

A Better Way

A NEWSLETTER FOR STUDENTS OF A COURSE IN MIRACLES / THE CIRCLE OF ATONEMENT / DECEMBER 2005 / ISSUE 54

“Make This Year Different”

How the Course Would Have Us Approach the New Year

by Robert Perry

As the new year arrives and you ponder making yet another set of resolutions, it may interest you to know that *A Course in Miracles* has its own ideas about the new year. In the final days of 1966 and the initial days of 1967, Helen Schucman took down a series of references to the new year. Though personally directed to Helen, these references are surprisingly universal. It is hard to imagine a person on the spiritual path who would not relate to them to some degree. In this article, I will go through the meatiest of these references and let you see for yourself if they apply to you.

“Accept the holy instant as this year is born”

The first passage comes at the end of Chapter 15. It is the conclusion to the Course’s discussion about how to really celebrate Christmas.

This is the time in which a new year will soon be born from the time of Christ. I have perfect faith in you to do all that you would accomplish [in the new year]. Nothing will be lacking, and you will make complete and not destroy. Say, then, to your brother:

I give you to the Holy Spirit as part of myself.

I know that you will be released, unless I want to use you to imprison myself.

In the name of my freedom I choose your release, because I recognize that we will be released together.

So will the year begin in joy and freedom. There is much to do, and we have been long delayed. Accept the holy instant as this year is born, and take your place, so long left unfulfilled, in the Great Awakening. Make this year different by making it all the same. And let all your relationships be made holy for you. This is our will. Amen.

(T-15.XI.10:1-14)

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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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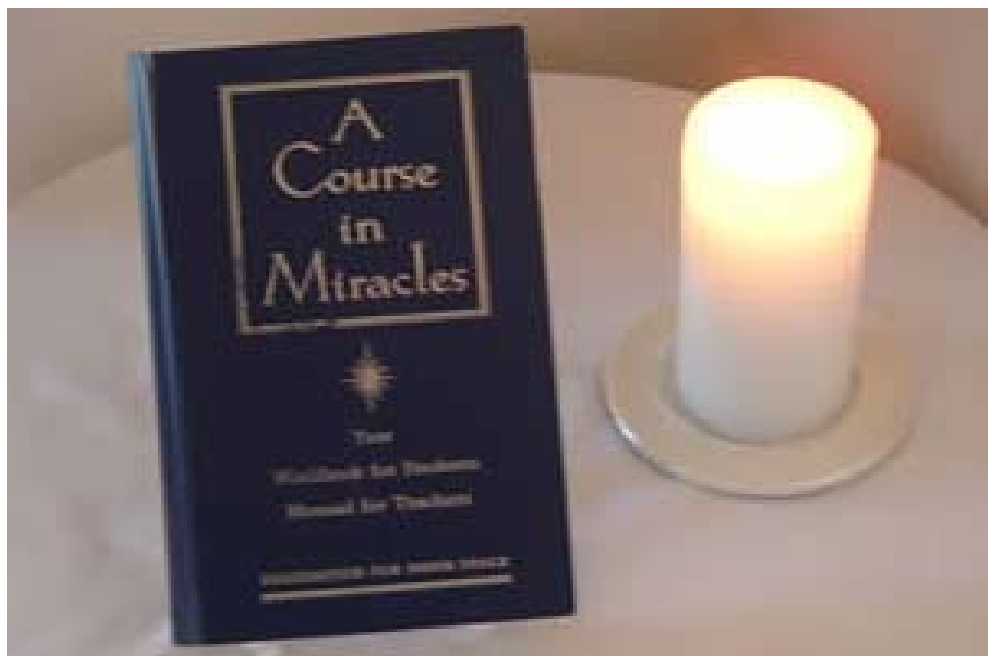
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“The time of Christ” is a fascinating term in the Course. It refers both to Christmastime and to the holy instant. It combines the two because the Course wants *us* to combine the two. It wants us to celebrate Christmas by entering a holy instant. That is what the above practice is for. In it, we release someone in our life from the demands we have laid on him or her, and if we do that with sincerity, *we* will be released from the ego’s prison and enter into a holy time, the time of Christ, in which the original Christmas event is repeated in us. This is how Jesus asks us to celebrate Christmas.

From this time of Christ, a genuinely new year will be born. Just as the calendar year is born from Christmastime, so our own new year will be born from our own time of Christ. This will not just be a new year chronologically. It will be a new *kind* of year, a year that is qualitatively different. How will it be different? It will be different because by entering this holy instant, we are consenting to join Jesus in his work, a work that here is called the Great Awakening. The actual Great Awakening was a religious revival that swept through the New England colonies in the 1730s and 1740s, sparked by the preacher Jonathan Edwards. Jesus is clearly using that religious movement as a metaphor for the global spiritual awakening that he is in charge of. He’s been at this, of course, for a very long time, and all that time he has reserved a place for us in this great work. However, our place has been “long left unfulfilled,” while we have been meandering through one year after another, living each one very much like the last. As a result, our work with him has “been long delayed.”

What makes this a new kind of year, then, is that this is the year we take our place in the Great Awakening. This begins with truly releasing one brother. By doing that, we sign a contract with Jesus to release all brothers. This purpose becomes the central theme of the year. It is what has the power to make all our relationships holy. It is what can “make this year different by making it all the same.” In a normal year, we constantly jump around between different purposes. This year, however, our only purpose will be fulfilling our part in the Great Awakening. And if we give everything in the year one purpose, then we will *experience* everything in the year as the same. As the Course says elsewhere, “What shares a common purpose is the same. This is the law of purpose” (T-27.VI.1:5-6).

So this is one of the Course’s visions of the new year. We have a holy instant of releasing one brother, and through doing this we are led to a desk that has been gathering dust for perhaps thousands of years, a desk with our name on it. We then sit down, roll up our sleeves, and assume our part in the company’s mission, our place in the Great Awakening. And this becomes the keynote of our year, a year of joy and freedom, a year of our relationships being made holy, a year that is all the same because everything in it is dedicated to a single purpose, that of awakening all our brothers.

Can we relate to this? Do we sense that perhaps there is a desk sitting somewhere with our name on it, a desk that has been gathering dust, waiting for us, for a long, long time? Do we sense that if we found that desk and cleared it off and sat down and really got to work, our life would be qualitatively different? Finally, is it possible that releasing just one person from the iron chains of our relentless expectations could lead us to that desk?

“This year determine not to deny what has been given you by God”

Do not interpret against God’s Love, for you have many witnesses that speak of it so clearly that only the blind and deaf could fail to see and hear them. This year determine not to deny what has been given you by God. Awake and share it, for that is the only reason He has called to you. His Voice has spoken clearly, and yet you have so little faith in what you heard, because you have preferred to place still greater faith in the disaster you have made. Today, let us resolve together to accept the joyful tidings that disaster is not real and that reality is not disaster.

(T-16.II.8:1-5)

This paragraph sketches an ironic picture, one that is so reminiscent of Helen Schucman’s Kafkaesque mindset that we can be sure it was addressed directly to her. In this picture, we have someone who has placed her faith in disaster, and not just disaster in general; the disaster she herself has made. This disaster is for her the central feature of reality. It is the first cause, that which has more power than anything else.

Yet something has broken into the calm certainty of her disaster. God’s Voice has spoken to her. Things have happened to her that are “witnesses” that testify to the reality of God’s Love. The news they convey is even called “joyful tidings,” a

reference to the “good tidings of great joy” that the angels gave the shepherds when Jesus was born. These occurrences in her life are not subtle. Both the Voice and the witnesses are said to have spoken “clearly.” Indeed, they have spoken “so clearly that only the blind and deaf could fail to see and hear them.” God, in other words, has shown up in this person’s life in a way that is so obvious that anyone could see it. It’s as plain as the nose on her face.

This is obviously talking about what has happened to Helen in the eighteen months since she and Bill joined in a better way. She has had dreams and visions that beckon her to a higher calling. She has experienced remarkable synchronistic events that convey a clear message. And a voice has begun speaking to her, speaking with a wisdom that is not of this world.

At this point, you would think that anyone would see that the night is over. The light has come. God has arrived. But not Helen. She sees the witnesses to God’s Love, but she mercilessly cross-examines them, seeking to poke holes in their testimony. She hears God’s Voice, but she is unable to muster much faith in it. The disaster is so patently real, so historically imperious to all attempts at solution, that it is hard to take seriously some pie-in-the-sky Voice of hope. Despite all the miracles she has seen and all the wisdom she has heard, her faith in the disaster stands firm. The Voice and the witnesses are details buzzing around the edges; they are easily batted away by her skepticism.

Imagine that someone you care about has been in sorrow for years and years, and finally the good news shows up, that which solves everything, and yet this person’s sorrow goes on without missing a beat. How would you react? What would you say? You would probably say something more or less like what Jesus says to Helen: Wake up and look at the evidence. Stop trying to dismiss it. The case for despair is not open-and-shut. Rather, what is airtight is your *faith* in despair, and this faith is leading you to dismiss the evidence, to shut your ears to the joyful tidings that are so resounding that only the deaf could fail to hear them.

As the way out of her denial, Jesus asks Helen to make a new year’s resolution: “This year determine not to deny what has been given you by God....Today [which was January 1], let us resolve together to accept the joyful tidings that disaster is not real and that reality is not disaster.” He asks her to dedicate the new year to reversing the natural tide of her despair and dismissal. He asks her to face the witnesses to God’s Love in her life and accept their testimony. He asks her to resolve with him to really hear the joyful tidings that have been echoing all around her, the good news that Christ has been born again to her.

Helen’s situation sounds almost comical, yet are we really so different from Helen? Have we never experienced something miraculous that failed to brighten our overall outlook? Have we never seen concrete evidence of God’s care that still failed to crack the core of our pessimism? Have we never managed to brush aside joyful tidings? Then perhaps Helen is not the only one who should dedicate the year to rousing herself from despair and listening to the angelic witnesses that have been sent to her. This year perhaps *we* should determine to stop denying what has been given *us* by God.

“This year invest in truth”

You have never given any problem to the Holy Spirit He has not solved for you, nor will you ever do so. You have never tried to solve anything yourself and been successful. Is it not time you brought these facts together and made sense of them? This is the year for the application of the ideas that have been given you. For the ideas are mighty forces, to be used and not held idly by. They have already proved their power sufficiently for you to place your faith in them, and not in their denial. This year invest in truth, and let it work in peace. Have faith in Him Who has faith in you. Think what you have really seen and heard, and recognize it. Can you be alone with witnesses like these? (T-16.II.9:1-10)

This is the paragraph that follows the one we just examined, and it continues the same themes. In its opening lines, you can almost hear Jesus say, “Will you just pull your head out of the sand and look at the evidence in front of you? Is it not true that whenever you have really given a problem to the Holy Spirit, He has solved it? And isn’t it true that whenever you try to solve things by yourself, you just create more of a mess? Isn’t it time to put two and two together here?”

The paragraph ends with the same themes we explored above as well: “Think what you have really seen and heard, and recognize it.” Helen has seen and heard wondrous things, but she hasn’t really considered what they mean. She hasn’t really recognized what they imply. They imply, quite simply, that she is not alone. They imply that God is with her, and that He has faith in her, in spite of all her resistance. Would it be unreasonable for her to have faith in Him?

What is new in this paragraph is the middle part, which begins with, “This is the year for the application of the ideas that

have been given you.” As her chief gift from God, Helen has been given the ideas of the Course. These ideas are not empty theory. They are not just a head-trip. Rather, “the ideas are mighty forces.” They have the power to work miracles. Yet they can only do so if she uses them. Actually, she has used them a little, enough for them to prove their power. They have therefore earned her faith, but she still has not *given* them her faith. Indeed, she puts more faith in their denial than in them. And so, rather than using these powerful engines, she mostly keeps them parked in the garage. They could take her places she’s never been before, they could whisk her away from the disaster she has made, but they just sit there, unused.

Therefore, Jesus urges her to make this the year in which all that changes. “This is the year for the application of the ideas that have been given you.” “This year,” he says, “invest in truth”—invest in the Course’s ideas, rather than in their denial. Give them the faith that they’ve earned. And above all, *use* them, apply them.

What Course student can’t identify with Helen here? We’ve seen the ideas work again and again, so why don’t we use them more frequently? Why do we still stand before them wondering if, in this situation, they are really in our best interests? Why, when faced with messy relationship issues, do we eye the Course’s prescription to forgive with such ambivalence and even suspicion, as if forgiveness has never proven itself to us before?

If we share Helen’s problem, it is only logical to assume that we must also share the solution she was given. Who of us couldn’t benefit from making this the year when we really apply the Course’s ideas? Those ideas that bowl us over when we read them, that work miracles when we use them, but that mostly stay parked in the garage? Imagine what might happen to your life if you really went for it, if you really gave this year to putting into practice all that you have learned from the Course.

Conclusion

Now that we have explored these three passages, we can see that they are really three pieces of a single picture. It is first of all a picture in which we chronically hold God at arm’s length. He has reserved a place for us in the Great Awakening, and we do mean to assume it someday, but we keep putting it off. He has sent us witnesses that speak of His Love for us, but we don’t listen because we’d rather be depressed. He has sent angels to sing to us the joyful tidings of Christ’s birth in us, but we just turn the radio up. His Voice has given us ideas that could clean up the disaster we have made, but we don’t feel like using them. Surely we have enough self-honesty to see ourselves in this picture.

Again and again, Jesus’ prescription is the same: Make this the year in which you no longer hold God at arm’s length. How you do this may seem mysterious, and I’m sure that the form would vary from person to person, but in essence it’s pretty simple: You determine to stop denying what He has *already* put in front of you. He has given you a place in the Great Awakening. So take it. He has sent you witnesses of His Love, concrete evidence that He is with you. So acknowledge them. He has given you ideas that are mighty forces. So use them.

This, of course, is the same basic idea that fuels conventional new year’s resolutions. There’s something that we have known we should be doing, we just keep not getting around to it. But the new year gives us a chance for a fresh start, and so we resolve that, this year, we will finally bite the bullet and do it. We will finally take those ten pounds off. We will finally get in shape. We will finally stop smoking. Jesus is making use of this same idea, only taking it much, much further. He is not talking about little details like procrastinating about health issues. He is talking about the biggest procrastination of them all: putting God off.

So as the new year rolls around, let us ask ourselves, “How have I been putting God off? How have I been keeping Him at arm’s length? How has He shown up in my life in ways that I have not acknowledged and have not made use of?” It will surely help to take a moment, close your eyes, and ask these questions of God, and listen for an answer. Once you have done this, perhaps you will have the strength to take the next step and actually make a resolution with Jesus. He did say to Helen, “Let us resolve together,” so why not take him up on his offer? If you do, you just might succeed in making this year truly different, different from everything that has gone before.



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

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Should We “Should” on Ourselves?

by Greg Mackie

“Don’t ‘should’ on yourself.” How many times have you heard someone say this when you mention that you really should do something? Perhaps you have used some version of these words yourself. The word “should” (along with its counterpart “shouldn’t”) has become a kind of taboo word in Course circles. It seems to be an invitation to guilt, a regression back to the moralistic religion we’re trying to outgrow, an unnecessary limit to our free expression. Surely it’s a word that the Course would have us avoid, right?

It may come as a surprise to find that the author of the Course loves to “should” on us, using the word over three hundred times. Clearly, then, it isn’t something to avoid. In fact, we *can’t* avoid the concept it expresses—even to say we shouldn’t use it is (oops!) a “should.” The real question, then, isn’t whether we should “should” on ourselves, but how. In this article, I’d like to show how we can unload the painful baggage from this loaded word and use it in a Course-inspired way, a way that brings happiness instead of guilt.

The problem is the ego’s use of “should”: “You should do this—if you don’t, you’re a guilty sinner”

I certainly understand where the “don’t ‘should’ on yourself” idea comes from: who among us hasn’t felt the sting of “should” statements being used to make us feel guilty? We may have had parents or other authority figures who berated us if we didn’t measure up to their standards: “You should’ve done better on that test—why can’t you do anything right?” We may have grown up in religions that made us feel like miserable worms: “You should be ashamed of those unclean thoughts—do your penance!” We may have a long history of using “should” to beat ourselves up: “I should’ve done better on that job interview—why can’t I do anything right?” All of this, of course, comes from the ego’s drive to paint us as guilty sinners, and it’s perfectly natural that we want to free ourselves from this.

Unfortunately, avoiding “should” doesn’t really free us from guilt. Let me illustrate my point with an example. Let’s say I get angry at my wife and yell at her. This is not a sin, of course, but it *is* a mistake, something I shouldn’t have done—“anger is *never* justified” (T-30.VI.1:1). In the Course’s view, acknowledging the mistake so it can be corrected is crucial: “What is important is...the recognition of a mistake as a mistake” (M-7.5:8). But if I’ve banished the entire concept of “should” from my mind, I’m incapable of acknowledging the mistake, since calling something a mistake is simply another way of saying, “I shouldn’t have done that.”

Now that I’ve prevented myself from recognizing my action as a mistake, my ego has a great opportunity to rationalize what I did, to put on the face of innocence and protest that it was *not* a mistake. Now I’ll come up with all sorts of reasons why what I did was perfectly justified. I might use the kinds of excuses everyone uses, like “I was right!” or “She started it!” or “After that rotten thing she did, she had it coming.” As a spiritual person, perhaps I’ll use “spiritual”-sounding rationalizations like “I was expressing my truth in that moment,” or “it’s all perfect,” or “that’s exactly what she needed to hear for her growth,” or “I gave her such a great opportunity to forgive.” Perhaps I’ll even express these rationalizations to her, and discover to my surprise that she doesn’t find them nearly so profound as I do.

Ironically, even though I’ve stripped out those nasty “shoulds,” the end result of this is more guilt. Why? Because it sets up a situation where my ego has free rein to do whatever it pleases, and acting from the ego *always* produces guilt. The Course says this, and I have found it to be true in my own experience: however much I might try to justify it when I do something mean, I feel terrible inside. Moreover, by not recognizing my mistake, I actually prevent it from being corrected through forgiveness. It’s just flushed down into the dark sewer of denial where all my other unacknowledged mistakes are stinking up the place, just increasing my guilt all the more. Surely there must be a better way of dealing with our guilt than refusing to “should” on ourselves.

The solution is the Holy Spirit’s use of “should”: “You should do this—if you do, you’ll be happy”

If the problem is the use of “should” to make us feel guilty, then the solution is not to eliminate the word or the concept behind it, but to sever it completely from the idea of guilt. This is how the Holy Spirit uses it. Yes, He tells us there are certain things we should do. But the reason we should do them isn’t that we’re guilty sinners if we don’t, but simply that they bring us benefits that will make us happy if we do. It’s a straightforward “if you want A, do B” situation. If I want to satisfy

my physical hunger, then I should go to the kitchen and get something to eat. If I want to satisfy my hunger for God, then I should do the things that awaken me to God.

This is the rationale for the numerous “shoulds” in the Course. Here are a few examples that show a clear connection between doing something you should do and receiving benefits that will make you happy. To illustrate that connection, I’ve bolded the word “should” and italicized the benefit that comes from it:

All abilities **should** therefore be given over to the Holy Spirit, Who understands how to use them properly. He uses them only for healing, because He knows you only as whole. *By healing you learn of wholeness, and by learning of wholeness you learn to remember God.* (T-7.IV.4:1-3)

Whoever is saner at the time the threat [to the holiness of a holy relationship] is perceived **should** remember how deep is his indebtedness to the other and how much gratitude is due him, and be glad that he can pay his debt by *bringing happiness to both.* (T-18.V.7:1)

There is one thought in particular that **should** be remembered throughout the day. *It is a thought of pure joy; a thought of peace, a thought of limitless release, limitless because all things are freed within it....* Your defenses will not work, but you are not in danger. You have no need of them. Recognize this, and *they will disappear. And only then will you accept your real protection.* (M-16.6:1-2, 11-14)

One rule **should** always be observed: No one **should** be turned away because he cannot pay....Whoever comes has been sent. Perhaps he was sent to give his brother the money he needed. *Both will be blessed thereby.* Perhaps he was sent to teach the therapist how much he needs forgiveness, and how valueless is money in comparison. *Again will both be blessed....In sharing, everyone must gain a blessing without cost.* (P-3.III.6:1, 5-9, 11)

One category that deserves special mention is the Workbook’s practice instructions. We are very good at finding reasons not to do the Workbook’s practices as instructed, but the Workbook is very clear that if this particular course is our path, we need to do what it asks us to do. Again, this isn’t because we’re guilty if we don’t, but because we’ll benefit if we do:

The idea for today needs many repetitions for *maximum benefit*. It **should** be used at least every half hour, and more if possible....If only once during the day you feel that you were perfectly sincere while you were repeating today’s idea, *you can be sure that you have saved yourself many years of effort.* (W-pI.27.3:1-2, 4:6)

“Who walks with me?” This question **should** be asked a thousand times a day, till *certainty has ended doubting and established peace.* (W-pI.156.8:1-2)

How kind and merciful is the idea we practice! Give it welcome, as you **should**, for *it is your release*. It is indeed but you your mind can try to crucify. Yet *your redemption, too, will come from you.* (W-pI.196.12:3-6)

Those practice periods that you have lost because you did not want to do them, for whatever reason, **should** be done as soon as you have changed your mind about your goal....*[Your other goals] gave you nothing. But your practicing can offer everything to you. And so accept [its] offering and be at peace.* (W-pI.rIII.In.4:1, 4-6)

The basic idea is that you should do the Course’s practices as instructed because “you want salvation. You want to be happy. You want peace” (W-pI.20.2:3-5), and doing the practices is how to get those things. Of course, none of us follows the instructions perfectly, but when that happens we are actually given another “should”: we should “be determined...to be willing to forgive ourselves for our lapses in diligence” (W-pI.95.8:3), so we can let go of our mistakes and get right back to practicing. In short, if we just do what the Workbook says we should do, “great indeed will be [our] reward” (W-pI.20.2:8).

To illustrate the Holy Spirit’s use of “should,” I’ll use the same example as before: I get angry at my wife and yell at her. This time, though, I do something crucially different to handle the situation: I decide to “should” on myself the way the Course would have us do. I say to myself, “I shouldn’t have lashed out at her like that. It just brings unhappiness to us both. It was a mistake. But, thank God, a mistake is not a sin—it is simply something to be undone. To undo my mistake, I should use the Course to practice both forgiving her and forgiving myself.”

How refreshing and liberating it is to simply acknowledge a mistake as a mistake! I may feel bad about it initially, but now I’m in a position to really do something about it. I can use Course practices to help correct my mistake and restore peace of

mind. I might use this line from the Text to forgive myself: “I do not feel guilty, because the Holy Spirit will undo all the consequences of my wrong decision if I will let Him” (T-5.VII.6:10). I might use a practice to forgive my wife through letting my perception of her be healed; after all, the Course tells us, “You should look out from the perception of your own holiness to the holiness of others” (T-1.III.6:7). I might use that holy relationship practice mentioned above, which says I should remember how grateful I really am toward my wife and be glad to pay my debt to her “by bringing happiness to both.” And certainly I’ll also ask for guidance about how to express my healed perception of her behaviorally, perhaps using this beautiful question from *The Song of Prayer*: “What should I do for him, Your holy Son?” (S-2.III.5:1). This question, the rest of that sentence tells us, “should be the only thing you ever ask when help is needed and forgiveness sought.” In answer to this question, perhaps I will be guided to say a kind word to my wife, or give her a hug, or apologize.

Notice that I have a whole string of “shoulds” here, but instead of wracking me with guilt like the ego’s version, these actually *free* me from guilt. Why? Because they rein my ego in and stop it cold, thus cutting off guilt at its source. By recognizing my mistake at the very beginning, I set up a situation where I can turn to the Course to find out what I should do to set things right. By being willing to “should” on myself in a way that doesn’t paint me as a guilty sinner but simply acknowledges that I’ve made an innocent mistake, I open my mind to the loving correction of forgiveness.

Let’s learn how to “should” on ourselves as the Holy Spirit directs

In the Text, Jesus says, “I can tell you what to do, but you must collaborate by believing that I know what you should do. Only then will your mind choose to follow me” (T-8.IV.4:9-10). I think bringing the word “should” out of the closet and using it properly is one way we can collaborate with him. After all, if we tell ourselves there are no “shoulds,” how can we possibly believe that he knows what we should do? Only if we recognize that there really are things we should do to find what Jesus promises us will we be willing to ask him what those things are. So yes, let’s let go of all that guilt we’ve piled up through the ego’s use of “should,” but let’s not throw out the baby with the bathwater. Let’s learn how to “should” on ourselves as the Holy Spirit directs, and thus choose to follow Jesus’ way out of guilt and into the joy the Course says should be ours.



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

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.

The Movie Projector Analogy Revisited

by Greg Mackie

If you’ve been a Course student for a while, you’re probably familiar with the movie projector analogy. This analogy illustrates the Course’s teaching about projection by comparing it with the common experience of going to a theater: we project our thoughts outward to produce the world we see, just as a movie projector projects a movie onto a screen. According to this analogy, then, the way to change the world we see is to change our thoughts, just as the way to change a movie is to change the film in the projector.

I think this analogy is an excellent way to convey these ideas. But sometimes, I’ve seen it used in a way that I don’t find quite so illuminating. It is used to claim that changing things “out there” through our behavior has no role whatsoever in the Course’s system. This claim is made by saying that trying to bring about real change through changing things in the world is like trying to change a movie by manipulating the screen.

I don’t think it’s true, however, that changing externals through behavior has no role in the Course. True, the Course does claim that changing behavior, in and of itself, cannot change the mind. The Course is also clear that we cannot find happiness by manipulating externals; happiness is an inside job. Yet the Course does see a powerful role for external change: while the

change that really matters occurs on the level of the mind, external change *reinforces* that change of mind by *communicating* the mental content behind the external change. “All behavior teaches the beliefs that motivate it” (T-6.I.16:6). Therefore, when a miracle worker expresses the loving content of her mind in her words and actions—perhaps even through an external miracle, like a miraculous healing—she communicates love to others and thus reinforces it in both their minds and her own.

Getting back to the movie projector analogy: I think that to capture what the Course says about changing externals through behavior, this analogy needs to be fleshed out a bit and examined more closely. Here is how I see the parallels between the movie theater situation and the Course’s teaching:

- projectionist = the mind
- film = thoughts, including decisions about both how to perceive the world (content) *and* how to express that perception behaviorally (form)
- projector = projection/extension (both mental and behavioral)
- screen = the world, onto which the “film” of our thoughts and behavior is projected
- audience = other minds watching the “film”

Notice that behavior is not equated with “manipulating the screen.” That particular parallel has never made sense to me. How can changing externals through behavior, which we’re perfectly capable of doing, be compared to trying to change a movie by manipulating the screen, which is clearly impossible and therefore useless? Equating behavior with something useless suggests that behavior is useless. But while of course behavior *appears* on the screen, it is not a manipulation of the screen but rather a part of the film, a decision of the mind. Just as we choose the thought-content which determines our perception of the world (the ego’s thoughts or the Holy Spirit’s thoughts), so we also choose the behavioral form through which we express that content (guided by the ego or the Holy Spirit). Both things—content and form—are put into our “film” and projected onto the screen of the world for all to see. And this is very useful to the process of salvation.

Now let’s see how this analogy works, using both ego and Holy Spirit versions. First, let’s say the “projectionist” here is stuck in his ego. He projects his ego’s thoughts onto the screen of the world and sees a horror film, a dog-eat-dog world that attacks him mercilessly. As an actor in this film, he also projects his ego’s behaviors—he himself is one of the dogs, an attacker who is only out for himself. He seeks happiness as egos do, by trying to get all his ducks in a row, by trying to manipulate the world to cough up what his ego wants. His egocentric behavior inevitably communicates the egoic content of his mind to others watching the film and reinforces the ego in both their minds and his. He has chosen the ego as his advisor, and what he offers the world “will reinforce the rule of [his] adviser in the world” (T-30.I.16:7).

This is true even if he tries to disguise his ego with behavior that looks loving. He may fool people for a while, but deep down everyone gets the attacking message he is really sending. This is inevitable, because “all behavior teaches the beliefs that motivate it”—the beliefs that *really* motivate it. The audience watching his movie may see a peaceful ocean scene at first, but *Jaws* lurks in the depths and will rear his ugly head before long. The “love story” will quickly be revealed as the horror film it really is.

But now let’s say the “projectionist” is a person whose mind is truly healed. He extends the Holy Spirit’s blessing to the screen of the world, and so he sees beyond appearances to a *true* love story—the real world that shines with peace, joy, and mercy. His happiness no longer comes from manipulating the world; his only goal now is to heal his brothers through giving the priceless gift of healed perception to them. So, he extends loving thoughts from his mind to theirs. This extension is where healing ultimately takes place.

However, since his brothers believe the movie they are watching is real, he also does something more. As an actor in this film, he extends loving behavior based on his loving thoughts. He behaves selflessly, joining the Mother Teresas and Dalai Lamas of the world by devoting his life to helping others. He works miracles, perhaps even bringing about dramatic external healings as Jesus did. This behavior communicates the loving content of his mind to others watching the film and reinforces love in both their minds and his. He has chosen the Holy Spirit as his advisor, and the miracles he offers the world reinforce the rule of *this* advisor in the world. His loving behavior teaches the truly loving beliefs that motivate it. *Jaws* has been replaced by *The Miracle Worker*. And as everyone in the audience sees this new movie with its glorious message of love, the day is hastened when everyone together will leave the theater entirely and walk out into the eternal sunshine of God’s Love.

CIRCLE MAILBOX

The last issue of *A Better Way* (#53) was excellent. I'm always awed by the depth of thought expressed in each article. I'm always amazed how our egos are so much alike and yet ACIM is such a beautiful way, by *applying* what we study, to *exit* peacefully and with love from planet *cuckoo*!

Vic Strammiello - *Via e-mail*

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[Robert Perry's] interesting article titled "How Does God's Voice Speak to Me Through My Brothers?" (*A Better Way* #53) set me thinking, thank you.

You seemed to suggest that we might look for hidden, positive meaning behind others' words, and that this meaning would point us to the Holy Spirit. Quoting you: "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." This is an entirely reasonable interpretation of the Course, but I did feel that, working with the excellent examples you provided, much complication could be avoided simply by seeing that neither I nor my brother is really speaking, but only God is, whatever "we" might apparently be saying.

Looking for the deeper content ("spiritual truths") of people's utterances, therefore, seems to me to possibly introduce an unnecessary complication to a very simple situation, however well intended: whatever I say, or my brother says, can, if my view of the Course is accurate, never come from the ego but is always from God. Only ego will tell me my utterances are "mine." After all, is it not the central and ultimate teaching of the Course that the ego does not exist?

This is also the central teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita* in the opening scene of which Arjuna the great warrior balks at God's command that he must fight and kill some of his relatives and other good people, whereupon the Lord Krishna sets out to teach him that he is mistaken in his view that it is he, Arjuna, who will be doing the killing. All actions in the world are God's actions and are never ours, is the message, if I understand it correctly.

I surmise, however, that the examples you gave might be examples to illustrate an interim view, appropriate for the student, which for now regards the ego as real and in need of taming. It is, however, my understanding, that in the final analysis, the Course asserts that there simply is no ego. Therefore, is the Course not suggesting that all attempts to understand the ego's illusory workings must eventually fade away?

John Strydom - *Via e-mail*

Robert's response:

I actually don't agree that the Course would say that it's always God speaking through us (though I am a fan of the *Bhagavad Gita*). The Course has a paradoxical view of the ego—that, ultimately, it doesn't exist, and that, in this world (which also doesn't exist), it is extremely active. A paragraph that captures both sides of this paradox is the second paragraph of the very next section:

To the ego it is kind and right and good to point out errors and "correct" them. This makes perfect sense to the ego, which is unaware of what errors are and what correction is. Errors are of the ego, and correction of errors lies in the relinquishment of the ego. When you correct a brother, you are telling him that he is wrong. He may be making no sense at the time, and it is certain that, if he is speaking from the ego, he will not be making sense. But your task is still to tell him he is right. You do not tell him this verbally, if he is speaking foolishly. He needs correction at another level, because his error is at another level. He is still right, because he is a Son of God. His ego is always wrong, no matter what it says or does. (T-9.III. 2:1-10)

Note the two sides here. Parts of this passage speak of the ego pointing out errors, speaking, and doing (or at least motivating a person to point out errors, speak, and do). But other parts speak of the ego not being who that person really is. Therefore, if he is speaking from his ego, and therefore speaking foolishly and making no sense, your task is still to tell him he is right, not because of what he says, but because of what he is—a Son of God. I think this captures both sides of that paradox very well.

Robert

Responses to Greg Mackie’s “Shadows on the Wall: How Would the Course Have Us Regard Modern Physics” (A Better Way #53):

You have just rung my steeple of bells! I am so thankful you chose to do this and you did it fairly, accurately and comprehensively, as well as in terms one can easily understand. Keep up your outstanding work!

Jeanine Peterson - *Via e-mail*

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I really enjoyed your writing on this subject. It made physics and reincarnation, which I believed in, clear. I understand where both topics are coming from in regard to the Course. I am a student of *A Course of Miracles* and am really enjoying and understanding it. It has changed my life.

Thank you for your words.

Esther Morrow - *Via e-mail*

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Just now I happen to be working on Lesson 76, “I am under no laws but God’s.” I majored in physics in college, and one thing I remember is that the entire science is built around determining laws that describe how the world works. I believe that Lesson 76 applies to the laws of physics as well as to the types of laws that are specifically mentioned in the lesson.

Bart Bacon - *Via e-mail*

CIRCLE NEWS

WEDDING BELLS FOR ROBERT AND NICOLA



Robert Perry and Nicola Harvey (now Nicola Perry) were married at their home, which is also the headquarters of the Circle, on October 22. The wedding was performed by Mirkalice Gore, founder of A Place for Miracles, a *Course in Miracles* church in Las Vegas, Nevada. The ceremony was accompanied by beautiful harp music played by Course student and professional harpist Laurie Riley. It was a lovely occasion attended by family (Nicola’s family from England and Robert’s from California) and was followed by a celebration in which the house was filled with family, friends, and fellow Course students. The food was prepared through an amazing team effort by the wonderful folks at Course Community House. The best man was Robert’s son Adam (who delivered a moving toast), the bridesmaid was Robert’s daughter Anna, and the flower girls were Nicola’s nieces, Imogen and Eve. Nicola and Robert’s daughter, Miranda Rose Perry, was in attendance too, of course. Miranda, two months old then, is now four months old and offers happy, open-mouth smiles to everyone who comes to the house.

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MITZI LEAVES THE OFFICE—THANK YOU AND FAREWELL!

Mitzi Condit’s last day in the Circle office was December 15. Mitzi has been our “angel in the office” for almost nine years and has brought so much to the Circle through her sweet, gracious presence and her unswerving dedication to both the Course and the Circle. If you have called here, chances are you have spoken to Mitzi. Many of you have met her in person, but even if you haven’t, you may feel a personal connection with her. We have heard from so many people over the years who have been touched by her kindness. She plans to spend more time working on her house and in her garden and pursuing her art. She will be sorely missed. We wish her all the best in her retirement.

