

Class Handout

Points Covered in Introduction Session, Lessons 1 to 10

Lessons 1–19: The Basic Shape of the Practice Periods

Main exercise: 2–5 (average 3.5) exercises, each a minute or so in duration

Consists of applying the idea (specifically, indiscriminately and leisurely) to either your visual world or to the contents of your mind (after searching your mind).

Response to temptation is introduced as an optional practice

You are given the option of applying the idea as needed to sources of upset during the day in lessons 4, 5, 6, 10.

LESSONS 1–19: TEACHING GOALS

1. To teach you that all things you see are the same, without distinctions between them:

- equally meaningless
- equally not understood
- equally in the past
- equal in their effect on your mind
- equal in their effect on everyone's mind

2. To teach you that all of your thoughts are the same, without distinctions between them:

- equally meaningless, neither good nor bad
- equally nonexistent—your mind has been a blank
- equally in the past
- equal in their effect on your mind
- equal in their effect on everyone's mind

3. To teach you that what you see and what you think are both the same, without distinctions between them. Both are equally meaningless because both are based on the past.

4. To teach you that what you think *determines* what you see.

5. To teach you that you have made your inner and outer worlds based on fear of God's Word. You have filled them with your "meaning" out of fear of God's meaning.

6. To clear your mind of what you see now so that you can see the Word of God instead.

LESSONS 11-19

As before, several lessons include the *response to temptation*, asking you to apply the lesson for the day as needed to sources of upset during the day: lessons 14, 15, 16, and 19.

Clarification: Why Are You Upset?

Lesson 5: not for reason you think.

Lesson 6: You are upset by something you see, but that something isn't there.

Lesson 7: You are upset by something you see, but that something isn't there. It is in the past.

Lesson 12: You think that you are upset by seeing an upsetting world. But you are really upset because you see a meaningless world. The inherent neutrality of the world scares you and compels you to write your own meaning onto it.

Lesson 13: You are upset because you are afraid (fear is the specific emotion of the upset) that God will write His meaning on the meaningless world, demonstrating the ego's impotence and unreality. "A meaningless world engenders fear because I think I am in competition with God."

Review of Lessons 1, 2 and 3: Meeting of January 3

Lesson 1—Nothing I see...means anything.

This lesson undermines our ego-based certainty that we know what things mean. Its intention is to help us realize that we do not truly understand *anything* we see. As long as we believe we know what a thing means, or understand events and people around us, we will not ask the Holy Spirit for its true meaning. As the Zen Buddhist teacher, Shunryu Suzuki, taught in his classic book, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, the key to continual spiritual growth is to maintain a *beginner's mind*, always open and aware of the imperfection of its own understanding.

Lesson 2—I have given everything I see all the meaning that it has for me.

The only meaning anything has is the meaning I have given it. Example of a family photo: It means a lot *to you* but means nothing to anyone else. This lesson begins to teach us that our perception is formed by our thoughts, and not vice versa. Try applying this idea to the next thing that really upsets you to feel how powerful it is.

Lesson 3—I do not understand anything I see.

To learn a new understanding of anything we must let go of our belief that we already understand it. How we interpret things—good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant—is determined by our imagined understanding of it. *The beginning of understanding is the understanding that I don't understand anything.* Remember you are *practicing* these lessons: It's okay if you believe you *do* understand a thing; just practice with the idea that you do not understand it.

Preview of Lessons 4 to 10

Lesson 4—These thoughts do not mean anything. They are like the things I see in this room.

The first thing this “course in mind training” teaches about our thoughts is that they are meaningless.

These early lessons assume we are inexperienced, out of touch with our deeper spiritual nature. Don’t make the mistake of thinking that they therefore do not apply to you. Compared to the exalted state of mind to which the Course intends to bring us, we are *all* in kindergarten.

The thoughts it refers to as *meaningless* are the thoughts of our egos, and the Course teaches us that our minds are nearly completely controlled by our egos: It says we “must realize how much of your thinking is ego-directed” (T-4.VI.1:4). But we have “real thoughts” as well (2:3): the thoughts of the Christ within us. If you doubt that what you now know as your thinking is ego-directed, ask yourself what part of your thinking presupposes total oneness, and what part operates from the point of view of you-as-an-individual. For me, one-mindedness is a state rarely attained and then only for seconds at a time. Most of the time, it’s “me here, the rest of the universe over there.” And *that* kind of thinking is what the Course is calling meaningless.

I found this lesson very useful when my mind seemed filled with thoughts of fear, or self-judgment, or any other thoughts I might find upsetting. These thoughts are not representative of my True Self. They are not part of me.

Note that in asking you to repeat the lesson three or four times during the day, the practice instructions have moved beyond the basic morning and evening practice to include random times in between.

Lesson 5—I am never upset for the reason I think.

When you practice this, the Course does not explain the real reason for your upset. To begin with, it just wants us to recognize that the reason *is not what we think*. This is a variation on the idea that we don’t understand anything.

Notice how the lesson itself suggests variations on its main thought (2:3) such as, “I am not angry [at so-and-so] for the reason I think” or “I am not afraid [of whatever] for the reason I think.” This is a good example of making a lesson specific. Try to think of other variations based on your own personal repertoire of upsets: embarrassment, worry, disgust, annoyance, or add-your-own.

Be sure you practice naming both the *specific kind of upset* you are feeling and *the perceived source*, that is, what you think is causing the upset.

At this point the lesson is not asking you to make these feelings go away. It just wants you to realize they are not occurring for the reasons you think. The cure for such feelings requires that we come to realize they all have the same cause; they are not different, they are all the same. The lessons that follow will expand on this idea.

Lesson 6—I am upset because I see something that is not there.

The practice is much like that of Lesson 5.

Notice that today calls specifically for three or four practice periods, preceded by a minute or so in which you search your mind to become aware of different forms of upset.

The lesson adds one step to the explanation of our upsets: they are not for the reason we think; they occur because we are seeing something that is not there. *What* we are seeing is not named, just the fact that—whatever it is—it isn't there. It isn't real. Things that are not real bring on all our upsets. Only God creates *real* things, and nothing God creates is upsetting.

Be careful to apply the lesson to your “small” upsets because, “There are no small upsets. They are all equally disturbing to my peace of mind.” *Anything* that interferes with my peace is important.

Lesson 7—I see only the past.

The lesson starts by acknowledging that this idea “is particularly difficult to believe at first,” so don't be surprised if you find it difficult! Nevertheless, it is extremely important because everything that has been said so far is based on this fact. When you practice it, give it very serious consideration. The Text teaches that the ego believes that the past is the only aspect of time that is meaningful; everything is explained by the past. It teaches us that the past blocks our sight of present reality. We project images from the past on the present and distort everything we see. We look at the present through the filter of our past learning. The Text urges us not to let our past learning guide us, but to open our minds to the Holy Spirit at all times.

The lesson uses the example of a cup, and says, “You would have no idea what this cup is, except for your past learning,” and, “This is equally true of whatever you look at.”

As you do this lesson, even if you accept what it says, you may wonder what possible alternative exists. How else can we understand anything? But there *is* another way. The Course will explain that eventually.

Lesson 8—My mind is preoccupied with past thoughts.

If lessons 1 to 6 were based on the idea of Lesson 7, the idea in Lesson 8 is the *reason* why Lesson 7 is so: All we see is the past because what we are seeing is our thoughts projected outward (1:2–3), and the past is what preoccupies our thinking. The past does not exist. Therefore, thoughts about the past are thoughts about nothing, and therefore, they are not real thoughts at all! When you think about the past your mind “has merely been blank” (3:3).

The Text says much the same thing:

Projection makes perception. The world you see is what you gave it, nothing more than that. But though it is no more than that, it is not less. Therefore, to you it is important. It is the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition. As a man thinketh, so does he perceive. (T-21.Int.1:1-6)

What you see is nothing more than the outside picture of your state of mind, and your mind is filled with the past. This idea can be irritating; if so, pay attention to the last paragraph of the lesson, and make your irritation a part of your practicing.

For reflection: Think about this line: “The one wholly true thought one can hold about the past is that it is not here” (2:1). How often have you discovered that your memory of the past isn’t accurate? “I thought I put that key here!” The one completely accurate thought you can have about the past is, “It isn’t here now!” And if it isn’t here, how can it be affecting you? *Your thoughts* about the past can affect you, but the past itself cannot.

Lesson 9—I see nothing as it is now.

Even if you can accept this idea, “it is unlikely that it will mean anything to you as yet” (1:2). That’s okay! You don’t have to understand yet. You might say that one of the goals of this lesson is for us to recognize that we don’t understand it! “You do not need to practice what you already understand” (1:6). As I said in the intro class: Just practice! Helping us to understand, or to believe, is what practice is for. This is not a course in instant enlightenment. In fact, it says that the norm is a slowly-evolving training program.

As the Course will remind us when it reviews this lesson, since seeing the past is seeing nothing, “The choice is not whether to see the past or the present; the choice is merely whether to see or not.” When a situation is upsetting or seems fearful, it can be helpful to remind yourself that you are not seeing the situation as it really is.

Lesson 10—My thoughts do not mean anything.

Recognizing the emptiness of our usual thoughts is a prerequisite to true vision. And pay attention: the idea “applies to all the thoughts of which you are aware, or become aware” (1:1). *Don’t exclude any of your thoughts*. For the time being, the Workbook is asking us to take this lesson on faith; we don’t have any basis for comparison (with real thoughts) *as yet*, but a time will come when what we are being told makes perfect sense to us.

Note that the final paragraph is introducing the practice of using the daily lesson to respond to temptation, that is, any thought that distresses you, and that these uses of the lesson are *in addition* to the five practice periods you take whether you are distressed or not.