

A Course of Love



COMBINED VOLUME

Mari Perron, First Receiver

Foreword

For almost three years Mari Perron heard an inner voice, as if dictating. She transcribed what she heard. The result, unedited, is *A Course of Love*. It explicitly states that it is a “continuation” of *A Course in Miracles*, although there is no formal connection between the two courses. Both courses were received in an identical manner. In both courses Jesus is entirely forthright about his identity as the Source.

The two courses were received approximately 30 years apart. Helen Schucman received *A Course in Miracles* over a period of seven years in the late 1960s and early 1970s; Mari received *A Course of Love* from December, 1998 through October, 2001. Both courses present themselves with a rare degree of authority and intelligence. Their spiritually pioneering nature is far beyond what either woman could have written on her own. Those familiar with *A Course in Miracles* will recognize the distinctive and brilliant style, although most people will probably find the language of *A Course of Love* considerably less complicated and more accessible than its predecessor.

The dictation Mari scribed specifically referred to this Course as a “continuation of the coursework provided in *A Course in Miracles*.” (A.4) It also stated:

Where the original Course in Miracles was a course in thought reversal and mind training, a course to point out the insanity of the identity crisis and dislodge the ego’s hold, this is a course to establish your identity and to end the reign of the ego. (C:P.8)

Mari Perron grew up in a working class family in St. Paul, Minnesota. At the University of Minnesota she majored in English; as a returning adult student with three children she won the notable Jean Keller-Bouvier Award for literary accomplishment. A practicing Catholic, she felt deeply about her faith and had no particular interest in other approaches to spirituality. “I wanted to write mystery novels and smoke cigarettes and be an intellectual.” She describes herself as an “ordinary” woman.

It was a deeply personal joining together in relationship with two other women that paved the way for the transmission of *A Course of Love*. (Similarly, those familiar with the history of *A Course in Miracles* will recall that it was Helen's colleague, Bill Thetford's "speech" that "there must be another way" out of their conflict, and Helen's wholehearted agreement, that signaled the events leading to the transmission through Helen.) In 1993 Mari was one of three administrators conducting an off-site adult-study program for the university's health services department. The nature of their jobs required all three women—Mari, Mary, and Julieanne—to work together closely. At about the same time, Julieanne and Mary each discovered that they were pregnant, and that their babies were due to be born on nearly the same date. Julieanne gave birth to a healthy baby. Mary's baby, Grace, had a serious heart malformation. Five weeks after her birth and following multiple surgeries, Grace died. Although the stark contrast in the situations of the two women could easily have torn the group apart, instead it intensified their closeness. Through Grace's life and death the three women bonded together in a deeply personal quest for meaning. They read many spiritual books. They each had significant experiences and insights. Most importantly, they actively shared their feelings and discoveries with their "spirit sisters."

One of the readings the women shared suggested it was possible to contact one's "angel." Mari was skeptical. Nevertheless, on May 1, 1995, she decided to try by typing a little letter. Her favorite way of expressing herself is through writing. She was "ready to ask" even though she did not expect an answer. The following is how she recounts what happened next:

"Dearest Angel,

"I think I have felt you with me since my earliest childhood, certainly in my most tormented times when you would tell me I was special and a part of me believed you. Thank you. That voice that said I was special kept me living as much as I could live. Feeling as much as I could feel. . . . It is this part of me that is willing to believe I can talk to you. It is this part of me that says it makes sense. Will you talk to me?"

The answer came immediately, my fingers responding and typing the words almost before the thoughts had entered my mind. . . . I did not hear a voice distinct from my own. But I knew the words were not my own.

Smell the sweetness. You are sweet. Don't try to force it, to will it, just let it come. It is there in the in-between, between thought and feeling. Breathe. Feel your heart.

So began the receiving of messages from a voice that identified itself as an angel going by the name of “Peace.” Mari later wrote, “I look back now and think how simple this communication was. How childlike. How innocent. . . . It was given through the act of asking.” In 1995, Mari, Mary, and Julieanne decided to share their story with the world through publication of *The Grace Trilogy* (Hazelden, 1997; available as an ebook through Take Heart Publications). Her experiences with receiving messages from the angel Peace turned out to be a prelude, or perhaps an exercise, for things to come.

Mari discovered *A Course in Miracles* in 1996.

I read about ACIM in a newspaper article that did not name it as a book that came in the voice of Jesus. When I started reading it, I still didn’t realize that it was, and when I became aware of it I didn’t believe it. But by then I wasn’t about to put the book down because I felt everything in it was Truth with a capital T. . . . After a while I started to figure maybe it really was Jesus.

She was enthralled. Although usually Mari voraciously read many books, for two years she read little other than *A Course in Miracles*, many times through, especially the Text. Well over a year before she actually heard the voice, preparation had begun. Mari says:

A Course of Love began with a dream. The dream came to me in July of 1997. In the dream, I heard, You can no longer sell your mind for money. Your mind now belongs to God.

Months of soul-searching followed. Eventually Mari left her job and held herself ready—for what, she had no idea. After nine months and much financial uncertainty she considered going back to work, but an inner knowing kept telling her that she “had work to do for God.” Then her friend Mary shared a dream in which she saw “a new course in miracles.” Mari felt that somehow Mary’s dream was an announcement of the work to come—a work so monumental that Mari had been unable to accept signs that now, looking back, had pointed toward this scribing work all along. A week later, on December 1, 1998, Mari began to “hear” the voice.

As soon as I heard the familiar voice of Jesus, not as I remembered it from my youth or the Bible, but as I remembered it from many readings of *A Course in Miracles*, I was awestruck by the task set before me. For the next three years, I dedicated myself to receiving the three books that combine to deliver this new message.

Referring to Mari, Jesus said that “the first receiver of these words can ‘hear’ these words as thoughts. Keep in mind that she has thoughts she is not thinking.” (D:12.7)

In 2001, Mari, along with friend and former literary agent Dan Odegard, worked to bring forth the first edition of *A Course of Love*, published by New World Library. Several decisions made at that time were later reversed. Because of ongoing litigation over the copyright to *A Course in Miracles*, language was removed that referred directly to *A Course of Love* as a continuation of *A Course of Miracles*. This language was later restored. Similarly, the misleading subtitle “The Complete Course” was later deleted—it contained the first volume only.

Once published, Mari felt “it wasn’t really calling me to do anything with it. Instead I felt called to solitude and spent most of the next couple of years embracing that way of life.” Outwardly, then, Mari may seem an unlikely person through whom Jesus would extend monumentally to the world. But when New World Library decided not to publish the other volumes, she promptly went about making them available on her own.

Mari brought out *The Treatises* and *The Dialogues*. In 2003, as she worked on these volumes, Mari received an additional message, “Learning in the Time of Christ,” in the same manner as the rest of the material. It anticipated future discussion groups and was clearly meant as an aid to both individuals and groups who would be studying this Course. It is presented at the end of this Combined Volume as an Addendum—although those so inclined may find it illuminating at any time.

Finally, when New World Library let the so-called “Complete Course” go out of print, Mari prepared to self-publish all three volumes as a coherent series. Once again, as she was preparing the volumes on Valentine’s Day, 2006, she received yet another message evidently intended to introduce this Course. It is included in this Combined Edition as the Introduction.

Even as a self-publisher, Mari was not naturally inclined to campaign on behalf of *A Course of Love*, but she took to heart the message that “you can only be who you are by sharing who you are.” (C:31.17) She decided that not only was she willing to ask, to listen, and to transcribe, but also to share—and not just the beautiful consoling words of Jesus. Mari shares her own humanity, her challenges and struggles as a mom, her lack of resources, the

problems of addiction in her own family, and a perspective on healing that is not a sentimental view of love or life. In her blog, her books, and her abundant private correspondence, Mari speaks of the acceptance that love can draw to those with “imperfect” pasts and how “knowing and being known” can invite justice, equality, and dignity, as well as peace.

In her first printing of all three books of this Course, Mari wrote the following as a Foreword:

In *A Course of Love*, as well as in *A Course in Miracles*, Jesus says that love cannot be taught. What can't be taught is a mystery. These messages from Jesus are both mystery and revelation of mystery.

In 1998, I was reading *A Course in Miracles* and seeking my own heart's calling when I heard a Voice tell me that I would receive a new course in miracles. As you might imagine, my part in this mystery—having this Course of Love come to me and through me—raised a number of questions.

How did it happen? How was this guidance made possible? What did it feel like? What did I actually experience?

Receiving Jesus and his guidance was easy. I loved the relationship and the process by which I wrote. The words arose from within, more or less as thoughts I didn't think. This writing practice lasted three years. The work of it was effortless, uncomplicated, and awe-inspiring.

There was a way I made it difficult, though. This is what I want to tell you about so that I might save you from the same unnecessary suffering.

It was when each day's writing was done that difficulty would arise. That was when I would begin to think about it. Thinking about it, I felt overwhelmed. My mind struggled and grew painfully frustrated by its inability to comprehend what was happening and even what was being said. My mind could not accept the new experience. I couldn't understand it, explain it, or compare it to anything else.

My feelings fared little better. As soon as I stood back from the work I was doing, I felt like a peon on an iceberg enveloped by immensity. I felt surrounded by the most powerful force in the universe, as if I was in the eye of a hurricane.

Yet I was just sitting at my desk. A mere moment away from dinner. I'd find it hard to believe I could still eat. I'd hear the sound of the television or the phone ringing and I'd be whisked back from my iceberg in a nano-second. The shift in atmosphere felt as if it would just about kill me.

This is how sharp the contrast was between union and separation. I knew I couldn't continue to feel union only when I was actively engaged in the work. I couldn't continue to feel miserable as soon as it stopped. I knew

that Jesus didn't leave me when I left my desk, but I felt unable to extend my awareness of union much beyond it.

This didn't stop me from trying. I felt that if I tried hard enough, I could learn how to do it. If I could only get a clear grasp, a definitive understanding of what was going on, then I would "have it." I could "achieve" union. I kept trying to make it be like other experiences I had learned from and learned to duplicate – experiences from which I had always stood back – a mind, or a self, observing.

It wasn't by the effort of my mind, but through stillness of mind, that I eventually realized that it wasn't something miraculous about "the work" that made union possible and separation intolerable. Union was what arose naturally when the blocks to my awareness of love's presence were removed. This was what happened as I received the Course. The barrier of my separate thoughts melted away and Jesus was with me without being "other than me." We were in relationship without being separate.

In union there is no "self" standing back, observing the experience. Without a separate consciousness, there is no thought. Without thought there is oneness of being.

When I saw this, I knew that I could experience oneness in life, that I'd had these experiences in the past, and that I continue to have them. They just weren't experiences of my thinking mind.

It would only be after such an experience that an awareness that "something happened" would come. Then I'd think, "Oh my God, that was the greatest thing ever. I want to have that again." Once more the work would begin toward realizing unity wasn't something I could "have" and that it's who I am when I'm not being an "other" to myself; when I'm not being separate.

When I'm thinking, I'm present to this "other" who is the self I think I am. "She" is there in my thoughts just like any other person, thing, or situation taking up space in my mind. I am not alone with God and not in unity.

Having an "I," and all that is not "I," is the way of thinking. This is not the way of the heart that Jesus calls us to. He ends this Course (Book One) by saying, "Think not." (C:32.4)

To move from the experience of separation to the experience of union is to experience the power of God and the force of love. It is an unthinkable experience.

Jesus says: "Start with this idea: You will allow for the possibility of a new truth to be revealed to your waiting heart. Hold in your heart the idea that as you read these words—and when you finish reading these words—their truth will be revealed to you. Let your heart be open to a new kind of evidence of what constitutes the truth." (C:7.23)

Revelation is what this Course is, as well as the new way of knowing that it invites. When I received the Course I received revelation. When I thought about it, I blocked my ability to recognize what I received.

You are about to receive this Course. As you open your heart to it, don't rely on your mind to recognize what you receive. When you close the book and go about your day, don't do as I did and bring it to your mind. Hold it in your heart. Stay in love's presence. Don't step back into separation. Do everything you can to quit standing back from life. Start at the beginning, with who you truly are. Don't think too much. Let your heart lead the way.

Then you will see that in the beginning, and before the beginning, and before the before, there was only love.

Being a first receiver can be challenging. For both Helen Schucman—whose story of receiving *A Course in Miracles* is well known—and Mari Perron, their new, uninvited status brought with it an odd mixture of isolation, uncertainty, even notoriety. Just what were they to do with the material, and with their lives? Yet despite bouts of inner conflict, both Helen and Mari vigorously protected the integrity of the text and knew that they had received a rare and precious gift.

A Course of Love gives enormous importance to its predecessor. It says: “The world as a state of being, as a whole, has entered a time, brought on largely by *A Course in Miracles*, in which readiness for miracle-mindedness is upon it.” It did so “by threatening the ego.” (C:P.5)

A Course of Love is decidedly non-threatening, at least in its style. Jesus carefully and methodically progresses from The Course to The Treatises to The Dialogues—using logic, developing sometimes-radical ideas, yet speaking gently and always to the heart. Unlike *A Course in Miracles*, this Course presents few exercises, but rather offers a “mountaintop” experience in The Forty Days and Forty Nights. It speaks as much to “she” as to “he,” to sisters as to brothers, and strongly validates feminine ways of knowing. It reveals a “Way of Mary” that exists in symbiotic relationship to the “Way of Jesus” now ending. It emphasizes “being who you are” in a way that does not negate the personal self or the body. It reveals how the human form can be transformed into “the elevated Self of form,” and how an illusory world will be made “new”—divine—through relationship and unity.

Understandably, those familiar with *A Course in Miracles* may initially be skeptical of *A Course of Love's* authenticity, but they will recognize its

continuity. And although familiarity with *A Course in Miracles* offers valuable preparation and perspective, *A Course of Love* stands alone. Regardless of religious or spiritual background, those called to it will find treasure.

With this Combined Volume, *A Course of Love* ends its relative obscurity. Since originally transcribed, no concerted effort was made to promote it. Nevertheless, an “underground” of keen interest developed, including translations in foreign languages. Its time has come because so many yearn for connectivity of the heart and are bursting with passion to be who they really are.

This is not an ordinary spiritual book. “Something different is going on here.” (D:12.5) Let it wash over you. As Jesus says near the end of The Forty Days and Forty Nights:

This Course requires no thought and no effort. There is no prolonged study and the few specific exercises are not required. This Course has succeeded in ways you do not yet understand and have no need to understand. These words have entered your heart and sealed the rift between your mind and heart. (C:32.4)

This Course speaks as if it were written just for you. So it was. (D:Day40.31)

Glenn Hovemann, editor

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The text of this Combined Volume has been carefully compared with the original transcription and is presented as originally received, edited for minor matters such as spelling and punctuation only. To make it easily referenced, each paragraph has been numbered. A standard form of referencing is suggested on page 675.