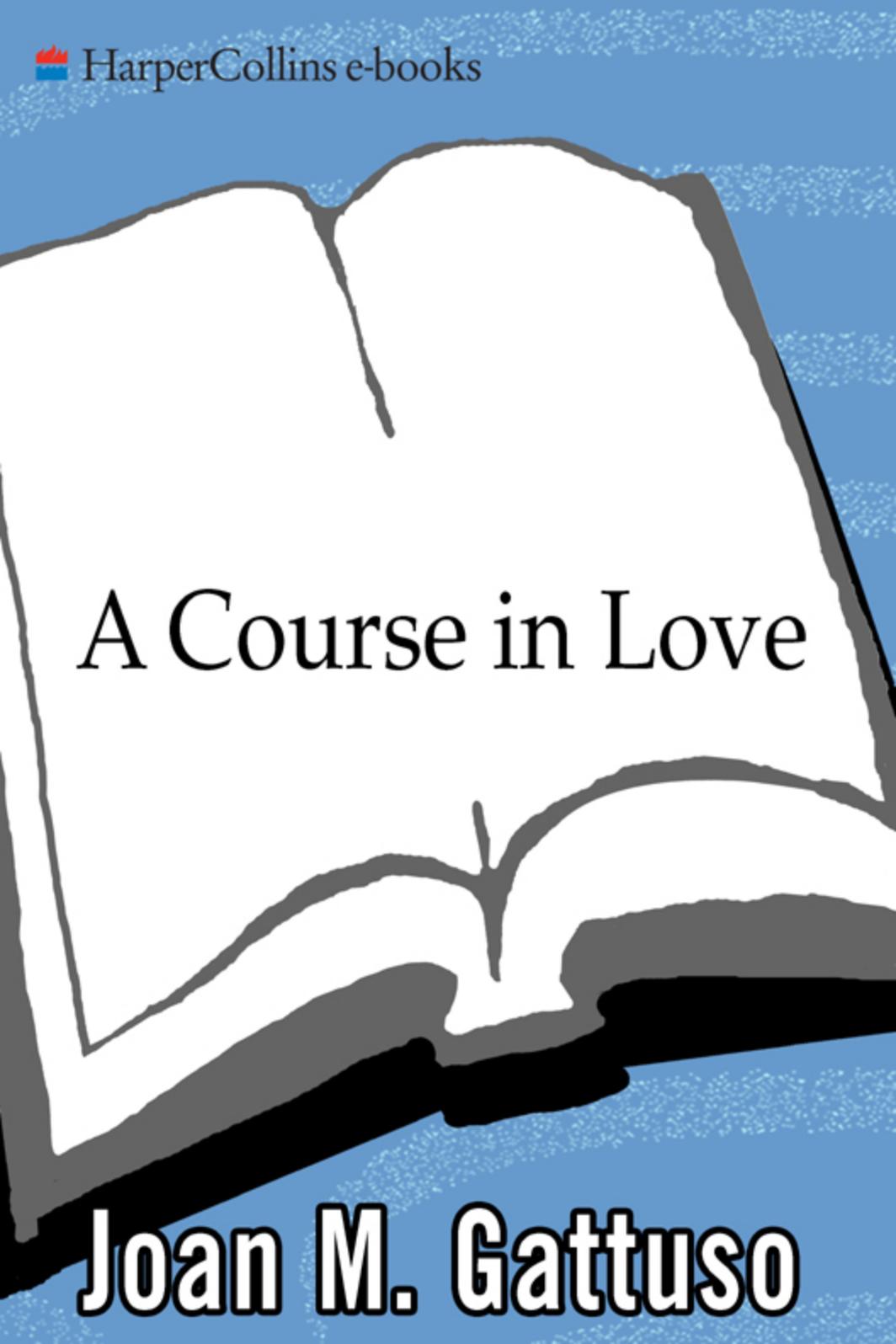




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A Course in Love

**Joan M. Gattuso**



# A Course in Love

Powerful Teachings  
on Love, Sex, and  
Personal Fulfillment

Joan M. Gattuso

From my heart and soul  
this book is lovingly dedicated to  
my husband and soulmate,  
David S. Alexander,  
who was worth the wait.

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# Introduction

David was ten when he knew. I was older, perhaps fourteen, when I knew.

We knew the *possibility* of being in a loving relationship in which one's soul draws to itself its perfect partner. This partner would not fill our empty place, but would perfectly complement the fullness of our inner selves, our spirits.

As children in small-town middle America in the fifties and sixties, we did not have many role models for such a loving and fulfilling relationship. As the two of us passed through puberty, there certainly was no mention of being with one's soulmate and having a joyful partnership. But we knew that there was a remarkable way in which to be in a relationship, and we would not stop the quest until that way was found.

The prevailing message to women of that day was that men were to be tolerated at best. The common belief was,

“Can’t live with ‘em and can’t live without ‘em.” Most men were saying the same thing about women. Both camps in the battle of the sexes were fortified with enough anger, hostility, unmet expectations, and cruelty to keep the war going for years. Most relationships were, and still are, about doing battle with each other in an attempt to manipulate the partner into fulfilling our unmet needs.

Yet the flame of another possibility continued to burn, and in the face of no tangible evidence to support this inner certainty, it stayed with us. Through two early and unfortunate marriages, it stayed with me. This was true for David as well. He also experienced two marriages that ended in divorce.

In my soul I knew relationships were meant to be holy, not hell. Loving another meant loving him all the time, not just when he was doing what I wanted him to do or saying what I wanted him to say. Love had to be unconditional or it wasn’t love. Being together would be easy, not work. We would naturally be kind and considerate of each other. To behave otherwise would be unnatural. We would be comfortable together. We would have a great deal in common and respect each other’s differences. Our essences would connect.

As Leslie Parrish Bach says in her husband Richard Bach’s book *A Bridge Across Forever*, “A soulmate is someone who has locks that fit our keys, and keys to fit our locks. When we feel safe enough to open the locks, our truest selves step out and we can be completely and honestly who we are, we can be loved for who we are and not for who we’re pretending to be.”

We would know God together. The sexual aspect would be easy and pleasurable but would only be a piece of the magnificence. Our love would embrace other people rather than ex-

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clude them as a threat to our relationship. Such a relationship would bring a touch of heaven to our daily lives.

Elizabeth Bowen wrote, "Certain books come to meet one, as do people." A spiritual text entitled *A Course in Miracles* came to meet me in November 1976. I fully agree with Marianne Williamson's description of *A Course in Miracles* as "a self-study program of spiritual psychotherapy." As I began to study the *Course* in depth, my soul resonated with the spiritual teachings it contained. Although the material was similar to what I had been coming to know was true through my study of Unity's teachings and through meditation, it brought every aspect of life into clear focus. *A Course in Miracles* is the foundation of my spiritual understanding. Its instruction on relationships, and its affirmation of how glorious they can be, is clearer and better than anything else I have encountered.

When I began studying and applying these spiritual principles, I stepped onto a new path, a path that led me into a number of trainings, teachings, and spiritual adventures. My life began to radically transform, and I began to view all of life from a different point of view, seeing relationships in a way that I had never been taught.

What I had known in my soul to be true was now being confirmed in these teachings: it *is* possible to have love without conflict, to totally forgive the past, to have happiness as the purpose of relationships, to know that relationships were meant to be holy. I held to these truths and began an incredible journey of transformation. That journey and what could be yours is presented to you in *A Course in Love*.

In the first part of this book, we will look at the status of most relationships today. An honest, thoughtful examination of our relationships suggests that nearly all of us have settled for

the dysfunctional norm: relationships born out of the ego rather than the spirit.

The second part of the book moves beyond the unacceptable norm to what is possible in our relationships. The journey from hell to holy relationships is laid out step-by-step so that you, the reader, can take this journey and create your own transformational relationship.

The journey's end—a holy relationship—is the subject of the final section. What does a holy, transformational relationship look like? What makes two people soulmates? In this section, I share my miraculous story of meeting my soulmate and how our love drew us together through time and space. We will also take an intimate look at the blessed unions of several other couples who enjoy successful, love-filled relationships. Included is a list of the common factors found in the expression of love between soulmates. If you are not already in a holy relationship, you will find all the tools necessary to transform the repetitive patterns of failed relationships into relationships that are easy, joyous, energizing, loving, happy, healthy, and free.

I took hold of the spiritual principles taught in *A Course in Miracles* and, with my own spiritual faith, applied them unceasingly to my life and history. I learned to rise out of victim consciousness into self-mastery, out of fear, hurt, and separation into love, peace, and bliss.

I've done it. So can you. It's much more than a possibility. It's the way life was meant to be. If you also hold what I term "the knowing" within your heart, I share with you from Richard Bach's treasure, *Illusions*: "You are never given a wish without also being given the power to make it true. You may have to work for it, however."

On July 25, 1986, my soulmate and I met and began walking together to God. This is our story of spiritual quickening

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and of bringing what the heart knows is true into living, breathing expression.

Getting here wasn't easy, but David was worth the wait and the work. It is my prayer and sincerest desire that you too may know love in a life-supporting, renewing way.

There is a way the world looks at relationships that does not work. There is a way to look at relationships that truly does work, and I have found it. Now you too can have true love.



# 1

## Relationships: Holy or Hell?

Sam and Kathy met in graduate school, where he was a student and she was in administration. They were friends for quite a while and eventually began dating casually, which soon led to their dating each other exclusively.

Initially, one could not praise the other's virtues loudly enough. Sam told his family and his buddies that he had finally met the woman for him. She personified everything he wanted in a wife. She was a beautiful blonde and had a rewarding career, but she was willing to put his career and possible moves ahead of her own goals. She had a cutting wit and thought his humor was charming. She was athletic and loved their home sports teams as much as he did. She could take care of herself, and he just knew she would take good care of him.

Kathy, on the other hand, had just ended a five-year relationship with a man who was incapable of making a commitment.

At the time that Sam began pursuing her more directly, Kathy was tired of being “the one who keeps giving and giving. Next time I’m going to choose someone who wants to give to me.”

Kathy enjoyed Sam’s company, and they shared many interests, as well as similar career goals. She knew that in time she could help Sam change those few characteristics of his that she did not like or found irritating.

At this point the warning signs were already evident. Here are some of the obvious ones that ultimately would doom Sam and Kathy’s relationship:

- Sam’s first mention of Kathy to his friends always had to do with her looks—“beautiful and blond.”
- Kathy was willing to put Sam’s goals ahead of hers.
- Sam knew that Kathy would take good care of him.
- Kathy had recently ended a troubled relationship.
- Kathy expected to “help Sam change.”

Later we will explore in depth why these signs point to a relationship that will evolve into conflict, suffering, and failure. For now, just examine these early warning signs as they may apply to your own relationship.

Sam and Kathy’s romance was on-again, off-again for a couple of years, but all their friends could see that they truly cared for each other and had a “special” relationship.

*A Course in Miracles* teaches a radical view of what “special” means. Specialness is seen not as something wonderful, loving, and positive, but rather as something that isolates us and fills us with fear—fear that at any second what we perceive as love and the union of two souls will be snatched away. While living in a consciousness of specialness, we view all others as

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separate and apart from us, fiercely denying through our beliefs and actions our underlying oneness.

When seen clearly, special relationships can be viewed as codependent, compulsive relationships. Held together by the ego, these unhealthy alliances are doomed to fail. We must realize that “special” is a poor substitute for what could be. We have accepted specialness, which separates and causes pain, in place of holiness, which joins and brings love.

Specialness is not love. It is a substitute for love. When two lovers are in a special relationship, an impenetrable wall remains forever between them, keeping each one separate and apart, lonely and isolated.

While in specialness we are ever ready to assume the role of judge, jury, and executioner to our lover for any behavior or attitude that does not correspond to our image of how he or she is supposed to be. Specialness continues to live only through the defeat of our former lover, through devaluing, judging, or discounting him or her.

Consider the times you have dismissed as unworthy or insignificant a person you once claimed to love or whom you at least cared for deeply. That’s specialness in action. Here are some red flags of a special relationship:

- You care for someone for what he or she can give you, for example, name, home, security, children, wealth, sex.
- You feel a need to rescue the other person.
- A lover quickly turns into an enemy.
- What you once called love soon becomes disdain or even hate.
- The physical aspect of the relationship is of utmost importance.

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- Bodies are everything; essence is not very important. You focus on the outer package and never examine the inner essence.
- You feel the need to remake your partner, giving the message that he or she is not good enough the way he or she is right now.
- You always point out what is lacking in the partner.
- The relationship is filled with judgments, guilt, hurt, and anger.
- You always hold the “object of your love” at arm’s length to be reviewed or scrutinized.
- You trust no one except yourself.
- Almost from the beginning of a new relationship you start to give up parts of what makes you unique.
- You make constant comparisons, attempting to establish your worth by devaluing your partner.
- You regard others as either beneath you or above you because you focus on people’s differences rather than their similarities.
- Through specialness you are ever ready to attack, find fault, adjust, make over, correct, or alter in some “helpful” way.
- You look to your partner to fulfill your needs.
- You see the other person as an object, rather than as brother or sister, someone just like you.
- You place limits on love.
- A little whisper you do not like, a circumstance that does not suit you, an unexpected event—any of these can upset your fragile world, hurling you into chaos.
- Your relationship is threatened by everything.