

Traveling Lightly

by Nicola Harvey

This world is a serious place. Everyone leaves here in a box. And before we make it into the box, we tread a precarious path trying to avoid catastrophe, whilst living in constant fear of it. This is the unpalatable truth that lurks at the back of our minds, casting a shadow over our lives. We're like long-term hostages who are telling jokes around a campfire with our captors, in a spirit of camaraderie. Even whilst we're having fun, we know that at any moment one of us could be taken away and shot.

For those of us on a spiritual path, we tend to believe that there is a better way of living in the world than being in a constant state of fear. Instead of being weighed down with the threat of disease and disaster, we know that there is a way of traveling lightly through this world; a way in which we have far fewer cares, and a future of hope, not despair. As Course students, we believe that as we progress along the path to God, ultimate reality will become gradually more real to us. We will have more holy instants. We will experience miracles. We will live increasingly in the light of Heaven rather than the darkness and heaviness of the world. Even though we are treading the same earth as everyone else, we will feel safe and loved, whole and at peace, unburdened and happy. We will be living in the real world.

How do we travel lightly?

Picture going through life unburdened by problems, fears, worries, and grievances. Can you imagine the release and freedom you would feel, and the lightness of heart? Wouldn't going through life be an utterly different experience? So how do we learn to travel lightly?

Release the burden of events and situations

A good place to start is by not collecting unnecessary burdens in the first place, and letting go of as many "small" upsets as we can. Workbook Lesson 5 reminds us that "*There are no small upsets. They are all equally disturbing to my peace of mind*" (W-pI.5.4:3-4). However, they certainly *feel* easier to deal with, and so we can do much on behalf of peace by simply being vigilant about not collecting these apparently small upsets, or being quick to let go of them.

Our daily lives are filled with minutiae to get upset about, and if we allow ourselves to fall thoughtlessly into that trap we can end each day ground down by the stress of it all, even when nothing all that dreadful has actually happened. I had a wonderful lesson in this recently when I went to the dentist, knowing I was to have an injection for the treatment I would be having. I was in a fearful state of mind, and prayed for help as I sat in the dentist's chair. Immediately I got a brief impression of Jesus laughing at me. He apparently wasn't taking this as seriously as I was! It was a great help, and I got the

message: Is a moment's twinge of pain something worthy of weighing my mind down? I hardly think so.

Assuming that we do collect these small and senseless burdens regularly through the day, the Workbook teaches us to stop each hour and release from our minds that which has been weighing us down in the past hour (see for example W-pI.193.12). In this way, we aren't carrying around an increasingly heavy load of irritations and upsets.

But what about "big" upsets? What do we do when we're faced with some of the worst this world has to offer? It can be tempting to throw truth out the window when a

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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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by Nicola Harvey

We all want to travel lightly through life, yet most of us feel weighed down with a series of heavy, seemingly unshakable burdens. Nicola offers counsel on how we can learn to travel lightly without resorting to denial...1

"The Ego Does Want to Kill You" An Experience of the Murderer Within

by Greg Mackie

The Course wants to put us in touch with the peace and joy within us, yet it also wants to bring us face-to-face with our own murderous ego. It even tells us to pray that this encounter may be soon. Greg tells a fascinating story of his own encounter with the murderer within. . .6

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by Allen Watson

As Course students, who of us hasn't struggled with the concept of the holy instant? Allen finishes his two-part series on the holy instant with thirteen different descriptions of what a holy instant is.10

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by Robert Perry

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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

If you are interested in having a healing session with Nicola, please contact her at nicola@circleofa.com.

Internet Services

Our website is a useful tool for accessing Circle resources, programs, and services. The Workbook Commentaries by Allen Watson are available online. You will also find a huge variety of articles by other 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.

For Your Consideration

In recent years, we have been blessed with bequests from people remembering us in their wills, and this has benefited us tremendously. We had no idea how helpful it could be until we started receiving these bequests.

As you plan for your estate, we invite you to consider naming the Circle of Atonement as a beneficiary. If you do decide to do this, please know that you have our deepest gratitude. If you have questions, don't hesitate to contact us (by phone: 928-282-0790; via e-mail: info@circleofa.com; or through regular mail: The Circle of Atonement, P.O. Box 4238, West Sedona, AZ 86340).

CIRCLE EVENTS

Regular Classes in Sedona, Arizona

Daily Morning Workbook Class

With Mary Anne Buchowski and Greg Mackie
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



Regular Classes in Portland, Oregon

Topical and Text Classes

With Allen Watson
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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crisis comes along, but ultimately, it's only by shining the light of truth onto the darkness of our suffering that we will get through it. Somehow, in the midst of our pain, we need to find a way to meaningfully connect with the truth. We need to find a way of internalizing the fact that “*There is another way of looking at this*” (W-p1.33.3:4), something which will help bring our difficulties into perspective with the truth, and which will ultimately lead us beyond the darkness and into the light once more. Of course, the main way that the Course trains us to do this is to respond by repeating our Workbook lesson for the day.

Traveling lightly doesn't mean that nothing bad ever happens to us—it means that whatever happens, we let the light of truth into our minds. This light guides us into another way of perceiving, melting away the pain of the experience, and teaching a deep lesson to our minds: all problems are equally meaningless; they have no substance and no real power to hurt us. “Big” problems are just as illusory as “small” ones. Learning this lesson (a lesson we will need to learn over and over in many different situations) marks the dawning of a deeper wisdom and a greater capacity to live life less fearfully.

Release the burden of grievances through forgiveness

Of course, a major way that we can unburden ourselves, according to the Course, is by letting go of our grievances. We deeply underestimate the impact that forgiveness will have on us. Apparently, holding grievances is like trying to stagger along under a massive burden that all but wipes us out:

You are not really capable of being tired, but you are very capable of wearying yourself. The strain of constant judgment is virtually intolerable. It is curious that an ability so debilitating would be so deeply cherished.

(T-3.VI.5:5-7)

Don't we just cherish our judgments? Don't we assume we will feel bereft without them? The Course, though, uses some of its most motivational language on the topic of forgiveness. When we're feeling unwilling to forgive, it's worth spending some time with those passages. It's difficult to read Lesson 122, "Forgiveness offers everything I want," for example, and remain fully committed to our hatred.

What we seem to forget is that when we're angry, we're grim. Resentment and light-heartedness simply don't mix. Considering the amount of time and energy we give to our grievances, and our unwillingness to truly let go of them, it's no wonder that Jesus tells us point-blank that we are "steadfastly devoted to misery" (T-14.II.1:2). In contrast, he tells us that seeing our grievances as the illusions that they are will be a deep relief to our minds, and that we will experience happy laughter, not regret, as we let them go:

It is sin's unreality that makes forgiveness natural and wholly sane, a deep relief to those who offer it; a quiet blessing where it is received. It does not countenance illusions, but collects them lightly, with a little laugh, and gently lays them at the feet of truth. And there they disappear entirely. (W-pI.134.6:1-3)

Release the burden of planning

Another major burden is planning for our future. We plan to defend ourselves against imagined threats, such as poverty. We plan to achieve the things we have decided are important to us. We plan to ensure that certain things or people or situations that we are attached to stay within our grasp, or come within it if they aren't already. To us, planning is essential, natural, and a sign of intelligence. To Jesus, planning keeps us firmly rooted in the world of illusions, and is a sign of our profound ignorance of God and His laws. In Workbook Lesson 135, in which this topic is addressed at length, Jesus tells us that our obsessive planning, which is centered on our body and its perceived

needs, is actually what makes us ill. Whilst we are engaged in plans for its defense, we are so misperceiving our body and its purpose that this amounts to an attack on it, and consequently it becomes sick. Yet if we understand that it is an illusion, and focus instead on playing our part in God's plan for salvation, then it will remain healthy for as long as it is needed:

Enslavement of the body to the plans the unhealed mind sets up to save itself must make the body sick. It is not free to be the means of helping in a plan which far exceeds its own protection, and which needs its service for a little while. In this capacity is health assured. (W-pI.135.13:1-3)

The opposite of planning is trusting in the Holy Spirit. Instead of carrying out our own plans for the defense of our body, we ask Him what He would have us do on behalf of the plan for salvation. We listen for His guidance, and then we carry it out. This does not mean, however, that we should throw away our schedules. The Holy Spirit can use these forms just as well as we can. Giving up planning does not mean that we stay in bed until a Voice tells us what to do with our day. Jesus did not ask Helen and Bill to give up their jobs and stay at home all day so that they could live "spontaneously." Instead, he very often gave them guidance about how their many responsibilities and interactions with others could be used on behalf of healing.

Giving up planning does mean, though, that we give up our own ideas about what our life, our schedule, our daily appointments, are all *for*. Once we are living for another purpose, we may well then be given plans to carry out that we wouldn't have thought of by ourselves. Giving up our own plans, in simple terms, means that the larger goal of the salvation of the world is more important to us than the life and times of _____ (fill in your name!). Our life then becomes "a meaningful encounter with the truth" (W-pI.135.19:2), filled with joy. Our mind is relieved of the burden of our fears, our body is relieved of the burden of sickness, and our life becomes increasingly joyous:

Your present trust in Him is the defense that promises a future undisturbed, without a trace of sorrow, and with joy that constantly increases, as this life becomes a holy instant, set in time, but heeding only immortality. (W-pI.135.19:1)

What a wonderful picture! What an inspiring vision of what our life could be! And what a beautiful lesson: living as the instrument of a larger plan, and therefore in a way which transcends our separate interests, is *how* we get our deepest needs—our needs for peace and safety and happiness—met.

**Resentment
and light-
heartedness
simply don't
mix.**

Release the burden of attachment to material things

Another aspect of traveling lightly is releasing our attachment to material things. When our possessions—either objects we currently possess or would *like* to possess—mean so much to us, it keeps our focus firmly fixed in this material world. This faulty perception—that we need certain objects because of the meaning we think they have—wreaks havoc in our minds.

Cherishing certain possessions, and letting their presence in our lives dictate the way we feel about ourselves, is an attack on our own peace of mind. We can see this in the extreme example of an autistic person who has a temper tantrum because one of his favorite objects is not where he expected it to be, and his sense of safety in the world has been shattered. Yet we don't see that our "milder" version—of feeling a sense of anxiety should anything happen to our most prized possessions—is exactly the same mental sickness. Our sense of wholeness and safety in the world, for the moment, depends on an object. When reduced to this, doesn't it seem ridiculous? Yet who of us can honestly say we have never fallen prey to that kind of thinking?

Of course, material things also burden us when an attachment to having them dictates an entire way of living. We may choose to spend huge chunks of our life doing senseless things in order to get a good supply of paper strips and metal discs so that we can buy all the things that we think will make us happier. We don't ask the Holy Spirit what He would have us do with our life, since we have already decided.

We cannot travel lightly through a world where the material things around us mean so much to us. We have given those objects all the meaning that they have, and having made them into gods, they rule us accordingly. The alternative, Jesus tells us, is to leave our needs to the Holy Spirit. He will supply us with all that we need when we release our attachment to our worldly agendas:

What comes to you of Him comes safely, for He will ensure it never can become a dark spot, hidden in your mind and kept to hurt you. Under His guidance you will travel light and journey lightly, for His sight is ever on the journey's end, which is His goal.

(T-13.VII.13:3-4)

A deeper understanding of reality

Are you getting a picture of what traveling lightly actually looks like? We don't collect small burdens,

because we see their senselessness. When we hit a crisis, we reach out to the truth to help us through it. We let go of our grievances because we understand how futile they are. Our body becomes healthy and our life more and more joyous as we learn to let go of our selfish concerns and instead take our appointed place in God's plan. We release our attachment to material possessions, instead trusting the Holy Spirit to supply us with all that we truly need to live in the world.

To travel lightly, we need illumination—the illumination that lights up the dark corners of our minds, replacing ignorance and fear with wisdom and understanding. But what *is* this illumination? What *is* this spark of understanding which has the power to instantly melt our grievances and fears as if they were nothing? Quite simply, it is the deeply internalized understanding of the unreality of this world, and an acceptance of Heaven as


the only reality—a perfect reality where we are totally loved and cared for by God. If we truly understood that we need no defenses—no anger, no judgment, no planning for our future—because we are living in a world of illusions, wouldn't we feel released from our burdens in a way that all our defending and judging and attacking has never achieved? If we deeply accepted that this heavy world is just an illusion, and Heaven is the only reality, would we have any reason to feel afraid?

Traveling lightly is about a deeper and more profound ability to *treat* illusions as illusions, and a refusal to be weighed down by them accordingly. This does require flexing some big spiritual muscles, however. It's not enough to try to deal with our anger by denying it on the basis that we intellectually grasp the fact that the world is an illusion. The illusion has ways of getting more and more upsetting until we finally snap out of our illusory peace and start doing some real forgiving! Again and again in the Course, we're told that our only way out of the hell we've made is by bringing the darkness to the light, which means we must look our ego squarely in the face before it will disappear into the nothingness it really is. Jesus cautions us about being too quick to dismiss the ego as something which doesn't affect us. In reality, of course, it doesn't, but in time it does, until we have truly learned to walk without it, something that not many of us have yet achieved:

I have spoken of the ego as if it were a separate thing, acting on its own. This was necessary to persuade you that you cannot dismiss it lightly, and must realize how much of your thinking is ego-directed. (T-4.VI.13-4)

Conclusion

Traveling lightly isn't about living in denial of the darkness that drives us, slapping on a happy smile, and working like crazy behind the scenes to make sure that life goes the way we want it to. It's about *facing* that darkness with an unflinching eye because we know that the truth will help us to see this differently. It's about letting the

light of wisdom dawn within us, rather than intellectualizing our fears away. It's about letting a profound truth illuminate our thinking, and be our guide in responding to the difficulties we encounter, beautifully summarized by Jesus as: "*Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists. Herein lies the peace of God*" (T-In.2:2-4). 

"The Ego Does Want to Kill You"

An Experience of the Murderer Within

by Greg Mackie

A couple of newsletters ago (*A Better Way* #41), I shared a remarkable spiritual experience of mine, an experience of universal love. Recently, I had another remarkable experience, this one of the opposite end of the spectrum—what could be called an experience of universal hate. It was a terrifying encounter with the ego unmasked, the false self in me that is utterly malevolent and quite literally wants to kill me.

I would like to share this experience in the hope that, like the first one, it may be helpful to others on the path. It was certainly helpful to me. It brought with it some powerful lessons, which I will share below. Terrifying though it was, I am very grateful for this experience. It felt like a significant milestone in my journey with the Course.

The prelude: whispers of the murderer within

It all started in late May. For a couple of days, I had been experiencing vague feelings of depression and self-loathing. I'm fairly certain the trigger was a conversation I had with a friend of mine on May 24, which brought up a lot of anger and defensiveness in me. Though the conversation was outwardly amicable and the disagreements that came up in it totally resolved, my inward anger and defensiveness made me aware of just how much I attack and condemn others in my mind. I saw myself as an attacker, and that made me feel grimy and loathsome. I did Course practices to address these feelings and the thoughts behind them, and this actually helped quite a bit. But my negative feelings did not dissipate entirely.

It's not that I was walking around in abject, full-blown self-hatred. In fact, as I look over my practice notes for those days, I see that my overall mood was positive. I was

definitely consciously aware of my depression and self-loathing, but I had no idea of the extent of those feelings. It was as if something dark lurked just below my awareness; there was a shark swimming in the depths of my mind, and all I was seeing was the dorsal fin breaking the surface. I had a dim sense of a vicious thought in me, a kind of malevolent force that truly hated me and literally wanted to kill me. But at the time, it wasn't very strong.

The experience: a terrifying encounter with the murderer within

That dim sense remained with me as I went to bed on May 26. I don't remember how much sleep I got, but I'll never forget that at about three o'clock in the morning, the awareness of this malevolent force hit me like a ton of bricks. There wasn't anything in particular that brought it on; it just happened. There's really no way to adequately describe it. There was just this *something* in me that felt like pure evil, something that was bent on destroying me. It literally wanted to stop my heart. It wanted to take control of my hands and wrap them around my throat. It was a real

force—real in my experience, anyway—that gripped me with incredible intensity.

Before anyone gets too worried about my mental health here, let me assure you that I was never truly suicidal. I'm normally an upbeat, emotionally stable person who is not prone to dramatic mood swings. The "normal" part of my mind could look upon this murderous impulse from "outside" of it, as it were; the impulse did not take over my entire mind. On the contrary, it felt almost as if it were independent of my mind. I think I now understand something of what people experience in cases of apparent demon possession. I didn't think I was really being taken

It was as if something dark lurked just below my awareness.

over by a demon—as a Course student, I immediately identified this apparently demonic force as a product of my own mind, my ego unmasked. But it *felt* like something from outside my mind, and it was truly terrifying.

I had to do something to assuage my terror. So, I did various Course practices and called upon God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit for help. I don't remember every single practice I did, but I definitely remember saying, "Help me, Father," "Steady my feet, my Father" (based on W-pI.rV.In.2:1), "Help me, Holy Spirit," "Help me, Jesus," "There is nothing to fear" (W-pI.48.Heading), and "God is but Love, and therefore so am I" (W-pI.rV.In.4:3). Unfortunately, nothing really seemed to work.

As I was doing all this, I remembered the Course's idea that the ego really wants to kill us. I also remembered the idea from Lesson 196 that we will one day see the murderer within us—the ego as it really is—totally unmasked. It occurred to me that this was exactly what I was experiencing right now. I felt prompted to read some of this material, so I turned on my lamp, picked up my Course, and began to read. I read T-13.I-II., which discusses how we believe that we have crucified the Son of God. It says that "the ego does want to kill you, and if you identify with it you must believe its goal is yours" (T-13.II.5:6). I also read Lesson 196, "It can be but myself I crucify," which says that our attacks on others in the name of "self-defense" lead to our fear of crucifixion at the hands of God and the world. I had read this material many times before, but it spoke directly to my experience now in a way it never had before.

The material that hit home for me the most began with paragraph 10 of Lesson 196. I'll quote the most relevant lines here:

There is an instant in which terror seems to grip your mind so wholly that escape appears quite hopeless. When you realize, once and for all, that it is you you fear, the mind perceives itself as split. And this had been concealed while you believed attack could be directed outward, and returned from outside to within....

Now, for an instant, is a murderer perceived within you, eager for your death, intent on plotting punishment for you until the time when it can kill at last.

(W-pI.196.10:1-3,11:1)

I was stunned by these words, because they described precisely what I was experiencing at that moment. I was immersed in that "instant in which terror seems to grip your mind." My mind felt split between a terrified "me" and a homicidal maniac out to get "me." I was face to face with a murderer within me, bent on my death.

But the lesson went on to say that this grim encounter was not a bad thing at all. On the contrary, this terrifying instant had a priceless gift to give me, if I was open to receiving it:

Yet in this instant is the time as well in which salvation comes. For fear of God has disappeared. And you can call on Him to save you from illusions by His Love, calling Him Father and yourself His Son. Pray that the instant may be soon,—today. Step back from fear, and make advance to love.

(W-pI.196.11:2-6)

I tried to do exactly what this passage instructed me to do: call on God's Love to save me from this terrifying but illusory murderer.

My perception of the experience really began to shift as I read this. This passage was tremendously reassuring. It told me that what I was going through was a precious opportunity, because getting in touch with the fearsome murderer within me opened the door for God to heal me with His Love. This experience was not one the Course wanted me to avoid, but one it wanted me to have soon—*today*. Well, I was having it today. So, I tried to take advantage of the opportunity. I tried to do exactly what this passage instructed me to do: call on God's Love to save me from this terrifying but illusory murderer. And while my earlier calls for help had seemed ineffective, this time I felt a glimmer of a response. My practicing was finally beginning to work.

It was clear from this lesson that my attacks on others were what gave birth to and sustained this murderer within. This whole experience was tied in directly with the depression and self-hatred I had been feeling the past few days, since those feelings came directly from my attacking and condemning others. Whatever benefits I thought my attacks brought me, my current experience was their actual result. And I didn't want this result, to say the least. I now had all the incentive in the world to stop attacking others and set my murderous ego aside.

I prayed about this to Jesus, and this was exactly the message I got: "Give up your attacks on others. This experience you are having is what your attacks on others really bring you. This is their actual result, all the time, whether you are aware of it or not. It is a blessing for you

to experience this, because now you know what you're really giving yourself when you attack and condemn others. Never forget this. You now have all the reason in the world to give up attack."

Now, I was actually *thankful* for the experience, even in the midst of it. I was still highly aware of that murderer within, though the terror had dissipated somewhat as a result of my reading, repetitions, and prayers. It was as if my practicing allowed me to look upon the experience from even farther "outside" of it than before. More and more, I was finding a place of refuge at the center of my being. More and more, I was feeling God's answer to my call on His Love.

So, I expressed my gratitude to God for His Love. I also continued to practice as the experience went on. I used some of the same lines as before, and added things like "Thank you, God, for showing me this," "My ego may want to kill me, but I am not an ego," "My ego is an attacker, but I am not," "This murderous impulse is an illusion that cannot harm me at all," and "This will disappear when I stop attacking others." In addition, when I had turned to Lesson 196, I had stumbled upon the Lesson 198 practice along the way: "Only my condemnation injures me. Only my own forgiveness sets me free" (W-pI.198.9:3-4). This really appealed to me, so I started repeating it over and over. With this constant repetition going through my mind, the experience finally dissipated enough for me to go to sleep.

When I woke up the next morning, I read Lessons 196 and 198, and decided to use them both as the basis for the day's practice. From Lesson 196, I picked various lines from the paragraphs that discuss the experience of the murderer within (paragraphs 10-12), and adapted them to suit my needs. One line I used was "Father, I call on You to save me from illusions by Your Love" (based on W-pI.196.11:4). From Lesson 198, I used the practice lines quoted above: "Only my condemnation injures me. Only my own forgiveness sets me free" (W-pI.198.9:3-4). I used these practices during my quiet time, and many times during the day.

I also felt prompted to bring to mind various people whom I had been attacking, and extend forgiveness to them. This felt like the perfect thing to do, since attacking others is what feeds that inner murderer and sustains its killing spree, while forgiving them is what starves it until

it can kill no more. So, I pulled out my favorite forgiveness practices and applied them to people against whom I had been holding grievances. I said things to them like "Awake and be glad, for all your sins have been forgiven you" (P-3.II.4:10), "You are the holy Son of God Himself" (W-pI.191.6:1), "Light and joy and peace abide in you. Your sinlessness is guaranteed by God" (W-pI.93.11:3-4), and "Your holiness gives life to me" (based on T-26.I.7:2). The goal I wrote down for the day was "to stop crucifying myself by withdrawing my attacks on others, and forgiving them instead."

Over the next few days, the sense of that murderer within me remained, but gradually faded away. My guess

is that this was due partly to all the forgiveness practice I was doing, and partly to my denial mechanisms clicking back into place. I don't think anyone could tolerate the full experience of his or her ego unmasked for too long. I'm sure this experience will come to me again at later stages of my journey, whenever I am ready for it again. But I know now that whether I'm consciously experiencing it or not, that murderer is still down there, feeding off of my every attack on others. I try to remember that when I am tempted to attack.

The lessons: benefits of encountering the murderer within

As I've said, I am now very grateful for this experience. Like the universal love experience I had before, this one taught me a number of valuable lessons. As I reflect on what it taught me, three lessons stand out.

1. The Course's descriptions of the ego and its pure malevolence are really true.

Just as my earlier experience confirmed what the Course says about the sheer joy and love of true perception, so this later experience has confirmed what it says about the sheer insanity and hatred of the ego. Just as the Course's account of our light is true, so is its account of our darkness. This is a crucial lesson for me. I think most if not all Course students tend to minimize and soften the Course's statements about the ego's malevolence. I've done that as much as anyone. Surely, we think, it can't be *that* bad. Surely Jesus is engaging in a bit of hyperbole when he says all that grim, gory stuff about the ego.

Those graphic descriptions of the ego's madness are dead-on accurate descriptions of the force that actually drives our lives most of the time.

Maybe he's doing it for dramatic effect, making it sound worse than it really is to shock us into changing our minds.

But all that material about the murderous ego is no longer just abstract theory or vivid literature to me—what it talks about is now part of my practical experience. Those graphic descriptions of the ego's madness are not hyperbole, but dead-on accurate descriptions of the force that actually drives our lives most of the time. Jesus really means what he says. However illusory it is, that shark is really swimming down there in the depths of our minds, and he's out for blood. Over the years, a number of Course students have asked me if I have ever really experienced the grim ego stuff the Course talks about. Now, I can unequivocally say yes.

A brief aside concerning the truth of the Course's descriptions: As I compare my experience of the murderer within to that passage in Lesson 196, I am truly amazed at how well that passage matches my experience. I'm amazed that my experience is described *perfectly* by something Jesus dictated to Helen over thirty years ago. This demonstrates to me that when Jesus says in the Course that certain things will happen to us as we progress on the path, he means it very literally. He is describing quite precisely what will happen to us at various stages. Often, as in Lesson 196, he also gives us specific instructions for what to do when those things happen. Jesus has the entire map of the journey in his mind, and he has laid it all out for us in detail.

2. I have every reason in the world to forgive my brothers. It is totally in my self-interest to do so.

Just as my earlier experience gave me an incentive to forgive others because it feels so good to do so, so this later experience has given me an incentive to forgive others because it feels so bad *not* to do so. This, too, is a crucial lesson for me. In the Course's view, seeing plainly the stark contrast between the joy of the spirit and the pain of the ego is the key to salvation, and that contrast is much clearer to me now. My experience of the ego unmasked has given me ample reason to give up attack. I don't want a murderer within me—especially one that wants to murder *me*—and the only way to let that murderer go is for me to stop attacking and condemning others.

Unfortunately, I must admit that I haven't entirely given up attack, which shows just how committed to my ego I really am. But this experience has definitely soured

me on the ego to some extent. I feel that I'll never attack with quite the same relish again. Giving up attack is not a sacrifice for the sake of being a good person, but a way to free myself from guilt, fear, and pain. Putting both experiences together, I now know both how *desirable* God's Love is and how *undesirable* the ego's attack is. How can I not eventually succeed with motivation like this?

3. Practice really works.

Finally, just as my earlier experience came as a result of intensified Course practice, so this later experience did also. In April, I started using a structured checklist for my practicing, and from then on, my practice really took off. I was doing much more than I had before. I'm sure it is no coincidence that this dramatic experience came on the heels of a couple of months of greatly increased practice.

Once again, I feel that I have received confirmation of what the Course says about its entire program: "If you do it, you will see that it works" (T-9.V.9:2).

Conclusion

It may seem that a terrifying experience of a bloodthirsty murderer within is hardly evidence that Course practice really works. But it is. For the Course's path is not just about giving us glorious experiences of love and light, as wonderful and necessary as those are. It is also about bringing us face to face with the dark motives which drive our lives, but which stay safely hidden under multiple layers of denial most of the time. It is about learning what we really want through experiencing both the spirit and the ego as they really are.

The experience I've described here was not pleasant to say the least, but I consider it a real gift. I thank God that I was given a brief glimpse of what my attacks on others and myself have truly wrought, for now that I have seen it, I have the power to do something about it. As Lesson 196 concludes, seeing that "it can be but myself I crucify" (W-pI.196.Heading) is not a curse, but a blessing. Seeing the murderer within reveals the savior within. And that is cause for great rejoicing:

How kind and merciful is the idea we practice! Give it welcome, as you should, for it is your release. It is indeed but you your mind can try to crucify. Yet your redemption, too, will come from you.

(W-pI.196.12:3-6) 🌸

**My
experience of
the ego
unmasked
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attack.**

What Is a Holy Instant?

Part II, Specific Examples and Characteristics

by Allen Watson

In Part I of this article, we saw that in one sense, there is only one holy instant, which is simply a window in time through which we perceive eternity. Although we have many experiences of a holy instant in our lifetimes, those experiences are really all instances of tapping into the one holy instant which, being eternal, extends through all time.

What a Holy Instant Is

In this second part of the article, we want to look at several passages in the Course that offer a definition or description of what the holy instant is, to better understand how we can “practice the mechanics of the holy instant” (T-15.II.5:4). As we learn what constitutes a holy instant, we can begin to *practice* it. We can consciously aspire, in any given moment, that it might be a holy instant, and we can develop techniques that will facilitate making it so.

1. An Instant Offered to the Holy Spirit (T-15.II.1:6)

One simple definition of the holy instant is that it is an instant that you offer to the Holy Spirit. Offering the instant to Him entails taking your own hands off it, letting go all your past learning, and putting Him in charge. As the final Workbook lesson has us repeat over five days (and for the rest of our lives, really):

This holy instant would I give to You. Be You in charge.

(W-pII.361-365.Heading)

Another way of saying the same thing is that in the holy instant you let go of your independent will and accept the Will of God as all there is (T-15.IV.8:6).

This aspect of giving the instant to the Holy Spirit, and letting Him make the decisions and judgments in place of your own, does not mean you are absolved of all responsibility for your life, as can be seen in T-21.II.2:1-3; 3:3,5-7; 4:5-6. This section juxtaposes allowing the Holy Spirit to make your decisions with the idea that “[You are] responsible for what [you] see” (T-21.II.2:3). These two thoughts are not incompatible because you are the one responsible for deciding to give the instant to the Holy

Spirit or not. That decision determines what you see: the “world you do not want” results from your deciding for the unholy instant, while the “one you do” want results from giving the power to decide for you to the Holy Spirit (T-21.II.4:6). Therefore, one way of increasing your experience of the holy instant is to develop a habit of consciously asking the Holy Spirit to make your decisions for you.

Choosing to allow the Holy Spirit to make your decisions seems inextricably linked to the holy instant. I’m not sure which comes first or which causes the other. Does

the holy instant provide us with strength to make that choice, or does the choice trigger the holy instant? Whatever the case may be, it is clear the two go hand in hand, and you can’t really have one without the other. The key, as is pointed out in T-21.II.4:8, is recognizing that we *want* the world we will see when the Holy Spirit is given control of our lives, and that it is up to us to choose it. As we have already seen (in Part I), equivocating and trying to hold onto the ego’s separation-based values will always block, or at least dampen, the experience of the holy instant.

In the rapid onrush of our lives, it may often seem impossible to pause and offer the moment, whatever it contains, to the Holy Spirit. There is so much to do, and the demands of life seem urgent; stopping even for a few seconds to mentally ask the Holy Spirit to be in charge seems not only of lesser importance, but we may even think that taking our attention away from

our situation would do more harm than good. After all, things might get out of our control! Does it ever occur to us that loss of *our* control might be a good thing?

In the holy instant, we give the Holy Spirit control over the present moment of time. In return, He empowers us to offer forgiveness to our brothers, thus enabling them to offer salvation to us (T-21.II.3:7-8). The Course says that when we offer Him only one instant, wholly and completely, without reservation, He will give us all of salvation (T-21.II.2:1-5; also, T-18.VII.5:3; T-27.V.4:2; M-15.2:7). That exchange is brought about in the holy instant, and it is maintained by continuing to enter holy instants with Him. In a holy instant offered to the Holy

Offering the instant to Him entails taking your own hands off it, letting go all your past learning, and putting Him in charge.

Spirit, you stop projecting blame outside yourself. You cannot experience a holy instant while maintaining that your brother's guilt is real, rather than something you are making up in your own mind (T-21.II.13:3).

2. Remembering Your Union with God and the Sonship

One description that really says it all is that the holy instant is an instant in which you remember God and your union with Him. You are aware of being united directly with Him, and since all the Sonship—all our brothers and sisters—are also united with Him, you are united with them as well (T-15.VI.8:1).

This is not a moment of *becoming* one, but of recognizing the Oneness that always already *is* (T-21.VIII.5:1). In the holy instant you may *feel* the unity with God and your brothers, a unity that is always there, having been given us in God's gift of creation. People who experience a holy instant of unity carry from it a reflection of that eternal unity to the world of time around them (W-pI.169.13:3).

Clearly, you cannot recognize your oneness with God and your brothers without forgiving both your brothers and yourself, and acknowledging the total innocence of both. If you are one with God, and also one with your brother, then your brother must also be one with God. A moment in which that understanding becomes a concrete certainty, beyond all doubt (at least in that moment), is a holy instant.

3. A Moment of Shared Faith in the Sonship (T-15.VI.2:5)

When you remember God you remember His Son. You recognize the Holy Spirit in your brother. When you interact with others through your ego, you focus on their flaws; you don't think they can be counted on to overcome their biases and to reach the truth. To have faith in the Sonship means that you realize, as the Course points out, that "Everyone will answer the Call of the Holy Spirit" (T-5.II.10:8) and "Everyone seeks for love as you do" (T-14.X.10:5). "He asks for what you want, and needs the same as you" (T-31.II.10:3). Again, a moment in which you simply *know* you can trust God in your brother or sister is a holy instant.

I think this might have been a central factor in Helen and Bill's holy instant, when they joined in a common purpose. Bill somehow recognized something in Helen that would respond to his appeal; Helen recognized in Bill a heart like her own. And they joined. In that moment they

believed in one another; they shared a faith in the Sonship. That was a holy instant.

4. A Moment in Which Desire for Vengeance Is Gone

In a holy instant "the drive for vengeance has been uprooted" because "the past is gone" (see T-16.VII.6:1-4 for the complete context of this idea). The ego tries to convince us that we will be happy if we can just get even with the people who have hurt us; the Holy Spirit teaches the opposite.

Chapter 27 refers to "an instant of your love without attack" (T-27.V.4:2). That is one way of describing the holy instant. Your desire for vengeance is gone because you understand the past is gone, and therefore, nothing remains to impede the natural outflow of your love. Most experiences of forgiveness fall into this category, and an experience of forgiveness is, therefore, a holy instant.

I remember a close friend of mine who had been in an abusive relationship for years, and had been filled with bitter hatred and resentment, her sleep bothered by dreams of vengeance in which she stabbed her husband to death. After experiencing a deep holy instant of forgiveness she was astonished at what had happened inside her. "I'm not even angry with him any more," she said. "I used to hope he'd rot in hell, but now I really want him to find happiness and peace for himself." Her desire for

vengeance had simply disappeared.

If grievances and desires for revenge (which you may think of as "justice") occupy your mind, you can increase the likelihood of experiencing a holy instant by frequently praying, as the Workbook counsels us, "Let miracles replace all grievances" (W-pI.89.3:1), or reminding yourself, "The problem is a grievance; the solution is a miracle" (W-pI.90.2:5).

5. A Moment in Which Self-attack Ceases

In Chapter 28, Section I, the Course speaks about miracles. It says that "The miracle comes quietly into the mind that stops an instant and is still" (T-28.I.11:1), which is clearly a reference to a holy instant. In that moment, we recognize our own innocence. We connect with our loving heart, and in that identification there is no guilt, "nothing that would make [us] afraid" (T-28.I.12:6). We stop attacking ourselves! (T-27.V.5:5).

I don't think we have the slightest idea of how constantly our minds are attacking themselves. We exist in a sea of self-judgment. We earnestly believe that large

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chunks of ourselves are despicable. The Course says we lack “confidence in [ourselves], so long despised” (T-18.III.3:4). When self-attack ceases for a moment, that moment is a holy instant. When you let yourself love yourself, that is a holy instant, because it is getting in touch with the eternal truth about yourself, instead of looking at your track record. Marianne Williamson has said, “You are not your resumé.” A moment in which you recognize the truth of that is a holy instant.

I recall taking part in a meditation on loving-kindness, in which we extended blessing and acceptance and peace to others, starting with those close to us, and then extending outward to the city around us, to the nation, and to the entire world. Finally, after our hearts had been opened fully and attuned to love and compassion, the person leading the meditation asked us to turn that compassion on ourselves. “Look down on yourself. See yourself there, and *have mercy* on yourself. Say to yourself, ‘May I be happy. May I be contented. May I be free from suffering. May I remember who I really am.’”

As I followed those instructions and offered those blessings to myself, my heart melted, my eyes filled with tears, and I was aware as never before of the constant self-condemnation that had become so *normal* to me that only its absence revealed its usual presence.

6. A Time of Perfect Communication

A holy instant can be a moment in which your mind is perfectly open to another mind. You are willing to receive, or to give, as the moment calls for (T-15.IV.6:5). Your mind, therefore, “seeks to change nothing, but merely to accept everything” (T-15.IV.6:8). To be so perfectly open to another that we have abandoned any desire to change them, and seek only to offer them love and healing, is a rare state, and one that we should spend more time seeking. “When a brother behaves insanely, you can heal him only by perceiving the sanity in him” (T-9.III.5:1). I recommend frequent readings of the Text, Chapter 9 Section III (“The Correction of Error”) to aid in the formation of this perfect openness.

7. A Recognition of Love in Yourself

When we suspend our judgment toward others, it leads us to the holy instant, in which we recognize the Love of God within us, the fact of our union with the Love of God in our minds (see T-15.VI.5:3 and T-21.II.8:2-4). Those passages show that the recognition of our true nature cannot occur while we maintain our judgment and

condemnation of our brothers. When we withdraw the projection of guilt, and realize that we are responsible for what we see, it enables the holy instant of self-recognition to happen.

Your judgments are the root of your seeming desire to attack. When the judgments are gone, attack is gone, and when that happens you discover that, in the core of your being, you are love. You recognize the idea of love in yourself. You experience yourself *as* love, because that is what you are (T-6.I.13:2). When you experience love, free from attack, flowing through you, that is a holy instant.

Think of some time in your life when love was flowing deeply, when you *knew* that your love was pure, an untainted desire for goodness for another person. That cannot happen when you harbor grievances against the other person. But when it does happen, you become aware of a part of yourself, a wellspring of love within you that is obscured and often so overlaid with self-judgment that you doubt its existence. Those moments of knowing, “This is really in me! I am truly a loving being!” are one type of holy instant. They are one of the rewards of forgiveness.

When you experience love, free from attack, flowing through you, that is a holy instant.

A Clarifying Note: the Holy Instant and the Miracle

If we try to distinguish between the terms *miracle* and *holy instant*, based on T-21.II.8:3 we might at first deduce that the miracle is a suspension of judgment toward others that leads to the holy instant of recognizing ourselves as love. Yet this distinction between the miracle and the holy instant, connecting them as cause (the miracle of suspended judgment) and effect (the holy instant of self-recognition), is only one side of the story. Other passages seem to imply that the miracle happens *in the holy instant*, and still other passages seem to say the miracle *follows* the holy instant or arises from it (T-19.I.14:1,3; T-16.VII.11:1-2; T-28.I.11:1-2; T-27.V.3:1-2).

If we wish to establish some temporal order here, we must understand that there are two aspects of the miracle. There is the miracle that each of us receives from the Holy Spirit, which touches our mind, suspends its judgment, and makes it aware of the love within itself. This aspect of the miracle brings us to the holy instant. The second aspect of the miracle involves its extension: in the holy instant we see the miracle of our relationship with our brothers, and then the miracle *extends* from the holy instant to other minds.

In a larger sense, remember, the holy instant and the miracle do not “happen” at all; they are not bound by time or temporal order. Being eternal, the holy instant always *is*.

What “happens” is that we remove the barriers to experiencing it. The holy instant is always present; the miracle is what allows us to tap into it and share that experience with others. The holy instant is the content of what we experience. The miracle we experience brings us into the holy instant, and then from the holy instant we extend the miracle to our brothers.

Another way of looking at this is implied by a phrase the Course uses more than once: “the miracle of the holy instant” (T-15.I.15:11, T-18.IV.2:8). This seems to make the two terms identical: the holy instant *is* the miracle we receive and give. In that light, we might restate the sequence of events surrounding the holy instant in this way: First, you receive the miracle of the holy instant (internal aspect of the miracle), and second, from this holy instant you extend miracles to your brothers (external aspect of the miracle): “Offer the miracle of the holy instant through the Holy Spirit, and leave His giving it to you to Him” (T-15.I.15:11).

8. A Miniature of Heaven and Eternity

In the holy instant, you experience now, in time, what is true in eternity. You catch a glimpse of Heaven. You get a foretaste of eternity (T-17.IV.11:1,4). You enter into the Oneness. You catch a bit of the melody of the eternal song of love that fills Heaven.

There are times when what we need is to escape from the narrow confines of this world. In those times, we can say, “I will be still an instant and go home” (W-pI.182.Heading). Sometimes a holy instant is not so much a moment of union with our brothers as it is one of enjoying our union with God. It is a quiet time of retreat and rest in the Father’s house, a moment in which the world falls away from your awareness and your heart returns to God.

9. A Shift to Vision

The holy instant shifts you from false perception to vision (T-15.IX.1:1-2). You see past the limits of the body to what lies beyond the body. You catch a glimpse of a reality that transcends everything you thought was real until then. It could be a very brief recognition of the Christ in one person. It could be an extended, mystical experience of the oneness of all beings. Both would be a holy instant.

In a way this is the goal of the Course’s training program. It seeks to shift us from false perception to the vision of Christ, in which Christ is all we see, hear, and touch in everyone, everywhere (T-24.V.7:7-10). A holy

instant is a momentary experience of what that is like, often with one specific individual. We see them in a way we never imagined possible. We see them as (Gasp!) *holy*. The vision of Christ is given to anyone who is willing to see his brother as sinless (T-22.II.13:2).

10. A Way of Reaching Another State of Mind

Chapter 27, Section IV, “The Quiet Answer,” contains one of my favorite definitions of the holy instant. The holy instant is a “way of reaching to another state of mind in which the answer is already there” (T-27.IV.2:3-4). It speaks of how our normal state of mind is so conflicted that no answer is possible to our problems. And yet, there is another state of mind in which the answer exists already. The holy instant consists in reaching to that other state of mind. (You may want to read the first two paragraphs of Section IV.)

One side of the coin is: because God does not will for us to have problems, every problem can be answered right now. That is the real situation. However, the other side is: in our state of mind, “solution is impossible.” The resolution obviously must be some way for us to reach a *different state of mind*, so that we can recognize that our problems have already been solved by God (T-27.IV.2:3-4). The holy instant is that way.

The holy instant, then, is a moment in which you connect with a state of mind in which all your problems have already been answered. It must be that, if you just think for a moment. We associate peace of mind with the holy instant (T-27.V.3:2), but how could you be at peace if your problems were unanswered?

The Workbook, in Lesson 50, is talking about the holy instant when it refers to this same state of mind, where “nothing can threaten...and where nothing can intrude upon the eternal calm of the Son of God” (W-pI.50.3:3). The thing to notice is that this is speaking about a state of mind that *already exists*. It must exist already if, in it, your problems have been answered already. This is your *right mind*, and it is part of you. It exists within you and you are, in the holy instant, connecting with it, becoming aware of it. You are letting go of all the ego’s defenses against peace and accepting the peace that is always, already there, an inherent aspect of your being.

This same part of the Text includes a very clear definition of the holy instant in just these terms: “The holy instant is the interval in which the mind is still enough [that is, sets aside the ego’s noisy thoughts for a moment] to hear an answer that is not entailed within the question asked” (T-27.IV.6:9).

In the holy instant, you experience now, in time, what is true in eternity. You catch a glimpse of Heaven.

Obviously, then, one way of approach to the holy instant is to engage in exercises designed to quiet or still the mind. Meditation, for instance, is one such methodology.

11. A Moment of Stillness

The preceding quote speaks of the mind becoming still. *Stillness*, or quiet, is another aspect of the holy instant that is frequently mentioned. Our right mind is naturally quiet and calm; it is the ego that is noisy, raucous, and filled with shrieks of terror. The ego is constantly busy, frantically in action, but when we connect with our right mind in the holy instant, the noise drops away and we are still. I believe this is what many meditators experience, even though they have not studied the Course. (Some Course references to the still mind are T-28.I.11:1; T-31.I.12:1-4; T-31.II.6:4; and T-31.II.8:1-6.)

You won't feel that stillness to its full extent or experience it profoundly in every holy instant. Sometimes we connect with that quiet inner place more clearly than at other times. But it is always there, within you. "There is a place in you where there is perfect peace" (W-pI.47.7:4; see also T-29.V.1:1-3,2:3-4). Once you have experienced it, you know it is always there, even when the surface of your mind is agitated. And, with practice, dropping down beneath the turmoil to "the stately calm within" (T-18.I.8:2), "the quiet center" (T-18.VII.8:1-2) that is always present, becomes easier and more consistently possible.

Sometimes when I sit down to practice my Workbook lesson, looking for what the Workbook calls a period "of wordless, deep experience"—which is one way it describes the holy instant (W-pII.In.11:2)—my mind will just be filled with thoughts. I can't get still. I can't seem to quiet my mind and let go of its busy-ness. I may practice some meditation technique like focusing on the breath or offering peace of mind to everyone I think of (Workbook Lesson 108). Sometimes these methods work. Sometimes they don't. The goal of the still mind is important and should always be before us, and attempts to reach it are always valuable, but the most important things are our desire for it and our faithfulness to the practice.

When there is a storm at sea, the surface of the ocean may be violently agitated. The waves may crash and clash together. Foam may spray up into the air. But deep, down deep, there is a placid calm. Our mind is like that. On the days when I cannot seem to get beyond the whitecaps of my mind, I remind myself that the peace is there; I'm just unable to be aware of it.

I think trying to manufacture particular feelings, or trying to forcibly resist certain thoughts, in order to achieve a holy instant is a mistake. "What you resist,

persists," as Werner Erhard said. I think such things can best be done by a gentler (but still firm) approach. One practice I like is the practice of recognizing ego thoughts, affirming I don't want them, and choosing a Course-based thought with which to replace them. I do not try to repress the ego thought or force it to go away; rather, I replace it. I do not get rid of this thought by taking a sledge hammer to it, or denying that it is in my mind, but simply by turning my mind elsewhere.

We need to place both our attempts to have a holy instant and the results of those attempts into the hands of the Holy Spirit. It does not matter what we believe the results are; they are always abundant. "Your benefit will not be less if you believe that nothing happens" (W-pI.124.9:1). The Holy Spirit is grateful for my effort. The gift of the holy instant is always given to my right mind, and my right mind is grateful to me also, grateful for my efforts. "The joy your Self experiences It will save for you, and it will yet be yours in full awareness" (W-pI.96.11:4; see also T-1.III.5:4). I receive the benefit every time I practice the holy instant, whether or not I feel it, whether or not it seems like anything happens. The bliss is there whether or not I experience it.

One image that often helps me drop through the clouds of fear and into peace is the image of "going home" (see, for example, all of Lesson 182 in the Workbook). It teaches us to "Be still an instant and go home with Him, and be at peace a while" (W-pI.182.12:9). I think of going home to my Father's house and just resting there a while. I don't try to force anything. I just picture myself walking into a place and feeling at home, and sitting down to rest. Just for a moment, just for a little while, I am resting, here at home. Sometimes just repeating the words, "I am at home with God," or similar words, will draw me into that experience of peace.

12. A Release from Physical Restrictions

In what we might call a "full-blown" holy instant, our awareness of our bodies falls away. This is not like what is called an out-of-body experience; rather, the body is virtually forgotten. Our attention is completely on something else (see T-18.VI.10-14, especially paragraph 13). What is happening is that, for a moment, we are sloughing off our imagined bodily identities and expanding into the vastly larger identity that is truly ours in spirit. While I do not think we need to berate ourselves if we have not experienced this loss of body awareness, it is a valid measure of the extent to which we have entered into the holy instant and left the world behind.

Our right mind is naturally quiet and calm.

13. An Interval of Light, Knowing Yourself

Perhaps the best single description of what a holy instant is in the Course, although it does not use the phrase “holy instant,” occurs in W-pI.184.10:1-3. I recommend that you read these words now, and then write them out and use them to motivate yourself every morning until you have made a daily habit of setting aside time to enter the holy instant.

This passage tells us that a holy instant is an interval in which you leave behind the prison house of the world and “go into the sunlight” for a while, forgetting the darkness. You don’t stay there, away from the world—we know because the next sentence in the Workbook says, “And then step back to darkness”—but just for a moment, just for a brief interval, you allow yourself to experience the freedom that is ours beyond the body and the world.

The part about returning to the darkness of this world tells us that we emerge from these holy moments of quiet and light to carry the message of light and peace to the world around us. To me it is clear that the practice described here is what the Course means by practicing the mechanics of a holy instant. It involves regularly and frequently turning our minds away from the world, away from the sights and sounds conveyed by our senses, and focusing instead on the spiritual reality that is visible to our inner vision. It means setting aside what our senses and thoughts tell us about our sisters and brothers and, instead, listening to what the Holy Spirit tells us about them.

Summing Up

Considering all these instances and aspects of a holy instant, I would define a holy instant as follows:

The holy instant is an experience of grace and stillness, an instant in which we set aside some or all of our identification with the ego and our belief in the reality of the world it has projected, and allow the reality of our true Identity in God to shine through, an Identity we share with all the Sonship.

The Course teaches us that we *need* the experience of holy instants to show us what we are, if (as it clearly teaches) we are not bodies (W-pI.91.7). In one sense, you might say that the entire program of the Workbook is directed at inducing such experiences and making them a habitual and even daily experience. The Introduction to the second half of the Workbook even refers to the daily periods of practice as holy instants, indicating that entering

the holy instant is the goal of every day’s practice session (W-pII.In.3:2).


Our times with the Workbook should be much more than just reading through the lesson, perhaps mulling over one or two thoughts from it, and maybe even writing our thoughts in a journal. These times, clearly, need a period in which we seek to quiet our jangled minds, leaving our dark thoughts behind and entering into the light, finding the deep place within our spirit or mind that is always at peace. We need to, however briefly, disconnect from our bodily identities. We need more than to read about our true Identity; we need to experience It, to connect with It.

At the end of our successful traverse of the Workbook’s program, we are left with a simple, short lesson: “This holy instant would I give to You. Be You in charge”

(W-pII.361-365.Heading). At the start of each day, then and by implication for the rest of our lives, we are meant to enter the holy instant and to give it to the Holy Spirit. In that way we set the tone for the day, and adjust our mindset so that the day that ensues will be a seamless continuation of that holy instant. That mental readjustment may be accomplished in a minute, or it may take an hour. The Manual for Teachers, in its instructions for post-Workbook practice,

tells us that we should continue our meditation (or quiet time, or practice period) “a minute or two after you begin to find it difficult” (M-16.4:7). For the entire second half of the Workbook, we have been instructed to “use as much [time] as we will need for the result that we desire” (W-pII.In.2:8). During the day, if we become aware of slipping off track, we pause and reset, once again seeking that holy instant.

All during the day, we carry the fruits of our holy instants to the world around us. The healing we receive, we give, and by giving it we establish it in our own awareness. Indeed, as we have seen, one characteristic of the holy instant is an awareness of union with everyone, a recognition of a shared identity. If we truly experience such union we cannot help but reflect it to the people we meet.

Ultimately, “life becomes a holy instant” (W-pI.135.19:1). But that will not happen without effort on our part, without daily and even hourly practice of the holy instant. We practice it until it becomes our life, until it becomes our constant, habitual state of mind. 

The holy instant is an experience of grace and stillness.

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.

Thank you all so much for your newsletter. It has inspired me to change my perspective on life, and enabled me to inspire others to instill some goodness in the heart, while showing others that forgiveness is the perfect remedy for healing the pain of the heart, and that only love can bring happiness to the spirit and soul.

Jose Anthony Colon
Crescent City, California



I want to thank you for your help in the articles, books, and the newsletter that I have been receiving for years. They have been inspirational and very helpful in my own individual spiritual path with *A Course in Miracles*.

Robert J. O'Connor
Holbrook, New York



I just wanted to communicate to you my appreciation for the Circle and its value to me on my spiritual path. I see each of you as my teacher and I especially appreciated and benefited from Issue #41 of *A Better Way*. What a great issue. Every one of the articles had cogency and seemed to offer insights and guidance that were especially apropos to where I am on my spiritual path. Have no doubts that your efforts are helpful to those on the quest and that you are successfully achieving your mission.

Lucien Rose
Plano, Texas



We received a number of messages in response to Robert's article, "This Is My True Church," and Greg's Q & A on the Great Rays, both recently posted on our website (www.circleofa.com):

Today was the first day I went online to search for an *A Course in Miracles* site. I was curious to see what was out there. I found Robert Perry's article "This Is

My True Church" and I was truly surprised. How can any of us read and study ACIM and not know that we are here to perform miracles? Yes, perform *miracles*! I know the thought is frightening to those with self-doubt. Either Jesus is the author of ACIM or he is not. The Course is very simple. Don't try to intellectualize love. You cannot. Just remember, no one is a stranger or you are a stranger to yourself and you have forgotten God. See love in yourself and in others and let the power of the Holy Spirit guide you in becoming a "true" healer.

Christina
By e-mail



I just finished reading "This Is My True Church." Thank you.

I started studying the Course twelve years ago when my husband was diagnosed with an incurable cancer, and I went back to it a few years after he died. While it helped with learning how to give unconditional love, I found it to be lacking in discussions and actual service to the poor and the outcast.

I have been drawn to and finally called to fulfill this service mission full-time, and as I did, I also went on a search of like-minded people. Except for a few people, I have not found the so-called New Age groups to engage in much service work—unlike the Christians I have encountered. I have opened a nonprofit agency and I primarily teach self-empowerment and self-love to clients of nonprofit organizations—homeless women, abused women, homeless youth, caregivers, cancer patients, and others who feel outcast. I also work with their staff to enrich their work. I would welcome an opportunity to engage in a discussion group or perhaps a workshop at the Circle of Atonement.

Thank you again for your article and your insight.

Janet Bauer
By e-mail

Many thanks for the article on the Great Rays. It lifted me out of a dark place.

Sarah Maguire

By e-mail



We received the following regarding the war in Iraq (which had not yet taken place when this was written):

Re: A solution to end all wars

Undoubtedly it is good to be informed. Undoubtedly there is a place for trying to change other people's minds. I support doing everything within our power to make our voices heard to prevent war in Iraq, but I wonder if there is an even more effective approach to the problem of wars and rumors of wars. Suppose it is all about you changing your mind? You may say, "I don't need to change my mind; I know I don't want war." But perhaps there is a solution to the problem which does have to do with you directly. What if your mind really were all-powerful?

I have been told that I was created with all the power and grandeur of God Himself. Perhaps it is worth

focusing on how to realize our God-given power. Using the "hundredth monkey" theory, if enough of us held the truth that we are all-powerful, if enough of us determined to use that power in the best interests of the whole, then soon everyone, including Bush and Hussein and North Korea's leader, would simply find that they could no longer sustain their selfish interests. If enough of us were motivated to dedicate our lives to the truth that our minds are powerful enough to change the world's course for the better, perhaps we stand a chance at actually seeing some real results from all our worthy efforts.

We don't have to be content to merely prevent a war. Let's aspire to end suffering for all humanity forever. Imagine a world without pain, without lack, without death. That is the world God created for us. That is the world we can manifest by focusing on the possibility that we are as powerful as God created us. God did not change His mind, so now we need only change ours to be restored to our truth.

Yaani Drucker

Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin

We Can Be Wrong

by Robert Perry

Last year I was talking to a fellow Course teacher, and he mentioned how ironclad my views sound in print. He said that what I write—and I think he was also including writings from other teachers at the Circle—sounds so well researched and well argued that there seems to be no room for error or for discussion. In a way, I could understand what he was saying. We do have a great deal of confidence that our views are roughly accurate. The basic shape of our model of the Course, though constantly growing richer and undergoing change on the detail level, has become increasingly confirmed in our minds.

Yet I was also somewhat taken aback to hear what he

had to say, for a couple of reasons. First, because we have often been told by people that they appreciate how we qualify our statements and how we admit that we have changed our minds. Second, because we ourselves put a high value on having open-ended views, on learning new things about the Course, on revising old views, and on admitting that we at times have been wrong. Speaking for myself, even though my basic picture of the Course has stayed roughly intact, new themes are constantly being gathered into it—some of them central—and old themes are constantly being clarified and revised. The level of flux is such that, once something I have written is more than

We put a high value on having open-ended views.

six months old, I often wish that I could rewrite it. In addition to revising my understanding of various Course themes, I have changed my interpretation of a long list of Course passages.

For example, I used to believe that all four kinds of practice in the Workbook (morning and evening quiet time, hourly remembrance, frequent reminders and response to temptation) finally came together in Lesson 153, after which they stay together for the rest of the Workbook. For this reason, one year we threw a “Lesson 153 party,” celebrating the fact that we had reached this important point where all of the Workbook’s pistons are firing, so to speak. I must admit that I felt embarrassed when, upon closer inspection, I realized that all four kinds of practice really only came together almost fifty lessons later in Review VI. I got a fair amount of razzing for that one.

I have now gone through three distinct understandings of “Rules for Decision,” the section in Chapter 30 of the Text where we are told to repeat these lines to ourselves:

*At least I can decide I do not like
what I feel now....*

And so I hope I have been wrong....

I want another way to look at this....

*Perhaps there is another way to look
at this.*

What can I lose by asking?

(T-30.I.8:2, 9:2, 11:4, 12:3-4)

At first I thought we are supposed to repeat these lines whenever we were upset about a particular situation. Then I thought we are supposed to repeat them when we find ourselves having a general resistance to asking the Holy Spirit for guidance. Finally, I realized that we are supposed to repeat them when we are unwilling to ask the Holy Spirit about a *particular* situation, one in which we are attached to a certain course of action and afraid the Holy Spirit will cause us to change our plans.

I have probably made the most about-faces on the subject of special relationships. At first I accepted the conventional wisdom that under the generic heading of special relationships there were two kinds of such relationships: special love and special hate. This was

reflected in my 1992 booklet on special relationships, where I had chapters on both special hate and special love. Slowly, however, I realized that all the references to special relationships, when read in context, are really about special *love*, and that there is only one very brief reference to special hate in the sense in which we normally use the term (as an overtly antagonistic relationship). This meant that there really isn’t this umbrella idea of special relationships under which are two sub-categories: special love and special hate. With the exception of one brief, anomalous reference to special hate, the Course really only talks about *one* category: special love. Since deciding this, I’ve had two smaller about-faces. First, I became persuaded by one of our teachers that the one reference to special hate is really talking about special love (since, after all, special love is actually hate). Then, after a few years on that position, I did a close study of the passage in question and went back to my earlier position: the passage *is* talking about special hate in the commonly understood sense. As you can imagine, I’m tired of changing my mind on this one.

The point is: our minds change a lot around here. If you were to attend my classes, for instance, you would hear me talking frequently about new discoveries I have made or old views I have revised.

While admitting such things obviously makes me look less than perfect, I see it as a crucial expression of the essential relationship that should exist between the Course and an interpreter. In particular, the interpreter needs to always allow for potential distance between his *interpretation* of a thing and the thing *in itself*. This is true when one is interpreting anything, but is especially true in this case, for the Course quite simply towers above our minds. It is a vast, radical, original, exacting, and multileveled teaching. Let me explain what I mean by each one of these terms:

Vast: there are literally thousands of themes circulating around in the Course. It would be impossible for any one person to be familiar with them all.

Radical: all of the Course’s themes contain a reversal of

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how we commonly see things. As a result, our minds will unconsciously soften their radical edge, taking them off their heights and dragging them down closer to how we normally think.

Original: the Course does echo many ancient ideas, yet it also strikes out in bold new directions. Our minds, with their tendency to interpret the new in light of the old, will easily slant the Course so that it sounds just like the wisdom we have soaked up from so many other sources.

Exacting: the author has a razor-sharp mind; when he speaks, he knows exactly what he means. He is not fuzzy about what he is trying to say. If, in interpreting a particular statement of his, you miss the strike zone by just an inch, then you may be in the ballpark, but you are not right on target.

Multileveled: even if you understand a statement more or less accurately, there are always depths to it that remain hidden from view, depths that only come out when you set that statement next to related statements from elsewhere in the Course.

As an interpreter, my job is to honor the Course as it is. Yet given what it is, I am simply not going to be able to do that perfectly. It is too vast, too radical, too original, too exacting and too multileveled. There is always going to be some distance between my interpretation of it and what it really is. Even if my understanding of a certain passage is more or less accurate, that understanding will not perfectly reproduce what the author had in mind when he dictated that passage. It is just not possible. It is as if I am drawing a sketch of a mountain. I may have got the basic shape of the mountain more or less correct in my sketch, but it will not be perfect, and there will be levels of detail on the mountain—rocks, trees, leaves, animals, insects—that do not show up in my sketch at all. And that is a best-case

scenario. There are times when I will draw that pyramid-shaped mountain to look more like a dome.

This is how I see my interpreting of the Course. I do my utmost to draw the mountain accurately. I really do put everything I have into it. But I know that at best my drawing is a rough approximation—it is not the mountain—and so I do a lot of erasing and redrawing along the way. That, in fact, is why I have confidence in my views; I have total faith in my willingness to redraw them in response to the true shape of the mountain.

Because there will always be this distance between my understanding of the Course and the Course itself, it is crucial that I openly admit to the distance. Otherwise, I will lead people to believe that the Course is identical to my partial, imperfect understanding. Now they will think the Course is contained within the small set of themes with which I am familiar; they will have no clue of the thousands of themes that are really there. They will think that when they get my watered down views they are really getting the undiluted Course. They will nod when they hear me making the Course sound like their favorite spiritual wisdom, not realizing that it doesn't really sound like that at all. They will think that my inaccuracies are the absolute truth, especially if I repeat them often enough. And they will think the Course is no deeper than the wading pool of my understanding,

having no idea of the oceanic depths that are really there. In short, they will think that the vast, majestic mountain is nothing more than my clumsy little sketch. And if my whole role is to honor that mountain *as it is*, then I have failed, haven't I? How much better would it be for me to tell them, "Look, I've tried to draw the mountain as best I can, but my drawing does not even begin to do justice to the stunning and humbling beauty of the real thing." That is why we at the Circle believe it is so important to admit that we can be, and often are, wrong. 🌿

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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

An Invitation to Join with Us

If you have benefited from the materials, programs, and services of the Circle of Atonement and would like to help us fulfill our role with *A Course in Miracles*, we invite you to consider joining the Friends of the Circle. Over the years, the Friends' financial assistance, spiritual support, words of appreciation and encouragement, as well as the relationships we have developed, have brought us many blessings and much joy, and have been instrumental in our fulfilling our vision and mission statement (see opposite).

Benefits

In addition to offering you the opportunity to join with us in our vision, contribute to our work, and experience being an active part of our Circle family, your annual membership of \$180 includes:

- **Four issues of our quarterly newsletter, *A Better Way*;**
- **20% off Circle books, tapes, workshops, and retreats;**
- **90% tax-deductible donation;**
- ***Friends of the Circle* newsletter and updates**, keeping you up to date with the life and work of the Circle;
- **Support** in your study, practice, and extension of the Course's teachings;
- **Special materials** from workshops and classes;
- **Feedback forms** for sharing your ideas and concerns.

To Join

- Tell us about yourself and why you want to join the Friends;
- Take a few moments to silently join with us in purpose;
- Send us your initial contribution for a full year (\$180 U.S.) *or* for the first quarter (\$45 U.S.).

You may join:

- 1) through our website** (www.circleofa.com - "About the Circle")
- 2) via e-mail** to: info@circleofa.com (please include your credit card number and its expiry date)
- 3) by regular mail;** send your request, along with payment, to:
The Circle of Atonement, P.O. Box 4238, West Sedona, AZ 86340.

Donations: Contributions above the annual membership fee are gratefully received, both for our general operating fund, as well as for special projects as they arise.