

# A Better Way

A NEWSLETTER FOR STUDENTS OF A COURSE IN MIRACLES / THE CIRCLE OF ATONEMENT / AUGUST 2005 / ISSUE 52

## Does *A Course in Miracles* Commit the “Sins of Scripture”?

by Robert Perry

I am currently reading a powerful and provocative book entitled *The Sins of Scripture*, by John Shelby Spong.<sup>1</sup> We are used to hearing of sins *against* scripture, but the sins *of* scripture, the scripture’s *own* sins? One might assume that only an outsider, trying to tear down Christianity, would write such a book. Yet far from being an outsider, Spong is all the way on the inside. He was the Episcopal Bishop of Newark for many years, before retiring in 2000. He remains a believing Christian, though one who speaks out passionately against many elements of his own tradition. Spong’s claim about the Bible can be boiled down to three points.

1. He says that the Bible is littered with what he calls “texts of terror,” texts that have been used to justify overpopulation, destruction of the environment, oppression of women, hatred of homosexuals, abuse of children, and anti-Semitism. He quotes, “If a man lies with a male as with a woman...they shall be put to death” (Leviticus 20:13), which has been used to justify persecution of homosexuals. He quotes, “Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man” (1 Corinthians 11:9), which has been used for centuries to keep women “in their place.” And he quotes, “Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you beat him with a rod, he will not die” (Proverbs 23:13), which has led to generations of child abuse in the name of God.

2. He claims that the Bible is not the Word of God, but the product of human authors bound by their culture. Thus, attitudes against women, for example, are not inspired by God but are simply the product of the “tribal mentality” of the ancient cultures which produced the Bible. When this tribal mentality is elevated to the position of God’s will, it stands in the way of natural historical progress.

Like all other peoples, the writers of these sacred scriptures could escape neither their limitations in knowledge nor their place in history. Because of the advance in scientific learning, however, the attitudes, prejudices and ignorances of the past tend to die out as new ideas challenge old practices. This very normal and constant process is much more difficult to accomplish, however, if a cultural assumption is made along the way that the words in this particular book cannot be wrong because God is their author. So the limitations and the uninformed ignorance of ancient biblical authors have been quoted to perpetuate, throughout the history of those who call these writings sacred, the prejudices of antiquity. (p. 123)

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## WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT SAYS

*A Course in Miracles* is a spiritual path. Its purpose is to train us to work miracles—to accept and extend to others the shifts in perception that awaken us to God. It consists of three volumes, which signify the three aspects of its program:

◆ *Text* : Through studying the teaching, the Course's thought system first enters our minds.

◆ *Workbook for Students*: Through doing the practice, the Course's thought system penetrates more and more deeply into our minds.

◆ *Manual for Teachers*: Through extending our healed perception to others, the Course's thought system receives its final reinforcement and becomes the only thing in our minds.

The Course's message is that the source of our suffering is not the world's mistreatment of us, but rather our egocentric attack on the world. This attack convinces us that we have defiled our nature beyond repair, that we are irredeemably guilty. Yet the Course says true reality cannot be defiled; it is a realm of pure, changeless, unified spirit. This realization allows us to forgive the world's apparent mistreatment of us by recognizing that it did not actually occur. And as we see this forgiveness come forth from us—see that we are capable of something genuinely loving and egoless—we gradually realize that we never defiled ourselves. Thus we awaken to the untouched innocence of our true nature.

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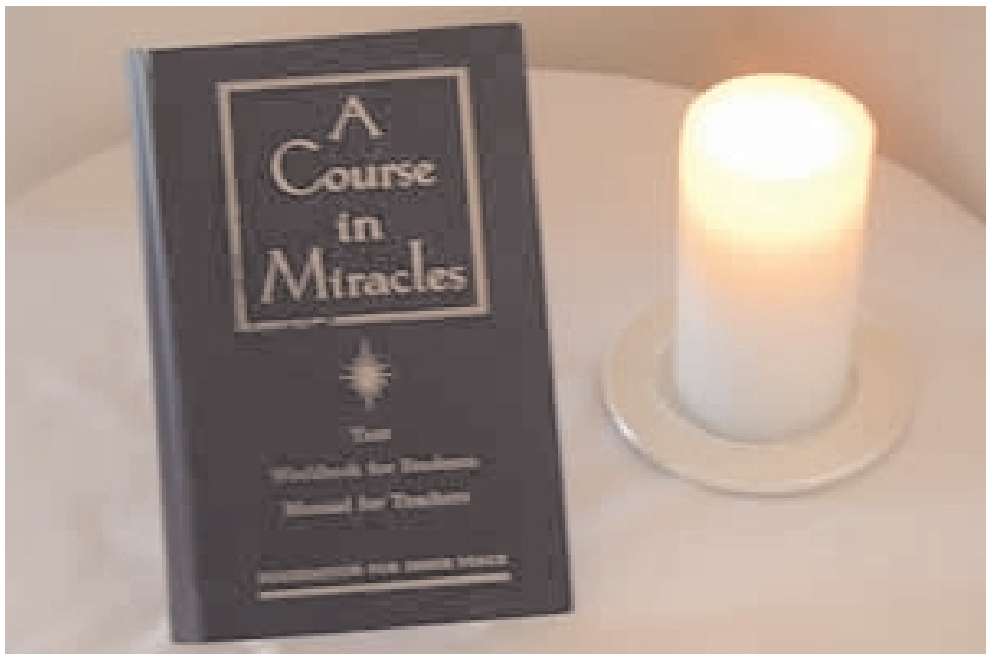
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3. The Bible is not the Word of God, says Spong, because there is no God as an active agent who tells us what He wants us to do. “There is no theistic God who exists to take care of you or me” (pp. 61-62). This obviously has sweeping implications for the notion of scripture as God’s Word:

Perhaps the strangest claim ever made for any written document in history is that its words are or somehow contain the “Word of God.” Such an assertion assumes that God is a very humanlike being who has the ability to speak to a particular people in a language they understand and that God is intimately invested in the minutiae of human life. Yet without any apparent embarrassment such claims have been made throughout Western history for what we call the holy scriptures of the Christian church. (p. 15)

Spong does believe in God, but (as best as I can figure out) he sees God as a kind of biological dynamism, as “the power that emerges within all of life” (p. 64). He traces the relentless evolution of life on our planet over billions of years, from single-celled organisms, to plants and animals, and finally to humans, and then says, “God’s spirit...is not a theistic, supernatural, alien-to-our-world deity, but the source of our common life” (p. 65).

Where does all this leave *A Course in Miracles*? For it too is a scripture, since a scripture is simply “a body of writings considered sacred or authoritative” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). And it too is considered to come from God in some sense. It doesn’t call itself the Word of God, but it does claim to be authored by Jesus, who, according to the Course, received its teachings from the Holy Spirit and ultimately from God (see W-pI.rV.In.8:1).

Where does this leave the Course? My response is that even though the Course is a scripture which claims to come from God, Spong’s critiques simply do not apply to it. Let me demonstrate what I mean by going through his three points.

### 1. Does the Course contain “texts of terror?”

Spong’s “texts of terror” are biblical texts that directly or indirectly justify some form of mistreatment—of women, children, homosexuals, Jews, or the environment. Spong, however, does perceive “minority voices” in the Bible which speak for another way. Chief among these voices is Jesus:

Jesus crossed the boundaries separating males from females and invited women into full discipleship....

Jesus also embraced the outcast. He touched the rotting flesh of the leper and gave him back his own humanity (Matt 8:2-3)...Jesus welcomed the touch of the woman with the chronic menstrual discharge, though by touching him in her uncleanness she rendered him unclean according to the Torah. Jesus stood between the woman taken in the act of adultery and her accusers (John 8:1-11). No sinful deed made anyone ultimately rejectable, he said, certainly not worthy of death....

...He expanded the concept of humanity to include both our enemies and the objects of our prejudice and scorn (Luke 17:16). He called on his followers to love their enemies (Matt 5:43) and to be willing to let their enemies love them (Luke 10:29-37). (pp. 291-292, 293-294)

Jesus, in other words, stands for the opposite of those texts of terror. Rather than condoning the mistreatment of those who are different from us, he called us to grant ultimate regard to everyone, especially those usually considered “other.”

This is the voice I hear in the Course, not as one of its many voices, but as its only voice. At the heart of the Course lies Jesus’ ancient vision of humans as infinitely worthy children of God, regardless of their social status, lifestyle, morality, or treatment of us. The Course has taken this essential insight and expanded it into a complete path of transformation, which includes a profound metaphysics, sophisticated psychology, and a multifaceted system of spiritual practice. Yet all this complexity boils down to the simple idea that seeing and treating people as Jesus did is the key to our own spiritual liberation. In *this* scripture, then, there are no texts of terror.

### 2. Is the Course a product of human authors bound by culture?

The most natural assumption, of course, is *yes*—the Course must be a human product. It has been suggested that the Course is simply the result of Helen Schucman’s brilliance, infused by a childhood sense of the miraculous, and informed by contact with Catholicism, Christian Science, and Theosophy. Yet of all the books in the world, I believe there are genuine problems with ascribing a human origin to *A Course in Miracles*.

The most immediate problems lie in Helen’s own relationship with the Course. Based on all that we know, she really was a barely willing scribe for material that simply appeared in her head, material that was deeply threatening to her personal outlook and material that she never fully embraced. She later claimed that at the time she knew nothing about the Eastern and Western mystical concepts that appeared in the Course. And Patrick Miller, author of *The Complete Story of the Course*, states, “There is little evidence of ‘new thought’ or metaphysical schools exerting significant influence on Schucman before the tran-

scription of the Course.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet this is only the beginning of the problems with the idea that the Course had a human origin. To me, the biggest problems lie within the Course itself. In its pages I find a simply astonishing independence from the universal process of authors being influenced from without. The works that humans produce quite naturally soak in popular currents of thought as well as rely on the past development of thought. To put this more simply, we are all profoundly influenced by our culture. We are influenced by what everyone believes around us and by the great thinkers who went before us. We, quite simply, are culture-bound. This is an inescapable trait of human authorship. This, in fact, is how Spong identifies the Bible as a human product. He makes the obvious observation that the biblical authors were expressing currents of thought prevalent in their culture. That’s what humans do.

But that is not what the Course does. It strikes me as completely independent of cultural currents, be they those of the 60s and 70s (when it was written), the twentieth century, the modern era, or any time in history, for that matter. In an age of relativism, the Course is firmly grounded in absolutes, and calls the popular wisdom that “the truth is different for everyone” (T-23.II.2:1) the first law of chaos. In an age of empowerment, in which psychology, spirituality, and even religion all seem joined on the idea of empowering the self to get the love, success, and material abundance it wants, the Course wants to dismantle the self we think we are, and free us from our enslavement to love (as we define it), success, and material abundance. In a scientific age, the Course contains not a shred of science. While the rest of us are marveling at the physical universe, the Course is calling it “a dismal alcove separated off from what is endless” (T-29.VIII.7:4). While the rest of us speak in awe of the big bang, the Course calls the moment when time and space began “the time of terror” (T-26.V.9:1, 13:1; T-27.VII.12:4). Can you imagine anyone in our culture calling the big bang “the time of terror”? While other spiritualities are rushing to get cozy with science and to laud the importance of the physical world, the environment, the body, and the brain, the Course is saying that the physical world is an illusion, the physical environment is a massive dance of death that contradicts God’s Will, the body is “an isolated speck of darkness” (T-20.VI.5:2), and the brain is far too tiny to perform real thought (W-pI.92.2).

Just to clarify: the Course doesn’t encourage us to treat the world, the environment, the body, or the brain disrespectfully. It encourages us to see all living things, not just humans, as divine Sons of God. Certainly if we actually did this, we would find ourselves treating the environment differently. And it teaches us to use all forms, especially our own body, as instruments for the communication of love. Yet even while teaching this, it refuses to grant either divine origin or genuine reality to any physical form. And it sees natural processes as essentially obeying the laws of death.

The Course also strikes me as not relying on what human traditions and humanity’s great minds have developed. This is a dramatic and risky claim, but let me explain my reasons for saying this. First, even though the Course will often agree with history’s great minds, it will just as readily disagree, frequently offering completely new answers to age-old questions. Second, and perhaps more significantly, the Course will set forth highly developed conceptual systems around issues that have received little or no attention.

For example, Christian theologians have discussed the meaning of the crucifixion for two thousand years. The traditional interpretation, of course, is that Jesus died as a blood sacrifice to pay off our sins. The Course completely rejects this view, saying instead that Jesus died as an extreme example of forgiveness and defenselessness in the face of attack. In this view, his death was a real-life demonstration of his own radical teachings. This seems to fall within the outlines of what has been called the “moral exemplar” theory (the least popular of the three main theories of Atonement), yet it also seems to be a boldly original version of that theory.

Much less attention has been given by theologians to the resurrection. Roman Catholic theologian Claude Geffré lamented, “As strange as it may seem, the resurrection of Christ, which sums up all of Christianity, has still not been the object of any exhaustive reflection within dogmatic theology.”<sup>3</sup> Yet this lack hasn’t hampered the Course, for its theory of the resurrection is just as powerful and original as its theory of the crucifixion. In its view, the resurrection was the definitive demonstration that attack can have no effect on the truth of who we are. This notion of the powerlessness of attack was the very idea that enabled Jesus to be forgiving and defenseless in the crucifixion. Thus the Course wraps both crucifixion and resurrection into a single coherent interpretation. Further, when the Course refers to the Atonement, it is actually referring to the *resurrection*, not the crucifixion, for in its view it was Jesus’ full awakening in the resurrection that opened the way for all of us to awaken to God. This is an extremely original claim, one which flies in the face of the universal equation of the Atonement with the crucifixion.

In its views on the crucifixion and resurrection, therefore, the Course certainly does not appear to be relying on the contributions of Christian theology. Those contributions simply do not seem to be its starting point in any way. Where theologians have shared universal assumptions, the Course is free to go its own way. Where theologians have neglected certain issues, the Course’s views are just as highly developed.

And this is what I find to be true whenever the Course speaks, on whatever topic. You see it echoing the insights of great thinkers, but you also see it going its own way, stepping outside universal assumptions, offering completely original insights,

and putting forth sophisticated answers where no one has even been asking questions. And as it does all this, it stays consistent. The quality of its thought stays consistently high, and its views on countless topics somehow manage to stay consistent with each other.

The picture that comes to mind is that human authors have to get around in cars which are confined to roads, roads that someone built. The roads are the paths of thought laid down by a culture, by its popular ideas, its influential thinkers, and its enduring traditions. Most authors stick to the wide, well-traveled roads that run through populated areas and are often jammed with other cars. However, the more original ones get away from the crowds and up into the mountains, into higher pathways of thought, where they find the roads less traveled. The truly great ones have four-wheel drive vehicles which can get off the road altogether and push even further up the mountains toward their peaks. Yet even these can push only so far off of an existing road. Even the great ones are constrained by what human culture has already laid down.

As I read the Course, it seems to me that it is outside this system entirely. It is not confined to the road system that we have built. Rather, I see the Course as an airplane, flying at a constantly high altitude, whether it is above plains or above mountains, and flying in its own direction, not having to follow the twists and turns of the roads below. In other words, the Course, in my opinion, is completely unbound by culture, and so is not a product of human authorship. The Course does use cultural forms (for example, literary forms like iambic pentameter), and does so masterfully, yet it appears to be coming from a point *beyond* culture, and using those forms simply to reach those still *within* culture.

To the modern and postmodern ear, this can sound like lunacy, for it simply cannot be true. Yet, even though such a claim can never be proven, I believe that the more that humanity deeply investigates the Course, the more credible and indeed probable such a claim will become.

### 3. Is there a God who can speak to us?

Spong's final objection to the Bible being the Word of God is that God cannot speak. There is no God who has a will for human affairs, let alone who is able to express that will. If there was, how do you explain this God's failure to rescue people in their time of need? "Ask the Jews," says Spong, "where the God who could split the Red Sea was when they were being marched into Hitler's crematoriums during the Holocaust" (p. 62).

Yet how can Spong be so confident that there is no God who can speak to us? True, the theist's position has to explain the apparent absence of God stepping down and influencing human affairs (something the Course does quite nicely by seeing the world as our dream, which God can only enter with our permission). Yet Spong's position has to explain the apparent *presence* of that very thing. For there are events in this world in which, against all the odds, God appears to show up. There are events in which God appears to speak to us. *A Course in Miracles* is one of those events. The story of its origin and the content of its pages convey the overwhelming appearance that this book is the result of an activity from beyond the human, reaching down to offer us a better way.

### Conclusion

Bishop Spong's criticisms of the Bible as the Word of God are well taken. Although I myself believe that parts of the Bible are Holy Spirit-inspired, I see the Bible for the most part as a very human product. And though I believe it has given the world incalculable gifts, I also find it impossible to deny that it contains many "texts of terror," texts which, as Spong says, "have been quoted throughout Christian history to justify behavior that is today universally recognized as evil" (p. 18).

Yet in my mind this does not mean that we should do away with the concept of a scripture that is the Word of God. It may yet be that there are instances in which God speaks to us, in which He speaks from outside the bigotry of human culture, in which He speaks only of love. I remain undeterred in the conviction that my scripture is one such instance.

...

1. John Shelby Spong, *The Sins of Scripture: Exposing the Bible's Texts of Hate to Reveal the God of Love* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005). All page number references in parentheses are from this source.
2. D. Patrick Miller, *The Complete Story of the Course: The History, the People, and the Controversies Behind 'A Course in Miracles'* (Berkeley: Fearless Books, 1997), p. 33.
3. Claude Geffré, *A New Age in Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1974), p. 1.



**Robert Perry** has authored, or co-authored with Allen Watson, nineteen books on *A Course in Miracles*. He is an internationally recognized authority on the Course, and has traveled extensively.

# From Monkey Mind to the Mind of God

## *Our Real Thoughts and How We Can Find Them*

by Greg Mackie

Have you ever watched your mind and noticed how wild and crazy and seemingly uncontrollable your thoughts can be? I have, and it's not a pretty picture. The Buddhists have a name for the mind that produces all this insanity: "monkey mind." They say the mind is like a monkey furiously leaping about—not just any monkey, but a drunken monkey stung by a scorpion. I'm sure many of us can relate to this description. At times, it seems impossible to settle our thoughts down and find that precious inner peace we yearn for.

Fortunately, the Course tells us there is an alternative to these crazy monkey mind thoughts: our real thoughts. These thoughts *will* bring the peace we yearn for. What are our real thoughts? In the revised and expanded edition of Robert's Course glossary, now titled *Glossary of Terms from 'A Course in Miracles,'* Robert defines them as follows:

The thoughts we think with God, joined with His Mind. Our current thoughts are meaningless and are not actually real. They bear no relation to our real thoughts. In thinking them, we are not actually thinking. These thoughts cover over our real thoughts, which lie unchanged within the mind we share with God. In Course meditation, we sink past our unreal thoughts in order to experience our real thoughts. These thoughts will tell us that we are saved. And they will show us the real world.

In this article, I want to expand on this definition. I will describe our current thoughts and our real thoughts as the Course depicts them, and then offer some Course-based instructions for finding our real thoughts. I hope this will shed some light on this confusing topic and help us make the inner journey from monkey mind to the Mind of God.

### What are our current thoughts?

In short, our current thoughts—the thoughts that normally occupy our minds—are the result of "trying to think without God" (W-pI.51.4:2). The following categories give us some idea of the nature of these thoughts:

#### *They are unreal and meaningless*

Our thoughts feel powerfully real and meaningful to us. It seems to us that they help us navigate our world, give our lives meaning and coherence, and define who we are. The Course, however, dismisses the usual contents of our minds in a truly stunning way. As Robert's definition points out, our current thoughts are totally unreal, so unreal that thinking them doesn't qualify as real thinking. Indeed, the Course says that "the mind is actually blank" (W-pI.8.2:4) when it is occupied with them. In short, they are literally nothing, which means that they are utterly meaningless. This is a strong emphasis early in the Workbook, which presents us with lessons like "These thoughts do not mean anything" (Lesson 4) and "My thoughts do not mean anything" (Lesson 10). Dizzy yet?

#### *They are chaotic and impermanent*

This is where we really see that drunken monkey stung by a scorpion. The Course describes our current thoughts as "senseless thoughts and mad ideas" (W-pI.45.7:1), "raucous shrieks and sick imaginings" (W-pI.49.4:3), and "frantic, riotous thoughts" (W-pI.49.4:4). They come and go at will. "They blow across [our] mind like wind-swept leaves that form a patterning an instant, break apart to group again, and scamper off" (W-pI.186.9:5). With such wild things screeching in our minds and pulling us this way and that all day, is it any wonder we find peace so elusive?

#### *They are the source of the illusory world of suffering and death*

Our thoughts produce our world. What could such insane thoughts produce but a world that is as unreal, meaningless, chaotic, and impermanent as they are? "The fact that I see a world in which there is suffering and loss and death shows me that I am seeing only the representation of my insane thoughts" (W-pI.53.5:4). Our monkey minds thus produce not only chaos within, but chaos without. Why, then, would we want to hang onto our unreal thoughts? Given the nightmare they've produced, what a relief it is to be told that there is an alternative to the madness.

## What are our real thoughts?

Robert's definition puts it succinctly: they are "the thoughts we think with God, joined with His Mind." This passage from Lesson 45 expands on this idea:

You think with the Mind of God. Therefore you share your thoughts with Him, as He shares His with you.  
They are the same thoughts, because they are thought by the same Mind. (W-pI.45.2:1-3)

We can get a better idea of what our real thoughts are by using the opposites of the categories we used to describe our current thoughts:

### *They are real and meaningful*

Our real thoughts are more than just our thoughts about reality: as thoughts we think with God's Mind, they *are* reality. The Course, in fact, says that "all creation lies in the thoughts I think with God" (W-pI.51.4:8). As Thoughts of God, our real thoughts are formless realities in Heaven (so they aren't verbal thoughts). And as Thoughts of God, they are more than just meaningful; they are meaning itself, since "He is the Source of all meaning" (W-pI.53.4:3). Our current thoughts are literally nothing, but the real thoughts we think with God are literally everything.

### *They are changeless and eternal*

When I read Course passages on our real thoughts (or on God's Thoughts, which *are* our real thoughts), the word that keeps popping up in my mind is *stability*. On those days when that monkey in my mind has drained a bottle of Jack Daniels and has sat on an entire nest of scorpions, just imagining the stability of my real thoughts is comforting. Our real thoughts are rocks that we can cling to in the raging sea of our world. They are utterly changeless and eternal, as all creation is. They are a firm foundation that we can depend upon to hold us up no matter how much shifting and shaking is happening on top of it. See if you can get in touch with the peace this stability brings as you read the following passage:

Under all the senseless thoughts and mad ideas with which you have cluttered up your mind are the thoughts that you thought with God in the beginning. They are there in your mind now, completely unchanged. They will always be in your mind, exactly as they always were. Everything you have thought since then will change, but the foundation on which it rests is wholly changeless. (W-pI.45.7:1-4)

### *They are the source of the real world of blessing and salvation*

Just as our unreal thoughts produce an insane world, our real thoughts show us the real world of perfect sanity. "I can...see a real world, if I look to my real thoughts as my guide for seeing" (W-pI.53.1:5). They have the power to transform the chaos we see within and without into a reflection of the peace of God. And because real thoughts are shared with all our brothers, this peace is not for us alone. Finding our real thoughts helps our brothers do the same, and when this happens, "the world my real thoughts show me will dawn on their sight as well as mine" (W-pI.54.3:7). In short, our real thoughts save us from the nightmare our unreal thoughts have wrought. They bring the blessed peace that all of us seek but so seldom find.

## How do we find our real thoughts?

As Robert's definition indicates, we find our real thoughts through practicing the forms of meditation taught by the Course. Our unreal thoughts are currently covering up our real thoughts, but through meditation we can slip past the unreal and contact the real.

We'll give this a try in a moment, but first I'd like to address a question that often comes up in the Circle's Workbook class: How will we know when we have found our real thoughts, especially since they aren't verbal thoughts? The Course doesn't tell us explicitly, but the way I look at it is this: our real thoughts are reality itself, so finding them means finding reality. Finding reality is the goal of all Course-based meditation. Therefore, I think the measures the Course gives us to evaluate the success of our meditation are the same measures we can use to determine whether we have found our real thoughts.

Among other things, the Course says you can tell your meditation has been successful if you feel a sense of "entering into light" (W-pI.44.10:1), "a sense of deep peace, however briefly" (W-pI.47.7:2), "a sense of being lifted up and carried ahead" (W-pI.69.7:1), and "a deep sense of joy and an increased alertness" (W-pI.74.5:4). I think we could safely add a sense of love, holiness, gratitude, oneness with God, or any other quality of reality as the Course describes it. Whenever we are feeling these things, however faintly, we are in contact with our real thoughts.

Now, let's try to find our real thoughts. The following brief exercise is based on Lessons 45 and 49, both of which give us a meditation in which we seek our real thoughts. The key to success in this, the Course tells us, is to bring a certain mindset to our meditation. We are to practice with *desire* for the goal, a sense of the *importance* and *holiness* of what we are attempt-

ing, and a feeling of *confidence* that we will succeed because it is God's Will and our true will that we do so. Lesson 45 captures the attitude we need to adopt in a beautiful image: "For this kind of practice only one thing is necessary; approach it as you would an altar dedicated in Heaven to God the Father and to God the Son. For such is the place you are trying to reach" (W-pI.45.8:4-5).

With this attitude in mind, it is time to "leave the unreal and seek for the real" (W-pI.45.4:2). Sit comfortably and take a few deep breaths to relax. Read over the following instructions from Lessons 45 and 49 and then carry them out as closely as you can. The idea is to enter into a time of silence, so you might want to determine the length of that time in advance and set an alarm to bring yourself out of it:

Begin...by repeating the idea to yourself ["God is the Mind with which I think"], closing your eyes as you do so....[then] tell yourself gently:

*My real thoughts are in my mind. I would like to find them.*

Then try to go past all the unreal thoughts that cover the truth in your mind, and reach to the eternal....

Listen in deep silence. Be very still and open your mind. Go past all the raucous shrieks and sick imaginings that cover your real thoughts and obscure your eternal link with God. Sink deep into the peace that waits for you beyond the frantic, riotous thoughts and sights and sounds of this insane world. You do not live here. We are trying to reach your real home. We are trying to reach the place where you are truly welcome. We are trying to reach God. (W-pI.45.6:1, 3-6; W-pI.49.4:1-8)

How did that exercise go? Did you find yourself leaving your chaotic thoughts behind and sinking into peace, however briefly? If you did, you have made contact with your real thoughts. If you didn't, don't despair; the Course promises that this form of practice will always be successful eventually, if we keep doing it on a regular basis. If we keep seeking our real thoughts with diligence and confidence, we cannot fail to find them. In the end, however long it takes, we will leave our monkey minds behind forever and gratefully return our awareness to our eternal home in the Mind of God.



*Greg Mackie is the author of How Can We Forgive Murderers? And Other Answers to Questions about 'A Course in Miracles.' He has been a student of A Course in Miracles since 1991, and a teacher for the Circle of Atonement since 1999. He writes Course Q & A's and a popular blog on the Circle of Atonement's website, and teaches the Circle's weekday Workbook class in Sedona, Arizona (along with Robert Perry). He sees his primary function as helping to develop a tradition of Course scholarship.*

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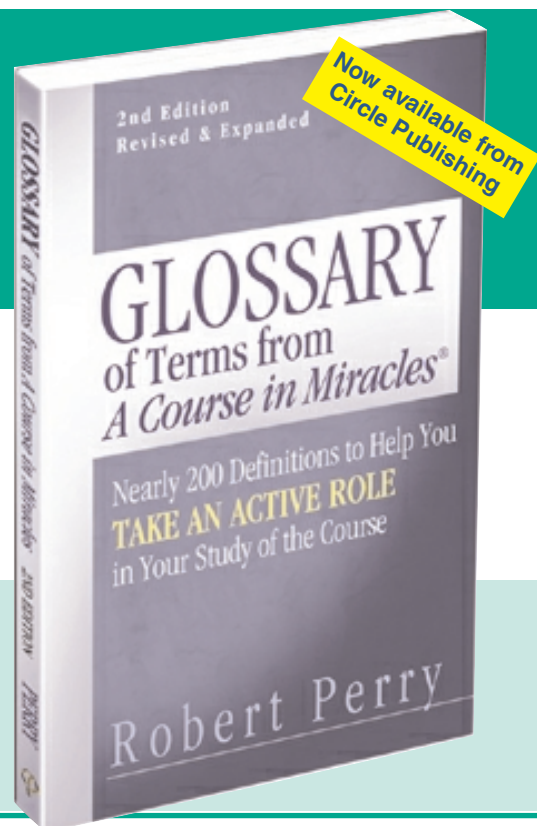
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*A Course in Miracles* uses language in a unique way, filling familiar terms with new meaning. This makes its language initially confusing, yet eventually transformative. This glossary clears up the confusion and helps the reader experience the full effect of

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# A New Way of Looking at Yourself

by Allen Watson

The following article is derived from my study of *A Course in Miracles*. This is what I hear the Course saying to me. I have put this in my own words, without direct reference to passages in the Course, but everything you read here is derived from the Course, processed through my mind. In writing these words I have felt *as if* Jesus were speaking to me, although I would not claim to have heard a voice, as Helen Schucman did. These are words I imagine he might be saying to me, so I have written them as if Jesus were speaking; you can decide for yourself how accurately I have “heard” him.

I have not yet fully realized these words for myself, but I know this is where I am heading. This is where we *all* are heading. In stepping back and letting him speak through me, I have felt as if I were finding the voice of my own heart. And that is the truth! Because the voice that speaks here speaks in all of us. I believe these words are a message from our true Self, addressed to me and to you. This, and only this, is what we truly are.

...

*There is nothing wrong with you. There is nothing bad about you, nothing twisted or spoiled. You really are the innocent child of God.*

You have looked at what you are, at thoughts you have had, at certain ways you have felt, and you have said, “You are a bad person!” You have thought what you saw in yourself was ugly and black, or pitiful and weak, or—worst of all—hopeless. You have judged yourself horribly and unmercifully.

I have good news for you. You were wrong!

It is so very, very hard to admit you were wrong, even about something as awful as this. Feeling this way about yourself is the only thing you know, the only *way of being* that you know. You identify with it. It is comfortable, somehow—even in its perverted sickness. Somehow you feel, “This is me. I’m at home with this. I’m afraid to even think I am anything else, anything better, because I would feel terribly, profoundly disappointed if I dared to hope, and then found out I’d been right in the first place. Better not to hope. Better not to dream that maybe, somehow, in some magical way, I might be innocent instead of guilty.”

And yet you *are* wrong. The guilt you feel is without cause; nothing happened. You didn’t sin. Not ever!

Oh, you did those things you remember. You said those awful words. The person you loved does indeed feel hurt, and hurt *by you*. We can’t deny that.

What we *can* deny, though—what I and the Holy Spirit and God the Father deny—is that those things you feel so guilty about *mean* what you think they mean.

They do not mean you are evil.

They do not mean that you have “sinned.”

They do not mean that you are cut off from God forever, or even for the tiniest tick of time.

They do not mean that you have somehow lost your innocence, which was given you as a gift of God in creation.

They do not mean that you are no longer a loving being.

They do not mean you are unworthy of love, unworthy of grace, unworthy of God’s gifts, unworthy of health or life or abundance.

They do not mean you are no longer entitled to joy.

They do not mean you are damned.

They do not mean that anything of value has been lost or hurt or damaged.

You have been seeing your own thoughts, words and actions and deeming them to be sin, to be proof that you are no longer a child of God. And you have been wrong. I *rejoice* to tell you, you have been wrong! What God created holy cannot be corrupted.

It’s all a matter of interpretation, you see.

These things that shame you, that make you feel so small, these dark secrets that you have never shared with another soul, or often wish you had never shared—you have looked at these things and judged them as “sin.” What a silly idea! They are not “sins” at all. That’s just a foolish notion you have had. A foolish notion that has played havoc with the world as you see it.

Because so much of what you have judged as dark and evil in yourself is unbearable—and there is so very, very much that you have judged in yourself—you have striven to project it outside yourself. You react violently when you think you see these things in other people because you are so very, very afraid to admit that those same dark thoughts exist in yourself. What you

do not like in another is what you are afraid to see in yourself.

But you are afraid for no reason. These things in you are not “sin.” That is only an interpretation that *you* have made, and it is an interpretation that is wholly unfounded. You have grossly undervalued yourself. You have misjudged yourself.

You attacked your brothers only because you believed you were deprived by them of something you needed. In reality you were never deprived at all; your attack came from ignorance. It was a mistake, not a sin. You can learn this about yourself by learning it about your brothers. When they appear to attack you, they are offering you a chance to bless yourself by blessing them—by seeing past the appearance of their ego to the reality of who they truly are. You feel lack in yourself because you insist on seeing lack in your brothers, and what you deny to them you deny to yourself.

You can’t love yourself as your ego sees you, but you can realize that the ego, and the ego’s picture of you, is not you at all. All you need to do is to deny the reality of this false, unloving self in your brothers. I have said, “Teach no one that he is what you would not want to be” (T-7.VII.3:8). As long as you continue to see evil in them, you will see it in yourself. Teach them, instead, of their abundance as God’s Sons, and you will remember your own abundance.

You have been caught up in an insane whirlwind of self-judgment and self-loathing. How very wrong you have been! You *are* the beautiful child of God. You *are* everything you have ever been seeking for. Why else would you seek it? Love is what you *know* to be right, what you *know* to be true, what you know to be good and holy and pure and awesomely beautiful. And you know that because *that is what you are*.

How awfully, terribly frustrating it has been all your life, to *know* what you *ought* to be, and to feel you never could *be* that! How sad, how tragic your life has felt!

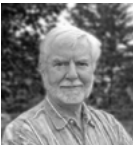
Dear brother! Dear sister! Rejoice! For you have made no more than a foolish mistake! You are not the pitiful being you thought you were. You are still God’s child. He is still your Father, and you are still just as He created you. Nothing has changed. You *can* be what you always knew you *should* be! You already are. You have never ceased being exactly that!

That you have pushed away love and recoiled from union only proves that you unconsciously believe in the reality of love and union. There are only two emotions, love and fear, and fear is nothing but a call for love.

Abandon your self-judgment. Let go of that self-doubt. Remove the crown of thorns and stop hammering in the nails; you are not guilty! You *are not* guilty! You do not deserve this crucifixion! God did not will this for you! You have chosen it for yourself. And it need not be!

You *still* have the power to choose to free yourself. You will never lose that power, no matter what you do, so I cannot feel despair or anxiety or even mild concern that you do not seem to hear me *now*. My joy is already full. I know that your hearing truth is inevitable. The nightmare can end the instant you choose to end it. And you *will* choose to end it, so my joy is already complete.

When you are able to look at every awful thing you have judged in yourself and see the truth about it—that it is *nothing but your confused mind calling for love*—you will be home. Your dark secrets are not sins. They are not weaknesses. They are not failures. They are your prayers from the heart, the evidence, the proof of your eternal innocence! They are the heart in pain over what it thinks it has done. They are the essence and flowering of life and love within you. They are not your damnation; they are your salvation. What you thought of as sins are in fact the proof that love still lives within you. They are the witnesses to the truth that love, in you, will never die.



*Allen Watson is a staff writer and teacher with the Circle of Atonement, and is the author, or co-author with Robert Perry, of several popular books on the Course, as well as numerous articles in Course magazines and newsletters. He is well known around the world for his helpful daily commentaries, which are on the Internet as well as in book form (A Workbook Companion, Volumes I & II). Allen is also internationally known as a speaker on the Course. His gifted and spirited writing and teaching help students to unlock the meaning of the Course for themselves.*

# What Does the Course Mean by “Heart”?

by Robert Perry

“Heart” is one of the most revered words in alternative spiritual circles. We speak of journeying into the heart, reconnecting with the heart, coming from the heart, being in our heart. The impression one gets from such usages is that there is this deep place in us that is the seat of emotions, of love, and even of God. In this place, there is no game-playing, no masks, and no being cut off from one’s feelings. There is instead the same simple directness of emotion that one finds in a child. There, we are not rationalizing our feelings away, we are just feeling them. Along with these notions often comes the sense that it is our modern, logical, mechanistic civilization that alienated us from this place in us, which is why we have to get back there, why we have to go on that twelve-inch journey from our *head* to our *heart*.

How does *A Course in Miracles* use the word “heart”? Does it use it in the way I just described? That is what I set out to learn when I was writing definitions for our revised *Glossary of Terms from ‘A Course in Miracles’* (which has just come out). I collected the 127 references to “heart” and its cognates (“hearts,” “heartbeat,” “heart’s”), and began to categorize them. The first thing that struck me was the tremendous variety in the Course’s usage of the term. It spoke of happy hearts, thankful hearts, quiet hearts, renewed hearts, tired hearts, hard hearts, heavy hearts. It spoke of hearts beating in hope or pounding in fear, of hearts arising, singing and even leaping. It spoke of opening our hearts to God, and of His Love blazing into them. It also spoke of the fear of hell being upon our hearts, or our hearts being held in an iron grip.

Trying to make sense of this dizzying variety, I felt I discerned three levels of heart. Those three levels became the skeleton on which I tried to hang all the details. Here is the definition I came up with:

## heart

The inmost center of one’s mind or oneself. It does not, in the Course’s usage, have connotations of feeling as opposed to thinking. In the Course, “heart” and “mind” are always paralleled and never contrasted (e.g., “Love cannot be far behind a grateful heart and thankful mind”—M-23.4:6).

1. Most references refer to the innermost center of one’s *separated* mind, the place that contains our most central thoughts and feelings. It contains what we *really* think, feel, desire, and value, as opposed to what we like to *believe* or *say* we do; these self-deceptions do not enter into our heart. Thus, the “prayer of the heart” asks for what we really want (even if what we want is things of the world), as opposed to what we *claim* we want. (“What do you ask for in your heart? Forget the words you use”—W-pI.185.8:2-3.) The heart is also where we carry the real experiential effects of believing in the ego. As a result, our heart tends to be tired, heavy, hard, and uncertain. Our heart holds hatred within it, feels terror striking at it, and feels the mark of death upon it. Yet the goal is for it to be transformed. We need to lay different thoughts on our heart, hold different goals to it. We need to become pure in heart, kind in heart. We need to open our heart to God and let Him come rushing in. Then, our heart can be renewed. It can be glad, thankful, at peace. Peace can shine out from it and onto others. It can be stirred, can sing, and be lifted up, and will finally leap into Heaven.

2. Underneath this changeable heart is what you might call our *true* heart, which has never changed since God created us. And so the peace of God still abides in this heart. The Word of God is written on this heart. And God Himself dwells within it.

3. Finally, the Heart of God is the inmost center of God. This is what we will enter into and disappear in when we awake. This is where we truly are now. This implies that, rather than being peripheral to God, we are at His very Center, in His very Heart.

The final two meanings are quite beautiful, I think. The second one reminds me of the use of “heart” that one often hears among students of Eastern spirituality—heart as the seat of the divine in us. However, I want to focus on the first one, since that is what the vast majority of Course references to “heart” refer to. The first definition speaks of the heart we experience on the conscious level, the heart that experiences changing emotions.

To begin with, notice that, in the Course, “heart” is not contrasted with “mind.” This is a major difference from conventional usage. There are eight Course passages which mention both mind and heart, and in every one of those, the two terms are paralleled. We can see this in these two passages:

My **heart** is quiet, and my **mind** at rest.

(W-pII.286.1:8)

What, then, can be his solace but what You are offering to his bewildered **mind** and frightened **heart**, to give him

certainty and bring him peace?

(W-pII.334.2:3)

Notice how heart and mind are paralleled, not contrasted. The heart is quiet, the mind is at rest. The mind is bewildered, the heart is frightened. In each case, the two are in a parallel state. The terms, in fact, are so parallel that that they are almost interchangeable. What exactly is the difference between “My heart is quiet, and my mind at rest” and “My *mind* is quiet, and my *heart* at rest?” Perhaps there is a difference, but it is not much.

The usual contrast between mind and heart continues to break down when we read the Course talking about *thoughts* in our heart:

This is how a man must **think** of himself in his **heart**.

(T-1.III.2:4)

Come unto Me, My children, once again, without such twisted **thoughts** upon your **hearts**.

(S-3.IV.6:1)

If mind and heart are virtually interchangeable, if our hearts can think and our minds can feel (as the Course also says), then what is the difference between heart and mind? *Is* there any? Actually, I think there is, even if the difference isn't particularly significant. The main usage of “heart” in the Course is that the heart is the central place in these confused, separated minds, the place that contains what is *really* going on in these minds, the place where we cannot lie about what we are truly thinking, feeling, and desiring. This is similar to the New Age heart, which is also a place where our feelings do not lie. In the Course, however, it is not a case of heart vs. mind, feeling vs. thought, with the former seen as holy and the latter as suspect. Rather, heart and mind go together, with the heart simply containing what the mind is truly thinking and feeling.

In our prayers, for instance, we may say that we only want forgiveness and love, but underneath that, our actual “prayer of the heart” may be for money, sex, and fame. Those may be the things we “cherish...within [our] heart” (W-pII.288.1:6). Similarly, when we entertain thoughts of the ego, we usually put a nice covering on them, making them appear reasonable and harmless. Yet at the core of each one is a hidden lump of fear and guilt. These lumps, stripped of their coverings, are stored in the heart. Consequently, we feel “terror striking at [our] heart” (W-pI.135.2:5), or feel “the mark of death upon [our] heart” (W-pI.191.6:5).

This is obviously a very different usage than the usual New Age one. For there, “heart” is always a positive word. There, the heart is an unreservedly positive place. Even when the heart is feeling something like grief or anger, it is still seen as a very good thing to be in the heart feeling those things. Here in the Course, however, “heart” is simply *central*. It is the central place in a mind whose contents can be either positive or negative. The heart, therefore, can be the dwelling place of ego or of the Holy Spirit. You can have “hatred in your heart” (S-3.IV.4:6) or love. And your heart can be tired and heavy, or can arise and sing.

This gives us a hint of where the Course is trying to take us. It wants to lead us to a *transformed heart*. It is not just about saying different words or entertaining new theories. It is about a genuine change of heart. It wants the thoughts we hold in our hearts to be truly different. It wants the desires we cherish in our hearts to be all about God. It wants us to become pure in heart, “kind in heart” (T-31.VI.6:9). In short, it wants our hearts to become *holy*. For once they are, they will be filled with joy (T-11.III.3:5) and gratitude (W-pI.190.11:2) and deep tranquility (W-pI.122.8:3). They will be raised “from dust to life” (W-pI.rV.In.5:4). They will “rise up and claim the light as theirs” (W-pI.168.4:3). They will welcome God, and He, in response, “will come rushing into” them (T-10.V.7:7). Finally, “your heart will be so filled with joy that it will leap into Heaven, and into the Presence of God” (T-11.III.3:5). How will this feel, we wonder? Jesus gives this tantalizing answer: “I cannot tell you what this will be like, for your heart is not ready” (T-11.III.3:6).

Interestingly, this usage of “heart” is very close to Jesus’ usage in the gospels. The following is from leading Jesus scholar Marcus Borg:

Jesus spoke frequently of the heart—of good hearts and bad hearts, hardened hearts and pure hearts. To us, the heart is primarily a physical organ and sometimes understood metaphorically as the “home” of feelings. But within ancient Jewish psychology, it had a different meaning. The heart was the self at its deepest center....

What matters [in Jesus’ teaching] is what kind of heart you have, that is, what kind of tree you are. And you cannot change the kind of tree you are by dealing only with the fruit. That would be like trying to change a thorn bush into a fig tree by hanging figs on it....

According to Jesus, what was needed was an inner transformation of the self at its deepest level. “Blessed are the pure in heart,” he said, “for they shall see God.” The fruit of an anxious heart, concerned about its own well-being, is bitter. What is needed is a new heart, a pure heart, for such a heart produces good fruit.<sup>1</sup>

What I find fascinating is that the Course’s usage of “heart” is so close to the usage of the historical Jesus and yet so far from the usage we often find in spiritual circles. In both the Course and the gospels, the goal is not to journey to, reconnect with, or “be in” a heart whose virtue is that it directly feels, without the constraints of thinking and social conditioning. Rather,

the goal is a transformation of heart, so that the heart goes from hateful, tired, and terrified to loving, joyful, and at peace. In the gospels and in *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus' goal for us is a new heart.



1. Marcus Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987), pp. 108-110.

## Volunteer Profile: Geoff Tischbein

*We are so grateful for the volunteers and staff at the Circle who give so generously of themselves to further the Circle's work. We thought Better Way readers might enjoy meeting some of these wonderful people. This month, we'd like to introduce you to Geoff Tischbein, one of our new office volunteers.*



Hello! My name is Geoff Tischbein and I just recently moved to Sedona from Colorado, where I had lived for thirty-four years. Having dabbled in *A Course in Miracles* for many years I decided it was time for deep immersion, and not wanting to venture out of the Southwest, Sedona and the Circle of Atonement seemed like the perfect opportunity. I think the Holy Spirit also may have had something to do with it!

I discovered the Course in 1988 after moving back to Montrose in western Colorado, from Fort Collins where I had been heavily involved with the Quaker community for eight years. Having first moved to western Colorado in 1971, I knew that Quakers living on the West Slope, as Coloradans refer to that part of the state west of the Continental Divide, were about as common as Eskimos in

Africa. I wasn't at all sure what I was going to do for a spiritual community.

But as "luck" would have it, my first week back I bumped into an old friend in the Ouray hot springs, Becky Lindsay, who had heard about the Course while at the Omega Institute in New York. She had just started a study group in Montrose and invited me to join. It was a small but dedicated group of spiritual seekers who were curious about this new path.

Fortunately I am a voracious reader and wasn't intimidated by the complexity of the text. Several in our group were of the same intellectual bent and we devoured the Course—albeit with frequent but diminishing bouts of indigestion! I found the Course to be the most eloquent explanation of Quaker theology I had ever come upon and absolutely loved it.

Then, in 2003, after retiring from twenty-seven years with the Colorado Division of Wildlife, I sojourned out to Oakland to take courses in Sacred Cinema at the University of Creation Spirituality. While there I got involved with the Community Miracles Center in San Francisco, where I met Tony Ponticello and Larry Bedini and the wonderful community they have inspired in the Bay Area.

They hold two "Miracle Experience" retreats yearly and it was at one of these retreats I met Robert Perry, who had been invited to be the guest speaker. I was familiar with Robert's writing—in fact, Becky and I would buy his booklet *An Introduction to 'A Course in Miracles'* by the case to give to people who would come to our study group. Robert told me about the Circle of Atonement and invited me to come to one of their retreats.

And so, last September, I took him up on his invitation. I had never been to Sedona and, I now realize, the Holy Spirit was gently pushing me into a more intense experience of the Course. The retreat was fabulous, the people I met were wonderful, and for the first time in thirty-three years, I felt beckoned to a place not in Colorado, but just as beautiful. There was not a shred of doubt in my mind that I was being led to move here. So I did!

That was this past spring. Since then I have taken advantage of every opportunity to get more immersed in the Course and believe me, there are many opportunities out here! One of the first teachings of the Course that impressed me was its emphasis on service. I feel very fortunate to be in a position where I can be of service to such a profound spiritual teaching through volunteering with the Circle of Atonement.

One of my favorite and most challenging quotes from the Course is in the "What Is Forgiveness?" section that opens Part II of the Workbook: "But he who would forgive himself must learn to welcome truth exactly as it is" (W-pII.1.4:5). I can't imagine anything more difficult or ultimately rewarding than *knowing* we are not these bodies, we truly are God's children, and that our eternal safety is guaranteed. The opportunity to be with others who are also dedicated to welcoming the truth is simply awesome. Failure is impossible!

## THE CIRCLE'S NEW LOGO UNVEILED



### CIRCLE OF ATONEMENT

Dedicated to *A Course in Miracles*

We have a new logo. This is the end of a search that has lasted literally for years. The problem was probably that I [Robert] felt that we had to have a logo that actually reflects the image of the circle of Atonement in the Text (T-14.V.7-9). Our first logo (which I drew) did that, but it was genuinely ugly and has been described as a bunch of little people in a spin-dryer. Everyone was happy when we stopped using it. Our second logo, the starburst, was just a bit too spare, even though it was designed to reflect the circle of Atonement image. Finally, Mick Phillips (who typesets books and newsletters for us) and I collaborated on a logo (with some help on color and lettering from Leif Weightman and input from Paul Nelson) that all of us are extremely happy with.

What I particularly like about this logo is that it is not only beautiful, but it truly reflects the Text's image of the circle of Atonement. That circle is a space inside which everyone is joined in the experience of God's peace and purity (T-14.V.8:2-4). We felt that a circle lit inside with celestial light would express this. In the circle stands Jesus, calling us to peace (T-14.V.9:4). This is why the light is cross-shaped, to subtly convey a sense of Jesus. But the cross is also a star, to get away from a traditional crucifix image and convey the Course's nontraditional, more light-filled view of Jesus. The circle is a nonexclusive one. It is not a private club. Everyone inside of it is engaged in reaching out to those who think they are outside, to draw them in (T-14.V.8:6). That is why the logo's circle does not have hard edges, but is more like a spiral, one which can be seen as either reaching out or drawing in.

...

## ROBERT'S TUESDAY CLASS NOTES AVAILABLE VIA E-MAIL

One of the Circle's most popular services these days is Robert's weekly class notes. Each Tuesday night here in Sedona, Robert teaches a class on a topic from the Course. Recent topics have included "Needs According to *A Course in Miracles*," and "Why Does the Course Say 'Son of God' So Much?" Some topics are familiar ones, and some are topics never before explored in the Course.

After each class, Robert will take the handout he produced for that class and fill it out with comments shared during the class discussion, adding additional comments of his own. Then, on Friday, he sends that set of notes out to an electronic list. The notes are ideal for group use because they include not only Course passages and commentary, but also discussion questions, writing exercises, and internal practices.

The service is free. If you are interested in signing up, just use this link: [www.circleofa.org/subscribeAll.php](http://www.circleofa.org/subscribeAll.php). Fill out the form on the bottom of the page this link takes you to and check the box next to "RPerry\_Notes."