

## The Metaphysics of Separation and Forgiveness

Excerpts from the Workshop held at the  
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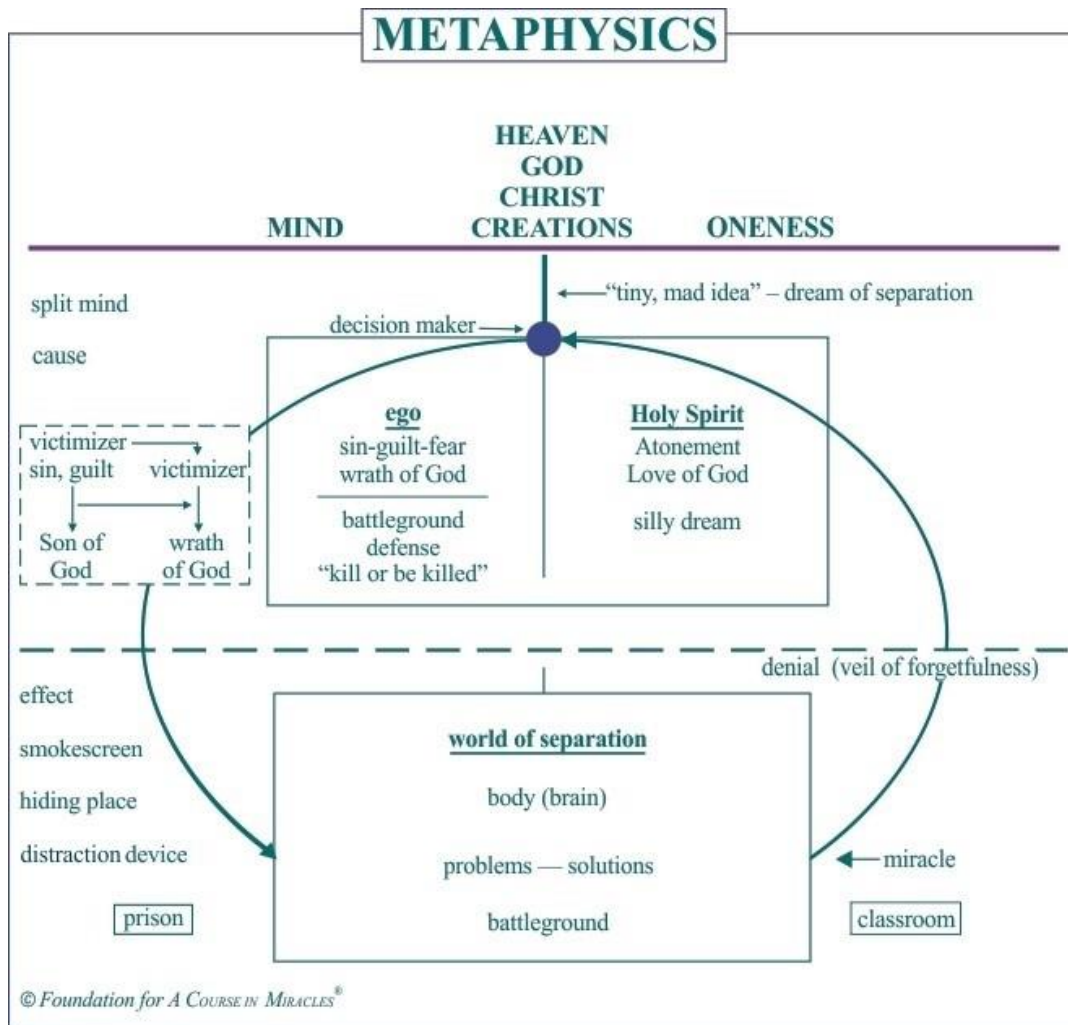
### Part I

*A Course in Miracles* shares many of the teachings found in the spiritualities and religions of the world, both the traditional as well as some of the New Age ones. For example, the Course teaches us that God is a loving Creator, a loving Father, not a hateful or a vengeful one. The Course teaches us that we should be loving and peaceful rather than filled with judgment and anger. The Course teaches that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were expressions of love rather than of judgment, punishment, and sacrifice. And the Course teaches, as we know, that forgiveness should be our central focus.

These teachings do not make the Course unique. What does make the Course unique among all of the religions and spiritualities of the world, both western and eastern, is the way that it integrates its non-dualistic metaphysics with a very practical and sophisticated psychology. Forgiveness is the concept which unifies and integrates the metaphysical teaching that the world is an illusion not created by God—and therefore there is nothing to forgive—with very sound, practical guidelines for how we should demonstrate and practice forgiveness in our daily lives.

One of the major purposes of this workshop is to present an overall summary of the Course's teachings, specifically addressing how the metaphysics of *A Course in Miracles* becomes the foundation for everything it teaches about forgiveness. The key idea in the metaphysics is that the world is an illusion and was made as a hiding place so that God would never find us, an idea which can seem rather abstract and removed from our experience, but nonetheless, again, is the foundation for everything the Course teaches about forgiveness. Focusing on the metaphysics will also allow us to understand in more depth why it is extremely important, as we work with the material, not to fall into the trap of thinking that the Holy Spirit is our magical helper Who will take care of all of our problems and needs, from the "minor" ones of getting parking spaces, to the "major" ones of healing us of cancer or AIDS, or bringing world peace, or whatever. It is one of the essential teachings of the Course that the purpose of the Holy Spirit or Jesus is to remind us of the choice that we have to make. And that understanding is not possible without first understanding the metaphysical framework of the Course.

We will be reviewing and summarizing the Course's basic teachings in order to see how this important thread runs through everything that the Course teaches. I will be presenting a basic visual framework for the teachings (see chart). So let us start right at the beginning—and of course the word Beginning here will be spelled with a capital B because we are speaking of Heaven where there is no time—there is no beginning, no end, and no time intervals.



In the Beginning there is God and His Son, which the Course refers to as Christ. Perhaps the most important characteristic of Heaven is the idea that God and Christ are perfectly one. It is Their oneness that characterizes the state of Heaven. There is a definition in the text where Jesus says that Heaven is the "awareness of perfect Oneness" (T-18.VI.1:6). When the Course says that God and Christ are one, and that the state of Heaven is perfect oneness or perfect unity, Jesus means that very literally.

Let me address this a little more, because it will be important later as we see what forgiveness really means. To say that God and Christ are perfectly one is to say that there is no separated consciousness in God that can observe Himself in relationship to His creation, just as there is no separated consciousness in Christ that can observe Himself or experience Himself in relationship to His Creator. To speak of two beings, God and Christ, is a formulation we are comfortable with in a world of duality, or a world of separation. They are not terms, however, that would ever be used in Heaven. Again, God would not identify Himself as God the Creator and Source, and Christ would not identify Himself as the Effect of God or His creation.

Another term that could be used to characterize Heaven is that it is *a state of perfect non-duality*. There are not two Beings Who interact with each other. An important line in the workbook says, "Nowhere does the Father end, the Son begin as something separate from Him" (W-pl.132.12:4). And there is another passage in Lesson 169 that speaks about this state of oneness:

Oneness is simply the idea God is. And in His Being, He encompasses all things. No mind holds anything but Him. We say "God is," and then we cease to speak, for in that knowledge words are meaningless. There are no lips to speak them, and no part of mind sufficiently distinct to feel that it is now aware of something not itself (W-pl.169.5:1-5).

That is that same idea—there is no place where the Father ends and the Son begins. There is no separated consciousness in the Son that could observe Himself in relationship to His Creator.

The passage continues:

It has united with its Source. And like its Source Itself, it merely is. We cannot speak nor write nor even think of this at all (W-pl.169.5:6–6:1).

This is why we are not going to spend much time on this, and why in the Course Jesus does not spend much time on it. Obviously, it is impossible for our separated minds and brains to conceive of a reality in which there is absolutely no separation. Again, there is no place where God ends and His Son begins. So the state of Heaven is that of perfect unity. Another way of characterizing this is to say that the Mind of God and the Mind of Christ are totally one. Later on, it will be clearer why it is so important to understand that the state of Heaven is absolute oneness and perfect unity.

The Course then explains that the impossible seemed to happen. In reality it never happened at all, but it *seemed* to happen. That is when the "tiny, mad idea" (T-27.VIII.6:2) of being separated from God seemed to enter into the mind of God's Son. We will characterize that by a little vertical line going down (see chart)—this is the "tiny, mad idea." It is the idea that the Son somehow now is separate from His Father—he has a mind, a will, a self that is separate

and independent from his Creator. So he can now observe himself and experience himself in relationship to God.

Before this tiny, mad idea (which the Course also talks about as the beginning of the dream) seemed to arise, such a phenomenon was impossible, because the Son did not have a mind or a self that was distinct or separate from His Creator. But once the dream began—a dream of separation—the Son all of a sudden began to observe himself as someone separate from his Father. And that gave rise to what we can refer to as the split mind (with a lower case "m" to distinguish it from the Mind of God and Christ).

When the Son falls asleep and begins to experience himself as a separated being, he has a mind which now appears to coexist with the Mind of God or the Mind of Christ. That mind has two parts, or what the Course often refers to as two voices that speak for it. One is what the Course refers to as the ego, and the other is the Holy Spirit. Both of these voices can basically be understood as reactions to the tiny, mad idea. In reality there are not two people taking up residence in the Son's mind. We are speaking in the realm of metaphor or myth. So we speak about the Son's mind having these two parts—and shortly we will add a third part—and speak of these two parts as if they are two seemingly separated beings—the ego and the Holy Spirit. In the Course, the ego is always spoken of as an "it," while the Holy Spirit is always spoken of as a person, as a "He." But the ego is nonetheless described in anthropomorphic terms—it plots, it seeks vengeance, it seems to love, it hates, it deceives, etc.

So, in the Son's mind there are two thoughts or two reactions to the tiny, mad idea. The ego thought is that the tiny, mad idea has actually happened. In fact, one way of defining the ego is to say that it is the belief that the Son has really separated himself from his Creator. Thus, the ego is nothing more than a thought or a belief that exists in the separated Son's mind—the thought that the separation has actually occurred. The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, is the thought that the separation never happened—that the "tiny, mad idea" is meant to be understood literally: the idea is "tiny" because it was inconsequential and had absolutely no effect, and it is "mad" because it is insane. It is insane to think that a part of God, a part of the All, a part of total unity could somehow split off and, all of a sudden, be outside everything—that there could be a reality beyond totality, something beyond infinity, a power beyond omnipotence. Near the end of the text, a section called "The Anti-Christ" (T-29.VIII) discusses this specifically. Anti-Christ is another term for the ego. The anti-Christ is the thought that there is a power beyond omnipotence, a place beyond infinity, etc. And so the Holy Spirit is the thought that says, "This could never happen."

There is also another way of understanding Who or What the Holy Spirit is. When the Son fell asleep and began his dream, he carried into the dream the memory of who he truly is as God's Son, the memory of God's Love. That memory, which now rests within his separated mind within the dream, is what we refer to as the Holy Spirit. And that memory is what links the

dream to the reality. This is similar to memories in our everyday experience—when we have a memory in the present, it is a link to something that happened in the past. That is what the word *memory* means.

Whatever happened in the past—whether it happened five minutes ago, yesterday, or thirty years ago—suddenly becomes very real and present to me. If it is an unpleasant memory, I will experience anger, anxiety, fear, or depression. If it is a pleasant memory, I will experience happiness and joy right now, as if the past were present. That memory is what links the past and the present. The Holy Spirit works the same way. He links the Son's present experience of believing he is in a dream with his reality, which is not really in the past in a temporal sense. This link then connects him to the God Whom he never truly left. That is why the Course teaches that the Holy Spirit undid the original error the instant that it seemed to occur, because when the Son fell asleep he had that memory with him. And that memory is what proves to him that he never separated himself from God, that it was simply a dream.

In addition to these two thoughts in the Son's mind, there is a third part of the split mind—which we will characterize by this little blue dot (see chart). This is the part of the mind that must choose between these two thoughts or voices. I will call the blue dot the *decision maker*. Although the Course never uses the term in this context, it really is what the Course means by *Son of God*, the Son of God in his separated state. In the Course, Jesus uses the term *Son of God* in two ways: either to refer to Christ and our Identity as Christ as spirit, or to denote the Son within the dream.

While, again, Jesus never uses the term *decision maker*, over and over again in the Course he is asking us to choose again—to choose between the ego's thought system and the Holy Spirit's thought system, between the crucifixion and the resurrection, between a grievance and a miracle. The part of our minds that he is continually appealing to in the Course, when he addresses us as "you," is this part that chooses. And so I have just given it a name for convenience.

Thus basically we are talking about three essential parts of the split mind: (1) the part of the mind that contains the thought that the separation is real; (2) the part of the mind that contains the thought that the separation never occurred (what the Course refers to as the Atonement principle); and (3) the part of the mind that must decide which thought system is true. As the Course repeatedly explains, the Son has no other choice—he must choose between the ego and the Holy Spirit. There are no other alternatives. And he must choose one of them. He cannot choose both of them simultaneously. And he cannot choose neither of them. He must choose either the ego or the Holy Spirit. The decision maker is never neutral.

Here is where the story becomes interesting, because the ego now is confronted by a real threat. What if the Son of God listens to the Voice of the Holy Spirit and recognizes that all of this is a dream, that it never really happened, that there is no separation? What happens then? The Son awakens from his dream, and the ego is gone, the dream is gone. So in order to sustain itself and keep its existence going, the ego must somehow convince the Son of God—the decision maker—that he needs to choose the ego instead of the Holy Spirit. If we can understand this point and always keep it in mind, it will make everything else that we talk about in this workshop—and certainly everything else in the Course—very, very clear. It will help us to understand why we always do the insane things that we do. For example, we may have been students of this Course for ten or fifteen years and we will still hold on to grievances. We still choose to forget about Jesus and identify with the ego when the going gets tough, and continue to do all the maladaptive things we do.

So the ego devises a plan—a plot in which it hopes to ensnare the Son and convince him that the Holy Spirit is not to be trusted, not to be believed, and certainly not to be identified with. To do this, the ego makes up a story. It is a totally made-up story, with no semblance to reality, no basis in reality at all. The ego's story rests on three basic thoughts: sin, guilt, and fear. Now keep in mind again that the purpose of this story is to convince the Son to turn his back on the Holy Spirit and to identify with the ego. As long as the Son does that, the ego remains intact. And remember, the ego is simply a thought or a belief in a self that asserts that the separation from God is real—that the reality is the separated Son of God. This of course is in contrast to the Holy Spirit's "story" that says that the Self of the Son is the Self of Christ, Who has never left His Father.

So the purpose of the ego's story is to have the Son end up not trusting the Holy Spirit and turning his back on Him. So the ego tells the Son this story:

You have done a very bad thing in separating from your Creator and your Source. Here was this perfectly loving Father Who was only love, and He shared that love with you totally. He withheld nothing from you—what was the Father's was the Son's. The Father was perfect Love, so the Son was perfect Love. But you turned your back on this Love, and told God in no uncertain terms that you wanted something more than the everything He gave you. You told God that His Love was not enough, that His Heaven was not enough.

We could embroider on the story in many ways: the Son could tell the Father that Heaven was boring, that he wanted a little excitement. Or the Son could be jealous and want some of what God had. These are all just different symbols or metaphors to try to explain in terms we can understand, what seemed to happen at the moment of separation, and what seemed to evolve into the whole dream of this world. But the bottom line is that the ego gives this act a name, and it is a dirty name, a dirty word: *sin*. The ego tells the Son:

You have done a sinful thing to your Father. He was all-loving, and He gave you everything. You had everything—everything He had, you had. You were totally one with Him. But you turned your back on Him and said, "This is not enough. I want something more." That was not very nice of you. In fact it is sinful. And because of your sin, you should feel guilty.

This is the beginning of all guilt, which we could translate freely as self-hatred. We end up hating ourselves because of the terrible sin that we believe we have committed. So guilt automatically follows from sin and is, basically, the psychological equivalent of the thought of sin. The ego tells the Son of God, "You have sinned against your Father, and you deserve to feel guilty because of what you have done." This inevitably leads to the third member of this unholy trinity. The Son is now told:

Because of what you did, because you stole from Heaven, and because you in effect destroyed God by proclaiming yourself God by saying "I am self-created instead of created. I am on my own, and I am independent and separate from my Creator," God is very angry. When He recovered from the shock of what you had done—that you had stolen from Him—He realized what had happened. And now all He wants is vengeance.

The ego then tells the Son of God,

You know that Holy Spirit Who is present in your mind, Who seems to speak only of the Love of God, and tells you that nothing happened and that God does not even know that you are gone? Don't believe a word He says. He is not to be trusted, because God sent Him out. He is God's general, Whom God dispatched into your mind to trap you and capture you and bring you back to Heaven so you can be punished as you deserve to be—which of course means your annihilation.

This is the beginning of fear—where the "fear of God" comes from. Those who have worked with the Course for a while know that the fourth and final obstacle to peace is the fear of God (T-19.IV.D). This is its origin. It begins with the idea that we have sinned against God, that our guilt is overwhelming because of what we have done, and that our guilt demands that we be punished. The ego warns:

And this Presence of God's Love in your mind is God's punishing agent. In fact, that is why God dispatched Him into your dream—so that He could capture you and bring you back. If you believe His lie, you will be seduced by Him, and will you ever be sorry!

That is the ego's story. It means that the Love of God, which the Holy Spirit represents as the memory of God's Love in our dream, turns into something else—it turns into the wrath of God. The ego's story has very nicely made the real God nonexistent, because the Love of God is now turned into its opposite—the Love of God is now seen to be filled with wrath and vengeance. And the Son is the object of this wrath. This of course is where all the dreadful "wrath of God" passages in both the Old and the New Testaments come from. They have

nothing to do with the loving God Who created us, Whom we never left. But they have *everything* to do with the ego's story.

Basically, with some exceptions of course, the story and the view of God that we get in the Bible is this god of the ego. It really is a god of specialness—God is nice when you give Him what He wants, but when you do not, He becomes insane and He kills. That is the ego god, which is what the wrath of God represents. And that is what the ego has made of the Holy Spirit as well. So that is the choice that the decision maker—the Son of God—is confronted with. Either he believes the Holy Spirit, representing the principle of the Atonement, Who tells him that nothing has happened, that the Son never left his Father, and this is only a bad dream. Or he believes the ego's story that the separation did indeed happen—the Son did steal "the family jewels," he did steal all the power of God, and God is hopping mad and has sent out his henchman, the Holy Spirit, to find the Son and bring him back. That is the ego's story.

Now for reasons which can never be explained, the Son of God made the wrong choice. He turned towards the ego and in effect turned his back on the Holy Spirit.