

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM Text, Section 1.I

Principles of Miracles

The first four chapters of the Text are terse and telegraphic in style, and that is especially true of this first section. Each “miracle principle” is a short, pithy statement of a profound truth. Like a proverb, each one contains a highly condensed dosage of the Course’s thought system. Often, these early statements concisely state ideas that are fully developed only much later in the Text. We’ll spend two weeks on these fifty principles because they are foundational to the rest of the Course, but at that we will barely scratch the surface.

The first four chapters are all somewhat disconnected; almost as if connecting thoughts and words are missing, or just assumed. I’ve compared it to reading my own detailed notes on a lecture; sometimes I wonder, “How did the speaker get from here to there?” because I left something out. This is due in part to two things: 1) Helen Schucman’s ability to listen and take down the thoughts was imperfect at the start especially; she often had to go back and make corrections. This problem diminished as she got used to the process, and after Chapter 4, the dictation came more smoothly. 2) The earlier chapters were heavily interspersed with personal passages that were later edited prior to publication. This sometimes makes the connection between remaining sentences difficult (but not impossible) to discern.

Don’t expect to understand them all in a single reading, or even in a dozen readings. Most students of the Course find that the significance of certain of these principles does not become clear until they have been studying the books for years.

I have formed ten groups of principles that seem to me to have similar themes. I will try to draw out some of the main concepts or themes in each group, covering five groups this week, and five next week.

Thoughts on Miracle Principles

Expressions of Love: Miracles Are Interpersonal

Principles 1, 3, 11, 35, 9, 18, 21, and 8

1. There is no order of difficulty in miracles. One is not “harder” or “bigger” than another. They are all the same. All expressions of love are maximal.

3. Miracles occur naturally as expressions of love. The real miracle is the love that inspires them. In this sense everything that comes from love is a miracle.

11. Prayer is the medium of miracles. It is a means of communication of the created with the Creator. Through prayer love is received, and through miracles love is expressed.

35. Miracles are expressions of love, but they may not always have observable effects.

9. Miracles are a kind of exchange. Like all expressions of love, which are always miraculous in the true sense, the exchange reverses the physical laws. They bring more love both to the giver **and** the receiver.

18. A miracle is a service. It is the maximal service you can render to another. It is a way of loving your neighbor as yourself. You recognize your own and your neighbor's worth simultaneously.

21. Miracles are natural signs of forgiveness. Through miracles you accept God's forgiveness by extending it to others.

8. Miracles are healing because they supply a lack; they are performed by those who temporarily have more for those who temporarily have less.

• Study Question •

1. Before you read the commentary, read over these principles in the order listed above. What ideas or phrases seem to be repeated quite often? Based on these principles, would you say that a miracle involves one person, or two or more persons?

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As the first five of these principles make abundantly clear, a miracle is an expression of love, and all expressions of love are miracles, in the sense that they are inspired by love, which is “the real miracle,” and which finds its Source in God. God's love is the original miracle, and therefore any expression of love is also a miracle.

The phrase, “expressions of love,” implies an exchange between persons; one to give love, one to receive it. We need to take note of that, because the traditional understanding of miracles lacks this interpersonal element. We typically think of a miracle as something purely between us and God; to the Course, miracles seem to involve at least two people. It speaks of “their interpersonal nature” (T-1.II.2:5); that is, the *nature* of miracles is that they occur *between persons*. At least two people are involved, a giver and a receiver; there is an “exchange” of love.

In a miracle, one person, through prayer, receives God's Love, and then, temporarily having more of God's Love (or at least being more aware of having it), she *extends* it to another person or other persons. (“Extend” is a very important Course word, by the way. Extension of love is our whole reason for being.) That extension may or may not be observable—that is, physically visible; it could be purely a mental act. It always involves extending forgiveness, or recognizing her neighbor's worth. In the act of extending forgiveness to others, the first person accepts it for herself.

The miracle begins, then, with God expressing love to me; it continues with my mind receiving that love; it results in an extension of that love, through me, to another person. That is what the Course means by a miracle.

Notice how very different the Course's view of miracles is from our own. "Miracles occur naturally," it says (T-1.I.3:1). To us, miracles are *supernatural* by definition! Not to the Course. I'll come back to this point later. For now, just notice that a miracle is a natural expression of love. It isn't always flashy; sometimes our eyes don't see anything happening at all. It's quite ordinary. But it's still a miracle!

No Order of Difficulty: Miracles Are All the Same

Principles 1 and 49.

1. There is no order of difficulty in miracles. One is not "harder" or "bigger" than another. They are all the same. All expressions of love are maximal.

49. The miracle makes no distinction among degrees of misperception. It is a device for perception correction, effective quite apart from either the degree or the direction of the error. This is its true indiscriminateness.

Let's look closely at Principle #1: "There is no order of difficulty in miracles." The phrase "order of difficulty" occurs 28 times in the Course; this principle of miracles is not only the first one numerically; the Course refers to it as "the first principle of miracles" (T-2.I.5:5; T-23.II.3:1), first in importance as well as in number. Jesus says it is "a real foundation stone of the thought system I teach and want you to teach" (T-6.V(A).4:5). No one miracle is any harder than any other miracle; "they are all the same...[all are] maximal" (T-1.I.1:3-4).

If you think of a miracle as an expression of love, this makes sense. If you love someone, expressing it isn't hard at all; it is simply natural. We might suppose that it is harder to love some people than to love others; that's really a separate issue. But if you *already* really love someone, you love them completely, and all expressions of love are equally easy.

Where we get into difficulty is when we begin to apply this principle, as the Course itself does, to specific things. Healing cancer is no more difficult than healing a cold; transforming that relationship with an alcoholic, abusive parent is no more difficult than transforming your relationship with the most saintly person you know.

Central to the Course is the idea that we are really facing only one problem, which is a problem of misperception. Every apparent problem we have is nothing more than a variation of this one, central problem. Truly heal one problem, and you've healed them all, because they are all the same. Therefore, all miracles are equally easy—or equally hard, depending on how you look at it. Their function is to correct perception, to help us see the truth, rather than seeing an illusion. Whether the illusion is "big" or "small" is of no consequence; the miracle undoes them all with equal ease.

This is the first lesson in the Text and also one of the last; when we have truly learned there is no order of difficulty, our lessons are done. The *Manual for Teachers* says that a fully healed mind will put all problems and sicknesses into a single category (no order of difficulty): *unreal* (M-8.6:1-4).

• **Study Question** •

2. Think of some difficult situations, barriers, problems, or relationships that confront you. Let yourself be aware of how difficult or maybe even impossible their solution seems to you. Now, think of some problems you consider to be easily resolved, or barriers that are easily overcome. Allow yourself to realize how thoroughly convinced you are that some problems are much harder to solve than others. Then, repeat the words of Principle #1 to yourself, correcting your thinking: "There is no order of difficulty in miracles. One is not "harder" or "bigger" than another. They are all the same. All expressions of love are maximal."

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Miracles Join the Giver and Receiver, Making Minds One

Principles 9, 16, 18, 19, 27, 40, and 45

9. Miracles are a kind of exchange. Like all expressions of love, which are always miraculous in the true sense, the exchange reverses the physical laws. They bring more love both to the giver **and** the receiver.

16. Miracles are teaching devices for demonstrating it is as blessed to give as to receive. They simultaneously increase the strength of the giver and supply strength to the receiver.

18. A miracle is a service. It is the maximal service you can render to another. It is a way of loving your neighbor as yourself. You recognize your own and your neighbor's worth simultaneously.

19. Miracles make minds one in God. They depend on cooperation because the Sonship is the sum of all that God created. Miracles therefore reflect the laws of eternity, not of time.

27. A miracle is a universal blessing from God through me to all my brothers. It is the privilege of the forgiven to forgive.

40. The miracle acknowledges everyone as your brother and mine. It is a way of perceiving the universal mark of God.

45. A miracle is never lost. It may touch many people you have not even met, and produce undreamed of changes in situations of which you are not even aware.

• Study Question •

3. Like the first group of principles, this group emphasizes that miracles involve more than one person. Ultimately, how many persons are involved? Why is that so?

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I'm repeating a couple of principles here from the previous groupings because I want to connect a part of what they say to this further concept: Miracles join the giver and receiver; they make minds one in God.

Miracles are based on the fact that all that God created is already one; there is a "universal mark of God" in everyone and everything. We might say that a miracle is a recognition of oneness. When we offer a miracle, we are merely acknowledging or recognizing that mark of God in those around us. Each miracle ultimately affects everyone, because that mark of God is in everyone. All minds are already joined. As I recognize that my mind is joined with yours, that we together share the universal blessing, the mark of God, it leads both of us closer to acknowledging that mark in everyone.

Most especially, as I recognize the mark in you, I recognize it in myself. In giving you that blessing, I find I have also given it to myself. This demonstrates that "it is as blessed to give as to receive" (T-1.I.16:1). In fact, it shows that to give and to receive are identical, which is one of the primary lessons the Course aims to teach us. When Principle #9 says that miracles reverse physical laws, this is what it is referring to: When I give a miracle, instead of having less, I have more! Haven't you ever noticed that? When you give love away, your own heart is enriched.

Miracles are Natural

Principles 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 43

2. Miracles as such do not matter. The only thing that matters is their source, which is far beyond evaluation.
3. Miracles occur naturally as expressions of love. The real miracle is the love that inspires them. In this sense everything that comes from love is a miracle.
4. All miracles mean life, and God is the giver of life. His voice will direct you very specifically. You will be told all you need to know.
5. Miracles are habits, and should be involuntary. They should not be under conscious control. Consciously selected miracles can be misguided.
6. Miracles are natural. When they do not occur something has gone wrong.
7. Miracles are everyone's right, but purification is necessary first.
43. Miracles arise from a miraculous state of mind, or a state of miracle-readiness.

• Study Question •

4. "Miracles occur naturally as expressions of love." "When they do not occur, something has gone wrong." What, do you suppose, may have gone wrong? If miracles are expressions of love, and they are not occurring, what might the problem be? (See the Text, Introduction, 1:7 for a clue.)

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Miracles are not supernatural; they are *natural*. Love inspires them, and miracles just occur naturally as a result of love. The Course uses many terms that mean very much the same thing as “natural.” Miracles are habits; involuntary; our right. You get the feeling that we should not have to think about miracles at all; they should just be there, without any conscious effort, like breathing.

If miracles are love’s expression, then if we rediscover our identity as love, miracles *will* just be there, like breathing. I think the notion of miracles as *involuntary habits* is stunning! When my mind is fully healed, I will shed miracles like our pet Corgie sheds hair; miracles will drop from me like leaves from a tree in autumn. I will just be going about my business, listening to God’s Voice as It directs me very specifically, and wherever I go, miracles will follow.

The Workbook has a wonderfully poetic description of such a person:

From this day forth, your ministry takes on a genuine devotion, and a glow that travels from your fingertips to those you touch, and blesses those you look upon.

A vision reaches everyone you meet, and everyone you think of, or who thinks of you. For your experience today will so transform your mind that it becomes the touchstone for the holy Thoughts of God (W-pI.157.5:1–3).

Another interesting point is the notion of *purification*. Miracles are our right; they should be natural and unconscious habits; if they aren’t, something is wrong, and purification becomes necessary. When you consider the context, this cannot mean any kind of external purification, such as abstaining from sex or meat or drink. It is our *minds* that need to become miracle-ready (T-1.I.43). We need to, as the Introduction told us, remove the blocks to the awareness of Love’s presence; then the miracles will flow again.

• **Study Question** •

5. Compare Principle #7 with T-18.IX.14:1–2. Is it our bodies and behavior that need to be cleansed and purified, or is it our minds and our perceptions?

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Miracles Correct Thoughts

Principles 10, 12, 14, 23, 33, 34, 36, 37, 38, 39, 49, and 50

10. The use of miracles as spectacles to induce belief is a misunderstanding of their purpose.

12. Miracles are thoughts. Thoughts can represent the lower or bodily level of experience, or the higher or spiritual level of experience. One makes the physical, and the other creates the spiritual.

14. Miracles bear witness to truth. They are convincing because they arise from conviction. Without conviction they deteriorate into magic, which is mindless and therefore destructive; or rather, the uncreative use of mind.

23. Miracles rearrange perception and place all levels in true perspective. This is healing because sickness comes from confusing the levels.

33. Miracles honor you because you are lovable. They dispel illusions about yourself and perceive the light in you. They thus atone for your errors by freeing you from your nightmares. By releasing your mind from the imprisonment of your illusions, they restore your sanity.

34. Miracles restore the mind to its fullness. By atoning for lack they establish perfect protection. The spirit's strength leaves no room for intrusions.

36. Miracles are examples of right thinking, aligning your perceptions with truth as God created it.

37. A miracle is a correction introduced into false thinking by me. It acts as a catalyst, breaking up erroneous perception and reorganizing it properly. This places you under the Atonement principle, where perception is healed. Until this has occurred, knowledge of the Divine Order is impossible.

38. The Holy Spirit is the mechanism of miracles. He recognizes both God's creations and your illusions. He separates the true from the false by his ability to perceive totally rather than selectively.

39. The miracle dissolves error because the Holy Spirit identifies error as false or unreal. This is the same as saying that by perceiving light, darkness automatically disappears.

49. The miracle makes no distinction among degrees of misperception. It is a device for perception correction, effective quite apart from either the degree or the direction of the error. This is its true indiscriminateness.

50. The miracle compares what you have made with creation, accepting what is in accord with it as true, and rejecting what is out of accord as false.

“Miracles restore the mind to its fullness” (T-1.I.34:1). What Jesus wants us to understand is fairly obvious from the number of times and the number of different ways in which he says it: Miracles have to do primarily with our minds and our thinking, and not with things outside of our minds. They are not spectacles that induce belief (a common perception of the miracles Jesus is reported to have performed in the Bible). They do not work on the physical level so much as

on the spiritual level. They rearrange *perception*, rather than rearranging the physical world. They are thoughts, examples of right thinking, corrections introduced into false thinking that align our perceptions with truth, devices for perception correction.

We typically think of miracles as external spectacles, like Jesus walking on water or turning water into wine, or Moses parting the Red Sea. In modern times we associate inexplicable healings and synchronistic events with miracles. But the Course sees a miracle as something that acts on our thoughts to correct them.

The Course says that it deals in cause, and not in effect (T-21.VII.7:8). In the Course's view, what we traditionally think of as miracles are just the *effects* of miracles. A healing is caused by a shift in the thinking and perception of the sick person; the miracle is not the healing, but the divine activity that brought about the shift in that person's perception. The miracle is what changed the mind; the change of mind, in turn, caused the rearrangement of the physical world. The Course wants to instruct us in how to receive, and how to give, those mental catalysts that shift and change our perceptions.

Miracles, as we read earlier in Principle #35, do not *always* have observable effects such as healings and synchronicities. Some people have come to believe that the Course teaches that miracles have nothing at all to do with the physical world; they *never* have observable effects. The way Principle #35 is worded, however, makes it clear that *some* miracles *do* have such observable effects. If I say, "I do not always eat Wheaties for breakfast," it would not be correct to infer that this means, "I never eat Wheaties." You can properly infer that some days I *do* eat Wheaties. Likewise, Principle #35 can clearly be understood to say, "Some miracles" [maybe even most miracles] "do have observable effects." Some miracles result in bodies being healed, in bills being paid, in enemies being reconciled. Not all, but some.

Another misconception about miracles is that a miracle *is* a shift in perception. Principle #37 clears that right up. It says that, "A miracle is a correction introduced into false thinking by me," where "me" is the author, Jesus. "Miracles rearrange perception" (T-1.I.23:1). In Principle #38, the Holy Spirit is identified as "the mechanism of miracles." Without getting into a long discussion about Jesus and the Holy Spirit here, let's just say that the miracle is an intervention in our thinking by an agent of God. That miracle, says Principle #37, "acts as a catalyst, breaking up erroneous perception and reorganizing it properly." So the miracle is not the same thing as a shift in perception; a miracle *causes* a shift in perception. The Course is consistent in making that distinction (see T-1.I.23.1; T-1.II.6:3; T-2.V(A).15:1; T-5.II.1:3; W-pII.13.2:3; and W-pII.346.1:1). Why make a point of that? What's the difference between saying a miracle *is* a shift in perception and a miracle *causes* a shift in perception? Well, for one thing, it's once again confusing effect with cause. If we go about directly seeking a shift in our perception, we may not find it. We may labor at trying to change our perception and become quite frustrated when we can't do so. If we turn to God to seek the miracle that *causes* a shift in perception, we will find it, and experience the shift we desire. A miracle is not something we do by ourselves; it is something we receive from God, and then offer to others. Based on this section, this is how I would define the word "miracle" in the Course:

A miracle is the intervention, invited by us, of a divine power—the Holy Spirit, or Jesus Christ in the context of the Course—to heal human thought patterns in a

way that is beyond our human ability. Usually this also involves that divine power extending from one person's mind to heal that of another.

• Study Questions •

6. *Many points in these principles have been skipped over in the general commentary. To consider a couple of them: Notice the distinction between the use of the words “make” and “create” in Principle #12, and again, indirectly, in Principle #50. Miracles are thoughts; then two classes of thoughts are mentioned. Which of the two classes do miracles fall into? Do miracles reflect what our thoughts make, or what they create? In what realm do they act, physical or spiritual?*
7. *What definition is given to the term “magic” in Principle #14? (This term is used fairly often, so it helps to get the definition as clear as we can now.)*

• Answer Key

1. The phrase “expressions of love” is repeated (or closely paralleled) in Principles #1, 3, 11, 35, and 9. Some form of the idea “exchange,” “extend” or “extension” appears in three of these principles. These all carry the idea of something that takes place in a relationship between two or more persons.
2. No written answer required.
3. Ultimately, every miracle involves everyone—the entire Sonship. This is so because miracles reflect the laws of eternity, in which all that God has created is joined as one. A miracle is acknowledging or recognizing the oneness of all that God created.
4. The problem is that we are not aware of love's presence; we are not recognizing the love that we are. There are things blocking that awareness that need to be removed. When the blocks are removed, we will be aware of love, and miracles will occur naturally as a result.
5. It is our minds and our perceptions that need purification.
6. Miracles belong to the class of thoughts that represent the higher or spiritual level of experience. Higher thoughts *create* the spiritual; lower thoughts *make* the physical. A miracle thought reflects the higher; it holds what we have made up to creation, rejects what is out of accord with creation, and accepts what is in accord with it.
7. Magic is the uncreative use of mind; it is “making” instead of “creating.” Thus, as is explained later in the Course, it can be thought of as any attempt to solve problems or seek satisfaction in separation, by ourselves and apart from God.