconds in which I lost all association with my body. I felt as if I were mentally gazing down upon an alien and was left with a completely neutral sense of the body -- neither disgust nor enchantment. Is the illusory world beginning to disappear for me? Am I beginning to wake up from the dream?

A: It could be that you are beginning to wake up, but since we do not know you, we really cannot give you a definitive answer. People experience the process of disidentifying with the body and the world in different ways. Jesus talks about this experience in a series of beautiful paragraphs in **"Beyond the Body"** in the text (T.18.VI) . He speaks of it in the context of the Identity we share that transcends all specialness and the limitations of the body. Thus he says of the experience: **"What really happens is that you have given up the illusion of a limited awareness, and lost your fear of union. . . . There is no violence at all in this escape. The body is not attacked, but simply properly perceived. It does not limit you, merely because you would not have it so. You are not really 'lifted out' of it; it cannot contain you. You go where you would be, gaining, not losing, a sense of Self"** (T.18.VI.11:7; T.13:1,2,3,4,5).

In the workbook, Jesus tells us that **"to be without a body is to be in our natural state"** (W.pl.72:9:9) . So it is not something special; it is merely natural. As the process of awakening proceeds through our practice of forgiveness, we thus will take the body and everything of the body less and less seriously, until we reach the point where we know we are not our bodies, even though we still appear as a body. This has nothing to do with death, as some students mistakenly think. It is a shift from false perception to true perception in our minds, and there may or may not be a physical correlation -- most of the time, there is not. What is of prime importance is the shift we make in our minds about the purpose for which we will now use our bodies: to learn that we all share the same ego thought system, the Holy Spirit's correction of that, and the power to choose between them. We all share the pain of separation, and we are all calling out for the love we believe we have denied.

Q #1006: I have read your answer to [Question #15](#), yet somehow I need a little more help. I have a healthy son I am thrilled with, whom I had through *in vitro* fertilization. I desired more children, but since have lost two to miscarriages. I believe I have a great deal of guilt in that my age -- past 40 -- would be a gamble and here seemed the proof: death of both embryos due to chromosome damage. I really feel like I murdered them both by seeking magic -- the *in vitro* fertilization. So here is my issue: Almost daily, when I am with my son, someone asks if he is my "only child." My mind instantly swings into guilt mode. I know the question is just a conversation opener, but it feels like an attack. I have issues around the miscarriages, older stepchildren, and adopting, and all my feelings bubble up. The last time I could only nod my head in shame and guilt. With my five year old son there and unaware of all the details, I could not attack back as my ego wants, "No, he is not my only, the other two are dead!" And I realize an attack would alienate everyone. But my internal buttons and feelings of sin, guilt, and fear are being pushed. I am still stumped as to how to cope with all this.

I do acknowledge what is happening in the moment and how enraged I become. I do see how their bringing up this deep pain (which is just scratching the surface of the original pain of killing off God) makes me want to "kill," through words or fantasy, the person I perceive as my attacker, even though they only have unintentionally handed me the mirror so I can look at my guilt. I also know intellectually that I did not murder my unborn children, but part of me must not believe it. I ask for help from Jesus and show him my negative thoughts, but I would like more healing than this. I find it difficult to accept the statement, "Loss is not loss when properly perceived." I understand intellectually that this is all an illusion, that I am not a body. But when this stuff comes up they are just concepts to my ego.

A: Where you are with all your feelings is okay. You don't want to try to use the intellectual concepts of *A Course in Miracles* to change what seems to be happening for you. You will know at a deeper level that

they are true at some point on your spiritual path, but for now you simply want to be as honest as you can about your thoughts and feelings about your life circumstances -- they after all comprise your classroom. Mostly you speak of your guilt, but what also comes through very clearly is your anger. And although you acknowledge your rage at the strangers' inquiries, there almost certainly are layers to that anger that you may be missing by jumping to the ontological explanation that you killed God. And all these unrecognized and unacknowledged layers of defenses continue to operate below your awareness, keeping your focus outside yourself, which of course is their purpose, despite your best intentions to look at the guilt within.

What might these other layers involve? Your anger at the strangers seems somehow out of proportion to the nature of their "attack," as you acknowledge. It may feel safer to keep the focus of your anger on them than on other perhaps less conscious targets. For it seems likely from what you say that you are angry that you have not been able to have the children you want -- perhaps angry at a spouse or ex-spouse, a lover, a parent, or God -- someone else who is somehow responsible for depriving you of what you so desperately want, requiring you to rely on your own creative attempts to have the children on your own that will make your life feel more complete. And there must also be great sadness and grief at the recurring losses. It's important that you uncover the anger and grief you are carrying, and all the hidden justifications for those feelings, not because they are true, but because you still believe at some level that they are true. And you cannot jump to the ontological explanation without looking at the ego's layers of defenses as clearly as you can, or you will simply keep the defenses unexamined and intact (T.11.V.1;2:1,2) .

Once you can get in touch with the anger and the specific thoughts behind that anger, you can begin to take responsibility for the projection involved in those judgments against others. Now it is true that all the levels of anger are simply defenses against the underlying ontological guilt, but the thought that we believe we have killed God is mostly an intellectual concept for most of us, which is, as Jesus tells us, **"an instant so ancient that it is beyond all memory, and past even the possibility of remembering"** (M.2.4:1). But we relive its content every instant that we choose the ego, putting our own needs and desires above everyone else's. So we can at least begin to be honest about how much we want to have things our own way and how angry we can become at anyone else who seems to stand in the way of our getting what we want. There's the projection that most of us can begin to identify with. Others may be putting their own needs first, but that could not anger us unless we were doing the same thing but did not want to acknowledge it in ourselves.

Ultimately, Jesus assures us, we will learn that **"it is not necessary to follow fear [and guilt] through all the circuitous routes by which it burrows underground and hides in darkness, to emerge in forms quite different from what it is. Yet it *is* necessary to examine each one as long as you would retain the principle that governs all of them"** (T.15.X.5:1,2,3). And that principle that we all still retain, even cling to, is that the separation and the accompanying guilt -- and the resulting individual self that each of us identifies with -- are real and require a defense. But until we can genuinely experience the guilt at that level, we will need to begin with all the specific expressions of our guilt, usually accessed by first acknowledging our anger at others and the judgments we are holding against them. Over time, we will begin to recognize the common thread running through all of our projections, and the ontological guilt will become more of an experience than an empty intellectual concept. But in each case, by looking with Jesus at our projections and accepting the underlying guilt as ours, we will begin to release the need for that defense. And the need for anything or anyone -- adult or child -- to fill the emptiness we feel inside will lose its power over us. And peace and joy will then fill the space left empty by the disappearing guilt and anger.

Q #1007: In Lesson 108 of *A Course in Miracles* , it is stated that, "To forgive one brother wholly is enough to bring salvation to all minds." Yet Jesus wholly forgave the entire brotherhood and this did not bring salvation to all minds. He frequently insists that we are one with him, can do what he did, etc. Yet, apparently, one of "us," not Jesus, must be the "one" who wholly forgives at least one brother. Am I looking at this correctly?

A: No, you are not quite looking at this correctly. The title of Lesson 108 is, **"To give and to receive are one in truth."** This is a statement that makes no sense from the ego's perspective, which is that we are separate beings (i.e. bodies) with separate interests. The ego tells us that our very survival depends on taking what we need at someone else's expense. For example, if I am hungry and there is not enough food, I need to find a way to feed myself. If you are there and are hungry too, I have to make sure that it is my body and not yours that receives whatever limited nourishment is available. In other words, I have it only if I keep it. If I give it to you, I lose it.

As long as we believe that we are bodies and that this world is real, that dynamic appears to be true. But Jesus knows we are not bodies. We are not even separate minds. We are the one mind of God's One Son, dreaming we could be separate from our Source and from each other. So, in reality (because we are mind and not a body), we cannot really give anything away. What we give, we keep. The reflection of this within this dream world is that when we think hateful, angry, or fearful thoughts about another, we are filled with hate, anger, or fear. When we think loving thoughts about another, we feel love.

This is the perspective Jesus is coming from when he states, **"One thought, completely unified, will serve to unify all thought. This is the same as saying one correction will suffice for all correction, or that to forgive one brother wholly is enough to bring salvation to all minds"** (W.pl.108.5:1,2) . What he means is that one thought of total forgiveness will forgive everyone *in our mind* . This is so because true forgiveness means forgiving a brother for what he has *not* done to us -- recognizing that we merely imagined that another's actions could take away our peace. And if we truly recognize this fact in relation to one person, we have to realize that it must be true for everyone -- no one can hurt us because no one has the power to deprive us of the peace of God.

Thus, within our mind, we will have brought salvation to all minds. This is, in fact, all we need to worry about because, in truth, there is no one -- and, indeed, no world -- outside our mind. The Course is not saying that one of "us" needs to forgive a brother in order to change the world. It is telling *you* that by completely forgiving one brother, you can entirely change your *experience* of the world. And in this way, you can remember that salvation is already there for you, in your mind, should you choose it.

When, like Jesus, we have learned to let the Holy Spirit (the memory of God's Love) become our only internal Voice, we will become a consistent reflection of love and forgiveness within this dream. This could serve as a reminder to others that none of their imagined sins have had any effect on reality and that salvation is already theirs if they choose to experience it. But when, if, and how they make that choice need not concern us.

Q #1008: I need advice about how to respond when people don't treat me with respect or consideration. For instance, what should I do when people are dishonest or when we make plans to get together and then they don't show up and don't call to cancel? I don't want to be a doormat.

A : First, we need to be clear that *A Course in Miracles* does not tell us what to do behaviorally. The guiding principle of the Course is: **"seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world"** (T.21.in.21:7). However, Jesus is not telling us to become doormats. He simply recognizes that our behavior reflects our thinking; therefore, that is what we need to focus on. In fact, by changing our thinking we can entirely change our experience of this world. This does not necessarily mean that our experiences *in* this world will change -- they may or may not -- but rather that we can learn to be at peace no matter what is happening externally.

The Course teaches us how to make this internal shift, which will result in our knowing how to handle every challenging situation we encounter. But before we can make it, we need to understand Jesus' healed perspective of our experience of conflict, summarized in the following statements: **"You cannot be unfairly treated.... The secret of salvation is but this: that you are doing this unto yourself. No**

matter what the form of the attack, this still is true. ...you would not react at all to figures in a dream you knew that you were dreaming. Let them be as hateful and as vicious as they may, they could have no effect on you unless you failed to recognize it is your dream." (T.26.X.3: 2; T.27.VII.10:1,2, 4,5,6).

In other words, Jesus knows our lives here are merely dreams and that in reality we remain at home in Heaven, at one with our Creator. As real and as difficult as life in this world seems to be, it has no effect on God's Love for us. So the key to being at peace within this dream is to realize that the Love of God is still available to us anytime we choose it. The Course conceptualizes the process of making this choice as dropping the ego's hand and instead choosing the Holy Spirit (the memory of God's Love) as our internal Teacher.

Every time we feel unfairly treated by another, we choose a teacher and learn a lesson. If we choose the ego (as most of us are accustomed to doing), the lesson will be that we are victims, that our happiness is dependent on the other person's action, and that unless he or she changes, happiness is impossible. And, of course, this guarantees that happiness *is* impossible because even if this particular person did change, it would not be long before someone else did something we perceived as unfair or unkind. Thus, the ego teaches us its ultimate lesson: My experiences, my pain, my very existence are someone else's fault.

On the other hand, when we choose the Holy Spirit as our Teacher, He will teach us that we need not be in pain about what seems to be happening to us. He will tell us that the other person's actions have nothing to do with us. They are simply a reflection of the guilt and fear in that person's mind -- the same guilt and fear that is in our mind. That person could not act in an unloving way unless he believed he was unlovable. And we could not be upset about it unless we unconsciously believed that we were getting the treatment we secretly think we deserve -- again, stemming from the thought that, having destroyed God's Love, we are unlovable.

Holding the Holy Spirit's hand, we reconnect with God's Love in us. And filled with that Love, we cannot help but react lovingly to anything a brother does. So, whenever we are upset, the one thing we need to do is ask the Holy Spirit to help us look at the situation through His loving and non-judgmental eyes. This does not mean we will not express to others our desire that they be honest with us; that they show up when they say they are going to, and so forth. But it does mean that we will express it without any sense of wanting to attack them.

Knowing that we have not been hurt, we will automatically know what would be the most loving thing to say or do. And coming from this place of love, we truly model for others how we want to be treated.

Q #1009(i): (The following three questions were submitted by the same person.)

If I am with someone and sense that he or she is getting irritated with me, how can I tell what action would be appropriate to take? How can I know for sure what another is thinking and feeling?

A: *A Course in Miracles* is a guide to changing our *own* thoughts and therefore does not offer advice about developing the ability to read the thoughts of others. It does, however, tell us that there are really only two types of thoughts: those inspired by love and those motivated by guilt and fear. The Course teaches us that up to this point, the vast majority of our thoughts have been driven by our unconscious guilt. It describes this kind of thinking as *listening to the ego* -- an internal teacher that insists we destroyed God so we could exist as individuals and that now we are separate both from our Source and from each other.

In contrast, we have the ability to choose the Holy Spirit as our internal Teacher instead. This is a Voice born of our memory of God's Love. The Holy Spirit in our mind will always provide us with a love-inspired

correction thought for any angry, guilty, or fearful thought we have. In a nutshell, the purpose of the Course is to teach us how to turn away from the ego's thought system of attack and toward the Holy Spirit's thought system of love.

This can actually make relating to others very easy. First, we can know that whether another person is feeling loving or attacking toward us is merely a reflection of his or her internal choice, and that the choice another is making at any given moment is not really our concern. Our concern is the thought system we are choosing right now. If we are feeling less than loving toward another, then our actions toward the person will undoubtedly reflect that. On the other hand, if we are feeling love, then that will come through in our actions. Thus, ultimately, all we have to do is ask the Holy Spirit to help us watch our own thoughts and feelings through his non-judgmental eyes. As we do this more and more, the growing awareness that the Love of God is still within us will automatically cause us to act toward others in a loving way.

Q #1009(ii): The other day I told a friend that I don't have any needs when I'm with other people -- I try to just give others what they want. My friend said that what I am doing is not being myself. This made me feel very confused. Am I not being myself if I behave with only respect toward the thoughts and feeling of others? What is "myself"? How am I supposed to act around people?

A: The Course teaches us that all the needs we seem to have within this world are, in reality, our attempts to find substitutes for the one thing we think we destroyed and can never get back: the peace of God. Further, we are not the individuals we think we are -- we are just figures in a dream and, upon awakening, will find that we remain a **"Oneness joined as One" (T.25.1.7:1)**, at home with our Creator.

Of course, none of this makes much sense from our perspective, within this dream of separation and individuality. Within this dream, we do seem to have many needs (air and water being among the most basic) and the last thing we want to do is pretend not to have them. But we can begin to recognize that we do not need anything from others in order to be at peace. And we can start to see how our identity has, until now, been very much defined by all our needs and ask ourselves who we would be without them.

The fact that you want to act with respect toward the thoughts and feelings of others is a very helpful goal to have. Only you can know if you genuinely feel that you have no needs when you are with others or if you are denying something. As a Course student, there is no single way that you are "supposed" to act around people. But, ultimately, if you continue to monitor your thoughts, you can, with the Holy Spirit's help, begin to feel peace no matter whom you are with.

Q #1009(iii): Can we experience the Love of God by ourselves (for example, by living in a cave for years), without communication being perfect, or is it dependant on us having perfect communication?

A: We can experience the Love of God no matter where we are or whom we are with. When the Course refers to "perfect communication," it does not mean anything that we do with our bodies. It has nothing to do with speaking or the presence of another person. Jesus is talking about our letting the Holy Spirit become our internal Voice, perfectly communicating to us only thoughts that stem from the remembrance of God's Love. The moment the miracle occurs -- our shift from the ego's wrong-minded thought system of separation to the Holy Spirit's thoughts of shared interest -- we could be said to be in perfect communication. Again, this is a communication that happens only in our mind -- the one place in this dream where the Love of God is always present.

Q #1010: Within the world of form, in our daily interactions with people, how is it recommended we conduct ourselves without judgment? We meet people and carry on conversation of one type or another, but, invariably, someone else's name will come up and a "judgment" seems to be made; or in conversing about the current events -- political, spiritual, or otherwise -- judgments are made. I have felt it very difficult to maintain a "right mind" while living in this world, and have wondered what I will talk about -- if not about expressing an opinion about one thing or another, be it positive or negative.

A: It is normal within the world that emanates from the thought of separation to have a point of view and to express it; in fact, it would be impossible not to have preferences and to spend time with some people and not others. Right-mindedness does not mean you cannot have a point of view; you would just not take it seriously; and when you are called upon to make an objective judgment or evaluation, you would do so without the element of condemnation that reinforces differences and separation. A helpful guideline to follow -- in terms of the content in your mind -- is that if what you say about someone is not true of everyone, it must be coming from your ego, and therefore is an attack. People's forms differ of course -- including opinions -- but the forms have nothing to do with what is real about us. Content alone is meaningful, and that content is that everyone, without exception, has a wrong mind, a right mind, and the power to choose between the two. That is the vision that should inform the content in your mind. Once you are clear about that, and you have no investment in one side or the other in a discussion, you automatically will do or say whatever is most loving. That could mean participating in the discussion, not participating, or leaving the gathering.

Course students many times reinforce separation and differences by *not* participating in conversations that involve judgments about others -- gossip and the like. They assume it could never be the right thing to do, without their first having asked for help and remembering that the content of joining with others, not the form of joining is all that matters. They wind up judging people for judging others, thus making the very mistake they accuse others of making. In terms of content, it may be a loving thing to do what others are doing so that you do not make yourself separate. There is no right or wrong behavior in these situations -- only on the level of thought. Jesus tells us to do the "**outrageous**" thing a brother asks of us (**T.12.4:1**), but he cautions us not to do it if it is going to harm oneself or someone else (**T.16.1.6:4**). Discernment is therefore needed.

What will also help is to keep in mind that the emphasis in Jesus' teachings about judgment is that it is not sinful; it is just impossible -- meaning we do not have the knowledge needed to make judgments. We got ourselves into trouble at the beginning by judging against what was in our best interests -- we chose to listen to the ego instead of the Holy Spirit; so we should not put much stock in our ability to make good judgments. That is Jesus' point, and so he encourages us to proceed from a base of humility. These ideas are discussed in "**How Is Judgment Relinquished?**" in the manual for teachers (**M.10**), and in Lesson 151 in the workbook (**W.pl.151**). An attitude of humility helps keep our minds open to have the Voice for God judge through us.

This common problem in students' processing of the Course's teachings is addressed in our tape albums, "To Judge or Not to Judge" and "The Meaning of Judgment." Question [#692](#) on this Service also is relevant.

Q #1011: With numerous possible scripts to choose from, is it always the ego that makes the choice between one lifetime or dream and another? Although time is neither linear nor real, isn't there still some cause/effect relationship between "lifetimes"? Is the idea that the Holy Spirit determines when time will end for "each" just an example of poetic effect and metaphor? There were a few revelations a number of years back. Shouldn't there be a lessening of guilt? (There's not.) As a result of those experiences I know that I didn't destroy God. -- God is all there is. I didn't plan for those experiences the way one plans to go

to a movie, but the consequence is that I can't honestly entertain that there is a Jesus figure or symbol helping me.

A: It is not clear from what you say how your experience that you did not destroy God left you feeling that there is no Jesus figure or symbol helping you. Yes, God is all there is; but if you were *fully* aware of that - what the Course calls revelation -- you would not also think you are a separate self in need of help. Jesus talks about the experience of union with God in the section in the manual called **“Can God Be Reached Directly?” (M.26)** . There he says, **“If God were reached directly in sustained awareness, the body would not be long maintained” (M.26.3)** ; but he also explains that love may ask this healed mind to still appear as a body to others who are still caught in the dream, but asking for some sign of help. That mind, though, would be at peace always, and know that it is not in the dream at all.

It would seem, however, that if you experience guilt and feel you are in need of help, there must still be a part of your mind caught in the illusion of separation from God. Then why not trust that the memory of your love for God and His for you can close that gap? In Jesus' beautiful, poetic rendering of this thought: **“What better way to close the little gap between illusions and reality than to allow the memory of God to flow across it, making it a bridge an instant will suffice to reach beyond? For God has closed it with Himself. His memory has not gone by, and left a stranded Son forever on a shore where he can glimpse another shore that he can never reach. His Father wills that he be lifted up and gently carried over. He has built the bridge, and it is He Who will transport His Son across it. Have no fear that He will fail in what He wills. Nor that you be excluded from the Will that is for you” (T.28.I.15:3,4,5,6,7,8,9)** .

The practice of forgiveness under Jesus' or the Holy Spirit's guidance is the means this course uses to restore this memory of God to our awareness. With this as our daily purpose, living in this world would be joyful and hope-filled rather than painful and isolating. As part of his answer to the question, **“How Should the Teacher of God Spend His Day?”** Jesus says in the manual that **“there is one thought that should be remembered throughout the day. It is a thought of pure joy; a thought of peace, a thought of limitless release, limitless because all things are freed within it” (M.16.6:1,2)** . This echoes so many other encouraging statements in *A Course in Miracles* that he wants us to remember as we continue our journey. Being in touch with the truth in your mind -- even if this is just intellectual -- means that you know you are not alone and can never be alone. Each day can be unified around the single purpose of seeing everyone as sharing with you the same wrong mind, the same right mind, and the power to choose between the two -- regardless of the different roles and tasks we all have. All of that is just form; the content in your mind of undoing the separation alone is meaningful. Rather than leading to a sense of isolation and pain, this approach to living in the world offers hope of real and lasting peace; in fact, it guarantees it, as you would be undoing the remaining interferences to your experience of union with God.

The concern with lifetimes and how many more lifetimes we must go through always comes from the ego, as part of its strategy to keep us thinking we are really here as bodies and that our problems and pain are rooted in the world. At best, we can use analogies drawn from our experience to try to understand this aspect of our process, but it is essentially not understandable, not only because it is all part of the illusion of separation, but also because it does not correspond to our experiences as seeming individuals in a world of time and space.

On one level (Level One), we are either awake in eternity or asleep in a dream of time. On another level (Level Two), as decision-making minds within the dream we are always choosing between the ego's script and the Holy Spirit's correction of that script. *We* , as decision-making minds, choose which part of the script we will choose to review. To use the analogy of a movie, each of us is the writer, director, producer, and actor. Yet we are always re-experiencing something that has already happened, even though our experience is that it is happening for the first time. Jesus teaches us that if we focus on learning and practicing forgiveness, we will eventually remember our decision to forget that we are dreaming, and then will be free of the dream's effects: **“The miracles establishes you dream a dream, and that its content is not true. This is a crucial step in dealing with illusions. No one is afraid of**

them when he perceives he made them up. The fear was held in place because he did not see that he was the author of the dream, and not a figure in the dream” (T.28.II.7:1,2,3,4) .

“**The Forgiven World**” in the text gives us a lovely, comforting view of what our experience will be like when we see everything and everyone through the eyes of forgiveness. And for an extended discussion of the metaphysics of time, please see our book, *Time: A Vast Illusion* .

Q #1012: In 1985 I had an extraordinary experience of oneness with God. I have never considered myself a religious person and never understood why people were religious. I came away from this experience believing to my very core in things that I didn't really understand, i.e., there is no sin, God is mind, do not judge, we are all one, etc. The experience was one of profound remembering where I belonged, and it surely wasn't here on earth. My path since then has been convoluted. After attempting to adapt my personal "knowledge" to other religions, I read and attempted to practice *A Course in Miracles* , but soon gave it up to turn to other things. I have recently had a renewed interest in the Course, but have many questions about my own personal experience and no one to talk to about it. Is this type of experience a common occurrence?

A: There is no way of our knowing how many people have had such an experience. Not more than a few have mentioned something like this to us. There certainly could be many others who have experienced their oneness with God and now live quietly in peace with love being the sole source of their thoughts and activities. They would not have a need to talk about their lives, although they could be guided by love to do so. Jesus talks about the experience of union with God in the section in the manual called “**Can God Be Reached Directly?**” (M.26) . You might find it helpful to read that, and also the earlier one entitled “**How Should the Teacher of God Spend His Day?**” (M.16) .

The focus of *A Course in Miracles* is on forgiveness, not God, even though He is mentioned on just about every page. The Course is about our daily practice of its lessons, rather than on experiencing oneness with God. It is nice when one has such an experience, as that provides a glimpse of the end of the process. But reflecting that oneness in the relationships of our lives is the immediate objective of the Course's teachings. We do that by first recognizing our wrong-minded dedication to seeing our interests as separate from others', and then asking for help to shift that perception to shared interests, whereby we realize that we are all -- without exception -- joined both in the pain of separation from God, and in our common call for help to awaken from that nightmare. Then, when “**not one illusion is accorded faith, and not one spot of darkness still remains to hide the face of Christ**” (T.31.VIII.12:5) , our minds will rest in the peace and stillness of Perfect Oneness.

Q #1013: I keep hearing all these dire predictions and prophecies about great changes in the earth. Some predictions are saying the earth's population will be reduced by two-thirds as a result of these coming changes. Some say World War III will come next year. Some speak about a planet that will be passing through our solar system and trigger great changes in the sun which will trigger great changes at the core of earth resulting in devastation similar to Atlantis. Our government seems to be tightening it's noose around our necks at every turn with all the new laws -- and even more are coming. What should *A Course in Miracles* student's attitude be toward all these changes?

A: Jesus, who offers himself as a model for how we want to learn to look at the world and ourselves (T.5.II.9:6; 12:3; T.6.in.2:1; T.6.I.8:6,7) , would look upon all of the predicted impending doom with a gentle smile. For he's outside the dream and knows that all such thoughts simply reflect the Son's identification with the ego mind, which puffs itself up with threats of calamity and chaos and crisis in the world, so that we don't see the ego itself in our mind as the source of these so-called perils. For if we looked to this source, it would not take much more looking to see that we are observing a very puny little

mouse of an idea, cowering in its fragility and impermanence, at the same time attempting to roar as a cover for its vulnerability (T.22.V.4) . And then we could not help but smile ourselves, along with Jesus.

But while we still want the world and our insignificant, separate selves to be real, we will have our reactions -- our judgments and our anger and our fear. And Jesus does not ask us to deny how we feel, but rather asks us to use our reactions as a means for recognizing and acknowledging our continuing identification with the ego. For the ego has us convinced deep down of our own sinfulness and guilt, which demand our punishment. But preferably, the disasters will befall others instead of ourselves, as proof that the guilt lies elsewhere and no longer upon us. It's a very nasty thought system and the suffering that we are willing both to endure and to see as if it were being inflicted on others only attests to our own insanity. But it is through our willingness to look honestly at what we believe we could make real that our motivation to turn to Jesus and ask for another way to look at the world's insanity, with a smile rather than a frown or a grimace, can be reinforced.

Q #1014: I have had psychic experiences and never paid much attention to them until now. I am trying to understand what they were for. Is it the contention of *A Course in Miracles* that there are no coincidences -- that we get exactly what we ask for, and in this sense there are no victims and victimizers on the level of form? Is it also true that everything that seems to be given by another on the level of form -- "good" or "bad" -- we have asked for consciously or not, and therefore it is no coincidence that it shows up? Their ego takes it and gives you exactly what you asked for and you do the same in turn?

A: The Course tells us that we are always “**reviewing mentally what has gone by**” (W.pl.158.4:5) . It seems as if we are experiencing everything for the first time and that the thoughts in our minds are our own private thoughts. But this is only because we have chosen to identify with the ego's thought system that rests on the premise that separation and time and space are real. Keeping in mind that this is all an illusion, the Course explains that at the moment the separation from God seemed to happen, every conceivable form of separation spun out from that thought, and simultaneously the correction for each of those thoughts also spun out. The separation seemed to occur and was undone in the same instant. Not that we can understand any of this in our present state! So, in this framework, there are no coincidences and nothing happens by chance -- everything has already happened. And as decision-making minds we are choosing which part of the “script” we shall revisit, or to use the analogy of a video-tape library, we are choosing which tape to watch. Everything is on the tapes already; we choose what we are going to watch.

The point of the teaching and mind-training exercises in *A Course in Miracles* is for us to learn how to bring into our awareness our decision-making capacity, so that we will realize what our lives are all about. Realizing that we are minds, we can then continue to choose the ego's version of the truth, or switch our allegiance and choose the Holy Spirit's thought system of forgiveness that will eventually return our minds to their natural state of undifferentiated oneness in God.

Jesus discusses psychic powers in the manual for teachers (M.25) . He talks about them in the context of the communication levels necessary for the process of salvation: “**Communication is not limited to the small range of channels the world recognizes. If it were, there would be little point in trying to teach salvation. It would be impossible to do so. The limits the world places on communication are the chief barriers to direct experience of the Holy Spirit . . .**” (M.25.2:2,3,4,5). These limits are a consequence of the separated mind's intention to block out anything that would remind it of the illusory nature of its existence. Thus, Jesus goes on to explain that the relevance of psychic abilities lies in the *purpose* for which they are used: as part of the ego's plan or the Holy Spirit's undoing of that plan. We have discussed different aspects of these issues in questions [589](#), [644](#), and [682](#), which you might find of interest.

Q #1015: What is the difference between looking at resistance and not fighting it and being "unwilling"? I am a bit confused. Should I look at the resistance to doing a lesson and do nothing, or see that I am unwilling and overcome the unwillingness? I find myself at times resisting practicing the lesson because I am into something else. I recognize that I am resisting, but then again am I unwilling?

A: For all practical purposes, resistance and unwillingness are the same; they keep the ego thought system in place and prevent the mind from choosing the Holy Spirit. The important thing is to be aware of the resistance/unwillingness and to acknowledge the underlying fear of love, without judging yourself for it. Knowing the depths of our fear, Jesus anticipates our resistance in the instructions he gives in the Introduction to the workbook: **"Some of them [the ideas] you may actively resist. None of this will matter, or decrease their efficacy. ...whatever your reactions to the ideas may be, use them. Nothing more than that is required"** (W.in.9:2,3,4,5) . Implicit in this passage is the message that we should not be surprised by resistance, not struggle against it, not judge it, but simply practice as instructed. Skipping a practice is merely wasting time, delaying the return to the awareness of love's presence (T.in.1:7) . Since time was made as a delay tactic, we have as much time as we choose to take. As Jesus tells us in the Manual: **"...it is all a matter of time. Everyone will answer [the call to accept the Atonement] in the end..."** (M.1.2:8,9) .

When we become convinced by our own experience that resisting love is extremely painful, we will gradually cease to resist. Willingness and motivation will then replace resistance/ unwillingness. We will begin to relinquish pain (the ego) and accept peace (the Holy Spirit). Meanwhile, the only thing to do with resistance or unwillingness is not to deny or fight it, but to wait with the patience of one who knows the outcome is certain (See T.4.II.5).

Q #1016(i): (One answer for two questions submitted by the same person.) Lets say I go about my day referring to my body, in my thoughts, in the third person, regarding it as a "puppet" of my ego mind in my sad, sad dream. Is there a flaw in this approach in the context of *A Course in Miracles* ?

(ii): As a recovering perfectionist/workaholic I can look back and see how the body was abused when used as a tool for achievement (a role or goal misperception). There is a broader view of this arena, so I ask: How to perceive the body (role, purpose, goals) so as not to abuse it?

A: Yes, the body can be viewed as a "puppet" of the mind, since it merely acts out the mind's decision to identify with it, using it as the expression in form of the mind's choice for separation. It is also referred to as a dream figure, which is somewhat more to the point because, as we know from our experience of nocturnal dreams, the people and events in a dream are not real. Although it is a figure in a dream, it is important to pay attention to the body's thoughts, reactions, and feelings. These specifics have been purposefully designed to fulfill the ego's goal of making the body real and keeping from awareness the mind's power to choose. Dissociating oneself from them without recognizing this ego strategy could short circuit the process of learning to accept responsibility for choosing the ego's use of the body . The Course teaches us to relate to the body as a communication tool to recognize the choice that has been made in the mind. Since identity with the mind and its power to choose have been forgotten, the body serves to show us the effect of the mind's choice, if we are willing to look. This statement about the world applies equally to the body and gives us the Course's perspective on it: **"The ego made the world [body] as it perceives it, but the Holy Spirit, the reinterpreter of what the ego made, sees the world [body] as a teaching device for bringing you home"** (T.5.III.11:1). When the mind chooses separation, it identifies with the ego and with the body, thus becoming the body in its experience of itself. Yet, the mind that has forgotten it is a mind can use the body as a communication device to recognize the effect of its choice.

In the choice to identify with the body, it is the mind that is abused. It attacks itself by denying its true nature as spirit, and then exacerbates the attack by projecting itself onto the body obliterating from awareness all memory of its decision-making power. The ego always uses the body to reflect the mind's

attack upon itself. It does not matter whether the attack is experienced in the form of punishment or pleasure, laziness or workaholism. The attack consists in the mind's belief that it is a body that can act and be acted upon. Of itself the body does nothing; it cannot suffer or enjoy independently of the mind. In fact, Jesus tells us in the text: **"At no single instant does the body exist at all" (T.18.VII.3)**. It has no purpose of its own. In the service of the ego, the body is used to separate and attack. In the service of the Holy Spirit, it is a means of communication to remind the mind it is *not* a body. The goal is to learn to see everything the body experiences as the messenger of a decision made in the mind to listen to the ego or the Holy Spirit. Anything but perfect peace means the mind has chosen the ego, and can choose again. As the text tells us: **"If you use it [the body] only to reach the minds of those [including, and especially, one's self] who believe they are bodies, and teach them *through* the body that this is not so, you will understand the power of the mind that is in you. If you use the body for this and only for this, you cannot use it for attack" (T.8.VII.3:2,3)**.

Q #1017: In the manual we are told: "It is better to sit up, in whatever position you prefer. Having gone through the workbook, you must have come to some conclusions in this respect" (M.16.5:4,5). I have gone through the workbook, and I missed it. Could you please elaborate on the importance/significance of sitting up.

A: In this passage in the manual, Jesus is giving us specific instructions as guidelines for our practice. Quite simply, it is likely that lying down at the end of the day or just before going to bed will induce sleep, which then prevents one from spending the quiet time he is recommending. It is also probably more comfortable than standing up. This is a very clear example of how Jesus takes into consideration our resistance, the nature of the ego, and the body's needs. He is helping us to find ways to make our best effort at complying with the structure set up in the workbook and reinforced here in the manual.

Jesus knows that we are not always eager to learn what he is teaching us in *A Course in Miracles*. One of the ways our resistance is expressed is by falling asleep while reading it. He assumes that we must have noticed that we come up with all kinds of excuses and distractions for not doing the workbook lessons. Sleep is just one of them. He also assumes we are serious about our commitment to the practice of forgiveness, and so he gives us these helpful tips. That is all that is meant in this passage.

Q #1018: I have a question regarding Gloria's "myth" in *Awaken from the Dream*. I'd like to understand a bit more about a point where she as a representative of the "middle group" is looking at physical reality and pledging that she'll endure any amount of suffering to get back into the dream and help others awaken. This, to me, seems to be a really important moment. Is judging the pain and suffering we are seeing, and feeling that it must be fixed, and that we are the ones to fix it -- is that a wholly fallacious judgment? Is viewing the scene in that way purely the result of guilt (which is always of the ego)? Is guilt the key to the continual recreation of the dream for people like us? Could return to the dream be motivated by love? Ever? I feel like this is a really crucial question and want to be sure I understand it correctly. Would a bodhisattva or a reincarnated lama who has pledged to return endlessly until everyone is freed fall under that category? Or is it something else with them?

A: Returning to the dream could definitely be motivated by love. We need to distinguish between the healed and the unhealed mind to get the proper perspective on this; and we need also remember that this cannot be understood from our very limited human perspective. Our human experience is the effect of the mind's choice to conceal its life as mind outside time and space, and so it can never be a reliable link to the truth. We must start there, for that is all we have to draw on; but Jesus cautions us regularly about using our experience as individuals as a criterion of what is real. He leads us beyond that to the dimension of mind we have sought to deny.

The healed mind is totally free of guilt -- it is no longer split into a right and wrong mind with a decision-making power. The healed mind is identified only with love and knows that anything else is illusory. That unrestricted love could then appear in the dream in a form recognizable by other figures in the dream seeking salvation. But this extension of love -- this healed mind, this Teacher of teachers **(M.26.2)** -- would not be experienced as a "coming into the dream." It would simply be the form love takes. There would be no sense of having been sent on a holy mission to redeem or rescue souls, etc., and there would be no sense of sacrifice -- of reluctantly returning to an unholy place of sin, for example. That mind would be joyous and at peace, knowing it is not *in* the dream at all, and recognizing as well that that is everyone's true reality. It would not respond to anything as though it were real and in need of "fixing," although in form it would appear to be just like everyone else. It is important to recognize that this way of being does not correspond to any motivation known to us who experience ourselves as limited individuals competing for survival in a world with an overwhelming number and variety of problems.

An unhealed mind would continue to take form in the dream in order to carry out its ego-driven objective of proving the separation real, projecting responsibility for it in an attempt to flee the punishment it thinks it deserves. An unhealed mind could also take form in order to continue to learn to awaken from the dream (a right-minded motivation). Again, we need to be wary of trying to conceptualize this in terms of our experience as humans. We can use analogies, as Jesus does, but all of this takes place only within the mind. There is not some non-physical entity somewhere that enters time and space as a body. This is always about the dynamics in a mind that never ceases being a mind. We need to remember as well that we are attempting to diagram something that is inherently illusory.

For the unhealed mind -- still guilt-ridden -- the world of separation would be perceived as a battleground of opposition between those protecting the separation and those seemingly imprisoned and trying to free themselves. If one perceives oneself as here to free those still imprisoned, or to use switch metaphors, to awaken those still asleep, then one is sharing the perception of the ego. If something needs "fixing," then the separation has been judged real -- the fallacious judgment you referred to. Jesus is helping us realize that our only responsibility is to accept the Atonement for ourselves, which means to realize that nothing happened -- **"Not one note in Heaven's song was missed" (T.26.V.5:4)** -- the separation from God never happened: Yet, as we make progress in this, we will begin to perceive everyone else in the same way -- as here solely to learn this same lesson. If we are truly undoing the separation in our minds, it could hardly be otherwise.

Q #1019 : I am currently experiencing a lot of concern regarding recurring problems with a romantic partner. It seems like the same cycles keep on repeating themselves. Recently, I came across *A Course in Miracles* and have incorporated it into my life. I have tried to forgive myself and him, but it seems like the pattern is repeating. Even though I experience more of a sense of peace and less worry, I still don't know how to end this cycle or how to find the answer to what to do.

A: Having the intention to forgive is usually not enough, unless we have some understanding of just what it is we want to forgive. When we are new to the Course -- typically at least the first thirty or forty years of our study and practice of it -- most of us think we are trying to forgive others for what they are doing, and ourselves for getting caught in the traps that they have set for us. And that may not be a bad place to begin, because we have to start somewhere. But this must not be what Jesus has in mind by forgiveness in his Course, since he gives the following definition: **"Forgiveness recognizes what you thought your brother did to you has not occurred" (W.pil.1.1:1)** . The fact is, what needs to be forgiven has nothing to do with other persons. They are simply the screen upon which we see our own seeming sin and guilt projected. But our ego has given them the purpose of being responsible for how we feel, so that we don't look within to the real source of our disquiet and conflict -- our foolish choice for the ego with its accompanying investment in separate interests, attack, anger and guilt.

We all think our partners, and friends, and enemies do things that upset us and rob us of our happiness and peace. But that's just how we've tried to set things up so we don't see that we are the ones who have already chosen to be upset and to throw our happiness and peace away, while the other person is just the convenient scapegoat for how we feel -- *regardless of what they may seem to have done!* That's not to say that others don't say and do unkind, even cruel things. But I can only react personally to what someone else says or does if I have already made sin and guilt real in my own mind, believing I am a separate individual who can be attacked and hurt.

Is it really possible to accept that this is true and recognize that blame and anger are never justified? Yes, but not if I attempt to come to that realization on my own. This will be a process in which, each time I remember after I've become upset, I am willing to acknowledge that I have made an interpretation about the situation *and I am wrong!* And so I want to be able to take my faulty perception to Jesus or the Holy Spirit and allow them to cleanse it of all my judgment and self-centeredness. And nothing in this process has anything to do with the other person or with what I should say or do with them.

Now most of us can't simply allow things to remain as they are in our relationships without attempting to fix them, as we believe they need to be fixed. While there is nothing bad about doing this, it will be our ego's attempt to usurp control in the situation and diminish or minimize Jesus' role in the healing process, which happens only in our own mind, and not in the relationship between our body and the body of the other person. As soon as we shift our focus from the guilt in our own mind to the problem with our partner, we have become mindless. And we may find a temporary solution that seems to resolve the conflict, but we will have done nothing about the root cause of the conflict -- our own sense of guilt and sinfulness. And so, as you say, it will seem as if the cycles of conflict keep repeating themselves, and we will not understand why.

But little by little, as we are willing to acknowledge our own complete responsibility for how we are feeling and reacting, we will begin to release our investment in our guilt. And we will not be upset when the same issue seems to cycle back, but we will welcome it as a further opportunity to practice forgiveness and heal the pain in our own mind that comes only from our choice to see ourselves as separate and alone. As Jesus points out near the end of the text, and notice that he makes no mention of the other person in this process:

“Trials are but lessons that you failed to learn presented once again, so where you made a faulty choice before you now can make a better one, and thus escape all pain that what you chose before has brought to you. In every difficulty, all distress, and each perplexity Christ calls to you and gently says, ‘My brother, choose again.’ He would not leave one source of pain unhealed, nor any image left to veil the truth. He would remove all misery from you whom God created altar unto joy. He would not leave you comfortless, alone in dreams of hell, but would release your mind from everything that hides His face from you. His Holiness is yours because He is the only power that is real in you. His strength is yours because He is the Self that God created as His only Son” (T.31.VIII.3).

Q #1020: At times I feel depressed and a bit fearful with the reality that this is all an illusion. I know it is my ego mind that is weighing me down, but this feeling can be very intense. What is going on?

A: What is going on is a normal reaction when someone is told that everything they think about the world is wrong. The mind begins to suspect that if the world is not real, then neither is the body with which it has chosen to identify. Doubt thus enters the belief system that holds the world and the body together, and that can only mean trouble for the ego. Feeling attacked, it defends itself, thereby attacking the mind. The attack brings on guilt in the form of depression, fear, anxiety, and every other form of misery experienced by the body.

What is depressing is not the fact that the world is an illusion, but the belief that it is real. The problem begins when the mind chooses the separation, causing it to split into a wrong mind that believes the separation is real, and a right mind that knows it is not. The wrong mind (ego) defends and maintains its choice by identifying with the body and making the world real. The mind then becomes the body in its experience of itself, and feels intensely threatened by the message of *A Course in Miracles* that its made-up world/body is an illusion. The wrong mind that has identified with the body feels threatened by the right mind that knows it is not a body. This conflict in the mind is the source of the depression and fear that you experience. They are the inevitable effects of the split mind that is in conflict over its identity and perceives itself as separate from its Source. There is a part of the mind that knows it is wrong in identifying with the ego, but it is enticed by the autonomy of specialness. This is a depressing and fearful condition because it rests precariously on the made-up belief that illusion is reality. The mind knows this belief can be as easily abandoned as it was chosen. Herein lies the cause of the predicament in which you find yourself, and its solution as well. The problem has its source and its solution in the mind's ability to choose between the ego's belief in separation and the Holy Spirit's memory of the oneness with God that has never changed. The ego has us believe that somehow happiness is possible in the world, while the Holy Spirit reminds us that nothing but our oneness with each other and with God will make us happy.

The world is brought into awareness and held together by the belief that happiness can be found in it: **“No one who comes here but must still have hope, some lingering illusion, or some dream that there is something outside of himself [outside of the mind] that will bring happiness and peace to him” (T.29.VII.2:1).** In spite of all the evidence to the contrary, the ego insists there must be some way to keep the body, specialness, and the world, and still be happy. It seeks relentlessly to have its cake and eat it too. The fear and depression engendered by the split mind are further exacerbated by the fact that on some level we know this is impossible. Thus, underlying every pursuit of specialness is an inescapable sense of futility. Each quest ends in bitter disappointment and loss, for no matter how deceptively satisfying special love seems to be, it cannot last. And since we are told that only what is lasting can be real, and only what is real can bring us happiness, the ego's maxim **“Seek but do not find” (T.16.V.6:5)** is fulfilled.

The world will not disappear from awareness as long as we want it. In this regard, Jesus tells us: **“Fear not that you will be abruptly lifted up and hurled into reality. Time is kind, and if you use it on behalf of reality, it will keep gentle pace with you in your transition” (T.16.VI.8:1,2).** Keeping these comforting words in mind while working with the Course will not only lessen the fear that impedes progress, but do much to relieve the distress you describe. The pace is gentle because we are not being forced to accept anything for which we are not ready. In His curriculum of forgiveness, the Holy Spirit respects our belief that the world is real. In fact, He uses the world as a classroom to teach us to forgive ourselves for taking the **“tiny, mad idea” (T.27.VIII.6:2)** of separation seriously. Thus, chosen by the ego as a place to hide and forget God, the world can be used by the Holy Spirit to remember God and return to the home we never left. Therefore, release from depression in the face of the illusory nature of the world is found in changing the world's purpose from the ego's goal to the Holy Spirit's. The world itself, then, becomes an opportunity to find our way out of it through forgiveness: **“Forget not that the healing of God's Son is all the world is for. That is the only purpose the Holy Spirit sees in it, and thus the only one it has” (24.VI.4:1,2).**

Q #1021: A few of my friends and family members are very depressed; some self-mutilate or harm themselves in other ways. At my school, I am a peer-mediator and have helped tons of people with their conflicts. But I feel I no longer have any good advice to offer, because I now believe in *A Course in Miracles*, and how am I supposed to help my family and friends with their problems without mentioning the Course? What can I say? What should I do? It hurts me a lot to know that I am not doing anything at all.

A: It is never easy to watch people self-destruct, especially those you are close to. But if the content in your mind reflects the Holy Spirit's thought system of forgiveness, you will automatically respond with

love, no matter what the situation may be. Importantly, that loving response could be to do and say nothing, and to simply love them in your mind by not seeing them as victims. And just as importantly, as a Course student you can offer advice without ever using the language of the Course. Its principles and message always pertain to the content in your mind, not the form of expression. The issue is whether you are seeing the situation through the eyes of the ego or through Jesus' eyes.

When you are in your right mind, looking through Jesus' eyes, you will perceive people as sharing with you the same wrong mind, right mind, and the power to choose between the two. You will realize that everyone is in intense pain and desperately hoping they are wrong about what they perceive as their unredeemable sinfulness. The answer is in their right minds, as it is in yours; and when they are ready, they will choose it. When you thus empathize with the strength in them, they are more apt to perceive you as standing for that alternative **(M.5.III.2:6)**, even though you might not have said a word to them. The message would have been conveyed through that instant of your ego-less presence; and if their fear of healing has subsided enough, they will hear that message **(M.5.III)**. If they do not hear it now, they will later, or from someone else. That is the point of Jesus' teaching that choosing forgiveness is our responsibility, but the extension of forgiveness or the miracle through us is not **(T.16.II.1)**.

If you thus concentrate solely on the content in your mind, you will not feel frustrated that you are not doing anything. The assumption you are making is that you must fix the problem, having defined both the problem and its solution. You will feel much freer and will be more open to the answer in your right mind if you drop that assumption. That will also lead you to respect the power of these people's minds to choose their ego and not to judge them for doing that, as you will realize they can use that very same power to choose against the ego. In this they are no different from you and everyone else. The form is irrelevant. This is the essence of true compassion and true empathy.

We have discussed some of these ideas in Questions [#45](#) and [#647](#).

Q #1022: I have practiced the Course for many years and during that time I have tried to interest others in it with no success. I now realize that the Course is designed for me, and that others will find their own paths. I once attended *A Course in Miracles* group meeting, part of a Christian following, and was surprised when the facilitator asked all to join hands and for everyone to focus and see if we could channel an entity. Unfortunately, at this time my ego stepped in and I told the group what I thought of their folly. That was my first and last meeting. I have thought that it would be nice to share the Course with others, but other than this Web site I travel my path alone.

A: There may be no better way to learn the crucial distinction between form and content! You can practice forgiveness and relate to everyone in the context of shared interests without ever using the language of the Course or discussing its metaphysics. That sometimes can be a more effective way of learning than meeting regularly with other Course students to share experiences and discuss the theory. There is nothing wrong with that, but it is not a necessary part of the completely internal process of shifting from the ego as your teacher to Jesus or the Holy Spirit. And if you are focusing on the content of our -- everyone's -- common journey home to God, you would not feel you are traveling alone. That is the whole point of the mind-training dimension of the Course, as Jesus eloquently states in one passage in the workbook: **"You want the peace of God. And so do all who seem to seek for dreams. For them as well as for yourself, you ask but this when you make this request with deep sincerity. For thus you reach to what they really want, and join your own intent with what they seek above all things, perhaps unknown to them, but sure to you. . . . It is this one intent we seek today, uniting our desires with the need of every heart, the call of every mind, the hope that lies beyond despair, the love attack would hide, the brotherhood that hate has sought to sever, but which still remains as God created it. With Help like this beside us, can we fail today as we request the peace of God be given us? (W.pl.185.10:1,2,3,4; 14:1,2).** To get closer to this ideal each day can lead only to the undoing of all sense of aloneness and isolation.

Your reaction to the group was not untypical of so many other Course students' experiences with groups. It calls to mind the gentle admonition Jesus gave to Helen one day when she was being very critical of the spiritual path another person had taken. It can easily be adapted to your experience. As related in Ken's *Absence from Felicity*, "she suddenly heard the non-judgmental voice of Jesus say to her, cutting through *her* judgments: 'Don't take another's path as your own, but neither should you judge it.' In the presence of this loving and gentle correction for her judgment, Helen's anger quickly dissipated" (p. 430). This is one of those directives that should be in the foreground of our minds as we meet the challenging situations of daily living.

Q #1023: I am having a dark night of the soul. This is directly related to a family member being diagnosed with a terminal illness. I can tell myself the illness is an illusion all I want, but the little voice inside my head keeps telling me there is no God and *A Course in Miracles* is a hoax. I don't want to feel this way. I have asked the Holy Spirit to give me my own "burning bush." How do we know God exists and that the Course is the word of God?

A: When going through something like the terminal illness of a loved one, most of us desperately long for comfort. While the message of *A Course in Miracles* -- that the entire phenomenal world is a dream and we remain at home in Heaven -- can be comforting, it is anything but comforting to the part of our mind that gets upset by events in this world. To the ego, the idea that everything here is an illusion is the most upsetting thought of all.

Therefore, when we are in the midst of a major upset, the last thing we want to do is beat ourselves over the head with the idea that it is not real. Instead, we need to do whatever it takes to comfort and care for ourselves.

Remember that the Course tells us " **it is almost impossible to deny (the body's) existence in this world**" and that to do so is "**engaging in a particularly unworthy form of denial**" (T.2.IV.3:10,11). It further lets us know that anything we see as real in this world "**would persuade the holy Son of God he is a body, born in what must die, unable to escape its frailty, and bound by what it orders him to feel**" (T.31.VIII.1:2). In other words, the Course recognizes we are in a great deal of pain and does not ask us to pretend that we are not. Quite the opposite, the Course asks us to look at our pain honestly.

We need to do this because we cannot pick and choose parts of our experience in which to believe. As long as we believe *anything* here is real -- for example, that we see someone when we look in the mirror each morning -- we have to admit that we think *everything* here is real. The very fact that we feel physical and psychological pain tells us how much we believe in the reality of our bodies and of this world. In truth, every time we take a breath, there is a little voice telling us that the Course is a hoax and God does not exist. If there were not, we would not need the Course and probably would not be here.

So, one benefit of difficult times is, by amplifying the fear and pain that we always carry, they can make us keenly aware of what we *really* believe and how much better off we would be if we believed something else. The question is: What should we believe and how do we get ourselves to believe it?

The Course does not claim to be the Voice of God. In fact, it tells us that " **God does not know of separation**" (P.2.VII.1:11). This means God could not possibly know about this world. Further, it states that, " **the world was made as an attack on God**" and to be " **a place where God could enter not**" (W.pII.3.2:4,5) .

So, the Course does not come from God. What it comes from is the memory of God's Love that Jesus embodied and that remains in each of our split minds. The Course is not the ultimate truth, nor the only truth. It is a tool, inspired by God's non-specific, all encompassing Love. Its sole purpose is to remind us

of that Love. And we could not be reminded of it (and moved by the Course's teaching) if we did not already know it.

Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and God's Love: We need them, not in the world, but in our mind. Fortunately, that is exactly where they are. In other words, everything we need is *already in our mind*. This is why the Course makes statements like " **You always choose between your weakness and the strength of Christ in you**" (T.31.VIII.2:3) and tells us that "**the Holy Spirit is in the part of your mind that always speaks for the right choice**" (T.5.II.8:1,2).

The Holy Spirit cannot give you a burning bush because the Holy Spirit is not external to you. But a burning bush is not what any of us needs. What we need is a way out of our pain. And for that, all we have to do is be willing to say, "Maybe I am wrong" and ask Jesus or the Holy Spirit in our mind to hold our hand and simply watch our pain with us without judgment. In so doing, we will see that though pain can feel crushingly real; even in the midst of it, there is source of love, strength, and peace to which we can turn. That is all we need to believe. And what could be more comforting than that?

So, let yourself be comforted -- knowledge and understanding will follow.

Q #1024: I have a question about Helen Schucman. I have noticed a lot of negative comments made about her final years. And the implication being that she died with an unhealed mind. And to me it seems that there is no way anyone could accurately determine what was going on in her mind, as we always judge by external appearances. And *A Course in Miracles* does tell us: "Nothing so blinding as perception of form" (T.22.III.6:7). Could you address this issue, and give your own feelings on this?

A: Yes, it is not usually a good idea to make judgments about anyone -- including oneself -- based on form or external appearances. We really don't know our own or another's path or where one is on it. A very moving account of Helen's final months and days appears in Ken Wapnick's *Absence from Felicity*, Chapter 18 "Helen's Final Months and Requiem." As he did for the last eight years of her life, Ken spent considerable time each day with Helen and her husband Louis during her final days. Ken knew her well -- especially the internal conflict between what she herself described as Heaven and Helen, and beyond even that dimension, her trans-human priestess Self. That priestess Self is the key to understanding everything else about her life. Ken thus states, "And yet even though it did not *appear* to be so, I was certain that at the actual moment of her death Helen finally reached a peaceful resolution to her lifelong conflict with God" (p.471). He was with Louis when the call came from the hospital telling them that Helen had died. "We returned to the hospital, and Helen was still in her bed. Her face had a remarkably quiet expression of peace, so different from the tortured disquiet we had grown so accustomed to seeing these many months. I suddenly recalled what Helen had shared with me on several occasions, a thought that always brought her great comfort. Jesus had told her that when she died, he would come for her personally. Who can really know what was in her mind in those closing instants? Yet her peaceful face was unmistakable, and spoke convincingly for an experience of knowing, at the very end, that her beloved Jesus had indeed kept his promise, as she had kept hers. The priestess had returned home" (pp. 471, 472).

Helen never thought of herself as a model to be emulated by other people. It made her most uncomfortable -- to put it mildly -- when people approached her in that light. She was never really a student of the Course -- she knew it from within, as Ken has observed. She always directed people to their own inner guidance as their main source of strength. And that is Jesus' emphasis throughout his teachings as well. We can decide right here and now in this present instant to accept the Atonement. Nothing and no one outside us can deter us unless we want it so. In that sense, it should make no difference whether Helen got past her ego or not. Jesus tells us that "**our success in transcending the ego is guaranteed by God . . .**" (T.8.V.4:4). The ego would seize any opportunity to invalidate anything that has the potential to expose its lies and deceptions. What holds us back is not Helen's or

anyone else's seeming failure, but our own fear of the power of our minds to accept full responsibility for our condition of separation, and then to correct our mistaken decision and return home to God. What other people do or do not do should not influence one's own spiritual advancement.

Q #1025: I have been working with *A Course in Miracles* for 10 years now. Why is it that I find myself more hateful towards more people that I was ever aware of being before? I totally understand that all my brothers and I are one and that it is not on the level of the body. The more I understand this concept the more I find fault and people generally seem so pitiful in a disgusting way to me. It was a lot easier when I thought I was so kind and loving towards others. I give it to the Holy Spirit for transformation and ask to see this as Jesus does, but some days I have to do that many times and it doesn't seem to be improving as time goes by.

A: It sounds like you have achieved two of the workbook's most important goals: paying attention to the mind, and awareness of the attack thoughts that are covered over with layers of "niceness." This is no small accomplishment, however disconcerting it may be. Your study of the Course is paying off since you are no longer deceived by the "loveliness" of the ego's disguise. The Holy Spirit's thought system, as put forth in the Course, has the ego turned inside out. It is not easy to become aware of the hateful feelings that hide behind the socially acceptable and politically correct behavior the world requires. What appeared to be kind and loving in the past has been exposed as an attack. Such it is, simply because it is based on the perception of difference that emanates from belief that the separation is real, which is an attack on the Sonship by obliterating from awareness the oneness God created. Becoming aware of this attack is a very important step on the journey back to the mind that can choose against separation, just as it chose in favor of it. This is how we will find our way out of the ego's insanity to return to our home with God.

So, you are heading in the right direction. Looking at your predicament in this light and without judgment will lessen the guilt that elicits the negative judgments towards others. Thus, what appears to be the descent into the darkness of negative feelings is actually an ascent out of the ego's mire. The important thing is not to judge yourself, but to acknowledge that what the Course reveals about the ego is true. By the same token, what it tells us about the memory of love in the right mind is also true. Therein lies our hope.

Although it may seem to be quite powerful, the ego's hatefulness is not real. It is made up as a defense against the love that lies buried beneath it. Thus, it is fear of love that has brought forth awareness of the hateful feelings toward others. This can only mean that on some level you have acknowledged the love, otherwise you would not defend against it. Jesus reveals the ego's true fear when he tells us: **"You do not like it, but it is not your desire to attack that really frightens you. You are not seriously disturbed by your hostility. You keep it hidden because you are more afraid of what [love] it covers (T.13.III.1:6,7,8).** If the viciousness of the ego's defense strategy is kept hidden behind the "niceness" of its deceptive ploys, it will never be brought to the healing light of forgiveness. Allowing yourself to see the hateful judgments brings the truth that much closer. In fact, looking at them without judgment is how to give them to the Holy Spirit, Who sees them as the projection of guilt for mistakenly choosing to take the thought of separation seriously. The ego, on the other hand, sees them as sinful, and relishes both the guilt and the hatred as proof that God's Son is no longer one with Him and the world is real. This is the Course's explanation for the feelings you describe. The next step is willingness to accept that this is what is going on, and that the feelings of disgust have nothing to do with the "pitiful" people out there.

Thus, whenever you become aware of the judgments against others, all that is required is the simple acknowledgment that you chose the guilt of hostile feelings because you are afraid of love. If you do not judge yourself, the intensity of the feelings subsides. Little by little, the air is let out of the ego's inflated guilt balloon and it eventually goes flat. It can then be seen as **"a frightened mouse that would attack the universe" (T.22.V.4:3)**, not a roaring lion to be feared. Therefore you are not more hateful since you

have been studying the Course, you have simply tuned in to the roaring mouse. If you learn not to take it seriously it will grow weary and cease to roar. This will lessen guilt, which in turn will diminish the hateful feelings because they come from guilt. One of the most loving things we can do for one another is to acknowledge our mind as the true source of our judgments, and not the perceived "pitifulness" of others. Since this includes everyone, no one will be excluded from the true kindness of the non-judgment that follows. This, more than any of the false sweetness of the ego, is what we all truly need and long for.

Q #1026: "Your ego is trying to convince you that it is real and I am not, because if I am real, I am no more real than you are" (T.4.IV.10.8). Would you comment on this sentence? It confuses me. I am not sure what Jesus is saying here.

A: There are two parts to this statement. The first part -- "The ego is trying to convince you that it is real and I am not" -- is what we would expect of the ego, that it would try to convince us that separation, which the ego symbolizes, is reality, and oneness, which Jesus symbolizes, is not. The purpose of *A Course in Miracles* is to lead us to accept the Atonement for ourselves, which means that we come to recognize that the separation never happened. So if Jesus, as the symbol of oneness, is real, then the ego is not. Since the ego's only purpose is self-preservation, regardless of the truth, it must make every effort to persuade us that the Jesus of the Course is not real.

The second part of the statement -- "because if I am real, I am no more real than you are" -- is another way of saying that if Jesus is real, we are all the same, and ultimately we are all one. The ego, confronted with the reality of Jesus, can only hope to persuade us that he is very different from us -- God's only Son, divine, innocent while we are guilty, existing before us through all of eternity. If the Jesus the ego is willing for us to embrace were real, the ego could remain in business, for the separation would be confirmed. That is what has made Christianity and its central figure Jesus so popular across the centuries -- they affirm the reality of separation and differences and sin, as well as attack and victimization.

But the Course's message is that we are all the same because we are all one. There are no differences that mean anything. If the Jesus who is like us is real and exists, then the ego and all its perceived differences are meaningless. And sin and guilt are nothing but idle fantasies with no effects. And all of this, to the ego, is blasphemous.

Q #1027: I have a compulsion to make to-do lists and set goals. Is this an ego thing? How do I let go of it? I feel like I'm supposed to surrender my will and life over to the Holy Spirit and let Him run the show, but every time I try, I end up back making lists. I feel like I'm doing something wrong and it's creating a lot of tension in my life.

A: Fortunately, nowhere in *A Course in Miracles* does it say you cannot make to-do lists. Nor does it tell us to change our behavior or personality traits in any way. The Holy Spirit has indeed come to help us, but He will not pay the bills, wash the dishes or clean the garage. Putting ourselves under the Holy Spirit's guidance means becoming mindful of the thoughts of judgment about ourselves and others that continually re-cycle the guilt in the mind for *not* choosing the Holy Spirit. The true source of tension is in the split mind that is in conflict between choosing the ego and the Holy Spirit. That is the real problem. The first thing on the Holy Spirit's list is to see the problem where it is (in the mind), not where it has been projected (making or not making lists).

As long as we believe the world is real, there is a place for making lists and setting goals. Things need to be done. Jesus acknowledges this in *The Song of Prayer*: **There are decisions to make here, and they must be made whether they be illusions or not (S.1.I.2:4)** The important question to ask is with whom

the decisions are made (**See: Rules for Decision T.30.I**) . Guided by the ego, making lists and setting goals are activities driven by compulsion and need. The underlying belief is that salvation lies in the security of having lists and accomplishing tasks, and peace is lost when task goals are not set and met. They are thus used as attacks against peace. The Holy Spirit's goal is the healing of the mind, and the only task needed to achieve this goal is forgiveness. His help is not directed toward behavior of any kind, but with the mind that chooses to believe that certain behaviors are valuable and then judges that decision as sinful. Lists cannot keep you from Heaven any more than they can get you in, unless, of course, returning to Heaven is on the list. In that case, the work to be done is the practice of forgiveness, which begins with awareness of the judgments against oneself and others. Looking at these judgments with the Holy Spirit means seeing that their true purpose is to keep Him away. That is how we beat the ego at its own game, so to speak, and invite the Holy Spirit to be in charge. It is a process of learning to see everything, from making lists to accomplishing the tasks on the lists, as opportunities for forgiveness. If that is at the top of the list, everything will serve the Holy Spirit's purpose of healing, thereby putting Him in charge, rather than the ego.

Q #1028: Why is this so hard? Once we make a decision to "find" God, why can't He make it more simple to understand or grasp? I can't help think if God loves us like I believe He does, why all this? I love my children and I would never put them through this. I have been on this journey going on 8 years, and just when I think I finally got it, my whole world crashes in and I have to start all over again.

A: Many people feel the same way you do about their spiritual journey. And we agree with you that God would never subject His children to any kind of misery. That is exactly what the Course teaches. The true God only loves His Children and shares totally with Them all that He is. Any experience of feeling separate from Him must therefore be illusory. Unlike other spiritualities and most religions of the world, *A Course in Miracles* teaches that the true God has nothing to do with the world of separation in which we appear to live. Beseeching God's help and then trying to rationalize His apparent non-response to our plea rests on entirely false premises. It is a very difficult lesson to learn, but the essence of the Course's teaching is that it is only our own choice to be apart from God that is the cause of our lack of peace. Our resistance to learning this is far greater than we realize; but that is the source of our pain and what seems to make this such a difficult path.

So our prayer to find God should really be addressed to ourselves; and what that means is that we would become more vigilant for the ways in which we are expressing the largely unconscious decision to prefer our existence as individuals with a special, autonomous identity rather than be the non-specific Self that God created at one with Him. This is what being a student of the Course entails. The lessons and exercises in the workbook are geared toward training us to see that our outer world is a reflection of this inner world of opposition to God's Will. The content of our wrong minds gets projected so that we wind up experiencing conflict, guilt, fear, victimization, despair, etc., and always fixing blame somewhere. But if we consistently choose against the ego, we will eventually be at peace regardless of the conditions in the external world. That is the ideal toward which we strive.

Jesus assures us so many times in the Course that we cannot fail in this effort, for we are simply undoing a false belief system, and ultimately something that never truly happened in the first place. He tells us, for example: **"The outcome is as certain as God" (T.2.III.3:10; T.4.II.5:8) ; "Our success in transcending the ego is guaranteed by God and I share this confidence for both of us and all of us" (T.8.V.4:4) .** So you want to try to be more patient with yourself, accepting that your fear of being without your ego must still be too great; but that as you practice seeing your interests as the same as everyone else's, this fear will gradually subside. Then the peace of God abiding in your mind will return to your conscious awareness.

Q #1029: In *A Course in Miracles* Jesus says: "Make no one fearful, for his guilt is yours" (T.13.IX.2:2). I am a school teacher and I hate to say it but the only way that I can keep my classroom full of middle-school students orderly at times is to indeed make them fearful. For example, if my students do not fear that I will lower their grade or call their parent if they misbehave, they will have no motivation to behave as I need them to in class. How do I reconcile your oft-stated suggestion to not forget to be "normal" with Jesus' statement that I quoted above about not making others fearful? I see no other practical way to control my classroom at times but to use fear. I guess what I am really asking is: Can we lovingly be guided to use fear?

A: You're suffering from another one of those *form versus content* confusions so common to Course in Miracles students! (You may wish to look at Questions #371, #452, #484 and #584 for further discussion of issues related to the ones you raise here.) First of all, to answer your closing question, we will *never* be lovingly guided to use fear as a way to change or control anyone for any purpose -- not even 12- and 13-year old brats! For fear is the emotion/thought that is triggered and reinforced by our belief in our guilt (**T.19.IV.A.10:1,2,3,4**) , which says we are deserving of punishment (**T.26.VII.3:1; W.pII.259.1:4**) , and Jesus' main purpose in the Course is to help us undo our guilt and all its various expressions. So any intervention or manipulation intended to reinforce guilt and fear to achieve a specific end could never have originated from the right mind.

Now that is not to say that we would never be lovingly guided to be firm or use discipline or the possibility of negative consequences in our dealings with others, especially with children and adolescents. And this brings us back to the central issue in the Course of purpose, which is always the determiner of the content of any of our decisions and subsequent actions. If our purpose is to see others as responsible for how we feel, then we have chosen to reinforce our own belief in separation, and we have turned to the ego as our teacher in the situation. But if our purpose is to remember that we all share the same interests, and acting out is only ever a call at a deeper level for the love that we all long to experience, then we have chosen to listen to the Holy Spirit as our guide.

So how would this look in your classroom situation? If you are aware of some degree of anger towards your students for their misbehaving and feel a need to threaten them and punish them to get them to do what you want them to do, you can be certain that your ego is in charge. But if you simply recognize that they are acting their age and that they need guidelines and limits, as well as consequences for crossing those limits, in order to be able to benefit individually and as a group from their learning environment, that could very likely be a right-minded perspective. At the level of form, you may do and say the same thing to your students as you would when your ego is calling the shots, but your intent or purpose would be different.

To set limits from a right-minded perspective, you must first be very honest with yourself about any ego-based feelings you have towards the class as a whole or towards any individual student or students. If you are aware of anger or even mild annoyance or irritation, any action against your students that you take in response to those feelings will be coming from your ego. And so you are the one in need of help. Your first step then would be to recognize that your upset has nothing to do with how your students are behaving or misbehaving. Anger is *never* a reaction to anything external, regardless of how justified it may seem (**T.30.VI.1:1,2; M.20.3:3,4**) , but always represents a projection of our own unresolved internal conflict over the separation (**T.6.in.1:2,3,4,5,6,7**) . This is perhaps the most difficult step in the correction process to accept, given the value accorded to projection as a defense within our ego thought system.

But once you can recognize and accept that your reactions are not to your students but to your own guilt, you can withdraw the projection from your students and begin to address the real issue in your mind. And that simply involves acknowledging that the anger has been a defense against accepting responsibility for how you feel, but that now you are willing to acknowledge that you are the one who decides how you will feel and react.

Your next step simply involves taking the inner guilt that is behind your anger to Jesus and looking with him at its insubstantial nature (**T.18.IX.5:2,3,4; 6; 8**) . Our guilt does not seem like nothing to us, and that

is why joining with Jesus, who symbolizes the memory of oneness for us -- which means he is the reminder that the separation and guilt are not real -- is so essential to the looking process. When we allow ourselves to take that step, our anger and guilt disappear. It is at this point that you can then return your attention to your students, knowing more clearly what is the kindest, most loving way to keep or bring the class under control, since you no longer have any anger invested in the situation. It may involve setting limits, or you may also at times find that there could be a different way of structuring the class or framing the lesson that more readily elicits your students' participation and cooperation. And a different overall approach may evolve over time, as you are able to release your own obstacles to seeing more clearly.

And should your guidance be to set some limits with consequences for your students, it may be helpful to know that you are not responsible for your students' reactions. Should they experience fear at the possible outcomes for crossing the boundaries you establish, their fear, much like your anger, is not the result of the external limits you have set, but rather is a projection of their own unresolved guilt. Fear after all need not be the only reason for respecting the limits, and you can set clear limits without intending to arouse guilt and fear, if you have done your part first to recognize and release your own ego investments in the situation .

Q #1030: I've stopped thinking about inconclusive questions that we cannot answer with our minds. One thing that did it for me is that I realize that we find a witness to our own innocence, not in ego but as in Self. And most of all, I read *A Course in Miracles* as a prime source of our understanding/perception, until we arrive with knowledge which just IS. Herein lies forgiveness of the world. What do you think?

A: Yes, the process is easy in this sense. We first choose to identify with either the hatred of the ego in our wrong minds or the love of Jesus or the Holy Spirit in our right minds. Then our experience of the outer world will reflect this experience of our inner world. It is a significant step forward to realize that our internal experiences are never anything other than expressions of the choice we have first made in our minds. Our unfortunate mistake has been to take for granted that our experiences are caused by what happens externally, and so our lives have been geared toward changing the world so that we may be happier and more peaceful.

In **"The Savior's Vision"** Jesus tells us: **"For holiness is seen through holy eyes that look upon the innocence within, and thus expect to see it everywhere. And so they call it forth in everyone they look upon, that he may be what they expect of him. This is the savior's vision; that he see his innocence in all he looks upon, and see his own salvation everywhere"** (T.31.VII.11:3,4,5) . The world is thus forgiven, because we no longer see it as the cause of our problems and lack of peace. This is what is meant when Jesus says in this same section in the text, **"The savior's vision is as innocent of what your brother is as it is free of any judgment made upon yourself. It sees no past in anyone at all"** (T.31.VII.13:1) . When you identify with your innocence (the Atonement principle), you know that everyone else is included in that innocence, as God's Son is one; and therefore you see past all the differentiating forms that would tempt us to think otherwise. The varied conflicts and problems may continue in the world, but you would have released them from all responsibility for *your* internal condition. And you may be participating in resolving some of those problems, but you would be doing so solely as a means of having that vision of innocence encompass everyone, without exception.

Q #1031: This question is with reference to Question #724. Many religious beliefs and spiritual paths say that God created this world or constantly creates it through us. The Course says otherwise, and I think this is what distinguishes it from other belief systems. However, if you say that we cannot think apart from God, then the "little" things we witness in this world must also be part of, not just us as dreaming Sons of God, but also of God Himself, from Whom we never separated. So one could be tempted to say that the world is made of (part of) God having fallen asleep rather than "only" the sleeping Son of God. Would it

be apt to say that God is "the canvas" upon which all the playings and going-ons of the world take place? A kind of background picture that never changes? God is Love, and then we cease to speak?

A: If the world, in any sense, were part of God, the world would be real. And the Course states unequivocally that it is not real: **"There is no world! This is the central thought the course attempts to teach (W.pl.132.6:2,3)** . The teachings of *A Course in Miracles* are presented on two levels. Level One teachings state the absolute truth: The world of Heaven alone is real -- God, Christ, and His creations; all else is illusory and not real -- anything with limits, which includes everything material, temporal, and spatial. We think we are real as bodies existing in a physical world, so Jesus speaks to us on that level (Level Two), but only so that he can help us realize that our identity as individual selves is part of a delusional thought system intended to keep the truth about us concealed. God would not be God if a delusional system were in any way part of Him or even known by Him; and certainly He would not be perfect as God if part of Him fell asleep.

To say that "we cannot think apart from God" is to say that our reality as Christ alone is real, and therefore any thoughts we seem to have as autonomous individuals cannot be our real thoughts. This is the point of two lessons in the workbook: **"My mind is part of God's. I am very holy" (W.pl.35)** and **"God is the Mind with which I think" (W.pl.45)** , where Jesus speaks to us on Level One: **"There is no relationship between what is real and what you think is real. Nothing that you think are your real thoughts resemble your real thoughts in any respect. Nothing that you think you see bears any resemblance to what vision will show you" (W.pl.45.1:3,4,5)** . The "you" Jesus is addressing is the decision-making aspect in our minds that has denied our true Identity and made up another identity as an individual self in this world. In the exercises, therefore, Jesus helps us get back to that decision-making power of our minds so that we would realize another choice is available to us -- we can choose to identify with our right minds where the Holy Spirit holds for us the memory of our true Identity. Thus, our thoughts right now can be reflections of the ego's thought system of separation or the Holy Spirit's thought system of oneness. That distinction reflects the Level Two teachings in the Course. When we no longer choose thoughts of separation, which means we give no credence to the differences in form among us, our minds will be one with the Holy Spirit's and then our thoughts will reflect only the perfect Oneness of God's Love. In sum, then, in truth we cannot think apart from God, because there is no "we" apart from God. If we think we are apart from God, then our thoughts are not real thoughts.

Q #1032: Would the following concept be consistent with the teachings of *A Course in Miracles*? : "We live in the spirit; mind is the builder; and the physical is the result"?

A: Not exactly. The mind that knows itself as spirit lives in God, it would not, therefore, build a world to escape to. Because only the mind is real **(T.6.V.A.3:2)** , and the world is but an hallucination **(T.20.VIII.7:3)**, they cannot be set equally in the sequence. It is more accurate to say that the mind hallucinates the world into awareness in order to defend its choice for the ego. Thus, the statement could read: we are Mind/spirit, the mind chooses against its identity as Mind/ spirit, forgets its choice, projects the guilt outside of itself, and experiences an illusory world that it then uses to prove it is not a mind. Therein lies the insanity of the ego thought system. Once the mind believes this thought system is real, its only activity is choosing between it and the thought system of the Holy Spirit. When the split mind chooses separation, guilt for that choice is projected out resulting in the illusion of the physical world. Thus, the mind "builds" only in the sense that the world is the effect of the mind's projection of guilt. It then identifies with the body in which it thinks it lives, forgetting that it is a mind.

When the mind chooses the Holy Spirit, it identifies with the part that knows the separation is not real. This choice is then extended and experienced in the world as right- minded thinking. When the mind chooses *only* the Holy Spirit, it will be completely healed and cease to perceive anything outside of itself. It then lives in the spirit, aware only of its oneness with God. That is how the world disappears from awareness **(C.4.4)** .

In reality, none of this is true because the separation never happened (**T.6.II.10:7**) . There is no separated mind, no world (**W.pl.132.6:2**) , nothing to build. While we choose to believe the separation is real, the world will remain real in our perception. Belief in separation and belief in the world go hand in hand as cause and effect. Each depends on the other for its seeming existence. The goal of the Course is to teach us to see the world as the projection of the mind, and to replace the mindlessness of the body with the mindfulness of paying attention to the thoughts of separation that fill our days with judgment. Looking at these thoughts with willingness to let the Holy Spirit transform them is the only useful purpose for the world we perceive. It is the way we live in the spirit until we return to our true life in the spirit of God.

Q #1033: Music, especially classical music, is an aspect of that state I like to think of as pertaining to my right mind. Jesus uses such terms as a song of thankfulness, praise, union, gratitude, Heaven; and in "The Forgotten Song" (T.21.I) there is a particularly lovely analogy to help us understand the beauty of what we have forgotten. Sometimes I wonder if there is some subtle reference in *A Course in Miracles* to a particular type of music or composer or work that would reflect these melodies to which he refers as we dream our dream of beautiful music here.

A: It is always the content of what Jesus is saying that he is trying to draw us into, never the form. Form is always specific and even though we would love for him to deal with specifics, that really would not be in our best interests. Our record with specifics is not very impressive, when you think about it. Isn't it true that if he gave us specific musical references we would immediately get into comparisons, debates, etc., and just stay stuck on that level? Then, too, different forms appeal to different people; one is not better or more inspirational than another. One person may have an instant of selfless joining while listening to a Neil Simon song and not relate at all to Beethoven's "Ode to Joy." So form can never be prescribed universally. Love may guide one person one way and another person in a completely different way.

The real reason Jesus does not get into specifics, however, is that he does not recognize them as meaningful. Specifics and form always pertain to the body, whereas content pertains to the mind. The Shakespearian meter of the Course's form makes for lovely reading, but it has nothing to do with the content -- it could have been expressed in any number of other forms. Jesus reminds us in "**The Forgotten Song**" that "**the notes are nothing**" (**T.21.I.7:1**). This is consistent with his pattern of bringing us ever closer to the essence of love -- oneness -- that transcends anything in this world of form. But if a certain type of music or certain composers or pieces inspire you and help you to be more peaceful, then it would be foolish not to enjoy listening to them. Just try to relate to the content, which in some way should remind you of the ego-less Presence within you that lovingly embraces everyone, without exception.

Q #1034: Why would God create a Son that is capable of having "unhappy dreams?" Does this have something to do with God's desire that His Son have a "free will?" "Never approach the holy instant after you have tried to remove all fear and hatred from your mind. That is *its* function. Never attempt to overlook your guilt before you ask the Holy Spirit's help. That is *His* function. Your part is only to offer Him a little willingness to let Him remove all fear and hatred, and to be forgiven" (T.18.V.2:1,2,3,4,5) Does this mean that we do not need to forgive ourselves before we approach the holy instant and that we do not need to forgive ourselves before we ask the Holy Spirit's help? Does this mean that all we need to do is open ourselves a little bit with our "little willingness" and the Holy Spirit will take care of the rest. That the Holy Spirit will then teach us how to forgive ourselves and will then teach us how to change our fearful dreams to "happy dreams" on the way to awakening?

A: The first part of your question is asked by just about every student of *A Course in Miracles* . It is founded on a belief system that tells us dreams are real, that they have an unhappy effect on the dreamer, and that God is to blame for this miserable state of affairs. This belief system is shared by all the Sonship once the thought of separation is taken seriously. It rests on the declaration that the separation

did indeed occur and has had disastrous effects. Furthermore, God is not only responsible for this, He won't do anything about it. Herein lies the ego's woeful tale of separation. Once the mind chooses to believe that separation is possible, the creative power that it shares with its Source is expressed in the ability to choose between separation and Oneness. However, choosing between what is real (oneness) and what is not real (separation) is not a real choice. It is the denial of one and acceptance of the other. Denial of truth is what the Course calls a misuse of the mind's creative power, while free will is defined as the choice for truth/denial of error: **"Denial of error is a strong defense of truth, but denial of truth results in miscreation, the projections of the ego. In the service of the right mind the denial of error frees the mind, and re-establishes the freedom of the will. When the will is really free it cannot miscreate, because it recognizes only truth"** (T.2II.2:5,6,7). Thus, choosing the ego's unhappy dream is the denial of free will.

Since **"God does not know of separation"** (P.2.VII.1:11), He is unaware of the Son's "choice" or of any will that is not the Will He shares with him. Neither can we speak of God as desiring anything for His Son, for desire implies need or some sense of lack. In the non-dualistic state of perfect oneness that God shares with His Son, there is no need or lack of any kind. He knows only perfect Oneness, perfect Love, one Will shared with His Son. This is a unitive state that is impossible to understand from within the dream of duality. While we still believe the separation is possible, the Course meets us where we think we are by describing our seeming separated condition as a dream the Son has while he remains at home with His Father (T.13.VII.17:7), Who is unaware of the nightmarish escapades and adventures of the dream.

You are absolutely right, all that is required of us is willingness. In fact, the passage you quote is saying that we should not do anything except *be willing*. We cannot forgive ourselves, nor remove the guilt, fear, and hatred from our minds. What we can do is become aware of our need for forgiveness by being willing to look at our judgments as projections of guilt for having chosen separation. The choice is forgotten until we see the judgments. The miracle of forgiveness begins with willingness to recognize them as the projections they are, rather than justify them by shifting blame outside the mind and on to external agents. That is enough for us to do because in itself it is not as easy as it may seem. The world is a fertile battleground, bombarding us with "legitimate" external reasons for lack of peace. It is no small thing to learn to accept that nothing external to the mind can take peace away. That is probably why Jesus thought "miracle" was a good word for his teaching on forgiveness. When we do our part, the rest follows without further effort. Trying to do anything more, simply means we have put ourselves in charge of the Atonement, which ensures that we will not accept it. In this regard it is always helpful to remember the one task we have been given: **"Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all of the barriers within yourself that you have built against it"** (T.16.IV.6:1).

Q #1035: Lately I've been observing my "sleeping dreams" versus "waking dreams" from the point of view of *A Course in Miracles* and my understanding of "dreaming" has deepened a bit. Although not always, it sometimes helps me to put "the problems in this world" in the right perspective. In Kenneth Wapnick's "Cause and Effect" first tape, he mentions this line: "A dream is a wish fulfilled." Could you please elaborate?

A: A significant part of Freud's work is based on his theory that the dreams we have at night are fulfillments of wishes -- that we hold secret wishes in our minds which then manifest in our nocturnal dreams. Jesus is saying the same thing, except that he generalizes this to include our entire lives, as well as the "life" of the entire physical universe. Thus, we **"are at home in God, dreaming of exile but perfectly capable of awakening to reality"** (T.10.I.2:1). Our lives in this world are parts of this dream of being separate from God. This is illusory, of course, as separating from Infinity and Perfection is impossible; but since we think we are really alive in this very real world, Jesus uses the analogy of the dream to help us return to our original, unchanged state as one with our Source. He teaches us how to become "lucid dreamers" -- a gradual process of bringing back into our awareness the power of our minds

to decide to awaken from this dream of separation or to stay asleep, oblivious to the fact that we are the dreamers of our own dreams.

What keeps us from awakening, however, is our secret wish to keep our individual existence but to project blame for it onto something or someone else. This is the *cause* of our feeling victimized and unfairly treated in our lives (the effect). It is an absolutely bizarre strategy, but our secret wish is fulfilled within the dream every time we feel we are suffering unjustifiably at the hands of another. Because we keep this wish buried, it appears as if we are innocent victims; but we are anything but innocent. Contrary to our experience, the world is not the cause of our misery and problems. **“Perception is a result and not a cause” (T.21.in.1:8)** . The world with its potential for inflicting suffering and the bodies within the world that can be so afflicted are both the fulfillment of the mind's secret wish to have an existence of its own but to make it appear that it is not responsible for it. Correcting this delusion is the objective of Jesus' curriculum in his course. But the effectiveness of this correction rests on our willingness to question the validity of our perceptions about ourselves and the world. We must get to the point where we are open to viewing ourselves and everyone else in the world -- and the very world itself -- as figures in a dream.

For further study, we refer you to some sections in the text that discuss these ideas: **“The Basis of the Dream” (T.18.II); “The Dreamer of the Dream” (T.27.VII); “The ‘Hero’ of the Dream” (T.27.VIII)** .

Q #1036: I have only been studying *A Course in Miracles* for six months but previously have read David Hawkins, Ken Wilbur, and studied some things on quantum physics. Before I came to *A Course in Miracles* , I was having strong feelings of love for everything from bugs to trees to people. I saw their forms as cute, implying childlike innocence. It wasn't as if I was denying their propensity for attack, but I found people responding to me with kindness and friendliness so I didn't see this side to them. You stated in a tape that, in the ego world, we created children to appear innocent so that the blame can be projected outward. (I hope I'm interpreting you correctly here). Now, I'm confused on how to feel love toward people and animals. Am I loving their form? Am I able to see spirit in form even if form doesn't exist and is just a projection? Where do I direct the intense feelings of love that sometimes wash over me?

A: If these intense feelings of love embrace everything and everyone and exclude nothing and no one, then they are coming from the part of your mind that remembers the oneness of God's Son, which transcends form. Spirit is never in form, as form is inherently illusory. Form issued from the separated Son's mind as a means of obliterating any awareness of oneness, thereby validating his existence as separate from God. Jesus describes this mistake as **“the substitution of illusion for truth; of fragmentation for wholeness. It 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” (T.18.I.4:2,3)** . Bodies, with their senses, were made to perceive only form, and so we cannot rely on them to put us in touch with the truth. We can turn inward to our minds, however, where we can choose to regard everything of form as symbols that can either reinforce our belief in the reality of separation or help us undo that belief. In other words, our focus shifts from the forms themselves to the *purpose* they serve - the purpose of the ego or the purpose of the Holy Spirit. This is the shift from form to the content in our minds, which is the function of the miracle. Even though, on one level, all form represents an attack on the perfect formlessness of reality -- **“the body is a limit on love . . . it was made to limit the unlimited” (T.18.VIII.2:2,3)** -- on another level, **“love does not condemn it and can use it lovingly, respecting what the Son of God has made and using it to save him from illusion” (T.18.VI.4:8)** . This is the gentle way of the Course and of Jesus, the teacher in our minds to whom we can turn for help in making this shift.

Lesson 151 in the workbook is especially helpful in contrasting these two ways of perceiving. It helps us see how we have gotten ourselves stuck by using our senses as the chief means of judging what is real and true and lovable, and why we did that. Then Jesus teaches us to turn to the Holy Spirit within, Who

will help us perceive truly, a process that will gradually **“bridge the gap between illusions and the truth” (W.pl.151.9:7)** . Near the end of this journey, as we advance spiritually, our perception will be one with the Holy Spirit's, Who sees everyone as either expressing love or calling for it. In the earlier stages of our spiritual growth, Jesus tells us that we **“cannot safely make this division, for . . . [we] are much too bound to form, and not to content” (T.14.X.7:2,3)** . Learning to thus distinguish between form and content is an essential step in the process of restoring to our awareness our true Identity as God's one Son. So your intense feelings of love can be directed inward to the content in your right mind, where you go beyond form and differences to the love that reflects the perfect Oneness of God's Love.

Q #1037: Many years ago I experienced what I believe to be a "sampling" of God's Love. It was so overwhelming that it defies description. Since that time, I have been reviewing my life and experiencing and reevaluating every relationship, both painful and joyful. I understand so much, and still I am longing for that "feeling" again. I have a difficult time sharing my journey back to Heaven with those I come in contact with. Some believe me, but doubt my sanity; some ignore me, some want to believe me but are afraid of change; many misunderstand me and my intentions. I feel like Jesus did during his time. Wasn't he alone and frustrated? How do I help heal all our wounds when others don't seem to want any help and resent any implication that they need help?

A: The way you can be most helpful to others in your life is to remain vigilant in your own mind for anything that keeps them separate from you, and then to trust that when they are ready they will let go of their egos and accept back into their awareness their true Identity. It could be that you are reinforcing the differences between you and your friends by focusing on their “wounds,” instead of identifying with the power of their minds to choose their egos, and respecting that choice. Identifying with the power of their minds and respecting their choice to choose their egos is an effective way of joining with them in your mind, as that would reflect your own process, and then the differences between you would fade away. In that instant of joining, love would simply flow through you and take the form that is most helpful right then. It is not necessary to explicitly call attention to other people's wounds. Most people would not take kindly to that. When you are beyond your ego, you would know that they are as well: **“When I am healed, I am not healed alone” (W.pl.137)** .

Jesus was not frustrated, nor did he ever feel he was alone -- those are effects of believing you are a body, and Jesus knew he was not a body, even though everyone related to him that way. The major lesson he was teaching, and still is, is that nothing happened in reality to separate us from our Father; we only believed something happened. So by focusing on people's wounds and then trying to heal them, we would be doing exactly what he wants us to avoid doing: *making the error real* . In the Course he uses the term *unhealed healers* for those who see error as real and then set out to correct it **(T.9.V)** . Just as he instructed Helen, the scribe of *A Course in Miracles* , he urges us not to decide on our own who needs healing and how to go about it, but rather to ask him which miracles we are to perform. If our own minds are not healed -- for just an instant of being beyond our egos -- our perception will be distorted, and we will not be clear and clean channels through which his healing love can flow.

Jesus stood for the Alternative **(M.5.III.2:6)** . He reminded others -- just by his presence -- of their wholeness and innocence. His non-judgmental presence was enough; words were not necessary, and if there were words, as there are in this course, they would simply be the form that love takes for those too fearful of love's direct, formless presence. He asks us to do that with the people in our lives -- just be the loving, non-judgmental presence that stands for the Alternative. Remember Jesus' description of *forgiveness* : **“Forgiveness . . . is still, and quietly does nothing. . . . It merely looks, and waits, and judges not” (W.pll.4:1,3)** .

Q #1038: At the beginning of *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus talks about mind and spirit. Could you please explain, as I always thought it was mind...but either wrong mind or right mind.

A: The terms Mind and spirit refer to the true identity of God's Son, and are used in contrast to the body identity of the ego thought system. Though both terms are contrasted to the body, there is a slight distinction between them as they are used in the Course: **"Whatever is true (our identity as spirit) is eternal, and cannot change or be changed. Spirit is therefore unalterable because it is already perfect, but the mind can elect what it chooses to serve" (T.1.V.5:1,2).** Thus, spirit refers to our true identity as God's one Son, which is changeless, and remains unaltered by the mind's seeming escapade into the insanity of separation. In truth, God's Son, whose only reality is spirit (T.1.III.5:5), cannot split off and be separate from his Source (T.7.V.6:15).

The term mind, however, is used to help us understand the seeming separation. We are told that a **"tiny, mad, idea" (T.27.VIII.6:2)** entered the mind of the Sonship, and was taken seriously. When the mind chose to believe that separation was possible, it split into a right mind, a wrong mind, and the power to choose between them. This is the Course's explanation of an event that never occurred (M.2.2), in which we believe we can have an identity (body) other than the one given us by God. One of the important goals of the Course is to teach us that we are mind/spirit, and that neither is found in the body. That is why the most frequently repeated phrase in the Course is: **"I am not a body" (W.84.1:4).** Clearly, Jesus is making a point. In fact, the practice of forgiveness rests on learning to see every experience as the reflection of the mind's choice to believe in the ego's separation (wrong mind) or the Holy Spirit's oneness (right mind). It is only in practicing forgiveness in this way that meaning is given to the terms used in the Course. Each application of the mind training we are taught in the workbook breathes life into our forgotten identity as spirit. Eventually the body will be forgotten, the mind will be healed, and only spirit will remain.

Q #1039: As a mail man, I meet the public daily, and I am in a quandary about my brother who asks me for money daily. I know there are no chance meetings. At first I perceived he needed monetary assistance. I then JUDGED that he was freeloading. Is my lesson to give all the time (he looks for 5 dollar bills) because the Son of God has it all? I finally told him I couldn't give any more because I can't afford it. I felt terrible about it for a while, until I conceded I just don't have the faith required to give like that, and knowing the One Who Knows keeps working with me. My brother stopped asking me but I know I'll come to this crossroads again.

A: Your decision to stop giving away money you can't afford to give seems to be a good one. When *A Course in Miracles* tells us we have everything, it is referring to the only need we truly have, which is our need for the Holy Spirit, Who represents the right mind. In other words, having a right mind that holds the memory of God is *everything*. It is all we truly need. Obviously, this has nothing to do with meeting physical needs, our own or someone else's. However, while we identify with the body, its needs must be met. Having our one true need met through the presence of the Holy Spirit does not mean that we have an unlimited supply of physical things, such as money. So, there is nothing wrong with using common sense in the distribution of funds, while at the same time seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit to search the minds for thoughts that reflect the choice for separation.

Whenever guilt enters awareness, it means the mind has chosen separation, regardless of the apparent external catalyst for the guilt feeling. In choosing to be separate from God, the mind decides to be author of a separate identity, thereby stealing authorship from God. The insanity of this delusion of creative power is the source of tremendous guilt that is projected out of the mind onto a situation in the dream; e.g. meeting a brother in need of financial assistance. In the ego's twisted thinking, his need is perceived as the result of his somehow having been robbed of his rightful share of earthly goods. Fundamental to the ego's thought system is the belief that in order for someone to gain, another must lose. Thus, if this brother doesn't have what I have, I must have stolen it from him. Since stealing power from God is how

the separated self came into being, whatever I have, I stole. That is why it is so common to experience guilt when confronted with those who are deemed less fortunate. Once this system is set in motion, one misperception follows another. Resentment for having been exploited by a freeloader follows the choice to give money; guilt for being selfish and unkind follows the choice not to give money. We come to this vicious circle whenever we decide to listen to the ego. You can't win on the ego's turf.

The only way out of this unwinnable situation is willingness to pay attention to the feelings and judgments that come up in any situation, seeing in them the effect of the mind's decision to be separate. What the ego ultimately goes for is the turmoil of guilt that keeps the mind rooted in the world's dilemmas, rather than the quiet peace of the right mind. Every situation can be transformed when a decision is made to choose the Holy Spirit instead of the ego. The question then becomes, to whom will I listen: the ego or the Holy Spirit? The specific behavior of giving or not giving is of no concern to the Holy Spirit. His agenda is only the content of the mind that has the power to choose to remember or forget its identity as mind. The crossroads in every situation consists in one road that leads to the guilt of the ego's thinking, and one that leads to the peace of the Holy Spirit. Whether you give or don't give, the ego's road is paved with the guilt that originates in the mind that chose the ego, not from the act of giving or withholding a hand-out. Likewise, choosing the Holy Spirit brings peace whether you give or not.

The mistake lies in thinking that the external circumstances can generate or abolish guilt, or have any effect on the mind whatsoever: “...**all external things are only shadows of a decision already made**” (P.2.IV.2:4). This fact rests on a very fundamental principle of the Course's teaching: “**Ideas leave not their source**” (T.26.VII.4:7) . That is why there are no specific guidelines for behavior in the Course. Rather, it teaches us to see everything in our lives as an opportunity to shift the focus back to the mind by becoming aware of its thoughts and judgments. That is how we begin the practice of forgiveness in every situation in which we find ourselves, which is the only meaningful thing we can offer another. What we all truly need is the healing of our minds of the thought of separation, and until our minds are healed we are all begging for forgiveness. Remembering this frees us to be guided by the Holy Spirit to give a few dollars or not, without the burden of the ego's guilt.

Q #1040: Regarding parts of Question #167: Since we are only ever "reviewing mentally what has gone by" because "this world was over long ago," what is the point of forgiveness unless through forgiveness one (any individual mind/body) can actually skip over part or all of this dream/illusion by forgiving everything all at once, if that is possible, and just really let this whole world/cosmos truly be over and done with?

And the concept of enlightenment/awakening is a conflict-maker for me because I do not understand how one can be both awake *and* asleep (this “awake in the dream” concept), because either one is awake and not dreaming or one is asleep and dreaming.

And since both Jesus and *A Course in Miracles* are also illusion/dream, which is telling the illusory student/reader that he/she doesn't really exist as anything other than a dream character in some dreamer's dream, how can one trust anything at all in this worldly experience, including Jesus and the Course? It seems to me that all dreams are unreliable since they can and do change in an instant and if we are truly just dream characters, everything that seems to happen to us isn't up to us dream characters at all.

A: Addressing your questions in the order you present them -- yes, forgiveness, also referred to in the Course as the miracle, allows us to skip over part or all of the dream. For most of us, our forgiveness in any instant is incomplete or partial and so we skip over only part of the dream. Jesus discusses this time-saving nature of the miracle a number of times very early in the text: “**The miracle is a learning device that lessens the need for time. It establishes an out-of-pattern time interval not under the usual laws of time**” (T.1.I.47:1,2) .

And a few pages later: **“The miracle minimizes the need for time. In the longitudinal or horizontal plane the recognition of the equality of the members of the Sonship appears to involve almost endless time. However, the miracle entails a sudden shift from horizontal to vertical perception. This introduces an interval from which the giver and receiver both emerge farther along in time than they would otherwise have been. The miracle thus has the unique property of abolishing time to the extent that it renders the interval of time it spans unnecessary. There is no relationship between the time a miracle takes and the time it covers. The miracle substitutes for learning that might have taken thousands of years. It does so by the underlying recognition of perfect equality of giver and receiver on which the miracle rests. The miracle shortens time by collapsing it, thus eliminating certain intervals within it. It does this, however, within the larger temporal sequence” (T.1.II.6).**

In the next chapter, Jesus elaborates further: **“Just as the separation occurred over millions of years, the Last Judgment [the “final healing”] will extend over a similarly long period, and perhaps an even longer one. Its length can, however, be greatly shortened by miracles, the device for shortening but not abolishing time” (T.2.VIII.2:5,6).**

In reality, it would be possible to let go of the whole illusion at once, a complete and total collapse of time if you will, if our fear of losing this self we believe to be ourselves were not so great. For it's not simply that “this whole world/cosmos [will be] truly over and done with” but so will this self we identify with, or any specific self we may wish to identify with, for that matter. And then, our ego self asks, who would we be? That's why Jesus assures us, **“Fear not that you will be abruptly lifted up and hurled into reality” (T.16.VI.8:1).**

I am not sure where you have drawn the conclusion that the Course says we are “awake in the dream.” Jesus does say that, **“ You are at home in God, dreaming of exile,”** but this is not the same as saying we are awake and dreaming at the same time, for he adds to that thought, **“but perfectly capable of awakening to reality” (T.10.I.2:1).** Repeatedly through the Course, Jesus contrasts the alternative states of dreaming and waking, as in the following passage: **“Could it be some dreams are kept, and others wakened from? The choice is not between which dreams to keep, but only if you want to live in dreams or to awaken from them. Thus it is the miracle does not select some dreams to leave untouched by its beneficence. You cannot dream some dreams and wake from some, for you are either sleeping or awake . And dreaming goes with only one of these (T.29.IV.1:4,5,6,7,8; italics added).**

The Course does say that we cannot change our reality (T.19.II.3) and the Self we truly are continues on, unaffected by our nightmarish dreams (e.g., T.30.III.10; W.pl.190.6; W.pl.6.1) . But *awakened* does not describe our state in Heaven. It is a dualistic term that refers to the state of the final correction in the split mind for the dreaming of the ego, when we recognize it is all a dream (T.17.I.1) . Another term Jesus uses to describe the awakened state is the *real world* , but this is still part of the illusion (e.g., T.26.V.12:3) . In the real world, we know that the separation has never happened and that to think that it could happen is only silly. We are still aware of the dream, but we are no longer personally identified with any of the figures within the dream, although others who are still asleep and dreaming may continue to see us as a figure within their dream. There may be an intermediate step, before we awaken, when we become aware that we are dreaming, much like the state of lucid dreaming some people experience at night, when we are still asleep but become aware that we are asleep and dreaming, but choose to continue to sleep and dream.

As for your final concern, you have been ensnared in the ego's very deliberate delusion that you are “the dream character in some dreamer's dream” (e.g., see T.27.VII.8) rather than the dreamer yourself of the dream (T.27.VII.9) . If you keep your identification and focus on the dream symbols, the dream figures, of which the self you think you are is just one, you're right, nothing in the dream can be relied on, for none of it is true, not even Jesus and the Course. But symbols can be used to serve either of only two contrasting purposes, and it is at the level of purpose that we can distinguish between what can and cannot be relied upon. The purpose for the dream is always assigned, not within the dream itself, but in the mind outside

the dream. And quite simply, symbols within the dream may be used either for the purpose of keeping us asleep and dreaming by supporting the mind's identification with the dream figures, or for the purpose of awakening by helping the mind disidentify from the dream and its figures (T.28.II.4) . Clearly people can and do use Jesus and the Course for both purposes. So we're not being asked to trust or believe Jesus or the Course as figures/symbols within our dream. Our only concern should be whether those symbols are being used in our own mind to maintain our belief that something of value is happening within the dream, so that we remain content with continuing to dream, or are being used to point to a reality beyond the dream that reinforces our desire to awaken. We are the only ones who can make that choice. In the end, we will all awaken, and that outcome is certain, since sleeping and dreaming are only illusions. But we can continue to believe we are asleep and dreaming for as long as we want, with all the sorrowful consequences of a seeming life lived outside of love. Yet, to return to the point we made earlier, we can always choose to shorten the duration of the nightmare through the practice of forgiveness, or the miracle.

For further discussion of the nature of the dream and awakening, you may wish to refer to [Question #893](#).

Q #1041: My 8-year-old granddaughter has Tourette's Syndrome. I feel I am in her life to help her, but I'm not sure how. I am new to *A Course in Miracles* . I know the answer to my quest is in there somewhere! Can you speed up the process for me? How do you help a child with a debilitating disorder overcome her fears when you find it hard enough to face your own? I think she is here to teach as well as to learn. And can you also address the issue of the Indigo Children. Are they real or just another figment of our imagination?

A: First and foremost, just be a normal grandmother, doing what loving, caring grandmothers do for their grandchildren. Along with that, the Course can be helpful to you in terms of looking within to the content in your mind -- there is nothing in the Course about behavior. You put your finger on the core of the problem by recognizing that you cannot be of genuine help to anyone when you yourself are in a state of fear. If you are afraid for another person, you are seeing that person and yourself as an ego -- as a vulnerable, weak, victimized body. That is the temptation practically all of us succumb to, and with good reason, for that is why there is a world in the first place -- so that we would be blinded by form (bodies) and forget all about content (our minds) (T.22.III.6:7) . So the first step in your thinking about this is to ask for help to correct your own distorted perception of yourself and your granddaughter.

In this sense, she is your teacher, because she is reflecting back to you -- through your reactions to her -- what is going on in your own mind, the thought system you are using to interpret the situation. Feeling fearful, which is quite normal, is telling you that you are looking at the situation through your ego's eyes. This course is teaching you that fear is a choice, and that you can make a different choice: to see through Jesus' eyes, or the Holy Spirit's. So to begin with, you just want to acknowledge that you are following the ego's interpretation of the situation -- that this is a tragedy and that your granddaughter is an innocent victim. Again, these are normal perceptions in this world.

When you switch to Jesus as your inner teacher, you will begin to realize that you can be peaceful in the face of what appears to be sad misfortune. Most people find this terribly difficult to accept, because -- having identified with the ego thought system -- we instinctively feel that inner peace is dependent on external circumstances. That is totally false. It is the big lie of the ego that what God created can be changed. Jesus repeats in different ways throughout the Course the essential thought that “ ***I am as God created me. His Son can suffer nothing. And I am His Son You are as God created you, and so is every living thing you look upon, regardless of the images you see***” (T.31.VIII.5:2,3,4; 6:1) . You can thus use this situation in your life as a means of learning this for yourself, and in so doing, you will be conveying the same sought-for message to all who come into your presence -- without ever uttering a word about it. Your peaceful presence will remind them that they, too, can make the same choice.

We cannot see our own or anyone else's full Atonement path, so we should be extremely cautious about judging situations as tragic, and people as innocent victims. Although we do not know this, it could be that your granddaughter (as a mind) is using this physical condition as a way of learning that the body is a projection and does not define her. If that is the case, then that is her means of getting beyond her ego and remembering her true Identity; therefore, from that point of view it would not be a tragedy at all. However, this does not mean that you and her family should not pursue medical treatment, etc., but in *your* mind, you would be seeing the situation from a different perspective. When you can set your fear aside -- if just for an instant -- the love in your right mind would flow through you and guide you in what to say or do, which could be nothing, other than being a non-judgmental, peaceful presence.

With regard to your question about the Indigo Children who are reported to be enlightened beings that have come to the planet to help us . . . This is best thought of in the same context as above -- that is, on the level of mind we are all one. Everyone is here to teach and to learn. There may be some extremes on the scale, as reflected in your question, but in truth everyone is here to both teach and learn.

Q #1042: What exactly is meant by *littleness* ? It is not contained in the glossary of terms. I have an idea but I would really appreciate a confirmation. If the separation never really happened, then why are we still perceived to remain in a separated state?

A: At one point in the text Jesus says something absolutely startling about us: **“The truth about you is so lofty that nothing unworthy of God is worthy of you” (T.9.VII.8:4)** . This same evaluation is echoed in a later statement: **“God is not willing that His Son be content with less than everything. For He is not content without His Son, and His Son cannot be content with less than his Father has given him” (T.15.III.4:10,11)** . *Littleness* , then, is anything not worthy of God, which means that anything of the ego would fall into the category of littleness -- any kind of limitation, individuality, fragmentation, or imperfection. Thus, we belittle ourselves and each other when we think of ourselves as bodies -- incomplete, needy, conflicted, sick, special, superior/inferior, etc., etc. And when we seek for things in the world, Jesus says, **“Here does the Son of God ask not too much, but far too little. He would sacrifice his own identity with everything, to find a little treasure of his own. And this he cannot do without a sense of isolation, loss and loneliness” (T.26.VII.11:7,8,9; see also W.pl.133.3)** .

The entire Course, in a sense, is about helping us realize what we have done to ourselves by preferring an illusory existence of specialness and individuality over our true Identity, eternally at one with God's Love. Never does Jesus say this is sinful and deserving of punishment. It is simply a silly mistake that we should not want to choose to uphold an instant longer.

There is no intellectually satisfying answer to your second question -- it presupposes the reality of the “we” who perceive ourselves in a separated state. This is totally baffling to us, as “we” seem quite real, and “we” often evaluate situations as “life threatening” -- implying our lives here are real. Fortunately, the focus of *A Course in Miracles* is not on getting us to see everything, including ourselves, as illusory. Forgiveness applied to our daily relationships and interactions is its focus: seeing shared, not separate interests, and that nothing has power to take away our peace. Yet, ultimately, the Course's unique understanding of forgiveness can be properly comprehended only within the framework of its metaphysical non-dualism. Jesus assures us, though, that it will all come together for us if we just become more consistent in choosing him as our teacher, rather than the ego. Withdrawing our faith and trust in the ego's version of reality and placing it in his is the one alternative that is always open to us.

Q #1043: I know that you all say to not forget to be "normal" and Ken frequently has said that the only difference between a teacher of God and others is that the teacher of God "smiles more frequently." But, I feel that I hide the fact that the Course and my spiritual path are such a big part of my

life from others out of fear that they will not understand. I want people to know this about me because I feel it is "who I am." This has become a very big part of my life and I feel that by trying to "blend in" and be "normal" I am not being true to myself. Can you please comment on this?

A: This is an issue many students have raised over the years in many different ways. While it probably is true that others will not understand the Course and why you chose it as your path, this need not be something fearful to you. You did not mention specifically what you are afraid of should they not understand, but in some cases people have feared being rejected for believing in a thought system that is not reconcilable with traditional biblical religions. That has happened to many students, but they were able to deal with it.

What will help you a great deal is to keep form and content distinct. On the level of *content*, to say that *A Course in Miracles* has become a big part of your life means that you have chosen Jesus or the Holy Spirit as your inner Teacher, and are now dedicated to seeing everything in your life as a classroom in which you will learn that your interests are not separate from anyone else's. Your life now has this as its purpose (content), having relinquished the ego's purpose of seeing everything in the context of its principles of *one or the other* and *kill or be killed*. Being true to yourself thus means living this way, and forgiving yourself when you discover you have reverted to the ego's way -- of judgments, differences, specialness, victims and victimizers, etc. You are being true to yourself by recognizing separating thoughts and actions, and then not judging yourself for them. There is no need, really, to explicitly let others know that you are approaching your life differently now. It doesn't matter if they know or not, for your focus would still be on the thoughts in your mind about yourself and others -- wrong-minded or right-minded. In a sense, this will keep you more honest with yourself. You will not feel that you are hiding anything from anyone or sacrificing something of yourself.

If spiritual paths come up in a conversation, or others see you with "the book," then you would just talk about its meaningfulness to you, without any investment in their responses. Again, if your focus is always on bringing your wrong-minded thoughts to the loving presence of Jesus in your mind, then you would not be focusing on bringing "the book" to others. The love of Jesus is in their right minds, just as it is in yours; and they have the power to choose it, just as you do. If that is the *content* in your mind, then you are being true to yourself as a student of this course. That is where your passion and excitement should be directed -- the joy of seeing yourself and others as Jesus does. When you are thus centered in loving content, you will have less and less sense of a separate self that needs to communicate as one self to another self. The love in your mind will naturally extend itself through you in whatever form is helpful at that time in those circumstances.

Q #1044: My question relates to page 155 of *Absence of Felicity* where Kenneth states that people experience Jesus differently and that Helen knew Jesus was talking to her because, "He told her the opposite of what she wanted to hear." I understand that Jesus speaks to each person in an individual way, yet how could something that speaks against someone's peace be benign? I believe that Jesus would never speak for such things.

A: It is important to know the context of Helen's comment in order to understand it properly. On the same page you cite in *Absence from Felicity*, Kenneth states that Helen was keenly aware of her inner conflict -- between "Heaven and Helen," as she described it. Within this framework, "Jesus' will and her own were always separate," and therefore she would be aware of what was coming from her -- meaning the part of her that was terrified of accepting his love -- and what was coming from that loving presence she knew to be Jesus. She was aware that she was resisting the *emotional* acceptance of what she had accepted *intellectually* from Jesus. "Helen did believe in the truth of the Course's teachings, not to mention in the existence of its author. However, she was not able emotionally to accept its truth into her own personal life" (p. 156). This is a crucial distinction. She knew that she would be better off doing what Jesus asked of her; she was just afraid of the consequences of accepting his will unconditionally at all

times. Jesus was not speaking against her peace, as you have interpreted her comment to mean. Quite the opposite -- she knew she would be better off if she integrated into her daily life what she knew to be the truth intellectually. Kenneth concludes that this integration came "all at once at the moment of her death" (p. 157; see also Chapter 18 where Kenneth describes her final days and death).

Every student of *A Course in Miracles* is bound to run into this same dilemma. We all have minds split between wanting Jesus to be the central figure in our journey, and a fierce resistance to letting go of the self we think is our identity but which is a false self determined to keep the true Jesus as far away as possible. This intense fear will inevitably cause us to have a distorted experience of his love. That is why he emphasizes so much the need to become aware of these two parts of our minds. It is vital to our progress with the Course to come to know and respect our fear of the truth about us, so that we will not erect even further defenses against it, thus burying it deeper and deeper in our minds. This is what Jesus wants to help us with more than anything, if we will let him. If we do let him, we will be more peaceful, more often, as together we walk the pathway home.

Q #1045: I have a huge problem with the teaching that says we are creating our own illnesses. If I should someday be dying from a terminal illness, knowing that I have created this, I would feel so terribly, terribly GUILTY. Knowing that I have done everything possible to free myself from it – forgiving the patterns creating it, seeing it as the ego's thought system -- and it is still there would put me in an impossible situation. It opens me up to all kinds of self-hatred -- "I should have had different thoughts than I have."

And a second question: when pain is here, I should not relate to them with love and mercy and care, because that would make them real to me? Please help me out here!

A: Your confusion and fear are common among students of *A Course in Miracles* because we want to read its words from the perspective of the self we think we are -- a vulnerable body, with its own specific personality and personal history, that makes choices affecting the quality of its life here in this world of time and space (**T.27.VIII**) . But when we read it this way, the Course's words can be turned into a tool of the ego, reinforcing rather than undoing guilt. And so long as we do, we will not understand what the Course means by sickness, why there is no hierarchy among illusions, including physical illnesses, what is the real cause of all our suffering and pain, where the suffering and pain is actually experienced, or just who it is that is responsible for choosing what seems to happen to the body, including illnesses.

Identified with our body, we come to the Course with a variety of intentions to make our lives here better, perhaps improving and maintaining our health and avoiding or at least minimizing future sickness and disease and decline, resolving our financial concerns, and healing our relationships with our families, lovers and friends so that we may be happier in the world. And some of these things may in fact occur in our lives as we begin to practice the Course at whatever level we understand its message of forgiveness.

But Jesus and his Course are not concerned with the world, our lives and our bodies, or the relationship of our bodies to other bodies. Jesus is only concerned with our minds and the thoughts that they are holding, and which teacher we are inviting to look with us at those thoughts. From his perspective, sickness, as well as death, is nothing more than a thought of separation and guilt in the mind that has nothing to do with the body (**M.5.II.3**) . With the ego as our teacher, we will attempt to hide the guilt from ourselves, disguising it by projecting it onto a made-up world as either sickness within our body or conflict with other bodies, either of which then seems to be the cause of our suffering and pain. But the pain and suffering, just like the thought of guilt, remains in the mind that continues to identify with the ego -- that, again, is the only sickness (**T.28.II.11:7**) . And so from the ego's perspective the specific bodily problem and its severity do not really matter -- it can even be simply the *fear* of a future malady -- so long as the focus remains, not in the mind where the only real healing can happen, but outside the mind on the body and the world, where no meaningful change can be effected.

So long as we continue to identify with the body and take its needs seriously, we are sick. Not because there is anything bad or sinful about the body, but only because we obviously are still needing a defense against the thought of guilt and separation in the mind, or we would know we are a mind and not a body. As we begin to make the shift in identification to the mind, with the Holy Spirit or Jesus as our teacher -- a process which for most of us will be gradual -- we will become increasingly less concerned with what specifically is happening with our body and more focused on how we can use whatever seems to be happening as a means for getting back in touch with the underlying thought in the mind that is behind the projection. To feel guilty about anything that seems to be happening to the body simply means that we have once again turned away from the Holy Spirit and are looking to the ego for guidance (T.13.X.6) . And that may not be very smart, but it's likely to happen and certainly is nothing to feel guilty about.

Now it will be much more helpful to notice any concern you have right now with any current problem with your body and to recognize it as a classroom for looking at the buried guilt right now, than to be concerned about an imagined and imaginary state of your body at some point in the future near the end of your life. For the more you are able to practice the Course's principles in the present, the less fear you will have about what may seem to happen to your body in the future. And if your goal increasingly becomes, not to have a healthy body, but to have a healed mind, you will be able to rest in the assurance that you are okay no matter what seems to be happening to the body. Such peace of mind may seem still to be off somewhere in the distant future, but the steps to make it a reality are available to all of us now.

As for your second question, the issue is not whether to relate to our pain and suffering with mercy and love and care, but rather whether we can relate to *ourselves* with mercy and love and care for foolishly having chosen pain and suffering. Please understand that once you are experiencing pain, you have already made that pain real. So to decide at that point that you will avoid looking at it and addressing it out of fear of making it real is simply a form of denial that serves no helpful purpose. And remember, our pain and suffering has nothing to do with what's happening to our body and everything to do with the teacher of separation and guilt and fear that we have chosen in our mind. Jesus would never judge or condemn us for making the wrong choice, so why should we? It's only the ego that condemns us for choosing the ego, because nothing better serves its purpose than convincing us that the ego needs to be taken seriously. Jesus' teaching is much gentler and so we would be wise to ask for his help in learning how to be gentle with ourselves.

Q #1046: Is it possible to transcend the body and not be aware of it for sustained periods of time? I just want to have an experience where I know I am not a body. I feel like if I can't have that experience then all this stuff that I have been learning is false -- just a way of thinking to make me feel comfortable. I understand that minds can communicate, but that doesn't prove our immortality. To me, that is like saying that radios are alive; they are just vibrations. Only when I know that I am not a body will I believe that we live forever.

A: This idea of transcending the body is the subject of **“Beyond the Body”** in Chapter 18 of the text (T.18.VI) . There Jesus speaks about it as the experience of **“escape from limitations . . . a joining of yourself and something else in which your mind enlarges to encompass it. . . . What really happens is that you have given up the illusion of a limited awareness, and lost your fear of union. . . . You have accepted this instead of the body, and have let yourself be one with something beyond it, simply by not letting yourself be limited by it”** (T.18.VI.11:3,4,7,11).

The Course's process of getting us back to our natural state as spirit beyond the body (W.pl.72.9:3) involves reversing the steps we took to “become” bodies. As the above passages indicate, Jesus is telling us that because we have a such a fear of union (oneness), we cling to our perception of limitations in ourselves and others; and it is the body that serves this purpose of limiting our awareness. We can never know love as it truly is or ourselves as we truly are as long as we are convinced of the reality of the body: **“The body is a limit on love. The belief in limited love was its**

origin, and it was made to limit the unlimited. . . . it was made to limit you ” (T.18.VIII.1:2,3,4) . But the way to reverse this, Jesus is teaching us, is to focus on the *purpose* of what we do with our bodies, rather than to try to talk ourselves into believing we are not bodies. Your insistence on experiencing yourself without a body could well be an ego setup -- a way of *making the error real* . In other words, you would not be making this into a condition of accepting the Course as true unless you were not already convinced that you *are* a body.

So if we use the body to keep ourselves separate from others -- through specialness, comparisons, competition, judgment, etc. -- then we will always be limited by it and bound to it, for that is the secret wish behind our perception of separate interests. On the other hand, we can change that purpose by asking Jesus or the Holy Spirit to help us see that our interests are the same as everyone else's. That would be to affirm our underlying will to regain awareness of our true state of oneness: God's Son is one.

The Course's means of having us get beyond the body is first to train us to think in terms of the purpose for which we use the body, and then, having chosen Jesus or the Holy Spirit as our Teacher instead of the ego, use the body for the purpose of dissolving the separation we thought existed between ourselves and everyone else -- this is always a matter of our mind's perception, not behavior. Again, this is accomplished through the recognition that our interests are the same, regardless of the different forms our lives take.

As our perceptions of separation gradually change to true perception of our oneness, then the importance of the body starts to fade. Our awareness of the body as our real identity, thus, is entirely dependent on the choice we make in our minds to see separation as real or unreal. If we choose to minimize in importance the differences among us, the body's importance to us will likewise diminish, for our awareness will be flooded more and more with what joins us. The body's reality in our awareness disappears to the extent to which our “fear of union” disappears. That is why the process of *A Course in Miracles* focuses so intently on undoing our perception that we are separate from one another. This process -- forgiveness -- does not focus on having us transcend the body through meditation or some other means, as do other spiritual paths; it has us focus on the *cause* of our thinking we are bodies in the first place, which is to maintain our existence as separate, special individuals. Again, that is not our natural state (**W.pl.72.9:3**) .

The “proof” of immortality that you are seeking will occur in these experiences of the holy instant and in true perception, where you realize that the boundaries that seem to separate you from others are totally false. This experience can be sustained for long periods of time, and indeed is the natural outcome of the practice of forgiveness. The sense of invulnerability that is our natural state as God's Son will be restored in this way. But to have no awareness of the body at all is not the goal of our practice; it would be impossible to stay here without some awareness of the body. The difference would be that as your mind is healed, you would know for certain that you are not your body, and therefore that nothing in this world can affect the inner peace that is the permanent content of your mind.

Q #1047: Did the Jewish People have a "collective consciousness" experience of God at Mount Sinai when they received the Torah? Or were they tapping into some illusory transmission of a set of rules to guide societal living, perhaps even a "close encounter," so it could have been a very real feeling experience but not one of God if "He" has nothing to do with our dream of separation? And if any group relates to the idea of separation/good/evil it is certainly the Jewish People! It just bothers me, as a 10 year convert to Judaism and as a new student to *A Course in Miracles* , that as long as one insists on the existence of "good" in the world, it continually recreates its opposite of "bad," so one can be "right" about others being "wrong." And yet God IS good, light, and love, correct?

A: It can be fun to speculate on what the source may be for ideas and teachings that seem to allow mankind, or parts of mankind, to take steps forward in its thinking and understanding of where it has

come from and where it is heading. But at this level of explanation, we can not go much beyond speculation. However, from the perspective of mind, as the Course describes it, there can be only two possible sources for all ideas that appear within the world's dream -- either the right mind or the wrong mind. And regardless of the source, there are also only two choices for how those ideas can then be used and justified in the world -- either to reinforce or to undo the belief in separation and guilt.

The Torah, like nearly all of the world's spiritual teachings, no doubt drew some of its inspiration from the right-mind, translated into symbols that were especially meaningful to the specific time and place into which it was received, at a level at which it could be understood. Read symbolically, despite a theology very different from the Course's, the Torah can lead the individual to look beyond himself to Something that transcends his limited existence. But as its teachings over time became the foundation for codifications and rituals, it fell into the same spirit- denying strictures that have bedeviled nearly all of the world's formal religions, elevating form above content to justify a belief in differences, specialness, and separation. There is no reason, by the way, to believe that the Course should be immune to such a fate, and it is not difficult to see how this is already happening with its teachings. Never underestimate the power of the ego to use *all* duality-based symbols for its own duplicitous purposes -- self-preservation after all is its *only* motivation. And that, as you point out, is the problem for any spiritual teaching that keeps its focus on the world and getting things right here. Once that is the premise and the purpose, there is no way to avoid the trap of opposites, and the ego's continued existence has been assured. That is why the Course, in contrast to nearly every other spiritual teaching, insists so uncompromisingly that God has nothing to do with the world (e.g., **T.8.VI.2,3**; **T.11.III.3**; **T.11.VII.1,2**; **T.12.III.9**; **T.16.V.3:6**) , for the Love that He is has no opposite (e.g., **T.in.1:8**; **W.pl.127.3** ; **W.pll.259.2**) , and this is most definitely a world of opposites and opposition.

Q #1048: Coming into contact with *A Course in Miracles* over 20 years ago, a doubt bothered me early on: did Helen and Bill make this up? like a project/experiment, all with good intentions. Helen's influences like Freud, Plato, Shakespeare and the Bible seems like someone could make this up. I know it was just my fear of having the answer to my personal hell (the Course) not be true. Am I the only one with such doubts?

A: There are very few people who have *not* experienced some doubts along these lines. Jesus probably had you in mind when in the Epilogue at the end of the clarification of terms he says that doubts -- and even despair -- will arise, but not to fret, because the ending is guaranteed: **“Forget not once this journey is begun the end is certain. Doubt along the way will come and go and go to come again. Yet is the ending sure. No one can fail to do what God appointed him to do. When you forget, remember that you walk with Him and with His Word upon your Heart. Who could despair when hope like this is his? Illusions of despair may seem to come, but learn how not to be deceived by them. Behind each one there is reality and there is God. . . . The end *is* sure and guaranteed by God” (C.ep.1:2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10) .**

More than likely, your doubts are linked precisely to what you suspect: your fear that this way out of hell is not valid. In line with what Jesus says in **“The Fear of Redemption”** section, however, it would probably be more accurate to say that your fear is that the Course *is* valid, and that it *will* work (**T.13.III**) . As egos, the last thing we truly want is to be free of our egos! And therefore we will seize on anything at all that would justify our remaining in an ego state, even at the cost of our peace of mind. Insane? Yes! But that is exactly why we need to learn to trust a teacher who is not caught in the same thought system as we are. “Trust” is the very first characteristic that Jesus cites in the manual for teachers as a mark of an advanced teacher of God, and then he goes on to discuss the various stages that one goes through in the process of learning to trust (**M.4.I**) .

Just accept your doubting as normal, and as a stage that most students go through as they begin to take Jesus' message seriously and decide to put it into practice. Our resistance to seeing this process through

to the end is far stronger than we ever imagined, which makes patience and gentleness, along with trust, essential for any student on this path of thought-reversal. As you begin to experience hope and peace, your assurance that this is the right path for you will increase, and your doubts will lessen, or you will be guided to another path. Jesus himself tells us that we don't have to believe his ideas, or accept or even welcome them: **"You are asked only to use them. It is their use that will give them meaning to you, and will show you that they are true" (W.in.8:5,6)** . How can we not trust in such a teacher, who has such trust in us!

In the end, what difference would it make if the Course did come from Helen and Bill? Only its ideas -- what it says -- are important. The material stands on its own. This is what Jesus means when he tells us that it is only his message, not *him* , that will help us, although he would love to have us accept his love in a very personal way in our lives **(C.5.6)**

Q #1049: In lesson 359, the first sentence reads, "Father, today we will forgive Your world, and let creation be Your Own" (W.pII.359.1:1). I don't understand why the world was referred to as "Your world". We made the world which needs forgiveness. The "world" the Father created is Heaven and doesn't need forgiveness. So why would we need to forgive "Your world"? I would have understood it if it had read "our world". There's just something here that's confusing me.

A: You are correct, the Father's world is Heaven, which of itself does not need forgiveness. We need to forgive Heaven/God's world because we have projected responsibility for the separation onto it, and thereby onto God. In an effort to escape responsibility for the mind's choice to be separate, the ego tells us God banished us from Heaven as punishment for taking the thought of separation seriously. We forgive God's world by accepting that the decision to be separate is a choice in the mind, about which God knows nothing. His changeless world remains unaffected by the choice, as Jesus tells us: **"not one note in Heaven's song was missed" (T.27.V.5:4)**. The need to forgive Heaven arises when the mind that would believe that the separation did indeed occur, and has had devastating effects, takes offence at the changelessness of Heaven, and the immutability of God's Love. In the mind's choice for separation, God, His Love, and His world are perceived as threatening because in Them all specialness vanishes.

Directed to the mind, rather than to God Who does not hear prayers, the beautiful prayers in the second half of the workbook are poetic, meditative ways of restating the principles taught previously in the workbook. Like the single voice with which the Son sings to the Father, and He to the Son **(S.1.in.1)** , the prayers are expressions of the mind reflecting back to itself its willingness to live the ideas contained in the prayer. In this case, we remind ourselves that we want to remember Heaven, releasing it of the judgments projected onto it by the guilt-ridden mind. Our desire is to remember that Heaven did not abandon us; we abandoned Heaven by our choice. Just as it was forgotten it can be remembered, and thus it is forgiven.

Q #1050: After reading fully the text of *A Course in Miracles* and committing myself to the students' program for a year, I find myself in a position of "belief," but want to go to the level of "knowledge." I ask for something to show me that I am on the right path, that I am going in the right direction. I have looked at the various aspects of my life, be it career, creative projects, or relationships, and all things seem at a standstill. I let go and give the future to God to lead me....and nothing happens.....I have worked through being anxious about the future and ask that what I feel inside be reflected on the outside somehow, but, there does not seem to be congruency. I want so much to have my beliefs validated because I don't want to believe that God would withhold happiness and fulfillment from one of his Sons who wants so much to be joined with Him.

A: In the simplicity of its message, the Course offers only one path for its students: the practice of forgiveness. This will lead to knowledge, which lies beyond forgiveness and beyond any path. The one-year study program of the workbook is only the beginning of a lifetime of practice: **“This course is a beginning, not an end” (W.ep.1:1)** . So, although the Course is a “fast track,” the process of applying its teachings to our lives is a slow road that requires patience and practice. The process is slow only because resistance is great, and attachment to the ego's belief system is deeper than we think. That is why Jesus repeats his message in many different ways throughout the Course.

What seems to be a lack of congruency in your process, therefore, is only evidence of the inevitable resistance. This is no cause for distress. Jesus acknowledges our resistance and recommends that we proceed gently and patiently. He assures us that God is not withholding anything from His Son. Nothing is missing in the equation of oneness; rather, something has been added that blocks awareness of the oneness: the decision to be a separate self. The mind's choice to believe in separation is the only thing that keeps knowledge of our oneness with God from awareness. Thus, the way to return to knowledge and love, is to accept the mind's healing of the thought of separation through forgiveness. That is all we are asked to do. Jesus tells us the plan will not fail because its success lies in the power of the mind that chose separation, and can choose differently: **God's guarantee will hold against all obstacles, for it rests on certainty and not contingency. It rests on you (T.20.IV.8:10,11).**

To further lighten our burden, we are not asked to evaluate our progress. In fact, Jesus tells us : **“Put yourself not in charge of this, for you cannot distinguish between advance and retreat. Some of your greatest advances you have judged as failures, and some of your deepest retreats you have evaluated as success (T.18.V.1:5,6)** . Clearly, then, we are most gentle with ourselves if we agree to proceed calmly in the simple, though not easy, practice of forgiveness. Diligence in this practice is what will make the inner and outer more congruent, as every relationship and experience in daily life become opportunities to apply the principles of the Course's teaching, thereby unifying their purpose in service of a single goal. Having found the right path and a curriculum that guarantees results, the only thing to do is stay with the program. The pace of the learning process is commensurate with willingness to look at the ego's arsenal of resistance techniques without judging them. Jesus offers encouraging words to every student of his Course: **“If the way seems long, let him be content. He has decided on the direction he wants to take. What more was asked of him? And having done what was required, would God withhold the rest?” (M.22.2:6,7,8,9).**

Q #1051: I suppose I do not get it, i.e., that consciousness came into being after the separation. Would not consciousness have been born before the separation? Because if there were a fusion of Cause and Effect or Creator and creations there would not have been an awareness of distinction that could precipitate a separation. The conscious Son was tempted by the ego-maniacal idea that it should resent being just a mere creation and not be grateful to the Creator. The ego told the Son that it would always be second best. Thus was born the separation. We now have the real world of God and His only Son. We also have an unreal world, the only world we know and the fact that it is called unreal does not seem to make any difference. Like I said, I guess I just don't get it.

A: Consciousness could not be part of perfect Oneness because consciousness implies duality: subject and object. In a sense you are asking a version of the most commonly asked question -- how could this have happened? -- and there really is no fully satisfying answer. The problem is that your question itself arises from a mind that believes the separation happened, otherwise there would be no question. Jesus thus says in *A Course in Miracles* : **“The ego will demand many answers this course does not give. It does not recognize as questions the mere form of a question to which an answer is impossible. The ego may ask, ‘How did the impossible occur?’, ‘To what did the impossible happen?’, and may ask this in many forms. Yet there is no answer; only an experience. Seek only this, and do not let theology delay you” (C.in.4; see also T.4.II.1:1)** .

In this same place Jesus explains that his course “**remains within the ego framework, where it is needed. It is not concerned with what is beyond all error because it is planned only to set the direction towards it. Therefore it uses words, which are symbolic, and cannot express what lies beyond symbols**” (C.in.3:1,2,3). Jesus must use language we can understand, otherwise there would be no communication at all; and the language we understand is the language of duality -- real distinctions, separate beings, consciousness of things, etc., as well as the language and concepts of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. But as he says here, as well as in other places (see especially, T.25.1) , he regards words as symbols that point us to something that cannot be expressed in words or any other kind of symbol. He therefore asks humility of us, and not to rely on our own understanding as a measure of the truth of what he says (T.18.IV.7:4,5,6). We cannot rely on our own thinking because of our concealed commitment to uphold the ego thought system rather than the truth held for us in our right minds by the Holy Spirit. Our understanding is prone to distortion because of what we have hidden from the light of truth. That is why Jesus says, “Do not let theology delay you” -- for centuries we have argued and fought over which theological systems are valid and which are not. So he is advising us to seek only the experience that is the outcome of our practice of forgiveness -- that God loves all people without exception, and that we never lost the innocence in which He created us. All questions and doubts will simply vanish then.

Q#1052: If the world we live in is an illusion (and not the real world), created by ourselves through the separation and not by God, then I am confused. I experience such joy, wonder, and appreciation of what I have always perceived to be God's creation! What now if He didn't create all this -- the beauty of nature, etc., and none of it is "real"? I will be very disappointed.

A: You have understood the Course's explanation for the physical universe correctly. God did not make the world, it is a miscreation of the mind that brought it into awareness by projecting on to it the guilt for having chosen to believe in the separation. This insight is not only disappointing, but a shock for everyone who has held traditional beliefs in God, and it is usually not the only shock in studying the Course. The ego has done a very good job of teaching its thought system, which includes a God who made the world, put us in it, and takes us out whenever He chooses. One of the important goals of the Course is exposing the secrets and hidden lies of this thought system. One such secret is the mind's wish that there be a world to replace the home that seemed to have been lost when separation was chosen. Although the world has great physical beauty, Jesus explains its origin and purpose as established by the ego: “**The world was made as an attack on God. It symbolizes fear. And what is fear except love's absence? Thus the world was meant to be a place where God could enter not, and where His Son could be apart from Him**” (W.pII.3:2,3,4).

Uncovering the ego's scheme involves questioning long-held values that support belief in the reality of the body and the world. Since the thought of separation is not true, it requires heavy defenses to maintain belief in it. One of the convincing arguments in favor of belief in the world is its physical beauty. However, its beauty does not beautify the mind's decision to use it to defend separation. This information may be experienced as disappointing or worse, but a closer look reveals the ego's thought system at work in a world that offers much suffering and devastation along with its beauty. If God made one, He must have made the other, which makes Him a cruel Creator indeed, and that is precisely what the ego would have us believe. It feeds our fear that what God gave He can snatch away in an instant without warning. This thought covers an even deeper secret; i.e. that what the world offers was not really given to us by God but was stolen from Him, and He will “appear” suddenly and take it all back. The source of this belief is the mind's guilt for having usurped God's creative power by deciding to identify with the ego (and thereby with the body), instead of accepting the Identity God bestowed upon us as His one Son. In this choice for the ego the mind “steals” authorship of itself, believing it is the father, not the son. This is one example of what the Course refers to as the reversal of cause and effect. The ego was made out of the wish of God's Son to father himself: “**The ego, then, is nothing more than a delusional system in which you made your own father. Make no mistake about this. It sounds insane when it is stated with perfect honesty, but the ego never looks on what it does with perfect honesty. Yet that is its insane**

premise, which is carefully hidden in the dark cornerstone of its thought system. And either the ego, which you made, is your father, or its whole thought system will not stand” (T.11.in.2:4,5,6,7,8). With the ego as father, the Son now identifies with the body and is in need of a home. The mind then brings the world into awareness to serve as the home of the father/ego and his son/body. The problem is, as Jesus tells us in the text, **“You do not really want the world you see, for it has disappointed you since time began” (T.13.VII.31).**

That is not to say that you cannot enjoy the beauty you find in the world any less than other pleasurable things of the body, such as music or art. Though born to serve the ego, the world can become the means to undo belief in the ego. It can serve the Holy Spirit's purpose, which begins with the recognition that the world came into being with the mind's belief that separation is not only possible, but has been accomplished and has had real effects. Your surprise is an indication that this new perspective has already occurred to you. From here the important thing is to proceed gently in the process of exchanging the ego's thought system for the Holy Spirit's. Learning to see the beauties of nature differently does not mean not enjoying them. When you choose the Holy Spirit as your teacher, the world becomes a classroom that has a beauty all its own by giving us a place wherein to apply the teachings of His curriculum. Then, whether the world shows its beautiful side or the devastation effects of nature (e.g. Katrina), the Holy Spirit's lessons can be applied equally. Thus, for the ego, both the beauty and the devastation of the world serve to make it real. For the Holy Spirit, neither the beauty nor the devastation can serve to detract from the peace of God, nor impede progress on the path to the beauty of our true home.

See Questions [#70](#) and [#121](#).

Q #1053: If God does not take the "last step" who or what is taking that step that we are supposed to refrain from taking?

A: God cannot not take the last step. There really is only one step and He already took it. It seems that we are on a journey with multiple steps only because our fear of awakening is so great. We therefore proceed gently, “step by step” through the healing process. To accommodate our fear and resistance, Jesus uses an expression such as God taking a step because it makes sense to us. Since we think in terms of linear time, and believe that the separation has been accomplished, we perceive the need for a gradual process of undoing. Our only concern is the steps of forgiveness we are asked to take. We don't even have to refrain from the last step. It is a given, once the blocks of resistance are removed. In the end, we will awaken from the dream of separation and remember the first and only step that God took in creating His Son. That is the meaning of what Jesus tells us in the text: **“ For God will take the last step swiftly, when you have reached the real world and have been made ready for Him” (T.17.II.4:5).**

Q #1054: Over the years I've had an experience from time to time while sleeping, where my mind wakes up and I feel I'm in an astral plane racing up to higher levels. It feels very real and I feel cool air and my mind feels very electric, like I've left my body. I get a little fearful and try to pull myself back and wake up my body. This has shown me that there are much deeper levels in my mind that I normally wouldn't experience in my everyday life. It seems like I really fear letting go of my body and the world when I have this experience. Now I see why no matter what good intentions I have for letting go of my ego and being at peace, I'm so entrenched in my ego/body identity. For 40 years it's a chipping away process, little by little, because of the deep rooted fear/guilt I don't even notice on the surface. Is this why we rarely experience the deeper levels of our mind because of the massive block of guilt and fear?

A: Yes, the guilt experienced by the mind for choosing against itself, and thereby against God, is very deep. It has been covered over by layers of denial spurred by fear of God's punishment. Experiences that

indicate we are not physical bodies, such as the one you describe, often evoke feelings of fear that reflect the mind's fear of recognizing its identity as mind. Your insight into the fear of losing the body's identity is very helpful. It explains why it is so difficult to understand the Course, regardless of Jesus' assurance that it is very simple (**T.11.VIII.1:1**). Though it is difficult, practicing it and applying its teachings to our lives is much more so, due to our tremendous resistance to letting go of the ego's thought system. The process begins with the recognition of resistance by an honest admission of how firmly we hold on to the ego. Seeing the blocks of resistance makes the need for setting a gentle pace in the undoing process obvious. It also accomplishes one of the most important steps in learning the Holy Spirit's curriculum: **"Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all of the barriers within yourself that you have built against it"** (**T.16.IV.6:1**).

In the manual, Jesus refers to resistance in a way that applies to your experience. He tells us that resistance to healing is "enormous" because it requires the acceptance that our experience of the world is the result of a choice in the mind (**See: M.5.II.1**). This returns responsibility for it to the mind, and in the process undoes all belief in the decision-making power of the body. The ego has taught us (and we have learned the lesson well) that the body makes decisions and "rules" the world. This belief makes both the body and the world real in our experience. Clinging to this belief we resist Jesus' teaching in order to protect the world and the body, and to maintain the thought of separation.

An experience of the astral body, although still within the realm of the ego, may serve as a reminder to the mind that it cannot be contained in a body. Indeed, it does not belong to the body at all, neither astral nor physical. Therein lies the threat to the body's "existence" that evokes fear in the form of resistance calling to mind Jesus' words of caution: **"Trust not your good intentions. They are not enough"** (**T.18.IV.2:1,2**). A healthy respect for the intensity of attachment to the body sets a firm foundation for proceeding with patience and gentleness through the learning process. It helps dispel the fantasy of instant success and keeps the mind calmly focused on the path of forgiveness. Your insight into the depths of the searing guilt that permeates the dream of separation is therefore of great value. Neither the guilt nor the resistance will prevail. Acknowledging them can only save time by not wasting it on escapades into deeper forays of denial. We are not asked not to have the blocks of resistance, but countless times we are asked to look in order to find them. In few words Jesus puts the simple task before us: **"Be vigilant..."** (**T.6.V.C**). And when you find the blocks it will not be the ego that has led you.

Q #1055: In all the years that Helen Schucman was "talking" to Jesus, did she ever ask him any questions about historical data that concerned his life on earth?

A: No, Jesus' life on earth seemed to be of no interest to her. At one point when he was speaking to her about the fruitlessness of studying the past, he said to her. "Even *My* personal history is of no value to you *except* as it teaches you that I can help you *now*" (*Absence from Felicity* , p. 287).

Q #1056: *A Course in Miracles* speaks frequently of the one question that we are to "ask" God instead of the many that make up our "lives" on earth. What exactly would that question be if it cannot be asked with words? A feeling of direct "communication", i.e. "being"? Is the "communion with God" the Course speaks of not also an illusion in that it implies one (separated) aspect of God is talking to another separated aspect?

A: This "question" always pertains to content, not form. Thus, it would always be about our accepting the Atonement, or some variant of that. As an example, Jesus twice pleads with us: **"Why wait for Heaven?"** (**W.pl.131.6:1**; **W.pl.188.1:1**); and again in the workbook he tells us that we should ask **"a thousand times a day," "Who walks with me?"** (**W.pl.156.8:1,2**). Then, in the lovely prose poem "The Gifts of God," Jesus directs our thoughts to the gifts we can give to God. In one of many beautifully moving pleas

to us, he exclaims, "Child of Eternal Love, what gift is there your Father wants of you except yourself? And what is there that you would rather give, for what is there that you would rather have? . . . What trifling gifts made out of sickly fear and evil dreams of suffering and death can be the substitute you really want for the remembrance of Christ in You?" (*The Gifts of God* , p. 125)

Since imploring God's help with our world and our lives has been the focal point of prayer in practically all religions, East and West, Jesus uses that form in his process of correcting our thinking about who we are and Who God is. But he obviously does not think real communication with God occurs in the dream; it can't. This becomes clear as you comprehend the thought system of *A Course in Miracles* in its fullness. We are really praying to ourselves to recognize, first, our unquestioned commitment to the ego, and then to turn to the memory of truth in our right minds -- symbolized by Jesus and the Holy Spirit -- for help in seeing our mistake, so that we may make the choice to end our self- imposed exile from Love, now that we realize that that is what we have done. As our minds are healed of all thoughts of separation from God and from each other, we simply become Love, once again, God's gift to us in our creation

Q #1057: Lately I've become aware that I hold a lot of resentment against white people. I even think it may have past life roots! Every time I think I can be at peace or stop judging what I see as gross insensitivity or outright hostility, things occur that bring me right back to square one. When I ask Jesus about it, all that seems to come to mind is the idea that I shouldn't judge, yet neither should I be blissfully ignorant of these behaviors. Then I get "mad" because it's like watching a persistent re- offender with no judicial recourse! Believe it or not, I'd finally like to heal this. Any ideas?

A: One last piece you can add to the excellent ideas you already have -- don't judge and don't deny -- is to become aware of the *cost* of judging, a prominent theme in *A Course in Miracles* . When you are being judgmental, you may have the temporary good feeling of being right and being the innocent one; but you would not be truly peaceful. The ego's peace never lasts, which tells you it is not the peace of God. You therefore can remind yourself when you are tempted to judge, or even after you have engaged in a massacre of judgment, that you are choosing to divest yourself of God's gift of eternal peace by seeing others as sinful. There is no doubt that people do and say very hateful things, but why must that evoke a response of condemnation and anger? That could happen only if you had already made the decision to throw away the peace that is your natural inheritance; and you would do that only if you valued something else more. If you saw this process clearly, you would have to ask yourself what means more to you than being as God created you. The answers could be enlightening -- but they would always have something to do with wanting to preserve your individuality and, through projection, getting rid of the sense of sin and guilt associated with it.

This approach would be more beneficial than just getting mad at yourself for being a repeat offender, because getting mad at yourself is itself a judgment, and as you are aware, you cannot get past judgment by judging. So you need to simply watch yourself succumbing to the same temptation, and then, instead of getting mad at yourself, just acknowledge that this is costing you the peace of God; and that you are willing to pay that price in order to be right and to denounce the "evil ones." Separating yourself from others that way leads only to guilt and misery, never peace. But that makes you only a mistaken Son of God, not a sinful one. Hate is a call for love -- *everyone's* call.

Q #1058: A book I read said that in the formless realm the inhabitants live in state of bliss for eons; and then after many eons they fall to one of the lower states. Can you expand on this? I think the person who wrote this is talking about a realm of existence, but he is not talking about God's formless Love.

A : This view is different from what *A Course in Miracles* says of God and Heaven. Heaven is "**an awareness of perfect Oneness**" according to the Course (**T.18.VI.1**) . Nothing other than this perfect

Oneness exists; anything else is totally illusory. If anything could "fall" from this state to another state, there would be something besides perfect *Oneness*. This is what is known in the Course as the Atonement principle -- that separating from God is impossible and therefore never happened in reality.

Q #1059: Because of sexual abuse from several men, I have all my life experienced demonic "entities" in dreams, and also as a "presence" now and then as "awake." They have a specific energetic radiation: the absence of love and good. Aware that I have to deal with this and not flee, I have used many ways to "combat" them. When I *know* they are not real, when I "see" them, they transform or disappear; but there are times when their appearance is so terrifying that the fear is stronger than my clarity of mind, and I just "run." This terror from childhood seems to have become symbiotic with my ego-identity. I would like to know if the Course has any suggestions as to how these beings still are in my consciousness when I already have succeeded in "melting them" in the light of reality?

A: Entities such as the ones you describe are different aspects of the ego, and therefore can be let go of as you would any other aspect of the ego: through forgiveness. Forgiveness, in theory, means that we are forgiving an illusion of separation -- one form of illusion is not harder to let go of than any other. The practice of this principle, however, must be directed to the level of our experience at any given point in our lives. In terms of our experience, in other words, some aspects of the ego dominate our thinking so intensely that it is necessary to turn to external sources of help that could get us to the level where we can then apply the principles of *A Course in Miracles* more meaningfully and effectively. This is most often the case when there have been years of fear and terror from abuse, whatever the form. We need to be able to accept help at the level at which we need it; otherwise it will not be truly helpful.

Early in the text Jesus teaches us about this important part of our process: **"The value of the Atonement does not lie in the manner in which it is expressed. In fact, if it is used truly, it will inevitably expressed in whatever way is most helpful to the receiver. This means that a miracle, to attain its full efficacy, must be expressed in a language that the recipient can understand without fear. . . . The whole aim of the miracle is to raise the level of communication, not to lower it by increasing fear"** (T.2.IV.5:1,2,3,6). So just be sure that you are not skipping this crucial step in your work with the Course.

The ultimate lesson is that we can be at peace, regardless of what the world may have done to us. We need only remember that the world has no power over the mind; the dream no power over the dreamer -- as we learn in this passage: **"For you would not react at all to figures in a dream you knew that you were dreaming. Let them be as hateful and vicious as they may, they could have no effect on you unless you failed to recognize it is your dream"** (T.27.VIII.10:5,6).

Q #1060: Is it possible that once the "tiny, mad idea" of separation from God entered the mind of spirit, it produced an illusory Big Bang that we think led to the formation of the phenomenal universe with time and space as coordinates? In this way, the ego could "explain" the origins of the universe and therefore perpetuate the notion of separation. Is it also possible that a portion of the Sonship never entertained the idea of separation, never participated in the dream, and is able to maintain continuity of oneness with God despite the fact that another part of the Sonship is dreaming?

A: We always need to keep in mind when we engage in speculation that there never was, nor could be, any separation from God. That is the principle of the Atonement -- separation from God is impossible. But in the context of the myth of separation and its undoing presented in *A Course in Miracles*, the Big Bang could be associated with the decision the Son of God made, once he believed the separation really happened, to heed the ego's advice to deal with the resultant overwhelming guilt and terror in his mind by making up some other realm outside his mind in which he could exist as separate and also elude capture

and punishment by what must now be a furious, wrathful God. The instant the Son decided he was not a mind by projecting himself outside it could be thought of as the instant the world came into being -- the Big Bang. This occurred following the earlier stages of the ego's dynamics that convinced the Son of the reality of sin, guilt, and fear. In this approach, the "tiny, mad idea" does not enter the Son's mind at the level of spirit, which would be impossible.

The Course teaches that the Sonship "fell" as one -- not in reality, of course. The continuity between God and His Son is eternal. It can never be ruptured. There is nothing in the Course that says part of the Sonship "never entertained the idea of separation, never participated in the dream." But the clarification of terms states that Jesus **"remains a Savior because he saw the false without accepting it as true. . . . In His complete identification with the Christ -- the perfect Son of God, His one creation and His happiness, forever like Himself and one with Him -- Jesus became what all of you must be"** (C.5.2:5; 3:1) . This is a way of saying that Jesus accepted the Atonement for himself; however, there is no indication of *when* he did this. Perhaps it was in the very instant of the tiny, mad idea; so that in that sense it could be said that Jesus was one of the fragments that never took the idea seriously. There could have been others as well (C.5.6:1,2,3) . For us as students of this course, however, Jesus is the teacher in our minds who, at every instant, reminds us that we can make the same choice he did: to remember to laugh at the tiny, mad idea as it manifests in our lives. He reminds us, too, that we were with him when he arose (C.6.5:5) . Thus, always present in our minds, awaiting our acceptance of it, is the memory of our true Identity as Christ, forever one with His Source.

For further study of this aspect of the Course's theory, we refer you to *All Are Called* , Volume 1 of *The Message of A Course in Miracles* , and our audio album, "Separation and Forgiveness: The Four Splits and Their Undoing."

Q: #1061: What is the significance of the *giant strides* ? Why are they such a large learning device?

A: This is a very encouraging term that Jesus uses to let us know that we are saving a great deal of time on our journey by taking what seem to us to be small, insignificant steps: **"Each time you practice, awareness is brought a little nearer at least; sometimes a thousand years or more are saved"** (W.pl.97.3:2) . Every time we make an effort to do what a lesson prescribes, we are taking a **"giant stride"** toward release from our ego (W.pl.94.5:9) -- **"another step toward quick salvation"** (W.pl.194.1:1) . It is Jesus' way of telling us that by continuing to choose him as our teacher and doing what he says, we are getting much closer to letting go of our pain, and accepting lasting peace in our lives .

Q #1062: I understand that only one workbook lesson per day is to be done, but is there a correct number of times during the day that the lesson can be read and the exercises done? The beginning lessons are quite short and could be read and the exercises done several times during the day, but is this advisable? Or should each lesson and exercises be done only once during the day?

A: The instructions for doing the workbook state that only one lesson be done and it can be assumed that it means only once. Some of the lessons have further instructions about repeating or recalling the thought for the day. In some lessons Jesus asks that we make specific applications throughout the day. The instructions as given in the workbook are the only guide we need for practicing.

It is very important to do your best to follow the instructions as they are given, but not to judge yourself when you fail. If you could do the workbook perfectly you would not need it. Since it is a mind-training program, it is understood that we are in need of training. And no trainee is expected to perform flawlessly.

The temptation to set expectations of perfection is an attempt by the ego to place itself in charge of the Atonement process. If you find it helpful, there is nothing wrong with rereading the lesson to reflect and meditate on its message, as long as you do not feel compelled or obsessed with doing the lessons. Frequently, Jesus reminds us that we should not feel any strain. His advice in lesson 12 can be applied generally to the practice of the workbook: **“Terminate the exercises whenever you experience a sense of strain” (W.12.6:4)**. A sense of urgency, compulsion, or strain is an indication that the ego has snuck in to take command. That is nothing to be upset about. It only means you have become afraid. And since you cannot force yourself through fear, it is best simply to stop. Being willing to tell Jesus you are too afraid to go on, and not judging yourself for it, is more in keeping with the goal of the workbook than straining to practice perfectly. The goal is to go **“... from one apparent lesson to the next, in easy steps that lead you gently from one to another, with no strain at all (T.31.2:4)** . We can only take one step at a time, and that is all we are asked to do.

Q #1063: If I feel joy with someone for something he or she has received, I used to think this is a "good" thing, in that I feel with that person. But lately, through working with the Course, I had a sense of, maybe this is only fostering the illusion that we are all living in. Is this really real? Why would I want someone "special" to me to receive a certain award or be knighted etc.? I feel that idols stand decidedly for "special relationships" serving our egos sometimes too well as means to project on good and bad things.

I don't know any more which is the ego's voice, the one which feels joy with that -- special -- person or the one that says, it all means nothing. What is the Course's stance on this issue? Certainly the Holy Spirit would just go with me and say, okay, feel joy and idolatry and admiration? But then I might never let go of the illusion and projection because that person would then stand for something I would like to do/ live? Or is it just my ego trying to use the Course to get me away from feeling joy?

A: Nothing in the Course asks that you not feel happiness for someone's good fortune. In fact, the Course tells us we should not only feel our emotions, but should pay attention to them as well as to the thoughts that accompany them. That is how we become aware of the mind's choice for separation. The feelings are not the cause of attachment to specialness; they are its effect. The mind's choice for separation gives rise to specialness that is then expressed in all the emotions experienced in our lives. Paying attention to your feelings and questioning them as you are is precisely what we are asked to do, for behind them are the values and beliefs that sustain the ego. Jesus' directive in this regard is very clear: **“To learn this course requires willingness to question every value that you hold” (T.24.In.2:1)**.

Another very important step in the learning process of the Course is to become aware of the two voices that express mutually exclusive interpretations of everything in the dream. Correctly identifying the two voices, as you have, is a significant accomplishment in itself. It means recognizing that every external situation is nothing but the reflection of the mind's choice to listen to one of the two voices. This is the foundation of the forgiveness process. The next step is to evaluate the feelings, thoughts, and judgments that are associated with every situation in this light, rather than be deceived by the specifics. You are fulfilling your part in the Atonement if you are willing to be honest with yourself about how you perceive the attainment of an award, without guessing at what the Holy Spirit's perspective would be, or thinking that you should be feeling differently. When Jesus tells us **“...seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world”(T.21.in.1:7)** , he is not only referring to the planet, but to the tiny world of our experiences. Changing our minds about it means seeing beyond the form to the content (the two voices). This opens the mind to the possibility of change, which is an invitation to the Holy Spirit. That is all we are asked to do. In this process of forgiveness the ego's perspective is not given full credit or credence, which weakens it. Questioning its interpretation gradually reduces the ego's hold on the emotions that flood our lives, thereby loosening their grip. They are gently changed by the simple process of questioning them, rather than by trying not to have them. This will eventually lead to the true happiness that is the goal of the Course. In contrast to the ego's roller coaster of feelings, the Holy Spirit's happiness is constant, not bound by the specialness of specific situations or relationships. Jesus

distinguishes true happiness from pseudo happiness for us: **“Elusive happiness, or happiness in changing form that shifts with time and place, is an illusion that has no meaning. Happiness must be constant, because it is attained by giving up the wish for the *inconstant* . Joy cannot be perceived except through constant vision. And constant vision can be given only those who wish for constancy”** (T.21.VII.13:1,2,3,4). When we are ready, this happiness will be ours. Meanwhile, knowing that the learning process leads us gradually to true joy is itself a source of happiness.

Q #1064: There is a lot of media coverage about alleviating world poverty. Also many people seem to be on a mission to change this world. Dr. Wapnick often points out in his tapes and text that this is a mistake, as we can't change the world. Whilst I know that this is true on the level of truth, when I pray about it and ask Jesus what to make of it, I find myself reading parts of the text like "For They Have Come" and I get the impression that Jesus is ecstatic about it (collaboration). Jesus didn't *not* heal the sick or raise the dead just because sickness and death are part of the illusion (and I like to think he did do these things). On a practical level, I'd like to think if I were starving to death, someone was desperate to help me. Has this got something to do with true empathy? I almost feel guilty writing this, as I know people die of poverty as we speak.

A: Let's begin by clarifying what you think you heard Dr. Wapnick say, and what the Course is saying, about changing the world. It's not that we can't change the world -- at this level people do it all the time. The point is, the world is not the real problem and to focus on it is to attempt to change effects rather than getting to the root cause of our unhappiness, which is in the mind (T.21.in.1) . The world, from the perspective of the Course, is nothing more than a projection of the thought of separation in the mind and, in the end, we will come to realize that neither of them is real. To seek to change the world outside is to avoid solving the real problem within.

This kind of admonition is directed to students of the Course and has meaning only from the perspective of the Course's metaphysical principles. For someone who resonates to a different spiritual path, it most likely will make little or no sense. And so it would certainly be a mistake to use the Course's teachings to judge others who are seeking to bring about what they perceive as meaningful change in the world, such as alleviating suffering. We simply have no way of knowing what will be most helpful for others on their Atonement paths.

It's important to understand that the Course is never speaking about behavior, but only about the thoughts in the mind and, in particular, what purpose those thoughts are giving to whatever we seem to find ourselves doing in the world. The Course would never say don't help others in need, or don't try to eliminate world hunger, for example. But it would say pay attention to whatever thoughts are behind your actions. And if, for example, you are seeing the poor and the helpless at the mercy of unscrupulous governments and corporations or impersonal forces of nature, you are reinforcing your belief in victims and victimizers, as well as in differences, separation and loss. And that kind of false empathy, which makes distinctions between the innocent and the guilty, truly helps no one for it denies the power of each mind to have chosen its external circumstances as a way to protect its decision for individuality and specialness, and therefore to make a different choice for healing and wholeness (T.16.I.1,2) . And this is what we all continue to do until we are at last willing to ask for another way, which has nothing to do with changing the world and everything to do with changing our own mind.

Following up on this third point, it is a misunderstanding of Jesus' meaning in **“For They Have Come”** (T.26.IX) to interpret it as if he were speaking about what bodies do with each other. He is referring to a change in perception, which happens in the mind, which may or may not then be expressed in actions. Yes, he does speak of how **“no one on earth but offers thanks to one who has restored his home, and sheltered him from bitter winter and the freezing cold”** (T.26.IX.7:3) , but only to make the point of how much more grateful we will be to have our true Home restored to us.

As for whether Jesus performed the miracles reported in the gospels, it is important to remember that the gospel writers, whom many biblical scholars believe were not eyewitnesses to his life, were writing their accounts to demonstrate that Jesus was special, different from everyone else, divine. If persons experienced healings in the presence of Jesus' love, it seems very unlikely that it would have happened in the magical ways described in the gospel stories. Rather, being reminded of the love that was within them, they would have released the guilt in their minds and no longer have needed to maintain its projection in the form of their symptoms **(M.5.II.2)** .

Jesus' compassion was not for the suffering and crippled bodies the eyes see, but for the suffering and crippled minds that were choosing to believe that illness and pain were somehow necessary for salvation. That those who witnessed his compassion two thousands years ago misunderstood his message and interpreted it in terms of expressing care and concern for those less fortunate than oneself -- reinforcing a belief in real differences and separation -- is not surprising. For just look at how Jesus' students today continue to misunderstand his message in the Course, even though it is presented in much more direct and unambiguous language.

Q #1065: I started working really hard on myself spiritually about 20 years ago, using the Course for the last ten years. I thought that the fact that my life had evolved from one of extreme difficulty, pain and hardship to one very much improved signified I was on the right track. All that ended when I lost the one really good job I've ever had due to a downsizing six years ago. Since then, I have had three very long periods of unemployment in between two horrible jobs that also were eliminated.

These past six years have been a real "dark night of the soul" for me, and I have faced some even deeper and more horrifying things about myself than I had realized were there. My guilt seems so vast, and my ego seems to be especially vicious. Despite my attempts to have a relationship with Jesus, I feel that I receive no help from him or from anyone else.

While I realize that I shouldn't expect to see any outward manifestation of my spiritual efforts, I do need to be able to support myself financially. I would give anything to understand what happened inside myself to suddenly change my circumstances. I feel that I have been doing everything I possibly can to help myself, but I feel as though I am at the mercy of something I have no control over.

What does it take to put an end to extreme circumstances caused by (what I am guessing to be) an ego investment in victimhood/martyrdom? I feel that "I" am not choosing these situations for myself, yet I am forced to deal with the consequences. Is it really enough to say, "Oh, that's just my ego acting up and causing trouble," and then just do whatever I can to feel at peace? Please tell me specifically step by step what my thoughts should be.

Is there any validity to the idea that feelings of worthlessness are broadcast to the universe as an invitation for mistreatment (in order to intensify guilt)? What concept, idea, or lesson from the Course could I focus on to make the biggest difference to me right now? How do I convince myself that Jesus does care, even when I see no reason to believe he does or to have faith in him?

A: There really can be no satisfactory answer at this level to explain why each of our lives plays out in the specific form that it does. And so to look for specific causes in our thoughts, such as "the ego's investment in victimhood/martyrdom" only serves to reinforce our feelings of guilt, as you are experiencing. The Course has no prescription for changing our life's circumstances. Rather it offers a different way of perceiving or interpreting the events of our lives, whatever they may be, which will allow us to be increasingly peaceful and eventually to disidentify with the self we have believed we are. As Jesus says early in the text, **"How else can you find joy in a joyless place except by realizing that you are not there?" (T.6.II.6:1).**

You are right, the self you believe you are is not making the decisions about what will happen in your life. While there may at times seem to be some correlation between our conscious thoughts and our external circumstances, the correspondence is by no means consistent nor predictable. And believing that there should be some congruence, as you thought when your situation seemed to be getting better as you integrated various spiritual teachings into your life, can be a real ego setup, as you then found out. Yet we are not victims of some powerful mind over which we have no control. It is just that, because of our own fear of accepting responsibility for the ego, the part of our mind that is making choices is usually out of conscious awareness for most of us other than for the briefest instant (**W.pl.136.3,4,5**) . And so it is unlikely that we will understand all of what is involved in determining our specific experiences as bodies in the world, nor is it necessary. So judging ourselves and laying a guilt trip on ourselves for what we judge to be our difficult life circumstances is both misguided and counterproductive and you should stop doing it right now!

The notion that our feelings of worthlessness invite mistreatment from the universe may be part of other spiritual teachings, but not the Course. The Course would say that we believe that guilt calls for punishment (**T.26.VII.3:1,2**) and so we seek to suffer in order to atone for our sinfulness, but the suffering is always simply the result of a choice for separation in the mind and not the consequence of anything external. In other words, a mind identified with guilt will interpret an external event or situation as punitive, while a healed mind not identified with guilt will see nothing punitive about the same external circumstance. These alternative ways of viewing the same event are clearly contrasted in Jesus' discussion of the crucifixion (**T.6.I**) . And so it is most helpful to think of guilt as dictating our interpretation of what seems to be happening to us in the world, rather than as dictating what the events themselves shall be at an individual level.

Having said this, your external circumstances nevertheless can be used by the Holy Spirit if you allow yourself to see, not the externals themselves, but your reactions to them as expressions of your identification with the ego in your mind, which is the one thing you have a real choice about. What is most challenging and difficult about this process for most of us is that the outer situation may not change and most of us want to see "positive" change in our lives as proof we are healing our mind. But the Course's purpose is to lead us to an ever-deepening experience of peace (**T.8.I.1:1,2; T.13.II.7:1**) , no matter what may seem to be happening to our bodies.

As for the vastness of your guilt, that is your perception simply because you are looking at the guilt with your ego, which must see it as huge and serious in order to maintain its own existence in your mind. The ego can not tolerate your considering it as insignificant or silly. And that specifically is what Jesus can help you with. If you're looking to him to help you get your life back on track, you'll be sorely disappointed in the long run. But if you're looking to him to remind you that your guilt is not real and that you already have what you need to be happy in your mind -- you're just blocking it from your awareness - he's always ready to help. You just have to ask.

And so the specific steps you ask for would be first to acknowledge, whenever anything in your life circumstances seems to be upsetting you, that the real problem is that you have chosen the ego as your teacher to help you interpret what seems to be happening to you, and the ego's only teaching goal is to reinforce the buried guilt in your mind by viewing the situation as a punishment for that guilt. The next step is to recognize that, if the ego is a choice, there must be an alternative teacher available in your mind, and Jesus is simply waiting on your invitation. His purpose will not be to change the external situation but to help you look at the guilt you have made real in your own mind and see its insignificance. When you are willing to join with him, this is what he will help you see, or rather, not see! Then, when you look back at the external situation, you will no longer be looking at it through the lens of guilt and you will no longer need to see it as punitive. And what is called for is not faith in Jesus that he will help you, but faith in your own power of choice, that you will be willing to look at the guilt you have made real in your own mind and then ask for the help to see through it and beyond it to the love that is always there.

You may find the section in the text, "**The Real Alternative**" (**T.31.IV**) , a helpful one for reflecting on the issues that you are confronting. In very clear and direct language, Jesus addresses the futility of looking

for any answers in the world, but also reminds us of where the happiness we are looking for can truly be found.

Q #1066: From an ego vantage point, most ego-based activities are male oriented. For example, traditionally and most frequently the areas of sports, war, politics, business, wealth accumulation, prestige cars, boats, airplanes, sexual promiscuity, construction, attack mentality, are all male-oriented values and activities. Women participate in all of the above but in much diminished ratio. Perhaps ego-based drives are hormone driven, and that what we ascribe to the ego may well be a condition of testosterone presence -- our bodies influencing how our mind thinks by its innate chemistry. Many studies confirm this indeed. If this has some truth to it, then it would seem that we have two different types of egos: one male and the other female. Could it be that as we are not equal in our bodies, we are not equal in our ego strategies either?

A: In *A Course in Miracles*, the ego is ascribed exclusively to the mind, which is totally independent of physical organs and systems. **“The ego is the part of the mind that believes your existence is defined by separation” (T.4.VII.1:5).** Ego-based activities and values thus are expressions of the mind's decision to sustain an autonomous existence as an individual apart from God. To secure this, the mind disowns its identity as a mind, so to speak, by projecting itself into a complex bodily system that is part of a larger much more complex physical world. The mind's goal, once it has identified with the separation from God, is to protect itself by remaining oblivious of its origins and the dynamics by which it became essentially mindless. It obliterates from its awareness the proper relationship between cause and effect, so that it now believes that bodily states and conditions (chemical, for example) are causal -- they cause mental experiences. This is what Jesus describes as “level confusion” early in the Course (see **T.2.IV.2**), and the restoring of the proper relationship of cause and effect is the objective of a major part of his teaching throughout the Course (see, for example, **“The Responsibility for Sight” [T.21.II]; “Reversing Effect and Cause” [T.28.II]**).

In a section on healing in the manual for teachers, Jesus defines sickness as a “faulty problem- solving approach” (the problem being our fear that God will take back our identity as individuals, which we granted ourselves at His expense); and as such, it must be a decision made by the mind, not the body (**M.5.II.1:5,6**) . Then he says something of paramount significance: **“The resistance to recognizing this is enormous, because the existence of the world as you perceive it depends on the body being the decision maker. Terms like ‘instincts,’ ‘reflexes’ and the like represent attempts to endow the body with non-mental motivators. Actually, such terms merely state or describe the problem. They do not answer it” (M.5.II.2:7,8,9,10)** . We can easily add hormones to the list. The mind (the ego) is neither male nor female, as it transcends all materiality. Sexes and the chemical systems that define them are the *effects* of the mind's decision to block its awareness of itself as a decision-making mind, making it appear as if external causes now are responsible for how we think and what we do. Our activities, therefore, are traceable not to a decision-making mind intent on remaining separate from God, but to a complex physical/ chemical system that itself is affected by external forces and systems. Male and female hormonal systems are part of the ego mind's strategy to focus our attention on form rather than content. Thus, though different in form, the content of all ego-based activities is the same.

That is the function of the miracle -- it is a shift in our thinking that gets us beyond the differences in form to sameness of content so that we can focus our attention on the “real” problem, which is the decision we made as minds, and continue to uphold, to remain as individuals, as God did *not* create us .

Q #1067: As I understand it, the process of *A Course in Miracles* is to look at painful feelings, understand they are not the effect of the situation from which they seem to spring, but that they are the ego's way to try to keep us focused on our bodies rather than our minds. Am I right? I believe Ken has said that when

we look at those feelings in that way, we're automatically looking with the Holy Spirit. However, if in following this practice, the negative feelings do not dissipate and we do not feel a sense of peace, does that mean we are doing it wrong? I'm asking because of this passage in the Course: "How can you know whether you chose the stairs to Heaven or the way to hell? Quite easily. How do you feel? Is peace in your awareness?" (T.23.II.22:6,7,8,9).

A: A clarification of the process as you've described it -- it's not the painful feelings themselves that are the ego's way of keeping us focused on the body, but the ego's *interpretation* of those feelings, which deceptively looks to the body and the world to account for them. The pain is actually a thought in the mind (T.13.III.6,7) that comes from embracing the tiny mad idea of separation (T.8.IV.5:7,8), having nothing to do with the body and the world (W.pl.132.10). As Jesus unequivocally notes, "**The cause of pain is separation, not the body, which is only its effect**" (T.28.III.5:1). But so long as we look to relieve our pain only by changing things about our body and our circumstances in the world, we remain mindless. And the pain -- and the thought of separation, which *is* the ego -- remain protected and beyond the possibility of change.

Whenever we look beyond the ego's subterfuge and recognize that we are responsible for what we feel, and that the decision for pain rests in our mind (T.21.II.2), we must have chosen the Holy Spirit rather than the ego as our teacher in that moment of awareness or we would never have recognized the real source of our pain. However, our fear of letting go of everything that comes with the pain -- including the self we believe we are -- may lead us to vacillate between the Holy Spirit and the ego. As a result, pain may remain in our awareness and in our experience, until we can in a holy instant release it completely to the Holy Spirit in our mind. In general, if we are honest with ourselves in acknowledging the truth about what we have been feeling and why, even if the feelings do not dissipate completely, we will begin to experience a release from the rigid hold that those feelings had seemed to have over us, and we will have at least taken the first step up Heavens' stairs. For the possibility of peace will now be in our awareness.

Q #1068: *A Course in Miracles* seems to say that the Holy Spirit both perceives (e.g., that I am sitting here at my computer) and has knowledge. It is a bit strange that the Holy Spirit seems to unite contradictories. Generally only God and Christ have knowledge.

A: This is a question of language inconsistencies in the Course. Jesus is correcting our long-held misconceptions about God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and himself. But he must do so using language and concepts we are familiar with and can accept. Above all, Jesus wants us to know that God and the Holy Spirit are not part of a conspiracy of some kind to lure us into a trap and then destroy us because of our sins. However he can get this loving message across to us is how he will proceed. Thus he will use language that says that the Holy Spirit perceives us as either calling out for love or extending it -- this is part of his larger message that sin is not real. He is speaking to *our* needs -- our longing to be assured that God loves us and never condemns -- and therefore he must speak in ways we can relate to. If you study the Course with this in mind, you will not be confused by the language. You will see there is no contradiction in its content. Jesus is getting a loving message across to us, and his language will be relative to the point he is making.

In the clarification of terms at the end of the manual for teachers, Jesus tells us: "**The Holy Spirit is described as the remaining Communication Link between God and His separated Sons. In order to fill this special function the Holy Spirit has assumed a dual function. He knows because He is part of God; He perceives because He was sent to save humanity. He is the great correction principle; the bringer of true perception, the inherent power of the vision of Christ. . . . He seems to be a Guide through a far country, for you need that form of help. He seems to be whatever meets the needs you think you have**" (C.6.3:1,2,3,4; 4:6,7). But when we awaken from the dream, we will not need a Voice (form) to remind us that we are only dreaming we are separate from God: "**And then the Voice is gone, no longer to take form but to return to the eternal formlessness of God**" (C.6.5:8).

Q #1069: I am at a point in the Course where I am very sad and depressed. My thinking is: If we are to return to our true Self, we need to pass, die, shift, or whatever, back to the arms of God. I don't want to give up this world, just the mis-creations like war, illness, etc. I know the Course says God has our good creations saved for us, but does that include my projections of egos (bodies) I love, like my family? I fear loneliness. Do I have it all wrong? I keep thinking I need to die to reach Atonement.

A: You do not have to die to reach Atonement. Atonement is a shift that takes place in your mind whereby you now see with Christ's vision, not the ego's. What that means is that you see everyone as the same instead of as different, with different and competing interests and goals. You clearly see separation as an illusion. You can still be here with a healed mind, but you would realize that living as a body in a physical world is not your real identity, and you would also realize that that is true of your loved ones as well, which makes loneliness impossible. You do not have to die to have this realization. It is a state of mind that *A Course in Miracles* calls the real world. You do not disappear in the Heart of God the instant you accept the Atonement: **"Fear not that you will be abruptly lifted up and hurled into reality,"** Jesus assures us (T.16.VI.8:1) . The process of awakening is a gentle one: **"God willed he waken gently and with joy, and gave him means to waken without fear"** (T.27.VII.13:5) . Only when the world and *all* forms of separation are meaningless to you will they disappear from your mind -- but not before then. We are never asked to sacrifice what we still want (T.30.V.9:4,5) .

Q #1070: About 8 or so years ago, I had several strange experiences. I felt an energy come over me, up my back and into my head. At first I was frightened and said no to it. After a time or two I gave in to it. What happened next took a second or two. I had a glimpse of -- what? I'm not sure; it was so fast. But I think I knew everything. It was like a revelation. I remember saying, "So, that's what it's all about!" Then I promptly forgot what I saw. This happened about 4 or 5 times -- I had no control over when. One time I was at the movies. Another peeling potatoes at the sink! The feeling went away as quickly as it came. I haven't had that experience since, yet I can't forget it. Can you shed any light on it?

A: It is difficult to know for certain what these experiences may have been. Generally speaking, if an experience leaves you feeling less guilty, fearful, and judgmental, and kinder and more loving toward everyone, it came from the part of your mind that is linked to the truth about reality and the Love of God that is its source. *A Course in Miracles* teaches us that our minds are split between that part and the other part that fiercely and even viciously protects its perceived independence from God. The decision-making aspect is *always* choosing to identify with one or the other. One manifestation of choosing the right-minded part would be an experience such as the one you had, where you suddenly realize "what it's all about." We are not usually aware of these instants of decision, although the point of the mind-training dimension of the Course is to help us become more aware of them; and since linear time is part of the ego's strategy to keep us away from our mind, the fact that this happened 8 years ago is not important. Your promptly forgetting what you saw could be interpreted as a reaction of fear to what you saw since your ego defends with all its puny might *against* such glimpses of truth, as it knows its existence is threatened should you see the truth and then choose for it instead of against it.

These dynamics are going on all the time, and in the early stages of our work with the Course, our objective is to see our lives in that context, with our focus on which teacher we are choosing to direct us in our daily interactions: Jesus or the ego. So the experience you had could be used as a reference point, a kind of confirmation of your right-minded self; but it is best not to try to re- create it or go back to it. Just focus on the present, that right now in this instant you are choosing; try to become aware of which teacher or thought system you are choosing. Don't judge your choice, just observe it, and as you go on, evaluate the effects as something that is bringing you peace or more conflict.

Q #1071: Is the decision maker in "me" different from the decision maker in other people? Who is the "I" who is responsible for the decision, the "you" that *A Course in Miracles* addresses? On that same note, does this decision maker continue in some form, even after death, until he has made the decision to relinquish the separation? Would any progress in this "lifetime" carry on?

A: When thinking about these kinds of issues, it is always helpful to recall that we are attempting to provide a rational context for something that is inherently illusory and originally spawned from the wish to oppose what is eternally true. Our human framework of explanation is the only one available to us, but as part of the attempt to deny truth, it is necessarily limited. Jesus cautions us about these limitations in different ways throughout the Course. Yet he must meet us where we are so he can help us identify our mistakes and then correct them once we have accepted him as our teacher.

Our primary mistake has been to believe that something other than the perfect Oneness of God's Love is real. As is evident in our reactions to everyday occurrences, we rarely question the reality of multiplicity -- that we are all real as separate individuals in a universe of diverse entities of all kinds. Skipping over the ego dynamics hidden within our minds, which include the terrorizing fear that we are going to be punished for our existence as individuals, let us look at Jesus' description of this situation. He speaks of it as a process of substitution: **"It has taken many forms, because it was the substitution of illusion for truth; of fragmentation for wholeness. It 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. That one error, which brought truth to illusion, infinity to time, and life to death, was all you ever made. Your whole world rests upon it. Everything you see reflects it, and every special relationship that you ever made is part of it"** (T.18.I.4) .

Jesus is clearly speaking to a *mind* that is living out the effects of its decision to substitute "illusion for truth" and "fragmentation for wholeness." He could not be talking to us as bodies because he knows bodies are nothing more than projections of the mind, and therefore are lifeless. All that is important is helping us recover our awareness of ourselves as minds. Given our investment in separation and fragmentation, it appears that we are individual decision-making minds, different one from another; and it is not wrong to think this at the beginning stages of one's work with the Course. But the natural outcome of practicing forgiveness is the gradual dissolving of this sense that we are separate from each other, which means we will be moving back in the direction of oneness -- first in terms of recognizing we all share a common interest, and then in realizing we share the same Identity as God's Son. At this level of correction we would know there is only one mind. We no longer would be choosing to substitute fragmentation for wholeness and illusion for truth, and therefore we would gradually accept oneness as the truth, and experience separation as less and less attractive. Question [#663](#) also discusses this issue and cites relevant passages in the Course.

Death is a decision made by a mind for either a right-minded or a wrong-minded purpose. In other words, it is part of the continuum of the mind's ongoing decision either to uphold the illusion of separation or to undo it. The mind is not in the body, so the mind is not changed in any way when the body dies. It is affected only by its own choices. From this perspective, death is irrelevant, although from the perspective of the world clearly it is not. See Questions [#68](#) and [#494](#) for further discussion and references.

To ask whether we carry with us what we learn in this lifetime is to assume that time is linear, and *A Course in Miracles* teaches that it is not. We always have to return to the reference point of a mind that is outside time and space deciding between two teachers and their thought systems. It is very humbling to be asked to disregard our experience as a reference point for understanding issues like these, but we really must raise ourselves to Jesus' level if we are going to make progress in understanding his teachings. Time and space are part of the ego's strategy to convince us that we are bodies -- to substitute fragmentation for wholeness, as quoted above. The learning takes place only on the level of the decision-making mind outside time and space -- and it is essentially learning that its choice for the thought system of separation was a mistake, which can now be corrected.

Q #1072: When we seem to die, that is, lay aside our body in one of many possible ways: accident, suicide, being murdered or after a prolonged illness, and we have not learned forgiveness, is it mandatory that we return to this world to learn our lessons? If we do not wish to return and since forgiveness occurs only in the mind, does the mind have to project itself into a phenomenal world to learn forgiveness? The reason for this question is that I seem to be going backwards in learning the Course and I have reached the biblical three score and ten with questionable health issues. I have no wish to return in a projected material form and would prefer to work out my salvation in the abstract or mind state of existence. This question by the way, along with my other questions, will be manifest confirmations of my backwardness in understanding the Course. That is not false humility begging for contradiction but simply a recognition of my limitations. But as the Course says, I planned it that way. Better stop while I'm not too far behind.

A: Cute. But you may first want to remember that you are never in a position to evaluate your progress with the Course along your Atonement path (**T.18.V.1**) . In fact, acknowledging your difficulties in mastering and applying Course concepts and principles probably puts you a good deal farther along than those students who believe they are progressing quite nicely on their path, thank you. For you at least are not in denial about how challenging this set of teachings can be to understand and put into practice!

But your mistake comes in believing that you are here in projected material form now and would prefer not to return to such a state in the future after this lifetime has been completed. The fact is, like every other seemingly separate aspect of the Sonship, you always have been, are and will remain in the mind, and that is the only “place” where salvation can be found. This mind has created a vast array of symbols, some of which it has chosen to identify with (e.g., **T.6.V.A.2:2**; **T.12.III.8:4**; **T.13.in.2:4**; **T.28.VI.3:10;4:1**; **W.pl.161:5,6**) , but the fact is that the mind never resides within any of its symbols. Rather the symbols remain always within the mind, at least for as long as we wish to believe that we are separate from our Source.

And so, rather than being concerned with how much longer you may continue to experience the particular set of symbols that you currently identify as yourself and this lifetime, or what symbols you may relate to in an imaginary “future” life, you could do better to watch what you have made real right now with as little judgment as you can, simply observing the self you think you are and all the other selves that this self seems to be relating to. And by that very process of observing, without valuing either positively or negatively, you are actually, little by little, distancing yourself from the symbols and reinforcing your identity as mind, which is all Jesus is inviting you to remember. We all in fact are dealing with seeming abstractions of mind - sin, guilt, fear and attack -- that we have sought to make into concrete and specific symbols so that we might avoid the truly abstract nature of mind -- the rarefied atmosphere of total oneness in which the ego can not survive (**W.pl.161.2,3,4,7,8**) .

Q #1073: I am relatively new to *A Course in Miracles* . I am wondering if it might not be more beneficial for a student to use magic in the illusion to address the ego's threat before trying to incorporate the Course into our daily lives. If we use the magic of psychology to address issues such as self-hate and destructive behaviors, and come to a place where we love and forgive ourselves fully in this illusion, will it not help to see the Course as a method to change the mind and not so much as a source of help in this illusion? For example I am going through a tough time at the moment and am looking for small miracles to help me through it. But I fully understand that the Course is not intended for this illusion. It leaves me feeling alone and fearful (the ego). But if I come to accept and love and forgive myself through magic it will be easier to aim for the higher purpose.

A: The use of magic is never wrong, and in fact Jesus tells us that it is a wise choice when we are so gripped by a condition that we cannot effectively deal with the ego dynamics in our minds. He calls this a “**compromise approach to mind and body, in which something from the outside is temporarily**

given healing belief” (T.2.IV.4:6) . This approach is summarized in a passage we often quote: “The value of the Atonement does not lie in the manner in which it is expressed. In fact, if it is used truly, it will inevitably be expressed in whatever way is most helpful to the receiver. This means that a miracle, to attain its full efficacy, must be expressed in a language that the recipient can understand without fear” (T.2.IV.5:1,2,3) .

Thus, external intervention often is the kindest and most helpful direction to take when there is a pattern of destructive behavior triggered by intense self-hatred. But you would not necessarily have to reach the level where you love and forgive yourself *totally* before you can work with the Course and benefit from it. Even without the element of destructive behavior, most people have not reached that level. If they did, they would not need the Course. Jesus is addressing people at the bottom of the ladder of spirituality, not the top. As is indicated in dozens and dozens of passages, he clearly is aware of the wretched self-images we all carry around with us. (See, for example, **W.pl.93** and **W.pl.191** .) It could not be otherwise, given the means by which we acquired our existence: attacking and rejecting perfect Love and Oneness.

Once our behavior is under control and we can function reasonably well in the world, the Course can be helpful in teaching us how to relate to ourselves and others in a way that would gradually diminish self-hatred, guilt, and judgment, and bring about a more peaceful way of proceeding through our everyday interactions. In this sense, the Course is helpful in the illusion. It helps us who are rooted in it to gently begin the process of easing ourselves out of it.

Q #1074: Do we keep our learning into the next life? I am finding judgment to be so pervasive, that it seems almost impossible to find my way home in just this lifetime.

A: A lifetime is but a classroom with a set of lessons on of the Son of God's return to his true home. There will be lifetimes as long as the mind believes the thought of separation is real and that there is a choice to be made between truth and illusion. Each time the mind chooses the illusion of separation it projects its guilt for making that choice in the form of judgments. The single thought that the separation did in fact occur, and therefore the world of illusion is real, stands behind the myriad of seemingly different judgments and lifetimes. From this single thought, all judgment and every lifetime is brought forth. The goal of *A Course in Miracles* is to teach us to distinguish between what is true and what is false, and to train our minds to recognize the effects of the mind's choice. This process may take lifetimes because of the unwillingness to choose to believe that only truth is true, and what is false will never bring happiness. Every judgment brings misery; every lifetime ends in death. Indeed, every lifetime *begins* with a death blow to God's Son.

What seems to be learning is actually a process of remembering the truth by *unlearning* the ego's thought system. The mind that has forgotten uses the body, the world, and many lifetimes to remember its true Identity and to forget everything else. Of itself the body does nothing; in fact, “ **At no single instant does the body exist at all**” (T.17.VII.31). Clearly, then, the remembering process goes on with or without the body; it precedes birth and outlives death. And since unlearning/remembering occurs only in the mind, it is not happening in any “lifetime”; a term we associate with the lifespan of the body measured by linear time. Ironically, this is now called “real time.” The Course would call it “illusory time” and tells us it takes no time at all to choose against the ego.

Fortunately, we do not need to reverse every judgment that we hold stockpiled in our arsenal of attack thoughts. The only “judgment” that needs to be reversed is the decision to side with the ego in its interpretation of the separation. If every judgment is the projection of guilt for having made that decision, judgments end when the mind decides in favor of the Holy Spirit instead of the ego. When that decision is made unequivocally, all judgment ends, as does all belief in the illusion of the world and the lifetimes spent in it. At that point: “**Your foot has reached the lawns that welcome you to Heaven's gate; the quiet place of peace, where you await with certainty the final step of God**” (W.pl.194.1:3) .

Meanwhile, it is important to continue patiently uncovering the judgments that reveal the mind's mistaken belief that separation is possible and God's Son has been put to death. Each one is an opportunity to consider the insanity of this belief as well as its painful effects, in order to move closer to the final decision against the ego's madness.

Q #1075: What does *A Course in Miracles* say about angels? Also, what about people who seem to see an evil presence? I was raised in Christian Science and I have not come across anything they do not have in common with the Course. Christian Science believes that evil spirits do not exist, and that there is nothing other than God's power. It says we create in our minds, and anything that is not absolute is not real. Although Christian Science does not use the same terminology as the Course does, it, too, says this is a illusion.

A: As we discussed in Question #413, angels in *A Course in Miracles* are regarded as extensions of God's Thought. In this sense, they are symbols of the light and protection of God that always surrounds us, since in truth we never left Him (**T.18.VI.10:6; W.pII.264.h**) . If we are too afraid of that level of our Identity, our minds would translate the experience of formless Love into form, and one form might be angelic beings or entities. But the form is not the reality. The idea would be to relate to what they symbolize, and then go beyond that to the Source, which is always the Love that transcends anything of form.

This same kind of thinking would apply to the perception of an evil presence. We are so heavily bound to form that we immediately translate thoughts into form: **"Everything you recognize you identify with externals, something outside itself. You cannot even think of God without a body, or in some form you think you recognize"** (**T.18.VIII.1:6,7**) . The core of the ego is hatred and murder, and sometimes that can be experienced as an evil presence; but the Course helps us by teaching us not to be afraid of it, for it has no reality other than what we give to it -- coming from our guilt and fear over believing we destroyed God in order to have our own existence.

About Christian Science . . . As we discussed in Questions #372 and #512, there are parallels on the metaphysical level of teachings between Christian Science and *A Course in Miracles* ; but there are significant differences as well. And of course that does not make one system superior to the other -- just different. One difference is that according to the Course's theory, God knows nothing of the world because it does not exist as something real. As an illusion, it will disappear from our awareness when we let go of our belief in separation. At the level of purpose and practice there are differences as well. A major purpose of Christian Science is the healing of illnesses, with these healings then demonstrating the validity of its principles. The primary focus of the Course's process is the healing of our minds of the guilt that is hidden there. Healing the body is never the goal, although that may be an effect of the mind's healing.

The Course's view of forgiveness also distinguishes it from other paths. We are asked to have the willingness to forgive our brothers for what they did not do (**T.17.III.1:5**) ; and so a central aspect of one's work with the Course is developing a relationship with Jesus or the Holy Spirit, so that we may turn to Them regularly for help in choosing right-minded perceptions of everything in our lives. The questions cited at the beginning fill in the details of this brief answer. Of most importance, again, is that differences not be turned into judgments of one or the other thought system.

Q #1076: As I have moved along on my forgiveness path, I am obviously becoming less judgmental, less critical, and less fearful. This is not to say that I am by any means free of these things but I sense that my non-verbal energy and body language emit a sense of acceptance and non-judgment to others, both in right-minded moments and generally. What I am amazingly finding, though, is that women are less

attracted to me this way. I guess what I am asking you is: "Is it possible that some people will not like us when we seem less judgmental?" Can you explain, what seems to me to be a fascinating psychological concept: that some people will be turned off and threatened when we are not judgmental. I thought that a Teacher of God was supposed to teach messages of hope and acceptance.

A: It may be helpful to remember that *A Course in Miracles* does not ask that we not have judgments. Jesus tells us not to judge because we *cannot* judge (**W.p.I.154.4**) . What we call judgment, critical or otherwise, is perception; and we are perceiving all the time: “ **Perception is a continual process of accepting and rejecting, organizing and reorganizing, shifting and changing. Evaluation is an essential part of perception, because judgments are necessary in order to select**” (**T.3.V.7;8**). That is because the mind's decision to believe in separation results in guilt that is projected out and experienced in the world in the form of separation between one's self and everybody else. Whether the “other” is perceived negatively or positively does not matter. In fact, the ego goes to great lengths to refine its distinctions between those considered to be friend or foe, desirable or undesirable, attractive or unattractive. We comply with the guidelines of the Course's mind training by learning to recognize these “judgments” in every interaction, rather than trying to be without them. It is possible to act quite normal while monitoring the mind in this way. Indeed, it is normal to have judgments.

What makes this Course simple, albeit not easy, is the single function we are given, which is to look honestly at whatever speck of darkness still remains to block the full awareness of love's presence. That is all we are required to do. Whatever else has previously been accomplished in letting go of judgment remains safe in the hands of the Holy Spirit. It is not meant to be used as a means to establish differences between oneself and others. The only thing we are asked to do when we find ourselves with someone who is judgmental and critical, is pay attention to our own thoughts of judgment about the person who is judging.

Fortunately, we are not responsible for others' perception of us. When the mind chooses to listen to the ego it can misperceive even the most beautiful reflection of the right mind; e.g., the figure of Jesus and *A Course in Miracles* . From the perspective of the right mind it does not matter how anyone perceives us. From the wrong mind we are so busy misperceiving ourselves it also does not matter. Again, all we ever need to do is pay attention to any thought that hints (or glares) of separation and difference. People usually do prefer the company of those who share their judgments. To that end, groups of all kinds are organized; many of which involve judgments against those who do not share their values/judgments. This is not surprising, considering the ingenious separative devices of the ego thought system. So there are probably as many women who find a lack of criticism attractive as there are who don't. While on the level of form you follow the shifting flow of attraction and attractiveness, the goal of practicing the principles of the Course in every relationship remains unaltered. And that is all that matters. In this regard we may slightly paraphrase what Jesus tells us: **Forget not that the healing of God's Son is all [a relationship] is for (T.24.VI.4:1)** .

Q #1077: I have been watching my thoughts recently and now it seems like they are almost thinking themselves -- almost like they have nothing to do with me. They just run on, and when I remember I try to watch them: i.e., I am not thinking them at all; they are just happening inside me. They just appear, though on the whole they are quite negative and I still often identify with them and get sucked back into them. And I still see myself as a body having these separate thoughts which I witness rather than a mind witnessing them. Though it is obvious that many of these thoughts relate to the body and influence the way the body feels and what it/I want to do. Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj said that all the personality is, is a stream of memory. That's what it seems to me from watching the thoughts arising in me, but I still see them as me.

A: Our work with *A Course in Miracles* is aimed at getting us back to full awareness of ourselves as decision-making minds so that we can see clearly that we are always choosing between one of two

thoughts: that of the ego or that of the Holy Spirit. The seeming endless stream of thoughts we experience are really variations of these two fundamental thoughts. That is why Jesus places such emphasis on the *content* of our thinking, and asks us to learn to place less stress on the forms in our lives. As you watch your thoughts, thus, you can also acknowledge -- being careful not to judge yourself -- that you are *choosing* to identify with a separate bodily self, a special bodily self, a body that lives in time and space, a fearful bodily self, etc. The *you* that is making this choice cannot be the body.

Then what should come up very quickly is why you, as a mind, would choose to identify with the body. Your thinking, thus, would shift to *purpose* : there must be a purpose the body is serving that keeps you so rooted in it. But because we are so heavily defended against seeing ourselves as minds, this process of moving from body to mind can take quite some time. It does not happen overnight. And in his characteristic gentleness, Jesus tells us that we do not have to let go of this identification for more than an instant: **“You are not asked to let this happen for more than an instant, yet it is in this instant that the miracle of Atonement happens. Afterwards you will see the body again, but never quite the same” (T.18.VII.2:3,4) .**

Concentrating on the *purpose* the body serves thus will help you move along in the process of dis-identifying with it. It was made by our self-serving ego to convince us that we are indeed separate, but are not responsible for that, as evidenced by the “innocent victim” experiences that pervade our lives. As you practice seeing that dynamic in operation in your daily life, you can recall that the body can serve a different purpose by your choosing Jesus instead of the ego as your teacher. You then will use the body to learn more about the interests we all share in common. In your practice of this, you will gradually be shifting your identification from your body to your mind.

Q #1078: I would like to know the specific parts of *A Course in Miracles* which deals with the metaphor the eagle and the sparrow, because since I read it I have not been able to find it.

A: The following are the two passages where the eagle and sparrow metaphor is used:

Those who choose freedom will experience only its results. Their power is of God, and they will give it only to what God has given, to share with them. Nothing but this can touch them, for they see only this, sharing their power according to the Will of God. And thus their freedom is established and maintained. It is upheld through all temptation to imprison and to be imprisoned. It is of them who learned of freedom that you should ask what freedom is. Ask not the sparrow how the eagle soars, for those with little wings have not accepted for themselves the power to share with you. (T.20.IV.4)

When this power has once been experienced, it is impossible to trust one's own petty strength again. Who would attempt to fly with the tiny wings of a sparrow when the mighty power of an eagle has been given him? And who would place his faith in the shabby offerings of the ego when the gifts of God are laid before him? What is it that induces them to make the shift? (M.4.I.2)

The “Concordance,” “Glossary Index” and the electronic version of *A Course in Miracles* are very helpful tools for finding specific passages. You may find these publications listed in our newsletter and catalog. The Concordance and Glossary are also available on our Web site with a 10% discount. The Concordance lists every word found in the Course, while the Glossary defines the important terms used in the Course and references where they are found. The electronic version of the Course has a search feature that allows you to find any word or phrase.

Q #1079: I recently read the book *Miracle Detective* by Randal Sullivan. The book is basically about apparitions of Mary all over the world. He also discusses other types of miracles as reported by the Catholic Church. Near the end of the book he interviews a priest who said he knew Helen Schucman, the scribe of *A Course in Miracles*. He reported that near the end of her life, he visited her often in the hospital where he heard her "bad mouth" the Course, saying how she wished that she were never involved. He said that this made him seriously concerned about the origin of the Course, as maybe not from Jesus. This is absolutely not going to stop me from doing the Course, but I was curious about whether Helen actually felt like this.

A: Kenneth's book *Absence from Felicity* gives a comprehensive account of Helen's life and relationship with Jesus and the Course, which is always helpful as a context for considering reports such as the one you mention. As Kenneth relates, near the end of her life Helen suffered from pancreatic cancer, which had gone undetected for a long time. It had impinged on her liver, and as a result, her whole body, including her brain, was extremely toxic. This poisoning throughout her body led her to act in ways that were not normal for her. One of these uncharacteristic expressions was to say negative things about the Course. Until her final illness, however, she never did anything like this. Again, Kenneth's book provides a helpful context for understanding this kind of behavior.

Q #1080: Can you forgive the ego?

A: No, you cannot forgive an illusion. To say you forgive the ego would give it a reality it does not have, and would mean that the separation did occur. Forgiveness is a change of mind, whereby belief in the illusion of separation (the ego) is replaced with the memory of God's Love (the Holy Spirit). The separation did not happen (**T.6.II.10**) and therefore there is nothing to forgive, which is why Jesus tells us in *A Course in Miracles*: **"The miracle (forgiveness) does nothing. All it does is to undo. And thus it cancels out the interference to what has been done"** (**T.28.I.1:1,2,3**). Forgiveness restores to awareness the power of the mind to choose. In another passage Jesus makes this point again in a slightly different way: **"...forgive the Son of God for what he did not do"** (**T.17.III.1:5**). Nothing anyone does has any effect on our peace. Peace is thrown away when the mind decides to side with the ego. The mind then "forgives" itself by choosing the Holy Spirit instead. Choosing the ego, which is a choice for nothing, is thus undone/ forgiven.

Q #1081: It is said that without God's wish nothing can move. Everything is God's wish. Thy will be done. Then why give a credit to God for goodness and blame the ego for evil? Is not God beyond that duality?

A: Yes, God is beyond the duality of good and evil. There are no words that truly define or describe God. Anything that we say about Him comes from the dualistic perspective of the split mind. As Jesus tells us: **"Everything you recognize you identify with externals, something outside itself. You cannot even think of God without a body, or in some form you think you recognize"** (**T.18.VIII.1:6,7**). The ego thus uses its own descriptive terms for its version of God, but they have nothing to do with God. As a great philosopher once said, "God made man in his image, and man returned the favor." This man-made image incorporates opposing concepts such as good and evil, which are inherent in the ego's thought system. Since the ego's very existence is sustained by opposition and differences, the God it claims as father has to share these characteristics. Most important to the ego's God is the relationship He is imagined to have with His separated Sons. In this relationship we find the source of all the ideas about God's supposed Will for His separated Sons. We learn in the Course that God cannot have a separate Will for separated Sons, since separation from God is impossible (**T.6.II.10**). Thus, God does not move anything, nor could He possibly have any awareness of the world of form. This would be true even if the world were *not* made as an attack on Him, which is impossible since the world is made precisely to be perceived as outside the Mind of God. Oneness with His Son is all He knows. That is His Will.

A Course in Miracles uses the term “will” as a property of spirit, while “wish” is an activity of the ego. God's Will, as defined in the “Glossary-Index” by Kenneth Wapnick, is **“the expression of God's being” (Glossary-Index, p. 222)** . In other words, it is Who He is, and it is a Being/Will He shares with His Son. That Will is reflected in the dream in the part of the mind that remembers God (the Holy Spirit): **“The Holy Spirit is the way in which God's Will is done on earth as it is in Heaven. Both Heaven and earth are in you, because the call of both is in your mind (T.5.II.8:4,5).** In this passage Jesus gives new meaning to the phrase from the Lord's Prayer: “Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.” He refers to the split mind that chooses between the ego (earth) and the Holy Spirit (the memory of Heaven). One could say that “evil” lies in choosing the ego and goodness in the choice for the Holy Spirit, but the Course would not make that kind of distinction because it tells us we are choosing between the truth and an illusion. Illusion cannot be given reality, or the power of “evil” to have effects. It simply is not real. What most distinguishes the Course's teaching about God's Will from traditional Christian belief is that God's Will is not done on earth; He does not know about earth, bodies, separation, or duality. He does not even know goodness because the idea of goodness is made up in contrast to evil. The Course uses the dualistic language and concepts that we understand only to lead us to the oneness we have forgotten. Though it has been forgotten, it has not been extinguished nor changed in any way. No matter how much we believe the madness of the ego we remain one with God's Will: **“Whatever your reactions to the Holy Spirit's Voice may be, whatever voice you choose to listen to, whatever strange thoughts may occur to you, God's Will *is* done” (T.13.XI.5:4).** Therein lies our hope and comfort.

Q #1082: I am wondering what *A Course in Miracles* has to say about the consciousness of plants and animals and perhaps even inanimate objects. I find the whole issue quite distressing -- "nature red in tooth and claw" -- and wonder if plants feel pain when picked / cut / eaten, etc. I have always been a nature lover and am passionately concerned about ecology, preservation of biodiversity, etc. I am also considering taking up gardening as a career. Yet I feel deeply conflicted because in creating better habitats I am allowing more plants, animals, bugs, etc., to come into the world and suffer pain, and also inflicting pain on the invader species I remove.

I am very confused on the whole issue and I find a lack of explicit guidelines in *A Course in Miracles* . It is all very well to say the world is a dream; such an argument would allow for all kinds of monstrous evil to be committed to humans, plants, animals, alike. But saying it is not real does not help. The only thing that is real at this very moment is what is actually being experienced, not what would be experienced if it were not for the veil of illusion.

I am not alone in this. The Jain religion takes the practice of not harming anything to extremes. Some Jains wear masks over their faces to avoid inhaling insects, bugs, etc., and lightly brush the road before them to avoid treading on living creatures. I sometimes feel I ought to be doing the same thing, and certainly not inflicting pain on millions of blades of grass with a mower, or injecting rhododendrons with poison to prevent them from spreading and destroying the countryside. Yet do I want to preserve / enhance the countryside when it is a killing field?

A: One of the major teachings of the Course is that all Sons are the same, equal in content, not form. And Jesus is not speaking exclusively about homo sapiens when he uses the term *Son of God* , and so from this perspective he tells us that even the smallest grain of sand is part of the Sonship (**T.28.IV.9**) . Seeing qualitative differences, therefore, means one's mind has merged with the ego.

As horrifying as it may be to acknowledge this, if you look carefully, you will see that the entire world is a “killing field.” What level does not share somehow in the ego genome of *kill or be killed* and *one or the other* ? Where is there growth and survival that does not come at another's expense? -- root systems; insects; marine life; microorganisms; corporations; governments; defense systems. What can survive without feeding off another? What is there that is needed for our survival that is not also potentially harmful or lethal, to say nothing of limited? Granted, there are examples of stunning beauty, selflessness,

and helpfulness. But if you scratch beneath the surface, are not most instances of beauty tinged with pain or vulnerability? Are not most instances of selflessness marked by sacrifice? Are not most forms of helpfulness limited?

Given its origin in the ego's vicious and defiant intent to produce an existence totally apart from God's Kingdom of Love and Oneness, how could the world be anything other than this? It was made as an attack (**W.pll.3.2:1**) ; and since **"ideas leave not their source"** (e.g., **W.pl.132.10:3**) , it simply replicates the thought that owns it. **"Therefore,"** Jesus teaches, **"seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world. Perception is a result and not a cause"** (**T.21.in.1:7,8**) . The problem, though, is that we have identified with the ego's version of reality to such an extent that we have no sense of ourselves as minds always deciding to uphold this attack on truth. To protect its system -- itself -- the ego has us focus entirely on form, believing there is a hierarchy of values and beings, which leads to what Jesus calls **"the first law of chaos"** (**T.23.II.2,3**) . We think that what we perceive is reality. Thus we become obsessed with defending what we judge as good and worthwhile against what we judge as bad or threatening, in the process becoming totally confused and frustrated, as we intuitively sense that the situation is hopeless. And all because we have lost sight of the total picture -- that an illusion is an illusion is an illusion. One part of an illusion is no more valuable than any other.

Fortunately, there is a solution, and it does not require that you deny what you are seeing and experiencing. Jesus is the loving presence in our minds who helps us get back to the sane part of our minds, where we can recall the steps that led us into this depressing state and then choose to begin the process of healing by looking at everything differently. This means seeing our lives as a classroom and all our relationships and interactions as the curriculum Jesus can use to restore our minds to their natural state of peace and oneness. The world will continue to be what it is, but because our perspective will be different, our perception of it will change. We thus can learn to use our body and the world for this purpose by changing the teacher in our minds from the ego to Jesus or the Holy Spirit. *Any* role you choose in the world can serve this purpose, and this purpose alone is what would give your life meaning. The thought system in your mind is the problem, not the world. Why would you allow the world -- made to conceal your true Identity -- to tell you who you are and what your purpose should be?

A Course in Miracles as a spiritual path teaches that there is no way out of conflict and hopelessness unless we are open to the idea that we are choosing what we want to be real in our perception: **"Perception selects, and makes the world you see. It literally picks it out as the mind directs. . . . Perception is a choice and not a fact. But on this choice depends far more than you may realize as yet. For on the voice you choose to hear, and on the sights you choose to see, depends entirely your whole belief in what you are. Perception is a witness but to this, and never to reality. Yet it can show you the conditions in which awareness of reality is possible, or those where it could never be"** (**T.21.V.1:1,2,7,8,9,10,11**).

This is a radical teaching, without question. It overturns everything we have learned in the world, and it therefore threatens the foundation of our self-concept and our lives. And it seems the only people who are receptive to it are those who have tried other approaches and found them inadequate, or who have thrown up their hands in desperation and have cried out, "There must be a better way!"

You might wish to read Questions [#134](#) and [# 340](#), which also speak to these issues.

Q #1083: How do I bring a problem to the love of Jesus in my mind when I'm not even aware of his presence there?

A: When the mind chose to identify with the ego thought system, it also chose to forget its identity as mind and identified with the body instead. In doing so it lost all awareness, not only of the memory of God's Love symbolized by Jesus or the Holy Spirit, but of itself as a mind. One of the most important

goals of *A Course in Miracles* , therefore, is to teach us that we have a mind that has the power to choose between the ego and the Holy Spirit. That is the fundamental goal of the mind training curriculum of the workbook. The application of the principles taught in the text and the foundation of the practice of forgiveness is to become aware of the mind that is always choosing between the ego and Jesus' love. The ability to choose is not lost by the mind's decision to forget its power. Lack of awareness does not stop us from choosing; it merely means we are oblivious of the mind's existence, mistakenly believing that the world exists outside the mind and that things external to the mind can have an effect on it. This belief is essential to the ego's thought system and is its mainstay. It finds its clearest expression in the mind's decision to identify with the body. Willingness to accept this identity is no different from willingness to turn to the part of the mind where Jesus' love abides. The question is why it seems easier to believe the ego's lie (the existence of the world and the body) than the Holy Spirit's truth (the existence of the mind and the memory of love/Jesus). The reason is because we want to.

What motivates us to want the love that Jesus represents is learning to recognize the painful effects of choosing the ego, by seeing everything in our lives as the reflection of the mind's choice. That is the first step in the process of forgiveness, and it is how we get in touch with the mind that has been forgotten. It means paying attention to every experience of conflict in any form; from a tiny annoyance to murderous rage, and recognizing in it the mind's choice for the ego. The next step is to be willing to accept responsibility for this choice and to remember that the mind can choose differently. This recognition and willingness is how to turn to the Presence of the Holy Spirit in the mind. Awareness of this Presence is thereby strengthened, and belief that the ego is the only way to go is weakened.

Jesus himself provides the answer to our quest for him by telling us that only a little willingness to apply the Course lessons is needed. As the symbol of God's Love, Jesus' presence becomes more real with every small step made in the practice of his teaching: **“Our Love awaits us as we go to Him, and walks beside us showing us the way. He fails in nothing. He the End we seek, and He the Means by which we go to Him” (W.pII.302.2) .**

Q #1084: In the manual for teachers of *A Course in Miracles* , Jesus talks about the three levels of relationships that are used by the Holy Spirit for teaching and learning purposes (“What Are the Levels of Teaching?” [M.3]). I have found myself lately trying to figure out where my different relationships fit into the three levels described in that section. Is it possible that our relationships may not fit neatly into any of the three levels and can be a combination of two possibly? I am so interested in this because a part of me loves the fact that everything is systematic and planned and I feel a need to try to figure this all out.

A: Yes, some relationships can span two levels. That would not be uncommon. But in the end this does not matter, because **“each teaching-learning situation is maximal in the sense that each person involved will learn the most that he can from the other person at that time” (M.3.4:1) .** As in other parts of the Course, Jesus here is teaching us to avoid thinking with the ego that there is a hierarchy of illusions, in this context that some relationships are more important than others. The mind is outside time and space where there is no gradation or ranking. This means that at any given moment the entirety of the ego's thought system can be activated, as can the entirety of the Holy Spirit's -- whether on the freeway, at the supermarket checkout counter, or with a person you live or work with. The lack of difference is what is important. There is only one content: either the ego's separate interests, or the Holy Spirit's shared interests that reflect the One Level of God's Will. There is nothing else. Your attraction to figuring everything out and fitting relationships into neat compartments could very well be a means your ego is using to keep you focused on form instead content. Jesus wants us to learn and practice that the content is always the same, regardless of the form.

Q #1085: I have read on your Web site that God does not hear the prayers that we pray here from this illusory world. How can this be true since we are joined to God through our "right" mind? Also, as we are just ideas in the mind of God, and *ideas leave not their source*, how could God *not* hear them seeing as how we, and everything there is, is in the Mind of God? I understand from reading *The Song of Prayer*, that our prayers should be around forgiveness and about not making any decisions on our own each day. Does the Holy Spirit, and thus God, in fact, hear our prayers or do they only serve to strengthen our faith in the Holy Spirit and God's plan for our salvation?

A: When we (as one Son) fell asleep and left our home in God, we took with us the memory of our true Identity -- that is what is known in *A Course in Miracles* as our right mind. But since our separating from God is completely illusory, the right mind is as well. We can choose to remember that we are not separate from God, but this has nothing to do with God. God knows nothing of what is not real. The Holy Spirit is spoken of as the **"remaining Communication Link between God and His separated Sons" (C.6.3:1)**, but as with the other forms He seems to be for us within the dream -- a Voice, a Guide, a Helper, etc. -- He is in truth part of the **"eternal formlessness of God" (C.6.5:8)**. It is helpful to keep in mind that to get through to us, Jesus must use language that is meaningful to us; but his meaning is not always meant literally. Thus, whenever he is speaking about duality in any sense, his language must be understood metaphorically, not literally.

In truth, we exist only in the Mind of God, **"a Oneness joined as One" (T.25.I.7:1)**. But in our deluded state we do not think of ourselves as one with God; we think of ourselves as individuals trying to communicate with God Who is separate from us. There is no "we" in Heaven: **"God shares His Fatherhood with you who are His Son, for He makes no distinctions in what is Himself and what is still Himself. What He creates is not apart from Him, and nowhere does the Father end, the Son begin as something separate from Him" (W.pl.132.12:3,4)**. In Heaven, therefore, prayer is radically different from what we think it means in this illusory world of separate individuals, where it usually is some form of supplication or entreaty related to our needs. As one with our Source in Heaven, though, "we" could have no needs. Jesus thus says: **"The Love They [Father and Son] share is what all prayer will be throughout eternity, when time is done. For such it was before time seemed to be" (S.1.in.1:7,8)**.

While we still believe we exist as separate individuals, however, Jesus teaches us that prayer will take the form that best suits our needs **(S.1.in.2:1)**. It is a process, with different levels corresponding to where we are on our journey back to our natural state of oneness with each other and with God. But it is always for ourselves **(S.1.II.6:1; III.1:1)**; it is part of *our* Atonement process. Prayer thus should be centered on forgiveness as much as possible, as it is the experience of forgiveness that leads us to the awareness that we already have what we need: **"Prayer in its earlier forms [asking out of need] is an illusion, because there is no need for a ladder to reach what one has never left. Yet prayer is part of forgiveness as long as forgiveness, itself an illusion, remains unattained. Prayer is tied up with learning until the goal of learning has been reached. And then all things will be transformed together, and returned unblemished into the Mind of God" (S.1.II.8:3,4,5,6)**.

Q #1086: What is the relation between interpretation and judgment? And what is cause and effect in this matter? If the decision-making part of my mind makes the all-important root- cause decision not to be separate, there will no longer be any perception at all; and I'm terrified to make this root-cause decision because it will mean the end of 'me' as separate existence, right? But who is the "I" who is afraid this will be the end of him? Is it the person I think I am, or is it really the decision-making part of mind? Is there really an "I" who chose separate existence, or is "I" simply an effect of (not existing) separation, an effect who cannot by itself undo the cause? Is "I" cause or effect?

A: The sense of "I," a personal self, is the effect of the mind's decision-maker choosing the ego. Here is the basis of that conclusion: A major step in the thought-reversal process of *A Course in Miracles* is our

realizing that we are never *not* a decision-making mind. There is not a self -- an "I" -- *and* also a decision-making mind. The reason we tend to think they are not the same is part of the problem: *denial*. It is essential for the continuation of the separation that we *not* think of ourselves exclusively as minds, or else that we change the meaning of *mind* so that it is associated only with something physical: *the brain*. The separation would be in jeopardy if we knew without question that we were minds with the ability to choose to be or not to be separate from God. The strategy to keep the separation intact but disown responsibility for it requires that we think of ourselves as separate, competing selves, not minds sharing the same thought systems and decision-making capacity.

As we say again and again, Jesus is addressing *only* the decision maker. His lessons are geared toward helping us learn to relate to ourselves this way so that we never lose sight of the fact that we are always choosing the ego's way of perceiving or the Holy Spirit's, the ego's purpose for our life or the Holy Spirit's purpose. When we are more consistent in this, we will easily recognize that things are not at all the way they appear to be, and we are not at all who we appear to be. This, then, brings us closer to the end of the journey, our accepting the Atonement and remembering, **"I am one Self, united with my Creator" (W.pl.95).**

In the process of getting to this final stage, our fear would gradually diminish, because we would know that we are letting go of something that is false and therefore meaningless: **"The self you made is not the Son of God. Therefore, this self does not exist at all. And anything it seems to do and think means nothing. It is neither bad nor good. It is unreal, and nothing more than that. . . . [it] is meaningless" (W.pl.93.5:1,2,3,4,5; 6:6).** We would eventually gladly relinquish our hold on this identity, because we would know that it but interferes with our awareness of who we really are: **"Try not to interfere with the Self which God created as you, hiding Its majesty behind the tiny idols of evil and sinfulness you have made to replace It. Let It come into Its Own. Here you are; This is You. And light and joy and peace abide in you because this is so" (W.pl.93.9:5,6,7,8).**

Q #1087: When I choose the Holy Spirit, will this then be reflected concretely in my life as a person in this world (dream) -- that I would have fewer problems regarding economics and partnerships, and be in better physical condition?

A: There is no way of knowing how this choice would be reflected in form. When you choose against the ego more consistently, you will become more peaceful, kind, and compassionate, which means you will be less judgmental, less guilty and fearful, and have less and less investment in how your life is going in the world -- because you would have a growing sense that your life is centered in the mind, not in the world. With the disappearance of guilt goes the need to project, which means you would not attack other people or your own body. But the remaining forgiveness lessons would unfold according to your mind's choice of scripts; and the scripts could be ones of wealth, poverty, or anything in between; problematic relationships, great relationships, or anything in between; a relatively healthy body, a frail body beset with serious illness, or anything in between. There is no way of knowing what form you will choose to learn from. But the central lesson in choosing the Holy Spirit as your Teacher is always that your peace is not dependent on external conditions; it is dependent only on whether you choose to accept the peace that is always present in your mind .

Q #1088: The other day I finally came to understand that we never left our place with God. Now I would like to understand two things. First, why are we here? What happened to cause us to dream up this separation in the first place? Second, if this is all just a vivid dream that we've created, then it seems that nothing really matters. So what of the things of the world? What really matters?

A: Your questions echo the universal cry of the Sonship: “why are we here? how did we get here? what are we to do here?” *A Course in Miracles* comes in answer to these questions, but not from the same thought system that gave rise to them. The part of the mind that chooses to believe that the separation is real (the ego) asks the questions from within the illusion of separation. The part of the mind that knows the separation never happened (the Holy Spirit) answers the questions from above the battleground of separation. Thus, although Jesus acknowledges our experience in the dream, he does so only to tell us we are not here, but are “**...at home in God, dreaming of exile**” (T.10.I.2:1) .

The explanation we are given in the Course for our seeming existence in the world is that God's Son chose to make up a separate identity to replace the one God gave him, a body to house it and a world in which to “live.” We need only consider the myriad ways we assert our individuality and specialness to find the clue to our experience of the world. These assertions follow the ego's law of perception establishing that “we are here” because we want to be here: “**You see what you believe is there, and you believe it there because you want it there**” (T.25.III.1:3). Since the mind cannot obliterate the memory of our oneness with God, it must go to great lengths to prove to itself that the separation has occurred. Evidence of this abounds in the belief in the reality of the body and the world, the strong attachment to specialness, and all the ways we defend our individuality. Since God did not (*cannot*) respond to the Son's request for special favor, the Son takes it upon himself to make and defend his specialness, independent from his Creator. Guilt for this decision drives the Son out of his mind and into the world to hide from the imagined wrath of God Who, according to the ego, seeks His Son to punish him for the terrible sin of separation. Thus, at the core of the dream is the insane belief that separation is indeed accomplished.

All the things of this world are the ways by which the mind feverishly defends its choice for separation. Although they are illusory, the belief that they are real makes them real in our experience, and so they must be dealt with. While the ego has brought them forth to make its separation dream real, the Holy Spirit uses them as a classroom to teach us that it is not. It is very important, therefore, that we pay attention to everything in our lives. In fact, becoming mindful is one of the primary goals of the Course and the explicit goal of the workbook. What matters, then, is to learn to recognize all the specific ways in which the mind's choice for separation is revealed in the events and relationships of every day. The greatest defense of the ego thought system is the mind's decision to forget that it is a mind and to identify instead with the body. A correction for this mistaken belief is the most frequently repeated phrase in the Course: “**I am not a body I am free, I am as God created me**” (W.pl.199). This is not meant to be used as an affirmation to suppress the belief in the body, but as a reminder of our identity as minds with the power to choose another way of looking at everything. If we are willing to admit that we do not know what the other way is, and allow the Holy Spirit to reinterpret everything for us, what was chosen in defense of the ego's thought system will be used by Him for its undoing.

Ultimately the Course answers your questions with its single most important statement: “**...the separation never occurred**” (T.6.II.10:7) . Nothing but the mind's choice to identify with the ego thought system of separation got us here, and nothing but the choice to identify once and for all with the Holy Spirit will end the nightmare of believing we are here. Jesus makes this very clear for us in a different way in workbook lesson 32: “**You are not the victim of the world you see because you invented it. You can give it up as easily as you made it up. You will see it or not see it, as you wish. While you want it you will see it; when you no longer want it, it will not be there for you to see**” (W.pl.32.1:2,3,4,5).

See related Questions: [#10](#), [#27](#), [#88](#), [#100](#), [#148](#), and [#171](#).

Q #1089: I understand that we are not bodies, and I am in total agreement with *A Course in Miracles* that we are all either calling for love or expressing love, and that we are to practice forgiveness by looking at the ego without judging ourselves. But I have a question involving a family member -- a daughter who is involved with drugs and creates havoc within the family. She is calling out for love but not accepting the love her family is offering her, both physical and spiritual. And so I have a sense of loss, and no idea what

else to do other than to try to extend forgiveness and love to her while looking at the ego without judgment. And even then, my sense of guilt is overwhelming to the point of depression and sense of total loss, since it is so difficult for me to figure out when I may be judging her. I had to make difficult decisions against her in order to protect others from harm by her actions. How can peace be found under such circumstances?

A: Our family relationships often present us with our most challenging and painful forgiveness lessons. And sometimes the struggle within our own minds over whether we have done the right thing with difficult family members can feel overwhelming, as if there will be no release from the anguish and the guilt. And yet Jesus assures us release is possible. But the only real release comes from an ongoing vigilance over our own thinking, recognizing when it is being directed by the wrong teacher -- the ego (**T.6.V.C.4:2,3,4,5; T.7.VI.8:5,6,7,8,9,10,11**) . The challenge of course is recognizing how to apply that understanding to the very real experiences of our lives, for the Course is not intended simply to be an empty academic exercise, but a very practical tool for leading us out of conflict and into peace, *in our minds* . In other words, Jesus is assuring us that we can be at peace, even if the external situation with a family member does not change. **“In reality you are perfectly unaffected by all expressions of lack of love. ... Peace is an attribute *in* you. You cannot find it outside” (T.2.I.5:6,8,9).**

And so we need to practice repeatedly until we overlearn the fundamental correction: No matter how real the conflict with others and within ourselves over any action or inaction may seem, the real cause of the conflict and pain and sense of loss is our continuing identification within our own mind with the belief in sin and guilt -- our own and others, with theirs only ever a projection of our own (**T.31.III.1,2**) It is enough then simply to recognize that we have put the ego in charge whenever we are aware of being upset about anything, and that is the only problem that needs correcting. If in those moments of recognition, we can acknowledge that our choice for the ego is a mistake, but it is no sin, we will not need to punish ourselves but will be willing to accept the gentle help that Jesus always offers first to our own unhappy mind (**T.19.III.3,4**) .

Our concern for others at this point in the forgiveness process is simply the ego's convenient smokescreen to keep us in conflict, without recognizing where the conflict is really coming from. Once we choose the right inner teacher, we can respond to the external situation without the interference of our own guilt. But, of course, this takes practice, since our ego is not likely to surrender without a fight. And so ongoing relationships with loved ones like your daughter provide continuing opportunities to practice and learn the basic lesson about what the only real problem is and where it lies.

Your daughter is making choices that are self-destructive, but all ego-based choices are self-destructive, even those seemingly intended to protect us and make our bodies safe (e.g., **W.pl.135**) . Now although the Course teaches that we are not our body (e.g., **W.pl.199**) , Jesus also recognizes that the body will continue to be our identity in our experience. And so he never asks us to deny our experience, only our interpretation of it when we have chosen the ego as our teacher. Often the most loving thing we can do when faced with others' insanity is to place limits on them that will prevent them from hurting themselves or others any more than they may have already. The key is to be able to do that without judging, either the other person or ourselves. Now in response to our efforts to place limits, their actions or words, just like a young child's, may scream, “I hate you.” But as we are able to release our own guilt to the gentle, forgiving gaze of Jesus, we will not experience the seeming attack personally. For it is only ever our own guilt that leads us to believe that we can be attacked.

It is not easy to watch those we love make wrong choices, with what appear to be serious negative consequences for themselves and for those around them. And there are usually limits on just how much influence or control we can exert over those choices. But a helpful lesson we can learn is that this is their chosen classroom, and they will continue down this path until they are ready to make a different choice. And we are never in a position to judge what their path should be. In such circumstances, it can be helpful to remember that the only really meaningful help we can offer anyone else is to remember for ourselves that we always have a choice in our own mind as to which teacher we will turn to for help (**M.5.III.1,2**) .

Since minds are joined, this reminder will be received by their mind as well, and it is there, simply waiting on their acceptance, when they are ready and their own fear of love has subsided.

Q #1090: This question is a variation on the old “free will” conundrum. Since God created Christ, he therefore endowed his Son with the capacity to have that first “tiny, mad idea” that led to the separation. So, even though the Course lovingly affirms that God has no desire to reject or punish his Son, it still looks like God set up Christ, because how could His Son possibly resist the temptation to find out what it was like to substitute illusion for truth? Why would God create Christ with the ability to make this error, knowing full well that his Son wouldn't be able to resist the temptation?

A: Your question is also a variation of the frequently asked question: “How could the separation have happened?” The question rests on the affirmation that the separation actually occurred, which is the expression of a choice for it. Affirming the separation is the ego's way of establishing its “reality.” It is chosen as a substitute for reality, after which the Son of God is off and running with the ego in hand, certain he has pulled off the impossible, convinced that God is chasing him to punish him for his “sin” and blaming Him all the while for letting it happen. This is the ego's clever, yet nonetheless illusory version of the “big bang” that never happened.

The helpful explanation Jesus gives for the non-existent “big bang” is that the Son of God has fallen asleep and dreams of separation (**T.28.II.7**) . In this dream, the Son seems to have special powers in the form of a will apart from God's; just as a child at home in his bed dreams he is the son of a king (or more in keeping with the ego's specialness, the king himself) in a far away magic kingdom. In the dream, specialness is preferable to oneness and “free will” is the maximum expression of individual power. It is a clever distortion of the power of the mind to choose to accept the one Will the Son shares with the Father. In this light, free will is understood as the ability to make that choice. It is not a choice between two real possibilities, but rather a choice between truth and illusion, everything and nothing. There is no reality but God's, no Will but His, nothing but the mind's power to accept the truth. The part of the mind that chooses against the truth and identifies as a figure in the dream defends its “reality” in terms of the conundrum of God making the separation a real and irresistible choice. Only resistance to accepting truth keeps the separation real in our experience, fires the intrigue of asking the unanswerable, and breathes life into the ego's belief in illusion. The way out of this seeming dilemma is learning that, ultimately, the only temptation we cannot resist is that of accepting the Identity given us by God and claiming our rightful place in oneness with Him. We then freely join the one Will we share with our Father: **“And this is the function of God's teachers; to see no will as separate from their own, nor theirs as separate from God's” (M.5.III.3).**

See also Questions [#10](#), [#27](#), [#88](#), [#100](#), [#148](#), and [#171](#).

Q #1091: Whilst I find *A Course in Miracles* very stimulating and thought provoking, it bothers me that it is based on Christian theology and the Trinitarian concept. I guess I could simply ignore this problem and have my own thoughts about it; but there is a nagging doubt. To the best of your knowledge, is *A Course in Miracles* acceptable for Muslims, or are there simply too many hurdles to overcome?

A: Anyone, regardless of religious affiliation, can practice this course. Its theology is part of its form, which is specific and differs from other theologies. But that is not the heart of *A Course in Miracles* , as reflected in this statement: **“A universal theology is impossible, but a universal experience is not only possible but necessary. It is this experience toward which the course is directed” (C.in.2:5,6).** Thus, if you are being helped by the Course on your spiritual journey, it would make sense to continue with it, as the experience toward which the practice is aimed transcends all theological expressions. **“Its central theme is always, ‘God's Son is guiltless, and in his innocence is his**

salvation.' It can be taught by actions or thoughts; in words or soundlessly; in any language or in no language; in any place or time or manner" (M.1.3:4,5,6). The idea, therefore, would be to focus on the content not the form; and if there is anything about Christianity that is disturbing to your peace, this would provide an opportunity to look at it and forgive it.

Q #1092: As a manager of a retail business, I am faced almost daily with confrontational situations with customers. Although I realize that this offers me a lot of opportunities to practice forgiveness, I am having a hard time breaking the bad habit of feeling pressured and insecure when someone is really upset, mad, and being unreasonable. I try not to take it personally, but I can't seem to find the right perspective to resolve the situation and remain calm under stress. I know the problem is all within me. Can you please give a couple of examples of how to apply forgiveness to myself and step back to let the Holy Spirit help me deal with my daily dose of stress?

A: You have the right approach -- to see the situation as a classroom in which you are learning forgiveness, which means learning not to take the attacks personally. That is not easy to do, as you have discovered, because as egos we thrive on holding others responsible for our lack of peace: "If this person were more reasonable, I wouldn't feel so insecure and threatened." What really is happening is that we make the decision in our mind to turn away from love *before* the exchange with the other person takes place, and then the guilt over that decision gets projected onto whatever happens to come along. In other words, we secretly *want* to be mistreated so that our attention can be focused outward on what someone else is doing to us, rather than on the pain of the guilt within our minds.

The cause of feelings of inadequacy and weakness in the face of others' irrational behavior, thus, has nothing to do with those people and their behavior. It has to do with our feeling profoundly and permanently deficient in our relationship with ourselves (self-hatred) because we chose to separate from our loving Creator and then sever all connection with that Love, believing we would do just fine on our own. Therefore, by looking at this self-concept with the love of Jesus next to you, you will be dealing with the true cause of the problems you've been having. The next step would be to accept love's assurance that your self-accusation is unjustified, being founded on false premises. It is impossible to separate from Totality and to reject the Love that encompasses all reality. Thus, your only responsibility is to look at how you have identified with the ego and with guilt, and to realize that all of that is just a mistaken decision. Your innocence has not been lost (W.pl.93) .

When your perception is rooted in your innocence or holiness, you will not be affected by your customers, however belligerent they are. You will see right past their ego to the same right mind in which you are now centered. You realize that in your wrong mind you want to be weak and have others mistreat you; then you recognize that the problem is this decision to identify with the ego; then you ask for help to correct that choice; and when you accept the innocence in your right mind as the truth about you, you will remain at peace no matter what other people do or say. **"Let them be as hateful and as vicious as they may, they could have no effect on you unless you failed to recognize it is your dream"** (T.27.VIII.10:6). From that quiet center, which you know everyone shares with you, you will respond in a way that is loving to all involved. You will perceive any weakness in you as simply a defense against this truth, with no power to change it.

Q #1093: We are repeatedly counseled against specialness, not only in ourselves but in others as well. However, as there are differences in nearly all of us, this makes degrees of conditions: better/worse, smart/not smart, beautiful/ugly, talented/untalented, etc. As long as there are differences to any degree in anything, the contrast points to one's specialness or differences. We can deny spiritual specialness, but what view can be taken with regard to one's differences, many of which are in the extreme.? Does anything that we do that shows our differences make us a tool of the ego? Ex: If I write a best seller

book, does this qualify me as special or different and what is the distinction? Are we right to acknowledge this type of difference without the error of being considered special. Therefore, must we avoid exercising any of our positive differences?

A: The dream of separation is founded on differences, division, and their mainstay; specialness. The ego's very existence depends on differences, as does the body's. We are not asked to avoid these differences, nor the specialness that is their foundation, but rather to see in them the ego thought system at work. To deny their importance in our lives is to deny the classroom in which to learn the lessons of forgiveness that will eventually undo the belief in differences. As Jesus tells us in the manual: **"Do not despair, then, because of limitations [specialness/differences] . It is your function to escape from them, but not to be without them"** (M.26.4:1,2). We escape from them by going beyond them, which requires that we first see them for what they truly are: projections of the mind's guilt for having chosen separation. Every perception of difference is thus an opportunity to become aware of the judgments that reflect the guilt hidden in the mind. Denying the differences, or trying to be without specialness, buries the guilt deeper and keeps it from awareness. This keeps the mind's choice for the ego from awareness, which also keeps love's presence from awareness. These are the steps in the ego's spiral of denial.

The steps for the ego's undoing begin with not denying specialness nor the guilt it engenders, but most importantly in recognizing that the mind has made a purposive choice for the ego and its offspring: specialness and guilt. There are numerous passages in *A Course in Miracles* where Jesus tells us that denial makes the error of the ego's thought system real, while looking at it without judging it as sinful gradually dispels it. The goal, therefore, is not to be without differences or specialness, nor to fight against them by forcing a false perception of sameness in form. Rather, the goal is to see in every perceived difference the reflection of the mind's choice for the ego. This changes the ego's goal of making differences real and important, to the Holy Spirit's goal of teaching us that we have a mind that chooses. In this way, the differences that were meant to separate become the means to learn that all differences are the same in that they reflect a choice made in the mind.

Whatever form it may take, the ego's content is always separation. The Holy Spirit's content is to take what is different and make it all the same by teaching us that it has the same source (the mind) and the same content (the ego or the Holy Spirit). In this regard it is important to keep in mind the distinction the Course makes between form and content. Everything in our lives reflects the mind's choice for the ego or the Holy Spirit. Special talents can be used by the ego to prove separation and differences, or by the Holy Spirit Who teaches that different talents (form) do not make any difference in our shared Identity as God's one Son. Jesus gives us the right minded use of different talents and abilities: **"The Holy Spirit teaches you to use what the ego has made, to teach the opposite of what the ego has "learned." The kind of learning is as irrelevant as is the particular ability that was applied to the learning. All you need do is make the effort to learn, for the Holy Spirit has a unified goal for the effort. If different abilities are applied long enough to one goal, the abilities themselves become unified. This is because they are channelized in one direction, or in one way. Ultimately, then, they all contribute to one result, and by so doing, their similarity rather than their differences is emphasized"** (T.7.IV.3:3,4,5,6,7,8).

Thus, if we choose to learn the sameness of our shared Identity as God's Son while developing and exercising a special talent, it becomes a tool in the hands of the Holy Spirit that will lead to that goal. So, to answer your specific question, by all means write your best seller, just be sure to invite Jesus to be your co-author.

Q #1094: I am struck by the fact that in studying and practicing *A Course in Miracles* one can get so overwhelmed by stuff coming up that there is little time, energy, or motivation left to do much else. Life becomes one long drudge of dealing with stuff; there is little time for fun, and it is impossible to earn the money necessary to pay for the therapy needed and sometimes hardly enough even to eat! That has

been my experience. My question is whether there is any way out of this kind of Catch 22. The Course seems to be ineffective at supporting one in the process of going through all the stuff. It leaves one hanging in the midst of a mess with no real practical support.

A: What you may be forgetting is that you need only *look* at all the “stuff” and not judge yourself for it -- you do not have to do anything about it, in the sense of trying to change it: **“Forgiveness . . . is still, and quietly does nothing. . . . It merely looks, and waits, and judges not” (W.pll.1.4:1,3).** The idea is to learn that the only problem is our decision to choose the ego as our teacher rather than the Holy Spirit, a decision we are making in the present, and that therefore can be changed in the present. When your process becomes “drudge,” you probably are giving the ego a reality it does not have. It has no power of its own: **“Only your allegiance to it gives the ego any power over you” (T.4.VI.1:2).**

Then, too, you probably are forgetting to look at your stuff with Jesus' love beside you. That is where the comfort lies, because he knows it is all made up and has absolutely no effect on his love for you, and that you remain as God created you. Thus, all we have to “do” is bring the darkness to his light, where it will simply disappear: **“ [Forgiveness] does not countenance illusions, but collects them lightly, with a little laugh, and gently lays them at the feet of truth. And there they disappear entirely” (W.pl.134.6:2,3).** When our “stuff” feels too heavy and without end, we are forgetting that, in content, it is all the same stuff, and that, in the end, it is just a reflection of the **“tiny, mad idea at which the Son of God remembered not to laugh” (T.27.VIII.6:2).** Even though the ego's thought system can spew forth some rather hideous stuff, it rests on nothing, which, if we realized that, would produce in us only a gentle smile, rather than fear and depression. That is why Jesus encourages us to become “happy learners” (T.14.II), for, in the end, we are undoing something that never happened -- we just believed it happened. We can indeed proceed with joy, knowing that that terrible burden has been lifted from our shoulders. We need only accept this happy truth by realizing that we have been denying it and no longer wish to do so.

Q #1095: Is it fair to surmise that since this world and all its ideas, concepts, etc., are all of the ego, so is the idea of a god, a son, creation, etc. -- that the author of *A Course in Miracles* knows this and has used all of our ego ideas to penetrate our thought system, using the Course as a catalyst to bring us beyond everything, even beyond our ability to describe it?

A: This is one way of looking at it. What we would tend to revise is the idea that the author of the Course, Jesus, is actively doing something. There are many passages in the Course that say that Jesus and the Holy Spirit use our experiences, concepts, and beliefs to help us undo our mistakes so that our minds may be restored to their original state of oneness. That is part of the ego framework within which the Course remains in order to meet our needs (C.in.3:1) . But when you develop a sense of the total picture, you realize that it is we who are opening up to the truth that we have denied; it is we who are realizing that we banished the truth and attempted to replace it with a thought system of our own making and now can see brings more pain than it is worth. We are thus denying our denial of the truth (T.12.II.1:5) . Our choosing to become students of Jesus and his course symbolizes our choosing to reverse our journey away from oneness, and examine and then correct the many ways in which we have made separation reality. Jesus is our teacher and guide in this sense, but if we learn his lessons completely, the distinction between him and us would dissolve, because, again, this is a journey back to oneness. Love is an ineffable oneness. Reality is non-dualistic (T.18.VI.1) .

Chapter 17 in Kenneth's book *Absence from Felicity* provides a helpful discussion of the different dimensions involved in this crucial issue.

Q #1096(i): (The following questions were posed by the same person). If God doesn't know about our illusions, why does the Course say, "God gave to all illusions that were made another purpose . . ." (T.26.VII.15:3)?

A: Whenever Jesus speaks about God being involved in the illusion, his meaning is not to be taken literally. It is the *content* of Jesus' message that is important, not its form. (See our answer to #4 below.) He goes to great lengths to re-orient the thinking of those who have come to think of God as judgmental and demanding punishment for our sins. In the passage you quote, what Jesus wants us to know is that although we have used the world and our lives for ego purposes, we can undo all that by turning to our inner Teacher (Jesus or the Holy Spirit) and asking for help to use the world and our lives for His purpose of healing our minds of the belief in separation. That choice of the miracle is *always* available to us -- at every instant in every experience. That is what Jesus is reminding us of in your quoted statement. The emphasis is not on God, but on the shift in purpose that we can make whenever we so choose. Without this alternative purpose, we would be stuck with the ego's version of salvation, which is atonement through sacrifice: our sin of separating from God is real, and now we need to pay Him back for what we did. Jesus is correcting that type of thinking.

Q #1096(ii): Frequently one hears, "you are where you are supposed to be and nothing is by accident." Is this because there is some divine script written by our right mind, or is it that anything that happens even at random can be turned into an opportunity?

A: We have discussed this issue in Questions [#266](#) and [#409](#), which provide the background for this brief answer. *A Course in Miracles* talks about a script, but it is one we have written; and therefore it is not a divine script. Talking about a script is a metaphorical way of describing what happened after the Son believed he had successfully separated from the Oneness of Heaven. This separation led to further and further fragmentation, so that Oneness became a totally foreign concept to us. Every conceivable form of separation spun out in that original instant, and that is what constitutes the "script." Our belief that time is real complicates this, which is precisely the ego's intention in adding linear time to its plan to keep us mindless. Jesus needs to teach us therefore that **"we but take a journey that is over . . . we but see the journey from the point at which it ended, looking back on it, imagining we make it once again; reviewing mentally what has gone by"** (W.pl.158.3:6; 4:5) . Nothing is by accident, thus.

The Course teaches that another script unfolded at the same time, and that is the Holy Spirit's correction of the ego's script. The Holy Spirit's "script" (another metaphor) is in our right minds, awaiting only our choice to identify with it. Our decision-making minds (not our brains) are always choosing to uphold the separation or to undo it. Should we decide that being separate is no longer worth it, we would be choosing to be guided by the Holy Spirit, which means shifting the purpose of our everyday interactions to blend with the Holy Spirit's goal. What we originally made to hurt ourselves (by attacking our true Self), now becomes the means of healing our minds: **"The Son of God can make no choice the Holy Spirit cannot employ on his behalf, and not against himself"** (T.25.VI.7:5) . This is what makes the Course so practical -- at any instant, regardless of what we are doing, we can choose to shift from the ego's purpose to the Holy Spirit's purpose. Any experience and any situation, therefore, can be a means of healing our minds .

Q #1096(iii): If Jesus is really an illusion of ours, then who spoke to Helen?

A: This intriguing and important question about Helen and Jesus is discussed in depth in Kenneth's *Absence from Felicity*, Chapter 17, "Helen and Jesus: The Illusion and the Reality." The importance of this theme led Kenneth to present two workshops that discuss it from different points of view. (See our publications: "Jesus: Symbol and Reality" and "Jesus: Fantasy or Truth?") We mention

this only so that you will realize that your question deserves an answer that the limited space of this forum does not allow. Briefly, however. . . As long as you have the illusion that you are an individual, you will experience Jesus as an individual, too. The very fact that you perceive yourself as an individual (as we all perceive ourselves) means that you have made a decision to be apart from perfect Love. So if you decide to undo that separation, you will allow love back into your awareness, but only in a form that you can relate to as an individual, while you still think you are an individual. Jesus, thus, would be that form to you, as he was to Helen when she perceived herself as a separate individual. When you *completely* identify with your right mind, however, then your mind will not limit love to a specific form. In reality, love is always abstract and formless; it is a perfect Oneness that knows not of separation and individuality. In your right mind, you know that individuality is not real, and that you are not really an individual person. Your experience of love would change accordingly. In other words, as you undo the separation in your mind, you likewise undo your perception (misperception) of love as limited. In the end, which is really the beginning that never changed, there is only the perfect oneness of Love. In reality, thus, *both* Helen and Jesus were illusory. She had experiences on that level where she transcended both Helen and Jesus, which Kenneth relates in his book.

Q #1096(iv): Are "we" really "we" the Son of God, or just one? Did the Son of God splinter into billions of parts in this illusion? These questions represent a basic problem I am having trying to understand the Course. Metaphysical explanations, metaphors, and plain logic get all mixed up in my mind. I read the course and take something literally, get confused, and then find out that it wasn't what was really meant.

A: According to *A Course in Miracles*, reality is non-dualistic, which means there can be no legitimate sense of "we." The Son of God is one, and this Son is not separate in any way from His Father: **"What He creates is not apart from Him, and nowhere does the Father end, the Son begin as something separate from Him" (W.pl.132.12:4)**. All sense of separation -- one being is not another being -- is illusory; words are meaningless on that level of oneness **(W.pl.169.5:4)**.

Most students experience the same difficulty you do with the Course's language. Many questions similar to yours have been submitted; see our answers to [#72](#) and [#566](#), for example. What will help, as we mentioned in our answer to your first question, is to distinguish between the *content* of Jesus' message and the *form* in which it is expressed. If you are clear about the content, the form in which it comes will diminish as a problem. He discusses this in, among other places, his introduction to the clarification of terms at the end of the manual for teachers: **"This course remains within the ego framework, where it is needed. It is not concerned with what is beyond all error [non-duality] because it is planned only to set the direction towards it. Therefore it uses words, which are symbolic, and cannot express what lies beyond symbols. . . . The course is simple . It has one function and one goal. Only in that does it remain wholly consistent because only that can be consistent" (C.in.3:1,8,9,10)**.

It takes time to develop this clarity about the Course's simple content, but that is because of our fear of its implications. That's why, at the beginning of *The Song of Prayer*, Jesus talks about our spiritual journey as a ladder with many rungs. We will understand his teachings one way on the bottom rungs, and quite differently on the upper rungs. That is *our* problem not his, because it was our decision to shield ourselves from the truth, having concluded it was a threat to our very existence as individuals. We thus replaced the truth with our own substitute, which made *duality* reality, and sent us to the bottom of the ladder. Therefore, we will climb back up that ladder slowly and tentatively, until we realize we have been totally wrong about everything we have perceived about ourselves and the world, and are thankful we have been wrong.

Kenneth has devoted some 60 pages to this subject in Chapters 2 and 3 of *All Are Called*, Volume 2 of *The Message of A Course in Miracles*. He also presented a workshop on it, which is now one of our audio publications: "Duality As Metaphor in *A Course in Miracles*."

Q #1097: What is love? *A Course in Miracles* says we can't understand love on this side of the fence and that we must only seek and find all the blocks to love's presence that we have built within us (T.16.IV.6:1). So, what is love?

A: The situation is this: Our experience is that we are individuals living in a finite, physical universe. But we experience that as our reality only to the extent that we are (in the present) choosing to be separate from our true Identity in God, Who is Love. How, then, can we understand what Love is if we are choosing not to be part of it? That, in essence, is why our spiritual journey must be centered on identifying and then undoing the blocks we have constructed and are upholding in the present to keep ourselves apart from Love.

Lesson 67 tells us that love created us like itself and that **“if love created you like itself, this Self must be in you. And somewhere in your mind, It is there for you to find” (W.pl.67.3:2,3)**. Yet nowhere in that lesson does Jesus define *love*, but he does talk about our need to undo what we have put in its place. In the very next lesson, Jesus teaches us about the cause of the almost irreparable damage we have done to our minds: grievances. **“You who were created by love like itself can hold no grievances and know your Self. . . . For he who holds grievances denies he was created by love, and his Creator has become fearful to him in his dream of hate” (W.pl.67.1:1; 2:4)**. So if we deny love, which holding grievances does, how can we know love? Yet, how can we fail to know it when we have totally forgiven everyone? This is similar to Jesus telling us that we can never understand the **“concept of a Oneness joined as One”** as long as we think we are separate from one another (T.25.I.7:1).

Again in Lesson 127, Jesus helps us realize the consequences of seeing our identity in the context of bodily existence in the world: **“What the world believes was made to hide love's meaning, and to keep it dark and secret. There is not one principle the world upholds but violates the truth of what love is, and what you are as well” (W.pl.127.5:2,3)**. It is not difficult to discern from this what we have to do to restore our awareness of love's meaning to our minds; and that is what Jesus spells out for us in this lesson, remarking that **“there is no better use for time than this” (W.pl.127.7:2)**. We ourselves (as decision-making minds) are the authors of all the values we find in the world, and our motivation in producing them was to replace what we disowned (our Self). Now we need but reverse that and allow God's gifts to replace what we made (W.pl.127.8:4). Love, then, will be our only experience, because love is the only reality in our minds.

In the end, as Jesus states at the beginning, love's meaning cannot be taught or learned because it is what we are. He says he can teach us to remember who we truly are, and adds, **“No course whose purpose is to teach you [this] . . . could fail to emphasize that there can never be a difference in what you really are and what love is. Love's meaning is your own, and shared by God Himself. For what you are is what He is” (W.pl.127.4:1,2)**. Our lives must therefore be dedicated to uncovering our self-deception and the means we use to sustain that deception. With that undone, love's meaning will blaze in our minds and all questioning simply dissolve into nothingness.

Jesus speaks of love and oneness in the same breath, and obviously they are equated, as expressed in this lesson as well as other places: **“As it is one itself, it looks on all as one. Its meaning lies in oneness. And it must elude the mind that thinks of it as partial or in part [that is, as special love] ” (W.pl.127.3:2,3)**. Love is all-inclusive and extends itself to infinity without limit. Another indication of what our curriculum must be: the undoing of all forms of separation -- judgment, special love (exclusion), separate interests -- and asking Jesus or the Holy Spirit for help in focusing our lives now on learning to see everyone as sharing the same purpose and the same identity. Of such is the function of forgiveness and the miracle. **“Forgiveness is an earthly form of love, which as it is in Heaven has no form. Yet what is needed here is given here as it is needed. In this form you can fulfill your function even**

here, although what love will mean to you when formlessness has been restored to you is great still" (W.pl.186.14:2,3,4) .

Q #1098: When Krishnamurti talks about choiceless awareness or when Buddhists speak about mindfulness, are they referring to the process of being in the mode of the observer which you talk about in your tapes? I think I heard you say that the decision maker and the observer are the same thing. Is there a difference between the two? *A Course in Miracles* says that forgiveness merely looks and waits and judges not (W.pl.1.1:3). That sounds like a definition of choiceless awareness and/or mindfulness. So forgiveness, being in the mode of the observer, choiceless awareness, mindfulness are the same? How does the decision maker fit in? It obviously decides which of the two voices to follow, the ego or the Holy Spirit. When one looks with Jesus is that being the observer or the decision maker?

A: In general, you could say that what Krishnamurti and the Buddhists are speaking of is roughly similar to the process the Course talks about. When the decision maker is in its right mind, it is an observer (i.e., looking with Jesus). This is also the state of mindfulness, in that the decision maker is no longer denying its true nature as mind, which it did as part of its plan to preserve its separated state, but not be held responsible for it. Being mind-less (i.e., believing we are bodies) cuts off any possibility of the decision maker reconsidering its original decision to believe it has truly separated from God and now has its own authentic existence. That is why a main objective of the Course is to return us to the state of mindfulness.

Q #1099: How do I go beyond hating God for creating me? That of course is my ego speaking or my self. Does my Self experience gratitude to God for creation? I have come to the realization that I have been a hypocrite all my life and am now experiencing my self in the pit of Dante's inferno.

A: That could be a positive step, for self-honesty begins to weaken all the barricades we have erected to block the truth. The way out is to realize that "the pit of Dante's inferno" is also part of the hypocrisy of maintaining that you are *not* as God created you. You have helped yourself by distinguishing between self and Self. Now you must accept that only one is your true reality, the other made up. And it's not hard to guess which is true and which false, especially if you are a student of *A Course in Miracles* . What you have to emphasize is that only *one* is real. Jesus talks about this very movingly in Lesson 93: **"You are what God created or what you made. One Self is true; the other is not there. Try to experience the unity of your one Self. Try to appreciate Its Holiness and the love from which It was created. Try not to interfere with the Self which God created as you, by hiding its majesty behind the tiny idols of evil and sinfulness you have made to replace It. Let It come into Its Own. Here you are; This is You. And light and joy and peace abide in you because this is so"** (W.pl.93.9) .

You perhaps hate yourself as a decision-making mind for choosing to be other than this Self God created in the image of His own Holiness and Love. The projection of self-hatred usually lands on God's doorstep! But when you realize that this mistaken choice had no effect (except in your own deluded mind), and it has not changed your true Self, there is nothing to upset over. To be upset and self-condemning implies that the mistake is not simply a mistake that has already been corrected, but rather is a sin that has had a real effect. But this is what we are constantly advised *not* to do: make the error real. That it is difficult to get past the horrendous self-image we harbor within has not escaped Jesus' attention: **"These are beliefs so firmly fixed that it is difficult to help you see that they are based on nothing"** (W.pl.93.2:1) . Suppose Dante had realized that *sin* has no foundation in reality?

Interestingly, Jesus uses the word *arrogance* in reference to our negativity toward ourselves. To cite one example, in Lesson 152, which also stresses the unchangeableness of our Identity, he instructs us: **"We lay aside the arrogance which says that we are sinners, guilty and afraid, ashamed of what we are;**

and lift our hearts in true humility instead to Him Who has created us immaculate, like to Himself in power and in love” (W.152.9:4) .

In conclusion, it is helpful to look squarely at whatever self-hatred and resentment may be present, but only so that you can bring into the light of forgiveness what you have denied and kept in darkness. Forgiveness means accepting that what you thought you made to replace God's creation is totally illusory and will fade into meaninglessness when you no longer have a need to see it as real. **“ Father, Your Holiness is mine. Your Love created me, and made my sinlessness forever part of You. I have no guilt or sin in me, for there is none in You” (W.pll.235.2) .** These are the happy thoughts of those who have walked the path, not with Virgil into the Inferno aflame with sin, but with Jesus into the light and peace of forgiveness, aflame with love.

Q #1100: Kenneth says in the tape series "Learning from the Holy Spirit" that "as long as you're in physical pain, there is no know way you're going to get quiet in your mind." But isn't the physical or mental pain what we need to bring to the Holy Spirit? Isn't that saying that there is a hierarchy of miracles? If we can only experience peace when there is no pain how are we ever going to rid ourselves of it? That's like saying that someone could keep us away from the peace of God by inflicting physical pain on us. I would think that even if someone is in pain that that would be the doorway to release.

A: From one point of view, you are correct. *A Course in Miracles* comes on two levels: one of absolute truth, and one of right-mindedness and wrong-mindedness within the illusion. From Level One: **“If you have the gift of everything, can loss be real? Can pain be part of peace, or grief of joy? Can fear and sickness enter in a mind where love and perfect holiness abide? Truth must be all-inclusive, if it be the truth at all. Accept no opposites and no exceptions, for to do so is to contradict the truth entirely” (T.152.2) .** Echoing this in the workbook, Jesus tells us, **“Pain is illusion; joy, reality. Pain is but sleep; joy is awakening. Pain is deception; joy alone is truth” (W.pl.190.10:4,5,6) .** On this level, then, pain and peace are mutually exclusive states.

Level Two refers to the teaching in the Course that addresses us who believe the world and bodies are real (we are real). On this level, we are taught that the Holy Spirit can use anything we (as decision-making minds) made to keep our separation from God intact, to help us reverse our direction and walk the path of forgiveness back to God **(T.25.VI.4:1,2) .** Since we believe our experiences as individuals are real, Jesus meets us there, but only so that he can teach us that we have chosen the wrong teacher and that the consequences have been horrendous. Once we see that, and realize we can choose differently, then our experiences take on a whole new meaning and purpose. In this sense, on this level, pain can be seen as part of the curriculum in our classroom, and that we can use it to learn the ego's lessons or Jesus' lessons, depending on which one we have chosen as our teacher. If Jesus is our teacher, we can learn that the inner peace that is our inheritance as God's creation is forever unaffected by anything of the world or the body. This corrects the world's thinking that peace of mind is dependent on external circumstances and conditions: I can't be peaceful as long as my child is in danger, or my spouse is ill, or I have nowhere to live because my house was destroyed, etc.

So, yes, you bring your pain to Jesus or the Holy Spirit, but for the purpose of seeing it differently, which means learning that your true Self remains unaffected by bodily states, even when the pain is mental or emotional. This is a very difficult lesson for us, because the ego made pain to banish awareness of our true Identity, as we are taught in **“Sickness is a defense against the truth” (W.pl.136.7) .** It is true that you can peaceful while you are in pain. This is the approach of the Stoicism, both ancient and modern -- a kind of acceptance or resignation that this is the reality for you right now. But that is not the peace of God spoken of by Jesus in this course. The miracle always entails shifting from body awareness to mind awareness, realizing that all experiences flow from the mind's decision to identify either with the ego thought system or the Holy Spirit's thought system. Identifying with the Holy Spirit's thought system leads ultimately to the undoing of the *cause* of all pain. Peace alone remains.

Q #1101: Can you describe the experience referred to in *A Course in Miracles* that is the reason certain people *know* there is a God and that the Course is true?

A: You perhaps are referring to the experience described in the section in the manual called, **“Can God Be Reached Directly?” (M.26)**, where Jesus talks about those who have reached the top of the ladder and no longer have any ego. These are the “Teachers of teachers,” or those in the real world. Although there are many ways of reaching that egoless state, the means offered in *A Course in Miracles* is the practice of forgiveness. Forgiveness is thus the path to certainty: **“Do you want happiness, a quiet mind, a certainty of purpose, and a sense of worth and beauty that transcends the world? . . . All this forgiveness offers you and more” (W.pl.122.1:4; 2:1)**. As you generalize forgiveness so that no area or relationship in your life remains untouched by it, your experience of who you are and who everyone else is must change. Forgiveness orients you away from specialness and separation and toward all-inclusiveness and oneness. This sparks the return to your awareness of **“your intense and burning love of God, and His for you” (T.13.III.2:8)**.

In the section in the text called “The Forgiven World,” Jesus speaks in glowing terms of what we will experience in the real world, **“attained simply by the complete forgiveness of the old, the world you see without forgiveness. . . . Forgiveness literally transforms vision, and lets you see the real world reaching quietly and gently across chaos, removing all illusions that had twisted your perception and fixed it on the past. . . . From the forgiven world the Son of God is lifted easily into his home. And there he knows that he has always rested there in peace” (T.17.II.5:1; 6:2; 7:1,2)**.

Q #1102: Is the “tiny, mad idea” always there waiting to be taken seriously? It sounds foolish, but if I were ever to return home, I would think I would never make that mistake again, but how can I return to where I never left? God, according to *A Course in Miracles*, is not aware of our separation in metaphoric terms; but is He aware of our choice to separate in response to the mad idea?

A: If you accept the strict metaphysical non-dualism of the Course, you would have to conclude that God could not be aware of our response to the tiny, mad idea of separation. If He were aware of it, that would mean there are two opposing *real* states: God and a state apart from Him. That puts you right into dualism, the prevailing view of reality in the world's theologies and philosophies, but not that of *A Course in Miracles*.

Within the illusion, the tiny, mad idea is always present, and we are always responding to it in one of two ways: either by remembering to smile gently at it (the Holy Spirit's response [T.27.VIII.9]), or by taking it seriously (the ego's response) and then living out the consequent defenses of denial and projection. That we have done the ego's bidding in this way is behind Jesus' pointed description of our lives: **“Each day, and every minute in each day, and every instant that each minute holds, you but relive the single instant when the time of terror took the place of love. And so you die each day to live again, until you cross the gap between the past and the present, which is not a gap at all. Such is each life; a seeming interval from birth to death and on to life again, a repetition of an instant gone by long ago that cannot be relived. And all of time is but the mad belief that what is over is still here and now” (T.26.V.13:1)**. This parallels his earlier description: **“Each day, each hour and minute, even each second, you are deciding between the crucifixion and the resurrection; between the ego and the Holy Spirit. The ego is the choice for guilt; the Holy Spirit the choice for guiltlessness. The power of decision is all that is yours. What you can decide between is fixed, because there are no alternatives except truth and illusion” (T.14.III.4:1,2,3,4)**.

These passages make it clear that we can correct our mistaken choice at any instant of any day in our lives. To make that choice without reservation *is* our return home (with a brief stop in the real world, of

course). Therefore, our only focus should be the present instant and the choice we are making in that instant. Our release from illusions lies only there. By concentrating your attention there, the questions about what will happen later will eventually fade away entirely in the realization that the tiny, mad idea never happened, and so it can never be chosen again.

Q #1103: If it only takes one mind to see the truth, to see another's needs as important/more important than one's own to heal the entire Sonship, why isn't Jesus' obvious success in this area enough to bring us all home? He speaks of himself as our older brother, yet the fact that his success didn't heal the Sonship seems to say that he is not truly -- that only someone who is among the illusory "separated" must be the one who sees himself as healed to initiate the Atonement.

A: The Sonship *is* healed. In fact, healing was never truly needed. In the workbook Jesus clarifies this for us: **"Just as forgiveness overlooks all sins that never were accomplished, healing but removes illusions that have not occurred"** (W.pl.137.5:2). Healing is thus understood as a process of removing the blocks to the awareness of what has never changed (T.in.1:7) . It is the acceptance of what is true and the denial of what is not. Since everyone has a right mind where the reflection of changeless truth abides, and Jesus is a symbol of the right mind, his healing is everyone's. Healing simply means choosing the right mind. Choosing against the right mind by choosing the ego does not void the truth, nor abolish the memory of love's presence; it merely draws a veil over them. The veil is lifted and healing is accepted by the mind's choice that it be so; that is all. Thus, Jesus didn't really do anything, nor could he. He is neither a success nor a failure. *A Course in Miracles* does not view time linearly, and nor does it teach the accomplishment of a historical Jesus who attained salvation and redeemed the world, as does Christianity. He is the name given to a symbolic figure who represents the right mind of the Sonship. He has what we all have. As he himself tells us the only difference between us is that he has nothing else: **"There is nothing about me that you cannot attain. I have nothing that does not come from God. The difference between us now is that I have nothing else. This leaves me in a state which is only potential in you"** (T.1.II.3:10,11,12,13). What we have that blocks healing from awareness is the belief that illusion is true. The desire that some form of specialness replace the oneness the Son shares with the Father keeps the insanity of the ego thought system alive and "sick." Jesus seems like a failure as long as the mind chooses to turn away from the sanity of truth, while healing occurs when the mind decides to accept, even partially, that what it sees in the nightmare of separation is not true. In that instant the mind shares in Jesus' healing.

Jesus gives us a very simple description of the state of mind we share with him whenever we choose to: **"How simple is salvation [healing] ! All it says is what was never true is not true now, and never will be. The impossible has not occurred, and can have no effects. And that is all"**

(T.31.I.1:1,2,3,4). The only "one" needed to see everything in the light of this true perspective is oneself. That is why it only takes one teacher of God to heal the world (M.12) . We take a step closer to the healing we share with Jesus each time we are willing to question the ego's interpretation of any situation (to prove separation is real) and accept the Holy Spirit's perspective (separation is not real). One is true, the other false. It is for us to choose.

Q #1104: I am wondering about Lesson 71 in the workbook of *A Course in Miracles* : "Only God's plan for salvation will work." In the process of asking the three questions: "What would You have me do? Where would You have me go? What would You have me say, and to whom?" (W.pl.71.9:3,4,5), I was carried along not to any actions, but to many places in the past where I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit, along with one place in particular where the tension of life circumstances produced a dramatic "pendulum" between feeling panicked and then totally at peace. Is there a "right" answer to these questions? Should I be getting specific actions about my life now? I wonder about this, especially since Kenneth talks so much

about Jesus not being invested in what happens in our lives, that the change is in the mind. I do know the remembrances and the spirit they compelled were beyond my normal daily concerns.

A: In this lesson, Jesus teaches that the mind chooses either God's plan or the ego's, which is then reflected in form by what we do, where we go, what we say and to whom. You are correct that Jesus is not concerned with form, but with the content of the mind. However, because our focus is usually on form, he uses a word formula related to behavior to be used as a reminder for us to turn our attention from the form to the mind, where we choose whose plan we will follow. Since that is Jesus' only concern, that is the purpose for the prayer he teaches in this lesson.

An experience such as you describe is the effect of the mind's choice for the Holy Spirit (God's plan) instead of the ego. Jesus tells us: **"Everyone has experienced what he would call a sense of being transported beyond himself" (T18.VI.11:1)**. In other words, everyone has accessed the right mind. What distinguishes the Course's teaching about how to arrive at these right-minded experiences is that it asks us to be willing to look at the ego's obstacles by paying attention to the thoughts and expectations that interfere with God's plan. Basically, that is everything we think. An important line in the tenth paragraph of the lesson tells us: **"Be alert to all temptation to hold grievances today..." (W.pl.71.10:2)**. The key to the practice of this lesson is found in the words: "Be alert." The repetitions are not meant to be used as mantras to suppress grievances, but as reminders to look at them without judgment and without trying to change them. This, along with willingness to accept a different perspective, weakens belief in the ego's plan of keeping salvation from awareness with its best friends denial and guilt.

Only God's plan, (choosing the Holy Spirit) will work because only truth is true, and only in accepting the true Identity God has given us as His Son will we find the happiness we seek. We learn to accept His plan by uncovering the ego's well established beliefs about where salvation can be found. Its version of what to say, or do and where to go supports separation and belief in the identity of the body. Remembering to ask God to reveal His plan in every situation is the Holy Spirit's way of inviting us to recognize the choice we have already made with the ego, and to make another choice. Until the ego's plan has been exposed and released, it cannot be replaced by the content of the right mind (God's plan). Thus, there are no specific answers to these questions. The mind's choice for the Holy Spirit instead of the ego is reflected in the dream in whatever form is loving and helpful, with no planning or thinking on our part. All that is required is **"...to seek and find all of the barriers within yourself that you have built against it [love/God's plan]" (T.16.IV.6:1)**. We then await with patience and gratitude the moments when the Holy Spirit's loving kindness guides our words and actions .

Q #1105: What does it mean to say that mind is the "activating agent of spirit, supplying its creative energy" (C.1.1:1)? And how does this fit with "spirit retains the potential for creating, but its Will, which is God's, seems to be imprisoned while the mind is not unified" (C.1.4:2)? Is consciousness the opposite of the mind that is "the activating agent of spirit," consciousness being "the receptive mechanism, receiving messages from above or below, from the Holy Spirit or the ego" (C.1.7:3)? Is consciousness another term for the observer or decision maker?

A: In the first section of the clarification of terms to which you refer, Jesus is somewhat inconsistent in his use of words, as he alluded to in the Introduction. He uses words here slightly differently from how he uses them in the Course itself, thus teaching us to pay attention to the content (his message), not the form (the words). In describing mind as the **"activating agent of spirit" (C.1.1:1)** , Jesus implies a difference between the two terms. This, of course, is not so in Heaven, where we are spirit *and* mind, the two being synonymous. To get a sense of Jesus' meaning here, think of a fountain: the mind is the engine that drives the fountain, and spirit is the water that flows through it. Still, these are but symbols for something beyond comprehension in our separated state.

Usually in *A Course in Miracles* , but not exclusively, when the word *mind* is lowercase, it refers to the split mind, but when it is capitalized, it always refers to the Mind of God or the Mind of Christ, which is the equivalent of spirit. *Spirit* , in this first paragraph, is our true Self, the unified spirit being God's one Son. In the next paragraph Jesus uses *spirit* differently—as a synonym for the right mind, and *ego* for the wrong mind: “It [the split mind] **is therefore described in the course as if it has two parts; spirit and ego**” (C.1.2:4) . This interchange of meanings illustrates the folly of attempting to analyze the precise meanings of these words and terms. Thus at the end of the first paragraph, Jesus speaks of the unified spirit, which is Christ, and here—and only here in this section— *spirit* is equated with the right mind. This is seen again in the third paragraph: “**Spirit is the part that is still in contact with God through the Holy Spirit, Who abides in this part** [the right mind] **but sees the other part** [the wrong mind] **as well**” (C.1.3:1) . It would be more technically correct to say that the *reflection* or *memory* of spirit is in the right mind.

“**Spirit retains the potential for creating, but its Will, which is God's, seems to be imprisoned while the mind is not unified**” (C.1.4:2). Since true spirit is always creating, Jesus is again referring to the right mind, because he speaks of spirit having the *potential* for creating. Our mind has this potential while we sleep, for we are not in touch with the Mind's power to create. The key word in the second part of the sentence is *seems* . It *seems* that our true Self as spirit is imprisoned. In reality, nothing has happened.

Some of these points have been discussed in Question #65, where you will also find some commentary on *consciousness* . Consciousness is entirely of the illusory world of separation, for it always entails duality or a split: the perceiver and what is perceived. It is a function of the mind that resulted when the separation from God seemed to have happened. It would not be wrong to think of consciousness as the observer or decision maker.

Q #1106: I started smoking pot and experimenting with LSD at eleven years of age. The first couple times I had the most spiritual experience of oneness. But the next time was pure hell. I had the worst bad trip, which opened a doorway in my mind I wish I had never seen. My ultimate fear was that I would remain in that fearful, panic state for eternity with no escape. It seemed very real and powerful at the time. Later, in my late teens, I developed panic attacks and anxiety, leading me to search for an answer, which I found in *A Course in Miracles* .

I still have concerns that I did some damage to my brain from the drugs, which caused my nervous system to give my body physical effects of fear, even though I knew it was false in my mind. Does the mind override the brain on all levels of experience while we are in a body or can we do damage to our brain and nervous system that will limit us, even though we know its just part of our grand illusion?

A: The only thing that can ever limit us in any way is our beliefs, which are the thoughts we hold about ourselves in our minds (T.26.VII.8:7,8,9,10) . Much of the time these beliefs are unconscious and so it appears that there is little we can do to change them (W.pl.138.8) . But, and we can't emphasize this enough, the body, the brain, and the nervous system are all the *effects* of the thoughts in the mind and can *never* be the cause of anything we experience.

It is the ego that is invested in our becoming mindless, and seeking causes for how we feel in the world of form outside the mind. Yet all forms are nothing more than projected symbols that represent the choices we have made in our minds, now hidden by our own choice from our awareness.

How does this translate specifically into the experiences you report? The drugs initially gave form to a desire you had to remember the truth about yourself and so they seemed to precipitate an experience of oneness. The mind, still strongly identified with the ego, became fearful, and so the subsequent effect -- the bad trip -- simply was a defense you chose against remembering the truth about yourself. Like

everything else in the world of form, the drugs are really neutral and your experience depends on which teacher you have chosen to interpret your experiences for you -- the Holy Spirit or the ego.

In an effort to assure that the detour into fear remains permanent, the ego reinforces the fear with the further fear that there can be no escape from the fear. And then, to put the final nail in the coffin that will lock you away from the light and into the ego's thought system forever, the ego tries to convince you that the fear you have experienced is not the result of your choice, but rather the secondary effect of irreversible damage that the external agents have inflicted on your brain and your nervous system. The ego is brilliant but insane, and we are just as insane when we choose to listen to it.

But there is always another Teacher available to us within our minds, when we wish to learn something other than separation and guilt and fear. And it is by becoming increasingly conscious of what we have chosen with the ego that another door opens to a different choice. This process is beautifully described in one of the lessons in the workbook:

“Heaven is chosen consciously. The choice cannot be made until alternatives are accurately seen and understood. All that is veiled in shadows must be raised to understanding, to be judged again, this time with Heaven's help. And all mistakes in judgment that the mind had made before are open to correction, as the truth dismisses them as causeless. Now are they without effects. They cannot be concealed, because their nothingness is recognized” (W.pl.138.9).

Q #1107: I decided to give this problem to the Holy Spirit and ask it once here, then let it go. I have been going to school to be a radiologic technician for a couple years now and will be finished sometime in 2007. During chemistry class I cheated on an exam because of the overwhelming work load I took on. Since then I sometimes have these scenes of death and physical pain and hurt in my mind that I will cause because I wonder if I happened to miss something very important on that test -- something that is detrimental to someone's health. I feel like others will be punished for my laziness. The thought comes to me that maybe I should take the class over so I can learn what I missed and then I am quickly filled with fear. I think what I missed will never come back around and has forever passed me by. When I offer this to the Holy Spirit I hear a voice that tells me, "Sure, now you're at peace but look at this pain you will cause. Do you care about their peace?" Another similar thought accuses me of hurting people in different ways. For example, I stretched the truth to get my job and I sometimes feel like I stole the job from people who are more deserving of it. I think I have hurt them, which must be atoned for, maybe by giving up my job. Can you give me some insight from the perspective of *A Course in Miracles* on this fear?

A: Before you let your thoughts go and give them to the Holy Spirit, there is one more thing that would be very helpful to do first. And that is to ask yourself what purpose both your acts of dishonesty and all your conflicting thoughts about them are serving for you. For they are not simply careless acts or random thoughts, nor are the thoughts about your deceptions thrust upon you against your will -- you in fact invite them all in for a reason. Your specific actions and your subsequent acute conflict are all part of the ego's relentless attempt to keep you mindless, that is, obsessively focused on shadow problems and guilt so that you never get in touch with what is behind them -- the guilt in the mind that is the source of their projection.

These situations with their future fears are symbols for the deeper self-accusation that you won't allow yourself to look at, that we all share -- that we are responsible for pain and death because of our choice against God and for the ego, a choice, by the way, that we continue to make, minute by minute, each day of our lives (**T.14.III.4:1,2**) , until we ask for another way. For we unconsciously believe we cheated God out of the life that is rightfully His and now masquerade as our own creator, while down deep we know the whole thing is one big lie, that we are a fraud and something is missing for which we are responsible. And so, while these thoughts are not conscious, they color our interpretation of all our experiences in the world with feelings of guilt and inadequacy for which no real solution seems possible. And if we then act out in

ways that seem to reinforce that negative self-perception, all the better, for those violations seem to be the reason we feel as we do and we think we need look no further to understand why we feel so guilty. And that guilt can never be undone, for what is done is done, with the potentially destructive consequences irreversibly set in motion.

Yet the good news is that there is an answer, but not in terms of fixing things in the world, such as atoning through sacrifice for our wrongdoing. Those actions merely reinforce the underlying thought that our guilt is real. It is not that there is something that needs to be done, but rather something that needs to be undone -- our belief that our underlying guilt is real and calls for punishment. Now we will not be able to change our minds about ourselves by ourselves -- to us it is all quite serious, certainly nothing to smile about. And so we need to turn to Jesus or the Holy Spirit and ask to join with them in their perception of the truth about us. For they see beyond the clouds of guilt we have made real to the light of holiness that shines always within our minds (T.18.IX.8,9) . And they will help us learn that we can neither harm nor be harmed (M.4.IV.1:1,2) . And then you will begin to smile at the reasons you have felt the need to protect yourself through dishonesty and deceit, and you will begin to see the silliness of all your thoughts of attack and hurt, because you will begin to understand that all your mistakes have had no real effect on anything that truly matters.

Q #1108: I very much want to “get it”, but in this desire I know there is a “spiritual specialness” that is driving me; an ego “trick”. All my life I have been a type A person and have been driven to accomplish. That is why the statement “I need do nothing” is so difficult for me. I continue to wonder if I will “get it,” whatever that is, in this lifetime. There is no time; it’s an illusion. But while I have accepted the atonement principle, I don’t know that I really have internalized it. What happens if I don’t “get it” in this lifetime? The problem is that all of the work I do in this lifetime will be “lost” and I’ll have to start all over again, even though I know I’m not a separated body, and am one with the Son of God; in fact I am the Son of God. The more I study, the more I get confused; I know there is a great deal of level confusion here. I guess I might just have to accept that “I need do nothing” and know that it is all alright and that my mind is with God, but it would sure help if you’d tell me this.

A: Indeed, you need do nothing, it is all right, and your mind is with God. And definitely nothing is lost. Knowing that in our state of deep confusion we are beset with fears and doubts, Jesus offers the reassurance you seek: **“There is no time, no place, no state where God is absent. There is nothing to be feared” (T.29.I.1:1,2).** The only thing keeping this realization from awareness is resistance. Resistance cannot be fought against; it can only be acknowledged, and the only thing “to do” is to use your natural affinity for getting things accomplished to be vigilant. You can accomplish mindfulness, and willingness to see that confusion is only fear of truly accepting the Atonement.

Just as you would not push someone who is afraid of drowning out of a boat, it is not helpful to try to push yourself into Heaven. Besides, it will not work. An understanding of the Course’s teaching about the illusion of time and the separation is helpful in learning the metaphysical foundation of its thought system, but until we are ready to experience these truths, it is best to practice *A Course in Miracles* in the classroom of the body and our lives. While we believe in the reality of the world, it is important that we “stay with it,” so to speak. It holds all the lessons needed for the practice of forgiveness. Everything within the illusion of time is useful to the Holy Spirit, including a type-A personality. And every step toward the goal of returning to the home we never left, taken in this lifetime or any other, gets us closer to the end we seek. Again, nothing is lost. Certainly there have been learning experiences in this lifetime (and perhaps many others) that led you to the Course. How can you know what preparatory steps paved the way. In fact, Jesus tells us in this regard: **“...you cannot distinguish between advance and retreat. Some of your greatest advances you have judged as failures, and some of your deepest retreats you have evaluated as success” (T.18.V.1:5,6) .**

The only way out of confusion is to stay with what we actually experience, not what we know intellectually. The thoughts that present themselves moment by moment are our guide to the activity of the mind. They reveal the choice the mind has made and the beliefs that support that choice. No conflict presents itself when the mind chooses the Holy Spirit. Anything but perfect peace tells us the ego has been chosen; misery, conflict, and confusion are then inevitable. No big deal, another choice can be made. When you find yourself getting on the merry-go-round, switching levels, it may be helpful to practice an exercise found in the text: **“This lesson takes no time. For what is time without a past and future? It has taken time to misguide you so completely, but it takes no time at all to be what you are. Begin to practice the Holy Spirit's use of time as a teaching aid to happiness and peace. Take this very instant, now, and think of it as all there is of time. Nothing can reach you here out of the past, and it is here that you are completely absolved, completely free and wholly without condemnation. From this holy instant wherein holiness was born again you will go forth in time without fear, and with no sense of change with time” (T.15.I.9).** In the Course, Jesus assures us that no small effort, no willingness however little, no tiny step toward truth are lost. Each one weakens our grip on the ego's thought system, and each strengthens our hold on his hand. We cannot lose, and you cannot help but “get it.”

Q #1109: A student of *A Course in Miracles* told me that whenever an attack at the level of form happens, it is a result of a forgotten agreement that exists between me and the other person for that person to do exactly that to me. Is that true? Are people in my life characters who are always enacting the script I wrote for them? Or are they acting in accordance to their own script and when they need a "scapegoat" will anyone who is at hand at that specific moment, which may or may not be me, be used as such?

A: The secret, forgotten agreement (**T.28.VI.4**) is never between the figures in the dream -- the selves we think we are -- but occurs at the level of mind, usually out of awareness, between the fragments that believe they are separate dreamers. And so as the dreamer of my dream, yes, I am responsible for everything that seems to happen to the figure that I identify as myself within the dream (**T.27.VIII.10**) . But that is not a level that most of us are in touch with, nor is it a particularly helpful way to approach our daily experiences and interactions. The more helpful level to consider, while I still identify with the figure I call myself, is that I am responsible for my interpretations and reactions to the various events in my life.

Now there is some truth in your observation that, when we are looking to project our guilt, any convenient target will do. But no one can truly be a victim of anyone else's seeming attack. It is only ever my own interpretation that leads me to see someone else as attacking me and, in particular, depriving me of my peace (**T.12.I.3**) . No matter what the other person may be saying or doing, it is my own choice whether to take those actions personally and, if I do, it can only be because I want to see myself as a victim. And that always reflects the secret agreement (see [Question #37](#) for further discussion of this hidden agreement) to seem to be hurt by the other.

In union with the ego, we have all agreed to see others as responsible for our unhappiness and feelings of victimization. And we all have special partners in which the dance of death has been especially intimately choreographed. Yet when we are willing to dismiss the ego and turn to a different Interpreter of our experiences, we will recognize our own buried guilt in all of our reactions to what others seem to be doing to us. And with that recognition, we can make a choice about continuing to hold on to that guilt or letting it dissolve in the gentle light of true forgiveness. And that always entails forgiving ourselves for our own projections of our own guilt, at which point we can only see others' words and actions as the calls for help and love that they truly are (**T.12.I.3,4**) .

Q #1110 Is it possible to for you to expand on the meanings of "sphere of celestial order" and "Divine Order" mentioned in the "Principles of Miracles" (T.1.I.32:3; 37:4).

A: The term *order* is another word for “dimension” or “realm,” more specifically, the system of laws governing that realm. Thus, the “sphere of celestial order” refers to the realm beyond the physical realm, where the laws of spirit have nothing in common with the laws of the ego world. The same would be true of the “Divine Order.” While we still adhere to the ego thought system, the realm of God and Heaven is completely unknowable by us. The law of love’s eternal, non- quantitative extension is meaningless to us while we are enmeshed in the specialness of individual existence.

Q #1111(i): Two questions on sickness:

A Course in Miracles talks about giving our body the Holy Spirit’s purpose and then it should function healthily. The past couple of years I’ve had a lot of sickness, which I attribute to stress and my two little rugrats bringing home what I like to call “the voodoo toddler virus” -- only because I had put the Course on the back burner in my mind for a number of years, but now I’m back on track. To what extent does limiting guilt and practicing forgiveness affect our immune system; and are we limited more or less as long as we remain in a body?

Q #1111(ii): The section in the manual called “How Are Healing and the Atonement Related?” (M.22) states that healing, the Atonement principle, and forgiveness are not just related, but are identical, and that this must be understood if the teacher of God is to make progress. I know that the body is the illusion and trying to heal the body is trying to make the dream and the body real. If the goal is to accept the Atonement, and having received it, my mind is healed, does it not follow that the body would then be subject to the decision that the mind has made and be healed too? Or can the mind be healed and the body still appear to be sick? How does this work if I am working with someone else who is sick? Does his body still appear to be sick or be healed?

A: (The following covers both questions.) The Course stresses that the body is a projection of the mind and does not exist as an independent entity that gets sick, gets better, and eventually dies (T.28.VI.2) . Thus, only the mind is active -- the body has no effect on the mind, and to think that it does is what Jesus calls level confusion (T.2.IV.4) . The guilt in our minds is always projected onto our own bodies (sickness) or onto others (attack), unless the decision maker chooses to look at the guilt with Jesus. This is all part of the ego’s strategy to get us out of our minds so that we will never realize that we have the power to choose against it (the ego). We thus wind up believing the body actively does things or is acted upon by outside agents, over which we have little or no control. But that is all made up (self-deception), which is why Jesus describes sickness as “**a defense against the truth**” (W.pl.136). Ill health is the effect of a decision made by the mind for a purpose it wants to fulfill -- ultimately, to remain in its separated state but not be held responsible for it. Thus does Jesus teach, “**The cause of pain is separation, not the body, which is only its effect**” (T.28.III.5:1). Pain, therefore, is not defined by bodily sensations; our experience of pain is due entirely to the guilt in our mind and our choosing the ego’s interpretation that we deserve to be punished.

Forgiveness is the mind’s decision to look at guilt with Jesus, learning that it is based on false beliefs and therefore need not be projected, but simply let go of. Although still a projection of the mind, the body, then, will not be used in support of separation and guilt, but rather to demonstrate the Holy Spirit’s thought system of shared interests. The mind healed of its belief in guilt will know that the body is not its reality, and so “health” will now be associated with the acceptance of the Atonement, not mistakenly with the absence of disease; and the immune system will be properly located in the mind -- the mind’s resistance to any belief in the reality of separation and limitation. No longer identified with the body, the healed mind will not be limited by it (T.18.VI.13) , although the body will still appear “normal” in the sense of aging and other kinds of conditions. An ego-free mind could also choose to help unhealed minds learn that the body is not their reality by appearing in a diseased body or in a body that gets crucified. Consider Ramakrishna or Jesus for example: their bodies at the end did not appear very healthy in the world’s terms; yet there was no guilt in their minds. They chose to teach us through those forms. There could also be other

reasons, unknown to us, for choosing bodily limitations; but the healed mind would not add on the ego's interpretation, that they are the punishment for our sinfulness.

Thus, the observation of the body alone cannot tell us whether a specific condition represents a right-minded or wrong-minded decision. Strictly speaking, of course, if a specific condition is the direct effect of the mind's projection of its guilt, then that condition will change when the mind lets go of the guilt. But with the disappearance of guilt goes also the mind's identification with the body, as the mind has realized that its state of peace is completely independent of the body's condition. That is crucial, and a very difficult lesson for us to learn.

In contrast, for the mind that still values separation and specialness, the body will symbolize whatever that mind values and wants to hold on to. Addressing the decision maker in this context, Jesus says, “. . . **you have made of it [the body] a symbol for the limitations that you want your mind to have and see and keep**” (T.28.VI.3:10). Consequently, we (as decision making minds) will experience ourselves as limited by the body only if that is the identity we want to be the truth about ourselves. We will become what we are not, which includes believing the body runs on its own systems, which are affected by outside forces.

It is far more helpful to focus on the *mind's* immune system: the power to accept the truth that we have been denying, and to deny that anything external can give us peace or take it away. (Kenneth presented a workshop in 2005 entitled “Strengthening the Mind's Immune System.”) Jesus reminds us, however, that **“the resistance to recognizing this is enormous, because the existence of the world as you perceive it depends on the body being the decision maker”** (M.5.II.1:7). So we need to be patient with ourselves as we process these teachings and learn how to smile gently at our need to have the body be real in our awareness.

If you are working with someone who is sick, your only responsibility is to be aware of your perceptions and to look for any judgments you may be making, and then to bring them to the love of Jesus that is always present in your mind. As Jesus states in an earlier section in the manual, where he is discussing how to be with a patient, **“ This is the function of God's teachers; to see no will as separate from their own, nor theirs as separate from God's”** (M.5.III.3:9). That is always the guiding principle for any relationship -- to perceive your interests as shared with the other person's, not as separate. Then you will simply know what to do or not to do. Whether the other person is coming from the wrong mind or the right mind will be irrelevant; your response will always be loving. Again, you cannot judge the content of the person's mind just from the condition of the body (form). But in that holy instant of being beyond separate interests, love will flow through you in a form that will be appropriate in that situation. You will then avoid the all-too-common mistake (often with hurtful results) of thinking you know what is in that person's interests; and, respectful of that mind's choice, you will have no ego needs that will disrupt the communication of love.

Q #1112: I know it is imperative to think of the Holy Spirit (or Jesus) as a real person who loves you. And this seems to be in keeping with the language of the Course. On the other hand, with certain rare exceptions, this does not come naturally to me, and we are also taught that the Holy Spirit, and God are really metaphors for oneness. I also find the language confusing because by defining the Holy Spirit as a person it would seem to increase the sense of duality (self vs. not-self) rather than eliminate it. Why can't the Holy Spirit be thought of as higher inspiration, as unconditional love, or as understanding that comes to one when one is receptive, through any means that is useful and natural to one? By insisting that He be a person, I often find myself put off because I think: I don't believe in this, the Holy Spirit isn't a person. I agree it is very comforting and very powerful to feel Jesus' presence. But that is a rare experience for me. I put the Course down for weeks.

A: Perceiving Jesus or the Holy Spirit as a person is meant as a helpful way to make their presence real to us. We are deeply attached to our identity as bodies; not only physical bodies but emotional, psychological, and intellectual bodies, wherein our thoughts, imaginings, fantasies, and beliefs take on great importance. We know that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are not persons. We know that loved ones who have died no longer have the bodies they wore when they lived amongst us. That does not deter us from remembering them as they were to us. In fact, we keep pictures of them to remember the love we shared with them. The pictures are symbols, Jesus and the Holy Spirit as persons are symbols. Indeed, we are not bodies, and Jesus is not speaking to the individual who identifies with a body. In addressing the mind of the Sonship, the Course uses symbols (words and images) to accommodate our mistaken belief about ourselves. It refers to the Holy Spirit as “He” (a person) Who symbolizes the part of the mind that holds the memory of God's Love. Jesus refers to himself as a person: **“I will teach with you and live with you if you will think with me...(T.4.I.6:3)”** He even invites us to see him as a body: **If it helps you, think of me holding your hand and leading you. And I assure you this will be no idle fantasy (W.p.I.70.9:3,4)** . The only important thing is that we take Jesus' invitation to heart in whatever form is most meaningful: **“Let my relationship to you be real to you, and let me bring reality to your perception of your brothers” (T.17.III.10:2).**

As always in practicing the Course, we look at everything we experience as the reflection of the mind's choice for the ego or the memory of love (Holy Spirit). Every annoyance, confusion, or irritation can only come from the choice to listen to the ego thought system. In resistance to its message, everyone puts the book down for periods of time. It doesn't matter whether it be for a few minutes, weeks or years. What matters is picking it up again, which reflects the mind's decision to listen to the Holy Spirit. If only for an instant, if only once in a great while, you experience Jesus' presence, it is enough to tell you he is there. That is all we need to know, for love has come, having been chosen by the mind that remembers.

Q #1113: I am disturbed by the concept of the holy relationship. I feel quite left out because I have no such relationship with another person. I have heard other Course people say it doesn't necessarily mean that, but having looked quite carefully through the text it sure does sound like that is exactly what Jesus does mean. And since so much seems to depend on this holy relationship, it makes me feel like I am not qualified to work with *A Course in Miracles* because I have no significant other.

A: Our answer to [question #223](#) provides a helpful overview of the issue of special learning partners in our work with the Course. In general, we all have people in our lives who push our buttons in a major way, and these encounters can be helpful in directing us to some deeply buried guilt, which we can then look at and ask for help with. Special love and special hate relationships are always rooted in the guilt we buried and projected in an effort to get rid of it. They are defined only by this choice to accept the ego's interpretation of our guilt, not by the way bodies interact. That is another critical point raised in our discussion. *Relationships exist only in the mind* (content) and are not between bodies in the world (form), as we commonly tend to think (see **T.28.IV.3**).

A holy relationship automatically flows from our choice to have the Holy Spirit be our Guide for seeing everything, which means all of our thoughts and perceptions will reflect the oneness of the Sonship in some way -- we will see our interests as shared with everyone else's, not as separate and conflicting. Thus, you do not have to make something happen or fix something with another person in your life for you to experience a holy relationship. The *only* relationship is the one that exists in your mind between you and the Holy Spirit, which can then be symbolized in a relationship with another person, meaning that the relationship now serves the Holy Spirit's purpose rather than the ego's. But you do not have to be in a close relationship with someone for this to happen. It is always a matter of whether you are making the ego's thought system real in your mind or the Holy Spirit's. Everything else will symbolize that choice.

When *A Course in Miracles* originally came, Jesus was speaking to Helen about her relationship with Bill Thetford and other significant people in her life. And so there are many statements about “you and your

brother.” Yet he also emphasizes that **“you can interact but with yourself” (T.31.V.15:5)** , and that **“there is nothing outside you” (T.18.VI.1:1)** . “You and your brother,” thus, are symbols or concepts in our minds -- that is what Jesus is trying to get us to see. Yes, that certainly is an advanced level of awareness, but if we lose sight of that central truth, we will not be able to practice this course as it was intended to be practiced, and we will wind up bringing Jesus down to our level (the ego's most cherished goal), instead of rising to his level, where our minds would be restored to their natural state of eternal love and peace.

Q #1114: Please clarify what is meant by: “ideas leave not their source” (T.26.VII.4:7). We read many times that we created ourselves and our world, but read as many times that God created us.

A: “Ideas leave not their source” (T.26.VII.4:7) is the cornerstone of the Course's teaching. Upon it rests every other principle of its thought system. This most basic law of the nature of the mind means that nothing exists outside the Mind of God, and therefore the separation is impossible. Likewise, nothing exists outside the mind of the Sonship, and therefore the world is an illusion. The world and the body are projections of the mind; they do not exist in reality. We perceive and experience them as real because we choose to believe in them as the expression in form of the mind's choice for separation. It is the mind's belief in them that “makes them.” That is what the Course means when it says we made them; or more specifically “made them up”: **“What if you recognized this world is an hallucination? What if you really understood you made it up? What if you realized that those who seem to walk about in it, to sin and die, attack and murder and destroy themselves, are wholly unreal? Could you have faith in what you see, if you accepted this? And would you see it?” (T.20.VIII.7:3,4,5,6,7).**

The key to understanding the principles and teachings of *A Course in Miracles* is to remember that it addresses the mind of the Sonship, not the individual who identifies with a body. Everything always refers to the mind precisely because **“ideas leave not their source.”** The “us” that the Course refers to as created by God is the Mind of His Son who remains one with Him in the home he never left. God did not create the individuals we think we are. The mind that is split by belief in separation has confused itself with the body. The goal of the Course is to heal this identity confusion by teaching us that we are minds with the power to choose. The healing is accomplished through the practice of forgiveness whereby every experience is seen as a projection of the mind. Thus, the principle that **“ideas leave not their source”** is made real in our experience, undoing the belief that something can exist outside the mind. In this way, the mind chooses to accept its true Identity (what God created), and weakens its belief in the hallucinatory experience of the world and the body (what the split mind made).

Q #1115: Some time ago, I slowly came to agree with the answer given in [Question #767](#) dated 07/20/2005.

However, there hasn't been any current "filling in the gap" or "holy instants" of joy, happiness, or anything or a positive nature to make an alternative route from the worldly ego to notice. The result seems to be a blah passing of life without any enthusiastic interest in anything through an acceptance of ACIM ideas. How can one take any joy in the illusive and the unreal? One could feel "guilty" for having not fulfilled the promises made in the texts, or at least disappointed, and surely feeling like we're just treading water until , at last we leave the body, at the least. So what is a ACIM believer to do while here in the body? The idea that some time there will be an atonement is great but how does one feel good about ourselves while we could still be in our bodies for the next 20 or 30 years, or more? And "horrors" we could come back to more ego illusions !!! After 16 years or reading, it feels like a labyrinth which has no exit, and that the promises are but more illusions. Is there ever some light somewhere in this tunnel which I have been traveling these many years?

I haven't experienced any "filling in the gap" or "holy instants" of joy, happiness, or anything of a positive nature to make an inviting alternative route from the worldly ego. The result seems to be a blah-passing of life without any enthusiastic interest in anything through an acceptance of the ideas of *A Course in Miracles*. How can one take any joy in the illusive and the unreal? One could feel "guilty" for having not fulfilled the promises made in the text, or at least disappointed, and surely feeling like we're just treading water until, at last we leave the body.

So what is a Course believer to do while here in the body? The idea that some time there will be an Atonement is great but how does one feel good about one's self while still in the body for the next 20 or 30 years, or more? After 16 years of reading, it feels like a labyrinth which has no exit, and that the promises are but more illusions. Is there ever some light in this tunnel that I have been traveling these many years?

A: Since the Course's teaching turns our usual way of thinking upside down, we should perhaps begin by turning your image upside down. The world is the tunnel, and the light both in the tunnel and at its end is the message of the Course. For you, and countless other students, it does not always seem this way. That is because, as the old song goes, we are so accustomed to "looking for love [light] in all the wrong places." If at any time you have felt a deep resonance and calm certainty in recognition that the message of the Course is true, you have accessed your right mind, and that *is* the holy instant. It is no more glamorous than that, yet hardly insignificant: **"A light has entered the darkness. It may be a single light, but that is enough" (M.1.1:4,5).** Eons of lies are undone in an instant of recognizing that truth is true. Appreciation of any small, but truly effective step in the accomplishment of the Atonement is the only source of hope in journeying with the Course. The ego works in grand strokes, roaring and shrieking, but it lies. The still, small Voice of the Holy Spirit whispers, but speaks the truth; It speaks for God. Using the body as an instrument for learning to listen to that Voice, with the world as a classroom, would seem a worthy use for them during the next 20 or 30 years.

No doubt the beliefs you previously held about God, your self and the world have been extinguished, or at least mortally wounded during your many years of Course study. Their demise is no small accomplishment, considering the investment in learning the erroneous concepts. If such change is possible in learning the principles of the Course, it is reasonable to believe that everything else it promises is also within reach. Advances toward the fulfillment of its promises are frequently obscured by the interference of expectations that have nothing to do with the goal of the Course. We do not always want what it promises, wanting instead, fanciful substitutions for true spiritual progress. That is why Jesus tells us: **"Some of your greatest advances you have judged as failures, and some of your deepest retreats you have evaluated as success" (T.18.V.1:6).** In other words, we don't know what's going on, and would be incapable of evaluating it even if we did. And so, in his gentle wisdom he adds: **"Put yourself not in charge of this, for you cannot distinguish between advance and retreat" (T.18.V.1:5).** Taken to heart, this inevitably leads to some sense of relief. We do not have to know what's going on. If 16 years seems like a long time, it may be comforting to know that in an instant of truly doing nothing by not judging, we **"slip past centuries of effort, and escape from time" (T.18.VII,7:3).** This is the light we find in the tunnel of the ego's insanity when we are willing not to put ourselves in charge of the Atonement. It not only lights our way, but lightens our load.

Q #1116: In the answer to Question #771, you say, "Jesus did not need to forgive those who crucified his body because he was not identified with his body." In bodies we need to learn to forgive others. The Jesus who appears in the Bible makes the most important quote of his entire career by saying, "Forgive them for they know not what they do." If he had no need to extend forgiveness to those who attacked his body, then why did he ask for those who had attacked his body to be forgiven? If one claims that this Jesus in his petition for forgiveness in the Bible has nothing to do with the Jesus in *A Course in Miracles*, then we have completely thrown out the baby with the bath water.

While it is easy to recognize the insanity of this world, one can but wonder at the lack of consistency in conflicting statements made throughout the entire texts. If they were in error or mere figures of speech, the distinction is not usually or clearly drawn for the reader. How can inconsistency be consistent with truth? If a thing is true it must always be true.

A: Ah yes, it can all become so very confusing when we try to understand who really said what when, or when we aren't clear how to differentiate between what is meant literally and what is meant metaphorically in a writing such as the Course, which is much more like a poem than a scientific treatise.

Perhaps the simplest way to respond to your query would be this. The *content* of the message of the figure we call Jesus who lived two thousand years ago is the same as the *content* of the message of the Jesus who speaks to us now from outside time and space through the Course. The forms no doubt are different, for a variety of reasons, including differences in the psychological sophistication of the times then and now. However, it is a completely separate question as to whether Jesus' followers, especially those who attempted to put his good news down in writing two thousand years ago, truly understood his message of love and forgiveness. From the Course's perspective, if we accept its words as coming from the same source as the Jesus who appeared two thousand years ago in Palestine, the accuracy of the New Testament and its gospels as reports on Jesus' words and teachings is debatable. Jesus' followers' recollections of his message, or what they heard second and third hand from others (ever played the game of "telephone"?), were no doubt distorted by the projections of their own egos.

Jesus comments very explicitly on these distortions in the text:

"The message of the crucifixion is perfectly clear: *Teach only love, for that is what you are* .

"If you interpret the crucifixion in any other way, you are using it as a weapon for assault rather than as the call for peace for which it was intended. The Apostles often misunderstood it, and for the same reason that anyone misunderstands it. Their own imperfect love made them vulnerable to projection, and out of their own fear they spoke of the "wrath of God" as His retaliatory weapon. Nor could they speak of the crucifixion entirely without anger, because their sense of guilt had made them angry.

"These are some of the examples of upside-down thinking in the New Testament, although its gospel is really only the message of love. If the Apostles had not felt guilty, they never could have quoted me as saying, 'I come not to bring peace but a sword.' This is clearly the opposite of everything I taught. Nor could they have described my reactions to Judas as they did, if they had really understood me. I could not have said, 'Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?' unless I believed in betrayal. The whole message of the crucifixion was simply that I did not. The 'punishment' I was said to have called forth upon Judas was a similar mistake. Judas was my brother and a Son of God, as much a part of the Sonship as myself. Was it likely that I would condemn him when I was ready to demonstrate that condemnation is impossible?

"As you read the teachings of the Apostles, remember that I told them myself that there was much they would understand later, because they were not wholly ready to follow me at the time " (T.6.I.13;14;15;16:1) .

So you're going to make yourself crazy if you attempt to reconcile the teachings of the Course with what Jesus' followers two thousand years ago wrote about what they thought he had said and taught and done. The statement you repeat above as attributed to Jesus by the gospel writers at his crucifixion, if taken literally, would undermine the whole foundation upon which the Course's teachings on forgiveness rest. If Jesus had believed there was anything to forgive, he would have been making sin real and his request to the Father would be what Jesus in **"The Song of Prayer"** pamphlet refers to as forgiveness-to-destroy (**S.2.I.II**) . Jesus in the Course does provide an alternative interpretation of this gospel statement that clearly provides a correction for its original intent: **"Miracle-minded forgiveness is *only* correction.**

It has no element of judgment at all. The statement 'Father forgive them for they know not what they do' in no way evaluates *what* they do. It is an appeal to God to heal their minds. There is no reference to the outcome of the error. That does not matter" (T.2.V.A.16) .

Now if you feel more drawn to the stories and quotations attributed to Jesus in the New Testament than to his words in the Course, then perhaps the Course is not your path. You are the only one who can decide that. But if the Course is your path, you'll want to stay focused on its content and not get lost in the ego's hairsplitting over discrepancies and contradictions. Jesus emphasizes this near the end of the Course:

"This is not a course in philosophical speculation, nor is it concerned with precise terminology. It is concerned only with Atonement, or the correction of perception....

"All terms are potentially controversial, and those who seek controversy will find it. Yet those who seek clarification will find it as well. They must, however, be willing to overlook controversy, recognizing that it is a defense against truth in the form of a delaying maneuver.... A universal experience is not only possible but necessary. It is this experience toward which the course is directed. Here alone consistency becomes possible because here alone uncertainty ends.

"This course remains within the ego framework, where it is needed.... Therefore it uses words, which are symbolic, and cannot express what lies beyond symbols. ... *The course is simple* . It has one function [forgiveness]and one goal [peace]. Only in that does it remain wholly consistent because only that can *be* consistent" (C.in.1:1,2; 2:1,2,3,5,6,7; 3:1,3,8,9,10).

Finally, in response to your concluding comment: A thing, including the Course, as well as the Bible, can never be true. The content underlying the words can reflect the truth, but the words themselves are not the truth. Teachings can only point to the truth, which is beyond all words and symbols.

For further discussion on the nature of the Course's use of symbols, *The Message of A Course in Miracles, Part II: Few Choose to Listen*, as well as the audiotope and CD set, *Duality as Metaphor* , can be especially helpful.

Q #1117: You mentioned in an earlier answer that recalling the past was a defense against the truth. I know from reading *A Course in Miracles* that sickness is also one of these defenses. Can you give a list of other common defenses?

A: Since the guilt that arises as the result of the mind's choice for separation is projected on to the body, *everything* pertaining to the body is a defense against the truth because it was made as a substitute for the oneness that was abandoned when separation was chosen. A list of defenses contains everything we choose to use to defend and protect belief in separation. It is a long list indeed. Anything that proves the world "real" in our experience defends the mind's belief in it, thereby denying the truth of oneness. This is the mind's way of dissociating from itself in its attempt to remain separate from its Source. The truth, however, is that there is no defense against the truth; it can be denied, forgotten, blocked from awareness, but it cannot be changed or extinguished. We read on the first page of the text: **"Nothing real (truth) can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists" (T.in.2.3)** . It follows that the illusory existence of what is not real (ego/ world) requires constant defense in order for the mind to sustain belief in it by its choice. Thus, the entire made-up physical universe is a defense. Obviously we cannot undo the belief in separation by crossing defenses off our list.

However, we learn in the Course that everything made as a defense *against* the truth can be used by the Holy Spirit to lead *to* the truth. Through the process of forgiveness, the entire defense strategy of the ego is transformed into a classroom for learning to accept the truth. The body and the world lose their power

to defend against the truth when they are seen as projections of the mind. Willingness to apply this important principle in any situation strengthens belief in the power of the mind and weakens the ego's defense arsenal. There is no need to fight against the defenses. They need only be recognized as a smokescreen used by the ego to keep truth from awareness. They reflect the mind's choice to identify with the ego and to forget that it ever made a choice. One of the important goals of the Course is to uncover the ego's deceptive scheme and expose its defenses so the mind can choose to correct the error of believing in separation and accept its true identity as mind. Anything outside of the mind that is perceived as having any positive or negative effect on the mind's perfect peace is a defense against it and therefore against the truth. It constitutes a denial of the part of the mind that holds the memory of God's Love and abides in perfect peace. Being willing to see the ego's defense strategy at work in every relationship is the beginning of its undoing by the mere fact that it has been exposed. Not justifying the mind's projections lessens their effectiveness as defenses; not defending the defenses weakens them. Through this gentle practice, the ego's grip is loosened and eventually undone. The defense list fades and is erased.

Q #1118: I've heard Ken Wapnick often say that God doesn't know we are here. How then can the quotes below be explained?

"His Word assures us that He loves the world. God's Word has promised that peace is possible here, and what He promises can hardly be impossible. But it is true that the world must be looked at differently, if His promises are to be accepted. What the world is, is but a fact. You cannot choose what this should be. But you can choose how you would see it. ...Yet has God's Judgment on this distorted world redeemed it and made it fit to welcome peace" (M.11.1:6,7,8,9,10,11;4:6).

"God turns to you for help to save the world" (M.29.8:2).

"You have projected outward what is antagonistic to what is inward, and therefore you would have to perceive it this way. That is why you must realize that your hatred is in your mind and not outside it before you can get rid of it; and why you must get rid of it before you can perceive the world as it really is" (T.12.III.7:9,10).

"The world as you perceive it cannot have been created by the Father, for the world is not as you see it" (T.11.VII.1:1).

"Now is the question different. It is no longer, 'Can peace be possible in this world?' but instead, 'Is it not impossible that peace be absent here?'" (M.11.4:11,12).

"To perceive anew is merely to perceive again, implying that before, or in the interval between, you were not perceiving at all. What, then, is the world that awaits your perception when you see it?" (T.11.VII.1:5,6).

"The world the holy see is beautiful because they see their innocence in it" (T.20.III.6:3).

"This loveliness is not a fantasy. It is the real world, bright and clean and new, with everything sparkling under the open sun" (T.17.II.2:1,2).

"The altar of God where Christ abideth is there. You have defiled the altar, but not the world. ...Bring your perceptions of the world to this altar, for it is the altar to truth. There you will see your vision changed, and there you will learn to see truly. From this place, where God and His Son dwell in peace and where you are welcome, you will look out in peace and behold the world truly" (T.12.III.10:3,4,6,7,8).

A: Although there is certainly much in *A Course in Miracles* that would seem to say otherwise, the Course's foundational metaphysical principles, if truly understood, make it very clear that God is abstract and not personal. For example, early in the text, in a discussion about how the ego arose, Jesus makes the following observation about knowledge, which is a term the Course uses to refer to our perfectly unified reality in God, or Heaven, in contrast to the realm of perception, which is the ego's invention: **"Abstract thought applies to knowledge because *knowledge is completely impersonal*, and examples [i.e., specifics] are irrelevant to its understanding. Perception, however, is always specific, and therefore quite concrete"** (T.4.II.1:4,5, italics added).

The personal -- and interpersonal -- can only arise out of a thought of separation, where there can seem to be a specific self and a separate specific other -- an observer and an observed . **"Ego illusions are quite specific, although *the mind is naturally abstract*. Part of the mind becomes concrete, however, when it splits. The concrete part believes in the ego, because the ego depends on the concrete. The ego is the part of the mind that believes your existence is defined by separation"** (T.4.VII.1:2,3,4,5 , italics added). The Course identifies both consciousness and perception as the result of the thought of separation. **"Consciousness, the level of perception, was the first split introduced into the mind after the separation, making the mind a perceiver rather than a creator. Consciousness is correctly identified as the domain of the ego"** (T.3.IV.2:1,2). Clearly then, consciousness and perception cannot be states or abilities of the true God as the Course characterizes God.

The oneness that is our reality, as the Course repeats in many different ways across many, many passages, simply cannot recognize separation nor the resulting illusory specifics and differences. Nor can the mind that has made separation real remember and understand its true, nonspecific, unified nature. **"Complete abstraction is the natural condition of the mind. But part of it is now unnatural. It does not look on everything as one. It sees instead but fragments of the whole, for only thus could it invent the partial world you see.One brother is all brothers. Every mind contains all minds, for every mind is one. Such is the truth. Yet do these thoughts make clear the meaning of creation? Do these words bring perfect clarity with them to you? What can they seem to be but empty sounds; pretty, perhaps, correct in sentiment, yet fundamentally not understood nor understandable. The mind that taught itself to think specifically can no longer grasp abstraction in the sense that it is all- encompassing (W.161.2:1,2,3,4; 4:1,2,3,4,5,6,7).**

So God does not know we are here, that is, He does not *perceive* that we are here, because the knowledge inherent in God as perfect Oneness is impersonal, nonspecific, and non-perceptual. If there could be any sense in which God knew that we are here, He would have to be a separate, personal God, capable of perceiving us as separate from Him, and we would in fact have to be separate from Him -- all contradictions of the Course's basic teachings on the nature of God and reality. So, as a matter of clarification, even referring to God as He or Him, as the Course does throughout, confers a Personhood upon Him that can only be a fiction.

If all of this is true, the question remains, why is so much of the Course, such as the passages you cite, written in a way that seems to suggest that the separation is real, that God exists apart from us, as a Person Who perceives His children as existing independent of Him in a world that can be perceived outside Him and that He seems to care about? Why is the Course presented this way, if the words contradict what the Course is saying about the nature of our reality and God's -- perfect oneness?

This question has been addressed both briefly and in depth across a number of answers on this service (e.g., Questions [#27](#), [#42](#), [#72](#), [#85](#), [#156](#), [#157](#), [#228](#), [#506](#), [#550](#), [#681](#), [#754](#), [#761](#), [#773](#), [#890](#), [#921](#), [#958](#), [#967](#)). But let us examine it once again, perhaps pulling everything together in a little bit different way. Invested as we are in believing that we are creatures of separation, we only understand duality. Everything in our experience reinforces our belief in separation and so simply to be told it is all illusion -- that the world, and the selves we believe we are, are not real, so get over it! -- would not be particularly helpful. Rather we need a teaching that addresses us where we believe we are, for with our self-imposed,

finite split minds, we cannot comprehend infinite oneness. And in fact, if the infinite, impersonal Oneness that the Course refers to as God had been the Course's primary emphasis, it would most likely arouse more fear and anxiety in our minds than it already does now, as we begin to grasp, when we are ready, its deeper implications.

We first need to be taught that our experience of separation and duality is based on belief and not fact so that we can begin to question the validity of all our interpretations of our experience and allow our investment in them to be undone. In particular, all of our interpretations that lead us to conclude that we or others are victims of persons and events outside our control need to be reconsidered. The Course's approach to teaching this is a powerful demonstration of one of the Course's major emphases -- that what needs to change is not the dualistic form of the illusion we believe in but the purpose we give it. For duality is not the problem in itself. The problem is our *belief* in it and, in particular, the purpose for which we have been using it - to keep ourselves believing we are sinful and guilty and consequently beyond gentle correction and genuine healing. So the first step is not to deny or negate duality, but to give it a different purpose -- to begin to use the symbols of separation to undo our belief in separation. And that is what the Course does.

This approach is brilliantly demonstrated in the Course's use of Christian terms and symbolism for a different purpose from that given to them by traditional Christianity. To understand the Course's correction, we first must understand what we have chosen to believe about this made-up dualistic God and our relationship with Him. For accepting the separation as real, we have also accepted an incredible dualistic myth about God as Someone separate from us Who wants to punish us because of our sin against Him in choosing to turn against His Love and reject the paradise He has made for us. All of us who believe we are here in the world must believe we have really accomplished the separation, thereby victimizing this otherwise all-powerful God. And so He must seek revenge, beginning by banishing us from the paradise He conditionally gave us. Incorporated into this myth of separation and sin are overwhelming feelings of guilt and fear, which keep us from seeing clearly what we have foolishly *chosen* to believe.

Christianity represents a vivid demonstration of the ego's separation-based religion that accepts sin and victimhood as real and presents the only resolution, called *God's plan*, as requiring the brutal murder of His only Son. Specifically, God's plan calls for His pure and innocent Son to take on a body so that he can be tortured and killed as a sacrifice, in order to compensate or atone for our evil, victimizing thoughts and deeds against God, and appease His otherwise boundless wrath. Why God can only be satisfied by a sacrificial death is never explained but simply accepted as the truth. Over and over again, traditional Christianity emphasizes that our sins have been washed away by the Son's redeeming blood. Bizarre as it may sound when presented without any additional context, there is little doubt that Christianity's basic tenets continue to hold sway over many minds in the Western world. Its far-reaching appeal lies in the fact that it reinforces the underlying ego thought system, upon which our personal identities and the existence of the world depend. And it has the added appeal of saying that God is a separate Individual Who acknowledges and reacts to separation and sin, conferring a sacred legitimacy on the entire ego enterprise.

The Course comes as a correction for these strange beliefs, using the same dualistic forms, speaking symbolically of God as a separate individual Person -- our Father -- while addressing our belief that we have attacked Him through our desire for separation. The correction remains within a dualistic framework while our fear of oneness and the loss of self is too powerful, assuring us that our Father only loves us, that we can only seem to attack God, ourselves and each other in our feverish imagination, and that the world we have made is simply an outpicturing of our own foolishly misguided and mistaken thoughts of separation and sin and guilt.

If we allow His Holy Spirit to correct our misperceptions, we will begin to experience the world in a completely different light, while we continue to believe the world is separate from us and real. And we will begin to recognize that all of our experiences represent a choice we have made in our own minds about how we want to feel. In the end, when all of our ego perceptions of attack and blame will have been

corrected, we will know that the external world, as well as the self we have believed we are, is not real. This healed perception is what the Course calls the real world, a state of mind in which all sin and guilt have been undone. It is the transitional state, still within the ego-derived perceptual realm, that precedes the return to knowledge/God/Heaven. There are many passages that make it clear that the real world is still an illusion and therefore not real, despite its name. We will conclude with a number of passages that should offer a correction for any strictly dualistic interpretation of the passages that you have cited, and should also make it abundantly clear that the Course's dualistic language is only metaphorical and is not to be taken literally.

“He [the Son] always perceives this world as outside himself, for this is crucial to his adjustment. He does not realize that he makes this world, for there is no world outside of him. If only the loving thoughts of God's Son are the world's reality, the real world must be in his mind” (T.12.III.6:6,7; 7:1).

“The real world is the second part of the hallucination time and death are real, and have existence that can be perceived” (T.26.V.12:3).

“The real world still is but a dream. Except the figures have been changed. They are not seen as idols which betray (T.29.IX.7:1,2,3).

“The real world is the state of mind in which the only purpose of the world is seen to be forgiveness” (T.30.V.1:1).

“ *Wrong-mindedness* listens to the ego and makes illusions; perceiving sin and justifying anger, and seeing guilt, disease and death as real. Both this world and the real world are illusions because right-mindedness merely overlooks, or forgives, what never happened. Therefore it is not the *One-mindedness* of the Christ Mind, Whose Will is One with God's” (C.1.6).

“There is a borderland of thought that stands between this world and Heaven. It is not a place, and when you reach it is apart from time. ...We have referred to it as the real world. And yet there is a contradiction here, in that the words imply a limited reality, a partial truth, a segment of the universe made true. This is because knowledge makes no attack upon perception. They are brought together, and only one continues past the gate where oneness is (T.26.III.2:1,2; 3:2,3,4,5).

“Perception will be meaningless when it has been perfected, for everything that has been used for learning will have no function. Nothing will ever change; no shifts nor shadings, no differences, no variations that made perception possible will still occur. The perception of the real world will be so short that you will barely have time to thank God for it. For God will take the last step swiftly, when you have reached the real world and have been made ready for Him. The real world is attained simply by the complete forgiveness of the old, the world you see without forgiveness” (T.17.II.4:2,3,4,5;5:1).

“This course will lead to knowledge, but knowledge itself is still beyond the scope of our curriculum. ... We need remember only that whoever attains the real world, beyond which learning cannot go, will go beyond it, but in a different way” (T.18.IX.11:1,3).

“For as Heaven and earth become one, even the real world will vanish from your sight. The end of the world is not its destruction, but its translation into Heaven. The reinterpretation of the world is the transfer of all perception to knowledge” (T.11.VIII.1:7,8,9).

Q #1119 I have been through other spiritual traditions and would like to know the place of *soul* in *A Course in Miracles* . Is it the same as right mind? the small self? the Self?

A: In the section "Mind - Spirit" in the clarification of terms, Jesus explains that in his course **"the term 'soul' is not used except in direct biblical quotations because of its highly controversial nature. It would, however, be an equivalent of 'spirit,' with the understanding that, being of God, it is eternal and was never born"** (C.1.3:2,3) . It can also be equated with the split mind that came into existence after the separation -- the mind that now journeys deeper into separation or back toward God. [Question #97](#) addresses this same issue.

Q #1120: Jesus says in *Psychotherapy: Purpose and Practice* that the process of giving up our guilt cannot be done "without some pain" and that the merciful nature of this letting go may be followed by a "deep retreat into fear, etc." I have recently gotten over a big mountain on my path and work with the Course and definitely experienced what Jesus describes in those passages. But why do we have to go through this? Is there any way around this painful process? I am motivated to keep going by the holy instants that I achieve, but I get scared of the process even though I intellectually know that it is going to work. Is there any way around this whole process? I don't know how much more I can take. Can I make a deal with my ego to leave me alone?

A: Making a deal with the ego is what got us into trouble in the first place. Furthermore, it didn't work. The ego told us it would leave us alone if we would just stay out of our minds and seek for peace and happiness in its promised land -- the world. According to this plan, the body would meet all our needs. As it turns out, the deal caused the guilt as well as the painful process of giving it up. The only way out is calling off all deals and deciding to stick with the alternative Jesus teaches in *A Course in Miracles* : forgiveness.

What makes the process of forgiveness painful is resistance. In fact, we could restate the phrase you quote from the Psychotherapy pamphlet to read: giving up guilt cannot be done **"without some resistance ,"** which is a mild understatement. Since the body is the home of guilt, the mind that identifies with the body will find it very painful to undo guilt because it thinks *it* will be undone. The practice of forgiveness rests on the fact that the mind, not the body, is the decision maker, and, as Jesus tells us in the manual: **"The resistance to recognizing this is enormous [and therefore painful] , because the existence of the world as you perceive it depends on the body being the decision maker"** (M.II.1:7).

Clearly we cannot avoid pain/resistance since its source is the mind that continues to choose to identify with the package deal of ego, body, and guilt. In case that is not enough, the ego throws another trap into the bargain by telling us that deciding for God is fearful and will somehow cause pain. The mind now finds itself between a rock and a hard place and inevitably becomes dazed by this dilemma, just as with the body-identity dilemma described in the text (T.4.V.4) . The pain and confusion of the ego's trap work splendidly to achieve its goal of making the Atonement seem unattainable. Mission accomplished.

The kind and gentle advice Jesus gives us with regard to resistance in "Rules for Decision" applies to all resistance: **"Do not fight yourself"** (T.30.I.1:7). Trying to starve out the ego or keep it at bay does not work because it has been invited in and has made itself at home. In fact, it now thinks it is master of the house, and the mind, having forgotten its decision to invite in this stranger in the first place, has subjected itself to its rule. To further exacerbate the insanity of this arrangement, the mind decides that what threatens the ego's rule is painful, while happiness is found in preserving its saga of sin, guilt and fear through specialness. Thus, duped by the world's **"painful pleasures and ... tragic joys"**(W.131.7:1), we no longer know what is good for us and are completely confused about joy and pain. True relief is found only when the mind strikes a "new deal" with *itself* by accepting its identity as a mind with the power to choose: **"It alone decides whether what is seen is real or illusory, desirable or undesirable,**

pleasurable or painful” (M.8.3:11) . No other deal will work. The ultimate way out is accepting the very simple and direct message at the heart of the Course's teaching: **“The secret of salvation is but this: that you are doing this unto yourself. ...Whatever seems to be the cause of any pain and suffering you feel, this is still true” (T.27.VIII.10:1,4).** The “secret” lies in recognizing that at every moment we are choosing between the ego and its pain, or the Holy Spirit and His peace. This blows the ego's deal of keeping us out of our minds by returning us to the source that reduces pain, and puts the Atonement that will ultimately end all pain, within reach.

Q #1121: I am a practitioner of Reiki in Brazil. Reiki uses the life force energy that flows through us, and it is administered by “laying on hands.” It's universal energy that comes from God. It's used to heal any kind of problem we have, be it mental or even physical problems. I have read that Jesus used Reiki to heal people. I strongly believe that all of us have this tremendous power inside but we don't know how to use it.

I understand *A Course in Miracles* to be saying that our focus should not be on what we do in our lives, but on learning to understand our minds. So it doesn't matter what we do. What really is important is how our minds look at the world and the people as a whole. My question concerns the fact that I was channeled with some kind of energy that flows through me and suddenly I am doing things that I couldn't do in the past, even healing people who have physical problems. How would you explain this to me? How do you explain those people who heal others with different beliefs, even different spiritual beliefs? What's the connection between Reiki and the Course?

A: The fact that Reiki involves a technique for channeling energy through the body, no matter what the source of the energy is perceived to be, means, from the Course's perspective, that it is a form of magic. Now magic, as the Course uses it, is not a pejorative term. It simply means that the effort to bring about desired changes is occurring at the level of effect, that is, through energy forces and the body, rather than at the level of cause, that is, the mind. This must be the case because the energy is operating within a spatio-temporal framework, that is, from one body to another at a specific time when those two bodies are in physical proximity, and then through the body of the one being treated.

The Course has a different metaphysical foundation from Reiki, and would not consider anything that can be directed through the body to be divine, or from God. The world of spirit and the world of the body are two mutually exclusive realms, only one of which is real, according to the Course **(T.31.VI.1)** . The Course's “technique” is forgiveness, which seeks to bring about changes at the level of mind, not at the level of the body. For this reason, while the Course takes no position on this, it would be more consistent with the Course's teachings to see the Jesus of two thousand years ago as healing through the principles of forgiveness, which means through reminding others of the power of their own minds to make a different choice about the ego and its effects, including the body, looking on all of it without judgment and without guilt -- that is the true means of healing, according to the Course.

How then does Reiki produce its effects, including your own personal experience of being changed by your attunement with Reiki energy so that you can apparently produce changes in others? There are mutually and nearly universally agreed upon laws of the illusory physical and energetic universes, operating within the ego system, that all split minds share, whether individual minds are conscious of those laws or not. An obvious one is the law of gravity. These laws receive their power from the collective belief of the Sonship. Although made by the ego mind, they are neutral in themselves and can be used for either ego purposes or purposes of healing, that is, to reinforce our belief in the reality of separation and differences, or to allow us to begin to heal the guilt and thoughts of attack in our mind.

Many other spiritual teachings describe aspects of energetic fields within and surrounding the body that are not visible to the naked eye that can be modified and directed by those who are tuned in to them. Yet all of these subtler energies remain a part of the ego thought system, and manipulations can have no

effect unless on some level, in most cases unconscious, the minds in relationship have agreed to be affected by those apparent manipulations. Always, behind any observed effect, there is a belief at the mind level, whether the individual is aware of that belief or not. Much of the ego's belief system remains at an unconscious level so we can remain unaware of our own agreement to seem to be affected by forces outside ourselves. If we allowed ourselves to recognize and acknowledge that inner decision, we could no longer see ourselves as victims of anything outside ourselves again.

Reiki does share some similarity with the Course at the level of content, since it emphasizes that the individual practitioner does not direct the healing process nor decide what problems to address. And so the practitioner is considered to be an instrument of healing, but certainly not its source. In fact, the practitioner as well as the patient is considered in need of healing and benefits through willingness to be a channel. As with all things of this world, Reiki has the power to direct the mind to an awareness of something beyond ourselves, and it does point symbolically to a seemingly invisible power beyond all appearances that intends only good for all.

Q #1122: The manual for teachers of *A Course in Miracles* talks about developing "psychic abilities" from spiritual practice. What would be "'psychic' powers that are clearly in line with this course," as mentioned in section 25? I thought, ultimately, psychic powers weren't desirable and only a side-effect of "walking the path"?

A: As the section you refer to suggests, anything that demonstrates that “**communication is not limited to the small range of channels the world recognizes**” (M.25.2:2) can be helpful to the process of remembering Who we are and would be in line with the Course's teachings on the nature of mind and the world. It is in the ego's best interests and one aspect of its grand deception to maintain the belief that bodies and brains are necessary for communication. In contrast, the Course teaches that all minds are joined and communication occurs only at the level of mind/ thought (e.g., T.15.IV.6:5,6,7;T.15.VI.8; T.15.XI.7; T.18.VI.8:3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11) .

Abilities that suggest there is something beyond the world of the five senses can lead to a questioning of the world's fundamental assumptions -- in particular, that we are bodies at the mercy of forces outside our control (e.g., W.pl.151.2,3,4,5) . This opens the door to the recognition that there is something that is not limited by the basic “laws” of time and space (T.18.VIII.2:1,2; W.p2.4:2) . The ego resists this recognition, for that begins a process that can lead to the recognition that we have a mind that has the power of choice and is responsible for how we seem to experience our world.

The only reason psychic powers could be considered undesirable has nothing to do with the abilities themselves but only with the purpose they are given -- “**the only important consideration is how they are used**” (M.25.3:4) . For if abilities are developed that transcend communication limited to the five senses, the ego's defense is to use them for displays of individual specialness, “**taking them as ends in themselves**” which “ **will delay progress,**” as the section you refer to emphasizes (M.25.3:5) . But if the powers are given to the Holy Spirit for His purpose of undoing our investment in the ego and its litany of limitations, they “**can be very helpful... [and] valuable teaching aids**” (M.25.3:1,2) .

You may wish to review several answers already posted that address the issue of psychic abilities, Question [#589](#) in particular, for it explores in depth the issue of the right-minded use of psychic powers (see also Questions [#167](#), [#497](#), [#623](#), [#644](#), and [#682](#)) .

Q #1123: I have difficulty seeing any connection between teachings about chakra systems, channeling and many other "truths" in New Age books, and the teachings I find in *A Course in Miracles* . How come?

A: You're having difficulty seeing any connection because there isn't any!

Although the Course comes within an ego framework (**C.in.3:1**) , its teachings come from a thought system and a Source completely beyond the ego, with its purpose to help the mind transcend the ego thought system and the resulting false self. Most New Age teachings are geared towards helping one function with greater ease and happiness within the ego thought system of separation and individuality, although at the same time they may reflect certain aspects of right- minded thinking, such as the value of releasing judgments.

Q #1124: I have heard you say that it is important to be true to the classrooms we have chosen for ourselves. I understand this to mean that relationships initially chosen to cause us to be guilty and confused we now can use for the Holy Spirit's purpose of forgiveness. We just need to do our best in these roles. But in Questions [#225](#) and [#405](#) you say that if we can let go of our egos for a instant, anything we do with the Holy Spirit will be the right thing. I have a problem with that. For example, if I let someone attack me, aren't you implying that that would be inappropriate and not responsible to the classroom I have chosen? But at the same time, if I let that person attack me, as long as I am with the Holy Spirit, it would be the right thing to do. In question [#3](#) you say it's important to do the best we can in our classrooms; yet at the end you say that in the end it does not matter what you do. The only thing that matters is *whom* you do it with. That's like saying something is important and then saying it's not. It is comforting for me to know that no matter what, as long as you choose the Holy Spirit and against guilt that is the right choice. So what is the answer?

A: The confusion you express is common to many students of *A Course in Miracles* . The meaning of the principle that when you are joined with the Holy Spirit, anything you do would be loving has been badly misunderstood and misapplied, with tragic results in many cases, as mentioned in the earlier questions you referred to. When the Holy Spirit is your Teacher, your perception would be the same as His, meaning you would see only through the eyes of love, and your actions would flow from love. That automatically means that you would never do anything that would harm yourself or anyone else on any level whatsoever. To *allow* yourself to be attacked is to *choose* to be attacked. It is hard to imagine that choice flowing from love, as both you and the attacker are being harmed. In extreme cases, the choice could come from love, but it would not be *experienced* as an attack. This is what Jesus refers to in speaking of the crucifixion: **“I was persecuted as the world judges, and did not share this evaluation for myself. And because I did not share it, I did not strengthen it” (T.6.I.5:3,4)** . He is trying to raise us to that *spiritually advanced* level through his teaching and mind-training exercises. But that is an ego-free level at the top of the spiritual ladder, where there is no longer any identification with the body. Until we no longer identify with the body, it is almost impossible to avoid taking attacks personally, as attacks.

You can relate to this perhaps in terms of the common experience of parents dealing with the attack of an angry child. If my child is having a temper tantrum and starts to kick and scratch me, I would stop him, because it would not be loving to *him* to let him continue attacking, and I would be irresponsible as a parent to permit him to do whatever he wants to me. If I have chosen the Holy Spirit as my Teacher, I will not perceive my child's actions as an attack and therefore not take them personally; my restraining him will thus not be motivated by anger, fear, or vindictiveness. My firmness with him will be the most loving thing to do for *both* of us, reflecting my choice to join with the Holy Spirit.

Now, I could have chosen to become a parent for ego reasons, but if I shift from the ego to the Holy Spirit as my Teacher, He will use this exact same role to teach me different lessons. Instead of the ego's gifts of specialness that I may have been attracted to originally, I can now accept the Holy Spirit's gifts of oneness; that is, my purpose now is to use my role as a parent to learn that my child and I share the same interests: we both have a right mind, a wrong mind, and a decision- making capacity to choose between them. Both my child and I (as minds) believe we separated from God and are trying to cope with the resulting anguish and pain of sin, guilt, and fear. That is the abiding content. In form, obviously, we are different, and I must respect that and act accordingly. So, even in disciplining him, I can be learning

that he and I share the same interests (content). I am being faithful to my classroom -- being a parent -- but I have changed my teacher and am therefore learning different lessons. You can extend these principles to the teacher-student relationship, boss-subordinate relationship, or any other relationship in which authority is involved.

Parenting is not easy. No one would disagree with that, especially parents dealing with rebellious teenagers! But the approach is always the same: seeing your relationship as a classroom with the Holy Spirit as your Teacher, Who is helping you learn how to close the gap of separation that you perceive between you and your teenager. That is the content, and that never changes; and that is the only truly important thing going on in the relationship -- in *any* relationship. It is not the behavior that is of primary importance; but behavior should not be ignored either. Common sense is a necessary component in this entire process.

The experience of most parents is that the most loving, helpful thing to *do* with a teenager is not all that clear. That is when you get your ego out of the way -- forgiving yourself for not doing it perfectly (**T.18.IV.2:3,4,5**) -- and then do what seems right. That may turn out *not* to be helpful and make the situation worse, or it could turn out to be very helpful. But that is not what matters; what matters is that you chose to listen to the Voice for Love instead of the ego. That is what heals your mind and gradually does away with all the interference and resistance to your unconditional acceptance of love. Your mind is being healed, and that healing extends throughout the Sonship (**W.pl.137**) . There is no other purpose for our being here (**T.24.VI.4**) . Having this single-minded purpose will actually help you to function more effectively in your classroom, whatever that may be; for you will become more and more free of internal conflict, and as a result be able to relate to the people in your personal world without the usual ego interferences.

Q #1125: What does *A Course in Miracles* teach about spiritual verbal communication through mediums? Who talks to us in these communications? In Brazil, people present at Kardec Centers 'receive' messages they say are given by 'spirits' that identify themselves with their real names or a name they give just to have one. There are even many, many books published in Brazil about what they say. I am not a Kardecist and never have been, but Kardec, as well as his books, is well known the world over.

A: Since we are all only split off parts of the one ego self, we are only ever talking to ourselves, no matter who seems to be speaking. And since that self is illusory, all conversations, whether seeming to happen with other physical bodies or with discarnate voices, are simply hallucinations. Now that answer may be the truth, but it is not particularly satisfying from the perspective of where we seem to find ourselves.

While the Course does not address the issue of mediumship specifically, the book's very existence would have to be considered support for the validity and helpfulness of the process, since Helen Schucman viewed Jesus and not herself as the source of the material she wrote down. But she also understood that Jesus did not exist as an entity outside herself, but rather as a presence within her mind that was always available to her, whether or not she was willing to be available to him!

As a point of clarification, the Course uses the word *spirit* differently from its more common usage, as in the case of spirit mediumship that Kardec researched and explored in the nineteenth century. In the Course, spirit refers to our reality as Christ in the Mind of God, beyond the ego split mind and any sense of individual identity (**T.3.V.7:3,4**; **C.1.1,2,3,4**) . Since, as the Course teaches, mind is *never* inside the body (e.g., **T.28.II.2:8**; **T.29.I.5**; **W.pl.72.8**; **W.pl.96.4:4**; **W.pl.167.6**; **W.pl.199.7:2**) , spirit as typically used would simply be, from the Course's perspective, any seemingly separate fragment of the ego mind, whether it happens to believe that it is currently incarnated within a body or not. And all communication therefore occurs only between minds, and not between bodies, despite what our experience seems to tell us to the contrary (see Question [#1122](#) for a more in-depth discussion) .

If this is understood, it should be apparent that the fact that a message seems to be coming from a discarnate voice in no way assures that the message is reflecting a higher or more healed perspective. Nor does identification with a physical body necessarily preclude more advanced understanding of the true nature of reality and the means for remembering it. It is helpful to recognize that, at the level of content, there are only two possible sources for any message we receive -- the ego or the Holy Spirit -- regardless of where in the world of form it may seem to come from. From the Course's perspective, preoccupation with specifics and differences is a red flag that the ego is the likely source, or is at least a filter that is coloring and distorting the message. Reminders that help us step back from our judgments and recognize what we all share in common are likely to have the Holy Spirit as their Source.

Near the end of the Course, Jesus speaks of the one source behind all messages of healing despite the various forms through which they may seem to be expressed and also explains why we need to experience the medium as specific:

“Why is the illusion of many necessary? Only because reality is not understandable to the deluded. Only very few can hear God's Voice at all, and even they cannot communicate His messages directly through the Spirit which gave them. They need a medium through which communication becomes possible to those who do not realize that they are spirit. A body they can see. A voice they understand and listen to, without the fear that truth would encounter in them. Do not forget that truth can come only where it is welcomed without fear. So do God's teachers need a body, for their unity could not be recognized directly” (M.12.3).

That we are all mediums who are channeling all the time -- channeling either the ego or the Holy Spirit -- is a helpful perspective on the whole issue of mediumship and channeling that minimizes differences and takes away the sense of specialness that our egos would like to attribute to the process. This perspective is developed and elaborated on in the audio set, *The Inner Voice*, by Kenneth Wapnick.

Q #1126: You say in Question [#225](#), "As long as we experience ourselves as bodies, then we need to respond to and respect our bodily needs, both physical and psychological." And in Question [#406](#), "Lack of attention or concern about those responsibilities at the level of form is almost always an expression of our authority problem ..." Does this mean that we need to follow the ego fears to respect our psychological needs? For example, do we need to travel around the world to be whole, sleep with certain people to be whole, act like a "real man," or repay people's wrongs to get rid of guilt? I believe Jesus frees us from these things, but my ego would like me to believe I am not being appropriate if I don't follow what it tells me I need to be a whole person. I'm trying to get to the point where I can listen to the Holy Spirit on matters like this and not give my power away to someone who will tell me the answer. But I still am not sure what Jesus or the Holy Spirit want from me.

A: What Jesus and the Holy Spirit “want” from you is that you would see that the ego is all made up, and that you therefore should not take it so seriously. You already are whole and complete as God's Son (**W.pII.14**) ; but you have hidden that from your awareness and replaced it with a self that is plagued with problems and self-doubt. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are guiding you in the process of letting go of your *need* to keep the truth of your wholeness concealed.

The ego would help you become a whole person only according to *its* definition of what that is. To follow the ego's guidance in anything would never help you get past guilt and fear. Without guilt and fear, there is no ego! The ego wants us to have physical and psychological needs so that we will always be in conflict and focused on satisfying those needs, which almost always happens at another's expense, thus reinforcing differences and separation. It is obvious, though, that we can never fulfill these needs perfectly and permanently. That is part of the ego's strategy to keep us glued to the world, and therefore to itself. Thus, as long as we think we are real as bodies, we are going to have needs and longings, and the frustration and satisfaction that come with them; we will also find ourselves in roles with responsibilities to

fulfill in those roles: as parents, children, citizens, students, employees, supervisors, drivers, etc. This is all very normal.

Spiritual advancement is not attained through defiance or fear with regard to our needs, roles, and responsibilities. But this does not mean that you must explore and experience every conceivable means of satisfying your needs: You needn't follow Don Juan's example with sex, anymore than you need to indulge your appetite for food by eating at every single restaurant in the world. When there is excessive fear or guilt over one's sexual drive, food cravings, or any other drive or inclination -- for whatever reason -- professional counseling is often helpful. We need to get to the point where we are comfortable with all of the normal drives and needs that we have as bodies, physical and psychological, so that we are not obsessed with indulging them, denying them, or running away from them out of fear and shame.

The approach of *A Course in Miracles* to this -- once one is fairly mature in the sense just described -- is to bring into the picture the idea of *purpose*, i.e., for what *purpose* am I using my sexuality, my intellectual attributes, my strong body, my role as parent, my role as husband, etc.? This is the shift from form to content, where the real healing begins. The ego's purpose is to reinforce separation through individuality and conflict; the Holy Spirit's purpose is to help us awaken from the dream that we are separate from one another and from God. This simplifies matters enormously, because focusing on purpose (content) enables one to get past the complexities of the behavior and all of the should I? or shouldn't I? dilemmas that sometimes lead people into long-term psychoanalysis. This is what is behind this instruction of Jesus: **"It is not necessary to follow fear through all the circuitous routes by which it burrows underground and hides in darkness, to emerge in forms quite different from what it is. Yet it is necessary to examine each one as long as you would retain the principle that governs all of them. When you are willing to regard them, not as separate, but as different manifestations of the same idea, and one you do not want, they go together"** (T.15.X.5:1,2,3) .

As you are able to recognize more and more the same ego thread running through all the complexities of human behavior and attitudes, you will be able to work on getting in touch with your decision to uphold the ego thought system, which is dominated by the principles of *one or the other* and *scarcity*. This is the function of the miracle -- to bring your attention from the world and the body back to the mind, where you can then, with Jesus, look calmly at the ego dynamics that are causing the problem, and replace them with the dynamics of forgiveness, thus restoring peace and joy to your mind.

Q #1127: Can you describe the process of looking at the horror and guilt in the ego with love beside you - without the use of personal symbols or names? How do you hold two completely antithetical thoughts in mind simultaneously in order to allow for the process of forgiveness? It seems that it's always one or the other. The emphasis on developing a "personal relationship" with either Jesus or the Holy Spirit makes me wonder how this process works if those "relationships" don't seem possible? What if the only figure that seems remotely plausible (in terms of having a connection) is Yogananda?

A: To look with love at anything of the ego is simply to look without judgment or guilt or fear. It is only the ego that wants you to believe that this process involves holding two *antithetical* thoughts in the mind simultaneously, for, to borrow the title of an audiotope set by Kenneth and Gloria Wapnick, "love does not oppose." This idea is expressed in chapter 23 of the text, **"The War Against Yourself:" "Truth does not fight against illusions, nor do illusions fight against the truth. Illusions battle only with themselves (T.23.I.7:3,4)** and then again in the workbook, in the context of determining our function: **"The ego does constant battle with the Holy Spirit on the fundamental question of what your function is. So does it do constant battle with the Holy Spirit about what your happiness is. It is not a two-way battle. The ego attacks and the Holy Spirit does not respond"** (W.pl.66.2:1,2,3,4).

This is the key to the process of undoing the ego in all its horror and guilt -- recognizing that there is nothing that needs to be opposed nor overcome, for to fight the ego gives it a reality that it does not have,

like Don Quixote tilting at windmills. Perhaps you meant to say “mutually exclusive” rather than “antithetical thoughts” and therein lies the answer. For love is our reality and the ego, despite all the complicated forms it seems to manifest, is simply the thought that love is absent from our experience. The ego has no power in itself and can be defined only in negative terms. Just as the darkness has no reality in itself and simply vanishes with the coming of the light, so the ego is a substanceless nothingness that disappears in the presence of love and has no power to resist the love that is always there -- *unless we want it to* .

And that is really the only obstacle to releasing the ego thought system. For while we remain invested in maintaining the false individual identity that we have given birth to in union with the ego, we are making a choice to maintain a belief in the horror and guilt that must accompany this thought system as well. And so the process of looking without judgment is not something we can do easily “on our own,” since “on our own” is another way of describing the ego state of mind.

The value in joining with a personal symbol of love is that it provides a gentle correction for the ego belief that we are really alone and on our own in our experience of the loneliness and pain of separation. And while we believe that our identity is a personal one, it is especially helpful to have a source of support and correction that we experience as personal as well. The mistake would be to assert that that symbol of love is not real, while still believing that we are real. The personal symbol is just as real as the self we believe we are.

Now what name that personal symbol is given in our mind is not nearly so critical as that we allow ourselves to be open to a help that comes from outside our own self-centered thought system. So if Yogananda works better for you than Jesus, by all means seek his loving presence and support in looking at the false beliefs you hold about yourself.

As Jesus says near the end of *A Course in Miracles* , in reference to himself, **“Is he God's only Helper? No, indeed. For Christ takes many forms with different names until their oneness can be recognized. But Jesus is for you the bearer of Christ's single message of the Love of God. You need no other [he was speaking to Helen and Bill in particular here] . It is possible to read his words and benefit from them without accepting him into your life. Yet he would help you yet a little more if you will share your pains and joys with him, and leave them both to find the peace of God. Yet still it is his lesson most of all that he would have you learn, and it is this:**

There is no death because the Son of God is like his Father. Nothing you can do can change Eternal Love. Forget your dreams of sin and guilt, and come with me instead to share the resurrection of God's Son. And bring with you all those whom He has sent to you to care for as I care for you (C.5.6). ”

Q #1128: If the entire universe is illusory or a dream, as is all form, then what is meant in *A Course in Miracles* : “As miracles in this world join you to your brothers, so do your creations establish your fatherhood in Heaven.” (T13.X.9.1). What are my creations? What are God's creations? What do we create when we are fully realized?

A: God's Son, who is one with Him in Heaven, shares His power of creation, which is the extension of love. The Course teaches that God created His one Son, and nothing else. Since we mistakenly believe we exist as bodies in the world, this use of words is intended to help us understand what cannot truly be explained or understood. “God's creations” refers to the extension of His Love to His Son, and Christ's creations are extensions of His Love (“Glossary Index for *A Course in Miracles* ,” Kenneth Wapnick, Ph.D. p.51). In the dream of separation our creations are reflected in the thoughts we think with God. When the mind chooses the miracle and identifies with the memory of God's Love, thereby accepting Him as Father rather than the ego. That is how the Son acknowledges or establishes that Heaven is his home, and God

is his Father. Being a right-minded extension of love, this choice includes everybody and so it joins us to our brothers. None of this has anything to do with form. The mind's decision to take the ego or the Holy Spirit is reflected in the dream, but the thought/creation remains in the mind. **“Fear and love make or create, depending on whether the ego or the Holy Spirit begets or inspires them, but they will return to the mind of the thinker and they will affect his total perception”**

(T.7.VI.1:5). Everything that seems to occur in our lives reflects this choice made in the mind. The mind is either projecting guilt for having chosen the ego, or extending love by choosing the Holy Spirit. The body/brain serves only as the mind's instrument. Thus, until we identify only with the mind, the body serves the Holy Spirit's purpose by interpreting everything it perceives in the light of His teaching. That is how we become aware of the mind where the decision to think with God is made.

One of the most important goals of the Course is to train us to become aware of all the thoughts we do *not* share with God. The practice of forgiveness begins with the honest recognition of all judgments that are reflections of the mind's choice for the ego as father, rather than God. Willingness to see every judgment as projections of guilt for choosing the ego, without judging oneself for it, is the way to clear the runway for the mind's creations. They follow automatically, with no effort, when judgment is relinquished.

When the mind chooses to identify only with the Truth of God's Love by the acceptance of the Atonement, only love will be perceived. That is what is meant by the beautiful phrase in the text: **“When you want only love you will see nothing else”**(T.12.VII.8:1). When Identity as God's Son is fully accepted, the Son shares the Father's creative power to extend only love. That is all that can ever be created because that is all that truly exists.

Webmaster note: Also see questions [103](#), [769](#)

Q #1129: *A Course in Miracles* in so many words says that we forgot to laugh as we entertained the idea of separation from God, took it seriously, left Heaven, etc. This implies that creation pondered the idea of separation, could have laughed and stayed put. Does this then mean that in the created there exists an idea of discontent that can be ignored or acted upon? Collective amnesia has rendered creation not responsible for the separation. Creation made all the specifics; the nuances of pathos of caring humanity when a child is beaten, tortured and raped. A good Course student realizes it never happened and if coached correctly will even offer condolences. Yet what appears to be a spontaneous outpouring of grief was contrived and scripted before time was made. Eventually what never happened will be forgotten, it won't have existed. Must humanity undergo another collective amnesia in order to forget the illusion?

A: Although your interpretation of the thought of separation as having its origin in God's creation is a common one, the Course's core teaching is that God and Christ have nothing to do with the tiny mad idea of separation, its seeming horrific effects, nor even the Correction, despite some passages that would seem to suggest differently. The part of the mind that seemed to fall asleep and dream a dream of separation does not exist in reality. Creation never pondered the idea of separation nor contains an idea of discontent. Even the Correction is outside the one Mind and merely *reflects* the Oneness of Heaven, being its memory in the illusory split mind. This is not satisfactory to our ego minds that still insist that *something* has happened that needs an explanation. But Jesus will never give us one for, from his perspective, there can be no explanation for nothing. Variations on this issue have been addressed in a number of questions, including Question [#350](#), [#568](#) and [#624](#), as well as in *The Most Commonly Asked Questions About A Course in Miracles*.

It is very difficult to look at the world from within the world and not react to it, for the messages that are brought back to us are exactly the messages we have given to ourselves to confirm our cherished belief in the reality of the separation and our separate selves (T.18.IX.3). It is at this illusory level that we can speak of a collective amnesia that has rendered us ignorant of our mind's role in our own experience. The world seems so very real because the illusory part of us really wants it to be. Perhaps, when pondering

the range of experiences -- both good and bad -- that the world seems to present to us, it can be helpful to recall how vivid and even palpable many of our dream experiences when we are asleep at night seem to be. And we can hold no one outside ourselves responsible for the experiences of those nighttime dreams, no matter how cruel and heartless they may be. And yet they do usually fade into nothingness upon our awakening. Our resistance is tremendous to accepting that this world that seems so real to us is no more real than the worlds of our nighttime dreams.

If someone is truly a "good Course student," when confronted with a tragedy or a horrible crime against a seeming innocent, such as a young child, there will be an inner acknowledgment of the pain and the guilt that everyone involved in the situation shares -- the perpetrator, the victim, the families, the observers -- as a defense against the love within all their minds that they also share, but are too afraid to embrace. Yes, *everything* that seems to happen has already been scripted and already happened, but that is not our experience. And so our choice in the present is which teacher shall we invite to look with us at the events our minds still perceive as real in our experience. If love is our guide, then our reactions will not be contrived but will be spontaneous and genuinely kind and loving. A contrived response is the work of an ego attempting to maintain its own control over a situation that it sees as somehow separate from itself.

In the end, what is needed is not another collective amnesia, but an individual remembering of our role as the dreamer of our dream (**T.27.VII**) . For with that recollection, we no longer will need to take the dream seriously and can smile at our mind's collective insanity, or silliness, to think that we could limit our reality to individual bodies, at the mercy of forces outside ourselves, that we are vulnerable and weak and will all meet our final demise, no matter what form it may take, in death and physical decay and destruction. This is not tragedy but a big joke we are playing on ourselves.

And perhaps, this path with its particular set of symbols and theology is not the one you resonate to and is not the gentle way home that your mind can embrace. If not, then there is another way home that will make more sense to you and that will provide you the comfort you are seeking as you open yourself up to the love that is awaiting there within you.

Q #1130: I am confused by the following sentences in the text of *A Course in Miracles* : "You can temporize and you are capable of enormous procrastination, but you cannot depart entirely from your Creator, Who set the limits on your ability to miscreate. An imprisoned will engenders a situation which, in the extreme, becomes altogether intolerable" (T.2.III.3:3,4). Who has our wills imprisoned? God?

A: We ourselves have imprisoned our wills by denying Who we really are. Our will is one with God's, which means we want only what God wills (see **T.8.IV.7:1,2**; **T.11.III.3**; **T.14.III.14**) . In our present limited state, we cannot know precisely what that means, other than to say that our true function as God's Son is creating with Him in Heaven -- extending love without limit (**W.pl.192.1**) . Because we have denied Who we really are, we are not free to fulfill our true function, which can only lead to intolerable pain. We believe our wills are separate from God's; for example, we believe He can ask us to do something we do not want to do. The same is true of Jesus -- what he wants for us goes against what we will for ourselves, we sometimes think. We love specialness and don't want to give it up; yet Jesus tells us that our investment in specialness prevents us from knowing the truth (**T.24.II.4,5**) . We are in a constant state of conflict and frustration as a result. As long as we believe we have our own separate identities, all we can do is *mis* create, deluding ourselves into thinking we are engaged in something valuable and commendable.

In the passages you cite, Jesus is teaching us that we can continue on in our false identities as separate from him and from God, but that choice will never make the separation and our individual selves reality. The truth of our oneness of will remains forever alive in our minds -- buried, but not extinguished -- and at some point, however long it takes, the deep, internal pain and frustration of knowing we are wrong about

everything, especially about our very selves, will cause us to cry out for “a better way,” as Jesus states in the following sentences in the paragraph you cited (T.2.III.3:5,6,7) .

Asking his help is the first step out of our self-imposed imprisonment. Thus he teaches us: **“By the belief that your will is separate from mine, you are exempting yourself from the Will of God which *is* yourself. . . . There is no separation of God and His creation. You will realize this when you understand that there is no separation between your will and mine. Let the Love of God shine upon you by your acceptance of me. My reality is yours and His. By joining your mind with mine you are signifying your awareness that the Will of God is One (T.8.V.2.3,8,9,10,11,12) .**

Q #1131: I, too, am struggling with the nature of forgiveness. Your answer to [Q #776](#) was very helpful, except when you wrote in parenthesis “. . . this does not rule out prosecution, etc.” Are you referring to the legal system? Can I forgive the guy that scams me (to use your illustration) and still take him to court?

A: Yes, that is what was meant. [Question #790](#) was posted after you submitted your question, and perhaps you have read that answer by now. It seems to speak directly to the issue you are dealing with. One of the key points brought out in that answer is the need to function on two levels, which requires a working understanding of the difference between form and content: “While we believe we are in the world, we generally ‘give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s,’ i.e., obey the rules of the world in *form* (file law suits, police reports, etc.). At the same time, we practice the Course by paying attention to the thoughts and judgments that arise in every situation.”

The practice of forgiveness does not lead to passivity in our relationships and encounters in the world. *A Course in Miracles* is not simplistic or naive. By focusing exclusively on the *content* we have chosen to infuse our thinking, the Course helps us get to the true source of all our problems and conflicts, and it provides us with an effective, uncomplicated way of solving them. It is just hard for us get beyond behavior (form) to the underlying content -- but that is why we must ask for help from outside our thought system; and that is what the first part of the workbook training is all about. This shift is a condition for achieving the Course’s goal of peace.

Prosecuting someone (form) can be done from one’s wrong mind or right mind (content). The obvious signs of ego motivation include anger, vindictiveness, fear, hatred, condemnation, humiliation. Forgiving the person who cheated you has nothing to do with whether or not you press charges against him in a court of law. That may or may not be the right thing to do; it may or may not be in that person’s best interests to be arrested and jailed. We cannot see the whole of our own or anyone else’s Atonement path. However, if *you* hold no grievances against him, you will know which way to go with it, and you will be peaceful every step of the way. You can perceive him as sharing the same journey home with you (content), even as you press charges that land him in jail for several years (form). That is quite a lesson, but this course is very practical -- it is meant to be put to work in the challenges of our everyday lives. We just need to become more accepting of the Holy Spirit’s, rather than the ego’s, purpose for our lives, our relationships, and our world.

Q #1132: After reading the Course I have the impression that the ego is synonymous with satan. Is this so? How does Christ look at hell according to *A Course in Miracles* ? There seems to be little reference to it. Is it just the absence of salvation?

A: In traditional Christian teaching, Satan is believed to be an independent being whose guiles are capable of having an influence on others. The Course not only teaches that there is no Satan, or hell, but in reality there is no ego (see **T.9.IV.5**). Nothing exists outside the mind, and the belief that something or someone outside the mind can not only exist, but have an effect on it, is the hell of the mind’s making.

You are correct that when the Course refers to hell or the devil it is referring to the mind's choice to believe that separation is real. Jesus tells us in the text: **"The mind can make the belief in separation very real and very fearful, and this belief is the 'devil'" (T.3.VII.5:1)**, and since the ego is the belief in separation, we may say that that ego is the devil. It is very important to remember, however, that the separation never happened (**W.p.I.137.4:3**), and so neither the devil nor hell exist. They are projections of the guilt that arises from the choice to believe that separation from God is possible. They seem real because they support the mind's belief that that thought of separation is real and sinful, and deserves punishment from a vengeful God. Thus, hell and the devil are important parts of the ego thought system. Fear keeps them alive and well. In the instant that the mind decides for separation, all memory of God is obliterated from awareness, making Him "absent" in one's experience. That is the theological definition of hell: the absence of God or salvation.

In the Course, the Christ refers to God's Son who remains one with Him in Heaven. Just as the Father in Heaven does not know of separation because He is perfect Oneness, neither does the Christ see hell. Where God and His Son are one there is nothing else. This changeless reality of Heaven is the heart of the non-dualistic teaching of *A Course in Miracles*. Christ is real and **"...where He is God must be, for Christ is part of Him" (T.9.I.14:7)**. If hell is the absence of God, where God is there is no hell.

Forgiveness is the process by which the mind reestablishes awareness of its power to choose between Heaven and hell; the ego and the Holy Spirit. There is no other power but this; nothing else to choose. Learning this is one of the most important goals of the Course. It reflects the mind's choice for truth and ultimately undoes belief in the ego, hell, and the "devil."

Q #1133: I sense a perceptible irony and paradox in the Course's objective of eliminating our separateness from our brothers, called the Son of God, in that with increasing study and reading, there is a perceptible change within me. However, as I observe the world, especially through the news media, I note more differences between us and more separateness by not being able to identify with the world. That is, my study is changing me towards goals which are not being equally developed in the world and we are slowly drifting apart in our concepts of ourselves. Is this the mistaken use of judgment? Or is this just increased opportunity to forgive the apparently increasing insanity?

A: There is a section in the text -- **"The Greater Joining,"** in Chapter 28 -- that may help you with your confusion about what seems to be happening in your experience. The mistake in your thinking is believing that you should feel closer to the world and its inhabitants as a result of practicing the Course. This could be an outcome for a while as you still identify yourself with your body. But Jesus' goal for us in his Course is to lead us to recognize that we are not the ego -- neither the thought system of separation nor its manifestations, bodies and the world. Rather we are mind that is caught in an illusory dream of separation, believing we are the figures in that dream. And the miracle, or forgiveness, is a process whereby over time we gradually identify more and more with the mind that is dreaming and less and less with the figures within the dream. This process progresses as we learn simply to release all the judgments we have been holding on to about all the figures in the dream, including the figure we have believed to be our own separate, individual self. And so you could say that the goal of the Course is to have us learn to use separation for healing, by learning to separate ourselves as mind from the ego and all its expressions.

However, this is not simply a process of intellectual denial of the world and all its insanity and suffering, for that would not be at all healing. And so we would want to ask ourselves if we are feeling some identification with and compassion towards other *minds* that are caught in the same painful web of ego illusion that we have been, recognizing that we all share the same underlying problem. And whenever we find ourselves in reaction to what seems to be happening with *any* of the figures in the dream, we have re-identified ourselves with the ego illusion and have once again made sin and guilt and pain real in our own mind, as everyone else is doing. And the solution is simply to recognize the choice we have made for

the ego, not judge ourselves for making that choice, and then remember that another choice is always available, when we want it.

Although you may find it helpful to read the entire section, we'll look at some excerpts from **"The Greater Joining"** that provide much of the foundation for what we have just described:

"Accepting the Atonement for yourself means not to give support to someone's dream of sickness and of death.... Unless you help him, you will suffer pain with him because that is your wish. And you become a figure in his dream of pain, as he in yours. So do you and your brother both become illusions, and without identity.... Refuse to be a part of fearful dreams whatever form they take, for you will lose identity in them. You find yourself by not accepting them as causing you, and giving you effects. *You stand apart from them, but not apart from him who dreams them . Thus you separate the dreamer from the dream, and join in one, but let the other go. The dream is but illusion in the mind. And with the mind you would unite, but never with the dream. Like you, your brother thinks he is a dream. Share not in his illusion of himself, for your Identity depends on his reality. Think, rather, of him as a mind in which illusions still persist, but as a mind which brother is to you. He is not brother made by what he dreams, nor is his body, 'hero' of the dream, your brother. It is his reality that is your brother, as is yours to him . Your mind and his are joined in brotherhood.... Identity in dreams is meaningless because the dreamer and the dream are one. Who shares a dream must be the dream he shares, because by sharing is a cause produced.... You share confusion and you are confused, for in the gap no stable self exists. What is the same seems different, because what is the same appears to be unlike. His dreams are yours because you let them be. But if you took your own away would he be free of them, and of his own as well. Your dreams are witnesses to his, and his attest the truth of yours. Yet if you see there is no truth in yours, his dreams will go, and he will understand what made the dream.* (T.28.IV.1:1,6,7,8; 2:2,3,4,5,6,7; 3:1,2,3,4,5,6; 5:4,5; 6:1,2,3,4,5,6, italics added).

Q #1134: I have a question regarding how to "approach" special love and hate relationships, which are the same if I understand *A Course in Miracles* correctly. They keep us from "real" love.

The Course "recommends" handing them over to the Holy Spirit. I have been trying to come to terms with one special relationship which involved both love and hate. At first I rejected it, then returned to it with the argument of the Course saying "you should love your special relationships in order to have a happy dream and then "awaken" (sort of!)." However, how can we love something that is ultimately "made" to attack God and ourselves as well? Isn't that a contradiction, and perhaps even counter-productive to our "healing"? Would it not then be better to "reject" someone and walk away?

I find it very difficult, in that relationship, to "give only love." There are issues that I feel need to be addressed, and when I do, ultimately the true nature of this relationship -- hate -- comes forth. How can we ever give true love in this world? What is more, how do we recognize it?

A: You do understand correctly; every special love relationship is a mask for special hate. If it is special, it is hateful, not necessarily in form, but certainly in content. In the Course, the term "special" is synonymous with "separate" because every special relationship has belief in separation at its core. Keeping this in mind is helpful since it explains why specialness is "hateful" even when it looks loving. Separation is a murderous thought by which the Son of God believes he can usurp God's power, steal life from Him, and live in a body independent of His Love. That is the content of every special relationship, no matter how loving the form may seem. This distinction between form and content is the key to unraveling the confusion regarding special relationships. In content they are all the same. The problem in any relationship is not the seeming love or hate that characterizes its form, but the mind's decision to use it to sustain belief in separation, thereby defending itself against God's Love. Willingness to recognize this ego dynamic at work in the relationship you refer to is how to give it to the Holy Spirit. We need not lose the special relationships; Jesus says we will not be deprived of them: **"I have said repeatedly that the Holy**

Spirit would not deprive you of your special relationships, but would transform them”

(T.17.IV.2:3). The “hate” you experience in the relationship is the projection of the mind's guilt for having attacked God by choosing the ego. It has nothing to do with the other person. However, it is possible to work out any issues you may have on the level of form, while remaining aware of the mind's projection. The Holy Spirit is present in your willingness to recognize that the “issues” are not the cause of conflict in the relationship; guilt is.

Although there is no true love in this world, its reflection begins with the simple acknowledgment that the origin of hate masquerading as special love is the mind's decision to choose the ego as teacher instead of the Holy Spirit. The ego focuses on form, blaming external agents for its discomfort, while the Holy Spirit asks us to see everything as a reflection of the mind's choice. You know you have chosen the Holy Spirit when you find yourself becoming increasingly mindful of your projections, regardless of the judgments or hateful feelings that arise in a relationship. This is the first step in the practice of forgiveness as the Course teaches it. It is the way that everything the ego made as an attack on God can be transformed and used by the Holy Spirit to undo the belief in separation and lead us back to Him. You have taken a step in the right direction by not denying the hatred you find in the relationship. It is important not to try to change the feelings or fight against them, but to recognize that their true source is the mind's belief in separation, as we said earlier.

In the introduction to the text, Jesus makes it clear that the goal of the Course is not love: ***The course does not aim at teaching the meaning of love, for that is beyond what can be taught. It does aim, however, at removing the blocks to the awareness of love's presence, which is your natural inheritance (T.in.1:6,7).*** The blocks are all the thoughts and judgments that flow from the mind's decision to identify with the ego. They cannot be removed until they are recognized, which is why there is much emphasis, in the practice of the Course, on looking at the ego. Exposing it to the light of the Holy Spirit's teaching is how it is undone; not by any effort on our part, but by a little willingness to see that one's own thoughts are blocking the memory of God's Love. The love that flows naturally when the mind chooses the Holy Spirit is not special because it excludes no one. It is not the “love” of one person for some people to the exclusion of others. The way is opened to this love when projections are acknowledged without judgment, and no attempt is made to interfere. Since everything the ego made is an attack on God, it isn't necessary to seek out situations or persons that upset you. There is nothing wrong with keeping a distance from a disturbing relationship. As with idols, if one relationship seems too much to handle, **“Another can be found” (W.p.I.170.8:7)** . Everything and everyone is equally important in the classroom of forgiveness. They are the form love takes until every judgment is laid aside and the Holy Spirit's Love flows uninterrupted.

Q #1135: I was hoping that you could help me by commenting on this inner dilemma that I am having as I am training with the Holy Spirit to become a Teacher of God. Jesus himself says in his Psychotherapy pamphlet that there is nothing holier or more noble in this world than helping a brother who asks for help. This is inspiring to me and I feel good that I am learning to be a messenger for the Holy Spirit. But, the dilemma that I am having is that others do not always see me the way that I see me. For example, a friend asks for help and I see it as an opportunity to teach and learn and think highly of myself and do believe that this Self-exaltation is coming from grandeur and not grandiosity. But, sometimes the other person does not see it this way and instead sees my “kindness as a weakness” -- like that I have nothing better to do than help them with their problem for example! I guess that I feel undervalued and confused because I may not have the worldly credentials that other teachers of God have but I know that I have a lot to offer. But others only judge me on my worldly credentials and status. Why would the Holy Spirit guide me to a situation to have me be His messenger only to find out that the other person sees me as needing their approval or something? Do you think that this is a pattern that I am getting some unconscious payoff or purpose from?

A: You've been caught in a very common confusion, thinking that Jesus is talking about *doing* things for others when he speaks of helping our brother. The line in particular from the **Psychotherapy** pamphlet

that you refer to says, **“Nothing in the world is holier than helping one who asks for help” (P.2.V.4:2).** While we still think we are bodies, we will interpret such statements at the level of the body and think, as you have, that we are being guided to come to the assistance of others who have some kind of need for specific help. There is nothing wrong with doing this, but it is not what Jesus means by this line. And if we believe we are being guided by the Holy Spirit to offer our help to others at the level of behavior, we may find ourselves very surprised at their reactions, as you have experienced. Despite what we believe to be our best intentions, this usually means that our ego has joined the relationship, and other egos can be very quick to react to ours! For we are seeing others as in need and ourselves as having what they need, even if we believe the Holy Spirit is the Source of what we think we have been sent to offer them. And this makes differences -- and separation -- very real.

“Trust not your good intentions. They are not enough” (T.18.IV.2:1,2) is Jesus' caution to us when we think we know what we need to do in any situation. And earlier in the text Jesus advises: **“Do not attempt to ‘help’ a brother in your way, for you cannot help yourself. But hear his call for the Help of God, and you will recognize your own need for the Father” (T.12.I.6;10,11).**

Perhaps the most helpful thing to keep in mind as you are putting *A Course in Miracles* into practice is that it is never speaking about behavior. What we do as bodies in relationship to other bodies is not where Jesus is asking us to focus our attention and efforts. For Jesus is not addressing us as the bodies that we think we are, he is speaking to us as minds. Over time, as you begin to recognize this deeper level at which the Course is written, you may be astonished at how many of the lines and passages that you thought you understood now take on a whole new meaning. And how many of the passages that you simply overlooked because you didn't understand what they were saying now become very meaningful. Yet this is the experience of most students who commit themselves to an open-minded study of the Course, acknowledging that there is much yet that they are not ready to understand but will, as their own practice of forgiveness deepens through first recognizing and then releasing their own guilt and fear.

Consider, for example, the lines that come a few paragraphs later in the same section as the above line on helping. These put the above sentence in a completely different light, as they negate the idea that there is any need for helping, or healing, as Jesus refers to it in this context; clarify what the true nature of help is -- forgiveness of oneself for all the false self-accusations; and identify who is truly being helped -- only ourselves. **“We are deceived already, if we think there is a need of healing. And the truth will come to us only through one who seems to share our dream of sickness. Let us help him to forgive himself for all the trespasses with which he would condemn himself without a cause. His healing is our own” (P.2.V.7:4,5,6,7) .**

In other words, we are always the ones in need of help, so long as we believe we are these individual selves in the world, and our brother is simply the mirror that allows us to look within. And the only help we can offer a brother is to remember the choice that we always have about whom we are going to turn to for help in any situation -- the ego or the Holy Spirit. As Jesus observes earlier in the text:

“The only meaningful contribution the healer [helper] can make is to present an example of one whose direction has been changed for him, and who no longer believes in nightmares of any kind. The light in his mind will therefore answer the questioner, who must decide with God that there is light because he sees it” (T.9.V.7:4,5).

The issue of credentials then becomes irrelevant, for the help we are being invited to offer our brother has nothing to do with any specific form. In fact, our brother may not even be consciously aware of the help that is being offered through us, for we may not say or do anything at all. But we will be remembering the truth about both ourselves and our brother -- that our guilt is not real. And that is the only help that any of us ever needs.

Q #1136: My father has always had a fear of death or nonexisting. He believes this world and the body are all that exist because he has no proof otherwise; and therefore he gets very depressed when he has health issues. My views are totally different. If he dies with the beliefs he has and I die with mine (both with the Holy Spirit), but at the time of physical death he still believes only in himself (ego), would we experience death differently? Also, does the Holy Spirit have any influence on us in terms of controlling how long we remain in the body/ world once we invite His memory back to guide our life?

A: From the point of view of *A Course in Miracles*, death is always a decision we make in our minds (**W.pl.152.1:4; M.12.5:6,7**), and that decision can be made with the ego or with the Holy Spirit. If it is made with the Holy Spirit, there will be no sense of regret, fear, bitterness, loss, or blame in one's mind. The mind would simply continue on as before; nothing happens to the mind because the body is no longer classified as "living" according to the world's standards (**W.pl.167.3,4**). *Everything* takes place in the mind and not in the body. That is what Jesus is always trying to help us realize. We, as minds, are always and only choosing to uphold the ego's thought system of separation and judgment or the Holy Spirit's thought system of oneness and forgiveness. Our experience reflects only that choice, never what goes on in our bodies. That is very difficult for us to accept, because we want so much to have Jesus validate our belief that we are real as bodies. He cannot do that, though, because it is a false belief. **"There is no death. The Son of God is free" (W.pl.163)**.

In answer to your second question: No, the Holy Spirit does not control the length of time we remain in our bodies once we accept Him as our Teacher. The Holy Spirit represents in our minds the truth that we split off when we chose to believe we had our own individual lives in a world apart from the world of Heaven and God. To be guided by the Holy Spirit means to think in accordance with what is true about ourselves and reality, rather than what is false. To share His perception means to consciously practice seeing everyone as having the same interests, and excluding no one from our love and compassion. Eventually, we will let go of all investment in having separation be the truth, and then there will be no difference between the Holy Spirit's perception and our own (**T.14.VII.7**). But all this means is that we have at last accepted back into our awareness our true Identity and the oneness of the Sonship. The Holy Spirit has not *done* anything. We retain our bodily identification only to the extent that we choose to keep ourselves split off from the truth. When the pain of that rejection is no longer worth it, we change our minds, and then all interferences to love and truth fall away, and we regain what we never lost. **"And what am I except the Christ in me?" (W.pl.354.1:7).**

Q #1137: I was recently reading a Christian book and it said that if you lie or cheat you should turn yourself in. Several examples were given that left me feeling very upset, because of the implications for my life. Is God really the originator of all the moral codes that we believe in and should I follow them to the letter? I think everyone lies and steals to a certain degree. Would a person who has accepted the Atonement not do these things in any degree? It might be easier for me to follow a moral code going forward, but the thought of the sacrifice of paying for my past actions now is overwhelming -- like quitting my job, giving back to people what I accuse myself of taking from them, fixing things I think I have done wrong, and believing I have to "redo" something the right way fills me with fear, and I know I will never actually follow what my fears demand of me. So will I ever be saved?

A: "All morality is of the ego, since it is based upon certain prescribed standards of behavior or conduct, all geared around what the body does or does not do.... Just as 'a universal theology is impossible' (**C.in.2:5**), so too is a universal morality, as values differ from one culture to the next, and change over time within individual cultures themselves. This relative nature of morality is proof that no ethical system can be of God, in Whom only the changeless and universal reality of non-dualistic truth can exist" (p. 336). This quote is from Kenneth's *All Are Called*, Volume 1 of *The Message of "A Course in Miracles"*, where you will find a comprehensive presentation of ethics and morality in the context of the Course's teaching contrasted with other systems. Another discussion of this topic appears in chapter 17 of Kenneth's *Love Does Not Condemn*. Also, our answer to Question #637, part 2, discusses several

important passages from the Course pertaining to morality and behavior. A study of them will help avert serious misunderstanding and misapplication of the Course's principles.

A Course in Miracles teaches that the body has no independent existence; it is simply a projection of the mind, as part of the ego's strategy to make the separation real. The body expresses the thought system the mind has chosen to uphold: either the ego's or the Holy Spirit's. Therefore, there is nothing in the Course about guidelines for behavior. Its exclusive focus is on the mind's power to choose, and the consequences of the choice the mind makes. It is thus a course in mind- training, not in how to behave in the world. Our behavior flows directly from the thought system with which we identify, and so that is where our attention needs to be directed. Our sense of sin and guilt, according to *A Course in Miracles*, comes from our decision to reject the truth about reality and ourselves and make a substitute for it. All of this is denied and then gets projected onto our bodies and the world, which ends with our thinking that our problems and their solutions are in the body (behavior) and the world.

Since the ego was born of selfishness, murder, deception, and theft -- it knows nothing else -- then when we choose to identify with the ego, the *content* in our minds will be the same as the ego's. We cannot but act that out in the world as long as we have elected to have the ego as our teacher. We don't realize, however, that this is what runs our lives, which is why we need help from a source outside our thought system entirely: Jesus or the Holy Spirit. This is the core of the Course's teaching and exercises. Understanding the form-content distinction is central to the practice of *A Course in Miracles* as it was meant to be practiced.

Salvation in *A Course in Miracles* has to do with changing our teacher from the ego to Jesus or the Holy Spirit -- or any other ego-less presence we are comfortable with. If we do this, which we would when our pain and despair causes us to cry out for "another way," then we would begin the process of thought-reversal (e.g., **M.24.4:1**) -- of going back into our minds, with this loving presence guiding us, and looking without judgment at all manifestations of our mistaken choice: judgment, specialness, selfishness, authority issues, one-or-the-other and kill-or-be-killed type thinking, etc. As students of this course, we learn that choosing this insane thought system was simply a mistake in need of correction, not a sin deserving of punishment. We realize, too, that it has not brought us the peace and happiness we were led to believe it would. Now, happily and thankfully, we allow our new teacher to guide our thinking.

When, once and for all, we let go of the ego, the only content in our minds will be love; we will have restored to our awareness what we had split off and concealed -- the memory of our true Identity as Christ. This is the acceptance of the Atonement, for which no sacrifice is necessary (**W.pl.192.6:1**). Guided only by love, everything we then do would be loving. It would be impossible to do anything that would hurt ourselves or anyone else. What that looks like specifically (form) cannot be formulated. The same behavior can originate in one's wrong or right mind (content). In your case, therefore, whether or not you should return what you claim you stole is between you and the Holy Spirit. When in a holy instant you are free of ego interference, you will just know. And if there is no clarity, then just be as ego-free as you can for a moment, and then do what seems most loving for yourself and the others involved. We will never run out of opportunities to learn our lessons of forgiveness! (**T.31.VIII.3**)

Finally, God has nothing to do with any of this, as the separation, the ego and its dynamics, and the undoing of all that is inherently unreal. That is why Jesus uses various metaphors and images to talk about it: a nightmare dream of separation, a journey, a ladder. Correcting various religious traditions, he also makes it unmistakably clear that God, as Love, can only love and extend that love for eternity -- condemnation and love are mutually exclusive: **"God does not forgive because He has never condemned"** (**W.pl.60.1:2**; see also **W.pl.198**) .

Q #1138: I have for some time wondered about the following question in relation to the metaphysics in ACIM: How real is other people's suffering? Are there people out there having their own perceptions of suffering (sorrow, pain etc) or are these perceptions "only" in my mind. More concretely : It bothers me to perceive that other people -- my ex wife -- are having problems of different kinds (and of course we always have to do what we can to help on a practical level). Seen from a metaphysical level are they "only" perceptions of suffering in my mind and "not really out there " in these people?

A: Yes, suffering is not really "out there" because nothing is really out there. Whatever is perceived in the dream of separation is a reflection of the mind's choice to listen to the ego or the Holy Spirit. *A Course in Miracles* teaches that all suffering is caused by the belief that the oneness God shares with His Son can be shattered by the dream of separation. To be separate is to suffer, thus everyone who believes in separation is suffering, whether it appears so in form or not. Even the ego's "joy" is a camouflage for suffering, a deceptive ploy to keep the mind from realizing the painful impact of maintaining belief in the illusion of separation. The first thing to remember, therefore, is that all separated ones are suffering the devastating effects of believing that the mind of the Sonship that God created one with Him can be limited to life in a body in a physical universe filled with pain. Life's ups and downs, pleasures and woes are part of the ego's scheme to keep the painful consequences of accepting its thought system from awareness. That is why an important part of the Course's learning process is getting in touch with the misery that underlies the experience of life in a body. Jesus does not mince words in this regard: **"You who are steadfastly devoted to misery [separation] must first recognize that you are miserable and not happy. The Holy Spirit cannot teach without this contrast, for you believe that misery [separation] is happiness" (T.14.II.1:2,3) .**

So much for all the effort and energy spent finding "happiness" in this world as bodies. The mind's decision to be separate and identify with a body is a painful distortion of the truth; a lie that can only cause pain. Therein lies the source of all suffering, including the disquiet seemingly caused by perceiving pain in someone else. So you are correct; being upset by another's suffering is the reflection of one's own pain. This does not mean being indifferent to others' pain. True empathy, as the Course teaches, begins with realizing that being upset by another's pain means one is in as much pain as the other. Both have made the same mistake (choosing to identify with the ego); both have a mind that can choose differently. Thinking along these lines identifies the true source of pain and opens the mind to true healing. Meanwhile, on the level of form, it is appropriate to do whatever may be helpful to comfort oneself or another.

The ultimate goal of the Course is to lead us to the release of all pain and suffering by our awakening from the dream of separation. This is accomplished as guilt is undone through the process of forgiveness. As belief in illusions is weakened guilt diminishes, thereby diminishing pain. Each instant of forgiveness sets in motion the mind's healing of the belief in separation. Thus, the most compassionate response to suffering -- one's own or another's -- is willingness to allow the healing of forgiveness to transform perception: **"A dying world asks only that you rest an instant from attack upon yourself, that it be healed" (T.2.V.5:5).**

Q #1139: My wife, whom I love very deeply, is a very nurturing and tender woman. I enjoy her mothering me, and she makes me feel safe and loved. I know that Jesus says he will not take special relationships from us, but will transform them. But are some special relationships worse than others? Are special needs different from special relationships, and are we allowed to have them? It seems to me that everyone has special needs and we all give and take; we all need people to not hurt us -- not that our peace of mind is dependent on our special needs being met. How can I understand and dispel this fear that my relationship with my wife is somehow wrong? What would our relationship look like as it is transformed? It scares me to death to open this issue to you and leave myself vulnerable to any judgments you might have.

A: It is not the purpose of *A Course in Miracles*, nor ours on this Service, to judge anyone for being involved in a special relationship. It is just about impossible *not* to be involved in one, for as you say, we all have needs, and we all look to others to fulfill those needs and not hurt us. What Jesus is teaching us is that these relationships are based on a hidden premise that we need to bring into the light and question -- specifically, that we are incomplete and it is not our fault. The ego has pulled the wool over our eyes with this, and therefore we do not see how we are actually hurting, not helping ourselves by seeking for comfort and completion outside us. We don't realize that this is just the ego's way of sustaining its own existence. Jesus thus wants us to see how we are selling ourselves short when we become involved in what he calls **“an endless, unrewarding chain of special relationships” (T.15.VII.4:6)**. Yes, we may experience comfort and security in a relationship -- that is not wrong and we are not asked to stop that -- but the security and comfort are always temporary, limited, and fragile. At any moment everything could change, and we would be back at square one, wondering what to do to have our needs met again. Jesus is teaching us that there is a much better way of relating to others, one that will not disappoint us, because it will restore lasting peace and happiness to our awareness. The better way, of course is changing the purpose of the relationship from the ego's to the Holy Spirit's, with the confident expectation that we will feel much better if we do.

Thus, this is not about showing you that your relationship with your wife is wrong, but rather about changing the purpose of that relationship so you will get back in touch with the love in your mind that is your true identity, as well as your wife's. A transformed relationship is one in which you experience your centeredness in Jesus' love, and therefore have no needs that you look to have filled by another. The holy relationship is entirely a matter of the content you have chosen in your mind; it is not about bodies behaving in a different way. Relationships are only in the mind, and accepting the Holy Spirit's purpose for the relationship does not necessarily mean that anything would change externally. Most often it does not. It is an inner change that takes place, in the sense that you are more kind and loving in your attitude -- less judgmental, less needy, less guilty and fearful. You would realize that the relationship is not about what bodies do together, but about minds sharing the same interests and ultimately the same identity, both within the illusion and in truth as God's innocent, invulnerable Son. The sense of separation between you and your partner would gradually diminish in importance and relevance, and would be replaced by a growing sense of your sameness.

There is bound to be discomfort in looking at the special relationship because of its roots in self-deception, and especially because its purpose to be a substitute for the God's Love **(T.17.IV.2:7)**. We have buried in our minds intense guilt and fear over this, and so it is necessary to retrace our steps to get beyond the ego to the love that it hides. Jesus guarantees our success in this, and never puts pressure on us to get on with it. Only a little willingness to question our beliefs and values is asked of us. Jesus' comforting presence will guide us through each step of the process. **“The Atonement is so gentle you need but whisper to it, and all its power will rush to your assistance and support. You are not frail with God beside you” (T.14.IX.3:2,3).**

Q #1140: Recently I had a sleeping dream in which a holy presence suggested to me that I need not keep living horizontally and to stop moving laterally -- that there was a better, quicker way to God, and that way is to live vertically. There was even a clear chart presented. Is this my ego being a trickster in my dreams, or could it actually have been a message from Jesus?

A: It could be a message from Jesus. If it is, that basically means you made a decision to be right-minded rather than wrong-minded, and that decision was expressed in symbols that would be meaningful to you, not necessarily to anyone else. If you are being guided by Jesus, not the ego, you would become less judgmental and critical, less angry, less guilty and fearful, and above all, you would be less tolerant of anything that makes you special and therefore separate from others. You would be drawn to what we all have in common as God's sinless Son.

Q #1141: I am very frightened by the thought that going into Heaven means losing my ego and forgetting everything about this world. Especially when I think about forgetting people I know or my parents or my son. I do not want to forget them. I want to be with them in love forever. This is when resistance occurs in me and really scares me. It seems so lonely to be with God and being only one. My whole life I feel separated and alone, and so to be in Heaven does not seem very tempting. Where is my misunderstanding?

A: You have a lot of company. The fear you describe keeps the world population exploding. We find long waiting lines at Disneyland, but certainly not at Heaven's gate. That is because when the mind identifies with the ego it finds the non-dualistic nature of Heaven profoundly threatening; in spite of the fact that it has no knowledge of non-duality. The ego's only reality is the multiplicity of separation. It looks on oneness with terror, because its existence depends on duality. The sum and substance of its cycle of life and death is variety, change, excitement, emotional roller coasters, and diversity. In fact, the ego's theme song proclaims: "The only constant thing is change." To strengthen its case for separation, the mind conjures up visions of Heaven as a place of boring, lonely, annihilation. This is a perfect example of the principle of projection: when the mind experiences the loneliness of its self-imposed exile caused by its rejection of its Identity as God's Son and abandonment of its home, it denies the loneliness of separation and makes up a substitute "home" (the world), replete with special relationships to fill the empty void. It then projects what has been denied and perceives Heaven as a lonely place of exile. All this is done to protect the mind from realizing the devastating effects of choosing separation, so it can continue to cling to it. The mind turns everything upside down to defend itself against choosing to return home with God, where all sense of loneliness disappears and every fragment of the Sonship (parents, children, friends) is joined in the oneness of God's Love.

In response to our fear of returning to our true home, Jesus has a very comforting message: **"Fear not that you will be abruptly lifted up and hurled into reality. Time is kind, and if you use it on behalf of reality, it will keep gentle pace with you in your transition"** (T.16.VI.8:1,2). Not only is time kind, but the forgiveness that Jesus teaches is a kind and gentle healing process. It does not take special relationships away, but transforms them to include those whom they were meant to exclude. The pace is set only by our willingness to forget the ego's separation lie and remember what it means to be one. While the mind identifies with the body, it makes eyes that see other bodies that seem real, and emotional attachments that seem more real than the oneness God created. These special relationships with loved ones are the ego's substitutes for the relationship between the Father and His Son; the only true relationship. This can only be understood in the context of the Course's teaching that we are minds, not bodies. *A Course in Miracles* teaches that nothing exists outside the mind (T.18.VI.8). The mind that chooses to believe the separation is real splits into two parts.

The right mind remembers the oneness of God's Love, and every fragmented part of the Sonship is included in that memory. No one is excluded, lost, or lonely. The love that flows from this part of the mind embraces family members, along with everyone else. When the mind chooses this all inclusive love as its *only* identity, it joins with the oneness of God's Love; the Heaven it never left.

The wrong mind, on the other hand, chooses to identify with the body that is exclusive by the very fact that it is bound by limitations. A body not only cannot love everybody, it cannot love at all. **"It [the body] was made to limit the unlimited"** (T.18.VIII.1:3). In contrast, **"Love has no limits, being everywhere"** (W.p.I.103.1:4). We may therefore conclude that what is limited is not love. What the world calls "love," the Course calls specialness; a "love" subject to change, disappointment, and loss. What changes does not last, and so, however pleasurable or noble it may seem to be, the ego's love will inevitably end. What does not last is not real, or eternal, or found in Heaven. The ego's answer to life's pain and anguish is a belief system that teaches that we will find beloved individuals in Heaven. This is a heaven that mirrors the world, only better. It is designed to support belief in the separation and the ego's dualistic God.

Heaven is not only not the lonely place projected by the ego, it is the state of mind in which everyone is included as one. Through the process of forgiveness, what was special love reserved only for certain people is gradually transformed to the all-inclusive love of the right mind. There are many passages in the Course describing the beauty of the real world that precedes the step into the eternity of Heaven. Though we are not asked to understand what has been obliterated from awareness by the “...**heavy garments of guilt**” (T.18.IX.9:7) , you might imagine the loving feelings you have toward your parents and son expanded to embrace everyone. That is the end result of the mind joining with itself and finally feeling at home. Meanwhile, until the last spot of darkness is removed, and nothing remains to blur the vision of our forgotten home, our only concern is the ongoing practice of forgiveness: small, but certain steps in undoing the belief that the body is all there is.

Q #1142: The Course's metaphysics says we are reviewing experiences. What and who did the initial experiencing? If the answer is still us (or the observer), how do we know we are not doing that initial experiencing right now as that would line up with "traditional" ego perceptions of space and time. Is the answer that the initial creation was made outside space and time by the separated Christ, that in a flash, due to the incredible creative power of Christ, the ego emerged, got so immersed in the thought of separation, splintered itself into almost infinite (recursive) thoughts, that it eventually believed it truly was separate, developed guilt, and then began reviewing everything it had created in human experience terms; i.e., in terms of space and time as separate bodies? In other words the initial experience was not as humans, but just thought, but that the incredible creative ability, and unfortunately ensuing guilt of this creativity, transformed that experience into us as separate bodies.

A: *A Course in Miracles* states that “**we but see the journey from the point at which it ended, looking back on it, imagining we make it once again; reviewing mentally what has gone by**” (W.pl.158.4:5) . Importantly, this statement comes after Jesus explains that time is not what we think it is; he corrects our ego-based understanding that time goes in one direction and contains a future unknown to us (W.pl.158.3:5,7) . He tells us that time is part of the ego's plot to divert us from the truth; and as such, it is “**a trick, a sleight of hand, a vast illusion . . .**” (W.pl.158.4:1) . This reflects the statement in the text that says, “**Each day, and every minute in each day, and every instant that each minute holds, you but relive the single instant when the time of terror took the place of love. . . . Such is each life; a seeming interval from birth to death and on to life again, a repetition of an instant gone by long ago that cannot be relived. And all of time is but the mad belief that what is over is still here and now**” (T.26.V.13:1,3,4).

Jesus is addressing us as decision-making minds outside time and space that are tangled up in the dynamics of denial, projection, and defenses. Ultimately, there is only one mind (lowercase), the Son of God who believes he has successfully split off from his reality in the perfect Oneness of God (a separation the Course defines as impossible, and therefore totally illusory). The Son of God in this context is not Christ, Who remains at one with God as His creation in Heaven. *Creation* , in the Course's view, is completely different from the biblical notion, which has to do with God creating outside Himself. God creates only like Himself (T.8.II.7:6) ; and creation is the eternal, non-spatial extension of love that takes place only in Heaven -- God creating Christ, and Christ continuing the extension of love in His creations.

The separated Son retains the memory of His true Identity as Christ, though it is concealed from his awareness by his own choice. The ego is simply that part of the Son's mind that he now thinks he is, having split off his true Self (Christ); and as such, it represents the thought system of separation.

In the instant the separation from Totality and Wholeness was thought to have occurred, every conceivable form of separation spun out instantaneously. The dynamics of separation involve getting as far away from oneness as possible so that the original state of oneness is longer remembered, and even considered alien and unnatural: “**Complete abstraction [formlessness] is the natural condition of the**

mind. But part of it is now unnatural. It does not look on everything as one. It sees instead but fragments of the whole . . .”(W.pl.161.2:1,2,3,4). “. . . he does not realize he has forgotten where he came from, where he goes, and even who he really is” (W.pl.166.4:4) .

Guilt is bound up with the belief in separation, but only because the choice to separate from God was branded as sinful by the ego. A massive system of defenses evolved to deal with the pain of that guilt in the mind, which characterizes a major aspect of our experience as humans, except that we are not aware of this underground dynamic. That is one of the purposes of the Course -- to help us regain our awareness of ourselves as minds, so that we can deal with the source of all our problems and pain, and learn that sin and guilt are made-up concepts. Ultimately, we will realize that the only problem is that instead of smiling at the silliness of the idea of separating from Totality, we, as the one Son of God, took it seriously (T.27.VIII.6:2,3) , and then began the process of *miscreation* , as *A Course in Miracles* refers to the works of the ego. Our only responsibility, our only purpose, is to accept the Atonement for ourselves, which means remembering that we never truly separated from our Source.

Q #1143: I have a question about emotionality and special relationships. I seem to have had one which resulted in both extreme love and feeling nothing at all simultaneously. Could you recommend anything on how to deal with extreme emotional ties where you know that it does not help you any further but you are still unable to let go? I am somewhat confused by the fact that one person can rouse both extreme love/hate and remind me at the same time of a more universal love. I suppose both are but in me but it's difficult to deal with. I have tried to work on this with a number of psychologists but to no avail basically. The decision to leave seems to be mine but it appears kind of cold. I suspect my question comes down to "what is love?" How does *A Course in Miracles* define love? I feel I am physically and emotionally in pain almost to the point of withdrawal symptoms (special love/hate). I read the Course and understand it on a mental level but emotionally feel all the hurt and pain. Healing only comes in small (illusionary) steps. Why do we do this to ourselves? Indian yogic systems use extreme emotions as breakthroughs to the more universal love. I suppose *A Course in Miracles* would not approve of any such techniques.

A: It may be helpful to remember that extreme emotional feelings are really not different from milder experiences of the same feelings (e.g., W.pl.21.2:3,4,5; M.17.4:3,4,5,6,7,8) . And our attempts to make sense of them, regardless of their intensity, are merely clever diversions orchestrated by our egos to keep us from recognizing the real issue: all pain comes from our decision to see ourselves as separate from love (T.28.III.5:1) . The scripts of our lives, with all their various relationships, are ego symbols that play out, in form, the ultimate ego drama in the mind, one in which we believe we are pitted in a life-and-death struggle with God, Who seeks vengeance for our attack on Him, when we wrested our autonomous individual self from His Oneness. And, the ego tells us, that struggle is one that in the end we *will* lose, for we all shall die.

Why do the feelings -- both positive and negative -- seem more intense within some relationships than others? There is really no answer to that question except to say that, when the ego's scripts were written long ago, some of the script's symbols, that is, the figures within the dream, seemed to be invested with more projected guilt than others. And so those symbols, which seem to be external to us, are mirroring the hidden contents of our minds, which we do not want to accept within ourselves. More intense relationships provide us an opportunity to look deeper within ourselves.

Should we ever allow ourselves to look calmly beyond the external relationship to the underlying conflict within, Jesus assures us, we would see the inner battle with God as merely silly and not at all serious. But the world of relationships keeps our focus outside the mind, so that we attribute all of the intensity and emotionality to the interactions we seem to be having with other individuals separate from ourselves. Yes, this is how we are experiencing the conflict, and we are not expected to deny our feelings. But we are being invited to consider a different interpretation of our experiences, one in which we learn to recognize that we are solely responsible for our feelings (T.21.II.2:3,4,5) and others are simply the excuses we have made up to assign the responsibility elsewhere. And so long as we project responsibility for our feelings

outside ourselves, no genuine healing is possible -- only a pseudo-healing that involves special love bargains or compromises in which we always feel we must give up something in order to get what we think we want.

Whenever we find ourselves wanting *anything* from someone else, we have already made a decision to identify with the ego thought system of separation, differences, limitation, and loss. And this decision, by its very nature, must be experienced as painful, since the choice for the ego is the choice against love. How could the decision to see ourselves as bereft of love, lost and all on our own, be experienced as anything but extremely painful?

As for how the Course defines love, Jesus says in the Introduction to the text, **“The course does not aim at teaching the meaning of love, for that is beyond what can be taught. It does aim, however, at removing the blocks to the awareness of love's presence, which is your natural inheritance (T.in.1:6,7).** So you will find no definition of love in the Course, because love, which is our reality, is beyond all limits, all boundaries, all concepts. Nevertheless, the Course says enough about love and what love is not to make it clear that what passes for love in this world -- what the Course calls special love -- is at best “a shabby substitute” (T.16.IV.8:4) and at worst a contradiction of love's reality.

Love simply is, having no degrees of depth or intensity, and it cannot change (W.pl.127.1:3,4,5,6; 2:1,2,3) . Whatever seems to change or alter with conditions and circumstances can only be an aspect of the ego thought of separation, and so it must be hate, since the ego was made to be love's opposite. In dealing then with what you are experiencing as extreme emotions that seem to range from love to hate, it is helpful to recognize that all of those feelings are of the ego. The ego's “love” is riddled with ambivalence (T.4.III.4) , since the ego itself is nothing but an ambivalent thought. And so its projections into a world of form can only be experienced with ambivalence, so long as the ego remains our guide and teacher. And so our feelings, grounded as they are in the ambivalence of the ego's oppositional nature, can only fluctuate between special love and special hate -- that is their range. And yet always, beneath the layers of hate and special love and guilt, lies our genuine love for our Father -- and the memory of our oneness -- that these layers were intended to conceal. But so long as we refuse to recognize the real problem, we will seek for answers to seemingly important yet ultimately irrelevant questions, such as, “What should I do about this situation or relationship? Should I continue or end it? And how do I stop the pain?”

However, all relationships can be helpful if we have the right teacher. Now their helpfulness has nothing to do with whether we choose to remain physically in a relationship with someone or not, but only with whether we choose to accept this other person as a mirror to our own unconscious, which we are now being given the opportunity to bring to the light and examine. And then we begin to understand that the only question is “How can I look at *myself* differently?” The goal is not to see the other person differently, but to recognize *why* I am choosing to see that person the way that I am. It is always a defense against looking at the self-accusations and the self-hatred within my own mind, where I could do something about my choice for the ego, with its accompanying conflict and pain. And it is in this looking that I begin to understand why I do this to myself -- to protect my false sense of self from the boundless love of our true Self that knows nothing of judgment or limitation.

We cannot experience love directly in this world, while we remain identified as separate, individual selves. But we can experience its reflection -- forgiveness, which **“is still, and quietly does nothing....It merely looks, and waits, and judges not” (W.pl.1.4:1,3)** . And the forgiveness, while it may seem to be experienced in relationship to another person, is truly only ever for ourselves.

Other spiritual thought systems may use the intense emotions you speak of as means for breaking through to the universal love, and the Course would pass no judgment on such approaches. But for those of us whose path is the Course, Jesus is inviting us to embrace his kindly practice of forgiveness, which involves no intense breakthroughs, but only a gentle melting within (T.18.VI.13,14) . The peace that always awaits us arises in our awareness once we have been willing to look at and release our own choice for and investment in all the various expressions of the ego's intensity.

Q #1144: I have trouble understanding how projection works and the meaning of the following: "As the world judges these things, but not as God knows them, I was betrayed, abandoned, beaten, torn, and finally killed. It was clear that this was only because of the projection of others onto me, since I had not harmed anyone and had healed many" (T.6.I.9:2,3). As I understand projection, in my mind I see love and do not want it; so I imagine a human form, Jesus, which I attack and destroy. Jesus or love, on the other hand, sees my reaction and understands it as a call for love, and he returns this love, which I would interpret in a number of ways. One possibility is that I see him not resisting or defending himself. This projection is quite a block for me.

A: The section of *A Course in Miracles* in which the quote appears is called "The Message of the Crucifixion"; Jesus is referring to what took place twenty one hundred years ago. People were extremely threatened by the love he expressed and that he was. As you say, we all accuse ourselves of rejecting love, and our guilt over that is so overwhelming that the only recourse we think we have is to project the guilt onto someone else and attack that person (T.31.III.1). That is what Jesus is saying happened back then. People had to find something they could accuse him of and feel justified in doing so; otherwise the pain of their guilt would have been unbearable. He, however, did not experience what, to the world, looked like betrayal, abandonment, torture, and death. With no ego, Jesus could not have experienced any of that; he knew he was not his body. He could only love, recognizing people's calls for love in their viciousness. His message thus is: **"You are merely asked to follow my example in the face of much less extreme temptations to misperceive, and not to accept them as false justifications for anger"** (T.6.I.6:7) .

Whenever you feel your anger is justified, you have projected your unconscious guilt onto the person you are angry with. This does not mean that the person may not have said or done something that was not loving. Without guilt, however, it would be impossible to justify your anger, regardless of what happened; in fact, at the top of the spiritual ladder, you would not get angry at all, as you would perceive the pain and fear behind people's viciousness, and you would feel only compassion. This content in your mind would then be expressed in a form appropriate to the situation.

Q #1145: Is there any specific meaning in the use of the figure "5", "50" etc. within *A Course in Miracles* , in particular in the workbook? Certain Christian/gnostic sects and similar organizations are said to have used certain symbols, as perhaps the pentagram as the symbol of Christ. I found it interesting that the "centre of our being," the holy instant is also sitting comfortably at the centre of the 31 chapters of the textbook and, 1+5=6, perhaps secretly alluding to the "inner Christ" or Son of God anyway (the figure 6 as symbolized by Tiphareth/Son of God in the kabbala)? Is there any "reason" behind the structure of the workbook, certain lessons building up on each other in a certain "symphonic" way? Could *A Course in Miracles* , as a whole, perhaps be regarded as "holographic" in structure and content?

A: As far as we are aware, there is no special meaning in the numbering and symbols used in the Course. It is written in such a way, however, that one could find all kinds of things along the lines you mention. That was never anything that Helen Schucman and Bill Thetford related to, though; and we at the Foundation do not either.

The structure of *A Course in Miracles* can quite easily fit into the symphonic or holographic model. Kenneth often speaks of this, and has described it explicitly and at length in his introduction to the series of classes he gave on each of the three books of the Course. In introducing his classes on the manual for teachers, for example, he states: "My presentation on the text . . . followed a musical format, taking not only Jesus as my inspiration, obviously, but Beethoven as well. Our journey was like a symphony within a symphony, each lecture built around the various themes of the text's thirty-one chapters, which reflected the symphonic nature of the text itself. Although the form is slightly different, I have done the same thing

in these lectures on the manual for teachers, using music as the inspiration for their structure, and, again, Beethoven as the model, specifically the third movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. . . . As I thought about the structure for these classes, this movement came to mind because the manual itself is organized around two themes and variations of these two themes, specifically the first."

The holographic model can be recognized in the fact that if we understood *completely* any one statement of the Course, we would understand the Course's message in its entirety. If we completely understood the first miracle principle -- that there is no order of difficulty among miracles -- there would be no need to read or study anything further in the Course. The same could be said of the very first lesson, or any other lesson. But because of the intense fear in our minds, Jesus leads us gradually. He told Helen and Bill to study the "notes," so that they would be prepared for what was to follow -- a message that is included, in part, near the end of Chapter 1 of the text (T.1.VII.4) . The early lessons in the workbook initiate a process of mind training, and they incorporate a certain amount of structure and discipline that will not be needed in later stages of the process. The Introduction to the workbook discusses this dimension of the Course. The workbook is carefully and intentionally structured to achieve maximum results, given the state of our minds' beliefs and fears.

Q #1146: This is about lucid dreaming, the ability to realize while dreaming that everything that is happening is only a dream. Then you can control your dream and your dream stops controlling you. I've been experiencing this phenomenon and I've learned to produce it at will. How can this kind of dream help me with *A Course in Miracles* and the Holy Spirit's purpose?

A: It can be very helpful. A primary objective of Jesus' mind-training program is to help us become lucid dreamers, which means becoming aware that what appears to us as real is not real -- we are just dreaming of ourselves as individuals in a physical world: **"You are at home in God, dreaming of exile but perfectly capable of awakening to reality"** (T.10.I.2:1). Jesus is not referring to our dreams at night, but to our experiences in our daily lives. Yet, he also tells us these are not different states in terms of their content: **"All your time is spent in dreaming. Your sleeping and your waking dreams have different forms, and that is all. Their content is the same. They are your protest against reality, and your fixed and insane idea that you can change it"** (T.18.II.5:12,13,14,15).

Being a lucid dreamer, you probably can relate very much to Jesus' discussions of dreaming. It is a major theme in the Course, but there are several sections that focus specifically on the nature and purpose of the dream: four sections in Chapter 18 (T.18.I,II,III,V) and two in Chapter 27 (T.27.VII,VIII). *Purpose* is the key word, and that is where our work as students is centered. Are we upholding the ego's purpose in our lives or the Holy Spirit's purpose? The ego wants us to stay asleep and to continue to dream, without ever realizing that that is what our lives amount to. The Holy Spirit wants us to realize that we are merely dreaming that we are separate; it is not the truth. Jesus thus says of the miracle that it **"does not awaken you, but merely shows you who the dreamer is. . . . The miracle establishes you dream a dream and its content is not true"** (T.28.II.4:2;7:1) .

We can begin the process of awakening by accepting the Holy Spirit's purpose of learning to see each other as sharing a common interest -- that we are all in pain for having left our loving home in Heaven, and we are all desperately hoping there is a way back that does not involve eternal punishment. The Holy Spirit thus represents the Atonement principle, the fulfillment of our hope that what awaits us is only love, for we never truly left. This is the dream Jesus refers to that precedes our final awakening, **"a gentler dream, in which his suffering was healed and where his brother was his friend . . ."** (T.27.VII.13:4) .

Q #1147: Today a friend of mine mentioned something related to "sowing your wild oats" and it brought up some conflict within me. I remember when I was married back when I was 22, I was tormented with

thinking I needed to sleep with other women to gain my peace of mind because I felt like I didn't know what it was like to. It was like that whispering voice that says you won't know until you try it. I would like to think that someone could have one relationship and be content and not wonder that completion lies within another relationship. My friend's comment brought up some old fears within me and even now I still wonder if I'm missing something in my experience of life. Another fear of mine is that I am not a complete man because I have never gotten into a fist fight with another man and so I feel like I would need to seek this to be whole. I guess I feel like I'm not like other men. Also, Question #202 says that, "Children must first learn to become strong, healthy egos in order to function effectively and to cope with the many challenges in world." How do I know my ego is developed enough so I can move on and follow the teachings of *A Course in Miracles* ?

A: That "whispering voice" that tells us that we need to do more, that we are not enough, that we are incomplete, that something needs to be different -- in our relationships, in our personalities, in our bodies, in our lives -- is always the voice of the ego (**T.29.VIII.8**) . Always! Now, knowing that, we still may choose to listen to it, and most of us do, most if not all of the time. And that's no sin. What we seek after won't make us genuinely happy, but if we believe it's more spiritual to deny that nagging inner voice or resist its urges, more than likely we will then feel as if we are sacrificing something important, and the ego will still have us in its grip. For the worldly experiences we've deprived ourselves of will still feel very real and we will have once again embraced the ego's religion, whose tenets hold that God and love demand that we sacrifice what we think we want for the sake of some greater good (**T.15.X.7:1,2**) .

So if you feel you are not whole or complete, or not the man you think you should be, and you believe there is something that may help you feel better about yourself, you may certainly want to check it out. Now of course you may want to choose your fight carefully, and perhaps a round of boxing, with the gloves on could help minimize the risk of broken knuckles and jaws, or brain damage! For most of us, the only way to be willing to move along on our spiritual path is to allow ourselves to experience what we believe will make us feel better about ourselves. Then we can see, after having the experience, that the emptiness and the sense of inadequacy still remain, for those feelings are not coming from what we do or don't do, but from what we believe about ourselves at the core of our very being . Oh yes, temporarily we may feel better about ourselves after some conquest, but the fix never lasts. For it hasn't addressed the source of the emptiness and self-loathing, which come from a decision buried deep in our unconscious to be different from God, rejecting the one Relationship that brings the sense of completion that we futilely search for outside ourselves (**T.30.III.3**) .

To a degree, the observations made about children in the question you cite apply to all of us. We will not be willing to let go of our investment in the ego until we have come to a full realization that it offers us nothing (**T4.IV.6:1,2**; **T.9.I.10:2,3**) , for it *is* nothing (**T.7.VI.11:4,5,6,7** ; **T.7.X.3:8,9** ; **T.11.II.7:6**) . And for most of us, the only way to recognize that is to continue to turn to the ego for guidance and then to look very honestly at the outcome. Now it may be a little like banging our head against a brick wall and wondering why we have a headache and where the blood is coming from, but until we make the connection, we will continue to ask the wrong teacher how to feel better about ourselves. In the end, we will all come to recognize the real content behind the ego thought system, and then it's just a matter of how much time we decide to continue unnecessarily to prolong our agony. But regardless of how stubborn and childish we may be, Jesus assures us a happy outcome is certain (**T.4.II.5**; **W.pl.71.6**) .

This does not mean that, as adults, we are confronted with an "either-or" choice between developing our ego and practicing the Course. As students of the Course, we can learn to be gentle with ourselves about our ego-based decisions so that we do not use them to reinforce our guilt. If we can watch ourselves choosing our ego without guilt, we will be more willing to look at the outcome of our ego identification and will come that much sooner to the recognition that each time we dip into the ego's well of experiences, we come up empty.

You may find Question #614 on masculinity and spirituality of some relevance to your concerns.

Q #1148: A friend said that it would be a good idea to agree to give each other 10 percent of any lottery we won. I agreed, but only in jest. He also asked that when I struck it rich that I would remember him. I gather that most people believe that it is the right thing to do to honor what we say, and that even God himself asks this. My problem is that after I said these things conflict began to arise in me, as my agreement seemed to mean that I should give him a part of all my money from now on. I began to hate him for this and even now cringe at people who say you should do what you say. Would Jesus enforce this? Promises of any kind now strike fear in my heart. Do you have any comforting words for this problem?

A: Jesus defines *honesty* as “consistency” -- it is one of the 10 characteristics of the advanced teacher of God (M.4.II.1). He teaches that is not just a matter of the words you say, but that **“there is nothing you say that contradicts what you think or do At no level are they [the truly honest] in conflict with themselves” (M.4.II.1:6,8)** . If you said the words “but only in jest,” then it would seem inconsistent to obligate yourself to stand by them. Apparently you never told your friend that your promise was made in jest. It would seem advisable to do so, and then you might have more peace of mind.

The only promise Jesus takes seriously is the one we made in our creation, and which we have blocked from our awareness: **“God keeps His promises; His Son keeps his. In his creation did his Father say, ‘You are beloved of Me and I of you forever. Be you perfect as Myself, for you can never be apart from Me.’ His Son remembers not that he replied ‘I will,’ though in that promise he was born” (T.28.VI.6:3,4,5,6).** Jesus takes this seriously only in the sense of reminding us that this is the source of all our internal conflict, but it is also where our true peace lies. He helps us become aware of the thoughts in our minds that we are choosing to keep us from remembering this promise. It is not that Jesus holds us accountable for this choice; he just wants to help us put an end to our pain and restore our natural state of peace to our awareness.

Our lives in this world are the means our minds have chosen to keep this Identity concealed. The seriousness we accord events and problems in our lives is simply part of this defense, which includes bringing Jesus and God into our lives to fix things for us, and even to enact sanctions for our transgressions. Yet, this is all but part of our unconscious intention to validate the world and the self we have made as substitutes for truth and reality. The teachings of *A Course in Miracles* invite us to rise above the battleground of the world we have made so that we will be aware of another way of perceiving the world and our lives.

You wound up hating your friend and becoming terrified of making promises because of the guilt over your failure to keep *your* promise, both ontologically and personally. The situation with your friend is really a reflection or a fragment of the much deeper self-accusation of failing to keep your promise to your Self and to God. Forgiveness and the miracle to the rescue! With Jesus leading the way, you can simply learn to smile at the insanity of thinking you sinfully betrayed God and Christ. That is totally false, and indeed, impossible. It is but a mistaken thought, not a sin, and you now can correct it by looking at it without judgment, which means with the love of Jesus next to you. You will then be more peaceful.

Q #1149: In discussing holy relationships, the text explains that “it is necessary that you have other experiences, more in line with truth, to teach you what is natural and true” (T.22.VI.13:10). Because my understanding of *A Course in Miracles* is still very limited, this portion of the text has disrupted the peace the Course has made me aware of. This is because, as I see it, I have no holy relationships in which “what one thinks, the other will experience with him” (T.22.VI.14:2). In other words, experiencing forgiveness has brought me peace in many situations, but I have no brother who shares the view the Course holds out of oneness in a present dream state. I hope I am misunderstanding this, as only the Course holds out stability, common sense truth, and peace for me.

A: Jesus is never talking about form or behavior -- what bodies do with each other. He is speaking exclusively about the content in our minds -- whether we have chosen the content of the ego or the content of the Holy Spirit. In the paragraphs to which you refer, Jesus is making the point that it is natural for us to perceive differences in each other (form), differences we judge as important and consequential for us, but this is natural only because we have identified with the ego thought system of separation (content). In truth, seeing each other as truly different is unnatural. Therefore he is saying that we will be better off choosing against the ego, so that we can begin to have experiences that reflect the truth of our oneness with each other, our natural state (see **W.pl.161.2,3,4**). With the ego as our teacher, we perceive our interests as separate and in conflict with those of others. But when we choose Jesus as our teacher instead, we will gradually learn how to perceive our interests as the same as everyone else's.

You do not have to have a specific person in your life who shares these views with you in order to practice these teachings. You can simply be thinking of someone (past or present), interacting with someone, watching someone on television, or reading about someone. Just become aware of how *you* are thinking about this person. You needn't say a word. If you do not perceive your interests as separate from that person's, the relationship has been made holy, regardless of whether the other person knows it, and regardless of what that other person's thoughts are. You then will have taken a step toward experiencing oneness of being, not just of interests.

When this new perception gladdens your heart and mind, Jesus states, “**you will realize that your relationship is a reflection of the union of the Creator and His Son. From loving minds there *is* no separation. And every thought in one brings gladness to the other because they are the same**” (**T.22.VI.14:5,6,7**). Jesus continues to unfold this experience of oneness, the extension of joy, love, and light throughout Sonship. Since our minds are joined as one, it is impossible that the gladness in your mind would not also be present in the other person's mind. That is Jesus' point, which is terribly difficult for us to grasp because we place so much trust in the testimony of our sense that tell us we are all separate from each other and that relationships are between two or more different people. But this is the revolutionary thinking Jesus is presenting in his course. Relationships begin and end in the mind as reflections of our relationship with either the ego or the Holy Spirit. That is where the healing is needed, so that we can awaken from the dream that we are separate from our Creator and Source.

Q #1150: Am I correct in thinking *A Course in Miracles* is called a "course" because we all take on a compulsory "course of thinking" from the time we notice our separate beingness? It seems we have no choice but to set about learning ways and means to live our separate lives as best we can, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. Survival of the fittest! So we find ourselves enmeshed in different cultures, religious traditions, and rules of behavior that best suit our needs as we see them. Our separately devised courses are clearly deeply conflicted, but we are unable to change our "course" because we only have our learned thinking to call on, which is how we got conflicted in the first place. Does the Course offer a *real* alternative -- a "course of thinking" not based on that old, separate, self-interest pattern?

A: The term *course* specifically denotes the educational and academic context of the Course. It “**is arranged as a teaching device,**” as the **Preface** states (**p. viii**) , and it consists therefore of a text, workbook, and manual for teachers. Jesus speaks about teaching and learning, teachers and students, a curriculum, goals and objectives of the lessons, etc.

Yes, *A Course in Miracles* most certainly offers a real alternative. There is a section in the text with that title (**T.30.IV**) , and one might well describe the entire Course in those terms. As you probably know, the dictation began shortly after Helen Schucman, the scribe, and her associate William Thetford agreed to rise above their separate, self-centered interests to find a better way of relating to each other and to the other people in their lives. Their agreement to join was the invitation to the source of truth in their minds, represented by Jesus and the Holy Spirit, to express this real alternative through them. Succinctly

stated, *A Course in Miracles* teaches that the way to remember God is by undoing guilt through forgiving others. It is a lifetime's work that begins with the humble acknowledgment that we have been wrong about everything, and that even though we know of no other way, we trust that there is one, and that we will succeed in achieving its goals.

Q #1151(i): (The following two questions were posed by the same person.) Could you please explain the meaning of the following passage from *A Course in Miracles* : "He has not left His Thoughts! But you forgot His Presence and remembered not His Love" (T.31.IV.9:1,2).

A: "His Thoughts" refers to the extension of God, which is Christ, His Son -- the capital *T* indicates that it refers to Christ. Jesus is using the plural form because of the context of his message in this section. The content of the statement is that Love is perfect Oneness that can never be divided or changed in any way. Contrary to what the ego says of God, Jesus is reminding us that Love never abandons. God leaving His Son is an absolute impossibility. But the Son can believe he has left his Source, even though, in truth, that is an impossibility as well. That is the Atonement principle running throughout the Course: the separation from God never truly happened.

Q #1151(ii): Also, what would be the formula for seeing a brother you disliked in the past, but now with spiritual vision instead of judgment? What thoughts/prayers are best to use while with my brothers/sisters in order to let go of judgment?

A: There is no formula as such in the Course, but in many ways seeing your brother as sinless is what the whole Course is about, for when you see the face of Christ in your brother, you then remember God. There are two important parts to the process that leads to this vision of sinlessness: recognizing the purpose judgment serves and the cost judging. Judgment is the life-blood of the ego; it keeps the belief in differences alive, and the belief in differences keeps separation real. Thus, we judge because we want to remain separate but not be held responsible for that choice. Locating our problems and lack of peace in what others do to us, thereby judging them as sinful and guilty, effectively hides the choice we are upholding in our minds.

Therefore, what we need to do, as Jesus teaches in many different ways, is to look with him at our *need* to judge, and to learn that the price we are willing to pay to continue to judge is the loss of our own peace. Jesus thus appeals to us: **"You have no idea of the tremendous release and deep peace that comes from meeting yourself and your brothers totally without judgment. When you recognize what you are and what your brothers are, you will realize that judging them in any way is without meaning. In fact, their meaning is lost to you precisely *because* you are judging them"** (T.3.VI.3:1,2,3). Judging costs us dearly! We lose our peace and all sense of the identity we share with each other. In return we get to be right (at least some of the time), and we keep our special individuality. Is it worth it? We need only look at this, and not force ourselves to stop judging when it is still so meaningful to us. Eventually we will let ourselves feel the pain of continued judgment, and then we will be less willing to pay the price, especially when we also realize that it is not a sacrifice to give up judgment, in view of the fact that we are incapable of judging in the first place (see **M.10.2**).

Lesson 335, **"I choose to see my brother's sinlessness"** (W.pII.335), might be helpful in keeping these teachings present in your mind. Remember, though, you never want to fight against your need to judge others (or yourself). That will only force you into denial and then your progress will be halted. It is far more helpful to be honest about *not* wanting to see your brother sinless, and then not condemn yourself for that, yet remind yourself that there's a price to be paid for such resistance. Gentleness and patience are essential.

In summary: **“Your function here on earth is only to forgive him [your brother] , that you may accept him back as your Identity. He is as God created him. And you are what he is. Forgive him now his sins, and you will see that you are one with him” (W.pl.192.10:6,7,8,9).**

Q #1152: I have been a reader of *The Science of Mind* , by Ernest Holmes, and a Religious Scientist for many years. I would be very interested to hear you comment on the ideas contained in that book, and how they do or do not coincide with the Course.

A: Although there are some parallels between the ideas contained in Ernest Holmes' *The Science of Mind* and *A Course in Miracles* , such as a recognition of the power of the mind to affect its experience, including the body and its circumstances, there are some fundamental metaphysical differences that have significant implications for how we look at the world and ourselves. For Holmes, the world is God's creation and so there is an expectation that ultimately there is a harmony and abundance in the world beneath all appearances, once we recognize how our own limiting thoughts are binding us to the negative. On the relationship between God and the world, Holmes' observed: “We believe in God, the Living Spirit Almighty; one indestructible, absolute, and self-existent Cause. This One manifests Itself in and through all creation but is not absorbed by Its creation. *The manifest universe is the body of God*” (italics added). Contrast this with the statement from the Course's workbook for students: **“The world was made as an attack on God. It symbolizes fear. And what is fear except love's absence? Thus the world was meant to be a place where God could enter not, and where His Son could be apart from Him. Here was perception born, for knowledge could not cause such insane thoughts” (W.pll.3.2:1,2,3,4,5).**

As for the self we believe we are, Holmes observed that Science of the Mind believes “in the eternality, the immortality, and the continuity of the individual soul, forever and ever expanding.” In contrast, consider the Course's observations on the individual self: **“The structure of ‘individual consciousness’ is essentially irrelevant because it is a concept representing the ‘original error’ or the ‘original sin.’ To study the error itself does not lead to correction, if you are indeed to succeed in overlooking the error. And it is just this process of overlooking at which the course aims. ...In this world, because the mind is split, the Sons of God appear to be separate. Nor do their minds seem to be joined. In this illusory state, the concept of an ‘individual mind’ seems to be meaningful” (C.in.1:4,5,6; C.1.2:1,2,3).**

The Course's central teaching on forgiveness is predicated on the reality of God as spirit and perfect Oneness, having absolutely nothing to do with the world of separation, form, bodies and individual selves. Forgiveness sees the world as nothing more than a feverish dream of separation, originating in our ego imagination. And we will all awaken as one mind from that dream, when we learn to forgive ourselves for what has never happened.

Ernest Holmes and *The Science of Mind* , in contrast, could be characterized as providing us with the means to attempt to have a better, happier dream of separation, as we learn to use our split minds to manifest abundance in our lives and in our relationships . However, from the Course's perspective, so long as we remain asleep and dreaming, we can not be truly happy, and the abundance that awaits us has nothing to do with the world of form, being instead an expression of the infinite extension of love in the formless realm of spirit.

Q #1153: What is meant by "secret sins"?

A: The “secret sins and hidden hates” are the separation beliefs the mind holds, but covers over with heavy layers of denial and projection. In fact, the mind builds a defensive fortress around its plot to keep separation real in its awareness. The cement that holds the whole thing together is denial. Almost simultaneously with its choice to be separate, the mind judges the choice as sinful, feels tremendous guilt for the “sin,” projects the guilt out to the body, and then denies it ever did anything. It thereby denies its power to choose and, most importantly, its identity as mind. Key to the success of this plot is keeping it hidden from awareness so the mind can convince itself that it is powerless and has no choice but to accept the ego's dream of separation. Once the mind finds itself embroiled in the illusion of the body, it continues to keep its sin and guilt hidden from awareness by projecting them out and blaming external agents for its predicament. The main target of this scheme is the ego's made-up God. The ego tells a very convincing tale to get the mind off the hook and ensure that its power and, most importantly its choice, are kept hidden: God made the world and the body, tricked his creatures into sinning, and is now tracking them down to punish them with death. This insanity is the foundation of the ego's plan for salvation through sacrifice and death, sustained by guilt and fear, and designed to keep the Son of God out of his mind.

Since hiding the mind's activity through denial is at the core of the ego's insanity, the Holy Spirit's curriculum of healing begins with uncovering what was hidden, and restoring to awareness the mind's power to choose. That is why so much of the teaching of the Course is devoted to describing the ego's dynamics. The key to unraveling the thick layers of denial is to train the mind to recognize the ego's antics in operation in one's life. Recognizing the mind's projections returns the source of the problem to the mind where it belongs. That is the first step in the forgiveness process. We find many passages in *A Course in Miracles* where Jesus exhorts us to look: **“You must look upon your illusions and not keep them hidden, because they do not rest on their own foundation. In concealment they appear to do so, and thus they seem to be self- sustained. This is the fundamental illusion on which the others rest. For beneath them, and concealed as long as they are hidden, is the loving mind that thought it made them in anger. And the pain in this mind is so apparent, when it is uncovered, that its need of healing cannot be denied. Not all the tricks and games you offer it can heal it, for here is the real crucifixion of God's Son”** (T.13.III.7:1,2,3,4,5,6). Several layers of the mind's denial network are revealed in this passage: illusions hide behind projections that seem to have a life of their own, hidden behind the illusions is the “loving mind,” as well as the pain that results from the mind's decision. The intense pain of denying God's Love is hidden behind all the ego's frantic attempts (“tricks and games”) to make the illusion of separation real and convince God's Son that happiness is possible outside of Heaven. No matter how hard the ego tries, it cannot undo the anguish of its error, and by confusing itself with the ego, the mind has crucified God's Son. This is the ego's arsenal of “secret sins.”

Hidden beneath all the debris of the guilt-infested secret sins is the mind's best kept “sinless secret”: the memory of God's Love. The Holy Spirit's healing process is aimed at undoing belief in the mind's secret sins so the Love that lies buried beneath them can be revealed. To that end, we are asked to *look* with the Holy Spirit at what has been hidden: **“Do not leave any spot of pain hidden from His light, and search your mind carefully for any thoughts you may fear to uncover** [the “sinful” as well as the sinless] **. For He will heal every little thought you have kept to hurt you and cleanse it of its littleness, restoring it to the magnitude of God”** (T.13.III.7:5,6, italics ours).

Q #1154 I have heard people say "it makes me happy to help others." I never thought that there was anything “bad” about that statement until I made that comment and my brother said that I was trying to please myself. I started wondering who was doing the talk, the ego or the spirit? I know that God wants us to be happy, but how can you tell if the happiness that comes from helping others comes from the ego? Can you give me your opinion?

A: Yes, God wants us to be happy, but that happiness can be found only through remembering we belong to Him and not to the world in any way (see Lesson 182 -- **W.pl.182**). When we forget this (which is usually all the time), we will be unhappy and then seek outside us for something that will make us

happy. That could be anything at all, including helping others. But the behavior of helping others (the form) does not, in itself, tell you whether it came from your mind's choice for the ego or the Holy Spirit (the content). If it was a right-minded choice, then you would have no investment in the outcome of what you did; your inner peace and happiness would not be affected by the situation in any way; you would not take anything personally -- praise or criticism; you would not perceive the situation in terms of victims and victimizers; you would not exclude anyone from the love and kindness you extended to that particular person -- the content of love in your mind, not the form of the help).

Jesus is teaching us in *A Course in Miracles* to focus on the purpose we have chosen in our minds, a choice that precedes behavioral interaction. That is the only relevant aspect of what we do -- our choice of teacher. You have chosen the ego's thought system of separation if your focus is on the body -- what bodies do or don't do and how that affects you. You have chosen the Holy Spirit's thought system of forgiveness if you focus on seeing shared interests, as opposed to separate interests, and you are increasingly attracted to seeing everyone as part of the Sonship, without exception.

Q #1155: My question is about what appeared to be a glimpse into the deeper meaning of *A Course in Miracles* that I experienced. I seemed to see the world from a very different plane, but essentially I was aware of the fact that everything in this world meant nothing. It was all a cardboard cutout. One of the very strange descriptions that came to me was that there was absolutely no difference between placing my toe on the floor and the war in Iraq (or anywhere for that matter). Everything, including myself, only existed through the specialness given it. The awareness that sensed all this was not lying in the bed yet it was me. I was somehow able to switch between this awareness and the me that I knew. No longer believing in my life as I knew it, I felt a great darkness come over me. I had no alternative insight into what was real. It was then that I made a conscious decision to opt for the cardboard world I knew, as the fear of the unknown was overwhelming. I always imagined that a realization of this magnitude would be accompanied by a great sense of love or joy showing you what is your reality but I had none of that. Is there a fear barrier that must be crossed simply through trust? And does this sound like an experience of 'vision' or was it just the ego's meanderings?

A: This is the kind of experience addressed in the section in the text called “**Light in the Dream**” (T.18.III) (as well as in other places). “**As light comes nearer you will rush to darkness, shrinking from the truth, sometimes retreating to the lesser forms of fear, and sometimes to stark terror. . . . If you knew Who walks beside you on the way that you have chosen, fear would be impossible. You do not know because the journey into darkness has been long and cruel, and you have gone deep into it. A little flicker of your eyelids, closed so long, has not yet been sufficient to give you confidence in yourself, so long despised. You go toward love still hating it, and terribly afraid of its judgment upon you. And you do not realize that you are not afraid of love, but only of what you have made of it (T.18.III.2:2;3:1,2,3,4,5,6).**”

The process of the Course is really a gentle one, but it nevertheless can lead to sense of disorientation as we make a radical shift in our perspective of reality. Jesus explains this and reassures us: “**In the transition there is a period of confusion, in which a sense of actual disorientation may occur. But fear it not, for it means only that you have been willing to let go of your hold on the distorted frame of reference that seemed to hold your world together. . . . Fear not that you will be abruptly lifted up and hurled into reality. Time is kind, and if you use it on behalf of reality, it will keep gentle pace with you in your transition**” (T.16.VI.7:4,5;8:1,2).

The questioning of your reality and the world's is a necessary step in the direction of total relinquishment of your ego. A part of you (the ego part, of course) is terrified of this. “**Yet,**” Jesus says, “**in this learning is salvation born. And What you are will tell you of Itself**” (T.31.V.17:8). When you calmly realize that your whole existence as a being in the world was made by you (the decision maker in the mind) as a defense against the truth, then you would also realize that to dismantle this powerful defense would expose the overwhelming fear that motivated you to erect it in the first place. It is at this stage of the

process that we encounter the most terror, without realizing its cause. This is described rather graphically in **“The Two Worlds”** section in Chapter 18 of the text. There Jesus talks about the willingness that is needed **“to follow the Holy Spirit through seeming terror, trusting Him not to abandon you and leave you there. For it is not His purpose to frighten you, but only yours. You are severely tempted to abandon Him at the outside ring of fear, but He would lead you safely through and far beyond”** (T.18.IX.3:7,8).

Jesus thus is aware of the fear and terror in our minds, but he wants to be a comforting presence to us as we go through this process, as he knows our fear and terror are unjustified. He wants to help us reach that same realization, but that means we must be patient and gentle with ourselves and allow ourselves as much time as we need to make the transition. What helps enormously is not to make a big deal about the process; after all, we are undoing only what is illusory, and restoring to our awareness only what belongs there and is natural. Our fear of loss is terribly threatening as we begin the process, but all that we will “lose” is our guilt, anger, anguish, and hatred, and we will become more kind, more forgiving, more compassionate, and more peaceful. That is not to be feared, but welcomed. And it will be, if we remember Who walks with us.

One last point . . . While it is true, within the illusion, that there is no difference between placing your toe on the floor and the war in Iraq, it is true only when you are with Jesus above the battleground. Missing this distinction could lead to denial of your experiences in the world, where differences must be respected. This crucial distinction is the basis of what Jesus teaches in Lesson 187. There he explains that **“you give but to yourself,”** and anyone who truly understands this **“must laugh at the idea of sacrifice. Nor can he fail to recognize the many forms which sacrifice may take. He laughs as well at pain and loss, at sickness and at grief, at poverty, starvation and at death. He recognizes sacrifice remains the one idea that stands behind them all, and in his gentle laughter are they healed”** (W.pl.187.6:2,3,4,5). Taken out of the context in which Jesus is presenting this lesson, these statements can make him sound cruel and insensitive. It is essential to understand, therefore, that his reference point, and yours in your experience, is the mind joined with his above the battleground.

Q #1156: In regards to my brain's relationship with my mind, would it be like my brain is a receiver, and my mind is sending an infinite amount of radio signals, and that the more I forgive, the higher the quality of the signals I am actually able to receive, all the way back up the ladder; and that with less forgiveness, my radio is only capable of receiving signals of the separation?

A: You have fallen into a common confusion with your analogy, equating yourself with your body and the brain, when the purpose of *A Course in Miracles* is to help us identify ourselves with the mind, not the body, which is the mindless effect of our mind's choice for the ego. For you speak of the mind as sending and the brain as receiving signals, and then speak of the quality of signals that *you* receive being affected by whether you forgive or not, as if you were the brain, with the brain being where forgiveness is occurring

The brain is simply part of the ego's subterfuge to keep us mindless. Everything is experienced in the mind, including the seductive illusion that we are a body that experiences everything through our body's senses, with our brain. Jesus gently pokes fun at our confusion when he observes, **“your idea of what seeing means is tied up with the body and its eyes and brain. Thus you believe that you can change what you see by putting little bits of glass before your eyes. This is among the many magical beliefs that come from the conviction you are a body, and the body's eyes can see. You also believe the body's brain can think. If you but understood the nature of thought, you could but laugh at this insane idea. It is as if you thought you held the match that lights the sun and gives it all its warmth; or that you held the world within your hand, securely bound until you let it go. Yet this is no more foolish than to believe the body's eyes can see; the brain can think”** (W.pl.92.1:3,4,5; 2:1,2,3,4).

The mind, not the brain, is the receiver. As Jesus explains near the end of the Course, **“consciousness [the split mind] is the receptive mechanism, receiving messages from above or below; from the Holy Spirit or the ego” (C.1.7:3).**

Jesus does refer to the body as a *communication medium* in the text, for it merely transmits to you, the mind, what you, the mind, have given it to transmit. For the mind is *both* the sender and the receiver: **“Why should the body be anything to you? Certainly what it is made of is not precious. And just as certainly it has no feeling. It transmits to you [the mind] the feelings that you want. Like any communication medium the body receives and sends the messages that it is given. It has no feeling for them. All of the feeling with which they are invested is given by the sender and the receiver. The ego and the Holy Spirit both recognize this, and both also recognize that here the sender and receiver are the same [the mind] . The Holy Spirit tells you this with joy. The ego hides it, for it would keep you unaware of it. Who would send messages of hatred and attack if he but understood he sends them to himself? Who would accuse, make guilty and condemn himself?” (T.19.IV.B.14).**

A little later, adding another dimension to the discussion, Jesus observes, **“the Holy Spirit, too, is a communication medium, receiving from the Father and offering His messages unto the Son. Like the ego, the Holy Spirit is both the sender and the receiver. For what is sent through Him returns to Him, seeking itself along the way, and finding what it seeks. So does the ego find the death it seeks, returning it to you. (T.19.IV.B.17:3,4,5,6).**

What remains consistent throughout these various observations is that Jesus is always speaking of aspects of the mind. The body clearly plays no active role in any of this.

To return to your analogy, the mind is like a person who tunes a radio, with the body/brain being the radio. The person can choose to tune into either the ego's wavelength or the Holy Spirit's, and what he will hear will be either discordant and hateful or gentle and kind, depending on which wavelength he chooses. But the radio itself experiences nothing, and makes no choice about which wavelength will be tuned in. Where the analogy breaks down is that the form of what is heard may be no different on either wavelength. For example, the same powerful symphony, or perhaps a news report, could be coming through the radio on both wavelengths, but the person may hear it as disturbing and unsettling if he's tuned into the ego's wavelength, while he may hear it as hopeful and loving if he's tuned into the Holy Spirit's wavelength. In that sense, the ego and the Holy Spirit are more like alternative filters through which the broadcast is perceived.

By the way, the radio would never be capable of receiving only the ego's signals, as you wonder, for the mind/person in any moment can choose to change to the Holy Spirit's broadcast, and this does not depend on what he has tuned into in the previous moment or series of moments, for however long they may seem to extend. He just needs to change the dial. However, if he's used to tuning into the ego's wavelength, over time he may forget that the Holy Spirit's wavelength is also available to him and he'll act as if he has no choice, as if the radio can only pick up one wavelength. But in any moment, when he wants to remember, all he needs to do is change from the ego's wavelength to the Holy Spirit's, and his perception and his experience will shift.

Q #1157: The purpose of the Course seems to be revelation or knowledge, which I've always assumed to be the same as the mystical experience, without which the journey is useless. Jesus also says in his course, "When you have seen your brother as yourself, you will be released to knowledge . . ." (T.13.VIII.8:1). Surely most people, at some point in their lives, have seen someone as themselves, if only for a moment . . . and not just those who have experienced revelation.

A: The term *knowledge* in *A Course in Miracles* is really a synonym for *Heaven*, the state of perfect Oneness. That is our true and natural state as God's Son; and although we believe we rejected it and made up another self as a substitute, we are assured through the Atonement principle that we never truly left that state and therefore Heaven's Oneness was never changed. Yet, our work with the Course is focused on a goal that will leave us at Heaven's gate, so to speak, where God Himself will then take the next step, lifting us back unto Himself. Thus, Jesus tells us: **"Knowledge is not the motivation for learning this course. Peace is. This the prerequisite for knowledge only because those who are in conflict are not peaceful, and peace is the condition of knowledge because it is the condition of the Kingdom. . . . Knowledge is His Will. If you are opposing His Will, how can you have knowledge?"** (T.8.I.1:1,2,3) Jesus reminds us of this later in the text: **"Forget not that the motivation for this course is the attainment and the keeping of the state of peace. Given this state the mind is quiet, and the condition in which God is remembered is attained"** (T.24.in.1:1,2).

The section in Chapter 13 from which you quoted is entitled **"From Perception to Knowledge"** (T.13.VIII), and there Jesus is teaching us that our perception of ourselves and others as separate is what keeps us from the state of knowledge, the state of perfect oneness. Thus, if we free ourselves of the illusion that we are separate, then the oneness of the Sonship will be the lens through which we perceive ourselves and everyone else. When this is our *only* perception, we are released to knowledge. We begin this transition, however, by learning to perceive that we all share the same interests, seeing others as ourselves.

Q #1158: What is *A Course in Miracles'* view on reincarnation? Is reincarnation considered an illusion? What happens when you die and you haven't completed the goal of "chipping away" at the illusions and defenses so that you possess a mindset that reflects Heaven or stays in Heaven?

A: In keeping with its teaching that there is no life outside Heaven, the Course does not make a strong case for or against reincarnation: **"There is no life outside of Heaven. ...In any state apart from Heaven life is illusion. At best it seems like life; at worst, like death. Yet both are judgments on what is not life, equal in their inaccuracy and lack of meaning (T23.II.19:1,3,4 5).** Based on this fundamental principle of the Course's teaching, the Manual answers the question of reincarnation directly: **"In the ultimate sense, reincarnation is impossible. There is no past or future, and the idea of birth into a body has no meaning either once or many times. Reincarnation cannot, then, be true in any real sense"** (M.24.1:1,2,3). Clearly, then, the idea of reincarnation is part of the illusory belief system of the ego. The mind that chooses illusion also chooses to identify with a body that lives and dies, once or many times; it does not matter. The important thing to consider is the mind's choice to believe in illusion rather than truth. That choice is made outside of time and space. It precedes the birth of the body and is unaffected by its death. If the body is the projection of the mind's belief in separation, the only thing that makes the body real is the continued belief in separation. Having chosen the body as its identity, the mind then convinces itself that the body acts independently in a linear process of "chipping away" that will ultimately have an effect on the mind. That is impossible. The mind confuses cause and effect as a defense against its own power to choose truth over illusion.

The only way out of the illusion of the life and death dilemma is for the mind to learn to recognize the painful effects of its choice, until it decides unequivocally for truth. Until it thus awakens from the nightmare of separation, the mind just keeps on dreaming. It dreams it is a body, has adventures, lives, dies, and lives again. Just as your body remains asleep in your bed whether you have a long, adventurous, nocturnal dream, jumping from one country to another, or a simple dream about a blue cat, so it is with the mind that dreams the dream of separation. It does not go out of itself. Thus, the mind's dream of life in a body is no more real than the nocturnal adventures of the blue cat. Nothing happens when you die because nothing happens when you live, as long as the "you" is the body. Each time the mind is willing to recognize itself as cause, it weakens belief in the body. As long as it is attracted to the separation thought, it establishes the "reality" of the body, birth, death, and rebirth. So while the mind keeps on dreaming, it keeps on choosing. That is all it ever does; it is all that ever happens. Being willing

not to deny the disastrous effects of its choice for separation, the mind will ultimately decide against it. Thus, the practice of forgiveness remains the only path to awakening and ending the cycle of illusory lives. It is the alternative to reincarnation.

See also: Questions #24, #91a, #94, #97, #153, and #291.

Q #1159: My question is about the relationship of the one Son, the one Christ, to the Holy Spirit. In some passages, *A Course in Miracles* seems to suggest that they are one and the same; yet, if there is a Holy Trinity in Heaven, does this refer to some concept of the Holy Spirit as having a role or function that is different from the One Son, or Christ? Since Heaven is non-dualistic, I recognize that these terms are just concepts to help us understand the non-separated state. However, I would benefit from your explanation of the distinction that the Course is using with the term *Holy Spirit* and the Son or Christ, and what is actually meant by these terms as part of the Holy Trinity.

A: Strictly speaking, there is no Trinity. In Heaven there is only God. **“The first in time means nothing, but the First in eternity is God the Father, Who is both First and One. Beyond the First there is no other, for there is no order, no second or third, and nothing but the First” (T.14.IV.1:7,8).** Christ is defined as **“the extension of the Love and the Loveliness of God, as perfect as His Creator and at peace with Him” (T.11.IV.7:5)** ; yet, to quote a well-known line in the workbook, **“... nowhere does the Father end, the Son begin as something separate from Him” (W.pl.132.12:4)** . Christ is not a being apart from the Father.

The Holy Spirit is metaphorically described in *A Course in Miracles* as God's Answer to the separation, but there is no detailed explanation of the genesis of the Holy Spirit. Some descriptions offered are as follows: **“The Holy Spirit is the only part of the Holy Trinity that has a symbolic function. . . . the Healer, the Comforter and the Guide” (T.5.I.4:1,2).** **“The Holy Spirit is the Christ Mind which is aware of the knowledge that lies beyond perception” (T.5.I.5:1).** **“He is part of the Holy Trinity, because His Mind is partly yours and also partly God's. This needs clarification, not in statement but in experience” (T.5.III.1:4,5).** It seems therefore that the Holy Spirit is spoken of only in relation to the separation, which we know is illusory and never happened. But Jesus also teaches that when the dream of separation is over, the Holy Spirit will **“return to the eternal formlessness of God” (C.6.5:8).**

In trying to fill in the blanks and even formulate a theology, it is important to keep in mind how the Course uses language, and related to that, its intention of offering a correction of what it sees as the mistakes of traditional Christianity. As you probably have noticed in our answers on this Service, we like to refer students to chapter 2 of Kenneth's *Few Choose to Listen* (Volume Two of *The Message of “A Course in Miracles”*), where they will find a comprehensive explanation of the Course's use of words and terms. Equally important, as you allude to in your question, there is no way we can understand the Godhead or Heaven while we are still choosing to keep ourselves separate from it by believing that we truly exist here as separate individuals. A sample of many such acknowledgments in the Course: **“Through our creations we extend our love, and thus increase the joy of the Holy Trinity. You do not understand this, because you who are God's Own treasure do not regard yourself as valuable. Given this belief, you cannot understand anything. . . . Truth can only be experienced. It cannot be described and it cannot be explained. I can make you aware of the conditions of truth, but the experience is of God. Together we can meet its conditions, but truth will dawn upon you of itself” (T.8.VI.8:9,10,11; 9:8,9,10,11).**

Q #1160: Where does the Course stand in regard to the ideas of twinflame, soul mate, and karmic relationships? Are those concepts true, or do they really just add to the belief of separation among brothers and special relationships?

A: *A Course in Miracles* does not say whether these concepts are true or not. On the level of absolute truth, of course, there are no relationships, because reality is non-dualistic, a state of perfect Oneness. In our separated state within the dream, though, we obviously have relationships; and the Course helps us realize that the only meaningful aspect of relationships is the purpose we have given them in our minds -- either the ego's or the Holy Spirit's. As we explain in Question #320, the key aspects of a special relationship -- which means the ego purpose of separation has been given it -- are dependency, completion, and needs. Thus, the feeling that someone is your soul mate could reflect the ego's purpose of reinforcing your belief that you are separate, incomplete, and have needs that must be met, or it could reflect your desire to undo these belief, and that this person will be your partner in the forgiveness process. It can be a right- minded or wrong-minded attraction.

With regard to karma, one of the major differences between that approach and the Course's is that the Course sees time as holographic, not linear, which means there can be no causal connection between the past and our present experience -- unless our minds deliberately put one there. Another point of difference is that since **“projection makes perception”** and the world is **“the outside picture of an inward condition” (T.21.in.1:1,5)**, we do nothing to the world and the world does nothing to us. A comprehensive view of this issue can be found in the following Questions: #332, #363, #514i, #516, and #577.

Q #1161: What does *A Course in Miracles* mean about relinquishing all other goals except salvation? Are we not meant to use our gifts? Are we not meant to cherish the goal of manifesting our gifts and using our talent?

A: Interestingly, in the passage you are referring to, Jesus describes these other goals as ones **“you have invented for yourself” (W.pl.65.1:5; italics added)**. That means they have nothing to do with our true Identity, and instead pertain to the self we made as replacement for the Self God created. As God created us, our true and *only* function is creating in Heaven **(W.pl.192.1)**. What we regard as our gifts and our talents are part of a substitute, ego-based identity. Once we understand and accept ourselves in that light, we can then ask Jesus or the Holy Spirit to help us use our so-called gifts and talents for the purpose of salvation, rather than for their original purpose of keeping us separate from our identity as spirit. Then, our only purpose will be forgiveness **(W.pl.192.2,3)**, **“the only function meaningful in time. It is the means the Holy Spirit uses to translate specialness from sin into salvation” (T.25.VI.5:3,4).**

Talents are very much an individual thing, setting people apart from one another -- the ones who have them from the ones who do not; the specially gifted from the modestly gifted, and so on. This, despite the fact that many people use their talents in the service of others, or as members of teams and groups. The Course is not saying not to develop our talents, but to become aware of our purpose for doing so, as would be the case with anything of the body and the world. As students of *A Course in Miracles*, we can learn to regard them simply as part of the curriculum our teacher of forgiveness can use to help us learn that we are all the same in sharing the same purpose, and ultimately that we are all the same as God's one Son.

Q #1162: What is the meaning of humor? Does it have anything to do with joy, or is it just part of the illusion?

A: Humor is just part of the illusion and, as part of the illusion, it can be a complex topic, one that has been analyzed and studied extensively over the years to determine what makes something funny or humorous. Freud, in one of the earlier analyses of humor, theorized that it always involves tension reduction or release. From the perspective of *A Course in Miracles*, guilt is the sole source of tension,

and so things which release or reduce guilt may be experienced as funny or humorous. But in the end, as with all things of the world, humor's meaning depends on whether it serves a right-minded or a wrong-minded purpose.

In the service of the ego, humor is a vehicle for attack, as can be easily seen in mean-spirited attempts to get a laugh by putting others down, where an individual or group is targeted as the butt of the joke, such as ethnic and racist jokes, political jokes, and humor that plays upon the "battle of the sexes." Ego humor can be cruel and vicious, always coming at the expense of someone seen as outside of oneself or one's self-identified group, and so always reinforcing the perception of separation and differences. The unconscious motivation behind the ego's use of humor would always be to see guilt outside oneself. Expanding on Freud's thesis, the tension reduction in the ego's humor would only be a reduction in *experienced* guilt as it is projected onto another. And the relief from such amusement would only be temporary, since the underlying guilt has not really been addressed and released.

Right-minded use of humor, in contrast, either minimizes or makes light of differences, and although its form may at times appear similar to the ego's, its content is gentle and its purpose is to help us not to take ourselves quite so seriously. Rather than laughing derisively at others, we learn to smile at ourselves. Drawing again on Freud's tension reduction/release hypothesis, it could be said that right-minded humor involves an actual release from guilt, as our investment in separation is relinquished in that moment of transcending the ego's artificial barriers and divisions. The laughter that may accompany this humor is light and joyful.

Jesus displays such a right-minded sense of humor throughout the Course, as in **"The 'Hero' of the Dream" (T.27.VIII)**, where he describes our so-called life in the body, pointing out our silly beliefs, which we take so seriously. For example, few topics are more serious and guilt-inducing to most of us, yet Jesus refers to money simply as **"little metal discs or paper strips the world proclaims as valuable and real" (T.27.VIII.2:2)**. And he regards the ego thought system and its ramifications simply as **"a tiny, mad idea, at which the Son of God remembered not to laugh,"** and **"a joke" (T.27.VIII.6:2,5)**. His words are not meant to attack our beliefs, but only to suggest a more light-hearted perspective that will allow us to move towards acknowledging and then looking beyond our guilt, thereby releasing it, rather than attempting to place it outside ourselves, as our egos would have us do, where its reality is never questioned.

Humor and laughter have no purpose in Heaven, for their right-minded function is corrective, that is, they serve to lighten and eventually cast off the burden of guilt that we have foolishly made real and taken upon ourselves, while we remain too afraid of the joy without contrast that is our real inheritance. As Jesus explains, **"This is the way salvation works. As you step back, the light in you steps forward and encompasses the world. It heralds not the end of sin in punishment and death. In lightness and in laughter is sin gone, because its quaint absurdity is seen. It is a foolish thought, a silly dream, not frightening, ridiculous perhaps, but who would waste an instant in approach to God Himself for such a senseless whim?" (W.pl.156.6)**. And so, **"the world will end in joy, because it is a place of sorrow. When joy has come, the purpose of the world has gone. The world will end in peace, because it is a place of war. When peace has come, what is the purpose of the world? The world will end in laughter, because it is a place of tears. Where there is laughter, who can longer weep? And only complete forgiveness brings all this to bless the world. In blessing it departs, for it will not end as it began" (M.14.5:1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8).**

Q #1163: In the first chapter of *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus talks about a traumatic experience that could result from starting on later stages of the Course without the preparation that careful study of the earlier sections would provide, because awe would then likely be confused with fear (T.1.VII.4,5). How exactly can your studying of the Course result in a traumatic experience? Which, more precisely, are the early sections and which the later ones, that Jesus is referring to in the text?

A: Jesus does not identify specifically which sections in the text are the early ones and which are the later ones. But he is basically talking about not jumping from the bottom of the spiritual ladder right up to the top without taking the intervening steps. Many people want instant enlightenment and do not want to do the often unpleasant and uncomfortable work of looking at their egos and how their lives have been directed by their choice to have the ego as their teacher instead of the Holy Spirit. That's not a pretty sight in our minds, but we will never be able to truly get beyond the ego and all its hate and selfishness without looking at it and humbly admitting we were wrong in wanting the special identity the ego offered in place of our true Identity as Christ. We must learn how to do that, trusting Jesus' word more and more that we will not be punished -- even annihilated as the ego warns us -- for having made a substitute for God's Love. We must practice every day how to shift the purpose of our lives and our relationships from the ego's to the Holy Spirit's; but we cannot do that without seeing -- sometimes shockingly so -- the extent of our investment in the ego and how we manifest the ego's madness of separation 24 hours a day, usually.

The point is, we have covered all of that over because we were convinced that unspeakably horrific things would happen if we ever remembered we have a mind and then would go back there and look at what we chose. There is such fear buried there that if we were to approach God directly, we would surely be thrown into a disabling panic. We need to approach God indirectly, through forgiveness and a relationship with Jesus or the Holy Spirit first, because of all the distorted notions we have implanted in our minds about Who God is and what we can expect of Him when we meet Him face to face. Jesus discusses this indirect approach in Chapter 14 of the text in the section called **"The Conditions of Learning"** (T.14.I). Earlier in Chapter 12 he tells us: **"You cannot lay aside the obstacles to real vision without looking upon them, for to lay aside means to judge against. If you will look, the Holy Spirit will judge, and He will judge truly. Yet He cannot shine away what you keep hidden, for you have not offered it to Him and He cannot take it from you."**

We are therefore embarking on an organized, well-structured and carefully planned program aimed at learning how to offer to the Holy Spirit everything you do not want. He knows what to do with it. You do not understand how to use what He knows. Whatever is given Him that is not of God is gone. Yet you must look at it yourself in perfect willingness, for otherwise His knowledge remains useless to you. Surely He will not fail to help you, since help is His only purpose. Do you not have greater reason for fearing the world as you perceive it, than for looking at the cause of fear and letting it go forever?" (T.12.II.9:6,7,8; 10)

This is the process Jesus wants us to focus on and not slip past, thinking we are already too spiritually advanced to have to engage in such work, and that we don't need any help.

Q #1164: I am having a problem identifying who my brother is. I know you are supposed to love your brother as yourself, no matter who he is. I am on chapter 25 now and I get confused as to who my brother is. Is it myself? I know this sounds preposterous but I really do not know.

A: The source of the physical universe, including all the bodies it contains, is the thought of separation taken seriously in the one mind of the sonship. This thought gives birth to the brotherhood of all the separated ones. From within the dream of separation there appear to be a multitude of separate bodies living separate lives, all of whom are referred to in *A Course in Miracles* as "your brother" because they are split off parts of the one mind. That is what is meant when Jesus tells us: **"One brother is all brothers. Every mind contains all minds, for every mind is one. Such is the truth"** (W.161.4:1,2,3). Thus, everyone is your brother. Everything the Course teaches about the practice of forgiveness in relationship with "your brother" applies to everyone. As long as the split mind perceives other bodies as separate from oneself, there is need for forgiveness. What simplifies the practice of forgiveness is its universal applicability. Every encounter is an opportunity to see the mind's choice for separation reflected in the thoughts and judgments projected onto others. In the manual, Jesus tells us there are no accidents, no chance encounters, no strangers (M.3.1,2) . Your brother is the person you are

with at the moment: “ [a stranger] **in an elevator, a child who is not looking where he is going running into an adult 'by chance,' two students 'happening' to walk home together**” (M.3.2.2).

To love a brother who is a seeming stranger is to recognize that any perceived differences are irrelevant in the face of the underlying oneness that unites every fragmented part of the Sonship. Every brother has a mind that holds the ego's lie of separation, the Holy Spirit's memory of truth, and the power to choose between them. To love a brother as one's self is to recognize that perceiving him as separate is a projection of the mind. When the mind chooses separation, it projects guilt for this choice onto the body -- one's own, as well as that of others -- and then mistakenly believes that external agents are responsible for what is experienced in the illusion. Thus, in the practice of the Course, to love a brother is to forgive him for what he did not do (T.17.III.1:5) . He may attack in a hateful, hurtful way, but he cannot take away the peace that abides in the mind. That is relinquished only by the choice to identify with the ego rather than the Holy Spirit.

To speak of separated parts is to speak in dualistic terms that apply within the dream of separation. In reality there are no “brothers”; only the one Son joined with the Father in a oneness that cannot be expressed in the language of separation. Jesus uses dualistic language in the Course because we believe in the duality of separation. He teaches forgiveness that we may undo this belief by learning that we are minds, not bodies. To that end, Jesus tells us: “**Think [of your brother] as a mind in which illusions still persist, but as a mind which brother is to you. He is not brother made by what he dreams, nor is his body, 'hero' of the dream, your brother. It is his reality that is your brother, as is yours to him. Your mind and his are joined in brotherhood**” (T.28.IV.3:3,4,5,6). The process of learning that as minds, we are all the same will lead to the awareness that we are all one.

Q #1165: In “Rules for Decision” of *A Course in Miracles* we are told: “Throughout the day. . . tell yourself again the kind of day you want; the feelings you would have, the things you want to happen to you, and the things you would experience, and say: if *I make no decisions by myself, this is the day that will be given me*” (T.30.I.4:1,2). However, *The Song of Prayer* states, “The secret of true prayer is to forget the things you think you need. . . in prayer you overlook your specific needs as you see them, and let them go into God's Hands” (S.1.I.4:1,3). This seems to be a bit of a contradiction. Can you please clarify?

A: About the “Rules for Decision” passage . . . At the beginning of the preceding paragraph, Jesus explained that our major problem is that we first determine what our problem is, and then we ask for help. Thus, in the passage you quoted, he is teaching us not to decide on our own. He wants us to learn that ultimately that we have only one problem, which is that we chose the ego instead of the Holy Spirit. So by not assuming we know the cause of our unrest or agitation, we are giving Jesus a chance to teach us where to look for the real cause: the decision we are making in our minds to uphold the ego thought system. It is important to realize that throughout the “Rules for Decision” section, he is talking about content, not form. Thus, when he asks us to think about the kind of day we want, he is talking about whether we want our day to go the ego's way, or his way. He is not talking about having a successful day in terms of winning the lottery or something like that. How we *experience* our day will correlate directly with our decision to choose the ego as our teacher -- more guilt, fear, specialness, and separation -- or Jesus as our teacher -- more peace, compassion, kindness, and love.

This parallels what he teaches in *The Song of Prayer* pamphlet. Prior to the passage you quote, he reminds us that he made a few statements in the text and workbook (very few, actually) where he instructed us to ask the Holy Spirit for specific help, and that we would receive specific answers to our requests. Yet, in two lessons he emphasizes that there is only one problem and one answer (W.pl.79,80) . “**In prayer this is not contradictory,**” he states in *The Song of Prayer* (S.I.1:3) ; and this is because prayer is a process -- like a ladder with rungs. On the bottom rungs, all that we are comfortable with is asking for specifics, which is the point of Jesus' statement in Lesson 161: “**The mind that taught itself to think specifically can no longer grasp abstraction in the sense that it is all-**

encompassing” (W.pl.161.7). As we grow spiritually, however, we become less and less attracted to the specifics, and more and more attracted to the love itself that is the substance of the answer. This is characteristic of the gentle nature of the Course's healing process. **“You cannot be asked to accept answers which are beyond the level of need that you can recognize. Therefore, it is not the form of the question that matters, nor how it is asked. The form of the answer, if given by God, will suit your need as you see it. This merely an echo of the reply of His Voice. The real sound is always a song of thanksgiving and of Love” (S.I.1:2:5,6,7,8,9) .**

Q #1166: Can the ego learn?

A: No. The ego is the thought of separation taken seriously. It is the effect of a decision made by the part of the mind that chooses (sometimes called the decision-maker). As such, it does not learn. What “learns” is the decision-maker mind that is able to experience the effects of its choice, so where it chose wrongly it can choose again. When *A Course in Miracles* says the ego can learn (**T.4.I.2.:13**) , it refers to this decision making part of the mind.

In deciding to identify with the ego thought system, the mind confuses itself with the body, denies its power to choose, and becomes oblivious to its natural condition. It uses the body as the depository of its guilt, proving that the sin of separation has had serious consequences. Thus the mind reinforces its belief in guilt and in separation. The goal of the Holy Spirit's curriculum of forgiveness is to teach the mind that separation not only had no effects, it never even happened (**M.2.2**) When the mind accepts the Holy Spirit's goal, the body serves as a mirror to reflect back the choice it made and subsequently denied. Learning to choose again is the only learning that ever occurs. It is more a process of remembering than learning. Each time the mind decides to remember its power to choose and chooses the Holy Spirit, it unlearns the ego-identity and weakens belief in the separation. Eventually the mind is healed of the belief in separation, and the memory of God returns to awareness: **“By healing you [the mind] learn of wholeness, and by learning of wholeness you learn to remember God” (T.7.IV.4:3).**

Q #1167: I find it fairly easy to not defend myself from others, see they are looking for love, not take offense, not take things personally; when someone is, from the world's standpoint, "attacking" me. Several have noticed and commented on what a “forgiving” person I am. However, when someone "attacks" my loved ones, my full defense mechanisms come on for their sake. Try as I might, I can't look at them as looking for love when they are "hurting" my family or friends. Can you suggest any readings from *A Course in Miracles* that could help me in this aspect? I need to see my loved ones as safe as I see myself! Why can't I?

A: Most students run into what you are experiencing. You seem to be heading in the right direction; you just need to continue the process of generalizing what you have learned. The key principles to keep in focus as you practice are that differences are not real, and that there is no hierarchy of illusions or attack. When you truly see another's attack as a call for love, you are no longer *you* ; you have become the extension of love, not one person forgiving another person. And since love is all-inclusive, when you are identified with love, everyone else, without exception, would also be enclosed in that circle of invulnerability and innocence. If, therefore, you perceive your loved ones as vulnerable and victimized, it is because you have left your right mind and once again identified with the thought system of vulnerability and victimization -- a thought system that has you project your guilt and see it in the form of guilty victimizers harming innocent victims. Then, in league with the ego, you will believe in a hierarchy of attack, and forgiveness will be harder in some situations than in others (see **T.12.VII.1**) .

To the ego, relationships are between persons, while Jesus teaches that relationships are only in the mind, because there is no one outside the mind. That is tremendously difficult to grasp, but it is essential

to keep in focus in order to avoid making differences important and then using them as means to maintain the reality of separation, often under the guise of being loving and protective. When you choose against the ego, you are choosing against separation in *all* its forms. As you learn to generalize, you will gradually perceive everyone the same way: as minds always choosing between illusion and truth (T.12.VI.6:4,5,6) - both victims and victimizers are calling out for love. You would then gradually focus less and less on bodies and specific identities (family, friend, stranger, etc.). This is not easy to do because of our obsession with form at the expense of content (see T.14.X.7,8,9; T.22.III.6).

So try to get past the form to the content when thinking about your loved ones. They, too, are either calling out for love or expressing it. This in no way means that you must sit back and allow them to be attacked. We are talking only about your thinking, not your behavior. Seeing attack as a call for love does not mean that you should never try to stop someone from hurting you or your loved ones. In your right mind you may be guided to do or say something, or to do or say nothing, but it would not be *you* making the decision.

In addition to the readings noted above, the section in the text called “**True Empathy**” (T.16.I) is always a good one to read when faced with the kind of issue you have raised.

Q #1168: As I understand it, *A Course in Miracles* describes a holy relationship as two people extending the Christ inside, joining with each other. If I have it correct, does this mean that both people need to be at this level of understanding about the true Self inside of them for the holy relationship to exist?

A: A holy relationship exists whenever anyone makes a decision in the mind to shift the purpose of the relationship from the ego's goal of specialness to the Holy Spirit's goal of healing. Since the problem of specialness/separation exists in the mind, the relationship is healed when the mind chooses the Holy Spirit instead of the ego. Nothing happens between two people because bodies do not join (T.18.VI.3:1). It is sufficient that one person choose to identify with the right mind for every relationship to be transformed; those with whom one is closely associated (family, friends), along with those who are seeming strangers. This all-inclusiveness distinguishes the holy relationship from the special relationship that is exclusive by its very nature. The Sonship shares the memory of God and of the true Self held in the part of the mind (right mind) symbolized by the Holy Spirit. Thus is everyone present when anyone chooses to identify with the right mind. That is why Jesus tells us we were with him when he accepted the Atonement (T.19.IV.B.6:5) . The other person need not be aware of the shift in the relationship from special to holy. Just as everyone will ultimately accept the Atonement that has already been accomplished, everyone will accept the holy relationship.

We cannot speak of the Christ as two people, even in the best of circumstances. The term refers to the non-dualistic nature of God's one Son. There is not a true Self within separate individuals, but one true Self shared by the seeming fragments of the Sonship. The oneness of God's Son cannot be understood from the perspective of the duality of separation: **“On this side of the bridge you see the world of separate bodies, seeking to join each other in separate unions and to become one by losing. When two individuals seek to become one, they are trying to decrease their magnitude. Each would deny his power, for the separate union excludes the universe”** (T.126.VI.5:2,3,4). The holy relationship cannot, then, exist between two individuals as a special union. If one brother is perfectly forgiven all brothers are forgiven, because each relationship contains them all.

Until **“not one spot of darkness still remains”**(T.31.VIII.12:5) to obscure the vision of the face of Christ, we are asked to look at the shadows in every special relationship without judgment, recognizing in them the mind's projected fear of its true Identity. Although it is not the vision of the Christ, every step in forgiveness is enough to make a relationship holy because it returns attention to the mind where the problem of specialness can be healed. Through the practice of forgiveness, guilt is eventually undone, which means the end of projection and the perception of differences. It leads to the moment when a

brother is seen as the mirror of one's self; the concept of a separate self is set aside, all judgment is relinquished, and the veil is lifted from the face of Christ (T.31.VII.8:4,5,6,7) . The mind's return to the awareness of this non-dualistic Identity as Christ is the ultimate goal of the Course.

Q #1169: My family -- three generations of them -- holds a political view that includes a lot of hatred toward the leadership of this country. To add spice to my stew, the head of the family studied *A Course in Miracles* for several years. But now he says things like, "I don't know why I ever studied that." As a Course student myself, I realize that my family's political anger is simply projected self-hatred, and I find myself wanting them to recognize this. They raise political issues for discussion quite often and I suppose from my responses that I appear politically apathetic or extreme in terms of valuing spiritual solutions over "real world" solutions. And so, I often do not say much at all. Quoting from the Course or taking the stance that "there is no one out there" feels egotistical to me. There is no sign that any of my family looks to me for leadership -- no desire for a teacher of God to come into an intractable situation to offer hope. And yet I feel more like I'm repressing myself than that I'm practicing faith and patience with them. I don't feel open minded as much as I feel that there is no use in saying anything. My question is: *why am I doing this ?*

A: It sounds like what you really want to know is why you are experiencing pain over this situation and conflict about how to handle it. Remember that *A Course in Miracles* makes it clear that all pain comes from guilt and that the source of all guilt is our belief in separation (T.15.V.2: 5) . Thus, it is not the fact that your family holds a worldview that differs from your own that is causing you pain. Rather, your pain stems from the fact that you judge them for it, thereby reinforcing your belief in separation and triggering your guilt. By starting with the assumption that they would be better off if they came around to your way of seeing the world, you ensure that no matter how you respond to them on the level of form, in your mind the content will be attack. And because this attack thought feels valid and justified, you will sense that by not expressing it to them, you are repressing yourself.

But as you stated, they are not asking you to teach them the Course or a more spiritual way of looking at the world. In fact, it sounds as if that is the last thing they want. Therefore, your wishing that they would look at things differently is to fall into the same futile trap that they are caught in by their political anger. In essence you are all saying, "I would be happy if only someone else would change." Part of you is aware of this dynamic, which is why spouting Course platitudes to them would feel egotistical to you. The fact that you know this, and yet still feel a desire to change them, can help you empathize with how real and justified their political rage must feel to them.

Because the head of your family is a former Course student, part of using this situation as your own classroom might include asking yourself whether his rejection of the Course feels like a rejection of you. You are likely to have this thought if, in fact, your ability to feel love for him is in any way predicated on the choices he makes.

Basically, the key to feeling better about all this is to realize that, as the Course says repeatedly, the peace of God is within you. Your family's choices and attitudes can have no power to take that peace away from you unless you want it to be taken away. They actually are offering you a wonderful opportunity to ask the Holy Spirit to help you look without judgment and learn to come from a truly loving place. When you do that, you will know what your family *really* wants from you when they express their anger at governmental leaders. And then your response might take many different forms including agreeing with them and allowing them to tell you all about their rage. Ironically, by not telling them that they are wrong, you might actually demonstrate that they *are* wrong about the one thing that really matters -- teaching simply by your compassionate presence that love *does* exist and that *they* are deserving of it.

Q #1170: I have just finished reading the text of *A Course in Miracles* . Reading and reflecting on this book has been the most arduous and overwhelming experience I have ever had. The Course has so completely affected my ideas about religion, spirituality, and, really, human existence in every dimension. I have been a pretty serious student of philosophy and theology most of my adult life. I'm 63 and everything has changed, most definitely for the better. My question: I know how demanding this process was for me. Is it that way for all students? And is it possible for an average person who isn't accustomed to "deep" thinking to really grasp the content of *A Course in Miracles* ?

A: Most people have found study of the text a difficult and challenging undertaking, especially, as you say, because it overturns just about everything we have ever believed about anything. But they also share your gratitude for it -- sometimes that turns in to mixed feelings, though, as they move along in the process of looking at their egos! Although the Course is written on a high intellectual level, its students can nonetheless practice its primary content of shared interests without mastering the metaphysical underpinnings of that content. The same is true for the giving up of judgment, also a major part of the Course's content. Jesus tells us that he is leading us to "**a new kind of experience**" (T.11.VI.3:6) , and everyone can share in that in their own way, regardless of whether they have been able to grasp the profound depth of the Course's spirituality, metaphysics, and psychology. For some further discussion of this topic, you might be interested in looking at Question #40.

Q #1171: I have a problem in my life that I was hoping that you could comment on. I sometimes have feelings of extreme happiness and bliss when I am in my right mind and feel truly joined with others. But it seems that some women mistake my kindness and genuine friendliness for "attraction" and romantic flirtation. I sometimes wonder why the Holy Spirit would let this happen when all that I am doing is trying to be who He would have me be. Should I feel confident that when the person is ready to accept the genuine truth of my actions that their misperception of my behavior will be corrected? I feel paranoid all the time now about being nice and friendly to others because I feel misinterpreted and misunderstood. Or am I possibly just maybe unconsciously setting myself up to be a victim of others' misperceptions and then blaming the Holy Spirit for it?

A: It may be helpful to remember that we are not responsible for how others choose to perceive us. But we *are* responsible for our own reactions to others' perceptions of us. And we only ever feel the way we do because we want to (T.21.II.2) .

You are correct in your suspicion that perhaps you are unconsciously setting yourself up for conflict and then seeking to pin the blame on the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit does not intervene in the world, and so it would be a misperception of Him to believe that He somehow allows things to happen. He also is not concerned with how we behave in the world, because He is not fooled, as our minds are, into believing we are bodies or that there is an external world. And so we would also be misperceiving Him if we believed that He cares about how we seem to act towards others. His only concern is how we *perceive* others whom we still see as separate from ourselves

The Holy Spirit, by the way, is not upset by nor does He blame you for your misperceptions of Him. His only function, in every situation and circumstance, is to remind us of another way of perceiving that does not reinforce guilt and pain and conflict. As Jesus points out, "**The Voice of the Holy Spirit does not command, because It is incapable of arrogance. It does not demand, because It does not seek control. It does not overcome, because It does not attack. It merely reminds. It is compelling only because of what It reminds you of. It brings to your mind the other way, remaining quiet even in the midst of the turmoil you may make**" (T.5.II.7.1,2,3,4,5,6). If you simply allow yourself to be a channel for the Holy Spirit's Love, which in this world would be Love's reflection, expressed as forgiveness (W.pl.60.1:4,5) , or nonjudgmental acceptance, you will find that you are not concerned with how others perceive you. And it is only the guilt in your own mind that is being triggered by how these women perceive you. But that is not a sin and, in fact, your reaction to them offers you a good learning

opportunity. For the only real healing any of us needs is to recognize that our own guilt over separation is not real, because the separation could never happen. Whenever that guilt is released, we will not react to how others perceive us, for in that moment our ego has disappeared and there is nothing within us that can react to or judge another.

Q #1172: Since we are all just projections of one mind, why didn't Jesus' return to the 'right' mind free us all? Does this mean that 6 billion or so separate egos must come to the truth separately? Doesn't that mean that each ego is in fact separate in a sense? Connected with that thought.... Considering that the whole point of this 'life' is, essentially, to escape it, would there be any point in having children? It seems that this only adds to the splintered mind and suffering. Does each new life in this world have the responsibility to free itself?

A: Your first question is one that has crossed the mind of just about every person who has taken up *A Course in Miracles*. It is an issue, though, only because the framework of all our questioning is that of linear time. We are programmed to perceive everything in terms of time and space, and therefore it is almost inevitable that we will misinterpret, or not understand at all, what Jesus teaches us about the mind, which is outside time and space. Jesus' objective in the lessons he gives us in the workbook is to help us become reacquainted with ourselves as decision-making minds so that we will perceive everything from a more helpful perspective. You might find it helpful to read our answer to Question #585, which discusses this problem, and also refers you to earlier answers pertaining to the issue you raise.

With regard to whether there is any point in having children, the answer would revolve around *purpose*. The decision can be wrong-minded (to reinforce separation and specialness) or right-minded (to learn forgiveness in the parent-child relationship). We have expanded discussions of this important topic in our answers to earlier questions -- #232 and #411.

Q #1173: Recently I visited several Internet forums on different subjects. People seemed to "hit out" at each other and argue so much, it reminded me very much of the Course's statement that this world is already an attack on the Son of God, made by himself. Since we regard the world we are living in as our "lives," does it mean, in the Course's perception of the world, that the very fact that we are "living" in this world is already an attack on ourselves? In other words, by "incarnating" into flesh and body are we being "auto aggressive"?

A: Yes. The attack on the Son of God is the mind's decision to be separate, and to identify with a body living in the world. The mind defends its choice by projecting out its guilt in countless scenarios for wars of opposition, not least among them, the many battles among students of the Course. Nothing misses the point more blatantly than the compulsion to defend a distinctive position regarding the teachings of *A Course in Miracles*. It proves that there is nothing the ego cannot use to defend separation. But then, there is nothing the Holy Spirit cannot use to heal the mind of belief in separation. And so, the world that the ego made as an attack (**W.p.II.3.2:1**) can become a classroom for the Holy Spirit's lessons of forgiveness. The goal of the classroom is to learn that neither the attack, nor the ensuing battles between opposing forces of any kind have any real effect on the mind's ability to choose peace. What takes the punch out of the attack is not judging it as sinful, because it has no effect; an illusory attack has brought forth an illusory world.

The lessons of forgiveness begin with willingness to look at the many forms of attack and judgment that present themselves in the course of living in this world, and seeing in them the reflection of the mind's choice to defend separation. In the case of "warring students," one might find judgments founded on the perception of these students as sinful wrong-doers. Missing the point is not cause for condemnation and exclusion, however eager the ego may be to make its case. It is a call for love expressed in discord

among students and is no different from the call for love of one who judges them. The important thing is to hear the call in oneself along with that of someone else, judging neither. This brings the mind in alignment with the Holy Spirit, transforms the battlefield into a classroom, and the attack into an opportunity. Practicing in this way with every situation that presents itself is how the mind is healed of the mistaken belief in the seemingly devastating effects of the Son of God's attack upon himself.

Q #1174: In Ken and Gloria's book "The Most Commonly Asked Questions About *A Course In Miracles*," they discuss the possibility that someone can be threatened by our "peace." They were clarifying the line in the Course that says we know we are truly at peace when all or meet or even think of us "share in our perfect peace" with the anger directed toward Jesus. Ken and Gloria said that in order to become threatened by our peace someone else would have to have first "experienced it as real and then become threatened by it." Does this mean that the person who becomes threatened senses that we do not want to compete with them but only want to be friends with them? Do they detect a sense of peace with ourselves? I just do not get why someone would be threatened by someone wanting to be peaceful with them.

A: To understand the dynamics of the ego thought system at work it is essential to look beneath the surface. For this purpose, a phrase used in the training of investigative teams applies aptly to the mind training taught in the Course: "nothing is as it seems." It is insane to think that peace would be a threat in any way, yet that is the ego's interpretation of anything related to the right mind of the Sonship. The ego is insane. The part of the mind that chooses to identify with the ego thought system is threatened by the part of the mind that knows peace. Its foundation is threatened by the possibility that the decision-making part of the mind may make a definitive choice against it in favor of peace, in which case it will cease to exist.

When peacefulness is perceived in someone else it is a reminder that the same peace is possible for oneself. All is well if the mind decides to choose peace and identify with the peace it perceives in another. However, if it chooses to identify with the insanity of the ego, it will perceive anything sane as a threat; fear then replaces peace. Guilt for choosing fear instead of peace is projected out in the form of a judgment against someone who seems peaceful. The judgment may come in the guise of envy, admiration, or a desire to bask in the comfort of the peacefulness the other possesses. Strange as it may seem, the ego always interprets this to mean: "if you have it and I don't, you stole it from me." This is the projected version of the mind's judgment against itself for thinking it stole God's power by deciding to reject the Identity given it by God and make up its own delusional separate identity. This hidden insane thought system is not visible on the surface. It is a disguised attack on oneself and the other person, masquerading as admiration or any number of "acceptable" sentiments. The Course teaches that any perception of difference is an attack, and attack engenders fear of counter-attack. Thus begins the ego's endless cycle of perceived threats to be defended against, including someone else's peace. That explains the gnawing, pervasive sense of vulnerability that gives reason to elaborate plans for security. The ego is under constant threat, and therefore in permanent defense mode because it is aware that at any moment the mind that chose for it can abolish it by choosing against it. That is why peace is perceived as a threat. It has nothing to do with the way another person behaves or what they say. It is the mind that chooses the ego that is threatened by the true peace abiding in the right mind, where the memory of God's Love is held. And again, the only reason one would fear God's Love is because the separate self cannot exist in the Oneness of His Love.

To follow the path of the Course's teachings, it is enough to be willing to notice how important it is to perceive difference. One of the goals of the Course is to teach us to see all these differences for what they are: weapons of the ego's defense strategy, and not to be deceived by the "beauty" of the world's kaleidoscope. Hidden behind the glitz is the fear of peace, and behind that fear is the fear of the Oneness of God's Love that we share. The hope of finding the true peace we seek (not to be confused with the bodily feeling of calm relaxation) begins with realizing we are afraid of it, and have buried the fear beneath layers of denial. This realization opens the door to releasing the fear that blocks the peace. The beginning of healing is to cease denying the sickness. That is why much of the Course is devoted to

exposing the ego's use of fear as defense against the peace of God. When we are no longer afraid of it, it will no longer be perceived as a threat: **“When we have overcome fear—not by hiding it, not by minimizing it, and not by denying its full import in any way—this [peace] is what you will really see” (T.12.II.9:5).**

Q #1175: I've noticed that night dreams are often mentioned in the general scope of *A Course in Miracles*. Could you clarify the role that night dreams play in the Course? Are we to pay attention to them as a source of specialness detection? Are they a sign of progress in the study of the Course?

On the other hand, I've hardly seen any testimony of healing reported -- not in the wonderful workshops on the net nor in the newsletter nor in the Electronic Outreach. If they are not praised in the Course, why not?

A: As we begin to identify ourselves increasingly with the mind and not with the body, we will begin to recognize that everything that we seem to be experiencing, whether we think we are a body awake or asleep, is nothing more than the play of symbols in our mind. When we awaken from a night dream, it is not difficult to recognize this. But the Course is asking us to generalize this awareness to all of our experiences. And so, from the perspective of forgiveness, we are asked to acknowledge that *all* our judgments, whether occurring while we seem to sleep or while we seem to be awake, are wrong and not justified. For there literally is no one out there doing anything to us, and so there is truly nothing to be judged, except the mistaken choice in the mind to identify with the ego thought system.

While we remain too fearful to accept the notion that “ideas leave not their source,” we can at least recognize the content of our reactions to our experiences, both waking and sleeping, and, when we find ourselves attributing our feelings to anyone or anything that seems to be outside and separate from us, ask ourselves if we are willing to consider the possibility that we are wrong. This at least opens the door to a different Teacher, and thus to a different experience.

Our sleeping dreams, once we seem to awaken from them, give us the opportunity to recognize how the mind operates in creating its own reality. It should become easy enough, with a little practice, to recognize the myriad ways, and forms, in which our ego attempts to disguise itself. And the correction for the mistaken choices of our dreams will be nothing more than the recognition that, whatever feelings I may have seemed to experience while I was asleep and dreaming, and no matter how justified they may have seemed within the dream, they could not have possibly been the result of anything outside my own mind, and so they simply represent a decision I have made for how I want to feel, while attempting to attribute those feelings to events that had seemed in the dream to be external to my own mind.

And so our sleeping dreams represent another opportunity to recognize the contents of our minds, but beyond that they have no special meaning or significance. There have been a number of other related questions on dreams within this service that you may find helpful, including Questions #41, #160 and #961.

As for your wondering about why there are no testimonies to healing through the Course reported anywhere -- the only place that healing occurs is in the mind and the only healing that needs to happen is my own, for there is no one else. So what is there to report?! For when my mind is healed, I will know that we all are one -- in the dream and in reality.

Q #1176: You teach that we don't change the world out there through forgiveness; we only change our perception. In my ego experience, however, when I catch the principle behind the problem the problem is

gone, and it doesn't occur anymore to me. If that is what you call change of perception, I'm with you. Nothing needs to be projected once I understand the content behind the "problem." Is it correct to conclude that everything that I bring from darkness into light -- forgiveness -- won't "hide" anymore in form, and, therefore, the principle/content brought to awareness won't happen again in my illusory world?

A: To use an extreme example of what we mean . . . if you were living under the control of a repressive, cruel dictator with no way of leaving, you could practice forgiveness by realizing that this dictator cannot take away the peace that is within you, regardless of the harsh external restrictions affecting you physically. You can thus be at peace internally, having no ill feelings toward the dictator, while your external living conditions remain wretchedly inadequate. In this case, your perception would have changed in the sense that you no longer are projecting your guilt from your mind onto anything external, including your own body. You have brought the darkness of judgment and hatred to the light of Jesus' love in your mind, and so you now look on everything through the eyes of that love. All grievances have thus dissolved and only love remains. Your problem is gone, because you have let go of the ego in this instance.

Sometimes what happens in a relationship where there are conflicts and grievances is that when one person chooses to shift from the ego's purpose (to keep separation alive) to the Holy Spirit's purpose (to see shared interests, thus undoing separation), the other person also breaks the special-relationship bargain with the ego, and then the relationship changes for the better. But this is not always the case, and one should have no investment in that happening. As Jesus emphasizes in *A Course in Miracles*, our *only* responsibility is to accept the Atonement for ourselves (**T.2.V.5:1**). When we accept the Atonement (that the separation never happened), there is no more guilt in our minds; and if there is no more guilt, there is no need for the defenses of denial and projection against the pain of that guilt. This is the essence of what Jesus teaches us in Lessons 79 and 80 -- there is only one problem and it has been solved already (**W.pl.79,80**). Regardless of what is going on externally, our inner peace would never be disturbed once we let go of our identification with the ego thought system.

Q #1177: As a result of my study of *A Course in Miracles* I've encountered an uncomfortable, and at times alarming, lessening of my identification with, and interest in the events and activities of my day-to-day experience. Is this an appropriate result from the shift of thinking that is described as the objective of the Course teachings? How are these feelings of detachment from the dream reconciled with a participation in the curriculum of my life experience so that I may teach and so learn to join as Jesus describes?

A: Learning not to take oneself too seriously is indeed one of the rewards of applying the principles of forgiveness to one's life. It is the result of recognizing that everything that occurs is a projection of the mind. Although it is true that the events and activities of day-to-day living are part of the illusion, until the mind is healed of all belief in the separation they are important opportunities in the classroom of forgiveness. The teaching contained in the text and the workbook lessons is meant to be applied to the specific experiences of one's life. All the events and activities do lose the meaning they had before the study of the Course, but can now serve the Holy Spirit's curriculum of healing the mind of the thought of separation: "**The Holy Spirit teaches you to use what the ego has made, to teach the opposite of what the ego has 'learned'**" (**T.7.IV.3:3**). There could be no higher purpose for the activities that fill our days. Nothing but the ego's devastating curriculum of separation is lost when the mind shifts to the Holy Spirit's lessons. Learning to see everything as a classroom for the practice of forgiveness more than compensates for the loss of interest.

One of the goals for a student of the Course is to become a "happy learner." The energy no longer expended in the pursuit of worn-out interests can now be spent paying attention to the activity of the mind that is often very busy putting up "interesting" obstacles to the awareness of love's presence (**T.in.1:7**) in the form of attack thoughts and judgments based on separation. They are the reflection of the mind's fear of fully accepting the memory of God's Love that the Holy Spirit represents. If we are willing to look at

these obstacles, without judging, changing, justifying or defending them, they can be given to the Holy Spirit to be healed. As Jesus tells us in the text: **“If you would be a happy learner, you must give everything you have learned to the Holy Spirit, to be unlearned for you” (T.14.II.6:1).** Engaging in this practice of forgiveness is how we join with Jesus and journey with him to the final goal of his Course.

Q #1178: What, then, is the nature of thought (and/or Thought) in conjunction with the laws of chaos?

A: The split mind holds two mutually exclusive thoughts: the ego's thought of separation and the Holy Spirit's thought that separation is impossible. The “laws of chaos” is a term that refers to the insanity that follows when the mind decides to take the ego's thought of separation seriously. They govern all the thinking of the world in complete opposition to reason, which abides only in the truth. There is no reason within the illusion of separation, so there is no real thought: **“While thoughtless ideas preoccupy your mind, the truth is blocked. Recognizing that your mind has been merely blank, rather than believing that it is filled with real ideas, is the first step to opening the way to vision” (W.8.3:2,3)** and the way out of chaos.

One of the important teaching goals of the Course is to help us understand that nothing is really happening in the dream of separation because there is nothing outside the unity of God and His one Son. Jesus tells us in many different ways in the Course, that the figure in the dream does nothing. It does not see, or *think*, or hear: **“...sights and sounds the body can perceive are meaningless. It cannot see nor hear. It does not know what seeing is what listening is for. It is as little able to perceive as it can judge or understand or know. Its eyes are blind; its ears are deaf. It can not think, and so it cannot have effects” (T.28.V.4:4,5,6,7,8,9)**. Thus, the brain produces ideas the mind has fabricated to fill the void that results when the mind turns from truth and seeks meaning in illusion. The ideas all support the choice for separation and its companion chaos. The term thinking can be replaced with the term choosing, which is the only activity of the split mind. Thinking, therefore, is synonymous with choosing, and thought with choice. The brain does not think; it reflects the mind's dictates. The split mind does not think; it chooses between the ego and the Holy Spirit. The only real thoughts, therefore, are the thoughts I think with God **(W.51.4:4)**, which, in the mind of the sleeping Son, means choosing the Holy Spirit.

In reality, God's only Thought is His Love for the Son, and the Son's only thought is his love for the Father. That is the meaning of workbook lesson 45: **“ God is the Mind with which I think” (W.p.I.45).** Everything else is the chaos of the ego's insane thought system, whose foundation is the belief that sin is real, God is a vengeful murderer, and so guilt and fear are justified. In this chaos lies the reversal of reason and of truth. God's laws of love, innocence, and life are replaced with hate, guilt, and death. His Thought is exchanged for thoughtless madness. In choosing separation, the mind chooses the insanity of the laws of chaos, no matter how brilliant the world's “thinking” may appear to be. As it chooses against God, it chooses against thought. The laws of chaos, then, are the absence of thought. The Holy Spirit's teaching of forgiveness is the correction to these laws, for it means recognizing that the mind that put them into effect can make a different choice, thereby restoring awareness of its decision-making power to the mind.

While the mind remains split between the ego and the Holy Spirit, vigilance for thoughts of judgment and attack is needed, for they reflect the mind's choice for the ego. Learning to identify with the mind in this way establishes mindfulness, and thus undoes belief in the thoughtlessness that gave rise to the laws of chaos. Becoming mindful is the goal of the important mind-training exercises of the workbook. It is the only meaningful use for the thoughts we think we think. They are undone as their emptiness becomes apparent, making way for the laws of God that have never changed: **“ Nothing but the laws of God has ever been, and nothing but His Will will ever be” (T.10.IV.5:5)**.

Q #1179: I read the term God's Son, does that pertain to us as well? Because some of the statements in *A Course in Miracles* regarding the Son of God are confusing to me.

A: Your question touches the heart of the separation dilemma -- identity confusion. In reality there is only the Oneness of God and His Son; defined in the Glossary as the second Person of the Trinity. This is our true Identity/true Self, always referred to in the Course as God's Son or the Son of God. This Identity remains unchanged by the "tiny, mad idea" of separation that crept into the mind of God's Son. Confusion sets in when the mind decides to believe this insane idea is real. Then there seems to be a son/self who is separate from the Father, fragmented into countless individual identities whom we call "us." Fragmentation is thus the essence of separation -- each part distinguished from the next. The mind is now split between the identity of separation (the ego), and that of the memory (the Holy Spirit) of its oneness with the Father: **"In a split mind, identity must seem to be divided" (T.27.II.11:1).**

In the Course, Jesus speaks to the split mind of the separated Son who no longer knows who he is, having identified with a body and seeming to exist in a world of form. Very early in the text, Jesus puts forth the separation creed, addressing this split mind: **"...you believe that what God created can be changed by your own mind. ... you believe that what is perfect can be rendered imperfect or lacking. ... you believe that you can distort the creations of God, including yourself. ... you believe that you can create yourself, and that the direction of your own creation is up to you (T.2.I.1:9,10,11,12).** Here, "you" refers to everyone who identifies with the thought of separation (most of us, most of the time). Also found in the Course are many passages in which Jesus speaks of our true Identity: **"... God's Son is guiltless (T.14.V.2:1) "God's Son is One" (T.17.III.1:2), " God's Son is perfect, or he cannot be God's Son (T.30.VI.9:1), "You stand in light, strong in the sinlessness in which you were created, and in which you will remain throughout eternity" (W.pl.94.2:6).** In these passages, "you" refers to the true Self that is one with God and knows not of separate parts or a split mind. In either case, "you" refers to God's Son for there is no one else. It is important to understand this distinction; otherwise identity confusion will be compounded by the belief that Jesus is addressing the body/the figure in the dream. That is *never* the case.

One of the important goals of the Course is to teach the confused separated Son of God that he is not a self, but a Self. **"Your goal is to find out who you are, having denied your Identity by attacking creation and its Creator. Now you are learning how to remember the truth" (W.pl.62.2:3,4).** The process involves learning to distinguish between when Jesus is addressing the self and when he is reminding us of our true Self. It is an important process of gradually dis-identifying with the body in order to identify with the split mind, and eventually with the right mind that reflects the Self. The first step is paying careful attention to the upsets and conflicts, large and small, that present themselves every day. They reflect the mind's choice to deny its identity as a mind/God's Son, and to identify with the body instead. Being willing to make that simple recognition identifies the problem at its source (the mind), where the correction can be found. It reminds the mind that it has the power to choose. This is a very important step in the mind's return to acknowledgment of its Identity as God's Son. In the seeming dream of separation, the power to choose unites the Son with the creative power he shares with the Father. Each step in choosing brings the Son closer to full acceptance of his Identity, and will eventually undo all belief in the alien identity of a separate self. Then the ultimate answer to the identity crisis will ring true: **"You are God's Son" (W.pl.199.8:1).**

Q #1180: Outside of the churches and the Bible, the concept of *sin* has almost no place. It is an obscure term to many people. I somewhat understand the meaning of *sin* in *A Course in Miracles*, but I have difficulty applying it to the undoing of my mind's illusion. I don't see sinners and sins; yet I experience suffering. I can't believe that I killed God, and find the idea completely ridiculous and insane. The idea that I made a world separate from God makes me feel that I have made a very foolish mistake, and I can see that I have lost myself in this illusion of a world. I am grateful to God for the Holy Spirit and the teaching of Jesus to help me and my brothers out of this complicated mess! It isn't the punishment from God that scares me, but the consequences of having chosen to believe in a world without God. By this choice I

have created a nightmare that seem to have trapped me like a psychedelic bad trip. Am I involved in denial because I cannot relate to *sin* ? Is *sin* a true archetypal concept in the background of everyone's mind, even a Tibetan Buddhist? Is blaming ourselves for the separation the same as saying that we are sinners?

A: There are many people in both the East and the West who cannot relate to the idea of *sin* . But there is another way of describing what *A Course in Miracles* means by *sin* that practically everyone can connect with, and that is the idea of *selfishness* or *self-centeredness* . It would be hard indeed to find someone who has never been selfish in the sense of being preoccupied with satisfying his own needs at someone else's expense -- not really caring about the needs of others as long as one's own are met. We all know what *self-interest* means, and how many times we evaluate situations and relationships only in terms of their impact on us -- the what's-in-it-for-me syndrome, for example -- thinking of ourselves first, and ignoring suffering or distress that does not directly affect us. (But the Course is not naive in this; it does suggest that we attend to every situation of need, near or afar.) This kind of thinking pervades all levels of relationships: international, national, business, athletics, families, interpersonal, and so on. It is universal because it is the DNA of the ego, so to speak, the foundation of its thought system.

We all as *one Son* separated from God, the Course teaches, and therefore this attitude informs the thinking of every single person whose mind is not ego-free. Separation from God means separation from oneness, so no matter how we describe the motivation for leaving oneness, it would always have something to do with wanting to be autonomous and special, and an abhorrence for joining or unity that does not support an individualized way of existing. We would want to keep as far away as possible from undifferentiated oneness (Heaven), intensely fearing, as the Course describes it, our disappearance back into the Heart of God (**W.pII.14.5:5**) .

Because of this, we all must be in terrible conflict deep within our minds, well concealed from our conscious awareness. We know that we intentionally left our Source and our true Identity to establish an identity more to our liking (an act of supreme selfishness). This means we banished God and His creation from our minds and set up a whole new mode of existing, which then required that we hide the real origin of our existence, as we would not want to be walking around with the identity of "banisher-of-love-and-God." Layers of deception and defenses then became necessary to protect the deception, and to deal with the self-recrimination over doing something we (the one Son) perceived as an attack. The ensuing sense of having a fraudulent existence also needed to be dealt with. These dynamics are all involved in what the Course calls *sin* , although you need not use that religiously based term.

What you seem to be sensing is the self-hatred over what clearly was a bad choice with horrendous consequences. Again, while it is not necessary to see sinners and sin, it would be awfully hard to miss the rampant selfishness and self-centeredness in the world and the negative effects of that. An expectation of retaliation almost always accompanies the experience of guilt, but that would not have to be focused on God -- there could just be a general sense that you probably deserve to be punished for what you have done to others, and to yourself. Perhaps this is behind your feeling afraid of "the consequences of having chosen to live in a world without God." If you truly accepted this as simply a mistaken choice, you could just admit your mistake and then make the correct choice, which really is the point Jesus is helping us to arrive at. But since you have not been able to change your mind, something else must be intervening in your mind that prevents you from making the right choice. That is what the Course identifies as the fear of loss, and the fear of having to pay somehow for what we did. We definitely would feel trapped here if those were our only options, which the ego has convinced us is the case. In the section in the text called "**The Fear of Redemption**" (**T.13.III**) , Jesus helps us understand these dynamics and how he can help us undo them .

Q #1181: I have been a student of *A Course in Miracles* since the mid-eighties. It is a very difficult Course. The ultimate reason for my difficulties with the Course in my life, I believe, is that I do not trust

God-Jesus. In lesson 71 it says that we should ask God "What would you have me do? Where would you have me go? What would you have me say, and to whom?" My fear is that He will ask me to endure a physical or psychological "crucifixion" and poof, I'll be history. Again and again I clearly see myself sitting with Jesus as he asks for my trust and extends his hand. I stall. I don't give it. I hem and haw. I truly believe if I would just accept the hand he is offering, my so called difficulties would dissipate.

A: Getting in touch with how much we do not believe Jesus, much less trust him, is a major milestone in the journey with the Course. This realization cuts through layers of denial, pretense, spiritual arrogance, and specialness. There are two important factors hidden in your concerns that hold the hope of your release from them: you know Jesus is there, and you know he does not leave in spite of the ego's antics. That makes all the difference. You don't have to trust him. In fact if your trust were complete and you believed everything he says, you wouldn't need him. Jesus has not come because we trust him; he has come because we *need* him. Moreover, he comes precisely because we do not trust him. If Jesus is the symbol of the right mind, and we are not sure we actually have a right mind, much less the use of it, how could we possibly trust him? Faith in the mind's ability to choose to identify with the memory of God's Love, and return to the Oneness we share with Him is lost when the mind wanders off in pursuit of the ego's fun and games. This is expressed in the fear of crucifixion you describe, that claims: "if I take Jesus' hand -- no more fun and games." Then there's the other part of the mind that whispers: "no Jesus, no peace." This is the experience of the split mind doing its dance. The question is to whom does one listen?

You have unveiled one of the sneakiest tricks the ego has come up with for students of the Course: using it as an excuse for not truly accepting its message for oneself. This insight in itself peels away layers of defense. Anything that unmask the ego's dark secrets, hidden in the vaults of denial, is a step into the light. Those steps cannot be taken by the ego and so they must be taken with the one who leads us, which means there is a part of your mind that has taken his hand. It is as simple as that. The Holy Spirit asks no more: "[He] **asks of you but this; bring to Him every secret you have locked away from Him. Open every door to Him, and bid Him enter the darkness and lighten it away. At your request He enters gladly. He brings the light to darkness if you make the darkness open to Him. But what you hide He cannot look upon... Bring, therefore, all your dark and secret thoughts to Him, and look upon them with Him. He holds the light, and you the darkness. They cannot coexist when both of You together look on them. His judgment must prevail, and He will give it to you as you join your perception to His**" (T.14.VII.6:1,2,3,4,5,8,9,10).

Jesus knows his students don't trust him or believe his message: "**We understand that you do not believe all this. How could you, when the truth is hidden deep within, under a heavy cloud of insane thoughts, dense and obscuring, yet representing all you see? (W.41.5:1,2)** . That is why the heart of forgiveness is uncovering what the ego would keep hidden: "**It merely looks, and waits, and judges not**" (W.pII.1.4:3). There is nothing you need do to the resistance you have revealed to yourself, except not to judge it. When you are ready to relinquish the ego's pain for the peace Jesus has promised, and in which you *do* believe, you will.

Q #1182: In your answer to Question #107, you say: "So you are quite correct in concluding that looking with Jesus, and choosing against the ego would automatically give you the same vision as Jesus." This is in the context of feeling attacked or shamed -- at work, home, whatever. My experience is that I am able to at least step back and realize that the feeling is not coming from outside, that whatever someone said or did is being latched onto for the purposes of the ego, but I rarely feel total freedom from it. The feeling continues, and with it a recurring attempt to step back from it. It's not simply "over." Does this make sense? Is it a process of then letting go more? Is it possible to watch the discomfort but have the discomfort, the swirling in the pit of the stomach, continue? Or do I still want it even though it doesn't feel good? I rarely "automatically [feel] the same vision as Jesus."

A: Your experience is quite common. The fact that you do not experience the shift does not mean that you have not made progress. You at least realize that you are not upset for the reason you think (**W.pl.5**) , which means you would be less inclined to justify your anger or shame. That is a major step forward, although you may not experience it that way. And, yes, it is possible to watch the discomfort while you are having it. It sounds strange, but that shows that you are beginning to disidentify from your ego. The part of you that is watching is not the ego (as long as there is no judgment involved). But because the discomfort is still there, part of you must still be attracted to victimization. That's normal. We keep layers of defenses concealed from awareness because of our fear of letting go of the ego all at once. We are too afraid of what we think might happen, given the vows we made to be faithful to the ego and its ambassadors of sin, guilt, and fear (**T.21.IV; T.19.IV.D.6**).

In *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus encourages us to be patient in our practice and our expectations as we proceed through the stages of healing. That is why he uses the metaphors of a journey and a ladder, and speaks about his curriculum as a process. In Lesson 284, he outlines four basic stages that we would all typically go through in our practice of what we are learning: **“This is the truth, at first to be but said and then repeated many times; and next to be accepted as but partly true, with many reservations. Then to be considered seriously more and more, and finally accepted as the truth”** (**W.pl.284.1:5,6**). Trust that your willingness to follow Jesus as your teacher will lead to the outcome he guarantees you will achieve (**T.8.V.4**).

Q #1183: Could you explain to me what the course means when it says, "Give all to All?"

A: To understand this phrase we must include the first part of the statement: **“To Have, Give All to All”** (**T.6.V.A**) It means that to have *all* the Holy Spirit offers, we must give *all* the ego's lies over to Him to be transformed, and must be willing to include everyone in the blessings we receive, or they will not be ours. The Holy Spirit's lessons are reversals of the ego's laws. In this one, we find a correction for the ego's belief in scarcity: **“To the ego, to give anything implies that you will have to do without it. When you associate giving with sacrifice, you give only because you believe that you are somehow getting something better, and can therefore do without the thing you give. 'Giving to get' is an inescapable law of the ego... (T.4.II.6:3, 4, 5)**. In the Course, Jesus contrasts the ego's “giving to get” with the Holy Spirit's **“giving and receiving are the same”** (**T.26.I.3:1**). Jesus is addressing the split mind of the Sonship that contains two thoughts; the memory of the truth of God's Love (right mind), and the illusory belief in separation (wrong mind). Only the content of the right mind can truly be given or received, since only it reflects truth. Everything else is some form the ego's law of “giving to get,” or its other favorite -- sacrifice. The content of the right mind that can be communicated, given and received, is some form of the extension of love: **“You cannot really give anything but love to anyone or anything, nor can you really receive anything but love from them”** (**T.12.VII.9:4**). When love is given, it never diminishes in the giver. As is true for everything of the Holy Spirit, **“ It increases in you as you give it to your brother”** (**T.5.II.2:7**).

Willingness to look upon a brother without judgment releases one's self from judgment. By the same token, holding a grievance against one person is enough to keep peace away. As long as one attack thought is cherished and withheld from love, peace is impossible. In order to be free of guilt and have the full experience of the beauty of the right mind, we must let everyone off the hook. Therefore, we may restate the phrase you quote: to have peace/love/innocence/true happiness, give every attack thought to the Holy Spirit, and in so doing, all of these will be received for oneself and given to everyone. **“Be willing, then, to give all you have held outside the truth to Him Who knows the truth, and in Whom all is brought to truth”** (**T.17.I.6:6**).

Q #1184: I need help with a forgiveness lesson. A situation occurred where forgiveness needed to be applied and I was able to do that mentally, but I still feel guarded around the person. Is it necessary to have complete restoration with the person? This person doesn't even desire more than a surface relationship with me.

A: *A Course in Miracles* teaches us that forgiveness is only about the content in your mind, not about behavior. It is about withdrawing the projections of your own guilt from the other person, and then letting go of the guilt within yourself. Your guiltlessness then allows you to perceive everyone through the non-judgmental eyes of Jesus or the Holy Spirit. It is possible to be free of judgment (condemnation and anger) toward another person, yet still not trust his ego -- egos are not trustworthy. So if you feel "guarded" in his presence, it could be because you sense that he is still identified with his ego, and not to be trusted with regard to certain forms of interaction. But your right-minded perception would nonetheless see him as a Son of God, and so you would not feel separate from him. You would realize that his ego is no different from anyone else's, that he also has a right mind like everyone else, and that his ego choices have no effect on his true Identity. In an advanced spiritual state, you would feel no fear and you would perceive the call for love behind all of his ego manifestations. Then all of your responses to this person would flow from that holy perception, reflecting the compassion Jesus has for each one of us.

Q #1185: A question about level confusion. If I remember correctly, all illness is caused by level confusion. I would think that identification with all things of Level Two would cause illness. Please explain. Perhaps your answer might enlighten me about some subtleties of level confusion. If feeling threatened, I am to use denial properly, i.e. "nothing in this world can harm me" and yet not say "nothing in this world can harm me because I am not a body" since body denial is improper. True?

A: When we speak of Level Two, we are not speaking about a level of reality. We are referring to a level of discourse in *A Course in Miracles*. Sometimes Jesus makes Level One statements: **"Pain is impossible,"** for example (**W.pII.284.1:2**). Well, since that statement does nothing for most of us -- we continue to experience pain as real -- Jesus then must talk to us about pain as though it were real, even though he knows it is not. This gets us into the other level of discourse in *A Course in Miracles*. Thus, Level Two discussions focus on helping us learn about right-minded and wrong-minded ways of interpreting pain, to stay with that example. Level One says that all perception is illusory. Level Two contrasts wrong-minded and right-minded perception.

Level confusion regarding sickness refers to the "levels" of mind and body, where we tend to think that sickness originates in the body in some way, not with a decision the mind makes. The foundation of this is **"the belief that there is a creative ability in matter which the mind cannot control"**

(T.2.IV.2:8). What corrects this distortion is understanding that the body is nothing but a projection of the mind; it is never anything other than an idea in the mind. A sick body is still an idea that has never left the mind; a healthy body is an idea that has never left the mind. It is a confusion of levels to think that physical and psychological symptoms are caused by something other than a choice made by one's mind.

Now to the issue of using denial properly. If you are feeling threatened, the first thing you want to do is acknowledge that, and not pretend you are not feeling threatened, by covering over your feelings and trying to convince yourself that you are not a body, when you are feeling very much like a body. Denying what you are feeling will not help you advance spiritually, as Jesus tells us (**T.2.IV.3:8,9,10,11,12**). It would be more helpful to do something that would calm you down or take you out of the threatening situation. Then you can have a conversation with yourself: "I know the Course teaches that nothing in this world can harm me, but I feel threatened right now, and so I will ask the Holy Spirit to be my Teacher as I go through this experience. That will help me not judge or blame myself or anyone else, and that is what will bring healing to my mind, regardless of how my body is feeling." This is the compromise approach that Jesus encourages us to follow that meets us where we are and gently leads us toward the experience of true invulnerability and innocence (**T.2.IV.5**). At this level, we practice "true denial" by

learning that we can be peaceful regardless of the condition of our body. Nothing external can give us the peace of God or take it away from us.

Q #1186: I would like some clarity around choosing *A Course in Miracles* as my spiritual path yet devoting time to yoga and meditation. I consider the Course to be my spiritual path with forgiveness being the way out of the dream. However, I also find that practicing yoga, meditation, and chanting are great tools for me to use to focus, increase my awareness, and remember my divinity. I also use yoga as a way to see the body and its energy symbolically, while understanding that it's not real. I also love my yoga community. Are there any conflicts with this?

A: Many students continue with other practices such as yoga and meditation while they are learning to integrate the principles of *A Course in Miracles* into their lives. There is no need to discontinue what you find helpful, whether that is yoga, going to a fitness center, meditating, long-distance running, or eating organic foods. Why stop doing something that helps you feel better and function better? Similarly, there is no need to leave a community you feel comfortable in and love so much just because you are a student of the Course.

Our goal as Course students is to become less judgmental and selfish as we go through our day interacting with others -- family, friends, groups, co-workers, team mates, etc. This can be practiced in any milieu -- forgiveness can be learned and practiced while doing yoga, shopping, or playing golf. The idea is to shift the purpose of all these kinds of activities from achieving bodily results to learning that everything is a classroom in which either the ego or the Holy Spirit is teaching you, depending on your choice (the content in your mind). With the ego as your teacher, you will continually feel special and separate in some way -- with interests you do not share with everyone else. With the Holy Spirit or Jesus as your Teacher, you will experience yourself as less and less separate from others, as you realize your interests are not separate from anyone else's. Form will recede in importance as content ascends and occupies more and more of your attention.

The discussion in our answer to Question #282 might be helpful in shedding further light on this issue.

Q #1187: This idea of us choosing to project our guilt onto our body really has me, and I just want to check my thoughts with you. Are you saying that *A Course in Miracles* is saying that if all of a sudden I have an outbreak of acne, for example, which is really upsetting me and which makes me not feel good about the way that I look, that I actually chose this? This happened recently and then I realized afterward that the acne may have happened from my recent chocolate binge. So, assuming that I am right; the theory does not make sense to me, because if I had known the chocolate would cause this, I would not have eaten it. Is the Course saying that we choose on some level to remain ignorant of some worldly cause/effect relationships so that we feel victimized? How can someone choose to feel victimized if they are unaware of the possible consequences of their action or actions and they truly felt they were following a good course? Do we know on some level that we are wrong?

A: The choices are made by the decision maker in the mind outside time and space, not by the person who appears to be living in the world as a body. Thus Jesus asks, **"Who is the 'you' who are living in this world?" (T.4.II.11:8)**. The understanding of this is made a little easier by going back to the ego's plan that we have identified with in our minds. The main piece in its strategy to keep us bound to it is to render us mind-less and then ensure that we never regain awareness of our identity as decision-making minds. This strategy results ultimately in our experience of ourselves as bodies subject to all kinds of laws not of our making: laws of biology, physics, chemistry, nutrition, etc. We thus have become oblivious to the source of all of our perceptions -- our mind's decision-making power -- and are left believing we come into a world ruled by pre-existing laws. Jesus responds: **"Perhaps you think you did not make the**

world, but came unwillingly to what was made already, hardly waiting for your thoughts to give it meaning. Yet in truth you found exactly what you looked for when you came” (W.pl.132.4:4,5). This is one of the Course's more radical teachings, to be sure, but it is necessary to come back to this level in order to understand the nature and purpose of the body, and why we experience things the way we do. It is the key to resolving your problem.

The body simply carries out the wishes of the mind; it has no life of its own. This is explained in many places in the Course; for example, **“The mind makes . . . all decisions that are responsible for the body's condition” (M.12.5:7); “The Secret Vows” (T.28.VI).** Thus, it is not *you* as an individual person in the world who chooses to be victimized; it is the mind fulfilling its pledge of fidelity to the ego that so chooses. The mind decides to deny its identity as mind and substitute another identity in its quest to remain separate from God but not be held responsible for that state. It therefore makes up a world with certain laws and then projects itself into the world as a body that is born and eventually dies, in the process deliberately forgetting it (the mind) did this. The body does not age because of the laws of aging; and the face does not break out because of chemical interactions with chocolate (although within the world that is true). The mind is running the whole show in order to achieve its objectives. A vulnerable body reacting favorably or unfavorably to laws external to it is an essential part of the mind's plan. That is what Jesus is helping us to understand. It is the mind that has a need to perceive external victimization to avoid seeing itself as the victimizer of God, and so it makes the whole thing happen. It is all made up! But it is also very convincing, as we can all attest. Jesus points out that **“resistance to recognizing this is enormous, because the existence of the world as you perceive it depends on the body being the decision maker” (M.5.II.1:7).**

In **“Sickness is a defense against the truth,”** Jesus explains that these decisions are made in clear awareness, but for the plan to work, the mind has to forget immediately what it did: **“. . . your plan requires that you must forget you made it, so it seems to be external to your own intent; a happening beyond your state of mind, an outcome with a real effect on you, instead of one effected by yourself. It is this quick forgetting of the part you play in making your own ‘reality’ that makes defenses seem to be beyond your own control” (W.pl.136.4:3; 5:1).** Again, Jesus is referring only to the *you* that is the mind, the decision maker. He is never talking about the bodily *you*, because he is telling us there is no such critter! **“The idea of separation produced the body and remains connected to it, making it sick because of the mind's identification with it. You think you are protecting the body by hiding this connection, for this concealment seems to keep your identification safe from the ‘attack’ of truth. If you but understood how much this strange concealment has hurt your mind, and how confused your identification has become because of it!” (T.19.I.7:7,8; 8:1; see also T.18.VI.9).**

The confusion of the body/brain with the mind is the root of many of the problems students have with *A Course in Miracles*. And it is a natural mistake to make, because we have no awareness of ourselves as minds (paradoxically, a choice made by our own minds). That is why we need a teacher like Jesus who is outside the dream. He has provided us with a carefully planned mind- training program that will restore to our awareness what we split off, our true Identity as one with our Creator. We need but humbly admit that we may be wrong about what we think is real, and that his non-judgmental presence in our minds will lovingly guide us on our journey back to the Home we never truly left.

For further study of the mind-brain issue, see Questions #117, #391, #825iii, and #901.

Q #1188: My former religious education has oriented me towards the idea that "as one sows, does one reap." However the idea of a consequential relationship with our behavior is absent from *A Course in Miracles*. One is only required to forgive and our actions, good or bad, are only illusions, which do not exist. But if it follows that the Course instructs nothing regarding behavior, why would forgiveness be an important element as forgiveness is applied towards imagined wrongs or sins or errors committed?

Finally, if there is no reality of behavior how can there be forgiveness for what never happened? Ignoring the matter may seem more accurate.

A: The questions you raise may make sense within the context of your former religious education, but the Course begins from radically different premises and its teachings can only be understood and appreciated when we recognize that it is saying something very different from nearly every other spiritual teaching the world has to offer (e.g., **T.18.VII.4,5,6**) . While the Course, it is true, is not concerned with behavior, it is very concerned with thought, which is the source of all perceived behavior (**T.2.VI.3; T.4.IV.2:1; T.5.V.8:3**) . It is our thoughts, not our actions, that the Course asserts have consequences (e.g., **T.12.III.7; W.pl.54.1,2**) . So, while the Course may not say that we reap what we sow in terms of behavior, it implores us to recognize that our thoughts produce very definite experiences within our minds (e.g., **W.pl.132.1,2**) , and that there are really only two categories of thoughts -- right-minded thoughts and wrong-minded thoughts, each with an outcome diametrically opposed to the other.

The Course's focus is on the mind because, from its perspective, the world is nothing more than a dream (**T.4.I.4:4,5; T.18.II.5:1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11; T.27.VII.13**) . Consider that while you sleep at night and dream of vicious attacks and cruelties perpetrated by other figures against you or your loved ones, you may desire vengeance or seek to make others pay for their destructive actions within your dream. But once you awaken, or if you know you are dreaming while you remain asleep, you understand that seeking to hold any of the figures in your dream accountable for their actions makes no sense and is really quite silly -- there are no real figures doing evil to others, but only thoughts or symbols within your own mind interacting according to the script your own unconscious mind has written. The problem is not with the symbols in your dream but with the thoughts within your mind that lie behind the symbols you seem to be experiencing. You would readily recognize, if you knew you were dreaming, that the only meaningful choice is between continuing to dream and awakening (**T.29.IV.1**) . To be concerned with what does or doesn't happen with the figures within your sleeping dream is only to continue to indulge in fantasy for your own apparent amusement and entertainment. The Course is inviting us to generalize this recognition to our lives in the world, which the Course refers to as our **"waking dreams"** (**T.18.II.5:12,13,14,15**) .

What lies beneath your question is the belief that we must all pay for our sins and it is an unfair universe where people can get away with murder. But if there really is no one other than myself, then to hold on to that belief and desire for earthly justice means I've been hoodwinked by the ego once again into wanting to make attack and grievances real, which keeps the dream of separation real in my mind, and keeps me apart from God's Love. Forgiveness is never for anyone but myself. And it can never be a matter of ignoring my experiences and calling that forgiveness, for my experiences always reflect which teacher I have chosen within my own mind. And when I believe I can simply ignore my own choices, I am secretly choosing the ego, with all the unpleasant consequences that follow from that choice -- sin, guilt and fear, and all their various expressions in form.

What ultimately needs forgiving is our own decision for separation, and not anyone's behavior within the dream, which we may have judged as bad or wrong or sinful. Yes, the Course says there ultimately is nothing to forgive, because it's all a dream. But while we are too afraid of awakening, then having a non-judgmental attitude toward all that we are perceiving -- which is what the Course means by forgiveness -- is the only way that we don't reinforce the reality of the dream in our own mind. Jesus describes this process in the manual for teachers: **"God's teachers choose to look on dreams a while. It is a conscious choice. For they have learned that all choices are made consciously, with full awareness of their consequences. The dream says otherwise, but who would put his faith in dreams once they are recognized for what they are? Awareness of dreaming is the real function of God's teachers"** (**M.12.6:2,3,4,5,6**).

Gradually, through that nonjudgmental attitude of forgiveness, we release our investment in our own guilt and sense of sinfulness, which are the hidden motivating forces behind the dream, just as our own unresolved inner conflicts and guilt are the source of our sleeping nightmares. And as we release the guilt, the fear of awakening gradually subsides, until that instant when we realize nothing matters except God's Love, which is our and all our seemingly separate brothers' true reality.

For a related question that addresses your concern over whether we should reap what we sow, see Question #363, which considers the issue in the context of the principle of karma in relationship to the Course's teachings. You may also find Questions #514i, #577 and #738 -- all on karma -- of some interest as well.

Q #1189: Do you have any idea what we will be doing in the right mind, being that we will have no lack, no body, no senses? It is hard to imagine a life without pleasure, goals, accomplishments. What are we going to be doing? And with what, since we won't have a body? Will we have an incorruptible body? And if we won't have a body, will we be able to still touch, feel, laugh, play, etc.

A: There is no need to worry. When the mind of the Sonship is completely healed and returns to full acceptance of its oneness with God, it will have no other awareness but that of the Father's Love. This is the state of pure spirit and the only reality. It is unnecessary and impossible to understand or describe this state from the perspective of the unhealed split mind. When the mind chooses to believe that separation from God is possible, it also identifies with the body and completely forgets that it is a mind with the power to choose. That explains why it seems so alien, and even undesirable, to consider any kind of experience that does not involve the physical, psychological, or emotional body in some way: **"You cannot even think of God without a body, or in some form you think you recognize" (T.18.VIII.1:7) .**

Meanwhile, the more immediate goal of *A Course in Miracles* is to learn to identify with the mind that has been forgotten, through the process of forgiveness. Because resistance is strong and the mind's attachment to the body-identity is intense, the process is gentle and gradual. It requires only willingness to begin to recognize that the experiences of one's life are projections of the mind's choice to believe the ego's lie of separation or the Holy Spirit's memory of God's Love. The foundation of the ego thought system is the belief that something external to the mind can have an effect on it. Everything is then perceived and judged from this viewpoint, and used to prove that the world is real and separation is a fact. The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, has come to teach us that *nothing* external to the mind has any effect on it because there is nothing outside the mind. To learn this **"requires willingness to question every value that you hold" (T.24.in.2:1) .** "Every value" refers to all the things associated with the body that reflect the ego thought system: pleasure, accomplishments, feelings, playing, etc. These things are all substitutes for the peace of God that was abandoned when the mind chose the ego. They are cover-ups for the intense pain that follows the choice for separation. The mind has become so confused about its identity it no longer is able to distinguish between pleasure and pain, nor is it aware of what it truly wants: **"Therefore ask not of yourself what you need, for you do not know, and your advice to yourself will hurt you. For what you think you need (everything you think is pleasurable and meaningful) will merely serve to tighten up your world against the light, and render you unwilling to question the value that this world can really hold for you" (T.13.VII.11:5,6).**

The only value the world has is as a classroom to learn the lessons of the Holy Spirit embodied in forgiveness. Until the mind is fully healed, and every pleasure, goal, or accomplishment of the world is of no interest, forgiveness is our only concern. The unhealed mind is much better occupied with the process of healing than with the perfect Oneness that lies far beyond its ability to comprehend. Fear of the perfect Love the Father shares with His Son prevents the experience of it, and makes it seem not only unappealing, as you have pointed out, but terrifying. And so a "gentler dream," accomplished through forgiveness, precedes full awakening: **"[God's Son] could not waken to reality without the sweat of terror and a scream of mortal fear, unless a gentler dream preceded his awaking, and allowed his calmer mind to welcome, not to fear, the Voice that calls with love to waken him; a gentler dream, in which his suffering was healed and where his brother was his friend. God willed he waken gently and with joy, and gave him means to waken without fear" (T.27.VII.13:4,5).** Let us use the means (forgiveness) we have been given, that we may learn that love is not an alien state, but our home.

Q #1190: In *A Course in Miracles* we read that the instant the idea of separation entered the mind of God's Son, God's Answer was given (the Holy Spirit). From the Course itself we can understand that the Holy Spirit Himself must be an illusion. My questions are: a) Who was the giver of God's Answer? b) If the Holy Spirit is an illusion, then the "giver" must be an illusion, too. Could you please clarify this for me?

A: These are logical questions, and have been asked by many students. First, the Holy Spirit is spoken of both as illusory (in the form of the Voice for God), and as part of the **"eternal formlessness of God" (C.6.5:8)**. As the "Answer," the Holy Spirit is illusory as you say; but He is also part of God, and in that sense is eternal with God.

The idea that God gave an answer to the separation the instant the Son took that idea seriously needs to be understood as a part of the myth presented in the Course to give us some help in understanding how we got to be in the situation in which we find ourselves. The apparent inconsistency can be remedied by recognizing that some parts of the Course are meant to be taken literally and others are meant to be taken metaphorically. Thus, the parts of the Course that talk about God's connection with the separation are never meant literally. Jesus must use language and examples that we can relate to and process, otherwise he could never help us. Oneness is the only truth and the only reality. But what does that mean to us? It is meaningless, and therefore he must use the language of duality to get through to us, even though he knows duality is illusory. (See **T.25.I.5,6,7** .)

For further discussion, we refer you to Question #616 in which we briefly summarize this approach and then mention several other questions and answers that you can read that deal with various aspects of your questions that have been raised by other students. A comprehensive discussion of the language of the Course can be found in Chapter 2 of *Few Choose to Listen* , Vol. 2 of *The Message of "A Course in Miracles"* .

Q #1191: My inclination has been for years to feel that I have enough work to do in personal encounters and relationships, and that I do not have to look for more issues coming from the media. I am convinced that the world will not become a better place, and so, not in resignation, but happily, I turn to the only place to go in seriousness, which is inside, and do the work there. I am asking about this because I remember thinking that the world will change some day because of our inner work, and then we will see happy headlines instead of catastrophic headlines.

A: It seems as if you are reflecting the important principle of *A Course in Miracles* : **"Seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world" (T.21.in.1:7)** . It is essential to understand this passage as pertaining only to content, not form. The opening statement of the paragraph in which this quote appears provides its context: **"Projection makes perception" (T.21.in.1:1)** . This is the thrust of Jesus' teaching and his training of us. He wants us to learn how to perceive correctly, which means learning to make a connection between our perception and the prior choice we made in our minds to identify with the ego thought system or the Holy Spirit's thought system. Our interpretation of what our eyes see follows directly from that choice. If we identify with the thought system of forgiveness, we can look on scenes of overwhelming devastation and know that devastation has nothing to do with reality (**W.pII.13.1:3**) . We will not be indifferent to the suffering of others; we will be at peace as we deal with the situations in our lives and the world because we will know that pain and suffering do not define our reality. We will be in the world but not of it.

The origin of the world is a thought of attack (**W.pII.3.2:1**) , and therefore it is not surprising that headlines constantly scream of disaster and catastrophe. That will continue until the mind of God's Son no longer is attracted to separation. When we are unwilling to pay the high price of being separate, we will ask for help to change our minds about our purpose for being here, and then the world will take on a different purpose: **"It becomes a home in which forgiveness is born, and where it grows and becomes stronger and more all-embracing. Here is it nourished, for here it is needed" (M.14.2:2,3)** . When

every seemingly separate mind has at last accepted the Atonement, the world will not become a better place with "happy headlines"; **"It will merely cease to seem to be" (M.14.2:12)** . There will be no need for a world when there no longer is any guilt in our minds that needs to be projected. But we needn't fear that the world will disappear before we are ready to leave it behind: **"Fear not that you will be abruptly lifted up and hurled into reality. Time is kind, and if you use it on behalf of reality, it will keep gentle pace with you in your transition. The urgency is only in dislodging your mind from its fixed position here" (T.16.VI.8:1,2,3)** .

In the section **"I Need Do Nothing,"** Jesus teaches us how to walk his unique path of forgiveness, a path that has us quietly peaceful in our minds while busily active in the world. It is not a path of indifference or escapism. One way of describing this approach is to say that we learn to become passive to the ego but not to the Holy Spirit. Our peace is sustained by our choice to identify with the Holy Spirit's thought system, because then whatever we do will be done through us, with no effort or strain on our part. That is the essence of Jesus' message in this section: **"To do nothing is to rest, and make a place within you where the activity of the body ceases to demand attention. . . . This quiet center, in which you do nothing, will remain with you, giving you rest in the midst of every busy doing on which you are sent. For from this center will you be directed how to use the body sinlessly. It is this center, from which the body is absent, that will keep it so in your awareness of it" (T.18.VII.7:7; 8:3,4,5).**

Q #1192: What is beyond the physical? Someone defined insanity as doing the same thing again and again and expecting different results. I believe the way the majority of us live is possibly a better definition of insanity: we hunt for food, we eat, sleep, and reproduce. The approaches we have developed to maintain this cycle differ, but with some variation, produce the same results regardless of one's status in society. Can this cycle be a valid reason for our existence?

A: To be technically accurate, we would have to say there is nothing beyond the physical because the physical does not exist. To say that there is something beyond it is to say it is real somehow. However, to start with our experience of the physical as real, we can then say that one of the principal purposes of *A Course in Miracles* is to help us realize that that experience is a defense against the truth. The truth is that only spirit in a state of perfect Oneness is real. Jesus thus is teaching us how we came to believe that the physical world and body are real and how to undo that erroneous belief. **"It cannot be too strongly emphasized that this course aims at a complete reversal of thought" (M.24.4:1).** Through our study of the text and our practice of the workbook exercises we will gradually make the shifts in our thinking that will lead us beyond the body (**T.18.VI**) and beyond all the idols (**T.30.III**) we made as substitutes for our true Identity as spirit, one with God's Love.

Insanity, from the Course's perspective, is thinking that we really exist apart from God as separate individuals. God is totality. There cannot be anything outside totality, and to think there can be is insanity, for we would then wind up seeing what is not there! Jesus thus instructs us: **"There is one life. That life you share with Him. Nothing can be apart from Him and live" (W.pl.156.2:7,8,9); "Life not in Heaven is impossible, and what is not in Heaven is not anywhere" (T.23.II.19:6).** Our work as students of this course, thus, is to ask our inner Teacher to help us learn how to use the world and the body to undo our belief that we are separate from God, our Source. We thus will be able to live more peacefully, with less guilt, anger, and judgment.

Q #1193: When I feel fearful, I don't ask Jesus for his help. He makes it clear that I have chosen to make myself fearful, and that I should not ask him for release from the fear, but for help with the conditions that made me fearful -- the wish to be separate (T.2.VI.4). Sometimes I do remember to do that, but at other times all I can remember is the four letter prayer, "Help!" Yet, I do want to have him remove all fear and hatred, and to be forgiven. What am I missing here?

A: The only way we can be totally and forever free from fear is by allowing ourselves to get back in touch with the power of our minds to choose. Then we will realize that we have been deceiving ourselves about ourselves, and have been looking on illusions the whole time we thought we were seeing reality (**W.pII.240**). We are choosing to make illusions true, and then concealing that choice from ourselves. Since that is the root of all fear, what good would it do for Jesus to take away our fear when we are holding onto its *cause* ? It is not that he is refusing to do it, but that he cannot take our fear away because we are holding onto what is producing it.

In *A Course in Miracles* , Jesus is also teaching us to take responsibility for our thoughts, for as he says, **“You may believe that you are responsible for what you do, but not for what you think. The truth is that you are responsible for what you think, because it is only at this level that you can exercise choice. What you do comes from what you think” (T.2.VI.2:5,6,7)** . Fear comes from our choosing the thought system of separation, and that is where Jesus' help is directed -- toward helping us get in touch with the power of our minds so we can change our decision and then be at peace. That is why he says in the next section: **“You may still complain about fear, but you nevertheless persist in making yourself fearful. I have already indicated that you cannot ask me to release you from fear. I know it does not exist, but you do not. If I intervened between your thoughts and their results, I would be tampering with a basic law of cause and effect, the most fundamental law there is. I would hardly help you if I depreciated the power of your own thinking. This would be in direct opposition to the purpose of this course” (T.2.VII.1:1,2,3,4,5,6)** . This is very difficult for us to accept and work with because we don't want to accept responsibility for our plight. But that is the only way to sure and lasting peace.

Although Jesus does not remove fear from our minds, he promises to go with us into the recesses of our minds that we have kept concealed in darkness: **“Fear lives in darkness, and when you are afraid you have stepped back. Let us then join quickly in an instant of light, and it will be enough to remind you that your goal is light” (T.18.III.2:4,5; see also T.11.V.1:3,4)** . We simply need to remember that his comforting presence is there with us at every instant: **“If you knew Who walks beside you on the way that you have chosen, fear would be impossible” (T.18.III.3:2)** . Thus, looking with Jesus at our attraction to separation is the release from fear; and we practice this each time we choose not to see our interests as separate from anyone else's.

Q #1194: Can you address if it is possible to incorporate the principles of *A Course in Miracles* in my practice of Reiki? Can I perform Reiki and be still following these principles?

A: The purpose you identify with in your mind is the key to applying the principles of *A Course in Miracles* . **“What is it for ?”** is the only question Jesus wants us to ask about anything (**T.4.V.6:8,9,10,11; T.24.VII.6:1,2,3**) . That simplifies things enormously, because there are only two purposes we can choose: the purpose of the ego (to see ourselves as bodies, separate from others), or the purpose of the Holy Spirit (to see ourselves as sharing the same interests with others). Applying this to performing Reiki means that you would see each session as a means of learning that you and this other person share the same split mind and the power to choose either the ego or the Holy Spirit as your teacher. Thus, the form pertains to the body; but the content pertains to the thought system you choose to identify with.

We have been asked this type of question in relation to other kinds of practices; you might find it helpful to read our answer to Question # 1186 .

Q #1195: If one makes an unintentional mistake that causes sorrow in others, how should one look at this situation? What is the lesson to be learned?

A: If it is appropriate, the first order of business is to apologize in a normal fashion. Then the truly important business is to look at the thoughts that arise as a result of the mistake. There may be self-recrimination, arrogance in believing that one is responsible for the happiness or distress of others, guilt, shame, self-defense ("I didn't mean to do it"), and on and on. All are forms of upset that serve the ego well in its scheme to keep the mind focused on externals, swirling in tides of guilt. Having these thoughts in support of the ego's strategy is the real mistake. The real correction begins with willingness to see the erroneous beliefs that are hidden in a seemingly "innocent" mistake. It means being willing to recognize that if you are upset by any situation it is because you want to be upset. If after an apology you notice that the upsetting feelings persist, you have a clear indication that the mind is choosing to be upset. This can only mean it is making a purposeful choice to make the separation real, and to engender guilt to keep itself in conflict rather than to accept the Holy Spirit's peace. That is the important lesson to be learned. The situation thus becomes a lesson in forgiveness, wherein the Holy Spirit reminds the mind that nothing outside itself is the source of its upset, which is likewise true for the sorrow experienced by the others. This is a very important lesson that is more difficult to learn than it seems; for the existence of the physical universe depends on the belief that the mind can go outside itself and be affected by externals.

A Course in Miracles calls magic the belief that something outside the mind can have an effect on it. The miracle teaches us to return to the mind the power of causation: **"The miracle is the first step in giving back to cause [the mind] the function of causation, not effect" (T.28.II.9:3)**. This principle of cause and effect is fundamental to the thought system of the Course. It is important to keep it in mind when practicing forgiveness in any specific situation. The key is to remember that whatever circumstances *seem* to be the cause of any form of upset, a choice in the mind is the real cause. Workbook Lesson 5 puts this forth in unmistakable terms: **"I am never upset for the reason I think" (W.pl.5)**. It is sufficient to be willing to remind oneself that this is true, no matter how real and convincing the external "cause" may seem to be. The reminder strengthens the mind's belief in its power to choose, and diminishes its belief in the power of externals. More is learned in this simple application than is immediately apparent. In fact, it holds the only purpose for the world -- to serve as a classroom for forgiveness. Thus, the lesson to be learned in every situation is the same: **"It is impossible the Son of God be merely driven by events outside of him. It is impossible that happenings that come to him were not his choice. His power of decision is the determiner of every situation in which he seems to find himself by chance or accident" (T.21.II.3:1,2,3)**. This is true whatever appear to be the circumstances, feelings, or cause of an event. All we are asked to do is remember this, and know that in so doing the Holy Spirit is invited to correct the mistaken beliefs at the root of every conflict.

Q #1196: We read that sickness is an attempt by the ego to make the body real. However this can be considered and contemplated by an adult mind, what purpose would illness serve in a baby who could not consider the implications of sickness as a learning device?

A: Although this is extremely hard for us to grasp, a baby has the same mind and the same power to choose the ego or the Holy Spirit that an adult has; its brain, of course, differs from that of an adult. But it is only the mind that makes decisions, as we discuss in Questions #117, #391, #825iii, and #901. It is not the baby that chooses sickness. The form of the body is irrelevant, not in this illusory world, obviously, but rather in terms of our spiritual journey. The differences in form are part of the ego's clever strategy to keep us away from our minds, lest we realize we chose against love and peace so that we could exist as separate individuals: **"Nothing so blinding as perception of form. For sight of form means understanding has been obscured" (T.22.III.6:7,8)**. If we realized that all of our misery is rooted in that one decision, not in the world or the body, we would rather quickly question the wisdom of that choice -- especially since we would know that we chose against the other option open to us. The ego thus is ferociously intent on keeping us mind-less, which it does by having us dwell only on the body and all of the problems that arise from bodily existence. A mind choosing to project itself as a helpless, deficient, or sick infant is all part of this plan.

Through *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus is helping us unlearn what the ego taught us so that we will recover a sense of ourselves as minds all sharing the same purpose of recognizing our mistake, choosing again, and returning Home. Our perception of innocent, vulnerable babies and children thus can serve either the ego's purpose or the Holy Spirit's purpose. We can see them as proof that differences, separation, and victimization is real, or as part of our classroom in which we are learning that we all share the same interests and the same identity. It is important to remember that this is only about the content in our minds, not behavior. Thus, you would still act appropriately and do what you usually do with babies, but you would do so with a growing awareness of the content in your mind.

Q #1197: In the teachings of the Foundation, based on *A Course in Miracles*, I have often heard it said that I am not responsible for the acts of others but that I am responsible for my *interpretations* of their acts. On an experiential level this certainly seems to be the proper way to take responsibility and to ask for help to change my mind about what others do rather than trying to change them. However, as I more and more begin to question "who is the [I] who [am] living in this world?" (T.4.II.11.8), is it not helpful to remind myself that I am responsible for having fragmented my Self into the self that is experienced as myself and into the others and then pitting these fragments against each other in order to maintain the belief in separation, guilt, sin, etc. (T.28.VI.4.7), and thus that I am responsible not only for my interpretations but also for the acts of others? And is not this very reminder (that we are all one) one form of correcting the belief in separation and separate interests?

A: Yes, both levels of correction are a part of the process of undoing the ego thought system we have accepted as a replacement for the truth. Using the metaphor of a ladder, the second step is well beyond the first one you describe, of recognizing that we always interpret what others do, and more often than not, that interpretation comes straight from our ego -- and that that is the problem, not what others do or do not do. Our self-concept gradually begins to change as we practice this and become more comfortable thinking this way. It *must* change, for our "normal" self-concept is almost totally defined by the perception that **"I am the thing you made of me . . ."** (T.31.V.5:3). Therefore, when we begin to realize we have built our self-concept on what turns out to be an insidious plot to give ourselves innocence at God's and everyone else's expense, and then decide to ask for help to undo this deception, our sense of who we are undergoes a transition. This happens without our actually focusing on changing anything other than our interpretations.

This is what takes us to the next step -- not a linear process, of course -- of beginning to get in touch with ourselves as minds that are always deciding to split off from oneness and remain in a state of separation and individuality, blaming others for that condition, or to undo the progression of splits and accept our true Identity as one with God, our Source. So, yes, at some point we would realize that our decision to be separate required that we split off into a multitude of figures that would victimize each other and be victimized by forces and circumstances in the world itself (T.18.I.4,5). On a very deep level that is where our guilt is overwhelming -- that we *want* there to be catastrophes, disasters, and brutality so that our plan to remain separate but not be responsible for it would work.

It is essential to remember that the self that is responsible for this is not the self we think we are and that interacts in the world -- it is the mind outside time and space that makes these decisions. But we should not force ourselves to try to experience that larger self, as we all have tremendous fear of letting go of the self we are familiar with. Jesus thus talks about his plan to help us awaken gently and without fear (T.27.VII.13), and so our focus should be on developing trust in Jesus and his guidance (T.4.VI.3:1; 6:1). His loving presence within us is always there to look with us at the hideous plot we support in our minds so that we will take the next step with him of realizing it is all just an expression of a **"tiny, mad idea, at which the Son of God remembered not to laugh"** (T.28.VIII.6:2). That is why he tells us that when we think about **"the mad projection by which this world was made"** that we **"call it not sin . . . invest it not with guilt . . . and above all, be not afraid of it"** (T.18.I.6:6,7,8,9).

Q #1198: I just want to know where we go, after we die. I know its not a "place." Do we go to the Beatific Vision, or do we go to such complete absorption into oneness that we have no "awareness" of our self, or awareness of any "self," so that the Buddhists term of the Void is more appropriate? If there is a God, but I do not "know" Him in some way after death, then its almost like there is no God, at least to this little speck called "me." Does the God I've prayed to disappear with me at the time of my physical dissolution, or does the part of me that knows and prays continue in some form?

A: All the parts of the puzzle regarding death are answered in *A Course in Miracles'* most important teaching -- the Son of God is a mind, not a body. In choosing to identify with the illusion of separation, the mind gives birth to the idea of a self, a world, and a God who relates to them. All of these notions are made up in support of the separation thought. Without this thought, neither life as we know it, nor death, have any meaning. It is this thought that persists beyond the "life" of the body until the mind fully accepts the Holy Spirit's correction, by which belief in separation is undone. The mind then awakens from the dream of separation to awareness of the oneness with God that never changed. This is accomplished not by death, but through forgiveness of every shadow of belief in the ego thought system. Nothing happens when the body dies (see Questions #68, #175, #187, and #260). In fact, we learn in the Course that there is no death (**T.27.VII.14**) because **"There is no life outside of Heaven. Where God created life, there life must be. In any state apart from Heaven life is illusion. At best it seems like life; at worst, like death. Yet both are judgments on what is not life, equal in their inaccuracy and lack of meaning"** (**T.23.II.19:1,2,3,4,5**). Thus, we do not go anywhere when the body dies.

When the mind accepts the truth of its Identity as God's Son, it returns to the awareness of what never changed. Removing the obstacles to this awareness is the healing goal of the Course and our only concern. The mind cannot see or understand what it fears. While fear remains, what lies beyond the body and the world is incomprehensible. As we read in the introduction to the Course, love cannot be taught (**T.in.11:6**); neither can it be understood. It is possible, and indeed essential to our awakening that we see and understand the mind's intentional choice against love and its devastating effects in our experience. That is why in the Course Jesus repeatedly encourages us to look at the ego thought system at work in our lives and see its painful consequences. Forgiveness is the miracle that shifts the focus from externals (form) to the mind (content). Only by so doing can the mind remember its identity as mind, gradually dissociating from its identity with the body. The question of the body's seeming life and death evaporates as the mind returns to awareness of itself as the Son who never left the Father.

Q #1199: I have heard Ken say at least a few times that *A Course in Miracles* is "not for spiritual giants" and that it is for people at the "bottom rung of the ladder." It is probably just my identification with the ego that causes me to be bothered by this, but consciously I feel it is because I want to be using the most effective/ fastest path to get me home. Ken's teachings on the Course have helped me a lot in being sure I am interpreting the Course clearly, but I really thought the Course was the best means. Is it not? Can you comment more on those comments by Ken? If the Course is for people on the bottom rung of the ladder, is it fair to say that most of us are not even on the ladder at all?

A: It is a humbling thought indeed. But, considering the amount of material devoted to helping us with our guilt, hatred, judgment, and specialness, and above all, with remembering that we have a mind, it is not hard to accept that Jesus is not addressing "spiritual giants." Moreover, he refers to us babies, infants, and children -- in the spiritual sense, of course. Surely, though, if we learn the lessons he is teaching us, we will wind up at the top of the ladder, and perhaps get there "faster" than if we had used other means, but his message and teaching is not directed at those already at the top -- the advanced teachers of God, and certainly not the Teachers of teachers who are no longer on the ladder at all (**M.26.2**) .

Staying with the metaphor of the ladder, we can say that everyone has at least one foot on the first rung, however precarious the grip might be, because everyone has a right mind, and as Jesus assures us, we are not totally insane (T.16.VI.8:8) . Everyone, in some way, has thoughts of kindness and selflessness, although they may be infrequent and fleeting.

There are countless people who are deeply grateful for the Course, because they feel that they have finally found the path they have long been searching for. But most of us are contending with tremendous resistance coming from our fear of what we sense Jesus is saying and where this course is leading us. We like to think of ourselves as spiritual, and that is not wrong or dishonest. Yet we have a very hard time just shifting the purpose of our relationships and our involvement in the world, let alone accepting our identity as pure spirit. We even wonder sometimes whether Jesus got it right! What do you mean there is no world! How can you say that sickness is of the mind, not the body -- and worst of all, that the body neither lives nor dies! Are you really serious when you say anger is never justified, and that we are never justified in perceiving ourselves unfairly treated? We struggle with all this; so it is no wonder that he tells us in different ways that we are not yet ready to accept his higher teachings about timelessness, spirit, and oneness, and therefore, that we should concentrate on what we can relate to: our seeming bodily life in the world. Some examples:

“To you the miracle cannot seem natural, because what you have done to hurt your mind has made it so unnatural that it does not remember what is natural to it. And when you are told what is natural, you cannot understand it” (T.16.II.3:1,2).

“One brother is all brothers. Every mind contains all minds, for every mind is one. Such is the truth. Yet do these thoughts make clear the meaning of creation? Do these words bring perfect clarity with them to you? What can they seem to be but empty sounds; pretty, perhaps, correct in sentiment, yet fundamentally not understood nor understandable. The mind that taught itself to think specifically can no longer grasp abstraction in the sense that it is all-encompassing. We need to see a little, that we learn a lot” (W.pl.161.4).

“When revelation of your oneness comes, it will be known and fully understood. Now we have work to do, for those in time can speak of things beyond, and listen to words which explain what is to come is past already. Yet what meaning can the words convey to those who count the hours still, and rise and work and go to sleep by them? (W.pl.169.10:2,3,4)

“O my child! If you knew what God wills for you, your joy would be complete! . . . I cannot tell you what this will be like, for your heart is not ready” (T.11.3:1,6).

We should not be discouraged by this, and we should not spend time pondering where we are on the ladder, because the metaphors of the ladder and the journey give us the impression that the healing process is linear, and it is not. Jesus speaks of the holy instant as **“a miniature of eternity” (T.17.IV.11:4)** , which is a way of saying that the experience of the holy instant is the experience of being beyond our ego. Since we have not generalized our lessons of forgiveness, we will leave the holy instant and become body centered again, and then go back and forth until there no longer is any attraction to the ego thought system at all. The happy dream, the real world is our destination, when our minds will be at peace -- no conflict, no fear, no guilt. We are then advanced teachers of God, as Jesus describes in the manual (M.4) .

Q #1200: I just want to ask a follow-up question to Question #825 to make sure that I understand the effects of choosing specialness. From the way that I understand it, any problem we have in our life can ultimately be traced back to our desire to be special and distinct from our brothers and sisters. Could that mean we have a problem in our life that is rooted back to our desire for specialness in another aspect of our lives? Let us say that I have a desire to be more intelligent than everyone and choose specialness

and act on this desire to be more intelligent. Are you saying that this choice will have the painful effects of illusions, but that these may show up in another aspect of my life that has nothing to do with wanting to be more intelligent than others?

A: The painful effects of choosing an illusion of yourself as a substitute for the truth about yourself will show up in many different ways, not just in the context of your efforts to be more intelligent than others -- that is just the specific form of the underlying content. Another way of saying that we are choosing an illusory identity is to say we are living a lie. Terrible consequences flow from that, obviously. All the unconscious defenses that must be maintained to protect the lie require enormous effort -- our defense system must always be on "high alert" for anything that could expose the lie and destroy our special position. These dynamics cannot but have a profound effect on *all* our relationships.

The ultimate cause, though, is our choice to reject the Holy Spirit's response to the "tiny, mad idea" of separation and accept the ego's instead. This is the level on which the "repair work" must take place. The underlying wish is to be superior to God -- that is where the real anguish and pain are. It is a laughable thought, really, but that is the thought reflected in the desire to be more intelligent than others. We *all* act that out every time we value specialness. In *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus asks us: **"If you perceived the special relationship as a triumph over God, would you want it?" (T.16.V.10:1)** The more we make this connection, the more we will realize that we are hurting ourselves in every attempt to be special, for not only will we be caught in the futility of the ego's "seek and do not find" trap (T.12.IV.1:4), but we will be robbing ourselves of the peace and joy that are our eternal inheritance and our "sacred right" (T.30.V.9:10).

Q #1201: Who is the Father in the Course? The same as "Our Father in Heaven" of the Bible? The same as Yahweh or another archon or demiurge? Kether or Sin Soph in the Tree of Life? We know that Jesus of the New Testament and the Course is the same teacher.

A: God in *A Course in Miracles* is the "Father" of Christ His Son. "Father" is in quotes because the distinction is made for our benefit, for we cannot understand non-duality, or pure undifferentiated Oneness. ". . . while you think that part of you is separate, the concept of a Oneness joined as One is meaningless" (T.25.I.7:1); **"Nowhere does the Father end, the Son begin as something separate from Him" (W.pl.132.12:4)**. God can only be experienced directly, but not in human terms, because human experience is thoroughly dualistic, and reality is not: **"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. It has united with its Source. And like its Source itself, it merely is" (W.pl.169.5).**

The theology of *A Course in Miracles*, while using the language of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, is decidedly and irreconcilably different from that tradition and most other systems as well, as is evident from this sampling of the Course's teachings about God: (1) The finite universe is not God's creation (T.11.I.4; M.22.5:5); (2) He knows nothing of this world (T.4.II.8:6,7; T.25.VII.3:3,4); (3) God does not condemn (W.pl.46.1; W.pl.10); (4) He does not demand sacrifice: **"Sacrifice is a notion totally unknown to God" (T.3.I.4:1)**.

The Course also makes it clear that many of the New Testament accounts of Jesus' life and message are inaccurate or distorted. In fact, the entire Course can be read and studied from that point of view. Thus, for example, he speaks of: Atonement without sacrifice, the real message of the crucifixion, and the meaning of resurrection (T.3.I; T.6.I; M.28); the meaning of Christmas (T.15.X,XI), forgiveness and the miracle (W.pl.1,13), and many, many more.

Kenneth's book "*A Course in Miracles* and Christianity: A Dialogue" covers the main points of difference. Other questions on this Service address the differences as well. Our Index will direct you to these: look under *A Course in Miracles* / other thought systems / Christianity.

Q #1202: Is hearing ideas that are wrong harmful?

A: It is not clear to us what you mean by "wrong." Most of us, most of the time, are listening to the ego, and anything the ego advocates will be "harmful" only in the sense that it will reinforce the pain of our separation from God and our true Self. All we need to do is become aware of that and look without judgment at these ideas. To be afraid of them or to fight against them is to make them real and give them a power they do not have. By looking at them without judgment, you are strengthening your identification with your right mind, and then, gradually, you will be less and less influenced by them.

In general, it is always best to be guided by the rule of kindness: kindness to yourself and others, which means if you have thoughts that would hurt you or others if acted on, it is best not to act on them.

Q #1203: I am currently on Lesson 76 "I am under no laws but God's" (W.pl.76). I must admit, up until now, all of the lessons resonated wonderfully with me and my spirit received them well. However, I am having a very hard time with this, and I feel as if I am positioning myself to accept chaos in my life. It appears to me that God's law would not concern itself with me going to work, or even getting there on time, or whether I dressed appropriately or not, and on and on.

A: Yes, you are correct in your understanding of God's law. Most students find it very unsettling (to put it mildly) to discover this aspect of *A Course in Miracles'* teachings. But it is only the ego in you that feels the outcome would be chaos, because the sane part of your mind knows that you are taking a major step in the direction of restoring lasting peace to your mind. It is essential for the ego's survival to keep you thinking that God and you are separate, that your life takes place in this world, and that you must sacrifice, pray, and do good things to get into Heaven after you die. That is the ego's thought system, which Jesus teaches us is simply an insane substitute for the truth, which is that separation from God is impossible and that we are forever one with Him.

The fact that God does not know about us and our seeming individual lives does not mean that we have been abandoned and are completely on our own without any comfort or guidance. The purpose of our work with the Course is to develop a relationship with Jesus who is always lovingly present in our minds so that we could allow him then to help us identify and then remove the barriers we have placed between ourselves and love's presence (**T.16.IV.6:1**). That is the only kind of help that is truly of value, and the only kind we should ever want. Making our lives better in this world is a futile endeavor, for nothing but God's eternal peace and Love could ever satisfy us, and our continuing to believe that we really exist as individuals apart from God is what keeps us from experiencing the peace and Love in which we were created.

Questions #131, #157, and #643 all discuss this important issue.

Q #1204: Even though I studied Lessons 28-29 some years ago, I realize I'm still confused about illusions and the universe. If nothing I see means anything, and this is all an illusion (which I am embracing with time), how can a table, or anything else I see with my eyes, share a purpose with the universe, which is also an illusion. And, how can any of this be shared with the purpose of God? Learning how to look on all

things with love, appreciation and open-mindedness seems to make the illusion, and all things in it, a reality instead of a dream. Please explain the holy purpose talked about in the lesson. "Above all else I want to see things differently."

A: The first 50 lessons of the workbook build on one another, contrasting the fundamental principles of the ego thought system with those of the Holy Spirit. All the metaphysical principles of the Course are contained in these lessons. They are the foundation for achieving the workbook's goal of "... [training our minds] **in a systematic way to a different perception of everyone and everything in the world**" (W.in.4:1) . It is helpful to keep this in mind when reviewing the workbook. To see anything differently means to first see the meaning that has been given to it by the ego. For example: based on past experience, a table is seen as an object to place things on, although of itself the table has no meaning. In like manner, we think we know what everything in the universe is for. What we are not aware of, however, is the *purpose* given to everything by the mind, depending on its decision to side with the ego's goal -- separation; or the Holy Spirit's -- healing the separation. Nothing means anything because nothing outside of Heaven exists in reality; however, everything shares the purpose the mind attributes to it. Its meaning supports belief in the ego thought system or the Holy Spirit's, Who has a correction for every meaning given to anything by the ego. Thus, His plan for the illusory world shares the purpose of God, because it leads us back to Him. In the practice of the Course we are asked to recognize that we have given meaning to everything we perceive; justifying and defending this meaning (sometimes adamantly), and perhaps even refusing to question our interpretations. These are the blocks to allowing the Holy Spirit to transform the perception of illusion to the memory of reality so that we may awaken from the dream. All we are asked to do is have a little willingness to question our interpretation and ask for the Holy Spirit's help: "**The great Transformer of perception will undertake with you the careful searching of the mind that made this world, and uncover to you the seeming reasons for your making it**" (T.17.II.5:2).

Accepting the Holy Spirit's plan of forgiveness for everything does not make the illusion real; it makes it useful: "**Illusion makes illusion. Except one. Forgiveness is illusion that is answer to the rest**" (W.pl.198.2:8, 9,10). The love and gratitude that is brought to everything is found in forgiveness. To see everything differently is to see it in its light, the core of which is to recognize that nothing outside of the mind has any effect on it. This shift in perception removes all blame from the universe of relationships, places, and situations for the feelings we experience. Forgiveness, therefore, serves as a bridge between the illusory dream and the reality of Heaven, giving everything in the illusion a holy purpose. The bridge is needed because of the belief that the dream is real, and it indeed seems to be. When every illusion has been forgiven, everything will be perceived through the eyes of the love that was always present in the mind, with no effort on our part.

Q #1205: Ken conducted a workshop at A.R.E. in September 2005. Can you highlight some of the differences and similarities between the Edgar Cayce teachings and the Course?

A: Cayce's work focused, for the most part, on helping individual people with their specific conditions. His readings, therefore, were not intended as a comprehensive philosophical or theological system, although there clearly are philosophical and theological aspects to the readings. He spoke of mind or thought as the builder, for example. In contrast, one of the purposes of *A Course in Miracles* is to provide us with a universal thought system that can be applied on the individual level of our everyday lives. In addition, reincarnation came up frequently in Cayce's readings, whereas in the Course reincarnation is not central to its teachings.

Q #1206: What I've learned so far in studying *A Course in Miracles* is that there is no real love in this world, and that forgiveness cannot change anything in the world, only our perception of it. We then can

look on devastation and know it is false; but we would still be "seeing" the devastation, correct? How does that work? In the crucifixion, for example, was Jesus, as the observer, watching it all happen, as the apostles later reported "seeing it," while at the same time untouched by it? No fear? No pain?

A: Yes, you are correct about there being no real love in this world. The reason is that this world was made by our minds (and remains in our minds, since *ideas leave not their source*) to cover the guilt we felt over having destroyed the Love of God. Of course the Love of God cannot be destroyed, but we believed we did it and now are dealing with the consequences of that belief. But we always retain in our minds the memory of our true Identity as one with God, and by choosing to have Jesus be our teacher and model, we can learn to be reflections of that love by undoing all the barriers we have built to hide it -- barriers made of judgment, specialness, hatred, and the wish to be separate. But the love is in our minds, not the world.

In your second point you appear to be referring to one of the Course's definitions of the miracle, which emphasizes its role as a correction: **"It does not create, nor really change at all. It merely looks on devastation, and reminds the mind that what it sees is false"** (W.pll.13.1:1,2). Jesus then speaks of forgiveness as **"the home of miracles"** (W.pll.13.3:1); therefore, it does not change anything in the world, only the perceptions in our minds. Remember, **"There is no world! This is the central thought the course attempts to teach"** (W.pl.132.6:2,3) ; so Jesus would not be teaching us how to change things in the world when he knows there is no world. But since we believe there is a world, he helps us see that it is but a projection of our own minds, and that we give it all the meaning it has, and that is what he wants us to focus on: the world **"is the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition. . . . Therefore, seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world"** (T.21.in.1:5,7). We first accept the ego or Jesus as our teacher; then our perception or interpretation of what our eyes see reflects that choice: **"Perception seems to teach you what you see. Yet it but witnesses to what you taught. It is the outward picture of a wish; an image that you wanted to be true"** (T.24.VII.8:8,9,10; see also T.21.V.1:7; W.pll.304.1:3).

Your eyes could be looking at the twisted wreckage of cars and bodies on the highway, for example, but your *perception/interpretation* of this event would depend on whether you have chosen the ego or Jesus as your teacher. If you are perceiving with Jesus, your inner peace would not be affected by the outer events, which does not mean, however, that you might not stop and offer assistance if you could -- we are talking only about the content in your mind, not behavior. The ego's interpretation would always center on victims and victimizers, tragedy, loss, fear, anxiety -- anything that would support the reality of separate bodies vulnerable to outside forces and conditions, making their peace and happiness dependent on these externals. (In this context, you might find it helpful to look at Questions # 1111 and #1187.)

Jesus was the perfect manifestation of love. As a totally healed mind -- no ego with guilt to be projected -- he could not fearfully or angrily experience himself as a crucified body or an unfairly treated victim, as he explains in "The Message of the Crucifixion" (T.6.I.5:3; 9:1,2). His mind could do only one thing: love. We are the ones who give form to that love, as our fear and needs allow. The problem we have in comprehending this is that we usually try to understand it from our reference point as bodies. But it can never be understood on that level because our perception of ourselves as bodies is itself a choice to separate ourselves from our minds and from the truth. So our concentration should be on the process of forgiveness, which will undo the many ways in which we interfere with love's communication in our minds. A clear understanding of these "theories" will then emerge.

Several other questions on this Service provide a comprehensive discussion of the crucifixion and Jesus' life from the point of view of *A Course in Miracles* : see, for example, Questions #401b, #505, #510, and #563.

Q #1207: When setting goals that are crucial to my own well-being and future as well as to my family, I feel guilty -- thinking that as a Course student I am doing something wrong by setting "worldly" goals when I should simply have the one goal of looking with Jesus at my ego. How can one sensibly integrate having goals and be a serious student of the Course, without the ego coming in and making a mess?

A: *A Course in Miracles* is not opposed to setting goals or anything else we do in this world. Jesus lets us know this through statements such as, "**All things you made have use to Him [the Holy Spirit] , for His most holy purpose**" (T.14.VI.5:3). In other words, Jesus wants us to keep doing all the things that bodies normally do, but to allow the Holy Spirit in our mind to change the purpose. This is why he tells us, "**What for?** ...is the question that **you must learn to ask in connection with everything**" (T.4.V.6:7.8).

Basically, from Jesus' perspective, whether we spend our days attempting to achieve ambitious goals, watching TV, or sitting in silence on a mountain is irrelevant. It is with which internal teacher we do these things that matters to him.

It is true that from the ego's perspective, everything we do or achieve here represents our triumph over God. And if you set goals with the ego, then undoubtedly you will find yourself trying to get your needs met at someone else's expense -- and feeling guilty as a result. But if you set goals (and try to achieve them) with the Holy Spirit as your Guide, each worldly goal can serve to help you remember the one true need we all share -- the need to realize that God's Love still exists and it is safe to awaken from this dream. If your overarching goal is to remember this one shared purpose, then there will be no cause for guilt over all the other things you do.

One final note: As a *serious* student of the Course, you should always begin with the premise that the ego *will* come in and make a mess, but that this phenomenon is not serious. The messes the ego creates simply show us that we became afraid of God's Love and ran to the ego for protection. As soon as we realize we have done this, we can once again drop the ego's hand and take the Holy Spirit's. And then the mess will look like a simple pile of silliness that the love in our mind can easily show us how to clean up.

Q #1208: I am wondering if Jesus is leading us directly into temptation, in a way, in his use of the word "magnitude." Couldn't he have used the word "importance" such as in the metaphor of Indra's net where each is like a mirror in a net of mirrors and so each one is of complete importance? But can not hearing of magnitude, as commonly understood, lead directly into grandiosity? Can not the language about one's special function also lead to grandiosity?

I am thinking that there is a raising, in tenderness, of the meek and teachable state and, as "pride goeth before the fall," there is an inevitable course to grandiosity. And, is it possible, that beyond simply allowing for the lessons of grandiosity to take place Jesus in this Course, by the use of such language, may be actually leading us into them, when we are so inclined!?

A: It is the nature of language that there is always the possibility of misunderstanding and misinterpretation, and this possibility of course extends to the concepts and symbols that Jesus uses in *A Course in Miracles* . And he is certainly not unaware of the ambiguity of words and their potential for confusion, for he says of words that "**they were made by separated minds to keep them in the illusion of separation**" (M.21.1:7) . And so your question is whether a word such as *magnitude* may have a heightened risk of misinterpretation and misuse.

What is essential throughout the Course is to understand just whom Jesus is addressing and what his purpose is. If we read almost any passage from the mistaken perspective of ourselves as bodies, we will misunderstand and can use it to reinforce our specialness. Consider for example "**I am the light of the**

world” (**W.pl.61.title**) or “**Salvation of the world depends on me**” (**W.pl.186.title**), both of which could be said to describe our special function. Jesus follows each of these workbook lesson titles, with which the ego could have a field day, with clarifications that make it very clear that he knows what our egos would like to do with these statements, but that he is not referring to the self that we think we are. And furthermore, that it is arrogance, not humility, that would deny these statements about ourselves.

So, for example, in lesson 61, he says, “**Who is the light of the world except God's Son? This, then, is merely a statement of the truth about yourself. It is the opposite of a statement of pride, of arrogance, or of self-deception. *It does not describe the self-concept you have made. It does not refer to any of the characteristics with which you have endowed your idols. It refers to you as you were created by God.* It simply states the truth. To the ego, today's idea is the epitome of self-glorification. But the ego does not understand humility, mistaking it for self- debasement. Humility consists of accepting your role in salvation and in taking no other.** (**W.pl.61.1,2:1,2,3**; italics added).

And for Lesson 186, Jesus similarly explains, paradoxically from an ego perspective: “**Here is the statement that will one day take all arrogance away from every mind. Here is the thought of true humility, which holds no function as your own but that which has been given you. ... *Our minds are suited perfectly to take the part assigned to us by One Who knows us well.* ...Today's idea ... *does not ask that you be different in any way from what you are. What could humility request but this? And what could arrogance deny but this?* ... *Arrogance makes an image of yourself that is not real.* ...**Salvation of the world depends on you, and not upon this little pile of dust** (**W.pl.186.1:1,2; 2:7; 3:1,3,4,5; 6:1;7:4**; italics added) .**

So considering the concept of magnitude, we must understand that Jesus is using the word as a correction for our belief in our own littleness, “**for the separation was a descent from magnitude to littleness**” (**T.10.IV.8:5**) . Littleness refers to our belief about ourselves, originating with our belief that we are separate from the great and glorious Whole that is our reality, and culminating in our experience of ourselves as impotent bodies and personalities, confined in our existence to a limited space in a body, living within a very brief interval of time. And then if we read the Course from the perspective of this false ego self, that we are bodies, which most of us almost certainly will do at first, we will misinterpret Jesus' words when he attempts to share what is the truth about us. For the magnitude Jesus is describing refers to our minds when we are no longer limited by all our false beliefs of separation and its seeming consequences.

While it may seem, as you say, that Jesus is leading us directly into temptation, since he knows with what false beliefs our minds seem to be circumscribed, there nevertheless is a valuable pedagogical purpose in his seeming seduction of our ego. For if we are sincere students of the Course, there will develop a growing awareness of our ego's efforts at grandiosity, and in our right minds we will recognize that something is amiss if we find ourselves believing in our own specialness. We can only fool ourselves for as long as we want to. And only by looking directly at our ego's deceptive manipulations and strivings, including its attempts to co-opt the Course for its own purpose, will we be able to learn to make a different choice, against all the various forms of littleness that the ego offers us. Jesus is clear that we cannot make the choice against littleness alone.

And so he counsels us, “**Be not content with littleness. But be sure you understand what littleness is, and why you could never be content with it. Littleness is the offering you give yourself. You offer this in place of magnitude, and you accept it. Everything in this world is little because it is a world made out of littleness, in the strange belief that littleness can content you. When you strive for anything in this world in the belief that it will bring you peace, you are belittling yourself and blinding yourself to glory. Littleness and glory are the choices open to your striving and your vigilance. You will always choose one at the expense of the other. ...All your striving must be directed against littleness, for it does require vigilance to protect your magnitude in this world. To hold your magnitude in perfect awareness in a world of littleness is a task the little cannot undertake. Yet it is asked of you, in tribute to your magnitude and not your littleness.**

Nor is it asked of you alone. The power of God will support every effort you make on behalf of His dear Son. ...In your practice, try to give over every plan you have accepted for finding magnitude in littleness. *It is not there.* Use the holy instant only to recognize that you alone cannot know where it is, and can only deceive yourself (T.15.III.1; 4:4,5,6,7,8; IV.4:5,6,7).

An honest reading of these sections could only expose any ego attempts to interpret magnitude as an aspect of our limited self. And if we still choose to give such interpretations to such passages, it can only mean that we are still too afraid to accept the unlimited magnitude of Wholeness that Jesus is offering us. And that may be foolish, but it is no sin.

Q #1209: I have often been concerned that all that I learned about *A Course in Miracles* and God would be lost when I came back in another illusion. But I think that this is not a concern as once this "life" terminates then I have the option to listen to the ego and choose another illusion or the Holy Spirit and realize that I am one with God. There is really nothing to remember about the Course because whenever I come back there will always be a message showing me the way back. In one of these illusions I actually realize my oneness and the dream ends. Is that about the size of it.

A: Yes, you've pretty much got the right idea, especially at the content level. And the good news, which can be said with certainty, is that you're not coming back into another illusion! Now that's not the same as saying you're going to awaken this time around, but rather it's true because you've never come into any illusion in the first place. We always remain within the mind outside the illusion, viewing it and perhaps identifying with it, but never truly entering it.

And, as you say, both options – the ego and the Holy Spirit – will always be available to you – with the correction for the ego experienced in some specific form, such as the Course. But these alternatives are always available because they are nothing more than projections or manifestations of the two thought systems that are always available within our minds, regardless of which illusory life we may happen to be reviewing.

So relax, sit back, and enjoy the show. Because no matter what our ego tells us, whether it's a comedy or a tragedy, it's never a big deal. And that's what forgiveness is all about.

Q #1210: Some years ago, I went through some things that in which it seemed to me that lessons in faith were played out before me, many of them centered on my sons and their drug addictions. There seemed to be immediate responses in the world -- a counselor calling to tell me that my son was doing so well, dolphins jumping high into the air -- when I would "let go" or release the whole thing to mystery.

In one last episode, I was commiserating with a friend. We were at Universal Studios. I was sitting on a planter in a patio with my head down in despair. Instantly an actor dressed as Groucho Marx sat on my lap and, flicking his cigar, said "There's no hope for Ben, hey?" I imagine our mouths hung open.

I would interpret this and many other events as the Holy Spirit intervening in the world or maybe, to be more, specific, in salvation. Yet, I hear you say that the Holy Spirit does not intervene in the world. Can you qualify this statement to integrate with my experience? Is there a difference between that actor doing what he did and Helen doing what she did for us? Isn't the Course itself an intervention into our world?

A: As you begin to recognize more and more that you are the dreamer of this dream that we call our lives, and not one of the figures in the dream, you will understand that you, as mind, are the one who chooses the symbols that you will experience, just as you do in your sleeping dreams at night. While we believe

we are bodies, we think that there is very much that is external to us, including the Holy Spirit and Jesus, and that they are agents who can intervene in our world, either at will or at our invitation. But the symbols are our own production. The only meaningful difference among them is whether we allow our minds to be guided by the Holy Spirit or by the ego as we choose and then, most importantly, interpret the symbols we experience. The ego's interpretation will reinforce our belief in the reality of separation, while the Holy Spirit's will very gently lead us to awakening from the dream of separation.

And so, as we are willing to practice our lessons of forgiveness, we may experience seemingly external symbols, as you have, while we believe we are bodies, that seem to remind us of and reinforce our decision to forgive, just as when we choose to judge and condemn, we may see external symbols that reinforce our decision to separate and hate. After all, **“projection makes perception,”** as Jesus notes twice in the Course (**T.13.V.3:5; T.21.in.1:1**) . But in either case, it is our mind that has chosen those symbols and chosen the teacher who will interpret their meaning for us. There is nothing special or mysterious about this process, except that we have chosen to keep our own responsibility for our experiences hidden from ourselves.

The Holy Spirit does not intervene in the world because there is no world – only a dream in our mind that seems very real while we remain asleep. The Holy Spirit does not intervene in our minds either, although the Course in places describes the Holy Spirit as if He does. This is simply a literary device Jesus uses at times to make it clear that we are not in charge of our own salvation, in the sense that anything we think we can do on our own must by its very nature involve our ego, that is, the part of our mind that believes we can be on our own and separate from God. The Holy Spirit represents that part of our mind that knows otherwise. And so by relinquishing our need to be in control, to be in charge, we allow another part of our mind to remind us of the truth about ourselves, opening our mind to gentler symbols and, most importantly, to gentler interpretations of all of the symbols we have projected within our minds.

Many passages in *A Course in Miracles* elaborate on what we have been describing, but let's consider just two of the clearer statements. In **“The Responsibility for Sight”** in Chapter 21, we find the following emphatic declaration: **“ I am responsible for what I see. I choose the feelings I experience, and I decide upon the goal I would achieve. And everything that seems to happen to me I ask for, and receive as I have asked. ...It is impossible the Son of God be merely driven by events outside of him. It is impossible that happenings that come to him were not his choice. His power of decision is the determiner of every situation in which he seems to find himself by chance or accident. ...Suffer, and you decided sin was your goal. Be happy, and you gave the power of decision to Him Who must decide for God for you”** (T.21.II.2:3,4,5; 3:1,2,3,5,6).

And later in the text, in **“The Dreamer of the Dream,”** Jesus notes: **“ You are the dreamer of the world of dreams. No other cause it has, nor ever will. ...So fearful is the dream, so seeming real, he [the Son of God] could not waken to reality without the sweat of terror and a scream of mortal fear, unless a gentler dream preceded his awaking, and allowed his calmer mind to welcome, not to fear, the Voice that calls with love to waken him...Accept the dream He gave instead of yours. It is not difficult to change a dream when once the dreamer has been recognized. Rest in the Holy Spirit, and allow His gentle dreams to take the place of those you dreamed in terror and in fear of death** (T.27.VII.13:1,2,4; 14:1,2,3).

Note that while this passage makes it sound as if the Holy Spirit is the author of the gentler dream, as already discussed, this is merely a way to remind us that we must not decide on our own what the content of our dreams should be, for we will look for symbols that answer our needs from the perspective of the ego, thus reinforcing our belief in the reality of the separation. Joined with the Holy Spirit, that is, the part of our mind that knows the separation is not real, we will see the world in a completely different light, not colored by the filter of our own personal needs.

Again, to understand fully what Jesus is saying in these passages, it is paramount that we know that he is addressing the mind. The selves we believe we are, bodies with special, unique personalities, are the dream figures -- the effects -- and have no power to dictate anything about what our experience shall be.

They only carry out the directions the mind gives. Once we begin to accept that, the mystery of our lives and our experiences will begin to fade.

Chapter 17 of Kenneth Wapnick's book, *Absence from Felicity*, contains a more in depth discussion of these and related issues, including how to view Helen's scribing of the Course from the perspective of the Course's uncompromising nondualistic metaphysics.

Q #1211: Could you please explain the following passage: "A solid foundation is necessary because of the confusion between fear and awe to which I have already referred, and which is often made. I have said that awe is inappropriate in connection with the Sons of God, because you should not experience awe in the presence of your equals. However, it was also emphasized that awe is proper in the Presence of your Creator. I have been careful to clarify my role in the Atonement without either over- or understating it. I am also trying to do the same with yours. I have stressed that awe is not an appropriate reaction to me because of our inherent equality. Some of the later steps in this course, however, involve a more direct approach to God himself. It would be unwise to start on these steps without careful preparation, or awe will be confused with fear, and the experience will be more traumatic than beatific" (T.1.VII.5:1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8).

A: Jesus first spoke of awe in the second section of Chapter 1, where he emphasized that it is not an appropriate reaction to him or to miracles: **"You are a perfect creation, and should experience awe only in the Presence of the Creator of perfection. . . . Equals should not be in awe of one another because awe implies inequality"** (T.1.II.3:3,5). Jesus is thus setting the stage for developing a relationship with him, and correcting the traditional biblical view that he is God's *only* beloved Son, and we are inferior to him. If we listen carefully to what he is saying and do what he says, we will learn to trust him as our loving brother, knowing that he is always there as a source of comfort and guidance in all things. We will be less and less afraid of him and his message as we learn he is simply reflecting back to us what we have denied about ourselves.

As we settle more into this relationship and become more comfortable with his message, we will be prepared for the steps he will ask us to take later. We just need to be humble and patient, and not try to jump quickly to the top of the spiritual ladder before we are really ready for that level. We will then be able to allow the memory of God into our awareness with a minimum amount of fear. It will feel more natural, and not something imposed on us. We will accept our love for Him as our Source and Creator, and His love for us as the extension of His Love. This awareness now inspires awe in us, as it should; but awe does not entail fear unless we still believe we are somehow separate from God.

Thus, at the very beginning of the text, Jesus is cautioning us not to rush our study and practice, and not try to make ourselves spiritual on our own. We must first learn how to deal with our egos and all the barriers we have erected between ourselves and God's Presence. If we were ready to leap right back into Heaven, we would not be here thinking we are bodies in a real physical world. Patience, gentleness, humility, and trust are essential in these early stages of our work with *A Course in Miracles* .

Q #1212: The scribing of *A Course in Miracles* , Jesus' interaction with Helen, and the Course itself as a physical book seem to be very specific and not abstract. The Course is here in the world in front of us. It tells us how to do the workbook lessons, how the world is, and how the ego operates in the dream, etc. How is this so if God is not aware of the dream, or of us as dreamers, and if God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus are non-specific and therefore do not operate in the world or the dream, as opposed to the ego which is specific and does. I was wondering if perhaps our right mind, in a way, could be said to work in the world, or the dream, when we are able to see the dream for what it is, particularly by decisions we

make as we see things differently, having different outcomes as a result, on the level of content and also on the level of form at times.

I heard Ken speak of the Course coming through Helen's right mind or the One Mind, with Jesus being used as the symbol of God's Love in that process. This explanation of Helen would seem to indicate that the right mind can work in the world. Could you comment on this in relation to the origin of ACIM, the Holy Spirit, One Mind or right mind working in the world or dream idea?

A: Jesus tells us in one emphatic statement why the right mind could never work in the world: **“There is no world! This is the central thought this course attempts to teach” (W.pl.132.6:2,3)**. Add to that the following key Course principles and it is unmistakably clear that there has to be another way of understanding how the right mind works: **“ [the world] is the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition” (T.21.in.1:5)**. *Ideas leave not their source* . Therefore, as a projection of the mind, the world is only an effect, not something real that can interact with, or influence the mind in any way (see also **T.21.II.11**) .

The right mind is the part of the split mind that retains the reflection of our unseparated state, our true Identity as God's Son, eternally one with Him. When we (the decision maker) choose against the other part -- the ego -- then our internal experience would reflect the oneness we have denied, which means we would know -- or at least begin to realize -- that nothing outside our mind has any power over us, because there *is* nothing outside. In the context of sickness and healing, Jesus expresses this radical principle: **“He [all of us] looks on what he chooses to see. No more and no less. The world does nothing to him. He only thought it did. Nor does he do anything to the world, because he was mistaken about what it is [a projection] ” (M.5.II.3:6,7,8,9,10)**. Our perception, therefore, reflects only the choice to identify either with the thought system of separation or the correction of that (the Atonement principle that defines the right mind): **“It [perception] is the outward picture of a wish; an image that you wanted to be true” (T.24.VII.8:10)**; **“For seeing can but represent a wish, because it has no power to create. Yet it can look with love [the right mind] or look with hate [the wrong mind] , depending only on the simple choice of whether you would join with what you see, or keep yourself apart and separate” (T.31.VII.12:5,6)**.

Strictly speaking, therefore, *A Course in Miracles* did not come into the world, nor does its practice aim at changing the world. In fact, we are asked to reorient our entire approach to our lives: **“ . . . seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world” (T.21.in.1:7)**. The Course, thus, can be seen as one reflection in the mind of God's Son of his choice to accept the truth instead of denying it. It is in a specific form because of what we have done to our minds (**W.pl.161.2**) ; but it will lead us beyond specifics as we become less fearful of letting go of our defenses against the truth. *Our* preoccupation with form (specifics and time) is the reason the Course takes the form it does. It is we who limit abstract love to forms consistent with our belief in an external world that affects us. As we practice forgiveness, however, our preoccupation with specifics will gradually shift to a preoccupation with the content in our minds, and then we will perceive the world and ourselves in a completely different way. The world will change, but only in the sense that our perception of it will have changed. We will no longer perceive ourselves as being at its mercy, imprisoned by it as innocent victims. Our internal experience of seeing our interests as joined with everyone else's -- and the love that inspires that - - will be what attracts us more and more. In other words, we will be, by choice, oriented more inward than outward, more toward spiritual vision than toward what our eyes see.

Ken's book *Absence from Felicity* , especially Chapter 17, gives a comprehensive account of how the Course came through Helen. This is also presented in Chapter 5 of *Few Choose to Listen* , Vol. 2 of *The Message of A Course in Miracles*, where, in Chapter 4, you can also find an explanation of the Holy Spirit's nature and role. Additionally, you may find it helpful to look at Questions #328 and #544 on this service.

Q #1213: I understand that our interpretation of things must change, but that outer conditions won't necessarily change as a result. Yet I also understand, in the cinema analogy, that what we see cannot be different from what the film in our minds projects onto the screen of our experience. I also understand that concern with how long the shift of purpose in a relationship takes -- and I believe this refers to perceived results of that shift -- is of the ego. Nevertheless, the Course does hold out the eventuality of the "happy dream." Does that occur only when the ego ceases to want it? Why do specific patterns exist in our personal dreams? Is there a simple answer to why it takes time for changes to appear, if they ever do, since they are supposedly reflections of consciousness and the miracle of conscious reorientation takes no time?

A: The only meaningful change that can take place is the decision to choose against the ego and for the Atonement, the undoing of the belief in separation. The "happy dream" spoken of in *A Course in Miracles* flows from this choice, and pertains only to one's inner experience or perception. It has nothing to do with what our eyes see, the seemingly real external world. It is natural, in our separated state, to want things to go well in our lives in the world (whatever that may mean). But as we work more and more with the Course, we learn that the source of true happiness and peace is our decision to forgive, which means we would increasingly see our interests as the same as everyone else's. This is the happy dream - where our joy comes not from anything external, but from the internal awareness that we have been mistaken about the world and who we are, and that the truth is that we all share the same interests, and, ultimately, the same Identity as God's one Son.

Sometimes, this shift in awareness is reflected externally, because when we let go of guilt, we will no longer act in hurtful ways, toward ourselves and others. For example, if I have been engaged unconsciously in a specialness bargain or a victim-victimizer bargain with another person, that other person may change when I choose to no longer uphold the bargain. But you have to be careful not to make judgments based on form -- appearances in the world. We do not see our own or anyone else's full path, and so we cannot judge why lessons appear as they do. It could be that some people have chosen to learn through ongoing physical or psychological suffering. That may be their path. We don't know that, so we should not attempt to draw conclusions about their spiritual progress on the basis of the external patterns and conditions.

It is fairly common for people to experience specific recurring patterns in their lives such as rejection, abandonment, abuse, or failure, for example. We all have a deeply repressed layer of guilt over our belief that we rejected God and our Identity as His Son, having thrown away our inheritance of eternal love and peace. The overwhelming guilt over that and the subsequent fear of punishment causes us to project responsibility for this "sin," which means we would always be seeking to blame someone else for it. Thus, in order to deflect the blame for my rejecting God and Love, I would experience myself as being the innocent victim of other people's insensitive rejection of me. So, until I am open to the idea of projection, and then can look at my own guilt with Jesus or the Holy Spirit, I will have the unconscious need to be an innocent victim. "It's not my fault!" will be my theme song, and I will have no awareness of the origin of this recurring pattern.

It cannot be said too often that a favorite ego lure is judging according to form, and that is why the lessons in *A Course in Miracles* are exclusively about the content in our minds. The early lessons, especially, are helping us to see that the inner and the outer are the same. That is hard for us to relate to, for it reverses what we have learned in the world. Progress in this course rests on our openness to seeing our lives in the world as the result of the choices we make in our minds. And we always make one of the only two choices available to us: to perceive everything in terms of the ego thought system of separation, or in terms of the correction of that, the Holy Spirit's thought system of forgiveness.

Q #1214: Have animals chosen their own scripts? Why is the focus limited to forgiveness of the people in our lives, with no mention made of the treatment of animals. The attributes of God's teachers, gentleness

in particular, seem to be towards our fellow man. Animals in this world live a daily holocaust at our hands, and seem to feel pain, and believe they are here. This bothers me tremendously, and I cannot figure out how to think about it. Are they not also our brothers?

A: Yes, they are also our brothers. We have discussed this topic in our answers to two earlier Questions: #134 and #340; and it is also discussed in Question #20 ("What is meant by the *Sonship*, and who or what is included?") in our book *The Most Commonly Asked Questions about "A Course in Miracles."* As we explain, animals are part of the fragmented Sonship, just as we are, and therefore they should be thought of in the same way. True forgiveness is universal; it excludes no part of the Sonship. Animals are not discussed in the Course specifically, as its primary focus is the healing of our relationships with one another. Recall its origin in Helen and Bill's decision to find a better way of relating to each other and their colleagues. But the same principles are applicable to animals, although one must be careful not to approach this from the perspective of form, which would only lead to confusion when thinking about issues such as scripts, as we (homo sapiens) are the ones who introduced the idea of different species and orders, such as animate and inanimate. Focusing on *purpose* will help you stay on the right track: Am I giving the ego's purpose of seeing separation and victimization to my relationship with animals?, or the Holy Spirit's purpose of learning that all separation is illusory? By thus focusing on the content in your mind, you will be more apt to see all beings as having a common origin and a common goal.

Q #1215: Would it be possible for one to be a user of magic (a witch or mage, for example) and be a serious Course student? Is that use of magic any different from the countless more common methods of magic that all of us use every day to some extent? For example, one Course student may put on his best suit, think positively, and prepare what he feels are some impressive answers before going to a job interview, while another may light a candle, meditate, or perform some magical ritual in order to prepare. Both are using means they feel could influence the outcome; both are attempting to exercise their will within the world, and I presume, one method is not more real than the other, given that nothing here is really real.

A: Our answer to Question #124 explains the concept of *magic* as it is used in *A Course in Miracles*. It is important to note that the Course's use of the term is different from its ordinary use in the world. In brief, *magic* in the Course refers to our attempts to use physical means to solve a problem that exists in the mind. We thus try to solve the problem of the guilt in our mind in the world or the body, where it does not really exist. Again, Question #124 provides the full explanation of this with several references to the parts of the Course that address it. We also talk about the Course's teaching that the use of magic is not wrong, and, in fact, is unavoidable because of our fear of accepting healing solely at the mind level, and because of our investment in believing the body is our real identity. Feeling guilty about the use of magic is a mistake and never justified, but we do need to recognize the difference between true healing and false healing.

You can practice magic in any form and be a devoted student of *A Course in Miracles*, just as you can be a dentist and be a devoted student of *A Course in Miracles*. What can help to resolve any conflict surrounding this is focusing on the *purpose* of what you do. Anything we do in the world can be used by the Holy Spirit, if we so choose, to help us undo our belief in separation. It is always a matter of the purpose we choose to identify with in our minds. Fortunately, there are only two: the ego's or the Holy Spirit's. We use what we do either to reinforce our mind's belief that we are separate from one another and God, or to undo that belief by learning how to recognize that our interests are not really separate, despite the differences in form.

You are correct in saying that, from the Course's point of view, there are no degrees of reality when it comes to the different forms of magic that we use. In content, they are all the same; and they are all illusory. There is no hierarchy of illusions -- one illusion is not better or worse than any other illusion. It is important to respect those differences in the world, however, as long as we think the world and our lives

as individuals are real -- to ignore this dimension is to confuse levels. The body is not real, but as long as we think it is, then we must take care of its needs. In the same vein, there are some behaviors that are appropriate in certain situations and others that are not. As Course students, again, our primary focus is on our *use* of the body and our interactions in the world, and this is always a matter of the choice we make in our minds to keep our separate, special identities intact or to gradually let go of our need to see ourselves as separate and special.

Q #1216: Once I am willing to see that the hatred, jealousy, and ill-will that an individual is projecting at me is really my own unconscious thoughts about myself, and my own unconscious guilt -- does this mean these thoughts are now conscious, and if so now what do I do? I still have the hatred and anger towards those who are trying to hurt me even though I have an intellectual understanding that it is myself being jealous and hating, and hurtful of myself. How do I heal it? How do I give it over to the Holy Spirit to heal my mind so that the guilt is healed.

A: Yes, the projected thoughts of hatred become conscious when they are recognized as projections. A missing piece in the equation is to then see them as the effect of the mind's choice, and to also recognize the painful price of this choice. Hatred is experienced as painful whether it is perceived in its projected form toward someone else or toward oneself. The choice for separation is the true source of the pain, hatred, and the guilt. Your insight into the difference between an intellectual understanding of the projections and their actual release is very important. It is often difficult to truly accept that "anger is never justified," yet in this principle lies the key to healing. The problem is that it is not easy to accept because it negates the ego's battle cry of victimization. The mind that has identified with the ego thought system revolts at the prospect of accepting its identity as mind and dissociating from the body identity. Anger, judgment, and guilt sustain this identity.

Jesus recognizes the intensity of resistance to his message: "**If sickness [anger, judgment, victimization] is but a faulty problem-solving approach, it is a decision. And if it is a decision, it is the mind and not the body that makes it. The resistance to recognizing this is enormous, because the existence of the world as you perceive it depends on the body being the decision maker**" (M.5.II.1:5,6,7). As "intellectuals," our job is done when we are willing to see the projections and recognize their true source. As students of *A Course in Miracles*, our job begins when we are willing to recognize the tremendous resistance to letting go of the hatred and making a choice against separation because it means the end of the ego thought system and the self that reflects it. That is where you find yourself. The only thing to do with resistance is see it, acknowledge it honestly to the Holy Spirit, and see the pain that persists because of it. Only in associating the painful effects of the hatred and the resistance to letting it go will we find the motivation to take the steps out of resistance to the acceptance of healing. Meanwhile, we have the agonizing predicament of wanting release from the pain of guilt without letting go of the guilt.

The unhealed mind has an intense identification with the body that cannot be undone forcefully. While fear persists, only gentle patience will facilitate the journey out of it. The way to give the process over to the Holy Spirit is to continue to look honestly at the ego's antics, the resistance to letting them go, and the painful conflict that ensues without judging yourself for it. He is invited in by the mere fact of turning away from the ego's tune of victimization with a little willingness to acknowledge the mind's choice. Consistent practice of this process is in itself a new perspective, and makes room for the Holy Spirit's healing. Nothing more than this is needed.

Q #1217: Years ago, during an intense time of spiritual searching but prior to my introduction to *A Course in Miracles*, I had a stunningly realistic dream in which I was standing in a field, looking at a black portal in the sky, being held open by two beings whom I couldn't see, and being urged, by a third unseen spirit,

to pass through to the beautiful light beyond. I remember experiencing stark terror -- a mortal fear -- at the prospect of somehow getting through all that darkness by myself. The gentle but firm coaxing I understood to be from Jesus, who told me that others had gone before, to be met with untold happiness, and I could do so as well, but that no one could do it for me. My question is this: was the terror I felt at the thought of passing permanently through that darkness related to a concern of my individuality being annihilated, and, if so, please explain the concept of self. In Lesson 84, Jesus encourages us to say, "I will worship no idols, nor raise my own self- concept to replace my Self." The Course teaches that in the real world we have no individuality as we think of it now. In light of that, please explain the concept of Self to which He refers in this quote.

A: First of all, your interpretation of your dream sounds pretty accurate, including your observation that your fear is of loss of your individual self at the thought of passing beyond the darkness into the light. Our egos would like for us to believe that we are really afraid of the darkness -- the seemingly impenetrable clouds of guilt that we have made real by our investment in the thought of separation as sin. But that is the cover for the real fear, the fear of oneness.

The self with which we identify is the false individual self we have made for ourselves by joining with the illusory ego, to prove that the separation is real and that we are limited and tiny and vulnerable. The body serves this purpose quite nicely. There are in fact many layers to this false self, as the section **"Self-Concept versus Self"** (T.31.V) makes clear. Our Self, as the Course uses the concept, is our true identity as Christ, the holy Son of God, who remains one with the Father, untouched and unaffected by any illusory thoughts of separation, sin and guilt (W.pl.95.12,13; W.pl.201.1:3,4,5,6) . Ultimately, even words and concepts such as these are illusory, for they remain within a dualistic framework, but point to something beyond. There is no Self that can be defined apart from God, but while we believe in a separate self with all its limiting self-concepts, the concept of a Self, which ultimately is beyond all concepts, provides a helpful correction for the false beliefs with which we have circumscribed ourselves.

And so statements in the Course, such as the one you refer to in Lesson 84, are meant to help us release or undo these false concepts so that they can be first replaced with helpful concepts (healed perception), before we release all concepts and "return" to our reality of oneness (knowledge beyond all perception).

Towards the end of **"Self-Concept versus Self,"** Jesus provides a helpful contrast between the false self we have made, with all its various faces, and our true Self, God's one creation, beyond all concepts:

"The concept of the self has always been the great preoccupation of the world. ...Salvation can be seen as nothing more than the escape from concepts. ...Seek not your Self in symbols. There can be no concept that can stand for what you are. ... And you will not perceive that you can interact but with yourself. ...You will make many concepts of the self as learning goes along. Each one will show the changes in your own relationships, as your perception of yourself is changed. There will be some confusion every time there is a shift, but be you thankful that the learning of the world is loosening its grasp upon your mind. And be you sure and happy in the confidence that it will go at last, and leave your mind at peace. ...There will come a time when images have all gone by, and you will see you know not what you are. It is to this unsealed and open mind that truth returns, unhindered and unbound. Where concepts of the self have been laid by is truth revealed exactly as it is. ...There is no statement that the world is more afraid to hear than this: *I do not know the thing I am, and therefore do not know what I am doing, where I am, or how to look upon the world or on myself.* Yet in this learning is salvation born. And What you are [the Self] will tell you of Itself. (T.31.V.14:1,3; 15:1,2,5; 16:1,2,3,4; 17:2,3,4,6,7,8,9).

When you experienced yourself as having an opportunity to pass through the darkness to the light, your ego interpreted that as the path to self-annihilation, as it tried to persuade you that this self is something. The fear you experienced is what Jesus makes reference to when he speaks of **"no statement the world is more afraid to hear."** While we still value the little false self, we will be afraid of anything that is dismissive of that self. And so we will also approach the Course with ambivalence and fear, for ultimately

its purpose is to teach us but one thing, summed up in a simple statement that comes near the very end of the workbook: “**Let me not forget myself is nothing, but my Self is all**” (W.pII.358.1:7).

Q #1218: *A Course in Miracles* says it is a universal experience, yet it is Christian-based. How do I tell my church leaders that the Course works with Christianity and other religions, too? Do people from other religions or faiths accept the Course as valid? How do they make it work in their minds? How do they explain it to their church leaders?

A: To respond to your inquiries, let's first take a look at the passage you're referring to for clarification, because you've jumped to some conclusions that don't necessarily follow from Jesus' statements: “**Theological considerations as such are necessarily controversial, since they depend on belief and can therefore be accepted or rejected. A universal theology is impossible, but a universal experience is not only possible but necessary. It is this experience toward which the course is directed. Here alone consistency becomes possible because here alone uncertainty ends**” (C.in.2:4,5,6,7).

In other words, Jesus is saying here that there will never be agreement among different religious and spiritual teachings at a theological level, for they all use concepts and symbols specific to their own cultural and historical contexts to explain the nature of God and our relationship to Him, and belief is the basis for accepting or rejecting the various teachings. But what all genuine spiritual and religious teachings share is that they are leading to an experience of oneness and love, which is universal, since such an experience is not dependent on symbols or words, and in fact transcends anything specific. Nearly all the major religions of the world have their mystics, and when you get beyond the specific words, drawn from their own religious and theological backgrounds if they attempt to describe their mystical experiences, you will find that every mystic, regardless of the specific spiritual path or religion, is sharing the same universal experience.

The Course, while using Christian terminology, does not use those terms in the same way as traditional Christianity, and in fact often uses them in a way that is intended to correct what are perceived as the errors of Christianity, from the Course's perspective. And so there are significant theological differences between the Course and all the various Christian sects, which in fact do not agree with each other. Any attempt to reconcile the differences between the Course and traditional Christianity is likely to be unsuccessful (see Kenneth Wapnick's book, *A Course in Miracles and Christianity: A Dialogue*, co-authored with Jesuit priest and scholar, Father Norris Clarke, for an in depth discussion of many of these theological differences).

With these thoughts in mind, let's turn again to your question. First of all, the Course is not claiming to be a universal experience, but only one path among many (**see M.1:3,4 for a discussion of the Course's position on this**) that leads toward that experience. It is not intended to be integrated with other religions or spiritual paths, but stands on its own as a self-study spiritual teaching that helps its students get in touch with their own Inner Teacher, replacing the teacher that they have made for themselves (the ego). While it is certainly possible to practice the Course while remaining among the faithful of any particular religion, it will become more difficult to remain faithful to the tenets of that religion as the principles of the Course are integrated more deeply into one's practice and experience. For the Course's theology is very different from nearly every other religion of the world, including and especially Christianity.

Since the Course is only for one person -- the individual student who is studying it and practicing it -- and it is not intended to form the basis for any mass movement or new religion within the world, your concern about how to share it with church leaders is really unnecessary. You may find there are times when you feel drawn to share aspects of your path with a church leader, but you should not be surprised if often they will not be receptive to its message, since it says something so very different from traditional Christianity (e.g., sin is not real, God didn't make the world, and Jesus is not God nor our personal savior).

who died for our sins!). It should be a relief to know that, as a student of the Course, there is no one else that you need to inform or persuade. And from a metaphysical perspective, the Course means that quite literally -- there *is* no one else -- another significant difference from Christianity and most other world religions!

Q #1219: How can I apply forgiveness if I don't know what the perceived cause of my suffering is, like an anxiety that is there but you don't know where it comes from? Do I have to find out what it is that is causing it?

A: *A Course in Miracles* teaches that the ultimate cause of all anxiety, pain, and suffering is the mind's decision to choose separation and abandon the Father's Love. That is what got us here in this world, which is racked with pain. One of the very important goals of the Course is to teach us the *real* cause of pain (the mind's choice for separation) from the *apparent* cause (a person or event external to the mind). This distinction is at the heart of the process of forgiveness. It is often very helpful to identify the apparent cause of suffering, because in it lie the specific grievances that the ego is using to keep pain alive. The mind uses pain to defend its belief that the dream of separation is real and suffering is justified. This is its excuse for continuing to choose separation and deny that any other choice is possible. Being willing to see this defense system in operation and recognize its devious purpose is the beginning of its undoing. However, as you mention, it is not always possible to identify the specific apparent cause of suffering, and it is not necessary to do so: **"It is not necessary to follow fear through all the circuitous routes by which it burrows underground and hides in darkness, to emerge in forms quite different from what it is. Yet it *is* necessary to examine each one as long as you would retain the principle that governs all of them. When you are willing to regard them, not as separate, but as different manifestations of the same idea, and one you do not want, they go together"** (T.15.X.5:1,2,3). This means that it is important to look at any thoughts of judgment, annoyances, or upsets that *are* associated with recognizable causes. They are at the root of the experience of unexplained suffering while the ultimate cause remains the mind's choice, as we mentioned earlier. Judgments and grievances that are tucked away, overlooked, or denied, are the cause of undefinable anxiety. They are the source of guilt, as Jesus tells us: **"Of one thing you were sure: Of all the many causes you perceived as bringing pain and suffering to you, your guilt was not among them. Nor did you in any way request them for yourself. This is how all illusions came about. The one who makes them [the decision-making part of the mind] does not see himself as making them, and their reality does not depend on him. Whatever cause they have is something quite apart from him, and what he sees is separate from his mind. He cannot doubt his dreams' reality, because he does not see the part he plays in making them and making them seem real"** (T.27.VII.7:4,5,6,7,8,9). Thus, it is important to recognize that suffering plays an important role in keeping the ego thought system intact. That is not to say that you should not do whatever is helpful to alleviate the form suffering takes, which may include seeking counseling or therapy to uncover the possible apparent cause.

The Course is not meant to replace the many things that provide comfort and relief from the anxiety and pain of believing we have abandoned God. It does offer ultimate relief by leading us out of the dream of separation, but that is accomplished in a gentle, gradual process of practicing forgiveness by searching the mind carefully for the judgments that keep the memory of God from awareness. If we are willing to question them, seeing them as the reflection of the mind's choice, we open the door to the Holy Spirit Who will release them. Guilt is thus diminished and eventually undone, along with the suffering that is its effect: **"Bring, then, all forms of suffering to Him Who knows that every one is like the rest. He sees no differences where none exists, and He will teach you how each one is caused. None has a different cause from all the rest, and all of them are easily undone by but a single lesson truly learned. Salvation is a secret you have kept but from yourself"** (T.27.VIII.12:1,2,3,4).

Q #1220: I seem to be determined to overcomplicate every potential friendship or relationship with the opposite sex. Not quite; but it has become clear a whole lot of unconscious emotional factors come into play. With the woman that I have just been involved, I find myself questioning her motivation, and then wondering about my own as well.

A: Although the specifics will change over time with our various special relationships, the underlying dynamics, content and purpose will remain the same, so long as we continue to employ the ego as our guide and teacher in approaching our relationships. It's helpful to recognize that specialness is always at the foundation of any relationship we pursue, no matter how we go about doing it. For the underlying premise is that I am incomplete in some way, and that I want and need someone else to help give me a different feeling or experience from what I am now experiencing. In other words, the motivation is always some sense of lack – always! And while we believe at the very core of our existence that lack is our reality, Jesus is asking us to consider the possibility that it is really a lie.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that *A Course in Miracles* is telling us not to pursue special relationships – Jesus needs our special relationships as the classrooms in which he can teach us our lessons of forgiveness. For special relationships, no matter what their form, allow us to get in touch with our own underlying guilt -- the source of our feelings of lack and need, which always motivate us to seek outside ourselves.

At this point it does not matter what the form of your relationship with this woman may be. Its value lies in the opportunity it has provided for you to recognize how effective the ego is in tying you up in knots when you seek to listen to its counsel. When we are willing to turn to a different Teacher, we will begin to understand that relationships are never really about anyone but ourselves. They are the mirrors we can hold up to look into the depths of our own unconscious mind and see what darkness is still lurking there. Intense feelings such as you describe around such relationships are not the result of past experiences in previous relationships, but rather result from the intensity of our belief in own guilt and unworthiness, having their ontological origins in our belief that we could separate from and attack Love. No wonder, with that belief, we will sabotage all of the relationships we pursue in a hopeless attempt to find outside of ourselves what we secretly accuse ourselves of having destroyed within and thrown away.

So, while we don't want to try to make ourselves stop any of the craziness we are pursuing in our special relationships, we do want to learn to step back from what seems to be going on and watch what we are doing with a certain sense of nonjudgmental detachment. If we can recognize our insanity without judging it, it will begin to lose its power and its appeal to us and we will find ourselves less inclined to act out our ego fantasies of conflict and victimization. Increasingly, we will find we can enjoy relationships simply as the joining of mind with mind, each whole and complete in itself, each seeking simply to extend the love that is already present within. And if the other does not seem to reciprocate, we will not experience it as an evaluation of our own worth, but rather as a call for the love that they have forgotten is already theirs.

This shift from a special to a holy relationship is beautifully described at the beginning of chapter 22 of the text:

“Who has need for sin? Only the lonely and alone, who see their brothers different from themselves. ... For an unholy relationship is based on differences, where each one thinks the other has what he has not. They come together, each to complete himself and rob the other. They stay until they think that there is nothing left to steal, and then move on.....

A holy relationship starts from a different premise. Each one has looked within and seen no lack. Accepting his completion, he would extend it by joining with another, whole as himself. He sees no difference between these selves, for differences are only of the body. Therefore, he looks on nothing he would take. He denies not his own reality *because* it is the truth. Just under Heaven does he stand, but close enough not to return to earth. For this relationship has Heaven's Holiness. How far from home can a relationship so like to Heaven be? (T.22.in.2:1,2,5,6,7; 3)

To get more clarity about the purpose our egos give to our relationships, you may wish to check into either the book or the audio set on *Form versus Content: Sex and Money* .

Q #1221: Sometimes I'm just depressed, and I'm not quite sure how to look at it. I feel that any direction is wrong, that if I read or listen to *A Course in Miracles* , I'm unable to live up to its expectations, then I calcify even more, thinking, "Okay, since I have to accept choosing the separation as my responsibility, I must want to be depressed." So two questions: (1) Could experiencing bouts of depression be part of one's script? In the same way that any other "event" might be? If so, then is it just a matter of accepting it and not fighting? Or am I deluding myself and not looking deeply enough? (2) Is it always a matter of having faith and hanging on through the discomfort? How does one know if this is the layers of fear that Jesus talks about going through--those cloud banks, etc.?

A: Basically, if we can take Jesus at his word, all of us, most of the time, whether we recognize it or not, are walking around feeling either angry or depressed, or perhaps angry *and* depressed (**T.12.III.6:1,2,3; T.29.IV.3:3**) . After all, everything in the ego thought system comes from guilt, and if we internalize the guilt, that's depression, and if we externalize or project it, that's anger. We cover those feelings over as much as we can with thin veils of apparent pleasure, Jesus also tells us , but you don't have to scratch very far beneath the surface to find the anger or the depression (**T.29.IV.3:4**) .

So, in a sense, yes, you could say depression is just part of our script, once we choose the ego, just as having a body is. In fact, Jesus explains, **"When you equate yourself with a body you will always experience depression. When a child of God thinks of himself in this way he is belittling himself"** (**T.8.VII.1:6,7**). And it seems likely that, until we near the end of our journey, we will continue much of the time belittling ourselves, seeing ourselves as bodies. Jesus describes this overriding identification: **"You still have too much faith in the body as a source of strength. What plans do you make that do not involve its comfort or protection or enjoyment in some way? This makes the body an end and not a means in your interpretation, and this always means you still find sin attractive. ...There is one thing that you have never done; you have not utterly forgotten the body. It has perhaps faded at times from your sight, but it has not yet completely disappeared"** (**T.18.VII.1:1,2,3; 2:1,2**).

Yes, if we feel depressed, it can only be because we want to be depressed. But that's because we're also saying we want to be an individual, a vulnerable, helpless body, but we're not allowing ourselves to see the connection between that choice and the depression (**T.12.III.6:5,6,7; T.21.V.2:3,4,5,6,7**) . It would be a mistake however to think that the Course, or Jesus, has expectations of us that we are failing to meet. Only the ego has expectations against which we can be measured and judged. Jesus describes in uncompromising terms how our choices affect us, but he is not judging or condemning us for our foolish decisions. They are almost unavoidable while we persist in identifying with the ego and its seeming effects, for the learning situation with the wrong teacher must be depressing and hopeless (**T.8.VII.8; 13:1,2,3**) .

The Course process is not to deny that we are bodies but rather to seek Help in undoing the guilt in the mind that makes the need for a defense such as the body seem necessary. So it would be best not to make too big a deal of our depression, trying to figure out how to deal with it or get rid of it, as the ego delights in our doing, as if the depression itself were the problem. When we attempt to do anything about any ego state, even seeking a so-called spiritual solution, such as turning to the Course itself, we only reinforce our feelings of emptiness and inadequacy, because we are making the problem real and still putting ourselves in charge of the solution. And then nothing we decide to do will help, as you have found. Rather than trying to fight or change or minimize depression, it is more helpful simply to recognize that it is merely a symptom of a faulty choice in the mind -- choosing the wrong teacher. And so the goal then becomes, not to escape the depression, but to make a different choice in our mind.

The choice for a different Teacher is reflected in those holy instants, which we open ourselves to when we simply say “no” to the ego and “yes” to the Holy Spirit. And in those instants the body recedes in importance in our perception, at least momentarily. **“You are not asked to let this happen for more than an instant, yet it is in this instant that the miracle of Atonement happens. Afterwards you will see the body again, but never quite the same. And every instant that you spend without awareness of it gives you a different view of it when you return. At no single instant does the body exist at all” (T.18.VII.2:3,4,5; 3:1).**

It is then simply a matter of not judging ourselves for choosing the ego and *all* its effects, including depression, and then having faith – *in the process of forgiveness* -- that over time, our investment in the ego will recede as we look directly at it and eventually through it. Our own resistance is the clouds of guilt and the layers of fear that we must pass through. From where we stand on the ego side, it all looks dark and foreboding and impenetrable, but from Jesus' perspective it is all as substanceless as clouds (T.18.IX.8) . That is why we cannot let go of the ego and all its effects, including depression, on our own, and why we need the help of a Guide, such as the Holy Spirit or Jesus, Who is not fooled by the illusion. And then gradually, like the fog in the morning sun, our depression will dissipate and lift in the light of true forgiveness and healed perception.

By the way, since we will continue to identify ourselves as bodies for much of our journey back home, it only makes sense that we be open along the way to seemingly external interventions that can help ameliorate painful symptoms we may be experiencing, such as depression. If you find your bouts of depression are interfering with your normal functioning, you may wish to consider seeking some form of treatment, including therapy and medications, such as antidepressants. And you may also find the answers to some previous questions on depression helpful, including Questions #352, #257 and #128.

Q #1222: When I perceive an attack that seems totally unwarranted -- and this can be a mere comment someone makes that makes me feel invalidated -- my reaction is one of intense anger and hatred to the point that, if I could and get away with it, I would kill the other person. With these feelings of invalidation and indignation, I can feel like a door mat. This is a sticking point for me, because if I don't succumb to the anger and attack back, and I pray to the Holy Spirit for help instead, I just feel flat and unmotivated, and feel like trash.

As I understand it, what has happened is the experience of indignation and invalidation is just my own guilt and fear projected outward and the situation provides the opportunity to become aware of my unconscious self-deprecation, and that the people that appear to be doing it to me are not the true cause. Although I understand this intellectually, when it happens, this understanding seems to have very little power or strength in relation to the intensity of emotion, and does little to transform the pain.

I greatly desire to know a way I can follow that can help me to truly forgive and to transform the energy of this guilt / anger into the vitality and love that I seek. I want to know that, yes, forgiveness truly works through experience of applying and practicing it.

A: There is another aspect to the guilt in your mind that may help you understand why it is so difficult to let go of your anger when you feel you have been invalidated by the other person. Your unconscious guilt -- which can also be called self-hatred -- leads you to *expect* to be mistreated because that is what your guilt tells you you deserve. This is true of all of us, of course, who believe we attacked God and separated from Him. You would not be affected by the other person's attack unless, unconsciously, you thought you deserved it. In your right mind, where you identify with your guiltlessness as a Son of God, you would not take an attack personally, and you would see the fear in the other person that is behind the attack. This is why Jesus tells us in *A Course in Miracles* that **“no one can be angry at a fact. It is always an interpretation that gives rise to negative emotions, regardless of their seeming justification by**

what *appears* as facts. Regardless, too, of the intensity of the anger that is aroused” (M.17.4:1,2,3).

Related to this is another dynamic that is described in the section in Chapter 31 called “**Self-Concept versus Self” (T.31.V)** . The concept described there, “the face of innocence,” is one most students wish they had never come across. It is a devastating revelation about us, although it ultimately is our way out of the hell of situations such as the one you describe. The gist of this idea is that concealed beneath our protests of being the innocent victim of another's cruelty is a wish that we be unfairly treated so that we can blame that person for our lack of peace and happiness. Upon hearing this for the first time, most people strenuously object: “That's impossible! Why would I deliberately *want* to suffer at another's hand? That makes no sense.” It doesn't make sense from our perspective. But in light of the ego's strategy, it makes perfect sense.

As you stated, you realize, intellectually at least, that you have projected your guilt onto the other person, which is how the ego assures you that you will regain your innocence -- that other cruel person is the victimizer, not you. What follows from this is that deep inside you, therefore, you must *want* to be unfairly treated. You have to suffer at the hands of a victimizer if you are going to be the innocent victim, according to the ego's twisted logic. This is difficult to swallow, but it is essential to include in your understanding of projection. As you are able to look at this aspect of guilt, you are giving yourself another way of handling your anger. It does not take away your anger, but it helps you not justify it. That does not seem helpful, but it is very helpful, in that it gives you a better chance at getting at the real cause of your anger.

The way your ego has led you to see things, no matter which path you take, you wind up as the loser. On the one hand, if you forgive by letting the other person off the hook, you feel like a door mat and trash. But if you don't forgive, your anger just saps your energy and you just surrender, while your guilt stays intact in your mind. With true forgiveness, no one loses. You just look at what your ego is doing without judging yourself. If you are not judging, then you are in your right mind with Jesus or the Holy Spirit. Even if this is for a split second, you have made significant progress toward disidentifying with your ego, which is the real problem, not what the other person said or did. In that instant, you would be peaceful, having glimpsed your own innocence, which is shared by everyone. You do not forgive the other person, you forgive yourself for having believed that your guilt is real and that you needed to do something about it (the defense of denial and projection). This takes a lot of practice, but Jesus guarantees our success, because all we are doing is reclaiming the guiltlessness that is our true identity. Who can invalidate you if God Himself guarantees your innocence (**W.pl.93.6**) ? This can happen only if you forget who you are, and then give power to someone else to make you into a door mat, which can happen only in a dream or fantasy (**T.4.I.7**) .

We have discussed many of these ideas in Questions #63, 551, and 569.

Q #1223: I had an experience of God recently that I don't know how to connect with my work with *A Course in Miracles* . Briefly, here is what happened. My cat, Ben, became seriously ill, and I was terribly upset. After leaving Ben in the care of the veterinarian, I returned home, still very anxious, and I found myself repeating, “Please forgive me, Ben, I am so very sorry.” I did this for hours, as if compelled to. Then I became aware that I was directing this to myself -- that I was sorry to the core of my being for the harm I had done to myself over many years of abuse. Then came a powerful feeling that I was not alone. I experienced this as God, and for the first time in my life I felt alive and real. The power of His presence was beyond words. I was nothing; but I was everything. Fear did not exist, and there was a realization of beauty in death and in all things. This lasted for the weekend, but after that I felt very vulnerable, and my defenses built up again. I am still seeking to recover that feeling of being so real and alive.

A: Without knowing a great deal more about you, it is difficult for us to say what all of this means for you specifically. We can simply point out a few concepts and teachings in the Course that we hope will be of help.

First, Jesus reminds us that we are **“very new to the ways of salvation” (T.17.9:1)**, which means if a profound experience does not last, such as the one you had, then it can serve the purpose of showing us what our permanent experience will be as we continue to get in touch with the interferences that must still be operating in our minds. He describes this in another place in the text in terms of light and darkness: **“... the journey into darkness has been long and cruel, and you have gone deep into it. A little flicker of your eyelids, closed so long, has not yet been sufficient to give you confidence in yourself, so long despised” (T.18.III.3:3,4)**. The experience you had seems to be much more than “a little flicker of your eyelids,” but that assessment is from our point of view, not from where Jesus is outside the dream. It may be helpful to read this entire section, “Light in the Dream,” as you will see there that Jesus is very encouraging, and is basically saying that our unconscious fear of total release causes us to retreat back into darkness after we glimpse the light. He assures us that we will succeed, however: **“But you will advance, because your goal is the advance from fear to truth” (T.18.III.2:2)**. Notice, though, that in this section Jesus does not advise us to concentrate on God, but rather on our relationships -- looking for grievances we are holding onto, or something else that would keep us separate from others -- perhaps feeling that some people do not deserve to experience God's Love and peace. Our fear of release is expressed that way, and therefore if we focus on becoming aware of what is keeping us separate from others, and then look at all that with Jesus or the Holy Spirit (which means without judgment), we will be letting go of what is blocking our awareness of God's love and peace that is reflected in our right minds. Patience and gentleness are essential as you proceed with this process.

Q #1224: I reencountered Lesson 328 "I choose the second place to gain the first." I am somewhat baffled even after re-reading it carefully, and therefore would appreciate your help.

A: This thought comes from the famous statement in Matthew's gospel that the last shall be first and the first last. This is the foundation of the ego's thought system and its principle of *one or the other* -- God is second because the ego is first, which means God is no longer God, and so has been destroyed. *A Course in Miracles* helps us recognize and correct our mistake of believing we have separated from God and thus are in “first place” because we triumphed over Him. Jesus tells us in this lesson, as well as elsewhere, that we believe our autonomy is our salvation, but it is not really what we thought it would be: **“Yet all we find is sickness, suffering and loss and death” (W.pll.328.1:3)**, which is not at all what God wills for us. We choose the second place by realizing our mistake, letting go of the ego, and choosing Jesus as our teacher. Then we realize that there is only the unity of the Father and Son -- no one and two. There is only One. When we accept God as our Cause instead of the ego, the memory of our oneness with Him returns to our mind, and our will rejoins His.

Q #1225: The lesson "I am under no laws but God's" (W.pl.76) implies, among other startling powers, that we don't need to eat. *A Course in Miracles* has been around long enough and supposedly practiced by millions, and so it would seem that a few folks would not need to eat by now.

A: Although demonstrations of being beyond physical laws may be helpful reminders to us, that really is not the point of this lesson. Jesus is simply stating the truth -- that in reality there is no body, and therefore there can be no laws that govern it. This is what we refer to as Level One, where Jesus contrasts truth and illusion. Level Two discussions are only about the illusory realm, where he contrasts the ego's thought system of separation (wrong-mindedness) and the Holy Spirit's thought system of Atonement (right-mindedness). Thus, by reminding us in this lesson that what we believe in is not really there, he is helping us develop a different perspective on our seeming lives in the world. Unfortunately, far

too many students have missed the distinction between Level One and Level Two, and therefore have wound up denying their physical and psychological experiences, to the detriment of themselves, their families, friends, etc. They have forgotten that Jesus stated early in the text that it is practically impossible to deny our physical experience in this world (**T.2.IV.3:10**). He never encourages us to deny our bodily experiences or our belief that we are individual persons living in a physical world.

Rather than making fun of us or challenging us to give up our belief in the necessity of medical treatment, eating, breathing, earning money, and having relationships, he is helping us learn how not to take it all so seriously, recognizing where our investment in that belief is coming from (the dynamics of the ego that govern the wrong-minded part of our split mind). The body and its seeming laws are not the problem, in other words. The problem is our unconscious need to believe that we are *not* as God created us, and, as a means of dealing with the guilt over that, we are instead bodies subject to laws not of our own making. To correct this, our attention therefore has to be re-directed from the body to learning how to become aware of our minds and our ongoing decision to uphold that thought system. That is why the emphasis throughout *A Course in Miracles* is on having us *change our minds about the body* -- which means becoming aware of the purpose for which we constantly use the body. Thus Jesus says, **“You are asked to live so as to demonstrate that you are not an ego . . .” (T.4.VI.6:3)**; and this means looking at and eventually letting go of all the ways in which we keep ourselves separate from God and from each other -- through judgment and specialness, for example. Similarly, in the context of relationships: **“Your question should not be, ‘How can I see my brother without the body?’ Ask only, Do I really wish to see him sinless?” (T.20.VII.9:1,2).**

In essence, thus, Jesus is teaching us in this lesson to look through his eyes at our dependency on all the laws we think bind us so that we can see the roots of this dependency in the guilt in our minds, and then give the purpose of forgiveness to all of our interactions in the world, thus allowing ourselves to accept the Atonement, the ultimate goal of our work with the Course and our relationship with Jesus.

Kenneth has given an extensive commentary on this lesson in Volume 2 of his *Journey through the Workbook of “A Course in Miracles.”*

Q #1226: Please discuss gratitude and *A Course in Miracles* . Can we be truly grateful for anything more than the opportunity to forgive?

A: If by gratitude for the opportunity to forgive, you mean *being grateful to each other* for these opportunities, you have touched upon the essence of *A Course in Miracles*, which is forgiveness. In a recorded workshop called “Our Gratitude to God,” Ken discusses gratitude on three levels: our gratitude to God, to Jesus, and to each other. Just as forgiveness is the correction for the unforgiveness we feel, gratitude, too, is a correction. It corrects the ingratitude we feel on these three levels, and when our ingratitude is corrected, the need for gratitude disappears. This has nothing to do with Jesus or God needing our gratitude (see **T.6.I.17**) -- it is just another dimension in the process of undoing the ego thought system in our minds. If ingratitude is seen as a cornerstone of the ego system, basically going hand in hand with judgment, attack, fear, and guilt, then love must come when we undo the ingratitude and allow ourselves to feel grateful to each other, to Jesus, and to God, because love has been hidden behind the ingratitude. Ingratitude is like a veil, and therefore, when the veil is gone, the Love of God can be experienced.

In brief, the gratitude the Course asks us to feel toward each other is not for what you do for me or for the miserable way you have treated me. It is gratitude for being able to see in you a mirror of my own self. Seeing the “sin” in you, I know it is within me, and by changing my mind about you, I am changing my mind about myself. That is the source of our gratitude toward each other. Yet, I cannot forgive you without a loving Presence next to me, and so my gratitude to you is impossible without my also feeling grateful to Jesus or the Holy Spirit. I realize, in other words, that I cannot change my mind by myself, because it is

my self that got me into this mess, that has accused you, and that believes I can do it on my own. Relying on this self will only serve to keep me in hell. Thus, I recognize not only that I cannot do this without Jesus, but also that I cannot do it without you, because you represent a part of my self that I have split off and pushed outside me. And until I recognize that you are not outside me, but are really a part of me, I will never know the Christ that I am. **“Your function here on earth is only to forgive him, that you may accept him back as your Identity. He is as God created him. And you are what he is. Forgive him now his sins, and you will see that you are one with him” (W.pl.192.10:6,7,8,9).**

As we advance in this process of undoing the ego, our gratitude to Jesus will grow as we realize that despite all the awful ego stuff that goes on inside us, part of us knows he truly loves us, and that by accepting his love, we can accept the love that we are. This, then, does away with the ingratitude we have felt toward God, thanks to our acceptance of the ego's replacement for the true God. By reflecting Heaven's love in his relationship with us, Jesus helps us remember the deep gratitude we feel for God as our loving Creator and Source.

For some further commentary, see Question #556, which contrasts the ego's version of gratitude with the Holy Spirit's. Excerpts from the tape album “Our Gratitude to God” are posted on our Web site under Teaching Materials/Excerpts Series.

Q #1227: I have a question about lights. I have been doing the Course for a very short time (about seven months), and I am already seeing light shows in my meditative states. I never experienced this before and I'm a little nervous. Although I do feel very peaceful, I'm still ready to run to the eye doctor to check and see if I have glaucoma or something! I still haven't seen light around the edges of things or anything really in the world of form, but when I lay down it's showtime! My question really is this: Isn't it too soon for me to be seeing this stuff? It's a little scary sometimes and I don't know if it is real or somehow just a figment of my imagination. Why after just beginning *A Course in Miracles* would I have these episodes when others have been faithfully doing the course for years and don't seem to have these experiences?

A: Like everything else in the world of perception, once we have made it real in our minds, the lights you are seeing are in themselves neutral. And what determines their value is the interpretation you give them, which depends only on to which teacher you turn to give them their meaning.

Turn to the ego and you will see them as evidence of your specialness, an interpretation you've already been in touch with when you believe they somehow make you different from, possibly even better than, other students who have been studying the Course much longer. By the way, although the wording of Lesson 15 may seem to suggest that experiences of light will be an outcome of practicing the Course's principles, you may find that the discussions of these kinds of phenomena, presented in Questions #218 and #339, can provide some helpful clarification. And so whether one experiences light episodes earlier or later in one's work with the Course, or not at all, in the end is irrelevant to the Course's genuine purpose, which is to teach us how to undo our investment in the ego and its thought system of separation and differences, through the practice of forgiveness -- the releasing of all of our judgments.

Turn to the Holy Spirit in your right mind, and your light experiences can become symbols that remind you that all perception is ultimately illusory -- and that may be at least in part what you are finding so frightening about your experience -- for the seeming external world of our perception is no more nor less a figment of your imagination than the flashes of light and flaming sparks you are seeing during your meditations with the workbook lessons. The light can also symbolize the little willingness needed to shine away the darkness of the ego's thought system of sin and guilt by looking directly at it and seeing through it (e.g., **T.11.in.3**) . And, when seen through the vision of the Holy Spirit, it can also be a symbol of the formless light and love that is our reality as God's Son, an extension of His perfect Love (e.g., **T.12.VI.7:2,3**) .

Perhaps the most important thing you may wish to keep in mind about your experiences is that nothing of the world of perception is of any value in itself. If the experiences should continue for any time, simply enjoy them without making them a big deal. And if they should cease, nothing of value will have been lost.

Q #1228: The same type of people keep coming into my life. In my childhood, my father was violent and tyrannical, and later all my boyfriends were like that. Now I have a husband who has made my life a living hell. I also work with someone just like my husband. I fight fear and anxiety all the time. One thing is clear to me: the problem is in *me* . I also have met people who have found inner peace, or are working toward it. I do not want to suffer anymore, and I want to be liberated from fear. How can psychotherapy help me with this? I believe it was not a coincidence that a friend of mine presented me with *A Course in Miracles* . How can this help?

A: First, if you have not done so yet, you might try going to a therapy center that works with abused women. That is often a good first step. Therapists and counselors with experience in this field can offer helpful resources, and sometimes they can advise you in terms of what to do and what not to do in an abusive situation. Getting this kind of help would not be going against anything the Course teaches. In fact, Jesus tells us that using external sources of help is a wise thing to do, while we are also working on letting go of the ego beliefs in our minds (**T.2.IV.4,5**) . Seeking and accepting help on this level can give form to your desire to be healed; it can be an act of kindness to yourself, which would be an important step in reversing the ego's image of you as guilty and deserving of punishment.

The Course can help you learn how to interpret your experience differently. The early workbook lessons, especially, help us to practice what the text has taught us about this -- namely, that perception is an interpretation, not a fact (see, for example, **T.21.in.1**; **T.24.VII.8:10**) . This distinction between what happens in the world and the interpretation we give it is crucial to our understanding and practice of the Course's message. It is one of the most difficult teachings to apply, because it goes against what all the learning of the world has taught us. Vicious, cruel attacks take place. This cannot -- and should not -- be denied. But to go beyond that "objective fact" and say you are a victim is to give the fact an interpretation. Thus, Jesus teaches us in Lesson 5 that we are never upset for the reason we think (**W.pl.5**) , and in Lesson 31 that we are not the victims of the world we see (**W.pl.31**) . Upon seeing these lessons for the first time, many people think Jesus has lost touch with reality, or that he couldn't mean what he says literally! But he does mean it literally, having already explained the basis of those statements in the text -- that the guilt in our minds is so intolerable that we must project it onto others, whom we then see as the guilty, victimizing ones. This is extremely difficult for us to process, and it becomes our lifetime's work.

What enables us to deal with this is to remember always that Jesus, or the Holy Spirit, is with us each step of the way. His comforting, loving, non-judgmental presence will help us proceed gently and patiently, with the assurance that we are simply undoing mistaken beliefs in our mind, or to use the metaphor of the dream, gently awakening from a nightmare of sin, guilt, and fear. It is important to remember as well that this presence can come in the form of a caring, non- judgmental therapist, who can help you deal with your experience of abuse -- all of the guilt, hurt, resentment, and rage. This often can be a helpful prerequisite for healing to occur.

Q #1229: You stress that all of our work with *A Course in Miracles* is done exclusively at the level of mind. How does this fit in with Lesson 71, where we are told to ask God these specific questions: "*What would You have me do? Where would You have me go? What would You have me say, and to whom?*" (**W.pl.71. 9:3,4,5**). It seems that in this lesson, Jesus is focusing on behavior or form, not the mind.

A: Yes, this is one of very few places in *A Course in Miracles* where Jesus does this. Unfortunately, many students concluded that this is what *A Course in Miracles* is all about -- a means of getting specific answers to specific questions and concerns about our lives in the world. They thus distorted the meaning of the Course very soon after it was first published. This trend actually led to the scribed pamphlet, *The Song of Prayer*, in which Jesus clarifies what he meant by prayer, forgiveness, and healing, addressing the misinterpretations that were spreading among students.

Once you gain a sense of the full message of this course, you would know that it is definitely not about enhancing our lives as bodies in the world or about our behavior. It is not wrong to ask for specific help with specific problems -- it is a helpful starting point on one's spiritual journey, for it encourages a perception of God as caring and loving, not punitive and judgmental. But, ultimately, our goal is to get back home to Heaven -- to awaken from the dream that we are separate from Him and from each other. If we are always focused on specific concerns about our own and others' bodies, and on getting what we want in the world, then we will remain spiritual children, still seeing God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus as separate from us. God is a loving Father Who takes care of *me* -- I am separate from God; Jesus as an older, wiser brother who is guiding *me* -- I am separate from him. Again, this is a good start in developing a relationship with God and with Jesus, but it is just the beginning. There is so much more.

Compare what you have quoted from Lesson 71 with what Jesus says later in Lesson 133: **"You do not ask too much of life, but far too little. When you let your *mind* be drawn to bodily concerns, to things you buy, to eminence as valued by the world, you ask for sorrow, not for happiness"** (W.pl.133.2:1,2; italics added). He then goes on to list the criteria for finding out if what we are asking for will truly help us on our spiritual journey. And in one of the sections in the text that discusses what it means to ask the Holy Spirit for help, Jesus tells us that we do not really know what we need: **"For what you think you need [for example, ways to improve our lives in the world] will merely serve to tighten up your world against the light, and render you unwilling to question the value that this world can really hold for you"** (T.13.VII.11:6). He wants us to see that the only value this world has is to be a classroom in which we use our experiences to get us back to our mind, where we can then undo our belief in separation. Thus, he asks us to remember what we really want: **"The Holy Spirit leads me unto Christ, and where else would I go? What need have I but to awake in Him?"** (T.13.VII.14:2,3). Another lovely statement of this occurs later: **"For what but Christ is there to see and hear and love and follow home?"** (T.24.V.6:6) -- this comes in the context of Jesus urging us to look honestly at our quest for specialness, and the awful price we pay in the special relationships we value so much.

There are many other passages like these that could be cited, but the point is that we need to view them in the context of the overall message and aim of the Course. We also need to remember, as Jesus explains at the beginning of Chapter 25, that in order to communicate with us, he needs to use terms we are familiar with, but these are always from our framework of dualism, not the pure oneness of reality, which we would be unable to understand (see T.25.I.5,6,7). So he must express his message in terms that are meaningful to us but that are not literally true. He thus has us say prayers to God to get us on the right footing with Him, but he also states that God does not understand words and does not hear prayers, and, even more devastating to us, He does not even know we are here -- how could He know about what does not exist? (See W.pl.183.7:3,4,5; 10)

Although we could go on with this for several more pages, we will stop here and refer you to other questions on the Service where we have discussed these issues and provided additional references. We refer you to them for further study: #85, #336, #538, #555, #643. All of these issues are discussed in depth in Chapter 2 of *Few Choose to Listen* (Vol. 2 of *The Message of "A Course in Miracles"*); the discussion focuses on the crucial difference between the *form* of the Course and its unchanging, consistent *content*.

Q #1230: In *A Course in Miracles*, Workbook Lesson 20 says: “Yet you will not see if you regard yourself as being coerced, and if you give in to resentment and opposition” (W.pl.20.1:6). But the thing is, most of the time I regard myself as being coerced by any person I interact with, so I'm used to living like this and it is giving me trouble to do the lessons without this feeling. Is it all right to continue doing the lessons even if I do them uncomfortably?

A: It might help you to go back over each lesson with the intention of noticing how much Jesus emphasizes gentleness and patience. Focus on his loving nature as a teacher and guide who wants more than anything to help you let go of everything that is causing you pain. Try to sense his loving intention, totally free of judgment and coercion, even though you may not be used to feeling it in another person or in yourself. Then know that your feelings of coercion and discomfort are coming from your own guilt projected onto other people. That is exactly what Jesus wants to help you get past. So just look at those feelings as they come up; don't deny them and don't judge yourself for having them. You don't have to let go of them. It is important that you not force yourself to do anything -- you never want to fight against yourself. But simply learning how to look at or observe your feelings is a big step in the process of releasing them to Jesus' love.

Issues similar to yours have come up for other students. You might find it helpful to look at our discussions of these in Questions #71, 146, 184, 315, 934.

Q #1231: If God did not create the world and our collective mind did, how is possible that it made such a complex universe from beginning to end? It would seem only God could do this. And this universe seems to be made of all the same stuff. What is it made of? I thought it was all made of God.

A: The complexity of the universe is deliberate, but it is not of divine origin. From the perspective of *A Course in Miracles*, the world is the result of a series of steps in the ego's strategy to obliterate from our awareness any sense of the oneness of reality and of the Sonship. “**The Substitute Reality**” in Chapter 18 explains this process of fragmentation and its result, along with the Course's approach to the reversal of fragmentation (T.18.I.4,5,6) .

When you think of it, inherent in complexity is separation, whether you are talking about the microcosmic or macrocosmic level. In addition, this complexity produces what seems like an infinite number of problems demanding our attention, just so that we can survive as individuals, as nations, as a planet, etc. This is also important to the ego's strategy, for as long as we, as physical-psychological individuals, are preoccupied with what is going on in the world (including our bodies), we will never go back into our minds and discover that all of our perceptions are chosen and deliver to us the experiences we want. “**Projection makes perception. . . . [the world] is the outside picture of an inward condition**” (T.21.in.1:1, 5) ; “ [Perception] **is the outward picture of a wish; an image that you wanted to be true**” (T.24.VII.8:10). The world, thus, is not at all what it appears to be. It is the projection of a guilty mind seeking escape from its guilt and fear. As Jesus explains in a rather striking passage, “**The world you see is the delusional system of those made mad by guilt**” (T.13.in.2:2; see also W.pll.3.2:1).

Safely mindless in the world, we are oblivious to our own mind and its power to choose the Holy Spirit's thought system instead of the ego's. Keeping this realization out of our awareness is the ultimate goal of the ego, and our continual involvement in an impossibly complex world is among its most effective ways of achieving this end. This is the direct opposite of Heaven, which is “**an awareness of perfect Oneness, and the knowledge that there is nothing else; nothing outside this Oneness, and nothing else within**” (T.18.VI.1:6). Our primary goal as students of this course, thus, is to learn to reflect this Oneness in our daily interactions by recognizing that we all share the same interests and the same split mind with the power to choose between the ego and the Holy Spirit.

For further discussion of the relationship between God and the world, see Questions #764 and #904.

Q #1232: I have a friend who feels he understands *A Course in Miracles* better than anyone else. As much as I think he has some Course concepts right, I do not find his needing to talk about it non-stop and lecturing everyone helpful. He feels he can get people to understand the Course faster if they'll listen to him. At this point, after listening to him for years, I disagree, and I resist his lectures. He feels I should continue with the relationship and be open to letting him teach me. I enjoy his company when he is quiet and practices forgiveness instead of preaching at me and to others. The truth is I am having a hard time letting go of the relationship, or staying in it, and clearly I am not forgiving it! This relationship is very special and I know it. Can you shed some light on what I am doing to myself?

A: What would help relieve a great deal of the pressure you are feeling is to simplify the issue. The issue is not really whether you should stay in the relationship or leave it. Instead, your focus should be on asking for help to free your mind of judgment -- in other words, whether you stay or leave, you can do so without judgment. This is what we generally recommend to people who are in a quandry about whether or not stay in a relationship they experience as abusive or as uncomfortable. The lesson is that you can leave a relationship peacefully, or you can choose to stay in a relationship and be at peace. Asking Jesus or the Holy Spirit to help you on that level will take you out of the should-I-stay-or-should-I-leave bind you are experiencing.

Q #1233: Why did God create the Sonship?

A : *A Course in Miracles* speaks of God's Son in two ways: (1) as the creation of God in Heaven, the undifferentiated unity within the Godhead, wherein **"He makes no distinctions in what is Himself and what is still Himself. What He creates is not apart from Him, and nowhere does the Father end, the Son begin as something separate from Him"** (W.pl.132.12:3,4; see also T.2.I.1:1; T.11.I.2,3,4,5,6,7; T.28.II.2:1,2). The Son is the extension of God within the Godhead, **"a Oneness joined as One"** (T.25.I.7:1) , a process we are incapable of comprehending in our separated state (see also W.pl.192.2:1). There is no "why" in creation, as it is purely internal to the Godhead. There is no "why" in shared Identity that communicates eternally. It is simply of the nature of Love to extend Itself.

(2) The Course also speaks of the Son in a state of separation from God, a state that is purely illusory, as separating from Totality is an impossibility (the Atonement principle). The "author" of this existence is the ego, although to give it more credibility and validity, the ego encourages theologies that have God as the source of this existence, as in the Bible and other scriptures. Importantly, the Course does not use the term *create* or *creation* when talking about the separated Son's origin; it uses the word *make* instead. On this level -- existence outside God's Being -- the issue of "why" becomes very relevant, and has been the focal point of many, many studies for more than two thousand years. This, in fact, is the subject explored in Kenneth's comparative study, *Love Does Not Condemn: The World, the Flesh, and the Devil According to Platonism, Christianity, Gnosticism, and "A Course in Miracles."*

Question #198 briefly addresses this from the point of view of God's purpose in creating oneness.

Q #1234: In my view, the physical world as illusory can be compared to a novel, which, to me means we could speak at least of a relative reality (the content of the novel), the subject studied by scientists, historians, etc. So, for example, there would be a precise sense to any assertion about the "historical Jesus." I am disturbed by different accounts about the historical Jesus that contradict each other (in the Bible, in the Seth books, in the Cayce readings, in *The Disappearance of the Universe* , etc.). In my opinion only one of these, if any, can be true (in the illusory world). But a remark in chapter 1 of *A Vast*

Illusion by Kenneth Wapnick, where he speaks about “probable realities” in the sense of the Seth books, seems to indicate that this interpretation is wrong, that a better analogy for the physical world would be a whole library of different novels. Does this mean that the contradictory accounts about the historic Jesus could all be true (in our illusory universe) in some sense?

A: From the perspective of *A Course in Miracles* perception is always based on whether we are identified in our minds with the Holy Spirit's thought system or the ego's. **“You see what you expect, and you expect what you invite. Your perception is the result of your invitation, coming to you as you sent for it. Whose manifestations would you see? Of whose presence would you be convinced? For you will believe in what you manifest, and as you look out so will you see in. Two ways of looking at the world are in your mind, and your perception will reflect the guidance you have chosen” (T.12.VI.5).** The ego thought system of separation rests on the reality of sin, guilt, and fear; and at the core of this system are sacrifice, judgment, specialness, and the body. Thus, anyone identified with that thought system would have a need to perceive Jesus or any other symbol of love and enlightenment in those terms in some way -- and many variations and combinations are possible. The Holy Spirit's thought system of the Atonement, on the other hand, rests on the *un* reality of sin, guilt, and fear; and at the core of this system are forgiveness, all-inclusive love, shared interests, and the means for returning us to our reality as mind and spirit. Jesus thus would be presented, as he is in *A Course in Miracles*, as a reflection of the pure oneness of Love: as selfless, defenseless, with love and compassion for everyone without exception. But, as he tells us in the manual for teachers, the universal message of love represented by his presence in our dream can come in **“many thousands of other forms” (M.1.4:2).**

A second major consideration is that a significant number of biblical scholars have concluded that very, very little is known about the historical Jesus -- New Testament accounts of Jesus cannot be relied on for an accurate picture of his life and message. Because of this lack of “objective” evidence, there is no way of evaluating the contradictory accounts of the historical Jesus -- there is nothing to compare them against. In *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus refers to many biblical sayings and teachings attributed to him and tells us what he really meant, and what he could not possibly have said.

Lastly, also relevant to your interesting query is the Course principle, **“All thinking produces form at some level” (T.2.VI.9:14).** This is to say that for every thought there is a corresponding reality. Thus, any thought of Jesus in any mind would have some expression in the world of quantum physics. There is nothing in the Course about quantum physics, unfortunately; and so we must leave it at that.

Q #1235: Could you please explain the following passages in the text of *A Course in Miracles* which refer to being in someone else's dream: T.27.VII.8:2; T.28.II.4:1).

A: It is important to be aware that Jesus is speaking metaphorically when he talks about us dreaming and awakening. We are all very familiar with our experiences of having dreams at night and then waking and realizing, “Oh, it was just a dream! It wasn't real.” Because that is such a common experience that we all can relate to, Jesus describes our spiritual journey as analogous to that type of an experience.

The first passage comes in the section, **“The Dreamer of the Dream” (T.27.VII)**, and the point being made is that the only way we can awaken is to learn that our lives are unfolding only in a dream we ourselves are dreaming. It appears that much of what happens in our lives is done *to* us, and that is what Jesus is referring to when he says we become part of someone else's dream -- that we perceive ourselves as the victims of what other people do to us or what the world does to us. If when you are dreaming, however, you become aware that you are dreaming (a lucid dreamer), then eventually you would be able to control your dreams and make them anything you want them to be. At the end of this chapter Jesus summarizes this rather forcefully by stating, **“The secret of salvation is but this: that you are doing this unto yourself. No matter what the form of the attack, this still is true. . . . For you would not react at all to figures in a dream you knew that you were dreaming. Let them be as**

hateful and as vicious as they may, they could have no effect on you unless you failed to recognize it is your dream” (T.27.VII.10:1,2,5,6).

The second passage you refer to comes in **“Reversing Effect and Cause” (T.28.II)** , and the point is basically the same -- that we have left vacant our role as decision-making minds (the cause), and instead see our experience as the effect of what is done to us: **“Nothing at all has happened but that you have put yourself to sleep, and dreamed a dream in which you were an alien to yourself, and but a part of someone else's dream” (T.28.II.4:1).** As we know ourselves now, we are alien both to our true Self as Christ (**“you have put yourself to sleep”**) , and also to the power in our split mind to change our identification from the ego thought system of separation to the Holy Spirit's thought system of forgiveness. If we reverse our thinking that we are victims of what others do to us (i.e., that we are part of someone else's dream), then we begin the process of restoring our role as decision-making minds. Using the metaphor of dreaming again, Jesus thus says, **“Yet if you are the dreamer, you perceive this much at least: that you have caused the dream, and can accept another dream as well” (T.28.II.5:2).** Jesus then goes on to teach us about the role of the miracle in this process: **“The miracle establishes you dream a dream, and that its content is not true” (T.28.II.5:2).** This shift frees us to continue our process of removing all that stands in the way of our remembering the Love in which we were created and in which we forever remain.

Q #1236: I've heard it said that we don't see with the body's eyes. Could it be possible, then, for someone who lost his eyes to see like any other?

A: In one sense, yes; in another sense, no. A non-sighted person can “see” like a sighted person on the level of *content* (mind), but not on the level of *form* (sensory data). *A Course in Miracles* teaches that perception is always an interpretation, not a fact; therefore both sighted and non- sighted persons can have similar perceptions. Both can learn to “see” that we all share a common interest and that what separates us is illusory. This would be known as right-minded perception or vision, which is not physical sight. In one passage Jesus tells us: **“ The unreal or the real, the false or true is what you see and only what you see. Perception is consistent with your choice, and hell or Heaven comes to you as one” (W.pl.130.10:2,3).** This applies to both sighted and non-sighted persons, since Jesus is always speaking about our inner experiences, not what our physical eyes see. Remember, the world (the stimuli that seem to affect our senses) is not what it appears to be: it is **“the outside picture of an inward condition” (T.21.in.1:5).**

The body does only what the mind tells it to do, as the body is simply a projection of the mind, not an autonomous entity. The body's sensory apparatus is made by the ego to follow certain “laws”; thus, a person who “has lost his eyes” will not have visual data, and in that respect will not “see” what a sighted person sees. The bodily limitations we have are part of our own script, our mind's choice. Our function, then, as students of *A Course in Miracles*, is to learn that the peace of God within us can in no way be affected by bodily conditions. It is a terribly difficult lesson, but that power of choice is our path to salvation. **“I will remain forever as I was, created by the Changeless like Himself. And I am one with Him, and He with me” (W.pl.112.2:2,3).**

Q #1237: I know that I must be lost in level confusion, but terrorism has been on my mind. As did Hitler, they target some people but also kill their own. Regardless of whether they are a projection of our collective mind, I do think that they must be purged in the same way that all fascists must. I read about how monks and other devout groups prayed for the peace during the holocaust, but peace (relative though it was) came only with war. Of course, this is causing my already split mind to separate like orange sections.

A: Your *perception* of terrorists is the critical factor in resolving your dilemma; and as the Course teaches, perception can be either right-minded or wrong-minded -- the same behavior (form) can flow from either the right mind or the wrong mind (the content). From what you say, you apparently perceive terrorists and fascists as victimizers, which means you have chosen the ego as your teacher. The ego never lets us in on this, but perpetual conflict, not enduring peace, is the inevitable outcome of its thought system, because it rests on the divisive principles of *one or the other, kill or be killed*. There must always be an external enemy of some kind for the ego itself to survive, and we are thus lured into thinking that if we can just get this person or this group out of our lives, everything will be better. But as you have observed, the peace that follows war is partial and never lasts. This will always be the case until we turn inward and see the insanity of this thought system, and then reconsider our choice for the ego as our teacher. This is where *A Course in Miracles* is most helpful, as its focus is on training us to make the connection between our experience and the thought system we have identified with in our minds. This is why Jesus tells us, **“Therefore, seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world” (T.21.in.1:7).**

The insane belief system in our minds that claims peace can be attained through war and that we can stop hostility and hatred by killing people is the problem. The “other way” presented in the Course rests on the premise that we are all one as God's Son, and that there are no exceptions to this. Terrorists and fascists are part of the Sonship the same as everyone else, and therefore to condemn them in our minds is to condemn ourselves, and Jesus as well. If this vision is your point of departure, you are giving yourself a better chance of ending the conflict and pain in your own mind, for you would be proceeding on the basis of truth, not its denial. Then you would approach problems differently. Your response would be motivated by a sincere desire to heal, rather than a desire to eradicate the evildoers in the world, whom you see as the cause of unrest and fear. You would not deny the ego in anyone, but you would see it as the same ego in you (in content, not necessarily in form), and you would realize that violent, hateful behavior is coming from a mind that is itself tortured with pain and conflict that seems unbearable and therefore must be projected.

From this place of compassion in your mind, you would thus be a channel for true justice, which does not see winners and losers, victims and victimizers, but rather, from a larger perspective, what is best for everyone: **“Be certain any answer to a problem the Holy Spirit solves will always be one in which no one loses. And this must be true, because He asks no sacrifice of anyone. An answer which demands the slightest loss to anyone has not resolved the problem, but has added to it and made it greater, harder to resolve and more unfair. . . . The principle that justice means no one can lose is crucial to this course” (T.25.IX.3:1,2,3; 5:4).** That is what Jesus means by returning justice to love.

The last four sections in Chapter 25 help us understand the basis of the world's notion of vengeful justice, in contrast to Heaven's justice, which is rooted in all-inclusive love and compassion (**T.25.VI, VII, VIII, IX**). Lesson 200, **“There is no peace except the peace of God” (W.pl.200)**, is also important for understanding the major differences between the peace we seek in the world and the peace we find within our minds -- our natural inheritance as God's Son. **“For peace is union, if it be of God” (W.pl.200.11:6).** These issues are the subject, as well, of our four tape sets, “The Compassion of the Miracle,” “The Quality of Mercy,” “The Problem of Evil,” and “Justice Returned to Love.” We also direct you to the Interactive index of all topics on this Service, where you will find additional questions and answers under the listing, War.

Q #1238(i): (The following two questions were submitted by the same person.)

Can we pray to the Holy Spirit for other people's healing and protection and well being? In Christian and Gnostic mysticism and in religions around the world the spiritual power that mediates between apparent incarnate beings and God the Father is usually some form of the divine feminine and called Sophia (Kwan Yin, Tara etc. are similar concepts in eastern traditions). Could we say Sophia, Mother Mary in her cosmic aspect etc. is another name for the Holy Spirit?

A: Prayer in *A Course in Miracles* has a meaning quite different from other traditions such as the ones you mention. The kind of prayer you describe is not part of the Course's theory and practice, as it implies that God knows about our world and all of our problems, and that they are all real. The foundation of everything taught in the Course is its strict non-dualism -- all but God, Christ, and Their creations in Heaven is illusory. On this level, prayer is defined as the song the Father sings to the Son and the Son sings to the Father, the description Jesus uses in the Introduction to ***The Song of Prayer***. This pamphlet contains the scribed material that came in response to Course students' growing misunderstanding of prayer, forgiveness, healing, and the role of the Holy Spirit. In the first section, **"True Prayer,"** Jesus states that **"true prayer must avoid the pitfall of asking to entreat. Ask, rather, to receive what is already given; to accept what is already there"** (S.1.I.1:6,7). Jesus makes it clear, however, that there is nothing wrong with praying for specifics if that is what you want to do, because prayer is like a ladder, where at the lower rungs only specifics are meaningful to us (S.1.I.2). Communication, therefore, would have to take place in those terms; but prayer and our view of the Holy Spirit would change as we ascend the ladder and begin to value oneness more and more.

What this means to us who believe that the world and our individual lives in it are real is that our prayer must somehow reflect that song of the Oneness of Father and Son in Heaven. True prayer would share the right-minded purpose of our lives here, which is to undo all sense of separation, one person to another, and between ourselves and God. This belief in separation and the guilt that results from it is the only problem, and it is the source of every other seeming problem in our lives. Thus, the only true healing is the undoing of this belief through the practice of forgiveness; and that is where the role of the Holy Spirit comes in. We can choose to turn to the Holy Spirit in our right minds as the reminder that we have only one problem, separation, and that there is only one solution, forgiveness (W.pl.79 , 80). This is why Jesus tells us that **"the only meaningful prayer is for forgiveness"** (T.3.V.6:3). It also is the basis of Jesus' response to Helen (scribe of the Course) when she asked him what she should say to a person in need of her help. He replied that she was asking the wrong question, and that her concern should be not for what she should say, but for letting go of the judgments in her mind. Without the interference of judgment, we would just automatically know what to say or not say. Judgment blocks the flow of love that would always be expressed in a way that is best for everyone.

Many other students have asked about prayer and the Holy Spirit, and we refer you to our answers to their questions: #388, #572, #592, and #628. The role of the Holy Spirit is also explained in depth in Chapter 4 of *Few Choose to Listen*, which is Volume 2 of *The Message of "A Course in Miracles."* The context of that discussion is how students have misunderstood what the Course says about asking the Holy Spirit for help.

Q #1238 (ii): Anger is never justified -- I disagree. Surely anger is sometimes inevitable; it is vitally important to admonish and discipline one's children, teenagers, loved ones, and people who are monetarily 'out of it' or a potential or actual threat. Can we use anger without necessarily being controlled by it in certain situations, and offer it to the Holy Spirit to be healed?

A: Anger is always a projection of one's own guilt. But that does not mean that you cannot act responsibly and appropriately, as the situation may call for. Disciplining people, setting limits on their behavior, and physically stopping dangerous behavior can be done effectively without anger. You can be firm and assertive, and even raise your voice, as circumstances may demand -- all without anger. The distinction between form and content is the pivotal factor in understanding this aspect of the Course's teachings. We refer you to our answers to earlier questions where we have discussed anger and how to apply the principles of *A Course in Miracles* to parenting and other positions of authority: #179, #202, #551, and #569.

Q #1239: There is a line in one of the lessons in the workbook of *A Course in Miracles* that says "no one dies without his own consent" (W.pl.152.1:4). Could that mean that on some level in our mind we get to a point (while here, experiencing living in a body) that we say, "I am done with this," or does our dying (death of the physical body) happen at whatever point in time as a result of making the first decision to become a body? I would appreciate it if you could give me your understanding of this statement.

A: This statement about dying is best understood in the context of the only two purposes we can ever choose to identify with in our minds, and which we are always choosing between at every instant. We are always choosing either to reinforce our belief in separation or to undo it. Thus, death can come upon the completion of our forgiveness lessons, as explained in *The Song of Prayer*: **"a quiet choice, made joyfully and with a sense of peace, because the body has been kindly used to help the Son of God along the way he goes to God"** (S.3.II.2:1). Understand, though, that this expresses the content in the mind only; the form could be cancer, a stroke, or any number of other ways in which the body ceases to function. The form does not necessarily indicate the content in the mind. The purpose of a fatal illness could also be ego based -- a way of punishing oneself or others, for example. It is always a choice, though.

With regard to the second point . . . Since the mind is not bound by time, there is no predetermined time for the death of the body. To use the analogy of a video-tape library, there are multiple videos of death, and the decision maker can choose any one of them, depending on the purpose it has identified with. But all of this occurs outside time and space, so it is practically impossible for us to comprehend it in our present state.

Other questions on this Service address this important issue from several points of view, and we refer you to them for additional discussion and references: #135, #175, and #262.

Q #1240: I am increasingly having problems with obsessive-compulsive hoarding disorder as I age. I'm currently 61 years of age. Are there any teachings in *A Course in Miracles* that can help me better understand the roots of my problem?

A: Our experience of ourselves as real individuals in a physical world means that we have identified with the ego thought system in our minds. That in turn means that in the core of our being there is a sense of lack, accompanied by searing pain that we are compelled to defend against. The source of this is the self-accusation -- also deeply buried in our minds -- that we got to be who we are as individuals by separating from our Source, thereby rejecting our Identity as Christ in favor of an autonomous, special existence that we thought would give us what we judged we could not get as part of God. As a result of this rejection of our true Identity and our true home, we would have to feel that there is something seriously wrong internally -- a lack of enormous proportions. The pain of this is made worse by the overwhelming guilt we experience over having judged what we did as unforgivably sinful, intensified even more by the fear of punishment and retaliation by God Who will surely one day take back the existence we wrongfully acquired (the ego's version of God, of course).

Now, all of this pain and anguish in our minds must be dealt with. And following the ego's advice on how to handle it, we project it out of our minds onto our bodies and the world in any number of ways. This ontological level of lack then is expressed on the bodily level as neediness, insecurity, cravings, addictions, and general feelings of never having enough -- just some of the forms this content in our minds could take. We form special relationships with whatever we find externally that helps us feel better and takes some of the pain away. The need to hoard could certainly reflect the mind's insecurity about its fragile existence -- fragile in the sense that it really rests on nothing, since our separation from God is illusory. Thus, hoarding and accumulating things would be one of the ways we attempt to compensate for our internal feelings of scarcity. In this sense, it would be no different from any other special relationship.

Finally, it would not be antithetical to the Course to look at the more personal aspects that may also be involved in this disorder, and therefore working with a therapist could be quite helpful in uncovering this layer of causes. This would then free you to work at the deeper levels in your mind, releasing more of the interferences to your remembrance of the love in which you were created and forever remain.

Q #1241: I have struggled most of my life with never being fully aware of God's Love for me. I understand and appreciate His Love for others, just not me. Perhaps experiences from my childhood are the cause, or just a very poor sense of self-worth. The reasons could be endless. I see the problems and the errors in my thinking; but that does not provide an answer or healing. I feel abandoned by God. His Love is just not quite within my reach. How do I heal this thought when I do not even see myself as worthy enough to be heard by God? When I read and study the Course, it feels as though my ego, my resistance is greater and stronger than God and He is waiting for me to heal this perception of myself and of Him first, and until then He will just remain silent. Could this be true?

A: Resistance to changing our beliefs about ourselves is a major aspect of every student's spiritual process, as is feeling unworthy of love. Kenneth's book *Ending Our Resistance to Love* speaks to these issues directly. As is discussed in this book, being aware of your resistance is extremely helpful; but what you want to add to that is a decision not to justify your feelings of unworthiness. Although sometimes it is helpful to delve into the past to shed some light on this sense of unworthiness, the key to resolving the conflict is realizing that you are making a decision to hold on to that belief about yourself in the present. That is what you want to focus on. The ego loves to bring in the past because the past cannot be changed, which means we will be tempted to treat present conditions as limitations or handicaps we can do nothing about. Score one for the ego!

Approaching your sense of unworthiness as a belief you are choosing in the present (even though you do not experience it that way) advances you to the next step of looking at it now from the perspective of *purpose* : if you are choosing that belief, it must be for a purpose, which means there is a payoff to it, something you want. Since it leaves you feeling completely separate from God and even hopeless, then the goal of continuing to believe in it is to maintain your existence as separate from God. But the guilt over that (unconscious, of course) would necessitate projecting responsibility for it, resulting in the feeling that God has abandoned you.

This is why Jesus emphasizes that feeling unworthy of God's Love is not humility or virtuous in any sense, unlike the view of many other spiritual paths (**W.pl.61**) . Lesson 93 **"Light and joy and peace abide in me"** points out that our negative feelings are **"so firmly fixed that it is difficult to help you see that they are based on nothing"** (**W.pl.93.2:1**). They are meaningless beliefs and feelings because they rest on the false assumption that we truly are separate from God and hopelessly sinful and unworthy as a result. As part of the correction, Jesus assures us, **"Your sinlessness is guaranteed by God. Over and over this must be repeated, until it is accepted. . . . You are what God created or what you made. One Self is true, the other is not there. Try to experience the unity of your one Self"** (**W.pl.93.6:1,2 ; 9:1,2,3**). Realizing that our negativity is rooted in nothing real is extremely helpful, as we then would not be fighting against something we think is real.

To answer your last question: From the Course's perspective, it could not be true that God is waiting for you to change your beliefs before He comes to you. That would be to give God human traits, and more importantly, it would imply that God somehow recognizes us as separate from Him, which is the exact opposite of the Atonement principle that states the separation never happened. The passages in the Course that speak of God that way are meant to help us with our fear of Him so that we would grow to trust Him as loving, comforting, and forgiving rather than as vindictive, judgmental, and unpredictable. This course is corrective of all our misperceptions about everything, and it must use language that meets us at our level of need, so that it can then raise us to higher levels, drawing us closer and closer to the perfect Oneness of Love, our true and eternal Identity.

Since Love is perfect Oneness, it is just plain silly to think that there can be anything real that can oppose It, **“a power past omnipotence” (T. 29.VIII.6:2)**. What seems so powerful and destructive is nothing more than **“a frightened mouse that would attack the universe” (T.22.V.4:3)**; our seemingly monstrous ego has not even the power to stop the fall of a button (**T.18.IX.6:4**), and if we think otherwise, it is only because we want it to be that way, not because it is in reality. Again, our feelings of helplessness and unworthiness are all based on nothing. That is what choosing Jesus as our teacher would help us to learn, thus freeing us to be the Self that God created.

Related discussions may be found in Questions #180, #721, and #1042.

Q #1242: Recently someone close to me died of a drug overdose. I was with him at the time and was under the influence of drugs as well, and therefore I did not act accordingly to save him. How do I begin to deal with the tremendous guilt I have? If I chose the Holy Spirit's script at that point, could the form of the tape have changed; or would it rather be that my reaction would change: instead of attack and guilt, my reaction would have been forgiveness of myself?

Also, I had another death in my life a few years back that also brought up a lot of guilt. I tried to work through this, and then it did seem like I was in a place of peace for a while. Almost like nothing could bother me. Then I started to do some real stupid things. Was that my ego fighting back? How do I go about dealing with this guilt? I have been studying *A Course in Miracles* for over five years and thought I was making progress. Please comment.

A: The only thing we can say for sure is that when we choose the Holy Spirit's script, we would never attack ourselves or anyone else. Attack is impossible when we are identified with love. But what that means in terms of form we cannot know. We have to guard against the assumption that death is always a tragedy, and that it should be prevented if at all possible. We thus cannot automatically conclude that your friend's drug overdose was an attack on himself and/or anyone else. We just do not know that -- it might have been, and it might not have been. Remember, too, that a major principle in *A Course in Miracles* is that death is always a choice made in one's mind (**T.19.IV.C.1:4; W.pl.152.1:4; M.12.5**). Given that, it is possible that even if you were lucid and able to act, your friend may still have died -- if that were his choice. There is no way we can know that.

Another important point to keep in mind is that guilt is never justified, no matter what you have done. Undeniably, we all do very unloving things, and we all have very hateful thoughts. That is to be expected, considering that our existence was born out of our grossly selfish decision to separate ourselves from our home in God's Love. Jesus acknowledges that we can be hideously brutal when we choose the ego as our teacher; but he also makes it clear throughout his course that these choices are mistakes, not unforgivable sins deserving of condemnation, or even forgivable sins for which we must repent and do penance (a practice he says totally distorts the meaning of true forgiveness, turning it into a “scourge” and a “curse” [**S.2.I.1:1,2**]).

Judgments of condemnation are just what the ego ordered! They affirm *its* existence and the supremacy of *its* thought system in our minds, concealing the other part that quietly calls to us to remember that sin and evil are possible only in an illusion, and that nothing can change the truth that we remain forever sinless (see for example, Lesson 93, **W.pl.93**). The ego would never want us to question guilt, for guilt is its life's blood, so to speak: **“To the ego, the guiltless are guilty. Those who do not attack are its ‘enemies’ because, by not valuing its interpretation of salvation, they are in an excellent position to let it go” (T.13.II.4:2,3)**. This is why Jesus speaks about our *attraction* to guilt (**T.19.IV.A.i**), and that we hold it dear in our minds -- as a friend, a protector, and even our home (**T.19.IV.D.6**). It is because of this that we often wind up thinking, “Who would I be without my guilt?” We cannot even imagine what it would be like to be without guilt and still recognize ourselves! That is the strength of our commitment to the ego thought system in our minds. And that could very well explain your seeming departure from a

state of peace after working through some guilt relating to another death. We all just become fearful of being without guilt. Moreover, the ego usually kicks up its heels and retaliates for our "disloyalty" to it. Among the reasons that death plays such a central role in the ego's strategy is that it almost always brings up a lot of guilt and fear in people. But there is always a correction for this in the sane part of minds.

You can also approach your current situation as a good opportunity to learn that relationships are always in the mind, not between two bodies. They always come down to the decision we make in our minds to take the ego or Jesus as our teacher. The healing of relationships, therefore, is not conditional on time and the state of bodies. In this sense, you can still work on your relationship with your friend even though he has died. The death of the body does not have to interfere with the relationship dynamics in your mind. A very difficult lesson! -- and one the ego definitely does not want us to learn. The ego would have you learn instead that there is nothing you can do about your guilt, because your friend is dead.

What all of this means is that you still have a split mind, and that you (and all of us) are going through a process of shifting from the ego to Jesus as your teacher. We go back and forth. The idea is not to judge yourself, or even analyze what happened. It is simply natural (un-natural, really) for us to become afraid of being at peace, and therefore we will do things that bring about the opposite state. By not making a big deal about it, you will loosen your hold on your ego, and consequently will be less inclined to resort to self-destructive behavior. Not judging yourself means you are forgiving yourself, and forgiveness is the only answer that leads to peace.

Question #168 discusses some of the concerns you have raised -- especially feelings of guilt over the death of a loved one. You might find it helpful to read our discussion there, and also in Question #7, where we talk about the whole issue of blame and self-hatred. Questions #246, #466, and #598 deal with issues of addiction.

Q #1243: From what I understand, there is no world -- it is an illusion of a thought of separation set up to maintain our egos. Does this mean that there are no special "places"? I'm thinking particularly of Ramana Maharshi and the mountain Arunachala. Ken has spoken about him as an enlightened being, and from what I've read and felt being there, it's absolutely true. I felt drawn to the place, like there was a presence behind the mountain itself. Could this be? Certainly Ramana Maharshi was drawn there. When I went I swear I could feel the presence thirty miles away. Is this part of the "script" or an idea of the "ending" that we're all destined to? In other words, can a "place" work on both a physical and spiritual level?

A: Correct. If there is no world, then it follows that there are no special places. This is what we refer to as Level One in *A Course in Miracles* : statements of absolute truth, the contrast between truth and illusion. If we could accept this without reservation, we would know beyond all doubt that we are not our bodies; and then all but the perfect Oneness of God's Love would be gone. Since we are too fearful of full acceptance of that absolute truth, we allow only its reflection into our awareness, which is where Level Two discussions in the Course come in. On this level, Jesus contrasts the ego's thought system with the Holy Spirit's, and he teaches us that we are always choosing one or the other. This is the only content in our minds. The content with which we identify (the ego's or the Holy Spirit's) will govern how we perceive everything, without exception.

In light of these two levels, if you experience inner peace in certain locations or circumstances (the form), it is solely because you first chose Jesus or the Holy Spirit as your teacher in your mind (the content). (For the purposes of this discussion, we will skip the issue of the false sense of peace that can come through denial.) Nothing outside you can either give you peace or take it away. Peace is within you as your inheritance as God's Son. This is at the heart of the message of *A Course in Miracles* . Learning that is the means of remembering that we never truly separated from God. Accordingly, what we want to learn is that external things that inspire us serve as reminders of what is always within us. The mistake we

make -- owing to the prodding of our body-obsessed ego -- is to begin to worship the external place or thing as if it held special or spiritual qualities. The Course would have us learn that nothing in this world or the body is either holy or unholy. We can make it holy, so to speak, by using it or relating to it as a means of fulfilling our purpose of forgiveness. As we choose Jesus as our teacher more and more, we will be attracted more and more to the love and peace within us; and we will become less inclined to attribute our internal state of peace or lack of it to external conditions.

Jesus puts everything in perspective for us in this one moving statement: **“The holiest of all the spots on earth is where an ancient hatred has become a present love” (T.26.IX.6:1) .**

Q #1244: Could you comment on the issue of crucifixion as it is seen in *A Course in Miracles* . Do you think that Jesus invited his "persecutors" to crucify him in order to prove that the body isn't real at all (epitomized by the rising of Christ)? If I read the Course correctly, it places more emphasis on the rising and surmounting of the image of death rather than the crucifixion itself (which we do on a daily basis). So what does the crucifixion mean? Is it not also a symbol for how the world is structured, and did Jesus pick the crucifixion method because of that? Why did Jesus die that way? -- to make his point of rising beyond the body?

A: It is very difficult to talk about the crucifixion because we know so little about it. The gospels have been proven to be notoriously unreliable, as many scripture scholars have shown. In *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus uses crucifixion as a symbol for the ego thought system, and therefore we should view his crucifixion as a symbol, primarily of the truth that the ego has no power over the Love of God. Accordingly, *resurrection* , is defined in the Course as awakening from the dream of death, which means that our dream of separation has had no effect on reality. **(See “What Is the Resurrection?” in the manual for teachers [M.28].)** In this sense, it can be said that the resurrection occurred *before* the crucifixion, resurrection having nothing to do with the body.

Two important sections in the text focus explicitly on Jesus' teachings about crucifixion: **“Atonement without Sacrifice” (T.3.I)** , and **“The Message of the Crucifixion” (T.6.I)**. And in several of his works, Kenneth has commented extensively on the differences between biblical views and those in *A Course in Miracles*. See, for example, *The Message of “A Course in Miracles,”* Vol. 1, pp. 249-53; “*A Course in Miracles*” and *Christianity: A Dialogue*, pp. 40-47; *A Talk Given on “A Course in Miracles”: An Introduction* , pp. 117-27. Other students have asked about the Course's understanding of the crucifixion, and you may wish to look at our discussion of those Questions as well: #220, #505, and #510.

Q #1245: Can you please explain the passage in the manual of *A Course in Miracles* about not being free to choose the curriculum, or even the form in which you will learn it. Does the "you" refer to the decision maker? “As the course emphasizes, you are not free to choose the curriculum, or even the form in which you will learn it. You are free, however, to decide when you want to learn it. And as you accept it, it is already learned” (M.2.3:6,7,8).

A: The reference here is to the text's Introduction where Jesus makes the same point: **“This is a course in miracles. It is a required course. Only the time you take it is voluntary. Free will does not mean that you can establish the curriculum. It means only that you can elect what you want to take at a given time” (T.in.1:1,2,3,4,5; italics omitted)** . As an example, college students have nothing to say about the courses listed in the school catalog, but they are free to pick which courses they will take and when -- at least with regard to electives. Our situation is similar. Our decision maker has already established the curriculum of our lives, but our choice now lies with which teacher we will choose to re-experience this script: the ego or the Holy Spirit. Therefore, when we accept the curriculum, “it is already learned” -- we simply accept the learning that is there.

Q #1246: In answer to Question #265 you have written; "... it is important for students of the Course not to confuse the voice Helen Schucman heard and identified as Jesus', with the Jesus of traditional Christianity, nor to associate it with any particular image in form. The Course uses the term Jesus and the Holy Spirit as symbols reflecting the part of the mind of the Sonship that holds the memory of God. They are not real persons..."

There seem to be two different "realities" here; namely the ultimate reality (which is Love), and the apparent historical reality (which though illusory, would seem to have some validity for us, when perceived correctly). Is there any reason why we should (or should not) regard the 'voice' that Helen identified as Jesus, and which dictated *A Course in Miracles* to her, as the voice of the historical Jesus? If we should not regard this voice as the voice of the historical Jesus, then what is the relationship between this voice and the historical Jesus?

A: As much as we would like it to be, this is not a simple matter of "is he or isn't he?". That is because of the Course's uncompromising view of reality as non-dualistic: "**a Oneness joined as One,**" which cannot be understood by us in our separated state (T.25.I.7:1) . This non-dualism is expressed in the Course's definition of Heaven, as "**an awareness of perfect Oneness, and the knowledge that there is nothing else; nothing outside this Oneness, and nothing else within**" (T.18.VI.1:6) . Non-dualism means that both spirit and matter, mind and body cannot be real. That would be dualism. Thus, all multiplicity is illusory, as well as time and space. Statements expressing this contrast between reality and illusion are what we call Level One of the Course's presentation.

The issue then is how to conceptualize and talk about what certainly appears to be real to us, but is not. The initial stage of communication would be to use *our* language and concepts about individual persons living in a physical universe, and then teach us how to interpret our experiences here differently. This is Level Two of the Course's presentation, the part that contrasts wrong-minded and right-minded perception. This would eventually lead to our recognizing that our specifics-oriented perception is seriously distorted, and that everything we perceive is really a symbol -- either of our mind's choice to identify with the ego thought system of separation or the Holy Spirit's correction of that, the thought system of forgiveness. This approach of *A Course in Miracles* is made especially explicit in Lesson 184 (W.pl.184) , and also in Jesus' injunction that we not confuse symbol and source (T.19.IV.C.11:2) , to cite just two references. Viewing *everything* as symbolic, including ourselves, enables us to function purposefully in the world while we still think it real, and at the same time be oriented toward regaining awareness of our true Identity that lies beyond all symbols, as beautifully explained in three sections in the text: "**Beyond the Body**" (T.18.VI) ; "**Beyond All Symbols**" (T.27.III) , and "**Beyond All Idols**" (T.30.III).

Although this is not usually in our awareness -- but is what the exercises in the workbook help bring into our awareness -- we are always choosing either to deny the truth or to ask for help to remove the interferences we are making to our awareness of truth. When we choose to undo these interferences, we allow it to happen gradually, which means we do not suddenly let go of our identity as individual persons and accept our identity as spirit without reservations. We are too fearful of doing that; consequently, we let love in in stages or increments, according to what our fear will allow us to tolerate. Jesus tells us that the very origin of the body is our mind's belief in limited love; "**it was made to limit the unlimited**" (T.18.VIII.1:3) . Therefore, to the extent that we believe our bodily identity is our real identity, we will continue to perceive love in those terms. Love is abstract and formless, but as long as we think we are individuals, we will perceive love as limited, or as form in some way. This is not wrong. It is an important first step that would lead to delay in one's progress if skipped, for it gets us on the right ladder with the right teacher. But it is also important to realize that relating to Jesus as a person is a stage in our spiritual journey.

Jesus *reflects* the formless Love of God, but is not identical with that Love. (The passage we quoted from the clarification of terms in the question you cited, #265, is relevant here.) Thus, if my identity as an individual *symbolizes* my mind's belief in a real existence outside God and Heaven, and then my mind decides to undo that mistaken belief and accept the truth, the truth will be *symbolized* in a way that is

meaningful and understandable by my mind. If I think of myself as an individual, then I need love to be present to me in the form of an individual, otherwise I would not recognize it or be able to relate to it. The Jesus of the Course speaks to us in a personal way, and he encourages us to accept him into our lives as we would an older, wiser brother who knows what is best for us. And we ought to do that. In fact, he tells us: “ **If it helps you, think of me holding your hand and leading you. And I assure you this will be no idle fantasy**” (W.pl.70.9:3,4).

Yet, although he is presented in this way, speaking to us as individuals, he also makes it clear that we are involved in a process of climbing up the ladder that separation led us down (T.28.III.1:2) . The top of the ladder is the transcendence of individuality, because at that stage, we no longer value existence that keeps us separate from God and from each other; we have realized that that was the source of all our pain and conflict. We realize that there really is no self that is separate from other selves and from God, and we would have become *identified* with love, no longer relating to it as one specific form to another. We would have become one with the love that inspired the Course, no longer needing its specific form. This is the return to the oneness of our Self as God's one Son, Christ: “**Identify with love, and you are safe. Identify with love, and you are home. Identify with love, and find your Self**” (W.pll.5:6,7,8) .

The principle of the Course's non-dualism and the Course's aim of restoring to our awareness our oneness with the *formless* Love of God -- “**a Oneness joined as One**” (T.25.I.7:1) -- from which we never truly separated, must be taken into account when one thinks about the nature and origin of the voice Helen heard. A voice is specific; an historical person is specific. Therefore, to say *without qualification* that the voice she heard was the voice of the historical Jesus is to distort and severely dilute the profound and radical message of *A Course in Miracles* . Moreover, in light of biblical scholarship, one must draw a distinction between the historical Jesus and the biblical accounts of his life and message. The conclusions drawn by a significant number of scholars is that these accounts are not accurate, and therefore we actually know very little about the historical figure. In the Course, Jesus corrects a great many New Testament statements and teachings attributed to him, and so it is safe to say that the Jesus of the Course is not the New Testament version of him. His message in the Course differs decidedly from that presented in the Bible. See, for example, “**Atonement without Sacrifice**” (T.3.I) , and “**The Message of the Crucifixion**” (T.6.I) , where he tells us what his message really is. There are many more. Other Questions on this Service address this as well: #473ii and #505, for example.

What Helen “heard,” therefore, was a reflection of the formless Love of Heaven in a form that part of the Sonship could relate to and recognize as loving. Many other forms are possible (M.1.4:1,2) . The love that inspired the Course is all that is truly healing, and eventually identifying with that love is the aim of our work with it. The form known as *A Course in Miracles* is merely a learning aide that we can use, if we are comfortable with it, to help us reach the point where we realize that the love that inspired this course is all that is real in our own minds. Jesus reflects that to us until we can accept it as our own identity: “**And thus you joined with me, so what I am are you as well**” (W.pll.14.2:3) . This would be the acceptance of the Atonement, the undoing of our belief that separation from God is possible and has truly happened.

For further study, we recommend Chapter 17, “The Reality of Jesus,” in *Absence from Felicity*, and Chapter 6, “The Savior -- Jesus,” in *All Are Called* , Vol. 1 of *The Message of “A Course in Miracles* .”

Q #1247: I have become aware that the helpful yet needy relationship I have been developing with Jesus as teacher, friend, guide, elder brother, comforter is changing to something that I would like to try to describe. My question is whether this is a normal part of the process of learning and growing toward the goal(s) of *A Course in Miracles* . Rather than representing solely the above roles, I now seem to grasp that Jesus is a symbol that is not at all specific or limited. I sense that the content of the right mind is really a reflection of what I denied when the so-called dream of separation began, and like its source, the abstract content of the right mind merely is .

Therefore, I can better understand that Jesus or the Holy Spirit really *do* nothing. Somehow, in some way that I do not understand, my mind opens a little and allows or accepts some experience of what we call truth, love, peace, Atonement, and it is that experience (the miracle) that corrects and cancels out my errors in perception if I sincerely desire to let them go. What I am recognizing is that I am the one doing all the work; that my progress really is up to me, and I am more aware of the meaning of "a little willingness" to take responsibility when choosing my ego. Somewhere in your writings or tapes there is something about eventually growing up in our dependent relationship with our elder brother, Jesus. What do you make of this seeming change in my needy relationship with Jesus? I'm not just trying to kick him out again, am I?

A: What you describe seems to be the natural transition that should take place. The spiritual path of *A Course in Miracles* is a journey leading us back to the oneness of perfect Love that we believe we shattered by desiring our own special individualized existence. Therefore, any semblance of separation must eventually disappear in our minds if we are to regain our true Identity as Christ and return home to God. Relating to Jesus as an older, wiser brother is a wonderful starting point on our journey. He even asks us to relate to him that way, and to learn how to trust him unconditionally, acknowledging that he knows what is in our best interests and we do not. At that level we still see ourselves as separate from him, and very much dependent on him. That is as it should be, but it is just the beginning stage of the relationship, and he does not want us to remain at that level of spiritual childhood.

Thus, at one point he says, **"I will teach with you and live with you if you will think with me, but my goal will always be to absolve you finally from the need for a teacher" (T.4.I.6:3)**. He wants us to become what he is, something he expresses early in the text: **"There is nothing about me that you cannot attain. I have nothing that does not come from God. The difference between us now is that I have nothing else. This leaves me in a state which is only potential in you. . . . I am in [no] way separate or different from you except in time, and time does not really exist" (T.1.II.3:5,6,10,11,12,13; 4:1)**. And near the end of the workbook he speaks very movingly of our oneness with him: **"Yet in the final days of this one year we gave to God together, you and I, we found a single purpose that we shared. And thus you joined with me, so what I am are you as well" (W.pII.14.2:2,3)**.

A parallel to this is found in his description of prayer as a ladder (see *The Song of Prayer* pamphlet, **S.I,II**) . The bottom rungs of the ladder are marked by our pleas for help with our needs and problems. But as we find ourselves attracted to the loving Source of the answers, our perception of what we think we need changes. Now we grow increasingly vigilant for what stands in the way of our experiencing that love all the time, with all of our seeming problems fading in significance. We recognize that our only need is to awaken from the dream of separation, **"the only real need to be fulfilled in time" (T.13.VII.16:6; see also T.13.VII.14:2,3; T.24.V.6:6)** . We should be careful, though, not to skip steps and pretend that we are on the higher rungs of the spiritual ladder when we are not. It is humbling indeed to be told that we are in the infancy stage of salvation (**T.19.IV.C.9,10**) , but that humility is required if we are going to hear the answer to our call for help.

Spiritual maturity on the Course's path involves the recognition at some point that Jesus is really a symbol of the contents in our right mind that we have split off. Because of this dissociation, our only access to our right minds usually is to first relate to Jesus as a person like us, a loving brother devoted to teaching and helping us. As we allow him to show us that we have been wrong about everything -- especially about who we think we are -- we begin to realize that everything is going on only in our minds, which means that we begin to relate to everything as symbols of the choice we have made in our minds to identify with separation as reality or with oneness as reality. Our experience of both Jesus and ourselves will then change. We must gradually move beyond the perception of separate bodies relating to one another, or we will remain asleep and dreaming, living as aliens in a world that is not our home.

All of this is pulled together in Kenneth's *Lighthouse* article, "Our Equality with Jesus: A Child, a Man, and Then a Spirit" (Dec. 2004; a copy appears on our Web site collection of newsletter articles). Another helpful resource is our tape/cd set, "Jesus -- Symbol and Reality," in which Kenneth focuses on the

growth from spiritual childhood to spiritual maturity. Chapter 17 in *Absence from Felicity* also presents this spectrum in the context of Helen Schucman's experience of Jesus.

Q #1248: In the various thought systems extant in the world, there is often in-depth discussion of the "unconscious mind" and the "subconscious mind." In *A Course in Miracles'* view, are these the same, different, interchangeable areas of the mind? Since words are merely symbols twice removed and several words can symbolize the same idea (Jesus/Holy Spirit or God/Perfect Love/Oneness), could we just as easily say our guilt remains buried in the "subconscious mind" instead of the "unconscious mind"?

A: The term *subconscious* does not appear in *A Course in Miracles* ; but the term *unconscious* is used to describe the mind's intentional banishing of something from awareness. The emphasis is on the mind's decision not to deal with what it has judged fearful, or simply what it wants forever concealed. For example, Jesus explains in Lesson 136 that we **"set up a series of defenses to reduce the threat that has been judged real,"** and then after we do this, we deliberately forget we did it: **"your plan requires that you must forget you made it . . . (W.pl.136.4:1,3).** In this sense, Jesus is not really talking about a "region" in our minds, but the activity of the decision maker.

Q #1249: I have been a student of yoga for many years, and have studied numerous east and west perspectives of non-dualism. *A Course in Miracles* seems to be a different kind of non- dualism. I wonder if you have an idea of how this differs from other non-dualistic philosophies? I also have in my study substituted Guru-Spirit for Holy Spirit. Does the Course allow for such an exchange of terms?

A: *A Course in Miracles* is a strict non-dualism, which means that God alone is real. Nothing finite, limited, or imperfect is real, which also means that nothing lacking the perfect Love of God is real -- sin, for example, cannot be real. This type of radical monism is also found in the highest teachings of the Vedanta school of Hinduism, where all multiplicity and finitude is regarded as illusory. Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, is the only true reality. This absolute non-dualism differs from the mitigated forms of non-dualism, which loosely fall into the category of pantheism (*pan- theos* , meaning all things are God). In pantheistic systems, diversity is real, but only as parts of one Divine Being, not in the form of distinct beings with their own existence. There are examples of this in the West, but it is more prevalent in Eastern philosophies. Generally speaking, in the devotional traditions (*Bhakti*) of the East, the world and persons are real, but not as independent beings. They are real only as modes of the Divine Reality, in whom their ultimate reality is rooted.

The implications of these views of what constitutes reality are profound, and the exploration of that is the subject of Kenneth's book, *Love Does Not Condemn: The World, the Flesh, and the Devil According to Platonism, Christianity, Gnosticism, and "A Course in Miracles."*

With regard to substituting *Guru-Spirit* for *Holy Spirit* , if that works for you, then continue with it. The form is not what is important, only the content -- of an inner teacher.

Q #1250: I have been applying Lesson 97 "I am spirit" (W.pl.97) for two weeks, and lately have been having trouble sleeping. I think that my application of "I am spirit" and my sleep difficulties are related. Have you ever run across this?

A: It is possible that there is a connection. However, it may not be the lesson itself that is the cause, but the decision your mind has made to take what the lesson says seriously. And that itself could be a result

of all the work you have already done in your mind up to this point. Without realizing it consciously, you could have become more fearful of what *A Course in Miracles* really means, in terms of your identity and your life. This fear could then be expressed physically or psychologically -- sleep difficulties are just one form this fear could take. Most students go through something like this -- it is inevitable. Our whole approach to relationships, as well as everything else about our lives would have to change if we integrate the Course; and therefore we would experience the Course as tremendously threatening, even though we are strongly attracted to it and have chosen it as our spiritual path.

While it is natural to experience some agitation and anxiety when practicing the lessons, it is also important not to get overly serious about your process, and above all, not to force yourself to change in any way. *Gentleness* and *patience* should always guide your practice. If you experience anything else, then more than likely your ego has crept in and is trying to take over as your teacher. Simply slow down a little, and reassure yourself that when you are ready, you will take the next step, and it doesn't matter when that is. Time is irrelevant to Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

If behavioral difficulties persist, then sometimes the most loving thing you can do for yourself (which is a way of practicing the Course) is to get some external help.

Q #1251: I am having difficulty understanding how my interactions with other people who are going through the same process of learning that their thoughts are creating reality are able to coexist and not interfere with one another. If I believe and understand that reality is a manifestation of thought, does this not have an effect on other people? What if I have thoughts about another person? -- how can my reality possibly make our two realities come together? If the situation has been decided by all involved beforehand, then I feel as though I am in a grand illusion that is no longer a good space to be in. It would be nice to get some validation that I'm not a puppet on someone's string. I am giving 100% to learning how to relearn that the world, and this email for that matter, is only a thought and nothing more. I got the concept that we are all the same energy, but I don't understand it when it relates to individuality.

A: No, you are not a "puppet on someone's string"; and *A Course in Miracles'* theory of time does not entail predestination. In fact, one of the major objectives of Jesus' teaching is to have us realize that our decision to choose the ego or him as our teacher determines what our experience will be at every instant. But it would not be entirely accurate to say that we therefore "create our reality."

If I choose the ego as my teacher, then my thoughts will emanate from the thought system of separation, and whatever is going on externally will be interpreted by me (my decision maker) accordingly. The ego thought system will be a kind of template, in terms of which my *internal experience* of the external will be "created." When I interact with you, for instance, my ego needs will determine how I experience you. I do not create your reality; I "create" my perception of you based on my prior choice to listen to the ego rather than Jesus or the Holy Spirit. And my perception of you may not even square with the objective reality, because my ego needs could result in distorted perception -- which is frequently the case.

It is next to impossible for us to jump from our experience of ourselves as physical/psychological individuals to an experience of ourselves as minds not bound by time or space. Even the intellectual understanding of *mind* is not easy for us, as you have found. One of the reasons for this difficulty is that we are far more invested in the ego thought system than we realize, and since the core of the ego's strategy is to keep us mindless, attempting to perceive a realm beyond the body and specifics (the realm of mindlessness) would seem quite unnatural and frustrating to us, and almost impossible to attain. We would be fighting against ourselves to perceive everything as mind when, at the same time, we are upholding a decision to deny our identity as mind.

Therefore, what might help ease the pressure and confusion you are experiencing is to approach this issue from a different direction: shifting your focus to the *purpose* or the way you are using the world, your

body, and your relationships, rather than trying so hard to relate to the world and everyone as thought. It is true that there is only mind and thoughts in the mind; but your experience of that will come more naturally if you focus first on becoming comfortable with recognizing the purpose in your mind that is motivating the way you relate and interact in the world. The practice of this would lead you eventually to see beyond the appearances of individuality to the decision-making mind that is "in charge." Then you would see that no one is under anyone else's control, unless that kind of experience is wanted; but then that choice could be changed at any instant.

For example, as long as we identify with the ego's thought system of separation, it is a given that we will relate to each other in the context of specialness, which means we will judge some people as not deserving of our love, compassion, and forgiveness -- even ourselves at times. Specialness and exclusion go hand in hand. We can thus learn to recognize how we use people to keep ourselves in the particular state of specialness we desire -- to get what we want. Even further, the roots of specialness are hidden in the mind's compulsion to see and judge differences; and so we can learn to recognize that dimension in our relationships as well.

As we continue this process of looking and observing, we will be shifting our attention more and more away from form to the content in our minds. And eventually we will relate to ourselves and everyone else primarily on that level, while at the same time we will be functioning normally in our day-to-day activities (form). Thus, when we realize how we make differences important, and then seek to correct that (we change teachers in our mind), our perception will shift to the interests we all share -- that we all are suffering tremendous anguish and guilt over believing we selfishly separated from our Source, and that we all are longing to go back home to Heaven. As that becomes our abiding perception, then our investment in individuality will begin to weaken, without our even working on that directly.

The transition to the experience of everything as mind, thus, would be more natural, and certainly more gentle than trying to pressure ourselves to get beyond the body and form entirely. This is why Jesus reminds us often that we are involved in a process of undoing what we have made in error. We start where we are -- with what we are most familiar with. Near the end of the text, Jesus tells us, **"Salvation does not ask that you behold the spirit and perceive the body not. It merely asks that this should be your choice"** (T.31.VI.3:1). Thus, our willingness to change from the ego's purpose to the Holy Spirit's purpose for the world and the body is what will facilitate the gentle transition to true perception, and to the vision we share with Jesus.

Q #1252: If God is not aware of our illusion of separation, how did He know to send the Holy Spirit to help us? One thought that comes to me is that the Holy Spirit is a construct of, (or is?) our Christ Mind and so was in our mind, and remains so, even when we imagine that we are separate. Therefore, are Jesus, and the Christ Mind, and the Holy Spirit and the "Son of God" all the same? Is the idea of Trinity really a twosome (God and his Creation meaning all of the above terms?) I would be so grateful for your input.

A: We have already answered your first question, and refer you to Questions #459 and #616 for our response. The Holy Spirit, as presented in *A Course in Miracles* is not considered a construct of our Christ Mind. He symbolizes for us the memory of our true Self that resides in the sane part of our post-separation mind -- an illusory split mind, of course, as the separation never truly happened. You might say that the Holy Spirit is in the Mind of God, not the Christ Mind, insofar as Jesus tells us that when the separation is completely undone, the Holy Spirit will no longer take form -- as the Voice for God -- but will return to the eternal formlessness of God (**C.6.5:8**). Another discussion of this with additional references may be found in Question #1159.

Questions #625 and #626 pertain to your queries about the nature of God and Jesus. What always helps when trying to piece together a theology is to remember that we are dealing with symbols. Reality is pure oneness, which is incomprehensible to us as long as we experience ourselves as individuals consciously

thinking about issues. This is the main point of Jesus' discussion in the first section of Chapter 25 (T.25.I.5,6,7). He uses language and concepts that we can understand, but his purpose is to lead us beyond that level to the *experience* of God's Love, which transcends all form and symbol. Jesus, as we describe in #626 above, reflects or symbolizes God's Love in a form we can relate to, and in this sense he is not the Christ Mind. He is the Son of God, the same as we are in our separated state. In emphasizing our equality with him on this level, he corrects the biblical view that he alone is God's Son, and we the adopted sons of God. The term *Son of God* is also used in the Course to refer to Christ, our true Self, the Second Person of the Trinity. Thus, the term is used for our true Self, Christ, as part of the Oneness of God's Being, and it is also used for the post-separation self, or the decision maker that can choose to awaken from the dream of separation from God.

Q #1253: *A Course in Miracles* speaks often of how we have "made up our world." It uses the word projection, stating that it is mind that does the seeming deed. But I am confused as to how I make up my world. How did/do I do it?

A: It is important first to understand that when the Course says we have made up the world, it is not referring to the self we each believe we are, with a specific body and brain and personality and name. These selves, with which we are identified, are only aspects of the world that we have made up. That is, they are effects and not causes. Jesus is only ever addressing us as mind, and it is the mind that has made this all up, as you have noted. The mind exists outside of time and space, that is, outside this world in which we seem to experience ourselves. And more accurately, it can be said that the world of time and space exists, as an illusion, within the mind.

A useful analogy to help grasp this is to think of our dreams at night. While we are asleep, we typically think we are one of the figures we are dreaming about, usually the same self we are identified with when we are awake. But as we reflect upon a dream after awakening, we do not attribute any causal power to the figure in the dream with which we identified, even though it may have seemed as if it had some control over events while we were still asleep. We know the dream and all the figures are merely symbols, results of our mind's imaginings. Jesus tells us in **"The Basis of the Dream"** that the same mind that makes up and projects the world of our night dreams is also dreaming the world we experience when we believe we are awake (T.18.II.5:8,9,10,11,12,13,14).

We experience ourselves as separate minds, but we are in fact part of the one mind, both the single ego mind that is dreaming the world we experience as outside ourselves, and the one Mind that knows nothing of illusion. Although the *how* of this whole process of projecting a world is interesting, the more important question from the Course's perspective is *why* do we do it. As Jesus observes later in the same section, **"It is not strange that dreams can make a world that is unreal. It is the wish to make it that is incredible (T.18.8:2,3).** And the wish comes from the insane desire to be something other than Who we are as God has created us, and the guilt that follows from that desire, which we seek to project and see outside ourselves. Earlier in the text, Jesus observes that **"the world you see is the delusional system of those made mad by guilt" (T.13.in.2:2)** . And he means that quite literally! The world is nothing more than our own guilt as the one sleeping Son projected outward, identical in process to the nightmares we may experience while we sleep at night, which come from what we experience as our own personal internalized guilt. But they are all the same, and they are insane, for we are doing nothing to undo the guilt within our minds but rather are denying its source, preferring to see the guilt "outside" rather than within.

Each seemingly separate fragment of mind, believing it is separate, does not have the power to change the one ego mind's dream in any meaningful way. But it does have the power to learn to look at the dream differently, until eventually it gives no power to the dream and awakens from it. It is in this sense that we can say that we are each completely responsible for the world we see and experience. We each make up our own psychological world, based on our interpretation of what we seem to be experiencing. It is still the mind outside of time and space that is interpreting the experience, but we seem to have a

choice about how we will look at what seems to be happening around us and to us and what we ourselves as figures in the dream are doing. And the only real choice is to which teacher in our minds we turn to help us interpret our experiences – the ego or the Holy Spirit. This is the more practical level on which the Course is written. For knowing the metaphysical basis of our world helps us begin to question our ego interpretations of events, which up until now we were certain were true. And we will begin to see that, depending on to which teacher we turn to interpret what seems to be happening, we will have diametrically opposite experiences. For, as Jesus notes near the end of the workbook (in a lesson that begins by describing the process we've been discussing by which the mind makes a world), **“From insane wishes comes an insane world. From judgment comes a world condemned. And from forgiving thoughts a gentle world comes forth, with mercy for the holy Son of God, to offer him a kindly home where he can rest a while before he journeys on, and help his brothers walk ahead with him, and find the way to Heaven and to God” (W.pll.325.1:4,5,6) .**

Q #1254(i): (The following two questions were submitted by the same person.)

A Course in Miracles states that “ everything that seems to happen to me I ask for, and receive as I have asked” (T.21.II.2:5). On one of your tapes you said that if I am stuck and feel miserable, it is because I want to be stuck and feel miserable. I am having such a struggle in this life with everything -- job, family, where I live. It just does not seem possible that this is happening because I want to struggle and be unhappy. I feel like I do not want life to be so difficult, and that the way my life has gone and is going is totally out of my control. I know I don't know what I'm doing or how to be free of all of this misery. When we become aware that we are getting what we ask for, which for some of us is an unhappy life, how do we change it? Or is it just your lot in life?

A: First, Jesus is not referring to external circumstances or events in the passage you quoted; he is talking only about our interpretation or how we experience what goes on in our lives. What that means is that seeing yourself as an innocent victim of outside forces is an interpretation. It comes as quite a shock to most students, when, in the very next sentence, he says that to feel that way is self-deception **(T.21.II.2:6)**. It is true that we cannot control most things in the world: the weather, the speed of light, the job and housing markets, the decisions and actions of dictators, etc., but we definitely can control our responses to these forces as they affect our lives. That is the level of responsibility that Jesus is referring to and training us to focus on, because that is the beginning phase of recovering the power of our minds, which we gave away when we chose separation over union with God. This does not mean, though, that you should not take whatever steps you can to improve your situation in the world.

The main point is that the peace of God is within our minds as part of our very being and therefore is not dependent on anything outside us. Nothing can take it away or diminish it, as Jesus expresses in the lesson **“My salvation comes from me”: “The seeming cost of accepting today's idea is this: It means that nothing outside yourself can save you; nothing outside yourself can give you peace. But it also means that nothing outside yourself can hurt you, or disturb your peace or upset you in any way” (W.pl.70.2:1,2; see also W.pl.152)**. This is indeed hard for us to comprehend, but it is the heart of Jesus' radical message. If peace is within us at all times and we don't experience it, there can be but one reason: we ourselves chose against it because the ego's offering was more appealing to us at the moment. We then deny we did that, and blame our lack of peace on something other than that decision. It is true, as you say, that it makes no sense to think we actually want to be miserable and to be constantly struggling, but all that means is that we are not in touch with our mind's dynamics and are just deluding ourselves about why we are unhappy. Correcting this confusion is a main objective of the lessons in the workbook -- for example, Lesson 5 states, **“I am never upset for the reason I think” (W.pl.5)**.

Based on the strategy of the ego, what we *want* (in our wrong minds) is to keep our existence as individuals separate from God, but not the guilt over that; however, to achieve that goal, we cannot stay in our minds, because that's where God can get us, the ego warns. Therefore, we must project ourselves

into another state; and (to abbreviate a very long story) that's why we experience ourselves only as bodies struggling to survive in a world that seems to throw one problem after another at us. Then the world is the problem, not the decision we are making in our minds, because we are no longer aware that we even have a mind. The ego's strategy thus has succeeded -- apparently. So in *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus exposes this whole plot and teaches us how to end our suffering through the practice of forgiveness.

Similar concerns have been expressed by other students, and you might find it helpful to read these discussions. See Questions #980, #1353, and #1359.

Q #1254(ii): When I do the workbook lessons in *A Course in Miracles* and need to go into my mind away from the world, and reach God, I have never been able to do that. I have done the lessons several times and still am no better at sinking down, inward. I don't get to a peaceful place, or the altar or anywhere I am asked to "go". Can you help?

A: Patience and trust are the key to practicing the lessons. Your *wanting* to do what Jesus asks is what truly heals your mind, not necessarily perfect results as you would be tempted to judge them. Your willingness is the content that really matters. That is what you want to trust in. The action, so to speak, is going on at another level of which you are not aware; therefore, it could well be that you are making great strides spiritually simply by *wanting* to get beyond your ego, even though you do not experience being beyond it (see **T.18.V.1**). The experience may come in a different way -- perhaps at a time when you ordinarily would be anxious or angry, and that does not happen. Just try not to judge yourself as you do the lessons.

Q #1255 (i): (The following two questions were submitted by the same person.)

In some of Ken's books, he says that the Holy Spirit "sends" people our way for relationships. How does this work since we are making up the dream?

A: The important issue you raised is addressed by Ken in his Preface to the fourth edition of *Forgiveness and Jesus*, the Preface to the second edition of his *Christian Psychology in "A Course in Miracles"* (which also contains a new Afterword), and in the Preface to his *Love Does Not Condemn*. He explains that his early teaching was done in the context of the Bible, primarily because he was speaking specifically to a Christian and Jewish audience, and both he and Helen Schucman agreed that it would be helpful to those coming to the Course from a biblical background to establish a bridge between the two spiritualities. When that phase of his teaching and writing had been completed, he shifted the context of his teaching, now emphasizing the fundamental incompatibility of these two systems, as a blurring of the decisive differences was leading to a distortion of both the Bible and the Course. There are many other aspects to this transition, and we recommend that you consult one or all of the above books for the complete picture.

With regard to the specific issue you raise, we quote from Ken's Preface to the fourth edition of his *Forgiveness and Jesus*: ". . . in keeping with the language of *A Course in Miracles* and the Bible, as well as with the way Helen Schucman . . . William Thetford . . . and I frequently spoke during those early years, I occasionally refer [in *Forgiveness and Jesus*] to the Holy Spirit's or Jesus' 'sending' us people. . . . There is no question that our experience often leads us to believe that people are 'sent' to us, either to help us or for us to be of help to them. However, as I discuss in . . . *Love Does Not Condemn*, and in *Absence from Felicity*. . . Jesus and the Holy Spirit do *not* operate in the world, and certainly do not *send* us people as if they were operating a giant chess board, moving us around according to the

evolution of the plan of salvation" (p. xv). Expanding on this in another Preface, Ken states: "To believe in His [the Holy Spirit's] worldly interventions reflects the wish, mostly unconscious, that the Holy Spirit be deluded by the ego's strategy of using the world and its bodily preoccupations to distract us from the true problem (our belief in the reality of guilt) and answer (the miracle or forgiveness), both of which are found in our minds" (*Christian Psychology in "A Course in Miracles"* , p. xi).

Q #1255 (ii) : In *A Talk Given on "A Course in Miracles," An Introduction* , Ken gives a scenario of how to respond from the wrong mind and then from the right mind when someone is attacking us. I found this confusing because I thought that any time I perceive someone as attacking me, I have the opportunity to see how I am projecting my guilt on them by seeing them as attacking me. Isn't it only myself (self C) that I am seeing, always? If I am in my right mind, why would I see anyone attacking me at all? Isn't that making attack real? I thought there was really no one out there attacking me or anyone else for that matter, because I am making it up and attack is always my projection.

A: Everything you say is correct about perceiving from your right mind. Ken's discussion is in the framework of what the world would perceive as attacking -- in other words, he is talking about the two ways of responding when someone acts in a way the world would call attacking.

Q #1256: I have read the text of *A Course in Miracles* and will be starting the lessons soon. I am feeling an increase in depression and health concerns. Having been a spiritual student for several years, I know that the body is just an illusion and that we are in control of our thoughts. But I feel I will never achieve peace. Sometimes I feel so angry and depressed that I wonder, why bother? I feel very desperate for help!

A: The state you describe -- knowing that ultimately our own thoughts determine our experience but still at times finding ourselves mired in depression and anger -- is undoubtedly very familiar to many spiritual students. Ironically, the knowledge that we do not have to be miserable often heightens our awareness of just how miserable we are. In addition, it is likely that the idea of beginning the workbook is extremely threatening to your ego. As the Course says , **"The ego will attack your motives as soon as they become clearly out of accord with its perception of you. This is when it will shift abruptly from suspiciousness to viciousness, since its uncertainty is increased"** (T.9.VII.4:6,7) . So perhaps you can take some comfort in the fact that yours is a common reaction to trying to achieve spiritual growth. It is not a symptom of weakness or a sign of failure on your part.

If you are feeling desperate for help, seek that help in whatever form you think would be most effective for you right now. For example, do not hesitate to get medical or psychological assistance if that could alleviate your health concerns and depression. It is true that real healing comes exclusively from the miracle, or change of perception that occurs in the mind, and that it is the only thing that can lead us to lasting inner peace. But as long as we retain any guilt or identification with ourselves as the separated, physical beings we seem to be, we do not want to deny ourselves physical or psychological comfort. While Jesus does label attempts to solve problems where they are not -- i.e. in the world -- as *magic* , nowhere does he say not to do this. In fact, he tells us that to deny the existence of the world or the body is **"a particularly unworthy form of denial"** (T.2.IV.3:11) . (See also, T.2.IV.4,5)

Emotional ups and downs, and endless concerns and pains, are inevitable for bodies. Indeed, we dreamed up this world precisely to be in a constant struggle that obliterates God's Love from our mind. So we cannot expect our issues to subside easily. Feeling guilty or frustrated that we still have them is not a helpful or kind thing to do to ourselves. What *is* helpful is to realize that our pains are the very curriculum that the Holy Spirit can use to teach us that we are *not* the victim of the world we see (**W.57.1.31**) . For that to happen, we need to ask Him to hold our hand and look at our pain with us, without judgment. He

will teach us that our troubles merely indicate that our intellectual understanding of the illusory nature of the world and the body are still overshadowed by our fear. And fear calls for love and understanding, not punishment.

This, then, is the answer to why it is worth continuing on the spiritual path, even when it feels as though we are not getting anywhere. By realizing that the Holy Spirit's non-judgmental Love is in our mind -- right alongside our fear -- we discover that our insanity has no effect on God's Love. In this way, our fear and pain gradually lessen and begin to lose the power they seemed to have over us. They may not disappear for quite some time, but they slowly cease to be a big deal. Eventually, every time we feel pain we can simply look at it and say, "There it goes again. So what else is new?"

Until we reach that point, when we catch ourselves thinking that our pain is a miserable ending point rather than a silly, temporary roadblock, we can remember Jesus' loving advice: **"The ego always marches to defeat, because it thinks that triumph over you is possible. And God thinks otherwise" (T.23.I.2:6,7) .**

Q #1257 : I am very frustrated with my practice of *A Course in Miracles* because I feel that all that I want is specific guidance. I beg, beg, and beg for specific guidance but none comes. I am so sick and tired of people saying to just follow the Holy Spirit's directions, because I try to and I don't hear anything. Unlike many others, I am willing to accept that "I don't know" as Jesus says, but I don't hear an alternative often for what I think that I do know. I am willing to be the most obedient student of Jesus, but how can I be obedient if I don't hear any answers?

A: To at least reassure you that you are not alone in this, we quote Jesus' statement that **"very few can hear God's Voice at all" (M.12.3:3)**. Second, there are many different ways of "hearing" the Holy Spirit -- His guidance can come through an idea, a loving thought, a feeling, a dream, something you read or that someone else says or does, and so on. It is not limited to literal words or instructions.

The Holy Spirit, though, represents the content in your right mind, which essentially is the correction of the content in your wrong mind. That is what the Holy Spirit is about and speaks for. We are the ones who give the form to the content, meaning that, more often than not, we define the nature of the communication according to what we think we need. That is a severe limitation, but we do it only because of the tremendous fear we have of accepting pure love as our only identity. The reflection of pure love is in our right mind, and that is the content of any answer the Holy Spirit would give, because if we could accept that love, all our needs would vanish -- we would have everything and want for nothing, regardless of the circumstances in our lives. **"Can this be traded for a bit of trifling advice about a problem of an instant's duration?"** Jesus pleads in his discussion of the nature of prayer (**S.1.I.4:6**). Yet, he also recognizes that we are not yet on that level, and so goes on to speak about prayer as a ladder (**S.1.II**). Importantly, he never says it is wrong or harmful to ask for specifics; he is just helping us recognize that our needs are coming from a false identity we have accepted in place of the one conferred by our Creator, and that by continuing to ask for specifics without ever addressing our real and only need, we are ensuring that we will never have true and lasting peace.

Finally, what can simplify this for you is to see the issue not so much as, "Why don't I hear the Holy Spirit's Voice?" but as, "Why don't I do what He tells me, which is to forgive." Forgiveness is our only function; and fulfilling that function is what will bring us the peace and happiness we seek. Lessons 121 and 122 in the workbook are wonderful reminders of this (**W.pl.121, 122**).

You might find it helpful to look at Questions #215, #538, and #555, which elaborate on the issues discussed here.

Q #1258: I am continually confronted by my lack of faith in Jesus, God/Higher Power to actually create change in my mind. I want desperately to believe that I can have joy and peace while living in this world, in this lifetime, but it continually eludes me. And then I fear that my lack of faith is what is creating my lack of well-being (e.g., physical, financial) in many areas of my life. The lack of "evidence" of well-being in my experience makes sustained faith impossible for me. It appears that the small willingness necessary for a change in perception is not really enough to create the miracle for me. I spend so much time in observation of my thoughts and in recognition of my misperceptions. I give those mistakes to Jesus, and nothing changes in my experience or in my mind. Could it be that the Course was not meant to be applicable to everyone?

A: There are very few students who have not held out some hope that their diligent work with *A Course in Miracles* would somehow lead to the betterment of their situation in the world. It is hard not to want physical, financial, and other levels of well being, and the Course never asks us to give that up or feel that it is wrong to pursue it. It is just telling us that we will never rid ourselves of the *true cause* of our unhappiness and frustration that way, because the real problem lies in our mind's choice to project guilt instead of looking at it without judgment. We know all too well that however secure we may feel in terms of external conditions, that security is always precarious -- our world today makes that abundantly clear. Therefore, Jesus cautions us, **"Seek not escape from problems here. The world was made that problems could not be escaped"** (T.31.IV.2:5,6).

Part of us believes that, and part of us doesn't. Thus our conflicted state of mind. Our investment in believing the body is our reality amounts to an addiction, and our fear of bodily impoverishment and inadequacy is that of an addict's fear of being without his fix. Jesus explains to us that the source of this investment is the body's role in protecting us from the devastation we believe is in our minds because we accuse ourselves of having thrown away our wholeness, in our selfish demand for individual existence. **"The ego believes that mind is dangerous, and that to make mindless is to heal"** (T.8.IX.6:3). As long as we identify with the ego, we will desperately need the body; and even more important, we will need to be successful in the body so that we will never have to go back to the disturbing chaos in our minds. That is the reason we panic when things are not going well.

In view of this, we cannot long sustain the thought that we are as God created us, for that means we are not bodies. But the body, once again, with all its needs and problems, is what protects us from what we fear to face in our minds; so we are caught -- wanting to believe what the Course says, yet fearing to go there. Therefore, we find a way to compromise between our devotion to the Course and our devotion to achieving security and stability in the world. This ego strategy then leaves us desolate and despairing when things don't work out the way we think they should, and then we conclude that our faith is wanting; or the Holy Spirit has turned a deaf ear to our pleas; or our sinfulness is just too great, or we haven't sacrificed enough, etc. That is exactly where the ego wants us to end up -- no longer in touch with the truth about ourselves, the world, Jesus, this course, the Holy Spirit, and God, blaming something or someone for our miserable state.

Fear is the problem, not a lack of faith or belief. Therefore, just try to be gentle and patient, as you would with anyone you encounter who is frightened. Accept where you are in your process, and ask Jesus to help you look at the real source of your crisis. It is only our fear that makes the Course seem beyond our capability, because as we well know, fear can distort perception and cause us to grasp for anything that promises immediate relief. This course is simply asking us to accept the truth and deny what is false. Again, our fear causes us to complicate this, because fear impels us to erect defenses against it, and then we get lost in the defenses. In the face of the temptation to believe the Course is beyond you, remember Jesus' many assurances, one comforting example being: **"I would not ask you to do things you cannot do, and it is impossible that I could do things you cannot do. Given this, and given this quite literally, nothing can prevent you from doing exactly what I ask, and everything argues for your doing it. I give you no limits because God lays none upon you"** (T.8.IX.8:2,3,4).

Q #1259: How can I bring a problem to the love of Jesus in my mind if I'm not even aware of his presence there?

A: Expressed in other terms, bringing a problem to the love of Jesus is to look at your problem from the perspective of your right mind. While we have split off the right mind from our awareness, it is still there. We just need to choose against the ego (the wrong mind) more and more, and then we will gradually regain awareness of our right mind. As the process continues, you would come to experience this as a loving, non-judgment presence, though whether you call it Jesus or not is unimportant. In your right mind you know that separation is not real, and so you do not project, judge, or take anything that goes on in the world seriously. Attracted more to forgiveness and the undoing of thoughts of separation, you would automatically see your problem in a different light now. You would want to see the sameness between yourself and everyone else and minimize the differences, without ignoring them. You would realize that your right mind represents your true Self, and you would eventually feel more at home there than in the ego's home (your wrong mind) of specialness, judgment, conflict, and death. You would therefore approach the problems that arise in your life in a very different way, more in line with your purpose of asking for help to remove all interferences to your awareness of love's presence.

Other related discussions may be found in Questions #319, #934, and #1127.

Q #1260: Given the kinds of emotional problems many people have, shouldn't there be a warning or a caution of some kind at the beginning of the workbook, as doing the lessons will inevitably stir up "stuff" that could be difficult to deal with? Related closely to this: is *A Course in Miracles* not a pointless journey?

A: As a self-contained curriculum, it is not up to us to second-guess its author's methods. But the spirit of your question raises an important issue. There is no doubt that this is a difficult journey and that there will be periods of discomfort during the process of letting go of our investment in the ego thought system. In fact, in the manual, of the six stages in the development of trust that Jesus describes, he says four are likely to be experienced as uncomfortable **(M.4.I)** .

Then, too, there is much in the Course about the fear, and even terror, that arises from going within and looking at our ego. The ego thought system is not nice -- it is an expression from beginning to end of hatred, murder, sacrifice, victimization, specialness, and judgment. But we are told on page after page that it all rests on the mistaken belief that we can and have separated from God and crucified His Son. The truth, though, is that we never separated and could never separate from our Source, and that is why our only responsibility is to accept the Atonement for ourselves **(T.2.V.5:1)** , which we can do only in the context of our ordinary day-to-day experiences that reflect back to us the teacher we have chosen in our minds **(T.21.in)** . Thus, Jesus tells us, **"No one can escape from illusions unless he looks at them, for not looking is the way they are protected. There is no need to shrink from illusions, for they cannot be dangerous. . . . together we have the lamp that will dispel it [the ego thought system] we must look first at this to see beyond it, since you have made it real. We will undo this error quietly together, and then look beyond it to truth (T.11.V.1:1,2,3,5,6).**

An indispensable part of our process as students of *A Course in Miracles* is remembering that the ego has no power of its own, only what our minds give it. Looking at our ego manifestations with the Holy Spirit will help us remember that, and therefore we will learn not to take it so seriously, which we do whenever we judge ourselves or others for having an ego. If there were a warning at the beginning of the workbook lessons, Jesus would be saying that the ego is real and that getting in touch with it could be dangerous. But that goes directly against everything he says about the ego and how we should approach it. He is teaching us that the ego has no substance and that it is only a mistaken belief about ourselves that we are holding on to. His emphasis throughout is that we trust him to lead us, and to be as gentle, kind, and patient with ourselves as he is with us, and not force ourselves to work through anything that is too fearful. The opportunity to learn a forgiveness lesson will always be there, and since he does not

believe that time is real, he never puts pressure on us to learn our lessons within a certain time frame. If we emulate his gentle guidance with ourselves and others, we will make our way through the rough spots and be fine in the long run.

If, however, as is sometimes the case, this process stirs up “stuff” that is experienced as overwhelming, then the kind and gentle thing to do would be to seek help from a kind therapist, and then return to the Course process when you are more stable emotionally and psychologically.

The unsettling experiences of many students is addressed in other questions on this service. You may wish to read some of these listed in the Topics Index under A Course in Miracles/study and practice of/practice is causing fear and discomfort.

Finally, we do not see this as a pointless journey, as it is a means of undoing the mistaken beliefs in our minds that have led to all of our pain and problems. As long as we continue to react to our bodies and the world as though they were real, then we need help to rid our minds of these illusory thoughts so that we can regain the state of peace in which we were created to live forever.

Q #1261: If someone loves you, desires a special relationship with you, pledges their devotion and undying love, but you are still not attracted to that person in that way, and prefer to live alone, does that mean you are afraid of love? Should you consider a special relationship with that person? Ken says in “Living the Course” (audio album) that we should not abandon our special relationships, for they are opportunities for learning. Is it wrong to turn away love on the level of form? Are we not told to “give them what they want” when they seek love?

A: Frequently, students avoid their feelings of attraction to someone because they think that special relationships are bad and should never be entered into. And, just as frequently, students will leave special relationships for the same reason. Both attitudes seriously misconstrue what *A Course in Miracles* teaches. The point is that our relationships are the curriculum Jesus uses to help us get in touch with the choices we are making in our minds so that we can then shift the purpose for which we are using them from an unholy one (separation) to a holy one (the Holy Spirit's forgiveness process).

This does not mean that you should start up a relationship with someone to whom you are not attracted, for the sole purpose of learning lessons. You already have many special relationship classrooms, by virtue of your being the child of parents (alive or deceased), a relative of other family members, a friend, a member of certain groups, an employee/employer, a neighbor, a pet owner possibly, a consumer, a citizen, etc. In other words, you are not deprived of classrooms because you prefer to live alone. Special relationships are in the mind, meaning the way we relate to others reflects the choice we have made in our mind to live out the ego's thought system or the Holy Spirit's thought system. The form or expression of this varies greatly, and is not limited to sexual and romantic partners. The holy relationship is simply the correction of our choice to identify with the ego, and the expression of that choice with others.

One of the defining characteristics of special love is that it excludes in some way. On the level of *content*, in other words, it singles out and separates -- not everyone is included in your love. This is the core of specialness. On the other hand, you can spend most of your time with one person, but in content, be excluding no one -- this is the nature of a holy relationship, which means you are centered in your right mind. Likewise, in form, you may live alone, but your love, compassion, and forgiveness would extend to everyone, without exception.

Since “**love is content, and not form of any kind**” (T.16.V.12:1), you may not necessarily be rejecting love if someone “loves you, desires a special relationship with you, [and] pledges their devotion and undying love,” and you do not respond on that level. You need only look within your mind for ego complicity in your decision, some signs being fear, judgment, repulsion, selfishness, anger, vengeance.

You can still enfold this person in your love and compassion (content) without being romantically involved with him or her (form). You just want to notice whether there is a “charge” to your preference to live alone -- if so, then it would be a good idea to ask for help to look at the hidden content.

You answer a person's call for love in *content* , by seeing him or her as one with you, sharing the same interests as God's Son, as both an ego and the Self of Christ. The form of the relationship would then flow from this decision to undo whatever you have used to keep yourself separate from others and from God. That is why Jesus speaks of forgiveness as **“an earthly form of love, which as it is in Heaven has no form” (W.pl.186.14:2)** .

Q #1262 : In knowing that this world holds nothing for me, nothing that I want, and that beyond this world is the world I want (W.pl.128,129), should I be seeing God in everything, or is that validating what is not real?

A: Seeing God in everything means seeing His *purpose* in everything. This is not meant literally, of course, because God knows nothing of the world: **“There is no world! This is the central thought the course attempts to teach” (W.pl.132.6:2,3)**. It means choosing to identify with the content in our right mind instead of the content in our wrong mind. The world then is seen as a classroom, and our interactions become the means of undoing our thoughts of separation from everyone else and from God. We learn to use the world for this purpose of correcting our thoughts, which replaces our former purpose of using the world to further our existence as separate, special, bodily selves. Our eyes will continue to see the same things, but our *perception* of what our eyes see will be vastly different, meaning we will “see” that we all share the same interests and the same split mind. A gradual reduction of tension and conflict and a growing sense of inner peace will flow from this new purpose.

Question #918 also discusses the meaning of these lessons.

Q #1263 : If God is not aware of the world, or our separation from Him, then why did we have a Jesus for Atonement?

A: The principle of the Atonement states that the separation never happened; there is no separated Son of God, no sin, no world, and no need for redemption or salvation. This is what we refer to as Level One discourse in *A Course in Miracles* . But since we clearly believe we exist as individuals in a world that is quite real, the Course talks to us on that level, too: Level Two. In that context, the Atonement principle represents the part of our split mind that remembers the truth of Oneness, and corrects all of the misperceptions we have about God, Jesus, ourselves, and the world.

Having listened to the ego's tale of a vengeful God intent on punishing us for attacking Him and making up a world to replace Him, we fear God and seek to make amends in hopes of avoiding the horrible fate we believe we deserve. The Course presents a gentle, though decisive, correction of these terrifying concepts, which have dominated religious traditions for thousands of years. Thus, in place of the biblical Jesus who carries out his Father's Will through sacrificial crucifixion and then bodily resurrection, *A Course in Miracles* presents a loving, non-judgmental Jesus who is the reflection of God's Love in our mind. He thus symbolizes the love in our own minds that we had split off, and, as would an older and wiser brother, helps us recognize the sinlessness in each other and ourselves, thus easing our fears and gaining our trust. Then, through our practice of forgiveness, we gradually withdraw our belief in the insane idea that we had ever separated from God.

To summarize, Atonement, according to *A Course in Miracles*, is the happy truth that we were mistaken in believing that we ever did something that put us in need of salvation.

Expanded discussions of these core ideas may be found in Questions #328, #459, and #616, which also provide references to passages in the Course that explain and clarify the issues.

Q #1264: Can you guide me through the process of forgiveness? I have been reading your answers and understand that it is my own projection of guilt that is causing my pain. My current cause of pain is one in which a tenant owes me over \$2,000. Although the tenant has now been evicted, I am faced with a decision to file a civil law suit, which may not result in retrieving the back rent, or letting the whole thing go. Since I want to use this experience to get out of this hell of reality on this planet, I do not know which decision to make. Will my ego just become more incensed, or will the Holy Spirit actually lead me out of this insanity called life on earth? Please start with a concrete definition of forgiveness .

A: Forgiveness is the undoing of everything we made to take the place of our reality as Christ in Heaven, accepting the Atonement principle that states we never left our Source. Not a very satisfying definition! The problem is that forgiveness really cannot be understood or deemed useful without setting it in the context of the entire thought system that Jesus presents in this course. But you have already grasped a major chunk of the Course's metaphysics and its process of forgiveness in understanding that the projection of your guilt is the source of your pain. *Projection makes perception* is the key principle. That means that your view of life on this planet as hell and insanity is reflecting what you think is true about yourself in your mind, but have denied and then projected. In other words, you are interpreting the world through the eyes of your guilt. As Jesus expresses it, the world **“is the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition” (T.21.in.1:5)**. The meaning that the world holds for us comes entirely from the choice we make in our minds to accept either the ego or Jesus as our teacher. Our internal experience of the world, therefore, tells us which teacher we have chosen.

Based on this much, your question should not be, Should I proceed with the law suit or not? but rather, Which teacher do I want to have guide me? Guide you in what? -- in making fear and guilt real, or in letting go of your belief in their reality. Nothing else is relevant in the situation. If you choose Jesus (or the Holy Spirit) as your teacher, your purpose will be to learn that you are guiltless, and Jesus can use either option to help you with that. The *purpose* of what you do is important in releasing you from hell, not *what* you do. If you can identify with love for just an instant, you will automatically know whether to proceed with the law suit or not; and you will be peaceful. That is the goal. Even if you have no clear sense of what to do, you can still be peaceful, for forgiveness teaches you that your peace and security are within you, completely independent of external circumstances. You would then just do what makes the most sense to you; but the situation would no longer have a charge to it, and you would not have an investment in the way it turns out. Question #953 adds another helpful perspective to this.

Remember, hell and insanity are the outcome of our choice to make sin and guilt real in our minds; they have nothing to do with what appears to be the outside world. And therefore the only way out of hell and insanity is to reverse that choice. That is what forgiveness is. And that is the meaning of the lesson **“I loose the world from all I thought it was,”** which echoes the text in saying, **“The world is nothing in itself. Your mind must give it meaning. And what you behold upon it are your wishes, acted out so you can look on them and think them real” (W.pl.132.4:1,2,3)**. And so, Jesus teaches us, **“To free the world from every kind of pain is but to change your mind about yourself” (W.pl.132.10:2)**. Look within, then, with Jesus as your gentle, loving eyes, and see the peace and quiet beyond the made-up insanity that has no power to change your reality as God's beloved creation. Thus does Jesus say of forgiveness, that it **“is still, and quietly does nothing. . . . It merely looks, and waits, and judges not” (W.pl.1.4:1,3)**.

Q #1265: I am currently in my third attempt at the workbook in 15 years. I realize my question has to do with form and specifics, but could we get some specifics on how to meditate? I thought I read that Jesus gave some tips to Helen and Bill that were edited out.

A: No, there were no meditation tips for Helen and Bill that were edited out of *A Course in Miracles*. In terms of your practice, there is no right or wrong way to meditate. There are specific instructions now and then in the workbook about getting quiet and meditating, but the emphasis is not on the form -- this is not a course in meditation, as are some other paths. We have discussed this topic in several other questions on this Service. See, for example, Questions #394, #730, and #830.

Q #1266: After a miscarriage, I spoke to the source, on top of a mountain in North Carolina. I let him know that I had two healthy and whole children, and if there was a special-needs child that needed to come here that he thought I could care for, that I would be his vessel. My gift from the source is now ten years old. But as my studies of *A Course in Miracles* expand, I feel that maybe my "God's" gift is an ego script. As I look at my beautiful child who will never understand the Course's words but will walk the walk of love, I wonder what was it that I asked for and received.

A: There is no need to go back into the past -- you did what you thought was best at the time. There is no way of knowing whether you were right-minded or wrong-minded in making your request for a special-needs child. It would benefit you more, in terms of your spiritual process, to focus on your relationship with this child in the present. And what that really means is being aware of any ego needs you might have that are being played out in the relationship. Whatever was unhealed in your mind ten years ago is still there, and therefore is still being projected in the present. Looking gently and without judgment at the ego-motivated choices you become aware of right now is how the healing of your mind takes place. Time is irrelevant to this process.

It might also be helpful to realize that, in a sense, we are *all* special-needs children! We did unimaginable damage to our minds by choosing individual specialness instead of staying with the unity and wholeness in which we were created as extensions of infinite Love. To make matters worse, we then split ourselves off from the Voice within our minds that was reminding us, and still is, that our separation from Love was only a tiny, mad idea, and that we never did what we thought we did. Everyone of us, without exception, and regardless of the *form* of limitation or handicap, shares the same content in our minds -- both the pain of being separate from our Source, and the Call to deny this denial of the truth, in recognition of our oneness as God's eternally loved Son.

Q #1267: Is there any way within *A Course in Miracles* to help someone who has died? My niece was very troubled when she passed away two years ago prior to my starting the Course. At that time I prayed as I had always done, believing it would help somehow; but now I'm not sure how to approach it in the context of the Course. Can a holy relationship be established in a case like this?

A: All that is required to establish a holy relationship is to ask for help to change the purpose of the relationship from an ego-motivated one to a Holy Spirit-motivated one. This means shifting from seeing your interests as separate from your niece's to seeing them as shared. That she is no longer physically present is not relevant to this process, as what this is ultimately about is undoing your unholy relationship with *your* ego, which means undoing your belief in separation. How effective a way to practice this! You shift toward the holy relationship by recognizing that both you and your niece are one on the level of mind, both having a wrong mind, a right mind, and the power to choose between them. Death was made by the ego as one of many strategies to prevent us from ever regaining this realization of our oneness as minds. A holy relationship, thus, corrects our erroneous perceptions of each other, which are all aimed at

eradicating any sense that we are one as God's Son. The body simply embodies our mind's insane wish to be other than that.

Try, then, to recognize how you are perceiving your niece as different and separate from you -- by seeing her, for example, as victimized and powerless in the face of her inadequacies and weaknesses, and that you can help her out of that bind. A better approach would be to think of her as sharing with you both the ego self and the Christ Self, and the power to choose between them. Then respect her choice for the ego, just as you are learning to forgive yourself for choosing your ego, in recognition of the truth of the Atonement that you remain as God created you. Your choice for insanity has no power to change that truth, which defines both you and your niece, as well as everyone else. This will center you in your right mind, and from there love will direct you in a form that will remind others of the love in them, and of the power they have to make the same choice for love that you did.

Question #96 also discusses this topic.

Q #1268 : Is the term "special relationships" confined to relationships with people, or does it also apply to everything you are in relation to; e.g, objects, place, animals, work and so on?

A: Special relationships may be formed with anything at all, although *A Course in Miracles* focuses primarily on relationships with people. Whenever there is *dependency* on something external for any reason at all, there is a special relationship. We thus can have a special relationship with a pet, a car, a plant, clean air, a flavor of ice cream, our own body, a job, and so on. The basis of the special relationship is our experience of incompleteness and lack, the result of our decision to leave our true home and our true Identity in God. We (as the one Son) denied that and then projected ourselves from the mind into a deficient, needy, limited body, dependent on a vast array of things and people just to survive physically and psychologically. This false self- perception, maintained by our ongoing decision to identify with the ego thought system of separation, impels us to form one special relationship after another, until we recognize our mistake and then choose to listen to the Teacher Who reminds us of the eternal innocence and invulnerability of the Self we share with everyone.

For additional study, you might wish to look at Questions #130 and #340, which discuss pets as part of the Sonship, and #725 focuses on the unitary mind at the source of all perception of differences and fragmentation.

Q #1269: I have been a student/teacher of *A Course in Miracles* since 1977. A few years ago, I was "graced" with an awareness of my Oneness and my Totality with all that is. The experience is, of course, beyond verbal description. My life was forever transformed. The knowing was transcendent. Can you tell me how others who have "been there" and are "in the world but not of it" are responding to such an awareness?

A: We have answered other questions along these lines, and we refer you to them for discussion and references to helpful passages in the Course: #39 and #101. In general, what would characterize the experience of a healed mind is the effortlessness of life, because there would no longer be any interference or opposition to love's presence. Love would just flow through, answering all calls for help in forms that would be accepted without fear. There are no visible signs that distinguish an egoless person from one who is still processing, other than that the egoless person perhaps smiles more frequently (**W.pl.155.1**) . To truly know and experience that we are all one and that whatever seems to separate us is totally false simplifies one's life immensely, in that it relieves all the intensity and conflict normally associated with life as an individual, vulnerable, competitive, physical/psychological self.

Q #1270: Three years ago I ended a long-term relationship with a man who was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, and who also suffered from psychotic episodes. Eventually, I saw clearly how my ego had kept me miserable and trapped, and in my desperation I was able to find and embrace *A Course in Miracles*, which ended my nightmares and a potential breakdown. The gentleman recently contacted me, promising to have changed and wanting to be with me again. I heard this from him many times before. It evoked fear in me, as I never again want to be as miserable as I was. Just as importantly, I want to respond differently to him, with so much more love, and without so many imagined needs. I think I can. When I am quiet, I hear "step aside," and let what will happen, happen, without trying to control. There is also, however, a voice -- echoed by many loved ones -- saying, "Don't be stupid, the guy's a psychopath!" I've asked him for six months of silence before I respond. I feel like I need to get ready for what feels like a big and scary test. Do you have any advice on how to prepare for it? On how to overcome these voices of caution?

A: As much as we wish it were otherwise, *A Course in Miracles* focuses only on the content in our minds, and not on behavior (form). Nevertheless, what it recommends that we do in our minds is extremely helpful, as that is where the root of all our problems and pain lies, and so that is where the solution is as well. Thus, what you might find helpful in approaching your dilemma is to go within and become aware as best you can of all judgment and fear you may have about the relationship, and any investment you have in how it should turn out. Then calmly and quietly try to let go of all that, just for an instant. Recall Jesus' help with this in Lesson 189: **"Simply do this: Be still, and lay aside all thoughts of what you are and what God is; all concepts you have learned about the world: all images you hold about yourself. Empty your mind of everything it thinks is either true or false, or good or bad . . . come with wholly empty hands unto your God"** (W.pl.189.7:1,2,5).

You may recall that when Helen (the scribe of the Course) asked Jesus what she should say to someone who was in need of her help, he basically told her that that was not the right question. Instead of asking what she should say to this person, she should ask for help in getting her judgments out of the way. Then love would simply flow through her, and her concern would disappear.

There really is no right or wrong in these kinds of situations. It is a matter of suspending all judgment so that the most loving thing for everyone involved would be done. Just be sure you have no preconceived notion of what the most loving thing is. For example, many students feel that it is never loving to break off a relationship and disappoint the other person. Not so! That could be the most loving thing to do -- for *both* partners. But it could also be loving *not* to break it off. Search your mind for these kinds of preconceived notions.

We would also caution you about one other mistake that students of this course frequently make. Many have concluded that just because a lesson is very difficult, they should go ahead and do it; for example, stay in an abusive relationship because that's the best way of learning you are not a body! That is not at all in keeping with the gentleness of our teacher in this course. Jesus would never coerce us in that way, or put that kind of pressure on us. That would be more like the no- pain-no-gain approach, or that of the ascetic traditions that encourage sacrifice and self- abnegation. From the Course's point of view, that breeds further separation, not the undoing of it. But this does not mean that you should not go back to the relationship. Just try to keep your focus turned quietly inward to the content in your mind, and there, enfolded in Jesus' comforting peace and love, let go of whatever judgments you come upon. The love that the judgments and fear have concealed will guide you, and you will be peaceful.

Q #1271: *A Course in Miracles* has helped me to begin to understand so much of what was a source of confusion to me in the past. Being brought up as a Catholic and then rejecting it, I also rejected some of my family in the process and now realize that this was unnecessary. However, I would like some help in

reaching out to them (and others) without getting into conflict about the principles of the Course, because in the past there has always been so much resistance when any idea that didn't agree with theirs was expressed. Yet, in their own lives they appear to be such "good people" and I felt like a "bad person" because I rejected the faith. I now feel so excited about some of the "revelations" I've had and want to share them; but before I even approach my family (who do not live near me) I need to calm this sense that they will strongly resist the Course. Perhaps I should not mention it but just try to demonstrate my feelings by how I behave.

A: Demonstrating what you have learned from *A Course in Miracles* is probably the best approach, and this really has nothing to do with behavior (form); it is solely a matter of what is going on in your mind, your thinking (content). The main content to focus on is that your interests are not separate from your family's. Although you are on different paths with different theologies, you still share the same split mind and the power to choose between the thought system that each represents. Thus, instead of visiting your family to share the revelations and experiences you've had, you could shift the purpose to seeing the visit as an opportunity to bring all of your perceptions of differences to the love of Jesus in your right mind, which would then allow you to learn how to minimize the differences in form and concentrate more on the content you share in common. With this approach, you may find that you have little need to talk about the Course at all, unless it is brought up, of course -- in which case, your purpose would still be the same: to learn and practice the right-minded perception that you all share equally in the Sonship. The love in you would then be expressed in whatever form is best for everyone in the situation, and you would have no investment in whether your family accepts you or not.

What we are asked to demonstrate is that Jesus lives in us (**T.11.VI.7:4**), which means that his thought system of forgiveness lives in us. He demonstrated that sin has no effect and so is not a cause, and therefore does not exist, which means nothing can change the love that we *are* as the one Son of God. He asks that we demonstrate this in our relationships, which we do by our choice to remain identified with that love no matter what is happening externally. The message we thus give to all we meet is the same message Jesus gives to us: you can make the same choice I did, for our minds are joined. All of this, once again, takes place only in our minds. With that as your primary focus, then the expression in form would occur automatically, requiring no deliberation on your part. Always try to keep in the forefront of your thinking that your only responsibility is to accept the Atonement for yourself (**T.2.V.5:1**), and that the extension of the miracle is not up to us (**T.16.II.1,2**).

Q #1272: Could you elaborate on attack and praise being two sides of the same coin. I understand the attack part but not the praise.

A: When you take either attack or praise personally, you are denying that you are as God created you -- invulnerable, complete, and innocent. The key point is taking the praise personally, in the sense that you need it in some way, that it makes you feel better than you did before you received it. That would just be another indication that you have identified with the ego, which always would induce a sense of lack and incompleteness, because to identify with the ego is to reject the wholeness of your Self as Christ. Taking praise personally could also reinforce a sense of separation if you perceive it as given to you and not to someone else, or if it results in a feeling of superiority or of difference from the giver of the praise. This, of course, does not mean that you cannot graciously accept and acknowledge praise when offered, but you would know that it is irrelevant to your inner state of peace. In your right mind, you take nothing personally, while being fully present to others.

Q #1273: I have been doing the workbook lessons for 16 days. Two days ago I started feeling sick despite the nice sunny weather and I was at home most of the time. I am wondering if this is my ego, or

my system is trying to purge something out; or it is irrelevant? I will continue the lessons, because my curiosity has increased in the past 15 days and I am wondering what this course is taking me to.

A: It is not uncommon for students to have a reaction of some kind when they begin the lessons, and then when significant shifts are made. A major theme in *A Course in Miracles* is the ego's fear of our becoming aware that we have chosen the ego as our teacher and that we are beginning to think that that was a mistake. That ego fear can be expressed in many different ways; physical illness is one. A major part of the ego's strategy is to get our attention away from our minds and back to the body, so that we will be less inclined to question the reality of the body. That ensures the ego's survival, which it tries to convince us is *our* salvation.

Question #118 discusses this aspect of our process, and it also provides some references in the Course that can be helpful in understanding the ego's involvement in our practice of the Course.

Q #1274: This is a very strange question, but would you say that doing *A Course in Miracles* is an absurdity? For instance in Lesson 99 "Salvation is my only function here," the first paragraph basically says that we do not need salvation and/or forgiveness since nothing ever happened to us at all. At the same time, the Course places great emphasis on the fact that we need salvation from our strange or "mad" ideas about ourselves and "the world." Does, then, the Course not explicitly deal with what is totally unreal and even "unhealthy" if we engaged in it further? Would we not make "real" what is sick and "separated" within us, rather than step back from all these strange ideas and "do nothing," including letting go of the "doing the Course"?

How would you know that an argument pro or contra doing the Course is part of our resistance or part of our healthy "healed" Self? There seems to be a voice in me that likes to take a lesson from the Course, but at the same time they seem to be making me sick rather than healthy. Is that part of my "false" perception, or already part of the healthy aspect of myself that says that *A Course in Miracles* takes detours into sickness rather than health? Would you say there is a point in Course practice where we would have to let it go in order to come to its full understanding or would that be another trick from the ego providing me with the reasons for resisting the Course's teaching?

A: Valid concerns, indeed! From one point of view, yes, it is absurd to be engaged in undoing something that never happened. That sounds like insanity. And it is! In fact, Jesus uses some form of the word insane more than 150 times in the Course. He tells us more than once that we are seeing and hearing things that are not there, and that we are believing the incredible. Such a mind is truly in need of healing! Yet, this insanity is not real, which is why he says, "You need no healing to be healed. In quietness, see in the miracle a lesson in allowing Cause to have Its Own Effects, and doing nothing that would interfere" (T.28.I.10:8,9). And throughout the Course, especially in the workbook lessons, Jesus helps us become aware of how we are interfering and what to do about it so that nothing but the love in which we were created will be in our awareness.

Jesus once was talking to Helen (scribe of the Course) about her relationship with Bill, and he said that the intensity of her hatred for Bill -- a mutual "wish to get rid of each other" -- was something she was not fully aware of, but that she needed to deal with: "Your hatred is not real, but it *is* real to you. *It hides what you really want*" (*Absence from Felicity* , pp. 297-98). So, too, with us. Our bodies and the world are real to us ; our physical and emotional pain is real to us ; and our longing for peace is real to us . That is enough to justify our decision to practice this course, because it teaches us how to recognize and then let go of what we have made to hide true peace and love from ourselves. Our understanding is not needed -- our trust is. (See T.19.IV.7,8; W.in.8.) Jesus needs us to be humble enough to admit that we are too mixed up about things to be able to help ourselves, but that if we place ourselves in his hands, he guarantees that our minds will be restored to the eternal peace in which they were created, and in which they always abide.

One thing that we do need to recognize clearly, however, is that the ego part of our minds is going to fiercely resist the transition from mindlessness to mindfulness that our practice of the lessons will surely bring about. That part of our minds stores our decision for the insanity of separation over the sanity of our oneness as God's Son, and therefore we will inevitably encounter strong resistance to the continual practice of this course. That resistance, and the intense fear motivating it, will be expressed in the form of emotional or physical discomfort, problems, relationship conflicts, "accidents," -- anything at all that will re-focus our attention on the body and the world. That fear and resistance must be respected and treated with compassion, patience, and gentleness. But there is no need to rush through this process -- coercion of any kind always comes from the ego, not from Jesus, who knows time is unreal, and that the truth about us remains untouched by our seeming attacks on it.

Q #1275: I recently listened to your tape series about the stages of spirituality, "On the Three Metamorphoses:" I have a hard time understanding what it means to be a camel. Do I have enough life experience to move on to being a lion? Do I have access to Jesus' love, or am I only subject to the ego's hate? I have survived. That's about it. Not triumphed. I've managed to hold down my job for three years and barely drink anymore. I think I've learned from many of my mistakes and am learning to be loving to myself and am letting go more of self-judgment. I feel somewhat more peaceful. What does it mean to be true to classroom I have chosen for myself so we can release the guilt within? Does being true to the classroom also mean being a whole person according to the ego? Does ordinary functionality mean that I am subject to the idea that only real men have been in fights so then to be a true camel and whole I must prove my manhood and be in a fight to be true to the classroom?

A: We can talk in general about what it means to be true to the classroom we have chosen, but ultimately that is something that must be defined by each person, because there are so many different kinds of classrooms and so many variations in each type of classroom. Then, too, it is virtually impossible to come up with a definition of *normal* that everyone would agree with, just as there is no notion of what it means to be a *real man* that everyone would agree with, although I think we can safely say that you do not have to get into a fight to prove your manhood -- that's just silly.

One way of approaching this for yourself is to look for the negative -- something you are running away from or strenuously avoiding in yourself. This would entail more than just having certain preferences, which we all have. If you have become reasonably comfortable living in society, chances are you are being true to your classroom as a human being in the world. Again, what this means specifically is virtually impossible to delineate because it not just about form: you could be a hermit out in the wilderness and still be a well-adjusted human being, or you could be a celebrity constantly in the public eye and be a neurotic basketcase, unable to function on your own. Externals do not necessarily indicate the state of one's inner life.

Our classrooms are also individualized, meaning we are not just human beings -- we are parents, children, male, female, citizens, employees, employers, teammates, neighbors, friends, etc. If you are a parent, for example, you need to be true to that classroom and fulfill your responsibilities to your children; if you are the head of your department at work, then you need to function authoritatively in that position; if you are married, then you need to carry out the responsibilities of that relationship. You do not have to be perfect on any of these levels, and you do not have to be free of hang-ups and neuroses, but being aware of your weaknesses and neurotic tendencies is important. What is detrimental to progress is using spirituality as a way of escaping from aspects of yourself or the world that you find too overwhelming to confront and deal with. That is all too common, and students of *A Course in Miracles* are not immune to this. But, again, you do not have to be perfect, as Jesus reminds us: **“. . . be not disturbed that shadows surround it [your willingness] . That is why you came. If you could come without them you would not need the holy instant” (T.18.IV.2:4,5,6; see also M.26.4:1,2).** We bring what is in need of healing to the healing love of Jesus; but we cannot do that if we are not aware of our limitations, our guilt and hatred, our need for specialness, etc. We need to have some awareness of how our ego is

functioning in our lives, and we have to have learned through experience that the world will not provide the healing we now perceive we need. That is the transition to the lion stage.

Question #1126 discusses some aspects the camel-to-lion theme; and our publication *The Healing Power of Kindness* - Vol. 2: *Forgiving our Limitations* might also be helpful to you as you work through this issue.

Q #1276: I find the language at the end of paragraph 1 of the Introduction to *A Course in Miracles* does not logically follow. It says: "The opposite of love is fear, but what is all- encompassing can have no opposite" (T.in.1:8). Clearly what is all-encompassing must be love and not fear. Therefore, if love can have no opposite, its opposite cannot be fear. It would appear that the sentence should read: "The opposite of fear is love, but what is all- encompassing can have no opposite."

A: We do not find a problem with the logic. Since love is all-encompassing, it cannot have an opposite. We would tend to think of fear as the opposite of love, but since there can be no opposite to what is all-encompassing, fear is impossible. That is the point -- fear is not real.

Q #1277 : The Course says, "Whenever you are not wholly joyous, it is because you have reacted with a lack of love to one of God's creations" (T.5.VII.5:1). My question is: How can we perceive God's creations if the world is not of His making? It seems impossible to simultaneously look within and without, to see the light and the "darkness," the Christ Mind, and the world as we know it. Am I to meditate constantly like the Indian gurus who sit and "do nothing" all day? How can I live in this world AND react lovingly to one of God's creations? How would I recognize one of God's creations, especially if I live alone?

A: There is probably nothing in *A Course in Miracles* that causes students more confusion than its use of the term, *God's creations* . Jesus never fully defines this term because, from our perspective as separate beings within this physical world, there really is no way we could fully understand what he means. However, we can begin to comprehend what he is talking about and asking of us, if we bring together several different statements he makes.

"To create is to love. [Love] creates forever, but not in time. God's creations have always been, because He has always been.... In Christ's sight, the world and God's creation meet, and as they come together all perception disappears.... You are merely asked to return to God the mind as He created it.... to return your thinking to the point at which the error was made, and give it over to the Atonement in peace" (T.7.I.3:5,6,7; W.pII.271.1:3; T.5.VII.2:6; T.5.VII.6:5).

In other words, when the Course speaks of *creation* , it is not talking about anything physical. Rather, it means the extension of God's all-encompassing Love. Because it is all encompassing, it cannot help but extend. In this way, it creates forever because it goes on and on without end. This is in contrast to the ego's guilt, which, as a thought of difference and separation, can only project and produce illusion, or what the Course calls *miscreation* .

So, God's creations are simply His extensions of Love. Of course, in reality God does not extend Love, He *is* the Love of which we are a part. But, as Course students, we should remember that Jesus is not obsessed with accuracy in language. While he speaks to us in dualistic terms because that is what we can understand, he ultimately wants us to move beyond his words to his underlying, non-dualistic message.

With that in mind, we can consider what he means when he asks us to "return to God the mind as He created it." He does not literally mean that God as a dualistic being created the mind. Instead, he means

that the natural state of our mind -- the state of being filled with love -- comes from God. And so our job is to return our thinking to the point at which we chose the ego's guilt over the memory of God's Love. We do this by asking the Holy Spirit in our mind to help us correct this error -- a correction that will leave us filled with love and thus wholly joyous.

This is an internal process of correction that happens entirely in the mind. Whether we live alone or meditate is irrelevant. What does matter is that we use our reactions to what we perceive in the world to tell us whether we have chosen the ego or the Holy Spirit as our internal Teacher. Thus, the path the Course lays out is not about overcoming or blocking out the darkness of the world in order to find the light within. Rather, it is about realizing that the darkness without is no barrier to our finding peace within, *unless we want it to be*.

Q #1278 : I have recently begun studying *A Course in Miracles*, and I absolutely love it! However, I am also a recent graduate with a degree in evolutionary biology, and I am just wondering about the Course's view on the evidence for evolution? Did the God in *A Course in Miracles* also create non-human animals, and does He have a role in natural selection? Did He create the earth over three billion years ago? I know there is no such thing as time in the Course, but how do we account for the numerous studies involving radio carbon dating, all of which show that the elements of the earth's crust have been around for billions of years? If God created us all as perfect beings, why did nature "experiment" with so many other life forms and habitats before man came to inhabit the planet? What are the Course's views on other scientific phenomenon, such as the laws of gravity and motion?

A: The foundation of everything taught in *A Course in Miracles* is its view of reality as nondualistic. Nothing finite or quantitative is real, which means that not only is time not real, but neither is the cosmos. Only the realm of God, which is perfect Oneness, and the nonspatial extension of His Being as spirit is real. Therefore, in the Course, there is no connection between God and the world, as there is in the traditional biblical view of God as creator and sustainer of the physical universe. There certainly appears to us to be a world with billions of forms of life and nonliving kinds of things, and so Jesus addresses us as minds believing in what is essentially illusory. On that level of discourse, he talks about the origin of the world as a thought in our minds -- the thought of having an existence apart from totality and wholeness. Jesus refers to this as a **"tiny, mad idea at which the Son of God remembered not to laugh"** (T.27.VIII.6:2). Because the mad idea was taken seriously, the world, then, originated as attack on God (W.pl.3.2:1). Importantly, however, it is never more than an idea that never leaves the mind that thought it -- despite appearances and our experiences of being bound by physical laws (see **Lesson 76 "I am under no laws but God's"** [W.pl.76]) . The practice of *A Course in Miracles*, therefore, centers on our learning how to interact on a daily basis so as not to deny our experiences, but to use them as a means of restoring our minds to sane perception, and then to their original, unchanged state of oneness within God's Being. This reflects the principle that the world is **"the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition"** (T.21.in.1:5).

This view obviously presents many challenges for you with your interest in evolutionary biology. But this would be true for anyone, regardless of profession or interests: **"To learn this course requires willingness to question every value that you hold"** (T.24.in.2:1). The Course is a gentle path, however, and focuses primarily on transforming our perception of ourselves, each other, and the world, so that we will gradually be able to let go of the terrible burdens of guilt, fear, and conflict that we carry with us all the time. This is done through the practice of forgiveness, which directs our attention to the content in our minds that motivates us to relate in either helpful or hurtful ways.

If you would like to pursue this further, we recommend reading our answers to Questions #111, #121, #157, #316, and #616.

Q #1279: You have said that children must develop strong, healthy egos before learning the principles of *A Course in Miracles* . But I feel very weak, despite being 22 years old. How can I become stronger?

A: It is tempting to advise you to stay away from the Course for at least another 20 years! But seriously, there is a reason the Course typically attracts people who are middle aged or older. Generally, people spend the first half of their lives developing their skills and abilities and trying to find their way in this world. It is only after they have a firm sense of who they are -- and why being that person does not make them happy -- that individuals are ready to take on a thought system that asks them to question every value that they hold **(T.24.in.2:1)** . The problem with trying to practice the Course when you are very young is that you can wind up in the conflicted state of attempting to develop yourself and let go of yourself at the same time -- often a recipe for mental and emotional pain.

Of course, there are exceptions to every rule, and only you can decide when and if *A Course in Miracles* is the right path for you. However, if your primary issue right now is becoming a stronger, more confident, more fully developed person (the issue most people your age grapple with), then it is likely that you should focus more on exploring and discovering this world than on letting it go. In other words, you can become stronger as an ego by *letting yourself be you* . Find out what you like and do not like, observe yourself in relationships, and see what skills and talents you most enjoy using. Uncover exactly who you are as the individual you appear to be in this lifetime.

Pursue your worldly goals and do not feel guilty for doing so. In the process, know that God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are not going anywhere. Remember that God's Love, which is the only true strength any of us has, is present for you to receive **"any time and anywhere, wherever you are, and in whatever circumstance you find yourself" (W.pl.42.2:2)** .

Q #1280: I recently ended a seven year relationship with a partner I was planning to marry until he told me he wasn't sure. I gave him several weeks to decide, but he was unable to, saying he felt he was not good enough for me. I ended the relationship very sadly and reluctantly, still not knowing what he really wanted. I understand from the Course that everything that happens to us is made by ourselves. I would like to know if this situation, including his uncertainty and his not feeling good enough, was caused by my guilt, because I was looking for something outside myself. Was I mistaken to want the relationship to move to a deeper level? I am now uncertain if I gave up a loving relationship for the sake of wanting marriage.

A: *A Course in Miracles* tells us that this physical life is a dream and that we are the ones dreaming it. So, ultimately, it is true that everything we experience here is of our own making. However, it is not as the individual we think we are that we dreamt all this up. That occurs on a level outside of time and space -- a level that we cannot get in touch with or comprehend from within this dream. Therefore, we do not have to take responsibility for all the thoughts, feelings, and actions of everyone around us. In fact, doing so could be very detrimental because, rather than leading us to greater understanding and forgiveness, it tends to root us more deeply in guilt and fear. This is so because the "I" that tries to take responsibility is just as made up as that which it is attempting to take credit for. Thus, we wind up wrongly attributing power to a false self that is already terrorized by the mistaken belief that it has the power to destroy Heaven and banish God forever.

The message of the Course is exactly the opposite: We do *not* have power over God. Despite all the horrors we see and pain we feel, not one note in Heaven's song has been missed **(T.26.V.5:4)** . We remain **"at home in God, dreaming of exile but perfectly capable of awakening to reality" (T.10.I.2:1)** . What will help us move toward awakening is not trying to take responsibility for what others do, but rather taking responsibility for *our reactions* to what they do. Because we script our lives to be full of pain as a defense against remembering God's Love, the key to getting out of our pain is recognizing that it comes not from external circumstances but from our own choice to feel it. The process

of the Course consists of asking the Holy Spirit to be our internal Teacher and help us realize that we would be much happier if we chose God's Love over our pain, guilt, and fear.

And so, in a situation like the one you have described, the Course would not tell you whether you have made a right or wrong decision. What it would do is encourage you to explore whether you made the decision with the guidance of the ego or the Holy Spirit. Certainly, there is nothing wrong with wanting to get married and deciding you would like a partner who shares that desire. However, since the ending of your relationship was confusing and emotionally difficult and you are now second guessing yourself, it seems likely that there may be other issues involved.

None of this is reason to feel guilty. Indeed, virtually everyone here has relationship issues since it was our relationship issue with God that compelled us to fall into this dream in the first place. It does sound, though, like it might be helpful for you to look at the beliefs, feelings, and expectations you have around intimate relationships so that future ones go more smoothly. A good first step would be taking the Holy Spirit's hand and asking Him to help you look at what you have just experienced through His loving and non-judgmental eyes.

Q #1281: In Chapter 5 of the text, Jesus says, "I have saved all your kindnesses and every loving thought you ever had. I have purified them of the errors that hid their light, and kept them for you in their own perfect radiance" (T.5.IV.8:3,4). Is he talking about our errors or the errors of the people that our kindnesses were directed toward, or both?

A: Jesus is referring to our own kindnesses and loving thoughts. He is saying that he does not take into consideration the ego aspects that may have crept in, and that we reflect Heaven's changeless love when we choose him as our teacher instead of the ego.

This entire paragraph was originally meant for Helen, especially the opening line, "**How can you who are so holy suffer?**" (T.5.IV.8:1) . This is a unique passage in *A Course in Miracles* at this point (Chapter 5), for it is the first time this form appears. It is almost as if Jesus had been dictating the thought system to Helen from a script, which he dropped to sing this lovely little aria. Clearly, it is meant for all of us. It is Jesus' gentle way of saying to us that we can choose again and feel differently -- the choice is ours.

Q #1282 : I don't fully understand how if God is all there really is, and He is perfect Oneness, how He could have a thought of separation in the first place that created what we consider reality? I've read the sections on separation, duality .

A: This is, by far, the most frequently asked question about *A Course in Miracles* , and we refer you to Questions #10 and #171 for our answer, along with references to relevant passages. The main point, as you will find stated there, is that there is no intellectually satisfying answer to this seeming perplexity. That should not affect your practice of the Course, however.

Q #1283 : I don't want to judge others, but when I am with people I hear constant judgment from them of the president, government, religions, other people, etc. I do not join them in this and I am having trouble having conversations because of it. I want to show love -- and I feel love for them -- but it is increasingly awkward. My friends tend to be on spiritual paths (New Age, Yogis, etc.) but they still run down lots of things. I don't want to seem to be trying to change or preach to them. How can I handle this?

A: *A Course in Miracles* tells us that in the Holy Spirit's eyes, everything is either love or a call for love (T.14.X.7:1) . Thus, when we hear others expressing judgments in a way that is vicious, angry, fearful, and so on, we can know that what they are really doing is responding to a perceived lack of love within themselves. They are viewing the world through the ego's eyes, which tell them that God's Love has been destroyed. Every one of us carries around the unconscious belief that *I am the one* who destroyed God's Love. And because the guilt this thought induces is overwhelming, the ego tries to give it away by continually finding external targets to blame for the unhappiness it causes -- targets ranging from friends and spouses, to political leaders, to our own body. So the ego is always on the make, looking for someone or something with which to be upset. To the ego, finding such targets represents salvation.

It is easy, upon reflection, to understand the fallacy of the ego's approach, and it is particularly easy to see it in other people. However, we need to be aware that the ego is tricky. If we find ourselves reacting to and judging something another does -- even if it is merely a judgment that he or she should not be judging -- we need to recognize that our own ego has been activated. As the Course makes clear, on the level of behavior, salvation does not hinge on either doing or not doing something (T.12.III.2) . This is because salvation is not dependant upon behavior. Thus, as Course students, we want to realize that the problem is not the expression of judgment, but rather the underlying fear of love. Therefore, it is not our job to stop others from being judgmental. Instead, we should focus on turning our *own mind* away from the fear that necessitates judgment in the first place.

The process the Course lays out for doing this involves switching from the ego to the Holy Spirit as our internal Teacher. This means that whenever we do not know how to respond lovingly to another, we should ask the Holy Spirit for help. He will always show us how to look upon the other with love and compassion, which will automatically translate to words and actions that reflect His Love. The form of what we say and do will undoubtedly vary from situation to situation, but the content -- because it is *His* content -- will always be love.

From a loving place, you may even find yourself joining in your friends' tirades. Or, you might find other ways of listening to them without making them wrong. Ultimately, most people do not want their defenses taken away, or even suggestions for another way of looking at their grievances (unless they directly ask for this). What most people want is simply to be heard, to have another person understand that dealing with others and with life in general is hard, and to know that no matter what they tell you, your love and acceptance of them will not waver. When you are able to find this loving state in your mind and have no need for others to be any different than they are, your words will flow without effort and your friends will delight in talking to you.

Q #1284: Forgiveness is central to the teachings of *A Course in Miracles* , and there are so many aspects of forgiveness that are identified and discussed in the Course. Also, in this Q & A format and other publications from the Foundation, there are many discussions involving the aspects of how to forgive. All of this can be confusing as to how best to practice forgiveness simply. The question many have is, with all of the aspects and examples of forgiveness, is it as simple as when we are aware of an ego thought to sincerely forgive it and our self without judgment and give it over to the Holy Spirit for healing? There is a wonderful "forgiveness process" at the end of Chapter 5 of the text. Is this one we can universally use for every "unforgiving" ego thought"?

A: Yes, the process described at the end of Chapter 5 can be used any time you become aware of a thought of unforgiveness.

Forgiveness is described in different ways (as is true of the miracle as well) for several reasons -- and they all have to do with the state of *our* minds, not the concept or process itself, which is indeed simple. We need to hear it stated in different ways because we perceive situations and circumstances in our lives as being different. Eventually we will learn to generalize and recognize the same content in everything,

regardless of the form. Then forgiveness will be very simple. Second, the ego can easily slip into our practice of forgiveness without our realizing it. Our investment in keeping our identities as individuals and as bodies is far greater than we realize, which means we would secretly try to find ways to use the teachings of *A Course in Miracles* to reinforce that identity (which includes the belief in the reality of sin, guilt, and fear), and we would strenuously resist any teaching we perceive as threatening the reality of that self, which these teachings definitely are. In view of this, the simple -- and correct -- statement of forgiveness that you gave is subject to misunderstanding and misapplication. As impossible as it may seem, students have misconstrued each of the concepts you included: forgiving an ego thought; forgiving our self without judgment; and giving the ego thought over to the Holy Spirit.

We are both attracted to the Course and afraid of it. Our understanding and application of its principles cannot help being affected by this ambivalence, and by our largely unconscious commitment to the ego thought system. That is why Jesus talks about the concept of forgiveness-to-destroy (**T.30.VI.1,2,3,4; W.pl.126.1,2,3,4,5,6,7; S.2.II**), for example. He must alert us to the ego's distortions of love's teachings. We have banished the truth from our awareness, and part of us wants to keep it that way, but the other part doesn't. Therefore, we are only going to allow truth in a little at a time -- as much as we can tolerate at any instant, but never the full truth all at once. That is why the Course's teachings seem to us to be complicated. They aren't. *We are!* (See **T.11.VI.3; T.14.I.5.**)

Q #1285 : I need some advice on how to handle being in a relationship with someone who has a different interpretation of the Course than I do. Is it possible? I find it so difficult because he insists on teaching his understanding to me and others and tacitly implies that if I don't agree with what he says, I am not being open to the Holy Spirit in him. It is uncomfortable for me to listen to him, and I am not sure why it bothers me so much. I have implored him not to discuss Course concepts. He takes this personally and accuses me of not letting him be free. Does this relationship make sense?

A: While only you can know whether this is the right relationship for you, it is definitely possible for two people who interpret *A Course in Miracles* differently to have a happy partnership. You could disagree with someone and still feel peaceful and loving toward him. The Course teaches us that what generally makes this hard to do is that we are *afraid* to feel peaceful and loving. This compels us to unconsciously set out looking for reasons to be unhappy with others. We *want* to find differences and then proclaim, "Aha! *Here* is the reason I could never fully love someone like you. And now I know that *you* are the reason for my unhappiness." This strategy ensures that we will remain with our identity intact, certain that the other person is guilty and that we are right -- miserable, but justified in feeling so.

Indeed, it is not the fact that you do not see eye to eye about the Course that is a problem, but rather your shared decision to make an issue out of the fact that you do not see eye to eye. In other words, your unhappiness stems not from differences in belief or philosophy, but from a perception that you are being attacked and, undoubtedly, a desire to attack back. These are the dynamics we will always set up when we listen to the ego. What seems to be the trigger in the external world is actually irrelevant. This is why there is a saying about relationships that *the problem is never the problem* .

Of course, none of this means you should stay in a relationship that does not feel right to you (nor does it mean that you should leave one). But it does mean that it would be most helpful to stop focusing on your disagreements about the Course or even on how to handle behavior you find unpleasant. Instead, ask the Holy Spirit in your mind to help you watch what is going on and to change the conditions *in your own mind* that make attack (both giving and receiving it) feel safer than love.

When you recognize that the Holy Spirit's Love is *already* in your mind, you will no longer feel a need to defend yourself by being in conflict. Then, when your partner, or anyone else, acts in a way that you perceive as less than kind, you will know it is a reflection of his own fear and will not take it personally. You will also know the decision to make about your relationship -- either staying or leaving not out of

anger, guilt, fear, or need, but rather based upon a simple preference and a clear sense of the most loving thing to do.

Q #1286 : What happens if you make *A Course in Miracles* an idol? Is it possible to study the course and make it an idol at the same time?

A: This happens to most students, and in a way it is unavoidable in the beginning stages of one's journey with the Course. The idea is to recognize when you have done so and be willing to ask for help to go beyond that stage so that you will advance, otherwise you will not experience all that *A Course in Miracles* offers you. If you stay on the level of idols, you would be bringing the Course down to your level instead of raising yourself to its level. That is not sinful and you should not judge yourself for doing so. It is just that you would be preventing yourself from reaching its goal of true and lasting peace. A wonderful paragraph to read in this regard is in the text, Chapter 17, where Jesus asks us, **“Think you that you can bring truth to fantasy, and learn what truth means from the perspective of illusions? (T.17.I.5:1)** . He does not judge us, but simply helps us realize that we imprison ourselves when we cling to specialness or anything else of the ego, thinking it cannot be healed or transformed.

Q #1287: What does *A Course in Miracles* say about divine order in this unreality? Does it exist or is every (unreal) thing that happens random? I realize nothing does or has happened, and I know we are changeless; but until I can perceive myself as that, I notice the effects in my wrong-mindedness. Is the Holy Spirit leading or helping us once we make the choice to listen so we can stay in right-mindedness?

A: Divine order exists only in reality, the state of pure undifferentiated Oneness in Heaven. There is nothing random about our seeming existence in the dream on the level of content, for we are always choosing either to stay asleep, which means to relive in some form our choice to remain separate from God, or to awaken, which means to use the relationships and circumstances in our lives to undo that choice for separation. The Holy Spirit is the memory in our minds of our changeless state as God's one Son, Christ. When we recognize our mistake in wanting an existence apart from God, and then ask for help, we initiate the process of looking within at all the ways in which we interfere with the presence of light and love in our right minds. And when we learn to do this without judgment, we are perceiving with the Holy Spirit. That is right-mindedness. We bounce out of that peaceful state when we judge ourselves or others, as that means we have taken the ego seriously and have forgotten it is simply a tiny, mad idea, deserving only of gentle laughter. The Holy Spirit is the reminder of the ego's nothingness and of Christ's wholeness; and His function is to help us translate this into the daily events of our lives.

Q #1288 : I was born into a difficult, abusive, and painful life. Spiritually, I began working very hard on myself using the principles of *A Course in Miracles* . I thought the fact that my outer life had so dramatically improved was an indication that I was doing okay spiritually. Then, through "no fault of my own" (downsizings and company closures) I lost my very good job, my house, my 401K, and even my friends. I went through a long, very dark, and angry period and turned away from the Course, Jesus, and God entirely. Eventually, I worked through it, and, overall, I think I have been willing to face some horrible things inside myself, as well as my apparent need to be a victim. I think I have also shown a willingness and an effort to forgive others and to try to believe that I don't deserve to be punished. I know the Course does not say that a person's outer circumstances will change to correspond to inner changes, and I shouldn't expect them to, but I am certainly not far enough up the ladder to entirely give up wanting and hoping for at least a little positive feedback in my outer experience. I don't understand what happened in my mind to change my life so dramatically or why my inner and outer efforts haven't seemed to make any difference. Could all of this have happened because of my feelings of separation from other people? If so,

how do I truly fix my perception at a time when I am feeling more separate and more different than ever?
Can my script be changed?

A: In circumstances such as yours, it is really hard to avoid wondering “What am I doing wrong?”; but that is always the wrong question, and it would seem that part of you is aware of that. It is not helpful to dwell on it, first, because there is no way of knowing why you chose this script, and second, because the only relevant issue now that you are experiencing these conditions is whether you will invite the ego or Jesus to guide you and comfort you. Hear Jesus teach about this choice:

“Temptation has one lesson it would teach, in all its forms, wherever it occurs. It would persuade the holy Son of God he is a body, born in what must die, unable to escape its frailty, and bound by what it orders him to feel. It sets the limits on what he can do; its power is the only strength he has; his grasp cannot exceed its tiny reach. Would you be this, if Christ appeared to you in all His glory, asking you but this: *Choose once again if you would take your place among the saviors of the world, or would remain in hell, and hold your brothers there. For He has come, and He is asking this*” (T.31.VIII.1).

The ego would have you gaze outward and assess what you do *not* have. Jesus would have you look within and identify with the treasures that are unconditionally yours. It seems as if you have already experienced the peace of God that is not conditional on anything external, and now part of you is questioning whether that is enough to sustain you -- a normal wavering for a mind still split between two allegiances. In the lesson **“I am sustained by the Love of God” (W.pl.50)**, Jesus asks us to look at what we place our faith in as a means of sustenance, happiness, and protection. An honest assessment will reveal that our faith is in whatever will enhance and guarantee our continued life as a body. Yet, Jesus teaches us that **“all these things are your replacements for the Love of God” (W.pl.50.2:1)**. That is why, however successful we may be in the world's terms, we will never be truly happy and peaceful -- we would be living a lie, forcing us to conceal the tremendous guilt and fear that choice engenders.

What might help you, therefore, is to look upon your distress as a crisis of trust: is the peace of God enough? is the Love of God enough? If your trust were unconditional, you would not need this course; you would not need a teacher who asks only for **“a little willingness” (T.18.IV.2)**. You do not have to be at the top of the spiritual ladder to apply this -- Jesus approaches us with this lesson very early in the workbook. What better time to work with the lesson than when you are in the midst of a struggle? **“Do not breathe life into your failing ego,”** Jesus gently urges us in our moment of wavering **(T.17.V.8:4)**.

This obviously will not get you a job or money or other things you would like to have; and it is not meant to deny the frustration of not being able to get a job despite your many attempts to do so. This course should not be used as a means of avoiding one's responsibilities in the world under the guise of spiritual advancement, although, unfortunately, it has been used that way by many. Its purpose is to help us see that the only meaningful aspect of our lives is learning how to use our experiences as a way of getting in touch with the content in our minds that we are always choosing. As we choose against the ego and for Jesus and his thought system of forgiveness more and more, we will approach our problems entirely differently -- not that we will ignore them, but that we will no longer give them power to disrupt the peace that defines us as God's Son. Jesus thus encourages us:

“You surely have begun to realize that this is a very practical course, and one that means exactly what it says. I would not ask you to do things you cannot do, and it is impossible that I could do things you cannot do. Given this, and given this quite literally, nothing can prevent you from doing exactly what I ask, and everything argues for your doing it. I give you no limits because God lays none on you” (T.8.IX.8:1,2,3,4).

Q #1289: I know the goal of *A Course in Miracles* is to move toward seeing shared interests with people as opposed to separate interests, but part of me is resisting this. I struggle to understand how I am supposed to see shared interests with someone who just got sent to prison for murder or with a convicted rapist. Maybe I just don't have a good understanding of exactly what *shared interest* means and how to apply the concept practically to my everyday life. Could you please help with this?

A: To understand the Course's concept of shared interest, or shared purpose, you have to recognize that the Course is never talking about bodies. Indeed, the Course tells us that the physical world and our existence within it are illusory. Thus, being an illusion, bodies have no inherent purpose. However, they can serve the purpose that the mind gives them. And, within this dream, there are only two purposes: to stay planted in this painful, made-up world with our fear buried and our personal identity intact; or, to remember our real identity as God's one Son and awaken to our true home in Heaven.

The Course states, "**God gave you and your brother Himself, and to remember this is now the only purpose that you share. And so it is the only one you have**" (T.24.1.7:5,6). In other words, the one and only purpose that has any meaning in reality (and thus will lead us beyond this dream) is the recognition that the Love of God is still in our mind and is available to us anytime we choose it. Because, in reality, we are not separate, the separate interests we seem to have as bodies are not real either. Learning that this is so will gradually lessen our fear and guilt until, eventually, we are ready to awaken. That is the interest that we share. Again, to put it another way: The one and only need any of us really has is to realize that choosing the ego's pain and guilt makes us miserable while choosing God's Love would make us very happy.

That remains our only need regardless of whether we have lived a seemingly admirable or contemptible life. Therefore, in this way, you share exactly the same need as a murderer or rapist. Of course, this has nothing to do with behavior or the issue of holding people accountable for their actions. Most of the time, it would hardly be loving or productive to simply excuse criminal behavior. But what it does mean on a practical level is that we can hold the criminal accountable without hating him. We can recognize that he made a different choice in response to the same fear and guilt that is in our own mind. In this way, we step beyond our fear into love and compassion, realizing that our doing so helps our brother and that his doing the same would be helpful to us.

Q #1290: I don't understand about advanced teachers. Isn't that just another way of saying someone is "special," thereby creating a hierarchy, with teachers more advanced being superior and less advanced inferior. And the ego madness continues...

A: That is how the ego would perceive it, and then the temptation would be to toss *A Course in Miracles* into the unholy spiritual junk heap. That couldn't be the meaning of "advanced teachers," though, if the Course's message is understood correctly. Its whole approach is to restore to our minds the awareness of our *oneness* as God's Son and to help us realize that all forms of specialness represent a rejection of that oneness (T.16.V.2:3; T.17.IV.2:7). The startling feature of spiritual advancement according to *A Course in Miracles* is the joyful acceptance of our sameness and a corresponding disinterest in having or being something that is not shared with everyone else. An attraction to all-inclusiveness and selflessness replaces the former ego-generated attraction to exclusivity and self-importance. Thus, specialness fades into its own nothingness as one advances along the path. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, you would recognize in someone who appears to be beyond the ego but a reflection of your own holiness, rather than someone who has something you do not have. The ten characteristics of God's teachers described in the manual (M.4) lead to a state that is the exact opposite of specialness. An advanced teacher would be indistinguishable from others, except perhaps that he or she would smile more frequently (W.pl.155.1:1).

Q #1291: *A Course in Miracles* says: "As you teach so you shall learn" (T.5.IV.6:4; T.6.I.6:1), but do others learn what you teach or do they only learn what they teach?

A: This seems like a fairly simple question calling for a simple answer. It isn't, though, because the Course's approach to teaching and learning differs significantly from the world's, which rests on the premise that everyone's interests are separate from everyone else's. This is the mistake that Jesus attempts to correct throughout the Course. In this context, the idea "as you teach so shall you learn" flows from the general Course principle that *giving and receiving are the same*, the correction of the ego's deception that what you give to another you lose, and that you can affect another without affecting yourself (see **W.pl.108.1,2,3,4,5,6,7**; **W.pl.126**, **W.pl.187**.) The world's emphasis on form at the expense of content is what sustains this ego approach.

The most concentrated discussion of this issue is found in the Introduction to the manual for teachers. We quote only in part, but the entire Introduction is relevant.

"The role of teaching and learning is actually reversed in the thinking of the world. The reversal is characteristic. It seems as if the teacher and the learner are separated, the teacher giving something to the learner rather than to himself. Further, the act of teaching is regarded as a special activity, in which one engages only a relatively small proportion of one's time. The course, on the other hand, emphasizes that to teach *is* to learn, so that teacher and learner are the same. It also emphasizes that teaching is a constant process; it goes on every moment of the day, and continues into sleeping thoughts as well.

To teach is to demonstrate. There are only two thought systems, and you demonstrate that you believe one or the other is true all the time. From your demonstration others learn, and so do you. . . . You cannot give to someone else, but only to yourself, and this you learn through teaching. . . . Teaching but reinforces what you believe about yourself. . . . the self you think is real is what you teach." (M.in.1; 2:1,2,3; 3:7,10)

We generally equate teaching with form. Thus, for example, I may say that by profession I am a teacher and that I teach subjects in which I have expertise, which might include *A Course in Miracles*. This implies that I have what my students lack and I am going to supply them with it. While this analysis is correct on the level of form, we need to remember that this is a course in *content*: **"This is a course in cause and not effect"** (T.21.VII.7:8) is how the text expresses it. *Effect* is the form or behavior, having to do only with bodies and the world, whereas *cause* is in the mind and reflects either the ego's content -- guilt, separation, fear, and hate -- or the Holy Spirit's -- forgiveness, peace, and healing. The Course, therefore, emphasizes only content, and so teaching, according to the manual, has nothing to do with behavior or form.

On the level of form, my true interest as a teacher is the same as your interest as a student, and that is to learn that the Holy Spirit's thought system is true and the ego's is false. Therefore we are the same in *content* -- what I teach, I learn; what you learn, you teach. Teachers and learners alike share the thought systems of the ego and the Holy Spirit, and the power to choose between them. Again, it is not my demonstration of expertise in a particular subject matter that is important, but the demonstration that either the ego's or Holy Spirit's thought system is true. I teach the ego's separation by my special relationship with you, while I teach the Holy Spirit's Atonement by transcending specialness, choosing to see our interests as shared.

Your "learning" reinforces the decision you made for the thought system of separation or Atonement. For example, your special relationship with me -- regardless of its form -- reflects that you believe that separation is real and that your needs have to be fulfilled at my expense. If I am coming from that same point of view, my interaction will tell you that you made the right choice. Since egos *are* attack and I have identified with my ego, I will attack you. Thus do I give the ego's gift by reinforcing its message that you are an innocent victim; and you, of course, reciprocate. And so we continue our dance of death: my

decision for the ego reinforces your own, which strengthens my decision that in turn strengthens yours -- and both of us lose.

However, when I am in my right mind and not defensive, and I perceive our shared interests, my right-mindedness calls you to choose peace as I have. The peace you experience coming through me is now yours, if you so choose. Yet, if you are in your right mind and I am not, and I attack you as the object of my specialness, your defenseless non-judgment teaches me, even though I may be in the role of teacher. Your not becoming upset demonstrates that my attack had no effect, and thus you remind me that I have another choice.

Q #1292: Although, the Course does not specifically mention it, Ken Wapnick (in his tapes) makes it clear that Jesus is speaking to the separated portion of the mind (which is outside time and space) that is mentally reviewing the video tape we call our lives. He calls this the decision maker. Within the metaphysics of separation is there only one decision maker reviewing all our lives or is there a separate decision maker reviewing each life? Was the second split a split from a single ego mind into separate decision makers and then into the physical universe?

A: The second split is the mind itself splitting into two parts: the part that holds the ego thought system of separation (the wrong mind) and the part that holds the correction of that thought system (the right mind). This split symbolizes the Son's decision to separate himself from anything that would remind him of his true origin in God, and hold on to only what will ensure his cherished existence as autonomous and independent. At this stage, there is still only one Son, meaning there is one decision maker. This choice then unleashes a series of strategic moves that result ultimately in the mind's splitting into many minds, and finally into entities that are totally unaware of mind (i.e., bodies).

Insofar as we relate to ourselves and others as individuals with separate lives, it is helpful to think in terms of each of us having our own decision maker. However, as we learn to relate more to the idea that we are minds all sharing the same wrong-minded and right-minded content and the power to choose either, the idea of individual decision makers will gradually fade away by itself. Getting back to our identity as mind is part of our journey back to the state of oneness, so that whatever implies that separation is real will slowly dissolve the more we identify with mind.

It is essential to remember as you dwell on the metaphysical dimension of *A Course in Miracles* that Jesus is presenting these teachings in the context of a myth that uses language and a framework that are meaningful to us in our separated state. Thus, because we generally think about everything in terms of time and space, we always try to understand our process in quantitative terms -- when, where, how many, etc. That is one reason the Course comes in the form it does; but it is not like that at all. Jesus is helping us get in touch with a process that is non- temporal and non-spatial, and ultimately one that is illusory through and through. So, as intriguing as the theory is, it is best not to expend a great deal of effort trying to figure it all out, as if one were studying a schematic for a major building project. Our questions will all evaporate once we begin to have the experience that our practice of forgiveness will inevitably yield.

There are other discussions on this Service about the nature of the decision maker, which also provide helpful references: Questions #663, #713, and #715.

Q #1293 : I work with two people whose work habits I do not respect. There is no supervisor in our area and they take full advantage of this. I no longer criticize or try to change them, as they are very defensive, and the Course says that you can't change anyone anyway. Instead, on the level of form, I now interact with them only on work-related issues. When they attack me, I am able to choose another teacher and not attack back. By handling the situation in this way, I obtain some measure of peace. On the level of

content, I can see them as the Son of God and equal with me in that sense. I know that they are acting from their ego and I do not wish them any harm, but I do not wish to interact with them on a personal level. Or would it see me as doing my best on the level of form but still seeing myself as joined with these people on the level of content, so that I will be able to join with God as one with the Sonship.

A: The level of content is the only level of relevance from the perspective of *A Course in Miracles*. Thus, the issue is not whether to be with people or not to be with them, but to be without judgment of them. This is the point that Jesus stressed with Helen in one of his discussions with her. He told her that her concern should not be for what words she should say to people, but rather that she ask for help to see each person "through the eyes of truth and not of judgment." Then, Jesus concluded, "the help of God and all His angels will respond" (*Absence from Felicity*, p.381). Judgment interferes with the flow of love through our minds; and therefore if we let go of judgment, we will automatically do and say whatever is most loving, which is Jesus' meaning in saying "the help of God and all His angels will respond."

The idea, thus, is to look within to see if you have any investment in seeing your co-workers as the "bad ones" (which makes you the "good one"). Once free of that type of investment, you would be peaceful in interacting with them or not interacting with them on a personal level. It would no longer be an issue for you. Some people make the mistake of thinking that love would automatically direct you to associate with another person regardless of the circumstances -- that that would always be the loving thing to do. That is not true. Perhaps interacting on a personal level would not be the loving thing to do. The point of this principle is that the behavioral should-I-or-shouldn't-I conflict would simply vanish in the holy instant of being without judgment.

Q #1294 : I think I have a fairly good understanding of what *A Course in Miracles* is about. However, I get stuck! I have things that I want in my life; as an example, an intimate relationship with the opposite sex. I often catch myself wondering, though, is this something that I should pray for? The Course says that you are not to seek outside yourself (T.29.VII). Since I haven't found this intimate relationship, I wonder if this is the Holy Spirit's way of telling me I'm not ready, or is it my evil ego keeping me in its grip? I guess my biggest question is, what am I failing to see? I realize that I am to find happiness and all the love I need with God, but the fact is, I think I'm here and I want to have this relationship while I am here. What things do I need to look at to uncover why this isn't happening for me?

A: The Course does not really address the issue of why we do not get what we want in this world, as its purpose is to help us realize this is not our home and nothing here can ever give us the peace of God -- nor can anything here take it away from us. The Course would definitely not say, though, that your *not* getting what you want means that the Holy Spirit is trying to tell you something -- that you are not ready for a relationship, for instance. It is a mistake to conceive of the Holy Spirit as interacting with us in that way—He does not send us lessons or control the specifics of our lives. (Question #628 discusses the nature of prayer in relation to the Holy Spirit.)

People are always wondering what they are doing wrong because they are unable to get a good job, make more money, have children, etc., even though they are doing everything "right" in terms of the world. Sometimes it's just circumstances; sometimes it's an unconscious conflict— e.g., wanting something but also feeling unworthy of happiness, success, etc.; wanting something yet feeling you are failing the Course because it is against specialness, etc. But, without denying the responsibilities we have in our roles in the world, our focus should shift from why we are not getting what we want, to the underlying self-concept we have accepted that makes lack and inadequacy real, and then causes us to orient our striving toward solving these problems of lack and inadequacy, thinking we know what is in our best interests.

What the Course does is urge us to think carefully about what we are really asking for, but this refers exclusively to the content in our minds -- whether we are asking for what will keep us in the dream or help

us awaken from the dream; whether we are seeing our interests as the same or separate from others. The bottom line is always *purpose* -- what purpose will this relationship serve? And honesty about that is most important. It is not wrong to want a relationship with a person of the opposite sex, and the Course never says not to pursue one (see Questions #184 and #312). It just asks that we be clear about the purpose in our mind. Even if you are clear that it is all about specialness and bodies being together, you need not feel guilty or be hard on yourself. Since there is no hierarchy of illusions, pursuing a special relationship is no different from doing everything you can to insure a supply of clean air to breathe or healthful food to eat. It is normal in this world to do that. We need only remember that every aspect of our lives can be treated as a classroom into which we invite the Holy Spirit to help us transform our relationships so that they will serve not the ego's purpose of separation but His purpose of getting us beyond specialness to the perception of shared interests and a shared Self.

Q #1295: Traditional psychotherapy and *A Course in Miracles* seem to define the term *ego* in different ways. I've been in counseling for about the past two years and my therapist is working with me to build an ego. She tells me that I've got to get an ego first before I can give it up. It would seem that what she defines as ego and what Jesus is talking about are two different things, but I'm not completely sure just how to sort them out.

A: Counselors and therapists use the term *ego* thanks to Sigmund Freud. Freud divided the human personality into three parts: id, ego, and superego. According to his theory, the id operates on the pleasure principle, seeking immediate gratification for our instinctual drives. The superego is our internal, moral censor that represses the id. And the ego mediates between the id, superego, and the outside world, seeking to find means for us to express ourselves in socially acceptable ways. The ego is the conscious part of the psyche -- basically the personality with which we identify.

Today's counselors who speak of the ego do not necessarily view the psyche from a Freudian perspective. But they have largely adopted the word *ego* as a shortcut for saying *our personality and identity as an individual*. The goal of most counselors is to assist others in becoming healthier individuals -- helping them to be more comfortable and functional within this world. So, we could say that they are helping their clients or patients to develop healthy egos.

When Jesus speaks of the ego in the Course, he is basically talking about the entire human psyche, conscious and unconscious. He tells us that the person we think we are is a false self, born of our mistaken belief that we could create a substitute for our true identity as God's beloved Son. Thus, *A Course in Miracles* is all about recognizing that we would be happier if we released our grip on the ego and embraced the Holy Spirit instead. Therefore, for many Course students, the term *ego* has taken on a sinister ring -- making the idea of developing a healthy one sound contradictory, if not downright frightening. However, this is the result of a misunderstanding. The Course encourages us to live in this world but know we are not of it. And doing that requires ego strength. To not develop a healthy ego represents fear, which must be unlearned if we are ever to move beyond fear to acceptance of God's Love.

So, far from turning the ego into an enemy, Jesus would have us forgive it (and thus forgive ourselves) as the first step to moving beyond it. While he would ultimately have us let the ego go; Jesus would be the first to agree that we cannot move beyond the ego until we see it for what it is and make peace with it. Thus, like a great therapist, he asks us to simply watch it -- turning our experience of being an ego (which, within this dream, seems to be the entirety of who we are) into a classroom in which we learn more and more about ourselves every day.

The Course and most forms of counseling do part ways in that, in counseling, becoming at peace with yourself within this world is typically the final goal, while in the Course, it is only a step toward awakening. Yet, despite both this fundamental difference and differences in the use of language, there is certainly no

inherent conflict between the Course and the process of therapy. It is simply important for Course students to hold the aim of therapy as a means to an end and not an end itself.

Q #1296: If the split mind ($A=B+C$) is illusory, is the right mind the capital *M* Mind?

A: The *split mind* refers to the separated Son's mind divided into the ego (wrong-minded) part and the Holy Spirit (right-minded) part. The $A=B+C$ diagram refers to the wrong mind, A representing the concept of the sinful self which gets split off into self B (innocent victim) and self C (sinful victimizer), both B and C being experienced on the bodily level. The correction of this ego dynamic of splitting off our sense of sinfulness is what is known as the right mind, which is also diagrammed as A', B', C' (A prime, B prime, C prime). As part of the split mind, therefore, the right mind is still within the illusion. The capital *M* Mind is only in Heaven. We can say that in our right mind we are reflecting the capital *M* Mind, but as the correction of the wrong mind, the right mind exists only within the illusory realm of separation. When we awaken in God, there no longer is a right or wrong mind.

An expanded explanation, with charts, of this dynamic is given in *All Are Called*, Vol. One of Ken's *The Message of A Course in Miracles*. Also, Question #1189 might be of interest, as it considers the right mind from an experiential perspective.

Q #1297 : I was sitting in the library one evening and I noticed a certain book glowing. There was just something about it that made me know I needed to read it. So I took the random book and it turned out to be *A Course in Miracles*. I've spent much time over the last six years not only studying the Course but also other spiritualities, philosophies, and thought systems. I have reached the conclusion that nothing in this universe actually exists except the minds of the people. I absolutely do not believe in matter! I believe if we had mass consciousness believing along the same lines, this entire world as we see it would disappear and the Sonship would become reunited. Don't get me wrong though, I do believe that all works of good that a fellow brother does for another will be remembered for eternity in God's Mind, but everything else will be erased when full Atonement is achieved.

Until the majority of the Sonship has realized this, we are bound to this illusion of matter; so the question remains: How do we convince people in such a materialistic world that *matter doesn't matter*? How do we convince people who put so much faith in their bodies that their bodies are illusions? And for those of us who understand these things, how do we live in an illusory world recognizing the absurdness of it all and pay attention to the illusion to some extent; i.e., not getting run over by cars, walking naked down the highway, etc.? Because it sounds as if the more we "play" in the illusion, the more strength we are adding to that illusion as well. I firmly believe that this is the next logical evolutionary progression of the Course. What do you think of what I consider to be the "Evolution of *A Course in Miracles*."

A: *A Course in Miracles* clearly teaches that the world and the body are illusory, and that the world will disappear into the nothingness from which it came when we no longer want the *purpose* it serves. **"When not one thought of sin remains, the world is over. It will not be destroyed nor attacked nor even touched. It will merely cease to seem to be"** (M.14.2:10,11,12; see also T.20.VIII.7,8,9,10,11; W.pII.226). The world, thus, is not the problem, as it is nothing but a projection of the mind, **"the outside picture of an inward condition"** (T.21.in.1:5). The Course therefore teaches us to look within at what is causing us to project outward and identify with the form the projection takes. That is the core of its teaching and mind- training exercises.

Early in the text Jesus talks about the difficulty of getting through to us: **"How can you teach someone the value of something he has deliberately thrown away? He must have thrown it away because he did not value it. You can only show him how miserable he is without it, and slowly bring it**

nearer so he can learn how his misery lessens as he approaches it. This teaches him to associate his misery with its absence, and the opposite of misery with its presence. It gradually becomes desirable as he changes his mind about its worth. I am teaching you to associate misery with the ego and joy with the spirit. You have taught yourself the opposite. You are still free to choose, but can you really want the rewards of the ego in the presence of the rewards of God?" (T.4.VI.5) The pedagogy of this course is well thought out -- it meets us where we are and respects the choices we have made to dissociate ourselves from truth and love, while at the same time it shows us the disastrous consequences of those choices. It is never coercive or threatening, however, just abundantly clear about the mess we have made of everything, including our self-identity, why we have done it, and how to undo it all. Its approach is gentle and encouraging, reassuring us that there is no urgency, as ultimately time is unreal and we are undoing what never happened (the principle of the Atonement). Everything we need to restore to our minds the awareness of love's presence is already in the Course. For those for whom this course resonates, nothing more is needed. Other paths are available to those who are not comfortable with this one (M.1.4:1,2).

The Course often addresses the concern, to use your words, of how to "live in an illusory world recognizing the absurdness of it all and pay attention to the illusion to some extent; i.e., not getting run over by cars, walking naked down the highway, etc." Lesson 155 teaches us, for example, that **"there is a way of living in the world that is not here, although it seems to be. You do not change appearance, though you smile more frequently. Your forehead is serene; your eyes are quiet. And the ones who walk the world as you do recognize their own. Yet those who have not yet perceived the way will recognize you also, and believe that you are like them, as you were before"** (W.pl.155.1). There is also a section in the manual for teachers that discusses this aspect of our process: **"How Should the Teacher of God Spend His Day?"** (M.16).

The main point is that a mind identified with love would appear to others in a form that could be accepted without fear and to which others could relate in a normal way. The mind's purpose or content is the key factor, not the behavior. Many Gnostics deliberately disobeyed the world's laws to prove that the world is not real. Well, by fighting against the world, they proved just the opposite. If you are clear about the difference between form (behavior) and content (mind), you would be able to live in the world and abide by its rules without reinforcing the illusion in your mind. **"The body was not made by love. Yet love does not condemn it and can use it lovingly, respecting what the Son of God has made and using it to save him from illusions"** (T.18.VI.4:7,8). (Kenneth presents a detailed examination of this confusion as found in Gnosticism, the ascetic traditions, and other approaches in two of his books: *Love Does Not Condemn: The World, the Flesh, and the Devil According to Platonism, Christianity, Gnosticism and "A Course in Miracles"* and *The Message of "A Course in Miracles"* -- Vol. 1: *All Are Called*; Vol. 2: *Few Choose to Listen* . He shows how the Course avoids the pitfalls of different moral traditions, leading to a formulation of a non-normative or new morality.)

A Course in Miracles surely is not the final word in spirituality, as it is directed to those on the bottom rungs of the spiritual ladder (i.e., all of us); but for those of us who have accepted it as our path home, it is more than sufficient, which is why Jesus says at the end of the 365 lessons of the workbook, **"This course is a beginning, not an end"** (W.ep.1:1). We spend the rest of our lives applying its teachings to our personal lives. We needn't try to convince others to change how they go about their lives. Our focus is exclusively on how we choose to *perceive* others and the world: **"Therefore, seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world"** (T.21.in.1:7). Our only responsibility is to accept the Atonement for ourselves (T.2.V.5:1) . If I do that, then I know everyone has done it, because the Sonship is one. As long as I believe that others still have to do it, my mind is not yet healed, because I am still perceiving the Sonship as fragmented. This is a major difference between the Course's teaching and your belief that "if we had mass consciousness believing along the same lines, this entire world as we see it would disappear and the Sonship would become reunited." If this were true, there would be actual parts of the Sonship, and some would be victims of others because these others still choose to remain separate. That is decidedly different from the entire thrust of Jesus' teaching in the Course.

One further thought about *A Course in Miracles* and its “evolution”: It is impossible for a brain/ mind as limited as ours to fully understand this course, which comes from a mind that transcends time and space entirely and is without limit. That, again, is why the Course teaches that our only responsibility is to accept the Atonement for ourselves.

Finally, there is a lovely passage -- seems more like a song Jesus is singing -- that blends with your belief that “all works of good that a fellow brother does for another will be remembered for eternity in God's Mind”; we quote in part: **“How can you who are so holy suffer? All your past except its beauty is gone; and nothing is left but a blessing. I have saved all your kindnesses and every loving thought you ever had. I have purified them of the errors that hid their light, and kept them for you in their own perfect radiance. They are beyond destruction and beyond guilt. They come from the Holy Spirit within you, and we know what God creates is eternal”** (T.5.IV.8:1,2,3,4,5,6).

Q #1298: Can you please help shed some light on why the guilt seems to be so intense in dealing with parents? For example, I realize now that I keep the relationship going in form because of the intense guilt I experience if I don't visit them. What could the “sin” be, from a metaphysical perspective, that causes the guilt, and why is it such a sin within the ego system to end the relationship with parents in form?

A: The “sin” leading to the intense guilt in parent-child relationships is rooted in the ego's master plan to replace God with itself. As a result of our mind's choice to identify with the ego, we no longer experience our relationship with our true Source; instead, we substitute for that another self that then becomes totally dependent on human parents or the equivalent. The root of our guilt, thus, is our belief (now concealed from our awareness) that we have thrown God away and made a substitute for our true Identity as His creation, forever one with Him. We have proclaimed that we do not need God and can get all of our needs met through this new relationship of parent and child, the paradigm of all other special relationships in the world. Specialness always entails guilt, and therefore if the relationship never gets beyond specialness (neediness, dependency, expectations, etc.), the guilt will continue to be a major factor. This would be true of any relationship with authority figures: boss, teacher, political figure, hero, etc.

Kenneth's two-part book, *Parents and Children: Our Most Difficult Classroom*, discusses a wide variety of issues flowing from this most basic relationship, from the perspective of both parent and child. One salient discussion, directly related to your question, pertains to Freud's insight: **“The liberation of an individual, as he grows up, from the authority of his parents is one of the most necessary though one of the most painful results brought about by the course of his development.”** The key to successfully transcending the specialness aspect is distinguishing between form and content. Liberation from authority is a content issue; i.e., you can be living with your parents (the form) and be liberated from or bound to their authority (the content). Greatly abbreviating what really requires a lengthy explanation, you would gradually come to relate to them not as parents, but as Sons of God sharing with you and everyone else the same journey back to God. They have the same pain and anguish in their wrong minds, the same healing and peace in their right minds, and the same power to decide between the two as do you and everyone else. You would then recognize that the guilt in your relationship with your parents is a reflection of your guilt over having rejected God and accepted a substitute for this one and only real relationship. Then you would automatically know what to do on the level of form: you would remain faithful to the form (parent-child) and be appropriate, kind, and responsible, but you would do it all differently (the content).

Q #1299: The sections of *A Course in Miracles* titled *The Agreement to Join* (T.28.III.2:5) and *The Greater Joining* (T.28.IV.4) seem very important with respect to practically dealing with 'others' and our perceptions of them, and therefore our perceptions of ourselves. However, I am unclear as to the practical application of their meaning. Take, for example, the statement, "Uniting with a brother's mind

prevents the cause of sickness and perceived effects" (T.28.III.2:5). If I see a brother who is sick (in whatever form that may take), I know that I have joined him in that illusion. But what is it that I am to see, look for, become aware of, etc. in order to prove him and myself wrong in this perception?

A: Discussing practical applications of Course principles is always tricky. On one hand, the Course is very practical because it tells us exactly how to follow its teachings. On the other hand, when most of us think of practical applications, we envision something we can do behaviorally. But the Course is never about behavior. Thus, to answer your question, there is nothing you are supposed to see, look for, or become aware of *externally*. How could there be when the Course's overarching message is that there *is* nothing external to your own mind? And the Course certainly does not ask you to *prove* your perceptions or those of your brother wrong.

What, then, is it telling us to do? We can begin to answer this by carefully reading the very sentence you referred to. **"Uniting with a brother's *mind* prevents the *cause of sickness and perceived effects*" (T.28.III.2:5 italics ours).** In other words, we are asked to join on the level of mind. Jesus says nothing about joining as bodies or doing anything on the level of form. Obviously, a body cannot join with a mind. Clearly, this has to mean that the place in which we join our brother is in our thoughts. This prevents the *cause* of sickness. It does this because the cause of sickness is our belief in guilt and separation. Therefore, by recognizing in our own mind that guilt and separation are illusory and that we are united with our brother -- both in our sense of guilt within this dream and as God's beloved Son in reality -- we disarm the guilt and fear that caused the need for sickness as a potent defense against the truth within this dream.

This does not mean that our internal shift will heal either our brother's body or our own. However, it does mean that if we fully made this shift, we could have a body filled with cancer and still be at peace. Likewise, we could be with a brother who is dying of cancer and know that the disease has no effect on the reality of who he is. From that place, we would see that while his body appears to be sick, he is not a body and therefore *he* is not sick. Behaviorally, we would probably still do all the loving things one normally does for another who is experiencing pain. We would not try to make the sickness go away or tell the person that it was illusory. If the person were ready to accept that, he would not be sick. For this reason, we would instead comfort the person in whatever way would be most helpful to him in the moment.

Another key to grasping what the Course is getting at in the sections you mentioned is the realization that when Jesus talks about sickness, he does not mean a physical ailment in the body. To Jesus, simply thinking that we are here is sick. Believing that we need to breathe, eat, sleep, and so forth is an illness -- not because these things are bad, but because they represent our clearly insane choice to believe that we could be limited by this **"wall of flesh around the mind, keeping it prisoner in a tiny spot of space and time, beholden unto death, and given but an instant in which to sigh and grieve and die"** (T.20.IV.11:2). From Jesus' healed perspective then, your need to breathe is no more or less a sickness than your brother's cancer. This is why **"Accepting the Atonement for yourself means not to give support to someone's dream of sickness and of death"** (T.28.IV.1:1). Accepting the Atonement means recognizing that the *entirety* of our experience is but a bad dream of sickness and of death, and this is true whether the body currently appears to be what the world would label as healthy or ill.

Fortunately, Jesus does not ask us to make this dramatic shift in our thinking on our own. He lets us know that the Holy Spirit is already in our mind, ready to help us change our thoughts whenever we ask Him to. Again, you do not have to try to look for or prove anything. **"Your willingness to let illusions go is all the Healer of God's Son requires"** (T.28.IV.10:9).

Q #1300: "If to love oneself is to heal oneself, those who are sick do not love themselves" (T.12.II.1:2,3). Does this make the person who loves himself a "special love" person?

A: No, it does not lead to special love. According to *A Course in Miracles*, both sickness and healing are exclusively in the mind; and sickness is an attack, a decision to reject the love in our right mind and identify instead with separation and guilt in our wrong mind, which we then project. To love yourself simply means to accept the truth about yourself, thus healing yourself of all false thoughts about who you are. In that state, you would not and could not attack yourself or anyone else. This is not special love because this right-minded self-love, by definition, includes everyone else as well. The love in our right minds is all-inclusive, unlike the special love made by the ego that excludes certain people or groups. This is a love that is really self-less; it is the stage of the journey that precedes our return to the perfect Oneness of God's Love for His Son, and His Son's for Him.

Q #1301: Would you kindly explain the following sentence: "Under the circumstances, would it not be more desirable to have been wrong, even apart from the fact that you were wrong?" (T.13.IV.3) What is the difference between "you have been" and "you were"?

A: In the context of the two paragraphs that precede this passage, Jesus is saying that we were wrong in believing that attack is our reality and that our destruction is the final proof that we were right. In other words, we were wrong about everything we believed. So he is saying that we should really *want* to be wrong -- to be glad we have been wrong -- because our identification with the ego has led only to unhappiness and hopelessness. Recall the question he asks us later in the text of *A Course in Miracles*: "**Do you prefer that you be right or happy?**" (T.29.VII.1:9). It is the same idea -- we should be glad that we have been totally wrong about ourselves and reality, and happily accept the truth that we have been denying.

Q #1302: When I shut the doors, confine myself in a room, and immerse myself in reading *A Course in Miracles*, I feel such elation because everything it says rings true. I literally wish that when I open the doors, the illusory world would not exist anymore. This brings instantaneous fear and anxiety, of course. I sometimes picture the "cunning" ego asserting specialness, as if mocking me to say "see, God does not really love you; you're stuck here." I get so confused and sad, I just weep as I always have. It seems as if there is a constant battle raging inside me, and peace, even when it comes, is fleeting. It seems as if I have to remember to "choose once again" constantly and unrelentingly. When all is said and done, I truly want only God. I also honestly believe that God waits for me. But why the seeming distance and the muck that shields the light?

A: Yes, other students have these kinds of experiences -- they are not uncommon at all. Patience and gentleness are essential in working through this process. If we could simply accept the peace of God without reservation the first time we open our minds to it, we would not need *A Course in Miracles*; and, indeed, we probably would not even be here. It is perhaps far more helpful and realistic to assume that we don't really want it -- or, that we want it only our terms -- because we are terrified of what it would mean to fully accept it. Deep down we realize that our identity as we know it would disappear, as would the world. We thus are highly conflicted -- we both desperately want peace, yet are terrified of accepting it. We think it would be the most wonderful thing ever to awaken from this burdensome dream of suffering, yet we are not sure we want to let go of our identity as an self. This is the theme Jesus discusses in "**The Fear of Redemption**" (T.13.III), and it is also the subject of Kenneth's recent book, *Ending Our Resistance to Love*. However, Jesus reassures us of the gentleness of the journey on which he is leading us: we will first dream of peace, and then awaken to it (T.13.VII.9:1); and we will not be "**abruptly lifted up and hurled into reality**" (T.16.VI.8:1).

It certainly does seem as if a battle is being waged in our minds, but this is true only from the ego's vantage point. (Note the section in the text called "**Above the Battleground**" (T.23.IV.)) The ego senses a mortal threat to its existence, and that threat is our mind's power to decide against the ego and for the

Holy Spirit's thought system of forgiveness. To make this choice is the beginning of the end of the ego, which is why it devised its strategy to shield us from our identities as decision-making minds. Thus, for the ego there is definitely a life-and-death struggle, because both sides are real in its eyes. This is the tension we cannot help feeling when we identify with the ego. From Jesus vantage point, however, there is no battle, for he knows that the ego and everything it stands for is made up -- you cannot do battle with something that does not exist, unless you're Don Quixote! Asking our questions -- what is the ego and where can it found? -- Jesus answers: **"Nothing and nowhere!" (C.2.6:7)**. Jesus thus guides us on our journey back into our minds where we can get in touch with our erroneous beliefs and then choose against them.

But because we think we are bodies living in a world and are no longer aware of our identity as minds with the power of choice, Jesus starts us off on that level and uses our experiences in the world to lead us back to the content in our minds, and eventually back to our identity as minds. He teaches us how to treat our reactions to the goings-on in our daily lives as reflections of the contents we have chosen to make real in our minds: **"the outside picture of an inward condition" (T.21.in.1:5)**. That is why our interactions are important -- they constitute the curriculum Jesus can use as our teacher. This is *A Course in Miracles'* distinctive path.

If you retreat from the world out of fear, ultimately it is because you have given the world a power it does not really have, forgetting that it is a projection of your mind (part of the ego's strategy) and that you therefore have given it the only meaning it has -- a major principle in all of the Course's teachings (in addition to the reference to Chapter 21 above, see also **T.13.IX.3:1** and **W.pl.2**). Succumbing to the ego's threats about the danger of remaining in your mind, you are overlooking the real strength that is still there. Depression is one of the consequences of taking the ego seriously. To choose the ego is to deny truth, separate yourself from the source of true peace and happiness, and have it appear that you are just a helpless victim of forces beyond your control. Jesus' teaching objective, thus, is to lead us back within to the place where we make the choice to believe in his truth or to deny it. His method takes into consideration our unfortunate condition of not even realizing there is a "within" to which we can return. This, again, points to the value of our interactions in the world -- we can now learn to focus on their purpose (content) while still acting responsibly in our roles (form): **"Forget not that the healing of God's Son is all the world is for. That is the only purpose the Holy Spirit sees in it, and thus the only one it has" (T.24.VI.1,2)**. This is where our hope lies, upheld by Jesus' promise to be with us each step of the way, and by his guarantee that we cannot fail, for all that we are doing is denying our denial of truth (**T.12.II.1:5**), and remembering what we chose to forget.

Q #1303: My experiences with *A Course in Miracles* do not seem to fall into the category of "gentle awakening." I sometimes have extreme experiences of the ego's hate; and sometimes apparent glimpses of God's Love for me that are overwhelming. Recently, before falling asleep I was thinking about how much "I want to be love," and I was woken out of a doze by a formless voice/roaring that was as powerful as the whole universe, and it nearly vibrated me apart. It happened several times. I really didn't know what to make of these experiences, so I forgave them, telling myself that God would do nothing to cause me pain. I wonder whether this is a stage on my spiritual path that will eventually pass. Can you help me make sense of this, as I want to do my part in healing the mind.

A: Speaking in general, one can say that the Voice of the Holy Spirit is always quiet, gentle, and peaceful; and therefore disquieting experiences would always be from the ego. The intensity of such experiences would reflect the intensity of one's fear and resistance.

We all have tremendous fear of awakening from the dream, but it is almost totally unconscious. Our decision to study *A Course in Miracles* symbolizes our choice to awaken and to let go of the ego as our teacher; but our fear does not suddenly evaporate because of this decision (although in principle it could). The defensive shields that were protecting us from our fear begin to weaken and then the fear starts to rise to the surface, taking various forms and in varying degrees of intensity. We decided to bury it and

then keep it buried because we experienced it as overwhelming, having chosen to listen to the ego's warnings that we would be brutally punished and then destroyed if we ever turned back and asked God to accept us back.

The idea is to learn that the only power fear has is what we have given it, although we have no awareness of having made it. It is simply the result of our having identified with the ego and then forgetting we have a mind with the power to reverse that decision. We must respect the depth of this fear; yet, we needn't deny it, run from it, or confront it as though it were an enemy to be defeated. We just need to remember to be gentle with ourselves, and be sure to take whatever behavioral steps we can to alleviate the anxiety when it starts to overwhelm us. Looking at it with Jesus is the way we begin to let go of our belief in its reality.

Q #1304 : I know that *A Course in Miracles* is only concerned with the mind (cause). I seem to be getting the message that I should not ask Jesus for help making decisions concerning what external decisions may facilitate clearer thought. For example, I get caught up in the idea that my very physical job works against clear thought and consistent practice. Should I be solely concerned with forgiveness and let the physical world take care of itself? Or, is it appropriate to make physical changes that may put me in a better physical state to more clearly see my attack thoughts/forgiveness needs?

A: *A Course in Miracles* does not tell us that physical changes are wrong. It does tell us, though, that we do not need to make external changes to change our mind. We could see our attack thoughts and forgiveness needs even if we were nailed to a cross or in a concentration camp. This is why Jesus says: **"Change does not mean anything at the symptom level, where it cannot work.... You should ask... for help in the conditions that have brought the fear about. These conditions always entail a willingness to be separate"** (T.2.VI.3:7; T.2.VI.4:3,4) . In other words, our pain comes not from anything external but rather from the fear and guilt engendered by our belief that we are separate from God and His Love.

For this reason, we cannot expect external changes to change us internally. However, it *will* help us to change internally if every time we are tempted to make an external change, we first ask for help getting to an internal place of love and forgiveness. This is why the Course never says that there is any type of decision for which it is wrong to ask Jesus for help. Indeed, the Course's stance on decision making is summed up in the following passage: **"...you cannot make decisions by yourself. The only question really is with what you choose to make them. ...You will not make decisions by yourself whatever you decide. For they are made with idols or with God. And you ask help of anti-Christ or Christ, and which you choose will join with you and tell you what to do"** (T.30.I.14:3,4; 7,8,9) . Thus, whenever we make a decision, we listen to an internal teacher in our mind. The choice is whether we listen to the ego or the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is *always* a good idea to ask Jesus or the Holy Spirit for help.

Where we must be careful, however, is in making sure that we are actually asking for help rather than simply requesting confirmation of a decision we have *already* made. For example, you do not want to decide that your job is the source of your unhappiness and *then* ask Jesus what to do about it. It would be far more productive to simply bring your unhappiness to Jesus and ask him to help you look at it through his nonjudgmental eyes. Let him reveal to you what *internal* shift needs to happen so that you no longer feel that external circumstances can rob you of the peace and Love of God. When you do that, you will automatically make decisions that reflect the love in your mind. Then, if you do make any external changes, they will be based solely on simple preferences and will not be difficult.

Q #1305: I know the Course says sickness is a defense against the truth and that you shouldn't feel sorry for someone who is sick -- that that depreciates the power of the person's mind. I am having such difficulty learning this lesson. How does one learn the lesson when her daughter has a serious chronic illness, an illness that causes pain and prevents the person from living a "normal life"? Nearly every day my daughter suffers and I suffer with her. I know this doesn't help her or me, but it's not been something I can change my mind about. I pray for help for her (and me) and my friends pray and then I learn, in "The Song of Prayer", that prayer doesn't help either. God doesn't even know we're here. Prayer is only for oneself, etc. What can I do? How can I change my mind and not see my sick, suffering daughter? This has been going on literally for years and I sure need some help, please.

A: It is hard to imagine a more potent emotional trigger than watching your daughter suffer on a daily basis and being unable to do anything to alleviate it. The fact that her pain causes you pain is a very normal reaction. The purpose of *A Course in Miracles* is not to make you feel guilty or wrong for having this reaction. Nor should you feel that you are hurting her by having it.

The Course does say that sickness is a defense against the truth (**W.pl.136**) . But it would make the same claim about absolutely *every* aspect of our apparent existence and human experience. Breathing is a defense against the truth, thinking is a defense against the truth, speaking is a defense against the truth, and so on. This is so because *believing that we are here is a defense against the truth* . Yet, we all believe that we are here. And as long as we do, we cannot pick one element of our seeming existence, such as sickness, and convince ourselves that it is unreal. Unfortunately, the fear most of us have of illness often tempts Course students to do just that -- seeking to know that illness is an illusion, while still believing in other parts of this dream. From Jesus' healed perspective, desperately trying to let go of our belief in sickness makes no more sense than desperately trying to stop breathing. To him, neither of these is real and neither is something to feel guilty about.

Because we all choose the scripts of our lives on a level of the mind that we are not aware of -- outside of this dream of time and space -- we cannot know *why* we or others experience particular life events such as chronic illnesses. And we cannot will illness away or easily break the emotional hold it has on us. But the Course does tell us what we *can* do: **"Perceive in sickness but another call for love, and offer your brother what he believes he cannot offer himself. Whatever the sickness, there is but one remedy. You will be made whole as you make whole, for to perceive in sickness the appeal for health is to recognize in hatred the call for love. And to give a brother what he really wants is to offer it unto yourself, for your Father wills you to know your brother as yourself. Answer his call for love, and yours is answered"** (T.12.II.3:12,3,4,5) .

In other words, your daughter's pain and the pain you feel because of it are the same in content. You both feel victimized by something you cannot control, which seems to make it impossible to experience the Love and peace of God. So the way you can truly help your daughter is to allow your own call for love to be answered. Although, as you stated, God does not know about this dream world and thus cannot answer our prayers by directing the external events in our lives, help *is* available. We access it by asking the Holy Spirit (the memory of God's Love in our mind) to help us look at the events in our lives through His eyes. When we do this, we see that *nothing* makes it impossible for us to experience the Love of God because His Love is in us. And once you get in touch with this Love, you will see that though your daughter's body is sick and suffering, this has no effect on her own ability to feel God's Love. She may not realize this and you may still have strong feelings about her pain, but you will know that your only job is to watch the situation with loving eyes and continually ask for guidance to do the loving thing, whatever it may be.

Ultimately, whether our body appears to be healthy or sick, whether our life is one that the world judges as pleasant or miserable, we are all on the same journey. We all have the same opportunity to use our life as a classroom or a prison. Each of us can make the choice at any moment to drop the ego's hand, releasing our grip on this illusory world of pain, and take the Holy Spirit's hand instead, which gently awakens us and lifts us back into our true home in Heaven. You can only make this choice for yourself, but in so doing, you light the way for others.

So, during challenging moments with your daughter, do not feel bad about your thoughts or emotions and do not try to change them. Simply ask the Holy Spirit to help you remember that a happy end is assured for both your journeys. Let Him remind you that though your daughter may face many challenges, God's Love surrounds her and she will never be left comfortless (**W.ep.6: 6,7**) .

Q #1306: I have been studying *A Course in Miracles* for seven years, and my mind has changed for sure! Now I would like to ask your opinion about a situation that is causing conflict in my life. I fired my maid, who had been working for me for nine years, when I discovered that she had been stealing money from me. I feel at peace about what I did, and I don't feel any anger toward her. I am still in touch with her, but feel that I cannot trust her enough to give her a job in my house again. A professional colleague told me that by firing the maid, I did the opposite of what *A Course in Miracles* teaches -- a few other Course students agreed with that. But I still feel that I did the right thing, and feel peaceful about it.

A: From the Course's perspective, the issue is not about the *behavior* of firing your maid. Firing an employee is neither loving nor unloving in itself. Only the content in your mind determines whether it is loving or not, which means you can be motivated by the ego or the Holy Spirit. With your ego, you would perceive yourself as the victim and your maid as the victimizer, and therefore you would feel justified in being angry and punitive. With the Holy Spirit, you would not perceive a victim and a victimizer; and therefore the love in your right mind would direct you to do whatever is best for both of you in that situation. That could mean firing her or not firing her; but there would be no hatred, anger, guilt, or fear. You would feel peaceful.

There is nothing wrong in recognizing another person's ego at work and then limiting that person's ability to act it out. You would not hire a known pedophile to stay with your children while you were away; but that does not mean you would not see him as a Son of God with the same right mind, wrong mind, and decision maker that you have. It is just common sense not to allow him to stay with your children while you are not there. Similarly, if you served on a jury, you could be motivated by love to vote "guilty," which could result in the defendant going to jail for a very long time. Again, you would see the judge, the defendant, and the person bringing the charges as part of the Sonship with you -- no hatred, no anger, no *one or the other* . It is a serious mistake to think that forgiveness means that you must keep a dishonest person on your staff, have a pedophile take care of your children, or never vote "guilty" on a jury.

Without realizing it, many Course students are saying there is a hierarchy of illusions -- that some things and behaviors are always holy or spiritual and others are always unholy or unspiritual. How can that be, though, if *everything* here is illusory? One part of an illusion cannot be better or worse than another. The very first lesson in the workbook points us in that direction: **"Nothing I see in this room . . . means anything" (W.pl.1)**. Jesus is training us to focus on the choices we are making in our minds rather than on the external behavior; and he wants us to learn also that there are only two choice we can ever make: to believe that our existence as separate from God is real, or that that is just a mistaken belief that we can now correct through the practice of forgiveness. All of the interactions in our lives, then, can reflect back to us which of these choice we have made. That is the only meaningful part of our lives here.

Q #1307: As one forgives each successive painful situation/relationship in one's life, does that mean that happier situations and relationships will eventually occur?

A: This may or may not occur, but that would not be of concern to the mind that lets go of guilt through forgiveness. As you progress with forgiveness, in other words, you would realize that the guilt in your mind was the source of your pain, not external events and situations, however horrendous they may be on the level of the world. This perhaps is the most difficult of lessons for us to learn, but it is one of the

defining features of *A Course in Miracles* that teaches us how to be fully present to our roles in the world while learning that our perception of them (our internal experience) comes directly from the choice we are making in our mind to identify with either the ego or the Holy Spirit (or Jesus).

Sometimes there are external changes as well as the internal shifts in how we perceive the external. For example, if as a result of guilt we feel deeply unworthy of happiness and love, our unconscious need to punish ourselves will find its way into our interactions, possibly leading to one unhappy experience after another. Therefore, when we bring the guilt in our mind to the love of Jesus, also in our mind, we will be letting go of our *need* to remain unhappy, even though we were not consciously aware of that dynamic in our thinking. When that need no longer prevails, we obviously would make better choices in the world, as we would be walking Jesus' path of gentleness and kindness, and thus be less self-destructive, etc. The important point to keep in mind always is that the form (external situations) does not necessarily demonstrate the mind's chosen content. Thus, being in a painful relationship does not automatically mean that it comes from guilt. We cannot make a judgment based solely on appearances (form).

This issue has been the topic of several other discussions on this Service. You might wish to look at the following Questions, which provide many Course references: #350, #542, #660, #846, #873, and #987.

Q #1308 : I have been working with *A Course in Miracles* with good results, but one question keeps coming up. I had an insight one day that "Loving What Is" was a way to stress-free living. Indeed, by embracing a particular difficult emotion/feeling/thinking nexus, the stress dissolved into peace. The Course does not seem to advocate "Embracing What Is"; rather, it seems to say that when negativity arises, to turn your attention away and seek the light. If this is correct, then the Course seems to be dualistic and rejects life as it appears. Sometimes when reading the Course I get this feeling that God created Reality and I created the false; but who created me that made the false? Isn't maya/illusion also God; and therefore shouldn't we embrace maya/illusion, the false self, too? It sometimes feels like the Course is setting up a dualism between body mind ego and spirit, when perhaps they are really one?

A: *A Course in Miracles* is a strict non-dualism. It teaches that only the infinite realm of mind/ spirit is real. The source of our belief that the body and the world are also real is a thought we hold in our minds of selfishly wanting to exist apart from God. Thus, the Course teaches: **"The world was made as an attack on God. It symbolizes fear. And what is fear except love's absence? Thus the world was meant to be a place where God could enter not, and where His Son could be apart from Him"** (W.pll.3.2:1,2,3,4). This statement of the *purpose* that underlies the making of the world is a major difference between the Course and other traditions that also speak of the world as illusory. The world is not God. And the false self that made it is not God or of God. God creates only like Himself. Imperfection cannot from Him -- another major difference between *A Course in Miracles* and other traditions. That is why the Atonement principle is at the heart of both its teachings and its practices. This principle states that separation from Totality is an impossibility, and therefore we are simply mistaken in our belief that we exist as separate individuals apart from God. This is a greatly abbreviated summary of the Course's non-dualism -- all that our space allows here. Some other Questions on this Service may be helpful to you in providing additional insights: #6, #82, and #171.

Perhaps the only similarity between the Course and "Embracing What Is" (if we understand that correctly) is that our perceptions and experiences can be used for the healing of our minds, even though they are the perceptions and experiences of a false self. Thus, Jesus says: **"The body was not made by love. Yet love does not condemn it and can use it lovingly, respecting what the Son of God has made and using it to save him from illusions"** (T.18.VI.4:7,8). The key to practicing this effectively is gradually learning to discern the *purpose* we have chosen in our minds, for that is always the reason we experience what we do (not that we are responsible for other people's choices); this also entails learning to distinguish between form (behavior) and content (mind). In this sense we can say that the Course clearly does *not* "reject life" -- in fact, our daily interactions and feelings provide the very curriculum that

our inner Teacher uses to help us get in touch with the contents in our minds that are the source of all our pain and conflict. In other words, negativity is purposeful, and that is what the Course helps us get in touch with so that we can change a self-defeating purpose to one that will lead us out of the illusion entirely. (For some statements along these lines, see **T.20.VIII.7,8,9; T.31.VII.12; W.pII.226.**) In sum, then, the Course would never suggest that we turn away when negativity arises -- just the opposite! Jesus asks that we look at it with him, as expressed in this passage from "The 'Dynamics' of the Ego": **"No one can escape from illusions unless he looks at them, for not looking is the way they are protected. There is no need to shrink from illusions, for they cannot be dangerous. We are ready to look more closely at the ego's thought system because together we have the lamp that will dispel it . . ."** (T.11.V.1:1,2,3).

Seeking the light, thus, symbolizes our choice to reverse our identification with the ego's thought system of separation and identify instead with the Holy Spirit's thought system of forgiveness. We deny our denial of the truth about ourselves, thus restoring to our awareness the true peace and love in which we were created.

Q #1309(i): (The following three questions were submitted by the same person.)

Ken Wapnick has suggested that when dealing with others, we behave "normally," showing kindness the way "normal" people do. But if we come into the dream as egos, then isn't normal here always guilt, attack, and hate? If the ego is 100% hate and the Holy Spirit the expression of God's love, is it possible to be lead by the Holy Spirit or Jesus?

A: It is not quite accurate to say that we come into this dream as egos. We come into this dream as a result of *listening* to the ego. Therefore, we generally *think* we are the ego -- a belief that is reflected in our conviction that we are an individual, in a body, having a physical experience that is separate from everyone else. This causes us to live according to the principle of separate interests, which asserts that you and I need different things in order to survive. More specifically, *I* need to get *my* physical and psychological needs met and *you* need to get *yours* met. The only interest I have in your needs is a constant fear that as you try to get them met, you will take something from me.

As long as we listen to the ego, these will be the unconscious dynamics that drive our lives. Fortunately, *A Course in Miracles* lets us know that we do not have to listen to the ego. We could just as easily turn to the Holy Spirit as our internal Teacher. He will teach us that our needs are not separate because our very identities are entirely different than we ever imagined. He will gradually reveal to us that the person we think we are is but a puppet whose trials and tribulations have absolutely no impact on our reality as God's one Son. From that perspective, we will see that, appearances to the contrary, we have only one need, which we share with everyone: the need to awaken from this nightmare to our reality in Heaven where we can be at peace at last.

Clearly then, we have two entirely opposing thought systems in our mind. When we listen to the ego, we are 100 percent hate. When we listen to the Holy Spirit, we are 100 percent love. Which teacher we choose is entirely up to us. Notice that this is all about what goes on internally. Ken's suggestion is to *behave* normally. This does not mean that our behavior should be hateful. It simply means that in terms of spiritual growth, behavior is not what we should focus on changing because it is not the source of the problem. When we change the content of our mind to love, our behavior will automatically reflect that. We will generally still say and do all the socially expected things that our roles require. For example, will still behave the way one needs to as a parent, spouse, employee, supervisor, neighbor, friend, and so forth. The only difference will be that our internal mantra of "What's in it for me?" will have been replaced by a sense of all inclusive love. Obviously this is likely to impact our actions at times, but how it does so is not our concern.

Q #1309(ii): I have known many people in my life who are not spiritual, and know nothing about *A Course in Miracles'* concepts of forgiveness, but are thoughtful, kind, and nonjudgmental people. So can one hear the Voice of God without knowing it? And if not, how do we explain people who are "normally" kind?

A: Everyone has a right mind and a wrong mind. This is true regardless of belief systems, personal history, intelligence, ethnicity, gender, or any other element of human identity. One need not relate to the concept of God in any way in order to hear the internal voice of love. Because each of us has within ourselves both a murderer and a saint, virtually all of us have moments of extreme cruelty and moments of great kindness. What motivates a particular person to be kind and loving is an entirely personal matter and not something one can judge about another.

Q #1309(iii): I know a student of *A Course in Miracles* who believes and tells people he *is* the Holy Spirit. He also thinks *we are God* . This sounds like an authority problem to me. Perhaps I am misunderstanding. Is there a difference in saying you *are* the Holy Spirit or God, and saying *we share* the One mind of the Holy Spirit or God?

A: To bring this down to the level of contemporary political discourse: It depends on what your definition of "you" is. But seriously, there is no way we could know what that person actually means or believes. Certainly the Course says that we are a thought in the Mind of God rather than that we *are* God. But it also says that in reality we are a **"Oneness joined as One"** and that **"what is one can not have separate parts" (T.25.I.7:1,7)** . Obviously, there is an inherent difficulty in trying to give words to concepts we cannot truly understand.

In general, making statements like "I am God" or "I am the Holy Spirit" leads to problems because, while they may reflect some truth about our ultimate reality, they do not reflect the truth about who we think we are here. Thus, they tend to ring false and, as you have observed, come across as grandiose if not downright delusional -- whether or not that is actually true of the person making the comments. Fortunately, the Course gives us the tools to look beyond people's words and realize that whether they are motivated by love or fear, only love is a justified response.

Q #1310: If "God Is," and this dream that we call life does not exist, how is it that we believe it exists? It seems to me that if we are all perfect being of God, it would be impossible for this dream to even enter our minds in the first place. And if it did and the dream is false, to me that would make us look anything but perfect for receiving it. This would carry over to making God look anything but perfect as well. After all, how can this illusion even exist within our minds unless it is of God?

A: This is a variation of the most frequently asked question about *A Course in Miracles* . It is an intelligent question, but the Course's answer to it has not always been satisfying to those who have asked it. The main reason for this is that the question is really a statement that in some way says the separation did happen; the Son of God really did fall asleep; now tell me how it happened. You will find a discussion of this and key Course references in our answers to Questions #10 and #171, both of which center on the issues you raise.

Q #1311: Please explain what Jesus means when he says in *A Course in Miracles* : "If you are willing to renounce the role as guardian of your thought system and open it up to me, I will correct it very gently and

lead you back to God" (T.4.I.4:7). Does this mean that I should not censor my thoughts, or that I should open my thoughts to others even when they are not pure?

A: What we as decision-making minds are "guarding" is the decision to see ourselves as innocent and helpless victims of a world we are sure is outside us: the world's thought system imposes itself on us; we are not its origin. We (as minds) are carefully protecting ourselves from any incursion into this heavily defended secret. This is the role Jesus is asking us to renounce. He wants us to be willing to open our minds to him, meaning being willing to go within and uncover what we have been hiding from ourselves and from him. In a later chapter he tells us that **"together we have the lamp that will dispel [the ego thought system] (T.11.V.1:3)**. That really is the essence of our practice: to bring the darkness of the ego to the light of Jesus' love, where we will finally see there was only the *illusion* of darkness and therefore no need for defenses. And we can do this only when we are willing to look with Jesus at our investment in sustaining the ego thought system in our minds. That role of sustaining the ego thought system is what Jesus want us to give up in favor of our joining with him in all our thinking and perception.

Q #1312: On some of Ken's tapes he says this is not a course on peace and love. Then on others he says it is about peace and love. He is driving me crazy. So which is it?

A: Sorry about your confusion! The context of the statement -- the point being made -- should clarify its meaning. If the point being emphasized is that *A Course in Miracles* is about the hard work of looking at our ego and the terrible price we pay for choosing it, then one could underscore that by saying it is not simply a course on peace and love. In the same vein, many people just stay with all the "nice" parts of the Course and skip over all of the more threatening parts -- the sometimes gory descriptions of guilt and specialness, for example. While it is not wrong to do that if that is all a person can handle, it is not what the Course is about; and to make that point one could again say that this is not a course on peace and love -- reflecting this important principle: **"Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all of the barriers within yourself that you have built against it. It is not necessary to seek for what is true, but it *is* necessary to seek for what is false" (T.16.IV.6:1,2).**

When might one say this is a course about peace and love? Well, you could be talking about how Course students fall into judgment, for example, or specialness. Thus, "Here we have a course about peace and love, and yet its students go around ruthlessly hitting each other over the head with it." The point is that Jesus is teaching us to get beyond our self-centered approach to relationships and see instead that we all share the same interests; but then we wind up doing the exact opposite by using these very teachings to make ourselves spiritually superior to others, or to denounce those who fail to live up to them. In this context, again, one might say, "Jesus has give us this wonderful course about peace and love, and people use it to exclude others from their peace and love."

Q#1313 : For those who have not yet become enlightened, where exactly do they go when they die? Is it a different form of Heaven than the non-dualistic oneness with God that is our natural state?

A: Like many other questions that occur to students of *A Course in Miracles* , the question of what happens when we die is not one for which we can give a truly satisfying answer. This is because the question presupposes that something actually happens when we die, which in turn presupposes that we are actually here. From our perspective, within this dream of time and space, this is an entirely logical assumption. However, Jesus' message in the Course is that we are *not* here. We remain at home in Heaven, at one with God, merely dreaming that we are having a physical experience within a physical world.

Thus, from Jesus' healed perspective, nothing happens when we are born, nothing happens while we live, and nothing happens when we die. We could compare this to having sleeping dreams at night. Regardless of what seems to occur in your dreams, when you awaken in the morning you discover that you are still lying in your bed, and nothing has happened to you since you fell asleep.

If the entirety of our existence is a dream, it follows, then, that physical death is but one more element of that dream. Death may seem to have great impact on the figure you appear to be within this dream, but it has no impact at all on you as the dreamer of the dream. As the dreamer of the dream, your awakening has nothing to do with physical death. You could, in fact, awaken *at any time* to the knowledge that physical existence is entirely made up. The Course refers to the state of mind in which you know you are not here as being in the real world. Once we are in that state of mind, it will not matter to us when or how our death appears to happen.

Because the one thing you take with you when you die is your state of mind, we can assume that those who die and have not awakened will continue dreaming. Whether that looks like another lifetime within this world or something entirely different is beyond anyone's ability to know. Fortunately, we do not need to know this. We can rest assured that we will continue dreaming only as long as there is a part of our mind that wants to remain asleep. Ultimately, no matter what we seem to go through, a happy awakening will be the end to our imagined journey. And as the Course asks, **"Who could despair when hope like this is his?" (C.ep.1:6)** .

Q #1314: Did Jesus have a reincarnational history, just as all the rest of us, or was his lifetime here the only physical one for him?

A: There is no direct answer to this in *A Course in Miracles* . Many statements strongly imply that we reincarnate, and Jesus discusses the whole issue of reincarnation in the manual for teachers (**M.24**) . But there is nothing that indicates that he did or did not have past lives. We have answered several other Questions on reincarnation, which are listed in our Interactive Index under Reincarnation; #97 is especially germane to your question.

Q #1315 : I recently gave a special relationship to the Holy Spirit after the other person said that it was causing him too much mental anguish. I know the teachings of the Course, and I cannot understand that the relationship isn't becoming increasingly "beneficent and joyous," even if only in my mind. It is still causing me heartache and I think about this person all day and night. I am trying my best not to see him as a body and project my "special love" thoughts onto him, but it just doesn't seem to be getting any easier for me. Am I doing something wrong? There isn't much else I can do but to pray for him and hand over the relationship to the Holy Spirit, is there? When the Course says our minds are joined, does that mean he must be thinking the same thing? I am very confused.

A: To clear up your confusion, you need to understand an important fact about *A Course in Miracles* . The Course is not addressing you as the individual you think you are within this dream. Instead, Jesus is speaking to the decision making part of your mind -- outside of the illusion of time and space -- which has the ability to choose between the thought system of the ego or the thought system of the Holy Spirit. Thus, when he says that minds are joined, he does not mean that your individual mind is joined with that of another individual within this world. Rather, he means that all our minds are joined in reality because we all come from the same source and share the same thought systems. We all have the capacity to think either the ego's thoughts of sin, guilt, and fear, or the Holy Spirit's thoughts of love and forgiveness, inspired by the memory of God's all-encompassing Love.

The Course would not ask you to struggle not to see another person as a body or to stop projecting your special love thoughts onto him. Instead, it would advise you to ask the Holy Spirit to help you simply watch all your troubling thoughts without judging them. In this way, you could gently learn to accept yourself even when you are obsessing, longing, depressed, and so on. As you do so, your mind will become an increasingly beneficent and joyous place, which will then be reflected in your *experience* of your relationships. This does not mean that you will always get what you think you want from others on the level of form. But you will start to be happier and more peaceful regardless of what happens externally because you will know that the love you seek is inside of you, not something you need from another.

One final note: The Course offers a path for transforming our mind, which can ultimately lead us to a far greater sense of peace and happiness than we have previously known. However, it is a very gradual process and one that, because of our fear and resistance, can seem at times to make us more afraid, confused, and even depressed. For this reason, it is important not to view applying Course principles to our problems as a quick fix that will instantly take us from despair to joy. As Course students, we need to expect challenging times as we " **question every value that [we] hold** " (T.24.in.2:2) .

Q #1316: I would appreciate your clarification on the issue of death in the dream, particularly the taking of one's own life. From certain answers on this Service, it seems as if suicide is a particularly unacceptable form of making the dream real. I also seem to have read that the "form" of death really doesn't matter; what matters is looking at anything with one's wrong mind or right mind. Hypothetically, then, a person could, take his/her life "with a smile that says, 'These thoughts have no effect on who I am.'" In one sense, it would be better than a death caused by a car accident or cardiac failure, for example. I've often thought that the biblical Jesus knew that his death was imminent when he entered Jerusalem for the last time and, in a sense, took his own life, or at least had it taken from him, because he fully knew the implications of his action (assuming, of course, that there is some amount of accuracy in the biblical rendition.)

A: The whole idea of "taking one's life" is ego based, as we discuss in Question #274, as it assumes there is life in the body and that it can be "taken." From that reference point, we would naturally conclude that some forms of death are less traumatic than others. But that reference point is faulty. In fact, throughout *A Course in Miracles* , Jesus helps us learn that our reference point as bodies is virtually worthless when it comes to understanding truth and reality. Our preoccupation with suicide and other forms of death is simply a part of the ego's strategy to keep the body, and thus the separation, real in our awareness. This is the point of Jesus telling us that we are not really afraid of death, but are *attracted* to it (T.19.IV.C) , because that is what enables the ego to achieve its goal of keeping us from ever experiencing ourselves as decision-making minds not bound by time and space.

In Question #274, we talk about the conditions of the "quiet choice for death": "If the 'choice' represents the simple recognition of the end of the body's purpose in the world of form, the body would no longer seem to be infused with 'life,' and a whole variety of so-called natural or accidental causes could be seen in the world's view as the cause of the death." This is in sharp contrast to the choice to do something with the sole intention of bringing about the death of the body.

About Jesus' awareness of his imminent death in Jerusalem . . . no one knows for sure what happened and how it happened; but he surely would not have been thinking in terms of having his life taken from him, as he knew he was invulnerable and was not his body. He certainly knew the hidden intent of the ego in everyone's mind to destroy guiltlessness wherever it could be found (T.13.II.4,5), but he knew *he*, as the reflection of Heaven's eternal love, could never be killed, other than in the delusional minds of those identified with the ego's insanity. Thus, he asks of us when we question the meaning of his death, "**Teach not that I died in vain. Teach rather that I did not die by demonstrating that I live in you**" (T.11.VI.7:3,4). If we hold on to nothing else than that Jesus' all-inclusive love and compassion lives

in us and can never be destroyed, we will have fulfilled his purpose for us in studying *A Course in Miracles*.

Q #1317 : The answer to Question #898 said: "Love is in the director's seat now, not you as an individual." In my view, this seems to be in contradiction to what is said in Lesson 154 concerning the messengers of God and their messages: that they "perform their part by their acceptance of His messages as for themselves, and show they understand the messages by giving them away. They choose no roles that are not given them by His authority. And so they gain by every message that they give away" (W.pl.154.7:2,3,4). As I see it, the messenger has an active role here. How are these two ideas related?

A: Different points are being made in the material you quote, but the content is the same. The point that is stressed in Question #898 is that when you let go of the ego, you are aware that you are not the individual self that you thought you were and that was always defining both the problem and the solution. When you let go of the ego, there is nothing left in your mind but love, and then your perception is identical with the Holy Spirit's. You are aligned with truth, not illusion.

In Lesson 154, Jesus is making a different, though related, point; and that is that our only function is to accept the Atonement through the practice of forgiveness. As "ministers," we cannot truly bring Jesus' message of forgiveness to the world without first having accepted it ourselves, because in *A Course in Miracles* giving and receiving are the same. This is in contrast to the world's view, where the role of messengers is just to deliver messages to other people; the delivery of the message is just an external event. Jesus is teaching us that if we want to receive God's Love, we must give It -- meaning we must come to recognize that we all share the same interests, and, ultimately, the same Self. I remember my true Identity as Christ only when I see that same Identity as defining everyone else. This is all about content, not form.

The way we are "active," thus, is by choosing to be taught by the teacher of forgiveness and oneness, not by the teacher of conflict and separation. We then *become* the message, just as Jesus tells us that **"to teach is to demonstrate" (M.in.2:1)**. Again, this is only about what is going on in our minds (content), not behavior (form). I cannot experience the Love of God in myself if I am judging even one other person as not worthy of that Love, because what is inherently all-inclusive cannot be known through exclusion. We are active in our minds, thus; and then that content will be expressed in our interactions. In the end, then, the two statements convey the same content.

Q #1318 : I'm confused. Am I living in a hologram that provides for every possibility, depending upon what choice I make, or am I living a script that is closed to anything other than what has already happened?

A: Time can be viewed as holographic in the sense that it is not linear. But our choices, as minds, are only between two alternatives: the ego's thought system and the Holy Spirit's thought system. That is the only content in our minds, and we are never choosing anything else. Time and form blind us to that, which is why Jesus says: **"Nothing so blinding as perception of form. For sight of form means understanding has been obscured" (T.22.III.6:7,8)**, and time is **"a trick, a sleight of hand, a vast illusion . . ."** (W.pl.158.4:1). Time, the world, and our seeming choices in the world are all part of the ego's strategy to keep us split off from the truth that we never truly left God. The instant the separation seemed to happen, the correction of that error occurred as well. That is what Jesus is teaching us in saying, **"This world was over long ago. The thoughts that made it are no longer in the mind that thought of them and loved them for a little while" (T.28.I.1:6,7)**. In this sense, we are "living a script that is closed to anything other than what has already happened," as the workbook tells us: **"The script is written. . . we but see the journey from the point at which it ended, look back on it, imagining**

we make it once again; reviewing mentally what has gone by” (W.pl.158.4:3,5; see also W.pl.169.8:3). Our scripts are important, however, because they provide the curriculum that our Teacher can use to help us realize that we are merely dreaming that we are separate from each other and from God: **“The miracle establishes you dream a dream, and that its content is not true” (T.28.II.7:1).**

We could continue with this for many pages, but space limitations here do not allow for that. We hope, however, that this brief summary will be of help in unconfusing you. A major impediment to achieving full clarity is that our human conceptual/linguistic framework is itself an ego-derived defense against the truth, as this passage, among many others, acknowledges: **“Yet time is but another phase of what does nothing. It works hand in hand with all the other attributes with which you seek to keep concealed the truth about yourself” (T.28.I.6:1,2).** We have no other reference point, though, until we regain a sense of ourselves as decision-making minds and then realize we do not need defenses. Fortunately, that is exactly the kind of help Jesus provides in his course. We have listed below some other passages that pertain to your question, and we also refer you to Kenneth's comprehensive study of time in his book, *A Vast Illusion: Time According to “A Course in Miracles.”*

“Each day, and every minute in each day, and every instant that each minute holds, you but relive the single instant when the time of terror took the place of love” (T.26.V.13:1).

“Each day, each hour and minute, even each second, you are deciding between the crucifixion and the resurrection; between the ego and the Holy Spirit. The ego is the choice for guilt; the Holy Spirit is the choice for guiltlessness. The power of decision is all that is yours. What you can decide between is fixed, because there are no alternatives except truth and illusion” (T.14.III.4:1,2,3,4).

“. . . while time lasts in your mind there will be choices. Time itself is your choice. If you would remember eternity, you must look only on the eternal. If you allow yourself to become preoccupied with the temporal, you are living in time. As always, your choice is determined by what you value. Time and eternity cannot both be real, because they contradict each other. If you will accept only what is timeless as real, you will begin to understand eternity and make it yours” (T.10.V.14:3,4,5,6,7,8,9).

“Time seems to go in one direction, but when you reach its end it will roll up like a long carpet spread along the past behind you, and will disappear. As long as you believe the Son of God is guilty you will walk along this carpet, believing that it leads to death” (T.13.I.3:5,6).

“Past, present and future are not continuous, unless you force continuity on them. . . . You would destroy time's continuity by breaking it into past, present and future for your own purposes” (T.13.VI.4:2,6).

“Time lasted but an instant in your mind, with no effect upon eternity. And so is all time past, and everything exactly as it was before the way to nothingness was made. The tiny tick of time in which the first mistake was made, and all of them within that one mistake, held also the Correction for that one, and all of them that came within the first” (T.26.V.3:3,4,5).

Q #1319: I am so desperate to be released from the bondage of self-awareness that is keeping me from Jesus. I get so confused with the abundance of words in the Course. They seem to go nowhere. The overall thought is that I am fooling myself with the notion that I can find salvation. It is as if I am trying to digest the words to feed the hunger that I have for God. The self-awareness stays with me all the time like a sentinel that stops me from letting go of the physical world so I can go into the spirit world. In the

simplest way, how can I apply the teaching of *A Course in Miracles* to this problem of being trapped in self-awareness? How can I use the Course if the words just get trapped inside my head?

A: You can use the Course very effectively by quietly slipping past the words to the Love that inspires them, and just staying with that. That, after all, is the goal of every student's work with the Course. The words are not what it is about, as Jesus reminds us: **“words are but symbols of symbols. They are thus twice removed from reality” (M.21.1:9,10).**

It is important, as well, not to be upset that you do not experience God's Love yet. Striving hard to experience Love reinforces the ego's claim that It is not present within you. We all have split minds; we all are both attracted to that Love and terrified of It, because we know that in Its Presence, our individuality and self-awareness would disappear. We know that our false self is an interference to our awareness of Love's presence, but part of us does not want to let go of it out of fear. Being upset just makes the ego all the more real. It is better to quietly acknowledge that part of you is still afraid, and that's okay. Don't fight against it or judge yourself for it. Gentleness and kindness toward yourself is a very helpful way of accepting the Love that is always present in your mind.

The path of *A Course in Miracles* is learning how not to take the ego seriously. It is dispelled with a gentle smile, the smile of calm assurance that the ego has no power to change reality; and reality is Love. The ego's raucous shrieking will fade into its own nothingness as you gradually learn to take the ego less seriously. **“The part [of you] that is listening to the Voice for God is calm, always at rest and wholly certain. It is really the only part there is” (W.pl.49.2:1,2).**

If you feel it would be helpful, there is nothing wrong with consulting a therapist to help you deal with your concerns and anxieties. Many times, this form of help blends well with our efforts to free ourselves from the blocks in our minds.

Q #1320: Several years ago I experienced a bout of depression basically because of my struggle with the idea that "there must be something more," and there have been several occasions when it occurred to me that maybe this life is all a dream. I have read many of the questions regarding people's reluctance to awaken. I want more than anything to awaken from this dream, so in my mind I have more than "a little willingness." If that is what Jesus and the Holy Spirit want for us also, why can't I awaken since I want to so badly? There is certainly nothing in this world that could possibly outdo Heaven and Oneness. I'm ready to wake up, why don't I?

A: We cannot determine from your question whether this is the case with you or not, but many times an intense desire to return home is accompanied by an abhorrence or fear of the world, though this may not be apparent. Wanting to return home so badly, in other words, can reflect an underlying feeling that the world is such an awful place and that it is such a painful burden to be here that we would give anything to be released from it. This can actually be an interference to awakening, as it would indicate that the world is still regarded as real: we cannot abhor or fear what we know to be unreal. There must, then, be a sense of sinfulness and guilt still hidden in the mind that gets projected onto the world. That is why so much of our work with *A Course in Miracles* centers on recognizing how we are “making the error real” -- that is, how our reactions and perceptions reveal an underlying belief that we are separate from God and feel guilty because of that. Once we make that connection, we can ask for help to choose to see everything differently.

Real deliverance from the world comes in the recognition that the world is the source of neither suffering or happiness, but is simply the projection of the mind caught in the illusory belief it is separate from God (**W.pl.132; W.pl.226**). We get to that stage by first becoming aware of how much we do see the world as the cause of both suffering and happiness. This is why Jesus teaches us that **“Forgiveness is the key to happiness”** and **“Forgiveness offers me everything I want” (W.pl.121, 122)**. This is the

“real alternative” that Jesus discusses in the final chapter of the text **(T.31.IV)** , where he talks about the state of mind known as the real world, which precedes our awakening from the dream entirely.

As we continue on the path of forgiveness with Jesus as our teacher, we become less and less identified with life in the world, which actually makes living here easier, in the sense of relieving the pressure most of us feel from taking what goes on in our lives so seriously. As we choose the ego less often, the love in our right mind begins to direct our every thought and action, and our investment in being an individual special self diminishes greatly. We continue to fulfill our roles responsibly, but without pressure and conflict. In this state, there would be not be a feeling of urgency to awaken as quickly as possible because you would not experience yourself as separate from love. Being present to all things and all people with Jesus would be a source of security and quiet joy and peace. Peace, really, is the goal of our work with the Course, not knowledge (Heaven) **(T.8.I.1; T.24.in.1:1)** . And we are assured of peace by choosing the teacher of peace more and more often, who would help us experience our oneness with everyone. Patience and gentleness with yourself will help you through this process, as will trust in the process of forgiveness.

Q #1321: What does Jesus mean when he says in *A Course in Miracles* that we "have made very real relationships even in this world" (T.17.IV.3:1)? He goes on to say that we do not recognize them. What "real relationships" is he referring to?

A: The “very real relationships” are holy relationships: instances in which you forgave someone or did not judge; instances in which you did not see your interests as separate from another’s. It could have been an interaction with a waiter in a restaurant who was having a bad day, but you did not judge him; or perhaps a child ran into you in the supermarket, but you did not get angry; or you may have had only compassion for someone who was unkind. You may not even have realized at the time that you transcended your ego; and in that sense you did not recognize these “real relationships.” In the manual, Jesus discusses this idea in the context of levels of teaching or teaching-learning situations **(M.3)**.

Q #1322: There appears to be a contradiction in *A Course in Miracles* , or perhaps in my understanding of it. It is saying that the suffering in our dream is a reflection of the suffering caused by guilt in our minds, and the benefits of a healed mind is a happy dream. On the other hand, it says that our bad times in the dream are reflecting and bringing into our awareness our unconscious guilt and making it conscious so that we can forgive it and release. When we are able to do that, our innocent mind brings the benefits of reflecting that outward while we still believe we are here. Then why should we question these good times as just a cover over unconscious guilt? In other words, how do we determine if the blessings in our dream are covering up the guilt, or they are just the benefits of right thinking and a healed mind? And do most people believe that their suffering is bringing them closer to God, rather than a dream of health, abundance, and joy?

A: Good question! Many students have experienced confusion over this. What helps is to sort out form and content. A happy dream in *A Course in Miracles* is a state of mind (content) in which the Holy Spirit has been chosen as your Teacher, and only His purpose for everything is valued. Though still within the illusion, it is called a happy dream because instead of being the ego’s dream of condemnation, judgment, and self-centeredness, it is the right-minded dream of forgiveness, compassion, and shared purpose. This is all within the mind -- its content.

Once this state has been reached, you are always at peace: all sense of lack is gone; there is no guilt or self-hatred; and no need for projection or other defenses. And most important for the context of your question, there is no concern over anything external, no investment in having things go a certain way in the world, or in having what the world defines as good fortune or blessings. Your peace and happiness

are not dependent on anything external. Further, nothing is taken personally -- either so-called good times or bad times, because nothing is perceived in those terms. Jesus says this in many ways in the Course, one coming in the section **“Above the Battleground”**: **“Think what is given those who share their Father's purpose, and who know it is theirs. They want for nothing. Sorrow of any kind is inconceivable. . . . They know it is impossible their happiness could ever suffer change of any kind. . . . No one who knows that he has everything could seek for limitation, nor could he value the body's offerings” (T.23.IV.8:1,2,3,6; 9:4).**

Now, it is true that if there is no guilt in your mind, you would not seek to punish yourself in any way. But how that would appear in form is not knowable. It cannot be evaluated using the categories of the world. For instance, in the world's judgment, some pretty awful things happened to Jesus' body; yet, *he* did not suffer because he knew he was not his body, and he never perceived himself as persecuted or betrayed (see **T.6.I.5,9,11**). We thus need to be cautious about drawing conclusions simply from the condition of one's body or life circumstances (form). And we also need to keep in mind the Course's central teaching that *perception is always interpretation* .

As another example: the projection of my guilt onto my body may be the source of my illness; but then I could let go of that guilt and choose to learn further lessons in that same bodily condition. In other words, my illness is now my classroom, and so I would *perceive* the illness in a completely different way. The illness may be ravaging my body, but if in the process I am learning that I am not my body and that no one else is theirs, I would not be experiencing the illness as anything negative, even as I continue with medical treatment. The content in my mind would have shifted. What brings me closer to God, thus, is not the suffering, but the *purpose* I have chosen to give it in my mind. However, I can choose that same purpose of undoing my belief in separation with a healthy body, too; and I can choose it whether I am financially secure or struggling financially. One more example: a healed mind could choose the appearance of a diseased or defective body as a means of teaching others they can be peaceful no matter what is going on externally. That mind would be totally at peace at all times (content), in the face of what the world might call misfortune (form).

That abiding state of peace is the “benefit” of having a healed mind. In that state, you would know that nothing else is real, and that nothing can affect that peace in any way. Moreover, aside from your smiling more frequently, your life would probably be indistinguishable from anyone else's (**W.pl.155:1**). On the other hand, if your state of mind is linked to external conditions, then you should suspect some ego dynamics at work. If you are happy and content only under certain conditions, and your happiness and contentment are threatened or disappear when those conditions change, that should tell you that the happiness is not authentic. The joy and peace that God intended us to have as His creation are eternal; they are not conditional and they do not fluctuate or change -- they are our very Identity unified with His. In Lesson 133, Jesus gives us some criteria to use in determining whether what we are choosing is of value or not (**W.pl.133**). The only true blessings are those that restore to our awareness the all-inclusiveness of love, the all-inclusiveness of the Sonship.

Q #1323: My question is regarding the appearance of angels in the world. A friend of mine knows he is an angel but is struggling to understand the technicalities of such an appearance in the dream. Is he correct in thinking he is simply a manifestation of the Holy Spirit (i.e., the memory or thought of Christ's Oneness with God) in the same way as other enlightened beings who show up?

A: When Jesus speaks of angels in *A Course in Miracles* , he is always referring to the loving thoughts of God within us, not external beings. He is using a term that evokes a sense of comfort and protection, but he does not mean that there are actual spiritual beings called angels, as is taught in some religions. These are symbols representing thoughts in our mind. (See Questions #36 and #413ii.)

From the Course's point of view, there are no "technicalities" that an enlightened being would have to deal with. That healed mind would be completely at peace, knowing there is no world "out there" -- just other minds believing they exist in a state of separation from God as bodies, caught up in a system of defenses to protect their separation from God and each other, and to project responsibility for this separation onto others. Jesus, as the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, symbolizes the truth for us in a form that we can relate to. He simply reflects to us what is within us -- the truth that nothing real can ever affect the Love of God in which we were created and forever remain.

Q #1324: I was playing chess on the computer and began to think that I was wasting my life doing this; I'm not being spiritual enough. The other side of the coin is thinking I'm good because I spent a lot of time with my kids. I am aware of the ego traps in this, but I think underneath it is the idea that I have to sacrifice things of the world to let go enough to undo the ego, especially in light of passages from the Course that seem to teach that if we don't fulfill our function, we have indeed wasted our life. That's intimidating. What would it mean to fulfill your function? Is watching myself getting mad at myself for playing on the computer part of fulfilling my function? Is it possible to fulfill your function a little, or for a little while, then slip? I always feel like I'm being graded!!!

A: The last statement is quite important: "I always feel like I'm being graded" -- spoken as a good healthy ego! That is what you want to look at, because that indicates your study of *A Course in Miracles* must be being guided by the ego. Guilt distorts. That is why there is so much emphasis in the Course on bringing the darkness to the light. Therein lies your function: bringing your guilt to the presence of love in your right mind, or looking at your guilt with the healing eyes of love. And you can do this whether you are playing chess on the computer or spending time with your kids. It's not the form -- it's the content. You can play chess with guilt or without guilt; you can play with your kids with guilt or without guilt. It is always a question of which teacher you choose beforehand in your mind.

This is the message of two important sections in the text: **"Setting the Goal" (T.17.VI)** and **"The Consistency of Means and End" (T.20.VII)**. We first decide on the goal or end we want to attain: for example, peace, seeing our interests as shared with everyone else. Then the activity will be seen as the means to achieve this end. The activity itself (the form) won't matter. The content alone will provide the meaning for you. So, it is not *what* you do that is important, but the purpose you have given to it -- *with whom* you do it, the ego or Jesus. There is no hierarchy of illusions: some activities are not "good" for us and others "bad"; some are not holy and others unholy. The world is not the problem; therefore, we need sacrifice nothing. If we truly want the peace of God, then we will look at how we are using things in the world to interfere with that peace, and then ask for help to use them to undo the interference.

This really is the core of what Jesus discusses in **"The Special Function"** where he tells us that **"forgiveness is the only function meaningful in time" (T.25.VI.5:3)** ; that is a matter of choosing *against* the ego's purpose for our bodies and relationships (separation and specialness), and for the Holy Spirit's (forgiveness and peace). The Course is constantly training us to look within and focus on the purpose we are always giving to the interactions and activities in our lives. And, fortunately, there are only two possible choices, only one of which will undo the separation, bring us peace, and lead us home.

It is quite normal to be inconsistent in this process of shifting from outside to within, and from the ego's purpose to the Holy Spirit's. We are tremendously fearful of the implications of letting go of our ego, and so we bounce back and forth. But as we experience more and more the peace and calmness of mind that comes when we forgive, we will be motivated to choose it more frequently. Then the discomfort of being in our wrong minds will become more noticeable, and could be experienced as a kind of external pressure to do better. It is just that we are denying less, and the pain that was always there is coming into our awareness. Jesus never exerts pressure or imposes sanctions -- that would be the ego's Jesus. Our egos, eager to subvert our work with the Course, will tempt us to distort Jesus' gentle message of forgiveness into a threatening message of judgment. The more we recognize that intrusion, the more we

can learn to simply smile at its silliness and allow the non-judgmental, comforting presence of love in our minds to be the source of all we do.

Q #1325: I am wrestling with some metaphysical principles of *A Course in Miracles*, things I can't understand yet, or maybe don't want to accept. The Course says that everything we perceive is an illusion of our own making. It also has much to say about the role of the ego in our "special relationships." I lost my much loved only daughter to leukemia 11 years ago, and it is very difficult for me to believe she was just a figment of my imagination. I realize that we are all one, and that there is no individuality as we recognize our oneness with God and return fully to Him. As I write this I see that I am clinging to her individuality as much as my own, which will not get me where I want to go. Can you help me see this in a more enlightened way? Somehow, acknowledging that she is just an identity I made up is a painful thing for me, as I do miss her and still love her very much. Also, does she simply exist in my imagination, since she cannot be directly observed?

A: No, your daughter is not just a figment of your imagination. When we talk about made-up identities, we are not talking about one body imagining the existence of another body -- a mother imagining she has a daughter. This is a meant on a completely different level. You need to take it back to the level of the mind, a state of abstraction that this same mind has concealed and replaced with a self bound to specifics. That is why practically none of us can relate to our identity as mind (**W.pl.161.2**). The "our" in "everything we perceive is an illusion of our own making" is thus the mind that has identified with the ego thought system, not the physical/psychological human being we think we are. And woven into this deceit is the need to assign responsibility for the state of separation and its consequences to an external agent of some kind so that the mind's focus would never be on itself, where it might realize that its choice to follow the ego was not worth the price it has paid. The ego thus designs identities and relationships to serve its own life-preserving purpose.

This means that when the mind identifies with the ego thought system, it will split off into identities that form relationships that confirm the separation as real and that things happen that appear not to have been chosen. Accordingly, we experience needs that must be met on pain of physical and/or psychological devastation. It is essential for the ego's survival that this consciously chosen purpose in the mind remain hidden. Its dynamic of projection achieves this end by producing mindless individual beings not responsible for their own existence, and that are subject to forces beyond their control -- a world of victims and victimizers. This is the dream of separation the mind no longer realizes it is dreaming. And this is why a major focus of *A Course in Miracles* is to help us regain our identity as minds that are always choosing, for what also got buried was the other thought system in our mind -- the correction of the ego's, the memory of our true Identity as Christ.

Jesus therefore leads us in that direction by stressing the importance of getting at the *purpose* our relationships serve, something most of us would never think of, other than in terms of the world's dictates. We will experience tremendous resistance to this shift from form to content because, having identified with the ego, we will feel that our very foundation is being threatened, and that everything we have thought has been wrong. So we have to take small steps and not think we can instantly jump right back into our identity as spirit. There is far too much fear in most of us to make that sudden leap.

Jesus asks only that we remember, when we can, that there is another way of looking at everything in our lives, where we will wind up feeling peaceful, regardless of what is happening or has happened -- unlike the ego's way that always winds up preserving separation and conflict. Applied to your circumstances, this means, first, that it is not wrong to miss your daughter. On one level, it would be strange if you did not miss her -- you are the mother, she the daughter. Mothers miss their children. But what Jesus is teaching is that the way you are relating to your deceased daughter reflects a choice you have made in your mind to uphold either the ego's purpose for the relationship (separation, the body, and death are real), or the Holy Spirit's (shared identities, death has no effect on the mind). He asks only that you be open to that as

a possibility. The "more enlightened way" you are seeking would thus be to see how you might be using the death of your daughter to further the ego's goals, and that you can ask for help to change that purpose to one of forgiveness. That will not result in your loving your daughter any less, or in the disappearance of your identity as her mother. There will just be a different quality to those experiences and your sense of loss will gradually disappear.

For further discussion of the Course's approach to death and grieving, see Questions #15, #112, and #938. If you are interested in a comprehensive explanation of the metaphysics of separation, see the second and third chapters in Kenneth's book *All Are Called* -- Vol. 1 of *The Message of "A Course in Miracles."*

Q #1326: My younger daughter (age 25) hasn't spoken to me in about three years. She is angry with me as a result of a disagreement over her middle boy who lives with his father nearby. My daughter has a mood disorder for which she quit taking meds, and I am certain she also has bipolar disorder, as does her father. I understand how this affects people because I have lived with it and also researched it. She has two children I have never seen as they were born after she stopped speaking to me. I love her and the kids very much. I am trying to work with the Holy Spirit and the Course to deal with this problem, however, I am still human, and I still need help. I am trying to be accepting of her wishes and so forth, but do you have any ideas for me on this?

A: You say that while you are working with *A Course in Miracles*, you are still human and still need help. That is a very useful thing to recognize. While the Course is a wonderful guide to changing our mind -- providing the ultimate solution to all our problems -- it does not offer any guidance about what we should do behaviorally or how we should handle anything on the level of form. Therefore, until our mind is completely healed, there will undoubtedly be continual issues for which we seem to need more than the Course provides -- issues such as physical illness, stormy relationships, and so on.

Often, Course students mistakenly feel that they should not need to do all the "normal" things that ordinary people do during difficult times. However, this is a misinterpretation of Jesus' message. In truth, Jesus would advise us to do whatever we think would be most effective and comforting for us and not feel guilty about it. In the situation you have described, that might mean talking to a counselor, a trusted friend, etc. Without knowing a great deal more about your situation and all the people involved in it, we would not want to attempt to give you specific advice about what to do. Nevertheless, your desire for support and specific advice is entirely reasonable, and we urge you to find a trustworthy source that can fulfill this need.

As you do this, continue asking the Holy Spirit to help you see your daughter, this situation, and yourself through His forgiving eyes. Try not to fall into another common Course student trap of denying or feeling guilty about all the non-forgiving thoughts and feelings that may come up for you in the process. While forgiveness is always our ultimate goal, we cannot get there without dealing with everything that stands between forgiveness and our present state of mind. The situation you are in -- feeling rejected by your daughter and kept apart from your grandchildren -- would be emotionally charged and very painful for most people. It would be completely understandable if you felt angry, hurt, vengeful, defensive, and so forth.

Of course, you do not want to act upon these feelings. And yet, ironically, the way to ensure that you do not take these feelings out on your daughter, yourself, or other family members, is to allow yourself to have them. By bringing love and acceptance to your own troubled mind, you can gradually allow your mind to become a place of genuine sanity and peace, even as you have to face what feels like a familial battleground.

Q #1327: I am confused! Jesus tells us we are not real, the separation never occurred, there is no ego, no body, no world, not even the dream is real; yet we experience so much grief, pain, loss, etc. So whose consciousness are we? How are we responsible for everything we experience? Who are we anyway? I just don't get our essence, if we are not real, if we don't exist, if God doesn't even know we are here, *what are we* ? If this is Jesus' dream, how are we responsible for all we painfully experience in what seems to never end? Are we just stage puppets in a dream, as we cannot seem to wake from this nightmare! I feel unbelievably alone since I read that God doesn't know we exist.

A: Yes, this aspect of the Course's teachings can be very upsetting and disorienting -- many people have felt the same kind of distress you are feeling. But, fortunately, the Course itself rescues us from our confusion, and in fact gives us great hope and comfort as we deal with what certainly does seem like a nightmare. What will help ease your anxiety is to realize that *A Course in Miracles* is presented on two levels. Level One teaches us the absolute truth about reality -- all the statements that say in one way or another that the separation from God never truly happened, and therefore that nothing of the world or the body is real. But since that level of absolute truth is just about meaningless to us, the Course is presented on another level. Level Two meets us where we are (see **T.25.I.5,6,7**) -- as individuals living in a physical universe, experiencing grief, pain, loss, loneliness, etc. On this level, Jesus teaches us how to use all of these experiences to help us get back in touch with the truth that is still in our minds, but covered over. Thus, Level Two teaches us that we can use our bodies and the world either for a wrong-minded or right-minded purpose; we can choose to have the ego as our teacher or Jesus (or the Holy Spirit) as our teacher as we go through our daily lives. So Jesus relates to us in the context of what we experience as real, and then helps us to transform it so that it will be helpful to us, not harmful.

The goal of our work with the Course, thus, is to become more and more right-minded in our thinking, which means gradually letting go of guilt, fear, and all of our judgments and hatred. We then will be more kind to ourselves and others, and much more peaceful much more often. The key point of these Level Two teachings is that we have within our minds the power to choose which teacher we will follow (Jesus or the ego), and that we are always choosing one or the other, even though we are not aware of doing that. Through our study and practice of the Course's principles, though, we will gradually become aware that we are making these choices, and we will be able to see from our experiences which thought system we have chosen in our minds.

We thus are not puppets because we all have this power of choice, of which the Course reminds us over and over. The objective of Jesus' training is to put us back in touch with our real strength as minds. That is what will free us from the awful burden of feeling trapped in what seems like a never-ending nightmare of pain, conflict, and struggle. He assures us that we cannot fail in this, and that his loving presence is always beside us, as he says in Lesson 302: **"Our Love awaits us as we go to Him, and walks beside us showing us the way. He fails in nothing. He the End we seek, and He the Means by which we go to Him"** (W.pII.302.2).

Q #1328: I am a practicing student of *A Course in Miracles* and have been fortunate to read many of your books. Currently, I am reading *All Are Called* and came across a passage on page 110, as follows: "...we can see that all persons -- indeed, the entire animal, plant, and mineral kingdoms -- who are in this world, or better, believe that they are in this world, come with the ego thought system intact." I have no problem following the logic that we humans are ensnared within the ego thought system and can choose between the ego and the Holy Spirit, but I don't quite follow how a skunk, a stalk of asparagus, or a boulder could possibly possess an ego or arrive at a similar choice. Or am I making the mistake of believing that there is a hierarchy of illusions when, in fact, there is only one illusion, and that is the idea that separation from God is possible, and that any sentient form of life in this world must also be a part of the fragmentation that resulted from the fourth ego split?

A: Yes, you have answered your own question -- there is only one illusion, but it has taken many forms. We (the one Son of God) **“made one substitution. It has taken many forms, because it was the substitution of illusion for truth; of fragmentation for wholeness. It 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”** (T.18.I.4:1,2,3). It still is one! There is one thought of separation, appearing in billions of forms, so as to give truth to the lie of separation from God, and render the truth of oneness non-existent. **“Nothing so blinding as perception of form. For sight of form means understanding has been obscured”** (T.22.III.6:7,8). That was the ultimate objective of the ego's strategy -- to wipe from our awareness any trace of our origin as separated beings, and to make the truth unrecognizable to us, if not a preposterous absurdity: **“When you made what is not true visible, what *is* true became invisible to you”** (T.12.VIII.3:1).

Part of our difficulty in comprehending the Course's teachings about the separation (aside from the fact that it is illusory) is that we attempt to do so from *our* perspective. In other words, our reference point is our own experience as human beings in the world -- the world of form. From that reference point, it certainly does not make sense to think of a stalk of asparagus as having a mind and the ability to choose. But, again, that is precisely where the ego wants us to wind up. And that is what Jesus is getting at when he says in the workbook, **“One brother is all brothers. Every mind contains all minds, for every mind is one. Such is the truth. . . . Do these words bring perfect clarity with them to you? What can they seem to be but empty sounds The mind that taught itself to think specifically can no longer grasp abstraction in the sense that it is all-encompassing”** (W.pl.161.4:1,2,3,5,6,7).

It is certainly true that most people who begin working with *A Course in Miracles* have no reference point other than their own experience; but after considerable time with the Course, they begin to realize that Jesus is teaching us that everything we experience is a symbol of the choice we are always making in our minds, and therefore things are not as they appear to be. That is why he tells us that to learn this course we need to question every value we hold (T.24.in.2:1). As we grow in this realization and rise to the level of true perception beyond the intellect, we then will share Jesus' vision, expressed here in the language of form: **“How holy is the smallest grain of sand, when it is recognized as being part of the completed picture of God's Son! The forms the broken pieces seem to take mean nothing. For the whole is in each one. And every aspect of the Son of God is just the same as every other part”** (T.28.IV.9:4,5,6,7).

Q #1329: I have been coming across the concept of chakras fairly often recently, and as much as I realize that it is not a Course concept, I wonder how Jesus would see chakras. Would it be somewhat like the way reincarnation is seen -- reasonably benignly, but with warnings? It seems to me that if I tried to incorporate chakra thinking, I would be edging toward making the body real -- not Course-like at all! If I think of the chakra idea as a reminder to be open to the miracle, to see things differently, to accept the Atonement for myself, I think that's not chakra-like at all!

A: One of the primary messages of *A Course in Miracles* is that everything within this dream of physical existence is the same. It all came from the ego's thought of separation, and it can all now be used either for the ego's purpose of making the error real and remaining asleep, or for the Holy Spirit's purpose of remembering God's Love and gently awakening to our reality in Heaven.

As Course students, we should remember that every time we take a breath we are making the body real, and Jesus certainly would not ask us to stop breathing. In fact, he is not asking us to guard against making the body real nor to give up anything we want. He simply urges us to ask ourselves what purpose we are giving everything -- a loving purpose, or one that exacerbates our guilt.

For this reason, Jesus would not have an opinion about chakras. To him, studying the Course and working with chakras would be no different than, for example, studying the Course and believing it is

helpful to have an elbow. In Heaven, there is no need for elbows. But while we think we are here, we can either use elbows to viciously jab others or to facilitate our extension of a helping hand. Similarly, if you use your understanding of chakras to make yourself different from other people and, meanwhile, tell yourself that the key to peace is having open chakras rather than God's Love, then that would be a recipe for conflict with the Course's teachings. However, if you recognize that like everything else here, chakras are illusory, but nevertheless you find the concept helpful, then it would be silly not to work with them or to feel guilty for doing so.

Q #1330: Ken has indicated in both writing and on tapes that Jesus does not provide guidance regarding specifics in the world; yet he writes extensively about very specific guidance given to Helen in *Absence from Felicity*. There is a line on page 244 that I'm very drawn to and that I frequently say each day: "If You tell me what to do, I will to do it." It is a prayer that Jesus tells Helen is the door that leads out of the desert forever. Yet, I wonder if it's inappropriate for me to ask Jesus this. Is it possible that Jesus was providing specifics to Helen and Bill because of their involvement with the scribing of *A Course in Miracles*? Can you help reconcile the seeming inconsistency of Jesus providing highly specific guidance about worldly concerns to Helen (and Bill) and the statements that Ken has made about Jesus not providing this type of guidance?

A: We have addressed the topic in some Questions asked by other students -- see, for example, #437, #477, #538, and #626. It has been a source of confusion for many. In Chapter 17 of *Absence from Felicity*, Ken actually explains why Helen experienced Jesus as guiding her in specifics. There he shows that it is really not a question of Jesus doing anything different with Helen and Bill than with others, but rather what Helen did with her mind's fear of accepting the fullness of love symbolized by Jesus. This is instructive to all of us. We all have tremendous fear of melting into love's presence, our true Identity, and so we unconsciously determine the form in which we will accept that content of love. Thus, Helen allowed herself to experience his love only in the form of guidance with specifics, as many of us do. But, as Ken makes clear, Helen also knew that Jesus was the reflection of Heaven's love, and so there were times when she transcended all limitation and no longer identified with a limited self, separated from love and fearful of it. This is what the Questions cited above discuss in depth. But none of this means that you should not continue to say the prayer you like so much, or to ask Jesus to help you. Just try to remember that it is the love that Jesus *is* that you truly want. That way, you won't stay on the level of specifics, which is only the lower level of the ladder that leads us back to eternal, unlimited peace and love in which we were created.

Q #1331 : I've been studying the Course over a long period of time and so it seems strange to me that I'm having this thought. The thought is: I really don't want to be here any longer. It's a thought that I experience so deeply and so frequently each day. It's a thought that haunts me. Now, I do understand that the Course is about changing our mind and not about going to another place. I also understand that suicide is not the answer since the death of the body doesn't solve anything. Maybe the deep longing to be out of this world is really a reflection of wanting to be out of the misery that having an ego entails -- but this process takes so very long. Could you help me with this?

A: Recognizing that you do not want to be here is not only a normal and predictable consequence of studying *A Course in Miracles*, but, in fact, a crucial one. Again and again, the Course returns to the theme that this world is not our home. Indeed, it beautifully describes the experience of feeling haunted by the thought of not wanting to be here: **"...there is a Child in you Who seeks His Father's house, and knows that He is alien here.... It is this Child Who knows His Father. He desires to go home so deeply, so unceasingly, His voice cries unto you to let Him rest a while.... He whispers of His home unceasingly to you."** (W.p1.182.4:3; 5:2,3; 7:4).

Because most of us have spent our entire lives keeping this unceasing voice deeply buried, Jesus' efforts in the Course to bring it to our awareness can feel quite shocking. We may simultaneously be comforted that he knows exactly how we feel and frightened that we now have to acknowledge a truth that threatens the very foundation of who we think we are. Fortunately, there is another message in the Course that makes this situation bearable. Jesus teaches us that we are *not* here. He tells us, **"Nothing at all has happened but that you have put yourself to sleep, and dreamed a dream in which you were an alien to yourself" (T.28.II.4:1)** . He further teaches us that since this is a dream, we have control over the dream's content: **"...there is a choice of dreams while you are still asleep, depending on the purpose of your dreaming. A dream is like a memory in that it pictures what you wanted shown to you" (T.28.II.4:3, 5)** .

This, then, provides the key with which we can face the sense of not wanting to be here and ultimately find relief from the pain it causes us. The ego would have us interpret our desire not to be here as a longing to leave the physical world -- an inherently futile endeavor because there is no physical world from which to escape. The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, would reinterpret this desire as the perfectly sensible and achievable longing to awaken and leave *the state of mind* that has brought us nothing but pain. Therefore, by turning over the thought, "I don't want to be here any longer" to the Holy Spirit, we can have it transformed from a hopeless lament about our seemingly external situation into an inspirational wake-up call to change our internal situation. In the process, the world will seem to change from a noxious prison to a wondrous classroom.

When we are tempted to feel like prisoners here, threatened by seemingly cruel external forces and frustrated by a spiritual journey that can feel slow and rocky, we would do well to remember the following words: **"...there must be another way of looking at [the world] . I see everything upside down, and my thoughts are the opposite of truth. I see the world as a prison for God's Son. It must be, then, that the world is really a place where he can be set free. I would look upon the world as it is, and see it as a place where the Son of God finds his freedom" (W.p1.57.3).**

Q #1332: My question is in regard to sickness. I understand the idea that sickness, according to *A Course in Miracles* , is of the mind and is a perspective, etc. However, we obviously will all die of something unless we have reached a level of enlightenment in which we can just leave our bodies at will and break with the illusion. Does this mean that everyone who dies, no matter what level they have reached spiritually is still holding "unforgiveness"? I know of some very high beings who still got diseases, had strokes, and other health issues.

A: *A Course in Miracles* states that **"no one dies without his own consent" (W.pl.152.1)** ; but this decision can be wrong-minded or right-minded. Our discussion in Question #262 focuses on the important distinction between form and content in the Course's view of death. Helpful references are also provided there as well as in Questions #494 and #604. The key point is that the condition of the body does not automatically tell us which thought system the mind has chosen and whether or not the mind has reached enlightenment. Thus, we should not attempt to judge based upon appearances. A healed mind could take the form of a cancer-consumed dying body if there were a valuable teaching purpose in it, for example. That mind, though, would not be suffering -- a most difficult teaching for us to comprehend and accept, because of our lack of awareness of our mind and our body-oriented way of thinking. Jesus' body certainly seemed to be in terrible condition at the end, but we would not conclude that his mind must therefore have been in terrible condition as well. A seemingly pain-wracked body is not necessarily a regrettable tragedy, in other words. Again, this can only be understood from the perspective of the mind's right-minded position "above the battleground" of the ego's world of bodies.

Q #1333: I read your reply to Question #913 with great interest. I have also noticed the Course making people more assertive and aggressive, even unbalancing otherwise rather "normal" and friendly people by perhaps influencing them subconsciously. You/the Course seem to say that this is simply the ego fighting back, but I wonder whether *A Course in Miracles*, in itself, is very assertive in the way it presents its "truth," and therefore (deliberately?) causes these emotional storms, aggressive behavior, and hateful thoughts to come forth. Is the Course some sort of "provocative therapy" much like homoeopathy only in much more powerful degrees? It uses sentences like "I told you" and "do this," which sound very authoritative. As justification of its authoritative way of presenting its point of view, it says it comes directly from Jesus, the Holy Spirit, or even God. Is my interpretation correct?

A: Your interpretation is not quite right. To explain why, let us address your final point first. The Course does not claim to have come from God. It is written in Jesus' authoritative voice, but this is not the result of a calculated attempt to justify a point of view. Rather, it is a reflection of the fact that it was inspired by a source of love from outside this dream of time and space -- one which many of us within this dream, including the Course's scribe, experience as coming through the voice of Jesus.

The Course teaches that until now we have been listening to the voice of the ego, and it asks us to look honestly at the misery this has caused us. It informs us that we have access to another internal Teacher, the Holy Spirit, and that we would be much happier if we dropped the ego's hand and took the Holy Spirit's hand instead. It is unequivocal about the fact that this world is an illusion born from guilt and that therefore, we will never find lasting happiness or peace from anything within this world -- we will only find it by changing our mind. The difficulty is that, **"To learn this course requires willingness to question every value that you hold" (T.24.in.2:1).**

As long as we are listening to the ego, it is very difficult to hear that we are wrong about everything and should question all our values. Indeed, under the ego's guidance, it is virtually impossible not to hear that as an attack and react with emotional storms, aggressive behavior, and hateful thoughts. It is not the Course's goal that we experience these things, but Jesus realizes that it is almost inevitable that we will. He knows this because he recognizes that as long as we believe we are here, we merely reenact the original instant in which we stormed against God, insisting that we were right and God was wrong. Thus, when Course students seem to become overly assertive or aggressive as a result of what they are learning, it is not because they are fulfilling part of the Course's curriculum, but rather that they are reacting to the fear it has engendered.

Jesus is not out to provoke us, but neither does he try to protect us from feeling provoked by his message. He simply tells us that what is true is true, what is false is false, and asks us to watch our own internal process as we learn to distinguish between the two.

Q #1334: I have a question about the idea of a "self-concept" and its relationship to guilt. My understanding of the self-concept is this: I look in the mirror and assess the things I like and do not like about my body; whom I think about; who I am in the world financially; how I believe that I look compared to others; where I am in the world compared to others; etc. I see that there are things that I "like" and "dislike" about "myself." Is it correct to say that according to *A Course in Miracles*, the things that I don't like about myself are really projections of unhealed guilt that I am projecting onto my made up and false "self" in the world and onto my body; is that correct?

A: Without more specific information about what you dislike about yourself it is difficult to determine whether or not it is a projection of unhealed guilt. No one likes to hear this, but even things you like about yourself can come from unhealed guilt. It all depends on the goal you have chosen to pursue in your mind. If you (the decision-making part of your mind) are intent on validating your existence as an individual, then being kind and generous (seemingly positive traits) can be a way of having people notice you as someone very special. This would be the ego's way of dealing with unhealed guilt -- cover it over

with a self-concept that makes it appear that you are really a good, innocent person. But you can also use those same traits in the service of forgiveness, which would have the effect of lessening your investment in being special and different from others, a very effective way of dealing with guilt. Similarly, any form of success in the world can be an expression of your ego, but it can also be given the purpose of helping you learn that your interests are not separate from anyone else's. This is why Jesus tells us that **"Love makes no comparisons"** (W.pl.195.4:2) and that **"the ego literally lives by comparisons (T.4.II.7:1)** . Comparing yourself with others ultimately makes differences real, which is essential for the ego's survival.

What is helpful to remember is that on one level (Level One), *all* self-concepts, whether judged as positive or negative, are of the ego, because they are substitutes for our true Self as Christ, which we have denied. This is a major theme in **"Self-Concept versus Self"** (T.31.V). But on another level (Level Two), our self-concepts can be a means of helping us get in touch with the content in our minds and our power to choose to identify either with the ego or the Holy Spirit. This points out the importance of learning to focus on *purpose* . Thus, Jesus stresses: **"This is the question that you must learn to ask in connection with everything. What is the purpose?"** (T.4.V.6:8,9). If you shift to this focus, then your work with self-concepts can be more helpful in healing your mind of the guilt that the ego has convinced us is real, but which Jesus is helping us learn is made up and never justified.

Q #1335: Please comment on our relationship with Jesus, and the importance of this in *A Course in Miracles* . My struggle is that I have difficulty connecting with Jesus, and I would like to drop this resistance. I have felt "spiritually void" for most of my life, after negatively experiencing my Christian (Catholic) upbringing. I understand that forgiveness is the answer, and I feel I have forgiven; however, I don't *feel* within my relationship with Jesus. It was not something that was deeply cultivated in my childhood, and I have no real basis for the feeling of a "return."

A: Yes, forgiveness is the answer, as it is in *any* relationship. Try to bring to the surface the negative images you have of Jesus, any anger or resentment. He reminds us that **"some bitter idols have been made of him who would be only brother to the world"** (C.5.5:7) , and therefore we all need to become aware of what we are projecting onto Jesus, as these images and grievances prevent us from experiencing the positive elements in the relationship that are always present. Practically all formal religions of the world teach in some way that we are not worthy of God's Love, and that we must sacrifice to purify ourselves of our sinfulness. The centerpiece of Christianity in particular has always been that Jesus, wholly pure and innocent, had to die because of our sins, and that his sacrificial death was part of God's plan. And all of that has been presented as a supreme act of love. How could we *not* be mired in guilt and shame and highly conflicted in our relationship with Jesus?

Jesus comes to us through *A Course in Miracles* to tell us that sacrifice can never be part of love, and that it is only *we* (identified with the ego in our minds) who have convinced ourselves that we are sinful and guilty. The theologies that teach of sin and sacrifice are simply expressing the core principles of the ego thought system. Jesus is helping us to see the perversion of truth in that system, and he is asking us to allow him to help us undo our belief in it. This is what he means in saying of himself, **"Forgive him your illusions, and behold how dear a brother he would be to you"** (C.5.5:8). This is the basis for any relationship with Jesus, also well expressed in this passage: **"We are ready to look more closely at the ego's thought system because together we have the lamp that will dispel it, and since you realize you do not want it, you must be ready. . . . We will undo this error quietly together, and then look beyond it to the truth"** (T.11.V.1:3,6). This is a process of gradually developing trust in the non-judgmental presence in your mind that wants only to help you look within at all the ways in which you are keeping love away. He assures us, **"You have very little trust in me as yet, but it will increase as you turn more and more often to me instead of to your ego for guidance. . . . My trust in you is greater than yours in me at the moment, but it will not always be that way"** (T.4.VI.3:1; 6:1). The love is always there. In looking without judgment at all of our unkind, unloving, judgmental thoughts, we are turning to Jesus for guidance and letting go of the interferences to our awareness of that ever-present love.

Q #1336: I recently had a panic attack, and I recited verses from *A Course in Miracles* that usually bring me peace, but it was different this time, and my feelings of being scared only increased. I am in the middle of the workbook, so I had to be doing something right -- at least that is what I am thinking now. But what did I miss?

A: You did not necessarily miss anything. It is not unusual to experience bouts of intense fear while doing the lessons. Our egos get very threatened when we take what the Course says seriously, and things can appear to get worse, as many students have observed. See, for example, Question #155, which deals with panic attacks, and Questions #384 and #533, which deal with fear. It is important to be gentle with yourself and not force yourself to keep going with the lessons if you think you want to take a break from them for a while. The ego is ultimately nothing, and all fear comes from identifying with the ego; but it usually takes a long time and a great deal of practice to reach that level of experience. We just need to go slowly and not feel pressured in any way, knowing that Jesus' love is with us every instant.

There are some therapies in the world that have helped people deal with panic attacks; and as we mention in Question #155, it would not hinder your work with the Course to avail yourself of that kind of help, if you feel you would like to.

Q #1337: What is the meaning of this three dimensional universe from the perspective of *A Course in Miracles* ? Why are we located here on this planet? We have outer space to explore, but what is the meaning of space exploration if we do not know why we are here?

A : To answer your questions in the order you've asked them: The universe of space has no meaning from the perspective of the Course because it's not real -- it's only a belief (**e.g., T.1.VI.3:4,5,6; T.26.VIII.1:3,4,5; W.pl.184.2:1,2,3**) . Therefore, we're not actually here on this planet, even though our experience, which lies -- quite deliberately -- seems to tell us that we are (T.31.VII.9). It follows then that there is also no outer space to explore, such exploration also being meaningless. However, the Course does not simply leave us hanging, wondering why what is not real seems so real to us, but tells us, not why we are here, but why we *believe* we are here.

This universe of time and space that we seem to experience serves a purpose --actually two very different purposes, depending on which teacher we listen to. If the ego is our teacher, the universe of space proves to us that the separation is real and that we are apart from God (**T.26.VII.8:7,8,9,10**) . In this world, which we have dreamed up with our egos, we are isolated and alone, separated from everyone else, and potentially a victim of everyone and everything outside of ourselves. The fear and the pain we experience truly seem to have their cause in events and circumstances, spread across time and space, over which we have little or no control. And this perception of the world as cause conveniently precludes our ever considering another source for our pain and fear -- the inner decision, within our mind, to see ourselves as separate from Love. The world covers over that decision and its effects, but only because we want it to. In itself the world is literally nothing.

You might ask yourself -- how vast is the universe of space in your dreams at night, and what meaning does that seemingly three-dimensional world hold? Why are you wherever you seem to find yourself in your dreams? And what could be gained by exploring the farthest reaches of that dream space while you believe you are one of the figures in the dream? From the Course's perspective, answers to such questions would apply equally to the world of our waking dream, which we have convinced ourselves is our real life (**T.18.II.5**) .

In contrast, with the Holy Spirit as our Teacher, this world becomes the classroom in which we learn our lessons of forgiveness. Little by little, we begin to understand that the world of time and space is nothing

more than the projection of our own inner conflict, projected so that we do not see the conflict's real source within the mind. But with the Holy Spirit as our Interpreter of the world, we can begin to recognize that the world provides us a useful road map of symbols back to the unconscious conflict and guilt within our mind. And so gradually we begin to learn that there really is no need to forgive the figures in our dream – i.e., our relationships in the world. Our only need is to learn to forgive ourselves for once again turning away from love and choosing the ego and its constant companions of guilt and conflict. The resistance may be huge to making this shift, but as we at least can become clearer about Jesus' perspective on time and space, which comes from outside time and space, we can begin to take our world a little less seriously.

Q #1338: In Question #821 you stated that "if the ego begins to sense that our present relationship is no longer serving its purpose, it will counsel us to pull up the stakes...." My wife and I have been in a lot of counseling for her overspending and we are currently divorcing. I feel I have done all I can to save our marriage, but came to the point where I can no longer live with the dishonesty. I do not feel anger or condemnation or judgment towards her. I feel that the Holy Spirit, not the ego, has guided me to let this relationship go. Would you comment on divorce?

A: As with every other aspect of relationships, divorce can be wrong-minded or right-minded. It is thus is neither intrinsically good or bad, wrong or right, depending entirely on the content in the mind, as we discuss in Question #866 (#639 may also be helpful). All of the effort you have put into resolving the issues along with the fact that you experience no anger, condemnation, or judgment toward your wife would seem to indicate that your decision to end the relationship in form is probably right-minded. Our statement in Question #821 addressed entirely different circumstances, where the lessening of external conflict triggered intense fear of dealing with the internal conflict that the external conflict had been covering. References from *A Course in Miracles* cited there all pertained to that aspect of the spiritual process. Therefore, if your experience is that you are being guided by the Holy Spirit to let the relationship go, it would seem advisable to follow that. Whatever lessons remain to be learned will surface in other relationships in your life.

Relationships, as we always say, are in the mind, and are ultimately between oneself and either the ego or the Holy Spirit -- always a matter of content, not form. Accordingly, before, during, and after a divorce, we can still practice perceiving our interests as the same as the other person's, as that is independent of the form of the relationship. The form of our relationships set up the classroom in which we choose to be led by the ego -- following a curriculum of separate and competing interests -- or Jesus or the Holy Spirit - following a curriculum of shared and unified interests, leading us finally to a vision of our shared Identity.

Q #1339: I've been thinking about attacking people who are close to me, family, friends, etc. You know the expression, "Familiarity breeds contempt"? What does the course say about us attacking those we depend on?

A: *A Course in Miracles* is consistent in teaching that attack is always of the ego, regardless of circumstances and the person or persons to whom it is directed. The need to attack others comes from our usually unconscious perception of ourselves as guilty sinners deserving of attack ourselves, because we are unforgivable. We therefore project this self-accusation onto others and feel justified in attacking them: **"If you did not believe that you deserved attack, it never would occur to you to give attack to anyone at all. Why should you? What would be the gain to you? What could the outcome be that you would want? And how could murder bring you benefit?" (T.31.III.2:7,8,9,10,11).** This section in the text, "The Self-Accused," summarizes this central dynamic in the ego's strategy to keep our focus from the mind, where our mistaken beliefs about ourselves can be healed, and focused instead on other people's bodies and deeds that clearly seem to be the reasons for our problems and unhappiness.

The hostility we feel toward those on whom we depend is a specific aspect of this dynamic. This type of hostility can be associated with a substance and even medical technology (there have been cases of people who developed hostility toward their dialysis machines). What is triggered in us in dependency relationships is a very deep sense of vulnerability and threat. In other words, being dependent on others exposes the precarious nature of our existence -- that we are not self-sufficient. We therefore would want to attack those who expose our weaknesses and limitations. The conflict can become rather intense because however much we wish to destroy these people, we know we can't go through with it, because we still need them. We therefore will come up with other ways of acting out our hostility, through passive aggression, for example.

Another reason for the hostility, from the Course's point of view, is that we perceive these others as having something we lack, and we would secretly accuse them of having stolen it from us first, the fourth law of chaos in the ego's insane thought system (T.23.II.9,10,11). This ego dynamic would lead us to believe our anger and attack are justified, as a form of self-defense; we would feel completely innocent in attacking to get back what rightfully belongs to us.

We all have to deal with dependency issues, as that is the way the body was made, both physically and psychologically. We all have basic physical and psychological needs which must be met if we are to survive. The ego's secret purpose in this, of course, is to keep us rooted in the world and the body, so that we will never return to the mind where we would have an excellent chance of uncovering the falsity of these beliefs about who we are and what our true and only need is, which is simply to undo our false belief that we separated from our Creator in an act of extreme selfishness. Thus, the ego's undoing begins with our willingness to look with Jesus at the insanity of the thought system that harbors these beliefs and attitudes, and then ask for help to accept his thought system instead. Jesus himself tells us that our dependency on him as our teacher is only temporary, as his aim is to help us get to the place spiritually where we regain our awareness that we are all the one Son of God: **"There is nothing about me that you cannot attain. I have nothing that does not come from God. The difference between us now is that I have nothing else. This leaves me in a state which is only potential in you"** (T.1.II.3:10,11,12,13).

Q #1340: I would appreciate your help in understanding the section, "The Illusions of Needs," in Chapter 1 of the text (T.1.VI) of *A Course in Miracles*. Are the "levels" or "order of needs" a reference to Maslow's hierarchy of needs? What does it mean to correct errors from "the bottom up" (T.1.VI.3)? My sense is that one should not deny one's apparent needs while we still perceive ourselves as bodies, in the world. Am I on the right track in thinking that if I do rush "out there" to get my perceived needs met, the worst that could happen is that I'll end up in another corner of my "forgiveness classroom."

A: First, yes, "levels" or "order of needs" refers indirectly to the notion of hierarchy of needs, a much-discussed concept in psychology circles in the 1960s.

In this important section, **"The Illusions of Needs"** (T.1.VI), Jesus is helping us begin the process of realizing that what needs correction in our lives is not what we *perceive* to be lacking -- a relationship, money, health, etc. -- but our misbelief, which he defines as our sense of separation from God: **"A sense of separation from God is the only lack you really need correct. This sense of separation would never have arisen if you had not distorted your perception of truth, and had thus perceived yourself as lacking"** (T.1.VI.2:1,2). This is where the miracle or forgiveness comes in, as it is the miracle or forgiveness that undoes our distorted perceptions of ourselves.

As you observe, we should not deny our bodily needs while we still perceive ourselves to be bodies living in space and time. To deny our needs would not advance us spiritually at all, and as is often the case, it would tend to make things worse. To indulge ourselves in having our bodily needs met is certainly not sinful or wrong, and we should not judge ourselves for having gone in that direction. It simply delays the

healing process that leads us to a state of peace. When we become aware of what we have done, we are, as you say, simply in another corner of our forgiveness classroom. Thus, since our experience is external -- i.e., bodily -- that is where the correction needs to be applied. We believe forgiveness needs to be expressed from one body to another, **"from the bottom up."** Only later in our learning do we understand that the correction and the error occur only on the level of the mind. The world of time and space, of bodies, life, and death, are simply shadowy projections of the ego's thought system. Asking help of Jesus brings us awareness of the mind's causative function. Then we are able to undo the thought (or belief) that is the problem, replacing separation with Atonement, attack with forgiveness, the ego with God.

Q #1341: Is there a point at which the intellectual comprehension of the Course only has the benefit of aiding in communicating ideas? I recently heard someone make a loose comparison between the Course and Buddhist mind-training, in that both have the main goal of altering the student's perceptions through their repeated practices. So, it would seem the foundation of the Course (or text) is only to help the student understand why such practicing is necessary. In other words, trying to understand the Course intellectually through study of the text and other means only serves to help refresh one's sense of context once they have committed themselves to its mind-training, and doesn't actually further enlightenment in itself. Is that correct?

A: Neither the text nor the workbook stands alone; together they comprise the spiritual path of *A Course in Miracles*, as the introduction to the workbook explains: **"A theoretical foundation such as the text provides is necessary as a framework to make the exercises in this workbook meaningful. Yet it is doing the exercises that will make the goal of the course possible. An untrained mind can accomplish nothing. It is the purpose of this workbook to train your mind to think along the lines the text sets forth" (W.in.1).** Thus, an understanding of the Course's metaphysics and general principles would ground the lessons so that their full meaning could be better integrated in their practice. Moreover, doing the exercises without ever studying the text, although not wrong and not without some benefit, can actually be misleading in terms of knowing what the Course is really about.

We would agree that the study of the text in itself does not lead to enlightenment, if the focus is solely on the text as a conceptual thought system. On the other hand, however, the text of *A Course in Miracles* is not the typical text book devoted exclusively to the systematic presentation of theory. Written more along the lines of a symphony with themes and variations, the text invites and encourages its readers, in the midst of expounding its theories and ideas, to process the material in a very personal way. There are many profound, deeply meaningful, and moving passages in the text that can engage the mind open to spiritual transformation. Of course, not all readers would respond positively to its teachings, as they are not compatible with traditional biblical teachings and practices. Yet, for those who relate to its message, there often are transformative experiences of the loving source of the message they are reading. Such instants usually initiate a life-long process that advances through the application and generalization of the principles, which is the aim of the workbook exercises.

Q #1342: I've been studying *A Course in Miracles* for a number of years, but recently I have started to feel sad or anxious because the activities that once made me feel excited about life and engaged in living now seem flat or empty. I see friends and coworkers going about their lives improving themselves, going back to school for another graduate degree or planning trips to interesting places, and I can't find that enthusiasm in myself for much of anything. Today I noticed that I felt "left out" of things, like I was watching life from the sidelines. At times I have tried joining in, but I can't quite get into it like I used to. Much of the time I feel quiet inside and happy for others. Yet, at other times I find myself searching for something to throw myself into. There is a kind of desperate quality to the search. Could what I'm

experiencing be an example of the "period of undoing" referred to in the manual for teachers? Is it expected to go back and forth between peacefulness and agitation?

A: What you describe is very common with students who have been studying and practicing the Course for a while. You will notice some parallels in Questions #599, #971, and #1115; and you may find our discussions there supportive as you work through this phase of your spiritual journey. More than likely you are experiencing the effects of your willingness to undo your ego. When you are driven to find something in the world to throw yourself into, you probably are responding to a sense of lack and emptiness coming from your decision to let go of your ego. Shifting away from what you have identified with and valued all your life (**W.pl.133**) understandably can result in fear and panic, along with peace and relief because you are no longer fighting against the truth of who you are. So it is quite normal to feel desperate at times and then attempt to quell the storm by dropping another anchor in the familiar world. Moreover, as you shift your attention from the outer world to the inner, you would naturally feel different about the activities that formerly gave you pleasure, satisfaction, happy anticipation, etc. You are no longer firmly grounded in that world -- a good thing! -- but you are not yet firmly grounded in the inner world, and as a result, you would tend to feel suspended between the two.

As you settle into your new role of being a happy learner (**T.14.II**), however, you will find that there is a way to engage in activities without the highs and lows that characterized your participation before. Once you give your day the single purpose of being a classroom in which to learn the lessons that would help you awaken from the dream, you will find yourself simply doing the things you need to do, but with less intensity and more peace. You can still enjoy television and movies, traveling, sports, or anything else that has been part of your life, but there would be a different feel to those experiences now. You have to do something; you have to eat something; you have to take care of your body; you have to interact with people, and so on; but you would go about everything differently now, in the sense that you would not take any of it as seriously as you used to. You would try to see all of your interactions as the means of learning that we all share the same interests. This would actually make your interactions more meaningful -- even exciting, from the point of view of knowing this is helping you on your path back to God. The form of your activities would thus come to express the content in your mind. Your friends might not notice any difference, other than that you are more peaceful and light-hearted (**W.pl.155.1**), but you will be experiencing everything in your life from a new perspective, having chosen a new teacher who will help you see and judge everything through his eyes.

Finally, as you continue this process of forgiveness, the bouncing back and forth between your wrong and right mind will become less and less of a disturbance as you recognize the connection between undoing your ego and remembering to laugh at the "tiny, mad idea" (**T.27.VIII.6:2**). Your fear and resistance will become familiar to you and not be more than minor detours from which you will calmly find your way back to your chosen path and teacher.

Q #1343: Let go my ego! That's how I feel sometimes. I have been studying *A Course in Miracles* for about two years, and it seems the ego is very clever at using the Course in its own favor to set me up to remain guilty. Recently I have done several things that leave me with a lot of guilt that could hurt me and my family if I continue to hold this guilt and buy into the illusion. I think I may be depending on alcohol and sex outside of a committed relationship (which is causing me much pain). I tell myself I'm not going to go out with these friends or drink anymore, but I have asked Jesus to look at this with me and I do have peace when I truly allow that. When I'm not peaceful, I live in horror of getting an STD or ruining the relationship I have with my children's father whom I live with. When I drink I lose my judgment (how ironic is that?). It is such an escape for me. Is this a normal process in learning the course?

A: The ego's goal is to maintain the reality of guilt in our minds, which would then maintain our belief in the reality of our existence as separate individuals apart from God. Therefore, when we identify with the ego (our wrong minds), we would be attracted to guilt and then do the very things that would cause us to

feel guilty (**T.19.IV.A.i**). This guilt must always be projected in the form of attacking our own bodies (illnesses, addictions, etc.) or other people's (outright physical assault, judgment, condemnation, etc.). Understanding this dynamic is one thing; but to undo our investment in our ego identification is a process that usually takes many, many years of hard work, as our fear of letting go of the ego is much more intense than we at first realize.

Sometimes this process can be facilitated by turning to professional therapeutic sources in the world when destructive behavior continues with no change, despite clear awareness of its harmful consequences. Moreover, turning to a professional for help fits in nicely with the gentleness of the Course's approach to the healing of our minds and is even encouraged (see, for example, **T.2.IV.4,5**). Making progress on the behavioral level would reflect our mind's choice to let go of our investment in the ego thought system and accept instead the loving and peaceful correction in our right minds. Once the behavior is under control, then the principles of the Course can be practiced more effectively. In his ever gentle and patient guidance, Jesus never wants us to fight against ourselves (**T.30.I.1**) since he assures us that his love for us is unconditional and awaits only our acceptance of it as our fear subsides. He therefore asks us to be patient and gentle with ourselves, accepting help on the level where it is most immediately needed.

You might find it helpful to look at Question #84, which provides an overview and discussion of the issues involved in destructive behavior and the healing approach of *A Course in Miracles* .

Q #1344: From the perspective of *A Course in Miracles* , how does one deal with a chronic health situation where there is the experience of continual physical discomfort and disruption of one's day to day life. Say that person is able to see the illness as the result of his/her own wrong choices in mind and has earnest willingness to choose again, and seeks to forgive themselves for that wrong choice. How does one proceed if there is no available, known medical treatment for relief. What would be the kindest, gentlest way of forgiving oneself in this scenario, and how does one even begin to look past continual physical discomfort and/or pain to find peace when there is not even a "magic" solution to provide the illusion of momentary relief?

A: The situation you describe is extremely trying, and we certainly hope that some form of medical help will turn up for you soon. It is terribly difficult to be in a peaceful state when your body is wracked with pain all the time, day in and day out. Forgiving yourself in this context means being kind to yourself and not dwelling on the "wrong choice" that you see as responsible for your condition. It is a given that the choice to see oneself as justifiably guilty is the cause of all physical conditions, whether a sprained wrist or an inoperable brain tumor -- there is no hierarchy of illusions. But practically no one is directly in touch with that choice so as to evaluate and change it to a right-minded choice. It is also entirely possible that one has chosen a physical condition for right-minded reasons: for example, to demonstrate the body's irrelevance to the experience of God's Love and peace, or that one's identity transcends bodily limitations. Moreover, since we cannot see our own or anyone else's full Atonement path, we really cannot know why a specific condition exists -- whether it is the result of a wrong-minded or right-minded choice -- and so we best not attempt to judge it.

What the Course teaches us is to ask for help in learning that our suffering cannot affect the peace of God within us. Even if we are only able to say the words, that is enough to start the healing process (see **W.pII.284**) . Most people do not immediately experience any change in the symptoms, but we need to resist the temptation to conclude therefore that "it's not working!" The willingness *always* works, because the real sickness (separation) is only in our minds, and therefore healing takes place only at that level. The call for help underlying sickness is always being answered by the reflection of Heaven's love in our minds, and so we need only, in an act of kindness toward ourselves, acknowledge the truth of that, and then rest in the confidence that when we are ready, we will accept it into our conscious awareness. To judge ourselves because we seem not to be ready is to give support to

the ego's aim of keeping guilt real in our minds. When our mind is free of guilt, our body's condition would no longer be the focal point of our attention. But this is a process that requires daily practice, usually for an extended period of time: **"The resistance to recognizing this is enormous, because the existence of the world as you perceive it depends entirely on the body being the decision maker" (M.5.II.1:7)**. We cannot fail to get to this level, however, because it is the natural state of our minds, as Jesus reminds us: **"Love is your safety. Fear does not exist. Identify with love, and you are safe. Identify with love, and you are home. Identify with love, and find your Self" (W.pll.5:4,5,6,7,8).**

Supportive discussions of sickness and healing may be found in Questions #1045, and #1111.

Q #1345: My sister and I are doing the course together. We both are doing our forgiveness lessons as faithfully as possible, and are both working towards enlightenment. We have both experienced moments of pure joy, "holy instants," unforgettable and beyond words! Is it possible for us to eventually see each other as totally sinless? I think the text said that if we see but one brother sinless we will attain enlightenment?

A: Not only is it possible, but you cannot fail to see each other as totally sinless, because the sinlessness of God's Son is eternal and changeless. Nothing else is true. Only in an illusion could God's Son be perceived as fragmented, sinful, guilty, and fearful. Thus, our work as students of *A Course in Miracles* entails undoing our mistaken beliefs about who we truly are: the denial of our denial of the truth **(T.12.II.1:5)**. In this forgiveness process we first look at our need to see each other as sinful in order to establish our own innocence; then we withdraw that projection, which is followed by the next step of letting go of our perception of ourselves as sinful and guilt-ridden. At that stage, all that remains in our minds is the healed perception wherein we see everyone as sharing perfectly in the pure innocence of Christ. That is enlightenment, until the last step, when God lifts us back unto Himself **(W.pl.168.3)**.

Q #1346: Is a relationship worth pursuing when one partner seems contented, the other deeply unhappy for many years, with constant doubts about the suitability of the other person as a partner. I understand completely your response to a similar question: "Salvation is not found in form, because nothing external to the mind has any effect on it. This is the direct opposite to the ego's belief that salvation/happiness, and relief from the misery of separation can be found in the world. This explains the ego's endless and exhausting search for solutions, changes, and improvements in everything from a house to a relationship, in an attempt to fix the problem where it is not."

Even when a person accepts that their interpretation of the relationship is a consequence of their ego's perception and not the Holy Spirit's, and even if a person invites the Holy Spirit to help to heal their perception of this relationship, can't the relationship just be "wrong" for them? If not, then is it the case that any relationship will do as long as the Holy Spirit is involved in it? I can see that you would say "yes" to that last question, because we are One Mind and so it probably doesn't make a difference who we are in relationships with. But when it seems that two people just don't seem to really click, what then?

A: When your mind is healed, it would not matter with whom you live, where you live, or what you do, for you would no longer have a self with ego needs to be satisfied, and your identity would have no roots in the world at all. Without ego needs, you would simply be the extension of love that responds to people at their level, whatever that may be. "Clicking" with another person would have meaning only in terms of content, not form; and in that sense, a healed mind would click with everyone because everyone is seen as the same.

Until you reach that egoless state, however, it is important to respect your needs and not force yourself to stay in a relationship or do anything just because you think it is the spiritual thing to do. That really would

not advance you spiritually, and it would be hard to avoid resentment if you intentionally remain in circumstances that seem to demand sacrifice of you. It is not wrong to want to be with someone you perceive to be compatible on the level of form. Within the dream, it is perfectly normal to have preferences, which means you would prefer to be with some people rather than others. As long as the preference does not escalate into judgment and exclusion on the level of content, there would be nothing wrong in going with your preferences. Just be honest with yourself about what you are doing, and don't make it into a big deal or attribute spiritual motives to it.

Q #1347: Why would agnostics from a country like Japan, where there is very little interest in organized religion and certainly little fear of God in the tradition of the three Abrahamic religions, split off in the first place from their Source? If we are all hiding from a wrathful God by creating this world and this body, how about people who don't fear or care about any God?

A: It is difficult for our minds to ask questions that don't come from premises such as the world is real and is populated by different people with different beliefs and philosophies, each existing at a very specific time in a very specific space. Certainly, this is our experience, identified as we are with these individual selves that seem to have their own individual existences, relatively unrelated and unaffected by most other separate selves in the world.

From the Course's perspective, these premises could not be further from the truth. The world is merely the unitary projection of a fragmented, split mind that believes it can exist outside the Oneness of Reality (**T.18.I. 4,5,6**). There are many different forms the various aspects of this split mind assume as they seem to be projected out into a world of form, but there is one thing they all share in common – they all symbolize the belief that separation is real and that we are each alone in the world, not quite sure how we have ended up here, but each quite sure that we are here. And the world will at times be experienced as a potentially dangerous, menacing place, either because of impersonal forces of nature or because of more powerful personal forces – other people -- outside ourselves.

So no matter what our conscious religious or spiritual beliefs, or lack of, the fact that we all seem to find ourselves in a world of separation, identified with our own body, means that we all share the same ego thought system. And we all are therefore unconsciously using the world to hide from our own guilt over believing we are separate, projected on to some force outside ourselves. So it does not matter whether we consciously believe in any god or not, we all believe in the ego and its defenses. And we have accepted the seeming defense that the world and the body provide so that we don't seem to be responsible for all the sin and guilt and fear in the split mind, which everyone who believes he is in the world shares.

A Course in Miracles, as a set of symbols, is very culture-specific and so it may not resonate with those who seem to embrace a different set of cultural beliefs about the nature and existence of God and the world. The Course's specific mythology is merely derived from the rich mythology of Judaism and Christianity. But its content is universal, for it describes – in Judeo-Christian terminology or form – what every mind that believes it is a body in the world ultimately believes. And so ultimately, each seemingly separate fragmentary aspect of the split mind must come to the realization that it is not separate from Love and its guilt over separation is not real, although the symbols that lead to this realization will differ widely throughout the Sonship (**M.29.2:6**).

Q #1348: Chapter 1 of *A Course in Miracles* says: "This is a course in mind training. All learning involves attention and study at some level. Some of the later parts of the course rest too heavily on these earlier sections not to require their careful study. You will also need them for preparation. Without this, you may become much too fearful of what is to come to make constructive use of it.... Some of the later steps in

this course, however, involve a more direct approach to God Himself. It would be unwise to start on these steps without careful preparation, or awe will be confused with fear, and the experience will be more traumatic than beatific" (T.1.VII.4:1,2,3; 5:7,6,7,8).

The above quote implies that doing the Course could in certain ways turn out to be more traumatic than helpful. How seriously should we take the above "warning" from the Course's author to properly prepare before we start the later parts of the Course, and how would we know that we are indeed "properly prepared" in order not to fall into the trap of confusing "fear with awe"? For instance, if we study the first few chapters of the Course, when would we know that we should move on in the text and/or move perhaps on to the workbook? Aren't the first few chapters so abstract that it is indeed difficult to understand them before the rest of the Course? What am I missing here?

A: The two paragraphs you are referring to did not originally come at the end of Chapter 1. They were part of a longer message to Helen and Bill in which Jesus stressed the importance of studying the material he was giving them (see *Absence from Felicity* , pp. 251,52). In one sense, this would be true of any teacher-student relationship -- the teacher would urge the students to study what is being taught. Since the curriculum of *A Course in Miracles* involves mind training, it would be important to apply oneself diligently to the study of the material in order to be prepared for later stages in the mind training that build on the earlier ones.

Jesus essentially is talking about approaching God and experiencing His Love. We have many layers of defenses "protecting" us from the experience of God, lest we lose our cherished sense of independent existence. Therefore, the early phases of study and training establish a foundation for this process, and begin it in ways that we can tolerate without falling into a disabling panic. This prepares us for subsequent phases that bring us closer to the experience that we originally rejected and still reject in our choice to be separate and autonomous individuals. We need to become acquainted with the thought system we will be undoing and have some idea of the obstacles we have placed in our way, otherwise we will not be able to properly process what happens after the phase of undoing. That is why Jesus wants us to study the material carefully. By "carefully" he would mean that we realize that he is speaking directly to us as we experience ourselves now. He is not simply presenting a series ideas and concepts that we can approach in an impersonal way. He wants us to get used to thinking about ourselves as he describes us in his course.

Thus, it is more of an attitude toward your study, not so much comprehension of everything he is saying in these first few chapters. As you have observed, there are parts of these chapters (and all of the remaining chapters for that matter) that are difficult to understand, but he does not expect us to grasp every word and all of the implications of the ideas. That is why he comes back to the basic principles over and over and restates them in different ways throughout the three books. Thus, the aim is not intellectual mastery of the text, but rather, combined with a serious attempt to understand the thought system he is unfolding, that we recognize that we are embarking on a journey with him that will eventually penetrate deeply into areas of our lives and minds that we have sought to keep concealed. This is best done slowly and with a growing awareness that there is a loving, comforting presence within us inviting us to hold his hand every step of the way so that the journey will lead to a beatific experience.

Finally, it is helpful to remember that **"the curriculum is highly individualized"** (M.29.2:6). Therefore, with regard to when to begin the workbook lessons, trust what you feel and don't force anything. There is no right or wrong in such matters.

Q #1349: I have a question regarding the following quotes from the text that refer to God / the Holy Spirit and the Course confronting us with our separated world and ego.

"You are in an impossible situation only because you think it is possible to be in one. You would be in an impossible situation if God showed you your perfection, and proved to you that you were wrong. This would demonstrate that the perfect are inadequate to bring themselves to the awareness of their perfection, and thus side with the belief that those who have everything need help and are therefore helpless" (T.6.IV.10:1,2,3).

"What would be gained if God proved to you that you have thought insanely? . . . If He confronted the self you made with the truth He created for you, what could you be but afraid? You would doubt your right mind, which is the only place where you can find the sanity He gave you" (T.6.IV.11:5,9,10).

I understand that "God does not teach" and He does not prove to us that we have thought insanely. However, isn't that exactly what *A Course in Miracles* is trying to do, prove to us that we are indeed NOT living in a real world and are NOT separate from God? Isn't the Course, thereby, putting us into an impossible situation and contradicting itself grossly in this respect? What am I misperceiving? Will we not indeed start to "doubt the only place where God put His sanity," being "taught" that we are indeed NOT apart from the divine? Could this perhaps be the reason I have sometimes felt that the Course is "impossible to do" -- not from an emotional but from a logical point of view?

A: Being asked to undo what never happened is indeed a paradox, if not a pretty good koan. And yes, the Course often does send our logic-driven intellects into shock, while also revealing to us the strict logic of the thought system that has compelled our belief and commitment, deluding us into thinking insanity is sanity. On the one hand, if God Himself were to communicate our wrongness and insanity to us directly, we could not but conclude that our existence apart from Him is somehow real and that we should indeed be afraid of the consequences of what we have done.

On the other hand, though, our experience is that we are alive here as separate and apart from God, but that something is dreadfully wrong with that. What appears as *A Course in Miracles* is really an answer to this call for help that emanates from deep inside us. Yes, the Course is telling us that the world is not real and that we are not separate from God -- only in an illusion could this be so, but in truth, there can't even be an illusion of separation. We thus are confronted with our massive self-deception, but we are given the means of dealing with the underlying fear that inevitably rises to the surface when we connect with this message. We are taught that guilt and fear are not justified in the face of our now-exposed plot to hide what we have conceived of as our treachery and covered over with our "face of innocence." But it is not God Who exposes our deception, because God could not respond to what does not exist. A part of our own minds has chosen to question its own operating system, and the teachings of the Course symbolize this process going on in our own minds of questioning, asking for help, re-evaluating, and finally choosing to correct what is now seen as but a faulty choice, which never actually happened in reality.

The Course is written on a high intellectual level, as many have observed, and many others have bemoaned. Yet, there is a point in our work with the Course at which our intellects are seen to be part of the problem, as they serve primarily to sustain our self-perception as autonomous beings, capable of recognizing and solving problems to preserve our species and even the universe itself. Our intellects can take us only so far with the process of healing our minds because they function essentially in the realm of duality, and as many mystics have said, the intellect must be transcended in order to experience God directly. All this is a way of saying that there are no satisfactory intellectual answers to some of the questions that naturally arise as we delve into the Course's teachings. Our difficulties point back to what we have done to ourselves: **"When you made visible what is not true, what *is* true became invisible to you" (T.12.VIII.3:1). "To you the miracle cannot seem natural, because what you have done to hurt your mind has made it so unnatural that it does not remember what is natural to it. And when you are told what is natural, you cannot understand it" (T.12.II.3:1,2).**

Finally, there is that statement that many students have found frustrating and quite humbling, where Jesus gently pokes us in our intellects and says: **"You are still convinced that your understanding is a powerful contribution to the truth, and makes it what it is. Yet we have emphasized that you need understand nothing. Salvation is easy just *because* it asks nothing you cannot give right now"**

(T.18.IV.7:5,6,7). What this comes down to is balancing our intellectual efforts with the humble recognition that we cannot get ourselves out of the mess we got ourselves into without help from outside our familiar thought system. We thus use our intellects to get beyond our intellects. We learn to trust the inner Presence that symbolizes the restoration of our minds to the state of pure Oneness with our Source.

Q #1350: I have been studying *A Course in Miracles* for about 17 years and I am finding the more I work with it the harder it becomes; resistance to the Course is something that I have become very familiar with. There are times when I have actually put the book down and have said to myself, "No more, I want no part of this." Yet Something in my mind always reminds me to go back and read the book. Things settle down and I am all right for a while and then the ego seems to get me once again. It's as if I am at the point of no return. I cannot be as I was so many years ago no matter how I try. Any suggestions, or is this how it's supposed to be.

A: What you describe sounds very much like what most students go through, as you can tell from the number of questions submitted on this subject: see, for example, Questions #533, #730, #843, #1015, #1028, and #1182.

Seventeen years may seem like a long time, but that judgment would come from our very limited perspective and therefore should not be taken seriously. Moreover, how long your journey takes is not important because time is irrelevant to a process that takes place outside time and space. What is important is that you continue to be gentle and patient, and that you not force yourself to take steps you do not feel ready to take. Just do the best you can. Quite often, our fear of letting go of our ego identity is so intense that we need to take a break and set the Course aside for a while, and there is nothing wrong with that as long as there is no judgment involved. Fear is not a sin, and fear is usually at the root of all resistance to the practice of forgiveness and letting go of our identification with our special, bodily selves. That is the essence of many of the discussions you will find in the questions mentioned above.

Sometimes students find it helpful to have a few favorite passages at hand when they get bogged down -- as reminders that Jesus' trust in us is unconditional, yet he knows we will be resisting his message and that our trust in him is not yet unconditional, but we at least would like it to be. It is reassuring to remember when the going gets rough, **"You think you are destroyed, but you are saved" (W.pl.93.4:4); "Have faith in only this one thing, and it will be sufficient: God wills you be in Heaven, and nothing can keep you from it, or it from you. Your wildest misperceptions, your weird imaginings, your blackest nightmares all mean nothing. They will not prevail against the peace God wills for you" (T.13.XI.7:1,2,3).**

Q #1351: My question is about the Authority Problem. When I was little I had this particular thing I would do and my father told me to stop because it was not what big boys do. But my mother said that she thought it was cute and that they should just let me out- grow it. Well it's now a part of my personality and my relationships. Can I continue being this even if it is an authority problem, or does Jesus ask that we give up any self-assertion even if it causes us fear do so?

A: Jesus never asks us to sacrifice anything for the sake of spiritual advancement. Only the ego's God and Jesus demand sacrifice. What Jesus wants us to do is develop the habit of asking of our values and behavior, "What is it for? What purpose does this serve?" He wants us to become more and more aware that we are decision-making minds always making one of two choices: either to continue to be separate from God and others or to undo our belief in separation and learn that we all share the same interests and ultimately the same Identity. That is the only relevant meaning of what we do and think. Thus, if you were to evaluate the behavior you are referring to in this context of its purpose, you might attain a better

understanding of what is going on in. This would shift your attention from your behavior to your mind, and you would realize that your salvation does not rest on making changes on the behavioral level.

Self-assertion is an ego ideal, although it is not necessarily wrong to go through a stage of self-assertion as a correction for years of doing the opposite. When you choose Jesus or the Holy Spirit as your internal Teacher, rather than the ego, you will be centered in the love that responds to everything and everyone only with love and kindness. This content in your mind would then be expressed appropriately in the circumstances of your life, which may be in the form of assertiveness, but not the ego version that would reinforce differences and lead to an adversarial relationship. If you focus on being clear about the purpose you are choosing in your mind, your behavior would just flow from that, and then you would not be in conflict. There would be a consistency between your thoughts and behavior -- what Jesus calls "honesty," the second characteristic of God's teachers (**see M.4.II**). *A Course in Miracles*, actually, says nothing about what our behavior ought to be.

Finally, from the information you have given, it is difficult to determine whether your problem is simply an authority issue. We all would tend to have issues with authorities, given the fact that we believe we got our existence at God's expense and that He is after us to punish us and get back what we took from Him. Questions #304 and #379 discuss the different dimensions of this pervasive aspect of our ego identification.

Q #1352: Guilt is an enormous problem for me as a used-car dealer. I ask the Holy Spirit for help before deciding to sell a vehicle with problems, but it seems like I have made decisions before asking for help. It would be impossible to correct all problems with the car I'm selling without experiencing a great financial burden, so the solution is an auction, where there is a greater possibility of selling, or selling "as is" and recovering at least some of the loss. It seems impossible to have a holy encounter with a brother you're going to victimize. A change of professions would be my choice, but meanwhile, these situations always creep up. Could this be a situation of committing a sin and then atoning for it? I want my actions to be reflections of love rather than symbols of attack, but the opposite happens every time. Could you help with a formula for looking at this with God's help and not the ego?

A: *A Course in Miracles* would never call anything we do a sin, only a mistake, and the mistake would be in the choice we make in our minds to listen to the ego and make sin and guilt real, which leads to the projection of our guilt in the form of attack on ourselves or someone else. These dynamics involve deflecting responsibility for what we do and finding some way of justifying it: "It wasn't my fault. It's just business." The ego's God believes in sin and atonement for sin through suffering, sacrifice, and punishment. Jesus teaches us in the Course, however, that the true meaning of Atonement is the undoing of our belief in separation. God knows not of sin, and He does not forgive because He has never condemned (**W.pl.46.1:1**). There is a nice discussion of Atonement in Question #856 on this Service.

There is no real formula to give you, but it might help you just to look calmly at the thought system that underlies your view of your job and your relationship with buyers. This thought system of separation rests on the principles of *one or the other* and *kill or be killed*. Getting what we want comes at another's expense -- someone would always have to lose in this system. Jesus therefore asks us to look honestly at how we justify what we do and feel, but not to judge ourselves for it. We can then ask for help to look at the situation differently -- not through the ego's *one or the other* view, but through Jesus' eyes that see us all as the same. You are already caught in your wrong mind if you see a brother as someone you are about to victimize, someone who must lose so you can win. Again, this is a matter of the content in your mind, not your behavior, so that is the instant when you would acknowledge that you are in your wrong mind and therefore nothing that you do would be loving. The willingness to see the situation differently will help you shift to your right mind.

What this is saying is that you *can* be a right-minded used-car dealer! You would not lie, and you would not withhold information from the buyer. You would present the car in a positive way, meaning you would believe in the car you are selling. There is a relevant passage in the text that nicely fits your situation: **“A good teacher must believe in the ideas he teaches, but he must meet another condition; he must believe in the students to whom he offers the ideas” (T.4.I.1:4).** If you can orient yourself this way, you will feel good about yourself, the buyer, and the transaction, and then the conflict would disappear and you would be peaceful. You might even acquire a reputation as a trustworthy dealer and attract more business! Learning to think this way will affect other areas of your life as well, and after a while you will find it a very natural way to function.

Q #1353: I wonder about gratitude and its usefulness in practicing *A Course in Miracles*. Other Course friends frequently bring up the practice of gratitude as being very helpful to them and how they feel. I'm not really sure what I'm to be grateful for as a Course student. I do feel grateful when I experience relief from fear or pain, joy in relationship to another, the experience of peace. But, can this be a tool? Or is it an effect? I am bothered when I hear people say that the practice of gratitude has changed their whole perception of a situation.

A: Gratitude is integral to the practice of the Course. This is particularly evident from a study of the workbook lesson **“Love is the way I walk in gratitude” (W.pl.195).** There Jesus contrasts the world's view of gratitude, which reflects the ego's strategy to keep us separate, with the Course's view, which reflects **“the Love that is the Source of all creation” (W.pl.195.10:3).**

On our Web site, under Teaching Materials/Excerpts, we have posted the edited transcript of a workshop Ken presented called “Our Gratitude to God.” We refer you to that series for an in- depth discussion of this important dimension of the healing of our minds. As with most of the concepts addressed in the Course, gratitude is approached first from the ego's point of view and then from the corrected perspective in our right minds. Our resistance to being grateful is also considered.

Briefly stated, our gratitude is threefold: 1) to God for sharing everything of Himself with us in our creation; 2) to Jesus who is present to us as a brother helping us to remember God; 3) for all the circumstances and people in our lives, for they form the classroom in which we learn to awaken from our dream of fear.

If we are honest with ourselves we would recognize within us some rather strenuous resistance to these levels of gratitude. This would have to be the case considering the thought system from which our individualized existence emanates: The ego basically said to God, “Who needs You? I can make it on my own. Watch me!” This underlying attitude is present in the minds of everyone, and therefore to the extent that we value our independence and autonomy we would find very little justification for being grateful to God for creating us. This would also have to be true of our relationship with Jesus, as he symbolizes the Love of God for us. Being grateful would conflict with our unconscious need to prove that we can make something of our lives on our own. We might need some help from others now and then, but the ideal held out to us, especially in this country, is self-reliance and independence. “I did it my way,” as the popular song proclaims. What all of this means is that before we can experience true gratitude, we must look at the ingratitude we feel and what it represents, which is basically valuing separation. As we recognize the pain associated with that, we can turn to the loving, gentle teacher within, who will look at it with us. Choosing against all else but that love, **“our gratitude will pave the way to Him, and shorten our learning time by more than [we] could ever dream of” (W.pl.195.10:1).**

Q #1354: I am reading “A Vast Illusion: Time According to *A Course in Miracles*” and am trying to understand the idea of the observer. I think you are saying that the observer is still part of our split mind, but on another level from form. Is this correct?

A: Yes, the observer is the decision-making part of the split mind. Form, however, has to do only with the projections of the mind, the ego's way of trying to prevent us from looking at the content in the minds so that we will not remember that we have the power to change our minds about our having chosen the ego instead of the Holy Spirit. The observer, or decision maker, is thus the capacity of our mind to choose to identify either with the ego's thought system or the Holy Spirit's (see, for example, **T.14.III.4**) . When it chooses the Holy Spirit's thought system of forgiveness, it then looks at or observes all the ego thoughts in the mind without judgment. They then begin to fade, and finally they disappear, because their nothingness becomes apparent when they are seen in the light of truth (the right mind).

Your question is raised frequently by students, and so for further study, we refer you to previous discussions of this topic in the following Questions: #264, #663, #713, #715, and #814.

Q #1355: Where do our individual lessons, our "scripts," come from? Who, in what realm, is the part of me that has already written my script? Are our individual projections, the pictures we draw on our computer screen, the people and relationships we attract or repel, all based on what we, as separate egos, need to learn? Is that why people's life circumstances can be so different? And how do we find those that we need to play out our roles with? Is the plan we all follow a function of our higher selves or the Holy Spirit or is it more random? Somehow it seems the whole idea of forgiveness and the fact that it actually works has to do with this issue. I know the ultimate learning is to step out of the dream, no matter what it may be, and that we can choose once again, so free will obviously must come into play as well. But this is perhaps another question...Any clarification would be appreciated.

A: A proper treatment of your questions, all of which are intelligent and appropriate, would require a book-length answer. Fortunately we can refer you to one authored by Ken Wapnick: *A Vast Illusion: Time According to "A Course in Miracles"*, and also to other Questions on this Service that have addressed some of these issues: for example, #266, #489, #935, #1014, #1109, and #1141. We also have audio material available that you might find helpful: "From Time to Timelessness," "The Time Machine," "The Metaphysics of Time."

One caution to keep in mind as you probe this intriguing subject is that our intellects can take us only so far, because our reference point is the limited one of linear time and space, and the mind's process occurs outside time and space, beyond our intellects. Jesus reminds us of this in one of his discussions about our journey:

"There is no need to further clarify what no one in the world can understand. When revelation of your oneness comes, it will be known and fully understood. Now we have work to do, for those in time can speak of things beyond, and listen to words which explain what is to come is past already. Yet what meaning can the words convey to those who count the hours still, and rise and work and go to sleep by them?" (W.pl.169.10).

It is understandable that we would want to know how everything works, but because we have denied our identity as minds and taken on a limited bodily identity instead, it is vexedly difficult for us to understand what Jesus is telling us about our mind's process. In essence, we are trying to understand something a part of us does not want us to go anywhere near, because the very foundation of our existence as we know it would be profoundly shaken if we did. The Course is saying that by following the ego's strategy, we wound up in a state of mindlessness, and it is from there that we are attempting to understand mind. Jesus assures us, however, that our questions will tend to diminish as we begin to have experiences of forgiveness -- and that is where he would like our focus to be. We can practice forgiveness without fully grasping its metaphysical basis, but, as you say, some understanding of the principles on which forgiveness rests can help us with our practice. We thus use our intellects to transcend our intellects.

With this in mind, we can briefly address some of your specific questions here, but for comprehensive explanations and discussions, we again recommend that you turn to the sources mentioned above. The basic premise is that at the instant the separation from God occurred (which did not occur in reality), every conceivable expression of separation spun out, and just as instantaneously, the correction for the separation spun out as well. These are our scripts -- wrong- minded and right-minded -- which our minds are always choosing between, based on whether we want to remain separated or change our belief in separation. Jesus talks about this metaphorically in terms of a carpet (T.13.I.3) and as a process of substitution and fragmentation that resulted in our present state of ignorance and confusion (T.18.I.4,5). Linear time is the ego's way of perpetuating sin (the past), guilt (the present), and fear (the future). The mind training in the Course aims at helping us get back to our minds and this concealed content that underlies and motivates all of our activities in the world of time and space. Thus does Jesus tell us, **"Each day, and every minute in each day, and every instant that each minute holds, you are but reliving the single instant when the time of terror took the place of love"** (T.26.V.13:1). "Life" in a temporal-spatial universe of form is intended to keep this content hidden: **"Nothing so blinding as perception of form. For sight of form means understanding has been obscured"** (T.22.III.6:7,8).

A major difficulty in comprehending this is that our experience does not square with what the Course tells us is happening. We are taught for example that we are **"reviewing mentally what has gone by"** (W.pl.158.4:5), and that **"this world was over long ago"** (T.28.I.1:6). Yet that is not our experience, and so our tendency would be to try to bring these teachings into our experience instead of trying to raise ourselves to this other level that is outside time and space, and be content with what we can comprehend at this point in our journey (T.18.IV.7:5,6,7). Thus, we must hear over and over and in many different ways that the world **"is an outside picture of inward condition"** (T.21.in.1:5), and that all perception **"but witnesses to what you taught. It is the outward picture of a wish; an image that you wanted to be true"** (T.24.VII.8:9,10). Some philosophers have had intimations of this, but for the most part, it feels as if we have run into an intellectual brick wall when we read these lines. These basic principles, however, should ground any discussion of time, scripts, and free will.

Thus, our lives and relationships in this world reflect the choice made by our decision-making minds, not the Holy Spirit, either to keep the belief in separation going or to undo that belief. This mind is always expressing in form the content with which it has chosen to identify: the ego's or the Holy Spirit's, and therefore it is either projecting guilt or extending love. There are also collective decisions of minds that we as seeming individuals would recognize as couples, families, groups, etc. All of this flows from the desperate need of the ego to keep differences real and prominent in our experience, for only thus will the ego survive. What appear as choices we make in the world, thus, are but the effects of the thought system our minds (not our higher Self, which is not part of the illusion) have chosen to follow. That is indeed hard for us to understand and even harder to accept, but that is what the Course teaches. The exercises in the workbook lessons are geared toward facilitating this kind of thought reversal (see W.pl.11.1:1; 126.1:1; also in the manual, M.24.4:1). Jesus is always addressing this mind that has decided not to be a mind but to be instead an autonomous individual in bodily form. The circumstances of our lives constitute the curriculum which Jesus uses to redirect our focus back within so that we will re- identify with our nature, within the illusion, as decision-making minds.

When we have chosen once and for all against the ego, all that remains is the selfless love that had been concealed by the wrong mind. At that point there is no longer a decision maker and the mind then is the channel through which the love flows, taking whatever form is helpful to those minds that are still in the process of healing.

Q #1356: All my life I have been very troubled by the fact that I lack a burning passion for anything, or anyone. However, I do feel like I love my wife and family members (although not as much as I always thought I should) and I think that I am sensitive to the needs and feelings of other people in general, caring, good-natured and, although slightly introverted, not what I would consider antisocial or reclusive.

Moreover, I have never really felt the strong sense of attachment or belonging to any institution (religious, academic, or otherwise) that I see so many other people exhibit. The general lack of passion that pervades my entire life, as well as my inability to find a 'river of interest' (career-wise) in which I could get completely absorbed, has been a great source of angst for me. I have had multiple careers in this lifetime and I've searched incessantly over the past 15 years or so in an effort to find the meaning and purpose of my life.

Only in the past couple of months have I found *A Course in Miracles*. The words contained in *A Course in Miracles*, and other materials directly related to it, seem to resonate with me in spite of the fact that for most of my adult life I have always been very skeptical about the existence of God or the existence of anything other than what science could demonstrate as true.

Recently, feeling somewhat anxious but unable to identify a specific cause, I tried to slow down my thoughts and recall some of the passages from *A Course in Miracles* while asking the Holy Spirit's help to put things in perspective. After a minute or so, I had a somewhat startling thought. Perhaps my lack of attachment and lack of passion for things here are a result of me picking up where I left off in my efforts during a previous "lifetime" to see the illusory things in this world for what they really are. Is it possible that my inability to find real meaning in anything was "meant" to keep me searching until I found what I was supposed to find?

Being so new to *A Course in Miracles*, I am unsure whether this is a rationalization or justification of the way I "am" in this lifetime (ego?), or if this might be a genuine flash of insight (Holy Spirit?). I would greatly appreciate your thoughts on this.

A: We cannot evaluate anyone's inner experiences, but since you were startled by the thought, it would seem that it is somehow an answer to your seeking. It could well be that you are picking up where you left off in a previous lifetime in this sense: **"Trials are but lessons that you failed to learn presented once again, so where you made a faulty choice before you now can make a better one, and thus escape all pain that what you chose before has brought to you" (T.31.VIII.3:1)**. In processing this, it is crucial to remember the Course's teaching that our minds function outside time and space, and that linear time is a primary device the ego uses to keep us from connecting with our identity as decision-making minds so we would never uncover the true nature of our problems. This is the meaning behind Jesus saying, **"Each day, and every minute in each day, and every instant that each minute holds, you are but reliving the single instant when the time of terror took the place of love" (T.26.V.13:1)**. Jesus is describing the content in our minds which we, as minds, keep well out of awareness by being preoccupied with bodily existence in the world. The key part of this is that we are always denying and then projecting what is going on in our minds so that it appears as if our problems are rooted in the world, including our own bodies. This means we are living a lie by believing we are really here in the world, not of our own choosing, and that our existence here is significant and meaningful. Guilt must result, as long as we continue to repress this massive self-deception.

The anxiety you are experiencing could be related to the guilt that would be triggered over being exposed as living a lie. Ultimately, this is good, as the insight probably came from the sane part of you that is inviting you to make another choice and end your opposition to God and your true Self. The buried guilt over setting up an existence in opposition to God and your true Self could manifest itself in a lack of passion for anything or anyone, in the sense that deep within you would know that its real purpose is to give truth to a lie. Partial commitment would thus protect you from even further guilt, reflecting the gnawing suspicion that God will surely punish you (all of us) for setting up a personal existence at the expense of His Love and Oneness.

From another point of view, you would know that you don't really belong here and so you would be very reluctant to throw yourself into anything wholeheartedly. There is no real "fit," as Jesus poignantly describes in Lesson 182: **"This world you seem to live in is not home to you. And somewhere in your mind you know that this is true. . . . We speak today for everyone who walks this world, for he is not at home. He goes uncertainly about in endless search, seeking in darkness what he**

cannot find; not recognizing what it is he seeks. A thousand homes he makes, yet none contents his restless mind" (W.pl.182.1:1,2; 3:1,2,3).

The Course offers us a way out of this painful dilemma by teaching us that the Holy Spirit can use what we made to harm to heal our minds of their mistaken beliefs. Thus, **"The body was not made by love. Yet love does not condemn it and can use it lovingly, respecting what the Son of God has made and using it to save him from illusions"** (T.18.VI.4:7,8). The world and our lives now become classrooms in which, by choosing the right inner teacher, we learn the lessons that will lead us out of this nightmare of separation from God. Forgiveness is the means to this end. Giving your relationships and roles this purpose will supply the deeper meaning for which you yearn, and as you progress, you will feel much more connected to people, for you will be parting the veil that has hidden your oneness with everyone as God's beloved Son. Being on such a journey is truly joyous. **"Learn to be a happy learner"** (T.14.II.5:3).

Q #1357: In the text of *A Course in Miracles* Jesus tells us to ask him before we perform a miracle (T.1.III.4:3). I don't understand what I would do that would require me to ask Jesus if I should do it. Is there another process that I will be doing in the future that I don't understand yet?

A: The central theme of the early principles and the first chapter in the text that you refer to is that miracles shift our perception, and that is why they heal. The focus of our attention, however, is almost always on our bodies -- our planning and activities almost always center on what is good or not good for bodies. Therefore, right at the beginning of the text Jesus begins to train us to focus differently -- not on our bodies, but on the choices we are making in our minds, because those choices are the root of both our problems and their solution. Later he thus urges us, **"Seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world"** (T.21.in.1:7) .

The primary means of changing our focus from the external to the internal in the early stages of our work with the Course is to learn to ask Jesus' help before we act. This gradually gets us out of the habit of assuming we know what is best for ourselves and others -- that we know which miracles to perform, in other words. Thus, it not so much about doing something, but about gradually learning to focus on the purpose we have chosen in our minds for what we are doing. Jesus is teaching us that what we do is not important in terms of our spiritual journey; it is the choice of teacher we have made in our minds to guide us in what we do that is important. That choice, and that choice alone, is what will keep us asleep in the dream of separation from God or help us realize that we are the dreamers of that dream, which will eventually lead us to awaken from it entirely.

Q #1358: From what I gather, "ego ideals" are part of the level-confusion issue: I think that if I'm a "good" person and do "good" things, the Holy Spirit will look on me more favorably, or I'll be more "advanced"; on the flip side, if I "waste" my time watching basketball on TV or I treat someone poorly, the opposite terms apply. In this case, there's usually fuel for thinking myself guilty, and this is where the harder part comes in. It's obvious that on the level of behavior we have so many decisions to make, and some aren't morally good: If I decide to skip a meeting I know I should be at but feel is utterly unimportant, I feel the lack of integrity in myself, create the guilt that I project onto the Holy Spirit thinking I'm guilty and undeserving of peace, as though my skipping the meeting is part of the spiritual landscape. From what I'm understanding, skipping the meeting is not the issue, but instead it's that I have done all this unconsciously to create guilt by using the "ego ideal" as a defense against love? Another example: my parents are taking my family on vacation to a place I don't really care for; plus it'll be crowded and crazy. I'm planning on not going but spending some time alone, etc. My wife has no problem with this, and though I know my parents might frown some, I have made it into a big deal, as though there's a right

moral choice: I should go to fulfill my duty and be a good son. Same thing as the meeting, right? Or am I in denial?

A: You're on the right track, but you haven't gotten to the core of the problem yet. The "ego ideal" is not in itself the defense against love. It is the convenient external criterion the ego invokes and employs as a smokescreen to deceive us about why we feel guilty. But the only reason we ever feel guilty has nothing to do with anything external. It is that we have already made an internal decision to be selfish, to put our own self interests above everyone else's, to see ourselves as separate and in need of taking care of ourselves first and everyone else be damned -- that's the core of the separation thought. And it comes from our fear of love, which denies the truth of who we are. Any decision about external events or situations that proceeds then from this internal decision for selfishness will simply reinforce and seem also to account for those feelings. But we will be deluding ourselves about the real cause.

The Course's only reference to ego ideals describes their role in obscuring the source of the guilt in our mind: **"Yet consider how strange a solution the ego's arrangement is. You project guilt to get rid of it, but you are actually merely concealing it. You do experience the guilt, but you have no idea why. On the contrary, you associate it with a weird assortment of "ego ideals," which the ego claims you have failed. Yet you have no idea that you are failing the Son of God by seeing him as guilty. Believing you are no longer you, you do not realize that you are failing yourself"** (T.13.II.2, italics added).

The goal then is not to be able to make decisions that protect our self-interest without feeling guilty, but rather to turn to our Inner Guide whenever we feel that we have an important decision to make, so that we can be reminded of what is the truly important decision -- who we make it with. Now the ego would tell us, "Sure, turn to the Holy Spirit and you know He'll tell you that you need to do what you don't want to do" -- the ego always confuses sacrifice with love. And the ego's focus is always on behavior, or form, rather than on the mind, or content. And so morality - - doing the right thing -- is an ego concern. For the ego is preoccupied with rules for behavior. But the Holy Spirit is concerned only with rules for decision. In that sense we can say that the Course is an a moral thought system -- it is not concerned with what we do, but only with how we think.

So the guilt is not coming from the "ego ideals," which would dictate the "moral" or "right" choice, but rather from that fact that you are making decisions on your own. And so, in the examples you describe, you have already made up your mind what the problem is and what you want to do before you ask for help, hoping that you can decide on your own and get what you want without guilt. The guilt however is not coming from what you are deciding to do or not to do, but from the fact that you are deciding on your own, which means with the ego (T.30.I.14). In the section of the text titled **"Rules for Decision,"** Jesus says: **"This is your major problem now. You still make up your mind, and then decide to ask what you should do. And what you hear may not resolve the problem as you saw it first. This leads to fear, because it contradicts what you perceive and so you feel attacked. And therefore angry. There are rules by which this will not happen. But it does occur at first, while you are learning how to hear"** (T.30.I.3).

Jesus offers the solution in the preceding paragraph: **"The outlook starts with this:**

Today I will make no decisions by myself. This means that you are choosing not to be the judge of what to do. But it must also mean you will not judge the situations where you will be called upon to make response. For if you judge them, you have set the rules for how you should react to them. And then another answer cannot but produce confusion and uncertainty and fear" (T.30.I.2).

In other words, the important decision is not whether to participate in a certain meeting or go with family on a special vacation, but whether you wish to have the ego or the Holy Spirit as your interpreter and guide in whatever you end up doing. And since we never know what is in our own best interests, we will never know what the "right" thing to do is ahead of time, regardless of the ego's "moral" judgments. But

whatever we end up being guided to do, we will be at peace about it, because we have not decided on our own, from a belief in our own guilt and limitation and lack. And our experience then will be one of peace and joy, free of conflict and pain and guilt, regardless of what seems to be happening around us.

Q #1359(i): (The following two questions were submitted by the same person.)

I have only been studying *A Course in Miracles* for two months. At the end of the first month I felt elated -- people commented about their perceived change in my face. But just today I ended Lesson 31 in tears -- I did not know before I began the Course that I held such anger and fear. Is it normal to feel the strength of my ego growing the more I am learning about love and forgiveness? Are ego and evil synonymous? I want to escape from this illusory dream world today.

A: It would help you a great deal to remind yourself often that the ego is not an entity that has power over you; it is nothing more than an erroneous thought that you (and everyone else) are holding on to. You simply have forgotten that it is only a mistaken way of thinking that you adopted and then forgot you did it. Thus, the purpose of your work with the Course is to ask Jesus to help you look at -- not change -- these beliefs, so that you will see them for what they are. To look without judgment is to join with Jesus, and your fear then will be kept to a minimum. He never judges you when you choose your ego; he never does anything but love you and invite you to look with him at the silliness of your ego.

A major point in the Course's teachings is that the ego has only as much power as we give it; it has none of its own. That is why it can't hurt us and we needn't be afraid of it. There really is no "it" -- Jesus speaks of the ego as though it were an entity because that is a way of meeting us where we are (**T.4.VI.1**) . But as we continue to bring the darkness of our ego to the light of his love, we will gradually realize that our feelings of guilt and fear are not justified, and then their power to disturb our inner peace will fade and eventually disappear. It is like turning on a light in a darkened room -- the darkness just disappears. But at first, the fear and anger that were buried begin to rise to the surface and then it feels as if things are getting worse. Things were always bad -- for all of us! Our defenses protected us from the madness and chaos in our minds, that's all. That is why this is a process of undoing what we believe we have done. So it is important that you be very gentle with yourself and not try to force or rush the process. If you do, you will only be making it real, and that will not help.

There is no need to make the ego go away; there is only a need to look at it without judgment -- then its seeming power will begin to dissipate. Progress comes in realizing that you are undoing something that never even happened (that you separated from God), so it makes no sense to pressure yourself into letting go of the ego immediately. That is the wisdom of Jesus' gentle approach of simply looking with him, quietly and calmly, at the thought system of separation that you have made real in your mind, but that is not real at all (**T.11.V.1**) .

Finally, remember that the ego does not take kindly to one's decision to learn and practice *A Course in Miracles* -- it senses a threat and therefore fights back in an attempt to maintain its dominance. That is when our discomfort can increase dramatically. Jesus tells us that the ego's range of response varies from suspiciousness to viciousness (**T.9.VII.3,4**) , and that sometimes we will rush right back into darkness after having had a glimpse of the glorious light of forgiveness (**T.18.III.2; T.25.VI.2**) .

It might help you to look at some other discussions of the kind of difficulty you are experiencing - - many students go through this as they work with the Course in undoing the ego thought system. See, for example, Questions #384, #533, #812, #843, #913, #943, and #963.

Q #1359(ii): My husband died of Pick's dementia a year ago at the age of 59. I am choosing to become a recluse because my ego says it is safe in this house and studying the Course is the best thing I can do for myself right now. And yet I have just completed hospice volunteer training because I thought I have the skills and love and now forgiveness is needed to help end-of-life patients. Oh, the ego guilt for having to take meds to increase the serotonin that regulates my emotions when I should be able to regulate my own brain!

A: With regard to the loss of your husband, it is quite normal to feel isolated in your grief. But you probably have helped yourself move on by participating in the hospice training program. Be assured that there is no conflict in working in that field while you are studying this course. Your hospice activities (form) can be viewed as the classroom in which you can learn that you share the same interests as your "patients," and that you are not separate despite the appearance of separation (content). Our relationships with others are the means Jesus uses to help us learn our forgiveness lessons. Thus, if we see that as the purpose (content) of all that we do, we can become happy learners, regardless of what we do (form).

This same gentle approach can be applied to your need for medication. Jesus himself tells us that it is not wrong or "unspiritual" to use medication or other forms of magic -- in fact, it is the wise thing to do, rather than hurt ourselves by denying our bodily/psychological needs or judging ourselves because we have such needs (**T.2.IV.3,4,5**). When we judge ourselves, we are simply affirming the ego's evaluation of us as guilty sinners deserving of punishment. Jesus would only comfort us, seeing our fear and our longing to be told that we have not done the terrible thing we accuse ourselves of doing -- separating from God and destroying Love. He therefore is helping us learn that judgments are never justified. We remain as God created us. Nothing has ever changed that or ever will. We are simply dreaming that we have changed it. The good news is that we are **"at home in God, dreaming of exile"** (**T.10.I.2:2**).

Q #1360: I suffer from a dissociative disorder, meaning that in times of stress or fear, I experience myself as being split into parts, with only part of me being present as long as the episode lasts. My understanding is that I am dissociating within the dream of dissociation, and that it is my split-off ego self that is dissociating further within the dream. It seems that I experience fear or guilt and then "deal" with it by dissociating further, rather than by dealing with the feelings, which are too painful to face.

To date, my "solution" has been to be extremely open with my "unacceptable" thoughts and feelings, sharing them with the person I am with at the time, in the hope that I would thereby dispel the "unacceptable" label I put on them and remain fully present in the situation. But this often only makes me feel more guilty, particularly when the "unacceptable" thoughts are judgmental and hurtful of that person, as they often are.

Recently, it has occurred to me that the reason I dissociate around others is because I experience them as being different from myself and therefore threatening to me, and because this experience reminds me of the original difference -- the one I made real between myself and God -- and all the guilt and fear that I associate with this. So in avoiding others, I am trying to avoid dealing with my guilt and fear.

Am I on the right track? Is it necessary that I try to deal with this disorder by spending more time around people, placing myself in situations that I find fearful, where I am likely to dissociate? Or is it enough that I ask for help to try to see others as the same as me, and to be mindful of this when I am around others?

I was hesitant to ask this question, as it seems like it is fairly clinical and clearly involves a psychiatric disorder for which I have sought treatment, albeit with little improvement. I have been studying *A Course in Miracles* for several years and it has been the only thing that has ever truly helped me.

A: Yes, you're on the right track. For all of us in fact, everyone else is a symbol of our own guilt and fear, although the form in which we may experience those feelings will be different from person to person. In addition, our own self and our body are symbols of that guilt and fear.

Tracing the process from the beginning to where we find ourselves now, we first foolishly believed, as one Son, that we could dissociate ourselves from God, that is, end our association with Him so that we could be on our own. To convince ourselves that we really did it, we made guilt real in our minds, asserting that dissociation involves attack. We then had to dissociate ourselves from the guilt as well, because it seemed too painful. Each dissociation seems to create another "other" -- someone else outside the newly defined self we see as ourselves -- an other both to be feared and to feel guilty about, since they are literally made from our own denied guilt and fear (Part I of Kenneth Wapnick's two-volume set, *The Message of A Course in Miracles, Many Are Called*, especially chapters 2 and 4, as well as the two audio sets, *Separation and Forgiveness: The Four Splits and Their Undoing*, and *The Four Splits of Separation Revisited*, provide more indepth presentations of this series of dissociative steps and the projections involved).

The massive dissociation in our mind that seemed to lead to a world and countless "others" to fear and feel guilty about was our crowning dissociative accomplishment. But the dissociative process need not stop there, as you have found, for it can seem that the self that we by consensus have defined as the final dissociation -- the apparently "stable" individual self identified with a single body (see Questions #165 and #609 for further discussion of this process in the context of dissociative disorders) -- can experience further dissociation within its arbitrarily defined limits and seem to split into more fragments. After all, there is no natural boundary within the mind -- all boundaries are unnatural!

And so we live our so-called lives as separate, individual selves, believing that there are others outside ourselves who can hurt us and whom we can hurt, never realizing that we are simply looking at all of our own dissociated selves in the mirror that we self-deceptively have called the outside world. And then we either seek or avoid special relationships with others "out there" to help us manage and assuage the guilt we still carry within us but want to deny, never realizing that it is our own integrated, guiltless self that we all ultimately long for. But every split off part of ourselves, whether it seems to be physically separate from us or simply haunts a seemingly separate corridor of our mind, is made from our own guilt and fear. And consequently, guilt and fear are all that each dissociated part can represent or symbolize to us, so long as we remain with the teacher of dissociation and guilt and fear.

Although in some respects, your dissociative processes may seem more extreme than what most others experience, resulting in a clinical diagnosis, they really are no different. It is only because this is a world based on differences that there is a need to see only some of us as having dissociative disorders so that we never come to the recognition that we all do. The ego is very clever in this respect (see Question #671 for further discussion of this aspect of the ego's arsenal of deceitful tricks). In a sense, you are more aware than most of what your mind is doing, including its attempts through dissociation or compartmentalization to shut off the painful, guilty and fearful thoughts within your own mind.

Of course, the problem with all of our dissociative defenses is that they do nothing about our belief in the reality of the guilt and fear -- in fact, they reinforce that belief -- "All defenses do what they would defend," as Jesus points out (**T.17.IV.7:1**). And although your "solution" of acknowledging your unacceptable thoughts and feelings to the other person would seem to be a step in the right direction, it is not likely to work, as you have found, while the two of you both still believe in and are very much identified with the ego's thought system. The one we want to share those fearful, guilt-ridden thoughts with is Jesus, for he's the one who knows that they are not real.

Now Jesus is also an "other" who, along with the Holy Spirit, has been dissociated from our self, but he can represent to us something other than guilt and fear if we are willing to allow him to. For while we still believe the guilt is real, we need an "other" who seems to be different from ourselves to remind us that we are wrong about ourselves. It is in a relationship with him that the release of our guilt and fears can be experienced, as part of an integrative process that will begin to allow us to recognize that we are all the

same, first as egos who believe in the power of dissociation, and eventually as the one guiltless Son who knows there is nothing to fear, for there truly is nothing outside our Self, integrated and whole.

For this process of integration, or forgiveness, to happen, it's not necessary that you seek out others who trigger your dissociations. These experiences will begin to happen as you are ready to release more of your inner guilt and fear and they can be part of a gentle process that you need not put yourself in charge of. Your part will be simply to look at your resistance to trusting that you will never be abandoned by your inner Guide as your guilt and fear arise, although you will be tempted many times to abandon Him through dissociation. And when the fear becomes too great and you find yourself falling back on familiar defenses, there is no need for self-condemnation -- you simply became afraid and Jesus will never judge you for that. And over time, as your relationship with him grows, you will find that you are increasingly willing to associate your self with the love he is always holding out for you, and me, and everyone else, while we still believe there is anyone else.

You mention, by the way, that you have received treatment for your condition, although it is not clear whether you are still in any kind of treatment. There certainly is nothing in the Course that would advise against therapy, and there can be real value in seeking out some form of professional help, as you continue at the same time to do your inner work. And it is not at all necessary that the therapist be familiar with *A Course in Miracles*. A strong background in dealing with dissociative disorders, on the other hand, would be one of the more important criteria for selecting a therapist.

Q #1361: I've been married for a year, and I have a husband who constantly verbally abuses me. Any little thing I angers him, making him swear at me even in front of others. We have fought about this, but I found it of no use. It was during that time I began to practice *A Course in Miracles*. Sometimes the Course works, and sometimes doesn't. But somehow I feel I just can't take it anymore. I am full of hatred and self-pity. I don't want to forgive him and I hate myself for doing this. I don't know what to do.

A: Being a student of *A Course in Miracles* does not mean that you must stay in an abusive relationship in order to practice your lessons of forgiveness. That is a mistake students often make. While it is not the purpose of the Course to advise us on behavior, it does advise us -- and that is the focus of its training -- on the kind of thinking that would help restore our minds to their natural state of true innocence, because from that state, you would know what the most loving course of action is for both you and your husband. You would not have to agonize over it. You would either stay or leave, but whatever you choose, you would do it without conflict, guilt, anger, or fear. It is not easy to reach that state, as you have discovered in the short amount of time you have been working with the Course -- normally, it is a process that occurs over many years. But holy instants in which you are free of ego investments are within reach at any stage of the process: **"The necessary condition for the holy instant does not require that you have no thoughts that are not pure. But it does require that you have none that you would keep"** (T.15.IV.9:1,2). That instant without fear or guilt aligns your thinking with the compassionate truth that is always present in your right mind.

It is vital that you be gentle with yourself when you practice forgiveness imperfectly as well as when you refuse to forgive. There are many layers of fear in our minds that account for our resistance and all the difficulties we have with forgiveness. Jesus is our model to follow in this: he never judges us, for he sees our ego choices only as mistakes in need of correction, not sins demanding punishment. He asks that we have this same attitude when we are tempted to judge ourselves for our unwillingness and our imperfect practice. There is no merit in fighting against yourself just in order to be spiritual or a "good" Course in Miracles student (T.30.I.1:7).

It is important, too, to understand that forgiveness is never about the other person; it is solely about recognizing all anger as a projection of our own guilt, and that our concealed ongoing choice to believe in our sinfulness is the real and only source of our unhappiness and lack of peace, not what other people do

or do not do to us. That is why the overriding emphasis in the Course is on looking within at the contents of our minds and restoring to our awareness the power we have to choose to follow either the ego's teachings or Jesus'. That is the function of the miracle: **"The miracle establishes you dream a dream, and its content is not true" (T.28.II.7:1).**

Questions #501 and #675 also address the type of situation you find yourself in. The discussion elaborates on some points made here, with particular emphasis on the ego pitfalls that students are apt to miss in their attempts to deal with the pain and anger of abusive relationships.

Q #1362: What might be stopping someone from making the transition from student to practitioner in any health field? For at least five years I have undertaken much study in bodywork modalities, yet I have not felt confident enough to make the transition from student to practitioner. Sometimes it's hard to know if your reluctance to start practicing is because you truly are not ready and don't have the appropriate skill base to begin, or whether it is because of something more related to your self-concept, responsibility, power, etc. I am wondering if this whole difficulty in making the transition from student to practitioner could in some way be related to the ontological split as described by *A Course in Miracles*. Do you have any ideas as to what the "bigger picture" might be relating to all of this?

A: Many times this type of block is related to a guilt-laden self-concept. The guilt, of course, is ultimately rooted in the ego's response to the separation from God: it was a terrible sin deserving of severe and eternal punishment, if not death, by an avenging God. This deep layer of guilt in our minds would unconsciously motivate our life in the world in different ways. We might try to hide our "sin," for example, by never being successful in the world. That way, we reason, God would go easy on us if He were to catch up with us. We might also feel terribly unworthy of success. Since we accuse ourselves of having destroyed God's Kingdom and our true Identity to get our personal existence -- we stole it -- we might never allow ourselves to be successful or in a position of power or authority over other people for fear of destroying them as well. At an unconscious level we would know that we are living a lie here, and fear being exposed as such, and therefore one solution to that dilemma would be to stay in the background, as we would judge that.

All of this has been described as a "maladaptive solution to a non-existent problem." The problem, in other words, is not the inability to make a transition in the world. The problem is that we believe we are here at God's expense and that we are going to have to pay dearly for that terrible act, so we had better do something about it. We listened to the ego's tale of sin, guilt, and fear and ultimately wound up believing we really exist as individuals and that our problems all have to do with the world, including our own bodies, physical and psychological. Not true! says Jesus in the Course. It is impossible to separate from infinity and therefore we are not justified in accusing ourselves of sin. This is the Atonement principle. Thus, as students of *A Course in Miracles* we learn to see our lives and relationships in the world as a classroom in which we are going to learn the lessons that will undo the erroneous beliefs that are the source of whatever seems to be bothering us. It is the choice we are making in our minds to believe the ego's tale that is the problem. Therefore, the purpose we now give to our lives is to remember to laugh at all of the expressions of the tiny, mad idea that we could be separate from our Source **(T.27.VIII.6:2)**. We can do this in any role, profession, or career, on any level. The chosen content in our minds would direct all of our functioning.

Q #1363: If God is One, perfect Oneness, then what is the thought that took the tiny, mad idea seriously? How can there be a separate thought that would do this in the first place, if there is only God?

A: This question is asked more frequently than any other. It is a good question, and it occurs to just about every person who studies *A Course in Miracles*. For our answer, we refer you to our previous discussions in the following Questions: #10, #88, #100, #148, #171, #350, and #568.

Q #1364: When I ask the Holy Spirit for help to see my brother through His eyes, or what I should say in a certain situation, if my resistance is too great to receive an answer (or at least I don't recognize the answer), what do I do next?

A: Try to free yourself for the moment of any judgments you may be holding on to and any investments you may have about what you want to have happen. You are perceiving with the Holy Spirit automatically when you look without judgment and have no investment in the outcome. That is why our concern should not be about what to say or do in a given situation or interaction - - our concern should be to let go of our judgments. Then the love and truth in our mind will flow through and be expressed in the form most helpful at the time. This, in fact, is the essence of a message Jesus gave to Helen: "You cannot ask, 'What shall I say to him?' and hear God's answer. Rather ask instead, 'Help me to see this brother through the eyes of truth and not of judgment,' and the help of God and all His angels will respond" (*Absence from Felicity*, p. 381). The "help of God and all His angels" is Jesus' poetic way of referring to the Holy Spirit's Presence in our minds.

Other students of *A Course in Miracles* have asked similar questions, and you may find it helpful to visit these discussions. See Questions #11, #77, #399, and #498.

Q #1365: According to the teachings of *A Course in Miracles*, what is the meaning of healing?

A: Adapted from our *Glossary-Index*: Healing is the correction in the mind of the belief in sickness that makes the separation and the body seem real. It is the effect of joining with another in forgiveness, shifting perception from separate bodies -- the source of all sickness -- to our shared purpose of healing in this world. Since healing is based on the belief that our true Identity is spirit, not the body, sickness of any kind must be illusory, as only a body or ego can suffer. Healing thus reflects the principle that there is no order of difficulty in miracles.

Q #1366: How much time elapses between our thought (the cause) and its effect?

A: The effect happens simultaneously. The cause produces its effect immediately, otherwise it would be causing nothing and so would not be a cause (**T.28.II.1:2**). There is an illusion of a time gap, but there really isn't one. The ego wants us to perceive a gap between our thoughts and their effects so that we will not recognize the direct connection between them and then conclude that something external is the cause of what we experience -- anything other than our own mind's decision in that very instant. This is all part of the ego's strategy to keep our attention away from our minds, where we could recognize that we are always choosing between the ego's thought system and the correction of that, the Holy Spirit's thought system. Two sections in *A Course in Miracles* that discuss these ideas are "**The Responsibility for Sight**" (**T.21.II**) and "**Reversing Effect and Cause**" (**T.28.II**).

Q #1367: It has been said that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. In contrast, a fellow student claims that she has encountered a number of embodied teachers who have gone beyond all need for vigilance, and that is what she wants for herself. What is your perspective?

A: When we have completed all of our forgiveness lessons, there will no longer be a need for vigilance, because there will no longer be an ego thought system in our minds, having chosen against it once and for all. The ego's only existence is the choice we make in our minds to believe in separation as real (**T.4.VII.1:5**) , and therefore when we choose against that completely, the ego disappears back into the nothingness from which it came -- there is nothing to be vigilant about any more. That is the state of mind known in *A Course in Miracles* as the real world, a totally unified state of mind. There is no longer a split between two thought systems and no longer a decision maker who chooses between them. All the interferences to the truth of Who we are have gone.

Q #1368: I have heard that it is important to appear "normal" and not to proselytize about the Course. Through practicing the Course teachings, I find that my parenting process is very different from those around me. I have tended to keep quiet about why I do things differently, but when someone else tells me they think I am too permissive, is it all right to explain? Is defense in this case just another form of attack?

When I discipline my daughter, I have found that 90 percent of the time I am motivated by old judgments that I hold against myself that have nothing to do with her. So, rather than focusing on disciplining her, I work on forgiving myself, and the behavior in question usually disappears that instant. The only problem is when I forget.

A: First, it is wonderful that you have discovered that what motivates the disciplining of your daughter are your judgments against yourself that you have projected onto her, and therefore that the focus ought to be on forgiving yourself. It is not a complicated process!

Second, there is nothing wrong in sharing these experiences and insights with others. You can describe how you deal with your daughter without ever mentioning *A Course in Miracles* , although it would be fine to refer to it if the conversation leads there. A problem would arise only if you separate yourself from your friends in your mind by judging them -- feeling more spiritually advanced, for example. It is always the content that matters. The same form -- parents discussing child-rearing experiences -- can have the content of either the wrong mind or the right mind.

Focusing on the purpose of the conversation would help: Are you there to learn that differences don't matter and that you all share the same wrong mind, right mind, and decision-making capacity, or are you there to show that you are special in some way? Clarifying that level of your thinking is the best way to keep the conversation on a helpful level, to you and the other parents. It is perfectly normal for parents to talk about their experiences. Just try to do so for the right reason: as a means of healing your own mind of polluting thoughts of judgment and specialness. Your willingness to choose Jesus rather than the ego as your teacher will bring this shift about.

Q #1369: I have heard it said that it is our "unconscious guilt" that continues our "dream reincarnation" process. Would you direct me to where this is stated in *A Course in Miracles* . I believe this is correct, but a fellow student believes that it is our "decision to learn more lessons" that keeps bringing us back. My understanding is that we are not here to learn lessons but to remember our reality as Christ Who uses our everyday experiences to bring us back to that awareness if we ask.

A: The statement you refer to is not found in the Course. The Course teaches us that there are both wrong-minded and right-minded reasons for being in the world. The wrong-minded reasons are the obvious ones such as wanting a separate special existence rather than the perfect Oneness of union with God and having a means of seeing sin and guilt outside rather than within our own minds. The right-minded reason for being in the world is to awaken from the dream of separation -- everything would be given the purpose of leading us back within to our minds so that we can choose against the ego and allow the truth of Who we are to be our only thought.

Q #1370: Ramana Maharshi, Nisargadatta Maharaj and Nisargadatta's co-disciple, Ranjit Maharaj were all Indian teachers of Advaita Vedanta who were considered to be fully- realised beings. My partner once asked Ranjit Maharaj a question about *A Course in Miracles* ' teaching that God did not create the phenomenal universe and that ultimately it never happened at all. Ranjit responded that the Course's position was correct. I include this to show that this lineage's teaching, at the highest level, seems to correspond (in content at least) with the pure non-dualistic position of the Course.

Ramana and Nisargadatta were both asked frequently about the question of pain. Their responses were similar -- that there was great pain but no one experiencing it. However if, as the Course states, all pain is in the mind, and is an extension of guilt, then it would seem that these realised beings were experiencing guilt at some level. A further simple question is: who is experiencing guilt when there is no sense of ego identity as a separate entity? If there is indeed no doership (free will/volition) where would the Course locate the sense of separation in these teachers? Ramana would say there is "no creation or destruction" and that "nothing is born and nothing dies." According to Advaita, this "experience of understanding" takes place when the ego ceases effortlessly and the realisation dawns that the ego and the thought of separation literally never occurred. Please comment.

A: One of the conclusions we reached in Question #933 when we discussed the Advaita Vedanta teachings was that "despite using different words which seem to point to different practices, the Course and Advaita are really saying the same thing." Our discussion emphasized the importance of recognizing the two levels on which the Course is written, a distinction that is relevant to these questions about pain.

Speaking on the level of absolute truth (Level One), the Course says that pain is not real (**W.pl.190.3:3,4**). A healed mind -- i.e., a mind outside the dream but still aware of other minds dreaming of existence in a world apart from God -- would perceive the pain experienced by the figures in the dream, while at the same time knowing that the pain is real only in the dreams of minds that are in the process of awakening or else still choosing not to awaken. The healed mind would not feel that pain. This is the second level of discussion in the Course.

On the other hand, a healed mind could appear in form as a help to those seeking to awaken, but this would simply be a symbol or a representation in form of the memory of wholeness and invulnerability that we all have in our right minds. Perhaps this is what Ramana Maharshi and Nisargadatta were saying. This form could appear with some of the limitations, disabilities, and illnesses common to humans, but the experience of pain and infirmity would be radically different because there would be no identification with the pain and infirmity. The healed mind knows with certainty that the body is not its identity and so the pain would have no significance to that mind. In this sense, there is pain, but it doesn't mean anything. Thus, in this case, the pain does not stem from guilt but from the love that appears in a form that we can recognize and accept. This is in contrast to the unhealed mind that is still very much identified with the body and an individual self. For this self, therefore, pain has tremendous significance: there is still an I that is in pain and very much threatened by it.

Q #1371: I'm struggling with a choice on what career to choose. I understand that *A Course in Miracles* teaches that purpose, not form, matters and that *any* circumstance is an opportunity to practice forgiveness and therefore be purified and ready for enlightenment. But my dilemma is that I am eager for the path of spiritual development, feel a passion for learning about spirituality, traveling the world, seeing the world -- and very ultimately being a part of the solution for healing the world -- yet I also have passions for acting (and painting) and happen to be good at both. My acting classes are just starting again and I'm with a group where now it is make or break -- I go for it wholeheartedly or not, which means a daily dedication to that form of development. My fear is that I could be devoting myself to a greater cause -- to the cause of healing. Those hours could be spent with the sick, for example. Acting, of all the arts it seems to me, is such an ego thing and I don't know if I could do it and be true to my conscience, when so many people are dying (I work for a charity that helps kids in poorer countries) and the world is so sick and in so much pain on so many different levels.

A: Relax! There is a statement in the Course that is repeated over and over again, with some variation, throughout all three books, that every Course in Miracles student should take to heart: **"The sole responsibility of the miracle worker is to accept the Atonement for himself" (T.2.V.5:1)** . And this simply means that we need only be concerned, moment to moment, with the choice we are making within our minds for either the ego or the Holy Spirit. In the end, and on every step along the way, nothing else matters.

Concern for the world and all the pain and suffering seems to be such a noble dedication, yet the Course's radical position is that such a focus is in reality just another way of reinforcing the ego, and therefore is an attack (e.g., **M.7.4:4,5,6,7**) . It may seem unkind, even heartless, to diminish the significance of the world and all its problems, yet the reason follows very directly from the Course's basic metaphysical premises. The world, as real as it may seem, is nothing more than the symbolic shadow of the mind's guilt over choosing the ego (**T.18.IX.4**) , desiring separation rather than oneness. To focus our attention on the world is to fall into the ego's trap of mindlessness, insisting that we know what the problem is and how it can be resolved. The world is not the problem and the Course means this quite literally! To focus on the world is to assure that the real problem of choosing separation in the mind and taking it seriously is never recognized nor addressed (**W.pl.79**) .

There is no hierarchy in the world of illusion (**T.26.VII.6**) . It is not what we do, but with whom we do it that Jesus is asking us to realize is all that matters. One can commit oneself to alleviating the world's suffering and simply reinforce the underlying belief in victimhood, which the ego has invented as a means for maintaining guilt but seeing it outside oneself. Furthermore, the healer role can be used for purposes of self-aggrandizement, or to cover over one's own feelings of guilt and unworthiness, never questioning whether those underlying feelings have any reality. In contrast, one can devote oneself to the stage and acting and serve the Holy Spirit's purpose by helping oneself and others recognize that at some level, we are all the same, and ultimately, that the whole world is an act, and none of it is to be taken seriously.

And of course, just the opposite is possible, since the form itself is irrelevant. One can be involved in helping relieve and heal the pain and the suffering of others in the world in very specific, concrete ways, yet hold the awareness that all pain and suffering are truly only in the mind, which is all that is need of healing. And one can, as you suggest, use an acting career as a vehicle for self-aggrandizement, or perhaps to even greater detriment, as a means for propagandizing for the ego and all its values, including the reality of attack, betrayal and victimhood.

To reiterate, the form of our involvement in the world does not matter. It is the purpose we choose for it that counts. If we recognize that our *only* responsibility is to accept the Atonement for ourselves, we will also increasingly recognize that whatever we do will provide just the opportunity we need to learn our lessons of forgiveness and withdraw the projections of guilt that we have placed upon the world. To believe there is anything else meaningful we can do is to insist that we are right and to refuse the only real help that is available to us to alleviate all pain and suffering at its source.

Q #1372: I have many friends who devoutly prefer homeopathic medicine to allopathic medicine. I have long been okay with this, since I understand that any magic is magic, whether it is a pharmaceutical drug or an herb capsule. But, I realized recently that I perceive homeopaths to consider themselves to be more “enlightened” than allopaths. And this bothers me. I realize this is about me, not about them, because I am the one who cares what they think. How can I resolve this?

A: First, it is important to have recognized that “any magic is magic.” This restates the central principle in *A Course in Miracles* that there is no hierarchy among illusions. Both forms of medicine are magic, to the extent that they are used to correct conditions in the body, whether psychological and physical.

Being bothered by other people's claims to superiority usually reflects a projection of guilt or self-loathing over a similar attitude within yourself. Jesus instructs us about this in Lesson 134: **“When you feel that you are tempted to accuse someone of sin in any form do not allow your mind to dwell on what you think he did, for that is self-deception. Ask instead, ‘Would I accuse myself of doing this?’” (W.pl.134.9).** This has to do with content, not form. In other words, you could ask yourself, “What is it about what they are doing that bugs me?” Try to get at the meaning of their feeling superior -- what that triggers in you. Whatever it is, you would be accusing yourself of doing it, although in a different form more than likely. If nothing surfaces for you, that's okay. Just know that you are bothered by their attitude only because of something within you that you hate or are ashamed of and want to keep hidden, thus unforgivable.

It is important that you focus on the judgment you are making and realize that that is the problem, not the other people's behavior. You would not be bothered by that if you had not already chosen against love in your mind and then judged yourself for it. Try to accept that whatever ego choice you are accusing yourself of making, it is never more than a mistake -- and mistakes are in need of correction, not condemnation. Thus, if you can't identify the specific “sin” in you that is being projected and hated in these other people, you can still change your mind about your interpretation of it. You can still ask Jesus to help you see with him that sin and guilt are nothing more than toys that children play with and one day are put away forever **(T.29.IX.5)**. You will then look through his eyes and see not cause for judgment, but for compassion as you recognize your interests as being shared by everyone else. Finally, you can feel grateful for this opportunity that has come up to deal with guilt that would have remained concealed had you not been willing to take responsibility for your perceptions.

Q #1373: I am still struggling with the concept of realizing and living the “happy dream” that comes from the application of the Course's principles. Practising *A Course in Miracles* does not promise improvement of life circumstances; however, Joel Goldsmith achieved “healings” through the application of principles much the same as those described in the Course. How do you account for this?

A: In Question #783, we discuss some of the important differences between Joel Goldsmith's teachings and those of *A Course in Miracles*. It is true that physical symptoms disappear in some people as they practice the Course. The connection would be the letting go of guilt, as the Course teaches that sickness has its roots in the guilt that we are choosing to hold on to in our minds. But it can also be a right-minded choice -- one possible reason for choosing it being to demonstrate that the body cannot affect our inner state of peace.

In one important passage Jesus clarifies the nature of healing and the miracle: **“Thus is the body healed by miracles because they show the mind made sickness, and employed the body to be victim, or effect, of what it made. Yet half the lesson will not teach the whole. The miracle is useless if you learn but that the body can be healed, for this is not the lesson it was sent to teach. The lesson is the mind was sick that thought the body could be sick; projecting out its guilt caused nothing,**

and had no effects” (T.28.II.11:4,5,6,7). The real healing, thus, is the reversal of effect and cause -- the mind is sick, not the body, despite the appearance of bodily symptoms. The body is the effect; the mind is the cause. That is the function of the miracle -- to shift our perception from the body to the mind, where we would then recognize that our mind's decision is the sole cause of everything we experience. We are always deciding to have either the ego as our teacher or Jesus (T.14.III.4). Getting us back to that state of mind is the real healing and the only function of the miracle.

Q #1374: I am aware of thinking my dearest friend is deceitful. When she "proves" to me that she is not, I feel only love for her and remorse for my thoughts. I understand the deceit I see in her comes from within my own thoughts. How do I deal with those thoughts when they occur? I can tell myself this is my own projection, this is not the truth, the Holy Spirit would have me see her differently, but I am still plagued by painful thoughts of deceit, dishonesty. Please tell me how to deal with myself until I can allow the Holy Spirit to show me differently.

A: For any meaningful and lasting shift in our perception to occur, we will have to come to the recognition that we are all trying to deceive each other all the time, even when we think we are not being deceitful in the world's terms. For the world's terms *are* deceitful and deceiving. As *A Course in Miracles* teaches, the whole world, as well as the self we believe we are, is predicated on a lie -- the original ego deceit that we could separate from God. This sense of deceit is at the very core of our individual existence.

And we don't want to look at that lie, the ego tells us, because we will have to come face-to-face with our sinfulness and guilt for having lied, deserving of God's punishment. But the truth is, not that the lie is a sin, but that it is exactly that -- a lie-- which means that it is not true, that the separation has never happened. And that's what the ego, concerned only with self survival, does not want us to realize. And while we choose to listen to the ego, our reality will seem to be the world and bodies, along with an uneasy sense of deceit and dishonesty in our minds that we do not want to acknowledge. But since the world and our body depend on the lie, we will remain attracted to the deceit so long as we remain invested in our self and the world.

We need the deceit to continue to maintain our separate identity, but we do not want to accept responsibility for the lie. And so we want to see the deceit outside in anyone but ourselves. We are all secretly, and sometimes not so secretly, looking to catch someone else in a lie, for our ego is invested in proving that others are the deceitful ones so that we may assert our innocence. And since all of us, when we are identified with the ego, are doing the same thing, our suspicions of our brothers can seem quite well-founded.

Now to disentangle ourselves from this web of deception and deceit can seem almost impossible. And on our own, it is impossible, for all we can do is swap the guilt of the lie back and forth, either seeing it in others or embracing the guilt as our own. We need help from a source that lies outside the lie, that can help us look at it and recognize that although it is false, it is not evil, and in reality it has had no effects, so there truly is no guilt.

The only real relief from the ugly projections of the ego will come from looking at them honestly and recognizing first of all their purpose and then the flimsiness, and ultimately the unreality, of their source. But this will be a process that is not likely to happen all at once for most of us. First steps will be taken as we come to realize that not just some of us but all of us are children of the lie. And that, just as we may try to help a young child understand, Jesus wants to reassure us that a lie does not make us bad, but it still can be hurtful to ourselves and others. For so long as we continue to cling to the lie, we are clinging to our pain. But when we are willing to release the lie and see ourselves differently, we will see all our brothers and sisters differently as well.

For further examination of our attraction to deceit, you may find the recent CD release, "The Othello Syndrome: Innocence Lost...Innocence Regained," helpful.

Q #1375: We are going all the way. Is this why we Course students do so many crazy shenanigans? Because somewhere in our minds, we know this is it? I've heard Ken say that the fear level in Course students is high. Is that why?

A: Yes, ultimately our fear is of returning home to God because that means letting go of everything we made to replace our true Identity as Christ, eternally one with God. The sincere and honest practice of *A Course in Miracles* is a process that gradually exposes the series of lies on which our lives have been based, which means we begin to sense (with varying degrees of discomfort) that we are not who we think we are and our lives and all of our relationships are not what we think they are. Then we realize that no one did this to us -- we chose to deceive ourselves to get the separate and special identity that we wanted but could not have as part of God's perfect Oneness. In our determination to get and maintain this identity we became indifferent to the fact that it would always be at someone else's expense, starting with God Himself. A truly horrifying recognition.

The fear that we would some day get caught and then punished for this is hidden in our minds. And therefore when the once tightly sealed lid that kept this fear concealed begins to loosen, the fear starts to rise to the surface. It was always there, and identifying with individualized bodily existence was supposed to protect us from it, but when we choose to embark on the journey with Jesus, he gently leads us within to uncover the deception that has resulted in the colossal mess we call our world and our lives. Fear is inevitable as we go within, because, once again, the purpose of choosing the body and the world as our home was to prevent us from ever getting in touch with the terror we believed defined our home in the mind.

The value of our relationship with Jesus is that he is not part of our insanity -- he symbolizes for us the sane part of our mind that we had split off -- and therefore he can help us retrace our misguided steps back to the point where we made the one mistake of believing we pulled off the impossible: separating from eternal Oneness. Our fear dissipates as we simply look at it with his vision becoming ours, which reveals its unreality. We sacrifice nothing; we merely let go of what never was.

Students' struggles with fear and their defenses against it are discussed in a series of Questions -- see, for example, #384, #533, #943, #963, and #986.

Q #1376: Is the ego trainable?

A: Question #796 discusses the nature of the ego, emphasizing that it is not an entity but simply the name given to the thought of separation taken seriously. In this context, the answer to your question is No, because the ego is not a thing that has capabilities. There is a part of our mind, however, that is always choosing whether to continue in a state of separation or to accept the Atonement and return to its natural state of Oneness with God. And therefore *A Course in Miracles* can be described as a mind-training program aimed at helping us recognize that we, as minds, are always making a choice between these two alternatives, and that there are steps we can take that will help us make the sane choice more and more consistently. See, for example, **T.1.VII.4:1**; **W.in.1,4**; **W.pl.8.3**; **C.1.7**.

This training, importantly, really consists of undoing the training program we followed once we took the tiny, mad idea of separation seriously and then moved full-speed ahead in our determination never to

allow anything to interfere with our pursuit of individuality and specialness. Thus, Jesus speaks of the learning that teachers of God bring to this world as “unlearning” (M.4.X.3:7).

Finally, there are rare times in the Course where Jesus uses the term ego, when it is clear from the context that he is referring to the decision-making aspect of the mind -- for example, T.4.I.2:13.

Q #1377: Do animals have forgiveness lessons to learn like us?

A: Only the mind of God's Son has lessons to learn -- humans, dogs, elephants, etc., neither learn lessons nor accept miracles. That is one of the important points made in Question #340, which discusses animals as part of the Sonship. It is tough for us to grasp, but a major objective of the mind-training program of *A Course in Miracles* is to teach us to perceive correctly -- to perceive everything having form as a projection of the mind, realizing that the purpose of our relating to form as reality is to keep us from returning to our minds and becoming aware of the choices we make as minds that are behind all of our experiences. So the answer to your question is Yes, if you perceive animals as part of the Sonship, part of the same mind of which you are a part and that believes it is separate from God.

Q #1378: Is it possible to hate the body and all the ego ugliness that it stands for while still loving the mind/spirit for all its healed wholeness? Or is this just more evidence of a very split mind?

A: To hate the body is to confuse effect (the body) with cause (the mind), and thus to remain mindless, which is the surest way of maintaining a split mind. Jesus makes it clear that we only think we hate the body: **“You have displaced your guilt to your body from your mind. Yet a body cannot be guilty, for it can do nothing of itself. You who think you hate your body deceive yourself. You hate your mind, for guilt has entered into it, and it would remain separate from your brother's, which it cannot do”** (T.18.VI.2:5,6,7,8) .

Jesus goes on to describe the insanity of hating the body, since it can only ever serve whatever purpose our mind assigns to it: **“It is insane to use the body as the scapegoat for guilt, directing its attack and blaming it for what you wished it to do.”** t...**Fantasies have made your body your 'enemy'; weak, vulnerable and treacherous, worthy of the hate that you invest in it. How has this served you? You have identified with this thing you hate, the instrument of vengeance and the perceived source of your guilt. *You have done this to a thing that has no meaning* , proclaiming it to be the dwelling place of God's Son, and turning it against him”** (T.18.VI.6:1,5,6,7,8; italics added) .

And later he explains in great detail, **“You send it [the body] forth to seek for separation and be separate. And then you hate it, not for what it is, but for the uses you have made of it. You shrink from what it sees and what it hears, and hate its frailty and littleness. And you despise its acts, but not your own. It sees and acts for *you*. It hears your voice. And it is frail and little by your wish. It seems to punish you, and thus deserve your hatred for the limitations that it brings to you. Yet you have made of it a symbol for the limitations that you want your mind to have and see and keep. The body represents the gap between the little bit of mind you call your own and all the rest of what is really yours. You hate it, yet you think it is your self, and that, without it, would your self be lost”** (T.28.VI.3:2, 3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10; 4:1,2).

The body, while made to convince us that we are separate, can be seen as simply neutral (W.pII.294). **“Its neutrality protects it [the body] while it has a use. And afterwards, without a purpose, it is laid aside. It is not sick nor old nor hurt. It is but functionless, unneeded and cast**

off.... What is not created cannot be sinful nor sinless; neither good nor bad” (W.pll.294.1:6,7,8,9; 2:2) .

But for the body to be seen as neutral, we must let go of our own ego purpose for it. In the end, it makes no difference whether we hate or love the body, for either feeling simply keeps the ego illusion alive and real in our mind. **“Some hate the body, and try to hurt and humiliate it. Others love the body, and try to glorify and exalt it. But while the body stands at the center of your concept of yourself, you are attacking God's plan for salvation, and holding your grievances against Him and His creation, that you may not hear the Voice of truth and welcome It as Friend” (W.pl.72.7:2,3,4).**

For either to hate or to love the body is to react to nothing and insist that it is something, thereby denying God's perfect Oneness: **“The body that is asked to be a god will be attacked, because its nothingness has not been recognized. And so it seems to be a thing with power in itself. As something, it can be perceived and thought to feel and act, and hold you in its grasp as prisoner to itself. And it can fail to be what you demanded that it be. And you will hate it for its littleness, unmindful that the failure does not lie in that it is not more than it should be, but only in your failure to perceive that it is nothing. Yet its nothingness is your salvation, from which you would flee. As 'something' is the body asked to be God's enemy, replacing what He is with littleness and limit and despair. It is His loss you celebrate when you behold the body as a thing you love, or look upon it as a thing you hate. For if He be the sum of everything, then what is not in Him does not exist, and His completion is its nothingness” (T.29.II.9,10:1,2,3,4) .**

We are not the ones who give the body its new purpose. We merely accept that it can serve a purpose different from the one we have given it, by releasing it from the ego's judgments through which we have bound it. Jesus assures us, **“Be not disturbed at all to think how He can change the role of means and end so easily in what God loves, and would have free forever. But be you rather grateful that you can be the means to serve His end. This is the only service that leads to freedom. To serve this end the body must be perceived as sinless, because the goal is sinlessness. The lack of contradiction makes the soft transition from means to end as easy as is the shift from hate to gratitude before forgiving eyes. You will be sanctified by your brother, using your body only to serve the sinless. And it will be impossible for you to hate what serves whom you would heal” (T.22.VI.3) .**

So long as we hate the body and what the ego has made it to represent, we can not truly love mind/spirit for its healed wholeness. For the healed mind can only look on thoughts of sin and their seeming effects, including the body, with gentle laughter at the silliness of it all. With this shift, **“the body can become a sign of life, a promise of redemption, and a breath of immortality to those grown sick of breathing in the fetid scent of death. Let it have healing as its purpose. Then will it send forth the message it received, and by its health and loveliness proclaim the truth and value that it represents. Let it receive the power to represent an endless life, forever unattacked....The simple way to let this be achieved is merely this; to let the body have no purpose from the past, when you were sure you knew its purpose was to foster guilt. For this insists your crippled picture is a lasting sign of what it represents. This leaves no space in which a different view, another purpose, can be given it. You do *not* know its purpose. You but gave illusions of a purpose to a thing you made to hide your function from yourself. This thing without a purpose cannot hide the function that the Holy Spirit gave. Let, then, its purpose and your function both be reconciled at last and seen as one” (T.27.I.10:3,4,5,6; 11) .**

Q #1379: The other day I finally understood a crucial concept: that my behavior is directed by my perceptions and not by the events in the world around me. Though this is said hundreds of times in many ways in *A Course in Miracles* , it has taken nine years for it to click for me. Now I feel stuck because I don't know what to do! If my perceptions drive my behavior, how do I change my perceptions? And do I

even need/want to? Could this be the meaning of "I need do nothing"? I feel thrilled that I understand this crucial concept, and yet depressed because I don't know what to make of it or how to apply this learning to my daily life!

A: Take heart! This is exactly why Jesus gave us the workbook. The Introduction nicely summarizes its purpose: **"The workbook is divided into two main sections, the first dealing with the undoing of the way you see now, and the second with the acquisition of true perception" (W.in.3:1).** Thus, by practicing the lessons in Part I of the workbook and then generalizing them, we undo our commitment to the ego's way of perceiving, which is a way of saying that we stop interfering with the natural flow of love in our minds. The training gradually helps us experience ourselves as decision-making minds that are always choosing to perceive either the ego's thought system or the Holy Spirit's. We learn to recognize all the ways in which we are perceiving separation, for example, and then to acknowledge that we are choosing to perceive that way, because we want to perceive that way. That is the point we want to reach experientially, because then we are in a position to ask ourselves whether we want to continue perceiving that way or to choose the other available option in our minds, which is the Holy Spirit's perception that would have us see each other as all sharing the same interests. If we don't know we have a mind and the power to choose what we will experience (content, not form), then we will continue to relate to ourselves and others primarily as victims of happenings not under our control. Jesus' training, thus, is aimed at helping us shift from a state of mindlessness to mindfulness. So, basically, we do not have to change our perceptions; we just have to look at what we are choosing, ask ourselves if we want to continue that way, and, if not, say "no" to the ego. Right-minded perception will automatically take its place -- it was always there; we were just rejecting it and substituting our own (the ego's) perception.

Judging yourself because it took so long for this to click is silly -- and clearly of the ego. You are assuming that nine years is a long time, but according to whose standard of progress? You are not aware of the entirety of your Atonement path (which is true of all of us), so how would you know what it means? Be cautious about using criteria rooted in the world of time and space to assess your spiritual process. You are learning that you are not defined by the world and the body, and that they were made up to block your perception of the truth, so why would you rely on them to tell you about something totally beyond them? Be grateful, instead, that your fear lessened enough to part this veil. Move on now with greater trust in the process itself. As Jesus instructs us, **"All that is asked of you is to make room for truth. You are not asked to make or do what lies beyond your understanding. All you are asked to do is let it in; only to stop your interference with what will happen of itself; simply to recognize again the presence of what you thought you gave away" (T.21.II.7:6,7,8).**

Q #1380: I discovered a while ago that by printing the Q&As that I like the most I could have them at hand and read them whenever I wanted. Now when I am confronted in a particular situation I read one or several of them. The instant I read I feel better, I feel that I am in my right mind and I accept as best I can that the guilt is in my mind and that I made the choice for separation. But as soon as I finish reading, I forget the whole thing entirely, I hardly remember what I read an instant ago and I have to read it over again. I do not understand why I have such a short memory in those occasions. It is as if the ego does not want me to use my right mind and brings me back to my wrong mind as soon as I finish reading. Is it that I am trying too hard and that I am falling into the ego's trap?

A: Fear of oneness and peace does funny things to all of us. And understanding something from *A Course in Miracles* very clearly and experiencing the release it offers in one moment and then feeling totally clueless about it all in the next is just one of those funny things, and a pretty common one at that. The main thing is, don't judge yourself for it and don't try to fight it. Just smile at yourself and rest assured that the understanding is never lost, only temporarily blocked from your awareness by your own decision, motivated by a desire for "self"-preservation.

As the experience has become familiar enough that you recognize the pattern and can ask about it, you may just want to watch yourself the next time you turn to the printed pages for the support, and see if you can notice, perhaps ever so imperceptibly at first, that almost unconscious decision to forget. But don't make a big deal about it. Just see if you can very quietly sneak up on your ego as it tries to sneak up on you.

And it may be helpful to remind yourself that those sheets of paper do not hold the answers -- your mind does. They are only symbolic, seemingly external, reminders of what you already know but have been afraid to remember. Your decision to turn to the pages simply reflects your willingness to remember. And your amnesia simply reflects your fear of knowing who you really are. And while right now it may seem that your remembering is only temporary, be assured that the amnesia is what is truly temporary, for "the outcome is as certain as God" (T.2.III.3:10; T4.II.5:8) .

Q #1381: My question is about the relationship between cause and effect, specifically, the principle that if the effect can be shown, through forgiveness, to have no effect on anyone, the cause then disappears, as does the effect. The example often given is that of Jesus rising from the dead to prove death is not real. However, isn't this using forgiveness at the level of the body instead of the level of the mind? If one wishes to get rid of an effect, one should, through forgiveness, forgive the cause at the level of the mind, and then both the cause and effect disappear. Also, is it necessary when forgiving the cause of an effect to know the exact cause or thought that produced the effect? This has psychiatric ramifications -- one may need professional help to identify that particular cause.

A: Understanding the cause-effect relationship is essential for one's work with *A Course in Miracles* , both in terms of grasping its theory and practicing its teachings of forgiveness. We must be brief in our discussion here, but we refer you below to some of our publications for comprehensive presentations of this theme. Our answer is based largely on *A Talk Given on "A Course in Miracles"* , Chapter 5 -- "Jesus: The Purpose of His Life."

What Jesus ultimately demonstrated was that sin is not real, which in turn means that separation is not real. "Now, if the greatest effect of sin in this world is death, demonstrating that death is an illusion simultaneously demonstrates that there is no sin. This also says that the separation never occurred" (p. 120). This is one of the most important messages in *A Course in Miracles* , and it corrects what the Churches have traditionally taught about his life and message. ". . . Jesus took on the most compelling witness to the reality of this world and he showed that it had no hold over him. That was the whole meaning of his life, his mission, and his function. To overcome death is to show that death is not real, that its seeming cause [sin] also is not real, and that we therefore never really separated ourselves from our Father" (pp. 121,22). That was the objective of Jesus' teaching -- to demonstrate to us that we never truly separated from God. He chose a way that would be extremely meaningful to us, who have a most difficult time believing we are not bodies! His teaching is deliberately -- and lovingly -- designed to meet us where we are. He focuses first on the body so that he can lead us beyond it.

Applied to the practice of forgiveness in our daily lives, these principles mean that we should strive to demonstrate to others that their seeming sin (attack) against us has had no effect, that whatever they did had no effect on our inner peace. If their sin had no effect, it is causeless; and if it is causeless, it does not exist. Thus, we forgive others for what they did not do to us, the Course's unique approach to forgiveness. In the process, we also learn that we, too, are forgiven -- our seeming sin of separating from God had no effect, and therefore we do not need defenses to protect ourselves from the consequences of the sin we accuse ourselves of committing -- we were just mistaken in believing we sinned.

Jesus is our prime model and teacher in this. The attacks of others appeared to be causing him to suffer, but by not attacking back and continuing to love and forgive the "attackers" instead, he demonstrated that their sin against him had no effect, which meant they had not sinned -- they were simply mistaken and

were calling out for help. (See “The Message of the Crucifixion” in Chapter 6 of the text.) That is how Jesus forgives us, too. And he asks that we be like him -- to approach all of our seeming grievances and experiences of being unfairly treated the same way. Not easy, for sure! But that is why he remains within us -- to help us learn and practice this.

Sometimes the help of a professional is needed to uncover dynamics that are responsible for the way we experience our lives and interactions. Traumatic experiences can result in psychological blocks that inhibit or even halt further growth, and therapy can be useful in identifying and getting past these blocks. Ultimately, however, it is always the guilt in our minds and the fear of letting it go that are the core of our problems, whether physical or psychological. And so, in that sense, it is not always necessary to single out specific causes on other levels to make spiritual progress. It is enough to have the willingness to forgive -- to want to choose the right teacher, and to want to look at one's ego non-judgmentally. (See the Psychotherapy pamphlet: **P.2.VI.5.**) Again, though, it is never wrong or spiritually retarding to seek professional assistance.

Finally, the effects you want to “get rid of” are all the perceptions and experiences of separation, the results of the ongoing choice to remain apart from God as special individuals. It is normal to want to get rid of “effects” such as pain, physical/emotional inadequacies, financial problems, and other bodily conditions and circumstances -- and one should do whatever one can on that level -- but that should not be the focus of one's work with this course, as you seem to point out. Our focus should be turned within -- toward the choice we are making in our minds to interpret what goes on in our body and the world the way we do. When we finally shift from the ego's interpretation to the Holy Spirit's, the conditions and circumstances of our lives will no longer be an issue, even though there may have been no external changes. We will approach everything from that “**quiet center**” (**T.18.VII.8:3**) , assured once and for all that nothing can disrupt the peace within that is our inheritance as God's one Son.

For further study of the cause-effect theme, see Kenneth's “Cause and Effect” (cd, mp3); “Cause and Effect” in Forgiveness and Jesus, Chapter 2.

Q #1382: How do we really know we forgive others or a situation, and how do we actually do it? Do we continue to mouth 'I forgive you' over and over silently or quite literally until we might begin to mean it? For example, I am trying to forgive my company and the rather insufferable working and living conditions I must endure. Life in a presumed body is difficult enough without compounding the difficulties by accepting life conditions that are below basic minimal standards of the developed world. Sometimes I ask the Holy Spirit for guidance, but is this too gross a question to ask, being preoccupied with material conditions and survival and so forth? And how do I know for sure it is the Holy Spirit that answers and not my predilections?

A: There is nothing in *A Course in Miracles* or its teachings on forgiveness that advocate staying in situations that make you miserable or threaten your health and well-being. That would not be the Course's gentle approach to spiritual advancement. As long as we still believe we are bodies, it is quite normal to want to live and work in conditions that meet one's preferred standard of living, and it is not wrong or unspiritual to be thinking about that. Denying our bodily and psychological needs is something Jesus strongly cautions us against (**T.2.IV.3:8,9,10,11**). The Course's path is a gentle one, meeting us where we are right now.

Forgiveness is not achieved through forcing yourself to believe something you really do not believe or to do something you really do not want to do. We all have split minds, which means part of us truly wants to learn this course and another part is resisting it tooth and nail. But, again, this is a gentle path, and therefore it places great value on our “little willingness” to do what it asks of us. So rather than mouth words hoping one day they will be more than words, it would be more helpful to acknowledge how much you do not want to forgive your company, and how much you want to hold them responsible for your

misery, feeling perfectly justified in doing so. That is more honest. Then you can simply look at that ego dynamic and not judge yourself for it, knowing, too, that Jesus is not judging you for it either. Love never judges. At some point, you will realize that your judgments against your company are keeping you from being peaceful, and that it's not worth it to continue that way. You will then realize "there must be another way." This does not mean, to repeat, that you have to stay in that situation until you have forgiven. The same lesson will reappear in different circumstances, you can be sure; so you needn't fear that you are losing your one and only opportunity to get past your ego.

Q #1383: I am perplexed as to the warnings presented by the special relationship. I have renewed a sacred friendship with a woman whom I knew in college almost thirty years ago. I love her dearly and she loves me, and although we almost never actually see each other, we have taken on the task of reintroducing each other to God and ourselves. Why is this a bad thing? Why does the text render this as "the renunciation of the Love of God . . ." (T.16.V.4:2)? Yes, we are sexual. Why should I reject that gift?

A: The purpose you give the relationship is what will determine whether or not it is a renunciation of God's Love. God's Love is our very Identity, our only real relationship, all we ever truly need (**T.15.VIII**) ; and therefore if our peace and happiness depend on having another person's affection, comfort, approval, gifts, attention, or anything else -- physical/emotional/psychological -- then it has become a substitute for God's Love, which in our ego minds we believe we rejected because it did not offer us the specialness we demanded. That is what the rest of the passage you cited explains: "[the special relationship is] **the attempt to secure for the self the specialness that He denied.**"

Jesus is not asking us to sacrifice what we think we want; he is helping us realize that we have already made an extremely painful sacrifice and are trying to deal with it in a maladaptive way: **"You but seek in them [special relationships] what you have thrown away. And through them you will never learn the value of what you have cast aside, but still desire with all your heart"** (T.15.VIII.2:1,2,3). The emptiness and loneliness we feel deep within because of our rejection of God and our oneness with Him impel us to seek for fulfillment outside -- in another person, substance, object, etc.; and Jesus is helping us learn that the special relationship will never succeed in giving us true and lasting happiness and peace because we are not addressing the real cause of our sense of lack and need. That is why we need his help and guidance with our relationships.

It is probably safe to say that every relationship starts out as a special relationship and that many never get beyond the level of mutual fulfillment of needs because we are not aware of the true origin of our desires and needs. Yet, we are not asked to give up our special relationships, for if we so choose, they can serve to heal our minds of all thoughts of separation, and then, rather than being replacements for the Love of God, they can bring us closer to God by becoming reflections of His Love. This is the process of transforming a special relationship into a holy one.

In working through this process, it is important to distinguish between form and content. This is the primary focus of Kenneth's discussion in his book and audio album, *Form versus Content: Sex and Money*. The content is the purpose we choose in our minds, which can either reinforce our separateness or undo it, by our choosing the Holy Spirit's purpose of seeing our interests as shared, not separate and conflicting.

This is a common concern among students of *A Course in Miracles* , obviously. We have addressed it in other Questions which you might wish to look at. See Questions #366, #899, and #987, for example, that elaborate on some of our discussion above.

Q #1384: The most common concern I hear from people who have seriously attempted to study and practice *A Course in Miracles* is that it provides no help for processing the emotions that arise in the context of the truths the Course brings out.

A: There is no doubt that emotions get stirred up once one begins to take the Course seriously. This is bound to happen since the Course basically reveals to us the illusory nature of everything we thought was real and important about us, our relationships, and the world -- and even worse, that it was all made as **“an attack on God” (W.pll.3.2:1)**. We gradually realize that we have been in massive denial and have constructed elaborate defenses to protect us from ever getting back in touch with the pain and the chaos that we think is the permanent condition of our minds (a erroneous conclusion, of course). It would be surprising if there were not a strong reaction to these realizations -- along with gratitude, too, for finally understanding why our lives have never seemed to work, but that there is something we can do about it.

Despite our sometimes intense fear and anxiety, Jesus assures us in different ways in the Course that we are in no real danger because we are essentially undoing what never happened, and that he is ever present in our minds to comfort and guide us as we proceed on our journey. He knows what we are going through -- which is a comfort in itself -- and wants to help us every step of the way if we will grow to trust him **(T.4.VI.3:1; 6:1)**. In the workbook in one place he very personally and lovingly invites us to take his hand as we pass through the clouds we have gotten lost in to hide the light of truth from ourselves: **“Try to pass the clouds by whatever means appeals to you. If it helps you, think of me holding your hand and leading you. And I assure you this will be no idle fantasy” (W.pl.70.9:2,3,4)**.

Given all this, most students find that they still need external support of some kind, and so they work with another Course student or go to classes or group discussions where they can talk about what is happening in their process. But it must always be remembered that the process of salvation takes place exclusively between the student and Jesus (or the Holy Spirit).

The way to process emotions is to regard them as projections of thoughts. You never want to deny them; you want to use them instead as a means of getting back to your mind. For example, when you choose the ego, you will feel the emotions of fear, anger, anxiety, etc.; and when you choose Jesus or the Holy Spirit, you will feel peaceful and loving. Feelings, thus, are not what they appear to be; they are reflections of the decision we have made in our minds to identify either with the ego or the Holy Spirit. Adapting a statement from the text we might say, then, that “emotions are the outside picture of an inward condition” **(T.21.in.1:5)**. They can be useful, therefore, in getting us back to an experience of ourselves as decision-making minds, a primary objective of our work with the Course.

Q #1385: Are there any pointers or guidelines you can offer to help people make their way through the Course material? How can we get the most out of our study of the three books?

A: We will offer some general comments and then recommend other discussions and resources on this Web site.

Study Methods:

First, in keeping with its theory, there is no best or single method for studying *A Course in Miracles*. It is a curriculum undertaken by the student under the guidance of the Holy Spirit or Jesus, and as the manual for teachers specifically states, the training is “highly individualized” (M.9.1:5; M.29.2:6). Moreover, there can be no strict guidelines or rules that apply to every individual, as circumstances, backgrounds, and abilities, among other factors, differ greatly.

With regard to reading and studying the material, Jesus does not say which should be done first, the text, the workbook, or the manual. That decision is up to each student. There is no right or wrong way of

proceeding with the material. Yet, to attain a comprehensive understanding of the thought system and a solid foundation for practicing the lessons, students are encouraged to study the text at some point in their process. Jesus advises us to study it carefully, but not proceed too quickly with it, lest we plunge unnecessarily into overwhelming fear (T.I.VII.4,5; see also Question #1163). Also, in the Introduction to the workbook he explains that the “theoretical foundation ... the text provides is necessary as a framework to make the exercises in this workbook meaningful” (W.in.1:1). Thus, Jesus clearly expects his students to spend time with the text at some point in their process.

A Course in Miracles: Form and Content

The Course uses metaphors, and in form has many contradictory passages. That is why it cannot be read and understood exclusively on an intellectual level. Its content and loving message of forgiveness can be understood only with the willingness of the mind that opens to the truth that it reflects. The Course’s teaching that the world is an illusion and the separation never happened is seemingly contradicted by the very fact that the Course itself exists in form. Clearly, then, from its inception the Course lovingly accommodates its form to be helpful to the guilt-ridden part of the mind of God’s Son who believes he is irretrievably lost because of his terrible sin. According to the ego’s logic, the guilt that follows the “sin” of separation engenders tremendous fear of punishment from an angry God. When the Course tells us God weeps and is lonely without us (T.5.VII.4; T.2.III.5), the message is that He is not an angry, vengeful God, but One Who loves us and misses us. These symbolic images are helpful to us who are able to relate to the concept of a loving father more easily than to the abstract nature of God. As Jesus tells us, “You cannot even think of God without a body, or in some form you think you recognize” (T.18.VIII.1:7); and “Yet must It [Teacher of Oneness] use the language that this mind can understand, in the condition in which it thinks it is” (T.25.I.7:4).

These lines explain the metaphors used in the Course, as well as the levels of teaching. Since we believe we are in the world, Jesus teaches us from our level of experience. Having chosen to identify with the body, we think and act and “reason” like bodies, so the Course comes to us in a form we can understand, and uses numerous metaphors, poetic imagery, and symbols to speak to us of the Love we have denied and forgotten.

Again, the Course has to meet us where we are, and where we are is in a world that is very complex. But this is because our world has come from a very complex thought system, the thought system that dominates our minds. Therefore, if Jesus is going to be able to help us, the context of his teaching has to be this immense complexity of both our outer and inner worlds. That is what he means when he says, “This course remains within the ego framework, where it is needed” (C.in.3:1). Complexity is the name of the ego’s game, he tells us in the text (T-15.IV.6:2). His teachings must address this complexity in order to undo it.

Thus, when we start out with the Course, it can indeed appear to be hopelessly complex, but, again, that is because it is meeting us where we are. Its purpose, though, is to lead us out of that complexity to the “simplicity of salvation” (T.31.I), when we will all finally realize that “what is false is false, and what is true has never changed” (W.pII.10.1:1). That is the simple truth, hidden behind the vast complexity of both the ego thought system in our minds and the world that has come from it.

Anyone at all can benefit from A Course in Miracles. One does not have to be an intellectual to learn from it and use it as a spiritual path. Nonetheless, it is obvious that it is written on a high intellectual level with sophisticated metaphysical, theological, and psychological concepts integrated into the teaching throughout the three books. Much of it is written in blank verse. Thus, a reader/student who is not intellectually inclined and has no background in these areas might have difficulty understanding a great deal of the material. This does not mean, though, that such a person could not be helped by reading through it and doing the exercises in the workbook. If the person comes away from the Course being more kind, more loving, and reassured of God’s Love, and less angry, depressed, and fearful, then its purpose has been fulfilled. On the other hand, there have been many highly educated people who were

not able relate to the Course at all. They will find another path more suitable to their needs and inclinations.

The Course says of itself that it is only one among many thousands of other forms of the universal course (M.1.4). It does not have to be for everyone. Some religions have claimed that theirs is the only true religion, the only way to be reconciled with God. A Course in Miracles is not among them. Rather, the clear implication throughout the Course is that all people will eventually find a path that will lead them to God. It does not have to be this one.

Finally, the structure and flow of the text can be likened more to a symphony with themes introduced, set aside, reintroduced, and developed than to the linear progression of ideas usually found in an academic textbook, which systematically increase in complexity. This results in an interlocking matrix in which every part is integral and essential to the whole, while implicitly containing that whole within itself. Thus, the same material consistently recurs, both within the Course as a thought system as well as in the learning opportunities in our personal lives. The process of learning, therefore, resembles the ascent up a spiral staircase, with the reader led in a circular pattern, each revolution leading higher until the top of the spiral is reached, which opens unto God. The lovely rhythm of blank verse in much of the text enhances the impact of recurring themes.

The only specifications for the workbook lessons are given in its Introduction: "Do not undertake to do more than one set of exercises a day" (W.in.2:6). It is advisable for students to read this Introduction before beginning the lessons, and to reread it occasionally thereafter. Another important principle in the Introduction pertains to the student's orientation: "Remember only this; you need not believe the ideas, you need not accept them, and you need not even welcome them. Some of them you may actively resist. None of this will matter, or decrease their efficacy. But do not allow yourself to make exceptions in applying the ideas the workbook contains, and whatever your reactions to the ideas may be, use them. Nothing more than that is required" (W.in.9).

Lessons may be repeated if desired. If it is a particularly meaningful or difficult lesson, it could be a good idea to stay with it for a couple of days or so. However, there is a risk in thinking that a lesson needs to be done perfectly before moving on to the next one. This would be a trap, because it is unlikely that many of us will ever do any of the lessons perfectly. If we could, we would have reached such an advanced state of spiritual growth that we would not need the lessons at all.

The middle of Lesson 95 is helpful in knowing what to do if several days or weeks are missed in practicing the lessons. Importantly, it is not necessary to begin all over again. The instruction in Lesson 95 focuses on recognizing the ways in which the ego creeps into the process, and that we ought to respond to "our lapses in diligence, and our failures to follow the instructions" (W.pl.95.8:3) with forgiveness. That is the key. Jesus does not keep track of how punctual we are in following the instructions for the day; his interest is only in helping us train our minds to think more and more in terms of forgiveness, and then eventually to generalize our learning to every aspect of our lives and experience.

The core idea is that we be sincere in our attempts to study and practice what the workbook teaches, aware that we all have strong resistance, yet are willing to forgive ourselves for our often inadequate efforts. As long as we continue to study and apply the lessons as we are instructed, we will make progress. It is important to focus on the content, rather than the form. What matters is making a sincere effort to follow the instructions as carefully as we can, without judging ourselves when we fail. Indeed, we can say that the purpose of doing the lessons is to do them wrong and then forgive our mistakes. This would reflect our ultimate forgiveness of ourselves for the mistake of separating from our Creator-Source.

The manual for teachers, the third book, is the easiest and most approachable of the three. The Course helps us realize that we are all teachers and students of each other, and that there is no line separating teachers and students. As we teach we learn, and as we learn we teach; but this has nothing to do with a formal teaching setting. The meaning is that we teach by demonstration. A Course in Miracles is never

concerned with form (body) but only content (mind). The manual comes in question and answer form, with the questions addressing some of the more important themes found in the Course itself. There is an appendix to the manual, which Helen took down a couple years after the Course was completed. This is called the clarification of terms, which in a sense is like a glossary of some of the key terms that are used in the Course, the ostensible purpose being to define them for the Course's students. What one finds, however, is that if you do not already know what the word means, the clarification of terms probably will not be helpful. What it is, however, is a lovely, and many times poetic summary of what these terms mean. It is another way of revisiting what we already have.

Further discussion of the ideas discussed above, and other areas that may be of interest to those becoming acquainted with A Course in Miracles follow.

Clicking on any of the question numbers will take you to the full discussion of that issue.

The Course's Christian context and masculine language: [1](#), [5](#)

The Course's nondualistic metaphysics: [6](#), [85](#), [105](#), [923](#), [1096iv](#), [1118](#)

The symphonic nature of the Course: [1145](#)

The academic, intellectual level of the text: [40](#), [1150](#), [1170](#)

Levels of teaching: [217](#), [243](#), [1068](#)

The goal of the Course: [204](#), [235](#), [429](#), [885](#), [941](#)

Having a partner with whom to learn the lessons: [223](#)

Joining a group: [12](#), [105](#), [276](#), [493](#)

Practicing the Course while part of mainstream religion: [23](#); see also, ACIM/other thought systems

Jesus as the author of the Course: [110](#), [156](#), [479](#), [940](#), [1096ii](#)

Being normal: [634](#)

Best study methods: [105](#), [203](#), [782ii](#), [1163](#)

Suggested Readings available on the Foundation's Web site:

<http://www.facim.org/teach.htm>

Glossary of major terms used in the Course—<http://www.facim.org/acim/glossary.htm>

Summary of the Theory of A Course in Miracles—<http://www.facim.org/acim/theory.htm>

Excerpts Series, "The Metaphysics of Separation and Forgiveness."—

<http://www.facim.org/excerpts/mpseries.htm>

Online Bookstore—<http://www.facim.org/bookstore>

All publications authored by Kenneth Wapnick:

Introductory-level programs: A Talk Given on "A Course in Miracles" (book); What Is "A Course in Miracles"? - Theory and Practice (cd, mp3); An Introduction to "A Course in Miracles" (dvd).

Line-by-line commentaries: Journey through the Workbook of "A Course in Miracles"; Journey through the Manual for Teachers of "A Course in Miracles"; "What It Says": From the Preface of "A Course in Miracles." Forthcoming: Journey through the Text of "A Course in Miracles."

The scribing of A Course in Miracles: Absence from Felicity: Helen Schucman and Her Scribing of "A Course in Miracles."

In-depth analysis of theory and practice: The Message of "A Course in Miracles" - Vol. One: All Are Called; Vol. Two: Few Choose to Listen.