

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM Text, Chapter 29

The Worship of Idols

Section IV

The Spark that Shines within the Dream

Explanation of underlining, italics and footnote formats can be found at the end of the commentary. See also the note there on the effects of switching from the FIP edition to the Complete and Annotated Edition.

Please note that the FIP and CE versions may differ in where paragraph breaks occur.

Overview of Section IV

The first four sections of this chapter seem to be parts of a larger whole. Section II opens with what is obviously a continuation of the rhetorical questioning that ended Section I. Section III ends with a discussion about the “nothingness” of your brother’s body, and Section IV opens with what seems to be a continuation of that same discussion. Section IV, however, ends with the kind of summary, exhortation and encouragement that the author typically uses when bringing a topic to a close, which seems to confirm that the four sections comprise a single, longer topic.

Bear in mind, therefore, that Section IV is the continuation and conclusion of the same discussion that began in Section I. We are still talking about the closing of the gap, the inability of the body to separate our minds, and remembering our union with God through forgiving our brothers.

Paragraph 1

Condemn your savior not because he thinks he is a body, for beyond his dreams is his reality. ²But he must learn he is a savior first, before he can remember what he is. ³And he must save who would be saved. ⁴On saving *you* depends his happiness, for who is savior but the one who gives salvation? ⁵Thus he learns it must be his to give. ⁶Unless he gives, he will not know he *has*, for giving is the proof of having. ⁷Only those who think that God is lessened by their strength could fail to understand this must be so. ⁸For who could give unless he has, and who could lose by giving what must be increased thereby?

• Study Questions •

1. Remember that the body is the symbol that represents our wish for separation. How might you express some of the implications of what sentence 1 means to you?
2. With that larger understanding of what it means to think one is a body, have you ever condemned a brother for such things? Why, according to sentence 2, should you not do so?

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The phrase “thinks he is a body” (1:1) implies a lot more than merely thinking that physical existence is a core part of what we are. It indicates defensiveness, limitation, fear, attack—the whole the ego system. When we think we are bodies, we fear harm to the body and feel we must defend ourselves against the world. We believe the body limits us, and we attack other bodies that seem somehow to threaten us. The body symbolizes our separateness.

The Course insists, very emphatically, that we are not our bodies. Still, here it addresses the attitude of superiority often seen in those who have begun to learn that they are not bodies, an approach which manifests itself in judging the “less enlightened” among us who still think that they are bodies. When someone you know is fearful, or sick, or bound by physical limitations, do you judge them in your mind? When someone acts defensively, seeing an attack where there is none, do you mentally condemn them? “Condemn your savior not,” says the Course. He dreams he is a body, but his reality is the same as yours! (1:1)

He is an unlimited spirit, as you are, but he will not remember that until he learns, “he is a savior” (1:3). How will he learn that? By being a savior—to you (1:4–5). Your part in that exchange is to recognize that your brother is your savior and allow him to fulfill that function. (The Course gives a different slant to the words save, salvation, and savior. See footnote.¹) As we’ll see as we go along, this means forgiving him for his dreams rather than condemning him for them; it means seeing him as not a body, which allows his gratitude to flow back to you to

¹ The word *save*, in the Course, means something different than the typical Christian meaning. The Christian meaning is “to deliver from the power and effects of sin by the atoning death of Jesus on the cross.” In the Course, to save really means to deliver us from the *false* experience of guilt and separation, and to restore our awareness of unity with God and one another. Consider the following lines from the Course:

Never forget that the Sonship is your salvation, for the Sonship is your Self. As God's creation It is yours, and belonging to you It is His. Your Self does not need salvation, but your mind needs to learn what salvation is. You are not saved *from* anything, but you are saved *for* glory (T-11.IV.1:1-4).

The Atonement is the final lesson he need learn, for it teaches him that, never having sinned, he has no need of salvation (T-13.Int.4:6 (FIP), T-13.I.4:6 (CE)).

Salvation is thus an illusion, but one that ends all illusions. A *savior* in this sense is someone who assists another person in relinquishing their illusions of guilt and separation and in becoming aware of their own wholeness and perfection as God's creation.

save you. Then, seeing how something in him has reached out to bless you, he will realize what must be in him, thus saving himself. It's a reciprocal thing.

The principal outlined in sentences 4–8 is a familiar one: Giving is receiving. We learn what we have and are by giving it away, because “giving is the proof of having” (1:6). Your brother will learn who he is in this manner, and so will you. You, however, can initiate the exchange because you are willing to be saved (1:3). For your brother to wake up, he must give salvation, so he needs someone willing to be saved so that he can act as their savior. When you offer that gift to him, the exchange of salvation can happen. How we offer him our willingness to be saved becomes more evident as we go on.

The last two sentences (1:7–8) are merely saying that this is how giving works, and the logic is irrefutable unless you believe that you are separate from God, so that your strength or gain somehow diminishes God. This point is expanded on in paragraph 2.

Paragraph 2

2 Think you the Father lost Himself when He created you? ²Was He made weak because He shared His love? ³Was He made incomplete by your perfection? ⁴Or are you the proof that He is perfect and complete? ⁵Deny Him not His witness in the dream His Son prefers to his reality. ⁶He must be savior from the dream he made, that he be free of it. ⁷He must see someone *else* as not a body, one with him, without the wall the world has built to keep apart all living things who know not that they live.

• Study Questions •

3. **(2:1-4).** Try answering these questions for yourself, realizing that the ego would answer, “Yes,” to all three. Think about them, and about why what they propound (that God was diminished by creating you) does not make sense. In sentence 4, in your own words, what is the decisive argument that proves the first three questions must be answered with a “no”?

4. Who is the “Him” in sentence 5, and who is the “He” in sentence 6?

5. Sentence 6 mentions being a savior; sentence 7 makes a parallel statement that can be taken as a definition of what being a savior means, or how it is we do that. What is that definition?

6. How does this tie in to the admonition in 1:1?

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God did not lose Himself when He created us (2:1); instead, He extended Himself; He increased Himself or multiplied Himself. He shared His Love with us and extended that Love to become us, but that did not weaken Him. Sharing love strengthens love. Our perfection as His creations does not diminish His; it proves His perfection as Creator. “[You are] the proof that He is perfect and complete” (2:1–4).

So, since God’s giving to us did not diminish Him but, on the contrary, proved His perfection, our giving will likewise prove our perfection. This is the law of love; this is how it

works. "...every one [miracle] I give returns to me, reminding me the law of love is universal" (W-pII.345.1:2).

When Jesus asks us not to deny God "His witness in the dream" (2:5), he says the same thing as he said in 1:1: Do not condemn your brother when he thinks he is a body. When we do that, we deny the brother's or sister's perfection, denying that God's creation is perfect and complete, thus negating the witness to God's perfection. The brother may be living in a dream, a dream that he thinks is his reality, a dream he even prefers to his actual reality, but to be freed from that dream, he must be allowed to offer us freedom from it (2:6).

What does it mean to be a savior from the dream? It means to "see someone else as not a body, one with him, without the wall" that seems to separate us (2:7). And as I said, this is reciprocal: it applies to both my brother and me. For my sister to be free, I need to see her as perfect and complete, as one with me in God. As I see him that way, it enables him to see me that way, and to the degree he sees me that way, it offers salvation to me in return.

Paragraph 3

3 Within the dream of bodies and of death is yet one theme of truth—no more, perhaps, than just a tiny spark, a space of light created in the dark, where God still shines.² ²You cannot wake yourself. ³But you can let yourself be wakened. ⁴You can overlook your brother's dreams. ⁵So perfectly can you forgive him his illusions, he becomes your savior from *your* dreams.³ ⁶And as you see him shining in the space of light where God abides within the darkness, you will see that God Himself is where his body is. ⁷Before this light the body disappears, as heavy shadows must give way to light. ⁸The darkness cannot choose that it remain. ⁹The coming of the light *means* it has gone. ¹⁰In glory will you see your brother then, and understand what really fills the **gap** so long perceived as keeping you apart.

² This image of a tiny light that shines "within the dream of bodies and of death" may be a reference to these lines from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*:

That light we see is burning in my hall.
How far that little candle throws his beams!
So shines a good deed in a naughty world.

("Naughty," in the sixteenth century, was an all-purpose word that was similar to "bad" and could mean evil, unhealthy, unpleasant, vicious, inferior, or bad in quality.)

³ The "tiny spark" seems to be the entire concept expressed in this series of sentences: You can't wake yourself, but you can let yourself be wakened by forgiving your brother's illusions, so that he then returns the gift and awakens you.

• Study Questions •

7. This paragraph is one of the clearest statements in the Course about why we need one another. Try to make a simple outline of the process of awakening given here.

We are all severely enmeshed in what the Course calls “the dream of bodies and of death” (3:1). The body dominates our consciousness; its apparent reality is so convincing we struggle even to question it. “I’m not a body? The body is an illusion? Sure seems real to me!” And the dream of death laces all of our lives with despair.

We may not be fully conscious of this despair, yet it underlies everything we do. Ernest Becker’s book *The Denial of Death* is all about how we anxiously and firmly push the awareness of death out of our minds. We bury it in the trivia of daily life, struggling to find meaning in something we can attach to and somehow achieve immortality. Becker reaches the same conclusion as the Course, in some respects: that we are all insane, all bound up in denial and projection. 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)⁴

Or, as William James put it in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, “Let sanguine healthy-mindedness do its best with its strange power of living in the moment and ignoring and forgetting, still the evil background is really there to be thought of, and the skull will grin in at the banquet.”

In other words, we go through life haunted by the fear of death, but blinding ourselves to that fear with “personal preoccupations” and “ignoring and forgetting.” Despite all our efforts to obliterate it, our fear of death will always pop up in the end.

It’s a dark picture, and one that the Course almost entirely agrees with, but with one small yet encouraging proviso: in this dark dream “is yet one theme of truth; no more, perhaps, than just a tiny spark, a space of light created in the dark, where God still shines” (3:1). There is a tiny spark of hope, a glimmer of God in the darkness. What is that spark of hope?

The answer to that question begins with what seems like a negative thought: “You cannot wake yourself” (3:2). That line sums up the dark dream. We are so entangled in the dream of bodies and death, so blinded by self-generated delusions, and so lost in “disguised and dignified madness” that waking ourselves from the dream is not impossible. In that regard, there is no hope. Truly, we need to absorb this message, as unfavorable as it may seem, or we can waste years of our lives trying over and over to wake ourselves up.

But the next line is the spark of hope: “Yet you can let yourself be wakened” (3:3). You cannot do it by yourself, but you can allow another person to awaken you. In the Course’s spiritual program, salvation comes through our brothers and sisters, who seem like others but are parts of our Self. “The way to God is through forgiveness here. There is no other way” (W-pII.256.1:1–2). “God knows His Son as wholly blameless as Himself, and He is approached

⁴ *The Denial of Death*, Ernest Becker, Free Press, 1997, ISBN: 0684832402

through the appreciation of His Son” (T-11.IV.7:2 (FIP), T-11.IV.7:1 (CE). We appreciate our sister by recognizing her as God’s child, God’s creation, perfectly sinless. We forgive her; we overlook her dreams of death (3:4). We can forgive her for her illusions so that she becomes our savior from our dreams (3:5).

Forgiveness is the sole spark of hope in the dark dream of bodies and death. It is the escape from our madness. When we truly, “perfectly” (3:5) forgive, we see our sister or brother “shining in the space of light”; indeed, “you will see that God Himself is where his [or her] body is” (3:6). Have you ever looked at someone and seen God, instead of seeing a body? I have. It is a truly life-changing experience. I don’t mean that my eyes no longer perceived the physical body; I mean that something that was not my eyes saw past the body and saw a radiance and a glory that could only be God. It took my breath away! The body “disappeared” for me (3:7), in the sense that the person I was looking at was suddenly so much more than just a body. When the light comes, the darkness is G-O-N-E (3:8–9). The glory of God fills the gap, and there is no separation (3:10).

Suggestion for practice: (3:1–3). *Think about some ways in which you are still trying to wake yourself. Think about what these lines tell you about the importance of the other people in your life. Try repeating these lines to yourself, personalizing them and inserting the name of someone in relationship with you: “I cannot wake myself. Yet I can let myself be wakened by X. I can overlook X’s dreams.”*

Paragraph 4

4 There, in its place, God’s witness has set forth the gentle way of kindness to God’s Son. ²Whom you forgive is given power to forgive you your illusions. ³By your gift of freedom is it given unto you. ⁴Make way for love, which you did not create, but which you can extend. ⁵On earth this means forgive your brother, that the darkness may be lifted from your mind. ⁶When light has come to him through your forgiveness, he will not forget his savior, leaving him unsaved. ⁷For it was in your face he saw the light that he would keep beside him as he walks through darkness to the everlasting light.⁵

• Study Questions •

8. In 4:1, “God’s witness” is mentioned, and in 2:5 we were asked not to deny God “His witness in the dream.” What or whom do you think this term refers to?
9. What form does the extension of love take on earth?
10. When you forgive, what happens to you?
11. When you forgive, what happens to your brother, and what does he do?

⁵ Isaiah 60:19-20 (RSV): “The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended.”

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In place of the **gap** you now see the “gentle way” of awakening, the “way of kindness to God’s Son” (4:1). The next two lines are truly worth memorizing, for they sum up this gentle way, this spark of hope in the darkness:

Whom you forgive is given power to forgive you your illusions. By your gift of freedom is it given you (4:2–3).

Think about the short admonition, “Make way for love” (4:4). Jesus says we did not create it, so he must be speaking of God’s love coming through us. We did not create it but we *can* “extend” it. We can let love reach out through us to our brothers and sisters. I like the image of “make way”; it isn’t so much that we do something, but we get out of the way and let it be done through us. There was a hymn I used to sing in church that expresses it well:

Channels only blessed Master,
But with all Thy wondrous power
Flowing through us, Thou canst use us
Every day and every hour.

Or, to quote one of my favorite poems, which I’ve quoted before:

Love through me, Love of God,
Make me like Thy clear air,
Through which, unhindered, colors pass
As though it were not there.⁶

“Make way for love” to be extended through you. We may ask, “What does that mean?” But Jesus knows our questioning minds and has the answer ready: “On earth this means forgive your brother, that the darkness may be lifted from *your* mind” (4:5). Make a note of that: to “extend love” means “forgive your brother.” This is an experiment you can make: Try it. Forgive your brother, and watch the darkness lift from *your* mind. It happens every time. And if the darkness does not lift, you have not forgiven. I’ve watched faces light with joyful surprise as, having forgiven someone, light and joy and peace flood into their minds. It’s a wonderful experience.

(4:6–7) When you forgive, you extend God’s light into a darkened mind. When that person receives the gift, do you imagine that they will forget you? Or will they be forever grateful to you? Grateful, of course. I know that there are certain faces I have looked into in this life and I have seen the light of forgiveness. I have seen that face shining with love and appreciation for what I am in God, at a time when I myself did not *know* what I was, and was filled with self-doubt and self-condemnation. Those shining, holy faces reminded me of who I am; I will never forget them. In them, I have encountered the Love of God.

⁶ Amy Carmichael, in *Toward Jerusalem* (Fort Washington, Penn.: Christian Literature Crusade, 1989).

Paragraph 5

5 How holy are you, that the Son of God can be your savior in the midst of dreams of desolation and disaster. ²See how eagerly he comes, and steps aside from heavy shadows that have hidden him, and shines on you in gratitude and love. ³He is himself, but not himself alone. ⁴And as his Father lost not part of Him in your creation, so the light in him is brighter still because you gave your light to him to save him from the dark. ⁵And now the light in you must be as bright as shines in him. ⁶This is the spark that shines within the dream: that you can help him waken, and be sure his waking eyes will rest upon you first—and in his glad salvation you are saved.

• Study Questions •

12. (5:1–2). *How does the Son of God come to you? What are the shadows out of which he eagerly steps? Why is the Son of God grateful to you?*

13. *What do you think the third sentence means? “He is himself, but not himself alone”*

14. (5:4). *This refers to the thoughts in 2:1–4. Reread those lines, and then try to explain the connection or similarity (implied by the words “as...so”) between these two ideas:*

- *as the Father did not lose part of the Son when He created you;*

- *so the light in the Son is brighter because you gave your light to him.*

15. (5:5). *My shining light caused the light of God’s Son to shine brighter. Now, the light in me must be as bright as that entire light in the Son. The light I give to him adds to his light; then I realize that all the light must be in me. Why?*

16. (5:6). *Another passage worth memorizing. Compare this with the earlier reference to the “spark,” and in your own words summarize what “the spark that shines within the dream” is.*

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In reading the first sentence, it seems to me at first that Jesus has it backward. Shouldn’t it be, “How holy the Son of God must be, that he can be your savior in the midst of dreams of desolation and disaster”? Why does he say, “How holy are you”? (5:1) How is my holiness implied by the Son of God’s becoming my savior?

I understand it this way: the Son of God, who “steps aside from heavy shadows that have hidden him” (5:2), appears in my sister because she saw the light in my face (4:7). My extension of love, my act of forgiveness, is such a holy thing that it has drawn forth the Christ in my sister. He (Christ) comes “eagerly...and shines on [me] in gratitude and love” (5:2). The word “gratitude” clearly shows that His coming (I capitalize because it refers to the Son of God, not just to my sister) is in response to something I have done. “How holy” I must be to evoke such a reaction!

What is coming forth now is not merely my sister. Oh, it is her, all right, but it is also so much more! (5:3) It is the Christ in her responding to the Christ in me; it is our One Self, the Self we share, celebrating Its Oneness.

God the Father's extending of Himself in my creation did not diminish Him or the Christ but instead extended or increased the divine substance. In like manner, the light I extended to my sister has increased the light in both of us (5:4–5). We are both parts of the One Whole, and what I give to my sister I give to myself.

This exchange of light is the excellent plan of A Course in Miracles, the “tiny spark,” the “one theme of truth” (3:1): By my forgiveness, I can help my brothers and sisters to awaken, and, as they do, their changed perception of me will awaken me.

Practice Suggestion: Spend a few moments thinking about one or two of your relationships, and asking God's help to see your brother or sister as your savior.

Answer Key

1. Do not condemn a brother for being sick; for being fearful; for being defensive; for acting like an ego; for withdrawing and separating from me.
2. We should not condemn a brother for his dreams because, beyond those dreams, he is still the holy Son of God, exactly as God created him. What he *thinks* he is does not change what he *really* is.
3. Far from losing Himself when He created me, God is proved to be complete and perfect by the completion and perfection of His creation (me).
4. In 5 it is God; in 6 it is the Son of God, including my brother who is my savior.
5. Being a savior means seeing past someone else's dream of being a body, separated from all other living things, and recognizing them as one with me.
6. Condemning my brother for thinking he is a body is exactly the opposite of what, as his savior, I need to be doing in order to remember my own Identity.
7. Outline of the process of awakening:
8. I overlook my brother's dreams. I do not condemn him for thinking he is a body. I forgive him his illusions. I see him as one with me.
9. As I do this, my brother becomes my savior.
10. I see God shining in my brother in place of his body, and his body disappears in that light.
11. I realize what I thought was the gap keeping me apart from my brother is really filled with the way of salvation, the gentle way of kindness to God's Son, namely, that whomever I forgive is given the power to forgive me, that by giving him his freedom, I enable him to give me my freedom.
12. (Robert Perry's analysis of this question): In 2:4, it says that you are "the proof that He is perfect and complete." The admonition, "Deny Him not His witness," immediately follows that, so it would seem to mean that you, in your perfection as Son of God, are His witness in the dream. In 4:1, however, the term could refer to the Holy Spirit, or even to your brother in whom you have seen the light of God. T-1.I.14:1 (FIP) tells us that, "Miracles bear witness to truth." (In CE, the line in T-1.14:1 reads, "All miracles attest to truth.") So every miracle, or every act of forgiveness, whether from myself to another or from another to me, is a witness to God. T-27.V.7:1-5 (T-27.VI.5:1-5 in CE) speaks of the same idea of plural witnesses, where our healing witnesses to the reality of the Son of God, which in turn calls forth the world's witnesses to us. I would say, then, that a "witness" in the sense of this passage is whoever manifests a miracle of healing and forgiveness that validates the reality of the face of Christ; it can be my witness to another, or his to me.
13. Love takes the form of forgiving your brother.

14. When you forgive, darkness is lifted from your mind.
15. When you forgive your brother, light comes to his mind. He does not forget you, but saves (forgives) you in return, because he saw the light of Christ in your face and wants to keep that beside him as he walks “through darkness to the everlasting Light.”

This reciprocal forgiving reminds me of the story of two men, sworn enemies, who were chained and given food (which was out of direct reach) and a spoon with a handle tied to their arm which was so long that they could not get the bowl of the spoon into their mouths. Finally, one of the men saw that the only way he was going to get food, and avoid starving to death, was to feed the other man, who, in his own self-interest, would feed him in turn.

16. The Son of God comes in or through my brother. The shadows are the dreams of desolation and disaster I have shared with him, now lifted by my forgiveness, by my overlooking them. He is grateful because I have forgiven him and brought light to his mind; he has seen the face of Christ in mine.
17. To me, it means that the Son of God is not just my brother, he is also me, and not separate from me.
18. The ideas are similar because both contain the idea that I am a part of the Son of God. “As,” or in the same way, that my creation did not cause a rupture in the unity of God’s Son or a splitting off of part of him, “so,” in like manner, when I allow my light to shine, the Son’s is brighter, because I am a part of him.
19. Because the Son’s light and mine are one. When the shining of my light brightens his light, I realize they must be the same light.
20. The spark in the dream is this: Only by forgiving my brother and acknowledging the light of Christ in him, can I be awakened to the Christ in me. “Salvation is a collaborative venture” (see T-4.VI.8).

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. Please let me know of any referencing problems you find.

I have also tried to edit my commentary so as to reflect any wording changes in the CE. For instance, the CE 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.³ The "tiny spark" seems to be the entire concept expressed in this series of sentences: You can't wake yourself, but you can let yourself be awakened by forgiving your brother's illusions, so that he then returns the gift and awakens you.