



A BETTER WAY

Open Mind Meditation The Practice of the Final Step

by Robert Perry

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Meditation is enormously important in *A Course in Miracles*. Most Course students don't realize this, but it's true. Jesus spoke of meditation in positive terms to Helen Schucman and Bill Thetford during the Course's early days, saying, "Meditation is a collaborative venture" (yes, that's how that line originally read!). It may surprise you to learn that Helen was meditating when she had the first of her visions leading up

to the dictation of the Course. When we go through the Workbook, we are given detailed training in Course meditation, beginning in Lesson 41. There, we are told, "Today we will make our first real attempt to get past this dark and heavy cloud [of insane thoughts], and to go through it to the light beyond" (5:3). Then we are taught a fairly classic meditation technique, in which we clear our mind of thoughts and "sink down and inward" (7:2), toward the light within, occasionally repeating the idea for the day to keep our mind on track.

After that, meditation becomes a real staple of the longer practice periods. Most of the instructions given are variations on the "sink down and inward" technique that was introduced in Lesson 41. Yet, in my reading, there are two additional techniques that arise as the Workbook progresses. One is in Lesson 183, where we are told to "repeat God's Name slowly again and still again" (6:1), emptying our mind of all other thoughts, and repeating His Name as a call to Him that represents "the only wish we have" (6:6).

The other technique is the crowning technique of the Workbook. The introductions to all of the final sections—Review V, Review VI, Part II, and the Final Lessons—all enjoin us to do this kind of meditation. This means that we are supposed to be practicing this every day for nearly the entire second half of the year! Unfortunately, I think that virtually nobody is doing that, simply because the technique has not yet made it into the awareness of Course students. It is one of those important stories that gets no media coverage.

This article, I hope, will be a beginning of the news getting out. I will attempt to describe what this method of meditation is, how to do it, and how it fits into the Course's overall teaching.

I call this technique Open Mind Meditation, for reasons which I hope will become clear. Whereas the other methods of Course meditation rely to some extent on repeating words, this method is all about going beyond words. That is both the goal it aspires to and its means for getting there. And what spiritual seeker isn't captivated by the idea of going beyond words? Who doesn't want to transcend the limiting boxes of words that crowd the skyline of our minds, and rise up into the clear sky? Course students in particular love reminding each other that "words are but symbols of symbols" (M-21.1:9).

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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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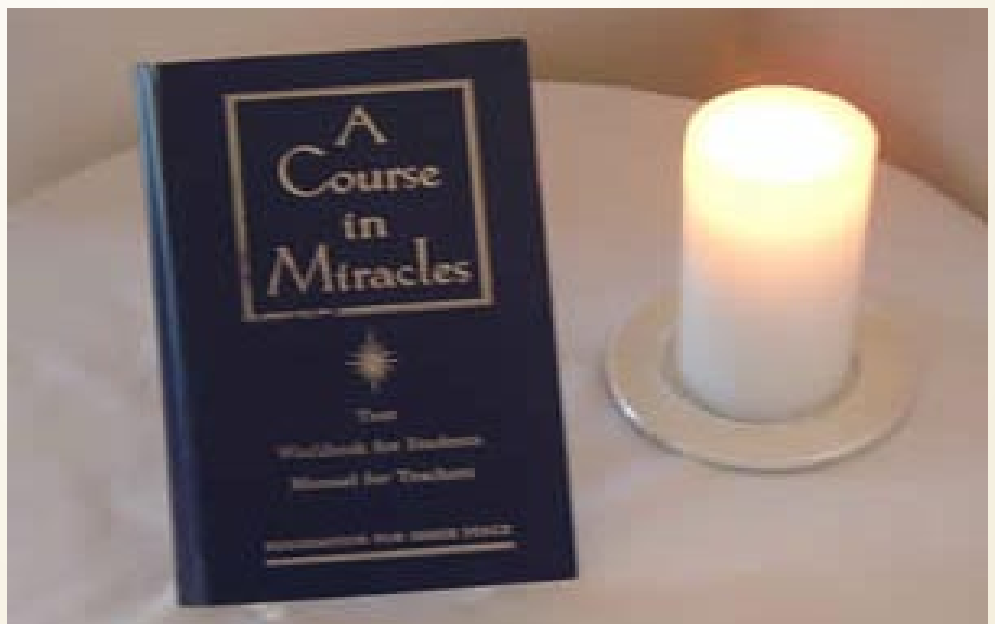
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Here, then, is our chance to stop talking about going beyond words and really do it. Here is a practice in which we sit down and hold our mind in focused, stable intention without the prop of words.

How, then, do we do it? I like to think of Open Mind Meditation as consisting of two aspects: what is not in the mind and what is in the mind.

What is not in the mind: thoughts, words, beliefs

Central to Open Mind Meditation is emptying the mind of all specific content. This includes thoughts, words, and beliefs. The first item on that list shouldn't be surprising. It seems like all forms of meditation involve clearing out the clutter in the mind. This technique is no exception. We are asked to silence the usual mental chatter, to turn off the "monkey mind," as it is often called in the East.

However, the next item on the list—words—is a little more surprising. Many meditation techniques, including the two earlier forms in the Workbook, rely on the repetition of words. Most of us find it extremely helpful to have that anchor to return to. If we are going to clear our mind of everything else, it helps to have one thing to focus on. Yet in this meditation, we do not repeat words; we have no specific anchor.

What is the purpose of dispensing with words? Contrary to popular belief, the Course sees words as essential tools, for they have the ability to point our minds to the meaning that the Course wants us to realize. Words are useful middlemen, yet therein lies their limitation as well. Middlemen make a connection possible, but they also get in the way of *direct* connection, and that is what we seek in this meditation. "We seek direct experience of truth alone" (W-pll.In.1:3). The following key paragraph describes the role of words in Open Mind Meditation:

Yet are the words but aids, and to be used, except at the beginning and the end of practice periods, but to recall the mind, as needed, to its purpose [besides the beginning and end of the meditation, we only use words to draw the mind back from wandering]. We place faith in the experience that comes from practice, not the means [the words] we use. We wait for the experience, and recognize that it is only here conviction lies. We use the words, and try and try again to go beyond them to their meaning, which is far beyond their sound. The sound grows dim and disappears, as we approach the Source of meaning. It is Here that we find rest. (W-pl.rV.In.12:1-6)

As this paragraph explains, we use words to introduce the meditation and to end it. In between, we use them only to "recall the mind" to its focus. The meditation, then, is mostly wordless. We aren't spending our time repeating words. Why? Because even though words are a useful guide which carries us toward the goal, we now want nothing in between us and the goal. If you want a direct encounter with your beloved, at some point you have to ditch the chaperone.

We clear our mind, then, of both thoughts and words, and we even go one step further and momentarily let go of our *beliefs*. Beliefs are a subtle but all-pervasive obstacle to the experience we seek. They spread a blanket over everything we see. On this blanket is written, "I know what all this is." The goal of this meditation is to peek beneath the blanket, to glimpse the radiant reality that all our smug "knowing" has obscured. For this reason, many instructions in Open Mind Meditation ask us to consciously set aside everything we think we understand, in order to open our mind to a whole new kind of knowing. Here is a classic example. The following paragraph, often taken as a kind of generic teaching, is in fact meant as a detailed induction process for entering meditation:

Simply do this: Be still, and lay aside all thoughts of what you are and what God is; all concepts you have learned about the world; all images you hold about yourself. Empty your mind of everything it thinks is either true or false, or good or bad, of every thought it judges worthy, and all the ideas of which it is ashamed. Hold onto nothing. Do not bring with you [into the silence] one thought the past has taught, nor one belief you ever learned before from anything. Forget this world, forget this course, and come with wholly empty hands unto your God. (W-pl.189.7:1-5)

In summary, then, what is not in the mind during this meditation are thoughts, words, and beliefs. This clears away the barriers to direct experience of the truth. I often imagine that by clearing my mind of thoughts, words, and beliefs, I am swiveling vertical blinds to the open position. The Course uses a similar image, asking us to “open the curtain” (W-pl.164.8:1). Then, in the next sentence, it uses the image of clearing our clutter from the room of our mind, so that there is room for Christ’s treasure to be placed there:

Your trifling treasures put away, and leave a clean and open space within your mind where Christ can come, and offer you the treasure of salvation. (W-pl.164.8:2)

What is in the mind: silent expectancy

Clearing our mind of thoughts, words, and beliefs, however, is only half of the picture. Something needs to go into that empty space, even if it is only one thing, or the space will quickly fill with clutter again. What, then, goes into the mind to replace what’s going out? Many meditation techniques use the repetition of words, yet we’ve already seen that we can’t do that here. Other techniques have us focus on particular bodily sensations, yet the Course has a dim view of sensation and so never asks us to focus on it.

The answer is captured in the following quotes:

Wait in silent expectancy for the truth. (W-pl.94.4:1)

Let it [your mind] rest in still anticipation. (W-pl.157.4:3)

We wait in quiet expectation for our God and Father. (W-pII.In.2:2)

And now we wait in silence, unafraid and certain of Your [God’s] coming. (W-pII.In.7:1)

Hold your mind in silent readiness. (W-pl.76.9:2)

Let’s look at key phrases in these quotes, beginning with “silent expectancy.” “Silent” does not mean physically silent but *mentally* silent. It means the absence of mental chatter. “Expectancy” means just that. The dictionary in my word processor defines expectancy as: “excited anticipation; excited awareness that something is about to happen.” Perhaps we can replace “excited” with “happy,” so that expectancy signifies a happy anticipation. The Course even speaks of “a happy expectancy” (T-19.IV(A).6:1). Thus, “silent expectancy” means that the mind is filled with a happy anticipation that something is about to happen, an anticipation that exists in a void of mental chatter.

Notice that the phrases “still anticipation” and “quiet expectation” sound a great deal like “silent expectancy.” They are clearly describing the exact same state of mind. In this state, the mind is still, quiet, silent. There are no thoughts to disturb the quiet. There is no motion to disturb the stillness. Yet there is *something*. There is anticipation, expectation, expectancy. We happily expect that something is about to happen. Yet this is not an expectancy composed of thoughts dancing excitedly about. It is still. It is motionless. It is silent.

And remember, this expectancy is not expressed in the form of words. It is not housed within the walls of words. It is completely *unclothed*. This reminds me of a phrase from the classic mystical text *The Cloud of Unknowing*: “Nothing lives in the working mind but a naked intent stretching to God.” We could rephrase this quote as “Nothing lives in the mind but a naked expectancy.”

Now let’s look at the final quote: “Hold your mind in silent readiness.” “Hold your mind” means “hold it still.” Reach the readiness you seek and then pause the video; freeze the frame. Again, we are talking about a stable, motionless state of mind. “Silent readiness” is very similar to “silent expectancy.” In fact, they are the very same state if we understand that the expectancy is what *readies* us for what’s coming. Expectancy is the state that draws it to us, and so our expectancy is simultaneously a readiness.

Finally, notice the recurrence of the word “wait”: “wait in silent expectancy,” “wait in quiet expectation,” “wait in silence” (this last phrase occurs twice more in the Workbook’s practice instructions). Indeed, the word “wait” pops up again and again in instructions for Open Mind Meditation: “We wait for Him to come to us” (W-pII.In.4:6). “We wait for the experience” (W-pl.rV.In.12:3). “Father, we wait with open mind today” (W-pII.311.2:1). My word processor dictionary defines “wait” as “do nothing expecting something to

happen.” This, of course, means physically doing nothing while mentally expecting something to happen. Yet to really get the sense of the Course’s use of the word, we need to realize that just as “silent” is being transposed from the physical to the mental realm, so “wait” is as well. In other words, to wait in this sense means to *mentally* do nothing while expecting something to happen. It means to hold your mind absolutely still, filled only with happy expectation. We are right back to “still anticipation” and “silent expectancy.”

What are we waiting for? What are we expecting will happen? The experience of God to dawn upon our mind, of course. If you were utterly confident that sixty seconds from now God Himself would enter your mind, how would you feel? Wouldn’t a holy hush fall over your mind? Wouldn’t you be filled with nothing but joyous anticipation? This is the state we are asked to hold. We may respond that it is impossible to be confident that God will show up, yet confidence is part of expectancy. How can you expect something yet have no confidence that it’s coming? Being part of expectancy, confidence is part of what draws the experience to us. Even if He doesn’t show up *now*, our confidence will guarantee that He shows up *sooner*. Notice the quote above, where we wait “unafraid and certain” of God’s coming. Repeatedly, the Course asks us to hold in mind this certainty—the confidence that He is indeed coming.

The technique as a whole, then, involves stilling our mind of thoughts, not relying on the repetition of words, and setting aside all that we think we know. We empty our mind of all these things, and fill it with nothing but silent, unclothed anticipation, confidently waiting for the experience of God to dawn upon our mind.

The practice of the final step

As I endeavored to practice this method of meditation, I began to notice something. The spirit of it reminded me a great deal of what the Course calls the final step. The final step is what happens at the end of the road, when we have shed everything of the ego and at last reached perfect openness to and readiness for God. Then God comes and takes the final step Himself, lifting our mind back into Heaven. Let’s look at these elements one by one.

First, the last step comes when our mind has been cleansed of all the ego’s illusions. “There is no opposition to the truth. And now the truth can come at last” (M-28.3:11-12). This passage from the Text describes this state beautifully:

There will come a time when images have all gone by, and you will see you know not what you are. It is to this unsealed and open mind that truth returns, unhindered and unbound....When every concept has been raised to doubt and question, and been recognized as made on no assumptions that would stand the light, then is the truth left free to enter in its sanctuary, clean and free of guilt.
(T-31.V.17:2-3, 5)

This, of course, is reflected in the first aspect of Open Mind Meditation, clearing the mind of thoughts, words, and beliefs.

Second, once the mind has been cleansed of all its concepts and images, there is a moment of pure expectancy, in which we wait for God’s arrival. This evocative line from the Manual describes the moment before God takes the final step:

All living hearts are tranquil with a stir of deep anticipation, for the time of everlasting things is now at hand.
(M-28.4:1)

This line describes exactly the inner posture we are asked to hold in Open Mind Meditation. Our hearts are supposed to be tranquil and still, yet filled with “a stir of deep anticipation,” in expectation of the arrival of eternity. This sentence, in my opinion, captures this inner posture more beautifully than any other.

Third, God comes and lifts us out of the dream and into Heaven. The Course describes this inexpressible moment in a line of sheer poetry: “But finally He comes Himself, and takes us in His Arms and sweeps away the cobwebs of our sleep” (W-pl.168.3:4). This, of course, is precisely what is meant to happen in

Open Mind Meditation, only there it happens momentarily, after which we return to the sleep of the world, whereas in the final step it happens permanently.

What really clinches this connection between Open Mind Meditation and the last step is that the Course itself connects them. The introduction to Part II of the Workbook instructs us to spend the latter part of the year doing Open Mind Meditation so *that* we can experience God's final step. Let's first look at some of the instructions for meditation:

Words will mean little now. We use them but as guides on which we do not now depend. For now we seek direct experience of truth alone. (1:1-3)

We say the words of invitation that His Voice suggests [the words of the lesson], then we wait [wordlessly] for Him to come to us. (4:6)

These, as we have seen, are the typical instructions for Open Mind Meditation. Now let's see those instructions linked to the final step:

We wait in quiet expectation for our God and Father. He has promised He will take the final step Himself. And we are sure His promises are kept. (2:2-4)

Now do we come to Him...and wait for Him to take the step [the final step] to us that He has told us, through His Voice, He would not fail to take when we invited him. (4:1)

These passages (and there are several others in this section) make it abundantly clear that we are being asked to go into meditation and wordlessly wait for God's final step. We are even given an arresting image which captures the state of mind with which we wait:

The memory of God is shimmering across the wide horizons of our minds. A moment more, and It will rise again. A moment more, and we who are God's Sons are safely home, where He would have us be. (9:5-7)

The image is the familiar one of watching a sunrise. The sun has not yet risen, but its glow is lighting up the lower sky, making you certain that you will soon see its brilliant edge peak over the horizon. In this expectation, you stand motionless, your eyes riveted on the point at which the sun will rise. This is the spirit in which we are supposed to wait in this meditation, only what we are waiting for is not the rising of the sun, but the rising of "the memory of God," the full awakening to God that occurs in the last step. We wait breathlessly, unmoving, certain that "a moment more," and we will experience the glorious dawning of God within our mind. Of course, I don't believe we should expect this dawning to literally be the last step—to lift us out of time forever—but it will be a taste, a foreshadowing, of that final moment.

All of this confirms that Open Mind Meditation really is the practice of the final step. We are seeking to approximate that empty, open, expectant state that our mind will be in right before God lifts us out of the dream altogether. Knowing that this is practice for waking up to Heaven should give us motivation to try it and become skilled in it.

The connection with the last step explains a great deal about this method of meditation. It explains why it is the crowning meditation method of the Workbook, the method the Workbook builds to and ends on. (Indeed, the final lessons, which begin with "This holy instant would I give to You," are exercises in Open Mind Meditation.) It explains why this kind of meditation is so important. And it explains why it is so hard. In my experience, it is far more difficult than methods in which I am allowed to repeat words. Holding my mind in this state of wordless, formless expectancy is not easy. The mind wants something specific to hang onto, and it also wants to flit around. It doesn't want to motionlessly gaze at an abstract horizon in anticipation of a formless dawning. Yet I am trying to become proficient in it, in part because it plays such a significant role in my spiritual path.

Instructions

I would now like to guide you through this method of meditation. Before actually beginning the meditation, it helps to prepare your mind for it. An excellent way to do that is with the prayer to Lesson 221, which follows immediately after the Part II material we have just discussed. This prayer can be thought of as the Open Mind Meditation prayer. It speaks of waiting for God's Voice, as opposed to waiting for union with Him, but the two are closely related, and many instructions to Open Mind Meditation say that God may use the open space we clear to give us guidance or other needed gifts.

Therefore, spend a few minutes repeating this prayer beforehand. Take each line one at a time and say it to God. Try to mean it. You are announcing your intention to wait in silence and stillness for God to come to you and give you peace. Go through the prayer slowly at least two times, ideally more.

Father, I come to You today to seek the peace that You alone can give.

I come in silence.

In the quiet of my heart, the deep recesses of my mind, I wait and listen for Your Voice.

My Father, speak to me today.

*I come to hear Your Voice in silence and in certainty and love,
sure You will hear my call and answer me.*

As further preparation, go through a step-by-step process of clearing your mind of all of its normal content. Take each line below and consciously attempt to carry it out before going on to the next:

Simply do this: Be still, and lay aside all thoughts of what you are,
and all thoughts of what God is.

Let go of all concepts you have learned about the world,
and all images you hold about yourself.

Empty your mind of everything it thinks is either true or false,
and everything it thinks is good or bad.

Clear it of every thought it judges worthy,
and all the ideas of which it is ashamed.

Hold onto nothing.

Do not bring with you one thought the past has taught,
nor one belief you ever learned before from anything.

Forget this world,
forget this course,

and come with wholly empty hands unto your God.

(based on W-pl.189.7)

Through this process, you are leaving behind all that blocks the experience of God.

You might even imagine, with eyes closed, that you are walking along a path,
divesting yourself of the burden of all your thoughts and beliefs,

leaving them strewn on the path behind you,
and leaving yourself free to meet your God.

Now imagine that, in this way, you reach the edge of an inner cliff.

Before you is nothing but open sky, the empty sky of your mind,
cleared of all thoughts, words, and beliefs.

Now the meditation really begins.

Repeat the following thought, which states your intention, and which you will use to recall your mind from wandering:

I am waiting only for You.

(based on T-12.VIII.4:6)

Now simply stand there, at the edge of the world,
waiting in silence for God to rise in the sky of your mind.
Everything of the world, everything of time and space, is behind you now.
All that's left is to wait for your Creator.
“Wait in silent expectancy for the truth” (W-pl.94.4:1).
Hold your mind still, as if it is a video on pause.
Keep it tranquil and at rest,
yet filled with a stir of deep anticipation, for the dawning of God is at hand.
Hold this anticipation wordlessly.
Let there be nothing in your mind but a naked expectancy.
Fix your gaze on the horizon of your mind, where the radiance of God is already appearing.
Don't let your gaze leave that horizon.
And let your expectancy be confident.
For you know that in just a moment more, God Himself will rise within your mind.
In your quiet heart and open mind, His Love will blaze its pathway of itself (based on W-pl.189.9.4).

Your attention will inevitably fall from this formless focus,
and clothe itself in words and thoughts.
Be ever alert to this. Be ready for it.
Watch for your mind falling away from its focus.
And when it does, you can use words to draw it back.
Immediately repeat, *“This thought I do not want.
I choose instead, ‘I am waiting only for You’”* (based on W-pl.rVI.ln.6:2-3).
Then return to your silent, expectant waiting.
Do this as often as you have to, even if it's every ten seconds.
Keep bringing your mind back to waiting.
Try to reach a state of perfect waiting,
where your mind is at rest but alert.
Still but expectant.
Empty but full.
For that is what allows God to come to you.



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

Robert Perry. *He is the author or co-author of twenty books and booklets, including Path of Light: Stepping into Peace with 'A Course in Miracles'.*

New Format and Schedule for *A Better Way*

Starting with this issue, there will be a new format and production schedule for *A Better Way*. In a nutshell, it will be shorter and more frequent. Instead of several articles, each newsletter will now have just one article, plus Circle news items. Instead of bimonthly, the newsletter will now come out monthly. We hope you enjoy the changes.



Allen's retirement party

On June 24, we hosted Allen Watson's retirement party at the Circle house, which is also Robert and Nicola Perry's home. It was a wonderful party and a moving occasion. Friends and students came, some of whom we hadn't seen for years. An unexpected gift of a huge bouquet of white lilies showed up for the occasion. We had the opportunity to listen to a visualization that Allen had just recorded for the Circle, which, coincidentally enough, was about a gift of lilies. After dinner, the Circle gave Allen a retirement gift in the form of a check (we knew he would appreciate that after years of modest paychecks!). The most moving part of the evening was when various people read aloud tributes to Allen that had poured in from all over the world. It truly put his time with the Circle in perspective. Here are just two of the dozens we received:

When I think of all the years I've known Allen several of his gifts really shine in my mind. Allen's wonderfully soothing voice made his lectures feel more like he was telling a story, a beautiful story. How often I closed my eyes and sank into those words! The Course became a living, breathing thing. One time, during a workshop Allen compared a lesson, (I think it was a lesson) to a ginsu knife commercial. He then went on to read it as such and he was absolutely correct and superbly convincing. He had the entire room laughing hysterically and the more he read, the funnier it got! What a wonderful sense of humor and lightness he brings to the Course which actually illuminates its beauty. Finally, Allen was so often visibly moved by the content he was teaching. His love for the Course was undeniable and extended contagiously. Thank you Allen! You changed my life.

Love,
Jane Suraci

In the 1994, the Course came knocking on my door. I couldn't get enough. In the process of investigating resources to help with my study, I discovered your online commentaries. I signed up, and they truly became my a trusted companion for my workbook practice, which was so very important for me in the early days and remains the core of my practice to this day. I found that you seemed to have read the lessons with a perspective much like my own. For instance, when I would have a question after reading a lesson, there was the same question (and the answer!) in your commentary. Or, I would think "wait a minute, how does this statement fit with what I read two lessons back?!", and I would find the same question posed in your commentary, and your perspective on the resolution. Again and



again I had these experiences with your commentaries, and I appreciated so much having a fellow traveler share reflections I related to so personally. I think the "personal" aspect, in your commentaries and elsewhere, is what I value most about your writing. There is a humanness in your writing that reassured me that I was not alone with my frustrations and questions. You bring a flesh and blood and emotional perspective to the study of a work so amazingly high in its intellectual standards, and yet you honor those standards too. You help bridge the gap.

I look forward to your continued writing. Thanks for being, as your signature states, my "companion on the journey."

Rick Baker

Paul Nelson leaves

Paul Nelson, who had been our Executive Director since May of 2005, has resigned. He returned to New England at the end of June to be with his beloved daughters. Paul made a number of major contributions to the Circle while he was here, including heading up the redesign of our new website, getting a new catalog designed and mailed to a huge number of Course students, instituting a long-distance learning program, getting a meditation CD released, pulling together a Path of Light 10-CD set (yet to be released), transferring us over from tape to CD, and accomplishing a lot of behind-the-scenes streamlining. His contributions enabled us to make giant strides in our ability to serve students of the Course, for which we will remain forever grateful.

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
- Free CD of Robert Perry’s *Meditations for Resting in God* (\$12.95 value)
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- 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.