

Study Guide and Commentary ACIM® Text, Chapter 4, Section V

The Ego-Body Illusion

Overview of the Section

This section continues to show the insanity of the ego's thought system, and the reasons why, if we become aware of that thought system, we will inevitably choose to reject it. The section focuses on the confused way in which the ego both identifies with and fears the body, considering the body its home and yet, at the same time, judging it as an unworthy home. It shows how the ego attempts to distract us from essential questions by getting us preoccupied with nonessentials, especially body-related problems that are incapable of solution. It exposes a whole class of ego thoughts related to the body, pointing them out so that, as they come up in our minds, we can become aware of their source and let them go.

Paragraph 1

1. ¹All [*All*] things work together for good. ²There are no [*no*] exceptions except in the ego's judgment. ³The ego exerts maximal vigilance about what it permits into awareness [Ur: Control is a central factor in what the ego permits into consciousness, and one to which it devotes its maximum vigilance], and this is not [*not*] the way a balanced mind holds together. [Ur: *Its control is unconscious.*] ⁴The ego is thrown further off balance because it keeps its primary motivation from your awareness [Ur: The ego is further off balance by keeping its primary motivation *unconscious*], and raises control rather than sanity [Ur: *sensible judgment*] to predominance. ⁵The ego has every reason to do this, according to the thought system which gave rise to it and which it serves. ⁶Sane judgment would inevitably judge against [*against*] the ego, and must [*must*] be obliterated by the ego in the interest of its self-preservation.

• Study Question •

1. *Why does the ego attempt to keep "its primary motivation from your awareness" (1:4), stand guard over what it permits into awareness (1:3), and attempt to obliterate sane judgment in the mind (1:6)?*

In 1:1, Jesus quotes a Bible verse from one of the Apostle Paul's epistles: "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28, KJV). His point, I believe, is simply that there is no reason to block *anything* out of awareness since all of it works

for good. Although “All things work together for good” is not the major point here, it is worth some attention. I’ve never understood this to mean, “Whatever happens is God’s perfect will,” a notion that results in empty platitudes such as “It was God’s will” being uttered when someone dies in a tragic accident. In fact, the Course flies in the face of such an idea! Just look at Lesson 14 in the Workbook, “God did not create a meaningless world.” It is quite evident from this lesson that things like plane crashes and wars are not things that are willed by God. In Lesson 99, we are told:

All the world of pain is not His Will. Forgive yourself the thought He wanted this for you. (W-pI.99.7:4–5)

What, then, can “All things work together for good” mean? To me, it simply means that the Holy Spirit can *use* anything for good. He can use even our so-called “sins” for good. He can use natural disasters. He can use every trying circumstance. That does not imply that He *sends* those adverse circumstances. No, we (individually or corporately) bring those on ourselves in one way or another. When we do, however, He can use them. For instance:

In His function as Interpreter of what you made, the Holy Spirit uses special relationships, which you have chosen to support the ego, as learning experiences that point to truth. (T-15.V.4:5)

The Holy Spirit, ever practical in His wisdom, accepts your dreams and uses them as means for waking. (T-18.II.6:1)

The Holy Spirit has a use for all the means for sin by which you sought to find it. But as He uses them they lead away from sin, because His purpose lies in the opposite direction. (T-21.III.6:1–2)

The Holy Spirit uses time, but does not believe in it. Coming from God He uses everything for good, but He does not believe in what is not true. (T6.II.10:1–2)

The Holy Spirit “uses everything for good.” That is how “All things work together for good.” More recent translations actually render the Bible verse along those lines; for instance, “We know that in everything God works for the good of those who love him.” (Romans 8:28, New Century Version).

So all things without exception are used for good by the Holy Spirit, and a sane mind will see things in that light. But not all things work for the good of the ego! Therefore, the ego thinks it needs to monitor what it allows into our minds (1:2–3). The ego is a lie and an illusion; therefore, it is exceptionally vulnerable to the truth. It wants to regulate what we think about, much as an oppressive government will regulate the content of the news media. Nor is the ego casual in the way it regulates our minds; it “exerts maximal vigilance about what it permits into awareness” (1:3). Just in case we happen to be thinking that “mental vigilance” is foreign to our nature, Jesus points out that we are *already* highly vigilant—just in the wrong direction! No doubt this is what he had in mind when he said, back in Section III: “Consider how much vigilance you have been

willing to exert to protect your ego, and how little to protect your right mind.” (T-4.III.10:3).

Filtering what you allow or don't allow into your awareness is a good way to stay out of touch with reality; it isn't "the way a balanced mind holds together" (1:3). In fact, a balanced mind is controlled *unconsciously* (Urtext)! The unbalanced mind is bound to react inappropriately, simply because it refuses even to be aware of so much of what is around it. But things get even worse! Not only does the ego censor what it allows into your mind, it also "keeps its primary motivation from your awareness" (1:4). You can't even carry out its censorship policies in an intelligent way because it won't let you know what the policies *are*. To the ego, being "in control" is more important than sanity (1:4). If the choice is between giving up control or going insane, the ego will choose insanity every time, even when the control it is preserving is completely illusory. Like Lucifer in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the ego thinks it "better to reign in hell than serve in heav'n."

Ego Mind (unbalanced)	Balanced Mind
Conscious control predominates	Control is unconscious
"Unsafe" thoughts such as sane judgment driven into unconscious	Sane judgment judges against the ego
Primary motivation hidden in unconscious	Motivation consciously under Spirit's direction

According to the ego's thought system, such choices are perfectly reasonable (1:5). The ego survives by hiding; it preserves itself in darkness. The light of the spirit is therefore a threat: "Spirit is perceived as a threat, because light abolishes darkness merely by showing you it is not there" (T-3.IV.6:6). Insanity is darkness and sanity is light. This is why the technique the Course is teaching—watching our minds for all the scraps of fear and bringing them to Jesus or the Holy Spirit for healing—actually heals us. If hiding in darkness preserves the ego, exposing it to the light undoes it. This is why the ego goes to such lengths to keep itself hidden; hiding is pure self-preservation on its part (1:6). This is why it *seems* to us that the Course is exaggerating the problem. It isn't exaggerating. We simply are not aware of the extent to which the ego dominates our minds, and that is just how the ego has planned it.

Paragraph 2

2. ¹A major [Ur: crucial] source of the ego's off-balanced state is its lack of discrimination between the body and the Thoughts of God [Ur: impulses

from God and from the body]. ²Thoughts of God are unacceptable to the ego, because they clearly point to the nonexistence of the ego itself. ³The ego therefore either distorts them or refuses to accept them. ⁴It cannot, however, make them cease to be. ⁵It therefore tries to conceal not only “unacceptable” body impulses, but also the Thoughts of God, because both are threatening to it. ⁶Being concerned primarily with its own preservation in the face of threat, the ego perceives them as the same. ⁷By perceiving them as the same, the ego attempts to save itself from being swept away, as it would surely be in the presence of knowledge.

Urtext version of 2:2-7: In its characteristic upside-down way, the ego has taken the impulses from the superconscious and perceives them as if they arise in the unconscious. The ego judges what is to be accepted, and the impulses from the superconscious are unacceptable to it, because they clearly point to the unexistence of the ego itself. The ego therefore experiences threat, and not only censors but also reinterprets the data. However, as Freud very correctly pointed out what you do not perceive you still know, and it can retain a very active life *beyond* your awareness.

Repression thus operates to conceal not only the baser impulses, but also the most lofty ones from the ego's awareness, because *both* are threatening to the ego and, being concerned primarily with its preservation in the face of threat, it perceives them as the same. The threat value of the lofty is really much greater to the ego, because the pull of God Himself can hardly be equated with the pull of human appetites.

By perceiving them as the same, the ego attempts to save itself from being swept away, as it would surely be in the presence of knowledge. The upper level of the unconscious thus contains the call of God as well as the call of the body. That is why the basic conflict between love and fear is unconscious. The ego cannot tolerate either and represses both by resorting to inhibition. Society depends on inhibiting the former {fear}, but *salvation* depends on disinhibiting the latter {love}. (Notes that follow are by Robert Perry.) {The grammar here dictates that “the former” should be love and “the latter” fear, but I think this is a mistake in wording. The last sentence only makes sense the other way around.}

The material in 2:2-7 has been moved here from another part of the dictation: what is now T-4.III.2, between sentences 3 and 4. This discussion assumes the model of the mind we saw earlier: the superconscious realm of Heavenly knowledge, the conscious mind which responds to unconscious and superconscious impulses, and the unconscious mind consisting of an upper layer of buried ego garbage and a lower layer of pure miracle-working ability.

• **Study Question** •

2. *Can you uncover in yourself some of the ways that the ego tries to conceal both Thoughts of God and some bodily impulses that would threaten its image? Over the next few days, spend some time examining your own thinking, trying to detect such thoughts.*

What kinds of things does the ego try to conceal from our awareness? Anything which it perceives as a threat to itself, even when those things are entirely unlike one another. Here we are told that the ego conceals not only “Thoughts of God” but also “‘unacceptable’ body impulses” (2:5). The call of God from the superconscious and the lusts of the flesh (as the Bible calls them) are equally threatening to the ego. We may imagine that unacceptable body impulses are things like gluttony or inappropriate sexual arousal. In another passage later in the Text, Jesus refers to this paragraph using slightly different wording that, in my opinion, helps to illuminate the meaning:

The ego... sees no difference between miracle impulses and ego-alien beliefs of its own. I told you that the ego is aware of threat to its existence, but makes no distinctions between these two very different kinds of threat. (T9.VIII.3:1–2)

Clearly, when he says “I told you,” he is referring to the passage we are studying in Chapter 4.V. He speaks of the ego’s inability to distinguish between “two very different kinds of threat,” but he uses different terms to describe the two things. In this later reference, Jesus uses the phrase “miracle impulses” instead of “Thoughts of God,” and the phrase “ego-alien beliefs of its own” instead of “‘unacceptable’ physical impulses.”

This may not seem much clearer, but a little more research will help. The term “ego-alien” is a very specific psychological term. As laypersons, we might think the term means something that is foreign to the ego, but then the whole phrase, “ego-alien beliefs of its own,” would make no sense whatsoever. How could “beliefs of its own” be “foreign to the ego”? But as psychologists, the original recipients of these words (Helen and Bill) would understand perfectly. “Ego-alien” means, “Of or pertaining to aspects of one’s behavior or attitudes viewed as inconsistent with one’s fundamental beliefs and personality” (*Random House Unabridged Dictionary*). In my own words, we are talking about beliefs and attitudes of the ego or behaviors of the body that contradict the ego’s core beliefs about itself.

If this seems complex, it is because the ego itself is complex: “Complexity is of the ego, and is nothing more than the ego's attempt to obscure the obvious” (T-15.IV.6:2). It represses the bodily impulses because it does not want to relinquish control to anything, including the body. (The ego’s fear of the body is further developed in paragraph 4 and beyond.) In addition, the ego is conflicted in its own desires; for instance, it craves immortality and yet seeks death. The ego has to hide its desire for death from us: “It is not given to the ego's disciples to realize that they have dedicated themselves to

death” (T-19.IV.B.17:1). The ego makes us sick; that, too, is surely an “unacceptable” physical impulse that the ego must hide, since it identifies with the body.

The other sort of thing the ego hides from awareness is “Thoughts of God.” I am not sure why “Thoughts” is capitalized here. Usually, I associate the phrase “Thoughts of God” with God’s creations, that is, us. Here, it seems to apply more to actual godly thoughts in our minds; the Urtext used the words “impulses from God” instead of “Thoughts of God.” The later passage in Chapter 9 calls them “miracle impulses,” so I think we can understand the phrase to mean an inner movement or impulse to express love, or to approach God. To the ego, such thoughts are threatening because “they clearly point to the nonexistence of the ego itself” (2:2). It puts them in the same class as physical impulses it does not like. It simply refuses to accept them, or else it “distorts” them into physical impulses, as was discussed earlier (T-1.VII); for instance, turning an impulse to unite with another mind into a sexual desire for a person’s body, or deflecting a hunger for God into a craving for chocolate.

The primary concern of the ego is its own preservation (2:6), so whether the apparent threat comes from a divine impulse or a bodily one, the ego perceives it as the same thing, and tries to conceal it (2:5). The point, I think, is that *concealment is a core ego defense tactic*. Therefore, watching our thoughts and uncovering what the ego is hiding is an excellent method of undoing the ego.

Paragraph 3

3. ¹Any thought system that confuses God and the body [Ur: makes *this confusion* {between impulses from God and from the body}] must [*must*] be insane. ²Yet this confusion [Ur: *demented state*] is essential [*essential*] to the ego, which judges only [*only*] in terms of threat or non-threat to itself [*to itself*]. ³In one sense the ego’s fear of God is at least logical, since the idea of Him does dispel the ego. [Ur: *Fear of dissolution from the higher source, then, makes some sense in ego terms.*] ⁴But fear of the body, with which the ego identifies so closely, makes no sense at all [Ur: *is more blatantly senseless*].

• Study Question •

3. *What is the ego’s sole criterion for judgment, which causes it to confuse God and the body?*

Although it makes no sense to confuse God and the body, the ego insanely does so, because its judgment puts everything into one of two categories: threat or non-threat to itself (3:1–2). It judges both God and the body to be threats. Yet, even on that basis the confusion seems odd. Judging God to be a threat to the ego “is at least logical,” because allowing thoughts of God in our minds “does dispel the ego” (3:3), but judging the body to be a threat to the ego seems downright crazy (3:4). The ego closely identifies with the body; how can it possibly see the body as a threat?

As I ponder this section, I wonder why the ego's fear of the body garners so much consideration. Why is it important *to me* that my ego confuses God and the body, and fears them both? I think it is because I need to know what kinds of thoughts to look for as I watch my mind for the ego. Identifying thoughts of fearing God or avoiding Him can easily be identified as ego-based. Avoidance of thinking about my body's weaknesses, or discomfort with my body's impermanence, however, is less obviously coming from the ego. I need to be aware that the ego sponsors these thoughts because it does feel threatened in some way by the body. *How* it feels threatened will be explained shortly.

Paragraph 4

4. ¹The body is the ego's home by its own election. ²It is the only identification with which the ego feels safe, since the body's vulnerability is its own best argument that you cannot [*cannot*] be of God. ³This is the belief that the ego sponsors eagerly. ⁴Yet the ego hates the body, because it cannot accept it as good enough to be its home. ⁵Here is where the mind becomes actually dazed. ⁶Being told by the ego that it is really part of the body and that the body is its protector, the mind is also told [Ur: *it is also constantly informed*] that the body cannot [*can not*] protect it. [Ur: *This, of course, is not only true, but perfectly obvious.*] ⁷Therefore, the mind asks, "Where can I go for protection?" to which the ego replies, "Turn to me." ⁸The mind, and not without cause, reminds the ego that it has itself insisted that it is identified with the body, so there is no point in turning to *it* for protection. ⁹The ego has no real answer to this because there is none [*there isn't any*], but it does have a typical solution. ¹⁰It obliterates the question from the mind's awareness. ¹¹Once out of awareness [Ur: *unconscious*] the question can and does produce uneasiness, but it cannot be answered because it cannot be asked.

• Study Question •

4. *How does the ego respond when the mind questions the fact that the body cannot protect it?*

The ego's attitude toward the body is a perfect example of its ambivalence. It likes identifying with the body because the vulnerability of the body "proves" that we cannot be of God (4:2), an idea it vigorously promotes to us (4:3). Yet that very vulnerability upsets the ego because the body isn't good enough to be its home, so it also *hates* the body (4:4).

There is a whole little back-and-forth story here. The ego tells us that the body is the home and protector of the mind (4:6). At the same time, it also tries to convince us that the body's vulnerability proves we are not of God. The mind gets "actually dazed" (4:5) by the evident contradiction. We ask the ego where we can go for protection, and it responds, "To me." The mind reminds the ego that if the body cannot protect us, and the

ego is identified with the body by its own admission, then the ego cannot protect us either. So where *should* we go for protection? To avoid the unanswerable question, the ego blocks the whole issue from the mind's awareness (4:6–10). This is a specific example of the principle of the ego's vigilance discussed in 1:3–4, 6. The ego is vigilantly monitoring what stays in your mind, and interfering with your thinking about things that would threaten the ego and its thought system.

When the ego succeeds in suppressing our questioning, we continue to feel uneasy. Subconsciously, we *know* that neither the ego nor the body can make us safe. If they are all we have, we are in trouble. The question, "Where can I go for protection?" remains unanswered because the ego in our mind simply will not allow the question to be asked. There is an entire Pulitzer-prize-winning book about this mental suppression by Ernst Becker, titled, *The Denial of Death*. Becker calls man "the mortal animal who is at the same time conscious of his mortality." He says that man, in an attempt to deny his fated death,

...literally drives himself into a blind obliviousness with social games, psychological tricks, personal preoccupations so far removed from the reality of his situation that they are forms of madness—agreed madness, shared madness, disguised and dignified madness, but madness all the same. (*Denial of Death*, p. 27)

Becker quotes the philosopher José Ortega y Gasset:

For life is at the start a chaos in which one is lost. The individual suspects this, but he is frightened at finding himself face to face with this terrible reality, and tries to cover it over with a curtain of fantasy, where everything is clear. It does not worry him that his "ideas" are not true, he uses them as trenches for the defense of his existence, as scarecrows to frighten away reality.

(Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, p. 156–157)

The Course is substantially in agreement with these assessments. The ego constructs this "curtain of fantasy" to hide our questions about our safety, because they threaten the ego's dominance. The diversionary tactics it uses are discussed further in the paragraphs that follow.

Paragraph 5

5. ¹This is the question that *must* be asked: "Where can I go for protection?" [Ur: Only an insane mind *fails* to ask it. Even the insane ask it unconsciously, but it requires real sanity to ask it consciously....The real problem {is} "What is the question?" because...the answer *could* be found if the question were recognized.] ²[Ur: When the Bible says] "Seek and ye shall find" [it] does not mean that you should seek blindly and desperately for something you would not recognize. ³Meaningful seeking is consciously

undertaken, consciously organized and consciously directed. ⁴[Ur: B's chief contribution to your joint venture is his insistence that] The goal must be formulated clearly and kept in mind [*kept in mind*].

You, Helen, are not good at doing this. You still search for many gods simultaneously, and this goal confusion, given a strong will, MUST produce chaotic behavior. B's behavior is not chaotic, because he is not so much goal-divided as not goal-ORIENTED. Where Helen has overinvested in many goals, B has underinvested in ALL goals. He has the advantage of POTENTIALLY greater freedom from distractibility, but he does not care enough to use it. Helen has the advantage of great effort, but she keeps losing sight of the goal.

B has very intelligently suggested that you both should set yourself the goal of really studying for this course. There can be no doubt of the wisdom of this decision, for any student who wants to pass it. But, knowing your individual weaknesses as learners and being a teacher with some experience, I must remind you that ⁵Learning and wanting to learn are inseparable. ⁶You learn best when you believe what you are trying to learn is of value to you. ⁷However, [Ur: values in this world are hierarchical, and] not everything you may want [*want*] to learn has lasting value. ⁸Indeed, many of the things you want to learn may be chosen *because* their value will not last.

• **Study Question** •

5. *Think about ways in which you can make appropriate use of the question, "Where can I go for protection?" in your life. What might be some ways you can use to approach the search for the answer?*

Rather than allowing the ego to suppress our probing question, "Where can I go for protection?" we *must* learn to ask it. The search for true safety and security is a healthy search. In the Bible, Jesus assured us, "Seek and ye shall find" (5:2, which is a reference to a saying from the Sermon on the Mount, Luke 11:9). Seeking, to be meaningful, cannot be carried on in a haze of blind, semi-conscious desperation. That, I think, describes how Jesus sees our "normal" seeking for security. Seeking, to be meaningful, needs to be "consciously undertaken, consciously organized and consciously directed" (5:3).

The emphasis here is clearly on *conscious* versus *unconscious*. We should be very consciously asking where we can go for protection. Such asking will quickly and repeatedly expose the inadequacy of the body and the ego to protect us, and cause us to look elsewhere—which is highly desirable, since "elsewhere" is where our safety can be found. Instead of wasting all our time in trying to secure the safety of the body or the ego, we will expend our energy in a useful direction, turning our hearts to God.

The personal aside to Helen and Bill, from the Urtext, shows us what Jesus has in mind here for students of the Course. We need to set ourselves a goal of mastering this

material: "You...should set yourself the goal of really studying for this course. There can be no doubt of the wisdom of this decision, for any student who wants to pass it."

When Jesus says we should formulate the goal clearly and keep it in mind (5:4), recognizing the goal's value for us (5:5–6), he must be referring to the goal of *true safety*, which is our eternal security in spirit rather than physical safety. He points out that not everything we want to learn (especially in listening to the ego) has lasting value. The ego, in fact, chooses some goals specifically "*because* their value will not last" (5:8). This agrees with the ego's desire to use our vulnerability to prove we are not of God. *The ego* avoids anything eternal because such things must come from God (6:1). *We*, however, do not need to avoid the eternal. On the contrary, eternal goals are the *only* goals truly worthy of our efforts. In this regard, you may want to read Lesson 133 in the Workbook, which declares, "If you choose a thing that will not last forever, what you chose is valueless" (W-pI.133.6:1).

Paragraph 6

6. ¹The ego thinks it is an advantage not to commit itself to anything that is eternal, because the eternal must come from God. ²Eternalness is the one function the ego has tried to develop, but has systematically failed to achieve. [Ur: It may surprise you to learn that had the ego willed to do so, it *could* have made the eternal, because, as a product of the mind, it *is* endowed with the power of its own creator. But the *decision* to do this, rather than the *ability* to do it is what the ego cannot tolerate. That is because the decision, from which the ability would naturally develop, would necessarily involve true perception, a state of clarity which the ego, fearful of being judged truly, *must* avoid. The results of this dilemma are peculiar, but no more so than the dilemma itself. The ego has reacted characteristically here as elsewhere, because mental illness, which is *always* a form of ego-involvement, is not a problem of reliability as much as of validity. ³The ego compromises [The ego also has countenanced some strange compromises] with the issue of the eternal, just as it does with all issues touching on the real question in any way. ⁴By becoming involved with tangential issues [Ur: By compromising in connection with all *tangential* questions], it hopes to hide the real question and keep it out of mind. ⁵The ego's characteristic busy-ness with nonessentials is for precisely that purpose. [Consider the alchemist's age-old attempts to turn base metal into gold. The one question which the alchemist did not permit himself to ask was "What For?" He *could* not ask this, because it would immediately become apparent that there was no sense in his efforts, even if he succeeded.] ⁶Preoccupations with problems set up to be incapable of solution are favorite ego devices for impeding learning progress. [The problems of squaring the circle, and carrying pi to infinity are good examples. A more recent ego-attempt is particularly noteworthy. The idea of preserving the body by suspension, thus giving it the kind of limited

immortality which the ego can tolerate, is among its more recent appeals to the mind.] ⁷In all these diversionary tactics, however, the one question that is never asked by those who pursue them is, "What for?" ⁸This is the question that *you* must learn to ask in connection with everything [Ur: your mind wills to undertake]. ⁹What is the purpose? ¹⁰Whatever it is, it will direct your efforts automatically. ¹¹When you make a decision of purpose, then, you have made a decision about your future effort; a decision that will remain in effect unless you change your mind [Ur; change the *decision*].

• Study Question •

6. *Consider your own life. Try to identify some of the "tangential issues" the ego has used to distract you from your eternal well-being. How can you break through your preoccupation with non-essentials?*

The ego avoids anything eternal because such things are connected with God, and it wants to avoid God at all costs (6:1). So it tries to keep our minds away from thinking about God or eternity. It wants to become eternal itself, but cannot (6:2). Its tactic is familiar; it distracts us with "tangential issues" (6:4). I love that term! If you had high school geometry you may remember *tangents*. A tangent is a straight line taking off from a circle, in the direction that you might take if you were on a merry-go-round and suddenly got flung off. You just fly off in whatever direction you were going at the time.

I am painfully familiar with tangents. Going off on tangents is one of my biggest problems. I can start in on some simple task like addressing an envelope to someone, and end up two hours later having done a dozen different and only slightly related things, most of them nonessential (6:5), with the envelope in question still unaddressed!

One result of having a tangent-prone mind is that my quiet time suffers, that is, the time I spend in spiritual reading, study, and meditation. I am constantly fighting a battle with time, feeling that I do not have "enough time." A major cause of my seeming lack of time is all the tangents I go off on, taking care of nonessential things. What usually gets sacrificed from my schedule is some or all of my quiet time. That is not simply happenstance, according to this paragraph. "By becoming involved with tangential issues, [the ego] hopes to hide the real question and keep it out of mind" (6:4). The ego is attempting to divert me from the real question; to stop me from thinking about the truly important things.

The solution to such mental wandering is to ask myself, "What is this for? What is its purpose?" (6:7, 9). This is another aspect of mental vigilance. Rather than accepting our involvement and preoccupation with "tangential issues" we are to become conscious of our thinking, and to question our involvement. If we ask "What is this for?" and bring things in line with a spiritual (and therefore eternal) purpose, the things related to our bodies will serve as learning devices on our way to God rather than as distractions from

Him. The general pattern of mental vigilance shows through: become aware of the ego's thinking, and choose differently.

The final sentence (6:11), I believe, states an important principle that governs our entire spiritual practice. In my own words, that principle states that *once you set the direction of your mind, it continues in that direction until you consciously make a different choice*. This is why a morning quiet time, in which you set your mind in a spiritual direction, can have such a powerful effect on your entire day. It also explains why it is so important to “choose again” the moment you realize you have chosen for the ego. If you do not make a different choice, your mind will continue in the ego groove indefinitely.

That's what happens to me, I know, when I let my mind run off in tangents. I've allowed the ego to take over, and even if the initial tangent seems to be a “good” one, it can quickly lead to some very negative paths of thought. Practicing this kind of mental discipline *is not easy*. I will be the first to tell you that! But the simple question the Course suggests—“What for?”—is remarkably effective in reining in the mind and bringing it back “on course.”

Answer Key

1. The ego hides itself because sane judgment would inevitably judge against the ego; to preserve its existence, the ego must obliterate sane judgment (1:6).
2. No written answer is expected.
3. The ego's only criterion for judgment is threat or non-threat to itself.
4. The ego engages us in dialogue and ultimately obliterates the question about protection from our minds; it keeps us from asking the question.
5. Meaningful seeking is above all *conscious* seeking. Consciously asking this question will lead us to recognize that neither the body nor the ego can protect us, and will ultimately lead us to turn to the spirit and to God. Such conscious asking can be part of our program of mental vigilance. We might, for instance, ask ourselves this question when we find ourselves preoccupied with attempts to secure our physical or psychological safety, and realize that safety on those levels cannot truly be found.
6. No written answer is expected to the first part. To break through our preoccupation with non-essentials, we need to learn to ask "What for?" and "What is the purpose?" concerning the things we do in our lives.