

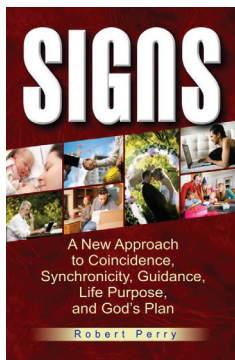


CONTENTS

Is Reading Signs Compatible with *A Course in Miracles*?*by Robert Perry* 1

Circle Mailbox 6

Circle News 9



Based on his latest book *Signs: A New Approach to Coincidence, Synchronicity, Guidance, Life Purpose, and God's Plan*

A BETTER WAY

Is Reading Signs Compatible with *A Course in Miracles*?

by Robert Perry

My first non-*Course in Miracles* book has just come out. It is called *Signs: A New Approach to Coincidence, Synchronicity, Guidance, Life Purpose, and God's Plan*. Its subject matter is such that it will immediately raise in the minds of Course students the question of how this relates to the Course. So I thought I would take the opportunity to address that question in this article.

The book is about a phenomenon I have been studying for the last thirty years. This phenomenon is a kind of extreme form of synchronicity or meaningful coincidence. Typically, there are no real rules for something we consider to be a coincidence or synchronicity—it's whatever feels coincidental. But the phenomenon I am writing about has definite rules. It requires two (or more) events that occur within hours of each other. Even though they seemingly come together by chance, they somehow share a long list of common features, which I call "parallels." These parallels come together to tell a coherent story, and this story is intended as commentary on a situation in our lives.

I informally call these occurrences "signs" (my own special usage of the term) or more formally CMPEs (*Conjunctions of Meaningfully Parallel Events*). The rules that define them end up weeding out about ninety-nine percent of what we call synchronicity. Yet that remaining one percent is pure gold. These CMPEs provide the most wise, insightful, specific, consistent, and prescient guidance I have personally come across. They really do appear to be guidance from the Holy

Spirit. For this reason, they are a huge focus for me personally and a great deal of what we have drawn upon to guide the Circle over these many years.

Of course, guidance from the Holy Spirit is also a major emphasis in the Course, and this overlap is what raises the question of how CMPEs relate to *A Course in Miracles*. What also raises that question is that these "signs" are not inner guidance, which is what the Course speaks of. Rather, they are external events. The question, therefore, is: Are we willing, in a Course context, to see the Holy Spirit as intelligently arranging external events in order to give us His guidance? Are "signs" or CMPEs in harmony with *A Course in Miracles*?

On the face of it, CMPEs and the Course actually have a great deal in common. Both appear to be guidance from beyond the human. In both cases, this guidance is wise and pragmatic, and displays an incredibly sophisticated interweaving of themes. And both appear to communicate a strikingly similar philosophy. In the book, I express the core message of CMPEs in this way: "To go toward others with love and helpfulness, overlooking all that would normally hold us back." You could condense that into one word: *forgive*. Thus, the core message of CMPEs and that of the Course seem to be remarkably similar. Indeed, in my life, the Course and the signs have been twin forces leading me in one and the same direction.

In addition to these more general similarities, however, there is a highly specific point of contact between the Course and CMPEs, and it is to this specific connection that I will devote the bulk of the article.

Continued on page 3

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- ◆ 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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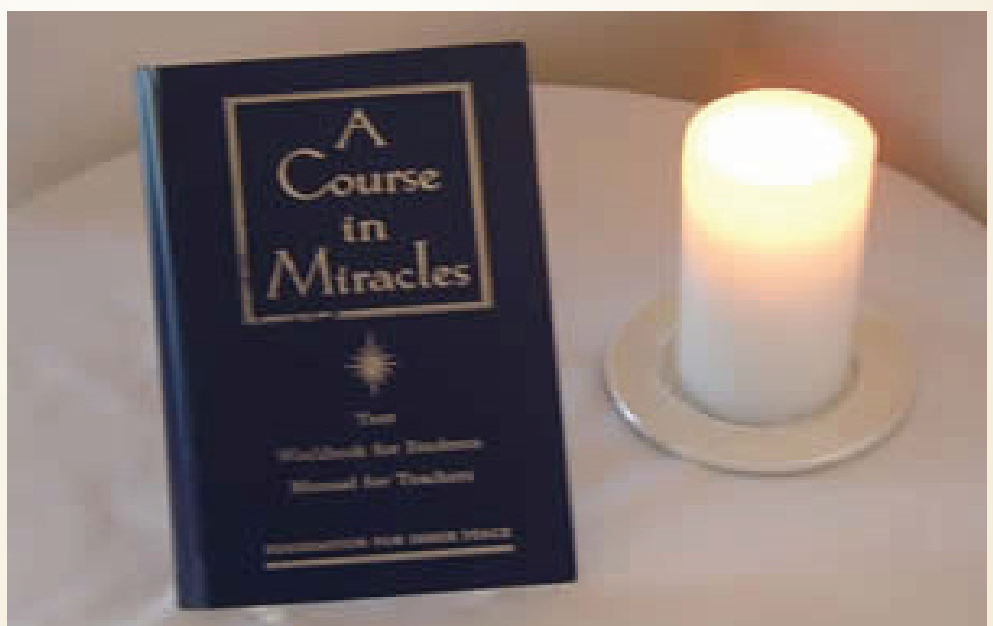
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Helen and Bill's Mayo Clinic experience

Because this phenomenon has such detailed characteristics and is also comparatively rare, I have had great difficulty finding examples of it in the literature on synchronicity. One of the very few unambiguous examples that I have found is not in books on synchronicity, but in the story of *A Course in Miracles*. I am referring to Helen and Bill's Mayo Clinic experience, which was not only pivotal in the developments that led to the scribing of the Course, but was also a classic CMPE. Most importantly, Jesus himself provided the interpretation.

In September of 1965, a month before the Course started coming through, Helen was in the midst of her "magic phase." In June, she and Bill had joined in trying to demonstrate "another way," and this joining had sparked a series of inner visions. Eventually, it also sparked a number of psychic experiences. Her newfound psychic abilities made her very anxious, yet also caused feelings of pride and self-inflation. Without her realizing it, she faced a crucial decision about what she would use them for, which really amounted to a decision about whether she would fulfill her life purpose, since that purpose was using those very abilities to scribe *A Course in Miracles*.

At this time, she and Bill were sent by their hospital for a brief research visit to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. The night before they left, Helen saw in her mind a clear and detailed picture of a Lutheran church. Seeing a chance to dramatically confirm her psychic powers, she told Bill she was certain they would see this church the next day as they landed in Rochester. Yet they didn't, and so to "restore my injured self-esteem" (*Absence from Felicity*, by Ken Wapnick, p. 120), Helen compelled Bill to take a cab with her, after which they drove past twenty-four of the city's twenty-seven or so churches—without success. The next day, however, when they were at the airport waiting to return home, Bill found a guidebook with a picture of the very church Helen had "seen." A chill went over Helen as she read that the church no longer existed, that it had in fact been razed in order to build the Mayo Clinic!

The crucial part of the story, however, is yet to come. Helen continues:

On the way home we had to change planes, and waited a good hour in a cold, almost empty airport. Huddled against a wall was a solitary young woman. I could feel waves and waves of misery going through her. I pointed her out to Bill, who was against my talking to her. We were both exhausted, it was very late, and he was not up to getting involved with strangers at that point. Besides, I might just be imagining her distress. She did not give any outward signs of anything but sleepiness. I could not, however, escape the feelings of pain I was receiving from her. Finally, I told Bill I could not help myself, and went to talk to her. (*Absence from Felicity*, p. 122)

It turns out Helen was right. The young woman, whose name was Charlotte, was terrified of flying, and so Helen and Bill (who required some coercion from Helen) offered to sit on either side of her on the plane, while Helen held her hand. Yet Charlotte's misery went beyond her fear of flying. She had just left her family. She said she was leaving her father and stepmother, but confessed later she had actually been leaving her husband and three children. With three hundred dollars, she was heading off to New York City to make a new life. She had not arranged a place to stay, but according to Helen she was not worried about that.

She was a Lutheran, and she was sure all she had to do was find a Lutheran church in New York and they would take care of her there. Bill and I exchanged glances. The message was not hard to grasp. "And this," I seemed to hear, "is my true church...helping another; not the edifice you saw before." (*Journey Without Distance*, p. 50)

The version of Helen's autobiography that Ken Wapnick quotes is slightly different. It concludes, "'And this,' said the Voice, 'is really my church'" (*Absence from Felicity*, p. 122).

As it turned out, Helen and Bill became Charlotte's support system during her ten days in New York City. They found her a hotel room, then found her a Lutheran church to stay at, and Helen and her husband Louis hosted her frequently for dinner. And when she had to return home in a hurry, Helen arranged for her luggage to be sent on after her. After that, she and Helen kept in touch for years. Helen not only proved a great benefit to Charlotte, but Helen received from her an incalculable gift:

I have an idea that I might never have found that scroll without her help. It might well be that magic had to end in the plain fact of Charlotte before I could make the final decision to abandon magic in exchange for something much more desirable. (*Absence from Felicity*, p. 124)

Helen’s comment “I might never have found that scroll” is a reference to her scroll cave vision. This is the vision (shortly after the Mayo Clinic visit) in which she chose to use her psychic abilities not for magic, but only for God. And in this choice she accepted her function as scribe of the Course.

A genuine sign

This story obviously contains a great deal of striking synchronicity. There is so much there it is hard to know what to make of it all. However, based on my experience with CMPEs, I recognized years ago that this was indeed one of them. From every angle, this is an instance of the exact phenomenon I have been working with. It fits the classic pattern, as I will now try to explain.

To begin with, a CMPE requires two or more independent events that are strikingly similar and occur within hours of each other. The two events in this case are really the two journeys—of Helen and Charlotte. These journeys didn’t just occur close together in time, they actually collided. When Helen struck up a conversation with Charlotte in the airport, their two journeys met and intertwined.

Let’s look first at Helen’s journey. Helen went to Rochester on business, but her secret goal was to confirm her inner picture of the Lutheran church, which would prove her psychic abilities to be real. Yet she was in for a surprise, for even though she found her church, she discovered that it no longer existed, thus making her inner picture of it totally useless in any practical sense. In light of this, it is hard to escape the impression that there was something misguided about her search for the church in the first place. Why search for something that does not exist? One senses that the driving force behind her search was really her desire to inflate her ego.

Yet the story also includes a very different use of her psychic abilities, one that did have practical utility and was not about puffing up her ego. This was her experience of feeling “waves and waves of misery going through” Charlotte, something she felt in the absence of “any outward signs.” This was clearly a psychic sense, one that was not only validated—Charlotte *was* in misery—but had extreme practical value. It led to Helen being of immense help to a complete stranger who happened to be at a crucial juncture in her life. It also led to Helen finding the right use of her psychic abilities, which in turn enabled her to fulfill her life purpose. In summary, at the heart of Helen’s journey are two contrasting uses of her psychic abilities.

Charlotte’s journey was about to take her to New York City, where she hoped to first find a Lutheran church and then make a new life for herself. But in her case, too, there was something misguided about her quest. She was running away from a bad marriage that included three children. She was so ashamed of this that she couldn’t tell Helen at first, and didn’t actually reveal this until after she had left. In trying to find her right life, she faced a crucial choice of either running away from her current life or facing and resolving it. With Helen and Bill’s help and kindness, she did the latter. She returned to her family, where she eventually left her husband, but reported to Helen she was peaceful and happy. As Helen put it, “She seems to have gotten herself fairly well straightened out now” (*Absence from Felicity*, p. 124).

As you can probably see, these two journeys, which just happened to bump into each other, had a surprising amount in common. And that is exactly what we need for a CMPE. We need the two events to share a number of parallel features. Let’s look at the parallels between Helen’s journey and Charlotte’s. I recommend first reading straight down the parallels in the left column, and then going back and reading the specific shape those parallels took in Helen’s and Charlotte’s respective journeys.

Parallel	Helen’s journey	Charlotte’s journey
A woman is on a journey which has taken or is taking her to a distant city.	Rochester, Minnesota	New York City
She hoped or is hoping to find a Lutheran church there.		
In her mind, this is crucial to the success of her journey	It would validate her psychic powers.	It would give her a place to stay.
This goal, however, is misguided.	The church no longer existed, so searching for it was pointless.	Her stay there represented running away from her family, which resulted in that stay being aborted fairly quickly.

It represents the wrong choice in a larger process in which she is involved.	Searching for the church represented using her psychic abilities to inflate her ego, which was the wrong choice on the issue of how she would use those abilities.	Searching for the church represented the wrong choice on the issue of whether she would run away from her current life (especially her marriage) or face and resolve it.
This process is really one of finding her right place in life.	Deciding how she would use her psychic gifts was really a decision about whether she would fulfill her life purpose of scribing the Course.	Deciding what she would do with her marriage was really a decision about finding her right life.
The right choice in this process is contained not in her goal of finding the church, but in an unexpected giving/receiving encounter with another woman.	Sensing Charlotte's misery, which allowed Helen to reach out to her, represented the right use of Helen's psychic abilities—using them to heal instead of impress. Learning this led to Helen (in her scroll cave vision) deciding to use those abilities only for God, which led to her scribing of the Course.	Helen's kindness toward Charlotte seems to have helped Charlotte return to her family and resolve her marriage, perhaps through modeling the right way to be, perhaps through giving her the strength to face her life—we don't really know. But it definitely seems to have helped.

This is actually a very typical list of parallels. I have processed hundreds of these things, and this list fits right in with the rest. There are seven parallels (my average is eight). Some are remarkably specific (“She hoped or is hoping to find a Lutheran church there”). And together they tell a clear story. This really is a classic sign (in my sense of the word).

What is this CMPE about? It is most likely about *both* Helen and Charlotte—what I call a “dual subject situation”—but let’s focus on Helen’s side of it.

CMPEs communicate their message by *framing* a situation in a certain way. You can usually see this framing very clearly in the parallels. In the case of this CMPE, all you need do is read down the list of parallels and apply that list to Helen’s situation, and you have the CMPE’s meaning (at least on Helen’s side). Here is how I would boil that meaning down:

Helen’s quest to confirm her psychic powers by finding the Lutheran church was misguided. It represented the wrong choice on the crucial issue of how she would use her psychic abilities, an issue on which depended her finding her purpose in life. The right choice in this was contained not in her trying to find the church, but in the unexpected use of her psychic abilities to help a stranger in need.

As you can see, all I’ve done is apply the parallels to Helen’s situation. That’s it. Indeed, once you come up with a solid list of parallels, the end result is usually obvious. It really is a rule-based process, one in which different interpreters should independently arrive at basically the same result (if they are doing it right). Greg Mackie and I test this out occasionally and routinely come up with interpretations that are in essence the same.

What is really interesting about *this* CMPE, however, is that the other interpreter is Jesus! The interpretation Helen heard was clearly that of her inner voice, which claimed to be Jesus (a claim I obviously accept). Even though in the version quoted in *Journey Without Distance* she said “I seemed to hear,” in the version quoted by Ken Wapnick, she made it explicit: “said the Voice.” So here we have the author of the Course playing the role of interpreter of a CMPE.

At the very least, this means the author of the Course thinks that coincidental events like Helen experienced can carry a message for us. This is unmistakable from the way Helen tells the story. First, Charlotte told Helen and Bill that she needed to “find a Lutheran church in New York,” just as Helen had needed to find a Lutheran church in Rochester. Helen and Bill both noted this incredible coincidence, as we can tell from her remark “Bill and I exchanged glances.” This is immediately followed by “The message was not hard to grasp,” which clearly implies that this coincidence *had* a message. And then Helen reports what “the Voice” said this message was. So here we have Jesus acknowledging that a certain coincidence had a message and then telling Helen what that message was. He is a sign interpreter!

As an aside, I have to remark on how similar this is to my experience of signs. Quite often, you are in the middle

of an event that is saturated with emotional significance, just as Helen's quest for the church was. Then another event comes along, which may carry its own emotional significance (as Charlotte's journey did for her). And as this second event collides with the first, the striking similarity between them jumps out at you. I can't tell you how often Nicola and I have exchanged glances for the very reason that Helen and Bill did. At first, what you notice is the most obvious specific parallel, not the more general ones that surround it, and this is exactly what happened with Helen and Bill in their noticing of the Lutheran church parallel. Finally, once you notice it, you have an immediate feeling that this *means* something, and often even a sense of *what* it means. This, of course, is exactly what Helen and Bill experienced as well. Thus, it is not just the structure of their CMPE that is so similar to mine, as we saw earlier; it is also the *experience* of it.

Getting back to Jesus' interpretation, what I find truly amazing is that it is essentially the same as the one dictated by my rules. One version of his interpretation is shorter: "And this is really my church." The other version is longer: "And this is my true church...helping another; not the edifice you saw before." Both, however, are obviously driving home the same point. They clearly imply that searching for that Lutheran church was misguided, and that what Helen *should* have been seeking (the "true church") was contained in the act of helping Charlotte.

If you look carefully at that last sentence, you can see that it also captures the essence of *my* interpretation. Indeed, you can lay it right on top of mine. True, mine is longer and more detailed, focusing on Helen's use of her psychic talents (which is not directly mentioned in Jesus'). And Jesus' is more powerful and poetic, with his contrast between the true church and the false church (which is absent from mine). But their essence is identical.

Of course, I could have simply manipulated my interpretation to agree with his. Yet, as I said, my interpretation comes straight out of the parallels. And I think that my account of the parallels is fair and accurate. I think Helen's and Charlotte's journeys *do* intersect in the very ways I list. And if they do, then my interpretation has been a product of my rules rather than my preconceptions.

What we have, then, is Helen and Bill experiencing a genuine CMPE, one that fits my model perfectly, and one that played a crucial role in the story of the Course. As we saw above, Helen said that without this experience with Charlotte, she might never have been able "to abandon magic in exchange for something much more desirable"—the "more desirable" here being her role as scribe of the Course. She is saying, in other words, that without this sign, *A Course in Miracles* might never have come into existence!

Further, once the CMPE happened, the author of the Course stepped in and interpreted its message. He thus acknowledged that this coincidental event actually *had* a message for Helen. And moreover, he interpreted that message in keeping with the very rules I have observed at work in my own CMPEs.

I cannot help but see this as a ringing endorsement by the Course of the phenomenon of CMPEs. If we might owe the Course's very existence to a CMPE, then clearly the two must be fully compatible. And if the author of the Course himself saw a CMPE as conveying a message and then interpreted that message himself, then surely we can engage in that same process and feel his blessing.

Moreover, I believe that CMPEs have priceless treasures to offer to the student of *A Course in Miracles*. Look at the treasures this one offered to Helen Schucman and Bill Thetford. Before their very eyes, they saw the apparently random events of their business trip shaped into a kind of orchestrated presentation, one which conveyed a vital message. How could they not see this as concrete proof that a larger hand was tangibly at work in their lives, shaping events in order to impart its wisdom? Further, the wisdom imparted was crucial. It was *the* message Helen needed to hear at that particular juncture in her life. How could she not see this as help from above in her moment of need? Physical evidence of a higher hand at work in our lives, crucial wisdom for moving our journey in the right direction—who of us could not benefit from these blessings?



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

Robert Perry. He is the author or co-author of twenty books and booklets, including *Path of Light: Stepping into Peace with 'A Course in Miracles'*.

CIRCLE MAILBOX

The following feedback is from a discussion of in our Circle Course Community of the lead article in January's *A Better Way*, "For This You Yearn": The Goal of Holiness in *A Course in Miracles*."

Thank you for your beautiful, inspiring article, Robert, and for inviting me to consider these questions:

How do you feel about the goal of holiness? Can you embrace this at least as the goal set forth in the Course?
Further, to what extent can you embrace it as your own personal goal?

I've actually been thinking a lot about this lately, but more in terms of seeing my brother's holiness than in understanding holiness as my personal goal. I think, though, that they must be very close to being the same thing. And I suppose I would have to already have reached some awareness of my own inherently holy nature to even want to see holiness in my brother.

As I read your article, I took some notes about the ways you say holiness is central to the Course: that forgiveness is the transition from seeing a brother as sinful to seeing him as holy. And I realized I had more of a problem with the word "sinful" than I did with the word "holy." So I replaced it with a definition (in keeping with the Course's teachings, to the best of my understanding) that feels more meaningful to me: Forgiveness is the transition from seeing a brother as limited by his humanness, and doomed to suffer because of it, to seeing him holy.

So in light of being able to take literally my calling as a miracle worker, this is my whole motivation. I'm learning how to see my brother—one specific brother, to begin with—as not limited or defined by his humanness, because in truth, he isn't. And in learning how to do that, how to see the truth of this one brother, I learn how to heal his suffering, how to free him from it.

Well, that's awesome news. I am so completely ready to embrace that goal and to give everything I've got to my efforts of training in its direction!

You write that on virtually every page of the Course is the call to let our hidden holiness rise to the surface and infuse our thinking and behavior. I don't have to become holy; I "only" have to honor the holiness that is already at the heart of my nature. What's more, something in me yearns for this, and always has.

The image of the priestess from Helen's vision is really powerful. I was so struck by two things about her holy work: her lack of judgment, and her trust in God's presence. "She prayed for everyone in the same way, and never really left God's side."

If I want to see my brother's holiness and release him from suffering, I can't go through my days and my life deciding who is deserving of that release. There can't be anyone I would not want release for. To make those kinds of judgments gets in the way, prevents the miracle. And without trust in God, I would rely on my own ability to come up with solutions, and those solutions wouldn't work, because they are based on a belief in the limits of my (and my brother's) humanness, a belief in loss and scarcity, weakness and sacrifice.

So what does this goal of holiness look like in my life right now? What's my temple, what are my prayers? How do I let go of judgment and trust God so I can heal suffering and honor my brother's holiness and recognize my own?

I think my temple is the simple, transparent life I'm living. It's the work I do with the Course to make of my mind a still and quiet and open place. It's the increasing space and attention I give to my relationship with God, going to Him to learn I'm loved and loving. My prayers, as you say, are my interactions with everyone I encounter, everyone I think of. Their form changes depending on the nature of my different relationships; but their content, more and more, is becoming consistent—a kind of brotherly love that acknowledges (or at least hopes) that if I will just be kind and stop pretending anything here makes sense, a miracle will show up and heal us all.

— Amy Speech

...

Robert, just a note to let you know something you said in a phone Workbook class a couple of years ago transformed my understanding of "holiness" and has stuck with me ever since. Like many others my idea of holiness had been tainted by childhood experiences in a fundamentalist church where holiness in my mind automatically translated to "holier-than-thou." My father would certainly sound like the holiest of men with his beautiful, virtuous prayers in front of the other

“saints,” but as soon as we were in the car on the way home he turned into a crabby taskmaster with a nasty temper. Sundays were always miserable because he brought his “holiness” home and found us, and probably himself if the truth be known, terribly deficient. (I do not mean to disparage my father; in the years before he died we saw beyond our differences and became very close.) For a long time when I stumbled across the word “holy” in the Course, it was with a sigh of frustration. That lesson you gave on that particular day, Robert (and I can’t even remember your exact words), changed holiness in my frame of reference from being synonymous with hypocrite to something much more than even just being sinless—a state of inclusion and wonderful innocence, of total acceptance, sublime happiness, and love for which we yearn in our deepest center. Now when I think of being “holy” I experience a warm rush and a yearning for that impossible-to-describe state beyond this physical world, yet deep inside. I hope my father, wherever he is, has tasted that kind of holiness.

— Sharon Edwards

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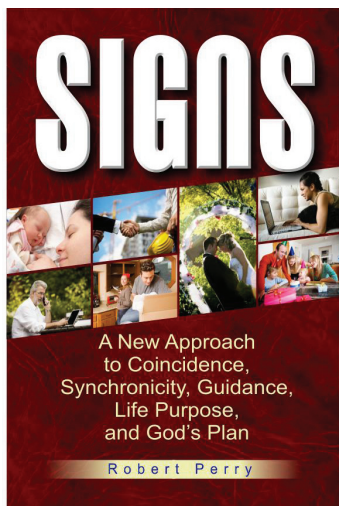
Is it possible that holiness and oneness are really the same thing?

It seems all of my errors are a result of this imaginary line I’ve drawn between myself and others.

What if we throw that line away? And just consider others to be an extension of our own selves? Would this be holiness? And wouldn’t it be also the perfect way to inform ourselves of how we treat another? Wouldn’t it be the ideal guide for making choices in the world? And after all is said and done in this very metaphysical universe we live in... isn’t it also the simple truth?

— Michael Little

CIRCLE NEWS



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Please note that this book is not available from the Circle’s bookstore.

New Book by Robert

We’re very excited to announce Robert’s Perry’s new book! *Signs: A New Approach to Coincidence, Synchronicity, Guidance, Life Purpose, and God’s Plan* (published by Semeion Press, January 2009) presents a new way of approaching coincidental or synchronistic events, events that seem to be telling us something. It explains how to separate out more ordinary synchronicities from what Robert calls “signs” or CMPEs (Conjunctions of Meaningfully Parallel Events), a kind of super-synchronicity. These occurrences are so intelligently organized as to go far beyond chance and convey a remarkable depth of wisdom and insight for our lives. Filled with dozens of real-life examples, the book is both a how-to guide for working with this phenomenon and an exploration of the phenomenon itself, including what it implies about the nature of reality and the existence of God.

"Allows us for the first time to get a firm grasp on the concept of synchronicity."
Bruce Greyson, M.D.

"We don't have to leave this world to experience a sense of being divinely cared for. All we need do is learn to listen. This book is teaching us how."
From the Foreword by Barbara Harris Whitfield

Read more testimonials [here](#).

