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A BETTER WAY

What on Earth Is Our Special Function?

by Robert Perry

What exactly does the term “special function” mean in *A Course in Miracles*? At first glance, the term appears to imply there is actually some special job for each of us—a specific calling, a life purpose. Yet it seems to me that most students have managed to resist that first impression, and have concluded that our

special function is just to forgive, to cleanse our own mind of resentment, or, perhaps more specifically, to forgive those hardest-to-forgive individuals in our lives.

What does the Course really teach here? Does it teach the “specific calling” or the “just forgive” perspective? For those of us who are its students, a great deal is at stake. If the former view is correct, that means there is a specific calling waiting for each of us, one designed to express the best in us, one we were born into this world to fulfill, and one that will allow us to uplift many lives. Such a thing answers a deep need in the human psyche.

As if that issue weren’t important enough by itself, the stakes are even higher. What is ultimately at stake here is the general character of the Course. Does the Course see the Holy Spirit as actually assigning us jobs in this world? Does the Course ask us to use our behavior to intentionally improve the welfare of others? Does it want us to play a particular role that actively contributes to the salvation of the world?

Or is the Course really just about my mind, about my internal peace, my private realization of oneness? Does it ask me to focus only on releasing my resentments, especially my own special pockets of resentment? Is an emphasis on some behavioral role God has assigned me and through which I help save the world, just a distraction—or worse, a grandiose fantasy generated by my craving for specialness?

Thus, between the “specific calling” and the “just forgive” perspectives lie two very different views of our lives and of *A Course in Miracles*. Much is at stake here, so the evidence needs to be sifted. This is such a crucial issue that it simply must be resolved.

The meaning of the word “function”

The key word here is “function.” Everything turns on that. Therefore, we need to begin our exploration by looking at the meaning of that word. The various dictionaries I have consulted generally provide two main definitions of function. The first is more general:

the action for which a person or thing is specially fitted or used or for which a thing exists : purpose

The second applies this general idea to human occupations:

professional or official position: occupation

a specific occupation or role: *in my function as chief editor*

When we speak about our function, then, we are referring to the action for which we are specially suited or employed, or our specific role or occupation in the world.

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WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT SAYS

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

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

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

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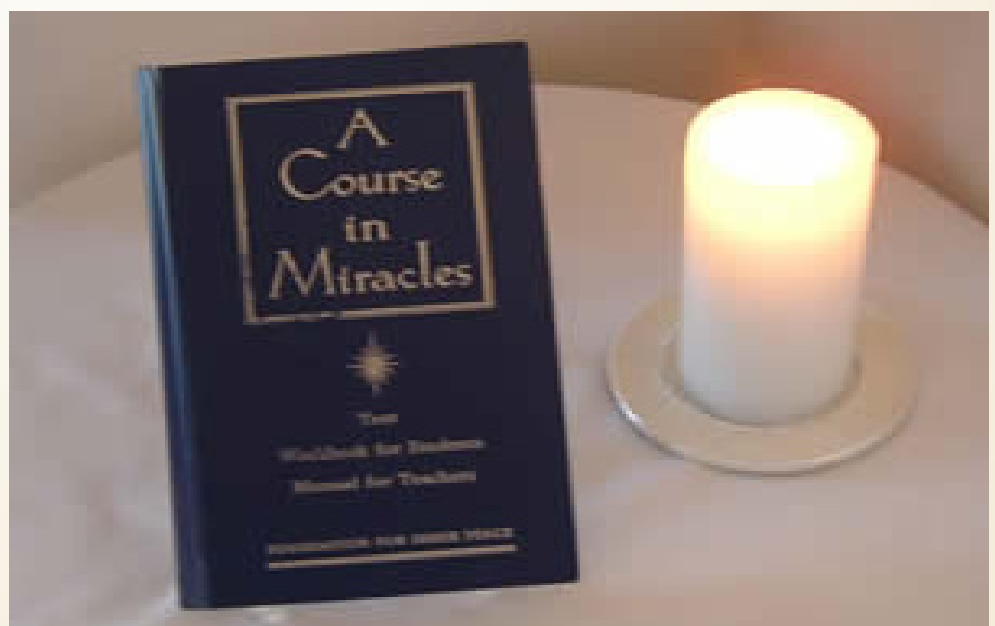
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Based on this, we can boil down the essence of “function” to the following three points. Please pay special attention here, for these three points will guide us throughout.

1. There is a *capacity* within us that enables us to do our function. Before we perform the function, we are already “specially fitted” for it, through innate ability, training, or both.
2. We express this capacity in the form of a particular *active role* (such as “chief editor”).
3. This active role then has a useful effect. It makes a *contribution* to a larger whole. The entire point of a role like “chief editor” is to have a useful effect, to make a contribution. Indeed, one of the meanings of “contribution” is “role played in achieving something.” Your *role* is your *contribution*.

To sum this up: Drawing on an internal capacity (#1) we carry out an active role (#2) through which we make an external contribution (#3). Or:

internal capacity → active role → external contribution

Examples are everywhere. For instance, a musician, through inborn ability, training, and practice, has a capacity to play music (#1). She then plays that music (#2). And people listen to it and enjoy it (#3).

Or a hammer, through design, materials, and craftsmanship, has a capacity to pound nails (#1). It is then used to pound nails (#2). As a result, things are nailed together (#3).

This may sound rather dry and obvious, but it lays the foundation for what the Course means when it speaks of our function. We will see again and again that the Course has these same three points in mind.

Our function according to the Course

As I just implied, the Course’s references to “function” follow the pattern I have just laid out. When the Course speaks of our “function,” it basically uses the normal meaning of that word, except in one significant respect: It raises the notion of function to a transcendental level:

God gave you the function to create in eternity. (T-9.III.8:4)

You who belong in God have the holy function of extending His Fatherhood. (T-8.III.3:5)

You are sad because you are not fulfilling your function as co-creator with God. (T-7.VI.13:1)

Your function is to add to God’s treasure by creating yours. (T-8.VI.6:1)

According to these quotes, then, our real function is to create in eternity, in Heaven. This is obviously a profoundly different function than, say, being a newspaper editor, or any other function in this world. It takes place outside of time and produces formless spirit, something impossible within time. However, it still follows the same basic three-step pattern I outlined above:

1. It stems from a capacity inherent in our nature, a capacity repeatedly mentioned by the Course. For instance, “He [God] gave you the power to create” (T-10.In.3:3).
2. This capacity is expressed in the role of creator, in which our mind “extends its being and creates more of itself” (T-22.VI.14:8).
3. The creations that result then increase the Kingdom. This receives great emphasis in the Course: “I have spoken often of the increase of the Kingdom by your creations” (T-7.V.9:9).

We can actually see all three of these steps, presented in this order, in the following quotation:

God...does not will to be alone. That is why He created His Son, and *gave him the power to create* [#1] with Him. Our creations are as holy as we are, and we are the Sons of God Himself, as holy as He is. Through our creations *we extend our love* [#2], and *thus increase the joy of the Holy Trinity* [#3]. (T-8.VI.8:6-9; italics mine)

This function tends to boggle the minds of Course students, and for good reason. It is beyond our current ability to understand, and it has no parallel, as far as I can see, in other spiritual teachings. Yet it is a foundational element in the Course's thought system. And, as we will see, it establishes the basic template for what becomes our special function.

Our earthly function

The heavenly function described above does have a counterpart within this world, as the Course often points out:

Do the Holy Spirit's work, for you share in His function. As your function in Heaven is creation, so your function on earth is healing. God shares His function with you in Heaven, and the Holy Spirit shares His with you on earth. (T-12.VII.4:6-8)

Our function on earth is said here (and elsewhere) to be healing. This may sound as if it's *inner* healing, the healing of our own minds, but that is clearly not what is meant. After all, our earthly function is a mirror of our heavenly function, and our heavenly function is "extending outward" (T-6.V.1:7). Therefore, our earthly function must also be extending outward. Further, our earthly function is said to be the same as the Holy Spirit's ("you share in His function"), and the Holy Spirit's function is obviously not to heal His Own Mind. His function is to heal other minds. Both routes lead us to the same conclusion: Our earthly function is *extending healing to others*. That is what it means to "do the Holy Spirit's work."

This earthly function is the one presented throughout the Course in different forms. Indeed, it is right there on the cover. *A Course in Miracles* is a course in learning how to extend miracles to our brothers.

This function follows the three-step pattern we have already seen. In fact, in speaking of our earthly function early in the Text (T-1.III.1:5-10), Jesus himself actually gave these same three steps. I will quote that passage here in its original, unedited form:

Having been restored to your original state, you naturally become part of the Atonement yourself. You now share my inability to tolerate lack of love in yourself and in everyone else, and *must* join the Great Crusade to correct it. The slogan for this Crusade is "listen, learn, and *do*." This means

Listen to my Voice
Learn to undo the error
and *Do* something to correct it.

The first two are not enough. The real members of my party are *active* workers.

The power to work miracles *belongs* to you. I will create the right opportunities for you to do them. But you must be ready and willing to do them, since you are already able to.

Doing them will bring conviction in the ability. I repeat that "You will see miracles through your hands through Mine." Conviction really comes through accomplishment.

Remember that ability is the potential. Achievement is its expression. And Atonement is the Purpose.

That last paragraph is my three steps exactly:

1. *Capacity*. The "ability [to work miracles] is the potential."
2. *Active role*. "Achievement [of miracles] is its expression." We express our ability to work miracles by actually doing them, by extending healing to our brothers.
3. *Contribution*. "And Atonement is the Purpose [of working miracles]." The purpose for working miracles is to contribute to the Atonement, to the "uniting [of] all creations with their Creator" (T-1.III.7:3).

The indications are all over the Course that when Jesus talks about our function, he is thinking in terms of this three-step model. But here is direct proof.

The rest of this passage speaks of our earthly function in fascinating detail. By accepting our function as miracle workers, we join the Great Crusade to correct lack of love in everyone. This Crusade is carried out by the Jesus party, whose slogan is "Listen, learn, and *do*." In light of this, its members understand that the foundation for their function is internal—*listening* to Jesus' voice and *learning* to undo error. Yet they also understand that this internal foundation is "not enough." On this foundation, they need to act. They need to *do*.

The members of the Jesus party are therefore “active workers.” They don’t just have “the power to work miracles.” They aren’t just “able to” do miracles. They are “ready and willing to do them” and therefore actually do them. They rely on Jesus to arrange “the right opportunities” for this, to send people their way who need healing. And as they “see miracles through [their] hands” to these people, they gain “conviction in the ability.” They become convinced that the power to work miracles actually *does* belong to them. After all, “Conviction really comes through accomplishment.”

Finally, this is how they play their role in the overall plan. They have now become “part of the Atonement,” part of the larger process of bringing all of the Sons of God home.

This, then, is how the Course characterizes our earthly function. It is only a shadow of our real function in Heaven. Rather than being based on the unlimited power to create, it is based on the far more modest power to work miracles. Rather than extending being to our perfect creations, we extend healing to hurting people. And rather than contributing to the eternal Kingdom of Heaven, we contribute to the Atonement on earth. Yet however faintly this function reflects our true function, this is what we are meant to do here. Just as hammers exist on earth to pound nails, we are here on earth to extend healing. As the Course says,

*I am the light of the world.
That is my only function.
That is why I am here. (W-pI.61.5:3-5)*

Special function

We can now finally turn to that enigmatic term “special function.” Actually, by now we have learned almost everything we need to know about it. At this point, we simply need to take what we’ve learned and add on the word “special.” The earthly function we have explored is generic; it is the same for everyone. When we add the word “special”—here meaning “specific” or “unique”—we say that our special function is our own *specific version* of the generic function we all share.

Actually, the idea of *special* function is already inherent in the word “function.” Definitions for that word include:

the action for which a person or thing is specially fitted
a specific occupation or role
a special job

Notice the words “specially,” “specific,” and “special.” Thus, the English word “function” already assumes that we all have *different* functions, *special* functions. In normal usage, this word has nothing comparable to the Course’s notion that we all share the same function. That is why the Course needs to add the word “special,” because the Course is playing both sides. It is saying that in essence we all have the *same* function of extending healing to our brothers, but that in form we each have a *special version* of this generic function.

This notion of special function as a function unique to each person is stated with utmost clarity in “The Special Function” section:

Let him no more be lonely, for the lonely ones are those who see no function in the world for them to fill; no place where they are needed, and no aim which only they can perfectly fulfill.

Such is the Holy Spirit’s kind perception of specialness; His use of what you made, to heal instead of harm. To each He gives a special function in salvation he alone can fill; a part for only him. Nor is the plan complete until he finds his special function, and fulfills the part assigned to him. (T-25.VI.3:6-4:3)

The special function, then, is not someone fulfilling a generic part in the world’s salvation, but rather his own unique part, a part that “he alone can fill; a part for only him.” Without him filling this unique part, the plan as a whole is not complete—meaning, the world as a whole is not saved. Lesson 317 makes these same two points:

I have a special place to fill; a role for me alone. Salvation [of the world] waits until I take this part as what I choose to do. (W-pII.317.1:2)

What is special about it?

If this is a special part, “a role for me alone,” what is special about it? What is unique to me?

To begin with, my special function is based on my special abilities. Early in the Course's dictation, Jesus explained that Helen's role as scribe of the Course was based on "some rather unusual talents." He also mentioned that both Helen and Bill had "special talents which are needed for the Celestial speedup at this time." He then broadened this to a general statement about the importance of "special agents" who exercise their special talents and make "individual contributions to the Sonship":

Equality does not imply homogeneity *now*. When *everyone* has *everything*, individual contributions to the Sonship will no longer be necessary. When the Atonement has been completed, *all* talents will be shared by *all* of the Sons of God....

When time is abolished, and all the Sons of God have come home, no special agents will be necessary. But do not underestimate the power of special agents now, or the great need there is for them. I do not claim to be more than that myself. No one in his right mind, (a term which should be specially noted) ever wants either more or less than that.

In Heaven, we are all exactly the same, and thus we all share the same talents. But that is not the case on earth. We may be homogeneous in Heaven, but we are not homogeneous *now*. Each of us has special talents, and these special talents are the basis for our "individual contributions to the Sonship." Through expressing our talents, we become "special agents" in the plan for salvation (which, of course, is just another way of talking about "special function"). Even though no such special agents exist in Heaven, Jesus says, "Do not underestimate the power of special agents now, or the great need there is for them. I do not claim to be more than that myself." Significantly, he adds, "No one in his right mind... ever wants more or less than" to be one of these special agents. Quite a statement.

Later on, the Course makes it explicitly clear that the design of our special function is based on our special abilities. Lesson 154 says:

It is not our part to judge our worth, nor can we know what role is best for us; what we can do within a larger plan we cannot see in its entirety. Our part is cast in Heaven, not in hell. And what we think is weakness can be strength; what we believe to be our strength is often arrogance. (W-pI.154.1:5-7)

On our own, we can't "know what role is best for us" within the "larger plan." Why? We don't have a clear vision of our strengths. What we call weaknesses may actually be our strengths. And what we call strengths may simply be our arrogance. That is why our particular role is "cast in Heaven." It's up to Central Casting, not to us, to assign us our part. Why? Because, as the next paragraph says, Central Casting possesses the very thing we lack: accurate perception of our strengths:

Whatever your appointed role may be, it was selected by the Voice for God, Whose function is to speak for you as well. Seeing your strengths exactly as they are, and equally aware of where they can be best applied, for what, to whom and when, He chooses and accepts your part for you. (W-pI.154.2:1-2)

Here we have it spelled out in the plainest of terms: Your special function is selected by the Holy Spirit based on Him "seeing your strengths exactly as they are." As a result, as Lesson 186 says, "Our minds are suited perfectly to take the part assigned to us by One Who knows us well" (W-pI.186.2:7).

Based on our strengths, the Holy Spirit identifies our particular strong suit in extending miracles. Some are meant to be "scribes" or "priestesses." These are terms Jesus applied to Helen in the early dictation, explaining the particular nature of each role:

Scribes have a particular role in the Plan of Atonement, because they have the ability to *experience* revelations themselves, and also to put into words enough of the experience to serve as a basis for miracles.

The role of the Priestess was once to experience revelations and work miracles. The purpose was to bring those not yet available for direct revelations into proper focus for them.

Yet not everyone is meant to be a scribe or priestess. Some of us have "a teaching function" (W-pI.184.9:1). Contrasting Bill and Helen, Jesus said, "I need devoted teachers as much as I need devoted priestesses." Likewise, some are called to be "healers" (S-3.III.5:1). Some are meant to be "theologians" (T-9.V.3:4). Some are assigned "the psychotherapist's function" (P-2.IV.10:7).

Of course, our special function is usually a combination of a number of roles. Jesus told Bill that he was meant to be not just an administrator and teacher of interns, but also a classroom teacher:

If Bill is under the misbelief that he is coping with the fear problem by functioning as an administrator and as a teacher of interns, but *not* as a teacher of students, he is merely deceiving himself.... Either you can function in all of the roles you have properly undertaken to fill, or you cannot function effectively in any of them. This *is* an all or none decision. (Urtext)

So here is something else that is unique about each special function: a particular vocation (or cluster of vocations) through which we express our special strengths.

Finally, based on the particular kind of healing we offer, certain people are sent to us who need that kind of healing. The Course says this in many places and in many ways:

And to each one has He allowed the grace to be a savior to the holy ones especially entrusted to his care. (T-31.VII.8:3)

If you [Bill] adhere to this role [while teaching a class on abnormal psychology]...you will inspire rather than dispirit the future teachers and therapists I am entrusting to you. (Urtext)

But whatever stage he [the therapist] is in, there are patients who need him just that way. (P-2.I. 4:5)

Certain pupils have been assigned to each of God's teachers, and they will begin to look for him as soon as he has answered the Call. (M-2.1:1)

The Holy Spirit knows your part in the redemption, and who are seeking you and where to find them. (T-13.VIII.7:3)

Healing these specific people *is* our particular part in the world's salvation. The salvation of the world is the healing of everyone. But we by ourselves do not heal everyone (except very indirectly). Our job is to heal only our tiny portion of everyone, only the ones who have been entrusted to us. These people, then, are our contribution. They are our legacy.

Remarkably, then, what is special about our special function follows the same three-step process we have seen throughout:

1. *Special capacity.* Our special function rests on our "special talents," our particular strengths.
2. *Particular role.* Based on these special strengths, we are assigned a particular form of miracle working that is our strong suit. This role is the way we can most effectively extend miracles to others, be it through teaching, healing, psychotherapy, scribing, or some other form.
3. *Unique contribution.* Certain people are sent to us, and the healing of these becomes our unique contribution to the overall effort, our special part of the larger plan.

Now that we have established the basic concept of the special function, we can see that it falls squarely into the "specific calling" model, as opposed to the "just forgive" model. It is about expressing our special abilities in the form of a particular role that will heal certain people. It is not simply about cleansing our mind of its particular pockets of resentment. The fact that it is designed around our special *abilities* rather than around our special *resentments* sends a clear message. "Ability" is defined as "the quality of being able to do something...to accomplish something." Having an ability, in other words, means being able to get something done, to make a contribution. That is the whole idea behind our special function. It is about using our special strengths to make a difference in the world.

To firm this up, let's look at three examples in which the "specific calling" model is unambiguously favored over the "just forgive" model.

The example of Jesus

Earlier, we saw that Jesus claimed that he himself was a "special agent," fulfilling a special role in the plan for salvation. In the following passage from the Clarification of Terms, he repeats this claim. Note that, as is often the case, the word "part" here is a synonym for special function:

The Holy Spirit is described throughout the course as giving us the answer to the separation and bringing the plan of the Atonement to us, establishing our particular part [special function] in it and showing us exactly what it is. He has established Jesus as the leader in carrying out His plan since he was the first to complete his own part [special function] perfectly. (C-6.2:1-2)

In this passage, it is clear that just as we are given a “part” in the plan of the Atonement, Jesus was given one, too. His part, then, is one example of a special function, in essence the same as ours. And what was his part? Was it just to forgive his particular forgiveness challenges? Clearly, he must have done that. But his part obviously went well beyond that. He taught. He healed. He went through the crucifixion to give us an “extreme example” of defenseless forgiveness (T-6.I.2:1). In his resurrection, “He offered you a final demonstration that it is impossible to kill God’s Son” (C-5.3:5).

Jesus’ special function, in other words, was very much in the mold we have identified here. It fits the “specific calling” model perfectly. It does not fit the “just forgive” model.

The example of Helen Schucman

As most Course students know, Helen Schucman had a series of important, unusual experiences between the time of her and Bill’s dedication to demonstrate “another way,” in June 1965, and the beginning of the scribing of the Course in October 1965. What is not generally recognized is that the vast majority of these experiences were focused on the theme of her special function.

Her three series of inner visions (I: ancient priestess; II: past life sequences with Bill; III: boat vision), her “magic phase,” and her Mayo Clinic experience and subsequent scroll cave vision all revolved around a single larger theme: She had fulfilled a holy role in ancient times based on highly unusual abilities. For a long time, those abilities had been either unused or misused. Now she was getting back in touch with them again, and this faced her with the question, would she use them for God? Would she resume some version of her ancient role?

This ancient role was mainly depicted as that of a priestess. In her first series of visions, Helen saw this priestess slowly emerging from chains, rising up from kneeling, and then raising her head and looking at Helen. In response, said Helen,

I was suddenly swept away by a sense of joy so intense I could hardly breathe. Aloud I asked, “Does this mean I can have my function back?” The answer, silent but perfectly clear, was, “Of course!” At that I began to dance around the room in an intense surge of happiness I had never felt before. I would not have believed it was possible to experience such happiness as that answer brought with it, and for a little while I kept repeating, “How wonderful! Oh, how wonderful!” There seemed to be no doubt that there was a part of me I did not know, but which understood exactly what all this meant. (*Absence from Felicity*, p. 98)

Of course, to “have my function back” meant to resume her ancient role as priestess in some contemporary form. And what was the priestess’s role? With Bill’s assistance, she had sat quietly in a marble temple privately communing with God, and through that had sent out healing blessings to throngs of people (*Absence from Felicity*, p. 103-104). This looks strikingly similar to the role Helen was soon to assume, in which, also with Bill’s assistance, she sat in her Manhattan apartment privately communing with Jesus, and through that ultimately sent out healing wisdom to untold thousands of people.

To state the obvious, Helen having her function back meant her scribing *A Course in Miracles*. That was what her unusual experiences in 1965 all led to. Some of them concluded with some symbolic reference to the Course, and all of them concluded with her actually starting to take down the Course. The ancient priestess had indeed gotten her function back.

In light of this, Helen’s special function completely fits the “specific calling” model we have been exploring. It was a perfect case of *special abilities* (to hear Jesus’ voice) expressing in the form of an *active role* (scribe of *A Course in Miracles*) in order to make a *unique contribution* to the world’s salvation (healing students of the Course, and through them countless others).

In contrast, her special function doesn’t fit the “just forgive” model at all. Scribing the Course was definitely not an act of her privately forgiving her biggest forgiveness challenges. So much of the irony of her story is that she did so *little* of that. Yet precisely because she did so little of that, hers is a perfect test case for deciding between these two different models. If we accept that Helen’s special function was scribe of *A Course in Miracles*, then the “just forgive” model is automatically eliminated.

The example of the special functions of holy relationships

One of the more interesting teachings about the holy relationship is that, when two people join in a common purpose, they will be given a special function that they carry out together, a *joint* special function. Here are a few of the many passages that speak of this:

Yet it [your holy relationship] is very useful to the Holy Spirit, Who *has* a special function here. It will become the happy dream through which He can spread joy to thousands on thousands. (T-18.V.5:4-5)

You have been called, together with your brother, to the most holy function this world contains. It is the only one that has no limits, and reaches out to every broken fragment of the Sonship with healing and uniting comfort....The holy light that brought you and him together must extend, as you accepted it. (T-18.I.13:1-2, 6)

And you [the two of you] will carry its message of love and safety and freedom to everyone who draws nigh unto your temple, where healing waits for him. (T-19.IV.1:7)

Such is the function of a holy relationship; to receive together and give as you received. (T-22.IV.7:4)

There is even a passage that uses the phrase “its special function,” meaning *the relationship’s* special function (I have put that phrase in italics below):

The ark of peace is entered two by two, yet the beginning of another world goes with them. Each holy relationship must enter here, to learn *its special function* in the Holy Spirit’s plan, now that it shares His purpose. And as this purpose is fulfilled, a new world rises in which sin can enter not. (T-20.IV.6:5-7)

If we put these passages together (and there are a great many more like them), we get something like this: The two holy relationship partners need to enter “the ark of peace,” which I understand to be the holy instant. In that place of safety and quiet, their relationship learns “its special function.” For the holy light that brought them together cannot stay confined to them. It “must extend” beyond them. They have received together, and now they must give together. And so their relationship “reaches out to every broken fragment of the Sonship.” It carries its message of love “to everyone who draws nigh unto” their temple. It eventually spreads joy to “thousands on thousands.” In the end, just like a twosome from the biblical ark, this relationship has truly become “the beginning of another world.” From it, “a new world rises.”

I honestly don’t know how to make sense of all this within the “just forgive” perspective. We might be tempted to say that the relationship’s special function is for the two people to forgive each other. And that is definitely *part* of its function (see T-22.VI.9), but that clearly does not explain the above passages, for in them the two people are obviously jointly reaching out to others. They are reaching “out to every broken fragment of the Sonship” (T-18.I.13:2). They are “walking the world with their Redeemer, and carrying His message...to everyone who needs a miracle” (T-22.IV.6:5). They are “two voices raised together [that] call to the hearts of everyone” (T-20.V.2:3). Having received together, they now give together (T-22.IV.7:4).

Maybe, however, there is still a way to explain these passages within the “just forgive” perspective. Perhaps these two partners happen to hold major resentments against the exact same people, and their special function is to jointly forgive those particular people. But is that how these passages sound? Don’t they clearly sound like two people serving as a joint channel of healing to others, “to everyone who needs a miracle”?

These passages sound, in fact, exactly like what happened with Helen and Bill. By bringing the Course into the world, they served as just such a joint channel of healing. Indeed, the resemblance between these passages and Helen and Bill’s relationship is no coincidence, for these passages were essentially *about* their relationship. When Jesus said, “Through your holy relationship...thousands will rise to Heaven with you” (T-18.V.3:1), he meant *their* holy relationship. So there is no mystery about what the holy relationship’s joint special function looks like. It looks like Helen and Bill collaborating on bringing *A Course in Miracles* into the world, where it could “spread joy to thousands on thousands” (T-18.V.5:5).

What about those passages that say forgiveness is our function?

I think part of the reason students adopt the “just forgive” model is that there are a number of places where the

Course openly says forgiveness is our function:

Forgiveness is the only function meaningful in time. (T-25.VI.5:3)

Forgiveness is the only function here. (T-26.VII.8:5)

Forgiveness is my function as the light of the world. (W-pI.62.Heading)

Your function here on earth is only to forgive him. (W-pI.192.10:6)

What about these passages? Don't they clearly support the "just forgive" model? Actually, they don't. Whereas we tend to see forgiveness as a way to free our own minds from the poison of resentment, the Course tends to characterize it as a way in which we free *others* from the burden of *guilt*. This heals them and in turn saves us by convincing us of our innate holiness. To say that forgiveness is our function, then, gets us right back to saying that *healing others* is our function, for forgiveness is how we heal them.

Also, although the Course says that forgiveness is our *function*, it never says that forgiveness is our *special* function. Healing others through forgiveness is our *generic* function. Our special function is the special role each of us plays in healing those sent to us through forgiveness.

We can see this exact message in the following passage from "The Special Function":

Here, where the laws of God do not prevail in perfect form, can he yet do *one* perfect thing and make *one* perfect choice. And by this act of special faithfulness to one perceived as other than himself, he learns the gift was given to himself, and so they must be one. Forgiveness is the only function meaningful in time. It is the means the Holy Spirit uses to translate specialness from sin into salvation. Forgiveness is for all. But when it rests on all it is complete, and every function of this world completed with it. Then is time no more. Yet while in time, there is still much to do. And each must do what is allotted him, for on his part [special function] does all the plan depend. He *has* a special part [special function] in time for so he chose, and choosing it, he made it for himself. (T-25.VI.5:1-10)

Note the sentence "Forgiveness is the only function meaningful in time." When combined with "Forgiveness is for all," it can easily make us think we are supposed to forgive absolutely everyone. But *forgiving* people here is subtly equated with *saving* them. We are told that when forgiveness "rests on all...is time no more," and we know that time ends only when complete *salvation* rests on all. And when that happens, the function of forgiveness has been rendered obsolete. Forgiveness, earthly functions, and time itself are all complete.

Until that day, our job is to do our "special part." Rather than focusing our saving forgiveness on all, we focus it on the specific ones sent to us. It becomes the one perfect thing we can do for them, the one perfect gift we can give to them, through which we ourselves receive. We clearly keep quite busy in this. We are told, "While in time, there is much to do," and *this* is what we do. We do the work of giving others our saving forgiveness. And thus our specialness has been translated "from sin to salvation." Our specialness used to be our special status gained by outdoing our brothers. Now it is our "special faithfulness" to the healing of our particular flock.

In this paragraph, then, we see a seamless integration of *forgiveness* as our function and the *special* function. The "specific calling" model, then, can fully account for the passages that say "forgiveness is our function." Yet the "just forgive" model cannot account for all those passages that frame our special function as more active, more behavioral, and more geared to making a contribution beyond ourselves.

Conclusion

Throughout, we have seen the repetition of the same simple structure. Let's briefly review those repetitions in table form:

Meaning of the English word “function”	Our true function of creating in Heaven	Our earthly function of healing (reflection of our true function)	Our special function (our special version of the earthly function)
1. <i>Capacity</i> : a talent or ability that makes us “specially fitted” to perform a certain role	1. <i>Capacity</i> : the “power to create” (ten references) eternal, formless spirit	1. <i>Capacity</i> : “the power to work miracles” (T-1. III.1:7)	1. <i>Capacity</i> : our special abilities, talents, strengths
2. <i>Active role</i> : a particular role through which we express our special capacity (e.g., chief editor)	2. “ <i>Active</i> ” <i>role</i> : the role of creator, in which we extend our being and bring into existence our creations	2. <i>Active role</i> : the role of miracle worker, through which we extend miracles to those in need	2. <i>Active role</i> : a particular role through which we express our special abilities (e.g., Helen’s role as scribe of the Course)
3. <i>Contribution</i> : the useful effect of our function on a larger whole	3. <i>Contribution</i> : the increase of the Kingdom due to our creations	3. <i>Contribution</i> : progress toward the world’s salvation due to our miracles	3. <i>Contribution</i> : progress toward the world’s salvation due to the fulfillment of our assigned part

We have seen support for each one of the above cells in the Course. We have even seen Jesus specifically employing this three-step model in speaking of our earthly function. But the main strength of the interpretation I have argued for is the entire above table. It all hangs together so simply and so logically that the “specific calling” model becomes very difficult to explain away.

At this point, I think the only way to argue for the “just forgive” model would be to say that the Course simply can’t mean what it says when it speaks of us expressing our special strengths in the form of a particular role by which we actively extend miracles to the particular people sent to us. We could claim that those notions just go too much against the grain of the Course as a whole. But do they? Could it be that those notions only go against the grain of *our formulation* of the Course? Could it be that we are using a faulty formulation to explain away actual teachings in the Course?

I have taken care to arrive at a definite interpretation of our special function because, as I said at the start, this topic has such massive ramifications for our lives and for the Course. And the conclusion I have reached does indeed carry massive ramifications. Let’s look at those.

It means there really is a particular role waiting for us, one that has been fashioned from a God’s-eye view of the very best in us. It means we really are here on earth to fulfill that particular role, a role that could eventually occupy us full time. It means we need “no more be lonely,” for we *have* a place where we are needed; we *have* an aim which only we can perfectly fulfill (to echo the words of “The Special Function”—T-25.VI.3:6). It means certain people are waiting for us, waiting for the miracles we have been assigned to give them. It means we have a contribution to make to the healing of the world that only we can make, and on which the completion of the entire plan is waiting.

And it means the Course is not just about our private realization of oneness. It is also about the Holy Spirit using our special talents to reach out to particular people who need exactly what we have to offer. It is not just about *receiving* miracles. It is about becoming a miracle *worker*. As Jesus said, “The real members of my party are *active* workers.”

I realize my conclusion probably raises more questions than it answers. It leaves us with so many concerns: “What is my special function? How do I find it? How do I make myself fit for it? Should I quit my day job? Should I charge money? Can I handle the pressure of being responsible for the salvation of ‘thousands on thousands’?”

In the next issue of *A Better Way*, therefore, I will approach this same topic from a more down-to-earth perspective. I will draw on my experience with my own special function and with helping others find and move into theirs. Based on that, I will try to answer the questions I have posed above, as well as any questions you might send in about this fascinating but puzzling topic.



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CIRCLE MAILBOX

I have just read your recent article about “The Holy Relationship” [*A Better Way* #81] and found it quite enlightening. Although you do not state this, am I correct in understanding that a special relationship can become a holy relationship if forgiveness is its foundation? Also, with regards to finding a holy relationship: you suggest that it is unhelpful to worry about this, and that with the right attitude it will occur on its own, so to speak, presumably with the help of the Holy Spirit. But, what I wonder is this—how essential is it that the other person in the holy relationship be a follower of *A Course in Miracles*? What if one knows nobody else who is following the Course? How likely is it that one will meet someone and develop a holy relationship then, in your opinion?

— Marnie McGrath

Marnie,

Thanks for your compliments on my holy relationships article. Regarding your questions: Yes, a special relationship can become a holy relationship—that’s exactly what happened with Helen and Bill. I don’t think it’s at all necessary for the other person to be a Course student. Holy relationships are a universal phenomenon; they have been happening long before there ever was a Course. Finally, it’s not a question of “how likely” you are to meet a holy relationship partner; it’s not a matter of playing the odds. As I said in the article, holy relationships are arranged by the Holy Spirit. If He wants two people to meet, He will make sure they meet.

— Greg

RECENT WEBSITE POSTINGS

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

“What It Says” from the Preface of *A Course in Miracles* by Robert Perry. [Read more.](#)

How To Deal with Payment in a Spiritual Ministry by Robert Perry. [Read more.](#)

Should We Dispense with Beliefs? by Robert Perry. [Read more.](#)

Course Meets World Commentary by Greg Mackie. This month Greg has posted the following commentary relating *A Course in Miracles* to a topic “in the news”: “How Can the Course Help Us Cope with the Current Financial Crisis?” [Read more.](#)