

Beauty from My Christian Past

by Allen Watson

One of the sweetest thoughts in the Course, for me, is this:

All your past except its beauty is gone, and nothing is left but a blessing. I have saved all your kindnesses and every loving thought you ever had.

(T-5.IV.8:2-3)

Lately I've been seeing that filtering of the past in a new way. I've been realizing how much truth and light reached me while I was a practicing fundamentalist Christian, truth that I cherish now in the Course, but which came to me through the Bible and various Christian teachers before I ever heard of the Course—before it was even written.

Actually, in the years I am speaking of, I didn't refer to myself as a fundamentalist; I thought of myself as "an evangelical Christian." Even within traditional Christian circles, the word "fundamentalist" has a bad taste to it. It conjures up images of pulpit-pounding preachers of hellfire who wear shiny suits, sport pompadour hair, and lecture their audiences about all the sinful things they must avoid. I was a college graduate; I convinced myself that my Christianity was respectable and intelligent.

Of course, I had a lot in common with those fundamentalists that I disdained. I believed in the inerrancy of the Bible. I believed that salvation came through the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross. I believed that Jesus was God the Son (which set him apart from the rest of us), and not simply the Son of God (as we all are). I believed that the devil existed. I believed that sin was real, and that everyone was born in sin, cut off from God, and had to choose salvation through Jesus Christ to be born again to eternal life. As I grew older, some of those beliefs began to morph; for instance, toward the end of my active participation in Christian churches and groups, I had come to believe that a person could choose salvation without consciously accepting Jesus Christ. And I was close to believing that no one would spend eternity in hell. But, by and large, until I had studied the Course for several years, my beliefs were well within the orthodox, conservative Christian camp.

I still consider myself, at heart, a Christian, although I have

strayed far from the accepted pathways. As a Course student, I acknowledge Jesus as my spiritual leader, and I proclaim the Christ in everyone. Yet I am not the same kind of Christian I was before; I no longer believe any of those things that I listed in the last paragraph. Many Christians consider them to be "fundamental" Christian truths—even many who, while not accurately described as fundamentalists, are still largely conservative in their theology. They would probably say that no one who does not believe those things could be considered to be a Christian.

**God's light
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For the sake of this article, then, let me distinguish between *traditional* Christianity and *Course* Christianity. When I use the term "Christianity" without qualification, I will be referring to traditional Christianity, but I do not mean to imply that Course students are not (or may not identify themselves as) Christians. I will use the terms "Christian" and "Course student" as though they were exclusive, even though I realize they are not. When I refer to my time as a Christian I mean my time as a Bible-centered, evangelical Christian; when I refer to myself and others as "Course

students," I mean people who consider the Course their primary spiritual path, while recognizing that many Course students are still practicing Christians as well.

Yet as I look back now, I can identify quite a few points at which God's light had shone through traditional teaching and reached me. Putting that another way, there were quite a few things I learned as a Christian, and from other Christians, that I carry with me still, things that I find either reinforced by the Course or at least consonant with it. I often think that, as Course students, we have more in common with our born-again brothers and sisters than we realize. I want to honor that commonality in this article by identifying a number of such gems of truth from my Christian past.

The points I mention here do not exhaust the treasures from the past; they are merely representative. These are points that come to mind when I ask myself, "What truths did I learn as a Bible-based Christian that I still cherish today as a devoted Course student? What truths from the Course came to me as

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Mission Statement

To discern the author's vision of *A Course in Miracles* and manifest that in our lives, in the lives of students, and in the world.

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The title of our newsletter comes from Bill Thetford's comment to Helen Schucman that "There must be another way" and from Jesus' comment in the Course that "Everyone eventually begins to recognize, however dimly, that there *must* be a better way" (T-2.111.3:6). We hope that this newsletter will be helpful to you on your journey to this "better way."

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Articles

Beauty from My Christian Past

by Allen Watson

We often think of Christianity and the Course as being on opposite sides of the fence. In this article, however, Allen relates some of the truths from his Christian past that he still cherishes as a Course student.1

Walking with the Holy Spirit in Post-Workbook Practice

by Mary Anne Buchowski

Mary Anne shares the latest developments in her own practice and in that of the morning class she leads. It answers the question: When you have been through the Workbook many times and feel that it's time to move on, what then?9

Loving God

by Robert Perry

Robert tackles an issue often skirted in Course circles: the issue of whether or not we should emphasize giving love to God. The article is actually a set of notes for a class taught in Sedona and includes written exercises.11

When Your Back Is up against the Wall

by Nicola Harvey

What do you do when your spiritual journey has been sailing along pleasantly and you are suddenly faced with a gut-wrenching crisis? Nicola's answer, though practical, steers clear of the superficial solutions we tend to reach for in such situations.14

"If You Do It, You Will See That It Works" An Experience of Universal Love

by Greg Mackie

Greg Mackie has written a wonderful article about a profound inner experience he had last year, a spiritual experience that was brought on by doing the practice taught in the Course.17

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CIRCLE SERVICES

Support to Course Students

In Sedona, Mary Anne Buchowski is available to work with individual Course students in a teacher-pupil relationship designed to help them along the path of the Course. We are also pleased to offer informal support and assistance, through correspondence or by phone, to both individuals and study groups. Contact Mary Anne at maryanne@circleofa.com, or call our office.

Course-Based Spiritual Healing

For the time being, the Circle's healing work is based in England where Nicola Harvey offers healing sessions and is available for workshops and speaking engagements. Contact Nicola at nicola@circleofa.com, or call (01425) 656441.

Internet Services

Our website is a useful tool for accessing Circle resources, programs, and services. Electronic Text Classes (ETC's) and Workbook Commentaries are available online. You will also find a huge variety of articles by Circle teachers, including the popular "Course Q & A" page. New articles are added every week. There is also a shopping cart for simple online ordering of books and tapes. Visit the website at www.circleofa.com.

Service to People in Prison

The Circle provides complimentary materials, as well as individual support through correspondence, to Course students in prison.

Spring 2003

Grand Spring Sale!

From now until May 31, we are holding a grand sale of books and tapes, at **40% off our normal retail price**. This offer includes the Circle's publications only (books and booklets by Robert Perry and Allen Watson); it does *not* include the source material (*A Course in Miracles*, etc.) or the new Q & A book by Greg Mackie. All tape sets are included in the offer.

Please order in the usual way (see enclosed mail order list). Calculate shipping based on the *undiscounted* price of the goods, then deduct 40% from those items included in the offer. Alternatively, simply call our office, and we will be pleased to help you with your order.

CIRCLE EVENTS

Regular Classes in Sedona, Arizona

Daily Morning Workbook Class

With Mary Anne Buchowski

The focus for 2003 is "Walking with the Holy Spirit"

Weekday mornings, 8:30 – 9:30 am

Weekly Class

With Robert Perry

This class covers a variety of topics on the Course

Tuesday evenings, 7:00 - 8:30 pm

Call our office for details

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Regular Classes in Portland, Oregon

Topical and Text Classes

With Allen Watson or Greg Mackie

Text study classes, plus a monthly topical class

Tuesday evenings, 7:00 - 9:00 pm

Contact Allen Watson

(allen@circleofa.com; (503) 284-3619)

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Workshop

You Never Have to Be Afraid

With Robert Perry

May 17 – 18: Sedona, Arizona

The Course's teachings on fear:

what causes it, and how we can be released from it.

See enclosed flyer for full details

Robert and Susan Ending Their Marriage

After twenty years of marriage, Susan and I have decided to break up. We have raised two wonderful children as well as the Circle of Atonement together, but it is clear to us that our paths are taking us in different directions. We spent most of last year processing this and seeking counseling and guidance, and through that process it became clear to us that it was time to lay our marriage to rest and move on.

Without Susan it is hard to imagine there being a Circle of Atonement. She worked hard to support me in the years when I was first teaching the Course. When I started the newsletter and booklet series twelve years ago, she was there in the office making sure the wheels kept turning. When we formally incorporated as the Circle of Atonement, she took us through the incorporation process and then served as the Circle's Administrator for a number of years. All along it was clear that her primary calling lay elsewhere, in building what has now become the thriving congregation of Sedona Interfaith Fellowship. Since this was always clear to both of us, however, her function with the Fellowship was not a factor in our breakup. Despite the Circle not being her main calling, she stepped in because she was needed, and in doing so made the Circle possible. Throughout, she was particularly focused on making sure that the Circle's idealistic vision was reflected in the daily grind of running an organization. She became so indispensable that it threatened to keep her from her real calling, and so for several years she slowly extricated herself from the Circle in order to focus on her role as minister of the Fellowship, as well as her role as mother. With the ending of our marriage, that process is now complete. She has resigned for now from the Board and has found an accountant to take over the bookkeeping. You may not have heard Susan's name often in the last few years, but if you have in any way benefited from the Circle of Atonement, you owe Susan a debt of gratitude.

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Beauty from My Christian Past

(continued from page 1)

reinforcements and affirmations of truths already familiar to me?" Some of these points came from particular Christian teachers, and some came directly from the Bible, but all of them represent points of truth shared by the Course and evangelical Christianity.

No Consciousness of Sin

I'll begin with a realization that came to me from an amalgam of many sources, but which arrived in my conscious

mind with all the force of a revelation: it is possible for us to live with no consciousness of sin—or, in Course terms, to recognize that we are guiltless because that is God's Will (see W-pI.93.6:1 and throughout that lesson). This realization came to me one day during 1969, thirteen years after my initial born-again experience. It really was the culmination of much Bible study and reading of scores of books, but it crystallized for me in a few words from the New Testament book of Hebrews, words that contrast the ineffectual animal sacrifices of the Old Testament to the perfect work of Jesus Christ:

1 For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can

never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.

2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? (Hebrews 10:1–2)

(All Bible quotations are from the New American Standard Bible [NASB] unless otherwise noted.)

What struck me in particular as I read that passage were the words “would no longer have had consciousness of sins.” The biblical author was clearly saying that if sacrifices had really worked to remove sin, the worshipers would have been guiltless after offering them; all consciousness of sin would have been gone from their minds, and they would have had no further need to offer sacrifices. Instead, the sacrifices were offered annually, proving that sin had not been permanently dealt with. Then, he goes on to say that the perfect sacrifice has now been offered in Jesus:

11 Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins;

12 but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, ...

14 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. (Hebrews 10:11–12, 14)

(The capitalized words are a quotation from the Old Testament (Psalm 110) that the writer is applying to Jesus.)

Students of the Course know that Jesus, in the Course, repudiates this interpretation of his death (see T-3.I and T-6.I), so atonement by sacrifice is something the Bible and the Course definitely do *not* have in common. The commonality that I see here is this: both the Bible and the Course say that God has arranged things so that, no matter what we may have done or left undone, it is possible for us to be freed of all consciousness of sin.

Traditional Christianity, and in particular evangelical or fundamentalist Christianity, very strongly emphasizes the complete forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ: “through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you” (Acts 13:38). He offered the definitive sacrifice that dealt with sin “for all time.” The basis on which Christianity offers forgiveness is vastly different from the Course; indeed, the Course dismisses the idea that Jesus died for our sins as “upside-down,” an “unfortunate interpretation, which arose out of projection” (T-3.I.1:5–6). Instead, it bases forgiveness on the fact that, since what God created cannot be changed, sin must be unreal; it must not exist: “There is no sin; it has no consequence” (W-pL.101.6:7). Being without sin, of course, we are also without guilt.

Although Christians proclaim forgiveness on what the Course considers a mistaken basis (Jesus’ sacrifice), still, forgiveness is being proclaimed, and within Christian circles many people hear that message and receive it. Course students and traditional Christians share a belief that God’s Will to forgive is so strong that He would move Heaven and earth to do so, allowing absolutely nothing to stand in its way. Well, perhaps not quite “nothing” where traditional Christians are concerned, because most do believe that a majority of the human race is doomed to hell. I might state more accurately that traditional teaching includes a profound but limited expression of divine forgiveness, while the Course expands that to make it unlimited and absolute.

To be honest, I found most Christian churches to be riddled with guilt and sometimes based on fear (trying to scare people out of hell into Heaven by threat of eternal punishment). The incredible freedom from all consciousness of sins was a message in scarce supply. It *was* and *is* still proclaimed here and there, but many miss it, even those who consider themselves to be “saved.” Christians who live without consciousness of sins are rare indeed—but the same could be said of Course students!

I learned the truth of complete forgiveness while still a Christian, but when I encountered it in the Course, it became a centerpiece of my spiritual repertoire.

Only One Person in the Universe

Perhaps my favorite Christian author, and a man I regard in many ways as a spiritual father, was Norman Grubb. Brother of Sir Kenneth Grubb (an Anglican Church leader and prominent figure in the World Council of Churches), author of many books,¹ and Director of the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade (WEC), Grubb was a unique figure. While remaining staunchly fundamentalist at the core, he opened himself to a wide variety of influences that included New Thought Christianity authors such as Thomas Troward (widely read in Religious Science) and even Sufi mystics. I attribute to him most of the open-mindedness in myself that led to my eventual acceptance of *A Course in Miracles*. I was privileged to hear Norman in person on a number of occasions. I had several personal consultations with him, and, in 1964, even met with him in his own home in Fort Washington, PA, where he lived near the headquarters of WEC. He died in 1993 at the age of 95. Many of his writings can be viewed on the web at www.normangrubb.com and at www.unionlife.org. Course students with a strong background in biblical Christianity may find some helpful material there to aid them in integrating their former beliefs with the Course.

In *The Key to Everything*, Norman wrote:

Essentially from eternity there has been only one Person.

I learned the truth of complete forgiveness while still a Christian.

This is difficult to realize. Yet throughout the Word of God it is underlined.

God was before all: He is the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega.

He is love.

He is inconceivable beauty.

He is the all.

If that is so, then the link between Him and us, whom He has created, is the link between the One and the means of manifesting or making known the One. In other words, our relation to Him is that of containing Him in such a way that He may be recognized.

I still recall the sense of wonder and rightness I had when I first read his statement that there is only one Person in the universe. The idea was radical and startling, yet it resonated to the core of my being. “Of course!” I thought. “The Bible says that God is All and in All (Ephesians 1:23; Colossians 3:11), so we are really all in Him.” The Amplified Bible renders the last phrase of Ephesians 1:23 as, “Him Who makes everything complete, and Who fills everything everywhere [with Himself].” I soaked up such passages like a sponge, relishing the vision of God’s infinite Oneness.

A. B. Simpson, who founded the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church, once wrote in a song: “All in all forever, only Christ I sing. Everything is in Christ, and Christ is everything.”

Perhaps neither of these writers went quite as far as the Course does in developing this idea, but the seed certainly was there. The Course says:

God is All in all in a very literal sense. All being is in Him Who is all Being. You are therefore in Him since your being is His. (T-7.IV.7:4–6)

I cannot imagine a clearer, more categorical statement. When the Course says something is true “in a very literal sense,” there is absolutely no wiggle room left to claim that this is figurative or does not mean quite what it seems to say. The second sentence confirms the first; everything that is, is in God because God is everything that is. To *be* at all is to be in God. On this basis the Course declares our salvation accomplished; there is nowhere else we could possibly be but in God! There is no “place beyond the infinite” (T-29.VIII.6:2).

In paragraph 5 of Workbook lesson 169, we read about the time when we have been restored to total conscious union with God. In that level of experience, when we have moved from perception into full knowledge, all that is necessary is “God is.” (Norman used to say, “God isn’t a *doer*; He’s an *Is-er*.”) Nothing else means anything, because in conscious union with God we

realize that there is nothing else *but* God: “In His Being, He encompasses all things” (W-pI.169.5:2). All is God, and therefore anything else—any other word—means nothing. That experience of oneness is our destination, our goal. In that union:

There are no lips to speak them [words], and no part of mind sufficiently distinct to feel that it is now aware of something not itself. It has united with its Source. And like its Source Itself, it merely is. (W-pI.169.5:5–7)

Other passages in the Course that speak of this truth are: T-8.IV.1:4; T-18.VI.1:5–6; T-8.V.3:1; T-14.VIII.5:2; and W-pI.95.12:2.

Nothing exists outside of God; all His creations are part of Himself. Since that is true, it means that from the Course’s point of view, all of reality is in God. I am in God; you are in God; your favorite enemy is in God. There is, quite literally, nowhere else to be, because all being is in God. God is, and only God is.

All else that the Course has to teach us is based upon this single, profound fact. It colors everything the Course says about forgiveness and salvation and the healing of relationships. Yet, I first heard it from Norman Grubb, a Christian missionary.

Living as Expressions of God

Another of God’s messengers for me was a British preacher by the name of Ian Thomas—*Major* Ian Thomas, as he was always billed, for some reason. He, too, wrote a number of books that influenced me, and I enjoyed attending a weeklong conference he gave in New York City. He presented a view often identified with the Keswick conferences, a well-known annual conference on “higher Christian living.” The book that first drew my attention was entitled *The Saving Life of Christ*. Its thesis was that the true central focus of Christianity was not on Jesus’ death, but on his resurrection (compare that with the Course’s statement, T-3.I.1:2). He quoted the Bible verse “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Romans 5:10, KJV). He pointed out that focusing on Jesus’ death and on escape from hell was a mistake; we were meant to go far beyond that to the experience of Christ living *in us and through us and as us*. It was “much more” than mere escape from punishment.

Major Thomas’s speech was full of startling aphorisms and memorable phrases. One such phrase I have never forgotten was that God created Man as “the human vehicle of the divine content.” In his talk illustrating the Christian life with parallels to the story of Israel’s exodus from Egypt, wandering in the wilderness, and eventual arrival at the Promised Land, Thomas said something like this: “God did not bring us out of Egypt and then leave us to be dumped in the wilderness [the equivalent of

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being ‘saved’ from hell by accepting Christ as savior, and stopping there]. His intention is for us to enter into our inheritance,” which meant to be “wholly filled and flooded with God Himself” (Ephesians 3:19, Amplified Bible), a passage Thomas loved to quote.

As a result of my early tutelage under Grubb and Thomas, the Course’s ideas that we are “among the ministers of God” (W-pI.154.title) who are meant to join Jesus in his crusade to undo the ego everywhere, and that we are people through whom God reaches out to the world, seemed like familiar notions. The Course says: “The Holy Spirit teaches you to use your body only to reach your brothers, so He can teach His message through you” (T-8.VIII.9:1). “You must see the works I do through you, or you will not perceive that I have done them unto you” (T-11.VI.9:3). And perhaps most exactly paralleling Thomas’s teaching: “If God created you by extending Himself as you, you can only extend yourself as He did” (T-7.I.5:2). We can be nothing but the human vehicle of the divine content; that is our only function.

The Importance of the Mind

I forget what teacher first pointed out this teaching in the Bible to me, or whether, perhaps, it was something in the Bible I discovered for myself (I think not). However I received it, the message of these passages has stayed with me:

The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace. (Romans 8:6)

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2)

What I understood from these two verses was that spiritual growth consists of *renewing the mind*. Patterns of thinking were to be repaired, and by renewing the mind we would be wholly transformed. The mind is thus the key to our spiritual growth; change the mind and everything else changes. As the Course says, “Seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world” (T-21.In.1:7). It very clearly says that our behavior is the result of our thinking (see T-5.II.12:3), and urges us to change our mind (T-4.IV.2:1). It calls itself “a course in mind training” (T-1.VII.4:1).

The first verse I quoted above is about our choice of what occupies our mind. If you substituted the word “ego” for “flesh” in the verse and substituted “that listens to” for “set on,” it would read almost like a quotation from the Course: “The mind that listens to the ego is death, but the mind that listens to the Spirit is life and peace.” The Bible verse presents the same dichotomy we often find in the Course: which voice are we listening to? That decision will determine whether we experience life or death.

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The second verse implies that transformation, or enlightenment, consists of a process of undoing the mind’s old thoughts and replacing them with new ones, as the Course often teaches. Because of this background, what the Course had to say on the subject was not unfamiliar to me.

Meditation

You may be surprised to hear that I learned anything about meditation in fundamentalist Christian circles, but in fact, my first exposure to it was at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, a bastion of evangelical Christendom. Two evangelical Bible teachers, Frank Currie and Bill Gothard, taught me that the meaning of meditation is (to quote a phrase Currie had his class memorize) “sharing with the Lord His own Word, prayerfully, and with personal application.” By this they meant taking the words of Scripture and turning them into personal prayers, adapting them to my specific situation, life, and needs. This was to be done, not only in a morning quiet time, but as one lay down to sleep, while walking from place to place, and whenever one had a moment during the day. They also taught that spiritual success was guaranteed to those who meditated in this way. I won’t go into the specifics of how this was derived from careful comparison of a number of Bible verses in the Old Testament, but it was a revelation to me at the time.

I had to spend time working on myself and applying the words of the Bible to my own life.

If you have read what I have written in *Bringing the Course to Life* or in several places in the *Workbook Companion* series, you can probably recognize that I believe this is precisely what the Course, particularly the Workbook, instructs us to do with its words. We are told to remember a sentence and to repeat it over and over during the day, applying it to the situations of our lives. Many of the exercises it gives us are either prayers or almost like prayers; it presents meditation practices that usually begin and end with words (though designed to take us beyond words) and that use phrases to recall the mind to its purpose in seeking the light within. The four-fold pyramid of practice includes morning and evening quiet times, hourly remembrances, frequent reminders, and responses to temptation. The Course tells us that meditation is a very important spiritual practice. Although it uses the actual word “meditation” only once, in W-pI.124.8:4, it presents it as “a major goal of mind training” that “must be accomplished” (W-pI.44.3:3–5). See Robert’s article about meditation on our website for more information:

www.circleofa.com/program/II_4-med_prayer.html

Quiet Time

That brings up the whole area of the general pattern of spiritual practice. The Christians I associated with, particularly in college but afterward as well, emphasized the importance of a daily quiet time, spent in reading the Bible and prayer. I worked my way through a three-year Bible study course called

“Search the Scriptures” that was designed for daily devotional Bible study—that is, Bible study applied to one’s own life rather than purely academic study. I devoured a little booklet by C. Stacy Woods, then the leader of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, titled *Quiet Time*. It drilled me in the concept that the key to spiritual growth was a daily time spent with God. Going to church wasn’t enough; doing good works wasn’t enough; reading books wasn’t enough. I had to spend time working on myself and applying the words of the Bible to my own life.

That beginning served me well, and I maintained a morning quiet time for over forty years, even after I dropped out of the Christian circles that taught me to do it and moved on to New Age books, Eastern religions, and the Course. The content changed, but the habit of daily practice remained, and still remains.

Admittedly, not all Christians practice a daily quiet time, but thousands do. Quite possibly the percentage of Christians who take time daily to study and pray compares quite favorably to the percentage of Course students who do so! Clearly, this is something the Course considers a basic for its students, even after completing the Workbook (see M-16.4–5). I owe much to my Christian heritage for training me in this way.

of the body—a corporate body. Read carefully, it can be seen in the New Testament that Jesus’ intention was not individual salvation, but the formation of the church, a society of those called into the service of God, devoted to the expression of love, and of all the fruits of the Spirit.

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service of
God.**

I remember reading a book written by a Southern Baptist author that said that true orthodoxy was measured not by the correctness of our doctrine, but by the quality of our relationships with God and with one another. That single statement shifted the entire direction of my life. The Course’s emphasis on relationships seemed only natural to me when I encountered it, and I owe the ease with which that fit into my mind to my Christian teaching.

Conclusion

Your background may be very different from mine, but I encourage you to reexamine it one of these days. Instead of looking for its flaws, and for the reasons you left it, look this time for what in your background helped you on your way to the Course and to where you are now. You may find there is far more to be grateful for, and to identify with, than you realized.

Salvation is a Collaborative Venture

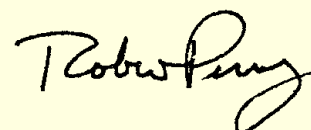
Finally, even in evangelical Christianity, there were some who emphasized the corporate nature of salvation; the ultimate intention of uniting all things in Christ. The Course expresses the idea with the words I use to title this subtopic. The Bible says that the eventual goal is the uniting of all into “a dwelling of God in the Spirit” (Eph. 2:22, NASB). It speaks of uniting us as “one new Man,” with Christ as the head and the rest of us as members

¹ Norman Grubb authored all of the following books, most originally published by the Christian Literature Crusade, a sister organization of the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade. Those currently in print are shown in bold: *Rees Howells*, *Intercessor*; *C. T. Studd*, *Cricketer and Pioneer*; *Continuous Revival*; *The Spirit of Revival*; *God Unlimited*; *Touching the Invisible*; *The Spontaneous You*; *The Deep Things of God*; *The Leap of Faith*; *Once Caught, No Escape: My Life Story*; *The Key to Everything*; *Liberating Secret*; *Summit Living*.

From the Editor

You may notice a number of small changes in this issue. You have probably already noticed the newly-designed masthead, and there are a number of other small changes aimed at keeping the newsletter looking fresh and interesting. Another, more major, change in form is that *A Better Way* is now available online, for those of you who would prefer to receive it that way. For details, see our

announcement on page 4. On the content level, this issue brings you a wide variety of articles from all of our staff writers and teachers, including some inspiring stories of personal application of the Course. For details of the articles, see page 2.



Walking with the Holy Spirit in Post-Workbook Practice

by Mary Anne Buchowski

This year we have taken a giant and exciting step forward in our practice of the Course, and I am writing to tell you all about it.

For the past few years, Robert and I have been teaching daily Workbook classes, going through the lessons in chronological sequence as set out for us. This has worked very well, and we have learned more and had new insights each time through. However, as we approached the end of our year of Workbook practice last December, I had a strong sense that Jesus was calling us to a different way of being and of practicing in the new year. I couldn't quite put my finger on exactly what this was, and I felt a bit nervous as the end of the year came closer and closer. Then it all came clear to me when we reached the Final Lessons and the Epilogue, and I understood that he was calling us to turn our practicing—and our lives—over to the Holy Spirit to guide from now on.

Let us turn to Him Who leads the way and makes our footsteps sure.

To Him we leave these lessons, as to Him we give our lives henceforth. (W-pII.fl.in.1:3-4)

Of course, this was really nothing new. I had understood it every other time I had completed the Workbook, but never before had I felt ready for this step, and so I had gone back to doing the lessons chronologically. This time, however, it seemed very clear to me that the time had come to move on.

I understood the significance of moving on when I read Jesus' comments in the Epilogue. In telling us that "No more specific lessons are assigned, for there is no more need of them" (W-pII.ep.3:1), Jesus seemed to be removing the firm structure that he had established for us and placing us in the care of the Holy Spirit. According to Jesus, from now on the Holy Spirit would guide us in everything. He would take on the role fulfilled by the Workbook up until now, guiding our practice, even telling us when and how to practice.

He will direct your efforts, telling you exactly what to do, how to direct your mind, and when to come to Him in silence, asking for His sure direction and His certain Word. (W-ep.3:3)

As I read the Epilogue, I had the distinct sense that, for some reason, Jesus *needed* to wean us of our dependence on the lessons. The reason became clear to me in his last sentence, "...of this be sure; that I will never leave you comfortless" (6:8).

This has striking parallels to the biblical account of what Jesus said to the disciples 2,000 years ago when he was about to leave them. In fact, in the King James Version, he virtually said the same words: "I will not leave you comfortless" (Jn14:18). In this

farewell discourse, he went on to say, "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate [the Holy Spirit, Comforter] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7, NRSV). I think that Jesus knew that he had to leave in order for his disciples to take their next step and become true teachers of God. As long as Jesus was there, they would rely on him, seeing him as the Christ doing miraculous deeds that they could never do, and they would not step into their own roles as miracle workers. They would listen to the Holy Spirit speaking through him, and be guided by him in this way, but they would not really learn to listen to the Holy Spirit speaking to them directly from within themselves and turn their lives over to Him. The only way Jesus would get them to fly on their own was to leave them.

It seemed to me that, here at the end of the Workbook, he was doing the same thing with us. As with the disciples, Jesus didn't want us to only be his followers, but to step into our roles as leaders. All through the Workbook, and especially in the "What Am I?" section (W-pII.14) and the following lessons (351-360), he seemed to be preparing us to accept our function as ministers of God in His plan for salvation. He wanted us to stop hanging on to his cloak tails. He had confidence that we were ready, and he wanted us to take our next step in becoming teachers of God. He also knew us well enough to realize that we wouldn't do that as

long as he was there for us in the form of the structured Workbook lessons. So, he released us from that structure and entrusted us to the Holy Spirit. He wanted us to shift our dependency from his lessons to the Holy Spirit within us, so, just as back then he left his disciples in the hands of the Holy Spirit, he was now leaving us Course students in those same hands. Just as his bodily form left his disciples, the concrete external form of the Workbook was leaving us. In both cases, an external source of instruction and guidance leaves so that we have to turn to the internal Source. From now on, it would be up to the Holy Spirit to guide us along the path and in our practicing, and

up to us to follow, trusting Him in all things, and certain that He would lead us back home to God.

And so we walk with Him from this time on, and turn to Him for guidance and for peace and sure direction. (W-ep.5:5)

My initial reaction to this was a resounding "Yes!", but that was followed quickly by my usual fearful "Yeah, but..." reaction. I had been through the Workbook many times and had come to count on the daily structure provided me by the lessons. I had been comfortable with practicing as asked; and practicing as asked often seemed to be as much as I could handle! As well, it seemed that there was always more understanding to glean from going through the lessons, and that seemed to be reason enough to continue along as prescribed. I felt some of what I imagined the disciples must have felt. I had come to rely on that wise and loving

**From now
on the Holy
Spirit would
guide us in
everything.**

source of instruction and guidance, and I felt somewhat apprehensive about that being taken away from me.

Now, three months into the new year, I am thrilled about the way in which our year of walking with the Holy Spirit has been progressing, and about the way in which the Holy Spirit has been walking with *us*! I am very grateful for the many benefits we are reaping, for the discoveries we are making along the way, for the great sense of freedom and joy we are experiencing in the process, and for the companionship we are sharing as we take this walk together.

We start a typical morning class by checking in on how our practicing went the day before, especially in relation to our being in communication with the Holy Spirit. We share insights about the lesson, passage, or idea we practiced—being quite open about our “successes,” as well as about the challenges or resistance we experienced—and I answer questions that have come up. We then have a quiet time in which we ask what Workbook lesson or other Course idea we need to practice that day. Sometimes, one of us will have chosen an idea beforehand, only to be guided to another one which seems to be more what we really need to be practicing that day.

We are still trying out what works best for us in terms of receiving our lesson for the day. Some of the methods we are using are: “scriptural divination,” asking and then allowing the book to open where it will; practicing an idea or phrase from our morning Text reading; and sitting quietly, asking to receive, and then being given a particular Course thought or lesson. (Some people are continuing to follow the lessons chronologically, and I encourage them to call upon the Holy Spirit in their practicing, as well.) As each one of us shares our practice idea, the rest of us join in seeing the person as having a day of practicing and learning his or her lesson as intended. Following that, we have a period of practice and meditation.

Often I include some teaching; for instance, for the first week we read and discussed “How Should the Teacher of God Spend His Day?” (M-16). We also took a couple of weeks to learn and practice “Rules for Decision” (T-30.I) which we are making an integral part of our practicing this year. We feel as if we are on an adventure, the likes of which we have not known before, and we are glad to be on it together!

I have not always taken Jesus at his word about trusting the Holy Spirit, and I hadn’t anticipated that the Holy Spirit would actually step in and guide the process itself! During the month of February, we had reached a point where I knew something else was called for, but I didn’t know what. About an hour before the morning class, I still didn’t know where to go. I sat down and had a talk with the Holy Spirit, and then found myself opening the Course to “As for the Rest...” (M-29).


I was a bit puzzled about why I would be guided to that section, but as I read it, I realized why this was exactly what we needed. For the most part, we had been practicing with the Holy Spirit because we recognized that He would offer us better direction in our practicing and decision-making than we could provide for ourselves. Now, here in Paragraph three, Jesus offered us an additional—and more long-range—benefit, for deciding with the Holy Spirit was not only a practical way in which to live

our lives, but also our route away from guilt and to salvation! I had read this section many other times, but I had never really seen this message, but this time I did, and I felt very excited and inspired by it. We spent the next week reading and discussing the section, and came away feeling more motivated and committed to our decision to live our lives with the Holy Spirit.

(By the way, on the same day on which I was guided to teach the Workbook class using “As for the Rest...,” Greg Mackie, up in Portland, Oregon, taught a class on how to listen to the Holy Spirit, and he focused on the same paragraphs from that section! We saw this as a confirmation—a Holy Spirit stamp of approval—on the direction we have been taking with our practicing, and another example of His presence with us in the process.)

Although we see this form of practicing as what Jesus is asking us to do, we are very clear that we would not be at this stage if we had not been developing the four-fold form of structured practicing (morning and evening quiet time, hourly remembrances, frequent reminders, and responses to temptation) set out for us by Jesus in the Workbook. I don’t think that the Workbook is meant to be gone through once and then set aside

prematurely; nor do I believe that it is meant to be worked through forever and ever without moving on to “post-Workbook practice,” as we call it here. I, for one, work best within a clear structure, and if I had not been practicing within that four-fold structure for quite some time, I know that I would not have internalized it well enough to keep on track with my post-Workbook Holy Spirit practicing. That four-fold structure is still an integral part of our daily practicing, only now we are doing it under our own steam, instead of depending on being told to do it by the lesson instructions.

At the time of my writing this, we are still feeling our way along, counting on the Holy Spirit to help us. We are experiencing so many benefits and making so many discoveries along the way. We do not see this as a test of our “spiritual specialness,” but as a measure of our desire and willingness to prepare ourselves for being teachers of God. We are certain that with an attitude of confidence, desire and determination, and with a sense of the importance and holiness of this endeavor, we will succeed in letting the Holy Spirit make our practicing “a loving gift of freedom to the world” (W-pL.rVI.7:4), and our lives one long, continuous prayer to God. 

We feel as if we are on an adventure, the likes of which we have not known before.

If you feel guided in your life to take this next step in practicing with us, please join us. If you aren’t yet at this step, I encourage you to keep practicing the Workbook as instructed, so that you will reach this point readily. No matter where you are in your practicing, please remember that we are here to support you on your journey with the Course; indeed, we see this as an integral part of our work here. I will be pleased to read your comments, answer your questions, and offer you support and encouragement through our prayers and our materials, and through the sharing of our experience.

Loving God

by Robert Perry

This article originated as notes for a class I taught here in Sedona. To preserve its full usefulness, I have decided to leave it in that format, complete with written exercises. I would encourage you to take out a sheet of paper and do them, either by yourself or with a group.

What is the role of loving God in *A Course in Miracles*? Many of us grew up in churches in which loving our Creator was central. There was no question that we were supposed to do it. Yet, as Course students, chances are that we have considerable confusion on this topic, and for various reasons. For one, God is so transcendent in the Course. He can seem so beyond this world and our little lives that He seems too far away to be relevant. For another, loving God may remind us too much of the religion of our childhood, which may have left us with the impression that our job was to fill God's voracious appetite for praise. We may have noted that the Course is critical of this emphasis, saying that God "has no ego with which to accept such praise" (T-4.VII.6:3). For whatever reason, I find that the topic of giving love to God seems to be almost taboo in Course circles. It just doesn't seem to be talked about.

What is your relationship with the notion of loving God? What is your history with this idea and where are you with it now? You might just want to write a brief account on a separate sheet of paper.

What does the Course have to say on this topic? To answer this question, I will begin by appealing to the prayer for Lesson 225, which gives us a wonderful snapshot of how the Course views this idea:

Father, I must return Your Love for me, for giving and receiving are the same, and You have given all Your Love to me. I must return it, for I want it mine in full awareness, blazing in my mind and keeping it within its kindly light, inviolate, beloved, with fear behind and only peace ahead. How still the way Your loving Son is led along to You! (W-pII.225.1)

There are three main themes I want to draw out here:

1. We give love to God because we first received Love from Him.

Notice that we don't just work up this love for God because it's the right thing to do. Our loving Him is an act of *returning* the Love He has already given us. He loves us first; our love is a response to that. He, in fact, has not just loved us, but has given *all* of His Love to us. That is an overwhelming idea; it is simply too big for our minds to comprehend. However, to the extent we do believe it, loving God becomes completely natural. It is not a

conscious choice; our heart simply responds. When someone has given all of his love to us, and given it for completely unselfish reasons, we naturally and spontaneously love him in return. To put this differently, when we genuinely receive, our natural response is to give. This is one implication of the Course's dictum that "giving and receiving are the same" (mentioned six times in the Course, one of those being in the prayer above).

2. We give love to God because we want to fully receive the Love He has given us.

Notice how the prayer says "I must return it, *for* I want it mine in full awareness" (italics mine). You return His Love *because* doing so makes you fully aware of the Love from Him you have already received. This is another side of "giving and receiving are the same": when you give, that causes you to receive. As a result of your gift, the inner content that you gave grows greater inside you. It increases. You had already received it (or you couldn't have given it), but now you have received it even more fully.

What this means is that your love of God is sandwiched in between two layers of His Love for you. You love Him in response to His Love *and* in expectation of receiving His Love more fully. You don't just love Him because it's your duty and He is the great and powerful King.

3. Fully receiving His Love transforms our whole journey.

Most of the prayer speaks in moving terms of what it's like to be aware that God loves you. Let's look at each phrase by itself:

- *blazing in my mind*: Just imagine God's Love for you blazing in your mind.
- *and keeping it* [my mind] within its [God's Love's] kindly light: Imagine your mind kept, held, embraced within the kindly light of God's Love.
- *inviolate*: Held in this kindly light, your mind would be totally *inviolate*—free from violation, injury and desecration, its sanctity untouched.

When we genuinely receive, our natural response is to give.

- *beloved*: Is there a better feeling in the world than to feel truly, totally beloved?
- *with fear behind*: Imagine feeling so loved that you felt as if literally all fear was behind you.
- *and only peace ahead*: Imagine feeling so loved that all you could see ahead of you was *peace*.
- *How still the way Your loving Son is led along to You!*
This final sentence speaks of how we will journey home when we love God (when we are His “loving Son”) and hence become aware of His Love for us. We will be led home in complete stillness, with all fear behind us and only peace ahead. Try to imagine this—journeying through life with your heart full of love for God and your mind shining with His Love for you, walking toward Him in pure stillness, seeing nothing but peace on the path that stretches before you. This is the end result of loving God: a life at peace because it is infused with the “full awareness” of His Love for you.

How do we come to love God?

But how exactly do we find this love for God within ourselves? To begin with, we don’t have to manufacture it. According to the Course, it’s already there, as an essential part of our being: “For still deeper than the ego’s foundation, and much stronger than it will ever be, is your intense and burning love of God, and His for you” (T-13.III.2:8). This passage claims two things: first, that every single one of us has an absolutely consuming love for God; second, that this love is actually far stronger than our identification with our separate identity.

How, then, do we uncover this “intense and burning love for God”? The main way the Course seems to suggest is through gratitude for His Love for us. Lesson 298, which has us repeat all day, “I love you, Father,” opens with this telling remark: “My gratitude permits my love to be accepted without fear” (W-pII.298.1:1). This is the key. If we are *grateful* to God for His love for us, we will not be *afraid* to love Him. Right now, we all feel love for Him deep inside, but we fear to let this love come to the surface. Simply being told, “You ought to love God” will not wipe away the fear. Instead, we must see and feel that God loves us, then let a natural response of gratitude arise, and this will allow our buried love for God to come to the surface without frightening us.

So our initial task is to look for the evidence that God does indeed love us. I can think of four classes of evidence:

1. Eternal truths about your reality

The following are mentioned by the Course as expressions of God’s Love:

- “You are changeless, for the Son He loves is changeless as Himself” (W-pI.123.3:2).

- “Your value far transcends your meager gifts and petty judgments of the one whom God established as His Son” (W-pI.123.3:5).
- The beauty and dignity of your spirit, which “stand forever as the mark of the Love of God for His creations” (T-4.I.12:5).
- The grandeur of your true Self, which God created “out of His Love” (T-9.VIII.4:8).
- The safety of your true Self, which is protected by God’s Love (T-10.I.1:4).

Do you have some belief in the above ideas? As a Course student, you probably have at least some. If you do, can you see them as expressions of God’s Love? For instance, can you see that God creating you changeless is an expression of His Love? What sort of God would create a creature whose being was in constant flux, so that his very identity was constantly uncertain

and insecure? That’s not loving. Can you see that God creating you with beauty and dignity is an expression of His Love? That one perhaps is easier. Go through all of the bullet-points above and see if you can see God creating you that way as an expression of His Love.

Now try telling yourself:

My changelessness is a result of the fact that God loves me.

My limitless value is an expression of God’s Love for me.

The beauty and dignity of my spirit come

from the fact that God loves me.

My grandeur is really a result of God’s Love for me.

My eternal safety is a product of God’s Love for me.

What thoughts or feelings arose in you from repeating those lines? Did it cause you to see these eternal truths about your reality differently? If so, how? You might want to write down your answers on your sheet of paper.

2. Evidence that He is leading you home

The Course emphasizes that God’s leading us home is evidence of His Love for us. It tells us that we should be thankful that

- “...your Father has not left you to yourself, nor let you wander in the dark alone” (W-pI.123.2:2).
- “...He has not abandoned you” (W-pI.123.3:1).
- “...in our solitude a Friend has come to speak the saving Word of God to us” (W-pI.123.5:2).

In looking over your spiritual journey, do you see signs that not all of the impetus has come from you, that there has, in fact, been a guiding hand on your journey? Can you see that God has been sending you light in different forms to guide your path? For

Every single one of us has an absolutely consuming love for God.

example, perhaps the Course came into your life in such a way that you could see it was literally sent to you. Write down on your sheet of paper one example from your life that you see as God sending you something in order to guide you along the path to Him.

We often are thankful that such experiences show up, but do we take them as evidence that God loves us? How does it feel when you think of the experience you just wrote about as actual evidence that God loves you, as a kind of love note from God? You might imagine that God sent you this event as a way of telling you, “I love you, Son, and I want you home with Me.” Imagine Him saying that to you and, if you will, write down how it feels to do so.

3. Inner blessings on the path

We probably think of the inner benefits we experience along the path as the result of the working of a kind of higher natural law—when we choose peace, we experience peace. This is appropriate, but it is also appropriate to see these inner benefits as an expression of God’s Love for us. We can see peace as a blessing from a God Who loves us. Please write down some inner experience that in your mind qualifies as a miracle, some instance in which fear or anger or upset was lifted from your mind and replaced by positive emotions.

Does it change your view of that experience to see your inner shift not just as the workings of the laws of the mind, but specifically as an expression of God’s Love for you? What thoughts arise in you from thinking of it this way? Please write those down.

4. Interpersonal blessings on the path

When we see God (through the Holy Spirit) as working in our lives, we may feel grateful, but we still may not make the connection that every such event is a sign of His Love. *The Song of Prayer* describes all instances of God (through His Voice) working in our lives as echoes of a primary sound, which it describes in this way: “The real sound is always a song of thanksgiving and of love” (S-1.I.2:9). The form is just an echo; the content is always God singing of His Love for you. Perhaps the highest blessing in this regard is the people that God sends into our lives. The following passage is particularly interesting along these lines:

Something good must come from every meeting of patient and therapist. And that good is saved for both, against the day when they can recognize that only that was real in their relationship. At that moment the good is returned to them, blessed by the Holy Spirit as a gift from their Creator as a sign of His Love. (P-3.II.5:1-3)

This passage tells a remarkable story which we might easily overlook. Every time a patient and therapist get together, some good comes out of it. No matter what happens between them, even if their relationship goes sour and they see no good in it whatsoever, all of that good is saved. It is saved *in provision for*

(that is the meaning of “against” in this passage) “the day when they can recognize that only that was real in their relationship.” What an incredible line! Then, on that day, all the good that they pushed away and failed to appreciate is returned to them “as a gift from their Creator as a sign of His Love.” This adds up to an amazing punch line: all the good that is shared by you and another person is *a sign of God’s Love for you*, and so is the fact that He saves that good for you until you are finally able to see it and appreciate it.

In light of this, pick a person in your life and try to write down the essence of the good that has transpired between you and that person. You may even want to ask the Holy Spirit: “What is the good that has been shared by this person and me?” It’s not important that you get it exactly right, just that you get some sense of the good that has been there.


Having written that down, now tell yourself, “That good was a gift from my Father as a sign of His Love for me.” Repeat it over and over again, sometimes with eyes closed, sometimes looking at what you wrote. Try to let this love note from God all the way in. How does it feel when you do so? Again, please write your answer.

Expressing our love for God

Now we are ready to turn our attention to feeling love for God. In the space below, please write a prayer to God. Begin by looking over the above four categories and your written answers. Take your time in looking them over and letting their implications sink in. Realize that He has always been there, always loving you, even while you had not a clue. As the magnitude of it all sinks in, let the gratitude you feel toward God well up in you. Then express that gratitude in your written prayer. As you do, see if this gratitude does indeed permit your

love for God to come into your mind without fear. If so, express that love in your prayer. If it’s there, don’t be shy—tell God that you love Him. It feels good. If it’s not there, be honest about that, too. You might even mention that you want to uncover your love for Him and ask for His help in doing so.

Finally, close by repeating the opening line from the prayer for Lesson 248: “*Father, my ancient love for You returns*” (W-pII.248.2:1). Say it with as much meaning and feeling as you can honestly muster. This poignant line speaks of a love that was your whole existence so long ago, a love that was so powerful that even when you left it, it could never die; it could only slumber deep in your mind, waiting for the moment when you would let it be your whole existence once again. Perhaps that moment has come. Say, “*Father, my ancient love for You returns.*”

I hope this article and its exercises have helped to give you a sense of permission to love God, not as a way of satisfying His ego or placating His anger, but as a healthy expression of gratitude and as the natural condition of your being. 

We can see peace as a blessing from a God Who loves us.

When Your Back Is up against the Wall

by Nicola Harvey

With any spiritual path, we face our hardest moments when a crisis comes along—when we are faced with awful circumstances, terrible dilemmas, and unanswerable questions. At these times, we may expect a number of things from our path in order to support us through a difficult time. We probably expect the wisdom of its teachings to comfort us—to provide answers that help us understand and make sense of the difficulty we’re facing. We may expect to receive our own direct guidance about the situation. Many spiritual paths, the Course included, teach us to turn inwards to a source of wisdom and inspiration that is within us. If we are part of a group, we may also expect to receive words and acts of kindness and comfort from those who share our path with us.

But what if our path for some reason doesn’t deliver what we need to get through the crisis? What if its teachings suddenly seem abstract and hollow in light of the seemingly very real pain and suffering we are going through? What if we turn within and cry out for help, and are met with the deafening silence of apparent Divine indifference? What if the comforting words of spiritual friends sound like irrelevant platitudes? We might even start questioning our spiritual path, having made the assumption that being on it would mean having *fewer* problems, not *more*. Or maybe we expected our spiritual advancement to carry us through any problems with greater ease. Whatever the form the distress may take, the result is the same: we want peace, but our path isn’t delivering it.

This truly is the branching of the road. We’ve traveled along our path a certain distance, but now we’ve reached a point at which we are forced to make a decision of allegiance. Until now, the ego has been happily keeping us company on our spiritual journey, making sure its counsel infiltrates our spirit-inspired path. We now find ourselves, however, facing a challenge in which that mix just won’t work, and we have to make a stark choice: *either* the ego’s way, *or* the Holy Spirit’s.

At this point, all we want is peace, right? Well, no, actually. If that really were *all* we wanted, we would *have* peace. What we have defined as “peace,” however, is usually some specific outcome that we are convinced will *bring* us the peace that we seek. Our cry of “I want peace!” is almost certainly a cry of “I want such-and-such to happen!” In other words, we’re yelling at God what strings we want Him to pull on our behalf, or what His

peace should look like when it finally shows up. This isn’t the Course’s way. It says, “But do not make demands, nor point the road to God by which He should appear to you” (W-pI.189.8:6).

Sometimes our anguish is about being faced with gut-wrenching choices, at which point we naturally want the clear and specific guidance we’ve been promised. I don’t know about you, but in these circumstances, my version of the guidance that I need tends to have more to do with five-year-plans and guarantees than it does with a quiet sense of inner knowing about simply the next step to take. How much of our desire for guidance is simply a need for guarantees of happiness? How much does our insistence on long-term guidance betray a lack of trust in our Guide? How much are we able to let go of these anxious concerns about the future? How much are we able to

trust that placing our future in the Hands of God literally means that we need not worry about what the future holds? “For in God’s Hands we rest untroubled, sure that only good can come to us” (W-pI.194.9:2).

Whatever the form our distress takes, we may also be consumed with thoughts about *why* something is the way it is. We just can’t understand what we did to deserve this, and we spend countless hours trying to understand God’s reasoning process, to no avail whatsoever. Somehow, to our minds, if we could just understand what is going on here, it would make it easier to accept and deal with.

In all these scenarios above, the focus is on *external* things. We are worrying about situations, our future, why things are going so wrong, why God is sending us such trials, or we are simply trying to deal with overwhelming pain. I believe, though, that the challenge at this branching of the road is to ask a different type of question. Instead of focusing on our future, or the difficult circumstances that have befallen us, we should switch our focus and ask questions of *ourselves*. I believe we should be asking ourselves fundamental questions such as: What are my values? Why am I on the spiritual path, and this one in particular? How committed am I to my growth, as opposed to spiritual escapism? What am I on this path *for*? Am I on it to find a “spiritual” way of getting my ego’s needs met, or am I on it to serve God? This is a time in which we face up to our true inner motivation, to whether we are seeking idols or seeking God. *The Song of Prayer* puts it beautifully and succinctly: “In prayer you overlook your specific needs as you see them, and let them go into God’s Hands. There they become

We should be asking ourselves fundamental questions such as: What am I on this path for?

your gifts to Him, for they tell Him that you would have no gods before Him; no Love but His” (S-1.I.4:3-4).

When I’ve been in this place myself, what has been absolutely crucial has been a willingness to go past the external problems and make a conscious decision to turn inwards, to turn *deeper* within myself than I am used to. When our backs are up against the wall, and we think we have completely exhausted our inner resources, we either surrender to our weakness (a truly intolerable option), or we simply delve deeper. We know that only being able to grasp hold of the truth will help us, and so we search for it with an earnestness that has been lacking until now. This is what the branching of the road is all about. It is about turning away from the distractions of the ego, no matter how urgent, distressing, or perplexing they may be, and deepening and strengthening our connection with God, with the ultimate truth, with the truth that resides within.

You may well have your own form of meditation for turning deeply within that works for you. I am going to share my own approach here, in the hopes that some of you may find it useful. I am not presenting this as “the way” but merely “a way” to help with this process.

I’ve found that a simple approach is the key. One thing I might do at the start of the meditation is to simply ask myself, “What quality do I value?” This is purely an abstract question. I’m focusing on something of truth that I value, even if it doesn’t seem to address my problems. After a few moments, a word will come to mind, maybe “love” or “kindness” or “peace.” (This is not an exact practice from the Course, but it is an adaptation of Course practices which have us sink down to experience the love or peace or holiness at the center of our minds, or which have us affirm the presence of certain qualities within us. See for example Workbook Lesson 67.)

It’s very easy for these words to be laden with ego agendas—for instance, “I want peace” can mean “I want this outcome,” as I mentioned earlier—and so next I go through a very short process of trying to reach inside myself to a purer desire for that quality. I just take a few moments and look honestly at any ego meanings it has for me, such as “peace” being about getting certain outcomes. One way I might do this is to ask myself, “If my ego chose peace, what would that look like? If my right mind chose peace, what would that look like?” If I find some big ego attachment coming up into my awareness that I am unwilling to let go of, I might use the practice from Workbook Lesson 74: “*There is no will but God’s. I share it with Him. My conflicts about _____ cannot be real*” (W-pI.74.4:3-5). As I do this, I can just feel the whole sticky web of ego agendas lifting off, and I get in touch with a much purer desire for that quality. Whatever method you use, the point is to spend just a few moments

extricating some ego hooks in order to get in touch with the purest possible desire for the truth.

I then spend the main part of my meditation turning within, looking past the darkness and turmoil that has been filling my mind. I believe in love (or peace, or kindness), and so I want to find it within me. The desire for the truth that I got in touch with in the previous step fuels this process. So I sit there until some spark of love (or peace, or kindness) makes itself known to me. I value that spark; I seek it, and it comes. It’s the prayer of my heart, and my prayer is answered. It may come as a feeling, or a loving thought, or an inner picture filled with loving meaning. When it comes, I focus on it, letting it grow bigger in relation to all the darkness in my mind, letting it be real enough to sink into, so that the turmoil is increasingly insignificant. In the Text section “The Invitation to Healing” Jesus asks us if we would be host to God, or hostage to the ego, and describes how the little spark of truth in us will grow if we just make room for it: “The Guest Whom God sent you will teach you how to do this, if you but recognize the little spark and are willing to let it grow. Your willingness need not be perfect, because His is. If you will merely offer Him a little place, He will lighten it so much that you will gladly let it be increased” (T-11.II.6:5-7).

It’s an incredible feeling to know that in the midst of pain I can get in touch with something so beautiful inside me, something that doesn’t demand anything—any answers, any particular outcomes, or even any guidance. I’m happy because I’ve found my heart’s desire. I truly value love because of what it is—not what it can do for me—and so when I find it, I’m complete. It’s incredibly healing to know that I can find sanity in the midst of insanity, love in the midst of fear, joy in the midst of pain.

Of course, it doesn’t always happen that I make conscious contact with some spark of truth inside me. I have a couple of things to say about that. The first is that, even if it doesn’t happen, going through this practice *always* leaves me with a feeling of greater peace than before I started. And secondly, I really believe that every effort on behalf of truth counts for something. There is some cumulative build-up, and if we keep trying, a breakthrough *will* occur, sooner or later.

As I said above, this practice is about going deeper within than we’re used to—past our ego’s desires for solutions to problems, past our ego’s hooks on the truth, to a place within us that simply desires the pure, unadulterated truth. And it’s likely that we’ll uncover hidden treasures on this journey, hidden strengths within ourselves—caring, gratitude, compassion, and little gems of pure happiness. We’ve all heard stories of people who come through horrendous situations and are strengthened by their experiences. This strength comes from within, nowhere


It’s incredibly healing to know that I can find sanity in the midst of insanity, love in the midst of fear, joy in the midst of pain.

else. We all have the same extraordinary inner beauty. We can all turn within to find it, whenever we want. It's a sad mark of our resistance to the truth that we rarely mine so deeply within ourselves until we have exhausted all external possibilities.

To me, this practice is the epitome of coming with empty hands to God. We are coming with no demands, no expectations—just a pure and honest desire for a stronger connection with Him. Paradoxically, what can often happen as a result of this practice is that answers *do* come, either in the form of insights or guidance, or just a feeling of being perfectly loved and safe in God's Arms. *The Song of Prayer* says that in true prayer we set aside our specific needs and instead we just seek God: "Prayer is an offering; a giving up of yourself to be at one with Love" (S-1.I.5:5). Yet in this true seeking are the answers

we need given to us, as a kind of side-effect of our true need being met—our need for God. *The Song of Prayer* describes these answers as the echo of the song, although it is the song that is the *real* gift. More important than specific answers is the sense of having somewhere to turn—an anchor in the midst of storms. The Course teaches us that God always answers the prayer of our heart, and when that prayer is for Him, how could He not respond?

And so today we do not choose the way in which we go to Him. But we do choose to let Him come. And with this choice we rest. And in our quiet hearts and open minds, His love will blaze its pathway of itself.

(W-pI.189.9:1-4) 

Circle Mailbox

Thank you for your letters to the Circle. We enjoy receiving them and sharing them with our readers. These letters are on a variety of topics, and include your letters to the editor of A Better Way, and your comments on our various services, programs, publications, and on our website. Write us at P.O. Box 4238, W. Sedona, AZ 86340, or send us an e-mail at: info@circleofa.com. Letters may be edited for space and clarity.

Letters to the Editor

Thanks, all of you, for the excellent work you're doing and for this illuminating commentary on the differences between your views and those of Ken Wapnick. From very early on I found that I/my ego was "bouncing off" things Ken Wapnick would write, with a feeling they were overly-harsh, or made the task too hard for me, or placed God's love/the Holy Spirit's activity too far from where I was to be of help. Salvation as entering into union with God was OK conceptually, but I wanted help and release from the problems I faced daily in my life—illusion or otherwise. I need the hope that Ken calls "blissniny"—that God/the Holy Spirit/Jesus can influence what I experience within the illusion of the world, in order to avoid feeling abandoned and hopeless over the problems I've made for myself. Truly accepting that I made them myself was too threatening to fully acknowledge for a long time. Adhering as best I could to the Course meant holding that thought (that I am responsible for all I experience and "see") away from myself, and asking the Holy Spirit to show me how to see myself, others and situations differently. I needed to do this again and again.

I wonder, however, whether considering the idea of psychological or spiritual development here, might be helpful.

I recently ran into a book—*Putting on the Mind of Christ*—by Jim Marion, a former Catholic monk. In it he recounts his personal journey as a mystic, and draws on the work of Ken

Wilber in describing the process as ascending through various stages.

I haven't found it helpful to try to place myself on Marion's stages, but what has been helpful is the realization that we do go through stages in spiritual growth just as we do in intellectual and moral growth—and that thought "frames" which emerge as useful in more advanced stages of the process can seem frightening and repulsive at earlier stages. In Marion's labeling of stages, the two final stages are "Christ Consciousness" and then "Complete Non-Duality" or "Absolute Monism." It seems to me the Circle's position is, generally, closer to "Christ Consciousness," and Ken's to "Complete Non-Duality." That said, I still prefer the Circle's positions. Clearly I can't be an absolute monist until I AM.

Amanda Armstrong
Honolulu, Hawaii



As a Course student for the past twenty-two years, I am delighted to see that the very problem I had with Wapnick's interpretation is supported by you. For years, I have been so confused by his interpretation. But you are right—it's right there in the book. God knows we are here, and the Holy Spirit does things in the world, Amen!

M Lechner
By e-mail

Other Mail

We have received many letters and e-mails on various articles posted on our website. Here is a sampling. You can visit our website at www.circleofa.com.

Re: “Does God Have a Plan?”

Great article. The beauty of Robert Perry for me (a nurse and editor with a degree in both nursing and psychology) is that he does not distort what the Course says, but supports his ideas with direct passages. He does his homework. I appreciate this.

Terri Metules

Sicklerville, New Jersey



Your article addressed what has probably been the central question in my life for many years: What is my right endeavor (expression, service) in this life? In some ways my circumstances are almost diametrically opposite to yours. Whereas you had a clear sense of your life’s work in your twenties, I’m retired, just turned seventy, and am still looking for what is my right place in God’s plan.

I find your article deeply encouraging and seeming to offer some focus for me. I’m particularly heartened by your tenth

observation that there’s no penalty for not having heard and answered the knock sooner. What generosity, kindness, and patience are expressed by that—much like the qualities of the Holy Spirit, Jesus, and God, as described in ACIM. I’m also encouraged by a thought that occurred to me while reading your article. It is a take-off on the principle that “there is no order of difficulty in miracles.” My twists on it are: “there’s no such thing as being too old or too young,” “there’s no such thing as being too early or too late,” and “there’s no order of merit in one’s contributions so long as they are in tune with God’s plan.” I’ll look forward to further exploring your website and to meditating and praying on “Does God Have a Plan?”

Joe Burge

By e-mail



Re: “The Ocean of Your Mind”

This was a really nice and useful article. I can’t imagine ever forgetting these images. Maybe now I have an insight into my own fascination with just staring out onto the ocean for hours with virtually no conscious thought.

Rick Baker

Eugene, Oregon

“If You Do It, You Will See That It Works” An Experience of Universal Love

by Greg Mackie

Powerful inner experiences of illumination have been an integral part of the spiritual journey from time immemorial. While I don’t think that such experiences are necessarily the strongest evidence of spiritual progress—the ability to love and forgive others is a better standard, in my view—they can give us glimpses of where we are heading and inspire us to deepen our commitment to our path.

I have always been inspired by reading about the spiritual experiences of others, especially when they teach me something I can apply to my own journey. So, I would like to share the most powerful spiritual experience of my life, in the hope that this sharing may be helpful to others on the path. It happened in the last year, and can perhaps best be described as a brief experience of universal love for God and His creation. This experience taught me that the lofty, transcendent states of mind the Course describes are real,

and that following the Course’s program really can bring those states to us. In short, the Course delivers what it promises. In its own words, “If you do it, you will see that it works” (T-9.V.9:2).

The background: “a slowly evolving training program”

I have never had a propensity for dramatic inner experiences. While I’ve had a few that were powerful and even life changing, they were the exceptions to the rule. My spiritual history has generally fit the mold of my earlier avocation as a long distance runner: instead of spectacular leaps, my path has been one of slow, steady progress. My successes have come not through prodigious natural gifts, but through patience, self-discipline, and endurance. Instant enlightenment has never been an option for me. I’m in it for the long haul.

My history with the Course has followed that same pattern. I've tried my best to bring the same self-discipline to the Course's mind-training program that I used to bring to my distance running. It has paid off tremendously: though I have a ways to go, slowly but surely my inner peace has deepened, my relationships have blossomed, and my heart has become more forgiving. Yet the spectacular kinds of enlightenment experiences reported in so much spiritual literature have for the most part eluded me; for me, the Course has definitely been a "slowly evolving training program" (M-9.1:7). This pattern made the experience I am about to describe all the more surprising.

The retreat: "I will accept my part in God's plan for salvation."

This experience happened during a personal retreat that I took on February 18-21, 2002. I had several goals for this retreat, all centered around a desire to deepen my commitment to the Course's path of salvation. I wanted to get a clearer understanding of my specific part in God's plan for salvation, and really commit to doing it. I wanted to learn more about the Circle's function in that plan, and mentally join with my Circle colleagues in committing to our function. Finally, I wanted to gain, through extended prayer and meditation, a deeper personal experience of the peace, joy, and love that the Course promises. I wanted this experience both for its own sake, and so I would be more motivated to follow through on my commitments.

To facilitate these goals, I did a number of different activities during the retreat. I sought Jesus' guidance on questions concerning my and the Circle's function, and wrote down what I received in a journal. I read Course sections pertinent to my questions. Since the focus of the retreat was on committing to the goal of salvation, I listened to a tape set of the Circle's workshop on goal setting (entitled *Seeking and Finding: The Course's Approach to Setting and Reaching Goals*). And I did a process of mentally joining with my Circle colleagues, visualizing all of us joining arm-in-arm in a circle and committing to our common purpose.

I used a variety of Course practices during the retreat. Above all, I did a lot of meditation. The main form of meditation I used was the standard Workbook style of meditation, in which you slip past your surface thoughts and try to sink deeply into your mind. As a focus for my meditations, I mainly used Workbook lessons on the theme of committing to our one true function of salvation: Lesson 65 ("My only function is the one God gave me"), Lesson 98 ("I will accept my part in God's plan for salvation") and Lesson 100 ("My part is essential to God's plan for salvation"). I meditated in one-hour sessions for the most part,

with short breaks for rest, writing, and meals. This added up to a *lot* more meditation than I usually do. I'm sure this contributed greatly to the experience I ended up having.

The experience: "I love you, Father, and I love your Son"

At first, my meditations were pretty much what they usually are: a mixed bag. There were positive, peaceful moments mixed in with plenty of mind wandering. But over the course of the retreat, the peaceful moments increased, and the mind wandering decreased. I began to feel a real connection to God and to my brothers and sisters at the Circle. My meditations went deeper and deeper. By the afternoon of the final full day (February 20), I was entering into uncharted territory for me. Here is what I wrote in my journal immediately after completing a one-hour session that afternoon:

This technique has *never* worked so well for me as it is today. I am tapping into a place of deep peace and joy, just as the Course promises....I feel the Love of my Father. *Wow!*

This feeling of peace, joy, and love continued to grow as the evening progressed. At bedtime, I did a final round of meditation using Workbook Lesson 109, "I rest in God." This is what I wrote immediately after that final round:

Wow! I just had a *great* final meditation!....I felt really great joy and thankfulness to God, and caught a glimpse of a deep ocean of peace and joy. I was smiling at the end, and close to tears.

But as wonderful as this was, it was only a harbinger for what was to come. I went to bed a little after ten o'clock, but couldn't get to sleep; it felt like I wasn't done for the night. So, I got up at about half past eleven and did another round of meditation. a

This was when the full-blown experience of universal love really started. It's difficult to describe exactly what happened, but it's as if the love and gratitude that I was already feeling toward God suddenly expanded outward and encompassed all of creation. Here is part of what I wrote during the height of this experience:

I unconditionally love everyone and everything with no reservations! I love God, my Father!....I am basking in a sea of love. Thank you Father, Jesus, the Course, everyone! I can scarce refrain from kneeling at everyone's feet. "I love my Father and I love His Son!" This is indescribable, wonderful, very intense, spectacular, mind-bog-

Instant enlightenment has never been an option for me.

gling, I'm free, I love, I am one with all, *I love everyone....This is awesome!* Words fail to describe it!

I basked in this radiant love for the next couple of hours. Yet oddly, even when I was in the midst of the experience, a part of my mind stood “outside” of it and witnessed it. So, I started doing mental experiments to test it. I brought specific people to mind and extended this deep love to them, starting with those who are closest to me. Then I brought to mind people I normally have grievances against—everyone from those who have personally “wronged” me to “evil” world figures like Hitler and Osama bin Laden. I wanted to see if I truly felt this love for them as well. I did.

I remembered that Course line that says if you were to see people truly, you could scarce refrain from kneeling at their feet (W-p1.161.9:3). I asked myself if that was true for me now, and amazingly, it was. I didn't actually kneel, of course, but I saw such *holiness* in these people. In thinking of the ones I normally hold grievances against, I remained fully aware of the negative things their bodies did, but *it just didn't matter what their bodies did*. The negative things were merely calls for help, which didn't change my love at all. I loved these people anyway, without reservation. I even loved animals and inanimate things when I brought them to mind. And I loved God with a deep, intimate, grateful love that I had never felt for Him before. It seemed that I was partaking in the Love of God Himself, a Love that enabled me to “see the world anew, shining in innocence, alive with hope, and blessed with perfect charity and love” (W-p1.189.1:7). It was an experience I never wanted to end.

The lesson: “If you do it, you will see that it works”


But alas, it did end. Over time, the experience faded, as all peak experiences do. My Course practice continued to go well once I got home from the retreat (certainly I had the motivation for it), but I could no longer meditate for hours a day, and my mental state gradually went back to “normal.” For the most part, I'm now back to my usual slow and steady distance runner mode. But I do believe that the level I've retreated back to is a higher level than I was at before the retreat. I still remember my experience fondly, and still catch glimpses of it on occasion. I'll never be the same person that I was—the memory of that incredible opening of my heart has remained with me, and continues to inspire me to the present day.

I learned many things from that experience. As I reflect back on it, two things in particular stand out, both of which I mentioned at the beginning of this article. First, it convinced me that the higher states of mind the Course describes are real. Certainly I had believed they were real before the experience—indeed, I had entered into less dramatic versions of them at other times in my life, and I knew that others on the path reported similar experiences. But the sheer intensity of what happened at my retreat reinforced my conviction tremendously. Now, when I read in the Course about the “holy instant,” “true perception,” and the “vision of Christ,” those terms are much more than vague abstractions. For me, they describe a state of mind that is tangible. It is something that I have actually touched, something that I have experienced in some measure and can remember.

I'll never be the same person that I was—the memory of that incredible opening of my heart has remained with me.

Second, it convinced me more than ever that the Course's program really works. I believe strongly that the foundation for my experience was all the work I had done with the Course for years prior to the retreat. And once I was at the retreat, everything I did—asking for Jesus' guidance, reading Course sections, studying the Course's approach to goal setting, committing to my part in salvation, mentally joining with others in a common purpose, doing Workbook-style meditation, and more—came straight from the Course itself. The entire experience of those higher states the Course describes grew directly out of following the Course's program of study, practice, and extension as given. Of course, there are many ways to spiritual experiences, but this is the way that worked for me. And I am truly amazed

that *anything* could possibly bring an experience of such magnitude to a career non-experiencer like me. This is miracle enough to convince me that the Course isn't kidding when it says that if we do it, we will see that it works.

As remarkable as it felt to me, the experience I've described in this article was, of course, not anywhere near as deep as it is possible to go. I think it was just a glimpse of what the Course promises us; the briefest, shallowest foretaste of the end of the journey; “the faintest glimmering of what love means” (W-p1.127.7:1). But what a glimmering! Now I am more motivated than ever to follow the Course's path, because I feel certain that it can take me all the way home to God. It gave me an experience I never expected to have in my lifetime, and I know that if I can experience it once, I can experience it again. All I need to do is take the Course Jesus has given me, and I will one day live forever in universal love. 

The Circle of Atonement Mission Statement

To discern the author's vision of *A Course in Miracles* and manifest that in our lives, in the lives of students, and in the world.

1. To faithfully discern the author's vision of *A Course in Miracles*.

In interpreting the Course we strive for total fidelity to its words and the meanings they express. We thereby seek to discover the Course as the author saw it.

2. To be an instrument in Jesus' plan to manifest his vision of the Course in the lives of students and in the world.

We consider this to be Jesus' organization and therefore we attempt to follow his guidance in all we do. Our goal is to help students understand, as well as discern for themselves, the Course's thought system as he intended, and use it as he meant it to be used—as a literal program in spiritual awakening. Through doing so we hope to help ground in the world the intended way of doing the Course, here at the beginning of its history.

3. To help spark an enduring tradition based entirely on students joining together in doing the Course as the author envisioned.

We have a vision of local Course support systems composed of teachers, students, healers, and groups, all there to support one another in making full use of the Course. These support systems, as they continue and multiply, will together comprise an enduring spiritual tradition, dedicated solely to doing the Course as the author intended. Our goal is to help spark this tradition, and to assist others in doing the same.

4. To become an embodiment, a birthplace of this enduring spiritual tradition.

To help spark this tradition we must first become a model for it ourselves. This requires that we at the Circle follow the Course as our individual path; that we ourselves learn forgiveness through its program. It requires that we join each other in a group holy relationship dedicated to the common goal of awakening through the Course. It also requires that we cultivate a local support system here in Sedona, and that we have a facility where others could join with us in learning this approach to the Course. Through all of this we hope to become a seed for an ongoing spiritual tradition based on *A Course in Miracles*.

Friends of the Circle

JOINING IN A COMMON VISION

If the vision of the Circle presented in the Mission Statement on this page speaks to you, we invite you to join with us in it. Ask yourself: Is this a vision I want to see promulgated in the world? Is this something I want to give my support to? If so, perhaps you would like to become a "Friend of the Circle." The annual benefits include:

Category 1:

In U.S.:	Canada/Mexico:	Aust., NZ, SE Asia:	Other Countries:
\$60/year	\$65/year	\$70/year	\$70/year
\$16/quarter	\$17.25/quarter	\$18.50/quarter	\$18.50/quarter

- Four-issue subscription to our newsletter, *A Better Way*
- Friends newsletter, updates and special reports, making you an informed partner
- Support in your study and application of the Course
- Special materials and handouts
- Feedback forms to share with us your ideas and concerns
- Opportunity to join us in our daily Workbook practice
- Contribution to our ongoing work and to the implementation of our vision and mission statement

Category 2:

In U.S.:	Canada/Mexico:	Aust., NZ, SE Asia:	Other Countries:
\$130/year	\$140/year	\$160/year*	\$148/year
\$33/quarter	\$35/quarter	\$40/quarter*	\$37.50/quarter

- Includes all of the above, plus an annual credit of \$70 U.S. (approx) towards materials, workshops, and retreats

* Please see *Publications Catalog* for details.

ALL PRICES ARE LISTED IN U.S. FUNDS

Donations above these category costs are greatly appreciated, both for our general operating fund and for special projects as they arise. A portion of each price is a tax-deductible donation (Category 1: \$25 and Category 2: \$35). Terms of membership are subject to change, with notice.

TO BECOME A FRIEND OF THE CIRCLE

- Write us a paragraph or two about why you want to become a Friend. What about this speaks to you?
- Take a few moments to silently join with us in purpose.
- Enclose your initial payment/donation (U.S. Funds only).

If you are unable to afford the amount listed, see our Financial Policy on page 2.