

## The Metaphysics of Separation and Forgiveness

Excerpts from the Workshop held at the  
*Foundation for A Course in Miracles*  
Roscoe NY

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### Part IV

It may be helpful to contrast the Course's process of healing our relationship with God with a process reflecting other spiritual teachings. Thus, people often say that they experience feeling much closer to God through nature—by just walking in the woods on a beautiful day, for example.

The problem, a typical and a common one, is hard to escape because we have such an idealized view of nature. We can understand God having nothing to do with New York City, or subway trains, or taxicabs, or AIDS, or bombs, or those kinds of things. But the beautiful woods, a beautiful tree, a spectacular sunset, this gorgeous lake—He obviously had to have had something to do with them, we think.

Yet they are all just part of the ego's smokescreen. We know something is of the ego if it is outside us. This is a helpful way always to tell if it is of the ego. What happens if there is a forest fire, and the beautiful woods are gone? What if I break both my legs and cannot walk out in the woods? Or it is a terrible day, the temperature is below freezing, it is snowing and sleeting, and I cannot go? Does that mean that I cannot have the peace of God? I know it is a special relationship when I say my inner peace, my feeling happy, depends on something outside me being a certain way.

That does not mean people should feel guilty because they enjoy a nice walk in the woods, any more than we here at the Foundation should feel guilty because this is such a pretty place. But when the pretty place becomes a substitute for the Love of God or the Love of the Holy Spirit in our minds, then we know we have made a mistake. If we have it and it is external, we are going to be afraid that at some point it will be taken from us. And then we will feel that God, or the terrible world, is depriving us of it. Similarly, we may think that civilization is despoiling this beautiful property, and we are the victims of it—we will always end up as the victim in the victim-victimizer dynamic.

The real value of walking in the beautiful woods is that it would remind us that the Love of God is within us. So a beautiful nature scene would be a symbol for us of the Love of God, as it obviously is for many people. There is nothing wrong with that, so long as we do not confuse the symbol for the reality, for the reason I have just given. What happens if for some reason we

cannot go out into the beautiful woods? Does that mean we are not going to have the Love of God within us? But since we live in a world of symbols—in fact we ourselves are a symbol, a symbol of this thought system—we need other symbols which represent that other choice for us. *A Course in Miracles* can be such a symbol—we could substitute the Course for a walk in the beautiful woods. This could take the form of a thought such as "I feel terrible and depressed, but if I read my daily workbook lesson, I feel wonderful."

Now, I can get caught in a specialness trap with this as well, unless I see the workbook or the Course, the way I see the walk in the woods: as simply a reminder that there is a place in my mind where I can choose. The workbook lesson or the walk in the woods simply becomes a way of getting back within myself, so that I can feel the peace of God regardless of where I am or what I am doing.

To the ego, the world is a prison in which we are stuck as a way of hiding from God's wrath. But in the end God is going to get us anyway, because everybody dies. There is no way out. And before God gets me, you are going to get me, because everybody in the world is out to steal from me what I believe, unconsciously, I stole from them.

To the Holy Spirit, the world is a classroom. The same relationships, the same objects of specialness that my ego used to convince me that I do not have a mind and that this world is a prison and a battleground, can now help me realize that the world is really a mirror that reflects back to me the conflict in my mind I did not even know existed. So feeling peaceful when I am walking in the woods could be the reminder that there is another thought system in my mind—not just a thought system of anger, depression, guilt, anxiety, and conflict, but one of love and peace. The mistake is when I associate the love and peace with the beautiful woods. Simply seeing the beautiful woods as a symbol reminding me of what is within me makes the woods "holy." And that can make Auschwitz holy as well—the external form does not matter. What makes something holy is that it serves the purpose of being a classroom that allows the miracle to lead me back to my mind where I can now make a different choice.

Whether I decide to take a walk in the woods or to read a workbook lesson, the choice to remember God's Love has already been made. Then I take a walk in the woods or do a lesson and see the reminder. In other words, I would not be open to feeling so happy and peaceful walking in the woods or reading the workbook lessons had I not first made the decision to join with the Holy Spirit or Jesus. The external then becomes a symbol or reflection of that decision. They seem to occur in a sequence, but in reality they do not. It all happens at once.

I began this workshop by saying that what makes the Course so unique as a spiritual path—which is not to say it is the *only* one or the *best* one, it is just unique—is that it integrates this overriding view of the relationship between the ego and God, between the world and God, with very specific practical guidelines for living in the world. And that is what I want to speak about now.

It does not really matter how we got here. What does matter is that we all experience ourselves as being here. The value of understanding the metaphysics is simply that it makes clear to us why we keep doing the same silly things over and over again. It makes clear why we have so much trouble really knowing Who God is and having an image of God that is clear and clean of all the projections that the world—and we—have put onto Him. It explains that what we believe we did to God is what we believe we are doing to each other. So we do not have to know why we are here or how we got here. All we have to know is that we are here, and that there are two purposes for our being here. One is the ego's, and one is the Holy Spirit's.

The ego's purpose is to continually establish that victimization is real, which is the principle of the world. It is "one or the other," "kill or be killed," "me or you." This world is a battleground. And it is a war that I know I will inevitably lose, because everybody loses—everybody dies. The ego interprets death as the punishment that God gives us because of what we did. We all believe deep down in the recesses of our minds that we stole life from God, that we took that life and hid it in our bodies. The body is the microcosm of the world as a hiding place. Therefore, when God finally finds us out, as He inevitably will, He will steal back from us what we stole from Him. When God takes back that life, life goes out of us. And that is what we call death.

The ego's interpretation of death is exactly what is found in the Adam and Eve story. And the whole concept of an after-life exists so that not only can God punish me here by killing me, but then He can punish me after death by kicking me out of Heaven. The Adam and Eve myth is remarkable as a description of the ego thought system: God not only kills me in the body, but then He pursues me throughout hell. He keeps me out of His Kingdom. The ego views this world as a prison from which we will never escape. And as long as we are here, we desperately try to hold off the inevitable. That is why people in some new-age circles like to think that their bodies could become immortal. It is their way of trying to stave off the wrath of God. I am not necessarily saying that that is not a helpful idea, if that is what works for you—but that is not what the Course teaches. The Course would ask why anybody would *want* to stay here.

The world then is a prison in which we try to get as many measly crumbs as we can. And when we get the crumbs, somebody else has to be without them. It is always dog-eat-dog—one or the other. That is why our guilt is so strong. And *specialness*—which we have not gone into in any depth because that would take much more time—is the Course's term for the ego's dynamic of trying to steal from another what I feel is rightfully mine. If it is an outright theft, that is special *hate*—I just attack and kill you. I do whatever I have to do to get what I want. If the theft is subtle and manipulative, then it is special *love*—I seem to love you, but I steal from you nonetheless. I only *seem* to be loving and kind so that you will not attack me back. You are doing to me what I am doing to you is the ego's version of the marriage made in heaven. Both of us are making special love bargains. And the altar—which is the Course's metaphor for where we act out our relationship in our minds—drips with blood.

There is no way out of the ego's version of the world, because no matter how successful we may be here, our egos tell us we stole what we have, and in the end God will take it back. And obviously, since we die, we know the ego is right. So there is no hope. That is why the Course says the ego's thought system is foolproof (T-5.VI.10:6)—once one is caught in it, there is no way out. But this thought system is not God-proof, because there is another way of looking at it. Here is where the nuts and bolts of the Course come in. As students of the Course, we are asked to become increasingly aware of our ego thought system so that we learn not to be afraid of it. The problem right at the beginning, when the ego told us its story about how sinful and guilt-ridden we were, was that we listened when the ego said, "This is so awful, you must never, ever look at it again."

In one place in the Course, Jesus speaks about our having made a bargain with the ego in which we swore never to look at it (T-19.IV.D.3:3). So the ego paints this terrible picture in our minds—we have stolen from God, killed Him, and He is going to kill us in return. And then the ego says, "It's so terrible. Never, ever look at this again. Just blot it from your memory. We will project it out into the world so that we will see the same scenario, but now it will be outside us—it won't be us!"

Jesus tells us that we have to be aware that that is what we have done. The problem is not only that we chose the ego, but that we vowed we would never look at it. And so he helps us, through the Course, to begin the process of looking. I want to begin to look at my ego and all my specialness thoughts—all of the ways I want to cannibalize you in the name of love, all of the ways I want to kill you in the name of righteous indignation, all of the ways I want to feel like a victim at somebody else's expense. And I exult at the idea of others being victims so I can blame the one who made them suffer—whether it is a political figure, an international figure, or a member of my own family. When I can look at all this without being guilty, without being afraid of it, and without judging myself for it, then I will be beginning the process of undoing the ego.

Looking at my ego without judgment means that I am not looking with my ego, because the ego cannot but look with judgment. That is what the ego is—a judgmental thought. If I can look at my ego in action, with all of its ugliness and murderousness, and then realize that this is not who I am, even though it may be what I am choosing to identify with at this moment, then I must be looking with Jesus instead of my ego. My ego would never look without judgment, and if I am looking without judgment, I cannot be looking with my ego. This is the beginning of the end of the ego thought system, because I am following the miracle line (see chart). I am going back to the choice point in my mind and making another choice. I am saying that I do not have to be afraid of my ego thought system any more. The value of the Course is that it reminds us of that choice. Jesus spends a great deal of time describing the ego thought system, not because it is real, not because it is true, not because it has done anything, but because we believe it is real. We believe the ego has accomplished the impossible. Therefore, we have to go back and look at

it and finally realize that it is nothing. It is not a roaring lion—it is a frightened mouse (T-21.VII.3:11). It is a little piece of nothing, a "tiny, mad idea."

When I can look at my ego with the love of Jesus next to me, I am beginning the process of changing my mind and going back to the Holy Spirit. That is *forgiveness*. The value of the world as a classroom is that it shows me what I never knew existed in my mind. I see all the horror around me, and I see how I make it real, either by identifying with it or being repulsed by it. I see all the horror in me—all the ways that specialness has ruled my life. And I realize as I see it outside me—whether it is in your body or in my body—that it is a projection of what is inside me. Once I know it is inside me, I can look at it with Jesus next to me, and I do not have to judge it. I do not have to change my ego. I do not have to fight against it, I do not have to feel guilty about it. I simply have to look at it without judgment.

Looking at the ego for an instant without judgment is what the Course means by the *holy instant*. In the holy instant I am joining with the Holy Spirit or Jesus. The mistake of seeing the role of Jesus or the Holy Spirit as solving problems in the world is that it makes them as insane as we are. We made up problems in the world—whether we are talking about not having a parking space for my car or having AIDS does not matter—to distract us from the problem we had in our minds when we made the wrong choice. To see Jesus doing things in the world is to drag him down into the illusion. And that is what the Course means by bringing truth to the illusion instead of illusion to the truth (e.g., T-17.I.5). We are asked to see that our investment in the problem in the world is a displacement from our fear of looking at the real problem in our minds.

The role of Jesus is to be a place of love and light in our minds—which really is a place of forgiveness—to whom we go when we are tempted to see the problem or the solution outside us. Asking Jesus for help, in Course terms, really means looking with him at our own specialness, without being afraid of it and without guilt. As we do that more and more, we begin to learn that the ego has no effect. No matter how terrible we think our ego is, it has not come between us and the Love of God. "Not one note in Heaven's song was missed" (T-26.V.5:4). This purple line (see chart), which we could take to represent eternity, has not been broken at all. So the role of the Holy Spirit is to help us look at our egos without judgment, and that is forgiveness.