



CONTENTS

A Conversation with Readers about Miracle Boomeritis	
by Robert Perry	1
Recent Web Site Postings	11

A BETTER WAY

A Conversation with Readers about Miracles
Boomeritis

In the last issue of A Better Way, I wrote an article entitled "Miracles Boomeritis." Boomeritis is a term coined by Integral philosopher Ken Wilber to describe an intellectual virus that he sees spreading through academia, the humanities, liberal politics, and "every form of religion and spirituality in today's world." Boomeritis starts with the idea that "Viewpoints other than mine have validity," goes from there to "Since all viewpoints are valid, there is no absolute truth," and ends up with "Since there is no absolute truth, nothing can impose its truth on me. Nobody tells me what to do!" I claimed that the influence of boomeritis is pervasive among students of A Course in Miracles and then asked to have a conversation with readers, asking in particular for their thoughts on the following questions:

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.

What follows are the responses I received, along with my responses to them. I make some overall remarks at the end. I welcome any additional correspondence on this, which we will print in the next issue of the newsletter.

— Robert

...

From Margaret Stuart:

I do think that boomeritis is a pervasive force in general, and would naturally find its way into the thinking of Course students, as it has found its way into every aspect of our popular culture. It has even found its way into our language culture, in that we have expressions like "whatever," or "talk to the hand." In my opinion, those are definitely symptoms of pluralism to the extreme. "Whatever" tends to mean, "You may have your truth, but it doesn't match mine, so I really don't care for you to impose your truth on me." The same applies to "talk to the hand." For me the meaning is essentially as you quote: "You are not the boss of me," so much so that "I won't even listen to you, but offer you a different body part that doesn't have ears." I have also seen on some reality-based television that people tell others that "you don't know me, so therefore you can't judge me." I think this is very telling. Basically, the statement is that if you knew "my truth," you would understand why I am the way I am, and you would accept it, and not impose a different truth on me. I have seen this be used to excuse all kinds of terrible behavior, from drug addiction to abusive parenting.

One question, though, that I have with the newsletter article is the statement about not being able to judge the behavior of others, because what they are doing might be "right for them," as an identifying feature of boomeritis. I did think that a large premise of the Course was that we are not supposed to judge the behavior of others. I believe that your booklet

Continued on page 3

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

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

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

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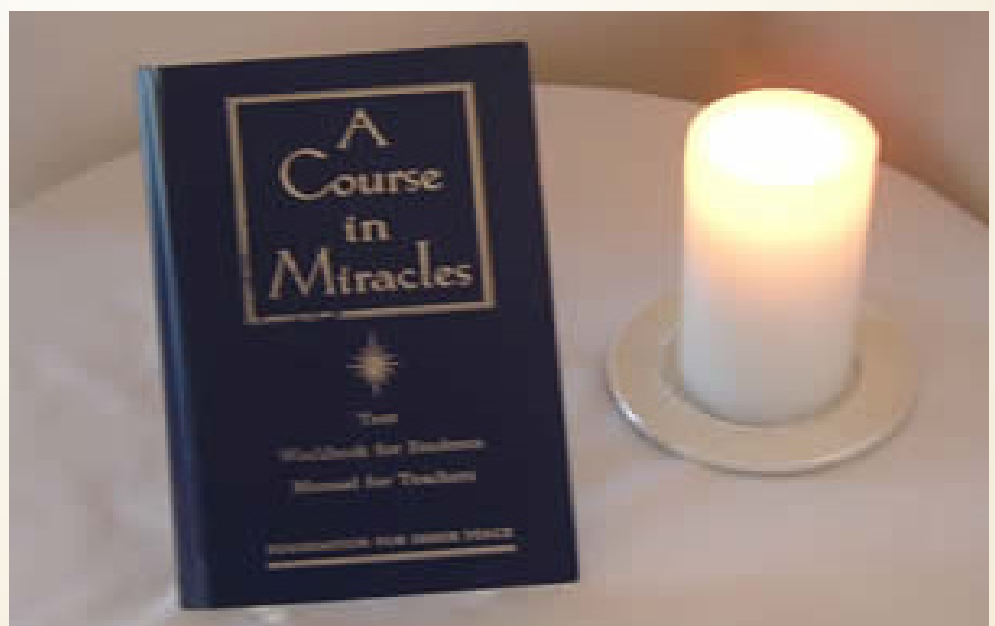
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Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Judgment, but Were Too Busy Doing It to Notice espouses that philosophy, doesn't it? Perhaps you could clarify this point, or indicate how I have misunderstood, as it does appear to be a part of boomeritis that actually does "fit" the Course.

Thank you for allowing me to respond, I really appreciate the "fresh start."

[From a follow-up response by Margaret]: I had responded to your newsletter on boomeritis recently, and I found a very interesting book review in a newspaper that also mentions this concept, although perhaps using different terminology (*International Herald Tribune*, February 2008). The book is entitled *The Age of American Unreason*, by Susan Jacoby. In the review, it is mentioned that "anti-intellectualism" is popular in American culture, along with the attitude that "too much learning can be a dangerous thing," and the concept of "anti-rationalism" (the idea that there is no such thing as evidence or fact, just opinion). I think this also fits your definition of boomeritis, in that there are no absolutes, and everything is just opinion, or "your own truth." It appears that this concept is being recognized by others as well. I haven't read her book, but it does appear to be very interesting.

Margaret,

I think you are right that we see the dark underbelly of boomeritis in some of the more callous expressions that have popped up in our culture.

About judgment, yes, it's true that both the Course and boomeritis urge us not to judge others. But the basis for non-judgment in each philosophy is, in my perception, totally different. The way I hear nonjudgment framed in boomeritis rules out the possibility that someone's behavior was a mistake. Instead, it was "right for you," or it was "what is." The notion seems to be that we shouldn't apply any of our "shoulds" to this person's behavior, because we are not in a position to overrule someone else's truth.

The Course, on the other hand, rests nonjudgment on the idea that we are not in a position to condemn the real nature of the person, since that would amount to condemning God's creation. But the Course is not shy about saying that, if a person attacks, that was a mistake; it was wrong (the Course uses the word "wrong" seventy-seven times). However, just because the behavior is wrong, that doesn't mean the being behind the behavior is wrong. After all, that being is God's Son.

So, in the Course, nonjudgment doesn't mean turning off our value judgments in relation to the behavior of others. It means positively evaluating the real nature of others as infinitely worthy, in spite of wrong-minded behavior. I personally find little commonality between the two positions.

About Susan Jacoby, I haven't read her book, but I did see an interview with her by Bill Moyers which I very much enjoyed. And I too made the connection with boomeritis. Boomeritis wants to clear out evidence, facts, and rationality, because those things put constraints on the ego. Facts allow no wiggle room. They leave no room for "my truth."

...

From Mary Benton:

While I don't like the term "boomeritis" very much, it does suggest that we are speaking about a disease, at least within the illusion of the world. That is a useful starting point.

The manifestations of this disease have been evident in our culture for many years. In his article "A Farewell to Arts" the late Australian philosopher David Stove saw the rot starting in the middle sixties. He likened the problem to "a badly leaking nuclear, or an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in cattle."¹ Stove was speaking about the malaise in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Sydney and, by extension, to Arts faculties of most Western universities.

Over the last few decades several thinkers have addressed these issues. In his magnificent book *The Western Canon*,² Harold Bloom evokes the grandeur of our literary tradition, while coming to some pessimistic conclusions. His first chapter is entitled "An Elegy for the Canon." Bloom reveals the collapse of cognitive standards happening in his own field, and doubts that literary studies as such will survive. The forces underlying this decline are multiple, but Bloom aptly summarizes them as the "School of Resentment."

In his book *The Wreck of Western Culture: Humanism Revisited*, John Carroll, in a brilliant and penetrating analysis, traces the journey of our culture from the Renaissance to the present. Carroll sees the roots of the decline going back many centuries. In 1486 the Italian philosopher Pico della Mirandola said: "We can become what we will."³ Carroll sees humanism as doomed from the start, carrying within it the seeds of its own destruction. He describes our present culture

as “a flat expanse of rubble.”⁴

It seems Ken Wilber has identified some of the problems Carroll sees, although I haven’t read his work. You list some of the manifestations you see in spiritual circles and give a detailed description of “miracles boomeritis.” It would take too long now to discuss everything you say, but in broad terms I agree with you. As the three authors I have cited reveal, there are some serious problems here.

Is our culture running on empty? It has been said that in times of great peril conscious influences from a higher source are introduced into the world to prevent complete chaos. The advent of *A Course in Miracles* seems to bear this out. Helen Schucman was told about the “celestial speedup” of which the Course is a part. Spiritual work provides a counter to the chaos in the world. It would be ironical if chaos had taken over the effort, yet this is always a danger, because that is what the ego is like.

Are the Course and “boomeritis” compatible? Are the complaint and the cure compatible? Hardly. Like any authentic spiritual path the Course challenges all our existing ideas and values. A spiritual path requires the finest level of discernment, a quality conspicuously lacking in the current malaise. The highest challenge we will ever undertake is an authentic spiritual path and onto this “boomeritis” would superimpose chaos and distortion of every kind.

To diagnose the problem is one thing, to provide an “answer” is not easy. Harold Bloom is not expecting to convince anybody in the broad field of Cultural Studies (that is not his aim), but he does have a readership who understand what he is saying. A scholar for over forty years who has taught at Harvard, and still teaches at Yale and New York University, freely admits he would not get a job in today’s Academy if he had to apply now. Bloom believes the future of his discipline (if it has one) will depend on the relatively few students who have the necessary capacity.

I don’t believe that *A Course in Miracles* is a document for mass consumption at this stage—the evidence for this is increasing rather than diminishing. In regard to Course discourse and scholarship I hope this continues. Like the scholars who are addressing the disasters in our culture, Course students and teachers who can should speak and write about these matters, but not everyone will understand. Some will listen, and some may be helped. The term “Course Community” represents too many different beliefs to be very meaningful. In any case I don’t believe the Course, as such, has to be transmitted to large numbers. The Course does not ask us to proselytize people. It does ask us to offer the peace of God.

The recent lessons in the Workbook (no. 91 onwards) have stopped me in my tracks, as the Course often does. When I listen to the Course I become far less concerned with the world and its conflicts, and become aware of the peace and strength within me. Does this mean I become indifferent to everything and everybody? No, but it does mean I see things differently, and the hypnotic pull of the world ceases, at least temporarily. In this way, the peace of God can extend.

The Manual tells us: “To teach is to demonstrate” (M-In 2:1). God sends his teachers into the world to demonstrate His peace. Persuasion, intellectual or otherwise, won’t work for everyone. What does belong to everyone is the peace of God. In the end, the most helpful thing we could do in these troubled times is to demonstrate the peace of God. This is what the Course is asking us to do. This is why the Course came.

References:

1. David Stove, “A Farewell to Arts,” *Quadrant*, May 1986.
2. Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994).
3. John Carroll, *The Wreck of Western Culture: Humanism Revisited*, rev. ed. (Melbourne: Scribe, 2004), p. 3.
4. *Ibid.*, p.1.

Mary,

Thank you very much for your erudite response. I think you are correct that we are looking at a kind of larger cultural rot. And maybe, as you say, it has been centuries in the making. I don’t know. Ken Wilber certainly feels that boomeritis is at work in the postmodernism that Harold Bloom has been railing against in the humanities.

Is the Course ready for mass consumption? In my opinion, that depends on how “mass” you are talking about. To be perfectly honest, I ache to see the Course reach more people. I feel like we hold the cure for cancer in our hands, yet can’t quite convince ourselves that it’s important to get it to all the other cancer patients. Yes, we should take the cure (embody the Course) ourselves, but is that incompatible with getting it out to those who also need this cure? I don’t want to see the Course prostituted so that it can reach the masses. I don’t want to see heavy metal bands screaming Course lyrics so that the Course can be seen as “cool” by the kids. But if it can reach the masses without being prostituted, why not?

Jesus clearly displays concern for the world as a whole, and sees his course as an instrument for saving it. Eighteen

times he tells us that our purpose as his students is to save the world. He asks us to be the voice for his words, so that through us he can save the world (*W-pI.rV.In.9:2-3*). He explicitly spoke to Helen of the Course growing “from infancy into a helper of the world”—which obviously means growing from having a small impact to having a large one. Speaking to Helen, he also likened the scribing of the Course to the Christmas event and suggested it would eventually be recognized as such: “The star is there, and all attempts to call it something else will slip away in time” (*Absence from Felicity*, p. 397). He told Helen that by taking down the Course, few had given a gift to God as she had done (*Gifts of God*, p. 128). He told Helen and Bill that in their joining, “thousands will rise to Heaven” with them (*T-18.V.3:1*).

My belief is that the world is more ready for the Course than it seems, because the Course is currently wrapped in an aura of flakism, so to speak. The extreme boomeritis that is often associated with it makes it for the most part unpalatable to intelligent people out there. How much of the world would be ready for the Course if it were stripped of this association? I don’t know, but I’d dearly love to find out.

...

From Steven Lanigan:

Just finished re-reading *A Better Way* Issue 75, “Miracles Boomeritis.” It addresses pretty clearly the “sacred cows” I’ve been trying to question in my own Course study group over the last year.

Frankly, your/Greg’s/Allen’s/Nicola’s thoughtful articles have been almost *solely* to credit for my deepening understanding of the Course during my two-year study of it.

Because my (sole local) Course study group of twelve-to-twenty-year Course “vets” answer my concerns with a “mantra” of “need-do-nothings” and “need for words...almost overs” and “universal curriculum” means “that the Course is really *no different* than all the *other* paths!”

Hearing these “truisms,” I, with wrinkled brow, have sometimes tried reading from the *Course*, only to have my concerns labeled “egoic” and dismissed. Imagine...while merely quoting, in context, Jesus’ own assertions, cautions, and instructions, directly from the Course! The teaching which is our stated *reason* for our gatherings!

(As the subject then is swiftly [“safely”] changed to so-and-so’s latest green-or-purple healing crystal, or latest New Age author’s “revelations.”)

I wonder if all of you at the Circle of Atonement truly yet *realize* just how crucial a “teaching lifeline” your publications and articles are for those of us who realize that the Course is our path, and who no longer wish to continually “try on” the muddled teachings of other contradictory paths we’ve relinquished? For those of us who *have*, at present, no other reliable source of Course-faithful instruction?

Please keep the wonderful articles coming, gang!

Steven,

Thank you very much for your kind remarks about our work. Thank you also for your colorful observations about the pervasive presence of boomeritis out there. A teacher and friend wrote me saying that he felt that boomeritis wasn’t particularly pervasive in the Course community. Alas, my experience has been more like yours.

...

From Jim Marion:

A truly excellent article. I expect you’ll get considerable reaction. I’m sure the Pope will too when he comes here in a few days and starts railing against relativism. One of the next questions, it seems to me, is what relationship the search for truth has to authority, whether scripture or tradition. It seems to me one bears a very heavy burden in opposing or even disagreeing with what has been the “truth consensus” for perhaps centuries. Sometimes, however, there does need to be a modification as the truth becomes clearer. But, of course, I agree with you that one can’t embrace or jettison truth just because it feels right to yourself or another or to one’s culture. These issues are a dialogue greatly needed these days.

Jim,

Thank you so much for your comments about miracles boomeritis. My personal take on what you bring up is that authority is a part of life. I don't want to dispense with all authority, but it must be earned. I'm willing to take a scripture as authoritative, but only if it really earns that position. In other words, I think it needs to be subject to rules of reason and evidence. If a scripture or a tradition doesn't stand up in the face of normal rational inquiry, then I think its authority needs to be demoted accordingly. That at least is my opinion.

For that reason, I'm actually a big fan of modern historical Jesus scholarship. I'm personally interested in what solid historical method can tell us about the real Jesus. I'm not interested in what the evangelists reported strictly on the basis of the fact that they reported it and it's in the Bible. If they report something Jesus didn't actually say or didn't actually do, then I'm not interested in that report. Of course, deciding what he did or didn't say or do is not easy. I don't think there are black-and-white answers. But I think there are some answers, and I personally lean quite heavily on the findings of contemporary historians in this regard. So yeah, I am willing to hold a scripture as authoritative, after I've held it up to scrutiny.

I think that this is much of the antidote to boomeritis. Boomeritis tries to throw authority away, justifying this by pointing to all the things that bad authorities have imposed on us. Yet no one really gets rid of authorities. We all rely on people who know more than we do or have more experience. I think the antidote is to openly acknowledge the value of authorities, and then grant authority consciously and responsibly to those sources that pass the tests.

...

From D. Patrick Miller:

After reading through your essay, I can't see how "boomeritis" is any different than the plain old historical self-absorption of the ego. When Ken says that boomeritis is affecting every major religion and spirituality, that's the clue that we're talking about something inbred in the human condition, not specifically caused by recent social trends. When our fundamental egocentricity gets mixed up with spirituality, as it inevitably will, then you get all the self-serving symptoms listed. But the same thing happens with more conservative forms of religious worship. When has "God as the 'Great Thou'" not been contaminated with the ego, in terms of how that God is preached at people?

I think Ken is just repackaging the idea of spiritual materialism, which is how the ego manages to attach itself to the idea of selflessness. And the results can be more obnoxious than open egotism, because everything is veiled and pretends to be the opposite of what it is. But in Course terms, the solution to open or covert egotism is always the same: when you catch it, you forgive it, because true forgiveness is the only thing that eventually undoes the ego. Just confessing that "I've got boomeritis" isn't sufficient because the next thing you'll say is, "But I'm getting rid of it" and then you've started the whole cycle of the ego reattaching to the idea of getting rid of itself!

For some reason I keep thinking of my favorite directive from Yogananda: "Be cheerful but grave." That was actually his advice to followers about how to deal with his impending death, but I've always taken it as the best four-word advice on how to live in general. To be cheerful implies forgiveness of everything we see and do, and especially of all the illusions we create to populate our world. As Ken Wapnick says, "Just don't take everything so seriously." But we also need gravity in order to deal compassionately with the suffering all around us, and that we experience ourselves even as we keep learning to forgive. I think the ego wants us to be cheerful *or* grave, that is, always full of New Age sunshine or weighted down with the plenteous misery of the world. We wouldn't have to forgive if we didn't believe in suffering, but forgiveness helps us begin to see through that belief without falsely denying that we have it. And I think that's the cure for boomeritis or any other inflammation of the ego.

Patrick,

I agree that boomeritis is an example of the self-absorption of the ego, but I personally think that Wilber is right in saying that it's a relatively new form of that self-absorption, made possible, really, by twentieth-century relativism. I think of this somewhat along the lines of the comment in the Course, "Some newer forms of the ego's plan are as unhelpful as the older ones, because form does not matter and the content has not changed" (T-9.V.4:1). In this passage, the new form was Freudian psychology, but I see boomeritis as a new form of the ego's plan as well.

Of course, the particular form is not so important, but clearly identifying that form can help us spot it in ourselves. And I do think that spotting it in ourselves is extremely useful. It matters what teaching we follow. Teachings shape us. And until we confess that we have been taking in a distorted teaching, it is impossible for us to follow the real one. For

example, if one were to switch from “it’s all about my peace; there’s no one out there” to “those are my brothers and they need my help,” one could easily step into a whole different life. One would certainly be following a different teaching. So personally, I think it is helpful to define and even name this particular form of self-absorption.

• • •

From Gene Smith:

I was much taken with your essay on this dread affliction. I have only one real objection to it, and that is to the name Wilber has coined for it. Is it really possible the authority problem is confined to people born between 1946 and 1964? The Course, pretty clearly, would say “no.” Nor do I think the particular form it takes in “miracles boomeritis” is confined to an age group.

Most interesting to me was your analysis of the particular form “boomeritis” takes in Course students. The anti-intellectualism of Course students is often startling, and turns the name of “student” into an oxymoron all too often. And I think I see a particular form of the compromise solutions for dealing with God found in many religious traditions. “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.” If we compare that to traditional Christianity, God is not depersonalized, but His wrath is satisfied in the sacrifice of Jesus, and Jesus comes between us and the Father whose holiness (as at some level we know) is utterly at odds with sin. Islam lacks this aspect, and hence has the fear of God to deal with in a very direct form, which is so intolerable it seems even more apt than Christianity to lead to projection. In Vedanta God is depersonalized and any personal aspect depreciated in the conceptualization “Ishvara.” And Buddhism avoids the issue altogether to concentrate on others, a valuable but clearly temporary, and temporizing, strategy. The Course lacked any really good strategy for delaying Atonement, but miracles boomeritis provides the anxious student a nifty one.

Gene,

I enjoyed your take on the different forms the authority problem takes. I suspect you are on to something. Maybe the authority problem is so deep-seated in us that we will naturally build it into our spiritual traditions, in one form or another. And if it’s not there at the start—as is the case with the Course—we’ll probably do our best to rectify that.

• • •

From Michael Dailly:

I see boomeritis as a new label for an old behavior formerly known as group influence or peer pressure or what is an acceptable level of how to be. The group (all of us) lead by few clamor to learn our lessons and be a living example of what has been learned so that we will be accepted. We are influenced by our economic status, by our level of education, by our family values, by advances in the field of science and technology. All of this is about our external world and the rules we make and how well we follow them to win status in this world. I follow these rules and I want my share and my rewards for being a good human.

However, the more I become conscious of my inner world and the eternalness of this world, through meditation, contemplation, and the practice of listening to my higher self and through study of the Course, I realize that my true self is all that I am aware of at this moment, my true self is all that I know in truth at this moment. All of which is beyond this material world and yet this is the world I find myself in and so I use what I know and extend love to the best of my ability. This world is like the waves on the ocean; my home is below this surface turmoil where the currents of love are constant and the peace of oneness is always.

It seems to me that wordsmiths through the ages have renamed and reshaped old ideas, hammered the letters into a pulp and tried to feed the masses something appealing to our new advanced and special tastes. To their credit, and in Ken Wilber’s case of his offering of boomeritis, it is a means to have us look within and find our truth beyond these commonly held group beliefs. Thank you Ken and Robert for suggesting once again that I look past the flotsam and be wary of adopted beliefs. I am committed to looking beyond to the truth within.

In closing I would like to say, “It’s all good!”

Michael,

Yes, I agree that boomeritis is spread by group influence or peer pressure, and that we need to listen to our true Self,

not just give in to group-think. Yet I think that we don't want to swing to the other extreme and only look within ourselves for truth. If we do that, then we are, ironically, doing exactly what boomeritis wants us to do. For its pull is not just without, but also within. It's a form of narcissism (Wilber calls it "pluralism infected with narcissism"), and we certainly don't need any peer pressure to become narcissistic.

I personally believe that the answer is to look without for truth in a more discerning way, and to look within for truth in a more discerning way. There are voices without that speak the truth—the Course being one of them. They have things to tell us that we will never come to on our own. We just need to tell them apart from the voices out there that lie to us. And, of course, there is a Voice within that speaks the truth as well. But we still need to tell it apart from all those other voices within that only claim to speak the truth. We certainly don't want to make boomeritis an excuse to turn off all outside influences. In my view, that would amount to running away from boomeritis right into its arms.

...

From Phil Brisk:

You asked for responses to your terrific and thought-provoking boomeritis article, so here's mine. I realize as I read it over that there's a lot I could have expanded on. However, I hope I've said enough for my essential argument to get through.

I broadly agree with Wilber's boomeritis diagnosis—and with what you say about "miracles boomeritis," the particular strain to be found in our ACIM community. But I also suspect there might be something else at play—a crisis of uncertainty.

What do I mean? I'll try to explain.

I recognize that, in some ways, we boomers do have it in us to behave like stropky two-year-olds who belong in the naughty corner. We can be pretty good at stamping our feet and putting up a fight when anyone is unwise enough to try and tell us what to do. But at the same time I feel a bit sorry for us. I see in that stropky emotional stance a lot of fear and confusion. I'd argue that we've grown up in a world where so many of the apparently straightforward truths and certainties that served and comforted our forebears for centuries have melted away.

As we boomers have come of age in the world, so has the global information network. Even before the Internet, even as long ago as the sixties and seventies, we've been exposed to a simply mind-blowing range of facts, opinions, conflicting viewpoints, and startlingly different angles on just about every subject under the sun.

Compared with our parents—let alone our grandparents—we've been able to see more, know more, question more. We've grown up in a world where black and white have been replaced by every shade of gray.

And another thing: as we've come to see more of our leaders, in glorious Fox and CNN live-feed warts-and-all close-up, so we've grown less certain about accepting what they say.

Whereas, in the past, we might have accepted something as true just because some authority figure told us it was, we're far less likely to do so today. Take a Clinton or a Bush, or in my country Tony Blair. If any of these guys announced it was raining, I think we'd figure it was prudent to take a look for ourselves out the window before we agreed to agree.

And this is not just true of politicians—it holds for religious and spiritual bigwigs too. In fact, for more or less any kind of bigwig. As a generation, we boomers know better than to take too much at face value. We've sat through too many media exposés of the great and the good. We've been let down and disappointed too often.

In some ways, of course, all this is to be welcomed. It should make us wiser and savvier operators, less likely to be led by the nose. (Although, clearly, there will still be occasional lapses; otherwise, how could we *ever* have let our current crop of leaders lead us all the way to Iraq?!)

However, here's the paradox. This extraordinary boomer knowingness doesn't make us stronger. It makes us weaker. Because, as I said at the start, it makes us an *unsure* and *unconfident* generation.

Okay, maybe now would be a good moment for me to put my violin down and pass the hat round with a simple appeal: *if there's anyone reading this who is not a boomer, please give generously to the boomer distress fund. You see how we suffer.*

But, seriously, I think there's a real issue here. We boomers don't expect to find certainty—we expect to find uncertainty. Plus, many of us would feel we were letting ourselves down, selling ourselves short, if we didn't question and challenge everything.

So, for me, the tendency to shy away from notions of absolute truth, or absolute authority, is down to more than boomer narcissism. It's also down to boomer lack of confidence and certainty. Which raises its own interesting questions

when we're talking about spirituality, a subject that in a very real way challenges us to draw on the polar opposite of uncertainty—faith.

I've no idea if my contribution to the discussion is helpful. But as a true boomer, who naturally likes to look at *every* angle, I did want to throw it into the mix.

Phil,

Your point is well taken. I think there is more going on here than just narcissism. The way I think of it is that in the first half of the twentieth century, as I understand it, the bottom dropped out of our certainty. I have heard it termed "metaphysical despair." In the intellectual vanguard of our culture, we became not only uncertain that we knew truth, not only uncertain that truth was knowable, but even uncertain that there was a truth to know. I wouldn't say that this uncertainty, in and of itself, was narcissistic. I would tend to think of it the other way around: This uncertainty was an opportunity for narcissism, one that narcissism fully exploited. Hence, boomeritis.

I do think there is a real honesty in saying, "I thought I knew, but now that I've looked at things more carefully and broadly, and now that I have more experience under my belt, I realize I don't have a clue." I think that can be the beginning of wisdom. The Course seems to agree—it often touts the value of admitting that we don't know. But I think that uncertainty can also be the beginning of something very different: "Since we can't really know anyway, there is nothing to overrule my feelings. And how dare you suggest otherwise!"

...

From Eileen Tiedeman:

Today I'm led to respond to your 75th *Better Way*. I fully know I do not have the qualifications of a Ken Wilber, and I'm amused that he'd be so concerned by the ego antics of boomeritis. The ego must be delighted. Ken's [Ken Wapnick's?] "bliss ninny."

It seems that kind of energy is really misplaced—and it's like trying to "fix" the whole Christian Church.

Isn't it true that the Atonement is the only choice we have to make? Not accepting the Atonement—God's gift—is our one problem.

Boomeritis is just being stuck in adolescence—the church's policies kept us in infancy—so now we're seeing a growth spurt! When such beliefs are found wanting—not able to deliver joy, peace, or love—those who have them will be ready for the awareness that the Christ within them is the only Truth.

There's nothing that can't be handled by the Holy Spirit in His time. Letting go of any issue that I "*know*" what should be the outcome of or solution, is a constant issue for me.

Eileen,

If I understand your point, it is that boomeritis is an adolescent mindset that we shouldn't get stuck in. But we also shouldn't speak out about it. Those who have boomeritis will eventually find it wanting and move on. The Holy Spirit will handle it in His time. When we think that something needs to be said, when we raise the alert about boomeritis, our energy is misplaced and "the ego must be delighted."

Personally, I think that speaking out is highly underrated in Course circles. We still speak out—as you too of course are doing—but then we often say, "No one should speak out. Let the Holy Spirit handle it." Aside from not noticing the obvious performative contradiction (it's like shouting "No one should shout!"), we also don't notice that the Course itself is an instance of Jesus speaking out. And he spends about half of the time speaking out about the ego, telling us how to identify it and how to not fall prey to its tricks. He even asks us to "take a stand against" it (W-pI.161.1:1). He does anything but maintain a holy silence. And he doesn't urge us to maintain one, either. Instead, he tells us—six times—that God "needs your voice" (or "our voice" or "my voice").

So I don't see speaking out about this as trying to do the Holy Spirit's job for Him. Without human amplifiers, the Holy Spirit's Voice is unheard, and as the Course says, "An unheard message will not save the world, however mighty be the Voice that speaks" (W-pI.123.5:6). Rather than doing the Holy Spirit's job for Him, I hope instead that I am simply amplifying a message that He needs someone to speak.

...

From David Pomatti:

Thanks for the article. One point I didn't see mentioned is that critiques of ACIM that I've read, by conventional Christians or skeptical cult-busters, seem always to be aiming their complaints at a boomeritis travesty of the Course. I always wondered whether these critics had actually read the Course, as their criticisms often took issue with various "new age" interpreters of the Course, or else isolated lines taken out of context. Now, however, I see that some at least may have read parts of the Course, but through their own boomeritis-tinged lenses, and they based their objections to it on the basis of this "the Course is just like other new age narcissism" projection.

This is not to say that such critiques against new age Course interpretations aren't valid, it's that neither the critics nor the "believers" they criticize are engaging the Course itself. The whole drama is like some dream travesty where the key to awakening has become just another dream figment.

David,

Excellent point. You're right, I hadn't brought that up, but I think it is very true. It dovetails with the point I made in response to Mary Benton above, that the Course has been tarred with a New Age brush, so that the world reacts in large part not to the Course itself, but to a boomeritis misconstrual of it.

Overall remarks

I will use David's letter above as a jumping-off point for my overall remarks. He said that conventional Christians and skeptical cult-busters are rejecting the Course based on a boomeritis misreading of it. I think this is true but, unfortunately, it only begins to capture the actual state of affairs. I think the world as a whole is keeping the Course at arm's length based on a boomeritis misreading of it. And, alas, I think that Course students themselves are *following* it largely based on a boomeritis misreading of it. I think boomeritis is by and large the lens through which the world on the outside and students on the inside are viewing the Course. Of course, there are varying degrees of this and exceptions to this, but I do perceive this as roughly true in the main.

If I'm right, then whatever the Course came here to do is for the most part blocked, at least for now. What it wants to do in our lives, and what it wants to do through us in the world, is for the most part blocked, at least for now. This is because, to a significant degree, we have deprived it of its voice. When it speaks, we don't hear it. We hear boomeritis talking instead. And then when we go to do what it says, we do what boomeritis says instead.

I may sound alarmist, but I am not really saying anything different than what Ken Wilber said about boomeritis Buddhism. Under the influence of boomeritis, he said, "Buddhism—known as 'the religion of no-ego'—often became 'the religion of express your ego'" (*Integral Spirituality*, p. 105). If boomeritis can turn Buddhism on its head, why can't it do the same to *A Course in Miracles*?

I am putting this in such stark terms because my perception is that we are collectively asleep to the problem. And as intelligent and thoughtful as many of the above responses were, I felt I saw that in them. Forgive me for saying this; I was very grateful to receive the letters and I felt they made a number of important and constructive points. But when you step back and look at them as a whole, there is this pattern that emerges. I don't know if you noticed, but almost every one spoke of boomeritis as something "out there," as an academic, historical, cultural, philosophical, or even terminological issue. Only one letter said much about its prevalence in the Course community. And not one letter said anything directly about its presence, or even possible presence, within the person writing. The impression this gives might be an exaggeration, in that I know that several of the respondents are quite concerned about the presence of boomeritis in the Course community. Yet the overall pattern remains, and I think it does say something about where we are collectively. The overall impression conveyed is that we are not thinking of boomeritis as something "in here," in our community, in ourselves.

A consequence of not thinking of it as something "in here" is that we are also not thinking in terms of what to do. Did you notice that no one really had any suggestions about what to do, even on a purely personal level? Please excuse the caricature, but while we are talking about the virus's historical roots, taxonomy, and appropriate name, the virus is meanwhile ravaging our community, and most likely ourselves.

And the letters I received were from those who clearly disagree with boomeritis, who think it *is* a virus. We didn't even hear from those who *like* it. You can see, then, why I say that we are collectively asleep to the problem. And a problem to which everyone is asleep, of course, just continues.

Don't get me wrong. I don't think all is lost. I do believe that Jesus is still around, and that the plan of his that brought the Course into existence is still at work. I trust, therefore, that he has a plan to steer the Course out of its current

boomeritis mire, so that it can do what it came here to do. But I don't want to stop with that trust. I want to know what my part is. He needs my voice, for an unheard message will not save the world.



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

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