

Workbook Lesson Support Notes

by Allen Watson

General Comments on Practice

You have only done ten lessons so far. The process may still seem unfamiliar or uncomfortable. Remember the basic guidelines laid down in the *Introduction*:

- Follow the practice instructions exactly.
- Be very specific in applying the lessons, and make them personal. Apply them when asked to your actual thoughts, or to things you see wherever you may be at the time.
- Don't exclude anything from your practice for any reason. Nothing is too insignificant to be an object of practice, and nothing is too *big* or *hard* to be an object of practice. For the sake of the exercises, view everything as the same.
- *Whatever your reaction to the idea for the day, just do the practice.*

When asked be sure to apply the lesson to anything that disturbs your peace of mind at any time during the day.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What if I do not understand the lesson?

It doesn't matter. Just do the exercise as asked. Practicing will eventually help you to understand.

2. What if I miss a lesson, or one of the assigned practice times?

Forgive yourself, and just pick up where you left off. Do the next practice period or the next lesson, and renew your decision to practice all the lessons as instructed.

3. What if I disagree with the lesson, or don't feel I really mean it when I repeat it?

If you fully understood and meant what you are saying you wouldn't need to practice it! At one point the Workbook says that fully grasping even a single lesson is enough to fully awaken us.

Lesson 11

My meaningless thoughts are showing me a meaningless world.

This lesson introduces the Course's theory of *perception*, as a "major phase" in "the reversal of the world's thinking" (1:1). Most of us tend to believe that the world outside of us determines how we see it. Someone pushes in front of us in line and we perceive him or her as "a rude person"; it seems obvious that the person and their action determines our perception. Take a moment to consider what *you* believe about things you see. Do you believe, most of the time at least, that the person or thing in the outside world is what determines how you see it?

This lesson introduces the idea that "your thoughts determine the world you see" (1:3). This is the exact reverse of what the world usually believes about perception. In the world's thinking, the world is the cause of our thoughts and perception; in the Course's thinking, our thoughts are the cause of the world and how we see it. Let yourself call to mind a few things you have seen within the last day or so. Do you really believe what this lesson is teaching: That your thoughts have determined what you see? Probably not! That's why the lesson is here, for you to *practice* this idea.

The way today's idea is expressed can help you to see that the world is inherently devoid of meaning, like a blank piece of paper, a blank sheet on which you write meaning with your thoughts. You are writing meaning onto the world constantly, every minute of every day, quite unconsciously. And because your thoughts (coming from the perspective of a separate individual, and being ego-based) are quite meaningless, the world you see is also meaningless.

Perceiving the world as meaningless is not the *objective* of this lesson; rather, the lesson is explaining *why we see it that way*. We do see it as meaningless a lot of the time, don't we? Many people do, and deduce that therefore the world *is* meaningless! They think their perception is just the report of what's out there. The good news is, if you see the world around you as meaningless, it only proves your *thoughts* are meaningless—and you can change your thoughts.

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Lesson 12

I am upset because I see a meaningless world.

This, then, continues the teaching about what really upsets us. We think it is a person or thing outside of us causing our upset. We see a person or situation as fearful, or sad, or evil, or undependable, and we believe *that* is causing our distress. The lesson insists that what *really* scares us is that we see the world is meaningless, but we cannot bear to leave it that way. We do not want *God* to tell us what it means; we want to decide that for ourselves. "You are impelled to write upon it what you would have it be."

The ego is, in part, an attempt to take God's place as Creator. Giving things our meanings, rather than accepting God's, is a symptom of that. This lesson works to counter that tendency.

Try, in practicing, to rhythmically shift your attention from item to item, as the instructions say.

The Text gives a similar practice:

When your peace is threatened or disturbed in any way, say to yourself:

I do not know what anything, including this, means.

And so I do not know how to respond to it.

And I will not use my own past learning as the light to guide me now.

(T-14.XI.6:6-9)

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Lesson 13

A meaningless world engenders fear.

As it says, this lesson “is really another form of the preceding one” (1:1). It identifies our “upset” as “fear.”

Can you think of an example of a time when you perceived something as meaningless?

Remember how the first lessons were about the way things do not mean anything, and thoughts do not mean anything? Did any of those lessons trigger feelings of fear in you? Did you resist the idea, and prefer to see some meaning in things? If you did, according to this lesson, you were projecting “attributes that [the world] does not possess” and filling it “with images that do not exist” (3:2).

To whatever degree we equate ourselves with our egos, we will engage in this kind of projection, because the ego considers itself “in competition with God” (4:7). Jerry Jampolsky characterizes the ego as **Easing God Out**.

The Course insists that the only reason we see a meaningless or fearful world is because we are intent on blocking out God’s meaning. This is the only reason we perceive others as attacking us, the only reason we see evil, the only reason we see anything but love or a call for love.

The lesson states that we are highly likely to resist the notion that we are in competition with God. It advises us to not even think about that except when repeating the words during practice. Just plant the seed and cover it over and let it germinate in its own time.

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Lesson 14

God did not create a meaningless world.

Were you surprised when you read that sentence? After so many lessons about things, thoughts, and the whole world being meaningless, now there is a plain statement that God didn't create a meaningless world.

If the world you see, or anything you see, appears to be meaningless, it does not exist! Chew on that. We are seeing an illusion superimposed on top of reality. Only what God creates is real; nothing else exists.

What we are trying to do in today's practicing is to "let go the thoughts that you have written on the world, and see the Word of God in their place" (3:1). Try to keep that goal in mind. Some of the Workbook exercises may "lead you directly into fear," but the Course promises to lead you past the fear "toward perfect safety and peace" (3:3-5). It refers to our spiritual journey as a journey through fear to love. And it guarantees the final arrival.

Consider the examples in the lesson, and plug in specific examples such as "the war in Iraq" or "the genocide in Rwanda." Try also to include examples of "your personal repertory of horrors," the things that terrify *you*.

Many, if not most, people find this lesson difficult. It seems like the worst form of denial to say that airplane crashes, floods, genocide, etc., "are not real." It feels like a lie. If you find the idea disturbing, just counsel yourself with the thought that you probably don't yet understand exactly how the Course means this. Just do the practice, even if it feels as though you are faking it.

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LESSON 15

My thoughts are images that I have made.

By now, you are probably getting used to the general idea that the Workbook is presenting: that the things we think we see outside of us are made by our thoughts, projected outward like images on a movie screen are projected by a movie projector. You may not accept it, and almost certainly you do not accept it completely. It probably still remains more an idea in your head than a deeply ingrained principle that governs everything about your life.

From the practice exercises, in which we look at some physical object and declare that it—the physical object—"is an image that I have made," it seems evident that the Course means to teach us that physical things are illusions, nothing more than projections of thoughts that are not even our real thoughts! If it seems difficult to accept the idea that the physical world isn't real, but only a projection of our thoughts, certainly we can accept the idea that *how we interpret* what we see is determined by our thoughts. Although I believe the Course intends the former, more far-reaching interpretation of projection, accepting the more limited view can still be of great benefit.

The “edges of light” referred to probably refer to the experience some people have of seeing auras, outlines of light around people and objects. These visions are symbols of the goal we are aiming for. The lesson is not trying to say that everyone should have such experiences; merely that, if such experiences do occur, we should not be disconcerted by them; they are a sign of progress. On the other hand, it is not the symbol we seek, but that which it symbolizes. We seek true perception itself.

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LESSON 16

I have no neutral thoughts.

Thoughts, whether true or false, “create their own likeness” (1:6). We believe our thoughts are confined to our own mind. Would you be horrified if your thoughts were broadcast to the world? Would you perhaps think different thoughts if you realized that every thought you think affects the entire world, and contributes to the store of truth or the power of illusions (2:3)?

Are your thoughts bringing peace to the world, or are they bringing war?

There are no idle thoughts, no trivial thoughts, and no unimportant thoughts. That punishing thought you had toward someone who offended you *had a real effect in the world*. This has to be why Jesus, in the Bible, taught that *thinking* about committing adultery was the same as actually doing it.

If you take this lesson seriously, it should strengthen your motivation to allow the Course to train your mind to think differently about everything and everyone in the world.

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LESSON 17

I see no neutral things.

PRACTICE SUMMARY

Purpose: To continue teaching you the real cause and effect relationship between what you think and what you see. You think that outer events cause you to have certain perceptions, and this in turn provokes you to have certain thoughts. The truth is that your perceptions are caused by your thoughts, not by outer events. Perceptions are interpretations, and interpretations are thoughts.

Exercise: Three or four times, for a minute (less if there is resistance)

An exercise in applying the idea to the objects in your visual field. For instructions, see paragraph 2.

Remarks: As usual, it is crucial to treat whatever you see as the same. The carpet may be neutral in itself, but you do not see it that way, because your perception of it arises from thoughts that

are inherently non-neutral. Even if the carpet is black-and-white, so to speak, your thoughts always color it.

COMMENTARY

The real way that cause and effect work here, according to the Course, is that thoughts are the cause and the world is the effect. We tend to believe that events or actions in the world cause us to think in certain ways; the Course says the exact opposite. No matter how much it seems otherwise, thought is the cause. When we look at the world all we are seeing is our own thoughts as if they were outside of us. That is why yesterday's lesson is the basis for today's.

What is our usual tendency when we find ourselves having certain thoughts? We ask ourselves, "What made me feel this way? What made me depressed, or angry, or bored?" But the thought always comes first. It was not anything outside of your mind that caused you to think in a certain way. Rather, the way you think is what caused the "outside" as you see it.

The lesson becomes quite radical in its statements at times. I'm thinking in particular of paragraph 3. I've been studying the Course now for ten years and I still have trouble fully accepting the idea that I don't see anything really alive. I know that the Course states that the body (which is what I see with my eyes), though alive in the biological sense is not alive in the true sense, and so I know intellectually that the Course defines "alive" quite differently than we normally do. By alive it obviously must mean something nonphysical, because it writes off the physical body as not being alive at all. But I have to admit that I still need to practice with this lesson because my instinct is still to regard bodies as alive. I have to work at it to remember otherwise.

I recall speaking with my friend, Lynne, a little over a year before her body "died." She was a student of the Course. Her body had deteriorated rapidly during the preceding year, and after several surgeries was only a shell of what it had been. She remarked to me that she was really learning the truth of what she really was. I said, "I guess you have a little more understanding of what the Course means when it says, 'I am not a body.'"

"I damn well better not be!" she exclaimed, laughing.

These two ideas—that my *eyes* see only the lifeless and that everything my mind sees is filled with non-neutral content (or, to put it differently, that my mind is always giving meaning to essentially meaningless things)—can be disconcerting. Even so, they have their plus side. The lesson is the same for us all, although for some, like Lynne, it seems to be accelerated. Yet our bodies will wither and decay just as hers did, only a little more slowly. It is a welcome relief to realize that the body's only meaning is given it by our mind. The mind and spirit are what are alive and real; they are the cause, and the body and its world are only movie projections of what first appeared in the mind.