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A BETTER WAY

Realizing the Promises of the Course

Why We Are Launching the Circle Course Community

by Robert Perry

Let's face it: as spiritual seekers, we are benefits-driven. We want peace. We want joy. We want relief from fear and anger. We want enlightenment. We want it all.

The spiritual scene has changed dramatically from the days, not too many decades ago, when people were cradle-to-grave members of a single church. We are not students of *A Course in Miracles* because our family has been for as long as anyone can remember. We are students of the Course by choice. Why? Because in it we hope to find some inner, spiritual benefit. We hope, in fact, to find the biggest of all benefits: salvation, liberation, God.

Far from decrying this benefits-mentality, the Course encourages it. It says, "You do not ask too much of life, but far too little" (W-pI.133.2:1). In fact, it puts its promised benefit right on the cover. Its title says to everyone who sees it, "Take this course, and you will experience miracles." Once you open the book you find this benefits-mentality present throughout its pages, where it repeatedly states that, in fact, it offers you *everything*:

I come to you from our Father to offer you everything again. (T-11.In.4:3)

We have repeated how little is asked of you to learn this course. It is...the little gift you offer to the Holy Spirit for which He gives you everything. (T-21.II.1:1-2)

Your practicing [of the Workbook lessons] can offer everything to you. (W-pI.rIII.In.4:5)

Is not a little time [to do your Workbook lesson] a small expense to offer for the gift of everything?
(W-pI.137.13:3)

Everything? That is no modest benefit. And when the Course says "everything," it means it. It sees the treasures of the world as paltry compared to what it holds out to us. Indeed, it views the pursuit of any external prize as an act of settling for less, of *giving up* on gaining everything. "It is as if you said, 'I have no need of everything. This little thing I want, and it will be as everything to me'" (T-30.III.1:6-7). "This little thing" might be a cardboard shelter in an alley or it might be all the wealth, power, and prestige in the world. Either way, it amounts to a meager substitute for the gift of everything.

Of course, to gain this limitless treasure, we need to do our part. We cannot simply own the Course, talk about it in study groups, and expect enlightenment to dawn. We have to do something. As the Course puts it, "I am sure my treasure waits for me, and I need but reach out my hand to find it" (W-pII.355.1:3). Yes, my treasure is there, waiting for me, but I still need to reach out my hand and take hold of it.

Here, of course, is where we fall short. For when it comes down to it, what the Course labels as simply "reaching out my hand" is what we call a set of impossible requirements. By our standards, the Course asks of us a ridiculous amount, more than we can possibly do. Let's look at just some of what it asks of us.

It wants us to study; not just read, but *study*. For example, it gives us one-page sections in the second part of the Workbook and then says, "These special thoughts should be reviewed each day, each one of them to be continued till the next is given you [ten days later]. They should be slowly read and thought about a little while" (W-pII.In.11:3-4). This is

not normal reading. This is not breezing through a novel. This is someone asking you to read something ten times, read it slowly, and really think about it while you read it. This is concentrated study. How many of us find that easy? How many of us *do* that?

The practice of the Workbook lessons places even greater demands on us. The Workbook wants us to learn how to still our minds so completely that, in the silence, we can hear the Holy Spirit speaking to us, and can ultimately “reach God” (W-pI.41.8:1, W-pI.49.4:8). Between Lesson 153 and 200, the Workbook asks us to do this “as long as possible” (W-pI.153.15:2), morning and evening. It expects that “as distraction ceases to arise to turn us from our purpose, we will find that half an hour is too short a time to spend with God” (W-pI.153.15:5).

The Course asks us to be so aware of our lesson throughout the day that we repeat it “four or five times an hour, and perhaps even more” (W-pI.67.5:3). And not merely repeat it, but do so slowly (mentioned twenty-seven times), thoughtfully (Lessons 28, 95), happily (62, 63), with confidence (77, 107), sincerity (27, 28, 185), and certainty (73, 95, 128, 235), clearing our mind of all else and dwelling only on those words (45, 129, 139). How attainable does this sound?

After you repeat your lesson in this fashion, the Course urges you to not “lay it down” (W-pI.rIII.In.11:3), but rather, to “try to keep it with you” (W-pI.rIII.In.10:6), so that whenever your peace is shaken in any way, you can repeat the lesson to restore your peace. Indeed, the Course wants us to be vigilant for a remarkably wide array of upsets (including things like the temptation “to engage in weaving plans”—W-pI.135.26:5). As soon we notice one, we are supposed to “be sure” (mentioned five times) to respond with our lesson *immediately* (four times), *instantly* (three times), *quickly* (five times). It wants us to become so trained in this practice that it eventually becomes a “habit” (five times)—“an automatic response” (W-pI.95.5:3).

When it comes to our relationships, the Course’s instructions are just as lofty. Every time we encounter someone, the Course wants us to “remember it is a holy encounter” (T-8.III.4:1). To call it a holy encounter is to say that it’s not about the usual things: looking good, gaining approval, fulfilling obligations, currying favor, getting your way, extricating yourself quickly. It’s not, in other words, about serving your separate interests. Rather, your goal is to spark an encounter in which “two people...lose sight of separate interests, if only for a moment” (M-3.2:7). To facilitate this, four different Workbook lessons (37, 43, 78, 95) ask you to silently repeat something—such as, “My holiness blesses you, [name]” (W-pI.37.4:6)—to literally “everyone you meet” (78, 95). Are we prepared to enter all of our encounters (which might number in the dozens or even hundreds a day) with this kind of awareness—and *egolessness*?

In the Course’s view, all of these instructions add up to no more than “a nod to God” (T-24.VI.12:4). “This course requires almost nothing of you” (T-20.VII.1:7), it says. And it has a point, for our ego asks full-time service of us, and the Course asks only a small fraction of that. Yet from our standpoint, the Course’s requests are indeed “a burden wearisome and tedious, too heavy to be borne” (T-24.VI.12:4). We find its instructions to be quite simply too much to ask.

And herein lies the crux. For the Course clearly attaches its promises—including that big promise of finding “everything”—to doing what it asks. Attached to every promise of benefits is an implicit or explicit condition that we must fulfill. If we don’t fulfill that condition, we don’t realize the promise. It’s that simple. As I said earlier, even if our treasure waits for us, we must still reach out our hand to find it.

This is the simple reason why we Course students are not realizing the Course’s promises, at least on the scale on which they are offered. To put it bluntly, we are not doing what it asks. At best, we are doing only a small part. My saying this may sound shaming or judgmental, but I honestly don’t mean it that way. In writing this, I am not only speaking to you but to myself as well. I depend on my daily study and practice, but I am nowhere near doing all that I described above. This is a boat that we are in together.

In our view at the Circle, this is the key issue faced by Course students, and the key issue the Course faces in fulfilling the purpose for which it came. On the one hand, the Course holds out promises that are literally limitless. On the other hand, doing what it takes to realize those promises seems utterly impossible. We can see the other shore; we just don’t seem able to swim to it. And if we can’t figure out a way to make that swim, that shore will remain unreachable. We will not have that peace and joy we crave. And people will rightfully say of *A Course in Miracles* what Chesterton said of Christianity: “Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried.”

This is why we at the Circle are launching the Circle Course Community (CCC). For years we have seen our purpose as supporting Course students in really walking this path and getting the benefits. Yet through this time there has been a growing awareness that what we are doing is simply not enough. The CCC is our attempt to rise to meet this challenge.

The basic idea of the CCC is to place you in an environment whose sole purpose is to help you do the Course to the very limits of your ability (which the Course says is limitless). Everyone in this environment is there for the same purpose you are: to walk this path and lay hold of those promises.

The chief feature is your own PathMap, a collection of hundreds of resources under the four headings of Study, Practice, Extension, and the Path (and eighteen subheadings). You will personalize this collection as you work through

the various resources there, focusing on those areas where you need work. Questionnaires will help you identify those areas. If, for instance, you need to forgive someone in your life, you would go to the “Forgiveness” category (under the heading of “Practice”), where you could read teaching about forgiveness and also make use of a wealth of forgiveness exercises. Once you finish each resource, you would mark it completed (with a shining footprint), write a note to yourself about what you want to retain for the future, and rate its usefulness for other users. Along the way, you will be able to sort each page in your PathMap according to your liking, so that at the top of the page will appear things you choose, such as key resources, or ones you’ve flagged for later, or ones that you have completed, or community favorites, or exercises, and so on. (If you want to read more about the PathMap, [click here](#). If you want to view the PathMap, [click here](#).)

We will also have about ten bloggers keeping weblogs of their own spiritual journey (these will include myself, Greg Mackie, and Allen Watson). These will not be opinion pieces about issues in the general Course community, nor teaching pieces about Course theory. Rather, we will be sharing our own process in following the Course’s way: our struggles, breakthroughs, and current points of focus. The purpose is to provide spiritual nourishment for the community, to model what a sincere (if imperfect) attempt at walking this path may look like, and to spark community discussion. Discussion will take the form of responses by community members to the various blog entries. Our hope is that the blogs and the discussion around them will give us all a feeling that Helen Schucman experienced from time to time: “a sense of everyone walking happily and very much together on the same path” (*Absence from Felicity*, p. 156).

There are other features of the community, which you can read about [elsewhere](#). As you can tell, though, this is the Circle’s major effort to date to support students in their journey with *A Course in Miracles*. From now on, a large portion of our time will go into growing this community, and we hope that it will continue growing for many years to come. It is our abiding hope that out of it will not only come mature Course students who are experiencing many of the benefits promised by the Course, but also teachers, groups, and centers who will extend the community’s purpose of “living *A Course in Miracles* and anchoring a tradition that will carry its light to the world.” More about that last point in the next issue of *A Better Way*.

If you are like me, you have probably carried a long-time secret thought that goes something like this: “If I really gave myself—without qualifications or excuses—to what the Course asks me to do, I’ll bet that I could realize my deepest spiritual longings.” This thought excites us but unsettles us at the same time. And so we generally give ourselves all sorts of excuses for tucking it away, until some day in the future when we really do plan to give our awakening everything we have. If you have carried any version of that thought, however modest, I hope you will consider that maybe it is time to take it out of hiding. Maybe it is time to use the Circle Course Community as a vehicle for really giving yourself to the Course’s path so that you can at last realize its promises.



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 NEWS

2008 Workbook Program

We are very enthused about this program, which begins the first of the year. The basic format is that each day participants will be e-mailed a 20-30 minute recording of Robert Perry and Greg Mackie guiding them through the next day's lesson. It turns out that someone shares our enthusiasm. We received this e-mail the other day from our dear friend, Mary Anne Buchowski, who has started Course Oasis in Ottawa, Canada. This is what she sent her students there:

Dear Course students,

I have just finished listening to an audio clip sample of Robert Perry's 1/2 hour recordings of the Workbook lessons, and want to share my excitement about this new service offered by the Circle of Atonement.

As you know, I studied and trained with Robert for many years, and taught the daily Workbook class at the Circle; yet just listening to this short clip of Lesson 1 added something new to my understanding! The recordings—one every day for the Workbook year—draw on Robert's 26-year experience of studying, living, and teaching the Course, and that experience is made abundantly clear in even this brief recording.

If you are considering doing the Workbook in 2008, I strongly recommend that you subscribe to these recordings. They will undoubtedly deepen both your understanding and experience of these wonderful and transformative teachings and practices. I am sure that they will also motivate you to practice, practice, practice, in order to experience the many benefits the lessons hold out to you.

Here's the [link](#) to listen to the audio clip. And here's the [link](#) for more information about the service.

With loving thoughts,
Mary Anne

Robert's Year-End Appeal

Dear subscribers,

If you haven't done so already, will you click [here](#) to take a look at our Year-End Appeal?

We ask because, frankly, we can't afford for you to miss it.

Right now, we're coming to the end of what may well be our busiest year ever. And with the launch of the Circle Course Community scheduled to happen in just over a month, on January 15th, next year promises to be busier still.

But all this activity needs funding. And right now, funds are short — painfully short. So, if you can support us with a year-end donation, please do so. Your help is not just welcome — it's sorely needed.

And still on the subject of support ...

... here's a quick reminder of the several major programs we've created recently to aid you in your journey with the Course.

- * **Circle Course Community:** A fresh online resource which will provide you with a new level of support in walking the path of *A Course in Miracles*.
- * **2008 Workbook Program:** Recorded lesson commentaries and practice instructions, direct every day to your e-mail inbox
- * **Text Reading Program:** (you can now sign up monthly)
- * **Manual Reading Program:**

For us, support is always best when it flows in both directions. So even as you consider helping us by sending your donation, please also take advantage of all the resources offered openly on our web site, and especially consider our educational and support programs for the practical help they can offer you.

In peace,
The Circle staff

If you wish to donate, click [here](#). We hope you will, as our current level of activity means the financial assistance we receive from our friends and supporters has never mattered more. Please accept our huge gratitude for any amount you are able to send.

CIRCLE MAILBOX

Dear Robert,

For years I have been wanting to deepen my connection with God so that I could really experience His love and wisdom in the deepest place in my heart. And I must say that thru my study of the Course and other spiritual paths, I have made progress and caught glimpses of deeper connections, but it wasn't until this morning while reading your article in *A Better Way* that I felt I truly experienced God's love expressed in His words and felt Him and me and Love deeply in my heart and mind. I feel so blessed and loved and full of gratitude to you and all my brothers. Here is what I wrote in my Journal this morning:

**Wednesday, 6:17 am
December 5, 2007**

I felt God's love today. I felt him talking to me. He stressed the importance of love, being totally present with whomever I'm with in the moment, whether it's God, a part of me, another person, coming to each moment with empty hands, mind and heart so I can just drink them in, feel the love that is surrounding us and ever present. All this occurred while I was reading Robert's article, "Practicing The Presence of God" in *A Better Way* #71, page 4, the paragraph just before the Conclusion starts:

The principle here is obvious. If our hands are filled with the things of this world, if our heart is filled with guardedness, and if our mind is clogged with our own know-it-all thoughts, what room is there for God? But when we open our hands to God, we have room to receive everything. When we open our heart to Him, He can enter and take up residence in our heart of hearts. When we open our mind to Him, He can stream into our awareness and become the center of our worldview. Only when we come to Him in silence and emptiness are we present enough to Him to allow His Presence into us. As Lesson 189 says, "And in our quiet hearts and open minds, His Love will blaze its pathway of itself" (W-pI.189.9:4).

Thank you, Robert, for your inspiring articles and for the clarity with which you express your ideas.

With love, many blessings, gratitude, appreciation and admiration,
Joan Lorenz,
Portland, OR