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A BETTER WAY

Forgiveness: The Recognition of Inestimable Worth

by Robert Perry

As students of *A Course in Miracles*, we are all trying to forgive. But even before that, we are trying to figure out what exactly the Course’s new kind of forgiveness is.

One of the things we tend to struggle with about forgiveness is how to view other people in this process. If, as the Course famously declares, “There is no world!” (W-pI.132.6:2), then perhaps other people aren’t actually there. Perhaps they are just illusions, just my projection. Perhaps, as we sometimes hear, “there’s nobody out there.”

This seems to fit well with forgiveness. How can I hold a grudge against someone who is just my projection? If nobody is out there, how could those nobodies possibly compromise my peace and thereby justify my anger?

That is one direction to go in: Regard other people as unreal. Forgiveness then becomes automatic. Resentment disappears as we realize there is no one out there to resent.

Yet isn’t there something a bit suspect about this approach? Aren’t we already all too adept at regarding other people as nobodies? In our little egocentric universes, others already appear to lack the reality we ourselves possess. They already seem to be mere rocks orbiting around our glorious sun. Couldn’t the “nobody out there” approach be typical human callousness dressed up as enlightenment?

A Course in Miracles actually wants us to go all the way to the other end of the spectrum, to grant others far *more* reality than we currently do. Look at the following passage:

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.3:1-6)

This passage specifically tells you to not think of your brother as just an illusion. Why? Because “your Identity depends on his reality.” If he has no identity, then *you* have no identity. So instead, think of him as a *mind*, a mind that still believes in illusions, but a mind joined with yours in brotherhood. To do this, though, you need to distinguish his mind from his *dream*, which consists of his body and his life. As the same section says, “Thus you separate the dreamer from the dream, and join in one, but let the other go” (T-28.IV.2:7). His body is not real, but *he* is real, possessing the same limitlessly real Identity that you do.

Worth

To grant our brothers complete reality we need to grant them unlimited *worth* (or value), and this is what I want to talk about for the rest of this article. What the Course has to say about our brother’s worth is, simply put, stunning.

We tend to see the value of others as in question, up for grabs. In our eyes, they can enhance their worth with good deeds, a killer outfit, great business contacts, a new car, etc. Or they can compromise their worth. Our evaluation of their

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WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT SAYS

A Course in Miracles is a spiritual path. Its purpose is to train us to work miracles—to accept and extend to others the shifts in perception that awaken us to God. It consists of three volumes, which signify the three aspects of its program:

- ◆ Text : Through studying the teaching, the Course's thought system first enters our minds.
- ◆ Workbook for Students: Through doing the practice, the Course's thought system penetrates more and more deeply into our minds.
- ◆ Manual for Teachers: Through extending our healed perception to others, the Course's thought system receives its final reinforcement and becomes the only thing in our minds.

The Course's message is that the source of our suffering is not the world's mistreatment of us, but rather our egocentric attack on the world. This attack convinces us that we have defiled our nature beyond repair, that we are irredeemably guilty. Yet the Course says true reality cannot be defiled; it is a realm of pure, changeless, unified spirit. This realization allows us to forgive the world's apparent mistreatment of us by recognizing that it did not actually occur. And as we see this forgiveness come forth from us—see that we are capable of something genuinely loving and egoless—we gradually realize that we never defiled ourselves. Thus we awaken to the untouched innocence of our true nature.

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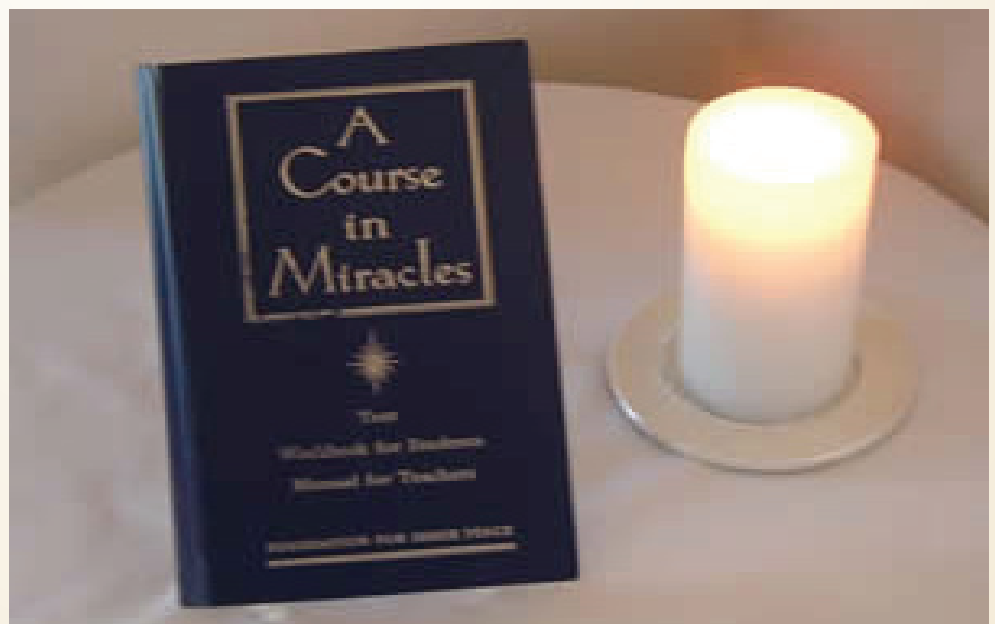
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worth is like a needle on a graph, constantly rising and falling.

This changing evaluation, by necessity, is a rough estimate. But surely, we assume, we are in the ballpark. And we have no choice but to try. We have to take our best shot, because without these estimates, we will have no idea how to feel toward others. In the end, how we feel about them is a direct result of what we perceive as their worth, their value. If you absolutely believe that someone is incredibly worthy and extremely valuable to you, how can you not love that person?

Yet what happens when that same brother attacks you? It's as if his worth has developed cracks, isn't it? And if his attacks go on long enough, at one point that worth will seem like a priceless vase that has hit the floor. And as you watch it appear to shatter, you will find that the very same thing has happened to your love.

We need to realize, however, that this whole process is entirely divorced from reality. In truth, says the Course, we literally cannot evaluate the worth of others. This theme appears in many places in the Course, almost unnoticed but definitely there. It first appears in miracle principle 18. Its original version read this way:

A miracle is a service. It is the maximal service one soul can render another. It is thus a way of loving your neighbor as yourself. The doer recognizes his own and his neighbor's inestimable value simultaneously.

The FIP version simply reads "your neighbor's worth." But originally we had this striking phrase: "his neighbor's inestimable value." "Inestimable" means "too great to calculate," "impossible to estimate or compute," or "of immeasurable value or worth; invaluable." So it refers both to an *amount* that is too great to calculate and to *worth* that is too great to calculate. Could it be that our brother's worth is so immense that it literally cannot be calculated?

After this original appearance, the notion of inestimable worth crops up again and again:

One Teacher is in all minds and He teaches the same lesson to all. He always teaches you the **inestimable worth** of every Son of God. (T-7.VII.7:2-3)

Seek **not to appraise the worth** of God's Son whom He created holy, for to do so is to evaluate his Father and judge against Him. And you *will* feel guilty for this imagined crime, which no one in this world or Heaven could possibly commit. (T-14.III.15:1-2)

It is **impossible to overestimate your brother's value....What is inestimable** clearly **cannot be evaluated**. Do you recognize the fear that rises from the meaningless attempt to judge what lies so far beyond your judgment you cannot even see it? (T-20.V.3:1, 3-4)

How **can you estimate the worth of him** who offers peace to you? What would you want except his offering? His worth has been established by his Father. (T-20.V.4:1-3)

Can you evaluate the giver of a gift like this? Would you exchange this gift for any other? This gift returns the laws of God to your remembrance. And merely by remembering them, the laws that held you prisoner to pain and death must be forgotten. (T-20.V.7:1-4)

A few themes stand out to me in these quotes. First, Jesus really means it. He really means that our brother's worth is inestimable. It is quite literally "impossible to overestimate." In short, it is infinite. Second, he is not just talking about our brother's *intrinsic* value; he is also talking about our brother's value *to us*. If our brother offers us peace, the remembrance of God's laws, and release from being a prisoner to pain and death, how can his value to us *not* be inestimable?

Third, Jesus is clearly asking us to stop trying to estimate our brother's worth. That never-ending process by which we size up our brother's value needs to, well, end. Fourth, he says that this process is already taking a heavy emotional toll on us. Somewhere inside we know that by judging something that lies "far beyond your judgment"; we are in over our heads. It's as if we are trying to lasso the sun, and we know it. Such a grandiose project causes us constant anxiety. Likewise, somewhere inside we know that by judging God's creation, we are automatically judging against the Creator, and we "feel guilty for this imagined crime."

Could it be, then, that in the normal, everyday process of downgrading our brother's worth, we dimly sense that we are messing with divine reality, and consequently carry around a heavy emotional burden over that?

Why is our brother's worth so immense? Because his worth is not established by his own actions. As the Course puts it, "His own worth is beyond anything he can make" (T-7.XII.2:8). Rather, "His worth has been established by his Father" (T-20.V.4:3). The following passage speaks about our worth, but what it says applies equally to our brother (who may, of course, be reading the same passage!):

Your worth is not established by teaching or learning. Your worth is [originally: was] established by God.... Again,—nothing you do or think or wish or make is necessary to establish your worth. (T-4.I.7:1-2, 6)

This means our brother's value is an infinite creation of God. It is, as the Course says, God's masterpiece (T-25.II.5-9). And as such, it is eternal. There is absolutely nothing our brother can do to dent it. It is permanent. It is unchangeable. He can no more compromise it than he can wave his hand and make the stars go away. It is what it is, and neither our brother nor ourselves nor anyone else can do a thing about it.

This is so jarringly different from our typical perspective that it really bears deep reflection, as well as repeated practice. Think about it: That former boss you wish would have a tragic accident has actually been given incalculable worth as an eternal gift from God. That homeless man who has been forgotten by the world is carrying around under his worn clothes the radiant light of infinite value. That murderer who has just finished his act has worth so vast that it is impossible to overestimate. And the same is true of that stranger...that friend...that fellow shopper...that celebrity on TV...of everyone, without exception. How would our lives change if we actually lived as if this was true?

What happens when the scales fall off our eyes and we at last see our brother's worth? Here is one description:

His worth has been established by his Father, and you will recognize it as you receive his Father's gift through him. What is in him will shine so brightly in your grateful vision that you will merely love him and be glad. You will not think to judge him, for who would see the face of Christ and yet insist that judgment still has meaning? (T-20.V.4:3-5)

I encourage you to read that second sentence over again. What is being described here is really a religious vision, a vision of "the face of Christ." You are gazing at your brother, transfixed by the blinding light of his worth; so transfixed you entirely forget to judge him. You merely love him and are glad.

This reminds me of accounts of religious ecstasy, in which someone is so utterly transfixed with the object of that ecstasy that he or she forgets all else. Normally, however, if there is a vision involved, we expect it to be of a traditional divine figure like Mary or Jesus. Here, however, the ecstatic is gazing at the divinity in an ordinary person. But the same joyful absorption in the vision is there, an absorption so complete that all else is forgotten.

Once you notice this pattern, you start to see it all over the Course. There are many images of us standing before our brother, caught up in an ecstatic vision of his divine worth, "unheeding of the body's witnesses before the rapture of Christ's holy face" (W-pl.151.8:4). It is easy to get the impression that this is the primary spiritual experience the Course is aiming for.

Indeed, this is where forgiveness is meant to lead us. It is not about wiping others off our projection screen in the realization that they are not there. It is about realizing that what really *is* there is far more than we ever dreamed. It is about recognizing that in our brother lies infinite, undamaged worth. It is about wiping away our judgments of him, which say he has damaged his worth, so that we can open up to a vision of his eternally inviolate worth. With the wiping away goes our anger, and with the vision comes love. In talking about the instant when we at last recognize our brother's worth, the Course says, "And in our appreciation of his worth we cannot doubt his holiness. And so we love him" (T-15.VI.2:6). Forgiveness is not just the letting go of resentment, and it is certainly not the message "You don't possess enough existence to bug me." In truth, it is the reinstatement of love.

Simply put, forgiveness is the recognition that in the blazing light of our brother's worth, all his mistakes and all his flaws fade into insignificance.

The return of love and the promise of ecstasy no doubt sound very attractive. However, we have a far more immediate stake in this issue. Remember that miracle principle I quoted near the beginning, which said, "The doer recognizes his own and his neighbor's inestimable value simultaneously"? Well, immediately after this, Jesus gave this aside to Helen: "This is why you cannot keep that thing about Wally [referring to Helen's intense dislike of Bill's friend Wally]. If you do, your own value can be estimated at X, or infinity minus that."

In other words, your awareness of your own value is tied to your recognition of your brother's. If you give in to dislike of him, then the same amount you see subtracted from *his* immeasurable value you will also see subtracted from your *own*. You will see your own infinite worth whittled down to a size so small that it's quite easy to estimate.

Of course, this is exactly what has already happened. We all have trouble really valuing ourselves. Could this be why? We all yearn to feel a sense of real self-worth. Could it be that the way to do that is to first accept our brother's inestimable value, trusting that we will then find ourselves gazing in rapture on our own divine worth?

Let us, then, try to greet every brother with this recognition. To adapt a practice that was given Bill Thetford about accepting the Atonement, let us say to everyone we meet,

*I recognize your inestimable worth,
And my own divine worth as part of my identification with you.*



E-mail your comments to the author at: robert@circleofa.org

Robert Perry. *He is the author or co-author of over twenty books and booklets, including Path of Light: Stepping into Peace with 'A Course in Miracles'.*

CIRCLE NEWS

Gary Renard Update

We recently heard from Bruce Fraser MacDonald, PhD, who has discovered that what Gary Renard presents as "Pursah's Gospel of Thomas" (in *Your Immortal Reality*), a supposedly original version of Thomas straight from its author, is almost exactly the same as a contemporary translation of Thomas by Stephen Patterson and Marvin Meyer. As you may remember, in 2006, we at the Circle, along with Jon Mundy, went on record expressing our view that Renard's masters are not real. While we do not necessarily endorse MacDonald's other views, including his views about *A Course in Miracles*, he has uncovered the most concrete evidence to date that Renard's masters are in fact no more than a literary device. This evidence is so compelling that the translators themselves are contemplating what action to take. If you are interested in this issue, see "[Gary Renard's Stolen Gospel](#)" by Bruce Fraser MacDonald, PhD.

CIRCLE MAILBOX

Here is some of the feedback we received from Greg Mackie's article in last month's A Better Way, "It All Served to Benefit the World: A Way Out of Guilt Over Our Past Mistakes."

I just read your article in *A Better Way*, and want to thank you for it. I was struck by how much is lost when I cling to guilt over past decisions and actions that have caused someone pain, and was really able to catch a glimpse of why it is so important that I learn from Jesus how to let myself be released of it. Thanks for bringing these ideas together in one place for easy reference—just in case I ever make a mistake again, and need a reminder that the Holy Spirit will use it to benefit the world!

— Amy Speach

I just had to write to you and thank you for the article in this latest *A Better Way*. I have been plagued by guilt for something I did when I was in high school. I just couldn't seem to shake it. Your article was like a light bulb—so clear and so liberating. I sat down immediately after reading it and offered it, in the way you recommended in the article, to the Holy Spirit. I felt such a weight lifted! Since starting the Course, whenever this situation came to mind, I would offer it to the Holy Spirit but I never had the experience of freedom that I got after reading, absorbing, and applying what you said in the article. Thank you so much. For me, this is one of the most important articles I have read from the Circle. This just confirms for me how very important teachers are. Your willingness to share your experience and understanding make the Course so much more immediate and meaningful.

— Ron Zeiler

• • •

Thanks so much for this article. I still beat up on myself occasionally when I remember times in the past when I was thoughtless and inconsiderate to someone—even in the long-ago past. I need to be reminded over and over that the Holy Spirit can use all our mistakes if we offer them to him.

I really appreciated your explanation about why this does not give “license” to hurt others. It may be useful as a reference if I continue leading an ACIM class.

I also appreciated your line-by-line commentary of the passage about “The past ... held no mistakes ...,” but I have a question: This passage appears in the middle of the Patience paragraph of the Manual for Teachers, and I'm wondering why. At one time, I memorized that paragraph and repeated it to myself when I was having trouble sleeping at night. I was feeling anxious because of some things that were taking too long to get resolved (I thought), and I used that passage to help me “wait without anxiety.” At the time, I didn't really understand why this section on “past mistakes” was in there, and I'm still not clear on the connection.

— Martha Fitzgerald

Martha,

Thanks for your question. I think the reference to past mistakes addresses an objection that may come up in our minds as we hear this teaching about patience.

The section is saying that we can be patient because everything will have a beneficial outcome that will unfold at the proper time. (I think the outcome referred to is primarily awakening from the dream.) When we hear this, an objection naturally comes up in our minds: “What about _____ that happened in the past? It was a terrible mistake, and nothing good ever came of it!” The past seems to provide evidence that some things don't have beneficial outcomes that we can patiently wait for.

In response, Jesus says: No, that past event is not evidence against the point I'm making. You may not see it now, but that past event, too, has a beneficial outcome that will unfold at the proper time. You can patiently await that unfolding as well. As the section concludes: “Patience is natural to those who trust. Sure of the ultimate interpretation of all things in time, no outcome already seen or yet to come can cause them fear.”

— Greg