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A BETTER WAY

The Joy of Realizing That This Place Is Hell

by Greg Mackie

Have you ever wondered if this world is hell? I think that deep down, underneath all of our paeans to Mother Earth and popular songs proclaiming “what a wonderful world,” we all suspect that this is so. It is a truism that the world is crazy. We joke about Murphy’s Law, which says that everything that can go

wrong will. We have the word “snafu,” which (in its G-rated version) is an acronym for “situation normal, all fouled up.” Natural disasters are seen by many as punishment for our sins. Not only do we wonder if we’re being punished for our bad deeds, but we even have a witticism that says no *good* deed goes unpunished. As the saying goes, we’re damned if we do and damned if we don’t. However much the party line may trumpet the miracle of life, I think the dissident in all of us is whispering in our ear that Thomas Hobbes was right: Life is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

In other words, this place is hell. *A Course in Miracles* certainly says so. Now of course, it also says this place is an illusion generated by our perception, an illusion that is neutral in and of itself and can be transformed with healed perception. But my point here is simply that the world as it normally operates, under the tyranny of the ego, is a hellish place. In the Course, it is described as “the hell we made” (W-pI.122.9:2). The body we seem to inhabit here is described as a means to “fence [the Son of God] into hell without escape” (W-pII.5.4:2). Everything here is painfully limited, “and what is limited cannot be Heaven. So it must be hell” (T-26.X.2:9-10). Indeed, this world is “the opposite of Heaven, being made to be its opposite, and everything here takes a direction exactly opposite of what is true” (T-16.V.3:6). And the Course is full of descriptions of this world that Hobbes would find congenial with his own:

The world you see is merciless indeed, unstable, cruel, unconcerned with you, quick to avenge and pitiless with hate. It gives but to rescind, and takes away all things that you have cherished for a while. No lasting love is found, for none is here. This is the world of time, where all things end. (W-pI.129.2:3-6)

For years now, I’ve believed that what the Course says is true: This place is hell. Yet lately, perhaps due to some recent encounters with some pretty hellish situations, this belief has sunk in on a more visceral level. Yet to my surprise, while this is a depressing idea, it has brought with it a curious joy as well. There is something refreshing about getting out of denial and admitting a hard truth. And to the degree that I’m really letting this idea in, my work with the Course has become deeper, more meaningful, and more vital. There’s nothing like recognizing just how bad the disease is to make you really want the cure.

In this article, then, I want to describe more fully my reasons for believing that this place is hell, and show how this realization can actually be a gateway to joy. Fair warning: The first part of this article will be rough sledding. I realize that I may come off as a bitter sourpuss, which is ironic since people who know me will tell you I’m actually a pretty upbeat guy most of the time. However, I ask you to bear with me. The point of laying out the depressing stuff is to set the table for the joy that follows, so hang in there. I promise that there is a bright light at the end of this dark tunnel.

This place is hell

The longer I’ve lived in this world and the more I’ve let the Course have its way with me, the more it has sunk in that every level of the world we see is a nightmare. First, there is the physical universe as a whole. Yes, astronomers like Carl

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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.

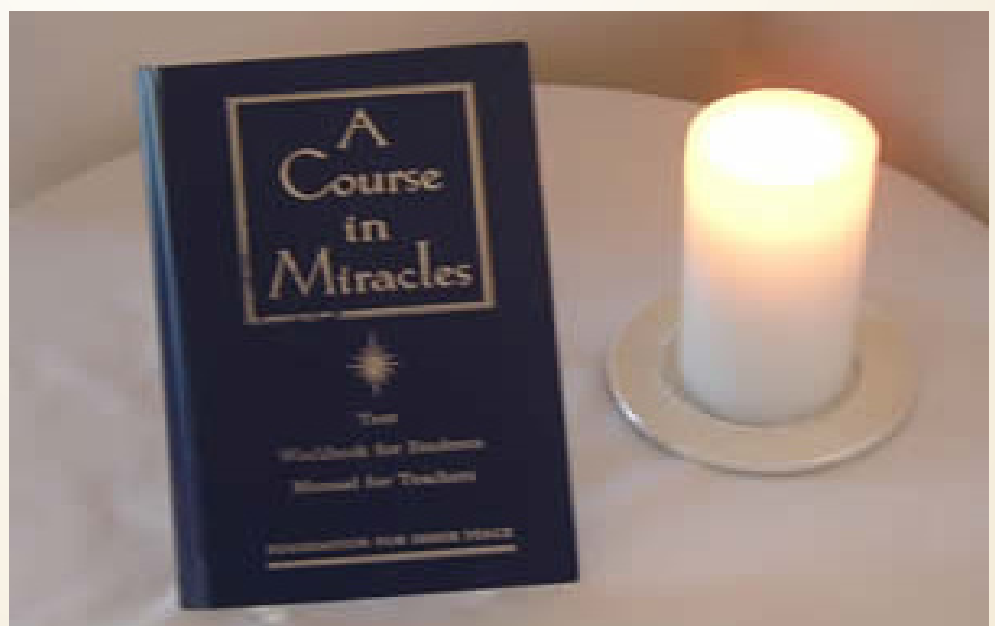
The Course's message is that the source of our suffering is not the world's mistreatment of us, but rather our egocentric attack on the world. This attack convinces us that we have defiled our nature beyond repair, that we are irredeemably guilty. Yet the Course says true reality cannot be defiled; it 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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Sagan have told us how magnificent those “billions and billions” of stars are. Yes, those pictures from the Hubble are pretty spectacular. But the fact is, the reason we can enjoy those things is that we’re very far away from them. We’re like the aliens in a Gary Larson *Far Side* cartoon I once saw, oohing and ahing at a thermonuclear war on earth because (for them) it was a great fireworks show. Our earth (and any earthlike planet out there) is a tiny island of life in a hostile ocean of burning balls of gas, cosmic dust, and most of all cold emptiness. And scientists tell us it is all inexorably winding down, dying a slow but inevitable death. Recent evidence suggests that the universe will keep expanding until it burns out; what started with a Big Bang will go out with a whimper.

And even this island of life is no picnic—well, in a way I guess it *is* a picnic, for it is certainly a feeding frenzy. The circle of life on earth is a never-ending war, a dog-eat-dog world of vulnerable bodies which must kill and consume other bodies to survive—what Robert has often called the “circle of lunch.” The Course puts it bluntly: “Devouring is nature’s ‘law of life’” (M-27.3:7). And while the process as a whole is terribly grim, some versions of it seem especially twisted. There are “slave-maker ants,” which enslave the colonies of other ant species by invading, killing the other colony’s queen, and rubbing her scent onto the slave-makers’ queen so the invaded colony will follow her. Recently, I read about a parasite that lives in mice but must complete its life cycle in the body of a cat. So, to ensure that it ends up in a cat, it destroys the specific area of the mouse’s brain where the fear of cats is located, so the mouse will make no effort to avoid cats and thus inevitably be eaten by one. And so the great circle of life goes on—that is, until it too ends in death, which will inevitably happen when our sun burns out, if not before due to some human blunder.

This brings us to the human world. At the most basic level, we human beings are participants in the biological circle of lunch. We too kill and consume other bodies to survive. Our bodies too are vulnerable, prey to countless illnesses and calamities of all kinds, from devastating ones like cancer and permanently crippling accidents to mundane everyday ones like colds and stubbed toes. Pain is our constant companion; even things as simple as breathing and eating are set into motion by the pain of lacking oxygen and food. Even the healthiest of lives is filled with the suffering that comes from just being in a body.

Then there is the human social world, which most of the time is just a more sophisticated version of dog-eat-dog. It is above all a world of egocentric self-interest; just as living things in nature consume other living things in order to survive, so human beings exploit other human beings in order to be king or queen of the hill. We see this on every level, from nations warring against nations to spouses warring against spouses. Yes, real love does exist and people are capable of selfless acts, but most of the time they are looking out for number one. Everybody is fighting for the spoils of war: territory, money, mates, prestige—to use the Course’s term, specialness. This battle is fraught with pain and suffering of myriad kinds: poverty, loneliness, humiliation, constant worry and fear, and the profound guilt that is the inevitable result of participating in this free-for-all. And though we like to joke that he who dies with the most toys wins, this little joke contains a sobering truth: Like everything else, *we die*, and therefore all of our striving is in vain. You really can’t take it with you.

The bottom line is that we’re living in a place where attack, pain, suffering, and ultimately death are the fundamental facts of everyday existence. Now, let’s think about the ramifications of this. What kind of people, in our usual way of thinking, most deserve to be attacked, to suffer, to die? Criminals, right? We punish criminals by inflicting some sort of suffering or deprivation on them, and the most vile offenders get the death penalty. If this is so, then doesn’t the fact that we’re living in a place of attack, suffering, and death suggest that someone or something regards *us* as criminals? Haven’t you ever caught yourself wondering what nameless cosmic crime you must have committed to deserve all this?

Now for the punch line: In our religious traditions, we have a name for the place where people are punished for the crimes (or “sins”) they have committed. It is a place they go after they die, where they are attacked with various forms of suffering, an abode where they are separated from goodness and love, a state which the book of Revelation in the Bible calls the “second death.” What is the name of this place? It is, of course, *hell*. And since our world matches this description so well, it’s difficult not to conclude that this place is hell.

Objections to realizing that this place is hell

I’m guessing that as you read the above litany of horror, you probably found yourself resisting it in one way or another. I know I have. Surely, we say to ourselves, it can’t be *that* bad. Surely there must be some way out of the conclusion that this world is hell. I don’t think there is a way out, but that hasn’t stopped people from trying to find one. In my experience both with Course students and in the larger world, I’ve heard a number of objections to the dark picture presented above (some of which I myself raised earlier in my life). Here are just a few of the more common ones, with my comments following:

Lots of good things happen here too; don't be so one-sided

When I lay out the bad news like I just did above, I often hear something like, “Don’t be such a gloomy Gus. What about all the good stuff? What about sunsets, and kittens, and romantic candlelight dinners?” There are several problems with this, though. First, from the Course’s standpoint, most of the things we call good and pleasurable are actually aspects of the system of attack, suffering, and death in pleasant disguise. The sunsets are part of this hostile physical universe, the kittens are predators who take part in the circle of lunch, and the romantic candlelight dinners are often skirmishes in the war for specialness. Second, even if these things are good, the bad can descend upon us without warning at any time. And if we live in a world where we constantly flip-flop between pleasure and pain, isn’t the *overall* situation hell? Finally, no matter how many good things happen in the course of life on earth, it always ends badly, because it ends in death. The end of a story is what determines the kind of story it is; a story with a sad ending is called a tragedy. And is this not hell?

You don't really have it so bad; count your blessings

There’s certainly a grain of truth to this one, because compared to so many people in the world, I personally *don’t* have it so bad. I live in a free country, and have a good home, plenty to eat, lots of friends, good health, fulfilling work, a rewarding spiritual life, and no major tragedies so far. I can count many genuine blessings in my life. But this doesn’t negate any of the things I’ve said about life in this world. The fact that my life is less painful than most is hardly cause for gratitude, “for who has cause for thanks while others have less cause? And who could suffer less because he sees another suffer more?” (W-pI.195.1:5-6). And of course, like everyone else I have my own sufferings, and I too will die in the end. If even the most fortunate people have lots of pain in their lives and will end up just as dead as the less fortunate, isn’t that hell?

You have to have the bad to appreciate the good; embrace the opposites

This argument says that in order to fully appreciate the good in our lives, we must have a standard of comparison. Therefore, we need to experience pain in order to really see how great the joy is. I’ve never understood the appeal of this idea. It certainly does seem that the pleasures of this world are sweeter when we’ve tasted the pains as well, but that’s hardly a reason to think this world is wonderful. Why couldn’t we live in a place where we can experience a joy without opposite, as the Course says we do in Heaven? To me, a place where we *must* experience pain in order to really experience joy is, well, hellish.

Individuals suffer and die, but the glorious whole goes on; celebrate Gaia

In this view, the earth is seen as a living organism (the popular understanding of the “Gaia hypothesis”); all of us are parts of Mother Earth’s body. Therefore, there’s no reason to feel sad when individuals suffer and die; it’s no different than cells dying in a human body. Individuals may pass away, but the glorious whole of life goes on. This is another idea that has never had any appeal for me, since I happen to be one of those unfortunate individuals in this scenario. The human version of this, in which individual people are seen as merely disposable cogs of the State, is called a totalitarian regime and is regarded as evil. Why, then, should a biological totalitarian regime be regarded as glorious?

To use another illustration: Imagine a war that has been going on for ages, in which each side is of equal strength. Soldiers are constantly getting killed at the front, but they are constantly being replenished by new recruits who take their turn at the front. This has been going on for as long as anyone can remember. If you were to say how horrible it is that so many soldiers are dying, would you be comforted by someone saying, “Well yes, individual soldiers die, but it’s all good because the war as a whole goes on”? Yet a version of this is the exact situation we have on earth. Sounds like hell to me.

Pain and suffering helps you grow; learn the lesson

In theodicy, the area of theology that deals with the problem of evil in the world, this is often called the “soul-making” theory: Pain and suffering exist in order to help us learn and grow and develop; without pain to teach us lessons, we would forever be in an immature state and would never grow into our full potential. In New Age circles, this takes the form of seeing everything as a lesson. My objection to this idea is along the lines of my objection to the idea of needing opposites: A world in which pain is necessary to learn lessons is hardly a wonderful world. Why couldn’t God have created us fully formed, without the need to learn painful lessons, as the Course says He did? True, the Course says we *can* learn through pain, but this is because the Holy Spirit has given us a way out of the pain we’ve unnecessarily inflicted

upon ourselves. A world in which we *must* learn through pain is like a giant Skinner box, and we're just experimental rats pressing levers that sometimes give us tasty pellets and other times give us painful shocks. Welcome to hell.

Calling this place "hell" is just your own judgment; think positive

I get this one a lot in Course groups. The Course says that we should relinquish our judgment, and some take this to mean that seeing the world as hell is merely our own judgment, which we must exchange for a more positive view. However, viewing the world as hell is not simply my judgment (though my judgment can certainly piggyback on that view); it is what the Course itself says about the world, as we can see in the quotes that began this article. "Thinking positive" in the way we normally conceive of that is actually the primary way of keeping the ego in business: It is listening to "the ego's arguments which seek to prove all this is really Heaven" (W-pI.73.6:1), and thus a way of *holding on* to our own judgment. Giving up our judgment means accepting the Holy Spirit's judgment in its place. If He thinks this world is hell—and He does, if the Course is any indicator—then giving up our judgment means seeing with Him that this world is hell.

Everything is in divine order; realize that it's all perfect

This is another one I get a lot in Course groups, yet the Course *never* says that this world is perfect. On the contrary, we've seen from the quotes that began this article just how dark the Course's view of this world is. Elsewhere, it depicts this world as "a picture of the crucifixion of God's Son" (T-13.In.4:1), and pleads with us to recognize that "this *is* an insane world, and do not underestimate the extent of its insanity" (T-14.I.2:6). Rather than divine order, our world is maintained by "laws of chaos" (T-23.II.Heading); rather than perfect, "It is born of error, and it has not left its source" (W-pII.3.1:2). It's true that the Course also says that everything here has been incorporated into the Holy Spirit's plan for salvation, but this is similar to His enabling us to learn through pain. It's not that the pain and suffering and insanity of this world are perfect, but rather that He has taken all of our self-made imperfection and installed a doorway out of it. He's taken our lemons and made lemonade, which testifies not to the perfection of this world but to the Holy Spirit's genius for getting us out of it. The fact that He's installed a doorway to Heaven here doesn't mean this place isn't hell.

We don't really know what it's all about; surrender to the mystery

Appealing to "mystery" is the last refuge when all other arguments have failed. The appeal to mystery says that given our human limitations, we just aren't capable of understanding how it all works. After all, "God works in strange and mysterious ways." Therefore, how do we know there isn't an explanation that, if we were capable of discerning it, would reveal how good and glorious and necessary this world really is? Well, it's certainly true that our understanding is limited. However, it is perfectly reasonable to look at our experience and develop plausible theories to explain that experience, and we've seen that the hell theory is quite plausible. The Course itself regards the appeal to mystery as patently absurd: "[God] does not lead you through a world of misery, waiting to tell you, at the journey's end, why He did this to you" (T-22.I.3:11). Yes, it's possible that this statement is wrong, but is it really likely that a loving God could have a satisfactory explanation for *this*? Many have concluded that He couldn't; indeed, the horror of life in this world is probably the number one argument for atheism. Given our actual experience in this world, I think the burden of proof is on those who say it *isn't* hell.

The joy of realizing that this place is hell

If you've made it this far, you should get a T-shirt saying, "I survived the first part of Greg's hell article." Now, at last, it's time for the good news: Just as seeing the true nature of an illness can open us up to the cure, so seeing that this place is hell, while initially sobering, can open us up to the pathway *out* of hell. To illustrate this, I want to trace a life journey that many of us who believe (or want to believe) in a loving God take: a journey that first sinks us into the dark night of despair but then, just when we think all hope is lost, miraculously lifts us into the glorious dawn of a joyous new life. This is a journey I have taken in my own life. As you read, I encourage you to reflect on your life experience and see if you too have been walking down this road.

If God is Love, why is there so much pain and suffering in this world?

This question is the catalyst that sets into motion the journey I'm describing. Among those who want to believe in a loving God, I don't think there's anyone who hasn't wrestled with this issue, because there is such a stark contrast between the God of Love and the slaughterhouse He is said to have created. This has been a burning issue for me for

as long as I can remember. Even as a child, long before I was able to articulate the issue with the clarity that I can now, I struggled with this. I've always believed in a loving God; this idea just seems to be part of my being, as necessary to survival as food and water. But an animal would die, a natural disaster would strike, some senseless human cruelty would be inflicted on me or someone else, and I would find myself crying out, "Why, God? Why do you allow this?" Looking back on it now, it seems that my whole life has really been driven by the collision between my loving God and this cruel world. I know I'm not alone in this.

Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him

The disconnect between a loving God and this world is very uncomfortable, so we try desperately to find ways to reconcile the good God we yearn to believe in with the evil we experience on a daily basis. God seems to be slaying us all the time (the heading here is from the biblical book of Job), yet we tell ourselves in myriad ways that we can trust and praise and justify Him and His painful world in spite of it all. I've listed some of the ways we try to do this above; there are many more. And when we run out of answers, we start grasping at straws; when transpersonal theorist Ken Wilber was asked why God produced all this, he replied, "It's no fun having dinner alone."

This issue continued to haunt me as I entered college. I studied European intellectual history, and there I encountered a famous expression of the dilemma: "If God is God, He is not good; if God is good, He is not God." In other words, if God is the only God and fully in charge of everything, He must have evil in His nature; if He is truly all good, He must not be fully in charge—there must be a competing evil power at work in the world. The logic of this was impeccable to me, but I simply could not shake my belief in a one-and-only loving God, anymore than I could shake my belief in gravity. After college I went on a spiritual journey through Raja Yoga, Zen Buddhism, various New Age teachings, and New Thought. Yet while I benefited in many ways from all of these teachings, and I tried to convince myself that they gave me what I was seeking, none really offered a satisfactory answer to my most burning question.

This place is hell; goodbye, cruel world

Like someone with an abusive spouse, we try mightily to love this world as it beats us into submission, yet I think something in all of us realizes it's a losing effort. I think we all suspect that there *is* no reconciliation of this world with a loving God—life on earth is, as I mentioned earlier, a potent argument for atheism. This place is hell, and as much as we deny it, our recognition of this seeps to the surface in all sorts of ways.

Of course, for some people, the recognition of the hellish nature of this world becomes fully conscious. And though many who reach this conclusion try to brush off its effects through flippant irony and gallows humor, let's face it: This is a devastating realization, one that can bring with it bitterness, deep depression, and even suicidal thoughts. "Men have died on seeing this" (T-31.IV.3:4), the Course tells us. Once we conclude that this place is hell and there is no hope of happiness here, what's the point of going on? Goodbye, cruel world. Of course, most of us never get to the point of actual suicide, but I think many of us give up one way or another as the depressing truth sets in.

As I said above, none of the answers in any of the paths I tried satisfied me. Try as I might, I just couldn't reconcile this place of such profound suffering with a loving God. The world really did look like hell to me, yet I still couldn't let the idea of a loving God go. I never completely lost hope and I certainly wasn't suicidal, but over time I did find myself becoming sad, confused, jaded, and lost. My life was fully functional on the surface, yet deep inside there was a tension that wouldn't go away. I found ways to minimize and deny the extent of the problem, but deep down I desperately wanted resolution.

I was in darkness, but now I see the light!

You've probably been wondering when I would get to the joy. Well, here is the turning point in the journey. While it's true that many people who have concluded that this world is hell fall into despair and just give up in one way or another, *there is an alternative to despair*. The realization that no happy alternatives exist in the world as we know it can lead to the joyous realization "that there is a real alternative instead" (T-31.IV.6:1). There is something glorious that transcends this nightmare world. This is the beginning of the joy that comes from realizing that this place is hell.

There are many examples of this realization. All of us are familiar with inspiring stories, about both famous people and ordinary folks, in which someone who was in the deepest pit of despair had an epiphany and "saw the light." Among the famous, there was the slave trader John Newton, who in his hymn "Amazing Grace" unforgettably depicted his transformation from a "wretch" to the realization that he was a beloved child of God. There was C.S. Lewis, who described his journey from atheism to faith in *Surprised by Joy*. There were Bill Wilson and Bob Smith, who in the dark depths of their alcoholism found the light of recovery in each other and went on to extend that light by founding Alcoholics Anonymous. There's *Power of Now* author Eckhart Tolle, who says he "lived in a state of almost continuous anxiety

interspersed by periods of suicidal depression”; he decided one day that he could no longer “live with himself,” and this decision led to a profound experience of awakening. There’s the popular spiritual teacher Byron Katie, who was living in a halfway house and wrestling with depression and suicidal thoughts until her own transformation occurred. The list goes on and on.

Notice a common element in all of these examples: The life-changing experience of seeing the light comes out of the person’s recognition (however this is expressed) that *his or her current life is hell*. Of course, these people didn’t necessarily conclude that the entire world as we know it is hell; my point here is simply that honestly admitting just how painful one’s life is can be a powerful catalyst for a spiritual awakening. No doubt there are cases where people didn’t have to sink quite so low to have such an experience, but it is an extremely common pattern. Most of the time, people just won’t change until they are forced to do so by the full realization of just how desperate their situation is. It seems that you often have to “hit bottom” in some way before you are lifted into the light.

My “seeing the light” experience was discovering the Course. I was blown away by the idea that God did not create the world at all, but instead created a limitless, perfect, one hundred percent joyful Heaven. I was *really* blown away by Section 27 of the Manual, which says that death is an illusion that is not of God, because God is Love. When I read that, I had a real epiphany. “Of course! That *must* be true. That solves everything!” It was one of those experiences in which you encounter something completely new, yet it feels like it has always been a part of you. My encounter with the Course changed my life forever. The tension was gone. The conflict between a loving God and this suffering world was over. I could follow the author of this course without any reservation.

From ancient hatred to present love

The dawning of the light brings with it another joyous gift: the shift from egocentric self-interest to genuine, egoless love toward others. What a beautiful thing! This, in the Course’s view, is the essence of that “real alternative” to hell. Don’t you find that the most inspiring stories are those in which people locked in some seemingly intractable conflict miraculously find the way to forgiveness and reconciliation? Every Course student I know melts when he or she hears that wonderful line, “The holiest of all the spots on earth is where an ancient hatred has become a present love” (T-26. IX.6:1). Everyone is deeply moved by forgiveness stories; there’s something about them that says to us, “These people are demonstrating what God is really like. The love they are expressing is reality; the hell we live in every day is not.”

We’ve shared some of these stories in our Circle articles precisely because they are so inspiring: Ashley Smith extending love to her kidnapper Brian Nichols; Roy Ratcliff baptizing Jeffrey Dahmer and saying to him, “Welcome to the family of God”; Holocaust survivor Eva Kor forgiving her former tormentor, the infamous Nazi doctor Josef Mengele; Imaculée Ilibagiza forgiving those who slaughtered her family in the Rwandan genocide. And again, the miraculous transformation arises out of the realization that things as they currently exist are hell. You can’t hit a much deeper bottom than being kidnapped, or being a serial killer, or experiencing the German or Rwandan Holocaust. The most dramatic reversals seem to occur in those situations when we simply *have* to face the fact that we are in a living hell.

I haven’t had to face anything as dark as what these people went through. But as I’ve come to the conclusion that this place is hell, people like these have become my beacons of hope. I’ve arrived at a deep and joyful conviction that in the darkness of our world, egoless love truly is “the spark that shines within the dream” (T-29.III.5:6), the ray of light that transforms hell into a reflection of Heaven. If Jesus could “teach only love” even as he was hanging from the cross, if all of these people could follow his example in the most horrendous of circumstances, then there really *is* a God of Love and there is shining hope for us all.

The way out of hell: walking the path of egoless love

This is yet another joyous gift the dawning of the light brings: When you’ve seen the path out of hell, you naturally devote your life to walking that path and helping others along the way. Again, think about the people who inspire us most: Mother Teresa doing “little things with great love” for the poor of Calcutta; Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. freeing their people from oppression by loving the oppressors; Bill Wilson and Bob Smith founding AA and freeing millions from the prison of alcoholism; the Dalai Lama demonstrating such great peace, love, and infectious joy in spite of the subjugation of his people. And of course, there is Jesus, whose loving example was so powerful that this ancient Jewish peasant, whose ministry lasted probably less than a year and ended with a humiliating public execution, became the most revered person in the world today.

I won’t pretend that I’m as inspiring as these great people, but I’m trying my best to walk the path of egoless love. Egoless love is, after all, at the heart of my spiritual path, a course in extending miracles to others. I’m convinced that this is the way out of hell for me, and I hope that my work as a teacher is helping others find the way as well. I still experience times of pain and sadness like everyone else, but overall my life is happier than it has ever been. And as I look over the journey I’ve taken, I realize that so much joy has arisen out of the realization that this place is hell.

What about you? If you are resisting the idea that this world is hell, ask yourself these questions: Given your experience of life so far, is it possible that life on earth really *is* hell? Is it possible that your resistance to this realization is actually keeping you *in* hell? Is it possible that, as hard as it can be to acknowledge the hellishness of life as you know it, this acknowledgment might motivate you to practice the Course with greater dedication, and open you up to joy beyond any you have ever experienced before? I encourage you to really consider these possibilities. You may just find, to your surprise, that it really is a joy to realize that this place is hell.



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

He has been a student of *A Course in Miracles* since 1991, and a teacher for the Circle of Atonement since 1999. He writes Course Q & A's and a popular blog on the Circle of Atonement's website, and teaches the Circle's weekday Workbook class in Sedona, Arizona (along with Robert Perry). He sees his primary function as helping to develop a tradition of Course scholarship.

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:

A Course in Miracles Revisited by Robert Perry. [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 Jesus of History: the Source of the Course?"; and "Love and Kindness Must Win Over Everything." [Read more.](#)

Questions and Answers by Robert Perry and Greg Mackie. Robert and Greg posted answers to several questions this month: "Are dreams just wish fulfillment?"; "Should I Take a Break from the Workbook?" [Read more.](#)

CIRCLE MAILBOX

I've been doing the Course since 1991. I recently celebrated my eightieth birthday. I can relate to so much of what you have written ["Questioning Every Value That You Hold" by Greg Mackie, *A Better Way* #69]. Well done, honest and for me most powerful. I have experienced the transformative power of the Course and do my very best to live it every day and for that I am grateful.

To what you have written I say, "Hallelujah."

— Steve Weglarz

Greg Mackie:

***Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*, edited and with commentary by Father Brian Kolodiejchuk.**

Billed as “the private writings of the ‘saint of Calcutta,’” this is the book that contains the letters that caused such a stir a few months ago: the letters in which Mother Teresa shockingly described her inner life as “dryness,” “darkness,” “loneliness,” and “torture.” The editor is the person responsible for presenting the case for her sainthood to the authorities in Rome, and it shows; he’ll often write things like, “But then God answered her fervent prayers by providing her with a new home for the dying.” I would have preferred a more neutral presentation. That being said, the letters and writings of Mother Teresa presented here make this book fascinating and worthwhile reading. I’m learning a lot about the person behind the icon.

Robert Perry:

***The Death of Socrates*, by Emily Wilson**

Fascinating new book on the death of the Athenian philosopher. It shows just how many different views of Socrates and his death there have been, this diversity being rooted in the fact that Socrates’ own contemporaries saw him and wrote about him in widely differing ways.

***The World of Shamanism: New Views of an Ancient Tradition*, by Roger Walsh**

Roger has written an excellent book on the ancient practice of shamanism, incorporating the latest scholarship. He constantly connects shamanism with the broader exploration of consciousness, which began with shamanism and continues to this day.