

Commentary

ACIM® Manual for Teachers

16. *How Should the Teacher of God Spend His Day?*

Explanation of underlining, italics and footnote formats can be found at the end of the commentary. See also the note there on the effects of switching from the FIP edition to the Complete and Annotated Edition. Please note that the FIP and CE versions may differ in where paragraph breaks occur.

Overview

This section might well be titled, “When the Student Has Completed the Workbook, What Form Should Their Spiritual Practice Take?” It's really a crucial section, and ought to be studied by everyone as soon as they have completed the Workbook. The Workbook's final words give the impression that you have gone beyond any further need for words or format in your spiritual practice. This very important section sets the record straight. It is exceptionally practical.

Paragraph 1

To the advanced teacher of God this question is meaningless. ²There is no program, for the lessons in the curriculum change each day.¹ ³Yet he is sure of but one thing: they do not change at random. ⁴Seeing this and understanding it is true, he rests content. ⁵He will be told all that his role should be, this day and every day. ⁶And those who share that role with him will find him, so they can learn the lessons for the day together. ⁷Not one is absent whom he needs; not one is sent without a learning goal already set, and one which can be met that very day. ⁸For the advanced teacher of God, then, this question is superfluous. ⁹It has been asked and answered, and he keeps in constant contact with the Answer. ¹⁰He is set, and sees the road on which he walks stretch surely and smoothly before him.

¹ This section addresses the issue of how one should continue to practice after the Workbook has been completed. The above sentence therefore means “For the advanced teacher of God, there is no program such as the Workbook—which provides you with a predetermined lesson each day—because the lessons change each day according to the Holy Spirit’s specific plan for your life.” Thus, the advanced teacher of God—a person possessing the ten characteristics of God’s teachers listed in M-4—has no structured practice program at all. For the new teacher of God, however, there *is* a general structure of daily practice, a structure that incorporates the types of practices he learned in the Workbook. From paragraph 2 on, this section provides this structure.

First, we cover the special case: the *advanced* teacher of God (1:1). I assume by that he means someone who is living consistently in the real world, listening all the time for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and no longer in need of any structured practice. They have no need to ask how to spend their day; they just listen and do what the Spirit tells them to do. There is no “program” for them; every day is different (1:2). Though the lessons change each day, this teacher knows and understands that whatever happens is part of the plan (1:4). The daily changes don't upset them. They know that whatever happens, the Holy Spirit will instruct them in what role they play in the events of the day (1:5). The right partners in the events of each day will show up at the right time, in the right place, “so they can learn the lessons for the day together” (1:6).

What a wonderful life this advanced teacher has! Whoever they need just shows up. The lesson plan for every hour is already set, and it is a lesson that all the participants can learn that very day (1:7). All this being true, the question at the head of the chapter is superfluous — it serves no useful purpose (1:8). The advanced teacher asked the question a long time ago and heard the answer, and applied it. Now, they are in constant contact with the Holy Spirit (who *is* the Answer) (1:9). This advanced teacher is all set; his path forward is clear (1:10).

Paragraph 2

² But what about those who have not reached his certainty? ²They are not yet ready for such lack of structuring on their own part. ³What must they do to learn to give the day to God? ⁴There are some general rules which do apply, although each one must use them as best he can in his own way. ⁵Routines as such are dangerous, because they easily become gods in their own right, threatening the very goals for which they were set up.² ⁶Broadly speaking, then, it can be said that it is well to start the day right. ⁷It is always possible to begin again should the day begin with error, yet there are obvious advantages in terms of saving time if the need for this can be avoided.³

But what about the rest of us, not yet living on that advanced plane (2:1)? Yes; you may have studied the Text and completed the Workbook, diligently practicing every lesson (and not many of us can make even that claim!). We are not ready to do without

² A routine is a fixed course of procedure, an unvaryingly repeated formula. A routine “as such” (defined strictly in the foregoing way) is dangerous because the mere carrying out of the routine easily comes to be seen as having saving power. In the context of your morning routine (which is the focus of the discussion following the above sentence), this error would mean that what you see as important is simply spending the time for your morning routine, whereas what's truly important is reaching the state of mind that will prepare you for your day.

³ As this section says later, we are meant to begin each day with morning “quiet time” (4:7). The situation described here is one in which we begin the day “with error” by *not* doing our morning quiet time, and decide to start the day again later by doing our quiet time then. In this scenario, the first part of the day, before the restart, was in essence wasted time. Avoiding the need to restart, then, has “obvious advantages in terms of saving time.”

any structured spiritual practice (2:2). This question is a very real one for every one of us if we have completed the Workbook (2:3).

First, I would say that if you have not done at least one conscientious pass through the Workbook over the course of a year (or more), you are not yet ready to graduate from the Workbook. It took me six or seven tries before I felt I'd really done the practice it sets out for us. The Workbook is absolutely the best way to establish the kind of spiritual practice that the Course wants to produce in us. But it isn't the end of the program. This chapter sets out the routine for post-Workbook practice. Even if you are still doing the Workbook, there are some pointers here that you will find useful, so read on.

So, for post-Workbook practice, what should you do “to learn to give the day to God” (2:3)? The general rules that are given here are flexible, and need to be customized for each person's circumstances (2:4). It seems as if Jesus dislikes the term “rules” because they imply “routines as such.” So these are *general* rules, not *rigid* ones, which might actually *interfere* with the development of good, workable habits, rather than helping (2:5). The rules to be set forth can be adjusted as needs require, as we'll see (2:4).

The first general rule is that “it is well to start the day right” (2:6). Have a morning quiet time first thing if possible or comfortable. I happen to be one of those people who are very slow to wake up. Try conversing with me in the first 30 minutes after I awake and I'm likely to just grunt or not respond at all. My morning routine includes splashing water on my face, taking my medications, getting dressed, feeding the dog and then taking him out in the yard. Meanwhile, I've started the coffee machine brewing a mug of coffee for me. Some days, things get going quickly and I don't get to a Quiet Time until mid-afternoon. Other days, if I have the time, I take my coffee into my office, journal a bit, do some spiritual reading like a Workbook lesson, and then, awake at last, I settle down for twenty to thirty minutes of meditation.

If you awake bright-eyed and bushy-tailed I'd recommend taking your Quiet Time as soon as you can; the earlier the better. Chapter 30 of the Text begins with “The Rules for Decision,” which speaks of the importance of getting your mind in a proper state as the day begins:

Decisions are continuous. 2 You do not always know when you are making them. 3 But with a little practice in the ones you recognize, a set begins to form which sees you through the rest. 4 It is not wise to let yourself become preoccupied with every step you take. 5 The proper set, adopted consciously each time you wake, will put you well ahead. (T-30.I.2:1–5 (CE), T-30.I.1:1–5 (FIP))

Notice the suggested time: “each time you wake.” That is definitely the preferred time. Jesus adds here, in the Manual, that the advantage of taking your Quiet Time first thing after waking is that you get your mind set properly before you do anything else (2:7). Of course you can “begin again” at any time during the day if your mind isn't properly adjusted at the start or gets off course later, but it's best if your day can start with your mind set in a way “which sees you through the rest” of your day.

Paragraph 3

3 At the beginning, it is wise to think in terms of time. ²This is by no means the ultimate criterion, but at the outset it is probably the simplest to observe. ³The saving of time is an essential early emphasis which, although it remains important throughout the learning process, becomes less and less emphasized. ⁴At the outset, we can safely say that time devoted to starting the day right does indeed save time. ⁵How much time should be so spent? ⁶This must depend on the teacher of God himself. ⁷He cannot claim that title until he has gone through the workbook, since we are working within the framework of our course. ⁸After completion of the more or less structured practice periods which the workbook contains, individual need becomes the chief consideration.

For this reason, at the beginning, “it is wise to think in terms of time” (3:1). In short: *schedule your Quiet Time*. If you have to set your alarm earlier, set it. Make the time, and try to have it at the same time every day. I think I need to heed my own advice here. My wife and I seem to have trouble getting to bed early enough for me to fit in both my wake-up routine with the dog and my Quiet Time. She wakes well before I do, so is a lot more regular at meditation than I am. It's something I really need to work on, because I have days go by without any Quiet Time at all! It used to be easier when I was working and was forced to keep a regular schedule. Retirement, in some ways, makes it harder—for me at least.

Having Quiet Time at the start of the day isn't the ultimate in importance, but it's the easiest to put into practice (3:2). It saves time. That probably means it accelerates our spiritual growth because it puts us in a healthy state of mind at the start of the day. Fewer hours are wasted living from our egos. Saving time is particularly important in our initial attempts at less structured practice, that is, without the support of the Workbook. As the learning process progresses, we will develop habits that diminish the need to pay strict

⁴ This probably refers to saving time in the sense of not wasting it. Saving time in this sense is also found in the discussion following miracle principle 25 in the Text, where Jesus says that he can save time for us by speeding us through the trivia of life, so that we have more time to give to miracles (T-1.25.1-6).

⁵ This qualification almost certainly includes having completed the Text as well. The Workbook, after all, says that the Text “is necessary as a background to make the exercises in this workbook meaningful” (W-In.1:1). At this point the Course has always assumed that one is going through it in order: first Text, then Workbook. Also, this sentence seems to rest on the straight-forward logic that one cannot be a teacher “within the framework” of the Course until one has *done* the Course—which would obviously include studying the Text.

The above qualification also seems to assume that one has *really* done the Workbook, not just reached its end. We say this because this section portrays the one who has completed the Workbook as now being able to do Workbook-style practice on his own—in the morning, throughout the day, in response to upsets, and at night—without the support of the Workbook's chronological lessons.

The qualifications for being a teacher “within the framework of our course,” then, would be to have completed the Course *up through* the Workbook and to now be able to continue Workbook-style practice on one's own throughout the day.

attention to time (3:3). But at the beginning, “time devoted to starting the day right does indeed save time” (3:4).

We may wonder how much time we should spend in our Quiet Time (3:5). Jesus says, “That depends on you” (3:6). Here, Jesus says plainly that no one can claim the title of “teacher of God” until they have gone through the Workbook. And I believe that means more than just reading it; it means really doing the practices given in the lessons (3:7). luther we have completed the loosely structured practice periods stipulated in the Workbook lessons, the amount of time we spend in practice will be determined by our individual needs (3:8). The next paragraph gives more detail.

Paragraph 4

4 This course is always practical. ²It may be that the teacher of God is not in a situation which fosters quiet thought as he awakes. ³If this is so, let him but remember that he chooses to spend time with God as soon as possible, and let him do so.⁶ ⁴Duration is not the major concern. ⁵One can easily sit still an hour with closed eyes and accomplish nothing. ⁶One can as easily give God only an instant and in that instant join with Him completely. ⁷Perhaps the one generalization that can be made is this: As soon as possible after waking, take your quiet time, continuing a minute or two after you begin to find it difficult. ⁸You may find the difficulty will diminish and drop away. ⁹If not, that is the time to stop.

As it always does, the Course makes this practical (4:1). For instance, your individual needs may include some situation that prevents quiet thought first thing in the morning (4:2). Like me, you may need to take care of the needs of a pet. Or it could be the needs of children: getting them dressed, feeding them, getting them off to school, and so on. It may not be possible for you to get up sufficiently in advance of the needs of children, pets, or spouses to have time alone to be quiet. Some days you may oversleep! No matter. The whole point is “to spend time with God as soon as possible” (4:3). If doing it first thing isn't possible, no problem; do it as soon as you can.

It's worth pausing to consider that phrase, “time alone with God.” That is what this is about: reconnecting with your Source. Even Jesus did so:

“In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed” (Mark 1:35 [NRSV](#))

Jesus was in the crush of events. He'd been up late, teaching and healing people, and he knew people were waiting for him. But he took time, or rather, he *made* time to get alone with God. This has been the practice of spiritual teachers down through the ages. Martin Luther is reported to have once said that he had so much to do today that he

⁶ This “time with God,” which is aimed at joining with God (4:6) and may conceivably take an hour (4:5), is clearly some version of the meditation practice taught in the Workbook. This section is instructing us in how to practice after the Workbook, and in doing so follows the order of many Workbook lessons: giving us instructions first for morning and evening meditation (paragraphs 4-5), then for repeating a thought throughout the day (paragraph 6), and finally for response to temptation (paragraphs 8-10).

needed to spend three hours in prayer first! He didn't decrease the time spent, he increased it.

To me, the most important thing about such times is renewing my experience of God's presence with me and in me. The length of time spent is not the major concern. The point is joining with the One (4:4–6). You can sit with eyes closed for an hour and accomplish nothing (4:5). Yet you might join with God in just an instant (4:6). In fact, that kind of instant joining with God is what we are learning to do all through the day, over and over, as often as necessary until we are living every moment in God. When you first begin to meditate it will take some time to quiet your mind and connect with the Inner Presence. As you continue, you will learn how to do so more and more quickly.

In sum, he gives a general rule: “As soon as possible after waking, take your quiet time, continuing a minute or two after you begin to find it difficult” (4:7). That's interesting. Stop when you begin to find remaining quiet difficult—not right away, but after a minute or two of difficulty. Why continue after you start to encounter difficulty? Because, “You may find the difficulty will diminish and drop away” (4:8). Give it a chance; continue to sit for a minute or two. If the difficulty continues, “that is the time to stop” (4:9).

Paragraph 5

5 The same procedures should be followed at night. ²Perhaps your quiet time should be fairly early in the evening, if it is not feasible for you to take it just before going to sleep. ³It is not wise to lie down for it. ⁴It is better to sit up, in whatever position you prefer.⁷ ⁵Having gone through the workbook, you must have come to some conclusions in this respect. ⁶If possible, however, just before sleeping is a desirable time to devote to God. ⁷It sets your mind into a pattern of rest and orients you away from fear. ⁸If it is expedient to spend this time earlier, at least be sure that you do not forget a brief period—not more than a moment will do—in which you close your eyes and think of God.⁸

Doing this once a day isn't enough; repeat “the same procedures” at night (5:1). There are a number of options for an evening Quiet Time. The best, it seems, is “just before going to sleep,” but earlier is okay if meditating at bedtime isn't feasible. It requires a time when you will be alert enough not to fall asleep and a place where no one else will bother you. You can probably think of a number of things that might prevent meditating just before sleep. The advantage of doing so just prior to sleep is that “it sets your mind into a pattern of rest and orients you away from fear” (5:7). If you can arrange things to

⁷ Sitting up for evening meditation, rather than lying down, is really about keeping us from falling asleep during the meditation, which of course is more likely to happen around bedtime. The Workbook explicitly cautions us against letting drowsiness intrude on meditation: “If you are succeeding, you will feel a deep sense of joy and an increased alertness, rather than a feeling of drowsiness and enervation” (W-74.6:4). This is also why it might be best to take this time earlier in the evening rather than right before bed (5:2).

⁸ This means “at least...do not forget a brief period” *at bedtime*.

do it then, by all means do so. Your dreams will be happier ones, and your subconscious will be able to work out problems that otherwise might go unresolved.

I still remember the first time I chose to meditate on some Bible verses just before falling asleep. When I woke the next morning, the same words were running through my mind! Later I had the same experience with Workbook lessons.

The advice about sitting up and not lying down for this evening Quiet Time (5:3–4) is based on the fact that, if you do, you will often fall asleep and never really meditate. He refers to your experience doing the Workbook as proof (5:5), assuming you did the evening practices the Workbook expects. If you did them and tried to do so lying down, you probably fell asleep sometimes. I would say that it is a general rule that lying down is to be avoided. However, for a few people I know this isn't a problem. Supine meditation works for them. If it works for you, fine. Meditating in bed is about as close as you can get to “just before going to sleep.”

If just before sleep does not work for you, “at least be sure that you do not forget a brief period—not more than a moment will do—in which you close your eyes and think of God” (5:8). Again, the idea here is to set your mind in a pattern of rest before sleep. What you *don't* want to do is to fall asleep reviewing the problems of the day or those coming up tomorrow!

All this advice applies equally well to the evening practice sessions of the Workbook, if you are still doing the lessons. Evening practice periods are introduced in the very first lesson of the Workbook and (in my opinion) should be part of every day's lesson practice. When a lesson calls for four or five times of practice, the final one should always be as close to sleep time as possible.

A word about these instructions and traditional meditation such as Mindfulness or other Buddhist meditation. Unlike these other traditions, the only stipulation about posture is to use whatever works for you as long as it does not make you fall asleep. There is also no mention of following the breath or mantras. That does not mean you cannot do breathing mediation (I often do), it just means the Course does not consider it essential. I find counting my breaths for a while to be a useful way of settling down and emptying my mind of random thoughts. Since the Course's practice aims at spending “time with God,” I've also found that repeating the word “God” or other words like “Spirit,” “Jesus,” or “Father” as a mantra often help me find that place of connection with the divine. Sometimes a phrase from a Workbook lesson also comes to mind, such as “peace to my mind.” The next paragraph's mention of “joy,” “peace,” and “release” suggests those words as a focus as well.

Paragraph 6

6 There is one thought in particular that should be remembered throughout the day.⁹ ²It is a thought of pure joy, a thought of peace, a thought of limitless release—limitless because all things are freed within it. ³You think you made a place of safety for yourself. ⁴You think you made a power that can save you from all the fearful things you see in dreams. ⁵It is not so. ⁶Your safety lies not there. ⁷What you give up is merely the illusion of protecting illusions. ⁸And it is this you fear, and only this.¹⁰ ⁹How foolish to be so afraid of nothing! ¹⁰Nothing at all! ¹¹Your defenses will not work, but you are not in danger. ¹²You have no need of them. ¹³Recognize this and they will disappear. ¹⁴And only then will you accept your real protection.

The one thought that should fill our minds all the day long is “a thought of pure joy, a thought of peace, a thought of limitless release” (6:1–2). I especially love the phrase “pure joy.” This essential thought is joy untrammelled by cares. It is care-free joy. It is peace that is free of fear or worry. It is absence of all restrictions, utter expansiveness. This is perhaps the best description of the state of mind the Course seeks to unveil in us: pure joy, peace, limitless release. When the Course tells us we need to reach “to another state of mind in which the answer is already there” (T-27.IV.2:3 (FIP), T-27.V.2:3 (CE)), it is referring to this thought of pure joy, peace, and release. I think our touches on this state are what the Course calls holy instants. Its intention is to bring us to the place where our entire life is spent in this holy instant, which is the only time there really is.

We think, so the Course tells us, that we can make a place of safety for ourselves, and find a power that can save us from all the fearful things of the world we see in dreams. It ain't so (6:3–5)! We will never find such a place or power in this world (6:6). These “protecting illusions” are all we “sacrifice” when we give our hearts and lives to God (6:7) Yet we are afraid of making such a sacrifice. It is this we fear, and nothing else (6:8). It's “foolish to be so afraid of nothing!” (6:9) Being afraid of nothing...“foolish” is a kind word to describe it. Fearing the loss of our defenses is fearing nothing at all (6:10) because these defenses do not exist! But the good news is, we don't need them (6:11–12). As long as we think we need them they will seem to be real—elusive, always out of reach, but real, calling us to continually seek for them. But if we recognize that we do not need them, they will disappear (6:13). Until that happens we will never accept our real protection, and never enter that state of pure joy and limitless release (6:14).

Why has the Course returned to the themes of sacrifice, of giving up the world and its illusions of safety? Why speak again of defenselessness? Because this is the goal of all our practicing. Stilling our minds, withdrawing from the world physically at first and more and more mentally, attempting to find and hear the Voice for God within ourselves, bringing our minds to pure joy, perfect peace, and limitless release—that's what we are practicing.

⁹ This corresponds to the Workbook's instruction to repeat the day's idea as often as possible throughout the day.

¹⁰ You fear *giving up* “the illusion of protecting illusions.”

Paragraph 7

7 How simply and how easily does time slip by for the teacher of God who has accepted his protection!¹¹ ²All that he did before in the name of safety no longer interests him, for he is safe, and knows it to be so. ³He has a Guide Who will not fail. ⁴He need make no distinctions among the problems he perceives, for He to Whom he turns with all of them recognizes no order of difficulty in resolving them. ⁵He is as safe in the present as he was before illusions were accepted into his mind, and as he will be when he has let them go. ⁶There is no difference in his state at different times and different places, because they are all one to God. ⁷This is his safety. ⁸And he has no need for more than this.

This paragraph gives us more details about the state of pure joy, peace, a limitless release mentioned in Paragraph 1. Once we recognize the folly of seeking peace and safety in the world and accept the protection of God, time slips by simply and easily (7:1). Life ceases to be an anxious struggle; it flows. (Eric Butterworth wrote a wonderful book all about this flow of life, titled “In the Flow of Life.” I highly recommend it.) Someone in the flow knows he is safe and knows it, so the deceitful protections offered by the world hold no interest for them (7:2).

In the flow, you know you have an infallible Guide (7:3). When you consider the various problems confronting you, none stands out from the others. Your Guide sees no order of difficulty in them; therefore, neither do you (7:4). You know you have rediscovered your original, unchanged and unchanging state; you are as safe in God as you were at the moment of creation. The illusions you've accepted have not affected that safety. It will still be yours when all illusions are gone (7:5). You have found a Self that, unlike your body and your self-concepts, is unchanging at all times and in all places because all of them are one to God (7:6). You exist in a stability that is quite literally out of this world, and that stability is your safety (7:7). You need nothing else (7:8).

¹¹. As the previous paragraph explains, he accepts his “real protection” through his recognition that he was “not in danger” in the first place.

Paragraph 8

8 Yet will there be temptation along the way the teacher of God has yet to travel, and he has need of reminding himself throughout the day of his protection.¹² ²How can he do this, particularly during the times when his mind is occupied with external things? ³He can but try, and his success depends on his conviction that he will succeed.¹³ ⁴He must be sure success is not of him, but will be given him at any time, in any place and circumstance he needs it. ⁵There are times his certainty will waver, and the instant this occurs he will return to earlier attempts to place reliance on himself alone. ⁶Forget not that this is magic, and that magic is a sorry substitute for true assistance.¹⁴ ⁷It is not good enough for God's teacher because it is not enough for God's Son.

Our safety in God exists whether or not we believe in it, and there will be times that we don't believe. We need to watch out for that. We should remind ourselves often of God's continuous protection. Appearances will tempt us to think otherwise (8:1). This is why the Workbook stresses "frequent repetition" of its ideas.

Everyone who does the Workbook and goes on to engage in post-Workbook practice encounters such temptations, and the issue we often face is how to keep reminding ourselves of the truth when our minds are "occupied with external things" (8:2). You can think of dozens of such external occupations: crying children, cooking a complex meal, solving some pressing problem at work, dealing with various familial relationship problems—the list could go on and on. Life can seem overwhelming at times. What to do?

"He can but try," says Jesus. How well you succeed depends on only one thing: Your conviction that you *will* succeed (8:3)! That's fascinating, isn't it? You determine the extent of your success at staying in the flow. If you believe that you *can* do it, you *will* do it.

I know I'm guilty of accepting defeat (that is, allowing events to overwhelm me) as inevitable. "It's just the way things are," I think. Let's stop a moment and think this through. What is happening when I give in to panic or loss of peace? I am forgetting that I am safe. Always safe. Completely safe, so matter what happens. If I knew that in the core of my being, I would be at peace even when the world is falling apart around me. Imagine that you were invulnerable, like Superman, and you are white-water rafting. You approach the worst rapids in the river, named "Devil's Throat" because it has swallowed

¹². This is a reference to the practice of response to temptation, in which we repeat a Course idea in order to dispel upsets.

¹³. "Success" here seems to be success in dispelling the upset with the practice of response to temptation (not success in *remembering to do* the practice).

¹⁴. The meaning of "magic" here is important for understanding the rest of this section and the two sections that follow. Based on paragraphs 6 and 7, magic consists of using our own power, our own separate will, to keep ourselves safe and solve our problems. This is called "magic" because magic is the belief in causes that, according to natural law, cannot do what they appear to do. In this sense, believing that our separate will can make us safe is analogous to believing that a magic wand can make an elephant appear.

dozens of people—literally swallowed them. But you are invulnerable, and nothing can hurt you. Besides that, you can fly! Would you feel fear, panic, or even a twinge of unquiet? No. You would be perfectly at peace because you know that nothing can hurt you, nothing can threaten you, nothing can disturb your safety. Well, that's how we are. We are in God's hands.

Do I suggest that we are physically invulnerable, immune to injury? No. But I am saying that no matter what happens to our bodies, we can be perfectly at peace because we are not our bodies; we are spirit.

Being in the divine flow means trusting that “success is not of [you], but will be given [you] at any time, in any place and circumstances [you] need it” (8:4). We are teachers in training, and there will be times we “lose it.” Like the disciples in the boat with Jesus when the storm hit, and they cried out, “Master! We perish.”

*“And he said to them, 'Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?' Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.
(Matthew 8:25–26 (ESV))*

”Why are you afraid?“ In the story, Jesus calmed the storm. We wish he'd do the same when the storms of life hit us. I think he did that (if the story is factual) in order to prove that they had no reason to fear; everything was under control. With us, he is asking us to know that even when the storm continues, instead of trying to handle the storm ourselves (8:5). But that will happen. We'll revert to self-reliance. He advises us to remember that self-reliance is ”magic,“ and a ”sorry substitute for true assistance“ (8:6).

Why is self-reliance called magic? The definition of magic is something that purports to cause some effect but really cannot do so, like a magician's ”Abracadabra.“ Relying on our ego self is just like that; it is no more effective at keeping us safe than waving a magic wand. Only God can grant real safety, and God does so for His Son, and for us, if we accept it. Our spiritual practice brings it to us.

Paragraph 9

9 The avoidance of magic is the avoidance of temptation, for all temptation is nothing more than the attempt to substitute another will for God's. ²These attempts may indeed seem frightening, yet they are merely pathetic. ³They can have no effects; neither good nor bad, neither rewarding nor demanding sacrifice, healing nor destructive, quieting nor fearful. ⁴When all magic is recognized as merely nothing, the teacher of God has reached the most advanced state. ⁵All intermediate lessons will but lead to this and bring this goal nearer to recognition. ⁶For magic of any kind, in all its forms, simply does nothing. ⁷Its powerlessness is the reason it can so easily be escaped. ⁸What has no effects can hardly terrify.¹⁵

¹⁵. As the first lines of this paragraph suggest, and as will be discussed in the next section, magic terrifies because it is a substitute for the will of God. Having made that substitute, having displaced God, we now live in terror of Him.

Avoiding magic means avoiding the temptation to attempt to provide our own safety and peace. It is magic to think that our bank accounts keep us safe, that proper eating habits keep us safe, that we can somehow find peace through purely worldly means. Nothing but the love of God can keep us safe, and searching for another way is our attempt to "substitute another will for God's" (9:1).

In 9:2 we read that "these attempts may indeed seem frightening." I think what this means is that when we realize we are trying to find a substitute for God we may become frightened of God, frightened that we will be punished. Or perhaps we are scared just because we think we have royally fouled things up! The sentence goes on to reassure us that there is no cause here for fright; these attempts "are merely pathetic" (9:2). They have no effect whatsoever, good or bad—no more than waving a magic wand (9:3). They win any rewards, bring healing or peace, but neither do they call for sacrifice, destroy anything, or merit fear (9:3). They are *nothing*. When we have realized that all magic is nothing we have reached the most advanced state for a teacher of God (9:4). This is where all the lessons in between have been leading us (9:5). *All magic, regardless of its form, does nothing* (9:6). That is why it is so easy to escape it (9:7)! It has no effects. How could it possibly be terrifying (9:8)?

It's good to recall what this chapter is concerned with: how a teacher of God should spend their day. All this talk about magic and sacrifice is describing the things our practicing is meant to free us from. This is where our practicing is leading us. This is what it is all about.

Paragraph 10

10 There is no substitute for the will of God.¹⁶ ²In simple statement, it is to this fact that the teacher of God devotes his day. ³Each substitute he may accept as real can but deceive him, but he is safe from all deception if he so decides. ⁴Perhaps he needs to remember "God is with me. ⁵I cannot be deceived."¹⁷ ⁶Perhaps he prefers other words, or only one, or none at all. ⁷Yet each temptation to accept magic as true must be abandoned through his recognition, not that it is fearful, not that it is sinful, not that it is dangerous, but merely that it is meaningless. ⁸Recognizing that it is rooted in sacrifice and separation,¹⁸ two aspects of one error and no more, he merely chooses to give up all that he never had. ⁹And for this "sacrifice" is Heaven restored to his awareness.

¹⁶ Magic acts as a substitute for the will of God because magic is what we use to keep ourselves safe and solve our problems, whereas in truth it is God's will that keeps us safe (by guaranteeing that all danger is illusion) and solves our problems (through the work of the Holy Spirit).

¹⁷ This is a suggested idea to use as a response to the temptation to rely on magic. In context, it means "Because God (my real safety) is with me, I cannot be deceived by this false source of safety (my own attempt to keep myself safe)." Like most of the Workbook lessons, it is in iambic pentameter.

¹⁸ Magic is rooted in "separation" (from God) in that it places reliance on the separate self rather than on God. Perhaps "sacrifice" is meant here in the sense given in Section 13 of the Manual: "the cost of believing in illusions" (M-13.5:2). This would mean that magic is rooted in the sacrifice of the true safety offered by God's will.

We are to devote our days to spiritual practice. What that means is that in one way after another, in one circumstance after another, in one relationship after another, we are learning that “There is no substitute for the will of God” (10:1–2). To state the answer to the question at the head of the chapter in the simplest terms possible: “Spend your day in learning that the will of God has no substitute.” We've filled our lives with scores of substitutes, and we must unlearn them one by one until it dawns on us that all such substitutes are meaningless and ineffectual. The ego keeps throwing promising new options to us, and they can deceive us, but we can be free of all that if we so decide (10:3).

One suggestion for escaping these deceptions is to remind ourselves often that, “God is with me. I cannot be deceived” (10:4–5). You may prefer other words, or only one word, or none at all (10:6). Some people use the daily Workbook lessons and memorize many of the titles. Some may elect to use just the word “God” or “I'm safe.” Some may just take a few deep breaths. The point is to recall your mind to the awareness of God's love, protection, and guidance. The whole point is to recognize any and all attempts at magic, “not that it is fearful, not that it is sinful, not that it is dangerous, but merely that it is meaningless” (10:7). Don't beat yourself up if you catch yourself falling into magical thinking, depending on your little self to make plans, to judge things, and to navigate safely thought life. Many religions have stressed that such behavior is evil or sinful, and used guilt and fear to coerce us back into proper behavior. It does not work. Magic behavior has no effect. It is nothing, it accomplishes nothing. It does not merit any guilt.

Jesus keeps hammering on relying on God rather than ego because, in a sense, it is the whole point, the content of every lesson. The practice he describes in this chapter is much the same thing as what he discussed back in Chapter 10 on the relinquishment of judgment. As I pointed out there, the whole point is to stop listening to our egos and to listen instead to the Holy Spirit. You give up nothing more than what you never had (10:8). Jesus says this was the final lesson he learned. Here, he tells us that once we recognize all magic as nothing we have reached the most advanced state for a teacher of God. All lessons lead to this. Give up the concepts of sacrifice and separation and Heaven is restored to your awareness (10:8–9).

Paragraph 11

11 Is not this an exchange that you would want? ²The world would gladly make it if it knew it could be made. ³It is God's teachers who must teach it that it can. ⁴And so it is their function to make sure that they have learned how to make it. ⁵No risk is possible throughout the day except to put your trust in magic, for it is only this that leads to pain. ⁶"There is no will but God's."¹⁹ ⁷His teachers know that this is so, and have learned that everything but this is magic. ⁸All belief in magic is maintained by just one simple-minded illusion: that it works. ⁹All through their training, every day and hour, and even every minute and second, must God's teachers learn to recognize the forms of magic and perceive their meaninglessness. ¹⁰Fear is withdrawn from them and so they go. ¹¹And thus the gate of Heaven is reopened, and its light can shine again on an untroubled mind.

Give up nothing, gain Heaven. Seems like a fair exchange doesn't it? Isn't this something we all want (11:1)? Everyone in the world would make this choice if they knew it was possible (11:2). How are they ever going to find out? Someone has to tell them, and that someone is you, and it is me (11:3). Our job is "to make sure that they have learned how to make" this exchange of all ego-centered magic, that is, all reliance on one's ego, for Heaven and the joy, peace, guidance, and safety given by God (11:4). If you live your days trusting in God there is no risk at all; the only cause of pain is to put your trust in magic (11:5).

"There is no will but God's" (11:6, quoting Lesson 74). A mature teacher of God knows that this is true, and everything else is magic (11:7). Knowing this truth, we have given up all attempts to have an independent will. God's will is peace, Oneness, union, in an endless circle of love. When we look at our irritating neighbor we know that God's will is to love them—so we do. Everything else is meaningless magic.

Our stubborn belief in magic is sustained by the simple-minded conviction that it works (11:8). It is a simple-minded conviction because *magic does not work*. Has anything you have ever tried to make yourself completely safe and secure worked? Of course not! Every time we go out of our homes we could be killed by an out-of-control car, an insane shooter, a meteor from outer space, or any of dozens of diseases. We aren't all that much safer *in* our homes.

In the Bible, Jesus said, "In this world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33 ESV). The way things are, in this world we *will* have tribulation. The word means great trouble or suffering. There's no getting around it; that's the way this world is. Still, Jesus says, "Take heart!" I believe what Jesus was preaching then, and now in the Course, is a way to be at peace *in the midst of tribulation*. The tribulation will come, but to a teacher of God, nothing can disturb their peace. "I rest in God" is their constant state of mind. (For an extended picture of what this might look like, see Rudyard Kipling's poem "If," In the Appendix.)

¹⁹. This is Lesson 74 in the Workbook.

How does a teacher of God spend their day? The daunting answer is this: "All through their training, every day and hour, and even every minute and second, must God's teachers learn to recognize the forms of magic and perceive their meaninglessness" (11:9). Every day, every hour, even every minute and second! It takes constant vigilance:

"You are much too tolerant of mind wandering, thus tacitly condoning your mind's miscreations. The particular result never matters, but this fundamental error does. The fundamental correction is always the same. Before you will to do anything, ask me if your will is in accord with mine. If you are sure that it is, there will be no fear."
(T-2.IX.5:1-5 (CE))

"By teaching you what to choose, the Holy Spirit will ultimately be able to teach you that you need not choose at all. This will finally liberate your will from choice, and direct it toward creation within the Kingdom. Choosing through the Holy Spirit will only lead you to it." (T-6.VII.6:1-3 (CE))

Choosing over and over with God, ultimately you will not have to choose at all; you will be liberated from choice! Your will and God's will be joined. When fear is withdrawn from all the forms of magic, they simply dissipate (11:10). Once again, as in creation, your untroubled mind has become open to the light of Heaven (11:11). Your life as a teacher of God will be a constant lesson to everyone you encounter.

Legend:

Light underscoring indicates emphasis that appears in the Urtext or shorthand notes.

The Text is taken from the Circle of Atonement's Complete and Annotated Edition (which I refer to as the "CE" for "Complete Edition" or "Circle Edition"). Please be aware that, even when the wording is identical to the FIP version, the division into paragraphs is often entirely different in the CE, which restores the paragraph breaks found in the original notes. This results in different reference numbering as well. I will indicate for each paragraph the corresponding sentences in the Foundation for Inner Peace (FIP) edition. You should be able to locate specific sentences in that edition if you need to, with a minimum of visual clutter in the commentary. References to quotations are from the CE unless another version is being quoted, in which case that version is indicated.

Footnotes by the commentary author are shown in this font and size. Other footnotes come from the Complete Edition itself.

Effects of Differing Editions of the Course

There were significant changes made in the CE, although for the most part there was no alteration in the meaning of the text, and the *Manual for Teachers* had far fewer changes. There are some changes in section and paragraph breaks and sentence structure that result in different numbering in references to the same text in the two editions. When there is a major difference I will indicate it with a footnote.

I have attempted for all references to add a separate FIP reference if it differs from the CE reference, but I may have missed some. If so, I apologize. Please let me know of any referencing problems you find.

I have also tried to edit my commentary so as to reflect any wording changes in the CE. For instance, the CE Text restored the plural use of "you" where the FIP had substituted the phrase "you and your brother." One such instance will illustrate the kind of change, significant in actual words but nearly identical in overall meaning:

FIP: Thus you and your brother but shared a qualified entente, in which a clause of separation was a point you both agreed to keep intact.

CE: You shared a qualified entente, in which a clause of separation was a point which you had both agreed to keep intact.

APPENDIX

IF, by Rudyard Kipling

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:
If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:
If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'
If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!