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INSTITUTE FOR TEACHING INNER PEACE THROUGH A COURSE IN MIRACLES

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THE UNIQUENESS OF A COURSE IN MIRACLES

[Announcements](#)Gloria Wapnick
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To state that *A Course in Miracles* is unique among world spiritualities is not to say that it is necessarily the best. After all, it is stated unequivocally in the opening pages of the *manual for teachers* that the Course is but one of "many thousands" of the "universal course":

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There is a course for every teacher of God. The form of the course varies greatly. So do the particular teaching aids involved. But the content of the course never changes. Its central theme is always, "God's Son is guiltless, and in his innocence is his salvation." It can be taught by actions or thoughts; in words or soundlessly; in any language or in no language; in any place or time or manner.... This is a manual for a special curriculum, intended for teachers of a special form of the universal course. There are many thousands of other forms, all with the same outcome (M-1.3:1-6; 4:1-2).

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Rather, speaking of the uniqueness of *A Course in Miracles* simply reflects its distinctive presentation of ancient truths within our contemporary language and conceptual systems, thus integrating the non-dualistic principles—known to the most advanced teachers of Hinduism and Buddhism, for example—with the psychological or psychodynamic insights given the world in the past century. Interestingly, this integration comes in decidedly Christian language, albeit with non-traditional meaning. Thus, at the same time that *A Course in Miracles* teaches that the physical universe is an illusion, a dream in which our false self believed it had split off from God and made a world the opposite of Heaven, it also shows us how to live in such a world so that we may eventually awaken from its dream of death.

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From the insane belief that the impossible could actually occur—i.e., a part of perfect Oneness could separate from the Whole—an insane thought system arose. This set of *beliefs* includes the unholy trinity of *sin*, *guilt*, and *fear*: the *belief* in the *sin* of separating from God, our Source; the *belief* in *guilt*, which affirms that we have not only sinned against love, but that we are ourselves wretched and evil because of our sinfulness; and finally, the *fear* over the *belief* in God's retaliation, reflecting the ego's principle that *guilt demands punishment*.

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To defend against the terror engendered by such insane thinking, an equally insane set of defenses is required. This most prominently entails the use of *projection*, the psychodynamic that Sigmund Freud made into a household term. Simply described, projection is the psychological mechanism wherein we seek to expel from *within*, the guilt we do not wish to remember, and place it *without*, onto someone else. On the macrocosmic level, it is projection that made possible the emergence of a physical universe: the thought of separation projected outward—*A Course in Miracles'* equivalent of the Big Bang that scientists believe began the cosmos. On the microcosmic level of our individual experience in the world, projection takes the form of seeing in other people the sins that we do not wish to acknowledge nor accept responsibility for in ourselves. And to ensure that the projected guilt remain outside our minds, the ego causes us to forget the projection, leaving us only with feelings of grievances and justified anger over how others have treated us unfairly.

The end result of the ego's defensive system of guilt and projection is a world in which we all feel justified in our anger, convinced of the truth of our perceptions that we are innocent victims of people and events beyond our control. The only available ego recourse, therefore, is to attempt to change the world around us to conform to our needs, and to protect ourselves from the harm that others would seek to inflict on us. And never would we remember that we are blaming others for what we secretly blame ourselves for.

This situation would indeed be hopeless were it not for the presence of the Holy Spirit in our minds. As *A Course in Miracles* says, the ego's thought system "may be fool-proof, but it is not God-proof" (T-5.VI.10:6). Patiently, the Holy Spirit waits for the pain of our hatred to become so intense that we are almost impelled by our need for peace to call out for help. As Jesus describes this part of the process:

Tolerance for pain may be high, but it is not without limit. Eventually everyone begins to recognize, however dimly, that there *must* be a better way (T-2.III.3:5-6).

And the answer to our call is not a solution to what we perceive to be the problem. Rather, it is a correction of this very perception. An important principle in *A Course in Miracles* is that *projection makes perception*, so important in fact that it is stated twice (T-13.V.3:5; T-21.in.1:1). We first look within our minds and choose to believe in the ego's thought system of sin, guilt, and fear, *or* in the Holy Spirit's thought system of forgiveness, innocence, and healing. From that decision, *the one and only true decision we can make*, we then look out onto a world that reflects back to us the thought system we chose to make reality—guilt or innocence:

The lessons to be learned are only two. Each has its outcome in a different world. And each world follows

surely from its source. The certain outcome of the lesson that God's Son is guilty is the world you see. It is a world of terror and despair. Nor is there hope of happiness in it....There is no joy that you can seek for here and hope to find....

The outcome of the lesson that God's Son is guiltless is a world in which there is no fear, and everything is lit with hope and sparkle with a gentle friendliness. Nothing but calls to you in soft appeal to be your friend, and let it join with you (T-31.1.7:1-6,8; 8:1-2).

Thus, it is our choice to shift perception—born of the shift in inner teachers—that produces our shift from fear, anxiety, and depression to peace, happiness, and joy.

Forgiveness, the "key to happiness" (W-pl.121), is the name given to describe this process of undoing, which can be easily summarized in three basic steps:

1. We begin by recognizing that the source of our distress is ultimately within ourselves, and that the responsibility for our unhappiness cannot be placed on anyone or anything that is outside our minds. Thus, we basically reverse the direction that was taken by our minds' projection: bringing the guilt back within that we had sought to place without, wherein we sought to make others guilty, having our "secret sins and hidden hates" (T-31.VIII.9:2) rest on them instead of looking at these beliefs within our own minds.
2. When the guilt has been brought back to its origin in our minds, we can exercise the power of our minds' decision-making ability to change the perception of our self. This shift from the ego's (or false self's) image of ourselves as the "home of evil, darkness and sin" (W-pl.93.1:1) to a Self that abides in "light and joy and peace" (W-pl.93) is what *A Course in Miracles* refers to as the miracle, the basis for the title of this spiritual text.
3. The darkness of our ego's thought system—having been brought to the light of the Holy Spirit, the memory of God's Love that we brought with us into the dream of separation when we first fell asleep—is gone, just as the darkness of the room disappears once a light is turned on.

A Course in Miracles succinctly summarizes the process of forgiveness this way, speaking of undoing the cause of the world:

This change requires, first, that the cause be identified and then let go, so that it can be replaced. The first two steps in this process require your cooperation. The final one does not (W-pl.23.5:2-4).

It becomes clear as one pursues *A Course in Miracles* as a spiritual path that its understanding of forgiveness differs widely from the traditional one. We are instructed by our inner teacher to forgive our brothers for what they have *not* done to us. "Let them be as hateful and vicious as they may, they could have no effect on you unless you failed to recognize it is your dream" (T-27.VIII.10:6). Thus, other people do not have the power to take away the peace of God from us. Only *we*—the decision-making part of our minds—have that power, through our choice for the ego's conflict instead of Jesus' peace. And it is for just that power over us to inflict harm that we accuse others of sin, rather than looking within at our own mistaken choice for the "power" of the ego as the shabby substitute for the loving power of God. The message of *A Course in Miracles* is simple: "There is no time, no place, no state where God is absent. There is nothing to be feared" (T-29.I.1:1-2). Regardless of the situations in which we find ourselves, many of which can indeed be terrible, we yet can choose to remember the Love of God that rests quietly within; a Love that awaits our decision to make it our own. And in that choice is peace returned to our tortured minds that dreamt of conflict.

And so, rather than making the sins of others real and then overlooking them, as the religious and secular worlds encourage us to do, we recognize the *perceived* sins as merely the *projected* images of a false self that can easily be exchanged for the memory of the glorious Self God created; a Self, which again, merely awaits our return to It. Herein lies the uniqueness that distinguishes *A Course in Miracles* from traditional Christianity, indeed from almost all other religious systems of thought. This distinctive view of forgiveness draws its meaning from an even more basic distinctive thought: the Course's *non-dualistic metaphysics*. At the heart of *A Course in Miracles*' thought system is the teaching that the perfect God did not create the imperfect physical universe, nor the impermanent bodies that inhabit it. The entire world's inherently illusory nature has its source in the impossible thought that God's living and loving Oneness could be compromised by sin, a sin that is thus first made real, and then atoned for by a life of suffering and sacrifice.

Because of its non-dualistic foundation in which form is not accorded reality, *A Course in Miracles* shares nothing in common with *formal* religions in which certain objects, places, structures, foods, rituals, even certain special people themselves—all have become sacred. *A Course in Miracles*, as we saw at the beginning of this article, is simply one among "many thousand(s)" of spiritual or religious paths; though a distinctive spirituality, it does not claim to be the *one, revealed truth*. We can state the uniqueness of *A Course in Miracles* by simply saying that it is not what it appears to be. Thus:

- It is not a new religion, church, or cult, though it is quite clearly religious; its ultimate goal being to awaken us to God, our Source.
- It claims no special persons as priests, ministers, or rabbis, yet each of us *is* the teacher who, with the love of Jesus beside us and supporting our change of mind, can choose to awaken from the world's dream.
- It is not built around the divine figure of a savior, though the loving presence of Jesus within our dream of separation is the source of this teaching as well as being the teacher who remains within our minds to lead us out of the dream.
- It is not the Christianity of the two-thousand-year-old tradition, yet its Christian language serves as the springboard for the correction of the mistakes of specialness, exclusion, suffering, and judgment that have so characterized the teachings of Jesus for centuries.
- It does not share the biblical cosmogony in which God is the world's creator, sustainer, and ultimate redeemer, yet the illusory world can lovingly be used as a classroom in which we learn to transcend it.

In summary, then, we can approach *A Course in Miracles* as being a wonderful gift that offers us the vision of a new world:

To your tired eyes I bring a vision of a different world, so new and clean and fresh you will forget the pain and sorrow that you saw before (T-31.VIII.8:4).

In this vision *all* people are seen as one, united in sharing

the *same* insanity of separation that led us in the beginning to fall asleep and dream this world of separate and exclusive interests in which, in the end, all lose;

the *same* need to awaken from this dream of pain and loss, suffering and death; and finally,

the *same* Self that has always waited beyond the dream for us to return to the Home we never truly left.

It is through our forgiveness of *all* those we had misperceived to be separate from us that we come at last to remember our Identity, the Self that is the Son of God, created as His Own, at one with Him in innocence and love.

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