

What It Means to Be a Teacher of God

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Part I

I have structured the topic, *what it means to be a teacher of God*, into three basic categories, based on the more important sections in the teachers' manual that deal with the teacher of God. The first is the characteristics of God's teacher, at the beginning of the manual (M-4). The second is the theme of magic, an extremely important issue in the manual, and a crucial one for anyone who works with the Course. We will discuss not only what magic thoughts are and how they interfere with our functioning, but also the important issue of how one deals with anger, which is closely related to the concept of magic thoughts. The final theme is healing and the relationship between teaching and healing, which actually are the same. So these are the three basic areas of being a teacher of God that we will talk about.

I will begin by saying a few words of introduction about what a teacher of God is and is not. The phrase *a teacher of God* does not appear in the text or the workbook at all—it is used only in the manual. Basically, a teacher of God is anyone who has accepted his or her function, which is to teach and learn forgiveness. The Course says that "the sole responsibility of the miracle worker is to accept the Atonement for himself" (T-2.V.5:1, T-5.V.7:8, M-7.3:2). At the moment that we accept that as why we are here, we become a teacher. The Course repeatedly equates teaching and learning. We teach what we are learning and, as we teach it, we learn it. We are all teaching and learning all the time. This teaching-learning theme is reflected in the very structure of the Course. Its three books include a textbook, which obviously we are supposed to study; a workbook, which obviously is supposed to teach us as we practice its lessons, and a teachers' manual, which reminds us of our teaching-learning function. So the curriculum, by its very structure, emphasizes that we are all teachers and students at the same time.

A lovely summary of what it means to be a teacher of God is given early in the manual:

A teacher of God is anyone who chooses to be one. His qualifications consist solely in this; somehow, somewhere he has made a deliberate choice in which he did not see his interests as apart from someone else's (M-1.1:1-2).

The principle criterion that establishes one as a teacher of God is that he sees joining, and not separation, as his reality. This is also a way of characterizing the difference between a holy relationship and a special relationship. In a special relationship, we always see our interests as different and separate and more important than anyone else's. In our minds, then, this justifies the murderous attack that is the underlying content of specialness. In a holy relationship, on the other hand, I do not perceive you as separate from me nor as having interests separate from mine. Rather, we go to Heaven together. This shift is not on the level of form—it occurs in my mind, so that I do not perceive my salvation as separate from or independent of you.

Thus, attacking you in the belief that my attack on you will let me off the hook so I will feel better will keep me in the ego's hell. In the shift to a holy relationship, I recognize that you are really one with me and we both share the same problem. We and everyone else on this earth believe that we are trapped in the world without any hope of getting free. And in joining with you, I realize that we share the common interest of awakening from this nightmare dream. That is what characterizes the teacher of God and makes the relationship holy. Not that we identify with that purpose perfectly. If we did, we would not be here. That simply is what our goal has become. This is a theme that we will return to over and over again in this workshop.

As in many other areas of its teachings, the Course talks about *a teacher of God* on two levels. It is clear in the introduction to the section on the characteristics of God's teachers that the characteristics belong to what the Course refers to as the "advanced teachers of God" (M-4.2:2)—those who have already learned some of the more basic lessons of forgiveness. Once those basic lessons are learned, then we share in the ten characteristics.

On another level, however, we are all teachers because we are all learning. On this level, being a teacher of God does not mean that we have mastered all the lessons. In fact, a point is made in the text that is repeated in the characteristics of God's teachers, which should always be remembered as a comfort: readiness does not mean mastery (T-2.VII.7, M-4.IX.1:10). We can be ready to teach without having mastered the curriculum. If that were not true, none of us could do anything because, obviously, none of us has mastered the curriculum of the Course.

So we learn the Course—and obviously this is meant, not intellectually, but experientially—by learning our forgiveness lessons. The more we learn them, the more we teach them. And as we teach them, we are also learning them. Teaching and learning are always reciprocal.

A teacher of God is not someone who teaches great things or does great things in the world. Rather, a teacher of God is someone who has accepted his purpose in this world as learning forgiveness. When the Course talks about function, it is not talking about anything external. It is talking only about accepting a function of forgiveness. And ultimately, of course, we do not forgive the person out there. We forgive ourselves.

Once we accept forgiveness as our purpose—not once we have learned it, but once we have accepted it as our purpose—then we are established as teachers. And then I will see that everything that happens in my daily life, as well as what happens in the course of my whole life, is part of a classroom in which I learn my lessons of forgiveness. So it does not matter whether things go well or things do not go well as I evaluate them. I will realize they are all the same because they all share the same purpose. The Course says the only question we should ask about anything is: what is it for? (T-4.V.6:7-9). If we listen to the ego, then everything is for establishing that we are victims or somebody else is a victim. And everything in the world is seen from that point of view—the whole theme of victimization is alive and well in this world. And that, of course, keeps the ego alive and well.

The Holy Spirit, in contrast, sees everything in this world as serving the purpose of undoing that belief in victimization—that is what forgiveness does. Once we accept forgiveness as our function, we become teachers of God, who see everything in this world as enabling us to learn the lesson that there are no victims. And as we learn it, the Love of the Holy Spirit and of Jesus extends through us. And that teaches

others. It is not our words or actions or behavior that teach—it is the Love of God through us that teaches simply by its presence.

The Course, as we know, makes a distinction between form and content. The form is our words, our behavior, and our deeds. But those are not what teach. It is our *content* that teaches. In other words, if love is in my mind and there is nothing else extending through me, then no matter what I am doing or not doing, the message I am teaching is love. It makes no difference whether I am standing up in front of a class teaching *A Course in Miracles* or I am teaching a third grade class how to read and write and add. It is not the form that teaches—it is the content in my mind that teaches. The words and the behavior become simply the means through which that content or that love in my mind is expressed.

Let us go to the teachers' manual now, and we will start with the characteristics of God's teachers **(M-4)**. We will discuss these ten characteristics in depth—this is actually a good way of talking about what the whole Course is about. We will begin with the **Introduction**.

(1:1-2) The surface traits of God's teachers are not at all alike. They do not look alike to the body's eyes, they come from vastly different backgrounds, their experiences of the world vary greatly, and their superficial "personalities" are quite distinct.

This is obvious to anyone. Everyone looks different from everyone else. We are all different in form. The characteristics this is addressing are of content, of attitude—not how we look, or what we say or do, but basically how we think and the characteristics of that thinking.

(1:3) Nor, at the beginning stages of their functioning as teachers of God, have they as yet acquired the deeper characteristics that will establish them as what they are.

This is the initial level of being a teacher, the first of the two levels I described earlier. The "beginning stages" would be our starting out on the journey of forgiveness, which comes with the recognition that that is our purpose in being here. We have not yet begun the process of truly learning and integrating what these lessons are—we are still starting out.

(1:4) God gives special gifts to His teachers, because they have a special role in His plan for Atonement.

This is one of those statements which, if taken out of context, does make it sound as if God has favorites, which is clearly antithetical to everything the Course is saying. This really is saying that those whom the Course would call "advanced teachers"—those who really have let go of their investment in guilt, separation, attack, fear, etc.—have accepted the gifts that are already there. And basically there is only one gift from God—the gift of Love. Or we could say the gift of freedom or the gift of eternal life—all different aspects of the same basic gift. None of these aspects can be known in this world, as we will read at the end of this section on the characteristics (M-4.X.3). What is known in this world is the *reflection* of this gift of Love.

The ten characteristics of God's teachers then are reflections of this one gift that God has already given to all of us. So when the Course says here that God gives His special gifts, it really is that the advanced teachers who have set aside their egos, are allowing themselves to accept and experience God's Love. That Love then will manifest itself in their daily living through these ten characteristics. Please do not think that God favors certain people or gives His gifts only to those who are good, etc.

(1:5) Their specialness is, of course, only temporary; set in time as a means of leading out of time.

In this sense, someone like Jesus is special. All special relationships are based on the idea that we are different from each other. You have something special that I need and I want to get it from you—that is special love. Or you have certain special traits that I hate, and therefore I am justified in attacking you—that is special hate. But they are all predicated on the idea that we are different. The Course makes it very clear that we are different in time, but we are not different in eternity. Hence, the Course talks about both beginning and advanced stages of a teacher of God. The section on *trust* (M-4.1) describes six stages in the development of trust. It is obviously talking about differences—different people will be at different stages. Now there is always the danger of trying to determine who is at what stage and when they got there, etc.—that is an ego trick.

But in this world there are differences and so Jesus in the Course is basically saying to us, "I am no different from you in eternity, but in time I am different because I am wiser than you are. I have awakened from the dream and I will now reach back and help everyone else awaken from that same dream." Within time there are differences—we are not asked to deny that. The idea would be that we not make judgments based upon the differences. Because Jesus has already awakened from the dream does not mean that he is any better than anyone else or that God loves him more. It simply means that he loves himself more at this point than we love ourselves. But those differences disappear when the ego disappears. This same idea is expressed when Jesus says, "You are not guiltless in time, but in eternity" (T-13.I.3:2). In the world of time, which is the world of illusion, the world of the dream, we are all guilty. Otherwise we would not be here. But that is not our true reality in Heaven—we are all the same in Heaven. In this world we are not the same.

(1:6-7) These special gifts, born in the holy relationship toward which the teaching-learning situation is geared, become characteristic of all teachers of God who have advanced in their own learning. In this respect they are all alike.

What gives birth to these special gifts, then, is the holy relationship. We evolve towards and accept these ten characteristics through the process of letting go of all of our negative feelings about ourselves, about each other and about God—that is forgiveness. As I said earlier, forgiveness does not do anything—it *undoes*. It simply takes away what the ego has put there.

God has given us His Love as our true Identity. But we have covered it over with guilt, hatred, and fear. So we do not have to do anything about the Love of God within us—it is already there. But we do have to identify the interferences that we have placed between ourselves and love's presence in our minds, so that forgiveness can take them away. That is how we advance on our spiritual path.

So forgiveness allows us to accept these special gifts by helping us undo or take away all the ego thoughts that we have put in our minds to take the place of the thought of Love that God gave us. These special gifts, therefore, will be characteristic of all of us once we choose forgiveness. And, as we will see as we review them, for most of the characteristics to have one really implies all the others. All ten are really just different ways of talking about what automatically and inevitably must follow when we let go of our belief in sin and guilt. And forgiveness is the process by which that happens.

(2:1-2) All differences among the Sons of God are temporary. Nevertheless, in time it can be said that the advanced teachers of God have the following characteristics:

In the end, all differences will disappear. But as long as we are in time there will be those who are "advanced." Again there is a real danger in trying to identify who is advanced and who is not—it is always the ego that would do that, because the ego is always interested in differences. And if the ego is doing it, we know right from the start it is a mistake. When the ego does anything, it always judges based on form, never content. And that is one of the primary ways of distinguishing a special relationship from a holy one. A special relationship always evaluates love based on form—love for the ego is always quantitative rather than qualitative. It can be measured. Similarly, hatred is always based upon form—I hate something in you or I hate you. I do not recognize that what I hate in you is really what I hate in myself, which means that we are both the same.

All specialness—everything of the ego—is based upon differences. And all differences are evaluated based on form. So when we try to judge who is more or less spiritually advanced, we always use a set of criteria in our minds based on form to make our evaluation.