

# Commentary

## ACIM® Preface

**Explanation of underlining, italics and footnote formats can be found at the end of the commentary. See also the note there on the effects of switching from the FIP edition to the Complete and Annotated Edition.**  
**Please note that the FIP and CE versions may differ in where paragraph breaks occur.**

## Overview

Since the first two sections of this Preface were written by Helen Schucman herself, I will only make a few short comments when necessary to clarify or add information she omits. The final section, which was dictated internally like the Course itself, deserves closer examination and discussion.

The article has three sections: “How It Came,” “What It Is,” and “What It Says.” In the first section, Helen shares her personal opinion about how the Course was prepared for publication. However, some people have a different view based on later evidence, which will also be discussed.

## How It Came

<sup>1</sup> *A Course in Miracles* began with the sudden decision of two people to join in a common goal. Their names were Helen Schucman and William Thetford, Professors of Medical Psychology at Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City. It does not matter who they were, except that the story shows that with God all things are possible. They were anything but spiritual. Their relationship with each other was difficult and often strained, and they were concerned with personal and professional acceptance and status. In general, they had considerable investment in the values of the world. Their lives were hardly in accord with anything that the Course advocates. Helen, the one who received the material, describes herself:

<sup>2</sup> Psychologist, educator, conservative in theory, and atheistic in belief, I was working in a prestigious and highly academic setting. And then something happened that triggered a chain of events I could never have predicted. The head of my department unexpectedly announced that he was tired of the angry and aggressive feelings our attitudes reflected and concluded that “there must be another way.” As if on cue, I agreed to help him find it. Apparently this Course is the other way.

No one can describe the Course's origin better than Helen Schucman. According to her autobiography, it began with “the sudden decision of two people to join in a common goal.” There were many events leading up to that decision, which you can read about in Kenneth Wapnick's biography of Schucman, *Absence From Felicity: The Story of Helen Schucman and Her Scribing of A Course in Miracles*. Schucman's relationship with William Thetford is also documented in Carol M. Howe's *Never Forget To To Laugh*. Howe describes the tumultuous relationship between Schucman and Thetford, but states that whenever they worked on the Course together, their antagonism disappeared.

What is notable is that both of them were very well-educated and intelligent people, not New Age nuts. Both were highly trained in psychology and respected in their field. Bill had even worked for the CIA with a top security clearance. Bill had a Christian Science upbringing, but became skeptical of religion after his family was affected by the death of children due to their parents' refusal of medical treatment. Helen, half-Jewish and raised by a Baptist nanny, saw herself as an atheist. Despite their vastly different backgrounds, they produced *A Course in Miracles*, a highly respected spiritual text. As Helen says, “The story shows that with God, all things are possible.”

3 Although their intention was serious, they had great difficulty in starting out on their joint venture. But they had given the Holy Spirit the “little willingness” that, as the Course itself was to emphasize again and again, is sufficient to enable Him to use any situation for His purposes and provide it with His power.

Embarking on a spiritual path through the Course only requires “a little willingness.” Its teachings align with modern discoveries in quantum physics and do not demand the acceptance of archaic doctrines or unbelievable facts. Following its simple teachings can lead to a total spiritual reawakening.

4 To continue Helen's first-person account:

5 Three startling months preceded the actual writing, during which time Bill suggested that I write down the highly symbolic dreams and descriptions of the strange images that were coming to me. Although I had grown more accustomed to the unexpected by that time, I was still very surprised when I wrote, "This is a course in miracles." That was my introduction to the Voice. It made no sound, but seemed to be giving me a kind of rapid, inner dictation which I took down in a shorthand notebook. The writing was never automatic. It could be interrupted at any time and later picked up again. It made me very uncomfortable, but it never seriously occurred to me to stop. It seemed to be a special assignment I had somehow, somewhere agreed to complete. It represented a truly collaborative venture between Bill and myself, and much of its significance, I am sure, lies in that. I would take down what the Voice "said" and read it to him the next day, and he typed it from my dictation. I expect he had his special assignment, too. Without his encouragement and support I would never have been able to fulfill mine. The whole process took about seven years. The *Text* came first, then the *Workbook for Students*, and finally the *Manual for Teachers*. Only a few minor changes have been made. Chapter titles and subheadings have been inserted in the *Text*, and some of the more personal references that occurred at the beginning have been omitted. Otherwise the material is substantially unchanged.

Aside from recommending the books I mentioned previously, I have little to add. They provide more detail to Helen's outline. Her belief that dictation was a "special assignment" suggests she and Bill believed they had lived many past lives working towards this task.

I disagree with her assertion that only minor changes were made when editing from the original dictation to the final product published by The Foundation for Inner Peace. A recent study of Helen's original shorthand notes has revealed that more than 50,000 words were omitted, and much was heavily edited and rearranged, especially in the early chapters of the *Text*. The original material and order have been restored to the Course in the "Complete and Annotated Edition" (abbreviated as CE), which we use in our study group.

To clarify, I have included a brief version history of the Course in the Appendix of this commentary. There are three commonly used English versions. The most widely distributed is that of the Foundation for Inner Peace (FIP), the original publisher, with over two million copies sold and over three million in print in twenty-seven languages.

*6 The names of the collaborators in the recording of the Course do not appear on the cover because the Course can and should stand on its own. It is not intended to become the basis for another cult. Its only purpose is to provide a way in which some people will be able to find their own Internal Teacher.*

From the beginning, *A Course In Miracles* was not intended to become the basis for another cult. It's important to realize that we are not expected to go around trying to “evangelize” people, striving to turn them into Course students. The Course refers to itself as just “a special form of the universal curriculum” (CE M-1.4:1). Nobody has to be a student of ACIM to learn the universal truths it teaches, and we can impart those truths to another person without ever mentioning the Course. Likewise, the truth of the Course should never depend on the merits of any of its teachers. There have been people of dubious integrity who have promoted the Course. You should not allow that to diminish the value of the Course in your eyes.

I am struck by the assertion that the *only* purpose of the Course is “to provide a way in which some people will be able to find their own Internal Teacher” (6:3). If you wonder what the Course can do for you, this is it. It is not designed to transform you into a perfect, fully enlightened being. Instead, it provides the necessary foundation to move in that direction by teaching you to listen to an Inner Voice. This can be a gradual process, but once you find and follow your Internal Teacher, you will begin to experience blessings and realize that the difficulties and pain that come from following your ego are not what you truly desire. As a result, you will become more inclined to listen to your Inner Voice.

It doesn't come easily. Not even for Jesus! In the Course, Jesus says that learning to listen *only* to that Voice was the *final lesson* he learned: “It is possible even in this world to hear only that Voice and no other. It takes effort and great willingness to learn. It is the final lesson that I learned” (CE T-5.II.12:1-3; FIP T-5.II.3:9-11). The Course's aim is to help us discover that Voice within us, and to begin to train us to listen to it. We have one advantage over Jesus: He is with us, helping us along the path he traveled before us.

## What It Is

This section discusses the physical format of the Course and the purpose of each of its parts. This section, too, represents only Helen's informed opinion about the Course. It was not dictated inwardly by the inner voice she heard.

As its title implies, the Course is arranged throughout as a teaching device. It consists of three books: a 669-page Text, a 488-page Workbook for Students, and a 92-page Manual for Teachers. The order in which students choose to use the books, and the ways in which they study them, depend on their particular needs and preferences.

The overall answer to the question, “What is A Course in Miracles”? is, “a teaching device.” It is designed to teach us how to think, not just to entertain or inspire us. I've known people who began just reading the Text through, as I did. I've known others who began with the Workbook, although you cannot fully understand the Workbook until you have grasped enough of the Text's teaching to become truly motivated to practice the Workbook lessons diligently. If all you do is read through the Text and Workbook, it won't do much for you. A few people have found that the Manual gave them their best entry into the Course because its chapters are short and seem more focused and more clearly written than some of the Text.

I should note that the number of pages given above for each volume applies to the FIP version only. The CE edition's numbers are higher, mostly because of the added material but also due to the addition of footnotes and a somewhat larger typeface. They are Text, 930; Workbook, 631; Manual, 115.

The Course does not claim that it is the only way to God. It does not attempt to invalidate other spiritual paths. It says there are “many thousands” of paths to God, all teaching one universal course.

The curriculum the Course proposes is carefully conceived and is explained, step by step, at both the theoretical and practical levels. It emphasizes application rather than theory, and experience rather than theology. It specifically states that “a universal theology is impossible, but a universal experience is not only possible but necessary” (C-in.2:5). Although Christian in statement, the Course deals with universal spiritual themes. It emphasizes that it is but one version of the universal curriculum. There are many others, this one differing from them only in form. They all lead to God in the end.

There is exceptional consistency and focus to the Course. Sometimes it may seem that it wanders and skips from one topic to another, but when you read carefully, you will realize that it is all to the point. It all fits together. The Course makes a rather amazing assertion about itself:

“...what you are studying is a unified thought system in which nothing is lacking that is needed, and nothing is included that is irrelevant or contradictory.” (W-42.7:2)

It contains everything it needs to contain and nothing that isn't necessary! From my thirty-eight years of study, I have to agree. Every time I thought I had discovered a contradiction, further study proved me wrong. And when I thought something was irrelevant, I later realized I was wrong. I don't know of another book I could say that about. Human authors, myself included, invariably wander from their topic from time to time. Not the Course.

It does present its case “step by step.” The Text presents a theory that builds and builds to a climax. You really should read it straight through. Don't just dip in here and there. Likewise, the Workbook trains you in the practical application of the Text's thought system. That's where the emphasis lies: practical application. Its aim is to bring you to an *experience* of the Truth, not just a mental understanding of a new theology or philosophy. Recall the earlier quote that said a universal theology is impossible, “but a universal experience is not only possible but necessary.” *Necessary*. That universal experience is the aim of the Course.

The Course is “Christian in statement.” It presents its thought system using terms borrowed from traditional Christianity, such as “Holy Spirit,” “Son of God,” and “atonement.” All such terms are redefined. For instance, “Holy Spirit” is not a mysterious, invisible deity but is the inner Voice in all of us that speaks for God and love rather than fear and attack. “Son of God” refers not to Jesus alone but to all of us; it is our shared identity as Christ. If the term “Father” raises your hackles, it's OK to substitute “Mother-Father” or whatever works for you. Neal Douglas-Klotz, an Aramaic language expert, has translated the Aramaic word for Father in the Lord's Prayer as “birther of the cosmos.” The Course has been characterized as “Advaita

Hinduism in Judeo-Christian terms.” It “deals with universal spiritual themes.” Don't let the Christian terms make you think this is just traditional Christianity in disguise.

The Course does not claim to be unique or better than other forms of spirituality. It says there are thousands of forms to the “universal curriculum.” “They all lead to God in the end.” The idea here agrees with spiritual teachers such as Huston Smith and Aldous Huxley, who speak of “the perennial philosophy,” the core spiritual truths at the heart of all the major religions. The Course proclaims that same perennial philosophy.

2 The Text is largely theoretical, and sets forth the concepts on which the Course's thought system is based. Its ideas contain the foundation for the Workbook's lessons. Without the practical application the Workbook provides, the Text would remain largely a series of abstractions which would hardly suffice to bring about the thought reversal at which the Course aims.

This paragraph is quite clear. One must read and study the Text to really understand the Workbook lessons, but the practical application provided by the Workbook is absolutely necessary “to bring about the thought reversal at which the Course aims.” The theory isn't enough; you need practical application. If you want to learn about Paris, France, you could read a book about it. But you would almost certainly learn a lot more if you actually went there and *experienced* Paris. Yet, if you read the book first and then went there, you'd learn even more!

Reading the Text alone isn't enough! To achieve the goal of the Course you must commit to at least one year of *daily spiritual practice* using the Workbook lessons and doing your best to follow its instructions for that practice. For most people, the best way to do that is to read the Text first.

3 The Workbook includes 365 lessons, one for each day of the year. It is not necessary, however, to do the lessons at that tempo, and one might want to remain with a particularly appealing lesson for more than one day. The instructions urge only that not more than one lesson a day should be attempted. The practical nature of the Workbook is underscored by the introduction to its lessons, which emphasizes experience through application rather than a prior commitment to a spiritual goal:

I said “at least one year” because, as said here, you may want to spend more than a day on some of the lessons you find particularly appealing. The first time I went through the Workbook it took me nearly two years. That wasn't always for a good reason. Some lessons I worked with for days, but on other days I missed practice entirely. Many Course students like to repeat the Workbook every year, beginning with Lesson 1 on January 1. The Course in Chapter 29 of the Manual seems to expect us to move on to a more general form of ongoing practice consisting of morning and evening meditation. I have chosen to repeat the Workbook for a year from time to time, but in between, I read a selected lesson or do other spiritual reading, followed by a period of meditation.

Whatever you do, don't try to read or practice more than one lesson per day. Get clear on what the practice instructions are and just do them. The aim is “experience through application.” The lessons grow increasingly demanding, starting with one or two minutes in the morning and reaching a climax for an extended period asking you to take five minutes every hour throughout the day. The eventual goal is to keep your mind spiritually oriented all day long, listening within for spiritual guidance and not falling back into allowing your ego to lead you.

The next two paragraphs are direct quotations from the Introduction to the Workbook:

4 Some of the ideas the workbook presents you will find hard to believe, and others may seem to be quite startling. This does not matter. You are merely asked to apply the ideas as you are directed to do. You are not asked to judge them at all. You are asked only to use them. It is their use that will give them meaning to you, and will show you that they are true.

This is a very important paragraph. If you disagree with some of the things the lessons say (or the Text, for that matter), don't worry about it. “This does not matter.” Don't put the book down or dismiss the lesson you are reading. “Apply the ideas as you are directed to do.” Don't judge them; just *use them*. Using the ideas, and practicing with them as instructed, will work to show you their meaning and, eventually, show you the ideas are true. I still recall reading the Text for the first time and reacting very negatively to some of the things it said that disagreed with my Christian theology. But a year or two later, reading the same pages, I suddenly realized I now agreed with what it said. I was unaware of having changed my mind. “Someone's been messing with my mind!” I exclaimed.

5 Remember only this; you need not believe the ideas, you need not accept them, and you need not even welcome them. Some of them you may actively resist. None of this will matter, or decrease their efficacy. But do not allow yourself to make exceptions in applying the ideas the workbook contains, and whatever your reactions to the ideas may be, use them. Nothing more than that is required (**W-in.8-9**).

The most important idea is: Don't make any exceptions in applying and practicing the ideas; use every one. You don't have to believe them, accept them, or even welcome them! It's even okay to *actively resist* them! Use them anyway, whatever your reactions are. That is the only requirement, but *it is a requirement*.

6 Finally, the Manual for Teachers, which is written in question and answer form, provides answers to some of the more likely questions a student might ask. It also includes a clarification of a number of the terms the Course uses, explaining them within the theoretical framework of the Text.

The Manual is not addressed to a *formal* kind of teacher; it is speaking to anyone who completes the Text and Workbook and feels ready to share some of its teaching with family and friends, whether formally or informally. The Course makes it clear that every relationship is a teaching/learning situation. At times, one person will be teaching, the other learning; at times, the roles reverse. The Q&A format of the Manual makes it easier to read and understand, and it will probably answer some of the questions that come up for you in studying the Course.

7 The Course makes no claim to finality, nor are the Workbook lessons intended to bring the student's learning to completion. At the end, the reader is left in the hands of his or her own Internal Teacher, Who will direct all subsequent learning as He sees fit. While the Course is comprehensive in scope, truth cannot be limited to any finite form, as is clearly recognized in the statement at the end of the Workbook:

8 This Course is a beginning, not an end...No more specific lessons are assigned, for there is no more need of them. Henceforth, hear but the Voice for God...He will direct your efforts, telling you exactly what to do, how to direct your mind, and when to come to Him in silence, asking for His sure direction and His certain Word (**W-ep.1:1; 3:1-3**).

“The Course makes no claim to finality.” All students of ACIM need to remember this. The biography of Ernest Holmes, who founded the churches of Religious Science (renamed Centers for Spiritual Living in 2011), is titled *Open at the Top*. It reflects Holmes' conviction that our minds must always remain “open at the top” to new insights or revelations from God. That is what the Preface says: This is not the “final truth.” There may be adjustments and additions yet to come. Human consciousness has been continually evolving for thousands, maybe millions of years, and our understanding of the truth has grown as we evolve.

On the other hand, I believe that no future revelation will contradict or be inconsistent with what the Course says. Several published books claim to be “expansions” of the Course. All such books I've examined contradict the Course in places, invalidating them for me. I do believe in progressive revelation. My booklet, *Seeing the Bible Differently*, sets forth ways I see the Course as such an evolution and expansion of the truth found in the Bible. I believe that any future evolution will not disagree with the Course; rather, it will perhaps clarify and expand on it.

If you recall, earlier in the Preface, it said, “Its only purpose is to provide a way in which some people will be able to find their Internal Teacher.” That idea is clearly reiterated at the end of the Workbook. The Text and Workbook do not contain everything you have to learn; they give you a jump-start in your learning, which will continue as you listen to your Internal Teacher, “Who will direct all subsequent learning as He sees fit.” Finding that Internal Teacher is the critical factor, and it takes a good while for most of us to learn to listen only to that Voice and no other. The Course provides us with invaluable help in doing so.

“The Course is a beginning, not an end.” Once we've completed the Course we have just begun our spiritual journey! The Holy Spirit, our Internal Teacher, has become an intimate,

constant companion on our path. “He will direct your efforts, telling you exactly what to do, how to direct your mind, and when to come to Him in silence, asking for His sure direction and His certain Word.”

## What It Says

1 Nothing real can be threatened.

Nothing unreal exists.

Herein lies the peace of God.

2 This is how A Course in Miracles begins. It makes a fundamental distinction between the real and the unreal; between knowledge and perception. Knowledge is truth, under one law, the law of love or God. Truth is unalterable, eternal and unambiguous. It can be unrecognized, but it cannot be changed. It applies to everything that God created, and only what He created is real. It is beyond learning because it is beyond time and process. It has no opposite; no beginning and no end. It merely is.

The Introduction to the Text is profound. Those three sentences give you the entire message of the Course. The Preface highlights the Courses' “fundamental distinction between the real and the unreal,” between reality versus illusion. It sounds very abstract, but He makes it immediately practical. He identifies the “real” with “knowledge” and the “unreal” with “perception.” Understanding knowledge to be something beyond perception, something that does not utilize perception, is fundamental to the Course.

The rest of the paragraph amplifies the description of what the real is, that is, what knowledge is. If nothing real can be threatened, ask yourself what that excludes. Can your body be threatened? Of course. Your possessions? Your relationships? Your freedom in this world? Your very life? Yes. What about the Earth itself? Climate change already threatens it, and scientists tell us that in a few billion years, the sun will explode and destroy our planet.

What can be threatened and therefore is not real? It seems like everything we think is real is not real at all. But “Nothing unreal exists.” What remains that can be considered real? It has to be something invisible, something beyond matter itself. It must be spirit; it must be something eternal. What is real is what we can know, what is true. The real is unalterable, which means you cannot change it in any way. For example, Just because you don't understand the laws of mathematics does not change the truth that  $2 + 2 = 4$ .

Truth is eternal; if it had a beginning or an ending, that would constitute change. 'Unambiguous' is another word he uses to describe knowledge, which means “not open to more than one interpretation”—an interesting characteristic. When you encounter the real, there is no doubt about what it is. When you “*know*” something, you know that you know it. There is no maybe this, maybe that, about it. Knowledge is “beyond all perceptions” (T-3.III.1:10 (FIP), cf.

T-25.III.3:1 (CE)); it is the affirmation of truth.

And that, according to the Course, is what you are: an eternal spirit that nothing can threaten. Accepting that view of yourself will bring you “the peace of God.” Imagine how it will feel to know with certainty that nothing can threaten anything about you! How can we ever find peace if anything can threaten nearly everything we are? Learning that certainty of peace is the Course's goal for us. It says, “Knowledge is not the motivation factor for learning this course. *Peace* is” (T-8.I.1:5-6).

The Course teaches that perception shows us unreality; knowledge brings us reality. The term “knowledge” in the Course does not refer to mere intellectual understanding; it means “unalterable, eternal and unambiguous truth.” Such knowledge exists only under the law of love or God. Truth cannot change; we can only recognize it or not. Truth applies to “everything that God created,” which means that everything God creates is unalterable, eternal, and unambiguous and that only this can be considered “real.” That includes you and me. We are unalterable and eternal. This cannot apply to our bodies or the physical planet they “live” on. What God creates (including you) is “beyond time and process. It has no opposite; no beginning, and no end. It merely is.” Several times, the Course sums up its message: “Only the truth is true, and nothing else is true.” “It merely is.”

To be eternal is to be beyond time. Eternity isn't time stretched out forever like a giant rubber band; it is the absence of time with no beginning or end. That's what God is: Be-ing. And we are part of that.

The knowledge the Course speaks of is beyond intellectual understanding. It has to be something that we must experience directly. Understanding in our minds that we are one with God is nothing like directly experiencing that Oneness. This knowledge is the mystical experience that mystics of all ages and religions have told us about. But recall that we read a moment ago, “Knowledge is not the motivation factor for learning this course.” Why? Because knowledge is “beyond learning,” and learning is all the Course is trying to bring to us.

I know; this all sounds very abstract and conceptual. If we take just one side of the equation, talking about what is real or true sounds quite metaphysical. But the practicality comes when we contrast knowledge with perception, which the next paragraph does brilliantly. Learning is the doorway to knowledge, but true learning is unlearning our false beliefs. When we do, what remains is knowledge. This process will become clearer as we read the rest of the Preface.

3 The world of perception, on the other hand, is the world of time, of change, of beginnings and endings. It is based on interpretation, not on facts. It is the world of birth and death, founded on the belief in scarcity, loss, separation and death. It is learned rather than given, selective in its perceptual emphases, unstable in its functioning, and inaccurate in its interpretations.

As the words “On the other hand” imply, perception is the complete opposite of knowledge. Where knowledge is eternal, perception is subject to time. Time brings change, with a beginning and an ending. Perception involves a perceiver and something or someone other—that which is

perceived. It inherently presumes separation and depends on it. According to the Course, none of this is real, which is perhaps the most difficult teaching of the Course for most people. Reading this, we think: “What? How can you say this floor under my feet isn't real? Or that my body isn't real? How can you tell me my children are not real? How can you say pain is an illusion? How can you say sin isn't real and has no consequence?” (The Course does say exactly that.) Remember what was said before: If you find the ideas hard to accept, it does not matter. Just try using them.

The concept of the world as an illusion isn't a new thought, however. Hinduism teaches that the world is “*Maya*,” an illusion. Idealist philosophers such as Plato, George Berkeley, and many Neoplatonist philosophers have held this view. It's called *Idealism*. Consider this quote from the Wikipedia article about Idealism:

“...most fundamentally, reality is equivalent to mind, spirit, or consciousness; that reality is entirely a mental construct; ...ideas are the highest form of reality or have the greatest claim to being considered 'real'” and “the physical world does not exist outside of a mind. In fact, in Berkeley's thinking, a single eternal mind keeps all of physical reality stable, and this is God.”

That is almost the position the Course is taking, although the Course goes a bit further. It says the primary error is a belief in separation from God and one another and that time and space are devices *invented by us to demonstrate and prove that separation is real*. It teaches that when all beings have allowed the Holy Spirit to correct their false thinking, the physical universe will disappear, including time and space. Please remember that you don't have to accept this radical view to profit from the Course, but do at least consider it! Even many modern quantum physicists declare that there is no such thing as “matter” and that thought is the ultimate reality.

So, the world perception sees “is based on interpretation, not on facts.” “Perception is a choice and not a fact” (CE T-21.V.2:1). We cause serious problems for ourselves when we mistake our perceptions for knowledge and our interpretations for facts. Confusing interpretations and facts is one of the foundations of most TV drama shows. Watch and see how often the show's characters see something, make a false interpretation of what they see, and then unthinkingly, foolishly act as if their perceptions were facts. Try applying this idea the next time you find yourself judging another person. Realize that how you see them is your interpretation and not a fact.

The world we perceive is full of birth and death. It is “founded on the belief in scarcity, loss, separation and death.” None of that is real. Yes, not even death. Eternal beings cannot die. The way we see the world is “learned rather than given.” We're convinced that our perceptions are *caused* by the things we see, that there is an objective reality outside of us that causes us to see, hear, or feel something real that is there. Nope! It's a choice we make, not a fact. It is *selective* in that we choose to see what we wish to see and ignore what we don't want to see. You have probably noticed how others see *you*. Once they've decided you are “in” or “out,” they see things that confirm their opinion of you. You do the same thing whether or not you know it. Perception's selectiveness is why perception is so undependable, “unstable in its functioning, and inaccurate in its interpretations.”

This final sentence of Paragraph 2 deeply disparages perception in multiple ways. Perception is:

- **Learned, not given.** We learn how to interpret people and events by accumulating experience over a lifetime, and a lot of what we learn simply isn't accurate. A bad experience with a certain place, a certain food, or a certain type of person, is far too easily and falsely generalized and applied to similar places, foods, or persons. We accumulate a crowd of what the Course terms "shadow figures from the past" that distort our perceptions of the present.
- **Selective in its perceptual emphases.** Perception picks out what it wants to see or expects to see in the people and things it observes, and is blind to aspects it either does not already understand or does not want to see or considers irrelevant.

*"Perception selects, and makes the world you see. It literally picks it out as the mind directs. The laws of size and shape and brightness would hold, perhaps, if other things were equal. They are not equal. For what you look for you are far more likely to discover than what you would prefer to overlook."*  
(T-21.V.1:1-5)

- **Unstable in its functioning.** In other words, it is changeable. It cannot be trusted. Perception is likely to shift and pull the carpet out from under you, if you are depending on it. Sometimes it works well; often it does not.
- **Inaccurate in its interpretations.** Finally, perception is all too often simply *wrong*. We see a man kissing a woman not his wife and "perceive" that he must be having an affair. Later, we learn the woman was his sister. And so on.

4 From knowledge and perception respectively, two distinct thought systems arise which are opposite in every respect. In the realm of knowledge no thoughts exist apart from God, because God and His Creation share one Will. The world of perception, however, is made by the belief in opposites and separate wills, in perpetual conflict with each other and with God. What perception sees and hears appears to be real because it permits into awareness only what conforms to the wishes of the perceiver. This leads to a world of illusions, a world which needs constant defense precisely because it is not real.

Knowledge and perception are important to the Course because they give rise to two thought systems that are complete opposites of one another. The Course's aim is to shift our minds from one to the other. The thought system based on knowledge contains no thoughts that exist apart from God because, in the Truth, God and His Creation (including us) share one Will. We are One with God; we are thoughts in His mind and have never left it. Here there is no Will but God's. The central goal of the Course is to have us grasp the truth of this (see W-74 and W-307).

But the world of perception is "made by the belief in opposites and separate wills." We believe, falsely, that we have wills that are independent of God and capable of willing something

other than what God wills. As “individuals,” we are perpetually in conflict with one another and with God. One effect of this is that we are overwhelmed with guilt, which is largely unconscious. This world, according to the Course, is “a world made mad with guilt.” This has a lot to do with why we get sick and why we “die.” Our belief in our guilt leads to a visceral fear of God. The deeper the fear, the more we bury it in our unconscious minds.

Why does the world and our guilt seem so real to us? Because perception “permits into awareness only what conforms to the wishes of the perceiver.” Perception filters the evidence; it sees only what we want and choose to see. What I see and dwell on in my brothers is what I am seeing and dwelling on in myself. How I view my brothers only reflects my view of myself.

“Perception seems to teach you what you see. Yet it but witnesses to what you taught. It is an outward picture of a wish; an image that you wanted to be true” (T-24.VII.8:8-10 (FIP), T-24.VII.24:1-2 (CE)).

“How can you manifest the Christ in you except to look on holiness and see Him there?” (T-25.I.2:1 (FIP), T-25.I.5:1 (CE)) In other words, you can only manifest the Christ in you by looking on your brother and seeing the Christ in him.

“Perception tells you *you* are manifest in what you see” (T-25.I.2:2 (FIP), T-25.I.5:2 (CE)).

“Perception is a choice of what you want yourself to be; the world you want to live in, and the state in which you think your mind will be content and satisfied.”  
“It reveals yourself to you as you would have you be” (T-25.I.3:1, 3 (FIP)),  
T-25.I.6:1,3 (CE)).

We made the mistake of desiring to be separate, to achieve “ego autonomy,” and we aren't willing to let go of that “tiny, mad idea,” as the Course calls it. Our insanely selective perception “leads to a world of illusions.” There seem to be people everywhere that, in one sense or another, are out to get us. The ego's thought system becomes a convoluted and complex structure, with many contradictory elements, all focused on proving the reality of separation and conflict. It presupposes conflict, projects conflict, then perceives conflict attacking itself, which necessitates protecting itself by means of attack that our ego calls *counter-attack*. We are trying to defend a world of illusions that requires defense precisely because it is illusory. We can sometimes see this in other deluded people who try to defend their delusions. We rarely realize we are all doing the same thing.

*5 When you have been caught in the world of perception you are caught in a dream. You cannot escape without help, because everything your senses show merely witnesses to the reality of the dream. God has provided the Answer, the only Way out, the true Helper. It is the function of His Voice, His Holy Spirit, to mediate between the two worlds. He can do this because, while on the one hand He knows the truth, on the other He also recognizes our illusions, but without believing in them. It is the Holy Spirit's goal to help us escape from the dream world by teaching us how to reverse our thinking and unlearn our mistakes. Forgiveness is the Holy Spirit's great learning aid in bringing this thought reversal about. However, the Course has its own definition of what forgiveness really is, just as it defines the world in its own way.*

It's vital to realize that you and I are deluded and continue to be deluded by what we see and hear. We've trapped ourselves in a dream. Because our perceptions are selective, "everything your senses show merely witnesses to the reality of the dream."

Imagine what it is like to be trapped inside a religious cult. The leadership carefully controls (or tries to control) everything you read and hear so that nothing contradicts their particular doctrines, and they give everything a spin that reinforces the cult's convictions. Anything conflicting with their teaching is considered dangerous, perhaps even demonic or devilish. To escape, people need help from outside the cult, a deprogrammer to help them deprogram their minds.

We all are trapped in the cult of the ego. Our minds are programmed to believe a lie. We need a deprogrammer, too, and God has provided One! This divinely provided Helper is how the Course characterizes the Holy Spirit, which it often calls "the Voice for God," not the voice of God but for God. The Course makes that distinction to underscore the idea that the Holy Spirit is, at least in a way, part of each of us. The Holy Spirit takes form in each of us as a voice that speaks for God. You might say the Holy Spirit is the God part of us. In several places, the Course says His voice is our own. Elsewhere, it calls Him our communication link with God.

The function of the Holy Spirit is to "mediate between the two worlds," the world of perception and the realm of knowledge. Figuratively, His feet stand in both worlds. "He knows the truth," but "He also recognizes our illusions without believing in them" (my italics). So, the Holy Spirit uses words, for instance, which are only symbols of objects and individuals that are not real in the first place. (I say individuals like you and me are not real because we are not separate in absolute reality. ) He uses our bodies as communication devices and our relationships as classrooms in spiritual awakening. The Text points this out often:

**"The Holy Spirit has a use for all the means for sin by which you sought to find it. But as He uses them, they lead away from sin, because His purpose lies in the opposite direction. He sees the means you use, but not the purpose for which you made them. He would not take them from you, for He sees their value as a means for what He wills for you" (T-21.III.6:1-4)**

“Defenses, like everything you made, must be gently turned to your own good, translated by Him from means of self-destruction to means of preservation and release.” **(T-14.IX.6:3 (CE), T-14.VII.5:8 (FIP))**

Whatever tricks our egos play on us, the Holy Spirit will use them all to teach us to “reverse our thinking and unlearn our mistakes.” It’s important to realize that although this emphasis—the idea that we cannot do it alone but need the help of the Holy Spirit—seems to support a dualistic thought system, it is nothing more than a simplified learning aid. There is only One; God is all there is. The Holy Spirit seems to be a separate Voice in opposition to the voice of the ego, a Voice that seems distinct from our own, but that is only because we have identified with the ego. When we break that identification, we will realize that the Holy Spirit’s voice is, in reality, our voice, the voice of our true Self; the ego’s voice is an illusion that creates the illusion of duality. And yet, until we break that identification with the ego, the concept of a Voice that speaks from outside the thought system of illusion is not only helpful but necessary.

The reversal process is purely mental; it consists of letting go of error thoughts and embracing thoughts aligned with the Truth. The “great learning aid” that facilitates the reversal of thought is *forgiveness*—forgiveness as the Course defines it, not as it is typically understood (5:7-8). The following paragraph expands on the definition of forgiveness and how it brings about the requisite thought reversal.

6 The world we see merely reflects our own internal frame of reference—the dominant ideas, wishes and emotions in our minds. “Projection makes perception” (T-21.in.1:1). We look inside first, decide the kind of world we want to see and then project that world outside, making it the truth as we see it. We make it true by our interpretations of what it is we are seeing. If we are using perception to justify our own mistakes—our anger, our impulses to attack, our lack of love in whatever form it may take—we will see a world of evil, destruction, malice, envy and despair. All this we must learn to forgive, not because we are being “good” and “charitable,” but because what we are seeing is not true. We have distorted the world by our twisted defenses, and are therefore seeing what is not there. As we learn to recognize our perceptual errors, we also learn to look past them or “forgive.” At the same time we are forgiving ourselves, looking past our distorted self-concepts to the Self That God created in us and as us.

To understand forgiveness, we first need to understand *projection*. As we usually understand forgiveness, we believe our perceptions show us facts. In those perceptions, someone has done us wrong and, therefore, is a “sinner” (although we may not use that word, the thought behind it is in our minds). Forgiveness means to us that we decide to overlook what seems to be the objective truth (that he is guilty), and we let him off the hook. We withhold any punishment. Such forgiveness, we believe, makes us good and charitable people.

The Course teaches that all our perceptions of the world are nothing more than a reflection of “the dominant ideas, wishes and emotions in our minds.” That reflection process is called *projection*, and projection is responsible for everything we see and hear: “Projection makes

perception; the world you see is what you gave it, nothing more than that.” (T-21.I.1:1 (CE), T-21.in.1:1 (FIP)). This is hard to accept. The statement is so absolute! We probably think, “We see nothing but the projections of our minds; really?”

As the paragraph continues, it becomes apparent that this is precisely what the Course means. “We look inside first, decide the kind of world we want to see and then project that world outside, making it the truth *as we see it*.” For instance, if we want to see something that justifies our egos, anger, selfish motives, or lack of love, that is *what we will see*.

We've all been aware at some time or another that the way another person seems to see us is the way they *want* to see us and has no substance in the truth. We may make an innocent remark with no thought of attack or judgment, yet the other person feels judged or attacked. They perceive a world around them full of envy, malice, and attack, and they see us that way because they want to—because it justifies their own ego reactions.

Well, the Course is saying we all do the same thing and that every time we believe in our perception of “evil, destruction, malice, envy, and despair,” what we see is not true. In other words, the guy who has “done us wrong” and is, therefore, “a sinner” is just a projection of *our* dominant ideas. Yes, there are objective facts out there in the world, but how we interpret what we see is totally skewed. We are using our perception to justify our ego's need to attack—“our own mistakes,” as the paragraph calls it (6:5). In fact, our egos' need to attack *precedes* our perception of attack in others: “There is nothing to prevent you from recognizing all calls for help as exactly what they are except your own perceived *need to attack*. (T-12.I.4:4(CE))”

We have to learn to forgive *all* of these things for the very reason that they aren't true; they aren't there. That's the critical difference in the meaning the Course gives forgiveness. It means looking past our perceptual errors. We are not forgiving because we are somehow better, “good and charitable” people, but because we were mistaken! What we were seeing was not true (6:6). We were seeing what is not there (6:7). Looking past those mistaken perceptions is what forgiveness is all about (6:8). And as we do so with others, we are learning to forgive ourselves in the same way, “looking past our distorted self-concepts to the Self that God created in us and as us” (6:9).

When we catch ourselves judging others, we need to realize our limited perceptions are incapable of accurate judgment. Letting go of our judgments, or forgiveness, is how we transcend our egos.

“The ego cannot survive without judgment, and is laid aside accordingly” (T-4.IV.9:4).

“Forgiveness recognizes what you thought your brother did to you has not occurred. It does not pardon sins and make them real. It sees there was no sin.” (W-**WI.I.1:1-3**)

In learning to see the unreality of others' sins, you are learning to see the unreality of your sins. You begin to look past your distorted self-concept—someone who is, if not evil, at least unworthy and unloveable, someone not good enough—so that you begin to realize the beauty and magnificence of the Self which God created in you and as you. That is forgiveness. As you learn to perceive the divinity of others, you learn to see it in yourself.

This is what the Workbook has us affirm about our true Self:

“My true identity is so secure, so lofty, sinless, glorious and great, wholly beneficent and free of guilt, that Heaven looks to it to give it light. It lights the world as well. It is the gift my Father gave me, and the one I give the world as well. There is no gift but this that can be either given or received. This is reality, and only this. This is illusion's end. It is the truth.” **(W-224.1)**

7 Sin is defined as “lack of love” (T-1.IV.3:1). Since love is all there is, sin in the sight of the Holy Spirit is a mistake to be corrected, rather than an evil to be punished. Our sense of inadequacy, weakness and incompleteness comes from the strong investment in the “scarcity principle” that governs the whole world of illusions. From that point of view, we seek in others what we feel is wanting in ourselves. We “love” another in order to get something ourselves. That, in fact, is what passes for love in the dream world. There can be no greater mistake than that, for love is incapable of asking for anything.

Another way the Course describes the process of forgiveness is that our perceptions change from seeing attacks coming from others to seeing that all such “attacks” are, in reality, calls for love. The only proper response to a call for love is love. It asks for help and healing, not punishment. In truth, love is all there is; seeing “sin” in another is a mistake on *our* part, and *their* lack of love (their apparent attack) is *their* mistake. It needs to be corrected, not punished.

It may be hard at first to grasp why we are so prone to see ourselves as sinful or not good enough. Most people suffer from low self-esteem. Our egos are heavily invested in seeing ourselves and the whole world as lacking in some way. The Course calls this the “scarcity principle.” It is a deliberate denial of the perfection of God's creation, an assertion that we can make ourselves better without God, which is all that the ego is: a desire to replace God. If we did not see some level of sin in ourselves, we'd have to accept God's creative work as perfect. The ego cannot accept that.

Because we see ourselves as lacking, we are constantly trying to fill that lack by finding in others what seems lacking in ourselves. Much of what the world calls love is an attempt to *get* something from someone else. That's pretty much how the “dream world” we live in sees love. Real love, the Course asserts, “is incapable of asking for anything.”

Think about some of the songs about love you may have heard. “You fill me up.” “I can't live if living is without you.” So many of the world's love songs blatantly state precisely what the Course is saying: Our concept of love is based on the scarcity principle, a belief in a profound emptiness within ourselves that only “that special one” can fill. We “fall in love” with a person who seems to be the missing piece of the puzzle, someone who can provide just what we need (7:4–5). Next time you listen to a love song on the radio, listen to what it is really saying. I think you'll be shocked. And oddly enough, since “love” involves “getting” something from the other person, it induces a feeling of guilt—a feeling of sin.

8 Only minds can really join, and whom God has joined no man can put asunder (T-17.III.7:3). It is, however, only at the level of Christ Mind that true union is possible, and has, in fact, never been lost. The “little I” seeks to enhance itself by external approval, external possessions and external “love.” The Self That God created needs nothing. It is forever complete, safe, loved and loving. It seeks to share rather than to get; to extend rather than project. It has no needs and wants to join with others out of their mutual awareness of abundance.

When the Course tells us, “Only minds can really join,” we must conclude that bodies cannot really join (see T-18.VI.3:1). No matter how hard we try and how well we accomplish it, no true union is possible on the physical level. True union is possible only on “the level of Christ Mind.” More than sharing common ideas, this is a mutual recognition of oneness, of union that has never been lost (8:2). We know in the core of our being that one who physically seems to be “other” is, in fact, a part of us. What happens to us happens to them, and vice versa. Their well-being is our well-being. The *Song of Prayer* pamphlet says that at the highest level of prayer, we recognize this union:

“Now can you say to everyone who comes to join in prayer with you:

I cannot go without you, for you are a part of me.

And so he is in truth. Now can you pray only for what you truly share with him”  
(S-I.V.3:8-11 (FIP)).

Instead of the vain attempt at union through “external approval, external possessions, and external ”love,“ we recognize that we need nothing. We are already One. in a God-created union that has always existed and always will. We have no needs because this union is perfect and eternal; we know we need nothing. The Workbook has us proclaim, ”There is one Life, and that I share with God.“ We could equally well say, ”There is one Self, and that we share with God.“ It is a Self that is ”forever complete, safe, loved and loving.“

Our egos are always trying to *get* something and more of something, but the Self, as God created it, ”seeks to share rather than to get; to extend rather than project.“ Consider your relationships and ask yourself, ”Am I seeking to share or to get?“ In holy relationships, there is none of the neediness that so often characterizes our romantic relationships. Our egos project our self-condemnation and scarcity; our Christ Self always seeks to extend its wholeness to others, recognizing the Christ Self in them. Our deepest desire is to join with others in mutual awareness of abundance.

9 The special relationships of the world are destructive, selfish and childishly egocentric. Yet, if given to the Holy Spirit, these relationships can become the holiest things on earth—the miracles that point the way to the return to Heaven. The world uses its special relationships as a final weapon of exclusion and a demonstration of separateness. The Holy Spirit transforms them into perfect lessons in forgiveness and in awakening from the dream. Each one is an opportunity to let perceptions be healed and errors corrected. Each one is another chance to forgive oneself by forgiving the other. And each one becomes still another invitation to the Holy Spirit and to the remembrance of God.

Here is another example of how the Holy Spirit can take something we've made to feed our egos and use it instead to point our way home to God. The Course focuses on our special relationships because they can be destructive in so many ways. “Selfish and childishly egocentric” barely begins to describe how far relationships can get from the expression of love they ought to be. (If you've ever watched Dr. Phil, you've surely seen this.) The divorce rate is one measure of their failures. Still, there are many other ways failure shows up: abusive relationships, relationships in name only that really are separate lives of quiet desperation, mutual manipulation, and constant lies.

Yet there is good news! What often seem to be personal battlegrounds “can become the holiest things on earth—the miracles that point the way to the return to Heaven.” No matter how egocentric the relationships are, they can become “perfect lessons in forgiveness and in awakening from the dream” (9:4). I often say that the best one-line description of the Course that I have been able to come up with is “It is a course in the healing of relationships through forgiveness.” Those very mockeries of union can become showplaces of forgiveness and joining. Indeed, that is their purpose; that is their destiny. The Course teaches, “It is the destiny of all relationships to become holy” (M-3.4:6). “The holiest of all the spots on earth is where an ancient hatred has become a present love” (T-26.IX.6:1).

That's the promise of the Course! How can this happen? The relationship must be “given to the Holy Spirit,” which means in practice that we begin to realize that our relationship is *not* meant to inflate our egos but rather to nurture our spiritual side. Instead of listening to our egos, we begin to ask our Inner Teacher for guidance on how to perceive one another. His answer will always be some form of His basic judgment on us: “Every loving thought is true. Everything else is an appeal for healing and help. That is what it is, regardless of the form it takes.” (T-12.I.3:2-4 (CE), T-12.I.3:3-4 (FIP)) Our relationships become classrooms for spiritual growth.

Instead of having relationships become breeding grounds for separation and exclusion, they become perfectly tailored lessons in forgiveness that meet our exact needs. *Forgiveness is the central focus of the Course*. Through forgiveness, we begin to awaken from our dreams of separation and fear. Our relationships are the perfect classrooms to heal our false perceptions of one another and allow the Holy Spirit to correct our mistaken thinking. We learn to forgive *ourselves* by forgiving one another. Every instance of forgiveness creates an opening for the Holy Spirit and helps restore our memory of God.

10 Perception is a function of the body, and therefore represents a limit on awareness. Perception sees through the body's eyes and hears through the body's ears. It evokes the limited responses which the body makes. The body appears to be largely self-motivated and independent, yet it actually responds only to the intentions of the mind. If the mind wants to use it for attack in any form, it becomes prey to sickness, age and decay. If the mind accepts the Holy Spirit's purpose for it instead, it becomes a useful way of communicating with others, invulnerable as long as it is needed, and to be gently laid by when its use is over. Of itself it is neutral, as is everything in the world of perception. Whether it is used for the goals of the ego or the Holy Spirit depends entirely on what the mind wants.

This paragraph and the next contrast bodily perception with the vision of Christ, which is a non-physical vision. Perception is tied to the body and its senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste. It is inherently limited (10:1-2). These inputs trigger various limited responses in the body. We believe the body is largely self-motivated; our physical senses receive input, and the body reacts to this external stimulus. A key insight of ACIM is that the body *does not act on its own*, nor do external causes drive it; its responses are always *to our minds*. When our mind is filled with unloving thoughts, judging and attacking others (whether in thought alone or in deed), our body responds with “sickness, age and decay.”

Most people today recognize a certain level of body/mind connection. We realize that prolonged mental stress can lead to digestive problems, including ulcers; anxiety may cause migraine headaches; a threat invokes the flight-of-fight response of the brain; and so on. What the Course is saying is much more extensive and direct. The mind is not just *one* of the causes of sickness; it is the *only* cause. It even causes aging and all the physical symptoms we commonly associate with getting old. The mind even brings about bodily death. The Course asserts that if our mind is fully healed, the body will remain healthy and useful as long as our part in the plan of redemption is needed. The purpose for which we use the body determines its health. For instance, it says:

“Health is the result of relinquishing all attempts to use the body lovelessly”  
(T-8.VIII.9:9).

“Perhaps you do not realize that this removes the limits you had placed upon the body by the purposes you gave to it. As these are laid aside, the strength the body has will always be enough to serve all truly useful purposes. The body's health is fully guaranteed, because it is not limited by time, by weather or fatigue, by food and drink, or any laws you made it serve before. You need do nothing now to make it well, for sickness has become impossible.” (W-136.19)

“You really think that you will starve unless you have stacks of green paper strips and piles of metal discs. You really think a small round pellet or some fluid pushed into your veins through a sharpened needle will ward off death.” (W-76.3:2-3)

On first reading words like these, most of us will react to the first quote with a thought like, “You've got to be kidding!” and to the second quote with, “Well, yeah! Doesn't everybody?” It seems unscientific to deny the efficacy of vaccinations or medications or to say that we can ever be unlimited “by time, by weather or fatigue, by food and drink.” That isn't what this implies, though. Do vaccinations work? Science says it is proven, and *in this world, it is*. Do we require rest and food? Of course. Are we limited by time? Of course. But this world is an illusion, a projection of our collective minds. Our true nature is spirit and is not a part of this world. I do believe that we can transcend all these limits. Maybe only for brief periods, but eventually for much longer. I don't see anyone doing it yet; I have to admit that. But have we not heard or read of people healed of illnesses in “impossible” ways? It *does* happen.

The key factor is the *purpose* we give to the body. The *Preface* continues in words that confirm what I've been saying about the Course's teaching: “If the mind accepts the Holy Spirit's purpose for it (the body) instead (of using it for attack), it becomes a useful way of communicating with others, invulnerable as long as it is needed, and to be gently laid by when its use is over.”

We can claim that promise for ourselves, giving our body up to fulfilling the purpose of the Holy Spirit. I intend to remain physically present as long as I am needed; I believe my “death” will be no more than laying aside my body when I no longer need it. As the *Song of Prayer* pamphlet puts it: “This is what death should be; a quiet choice, made joyfully and with a sense of peace, because the body has been kindly used to help the Son of God along the way he goes to God... We call it death, but it is liberty. It does not come in forms that seem to be thrust down in pain upon unwilling flesh, but as a gentle welcome to release. If there has been true healing, this can be the form in which death comes when it is time to rest a while from labor gladly done and gladly ended” (S-3.II.2:1, 3:1-3 (FIP)).

The body is neither good nor bad. “Of itself it is neutral.” Only the purpose we give to it makes a difference, and that is purely the choice of our minds. It *can* be used as a holy communication device:

“The body was not made by love. But love does not condemn it and can use it lovingly, respecting what the Son of God has made and using it to save him from illusions”  
(T-18.VI.18:6-7 (CE), T-18.VI.4:7-8 (FIP))

The reversal of thought toward which the Course aims requires us to withdraw our trust and belief in our physical senses and to turn to a different kind of inner vision and inner hearing.

11 The opposite of seeing through the body's eyes is the vision of Christ, which reflects strength rather than weakness, unity rather than separation, and love rather than fear. The opposite of hearing through the body's ears is communication through the Voice for God, the Holy Spirit, which abides in each of us. His Voice seems distant and difficult to hear because the ego, which speaks for the little, separated self, seems to be much louder. This is actually reversed. The Holy Spirit speaks with unmistakable clarity and overwhelming appeal. No one who does not choose to identify with the body could possibly be deaf to His messages of release and hope, nor could he fail to accept joyously the vision of Christ in glad exchange for his miserable picture of himself.

When we rely on our physical senses, we perceive weakness, separation, and fear. But if we listen to the Inner Voice instead of our egos, we can perceive the vision of Christ, which brings us strength, unity, and love. Although we may physically hear sounds of danger and attack, we have the Holy Spirit abiding in us, and we can choose to hear His Voice instead. A good deal of our spiritual practice is learning not to believe what our eyes tell us! In biblical terms, this is faith, which the Bible defines as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1, NRSV) or, as a looser translation (*God's Word*) puts it, faith “convinces us of the existence of things we cannot see.”

Note that the word “abiding” has a dual meaning: it means the Holy Spirit is living in us, but it also means He is *staying* in us. The Holy Spirit has *always* been in you and has never left. The same is true of everyone.

At first, hearing that inner voice doesn't seem easy. It seems to be “a still, small voice,” as one of the biblical prophets calls it. The Course says Spirit's voice is as loud as our willingness to listen (T-8.VIII.8:7 (FIP), T-8.VII.8:2 (CE))! Our egos are what get in the way. The ego's voice, which speaks on behalf of our little, separated self, seems much louder than the inner Voice for God, but in reality, the reverse is true. “The Holy Spirit speaks with unmistakable clarity and overwhelming appeal.” If we refuse to identify with our bodies, recognizing the spirit as our reality, we can't possibly miss “His messages of release and hope.” It will tell you of the magnificence of your being instead of your “miserable picture” of yourself.

We are asked to listen for the Voice of the Holy Spirit, “the Voice for God,” a voice that “abides in each of us” (11:2). This is a huge emphasis in the Course, which calls it “the way out of hell for you” (M-29.3:11). Recall what was said in the fifth paragraph, “You cannot escape without help,” and the reason for the emphasis is clear. To break us out of our closed, self-reinforcing thought system of fear, there *must* be another Voice with another message. Jesus insists that “The Holy Spirit speaks with unmistakable clarity and overwhelming appeal” (11:5) if only we are willing to listen.

12 Christ's vision is the Holy Spirit's gift, God's alternative to the illusion of separation and to the belief in the reality of sin, guilt and death. It is the one correction for all errors of perception; the reconciliation of the seeming opposites on which this world is based. Its kindly light shows all things from another point of view, reflecting the thought system that arises from knowledge and making return to God not only possible but inevitable. What was regarded as injustice done to one by someone else now becomes a call for help and for union. Sin, sickness and attack are seen as misperceptions calling for remedy through gentleness and love. Defenses are laid down because where there is no attack there is no need for them. Our brothers' needs become our own, because they are taking the journey with us as we go to God. Without us they would lose their way. Without them we could never find our own.

After a brief focus on hearing God's Voice, this summary of the Course's teaching returns to Christ's vision, an even greater emphasis in the Course. An amazing array of qualities and benefits is credited to this vision:

- ◆ It corrects all errors of perception.
- ◆ It reconciles all seeming opposites.
- ◆ It reflects a thought system that arises from knowledge.
- ◆ It makes a return to God not only possible but inevitable.
- ◆ It enables us to look past apparent injustices to see a call for help and union.
- ◆ It allows us to see sin, sickness, and attack as misperceptions that call for remedy through gentleness and love.
- ◆ It shows us there is no attack, and therefore, defenses are not needed.
- ◆ The needs of our brothers become our own needs.
- ◆ We realize that without one another, we could never find the way home.

How do we get this "vision of Christ"? It's a gift. We already have it, but it helps to ask for it anyway in any situation in which we need it. Several Workbook lessons deal with Christ's vision:

- I am determined to see things differently (W-21)
- Above all else I want to see things differently (W-28)
- I could see peace instead of this (W-34)
- Christ's is the vision I will use today (W-271)

Be clear; this vision is a gift. Students of the Course often miss this point. They seem to think that somehow *they* are supposed to correct their errors of perception, look past injustice, and see the unreality of attack. But that simply isn't possible when we restrict ourselves to our body's perceptions. We need that input from outside our thought system and an injection of divine sight. When our perceptions trigger our fear or our sense of attack, what works is not to *try* to see things differently but to turn within and *ask* to see things differently. Asking is calling on the Holy Spirit, or calling on our true Self, in recognition that our "little, separated self" simply cannot do it.

It's a gift that is ours whenever we truly want to use it. It enables us to see past "the illusion of separation and . . . the belief in the reality of sin, guilt and death." The Course aims to correct our perceptual errors and remove all the blocks to our awareness of Love's Presence. Christ's vision is "the one correction" for all such errors. It shows us how all the seeming opposites of this world can be reconciled. It allows us to see everything "differently" from a perspective reflecting the thought system of knowledge. Christ's vision makes our return to God *inevitable*.

What seemed like an "injustice done to one by someone else now becomes a call for help and for union." Think about that for a moment! How often today do we hear in the news of some injustice perpetrated in some ghastly fashion? Christ's vision is a miracle! It enables us to see such things as calls for help and union. But think closer to home: When someone slights you in some way, perhaps trivial or not, are you in that moment willing "to see things differently"? On your own, you can't, but if you ask, it will be given to you.

The examples go on. Can you imagine seeing sin, sickness, and attack "as misperceptions calling for remedy through gentleness and love"? Can you picture yourself laying down *all* your defenses because you are certain that there is no need for them? Are you open to seeing the needs of those around you as your own and treating them as such? "Without us, they would lose their way." If you feel this lays a heavy responsibility on you, consider the next sentence: "Without them we could never find our own [way]."

"Salvation must reverse the mad belief in separate thoughts and separate bodies, which lead separate lives and go their separate ways. One function shared by separate minds unites them in one purpose, for each one of them is equally essential to them all."  
(W-100.1:2-3)

As Benjamin Franklin is reputed to have said when some of the Continental Congress hesitated to sign the Declaration of Independence, "We must, indeed, all hang together or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately." Each of us is equally essential to all of us.

The shift in perception the Course aims at is unbelievably profound; it's mind-blowing. We can drop all our defenses when we see that *there is no attack*. That drastic shift is what the Course terms *a miracle*, and it is genuinely worthy of that designation. This shift is what the Course means by forgiveness.

13 Forgiveness is unknown in Heaven, where the need for it would be inconceivable. However, in this world, forgiveness is a necessary correction for all the mistakes that we have made. To offer forgiveness is the only way for us to have it, for it reflects the law of Heaven that giving and receiving are the same. Heaven is the natural state of all the Sons of God as He created them. Such is their reality forever. It has not changed because it has been forgotten.

Perhaps now you can see why there is no need for forgiveness in Heaven. Nothing in that realm *needs* forgiveness; it's inconceivable. We need it *here*, though. It is the necessary correction for our mistakes. Offering forgiveness is the only way to *have* forgiveness. In Heaven, giving and receiving are the same thing, and forgiveness reflects that truth in this world. When we forgive, we realize that we are not egos, nor are those around us. The ego we see is *not* who

they are; they are a Son (or Child) of God, and they remain perfect and holy as He created them (12:4). We are seeing their unchangeable reality, which we had temporarily forgotten (12:5–6).

People often ask me which comes first: forgiving myself or forgiving others. They are forgetting the unity that the Course affirms. As Marianne Williamson once said, speaking to a crowd of about 2,500 people in New York City, “There's really only One of us here.” To forgive another is to forgive yourself; to forgive yourself is to forgive another. There is no “first” involved because it is a single event.

Having spoken of Heaven, Jesus needs to add that Heaven isn't a place, some other realm we may or may not attain someday. It is our natural state as God created us and our reality forever. We've *forgotten* that about ourselves, but our forgetting hasn't changed its truth.

14 Forgiveness is the means by which we will remember. Through forgiveness the thinking of the world is reversed. The forgiven world becomes the gate of Heaven, because by its mercy we can at last forgive ourselves. Holding no one prisoner to guilt, we become free. Acknowledging Christ in all our brothers, we recognize His Presence in ourselves. Forgetting all our misperceptions, and with nothing from the past to hold us back, we can remember God. Beyond this, learning cannot go. When we are ready, God Himself will take the final step in our return to Him.

Forgiveness is how we remember the truth about ourselves.

“By healing you learn of wholeness, and by learning of wholeness you learn to remember God.” (T-7.IV.4:3 (FIP), T-7.III.7:3 (CE))

“To perceive the healing of your brother as the healing of yourself is thus the way to remember God.” (T-12.II.2:9 (FIP), T-12.II.12:8 (CE))

“No one who learns to forgive can fail to remember God. Forgiveness, then, is all that need be taught, because it is all that need be learned.” (P-2.II.3:1-2)

It is forgiveness that reverses the thinking of the world, turning the world into the gate of Heaven. Through forgiving others, we give ourselves the mercy of forgiveness, which opens the way back to our natural state: the remembrance of our Self.

Who are you holding “prisoner to guilt”? Are you willing to set them free? As long as we hold onto the view of another person as guilty, we cannot be free. In forgiving them, you will become free from guilt yourself (14:4). To recognize the Presence of Christ in yourself, you must be willing to acknowledge Him in everyone else! Cleared of our misperceptions, letting go of any guilt we ever felt or saw in the past, we can remember God.

This process is “the height of learning”; it is as far as learning can take us. When we have learned it fully, “God Himself will take the final step in our return to Him.” What that final step will be like cannot even be imagined, simply because there is nothing in this world like it, nothing we can compare it to. The Course describes it as disappearing “into the heart of God.” (W-WI.14.5:5) That's good enough for me!

# **APPENDIX**

## THE EVOLUTION OF ACIM

# EVOLUTION OF ACIM

1. The scribing (1965–1972)

Shorthand notes by Helen Schucman, transcribed by Bill Thetford.

  - A. Helen and Bill were research psychologists at Columbia University, New York.
2. the urtext (1972)
  - A. The typed transcription became known as the Urtext. The word *urtext* means original text and is often used to refer to the original manuscript of a musical score or literary work.
    - i. First published version, in notebook form, in 1972.; photocopies of the typescript.
    - ii. There are no chapter or section breaks in the Urtext.
    - iii. Copyright by Foundation for A Course in Miracles in effect 1975 to 2003; voided by the court in 2002.
  - B. Hugh Lynn Cayce Version (1972, first published in 2000)

Helen retyped the Urtext, editing as she went, with help from Bill. The intent was to turn the rough original dictation into a clear, readable manuscript. This eventually became known as the Hugh Lynn Cayce version (1972, which some refer to as “the original edition.” The *Urtext Text* contains 337,372 words. The *Hugh Lynn Cayce (HLC) Text* contains 299,189 words or 38,184 words fewer than the *Urtext*.

    - i. Chapter and section breaks were added (not necessarily the same as what we have today).
    - ii. Punctuation was somewhat cleaned up.
    - iii. Number of emphasized words was reduced for stylistic reasons.
    - iv. Most personal and professional material was deleted, and references to Helen and Bill have been removed, so the Course now appears to address the reader.
    - v. More editions were published almost identical to the Cayce version
    - vi. Criswell Edition, few hundred copies, printed in 1975 prior to copyright.
    - vii. Jesus’ Course in Miracles published 2000,

- viii. Blue Sparkly Edition published 2003 (Australia; now in USA)
  - ix. Original Edition published in 2007, Course in Miracles Society; 3RD PRINTING 2009. (AAW rates #3)
    - 1. Disadvantages of the Original Edition
      - a. Missing quite a bit of the Urtext
      - b. Referencing system differs from the common FIP edition.
      - c. Chapter and section titles sometimes differ from FIP.
  - C. Printed version of Urtext appeared 2008, [miraclesinactionpress.com](http://miraclesinactionpress.com)
    - i. Urtext annotated, reference numbers added
    - ii. Volume also contains Workbook, Manual, Song of Prayer, Psychotherapy pamphlet, and Gifts of God.
    - iii. Revised version was expected but has yet to appear (Dave Thompson editor)
3. first FULL printed edition by foundation for inner peace (fip)
- A. Hardcover, three-volume edition (June 1976)  
 Second edit done by Helen Schucman and Ken Wapnick. Published in three volumes: Text, Workbook, and Manual. It had chapter and section titles but no numbering of sections, paragraphs, or sentences, making referencing difficult. The Foundation for Inner Peace *ACIM Text* version contains 288,968 words or 48,405 fewer words than the *Urtext* (10,221 words less than the *HLC*).
  - i. Softcover single volume version published 1985.
  - B. FIP 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition Hard cover and soft cover (1992)  
 Extensive revision to restore accidentally omitted material, correct typographical, grammatical, and capitalization errors. Most importantly, a numbering system was added to enable easier and more exact referencing. The books still contained just the original 3 volumes.
    - i. From 1976 until 2000, these were the only available two versions of the Course.
  - C. FIP 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition hard cover. soft cover and Kindle (2007) (AAW rates #2)  
 Apart from correction of typographic errors, the major change is the addition of two supplementary booklets also published separately, “The Song of Prayer” and “Psychology: Purpose, Process, and Practice”.

**4. THE COMPLETE AND ANNOTATED EDITION (Hardcover 2017, Softcover 2021; also in Kindle edition and a free smart phone/iPad app) (AAW rates #1)**

- A. A Course in Miracles has become a contemporary spiritual classic. Since it was originally published in 1976, readers have recognized in its words truths that they had never heard before, yet somewhere inside seemed to have always known. However, in the process of editing for publication, roughly forty-five thousand words were edited out, mostly from the first seven chapters of the Text, and the wording of the first four chapters was edited to the point where only about a fifth of their sentences retained their original wording.**

**The Complete and Annotated Edition aims to restore the material that was lost. It was created by going back to Helen's shorthand Notes and editing afresh, retaining the original words to the maximum degree possible. By going back to the words that Helen Schucman heard in her mind and wrote down in her notebooks, it attempts to bring the reader into a more direct encounter with the power of those words. It includes, either in its main body or in appendices, those approximately forty-five thousand words that had been removed in the original published edition.**

**The teaching in this edition does not contradict the teaching found in other editions of A Course in Miracles. However, we believe that this edition will allow the Course's true meaning and character to shine through a little more clearly. And we hope that this will enable students to better see the Course for what it is, relate to it as it is, and apply its profound truths to their lives.**

- B. One *drawback* of the CE edition (as I abbreviate it) is that the references to the sentences, paragraphs, and even some sections have all changed in this edition. Nearly all books written about the Course use the referencing system of the FIP edition. Whereas in the FIP edition, a sentence in Chapter 2 might bear the reference T-2.II.3:9, in the CE, its reference is T-2.IV.13:9 due to the restoration of many intervening paragraphs. Both the section number and paragraph number differ in this example. Unfortunately, no cross-reference yet exists.**

**The CE does not contain the two supplemental pamphlets, *Psychotherapy* and *Song of Prayer*, nor does it contain the useful *Preface* that was added to the FIP edition by Helen Schucman, presumably because all these remain under copyright.**

C. One major *advantage* is that a digital version that runs in any web browser or as an app on IOS and Android devices is available at no charge. Donations are always appropriate! This version can easily and rapidly be searched to find any text from earlier editions, although sometimes the exact wording is different from earlier editions.

5. which edition is best?

A. The CE Edition is the best (in my opinion), especially for reading the Text, as it contains nearly fifty thousand words that were omitted from the FIP edition. The two supplemental pamphlets not included may be available at reasonable prices used. in a single volume titled "Supplements to A Course in Miracles." Check [abebooks.com](http://abebooks.com) and [alibris.com](http://alibris.com).

B. FIP 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition is very good overall for a number of reasons.

- i. It is the most widely read version, having for 25 years been the only version available. Millions of copies have been sold. It has been translated into 27 different languages, all of which use identical reference numbering.
- ii. Its reference numbers are used by most Course authors, with the exception of Robert Perry and Allen Watson.
- iii. It contains the two supplemental pamphlets (which are still copyrighted).

C. Disadvantages of the FIP 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition

- i. Missing over 48 thousand words found in the Urtext and CE.
- ii. In the opinion of many Course scholars, it was over-edited and sometimes altered the meaning of the original.

D. The bottom line

- i. Ideally, you can use two editions, the CE and the FIP.
- ii. The only way to obtain the two supplemental pamphlets is to purchase them used or as part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition.
- iii. Digital versions such as Kindle or the ACIM-CE app have the great advantage of being searchable. The best search is in the CE app, but for simple word or phrase searches, all work equally well.
- iv. You can find online versions you can read and search for free of all three versions I recommend: CE, FIP, and OE ("Original Edition").