



CONTENTS

“This Course Is a Guide to Behavior” Part II: The Joy of Releasing the Miracle Drive by Robert Perry	1
Circle Mailbox	14



A BETTER WAY

“This Course Is a Guide to Behavior”
Part II: The Joy of Releasing the Miracle Drive

by Robert Perry

Part I of this article appeared in the last issue of *A Better Way*. There, I quoted a series of passages in which the Course talks openly about the importance of behavior, and then I sketched a brief picture of how behavior fits into the process of salvation as the Course portrays it. While researching for that article, though, as I compiled more and more quotes, I slowly realized that there was a whole thought system around behavior. As this thought system came increasingly into view, I found it utterly fascinating, and actually far more interesting and useful than just a straight case that “behavior matters.” So I decided to write a second part to the article, simply because this new vision of behavior deserved to be showcased by itself.

This is a lengthy article, in part because it gradually spirals toward the heart of the matter, slowly preparing you for a dramatically new vision of behavior. By the end, you may also have a new vision of *A Course in Miracles*.

Behavior is an expression of thought

We will begin our tour at the most basic and abstract level. Behavior is not autonomous. It does not spring out of nowhere. It is an expression of what we think, of what we believe, of how we perceive things. This is so basic that it scarcely needs to be said, but still this is our logical starting point. The Course puts it plainly: “What you do comes from what you think” (T-2.VI.2:7).

Behavior is an expression of desire. It is motivated by needs.

We cannot leave it at behavior being an expression of thought, because that would leave unexplained why the expression is there. Do we just express, without any reason, like a geyser blowing off steam? No, we express in order to satisfy a desire, to fill a need, to achieve a goal. It takes little reflection to see that this is so. We *do* in order to meet our needs. Jesus spoke openly of this in a very helpful passage from the Urtext (which was reduced to just two sentences in the FIP Course: T-1.VI.1:9-10):

After the Separation, needs became the most powerful source of motivation for human action. All behavior is essentially motivated by needs, but behavior itself is not a Divine attribute. The body is the mechanism for behavior. (Ask any behaviorist, and he’s *right*, too.)

You tell your own classes that nobody would bother even to get up and go from one place to another if he did not think he would somehow be better off. This is very true.

Believing that he *could* be “better off” is the reason why man has the mechanism for behavior at his disposal. This is why the Bible says “By their *deeds* ye shall know them.”

A man acts according to the particular hierarchy of needs he establishes for himself. His hierarchy, in turn, depends on his perception of what he *is*, i.e., what he *lacks*. (Urtext)

PUBLISHED BY

Circle of Atonement

P.O. Box 4238

West Sedona, AZ 86340

Phone: (928) 282-0790

Fax: (928) 282-0523

Toll-free (orders only): (888) 357-7520

E-mail: info@circleofa.org

Website: www.circleofa.org

Bookstore: www.circlepublishing.org

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

A Better Way is published monthly by e-mail. If you wish to subscribe, please visit our website.

CIRCLE OF ATONEMENT

is a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation dedicated to *A Course in Miracles*. It was founded in 1993. Its publishing division, Circle Publishing, was founded in 2003.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Robert Perry
Nicola Perry
Greg Mackie
André Gendron
Rick Baker

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.

THE CIRCLE'S REQUEST

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.

The Circle is supported entirely by your purchases and charitable gifts, and we ask you to look within to see if you might be led to support our vision financially with a donation (any donations are tax deductible). We encourage you to give not in payment for goods or services received, but in support of our work and outreach.

MAILING LIST POLICY

The Circle will share its mailing list on request with other *A Course in Miracles* organizations, using our discretion and being sensitive to guidance. If you do not want your name shared in this way, please let us know and we will ensure it is not.

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.

REGULAR CLASSES ♦ SEDONA, AZ

Daily Morning Workbook Class

With Ben Bartle

Weekdays, 8:30 - 9:30 am

Contact our office for information
info@circleofa.org - (928) 282-0790

REGULAR CLASSES ♦ PORTLAND, OR

Weekly Classes

With Allen Watson

In-depth study of the Workbook of

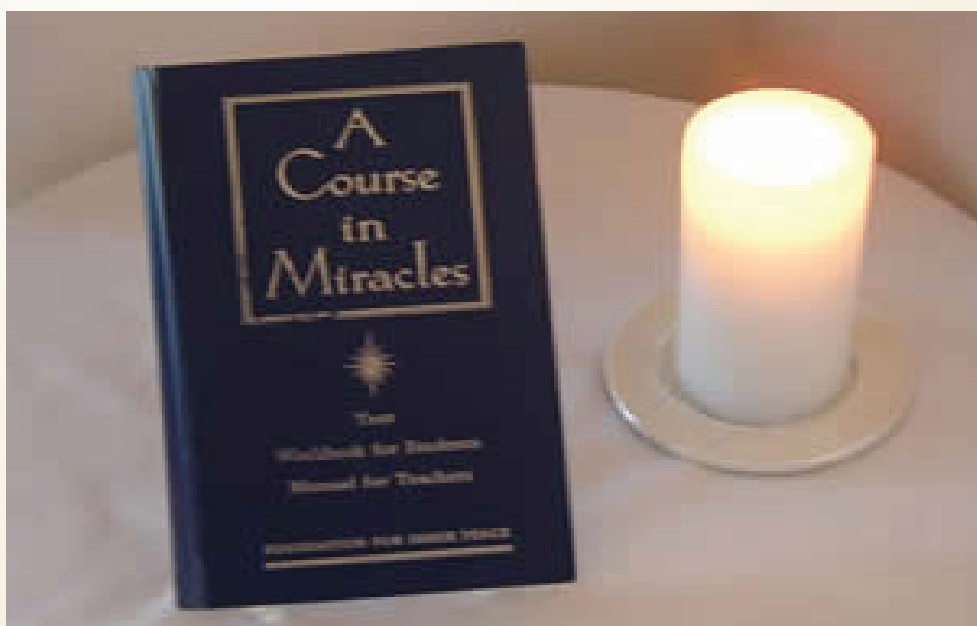
A Course in Miracles

Tuesdays, 10:30am - 12:30 pm

Thursdays, 7:00pm - 9:00pm

Contact Allen Watson

allen@circleofa.org - (503) 916-9411



The last two sentences allow us to combine both of our first two categories. We have a belief in or perception of what we are, and that perception, in turn, generates a hierarchy of needs. Thus, when we behave, we are expressing our belief system (first category) and trying to fill our needs (second category). We can easily consult our own experience to see that all this is true.

The ego's thought system leads to attacking behavior designed to get something

One of the biggest behavior words in the Course is “attack.” “Attack” occurs in the Course 742 times in different forms, and most of those times it carries a connotation of behavior. The Course even invents the special term “attack thoughts” to refer to *non*-behavioral attack. You can see the behavioral connotation of the term in these references:

The best defense, as always, is not to attack another's position. (T-3.I.2:1)

Good teachers never terrorize their students. To terrorize is to attack, and this results in rejection of what the teacher offers. (T-3.I.4:5-6)

[The ego] can only turn to other egos and try to unite with them in a feeble attempt at identification, or attack them in an equally feeble show of strength. (T-4.II.8:2)

Attack is the behavioral expression of the ego. That is what the ego does. That is how it expresses its thought system. However, as we saw above, this behavior has a goal in mind—it is designed to fill needs. We attack, therefore, in order to *get* something. The Course mentions “the ego's ‘drive to get’” (T-4.III.4:8) and tells us that all of our appetites—both physical hungers and “higher ego needs”—are just “‘getting’ mechanisms” (T-4.II.7:5). This is not exactly a surprise, once you think about it. Appetites, hungers, needs, desires—it's all about getting, isn't it? And because we feel so needy, our behavior ultimately becomes *driven*. Twice the Urtext mentions this:

Those who perceive and acknowledge that they have everything have no need for driven behavior of any kind. (Urtext version of T-1.IV.3:5)

He then becomes more and more driven in his behavior, to fill the emptiness. (Urtext)

Don't we, at least at times, feel driven in our behavior? And isn't that a testament to the emptiness we believe we must fill?

Our behavior is conflicted because we are torn between the ego's goals and the Holy Spirit's

We cannot completely go along with the ego's desire to attack in order to get. Such behavior, unchecked and undisguised, would horrify us. The fact is that we are torn between conflicting goals. We want to pursue the ego's agenda and at the same time we want to take a higher road. The result is that sometimes we express the ego and sometimes we express the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we wield a club and sometimes we lend a hand. Sometimes we take and sometimes we give.

As a result, our behavior is conflicted, as we see in this passage from the Workbook:

If I forget my goal I can be but confused, unsure of what I am, and thus conflicted in my actions. No one can serve contradicting goals and serve them well. Nor can he function without deep distress and great depression. (W-pII.257.1:1-3)

We hardly think of “conflicted actions” as a Course concept. Surprisingly, however, Jesus mentioned it a number of different times. I've put in boldface the references to conflicted behavior in the following passages:

You can choose to **do conflicting** things, either simultaneously or successively. This produces **conflicted behavior**. (T-2.VI.5:2-3)

Your mind is therefore split, and your **behavior** inevitably becomes **erratic**. (T-2.VI.5:9)

Errors of this kind produce some very **erratic behavior**, which usually point up an underlying unwillingness to co-operate [with Jesus]. (Urtext)

It is absolutely essential that you understand completely that **behavior is erratic** until a firm commitment to one or the other [light or darkness] is made. (Urtext version of T-3.II.1:4)

Your **behavior** is either strained or **unpredictable**. (Urtext)

You still search for many goals simultaneously, and this...*must* produce **chaotic behavior**. (Urtext)

Nevertheless, you are perfectly stable as God created you. In this sense, when your **behavior is unstable**, you are disagreeing with God's idea of your creation. (T-3.V.3:4-5)

Thus, when we are torn between the two sides of our mind, the result is that our behavior is conflicted (3 refs.), erratic (3), unpredictable (1), chaotic (1), and unstable (1). The simple reason is that one moment we are expressing one side of our minds and the next moment the other. We have probably never noticed this concept in the Course. Yet now that we see it there, can we not observe it as well in our behavior? Isn't it true that our actions tend to swing between expressing our spirit and our ego? Isn't our behavior in fact conflicted and even somewhat erratic? And isn't this extremely uncomfortable?

We try to fix the conflict by straining to produce the right behavior

Most of us have some awareness that our behavior chaotically alternates between expressing our baser and nobler sides. We recognize that this is a problem that needs fixing. So what do we do? We try to fix it purely on the behavioral level. We try to have consistently good behavior, which means we have to behave better than we really want to. In the Course's words, "You can behave as you think you should, but without entirely wanting to do so" (T-2.VI.5:4) or, "You can act in accordance with what you do not believe" (T-7.V.2:4). This can take the form of putting on a completely phony front, but what Jesus is mainly talking about is when we are of two minds but then express only our better mind. In other words, we feel both love and hate, but we express the love and cover up the hate.

This seems to solve everything. Our behavior now seems kind, relieving us of the guilt that would have accrued through expressing our angry side. And our behavior becomes more consistent, relieving us of the discomfort of conflicted behavior. Indeed, some of us are so good at this that our behavior may not be all that conflicted. Jesus, however, sees this "solution" as no solution at all, as we can see in the following passages:

It is pointless to believe that controlling the outcome of misthought [behaving kindly while thinking unkindly] can result in healing. (T-2.VI.3:1)

You can *behave* as you think you should, but without entirely *willing* to do so. This produces consistent behavior, but entails great strain *within* the self. (Urtext version of T-2.VI.5:4-5)

You *react* to your interpretations [of the motives of others] as if they *were* correct, and control your reactions behaviorally, *but not emotionally*. This is quite evidently a mental split, in which you have attacked the integrity of your mind, and pitted one level within it against another. (Urtext version of T-12.I.2:3-5)

All destructive thinking is dangerous. Given a death wish, a man has no choice except to *act* upon his thought, or behave *contrary to* it. He can thus choose *only* between homicide and fear. (Urtext)

Attack in any form is equally destructive. Its purpose does not change. Its sole intent is murder, and what form of murder serves to cover the massive guilt and frantic fear of punishment the murderer must feel? He may deny he is a murderer and justify his savagery with smiles as he attacks [i.e., make his attacking behavior appear to be kind and thus justified]. Yet he will suffer, and will look on his intent in nightmares where the smiles are gone, and where the purpose rises to meet his horrified awareness and pursue him still. For no one thinks of murder and escapes the guilt the thought entails. If the intent is death, what matter the form it takes? (T-23.III.1:3-9)

It is not exactly news that we try to keep our judgmental reactions from squirting out in our behavior. We have all been known from time to time to put on a more loving face than we really feel. What *is* news is that it doesn't work. Our forced love doesn't really heal the other person (first quote). It does produce consistent behavior, but at the cost of enormous inner strain (second quote). It pits our emotions against our behavior, and thus destroys the integrity of our minds, causing a split to go right down the middle of us (third quote). It makes us live in fear that we will slip up and express the destructive urge that is coursing through our veins (fourth quote). Finally, to the extent the "loving" behavior really is just a disguise over attack, it causes us tremendous guilt, just like an overt attack would, only now we have no idea where this guilt is coming from (fifth quote). The guilt certainly can't be coming from that thing we just did. After all, we were *smiling*.

This, of course, applies to all of us. We all try to keep our destructive thoughts from doing damage by behaving in ways that we don't really feel, that are not truly genuine. And we think this solves it. What if we are wrong? Go back and look at the five symptoms I just listed. Is it possible that you are suffering from every one of them?

We do need changed behavior, but must seek it through a change of mind

Let's face it, we do need changed behavior. Attacking, getting, conflicted, strained, driven behavior is not exactly a desirable option. If behavior reinforces the thoughts that give rise to it, what sort of thoughts are being reinforced by our current behavior? Jesus acknowledged this need for changed behavior. He said, "After the Separation...changed behavior had become mandatory" (Urtext). When we hear "changed behavior," we tend to immediately think of changing it in *our* way, straining to put on a better front no matter what is going on inside. Yet this, of course, is not at all what Jesus has in mind. For behavior to be genuine, it has to truly reflect what is going on inside. Thus, the changed behavior Jesus is talking about has to come from a real change on the inside. It has to come from *new* thinking and *transformed* desire.

It's as if a lamp has been unplugged and so is no longer giving forth light. Our version of changed behavior basically amounts to painting bright yellow rays on the wall behind the lamp, rays that look like they are emanating from the lamp. In our minds, an illusion of light is often good enough. What Jesus wants us to do is plug the lamp back in, so that it emanates real light. He makes this abundantly clear in the following passages:

You would not tolerate insane behavior on your part, and would hardly advance the excuse that you could not help it. Why should you tolerate insane thinking? There is a fallacy here you would do well to look at clearly.

You both believe that you *are* responsible for what you *do*, but *not* for what you *think*. The truth is that you *are* responsible for what you *think*, because it is only at this level that you *can* exercise choice. What you *do* comes from what you think. (Urtext version of T-2.VI.2:2-7)

I have said that you cannot change your mind by changing your behavior, but I have also said, and many times, that you *can* change your mind. (T-4.IV.2:1)

This change of mind entails a reevaluation of what we really want

As we saw above, behavior is the result of not only thought but also needs and desires. Thus, to have truly appropriate behavior, we have to hold a different sense of what our needs and desires are, and thus what our goals are:

In no situation which arises do you realize the outcome that would make you happy. Therefore you have no guide to appropriate action, and no way of judging the result. What you do is determined by your perception of the situation, and that perception is wrong. It is inevitable, then, that you will not serve your own best interests. Yet they are your only goal in any situation which is correctly perceived. (W-pI.24.1:1-5)

This comes from Lesson 24, "I do not perceive my own best interests." Underneath this passage is an implicit process in which to arrive at "appropriate action," you need to work backwards. Your ultimate goal should be to "serve your own best interests." Then you need to decide in a given situation what outcome would do that. You have to identify "the outcome that would make you happy." That outcome will then become your "guide to appropriate action." To turn this around, your *behavior* should be aimed at achieving the *outcome* that will make you *happy*. The problem, however, is that we don't know what will make us happy. We thus don't know the one thing that drives the whole process. What we need, then, is a deep reevaluation of the question "What do I want?" That is exactly what this passage from early in the Text says:

Everyone defends his own treasure. You do not have to tell him to do this, because *he* will do so automatically. The real question still remains *what* do you treasure, and *how much* do you treasure it?

Once you learn to consider these two points, and bring them into *all* your actions as the true criteria for behavior, I will have little difficulty in clarifying the means. (Urtext version of T-2.II.3:4-6)

Notice that this passage makes the same point as Lesson 24: The true criterion (or guide) for behavior is the question “What do I treasure? What do I want? What will serve my best interests?”

This is also the solution in “Fear and Conflict” (T-2.VI), a section I have quoted from extensively because it addresses behavior at such length. It lays out our two favorite solutions for the fact that both our baser and nobler sides want to express. The first solution is that we just let both sides express, though perhaps at different times. The second we have already seen: We produce consistent behavior by simply never allowing the baser side to express. Neither of these work, however, because at any given time, both solutions involve one of the sides in us being bottled up. That side then feels outraged over being suppressed. It then projects this outward, and as a result sees the world as *enforcing* this suppression on it. And then it fears the repressive world it now perceives.

As we can probably work out ourselves, this simply cannot be solved at the behavioral level. Between these two approaches—expressing both sides and expressing only one side—we have exhausted all the possibilities for a purely behavioral solution. Yet neither one works. The only real solution is a change on the inside. We must undo the split within us, which means throwing all of our inner weight behind the one side, the holy side. As the Course puts it, “This can be corrected only by accepting a unified goal” (T-2.VI.6:9). We need to have a single goal behind all our actions. We need to give one answer to “What do I want?” and let that single answer guide everything we do.

Can you imagine having only one goal behind all of your behavior? You would be freed from the Jekyll-and-Hyde mode of alternating between sinner and saint. Your behavior would be totally consistent, yet with no sense of strain whatsoever, for everything in you would be pulling in the same direction. Try to imagine what a state of wholeness that would be. First, you would be internally unified, with no inner division or strife. Your mind would finally be at peace with itself. Next, your behavior would be at one with your mind. Rather than putting up a false front, your behavior would be a transparent reflection of your genuinely loving thoughts. Finally, your behavior would be unified within itself. No longer would it be riddled with distressing contradictions and humiliating hypocrisy. What wholeness! Unity on the inside, unity on the outside, and unity between the two. And all because you had at last gotten in touch with what you *really* want. We find this entire picture compressed into this one sentence:

Let us therefore be determined to remember what we want today, that we may unify our thoughts and actions meaningfully, and achieve only what God would have us do today. (W-pII.257.1:4)

This changed behavior is what the Course calls miracle working

To repeat: We do need changed behavior. Yet this *must* come from a genuine inner change. Both sides are crucial. Without the genuine inner change, the changed behavior is hollow and fake—the same old game we’ve been playing already. But without changed behavior resulting from that inner change, we deprive others of the benefit of our inner change. We also deprive ourselves of deeply needed reinforcement for that inner change, since that is what behavior does—it reinforces the thoughts that produce it.

We can appreciate just how central this changed behavior is when we realize what the Course calls it: *miracle working*. It is an axiom among Course students that a miracle is a shift in perception. *A Course in Miracles* thus becomes a program in learning how to shift your perceptions. Yet surprisingly, this is not how the Course usually talks about miracles.

If you read the first chapter of the Course, where the concept of miracles is introduced and discussed at length, you can readily see what I am talking about. The very first miracle principle calls miracles “expressions of love,” not “*experiences* of love” or “*receptions* of love.” The third principle says it again: “Miracles occur naturally as expressions of love.” The fifth principle tells us that miracles “should be involuntary.” When Jesus refers back to this line in Chapter 2, he equates “miracles” with “constructive acts”: “I have said already that only constructive acts should be involuntary” (T-2.VI.1:2). The eighth principle tells us, “[Miracles] are performed by those who temporarily have more for those who temporarily have less.” The ninth principle says, “Miracles are a kind of exchange.... They bring more love both to the giver *and* the receiver.” The sixteenth principle says, “They simultaneously increase the strength of the giver and supply strength to the receiver.” The eighteenth principle says, “A miracle is a service. It is the maximal service you can render to another.” Based on these principles, miracles are something we *express* to another, *give* to another, *perform* for another.

er, *render* to another. They go from a *giver* to a *receiver*.

This giving can take place by thought alone, but the Course's language about it has a heavy connotation of behavior. We see this in all of the talk of *working* miracles, *performing* miracles, *doing* miracles, *giving* miracles. We see it in the language of "miracle worker" (14 refs.), "giver" of miracles (15 refs.), and "doer" of miracles (5 refs. in Urtext). We see it most clearly in passages like these that speak of miracles as involving action or doing (I have put in boldface the references to action):

Revelation induces only experience. Miracles, on the other hand, induce **action**. They are more useful now because of their interpersonal nature. (T-1.II.2:3-5)

Ask me which miracles you should perform. This spares you needless effort, because you will be **acting** under direct communication. (T-1.III.4:3-4)

The distinction has also been made here between "miracle-mindedness" as a *state*, and "miracle-**doing**" as its expression. (Urtext)

Miracles you are not asked to perform have not lost their value. They are still expressions of your own state of grace, but the **action aspect** of the miracle should be controlled by me because of my complete awareness of the whole plan. (T-1.III.8:3-5)

The concrete examples we have of miracles in the early dictation (as recorded in the Urtext) are also heavily behavioral:

- Jesus said that Helen's act of rewriting someone else's badly written report (which was needed to secure funding from the National Institutes of Health) was "a miracle of devotion." He used the story as an example of miracle principle 25: "Miracles are part of an interlocking chain of forgiveness."
- He called a statement made by astrologer Jean Dixon a "miracle." She had emphasized "feet on the ground and fingertips in the Heaven." Jesus said, "Many people knew exactly what she meant, so her statement was the right miracle for them."
- He repeatedly called Edgar Cayce's psychic readings "miracles." For instance, "While what he did came from Me, he could *not* be induced to ask me each time whether I wanted him to perform this *particular* miracle"—meaning, do this particular *reading*.
- He called Helen's scribal function miracle working, since what scribes write down can "serve as a basis for miracles" in others. Once, Helen was late for work because she didn't ask him when to stop taking dictation. He then said, "This is an example of the 'indiscriminant or uncontrolled' miracle-working we already spoke of." This clearly identified taking dictation as "miracle-working."

All four of these examples are behavioral, but the first two are also quite mundane. Indeed, one gets the impression in this Urtext material that miracles can take extremely ordinary forms. Helen, for instance, needed to find something out about Bill's flu shot. She then happened to have a meeting with the chairman of the flu board, who "permitted an opportunity for questioning...re Bill's flu shot," without Helen having to "jump into the question" herself. In other words, the information she needed for Bill more or less fell into her lap. Jesus then said, "This was an example of how miracles should work." At another time, Jesus told her that he had "inspired Bob" the elevator man to make a remark to Helen that would be useful to her, although she only heard the last part: "Every shut eye is not asleep." Jesus did not specifically call this a miracle, but it is very much like other things he did call miracles. In short, miracles don't need to look like the parting of the Red Sea.

In this same early dictation, Jesus talked about some very normal functions that he said should really be examples of miracle working. In two cases, he said that a particular function is an example of miracle principle #8 (miracles "are performed by those who temporarily have more for those who temporarily have less"). In two cases, he said that *all* the miracle principles given at the beginning apply to a particular function.

- *Parenting* should be miracle working. "Miracles are a blessing from parents to children. This is just another way of phrasing the previous point about 'from those who have more to those who have less'" (Urtext).
- *Psychotherapy* should be miracle working. "Therapy is *exactly* the same as all other forms of miracle-working.

It has no separate laws of its own. All of the points that were given for miracles apply to therapy because, *unless* therapy proceeds from miracle-mindedness, it *cannot* heal” (Urtext).

- *Teaching* (in this case, classroom teaching) should be miracle working. “The aim of the teacher is to give them more of what is temporarily his. This process has all of the miracle conditions we referred to at the beginning [in the miracle principles]. The teacher (or miracle worker) gives more to those who have less, bringing them closer to equality with him, at the same time gaining for himself” (Urtext).

Clearly, behavior is heavily involved in all three of these cases. The parent is blessing her children, the therapist is helping patients “in straightening out twisted perceptions,” and the teacher is giving his students “more of what is temporarily his,” not *irrespective* of behavior, but *through* behavior—as long as that behavior “proceeds from miracle-mindedness.”

The beauty of this early material is that it is so concrete, and as a result, leaves no room for misunderstanding. Yet we can find very similar snapshots of loving behavior all through the Course. Here is a group of three such snapshots:

The simplest level of teaching appears to be quite superficial. It consists of what seem to be very casual encounters; a “chance” meeting of two apparent strangers in an elevator, a child who is not looking where he is going running into an adult “by chance,” two students “happening” to walk home together. These are not chance encounters. Each of them has the potential for becoming a teaching-learning situation. Perhaps the seeming strangers in the elevator will smile to one another; perhaps the adult will not scold the child for bumping into him; perhaps the students will become friends. Even at the level of the most casual encounter, it is possible for two people to lose sight of separate interests, if only for a moment. That moment will be enough. Salvation has come. (M-3.2:1-8)

These little vignettes are not labeled “miracles,” but given that through them “salvation has come,” we can confidently surmise that they are indeed miracles. As a matter of fact, they look very much like the examples from the early dictation, to the point where, in both places, we have a meaningful encounter in an elevator!

All of this leads us to a conclusion that may well rock our entire view of the Course. If miracles are primarily something that is given by one person to another, and if this giving primarily happens through behavior, then what does that say about the title *A Course in Miracles*? It says we have been wrong in seeing it as meaning “A Course in Experiencing Shifts in Perception.” Along with that misunderstanding of the title has come a misunderstanding of the whole nature of the Course. In actuality, it is “A Course in Giving Miracles to Others (Primarily Through Behavior).” It is a course in “miracle working,” in “miracle-doing.” Yes, the internal shifts are central, but they are meant to put us in a state of miracle-mindedness that then leads to “‘miracle-doing’ as its expression.”

I want to suggest something. Please take your copy of the Course out, hold it in your hands, look at the title, and, thinking of the information you have just read, say to yourself, “A Course in Giving Miracles to Others.” How does that feel? Is it a different view of the Course than what you have been carrying?

Our miracle-working behavior is meant to be divinely guided

Over and over, we are told that our giving of miracles needs to be guided by the Holy Spirit. The reason is simple: so that our miracles can be received by those for whom they are intended. This means that which miracles we give, to whom we give them, and the form in which they are given are all supposed to be guided.

A miracle, to attain its full efficacy, must be expressed in a language that the recipient can understand without fear. (T-2.IV.5:3)

The action aspect of the miracle should be controlled by me because of my complete awareness of the whole plan....only I am in a position to know where they can be bestowed.

Miracles are selective only in the sense that they are directed towards those who can use them for themselves. Since this makes it inevitable that they will extend them to others, a strong chain of Atonement is welded. (T-1.III.8:4-9:2)

You can see why we need Jesus’ guidance. Only he knows which people are truly open to receiving miracles, and will therefore both “use them for themselves” and “extend them to others.” And only he knows the language in which those people can receive miracles “without fear.” It’s all about miracles hitting their target, about them doing actual good

in the world. In other words, it's all for the sake of *the receiver*.

Yet it's also for the sake of the giver. Jesus said that Edgar Cayce burned himself out because he wouldn't ask Jesus which readings he should do. "If he had," Jesus said, "he would not have performed any miracles that could not get thru constructively, and would thus have saved himself unnecessary strain. He burned himself out with indiscriminate miracles, and to this extent did not fulfill his own full purpose." The implication is that Cayce's burnout (which seemed to be the cause of his untimely death at age 67) was not so much a matter of the sheer number of miracles he did, but of the number of miracles that did not "get thru," that hit up against a closed receiver and thus seemed to have no effect. We might derive from this a general principle that describes where we are currently at: Miracles that "get thru" energize us; miracles that bounce off drain us.

The idea that our behavior should be guided is stated so many times in the Course that we could fill dozens of pages with quotes. Here are just a few (again, I've put in boldface references to action):

There is not a moment in which His Voice fails to direct my thoughts, guide **my actions**, and lead my feet. (W-pI.rI.60.4:3)

He is...the Spirit Which directs **my actions**. (W-pII.222.1:3)

I give You all **my acts** as well, that I may do Your Will instead of seeking goals which cannot be obtained, and wasting time in vain imaginings. (W-pII.233.1:4)

Releasing the miracle drive

This picture of behavior probably sounds almost superhumanly difficult. We are, after all, filled with drives and impulses that pull our behavior in very earthly and even base directions. These impulses cry out for satiation. And like a demanding baby, they keep crying until their needs are met. Consequently, the spiritual life can easily appear to be a case of fighting against these impulses, holding them at bay, and ultimately mastering them. We wonder, though, is this even possible? I remember a college professor of mine relating a hypothetical exchange among the desert monks of early Christianity. A young novice says to the elderly monks, "When will this burning in my loins cease?" The aged monks answer, "If we are any indication, *never*."

The spiritual life, therefore, can seem to be process of constantly saying no to urges that never die out. And then what happens? What happens to a river that is dammed up forever? And this is not the worst prospect we have to worry about. What if intense devotion on our part ends up changing our natural impulses into twisted versions of themselves, so that we now feel a kind of sexual attraction to something simply because that thing is mandated by our religion? That is a scary option. Who wants to end up like the monk who actually enjoys flagellating himself?

It seems, then, that in living up to the Course's lofty vision of miracle-working behavior, we face the possibility of either damming up our natural impulses or distorting them into something artificial and ultimately unhealthy. Neither option sounds particularly desirable.

Yet, in an astonishing turnaround, Jesus claims that this is exactly what we have already done. Our true natural impulses *are* dammed up and *have* been distorted. What we *call* our natural impulses are not natural at all, but are themselves the blockage and distortion of our *real* impulses.

This changes the entire discussion. If this is true, then what the Course is asking us to do with our behavior is natural and healthy; a desirable and attainable alternative. Let's look, therefore, at the case for this view (which is found mostly, though not entirely, in the Urtext). The first passage we will look at is from guidance given to Bill Thetford about his attendance at a conference on rehabilitation. This is the guidance that led up to the famous "truly helpful" prayer. Jesus tells Bill that he needs to go to this conference to face his recoil from those who need rehabilitation and replace that recoil with extension. The reason Bill recoils, Jesus says, is because those who need rehabilitation remind him of his own weakness and vulnerability. They remind him that with one mishap he could be in their shoes. Jesus then continues:

That is really why you recoil from the demands of the dependent, and from the sight of a broken body. Your ego is threatened, and blocks your natural impulse to help, placing you under the strain of divided will. You withdraw to allow your ego to recover, and to regain enough strength to be helpful again on a basis limited enough *not* to threaten your ego, but also too limited to give *you* joy. (Urtext)

If you look closely at this paragraph, you will notice that Bill feels torn between his *ego's* impulse to recoil and his

own “natural impulse to help.” In other words, his ego’s recoil is not really *his* impulse. The full picture is this: The sight of those who need rehabilitation reminds Bill’s ego of its own weakness and vulnerability. As a result, his “ego is threatened” and thus recoils. This withdrawal allows his ego to recover. But this is not a real solution, because Bill’s own “natural impulse” is to do just the opposite. Rather than recoil in disgust, his natural impulse is to reach forward to help. And that impulse to help is still present in Bill, asking for satisfaction. Therefore, Bill’s recoil places him “under the strain of divided will,” the very strain we discussed earlier. So now, once his ego has safely recovered, Bill tries to also satisfy his impulse to help—but while still trying to placate his ego. The result is that he doesn’t *fully* follow his natural impulse to help. He reaches out “to be helpful again on a basis limited enough *not* to threaten your ego, but also too limited to give *you* joy.”

I find this to be a remarkably accurate description of what goes on inside of us when faced with people who need help. We do feel torn between two sides of us, and we do try to negotiate a compromise between them. Yet if Jesus is right, we’ve got one thing wrong: These are not really two sides of *us*. We are negotiating between our own natural impulse to help and our *ego’s* impulse to recoil. We are compromising between the “real me” and the “not-me,” or as the Course puts it, between ourselves and the stranger passing himself off as us (see Lesson 160). And to the extent we fill *his* needs, we starve our *own*.

The impulse to recoil from certain people may feel perfectly natural, yet the Course claims it is an alien impulse, one that comes from outside our nature. Remarkably, the Course claims the very same thing about our physical impulses.

Physical impulses are misdirected miracle impulses. (T-1.VII.1:3)

Appetites are “getting” mechanisms, representing the ego’s need to confirm itself. This is as true of body appetites as it is of the so-called “higher ego needs.” Body appetites are not physical in origin. The ego regards the body as its home, and tries to satisfy itself through the body. (T-4.II.7:5-8)

These brief passages present a radical view of what we call our natural appetites. We think that such appetites come from the body and are about satisfying the body’s needs. But they really come from the ego and are really about satisfying the ego’s needs—specifically, “the ego’s need to confirm itself.” Body appetites are therefore a case of the ego using the body to convince itself (and us) that it is real. That ego confirmation is the actual need within the physical need. Thus, physical impulses are not really natural at all. In fact, as the first quote says, they are a misdirection of what is truly natural. And what is truly natural? Our “miracle impulses,” which are clearly the same thing as our “natural impulse to help.”

The two above passages are remnants in the FIP Course of a theory of mind that was originally spread throughout the early dictation. In this theory, there are two levels of the unconscious, a deeper level and a more superficial level. The deeper level contains what is variously called “miracle impulses,” “the miracle ability,” and “the miracle-drive.” This is a powerful drive to reach out to others with help (if need be) and joining.

Yet as these miracle impulses flow up toward the conscious mind, they flow through the superficial level of the unconscious. This is the storage facility for all the noxious residue of the ego, “a ‘container’ for the waste products of conflict” (Urtext). As miracle impulses flow through the toxic waste of this level, it’s as if they become polluted. They become distorted into physical impulses, and more specifically, sexual impulses. Thus, the original miracle impulse to join with another *mind* has become converted into the sexual impulse to join with another *body*. These passages from the Urtext describe this distortion of miracle impulses (“Distortions of Miracle Impulses” ultimately became the title of the last section in Chapter 1):

The deeper levels of his subconscious always contain the impulse to Miracles, but he is free to fill its superficial levels, which are closer to consciousness, with the impulses of this world [physical impulses] and to identify himself with them. This results in denying himself access to the miracle level underneath. (Urtext)

Both of you are involved with unconscious distortions (above the miracle level), which are producing a dense cover over miracle-impulses which makes it hard for them to reach consciousness. Sex and miracles are both *ways of relating*. (Urtext)

The results of this distortion follow logically. First, we do not satisfy our real drive, since we are expressing not it, but a substitute for it. Note the following sentence: “In conscious actions, then, his interpersonal relationships also become superficial, and miracle-inspired relating becomes impossible” (Urtext). The sexual impulse tells us to relate to

another's body, the most superficial aspect of the person. How, then, can our relationships *not* become superficial? And how can this superficiality satisfy our true impulse to deeply join?

Second, because the real drive has not been satisfied, the tension within us simply builds. "Tension is the result of a building-up of unexpressed miracle-impulses. This can be truly abated only by releasing the miracle-drive, which has been blocked. Converting it to sexual libido merely produces further blocking" (Urtext). As the pressure builds, we respond by expressing our sexual libido, which we think eases the tension. But since the real drive is the miracle drive, and since this remains *unexpressed*, the deeper tension is not released; it just keeps building. That deeper urge to truly join with the mind of another keeps gnawing away at us.

In short, by expressing a false version of our real drive, the real drive does not get satisfied but remains bottled up, causing a buildup of tension. As an analogy, imagine that you had an overwhelming love for a certain person, but this love scared you. So you channeled it into, say, a hobby of collecting air sickness bags (an actual hobby I just discovered on Yahoo!). Would this hobby actually satisfy your love for this person? Or would it just give a hollow illusion of satisfaction while causing an underlying buildup of unexpressed love?

According to the Course, this is basically the situation we are in. We really are like those monks I talked about earlier. We *have* repressed our truly natural impulses (the Course says the ego "denies all truly natural impulses"—T-4. VI.4:3) and we *have* twisted them into artificial and distorted versions of themselves. Having done so, we call these distorted versions "natural" and treat them as sacred. Yet the proof that they are not natural lies in the fact that no matter how much we satiate them, *we* are never satisfied. And all the while, a deeper drive goes unexpressed and so a deeper tension simply builds.

The Course's new vision of behavior

When we try to imagine how the Course would view behavior, it is easy to assume that we should just disinvest in all behavior. After all, the Course is all about a change of mind, and the physical world (including physical behavior) isn't real anyway. So shouldn't we just focus on our minds and then, on the behavioral level, simply do what's in front of us, just without investment? However logical these assumptions may seem, they are just guesses about what the Course *would* say. And we don't have to guess. We can just consult what the Course *does* say.

When we do, we find a view of behavior that is so much more profound, challenging, and ultimately uplifting than our off-the-cuff assumptions. The problem with the idea of totally disinvesting in behavior is that we behave in order to *fill needs*. As Helen told her classes, "Nobody would bother even to get up and go from one place to another if he did not think he would somehow be better off." Jesus added, "This is very true." So, if we *are* doing things with our body, if we *are* getting up and going from one place to another, we are trying to fill a need, and that means we are invested. Thus, if we managed to completely disinvest from all behavior, we *wouldn't* bother to get up. Is this a realistic option?

The Course takes what to my mind is a much more reasonable approach. Let's just admit it, it says, behavior is about filling needs. That's what it is, and that's what it will remain. The real question is: What are your real needs? What do you really want? What do you really treasure? We need to undertake a thorough reexamination of these questions. We need to come to understand that we have answered them all wrong. We have misunderstood our real will. We have identified with an alien will, which hungers for things we don't really like, things that simply do not fit our nature. Following this will thus mean forever chasing a carrot and never getting to actually eat.

The whole purpose of the Course, you could say, is to take us through this reexamination of our desires. It guides us to ask ourselves "What do I really want?" and to answer that question differently than we have in the past. As we do so, we realize that we have misunderstood our needs. We are like people who have mistaken their thirst for hunger, and so instead of drinking water, have eaten themselves into obesity. We, like them, have mistaken our real impulses for something else. Now, however, we are undoing that. We are identifying what we are really thirsty for. And this means we are finally in a position to satisfy that thirst.

This profound change of mind then *releases the miracle drive*. This phrase comes from an Urtext passage I quoted earlier: "This [tension] can be truly abated only by releasing the miracle-drive." Imagine that! Imagine that we actually have a *miracle drive*, an overpowering natural impulse to give miracles to others. Imagine that this drive is our true natural desire. This drive has been obscured by a "dense cover over miracle impulses, making it hard for them to reach your own awareness" (T-1.VII.1:1). Most of the time, therefore, we don't even suspect the miracle drive is there.

However, once we finally allow this drive to reach consciousness and recognize it as our true will, it becomes the driving force behind our behavior. Now, a broad river from the depths of our minds starts flowing into consciousness. No longer is it dammed up and allowed to reach consciousness only as a polluted stream. Now the dam is removed, so that the river flows freely into our awareness and out through our behavior, determining everything we say and do. This has several implications for our behavior.

First, it means our behavior will be filled with “the strength of God”: “Your mind and mine can unite in shining your ego away, releasing the strength of God into everything you think and do” (T-4.IV.8:3).

Second, it means that our behavior will naturally shine with an unearthly holiness: “His [Christ’s] purpose folds the body in His light, and fills it with the holiness that shines from Him. And nothing that the body says or does but makes Him manifest” (T-25.In.3:4-5).

Third, it means our behavior is controlled for us; it literally becomes *involuntary*. This point is made in different ways in the early part of the Text, especially in miracle principle #5 (“Miracles are habits, and should be involuntary”) and in “Fear and Conflict” (T-2.VI), where Jesus says that if we let him *guide* our thoughts, he will *control* our behavior: “behavior...is controlled by me automatically as soon as you place what you think under my guidance” (T-2.VI.2:8-9). This river, in other words, flows through us so powerfully that it actually controls our behavior for us. We no longer have to decide what to do. We just step back and watch our bodies do it. The giving of miracles becomes as involuntary as the beating of our hearts. This is clearly an extremely advanced state. Asking for guidance and then voluntarily doing what the guidance says is just a first step in this direction.

Fourth, it means our behavior will be:

- “Appropriate” (4 refs.): “The Golden Rule is the rule for appropriate behavior” (T-1.III.6:4).
- “Effective” (2 refs., including Urtext): “You cannot behave effectively while you function on different levels” (T-1.VI.3:2).
- “Unified” (2 refs.): “Unified need leads to unified action” (T-1.VI.2:5).
- “Efficient” (7 refs., including Urtext): “A Child of God is efficient” (Urtext).

Fifth, it means our behavior becomes a constant act of giving miracles. As an earlier quote said, we engage in “miracle-inspired relating.” What would it be like for all of your relating to others to be “miracle-inspired”? You are not doing the occasional miracle. Miracles pour off your every word, every gesture, even every glance. “And nothing that the body says or does but makes Him manifest.”

Like all behavior, this behavior is still goal oriented. We are not just doing for the sake of doing. Our doing aims at an *outcome*, one that we anticipate will meet our *needs*. Earlier, we saw Lesson 24 saying, “In no situation which arises do you realize the outcome that would make you happy. Therefore you have no guide to appropriate action.” Now this has changed. We *do* realize the outcome that will make us happy, and so we *do* have a guide to appropriate action.

What is that outcome? Remember Bill’s natural impulse when he saw those with broken bodies and dependent egos? His natural impulse was to *help*. That is the outcome his miracle drive was seeking—for those people to receive the help they need.

A passage we already quoted approaches the outcome from a different angle: “In conscious actions, then, his interpersonal relationships also become superficial, and miracle-inspired relating becomes impossible.” This sentence states the problem, but we can turn it around to give us the solution: When our “conscious actions” turn into “miracle-inspired relating,” our interpersonal relationships become the *opposite* of “superficial.” We are no longer just relating to bodies, to surfaces, and so our interactions take on real depth. We stop exchanging niceties about the weather and instead really join. This explains that statement early in the Text: “Miracles, however, are genuinely interpersonal, and result in true closeness to others” (T-1.II.1:4).

Our behavior is still geared toward achieving an outcome, it’s just a different outcome. As the Urtext says,

Sex and miracles are both *ways of relating*. The nature of any interpersonal relationship is limited or defined by what you want it *to do* which is *why* you want it in the first place. Relating is a way of achieving an outcome.

When we are relating with others, we are always trying to achieve an outcome. We are aiming for a relationship that will do what we want it to do; i.e., that will satisfy our need (as we define that need). That may sound shallow and self-ish, and it *is* when we are coming from the sex impulse. But when we are coming from the miracle impulse, it becomes holy. We relate to others in a new way. We aim for a different sort of relationship, because we are trying to fulfill a very different kind of need—the holy need to truly bless and innocently join with others. That is our true need and that is what we now fulfill.

This is where Bill could have been. He could have come only from his natural impulse to help. Then his help would have no longer been, as Jesus said, “too limited to give *you* joy.” With the limitations taken off, he would *have* joy. And this is where we could be. We could release our unexpressed miracle drive. We could constantly engage in miracle-inspired relating and thus bring real depth to our relationships, resulting “in true closeness with others.” At that point,

who would deny that *we* would have joy? Who would deny that we had satisfied our real drive, that we had found our true treasure?

Summary

This has been a lengthy and complex exploration, yet we can summarize things fairly simply. All behavior is part of a chain:

impulse → behavior → outcome → need satisfaction

We have seen this chain in different pieces over and over, most fully represented in Lesson 24. We have an *impulse* (or drive) which wants us to *behave* in a certain way. We behave that way to achieve a particular *outcome* (in a situation or relationship). And this outcome is in turn supposed to meet a *need* of ours. The Course is not challenging this chain. It is not telling us to just disinvest in our behavior. Rather, it is simply trying to fill this chain with different content so that it actually meets our need, rather than merely promising to do so.

We can summarize most of what we have said above in the following table, which shows how this chain manifests under three different thought systems—the ego’s, the Holy Spirit’s, and a split between the two:

	Ego’s thought system	Split between the ego and the Holy Spirit	Holy Spirit’s thought system
Impulse	“Natural” physical and “normal” ego impulses	A divided will, split between the ego’s impulse to attack and our true impulse to extend	The miracle drive, miracle impulses
Behavior	Attack in various forms: overt attack, withdrawal, predatory “joining”	Either we erratically alternate between the two sides or we consistently express the Holy Spirit’s side, though with great strain.	The giving of miracles—extending help, healing, and joining to others
Outcome	Getting—the other person loses something that then passes to us, something of value to our body and/or our ego	We sometimes get (take) something from others and they sometimes receive something from us.	Other people are helped and join with us.
Need satisfaction	The ego’s reality is confirmed, but we feel guilty and afraid. The ego’s need is satisfied, but ours is not.	We feel torn by inner conflict. Neither side is fully expressed, resulting in tension on both sides. We function with “deep distress and great depression” (Lesson 257).	Our true need is met; we are in joy.

What we have here is a comprehensive new vision of behavior. It starts with a frank acknowledgment of what behavior is: the expression of impulses in order to achieve outcomes that will in turn satisfy needs. This frank acknowledgment continues as Jesus dissects the problems with behavior as we currently practice it. In particular, I find his diagnosis of the split within us, as we try to negotiate the demands of competing impulses, to be unnervingly accurate. He seems to know us all too well.

By going to the roots of behavior, though, he can do more than just diagnose the way things currently are. The roots of behavior lie in the *impulses* behind it and in the *needs* it is supposed to fulfill. Unless we reexamine those roots, we are left working within their current versions, which means either straining against our “natural” impulses in order to behave better, or simply giving in to those impulses and finding ways to justify that. Jesus wants to get beyond both of these options, and he does so by questioning behavior’s roots. What are our *true* natural impulses? What is our *real* need?

By saying that our true natural impulses are miracle impulses, and that our real need is to help and join with others and thus heal our sense of separation from God (see T-1.VI.2:1), he has fundamentally refashioned the whole topic of behavior, giving us an entirely new picture of appropriate behavior. Appropriate behavior is the expression of miracle impulses in order to heal our sense of separation from God.

I have two reactions to this. The first is that it seems extremely beautiful. I am captivated by the idea that my most sublime impulses are also my truly natural ones, and that I can let these flow through my behavior, resulting in holy behavior that is perfectly natural, so natural that it is involuntary, and that is also perfectly fulfilling.

I must confess, though (and this is my second reaction), to finding myself wondering if this could really be true. Could it really be that my sex drive and hunger drive are *not natural*? That they are just my artificial distortions of something older and more fundamental? Could my only natural impulse in this world really be to extend miracles? All of this seems to stretch the bounds of credibility. Part of me wants to say, “Give me a break!”

What helps dissolve this skepticism is the fact that, by definition, what is *natural* is what comes from our *nature*. Thus, if the Course is right that our nature is divine, then of necessity our natural impulses must also be divine. In other words, once we accept that our nature is divine—something I *do* accept—this whole picture of behavior just follows logically. If we are Sons of God, our natural impulses must be of God; of Heaven, not of the earth. What could be more logical?

Let us therefore ask ourselves as honestly as we can: Is it possible that all of this is really true? Is it possible that my true natural impulses remain unexpressed, and that this is the real cause of the tension I carry? Is it possible that these natural impulses are so godly that they mark me as a Son of God—not a human being but a divine being? If we can answer yes to these questions, then we can set about the task of fully acknowledging those natural impulses, of allowing them into consciousness. And then we can at last start *behaving* like Sons of God, and as a result, *feeling* like Sons of God.



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 letters are feedback on Robert’s article entitled “This Course Is a Guide to Behavior” (Part I), which appeared in the last issue of A Better Way. Robert’s responses appear in italics.

From Ian Patrick, Miracle Network, London:

I write in response to your article “This Course Is a Guide to Behavior” in Issue 87 of *A Better Way*, in which you quote an article of mine and explain how you disagree with it. I would be grateful if you would permit me to do likewise and to disagree with you.

In your comments about my work, I would have preferred it if you had said something positive as well. Maybe the emphasis could shift to how much our ideas and teachings on the Course have in common, rather than on the differences. I think that more accurately reflects the truth of the situation, despite your article and my comments below.

I think your article is interesting. It worries me that these ideas may lead to the kind of teaching that is prescriptive on behaviour, as in the Bible (“thou shalt not...”).

To me, most—if not all—of the passages you quote suggest, really, that it is our **thoughts** that are the prime focus. Thought is cause and behaviour is effect. Our behaviour will naturally follow the thought that precedes it. An unloving thought will produce a different kind of action to that of a loving thought, whatever we may attempt to do on the behavioural level. For example, if I attempt to address someone with kind words, but am thinking unforgiving thoughts about them, my words will come across as an attack. Conversely, if I have loving thoughts, whatever I say, or don’t say, will extend love to the other. That’s why the prime focus of the Course is on thought. “*This is a course in mind training*” (T-1.VII.4) it tells us.

Naturally, when we change our thinking, those thoughts will then be reflected in behaviour, e.g. “*Today we let no ego thoughts direct our words or actions.*” (W-pII.254.2:1) and “*You cannot behave appropriately unless you **perceive** correctly*” (T-1.III.6:5).

Clearly, the Course knows that we believe we are living in the world, therefore it talks about behaviour. But how can something that is not true effect any real change at all? To me, the distinction between form and content is crucial to a full and accurate understanding of the Course.

However, in some sense, could changing one’s thinking be called an **action**? After all, changing our minds, e.g. forgiving someone is something we **do**, though it is not an action like running or writing. Some of your quotes, read in that context, appear quite different.

As you say, it is possible that Helen was guided in the editing process to downplay the subject of behaviour. If this was true guidance, rather than Helen’s own bias, could it be that behaviour was meant to be downplayed? (In the same paragraph you say there is still a heavy emphasis on behaviour, so you seem to want it both ways!)

I’m sure you could compile a similar list that portrays the Course as the course in mind training it says it is. For example: “*This is a course in mind training. All learning involves attention [thought] and study [thought] at some level*” (T-1.VII.4).

Ian,

I fully agree that thoughts are the prime focus in the Course. I don’t know anyone who would dispute that. I also agree, of course, that it is a course in mind training, which is why I take the mind training instructions in the Workbook so seriously.

You seem to assume, however, that the primacy of thought automatically settles the whole question of behavior. I may be incorrect, but your stance seems to be something like this: Given that behavior is simply an illusory effect of thought, we should not give attention to selecting the “right” behaviors. All that is important is that our behaviors have the right thought (love) behind them.

*Yet can we assume that this is what the primacy of thought implies about behavior? I don’t see how we can. Rather than assuming we know what the Course would say about behavior, why not start with an open mind, and then delve into the actual statements about behavior? Why not let **them** determine our view? Why not allow them their full voice, and see what they have to say?*

In my mind, your proposal that “actions” could refer to “thoughts” represents a different kind of approach. That approach says, “Let’s see if we can successfully fit the relevant passages into our current overall framework.” In this case, the result is to change the meaning of the passages. For instance, here is one of the quotes about action that you refer to:

Revelation induces only experience. Miracles, on the other hand, induce action. They are more useful now because of their interpersonal nature. (T-1.II.2:3-5)

*So, whatever this “action” is, it is contrasted with “experience” and is associated with “interpersonal.” In other words, in contrast to the extreme inwardness of revelation, with miracles we have **interpersonal action**. Can anyone doubt the Course is talking about behavior here? If we pay close attention to its usage, in fact, the word “action” always refers to behavior in the Course. The Course even says, “Bodies act, and minds do not” (T-31.III.3:4).*

I already addressed at length in the article your idea that “Helen was guided in the editing process to downplay the subject of behaviour.” I made three points there:

- 1. The word “behavior” was removed, but only sporadically, which meant that it was often left in, and in places that greatly emphasized it. (In other words, **I’m** not trying to have it both ways. My point is that the editing was inconsistent, which says something about its quality.)*
- 2. The concept of behavior was not removed. When it appeared in other forms (like “action”), it was not touched.*
- 3. There are passages throughout the Second Edition Course that are fully consistent with the early references to behavior in the Urtext. (This means I could make the exact same case without any reference to the Urtext.)*

*I don’t know about you, but I don’t see how any of these things could be true if the editing out of behavior was truly guided. If Jesus really wanted behavior removed or downplayed, he would have guided it to be removed or downplayed **consistently**—wherever it was emphasized (against #1), in all forms (against #2), and throughout the Course (against #3). As it is, the editing of behavior has every appearance of being rather ham-handed, and thus extremely human rather than arguably divine.*

But again, even if we think that maybe the editing was perfectly guided (though I see compelling reasons to conclude it wasn’t), why not still explore those passages that got edited out and see if they have something to say to us? Even Ken

Wapnick did that in *Absence from Felicity*. He saw a tremendous amount of valuable content in passages that were edited out.

How we approach passages on behavior, whether in the FIP Course or in the Urtext, makes all the difference. I say let's come to them with an open mind and let them teach us. We may end up with valuable new insight.

• • •

From Geoff Broughton:

Behaviour is a symptom not a cause. One does not aim for good behaviour, although poor behaviour can be taken as a reflection of the fact that previous thoughts and actions have not created the peace that one has looked for. If one seeks to perform one's function, be the light and to pursue forgiveness, then it must naturally follow that one's behaviour will be in accord—hence one does not need to concern oneself primarily with behaviour. I don't believe that there is a single quote that you have mentioned, Robert, that would refute this position.

The Course is simple, and as students of the Course we will from time to time attempt to add our layers of complexity to satisfy our egoic tendencies. However, the eventual outcome is only dependent on our fulfilling our one and only function. Being judgemental would appear to be the only place that leading on behaviour can get us to.

Behaviour is like the spots that follow from measles and one doesn't cure measles by treating the spots.

Interestingly our core function as in forgiveness is all about ignoring the spots!!

I have a daughter who describes herself as a drug addict who lives with us. I have had to ignore many bucketfuls of spots over the years.

I would suggest a revised headline: "This Course is a Guide to one's Function" - your behaviour is a result of this function.

• • •

From Harry McDonald:

I totally support what you are saying. It is exactly confirmed in my thirty years of doing the Course. The "doing" is the expression of where the mind is. To believe that thinking is enough is like loving without ever expressing it. It seems to me that hearing the Holy Spirit is cut off when we ignore the instructions to act. It is in the action that we learn the validity of the hearing and see the results of the miracle.

• • •

From Mary Benton:

I tend to see this whole issue as being overplayed and containing distortion. Your statement: "When it's all about me—whether I am coming from love or fear—then the clear implication is that you don't matter" epitomises my point. It is certainly not all about me if I am coming from love, the love that embraces us all. I could go on, but what's the point? Like the gymnastics about the special function there is a thicket of distortion in all this.

• • •

From Jeremy Stutsman:

Thank you for this most recent *Better Way* article, "This Course Is a Guide to Behavior."

As you may recall, I am no longer a student of the Course. Your article confirms for me that my decision was the correct one. The Course is a very confusing document and simply does not work for me as a guide to awakening.

For example, the Course is asking us to see that we cannot turn to the ego for guidance, since the ego is nothing and knows nothing. Yet here you have it that it is important not to offend people's egos—obviously their ego *is* important according to you. In my learning (apparently from the Course, as you would have it) that their ego is important, I teach them the same. Hardly a valuable lesson! Have I overstated the case?

You say:

If the mechanism through which I affect you doesn't matter, that implies that *how* I affect you (positively or negatively) also doesn't matter, which leads to the inescapable conclusion that *you* don't matter. Is this really what the Course is saying? This is the stance of a sociopath or a psychopath.

But what is the "you" in "the inescapable conclusion that *you* don't matter"? If the "you" is the awakened Son of God then no such conclusion is possible. If the "you" is the ego, then it doesn't matter. "You" as an ego doesn't matter. The *belief* that you are an ego does matter, and if I regard you as an ego I am teaching that you are an ego.

If I believe that you are an ego, and I offend that ego, does that matter? Hardly! It seems to me that what matters is whether I am teaching that you are not an ego. I will be able to do that only if I recognize deeply that I am not an ego. If I do recognize that, I won't need any guide to behavior except the love that is God. His will is my will. I will not then need the Course, or even the Holy Spirit to tell me what to do. "My" actions will be God's through the body. In fact, the use of "my," "you," "mine," and "yours" becomes very confusing. If there is no ego there is no "me" and "you"; there is the appearance of bodies and the awareness of love that embraces all.

If the Course is more about behavior than awakening to truth, then I want no part of it! In any case, it is a laborious exercise in confusion, in my opinion.

Jeremy,

I think the quick answer is that the way I teach you that you are not an ego is by being loving toward you, since the ego is not lovable. And the way I teach myself that I am not an ego is by being loving to you, since the ego is not loving. So it's still about awakening. But I suspect you are right, that the Course is not for you. I hope your future travels are speedy and filled with love.

Jeremy's reply:

Yes, I see your point. It is a logical idea, and I suspect that is what the author means. But I found that it didn't work well for me. It is just another way of "trying to be good." My grandmother was the most loving person I can imagine but all I learned from it was that being good is very difficult and involves a lot of suppression of anger, etc.

Trying to be good, or loving, is a fairly ineffective means, it seems to me. The ego is very good at convincing itself that it is good or that it would be good if others wouldn't provoke it. Even though the Course teaches about the illusions of the ego's innocent face, projection, etc. this is what I see people doing: presenting the innocent face while harboring grievance within. The whole thing becomes a lesson in frustration.

Blessing to you, Robert.

...

From China Carnella:

I really enjoyed your article regarding what the Course says about our behavior. During the first few paragraphs, I was inclined to believe that your opponent had a sounder argument, because, for instance...

Love has been expressed through all sorts of behaviors, from a slug in the arm, to a proposal of marriage, to mercy killing. If I don't take into account how very differently each of these would affect you, then I am obviously not taking *you* into account. When it's all about me—whether *I* am coming from love or fear—then the clear implication is that you don't matter. And can any state of mind based on that thought actually be called *loving*?

Arguments like the one you made above seem to imply that we can never make another person unhappy. In other words, we can never make a decision on behalf of ourselves if it will hurt another person. The classic example, I guess, would be when a child who was forced and expected to be a doctor by his parents decides that, despite the fact that it may make mom and dad unhappy, that he really wants to be a musician.

I disagree with the implication (if that is what you meant) that we can never ever make another person unhappy—how difficult would that be? We'd all have to be mind readers and basically be pretty codependent, and just do what everybody else wants us to do.

Although I still cannot reconcile the Course and your article to the idea of never making another person unhappy by

our decisions, etc., as I read your article, I saw great value in it and came to greatly see and agree with your point of view.

I don't know if you have a reconciliation in your mind about the idea of never making another person unhappy by our actions, but if you do, I'd love to hear it.

Otherwise, I just wanted to compliment you on your article—you make a great and winning case.

China,

I am not trying to imply that we can never make decisions that others are unhappy with. What I believe is that in every situation there is a course of action that is simultaneously in the best interests of all concerned. In other words, we don't have to sacrifice our interests for the sake of theirs or vice versa. We can serve everyone's interests at once. This doesn't mean that those concerned will see this action as in their best interests. They may be extremely unhappy with it, and we may be, too. But that course of action is there, I believe. It's in the Holy Spirit's Mind, and it can be in ours, too, if we get in touch with His. Ideally, though, we carry out this course of action in such a way that its loving intent is most likely to be accurately seen, even if it turns out not to be seen.