



Course Lore

Common Misconceptions and Their Correction

by Robert Perry

Last month I finished teaching our first Study Group Leader Training. One of our classes was on what we at the Circle call “Course lore”—ideas that get mentioned so much that people assume they are found in the Course itself, when in fact they are not. The response to the handout for that class was unexpectedly enthusiastic, so much so that I decided to turn it into a newsletter article.

It can seem counterproductive and contentious to spend time correcting misconceptions, and in spiritual circles it is frequently considered to be exactly that. Yet, unfortunately, these misunderstandings—which are rampant—can distort the Course at such a basic level that it becomes another teaching entirely.

A quick look at the recurring patterns in Course lore will show you what I mean. Course lore tends to be *narcissistic*, though the Course’s aim is to *reverse* our egocentricity; *against traditional religion*, though there is much in Christianity and the Bible the Course affirms; *anti-authority*, though the Course is full of loving authority; and *anti-work/effort*, though the Course asks of us a great deal of effort and discipline. The end result is that, under the influence of Course lore, we might as well be reading a whole other book.

So these misconceptions do need to be addressed. I hope that the following attempt to address them refines and deepens your understanding of *A Course in Miracles*.

Fifty Principles of Course Lore

1. Don’t take this book too seriously; just play with it. Doesn’t the Course itself tell us to “forget this course”?

The Course seems to take itself quite seriously. It says, “Listen and hear this carefully, nor think it but a dream, a careless thought to play with, or a toy you would pick up from time to time and then put by” (T-20.II.6:6). Also, “Forget this course” (W-pI.189.7:5) is just an instruction for meditation, not a general instruction.

2. We’re all students and teachers to each other. The Manual isn’t talking about actual teachers. We’re all teachers of God.

The Course does say that we all teach each other and learn from each other, but also makes clear that most of the time what we’re teaching and learning is *ego*. We aren’t all (yet) teachers of *God*. The Manual describes teachers of God as people who go through a process of becoming qualified (M-1.1), who are further ahead in time than their pupils (“time divides teacher and pupil”—M-29.1:4), and who, in terms of their proportion of the overall population, are “very few” (M-12.3:3).

3. The Course is a self-study course. Everyone knows that.

Jesus never called it a self-study course, not in the Course itself and not in anything dictated to Helen Schucman. Whenever Jesus talks about new students of *A Course in Miracles* (M-24.3, M-29.1-2), he portrays them as *pupils* of a Course teacher (i.e., mentor). He even implies that this teacher needs to discern (using guidance) if this student is *ready* for the Course (M-29.1:5-2:7). That’s not self-study.

4. We shouldn't try to stick too closely to exactly what the Course says. Trying to follow the letter of the Course is fundamentalism.

Throughout the Course, Jesus expects us to pay careful attention and stay true to what he says. He says that the Course itself has been “carefully planned” (T-12.II.10:1 and W-pI.20.1:3). He once told Helen and Bill, “*Be very careful* in interpreting this.” He even urged them to “re-read very carefully.” This is just a natural part of taking Jesus seriously as our teacher. If you are following a guide up an unfamiliar mountain, you listen carefully to his instructions, make sure you understand them, and *follow* them.

5. Being a Course student doesn't mean working with the book on a daily basis. It really just means believing in its basic principles, and I can even get those from others who read the book.

As the structure of the Workbook implies, we need an interaction between the book and our lives on a daily basis. Otherwise, we end up following a curriculum that we ourselves set up. Because of our insanity, the Course says it is not wise for us to design our own curriculum: “You would hardly turn to [poor learners] to establish the curriculum by which they can escape from their limitations” (T-12.V.5:6). We need the Course there to remind us of the truth we so easily forget: “You need to hear the truth about yourself as frequently as possible, because your mind is so preoccupied with false self-images” (W-pI.67.5:2).

6. The best way to do the Workbook is to screw it up and forgive yourself. Trying to follow the instructions to the letter just turns it into a ritual, out of a misguided desire to please some divine authority.

The Workbook's own attitude couldn't be more different. It asks us to follow its practice instructions “just as closely as you can” (W-pI.rIII.In.1:3). It never says that doing so turns the Workbook into a ritual. And its only injunction to forgive ourselves in the face of missing our practice periods (W-pI.95.8:3) frames this as important because it enables us to return immediately to our practice.

7. There is no one right interpretation of the Course. All interpretations should be affirmed. The search for the “correct” one is just about egos trying to be right.

Though we are all fallible interpreters and thus getting interpretation right is always a work in progress, Jesus is definitely concerned about us interpreting the Course the way he meant it. He clearly regarded it as “not open to more than one interpretation” (comment to Helen). Throughout, he acts as if the ego is always trying to distort what he says to us. He urges us to counteract this tendency by not reading the Course “hastily or wrongly” (M-29.7:3), and by learning “to see these foolish applications [the ego's distortions of Course passages], and deny the meaning they appear to have” (W-pI.196.2:4).

8. Any time we start talking about differences and disagreements, we are in ego. The egoless response to differences in interpretation is to “tear out the page.”

Jesus himself talked about differences between his teachings and the teachings of Freud, Edgar Cayce, and the New Testament. However, he always did so in a gracious way, being careful to affirm points of agreement, too. Rather than tearing out the page, why shouldn't we instead join together in searching for what the Course is really saying? “When two or more join together in searching for truth, the ego can no longer defend its lack of content” (T-14.X.9:6).

9. The Course isn't meant to be studied, only experienced. Studying it just turns it into an intellectual exercise.

Jesus told Helen and Bill that their study of the Course was crucial, and applied what he said to all students: “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.” Study is not antithetical to experience. Rather, study is the gateway to experience and, done properly, is *itself* experiential.

10. Following the Course alone is the same narrowness you see in traditional religion. We should follow many teachings because truth is one.

The Course says that “you are not free to choose” your intended path (M-2.3:6), and if that path is the Course, it says, “You are not making use of the course if you insist on using means which have served others well, neglecting what was made for *you*” (T-18.VII.6:5). The Course agrees that there are many thousands of ways to God, but describes the real truth at the heart of all of them as “God’s Son is guiltless” (T-14.V.2:1 and M-1.3:5), which is the Course’s own unique understanding of salvation.

11. The Course is so high and so unique that if you see a parallel between it and another teaching, you are not understanding the Course.

Jesus was quick to point out parallels between his teachings and teachings that were familiar to Helen and Bill, such as those of Freud, Jung, and Edgar Cayce. The Course is also full of positive references to the Bible. For example: “The Bible enjoins you to be perfect, to heal all errors, to take no thought of the body as separate and to accomplish all things in my name” (T-8.IX.7:1).

12. God is impersonal. He is less like a Being than a “suchness.” He doesn’t even know we are here.

The Course never describes God as impersonal. It does say that He has no form, but always describes Him as a Self Who wills, loves, and creates. It speaks often of our relationship with Him (it’s hard to have a relationship with “suchness”), and says that while we are asleep He feels lonely, yearns for our return, calls us home, and waits for us with open Arms.

13. God doesn’t know about the separation. If He did, He would be as insane as we are.

The Course always portrays God as *responsive* to the separation, a responsiveness exemplified especially by His creating the Holy Spirit. This, of course, implies that God was aware of the separation, something that two important passages tell us outright. One says that God knows about our lack of joy that comes from the separation: “And this He does know. He knows it in His Own Being and its experience of His Son’s experience” (T-4.VII.6:5-6). The other says, “So He thought, ‘My children sleep and must be awakened’” (T-6.V.1:8).

14. God does not hear prayers. The prayers in the second part of the Workbook aren’t meant to be prayed. They are metaphors.

The Course tells us at least eighteen times that God hears and answers our every call, and never tells us once otherwise. There are Workbook lessons in which we are told to pray to God as part of our practice for that day (e.g., W-pI.71.9 and W-pI.140.12). The first Workbook lesson that we say to God (“Your grace is given me. I claim it now”) opens by saying, “God speaks to us. Shall we not speak to Him?” (W-pI.169.1:1-2). When Helen took down the prayers in Part II of the Workbook, she surrounded them with quotation marks, indicating that they were things we were meant to *say*.

15. The Holy Spirit is just a metaphor for our own memory of God. The Holy Spirit as an actual created Being with His own awareness, will, thoughts, and feelings does not exist.

At least eighteen times the Course says that God created the Holy Spirit, Who is consistently described in the Course as having His Own will, thoughts, and feelings. The form the Holy Spirit takes as a “voice” in the dream is an illusion (C-6.4:5) and will ultimately pass away (C-6.5:8), but His reality as a God-created Spirit is eternal (T-5.I.5:6-7). He is not our “memory of God,” which is a technical term in the Course for our final awakening, when God (not the Holy Spirit) lifts us back into perfect knowledge.

16. It doesn’t matter whether or not Jesus wrote the Course. It wouldn’t change anything if Mickey Mouse wrote the Course. It still says what it says.

If Jesus didn’t write the Course, that would make its authorship claim, which underlies the whole Course, a lie, or at best a delusion. If he did write it, though, the Course carries the authority of the most influential salvation figure in

world history. And for those who feel a deep connection with the figure of Jesus, it means that doing the Course is an act of following him and being closely connected to him. At the end of the Workbook he says that by joining him in its year of practice, “we found a single purpose that we shared. And thus you joined with me, so what I am are you as well” (W-pII.14.2:2-3).

17. I do think that “Jesus” wrote the Course, but this Jesus has little or nothing to do with the Jesus talked about in the Bible.

The Jesus of the Course clearly speaks about himself as the figure that we read about in the New Testament gospels. He speaks about his birth, his miracles, his sayings, his disciples, his crucifixion, his resurrection, and his ascension. He does correct traditional understandings, and this includes correcting certain sayings from the gospels (and, in at least three cases, claiming he never said a particular saying), but that is very different than dissociating himself from the biblical Jesus. Instead, he frames the Course as a continuation of what Jesus began in his earthly ministry two thousand years ago (C-5.5:3-4).

18. The Course is not about behavior. It’s only about a change of mind. After all, doesn’t the Course say “I need do nothing”?

Behavior occupies an extremely important place in the Course. Even the “I Need Do Nothing” section indicates that the Holy Spirit’s plan for our lives involves a lot of “busy doing” (T-18.VII.8:3). Once we change our thinking, we are meant to give miracles to others through our behavior. The Course says we should “use the body for this and only for this” (T-8.VII.3:3). And this outward expression of love is a necessary reinforcement of our changed thinking. It shouldn’t surprise us, then, that Jesus said to Helen and Bill, “This course is a guide to behavior.”

19. The Course cautions us against “making the error real.” Whenever we talk about the importance of anything in this world, we are making the separation real.

“Making the error real” is not a Course term. The actual term is “making error [not *the* error] real.” This does *not* refer to making the separation real by regarding things in the world as real and important (the meaning of “making *the* error real”). Rather, the term refers to making our brother’s errors real by seeing them as real sins with truly real effect. Unfortunately, this key Course concept has been virtually replaced by the distorted version of it (making *the* error real).

20. “Level confusion” is thinking that sickness, healing, the miracle, the holy instant, the holy relationship, forgiveness, and salvation have anything to do with the body or the world.

Unfortunately, it is hard to identify what “level confusion” means because most of the references to it were removed from the FIP Course by the editing. The “levels” in “level confusion” are the levels of the spirit and the physical, and the term refers to improperly assigning attributes of one of these levels to the other. It usually refers to mistakenly thinking that we can find the attributes of the *spiritual* level—such as happiness, identity, reality, and home—on the *physical* level. That we can’t find them there, however, doesn’t imply that healing, the miracle, the holy relationship, and salvation have nothing to do with the world—they do. Finding them involves activities and interactions in the world, and in turn generates effects in the world.

21. Whenever the Course seems to us to imply that duality or separation is real, we can be sure that it is speaking metaphorically. It is just telling us a pleasant fairy tale to shield us from its true radical teaching.

There is literally no hint of this view in the Course. Such a view would grant us license to reshape the Course by labeling much of what it says as mere metaphor. Instead, the Course uses a minimum of symbolism because (as Jesus said to Helen) “symbolic” means “open to many different interpretations.” That is the opposite of clear, and the Course repeatedly emphasizes that it is clear, direct, and unambiguous; that it is a course “that means exactly what it says” (T-8.IX.8:1).

22. When the Course says the world is an illusion, it means the world *as we see it*. The world in itself, apart from our judgments and projections, is real.

The Course makes clear that what is illusory about the world is *change*. The reason “God did not create it [the world]” is that “there is nothing in the world you see that will endure forever” (C-4.1:2-3). Therefore, everything in the world that changes, that does not last forever, is an illusion that God did not create. It is thus more than just the world *as we see it* that’s not real. It is everything physical, because change is at the very heart of the physical. What is illusory therefore includes “the stars...night and day...the tides, the seasons and the lives of men” (T-29.VI.2:8-9).

23. “There is no world” means that the world we see does not exist in any sense of the term. There was no Holocaust. There is no Darfur. There’s no point in providing veterinary care to your sick dog; he isn’t there. Why dive into the pool to save a drowning child? She isn’t there.

On an ultimate level, the world itself never happened. But on the level of this world, these things do happen and have happened, and our response is meant to be caring, not callous. When Jesus referred to the Holocaust in the original dictation, instead of saying “There was no Holocaust,” he said, “I shed many tears over this.” Rather than being indifferent to suffering, we are meant to save people from suffering. The Course says that through our miracles—our expressions of love—we can actually remove the outer appearances of tragedy, and it’s by removing them that we prove that those appearances must have been unreal (T-30.VIII.2).

24. The Holy Spirit doesn’t work in this world. How can He when there *is* no world?

The Course speaks of the Holy Spirit as constantly at work in our minds and in the world (“I rest in God today and let Him work in me and through me”—W-pI.120.1:2). He arranges all of our interpersonal encounters and plans “everything that happens, all events, past, present and to come” (W-pI.135.18:1). He will guide our thoughts and control our behavior (T-2.VI.1:1-3) and even supply our needed possessions (T-13.VII.12-13). How can it be said that He doesn’t work in the world?

25. The Course teaches us how to manifest abundance. Being poor is an expression of the “scarcity principle.”

This would be a great surprise, since the attachment to material things (including money) is criticized throughout the Course. It does say that “He [the Holy Spirit] will supply” our possessions if we let Him, but then adds “with no emphasis at all upon them” (T-13.VII.13:2). Helen actually did manage to intentionally “manifest” a piece of jewelry—a Florentine gold pin (*Absence from Felicity*, by Ken Wapnick, p. 119)—but this was part of her “magic phase,” and her *rejection* of that phase is the very thing allowed the Course to come through her. The “scarcity principle” is actually a belief in a lack *inside* of us, which we then try to fill by getting things on the outside. Thus, *trying to manifest abundance* is an expression of the scarcity principle.

26. That person is my greatest teacher because he pushes all my buttons. He’s my savior because he flushes my ego into the open where I can let it go.

This is not how the Course talks about “teacher” nor how it talks about “savior” (with one exception). A teacher in the Course is someone who teaches to others the thought system in which he believes. A savior is someone who extends to others the salvation that is in him. So my *teacher*, in the positive sense, is someone who teaches me God’s thought system. In the Manual, it is specifically someone who mentors me in the path of the Course. And my *savior* is someone who extends salvation to me. Specifically, it is someone whom I have healed, and whose gratitude awakens me to the holiness in me.

27. My sole responsibility is to accept the Atonement for myself. Thinking I am responsible for others just takes away their responsibility to change their own minds.

In the Course, “*The sole responsibility of the miracle worker is to accept the Atonement for himself*” (T-2.V.5:1) because the miracle worker is one who gives miracles to others, and he cannot give what he does not have. So we accept the Atonement *as the precondition for giving miracles to others*. As for our responsibility toward our brother, the Course says, “You *are* responsible for how he sees himself” (T-21.VI.7:5), and “You have assumed your part in his redemption, and you are now fully responsible to him” (T-17.VIII.5:5).

28. There is no one out there. There's only one of us here. "Others" are just my own projections.

There is perhaps no more important theme in the Course than the true nature of our brother as a perfectly pure Son of God, who is God's masterpiece, who has inestimable worth, who is our equal, and who deserves all of the care and concern we typically lavish on our specialness: "All of the love and care, the strong protection, the thought by day and night, the deep concern, the powerful conviction this is you, belong to him" (T-24.VII.2:7). True, bodies and personalities are illusions, but it is hard to imagine an idea that cuts more against the grain of the Course than to turn this *brother* into an illusion, no more than a mirror, a mere projection screen.

29. A holy relationship only takes one—it is holy when I see it in a holy way myself.

The discussions of the holy relationship—in the Text (Chapters 17-22), the Manual, and the *Psychotherapy* supplement—consistently describe the same concept: two people establish a common goal for their relationship. This common goal invites the Holy Spirit into the relationship, and it is His presence, along with the presence of the goal, that makes the relationship holy. If that is the Course's sole concept of the holy relationship, shouldn't that be our concept as well?

30. Joining does not involve bodies joining or interacting in form. We should only join with Jesus and the Holy Spirit in our minds.

Joining in the Course is about minds joining in a common goal, in one idea: "When two minds join as one and share one idea equally, the first link in the awareness of the Sonship as One has been made" (T-16.II.4:3). Though this joining is on a mental level, it will usually be facilitated by physical communication (we should "regard bodies solely as a means of joining minds"—T-8.VII.2:5) and will naturally result in physical cooperation—in *co-operating*: "Salvation must reverse the mad belief in separate thoughts and separate bodies, which lead separate lives and go their separate ways. One function shared by separate minds unites them in one purpose" (W-pI.100.1:2-3).

31. Trying to help others only makes the error real. It is an activity that is full of hidden ego agendas. Why try to help "out there" if the world is not real anyway?

It is hard to imagine an idea that is more in conflict with the very heart of the Course. Here is how Jesus talks about trying to help another, even when that attempt is imperfect and limited by ego, as it usually is in this world: "Nothing in the world is holier than helping one who asks for help. And two come very close to God in this attempt, however limited, however lacking in sincerity" (P-2.V.4:2-3).

32. Trying to serve the poor or disadvantaged just reinforces the idea that they are lacking. The best thing you can do for them is just see beyond their apparent lack.

Seeing beyond their apparent lack is an important *part* of healing them, but this is perfectly compatible with helping them in worldly ways as well. Two stories from the genesis of the Course can clarify the Course's stance on helping the poor or disadvantaged. The Mayo Clinic story, which was pivotal in Helen accepting her role as scribe of the Course, concluded with Helen and Bill choosing to help a stranger in an airport, in response to which Jesus said to Helen, "This is my true church." Several months later, Jesus said that he arranged for Bill to attend a conference on rehabilitation, so that he could get over his fear of helping those with broken bodies, damaged brains, and weakened egos. The famous "truly helpful" prayer (T-2.V(A).18), in fact, was dictated so that Bill could take it with him to this conference. The Course says, "Let your gratitude make room for all who will escape with you; the sick, the weak, the needy and afraid, and those who mourn a seeming loss or feel apparent pain, who suffer cold or hunger, or who walk the way of hatred and the path of death" (W-pI.195.5:2).

33. Don't fall into the grandiose trap of thinking you should "save the world." The Course, after all, says "Seek not to change the world."

"Seek not to change the world" (T-21.In.1:7) means that we shouldn't try to rearrange circumstances to suit our pleasure. But "save the world" is an unambiguously positive phrase wherever it occurs in the Course, which is often (e.g., "our true purpose is to save the world"—W-pI.153.8:2). We need to see ourselves as being here for more than just our own salvation: "It is more than just our happiness alone we came to gain" (W-pI.139.9:4). Our true goal includes *everyone*: "Complete restoration of the Sonship is the only goal of the miracle-minded" (T-1.VII.3:14).

34. My special function is just to forgive, to let go of my own resentment. Thinking I have some special earthly role given me by the Holy Spirit is just the treacherous voice of specialness.

The Course says, “To each He gives a special function in salvation he alone can fill” (T-25.VI.4:2). This is your unique role in God’s plan. It is selected for you by the Holy Spirit based on your specific strengths: “Seeing your strengths exactly as they are, and equally aware of where they can be best applied, to what, to whom and when, He chooses and accepts your part for you” (W-pI.154.2:2). And through exercising these strengths you become “a savior to the holy ones especially entrusted to [your] care” (T-31.VII.8:3). Thus, in the pages of the Course it is Jesus’ voice—not the voice of your specialness—telling you that you have an important, divinely chosen role: “I am making His plan perfectly explicit to you, and will also tell you of your part in it, and how urgent it is to fulfill it” (T-5.VII.4:4).

35. The miracle is just a shift in perception. It’s not anything that happens in the world. And it’s certainly not anything I “perform” in the world.

If you read the fifty miracle principles, it is clear that miracles are something healing that passes *from* a miracle worker *to* a miracle receiver. What passes is love, for miracles are “expressions of love,” being called that five times in the Course’s early chapters. This is the main meaning of “miracle” in the Course: an expression of love by which we shift the perception of *another*. A miracle as something that shifts our own perception is an important meaning of the word in the Course, especially in the Workbook, but it is not the Course’s *main* meaning.

36. Forgiveness has nothing to do with the other person. I don’t forgive for their sake; I do it just for me.

In the Course, forgiveness is inherently interpersonal: by releasing your resentment, you free the other person from his or her burden of guilt: “Help him to lift the heavy burden of sin you laid upon him and he accepted as his own” (T-19.IV.D.16:5). Forgiveness, then, is the impulse to release both ourselves *and* our apparent attacker.

37. The Course never tells us to be honest in this world. How can that matter when the whole world is a lie?

In the section on honesty as a characteristic of God’s teachers (M-4.II), Jesus describes a kind of mega-honesty, or ultra-integrity, in which all of our thoughts, words, and deeds are absolutely consistent. This means that every word we say is an honest reflection of our thoughts, deeds, and other words; that we always keep our word (we always do what we say we’ll do); and even that every thought we have is an honest reflection of every other thought. This is not letting us off the hook from normal honesty. This is calling us to *perfect* honesty.

38. Everything is perfect. Every thought is perfect. Every feeling is perfect. If I think that anyone has made a mistake, I’m in judgment. It’s all good. Hitler was just fulfilling his perfect function.

It’s true that the Holy Spirit can use everything for His purpose. Even our mistakes get turned into learning opportunities by Him. But we *do* make mistakes, mistakes that at their core are expressions of hurtful intent (“No one attacks without intent to hurt”—W-pI.170.1:1). Further, the Holy Spirit only assigns functions that benefit everyone. What Hitler did was a rejection of whatever his true assigned function was.

39. Only the ego wants to be right, and only the ego calls something wrong. Instead of trying to be right, we should just be happy.

When the Course asks “Do you prefer that you be right or happy?” (T-29.VII.1:9), it means this: Do you want to believe that your current view (specifically, your view that seeking outside yourself can make you happy) is right, even though that view makes you unhappy? The Course later calls this “the goal of being right when you are wrong” (T-30.I.11:6). In other words, do you prefer that you be right even though you’re wrong, and your wrongness is costing you your happiness? Your job, in other words, is not to discard all concern with being right. It is to let go of your egotistical belief that you are *currently* right, so that you can change your mind and become both happy *and* right.

40. I shouldn't label the choices I have made "wrong." That's just the ego beating itself up. I was doing the best I could. All of it was right for that moment.

The Course asks for "a re-evaluation of everything you cherish" (T-13.IX.4:1). It "requires willingness to question every value that you hold" (T-24.In.2:1). How can we possibly undertake such a wholesale reevaluation if we do not allow ourselves to question our choices? Instead, we need to develop a boundless capacity for admitting we have been wrong. "Acknowledge but that you have been mistaken, and all effects of your mistakes will disappear" (T-21.II.2:7). As the Course points out, we haven't sinned, but we "have been much mistaken" (T-10.V.6:1).

41. Looking at the effects on others of my actions in the world is a wrong focus. The Course is very clear that my mistakes and "sins" have no effect.

Throughout the Course, the effect we have on others is portrayed as valuable feedback that can help show us whether we are coming from the ego or the Holy Spirit. "And you will recognize which you have chosen by *their* reactions" (T-15.II.4:6). Our mistakes and "sins" have no effect on eternity, but in this world they have a great effect. "You are not guiltless in time, but in eternity. You have 'sinned' in the past, but there is no past" (T-13.I.3:2-3).

42. I shouldn't expend energy looking for my ego. That is a negative focus that just reinforces the ego. I need to wake up from it, not wallow in it.

We don't want to *wallow* in the ego, of course, but we do need to *look* at it. The Course sees the ego as largely hidden in the unconscious, and controlling us from there as long as it remains hidden. We hide it because we believe that it is real. That is why we need to "bring it out into the light. There you will see that it rested on meaninglessness, and that everything of which you have been afraid was based on nothing" (T-11.In.3:9-10). That is why so many Workbook lessons instruct you to actively "search your mind" (eleven refs.) for ego thoughts. And that is why "it is so crucial that you look upon your hatred and realize its full extent" (T-13.III.1:1). Only when we bring the ego to light can we see that it is nothing.

43. The most important part of any action is the quality of my consciousness when performing that action. The actual external effect of my action is beside the point.

While a positive quality of consciousness when performing an action is obviously important, the effect on others of our actions is really the central point. In the Course, we are saved by *saving* our *saviors*. What saves us, then, is having a healing effect on others. An instructive example is where Jesus praised Helen for rewriting a friend's poorly written report, saying that Helen was "performing a miracle" for the friend, for herself, for the organization involved, and for Jesus. This was so even though Helen, Jesus said, found it "taxing," "because you resented Esther's sin [the poorly written report] and thought she put you in a very unfair position." So she felt taxed and resentful while doing it, but it was still a miracle because it had a healing *effect*.

44. There is nothing more important than being in the moment. As the Course says, "A healed mind does not plan."

In the Course, being in the moment is primarily about being free of past regrets and future fears and thus entering a holy instant. It is not about being in touch with the *sensory* present—the direct experience of current sights, sounds, and touch—but about being in touch with the *timeless* present. We don't want to use being in the present as an escape from life and from our responsibility to others. Indeed, we can be in the present and still make plans. It is true that "A healed mind does not plan." But the next line is important, too: "It carries out the plans that it receives through listening to wisdom that is not its own" (W-pI.135.11:2-3). It doesn't plan, but it does *receive* plans.

45. Spiritual states are the sign of spiritual advancement. We know that someone is spiritual if that person has had high spiritual experiences.

Spiritual states are extremely valuable tools for spiritual development. But in the Course's view, the real signs of spiritual development are the kind of character traits listed in "What Are the Characteristics of God's Teachers?" (M-4): trust, honesty, tolerance, gentleness, joy, defenselessness, generosity, patience, faithfulness, and open-mindedness. It is unfortunately quite common for the same person to have both high spiritual states and not-so-high character traits.

46. The reason I do the Course is to find peace—to exchange my judgmental, depressed inner states for peaceful, blissful inner states.

The Course does state that its goal is peace. But it describes its goal using many other words as well (such as true perception, forgiveness, happiness, and holiness). Focusing too much on peace can easily become a narcissistic focus that shuts out our concern for the welfare of others, since *their* problems can seem to get in the way of *our* peace. We need to combine inner peace with outer helpfulness—with giving miracles.

47. You should not emphasize words in your study of the Course. Words, as the Course says, are but symbols of symbols.

The Course is nothing but a long string of words. Its teaching is in the form of words. And most of its practice involves silently repeating words. The Course may say that “words are but symbols of symbols” (M-21.1:9), but it also says “the words we use are mighty” (W-pI.162.4:2), and that the Holy Spirit can raise words “from meaningless symbols to the Call of Heaven itself” (M-21.5:9). Words are so potentially transformative because they are conveyors of *meaning*, and the meaning we believe in determines the emotions that we feel.

48. The intellect is an expression of ego. The mind is the problem, the heart is the solution, for the heart is inherently pure and spiritual.

The Course sees logic and reason as powerful tools for persuading the mind to relinquish the ego and choose God. Indeed, it claims that reason is inherently ego-transcending: “There is no reason in insanity, for it depends entirely on reason’s absence. The ego never uses it [reason], because it does not realize that it exists” (T-21.V.8:6-7). The Course focuses so much on thought because it sees thought as what determines feeling. For this reason, the Course *never* contrasts the mind and the heart. It always frames them as keeping in step with each other, either for good (“My heart is quiet, and my mind at rest”—W-pII.286.1:8) or ill (“his bewildered mind and frightened heart”—W-pII.334.2:3).

49. It’s really all about direct experience, which is why feelings are where it’s at. Words, thoughts, and beliefs are abstractions from direct experience, which is why they get in the way.

Direct experience is highly valued in the Course, but this does not lead it to denigrate the things of the mind. Though they are not direct experience, words, thoughts, and beliefs can be crucial representations of the truth that we one day will directly experience. They can be needed reflections that can actually take us to direct experience, as many have experienced in doing the Workbook lessons, which are mostly about repeating words. Further, feelings per se are not exalted in the Course. In the Course’s view, feelings come in two varieties: feelings that are of the ego and are meaningless (anger, guilt, fear, worry, depression, etc.) and feelings that are of God and are true (love, peace, joy, etc.). And which side we experience is a result of which *thoughts* we choose to believe.

50. Children and animals live closer to the spirit than we do, because they live in the moment in direct experience. Basically, anything with a less developed intellect is more spiritual.

The Course does not extol children or animals. It uses children as great symbols for us, since their egos, their lack of understanding, and their need for help and guidance are more readily apparent than is the case with us. Animals do not fare any better in the Course. There aren’t many references to them, but the ones there are depict animals as experiencing human emotions (love of offspring, anger, rage), rather than somehow being free of such ego-based feelings. Animals, in other words, have egos too.



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