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## A BETTER WAY

## Brother, Can You Spare a Miracle? Overcoming Hard Times with the "Law of Love"

by Greg Mackie

The big thing on everyone's mind today is the economy. It is almost universally acknowledged that we are in the biggest economic downturn since the Great Depression. Everywhere I turn, I hear of people affected by it. A friend told me that at her church, congregants are offering \$10-per-hour odd jobs to fellow congregants who are out of work. My cousin, a department manager at a large corporation, just had her entire department laid off, the work outsourced to Puerto Rico. And the economic slump has affected the Circle in a big way. We too have had to cut back; everyone is affected. Our circumstances have required my own work hours to be cut drastically, so I will need to find work elsewhere in a tough job market to make ends meet.

What do we do in the face of such hard times? I've been thinking a lot about this, and my sense is that while there are many things we can do on a form level, there are two basic directions our minds could go. One, we could contract into ourselves; we could succumb to the fear of scarcity and become self-centered hoarders, determined to protect the little we have against those other self-centered hoarders who would take our meager provisions away from us. Or two, we could expand outward; we could open to the limitless abundance of God's Love and become generous extenders, giving selflessly to our brothers in need. We could retreat into our little separate enclaves, or we could join together in community.

The second option looks much more attractive, of course, but when we contemplate actually doing it, we immediately encounter a major rub: If I do it, what will happen to *me*? Won't giving to others when I have so little leave me empty handed? These are reasonable questions. But what if giving to others doesn't actually leave us empty handed? What if it is our hoarding that leaves us empty handed, while giving to others actually ensures that our hands will always be filled?

*A Course in Miracles* claims that this is in fact the case: Our lives are not really governed by the law of scarcity but by what the Course calls the "law of love": "What I give my brother is my gift to me" (W-pII.344.Heading). Could it be that living the law of love, giving to others even when it seems more prudent to cling to what little we have, is the true way to happiness and security in the midst of troubled times? That, I believe, is the Course's answer. In this article, I will explore the two options I've presented, using Lessons 344 and 345 as my touchstones, with the goal of encouraging us to overcome our hard times with the law of love.

### Our law: Saving what we desire for ourselves alone

Before we look at the law of love, we need to take an unflinchingly honest look at the law we usually live by. The prayer for Lesson 344 begins by describing what it calls "my own" law: "I have not understood what giving means, and thought to save what I desired for myself alone" (1:2). Regardless of how "spiritual" we may be, this is the law we actually follow in our daily lives, is it not? We think giving means *losing*, so we are naturally reluctant to do so. We know it is a good thing to give and we enjoy it to a certain extent, but we keep our giving restricted within very narrow bounds. We shouldn't give too much, lest we end up with nothing.

To have what we need, we tell ourselves, we must save what we desire for ourselves alone. We must look out for number one. We gather to ourselves money and possessions. We also covet intangible things like "innocence," specialness, and "self-respect," all of which we work to obtain at the expense of others. We hope that if we can just collect enough treasure

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## THE CIRCLE'S FINANCIAL POLICY

As stated in the *Psychotherapy* pamphlet: "One rule should always be observed: No one should be turned away because he cannot pay" (P-3.III.6:1). If there are any of our materials or services that you want but cannot afford, please let us know, and give whatever you can.

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You can have a profound effect on our ability to extend Jesus' vision of peace, love and understanding into the world and in assisting the implementation of the Circle's Financial Policy.

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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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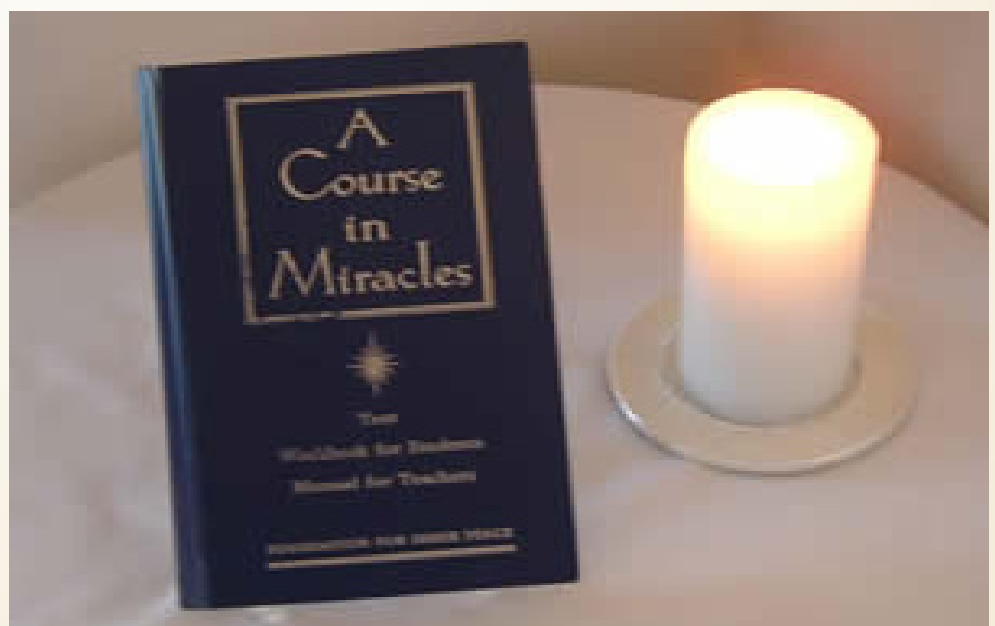
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for ourselves and keep the thieves out of our treasure house, we will be safe and happy.

But what actually happens when we retire behind our castle walls to enjoy our loot? Lesson 344 tells us:

*And as I looked upon the treasure that I thought I had, I found an empty place where nothing ever was or is or will be. (1:3)*

When we look for our loot, we find *nothing*. Oh, we may have lots of material things. But these things are empty of *content*—they are meaningless illusions. As the Text puts it, we “mistook for gold the shining of a pebble, and...stored a heap of snow that shone like silver” (T-28.II.7:2). If we are honest with ourselves, isn’t this what our hard-won goodies really feel like? We all know the tales of rich misers who have every material thing but whose lives are empty and meaningless. Our looking out for number one has robbed us of the only things that are real and worth having: love, forgiveness, generosity, connection, community. We are more like Ebenezer Scrooge (pre-ghostly visitations) than we’d like to admit.

Our selfish tendencies are usually intensified during times of economic crisis, when all of a sudden it seems that our very survival is on the line. We adopt an attitude that says, “I can’t help others now; God helps those who help themselves.” We contract inward, and metaphorically or literally start stuffing the money in the mattress. I know this has certainly been a temptation of mine as I’ve contemplated life without the paycheck that I’ve been depending on for years. It’s just so easy to retreat into a mindset of fear and avarice, keeping others at arm’s length and protecting my dwindling hoard from the barbarian hordes.

The Course is talking mainly about mental content when it speaks of selfishness leading to an empty treasure house. Yet interestingly, I just read an article which claims that the same basic principle works on the material level as well. It says that as the economy declines, people stop making purchases they would ordinarily make, which sends the economy down even further, which causes them to make even fewer purchases...and so on. It is a vicious circle in which the very thing people do to protect themselves against the bad economy makes the economy worse. Desperately clinging to what we have causes us all to lose in the long run.

Of course, neither I nor this article is suggesting that we shouldn’t save and economize during difficult economic times. What I’m pointing to here is the danger of retreating into a self-centered *mindset*, that mindset of “myself alone.” If it is true that saving what we desire for ourselves alone leaves us with nothing—and my life experience certainly corroborates this—then we need a better way if we want to find the way to peace and plenty during these difficult times.

### **The law of love: Giving what we desire to our brothers**

Instead of following “my own” law of looking out for number one, the Course offers us the “law of love”: “What I give my brother is my gift to me.” Giving to others doesn’t mean losing, it means *gaining*. It is the way we *keep* what we have.

The first thing that strikes me about this is that it is described as a *law*. Think about that. This idea is not just a lovely sentiment—it is a universal law, like gravity. Actually, it is greater than gravity, since in the Course’s view gravity isn’t truly a law at all, being part of the illusion. How would our attitude toward giving to others be transformed if we really believed “What I give my brother is my gift to me” were a greater law than gravity?

Lesson 344 presents the alternative to saving what we desire for ourselves alone:

*Yet he whom I forgive will give me gifts beyond the worth of anything on earth. Let my forgiven brothers fill my store with Heaven’s treasures, which alone are real. Thus is the law of love fulfilled. And thus Your Son arises and returns to You. (1:6-9)*

Extending forgiveness to our brothers is what fills our storehouse truly. When we forgive, the “toys and trinkets of the world” (W-pII.258.1:3) are replaced with “Heaven’s treasures, which alone are real.” Never was so little exchanged for so much.

The fact that forgiveness is the key to accessing those treasures clues us in to the most painful consequence of the self-centered life: *guilt*. When we spend our lives attempting to selfishly gain at other people’s expense, what could we feel deep down but guilty? We may tell ourselves that we have no choice but to take from others; after all, it’s a dog-eat-dog world out there and only the strong survive, especially in such tough times. But underneath our rationalizations for our self-centered ways, the voice of conscience is whispering to us: I am a greedy parasite, sucking the lifeblood from others.

Forgiving our brothers, seeing them as holy Sons of God instead of plunderers and rivals for our peace (W-pI.195.3:1), undoes our guilt. Why? Because when we generously lift our brothers' burden of guilt through forgiving them, we demonstrate to ourselves that we are not really the greedy parasites we thought we were. How could we be, when such love and generosity has come forth from us? Through forgiving, we see indisputable evidence of our own innocence—we feel forgiven. “Thus is the law of love fulfilled”: The forgiveness we give to our brothers is our gift to ourselves. “And thus Your Son arises and returns to You” (1:9): Seeing our brothers as innocent Sons of God enables us to see the innocent Son of God in ourselves. Everyone is saved. As the Course puts it elsewhere: “Forgive and be forgiven. As you give you will receive. There is no plan but this for the salvation of the Son of God” (W-pI.122.6:3-5).

Forgiveness is more than just forgiving a particular grievance, though of course it includes that. It is really the reversal of our whole selfish mindset. As we see the innocent Son of God in our brothers *and* ourselves, we realize that we are one. We no longer see our brothers as competitors, but rather as indispensable allies. We no longer see their gain as our loss and vice versa, but rather that we both gain and lose together. We have learned the law of love. We now have every reason in the world to express our love for our brothers through kind words, helpful acts, and even material provisions when needed. We now realize that it is in our own best interests to be extravagant givers. Of course, the form of our giving needs to be guided by the Holy Spirit; we don't want to burn ourselves out with unguided giving, as the Urtext says Edgar Cayce did. But with the Holy Spirit directing us, we are transformed from the miserly Scrooge to the redeemed, joyfully generous Scrooge at the end of Dickens's famous tale.

The priceless gift we receive from forgiving our brothers is our own forgiveness. But what of our material needs? Will these be provided as a result of our giving too? The answer suggested by Lesson 345 (and also by the first two paragraphs of Lesson 187) is yes. Lesson 345 applies the law of love to the specific case of giving miracles: “I offer only miracles today, for I would have them be returned to me.” How, exactly, are they returned to me? The lesson's prayer gives us the answer: “The miracles I give are given back in just the form I need to help me with the problems I perceive” (W-pII.345.1:4).

This is a fascinating line, and one I think we can all connect with. Many of us can think of times where we helped another person in some way, and later on we experienced some amazing event that gave us just the help we needed in a situation we were facing. It tends to happen to me in relation to teaching; I'll teach a Course class or help a Course student, and then some problem I'm facing is resolved in an unexpected way. And certainly one form the return of the miracle can take is material provision. After all, as the *Psychotherapy* supplement says about the psychotherapist (who is ideally a person who extends miracles), “Even an advanced therapist has some earthly needs while he is here....And while he stays [on earth] he will be given what he needs to stay” (P-3.III.1:3, 10).

Applying all of this to the economic crisis, I can envision an entirely different picture from the selfish one of everyone saving what they desire for themselves alone. In this new picture, we realize that “the law of love is universal” (W-pI.345.1:2), and therefore giving to our brothers is the way to receive what we need. We realize that we and our brothers gain or lose together. Therefore, we express our love and forgiveness of them by extending miracles as the Holy Spirit directs. These miracles take many forms, including ordinary acts of kindness and helpfulness, even providing material goods to our many brothers in need.

As we do this, we realize that we are not the petty scavengers we thought we were, but holy beings who bring blessings to all we encounter. We experience ourselves as forgiven. And we see our miracles return to us, just as the law of love dictates, in exactly the form that takes care of our own needs, including our material needs. As we learn that gifts to others are gifts to ourselves, even an economic crisis can become a happy time of sharing and helping and loving, a time when people come together in community and discover the treasures that really matter.

Indeed, this community spirit apparently arose, at least to some extent, during the Great Depression of the 1930s. My mother, P.L. Morningstar, recently wrote the following in her blog ([www.riverofmyst.com](http://www.riverofmyst.com)). In college she interviewed senior citizens who lived through that time, and what she found surprised her:

Almost without exception, their remembrances were positive...it was a time of shared hardships—everyone helping everyone else, creating a real sense of community. There was no longer any distinction between those who had and those who had not. Everything was homemade and having fun didn't have to cost much. There were church socials, taffy pulls, community picnics, evenings spent playing cards or games like Monopoly or listening to the radio (George Burns and Gracie Allen was popular), and there were occasional outings to a movie theater to see *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone With the Wind*. As I listened to their stories, it was evident by the smiles and wistful tone in their voices that despite the hard economic times my interviewees had experienced, they nonetheless remembered it as a good time.

As I've faced my own financial shortfall, I have had the good fortune to experience glimpses of this community spirit myself. For instance, I am making monthly payments to my mechanic for an expensive car repair that she very generously let me pay off in installments. But this month, I could not afford my usual amount, so I called my mechanic, told her that I was taking a significant cut in my work hours, and asked if I could pay a smaller amount this month. She said she really appreciated that I called her to let her know of my predicament, and she gladly let me pay the smaller amount. She talked of how so many people she knew were losing their jobs, and how her own business was suffering. We agreed that we're all in this together. My mechanic could have chosen to be self-centered and demand her regular payment, especially since her business was down, but instead she saw my call as a gift and gave me a gift in return. The potentially painful experience of calling to say I couldn't pay the full amount on a bill turned out to be a joyful experience. We were both blessed.

So, perhaps the ideal of giving what we desire to our brothers is not just a utopian fantasy. Perhaps we can really do this, and the new Great Depression (if that is what this turns out to be) won't be so depressing after all.

## What should we do to get through these hard times?

How do we apply these ideas in a practical way to weather the storm that so many prognosticators say awaits us (if it is not already here)? As Course students, I think we do so by using a formula that the Course repeats again and again: *receive, give, and recognize*.

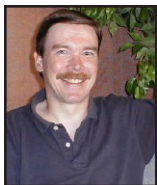
First, we need to *receive* the gifts of God. We do this through our daily study and practice of the Course. The Workbook places special emphasis on the morning practice time as a time of receiving God's gifts before we begin our day. When we repeat the idea for the day, do our meditation, or whatever other practice the Course asks us to do as the day begins, we fill our minds with the gifts of God, so we will be ready for a day of giving them to others through miracles.

That is the next step: Throughout the day we need to *give* the gifts we have received to others. We fulfill our function as miracle workers. The content of all our gifts is forgiveness, but the form and the particular people to whom we offer the gifts are meant to be guided by the Holy Spirit. So, we ask the Holy Spirit to guide us to those who need miracles from us. And we let Him tell us the form those miracles should take: a silent extension of love, a smile, a kind word, help with a problem, time and attention, and yes, sometimes even material gifts to those who need them.

Finally, through this giving, we fully *recognize* the priceless gifts we received from God. Above all, because of the law of love, our extension of forgiveness to others gives us the gift of recognizing that *we* are forgiven. And just as the forgiveness we extend to our brothers takes many forms, so does the forgiveness that returns to us. The miracles we extend come back to us in some form that perfectly meets our own needs: an inner shift, an event that furthers our progress to God, kind help offered by others, and yes again, the material things we need. When we fulfill the function we are meant to fulfill on earth, "[we] will be given what [we need] to stay."

This is the ideal, of course; it is what we're shooting for. For most of us, our journey through these difficult times will be a process of muddling through as best we can as we experience unexpected changes and the inevitable ups and downs. It will likely not be easy. But I believe that to the degree we can reach this ideal, we can be beacons of light to our brothers who need us more than ever, and our experience can be truly joyful. I myself have found, to my surprise, that I am actually excited about the new directions my current financial crisis has forced me to take. There's a blessing in the apparent curse, a light in the apparent darkness. I go forward not in fear, but in the joy of new opportunities.

Let us, then, overcome these hard times by practicing the law of love. Let us rise up and take our role as miracle workers. In a time when so many people need a miracle, what else would a *course* in miracles have us do? Brother, can you spare a miracle? Yes, you can, because the more miracles you give, the more you will see your own treasure house filled with "silver miracles and golden dreams of happiness" (T-28.III.7:1). What more could you possibly want?



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

Greg has been a student of A Course in Miracles since 1991, and a teacher for the Circle of Atonement since 1999. He is a teacher and writer for the Circle, best known for his "Course Q & A's" and "Course Meets World" pieces. He sees his primary function as helping to develop a tradition of Course scholarship.

## Announcing the Circle's First Satellite: Course Oasis

Since the very beginnings of the Circle, we have planned on having satellites, teaching centers that follow our approach and extend our overall mission. We have envisioned a future in which Circle satellites can be found in major cities all over the world. We have seen this as a crucial part of establishing a global Course tradition that is focused on doing the Course as the author laid it out.

We are therefore extremely happy to announce our first satellite! This is Course Oasis in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. It is headed up by Mary Anne Buchowski, with the help of her husband James Gregory. Mary Anne, as many of you know, spent several years in Sedona working for the Circle, being trained as a teacher, being mentored by Robert, and teaching both our Workbook classes and a number of personal pupils.

Mary Anne is deeply steeped in our model and we have full confidence in her fidelity to the Course. A primary reason why there have been no Circle satellites before now is that so much is required of the person leading one. That person needs to have an in-depth understanding of the Course, be immersed in and committed to the Circle's model, be diligent in walking the path on a personal level, dedicate his or her life to being a teacher, have sound personal integrity, and have a close relationship with the Circle. Mary Anne meets all of these qualifications.

Mary Anne has been associated with the Circle from its very beginnings. She and Robert met in Ottawa in 1989. She came here to help us put on our grand opening in 1993. Throughout the 90s, she visited Sedona regularly to strengthen her connection (on one of those visits in 1996 she met James, who also happened to be from Ottawa!). She moved here to be our administrator in 1999. Then, after returning to Canada in 2004, she founded Course Oasis with James in 2005. Course Oasis currently offers classes, retreats, and personal mentoring and counseling, along with selling the Circle's books in Canada.

Please check out their website ([www.courseoasis.org](http://www.courseoasis.org)). Maybe even drop Mary Anne a note of congratulations ([info@courseoasis.org](mailto:info@courseoasis.org)). And join with us in celebrating a milestone in our goal of establishing a truly global Course tradition.



**Mary Anne and James in the Course Oasis classroom in Ottawa.**

## CIRCLE MAILBOX

### Circle Mailbox

Your latest article, *It's For Real: Finding and Fulfilling Your Special Function*, steps elegantly from what ACIM says in *What on Earth Is Our Special Function* in last month's issue to what happens in real life. In my thirty years of following ACIM, what you talk about directly parallels my experience. It also reflects my guidance along the way. I really feel your view of the holy relationship combined with our function puts us squarely on how the Course works with us in this world while avoiding the pitfall of just intellectualizing that this journey is over and "I need do nothing." It makes us part of Jesus's Great Crusade where we "listen, learn, and do" instead of just believing that knowing what ACIM says is enough. Our function is forgiveness in action using the steps we can handle until it expands to include all of us. It's not that the journey is not over. It's when and how we wake up to knowing that.

— Harry McDonald

...

I read with interest your articles dealing with our special function. It is a topic that used to intrigue me and still does, as I have wondered about my own vocation or calling. Since I started ACIM a couple of years ago my life has changed in many ways and I am re-examining my special function at this stage of my life. I thought I had it well thought out, but now that I have had to leave my previous position and what I had thought was my calling, I am searching again.

I took early retirement at 56 from a University Faculty position and after considerable training worked as a spiritual director at a retreat center, directing individuals on silent retreats of various lengths. I also took up ongoing spiritual direction and have directed many people over the years. Initially, I did not have a good sense of what my "calling" was. On one retreat I was directing a young man who was trying to discover his calling. He brought in a booklet that he wanted to work through with me. The booklet was *Discovering Your Personal Vocation – The Search for Meaning through the Spiritual Exercises* by Herbert Alphonso, S.J. Often the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius are used to make an important decision but this was a novel use. I obtained a copy of the book and worked my way through it, discovering what I felt was my calling or function.

As the author explained, when you discover your function you find that you have been doing it all along, even to some degree as a child or teenager. My two careers were very different, but did they have a common thread? I discovered that indeed they did. As a professor I was a good teacher and researcher, but what I enjoyed most was the advising and counseling I did with undergraduates, one on one. I was responsible for more students than any other faculty member at the University. As a teenager I had thought that I wanted to be a psychiatrist, but for various reasons did not follow through. My calling thus appeared to be working with people one on one in various modes. Even though the context (professor versus spiritual director) changed very markedly I was still doing basically the same thing. The latter position was far more satisfying in that I had a real sense of being led by the Spirit of God on many occasions. Very significant healing took place in many people's lives. Thus I felt confirmed in my calling.

As you mentioned in your second article, I also discovered that one's special function is not necessarily one's profession or the means of making a living. Often one's special calling is expressed outside of one's job or profession; a case in point might be an assembly line worker who becomes involved in community activities through which he/she expresses his/her special function.

From my many years of working on retreats with clergy from many denominations, I sensed that this issue seems to be especially important. Many get discouraged, frustrated, or burned out in their positions. One person I directed had been in pastoral ministry, had burned out, and had gone to work in a factory. Over a number of retreats we worked on what his giftedness was and what his vocation might be in relation to that. Having discovered his true calling, he started back part-time in ministry, keeping in mind to follow his specific calling.

He eventually ended up in full-time ministry again, but much happier as he continued to minister out of his unique function. In another case a person who had been very frustrated in his ministry discovered his special gifts and went to the bishop to negotiate a change in his ministry. Many have told me that they felt called by God to ministry, and I tell them "I don't think so." If God has called you He has called you to something more specific than that. There is no way that one person has all the gifts necessary to fulfill all the many tasks that might be demanded. To discover and function

out of one's special function can make a world of difference in one's ministry.

I agree with you that each of us has a unique set of gifts, talents, and temperament and that God has a special function for us in relation to those. The more closely we honor that function and work from our unique calling the more fulfilled we feel in our job, our life, or our position, in whatever way we can give expression to our special function.

— Gerry Hofstra

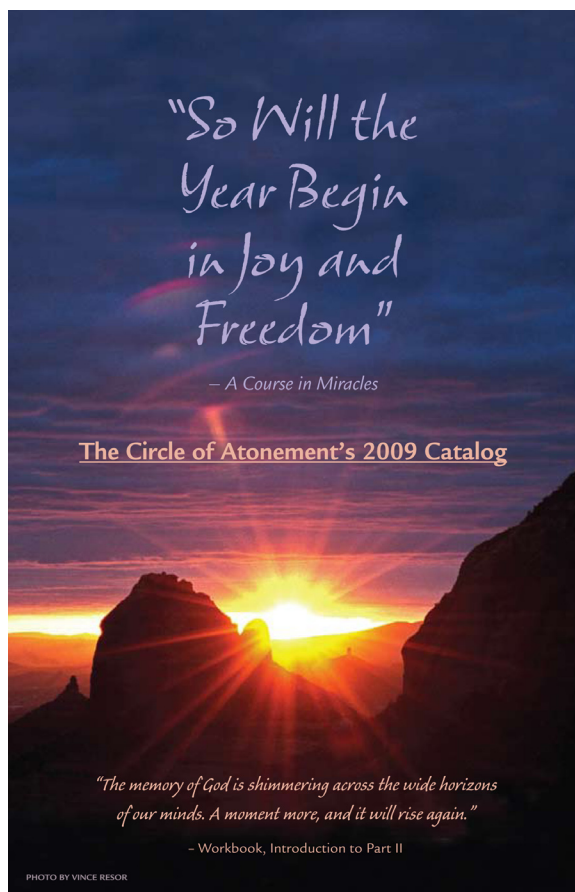
## RECENT WEBSITE POSTINGS

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

**“I Gladly Make the ‘Sacrifice’ of Fear”** by *Robert Perry*. [Read more.](#)

**Questions and Answers** by *Robert Perry* and *Greg Mackie*. Greg posted answers to the following question this month: “Should we regard hurtful and deceitful acts as good because good can come out of them?” [Read more.](#)

## OUR 2009 CATALOG



## FEATURED PROGRAMS FROM OUR 2009 CATALOG



**Sale! 1/3 off discount if you sign up  
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programs:**

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on the same path, then consider joining our online  
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