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Getting and Living A Course in Miracles

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*If I had a world of my own,
everything would be nonsense.
Nothing would be what it is
because everything would be what it isn't.
And contrary-wise; what it is it wouldn't be,
and what it wouldn't be, it would. You see?
Alice from "Alice in Wonderland"*

Correcting Upside-Down Perception

There was once an experimental psychologist named E.P. Stratton who made glasses for himself in which the world was inverted upside-down and backwards. He wore the glasses constantly and after a couple of weeks he adjusted to living in an upside-down, backward world. He could write, eat, dress – literally do everything upside-down and backwards. When he took the glasses off, the world was again inverted and backwards and he had to learn how to live in this world all over again.

It does not occur to us that we are seeing ourselves backwards when we look into a mirror, unless we're wearing a name badge. Then it is clear something is amiss. Either everything is backward or our perception is backward. In a similar way, the ego does a psychological inversion of reality that is completely backward, but we don't see it. We think that this world is real and Heaven is a fantasy. It's the other way around. Heaven is reality. This world is a fantasy. What if you were not here? What if you were in Heaven – would what is in front of you at that point not seem like reality and would this world not seem like a dream? The Course may seem like Greek or Swahili or any other language with which we are not familiar. Thus, we don't know the truth when we hear it. The Course is written in plain language. The Course is simple. We are complex.

Simplicity is very difficult for twisted minds.

Chapter 14: 2:3

*Complexity is of the ego, and is nothing more than the ego's
attempt to obscure the obvious.*

Chapter 15, IV. 6:1

Lesson 11 from the workbook, (*My meaningless thoughts are showing me a meaningless world.*) is a beginning step in the reversal in our thinking process. It seems as if the world

determines what we perceive. It's the other way around -- *our thoughts determine the world we see.*

It would be so nice if something would make sense for a change.
Alice in "Alice in Wonderland"

A reversal in thinking is the key to understanding much of the Course as it is, for example, in understanding forgiveness. (As we forgive "so" are we forgiven.) The ego does not understand forgiveness and, thus, twists it into something it is not. Making the other person wrong and then forgiving them for our projection is backward thinking. Corrected seeing is a matter of seeing our own misperception regardless of what appears on the surface. We resist the process of the Course and we do not understand the Course as we are blinded by our own reflection. We've been looking at the world so long "through a glass darkly" that all we see is ego's perception. Who we are, in truth, is nothing like the ego.

Getting the Course

The word addiction comes from the Latin "addictus" which means *that to which we are devoted, that to which we surrender or that to which we give our lives.* An alcoholic gives his life to alcohol. Alcohol becomes the object of devotion. It becomes God.

*Better read it first, for if one drinks much from a bottle marked "Poison,"
it's almost certain to disagree with one sooner or later.*
Alice from "Alice in Wonderland"

The Course seems difficult because we are devoted (addicted) to the ego and we do not want to let it go. The Course calls for the dropping of this old, useless addiction in favor of devotion to a higher calling. In this sense, I have noticed that serious *Course In Miracles* students are truly "devoted" to the Course. The more they follow this teaching the more exciting life becomes.

The Course is firm, unambiguous, gentle and clear, and the results are miraculous. It asks me to be more and more aware, and ever more attentive all the way to the point I *get it*, which means understanding what is required for the ego's undoing.

*The "dynamics" of the ego will be our lesson for a while,
for we must look first at this to see beyond it, since you have made it real.
We will undo this error quietly together,
and then look beyond it to truth.*
Chapter 11, V. 1:5

Getting it is not a matter of intellect. *Getting it* happens on a non-word, non-analytical basis. It happens as I choose to turn my *will* over to God.

*Instead of "Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven" say,
"Will ye first the Kingdom of Heaven," and you have said,
"I know what I am and I accept my own inheritance."
Chapter 3 VI, 11:8*

In order to understand something, I must first be psychologically ready for it and this is a matter of wisdom not intelligence. A study done on wisdom, a few years ago showed that even children can be as wise as older adults. Down Syndrome folks, living in the moment, are often quite wise.

Revelation

The intellect is based on information, facts, and associations gathered from life. Wisdom is a simple, all pervasive knowledge of reality. It is the direct perception of essence. It is a permanent inner knowing, a form of “mystical illumination,” a deep and profound insight into essence. The experience is not bodily or sensuous. Among the mystics, Plotinus (204-270 Greece) speaks of “another intellect,” different from that of rationality. It is not irrational; rather, it is “transrationality” Dionysius the Areopagite (5th or 6th Century, Greece) speaks of an “unknown knowing.” For Shankara (788-820, India) and Eckhart, (1260-1328, Germany) the way of salvation is the way of *revelation*. According to the Course, *revelation is an intensely personal experience*. It is a direct contact with God that transcends time and abolishes fear. Inevitably, mystics say that they now know something that they did not know before. They may not be able to tell you in words, however, what it is that they now know (because it is ineffable), yet they have received unquestionable insight beyond doubt.

*Revelation is literally unspeakable because it is
an experience of unspeakable love.*

Chapter 1, II 2:7

Trying to Live A Course In Miracles

*Revelation induces only experience.
Miracles, on the other hand, induce action.*

Chapter 1, II. 2:3-4

I did the EST training (which later became “the Forum”), in 1979. There was an emphasis, at the time, on not “trying” to do things; rather on “doing” as Yoda, pointing his long gnarled finger at Luke Skywalker in the original *Star Wars* trilogy said. “Don’t try. Do!” The thing is, we can’t do if we don’t try; and trying, especially the first time we attempt to do something, does not always lead to success. For this reason, we need a certain tenacity. With faith comes persistence and with persistence comes results.

*Success must come gently with a great deal of effort
but with no stress or obsession.*

From Don Juan in the Carlos Castaneda material

Studies have shown that the more times someone tries to quit smoking the more they increase the likelihood that someday they will actually quit. The Course often uses the word “try” or “trying.” Jesus says he is “trying” to teach us the Course. Lesson 49 from the Workbook says we should “try” to hear God’s Voice. I am trying to learn the Course so I can live the Course. Sometimes the Course *looks like* work. It is good work. It is the best work there is. It is the most

rewarding work possible. It brings nothing less than happiness and freedom from despair. Still, *getting it* requires time, attention, and focus.

To be in the Kingdom is merely to focus your full attention on it.

Chapter 7, III, 4:1

*Read the directions and directly
you will be directed in the right direction.*
The Doorknob from “Alice in Wonderland”

Open the book and read it slowly. There are 365 lessons. It takes a year to get through the lessons. Ultimately, psychologically speaking, we cannot skip steps. If we do skip a step, we’ll find ourselves repeating it later and it works best to let it sink in slowly.

There is more to life than making it go faster.

Mahatma Gandhi

The Course is a kind of “alchemy” that is a turning, cooking, gestating, sort of a thing. I begin the work, stick with it, and after a while, it works me. The key to understanding the Course is in developing a relationship with it. Getting the Course is like learning to play a musical instrument or it’s like learning a new language. In order to develop proficiency, I must practice, practice, practice.

Discipline

You sometimes hear folks speak of the Course and say, “Oh, I took that or I did that.” If enlightened, then indeed we’ve done the Course and “Thy Kingdom has come.” If I am still trying to do the Course, it is a matter of “Thy Will Be Done.” I still need to be turning it over. I need to listen better and respond more clearly.

*You want to be happy. You want peace. You do not have them now,
because your mind is totally undisciplined,
and you cannot distinguish between
joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, love and fear.
You are now learning how to tell them apart.
And great indeed will be your reward.*

From Lesson 20 2:3-8

The word discipline comes from the word disciple. A disciple is a follower of a teacher or a teaching. The teacher brings a teaching. Jesus is a teacher. The Holy Spirit is a teacher. Being undisciplined, we have work to do to be healed and whole. How much time is given to compulsions, to hungers of the body we “seem” unable to control? And, who is the “we” who cannot control it? How much do I dissociate, get caught up in projection or side-tracked by some habituated activity? We often do not even attempt to control our minds. An addict does not attempt to control an appetite.

I am trying to live the Course in so far as I have not yet established perfect communication. I’m being asked to give total devotion to the Will of God. There can be no hiding, no diversion into side-

tracks, no dissociations, no projection, no anger, and no blame. If any of these things do come up, then I have to recognize that something has gone wrong in my thinking and I need a better way of seeing.

*I warn you dear child, if I lose my temper,
you lose your head. Understand?*
The Queen of Hearts in "Alice in Wonderland."

I'm trying to live the Course because I'm continually adjusting to living inside this body which – though I know it's not me – it sure looks like it is. How easily am I distracted by the murmurs, rumbles, and cravings of the stomach; the aches and pains of the body? How much time and money is spent around eating? Mouths are strange things if you think about it. Sexuality, too, is a strange activity -- but let's not go there. You could easily do a comedy routine around the inelegant, ungainly, and awkward-looking nature of eating and or sexuality. No doubt it's been done. The body seems like a necessity and we *literally* do not know who we would be without it. Yet, the Course assures us we are not our bodies and the body is a very temporal experience. And yet, . . .

*When you let your mind be drawn to bodily concerns,
to things you buy, to eminence as valued by the world,
you ask for sorrow, not for happiness.*
Lesson 133, 3:2

I'm trying to live the Course because this body thing (if I let it) can take the peace of God away from me. I try to stay healthy and yet, as I get older, as the body rusts and the pipes get clogged, can I role with the punches time sends my way? These seeming necessities of the body can subtly turn into a distraction, even a fixation.

*Appetites are "getting" mechanisms,
representing the ego's need to confirm itself.
This is as true of body appetites as it is of the so-called
"higher ego needs." Body appetites are not physical in origin.
The ego regards the body as its home,
and tries to satisfy itself through the body.*
Chapter 4, II 7:5-8

The Course asks for less and less of what we call ego, defensiveness, and unconsciousness. It asks me to lay down all my defensiveness – all of them -- all anger, judgments, and any desire I might have to build my own kingdom. I must even let go of petty annoyances.

*A slight twinge of annoyance
is nothing but a veil drawn over intense fury.*
From Lesson 21, 2:4

I'm trying to live the Course as new temptations come around every day. Can I go though one day without judgment? Can I make it even for one hour? How long can I go without trying to make someone else feel guilty? Maybe, it is only in the subtle tone of my voice.

I'm trying to live the Course when I find that a brother has done something which is blatantly dishonest, hurtful, or "seemingly" even insane. Perhaps they have hurt someone. Perhaps they were thoughtless. Perhaps they sought to twist the Course itself into some form of non reality; and yet, I must continue to love them, to see the face of Christ in them despite what may appear as anything but the face of Christ.

I'm trying to live the Course because the more I do this work, the more I find dark places lurking within that I did not know were there - some little piece of resentment hiding in a corner which I don't want to acknowledge. Doing this work means I have to sweep all of the dust collecting cobwebs out of all the dark corners; all the little things which separate me from the peace of God. Nothing can be left to take the Peace of God away from me.

Love is the experience of wholeness and freedom from fear. It is freedom from the ego. The very thing we are not. All that is asked is we let go of our cherished addictions and follow the lead of Holy Spirit. All there is, is Love. All there is, is Truth. All there is, is God. All there is, is Oneness. All there is, is. This is a clear path to that truth, beyond the body and its peculiar problems and its seeming appetites. Here is life *beyond the body, beyond the stars and yet somehow familiar*. Here, all is present and nothing is missing. Here, love is.

The Course comes to us with impeccable clarity. Doing the Course, the Voice for the Course becomes increasingly clear, not louder – clearer. We are told *very gently* and *very specifically* what to do. We just have to be *willing* to listen. Then, we are kindly shown where we have gone off course and then gently led back on to the path to God.

I'm trying to live the Course and no doubt will continue to try and make peace with this body as it ages, relationships as they develop, and with God as I come to understand Oneness. In all these ways do I come to understand the Course and as I understand it, I live it; and, as I live it, I understand it better.

*When I get home I shall write a book about this place
... If I ever do get home.
Alice from "Alice in Wonderland."*

Peace,

Jon