



CONTENTS

At Home in a New World	
by Greg Mackie	1
Sacred Exchange	
by Amy Speech	7
Circle Mailbox	9
Circle News	12



A BETTER WAY

At Home in a New World

Making the “Foreign” Language of *A Course in Miracles* Your Own

by Greg Mackie

As many of you know, I am now living in Mexico with my fiancée, Patricia Zamudio. Things are going very well overall, but the transition from the United States to Mexico has been quite an adjustment for me in many ways. And the biggest challenge by far has been the language barrier. Virtually no one speaks English where I live (understandably so — I would not expect otherwise), and I had very little Spanish when I came.

This is a completely new experience for me. For the first time in my adult life, I can’t communicate with the people around me. Oh, I can call a taxi, order food, pay for groceries, and ask where the bathroom is, but I can’t truly communicate in any depth. It is a profoundly isolating and disorienting experience. Overnight, I have been transformed from a witty intellectual to a babbling toddler. Ever-helpful Patricia has become my linguistic equivalent of a seeing-eye dog, leading me around and keeping me out of trouble. But when she’s not around, I’m on my own, dazed and confused, groping about for a sense of connection and home. I am a stranger in a strange land.

I have taken steps to remedy this situation: I’m now in an intensive four-days-a-week Spanish class at the state university (conducted in Spanish with only the bare minimum of English). As my skill and vocabulary have increased, I’ve been speaking more and more Spanish with Patricia at home, which has been extremely helpful. And I’ve recently acquired a new learning partner, a young Mexican man who is learning English from me as I am learning Spanish from him. So, I’m definitely less dazed and confused than I was when I first arrived. But I still have a long way to go.

And as I’ve been trying to bridge the gap between me and the people around me, I’ve been thinking a lot about how this relates to our experience of *A Course in Miracles*. The Course, too, feels a lot like a foreign language to many of its students, at least initially. Indeed, at a Course conference some time ago, writer D. Patrick Miller gave a talk entitled something like “When Will *A Course in Miracles* Be Translated into English?” Course students, too, have often felt something like I’m feeling now in Mexico: a sense of disconnect, a gap between them and the Course. They too have felt like strangers in a strange land.

If you think about it, there are a lot of similarities between learning a foreign human language and learning the “foreign” language of the Course. In both cases, we start out in a state of confusion and lack of understanding as we encounter a language that initially sounds like gibberish to us. But through a process of diligent study, frequent practice, and ongoing application in real-life situations — a process of immersion — this language slowly but surely begins to make sense. If we keep at it, something wonderful will happen: we will become “fluent” in our new language. And when we become fluent, we will have much more than just a useful new skill. We will enter a whole new world, a world we can connect with, a world in which we feel at home.

Here, I want to draw out the similarities I see between learning a foreign human language and learning *A Course in Miracles*. Those who know the Circle’s work will recognize many of the points we have made in previous articles about how to really learn the Course — especially the familiar triad of study/practice/extension. But what I hope will be fresh here is the light that my process of learning a foreign language has shed on this topic, at least for me. This experience has

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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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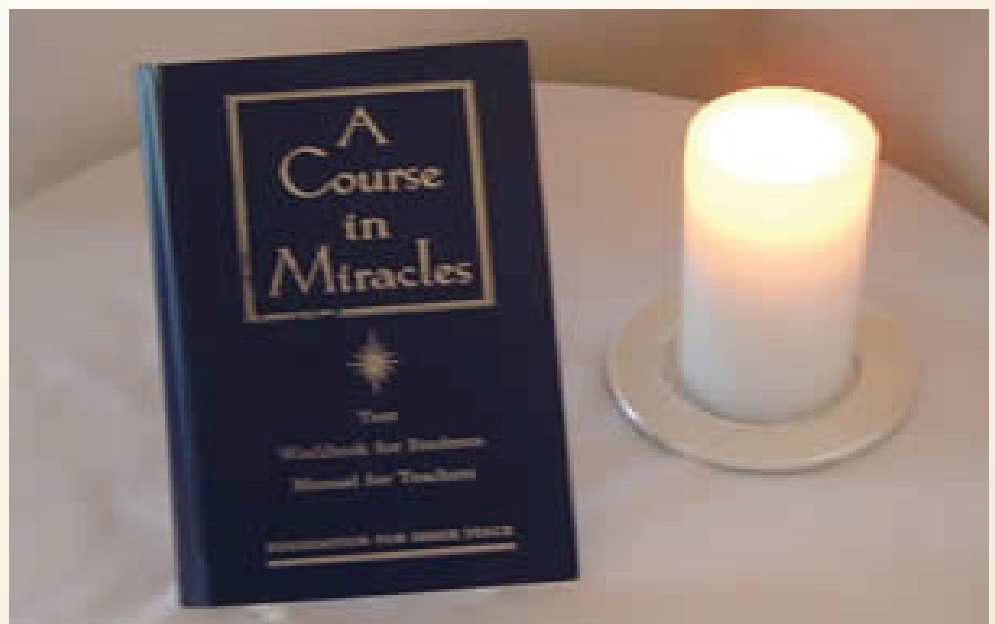
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had a deep impact on me. It has shown me in a new way just how critical these various elements are if we really want to bridge the gap between us and the Course and walk its path all the way home to God.

Some elements of learning a foreign language

I admit at the outset that I'm no expert in learning a foreign language, and no doubt there are elements that I've left out here. That being said, based on my experience (with both German and Spanish, as well as with the Course) and the experience of others I've known, it seems to me that to really learn a foreign human language or the "foreign" language of the Course, the following elements are vitally important:

Motivation

I've discovered the hard way that to learn a foreign language, you have to be really motivated to learn it. I knew months ago that I would be moving to Mexico, but as long as I was in my comfortable English-speaking world, my efforts to learn Spanish were sporadic at best. Once I got to Mexico, however, everything changed. There's nothing like that linguistic wall of isolation to motivate you to do whatever it takes to knock down the wall. My urgent desire to reach past isolation and connect with those around me has lit a fire under me to learn Spanish as quickly as possible. Good thing I have that motivation, too, because it is difficult work. Without that fire burning under me, I just wouldn't do it.

Motivation is also critical for learning *A Course in Miracles*. The Course, in fact, tells us that motivation is the alpha and omega of walking its path, the most critical element for good teachers to instill:

Strengthening motivation for change is their first and foremost goal. It is also their last and final one. Increasing motivation for change in the learner is all that a teacher need do to guarantee change.
(T-6.V.B.2:2-4)

What *is* the motivation for learning the Course? That could be expressed in many ways — for me it is a deep yearning to help my brothers and sisters by giving them the blessings of a God Who is *only* Love — but I think it is actually very similar to my motivation for learning Spanish: the desire to overcome isolation. As we know, the Course teaches that our core problem is separation from God and from each other. We don't realize it, but in truth we are all profoundly isolated, even from those who speak the same human language we do.

The Course wants us to realize just how incredibly painful this isolation is, and how wonderful true joining with God and our brothers is in comparison. Speaking of the holy relationship, the ultimate experience of joining with another person here on earth, the Course tries to increase our motivation through a series of poignant questions:

Do you not want to know your own Identity? Would you not happily exchange your doubts for certainty?
Would you not willingly be free of misery, and learn again of joy? Your holy relationship offers all this to you. (T-20.VIII.2:1-3)

In the introduction to lessons 181-200, we are told that if we just lay down our barriers for a little while each day, "Your motivation will be so intensified that... You will be sure of what you want" (W-pI.In.181-200.2:5-6). Wow, I would really love to have that kind of intense motivation to walk the Course's path!

That path is far more challenging than learning Spanish — facing and undoing our morbid attachment to our egos makes conjugating a few verbs look pretty simple in comparison. But with the kind of motivation the Course speaks of here, we will have what it takes become totally fluent in the Course's language of joining and walk its path all the way home: "It will be enough to guarantee the rest will come" (W-pI.In.181-200.3:6)

A human teacher

Before coming to Mexico, I (in my not-so-motivated way) used many of the Spanish instruction resources out there: books, audios, online translators, online courses, etc. There's so much out there, and there's no question that much of it is extremely helpful. I continue to use such resources today.

But now that I've been in my class for a while, it has become more clear to me than ever just how much I need a human teacher if I truly want to become fluent in the language. There's just no substitute for frequent, personal interaction with a flesh-and-blood human being who is an expert in what you are trying to learn. I think this is true of any kind of learning we undertake. A good human teacher is the best resource we can have.

My Spanish teacher is great. She gives personal instruction geared to the real needs of her pupils in a way that no one-size-fits-all course could do. She guides us, explains difficult concepts to us, praises us when we are right, gently corrects us when we are wrong, and encourages us to keep at it. What impersonal language course, however valuable, could do that? The personal relationship makes a huge difference. And speaking of personal relationships, I also have Patricia as my teacher, so I am doubly blessed.

Just as the various language instruction resources out there are extremely useful, so the many Course teaching resources out there can be as well. We at the Circle, of course, have spent many years creating such resources. But I think that just as with learning a foreign language, in the end there is no substitute for a good human teacher providing one-to-one instruction tailored to his or her pupil's needs. Who would not benefit from the guidance, affirmation, gentle correction, encouragement, and example of a person who has real knowledge and experience of the Course's path, someone who can teach this one-size-fits-all Course in a uniquely individual way? I know that for me, having such a teacher completely changed my life, and having pupils of my own has been a transformative experience as well.

As those who are familiar with the Circle's work know, we believe that the Course's Manual for Teachers plainly advocates a plan (the "plan of the teachers" — M-1.2:10) in which human Course teachers serve as mentors to Course pupils. Teacher-pupil relationships are in fact the only means the Course specifically advocates for passing it on. There is nothing in the Course about books and study groups, however useful those might be. (I think the Course would certainly approve of them if they are helpful.) But there is a whole volume devoted to teachers mentoring pupils.

Salvation itself, in fact, is said to rest on the relationship between two people who have joined in a common goal, and the teacher-pupil relationship is a prime example of this. So, while the exact contours of each person's journey are different, if we really want to become fluent in the Course, ideally most of us will (eventually) be guided by the Holy Spirit to a human teacher who will guide us through the Course's path.

The Course promises that this joining in a common goal, more than anything else, will undo the sense of isolation that motivates us to walk the Course's path in the first place:

In the teaching-learning situation, each one [teacher and pupil] learns that giving and receiving are the same. The demarcations they have drawn between their roles, their minds, their bodies, their needs, their interests, and all the differences they thought separated them from one another, fade and grow dim and disappear. (M-2.5:5-6)

This is the end of separation. This is how we breach the wall between us and join once again. This is how we reconnect with each other and with God.

Study

Intellectual study is essential for learning a foreign language, as I've been experiencing firsthand. True, we didn't learn our first language this way, and children can pick up second languages relatively quickly if they are exposed to those languages early enough. But for us unfortunate adults for whom that window has largely closed, there's just no avoiding it: to truly master a new language, we need to study it.

This means that we need to roll up our sleeves and get to work on vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and all the rest. At the most fundamental level, a language consists of words structured in a certain way to convey meaning. If we want to experience that meaning as a living reality, we have to learn what the words represent and how the language is structured. How could we learn this without study?

I've been studying Spanish intensively. We have a textbook for my class, and of course our teacher is guiding us through it. I have spent my days immersed in memorizing vocabulary lists, learning how to conjugate verbs (especially those tricky and all-too-common irregular ones), sorting out word order, wrestling with pronunciation (drop the dang "h"!), trying to remember those masculine and feminine word endings (did you know that men's underwear is feminine and women's underwear is masculine?) and, most difficult of all it seems, figuring out which prepositions go with which objects. Though I actually enjoy such things, it is still a challenging puzzle to put together — so challenging that if I weren't so busy with other aspects of life, I would be studying even more.

Study is essential to learning the Course as well, especially study of the Text. Yes, in the anti-intellectual climate of alternative spirituality, there are many who minimize the value of intellectual study and even regard it as a barrier to progress: "Get out of your head and into your heart." But with the Course (as with any communication in words), using your head is the way *to* the heart. Just as I could never convey any heartfelt communication in Spanish without knowing how the language works, so the Course cannot convey its heartfelt message to us fully unless we know how *its* language works.

Study is especially important with the Course, because it has such a unique vocabulary and structure, and it presents such original and radical ideas. Though written in English, it really *does* feel like a foreign language at first. Speaking for myself

as a native English speaker who has read thousands of books, I can say with certainty that the Course is utterly unlike anything else I've ever read. It is in a class all its own.

So, as with any foreign language, with the Course there is no substitute for study. My experience with Spanish has reminded me of just how important my own Course study is to my progress on the path. Study is the foundation for everything that follows. As Jesus once said to Helen about the Course, "Bill has very intelligently suggested that you both should set yourself the goal of really studying for this course. There can be no doubt of the wisdom of this decision, for any student who wants to pass it" (*Absence From Felicity*, p. 285).

Practice

Of course, to learn a foreign language, you have to do more than just study — you have to *practice*. Here, I'm not talking so much about using the language in daily life (that will be covered in the next point). Rather, I'm talking about using the words and structural principles you've studied in a controlled setting that is designed to help you learn: in the classroom with other students, with a practice partner, and the like. The idea is to train your mind in the language, to repeatedly practice the things you've studied to really get them down, so you'll be prepared when it is time to go out into the world and use them in daily life.

That's what we've been doing in my Spanish class. Our textbook is also a workbook, and we've done many of its exercises. Our teacher has also provided a variety of additional ways to practice the words and principles we're trying to learn. We've had dialogues, such as the exchange of personal information in Spanish with a dialogue partner. We've done numerous written exercises outside of the book, such as a description of the things in my house. We've played games, such as a game in which teams competed to see how well they could match a verbal description of someone with his or her picture. All of this has proven absolutely indispensable to me.

The Course, too, requires extensive practice of the principles we've studied, in order to help them sink in more deeply. This practice, of course, is provided by the Workbook, which tells us at the very beginning that while "a theoretical foundation such as the text provides is necessary...it is doing the exercises that will make the goal of the course possible" (W-In.1:1-2). The Workbook offers numerous exercises to "train your mind to think along the lines the text sets forth" (W-In.1:4).

And just as in my Spanish class the workbook is meant to be gone through in order so we can learn in a step-by-step, systematic way, so with the Course and its Workbook. It too aims to train our minds "in a systematic way" (W-In.4:1). If you really want to learn what the exercises are trying to instill, you can't just skip around willy-nilly. There is a structured *program* to follow, in which new learning is built on prior learning. And just as in my Spanish class, there are frequent reviews.

Interestingly, the Course's main practice is similar to the main practice in foreign language learning: the repetition of words so that their meaning will sink in. Needless to say, because of the Course's very different curriculum, it provides many other kinds of practices as well: meditation, forgiveness exercises, asking for the Holy Spirit's guidance, etc. These are practices aimed not just at teaching us how to communicate in a worldly way, but at bringing about nothing less than salvation from the human condition.

But the basic principle is the same: practice makes perfect — or at least it makes you a lot better at the thing you're trying to learn. Just as my experience of Spanish has underscored the importance of my Course study, it has done the same with my Course practice. I have been inspired to renew my dedication to my Course practice in a big way. It is difficult to overestimate the value of this practice, for in the striking words of the Workbook, "Your practicing can offer everything to you" (W-pI.rIII.In.4:5).

Extension

Study and practice are important foundations for learning a foreign language. But eventually, you have to leave the security of the classroom, go out into the world, and try the language out in real-life situations with real people. That, after all, is the whole point, isn't it? A human language is a communication device, a way of reaching out to and connecting with other people. It is a form of extension. And it is this extension, this daily use of the language to communicate with others, that really makes the process of learning the language complete.

Because I'm completely surrounded by Spanish speakers, I've had plenty of opportunities to do this. I've tried to throw caution to the wind and just dive right into talking with people. To be completely honest, it has been difficult. I'm finding out with each clumsy interaction that I need a lot more training before I can really connect with others the way I want to. This is why I'm looking for creative ways to study and practice even more. Without that foundation, I simply cannot do it. My ability to extend is tied directly to the how much studying and practicing I'm doing.

That being said, the study and practice I have done has truly helped me get better at speaking Spanish in daily-life sit-

uations. My program is clearly working, even if it is not as fast as I would prefer. (Besides Patricia, with whom I dearly love speaking her native language, I seem to do especially well with cab drivers.) And it is truly exhilarating when I use the language properly and a real human connection is made. Every time that happens, I feel like one more brick in that wall between me and the people around me has been removed. It seems like it is only a matter of time (and a lot more study and practice) before that wall will be removed for good. I look forward to that with great joy.

In like manner, ultimately our study and practice of the Course is meant to be applied to real-life situations. Specifically, we are meant to extend *miracles* to our brothers and sisters — loving thoughts, words, and actions that break down the ultimate wall of separation and reunite us with each other and with God.

Miracles are the whole point of this course in miracles, and learning how to perform them is the whole reason for all that study and practice. They are “communication devices” (T-1.I.46.2) far more effective than any human language (though human language can be used to extend them), because unlike human language, they can *only* be used to bless. They are expressions of forgiveness and love that heal separation forever:

Forgiveness, truth's reflection, tells me how to offer miracles, and thus escape the prison house in which I think I live. Your holy Son is pointed out to me, first in my brother; then in me. Your Voice instructs me patiently to hear Your Word, and give as I receive. And as I look upon Your Son today, I hear Your Voice instructing me to find the way to You, as You appointed that the way shall be: "Behold his sinlessness, and be you healed." (W-pII.357.1:1-5)

This is my real reason for learning Spanish: I want to be a miracle worker with Patricia here in Mexico, and learning Spanish will make me more effective at doing the very thing my spiritual path aims to teach me. It is through extending miracles, the ultimate communication devices, to our brothers that the wall of the “prison house” of separation is finally breached, we are connected with each other and with God once again, and our process of learning this course in miracles becomes complete.

Putting it all together: immersion

When you are learning a foreign language, what you want to do ideally is to completely *immerse* yourself in it through engaging in all of the above activities and more on a regular basis. You want to surround yourself with it, let it soak in from all directions and at all times, until it becomes a part of you.

That's what I'm trying to do in my process of learning Spanish. Of course, as I've said, I'm already immersed in an environment full of Spanish speakers. But I'm looking for creative ways to make that immersion even more complete. For instance, I'm reading my daily Internet news in Spanish (though of course I still read a lot of English). I've changed the instruction menus on my digital camera and my computer to Spanish. I'm reading the Spanish version of the Course. And as I said, I'm speaking more Spanish at home with Patricia.

I'm also trying as well as I can to even *think* in Spanish, though that's going to take a bit more time. For starters, I'm doing it in little ways. For instance, when I see a numeral, I try to immediately think of its Spanish name instead of its English one. The point of all this, again, is immersion, so that I can learn the language much more quickly. And in my case, I do think immersion is having a positive effect. I knew that Spanish was starting to really sink into my mind the night I had my first *dream* in Spanish.

I think that's what we're really meant to do with the Course as well. We are meant to put together everything it offers us and soak our days in it. We are meant to study it daily, practice frequently throughout the day, consult the Holy Spirit for all of our decisions during the day, and of course “each day should be devoted to miracles” (T-1.I.15:1). Like my dream in Spanish, ideally we're even supposed to keep our minds soaked in the Course while we're sleeping at night. After all, “teaching is a constant process; it goes on every moment of the day, and continues into sleeping thoughts as well” (M-In.1:6).

True, “You are not asked for total dedication all the time as yet” (W-pI.181-200.1:2). It is a gradual process of committing ourselves to the Course's way. But total dedication *is* the end point — “In time, with practice, you will never cease to think of Him” (W-pI.153.18:1) — and we are meant to immerse ourselves more and more in everything the Course is teaching us so that it will become the place where we live. I dearly want to do that more fully, because I want the Course's magnificent path to be the place where I live. Don't you?

At home in a new world

Learning a foreign language is really a process of entering a whole new world, and finding a home in that world. As

I said, I'm learning Spanish so I can be a miracle worker with Patricia here in Mexico, and to do so effectively I really need to have a sense of belonging. Sure, I could survive here without becoming fluent in Spanish, especially since I'm living with Patricia. But I don't want to do that. This is where I live, and I want to be able to extend real miracles to the wonderful people here, whom in these difficult times dearly need miracles. This is Patricia's world, too, and I want to be able to share it with her more deeply and more completely. I'm doing all this work because I want to be fully at home in this new world.

But I want even more to be fully at home in the Course's world. As Course students, what else could we truly want? Do we not want to become fluent in *its* language? Do we not want to experience fully the glorious message of God's Love its language conveys? Do we not want to live in the real world its language invites us to enter? If so, let us be willing to do all that this Course asks of us to really learn it in the deepest way possible. Let us do everything we can to immerse ourselves in its radical, world-transforming language and really make it our own.

If we do so, we will not just become fluent in a foreign language, but will make a wonderful discovery: "This is *your* language" (T-22.I.6:2). The language of the Course is actually our *native* language. Though now it can so often seem like a foreign language to us, by making the effort to learn it, we will eventually realize that (to paraphrase T-22.I.6) what we hear and do not understand is our native tongue, through which we truly communicate with all of our brothers and with God. We will recognize our true home, and see everyone there with us.

Whatever our place of human origin and whatever human language we learned when we grew up, learning the Course's language will awaken us to the language it reflects, the only language that is truly our own in the deepest sense: the language of the Kingdom of Heaven. We will awaken to "the single voice Creator and creation share; the song the Son sings to the Father, Who returns the thanks it offers Him unto the Son...the joyous concord of the Love They give forever to Each Other" (S-1.In.1:2-3). Is this not worth the effort to make the "foreign" language of the Course our own?



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

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Sacred Exchange: The Promise of Wellness

by Amy Speech

One of my favorite people in the world is my friend and former colleague Jenna, a talented graphic designer in the university alumni office where I used to work. I was on the hiring team that interviewed her, and knew the minute she walked into the room that she was the one for the job—that she would hit the ground running, and that she would bring a joyful energy to our team that would have a powerful positive effect not only on our work, but also on our lives.

In my last few months of working with her before I moved to Sedona, Jenna was studying to become a nurse—a decision that grew out of her personal experience with cancer following the birth of her little boy, Nathan. She had nearly died, but a bone marrow transplant gave her back her health and her life, and helped her envision a new career for herself as a healer.

I knew she'd be great at it. Not just because she's a strong, cheerful, and compassionate person, but because there's a holy light shining in her that promises wellness and hints at miracles. That light got brighter whenever she talked about Nathan or happily boasted about getting an A on a pharmacology exam. And it practically glowed when she shared stories about her nursing training, and the people whose hearts and spirits she was ministering to as she learned how to care for their ailing bodies.

One aspect of her studies presented itself as especially challenging for Jenna. She had to complete six two-day shifts on the psychiatric floor of the hospital where she was doing her training. I remember that she was totally dreading it when she left our office at noon that first Friday. But I looked forward to hearing the full report on Monday morning, and knew she'd have a moving and inspirational story to share, just like she always did.

She didn't let me down.

It wasn't pretty and nice, her weekend on the psych ward, and it didn't smell good. There were people locked away in empty rooms, isolated to keep them from lashing out at others or hurting themselves. There was a woman pacing the common room dressed only in a hospital gown that she wore back to front, oblivious to the fact that her unwashed body was exposed. There was another woman screaming and crying into a disconnected pay phone, demanding to talk to the president about how to get her babies back. There were seasoned and weary nurses, flatly and routinely dispensing medication from behind glass.

I could just picture Jenna and her classmates in the middle of all this—their bright and shiny selves a glaring contrast to the madness all around them.

As with each new clinical setting she encountered, Jenna was assigned a patient to research and monitor for the weekend: Donny, a twenty-two-year-old schizophrenic man, often incarcerated and much in his own world, tormented by the conflicting voices in his head. But bless her determined little heart—Jenna did her best to reach him. She spent the better part of two days trying to win his trust, approaching him gently when the opportunity presented itself, speaking to him kindly and with respect, letting him know that she was there for him if he'd like to talk or just sit quietly with her.

For the most part, he avoided her, although she caught him more than once watching her from across the common room. Whenever she made eye contact and smiled at him, though, he'd look quickly away. They did share one brief conversation, during which he revealed to her, "I want to trust you. But I can't. I don't trust people."

Somehow, though, he did finally muster up the courage to ask her a question: "I can talk to you about anything?" Hopeful that this was the opening she'd been trying for, Jenna assured him that yes, he could talk to her about anything (although she cringed a little when telling me this, and admitted she was afraid of where the conversation might go). His next question surprised her: "Can I talk to you about being a nurse?" Jenna really brightened at that. She was touched by his interest in this healing work that meant so much to her. And that spark of interest gave her a glimpse of him as present and accessible—as sane. Unfortunately, when she started to answer, he immediately shut down and wandered off again, returning to his private world.

That was the last exchange between them. But as Jenna was putting on her coat and preparing to leave on Sunday evening, she caught sight of Donny out of the corner of her eye, intensely engaged in conversation with one of her own nursing classmates!

She was still a bit flabbergasted about it when she told me the story that Monday morning. And to be honest, she was feeling a bit rejected, and even a little ticked off! "Here I had tried so hard all weekend long to win him over, and he goes and makes someone else his best buddy." Of course, she was laughing at herself when she said this. Because it wasn't about her at all, and as a healer in training, she knew that.

It wasn't about her. It was about Donny. It was about putting something true and good in his crazy world: something that let him feel safe, something worthy of his trust, something that would call him to step away from the darkness in his mind and connect, however briefly, with truth.

And that's exactly what she did, this dear, holy, healthy friend of mine.

It's what I see all of us trying to do as miracle workers in training, too. Through our willingness, our study, our practice, and our prayers, we're doing what we can to put something kind and sane into a crazy world. I know we won't always see the results. But I still want to believe that every effort we make on behalf of the holiness in us is helping someone, somehow, to move away from the agonizing isolation he thinks is real, to glimpse the light of God in another, and so, to know it's in himself.



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

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CIRCLE MAILBOX

In A Better Way #114, I (Robert) asked the question “Should the Course Community Actually Be United?” This was prompted by responses to my previous article, in which I asked “Could the Course Community Actually Be United?” Many of those responses challenged my assumption that it was a good thing for the Course community to be united. So I invited readers to join me in a conversation on the question “Should the Course community be united?” I suggested that “we turn to the Course itself and have a group conversation about what the evidence from the Course indicates.” That’s what my first article had proposed as a way of uniting the Course community, so that, it seemed to me, is how we should deal with disagreements with that first article.

I was pleased to receive a fair amount of responses, but unfortunately I didn’t really get taken up on my invitation. I had hoped that people would write saying, “Here is my evidence from the Course for why there is no reason for the Course community to be united.” The closest anyone came to this was Derek Cameron, who quoted two brief passages from the Course that suggest the Course community is already united.

I also found it interesting that the main piece of evidence I put forth didn’t really show up in the responses. I presented guidance that Helen Schucman took down on December 31, 1975, which basically said that the central priority for the Course’s growth in the world was that, above all, there must be “no misinterpretation.” This directly implied that Jesus wanted a unity of interpretation in whatever Course community grew up, an idea that is so different than what’s happened that it’s almost shocking. To me, that guidance is a game-changer. That is why it surprised me that no one mentioned it. If Jesus told Helen, in essence, “As the Course grows in the world, above all there must be no misinterpretation,” shouldn’t we all sit up and take notice? Shouldn’t that stop us all in our tracks?

* * * * *

The Course should not be interpreted in our own individual way. We must have some understanding of it as it uses terms we are familiar with in different ways—so we *do* need a teacher. When we have true perception we will all see it the same—at least in content—which is where it matters.

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. How else can it be, if God’s Kingdom is freedom? (T-8.IV.6:3-6)

I have so wanted what you have expressed, Robert, and I think it is a desire within all our hearts because we really *do* want to return to the one Son—in unity with God—which would mean we would have to understand this discipline in the same way. This has been a source of extreme frustration for me because even before I found ACIM I heard the *same* ideas expressed in Quaker philosophy and many of the great writers or religious disciplines—and *yet*—we miss the mark. Not only do we miss the mark—we seem to go astray right from the “starting gate”!! That is what I just could not understand in the “ACIM community” at all! So I now feel, as Helen had said, it is really only written for four or five people. She said that in the 1970s—today maybe that is twenty people. But it is still a very, very small number that are truly going to “get it.” And all we can do is to try to help each other.

Personally, I am finding it very important for me to back away from all ACIM groups and only follow Ken Wapnick at this point in time. I do have immense respect for your organization, too, and always felt you and Ken were not all that different—even in reading *One Course, Two Visions*, I still saw it as very small differences. But I needed to get clarity, and Dr. Wapnick was “cheaper” and also right there with Helen and Bill. So I felt I ought to go to the Source as it exists here within the illusion during this particular time. I feel I understand ACIM very well, and was told this by Ken. And I do see it as an “experience” that it is taking us to—for it says “A universal theology is impossible, but a universal experience is not only possible but necessary” (C.I.2:5). To me this means we really have to look at the “content” rather than the form—so that we could actually find “sincere ACIM students” in Buddhism or any religion/philosophy—because it is really about returning to being aligned with God and not choosing to see the separation in all its myriad of forms. I do believe that we probably have to go through all this chaos of conferences and new teachers popping up here and there—because it is a “fertile frontier.” But only a handful of people are really studying it to “accept the Atonement for themselves.” But in time—maybe it will take a hundred years (which really annoyed me until I really saw the resistance and

how tenacious it is!)—people will start to embrace it. The best we can do is to do our best.

Still, it is a start, and I just want to study with sincere seekers that don't use a lot of misinterpretation.

— Jean Weston

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Having read all this I can only reiterate my original response. Tony Ponticello made some good points. The fact that neither you nor Ken Wapnick will attend conferences is instructive. I can see why: the so called Course Community is now so divergent in so many ways, it seems to be a far cry from the Course itself. This will not change. How could it? You and Ken have yourselves given up on this one.

Regarding COA and Ken Wapnick, I have mixed feelings. I can benefit from some of Ken's teachings, but not all. The same with the Circle. Dialogue between you and Ken has long since ceased. That must tell us something. There is unlikely ever to be complete agreement between Ken and COA, and no ongoing war of attrition will change this.

As I have always said, students need to take more responsibility themselves. It is an unfortunate fact that many people like to follow leaders quite uncritically. Your call for a unified Course Community sounds like a job application for a job that will never exist. The real Leaders are Jesus or the Holy Spirit. Only in following their teaching and guidance can we achieve the true unity which is the aim of the Course.

— Mary Benton

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There were two things in the Course that rang more true than anything I had ever read or heard, and to this day make me believe that what Jesus said, "This time there will be no failure, no loss of truth, no misunderstanding and no misinterpretation," will hold true. The first item is where Jesus says we can only stand so much pain before we finally realize there must be another way. We keep fighting the same wars, dying from ever more insidious diseases, and growing our population to levels that will one day outstrip the world's ability to support us. At what point will we give up trying to manage the unmanageable? How many catastrophes, how many natural disasters, and how many losses and deaths can we endure before we finally stop and ask, what is it we are doing wrong? That point will come, I assure you. It certainly came to me at an early age for reasons I do not know.

The second item is the fact that once we have had enough pain and start to seek the peace that we somehow know is out there, the Course informs us it will be impossible to obtain peace without bringing our brothers along with us. When I first read this I was bowled over by its powerful simplicity and the thing that makes the Atonement foolproof. Even if I am an ego seeking world domination through gaining the power of awakening, I will never awaken without my brothers awakening. And at this point I have shed my ego and there is nothing to dominate. The moment any effort towards awakening or enlightenment turns individual and singular, the awakening stops and the pain returns. What could be more foolproof? The "first time around" was riddled with opportunities for failure. Namely, that in the minds of his followers, Jesus became a savior. He was feared by the rich and powerful because of his followers. This time around all individuality is removed from the equation. There is no individual savior because we all become the savior of each other.

I admire your effort to bring the Course Community together, for I truly believe this is our salvation. But rather than make an overt attempt through a democratic process, which opens the door to the ego, maybe you ought to consider another way. For me personally, at every turn in my study of the Course, at every bump in the road which my ego so covertly places there, I come up against seeing my brother as myself. And to add to my ego misery, I endure bodily maladies that keep me believing I am a body. Beating the drum, a singleness of Purpose, of seeing my brother as me and that I am not my body is the natural process towards union for those seeking peace. It is inescapable that union will occur as long as I am not allowed to dwell on my individuality and awakening to our oneness. By campaigning for union we are alerting the ego of an impending attack and its defenses will rise up. By not discussing unity and placing our efforts on seeing our brothers as ourselves, unity is the natural flowing process that will follow. Besides, we are already unified at the level of mind and to focus on non-unity is to stay in the world of form.

— Hal Seeley

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Regarding the idea of synchronizing all Jesus' Teachings, for One Community (if I understand correctly) and as a sixteen-month student of ACIM, here are my thoughts.

I understand Jesus to be telling me in the "Now," 12/7/2011 (and regardless of the dictation *past*/History of ACIM) that it is Jesus and/or beloved Holy Spirit who Guides me Now in a very personal way, suited to my needs for learning. I find him very sensitive in this way.

Therefore I *do* believe it is His Will for us all to live in Community on many levels, in our daily lives as humans; *but* in my guided understanding, as He did not come to start a Religion, neither does He expect us to see all His Teachings in the same way *at* the same times in Earth time...because as we move forward on the Way with Him, He continually shows me other, deeper ways of seeing Truth that I was not able to understand at the start of my studies with Him, Aug. 2010.

— Sally E. Nave

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As you are aware, Robert, I am not a scholar. I am simply lawyer-trained and not philosophically gifted; albeit one who accepts intellectual guidance as possibly being integrated with spiritual experience. Obviously as a lawyer, I was trained to argue both sides of any issue so as to ultimately advocate only my client's point of view despite contrasting facts.

When I ponder meditatively the "Jesus guy's" mode of teaching via stories, parables, and aphorisms, I "receive" experientially a realized Truth, if for only an instant "aha." This corresponds with the Shakespearian symbolism representative of the Course requiring the same "listener response" as that of an illiterate first century peasant. I see no difference in Jesus' message of the Kingdom and that of the Course. What is heartening from a historical perspective is how that basic message of Truth was sufficiently sustained for a couple of centuries before being limited and distorted in the fourth century. Perhaps in the relatively brief history of ACIM, we have hope and can avoid the sleep of the past seventeen centuries!

As we become sufficiently disciplined by Course teachings we can realize a unified community. I never cease to be impressed by the logical structure of the Course itself and believe we can move from perception to a true perception and its Christ vision within an accelerated time collapse which brings us collectively back home.

Think of a professional football team under the guidance of "that Jesus guy." Not only would every player collectively accept all required physical disciplines, but he would fully comprehend every nuance of a unified game plan. The Coach will have succeeded in a miraculous transference of His Vision to every player. The same would be true of any golfer who after years of individual practice succeeds in envisioning every shot and experiencing inevitable Unity with his Inner Coach.

I believe the more one sees the connection of Jesus' parables and his core teaching of the Kingdom, the more readily he/she "grasps" the Course. This has been my experience in The Villages as we discuss and combine both disciplines within concurrent weekly classes.

— Howard Westin

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What about Attitudinal Healing as a model for unity in ACIM in addition to the Pathwork? It is closer to home and certainly seems to work all over the world, and Jerry (or Jerry and Diane) now certainly were and are ACIM people.

— Phil Friedman

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I agree that *A Course in Miracles* is a community effort: "*salvation is a collaborative venture.*" But I also recall, and not the exact place in the Course that it says: "*The Holy Spirit's guidance is highly individualized.*" Additionally, I find the Course's central message of guiltlessness to be prevalent throughout our society, and not limited to the teachings in the blue book called *A Course in Miracles*. In fact, one of my close friends here who is into astrology (what I think the Course would call magic) states things almost exactly as the Course would. Example, there is no death, life is eternal, no matter if the form called the body dies. We can take the idea of joining with our brothers outside the Course community,

and I believe Jesus wanted this too.

— True Alisandre

• • •

Dear Robert, I read so many of your articles with great interest. Thank you for your devotion to the cause of getting the message of ACIM to the world.

My “gut” response to the question came to me as it being a “non-question” in itself. Only if you believe that the Course is not true could this question have any validity. In other words, the Course says that all of our own thought systems are meaningless, only God is True and God is All, we are *all* a part of the greater *allness* of God, so we are all One with each other regardless of what we do in form. So, to me, whether one studies ACIM or not, that person is a “part” of the community. How could they not be? The “community of truth” (which perhaps could be exchanged for what the course calls the “universal curriculum”) does not depend on our intellectual understanding, or our interpretation or even participation. It just is, it is Truth and does not justify debate. It is the Holy Spirit who is in charge of our Atonement, not “us.”

True forgiveness and love, which are the cornerstones of ACIM, leaves no one out. So, perhaps a personal mindset that we are *already* united could be adopted by as many who are able, with that being used by the Holy Spirit to further the purposes of our ultimate salvation and return to God.

— Susan Lindsay

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In your article you’ve considered should/shouldn’t and could/couldn’t questions. However, there is another view I’d like to offer for your consideration:

The Course community already is united.

Lesson 336: “Forgiveness lets me know that minds are joined.”

T-15.V.10:9: “Those who are joined in Christ are in no way separate.”

Romans 12:5. “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.”

— Derek Cameron

CIRCLE NEWS

Upcoming Workshop: The Only Real Relationship: God in *A Course in Miracles*.

For those of us who are involved with spiritual teachings like *A Course in Miracles*, God often seems remote and impersonal. This can feel like a welcome relief from the judgmental God we may have grown up with. *A Course in Miracles*, however, offers a God Who is both deeply personal and purely loving, a God Who can be our greatest source of comfort in this world.

If you are interested in getting clear on the issue of God, and learning how to draw close to a God Who is only loving, please join us for this one-day workshop with Robert Perry, who will be back in Sedona on his annual teaching visit.

When: Saturday, March 24, 2012

Where: Sedona Creative Life Center

333 Schnebly Hill Road

Sedona, AZ 86336

Time: 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.