

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM Text, Chapter 29

The Worship of Idols

Section V

Dream Roles

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 V

In the previous section, we talked about awaking from the dream of fear and recognizing that our brothers, who have appeared in our perception to be enemies, are, in fact, our saviors. The current section starts with what seems to be an abrupt change of topic, asking if we think we can select from our dreams to have some of them be true while letting the others go as the illusions they are. Jesus addresses a massive resistance we have to truly awakening: the fact that we like some of our dreams! He will point out that we must be willing to let go of the dreams we like in addition to those we dislike because all dreams are rooted in fear. Bear this in mind as you read, and I think the connection to the rest of the chapter will become clear.

Paragraph 1

Do you believe that truth can be but *some* illusions? ²They are dreams *because* they are not true. ³Their equal lack of truth becomes the basis for the miracle, which means that you have understood that dreams are dreams, and that escape depends, not on the dream, but only on awaking. ⁴Could it be some dreams are kept and others wakened from? ⁵The choice is not between which dreams to keep, but only if you want to live in dreams or to awaken from them. ⁶Thus it is the miracle does not select some dreams to leave untouched by its beneficence. ⁷You cannot dream some dreams and wake from some, for you are either sleeping or awake, and dreaming goes with only one of these.

• Study Question •

1. The logic here is clear. Make a mental note: What is “the basis for the miracle?”

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Jesus begins by asking a question that has a self-evident answer (1:1). He sets the stage for his argument that comes in the following paragraphs, gaining our agreement to his illustration before he leverages it into helping us awaken from our ego dream. Of course, illusions cannot be the truth, and that is true of every illusion. Dreams are dreams, not reality (1:2). The falsity of all illusions is “the basis for the miracle” (1:3) because that’s what a miracle is: the realization that dreams are dreams, and that escape from dreams is not dependent on the nature of the dream. You escape from dreams by waking up (1:3). You cannot wake up from some dreams while continuing to dream other dreams. You are either asleep or awake (1:4–5, 7). Therefore, a miracle undoes all dreams; none are untouched by it (1:6).

However, this implies that to be genuinely free from dreams, we have to stop evaluating the content of our dreams, to assign value to some, and to devalue others. They are equally untrue, and therefore equally without value. Escape from dreams comes through awaking, and in no other way. You have to wake up and stop dreaming. You cannot partly wake up and preserve some of the dreams while letting others go. You are awake, or you are asleep; there is no halfway house.

Paragraph 2

² The dreams you think you like would hold you back as much as those in which the fear is seen. ²For every dream is but a dream of fear, no matter what the form it seems to take. ³The fear is seen within, without, or both. ⁴Or it can be disguised in pleasant form. ⁵But never is it absent from the dream, for fear is the material of dreams, from which they *all* are made. ⁶Their form can change, but they cannot be made of something else. ⁷The miracle were treacherous indeed if it allowed you still to be afraid because you did not recognize the fear. ⁸You would not then be willing to awake, for which the miracle prepares the way.

• Study Questions •

2. *Make a personal list of some of the kinds of “dreams you think you like.”*
3. *(2:2–6). Take one example from your personal list of pleasant dreams and try to see if you can find the fear in it.*
4. *(2:7–8). If the miracle let you be afraid without recognizing your fear, the fear would still keep you from God. It would be like a cruel trick, promising happiness and not delivering it because the fundamental barrier wasn’t dealt with. If that is so, what does that imply about the miracle; and how does that tie in with 1:1–3?*

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The truth of 2:1 is something that most of us find difficult to accept. I can’t begin to count the number of times, in Course study groups, that people have said, “But I like some things about being in a body! I like listening to music. I love swimming. I enjoy watching sunsets and sunrises. Hiking in the mountains takes my breath away and gives me such a sense of God’s presence.” And so on. To be told that the dreams we like will hold us back just as much as the dreams that are full of fear is distressing. It feels as though it asks us to sacrifice something good, something we value.

The main point in 2:2–6, made repeatedly, is that all dreams, even the ones we think we like, are dreams of fear: they are made of fear, regardless of the form. How can that be? How is something like the pleasure of observing a sunset or seeing my son graduate from college a “dream of fear” (2:2)? That is a question that the succeeding paragraphs will answer.

Here, the Course lists several ways we can incorporate fear into a dream (2:3). It may be “seen within,” that is, we may be afraid of something within ourselves, such as our inability to break a bad habit or achieve a desired goal. Or, fear may be seen “without,” located in some circumstance or person, such as the fear of illness, terrorist attacks, or a malicious competitor at work. Or, we can see the fear in both places at once, which might occur if we experience conflict with another person and fear both what they might do and what we might do.

On the other hand, the fear may not be evident at all; it may be “disguised in pleasant form” (2:4). How that can be is still left unexplained until later. The central point is that “never is it [fear] absent from the dream” (2:5). Dreams are made out of fear and nothing else (2:5–6). Again, that may be hard to accept. We typically think of dreaming about things we want: dreaming of finding the perfect partner, that dream job, or our dream house. How can such dreams be made out of fear? We’ll have to wait for the answer to that.

Taking what the Course says at face value, and assuming it is correct, the rest of the paragraph (2:7–8) makes perfect sense. If the miracle allowed us to hold onto selected dreams, knowing that all dreams are made from fear, the miracle would be “treacherous indeed” (2:7). It could not be relied on to relieve our fear. It would leave us clinging to particular dreams and therefore preferring to stay asleep instead of waking up from all of our dreams—the whole point of miracles (2:8)!

Paragraph 3

3 In simplest form, it can be said attack is a response to **function** unfulfilled as you perceive the **function**. ²It can be in you or someone else, but where it is perceived, it will be there it is attacked. ³Depression or assault must be the theme of every dream, for they are made of fear. ⁴The thin disguise of pleasure and of joy in which they may be wrapped but slightly veils the heavy lump of fear which is their core. ⁵And it is this the miracle perceives, and not the wrappings in which it is bound. ⁶When you are angry, is it not because someone has failed to fill the function you allotted him? ⁷And does not this become the “reason” your attack is justified?

• Study Questions and Notes •

Note: (3:1). “...function unfulfilled as you perceive the function.” The word “function” is important in the rest of this section and the one that follows. The words “goal” and “role” are used here with much the same meaning as “function.” Scan through this section and the next and notice how often these words appear; mark them with a colored highlighter, if you like. I have used grey highlighting in the Text paragraphs.

5. (3:1–2). *Think about what makes you angry or what makes you want to attack something in yourself or somewhere else. Try to think of some examples of persons or things that don't fulfill their function and thus evoke anger.*
6. *What is the significance of the phrase, "as you perceive the function"?*
7. (3:3). *"Assault" is attack directed towards "someone else" (3:2) who is not fulfilling his or her function as we perceive it. How, then, might "depression" be related to the idea of attack? See the first phrase in 3:2.*
8. (3:3–5). *Our dreams are disguised in thin veils of pleasure or of joy. What lies at the core of every dream? What does the miracle see when it looks at our dreams? See also 2:5.*

Practice Suggestion: (3:6–7). *Think of the last time you were angry at someone, and try to see how the anger came because the person didn't fill the function you had allotted to him or her. This same idea crops up again in Chapter 30. Look now at T-30.VII.2:1–3 (FIP), T-30.VIII.2:1–3 (CE) and T-30.IV.1:1 (FIP), T-30.V.1:1 (CE). Reflect a while on how your anger is something you "made up."*
Note: *As you did with the word, "function," also make note of the word, "core," and scan this section and the next for occurrences.*



When something or someone does not behave as we think they should, we respond with an attack (anger being a common form of attack) (3:1). When your husband doesn't take out the trash, or when your wife keeps finding excuses not to cook dinner, you may feel angry. When your children don't come home on time, when the car won't start, when your computer crashes in the middle of your work, when the city does not keep the streets adequately repaired, you get angry.

Note the last part of the sentence, however, "as you perceive the function." The Text's manuscript emphasizes the entire phrase: "a response to function unfulfilled as you perceive the function." I may be getting angry for an invalid reason. If I think it is my wife's "function" to make dinner and feed me, I may get mad if she does not do so, but who says that is her function? Maybe I should be making dinner myself! Or possibly, I get angry at myself when I don't do whatever I think it is my function to do (3:2). We think we know what things are for and how people should behave or what they should do, but that is our perception. As we shall see, the critical point here is who assigns the function to people and things. Is it you? Or is it the Holy Spirit?

Elsewhere, the Course urges us to practice with this thought: "I do not know what anything is for" (W-pI.25.title). It tells us there that our big mistake is assigning function to people and things based on "ego goals" or "'personal' interests," when in reality, we have no personal interests because "the ego is not you" (W-pI.25.2:2, 3:1–2). The Holy Spirit will help us out of this mess by persuading us that we don't know what things are for and teaching us to allow Him to tell us what function things serve.

Perhaps it isn't clear how this applies to relinquishing our dreams, even our pleasant dreams, but it is definitely connected, as will become apparent in paragraph 4. We can begin to guess, though, if we give it some thought. If the things we get angry at are based on our ego's

perception of what people and things are for, and their failure to fulfill those functions, then the things we like are probably based on the same ego perceptions! The only difference is that the things or the people *do* fulfill the function we have assigned to them. But we are still operating on the same false premises, and we need to be freed from those.

Sentence 3:2 has an interesting twist. It turns the spotlight on ourselves; we may be getting angry at ourselves because we do not fulfill our function as we perceive it. And, as with outward-directed anger, the anger may be without foundation if our perception of our function is incorrect. Inward-directed anger may show up as depression; outward-directed anger shows up as assault (3:3). Whatever the form, they both derive from fear (3:3). The “heavy lump of fear” at the core is barely covered by a “thin disguise of pleasure and of joy” (3:4). The fear is what the miracle sees at the core of dreams, not the flimsy covering (3:5).

If you honestly consider the question in 3:6, your answer will be, “Yes.” If I expect you to meet me at 2 o’clock, and you don’t show up until 2:45, I have “good reason” to be angry. Right? I’ve assigned to you the function of showing up on time to meet my need, and when you don’t, my anger seems justified (3:7).

What is this flimsy covering of pleasure and joy? Why does the miracle perceive a heavy lump of fear at the heart of our most pleasant dreams? The answer is coming...

Paragraph 4

4 The dreams you think you like are those in which the functions you have given have been filled; the needs which you ascribe to you are met. ²It does not matter if they be fulfilled or merely wanted. ³It is the idea that they *exist* from which the fears arise.¹ ⁴Dreams are not wanted more or less; they are desired or not. ⁵And each one represents some function which you have assigned; some goal which an event or body or a thing *should* represent and *should* achieve for you. ⁶If it succeeds, you think you like the dream. ⁷If it should fail, you think the dream is sad. ⁸But whether it succeeds or fails is not its core, but just the flimsy covering.

• Study Questions & Notes •

9. *In sentence 5, what does “they” refer to? According to this, then, what gives rise to fear? How are dreams we like still dreams of fear?*

10. **(4:8–10).** *Here we see the word, “core,” again, as well as “function” and “goal.” Think about some of your own dreams. Analyze them; try to see how liking or disliking them, their success or failure at filling the function you’ve assigned, is only a “flimsy covering” over their core. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you see past the*

¹ How is fear caused by assigning people particular functions so that they will meet your needs? It may be because you will then naturally fear that they will *not* carry out their function, so that your needs will not be met. However, based on the Course’s overall teaching about fear, it is probably because the functions you assign them are essentially demands, and you fear that you will be punished for making demands. This is reminiscent of Chapter 2, where Jesus says that fear is at root fear of your own “destructive thinking” (T-2.X.5:5–7 (CE), not in FIP).

covering to the core; the core is what the miracle perceives (3:5). Once again, what is that core?

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What differentiates the dreams I don't like from those I do? One simple thing: The dreams I like *do* fulfill the function I have assigned to them. They meet the needs I have ascribed to myself (4:1). But in reality, it does not matter if the needs are fulfilled or "merely wanted"—that is, the dream does not fulfill the desired function (4:2). The fatal flaw, the thing that makes even these pleasant dreams into dreams of fear, is that the needs I believe I have do not exist in reality. *I have no needs!* "It is the idea that they exist from which the fears arise" (4:3).

If I have needs, that means I lack something. It implies that lack is possible. And if I can lack something I genuinely need, that is grounds for fear. I might get what I need, or I might not. If I get it, I might lose it. If I have it, I must protect myself against the loss of it. Whether their form is positive or negative, the principle of scarcity or lack permeates the whole structure of dreams. Why do I dream of the perfect relationship? Is it not because I believe that I lack such a thing? Yet if I find "my soul mate," there is always a buried fear I will somehow lose them. Thus, every dream, even one in which meets our needs, is a dream of fear.

4:4–5 seems to be saying that in truth, we don't desire "bad" dreams any less than "good" dreams; we (that is, our ego-selves) desire every sort of dream *equally*. We want to blame our unhappiness or happiness, our pride or our guilt, and our peace or our pain, on something outside of ourselves. The way we set things up, we want to manipulate the universe and tell it what to do. Every dream, good or bad, "represents...some goal which an event, or body, or a thing should represent, and should achieve for you" (4:5). It does not take much reflection to realize that this is precisely what we do. For instance, when we get upset because our mate leaves the cap off the toothpaste, we've set up an expectation that he or she "should" put the cap back on; if the cap is on, we like it; if the cap is off, we "think the dream is sad" (4:6–7). But the success or failure in the dream is "just the flimsy covering" masking the central core of fear (4:8). In other words, the ego's purpose in fostering dreams is to perpetuate fear in our minds.

Paragraph 5

5 How happy would your dreams become if you were not the one who gave the “proper” role to every figure that the dream contains. ²No one can fail but your *idea* of him, and there is no betrayal but of this. ³The core of dreams the Holy Spirit gives is never one of fear. ⁴The coverings may not appear to change, but what they *mean* has changed because they cover something else. ⁵Perceptions are determined by their purpose, in that they seem to *be* what they are *for*. ⁶A shadow figure who attacks becomes a brother giving you a chance to help, if this becomes the function of the dream.² ⁷And dreams of sadness thus are turned to joy. • Study Questions •

11. *Note that here we are told what the core of dreams given by the Holy Spirit is not; we are not yet told what that core is. See if you can identify what the new core is by looking ahead in this section.*

12. *The core of the dream changes from fear to something else, but “the coverings may not appear to change, but what they mean has changed because they cover something else” (5:4). What do the “coverings” symbolize?*

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Suppose you stopped assigning “roles” to everything and everyone in your dream. If you had no expectations, there could be no disappointments! If you had no idea what a person’s “proper” role was in your life, it would be impossible for them to fail. There would be nothing for them to live up to. Can you open your mind to the notion that all of your perceptions about other people’s failures and betrayals exist only because you have set them up for failure by pre-assigning their roles to them? And that if you stopped assigning roles, you would be immeasurably happier (5:1–2)?

Practice Suggestion: *Try to imagine what it would be like not to assign a role, or function, to people and things around you. We see most people and things as somehow designed to meet our imagined needs. What would it be like to no longer see them like that?*

The core of ego dreams is *always* fear; the core of the Holy Spirit’s dreams is *never* fear (5:3). When we allow Him to define the purpose of everyone and everything, He changes the core of our dreams. Interestingly enough, “The coverings may not appear to change” (5:4). In the preceding paragraph, we saw that the “flimsy covering” of a dream is its apparent outcome, the success, or failure to meet our needs. In plain English, the events and happenings of our lives may not change at all! Your mate may still leave the cap off the toothpaste; your car may still get wrecked; your supposed friend may stab you in the back; the terrorists may still attack. What changes is that, since the core of the dream is now love (see 6:7) instead of fear, you will see

² *Shadow figures* are our images of people who did *not* fulfill the functions we gave them. We project these images onto current people in our lives, so that in their behavior we see the shadow figure reaching out of the past to attack us once again. However, if you assign to the dream the purpose of helping your brother (instead of him meeting your needs), then you will see in the same behavior a different meaning. You will see “a brother giving you a chance to help.”

everything in a completely different way. The dream's appearance is the same, but the meaning for you is radically different (5:4). Before, the purpose of the dream, as determined by the ego, was to instill fear. Now, the purpose of the dream is to extend love. The change in purpose changes our perception because perceptions follow our purpose (5:5). And in this new perception, "A shadow figure who attacks becomes a brother giving you a chance to help" (5:6). Outwardly your brother's behavior has not changed. What has changed is your perception of it.

"And dreams of sadness thus are turned to joy" (5:7). Why joy? What makes this a "happy dream"? If the appearance is still that your brother attacks you, what is the source of the joy? It comes from within you; it comes from the delight of God's Love flowing through you, and your knowledge, most deeply and intimately, that *Love is in you*. It comes from watching the miracles that occur as Love flows out from you to touch the world. "For in the holy instant, free of the past, you see that love is in you, and you have no need to look without and snatch it guiltily from where you thought it was." (T-15.V.9:7 (FIP), (CE)).

Paragraph 6

6 What is your brother *for*? ²You do not know, because *your function* is obscure to you. ³Do not ascribe a role to him which you imagine would bring happiness to you. ⁴And do not try to hurt him when he fails to take the part which you assigned to him in what you dream your life was meant to be. ⁵He asks for help in every dream he has, and you have help to give him if you see the function of the dream as He perceives its function, Who can utilize all dreams as means to serve the function given Him. ⁶Because He loves the dreamer, *not* the dream, each dream becomes an offering of love. ⁷For at its center is His love for you, which lights *whatever* form it takes with love.

• Study Questions •

13. (6:1–4). *In your own words, summarize the two instructions we are given here, based on the fact that we don't know our own function, nor our brother's.*

14. *What does each dream become, based on the fact that His Love for us is now at the center of each dream?*

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Since we don't know our own purpose, how can we presume to think we know the purpose or role for our brothers and sisters (6:1–2)? This reminds me of the line earlier in the Text: "You who cannot even control yourself should hardly aspire to control the universe" (T-12.VIII.5:4 (FIP), T-12.X.5:4 (CE)). So, since we don't know what anything is for, let's give up the idea of deciding what other people need to do to make us happy (6:3). And if we forget, go ahead, and cast a brother or sister in a particular role, when they fail to live up to it, let's wake up and realize that it's not their behavior that causes our anger and disappointment, but our arbitrary expectations. And realizing that, let's not attack them for their "failure" (6:4).

He or she may be letting you down or even overtly attacking you, but in the eyes of the Holy Spirit, all dreams are asking you for help—help that "you have...to give him" if you see things as the Holy Spirit does (6:5). God gave the Holy Spirit a function, a purpose: to bring all illusion to the truth (T-14.IX.1:4 (FIP), T-14.X.1:4 (CE)), and to teach us to distinguish truth from

illusion. In a word, divine judgment. He exists to extend healing and forgiveness to the world and to dispel all illusion of sin and guilt. He can use every dream, good or bad, to serve that function. We will do the same in response to our brothers' dreams if we look at them with Him. Every dream "becomes an offering of love" (6:6), an opportunity to extend love, because the core of all dreams, for the Holy Spirit, "is His Love for you" (6:7). That divine Love lights every dream with love, "whatever form it takes."

Answer Key

1. The basis for the miracle is understanding "that dreams are dreams, and that escape depends, not on [anything in] the dream, but only on awaking" (1:3).
2. Some examples might include a special love relationship, a great new job, winning the lottery, or even finding a great parking place.
3. One example: I may think that a special love relationship is a dream I like. Fear is in it in several ways: If I have it, I may be afraid I will lose it. Eventually, one of us will die. If I don't have such a relationship, I'm afraid I'll never find it. I'm afraid I won't be good enough for her or him. I'm afraid he or she will change her mind or find someone better. And so on.
4. To be effective, the miracle must show us the fear in all our dreams, so that we realize dreams are dreams even when they seem pleasant and will desire to awaken from them all.
5. Some examples might include: When my car doesn't run right, when my body gets sick or fails me, when friends don't call when they said they would, when nobody refills the ice cube trays, or when I break a resolution.
6. When something fails to fulfill the function that I perceive for it, I get angry. That isn't necessarily its actual function. Silly example: getting angry at a screwdriver that "won't work," when I am trying to use a Phillips head screwdriver on a flat-head screw.
7. Depression is one way we attack ourselves when we don't see ourselves fulfilling our function, as we perceive it.
8. At the core of every dream is a "heavy lump of fear" (3:4).
9. "They" refers to the needs we ascribe to ourselves. What gives rise to fear is the idea that needs exist. We think dreams in which our needs are met are happy dreams, but since the idea of need is part of them, they are still dreams of fear.
(As an aside: People often think that when the Course talks of "the happy dream," it means a dream in which all their needs are met. Actually, the happy dream is one in which we see clearly that no needs exist.)
10. Fear.
11. The clue lies in 6:7, where the word "center" is a synonym for "core." The core of the Holy Spirit's dreams is Love—His Love for you.
12. The coverings symbolize the appearance of our dreams in this world; that is, the way the dreams work out and seem to meet or not to meet our perceived needs. Nothing may change outwardly, but now everything we see has a new meaning, because of the new core. As an example, we now see a shadow figure who is attacking us as a brother giving

us a chance to help him—his actions are the same; the meaning we give to them is different.

13. Don't assign a role to your brother that you think might make you happy. If you do, don't attack your brother for failing to fill the role.
14. Each dream becomes an offering of love, an opportunity for Him to give His Love to us. And that Love, at the core of the dream, lights even the form of the dream with love.

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."