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A BETTER WAY

Invincible

by Nicolas Mezzanatto

PFC Nicolas "Mezz" Mezzanatto is a 21-year-old infantryman serving in Iraq. He attends an ACIM group run by Army Reserve Lt. Col. Elizabeth Bowler. She is a psychiatrist working with the Army's Combat Stress Control Company, which counsels service members coping with life in a war zone. She has been using the Circle's materials in her group and thought we might appreciate Mezz's piece. All I can say is "Wow!" If he can apply the Course in the middle of a war, surely I can apply it when those Sedona "rock gawkers" stop their cars in the middle of the road to take pictures. Mezz's "extreme example" teaches me that the Course can truly be applied anywhere and everywhere.

The photos accompanying this story are of Mezz and Elizabeth on the day they distributed toys to Iraqi children. The toys were donated by Elizabeth's 7-year-old daughter Amanda, who asked children attending her birthday party to bring toys for Iraqi children instead of for her. Truly, the Love of God is everywhere, from a war zone to the heart of a child. Thank you Mezz, Elizabeth, and Amanda for inspiring us all. —Ed.

I am invincible. It sounds odd to say although it's true in every sense. I am invincible. I started reading *A Course in Miracles* when it was suggested to me by my good friend LTC Elizabeth Bowler halfway through my tour in southern Baghdad. The most dangerous and heavily bombed place in Iraq. I am an Infantryman. A trained killer. I've been in more than twenty near death experiences, one of which a bomb large enough to level a tank went off ten feet from me. Lifting me off my feet and tumbling down a hill. Never have I been hurt and never shall I be. Of course I'm not referring to my body ever being damaged. I am talking about the real me. Every day I roll out the gate in to a candy land of roadside bombs. You never know where they are and you rarely know who sets them off. You can understand this is a nerve wrecking way to spend an entire year. Fortunately I am invincible. I am utterly untouchable. A bomb may blow up and destroy my body. A bullet may make its way through me. I may be betrayed by my allies. I may be ridiculed by prowar or antiwar extremists. A million things could happen to me yet I do not falter. I do not look to the left or the right. Because I know something most do not. All of these are meaningless and don't exist. If any thing can be threatened it doesn't exist. So a roadside bomb isn't real. Ridicule is meaningless. I am grateful for the inner peace that God has granted me. I will live my life in pursuit of the only thing that is real. Love.

For an Infantryman to say his life is directed by love is not common. The majority of people in the infantry are blinded by the world. They live on a primal level of what they can feel, taste, and see. I refuse to live this way. It's like running on a hamster wheel. Never will you reach your destination and your thirst will never be quenched. You are chasing the wind. I love my enemy. I understand him and

respect him. He is a child of God just like everyone else. There is no need for resentment because there was never an offense. Forgiveness is the only way to triumph. The only way to win. Many of my friends have bled on the sands of this county. Many have died. There is no room for unforgiveness. There is no room for false thinking. I will think with my higher self. I will allow the Holy Spirit to guide me.

Sometimes I feel like I'm watching my life on the big screen. I have plenty of time to choose between responding in fear or in love. I choose love. Every scene is a new opportunity to improve. To choose to live in light of Love. And the director? God.



Lt. Col. Elizabeth Bowler with Iraqi child



PFC Nicolas Mezzanatto with Iraqi children

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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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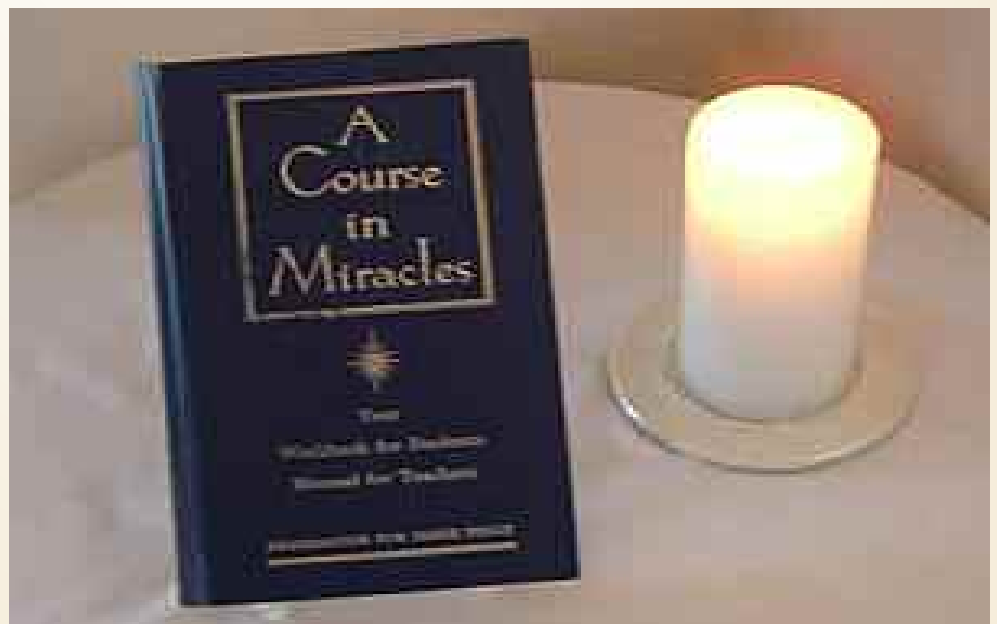
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The Hidden Power of IMIF Decisions

by Robert Perry

Have you ever wondered why we don't change faster? Why we seem so stuck in our patterns? Why we seem to awaken so slowly? After all, the Course teaches that we are in charge of the dream. We can choose whatever we want. We can choose to awaken right now. So why aren't we awake?

Recently, an answer presented itself to me in Workbook Lesson 136, "Sickness is a defense against the truth." This lesson contains a fascinating and disturbing account of how we defend ourselves against the truth.

Defenses are not unintentional, nor are they made without awareness. They are secret, magic wands you wave when truth appears to threaten what you would believe. They seem to be unconscious but because of the rapidity with which you choose to use them. In that second, even less, in which the choice is made, you recognize exactly what you would attempt to do, and then proceed to think that it is done.

Who but yourself evaluates a threat, decides escape is necessary, and sets up a series of defenses to reduce the threat that has been judged as real? All this cannot be done unconsciously. But afterwards, your plan requires that you must forget you made it, so it seems to be external to your own intent; a happening beyond your state of mind, an outcome with a real effect on you, instead of one effected by yourself.

It is this quick forgetting of the part you play in making your "reality" that makes defenses seem to be beyond your own control. (W-pI.136.3:1-5:1)

Here we have an account of how we keep the truth away from us. When the truth arrives and threatens to topple our secure world, we make a split-second decision to mount a defense, a decision that only *seems* unconscious because it is so quick. And then, just as quickly as we made the decision, we forget it. Now our defense goes forward, but it appears to just happen, without our involvement. It seems to be "an outcome with a real effect on you, instead of one effected by yourself" (4:3).

I'll call these decisions "IMIF decisions"—IMIF standing for "Instantly Made/Instantly Forgotten." Yet do we actually make IMIF decisions? How can we know if we do? After all, the nature of these decisions is that after making them we have no memory of doing so. It seems suspiciously convenient that Jesus says that we do something which, by its very nature, is extremely hard to catch ourselves doing. It's as if he said, "Your children's toys are actually alive, but you can't verify this because whenever you look, they act lifeless."

Yet I am really overstating the objection, for we *can* catch ourselves making IMIF decisions. I think the classic case is with diets. If you've ever been on a diet (and most of us have), you have probably experienced the phenomenon of a diet failing of its own accord. Somehow, it just stops working—or, worse yet, doesn't work from the beginning. This seems to be tied to a closely related phenomenon: food getting into your mouth without you putting it there. No decision was ever actually made to eat that food, and yet there it is, in your mouth.

Of course, you did decide to eat the food, and you can catch yourself making that decision. In my experience, the decision is uncannily similar to what Jesus described above. I feel a threat of hunger, or of simply missing out on something I want. At first I may consciously decide to resist the temptation. This decision to resist may be quite deliberate, accompanied a little back-and-forthing, some pangs of regret, as well as mental slaps on the back. And then suddenly, *bam!* I decide to eat that food. After all the previous deliberation, this decision is shockingly rapid. It is so instantaneous as to seem unconscious. It is no more than a flash of decision. And then, in a sort of twisted version of not letting the left hand know what the right hand is doing, I instantly look the other way. I look away so quickly and completely that this decision can actually be forgotten, to the point where at times I can't actually remember deciding to eat what I am in fact chewing. It seems to have just landed in my mouth of its own accord.

You probably know exactly what I am talking about. This is not a rare phenomenon. I saw a TV show that tested the claim of many obese people that they have lower metabolisms. They *must* have lower metabolisms, they reason, because they take in so little food and yet put on so much weight. The scientists on this show had a way of precisely measuring their metabolism, and found that these people were actually burning *more* calories than the average person, not less, for the simple reason that they had more body mass. What this show concluded (whether true or false, I don't know) is that the real story behind obesity is higher appetite settings in their brain. Obese people weigh more not because their body burns fewer calories, but because their brain pressures them (with hunger pangs) to take in more calories. If these scientists are right, then the people they were examining must have been using the process Jesus describes here in spades. They not only didn't remember *deciding* to eat; they didn't remember *eating*.

Therefore, we *are* able to make IMIF (instantly made/instantly forgotten) decisions. Having established that, let's ponder two additional questions. First, what if these aren't a small minority of our decisions, but are actually the majority? Second, what if these IMIF decisions are the culprit behind our slow spiritual progress? What if they are responsible for our snail's

pace along the path to truth?

IMIF decisions are indeed an excellent candidate for this role. Think about what Jesus said about them. He said that they are how we defend ourselves against the truth, and that once they set in motion our defense, it seems to go forward of its own accord, outside of our will. The predictable result of IMIF decisions, then, would be to leave us wondering why on earth the truth is still so far away, given that we never remember actually pushing it away. This, of course, is exactly the condition most spiritual seekers are in. We try and try and try to get close to God, and then we wonder where He is, why He isn't holding up His part of the deal. We are working so hard; why doesn't He reciprocate?

Indeed, our spiritual journeys are a lot like our diets. We start them with the best intentions and the most ambitious goals. We grind it out, day by day. And yet, after all our efforts, we inexplicably fall short. Sure, we slipped up here and there, but not enough to account for our meager results. Some mysterious element in the process just didn't work, and we are left scratching our heads and wondering what went wrong.

Surely that mysterious element is our own IMIF decisions. And is this really a mystery? Who exactly are we trying to kid? We may firmly intend to restrict our intake of ego, yet throughout the day, we are mindlessly munching on ego snacks, chewing on ego-based thoughts. “She is way less spiritual than I am” (munch). “I am being treated so unfairly” (munch). “It's such a pleasure to see him get what he deserves” (munch). Yet with most of these decisions, the very instant we make them, we forget we made them. Thus, at the end of the day, we find ourselves bloated with ego and have no idea how it happened. Seeing what a grip our ego still has on us and how far we seem from God, we think, “I don't know if I have what it takes. I am hopeless as a spiritual seeker” (munch, munch).

One of the classic examples of these IMIF decisions, and the power they have to derail our spiritual journey, can be seen in “Rules for Decision” (T-30.I). There, we begin the day with a special dedication. We sit down and decide to have an unusually happy day, and the way we plan to have this happy day is that we will make no decisions by ourselves. All of our decisions will flow from the Holy Spirit's guidance. What we are doing in this morning time is establishing a “set” (T-30.I.1:3-5)—a mindset for the day that will remain in effect until we change our mind (see T-4.V.6:11).

This section then goes on to give us instructions in how to renew this mindset throughout the day. Whenever we can, we remind ourselves of the day we want and tell ourselves that we will have that very day, *if* we make no decisions by ourselves (T-30.I.4:1-2). Between these two procedures—the morning time in which we *establish* the set for the day and the frequent moments of reflection in which we *renew* the set for the day—we should be able to carry through with our intentions. We should be able to have that happy day.

Yet most of the instructions—eight out of twelve paragraphs—deal with what to do when our day goes off track, when we find ourselves “unwilling to sit by and ask” (T-30.I.5:3). We have secretly decided that in this particular situation, we know what the problem is, and we are afraid that the Holy Spirit's answer will address a whole different problem, leaving the “real” problem unsolved. So we decide that it's impractical “to sit by and ask” for His guidance; it's time to take matters into our own hands. Notice the significance of this moment: Our whole day is planned around making all our decisions with the Holy Spirit, yet here we have refused to make a decision with Him. We are changing our mind about what the day is for. We are nullifying that mindset we established in the morning. We are changing directions and setting out on a whole different day.

Seeing the decisive nature of this one moment, the section provides a “quick restorative” (T-30.I.5:5). Here, we repeat words designed to wipe clean the new agenda and return us to our original one (“I have no question. I forgot what to decide”—T-30.I.6:4-5). This culminates in asking for His help in the very situation in which we were refusing it. Now we are back on track. Yet the section acknowledges that the quick restorative may not succeed. So it gives us a *longer* restorative, in which we gently reason ourselves out of our fear of asking. This longer process culminates in the pointed question, “What can I *lose* by asking” (T-30.I.12:4; emphasis from the original dictation). This is meant, of course, to be followed by actual asking—asking for guidance in the very situation we had been afraid to.

As you can see, a lot of guns are aimed at this single moment, and why not? This is the moment in which we throw away the day we planned on and decide to have another kind of day. It makes perfect sense to aim a solution, and then a backup solution, at this moment. Yet when I practice the day this section describes, I find it very challenging to carry all this out. The truth is that I don't want to look at the fact that I am “unwilling to sit by and ask.” I don't want to look at the fact that I have refused to ask and thereby decided to have a different day. Indeed, the investment to look the other way is so great that I often don't allow myself to notice that I *have* decided. After a time, I look back and realize the day went off track, but I can't tell you when or why. It just seemed to happen of its own accord. The simple truth is that I made an IMIF decision, and it changed everything.

I think that, in some sense, this is the standard day for a student of *A Course in Miracles*. We get up in the morning, we read the Course, we do our lesson, perhaps we meditate or pray. We feel so tuned in, so at peace. We look at the day in front of us and decide that today we are going to really live what we believe. Love and peace are going to flow from our fingertips to everyone we meet. We are going to be conscious of our lesson all the time. We then embark on the day, and we start out

really well, but then somewhere along the line, we begin to lose it. That initial peace fades away. And then about midafternoon we think, “What was my lesson again?” That spiritual day we planned on is nowhere in sight. The pressures of the day just swept us up and slowly ground us down.

No, that is the illusion. The truth is that somewhere along the way we made a decision, a crucial decision to toss out the priorities we set in the morning and have a different focus for the day. We made this decision so rapidly and forgot it so quickly that it seems as if we never made it at all. The memory of it is gone. All that is left of it is its legacy: a completely different day than the one we planned, a day in which, rather than feeling wrapped in the Arms of God, we maintained our distance from the “threat” of truth.

Are you beginning to see what a significant issue IMIF decisions are? Let me raise their significance one more level. In the Course’s original dictation, Jesus spoke the following line: “The unwatched mind is responsible for the whole content of the unconscious.” The unwatched mind, obviously, is the mind in which things happen while we aren’t watching, in which decisions are being made without our noticing. This is the very thing we have been talking about, isn’t it? The unwatched mind is where those IMIF decisions take place. This means that *IMIF decisions* are responsible for the whole content of the unconscious. Have you ever felt at the mercy of your unconscious? Have you ever felt imprisoned by all those weird reactions that spew out of it, overruling your best intentions? Well, you programmed your unconscious, and you did it with all those IMIF decisions.

How, then, do we gain control of these decisions? As we might expect, Lesson 136 contains an answer. The lesson says that if we do our practice period correctly, we will experience the truth we have been defending against. This will in turn place our body under a remarkable state of protection. The lesson then says this:

Yet this protection needs to be preserved by careful watching. If you let your mind harbor attack thoughts, yield to judgment or make plans against uncertainties to come, you have again misplaced yourself. (W-pI.136.19:1-2)

Notice what we are asked to do: “careful watching.” We are supposed to watch all those little thoughts that usually go unnoticed—attack thoughts, judgments, self-made plans—all those little decisions that have the power to derail our mind from the holy track on which we started our day (notice the similarity with “Rules for Decision”). We need to watch the unwatched mind. We need to catch our IMIF decisions in the act. Once we do, the lesson instructs us to “Give instant remedy” (W-pI.136.20:1), by silently repeating an expanded version of the lesson for the day, which is then provided.

We can see a formula here:

1. Watch carefully the unwatched mind.
2. Catch your IMIF decisions in the act.
3. Then instantly replace them with holy decisions, which you do by repeating Course-based thoughts.

Oddly enough, this is exactly what we do in “Rules for Decision.”

At this point, you are probably thinking, “Oh Lord. You mean that Jesus really means for me to do all that practice in the Workbook?” If you are like other Course students, you have probably settled on your reasons why you don’t actually have to learn the constant mind watching the Workbook is trying to teach. You have probably made your peace with the idea that your spiritual journey need not include really training your mind. Yet maybe that was just a decision to let the fox guard the henhouse. Perhaps it is time to rethink our *laissez-faire* attitude toward mental discipline. Perhaps we need to reread the opening paragraph of the Workbook, which says:

An untrained mind can accomplish nothing. It is the purpose of this workbook to train your mind to think along the lines the text sets forth. (W-In.1:3-4)

IMIF decisions are a simply massive issue on the spiritual path. They are the fine print that is undermining our whole spiritual contract. They are the termites in the walls that are weakening the entire structure. Yet even though their current effects are sobering, the potential they represent is exhilarating. If we could only learn to catch ourselves in the act, and replace those sneaky ego decisions with responsible holy decisions, think what could happen! We could lay hold of all of the spiritual treasures we ever wanted. We could virtually fly forward to the gate of Heaven. That slow progress we complain about would be a distant memory.

All it would take is being willing to train our mind.



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’.*

What Does It Mean to Be in the Present?

by Greg Mackie

The idea of being in the present is extremely popular in spiritual circles. A classic book by Ram Dass calls us to “be here now.” Another by Eckhart Tolle extols “the power of now.” Little children and animals, the conventional wisdom goes, are free of suffering because they’re blissfully taking each moment as it comes. We are told that each moment is a gift, which is why they call it “the present.”

The Course, too, emphasizes the idea of being in the present. But what exactly does this mean? This question is not as simple as it first appears, because the term “present” can be defined in different ways. In this article, I’d like to use three different definitions of “present”—the temporal present, the sensory present, and the eternal present—to clarify what I think the Course means when it calls us to be in the present.

The temporal present

The temporal present is quite simply the current time—“now” in the most ordinary sense. The temporal present for me right now is 2:42 pm on May 17, 2006. There are lots of references to this ordinary sense of “now” in the Course, as in the practice instructions where we are told to “now do this” and “now do that.” We can also see the temporal present in Course quotes like the following:

It [a language that a miracle recipient can understand without fear, i.e., physical medicine] is the highest level of communication of which he is capable *now*. (T-2.IV.5:5)

The abilities you now possess are only shadows of your real strength. All of your present functions are divided and open to question and doubt. (T-2.IV.5:1-2)

Start now to practice your little part in separating out the holy instant. (T-15.II.6:1)

It is in your power to make this season [Christmas] holy, for it is in your power to make the time of Christ be now. (T-15.X.4:1)

As we can see in these quotes, there is nothing inherently spiritual about the temporal present. It is a wholly neutral thing that can be filled with any content. The first two quotes show it being filled with ego content (diminished communication and abilities); the second two show it being filled with holy content (practicing the holy instant, the “time of Christ”). Yet the very fact that the temporal present can go both ways is important to the Course, because it means that we have the power to choose holy content at any moment. *Right now*, at this time on this date, we can choose God. We don’t have to wait for anything. “It is at this moment that complete salvation is offered you, and it is at this moment that you can accept it” (M-24.6:1).

In this sense, I think that being in the temporal present is *part* of what the Course means by being in the present. When it is given to the Holy Spirit the temporal present becomes a bridge to the eternal present: “You could live forever in the holy instant, beginning now and reaching to eternity” (T-15.IV.6:3).

The sensory present

The sensory present is what our body and physical senses are reporting to us at any particular moment in the temporal present. Being in the sensory present is focusing on sensation. This is what many people mean when they speak of being in the present. A popular idea these days is that there is something profoundly spiritual about connecting with our body and its senses, because (according to this theory) doing so frees us from the tyranny of the mind and gets us in touch with immediate experience: “Lose your mind and come to your senses.”

The sensory present is also what we’re really talking about when we say that little children and animals are in the present. They certainly do tend to flit from one sensation to another, without much thought of what happened the moment before or what will happen the moment after. My wife and I jokingly refer to this phenomenon in our cats as “kitty attention span.”

This, however, is not what the Course means by being in the present. The Course actually tells us that the body cannot truly be experienced in the present at all (see T-18.VII.3). It has a Workbook lesson entitled “I will not use the body’s eyes today” (W-pII.270.Heading)—meaning, I will not use the body’s senses to tell me what is true. In its view, focusing on the report of the body’s senses reinforces the apparent reality of the illusory world of sin and separation, which actually *blocks* awareness of the true present, the eternal present in which the real world and God abide:

Everything these messages [from the physical senses] relay to you is quite external. There are no messages that speak of what lies underneath [the real nonphysical world of light], for it is not the body that could speak of this. Its eyes perceive it not; its senses remain quite unaware of it; its tongue cannot relay its messages. (T-18.IX.3:4-6)

The body cannot know. And while you limit your awareness to its tiny senses, you will not see the grandeur that surrounds you. God cannot come into a body, nor can you join Him there. (T-18.VIII.2:1-3)

In short, focusing on the senses “leads to a perception of the world in which the proof of separation seems to be everywhere” (T-19.III.7:3). It is not too difficult to see this. Everywhere we look, we see proof of separation: separate bodies engaged in endless war in a dog-eat-dog world where everyone is doomed to die. How could being in *this* present bring us to God?

The eternal present

The eternal present is the timeless nonphysical reality that is always here and now but is covered up by the sensory present. Being in the eternal present is experiencing a reality that transcends the body and its senses entirely. Heaven and its knowledge abide in the eternal present, but on earth it is revealed by true perception. It is looking with the nonphysical eyes of Christ beyond the illusory world of sin and separation to the real world of holiness and love, the perceptual reflection of Heaven. *This* is what the Course primarily means by being in the present:

What time but now can truth be recognized? The present is the only time there is. And so today, this instant, now, we come to look upon what is forever there; not in our sight, but in the eyes of Christ. He looks past time, and sees eternity as represented there. He hears the sounds the senseless, busy world engenders, yet He hears them faintly. For beyond them all He hears the song of Heaven, and the Voice for God more clear, more meaningful, more near. (W-pI.164.1:1-6)

We enter the eternal present through the holy instant, in which we experience “the lifting of the barriers of time and space, the sudden experience of peace and joy, and, above all, the lack of awareness of the body, and of the questioning whether or not all this is possible” (T-18.VI.13:6). This may sound very advanced, but the Course assures us that “no one in this distracted world but has seen some glimpses of the other world about him” (T-13.VII.6:1). A friend of mine once told me of a time when she was walking with her father and all of a sudden she was filled with a deep, indescribable love for him. Their relationship had sometimes been contentious in the past, but now the barriers between the two of them just melted away and she experienced a profound joining in the present that changed her life forever.

Can you think of a time in your life when you experienced something similar, however faintly? This is a window into the eternal present that the Course would have us experience every moment of our lives. Its goal is to bring us to the state where “this life becomes a holy instant, set in time, but heeding only immortality” (W-pI.135.19:1).

The experiential difference between the sensory present and the eternal present

To get an idea of how different the sensory present and the eternal present are, let’s do two exercises. The first is based on a meditation technique I found on the Internet, and is focused on entering the sensory present. Right now, sit quietly and do the following:

*First, be aware of what is happening with your body.
Feel your breath, your heartbeat, your digestion.
Be aware of your sensations:
the feel of the chair against your back,
the feel of your clothing,
any feelings of comfort or discomfort in the body.
Now, become aware what your physical senses are reporting,
what your eyes see,
what your ears hear,
any smells or tastes you are experiencing.
Don’t contemplate these things.
Don’t try to make them part of your thinking process.
Just be aware of what is happening in the present moment.*

How did that feel? I found it somewhat relaxing; it was a pleasant enough experience. But it didn’t feel particularly profound. I didn’t feel like my perspective on life was changed in any significant way.

Now let’s try a Course exercise in entering the eternal present through the holy instant. Again, sit quietly, and this time do the following:

*Take this very instant, now,
and think of it as all there is of time.
Nothing can reach you here out of the past,
and it is here that you are completely absolved,
completely free and wholly without condemnation.
From this holy instant wherein holiness was born again
you will go forth in time without fear,
and with no sense of change with time. (T-15.I.9:5-7)*

How did that feel? Though the previous exercise was nice, I found this one much more profound and rewarding. I really felt like I was transported out of my normal frame of reference and put into contact with something truly transcendent. It was more than just relaxing; it felt peaceful in a much deeper way.

Indeed, you can really see how different this “present” is from the one the previous exercise focused on. Here, there is no reference to what is going on with the body at all. Nor is there an emphasis on freeing us from the mind. Instead, the emphasis is on freeing the mind from its oppressive burden of guilt (which ties us to the past and to the body). Instead of focusing on the changes of the body, this exercise focuses on the changeless present that is and will be the source of eternal joy long after the body has gone down to dust:

Each instant is a clean, untarnished birth, in which the Son of God emerges from the past into the present. And the present extends forever. It is so beautiful and so clean and free of guilt that nothing but happiness is there.
(T-15.I.8:4-6)

Being in the eternal present actually enables us to be present in the world of the senses in a truly loving way

This idea that being in the present means being in the *eternal* rather than the *sensory* present naturally brings up questions. Does being in the eternal present mean that we are constantly in la-la land and out of touch with the world around us? Shouldn't we be present to what's going on in the physical world, especially when we're doing something like driving? Shouldn't we be present to a person who is talking to us, listening attentively to what he or she is saying? Can anything good be revealed through the senses?

I think all of these questions have the same short answer: When we enter the eternal present, the Holy Spirit will use our senses for His purpose of salvation. His use of them will enable us to be present to the world of the senses in a truly loving way.

Ironically, by letting go of our *focus* on the body and its senses, I think we'll actually end up using them far more effectively. While there may certainly be times when we take leave of the senses entirely (say, during a meditation), He will enable us to use them properly when needed. When we see the world through the eyes of Christ, we'll be far more present to what really needs our attention than we were when our senses were pulled this way and that by every sight and sound. When we see other people through the eyes of Christ, we'll be far more present to them than we ever were when our senses were focused on their physical features and personalities.

And while I said above that focusing on the senses “proves” separation, the Course tells us that when the Holy Spirit's purpose of salvation becomes our own, “The senses then will seek instead for witnesses to what is true” (W-pII.4.2:7). Guided by the Holy Spirit, “They will be...careful to let no little act of charity, no tiny expression of forgiveness, no little breath of love escape their notice” (T-19.IV(A).14:4). Even physical forms, though unreal, are transformed in the holy sight of one who abides in the eternal present: “The smallest leaf becomes a thing of wonder, and a blade of grass a sign of God's perfection” (T-17.II.6:3). Wow! What would it be like to see the entire world in this way?

Conclusion

To sum up: At this very moment in the *temporal* present, we have a choice about what to focus on. One choice is to focus on the body's senses and see the *sensory* present. Focusing on this reinforces the apparent reality of the illusory world of sin and separation and actually blocks awareness of what the Course wants us to see. The other choice is take our focus away from the sensory present and use the eyes of Christ to see the *eternal* present, the timeless nonphysical reality of holiness and love that the Course *does* want us to see. The eternal present transcends the sensory present, but paradoxically, being in the eternal present enables us to be present to the sensory world in a truly loving way.

What, then, does it mean to be in the present? It means making that choice, moment by moment, to turn away from our focus on the sensory present and let the eyes of Christ reveal to us the eternal present that is always here, always now, always

available. Perceiving the eternal present on earth will ultimately lead us to *know* the eternal present of Heaven: “Heaven is here. There is nowhere else. Heaven is now. There is no other time” (M-24.6:4-7). What could be more joyful than knowing that we have always been in our Father’s timeless embrace?



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.

A Course in Cause and Not Effect

An Overview of Chapter 12 of the Text

by Allen Watson

In the chapters leading up to Chapter 12, the Course has presented some key concepts. These concepts are summarized in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, which is entitled “The Holy Spirit’s Curriculum.” A *curriculum* is a listing of subjects taught in a particular course of study. This chapter is thus another overview of what the Course is trying to teach us. The opening paragraphs remind us that the *mind* is always the source or the cause, and that everything else is the effect of choices made in the mind.

- **mind** chooses and interprets
- **emotions** react to mind’s interpretation
- **behavior** results

The mind, where choices are made, chooses between two possible interpretations of things and people in our lives. It chooses between “the two evaluations,” as it was called in an earlier section (T-9.VII). Mind chooses based on what we *want* to see: either the ego’s world or God’s creation. Our mind chooses the ego’s interpretation most of the time. As a result, we see attack or desertion or betrayal or enslavement (manipulation and control). Then, we make our interpretation *real* (real to *us* but not really real). We believe it is a fact, and not just our perception.

Secondly, we have an *emotional* reaction to our interpretation of things. We *feel* attacked. We feel ourselves to be the victim of the world we see. We feel angry, and want justice or vengeance; we feel pain.

Finally, in many cases, we translate the emotional reaction into *behavior*. We *act* like a victim. Perhaps we even get sick. “Oh! How you have hurt me!” we say to our brother. When we act out our emotions and play the victim, we are actually *attacking* our brother. It is a particularly vicious attack because it is disguised and looks like something else. By acting the victim, we are hurling an accusation at our brother: “You are a victimizer! You are a betrayer, a deserter, an attacker, a controller.” That is *never* the truth about him; it is only our interpretation, which we have made real to ourselves, and now are trying to make real to him.

Sometimes, however, we don’t act out the emotion. We control our behavior. We smile and act nice; we *pretend* we don’t have the emotional reaction. We actually may believe that we are being loving by doing so, avoiding conflict. Actually, it may sometimes be healthier to act out the emotion we are feeling (although it is still a vicious attack!). By suppressing the emotion, we are splitting and attacking our own mind. One part of the mind is seeing the other person as a sinner and having a strong emotional reaction, while the other part is telling us we can’t act that way and be a loving being. The integrity of our mind is destroyed.

Although it may be more honest to act out those emotions of hurt and betrayal, doing so is not the final answer. The Course does not want to leave either behavior or emotion intact; it wants to change them both. Attacking the emotion directly cannot do that. Trying to stifle your fear, your hurt, and your anger simply isn’t possible. As long as the interpretation on which the emotions rest remains unchanged, *you cannot forgive in truth*. “This is a course in cause and not effect” (T-21.VII.7:8), it tells us. You can’t fix the problem by changing things on the level of the *effects*, which is the level of behavior or the level of our emotional reactions. You have to go back to the level of *cause*, which is the choice made in mind and the interpretations based on that choice.

So you can’t fix it by altering the behavior; you can’t fix it by altering the emotions. You can only fix it by going back to the source, the decision in the mind to interpret in a certain way. We need a *different interpretation*, a different judgment. That is why the entire process begins only when we are willing to give up our interpretations, to call every one into question

(T-11.VIII.3:8), to realize that we don't know what anything means (T-11.VIII.2:3, 5), and to ask the Holy Spirit for a different way of seeing things.

His way of seeing things—His interpretation—is called here “the judgment of the Holy Spirit” (T-12.I.Heading). We saw in the previous section that only loving thoughts give this world any reality at all; everything else is false. Therefore the Holy Spirit interprets things in this way:

Every loving thought is true. Everything else is an appeal for healing and help, regardless of the form it takes.
(T-12.I.3:3–4)

That is the truth. Any other interpretation is the result of our ego, which imposes what it *wants* to see on top of the truth, and obscures it. All of our problems, all of our confusion and emotional pain, stem from this one source. We are not the victims of the world we see (W-pI.31.Heading); rather, I am the victim of my own interpretations, the victim of my own thoughts about what things mean.

This chapter, then, is about what the Holy Spirit is trying to teach us: to accept His judgment in place of our own. It tells us what we will begin to see when we are finally willing to let go of our interpretations, to stop thinking we understand anyone else's ego, and to allow the interpretation of the Holy Spirit to arise in place of our own. “I will step back and let Him lead the way” (W-pI.155.Heading) is one way of summing up this process; I withdraw my belief in my own interpretations of things, and I accept His judgment into my mind. This isn't about finding better parking places; it is about seeing everyone and everything in the world with different eyes (W.In.4:1).



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

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

“Resign Now as Your Own Teacher”

An Excerpt from Reading and Commentary for T-12.V, “The Sane Curriculum”

by Robert Perry

The following is an excerpt from a Text reading and commentary that was created as part of our 2006 Text reading program. The numbered material is the Text passage being commented on. The material in this color (dark red) is from the Urtext, Bill's original typescript of the Course. The material in this color (blue) is my commentary.

This section, which is entitled “The Sane Curriculum,” contains a powerful commentary on our impaired condition as students trying to learn how to love. In the end, it offers a compelling argument for why we need to rely on a curriculum that is not of our devising.

5. ¹You have learning handicaps in a very literal sense. ²There are areas in your learning skills that are so impaired that you can progress only under constant, clear-cut direction, provided by a Teacher Who can transcend your limited resources. ³He becomes your Resource because of yourself you cannot learn. ⁴The learning situation in which you placed yourself is impossible, and in this situation you clearly require a special Teacher and a special curriculum. ⁵Poor learners are not good choices as teachers, either for themselves or for anyone else. ⁶You would hardly turn to them to establish the curriculum by which they can escape from their limitations. ⁷If they understood what is beyond them, they would not be handicapped.

Nowadays we say “learning disabilities.” But back when the Course was dictated they used the term Jesus uses here: “learning handicaps,” which of course meant mentally retarded. Jesus is calling us retarded! And let's face it: When it comes to learning egolessness, we *are* retarded. “Poor learner” is putting it mildly. Slow learner is more like it; or even better, just plain slow.

Now imagine turning to a bunch of learning disabled kids and saying, “Okay, you're the teachers now. Design your own curriculum. Make up lesson plans. From now on, you're going to teach yourselves.” This, of course, is insane. Think of all the resources that the developmentally disabled need. They need highly trained teachers, with carefully planned curriculums and lots of learning aids.

The point is: When it comes to the journey home, this is what we are like. We are retarded. We should not be charting our own journey. We need to rely on the Holy Spirit, on His resources, and on His curriculum.

6. ¹You do not know the meaning of love, and that is [Ur: *is*] your handicap. ²Do not attempt to teach yourself what you do not understand, and do not try to set up curriculum goals where yours have clearly failed. ³[Ur: *For*] Your learning goal has been *not* to learn, and this cannot lead to successful learning. ⁴You cannot transfer what you have not learned, and the impairment of the ability to generalize is a crucial learning failure. ⁵Would you ask those who have failed to learn what learning aids are for? ⁶They do not know [Ur: *They do not know*]. ⁷If they could interpret the aids correctly, they would have learned from them.

Perhaps you've been trying to teach yourself to be a more loving person for a long time. How far have you gotten? Have you learned the kind of love the Course is talking about? A love without favorites, without degree, and without change—a love that is undivided? The reason you haven't is because, quite frankly, you are retarded when it comes to love. You are “love disabled”; not because you are brain-damaged, but because, unconsciously, you are dead set against love. Your goal, therefore, has been to *not* learn it, which has led to learning failure, inability to generalize your learning, and not realizing what the learning aids (such as the body and time) in your classroom are for. The developmentally disabled child is trying to play the teacher, with the inevitable results.

7. ¹I have said that the ego's rule is, “Seek and do not find.” ²Translated into curricular terms this means [Ur: *this is the same as saying*], “Try to learn but do not succeed.” ³The result of this curriculum goal is obvious. ⁴Every legitimate teaching aid, every real instruction, and every sensible guide to learning will be misinterpreted [Ur: *will be misinterpreted*], since they are all for facilitating the learning this strange curriculum is against [Ur: *they are all for learning facilitation, which this strange curriculum goal is against*]. ⁵If you are trying to learn how not to learn, and the aim of your teaching is [Ur: *and are using the aim of teaching*] to defeat itself, what can you expect but confusion? ⁶Such a curriculum does not make [Ur: *any*] sense.

Realize that when Jesus is asking Helen to accept the Holy Spirit's teaching and the Holy Spirit's curriculum, he is really talking about her accepting *his* teaching and *his* curriculum. This section is therefore a powerful argument about why we need the Course, why we need to follow its curriculum, rather than try to set up our own. I used to be passionately eclectic when it came to spirituality. I believed that the wisest, healthiest thing to do was have many teachings at my disposal, and then, inspired by all of them, set up my own curriculum. Yet I can tell you that the things I am doing now, under the Course's instruction, are things I would never have done on my own. They are just too challenging to my love affair with lovelessness.

I see tremendous resistance among Course students to treating the Course in the way this section implies. We conveniently misinterpret its teachings. We conveniently brush over its practice instructions, or conveniently decide that they are an unreasonable burden that is not in our best interests. Could it be that this teacher (Jesus) knows exactly what he is doing, yet we are neutralizing him because we are secretly against learning the love he is trying to teach us?

⁷This attempt at “learning” [Ur: *This kind of learning*] has so weakened your mind that you cannot love, for the curriculum you have chosen is against love, and amounts to a course in how to attack yourself. ⁸A supplementary goal in this curriculum [Ur: *A necessary minor, supplementing this major curriculum goal,*] is learning how *not* to overcome the split that makes its primary aim [Ur: *which made this goal*] believable. ⁹And you will not overcome the split in this curriculum, for all your learning will be on its behalf. ¹⁰Yet your mind [Ur: *will*] speaks against your learning as your learning speaks against your mind [Ur: *will*], and so you fight against all learning [Ur: *against learning*] and succeed, for that is what you want [Ur: *that is your will*]. ¹¹But perhaps you do not realize, even yet, that there is something you want [Ur: *will*] to learn, and that you can learn it because it *is* your choice [Ur: *will*] to do so.

The early paragraphs of this section said that we started out filled with pure, undivided love, and that this was our strength. Then we decided to attack ourselves, to attack the love in us. This split our mind into a love camp and a hate camp. Being divided inside between these camps, we were now weak, not strong.

Now this paragraph makes clear that all of the subsequent talk about learning and curriculums is a continuation of this same picture. The love camp wanted us to return to love, and so we have been trying to learn how to love again. Yet the hate camp wanted to make sure that, however much we tried to learn love, we never succeeded. Unfortunately, the hate

camp has had the upper hand. Under its influence, we have *majored* in repeating the original attack on ourselves, and have *minored* in keeping intact the split that allows that attack to continue. After all, you don't attack yourself unless you are split, unless the attacking part of you (the hate camp) looks upon the other part (the love camp) as something other than you, as not-you.

Unfortunately, trying to learn something we can't really want to learn (how to continually attack ourselves) has soured us on learning itself. What we need to realize is that there *is* something we truly want to learn, something that every legitimate impulse in us yearns to take hold of.

8. ¹You who have tried to learn what you do not want [Ur: will] should take heart, for although the curriculum you set yourself is depressing indeed, it is merely ridiculous if you look at it. ²Is it possible that the way to achieve a goal is not to attain it? ³Resign now [Ur: now] as your own teacher. ⁴This resignation will not lead to depression. ⁵It is merely the result of an honest appraisal of what you have taught yourself, and of the learning outcomes that have resulted. ⁶Under the proper learning conditions, which you can neither provide nor understand, you will become an excellent learner and [Ur: and] an excellent teacher. ⁷But it is not so yet, and will not be so until the whole learning situation as you have set it up is reversed.

Application: Ask yourself the following questions as sincerely as you can:

Have I treated Jesus' teaching in the Course as a developmentally disabled student ought to treat his teacher? Have I embraced his instruction, taken to heart his injunctions, and done what he told me to do?

Or with each bit of his instruction, have I reserved the right to set it aside or modify it, as if I know what's better for me?

Have I lived my life as if *he* is my teacher or as if I am my *own* teacher?

[Assuming the latter...]

How have I done as my own teacher? Have I learned the love I really want to learn?

Could it be that the curriculum I set myself is all about *trying* to learn love but never *succeeding*?

[Assuming a "yes"....]

I admit that my curriculum has been ridiculous.

I therefore resign as my own teacher.

I accept Jesus as my teacher instead.

But I do not resign in depression.

I resign in the happy faith that I will become an excellent learner and even an excellent teacher,

Once I am willing to act like a real student of my real teacher.

9. ¹Your learning potential, properly understood, is limitless because it will lead you to God. ²You can teach the way to Him and learn it, if you follow the Teacher Who knows the way to Him [Ur: and the curriculum for learning it] and understands His curriculum for learning it. ³The curriculum is totally unambiguous, because the goal is not divided and the means and the end are in complete accord. ⁴You [Ur: You] need offer only undivided attention [Ur: undivided attention {recognize this line from your school days?}]. ⁵Everything else will be given you. ⁶For you really want to learn aright [Ur: For it is your will to learn aright], and nothing can oppose the decision [Ur: will] of God's Son. ⁷His learning is as unlimited as he is.

Application: On the heels of your decision to follow Jesus' teaching, not your own, repeat the following to yourself with as much genuine conviction as you can:

My teacher will provide all that I need.

I need offer only undivided attention.

Everything else will be given me.

For it is my will to learn aright,

And nothing can oppose the will of God's Son.

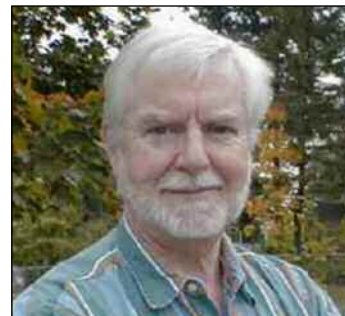
My learning potential is as limitless as I am.

Allen Watson Retiring—Thank You For Everything!

by Robert Perry

Allen Watson, who has been with the Circle since 1993, is retiring at the end of this month. I remember when I first encountered Allen's work. A friend, Bill Parham, sent me two booklets that Allen wrote and self-published in New Jersey. I remember getting them from the Circle's P.O. box, opening up one of them—*The Fear of Redemption*—and reading these words:

It is a central theme of A Course in Miracles that it is possible to live in complete freedom from guilt. However...we have generated guilt and chosen it as a means of validating our identity as beings who have separated from God. Deep down at the very root of our mind, we have made an incorrect choice. We have believed ourselves separate from God, Who is Love, and we suffer a profound, existential guilt over that separation—a separation which, the Course insists, is wholly imagined.



Allen Watson

I remember thinking that this man wrote with feeling and with depth, as well as with an accuracy of understanding that I had rarely if ever seen. The booklet was an extended commentary on a single section from the Text ("The Fear of Redemption" in Chapter 13), indicating that here was someone who really cared about the words of the Course. His whole aim was to draw out the meaning of that section and make his readers really understand it and really feel it. I immediately thought, "I wish we could get this guy to teach at the center we are planning on starting."

A couple of years later, that happened. In the meantime, we had struck up a correspondence, and he had shared with me how he dreamed of writing about the Course full time. I eventually shared with him my desire for him to teach out here, and in October of 1993, Allen moved across the country on a shoestring to join us here at the Circle. We didn't know how we were going to pay him, but we all felt completely guided about it, so out he came. He arrived just days after the Circle's official opening and soon after that he and I began the first live classes here, classes which, in one form or another, have continued to this day. After living in the house with my family and me for several years, he eventually moved to Portland when he met his future wife, and since then has worked for the Circle from there. During these thirteen years, Allen has taught countless classes and workshops, has written dozens of articles for our newsletter, and has authored or co-authored a number of our books and booklets. He has served on our board and has been our webmaster for these many years, after putting up the first version of our website himself. He assured us that this sort of thing would be important in the future!

I think the main thing I learned from Allen is "pay attention to every word." I'll never forget how, when he was first here, I would be teaching from a certain paragraph in the Text, thinking I had said pretty much what needed to be said, and then Allen would chime in. In the course of his comment he would read a snippet from that paragraph, often emphasizing one particular word, one that I had completely overlooked. Suddenly, a whole new meaning would jump out, leaving me wondering, "How on earth did I miss that?"

At that time, I was working hard on summarizing every paragraph of the Text in half of the space of the paragraph itself. This project felt very important to me and so I passed my summary of one of the sections to Allen for his feedback. Yet I was disappointed when he said that he couldn't really get the sense of the section from my condensation. Then he mentioned his real problem. "It's *already* condensed," he said. He didn't elaborate—he is an unobtrusive person—but those three words never left my mind. They embodied an entirely different approach to the words of the Course. I eventually abandoned my project and realized that my job, and our job at the Circle, was not to stuff those words into a smaller space, but to unpack them, to draw out the hidden reservoirs of meaning that they contain. And that's what we've been doing ever since.

Allen is beloved by Course students the world over. His writing touches a deep chord in readers. He is best known for his passionate and personal commentary on the Workbook, which we have published in the *Workbook Companion* series (the revised edition has just come out). In 1998 Allen began a similar series of commentaries on the Text, a very ambitious project that was planned to include several thousand words of commentaries on each and every section of the Text. When finished, it would be like having a couple hundred booklets like the one of Allen's that I first encountered on "The Fear of Redemption" (though it wouldn't be printed in that form, of course). Unfortunately, this project was sidelined by the copyright dispute several years ago. There is good news, however, and that is that Allen has decided to devote his retirement years to finishing this massive project. Thus, even though he is retiring from the rest of his duties at the Circle, he will continue writing, which means that Course students will be able to enjoy new expressions of Allen's unique gift for years to come.

Allen's contributions to the Circle and to the Course have been incalculable. He has our undying gratitude, which is exceeded only by what I am certain is Jesus' eternal gratitude. We wish him the greatest happiness in his retirement.

We will be hosting a retirement party for Allen on June 24 here in Sedona. If any of you would like to extend to Allen your gratitude and best wishes, please write me at robert@circleofa.org.

CIRCLE NEWS

THE CIRCLE'S NEW WEBSITE UP AND RUNNING

We are very happy to announce that the new Circle of Atonement website has just been launched. (It is at the same URL as the old one: www.circleofa.org.) Our website has increasingly become the public face of the Circle, and for that reason we have intended to revamp it for quite some time. Finally, after months of work, we have done so.

There are three overall improvements that you should know about. The first is a much cleaner, more attractive look. The second is a much better navigation system. The website is now more tightly and logically organized, and a navigation bar on the left of each page allows you to find your way around far more easily. The third is a number of new pages that we have added, which we hope you will find useful. The new site is still in progress—many pages, for instance, have not yet been converted to the new look and so still have the old look—yet the main pages are converted and we felt it was time to go ahead and launch the new site. If you have spent much time on our website, you will notice the difference immediately.

We are grateful for the help of those people who developed, designed, and programmed the new site, especially Leif Weightman, Caroline Griswold, Paul Nelson, Allen Watson, and Dee Doyle. Incidentally, Leif is a topnotch graphic designer from Boston who donated his time and expertise to us and Dee Doyle is our new webmaster, replacing Allen when he retires in June. If you find any problems with the new website you can always let Dee know at dee@circleofa.org. She appreciates hearing from you.

We hope you will enjoy the new site and we look forward to continuing to develop and enhance it, with your input, in the months to come. Enjoy!

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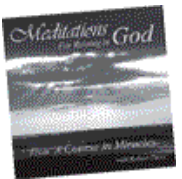
BOTH VOLUMES OF *A WORKBOOK COMPANION* NOW SHIPPING



Both volumes of *A Workbook Companion* are now shipping. The new Volume I covers Lessons 1-180 and the new Volume II covers Lessons 181-365. If you ordered the set when we originally offered it last year, your Volume II will be shipped to you soon if it hasn't been already. If you didn't order the set then, both volumes are now available for purchase. Until June 30, you can purchase both together for 20% off. That's \$39.90, plus shipping and handling. You'll also get a complimentary copy of the popular CD by Robert Perry entitled *Meditations for Resting in God* (also available separately—see below). To order, please visit the bookstore on our new website, www.circleofa.org, or give us a call at 928-282-0790.

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NEW CD NOW AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE



Robert Perry recorded a beautiful set of two extended meditations entitled *Meditations for Resting in God*. This CD has been used as a free premium for those people buying the new *Workbook Companion* books and as a membership benefit for those who become “Friends of the Circle” (see box below).

Now, because of popular demand, we are making this CD available for purchase at \$12.95. To order, please visit the bookstore on our new website, www.circleofa.org, or give us a call at 928-282-0790.

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BECOME A “FRIEND OF THE CIRCLE”

The Circle depends on your support to continue offering our programs, services, and outreach for new and experienced students of the Course. We invite you to become a member or “Friend of the Circle” with an annual donation as low as \$50 (income sensitive donation: \$35). Your membership includes:

- Access to Friends page on our new website, which includes discussion forums on various Course-related subjects
- Friends bimonthly e-newsletter
- Free CD of Robert Perry's *Meditations for Resting in God* (\$12.95 value)
- 20% discount on books and audio programs
- 20% discount on educational events

Donations can be made using a check or credit card. To become a Friend of the Circle, call us at 928-282-0790 or visit our new website at www.circleofa.org and follow the link labeled “Become a Friend” on the left-hand navigational bar. The Circle of Atonement is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and all donations are tax-deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.