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## A BETTER WAY

**“These Words Dispel the Night”**  
**The Centrality of Repeating Words in *A Course in Miracles***

by Robert Perry

As *Course in Miracles* students, we have an ambivalent relationship with words. Like knives in the kitchen, we use them, yet also regard them with some mistrust. Words, after all, are part and parcel of the very realm that we want to transcend. And so, as we look at them, we tend to see a series of negatives. Their names carve the world up into separate compartments. Their definitions replace life’s richness and wholeness with our thin formulations (Bob Dylan once remarked, “Definition destroys...there’s nothing definite in this world”). Their symbols distance us from things in themselves, removing us to a realm of arid

abstractions. Their directives control us, limiting our free expression (remember that old song, “Sign, sign, everywhere a sign....Do this, don’t do that, can’t you read the sign?”). Their concepts chain us to linear thinking, shutting us off from direct experience. It’s no wonder that one of the most oft-quoted lines in the Course is “Words are but symbols of symbols. They are thus twice removed from reality” (M-21.1:9-10).

Yet there are unfortunate side effects of our mistrust of words. To begin with, *A Course in Miracles* itself is a string of nearly half a million words. How, then, can our mistrust of words not subtly distance us from the Course?

I believe that this mistrust enters in even more strongly when the Course asks us to *repeat* words, as it does in the Workbook lessons. Repeating some preset verbal formula can easily look like a ritual, in which the mere act of mouthing lines from some dusty old book is supposed to magically cause God to smile on us. It can easily remind us of standing up in church and sleepily mumbling the liturgy for the one billionth time (thinking of my own church days). It smacks of us performing the very “chants,” “litanies,” and “dirges” which the Course associates with the ego. This sentiment finds its way into conventional Course wisdom, which has it that the big danger with the Workbook is making a ritual out of it. As a result of all this, we secretly suspect that repeating words is for neophytes, and that considering ourselves past that stage is a telltale sign of true advancement.

I think this is a truly unfortunate state of affairs. The fact is that, to a significant degree, the Course is resting the achievement of its goals on our repeating of its words. That may sound extreme, yet the evidence speaks for itself. The Workbook opens by saying that “it is doing the exercises that will make the goal of the course possible” (W-pl.In.1:2). And every single exercise involves the repeating of words. Further, in most of the exercises, repeating words is the pivotal feature. It is what brings about the intended experience. Repeating words is quite simply the Course’s main practice and, as we just saw, practice is what “will make the goal of the course possible.” How, then, can we not see an essential connection between repeating words and attaining the goal of the Course?

Given this, we need all the encouragement and support we can get when it comes to this practice of repeating words. We need to emphasize it, rather than pooh-pooh it. We need to clarify the mechanics of doing it, rather than continue to leave them unaddressed. We need to have an ongoing discussion of this topic, rather than maintain the collective silence about it. The goal the Course has set for us depends on it.

That is the purpose of this article—to offer clarification and support in this crucial area. I’ve gathered everything I can

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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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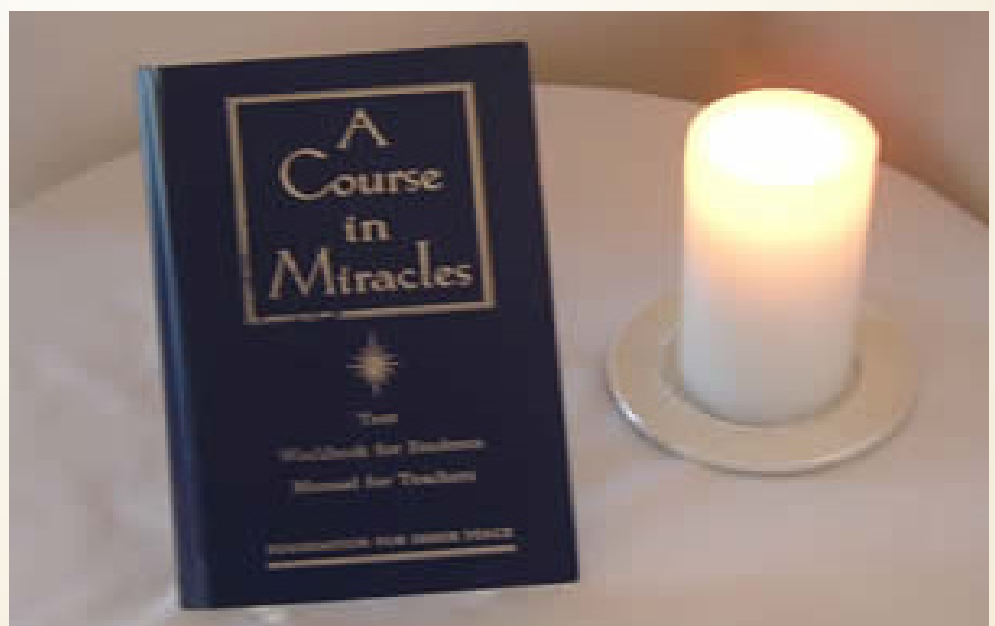
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find in the Workbook and Text on this topic, over fifty pages of quotes. This subject, as you'll see, is richly addressed in the Course's pages. The Course goes into great detail about *why*, *how*, and *when* to repeat its words. In this article, I will present what I have found.

## Why?

This, of course, is the big question. *Why* do we repeat words? Before I give the Course's answer to that, I want to present a story and a quote. The story, by an unknown author, is called "The Power of Words":

There was once a wise sage who wandered the countryside. One day, as he passed near a village, he was approached by a woman who saw he was a sage, and told him of a sick child nearby. She beseeched him to help this child. The sage came to the village, and a crowd gathered around him, for such a man was a rare sight. One woman brought the sick child to him, and he said a prayer over her.

"Do you really think your prayer will help her, when medicine has failed?" yelled a man from the crowd.

"You know nothing of such things! You are a stupid fool!" said the sage to the man.

The man became very angry with these words and his face grew hot and red. He was about to say something, or perhaps strike out, when the sage walked over to him and said:

"If one word has such power as to make you so angry and hot, may not another have the power to heal?"

And thus, the sage healed two people that day.

The quote I have is from an old episode of the television series *The X-Files*. In it, Charles Nelson Reilly plays a writer who is talking about hypnosis, particularly about the hypnotist inducing the hypnotic state in the subject. He says, "Still, as a storyteller, I'm fascinated how a person's sense of consciousness can be so transformed by nothing more magical than listening to words. Mere words."

Words are one of the most powerful tools in human experience. Just think of the emotional significance of the word "yes" or "no" following a proposal of marriage. And this power goes beyond evoking ordinary emotions. As the above story and quotation suggest, words have the power to *heal* and to *transform consciousness*.

So what does the Course say about why it places so much emphasis on repeating certain words? This was my question as I studied all those quotes I compiled. I had placed the quotes in forty-seven different categories, and I couldn't see anything that brought together all of the categories. Finally, however, it became extremely clear and simple.

Words, of course, are just verbal forms, meaningless in themselves. But they stand for meaning. They stand for content. Thus, it's not words per se that are important. It's the payload they carry. It's the meaning they stand for, the content they hold. In the Course's view, the meaning carried in *its* words is salvation itself. It says, "Here is salvation in the simple words in which we practice" (161.1:2; since most of the quotes I'm using are from the Workbook, I'll reference them starting with the lesson number or review number).

Therefore, contained in the Course's words is saving meaning. It is not just empty "head stuff." The Course's ideas are experiential. They spark emotion. They spark change. As the Course says, "The ideas are mighty forces, to be used and not held idly by" (T-16.II.9:5). We can imagine the words, then, as being the wrapping for a priceless gift, the gift of meaning and truth carried by the words. The Course uses this very image. In Review IV in the Workbook, we are told to repeat our two review sentences "with time enough to see the gifts that they contain for you" (rIV.In.8:2). The gift here is the meaning that God placed in those words: "Let each word shine with the meaning God has given it" (rIV.In.7:4).

So here was my simple answer that drew everything together. Why do we repeat the Course's words? Because doing so is an act of laying hold of the gift contained in those words. It is an act of internalizing the saving meaning placed there by God. The result is that salvation dawns on our minds, ending the long night of the ego. As Lesson 162 says, "These words dispel the night" (162.6:4).

This, I believe, explains the incredible benefits that the Course ascribes to the repeating of its words. Below is a list of passages announcing those benefits, condensed from ten pages of similar passages. Please read them slowly, trying to appreciate the true enormity of the benefits they attach to the repeating of "mere words":

If only once during the day you feel that you were perfectly sincere while you were repeating today's idea, you can be sure that you have saved yourself many years of effort. (27.4:6)

Use [today's idea] as frequently as possible throughout the day. It will help to make the day as happy for you as God wants you to be. And it will help those around you, as well as those who seem to be far away in space and time, to share this happiness with you. (62.4:1-3)

“I rest in God.” Completely undismayed, this thought will carry you through storms and strife, past misery and pain, past loss and death, and onward to the certainty of God. There is no suffering it cannot heal. There is no problem that it cannot solve. (109.3:1-4)

Let us declare this truth [“I am as God created me”] as often as we can. This is the Word of God that sets you free. This is the key that opens up the gate of Heaven. (110.11:5-7)

Do not repeat the thought and lay it down. Its usefulness is limitless to you. And it is meant to serve you in all ways, all times and places, and whenever you need help of any kind. (rIII.In.11:3-5)

If you have been practicing thus far [repeating “Would I condemn myself for doing this?”] in willingness and honesty, you will begin to sense a lifting up, a lightening of weight across your chest, a deep and certain feeling of relief. (134.16:3)

Thus [by repeating God’s Name slowly, again and again] do we give an invitation which can never be refused. And God will come, and answer it Himself. (183.7:1-2)

To say these words [“I want the peace of God”] is nothing. But to mean these words is everything. If you could but mean them for just an instant, there would be no further sorrow possible for you in any form; in any place or time. (185.1:1-3)

Shall we not learn to say these words when we have understood their power to release all minds from bondage? These are words which give you power over all events that seem to have been given power over you. (193.6:2-3)

To every apprehension, every care and every form of suffering, repeat these selfsame words. And then you hold the key that opens Heaven’s gate, and brings the Love of God the Father down to earth at last, to raise it up to Heaven. (193.13:4-5)

Can we really believe that repeating the Course’s words can bring benefits as astounding as these? If we can even entertain the possibility, then the rest of what I have to say will make perfect sense.

## How?

Of course, just mouthing a string of words is not going to bring anything like the benefits described above. It’s all about *how* we repeat them. And the Course has surprisingly detailed and extensive counsel on how to repeat them. This multifaceted counsel, however, flows from a very simple idea, which I will try to explain before taking you through the counsel itself.

Remember that the words are just the wrapping for the gift. Our goal, therefore, is to get inside the wrapping and claim the gift. We have to go on a journey from just handling the wrapping to actually laying hold of the gift; a journey from merely *saying the words* to truly *embracing their meaning*. We have already seen Lesson 185 say, “To say these words is nothing. But to mean these words is everything.” We also have Lesson 284, “I can elect to change all thoughts that hurt.” It outlines a five-step process, which I have numbered below:

This is the truth, at first [1] to be but said and then [2] repeated many times; and next [3] to be accepted as but partly true, with many reservations. Then [4] to be considered seriously more and more, and finally [5] accepted as the truth. (284.1:5-6)

Notice how this is just a five-step expansion of “To say these words is nothing. But to mean these words is everything.” It is a journey from merely repeating words to fully accepting the content of those words. And when we have fully accepted their content, when those words are “finally accepted as the truth,” our spiritual journey is done.

This actually provides the key to *how* we repeat the words. We repeat them in a way that allows us to embrace the saving meaning they contain. We repeat them in a way that takes us from the words to the meaning, from the form to the content, from the wrapping to the gift. The Course puts it succinctly: “We use the words, and try and try again to go



beyond them to their meaning, which is far beyond their sound” (rV.In.12:4).

With that in mind, let’s take a tour through the detailed and highly practical counsel the Course provides on how to repeat its words.

### *Repeat the words slowly*

The Course repeatedly emphasizes that we should say the words “slowly” (21 refs.), unhurriedly (10 refs.), even “quite slowly” (5 refs.). For example, “Each application should be made quite slowly, and as thoughtfully as possible. There is no hurry” (28.8:3-4). The reason is obvious. Only slow repeating gives us enough time to go beyond the words to their meaning, as this key passage says: “Then repeat the two ideas you practice for the day unhurriedly, with time enough to see the gifts that they contain for you, and let them be received where they were meant to be” (rIV.In.8:2).

### *Concentrate only on these words; hold them firmly in full awareness and clear your mind of other thoughts*

If you are going to claim the gift inside the words, they cannot merely be cycling through your mind—or *leaving* your mind—while you ruminate on other things. It’s hard to unwrap a gift while one or both of your hands are doing something else. Instead, you have to think “about [the words] and about nothing else” (64.7:1). You have to hold them “firmly in your mind (or the mind)” (3 refs.), hold them “in full awareness” (2 refs.). The Workbook repeatedly speaks of “laying by whatever thoughts you have, and dwelling briefly only upon this” (129.9:3). Indeed, Jesus was giving this counsel before the Workbook, even before the Text. The day before he began dictating the Course to Helen, he told her that Bill “has to learn better concentration.” So he suggested to Bill that he repeat “a very short phrase like ‘Here I am Lord’ and don’t think of *anything* else. Just pull in your mind slowly from everywhere else and center it on these words” (*Absence from Felicity*, p. 197).

### *If possible, close your eyes and sit quietly for a minute or so while repeating the idea several times*

The Workbook says that, if need be, you can repeat the words very briefly with eyes open. But it emphasizes that it’s preferable to repeat them with eyes closed (Lessons 33, 40, 41, 48, 49, 61, 62, 63, 74). While your eyes are open, you are barraged with visual stimuli, making the words of the Course just one object of awareness among many. The Workbook then goes further, and recommends sitting quietly, taking a minute or so, and repeating the idea several times:

You can use it with your eyes open at any time and in any situation. It is strongly recommended, however, that you take a minute or so whenever possible to close your eyes and repeat the idea slowly to yourself several times. (48.2:3-4)

Do so with your eyes open when necessary, but closed when possible. And be sure to sit quietly and repeat the idea for today whenever you can, closing your eyes on the world, and realizing that you are inviting God’s Voice to speak to you. (49.5:2-3)

All of these features—closing your eyes, sitting quietly, taking a minute, repeating the idea several times—are about really penetrating the shell of the words, so to speak, going past their sound to their meaning.

### *Use your own words if you wish*

Part of what can make the Workbook seem like an exercise in empty ritual is that we are given these set verbal formulas to repeat. Yet the fact is that the Workbook encourages us to use our own words. Its words are not magic words. As we have seen, what’s important is not the words but the meaning. The Workbook openly reminds us of this: “It is not the particular words you use that matter” (rII.In.6:4); “You need not use these exact words” (65.6:5). Jesus is quite aware that words that you choose might be more effective carriers of the meaning into your mind.

There are thus a number of lessons (39, 46, 65, 70, 81-90) in which the Workbook encourages you to put your own words to the idea. Lesson 46, for instance, says, “The shorter practice periods may consist either of a repetition of the idea for today in the original or in a related form, as you prefer” (46.7:1). The only caveat is that you select words that express the same basic meaning. Lesson 39, “My holiness is my salvation,” makes this point explicitly:

Do not, however, change the idea itself as you vary the method of applying it. However you elect to use it, the idea should be stated so that its meaning is the fact that your holiness is your salvation. (39.10:2-3)

### *Repeat the words thoughtfully; think about their meaning*

If the whole point of repeating the words is to take in their meaning, then it is crucial that you think about that meaning as you repeat them. The Course, therefore, urges you to repeat the words “as thoughtfully as possible” (28.8:3), to “think about them a little while as you say them” (66.11:3), to say the words “slowly and thoughtfully, attempting to allow the meaning of the words to sink into your mind” (95.11:3).

Doing this dramatically increases the benefits. For instance, Lesson 41, “God goes with me wherever I go,” contains these detailed instructions: “Think of what you are saying; what the words mean. Concentrate on the holiness that they imply about you; on the unfailing companionship that is yours; on the complete protection that surrounds you” (41.9:2-3). I encourage you to try this out. Repeat the words “*God goes with me wherever I go*” very slowly, concentrating “on the holiness that they imply about you.” Then repeat the same words slowly again, this time concentrating “on the unfailing companionship that is yours.” Finally, repeat them again, concentrating “on the complete protection that surrounds you.” Can you feel how much more power this has than just saying the words quickly and mindlessly?

### *Repeat them as an attempt to understand their meaning*

The previous category seems to imply that we understand what the words mean. And it’s true that “to make the exercises in this workbook meaningful” we need “a theoretical foundation” (In.1:1). We need *some* understanding of what they mean. Yet the whole assumption behind repeating the words is that we do not *really* understand their meaning. As Lesson 9 says, “While you may be able to accept [today’s idea] intellectually, it is unlikely that it will mean anything to you as yet” (9.1:2). After all, if we really understood its meaning, we would be saved; we would be enlightened. So we practice *in order* to understand. “We will practice this idea in many forms before you really understand it” (16.3:4). We repeat the words as a way of inviting real understanding to dawn on our minds. That real understanding comes from beyond us. It comes from an experience. It comes, as we’ll see later, from the Holy Spirit. Say the words, therefore, “with firm determination to understand what they mean” (74.3:1). Say them as a way of reaching out for an understanding that you do not currently possess and that you cannot supply yourself. If you are doing a lesson today, you might try repeating it now in this spirit.

### *Add to the words your mental assent; repeat them with sincerity and certainty*

It’s not enough to *see* the gift contained in the words. You have to *accept* the gift. You have to lay hold of it. And since it is a gift of the mind, this means giving it your mental assent.

One form this takes is saying the idea with *sincerity* (6 refs.). Try to *mean* what you are saying (7 refs.). Say it *honestly* (2 refs.), *earnestly* (2 refs.), *genuinely* (1 ref.), *positively* (1 ref.). Remember, “To say these words is nothing. But to mean these words is everything.” Here are some examples: “Say this to yourself as sincerely as you can” (T-5.VII.6:6). “Say only this, but mean it with no reservations” (T-21.II.2:2). “Make this request with deep sincerity” (185.10:3).

Another form this takes is that you *assure yourself* of the idea (3 refs.) with *certainty* (5 refs.) and *conviction* (2 refs.). You don’t force things, however. You say the idea *gently* (2 refs.) and with *quiet* certainty (2 refs.). For instance: “Begin the practice periods today with this assurance, offered to your mind with all the certainty that you can give...” (95.11:1) “Assure yourself often today [of the idea]...Repeat the idea with deep conviction” (80.6:1-2).

Again, try this out. Take, for example, Lesson 34, “I could see peace instead of this,” and first say it with deep *sincerity*; try to *mean* it with no reservations. Then *assure* yourself of it with all the *certainty* that you can give. Don’t you find that the benefits are increased by doing this?

Don’t worry, though, that you do not fully mean the words now (27.1:3), or will not stay true to them in the future (28.1:3; 181.4:3). Such concerns hold you back from giving your mind to your practice period right now. The Workbook puts it more bluntly: “These concerns are but defenses against present change of focus in perception” (181.5:3). Therefore, “lay these pointless limitations by a little while” (181.5:5). Suspend your disbelief and give your mental assent to the idea as fully as you can right now. The fact is that you don’t really mean it now. You aren’t certain now. But by repeating the idea with as much sincerity and certainty as you can muster, you invite total sincerity and certainty to come to you and become your future. As the Workbook says, you bring the time when you really *will* mean the idea “a little nearer” (27.1:5).

### *Say them as a statement of where you stand, as an acknowledgment or declaration*

The Course urges you to repeat the words as a genuine statement of where you stand. Fourteen times the Course calls repeating its words an *acknowledgment*. Twelve times it calls doing so a *declaration*. Lesson 50, “I am sustained by the Love of God,” places both terms together: “Tell yourself this often today. It is a declaration of release from the belief in

idols. It is your acknowledgment of the truth about yourself” (50.4:6-8).

“Acknowledgment” is defined as “the act of accepting the truth or existence of something.” So when you repeat an idea from the Course as an acknowledgment, you are saying, “This repetition is my act of accepting the truth of these words.” You might even see this in light of a more extreme meaning of “acknowledgment”: “a formal declaration made to authoritative witnesses.” This leads us right into the next category.

“Declaration” is a very strong word. Its definitions include: “an emphatic formal public statement,” “an explicit, formal announcement, either oral or written,” and “The act of declaring, or publicly announcing; explicit asserting; undisguised token of a...side taken on any subject; proclamation.” Do we normally see repeating our Workbook lesson as this kind of *declaration*? Lesson 31 (“I am not the victim of the world I see”) urges us to remind ourselves that we are doing exactly that: “Remind yourself that you are making a declaration of independence in the name of your own freedom” (31.4:2).

Why don’t we go ahead and do this? Repeat “*I am not the victim of the world I see,*” but not blandly. Repeat it as a declaration, as an emphatic formal public statement. Repeat it as your version of the original Declaration of Independence. You are taking your stand in front of the whole world. Say, “*I am making a declaration of independence in the name of my own freedom.*” Only you are not declaring independence from King George. You are declaring independence from every negative thing the world can try to throw at you. You might even see a beautiful parchment with the title “The Unequivocal Declaration of” followed by your full name. Underneath that, see the words “*I am not the victim of the world I see.*”

### *Add your own words; think about the idea and add related thoughts*

One of the key ways in which we actively take into our minds the gift contained in the words is by adding our own words after repeating the idea. There are two closely related ways in which the Workbook has us do this. One is “letting related thoughts come.” Here, we repeat the idea, and then let our minds spontaneously come up with thoughts that (directly or indirectly) relate to it. The effect of these related thoughts is to “add to the idea in your own personal way” (43.5:2), and by doing so, to integrate it into your mind. Instead of cranking these thoughts out ourselves, we “try merely to step back and let the thoughts come” (42.6:2). As a result, the thoughts that come are often truly inspired. “You may, in fact, be astonished at the amount of course-related understanding some of your thoughts contain” (42.5:2).

The second form of adding our own words is what the Workbook calls “thinking about the idea” (rI.In.2:3). Judging by the examples set in Review I, what we are doing here is actively “talking ourselves into it” (as my colleague Greg Mackie puts it). We are giving ourselves reasons for truly accepting the idea. Most notably, we are talking to ourselves about the benefits it will bring to us, how it will solve our current unhappy condition. Through this self-talk, we bring ourselves to a point of decision in which we wholeheartedly embrace the idea.

In both of these processes, the thoughts we add become the bridge that allows the gift contained in the idea to travel off the page and into our minds, where it becomes an authentic part of us.

### *Remember the power and importance of these words*

The Workbook is always trying to build up in our eyes the power and significance of its words. It tells us that in these words lies “the power of salvation” (T-21.II.2:2), the “power to wake the sleeping truth in you” (109.2:4), the “power to hold your gifts in your awareness through the day” (122.14:2), and the “power to release all minds from bondage” (193.6:2). It even asks us, while we repeat the words, to consciously “focus on” their importance or “remember” their power:

Finally, repeat the idea for today once more, and devote the rest of the practice period to trying to focus on its importance to you, the relief its acceptance will bring you by resolving your conflicts once and for all. (65.7:1)

There is a special message for today which has the power to remove all forms of doubt and fear forever from your mind. If you are tempted to believe them true, remember that appearances can not withstand the truth these mighty words contain. (99.11:1-2)

This is clearly yet another strategy for laying hold of the gift. If you believe that a certain manufactured good holds power and importance for you, you will make the necessary financial investment to make it yours. In the same way, if you believe that a certain *idea* holds power and importance for you, you will make a *mental* investment in it. Your mind will quickly and surely reach out for it and make it yours.

### *Repeat them happily, as a joyful reminder, as glad tidings*

We tend to approach the repeating of the Course's words grudgingly: "Oh, it's time for *another* practice period." The problem with this, of course, is that it puts the gift contained in those words at arm's length. If you receive a gift grudgingly, how much have you *really* received it? Jesus, being no fool, realizes that we silently groan while we practice, and constantly encourages the opposite approach. He wants us to see our repetitions as "happy exercises" (97.7:1), as "glad tidings of your release" (75.5:3), "joyful reminders of your release" (75.9:1). And he urges us to "be glad" to practice the idea all day long (62.4:1), to "be happy to remember it very often today" (63.3:1), and to "practice gladly with this thought today" (155.14:2). He wants us to receive this gift joyfully, knowing that taking hold of a gift with joy means *really* taking hold of it.

### *Repeat them as a statement of your goal for the day*

Each daily lesson that we practice in the Workbook is meant to be the keynote of that particular day. It represents our goal for the day. Our goal that day, in other words, is to learn that lesson—to internalize it, experience it, enter into its state of mind. We need to bear this in mind while repeating its words. For instance, Lesson 125, "In quiet I receive God's Word today," says, "As every hour passes by today, be still a moment and remind yourself you have a special purpose for this day; in quiet to receive the Word of God" (125.9:5). Lesson 126 says, "As often as you can, remind yourself you have a goal today; an aim which makes this day of special value to yourself and all your brothers" (126.11:1). In both lessons, you remind yourself of your goal for the day *by* repeating the idea. Several lessons additionally point out that this idea makes today "a time for special celebration" (75.9:2) or "a special day for learning" (135.26:5).

If you have a lesson you are doing today, go ahead and try this. First repeat your lesson. Then silently add, "*Realizing this idea is my goal for the day, and this goal makes it a special day, a time for special celebration.*" Now repeat your lesson again and try to infuse the essence of those extra words into it without explicitly adding them. Try this once or twice more, until you can get the lesson to actually fuse with the sense that "*this is my goal; this is a special day.*" If you're like me, you'll find that this adds a layer of happy significance onto repeating the lesson.

### *Realize that this is not just your voice saying this; these words come from God*

More than twenty times the Workbook, while asking us to repeat its words, tells us that these words come from a divine source, usually the Holy Spirit. They are "the words the Holy Spirit speaks to you" (97.7:1). "These are the words the Holy Spirit speaks in all your tribulations" (193.5:2). More simply, they are "His words" (97.8:6; 198.5:3, 6:1, 6:2, 6:3, 6:4, 6:5). At least seven times we are explicitly told that these words come from God (through the Holy Spirit), as we can see here in Lesson 162, "I am as God created me":

These words are sacred, for they are the words God gave in answer to the world you made. By them it disappears, and all things seen within its misty clouds and vaporous illusions vanish as these words are spoken. For they come from God. (162.1:4-6)

You can probably guess the practical value of this. If you believe the words you are practicing actually come from God, don't you think you are more likely to accept the truth in them? This is made explicit in Lesson 67, "Love created me like itself":

Try to realize in the shorter practice periods that this is not your tiny, solitary voice that tells you this. This is the Voice for God, reminding you of your Father and of your Self. This is the Voice of truth, replacing everything that the ego tells you about yourself with the simple truth about the Son of God. You were created by love like itself. (67.6:1-4)

Again, please try this out. Say, "*Love created me like itself,*" and as you do, have the sense that this is not your tiny voice telling yourself this. This is actually God's Voice speaking to you, replacing the lies your ego has told you with the real truth about you. Say the idea a few more times, trying to give it this sense of "*not my voice, God's Voice,*" and "*not my outlandish claim, the real truth.*" Can you feel the difference it makes?

### *Offer the words to the Holy Spirit; say them as a request, a prayer*

As we just saw, the words we repeat were given us by the Holy Spirit. Then, in repeating them, we are supposed to give them back to Him. As Lesson 97 says, "Receive His words, and offer them to Him" (97.8:6). Why do we offer the



words to Him? Because the words, as we saw earlier, are really a request for the understanding of the words, the truth of the words, the experience of the words, to dawn on our minds. We offer the words to Him because He is the One to give us that understanding, truth, and experience: “Give Him the words, and He will do the rest” (98.9:1).

The Workbook seems to consider all of its lessons to be requests or prayers. Most of them are not worded as requests, but as positive statements of the truth. However, the assumption is that those truths are really outside of our understanding now, and we repeat them as a prayer that they come into us. This is why the Workbook labels certain lessons as prayers that aren’t worded as prayers. For instance, the Workbook labels the following statement “a healing prayer”:

*Sickness is a defense against the truth. I will accept the truth of what I am, and let my mind be wholly healed today.* (136.15:5-7)

This is not worded as a request, but that doesn’t change the fact that it’s meant as one. It’s meant as a prayer for the truth about yourself to come into your mind and heal it. So let’s try saying it that way. Take the above words and offer them to the Holy Spirit, counting on Him to respond. Focus especially on that second line: “*I will accept the truth of what I am, and let my mind be wholly healed today.*” Offer it to the Holy Spirit as an implicit request for Him to give you the truth about yourself and thus heal your mind.

*Expect that He will respond by completing your journey from the words to their meaning*

We have seen throughout that our whole goal is to claim the gift contained in the words, to “use the words, and try and try again to go beyond them to their meaning” (rV.In.12:4). The Workbook is clear, however, that we cannot complete that process. We can set our foot on the bridge, but we cannot reach the other side by ourselves. The Holy Spirit has to complete the process for us. This should be a great relief, as we are often painfully conscious of our lack of conviction and sincerity as we repeat these words. Real conviction and full sincerity can only come from Him as He infuses us with an experience of the gift contained in the words. “Now can He make...your words sincere; not with your own sincerity, but with His Own” (S-2.III.3:3).

The Workbook says this in many ways. It says that after you give the idea to the Holy Spirit, He will “increase its power and give it back to you” (97.7:3). It tells you to repeat the words and then “let His Voice assure you that the words you speak are true” (105.8:3; see also 97.8:3). It says that He will give you “help in understanding what it [the idea] really means” (126.10:2). It says, “He will...help you understand the truth of [the idea]” (127.9:4). We find this concept most fully stated in Lesson 98:

He will give the words you use in practicing today’s idea the deep conviction and the certainty you lack. His words will join with yours, and make each repetition of today’s idea a total dedication, made in faith as perfect and as sure as His in you. His confidence in you will bring the light to all the words you say, and you will go beyond their sound to what they really mean. (98.7:2-4)

Here are the very things that we have been trying to muster in ourselves. We have been trying to say the words with “conviction,” “certainty,” “faith,” and “the light” of understanding. But the full realization of these qualities is a gift from the Holy Spirit. He is the One Who must carry us beyond the words’ “sound to what they really mean.”

To facilitate this, the Workbook repeatedly encourages us to repeat the idea with the confident expectation that He will respond. Over and over it encourages this confidence: “You will be heard and you will be answered” (79.10:6); “Ask and expect an answer” (106.8:1); “You cannot fail because He cannot fail” (94.4:4).

*After saying the words, wait in silence to receive an experience of their meaning*

As I have been saying, the words are an implicit request that the Holy Spirit grant us an experience of the gift within the words. And so, after repeating the words, the Course often instructs us to pause and open our minds to that experience. Again and again, it asks us to repeat the idea and...

Then wait a minute or so in silence, preferably with your eyes closed, and listen for His answer. (72.13:6)

Then attempt to feel the meaning that the words convey. (95.11:5)

Then seek Its [your Self’s] Thoughts, and claim them as your own. (96.9:4)

Then turn to Him Who shares your function here, and let Him teach you what you need to learn to lay all fear aside, and know your Self as Love which has no opposite in you. (99.9:8)

Then attempt again to find the joy these thoughts will introduce into your mind. (101.6:8)

Then welcome all the happiness it brings. (103.3:2)

Then spend a quiet moment, opening your mind to His correction and His Love. (126.11:6)

Then will we wait in silence, giving up all self-deceptions, as we humbly ask our Self that He reveal Himself to us. (152.11:5)

### *Comments on the “how”*

I find the amount of specific counsel we are given on how to repeat the Course’s words simply astonishing. Every one of the above methods is specifically designed to help us go from merely repeating the words to laying hold of the gift contained in them. And every one, in my experience, noticeably succeeds at doing just that.

There are clearly way too many methods to use at any one time, but just so you can get a taste of the benefits of each one, I want to ask you to try them all now in relation to a single lesson. The lesson I am suggesting to use is Lesson 41, “God goes with me wherever I go.” So, if you will, just take that lesson and go down the list with it, repeating it each time in the particular fashion suggested:

- Repeat the words slowly, without hurry, even “quite slowly.”
- Repeat the words, holding them firmly in full awareness, and “don’t think of *anything* else. Just pull in your mind slowly from everywhere else and center it on these words” (Jesus’ counsel to Bill Thetford).
- Close your eyes, sit quietly, take a minute or so, and repeat the words several times.
- Feel free to substitute your own words, as long as they express the meaning that God goes with you wherever you go.
- Repeat the words and “Think of what you are saying; what the words mean. Concentrate on the holiness that they imply about you; on the unfailing companionship that is yours; on the complete protection that surrounds you” (41.9:2-3).
- Repeat them as an attempt to understand them, as a reaching out to the understanding of their meaning.
- Repeat the idea as sincerely as you can. Try to mean it with no reservations.
- Assure yourself of the idea with all the certainty that you can give.
- Repeat the idea as your formal acknowledgment that these words are true.
- Repeat the idea as a formal declaration, a declaration of independence from all that is not of God.
- Repeat the idea and while you do, step back and let your mind spontaneously come up with a thought that is directly or indirectly related to it.
- Repeat the idea and then spend a moment thinking about it, talking yourself into it. Reason with yourself about its truth and benefits, so that you bring yourself to a decision to embrace it.
- Repeat the words, remembering their importance to you, remembering that they have the “power to wake the sleeping truth in you” (109.2:4), “power to remove all forms of doubt and fear forever from your mind” (99.11:1).
- Repeat them gladly, as a joyful reminder, as glad tidings.
- Imagining that this idea is your lesson for today, repeat it and add, “*Realizing this idea is my goal for the day, and this goal makes it a special day, a time for special celebration.*”
- Repeat the words, understanding that they come from God. Realize, therefore, that this is not your tiny voice telling you some outlandish idea. This is God’s Voice telling you the real truth.
- Offer the words to God. Intend them as a prayer for God to grant you an experience of the truth of these words.
- Say them again as a prayer, this time filled with confidence that He will answer and complete your journey from the words to their meaning. “Ask and expect an answer” (106.8:1); “You cannot fail because He cannot fail” (94.4:4).
- Then wait a minute or so in silence, opening your mind to an experience of His Presence, of Him being with you wherever you are.

## When?

In view of the immense value and importance ascribed to repeating its words, it's no surprise that the Course wants us to repeat them very frequently. How frequently? Under what circumstances? That is what we will explore in this final section.

### *Repeat the words throughout the day, and even bring them into sleep*

The Course asks us to repeat its words throughout the day. Ideally, we wake with these “words upon our lips” (rV.In.11:3). Then, as soon as possible after waking, we do our morning practice period, which begins and ends with repeating the idea for the day (and may involve repeating words throughout). After that, we repeat the idea during our hourly practice periods. In addition, we use the idea as often as possible during the hour. We also use it in response to even the most minor disturbances of our peace. Then, after spending the entire day with the idea, we end the day as we began. First, we use the idea to start and end our evening quiet time, and finally, we actually take these words with us into our sleep: “And with this thought we sleep, to waken once again with these same words upon our lips, to greet another day” (rV.In.11:3). In this way, the Course's words frame each day and even each hour. And as we know, how we frame something powerfully influences what it is for us.

This entire cycle is referred to in many places in the Course. This one is from Lesson 162, “I am as God created me”:

Holy indeed is he who makes these words his own; arising with them in his mind, recalling them throughout the day, at night bringing them with him as he goes to sleep. His dreams are happy and his rest secure, his safety certain and his body healed, because he sleeps and awakens with the truth before him always. (162.3:1-2)

This is how Jesus wants it. He wants the repetition of his words to be the constant running through the cycle of our days and nights. He wants us to sleep and awaken with the truth before us always. And “holy indeed is he” who does this.

### *Repeat the idea as often as possible, about four or five times an hour*

In the previous category, I included repeating the idea in our longer practice periods, periods which also may include significant amounts of wordless practice. In this current category, I want to focus on the short practice periods which consist mainly of simply repeating the idea. How often should we do those?

Jesus' main injunction is “as often as you can (or we can)” (11 refs.) or “as often as (is) possible” (10 refs.) or “as frequent(ly) as possible” (4 refs.). Once he even explicitly says, “There is no limit on the number of short practice periods that would be beneficial today” (42.7:1).

But how often *is* “as often as possible”? Once a minute? Twice a day? Actually, we can nail this down fairly specifically. When Jesus gives us a frequency per hour, it ranges from two to seven, and averages four to five. So this when he says “as often as you can,” he appears to be thinking four or five times an hour.

As challenging as we find practicing so frequently, Jesus is quite emphatic when he asks us to do it:

The idea for today needs many repetitions for maximum benefit. (27.3:1)

No long practice periods are required today, but very frequent short ones are necessary. Once every ten minutes would be highly desirable, and you are urged to attempt this schedule and to adhere to it whenever possible. (40.1:2-3)

It will be particularly helpful today to practice the idea for the day as often as you can. You need to hear the truth about yourself as frequently as possible, because your mind is so preoccupied with false self-images. Four or five times an hour, and perhaps even more, it would be most beneficial to remind yourself that Love created you like Itself. (67.5:1-3)

Try to remember today's idea some six or seven times an hour. There could be no better way to spend a half minute or less than to remember the Source of your salvation, and to see It where It is. (71.10:5-6)

Notice the descriptions he attaches to this frequency: “maximum benefit,” “highly desirable,” “particularly helpful,” “most beneficial.” Clearly, it's all about the benefit. If something brings you tremendous benefit, why wouldn't you do it

as frequently as possible?

Another way to put this is that since the words are the gateway to their content, how often you repeat the words is a measure of how much you want their content:

The real question is, how often will you remember? How much do you want today's idea ["Above all else I want to see"] to be true? Answer one of these questions, and you have answered the other. (27.4:1-3)

### *Repeat the words regularly; allow no long gaps*

Jesus also wants us to distribute these practice periods regularly: "Five or six times an hour, at reasonably regular intervals, remind yourself [of today's idea]" (91.11:1). He says, "Try to distribute them fairly evenly" (36.2:2), "at regular and predetermined intervals" (74.7:1). This way, you do not "allow any long periods of time to slip by without remembering today's idea" (43.9:2). The wonderful result is that the truth is never more than a few minutes away from any point in your day.

### *Set a schedule ahead of time and then adhere to it as closely as you can*

Several times Jesus instructs us to set a schedule for when we will practice, either for our frequent repetitions (Lessons 27, 40, 74), or for our longer practice periods (Lessons 65, 70). This has two steps: first, set the schedule in advance, and second, adhere to your own decision "as closely as possible" (65.4:2; 70.6:3). For example, "It is recommended that you set a definite time interval for using the idea when you wake or shortly afterwards, and attempt to adhere to it throughout the day" (27.3:4).

The reason for this schedule is really the same as the reason for any schedule. A schedule is there to make sure that when you decide to do something, you actually do it. It is meant to guarantee that decisions made ahead of time will take precedence over where the winds of the moment are blowing you. And isn't that what we want to happen with our decision to find God—that it take precedence over where the winds of the moment would blow us? Therefore, isn't setting a schedule for our practice a completely natural and desirable thing to do?

### *Silently repeat the words to anyone you meet*

Several lessons ask us to silently repeat the idea for the day "to anyone you meet" (37.6:2), "to everyone you meet" (78.10:3; 95.15:2). They ask us to repeat it "to strangers" as well as "to those you think are closer to you" (43.7:5), even "to the ones you think of or remember from the past" (78.10:3). If we really carried that out, imagine how many times we would be repeating the lesson. And imagine how differently our encounters with those people would go. The power of the words might even transform our bland routine encounters into unforgettable holy encounters.

### *Repeat the words immediately in response to even the mildest disturbance of your peace*

One of the central practices of the Course is what it calls "response to temptation," in which we repeat the idea as a way of dispelling our upsets. As part of this practice, we are supposed to be constantly vigilant for even the slightest disturbance of our peace. These disturbances include the obvious kinds of upsets, such as when "anyone seems to cause an adverse reaction in you" (37.6:3). But they also cover more subtle upsets that normally slip by unnoticed. For instance, Jesus wants you to repeat the idea in response to

- "generalized adverse emotions, such as depression, anxiety or worry" (34.6:1)
- "any temptation to experience ourselves as subject to other laws [earthly laws] throughout the day" (76.12:1)
- "any specific problem that may arise" (80.6:3)
- thinking "you see some value in an aspect or an image of the world" (128.8:2)
- "dismal thoughts and meaningless laments" (131.15:1)
- letting yourself "collect some needless burdens" (133.14:2)
- believing "you see some difficult decisions facing you" (133.14:2)
- letting your mind "yield to judgment" (136.19:2)
- letting your mind "make plans against uncertainties to come" (136.19:2)

Clearly, Jesus wants you to respond to *any* kind of loss of peace, no matter how subtle. This even includes *exciting* losses of peace, as when you think "you see some value in an aspect or an image of the world." And he wants you to respond *immediately* (5 refs.), *quickly* (4 refs.), *instantly* (2 refs.). He wants this response to become a "habit" (5 refs.).



“It must become a habit of response so typical of everything you do that it becomes your first response to all temptation, and to every situation that occurs” (T-31.III.1:3). Indeed, he wants it to be so habitual, so knee-jerk, that it becomes “automatic” (95.5:3).

Really doing this seems quite daunting, for it would inevitably mean repeating the idea many, many times throughout each day. Yet it would also mean possessing a peace of mind that stayed perfectly intact in the midst of everything that drags us down now. It may, therefore, be literally the most valuable habit we ever form.

*When you cannot do more, just repeat one short sentence with your eyes open*

We saw earlier that, if possible, we should close our eyes, sit quietly, take a minute or so, and repeat the idea several times. If this were an invariable rule, it would be a terrific excuse to not repeat the idea very often, since there are so many situations during the day when we simply can’t do this. Yet Jesus purposefully designs things in such a way that this is no excuse. Note carefully how he handles this key issue in these two passages:

You need not close your eyes for the exercise periods, although you will probably find it more helpful if you do. However, you may be in a number of situations during the day when closing your eyes would not be feasible. Do not miss a practice period because of this. You can practice quite well under any circumstances, if you really want to. (40.2:1-4)

If you close your eyes, you will probably find it easier to let the related thoughts come to you in the minute or two that you should devote to considering this. Do not, however, wait for such an opportunity. No chance should be lost for reinforcing today’s idea. Remember that God’s Son looks to you for his salvation. (63.4:1-4)

Indeed, he says, you can repeat the words “even if you are engaged in conversation, or otherwise occupied at the time. You can still repeat one short sentence to yourself without disturbing anything” (27.3:5-6). Can you see what he is doing? He is leaving us without any excuses. He is leaving us with no circumstances in which we can legitimately tell ourselves that practicing is impossible.

*When you realize you have lapsed in your practice, don’t be distressed, just try again*

Of course, even when we really intend to repeat our lesson several times an hour, we often forget for long periods. How do we respond to this? The Workbook’s counsel on this is consistent, simple, and very practical. First, “do not be distressed” (20.5:2), “do not be disturbed” (27.4:5), and especially do not “regard the day as lost” (95.7:4) and give up until tomorrow. Second, just try again. “Try to keep on your schedule from then on” (27.4:5). “If you forget, try again. If there are long interruptions, try again. Whenever you remember, try again” (40.1:4-6). The simple repetition of that phrase “try again” makes an important point—that trying again is your *only* valid response to any kind of lapse or failure in your practice.

Actually, “try again” turns out to be a key value in our practice. The phrase occurs ten times in relation to our practice. Four times it’s labeled as the right response to lapsing from our schedule. Given this, I think it is safe to say that “try again” is the practice version of “choose again” or “choose once again” (phrases which occur a total of nine times). On the level of your practice, you *choose again* by *trying again*.

These last two categories make a crucial contribution to the overall picture of when to repeat the words. In the previous categories, Jesus told us to repeat them with daunting frequency, to the point where we almost *had* to be looking for a way out. Then, in these final two categories, he closes all our escape hatches. He takes away all our excuses. Even if we can’t close our eyes, even if we are engaged in conversation or otherwise occupied, we can still practice. Even if we forget for long periods and generally screw up our lesson, the answer is to just get back to our practice. No matter what the circumstances, the appropriate response is to practice.

## Conclusion

We have come a long way from the simplistic denigrating of words as “symbols of symbols” that in our great advancement we should be above. In its place, we have discovered an entire edifice in the Course around the repeating of its words. We have discovered remarkably extensive, intricate, and practical counsel on *how* and *when* to repeat its words, all of it carefully designed to serve the larger philosophical *why*—because by doing so we claim the gift within the words. In light of the sheer size of this edifice, it is impossible to somehow imagine that Jesus didn’t mean it. Indeed,

the truth lies on the other end of the spectrum. Repeating its words is quite simply the Course's primary technology for bringing us home.

So why are we all so silent on this topic? I was planning on characterizing this subject as an unexplored frontier. Yet my wife Nicola had a more apt metaphor: the elephant in the room. Think about it. Most of us have gone through the Workbook, perhaps many times. That means we have probably read virtually every word I have quoted here. Why aren't we talking about all this? Why aren't we talking about why we aren't talking about it? It's as if there is a collective unspoken agreement to just let this topic be quietly ignored. And yet what we are ignoring is right in front of our eyes and is massive—the size of an elephant.

My suggestion is that we face this topic and just admit that Jesus must know what he's doing here. This is his course. If he gave us incredibly detailed instructions for how to claim the benefit of his teaching, surely we are wise to follow them. Isn't it rather odd that we think we know better how we can learn his course? Isn't that the classic ploy of the naïve and resistant student? Maybe it's time to relax our resistance, roll up our sleeves, and get down to work. Maybe it's time to really utilize the technology that he has so carefully and masterfully provided us. Maybe it's time to actually claim the gift that his words contain for us. As he says, "Practice in earnest, and the gift is yours" (164.9:5).



E-mail your comments to the author at: [robert@circleofa.org](mailto:robert@circleofa.org)

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## CIRCLE MAILBOX

### Reader Responses to “Never Correct Your Brother’s Error?” *A BetterWay* #79

I just finished reading your article entitled “Never Correct Your Brother’s Error?”

I enjoyed it thoroughly! Your progress from point to point was clear, smooth, and convincing. The thoughts expressed were personally meaningful as well. For I too, like many other students, have from time to time “debated with myself” regarding how to apply the Course’s teaching on this important practical issue.

Your commentary on Sections 9.3 thru 9.5 in the Text has thrown additional light on this issue for me. Thank you very much.

If I were to select examples of your finest written commentaries on the Course’s teachings, this article would surely be one of them!

— Robert J. Hellmann MA

...

This article could not have been written at a better time as far as my own learning is concerned. Oh, sure, it would have been nice to understand this much earlier but maybe my receptiveness to taking this to heart was unavailable before. I have long known of T-9.III.

But you have made sense of it all; and now it all comes together for me. Making the distinction between (1) correction as *vigilance* to find error in my brother, and (2) correction as *loving help* makes all the difference and helps me to accept that *vigilance only for God and His Kingdom* is the only correction I need and that the correction of my mind will enable me to offer real healing to my brother as well.

Thank you, Greg. This is just what I need to learn today.

— Jeremy Stutsman

## RECENT WEBSITE POSTINGS

Here are some of the articles we have recently posted on our website:

**God's Blessing Shines upon Me from Within My Heart** by *Robert Perry*. [Read more.](#)

**Course Meets World Commentary** by *Greg Mackie*. This month Greg has posted commentaries relating *A Course in Miracles* to a topic "in the news": "Miracles Happen to Everybody" and "Deep Down, We Can't Fool Even Ourselves" [Read more.](#)

**Questions and Answers** by *Robert Perry* and *Greg Mackie*. Robert and Greg posted answers to two questions this month: "How does the Course view animals?" and "How would the Course look at the miracles of the historical Jesus?" [Read more.](#)

## CIRCLE NEWS

### Thank You!

We at the Circle would like to extend our profound gratitude to those who responded to our plea for help in a time of financial crisis. We have experienced an incredible outpouring of love and kindness. We've literally never seen anything like it.

The good news is that we have actually reached the short-term goal we set! We are, however, still discussing and praying about our longer-term financial challenges. We have exciting plans for a more successful future, but these will take time to implement.

So please hold us in your thoughts. And please continue to help us if you possibly can. Also, consider nurturing your own work with the Course by signing up for our [Text](#), [Workbook](#), or [Manual](#) programs, purchasing a book, or by joining the growing [Circle Course Community](#). We gain along with you from all of these purchases.

Thank you again for your generosity. It has been extremely helpful and deeply heartening.

Thank you,



Robert Perry  
Founder, Circle of Atonement