

INTRODUCTION

Has there ever been a time in human history when the need for peace was greater? Each year new wars erupt, the arms race escalates, and a trillion dollars are spent on weapons, while millions of people remain hungry, helpless, and homeless.

Yet it is not that we are any more aggressive than our predecessors. Indeed, at this very moment millions of people are devoting their lives to calming hostilities, redressing injustices, and helping the poor and deprived. Rather, advances in technological power have awesomely magnified the impact of our negative states of mind. These negative states—such as emotions of greed and anger, thoughts of attack and revenge, and misperceptions of people and situations—are the root causes of the global problems we face today. The global turmoil mirrors our own inner turmoil, and the state of the world reflects the state of our minds.

Once this is recognized it becomes apparent that our global “problems” (nuclear weapons, ecological disturbances, mass starvation, etc.) are actually symptoms; symptoms of the psychological conflicts within us and between us. The basic source of our problems, as well as their solutions, lie within us, and therefore only solutions that include changing our minds are likely to be effective. Yet it is tragic how rarely this apparently obvious fact is recognized. Rather, most responses tend to be military, political, or economic and usually leave the psychological roots of the problems untouched or even exacerbated.

The question that therefore naturally arises (and it may be one of the most important questions of our time) is this: “What can we do to treat not only the global crises but also the deep psychological roots from which these crises arise?”

The great religions have addressed these root causes of suffering throughout human history. Each culture and age has brought forth its own version of the perennial wisdom that lies at the heart of the great religions. *A Course in Miracles* represents one form of this perennial wisdom for our own time. The significance and appeal of the *Course* transcend traditional boundaries and extend to all who ponder the deepest questions of human existence, meaning, and purpose. Its answers point out a path whereby the mind may be trained, our true identity remembered, and the gifts received thereby—such as love, joy, and peace—may be shared with the world.

The *Course* was first published in 1975 and consists of three volumes. The first is a text that lays out the underlying thought system; the second, a workbook with a lesson for each day of the year; and the third, a teacher’s manual. The language of the *Course* is traditional in its use of Christian terminology and masculine pronouns, but the underlying message and principles are universal.

The central aim of the *Course* is peace. It offers a road map for finding the peace for which everyone yearns, which the world so desperately needs, and which religious sages throughout the ages have called “the highest form of happiness.” “Forget not,” it says, “that the motivation for this course is the attainment and the keeping of the state of peace.”

The peace that the *Course* would have us experience is all encompassing, embracing our hearts and minds, our relationships, and the world. It points out that we cannot hope to create a peaceful world if we ourselves are not at peace. Peace, like love, it says, must first be uncovered within and then extended through our relationships in ever widening, ever more inclusive circles, until eventually peace encompasses everyone “without exception and without reserve.” Moreover, this inner peace is not something that we must create but rather something that already exists within us as part of our true identity.

Recognizing this peace and extending it in the world requires removing the obstacles—the fears and fantasies, anger and aggression, defenses and distortions—that keep our true identity from being known to us. Moreover, as we relinquish these obstacles we discover that we never really needed them in the first place. Rather we find that our true Self has no need of anger, fear, or defensiveness and is naturally loving, joyous, and peaceful. Such is the central claim of *A Course in Miracles*.

To the extent that we recognize the love, joy, and peace that constitute our true identity, to that extent we desire to extend them through sharing them. Such sharing is both the means for, and the result of, removing the obstacles to the awareness of our Self and our inner peace. For *A Course in Miracles* suggests that what we give we receive, what we teach we learn, and as we see others we see ourselves. Therefore it recommends that we “learn that giving and receiving are the same,” “teach peace to learn it,” and “remember in your brother you but see yourself.” Very simply, then, offering peace to others is a way to have it ourselves, and a natural result of having it is sharing it.

The following quotations from *A Course in Miracles* are those that we have found most relevant to the theme of peace. For those unfamiliar with the *Course*, we hope that *A Gift of Peace* may stimulate interest in exploring the original source. Certainly a full appreciation of the *Course* demands studying the original material since no quotations, no matter how beautiful, can offer more than a taste of the extraordinary depth and richness of the original. The potential impact of the *Course* can best be appreciated by studying it directly. If this book encourages readers to do that, it will have served its purpose well.

We are grateful for the opportunity of sharing these quotations and hope that they will indeed give you “a gift of peace” and enable you to share this gift with the world.

Walsh, R. and Vaughan, F. Introduction. In F. Vaughan and R. Walsh (eds.). *A Gift of Peace*. Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, 1986, pp 7-9.