

Rediscovering Your Authentic Self:
Applying A Course in Miracles to Everyday Life
vastly expands our perspective of who we are and why we are here. Moreah's
illuminating wisdom, love, and compassion shine through every page of
her book—a powerful tool for
conscious living.

Simone Gabbay, Editor

Rediscovering Your Authentic Self

Applying A Course in Miracles to Everyday Life

Moreah Ragusa

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This book is lovingly dedicated to all those in
conscious pursuit of their spiritual path—in
particular those seeking to understand
and practice the teachings of
A Course in Miracles.

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Preface

In 1987, I began surrendering my belief that I already knew what there was to know. I began asking why I felt such a gaping void in my heart that nothing I had tried seemed able to fill it. I questioned why I had to endure the painful experiences that I had in my life. Was there a lesson in them all? What is the real meaning of love and forgiveness? And why does life hurt so much?

As a child, I was introduced to many religions as my mother searched to understand the truth about God, as well as her purpose in life. This was a blessing, for it gave me the opportunity to experience several different spiritual doctrines and practices. It also allowed me to observe that the search within all religions was, in fact, a search for a relationship with God. It seems that we have all felt at times as though something were missing—as though there were a void that nothing in the physical world could fill. That thing is our awareness of, and conscious connection to, our Creator.

Through learning this lesson, I was able to more clearly comprehend who I was—the holy, innocent, perfect child of God. From that identity, I would learn that my purpose on earth was to do God's Will, which is to think and act only through love.

My awakening to this truth became quickened one day in the early 1990s while I was watching an Oprah Winfrey program. For years, I had felt victimized, a prisoner, entrapped within life's struggles. At that particular point in my life, I had endured a tremendous amount of emotional and psychological suffering that had been mystically softened by miracles. In their wake, the miracles left transformative ways of thinking and feeling that would change my life for months to come. What exactly was behind these transformative thoughts and outlooks that had the power to set me free? This is what I had to discover. I had learned that if I was pushed far enough psychologically, some divine power buried deep within me would emerge. I was both starving and searching to become engaged with this power—only this time I hungered for it not through desperation, but instead through inspiration.

On the show, Oprah introduced the author of a book that she claimed was, at that point, the best book she had ever read. My whole being became animated with an unexplained joy as my body felt weightless; my spirit seemed to be celebrating a long-awaited marker towards my awakening. On that very day, I purchased Marianne Williamson's book, *A Return to Love*, which was the catalyst that launched me firmly on my journey towards freedom. I simply devoured it line by line and page by page. In this, her first book, Marianne shared her reflections on another book, *A Course in Miracles*. She reflected on, and explained how, its principles and theories had transformed her life and restored to her a sense of peace she had not been able to attain in any other way.

I extracted the teachings of *A Course in Miracles* ("ACIM" or "the Course") from Marianne's book and passionately began living them. Eighteen months later, I would purchase my own copy of the Course and make the same discovery that Marianne had made. The reading and living of its teachings caused an awakening within me that continues today. Since that day, I have learned, practiced, and taught its teachings, discovering, along with thousands of others, that the Course has the power to restore perfect peace of mind.

Helen Schucman and William Thetford, Professors of Medical Psychology at Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City, scribed ACIM. Although

Helen and William were the scribes, the author is the spirit of Jesus Christ, who, the Course teaches, was the embodiment of a fully actualized Christ Mind, which, we're taught, is the Son of God. The Son of God is the collective of all people referred to as "the Sonship."

Through the Course, we are encouraged to explore the idea that the Christ Mind is within us all and is revealed to be the actual place where all is one. These teachings touched my life so deeply, and continue to do so today, that I committed to make it my life's work to learn and demonstrate them with each person and every event in my life. Strangely for me, these teachings seemed somehow to be remembered rather than learned.

This book is dedicated to the purpose of making the reader aware of the blocks that we have placed before our awareness of love's presence, in addition to the guidelines that I call Universal Truths, such as: Thou shalt not kill; love thy neighbor as thyself; to defend is to attack; as you think so shall you be; and, both giving and receiving imply having. These truths are not meant to conflict with any other spiritual doctrines, but rather to enlighten the perception of the reader to better understand the goal of all religions. I believe that goal to be love and forgiveness. With the theories outlined in this book, you will be able to draw from the knowledge within your own being—to help guide you on your sacred spiritual path. The majority of the ideas and principles offered in this book are derived from the above-mentioned book, *A Course in Miracles*—a self-study course dedicated to the psychological retraining of the way we think. *A Course in Miracles* is published by The Foundation for Inner Peace. It is not a religion. In my opinion, the goal of *A Course in Miracles* is to relinquish fear, guilt, and judgment from the human mind, which will prompt the releasing of a perceived state of separation. This releasing causes the mind to return to its natural state—the state from which it originated and that, in fact, it never left. That state is an all-encompassing love. Therefore, it becomes clear that to identify ourselves with the Christ Consciousness is to accept our natural state of being.

Throughout my study of the Course, I realized that if I wanted answers, I needed to first ask. This realization changed my life. When we think we know, we are not teachable. Our mind is closed to considering other possibilities. But when we are willing to ask for understanding about the mystery of life, answers always follow. Subsequently, we become open to ideas that may have been previously unquestioned and unexplored. With an open mind, and what felt like a love-starved heart, I asked.

INTRODUCTION

The Course Teachings

The foundation teachings of *A Course in Miracles* are love and forgiveness, and in the Introduction we are told:

This is a course in miracles. It is a required course. Only the time you take it is voluntary. Free will does not mean that you can establish the curriculum. It means only that you can elect what you want

to take at a given time. The course does not aim at teaching the meaning of love, for that is beyond what can be taught. It does aim, however, at removing the blocks to the awareness of love's presence, which is your natural inheritance. The opposite of love is fear, but what is all encompassing can have no opposite.

This course can therefore be summed up very simply in this way:

Nothing real can be threatened.
Nothing unreal exists.
Herein lies the peace of God. (In -1,2)

What this is saying is that only love is real, because that is the will of God. Therefore, nothing but love really exists. When we fully accept this to be truth, we find peace. If we experience the opposite, or find ourselves pulling away from love, we act out of fear. It is the "splitting of reality" or of mind—the turning away from love or from God—that generates the experience of fear. From this split perspective, perception rather than knowledge becomes the filter of our experience. The Course teaches that will and thought are the same, and that when we think through love, we are creating, and therefore will experience, heaven. And when we think through fear, we are dreaming, and will experience hell. We are, however, given free will, which allows us the freedom to decide whether we want to think through fear or to think through love. Whether or not we wish to experience heaven on earth is therefore up to us.

The common goal of all spiritual seekers, faiths, and religions is, ultimately, love. Although it may not be possible to narrow down the world's many faiths to a single practice or religion, it is certainly possible for all people to have a single experience based on their discovery of miracles. Miracles are natural expressions of love that happen when people are willing to become a vehicle through which love can be expressed. We must consider that in our humanness, we are perceptual beings, and our past experiences will affect our current and future perceptions. In other words, we perceive new situations through the filter of our own desires or fears. Changing our perceptions from fear to love is, in my opinion, to prove the existence of God through experience.

As perceptual beings, we need to be consciously aware of differentiating between our own limiting personal perceptions and the all-encompassing universal truths that lie deeply within each of us, unadulterated. It is my deepest desire that, through considering and working with the ideas put forth in this book, the reader will receive help in understanding, integrating, and practicing the principles of love (universal truths) explained in *A Course in Miracles*.

For me personally, living the Course teachings has profoundly magnified my natural intuitive abilities. The practice of love and compassion and the relinquishment of fear have significantly increased the clarity of guidance coming to me from non-physical dimensions. My promise to God to serve humanity through love, using whatever gifts He has inherently placed within me, has evolved the ability to do "readings." Essentially this means that I am a vehicle or voice accessible to God and angelic guides to help others receive guidance. In a sense, I serve as a communication link. It is hard to describe in the context of the five senses what occurs at an extrasensory perceptual level of consciousness. For the most part I see pictures, spirits, angels, and hear guidance for another's life to help them experience a greater sense of peace and well-being.

Daily I demonstrate the Course teaching that, in reality, there is only one mind, that we are all facets of that one mind, and that all of us are able to access the unbounded information. The

prerequisite for me in serving through this ability is non-judgment and the willingness to “be one.” The Course teaches that we are responsible for what we think and that our thoughts give rise to what we see; therefore, we are responsible for attaining Christ-sight—meaning the way in which we see the world. My purpose is simply to show up and be the voice for God and the Holy Spirit. For the most part, the individual is not surprised by the guidance given, but the surprise comes from my sharing information that is often known only to the intimate people in their life. Tremendous healing results through the release of guilt and the acceptance of forgiveness of past mistakes. The practicing of the Course is without question an opportunity to access our boundless, infinite, loving, authentic self.

Why not just read *A Course in Miracles* and decide for yourself what it says? You could certainly do this, but it has been my experience that most people find it a challenge to understand and integrate its teachings. Not because it is difficult to do so, but rather because its teachings are so different from how we have been conditioned to think. For this reason, people often struggle with the principles put forth in the Course. This book is offered to assist those with little or no previous exposure to *A Course in Miracles* to understand the function of true love. For those who are already working with the Course, I offer this book as a reminder and a helpful tool for putting the principles into practice.

In my work as a psychotherapist,¹ I have found that my clients are better able to work with the Course teachings when they have been given some background information. This can be obtained through reading books such as Marianne Williamson’s *A Return to Love* or Kenneth Wapnick’s *Forgiveness and Jesus: The Meeting Place of A Course in Miracles and Christianity*.

I have found that when individuals recognize that they are free from the false identities we are all conditioned to uphold, they become willing to surrender and experience their lives through love rather than fear. It is my hope that through sharing my own experience and knowledge, I can help the reader to release all fear of God and to surrender any judgment of all people and all religions. The ultimate goal is peace.

Finding Course References

A Course in Miracles was first published in 1976. Since that time, it has been released in different forms. The original Course consisted of three books—Text, Workbook for Students, and Manual for Teachers. For convenience purposes, these three books have been combined into one volume. Because there are different print editions of the Course, one might own a copy of either a numbered sentence-by-sentence text or an earlier version that was not numbered. My personal copy is from the 1992 softcover edition. Throughout this text, all quotes from *A Course in Miracles* are followed by a footnote to indicate the exact location of each quote. For example, if the quote comes from the Introduction of the book, it is signified by “In.” If the quote is derived from the Text, a “T” precedes the chapter, part, section, paragraph, and sentence. In the case of a quote coming from the lesson book, the quote is followed by “W” (for Workbook). If the quote is derived from Part I of the lesson book, the symbol is “PI,” and for Part II, “PII.” Following this are the lesson, paragraph, and sentence. If the quote is derived from the Manual for Teachers, it is followed by “M,” and then the question, paragraph, and sentence. If the quote is from the Clarification of Terms, which are found opposite the lessons in Part II of the lesson book, “C” is followed by term, paragraph, and sentence. In all cases the book, chapter, part, section, paragraph, lesson, term, or question, are clearly identified as follows:

Someday, after we have mastered the winds, the waves, the tides, and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love. Then for the second time in the history of the world, humanity will have discovered fire.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

PART ONE

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Who Are We?

CHAPTER 1

Choosing a New Way to Think

Guidance from Within

Inherent within me is a strong inner knowing that has always spoken clearly and directly of the universal truths explored in *A Course in Miracles*. These universal truths, I have learned, govern life perfectly. When I was a child, I naturally and frequently sought the guidance of my inner voice to better understand my unhappy parents, who constantly created pain-filled, difficult experiences. In my adult years, miracles have become an essential tool in life. In choosing the path of self-reliance, I have learned to ask for, and receive, answers from within that allow me to perceive my experiences differently. I have always believed that each and every one of us has access to this inner guidance. The question is, why don't we always rely on it? Most often, it is because of fear—because we're afraid of making a wrong choice! We're afraid that the wrong inner guidance is answering us, and we're afraid of our inability to act out the guidance that is offered.

To tap into our innate inner guidance, we must first surrender all of our fears and ask for help. We must put our goal first and in so doing, become clear on the path to attain that goal. The meaning, and the deeper understandings we seek, will follow, but we cannot be attached to the outcome; genuine answers are not always easy to accept. They will, however, return us to our authentic self. Answers will come to us—if we ask.

But what happens if we receive answers that we don't like, answers that we do not feel empowered enough to embrace? In these instances, the truth that accompanies the answer will generate fear, and so we must ask to be joined with the power of God, which is within us, to act on the guidance. Fear can, and often does, prevent us from asking in the first place. We may feel individually unable to deal with the truth that guidance brings, so naturally the strength needed comes from unification with God. Ultimately what we come to understand is that the truth will always liberate us. The truth reflects our brilliance and our resilience to overcome what we perceive as obstacles.

In my travels, I discovered that although there were many religions, each religion in its origin was founded on the desire to commune with God. The Course principles reflect universal truths that I define as the laws of love. Love and its meaning, we are told, are not teachable, but are, and must be, experiential. The thoughts that generate the experience of fear are what obstruct our awareness of the separation from love's constant presence. The skill of recognizing these obstructive thoughts is teachable, and it is towards the accomplishment of that goal that this book is written. In my opinion, all religions strive towards, and desire to expand from, these laws of love. It has become clear to me that all people, in all religions, are praying to the same God or the Grand Orchestrating Design.

The Fear of God

Throughout my spiritual quest, I encountered numerous people with a tremendous resistance to the Grand Organizing Design and religion. Compassionately, I understood. I could resonate with

them because I have also felt this way at certain points in my life. It is interesting, however, that these were the times when I was feeling both powerless and helpless, and it was these feelings that engendered anger towards God.

Even today, I often meet people who express anger and fear at the very idea of God. The fear and anger they feel stem from feelings of helplessness, and from having the concept of God or religion forced upon them, either by well-meaning parents, or by an exuberant individual who had become reborn into a greater awareness of God's love and mercy. Meaning well and surely feeling liberated, many "born-again" individuals understandably want to share their newfound feelings of joy and faith with everyone they meet. Unfortunately, many people are too turned off by God and religion and are not yet ready to hear their message. Many people whom I have counseled have confided that their fear, anger, and resentment all came from being told that if they didn't surrender to this "loving God" or didn't obey His commandments, they would be damned. Feeling confused by such an apparent contradiction in how the nature of God was presented to them, they shut down.

Many of us, using a reasoning mind, were not willing to buy into a thought system that left us feeling guilty and damned. Undoubtedly we realized that if this thought system were valid, that would mean that we didn't have free will—that we could not act according to our wants and desires. At the first stage of our awakening, we often realize that fear is being used to manipulate us into believing in God, and that this tactic is similar to the coercion employed in a dictatorship. But could this thought system really be of God?

For many people, any discussion about God is very difficult, and they would rather avoid the subject entirely. As I began working with people in my practice, I became increasingly aware of this common fear of God. With this in mind, the primary goals of my counseling became:

1. To soften any fears that people had about becoming "religious," or about my attempting to convert them in such a direction.
2. To offer my clients an opportunity, through spiritual thinking, to experience, and therefore to know, God.

If, for a moment, people can agree that God is love, then they can start on a journey of examining the "fear" thought system in its proper perspective. This process results in enhanced clarity and in a full understanding of God and love, which indeed manifests a heightened perception for everyone, whether they consider themselves to be religious, spiritual, or atheist.

Spirituality vs. Religion

The difference between being spiritual and being religious is often misunderstood. In the West, to be religious often means that one is practicing and following the rules and doctrines of a specific religion and that one is not as likely to be open to other thoughts and theories. Those who are interested in New Age philosophies or pursue metaphysical studies are commonly perceived as being more open to Eastern beliefs, such as reincarnation, that are often discouraged in some religious doctrines. In my experience, there are core issues in the beliefs of religious people and New Age thinkers that oppose each other and that are therefore often frowned upon within their respective groups. New Age people may believe themselves to be more open and non-judgmental, but I have encountered closed-minded individuals even among New Age folk. I have experienced that if you challenge their beliefs, they will often just as easily dismiss you from a gathering as any religious group might.

Kenneth Wapnick, PhD, a longtime friend of the now deceased Helen Schucman, and author of *Forgiveness and Jesus: The Meeting Place of A Course in Miracles and Christianity*, also writes on the desire to bridge the gap of understanding between the beliefs of mainstream religious groups and New Age thinkers. He writes:

Those who begin the Course expecting to find—for better or for worse—the Christianity they had learned and practiced, or the Christianity that seemed to condone bigotry and persecution, will be very much surprised. They will find many of the words they were familiar with—atonement, salvation, forgiveness of sins, Christ, Son of God, etc.—but with different meanings or connotations. The crucifixion remains the central event in Jesus’ life, yet the Course’s interpretation is 180 degrees from the traditional teachings that Jesus suffered and died for our sins.

We can see *A Course in Miracles* as an extensive commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, perhaps the clearest distillation of what Jesus’ teachings must have been, and whose principles of forgiveness are so perfectly exemplified in his own life. The Course helps us understand what these principles are, why Jesus made them the cornerstone of his gospel, and why he chose the crucifixion as the form in which he taught that our sins are forgiven. Before we can transcend the separatism of religion and know our oneness in God, the religions of the world must be purified of their errors. *A Course in Miracles* has been given to the world as one means of such purification.” (Intro. Pg.10 Par. 2-4.)

Through the theories of fundamentalist and mainstream Christianity, we are taught that we are guilty because we disobeyed God when we ate the fruit of the forbidden tree, or, in the Course, we are taught that this was a time when we began to believe that we were separate from God. As we turned away from His will, we became defined as sinners, and were therefore required to earn our salvation. In the ancient writings of Patanjali,² sin is nonexistent; there are only obstacles to one’s union with God.

Patanjali reminds us that the idea of sin promotes shame.

We must question if God could find His creation guilty. The Course reminds us that to sin means that we could alter our identity, which is perfect and innocent—to defile its original nature established by God. We are reminded that we make mistakes, but that those mistakes are correctible.

Spirituality and Karma

To define ourselves as spiritual means that we are affirming, to ourselves and to others, that we accept ourselves as being more than just a body—that there is an invisible part to our being that we want to include as we navigate through life. To be spiritual means we trust that we are living in a universe that loves and cares for us. It means that we believe that we are able to make mistakes, but that those mistakes do not alter our identity. To be spiritually minded means we believe that we can let karma rule. Karma is the cosmic law of a spiritual justice system of cause and effect. Scientifically, karma is reflected as the principle determining that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. In both the universal and worldly courts of justice, we adhere to cosmic, rather than human, justice. We trust that what we put into life ultimately will come back to us. Life is a cul-de-sac, what goes in will eventually come out. We trust that for every cause, there is an effect and that the effect experienced in this lifetime may have its cause in another.

Spiritual individuals understand that spirit is in a constant dance to seek balance. “An eye for an eye” is ultimately understood to mean that we must receive that which we have given. “I have no neutral thoughts,” (W-pI.16) is reflective of the fact that all thought creates form on some level of experience, and of the understanding that thought always precedes action. We trust that if a person makes the choice to take another’s life, they will eventually have to go through the experience of having their life taken in order to balance their karmic debt or live a life filled with challenge. This law does not need to be governed by people because it is perfectly governed by laws that are inherent in Spirit.

Spiritual people absolutely trust that they are always in the right place at the right time and with the right people. “There are no accidents in salvation.”(M-3-1:6) It means that we can relax in faith, knowing that we did, in fact, write our particular chapter within the collective Book of Life before we incarnated into a body. On each page in our book, there are opportunities geared to rouse us to our identity, in settings that include specific people. These people have the capacity to mirror and to jointly heal the wounds that we share.

There are within our chapter of such a symbolic book several paragraphs on each page, of which we must choose one. This one paragraph will be the determiner of the experience that has within it the potential to awaken us. The lowest or bottom paragraph experience is derived from a particular frame of thought most paralleling fear, while the top or highest paragraph is most paralleling love and forgiveness. The assortment in between reflects all possibilities of awareness. The highest or most God-reflective perspective is derived from the highest or most conscious loving thought that we are currently able to embrace. In this sense, then, truth is like water in that it seeks its own level. Yet it is important to realize that the destination of all paragraphs, so to speak, is the same, only the perception of self, and the road traveled, differ.

In other words, I can go to the neighboring city taking back roads or the most common route. I can drive in a worn-out 1990 Honda Civic, a 2001 E-Class Mercedes Benz, or anything in between. Each choice will provide a very different ride and experience. However, regardless of the choice I make, I will ultimately end up in the destination city. In this same way, our level of awareness gives rise to our thoughts, which in turn give birth not only to our experiences, but also to how we view them. To clarify, here are some examples of the differing levels of awareness that can determine how we will experience life:

Levels of Consciousness through Which We View the World

Level Seven—Christ Consciousness—I am the Holy Child of God, one with the Creator. I have accepted that my nature is one of self-referral, and that all things are lessons that God would have me learn. I respond to every situation from a place of love. I am awake and observe, rather than judge, all things. Spirit comes before matter. I have awakened to find that the mind, body, and spirit are unified and are experienced as dimensions of the totality of what I am. My desires are met effortlessly in the instant that I become aware of them. At this level, my desires generally seek to reflect love, and love’s presence.

Level Six—I am a reflection of my Creator. I am innocent and still as God created me, but sometimes I forget that I am the creator of my experience. For the most part, I have clarity of mind, and my needs are met both spiritually and physically. The relationship between my desires and the experience of those desires is almost instant. I drift between dreaming and wakeful consciousness. My experiences reflect both.

Level Five—I have recognized that miracles are both natural and possible and have begun calling on a power higher than myself to guide my life. I have begun to love myself because I am

learning to release the belief that I am guilty. I regularly pray or meditate and have begun to recognize that both my will and God's will are one. My desires are accomplished through synchronicities. Through authentic identity, I have begun to bend the rules of time and space. Forgiveness has become a way of life.

Level Four—I believe in a power greater than myself, but have not found it to be constant and reliable because I confuse the roles of cause and effect. I feel guilty for past mistakes and therefore still have a tendency to judge and get angry. I still view God as a spirit or intelligence outside and apart from myself. I project my faults and feelings of guilt onto others. I am beginning to understand that forgiveness is a source of healing, yet am still afraid to look like a doormat for practicing it.

Level Three—For the most part, I feel as though I am always responding to the unkind actions of others. I feel that I am a good person most of the time, but life does not reflect my goodness. I try diligently to adhere to the rules of the family and social dictates, in order to feel safe. I am often judging others so that I can feel better inside. I am afraid of God, or do not believe in Him, because I feel He has abandoned me. I do not correlate my thoughts with my experience and with the fact that my thinking creates my reality; in fact, I have not even paid attention to what I think about. I have a hidden victim-consciousness that propels me to seek safety from the ego. My desires are attained only through “hard work.”

Level Two—I believe myself to be a sinner. I am not worthy of a creator's love, if in fact there is a creator. I have a cynical outlook, and I believe only in what I can experience with my five senses. I have a rational mind that does not leave room for the unknown; in fact, the unknown terrifies me so much that I deny being afraid by equating the unknown with the absurd. I am highly judgmental and believe that my happiness comes from others' conforming to my will. I am ignorant about the relationship of thought and experience; therefore, I completely confuse the levels of cause and effect. I am only able to attain my desires through aggressively “taking the bull by the horns,” and to some degree believe that what one person attains is then no longer available to others.

Level One—I am a master of denial. I identify with my ego. I may or may not believe in God and if I do, I will not believe in a loving God but rather in a God of vengeance. In fact, I find the idea of God to be a good tool with which to manipulate others. What I perceive in myself to be negative characteristics are what I project onto God, and through this action, I feel justified to take actions into my own hands. I am still reliving my past and feel exonerated in judging and attacking others based on that past pain. I am almost totally ego-driven and use chemical or pharmaceutical substances to avoid having to deal with my deep yet unconscious feelings of guilt. I anger easily and try to escape my own pain by attacking others. I am almost capable of acting cruelly without conscience. Because of my own antagonistic nature, I assume that others are going to attack me, so I continually seek protection from the ego.

As we have just seen, at each of these levels, my reaction to life's experiences will be different. If part of my soul's journey towards enlightenment includes the experience of being arrested for a crime I did not commit, then each of these levels of thought will provoke very different responses to that same experience.

At Level Seven, I will trust that this incident is to experience and demonstrate my understanding of the power of love. I will not in any way perceive myself as a victim of the accuser.

At Level Six, I will see this incident as a final step towards my awakening. I will trust that I have a karmic agreement with the souls involved, and that the event is meant to test and reveal my faith in God. Forgiveness will be immediate as I recognize that only love is real.

At Level Five, the recognition that forgiveness is required in order to find peace will be entertained and embraced. The strength to forgive will come from calling on a power higher than myself.

At Level Four, the arrest for a crime I did not commit will be perceived as an assault on my identity. I will, at first, be overrun by fear, but then will begin to consider another way to deal with the situation, such as prayer and meditation for achieving clarity of mind. I will begin to assess areas in my life where I have falsely accused another, which will open the way to my practicing forgiveness someday.

At Level Three, I will feel tormented and believe that I am a victim of circumstance. I will look to blame others for the incident. I will find it extremely difficult to forgive. I will think that it is natural for me to respond to the incident. I will not entertain the idea that there might be reasons why this is happening to me because I fear facing the partial responsibility that I may have.

At Level Two of consciousness, I will respond with outrage. I will completely deny that there is a God. I will therefore not have a place to turn to for a deeper understanding. The situation will trigger the memory of all previous incidents and situations in which I have been a victim, and I will feel justified in seeking revenge in almost any form.

Finally, at Level One, this incident will be seen as just another kick in the teeth! I will believe myself to be justified in my rage. I will continually seek to find a person other than myself to attack, in order to cope with my deep feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness. I will tend to be violent, and feel justified in being so, because life has dealt me such a bad hand! I am a total victim of life, reversing cause and effect.

Within each of these levels of awareness, we can find ourselves. We will have enacted all of them in differing experiences. Our goal, however, is to eventually remain in the top three levels depicted here.

These foundational levels of awareness engender specific experiences so that the soul may become aware of its thinking. The Course teaches that the purpose of the world is to reflect our thoughts back to us. From this premise, we are permitted to become the active participant and witness of the challenging events in our life, rather than being the helpless sleeping actor, who would otherwise have perceived the event to be both random and painful. Through spiritual thinking, we allow our faith to begin navigating us through particular life experiences that will increase our understanding of who we are, and ultimately of where our power lies. It means we understand that we are the conscious actors in the play called life, fulfilling our part. Consequently, we come to trust that our higher self is the director.

Spiritually minded people use their five senses to interact with their perceptual reality, but they also use intuitive senses to define and experience their authentic reality. These intuitive abilities are intrinsic in all of us—natural extensions of our authentic self with which we were created. Living spiritually means we have discovered that there is both an inner and an outer world in which we interact. Through prayer and meditation, we explore and discover that the inner world is more reliable in truth than the outer. This applies because we are not so reliant on what our physical senses report as reality. We recognize that the outer is reflective of the inner and that therefore the cause is within. We learn to trust our gut feeling and our heart's wisdom. We confidently move forward, absolute in our ability to affect our world as we act through love.

To trust this inner world takes faith and confidence in one's identity as a spiritual being. When we are spiritual, we do not necessarily operate by the laws of time and space—instead,

we become free to bend the rules that no longer seem to make moral sense. We recognize that, to some degree, we have become collectively hypnotized by social expectations and rules, but that escape is always an option. Escape then becomes defined as leading our lives only by the cosmic laws of love. To live our lives spiritually means that we have accepted and established that Mind, Spirit, Love, and Light are interchangeable words, all describing who we truly are.

CHAPTER 2

Redefining God

God as an Idea

God is an idea, and an idea is creative mental energy. For me it was particularly refreshing to think of God as an idea, because for the first time, I was allowed to mold and shape my understanding of this Creator. I soon discovered that as I grew in my understanding of an authentic self, I also grew in my understanding of God. It was in the book *A Course in Miracles* that I first came across the concept of God as being an idea. The Course suggests that any resistance we may have to the concept of God's being an idea comes from our resistance to believe that each of us is also an idea.

It is crucial to understand the teaching, "Ideas leave not their source, and their effects but seem to be apart from them." (T-26.VII.4:7) This is a fundamental rule that must be borne in mind throughout the study of the Course text. Consider then that there is nothing about an idea that ever has to end; in fact, we are soon able to conclude that an idea is extended and expanded through sharing. When we share ownership of a physical object, then the individual ownership is lessened. But when we share an idea, it is increased because no part of it is lost in the sharing. "If you share a physical possession, you do divide its ownership. If you share an idea, however, you do not lessen it. All of it is still yours although all of it has been given away." (T-5.I.1:10-12) In fact, the idea is now greater than before the sharing occurred.

Author, lecturer, and spiritual leader Dr. Deepak Chopra teaches the principles of ancient Indian Ayurveda—"the science of life." In Ayurveda, God is defined as energy and as information that is self-referring. This self-referring quality, in addition to energy and information, is what identifies intelligence. When we stop and think of this self-referring quality in our own thinking-learning-evolving pattern, we see that it is true. We seem to curve back into ourselves in order to experience ourselves. This is congruent with the Course teachings that thought is the origin of experience, which in turn leads to another thought. The container of the thoughts is the Soul, and within it are its desires and memories since the beginning of time. The Course teaches that an idea can be forgotten, but it can never be lost. Therefore, if God is an idea and we are, too, then both can expand and extend through sharing, eternally.

My idea of God is one in which he is the divinely supreme intelligence of a loving parental Spirit. God is the creative energy of love. God is passion, compassion, playfulness, humor, integrity, wisdom, mercy, grace, endurance, and patience. In keeping with the teachings of

ACIM, namely that God is an idea and that God is perfect, reason would tell us that God would have had to create the Son of God from Himself and that therefore we, too, are perfect.

Jesus, the man, using his Christ Mind, came upon the earth to atone and to prove through demonstration that only love is real. To atone means to allow the mistakes of the fear-ridden mind to be brought to truth.

A Course in Miracles tells us that the Christ Mind began to fall asleep to its identity. The false identity that arose to take its place was the ego. The symbolic “Fall from Grace” was an outrageous belief that we could oppose God’s Will—meaning that we could think apart from love. As will be explored at length, we are taught that when we think apart from love, we are, in fact, no longer thinking, but rather are dreaming or hallucinating.

The “Fall from Grace” refers to the process whereby a mind that was aware of its oneness with all things, beings, plants, and animals began to conceive of the idea that it was now separate from them. Heaven is a state of mind that is in love, and the natural home of the Christ Mind. The first coming of Christ, we are taught, was the creation of the Christ Mind, while the Second Coming is the collective awakening of that Mind to Its reality.

Who Is the Son of God?

Paralleling the Course teachings, in this book I am referring to the Son of God as Christ, being the name of the mind that was duplicated from the Source.

Jesus incarnated so that He might experience human consciousness to transcend the belief in fear. He walked upon the earth, understanding the perceptual human mind and its evolutionary process and condition, while maintaining an awakened Christ Mind or consciousness. He understood the lower or human mind, but did not succumb to its fear-engendered perceptions. We are told in A Course in Miracles that Jesus does not have anything that we do not have, reminding that the capacity within us is the same capacity that is within Him. In the Bible, there is a statement reflecting this, in which Jesus says that even the least among us could do all that He did and even more. Within the Course, Jesus acknowledges that we are to see and treat Him as an equal yet elder brother. He is an appropriate guardian because He demonstrated that love is always the answer, whereas our typical response is to judge and evaluate whether or not someone is worthy of our love. Jesus, among other enlightened beings, was a demonstrator of a fully actualized human being, embracing and living through the Christ Mind. Living through this Mind, we recognize our oneness, and we relinquish all desire to attack one another. I believe that as souls, this is what we all seek to achieve.

The Christ Mind is within each and every one of us, awaiting our acceptance. Because of the law of free will we are not forced to live from this Christ Mind. We are given the choice to experience the world through thoughts from the Christ Mind or from the lower, split, ego-originated thought system.

The Dynamics of the Ego

Ego is defined as the part of our being that we perceive as separate from each other and from God. It is our self-image that has been shaped and molded by others, in both a positive and a negative way. It contains within it all memories, including memories of not receiving the perfect love and nurture that are necessary for total personal and spiritual development. Our parents, who

also suffered from unmet needs in their own childhood, often project their painful scars onto their children, thus perpetuating the cycle. Ultimately, we recognize that the healing of the ego can only come from a source outside the world that arose from it.

Because guilt is the cornerstone of the ego-based thought system, the belief in the justification of punishment is unavoidable from the perspective of the ego. Therefore, it is imperative to understand that the origin of all fear lies in the guilt over our separation from the mind of God. Certain that we have attacked God in opposing His will; we feel that He is justified in attacking us in return.

It is interesting to note that, on some level, the ego believes that we should receive that which we have given and which, it whispers, should make us terrified of God. This fear of God then causes us to seek a “savior” that is different from God. To this, the ego responds, “I will save you.” The ego virtually projects its twisted approach to revenge onto God, so that we might not turn within and find God’s constant and abiding love.

Consequently, the ego is an identity that sees itself in constant danger of retribution, and it is therefore extremely defensive. The ego ultimately resolves this dilemma by secretly suggesting that we are guilty, but that it can protect us from our guilt.

The thought of separation from God states in the clearest form possible, that the mind which believes it has a separate will that can oppose the Will of God, also believes it can succeed. That this can hardly be a fact is obvious. Yet that it can be believed as fact is equally obvious. Herein lies the birthplace of guilt. (M-17.5:3-9)

A *Course in Miracles* teaches that, although we believe during the waking hours that we are awake, we are, on one level, still dreaming. The mind that identifies itself as being apart from its Source is not awake. In reality, we are still connected, wholly innocent, and living within the mind of God. It is revealed to be mankind’s mission to collectively awaken from the belief that we are separate from each other and from God. Within each one of us is a whole and perfect spirit born from, and reflecting, a unique personality of God.

Each Soul Is a Part of God

One day while meditating, my higher self shared this example: Let’s say that within God, there is one hundred percent grace, one hundred percent compassion, one hundred percent humility, one hundred percent wisdom, one hundred percent forgiveness, and so on. Each soul has the opportunity to be created from a unique percentage of each of these qualities, or attributes, that are God. So I may be seventy percent compassion and thirty percent humility, while my neighbor might be two percent humility, three percent wisdom, ninety percent grace, and five percent compassion.

Each soul originates from the totality that is God, yet is given a specific composite of qualities proportionately arranged to manifest a part, yet containing the whole. Each soul has the capacity to achieve the awareness of its own perfection.

The sum total of each of the souls completes the manifestation of the Son of God—known as Christ. We can liken this concept to the idea of a diamond within which all facets are coming together as a whole, yet each individual facet refracts light uniquely and differently, thus contributing to the manifestation of the total brilliance of the diamond. Without even one of these facets, the diamond is incomplete.

Imagine a single sheet of glass—smashing and allowing it to shatter in order to experience its vastness. Each single piece still contains all the intelligence, information, and material from which it originated, yet it can uniquely mirror the whole. Provided that not a single piece of glass is lost, the whole remains complete. Likewise we can ask, is the wave separate from the ocean or just an individualized aspect of it? In this sense, the soul is the wave, Spirit the ocean, and the sum total of both is God. No two snowflakes are alike and yet the elements that create snowflakes are identical.

The Course insists that we are still as God created us; therefore, we are perfect and innocent.

This is God's final judgment: "You are still My holy Son, forever innocent, forever loving and forever loved, as limitless as your Creator, and completely changeless and forever pure. Therefore awaken and return to Me. I am your Father and you are My Son. (W-P11-C-10.5:1-3)

From this, we can recognize that it is our mission to accept the identity that God created for us, and not to create a new one, namely the ego.

We are reminded that not to accept our divine identity is in fact egocentric. The Course consistently makes reference to this belief as our "authority" problem. It implies that we believe we could do a better job than God! The ego does, in fact, believe this to be true.