

The View, Part I

Introduction:

Candy Wood

The Course in Miracles is a 3-volume set of books, published in 1975 as a self-study course. Two doctors of psychology created it over a seven year period, under a rather bizarre set of circumstances.

Dr. Bill Thetford, was a Professor of Medical Psychology at Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons, as well as Director of the Psychology Department at the Presbyterian Hospital in NYC. Dr. Helen Schucman, was research psychologist, working for Bill. They didn't get along well.

In 1965 Helen began to hear an internal voice dictating to her. As you can imagine, this did not make her a happy camper. She was afraid that she was going crazy. She resisted hearing the Voice, but the Voice was very insistent. Bill was very supportive of her efforts, as he had recently become interested in the work of Edgar Cayce. So with Bill's encouragement, Helen would take dictation from the Voice in shorthand in the evening, and bring the resulting pages in to her boss, Dr. Bill Thetford, the next morning. She would read her notes, and he would type them, because, as he said, he was the better typist of the two.

She believed that Voice to be Jesus. The resulting 3 books changed their relationship and their lives. There are over a million and a half books in circulation, with translations in 20 languages.

The first book dictated was the Text, which explains how to experience forgiveness. Forgiveness leads to Happiness and peace, which is the course's goal for its students. Miracles are defined as the shift in perception from fear to love.

The "Workbook for Students" consists of 365 lessons – one for each day of the year. This one-year training program begins the process of changing the student's mind and perception.

The "Manual for Teachers" is written in a question-and-answer form and provides answers to some questions a student is likely to ask.

Before turning the program over to the "UU View", please listen to this important announcement: "Viewer Discretion is advised. Three and four letter words (God and Lord) may be used in the following discussion."

Panel Discussion: Paula Braxton, Barb Brooks, Jan Means, Connie Thibeau-Catsis

Candy: *A Course in Miracles isn't exactly on the best seller list. What prompted you to begin this Course?*

Jan: I started meditating a few years ago, as a way of being more centered and relaxed. The next thing I knew, I had discovered that I had a soul. I was an atheist, so that wasn't a welcome discovery. I didn't quite know what to do with that information, so I started doing a lot of reading. I found that many of the books I was reading referenced 'A Course in Miracles' as part of the bedrock philosophy that many of the authors had adopted. I was intrigued, so I bought the book.

It came shrink wrapped, or I might not have bought it. When I opened it, I discovered that not only was it very thick; but the typeface was very small; it didn't read easily, and worst of all it looked too much like a bible.

So it sat on my shelf for 6 months or so. I knew that once I started it, I wanted to make a commitment to finishing it; but 365 daily lessons, and 1200 pages of text seemed pretty daunting. So last August I contacted the VUU office and offered to facilitate an ACIM discussion group, under the auspices of the RE group. I figured that if I had a support group, I could get thru the book. And so we began.

Paula: Jan Means told me that she was going to be facilitating a new class and that I should join. I didn't know anything about it, but was willing to try it, so we bought the book, which was shrink wrapped. Jan had said to do the first week's lessons prior to the first group discussion. I had to take the book to class because I couldn't find the daily lessons.

Barb B.: Over the last couple of years I have been discussing my spiritual beliefs with Jan and Jan's daughter Alison, and they have introduced me to many wonderful concepts. When Jan said she was going to start a discussion group to help her follow the lessons in 'A Course In Miracles' I became curious. When I went to the bookstore to look at the book I found like everyone else the book was shrink-wrapped. I looked at several books around it that talked about the course and I decide to buy the book. When I got home I thumbed through the book – found the 365 lessons in the workbook and I started to read the one sentence summary of each lesson. I was fascinated by the progression of throwing away negative perceptions and in their place promoting oneness, love, forgiveness and peace. I was hooked.

Connie: In 1987, we were going through a major life crisis that brought me to the Course. I was offered the three-volume version for \$15. They weren't "shrink-wrapped," and the language was a challenge, but I knew that I was supposed to have them, and to study the lessons.

Candy: *We now break for a word from our sponsors:*

Candy: *A Course in Miracles is available for only \$29.95 from a fine bookstore near you.*

The View, Part II:

Candy: *We've heard why you came to the Course on Miracles, but what's been your experience with it? What was the most difficult part of the journey?*

Barb B: The interpretation of the lesson has definitely been the most difficult part of the course due to the language, grammar and sentence structure. I was constantly looking up words to see if there was a definition that fit the usage. Especially since I was raised UU, Salvation and Atonement didn't mean anything to me. And the use of the female exclusive language Lord God Father, I am His Son... was very offensive at first. Although I still substitute enlightenment for salvation.

Paula: I think the most difficult part of this journey has been the isolation. The course teaches you to disengage from this reality. But in doing so, you are removing yourself from all those other people who are engaged in this reality. You start to feel really alone. That is why the discussion group is so important to me. I know each week, no matter how alone I have felt, I have a place where I belong and where I know others are feeling similarly.

Connie: It took me a long time to shift my perceptions from a material to a spiritual orientation. It is hard to say why it took me so long to address issues of love, forgiveness, and releasing judgments in my life, but it's just taken time. I read a lot of other stuff to verify for myself how the Course material aligned with other spiritual-oriented works—the issues tend to always be about love, forgiveness, and releasing judgments. Repeating the daily lessons year-after-year helped to incorporate these issues in my life.

Jan: Two things.

a. The first is the language and especially the 'G' word –God. I still cringe when I hear that word. God still has connotations for me of a white bearded All Mighty judgmental fellow in Heaven. I prefer the words Source or Creator. So I'm still working at overcoming my own mental barriers about God.

b. The second area, where I think many people have difficulty, is the idea that nothing here is real. It's all a fabrication and a product of our minds that keeps us separate from God and his love. This certainly feels real. But I can also see that so many things that we believe are real, are only a product of our minds – like slights that we experience, or needs that we have for material things. Most of what makes up our lives and our world has no value, and isn't real.

Candy.: *We now break for a word from our sponsors:*

Candy: *This course is reported to be only one of thousands of paths to enlightenment. Your experience may vary.*

The View, Part III:

Candy.: *Which of the 365 lessons have been the most meaningful for you?*

Paula: I love the lesson that says “God is in everything I see”. It really changes your perception when you are in a situation that is making you angry. If you look at someone who is upsetting you and think to yourself “God is in everything I see”, you will see their holiness and it stops those angry emotions.

Connie: #191-“I have a function God would have me fill.”

No matter what I was doing in my life, I raced through it...never perceiving that I had enough time to just be...and to be able to just be is what has become what is really important...

Lesson 191 brought me some peace and has helped me slow down when I remember: “...you have a function in the world in its own terms...forgiveness represents your function here...on earth, you need the means of forgiveness to let illusions go...”

Jan: I haven't finished the Course yet, but one lesson really stands out. I got a call last fall that my mother was dying in Florida. I was on Lesson 34, which read in part: “ I could see peace in this situation, instead of what I now see in it.”

I worked on that lesson the entire week I was in Florida. I said it to myself at her hospital bed. I said it to myself as we planned her memorial service. I said it to myself as we cleaned out her personal belongings. And it helped enormously. It was a gift to have been on that lesson when I got the call from my dad. “I could see peace, instead of what I now see”. And I did.

Barb B.: 110,162 “I am as God created me” – which says I am good enough, in fact perfect in God's definition of perfect; I can let go of judgment of myself.

153 “In my defenselessness my safety lies”. – Defense is a form of attack. When you defend you bring on attack. To not be attacked you must not defend

159 “I give the miracles I have received” – To give is how to recognize you have received. I have already been given forgiveness but I must forgive others to see it.

67 “Love created me like itself.”

Candy.: *And what impact do you think the Course in Miracles has had on your lives?*

Paula: The course has allowed me to release the anger I had around my mother's death. I had worked really hard on my relationship with my mom, and right when we got to a point where we could communicate and be friends, she died. I became very ANGRY

after that. I didn't realize how angry I was until I started ACIM. Looking back I realize that the anger was taking over and I was not being a very nice person. ACIM has allowed me to let go of that anger and to just have the good memories of my mom.

Jan: It's made a difference in the quality of my life. There aren't too many activities that I do on a daily basis where I can make that claim.

I don't look at the world the same way I did before I began a year ago. For one thing, I have a lesson to concentrate on all day. So I float all day on a wonderful, uplifting thought. It reorients me so I look at everything differently. My lesson today is:

"Today I chose to see a world forgiven,
in which everyone shows me the face of Christ,
and teaches me that what I look upon belongs to me "

I couldn't possibly be the same person that I was before I began the course. I'm happier, much less self critical (thank goodness!!), and more accepting of others.

A more subtle change is that I feel increasingly divorced from our American culture. Listening to the news, or commercials, or reading the newspaper, or hearing from our leaders, makes me realize that this entire culture is fear based. Fear of not fitting in, fear of change, fear of not having enough, fear of others, fear of everything.

From the beginning the course is very clear that it is about mind training. It's about opening yourself up to love, acceptance of others, viewing others as yourself, and forgiveness. It's about moving away from ego based thoughts of fear, and embracing love.

Our UU tradition encourages us to develop our own theology. A Course in Miracles has provided me the vehicle to do just that. It hasn't been an easy journey, but it's been incredibly rewarding. I believe that I'm a better person than I was a year ago. But I know for a fact that the quality of my life has improved dramatically.

Connie: The Course got me off the fence of duality and whether to focus on the "material-driven world view" or a "spirit- driven world view." Ego issues have to be addressed of how we perceive what is real, and our tolerance for being vulnerable. I am learning to more easily step back and let "spirit" my way. As a result of this journey inward, I am a bit closer to just living within the "flow" of life, rather than thinking about life.

Barb B.: Like the others I have a better understanding of fear, anger, forgiveness and what it truly means to be peaceful. But the most surprising impact has been an achievement of a real understanding of so many Christian cliché's. To have a concept for Heaven I can believe in, to really want to seek salvation, grace and atonement are all surprising concepts for a lifetime UU. I really understand why a person would say "it is God's will" or "the dead are in a better place".

Yet there is a completeness to the concepts in the Course, which typically Christian religions don't convey, and an openness to the presentation of the concepts that have allowed me to embrace the truth in each lesson. The course has brought depth to the peace and happiness in my life.

Candy: *I want to thank our panel. We now conclude this program with a word from our sponsor:*

Candy: *The Course in Miracles study group meets weekly on Sunday mornings in Room 5, at 9:45am. Child care will be provided with advance notice.*