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A BETTER WAY

Miracles Boomeritis

by Robert Perry

We are all creatures of culture, at least on the human level. We float in a sea of cultural attitudes and perspectives, and we naturally tend to move right along with its currents. Those attitudes and perspectives seem to soak right into our skin, usually without our even knowing it.

In this article I want to address a particularly powerful and pervasive cultural mindset, one that is extremely influential in spiritual circles, though in some form it seems to have soaked into every nook and cranny of our society. You have undoubtedly felt its influence, even if you haven't put words to it. Now, however, this mindset has been given a name: *boomeritis*. This term was coined by renowned Integral philosopher Ken Wilber, author of over twenty books and founder of the Integral Institute, to describe a kind of intellectual virus that he believes began with the "baby boomers," the generation born between 1946 and 1964. According to Wilber, the effects of boomeritis are pervasive. It has the "cultural creatives" in its grip, a segment estimated at 25 percent of the population. "It has dominated academia, liberal politics, and the humanities for three decades,"¹ he says. And it is infecting "every form of religion and spirituality in today's world, with literally no exceptions that I can see."² If Wilber is correct, boomeritis is like a gigantic freight train that is pulling whole segments of our society along behind it. So what exactly is it?

Wilber's most concise definition is that boomeritis is "pluralism infected with narcissism." We can unpack this enigmatic statement in three parts.

First, *pluralism* simply describes our current social reality, in which there is a dizzying diversity of viewpoints arising from a multitude of racial, ethnic, and religious groups. Along with this diversity has come a crucial intellectual capacity, the capacity to *appreciate different points of view*. Rather than claiming that only our perspective has validity, only our culture is sane, only our religion has the truth, we now can see that every point of view carries some validity, every culture has its own richness, every religion is a path to the truth. In other words, we have gained the ability to take the other person's perspective. And once we actually do that, once we look out through another's eyes, we see that it's not all false or all bad, nor is our own perspective all true or all good. There is a beauty and a truth in the other's perspective that our own perspective may lack. This capacity was a historic step forward, as Wilber notes:

The Boomers, to their great credit, *were the first major generation in history to develop* [this capacity]...And that is exactly why the Boomers spearheaded civil rights, ecological concerns, feminism, and multicultural diversity.³

Here is a capacity, then, which is not only broad minded and mature, but which has contributed so much to our society.

And yet—here's the second part—this ability to adopt the perspective of the other has been taken to an extreme. It has given birth to the idea that there is no absolute truth, there is only *your* truth and *my* truth. (Ironically, in this view, the idea that there is no absolute truth seems *itself* to be an absolute truth.) No stance is intrinsically better or truer than any other. There is no larger truth that we should all be striving to approximate. My truth is valid for me and your truth is valid for you, not because they conform to some absolute standard. My truth is valid simply because I hold it. It's valid because it feels right to *me*. Thus, there is no universal yardstick that can reach down and declare that my viewpoint is incorrect or that your viewpoint is inaccurate. Each of us is a yardstick unto ourselves.

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P.O. Box 4238
West Sedona, AZ 86340
Phone: (928) 282-0790
Fax: (928) 282-0523
Toll-free (orders only): (888) 357-7520
E-mail: info@circleofa.org
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WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT SAYS

A Course in Miracles is a spiritual path. Its purpose is to train us to work miracles—to accept and extend to others the shifts in perception that awaken us to God. It consists of three volumes, which signify the three aspects of its program:

- ◆ Text : Through studying the teaching, the Course's thought system first enters our minds.
- ◆ Workbook for Students: Through doing the practice, the Course's thought system penetrates more and more deeply into our minds.
- ◆ Manual for Teachers: Through extending our healed perception to others, the Course's thought system receives its final reinforcement and becomes the only thing in our minds.

The Course's message is that the source of our suffering is not the world's mistreatment of us, but rather our egocentric attack on the world. This attack convinces us that we have defiled our nature beyond repair, that we are irredeemably guilty. Yet the Course says true reality cannot be defiled; it is a realm of pure, changeless, unified spirit. This realization allows us to forgive the world's apparent mistreatment of us by recognizing that it did not actually occur. And as we see this forgiveness come forth from us—see that we are capable of something genuinely loving and egoless—we gradually realize that we never defiled ourselves. Thus we awaken to the untouched innocence of our true nature.

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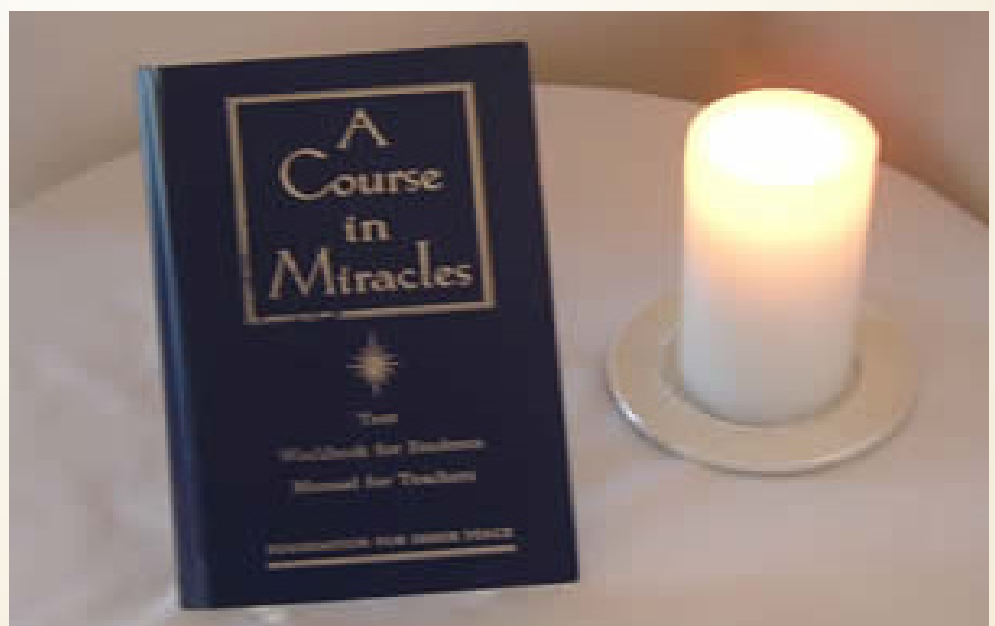
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This slides right into the third part of my explanation. If there is no objective truth, then there is nothing to over-rule *my* truth. My only authority is my own subjective feelings. No larger truth, no teacher, no expert, no scripture, and no God can come down and tell me what to do. This leads to what Wilber characterizes as the fundamental dictum of boomeritis: “Nobody tells me what to do!”

Boomeritis, then, ends up being a very curious mixture. Hiding under its high developmental outlook—“I can place myself in your shoes and see the validity in your journey, even if it’s different from mine”—is lurking the emotional stance of a toddler—“You’re not the boss of me!” This combination may seem odd at first, yet it has a certain logic to it. We start out with the noble statement, “Viewpoints other than mine have validity.” This then slides imperceptibly into “Since all viewpoints are valid, there is no absolute truth.” And that is just a step away from “Since there is no absolute truth, nothing can impose its truth on me. Nobody tells me what to do!” Thus a mature stance of inclusive tolerance ends up providing cover for an inner two-year-old. Now we can better appreciate that definition with which I opened: “Boomeritis is simply pluralism infected with narcissism.”⁴

Maybe you are beginning to sense that what I am describing lies all around you. To aid this process, let me list some of the identifying features of boomeritis, especially as it appears in spiritual circles:

- All human hierarchy is bad. No one’s experience or authority should be placed above another’s. If we do have teachers, they shouldn’t be authorities, but equals who merely “facilitate.”
- The only way to determine what is true is by our own feelings and experience.
- The realm of the intellect, including the emphasis on correct views, concepts, and beliefs, is viewed with suspicion and regarded as “unspiritual.”
- Discipline is frowned upon, being a classic case of someone telling us what to do. In its place, the reigning value is spontaneity. Wilber speaks of boomeritis as “dispensing with intense discipline and denying that awakening is anything other than doing the laundry with some sort of awareness.”⁵
- All value judgments are purely subjective and personal. I can’t judge the behavior of others because what they are doing may well be “right for them.”
- All viewpoints are valid. Their differences do not matter. The only viewpoints that should be condemned are those that imply that differences do matter and claim to have *the* truth.
- Much of spiritual development involves taking the thoughts, feelings, desires, and behaviors we already have and, rather than transforming them, simply “relabeling” them as enlightened. For instance, plain old anger and attack might be relabeled “empowerment” or “setting your boundaries” or “being true to your own self.”
- God as the “Great Thou” is absent from the picture. As a result, “there is nothing before which the ‘I’ must bow and surrender.”⁶ As I ascend the spiritual ladder, I never encounter “something greater than me, only higher levels of me.”⁷

What is celebrated in all these points, either overtly or covertly, is *me*, the separate, human me. Boomeritis is full of praise for the wonder and magnificence of me. And the notion that any outside authority or objective standard can reach down and correct me, restrict my freedom, or tell me what to do, is viewed as the very antithesis of spiritual truth.

Do we Course students have boomeritis?

In a chapter on boomeritis Buddhism, Ken Wilber invites non-Buddhists to “see how this might apply to your path as well,” since, he says, “the same type of thing can happen—and is happening, right now—to every form of religion and spirituality in today’s world, with literally no exceptions that I can see.”⁸ So, is he right? Can we see the influence of boomeritis among students of *A Course in Miracles*? Has boomeritis entered the Course community?

The answer is “of course.” Why should we be the exception? Boomeritis takes some special forms in a *Course in Miracles* context, and there are pockets in the Course community where it is virtually or entirely absent. But its presence among Course students in general is not hard to discern. The following is my attempt to capture “miracles boomeritis,” the particular form that boomeritis takes with students of *A Course in Miracles*. See if you can spot yourself in here, perhaps just in certain statements. You need not believe everything below to have a touch of miracles boomeritis.

Under the influence of boomeritis, the Course is most of all about my inner peace, along with my laughter and spontaneous celebration. The most important thing is maintaining a positive, light-hearted state of mind, in which I affirm everything that happens and also affirm myself. Why should I look at the darkness of my ego? Seen through spiritual eyes, all that darkness is really spiritual anyway. Rather than making my feelings wrong, I need to merely accept them and let them flow through me freely, without

judging them. Rather than ruminating on my inner darkness, I need to affirm just how advanced I really am.

According to miracles boomeritis, I have little responsibility toward others (who may, in fact, be only my projections); it is all about my mind. Indeed, miracles are just shifts inside my own mind. Why should I try to help others? Isn't that just trying to "be good" and please some Big Daddy in the sky? And doesn't that ultimately disempower those I try to help? Shouldn't I simply remind them of the power inside *them*? My outward behavior is not an issue the Course is concerned about. How could behavior be important in a world that is an illusion? My function is thus a completely internal one. And my relationships, too, are internal. They really exist only in my mind. Indeed, the whole world exists only in my mind. When I am concerned about the state of the world, and especially when I speak of our supposed need to better the world, I have forgotten that basic truth.

I have been talking about my "mind," but what is important in my mind is primarily my feelings. My heart is spiritual, while my intellect is at best of the earth, at worst of the ego. Intellectual activities like studying a book and trying to discern truth from falsehood are clearly acts of the ego. Aren't we supposed to get beyond right versus wrong, as well as concepts, theories, and theologies, on our way to the ultimate goal of direct spiritual experience? Words, too, should be deemphasized, for words limit, and we want to get beyond words to direct experience. Discipline should also be downplayed. How could making myself do something that someone else tells me to do lead to the flowering of my inner truth? Surely the Workbook doesn't mean for me to follow its instructions to the letter. Along with discipline, I see effort also as a trap. Rather than "efforting," I need to *allow*. Rather than trying, I need to *be willing*. I need to go with my inner flow, not swim against it.

The only real authority here is the authority of what feels right to me, based on my feelings and my experience. In miracles boomeritis, God, the ultimate Authority, is not talked about much and is depersonalized. The Holy Spirit is seen as more or less the same as my inner feelings and inclinations, so He is safe. And it's taken for granted that there is no human teacher; we are all teachers and students of each other.

Indeed, in miracles boomeritis, I don't even relate to the *Course* as an authority, strictly speaking. Yes, it contains amazing truths, and I'll use those truths when they work for me, which they often do. But I find truth in many places and many teachings. The differences between them don't really matter. Truth is one, whatever form it is packaged in. It is my job to draw from all those teachings to weave together the unique synthesis that is *my* truth. And just as differences between various teachings don't matter, so differences between various interpretations of the Course don't matter. The whole search for the "right" interpretation of the Course is just another time-wasting device of the ego. All interpretations are equally valid. The only interpretation that really matters is the one that works for me. The Course was meant to be read differently through each pair of eyes. What it really means is what it means to *me*.

The last thing I need is authorities, holy books, heavenly patriarchs, divine personages, teachers, words, ideas, interpretations, and disciplines limiting me, pointing out my darkness, making me wrong, and telling me what to do. That just puts me back in the Catholic Church. Those things might contain helpful truths, but the question is: Are they true for me today? For ultimately, the authority lies within me, in my guidance and my direct experience. Nothing can overrule that. That is what I must rely on if I am to discover the glorious truth that dwells within me. If I rely on something outside of me, I can only disempower myself.

Are boomeritis and the Course compatible?

What do we make of the foregoing description? Is it truly reflective of the Course? In other words, is miracles boomeritis genuinely compatible with *A Course in Miracles*? I realize that this is an uncomfortable question. Yet it is one that has to be asked. In my perception, boomeritis is the biggest sacred cow in our midst. It would be nice to say that potential differences between it and the Course don't really matter. But that is the boomeritis perspective. Is it the Course's?

The real question is: Do we really want to know the Course as it is, without the influence of cultural filters? If we do, then, as a purely practical matter, we have to be willing to set aside those cultural filters and see the Course afresh, as if for the very first time.

It is my perception that the Course is about as far from boomeritis as you can possibly get. The Course is grounded in a view of absolute reality, a reality that does not yield for our desires. We can either go with this reality and be awake and in joy, or we can go against it and be asleep and in pain. Our small "s" self, according to the Course, represents the latter option. This self is so fundamentally at odds with reality that it is actually *unreal*, not to mention unholy. "The self

you made, evil and full of sin, is meaningless” (W-pI.93.6:6), says the Course. Can you read a quote like that and think that the Course is about affirming our human self?

The Course is also grounded in a view of loving authority. It contains what amounts to a chain of authority that reaches from God, to the Holy Spirit, to Jesus, to the Course, to the advanced teacher, to the beginning teacher. These are loving authorities, not tyrannical ones. They simply direct us toward our happiness, leaving it up to us to follow (see T-1.III.4:6). But they are still authorities. They still know better than us (at least the divine ones do, and the human ones are meant to). These authorities even *tell us what to do*: “This course is a guide to behavior....It provides the guide who tells you what to do” (Urtext version of T-9.V.9:1). And our rejection of their loving authority is our core problem. The Course explicitly says that what it calls “the authority problem”—our rejection of God’s authority—is “the root of all evil” (T-3.VI.7:3). From this standpoint, the boomeritis motto, “Nobody tells me what to do,” is a distilled expression of the core of the ego.

This all may sound very limiting, yet I see it as the key to a truly mature kind of freedom. It is not the freedom of throwing off all rules and “shoulds” and rights and wrongs so that our ego is free to express with impunity. From the Course’s standpoint, real freedom comes from using concepts, words, disciplines, and effort to bring our minds into alignment with a changeless reality that is pure freedom. And when we reach this place, we are not a kind of spiritualized teenager, defending our right to live outside the rules because we are so above it all. Rather, we are the model of integrity, responsibility, and kindness. As the Manual reminds us in “The Characteristics of God’s Teachers” (M-4), we are honest, we are gentle, we are generous, and we are faithful. In my view, what the Course offers us is a grownup model of enlightenment.

The longer I have observed boomeritis, the more it seems like an artful, spiritual-sounding way of elevating my personal ego and clearing away anything that would get in its way. In short, I see it as the voice of the ego. If this is true, and if we are largely reading the Course through a boomeritis lens, then the results are far-reaching indeed, for it would mean that we have effectively silenced the Course’s own voice. It’s as if Jesus had physically returned, but spoke only in Aramaic, so that we could only listen to him through an interpreter. Yet this interpreter, unbeknownst to us, had his own ideas, and he was altering everything Jesus said to conform to his own radically different views. We would think we were hearing Jesus, when actually we were just hearing the interpreter. Who would want this situation? Yet, it seems to me, this is not so different from the situation we are in now.

What do we do?

I am not expecting that upon reading this article, you will look within, identify all strands and shadings of boomeritis within you (if they are there), and instantly pluck them out. Even if that is what you want to do, it will take time. Getting free of boomeritis requires a gradual retraining of beliefs. I think a great start would be to just face with an open mind the issues I have raised here. Face the question “Is boomeritis compatible with the Course?” Be willing to go with whatever answer turns out to be true—from “yes,” to “partly,” to “no!” And then also face the possibility that boomeritis lives in you. Ken Wilber reported, “One of the two or three most popular American Buddhist teachers, after reading *Boomeritis*, emailed me and said: ‘Um, I think I have this disease.’”⁹ Wouldn’t it be great to start with that kind of refreshing, ego-free honesty?

After that, all I can think of is for us to start a conversation. I’d like to hear your thoughts about this issue, print them in our next newsletter, and respond with my own. What do you think about this? Is there such a thing as boomeritis? What are your thoughts and feelings about it? Should we try to distinguish the Course from boomeritis? Is that a useful exercise? Is boomeritis compatible with the Course? Do you think that you have been influenced by it, that you are a carrier? What do you think we should do about the whole thing? Please write and let me know. And we will take it from there.

1. Ken Wilber, “On the Mean Memes in General: Red to blue to orange to green to yellow....” [<http://www.integralworld.net/index.html?mgm2.html>], February 2002.

2. Ken Wilber, *Integral Spirituality: A Startling New Role for Religion in the Modern and Postmodern World* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2006), p. 103.

3. Ken Wilber, *Boomeritis: A Novel That Will Set You Free* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2002), p. 35.

4. *Boomeritis*, p. 36.

5. Ken Wilber, “Sidebar H: Boomeritis Buddhism.” [<http://kenwilber.com/Writings/PDF/H-bms%20buddhism-jtp.pdf>], 2007.

6. *Integral Spirituality*, p. 160.

7. *Integral Spirituality*, p. 160.

8. *Integral Spirituality*, p. 103.

9. Ken Wilber, “Sidebar H: Boomeritis Buddhism,” [<http://kenwilber.com/Writings/PDF/H-bms%20buddhism-jtp.pdf>], 2007.



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'*.

RECENT WEB SITE POSTINGS

Here are some of the articles we have recently posted to our web site:

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”: “Easter: The Great Reversal” and “Is the Pursuit of Happiness Misguided?” [Read more.](#)

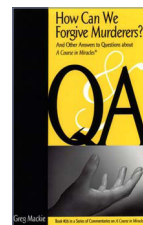
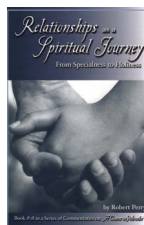
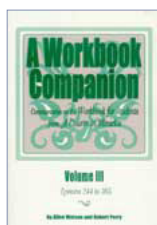
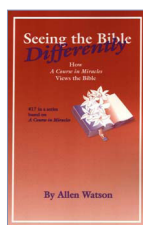
Questions and Answers by *Robert Perry* and *Greg Mackie*. Robert and Greg posted answers to these questions: “Should we follow the ‘Old Testament’ letter or the ‘New Testament’ spirit of the Course's practice instructions?” and “Should we bring more children into the world?” [Read more.](#)

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