

**Jesus:
The Manifestation of the Holy Spirit**

Excerpts from the Workshop held at the
Foundation for A Course in Miracles
Temecula CA

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**Part XI
Jesus as a Symbol**

I would now like to discuss Jesus as a symbol, and his importance as a symbol. I had mentioned earlier that the Course is written on the level of children—not chronological children, but children insofar as we do not understand the difference between appearance and reality, between truth and illusion. We are like children whom Jesus takes to the puppet show, who think things are really happening on the stage. So we become upset, we become glad, we laugh, we cry, we become frightened, etc. Jesus, as our loving older brother, is sitting there beside us, reminding us that what we see on the stage is not what we think it is. And this is a symbol for the fact that he is really in our minds, reminding us of what is not real. We can see the parallel to the prisoner in Plato's cave, who escapes from his bonds and comes back to remind all the prisoners that the shadows they perceive on the wall in front of them are not the reality—the reality is in back of them. In fact, there are a couple of references in the Course to Plato's cave (T-20.III.9:1-2; T-25.VI.2). Jesus is telling us the same thing. He addresses us in the Course at the level of little children because we do not understand what is real. Most of the time the Course is pitched on that level, although there are many statements throughout all three books that let us know that we are not separate, time is not real, the world is an illusion, God does not even know about us, etc. And so we get different levels in the Course. That makes the Course a powerful spiritual tool—no matter what level people come in on, it is written in such a way that they can relate to it and benefit from it.

In other words, if I study the Course and get nothing from it except the idea that God is loving and not hateful, that is pretty good. Or if I get nothing else from the Course than the idea that I will feel better if I let go of my grievances, that is still a lot. It is not what the *whole* Course is about, and many other spiritual paths teach the same thing. But if I do not get anything other than one of these ideas, I still can gain a great deal. But if I enter into the process that is the Course, then I will be led up the ladder, step-by-step, at whatever pace I can accept. Then gradually I will recognize what the Course is teaching on the highest level—that absolutely nothing is going on here, that all that is necessary for me to find the peace of God is to choose it, and that the means for me to attain that peace is forgiveness.

The entry level for the Course is the bottom rung or level. The workbook is pitched on that level, and it is an integral part of the curriculum of the Course. But it is a one-year training program. That is all it is. It is meant to help us begin a shift that is outlined for us in the text. The beginning of the workbook states that its lessons will be meaningful only within the theoretical context of the text (W-in.1:1). But the workbook starts from the premise that we do not know anything about anything—we do not know how to meditate or pray. And so the workbook on one level can be understood as a series of lessons in how to meditate or pray.

The workbook, thus, has a much greater emphasis than the text on asking the Holy Spirit for help and on asking to hear God's Voice. In fact, one workbook lesson specifically says we should ask God what we should do (W-pl.71.9), even though the text and other places in the workbook make it clear that God does not even know about us. In the last part of the workbook (W-pll.221-365), each lesson consists in part of a prayer addressed to God the Father from us—even though, in the teacher's manual (M-21.1:7) and also in Lesson 183, Jesus makes it clear that God does not even hear or understand words. And yet here are all these wonderfully inspiring words that we say to God.

This only makes sense when we understand the *content* that lies beneath the form, beneath the symbol. The great emphasis in the workbook—which is a mind-retraining program—is on listening to the Holy Spirit's Voice as a correction for what the ego has been telling us about the Holy Spirit. At the lowest level in the ego column on the chart, the ego's message basically is, "Don't ask God for help because God will destroy you. And even if the Holy Spirit is a kind Voice, there's no way He'll pay any attention to you, because you're so unworthy. The Holy Spirit will only speak to certain people." And so, if I am Roman Catholic, for example, those certain people are the priests. But every formal religion has its hierarchy of special people. So Jesus attempts to correct this error on the level at which we experience it, by telling us that the Holy Spirit speaks to all of us all the time. God does not play favorites. God does not love one person more than another.

Near the beginning of the text, Jesus tells us: "All my brothers are special" (T-1.V.3:6). He does not say that some are more special than others. He says that *all* of his brothers are special. But we all want to be more special than others. An important passage in a section in the text on special relationships speaks about how we demanded special love from God but did not get it (T-24.III.6). And we have been trying ever since to get it. We demand special love from Jesus, and we believe that either we are the recipients of it, or other people, far more worthy, are the recipients of it. Obviously, many in *A Course in Miracles'* world have seen Helen that way. Certain people are more worthy or more advanced or in some way better than I am because they can hear Jesus or the Holy Spirit in a way that I cannot.

So one of the purposes of the workbook is to correct our misunderstandings at the level where we believe we are. Jesus as an older brother is talking to us as very little children who do not understand. And he is telling us, "Yes, Daddy is not angry at you. Daddy hears all your prayers. In fact, here are all these wonderful prayers I have written for you to say to Him. And yes, Daddy will tell you what to do and where to go. And Daddy's Voice is within you and will tell you what you should do all the time. He loves you just as much as He loves everybody else." What is important is that we begin to undo the specialness—both in its positive and negative forms—that tells us that God's Love is only to be dispensed to certain people at certain times. One of the Course's major teachings is to have us realize that God loves us all the same, and His Voice speaks to us all the time.

That is the correction on the level of form, on the level of the symbol. In other passages, Jesus makes it clear that this is not the reality. In fact in the manual he says, "Very few can hear God's Voice at all" (M-12.3:3), even though the workbook tells us that "God's Voice speaks to me all through the day" (W-pl.49). If it were really that easy to hear the Holy Spirit, none of us would be here. The whole world was literally made to silence His Voice. The Course, borrowing from the Old Testament, refers to the Holy Spirit's Voice as "the still, small Voice for God [which] is not drowned out by all the ego's raucous screams and senseless ravings to those who want to hear it" (T-21.V.1:6).

The ego makes up its "raucous shrieks" (W-pl,49.4:3)—all the clutter and clatter in our minds and all the clutter and clatter in the world that simply mirrors our minds—to drown out this Voice. We obviously have a tremendous investment in this raucous shrieking, because we believe we are bodies. Bodies make a hell of a lot of noise, especially if we do not feed them on time, if we do not rest them or recreate them, and especially if we do not give them oxygen so they can breathe. And our bodies are always making internal noises, too—our hearts are always beating, our stomachs growl. Everything makes noises. All the sounds are just symbolic expressions of the noise of guilt in our minds whose purpose is to drown out that still, small Voice that basically says nothing at all—the song of prayer has no words, no notes. And in that quiet nothingness the Love of God is found.

And yet it is that quiet that we are so afraid of. Therefore, doing 365 days of lessons is not going to bring us into that place in our minds where we can hear the Holy Spirit's Voice. If you can do it that quickly, I assure you *A Course in Miracles* is not for you—you do not need it. For most of us it is not that easy. That is why that line I just quoted is there in the manual: "Very few can hear God's Voice at all." It is the text that gives the basic teaching of the Course—its theory, its theology. That is not the purpose of the workbook, even though it has many beautiful and profound passages. The workbook's purpose is to retrain our minds, starting at ground zero. We all believe that, if there is a God at all, He is hateful, He is vengeful, and He is not our friend. And so the purpose of the workbook is to teach us that we are all worthy to hear God's Voice, which speaks to us all through the day.

The text, though, makes very clear how fearful we are of this loving Voice, and how fearful we are of Jesus. That is why Jesus speaks in a few places in the text of our need to forgive him (T-19.IV-A.17:1; T-19.IV-B.6,7; T-20.I.2:8; T-20.II.4,6). He does not need our forgiveness for his own Atonement—he is beyond that. But he cannot help us—his love will not be accessible to us—as long as we are afraid of him or angry at him because he has something we do not have. That is why he talks about our need to forgive all the bitter idols we have made of him (C-5.5:7-8). But even more than the bitter idols, we have to forgive him for being the truly loving brother that he is—that is what we really hate him for. We are all quite comfortable with a Lord who believes in sacrifice and judgment and punishment. It is much more difficult to accept a brother who simply loves us.

But if the love of Jesus within our minds is true, then everything the ego has taught us is false. The world made Jesus to be an awful symbol of either special hate—all the bitter idols—or special love—someone who has something we do not have. Since Jesus then became the symbol of God for us in this world—and it is not a very nice symbol—the Course uses that symbol as part of the correction process. And that is why the presence of Jesus is so important and so manifest in the Course—in terms of the first-person references that make it clear that he is the source of the material, as well as all the references to his crucifixion and resurrection, and, above all, the many references where he speaks of himself as our loving brother who wants to help us, encouraging us in one way or another to take his hand and go home with him. The world made of Jesus a symbol of hate and specialness, and so we need a correction.

We need a Jesus who is always present to us, who meets our needs, who answers our prayers, who speaks to us all through the day, just as the Holy Spirit does. This Jesus, as we have seen, is also an illusion. But it is the only illusion we can relate to that can lead us beyond all illusions and back to the Love of God that is abstract and formless. Jesus is as real as you or I are real. To whatever extent we believe that we are real, that we are bodies and separate personalities, to that extent he also is real. So we do not want to throw out the baby with the bath water. If you say, "Well, he's an illusion" that's fine,

but just be clear that if you say that and mean it, then you also must really know that *you* are an illusion as well. And no one in this world knows that. If you dismiss Jesus as an illusion but continue to believe *you* are real, you are confusing levels.

Jesus is an illusion, but so are all of us. As long as we believe that we are here and have all the needs that we have, then Jesus is just as real as we are. He is a symbol, but we are also a symbol. He is a symbol of the Love of God. We are a symbol of the hatred, the fear, the separation, and the guilt of the ego. We are a symbol within the separated mind. He is a symbol within the separated mind. We are a symbol of guilt that has taken form. He is a symbol of love that also has taken form. So he is no different from us.

Jesus is an illusion—that is true—but on the same level that *we* are all illusion. On a practical level, since we obviously all believe that we are here and have bodies and personalities with needs, on that level Jesus then becomes incredibly important. In fact, in terms of the Course process, there is no way of undoing the ego thought system without forgiving Jesus and accepting his love. I have always thought it is a cute ploy on his part that he does not make belief in him mandatory. In fact, in a passage near the end of the manual, he says that we can still be helped even if we do not believe in him (C-5.6:6). On the other hand, he does ask us to forgive him. And it is very difficult to forgive someone whom you do not believe in.

Accepting Jesus as my teacher and taking his hand is the way to receive the help he represents. In that sense, he is "the way, the truth and the life" (T-6.1.10:3). He obviously is not the *only* way and truth and life. But for students of the Course, he is. And certainly for most people who have grown up in the western world, I think he is. That does not mean, by the way, that there is anything wrong if you find yourself more comfortable relating to the Holy Spirit than to Jesus. The Course gives a student a choice between the Holy Spirit and Jesus as our internal teacher. But we definitely need an internal teacher. The very fact that we think we are here is the proof that we have listened to the wrong teacher.

Early in the text, Jesus tells us that he can "control... everything that does not matter" and "direct everything that does" (T-2.VI.1:3). In other words, we turn our egos over to him—which means we look at our egos with him—and that is how he controls "everything that does not matter." We bring our egos to him. We bring the darkness to his light, and when the darkness is gone, his light simply works through us. That is how he guides us.

Therefore, we need another teacher who represents another thought system—not a thought system of fear, hatred, and defense, but a thought system of love, unity, and forgiveness. Jesus becomes the symbol of that other thought system, just as each of us has become a symbol of the ego thought system. What we seem to experience as our reality here is simply an outward expression or symbol of an ego thought in our mind. Hence, as long as we believe we are here, we need someone who symbolizes a different thought—and Jesus represents that for us.