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The HOLY ENCOUNTER



SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2023
A Miracle Distribution Center Publication

...when you meet anyone, remember
it is a holy encounter.



Healing our History

by Beverly Hutchinson McNeff

As readers of THE HOLY ENCOUNTER know, the Center turned forty-five this year, and we have been running articles about our history. This got me thinking about history in general and how it's taught.



Back in the old days, when I was in school, our heroes were always so noble and true. For example, Christopher Columbus was the great, daring discoverer of America, and Abraham Lincoln was the saint who emancipated the slaves. Today we have learned that Columbus was not a very nice guy, and he really didn't discover America. He only sailed as far as Central and South America and never really arrived at what we now call the United States. The only reason we attribute our founding to Columbus, who sailed for Spain, is that we didn't want to credit John

Cabot, who sailed under the English flag.

At the time we in this country were devising our history, we were at war with England, not Spain. The idea of giving the "glory" to Columbus rather than Cabot was more appealing. Therefore, it's the District of Columbia and not the District of Cabot. In Lincoln's case, he did end up being the great emancipator of African Americans, but not before he tried every way possible to keep the Union together if it meant not freeing the slaves.

With so much new light shed on these old stories of history, are we to judge and condemn those we have previously applauded? No, not at all. If anything, we can look at them with a new understanding that can help us see how the average person (with their flaws and less-than-perfect motives) can grow, change, and achieve great things.

Columbus helped establish a great deal of knowledge about trade winds and began a permanent presence of Europeans in North and South America. Lincoln, though he proposed five different ways to keep the concept of slavery alive in

"At the time we in this country were devising our history, we were at war with England, not Spain. The idea of giving the 'glory' to Columbus rather than Cabot was more appealing."

Continued on page 14

Beverly is the co-founder and president of MDC, one of the longest-running organizations based on *A Course in Miracles*. As a student, lecturer and author on the Course since 1977, her streamed weekly commentaries on Course principles have become an inspirational study and spiritual family for many around the world. View her free weekly livestream meetings at miraclecenter.org

Walking with God through Change

by Beverly Hutchinson McNeff

"Forget not once this journey is begun the end is certain. Doubt along the way will come and go and go to come again. Yet is the ending sure. No one can fail to do what God appointed him to do. When you forget, remember that you walk with Him and with His Word upon your heart. Who could despair when hope like this is his?" (Manual.C-ep.1)



The world is changing, and Miracle Distribution Center (MDC) has survived for 45 years because we adapted to change. Learning how to walk through this world in a way that brings us peace is the essence of the Course. That is why we have the text of *A Course in Miracles* to guide us and its workbook to practice its life-changing principles.

I have often said that the Course is a manual for teaching us the fundamental principle that Jesus spoke of: to be in the world but not of the world. Fighting against the changing tides of the world is not the answer, nor is denying and giving up. *A Course in Miracles* tells us that we must find a path between the two. As it says in workbook lesson 155, "Between these paths there is another road that leads away from loss of every kind, for sacrifice and deprivation both are quickly left behind. This is the way appointed for you now."

After Covid, many things in the

Continued on page 3

What's Happening...with the Course and the Center

For more Information go to
miraclecenter.org or call **714-632-9005**

● Looking forward to a Miraculous New Year! Our 2024

A Course in Miracles Wall Calendar is now available to give and receive as the perfect holiday gift! This calendar features stunning full-color photos and inspiring quotes from the Course for each month. It will surely keep the Course's message of peace and healing forefront in your mind all year long. It's a meaningful gift you can give to all your family and friends — and the more calendars you purchase, the lower the price! See back page for details.



● **You say it's your birthday?** Celebrate your loved ones and support the Center! Here's what **Bonnie in Michigan** did. "I am using the envelope in **THE HOLY ENCOUNTER** magazine to donate \$86.00 in honor of my wonderful mother, **Bonnie Clayborn**, who passed last December. On her heavenly birthday of July 5, 2023, she would have been 86. My mother's physical body blessed us for many years; now she's free!" ...**Elaine, in Rhode Island**, is celebrating her husband's birthday, **Bill Beaudoin**, who turned 90 with a \$90.00 donation. We thank you for celebrating your joy with us! Celebrate your birthday with us, and we will thank you personally in **THE HOLY ENCOUNTER**.

● **The case for paper** – Charlotte in Kansas said, "**The Holy Encounter (THE)** magazine has been an important part of my life for many years. I appreciate that you continue to mail the paper version, as I prefer paper to online reading. Thank you so much for the wonderful work you do!" We continue to publish in print for a few reasons. First, many readers are incarcerated or unable to access the internet because of location or ability. The hard copy thus becomes their only source. Some find reading from paper or books, as statistics have borne out, is more conducive to understanding. And studies have



shown that those who opt to receive **THE only online** often neglect to open the bimonthly email to click through to open the PDF, whereas receiving **THE** in their postal mailboxes makes it much more likely that it is read. However you choose to receive **THE**, we appreciate your loving support of our work.

● **Take the Peace Pledge!** – The Course tells us that if we forget our goal and purpose, we will be confused, unsure of what we are, and conflicted in our actions. Hav-

ing a consistent goal in mind and heart is critical to our healing and the world's. Join us in making peace your goal by taking the **Pledge for Peace** today! By committing with others worldwide to make the peace of God your one goal, you will become part of the unity of thought needed to unlock our power and healing. Take the **Pledge for Peace** at the Center's website, add your placemark on our world map,



and then share the pledge with friends and family. Together we can transform this world. As the song says, "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me." It all starts with YOU. Join us today.

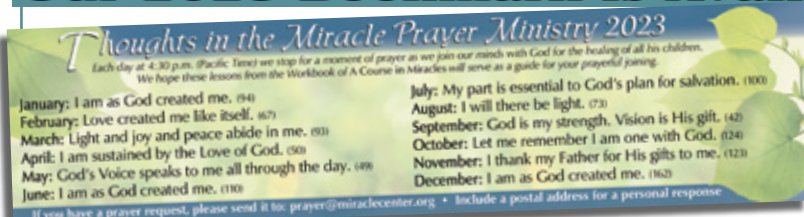
● **"Love cannot be far behind a grateful heart and a thankful mind."** This powerful thought from the Course reminds us that love is our natural state and comes quickly to our awareness as our minds are focused on gratitude and thankfulness. Let us start cultivating this awareness that will produce the experience of love that we are entitled to by taking time each day to join our minds with God in prayer. Every day at **4:30 pm (Pacific Time)**, we invite you to stop and join us for a moment of prayerful support for yourself, your loved ones, and everyone in the prayer ministry. The gift you give is the gift you will receive! Thoughts for:

September: "God is my strength. Vision is His gift." (Lesson 42)

October: "Let me remember I am one with God." (Lesson 124)

November: "I thank my Father for His gifts to me." (Lesson 123)

Our 2023 Bookmark is Available!



Request your **FREE** full-color bookmark today which lists all the thoughts in the prayer ministry for 2023.

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MDC is making a change! After 22 years at our current facility, we have moved. We are still in the basic vicinity, but no longer need the large space. As thoughtful caretakers of the Course's work and the sacred trust each of you has placed in us, we have been directed to undertake this move. Again, even this move seemed to be "gently planned." But all moves require a great deal of effort, and so it is with this one! Plus, none of us are as young as we were 22 years ago! Nevertheless, we have done it.

We are still in our moving mode, but as you read this, we will be moved in! That does not mean everything is set up. It just means that everything is in the new place, just waiting to find its perfect spot. This process takes a lot of physical effort, but we continue to make every attempt to keep the vital services of MDC going during this tumultuous time. But to keep our services active, in addition to all that goes into moving, we have experienced many extra costs. We are reaching out to our loving supporters to consider making a donation in any amount to help us deal with these added expenses. There is a lot to reassemble, refine, and redefine in this move, and we are working hard to get our livestream studio up and running as well. Your support right now would be greatly appreciated.

I know many of you have been our partners on this healing path for many years, and some of you are more recent, but I know, as you do, that joining together is the answer to any problem before us. I hope you will take a moment right now to ask within how you may be truly helpful to the Center at this point in our changing history. I thank you for your prayers and considered support.

A Gift of Peace for our Planet

We always receive such powerful comments from viewers, but a few years back, Rachel in Arlington, Virginia, shared her story of working in the Pentagon on that fateful day in 2001. We hope you will be as moved by her experience and awakening as we were.

"Thank you so much for sharing this video with us on this, the anniversary of the attack on the Twin Towers, the Pentagon, as well as the plane that was taken down in Pennsylvania. I was working in the Pentagon that morning and will never forget feeling the impact of the plane

tearing into the building and the ball of fire that rose up outside our windows on the fifth floor.

Although I had not yet 'found' the Course, I remember praying to Jesus and my recently departed mother and thanking them as I safely walked through smoke-filled corridors and exited the building to a safe gathering spot.

Looking back, I often think about the anguish I felt that day and in the following weeks as I digested the fear and enormity of the situation. It was only in studying the Course in the years that followed that brought me to a place of acceptance and forgiveness.

This beautiful message is what we all need, not just on this day but every day and always. Thank you for a wonderful way to start my day."

Like Rachel, may we all learn that forgiveness is the answer to any attack so that peace may finally prevail. The video may be viewed here: miraclecenter.org/wp/peace-video/



Forgiveness ends the dream of conflict here. (Lesson 333)

Conflict must be resolved. It cannot be evaded, set aside, denied, disguised, seen somewhere else, called by another name, or hidden by deceit of any kind, if it would be escaped. It must be seen exactly as it is, where it is thought to be, in the reality which has been given it, and with the purpose that the mind accorded it. For only then are its defenses lifted, and the truth can shine upon it as it disappears.

*Father, forgiveness is the light You chose to shine away all conflict and all doubt,
and light the way for our return to You. No light but this can end our evil dream.
No light but this can save the world. For this alone will never fail in anything,
being Your gift to Your beloved Son.*



Miracle Musings...

Simple Kindness

by Paul McNeff

"Be kind and helpful to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another..." (Ephesians 4:21)

"Dream softly of your sinless brother, who unites with you in holy innocence. And from this dream the Lord of Heaven will Himself awaken His beloved Son. Dream of your brother's kindnesses instead of dwelling in your dreams on his mistakes... Brother, He gives but life. Yet what you see as gifts your brother offers represent the gifts you dream your Father gives to you. Let all your brother's gifts be seen in light of charity and kindness offered you." (T-27.VII.15-16)

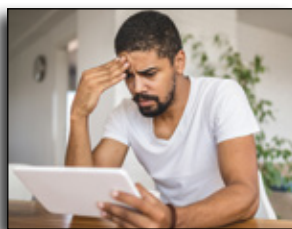
I have often found myself despairing over current events in our nation. I know that many good things are happening, but it doesn't seem like we hear much about them anymore on our favorite news outlets. Journalism's mission was to report the news as it happened, without fear or favor. Still, too often, the 24/7 cable news stations entice viewers with both physically and psychologically violent news stories that appeal to our fear-based egos. In the race to "break" the story, factual integrity is compromised in order to produce higher ratings, which attracts bigger name brand advertisers, to produce larger profits.

Some cable "news" channels have opted to simply make up their own version of the news to produce more fear in search of those bigger profits. The result of this sensory onslaught often leads to a dark construct of a world filled with bad things, leading the viewer down the rabbit hole of anger and depression.

So, what do I do to counteract the world's dark values as I see them on the rise? As an American citizen, I can exercise my sacred right to vote my conscience. When I see ballot issues or candidates that hold values that align with Course values,

such as love and kindness, I vote for them. I use my body to perform this function.

But some say, doesn't the Course teach us that this world and our bodies are illusions, so why make them real? I would answer yes, it does, but the Course also teaches:



"The result of this sensory onslaught often leads to a dark construct of a world filled with bad things, leading the viewer down the rabbit hole of anger and depression."

"Only the mind can create because spirit has already been created, and the body is a learning device for the mind. Learning devices are not lessons in

themselves. Their purpose is merely to facilitate learning. . . The body is merely part of your experience in the physical world. Its abilities can be and frequently are over-evaluated. However, it is almost impossible to deny its existence in this world. Those who do so are engaging in a particularly unworthy form of denial."

(T-2.IV.3)

We could see this as another example

of doing as Jesus taught us "to be in the world but not of it."

Perhaps an even more direct way to counteract darkness in our world when we become aware of it is to perform acts of kindness. We can do this anywhere or anytime the opportunity arises. Maybe it's just helping a person having difficulty reaching an item in the grocery store. Or perhaps we could just speak a kind word to someone in need. There are a thousand ways we can show kindness every day. And these simple acts of kindness don't have to be thought of as "little." They can make "big" impacts. We just need to keep our spiritual eyes open and look for opportunities to act.

This is what the Dalai Lama taught when he said, "My religion is very simple. My religion is kindness." Adding to that, Mother Teresa said, "Aspire not to do great things but small things with great love." Let us do our acts of kindness with great love.

An easy way to exhibit kindness is to give respect. For twenty-seven years, we have taught our children's chorus, **KidSingers**, a wonderful song that expresses these ideas in a very simple way. I will share the lyrics of the song "Expect Respect" below with a few of my comments following each:



"If you're gonna expect respect, you've gotta show a little kindness."

"If you're gonna expect respect, you've gotta show a little kindness."

Kindness breeds respect. When you are kind to someone, it opens up within them the storehouse

of their inheritance of love and devotion that they can then share with others. There is no hierarchy in respecting another.

Paul McNeff is married to MDC's founder and has been a student of the Course since 1986. He is a professional singer and conductor and holds a master's degree in vocal performance. In 1997, along with Beverly, he founded **KidSingers**, an inner-city, afterschool children's chorus. The program has won many awards and been featured on *Good Morning America*. Learn more at: www.kidsingers.org

"If you're gonna expect respect, you've gotta throw away the blindness."

If you want respect from others, you have to be open to seeing the innocence within them. We see them not with irrational judgment. Once we throw away the ego's blindness, we will receive the respect we want and deserve.

"Other people can be frightening; their traditions seem a little different."

This is no reason to disrespect others because we don't understand their cultures. The unknown will always cause us to fear, but the worst thing we can do is to get into the "us" and "them" mentality. That leads to choosing sides and setting up barriers where bridges cannot be built.

"If you feel resentment, I've the thing: Learn a little and you'll feel much different!"

If we are open to learning more about other people and being the first to show



"If we are open to learning more about other people and being the first to show kindness, we can enrich ourselves with newfound friendships and loving alliances."

kindness, we can enrich ourselves with newfound friendships and loving alliances.

"If you stop and take a closer look, you will find out that we all have feelings. Different colors and religions, too; living, breathing, feeling, just like me and you!"

Instead of making on-the-spot judgments, when we take some time to get to know someone who was once a stranger, we can see that they have feelings just like us. A common bond can be nurtured, and kindness is freed to lead the way.

"The world is a much better place when we all meet face to face. It's hard to hurt someone you finally know!"

"They say the ego's desire to dehuman-

ize is the first factor that breeds hatred between people of different races, religions, ethnicities, or colors. This is at the root of all hatred and war. But kindness can lead the way to respect, and respect to genuine friendship. There's nothing insignificant about that!

So, when you want to exercise your solemn duty as a free citizen living within

our great democracy, vote when you can. You probably will feel encouraged if your candidate is elected or discouraged if your candidate loses. But, if you want to always feel empowered by your actions, you can be assured that you have made a sizeable difference in the spiritual fabric of our existence by being an action-taker of simple kindness. ❖

FREE

Livestream Wednesdays

Please join us for the broadcast of our weekly *A Course in Miracles* meetings with Beverly Hutchinson McNeff

Wednesday Evenings @ 7pm PT / 10pm ET

A photograph of Beverly Hutchinson McNeff, a woman with blonde hair, wearing a red jacket over a white top, sitting at a desk and speaking into a microphone. There are books and a small statue on the desk.

These free livestreams tackle real world challenges and view them through the healing power of *A Course in Miracles*. Each week we explore a workbook lesson and text section in the Course. Sections are explained for their theory as well as their application into our daily lives. Bev brings knowledge, humor, and down-to-earth practicality to the Course's principles. Watch free or become a subscriber.

LESSON 125
In quiet I receive God's Word today.

1. Let this day be a day of stillness and of quiet listening. Your Father wills you hear His word today. And so He calls from deep within your mind where He abides. Hear Him today. No peace is possible until His Word is heard around the world, until your mind, in quiet listening, accepts the message that the world must hear to usher in the quiet time of peace.

A smaller photograph of Beverly Hutchinson McNeff speaking, with the letters 'MDC' in the top right corner.

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SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2023

5



Recognizing Spirit

Inspirational Psychology on How to Identify and Listen to the Holy Spirit - Part One

by Lee Jampolsky, Ph.D.

"The Holy Spirit mediates between illusions and the truth. Since He must bridge the gap between reality and dreams, perception leads to knowledge through the grace that God has given Him, to be His gift to everyone who turns to Him for truth." (W,p11,7)

A friend recently asked me what in *A Course in Miracles* was most helpful to me during challenging times. My answer: Feeling the presence of the Holy Spirit. A follow-up question was asked, how do you identify and listen to the Holy Spirit? This two-part article is my response. Part One primarily focuses on identifying the Holy Spirit, while Part Two focuses on listening and following.

The first step in identifying the Holy Spirit is wanting to. This step blossoms from a realization, however small, that there must be a better way than listening to our fears, judgments, and self-doubt. It grows into an acknowledgment that it is impossible to experience the peace of the holy instant when our mind is full of judgmental thoughts toward ourselves, others, and God.

With all I am, I believe God yearns for us to cease the games of guilt we play and recognize and remember our sinlessness. This recognition is easier said than done because of our shadow — the hidden and repressed parts of the psyche that we don't want to have as a part of ourselves but remains in our unconscious mind. This shadow side of our personality is an ego

creation that essentially consists of everything the conscious mind cannot admit.

The fear-based ego convinces us that hiding, denying, strategizing, and avoiding are safer than revealing. To keep the lid shut tight, the ego sells us on the idea that revealing our shadow would lead to

being hated, punished, humiliated, and retaliated against, including by God. However, God is not in the vengeance game despite the ego's proclamations. Quite the opposite, He is all about love and forgiveness, so he placed the Holy Spirit in our minds.



"As the philosopher Ken Wilbur once said, 'We can't see a fly in our eye when we have a fly in our eye.' For this reason, God placed the Holy Spirit in our minds; to help us see the fly..."

The Holy Spirit is here to help us stop hiding and fearing and remove the blocks to the awareness of love. As the philosopher Ken Wilbur once said, "We can't see a fly in our eye when we have a fly in our eye." For this

reason, God placed the Holy Spirit in our minds; to help us see the fly — all that is in the way of seeing the truth. Only then can we remember and act from love. Still, even while practicing the Course, a part of us avoids turning within because we think it a fool's pursuit, akin to setting sail on a flat world, discovering nothing, destined to fail. Yet, the Holy Spirit continues to call to us from within ourselves, offering everything and asking for nothing.

"You are being asked for nothing in return for everything. Here is a bargain that you cannot lose. And what you

gain is limitless indeed!" (W-98,6)

Reading about the Holy Spirit was hard to grasp in my early years of practicing *A Course in Miracles*. I understood on an intellectual level but not on a practical one. Many years ago, Course teacher Ken Wapnick pointed out something that significantly helped me: "The difference between Jesus and the Holy Spirit is a theological one, not a practical one." Ken's words planted the seed of something vital that was missing in my practice.

Not long after, during one of our many discussions on the Course, my father said, "I want to talk to you about something I have not discussed much; it is my personal relationship with Jesus." As Dad spoke, his voice and demeanor were as though he was talking about a brother I did not know he had that was an incredibly personal and vulnerable relationship.

A shift was happening within me as he spoke. I had intellectually understood that God created the Holy Spirit to help us heal the thought of separation in our minds. Still, despite my intellectual grasp, the Holy Spirit was not tangible or personal to me. I was not without benefit as I thought of the Holy Spirit as akin to a compass or thought director in my mind reminding me of the truth and how to forgive and love. Although this way of thinking about the Holy Spirit was helpful, it did not feel personal; more like I had an excellent compass but was still alone and anxious in the middle of the woods.

As I listened to my father's experience, I realized the very personal nature of his experiences and why he waited until now to share. Listening to Dad that day, I felt he was telling me about a close and dear friend who cares deeply and is wise with Truth, and one that I could have as well, which has come to be.

Most of the time, I shift effortlessly between talking to Jesus and asking Holy Spirit for guidance. In practice, the two are interchangeable for me. They are both teachers here to help in learning about forgiveness and love. People differ, but for me, the Holy Spirit is more for my needed immediate shifts in perception and Jesus more for a personal relationship developing over time.

I talk to Jesus on walks; I ask Holy Spirit for help seeing things differently when I am experiencing challenges or tempted to engage in conflict. Though I'm not big on technology metaphors, I think of the Holy Spirit as similar to an app; we'll call it "The Miracle App in Your Mind." The purpose is to take sights and sounds and translate them from the witnesses of fear to those of love. I think of Jesus as able to do the same, but he holds me in a way that I can experience his gentleness along the journey. In short, either will answer because their function is the same; a teacher and guide always and forever with me.

When I need help, I often begin with a reminder, "There is another way of seeing this situation." With this reminder, I open my mind to the Holy Spirit (and Jesus). The core teachings in the Course are relatively easy to grasp once we see that, essentially, there are two aspects of our mind which we always choose between. One is "Fear-Based Thinking" (wrong-mindedness), and the other is "Love-Based Thinking" (right-mindedness).

Each has its own complete set of beliefs, with distinct and intact logic delineating cause and effect. One leads to the awareness of the holy instant, the other away from it. In essence, the Holy Spirit and Jesus help us choose "Love-Based Thinking" through forgiveness, thus rendering "Fear-Based Thinking" powerless and worthy of nothing more than a good laugh at the insanity of its endless conspiracy theories.



"Not long after, during one of our many discussions on the Course, my father said, 'I want to talk to you about something I have not discussed much; it is my personal relationship with Jesus.'"

To better identify and understand the Holy Spirit, I find it helpful to see what it is that the Holy Spirit is here to help us undo and solidify. The fear-based thinking of the ego is what we need help undoing. The ego is loud and constantly searches for past experiences to reinforce its beliefs that we are something other than whole and created by God's love. The ego's primary goal is to remove us from turning to the Holy Spirit and discovering the insanity of fear-based thinking. The thirteen core beliefs of fear-based thinking that need undoing are:

Beliefs of the Fear-Based Thought System

1. I am alone in a cruel, harsh, and unforgiving world. I am separate from everybody and God.
2. I must judge others and defend myself quickly if I want safety and peace of mind.
3. Being right is essential. My perceptions are always factually correct. To feel good about myself, I always need to be perfect.
4. Attack and defense are my only safety.
5. The past and the future are real and must be constantly evaluated and worried about.
6. Guilt is inescapable because the past is real.
7. Mistakes call for judgment and punishment, not correction and learning.
8. Fear is real. Do not question it.
9. Other people are responsible for how I feel. The situation is the determiner of my experience.
10. If I am going to make it in this world, I must pit myself against others — another's loss is my gain.
11. I need something or someone outside of myself to make myself complete.
12. My self-esteem is based on material possessions and outer success.

13. I can control other people's behavior.

When entrenched in these beliefs, we are in a mess of our own making, and we can't see it without help. This is where the Holy Spirit comes in, helping us to move



"I talk to Jesus on walks; I ask Holy Spirit for help seeing things differently when I am experiencing challenges or tempted to engage in conflict."

from the insanity of fear-based beliefs to love and tenderness, recognizing the interconnectedness of life. The Holy Spirit and Jesus offer us the truth to replace the falsehoods of the ego and bring us home to love.

The thirteen core beliefs of love-based thinking that need remembering and solidifying are:

Beliefs of the Love-Based Thought System

1. What I see in others reflects my state of mind. There is an underlying unity to all life. I lack nothing to be happy and whole right now.
2. My safety lies in my defenselessness because love needs no defense. Acceptance is what brings me peace of mind.
3. My self-worth is not based on my accumulations and performance. Love is unconditional.
4. Forgiveness, with no exceptions, ensures peace.
5. Only the present is real. The past is over, and the future is not yet here.
6. To change my experience, I must first change my perception.
7. Mistakes call for correction and learning, not judgment and punishment.
8. Only love is real. And what is real cannot be threatened.
9. I am responsible for the world I see, and I choose the feelings that I experience. I decide upon the goal I would achieve.
10. To give is to receive. For me to gain, nobody can lose.
11. I am complete right now.
12. My self-esteem comes from loving and accepting myself as I am today and sharing love and acceptance with others.

Continued on page 11



45 Years in Retrospect...

The life of Miracle Distribution Center

by Beverly Hutchinson McNeff



In celebration of the 45th Anniversary of the Center, throughout the following several issues, we will be sharing with you its journey. Even though Beverly and Richard Hutchinson founded the Center, it has developed a life of its own. These articles will share the Center's birth, growth, life, and purpose as it continues to evolve and support students of *A Course in Miracles*.

Part V: Vocation of the Center

"The Holy Spirit is the spirit of joy. He is the Call to return with which God blessed the minds of His separated Sons. This is the vocation of the mind."

(T-5.II.2:1)

The vocation of the mind is to join, to heal the thought of separation, and that has been the vocation of Miracle Distribution Center (MDC). Over the last forty-five years, we have provided services, classes, workshops, retreats, and events that have brought a sense of unity to students of *A Course in Miracles*, but we have done so in a way that transcends the world's approach of joining.

The world of the ego sees joining as a form, i.e., bodies joining with other bodies. In a "spiritual" vein, some have thought this "joining" might look like a community in which you live, a group you must join, the need to only associate with people of the same mindset or belief, an organization you must be a part of, etc. But the purpose of the Course is to help us to see that the form of our lives is not our emphasis; healing and joining beyond form is our purpose.

The vocation of MDC may seem to contrast with the world's view of an organization. On the one hand, we provide a virtual map of groups studying the Course around the world, but we do not neces-

sarily advocate people studying in groups. The Course is self-study; groups may be helpful but are certainly not mandatory and should never become a substitute for an individual's personal study.

We believe in the transforming teachings of *A Course in Miracles* and have built

our lives and this Center around its principles, but we have no need to convert anyone to its curriculum. There is no membership. The Course is just one version of the universal curriculum, and we are here merely to be of help and

support to those who find this to be their path. We have also provided classes, retreats, and conferences with the purpose of offering a forum for students of the Course to join without need to be *the* forum.

Throughout the years, we have been blessed to have visitors from around the world make MDC one of their stops. We had an extensive bookstore and a large meeting room where we presented ongoing Course classes. The room's walls were filled with a pictorial history of Course events and presenters, as well as our international study group maps. Even though there was not much in the way of form at our Center, people seemed to enjoy coming here — I think the spirit of the place had something to do with it!

We are a center in the truest sense of

A Course in Miracles, for we really redefine the word *center*. We are a "center" in content and purpose, but we are not the typical worldly definition of a center since we are somewhat "formless." We are located in Southern California, and yet our work is international. We have close relationships with people across the globe whom we may never meet in person, and yet we feel as close to them as we do to the friend who lives down the block. As the Course reminds us, minds join, bodies do not.

The vocation of the mind is to join, not just to visit bodies, but to join minds and hearts! Don't get us wrong, we loved having those "bodies" stop by to visit, attend a meeting, event, etc., but we realized it was not mandatory that they do so for us to feel connected to them or for them to feel connected to us. God is not found in a place, event, or any one special person. God is found in every heart and mind that wants to remember they are one with their brother — not necessarily in form, but in purpose.

Whenever a service of MDC is introduced, our primary criterion is whether a person — no matter where they are — can participate. This is why we created the international study group map as well as our ongoing study group classes at the Center (which are still recorded and livestreamed for viewers across the globe), the Miracle Prayer Ministry, Prison Project, **THE HOLY ENCOUNTER** magazine, weekly inspirational emails and updates, Daily Lesson Email and Text services, our online store, and our website at **www.miraclecenter.org**, to name a few of our offerings. Through these services, people can feel a part of our work and a part of each other without ever having to leave home. For some, this is their only contact with other Course students. MDC can help almost anyone, anywhere, feel a sense of



Beverly and the president and staff of Natural Spirit, publishers of the Japanese translation of *A Course in Miracles*, when they visited the Center.

connection and support.

As you know, after the Covid pandemic, many things changed. This change is not bad, but it is different. We no longer have in-person meetings at the Center but continue to offer our weekly meetings free via livestream each week. People are no longer visiting the Center or purchasing their items exclusively through us, as online booksellers are now plentiful. In-person conferences have given way to livestreamed seminars that we continue to offer. We still present a yearly retreat and will do so as long as it is practical and desired. But we are open to new ways and new forms of service and support. After all, it is not the form that matters but the content of our vocation.



“Since we began sharing the Course’s message through our free livestream weekly meetings, we have reached viewers in 70% of the world’s countries! We have also added a closed caption option on video playbacks.”

All through the Center’s 45 years of life, we have known that our vocation has been “gently planned by One Whose only purpose is [our] good.” (W-135) Miraculously, even before the pandemic, we have always had a progressive, malleable approach to our services. We were never stuck in the form of the world, and always focused, and continue to focus, on serving the content of healing in all beings.

What is the vocation of the Center? Well, besides all the wonderful projects and services, MDC’s vocation is joining — a joining beyond the form, a joining with each of you and thereby with God. ❖

Next issue is our final installment...
2023 and Beyond: A Miracle Odyssey!

45 Years in the Life of MDC

~ 1978 - 2023 ~

Submit a comment
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We are here



We’d be honored to hear how the Center has blessed you over the past 45 years. Submit a comment or video to us.

We look forward to hearing from you!

to be truly helpful...

You and your staff, Beverly, have offered lilies of forgiveness to humanity and the world for over 45 years. The Center treats everyone with dignity, kindness, and love. MDC is a beacon of light bringing goodness to the world. Thank you, and many blessings.

—Daniel in Cloverdale, CA

The Course has changed my life in ways almost beyond belief. I copied my parent’s negative behavior patterns. I was angry, resentful, and more. I let that harmful behavior go. I find it easier to live inside my skin. I am filled with gratitude for the miracles in my life. Thank you for the work you do to change human consciousness.

—Nancy from Nevada

MDC, my north star... heartfelt thanks for all you do.

—Barbara in Vermont

Thanks for sharing your commitment to *A Course in Miracles* all these years! My wife and I watch the livestream every Wednesday and get such joy and peace. Your Center has been a place of inspiration, and we’re honored to be in partnership as fellow teachers of God.

— Love, Jerry & Candace in Nashville, TN (31-year students)

Not to be flippant, but, OMG, I think this is my first explanation of how MDC and *A Course in Miracles* have changed my world! There is nothing I hold more dearly, or that has changed my life (and perspective), more than the Course, supplemented by Beverly’s wisdom, humor, love, and understanding of its “simple” concepts and lessons. Without Beverly’s practical explanations and examples, I doubt I would have made it through as many times as I have. My prayers always include my gratitude for Beverly, Paul, Tess, Darin, and everyone that has ever, or will ever, work at MDC. Your contribution cannot be measured in this world’s terms. I love you all!

—Shelley in San Jose, California (30-year student)

Thank you for all the many years I have been receiving THE HOLY ENCOUNTER. Your work on behalf of *A Course in Miracles* is greatly appreciated by this long-time student.

—Audrey in Columbus, Ohio



A Refuge for Innocence

by Joseph Miller

"This Child needs your protection. He is far from home. He is so little that He seems so easily shut out, His tiny voice so readily obscured, His call for help almost unheard amid the grating sounds and harsh and rasping noises of the world. Yet does He know that in you still abides His sure protection. You will fail Him not. He will go home, and you along with Him." (W-182.6)

A couple of years ago, the comic strip *Bloom County* ran an homage to another great one, *Calvin and Hobbes*. It had been 25 years since Calvin and his tiger buddy vanished from print. Hobbes shows up with the *Bloom County* gang, and as Opus the penguin takes him around, not every character sees the same thing. If you remember *Calvin and Hobbes*, you'll recall that the adults only see a little stuffed tiger, while Calvin — and the reader, through his imaginative eyes — sees the living animal.

Opus laments the blindness of adulthood. "Maybe we're losing our daydreamsical whimsyfulness. Maybe we're born seeing with sillier, goofier, *better eyes*." The introduction of Hobbes to several characters becomes a litmus test for who has preserved their inner child and who has succumbed to the world. The series ends with Hobbes boxed and mailed to adult Calvin — now a hipster, nerd, off-the-grid recluse with attitude — who has built his own jet (with his childhood Radio Flyer red wagon welded to the nose) and keeps the US Air Force on its toes through stealth maneuvers. The last installment is a single illustration, poignantly detailed by artist Berkeley Breathed. Calvin is standing in his rickety hangar, silently examining the package he has received and cautiously opening the flaps. His own childhood has been returned to him. What will he see?

"When you are still an instant, when the world recedes from you, when valueless ideas cease to have value in your restless mind, then will you hear His Voice. So poignantly He calls to you that you will not resist Him longer."

(W-182.8)

We never find out. The author leaves it to the reader, suggesting, I think, that each one of us *is* Calvin. At some time, our childhood gets mailed back to us. Our response reveals what lives and what has died within.



Joe with his new friend, Radek, Joe and his wife give a stable home to Radek and his family, who have fled Ukraine while their father fights in the war.

My wife and I raised one child, a daughter, who is now in her 30s. I, by contrast, came from a birth family with a lot of boys and emerged from childhood with a great deal of fear and

confusion about maleness — i.e., action, energy, aggression, competition, daring, desire, choice, and sexuality. They say, as parents, we revisit our childhood. But raising an intelligent, gentle, conscientious daughter, who loved to read and play the piano, in a household with no TV, no profanity, and no bullying, was like dwelling on a distant planet. I thought I dodged a bullet by not parenting sons. I honestly felt I had little to offer a boy, that confusion and inner conflict can teach only the same.

But God has a way of excavating buried issues. "He would not leave one source of pain unhealed, nor any image left to veil

the truth." (T-31.VIII.3) What we think of as escape may only be pain deferred, awaiting an occasion to ripen. "Only salvation can be said to cure." (W-140)

When a Ukrainian friend, a man of 40, sent out a plea late last year to find refuge for his two young sons, wife, and mother-in-law, my wife and I stepped forward. Through the *Uniting for Ukraine* federal immigration program, we were able to provide sponsorship and space in our home for this displaced family. Like many, I have followed for years the news of millions of refugees all over the world crawling desperately from violence, want, and environmental catastrophe. But my privileged status had insulated me from these realities. Now, we have literally opened our doors to the costs of connection. The world has grown smaller for me. What a Russian strongman unleashed on the other side of the world has now altered my Santa Barbara home life and delivered Calvin's package.

I find myself, at age 62, a surrogate father to two beautiful and energetic boys, ages six and eight, who have not seen their biological father for more than a year. They were first whisked off to Germany for months and now to the U.S., courageously navigating language barriers and strangeness of every sort. Two boys who, I quickly discovered, were starving for a stable, reliable, affectionate bond with an adult male.

Since May, nothing has been the same. Morning still dawns with a crescendo of bird songs from my yard, but now another layer of sound takes shape, volleys of high-pitched Russian chatter. If my door is unlocked, my bed becomes a gymnastics mat. What was, only six months ago, a serene meditation routine is now a madcap wrestling match. Bed sheets become menacing nets, while conspiracies are hatched and executed, shouted in a language

I don't understand (and the enemy is *well aware* of my ignorance)!

I am rediscovering my own city as well, surveying my surroundings through new eyes. Trips to the mountains, wading through foothill streams, scouring beaches for shells, stalking frogs at the creek, capturing lizards, stink bugs, and crayfish, scouting out big red harvester ants for our ant farm, exploring the MOXI kids science museum, and exhilarating tag games at the "detskaya ploshadka" — that is,



Radek (6) and Myroslav (8) are superheroes who have touched the super-heart of their American "family."

"playground" (and yes, proudly I have learned to say that!)

The boys are, at once, bold and tenderly vulnerable. There is not a knee or elbow that is not scraped (often mine too). They are suddenly heartbroken when I have to go to work or if my wife is not home in the evening to read to them. Above all, I revel in their open-eyed faith in life and the salutary nature of immediate fun. I really see now that the temple of the human person is built brick-by-brick, not of traumas and scolding, but of minute assurances of faith, joy, and wonder.

"Trials are but lessons that you failed to learn presented once again, so where you made a faulty choice before you now can make a better one, and thus escape all pain that what you chose before has brought to you."

(T-31.VIII.3)

I grew up under the parental mindset of control and containment. My parents hated the wildness of the counterculture and were determined — by strap when necessary — not to let their children go to seed. "Honor thy father and mother!" "Children are to be seen but not heard!" "Children must be taught not to touch!" Yes, I understand how the chaos of parenthood can catch people unprepared. Ten short years

and five children spawned a hundred thousand loose ends and uncertainties. Responsibility opens one to vulnerability, and who has not despised feeling vulnerable? My parents chose the heavy hand and doubled down on that strategy.

Yet, a miracle is "a device for perception correction..." (T-1.I.49) My fear of playing the role of father to these boys is allayed by love and presence. Rather than seeing them as threats to my convenience, my sense of order, or the integrity of my possessions, I am viewing *myself* as a custodian of *their* inner assets: daring, curiosity, faith, humor, goodwill, sympathy, and spontaneity. These are saving virtues, interior engines for future successes. I know too well how tender feelings can be crushed by cynicism, dismissiveness, and bullying. But I also know that my stewardship of these vulnerable refugees is an inroad for the recovery of my own innocence.

"You have not lost your innocence. It is for this you yearn. This is your heart's desire. This is the voice you hear, and this the call which cannot be denied. The holy Child remains with you. His home is yours. Today He gives you His defenselessness, and you accept it in exchange for all the toys of battle you have made." (W-182.12)



Inspirational...

Continued from page 7

13. I can't change others, but, I can change how I perceive them.

Even with all that I have written and practiced, there are times that I forget. When I do, three words remind me where to turn: *always and everywhere*. The Holy Spirit and Jesus are with me *always and everywhere* to help me gain full awareness of love's presence in my life.



In the next issue of **THE HOLY ENCOUNTER**, I will focus more on ways to listen to and follow the Holy Spirit, including a seven-day practice of prayerfully asking the Holy Spirit to help us remember the loving beings we are and forget the fear-based insanity of the ego.

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Utter Practicality



by Beverly Hutchinson McNeff

A reporter had been invited to India to interview the Dalai Lama, and he was pleasantly surprised to be invited to pray with the monks before his meeting.

As the reporter sat in his peaceful pose and closed his eyes, his stomach began growling. He had forgotten to eat because of the time change and the excitement of meditating with the monks. Now, his stomach was...

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“Love created me like itself.” (W-67)

Kindness created me kind: the legacy of Gayle Prather

by Beverly Hutchinson McNeff



On May 22, 2023, my dear friend and supporter of Miracle Distribution Center, Gayle Prather, gently laid her physical body down to continue her journey of life eternal as the spirit she truly is. For her family and friends, there is a sense of missing her and her mighty spirit, but those feelings are short-lived when you know that she is now free! Gayle is no longer limited by a body that could not sustain her bright, magnificent spirit. Now that she is not limited, she is with us all the time, and I don't have to wait for a phone call or an email from her. She is within all our hearts, and so is everyone who has passed on because that is where Heaven is, and that is where we all truly abide. As the Course says, “The Kingdom of Heaven is within you.” (T-4.III.1)

What we call the death of the body is merely a transition into another part of life. Just as a caterpillar dies to its existence to become a butterfly, or a baby in the womb dies to the only life it knows to come forth and find a new life experience with loved ones to welcome them, so do we make a journey to another experience of life eternal. Much like we might discard an outworn garment, we release the body

with thanks “for all the service it has given us. But we are thankful, too, the need is done to walk the world of limits, and to reach the Christ in hidden forms and clearly seen at most in lovely flashes. Now we can behold Him without blinders, in the light that we have learned to look upon again.” (The Song of Prayer)



Gayle and Bev in 2011

This is what Gayle and anyone who has made that journey has experienced. I feel that with every fiber of my being. The words from *The Song of Prayer* give me much comfort and faith. And, just as the Holy Spirit and our brother Jesus are available to help and guide us, I believe those who have passed into this new experience of life are there to help us and guide us.

When we silence the insane voice of the ego and all the anger and fear it spews forth, we can hear the still, small voice of truth. This voice is what we *must* nurture now. After the “death” of a loved one, we often are more willing to stop and listen, willing to still the anger, hate, and fear in our minds; those are the moments when we pierce the veil of separation between body and spirit and experience something more — an interconnectedness to every

living thing. This is something that we only seem to experience in fleeting moments, but is what the Course assures us is our inheritance and truth and available to us right now!

After Hugh Prather suddenly passed in 2010, Gayle wrote a column for **The Holy Encounter** sharing her thoughts on her husband's death. It seems so perfect to share it again now since I know it will bless her family and will bless all of us.

Hugh's Legacy

By Gayle Prather

On Saturday, five days after Hugh's death, and the day after our son John returned home to Phoenix, Jordan, our other son, picked me up to take me to a restaurant that serves “the best fish tacos in Tucson” because he knows that I love fish tacos. As we were driving, I mentioned that not only had I felt incredibly peaceful, but I also had experienced a kind of gentle acceptance and love toward other people, be they strangers, politicians of the “wrong” persuasion, or anyone I thought of or spoke to.

Jordan told me that he had a similar experience, explaining that he had been in the habit of fantasizing about some individual saying or doing something to him, and then he soundly chastises them. Since his dad's death, it's been much more difficult for him to indulge in what sounds like an enjoyable, creative, fulfilling fantasy life.

I decided to ask John if he had experienced anything similar. Naturally, he had, although it did not involve human beings. John has always been much kinder in both his thoughts and actions than I have been. However, he has willfully, enjoyably slaughtered insects. He was not raised to do this. Hugh and I always take insects outside and try to find them a better place to live. This includes cockroaches, flies, and

Available from the Center

Gently Down This Dream

Notes on My Sudden Departure by Hugh & Gayle Prather

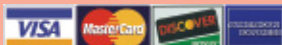
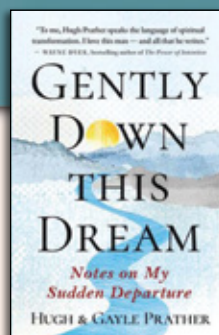
This book is for those who are tired of striving and suffering and want to awaken to the peace and love that are within us all. Hugh and Gayle present the self-improvement practices they learned in their long life together and later taught. Paperback - 248 pgs.

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spiders. Currently (pun intended), John owns a battery-operated bug sucker-upper that not only sucks in but also electrocutes its unfortunate victims. On Sunday, as he was about to employ this device on



Hugh and Gayle

a fly, he was suddenly compelled to get a jar to catch it and release it into the dulcet Phoenix afternoon. After informing me of this strange behavior, he claimed that there were now three flies on his outside screen watching him, obviously thinking that he was weak; personally, I believe they were there to thank him.

I know that our lives have changed forever, but almost from the instant he died, I have felt Hugh's loving, peaceful, gentle, and always humorous spirit. Yesterday, he made me pet our cat Binkley much longer than I wanted to. Saturday, he informed me that he was glad he didn't have to clean the house. There are times when I am overwhelmed by grief, but always there is his gentle spirit guiding me and helping me through this change in our long relationship.

In *Shining Through*, Hugh wrote this about Love: "The only Reality that can unite the little creatures and the large, all people, plants, and pets, all purposes, needs, and potentials, is Love. In Love's gentle arms, the fractured pieces are healed and made whole. Every lost hope, every field of grass come and gone, every song ended, every life wasted, every sun swallowed by darkness is resurrected and restored, is kept and cherished, and is forever here, in me, in everyone, in peace. And what must I do to experience this bounty? Merely be kind. Kind in my thoughts and gestures. Kind in the way I see and hear. Kind to my body and spirit. Kind even to my ego. For what is like Love is within Love. Simply be kind, and the Kingdom of all kingdoms surrounds me."

Update: Prison Project

The Prison Project of Miracle Distribution Center sends *A Course in Miracles* and other Course-based items to prison inmates. Through your generous donations, we have been able to supply many newly started spiritual libraries in prisons. In some cases, we have provided multiple copies of books so more inmates can read about the love that is their essence. These principles genuinely make a difference and quench a thirst for truth that those in prison have found no other place.



We were touched by Michael's letter sharing how much it meant to him to receive **THE HOLY ENCOUNTER** magazine, the table tent, and how studying the Course brings him hope. It reinforces once again how vital this project of the Center is in the lives of inmates. Miracles occur when those who find themselves in these institutions know they are loved and valued.

Dear ACIM Family,

Peace, greetings, and heart-filled love to all of you.

Thank you so much for the pop-up prayer card. As I am writing, I really wish I could help, donation-wise, but being indigent, I have no financial funds. When I am released, it'll be easier. I will keep you in my prayers to receive all that you need to keep the ministry going, so you can continue to help others in society and those of us in prison.

I'd like to share something that struck me and helped me recently in the Course. "What you made has imprisoned your will, and given you a sick mind that must be healed. Your vigilance against this sickness is the way to heal it. Once your mind is healed it radiates health, and thereby teaches healing."

(T-6.V.C.9:5) That struck me so much because I'm struggling so hard with sexually immoral thoughts and fantasies. As I continue to strive and persevere in the vigilant fight, this text has given me hope and strength.

I am so thankful you sent me this book and **THE HOLY ENCOUNTER** magazines. They're a big help to me and in my spiritual walk. I can relate to Paul McNeff, in his belief in liberal theology, as I myself am a Unitarian Universalist, which teaches liberal theology. I also enjoyed his articles called *Miracle Musings*.

If it is not too much to ask, can you please send *A Course in Miracles* 2023 *Wall Calendar*? Thank you so much.

Sincerely, Michael at the Connally Unit Texas



We are honored to meet Michael's request and each request! Thanks to your generous support of the Prison Project and the Center, we can ensure that these appeals are answered. Contact us if you know of an inmate who would like to receive books related to the Course or **THE HOLY ENCOUNTER** magazine. Rules are strict for sending items into prisons and secured facilities, so please check with the institution before requesting items to be sent. Together, we can experience healing by demonstrating healing through our willingness to be truly helpful to others. We invite your tax-deductible donations to support this project.

To read more click on "Prison Project" under "Services" at miraclecenter.org

order to preserve the Union, eventually recognized that slavery could no longer be tolerated. These things were a process.

The Process of Healing

That's how it is with forgiveness. It is a process of healing, not something to do or say just once and then we're done with it. If you have ever tried to forgive a situation or person, you know that just when you think you're done with it, that's when the unforgiving thought decides to visit you at 2:00 in the morning when you can't sleep.

A Course in Miracles offers us great wisdom when it says, "God is the love in which I forgive." Of ourselves, we can't forgive, for we see all the reasons that forgiveness is not warranted. On the other hand, God looks past the illusions we have made and focuses on the truth — the extension of love and the calls for love.

The Course's counsel to focus on the extensions of love or the calls for love is so wise, yet we rarely do this except in hindsight. But even in hindsight, forgiveness still works. As we read in the first fifty miracle principles found in the text,

"They (miracles) undo the past in the present, and thus release the future."

(Principle 13)

Years ago, one of our Center's study group attendees shared how he had recently experienced a miracle with his mother, who had died many years ago. He never had a very good relationship with her and did not see her as a very loving person. Recently, his six-year-old son wanted him to make cupcakes to take to school for his birthday. His son was very specific that the chocolate cupcakes needed to have white frosting and the white cupcakes needed to have chocolate frosting, and the sprinkles needed to adorn the

cupcakes in a certain way, etc. He wanted to do it just like his son asked and realized how much work went into doing a project like this.

As he was doing all this, he had a flashback to when he was a boy. He said he remembered that from when he started school until he was in about 7th grade, his mother had always made lemon-filled cupcakes with meringue topping and brought them to school for his birthday. He never realized until that moment when he was making those cupcakes for his son how much work his mother went to in order to prepare those cupcakes... baking the cupcakes, cutting out the center to fill it with lemon filling, preparing and topping them with meringue, and then baking the meringue to a golden finish. Plus, his mother didn't drive, so he had no idea how she got the cupcakes there, but somehow, she did.

In that moment of realization of what

she had done for him — her extension of love — so much hurt and anger fell away. He was able to see her in a new way. A miracle had entered his mind, and at that moment, he could see the truth about his mother that all his judgments had prevented him from experiencing. It didn't matter if she was no longer walking this earth; he was able to allow forgiveness to reign in his mind, and in doing so, he was released. He was released from being haunted by an image of an angry, uncaring mother, and was now free to experience the love that he is entitled to through the miracle of forgiveness.

A Return to Sanity

The Course so wisely redefines forgiveness by saying that it is the return to sanity. It tells us that fear condemns, and love forgives. When we forgive, we are re-

turning our minds to the presence of God. When we dwell with God, fear has no hold. "For this reason, forgiveness can truly be called salvation. It is the means by which illusions disappear." (W-46.2)

Why would we want to focus on an illusion? Have you ever gone to a scary movie, gotten caught up in it, jumped and screamed, and then walked out saying, "Boy, I'm glad that was just a movie"? It's the same for the movie of our minds. We have written the script and directed a doozy of a scary movie, but it doesn't have to keep scaring us, unless we want to keep focusing on the illusion.

Forgiveness becomes the means by which we see each other the way God sees us. Do you really think God sees the person you're angry at as that "S.O.B."? Maybe the story of a nine-year-old can lead the way for all of us.

A while back, NPR ran a story about a nine-year-old boy named Josef Miles. On Mother's Day weekend in Topeka, Kansas, Josef and his mom put up a different type of sign from what was normally seen by the congregation of the Westboro Baptist Church. This church had gained notoriety for its hateful signs protesting homosexuality, abortion rights, and even disrespecting the funerals of military veterans.

Josef had seen their signs in the past, especially ones that featured an objectionable F-word when referring to homo-

sexuals. He asked his mom why they were using a hate word, and she explained they were upset with men who

love men and women who love women. The signs were reading that God hated these people. The young nine-year-old thought for a

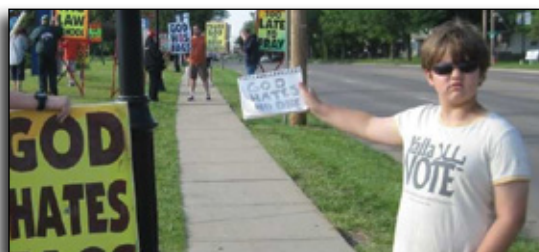
moment and said to his mom, "God hates no one. We should put up that sign."

She asked him why he said that, and Josef replied, "Because that is the truth."

Josef took out his notepad, wrote his



"He said he remembered that from when he started school until he was in about 7th grade, his mother had always made lemon-filled cupcakes..."



"The signs were reading that God hated these people. The young nine-year-old thought for a moment and said to his mom, 'God hates no one.'"

own sign, and held it up. His mom took the picture, posted it, and it went viral. His mom said that the protesters at Westboro were respectful to her son. Perhaps on that day, they saw the same message of truth that Josef knew in his heart, "God hates no one."

What is God Thinking

I have shared the following passage many times, but it always bears repeating because it makes us stop and realize what we are doing and not doing. It rhetorically asks: what *are* you thinking that God would not *think*, and what are you *not* thinking that God *would* think? It then tells us that if we truly want peace and truly want to be healed, then we must change our minds to think with God. It is the only sane thing to do.

For many, this seems too hard to do, but the Course reminds us that our mind is one with God. Denying this, therefore, and *not* joining our thoughts with God keeps our egos intact but "has literally split your mind." (T-4:IV.2:8)

We have all heard the saying, you can't serve two masters. We can't serve the ego and God, not because it's a bad thing to do but because they are mutually exclusive. It's like trying to compare apples and oranges. When our minds rest in God (love), there is no ego (fear), but when our minds are dwelling on fear (ego thoughts), then there is no love (awareness of God). The only caveat to this statement is the fact that God is always present, because we are creations of Him — we're just not aware of it when we are consumed with our fearful thinking. No thinking, though, can discount or change our reality in any way.

The Course tells us that forgiveness is a correction of our perception, so it can also be called a correction of our history. The Course defines forgiveness as "a selective remembering, based not on your selection." (T-17:III.1) It is remembering only the loving thoughts you have given and those that were given to you, and everything else *must* be forgotten. It is a desire to see your brother as yourself. It is your way out of hell.

Forgiveness becomes our course correction so that we can be released from the past. That's why the Course doesn't spend

much time discussing how we could have possibly separated from our reality in God. The Course tells us we are a thought in the mind of God. We cannot be unthought, but we can choose not to remember. Our amnesia, though, cannot separate us from our Source.

Parents and children are a good analogy for this idea. Even though a family might have estrangement, the parent and child will always be connected. Therefore, healing our "estrangement" with God becomes the focus of every unforgiving thought we experience. This means we don't have to go back in our minds to find everyone we have not forgiven; we can use the experience that stands before us now, knowing that *each one* represents *all the others*. Much like a domino effect, when you tap over the first one in a series, all the others also fall.

Forgiveness is Acquired

Allowing forgiveness to rest on any angry, judgmental, or fearful thoughts starts the process of releasing us from all our past mistakes. It's the good ole crock pot analogy. If you have ever cooked with a crock pot, you know that you put your food in, turn it on, and in about *ten hours*, you have a delicious meal. The *slow* cooking process is what makes the food delicious. But if you don't put the food in, turn it on, and have the willingness to wait, nothing happens. For us to reap the benefits of our perpetual connection with God, we must become aware of it, turn to the love that is our reality, and have the willingness to allow the process to take place. Any unforgiving thought that stands before us represents our opportunity to be released from hell now.

"Forgiveness is acquired. It is not inherent in the mind, which cannot sin. As sin is an idea you taught yourself,

forgiveness must be learned by you as well, but from a Teacher other than yourself, Who represents the other Self in you. Through Him you learn how to forgive the self you think you made, and let it disappear. Thus you return

your mind as one to Him Who is your Self, and Who can never sin." (W-121.6)

This passage from Lesson 121 in the workbook helps us understand forgiveness. As the Course tells us, forgiveness is an illusion because nothing can separate us from the mind of God, and that is the basis of every unforgiving thought, whether we are aware of it or not. Just as sin was a thought we

taught ourselves (as guilt for the fact that we thought we could be separate from God), forgiveness becomes an acquired thought, as well, but one directed by the Holy Spirit to release us from our self-made prison of guilt.

For this reason, the Course teaches us that forgiveness is not of God, but love is. God cannot forgive because He has never condemned, but His love becomes the basis of our forgiveness. Just as a boat needs water to float, forgiveness needs love to carry out its healing mission.

When anger, fear, doubt, etc., enter our minds, let us affirm, "God is the love in which I forgive (this person, idea, or fear)." You may wonder if this makes any difference at all, but we are assured in the Course that it does. Just as you may not see a crock pot cooking, fingernails growing, or a cut healing under a scab, we know the process is taking place. So it is with forgiveness. Forgiveness takes place the moment we are *willing* to allow our minds to be released from the fear and pain of the illusory past and focus on the power of love. Forgiveness works because love works. And love works because our collective history of fear is *powerless* in the face of God.



"Just as you may not see a crock pot cooking, fingernails growing, or a cut healing under a scab, we know the process is taking place. So it is with forgiveness."

The HOLY ENCOUNTER

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2023

In This Issue...

- Healing Our History
- Walking with God through Change
- A Gift of Peace for our Planet
- Simple Kindness
- How to Identify and Listen to the Holy Spirit
- The life of Miracle Distribution Center
- A Refuge for Innocence
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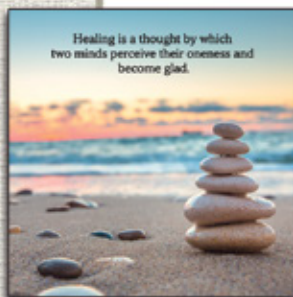
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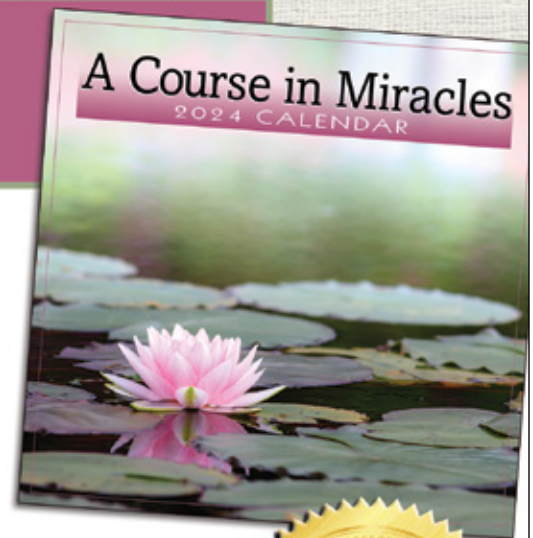
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