



CONTENTS

<u>My Course-based Jury Duty</u>	
<i>by Greg Mackie</i>	1
<u>Circle Mailbox</u>	6
<u>Circle News</u>	
<u>Big Summer Sale!</u>	7



# A BETTER WAY

## My Course-based Jury Duty

by Greg Mackie

We get asked a lot about whether it's proper for a Course student to serve on a jury. My short answer is yes, and I've already written a [Q & A](#) on the topic. Here, though, my focus will be different, because I was recently called to jury duty for the first time, and I served on a trial jury in an actual case. As a result, I now have not just an abstract understanding of Course theory behind my answer to that oft-asked question, but actual experience as a juror applying Course principles to the case at hand. So here, I'd like to describe the process I went through as I fulfilled my jury duty. Hopefully, it will provide a little snapshot of how a person might serve on a jury in a Course-based way.

The first step was simply showing up at the courthouse, listening to the preliminary instructions, and waiting — waiting, waiting, waiting — for my juror pool to be called in for jury selection for a particular trial. Finally, after what seemed like forever, my group was called into the courtroom. Before entering, I said the “truly helpful” prayer:

*I am here only to be truly helpful.  
 I am here to represent Him Who sent me.  
 I do not have to worry about what to say or what to do, because He Who sent me will direct me.  
 I am content to be wherever He wishes, knowing He goes there with me.  
 I will be healed as I let Him teach me to heal. (T-2.V.A.18:2-6)*

I was to repeat this prayer often during my time in the courthouse.

Once we were inside, the prosecutor read out the charges against the defendant, who was sitting next to the defense attorney. They were serious charges: He was accused of armed robbery under the influence of methamphetamines; he allegedly broke into an elderly man's house and beat him with the barrel of a gun. He looked like a rough character, but a little scared and confused too. I looked at everyone involved — the defendant, the defense attorney, the prosecutor, the judge, etc. — and said to myself, “These are all my brothers. Holy Spirit, guide me to the decision that is truly best for all concerned.”

Later, before a jury was even selected, we left the courtroom and spent some time in a jury room. There, it was apparent that some of my fellow jury candidates had already decided the man was guilty, even though no evidence whatsoever had been presented yet. I thought to myself, “I hope I do get on this jury, because whether this man did these things or not, he sure could use someone who will evaluate the actual evidence honestly, rather than making a snap judgment based on nothing but his appearance.”

When we came back, we were each asked a number of questions about our backgrounds (including whether we owned guns — I never knew so many people around me were armed to the teeth!). Each attorney was looking for reasons to accept or reject us as jurors. Finally, the prosecutor asked a big question: “Do any of you have any religious convictions that would prevent you from serving on a jury?” Well, if I wanted an out, this was it. I could have told them I was a student of *A Course in Miracles* and I thought everyone was a guiltless Son of God (probably the first time those words would ever have been uttered in that small-town Georgia courthouse with the Ten Commandments on the wall).

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Circle of Atonement

P.O. Box 4238

West Sedona, AZ 86340

Phone: (928) 282-0790

Fax: (928) 282-0523

Toll-free (orders only): (888) 357-7520

E-mail: [info@circleofa.org](mailto:info@circleofa.org)

Website: [www.circleofa.org](http://www.circleofa.org)

Bookstore: [www.circlepublishing.org](http://www.circlepublishing.org)

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*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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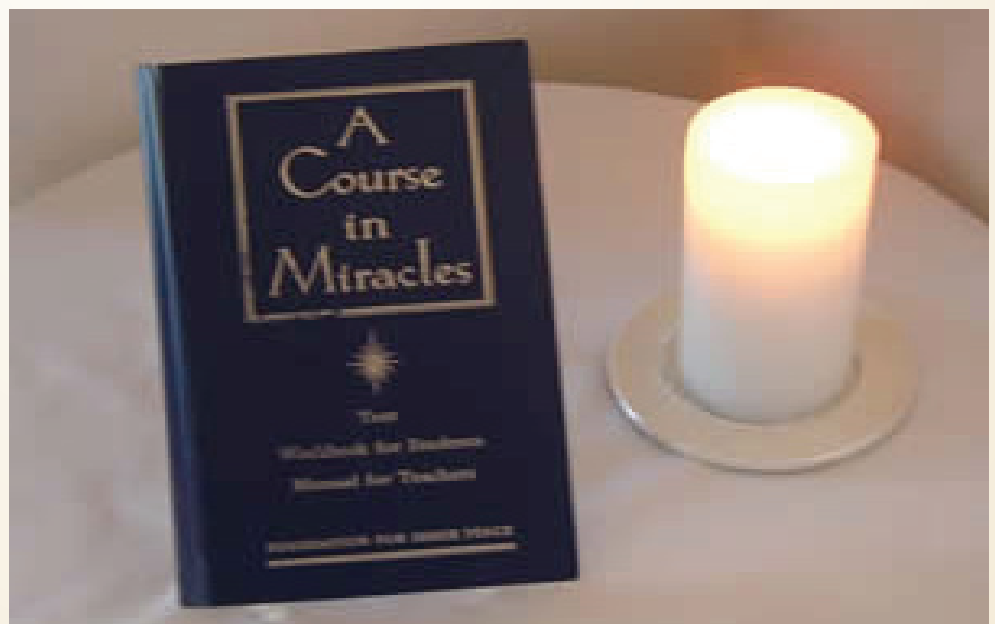
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But I didn't want an out, and I didn't believe the Course gave me one. As I looked at the defendant again, I thought: "It would be a disservice to this brother if I simply abdicated the role assigned to me. I would be doing him no favors if I decided that jury duty was 'beneath me.' He deserves someone who will treat him with dignity and fairness, who will do him the honor of coming to an honest, evidence-based decision on his fate. If he did not do what he is accused of, this decision would set him free from a false accusation. If he did do what he is accused of (within the illusion), then his conviction could be an opportunity for him to turn his life around. It would be up to him to take advantage of that opportunity, but it would be there if he wanted it. I would pray for him to take that opportunity."

It turned out that I didn't get onto that jury. The prosecutor excused me. I quickly discovered that the problem with me, from a prosecutor's standpoint, is that I have relatives who have wrestled with drug addiction and spent time in prison, and I've also done spiritual counseling for prisoners. From a prosecutor's standpoint, that means I'm probably going to be sympathetic to the defendant. I don't blame prosecutors for excusing me; they're just doing their job. But once I realized how the questioning process works, I figured I probably wouldn't get onto any jury with a background like mine. I thought to myself that the only way I would get a case would be if the Holy Spirit really wanted me to do it.

The next day, my panel of prospective jurors was interviewed for a different case, a case of alleged child molestation. Since I've been a spiritual advisor to a convicted child molester in prison, I knew exactly how this was going to end. I wanted to say to the judge and attorneys, "Why not just excuse me now instead of putting me through another hour of questioning? I'll serve on this jury when hell freezes over."

Well, I had to go through the questioning anyway. As I did, I went through the same basic process in my mind, reminding myself that everyone involved was my brother, and I was here to be truly helpful in any way the Holy Spirit directs. Sure enough, though, when it came time to pick jurors, the prosecutor decided that the way I could be truly helpful to her was to be as far away from this courtroom as possible. I was excused once again.

The next day, my panel was brought back in to be questioned for yet another case. The defendant was on trial for aggravated assault (allegedly attacking another man with a knife), obstructing a police officer in the performance of his duty, and possession of less than an ounce of marijuana. The usual round of questioning ensued. I was certain the prosecutor would strike me yet again and I would go home for good, since this was the last case I would be in line for.

So when my name came up during final selection and the prosecutor said, "The State accepts this juror," I just about fainted. I wanted to say to her, "You talkin' to me?" I think our remaining jury pool was so small and so full of risky characters that the prosecutor ran out of strikes and was stuck with me. At any rate, it appeared that the Holy Spirit wanted me to serve on a case after all.

The judge informed us before the case began that our job as jurors would be to weigh all the presented evidence and apply the existing law to the case in an objective, unbiased manner. It was crucial that we leave our opinions of the law at the door. (For instance, I personally don't believe that possession of less than an ounce of marijuana should be against the law, but I needed to set that aside to apply the existing law.) The defendant was presumed innocent unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. I resolved to apply the law as instructed, but at the same time to do so with a spirit of love and helpfulness to everyone. Even if I had to apply a law I didn't like, I needed to trust that the Holy Spirit would ensure a good outcome in the long run for all concerned.

And so the case began. The basic situation was this: The alleged victim was a man in his early twenties whom I'll call Mark. Mark was working in a restaurant kitchen when another man, a long-time friend of Mark's whom I'll call Dave, entered the kitchen and accused Mark of stealing his shotgun. Tempers flared, and it got to the point where Dave pulled a knife on Mark (both sides agreed that this happened). Mark claimed that Dave aggressively swung the knife at Mark, which would be aggravated assault. Dave, a much smaller man than Mark, claimed that he just pulled the knife in self-defense to fend Mark off, which is not aggravated assault.

Mark called the police, the police arrived, and the officer ordered Dave to put his hands up so the officer could remove the knife from his pocket. Dave, however, tried to reach into his pocket, disobeying the officer's order. Dave said he was reaching in to give the knife to the officer. Long story short, the officer tried to handcuff Dave, who offered some resistance. The officer ended up subduing Dave with two Taser shots. The officer pulled the knife from Dave's pocket, and also found the marijuana there. The officer arrested Dave, took him to the police station, and that was that.

As I listened to the evidence, I was doing two things at the same time. On the one hand, I was trying to weigh the evidence and arguments of both sides with as much intelligence and objectivity as possible. I felt I owed it to everyone involved to do everything I could to get the earthly facts right. On the other hand, I was trying to look beyond the evidence and arguments and discern the Fact beyond the "facts": These people were all beloved and wholly innocent brothers, one with me and with our Father.

I tried to look at everyone involved with the eyes of Christ. I kept telling myself, "Whatever I think the earthly facts are here, I want to see the real Fact of who these people really are. Whatever my opinions of what these people have done, whatever my impression of their testimony, even if it turns out that the defendant is 'guilty' of violating an earthly law, I want to see beyond all of these appearances to the truth that God's Son is guiltless." Whatever the earthly verdict



in this case turned out to be, God's verdict for everyone involved was and will forever be, "Thine is the Kingdom" (T-5. VI.10:8).

I used a number of Course practices to help me with this. I used pieces of the "truly helpful" prayer quite a bit. One practice in particular I remember using a lot was an adaptation of a favorite line from the Text, which I applied to everyone involved — the defendant, the alleged victim, the attorneys, witnesses, the judge, you name it. The line was this: "Your holiness gives life to me" (based on T-26.I.7:2).

We normally think the opposite: Our ego draws its pseudo-life from seeing others' "sins" and proclaiming itself holier than thou. But behind this line is the idea that each brother is a holy Son of God, and seeing his innocent holiness instead of his "sins" is what awakens me to true life, the life of Heaven given all of us by God. I've always loved this particular line, and have often used it as a "response to temptation" practice. I find something deeply beautiful and profound in it. It tells me that the vision of my brothers' holiness is what will awaken me to *my* holiness, the holiness I share with everyone.

At last, all the evidence was presented, and it was time for the jury to begin deliberations. At this point, I focused my Course practice much more on my fellow jurors. After all, we would now be debating this case. We could have widely diverging opinions, and arguments could get heated. Visions of the movie *Twelve Angry Men* danced in my head. So, I began to think along these lines: "Even as we debate the facts of the case, as we should, may we do so in a spirit of mutual respect and love. May the Holy Spirit guide our deliberations." And I continued to apply "Your holiness gives life to me" to my fellow jurors.

Things started out very smoothly, because based on the evidence, two of the charges were easy to handle. The marijuana possession charge was a no-brainer, since all agreed the defendant had the marijuana on him. Guilty on that one. (To clarify: When I voted "guilty," I meant it only in the strict legal sense of "The person did violate the human law in question.") The most serious charge, the aggravated assault, was also easy, because there were no witnesses to the knife incident besides the two participants. The knife definitely came out, since the defendant himself admitted pulling it, but what happened after that? It was just one guy's word against the other's, which wasn't nearly enough to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. Not guilty on that one.

Then we came to the charge of obstructing a police officer, and here we ran into problems. Most of us, myself included, felt the defendant was guilty on this charge, and that it wasn't really difficult to determine. We saw the defendant's resistance on a police video of the scene, and on top of that, the defendant admitted on the stand to obstructing the officer. If the defendant confessing in the courtroom doesn't pass the test of reasonable doubt, what does? But there were four people who, for various reasons, felt that there were extenuating circumstances that made his obstruction justifiable. They were very adamant about this; they insisted that they would never change their minds. And a unanimous verdict was required.

I found myself in a bit of an emotional quandary. On the one hand, I really didn't want to convict the defendant of this particular charge. His resistance was weak. It looked to me like the resistance was token, and he had no real intention of seriously obstructing the officer. It seemed like simply an impulsive reaction of fear. Moreover, I thought the officer handled things in a ham-fisted manner, needlessly escalating a situation that could have been defused with a calmer and cooler approach. And in my view, based on the video, this burly officer didn't need to twice apply a Taser to this exceedingly small, slight young man offering minimal resistance.

On the other hand, according to the law I had sworn to apply objectively, it was clear that the defendant did what he was accused of: He obstructed the officer, however lamely. He himself admitted to disobeying the officer's commands and putting up resistance. He claimed he did so because the officer acted unlawfully, but as ham-fisted as the officer was, he was well within the parameters of standard police procedure (this was no Rodney King situation). I understood and even shared some of the feelings of the "not guilty" contingent, but our job was to apply the law, which I thought was very clear.

This is where I think applying Course practices to my fellow jurors helped out. Of course, I can't know for certain whether there was a direct cause-and-effect relationship between my affirmation of their holiness and how the debate played out. But I will say that the debate was extraordinarily respectful and kind. It was a beautiful thing. Here were all these very different people — women, men, conservatives, liberals, Americans, foreign born, high income, low income — all treating each other with respect and consideration. Yes, there was plenty of passion, but no one got angry, everyone had his or her say, everyone listened, and by the end of the process, we all still liked and respected one another.

Alas, we never did come to an agreement. No one changed his or her mind. It was 8-4 in favor of "guilty," but since that wasn't unanimous, it was a hung jury: no decision, which for all practical purposes meant that the defendant was free of the charge. It struck me later that I actually ended up with the best of both sides of my inner conflict: I had fulfilled my juror's duty of applying the law objectively, but had also gotten the verdict I really preferred. Most of all, though, I was very grateful that we jurors were able to discuss serious disagreements in such a respectful and kind manner. At the end of our deliberations, I made a point of thanking all the other jurors for the pleasure of serving with such an outstanding group of people. This was one thing we did all agree on.

Immediately afterward, along with several other jurors, I spoke with the prosecutor. She asked in a calm and professional

manner why we arrived at the verdicts we did, because she wanted to learn from the experience. We told her honestly why we decided the way we did, and she thanked us for our willingness to share our process with her.

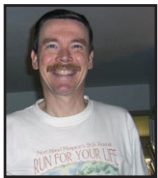
She struck me as a good and kind person who was just trying be of service to the citizens of our community as best she could. Even though she “lost” on the most serious charge, the one she wanted the most, there was no animosity. Everybody was just doing his or her job, and the verdicts were what they were. No hard feelings all around. I was glad to talk with her, because it let me see a human side that wasn’t obvious during the trial. Here too was a holy Son of God.

The final chapter of the story came when I went down to the jurors’ room for the final time after the trial was over. I was informed that the defendant wanted to thank the jurors for finding him not guilty on the aggravated assault charge (which would likely have sent him to prison for a while if he were convicted). I greeted Dave for the first time, and I shook his hand. There was a look of immense relief on his face, and he choked up a bit as he said, “Thank you for giving me my life.”

I wasn’t sure at first what to say in response. Something in me said that I shouldn’t respond in a way that completely ignored his mistakes on a form level. While guilt hadn’t been proven beyond a reasonable doubt, evidence presented at the trial showed that he had made a number of unwise decisions both during this incident and before. He needed to make some new decisions to turn his life around, or he could very easily end up right back in court again. I wanted to convey this to him somehow, while at the same time affirming his innocence as a Son of God.

So I asked quickly within for what to say, and words came to me. In response to his gratitude for giving him his life I said, “Take this gift and use it well. You now have the opportunity to make a good life for yourself. Make the most of it.” He responded, “You’re right. I’m glad to have the opportunity.” As we said goodbye, I said, “Have a good life, brother.” He replied, “I will.” So my term as a juror came to an end.

I left the courtroom with a heart full of love and gratitude, and a real sense of happy closure. I felt like I had accomplished the Holy Spirit’s purpose for me there. By bringing my Course practice into every aspect of my jury duty, I felt like I had simultaneously fulfilled my earthly responsibility as a juror and my Heavenly responsibility as a truly helpful miracle worker, extending love, forgiveness, and healing to everyone I encountered. Now I know, not just on a theoretical but on a practical, experiential level, that a Course student can indeed serve on a jury. We really can render an earthly verdict and render God’s verdict of “Thine is the Kingdom” at the same time. As far as I’m concerned, the case is closed.



E-mail your comments to the author at: [greg@circleofa.org](mailto:greg@circleofa.org)

Greg Mackie has been a student of *A Course in Miracles* since 1991, and a teacher for the Circle of Atonement since 1999. He writes Course Q & A’s and “Course Meets World” articles for the Circle of Atonement’s website, and is one of the co-leaders of the Circle Course Community. He sees his primary function as helping to develop a tradition of Course scholarship.

## CIRCLE MAILBOX

*Here is some of the feedback we’ve received on Greg Mackie’s article from Issue 101 of A Better Way, entitled How Ridiculous to Think That Love Could Be Compromised! How I Learned to Laugh at Misfortune.*

Your article created a shift in my awareness in recognition of this profound truth: Love cannot be compromised. I actually felt myself laughing, and awakening inside, releasing dark clouds of density that seemed to never move. I love to laugh, but this kind of laughter is of the light and is freeing.

Thank you sharing. :)

— Deborah Lovell

I very much appreciate this latest article on “laughing at misfortune.” Your personal practice technique seems like one that every Course student might benefit from. As I read your article, along with your mention of Robert’s “Nothing Can Compromise Love,” a feeling of gratitude welled up as I see Sons of God awakening. And we’re all right there along with you. Years ago, I read the *Yoga Sutras of Pantanjali: The Book of Spiritual Man*. It’s about the process we go through as we learn who we are, as we come to awaken to our true identity as Spiritual Man. As a Course student, I’ve always considered that to be identical to the Course process of coming to “right-mindedness.” As I read your article, I see evidence that both processes are occurring. It is encouraging to watch. It is one of the beautiful benefits of “Community.”

— Michael Stanford

...

I loved reading the newsletter this month! I am a Minister with Pathways of Light and a couple of my students and I have had the message “Lighten up!!” drilled into us by Jesus and Holy Spirit. Some of our experiences together on Skype have been hilarious....

I too am a laughter yoga leader and one exercise that I love is to go around and introduce yourself to everyone by shaking their hands and saying, “Hi, I’m an Ordained Minister” and laugh at that statement. “Hi, I’m a housewife,” “Hi, I’m...” It really does put everything into perspective as we laugh at our roles and who we think we are. As a former Corporate Play and Teambuilder facilitator, I’ve witnessed the benefits of laughter over and over as we let all our defenses down and let our Self out to play.

Thank you again for a wonderful article.

— Laurin Kyle Boyle

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