



A BETTER WAY

What If Jesus Really Did Write This?

Talk Given at the ACIM Conference “An Opportunity to Gladden Yourself,” San Francisco, California, February 23, 2007
by Robert Perry

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As all Course students know, the Course claims to be written by Jesus. The author talks about his disciples, his birth—speaking of it as Christmas—his miracles, his sayings in the gospels, his crucifixion, his resurrection, even his communication with his followers after the resurrection.

And I think most Course students accept that Jesus did in fact write it. I know there are some who don't and some who don't care. But in my experience, the majority of us seem to accept the authorship claim. In fact, we all seem to be quite casual about it: “Jesus says this. Jesus says that.”

But of course, this is a *massive* claim. Let's think about who this guy is. Our calendar starts at his birth. He has two billion followers—that's a third of the world's population. There are one billion Roman Catholics alone.

In other words, if he came back, and if all of his followers agreed that this was really him, he would have two billion people with ears fully tuned to his every word, ready to accept his every statement as the absolute truth.

Now imagine that he came back and said, “Actually, people, you have seriously misunderstood me. Consequently, I've got some changes to make.” With a few words, this man could change the world.

This, of course, is precisely what we Course students believe has happened. We believe he *has* come back. And we believe he *is* saying that Christianity went way off track. That has direct implications for two billion followers.

Of course, they probably aren't going to listen to us. But do we really know that? The fact is, we haven't made our case yet. We haven't told them *why* we think this really is Jesus. On an institutional level they won't listen, of course. But I could picture many, many individual Christians listening.

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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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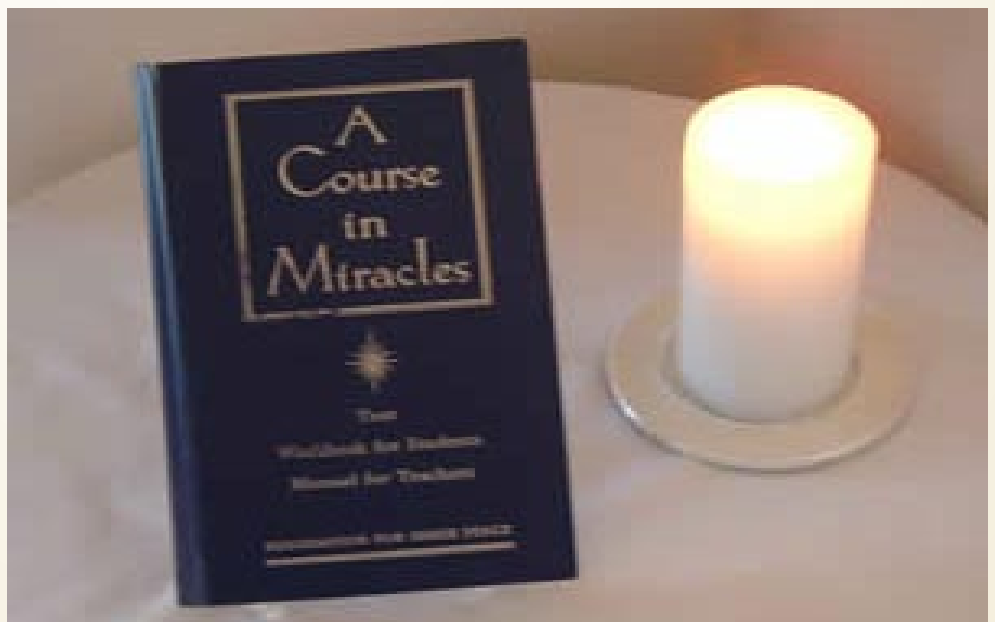
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This case I'm talking about is not just important for them. I believe that it's also important for *us*. It is important to know why we believe what we believe. If we don't know why, we may find ourselves believing all sorts of crazy things. We may find ourselves buying some version of "the earth is six thousand years old and was created in six days"

This is why it surprises me how little we talk about this in Course circles—talk about *why* we believe that this is Jesus. In twenty-five years as a Course student, I have heard very little talk about that. But we should talk about it, shouldn't we? Just for the sake of our own soundness of mind.

I know that many of us have had inner experiences that have convinced us that this is Jesus. But people have inner experiences that support their belief in all sorts of things, including things we wouldn't agree with. It's great, therefore, if we can not only have private *experiences*, but also publicly observable *realizations*.

Therefore, in my opinion, this topic of authorship should be an open topic among Course students. We should discuss it, write about it, ponder it, and be prepared to decide it's not a reasonable thing to believe.

It's true that we can never prove it. There are no fingerprints or DNA to examine here. And so it is always going to be a leap of faith to get over to the side of "this is really Jesus." But perhaps we could find enough reason and evidence to make that leap a *small* and *reasonable* one, rather than a blind leap across a fifty-foot chasm.

This has been a huge issue for me personally. I have based my life on this unprovable belief that the historical Jesus wrote this book that I read every day. That can feel like very shaky ground to stand on. When I was five, I believed in Santa Claus. I don't want to be caught doing that again.

Yet over many years I did become deeply convinced that this was the same person, that this was Jesus. It can sound crazy. It can sound intellectually indefensible. But I came to believe that there are actually good reasons to believe it. What, then, are my reasons? I want to share three with you today.

My first reason is that there are striking parallels with the historical Jesus.

If we are talking about this author being Jesus, the first question we are forced to ask is, How similar is he to the historical Jesus? We *have* to compare the two figures. And there we initially have a very big problem. The Course's "Jesus" is so different from the traditional Jesus that it is hard to imagine that they are the same person.

In the case of the traditional Jesus, the focus is on Jesus himself, on his birth, his death, his resurrection, his nature as the Son of God, and his role as the savior of humanity. There, the appropriate response is to believe in him, in who he was and what he did for us. Yet in the Course, the focus is quite obviously not on Jesus. Rather, it is on his teachings. The author doesn't say that much about himself. Here, the correct response is not to believe in him, but to follow his teachings. How can these two be the same figure?

The *only* way is if the real Jesus that walked the earth two thousand years ago was dramatically differ-

ent than the traditions that grew up around him. Oddly enough, this is exactly what modern scholarship is concluding. There is going on right now a two-hundred-year-old investigation into the historical Jesus, and though still fully in process, some fascinating things have come out of it. I'll mention two.

First, almost everything we can know about Jesus is contained in the gospels—the four gospels plus (some would say) the gospel of Thomas.

Second, much, probably most, of the material in the gospels does not trace back to Jesus himself. There is only a small portion of material that can be attributed to him with confidence.

For instance, the Jesus Seminar was a famous group of scholars that voted on the authenticity of the sayings in the gospels and in noncanonical gospels, based on all kinds of sophisticated textual and historical criteria. Out of about five hundred sayings and parables, they voted ninety as being more or less authentic. That's eighteen percent.

What sort of Jesus do those ninety sayings reveal? A teacher of wisdom, a teacher of a radical and unconventional wisdom. He doesn't teach about himself, but rather about a "way," a path. All of those "I am" sayings—"I am the way, the truth, and the life"—have been judged to not be historical.

According to Stephen Patterson, a prominent Jesus scholar, the weight of the evidence suggests "that Jesus was a wisdom teacher, and that the early Jesus movement thought of itself as a kind of wisdom school." Interesting, isn't it?

Bestselling Jesus scholar Marcus Borg has written this:

The glimpse provided by [the sayings of Jesus voted roughly authentic by the Jesus Seminar] highlights Jesus as a wisdom teacher who used parables and aphorisms [aphorisms are memorable one-liners that express a unique point of view]. As used by Jesus, both were most commonly invitational forms of speech. As stories the parables invited hearers to see something in light of the story. As crystallizations of insight, the aphorisms invited new insight. Moreover, Jesus regularly used both in a particular way: to subvert conventional (and religious) ways of seeing and being, and to suggest a radically alternative way of seeing and being. Rather strikingly, the most certain thing we know about Jesus according to the current scholarly consensus is that he was a teller of stories and a speaker of great one-liners whose purpose was the transformation of perception. At the center of his message was an invitation to see differently. (*Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, p. 172)

Let's look at that second sentence from the end again: "Rather strikingly, the most certain thing we know about Jesus according to the current scholarly consensus is that he was a teller of stories and a speaker of great one-liners whose purpose was the transformation of perception." I can never get over that quote. It stuns me every time. And please note that Borg is not some Course student tweaking the historical data to fit his biases. I've met Borg and exchanged correspondence with him, and I can tell you that he knows virtually nothing about *A Course in Miracles*. What he is rendering here is a strictly historical judgment, which he characterizes as "the current scholarly consensus."

So if Jesus was a wisdom teacher, what exactly did he teach? To answer that, I want to read a brief complex of sayings from the Sayings Gospel Q. The Gospel Q is an ancient gospel, believed to exist by a majority of scholars, that was not found buried in the earth, but “buried,” so to speak, in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, who incorporated its teachings into their gospels. Many scholars believe it to be the very first gospel, composed twenty years after Jesus died, and believe it to have been actually written in Galilee, where Jesus conducted his ministry. The complex I will read below is from what is often considered to be the first version of Q, before later additions were made. Sayings like these may be as close as we can get to the real historical Jesus.

Love your enemies and pray for those persecuting you,
so that you may become sons of your Father,
for he raises his sun on bad and good
and rains on the just and unjust.

Let’s break the logic of this down:

- God is completely indiscriminate in his care—he sends rain on just and unjust, sunshine on bad and good.
- So if you want to become his son,
- you should do the same.
- You should love even your enemies and pray even for those who persecute you.
- You should be indiscriminate in *your* love and care.

In 1950, Paul Ramsey, in a book called *Basic Christian Ethics*, took this same passage and paraphrased it in the following two ways:

Be ye therefore entirely indifferent to the qualities of character in particular men which usually elicit preference or lack of preference for them.

Be therefore completely self-giving and redemptive in any single case of your good will, even as your heavenly Father disinterestedly cares for all.

These paraphrases almost sound like someone trying to explain the Course! Compare them with this passage from the Course:

You cannot enter into real relationships with any of God’s Sons unless you love them all and equally. Love is not special. If you single out part of the Sonship for your love, you are imposing guilt on all your relationships and making them unreal. You can love only as God loves. Seek not to love unlike Him, for there is no love apart from His. (T-13.X.11:1-5)

In both Q and the Course, the logic is almost exactly the same:

- God loves totally without discrimination or preference.
- Therefore, act like His Son, and love like God does,
- love without discrimination or preference.

This is just a small taste of what turns out to be a long list of extremely impressive parallels. But these

parallels really only leap to the fore when scholars dig through layer after layer to uncover what they believe to be the original figure.

I've been studying Jesus scholarship for nearly twenty years now, and I'm left feeling that if I had actually stood there and listened to the real Jesus, I believe I would have heard a first-century version of the Course, adapted to a different time in history, a different culture, and to the ears of a peasant audience, but nonetheless possessing the same very distinctive essence. These two figures share an outlook on life that is uncannily similar and quite unique. It's a close as we can come, I think, to a fingerprint match.

My second reason is that the story of the Course suggests a distinct presence that is orchestrating both the inner and outer in a unified way.

The story of the Course has always sounded a note of authenticity to me, as it has to so many of us. It really seems like the main character was an actual presence on the other side. You really get the sense that there was more than just a flow of words in Helen's head.

Let's face it—most intelligent people would assume that there was no “spirit” speaking to Helen, that this was her own unconscious. But the story doesn't read that way. For instance, Helen didn't take a class in channeling, channel a bunch of material, and then arrange it in book form. Rather, out of the blue, this voice starts speaking to her, announces the title of his book, and tells her to take dictation.

But this presence does more than just author the book. For one, the presence expressed itself in the form of Helen's inner visions. The content of these inner visions clearly reflected the content of the words she would take down. For example, here is an inner vision that she considered one of the most important experiences of her life. It came in the period shortly before the Course dictation began:

I was in a large room on the top floor of a church building. Bill, seated at a large, old-fashioned church organ, was playing Handel's “Hallelujah Chorus,” his face glowing with joy. We had finally reached our goal. I was standing at the back of the room, facing a simple brown wooden altar on which two words were written one above the other. I cannot imagine a less appropriate pair of words. The top word was “Elohim,” which I did not recognize at the time. Later I found out it is the Hebrew word for God. The other word, “Evoe,” I recognized to be the cry of the Greek Bacchantes, the female revelers in the rites of Bacchus.

As I watched, a jagged streak of lightning from the back of the room struck the altar and obliterated the second word entirely. Only “Elohim” remained, its bright gold letters standing out in stark simplicity against the brown background of the altar. The music reached a crescendo and a figure outlined in brilliant light stepped from behind the altar and came toward me. Recognizing him as Jesus I started to kneel, but he came around to my side and knelt beside me at the altar, saying, “I would as soon kneel at your altar as have you kneel at mine.” Bill rose from the organ and knelt at his other side. And then a Voice, with which I was to become increasingly familiar, said silently but unmistakably, “That altar is within you.” The impact was so intense that I burst into tears and did not regain my composure for some time. (*Absence from Felicity*, p. 106)

These are classic Course themes. There is an altar, which is really within you. There are the two opposed and mutually exclusive thought systems or devotions. There's the holy relationship going on a journey

and reaching its goal. And there's Jesus relating to us as a brother, an equal, rather than as God. This vision certainly looks like it was specially designed by the author of the Course.

Further, he goes beyond designing her inner visions and the words she hears. This presence seemed to be orchestrating external events as well. For instance, there is her Mayo Clinic experience. Many of you know this story. Helen was in the middle of what she called her "magic phase." She had discovered that she had psychic powers, and was deciding how she would use these powers. Would she use them to puff up her ego or would she turn them over to God for a higher use? In this decision, she was really deciding whether or not she would fulfill her life purpose.

In the midst of this, Helen and Bill were going to the Mayo clinic in Minnesota on business. Helen had a psychic flash that they would see a Lutheran church as they landed. They didn't; then they spent all evening looking at all the churches in Rochester, still with no success. The next evening, while at the airport, ready to return home, Bill found a photo of her church in a guidebook. It turns out that it had been leveled in order to build the Mayo Clinic. It was impressive, but the fact that the church no longer existed made the whole thing seem a bit pointless. Then, while on a layover in Chicago, Helen said:

Huddled against a wall was a solitary young woman. I could feel waves and waves of misery going through her. I pointed her out to Bill, who was against my talking to her. We were both exhausted, it was very late, and he was not up to getting involved with strangers at that point. Besides, I might just be imagining her distress. She did not give any outward signs of anything but sleepiness. I could not, however, escape the feelings of pain I was receiving from her. Finally, I told Bill I could not help myself, and went to talk to her. (*Absence from Felicity*, p. 122)

Clearly, Helen was using the same powers she had used to see the church. She could "feel waves and waves of misery going through her," when to anyone else the woman just looked sleepy. Here was the true use of Helen's powers—to be of help, not to make impressive predictions.

The young woman's name was Charlotte. She was terrified of flying and so Helen and Bill offered to sit on either side of her on the plane, while Helen held her hand. She had felt like her life was "closing in" on her, and so, without any planning, she had left her husband and three children, and, with nothing but a small suitcase and a few hundred dollars, was heading off to New York City to make a new life, with no specific plans of where to stay. Helen says:

She was a Lutheran, and she was sure all she had to do was find a Lutheran church in New York and they would take care of her there. Bill and I exchanged glances. The message was not hard to grasp. "And this," [Helen's inner voice said], "is my true church...helping another; not the edifice you saw before." (*Journey Without Distance*, p. 50)

Helen and Bill were extremely helpful to Charlotte during her brief stay in New York City, in a number of ways. They even found her a Lutheran church to stay at for a while. All in all, they really helped her find her way. She eventually returned to her family, after which Helen kept in touch with her for many years.

Going back to the night of their encounter: What happened there? Two women have run into each other in an airport. They are both traveling to some distant city hoping to find a Lutheran church there.

For both of them, finding this church symbolizes a deeper search, a search to find their place in life. Both find this church, but it's not really what they are looking for. They find what they were looking for *in each other*.

What are the odds of these two women, with these things in common, running into each other by chance? It looks like more than chance. It looks arranged.

Further, this arrangement seemed to carry a message, that the church they were looking for was not the building, it was their relationship. Interestingly enough, this is more or less what Helen's inner voice said. He said, "And this is my true church...helping another; not the edifice you saw before." And that, of course, reflects a specific Course teaching, that the Holy Spirit's temple is not a body or a building, but a relationship. Six times the Course says that relationships are the temple of the Holy Spirit. As far as I can tell—and I've looked into this a little—this theme is completely unique to the Course.

This whole episode looks so arranged. How could those two women on such parallel searches just happen to run into each other? And how could the resulting message just happen to be a uniquely *Course in Miracles* message, one that the author of the Course just happens to step in and communicate at the key moment? It is very easy to get the impression that he arranged the whole thing *in order* to communicate that message.

And it wasn't just individual events he seemed to be orchestrating. The whole sweep of the Course story is uncannily similar to what the Course teaches about the journey of the holy relationship—another uniquely *Course in Miracles* theme. The Course says that the holy relationship is formed when two people, at least for one moment, enter a holy instant in which they establish a truly common goal. It says once this happens, a presence of holiness enters their relationship and begins guiding them toward their goal. They set out on a brand new journey, a journey of which they are not in control. And as this presence guides them forward, it will reach out through them to others. Together, they will have a joint special function through which they contribute to the salvation of the world. To use the Course's language, it's as if the Christ child in their relationship has now grown up and has gone out into the world to perform his adult ministry.

That describes to a tee what happened to Helen and Bill. They *did* have a holy instant of joining in a common goal—the goal of living what they called "a better way." A presence of holiness *did* enter their relationship and begin guiding them toward that goal. That presence, of course, was the author of the Course, and it was a course in *living* that better way. This presence *did* take them on a whole new journey. When they stepped on that boat, they had no idea where they were going. They didn't realize that nothing would ever be the same. And this presence did not just speak to them; it spoke to the whole world *through* them. It eventually left home, so to speak, to make its contribution to the salvation of the world.

Significantly, much of this story played out after this presence had already talked about it in the Course. For instance, at one point he told Helen and Bill, "Through your holy relationship... thousands will rise to Heaven with you" (T-18.V.3:1). It is not hard to see how, through the spread of the Course, this has come true. But when he said this, the Course was still locked up in their closet. It was still their "guilty secret."

So this presence was whispering into Helen’s ear, and the story that he was whispering to her, he appears to have also been painting onto the canvas of Helen and Bill’s lives. Again, it gives you the feeling that he was orchestrating both the inside and the outside. And he was orchestrating the inside and the outside in a unified way. The words, the visions, the outer stories—all of it reflected his unique point of view.

Now this doesn’t say it’s Jesus. But it does say this is not just Helen tapping into wisdom buried in her own unconscious. It says to me that it’s *someone*. It’s an *active* someone with a definite vision. And whoever this someone is, I’m impressed. He’s got my attention. At this point, if he tells me he’s Jesus, I might just believe him.

My third reason is what I will call “mastery beyond the human.”

This is very close to the top of my list. For many, many reasons, I, along with so many other Course students, honestly don’t see how a human could have written this book.

I want to illustrate what I’m talking about by taking just one brief statement and going through it at length. It’s only half of a sentence, but it will show you some of what I mean. First, I’ll read it, and then go through a number of characteristics that it displays.

Lay down the cruel sword of judgment that you hold against your throat. (W-pI.190.9:4)

Vivid imagery

The first characteristic of this line is vivid imagery. This is an extremely vivid image. We all know the image of someone holding a knife or sword at someone else’s throat. Nothing says “imminent threat of death” like that. Likewise, nothing says “you are utterly powerless before me” like that.

But notice that he has taken this image and twisted it. Now the image is that of *us* holding a sword against our *own* throat. We are now threatening *ourselves* with death. We are powerless before *ourselves*. It’s a really twisted image, an insane image. It’s very hard to forget.

Reverses our usual perspective

The next characteristic is that it reverses our usual perspective. Judgment, of course, seems to be something that we use against others. And using judgment against others is actually what this passage is envisioning. The paragraph in which it’s found talks about *arms* and *attack* and *assaults*. So it’s talking about judging others. Doing that seems to benefit us. It seems to put them down and boost us up. But this is saying the reverse: Rather than boosting us up, judgment cuts our throat. This turns upside down our normal perspective on things.

Psychological wisdom

The next characteristic is psychological wisdom. This passage is rooted in an extremely sophisticated view of the psychology of judgment. You can get a hint of this by looking at the sentence as a whole:

Lay down the cruel sword of judgment that you hold against your throat, and put aside the wither-

ing assaults with which you seek to hide your holiness. (W-pI.190.9:4)

The key here is understanding that the two halves of the sentence are saying the same thing in different words. Thus, the *sword of judgment* is clearly the same as the *withering assaults*—both are talking about an attack on others. And *holding the sword against your throat* and *hiding your holiness* are also the same thing. So if we put it all together, we get something like this:

- By judging others you are assaulting them, you are putting them to the sword.
- Through this, you are hiding your holiness from yourself.
- And hiding your holiness from yourself is like slitting your own throat.

The assumption here is that we have a profound and overpowering need *to feel innocent*, to feel pure, to feel that we are not a devil, but are of God. And judging others directly thwarts that need. As he puts it elsewhere, “if you judge the reality of others you will be unable to avoid judging your own” (T-3.VI.1:4). I find that to be a very psychologically wise statement.

Originality

The next characteristic is originality. There is thought in here that I doubt you can find outside the Course, or at least apart from the influence of the Course. Many teachings in the world recognize that being judgmental hurts us. Some even recognize that it hurts us by causing us *guilt*. But the Course is adding another layer here, a much deeper layer.

In this passage, the pain that judgment causes us is not inadvertent. It’s not an unintended consequence. It’s *intentional*. Notice: We are *holding* the sword against our throat. We are *seeking* to hide our holiness. The thought here, made plain elsewhere in the Course, is that deep down we recognize that we are inherently holy, that we share the Divine nature. Just as God is holy, we are holy. In our egoic state, that frightens us and so we want to hide it. Thus, we are being judgmental in order to make ourselves seem guilty, seem unholy. We are judging *as a way* of hiding our holiness.

When you judge someone, let’s say someone that you find just detestable, are you thinking, “I am judging because deep down I know that I am genuinely holy, and that scares the hell out of me. Judging this person calms my fear, because it seems to *prove* that I’m unholy”?

Not only are you *not* thinking that, I doubt you are *reading* that anywhere. Maybe that was taught before the Course or apart from the Course, but if it was, it’s hard to find. So there seems to be some original thought in this line.

Biblical allusion

The next characteristic is that this line contains a biblical allusion. After I had spent hours with this line, I thought, “Sword of judgment—that sounds familiar.” I googled it, which is what you do these days, and all the results were Christian websites. It turns out that it’s a biblical image, found in about ten passages in the Bible. Here are two examples:

For the Lord will execute judgment

on all flesh with His fiery sword,
and many will be slain by the Lord. (Isaiah 66:16)

[God is speaking here] When I sharpen My flashing sword,
and My hand takes hold of judgment,
I will take vengeance on My adversaries
and repay those who hate Me. (Deuteronomy 32:41)

Very inspiring stuff. The sword, as you can see, is God’s means of executing His judgment. These verses envision the wars and disasters that sweep down on a people as being God’s sword of judgment. In this light, the phrase “sword of judgment” takes on a whole new meaning.

As with the image of the sword against the throat, the author of the Course doesn’t just use this image; he reshapes it. He gives it a new application. Now it is no longer about God doing something on the national level. It is about *us* doing something on the *psychological* level. Now, it is *us* executing judgment and wielding the sword, not God. Further, our judgment is not *carried out* by the sword. Our judgment is *itself* the sword.

Are we willing to rise to the challenge of this biblical allusion? Are we willing to see our judgments as a case of us playing an angry Jehovah, mentally sending a sword-wielding army down on our poor brothers? Even more challenging, are we willing to see ourselves as playing the role of a *guilt-stricken* Jehovah, who feels so guilty that he righteously turns the sword on himself?

Iambic pentameter

The next characteristic is iambic pentameter. While the author is doing all this, he is writing in a strict form of poetic meter. Most of you probably know that much of the Course is written in iambic pentameter. For instance, the entirety of the Workbook after the opening lines of Lesson 98 is written in this meter.

Iambic pentameter means that each “line”—and the lines are not separated out on the pages of the Course—each line has five *pairs* of syllables, with the accent being on the *second* syllable in each pair. So you have ten syllables, with the emphasis placed on every other syllable. Look at the title of the lesson from which our line is drawn: “I **choose** the **joy** of **God** instead of **pain**.” Now let’s read our sentence, starting with the previous sentence that begins with “Let no attack”:

enter with **you**. Lay **down** the **cruel sword**
of **judgment** **that** you **hold** **against** your **throat**,
and **put** **aside** the **withering** assaults
with **which** you **seek** to **hide** your **holiness**.

It’s perfect iambic pentameter. In composing this, he not only has to get the beat right, but he has to carefully decide where to break the lines. You can’t just break them anywhere, but need to break them at a period, a comma, or somewhere else that enhances the effect you are trying to achieve.

Recurring themes

The next characteristic is recurring themes. The Course has a huge collection of recurring themes. There are *ideas*—recurring ideas like forgiveness. There are special *terms*—we all know that “forgiveness” doesn’t mean the same thing in the Course as it usually does. There are recurring *phrases*. For instance, “There is no death” occurs eighteen times. And there are recurring *images*. I’ve counted over eighty recurring images.

We can see this going on in our very sentence. Virtually every one of the important terms has a distinct pattern of usage in the Course. What Jesus has done is to take the term as normally used and retool it, to make it into a specific vehicle for his thought system. It has thus become a recurring theme, much like a leitmotif in opera.

For instance, when we think of a sword, what things come to mind? We may think of acts of heroism. There’s all the romance associated with the sword. There’s good battling against evil. There’s justice being done to the bad guys. We may think of the craftsmanship that went into it. We may think about blades whose steel is folded a hundred times and won’t rust even when underwater for years and years. We may think of all the training, discipline, and expertise that goes into swordsmanship. We may even think about how there are martial arts that meld swordsmanship and spirituality.

But *none* of that is what the author of the Course thinks of when he thinks about a sword. How do we know what he thinks? There are thirteen references to “sword” in the Course, and if you look at them all together, a clear pattern emerges.

First, he sees a pitiful weapon—once he mentions our “tiny spear and rusted sword” (T-29.V.7:6)—not perfect blades that never rust.

Second, it is a weapon that symbolizes anger and judgment, not heroism and nobility. Five times he uses the sword as a metaphor for either anger or judgment.

Third, it is a weapon that is directed by an insanity within us, rather than by a mind trained to do good, or even by a mind that has been trained in spiritual mastery. He speaks of us fighting an enemy that does not exist (W-pI.182.11:1), or fighting to keep the space between us unoccupied by love (T-31.VII.9:2). That’s insane.

Fourth, it is a weapon that we end up using *against ourselves*. You may remember where, early in the Text, it says that any defense that is a two-edged sword, “is inherently weak precisely because it has two edges, and can be turned against you very unexpectedly” (T-2.II.7:6).

Fifth, given all this, the only real issue is not *how well* we use it. The only issue is *holding* it versus *laying* it *down*. Four times he mentions that we are holding it, and three times he says we need to lay it down.

He is still thinking about a sword, but he is thinking about it in a way specifically designed to express *his* thought system. Now, when he mentions “sword” in this sentence, he is expressing *this* way of thinking about it. Indeed, almost all the things I mentioned just now are in this sentence:

- The sword symbolizes judgment.
- It is directed by an insanity within us.
- We have turned it on ourselves.
- Thus, even though we are holding it, we really need to lay it down

My point is that he's done that with all the important words in this sentence. One, he has retooled them, and two, that retooling is reflected in their usage in this sentence. Let's look at those.

“Lay down.” There are twenty-four references to “lay down.” We are consistently asked to lay down things that we are holding onto but that actually hurt us. Most especially, we are asked to lay down three things. First, our *weapons*—arms, defenses, spear, shield, sword. There are eleven references to laying down weapons. Here's one:

Now must you once again **lay down** your sword. (M-20.4:4)

Second, our *illusions* and *dreams*—six references. And third, our *judgment*—three references. The Course says,

Therefore lay judgment down, not with regret but with a sigh of gratitude. (M-10.5:1).

This meaning of “lay down” is intimately reflected in our line, where we “lay down” both judgment and weapon.

“Cruel.” There are thirty-nine references to “cruel.” They speak of cruelty that seems to come from God or from the world, but then they say that that's an illusion. The real cruelty to be concerned about is *our* cruelty toward our brothers. This then invites the ego to be cruel to us. Here is a reference to the ego's cruelty to us,

Within this kingdom [the kingdom of our mind], the ego rules, and cruelly. (T-18.VIII.3:1)

This sense of “cruel” is indeed found in our passage, where the cruel sword we wield against *others* we then turn on *ourselves*.

“Judgment.” Judgment is a huge topic in the Course, with over five hundred references. However, for our purposes here, we should note that it is often characterized as a weapon or *sword* (five times) that we use against others, one that we *hold* onto in the belief that it protects us, but one that actually backfires and ends up being used against *ourselves*. And so it is one that we should *lay down*. For instance, Lesson 347 says,

Judgment is
The weapon I would use against myself,
To keep the miracle away from me. (W-pII.347.Heading)

That sounds a lot like our passage. Here's another passage about judgment:

The teacher of God lays it down happily the instant he recognizes its cost. (M-10.6:3)

“Hold.” We saw that the word “hold” is something often associated with *sword* or *judgment*, where the big issue is holding onto versus laying down.

“Throat.” This actually is the Course’s only reference to throat. But the image of using a weapon against our own body is found throughout the Course. In fact, there is another reference to using a sword on ourselves:

Every time you feel a stab of anger, realize you hold a sword above your head. (W-pI.192.9:4)

It’s not just a similar image; the *meaning* behind it is also similar. In both, our anger or judgment against others is shown as a weapon with which we physically assault ourselves. Let’s look at some other examples:

He says that when someone takes vengeance on another, “the avenger’s knife [is] in his own hand, and pointed to himself” (T-27.VII.4:7).

Lesson 134 describes condemning another as trying to lay chains on him, and says that when you do this, you really lay them on yourself. Then, when you forgive that brother, you can actually feel “a lightening of weight across your chest” (W-pI.134.16:3)—as if the chains you laid on yourself were almost *physical* in nature.

In lesson 196, he says that trying to benefit from attacking others “has nailed you to the cross” (W-pI.196. 5:1). Elsewhere, he says, “You have nailed yourself to a cross, and placed a crown of thorns upon your own head.” (T-11.VI.8:1)

As you can see, by the time we are done with ourselves, we are a mess. We’ve got chains on our chest and a thorny crown on our head. One hand is nailed to a cross. The other hand has a sort of Swiss Army sword, with a knife point aimed at our body and a sword blade pressed against our throat.

So even though the word “throat” occurs nowhere else, the meaning behind it—the idea of doing violence to our own person by judging our brothers—is a consistent theme that runs throughout the Course.

What is my point about these recurring themes? The author has taken each one of these terms and crafted it to make it a specific vehicle for his thought system. Then, when he uses these terms in our sentence, that usage minutely reflects these retooled meanings.

Now if he had done that with just the six items I’ve looked at here, I don’t know how impressed we would be. But he has done that with *thousands* of words, *scores* of repeating images, and probably *hundreds* of repeating phrases. What this means is that, as he speaks, he is juggling literally thousands and thousands of specially crafted words and images. And remember, Helen was taking down what she called a kind of *rapid* inner dictation. So he was speaking at top speed—and doing so in iambic pentameter! Give me a break!

Egolessness

The next characteristic is that there’s an egolessness here—it’s not about him, it’s about us. While he’s

doing all this, he's not showing off. He's not showcasing the level of genius that's actually there. He doesn't say "the sword of judgment" and then, in parentheses, "to take a biblical image of a vengeful God and apply it to your own psychological state." He is *so* not showing off that we don't even notice ninety-eight percent of what he's doing. This is because it's not *about* him. It's all about *us*. It's all about him motivating us to do the last thing we will ever do—*change*. Which leads me to my final point about this passage.

Practical and transformative

That point is that it's practical and transformative. While all of the above is going on, he has designed a powerfully transformative line. As I said above, it is clearly designed to motivate us. We already looked at this line:

The teacher of God lays [judgment] down happily the instant he recognizes its cost. (M-10.6:3)

Our line is obviously designed to help us do exactly that—help us recognize its cost and thereby motivate us to lay it down *happily* and *instantly*.

Further, note that the line is not just a teaching, it is an injunction. He is not just saying, "When you judge you hold a sword against your throat." He is instructing us to *do* something: "*Lay down* the cruel sword of judgment." So let's do that. Let's make an exercise out of this line. It's very easy to do.

Exercise

Please get comfortable and close your eyes.

[Since you are reading rather than hearing this, you may want leave your eyes open, have someone else read it to you, or record this exercise on tape.]

Think of someone you've been judging,
someone whose actions are upsetting you,
whose personality traits are irritating you,
whose opinion of you is causing you distress.

Now see a sword in your hand,
a righteous sword, a sword of judgment.
Realize that in your judgment of this person,
you are playing an Old Testament God,
ready to cut this person down in righteous wrath.

You don't have to physically do it;
your judgment itself does it.

The judgment itself is the sword.

Feel that sword in your hand, itching to spring into action and execute judgment,
with an unkind word or with a callous action.

Now realize that somewhere deep down you are judging yourself,
simply for being so judgmental toward this person.

In that deep place, you have turned this sword of judgment against yourself.

You are righteously holding it against your own throat.
You might even hold your hand up now in the appropriate position, as if a sword were in it.
Feel the blade against your throat.
Feel the awful threat contained in that hand,
that hand that's ready to vengefully jerk the blade across your throat without notice.

Now realize how ridiculous this is.
Judging your brother isn't worth *this*.
You can lay this sword down.
You can lay it down happily, now that you recognize its cost.
Say to yourself,
I lay down the cruel sword of judgment that I hold against my throat.
Feel your judgments against this person falling from you.
Feel your judgment against yourself doing the same.
Say again, and say it with a sigh of gratitude,
I lay down the cruel sword of judgment that I hold against my throat.
Imagine physically laying it down.
If you have had your hand in position, actually lower it.
Say one last time, and say it happily,
I lay down the cruel sword of judgment that I hold against my throat.
Feel the relief of not having that sword at your throat.
To conclude, add,
I no longer want to hide my holiness.
Sit with that.
Let yourself feel holy again.
Amen.
You can open your eyes now.

Now I know what you were thinking earlier: "This is like being back in English Lit." But I hope you can see now that all that mastery he put in that line has a purpose. It transforms the line into a potent vehicle for practical change. My experience is that delving into any line and seeing what he has done with it gives it more power in my mind, more power to shift my perception.

Summary

Let's review what we've discovered about this one line: He has given us a vivid, unforgettable image, that turns upside down our usual way of seeing things, that contains deep psychological wisdom, that contains original thought, that contains a brilliantly applied biblical allusion, that is written in iambic pentameter, that weaves together a whole host of recurring Course terms and themes, that conveys an egolessness—it's not about him showing off, but about him motivating us to change. Finally, it's an image that *does* produce change. It's practical, it's transformative.

We can say all these things about this one tiny half of a sentence. And this is just a single brushstroke in a fifty-foot mural. The brushstroke is absolutely masterful. But what is even more masterful is how that brushstroke fits in with every other brushstroke in the painting, how they all come together to form an unparalleled masterpiece. When you see that—something which takes a lifetime—the level of mastery

increases exponentially. It literally staggers the mind.

I simply don't expect to encounter this kind of mastery in human authors. I read them, but I don't encounter anything like this. In comparison to him, history's greatest minds feel like kindergartners before the master teacher. I don't say that mockingly—there are towering minds out there that I greatly admire. But I also don't say it *lightly*. No one has thought through things this thoroughly, this deeply, this radically, this helpfully. Please forgive the pun, but this guy's on a whole different plane.

Putting it all together

Now let's add in my other two reasons. Add in the fact that the story does not suggest Helen just accessing buried wisdom in her own mind, but suggests an actual *someone*, a someone that is orchestrating both the inner and outer to reflect his unique vision.

Finally, add in the all-important fact that this someone bears extremely striking similarities to the historical Jesus—*not* to the traditional Jesus, *not* to the iconic Jesus, but to the Jesus that is being uncovered by scholars as they sift through the layers in the gospels trying to reach back to what the actual figure was like.

All of this doesn't add up to proof that Jesus really wrote this book we are studying. But it does add up to a set of facts that need explaining. We are talking about more than just subjective feelings. There are some very strange facts here. At the least, I think these facts push us toward really opening our minds to the possibility that this may in fact be Jesus. At the most, they make belief that this is Jesus an intellectually responsible view, one that need not apologize or be embarrassed. Suddenly, that position is not just a blind leap of faith. Suddenly, it may well be the strongest explanation for the facts. And that is no small thing.

What does this imply for us?

In conclusion, I want to address the question, If this really is Jesus, what does this imply for us? How should that affect our thinking about the Course? I have three things I want to say about that.

It gives his teaching an incredible authority.

When we read, "Lay down that sword," we might think, "But I *like* the sword. It protects me so well. And it's really shiny." But we should think, "You know, I suspect he probably knows better than I do." He says that when we disagree with the Holy Spirit, we should consider this: "Which is more likely to be right?" (W-pI.186.12:3). The same could be said about when we disagree with Jesus.

So we can use his authority to help us get over our resistance. And we all have a lot of that.

We need to let him say whatever he is really trying to say.

If this really is Jesus, we need to really listen to him. We need to let him say *whatever he wants to say*.

You'd think we would do that automatically. And of course we do—at least at times—take in what he is actually saying. But we also subtly wallpaper over what he says with our preconceptions. Why should we

expect things to be any different? As the Course says, “projection makes perception.”

In my opinion, *the* big “wallpaper line” is, “*It’s just the same as.*” “*It’s just the same as* my favorite spiritual teachings.” “*It’s just the same as* what my favorite teacher says about it.” “*It’s just the same as* my current understanding of it.”

These statements, in effect, put our mind to sleep. They become this filter that only allows through what *is* the same, even if we have to bend things a bit to *get* it the same

Imagine that Jesus shows up to tell us the secrets of the ages. But he only speaks Latin. So we summon this interpreter to tell us what he says. But first, the interpreter says, “Since you are employing me, before I begin, you must tell me what you *expect* him to say.” Wouldn’t we find that to be a huge let-down? We wouldn’t know if we could trust what we were hearing. That is what this filter in our mind does. It says “I’ll interpret this for you, and always in keeping with your expectations.”

Don’t we want what he *really* has to say? In my view, he is saying things all over the place that have never been said. He is subtly but dramatically reframing the entire salvation process. It’s a whole new vision of how to reach God.

Let me give just two examples of places where he is saying things that often don’t make it through our filters, where the interpreter in our mind tells us what we expected to hear, rather than what he really said. Here, he is actually saying things that have been said for centuries, but they don’t fit the contemporary mood, and so we tend to filter them out.

The first has to do with spiritual practice. Jesus—I’ll just call him that—puts a huge focus on disciplined spiritual practice. There are three hundred and fifty references to the words “practice” and “practicing.” By the time the Workbook is done, it wants us to practice for longer periods in morning and evening, a couple minutes or so on the hour, several times during each hour, and in response to even the most minor upsets, worries, and irritations. He attaches gigantic promises to doing this practice. The first paragraph of the Workbook says, “It is doing the exercises that will make the goal of the course possible” (W-In.1:2).

But we know he doesn’t really mean that, right? I mean, it’s not about “shoulds.” And it’s important not to turn this into some kind of *ritual*, or to try to do it perfectly in order to please some authority figure in the sky. It’s not about forcing ourselves or “efforting.” And how can he be serious about us practicing by the clock when time isn’t *real*? Further, we all know that doing the practice right means screwing it up and forgiving ourselves. Being spiritual isn’t about obeying external forms and structures. It’s all about staying in the moment and being spontaneous.

We give ourselves so many “spiritual” excuses to not do the practice that it’s no wonder that we generally don’t do it that much. Could this be a place where we have filtered out a huge part of what he is asking us to do? In our supposed spiritual wisdom, are we overlooking what he says *will make the goal of the Course possible*?

The second place has to do with *extension*. Jesus places a massive emphasis on extension—meaning, extending love, healing, and helpfulness to other people. It is one of the most frequently talked about subjects in the Course. It’s right there in the title—believe it or not, a miracle is usually framed in the

Course as an extension of healed perception from you to another person, from a miracle *worker* to a miracle *receiver*. He says, “Nothing in the world is holier than helping one who asks for help” (P-2.V.4:2).

And this does involve behavior. How are we going to heal and help people by thought alone? The Course makes this clear in so many ways. It was especially clear in the original dictation, where it said in one place, “This course is a guide to behavior.” Can you believe that?

This is made clear in many different ways throughout the Course. The loudest way is in the Course’s statements about the true purpose of the body. It says,

The Holy Spirit sees the body only as a means of communication, and because communicating is sharing it becomes communion. (T-6.V(A).5:5)

So, the body is supposed to be *only* a means of communication to our brothers, and communication means sharing which turns into communion? Think what that implies. It implies that the only valid use for our bodies—the only valid *behavior*—is to communicate love to our brothers. That’s our full-time job.

Ah, but again, we know he doesn’t really mean that. After all, the Course says, “Seek not to change the world.” Why would we, when the world’s an illusion? And if we try to help others, isn’t that implying that they truly *need* our help, that they really *are* flawed and imperfect? And isn’t it true that there is no one out there anyway? By reaching out to these illusory “others,” aren’t we just making the separation real? And doesn’t the whole thing smack of being codependent? I thought my sole responsibility was to accept the Atonement for myself. I thought that I “need do nothing.”

We tell ourselves these things because we have heard them so many times. But in the end, this amounts to a whole pile of reasons to overlook and dismiss this absolutely massive theme in the Course. Remember what Jesus told Helen: “This is my true church...helping another.” How did we get to this place where *Jesus* sounds un-Course-like?

So, if this really is Jesus, let’s let him say *whatever he wants to say*, whether or not it’s just the same as our favorite teachings, what our favorite authority says, or even our own current understanding.

There’s this great story Ken Wapnick tells about Helen. At one point she let loose and told Jesus off, saying, “What authority do you have? You are a paranoid schizophrenic, filled with delusions of grandeur, thoughts of religious persecution, and are of uncertain psychosexual development” He replied, “Oh I don’t know about that. After all, all power in Heaven and earth was given unto me” (*Absence from Felicity*, p. 439).

We need to realize we are the current stewards of this path, that we hold it in trust for a much greater audience in the future.

Let’s face it, if this really is Jesus, then this book is almost certainly going to have a major impact on the world. True, right now, we Course students are this tiny backwater. But how long can it stay that way? Thirty years into it, primitive Christianity was much smaller, and look where it is now.

If this really is Jesus, then we are sitting on the tiny seed of a giant Sequoia. At that point, what we do with that seed becomes a big deal. The future will be different depending on whether we put it in good soil and water it or toss it onto the pavement. So how can we be responsible stewards? How can we nurture this seed?

I think there are many, many ways. But most of the ways I am thinking of are more directly relevant to teachers and leaders, rather than to the vast majority of students. What, then, is there that *each one of us* can do? I think the answer to that is simple: We can really take this Course. We can become incredible students.

For one, we can *read this book* attentively, over and over, not to impress our friends by being able to quote chapter and verse, but to reeducate our fundamental outlook on reality.

For another, we can *practice*. We can become proficient in the Workbook's methods. We can learn to become expert at shifting our perception in any situation. We can learn to sink deep into our true nature through the training of our mind (the Course has wonderful methods of meditation). We can master the forgiveness process, so that no matter what anyone does to us, we can bless that person with a full heart, and lend a caring hand in response.

And finally, we can *extend*. Jesus expected to be sending miracle workers out into the world. He expected them to be so powerful that he wanted to make sure their power is tempered with mature understanding. He said, "Before it is safe to let miracle workers loose in this world, it is essential that they understand fully the fear of release" (Urtext version of T-2.V.1:1).

We can be those miracle workers. We can begin each day by using the line Jesus gave to Helen and Bill: "Help me to perform whatever miracles you want of me today." The test of our advancement on this path is our ability to uplift the lives of those around us: our spouses, our children, our friends, our colleagues, even strangers. Such a visible, concrete example, the Course says, "can speak with power greater than a thousand tongues" (T-27.II.5:8).

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could set that kind of example, if the world could look at our lives, look at the love shining from our faces, look at our miraculous effect on the people around us, and say, "Maybe Jesus really did write this book"?



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'.*

Circle Mailbox

We got a lot of feedback on Greg's article about The Secret in our last issue ("A Course in Miracles and The Secret," A Better Way #62).

Continued on page 21

Much love and gratitude for your article with regard to *The Secret*—as a poor and unwilling student of awakening and very attached to my specialness, easily seduced by the ways of the world, I am always grateful for simple, clear and direct discernment which clarifies ideas and points out the differences between a path that really points towards reality and one that has elements of these paths but really is an imitation perpetuating a dream of separation and the belief in separate identities living separate lives.

The differences were definitely apparent to me when *What the Bleep* came out and *The Secret*; despite the hoopla and raves about both films (although there might have been one or two one-liners that could be discerned as pointers or useful), the difference between them and a true path or a real pointer to reality was kind of “floating” around my mind and I’m always so grateful when these ideas are expressed in such a concrete and clear way as given in the *Better Way* article. Much love and gratitude for your love, devotion and dedication and willingness to point to the Truth and keep “me” on track.

— annie

• • •

I have not seen *The Secret* but I have been hearing about it from various persons that I come into contact with in a variety of settings. Thank you so much for taking the time to write the article comparing *The Secret* to the Course’s teachings. It was reassuring and strengthening to read as it resonated with what I had been feeling and thinking about as I heard discussions related to the movie. I felt you shared in the right “spirit” of affirming persons but, equally, I didn’t think you came on too strong in any way. The Course itself does the talking!

I would encourage you and Robert to continue to write articles exploring some of the “New Age” spiritualism that is becoming so prevalent. I loved your comments that such foci are actually just “another of the ego’s tricks to reinvent the wheel,” my words for your summary. I believe *The Secret* and writings/teachings like it are very slippery for many of us. They “sound” like the real thing until you go deeper and realize they have EGO written all over them. That has been the ego’s tricks since the beginning of the separation, hasn’t it? To take Heaven and make it into a new way that sounds quite familiar yet has a totally different focus and outcome. As you suggest to us over and over, be vigilant, as we all fall prey to the ego’s seduction. Perhaps you and Robert focusing on some of the material in a specific way like you did with *The Secret* might be really helpful to us as your students. For example, the Esther Hicks material is something I had read before the Course came into my life, the Seth books, etc. and I’ve struggled at times to hold commonality (if there is any) with the Course now. Your summations and counsel give me the tools to hold those up side by side and hear the Holy Spirit speaking more clearly.

Thanks Greg!

— David Wine

• • •

Excellent discussion on *The Secret*. My only exposure was a short “clip” on Oprah and I thought exactly what you said: “the same ‘old’ paradigm of egocentric self-interest.” Keep up the good work. Bravo.

• • •

— Thomas Rice

Greg, thanks for your excellent article comparing *The Secret* with ACIM. You articulate the con-

cepts of the Course so well, and you make the points very clearly and, as always, your work is well written. Visualizing the sports car in our driveway is really not what Jesus had in mind when he dictated the Course (something closer to visualizing our brother holy/pure/innocent and healed). Thanks again for helping us keep clear what the message of the Course is all about.

You're a real blessing for all Course students. Please keep up the good work.

— Jan Worley

• • •

Thanks for your great article in response to *The Secret*; I've been working on a similar response for the past two weeks, but you have taken it much further than I could have. Yes, thank you very much for this fabulous help in explaining (for my Kamloops group) the difference between the Course's goal and the thrust of *The Secret*.

— John Perry

• • •

Bless you and thank you for this most recent edition of *A Better Way*. I have a copy of *The Secret* DVD and had been wondering what it was that was bothering me about it. I could not put my finger on it. In fact, I spent much of today trying to compare it to what I have learned these past twenty years about the Course. Try as I might, I could not come up with the material I needed to make a comparison. Then I open this recent e-mail from you and find you have written about the very thing I have been soul searching about.

You have written so clearly and concisely that which I could not identify myself. Yet, when I read what you had to say about God being missing in *The Secret*, I knew it was exactly what I was feeling but could not identify.

Thank you so much and bless you!

— Cecelia Cole

• • •

Just a quick note of thank you for your much enjoyed and illuminating article on *The Secret*.

It had seemed to reach hurricane Level 5 over the last few weeks (even up here in French Canada, Oprah is a regular and my wife made sure to fetch me to watch this episode—I will get her to read your fine article tomorrow...)

I'm in the throes of finishing a dissertation (on forgiveness), so I don't get to read or follow very much what is happening Course-wide except for noticing that you guys at COA do a great job, dedication-wise and writing-wise. I shall read more of your writing in the future and eventually come by Sedona sometime and participate.

— Richard Lalonde

• • •

Hear, hear Greg! Excellent article on *The Secret*. I am happy it was said, like I stated...I was about to write it myself. I think I will also add to it in an article. Thank you tons!

— Dr. Keith Sudano

• • •

Thank you so much for your article. I'm in a Course study group with several people who are really turned

onto *The Secret*. They have been studying the Course for many years and I'm relatively new to it (year and a half), but I recognized immediately, as with *What the Bleep*, that it wasn't congruent with the Course and would serve to exercise my ego. I gave away the copy I ordered after watching it. Wish now I had thrown it away. Oh, well. An opportunity to sharpen discernment.

I appreciate the thoughtful, true-to-The-Course articles, books, and other materials coming from the Circle of Atonement. I used the Workbook commentaries all last year and found them to be a great addition to the daily lessons. I was privileged to hear Robert at the conference in SF last week. While the rest of it was pretty much a bust for me, I was glad to know I have so much support through such materials Circle of Atonement authors produce and make available. I doubt I'll ever be tempted to attend such a future gathering.

— Cathy Christian

• • •

I have just read your article, "*A Course in Miracles and The Secret*," referred to me by Mary Anne Buchowski. I have known Mary Anne since before she left Ottawa to live in Sedona.

I have been a student of the Course for ten years now and should not be surprised when any specific question that is circling in my mind is promptly answered—very often by the part of the text I read the next morning.

However, I had been vacillating about manifesting something in my life and kept hearing, "Do you want to manifest something in the Illusion?" I had decided to ask the Holy Spirit to decide for me what was for the highest good, while remaining receptive to whatever might appear—and then I read your article.

Thank you for being the vehicle to confirm my decision was the right one. I know we are all teaching all the time but we seldom know the outcome, so I wanted you to know that your article was strong confirmation for me.

I also feel the pull of Sedona in my life, so I may turn up one day to meet you all in person.

— Nancy Langdon

• • •

I've read and reread your recent article in *A Better Way*, and felt I must react.

What I liked about *The Secret* was its strong recognition that there is an energy that we can all relate to. I have no trouble agreeing with every issue you identify as being ego oriented.

The ego is so clever in edging God out. Got to give it credit for that. I see the energy as something H.S. can and probably does use. What I find somewhat amazing is that Course students seem reluctant to either recognize or share their experience with Miracles.

Seems like that's our secret. Once having experiencing a change of our perception to true perception, why aren't we celebrating that? I'll quickly admit the change needs constant help in requesting further H.S. intervention, and it works.

Thanks for clarifying *The Secret*, and all the documentation in showing how ego oriented it is. I hope the day soon arrives when we can identify and celebrate Miracles.

— Eileen Tiedeman

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I am one of those students who e-mailed you about *The Secret*. Thank you for your well-written article. You supported my basic gut feeling that something was really wrong about *The Secret*.

— Gail DeMers

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I want to thank you for the excellent article you recently wrote about *The Secret*. I would like to offer another perspective.

We share in several ways the same sense about *The Secret*. It is clearly not the Course, and as presented in the DVD, not an especially evolved teaching, nor a particularly new one. And yet, I believe, it has a usefulness. No one wakes up from this dream directly, all at once. We substitute progressively “happier” dreams leading us closer to Truth. Each one is useful in its own way, but also an obstacle if we identify with it and hold on. Like the traveler who needs a boat at a certain point in her Journey to cross a river, but then will be held back if she tries to carry it with her after the river is crossed.

The specific steps *The Secret* is useful for is to move from the place of powerless victim to taking responsibility for our experience and learning to be mindful of our thoughts. Even if the focus is initially on forms, it is not evil or sinful to pursue them. They are just ultimately unsatisfying. We all pursue and reject many before we finally get it. We can and do do this for many lifetimes. We could look at any one and say “they” (it’s usually not ourselves we are so willing to look at!) are delaying themselves. Perhaps, but as I said in another way, no one goes to God directly. We all take detours, and when we do, that detour becomes part of our path, part of our classroom.

There is an important learning that occurs during this process:

The power of your wanting must first be recognized. You must accept its strength, and not its weakness. You must perceive that what is strong enough to make a world can let it go, and can accept correction if it is willing to see that it was wrong. (T-21.II.4:7-9)

Through “manifesting,” we can experience how powerful our mind is, how it can make our world. Then we know, not just intellectually but experientially, that our mind is powerful enough to let it go. The more we “manifest” consciously, with honesty and integrity with ourselves that this is a learning process in which we find out what we really want, the faster we will learn this and seek only that which will make us truly happy. We have all been trying to “manifest” what we want in this lifetime anyway, mostly unconsciously and with great effort. I can see a way in which this material can encourage more awareness about this process.

So things like *The Secret* and the Abraham material (a deeper version of *The Secret*) are like those boats that may help at a certain stage but are obstacles if overly attached to and held on to. They are definitely not a path in themselves. But for some, they can be an important step.

— Dennis Gaither

CIRCLE NEWS

Staff Changes

Farewell, Linda; Welcome, Alexandra

We’ve had a changing of the guard in the office. Linda Trammell, who was working in the office part-time, has moved on to a wonderful new job working for one of Sedona’s many art galleries. We’ve certainly missed her. Fortunately, though, Linda’s move to a better situation for her gave us the opportunity to hire a full-time office manager.

Our new office manager is Alexandra Fraser, a long-time friend of Robert’s who had worked in the Circle’s office way back in the early nineties. Alexandra has a lot of experience in office management, and says she has always wanted a meaningful, service-oriented job working for an organization that helps people in their spiritual development. She’s looking forward to helping the Circle as it takes the next step in bringing the Course’s message to the world. Farewell and Godspeed, Linda; welcome aboard, Alexandra!

Materials recently posted on our website

Many of you know this, but for those who don't, we post new material on the web site every week. You can be notified when we post new articles by subscribing to [Circle News](#). Here is a list of our recent postings:

How To Listen for Guidance by *Robert Perry*. Wouldn't it be great if *A Course in Miracles* gave us detailed instructions in precisely how to listen for the Holy Spirit's messages? [Read more.](#)

Are There Many Sons or Just One Son? by *Robert Perry*. This question sounds vaguely akin to "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?" But actually, it has direct and massive ramifications for how we see—and practice—the entire Course. [Read more.](#)

I Rest In God by *Robert Perry*. More important than the rest of the body is rest of the mind, and that is what is offered us by this wonderful line, "I rest in God". [Read more.](#)

A Priceless Remedy for Major Upsets: "Response to Temptation" Practices in Review II by *Robert Perry* Have you ever wondered how to deal with major upsets using the Course's methods? [Read more.](#)

These are not chance encounters by *Greg Mackie's* most recent blog entry. [Read more.](#)

Course Meets World Commentary by *Greg Mackie*. This month Greg has posted the following commentaries relating *A Course in Miracles* to a topic "in the news": "The Holiest Spot On Earth", "The Lost Tomb of Jesus?", and "Welcome to the Family of God". [Read more.](#)

Question and Answers by *Robert Perry* and *Greg Mackie*. Robert and Greg posted answers to several questions this month. "Celestial Speedup", "Are things really possible to God?", and "Which Volume of the Course should I start with?" [Read more.](#)

What We're Reading

Greg Mackie:

***Teresa of Avila: The Progress of a Soul* by Cathleen Medwick**

This is an excellent biography of the great Spanish mystic, reformer, and saint. As a reviewer of this book put it, Teresa was "a very modern woman with a gift for administration, a passion for direct conversation with God, and a lifelong struggle to balance the two." She was truly amazing. I've been especially impressed with her ability to creatively navigate through a world that placed obstacles before her at every turn—this was, after all, the time of the Spanish Inquisition, a time when both bold women and ecstatic mysticism were highly suspect. I've found her ability to fulfill her special function (to use a Course term) in the face of such great obstacles very inspiring.

***In Silence: Why We Pray* by Donald Spoto**

Spoto is the author of *Reluctant Saint*, a biography of St. Francis that I enjoyed. *In Silence* is a guided tour through the various types of prayer that human beings all over the world have engaged in through the ages. It is a beautifully written book that combines scholarship and devotion. Though Spoto never talks about himself, the spirit of his writing makes it evident that this book comes from someone who has an active prayer life of his own. A very rewarding read.

Robert Perry:

***American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War On America*, by Chris Hedges**

Chris Hedges, former *New York Times* foreign correspondent and author of *War Is a Force that Gives Us Meaning*, lays out his disturbing vision that the "dominionist movement," a powerful segment of the Christian Right, is actually a proto-fascist movement aimed at turning America into a theocratic state. From the back cover: "All it will take, Hedges writes, is one more national crisis on the order of September 11 for the Christian Right to make a concerted drive to destroy American democracy. The movement awaits a crisis. At that moment they will reveal

themselves for what they truly are — the American heirs to fascism.” Hedges makes his vision credible by going inside the movement and telling us what is said and done on the inside.

Boomeritis: A Novel that Will Set You Free, by Ken Wilber

Ken Wilber’s first novel is really just a forum for presenting his ideas on what he calls Boomeritis. Boomeritis is the disease of the baby boomer generation. Wilber describes it as “pluralism mixed with narcissism,” or “everyone has their own truth” turned into “and therefore no one tells me what to do.” Wilber sees Boomeritis as the chief obstacle for reaching what he calls second tier awareness. I am enjoying the book, which I haven’t finished yet, but mainly because of the ideas. I am not excited about it as a novel. If you do pick it up, be prepared for a young male sexual fantasy on every other page.