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A BETTER WAY

“All My Sorrows End in Your Embrace” The Concept of “Embrace” in *A Course in Miracles*

by Robert Perry

Who doesn't enjoy a good embrace? An embrace with a loved one speaks to a set of deep needs in us—for love, for belonging, for closeness, even for a sense of safety. *A Course in Miracles* recognizes this and uses the image of an embrace as a symbol for how we are treated by the things of God. In this article, I would like to explore the concept of “embrace” in the Course. As we look at the references to the word, along with related passages about being “enveloped” and being “held” in “arms,” we will find that a deeply desirable picture emerges.

Embraced by God

The Course describes us being embraced by a number of things, both on the level of Heaven (God, eternal peace) and on the level of the right mind (communication, the holy instant). However, by far, the most frequent “embracer” is God (I find eleven references to this). This frequency suggests that the idea of an embrace captures something at the heart of how God relates to us. *The Song of Prayer* describes this embrace in these beautiful words: “I would recall My weary Son to Me from dreams of malice to the sweet embrace of everlasting Love and perfect peace” (S-3.IV.7:1).

This, in fact, is much of the function of God’s “Arms” in the Course. Whatever functions we might imagine for them, they in fact have only two. All of the references to God’s “Arms” are either to them being *open* in welcome or to us being *held* by them. These two obviously fit together in a single sequence, in that opening one’s arms in welcome is supposed to culminate in wrapping them around the one being welcomed. That is exactly what we see in the following passage (though don’t blink or you’ll miss it): “Love’s Arms are open to receive you, and give you peace forever” (T-20.VI.10:6).

This imagery actually goes back way before the Course to Helen Schucman’s subway vision in the 1930s (see *Absence from Felicity*, by Ken Wapnick, pp. 52-55). There, she saw herself as a child walking into a great light she understood to be God, then “resting her head as if leaning against a gigantic knee.” Then comes this climactic part: “The feeling of a great arm reached around her and she disappeared.” Do you see what happened? She leans her head against God’s knee, He responds, as any father would, by reaching His Arm around her to embrace her, and she then disappears in Him.

Embraced by peace

The second most frequent “embracer” is peace (I find six references to this). These passages speak movingly of us being embraced or enveloped by peace:

The still infinity of endless peace surrounds you gently in its soft embrace, so strong and quiet, tranquil in the might of its Creator, nothing can intrude upon the sacred Son of God within. (T-29.V.2:4).

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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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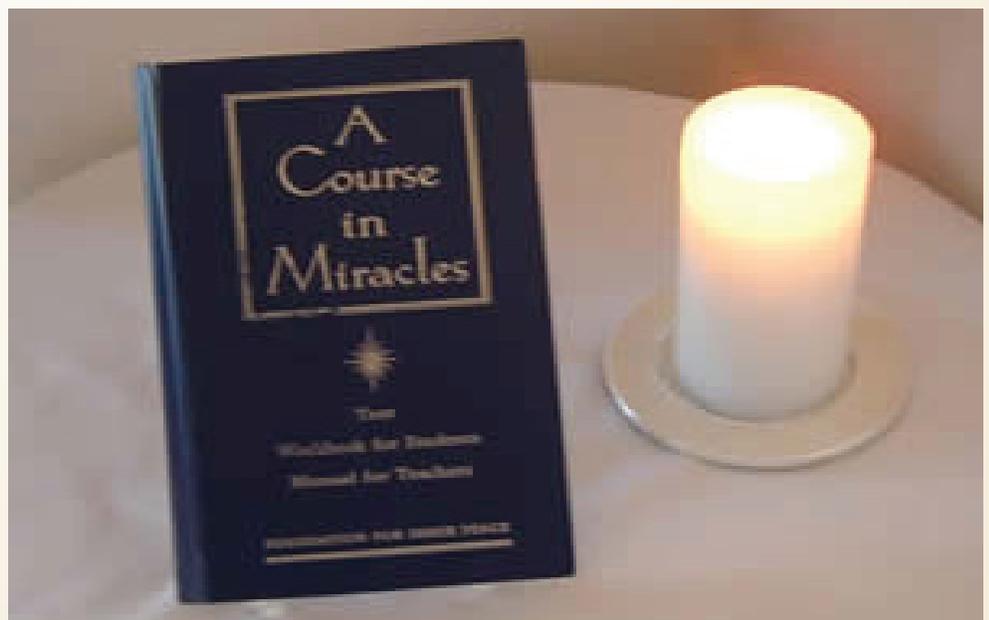
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Peace is already recognized at last, and you can feel its soft embrace surround your heart and mind with comfort and with love. (W-pI.200.10:6)

Today the peace of God envelops me,
And I forget all things except His Love. (Lesson 346)

A loving and soft embrace

These images of being embraced can stir a deep response in us. But why? Why do we find them so attractive? To begin with, an embrace means love. If you are being embraced, you are being loved. What greater love could there be, then, than being embraced by God? In *The Song of Prayer*, God says to us, “How lovingly I hold you in My Heart and in My Arms” (S-3.IV.9:6).

Further, these embraces are said to be *soft* and *gentle*. My oldest daughter used to give what we called “attack hugs” that caught you off guard with their fierceness. Clearly, the embraces in the Course are not that. We need only look at the first “peace” quote above to see this. It says, “Peace surrounds you *gently* in its *soft* embrace.” The phrase “soft embrace” actually occurs twice in the Course.

An enveloping embrace

Also, as the preceding quote says, an embrace “surrounds” you. It “envelops” you. This is a major part of the concept of “embrace” in the Course. Its significance lies in the fact that when something surrounds you, it becomes *the only thing that is affecting you*. It is touching you at every point, and nothing else is touching you at all. Isn’t this why we like being surrounded by something good? George Costanza on Seinfeld used to say, “I would drape myself in velvet if it were socially acceptable.” How much more would we like to be “draped” in peace or in love?

To help us experience this idea, there are two places where the Course builds, step by step, an image of us being surrounded by something of God. The first is in Lesson 68, which says: “Try to feel safety surrounding you, hovering over you and holding you up” (W-pI.68.6:5). So safety is not only all *around* you, it is also *underneath* you and *above* you. The second such image is in Lesson 264, “I am surrounded by the Love of God.” It says, “Father, You stand before me and behind, beside me, in the place I see myself, and everywhere I go” (W-pI.264.1:1). Notice how both passages gradually build, piece by piece, that sense of being completely surrounded.

What follows is a passage that specifically mentions the concept that being surrounded by something means that you can be touched by only that one thing and nothing else. Look at each sentence separately, noticing how it draws upon this concept, directly or indirectly:

It is God’s Will that nothing touch His Son except Himself, and nothing else comes nigh unto him. He is as safe from pain as God Himself, Who watches over him in everything. The world about him shines with love because God placed him in Himself where pain is not, and love surrounds him without end or flaw. Disturbance of his peace can never be. In perfect sanity he looks on love, for it is all about him and within him. He must deny the world of pain the instant he perceives the arms of love around him. (T-13.VII.7:1-6)

Did you notice the embrace in the last line—“the arms of love around him”? This is naturally connected to the idea that “nothing touch His Son except Himself, and nothing else comes nigh unto him.” If God’s Arms are around you, then the only thing that is touching you is God. Nothing else can come near you.

Perhaps the clearest example of this concept is in that beautiful line about the embrace of peace: “The still infinity of endless peace surrounds you gently in its soft embrace, so strong and quiet, tranquil in the might of its Creator, nothing can intrude upon the sacred Son of God within” (T-29.V.2:4). Notice the picture here: strong, gentle, endless peace surrounds you in its embrace, and because it does, *nothing can intrude upon you*.

A “safe embrace”

In this world, vulnerability is a constant issue. Danger can come from any direction. We can “get it in the neck” or “right between the eyes.” We can be “stabbed in the back” or “cut off at the knees.” Any part of our body—front, back, or side—can be struck, scratched, bitten, or pierced; as can any part of our equally vulnerable ego. Herein lies a great deal of the appeal of the kind of embrace we see here. While Love’s Arms are around us, “nothing else comes nigh unto” us. We are sheltered. We have found sanctuary. We are in the most perfectly soft and loving cocoon.

Can you feel yourself relax just reading that? That leads to one of the most frequently mentioned features of the

embrace in the Course: It is *safe*. As two of the quotes below say, it is a “safe embrace.” Please read through these quotes and try to feel the sense of safety they describe:

[The holy instant] calls to you to be yourself, within its safe embrace. (T-18.VI.14:3)

The power of God draws everyone to its [the circle of Atonement’s] safe embrace of love and union. (T-14.V.8:5)

And I need but remember that God’s Love surrounds His Son and keeps his sinlessness forever perfect, to be sure that I am saved and safe forever in His Arms. (W-pII.235.1:3)

How can he fear or doubt or fail to know he cannot suffer, be endangered, or experience unhappiness, when he belongs to You, beloved and loving, in the safety of Your Fatherly embrace? (W-pII.244.1:3)

This last passage is part of an explicit reference to the concept we have seen here, that being surrounded by God’s embrace means that no danger can touch us. Right after it come these two lines: “And there we are in truth. No storms can come into the hallowed haven of our home” (W-pII.244.2:1-2). God’s embrace is actually our home, and no storms can come into that hallowed haven.

“I forget all things except His Love”

This safety is not just a case of “thank God I’m in the protection of these Arms and those harmful forces can’t get at me.” While wrapped in God’s Arms, nothing else seems real. By contrast with the overwhelming love that surrounds us, all the harm and negativity become like a distant dream, and pass out of our minds. Let’s look at two examples of this:

He must deny the world of pain the instant he perceives the arms of love around him. (T-13.VII.7:6)

Today the peace of God envelops me,
And I forget all things except His Love. (Lesson 346)

The first passage says that when we finally perceive that we are surrounded by the arms of love, we will let go of our allegiance to the world of pain. For us, it will no longer be real and no longer be wanted. The second passage says that when we find ourselves enveloped by the peace of God, we will be so utterly absorbed in His Love that we will forget everything else. And isn’t that what happens in the ideal embrace? You forget everything but the love you are enfolded in.

We could say, then, the same thing about the safety inside the embrace versus the danger outside as the Manual for Teachers says about the peace of God. The Manual says that when you first experience God’s peace, there is a contrast between this peace and everything you experienced before—which basically consisted of different forms of *war*. But then, it says, this initial contrast (between peace and war) passes away as the peace spreads out and blankets everything: “The contrast first perceived has merely gone. Quiet has reached to cover everything” (M-20.2:10-11). In our context, we could rephrase that idea in this way: The contrast first perceived, between the safety of the embrace and the danger outside it, has merely gone. The embrace has reached to cover everything. Now “its all-embracing tenderness” (W-pI.189.6:1) is the only thing we feel.

“Forever in His Arms”

There is one more feature of the embrace I want to cover: It is not fleeting, like embraces in this world. Rather, it is permanent. It is forever. Notice the word “forever” in these quotes:

I am saved and safe forever in His Arms. (W-pII.235.1:3)

Love’s Arms are open to receive you, and give you peace forever. (T-20.VI.10:6)

I am...held forever quiet and at peace within His loving Arms. (W-pII.267.1:6)

How seriously should we take this metaphor?

Many Course students will note how dualistic this all sounds: “So, let me get this straight: God has *Arms* that actually

embrace us? Surely this is some sort of metaphor. How can a formless God have Arms? How can a formless God wrap those Arms around His formless Son?”

Of course this is a metaphor, but in Course circles we often forget what a metaphor is. A metaphor stands for something that is *like* it. Calling something a metaphor doesn't mean we can then relegate it to the scrap heap of poetic nonsense. Rather, it means that the metaphor points beyond itself to a reality that is like it. In this case that means that, even in eternity, there is something *like* an embrace. It is not a human embrace. How, in the formlessness of Heaven, can we speak of arms wrapping themselves around a body? All of that assumes both form and time. Yet something *like* an embrace occurs, something similar enough that it is more accurate to speak of Heaven as an *embrace* than as a *void*, for the Course does the former many times and the latter not once. Even when the Course gets as close as it ever does to the image of a void—when it speaks of God's Mind as a sky in which we appear as a star—it still speaks of God's Mind *embracing* us and *holding* us: “The sky embraces it [the star] and softly holds it in its perfect place” (T-30.III.9:3).

Perhaps the void comparison, however, is an unfair one, in that hardly anyone uses the word “void” in describing the Course's Heaven. Course students are more likely to describe Heaven as *formless* than as a void. Yet the Course describes Heaven as an embrace (sixteen times) more than twice as often as it describes Heaven as “formless” or “formlessness” (seven times).

I actually think that this talk of God's embrace captures something very real. I have been struck by the fact that people who have near-death experiences often report an encounter with God (usually as a blazing light) in which they feel held or embraced by God. The following are quotes from the website of the Near Death Experience Research Foundation (www.nderf.org) which has over 2500 published accounts of near-death experiences (NDEs). These are a few of the many accounts in which the experiencer describes a sense of being wrapped in a loving embrace:

Suddenly I was surrounded by profound peace, and warmth and love. The “situation” was so magnetic and the feeling of love intense. I was not afraid—I felt at home and at peace. The intense presence of love surrounded me. I had felt an embrace and incredible love beyond belief!!! I saw no one but I felt a “massive presence” of warmth and love—a strong feeling of togetherness and joy. (Barbara)

Safe in the gentle yet powerful embrace of his love, I rested, secure that everything was okay, exactly as it was supposed to be. (Linda S)

I felt like a little baby nuzzled in the warm embrace of my mother. (Thomas M)

The peace and comfort felt like being embraced or hugged by a lover, and the calmness felt like the feeling of lying in your lovers embrace after making love to someone special. The safety feeling it gave was almost that soft [sort?] of safe and comfort feeling that we got when we were just a child being embraced and carried around in our parents arms. (Wan I)

I was embraced by this being, or enveloped in its light, which felt like an embrace. Suddenly I remembered this place. This was my home, the place that was really my home, and I wondered how I could've ever forgotten about it. (Lisa M)

The arms were held out as if to embrace me and I wanted nothing more than to be in that light. I experienced an acceptance and love unparalleled by anything on earth. I have never wanted anything in my life as much as I wanted to be in that light. (Jennifer)

In these accounts, we are clearly encountering the exact same concept that we have been reading about in the Course. The only discernible difference is that one is an abstract teaching while the other is a personal report. Otherwise, they are indistinguishable. We even see many of the same words used to describe the embrace: “safe,” “gentle,” “peace,” “love,” “comfort,” “enveloped.” There is even an understanding that this is not a literal, physical embrace, but is *like* that: “I felt like [a baby] in the warm embrace of my mother.” “The peace and comfort felt like being embraced.” “I was...enveloped in its light, which felt like an embrace.”

Maybe, then, the Course is not just tossing around careless poetry when it talks about this embrace. Maybe it is using a human metaphor to point to something that is *like* that metaphor, something that is entirely real and that is at the heart of the eternal state we call Heaven.

“All my sorrows end in Your embrace”

I would like to conclude with my favorite Course passage about this embrace, one that tells us some of the most important things about it. This comes from Lesson 317, “I follow in the way appointed me.” The prayer in this lesson speaks of us traveling home along God’s way and then of what happens when we reach “the end” of that way. I’ll lay out the rest in iambic pentameter:

*The memory of You awaits me there.
And all my sorrows end in Your embrace,
which You have promised to Your Son, who thought
mistakenly that he had wandered from
the sure protection of Your loving Arms. (W-pII.317.2:4-5)*

What awaits us at the end of the road? The memory of God, our reawakening to the total, permanent awareness of God. But this memory is described here, as elsewhere (see T-20.VI.10:6 and W-pI.168.3:4), as the act of being enfolded in God’s *embrace*. This embrace is so loving, so all-encompassing, that it heals all of our sorrows. What are these sorrows, specifically? Because the embrace takes place at the end of the road, the sorrows must clearly be all those we collected *along* the road.

Now the picture becomes clear. It’s as if we have been on a seemingly endless journey, far from the protection of home. The journey, as the Course says elsewhere, has been “long and cruel and senseless” (T-13.I.3:7). We have been battered and bruised and reduced to tears more times than we can count. At last, though, we have reached our home again. And there stands our Mother, waiting for us with Arms open wide, filled with nothing but Love and joy and the longing to be with us again. And as Her Arms enfold us and we are enveloped in Her perfect Love, none of the bad times seem real anymore. They shrink and recede and vanish from sight, leaving our hearts unscarred, without a trace that the sorrows were ever there in the first place. This image can almost seem too good, too loving, to be true. Yet we find elsewhere in the Course almost the exact same image of our return home: “The graciousness of God will take them gently in, and cover all their sense of pain and loss with the immortal assurance of their Father’s Love” (T-14.IX.4:3).

Yet there is more. Next we are told that this final, perfect embrace has been “promised” to us. It’s not that some of us will reach it and others will remain forever wandering. Every single one of us will end up in this embrace. It is guaranteed. God has promised it to each of us.

Finally, this prayer has one last revelation, which explains why our return is guaranteed: We only “thought mistakenly” that we “had wandered from the sure protection of Your loving Arms.” We only dreamt that we wandered off into a dangerous world, away from the safety of our Father’s Arms. The reason we will return to that embrace, then, is because we never actually left it. Though we seem to be stumbling along that lonely road, banging our knees, we are actually wrapped in that perfect embrace *right now*. We always have been. We may fail to perceive “the arms of love around” us (T-13.VII.7:6), but that doesn’t change the fact that they are still there. Indeed, they are around us this very instant.

This is not an incidental fact. This can hold us up every day, every minute. This can make the thorny road we walk tolerable. This can dry our tears long before we actually melt into the Love at the end of the road. Significantly, the very first instruction Jesus gave to Helen and Bill (in Helen’s notebooks) for a day of Workbook-like practice encouraged them to practice this one great fact:

Have a good day. Since only eternity is real, why not use the illusion of time constructively? You might remember that underneath are the Everlasting Arms.

How do you have a good day? Remind yourself all day long that you are not really wandering alone through time, but that you are in fact, right this instant, being held by God’s Everlasting Arms.



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

Welcome to Circle House!

Here in Sedona, Arizona, at what we affectionately refer to as Circle World Headquarters, three of us with close ties to the Course and the Circle -- Greg Mackie, Amy Speech, and Veronica Vaughan -- are sharing Robert and Nicola's house and laying the groundwork toward the Circle's longtime vision of establishing a center in Sedona.

For now, a mini version of this dream is taking shape here at Circle House, where our lovely and spacious guest suite is available for rent. So if you're thinking about a quiet retreat or a restful vacation in a beautiful setting, please consider a visit to Sedona and a stay with us. We'd love the chance to meet you, share a chat out on the patio, and have you join us on weekday mornings for a reading of the daily lesson and meditation.

For photos and more details about the suite and to make reservations, please click [here](#).

CIRCLE MAILBOX

The following is feedback on Robert's article in A Better Way #106, "Unconditional—What a Wonderful Word"

Thank you, Robert, for a wonderful article. So very relevant to me and everyone, and so spot on. Bless you for your work.

— Michael Gould

...

Hi, just wanted to thank you for your article. I love when I can grab onto something so simply said and know I can use it without much thought or practice in my daily life. I found this in your article, especially about the changing of moods throughout the day. The visual you gave seems so simple yet freeing, looking forward to using it. Thanks.

— Bennett Darienzo

...

The following is feedback on Robert's article in A Better Way #103, "Who Made the World?"

The Course can sometimes be confusing on a quote by quote basis on this and other subjects. In this case there are some Course fundamentals which help to unify the apparently disparate quotes.

As soon as I had finished reading your article a passage came to my attention, being close to the lesson of the day:

What is the world? The world is false perception. It is born of error, and has not left its source. It will remain no longer than the thought that gave it birth is cherished. 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. (W-pII.3.1:1-4)

This highlights an important fact. The world has not left its source in the mind. This reminds us of the fundamental metaphysics of the Course which is consistent throughout. The principle that the error has never left its source, that in fact we have never left Heaven is the saving principle. This is why salvation is ultimately guaranteed.

The Text tells us, “The Holy Spirit is God’s answer to the separation, the means by which the Atonement heals until the whole mind returns to creating” (T-5 II.2:5). The Clarification of Terms tells us, “The Holy Spirit abides in the part of your mind that is part of the Christ Mind” (C-6:4:1).

So we have the thought of separation, the space-time belief, and God’s Answer to the error, all in the Son’s mind. How does this play out? As you point out, the Course brings the two things together in some key passages:

There is another Maker of the world, the simultaneous Corrector of the mad belief that anything could be established and maintained without some link that kept it still within the laws of God. (T-25.III.4:1)

There is another purpose in the world that error made, because it has another Maker Who can reconcile its goal with His Creator’s purpose. In His perception of the world, nothing is seen but justifies forgiveness and the sight of perfect sinlessness. (T-25.III.5:1-2)

The key here is the perception of the world. There is a space-time belief and for every erroneous thought and perception there is the Holy Spirit’s healing Correction. The simultaneous Corrector is always present in every situation because He represents God’s comprehensive Answer to the original error which is there in our minds along with the original error. There are no half measures here. The Correction is total.

The other Maker of the world sees everything differently from us. We made it all as a separation device and perceive accordingly. He sees it as a healing device and “makes” it something different because of His holy perception. This is very big picture. Perception is powerful and is the crux of the Course.

The Great Transformer of perception will undertake with you the careful searching of the mind that made this world...Each spot His reason touches grows alive with beauty, and what seemed ugly in the darkness of your lack of reason is suddenly released to loveliness. (T-17.II.5:2-4)

The whole thing has never left the mind of the Son, the whole thing is an illusion. How is the illusion perceived? That is the real question. Two “makers” of the world are available. Our false perception and purposes or the perception and purpose of the Holy Spirit. Our lives can be full of meaning and purpose if this choice is remembered. Nothing has been left out, no person, place or event is beyond the Love of God, but it does require our choice that this be so. Which “maker” do we choose? Our choice in this matter has vast consequences and will play out in a myriad of ways in every moment of our lives. This is our part in the Atonement.

Let us not rest content until the world has joined our changed perception. Let us not be satisfied until forgiveness has been made complete. And let us not attempt to change our function. We must save the world. For we who made it must behold it through the eyes of Christ, that what as made to die can be restored to everlasting life. (W-pII.3:5)

— Mary Benton