

Study Guide and Commentary ACIM Text, Chapter 29

The Worship of Idols Section I

The Cautious Friendship

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 paragraph breaks differ between the FIP and CE versions.

Overview of Section I

This section makes conspicuous references to the concept of “**gap**” that has run through the last several sections of Chapter 28. It would be a good idea to refresh our memory of what is meant by the word “**gap**.” Take a moment to read over a few references to this term, and then answer the following question.

• Study Question •

1. *As you recall your study of the previous chapter, and read the following references, how would you define the term “**gap**”?*

References:

<i>T-28.III.3:3–5 (FIP),</i>	<i>T-28.III.3:1–3 (CE)</i>
<i>T-28.III.4:2–3 (FIP),</i>	<i>T-28.III.4:1–2 (CE)</i>
<i>T-28.III.5:1–5 (FIP),</i>	<i>T-28.III.4:5-5:2 (CE)</i>
<i>T-28.IV.3:7–4:1 (FIP),</i>	<i>T-28.IV.3:7–8 (CE)</i>
<i>T-28.IV.9:1 (FIP),</i>	<i>T-28.IV.8:1 (CE)</i>
<i>T-28.V.7:1 (FIP), (CE)</i>	

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Paragraph 1

There is no time, no place, no state where God is absent. ²There is *nothing* to be feared. ³There is no way in which a **gap** could be conceived of in the wholeness that is His. ⁴The compromise the least and littlest **gap** would represent in His eternal love is quite impossible. ⁵For it would mean His love could harbor just a hint of hate, His gentleness turn sometimes to attack, and His eternal patience sometimes fail. ⁶All this do you believe when you perceive a **gap** between your brother and yourself. ⁷How could you trust Him, then? ⁸For He must be deceptive in His love. ⁹Be wary, then; let Him not come too close, and leave a **gap** between you and His love, through which you can escape if there be need for you to flee.

• Study Question •

2. If you see a **gap** between yourself and a brother, what must you believe? Let this sink in; consider whether or not this is something you want to believe.
3. Why does seeing a **gap** between brothers imply that we do not trust God, and believe His love is imperfect and deceptive?

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“There is no time, no place, no state where God is absent” (1:1). The first sentence, a statement of absolute truth, is worthy of being memorized. It reminds me of the benediction often used in Unity and Religious Science churches, which ends with the words, “Wherever we are, God is, and all is well.” This statement’s truth is often encapsulated in the single word *omnipresent*, but it is a truth far more practical than that abstruse theological term would imply. Think about it a bit.

No time where God is absent: morning, afternoon, evening, middle of the night, wee hours of the morning—God is there, fully, absolutely, entirely. All of God is with you, *now*. And *now*. And *now*. Always. In times of joy and laughter, times of sadness, times of suffering and pain, times of triumph and times of tragedy, times of loss and times of gain, times of health and times of sickness, times of affluence and times of poverty, the best of times and the worst of times, at the birth of a baby or the death of a friend—God is never absent.

No place where God is absent: God is present in a church—every church, any church, any synagogue or mosque or temple. God is present in your home and mine, your place of work and mine, in Iraq, Lebanon, Bosnia, and Somalia, in any place you can think of. God is present in bars and whorehouses, as well as in nurseries or retreat centers. You cannot find any place God is not; you cannot *think* of a place that God is not.

No state where God is absent. Are you rich? God is with you. Are you starving? God is with you. Are you enslaved? God is with you. Whatever your condition, whatever the circumstances, God is present.

The Psalmist said it well:

“Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from Your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, You are there;
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.
If I take the wings of the dawn,
If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,
Even there Your hand will lead me,
And Your right hand will lay hold of me.”
(Psa 139:7-10 NAS)

We need to connect to this truth, to *realize* this truth: God is with us. God is never absent. God is *here* and is here *now*. The truth only affects our experience to the extent to which it is realized (given actual form). We can make it real by meditating on it, repeating it over and over, singing it, and reminding ourselves of it every minute of the day. That’s why we have lessons in the Workbook, such as, “God is with me. I live and move in Him” (W-pII.222), and “God goes with me wherever I go” (W-pI.41). We need, as Brother Lawrence taught, to *practice* the

Presence of God. Indeed, if the problem is our false belief in separation, the antidote is practicing God's endless Presence.

If God is always, everywhere present, fear is impossible (1:2). "If you knew Who walks beside you on this way which you have chosen, fear would be impossible (T-18.III.3:2 (FIP), T-18.III.3:1 (CE)). God's eternal love makes it impossible for there to be a **gap** in which fear exists because such a **gap** would mean that His love, gentleness, and patience were less than perfect (1:3–5). Whenever you perceive a **gap** between yourself and your brother, some difference or separation which seems to be grounds for fear, you must believe that God's love could turn to hate (1:6). If you have reason to fear your brother, you cannot rely on God's protection. You had best not trust it fully; you need to keep God at a little distance (1:7). You cannot trust His love, and therefore you desire an "escape **gap**" just in case you need it (1:8–9).

Let yourself think about the reasoning in this paragraph. How *could* there be a **gap** in God's Wholeness? If God "encompasses all being" (T-4.VII.5:1), if there is no place He is not, a "**gap**" is impossible, because a **gap** would be a place where God does not exist. You are a part of all being. So is your brother. Therefore you are part of God. If there is no **gap** in His Wholeness, and there is no place He is not, and we all are part of that Wholeness, how could there be a **gap** between you and your brother? It is simply impossible.

Therefore, to perceive a **gap** between brothers, our minds must first believe there is a **gap** in God, a hole in His Wholeness. Thus, our separation from one another *proves* our deliberate misperception of God, even if consciously we affirm God's unity. Our mental rejection of God's unity (a unity that includes *all that is*) is why we shrink from God and resist accepting our union with God.

When we see God as imperfect, a flawed Being Who sometimes harbors hate, Whose patience fails, and Who sometimes attacks us, *how could we trust Him?* So although we may feel an intense attraction to God, we also feel fear. We are "wary" of God; our devotion to Him is less than whole-hearted. We try to preserve a "way out" in case God proves to be just another disappointment.

All this is, most likely, quite unconscious. But the proof of it lies in our continued separation from our brothers and sisters.

Paragraph 2

² Here is the fear of God most plainly seen. ²For love is treacherous to those who fear, since fear and hate can never be apart. ³No one who hates but is afraid of love, and therefore must he be afraid of God. ⁴Certain it is he knows not what love *means*. ⁵He fears to love and loves to hate, and so he thinks that love is fearful; hate is love. ⁶This is the consequence the little **gap** must bring to those who cherish it and think that it is their salvation and their hope. ⁷The fear of God! ⁸The greatest obstacle that peace must flow across has not yet gone.¹ ⁹The rest are past, but this one still remains to block your path and make the way to light seem dark and fearful, perilous and bleak.

• Study Question •

¹ See T-19.IV.D: "The Fourth Obstacle: The Fear of God"

4. (2:1–3). *These sentences are full of logical connectives: for, since, and therefore. The argument is that if you are perceiving a **gap** (which means you must fear your brother to some extent), you must be afraid of God. How does Jesus arrive at that conclusion?*
5. (2:4–6). *What is the consequence of holding on to the little **gap** between you and your brother?*
6. (2:7–8). *Try to locate the passage to which these two sentences are a clear reference. Where else, several chapters ago, did it speak about “the fear of God” being an “obstacle that peace must flow across”? Hint: It is in the longest section in the Text.*



God is love. If you fear your brother, you have to fear loving him, which amounts to being afraid of God. Our fear of God, Jesus says, can be “plainly seen” in the **gap** that we maintain between ourselves and our brothers (2:1). Think about it. If you fear someone, “love is treacherous” (2:2). What’s the most significant objection people raise to unconditional love? Isn’t it something like, “I’ll become a doormat! They’ll walk all over me”? Love seems like a hazardous course of action! Such a response is inevitable because when you fear, you also hate. Fear and hate “can never be apart” (2:2, note the emphasis). If you fear, you hate what you fear; if you hate, you are afraid of love and, therefore, afraid of God (2:3).

Of course, you are not actually afraid of God or love; you fear what you imagine about them (2:4). You have become mixed up about love and hate, and all because you think there is some benefit to be had by remaining separate from your brothers and sisters (2:5). You think you are protecting yourself by cherishing the **gap** between you and others, but in reality, you deny your Self and God (2:6).

Although the other obstacles to peace are gone, the fear of God, which is the greatest obstacle that peace must flow across, remains to block your path and make the way to light seem fearful (2:7–9).

Summing up: To not trust God’s love is to fear it and, therefore, to hate it; if you hate it, you are afraid of love and God. You certainly do not know what love means. If you cherish the little **gap**, you inevitably fear to love and love to hate; you think love is fearful, hate is love. This total confusion is the result of cherishing a **gap** between yourself, others, and God.

Paragraph 3

3 You had decided that your brother is your enemy. ²*Sometimes* a friend, perhaps, provided that your separate interests made your friendship possible a little while. ³But not without a **gap** between you lest he turn again into an enemy. ⁴Let him come close to you, and you jumped back; as you approached, he instantly withdrew. ⁵A cautious friendship, limited in scope and carefully restricted in amount, became the treaty you had made with him. ⁶You shared a qualified entente, in which a clause of separation was a point which you had both agreed to keep intact.² ⁷And violating this was thought to be a breach of treaty not to be allowed.

• Study Question •

7. *What, in the preceding two paragraphs, has been said to be a sure sign that the fear of God remains?*
8. *Notice the legal or political terms used here: treaty, clause, entente. It is interesting to notice the dictionary definition of “entente”:*

I. an arrangement or understanding between two or more nations agreeing to follow a particular policy with regard to affairs of international concern.

If we replace the concept of “national” here with “personal,” how does this accurately describe what the Course is saying about our “treaty” with our brother? What is the “particular policy” we have agreed on?

Consider some of your relationships, and see how well this description applies to them.

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You had decided that your brother, although he may sometimes be a friend when your separate interests coincide, is still your enemy; you require a **gap** to protect you (3:1–3). When one of you approaches, the other pulls back (3:4). Your treaty calls for a cautious, limited, and restricted friendship, a qualified entente, with both agreeing to maintain a separation clause, whose breach would be intolerable (3:5–7).

These sentences assume that we have already left the first three obstacles to peace behind:

- the desire to get rid of peace
- the belief that the body is valuable for what it offers
- the attraction of death

In a sense, this section brings us back to that discussion of the fourth and final obstacle, in which you and your holy relationship partner have come together, to stand before this last veil: the fear of God. We see here that our fear of God has a cause: our cherishing of the little **gap**, the distance between ourselves and our brothers. We want a **gap** because we want to be different (not the same). We want to be special, and you cannot be special without being different. You cannot

² An “entente” is an understanding between two or more nations in which they agree on a common course of action. This term is part of the treaty language in this paragraph, which likens our interpersonal relationships to international relations, in which two nations, due to separate interests, cautiously cooperate on the basis of a carefully negotiated treaty.

be special without being “better than,” and that makes our brother or sister “worse than” or “less than” us. And because she is trying to be special, too, she is our competitor. We fear loving her; we cannot give in to love, and therefore, we fear love. And God is love, so we fear God.

The reference to “your brother” (3:1) applies to anyone, but in particular, refers to our holy relationship partner. We have decided that our brother is our enemy (or competitor for specialness), to be allowed only limited and provisional friendship. Notice the essential component of the “treaty” we have made; the particular “clause” we both firmly have agreed upon: we have decided to remain separate (3:6). If either one gets too close, if the separation between us is in jeopardy, it is justification for anger; it is a breach of contract (3:7).

Paragraph 4

4 The **gap** between you is not one of space between two separate bodies. ²This but *seems* to be dividing off your separate minds. ³It is the symbol of a promise made to meet when you prefer and separate until you both elect to meet again. ⁴And then your bodies seem to get in touch, and signify a meeting place to join. ⁵But always is it possible to go your separate ways. ⁶Conditional upon the right to separate will you agree to meet from time to time, and keep apart in intervals of separation which protect you from the “sacrifice” of love. ⁷The body saves you, for it gets away from total sacrifice and gives you time in which to build again your separate selves, which you believe diminish as you meet.

• Study Questions •

9. (4:1-3). *It seems to us that what separates us from one another is the space between our bodies. The Course disagrees. If space between two bodies is not what separates us, then what does separate us? What does the space between our bodies symbolize? (Both questions have the same answer.)*
10. *To understand why this section, which begins by talking about the fear of God, is now talking about our wish to be separate from our brothers, ask yourself again: What does our desire to have a **gap** between us have to do with our fear of God? Read T-19.IV(D).11:5 before you answer.*
11. (4:4-6). *What seems to be the key “right” we insist upon in all our relationships? Once again, think about some of your relationships and look for this factor in them. Is it there? In what ways?*
12. (4:7). *The body, by its limitations and inherent inability to always be joined, seems to “save” us from the sacrifice of total oneness. There can be true value in taking time to be alone; the Workbook even encourages it, especially at the beginning of practice. What is the difference in this kind of separateness? Look at your own desire to be alone, and how you spend the time; which kind of aloneness is it?*

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The **gap** that seems to be dividing our separate minds is not space between our bodies, although the physical separation certainly appears to be real and hinders our sense of union (4:1–2). The physical **gap** only symbolizes our mutual promise to meet when we prefer and then separate until our bodies get in touch again (4:3). We allow ourselves to meet only on the

condition of our “right” to separate and keep apart, thus protecting ourselves from the imagined sacrifice of love. The distance gives us time to rebuild our separate selves, which we genuinely believe are diminished by our meetings (4:4–6).

The picture the Course paints here portrays our entire physical existence as an ego device to out-picture our mental separation. “The world you see is what you gave it” (T-21.In.1:2 (FIP), T-21.I.1:1 (CE)). We have separate bodies that seem to be far apart at times to provide a way for our minds to play out their illusion of separation. Separate bodies are tools of the mind to facilitate separate selves. We imagine that we feel separate because our bodies keep us apart (especially when we are geographically distant); in fact, the physical separation is the projection of our ego’s thoughts of separation. As always in the Course, the mind, not outside circumstance, is the cause.

If I examine my way of being in the world, I find that I seem to need time by myself. Too much time in others’ company is tiring; my “self” seems diminished by it, and I need time to regenerate. And I’m not alone in this; we all pretty much agree with it. Our social structure supports it. The Course seems to have described us very accurately here.

Paragraph 5

5 The body could not separate your minds unless you *wanted* it to be a cause of separation and of distance seen between you. ²Thus do you endow it with a power that lies not within itself. ³And herein lies its power over you, for now you think that *it* determines when you meet, and limits your ability to make communion with each other’s minds. ⁴And now it tells you where to go and how to go there; what is feasible for you to undertake and what you cannot do. ⁵It dictates what its health can tolerate and what will tire it and make it sick. ⁶And its “inherent” weaknesses set up the limitations on what you would do, and keep your purpose limited and weak.

• Study Question •

13. *What gives the body its seeming power over us?*

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The Course is not trying to tell us that we have to get rid of our bodies to be united. On the contrary, it insists that the body could not separate our minds unless we wanted it that way (5:1). I believe 5:1 is the key sentence of this section. The body is not the problem! It is our minds, our thoughts, that give our bodies the seeming power to separate us (5:2). Once we grant that power to the body, it entraps us. We believe we can meet only when our bodies are in the same place; we believe that only what we can express with our bodies (voice, gesture, expression) allows our minds to communicate. We think our bodies determine their health, endurance, and vulnerability to sickness. In other words, for all practical purposes, we have identified with our bodies (5:3–5).

The implications here are relatively clear, albeit startling: If we wanted to, we could communicate without our bodies (see T-18.VI.6–10 (FIP), T-18.VI.6–11 (CE)).

“The body is a limit imposed on the universal communication which is an eternal property of mind. But the communication is internal. Mind reaches to itself.” (T-18.VI.8:3–5 (FIP), T-18.VI.9:1–3 (CE))

We could “meet” a brother or sister without being physically near one another. Our bodies in no way limit us; we can be anywhere we wish, and do whatever we wish, without concern about what the body can tolerate, what tires it or makes it sick (5:6). The Course calls us to stop accepting the limitations our bodies would impose on us and recognize that we are not our bodies. These limitations are all designed by the ego to keep us separate, and we allow our bodies to keep us from joining mind to mind with our brothers and sisters.

To be honest, I’m not entirely sure how we can do this. I realize that when I feel the call of love to join with someone, I often feel some physical barrier to that joining—I’m too tired, I am not strong enough, it would deprive me of sleep, I need to eat first, or there is a vast physical distance between us. Whatever that physical barrier is, I need to question it. On the one hand, I know that while I am in this world, I do need to take care of my body. It is a valuable tool for communication. But I also know that I must never let my body stand in the way of communication. It’s a fine line. I need to stay in constant touch with the Holy Spirit to know when to stop and care for my body and when to ignore its apparent limitations.

Practice suggestion: Try negating these sentences and personalizing them, as a way of considering the implications for you if what they say is not valid. For instance: “My body and [name of friend]’s body do not determine when we can meet. Our bodies do not limit our ability to communicate with our minds.”

Paragraph 6

6 The body will accommodate to this, if you would have it so. ²It will allow but limited indulgences in “love,” with intervals of hatred in between. ³And it will take command of when to “love” and when to shrink more safely into fear. ⁴It will be sick because you do not know what loving means. ⁵And so you must misuse each circumstance and everyone you meet, and see in them a purpose not their own. ⁶It is not love that asks a sacrifice. ⁷But fear demands the sacrifice of love, for in love’s presence fear cannot abide. ⁸For hate to be maintained love must be feared, and only sometimes present, sometimes gone.

• Study Questions •

14. *What are some ways your body seems to allow only limited indulgence in “love”? How does your body seem to “take command” of when to love and when to withdraw in fear?*
15. *How is 6:4 related to the two sentences that preceded it? Compare with 2:4-5.*
16. *Because I don’t know what love is, I misuse every circumstance, and every person I meet; I “see in them a purpose not their own.” What does that last phrase mean to you?*

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Our bodies “accommodate” to our limited and weakened purpose (6:1). “Accommodate” means that the body adjusts its actions in response to our needs. (Compare the sentence to T-28.VI.1:10, 2:3 (FIP), T-28.VI.1:9, 2:3 (CE).) And since our “need” is separation, it adjusts to give us separation. It gets tired. It gets sick. It feels weak. Our bodies seem to limit when and how we can “love” ((6:2). When it encounters a conflict with someone, it leaves the room instead of seeking healing, shrinking more safely into fear (6:3).

Elsewhere, the Course says the same thing about the way our bodies adapt to our holy purpose:

“Perhaps you do not realize that this removes the limits you had placed upon the body by the purposes you gave to it. As these are laid aside, the strength the body has will always be enough to serve all truly useful purposes. The body's health is fully guaranteed, because it is not limited by time, by weather or fatigue, by food and drink, or any laws you made it serve before. You need do nothing now to make it well, for sickness has become impossible.” (W-pl. 136.18:1–4)

Simply put, the body does whatever is needed to fulfill the purpose we assign to it. In the Course's view, the mind's misuse of the body to maintain separation causes all bodily fatigue, sickness, and even the need for food, drink, sleep, or protection from the weather. Sickness occurs “because you do not know what loving means” (6:4, note the emphasis). Even the body's subjection to physical laws such as gravity appears to be included in the list of things brought about by our dedication to separation (“any laws you made it [the body] serve before”: (W-pl.136:18:3)). Jesus' biblical miracles, such as feeding the 5000 or walking on water, seem to bear this out.

You may find such a black-and-white viewpoint challenging to accept. I think everyone who reads the Course finds this a difficult teaching. Yet surely it is worth considering. What if it is true? What if all physical limits are, in the end, unnecessary entrapments of the ego? Each of us can apply this to whatever extent we believe it is possible. I must say I don't expect to go without food, sleep, or clothing any time soon! But when there is an inner impulse to help a brother or sister opposed by feelings of fatigue or belief in lack of time, I can call that into question. I can check within, asking, “Is this bodily obstacle something I need to ignore, or is it something I need to honor for my own health?” I suspect that, all too often, we pander to our bodily desires when the Spirit would have us transcend the limits our bodies would impose on us.

I find the next sentence quite interesting. It tells us that because of the way our body accommodates itself to our desire for separation, we inevitably “must misuse... everyone you meet, and see in them a purpose not their own” (6:5). (The FIP had “not your own” here, but the handwritten notes have “not their own.”) The word “must” is emphasized, which is why I say such misuse is inevitable. But it is the nature of the misuse that intrigues me: Because we are devoted to separation, we perceive our brothers and sisters as having a purpose that is different from their real purpose. We see them in competition with us. That is how we see things, isn't it? Someone makes a gesture of generosity, and we wonder, “What's in it for them?” We view everyone as having purposes that, at least potentially, can interfere with our purpose. Most of our interactions with one another consist of trying to sort out the opposing purposes. Our ability to love freely is constrained and blocked. We seldom suspect that we are all part of one being with a single, shared purpose.

Why is the concept of sacrifice introduced here (6:6)? In part, I think, because when we interact with our brothers as if we have competing purposes, it always seems as though being loving means sacrificing our desires in favor of another's, or trying to get them to sacrifice theirs for us. After all, isn't it loving to be selfless? We are willing to “love” up to a point, but then we feel love is asking too much and is calling for sacrifice too high for us to make. Jesus tells us that the sacrifice is not being asked for by love; instead, fear is asking us to sacrifice love (6:7).

“Hate” and “fear” (6:7–8) are characteristics of cherishing the little **gap** or clinging to our separate selves. To maintain fear, one must “sacrifice” love; to maintain hate, one must fear love. (Compare with 2:3-6). The author is repeating one of the primary points of this section: Clinging to separation from our brothers causes us to fear love, and thus to fear God. The logical conclusion, stated in Chapter 19, is that we can “overcome” the fear of God by eliminating the **gap** between our brothers and us by forgiving them. See T-19.IV(D).9:1-3 (FIP), T-19.IV.9:1–3 (CE), and 11:1-3 in that same section. The rest of this chapter emphasizes that theme. The words of T-11.IV.7:2 (FIP), T-11.IV.7:1 (CE) summarize it well: “God...is approached through the appreciation of His Son.”

In sum: love is not what is calling for sacrifice; fear is—it demands we sacrifice love because fear cannot exist in love’s presence. The only way to maintain hate [separateness] is to fear love and minimize its role. Love is therefore seen as treacherous because it seems unstable and unreliable.

Paragraph 7

7 Thus is love seen as treacherous, because it seems to come and go uncertainly and offer no stability to you. ²You do not see how limited and weak is your allegiance, and how frequently you have demanded that it go away and leave you quietly alone in “peace.” ³The body, innocent of any goal, is your excuse for variable goals you hold and force the body to maintain. ⁴You do not fear its weakness, but its lack of strength *or* weakness. ⁵Would you recognize that nothing stands between you? ⁶Would you know there is no **gap** behind which you can hide?

• Study Questions •

17. Where else in this section has love been called “treacherous”?
18. Why does love seem treacherous to us?
19. A question for thought: If our holding on to separation, which involves fear and hatred, is the cause which makes God’s love appear to be treacherous and therefore an object of fear; what can the solution be to our fear of God? If you need a clue, look at T-28.VII.2:6.

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It seems to most of us that love is “treacherous” in that it seems to come and go uncertainly. It can’t be depended on (7:1). You don’t realize the instability is not in love, but in your fickle allegiance to it, when you demand that love go away and leave you in “peace.” In 7:2, one can almost hear a poignant sorrow in Jesus’ voice, thinking of the many times we have, consciously and unconsciously, asked him to go away and leave us in “peace.” Have you ever done that—asked God to go away? I have, several times, and I’ve discovered the truth behind the old gospel hymn, “O love that will not let me go, I rest my weary soul in Thee.” God won’t go away, not really. He won’t let us go. Thank God!

(7:3). This statement provides the reason behind most of the other things said in this paragraph. The body is our excuse for goals that we are holding; that is, our scapegoat. We blame the body for our separateness when our mind has chosen separation as our goal and has given the

body the job of carrying it out. We blame our weak expression of love on the limitations of the body. We whitewash our ego outbursts with the lame excuse, “I’m sorry, I’m not feeling well.” The body plays a crucial role in covering up our mind’s choices, but we very much do not want to recognize that this is so. We want the body to be significant, to be the cause rather than the effect. We do not want to acknowledge its nothingness. We do not want to know that we are the cause, not the body. Its strength cannot protect us or attack others, and we cannot blame its weakness for our lack of love; it has no strength; it has no weakness (7:4). “There is no **gap**” (7:6)!

We believe our bodies keep us separate, walls of flesh between our minds:

“The body is the ego’s idol; the belief in sin made flesh and then projected outward. This produces what seems to be a wall of flesh around the mind, keeping it prisoner in a tiny spot of space and time, beholden unto death, and given but an instant in which to sigh and grieve and die in honor of its master.” (T-20.VI.11:1-2)

“Sickness is isolation. For it seems to keep one self apart from all the rest, to suffer what the others do not feel. It gives the body final power to make the separation real, and keep the mind in solitary prison, split apart and held in pieces by a solid wall of sickened flesh, which it can not surmount.” (W-pl.137.2:1-3)

Jesus tells us the body is an insubstantial wall, nothing at all, in fact. Note the word “seems” in both of those passages; the body *seems* to be a wall, it *seems* to keep one self apart from all the rest, but it does not separate us in reality. There is nothing between us (7:5). All this talk about “the little **gap**” and there is no **gap**!

Paragraph 8

• Study Questions •

20. (8:2). *We don’t actually fear the body’s weakness; we fear “its lack of strength or weakness.” Why? Can you think of another way of saying what this sentence says?*
21. (8:3-7). *Each of these sentences contains at least one thing that, in our wish to be separate, we do not want to know. Try stating those things in that way (only write the answer if you wish to), for instance: “I do not want to know that nothing stands between me and my brother.”*
22. *Why do we resist knowing these things?*
23. *The fear we experience in acknowledging oneness with our brothers, and in approaching God is irrational. All that results is peace eternal. Why do you suppose Jesus states two “nothings” here: “Nothing more than that, and nothing less.” What would be missing if he said just one “nothing” without the other?*

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8 There is a shock that comes to those who learn their savior is their enemy no more. ²There is a wariness that is aroused by learning that the body is not real. ³And there are overtones of seeming fear around the happy message “God is love.”³ ⁴Yet all that happens when the **gap** is gone is peace eternal. ⁵Nothing more than that, and nothing less. ⁶Without the fear of God, what could induce you to abandon Him? ⁷What toys or trinkets in the **gap** could serve to hold you back an instant from His love? ⁸Would you allow the body to say no to Heaven’s calling, were you not afraid to find a loss of self in finding God? ⁹And *can* your self be lost by being found?

I love the first three sentences of this paragraph because they so accurately express the experience I initially had in reading the Course, which many of its students share. “Shock.” “Wariness.” “Overtones of seeming fear.”

Shock: How can it be that this person, the one I’ve loved to hate, the bane of my existence, the target of my righteous wrath for much of my life, is not only any longer my enemy but has become my savior? No! It cannot be! How is it possible that I am seeing her or him this way? How can it be that I no longer find fault with them, that I deeply and truly forgive them and see “there was no sin”?

Wariness: What do you mean: “I am not a body”? What do you mean, the body isn’t real!? The body does not live, nor does it die!? It doesn’t limit me!? I don’t need it to communicate!? It isn’t the source of my pain!? If I am not the body, then what am I? And is that something I even want to be? This whole thing is downright spooky!

Overtones of seeming fear: I hear you saying, “God is love,” but how far does that go? Does that mean the wicked won’t be punished? Is that even fair? Union with God sounds nice in a way, but does that mean I will cease to exist as an individual?

Haven’t you had some or all of these thoughts? The Course admits that, to minds chained so long by the ego, its message can seem shocking, threatening, and even scary. Despite all our fears, when we recognize the **gap** as nothing and acknowledge it is not there, all that happens is peace eternal (8:4). There are no adverse side effects of enlightenment! (8:5)

A friend of mine once had such a powerful spiritual experience that, for days, she went around in perfect peace and happiness, loving everyone she met, seeing Christ in everyone. But the ego eventually struck back, raising questions such as, “What would happen to me if I stayed like this the rest of my life? I’d probably get creamed. After all, look at what happened to Jesus, to Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr.” She lost the joy; she went back to judging others.

But the truth is, all that happens is peace, peace forever, “nothing more...and nothing less” (8:5). If the fear of God were gone, there would be absolutely no reason to “abandon Him” (8:6). If we didn’t think that we are somehow giving up our *self* in giving up the body, we would stop saying “no” when Heaven calls to us (8:8).

Yet perhaps, as you read that line about having no reason to abandon God, you immediately find your mind asking, “Then why did I abandon Him in the first place?” Can you see the subtle insinuation in that question? It almost implies that there must have been some good reason for

³ 1 John 4:16 (RSV): “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.”

leaving God! “How did the separation happen?” is the unanswerable question, because it is an assertion masquerading as a question, asserting that the separation did indeed happen.

“The instant the idea of separation entered the mind of God’s Son, in that same instant was God’s Answer given. In time this happened very long ago. In reality it never happened at all.” (M-2.2:6-8)

If it *never* happened, as the Course says, then questioning *how* it happened is meaningless. When that kind of question arises, it is always a distraction of the ego, trying to keep us from accepting the truth.

Accepting our union with God and one another is not a loss of our self, it is the discovery of our Self (9:6).

Let me not forget myself is nothing, but my Self is all. (W-p11.358.1:7)

Have you ever experienced a fear of “a loss of self in finding God”? This final paragraph’s thrust seems to be that we need to acknowledge our fears rather than trying to hide them. We need to realize that they are self-induced. Our fears have no basis in reality—in finding God we find our Self, we do not lose It. Our fears are falsely generated by the impossible wish to be separate. What we fear losing, which is our separate self, does not even exist.

Spend some time thinking on these ideas, and perhaps speak with God in prayer about them, opening your heart to finding a way out of this self-deception.

Answer Key

1. “The little **gap**” is identified as “a wish to keep apart and not to join” (T-28.III.4:3). It is another way of referring to the tiny, mad idea of separation. It is the imaginary distance we have made between ourselves and God, which manifests itself in the distance we see between ourselves and our brothers.

It is interesting to notice that earlier, the exact same meaning was attached to the body:

2. This separating off is symbolized, in your perception, by a body which is clearly separate and a thing apart. Yet what this symbol represents is but your wish to *be* apart and separate (T-26.VII.8:9–10).
3. We might say then that the **gap** is the wish to be separate, and it is symbolized by the body. Robert Perry’s *Glossary* defines it as follows:
The space between reality and your dreams, which God will **bridge** in the final step. The space between your mind and your brother's, which is a mental space but is symbolized by separate bodies and the physical space between them. In this imagined **gap** arises the entire world, which is merely a collection of images projected on the fog that fills the **gap**. The **gap** is filled with countless **idols** and is the source of **sickness**. You try to join your brother by having your bodies meet in the **gap**. Yet real joining comes from acknowledging that the **gap** is completely empty and is not even there (see T-28.VI.5:4). See **separation**. See T-28.III.3-5, T-28.V.7, T-29.I.
4. If I perceive a **gap** between myself and my brother, I must believe that God’s love hides a little hate, His gentleness can turn to attack, and His patience can sometimes fail (see 1:4–6).
5. I see a couple of reasons. First, since God is everywhere, if I see a **gap** anywhere, the **gap** must be *in God*. Therefore, His love must contain a little hate because separation is a part of Him. Second, if my brother can truly attack me and do me harm, then I cannot trust God’s protection; He might let me be hurt. Separation always means difference; it brings fear; it signals danger and threatens attack. Therefore, I have to hold on to an “escape **gap**” between God and me, a way out in case His love fails.
6. If you are fearful, then, since fear and hate always go together, you must also hate what you fear. To hate means you are afraid of love (because if you were not afraid of love you would be loving, but your fear causes you to see love as “treacherous” or untrustworthy—that is, it does not feel *safe* to love). And if you are afraid of love, you must therefore be afraid of God—because God *is* love.
7. The consequence of holding on to the little **gap** between yourself and your brother is that you will conclude that love must be fearful (I believe this is in the sense that you are afraid to love your brother, thus rejecting your own loving nature), and that hatred is desirable (presumably because hatred appears to be protecting you from your brother).

8. The idea that peace has been placed within the holy relationship and must now flow out across obstacles in order to extend to the whole Sonship is presented in T-19.IV.1-2, particularly in T-19.IV.2:2. The reference to the fear of God as the final such obstacle to peace is from the last subsection of this chapter, T-19.IV(D), “The Fourth Obstacle: The Fear of God,” particularly T-19.IV(D).3:4: “*the fear of God*, the final step in your dissociation.” It could be helpful to read over this entire section, all twenty-one paragraphs, since it contains many themes similar to the current section of Chapter 29.
9. Perceiving a **gap** between myself and my brother “plainly” reveals that I must still be afraid of God.
10. Like two nations agreeing on a policy governing international concerns, we are two people who have agreed on a policy governing interpersonal concerns. That policy is that we have agreed to keep our separation intact; to maintain the **gap** between us, with violation of that **gap** being a breach of treaty and just cause for dissolution of the relationship.
11. What separates us is “A promise made to meet when you prefer, and separate till you and he elect to meet again.”
12. The desire to be separate is the cause of our fear of God. We are afraid of God *because we fear our brother* (T-19.IV(D).11:5).
13. In all our relationships, we insist on the “right” to separate, to be able to go our separate ways after meeting together.
14. This separateness, which is taken in order to rebuild a separate self, avoids joining, rather than facilitating it; it is based on a fear of loss of individual identity. The aloneness of the Workbook, solitude for the sake of private spiritual practice, is taken to retreat from the distractions of the world so as to *increase* your awareness of identity with the Christ in yourself and in others.
15. We give the body its seeming power over us; our minds do it. We want it “to be a cause of separation and of distance seen between” us; it takes on that desire and carries it out. We want the body to be the *cause* of separation, so we have to appear to be at its mercy, its effect rather than its cause, so our mind *attributes* this power to it. But the body has no real power to limit us unless we grant it that power.
16. It gets tired to force me to withdraw from company. It may get sick, forcing withdrawal. It manifests weaknesses that keep me from participating with others. (Your answers may be different.)
17. Sickness is one of the ways the body uses to command withdrawal into fear. It is startling to realize what the Course is saying here: My body gets sick because I don’t know what loving means; I get sick because I am afraid to love and think love is fearful.
18. It means that when I meet anyone, I see them as having a purpose different from my own, and therefore I see them as a threat or as competition, someone from whom I must be protected. I end up treating every encounter as a contest of opposing wills, and cannot allow myself to freely love the other person.
19. In 2:2: “For love *is* treacherous to those who fear...”

20. Because love seems to come and go uncertainly, and offers no stability to us. This seeming instability is caused, of course, by our holding on to fear and hate, which *demand* that love be “only sometimes present, sometimes gone.”
21. Letting go of separation; choosing its opposite, which is joining with our brother through forgiveness. This removes the *cause* of our fear of God’s love, and allows us to approach Him without fear.
22. We fear the body’s lack of strength or weakness because, in its role as “cause” of separation, we want it to have the strength to keep us separate, and we want it to appear weak and limited in its ability to join with others. Another way of saying this might be: “You fear to discover that the body has no power at all except what your mind has given it,” or, “You fear to discover that you cannot blame the body for your separateness.”
23. I do not want to know that nothing stands between me and my brother. I do not want to realize there’s no **gap** I can hide behind. I don’t want to realize that this brother I think of as enemy is really my savior. I don’t want to learn that the body is not real. I don’t want to hear the message that “God is love.”
24. Because each of them is a “necessary” defense against acknowledging our responsibility for the appearance of separation. To learn or know these things would remove our “excuse” for separateness.
25. If he said only “nothing more” we might think that what results could be something less than peace; if he said only “nothing less” we might think the result could include something besides peace (such as mindlessness, or disappearing into a formless blob, like the “peace” of a frontal lobotomy or being heavily sedated). Think about it, because we *do* fear that about the peace of God.

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 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. Passages that lie outside the current section will continue to have footnoted references. 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 Switching Editions of the Course

The commentaries on Chapters 29, 30, and 31 were written prior to the publication of the Complete and Annotated Edition (CE) of the Course in 2017. Originally they were based on the edition published by the Foundation for Inner Peace (FIP). The references to other parts of the Course were based on the FIP edition, and the comments themselves were based on the same edition. There were significant changes made in the CE, although for the most part there was no alteration in the meaning of the text, and these final chapters 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.

I have attempted for all references to add a separate CE reference if it differs from the FIP reference, but I may have missed some. If so, I apologize.

I have also tried to edit my commentary so as to reflect any wording changes in the CE. For instance, the CE 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.