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# A BETTER WAY

## Unconditional—What a Wonderful Word

by Robert Perry

Recently, I have been riveted on one particular word: *unconditional*. What I have realized is very simple and something I think we all know. It’s old hat, really. It’s extremely easy to forget, yet it has the potential to become the central notion of our lives.

When you think about it, “unconditional” is really quite a profound word. According to various online definitions, it means “absolute, and without conditions, limitations, reservations or qualifications,” “categoric: not modified or restricted by reservations,” and “not contingent; not determined or influenced by someone or something else.” Something that is unconditional is something that is subject to nothing, contingent upon nothing, limited by nothing.

The strong message at the heart of *A Course in Miracles* is that our response to all the truly important things can and should be unconditional. Our response to *life* is meant to be unconditional. Let’s look at three examples of this.

### Unconditional response to others

Our emotional response to other people is, of course, profoundly conditional. Our evaluation of them is a constantly moving sea, rising and falling according to a vast constellation of factors, most of them utterly trivial. How does their hair look today? Did they just say something flattering? Am I too busy to deal with them right now? Do they know someone who can open doors for me? What have they done for me lately? Hundreds of factors bob up and down on this restless sea, jostling for position, vying for attention. As a result, the exact way we feel towards someone right now is like a snowflake—a special configuration that will only briefly hold its shape and that will never again be repeated.

Actually, I think we are constantly disappointed in ourselves for being so fickle. We sense that there is something in other people that deserves more constancy from us, more emotional fidelity. Yet we watch as this ideal of constant love and acceptance is tugged at and torn by a thousand superficialities, to the point where we end up disheartened over just how shallow we are.

It would therefore be a deep relief, I believe, to feel what Carl Rogers called “unconditional positive regard.” Wouldn’t be wonderful to feel toward others a deep love that was absolutely immune to that shifting sea of superficialities? That was unaffected by anything that happened? That was supremely happy with them no matter how they looked today or what they said yesterday?

However, to really pursue that goal, we need a solid rationale for it. We need a picture of reality in which it represents more than just wishful thinking. We need it to make sense. That is what the Course’s teaching does for us. It teaches us that the reality of other people is worlds away from what we see. Their reality is like the vastness of infinite space, whereas what we see is like a tiny propaganda film. If we could just stop believing that tiny film, and accept the vast reality in its place, then our response to others really *could* be unconditional.

Try to imagine that. Imagine feeling love for a stranger that was “absolute, and without conditions, limitations, reservations or qualifications.” Imagine feeling love for your spouse or partner that was “categoric: not modified or restricted by reservations.” Imagine feeling love for an estranged friend that was “not contingent; not determined or influenced by someone or something else.” The Course is telling us that in the big picture of things, that is what is truly normal. That is how we are meant to feel towards others all the time.

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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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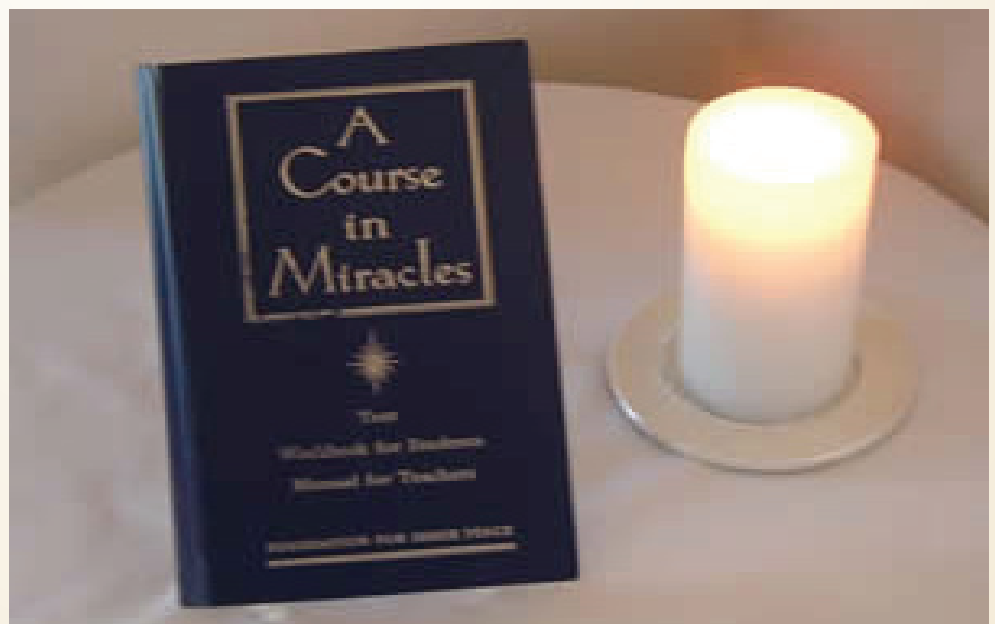
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## Unconditional response to ourselves

Our emotional response to ourselves, of course, takes place along lines that are extremely similar to what we saw above. Self-criticism and self-praise, at any given moment, are going on in relation to a myriad of factors. Indeed, if you are really sensitive to what is transpiring in your mind, you will probably be able to detect multiple lines of self-evaluation just in relation to your reading of this article. In the back of your mind you may be monitoring a whole host of questions related to it, such as: Am I concentrating enough on what I'm reading? Am I understanding this enough or am I being dim? Am I tempted to flake out and skim the rest? Is this affecting me like it should? Do I already know all this? Is my love really as conditional as he is suggesting? Is my love more unconditional than that of other readers? By reading this, am I avoiding something else I should be doing?

These questions go on and on, don't they? In answer to them, we at any given moment will be applying to ourselves a long list of labels, both praising and condemning. The Course includes a couple of lists like these. In Lesson 35 we find this sample list:

*I see myself as imposed on.*  
*I see myself as depressed.*  
*I see myself as failing.*  
*I see myself as endangered.*  
*I see myself as helpless.*  
*I see myself as victorious.*  
*I see myself as losing out.*  
*I see myself as charitable.*  
*I see myself as virtuous.* (W-pI.35.6:2-10)

Here is another list, this one from the Text:

The ego can and does allow you to regard yourself as supercilious, unbelieving, "lighthearted," distant, emotionally shallow, callous, uninvolved and even desperate. (T-11.V.9:1)

The conclusion is obvious: Our feeling toward ourselves is incredibly conditional. For this reason, it is hard to imagine an unconditional response toward ourselves. Can you imagine carrying "unconditional positive regard" for yourself, unshaken by anything you said or did? This can even sound kind of scary, like you'll take the controls off your behavior and do lawless things.

Just as with the previous category, we need some strong philosophical foundation for this, something to convince ourselves that this is more than just a blank check we are giving to ourselves, signed with our own suspect hand.

I think that foundation is best found in God's unconditional Love. The Course is so repeatedly and emphatically clear that God loves us absolutely, no matter what, that we might just start believing it ourselves. There is, in fact, a lovely pattern in the Course in which our self-condemnation comes face to face with God's unconditional Love:

[God's Own Higher Court] will dismiss the case against you, however carefully you have built it up. The case may be fool-proof, but it is not God-proof. The Holy Spirit will not hear it, because He can only witness truly. His verdict will always be "thine is the Kingdom." (T-5.VI.10:5-8)

[The prodigal son] was ashamed to return to his father, because he thought he had hurt him. Yet when he came home the father welcomed him with joy, because the son himself *was* his father's treasure. He wanted nothing else. (T-8.VI.4:2-4)

We come in honesty to God and say we did not understand...[In response to this] Would He hurt His Son? Or would He rush to answer him, and say, "This is My Son, and all I have is his"? (W-pII.FL.6:1-3)

In all three passages, we are approaching God full of self-judgment and terrified of His judgment. In the first, we bring to Him the case we have built up against ourselves. In the second, we (symbolized by the prodigal son) come to Him in shame, expecting anger. In the third, we come to him "in honesty," admitting our mistakes and afraid this will open us up to His wrath.

In all three, however, God simply ignores our self-evaluation and wraps us in an unquestioning embrace. His Voice refuses to hear our case and instead renders the verdict "thine is the Kingdom." He sweeps aside our claim that we have

squandered His treasure; all He wants is to have us back because we *are* his treasure. He rushes to answer us, saying, “You are My Son, and all I have is yours.”

We need to see these as more than mere poetic images. They are how God is responding to our self-evaluations right this second. They are His response to those lists we saw earlier. The fact is that we think our lists are absolutely realistic, and that anything else is a pie-in-the-sky fantasy. To let the lists go would be the height of irresponsibility, wouldn't it? Yet can we really maintain this when we see the ultimate Authority sweep them aside as so much irrelevant debris? God's authority, then, can give us permission to let our labels go, permission we would never give ourselves. Therefore, when we say, “I see myself as failing, helpless, losing out,” we can hear Him rush to answer us, saying, “You are My Son, and all I have is yours.” When we say, “I am distant, emotionally shallow, callous, and uninvolved,” we can hear Him respond, “I dismiss the case against you. My verdict will always be ‘thine is the Kingdom.’” I encourage you to actually apply one of these in your own case. Think up your own list of current labels and hear God speak one of these lines to you. His unconditional Love can become the basis for your unconditional self-acceptance.

## Unconditional response to our lives

The same thing that goes on with our evaluations of self and others also goes on, of course, with our feelings in general. Our mood is notoriously variable, changing like the wind. Yet it doesn't actually have to be that way. The Course always seems slightly puzzled by our changing moods. It observes how “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” (W-pI.186.8:5). The Course acknowledges that the ego “promotes different moods,” yet it teaches the Holy Spirit promotes only one: “the one mood He engenders is joy” (T-6.V.1:9, 10).

However, isn't it unnatural to respond to everything with the same mood? It certainly seems to be. Yet what *is* natural? Isn't it what's in line with our nature, what flows freely from our nature? And the Course claims that our nature contains only one mood. It's not actually in our nature to feel anything else. This means that shifting moods are actually *unnatural*:

As God created you, you must remain unchangeable, with transitory states by definition false. And that includes all shifts in feeling, alterations in conditions of the body and the mind; in all awareness and in all response. (W-pI.152.5:1)

As a result, nothing requires us to have changing moods. We don't have to do them. This is the theme of the important section “This Need Not Be” (T-4.IV). This section tells us that whenever our “mood” is “not joyous,” we need to “*know this need not be*” (T-4.IV.2:2) and then change our minds. When we are sad, when we are depressed, when we are anxious, when we are guilty, when we are anything but joyous, we must remind ourselves “*this need not be.*” We don't have to feel this way. It is not required by the conditions of our lives. It is not even natural.

Imagine having an unconditional response to your life. Imagine carrying a mood of joy that was not subject to anything that happens in your day. Imagine a joy that nothing could sway, that was the same whether you were asleep or awake, engaged in intense activity or relaxing by yourself, surrounded by enemies or praised by your friends. Who wouldn't want such a state?

## Conclusion

The Course's promise is that it really is possible to have unconditional love for others, unconditional acceptance of self, and an unconditionally joyous mood. The key, it seems to me, is to gradually accept one thing: In the big picture, *all the “conditions” are nothing in light of what really matters.* What really matters about others, what really matters about ourselves, what really matters about life, is something so vast and so indescribably wonderful that, in light of it, the conditions of this world do not amount to a hill of beans. Thus, the conditions that seem so solid and serious are, the Course tells us, just “mists before the sun” (T-31.VIII.6:3), nothing but “a little feather before the great wings of truth” (T-19.IV(A).9:1), just a “disappearing snowflake” in the summer sun (T-19.IV(A).9:6), a mere “passing cloud upon a sky eternally serene” (W-pII.300.1:2).

These images, I think, can become a focal point for us as we train our minds in unconditional response. Why don't we go ahead and use them that way now? Think of something you are judging another for today and name that thing. Then see it as just a mist before the radiant sun of who that person really is. Think of something you are judging yourself for today and name it, too. Then picture it as nothing but “a little feather before the great wings of truth.” See that same thing as just a disappearing snowflake in the summer sun of God's Love. Finally, name some condition in your life that has made your mood less than joyous today. Then visualize that condition as nothing “more than a passing cloud upon a sky eternally serene.”

Let yourself feel all these conditions lift off of you. The mist evaporates, the feather blows away, the snowflake melts, the

cloud passes. And you become transfixed by the blazing sun, carried away by the great wings, at one with the serene sky. Your response to others, to yourself, and to your life has become *unconditional*.



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## CIRCLE NEWS

### Website Fundraiser Update: Doubling Your Generosity

Thank you for your contributions! We're very happy and grateful to announce that due to your generous support, we have reached our matching goal of \$6,000, as well as our initial overall goal of \$26,000 for the revamping of our online presence. Work has begun on the reconstruction of our website, and we are optimistic that we are well on our way to better times for the Circle and those served by our work.

However, we're not quite there yet. Our financial needs continue. We need both additional funds for the back-end work involved in getting the new website launched, and general operating funds during this continued phase of transition and rebuilding. So, your continued support is still very much needed, and as always, very deeply appreciated. Please click [here](#) if you would like to make a donation.