



CONTENTS

How Exactly Is Attack a	
Call for Love?	
by Robert Perry	1
Circle Mailbox	5



# A BETTER WAY

## How Exactly Is Attack a Call for Love?

by Robert Perry

One of the very first ideas I encountered from *A Course in Miracles* was that attack is really just a call for love. A friend of mine had a quote up in his house that was attributed to the Course and said, “Every communication is either an extension of love or a call for love.” That idea has always inspired me and struck me as eminently practical, yet I have struggled to understand it for nearly thirty years now and have revised my understanding more than once. What does the Course really mean by saying that attack is a call for love?

### The intent theory

When you first hear the idea, it sounds clear enough. When you attack, you are not really trying to do harm. You are just looking for love. You just want to be valued, to feel a sense of worth, to be loved. You may be looking for love in the wrong way. Your pursuit of love may blind you to the collateral damage you cause along the way. But regardless of how misguided your pursuit is, your motives are ultimately innocent. How can you be faulted for just wanting to find love? Attack, therefore, is not the evil thing it seems to be. Because its intent is ultimately benign, it can be forgiven.

To boil this down: The search for love is the *intent* behind attack. Hence, I will call this the *intent theory*. There is no question that this is a very attractive concept, and one I used to believe in myself. Unfortunately, however, I have been unable to find a single passage in the Course that talks about the call for love in these terms. I admit that this is how the idea sounds; it is not how it is talked about in the Course itself.

One clue is that the Course talks in very dark terms about the intent behind attack. In speaking of attack, it says things like “Its sole intent is murder” (T-23.III.1:5) and “No one attacks without intent to hurt” (W-pl.170.1:1). From these quotes, we can see that the Course sees the intent behind attack not in *more* charitable terms than usual, but in *less* charitable, more sinister terms. It implies we are in profound denial about the motives behind our attacks. In light of this, saying that our real motive is merely to find love sounds like just more denial.

### The call for help

So what does the Course mean when it talks about attack as a call for love? One clue is that the Course’s favorite term is not “call (or appeal) for love” but rather “call (or appeal) for help.” I find twenty-eight references to call for help, compared to thirteen to call for love. The two terms refer to the exact same concept, as they are used interchangeably. Yet “call for help” is the more standard usage, and so we can probably assume that it captures the concept better.

If I am calling for help, that obviously implies I need help. It implies something has gone wrong inside of me, something I need help to correct. It implies I have fallen into a mistaken state from which I need rescuing. This notion runs throughout all the references to “call for love” and “call for help.” This is why the concept is also termed a call for *correction* (two refs.), for *healing* (two), for *release* (two), for *forgiveness*, for *mercy*, and for *salvation*. All of these imply a call to escape from some problem I am stuck in. You can see this with the passages below. With each one of them, notice how the call is a call for *help* to get out of *pain*:

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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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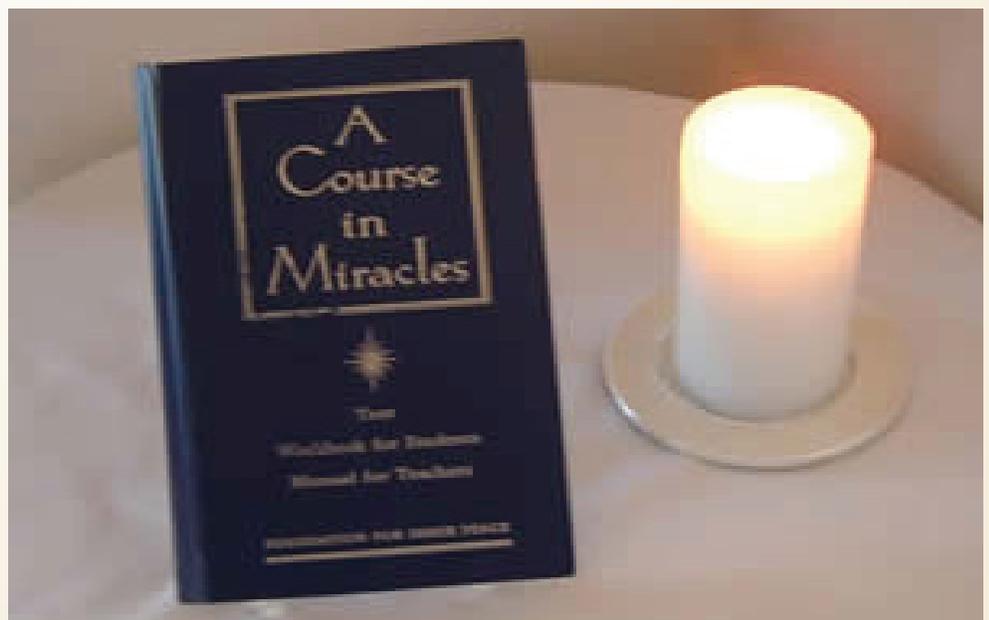
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Love always answers, being unable to deny a call for help, or not to hear the cries of pain that rise to it from every part of this strange world you made but do not want. (T-13.VII.4:3)

But you are merely asked to see forgiveness as the natural reaction to distress that rests on error, and thus calls for help. (T-30.VI.2:7)

Yet to the One Who sends forth miracles to bless the world, a tiny stab of pain, a little worldly pleasure, and the throes of death itself are but a single sound; a call for healing, and a plaintive cry for help within a world of misery. (T-27.VI.6:6)

Notice that in the first passage, the “call for help” is the same thing as the “cries of pain.” In the second passage, the “distress” is what actually “calls for help.” And in the third passage, the “stab of pain” is itself the “plaintive cry for help.” (Indeed, twice in the Course, the call for love is called “plaintive.” It is thus a *sorrowful* call.) In all three cases, then, the pain itself is what is calling for help.

### The need theory

This is our clue about the real meaning of the call for help. That meaning is this: There is a state we are in that *lacks* something essential, and that lack is a *need* that calls out to be filled. This idea shows up in many different forms:

- We are in a state of pain, and that pain is itself a call for relief. We saw this in the above quotes.
- We are in a state of error, and that error, by its nature, calls for correction: “Errors call for...correction” (T-23.II.4:2). “Mistakes are *for* correction, and they call for nothing else” (T-19.III.4:5).
- We are in a state of sickness, and that sickness is simultaneously a call for healing. “Perceive in sickness the appeal for health” (T-12.II.3:3).
- We are in a state of hate, and that hate is inherently a call for the love that it lacks: “Recognize in hatred the call for love” (T-12.II.3:3).
- We are in a state of fear, and that fear is itself a call for the love that is its opposite. “For fear *is* a call for love, in unconscious recognition of what has been denied [love]” (T-12.I. 8:13).
- We are in a state of poverty, and that poverty is automatically a call for abundance. “Remember that those who *attack are poor*. Their poverty asks for gifts, not for further impoverishment” (T-12.III.3:3-4).

Again and again we see the same idea: We are in a state of need, and inside each need is *a call for the need to be met*. This is why the call for help applies to any kind of need—to pain, error, sickness, hate, fear, and poverty (as we have just seen). The concept here is obvious. If a person is in pain, we all know that her pain calls for relief. If a person is sick, we all know that his sickness calls for healing. If a person is poor, we all know that her poverty calls for gifts. There is no mystery in this concept; it is as plain as day. *A need by its nature calls to be filled*. In contrast to the intent theory, then, I will call this the *need theory*.

### Attack in light of the need theory

Now let’s bring this idea back to attack. How is attack a call for help and for love? You can probably guess the answer: Attack is really a state not of fulfillment, but of *need*. Those who attack are in pain, error, sickness, hate, fear, and poverty. Attack arises from a sense of poverty and a feeling of hate, and poverty and hate are clearly painful states. Moreover, attack *results* in feelings of guilt and fear (“Guilt is the result of attack”—T-13.I.11:1; “Only attack produces fear”—T-12.I.8:12), which of course are also painful states. Given that attack entails so much pain in the attacker, attack is a mistake—not a sin, but definitely a mistake. We can see most of this condensed into one brief sentence that I quoted above:

But you are merely asked to see forgiveness as the natural reaction to distress that rests on error, and thus calls for help. (T-30.VI.2:7)

We tend to see attack, under the right circumstances, as a crucial tool that can bestow real advantage and yield real benefits. Isn’t this why we get so angry at an attacker? Isn’t it because we see him as having gained from our loss? This quote, however, has a very different vision of attack. It says that attack brings nothing but “distress” and is therefore an

“error.” And isn’t an error that causes distress something that automatically “calls for help?” And when you see this need for help, isn’t rendering that help “the natural reaction?”

How do we render that help? According to the above sentence, through “forgiveness.” If forgiveness is the way we alleviate the person’s distress, that implies that the distress consists of feelings of guilt, since forgiveness, of course, is the remedy for guilt. Putting all of this together, then, the above sentence means something like this: When you see that your attacker gained nothing from his attack, but came away carrying the heavy burden of guilt, you will realize that he is not a sinner. He is simply in error, an error which causes him pain. His situation thus calls for help, not for condemnation. You help him by offering him forgiveness, by telling him that he is not a guilty sinner, but an innocent Son of God who is merely mistaken. His attack on you placed him in a state of need, but your forgiveness is able to meet his need.

## Conclusion

Thus, it is not the case that when people attack they are just looking for love. It is not the case that their real intent in attacking is just to find love (the intent theory). Rather, they really are trying to hurt others for the sake of personal gain—exactly as we have suspected about them (and feared about ourselves) all along. However, they don’t actually gain, they lose. Rather than being fulfilled by their attack, they emerge plagued by various forms of pain: hate, guilt, and fear. Their attack, then, rather than placing them in a state of gain, places them in a state of *need*. And this need automatically calls out to be met (the need theory). If we can step out of our egocentrism, we can recognize their need. We can hear the call of their distress. When we do, we will have a natural reaction of wanting to help. We do so by forgiving them, by giving them love. Our love overturns the hate, guilt, and fear they were experiencing. Our love fills their need.

The call for love idea, then, is really a different way of answering the question: Who is in need here? When we have been attacked, we generally assume that *we* are the ones in need. Our attacker has just taken something from us. Consequently, it appears that he has gained while we have lost. It seems obvious, then, that we are the ones in need while he is the one sitting fat and happy. In this scenario, condemnation is the only thing that makes sense. The call for love idea, however, says that we have gotten it all wrong. It says that *he* is the one in need. He didn’t gain anything real, and in the process lost the things that matter most: his sense of innocence and his peace of mind. We, on the other hand, are in truth invulnerable. Since nothing real can be taken from us, we still have everything. Thus, despite all appearances, our attacker, not ourselves, is the one in need here.

This is the key—to believe that when attacked, our attacker is in need and we are not. Herein lies the challenge of this idea. It requires us to believe at least three things we are reluctant to accept. First, that the gains that come from attack—victory, status, money, all the treasures of this world—are not real gains. Second, that despite appearances, our attacker really does feel guilty about the attack, even if the attack seems unrecognized by the attacker. Third, that our loss was not real, that any loss we felt was due to our own interpretation of the situation, not due to the attack itself.

Let’s face it, these things are a stretch for us, and yet they are the gateway into really believing that attack is a call for help. And once we believe that, we will have a totally different response to attack. Rather than responding with hurt and anger, we will respond with peace and generosity. Our only thoughts will be, Why is this person hurting herself like this? What can I do to help her out of her distress? And since the world is a place of attack, a different response to attack means a different response to the world.

Of course, we do not embrace this new response overnight. We get there one step at a time. To take one such step, I encourage you to practice this idea now. Think of someone whose attack has lingered in your mind, undermining your peace. Then say the following words to this person, slowly and with as much sincerity as you can:

*You did not gain from your attack;  
You merely damaged your own peace of mind.  
I did not lose from your attack,  
For I am invulnerable.  
You are thus in a position of need,  
And I am in a position to give.  
I give you my forgiveness and my love.  
I acknowledge you as a Son of God and my brother.*

If you could connect with these words even a little, you have answered this person’s call for love. In doing so, you have done more than you realize, for the Course assures us, “Answer his call for love, and yours is answered” (T-12. II.3:5).



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## CIRCLE MAILBOX

### Circle Mailbox

*Comments on Greg Mackie's article "The Law of Love Is Universal: Reflections on the Prayer for Lesson 345" (A Better Way #59):*

What a wonderful article! I truly enjoyed it and feel like my "love tank" just got filled up with premium.

— Barbara Whitfield

• • •

You hit this one out of the ballpark my friend!

I don't presently have any stories to share confirming this idea, but my inner guidance easily confirms its truth.

This teaching alone has the ability to spread far and wide into our world. People are always greatly interested in how to improve their lives. Such is the reason for overwhelming popularity of "The Secret" and other related teachings. Yet, I've never heard it in its true form, until now. I plan on sharing this article with a number of people.

Thank you for taking the time to "break it down" and offer this precious teaching to us.

— Michael Little