

*Inner Healing: A Spiritual Process*  
by Dan Joseph

Revised Edition  
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## Author's Note

*Inner Healing* was originally published in 2002. Recently I decided to go back and update the language of the book. I also clarified some concepts and replaced the original Notes section with a new series of Question-and-Answers.

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I may edit or add to *Inner Healing* in the future. You are welcome to visit [www.SpiritSite.com](http://www.SpiritSite.com) to check for newer versions. The copy you are currently reading was updated in May 2019.

## Introduction

*Inner Healing* is a book about opening to an experience of inner peace. I believe this sense of peace is waiting to enter our awareness, and that it simply needs an opening.

*Inner Healing* draws upon several spiritual and psychological practices, most particularly *A Course in Miracles*. For those who are not familiar with it, *A Course in Miracles* is a program of “spiritual psychotherapy” that focuses on releasing blocks to the experience of this peace.

In the following chapters, I will focus on a simple practice that the Course outlines: the practice of identifying any distressing thoughts and feelings, and becoming willing to exchange those burdens for an inflow of inspiration.

In [Part One](#) of this book, I present a three-step process that facilitates this experience. I spend a few chapters exploring each of the three steps in greater detail. In [Part Two](#), I add “advanced techniques” to help with these steps. [Part Three](#) contains a series of exercises to make the work practical. Finally, in [Part Four](#), I conclude with a series of questions-and-answers.

You are welcome to skip around in the book if you would like. Although I have written the material so that each section builds on the previous one, the core practice remains consistent throughout.

I’d like to be clear that this three-step process is simply one way of opening our minds and hearts to an experience of peace. There are countless other approaches, all valid. However, I do find that this process is one effective way to support the goal of inner healing.

## Part One



### The Three-Step Process

## The Three Steps



### An Overview

There is a three-step process that I have found to be very helpful in my life. Although it is a simple practice, it can be powerful.

Here are the three steps:

At step one, we honestly acknowledge some of our inner blocks to peace – any thoughts or feelings that are causing us distress.

At step two, we express our willingness to release those blocks.

At step three, we open to an experience of divinely-inspired comfort and peace, even if just for a moment.

That inflow of peace is what *A Course in Miracles* calls a “miracle.” It is the goal of the three-step process.

Although those three steps are simple in theory, they are not always easy to practice. However, I find that they can produce very tangible results.



Let me offer an example of the three steps in order to clarify them.

I recently found myself in a conflict with a business associate of mine. He was delaying signing an agreement, and I felt upset. Instead of squashing down my sense of upset, or “venting” it toward my associate, I decided to run through this three-step process.

To begin, I sat down and took note of my feelings. “I’m feeling annoyed right now,” I admitted. “I’m also feeling impatient about getting this agreement signed.”

I then identified some of the thoughts behind those feelings. “I think that this guy is being disrespectful,” I said. “I suspect that he’s delaying this agreement on purpose. Those are a few of my unpeaceful thoughts.”

That honest acknowledgement of my thoughts and feelings completed step one. Then I moved on to step two. I became willing to release those thoughts and feelings, recognizing that they were causing me distress.

“I’m willing to release these old thoughts,” I said. “I am willing to exchange them for something new.”

I imagined placing my thoughts and feelings into a stream, as if they were objects in my hands. I imagined watching them float downstream. As I did that, I felt a lightening in my heart.

Then I moved on to step three. “I’m open to a new experience of this situation. I’m willing to receive a clearer, wiser perspective.”

As I said that, I quietly held my mind open to something new. A sense of security arose in me, and I began to see my associate in a warmer way. My feelings of annoyance about the situation were gradually replaced with a greater sense of patience. As my attitude shifted, I felt comfortable giving my associate more time to respond.

A few days later, I found out that our business agreement had been mixed-up in the mail. My original interpretation of the situation turned out to be completely off-base! My associate and I ended up working out our agreement without a problem.

That was a simple example of the three-step process. By acknowledging some of my painful thoughts and feelings (step one), becoming willing to release them (step two), and opening to

the inflow of a more illuminated set of thoughts (step three), my mind was comforted.

The whole process took only a minute or two. But it inspired a clearer approach to the situation. If I had ignored my sense of distress, or “taken it out” on my associate, I would have stayed in conflict. But by becoming willing to exchange my burdensome thoughts for some inspired replacements, my state of mind – and the relationship – was improved.

## Divine Love

The real goal of the three-step process is to open to an experience of divine love, peace, and wisdom – our “inner light,” as some people call it. It is this light that heals us; our job is simply to clear the way for it. In the three-step process, we identify our inner blocks to this light, become willing to release those blocks, and open to receive an inflow of comfort.

When I began working with *A Course in Miracles*, I didn’t understand the importance of this practice. At the time, I was enchanted by spiritual ideas. I loved to gather philosophical insights. But I didn’t understand that there was some active inner work to be done.

After years spent studying the Course and other spiritual writings, I realized that I must be doing something wrong. I understood the ideas fairly well, but I was as unhappy as ever. It was at that point that I began to do the work that the Course describes – this active work of exchanging my inner blocks for a set of inspired replacements. Suddenly, like a car stuck in the mud for years, I began to inch forward.

In many ways, I am still a beginner at this practice. Perhaps we all are. However, I find that beginners can support each other quite well. My purpose in writing this book is to explore the three-step process, share my experiences, and offer some simple exercises for practicing.

## More Detail on the Process



### A closer look at the three steps

Let me explore each of the three steps in slightly more detail. As with everything I write, I encourage you to read through these ideas and then adapt them in whatever way feels meaningful to you. I find that flexibility is essential in this type of work.

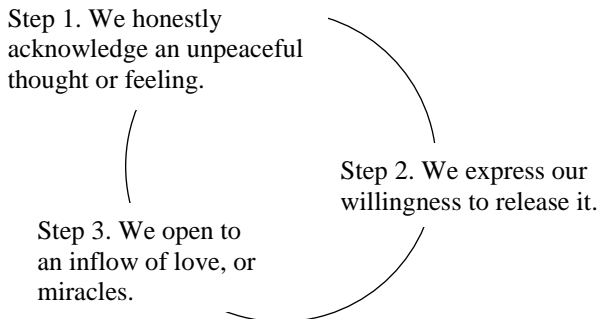
If at any point things begin to feel “theoretical,” you’re welcome to turn directly to [Part Three](#) of this book, which contains practical exercises for application.

Let me recap the three steps:

At step one, we acknowledge some of our distressing thoughts and feelings. These may include resentments, worries, self-judgments, or other forms of upset.

At step two, we express our willingness to release those distressing thoughts and feelings.

At step three, we open our hearts and minds – even just for a moment – to a divinely-inspired inflow of love, or miracles.



Let me now take a deeper look at each of the three steps.



## Step One



We acknowledge some of our distressing thoughts.

At step one, we become honest about the thoughts and feelings that are interfering with a sense of peace. We say, “I have a resentment against that person,” or, “I’m worried about this situation,” or whatever else is interfering with a sense of peace.

This can be a challenging step. “Bringing up” these thoughts and feelings into our awareness can be humbling. It may be difficult, for example, to admit that we’re feeling jealous toward someone, or guilty, or afraid. But if we courageously, and with great self-acceptance, raise those thoughts and feelings to our awareness, we can exchange them for an experience of peace.

At step one of the three-step process, we make note about where we feel blocked – anxious, sad, angry, or whatever. Our job at this step is simply to become honest about any blocks to peace. This prepares us for the next two steps, in which we release those blocks to our inner light, and open to an inflow of miracles.

I’ve found that some people who try to “stay positive” in their lives may have difficulty with step one. Acknowledging an angry or self-attacking thought may feel like a step backward. Admitting to feeling sad or lonely may conflict with an effort to “stay upbeat.” It may seem better to keep the distressing thoughts hidden.

*A Course in Miracles*, however, asks us to honestly acknowledge any blocks so that we can become willing to release them. At step one, we simply admit to ourselves where we feel stuck.

Step One Avoidance Tricks

The mind can play some funny tricks to avoid acknowledging its blocks. Like many of us, I find that sometimes when I'm upset, I search for someone to "pin" my thoughts on instead of admitting what's going on inside.

For example, I remember having a conversation with a friend of mine that went like this:

"How are you doing?" my friend asked.

"I'm fine," I said. "But I'll tell you – this guy I know is being really irritating."

"So you're feeling upset?"

"Oh, no," I said, "I feel great. It's just that this person is acting annoying."

"I see. So you're feeling annoyed."

"No, I told you – I'm wonderful. I feel great. It's just that this guy is acting like a jerk!"

In that situation, I didn't want to acknowledge my thoughts and feelings. I didn't want to admit that I was angry or annoyed. Instead, I wanted to see another person as the problem. I chose to focus on his "annoying behavior" instead of admitting that *I* was in a state of annoyance.

This kind of circle can go on for a long time. Many psychotherapists call this "projection." Instead of acknowledging our own thoughts and feelings (for example, my annoyance), we focus on someone else's behavior. We try to "project" our thoughts by seeing them outside of us.

Step one of the three-step process reverses this. It turns our focus to our own state of mind. To be sure, there are many people in the world who are acting in unloving ways. But our inner healing doesn't occur by focusing on their unkind behavior. It occurs by releasing our *own* inner blocks. At step one, we identify

where we are in need of a change.

As we identify some of our blocks to peace – our grievances, worries, and so forth – we don't need to analyze them. We simply become aware of them. That completes step one. Once we have done that, we can quickly move on to step two.

## Step Two



We become willing to release our blocks to the light.

Having become aware of our unpeaceful thoughts and feelings in step one, the Course asks us to immediately bring them to our inner light to be replaced.

As I see it, our distressing thoughts are like splinters that stick into us and cause us pain. At step one, we admit that we're being troubled by the thought splinters – not just the outside situation. At step two, we turn to the doctor and allow her to take the splinters out.

Some people stop me at this point and say, “But I've tried to change my mind! I just can't change my angry (or fearful, or self-critical) thoughts!” I understand this response. When we're in a state of distress, it can be nearly impossible to single-handedly lift ourselves out of it.

However, *A Course in Miracles* doesn't ask us to do the work by ourselves. We're not asked to change our painful thoughts into inspired ones using only our own personal efforts. Rather, we're simply asked to release our hold on our thoughts, and allow the light of the spirit to transform them.

There are countless ways to practice the willingness-to-release process of step two. A simple approach that I often use is a short prayer:

Divine spirit, here are my burdensome thoughts.  
I am angry at this person,  
Frightened about that situation,  
And I feel guilty because I see myself as having failed.  
These thoughts and feelings are hurting me.  
I am willing to give them to you.

I am willing to receive a sense of comfort and healing.

The key at step two is the desire to release our unloving thoughts, and the willingness to let the exchange happen. As with everything, this can become easier with practice.

## Imagery

I sometimes use symbolic imagery in this “releasing” process – particularly if I feel unfocused. When I do this process with a friend of mine, we bundle together our unforgiving thoughts and offer them to our inner light like a bunch of packages.

Other times I feel the weight of my stressful thoughts as if they were rocks in a backpack that I’ve been carrying around. I try to experience how heavy those thoughts feel. Then I become willing to hand that burden over to the light, feeling the weight leave me.

Water can also be a helpful image. We can imagine a cleansing rain washing away our painful thoughts. Or we can see ourselves dropping our old thoughts into a river that carries them away. We can watch them float downstream, released from our minds.

There are other methods besides imagery. I know one man who actually stands up and raises his hands during this process as he says out loud, “Spirit, I release this to you.” Involving a concrete, physical movement helps him to release his burdensome thoughts.

I don’t think that there is any one “releasing” format that’s best for everyone. The key is simply to hold a willingness to let the thoughts go. If imagery, prayers, or any other technique helps you, you can certainly use it. If you wish to just quietly say, “I am willing to let this go,” that is equally good.

Once we have identified an inner block, and expressed our willingness to have it be removed, we can then move on to the final step of the three-step process.

## Step Three



We open our minds to the inflow of new, inspired thoughts and feelings.

As I see it, divine love is like an eternally flowing river. There is no end to it, and it wishes only to flow into and through us. The experience of this love can be temporarily blocked by our inhibiting thoughts – our grievances toward others, our self-attacking thoughts, and so forth. But the instant the blocks are removed, the river flows through our hearts once again.

Because of this, step three in the process requires the least amount of work. At step one, we honestly acknowledge an inner block. At step two, we state our willingness to release that block. Step three is the reward step for our work. At step three, we simply open our minds and hearts to the inflow of divine love, wisdom, and comfort.

I believe that every one of us desires the experience of this comfort. The Course points out how many ways we seek for comfort outside ourselves – through worldly acquisitions, possessive relationships, and so forth. I have spent years seeking comfort and security through those forms, and have rarely found it there. The good news is that the comfort we seek is available right now; it simply needs an opening.

Step three does require some effort on our part, but the effort is directed at keeping the channel open. In step one, we found the sluice gate in the dam. We threw it open in step two, by expressing our willingness to release our interference. In step three, the river of divinely-inspired thoughts and feelings begin to flow back in. Our job now is to make sure that the gate stays open.

When *A Course in Miracles* refers to a “miracle,” it is talking about the experience of step three. As the divine flow of inspired

thoughts reaches us, our minds are healed. But that isn't all. A sense of love returns to us, and our whole experience of the world is altered. We are filled with an experience of compassion and care, which spills out from us into the world. The inner healing that takes place at step three truly is a miracle.

As the Course points out, the external issue that sparked our need for an inner healing may or may not seem to change. But externals will fade into the background as we're filled with an inner sense of true peace. We have found and handed over the core problem in steps one and two – the core problem being our self-criticism, our sense of aloneness, and so forth. We are receiving a core correction in step three: an inner, personal sense of divine care and comfort. That healing-at-the-core is what the Course is focused on.

At times we may identify an interfering thought at step one, and express our willingness to release it at step two. But we may not immediately feel a great inflow of love, or miracles. This doesn't mean we have done something wrong. The inner light may enter our awareness as a little trickle at first. It may take some time for our minds and hearts to truly open.

Many of us have spent years generating unpeaceful thoughts and attitudes. It may take practice before the habits we've developed are reoriented. If there is one thing that the Course has taught me, it's that persistence, gentleness, and a calm, patient approach is essential in this type of work.

## Outflow

There is an additional part of step three that could possibly be split off as a "step four." However, in the interest of keeping things simple, I'd like to include it in this step. The addition is the practice of allowing our inner light to extend through us to other people.

As I wrote earlier, I look at divine love as a river. Just as a river doesn't flow into our land and stop there, so this love doesn't

terminate with us. It flows through us, to others.

Because of this, I find it helpful to allow the inner miracles of step three – the new, inspired thoughts and feelings – to extend outward to other people I think about, and other things I see. As those miracles flow out, they continue to flow in.

As an example, let's say that I pause during a conflict with a friend to practice this three-step process. I identify some of my conflict thoughts (step one). I then express my willingness to let them go (step two). A sense of peace begins to arise in me (step three).

If I stop at that point, I will have moved in the right direction. However, if I want to truly keep the river flowing, I can actively extend my newfound peace to my friend – through thoughts, words, or actions. Even if I've only been able to let in a glimmer of peace, it will grow as I let it move through me.

The flow of divine love, like the flow of a river, can be blocked in two ways. It can be blocked upstream, between us and its source. Or it can be blocked downstream, between us and others. Blockages on either side will impede the flow.

At the beginning of step three, we clear the inflow. We exchange our distressing thoughts for the spirit's loving replacements. But it's also important to keep the outflow clear – to let that love flow through us. As we let love, wisdom, and peace extend from us to others, those experiences will continue to flow in.

During our practice of step three, you may find yourself once again inhibited by an inner block – a grievance or a flash of fear or something. If so, you can simply return to steps one and two. You can identify the block, express your willingness to release it, and welcome the inflow of peace.

In my experience, this is an ongoing practice. It isn't something that we do once, and then are done with. We will undoubtedly hit a new bit of interference as we go along. The skill is simply to



recognize this, and once again turn to our inner light for help.

## The Practice of Step One



### Raising the blocks to awareness

Let me now take a deeper look at each of the three steps, beginning with the first one.

The trickiest step might be step one – the “acknowledging the blocks” step. It can be challenging to honestly admit our resentful, fearful, or self-critical thoughts. The process requires us to shift our attention from an outside situation to our state of mind. This requires some discipline – even courage.

To illustrate this, let’s imagine that you experience a “crisis” at work. If you’re like me, your normal tendency in that type of situation may be to squash down any uncomfortable thoughts and feelings, and focus exclusively on fixing the outside situation.

The problem with that approach, however, is that your state of mind will influence your whole experience of the worldly situation. Ignoring your thoughts and feelings is like ignoring a hole in the bottom of a boat, choosing only to bail out the rising water.

The Course asks us to stop and take at least a few moments to identify how we’re feeling and what we’re thinking. By doing this, we can locate any holes and let them be filled.

As I mentioned before, this does take some discipline. When we’re faced with a problem, a sense of threat often kicks in, and that sense of threat steers our attention outward, toward the apparent problem. What we’re asked to do in step one is pause for a moment and turn our attention within. We’re asked to stop and take an inventory of our thoughts.

Let’s say that a business project that I’m working on runs into a

problem. As soon as I learn the news, I anxiously pick up the phone in order to address the external situation. But then I stop and sit down for a moment.

While I'm sitting, I spend a few moments practicing step one – honestly searching my mind for any unpeaceful thoughts and feelings.

“This feels like a disaster!” I say to myself. “I can think of so many things that could go wrong! I feel really worried about what could happen.”

That type of honest inner-identification takes only a few seconds. But it is a significant step. It turns my attention from the outside form to the inside content. It sets me on the path toward healing my mind.

If I refuse to do that step, I will likely pick up the phone and begin to project all of my conflict thoughts outward. I might snap at someone, or become defensive and blameful. This will, of course, only add more burdens to my mind. By refusing to acknowledge my inner situation, I'm not only failing to let it be healed; I'm probably going to end up increasing my distress.

If, on the other hand, I stop and identify my upsetting thoughts and feelings, I can gather them together and open them to the light to be healed. The process begins with an acknowledgement of the inner blocks.

### Feelings as Indicators

A helpful technique at step one is the practice of monitoring how we *feel* throughout the day. If we find ourselves falling into a state of anxiety, sadness, or anger, we can try to “catch” that and take a survey of our thoughts.

For example, I recently received a phone call that was related to a project I was working on. I handled the phone call and left to run some errands.

While driving around, I realized that I felt somewhat upset. There was no obvious reason for this, but it was a good signal. I stopped the car for a few minutes and took an inventory of my thoughts.

As I turned my attention to my state of mind, I was able to quickly uncover a series of inhibiting thoughts. They were little things, sparked by my phone call – little worries and irritations. They were, in fact, so little that I never “caught” them in the moment. But left unchecked, they snowballed. When I realized that I felt uncomfortable, I was able to stop and do a quick inner survey. I then practiced exchanging my old thoughts for a new perspective.

One of the ideas that I will cover in a later chapter is the idea that our thoughts and feelings are closely related. Feelings are like “signal flares” targeting underlying thoughts. Feelings can serve as pointers to the parts of our minds in need of help.

If we become very sensitive to our feelings, we can quickly identify when we are in need of comfort. As we notice ourselves slipping into emotional distress, we can stop and run through the three-step process. I will discuss this dynamic more fully later.

## Observation

The process of acknowledging our thoughts and feelings can actually be viewed as something of a game. The challenge of step one is to stay aware of what’s running through our minds. I sometimes imagine myself like an inventory manager in a factory, watching a series of items roll by.

My only job during step one is to note each thought and feeling as it crosses my mind, and check it off. “Ah, yes – a resentment against so-and-so person. Some worry about what’s going to happen next week. A sense of failure about that thing.”

The aim at this step is to become aware of our mind’s contents. I find that a calm – even “relaxed” – perspective is helpful. Our job is simply to stay honest about what is going on inside. We are the

observers in this process, noting each thought as it passes by.

I'd like to be clear that this observation process is different from intellectual analysis. I used to believe that I had to intellectually pick apart the thoughts that passed by. I believed that I had to stop the conveyor belt and figure out why each thought was present, what it meant, and so forth.

I now believe that it's enough to acknowledge our feelings, observe our thoughts, and open them all up to the light. We may, of course, want to take a deeper "look" at a particular thought or feeling. But our emphasis can be on immediately opening it to be illuminated. We don't need to sit around in a state of analysis.

At step one, we become aware of our inner blocks. We don't have to transform these blocks on our own, but we are asked to acknowledge them where they are. A calm, honest perspective can be helpful at this stage.

### "Building a Case"

Step one can be a little more difficult when we've spent some time "feeding" a resentment or grievance. If we spend a few hours building a case against someone in our minds, that line of thought forms a momentum. It can be challenging to stop and turn our attention to our part in the situation – our painful thoughts, our need for healing.

To illustrate what I mean, let's imagine that a person tells me that he dislikes some work I've done. He tells me that I've done things in an uninteresting way. My feelings are hurt by this, but instead of admitting that, I immediately turn my attention outward.

"What does that guy know," I say. "He's just a critical person. I've never heard him say anything supportive in his life. He probably never says anything kind to anyone. He..."

The more I continue along that path, the farther I get from the core problem – my own painful thoughts. In fact, the process of focusing on this person's "criticalness" fills my mind with ever-

increasing burdens. As each minute ticks off, it will become more challenging to turn the tide of my thoughts and ask myself what *my* part is.

Let's say that – hours later – I admit that I feel terrible. I decide to practice step one. I sit down and firmly pull my attention back to the contents of my mind. I ask myself what I am feeling and thinking.

“OK,” I say, “I guess I feel hurt. I see myself as vulnerable to this person's opinion. I'm afraid that maybe he's right. Maybe I'm a failure at this.”

As I do that, I identify the real problem – my painful thoughts. If I continue to focus on what a “bad person” my critic is, I'll completely obscure the source of my discomfort. But as I honestly identify my thoughts – uncomfortable as they are – I clarify the situation. I can then quickly take the next step, which I'll cover next.

## The Practice of Step Two



### Opening the burdens to the light

Part of the skill involved in this three-step process is shortening any time lag between steps one and two. Ideally, we become aware of our inner blocks, and then quickly, without delay, turn to our inner light for healing.

I don't believe that there needs to be any gap between these steps. As I mentioned earlier, I don't believe that we need to sit around analyzing our painful thoughts once we've identified them. Our focus can be on actively turning within for a healing of the problem.

*A Course in Miracles* often stresses the importance of “willingness” or “openness” at this stage. We don't need to sweep away our inner blocks by an act of personal will. We don't need to find our way out of darkness by ourselves. Rather, we are asked to bring our burdens to the inner light, and allow that light to free our minds. Step two is a releasing process, not an act of enormous personal effort.

I look at the mind as like a train. The train – the mind – will keep chugging along its track. It is a powerful thing, and doesn't need a push from us. Our job is simply to flip the track switch in order to reorient the train's path. One flip will send the train in a new direction.

Our sole responsibility at step two is to shift from holding onto our burdensome thoughts to becoming willing to let them go. That is all. We have identified our inner blocks at step one. Now we are bringing those blocks to the inner light to be cleared.

As soon as we flip the switch to willingness-to-release, we are done with this step.

## The Art of Step Two

Of course, becoming willing to release our angry, anxious, or self-critical thoughts can be a challenging process. Sometimes I stay stuck at this step for quite some time, unwilling to loosen my grasp – unwilling to flip the switch. Step two may require some artistry, as we may need to engage in the process of “talking” the mind into letting itself be healed.

If I’m feeling stuck – unwilling to open my burdensome thoughts to the light – I often find it helpful to have a little conversation with myself:

Are these thoughts giving me a sense of peace? No, I suppose they aren’t. Are they making me feel safe? Perhaps – but this isn’t a very deep sense of safety. Might there be benefit to me in trying on a new set of thoughts – a set of more inspired and peaceful thoughts?

I ask myself those types of questions until my mind becomes a bit more flexible.

I find that I sometimes need to engage in this type of reasoning for a while. When I’m locked onto my old thoughts and perspectives, I’m like a child with his hand stuck in a candy jar. I’m stuck, but I don’t want to let go of the candy in my hand. I could wait until I drop the candy in exhaustion. However, that could take a very long time.

I find it kinder to reason with myself like a caring adult would:

Am I enjoying the candy in my hand? No, I’m not. I’m simply stuck. Might I be a little better off if I drop the candy? Well, I might be. Might I loosen my grasp for a second or two at a time, and see how I feel?

When I do become ready – or willing – to release my old thoughts, I find it helpful to formalize the releasing process with a prayer. This type of focus can provide a concrete boost forward.



I might say something like:

Divine Spirit, I have clarified my thoughts and feelings as best as I can.

I see myself as unfairly criticized.

I feel sad about this.

I am worried that perhaps my critic is right.

Those are my thoughts and feelings, as best as I can state them.

They are causing me discomfort.

I offer them to you.

You are the healer.

I am willing to release them to you and let you heal my mind.

If I say that, and truly mean it, I am done with step two. I have flipped the switch. I have become willing to offer my inner blocks to the light. There is nothing more that I need to do at this stage.

One thing that I look for in doing step two is an actual “felt sense” of release. I aim for a tangible feeling of having my heart lifted, or of having a burden removed. This isn’t merely an intellectual exercise; I’m actually allowing a burden to be lightened.

We may, of course, release our painful thoughts, feel a sense of relief, and then immediately snatch our thoughts back again. If that happens, we can simply return to step one – identifying what it is we took back – and once again offer the blocks to the light. I find that there is sometimes a great deal of this back-and-forth activity.

## Imagery

As I mentioned earlier, imagery can be helpful at step two – especially if we need some structure to make the giving-over process more concrete.

I believe that the best imagery is imagery that’s inspired by our inner wisdom in the moment. However, I sometimes fall back on some old standbys.

For example, I may incorporate the following imagery into a

prayer:

Inner Light, here are my unloving thoughts.  
They are like hot coals that I've been clinging to.  
They are causing me pain.  
Spirit, I give you this grievance.  
I give you this sense of anger.  
I give you this desire for revenge.  
These thoughts have burned me.  
I am willing to release them.  
I offer them to you.

Or:

Spirit of Healing, I have been carrying around these chains for years.  
I bring them everywhere I go.  
I am tired.  
I am ready to let you take these chains from me.  
My sense of failure.  
My belief that I am all alone.  
My sense of hurt.  
I give you these chains, Spirit.  
I am willing to feel free.

Again, I think that it's essential to aim for a felt sense of release – an inner experience of handing over our burden. This can immediately lift our hearts.

Of course, sometimes a simple prayer isn't enough; my mind is too locked onto its blocks. In those cases, I may try an extended imagery session.

I may choose a few old thoughts that are troubling me and imagine them as weights in a backpack. I pull them out and set them before me. I take a good look at each one before allowing it to pass into the light. As I hand over each one, I see – and feel – it leaving my hands. I feel the transfer of the weight. I see my painful thoughts moving into the light. I feel myself free of them.

The practice of step two doesn't necessarily require a great deal of time, but each minute spent in this type of work reinforces our desire to hand our thoughts over. If I'm only mildly ready to release an inner block, I might need to spend some time developing my readiness. I might need to take ten minutes or more on this step. On the other hand, if I'm truly willing to let a thought go, this step can be accomplished in a moment.

I believe that emotional honesty is very important at step two. If we're feeling scared, sad, small, or otherwise overwhelmed during this process, we don't have to hide that. We don't have to fake a sense of bravado.

Sometimes I simply say:

Spirit, I am worried.  
It is my own fear, though.  
I am willing to offer it to you.  
I am open to a sense of peace.

A simple, honest, heartfelt prayer can be a powerful opening. When we are in darkness, we are like lost children; we don't have to pretend otherwise. The key is simply to identify the core problem – our inner distress – and turn to our inner light for healing, in whatever way we can.

## Ownership

Before moving on to a discussion of the final step, I'd like to address an important element in the releasing-the-blocks process. It's essential to take ownership of our thoughts, to whatever degree we can.

Our thoughts are ours, not someone else's. Another person may be generating his or her own unloving thoughts – usually, this will be the case. It may seem that the other person is forcing us to think and feel upsetting things. But it's important to take responsibility for our own thoughts and feelings.

I've been stuck in certain areas for years, lost in a sense of

powerlessness because I didn't see myself as capable of releasing my blocks to the light. My painful thoughts didn't seem to be mine; they seemed to be generated by someone or something else. I saw myself as having no role of my own.

This is a difficult place to be. When we see our thoughts as generated by someone or something else, we see ourselves as powerless. We become focused on the "generator" outside ourselves, usually in a high-conflict way.

It's important to remember that our inner blocks are ours, and that no one else can open up these blocks to the light. The light waits for our participation; it doesn't "push its way in" without our involvement. And it enters our awareness as soon as we create an opening, regardless of what the people around us are doing.

To recap, the first step in the three-step process is honestly identifying any block to peace. In step two, we become willing to release those thought to the inner light. In step three, which I'll cover next, we open our minds to the inflow of divine love – peaceful, healing miracles. This is the goal that we're moving toward.

## The Practice of Step Three



### Opening to the inflow of divine love

Identifying our inner blocks and expressing our willingness to release them are the housecleaning steps that lead to step three. When we have cleared an opening, we have done most of the work. We are like thirsty travelers who have found our way to a well. All that's left is to drink.

Mystics and saints have talked at length about the experience of divine love. This love is a mind-altering thing; it sweeps away our old concepts of ourselves and others, and reveals everything in a new light.

*A Course in Miracles* assures us that we don't have to spend years in prayer or meditation in order to experience this love. We simply need to clear away the blocks to it – the blocks being our own unloving thoughts. As we identify and hand over a block to the light, the light rushes in on its own accord.

Step three is a fulfillment step. It is the moment at which we enjoy the fruit of our labors. We have identified some blocks in step one, and become willing to release our hold on them in step two. In step three, we simply sit back and allow ourselves to be comforted. We have opened our hearts to the healing presence of our inner light. Now we simply welcome the experience of it.

I recently heard a woman exclaim that she felt “bathed in love” during this phase of the exercise. I think that's an excellent description of the goal in step three.

One could say that, in truth, we are constantly bathed in divine love. But we create a wall of discomfort with our thoughts and feelings, and that wall prevents us from feeling the love. As we become willing to release old thoughts and let a sense of divine

comfort once again reach us, our minds are healed.

## Little Streams

There *is* some work to be done at step three, but it is primarily maintenance work. Our job is to keep the channel clear. In step one, we become aware of a block in the river. In step two, we take ownership of that block and become willing to let it be removed. The river begins to flow again in step three. Our role at this point is to enjoy it, and to make sure that no new obstructions form.

I find that continuing to monitor my feelings is a helpful technique at this stage. Do I feel uplifted? Do I feel supported, comforted, and carried along? If so, I know that things are flowing well. If I begin to feel alone, anxious, or doubtful, that's a sign of a block in the river. When that happens, I return to step one – identifying the block – and hand it over, so that the experience of love can return.

Of course, there are times when I practice steps one and two and only feel a very slight increase in peace during step three. A sense of divine love doesn't come forth as a river in those times. Rather, it's like a trickle, or just a few drops of water. This is probably because there are further blocks to uncover. However, I don't see that as a problem. To a thirsty person, a trickle of water is as good as a river.

It is wonderful if we feel bathed, or enfolded, in divine care and comfort. But if we only begin to feel a slight lifting of our hearts, that is good. We can rest in that stream, despite the fact that it is small. We can refuse to wander away. We can protect that little trickle as we continue to clear away the blocks.

I'd like to reiterate that in the past, I never thought this type of work was important. I didn't realize that it required patience and cooperation on my part. I figured that there was a raging river of inspiration around somewhere, and I could keep wandering until I found it. I ignored the little trickles of water. I passed by many opportunities to clear channels for a sense of love.

After a long time spent wandering and never finding the great river, I sat down and started to work with the streams. I was discouraged at first. There were a lot of blocks, and not a lot of water. I didn't feel bowled-over by an experience of joy or love. But I did feel a tiny increase in peace as I identified my inner blocks, and turned to the light for healing. That was enough to keep me working.

Like many of us, I have areas in my life that are filled with a variety of blocks. Approaching those areas is like approaching a pile of stones. I sometimes resist step one, as it feels daunting to tackle the pile. But even one inner block identified and released creates a glimmer of light. That glimmer brings hope, and if we remain with it and continue to clear away the blocks, it grows.

I believe that step three – the experience of divine love, or comfort – is a wonderful thing, regardless of how strong the experience is. A trickle of water in a desert can be lifesaving. A glimmer of hope when we are in despair is equally precious.

#### Extension

As I mentioned earlier, I find that the best way to throw the gate open at step three (and keep it open wide) is to let divine love flow through us to others. As we open our minds to the Spirit's inspiration, we can extend this inspiration to the people around us. In doing this, we open an ever-wider channel.

One of the most fundamental ideas in *A Course in Miracles* is the idea that we will experience love to the degree that we share it. The love within us is a flowing thing. It needs to move through us.

I remember the day that I first came across this idea in the Course. Up until that time, I had been spending months by myself – months in prayer, study of spiritual ideas, and so forth. Despite my hard work, my efforts weren't producing any fruit. I felt isolated and cut-off – anything but inspired. I didn't know what was wrong. I was trying my best to access a sense of peace and love, but I felt bereft.

When I finally came across the idea that I could experience love only as I *extended* it, I was shocked. I thought that I had to “get” it all by myself, and then begin to share what I had received. The Course taught otherwise. The receiving and giving happen at the same time, says the Course – just as the river flows into and through our land at the same time. I wasn’t giving anything to anyone; consequently, I struggled to receive.

To be clear, when I talk about “giving love,” I don’t necessarily mean anything dramatic. We can give a kind thought or word to someone. That may be all that we’re able to offer at the time, and all that the other person needs. My problem was that I was focusing exclusively on trying to get to the inner light myself. I blocked out everyone else from my mind in the process. I believed that it was a personal, solitary journey. The Course clarified why that approach doesn’t work.

These days, when I begin to feel a sense of the Spirit’s comforting presence in step three, I often let my mind move to other people and things, and try to let that love embrace them. I believe that this is one of the best practices for keeping the river flowing. Divine love will comfort us as long as it’s moving through us.

## The Practice

As I mentioned earlier, there may be some maintenance work to do during step three. We may need to return to steps one and two repeatedly in order to keep the experience of peace in our awareness.

For example, let’s say that I am feeling upset about a relationship in my life. I sit down and identify my unloving thoughts about the situation – my resentments, fears, and so forth. That completes step one. I then express my willingness to offer those blocks to the light (step two). I open to a sense of peace, which I allow to grow in my awareness, and extend to the other person (step three).



Things flow well for a minute or two; I'm feeling much better than before. But then a memory comes to mind of something the other person did last week – something that really bothered me. I immediately begin to feel defensive. The channel of divine love begins to become blocked.

The skill in this practice is to acknowledge that I've once again fallen off track, and need help. Despite the fact that I just ran through steps one and two, I can do it again. I may have fallen into an old habit of thinking, or a deeper block may have surfaced. Either way, the approach is the same. I can identify the inner block – the new distressing thought or feeling – and allow it to be replaced with an inflow of peace.

One of the “skills” of step three is to stay with the sense of peace, or love, until it becomes stable. Let me illustrate this by building on the example above.

Let's say that I bring some resentful thoughts to my inner light, and become willing to release them. I become willing to receive a peaceful replacement. A trickle of kindness begins to flow into my mind. I let that trickle grow and expand. I begin to feel quite a bit better.

However, a minute or so into this process, a thought comes to mind. “You know,” I say, “this person is still acting in a thoughtless way. I should really tell her what I think of her behavior!”

If I break away from peace at that point, and start trying to “resolve” the situation from a place of upset, I'll have reversed the process. I'll have once again returned to painful thoughts. Most likely, my inner conflict will spill out into the situation, and I will find myself in a relationship conflict as well.

The alternative is to remain with step three until the peace feels solidly in place. I may very well need to respond to the outer situation, but the challenge is to do it from a clearer, more inspired state of mind. If an attacking thought comes to mind during step

three, I can identify it and offer it to the light. I may need to run through this cycle many times. The challenge is to stay with the process rather than breaking back into conflict.

I find that there are many temptations to “jump ship” during step three. Staying with the trickle of peace takes practice. It’s like remaining in the eye of a storm. We may feel a temptation to bolt – to egocentrically fight the external situations. The trick in step three is to notice when we feel that, become willing to release our distress to the light, and continually open to an inflow of peace until it becomes stable.

### A Quick Practice

Of course, this three-step process doesn’t necessarily need to take a lot of time. In fact, steps one, two, and three can take place very fluidly in a moment or two. Let me offer a couple of examples to illustrate.

Recently I was driving down the road and someone swerved in front of me. I felt a flash of anger. At that point, there were three main choices before me: I could vent my anger at the person, squash down my anger, or quickly speed through the three-step process.

I chose to run through the process. “I am outraged at this other driver right now! I see him as a reckless person! I think that he deserves some of his own medicine! Those are my thoughts. They are causing me pain. I give them to you, Spirit. I’m open to a miracle – an inner healing.”

That type of process – including opening to a sense of divine support – required only a few seconds. When I felt another flash of anger, I ran through the steps again. My thoughts, and thus my actions, were elevated after this – at least, to some degree. I was able to respond to the external situation in a clearer way.

As another example, I was recently waiting on a long line at the post office. Someone walked in front of me and stood ahead of me on the line. I was a bit stunned at this. At that point, I could

have expressed my displeasure toward the person, squashed down my emotions, or tried the three-step process. I decided to run through the process.

“I feel insulted by this. I see this person as way out of line here – literally. I see myself as disrespected. Those are my painful thoughts and feelings. Spirit, I am willing to release them to you. I am open to a miracle of peace. I welcome a new perception.”

As I said that, I found myself filled with a greater sense of tolerance. I mentioned to the person that I had been waiting in line, but that he was welcome to go ahead of me if he was in a rush. The person apologized, and said that he would wait. The situation was resolved in a harmonious way. The process took less than a minute.

During our practice of step three, we may receive insights on how to respond to worldly situations. We may find our perspectives on the world shifting. Or we may simply feel lifted up and carried along.

All of these are wonderful. If we let it, the inflow of divine love in step three will expand. As it does, our minds are healed.

## Summary



### Two examples

Before moving on to Part Two of this book, I'd like to offer a few sample illustrations of how the three-step process might look.

As a first example, let's imagine a man who is laid off from his job. This man begins to search for a new job, but he doesn't have any success in his search. Despite his best efforts, he's unable to find a new position. As the weeks go by, he begins to feel anxious and overwhelmed.

One day, feeling unable to squeeze out another drop of effort toward his job search, the man stops and turns his attention from the outer issue – the lack of a job – to his state of mind.

He begins to acknowledge his current thoughts and feelings. "I feel really overwhelmed," he says. "I think that I'm facing insurmountable odds. I believe this is rather hopeless. That's what's going on inside. That's as clear as I can state things." That honest acknowledgement of his thoughts and feelings completes step one.

He then immediately brings those thoughts to his inner light. "Spirit," he says, "I'll probably have a better time with this job search if I'm not carrying these thoughts around. I'd prefer to be at peace. I am willing to give these thoughts to you. I am willing to release my sense of being overwhelmed. I am willing to release my view of this as insurmountable and hopeless. My mind is open. I am open to a clearer perspective." That giving-over process completes step two.

The man then sits for a few minutes with an open mind. As he sits, he begins to feel a sense of hope rise up within him. It's only a trickle of hope, but it feels better than what he was feeling before.

The man stays with that hopeful current. He keeps his focus on it, and encourages it to grow.

After a while, the man finds the sense of hope wavering. He feels old fears beginning to resurface. Realizing that, the man identifies his specific concerns and offers them to the light. “Spirit, I have a friend who was out of work for a year. That type of proposition frightens me. But I am willing to release that concern to you. I am willing to have you take it from me. I want to stay with that sense of hope.”

The man goes through this cycle several more times, with various different issues. After a while, he begins to feel a good deal better. The sense of hope gradually expands into a sense of confidence. “You know,” the man says, “I should give my old boss a call. I think she’s been doing some freelance work lately, and she may have some leads. Funny that I didn’t think of that before.”

That new idea feels promising. The man picks up the phone to call his boss, but as he does so, he tries to stay with the new current of hope. He keeps an eye turned toward the inner. He makes a commitment to keep identifying and opening to the light any painful thoughts that arise.

Whether or not this man finds a new position immediately, he will very likely move through the process with a greater sense of clarity and support. It’s quite possible that new, creative ideas will flow into the spaces in his mind that were previously occupied by anxiety and exhaustion. He will be able to address the situation with a clearer perspective.

Let me offer another illustration. Let’s imagine a woman who is experiencing some conflict with her teenage son. This woman loves her son; however, their relationship has become strained. The more she sets limits for the young man, the more he rebels against them. She is at a loss about what to do.

One night the woman’s son stays out very late. The woman feels that this is unacceptable behavior, but she doesn’t know how

best to respond. Should she double last week's punishment? Have a long talk with him? Get professional help?

Feeling confused and upset, the woman decides to focus for a few minutes on her own state of mind. "I feel very upset right now. Actually, I'm quite angry at my son. I see him as terribly reckless, and I'm afraid that he's going to endanger himself. I feel ashamed that I haven't been a better parent for him – if I had, maybe he wouldn't be acting like this. Those are my thoughts and feelings. That's what's going on inside me right now."

The woman then weighs how she feels about her current state of mind. She decides that she'd be better off addressing the situation from a clearer place. She becomes willing to open her thoughts and feelings to the inner light.

"Divine Spirit," she says, "I don't know how sincere I am about this, but I'm going to try to release this to you. I am willing to release these fearful and angry thoughts. I am willing to receive a new view of the situation, and insights about what to do."

The woman then sits for a while, holding each one of her distressing thoughts in mind before envisioning it flowing into the light. She feels a palpable sense of relief as she does this. She feels each old thought lifted from her heart. She reaches a point where her mind is open to a new set of thoughts.

"I am willing to feel supported," she says. And as she says that, she opens her heart to the inflow of divine love. She begins to feel a sense of inner appreciation – appreciation for her own devotion to her son, and for her efforts at keeping him safe. She also begins to feel a sense of faith that – despite her son's current behavior – he has the capacity to make better choices. She begins to see a previously hidden quality of wisdom in him. She is comforted by these thoughts. They feel quite different from what she had been thinking before.

In the end, this woman may feel inspired to take any number of approaches to dealing with her son's behavior. But she will be

making her decision from a greater sense of clarity and peace. By allowing her own mind to be comforted, she has prepared herself to more effectively deal with her son's growing-up process.

The key in both these examples was for the people to turn their attention – at least for a few minutes – from the outer situation to their inner state of mind. If the man had continued to focus exclusively on the job search, ignoring his anxiety and sense of exhaustion, there would have been little room for spiritual inspiration to enter. If the woman had focused entirely on her son's recklessness, ignoring her own need for healing, she probably would have continued to “butt heads” with him. By identifying their own painful thoughts, these people were able to open to an inner healing.

I'd like to say one more thing before moving on to the next section. Although I have presented this three-step process in a rather structured way, I don't think that such structure is essential.

Some people simply turn to their inner light with an open heart, and become willing to receive a sense of divine love. Clearly, that is a complete process. Some people do not need to identify their blocks, as I've discussed in step one, and formally express their willingness to release them, per step two. These people can, in a heartfelt instant, simply open to a sense of love.

There are times when I am able to do that myself. However, quite often, I find benefit in running through a structured process like the one I've outlined. I encourage you to use whatever approach works best for you.

Part Two



Advanced Techniques



## Advanced Techniques



In this section, I'd like to address some techniques that I use in conjunction with the three steps. Although I've titled this section "advanced techniques," I don't mean that these techniques are for people who are advanced at the process. Rather, these techniques are designed to give us a boost when we are stuck at a particular step.

As I mentioned at the end of the last section, I don't believe that any technique is absolutely necessary. If our minds are truly open, we will be able to naturally, fluidly exchange our painful thoughts for an experience of divine love – possibly in an instant, and without a great deal of conscious work. That is the goal: to move toward that level of openness.

However, because we often encounter resistance during the process, we may need to work at one step or another. These techniques are my attempt to shed light on the steps.

You're welcome to jump ahead at any point to the exercises in part three of this book. It may be helpful to try out the actual exercises first, and then return to this section if you encounter difficulties with any particular step.

## Plumes



### Helps with step one

There is one important idea from *A Course in Miracles* that I'd like to explore in this chapter. The idea is that our painful feelings don't come and go on their own. Rather, our feelings are influenced by our *thoughts*.

Angry thoughts, for example, will produce feelings of anger. Jealous thoughts will produce feelings of jealousy. Understanding this relationship can help with the practice of step one.

This thoughts-influence-feelings idea isn't unique to the Course. It's actually the basis for many approaches in a type of psychotherapy called cognitive therapy. Although it can be readily observed, the relationship between thoughts and feelings is often quite hidden.

I remember being very surprised when I first came across the idea that my thoughts and feelings were related. For years I had battled with emotional storms. I had grown used to being hit by squalls of fear, doubt, and powerlessness. These emotions seemed to rise up out of nowhere, blow through my life, and eventually pass. I figured that I just had to tolerate them.

Because of this, it was quite surprising to read that my thoughts and my emotions were related. Could it be that my thoughts had some influence over these emotional storms?

I decided to spend some time observing the relationship between how I *felt* and what I was *thinking*. As I did that, the connection became clear.

When I found myself hit with a wave of anxiety, I'd take a quick survey of my thoughts. Usually I'd uncover a series of

threat-oriented thoughts that preceded the anxiety – thoughts like, “This person is going to judge me,” or, “They’ll think I’m terrible at this type of work.”

It was no wonder that I felt bombarded with waves of painful emotions – I was generating waves of painful thoughts. Seeing this connection was an important step. It helped me realize the source of my emotional discomfort.

To clarify this point further, let me offer a few examples of the relationship between thoughts and emotions.

<i>Thought</i>	influences	<i>Emotion</i>
The thought “That guy is so rude”		...will generate feelings of anger.
The thought “I’m really bad at this”		...will generate feelings of insecurity.
The thought “I’m all alone”		...will generate feelings of loneliness.

In those examples, the feelings of anger, insecurity, and loneliness didn’t arise on their own. Instead, they were influenced by specific thoughts, or perceptions. Although the feelings need to be acknowledged and released, the thoughts *also* need to be replaced. Otherwise, the old feelings will build back up.

### Smoke and Fire

Let me share an analogy that I find very helpful. Distressing feelings are like clouds of smoke. Painful thoughts are the fires that give rise to the smoke.

I find that where there is smoke, there is fire – where there is a painful feeling, there is a painful thought beneath. Even one distressing thought can generate a large plume of uncomfortable feelings.

As an illustration of this idea, let's say that I hold a grievance against someone in my life. That one grievance can create a large amount of emotional distress. Visiting that area of my mind may feel like stepping into a smoke-filled room. The emotional smoke plume (the feelings of anger) may be quite large. However, the fire (the grievance) may be relatively easy to put out.

The Course doesn't ask us to thrash around in the smoke of our emotions. Rather, it asks us to move to the fire at the center of the smoke, and let that fire be quenched. If we're willing to be extremely honest with ourselves, this can be done rather quickly.

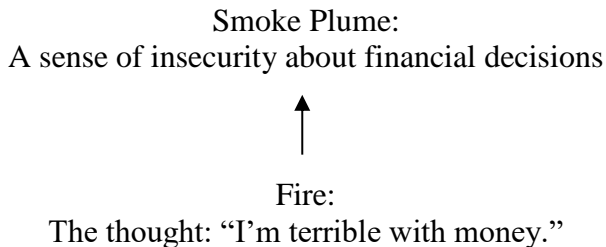
### Examples

Let me clarify what I mean by smoke plumes and fires by using a couple of simple examples.

As a first example, let's say that I experience a difficult financial event in my life. As a result of that experience, I form a belief that says, "I'm really terrible with money." If I hold onto that thought, I will feel insecure whenever I have to make a financial decision.

In that case, the fire is the thought, "I'm terrible with money." The smoke plume is the feeling of insecurity that results. Left uncorrected, that one thought can create a large plume of smoke.

Here is a simple diagram of the smoke and the fire:



As the years pass, I may invent elaborate mechanisms for avoiding my uncomfortable feelings. I may refuse to get a checking account or a credit card. Or I may latch onto someone

who will make my financial decisions for me. I may end up restructuring my whole life in order to avoid the sense of insecurity.

Let's say that after years of contortions, I decide to reach through the smoke plume to the source. "I have this belief that I'm terrible with money," I say to myself. "I have lots of evidence to support that belief. But that thought is causing me enormous distress. I am willing to release that thought. I am willing to receive a new, more peaceful set of thoughts about myself."

That may be enough to resolve the fire. It is at least a good beginning. Again, the key is the willingness to go to the source of the smoke – our thoughts – rather than inventing further mechanisms for avoiding the uncomfortable feelings.

It does, of course, take courage to do this, and we may encounter some smoke on the way. But our emphasis can be on quickly moving to the source – our painful thoughts and beliefs – and immediately opening up those thoughts to our inner light.

As another illustration, let's say that I have a falling-out with a friend of mine. I say some spiteful things to this friend, and he says some to me, and we part on that note. Whenever I think of him after that, I feel a sense of anger rising up. Therefore, I try not to think of him.

In that situation, my sense of anger is the smoke plume. The Course asks me to walk into the heart of that plume, and let my inner light heal the source. I'm not asked to simply tolerate my anger. I'm asked to go to the source of the anger, and let that source be healed.

Let's say that I sit down one day and move toward the center of the smoke. "I'm really angry at this guy," I say. "I see him as an insensitive person. I believe that he never respected our friendship. Those thoughts are giving rise to this anger."

I then look for even more of the source. I become as honest as possible about my thoughts. "You know," I say, "I also believe that

I've failed at my half of our friendship. I see myself as a not very good friend."

Here is the smoke and the fire in that situation:

Smoke Plume:

A sense of anger and guilt about this relationship



Fire:

The thoughts: "My friend never respected our friendship" and "I'm not a very good friend either."

Let's say that I gather up those thoughts and express my willingness to let them go.

"I see this guy as insensitive and I see myself as a bad friend. Those are my thoughts and perceptions. They are causing me a great deal of discomfort," I say. "Healing spirit, I am willing to release those thoughts to you. I am open to a new view of this guy and myself."

I then become willing to release my thoughts to a place of light (step two) and open my mind to a new view of my friend and myself (step three). As I sit with an open mind, I begin to feel a slight increase in peace. A sense of tolerance arises in me. I begin to see my friend and myself as like little children who have made forgivable mistakes.

That new view – that new thought – begins to create a new plume of fresh air. I let that plume grow. I begin to feel more peaceful about the whole situation. The feelings of anger begin to clear. After a while, I feel more benevolent and kind. I decide that I wouldn't feel so bad if I were to see this friend sometime.

Now, I may or may not have uncovered the complete root of the problem. But I have identified a few elements of the fire, and have allowed the light to replace those elements with kinder thoughts. I know that I have succeeded, at least to some degree,

because I feel more peaceful. There isn't quite as much smoke anymore.

The challenge in this type of process is to move to the center of the discomfort, honestly identifying our specific thoughts and perceptions, rather than avoiding the whole area. In the example above, the core problem wasn't the fight I had with my friend. The core problem was my painful thoughts and perceptions – my anger-producing thoughts about him, and my guilt-producing thoughts about myself.

As long as I saw my friend as insensitive, and saw myself as a bad person as well, I was going to be surrounded by smoke. There was no way around it. My painful feelings were byproducts of my thoughts. They were also a good indication of where the work needed to take place.

### Core Resolution

My main point in discussing this metaphor of smoke plumes is to say that if we're having trouble exchanging our discomfort for a sense of inner peace, we may want to become as honest as possible about any underlying thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions.

By reaching through our sense of distress to our specific thoughts, we become more aware of the problem. We may then have an easier time releasing the fire at its core and clearing a space for an inner healing.

Our inner light can't heal our painful feelings if we continue to generate painful thoughts. If we say, "I want to feel better," but continue to fill our minds with a stream of attacking thoughts, we won't experience much relief.

If, on the other hand, we become honest about our painful thoughts, and become willing to release those thoughts along with our distressing feelings, we have gone to the root. We have identified both sides of the coin.

I do find that where there is smoke, there is fire – when I feel

sad, angry, or anxious, there are specific thoughts or perceptions underlying those feelings. Becoming honest about the whole package creates an open space for the inflow of miracles – the inflow of divine love and comfort.



## The Crest of the Hill



### Helps with step two

Once I have identified some of my inner blocks, I try to immediately express my willingness to let them go.

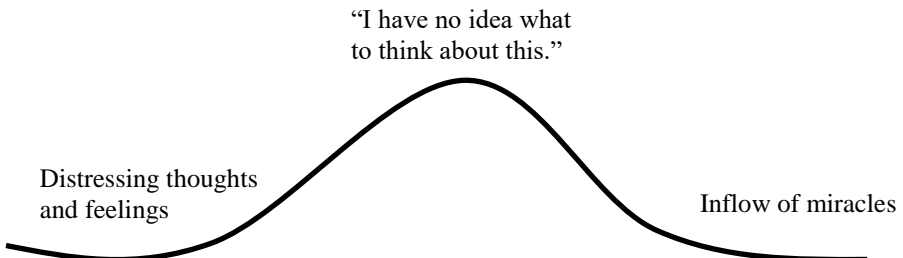
Unfortunately, sometimes I get to that point and nothing happens. Although I say “I am willing to release this,” I’m still holding tightly onto my painful thoughts. I’m not truly ready to let them go.

When I first started working with this process, I’d give up at that point. I’d say, “Well, I guess that I’m just not ready. Perhaps I’ll try tomorrow.” I’d then walk away feeling somewhat defeated.

My attitude has changed since then. These days I try to inch forward at step two, even if my willingness to release my painful thoughts isn’t very strong. I find that even a slight movement in the right direction is helpful.

There is one technique that I often use when I feel stuck. Rather than aiming for a full experience of divine love, I aim for a point at which I simply say, “*I have no idea what to think about this.*”

Going to that point of open-mindedness is like climbing to the crest of a hill. It gets me to a place where my momentum can carry me forward.



As an illustration of this, let's say that my neighbor frequently plays loud music. Every week or two, I ask him to turn his music down. He complies for a few days. However, he soon returns to his old habits.

One night, I'm awakened late at night by a blast of music. I feel a sense of indignation rising up within me. I start to have some rather unpeaceful thoughts. Before taking any rash actions, however, I decide to run through the three-step process.

"Divine spirit," I say, "I am really angry right now. I see this guy as insensitive and belligerent. He never seems to get the message that he needs to be quieter. I believe that he's intentionally trying to bother me. Those are my painful thoughts and feelings."

But then I get stuck. "You know," I say to myself, "I really don't *want* to take the next step. I don't want to feel any sense of kindness toward this guy. I'd rather start thinking up ways to get back at him."

It's at this point that the "crest of the hill" technique can be helpful. I'm not willing – or ready – to move into a full experience of divine love. But I can at least aim for a place of open-mindedness. I can try to clear my mind of my old, painful thoughts – even if I'm not willing to go any further than that.

"Divine spirit," I say, "I'm not ready to feel anything like love toward this guy. However, I admit that my current thoughts are causing me distress. I'm willing to say that I don't know how best to respond to this situation, or how to think about this guy. That's as much as I can do right now. But I am willing to go there."

I then try to move to a place of neutrality – a place where the slate of my mind is clear. I may not be ready to go much farther than that, but I'm at least willing to empty my mind of my old thoughts.

This, I find, is a great technique. It's like climbing to the highest point on a bicycle course, rather than aiming for the finish

line. Once we get to the point where we honestly say, “I don’t know how to look at this person (or situation),” we have done the hard part. If we don’t drop back, our momentum will carry us forward from there.

Let’s say that, in the situation with the noisy neighbor, I bring my distressing thoughts to the inner light. I express my willingness to let them go, and I sit for a while in a place of open-mindedness. I’m not ready to accept a full-blown experience of divine love (or peace), but I am committed to release my old thoughts.

I sit at the crest of the hill for a while. I don’t feel any great sense of love, but I also don’t feel overwhelmed by my anger. I feel sort of “neutral.” I stay with that neutrality.

After a few minutes, a thought comes to mind. I remember that my neighbor’s younger brother is visiting him. “Perhaps that’s the brother who’s playing the music,” I think. I begin to feel a tiny bit more tolerant.

Because I’m still feeling less than peaceful, however, I work to stay at that place of neutrality. I continue to monitor my mind for unpeaceful thoughts, and express my willingness to release them when they arise. I’m still not willing to feel any kindness toward my neighbor, but I’m willing to keep my mind clear of overtly hostile thoughts.

After a few minutes, the music stops next door. I continue to work on acknowledging any resentments that arise in my mind – resentments about being awakened, resentments about the ongoing music problem, and so forth. When they come up, I express my willingness to release them and move back into a place of open-minded neutrality.

After a while, I begin to feel sleepy. I fall back asleep still in that neutral space. When I wake up in the morning, I feel somewhat better – a bit more patient with my neighbor. I decide to leave him a note about the music, but I’m able to do so from a place of relative calmness.

In that example, the key was for me to move into – and maintain – a space of neutrality. Reaching a place where I could say, “I don’t know how to respond to this situation” was all I could do at the time. Thankfully, it was all I needed to do. From there, momentum could ease me forward.

If I had quit the process, saying, “I’m not willing to feel anything like love toward this guy,” I would have stayed on the wrong side of the hill. But by moving to the crest – and refusing to drop back – I created an open space for forward movement.

## Open Mind

*A Course in Miracles* encourages us to get to the point where our minds are clear and open. A sense of divine love can then enter on its own – perhaps as a torrent, or perhaps as a trickle. The key is simply to create an open space. Reaching a point where our minds are clear of our old thoughts – the crest of the hill – is our primary work.

The reason that I find this idea so helpful is that, in the past, I believed that I had to take a giant leap from anger to love. On rare occasions, by an act of will, I could do that. I’d say, “OK, I’m really angry at this person right now, but I’m going to start loving him/her.” I do believe that it’s possible for us to take that leap. However, it can be quite a challenge.

It’s far easier, in my experience, to simply acknowledge our painful thoughts, and be willing to go to a place of open-mindedness. Then a sense of peace or love can begin to flow in. Whether that flowing-in process happens quickly or slowly isn’t the essential thing. We’re simply asked to keep the channel clear.

If I’m having trouble moving to the crest of the hill, I often sit down and honestly measure the value of my current thoughts. Anger doesn’t feel good, and it rarely inspires clear, wise action. Might I be willing to let go of my current thoughts, and admit that I don’t know how best to respond to this situation? Might I at least be willing to release my pain-producing thoughts?

I sometimes need to “talk myself through” that journey to the crest of the hill. However, once I’ve hit a point where I can say, “Yes, it’s true – I really don’t know how to think about this situation,” my primary work is done. An opening has been created for something else to flow in. As long as I refuse to slide back down the slope, I have completed my role in the process.

*A Course in Miracles* doesn’t ask us to leap into sainthood. It doesn’t ask us to vanquish, by ourselves, all of our painful thoughts. Rather, it asks us to let an inner light heal our minds. It asks us to gather our pain and open it to this light. Getting to the crest of the hill is all we’re personally asked to do. At the crest, we come forward with an open mind and allow a transformation to take place.

## Forgiveness

Let me add a final point about how this “crest of the hill” process relates to forgiveness. I consider *A Course in Miracles* to be, essentially, a course in forgiveness. Forgiveness is one of the central themes in the Course. However, when *A Course in Miracles* talks about forgiveness, it’s not talking about a process that we do by ourselves.

In the Course’s approach to forgiveness, we don’t grit our teeth and say, “I’m going to force myself to feel charitable toward this person.” Rather, we honestly gather up our unforgiving thoughts, express our willingness to loosen our grasp on them, and open to the inflow of divinely-inspired loving thoughts. It is the spiritual light within us that accomplishes the actual healing.

When we feel that someone has hurt us, we’re not asked to personally convert our sense of hurt to a sense of love. We’re not asked to heal our minds using our own efforts. Rather, we’re asked to move to the crest of the hill and allow miracles to lead us from there.

As an illustration of this, let’s say that I’m at a party and someone makes a joke at my expense. My feelings are a bit hurt. In

the past, in that type of situation, I'd try to screw up a sense of toughness. I'd say, "Oh, I'm not going to let that bother me." However, I would probably hold a grudge against the person who made the joke. I might avoid him, or look for a way to "even the score." Clearly, that isn't healing.

These days, I try a different approach. To begin, I honestly admit my thoughts and feelings to myself – no matter how "petty" they may seem.

I might say to myself, "Wow, that stung a bit. That triggered a sense of insecurity in me. I'm a bit worried that I've been 'diminished' in these people's eyes by that joke. That's what's going through my mind right now."

Then I try to get to the crest of the hill – the place where I can exchange my current thoughts for a state of open-mindedness. I might say a prayer:

Spirit of healing, I am willing to release these thoughts and reactions to you.

I have no idea how to respond to this.

I have no idea if I should laugh off this joke, or make a joke back, or something else completely.

I don't know how to look at this guy who made the joke.

I don't know how to look at myself.

I give you my old thoughts and open my mind to you.

I am willing to be led forward from here.

That is the crest of the hill. From there, I can be led on. I don't have to "invent" a new, beneficent view of the person who told the joke. I don't have to force out a sense of kindness or tolerance toward him. All I have to do is clear a space for the divine inflow of kind, compassionate thoughts, and be willing to let them move through me.

Perhaps I choose to say nothing for a few minutes after the joke. But then I feel inspired to share that I feel a bit nervous about meeting new people. Suddenly the joke-teller's demeanor changes.

He admits that he, too, feels nervous about meeting new people, and that he meant no disrespect by the joke. I thank him for his honesty. Our relationship is immediately improved.

In that example, there was a healing of my defensive thoughts – but the healing wasn't done by me. My job was simply to carry my painful thoughts to the top of the hill, and express my willingness to let them go. The light within moved me forward from there, and new thoughts then spilled out into my interactions.

This is very different from the conventional view of forgiveness. In the conventional approach, we “forgive” someone all by ourselves, without any divine help. Usually this turns out to be a half-hearted attempt. We often end up simply squashing down our painful thoughts rather than letting them be healed.

In the Course's approach to forgiveness, we honestly acknowledge our pain, and open it to an exchange. Our views of ourselves and others are changed by this experience. To an outside observer, it may look as though we spun around 180 degrees through an act of will. But in truth, we simply became willing to release the old and receive something new.

I share this because when people say, “I just can't forgive this person for what he did to me,” I tell them that I understand. We by ourselves can do very little. But we aren't asked to do the work by ourselves. We're simply asked to bring our sense of hurt to our inner light – to walk to the crest of the hill.

We can express our willingness to release our pain. We can admit that we don't know what to think. We can hold our minds open to an inflow of divinely-inspired comfort. And we can let that comfort flow through us to others.

As we do that, we become conduits for a flow of loving, forgiving thoughts. That is true forgiveness. Again, our job is simply to clear the channel; to move to the crest of the hill. Once we have reached that point, we can be led forward from there.

## Permission Slips



### Helps with step two

If I'm able to identify some of my painful thoughts in step one, but I'm unable to move to the crest of the hill – the place where I say, “my mind is open to something new” – I sometimes try an approach called “writing a permission slip.”

When a young child wants to go on a school activity, she often needs a note from her parents: a permission slip. Although that permission slip is just a little piece of paper, it is a powerful thing. It opens doors to new worlds.

As a parallel, we can write “permission slips” for our minds, just as a parent would write one for a child. If we feel stuck at step two – aware of our painful thoughts, but unable (or unwilling) to release them – we can simply state our permission for our inner light to release us.

For example, I might say, “Divine spirit, I am worried right now. I am feeling anxious about this situation, and see it as a threat to my happiness. Those are my thoughts and feelings at this moment. I feel rather locked into them, but I give you permission to remove them. That's all I can do right now. You have my permission to take them away.”

That, I find, is surprisingly effective. As I wrote earlier, it's like flipping the switch on a train track. The effort involved is minimal, but it sends the train down a new route. The key is to express our permission and really mean it.

It's my experience that our inner light needs only the slightest opening to sweep away our unloving thoughts and send in miracles. A heartfelt statement of permission can create just this opening.



## Simple Things

At times, we may find ourselves overwhelmed by our painful thoughts and feelings. Our fear, resentment, or sense of loneliness may seem large and beyond our control. We tend to forget at these times how strong our inner light is, and how available it is to help us.

Writing a permission slip reminds us of the Spirit's strength. It reminds us that we are the "permitters" of healing, the "welcomers" of healing. We do not force peace or love to flow; we simply give it permission to enter our awareness.

Permission slips can be simple things. If I'm feeling anxious, a permission slip might look like this:

Divine Spirit, I feel anxious.  
I feel worried that so-and-so may happen.  
I feel overwhelmed.  
However, I can do one thing – I can allow you to help me.  
I give you permission to relieve my mind of this burden.  
You have my consent.  
I give you permission to take away my worry and the underlying thoughts behind it.  
You have my permission to comfort my mind.

If I'm feeling ashamed about a mistake I made, a permission slip might look like this:

Spirit of healing, I feel terrible about what I said to that person today.  
I fear that I may have made an uncorrectable mistake.  
However, I am willing to let you heal me of these painful thoughts, and help me to make amends.  
I give you permission to take away this sense of self-condemnation.  
I don't feel that I can remove these thoughts on my own, but I give you permission to help me.  
I give you permission, Inner light.

I give you permission to relieve me of this burden.

We may need to maintain this sense of permission while our minds become comfortable with the idea. We may need to restate (or actually write out) our permission slips several times. But if we keep our focus on our willingness to let the light illuminate our painful thoughts, we will very likely find our minds opening more fully to the exchange.

## Locking Knots



### Helps with steps one and two

I have a friend who takes me rock climbing. When my friend ties a knot in a rope, he always ties a very solid knot. However, he then ties an additional knot on the end – a second, small knot. He calls this second knot a “locking knot.”

I once asked him about it. “You see,” he said, “if the primary knot starts to slip, this locking knot will grab it and tighten. Even though it’s small, it will keep the rope tied.”

That struck me as a good metaphor to describe a dynamic on the three-step process. Here is what I mean:

Whenever we fill our minds with distress, we tie our minds into a knot. Our painful thoughts are the elements of the knot, and they can be tied rather tight. It can take a good amount of work to unravel our knots.

However, that unraveling (and releasing) of our painful thoughts is profoundly complicated by a “locking knot” that we sometimes tie onto the end. The locking knot is the belief that our core problem isn’t internal, but external.

Let me offer an example to illustrate what I mean. Let’s imagine that a young woman saves up some money and decides to invest it in the stock market. A friend offers her a “tip” on an attractive stock, and she decides to take the plunge. She buys as much of that company’s stock as she can.

A few weeks later, she finds out that the company has been involved in an accounting scandal. The stock immediately gets cut in half. The woman is horrified. She feels enraged at the company and at her friend who recommended it, ashamed for choosing such

a bad stock, and terrified about losing half of her money.

Those thoughts and feelings are the elements of the primary knot. However, instead of beginning the unraveling process – instead of admitting to herself her painful thoughts and feelings – she ties a locking knot on the end. She begins to focus entirely on the outside situation.

“What a deceitful company,” she says. “I’m going to look into filing a lawsuit against them. And what a terrible friend. I’m going to tell my friend never to give me financial advice again.” Her mind begins to cycle through the externals, going deeper and deeper. The more she does that, the tighter the lock becomes – and the more impossible it becomes to unravel the primary knot.

The challenge at this point is to first undo the lock. The woman needs to turn her attention from the outer situation to her internal experience. Once she does that, she can let her painful thoughts be healed. But as long as she insists that the problem is exclusively external, she is going to remain stuck.

Here is an illustration of what I mean:

A Locking Knot:

“The problem is that deceitful company.”

The Real Knot:

“I feel angry because I believe I have been misled. I feel guilty because I see myself as a terrible investor.”

Let’s say that the woman cycles through externals for weeks, going deeper and deeper into anger and misery. Then one day she sits down and says, “You know, I feel terrible. Just terrible. Maybe I should do a little inner work before I get angry at anyone else.”

That tiny step unties the lock. Despite the difficulty of the external situation, she has decided to turn her attention to her inner experience.

At that point she can begin step one, which may look like this:

“I feel devastated by this. I see myself as a failure at investing. I feel ashamed about making such a poor choice. I’m angry at some other people, but I’m really angry at myself. Those are my thoughts and feelings.”

She can quickly move on to step two, and express her willingness to release those thoughts. She can then move to the third step, in which she opens her mind to receive an inflow of comforting, inspired thoughts – including guidance on any actions to take.

However, that three-step process can’t begin until the woman shifts her focus to her internals: her state of mind. That shift undoes the lock.

### Inner Focus

I don’t want to imply that it is easy to undo our locks and begin the releasing process. It is a simple shift in focus, but it can take a good degree of discipline. When I am confronted with a challenging situation, I often throw my focus to the externals. I thrash about for a while (sometimes a long while), flailing at the outer situation. Eventually I become tired, sit down, and begin the inner unraveling process.

Whenever we say, “My thoughts are not important here; the problem is entirely so-and-so external thing (or so-and-so other person),” we have tied a locking knot. There can be no forward movement – no real healing – until we undo the lock and acknowledge the inner problem, our painful thoughts.

There may, of course, be some important worldly actions to take in conjunction with our situation. I am not suggesting that we should ignore the worldly aspects of our lives. But if we hold our painful thoughts in place by choosing to focus exclusively on the outer situation, we’re probably not going to find much relief.

One common way to tie a locking knot is to focus on someone else’s mistakes, rather than on our own state of mind. This is the stuff that long-term interpersonal conflicts are made of. Instead of

saying, “I feel afraid,” we say, “You are doing this terrible thing and that terrible thing!” We lock our own fear or anger into place by focusing exclusively on another person’s actions.

A second, more subtle way to form a locking knot is to ruminate on our own past mistakes. This, of course, has exactly the same effect as focusing on someone else’s errors. It locks our current painful thoughts into place. It is an avoidance mechanism – a way of avoiding an inner healing.

The alternative is to turn to our inner light with our *current* painful thoughts, and express our willingness to release them in the moment. Instead of saying, “I should have done so-and-so differently last year,” we say, “I feel ashamed (or frightened, or whatever) right now.” That shift of focus undoes the lock. It allows us to begin the inner healing process – the healing of our current state of mind.

Again, I do believe that there may be some worldly actions to take in a particular situation. But ideally, we let our inner wisdom guide us in those activities. If we made a bad decision last week, we may be guided to make amends in some way. But we can’t begin that amendment process if we sit around in a state of self-abasement, fixating on how bad we are for making the mistake.

Let me summarize the point about locking knots. It’s important for us to get to the core knot. If we try to run through the three-step process but don’t find any relief, we may be fiddling about with the outer lock rather than working on the core.

For example, “I’m mad that I did a bad job at work yesterday” is a locking knot. It is a way of throwing focus away from internals. The *real* knot is, “Right now, I see myself as a failure. Right now, I’m worried that my co-workers don’t like me.” Those are the current painful thoughts, to be exchanged for miracles.

By going within, to our current thoughts and feelings, we pinpoint the area that needs to be healed.

## The Deepest Need



Helps with steps one, two, and three

I find that there is a simple question that provides direction through the three-step process. The question is: “What is my deepest need right now?”

Typically, when I’m upset, I believe that I need something in the world to be different: a person’s behavior, a financial situation, or something of that sort. Those may, of course, be legitimate needs. I may, for example, need money to pay my bills. However, those are not my deepest needs.

When I’m feeling stuck, I sometimes try to reach down to my deepest need. This helps to reorient me toward the process of inner healing.

For example, let’s say that I’m feeling alone one night. “I really need a friend to go out with tonight,” I say. But none of my friends are free on this night. I sit around for an hour, feeling upset about the situation.

Then I decide to ask what my deeper needs are. What do I expect to get from a night out with a friend?

“I suppose I have a deeper need than simply going out tonight,” I say. “My deeper need is for companionship. That’s a deeper need I’m trying to fill.”

But then I try to go even deeper, to my deepest need. What does “companionship” look like to me – does it mean simply being physically present with another person? No, it’s more than that. What is the deepest need I am trying to fill?

“I suppose that I want to feel a sense of joyful connection,” I

say, “and I want to share that with others.” And that, I believe, is my deepest need. That need – the need for an experience of joy and connection flowing through me – is what I am associating with “going out tonight.”

Once I have reoriented in that way, I can begin to directly fill that need. I can remove any blocks to that inner experience. I certainly don’t have to wait for a friend to call me on the phone in order to begin this process. As I create room for the experience of joy and connection to flow into my mind, I may feel inspired to let it flow out in any number of ways.

Here is another example: if I find myself in financial distress, there may be an immediate need for a certain amount of money. Beneath that, there may be a deeper need – a need for a sense of financial stability. The deepest need, however, is the need to feel safe and secure. If I gather together some money, but don’t access that inner experience, I will very likely continue to find myself in a state of distress.

*A Course in Miracles* points out that our perceived needs are generally reflections of our core need to reconnect with our spiritual light. Without that core need fulfillment, we will remain unsatisfied. When we identify that deepest need, however, we can take active steps toward letting it be filled.

As I stated earlier, I don’t mean to imply that our worldly needs should be ignored. We may need money to pay for things, and we may need friends to share our joys and concerns with. But I find that things work best when we let our deepest need be fulfilled. A moment of connection to divine love and wisdom may inspire a worldly solution, or motivate us to reach out to people in new ways. The key is to unblock things from the inside out.

Asking, “What’s my deepest need in this situation?” can help us to move toward the true goal. Our deepest need – our need for the experience of divine love – can be filled at every moment. It returns to us the instant there is an opening. It blesses us in myriad ways, and flows through us to others, blessing them.



## Outflow



### Helps with step three

The three-step process of opening to miracles doesn't really end with us. The process simply unblocks an inner channel, which clears the way for an outward flow.

As I mentioned earlier, there was a time in my life when I spent enormous amounts of effort on personal growth. I studied spiritual books, spent time in prayer, and so forth. However, I never seemed to get close to a real sense of peace. Looking back, one of my mistakes was that I thought the work terminated with me. I looked at spiritual work like a personal project – it was something that was going to enrich my own life. Other people didn't factor into the equation.

It was because of that orientation that I didn't get very far. I didn't understand that divine love is an extending, expanding thing. I didn't realize it needs to flow through us, to others.

Today, in order to stay on the right track, I try to keep my eyes on the goal of the three-step process – the experience of love extending through me. The goal isn't my own separate peace or my own personal enlightenment, apart from others. Rather, the goal is to become a conduit for a flow of divinely-inspired thoughts and feelings.

*A Course in Miracles* teaches that we will be comforted as we let this comfort flow through us. We don't have to squeeze love out. We don't have to ramp up a personal effort to give love, using an act of will. All we need do is clear a space for this love to come through us. As we do that, our minds are healed.

I sometimes “backload” the three-step process by keeping my eyes on that goal. I begin by recognizing a need – a situation or a person in need of blessing. I then begin the three-step process, keeping my eyes on the goal of extending miracles to that person or situation. The process is still the same: I identify my own unloving thoughts, express my willingness to release them, and open to the inflow of a sense of peace. However, I keep an awareness of the outflow as well.

As an illustration of this, a friend of mine recently called me on the phone. This friend was quite angry about a difficult situation she was facing. She seemed quite upset. I reminded myself that if I allowed love to flow through me to her, *I* would be comforted in the process. Keeping that in mind, I ran through the three steps.

As I sat, listening to my friend, I turned my focus inward to my own inner blocks. I asked myself, “Where are the blocks to love inside *me* right now?” I took a quick inventory.

“I’m feeling somewhat anxious about this conversation,” I admitted to myself. “I’m worried that my friend might turn some of her anger on me if I say the wrong thing. I see myself as a bit vulnerable. Those are the inner blocks that I’d like resolved.”

I then moved on to step two. “Divine spirit,” I said, “I am willing to release these blocks. I am willing to release my worry and my sense of vulnerability. I am willing to let you transform these thoughts and feelings.”

I then moved on to step three, and tried to open my mind as wide as possible to the inflow of new, loving thoughts – miracles. I began to feel a greater degree of peace, mixed together with a sense of compassion toward my friend. I tried to let that peaceful compassion direct my words.

“You know,” I said, “that does sound like a difficult situation you’re going through.”

“Yeah, it is,” my friend said.

“I want to let you know that you’re not alone.”

She paused for a moment. “Thank you,” she said.

“Is there anything I can do to help?” I asked.

And the conversation went from there. I tried to hold open the channel for divinely-inspired peace, or strength, to flow through me.

When I felt a spot of defensiveness or discomfort surface in me, I ran through the three-step process once again, expressing my willingness to exchange my defensive thoughts for miracles. I ended up doing this several times.

As the Course points out, this type of process will always help us – regardless of whether the other person recognizes our attempts to help. As we clear a space for divine comfort to flow through us, *we* will be comforted.

The three-step process clears a path for this flow. Every time we identify a block to peace, and become willing to release it, we instantly expand the channel for love to flow through us. This love can then extend from us to others.

I’d like to point out that an experience of miracles can take many forms – both coming in and flowing out. Divine love may come in as an experience of peace, and flow out as patience toward a family member. It may come in as a sense of safety, and flow out as kindness toward a friend. The form, I find, adapts itself to the circumstances at hand.

Focusing on the “outflow” of love can help to keep our minds on the right track. A gentle word – even a smile – can keep our minds clear.

### An Example

Let me offer one last example of how the “outflow” of miracles may look.

Let's say that I'm feeling bothered by a co-worker. I've begun to avoid interacting with this person. I decide to sit down and run through the three steps.

"I'm feeling upset about my interactions with this guy," I say, "but let me get clear about my specific thoughts and perceptions. What is my view of this person? How do I see him?"

I search my mind honestly, and identify several painful thoughts. "I see this person as tough to please," I say. "I see him as rather domineering. I see him as the cause of a lot of my problems. Those are some of my burdensome thoughts."

I then move on to step two. "Spirit of healing," I say, "I recognize that this isn't the highest way to look at this person. I realize that these thoughts are causing me distress. I'm willing to release them to you. I would like to be free of them, and receive your inspired replacements – your new thoughts."

As I become willing to release my old perceptions, I begin to feel a trickle of peace – a hint of warmth that I hadn't felt before. I stay with that warmth, and protect it in my mind. I continue to clear away the interference to it. As I identify and release my blocks, that peaceful warmth grows. It begins to change my view of my co-worker.

Gradually the sense of peace expands, and I begin to feel more compassionate. "You know, I act just like he does sometimes," I realize. The sting of anger that I've been feeling diminishes. Some of my co-worker's more enlightened qualities come to mind. I actually begin to feel a sense of appreciation for him.

Now, at that point, I've successfully run through most of the three-step process. I could conceivably stop there, glad to have received a new, more peaceful perception. I could go about my business with a more elevated state of mind.

However, if I want to really throw open the gate to miracles, I can focus on extending those new, loving thoughts.

For example, I may think of a few ways to share my appreciative thoughts with my co-worker. I may say something kind, or otherwise extend my newfound sense of warmth to him.

I may also spend some time thinking of other people in my life, and extend my sense of peace to them as well. I may simply express my willingness, during step three, to be guided how to bless people more fully.

The point is that if I open my mind to the outflow of divine love through me – regardless of how “clear” the channel is – the flow will continue. It will very likely increase.

If, on the other hand, I enjoy a few minutes of peace and then return to my old thought patterns, I will feel like a desert traveler who has momentarily stopped by an oasis. I will look fondly back on those few minutes, but they will be like a memory.

I believe that any type of inner healing – whether it takes place in a therapist’s office, in a spiritual center, or wherever – simply sets the stage for a new inner lifestyle. We will never be satisfied journeying from oasis to oasis. We need to let the water flow throughout our daily lives.

Allowing the miracles of step three to extend to other people helps to keep this river flowing. It is one of the best ways to keep the channel clear.

Part Three



Exercises

## Exercises

In this section of the book, I'll present a series of practical exercises that relate to the three-step process. As with everything I write, I encourage you to work with these exercises in whatever way is personally meaningful. If you feel that a variation of a particular exercise would be more appropriate to your situation, please feel free to use your own variation.

In the following exercises, I will be making a more precise distinction between thoughts and feelings. In the earlier parts of this book, I described step one as “identifying our painful thoughts and feelings.” In these exercises, I'll begin with a specific feeling, and use it as a “pointer” to identify the thoughts in need of healing.

As I mentioned earlier, our feelings can be excellent indicators of our thoughts. If we can acknowledge a distressing emotion at its earliest stage – when it's merely a hint of discomfort – we can save ourselves a great deal of trouble down the road.

As a summary, here is the general format of the exercises that I will present:

Step One: “In the situation involving \_\_\_\_\_, I feel \_\_\_\_\_ because I think/see/believe \_\_\_\_\_.”

Step Two: “I am willing to release those thoughts and feelings.”

Step Three: “I am open to an experience of divinely-inspired love, wisdom, and comfort.”

It is a simple format, but I find that it is quite effective.

## First Exercise



### Self-perception

When I work with people on the three-step process, I often suggest that we write out our thoughts and feelings in step one. Writing, I find, is an excellent “focusing” tool. It helps to clarify exactly what is running through our minds.

In the following exercises, I will leave room in step one for you to write out your thoughts. You’re not required, of course, to write out anything. But I find that writing can provide some helpful structure. Often I’m not aware of my specific thoughts until I put them on paper.

I will include an italicized example in each exercise to illustrate a sample response.

#### Introduction

To begin this exercise, please choose some area of your life that’s troubling you. It could be a relationship, a work-related situation, or anything else. If you wish, you can describe the issue below.

*(ex. My wife is bothering me about cleaning up my stuff around the house. I’m getting a little tired of it.)*

#### Step One

In order to zero-in on the thoughts in need of healing, let’s first take a look at your feelings. As I mentioned, uncomfortable



feelings can serve as excellent pointers to the underlying thoughts.

When you think about this issue, how do you *feel*? I invite you to list out your specific feelings below.

*(ex. I feel frustrated, and a bit guilty. I also feel a sense of dread about getting into further arguments.)*

Having listed out some of your feelings, you're halfway through step one. Now let's take a look at the thoughts that are giving rise to those feelings. I believe that it's important to be very honest with ourselves at this point. We don't want to "censor" our thoughts. We're honestly bringing these blocks into our awareness so we can allow them to be exchanged for miracles.

Here is one way to bridge from the feelings to the underlying thoughts: "I feel this way because *I see myself as \_\_\_\_\_.*"

I invite you to complete that sentence.

*(ex. I feel this way because I see myself as unfairly criticized. I see myself as unappreciated. I see myself as trapped by all this criticism.)*

That completes step one. You have successfully identified some of the thoughts and perceptions that need to be replaced. In this example, the person's painful thoughts were: "I see myself as unfairly criticized," "I see myself as unappreciated," and "I see myself as trapped."

Of course, those might not look like thoughts or perceptions – they might look like objective descriptions of the situation. But it's

important to realize that these are just perceptions, or thoughts, and that your inner light can inspire another perception – a perception that leads to feelings of comfort and peace.

## Step Two

Let's immediately move on to step two. Let's gather up the perceptions and thoughts that you wrote out in step one (along with their resultant emotions) and express our willingness to release them.

As I mentioned earlier, I like to use a short prayer in this process. You are welcome to use whatever techniques are helpful to you – prayers, imagery, physical movements, or anything else. You can even choose a spiritual figure who represents divine love to you, and ask him or her to join you in releasing these thoughts. I support you in using whatever approach is helpful.

For the sake of this example, I will include a short prayer below.

Spirit of healing, I see myself as unfairly criticized.  
I see myself as trapped.  
I see myself as unappreciated.  
However, I admit that these are my own perceptions.  
I am willing to release them to you and receive something new.  
I am willing to release these thoughts and perceptions.  
I am open to an inflow of peace.

If you wish, you can spend a few minutes envisioning yourself handing over the thoughts and perceptions to your inner light. Our goal at this point is to become willing to release the old thoughts and move into a place of open-mindedness. Regardless of how much time that takes, you can try to reach that “crest of the hill.”

If you find it difficult to move into a place of open-mindedness, you may want to say:

I have no idea what to think about this situation.  
I am willing to release my old thoughts.  
My mind is open.  
I do not know what to think.

That creates an opening for an inner healing.

When you feel a space opening in your mind for an inflow of new thoughts, perceptions, and feelings, you can move on to step three. Even a tiny opening is enough.

### Step Three

During step three, our goal is to become open to a personal experience of divine love, comfort, and peace. Steps one and two were designed to clear a space for this experience.

I often need to spend a few minutes at step three, seeking this inner experience of comfort. As I seek for it, I continue to monitor my mind for painful thoughts, and express my willingness to release them as they come up.

Again, it may be helpful to say a short prayer:

Inner light, I am open to your help.  
I am willing to receive a sense of comfort.  
I want to feel your love and support.  
My heart is open to you.

Our goal at this step is to allow an inflow of peace to enter our awareness. That experience will transform our perceptions and guide our responses to the original issue.

We may need to tend to any newfound sense of comfort like a gardener would tend to little seedlings. We may need to spend most of our time releasing the weeds of our old thoughts. But the work is worth it.

If you do begin to experience a sense of comfort or love during step three (no matter how strong it feels) you can to give it

permission to flow through you to others. You can allow it to enfold whatever or whoever comes to mind – including people connected with the original issue. As you let miracles flow into and through you, you create an ever-wider channel for them. In the process, your mind is comforted.

If you *aren't* able to feel a sense of comfort right away, you may need to “search around” in your mind a bit. This may take some practice. There is a current of peace, or warmth, somewhere in your mind, although it may be buried under layers of painful thoughts. If you search for it – and continue to release any interfering thoughts – you will clear a space for it to grow.

Once you begin to get in touch with a sense of divine love, you can let that new current of thought inspire your actions. This makes the whole process very practical. We're not just seeking a temporary oasis of peace; we're actually seeking a new way to perceive and respond to our original issue. We're seeking a new path to follow.

### A Note on Step Three

I'd like to add a personal observation about step three. I have found that the inflow of miracles may take place sometime *after* we've completed this exercise. The full impact of step three can appear in unusual forms.

As an example, one day I was feeling anxious about a financial concern. I ran through this three-step process while sitting at a coffee shop.

“Divine spirit,” I said, “I'm feeling anxious because I see myself as threatened by this financial issue. I see myself in danger of some serious consequences. But I am willing to release those thoughts and feelings to you. I am open to a sense of peace.”

As I finished with that process, I felt only a slight increase in peace. It wasn't much, but I decided that I would stay with it. Perhaps, I hoped, it would grow.

About ten minutes later, a man sitting across from me launched into a conversation with a third patron. We were sitting in something of a triangle, and the other two people seemed to have just met for the first time.

“My friend,” said the man to the other patron. “I’m on a spiritual path. I have everything I need!”

He said this somewhat out of the blue, and the other patron seemed surprised by the comment.

“Yeah?” he said.

“I have no worries about money,” said the man. “No financial concerns.”

“Really?” said the other patron. “Then how do you pay your bills?”

“The spirit provides,” said the man. “I’ve never missed a bill yet.”

“You never worry about money?”

“You just have to have faith,” said the man. “I do, and things work great. I am a happy man.”

At this point, I started chuckling at the obvious relevance of these comments to my situation. The other patron turned to me and asked me what I thought about the conversation.

I said to him, “I appreciate this man’s attitudes. I also relate to your questions. I’m enjoying your conversation very much.”

They seemed satisfied with this, and returned to their talk. After a few minutes, the man sitting across from me stood up, shook the hand of the other patron and my own, and went on his way. My anxieties were replaced with a sense of humor.

The interesting thing about this story is that the most dramatic

inflow of support came to me through another person, a few minutes after I tried to open my mind to it. The full impact of step three came in an unexpected form.

I share this because I believe that it's important to keep our minds open to the experience of divine support in a variety of different forms. If we run through the three-step process and only feel a slight increase in peace, we can stay with that peace. Broader inflows may come to us as we go along.

## Second Exercise



### Perception of Others

Let me offer a parallel exercise to the earlier one. In this second exercise, instead of choosing a situation in your life that is causing you distress, you'll choose a person toward whom you feel some conflict.

As *A Course in Miracles* points out, we can only feel divine love to the degree that we're willing to share it with others. As we let our views of other people become healed, we open an ever-wider channel to that love within us.

#### Introduction

To begin, please choose a person whom you don't feel a great deal of appreciation toward. It could be someone you care about who is currently bothering you, someone you strongly dislike, or someone whom you feel just slightly negative toward.

If you wish, you can write his or her name below.

*(ex. My supervisor Dorothy.)*

#### Step One

As before, let's identify your specific feelings when you think about this person. This step calls for a great deal of honesty. It may be difficult to acknowledge some of your painful emotions – particularly if this person is a friend or family member. However, your painful feelings will point you in the direction of the thoughts

that need to be healed.

Let's complete the following sentence: "When I think about this person, I feel \_\_\_\_\_."

*(ex. When I think about Dorothy I feel angry and somewhat sad. I also feel defensive.)*

Let's now take an honest look at your perception of this person. Using your feelings as a lead-in, let's complete the following sentence:

"When I think about this person, I feel this way because *I see him/her as* \_\_\_\_\_."

*(ex. When I think about Dorothy, I feel angry, sad and defensive because I see her as a really insensitive person. I see her as someone who is in her own world – someone who never thinks about other people's feelings.)*

The final part of the above sentence represents the thoughts and perceptions in need of healing. Your current view of (or thoughts about) this person is fostering your uncomfortable feelings. A new, inspired view of this same person will clear the way for feelings of compassion and peace.

Having written out your feelings and thoughts, you have completed step one. You can now move immediately on to step two.

Step Two



It may be helpful to begin by taking “ownership” of your current thoughts. I like to say a brief prayer:

I take ownership of my thoughts about this person.  
These thoughts are mine, to keep or release.  
I am willing to release my hold on them.  
I am willing to be free of my old, painful view.  
I am willing to receive something new.

Then spend some time resting in your willingness to release your old view. If you find it helpful to use imagery or any other supports in this process, I encourage you to do so.

Here is one form of imagery that I occasionally use:

Spirit, I have been seeing this person through a cracked set of eyeglasses.  
The cracks are all my painful thoughts, and they are distorting my vision.  
I can't see this person clearly.  
My old thoughts are distorting my view.  
Spirit of healing, I am willing to take off these cracked eyeglasses and release them to you.  
I am open to a clearer vision of this person.

As you sit at step two, expressing your willingness to release your old view of this person, you may want to occasionally say:

I don't know how to look at this person.  
I just don't know.  
I am willing to release my old thoughts and perceptions.  
My mind is open to something new.

When you can say that and mean it, you have completed step two. If it takes a bit of time before you feel your mind becoming open, that's normal. I find that I sometimes need to rest in a state of willingness for five, ten, or fifteen minutes before I begin to feel my mind open.

### Step Three

When you do feel that an opening has been created, you can move on to step three – the true goal.

You can say:

Inner light, I have cleared a space in my mind.

I am open to a new view of this person.

How does she/he appear in your light?

I have no interest in my old way of seeing anymore.

I am open to a replacement.

I am open to seeing this person in an illuminated way.

Then you can hold your mind open to the inflow of a new view. You may begin to feel a trickle of compassion enter your awareness, or just a slight increase in peace. Or you may begin to receive insights into the person's behavior – insights that will inspire a greater sense of understanding. You may begin to sense a hint of beauty in this person that you hadn't seen before. The inflow of the new vision can take any number of forms.

Again, the new vision may come over days or even weeks. At times I have engaged in this process, and have felt only a slight increase in peace. However, the next time I interacted with the person in question, there was a different "tone" to my responses. Doing the three-step process set the stage for an evolving new perception of the relationship.

If you do receive an increased sense of compassion, tolerance, peace, or love during your practice of step three, you may want to "throw the gate open" to that love by consciously allowing it to extend to the person in question, as well as others.

You can, for example, "say" to this person as you think about him/her:

I bless you with the divine love I feel.

You deserve it, as do I.

You can ask your inner wisdom to bring to mind other people who are in need of blessing, and say the same to them. That proactive “extension” of love will help to keep it flowing into and through you.

## Examples

In order to more fully illustrate the process of this exercise, let me offer a few examples of how it may look.

Let’s say, as a first case, that a person is having an argument with her husband. She decides to run through this exercise.

She begins by identifying her specific feelings about the situation. “When I think about this conflict with my husband,” she says, “I feel somewhat resentful. I also feel worried.”

She then identifies the specific perceptions, or thoughts, that are generating those feelings.

“I feel resentful because I see my husband as stubborn and closed-minded. I see him as totally off the wall about this issue.”

She runs through the flip side of the equation, and becomes honest about her self-perception as well.

She says, “I see myself as trapped. I see myself as powerless to resolve this situation. That’s what’s causing my sense of worry.” That honest identification of her thoughts and feelings completes step one.

She then gathers up those various perceptions and brings them to her inner light.

“Inner light,” she says, “I see my husband as stubborn and closed-minded. I see myself as trapped and powerless. I am willing to release those perceptions. I am willing to receive a whole new view of my husband and myself.”

She spends some time “looking” at each one of those

perceptions, and imagines herself handing each one over to her inner light. She actually feels her heart lifted as she does this. She begins to feel an open space being created in her mind for a new experience to enter.

After a few minutes spent resting in a place of willingness to release her old perceptions, she says another prayer:

“Inner light,” she says, “I am open to a new perception. Help me to see my husband and myself through your vision. I want to be at peace, and I want to respond to this situation from a place of peace, wisdom, and clarity. I am open to a miracle of healing.”

The woman then holds her mind open as wide as she can, inviting a new set of inner experiences to enter. After a few minutes, she begins to feel a little more peaceful. Her mind wavers between the old feelings and this new peace, but as the old thoughts arise in her mind, she expressed her willingness to release them, and returns to a state of open-mindedness.

As the minutes go by, some comforting thoughts come to mind. She realizes, for example, that she and her husband have always been able to resolve these types of arguments in a peaceful and mutually supportive way. That realization gives her hope. She also begins to feel stronger in her commitment to finding a solution to the conflict. Her feelings of vulnerability diminish, and she feels more inspired to find a resolution.

As the woman feels a sense of peace stabilizing, several thoughts come to mind to share with her husband – potential solutions to the conflict. She decides to call him on the phone and share them with him.

In that example, the woman’s husband may or may not react favorably to her phone call. But by engaging in this type of practice, the woman has let her own mind be comforted. She has accepted an inner healing. This will undoubtedly assist her in her efforts to find a resolution to the relationship conflict.

Let me offer another example. Let’s imagine a student who

dislikes going to school. This student has never felt very close to his friends, and doesn't feel as though he "fits in" at school. He decides to run through this exercise.

"When I think about going to school," he says, "I feel stressed and upset." However, that doesn't feel like the deepest level of his emotions. He tries to become even more precise about his feelings.

"When I think about school," he says, "I feel angry at people and a little lonely." That feels like a more honest assessment of his feelings. He then goes deeper, and looks at the thoughts and perceptions behind those feelings.

"When I think about going to school," he says, "I feel angry and lonely because I see myself as left out from the crowd. I see myself as unable to fit in."

He also acknowledges his perceptions of other people. "I see the other kids as dumb," he says. "I see them as self-absorbed and uninterested in me or anyone else."

He then immediately brings those honestly-identified perceptions to his inner light. He says, "Inner light, I could use some help with this. I'm willing to open my mind to a new view of myself and the other kids. I'll trade my old views for something new."

As this young man sits, holding his mind open to a new view of himself and his fellow students, a couple of realizations come to mind. He remembers that, last week, another student invited him to lunch, but that he refused. "Maybe that kid could use a friend," he says. "I don't know why I said no to him."

He also begins to realize that the "bravado" of the popular kids at school is really just a cover for insecurity. "It's all an act," he says. For the first time, he really sees it. His anger toward the other students changes to something more compassionate. "They're probably feeling bad, too," he thinks.

As he sits, keeping his mind open to a new view of himself and

his fellow students, he begins to feel a sense of appreciation for his own talents. “I’m a pretty nice guy when I’m in a good mood,” he says, “and I like to help people. Maybe I can reach out to other kids who could use some help.”

After a few minutes, he feels a bit better. He decides to try to keep these new thoughts in mind at school the next day – especially the realization that the bravado of the “in” crowd is a mask for insecurity, and that he himself can reach out to other kids who are feeling alone. He feels complete with the process.

In that example, there may or may not be a magical transformation of the student’s experience at school the next day. But at least an opening has been made for something new.

By identifying his painful feelings and underlying thoughts – and becoming willing to exchange them for something more inspired – this student has taken a step toward peace of mind. He may need to run through this process many times before a new, more peace-producing set of thoughts becomes stable. But every step is helpful.

## Troubleshooting



Before offering another exercise, I'd like to outline some potential "trouble spots" on this three-step process. Knowing about these common stumbling points may help to clear up some difficulties.

I'd like to be clear that the following conversations are hypothetical. I wouldn't disclose details involving someone's actual struggles with this process. However, the following conversations represent similar ones I have had.

### Troubleshooting Step One (Feelings)

In working with people on these exercises, I find that one of the most trouble-prone areas is the identifying-the-emotions step. I sometimes have a conversation that goes like this:

Me: "To begin, please choose a situation in your life that's causing you discomfort."

Person: "Sure – I just got socked with a huge tax bill. I'll use that."

Me: "OK. Now, when you think about your tax bill, how do you feel?"

Person: "I feel that the government is ripping me off!"

At that point, I would stop the exercise and try to help the person more closely identify his or her feelings. "The government is ripping me off" isn't really a feeling. It's a perception, or a thought. The actual feeling is probably anger, or a mix of anger and insecurity, or resentment, or something of that sort.

When I find it difficult to identify my own emotions during

step one, I often run through a list of feelings and “try on” each one. For example, I say, “Do I feel sad about this? No, not sad really. Angry? No, more like insecure. Insecure and a little anxious.” That type of process helps me to become more honest about what I’m actually feeling.

I sometimes run through a similar process with other people. It might look like this:

Me: “When you say that you feel the government is ripping you off, do you mean that you feel angry?”

Person: “Darn right I feel angry.”

Me: “OK, anything else? Maybe a little frightened?”

Person: “Not frightened. But maybe a little nervous.”

That is a much clearer identification of the emotions. The person can now say, “I feel angry and a little nervous,” and move on to the next step.

Other people have trouble identifying their painful feelings because they’re well-versed in psychological or spiritual theory, and understand that uncomfortable emotions aren’t necessarily “rational.” However, that intellectual understanding can be a block to actually acknowledging the feelings. Here is how that type of problem may arise:

Me: “You mentioned that your job is troubling you. When you think about your job, how do you feel?”

Person: “Well, I know I should trust the Spirit with this.”

Me: “That’s definitely the goal. But let’s take a look at what you’re actually feeling.”

Person: “But I understand that there’s really no reason to feel bad about this. I know that bad feelings don’t accomplish anything.”



Me: “OK, but let’s begin at the beginning. How do you feel right now?”

Person: “I know that I should just have faith.”

And so on. The intellectual understanding – true as it may be – is a block to the acknowledgement of the actual feelings. In a conversation like that, I might share how *I* would feel in a similar situation, and use that as an opening for the other person to agree or disagree. For example:

Me: “If I were to go through a situation like the one you’re describing, I imagine that I might feel a little angry, and perhaps sad.”

Person: “Really?”

Me: “Sure. Now, you might feel something completely different. I’d be interested in hearing what your feelings are.”

That sometimes helps the person to feel more comfortable identifying his or her feelings. I also try to be clear that identifying feelings is simply part of step one. It sets the stage for an inner healing. Identifying feelings is not the healing itself, but it can be a very helpful preparatory step.

### Troubleshooting Step One (Perceptions)

One of the trickiest parts of step one is identifying perceptions *as* perceptions. For example, I may have a conversation like this:

Me: “You were able to identify your specific feelings; that’s great. Now let’s go on to the next part of step one. You feel angry because you see your boss as...?”

Person: “I feel angry because my boss is rude.”

Me: “I think that it’s important to say, ‘because I *see* my boss as rude.’”

Person: “But he is.”

Me: “He may be acting in certain ways. But it’s important to get clear about our own thoughts, or perceptions of the situation.”

Person: “Believe me, if you knew him, you’d understand what I mean. That guy is rude.”

In this situation, the person is having some difficulty identifying her perception of her boss *as* a perception. It’s true that the boss may be acting in insensitive or unkind ways. But in order to clear a space for divine comfort to enter her mind, this person needs to become willing to release her own inner blocks. Focusing only on the boss’s behavior won’t create this opening.

In this case, I might say:

Me: “I understand that your boss isn’t showing much kindness toward you.”

Person: “Yeah, that’s right.”

Me: “We can’t work on him, though.”

Person: “Unfortunately, no.”

Me: “OK, why don’t we focus on clearing out our *own* painful thoughts. Do you have any painful thoughts about your boss?”

Person: “I guess I do. He really triggers a lot of negativity in me.”

Me: “OK, why don’t you list out some of those negative thoughts. Then we’ll turn with them to your inner light.”

The key in step one is always to become clear about our own feelings and thoughts. Even if someone else is “triggering” those feelings and thoughts (and this will often be the case), we’ll only find peace by working on our side of the equation. Acknowledging our specific thoughts clears the way for steps two and three.

## Troubleshooting Steps Two and Three

Steps two and three have their own unique challenges. When I help people with the three-step process, I sometimes lead a “guided meditation” for steps two and three. We might spend a few minutes on each step. Talking through these steps helps to clear up a lot of problems.

When I’m doing the process by myself, however, I sometimes find my mind wandering during steps two and three. Short prayers and imagery are great; I often use them. However, when I need some additional help, I use a technique inspired by *A Course in Miracles* and many other spiritual and psychological practices: the technique of a “focusing prayer.”

A “focusing prayer” is a short idea or statement that we repeat to ourselves, over and over, as a way of focusing the mind. The goal is to use peace-inviting words to go beyond the words, into an actual experience of peace and release. Let me offer a few illustrations of what I mean.

Let’s say that I’m able to identify some of my painful thoughts and feelings in step one. However, as I express my willingness to let them go, I find my mind wandering. At that point I may begin to repeat a phrase as a centering point for my intention. For example:

Spirit of healing, I release these thoughts to you.

I release them to you.

I release them to you.

I release them to you.

I may need to repeat that phrase dozens or hundreds of times in order to keep my mind focused and on-track. The goal isn’t simply to repeat the phrase; the goal is to use the phrase to go into an actual *experience* of release. It is a way of focusing the mind.

Because step two is a clearing step, I might use a statement of

open-mindedness as follows:

My mind is open.  
I don't know what to think.  
I don't know what to think.  
I don't know what to think.

Again, the repetition of that phrase is simply a way of strengthening my intention to open my mind. Like a set of train tracks, it supplies some structure for the journey.

A step three focusing prayer may look like this:

Inner light, I am open to your love.  
I am open to your love  
I am open to your love  
I am open to your love

The phrase serves as a reminder of a truth. It is a way of directing my mind toward the actual experience of that love. It is a way of focusing my attention on my goal.

Another step three focusing prayer may be:

My goal is peace.  
My goal is peace.  
My goal is peace.  
My goal is peace.

If, during the repetition of that phrase, I begin to actually *feel* a sense of peace, I will probably let the phrase drop away. If my mind wanders, I may take up the repetition again.

The use of a focusing prayer is just one method of retaining focus during steps two and three. However, I find it to be an enormously powerful tool.

## Additional Exercises



### Beliefs and Thoughts

I have found that some people prefer a slightly different variation of an exercise. Because of that, I'd like to present a couple more "flavors" of the earlier exercise in an attempt to broaden the approach.

In the first exercise, we looked at our self-perceptions. Saying, "I see myself as \_\_\_\_\_" accomplished this. In the second exercise, we looked at our perceptions of (or thoughts about) other people.

In this third exercise, we'll take a look at the *beliefs* that we hold about a situation, rather than our specific perceptions.

#### Introduction

To begin, please choose some issue in your life that is troubling you. If you'd like, you can describe the issue below.

*(ex. I want to quit my job and do something more fulfilling. I really don't like my current job.)*

#### Step One

Next, let's identify your specific feelings. As before, I invite you to complete the sentence, "When I think about this issue, I feel \_\_\_\_\_."

*(ex. When I think about this issue, I feel a bit frightened. A little confused, too.)*

Previously, at this point, we would identify the self-perceptions and perceptions of others that led to these feelings. In this variation of the exercise, we'll take a slightly different approach. Let's use the following sentence as a bridge to our thoughts: "I feel this way because *I believe that* \_\_\_\_\_."

*(ex. I feel frightened and confused because I believe that I might make a bad mistake. I believe that jobs are hard to come by, and you better stick with what you have. I believe that I might not be qualified to do anything but this job.)*

The variation here is that instead of identifying your perceptions, we're identifying your underlying beliefs. Perceptions and beliefs are so entwined that this variation might produce identical results to the previous one. However, some people are more easily able to identify their beliefs rather than specific perceptions.

## Step Two

Once we have listed out our limiting beliefs – some of which may seem “silly” or “irrelevant” and others of which may feel “true” – let's express our willingness to release them to our inner light

I like to say a prayer at this point. I may say:

Spirit of wisdom, I am concerned about this issue with my job.  
I feel frightened and confused about it.  
I feel that way because I believe that jobs are hard to come by,  
and I might make a terrible mistake.

I also believe that I might not be qualified to do anything else.  
But I am willing to loosen my grip on those beliefs.  
I don't know what to believe about this job situation.  
I am willing to release those old beliefs.  
My mind is open to something new.

That type of prayer can help us to clear out a space in our minds for inspired thoughts to enter – new, loving thoughts that will foster new beliefs and perceptions.

### Step Three

As you feel an opening being created, you can immediately move on to the final step. You may wish to say:

Divine comforter, my mind is open to you.  
I am willing to receive a new set of beliefs.  
I am willing to open to an inflow of your loving thoughts.  
Transform my beliefs with your light.  
I am open to you.

As always, our goal in steps two and three is to clear the slate of our personal thoughts (in this case, our beliefs) and create room for the inflow of divinely-inspired loving, wise, comforting thoughts. By admitting that we don't know what to think, and opening ourselves to a new set of thoughts, we make room for the miracle of an inner healing.

The person in the example above may find her whole belief system altered by this exercise. She may experience a shift in attitude that allows her to more fully appreciate her current job. Or she may begin to feel more empowered to seek a new, more fulfilling job. Divine wisdom and inspiration can come in any number of forms.

### Thoughts

Here is a final variation of the same exercise. Instead of identifying your specific perceptions or beliefs, you'll simply take a broad inventory of your thoughts.

## Introduction

To begin, please choose a situation that is troubling you.

*(ex. That person's cell phone is ringing very loudly, and it's distracting me.)*

## Step One

Next, let's identify your specific feelings, as uncomfortable as they may be. Let's use our typical format of, "When I think about this issue, I feel \_\_\_\_\_."

*(ex. When I think about this issue, I feel angry and a bit vengeful. Like I want to make this guy feel bad for setting his phone ringer so loud in a public place.)*

Now let's simply take an inventory of whatever thoughts are crossing your mind in regard to this issue.

I invite you to state whatever you're thinking about the situation:

*(ex. This guy is a total boor. I mean, give me a break. Doesn't he realize how rude it is to let his phone ring like that in a public place? He probably likes the attention.)*

The key at this point is to realize that your feelings are coming from these thoughts, rather than from the external situation itself.



Your inner light can replace these anger-producing thoughts with peace-producing thoughts, if you are willing to allow that exchange to take place.

## Step Two

Once you have taken an inventory of your thoughts, you can immediately express your willingness to release them. You can say:

I have honestly identified my thoughts.  
I realize that they are producing discomfort in me.  
I am willing to release these thoughts to you, Inner light.  
I have no interest in them anymore.  
I am willing to create a space for a new set of thoughts.

## Step Three

Let's say this, as we move into step three:

Divine Spirit, my mind is open.  
I don't know what to think about this situation.  
I really don't know.  
But I'm willing to receive your thoughts on the matter.  
I am willing to receive your peaceful thoughts.  
I am open to something new.

Then you can rest in your willingness to receive an inflow of wiser, more peaceful thoughts. As you do this, you receive an inner healing – regardless of what happens on the outside.

## Ongoing Practice

The exercises that I presented have focused on specific situations in our lives that are causing distress. I'd like to conclude by broadening the scope of this practice.

The real goal of the three-step process is to clear out our old perceptions of everything, and let an experience of divine love light rush in to take their place. If we can get to the “crest of the

hill” with everything we see, we can open our minds to a miracle-infused vision of those things. Ultimately, this can be a fluid, ongoing practice.

Let me share how this process may look. I may be sitting in my office one day. I decide to spend a minute looking around myself and running through this exercise with everything in my field of vision.

“When I look at that computer,” I say, “I feel some disappointment because I see it as outdated. But I am willing to release that perception to you. I don’t know how to look at this computer. I am willing to receive a new view of the computer that brings me joy.”

I spend a few seconds loosening my hold on my old view, and opening to a new, peace-producing perception of the computer. I begin to feel a sense of appreciation for the computer. Then I move on to something else.

“When I look at that desk,” I say, “I feel some concern because I see it as falling apart. But I also feel some thankfulness because I see it as a good companion over the years. Inner light, I bring that mix of perceptions to you. I don’t know how to look at this desk. I am willing to give you all my old thoughts about it, and receive a new view.”

I spend some time opening my mind to a peaceful perception of the desk, and then move on to the next thing.

“When I look at these phone messages, I feel overwhelmed because I see myself as trapped by a lot of demands. I am willing to release that perception and receive a new view.”

And so on. When I’m sitting in traffic, or waiting at the post office, I sometimes run through this type of exercise. The goal is to open my mind to a divinely-inspired vision of all these things.

People

For a more challenging version of this ongoing practice, we can use people.

For example, I might be walking down the street. As I cross paths with various people, I acknowledge my thoughts and become willing to exchange them for something ever-more loving.

The process might look like this:

“When I see that man, I feel nervous because he seems a bit intimidating. But I don’t know how to look at that man. I am willing to release my old perception of him, and receive a new, loving view. Inner light, how do you see him?”

“When I see that woman and child, I feel sad because they seem to be in a great deal of conflict. But I am not seeing that woman and child as they really are. I am willing to release my perception of them, and see them in a new, loving light.”

“When I see that group of people I feel some impatience because I see them as crowding my space with their noise. Inner light, I am willing to release my old thoughts and receive a new set of thoughts about this group of people.”

Underlying this practice is the idea that our personal perceptions of people are always limited, to some degree. As we become willing to receive a new perception – a perception based on divine love – our views are elevated and our minds are healed.

## Conclusion



My goal in this book has been to share a simple practice that supports the experience of inner healing. In the three-step process, we identify and become willing to release some of our painful thoughts, which clears an opening for the inflow of divinely-inspired loving thoughts.

I'd like to state once again that this is just one method of opening our minds, or hearts, to our inner light. There are many other processes, all potentially helpful.

And of course, there are people who go through their days feeling a perpetual connection to the flow of divine love. These people do not need a specific practice; they are receiving an inner healing all day.

That is the ultimate goal of this practice: to develop a continual connection to the source of miracles within us. Each bit of practice can help us move toward this goal.

In the next section, I will share some questions about this process that I have received.

## Part Four



## Questions and Answers

*Q: Sometimes when I try using this process, I end up “fighting” against my anger, fear, or depression. That only seems to make things worse. How can I avoid the tendency to fight against the blocks?*

A: It is true that fighting our inner blocks only adds more fuel to the conflict. One of the reasons that I updated the language of *Inner Healing* is that I wanted to reinforce the concept of *willingness*.

The healing process that takes place at steps two and three arises from a humble willingness to let our old thoughts go, and a parallel willingness to open to something new. We simply rest in our willingness to release the old and receive the new. This is the opposite of fighting.

In the three-step process, we give permission for our minds to let go of a tiresome burden. We admit that we don’t know what to think or feel. We express our willingness to receive a new experience.

We allow, we assent, we open. We don’t fight against the blocks. Instead, we simply rest in a state of willingness to allow the exchange to happen.

*Q: But aren’t we trying to get rid of our blocks? How is that different from fighting?*

A: Fighting generally comes from a fear-based perspective. When we fight, we begin by perceiving a threat, which we feel pressured to eliminate or change.

However, our inner blocks are not really threats. They are like swirling fog that is temporarily interfering with our awareness of miracles. But this fog doesn’t actually affect the miracles at all.

By swinging violently at the fog, by desperately trying to get rid of it, we simply add to the obfuscation process. We add more fear and

conflict to our minds.

The alternative is to turn, peacefully, to our inner light. We invite this light to rise in our awareness and shine away the fog. We refocus our attention on this light, and allow it to dispel the interference, which we are willing to let go.

Sunshine does not fight mist or fog. It simply shines those things away. In the same way, our inner light shines away our inner blocks. Our job is simply to allow the process to take place – not through fighting, but through a simple willingness to release and receive.

*Q: I can do this type of practice when I'm in a quiet space, like in meditation. But when I'm dealing with a bunch of activities, I find it very difficult to practice this. Is there anything that can make it easier?*

A: I always recommend that people start by using this type of practice in the easiest setting possible. For some people, that is silent meditation. For others, it's during a walk in nature. Others might find it easiest to do this with a friend or partner.

If we can practice in those “easy” settings, over and over, it primes the mind to use the practice in more challenging settings: during an interpersonal conflict, for example. Or on a crowded subway, or busy street.

Now, many of us (including me) have work or family responsibilities that occasionally require our full attention. We may not have the ability to pull our focus away from a task to run through the three-step process.

In these times, I find that it's helpful to set aside a few minutes throughout the day where I pause from my tasks and run through the process. I personally have an alarm on my phone that beeps on the hour, inviting me to take a break and open to a peaceful recharge.

I do believe that it is possible to establish such a strong and secure

connection to our inner light that we maintain an awareness of it even as we're engaged in complex tasks. But in order to get to that point, it can be helpful to set aside "break times" throughout the day to strengthen our connection.

*Q: I have no problem with what you're saying about an inner healing. But what if you need an outer healing – like of a physical or financial problem? Or of a relationship conflict? How do you use this then?*

A: I find that connecting with our inner light helps with any problem-solving activities we're engaged in. As we connect with our inner light, we receive a sense of peace. But along with peace comes wisdom, insight, and creative ideas for solutions to problems.

Because of this, we can make the connection with our inner light our first priority. As the light enters our awareness and a sense of peace and wisdom return, we will likely gain clarity about how to address challenges in our lives.

Let me give an example of the first time I used something similar to the three-step process. I was in college at the time, and I had been spending my time studying philosophy books. I was searching for a spiritual path for myself, and I was frustrated that I hadn't yet found something that "clicked."

One night, my frustration built up to a point where I couldn't tolerate it. At that moment, I said, "I am incredibly frustrated and weary by this search. I really want to know what my spiritual path should be. I am completely open to an answer." (I might not have used those exact words, but that was the spirit of things.)

Immediately the thought popped to mind: "Go check out *A Course in Miracles*." I put on my boots, walked to the closest bookstore, and found a copy of the Course. I opened it up, and immediately felt, *This is it*.

Without realizing it, I had used the three step process. I had admitted how frustrated and blocked I felt (step one.) I adopted a



willingness to let go of those blocks for a moment (step two) and open to an inflow of wisdom and guidance (step three.)

I share this because the process took place on the inside. It was the momentary connection to the place of wisdom and insight, rather than the specific actions that flowed from that, that was the most important thing.

In fact, over the next few years I became bored with *A Course in Miracles* and turned to studying other things. The books themselves weren't the answer. The answer I was seeking was the connection with the inner light – the light of comfort, peace, wisdom, and clarity.

Our inner light is the miracle. Any worldly results that ripple from the light are wonderful. But it's the moment-to-moment connection to the light that really matters.

*Q: I could probably spend forever on step one. I have a ton of inner blocks, and I can always find more. How much time should you spend on that first step?*

A: No more than a moment or two. Step one is designed to help us identify where our minds are feeling stuck. It is a preparatory step for the process of releasing and receiving. There is no need to spend a great deal of time seeking out every inner block.

Ideally, we spend just a moment on step one, a moment on step two, and as much time as possible on step three. The inflow of peace and miracles in step three is the important thing.

The mind will generate endless forms of inner blocks. The specific forms don't matter, and we don't need to analyze or seek out every one. In this process, we simply note whatever is currently obscuring the light, become willing to release it, and express our openness to have the light flood back into our awareness.

*Q: I sometimes feel that I've let go of a block, like a grievance or something. But then it keeps coming back. How can I permanently let go of things?*

A: I always encourage people not to aim for permanence or perfection in this practice. Instead, our goal is to simply open to a new experience for one moment at a time.

If, for just a brief moment, you can release an inner block and open to an experience of inner peace, you have accomplished something remarkable. If you can do that again later that day, you have begun a pattern.

The more times you can “touch in” to your inner light, the more comfortable your mind will become with the experience. Over time, you may find that you long more and more for the experience of this light.

The burdens of your distressing thoughts will become increasingly intolerable. The peace that lies just beyond those blocks will become increasingly attractive.

Over time, your mind will seek the experience of peace with ever-greater desire. Blocks to the peace will lose all luster, and will begin to appear as nothing but unnecessary burdens.

This process will unfold through your practice. During the practice, it’s inevitable that your mind will grab back a block or two. Some of these blocks may be old-familiar ones. Others may take new forms. The forms really don’t matter.

You can treat each of these blocks, as I discussed above, like fog and mist. Notice when they have arisen, express your willingness to let them go, and turn once again to your inner light.

As you do this – for one moment at time – the mind will move closer and closer to a more stable awareness of the light.

*Q: I feel really guilty about my thoughts sometimes. Like I have really mean and unkind thoughts toward people at times. Even people who are close to me. How do you deal with this sense of guilt?*

A: Inner blocks have a tendency to feed on themselves. It’s quite

common for our minds to feel fear, guilt, or anger about our fearful, guilty, or angry thoughts.

This self-feeding process, of course, simply keeps the blocks in place. When we look at our unloving thoughts as sources of guilt – as “proof” that we are somehow “bad” or “wrong” – we are keeping the blocks in place.

The alternative is to remind ourselves that our inner light is unaffected by our blocks. Our unloving thoughts and feelings do not put out our light, or make us unworthy to access it. The blocks simply hide the light from our awareness for a while.

The ultimate practice is to hold our inner blocks within a spirit of self-acceptance. This is like putting ice cubes by a warm fire. If we can respond to our blocks with self-compassion, self-acceptance, and ultimately self-love, the blocks will melt away.

*Q: Sometimes I think I'm tapping into a sense of peace, but I'm not sure. Like, maybe I'm just sleepy or even depressed. How do you know when you're really feeling a sense of peace?*

A: The peace that we experience at step three is a robust, inspiring thing. We might say that peace is a facet of our inner light. But there are many other facets that come with the light as well: joy, love, wisdom, and more.

If you are experiencing a peaceful joy, a joyful peace, a loving wisdom, a wise love – then you can be confident that you're accessing your inner light.

As I mentioned in the “outflow” section of this book, the inflow of peace that we receive at step three will fill our hearts and flow through us. It is an active, expanding experience. We will want to extend it by blessing those around us.

This is a very different experience from the quietly withdrawn feelings associated with depression. If you feel lifted-up, inspired, blessed – so much so that you want to extend those experiences to others – you can feel confident that you are accessing your inner

light.

*Q: What is the best way to extend the love that you feel? I have sometimes wanted to extend kindness and love, but I didn't know how to do it.*

A: I find that one of the best ways to let our inner light guide our actions is to quietly, humbly “listen” to it. As I mentioned above, a facet of our inner light is wisdom – including wisdom about how to extend what we have received.

We might want to say:

Inner light, how can I extend blessings to the people around me?

I am open to being guided.

I am open to being inspired.

How can I bring peace to this person?

If you do this, a thought about a form of expression might pop into your mind. It may be something you hadn't considered before. It may be a unique expression of love.

Even after receiving a bit of inspiration, it's important to stay humble. If we offer an expression of kindness to someone, and he or she doesn't find it helpful, we can return to our inner wisdom and seek its guidance again.

As *A Course in Miracles* teaches, sometimes a simple smile is the best form of love to offer. Sometimes a bit of patience is all that's asked. Sometimes we may feel inspired to simply say to someone, “You're not alone.”

The specific form of expression isn't the important thing; the important thing is to simply allow our inner light to extend. If we give it room, the light will find its own channels.