

## INTRODUCTION

In the search for understanding and awakening we are drawn to those teachings that convey the deepest wisdom with the greatest beauty. When we are fortunate enough to find such a teaching, we may also find limits to our capacity to appreciate it, particularly when profound ideas follow one another as rapidly as they do in *A Course in Miracles*. In studying the *Course*, we have therefore found it helpful to separate out specific passages in order to ponder them more fully. This book is a collection of some of our favorites.

Although written in Christian language and style, *A Course in Miracles* clearly embodies the perennial wisdom found at the core of all the world's great religions. Because of this universal nature, its significance and appeal transcend traditional boundaries and extend to all who seek answers to the deepest questions of human existence. *Some Buddhists have said that the Course echoes the words of the Buddha; yogis have remarked that it expresses the wisdom of Vedanta; and psychologists have found that it offers insights comparable to some of the best contemporary thinking about phenomena such as perception, belief, and identity.*

The *Course* was written down by two psychologists, doctors Helen Schucman and William Thetford, who were both on the faculty of Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons. Beginning in 1965, Helen had a series of symbolic dreams and imagery experiences that culminated in hearing an inner Voice that began dictating the *Course*. She was both a psychologist and educator, conservative in theory and atheistic in belief, and was surprised and disconcerted by these events. Since she felt she was the scribe, not the author of this material, she therefore chose to remain anonymous. In her own words Helen said:

Three startling months preceded the actual writing . . . . Although I had grown more accustomed to the unexpected by that time, I was still very surprised when I wrote, "This is *A Course in Miracles* . . ." That was my introduction to the Voice. It made no sound, but seemed to be giving me a kind of rapid, inner dictation which I took down in a short-

hand notebook. The writing was never automatic. It could be interrupted at any time and later picked up again. It made me very uncomfortable, but it never seriously occurred to me to stop. It seemed to be a special assignment I had somehow, somewhere agreed to complete. It represented a truly collaborative venture between my friend [William Thetford] and myself, and much of its significance, I am sure, lies in that. . . . The whole process took about six years.

The *Course* was first published in 1976 and consists of three volumes. The first is a text that lays out the underlying thought system; the second a workbook with 365 lessons, one for each day of the year; and the third a teacher's manual designed to clarify terms and facilitate the teaching-learning process.

The language of the *Course* is traditional in its use of Christian terminology and masculine pronouns. Some non-Christians have therefore found that it can be more easily understood when terms such as "salvation" and "Son of God" are translated, for example, as "enlightenment" and "Child of God." The teaching makes no gender distinctions, since in the realm of Spirit, gender is transcended and the form of the language need not obscure the essence of the communication.

The language of the *Course* is exceptionally poetic and contains a wealth of succinct, powerful, and moving aphorisms that readily stand by themselves as potent capsules of wisdom. For those who have already studied the material, such quotes may provide fresh opportunities to appreciate it and offer easy access to ideas on specific subjects. For those unfamiliar with the *Course*, these quotations may stimulate interest in exploring the original source.

Certainly a full appreciation of the *Course* demands studying the original material, whose extraordinary richness, profundity, and integrated thought system cannot possibly be represented in brief extracts. In the *Course*, thoughts build on and interconnect with one another in a mutually supportive network of ideas that create a symphonic whole of which no extract, no matter how beautiful and succinct, can express more than a partial and selective perspective. The parts cannot substitute for the whole any more than a few melodies can

substitute for a symphony. The full power and impact of the *Course* can only be appreciated by studying it directly. If this book encourages readers to do so, it will have served its purpose well.

We have been studying the *Course* for several years, and our appreciation for it continues to grow. As with all *profound teachings, deeper and deeper levels may be recognized as one continues to work with it.* We were moved to prepare this book of aphorisms when we realized just how impactful such brief quotations could be. From among our favorites we have selected some that we considered succinct, profound, and poetic, and capable of being understood without previous familiarity with the *Course* itself.

This volume can best be read and reread slowly and reflectively, allowing time to appreciate the feelings it evokes. *Responses to the material tend to vary with different moods and circumstances. What seems difficult at one time may seem obvious at another; what feels healing at times of stress or transition may be a source of joy and delight in quiet moments of contemplation.* Some people find it instructive to turn to the material with particular questions in mind, for example, "What is important for me to learn?" "How can I improve my relationships?" "What should I remember today?" "How can I learn to love more fully?" Simply holding a question in mind and opening the book at random can be surprisingly helpful.

The *Course*, therefore, is not only intellectually sophisticated but also eminently practical. To facilitate its practical application, many of the lessons contain affirmations. These are "I" statements that, if repeated often to oneself, can change thinking and behavior in desired directions. Affirmations have been included at the end of most sections and are printed in italics.

*A Course in Miracles* has been deeply meaningful to us, and we are grateful to the Foundation for Inner Peace for allowing us to share it in this way. We hope that these selections will prove as helpful to you as they have to us, and that they will contribute to the extension of peace in the world.