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A BETTER WAY

How Do We Spend Our Days After the Workbook?

by Robert Perry

If you are a student of *A Course in Miracles* and have completed the Workbook, what do you do afterward? The epilogue to the Workbook gives the impression that you just sail along under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

For most of us this can sound so vague that almost anything could be done under that heading. And I suspect that almost anything is. For instance, after I finished the Workbook for the first time, I decided to focus each day on the message I gleaned from my dreams of the night before. That seemed to fit what the epilogue said.

However, we receive a much more specific picture of what to do after the Workbook in the Manual for Teachers. This is found in Section 16, "How Should the Teacher of God Spend His Day?" Recently, this section came to life for me in a way that it hadn't before, and I wanted to get what I saw down on paper, for my own sake as much as anyone else's. Even though Jesus tells us that he can only give general rules (since each one must focus on what works best for him or her), these general rules provide a great snapshot of how Jesus sees more mature students living his course.

Starting the day with God

He starts his account of how teachers of God should spend their day, quite naturally, with the morning. He asks, "What must they do to learn to give the day to God?" (2:3) and then answers that "it is well to start the day right" (2:6). How does one start it right? By taking one's morning "quiet time" (4:7), in which one "chooses to spend time with God" (4:3). It's clear that Jesus is talking about meditation, the very practice that the Workbook taught us to do in our morning quiet time in order to join with God.

With this meditation, the important thing is *quality*, not *quantity*. It's not about how long you spend—"One can easily sit still an hour with closed eyes and accomplish nothing" (4:5)—but about how deep you go—"One can as easily give God only an instant, and in that instant join with Him completely" (4:6). The point is to join with God, and to let the time be geared around that. If you need an hour, take an hour. If you need an instant, take an instant.

This joining with God is an end in itself, but it is also more than that. It is the way that we "give the day to God" (2:3). It is our preparation for an entire day spent with God. In our meditation, we are like an athlete joining with our coach before the game, readying ourselves to take our coach's plan into the game, rather than our own fickle agendas.

That is why this section spends so much time telling us to take our quiet time "as soon as possible" (this phrase occurs twice, in 4:3 and 4:7). It's ideal if you can take it the instant you awake. If you are

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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.

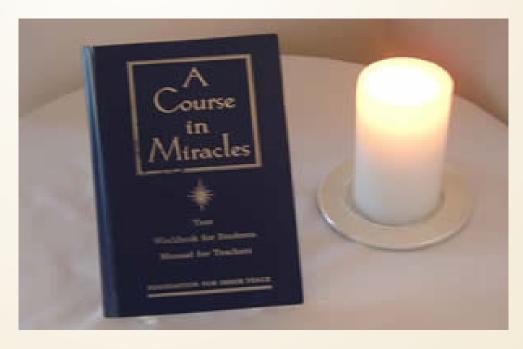
The Course's message is that the source of our suffering is not the world's mistreatment of us, but rather our egocentric attack on the world. This attack convinces us that we have defiled our nature beyond repair, that we are irredeemably guilty. Yet the Course says true reality cannot be defiled; it 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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"not in a situation that fosters quiet thought" when you awake (4:2), then take it just as soon as you can. If instead you miss your quiet time, then you have not "start[ed] the day right" (2:6). Rather, you have let "the day begin with error" (2:7). You have set off down a path of your own devising, a path on which you walk alone

At this point, the only truly useful thing to do is to "begin again" (2:7)—to, in essence, start your day over by doing your quiet time right there and then. It may be 10 A.M., or 12 P.M., or 5 P.M., but whenever it is, that is when your real day, your day with God, begins. The time before that has been spent spinning your wheels. It has been wasted time. This is strongly implied when Jesus says that you save time by doing your quiet time first thing: "Time devoted to starting the day right does indeed save time" (3:4). It saves you from having to waste part of your day walking apart from God.

Remembering God all through the day

If you are catching the flavor of this, you can see that Jesus really is serious about our day being actually given to God. This seriousness continues as he speaks of the rest of the day. In typical Workbook fashion, he instructs us to remember a particular thought all day long:

There is one thought in particular that should be remembered throughout the day. It is a thought of pure joy; a thought of peace, a thought of limitless release, limitless because all things are freed within it. (6:1-2)

Clearly, this thought we are supposed to keep with us is a very happy one—a thought of pure joy, peace, and limitless release. Yet what is this thought? Whatever it is, it is clearly about our *safety*. The words "safe," "safety," and "protection" are mentioned nine times in paragraphs 6-8. To get a more specific idea of what this thought is, we can turn to paragraph 7, which describes the state of someone "who has accepted His protection" (7:1):

He is safe, and knows it to be so. He has a Guide [the Holy Spirit] Who will not fail. He need make no distinctions among the problems he perceives, for He to Whom he turns with all of them recognizes no order of difficulty in resolving them. He is as safe in the present as he was before illusions were accepted into his mind, and as he will be when he has let them go. There is no difference in his state at different times and different places, because they are all one to God. This is his safety. And he has no need for more than this. (7:3-9)

Let's look at this more closely. The person "who has accepted his protection" feels utterly safe because the Holy Spirit will solve his every problem for him. He doesn't even sort his problems into "harder" and "easier"; they are all labeled "no difficulty." Amazingly, he feels just as safe as he was in Heaven before the separation, and as he will be after the separation. And this experience of safety doesn't change with different times and places. Through all of them, his state remains the same because God regards all times and places as one.

His safety, then, does not come from externals. Its source is entirely internal. Rather than resting on outside conditions, it rests on the Holy Spirit, on Heaven, and on God. We can shorten this to a very concise statement: *My safety lies in God*. This thought (or some variation of it) is the thought that we are supposed to remember "throughout the day" (6:1). Variations on this thought can be found in many Workbook lessons, such as "God is my refuge and security" (Lesson 261) and "Your peace is with me, Father. I am safe" (Lesson 245).

This whole picture is actually very similar to something Jesus told Helen and Bill very early in the Course's dictation (as recorded in the Urtext). After telling them to "have a good day," he said, "You might remember that 'underneath are the Everlasting Arms." In other words, the way to have a good day is to remember that underneath you are God's Everlasting Arms, holding you up, giving you protection, keeping you safe. Remarkably, this is the exact same thing Jesus is telling us, in different words, here in the Manual. In both places, he is saying, "Have a happy day by remembering God's protection throughout the day."

Who isn't comforted by the idea "My safety lies in God"? This idea, however, takes on more of an edge when we add on a corollary: "My safety does *not* lie in my ability to deal with external problems." This section is clearly adding on this corollary. It refers to you trying to make "a place of safety for yourself" (6:3) and to the things you "did before in the name of safety" (7:2), and then asks you to "give up" (6:7) these foolish endeavors.

This is serious business. Our emotional sense of safety, minute by minute, rests on our estimation of how well we can handle the various stresses, dangers, and challenges thrown at us by the world. It rests on our perceived adequacy for the task of putting out all the fires. If we believe that we can put them out, we feel (relatively) safe. If we don't, we begin to panic. Jesus, however, is asking us to actually withdraw our sense of safety from our perceived adequacy and place it, instead, in God. He is asking us to give up the entire foundation on which our emotional equilibrium rests and instead establish a new foundation. If we actually carried this out, our emotional stability would have nothing to do with how well we think we are juggling all the balls, and everything to do with "underneath are the Everlasting Arms."

What Jesus is talking about, then, is spending the day in a very different state of consciousness. He is not talking about the way that most of us do the Workbook, where we go through the day in our normal state of mind and then occasionally drop in the idea we are practicing that day. He is talking about that idea *becoming* our state of mind. That thought isn't just a pebble that gets dropped into our normal stream of consciousness. That thought *becomes* the stream, and we spend our day simply floating on our backs down that stream.

Now we can see why it was so crucial that we start the day by giving it to God. How can we possibly walk around all day consciously resting in God without starting the day by joining with Him? How can we spend the day in this altered state without plunging ourselves into it first thing in the morning? Now we can appreciate Jesus' plan. We begin the day by giving it to God, through having a deep meditation in which we join with Him. And then we spend the rest of the day maintaining that state by remembering that our safety lies in Him, not in our own juggling ability.

Guarding our state of mind

A crucial part of maintaining this higher state is protecting it in the face of disturbances. We need a way to restore our sense of safety in God when it has been shaken by disquieting circumstances. This issue is so important that this section devotes three paragraphs to it (8-10).

We may assume that the threats to our sense of safety would be external difficulties. But that's not how they are framed in this section. Rather, they are framed as us returning "to earlier attempts to place reliance on [ourselves] alone" (8:5). In other words, the threat to the thought that "My safety lies in God" is not some external danger; it is the thought that "My safety lies in my own ability to handle this."

This section calls this thought "magic." But how does this fit the definition of magic? Magic is a *cause* that cannot really produce the *effect* it purports to produce. A magician waving his wand (cause) cannot really make an elephant disappear (effect). It can only produce an *illusion* of that effect. The same is true with us trying to secure our own safety. Our own separate will (cause) can never really make us safe (effect). Waving our wand at all the challenges we face us will never really make the elephant of our anxiety disappear. To believe otherwise is to fall prey to a superstitious belief in magic. We need to acknowledge that this magic has never really worked. It has never made us feel truly safe. Jesus puts great emphasis on this: "Magic of any kind, in all its forms, simply does nothing" (9:7). It just doesn't work.

To keep from throwing our peace away, then, we need to be vigilant all day long for the thought "I can put this fire out, and that's why I can feel safe." Rather than that thought causing a sigh of relief, it needs to alert us to the fact that we've stepped off the path. As soon as we notice it, we need to remember our real protection (8:1). We need to remind ourselves that our protection lies in God's Will, not in our small will (9:2).

To aid us in doing this, Jesus gives us a Workbook-like line to repeat (though he adds that we can use "other words, or only one, or none at all"—10:7). That line is "God is with me. I cannot be deceived" (10:5-6). Yet how exactly are we being "deceived"? By believing that we can make ourselves feel safe. We know from experience that our efforts never bring a true sense of safety. If we choose to ignore that experience, we are

lying to ourselves. But if God is with us, we can see through this deception. That is the meaning of "God is with me. I cannot be deceived."

Yet in the middle of a busy day, how can we not only use this line, but actually succeed in shaking free of our deception? How can we genuinely lift our sense of safety out of our own hands and place it back in God's Hands? Jesus addresses this very question:

How can he do this, particularly during the time when his mind is occupied with external things? He can but try, and his success depends on his conviction that he will succeed. He must be sure success is not of him, but will be given him at any time, in any place and circumstance he calls for it. (8:2-4)

In other words, we need to repeat that line ("God is with me. I cannot be deceived") filled with the conviction that we will succeed, not because of ourselves but because we are calling on the Holy Spirit (by repeating the line). It is He Who will free our minds from the deception that our safety comes from our own efforts.

As a very small example—and our days are made up of such small examples—imagine the following scenario. You realize in a panic, "The Smiths will be here in only fifteen minutes! I don't think I can clean the house by then." You're feeling unsafe. Even if your body is not in danger, your *image* is. Then you think, "Maybe I can do it if I just tidy away the really visible stuff." Now you've restored a marginal sense of safety. Your anxiety level goes down to a reasonable level. What you need to do is first realize that you've replaced your true protection with a poor substitute. To remedy this, you tell yourself firmly, "God is with me. I cannot be deceived." This means, "With God by my side, I can't be deceived into thinking that my safety depends on my cleaning ability." You don't say this timidly. That would mean you are resigned to the fact that nothing can shake you from equating your protection with you cleaning efforts. Rather, you say it with certainty, knowing that this is a call to the Holy Spirit to release you from this deception, and that this call *will* be answered. (Incidentally, this doesn't mean that you don't clean the house—though you might not—it just means that you don't see the condition of the house as being at all related to your peace.)

Again we see how serious Jesus is about spending our day in a very different mindset than usual. The state we reach in the morning and then maintain all day is so precious to us that we remain alert to any threat to it, and deal with that threat just as quickly and decisively as if it were a threat to our physical body. This notion of spending our time in an uplifted state and then guarding that state so that we don't fall from it may sound like a new concept, yet it can be found throughout the Course. Here is one example:

When the temptation to attack rises to make your mind darkened and murderous, remember you *can* see the battle from above....When [this temptation occurs] leave not your place on high, but quickly choose a miracle instead of murder. And God Himself and all the lights of Heaven will gently lean to you, and hold you up. (T-23.IV.6:1, 5-6)

Evening quiet time

Finally, after beginning the day with God, renewing that connection all day long, and guarding it against all that would bring it down, we end the day with God. We do an evening version of our morning quiet time:

If possible...just before going to sleep is a desirable time to devote to God. It sets your mind into a pattern of rest, and orients you away from fear. If it is expedient to spend this time earlier, at least be sure that [at bedtime] you do not forget a brief period,—not more than a moment will do,—in which you close your eyes and think of God. (5:6-8)

Notice how Jesus wants to make sure that we end the day with God. Even if we do our quiet time earlier in the evening (since many of us would fall asleep if we did it right at bedtime), we should take an additional moment at bedtime and think of God. He really wants God to be the very last thing on our mind as we go to sleep.

Ending the day in this way has two purposes, I believe. First, it reinforces the fact that our day really was about resting in God's protection, for the way we end something is always a statement of what that thing really

was to us. Second, "it sets your mind into a pattern of rest, and orients you away from fear" (5:7). It prepares you to spend your sleep resting in God rather than tossing in fear. It allows the sense of safety you rested in all day to continue throughout the night, so that when you wake you will be ready for yet another day of resting in God.

What do we do with this picture?

I find this picture of a day lived after the Workbook to be incredibly attractive. It is not a day in which we fit God occasionally into the cracks. It is a day that is all about God, in which we exchange the constant anxiety of trying to procure our own safety for the profound peace of resting in God's Everlasting Arms. Can you imagine a day in which your sense of safety was so deep that it couldn't be shaken no matter what happened outside you? Who wouldn't want a day like that?

Yet as you can see, it comes with a "price." It means starting and ending the day with a deep meditation. It means maintaining a higher state by remembering all day long that our safety lies in God. Perhaps most challenging of all, it means protecting that state by not hanging our emotional equilibrium on our own ability to make ourselves safe. It means taking a firm stand against this very deeply ingrained habit. If, however, we are willing to pay this "price," the benefits are incalculable.

Having this kind of day is admittedly far beyond where most of us are now. Yet rather than allowing this to make us feel guilty and inadequate, let's allow it to fill our hearts "with a stir of deep anticipation" (M-28.4:1), knowing that this is where we are going. And then let's think about taking the steps to get there. We are simply not going to get there without the mind training that the Workbook provides. It's just not going to happen. While doing the Workbook, let's realize that we are preparing ourselves to eventually take the training wheels off and, without the Workbook's support, experience this kind of day. And once we have finished the Workbook, let's see this day as what we are shooting for. If we then fall on our faces, let's go back to the Workbook, so that next time we finish we will be in a better position to succeed.

But let us not forget: Making this beautiful day with God our *every* day is where we are heading. This is our inheritance as students of *A Course in Miracles*. This is the gateway to receiving our real inheritance.



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

I just finished reading your relationships article ["The Importance of Relationships in *A Course in Miracles*, by Robert Perry, *A Better Way* #67], and I had to let you know right away how brilliant I think it was. I think it's one of the finest things you have written. I was struck with how beautifully you drew together what the Course says, made the connections, and explained it all so clearly and simply. I don't see how anyone reading it could not see the truth of what the Course really says and how it sees relationships. I was very inspired by it and am going to share it with the students here.

— Mary Anne Buchowski

Thank you for your article on "The Importance of Relationships." I very much appreciated the documentary evidence showing that our relationships here at the bodily level of experience are important for our salvation. However, I would like to direct my comments more toward the section where you discuss the idea that there are relationships *in reality*, at the spiritual level of experience.

Robert, I know you are personally aware that I have been a dedicated student/teacher of ACIM since 1982 and have conducted hundreds of classes on the Course's teachings. I know as well that you are aware that there is a lengthy discussion in my book [God, Self, and Evil: A Miracle Theodicy] regarding the Course's teachings on the nature of God and His creations (Thoughts, Sons). Given this, I feel confident in making the following remarks.

As you correctly point out, if there is *relationship* in reality, there must be *more than numerically one* thing or being in reality. God cannot be the sole, single, and only being in reality since He created beings (minds) that are perfect like Himself. And the Course does repeatedly speak of "the minds God created" and, as you quoted in your article, explicitly states that God's Thoughts (Sons) are "in number infinite."

Students who are familiar with the teachings of Ken Wapnick are well aware of the fact that he teaches that there is only one single being in reality, i.e., numerically one being. I have long disagreed with Wapnick on this point and have tried to discuss this with him several times in recent years. And although, or perhaps because, Ken knows my background he refuses to discuss the topic.

It has been a repeated experience of mine that those who follow Wapnick on his teaching of "numerically one being in reality" have great difficulty advancing in their learning this Course. One of the reasons for this difficulty is all the corollaries of Wapnick's teaching on numerical oneness, corollaries like: there is no Son of God in reality, no creation, no increase, no relationship, and ultimately that *there is no real and eternal Self that is my true identity*, i.e., there is no Christ—the Son of God as He created him—*in reality*.

I have also repeatedly experienced that when any fellow student/teacher of the Course presents documentary evidence—as your article has done—that questions Wapnick's position on this topic, he encounters objections all of which reduce to "well, the Course does not mean what it says."

No one who says to himself, "my teacher does not mean what he says," can learn what his teacher wants him to learn. In fact, his teacher is denied his role as teacher. And a substitute teacher is accepted instead. Is it a wonder then that such students have difficulty understanding and learning what *Jesus* is trying to teach them?

I do wish that those students who follow Wapnick's teaching on "numerical oneness" will read your article on relationships and give it serious consideration. I hope that, with the help of this article, their minds will be opened to what Jesus himself teaches in his Course, for only then can they advance in learning what Jesus wants them to learn.

— Robert J. Hellmann, M.A.

• • •

Dear Robert,

Thank you for an interesting article about relationships in the Course. In this context you raise the important question of Course metaphysics about Heaven. I have never been satisfied with the definition of Heaven as simply "Oneness. "A Oneness joined as One" (T-25.I.7) tells us a bit more – I have always felt there was communication, and relational reality in Heaven. Your article, with many relevant quotations, ably illustrates this truth about Heaven, and does provide a metaphysical underpinning for our understanding of relationships.

Leaving aside metaphysics for a moment, I'd like to quote a couple of passages from the Text which are practical, explicit, and unambiguous.

"Your way will be different, not in purpose, but in means. A holy relationship is a means of saving time." (T-18. VII.5)

"Time has been saved for you because you and your brother are together. This is the special means this Course is using to save you time. You are not making use of the Course if you insist on using means which have served others well, neglecting what was made for you." (T-18.VII.6:3-5)

Here Jesus tells us point blank that relationships are the means the Course is using to bring us home. These passages, and others like them, (some quoted by you) are not difficult or highly metaphorical. We have very plain language here. Given the clarity of these statements it is surprising that students are "shying away from the importance of our relationships." Your article provides a very good metaphysical argument, which is helpful, but whatever our metaphysical position about ultimate reality, these statements are incontrovertible. One wants to ask these students: "Have you read the book?"

Regarding Ken Wapnick's teachings I'd like to make a few observations. The Course does say "there is no world" (Lesson 132), and "It still is true that nothing is without." (T-20.VIII.9:7) and many other statements to that effect, so these ideas are definitely part of Course metaphysics. In my experience Ken has always warned against using these metaphysical ideas as a way of ignoring our experience in the world, after all this is what we work with. Further, I have never heard Ken say we shouldn't pay close attention to our relationships, quite the contrary. For example, in his two booklet set *The Healing Power of Kindness*, Ken shows how the healing of ourselves and our relationships frees us to be the Holy Spirit's instruments of love in the world. This is not an isolated example; this is a constant theme in his work.

This leads to my next point. I have never heard Ken say we shouldn't help people. Again, quite the contrary. To take *The Healing Power of Kindness* once again, here we are shown how our healing leads to the extension of love in the world through us. Ken does stress the importance of knowing whether the agent of our functioning is the ego or the Holy Spirit. If coming from the Holy Spirit I will be truly helpful, if coming from the ego I am deluding myself. Further, the Holy Spirit would reveal the brother I am helping is one with me. If I think it is "me" helping "you" this is a dead giveaway of the ego based approach. Ken rightly stresses these important points which do require some self knowledge and spiritual maturity on our part.

The essential importance of inner awareness and self knowledge, taken for granted in most spiritual traditions, seems to be obscured in some Course discussions which don't seem to get beyond externals ("Do we do this or that?").

In closing I'd like to stress, as I have before, the need for individual discernment by students. It's not enough to carry around a few catch phrases and half understood ideas from Course teachers. Ultimately, true understanding must come from within ourselves. *A Course in Miracles* is a path given to us from the highest source. Let's do it the honour of giving it our full attention, effort, and discernment.

In peace, Mary Benton

Mary,

Thank you for your very thoughtful and balanced response. I'm glad you agreed with the emphasis on the importance of relationships. In terms of Ken Wapnick's teachings, I do see his construal of the Course's metaphysics as doing away with the notion of relationship in Heaven and thereby removing the basis for the importance of relationships here. On the issue of helping others, I find Ken to say a number of things which seem

hard to reconcile. I've heard him speak of the importance of kindness, I've heard him say that, while helping others is important, it's not a part of the Course, and I've heard him say that helping others makes "the error real." For instance, I found these remarks in *The Message of A Course* in Miracles: *Few Choose to Listen*:

The ego's need to make the world and itself special will distort the words to mean that the Course student, now a seemingly advanced teacher of God, is asked by Jesus *behaviorally* to teach other students, heal the sick, or preach to the world.

...One does not heal *others*, minister to *others*, or teach *others*; one simply accepts the truth within oneself by realizing the illusory nature of the ego....

Even more to the point, one cannot heal others because ultimately, if the world is an illusion, who is there to help?...Needless to say, the whole concept of helping presupposes a dualistic universe, of which God knows nothing. (p. 32-34)

Not exactly a pep talk on helping others. My article, however, was an attempt to address what I perceive as a broad sentiment among Course students. Whether it's because of Ken saying "there is no one out there" (which he does say) or because of the notion that the spiritual path is all about one's own inner states, I perceive a widespread resistance to the Course's emphasis on actual helping and actual joining. I'm glad you are behind that emphasis. Thank you again for writing.

In peace, Robert

WHAT WE'RE READING

Robert Perry:

Birthtimes: A Scientific Investigation of the Secrets of Astrology, by Michel Gauquelin

I've wondered for years if astrology had any scientific evidence whatsoever in its favor. My wife finally bought me this book for my birthday and it's fascinating. It reports on the life work of Michel Gauquelin, who spent decades rigorously investigating the claims of astrology. The good news for believers in astrology: he found a number of statistically significant effects that associated the position of the planets at birth with personality and career. The bad news: he pretty well demolished the traditional horoscope. Reading this book, it is hard not to be impressed by his scientific rigor. His positive results are quite surprising (at least for me) and difficult to explain away, despite the consistent efforts of skeptics. His negative results, on the other hand, have served to strengthen my prior skepticism. I am left very grateful for this book.

RECENT WEB SITE POSTINGS

Many of you know this, but for those who don't, we post new material on the web site every week. Here are some of the articles we have recently posted:

What Does It Mean to Be in the Present? by Greg Mackie. Read more.

There Is No Sin by Robert Perry. Read more.

Who Was Jesus by Robert Perry. Read more.

A Course in Cause and Not Effect by Allen Watson. Read more.

Blog: Greg Mackie's most recent blog entry is "Is it a help or a hindrance?" 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": "Forgiving Doctor Mengele"; "Give 'Til It Feels Good"; "Freedom Is Free"; "The Atheist and the Martyr"; and "All My Relations." <u>Read more</u>.

Questions and Answers by *Robert Perry* and *Greg Mackie*. Robert and Greg posted answers to several questions this month: "I cannot be unfairly treated?"; "Why does the Course never mention Jesus' Mother?"; "How do we reconcile our unique, individual 'special function' with the Course's contention that there is no unique individuality?"; "What Are the Great Rays?"; and "What is the relationship between fear and hate?" <u>Read more</u>.