

A Better Way

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Shadows on the Wall

How Would the Course Have Us Regard Modern Physics?

by Greg Mackie

The idea that modern physics proves or at least strongly supports a spiritual worldview is one of the pillars of alternative spirituality. Countless books on this theme have been written, from Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics* to Gary Zukav's *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* to Deepak Chopra's *Quantum Healing*. A movie exploring the possible connections between physics and spirituality—*What the @!\$%#* Do We Know?* or *What the Bleep* for short—was one of last year's surprise hits. In the minds of many, including Course students, modern physics and mystical spirituality are two peas in a pod, two windows into the same reality. More than one Course student has said to me that modern physics scientifically proves the thought system of *A Course in Miracles*.

But how would the Course itself have us regard modern physics? While it never discusses physics, does it offer any clues about what stance to take? I think it does. In this article, I will examine some of those clues and offer my answer to the subtitle question. In short, my answer is this: While exploring modern physics is fine if we find it helpful, we should be careful not to mix it into the Course's thought system, because it doesn't lead to the complete reversal of thought the Course is aiming at. The following points sum up my reasons for this answer.

Physics is never mentioned in the Course

The two great theoretical underpinnings of modern physics—relativity and quantum theory—have been around since the early twentieth century, so the Course's author certainly could have referred to them when it was scribed in the 1960s and 70s. Yet he never mentions physics, not once—in fact, he never mentions any physical science. If physics proves the Course's thought system, why doesn't the Course's author use that proof? The complete absence of physics in the Course shows that he doesn't consider it relevant to the Course's thought system—I think for the very reasons I'm presenting in this article.

This refusal to appeal to physical science for evidence or proof is truly remarkable. Physical science has become the ultimate arbiter of truth in our age. For that reason, any idea or movement that wants to be taken seriously today tries to find a

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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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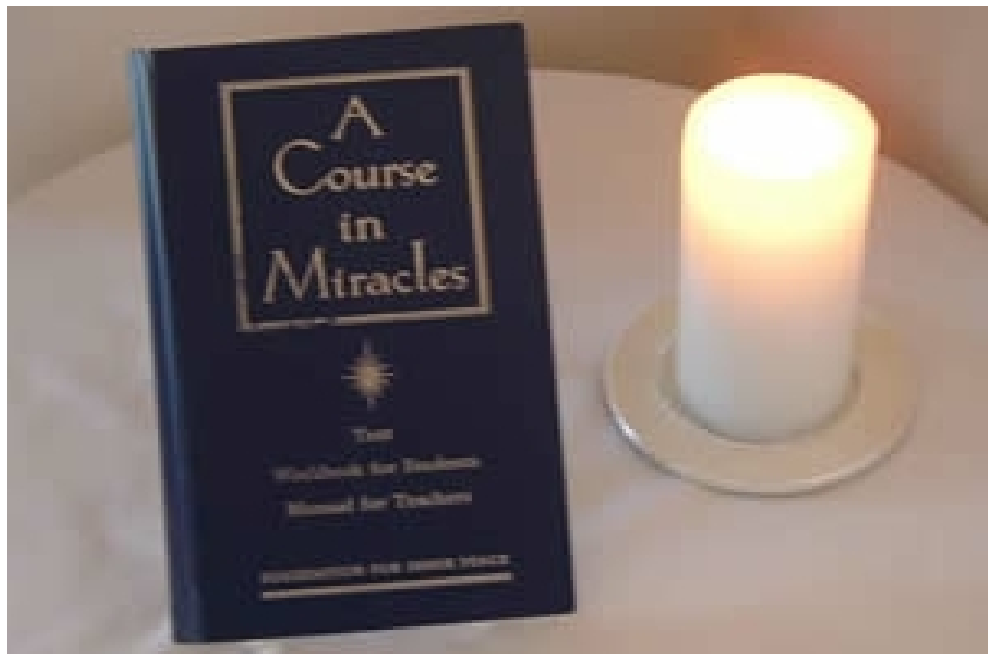
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way to ally itself with physical science. Religion and spirituality are no exception, as Tom Huston notes in a review of *What the Bleep* in the magazine *What Is Enlightenment?*: “Having our spiritual beliefs backed by science lends them some degree of legitimacy, however tenuous the connection.”¹ But the author of the Course isn’t playing this game at all. He displays a shocking independence from the current zeitgeist.

What’s also striking is the one science he does include in the Course: not any physical science, but the science of *psychology*. Sciences that describe how the physical world works are irrelevant, but the science that describes how the *mind* works is extremely relevant. The mind is what really matters, since in the Course salvation comes from changing the mind.

Physics can only describe the illusory physical world; it cannot reveal the reality beyond

Like all physical sciences, modern physics is necessarily limited to the domain it was designed to describe: the physical world. It cannot go beyond that domain. If, as the Course claims, the physical world is an illusion rooted in the error of separation, then physical science is the study of illusion or error, which will never reveal the reality the Course is trying to show us. The following Course passage actually refers to the structure of “individual consciousness,” but I’ve inserted “the realm explored by physics” because I believe the passage can just as easily be applied to that realm:

The structure of [the realm explored by physics] is essentially irrelevant because it is a concept representing the “original error” or the “original sin.” To study the error itself does not lead to correction, if you are indeed to succeed in overlooking the error. And it is just this process of overlooking at which the course aims. (C-In.1:4-6)

The idea that science cannot overlook illusion or reveal reality finds support from an unexpected source: the founders of modern physics themselves. The great scientists of the twentieth century who pioneered relativity and quantum theory—Albert Einstein, Werner Heisenberg, Erwin Schrödinger, Max Planck, Sir James Jeans, and Sir Arthur Eddington, among others—were in surprising accord on this point. They were virtually unanimous in claiming that their theories did *not* offer any proof or support for spirituality, and that what physics describes is only, in Eddington’s words, “a *shadow world of symbols*.”² They didn’t necessarily believe that the world is an illusion in the sense the Course teaches, but they did believe that physics by its very nature is incapable of coming into direct contact with reality, whatever that might be. Sir James Jeans expressed the prevailing view this way:

Many would hold that, from the broad philosophical standpoint, the outstanding achievement of twentieth-century physics is not the theory of relativity with its welding together of space and time, or the theory of quanta with its present apparent negation of the laws of causation, or the dissection of the atom with the resultant discovery that things are not what they seem; it is the general recognition that we are not yet in contact with ultimate reality. We are still imprisoned in our cave, with our backs to the light, and can only watch the shadows on the wall.³

Ironically, it was for this very reason that virtually all of these theorists ended up becoming spiritual mystics. They became mystics not because physics revealed ultimate reality to them, but because it *didn’t*. They needed something beyond physics to leave the shadows of the cave behind and enter into the light of reality.

Physics is neutral in itself; it cannot enable us to see a new meaning in things

Precisely because physics can only describe the play of forms in the physical world, it cannot say anything about the *meaning* of what we see. “Form is not enough for meaning” (T-14.X.9:3), and meaning is what the Course is all about. Perhaps the most important categories of meaning from the Course’s standpoint are those of “sin” and “holiness”: it wants to replace our perception of sin in the world with a new vision of the holy Christ in everything we see.

Physical forms are neutral and cannot reveal this new vision; therefore, physics is neutral and cannot reveal this new vision. To illustrate the point, I’ll slightly alter a Course passage once again. The following passage actually refers to the body, but I’ll replace all the references to “body” with a term from modern physics, the “quantum field”:

To see a sinless [quantum field] is impossible, for holiness is positive and the [quantum field] is merely neutral. It is not sinful, but neither is it sinless. As nothing, which it is, the [quantum field] cannot meaningfully be invested with attributes of Christ or of the ego. Either must be an error, for both would place the attributes where they cannot be. And both must be undone for purposes of truth. (T-20.VII.4:4-8)

In short, the quantum field and everything else described by physics is nothing and therefore inherently meaningless. Because this is so, physics cannot bring about the shift in perception from sin to holiness that is the goal of the Course.

Physics, when misused, can lead to ego empowerment instead of egoless extension to others

The very neutrality of physics means that it can be used for either the ego's or the Holy Spirit's purposes. It can produce an atomic bomb that destroys lives or an MRI scanner that saves them. But while physics can go both ways, I think that the way it is often presented in alternative spiritual circles, though sincere and well intentioned, can all too easily lead to empowering the ego.

While there was much that I enjoyed in *What the Bleep* (the wedding scene was a riot), in my opinion some of the material presented there displays this tendency. A major theme of the film is that the findings of modern science can empower you to “create your own reality” and thus get what you really want. Indeed, the most popular material in the film has turned out to be that of Dr. Joe Dispenza, who says, “I consciously create my day the way I want it to happen” by “infecting the quantum field.” The channeled entity Ramtha puts the icing on the cake by proclaiming, “*You are God.*”⁴

Now, I'm sure that if it is really possible to infect the quantum field, this ability could be used by the Holy Spirit (just as He can use things like psychic abilities—see M-25). But it is not difficult to see how the idea that *you* are God and *you* create your own reality can lead to ego empowerment. An emphasis on gratifying your own desires inevitably conflicts with the ego-transcending goal of the Course and mystical paths in general. Tom Huston puts it this way:

Mystical practice is traditionally aimed toward the mind-shattering revelation that there is actually only *one* reality and *one* self, and this revelation is said to liberate the individual from his or her attachment to personal desires. So if we're pursuing the manifestation of our desires by consciously manipulating the quantum field, and thereby attempting to re-create reality itself in our own image, how spiritual can that be, *really*?⁵

Good question. How can manipulating the quantum field to manifest our personal desires liberate us from our attachment to personal desires?

Oddly enough, though the new physics is often described as a “new paradigm” that will transform our minds if we really get it, this use of physics appears to be just one more version of the old ego paradigm. That paradigm says, “I am an autonomous self in an external world, and the way to happiness is through arranging the external world into a configuration that I prefer.” This use of physics leaves that paradigm entirely intact; all it does is promise great new magical powers that will enable me to arrange the external world much more effectively. To illustrate this, here's one more passage with a few word switches. The passage actually refers to a patient's attempt to empower himself through psychotherapy, but it is just as applicable to the quest for empowerment through physics:

The [manipulator of the quantum field] hopes to learn how to get the changes he wants without changing his self-concept to any significant extent. He hopes, in fact, to stabilize it sufficiently to include within it the magical powers he seeks in [physics]. He wants to make the vulnerable invulnerable and the finite limitless. The self he sees is his god, and he seeks only to serve it better. (P-2.In.3:3-6)

The Course offers a refreshing alternative to all this. You yourself are not God; rather, you are a beloved extension of a loving Father Who *is* God. You don't create your own reality; rather, you are as God created you, and your reality can never change no matter what you do. Happiness does not come from arranging externals into a configuration you prefer; rather, happiness comes from healing your perception that you are an autonomous self that needs to arrange externals.

Finally, I think one more thing that is vital to the Course gets lost in the shuffle when we focus on getting what we want through physics: the importance of selfless, loving extension to our brothers. This extension, according to the Course, is the most ego-transcending act of all, but we're not likely to do much of it if we're spending our time “attempting to re-create reality itself in our own image.” Where is the love in that? I can't imagine Mother Teresa trying to create the day she wants by infecting the quantum field. In sum, however well meaning we may be, getting caught up in the heady excitement of “creating our own reality” will tend to turn us in the direction of ego empowerment instead of egoless extension to others.

Physics does not lead to a complete reversal of thought

All of the previous points converge on this one, which is a paraphrase of a line in Section 24 of the Manual, “Is Reincarnation So?” (The paragraph and sentence references that follow are all from Section 24.) This section is especially pertinent to our topic because spiritual seekers' current fascination with modern physics is much like the fascination with reincarnation. Reincarnation, like physics, is a belief many people use to support or prove a spiritual worldview. What, then, is this section's counsel regarding reincarnation, and how can we apply that counsel to physics?

One thing this section makes clear is that it is perfectly fine to believe in and discuss reincarnation if you find it helpful. It says that the Holy Spirit will guide us in how to use any concept or belief in a way that leads to spiritual progress (see especially 4:6-5:6). I think this counsel certainly applies to physics. There is nothing inherently wrong with talking about

physics and its possible relationship to Course ideas—I'm doing exactly that in this article. And I do think there are ways it can be potentially helpful. I personally am heartened by the contention of the founders of modern physics that it cannot describe ultimate reality; in my mind, this leaves a lot of room for the *Course's* description of ultimate reality.

However, the section's central teaching is that even though belief in reincarnation may be helpful to some, it is not part of the Course. "The idea cannot...be regarded as essential to the curriculum" (2:6), and therefore the teacher of God should not treat it as if it *were* an essential part of the curriculum (3:1-2). Along the way to this conclusion, the section makes points about reincarnation that are very similar to the ones I've made about physics:

- The entire section is an explanation of why reincarnation is not mentioned elsewhere in the Course.
- It suggests that reincarnation can only describe what happens in the illusory physical world (1:1-3).
- It suggests that reincarnation is neutral in itself and ultimately meaningless (1:2; 2:5-6; 4:2).
- It points out that reincarnation can easily be misused in ways that support the ego (1:8-11; 2:7; 5:5).

All of this culminates in the section's counsel about what stance the teacher of God (in particular, a teacher of God who is teaching the Course) should take toward reincarnation and issues like it:

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that this course aims at a complete reversal of thought. When this is finally accomplished, issues such as the validity of reincarnation become meaningless. Until then, they are likely to be merely controversial. The teacher of God is, therefore, wise to step away from all such questions, for he has much to teach and learn apart from them. He should both learn and teach that theoretical issues but waste time, draining it away from its appointed purpose. (4:1-5)

Applying this passage to physics, one of those "issues such as the validity of reincarnation," this is the counsel I hear: Physics deals with meaningless "theoretical issues" about the nature and structure of the illusion. Because of this, mixing physics into the Course's curriculum will likely distract our minds and embroil them in time-wasting controversies about questions that don't lead to a complete reversal of thought. Therefore, instead of placing too much stock in physics, we should step aside from it and focus our minds on what really *does* lead to a complete reversal of thought: the real "new paradigm," the path of salvation laid out by the Course, the path that leads us out of illusion and into reality.

Conclusion

How, then, would the Course have us regard modern physics? Everything we've covered here leads me to the answer I presented at the beginning: While exploring modern physics is fine if we find it helpful, we should be careful not to mix it into the Course's thought system, because it doesn't lead to the complete reversal of thought the Course is aiming at. Let's not delay ourselves by gazing at the shadows on the wall. Let's resist the temptation to join those who, in Ken Wilber's words, "feel they need to rest their souls on the findings of physics."⁶ Let's rest our souls on a firmer foundation: the truly mind-changing and ego-transcending spiritual path of *A Course in Miracles*.

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1. Tom Huston, "Taking the Quantum Leap...Too Far?" in *What Is Enlightenment?* (Issue 27, October-December 2004). Also available on the *What is Enlightenment?* website at www.wie.org.
2. Quoted in Ken Wilber, ed., *Quantum Questions: Mystical Writings of the World's Greatest Physicists* (Boston: Shambhala, 1984, 2001), p. 6.
3. *Quantum Questions*, p. 8.
4. The quotations from Dr. Joe Dispenza are from a transcript of his movie interview on the *What the @\$%#* Do We Know?* website at www.whatthebleep.com. The Ramtha quotation is from my own memory of the movie.
5. "Taking the Quantum Leap...Too Far?"
6. *Quantum Questions*, p. x.



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How Does God's Voice Speak to Me Through My Brothers?

by Robert Perry

If you would know your prayers are answered, never doubt a Son of God. Do not question him and do not confound him, for your faith in him is your faith in yourself. If you would know God and His Answer, believe in me whose faith in you cannot be shaken. Can you ask of the Holy Spirit truly, and doubt your brother? Believe his words are true because of the truth that is in him. You will unite with the truth in him, and his words will *be* true. As you hear him you will hear me. Listening to truth is the only way you can hear it now, and finally know it.

The message your brother gives you is up to you. What does he say to you? What would you have him say? Your decision about him determines the message you receive. Remember that the Holy Spirit is in him, and His Voice speaks to you through him. What can so holy a brother tell you except truth? But are you listening to it? Your brother may not know who he is, but there is a light in his mind that does know. This light can shine into yours, giving truth to his words and making you able to hear them. His words are the Holy Spirit's answer to you. Is your faith in him strong enough to let you hear? (T-9.II.4:1-5:11)

These paragraphs have always puzzled me. I have studied them and taught them, but I'm not sure I have ever truly understood them. Are they saying that I should believe any old crazy thing my brother says? Or are they saying that my faith, if strong enough, can turn my brother into some sort of oracle, whose eyes will roll back in his head as he channels the Holy Spirit and answers all my questions?

Recently, someone just as puzzled as myself wrote to me, asking for clarification of these paragraphs, and while responding to him I had an insight, which I'd like to share with you. What I realized was that, in the early dictation of the Course, Jesus would often interpret other people's words in ways that were strikingly reminiscent of what these paragraphs are talking about. Suddenly, in light of those examples, these paragraphs made sense to me.

Let me first just outline the process that seems to be sketched in these puzzling paragraphs, and then I'll go through the examples.

First, you don't doubt a brother. You don't question him. Rather, you decide that he is a Son of God who deserves your faith rather than your doubts. This, however, does not mean you have faith that he will always do the right thing. It means that you have faith in his essential goodness, no matter what he may do behaviorally.

Second, your faith in him allows you to hear the Holy Spirit speaking through his words. This, of course, is the puzzling part. What does that mean? I have to believe that what you are hearing is probably not the surface meaning of his words. I assume that your faith illumines a hidden element in his words, something perhaps between the lines, which comes from the Holy Spirit within him. Just as your faith tunes you into his beneath-the-surface identity as God's Son, so it also tunes you into the beneath-the-surface meaning in his words.

Yet how does this happen? How do you hear something in his words that is not what he consciously intends? And are you just making it up if you do?

The sense I get from these paragraphs is that, for this to work, the Holy Spirit has to be on both the sending side and the receiving side. First, the Holy Spirit is in your brother's mind, expressing His message as a hidden presence in your brother's words, a message that your brother probably isn't aware of. We have all had the experience of sensing in the words of others hidden attitudes and feelings that they themselves may not know about. This is just another version of that same idea. Rather than someone's words subtly revealing their own unconscious feelings, they are subtly conveying the Holy Spirit's unconscious wisdom.

Second, your faith in the Holy Spirit in your brother's mind will allow that Spirit to "shine into yours" and there play the role of decoder. He will become the interpreter in your mind that reveals to you the hidden truth that He placed in your brother's words.

This process of believing in the Holy Spirit in your brother and then hearing the Holy Spirit speak to you *through* your brother is, according to this section, how your prayers are answered.

That, I think, is the gist of these two paragraphs. But what does this look like? Without specific examples, the whole thing can seem hopelessly vague and can remain quite puzzling. This is where those examples from the early Course dictation come in. In those early months, Jesus commented on all sorts of things, from things that Helen and Bill said and did to psychology, mathematics, and even cryogenics. And, as I said, several comments he made look suspiciously like examples of the ideas we have just discussed. In those comments, Jesus would hear something in what someone expressed that seemed to go well beyond what that person consciously intended to say. I'll now go through those examples, all but the last of which I have drawn from the Urtext, the original typescript of the Course.

A holy Freudian slip

(Tell B. that his slip about (rivet) should be noted. Some slips reach consciousness from the un-Christ-controlled subconscious, and betray lack of love.)

But others (slips) come from the superconscious, which is in communion with God, and which can also break into consciousness.

His slip (rivet) was an expression of a Soul gaining enough strength to request freedom from prison. It will ultimately demand it.

Here, Bill has made a slip of the tongue, saying “rivet” instead of whatever he wanted to say (and, unfortunately, we don’t know what that was). Jesus latches onto this slip, seeing it as what we might call a “holy Freudian slip.” Rather than expressing Bill’s hidden darkness (which is how we often think of Freudian slips), it expresses his soul’s hidden yearning for freedom. Like a true Freudian, Jesus is seeing unconscious meaning in Bill’s slip, yet unlike Freud, he sees that meaning coming from the spiritual element in Bill. This idea that Bill’s soul is “slipping” through in his speech is not so different from our two puzzling paragraphs talking about the Holy Spirit coming through in one’s speech.

Bill not understanding his own vital contribution

Bill, who has made a number of vital contributions to our joint venture, made a major one a while ago, which he himself did not appreciate or even understand. If we recognize its value together, we will be able to use it together, because it is an idea, and must therefore be shared to be held.

When Bill said that he was determined “*not* to see you that way,” he was speaking negatively. If he will state the same idea *positively*, he will see the *power* of what he said.

Here Bill said that he was determined “*not* to see [Helen] that way.” Jesus says that Bill “did not appreciate or even understand” what a vital contribution this was. He says that if Bill would just phrase it in the positive—“I’m determined to see her in God’s way”—he would “see the *power* of what he said.” So Bill’s words contained this vital contribution to their joint venture, yet Bill did not even *understand* that contribution. You get the feeling that Bill’s statement was a case of some deep spiritual awareness bubbling to the surface in his mind, an awareness that he voiced but did not fully grasp. It was left to Jesus to hear the Holy Spirit speaking through him.

Cervantes not understanding the real point of his own book

Destroying the devil is a meaningless undertaking. Cervantes wrote an excellent symbolic account of this procedure [*Don Quixote*], though he did not understand his own symbolism. The *real* point of his writing was that his “hero” was a man who perceived himself as unworthy because he identified with his ego and perceived its weakness. He then set about to alter his perception, *not* by correcting his misidentification, but by behaving egotistically.

Jesus is saying that Cervantes didn’t understand the real meaning of his own symbolism. That’s a pretty gutsy claim, but let’s give him the benefit of the doubt and look at what he means. Don Quixote, according to Jesus, was a *negative* symbol, an example of a man who identified with his ego and as a result perceived himself as weak and unworthy. But then he tried to correct this perception, not by letting go of his ego, but by puffing up his ego, by playing the hero, by going out and battling evil—“destroying the devil.” Yet it was all just fantasy. The giants he fought were just windmills. The whole enterprise was in vain. And this was the real point of the story, Jesus says, that *all* of our attempts to solve the ego’s weakness by puffing it up are just acts of fantasy, the vain attempts of someone who has lost his mental balance.

What strikes me about this is that the symbolism really works. Seen in this way, Don Quixote becomes a great symbol for the Course’s teaching about the foolish journeys our ego undertakes as it vainly tries to solve the problems it creates. Maybe this *was* the message the Holy Spirit was whispering into Cervantes’ ear. Maybe this was the real inspiration behind *Don Quixote*, and Cervantes just didn’t hear it clearly enough.

The childish superstition that started out as something profound

NOTE: The very old Jewish practice of changing the name of a person who is very ill, so that when the list is given to the Angel of Death, the person with that name will not be found.

This is a good example of the curiously literal regression which can occur in very bright people when they become afraid....

Actually, the Jewish superstition about changing the names was a distortion of a revelation about how to alter or avert death. What the revelation’s proper content was that those “who change their mind” (not name) about

destruction (or hate) do not need to die. Death is a human affirmation of a belief in hate.

Here, Jesus remarks on an old Jewish superstition that if you change someone's name, the Angel of Death will not be able to locate him and so cannot carry him off to the land of the dead. Like most superstitions, this one is based on some very simple-minded, childish thinking. Jesus basically says as much, calling it a "curiously literal regression."

Yet Jesus goes on to say that it was actually a distortion of a true inspiration, which was that "those 'who change their mind' (not name) about destruction (or hate) do not need to die." The superstition said that if you change your name, the Angel of Death can't find you. But the original inspiration from the Holy Spirit said that if you change your *mind*, the *principle* of death cannot find a home in you. That's not childish at all. It is actually kind of profound.

The idea that this "was a distortion of a revelation" is important. It says that the superstition originated from the Holy Spirit. It started out pure. But by the time it came out, it had been warped into something else. Now it was this simple-minded superstition, this "curiously literal regression." It makes you wonder how many childish statements are actually distortions of true revelations.

Biblical writers not understanding their own writings

We can see the same principle operating when Jesus interprets biblical passages in the Course:

"Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord" is easily reinterpreted if you remember that ideas increase only by being shared. The statement emphasizes that vengeance cannot be shared. Give it therefore to the Holy Spirit, Who will undo it in you because it does not belong in your mind, which is part of God.

"I will visit the sins of the fathers unto the third and fourth generation," as interpreted by the ego, is particularly vicious. It becomes merely an attempt to guarantee the ego's own survival. Actually, all it really means is that the Holy Spirit in later generations retains the power to interpret *correctly* what former generations have thought, and thus release *their* thoughts from the ability to produce fear *anywhere* in the Sonship.

(T-5.VI.7:1-8:3; last sentence is the Urtext version)

Obviously, what "Vengeance is mine" originally meant was, "Don't take vengeance on your brothers. Leave it to Me. I'll make sure they get theirs." But Jesus sees a purer, higher meaning there. Now it means, "Don't take vengeance on your brothers. Give the idea of vengeance to Me, and I'll undo it for you, for an unholy idea like that does not belong in your holy mind."

Likewise, "I will visit the sins of the father unto the third and fourth generation" meant just what it says. Yet again Jesus

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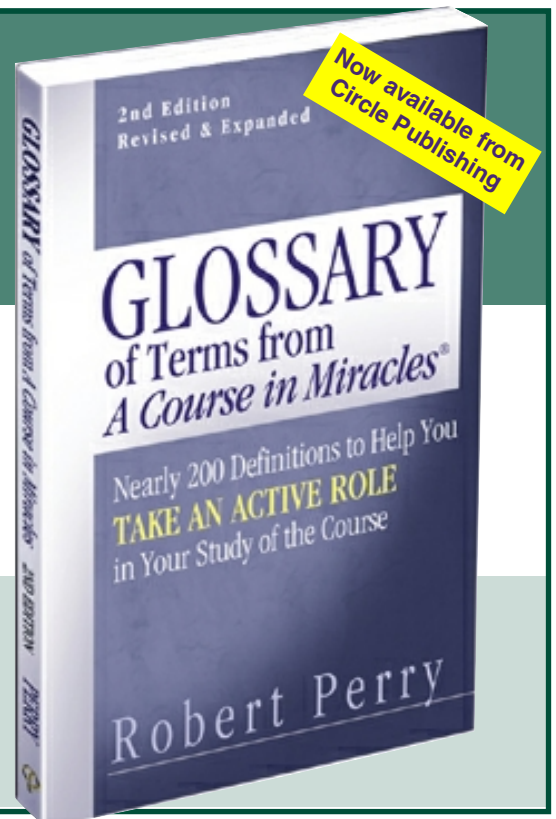
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sees a higher meaning there. His interpretation implies that those sins of the fathers, left uncorrected, will trickle down and continue to do harm in future generations. However, even in those later generations, the Holy Spirit still has the power to visit them and *correct* them, so they can do no more damage. The meanings are almost opposite. One says, "Even after you're dead, I'll make sure that your children and grandchildren suffer for what you did." The other says, "The natural motion of your mistakes is to go on causing harm indefinitely. But don't worry, at any time I can correct them and thus protect your descendants, as well as the entire Sonship, from them."

I don't think that Jesus is just being naïve and believing the biblical writers actually had these higher meanings in mind as they were writing. He knows full well the frightening meanings these Bible verses were intended to convey. He is simply carrying out his own counsel. His sight is penetrating so profoundly into these words that he actually perceives the original inspiration behind them, an inspiration that got warped and obscured as it passed through the writer's mind and out of his pen. And he is able to see so deeply into these words because he sees so deeply into those who wrote them. There, buried in their minds under layers of ego, he sees the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

It makes you wonder. What is coming out of our brothers' mouths that we are not hearing? What otherworldly truths are they uttering, unbeknownst to us and even to themselves? What would we hear if we only had ears to hear? Would it perhaps be the answer to all our prayers?

This strikes me as a new understanding of what it means to *listen*. The good listener hears what a speaker is trying to say. The great listener hears more than that. He hears the speaker's buried desires, aspirations, and pain coming through in his words. But the holy listener hears even more. He hears the divine element within the speaker, giving forth spiritual truths that far exceed the speaker's conscious wisdom.

How can we begin to listen in this way? How can we begin to hear what the Holy Spirit is telling us through our brothers? I am tempted to say that I don't have a clue how to answer that question. What Jesus does in these examples seems so far beyond me. Yet the fact is that that question has a very simple answer: "Never doubt a Son of God. Do not question him and do not confound him...Remember that the Holy Spirit is in him."



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

Robert Perry. *One of the most respected voices on ACIM, Robert has traveled extensively, speaking throughout the U.S. and internationally. He is the author or co-author of twenty books and booklets, including Path of Light: Stepping into Peace with 'A Course in Miracles.'*

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How Did Sin Give the Body Eyes?

Commentary on Paragraph 1 of “What Is Sin?”

by Robert Perry

Sin is insanity. It is the means by which the mind is driven mad, and seeks to let illusions take the place of truth. And being mad, it sees illusions where the truth should be, and where it really is. Sin gave the body eyes, for what is there the sinless would behold? What need have they of sights or sounds or touch? What would they hear or reach to grasp? What would they sense at all? To sense is not to know. And truth can be but filled with knowledge, and with nothing else. (W-pII.4.1:1-9)

This is one of those paragraphs which you look at initially and just say, “Huh?” It speaks in simple sentences and familiar words, yet it doesn’t seem to be making sense. The problem, I think, is that it is talking about sin, and yet nothing that it says seems to fit the concept of sin, at least as we understand it. The paragraph begins by equating sin with insanity (huh?). Then it says that sin sees illusions in place of truth (huh?). Then it says that sin gave the body eyes because the sinless don’t want to see anything. *Huh?*

Yet, as is always true with the Course, if we can look more closely at this paragraph, we will find a teaching that is both theoretically brilliant and personally transformative. Let’s do that now.

We think of sin as evil, as a willful impulse to violate God’s laws and injure others. Yet the opening line of this section, in three short words, offers a completely different perspective: “Sin is insanity.” We usually put evil and insanity in different categories. Think of how differently they fare in court. We put the evil one to death, while we try to help the one who is “not guilty by reason of insanity.” Imagine how different it would sound if we said, “Osama bin Laden is not evil. He is simply mentally ill.” In our categories, insanity is forgivable, while evil is not.

What sorts of things tell us that someone is insane? Isn’t it when that person says something that flies in the face of reality? If he says, “I am a teapot” or “Perhaps I will fly to the moon today,” we conclude that he has completely lost touch with reality. And that is the essence of insanity—someone has lost touch with reality and lives in an unreal fantasy world, a world that exists only in his head. He has, as the paragraph says, “let illusions take the place of truth.” In this state, the insane actually hang onto their fantasy world and protect it against the incursion of reality. They surround themselves with things that reflect and seem to verify their insanity.

I’ve seen countless movies where the police finally find the lair of the madman. They always seem to find some dark apartment whose walls are covered with newspaper clippings. Have you ever noticed that? Those clippings are stark depictions of the madman’s insanity, external mirrors of his internal state. They are his way of surrounding himself with the evidence that tells him that his fantasy world is actually real, that his madness is really sane. Usually, his whole apartment is a surreal environment carefully crafted to reflect and reinforce his insanity. But those newspaper clippings are what stick in my mind. They are the perfect symbol for what insanity does. It surrounds itself with “evidence” for its “sanity.”

And that is exactly what this paragraph says that we do. We have embraced the idea of sin. We have embraced the idea that we could operate independently from God, becoming a god in our own right, and the idea that we could attack others and benefit ourselves. In doing so, we didn’t turn evil. We simply went insane. Now *we* live in a completely unreal fantasy world, and *we* fear the incursion of reality. We fear it and resist it in the same way that a psychotic person resists the truth when confronted with it. If Uncle Fred thinks he’s Napoleon and you tell him that he’s really just Uncle Fred, do you think he’ll welcome your remarks?

This is where this paragraph takes its next step, a step that is only logical, but one which we probably find startling. It applies this idea to our physical senses. In our culture, the senses are glorified. Everyone agrees that the beauties, pleasures, and wonders of nature as revealed by our senses are among life’s precious gifts. That familiar perspective makes the following line all the more shocking: “Sin gave the body eyes.” Indeed, sin is said here to be the source of *all* of our senses. We are told that the sinless have no need “of sights or sounds or touch.” In making this claim, the Course is definitely not trying to win any popularity contests. Fritz Perls, the founder of Gestalt psychology, used to say, “Lose your mind and come to your senses.” The Course, on the other hand, is saying that we already did that. That’s the state we’re in now, and that’s the problem.

This strange notion that “sin gave the body eyes” is actually inescapable if you accept three things:

- that sin is insanity
- that insanity wants to reinforce itself by looking on illusions
- that the body’s eyes look only on illusions

Let’s go through this a little more slowly. The Course is saying, as we saw, that sin is insanity. Insanity by definition is out

of touch with reality. It wants to be in touch only with illusions, for they are what reinforce it. The insane are always unconsciously looking for the evidence that will validate their insanity.

And that is exactly what the senses give us. One of the Course's most fundamental teachings is that the physical world is an illusion, and the physical world, of course, is the only world the senses sense. Can your eyes see spirit? Can your ears hear God's Voice? Because they can't, the senses provide constant evidence that the world is real and that Heaven is unreal.

In the process, the senses also provide specific evidence for the reality of sin. For sin boils down to the belief in separation and attack. And our senses show us a realm in which everything is separate and everything attacks. They show us a world of separate creatures, competing against each other, devouring each other, and being devoured in return—a world full of sin. Thus, our senses "prove" to us that, rather than being insanity, sin is the beating heart of reality.

The paragraph closes with this: "To sense is not to know. And truth can be but filled with knowledge, and with nothing else." We don't want to know, because *knowledge*, in Course terminology, is direct experience of reality, direct knowing without any intermediary. It's more than face-to-face or even mind-to-mind. It is one Mind knowing Itself, knowing Its own reality. And that kind of direct knowing is precisely what insanity seeks to avoid. It doesn't want reality. It wants to stay in its unreal bubble. And so, under the weight of it, we retreat into the indirect world of perception, the world of *sensing*. Our senses become our intermediaries, our middlemen. We don't have direct contact with the things they tell us about. All we know is what they tell us. In this frustrating condition, we can never be sure of what's out there, precisely because all we have is the word of middlemen. One of the dictionary's definitions of "sense" is "a more or less vague perception or impression." That's all the senses can really deliver, because they make direct knowledge impossible.

So our senses, so glorified by our culture, distance us from reality in two ways. First, they show us a realm of illusions and make it seem real. Second, they place intermediaries between us and what we want to know, so that the truth of what is out there is always beyond our grasp. In short, they show us illusions and they keep us from truth. And they do it all to reinforce and protect our core insanity: sin.

This paragraph, though it initially seemed like gobbledygook, actually contains profound teaching. The only reason this teaching seemed nonsensical is because it makes links between concepts that we generally see as separate. We normally do not connect sin and insanity. And we definitely do not connect insanity and our physical senses. However, these connections, once made, have a strangely compelling plausibility to them. They open up new vistas and give us a fresh perspective on reality. That is what brilliant teaching does—it links concepts we had never linked, and makes their linkage seem reasonable, plausible, even liberating.

The theory laid out in this paragraph is fascinating, but are we willing to apply it on a personal level? At that point, the theoretically fascinating becomes the seriously challenging. For it says that I am the madman. And this world is my lair. And the trees and clouds and buildings and people are my newspaper clippings, along with the wars, murders, diseases, and disasters. They are what I have tacked to the walls of my experience, because they are what mirror the madness within. They show me a "reality" that is soaked with sin, a reality that constantly validates my own belief in sin—the very essence of my insanity.

The only reason I gave myself my physical senses was so that I could look upon these clippings and feel the comfort of their validation, so that I could feel sane in the midst of my madness. In keeping with this purpose, these senses do not show me the actual events that the clippings report on. They are utterly blind to these events. All my senses can see is the newspaper stories about those events, stories that they themselves wrote. Thus, they close me in a loop, in which the insanity within produces the visible realm without, which then validates the insanity within, and so on.

Can I admit that that is what is going on now? That when I look around me right now, all I see are my newspaper clippings, designed to reinforce my madness, the madness of sin? There are, of course, exceptions, clippings that we bring in to our experience to lead us out of insanity (the Course being one). But let's face it, the world as a whole does a good job of teaching us that the law of tooth and claw is virtually the pillar of reality, that unless we compete against other individuals we will not get our share of limited resources, and will ourselves become a resource to be consumed by a more successful individual. Let's be honest and admit that to some degree, we have all learned this. The clippings have done their intended work. To claim that they haven't is mere denial.

Yet this is where the comfort of this teaching comes in. It tells us that we don't have to accept the testimony of the clippings that fill our vision. They are not reality, just clippings. We plastered our walls with them to show us a false reality. We placed them there to give us false testimony. Now that we recognize that, we can refuse to accept their testimony. If they tell us that reality is separation and attack, that the fundamental law of the universe is "eat or be eaten," we can calmly refuse to believe it. We can learn a higher law. And to the extent we have already internalized the belief in separation and attack, we can forgive ourselves. We are not sinners. We are just insane; we are just mentally ill. We don't deserve the death penalty. We just deserve help.

I Do Not Know

by Greg Mackie

This article originally appeared on Greg Mackie's blog page on the Circle of Atonement's website, www.circleofa.org.

This past week, four words have brought me a lot of peace: "I do not know." On the face of it, the idea of finding peace in not knowing may sound strange. It may sound like a head-in-the-sand stance that recalls George Orwell's intentionally absurd slogan from 1984, "Ignorance Is Strength." But let me explain.

The Course often tells us that we really don't know what things mean or what decision is best in any given situation, so we need to set aside what we think we know and let the Holy Spirit decide things for us. One of my favorite passages on this theme is this great practice from the Text:

When your peace is threatened or disturbed in any way, say to yourself:

I do not know what anything, including this, means. And so I do not know how to respond to it. And I will not use my own past learning as the light to guide me now.

By this refusal to attempt to teach yourself what you do not know, the Guide Whom God has given you will speak to you. He will take His rightful place in your awareness the instant you abandon it, and offer it to Him.

(T-14.XI.6:6-11)

What comes up for you when you are told that you don't know what *anything* means, that you therefore don't know how to respond to anything, and that your past learning is useless as a guide for how to respond? This can be a pretty scary idea. How can we survive in this crazy world if all those facts and techniques and coping skills we so painstakingly learned over the years can no longer guide us? Without our own knowledge, what can we rely upon to get through the maze of countless critical decisions that confront us every day?

This passage goes on to give us the answer to this question: the Holy Spirit, "the Guide Whom God has given you." Admitting that we don't know what things mean or how to respond to them doesn't leave us in a terrifying void with nothing to guide us through life. On the contrary, it opens our minds to the Holy Spirit, Who knows what *everything* means and how to respond to it, and is therefore the only one who really *can* guide us through life. Once we realize this, letting go of what we think we know is not a fearful proposition but a liberating one. As the Course says in the Manual: "Therefore lay judgment down, not with regret but with a sigh of gratitude. Now are you free of a burden so great that you could merely stagger and fall down beneath it" (M-10.5:1-2).

This is why the words "I do not know" can bring peace. We're relieved of the burden of having to know everything. Admitting we don't know is not a head-in-the-sand stance, but instead enables us to pull our heads *out* of the dark sandpit of false certainty and turn them toward the light that can guide us truly. Admitting our ignorance really *is* strength because it enables us to access the knowledge and strength of the Holy Spirit.

The words "I do not know" really helped me find peace of mind this week during an e-mail exchange I had with someone about political issues. This person disagreed with my views in very strong terms and expressed his contrary views with absolute certainty. He was absolutely convinced that he was right, and anyone who disagreed with him was hopelessly misguided.

Now, I have to admit that getting so thoroughly slammed by him disturbed my peace. My ego was all too willing to slam him back. But I caught myself and said, "I do not know." How do I know who's right and who's wrong here? How do I know which political theory is correct? How do I know what all this means? How do I know what outcome is best? How do I know how to respond to this guy? I reminded myself that the Holy Spirit knows everything and has a plan for everything that happens in this world, and I entrusted the whole situation to His care.

It's difficult to describe how much relief this brought me. Immediately my attack thoughts fell away, and I felt peace wash over me. After asking for guidance about how to respond, I ended up writing this person back and saying that while I still didn't agree with his views, I wasn't certain of mine and for all I knew, he could be right. He hasn't written back, so I don't know yet how this exchange will turn out. But I do know that I feel very much at peace with it.

How about you? Have you found yourself in situations where your peace is disturbed, where you're clinging to what you think you know or arguing with people who are convinced that *they* know? The next time this happens, you might try using those four liberating words: "I do not know." You might also try the Course practice I referred to above. Though I didn't use

that specific practice in my encounter with the guy who disagreed with my political views, I've used it on countless other occasions with great results. May you find the peace that comes from turning your life over to the One Who really knows.

CIRCLE NEWS

WELCOME TO OUR NEW ARRIVAL, MIRANDA ROSE PERRY



On August 26, Nicola Harvey and Robert Perry were delighted to become the proud parents of Miranda Rose Perry. She was born at 10:03 am, was 19 1/2 inches long, and weighed 7 lbs. 2 oz. Nicola and Robert are adjusting to life with a newborn, and the Circle is adjusting to Miranda being around. Though she is generally a quiet and content baby, the air is occasionally shattered by her cries. And though Nicola is still for the time being on maternity leave, Miranda does join us for some of our staff meetings.

...

TUESDAY NIGHT CLASS DOING WELL IN NEW VENUE



As many of you know, we recently moved our long-running Tuesday night class to a new location: the Sedona Creative Life Center, 333 Schnebly Hill Road in Sedona. The accompanying pictures show the class in progress. Everyone has really enjoyed the new venue. Attendance has been good, and because we're now able to advertise, we get a lot more newcomers than we used to.

The Tuesday night class is a ninety-minute class (7-8:30 pm) taught by Robert Perry (and sometimes Greg Mackie) on a grab bag of course topics, from "The Spiritual Experiences of Helen Schucman" to "Quitting the Ego's Religion" to "Is God *Only* Loving?" We recently completed a very well-received three-part series on the parallels between the teachings of the historical Jesus and the author of *A Course in Miracles*.

You can sign up to receive via e-mail the weekly notes Robert creates for this class. To do so, just go to the subscription page on the Circle of Atonement website (www.circleofa.com/subscribeAll.php) and sign up for "RPerry_Notes."

