

**Circle of Atonement**  
**Study Group Leader Training Program**  
**June 21 - December 13, 2014**  
**Application Material**

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Please complete and return to Robert Perry (robert@circleofa.org) and to Mary Anne Buchowski (courseoasis@primus.ca) by **Friday, June 6th**.

1. How long have you been working with *A Course in Miracles* on a regular basis?  
I began studying ACIM in 1994, so 20 years in total. For the majority of that time I have considered ACIMs to be my primary source of spiritual guidance and regularly undertake daily devotions and study of the Course via both written and audio media.
2. How well do you feel you understand the teachings of the Course?  
I have a firm grasp of the fundamentals, gained both through self-study and group discussions over the course of my ACIM experience.
3. In what ways do you attempt to apply the Course in your daily life?  
Most mornings at rising, I greet the Holy Spirit and ask for guidance, and do the same at night before going to bed. While showering I offer a devotion by writing on the steam covered wall of my shower: "I am as God created me: Eternal, United, Light and Love." And throughout the day I acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit in my mind by saying "Hey, Lord," when I sense the presence of the Holy Spirit in my mind. This serves to focus my attention away from the material aspects of my surroundings and reminds me of my true nature and source of being.
4. Who would you say are your main Course influences? (E.g., Ken Wapnick, Marianne Williamson, etc.)  
My principal Course influence has always been Jesus, and by that I mean that prior to discovering ACIM and still thereafter I have identified myself as a Christian, albeit with a different view of the Bible's teachings and the meaning of Jesus' earthy mission. It was the premise that the Course was delivered to the world by Jesus, through the assistance of Helen and Bill, that I was attracted to it in the first place. My earliest exposure to Course teachers was Ken and Barbara Wapnick, both of whom I met in the mid 90s. I have reviewed Ken's work in a study group format for many years and believe I have gained insights into the Course by doing so. That said, I don't always agree with his personal interpretations, but that's to be expected. For the last year or so, I have relied on writings and guidance found in the Circle of Atonement website. I particularly like the weekly newsletter and associated articles.
5. A. How long have you been in contact with the teachings of the Circle? I have read articles from the Circle's website for the last several years, but started a more intense focus on those writings in the last 12 months.  
B. Have you taken any Circle programs (e.g., the Text Reading Program)? No  
C. Are you a student member or teacher member of the Circle Course Community (CCC)? I am not a paid member of the site, but rather a registered user. I'm not a joiner by nature—generally finding it difficult to find like-minded organizations that keep me intellectually and spiritually engaged—so it takes me a while to warm up to joining a new group. To be totally honest, I was initially turned off by the conflict that seemed to be raging between Robert and Gary Renard. I have been to other ACIM-related sites where there appeared to be a great deal of conflict between individuals of different points of views regarding the Course. I haven't seen that to be a pattern with the Circle, so I no longer consider that an issue.

- D. How aligned do you feel with the Circle's approach to the Course (see end of document)? I agree with the Circle's approach to the Course as described in this document, especially the focus on ACIM as the only necessary path. I choose to concentrate my energies on studying the Course and putting its learnings into practice on a daily basis.
- E. Have you led a study group or do you lead one now? If so, how would you describe your role in the group as well as the group's focus and format? I have participated in several different study groups over the years, but none of them had a de facto leader, in the sense that one person assigned the readings and/or led the meetings. Instead, we decided as a group what to read and discuss and we rotated the reading of the materials during the meeting and provided everyone with an equal opportunity to make comments or ask questions. Frankly, I stopped attending such groups because I felt I had exhausted the learning potential of the "pass the book around the room" style of group study. I am now interested in pursuing a more focused, topics-based approach, which is what I have found in many of the Circle's writings.
- F. If you're not already leading a study group, do you have plans to do so after the completion of this training, and if so, what are they? It depends on what I learn about the Circle's approach to leading a study group. As mentioned previously, the style of group I am accustomed to has no real leader. That said, I could see value in having an actual leader who directs the lessons and facilitates the discussions, similar in my experience as a Sunday school teacher, which I am on occasion.
- G. What experience and/or training do you have in teaching, public speaking, or group facilitation? I taught numerous courses in graduate school and have continued to teach digital marketing and general marketing principals on a periodic basis at local colleges and universities. I have also led numerous Sunday school classes in Biblical-based discussions. I am very comfortable speaking in front of an audience—both large and small.
- H. Please feel free to add anything else about yourself in support of your application, such as interests, professional background, trainings undertaken, etc. I'm a family man, having been married to the same wonderful woman for 18 years, with whom I have raised two great kids, age 13 and 16. I am a member of the United Methodist Church, attending services on a regular basis, as well as being an active member of a great Sunday school class. I'm a marketing executive by trade, having owned my own agency and now working for a national health care marketing firm overseeing the marketing activities of the agency's largest account. I enjoy spending time with my family and reading about a wide variety of topics including quantum physics, altered states of consciousness, mind-related sciences, and the subject of death, as it relates to human psychology and perceptions of the afterlife. I am also fascinated by religion: how they came into existence, prescribed practices and rituals, and current states of growth or decline, especially as it relates to Christianity.


## Statement of Commitment

We are asking each person who is applying to take the training to make the following personal commitments. Keeping these commitments will greatly enhance and deepen the value of the training for you.

Before signing the statement, please reflect on the agreements and let us know if you foresee having difficulties carrying out any of them. We would like to know beforehand, so that we may take them into consideration and discuss them with you.

I agree to:

1. Attend all classes, as much as physically possible. If I *have* to miss a class, I will listen to the class recording before the next class.
2. Fulfill the other aspects of the training program, such as doing the assigned readings and homework when applicable, and participating in the discussion forum.

Name: 

Date: June 6, 2014

# THE CIRCLE OF ATONEMENT'S APPROACH TO *A COURSE IN MIRACLES*

*The Circle takes a unique approach to A Course in Miracles, one that seeks to honor the tremendous breadth of a course, which includes radical, mind-expanding ideas as well as detailed instructions for practical application. This approach is grounded in long and close study of the Course itself and has been tested in the lab of personal experience. Here is a brief description of it.*

## **Course fidelity**

The foundation of our entire approach is the attempt to be completely faithful to what the Course says. The Course claims that it "is perfectly clear" (T-11.VI.3:1) and "means exactly what it says" (T-8.IX.8:1), and we accept these claims. We therefore take it at its word, apart from obvious metaphors (which are a small portion of its writing). Doing so reveals that the Course is not just giving teachings, but also instructing us in how to apply those teachings. Taking the Course at its word is not always comfortable, but this is where the real benefits come from—the peace, the joy, and the miracles.

## **Jesus: the author**

We accept the Course's claim that it was authored by Jesus through a human scribe. We believe that as a man, Jesus fully awoke to reality, and thereby gained a unique perspective on the process of awakening. We believe that he expressed this perspective in the sayings and parables in the gospels that are authentically from him, and that he has expressed it again, in a more thorough and contemporary form, in *A Course in Miracles*. This is why the Course carries so much authority for us. By following it, we believe we are following Jesus.

## **The Course as a path**

The Course characterizes itself not as a series of ideas, but as a course—a *path*. It wants to take its students far—all the way to complete salvation. And it claims to possess all the necessary tools for that. It specifically says about itself, "Nothing is lacking that is needed" (W-pI.42.7:2). What's more, it urges those students who have embraced it as their path to *treat* it as such. This means practicing it alone, rather than mixing it with other paths: "You are not making use of the course if you insist on using means which have served others well, neglecting what was made for *you*" (T-18.VII.6:5). Ideally, we are meant to walk this path under the care and guidance of a personal teacher or mentor. This is openly described in the Manual for Teachers (though, unfortunately, such teachers are not widely available as yet). The Course never describes itself as a self-study course.

## **Study of the Text**

Doing the Course is really a process of internalizing its thought system. The foundation for this is *study* of the teachings, primarily the Text. As Jesus told his scribes: "You...should set yourself the goal of really studying for this course. There can be no doubt of the wisdom of this decision, for any student who wants to pass it." As we study the Text, the ideas which will eventually become our new thought system enter our awareness, where they are considered for the first time. Such study is not a superficial "head trip," but a deep-level reconstruction of our worldview. How should we study the Course? We can boil its own counsel down to one sentence: Read slowly, carefully, even repeatedly, and think about what you read.

## **Practice of the Workbook**

The second step in internalizing the Course's thought system is practice of the Workbook, the Course's training program in its method of spiritual practice. This practice mainly consists of repeating, dwelling on, and mentally applying the Course's ideas. As the Text says, "The ideas are

mighty forces, to be used and not held idly by" (T-16.II.9:5). As we practice them, these ideas sink in more deeply and become more fully our own. We are slowly training our minds "to think along the lines the text sets forth" (W-In.1:4). The Workbook is meant to be done as it says; it asks the student to follow its instructions "just as closely as you can" (W-pI.rIII.In.1:3). If you do, you will eventually no longer need the Workbook. Your practice will grow from an obligation into a way of life.

### **Extension as a teacher of God**

The Manual for Teachers represents the final step in the process of internalizing the Course's thought system. This final step is *extending to others*. Extension means conveying to others, with our thoughts, words, and deeds, the love and forgiveness that we studied in the Text and inwardly practiced in the Workbook. This extension, besides healing the other person, also reinforces that love and forgiveness in our own minds. Thus, as we devote our lives to extension, the Course's thought system receives its final reinforcement for us. It becomes the sole lens through which we see, feel, and experience reality. At that point, we will have reached the goal of true perception.

### **Being a miracle worker**

Being a course in miracles, the Course wants ultimately to teach us to be miracle workers, whose days are devoted to extending miracles to others. It calls this our *function*, and says that for each of us this function will take a special form tailored to our unique strengths. We are not meant to perform this function alone. We are asked to consult the Holy Spirit for all decisions relevant to it and we are also meant to collaborate with others. These are our holy relationship partners (holy relationships being another key feature of the Course's path). Our special function may take the form of being a personal teacher to newer Course students, being a spiritual healer to those who are ill, being a psychotherapist, or any of countless other forms, many of which will not look spiritual at all. We perform our function by entering into holy encounters with those we serve, in which we both give forgiveness and receive it. It is in these holy encounters that we find our own salvation and play our part in the salvation of the world.