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# A BETTER WAY

## The Earthquake in Haiti: A Call for Miracles

by Greg Mackie

The entire world has been shocked by the news of the devastating earthquake in Haiti. The numbers are staggering: Some estimate that the death toll will eventually reach 200,000, with countless more injured, left homeless, or affected in some other way. An entire country is in ruins. Beyond the numbers, the pictures we've

seen of terrible human suffering are truly heartbreaking; the devastation is hard to fathom. We send our loving thoughts and prayers to everyone affected by this horrific event. As I reflect on what has happened, I'm brought back to the thoughts I had when 9/11 happened, which I shared in an [article](#) wrote at that time: thoughts of darkness, light, and the call for miracles.

First, the darkness: Once again, we have a grim reminder that this world we made out of the ego's hate is a world of impermanence, attack, suffering, and death. It is an immensely sad thing to behold. And what always strikes me when disasters like this happen is that they are really not that unusual; they are just more obvious versions of what happens in our world every day without us noticing. For instance, as I noted in my 9/11 article, 24,000 people per *day* die from hunger in this world. That's approximately one person every four seconds — six or seven people have died of hunger since you began reading this paragraph. But this never makes the headlines, and we don't see people rushing to send money to the hungry.

Death and destruction is, indeed, the way of the world; the Haiti earthquake is ample evidence of that. This is a world in constant flux. All things change, fade and die; nothing here is permanent. As the Course says, "What *seems* eternal all will have an end" (T-29.VI.2:7) — even night and day, the tides, the seasons, and the stars. Death, dissolution, and decay are at the very heart of physical existence, the inevitable consequences of the world our egos have made as an attack on God. This is not a rare tragic moment in what is otherwise a "wonderful world." Sad to say, the suffering that is happening in Haiti now is not the exception; it is the rule.

Second, the light: As a Course student, events like this make me appreciate more than ever the Course's assurance that this physical world is unreal, and all that is real is God and we who are His creations: the members of the Sonship, abiding forever in the Heaven of His changeless Love. True, this teaching does not appeal to everyone. Some people get downright angry when they hear it. And we certainly shouldn't aggressively preach it to people who are suffering from this or any other tragedy.

But for me, there is something in the mere idea of the world's unreality that fills me with a tremendous sense of relief and gratitude. Thank God that, however grim the Haiti earthquake looks to us, in truth everyone involved is still resting safely in the Father's everlasting embrace. How wonderful that even as we look with horror and compassion on "pain and death, on grief and separation and on loss" (W-pI.99:5:4), our loving Father guarantees that everyone's true nature is shining in Heaven eternally unchanged. How beautiful that in the midst of even the most horrific suffering, God gently assures all who suffer: "You are still My holy Son, forever innocent, forever loving and forever loved, as limitless as your Creator, and completely changeless and forever pure" (W-pII.10:5:1).

Of course, for those of us who believe this, it is only effective as a healing balm to the degree that we commit to practicing it, using the practice tools the Course itself gives us day by day, hour by hour, and minute by minute. Here are some practices I like to use in situations like the Haiti earthquake:

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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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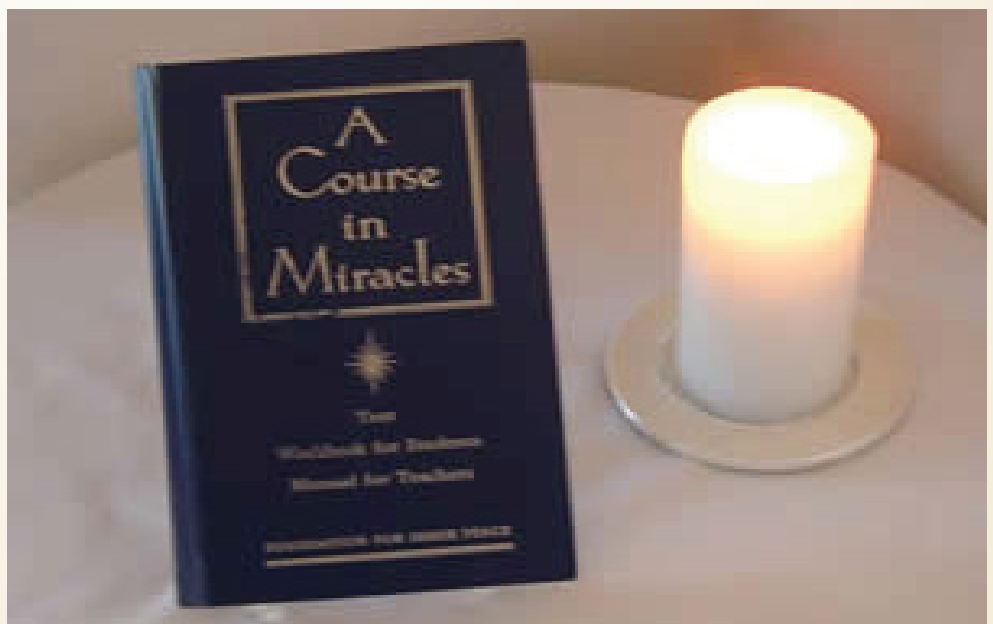
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- Lesson 14, which has us apply its practice line specifically to “all the horrors in the world that cross your mind” (W-pI.14.4:2). For instance: “*God did not create that earthquake in Haiti, and so it is not real*” (based on W-pI.14.4:7).
- The beautiful first paragraph of the “What am I?” section (W-pII.14.1), applied in second person to all who are suffering in this situation.
- The prayer from Lesson 245, “Your peace is with me, Father. I am safe.”
- The prayer from Lesson 163 (W-pI.163.9), “There is no death. The Son of God is free.”
- One of the practice lines from Lesson 99, “Salvation is my only function here,” applied directly to the situation: “*God still is Love, and this earthquake in Haiti is not His Will*” (based on W-pI.99.6:8).
- A couple of lines from Lesson 193, “All things are lessons God would have me learn,” lines which are meant to be applied to “all suffering regardless of its form” (W-pI.193.5:2). The first line is this one (which I’ve converted to first person): “There is a way to look on everything that lets it be to me another step to Him, and to salvation of the world” (W-pI.193.13:1). The second, which I say to myself, is a line which expresses this new way of looking: “*Forgive, and you will see this earthquake in Haiti differently.*”
- The various “response to temptation” practices from Review II, which are all meant to be applied to “this” (a particular situation) or a particular person (and can also be applied to any group of people). For instance: “*Let me perceive this situation in Haiti only in the light of God’s plan for salvation*” (based on W-pI.86.2:4) or “*Let peace extend from my mind to yours, my brothers in Haiti*” (based on W-pI.82.2:1).

Of course, just one application of any of these lines is unlikely to produce a significant shift. For maximum benefit, they need to be repeated again and again.

Finally, the call for miracles. On the Course’s path, we are not meant just to passively learn that the world is an illusion, and we’re certainly not meant to say to those who suffer, “Get over it, dude, it’s just an illusion.” Rather, the Course wants us to extend what we’ve learned of God’s Love to others in the form of truly loving and helpful words and deeds; as Jesus said to Helen and Bill, “the members of *my* party are *active* workers.” Events like the earthquake in Haiti remind us once again that the Course is calling each and every one of us to become a *miracle worker*, an active agent in God’s plan to bring us from the darkness to the light. One of my favorite lines from the Course is more appropriate than ever as the world turns its attention to the agony of Haiti: “Look about the world, and see the suffering there. Is not your heart willing to bring your weary brothers rest?” (W-pI.191.10:7-8).

Of course, not all of us will be guided to extend miracles specifically to the people of Haiti, though many of us may well be. Where, when, how, and to whom we give our miracles is up to the Holy Spirit. The important thing is that we become truly miracle-minded through our practice of the Course, and allow the Holy Spirit to extend miracles through us in whatever way He sees fit. I hope that this tragedy will serve as a catalyst that will inspire people around the world, whatever their particular path, to become miracle workers in their own way — beacons of love, forgiveness, and healing in a dark world that dearly needs the light.

Many are doing just that in the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake. As with earlier events like 9/11, the Asian tsunami, and Hurricane Katrina, we have seen a tremendous outpouring of loving help — prayers, humanitarian aid, donations to help the relief effort, etc. — from around the world. I have been deeply heartened by the love this tragedy has brought forth. I can only hope that it will continue once Haiti drops from the headlines, as in time it surely will. (Along these lines, if you are donating to the Haiti relief effort, I recommend marking your calendar and making another donation a year later. It will still be as much needed as ever, and the tendency with events like this is for donations to bottom out quickly once the event is no longer in the news.)

Miracles are the Course’s prescription for a deeply ailing world, and we are meant to be the doctors who administer them. In the Urtext, Jesus even reminded us that he sent out his disciples to be “Physicians of the Lord.” Let the horror in Haiti remind all of us, as Jesus tells us in the Course, that “Each day should be devoted to miracles” (T-1.I.15:1). Let us ask him, as he invited Helen and Bill to ask him: “Help me to perform whatever miracles you want of me today.” Let us make true the promise that Jesus gave them at the very beginning of the Course’s dictation: “You will see miracles through your hands through me.”

This is how we will finally undo the world in which horrific events like the Haiti earthquake are possible. This is how we will transform the world from a “slaughter house” (M-13.4:4) to “a gentle world...with mercy for the holy Son of God...a kindly home where he can rest a while before he journeys on” (W-pII.325.1:6). This is how we will lift all minds and hearts from the darkness of the ego’s hateful world to the eternal light of God’s loving Heaven.

# Groundhog Day

by Greg Mackie

I love the movie *Groundhog Day*, with Bill Murray and Andie MacDowell. If you haven't seen it, I highly recommend it. (And if you haven't seen it, you probably don't want to read this article until you have—warning, spoilers ahead!) This movie has become a bit of a classic among alternative spiritual seekers, and for good reason. I watched it again recently and realized once again what a deep commentary it is on life, and how well its story reflects certain teachings of *A Course in Miracles*.

*Groundhog Day* is the story of Phil, a cynical, egocentric weatherman assigned to cover the Groundhog Day festivities at Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. With his cameraman and his producer (Rita, Andie MacDowell's character), he grudgingly covers the annual ritual, in which the town's dignitaries determine whether Punxsutawney Phil, the nation's favorite weather-predicting groundhog, can see his shadow. If he can, the legend has it, it means six more weeks of winter.

Once the ceremony is over, Phil wants to leave right away, but a snowstorm keeps them in town for the night. And when he wakes up the next morning, he discovers something very strange has happened: It is Groundhog Day, February 2, the *same* Groundhog Day, all over again. This happens not just once but again and again and again. He's the only one who experiences the repetition; to everyone else, each February 2 is a brand new day, and they don't remember anything that happened on Phil's previous repetitions of the day. But from Phil's perspective, every day is the same February 2, and events unfold exactly as they did the day before.

Well, not *exactly*. For Phil himself is free to act differently each day, and thus change the course of the people and events he himself comes into contact with. What would you do if you had to live the exact same day over and over again, but could choose how to live it? The rest of the movie depicts Phil's journey of transformation as he quite literally faces this question.

I see three broad phases in Phil's journey. First, he goes through a selfish phase. He thinks of the situation like this: If there is literally no tomorrow, there are no consequences. Therefore, he can do whatever he wants. What glorious freedom! His attitude reminds me of those people who worry that the Course's teaching about the illusory nature of the world might lead people to say, "If it's just an illusion, why not just run amok?" Phil runs amok. He gets drunk and drives on the railroad tracks with the cops chasing him. He eats huge portions of decadent, fattening foods—why worry about weight or cholesterol? He spends lavishly. He manipulates women into going to bed with him—for him, everything is by definition a one night stand. It's a selfish hedonist's dream.

But eventually, the thrill is gone, and he enters a despairing phase. Sure, all that decadence was fun for a while, but when it's just the same thing day after day after day, even the most exquisite pleasure loses its appeal. Phil begins to realize that wanton selfishness will never make him happy. It is empty and meaningless. All of this leads him to try to end his dilemma any way he can. He steals Punxsutawney Phil away, thinking that getting rid of the groundhog might get him out of Groundhog Day. When this doesn't work, he tries to commit suicide, which does work—until he awakens again the next morning. Each day he tries suicide in a different way, only to awaken again to (gulp) yet another Groundhog Day.

Phil's attitude in this phase reminds me of the "Real Alternative" section of the Course's Text. This section speaks of how we eventually realize that all the pathways of the world are really the same, and none of them lead to happiness. It says, in what I believe is a reference to suicide, that "Men have died on seeing this, because they saw no way except the pathways offered by the world. And learning they led nowhere, lost their hope" (T-31.IV.3:4-5). Phil has lost all hope and *tries* to die, but there seems to be no way out.

But then, inspired by Rita, he begins to look at his situation a different way. Earlier in the movie, he had tried to manipulate Rita into going to bed with him, without success. But as time goes on, he starts to see how good and kind and loving she is, and slowly but surely falls in love with her. The two start enjoying each other's company. He tells her about his repeating-day dilemma and convinces her that it is really happening (not so easy to do, because she has no recollection of what she heard or did in his previous repetitions; he has to start over from the beginning with her each day). One day she says to him, "Maybe it's not a curse. It just depends on how you look at it." Perhaps, to use the words of the "Real Alternative" section, Phil might use this situation as an opportunity to learn a new way to live: "The learning that the world can offer but one choice, no matter what its form may be, is the beginning of acceptance that there is a real alternative instead" (T-31.IV.6:1).

This leads to Phil's final phase, a loving phase. He begins to devote his days (well, his day) to being of loving service to everyone in the Punxsutawney community. Because he has seen the exact same daily events unfold countless times, he knows exactly who needs help, and he becomes the ultimate Good Samaritan. He is cheerful and upbeat. He has a kind word for everyone. He gives wise counsel to an engaged couple contemplating splitting up. He rescues a child who falls from a tree. He helps a homeless man. He saves a man from choking to death. And he also learns to love Rita with a genuine, selfless love. He is caring and sensitive to her. He learns how to play the piano, because she always wanted a man who could play an instrument. He asks her about her hopes and dreams. He no longer tries to get her in the sack.

Just as Rita suggested, Phil finally realizes that it really does depend on how you look at it. He finally realizes that with

the right attitude, he is not cursed but blessed. Finally, at the end of a wonderful day full of love and helpfulness to others, Phil takes Rita in his arms and says what prove to be climactic words: “No matter what happens tomorrow, or for the rest of my life, I’m happy now because I love you.”

This, as you’ve probably guessed even if you haven’t seen the movie, is what breaks the spell. Love is the answer. When Phil awakes the next day, it is February 3. Groundhog Day is over. Phil’s journey is complete. He has transformed from an egotistical lout into a truly loving and generous man. He got the girl too (this is Hollywood, after all). And now, finally, a new life can begin.

It’s not difficult to see how this entire movie echoes the journey the Course says we are all on. For the Course tells us that even though our days look different in form, each day is really the exact same day in content: “Each day, and every minute in each day, and every instant that each minute holds, you but relive the single instant when the time of terror took the place of love” (T-26.V.13:1). We’re not just reliving Groundhog Day; we’re reliving Time of Terror Day.

We try to tell ourselves it really isn’t so bad. We try to “seize the day.” We each “run amok” in our own way. We seek worldly pleasures, and tell ourselves that if we can just manipulate things to go our way, we will be happy. But the older we get, the more we realize that the life we’re living is just “same ol’, same ol’.” Whether we get the things we want or not, it’s just an exercise in futility. As long as we continue to live egocentric lives looking out for number one, we will simply repeat the time of terror over and over again. And we will experience the same despair that Phil did, whether we’re fully aware of it or not.

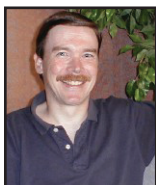
But just as Phil did, we can choose to look at life with fresh eyes. It doesn’t have to be a curse. We can use our experience here to learn that there is a real alternative to the time of terror. Indeed, as a well known Course passage tells us, Christ uses all of our seemingly endlessly repeating trials and tribulations to teach us that there is a better way to live and we can choose that way:

Trials are but lessons that you failed to learn presented once again, so where you made a faulty choice before you now can make a better one, and thus escape all pain that what you chose before has brought to you. In every difficulty, all distress, and each perplexity Christ calls to you and gently says, “My brother, choose again.” (T-31.VIII.3:1-2)

What is the better way Christ wants us to choose? It is, of course, the way of love. He calls us to be truly helpful; He calls us to selflessly extend love in the way Phil finally learned how to do. He calls us to be miracle workers. This is the way to leave Time of Terror Day behind and live a new life — our true life — rooted in the Love of God we never really left.

Interestingly enough, after watching *Groundhog Day*, I received a striking piece of spiritual guidance that said, in essence, that I’m on the same journey that Phil was on. His path is mine. I need to set aside my own selfishness and become truly helpful to others. I need to learn how to genuinely love everyone I encounter. This guidance had such a profound effect on me that the very words “Groundhog Day” have become a little spiritual practice for me. I say these words when I’m tempted to be selfish, and they remind me that the real purpose of my day is to take a step toward becoming what Phil became, a step toward becoming a miracle worker who blesses the world with true helpfulness and love.

May we all use our “Groundhog Days” to discover the unparalleled joy of selfless love.



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

Greg Mackie 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 “Course Meets World” articles for the Circle of Atonement’s website, and is one of the co-leaders of the Circle Course Community. He sees his primary function as helping to develop a tradition of Course scholarship.

## CIRCLE MAILBOX

*Here is the feedback we've received about Robert's article in A Better Way #96: "The Creative Impulse: What Place Does It Have in the Spiritual Life?"*

Thank you for writing this. It seems to me to offer another way of reframing what time is for, which is the same as rethinking what my day is for, and so, what my life is for. In this world, I can't create in the true sense of the word. But I can honor the creative impulse in me, that natural longing, by performing a reflection of heavenly creation. I do that by using time creatively (constructively, productively), devoting it to miracles, in order to convince myself of my own ability to create something of value, and so, of my own divine worth.

Put another way, I spend my day in giving miracles to others through simple acts of loving extension. This is how I bring into existence something of real value. The miracles I give are my creative act. They are a creative energizer for others. They are a way for me to channel my natural creative ability into an interpersonal exchange that produces something of God — love and healing, a light in the soul — in another person.

To think of myself as being capable of producing something of God in someone else seems like a pretty ambitious endeavor, one I'm definitely not holy enough to pull off. But the truth is that I see how I've already begun to do this in my life in daily ways, not thinking of what I'm doing as particularly creative acts or as miracles. I like for people to feel accepted and appreciated, and I like to be in an environment that is calm and productive. So this is part of what I express through my writing and my work, but also by simpler acts like baking cookies with my sister, helping my son dry the supper dishes, wrapping presents, singing my heart out in church, laughing with friends over lunch, or helping a co-worker put the finishing touches on a term paper.

As individual acts, they're no big deal. But as these ordinary expressions of appreciation become a consistent way of life, I suspect they'll hold more and more power for a changed experience, for me and those I'm in relationship with.

And I think I'm getting there. Because when I step back and look at my life as one total picture, one story with many parts and a changing cast of characters, I see how much of what I think and do and hope for is beginning to pull in the same direction. With rare exceptions, I honestly believe that direction is toward light. And that feels really good.

— Amy Speech

## CIRCLE NEWS

### *The Illuminated Text Volume 2*

We are very excited to announce the publication of our latest book! *The Illuminated Text* by Robert Perry and Greg Mackie is a multi-volume series drawn from our extremely popular online Text Reading Program. With numerous requests to publish in book form we have finally done so, and Volume 2 is available to [buy now](#) for just \$17.95!

Why an illuminated Text? The Text is the foundation of A Course in Miracles. Doing the Course is simply a process of learning and internalizing its thought system, and the Text is where that thought system is laid out. It is an unparalleled spiritual tour de force. Careful study of it will change your outlook in ways that perhaps nothing else can.

Many students, however, find the Text to be very hard going, and wish they had a deeper grasp of what they were reading. *The Illuminated Text* will guide you, in detail, through the Text, enabling you to get a deep understanding of this spiritual masterpiece. Each Course paragraph is first presented, and this is followed by detailed commentary. Material that was edited out of the Course is included where it is relevant and clarifying, and there are exercises, from Robert and Greg, for practical application.

You won't want to miss these extremely helpful volumes. It will eventually be a seven-volume series, and as we mentioned, Volume 2 has just been released, and can be [purchased](#) for \$17.95!