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A BETTER WAY

The Law of Love Is Universal
Reflections on the Prayer for Lesson 345
by Greg Mackie

I've getting a lot of mileage lately out of the prayer for Lesson 345: "I offer only miracles today, for I would have them be returned to me." It suggests a whole new way of living in the world: a way of selfless giving that helps alleviate the problems of others, helps us resolve our own problems as well, and ultimately undoes the core problem behind them all: the unforgiveness that alone keeps us from remembering our Father. If we were to let the message of this prayer all the way in and choose to live by the "law of love," it would change everything.

This is a truly wonderful prayer. As we've done with a number of the Part II Workbook prayers, I'd like to go through it line by line and draw out its meaning.

Father, a miracle reflects Your gifts to me, Your Son.

When we were created, God showered us with the infinite gifts of Heaven. The Course speaks frequently of these gifts; one representative list speaks of "the Son of God's inheritance" as "love, sinlessness, perfection, knowledge, and eternal truth" (M-4.X.3:2). These gifts are so lofty that they are beyond the earth entirely and "can rarely be received directly" (M-23.1:1).

But they appear on earth in reflected form, and that form is the *miracle*, the complete overturning of the so-called laws of earth by the laws of Heaven. The miracle is where Heaven and earth meet and earth is undone, as Jesus demonstrated when he healed the sick, raised the dead, and arose from the tomb on Easter morning. The miracle is God's Love come down to earth to bless His Son in exile. As this beautiful line from the Workbook puts it, "Miracles fall like drops of healing rain from Heaven on a dry and dusty world, where starved and thirsty creatures come to die" (W-pII.13.5:1). I sure could use a drink of living water. Couldn't we all?

And every one I give returns to me, reminding me the law of love is universal.

The first part of this sentence, of course, is the basis of the lesson's title. Because every miracle I give returns to me, I *want* to offer only miracles today. Who wouldn't? Don't we all want more miracles in our lives? Don't we Course students complain that we don't experience enough of those miracles the Course is supposed to be a course in? Well, here is the answer to our dilemma: The way to receive them is to give them.

Why is this the way to receive them? Because of the "law of love." What is the law of love? It is expressed succinctly in the previous day's lesson title: "Today I learn the law of love; that what I give my brother is my gift to me." This is a law we always live by whether we're aware of it or not (usually in a negative, ego-based way), but Jesus wants us to learn how to live by it in the sense of consciously applying it to our lives in a positive way. Lesson 345 is a means to this goal, a more specific application of the law of love: Since the law of love says *whatever* I give my brother returns to me, I should offer only miracles because that's what I *want* to return to me.

This offering and returning of miracles reminds us that the law of love is universal: Just as it is the law of Heaven that my gift to my brother is my gift to me, it is a law that works on earth as well. There is no place where this law doesn't apply. Would we not live very differently if we really believed that it is an *invariable, universal law* that everything

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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

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WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT SAYS

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

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

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

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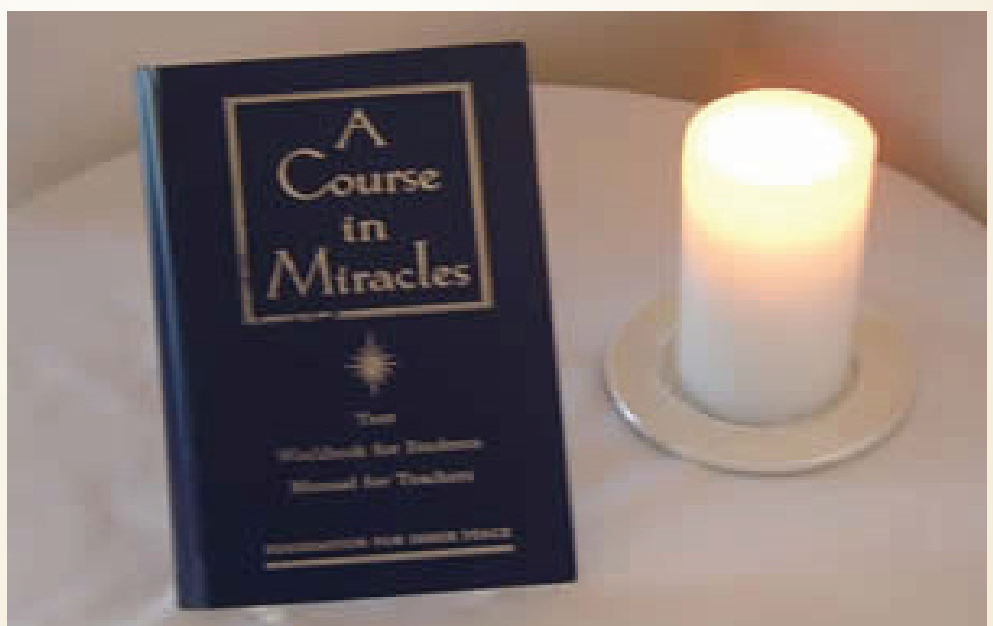
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we give returns to us? Would it not make us think twice about lashing out in anger, and would it not make us eager to extend as many miracles as we could?

Even here, it takes a form which can be recognized and seen to work.

This sentence says in different words what I just said above: The law of love works not just in Heaven, but “even here” on earth. It is a universal law.

How wonderful that on earth “it takes a form which can be recognized and seen to work”! Let’s face it, we need concrete evidence for the Course’s lofty teachings. We need to see that they work in the nitty-gritty of daily life. The Holy Spirit recognizes this need; as an earlier Workbook lesson puts it, “I am not asked to take salvation on the basis of an unsupported faith” (W-pII.327.1:1). Being a doubting Thomas is quite okay as far as the Course is concerned.

Another earlier lesson, “To give and to receive are one in truth” (Lesson 108) makes a similar point about the value of concrete evidence for the law of love. (It doesn’t use the phrase “law of love,” but the lesson title is obviously a version of that law.) In the practice for this lesson, you give spiritual gifts like love, peace, and joy to others and then experience those gifts returning to you. The lesson tells us that this is “a simple lesson in the obvious because it has results we cannot miss” (W-pI.108.7:2). And these results are powerful evidence not only that this lesson is true, but that everything else the Course tells us is true as well:

To learn that giving and receiving are the same has special usefulness, because it can be tried so easily and seen as true. And when this special case has proved it always works, in every circumstance where it is tried, the thought behind it can be generalized to other areas of doubt and double vision. And from there it will extend, and finally arrive at the one Thought which underlies them all. (W-pI.108.6:1-3)

Let that sink in for a moment. If you simply give to others and experience that gift returning to you, this will lead you all the way to the one Thought which underlies them all: the Thought of God. It will awaken you from the dream. It will enable you to achieve the goal of the Course. Wow!

Every time I do the practice from Lesson 108, I discover that indeed it does work. When I give peace, love, and joy, I do feel them returning to me, and I always ask myself, “Why don’t I do this all the time?” Indeed, why not? Applying the same question to Lesson 345: Why not offer only miracles today, so I can have them be returned to me?

The miracles I give are given back in just the form I need to help me with the problems I perceive.

Here we are given this lesson’s specific “form which can be recognized and seen to work.” This is my favorite line, for it is so encouraging and so practical. You give a miracle to help a brother with the problems he perceives. Then it returns to you, but not in exactly the same form. If you give a homeless man true love and forgiveness in the form of a new pair of shoes, it doesn’t mean that you’ll get a new pair of shoes in return. That form may not help you with the specific problems you perceive in *your* life; you might already have twenty pairs of shoes.

No, your miracle will come back to you in a form which is perfectly suited to deal with *your* problems. Perhaps you will receive the answer you need to a health issue you have been struggling with. Perhaps you will receive a phone call from an estranged old friend that brings about a reconciliation. Perhaps you will receive socks instead of shoes. But whatever you receive, it will be exactly what *you* need.

I had an experience of this just recently. I was mired in a conflict with a friend of mine, one of those messy conflicts that seems impossible to clean up. I remember thinking to myself, “We need a miracle,” and since I was writing this piece, I began applying this lesson to my friend: “I offer only miracles to you, [name], for I would have them be returned to me.” Well, one day soon after beginning this practice, I started feeling a remarkable shift in my attitude toward my friend. The anger and pain I had been feeling melted away, and deep love and gratitude toward her welled up in me. The conflict that had seemed impossible to solve was gone, at least in my mind. The miracle had come.

I talked to my friend later, and it turned out that she was having the same experience as me, at virtually the same time. (We hadn’t had a chance to talk, so I had no idea what was happening on her end at the time.) She too asked for a miracle (in different words), extended healing to me, and experienced the replacement of her own anger and pain with deep love and gratitude for me. The conflict was over in her mind as well. The rift between us was healed by the miracles we had shared.

That was wonderful enough in itself, but then, the very next day, I received an unexpected bonus: I got a call from an employer offering me a full-time job, a job that was absolutely perfect for me. This was a true godsend, since I had been looking for full-time work for months, and my financial engine is running on fumes. Though it’s difficult to know for sure if there’s a direct cause-effect relationship, I believe the miracle I sent to my friend (with a huge boost from the

miracle *she* sent to *me*) came back to me in just the form I needed to help me with my own problems: not only the healing of a relationship, but the perfect job to solve my financial problems as well.

I think we've all probably experienced this, often without noticing it. Have you ever had a problem solved miraculously, a seemingly intractable situation where everything suddenly fell into place? Have you ever found yourself marveling about what happened and saying, "Where did that come from?" Perhaps this was an instance of a miracle you extended returning to you in just the form you needed. Perhaps the chicken dinner you cooked for your spouse last week has come home to roost. You might want to think about your life and see how many instances you can find of something like this happening.

Here, then, is a whole new way to deal with the problems in our lives. Normally, when we have a problem we often think, "Well, I have to solve this problem of my own before I can help anyone else." Actually, we often think something worse than that: We think the problem *is* someone else, and the solution is to take back whatever that someone else stole from us, whether it was our car, our job, our girlfriend, or our pride.

But in this lesson, the way to solve our problems is *to solve other people's problems through extending miracles to them*. So, when I have a problem, I should not be thinking about what a drain it would be to help someone else right now, or thinking about ways to exact my revenge. I should be thinking: "Jesus, what miracle would you have me perform for a brother right now? If I do that, I can trust that a miracle will come in just the form I need to solve the problem I'm facing."

Father, in Heaven it is different, for there, there are no needs.

In Heaven, of course, we *have* no problems. The law of love doesn't solve problems there; it is simply the law of our being. When we were created, we basked in what the Text calls "the Garden of Eden, or the pre-separation condition...a state of mind in which nothing was needed" (T-2.I.3:1). And we are still in that state, though we experience ourselves living very far east of Eden now. In our current state it is difficult to even imagine what a state without needs or problems of any kind feels like. What a glorious state that must be!

But here on earth, the miracle is closer to Your gifts than any other gift that I can give.

Fortunately, we don't have to try to imagine what a state without needs feels like. We have a version of Heaven's gifts which meets all the needs and solves all the problems we perceive right here on earth: the miracle. Again, this is so practical. We haven't been left alone in this wasteland east of Eden, forced to live by the sweat of our brow. We have been given manna from Heaven that nourishes us completely, if we will just pick it up and give it to our brothers.

I find it striking that the miracle is the closest thing on earth to God's gifts. We might think the closest thing is blow-out enlightenment experiences during meditation or something like that. Surely the adept in his cave is the pinnacle of spiritual achievement. Indeed, many mystical paths regard miracles with suspicion, seeing them as something that happens on the lower rungs of the spiritual ladder, something that must be outgrown. This is certainly understandable. We have all heard of people who perform wonders to show everyone how wonderful they are, so in many cases that suspicion may be justified.

But from the Course's point of view, genuine miracles stemming from true perception of others and the egoless impulse to be truly helpful (what the Urtext calls the "miracle drive") are the closest thing to Heaven on earth. The Course is all for blow-out enlightenment experiences; they can be very helpful on the journey. But the golden road to God is to "hear a brother call for help and answer him" (P-2.V.8:4)—with a miracle.

Then let me give this gift alone today, which, born of true forgiveness, lights the way that I must travel to remember You.

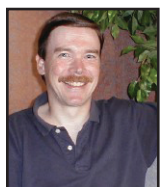
This line, besides telling us to give miracles alone today, adds two important points to what we've seen so far. First, miracles are "born of true forgiveness." They are not magic tricks that simply rearrange outer circumstances so we'll feel a little better. Instead, they are expressions of true forgiveness. They are extensions of healed perception from the mind of the miracle worker to the mind of the miracle receiver. This is the source of their healing power. The changes they produce in outer circumstances are simply external manifestations of their healing power. These external manifestations are helpful since they give us the concrete evidence we need, but they are not the ultimate purpose of miracles.

Second, the gift of miracles "lights the way that I must travel to remember You." Miracles don't simply resolve earthly problems, as useful as that is. They resolve our central problem, the granddaddy of them all: unforgiveness. When we give miracles rooted in truly forgiving the miracle receiver, the most precious gift that returns to us is the recognition that *we* are forgiven. This process—extending forgiveness to others through miracles and thus recognizing that we our-

selves are forgiven—is what lights the way that we must travel to remember God.

“Then let me give this gift alone today.” Let me offer *only* miracles today. To really carry out this injunction, I recommend that you go through this prayer line by line in the morning, applying it to your own life as specifically as possible. In addition, you might begin the day with a prayer Jesus gave Helen and Bill early in the Course’s dictation: “Help me to perform whatever miracles you want of me today.” You might ask Jesus or the Holy Spirit for specific guidance on what to do: To whom specifically do you want me to offer a miracle? What healing content do you want me to express through this miracle? What form should this miracle take?

The benefits of living in this new way of selfless giving are truly immense. Miracles are the closest thing on earth to God’s heavenly gifts. Every one I give helps a brother with a problem he perceives. Every one I give returns to me in just the form that will help me with the problems I perceive. Most important of all, every one I give helps undo the central problem of unforgiveness, and thus brings all of us one step closer on the shining path back to our Father. Thank God the law of love is universal. Why not live in a way that demonstrates that law every day, every hour, every minute, and every second, a way that helps all of us return to the Love we never really left?



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

Greg Mackie. He has been a student of *A Course in Miracles* since 1991, and a teacher for the Circle of Atonement since 1999. He writes *Course Q & A's* and the “Course Meets World” feature on the Circle of Atonement’s website. He sees his primary function as helping to develop a tradition of Course scholarship.

CIRCLE MAILBOX

Here are some of the reader comments we received on Robert’s article in A Better Way #88, “This Course Is a Guide to Behavior, Part II”:

Thank you so much for the wisdom in the article about behavior. I have always felt a disconnect that I could not resolve around the issue of behavior and the Course. This comes at a very crucial time for me because I am being downsized from a long time management client and looking for new work to fill in. I have felt for a long time that my spiritual work with this client was lessening but kept believing that Holy Spirit would find a way for them to wake up and recognize what I am doing there. Now I see the signs clearly: there are others with whom I can do my work in love, light, and peace. I am being redirected to others who can see the love that I bring. Just the other day I was visiting with an old client to see their new building. It is a wonderful new space that is providing healthcare to the homeless. Toward the end of the visit, the director said to me that he really needs for me to help them with developing a more positive environment for the staff. I heard the call and immediately answered yes.

So, thank you again. I hear clearly the message from Jesus that love reaches out to love. I wish no ill will toward my old client but there is no need to keep trying to help when it is obvious that this help is not wanted or understood. I will listen to the voice for God, the Holy Spirit to direct me to those who will welcome my gifts of spirit.

— Gwen Hadden

...

There will come a time in the earth on which we stand where humans, en masse, will know in the marrow of their bones that they are Sons of God. They will know there is no illness that cannot be cured, no oppression that will not yield to God’s plan, and no horror that cannot be completely reversed by their own manifestation of God’s love. They will have the joyful knowledge that it is they who will make that world by their own cooperation as miracle workers. The happy dream will in time manifest in a world with no hunger, no war, and no hideous oppression by the powerful over the weak. When evil sprouts on this earth, it will be immediately known by loving custodians of this planet. It will be lovingly culled, and its causes healed before it could even be noticed. The road to full awareness of our divinity will see a weary world completely healed. It will be a place of joy and happiness for the Son of God to stop a while before he makes the final union with God. His earth and all of time and space will disappear into the nothingness from which it was made.

Yet, its final lesson will be a peace and joy never before understood here.

Who will begin the healing through which that world is manifested? We begin it in this very moment with our thoughts of forgiveness and love. We build a road to heaven made from golden cobblestones with our own hands. Each time the sword of anger and judgment is laid down, someone places another golden brick in the road. Our children continue the work, having learned from us. Their children do the same, and so it continues until the road stretches almost to the gates of Heaven itself.

Slowly, the drive to extend the miracle to the seemingly lost parts of ourselves becomes overwhelming. The primordial “need” to love, to really join, spills seamlessly into all behavior. While the Son still believes the world is real, the Great Spirit uses his hands, feet, and his voice to communicate His message. He adds His Mysterious Power to every thought of love; every impulse to really join, such that “immutable” laws of time and space are effortlessly reversed, as one would brush aside a cobweb. Right thinking results in the urge for right action. With constant guidance from the Holy Spirit, the Son’s thought and deed become a seamless continuum of love manifested. By his deeds he is then known, and he thereby teaches himself and all witnesses the ways of God’s love.

— Thomas Dunn

...

I read with interest Part 1 and 2 of the “Guide to Behavior” articles, and was very interested to see some opposition to what your articles are saying.

The way I see it is (please correct me if I’m wrong):

- a) The course is about correcting our minds which leads to...
- b) ...our behavior reflecting our miracle mindedness.

There is a large school of thought that diminishes the importance of (b).

Your articles are showing us that (b), our behavior, is actually important, but I don’t see you taking anything away from (a), correction at the level of the mind.

The risk of ignoring behavior is that we may not perform the miracles the Holy Spirit guides us to because “it’s about our minds, not our behavior.” Relationships are of utmost importance in the Course, and we have relationships with the people we meet “in a lift” or “on the way home from class” as well as our romantic partners or families. These are the places where our behavior can reflect the miracle mindedness that we train for. Let’s keep our minds ready to hear the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that we can be the light the world so badly needs. We must remember that we need to help all our brothers to achieve enlightenment with us.

I think the articles were excellent as always, with plenty of relevant quotes to back up what you are saying. Thank you!

— Mark Bind

...

I read your Part II article early today....I was left with a *very* strong sense of hope of finding the way out of what I would call a strong food addiction that I have. I felt relieved and hopeful that what I experience as really strong urges and drives to eat crappy food might be a distorted miracle drive. I thought how great life would be if I was able to use that drive to benefit myself and others, rather than to use it to self destruct.

So in summary, I felt very inspired and hope-filled by your article.

— Ben Savage

...

I am really inspired by the idea that all the distress and conflict in my life comes from the fact that I have long misunderstood what I really want and need: to honor the overpowering, God-given impulse in me to give miracles, to behave lovingly. And when I do honor that natural miracle drive, my behavior will be filled with the strength of God, shine with unearthly holiness, and become as involuntary as the beating of my heart. It will teach me I am not separate, that there is nothing to fear, that I really am the Son of God. That’s so beautiful and simple, and it makes perfect sense.

— Amy Speech