

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 29

The Worship of Idols

Section VIII

Seek Not Outside Yourself

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 VIII

Note: Idols. This section and the two following sections, which close the chapter, all deal with the topic of “idols.” You may want to mark this word’s occurrences in the three sections to call your attention to the running theme as you read. There are sixty mentions of either “idol” or “idols” in these three sections. The last time the Course mentioned idols was in T-24.III.2, but the last in-depth discussion of idols was in Chapter 20, Section VI, “The Temple of the Holy Spirit.” The theme of idols is taken up again, extensively, in Chapter 30, Sections III to VI. You may find it interesting to read through all of these sections, to get an overall grasp of what the Course has to say about idols.

The following definition from Robert’s *Glossary of Terms* may be helpful:

idol: A false god, which we worship, believing it holds our salvation, but which has no life and therefore no power to answer our prayers or fill our need. 1. The ego itself and the ideas necessary to its survival—such as sickness (see T-10.III.4), weakness (see W-pI.92.4:7), cruelty (see W-pI.170.6), death (see W-pI.163.4) and specialness (T-24.III.2)—which we have placed on our inner altar and worshipped. 2. Any external thing—body, place, substance, possession, situation, achievement, right—that we think will give us salvation by making us special and by protecting us from danger. We seek these idols to fill our lack and make ourselves complete, and they seem to work for a time. But they always fail and end

up being harsh gods that punish and demand but do not give. In seeking them we end up reinforcing our beginning premise: that we are lacking. The reason is that we are unconsciously seeking lack, incompleteness and death (the ultimate lack of life). Idols may seem powerful but they are simply toys we made. See T-29.VII, VIII, IX and T-30.III,IV,V.

This chapter's overall theme is the way our attachment to our bodies and to dreams that we like prevents us from fully embracing forgiveness and waking from our dream of death into life eternal. In launching into what appears to be a new central theme concerning idols, Jesus is not abandoning that overall theme. He simply employs a different analogy: bodies, the dreams we like, and the things of the world in which we seek fulfillment and happiness, are like idols. These obstacles, these things we cling to and fear that absolute forgiveness will take away (which, in the end, it will do), are like false gods we worship instead of the one true God.

Paragraph 1

Seek not outside yourself. ²For it will fail, and you will weep each time an idol falls. ³Heaven cannot be found where it is not, and there can be no peace excepting there. ⁴Each idol that you worship when God calls will never answer in His place. ⁵There is no other answer you can substitute and find the happiness His Answer brings. ⁶Seek not outside yourself. ⁷For all your pain comes simply from a futile search for what you want, insisting where it must be found. ⁸What if it is not there? ⁹Do you prefer that you be right or happy?¹ ¹⁰Be you glad that you are told where happiness abides, and seek no longer elsewhere. ¹¹You will fail. ¹²But it is given you to know the truth, and not to seek for it outside yourself.

• Study Questions •

1. **(1:1).** *The sentence is the theme of the section. Locate several restatements of the same idea just in this first paragraph.*
2. **(1:2).** *What does “it” refer to?*
3. **(1:1–5).** *Based on these sentences alone, what does an idol seem to be? Examine your life: what idols have you sought (or are you seeking for) for outside yourself? Have you experienced weeping when your idols have fallen?*
4. **(1:7–10).** *The phrase, “Do you prefer that you be right or happy?” is a famous line from the Course. Often, it is applied to situations in which we are holding on to a point of view, perhaps in an argument, instead of simply giving in and seeking*

¹ This is not to imply that you should choose happiness at the expense of being right. “Do you prefer that you be right?” means preferring to be right about your *current* view—that happiness is found outside yourself. Since happiness is not found there, wanting your current view to be right means that, as the Course says later, you are holding “the goal of being right when you are wrong” (T-30.I.13:6). If you are willing to admit you are wrong, you can switch to being right *and* happy. In fact, the only way to be *happy* is to be *right* about where happiness can truly be found.

for peace. That may be good advice in many situations, yet that is not the primary meaning of the line its context here. What does the line refer to here? How would you expand its wording to include the surrounding context more fully?

5. **(1:3–6, 10, 12).** *According to this paragraph, where can we find Heaven, peace, God's answer, happiness, and truth?*

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Jesus is trying to save us a lot of grief. He urges us to give up our insane search to find happiness in something or someone in the world, knowing that every such search will end in failure and tears (1:1–2). He is enlarging on what he said two sections ago:

...here is not where changelessness is found...seek not the eternal in this world (T-29.V.8:3-4).

You are looking for Heaven, but looking in the world, which is not where Heaven is. You can't find it there, nor can you find peace in the world (1:3). That does not mean that while we are on earth, we cannot find peace. It means, rather, that the world cannot be the source or sustainer of our peace. The idols are dumb; they will never answer (1:4). Peace can be found *only* in Heaven (1:3). But remember, Heaven is in you. It is a state of consciousness. You carry it with you wherever you go.

In looking to things of this world to bring us happiness and satisfaction, we are praying to stone idols expecting them to answer. You can't get answers out of a rock. The only god that answers our prayers for peace is the One True God, and He lives within us (1:5). Jesus then repeats the thematic injunction: "Seek not outside yourself" (1:6). His repetition merits a deeper look. Consider where you *should* be looking for peace and happiness. If not "outside yourself," then what is left? *Inside yourself*. That is where you are going to find peace and happiness, and *nowhere else*.

Jesus says that all of our pain—all of it—"comes simply from a futile search for what you want, insisting *where* it must be found" (1:7). We are looking for the right things, but looking in the wrong place. We might as well be looking for an iceberg in the Sahara Desert. Jesus asks us, "What if what you are looking for in the world isn't *there*?" (1:8) If it isn't there we cannot find it no matter how hard and long we look!

At this point we find the famous line, often quoted out of context:

"Do you prefer that you be right or happy?" (1:9)

Often, this line gets used when someone is standing up for the truth in a particular situation or expressing a firm conviction that they are right about something. The use of the quotation seems to suggest that being right and being happy are mutually exclusive. It seems to say that if you insist on being right *about anything*, you can't possibly be happy, and the only way to be happy is to stop worrying about being right. Just stop worrying about what is true and what isn't; it doesn't matter.

But can it *possibly* mean that? Can a Course that says, "Truth will correct all errors in my mind" (W-pI.107.title) really be telling us not to stand up for the truth?

Look at this line in its context. What Jesus is saying here is that we are looking in the wrong place, and he is trying to correct us with the truth so that we look in the right place, within ourselves. Far from saying that truth does not matter, or that being *truly* right does not matter, he

is saying it matters supremely! *Where* we are looking is *wrong*. Are we stubbornly going to insist that we are right (when we are wrong), and continue to weep each time an idol falls, or would we rather be happy, which can happen if we admit we have been wrong and make the *right* choice? That's what this question really means.

As an example of what Jesus is saying to us here, think of a person, perhaps a friend, who becomes infatuated with another person, convinced that their happiness hinges on having that other person love them and live with them. Yet you happen to be entirely confident that the object of this infatuation is a dangerous egomaniac that would make your friend's life hell on earth. You try to explain to your friend, but they stubbornly hold on to their opinion, insisting that they are right: this person is the only one for them. Would you not find yourself thinking or saying to them, "Would you prefer to be right about that, or actually to be happy?"

So the remark is not contrasting being right with being happy and saying they are mutually exclusive. It is saying, "Do you prefer to insist that you are right about where to find happiness, or actually to *find* it?"

The paragraph ends by advising us to be glad that it has told us where to find happiness (within, in God) and to stop looking for it anywhere else because it won't work (1:10–11).

Paragraph 2

2 No one who comes here but must still have hope, some lingering illusion, or some dream that there is something outside of himself that will bring happiness and peace to him. ²If everything is *in* him, this cannot be so. ³And therefore, by his coming, he denies the truth about himself and seeks for something more than everything, as if a part of it were separated off and found where all the rest of it is not. ⁴This is the purpose he bestows upon the body: that it seek for what he lacks and give him what would make himself complete.

• Study Question •

6. (2:1–3). *What do these lines tell us about ourselves and about how everyone in the world came to (apparently) be here?*
7. (2:4–5). *2:4 echoes and crystallizes what was said earlier (in 29.II.6–10) about the body; we ask too much of it, asking it to “be God” in the sense of giving us what will make us complete, which only God can do (and has done). Think of some ways in which you have given your body the purpose of seeking for what you lack and making you complete.*
8. (2:5). *What do you think the phrase, “believing that he is what he is not,” means?*

If we had any doubts about the interpretation of “right or happy” above, the first sentences of paragraph 2 would reinforce our understanding. We all came to this world convinced that it held something that could bring happiness and peace, if only we could find it. That is true of everyone without exception (2:1). It was a vain dream. How could anything *outside of us* possibly bring us happiness and peace if everything is *inside* of us? (2:1-2) Do we want to go on making the same mistake over and over, refusing to give up our dream no matter how many times it has proven wrong?

You've probably heard of the experiment made with rats in a maze, and cheese. The rats were placed in a maze with cheese at the end of the maze. Eventually, by trial and error, the rats solved the maze and found the cheese. Then, they were put back at the start. Over and over, they found their way to the cheese until they had learned it by heart. Then, the experimenters played a nasty trick on the rats. They moved the cheese to a different section of the maze. But the rats had learned just that one way of getting to the cheese, so they kept on going the old way, over and over, no matter how often it failed. If we could communicate with them verbally, we might have asked them, "Hey, rat! Would you rather be right about your solution to the maze, or find the cheese?"

We're like those rats, clinging to our illusion that something outside of us can make us happy. Apparently, we'd rather be right about that than be happy. It's a kind of stubborn pride, a conceitedness that won't admit we are wrong. It's the whole reason we came to this world, to this plane of existence! How can we give it up?

The *only* way we can continue down this cheese-free path is to deny the truth about ourselves (that everything is in us, given to us by God in creation). We pretend that there *is* something outside of us, and we commission our bodies to look for it (2:3–4). Our entire life becomes an aimless search for something that does not exist, like an existential Don Quixote (2:5).

Suggested exercise: Think of some things outside of yourself that you have hoped and believed, or now hope and believe, might bring you happiness. Get each one clearly in mind and then tell yourself, "It cannot be that this will bring me peace and happiness, because everything is in me."

Paragraph 3

3 And thus he wanders aimlessly about, in search of something that he cannot find, believing that he is what he is not. 2The lingering illusion will impel him to seek out a thousand idols, and to seek beyond them for a thousand more. 3And each will fail him, all excepting one; for he will die, and does not understand the idol that he seeks *is* but his death. 4Its form appears to be outside himself, yet does he seek to kill God's Son within and prove that he is victor over him. 5This is the purpose *every* idol has, for this the role that is assigned to it, and this the role that cannot be fulfilled.

• Study Question •

9. (3:1). "Lingering illusion" is a phrase from the last paragraph; what does it refer to? What is the "lingering illusion"?
10. How is seeking an idol the same as trying to kill the Son of God?

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This paragraph is somewhat dark and depressing because what it says, in essence, is that all the things we are looking for in this world are secondary goals, hiding the one real goal we all are looking for: death. And that's the only one that delivers because we all die. (The later paragraphs have a happier tone, so don't despair.)

As the Course speaks here of "a thousand idols" and "a thousand more" (3:1), I think we can all relate. It's the story of our lives. It's the story repeatedly told on situation comedy TV shows,

someone haring off after some stupid goal, a job, a person, an object, some fame, something that will “do it” for them. The TV shows make us laugh because we recognize ourselves in the exaggerated characters on the shows: Joey, Monica, Ross, Rachel, Chandler, and Phoebe, or the Fraser brothers, or even the Simpsons. The more futile searches, the more failures. The characters in the TV shows bounce back week after week as if nothing happened. In real life, we find it progressively more challenging to bounce back as the years go by, and harder and harder to believe that the idol will satisfy us this time. It never does; they all fail (3:2).

“...excepting one,” the Course says. The idols all fail except one. What one is that? *Death* (3:2). He says that we don't understand the truth of what we are seeking, in all of our seeking, is our own death. The idol we are looking for may appear to be something outside of us (3:3), yet our seeking of it is a veiled attempt to “kill God's Son within, and prove that he is victor over him” (3:4). Think about it for a moment. If we *found* happiness in something outside of us, what would it mean about God's Son within? It would mean that everything is *not* in God's Son. It would prove that our denial of God's creation is now the truth, and that part of God's creation really *is* “separated off and found where all the rest of it is not” (2:3). Therefore, in seeking after idols outside of us, our hidden goal is to prove that we have killed God's Son.

“This is the purpose every idol has, for this the role that is assigned to it, and this the role that cannot *be* fulfilled.” (3:5)

Let's remember here that we are talking about the things that keep us from just letting go and leaping into God's arms. We are talking about the dreams we like, the stuff we *think* makes us happy. All of them are concealed murder plots, or perhaps more accurately, suicide attempts. The final phrase, however, brings light into this dark discussion. The hidden agenda we all have, to prove that God's Son can be (or has been) killed, “cannot *be* fulfilled” (3:5). We've been told, “Swear not to die” because it is an impossible goal:

“Swear not to die, thou holy Son of God!² ³You make a bargain that you cannot keep. ⁴The Son of Life cannot be killed. ⁵He is immortal as his Father. ⁶What he is cannot be changed.” (T-29.VII.2:1-5 (CE))

So we need not be threatened by the realization of what we've been seeking. It an idle dream, impossible of fulfillment. All we need to do is face the fact that every goal we seek *outside* of our Self hides this unreachable goal. We are not doomed. We are not sinful. We're merely existential Don Quixotes, mad fools, but capable of re-evaluating our basic assumptions so as to direct our searching to where it has *certainty* of success.

² In context, the above sentence does not mean “Swear to not die.” Rather, it means “Do *not* swear to die,” for we have *already* sworn to die. The previous section says that each one has come here “to keep his ancient promises to die” (T-29.VI.6:6). “Thou holy Son of God” seems to be a reference to Luke 8:28 (KJV): “When he [the man possessed by a ‘Legion’ of devils] saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high?”

Paragraph 4

4 Whenever you attempt to reach a goal in which the body's betterment is cast as major beneficiary, you try to bring about your death. ²For you believe that you can suffer lack, and lack is death. ³To sacrifice is to give up, and thus to be without and to have suffered loss. ⁴And by this giving up is life renounced. ⁵Seek not outside yourself. ⁶The search implies you are not whole within, and fear to look upon your devastation, and prefer to seek outside yourself for what you are. ⁷Idols must fall because they have no life, and what is lifeless is a sign of death. ⁸You came to die, and what would you expect but to perceive the signs of death you seek?

• Study Question •

11. (4:1). *A challenging sentence! Do you think this means that you seek death by starting an exercise program, watching your diet, or taking vitamins? Give reasons for your answer.*
12. (4:2–6). *Note the emphasis on “lack” and the identity of lack with death. There was a similar emphasis on the error of our belief in lack or need in 29.IV.4. What was said there about needs?*
13. *“Lack is death”; anything but wholeness and completion is death. What does seeking for something outside ourselves imply about what we believe about ourselves?*

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The first sentence is challenging, as I said in the study question. We might mistake it to mean that any action taken to preserve or improve our bodies is unnecessary or “bad,” a manifestation of the ego. I think we can cast a little light on this by turning back for a moment to Chapter 8, Sections VII and VIII: “The Body as a Means of Communication” and “The Body as Means or End.” There, we read:

The body is ugly or beautiful, savage or holy, helpful or harmful, according to the use to which it is put....If your body becomes for you a means which you give to the Holy Spirit to use on behalf of the union of the Sonship, you will not see anything physical except as what it is. (T-8.VI.4:5, 5:1 (CE), T-8.VII.4:3, 5 (FIP))

If the goal is “the body’s betterment,” if the body is the end rather than the means to a more lofty end, our goal is a way of seeking death. If our goal in acting to promote the health of our body is “to use [it] on behalf of union of the Sonship,” then our actions are beautiful, peaceful, and helpful. We are taking care of the means, taking care of the communication device. As is so often the case in the Course, what is in our minds is what makes the difference, not the form of our outward actions.

The goal of bettering the body translates into seeking death because it implies that we lack something, “and lack is death” (4:2). “Lack” means “not whole.” And for a living being to be not whole is equivalent to being dead. Anything that imputes lack to God’s Son is an attack on the Son’s wholeness, and thus an attack on His life. Searching outside ourselves for peace and

happiness implies that we cannot find them within ourselves, and are not whole (4:4). We are paradoxically looking for the completion of ourselves *outside of our self*.

In 4:5, Jesus repeats the line that opened the section: "Seek not outside yourself." He repeats it again, in slightly different words, in 5:8. It's clear he wants to drive this idea home, so it merits taking a deeper look at all it says and implies. For instance, since he absolutely rules out seeking for anything outside ourselves, what's left? Where *should* we seek? Our seeking must be *within ourselves*, and only there.

Seeking within, not without, has been a consistent message from Jesus ever since he walked the earth. He told us that "the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21 KJV) and made it clear that within is where we should search for happiness:

"Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (Matthew 6:31–33 ESV)

The last part about "all these things" being added to us makes it clear (for me, at least) that by telling us not to seek after the things of the world, Jesus does not mean that we must *totally* give them up. While we are in the dream, we need the sustenance of the dream, but the Course urges us to stop seeking those things, trusting God to provide them as our focus becomes entering and furthering His Kingdom here.

The *Gospel of Thomas* reports similar sayings from Jesus:

3a Jesus said: If your leaders say to you "Look! The Kingdom is in the sky!" then the birds will be there before you are. If they say that the Kingdom is in the sea, then the fish will be there before you are. Rather, the Kingdom is within you and it is outside of you.

2 Jesus said: The seeker should not stop until he finds. When he does find, he will be disturbed. After having been disturbed, he will be astonished. Then he will reign over everything.

27a If you do not fast from the world you will not find the Kingdom.

These sayings contain a few words that seem to include the outside world to some extent: "the Kingdom is within you and it is outside of you." As the Course says, we seek within, but when we find our Self there, we extend it to the world around us:

God extends outward beyond limits and beyond time, and you who are co-creator with Him extend His Kingdom forever and beyond limit. (T-6.VIII.5:6 (CE), T-7.I.5:4 (FIP))

When we seek outside ourselves, it implies a lack within us. Instead of looking within ourselves for what we think is missing and fearing the "devastation" we expect to see, we prefer to seek what we are outside of ourselves, which makes no sense! (4:6)

Another reason the seeking of idols means seeking death is that idols are lifeless, and therefore they are a sign of death (4:7). We cannot continue to seek any idols (even the ones that seem beneficial to us) if we intend to stop seeking death; the "idols must fall" (4:7). We must let them go if we want to escape the ego's clutches.

Sentence 8 is genuinely startling: "You came to die." Many people have asked themselves, "Why did I come to this world? What is my purpose here?" Not many of them have discovered

the answer offered here by the Course: we came to this world to die. From an ego perspective, that is the one underlying reason behind every baby's "birth": they came here and took on a body because a body is what they need to die.

It's essential to bear in mind the thought behind a passage we read earlier:

But this world has two who made it,³ and they do not see it as the same. To each it has a different purpose, and to each it is a perfect means to serve the goal for which it is perceived. For specialness it is the perfect frame to set it off, the perfect battleground to wage its wars, the perfect shelter for the illusions which it would make real.² Not one but it upholds in its perception; not one but can be fully justified.

4 There is another Maker of the world, the simultaneous Corrector of the mad belief that anything could be established and maintained without some link that kept it still within the laws of God; not as the law itself upholds the universe as God created it, but in some form adapted to the need the Son of God believes he has. ... There is another purpose in the world that error made because it has another Maker Who can reconcile its goal with His Creator's purpose. (T-25.III.3:3-4:1,5:1 (FIP), (T-25.III.3:3-4:1,4 (CE))

If the ego's purpose for the world is our death, the Holy Spirit's purpose for the world is healing. If we individually "came to die" as egos, it is also true that we came to heal and be healed. The purpose of our lives depends on which teacher we listen to, the ego, or the Holy Spirit.

But, given that nearly everyone is listening mostly to the ego, most people's purpose is to die. And with that purpose, is it any surprise that we perceive signs of death everywhere? (4:8) We see what we expect to see. Even quantum physics is teaching us this:

In other words, because of the quantum, dreamlike (i.e., consciousness-based) nature of reality, once we view the universe "as if" it independently, objectively exists, *it will manifest in a way which simply confirms our viewpoint*. Nature seems to respond in accordance with the theory and beliefs by which it is approached. (Levy, Paul. Quantum Revelation (p. 23). SelectBooks, Inc. *My emphasis*.)

Paragraph 5

5 No sadness and no suffering proclaims a message other than an idol found which represents a parody of life, which in its lifelessness is really death conceived as real and given living form. ²Yet each must fail and crumble and decay, because a form of death cannot *be* life, and what is sacrificed cannot be whole. ³All idols of this world were made to keep the truth within from being known to you, and to maintain allegiance to the dream that you must find what is outside of you to be complete and happy. ⁴It is vain to worship idols in the hope of peace. ⁵God dwells within, and your completion lies in Him. ⁶No idol takes His place. ⁷Look not to idols. ⁸Do not seek outside yourself.

³. As is subsequently made clear, the "two who made it" are specialness and the Holy Spirit.

• **Study Questions** •

14. (4:7–8 & 5:1–2). *What specific things are mentioned in these sentences that might seem to be “signs of death” to us?*
15. *Do you find any evidence here that the body might be considered such a sign of death?*
16. (5:1). *Think about the sadness and suffering you have known. They seem to be “signs of death” that teach you that death and decay, sacrifice and loss, are real and potent forces. What is their true message? What do they tell you about yourself?*
17. (5:3). *Try to summarize, in two concise phrases, what the purpose of idols is.*
18. (5:4–8). *If our completion does not lie in idols, where is it to be found, and what is it?*

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We look around us, and we see sadness and suffering. The Course tells us that sadness and suffering should not surprise us, because each such instance demonstrates that someone, somewhere, has chosen to believe in an idol and believe it is real, a thing of substance with real value (5:1). We are clinging to death while believing it is life! Every idol is a sham doomed to failure and collapse because idols are death masquerading as life, and death cannot possibly live (5:2). When we believe we have sacrificed something (usually one of our idols), we have given up only an empty idol. As it said in 4:2–4, we believe we can “suffer lack,” which means we can sacrifice. But what is whole cannot sacrifice and remain whole; therefore, sacrifice is impossible to the Son of God. Our sense of sacrifice always comes from the perceived loss of an idol.

I find myself wondering: Does this mean that I should never feel sad? If all sadness betrays dedication to an idol, isn't sadness immediately suspect? Should I not attempt to banish my sadness? If so, this seems like a harsh saying. I think back to the time I lost my closest friend, my spiritual partner. She died, and I was devastated. Now, if my mind were 100% healed, I would have known beyond a shadow of a doubt that her body's sickness and decay, her body's death, was not her death. I would know nothing had died. My mind would continue to be in full communication with her (and with every mind).

So, yes, my fierce sadness indicated that I believed I had lost something. I had been tricked by an idol. What, then, should I do in such situations? Should I deny my sadness? I think not. Sadness is where I am, and I need to be honest about that. If I am sad, let me be sad—without guilt. But let me also *remind* myself that what I seem to have lost is not lost in reality. I may not yet accept that fact, but my sadness can become an indicator that I still have growing to do. I still identify with my ego and body, and I identified her with hers. That's no surprise. But let me be gentle with myself. Let me be content with healing, as the Course admonishes elsewhere (T-13.IX.7:1 (CE), T-13.VIII.7:1 (FIP)).

Our ego has manifested so many idols to mask the reality of our true Self from us and keep us hooked on the dream of finding completion in all the wrong places (5:3). It's as if the ego says, “Oh, that didn't work? Never fear! Here are another dozen possibilities. There are a lot of fish in the sea.” The whole hapless enterprise is “vain,” which, by definition, means “failing to have or unlikely to have the intended or desired result” (5:4). Why waste time on idols when “God dwells within, and your completion lies in Him” (5:5). What we are seeking is always God;

anything else is a poor substitute. As St. Augustine wrote, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in You." No idol can take His place (5:6). Jesus appeals to us, for the fourth time in five paragraphs, to stop our senseless pursuit of idols, our seeking outside ourselves for completion and happiness (5:7–8).

We need to examine our lives, not just once, but repeatedly, regularly, similar to the idea of New Year's resolutions, to see if we have been caught up once again by idols, and turned away from the living, indwelling God. When we find that Presence within ourselves, it is like the man finding the pearl of great price, who sold all he had to buy the pearl. Finding that Presence, we gladly let go of idols:

Oh how the thought of God attracts
And draws the heart from earth,
And sickens it of passing shows
And dissipating mirth!

God only is the creature's home,
Though rough and straight the road;
Yet nothing less can satisfy
The love that longs for God.

Frederick William Faber

Paragraph 6

6 Let us forget the purpose of the world the past has given it. ²For otherwise the future will be like the past, and but a series of depressing dreams in which all idols fail you one by one, and you see death and disappointment everywhere. ³To change all this and open up a road of hope and of release in what appeared to be an endless circle of despair, you need but to decide you do not *know* the purpose of the world. ⁴You give it goals it does not have, and thus do you decide what it is for. ⁵You try to see in it a place of idols found outside yourself, with power to make complete what is within by splitting what you are between the two.

• Study Question •

19. *What is "the purpose of the world the past has given it"? You may find it helpful to re-read T-27.VIII.3 (T-27.X.3 (CE)) and T-28.II.6:1-4 (T-28.II.6:1–3 (CE)), as well as 2:1, 2:4 and 9:9 (8:3 (CE)) in the current section.*
20. **(6:3).** *This sentence gives us the way out of despair; the rest of the paragraph and the next tell us what we have been doing all along that needs to stop. Before you read the commentary below, can you explain this sentence (6:3)? How does deciding we don't know the purpose of the world "open up a road of hope"?*

We've looked at the purpose the past has given to the world. It would be interesting to think a bit about what purposes *we* have given to the world in the past. What "dream role" have we assigned to the world and the people in our lives? These purposes are what each of us must "forget" (6:1).

Sentence 2 gives a gloomy picture of reality, but it certainly sounds like a description of how many or most of us view our lives! “A series of depressing dreams!” Wouldn't it be nice to escape from that pattern? Spend a moment in quiet, trying to see the world as without the purposes you have given it.

We've been like the rats who thought they knew the path to the cheese that was no longer there. We keep running down the wrong path, seeking outside ourselves, and thinking that the world's purpose is to bring us completion and happiness. If we are to learn a new way to the cheese, we have to forget the old way! Deciding that we don't know what the world is for opens us up to the possibility of finding completion and happiness somewhere else: within.

Who would have thought that the secret to escaping from the futility of life in this world would be deciding that we don't know the world's purpose? What a unique thought! And to me, this is a verifiable assumption. We can give it a try. We can make a practice of telling ourselves, “I do not know the purpose of this world. I do not know what anything is for,” and we can observe what effect this has on the level of our happiness. If the Course is right (and I'm sure it is), instead of finding ourselves feeling adrift and uncertain in the world without purpose, we'll find ourselves becoming happier. We'll find that the Holy Spirit takes the blank slate we present to Him and writes a new purpose on everything in our lives, a purpose that is vastly more fulfilling than the one we have believed in.

The rest of the paragraph describes what we have been doing up until now. We have been assigning purpose to the world and trying to make it into a place filled with idols with the power to complete us. Since there is nothing outside of us, anything we see as existing outside of us has to come from within us, projected outward. That's what the phrase “splitting what you are between the two” (6:5) means. We imagine a lack in ourselves, and then imagine something outside of ourselves that has what we lack, and begin pursuing that will-o'-the-wisp.

Paragraph 7

7 You choose your dreams, for they are what you wish, perceived as if it had been given you. ²And idols do what you would have them do, and have the power you ascribe to them. ³And you pursue them vainly in the dream, because you want their power as your own. ⁴Yet where are dreams but in a mind asleep? ⁵And can a dream succeed in making real the pictures it projects outside itself? ⁶Save time, my brother! ⁷Learn what time is for. ⁸And speed the end of idols in the world made sad and sick by seeing idols there. ⁹Your holy mind is altar unto God, and where He is no idols can abide.

• Study Question •

21. (7:4–5). *All the idols we see exist only in our sleeping mind; that is the sobering aspect of what is said here. What is the encouraging aspect of these two sentences?*

•

We make up the dream but then turn it around and see the dream as something brought on by outside forces (7:1). We see the idol in the dream as if it were the source of the power that we gave to it (7:2). A simple example is how we sometimes seek a relationship with someone who

will praise and encourage us, giving us confidence in ourselves that ultimately must come from within anyhow. The other person does not have the power to give us self-confidence; only we can give that to ourselves. So we've split off parts of ourselves and have imagined them outside of us in the other person, waiting for us to acquire them to make us complete. In our dream, we "pursue them vainly" (7:3), trying to obtain the power we have given them, but which only resides within us.

It seems a cockeyed but tragic picture, with us running after phantoms we can never catch, chasing an illusion in pursuit of something we already have. The bad news is that this world is a dream. The good news is that this world is a dream! Dreams don't have any real existence; they are mind static. Nothing in them is real, so nothing in them is worth getting upset about (7:4-5).

Jesus admonishes us: "Save time, my brother! Learn what time is *for*" (7:6-7). Notice a progression in these paragraphs:

forget the purpose of the world as you know it (6:1);

decide you don't know what it is for (6:3);

learn what it is really for (7:7).

What *is* time for?

"Time was made so you could use it creatively, and convince yourself of your own ability to create.⁴ Time is a teaching device, and a means to an end.... Since only eternity is real, why not use the illusion of time constructively?" (T-1.15.1:2-3, 2:2 (CE), (T-1.1.15:2-3 (FIP))

"Your own final judgment cannot be directed toward yourself, because you are not your own creation. You can apply it meaningfully and at any time, however, to everything you have ever made, and retain in your real memory only what is good. This is what your own right-mindedness cannot but dictate. The purpose of time is solely to "give you time" to achieve this judgment." (T-2.XIII.7:8-8:4 (CE), T-2.VIII.5:5-8 (FIP))

The Holy Spirit interprets time's purpose as rendering the need for it unnecessary. Thus does He regard the function of time as temporary, serving only His teaching function, which is temporary by definition. (T-13.IV.8:1-2 (CE), (T-13.IV.7:3-4 (FIP))

So time's purpose is to serve as a learning device, teaching us to sort out the true from the false in our minds until only truth remains, which renders the need for time unnecessary. In this section's symbolism, time's purpose is to end idols and rid our minds of their constant search for completion outside of ourselves. How do we do that in practical terms? One way is by the practices given to us in the Workbook. In the Introduction to Review IV, after telling us to read over the ideas under review, Jesus says:

Then close your eyes, and say them slowly to yourself. There is no hurry now, for you are using time for its intended purpose. (W-pl.rIV.ln.7:2-3)

⁴ "Creative" and its cognates in the early dictation refer to expressing the power to create—creating something—rather than to being imaginative or original. It is thus similar to "productive." In this miracle principle, you are creative (productive) when you perform miracles. This also explains the word "constructively" in the next paragraph.

Lately, I have been trying to bolster my spiritual practice. I intend to do some spiritual reading, plus fifteen to thirty minutes of meditation every morning. That's something I had the habit of doing for many years, but recently I've slacked off considerably. And why? What I tell myself is, "I don't have time." What this reading is saying *to me* is, "But, my brother, that spiritual practice is *what time is for*. How can any other use of time be more important than this?" To set aside some time for daily spiritual practice (mornings, evenings, and all through the day as the Workbook instructs us to do) will "speed the end of idols"; it will bring healing to the world, ministering to the sadness and sickness idols generate (7:8). Isn't this a work more worthwhile than any other you can think of?

My mind is God's altar; my task is clearing away all the idols that have come to clutter that altar, leaving room only for God (7:9). It reminds me of the prayer of the psalmist:

Search me, O God, and know my heart;

Try me and know my anxious thoughts;

And see if there be any hurtful way in me,

And lead me in the everlasting way. (Psa. 139:23–24, NAS95S)

Paragraph 8

8 The fear of God is but the fear of loss of idols. ²It is *not* the fear of loss of your reality, but you have made of your reality an idol, which you must protect against the light of truth. ⁵ ³And all the world becomes the means by which this idol can be saved. ⁴Salvation thus appears to threaten life and offer death. ⁵It is not so. ⁶Salvation seeks to prove there is no death, ⁶ and only life exists. ⁷The sacrifice of death is nothing lost. ⁸An idol cannot take the place of God. ⁹Let Him remind you of His love for you, and do not seek to drown His Voice in chants of deep despair to idols of yourself. ¹⁰Seek not outside your Father for your hope, for hope of happiness is *not* despair.

Practice Suggestion: (8:9–10). *The closing lines of the section continue to counteract the notion that accepting salvation is some kind of loss. Try to visualize the scene:*

Picture yourself coming to the world, certain that peace and happiness lies in finding the right idol.

Imagine yourself wandering through the world, from city to city, or in the mountains and deserts, finding one idol after another only to be disappointed by it.

⁵ We believe, in other words, that we are afraid of God because we think our self will disappear in God. What we really fear, however, is the disappearance of our *false* self, the idol that we have made.

⁶ Proverbs 12:28 (KJV): "In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death."

Imagine yourself kneeling before the latest idol, hearing a whisper of God's Love in your ear but finding yourself terrified by it, and trying to drown out that Voice with your desperate chanting to the idol before you.

See yourself hearing that Voice despite your efforts and beginning to realize that it is not offering death, but life. Perhaps your endless seeking has been mistaken; perhaps the answer is not in idols.

Your chanting quiets down, and you begin to listen.



If we feel any fear about approaching God, what we are actually feeling is “the fear of loss of idols” (9:6). We don’t want to give up those pleasing dreams, in which our imagined needs are met. We are not fearing loss of anything real; our reality is changeless, immortal, and eternal, and loss is impossible (9:7; T-29.VI.2:3–5). What we have done, however, is to identify with an idol, a false picture of what we are (an ego living in a body, rather than a formless spirit). The truth of God would negate that false picture, but because we think that false picture is us, we think we must protect it from the truth. We use the world to preserve that false identity. So when God offers us salvation, it seems to threaten our idol-self. It seems to promise the death of what (we think) we are (9:8–10).

Contrary to our mistaken perception of things, salvation is no threat; it does not offer death (10:1). It is the complete opposite: it proves that death does not exist, and “only life exists” (10:2). Salvation is a win-win situation; there is no downside to it. All that disappears is an illusory and false identity whose purpose is to die, and how can that be termed a loss or a sacrifice (10:3)?

No idol can take God’s place (10:4)—thank God for that! So Jesus appeals to us to give up our silly attempts to make “idols of yourself” serve in place of God and to stop trying to drown out God’s Voice (10:5). The imagery is religious, calling up images of dark temples, flickering candles, and deep-voiced choirs chanting dismal melodies, fervently but frantically calling out to a god who never answers. But the picture is one of our ordinary lives, crammed full of stuff and distractions that keep us from listening to the still, small Voice, preventing us from remembering God’s Love for us:

The still, small Voice for God is *not* drowned out by all the ego's raucous screams and senseless ravings, to those who *want* to hear It. (T-21.V.1:6)

Some of my favorite lines of “Course material” are not from the Course proper, but occur in the prose poem titled “The Gifts of God,” which is available only as part of a book of Helen Schucman’s poetry (*The Gifts of God*). So let me quote them here, as you may not have read them before:

Rest could be yours because of what God is. He loves you as a mother loves her child; her only one, the only love she has, her all-in-all, extension of herself, as much a part of her as breath itself. He loves you as a brother loves his own; born of one father, still as one in him, and boded with a seal that cannot break. He loves you as a lover loves his own; his chosen one, his joy, his very life, the one he seeks when she has gone away, and bring him peace again on her return. He loves you as a father loves his son, without whom would his self be incomplete, whose immortality completes his own, for in him is

the chain of love complete—a golden circle that will never end, a song that will be sung throughout all time and afterwards, and always will remain the deathless sound of loving and of love.

O be at peace, beloved of the Lord! What is your life but gratitude to Him Who loves you with an everlasting Love? What is your purpose here but to recall into His loving Arms the Son He loves, who has forgotten who his Father is? What is your only goal, your only hope, your only need, the only thing you want, but to allow the secret place of peace to burst upon the world in all its joy, and let the Voice within it speak of Him Whose love shines out and in and in-between, through all the darkened places to embrace all living things within its golden peace?

Answer Key

1. Sentences 1:1, 1:6, 1:10, and 1:12 all restate the same basic idea: “Do not look outside yourself for happiness.”
2. “It” seems to refer to searching outside yourself.
3. An idol is something outside of myself that I seek for, imagining it will give me Heaven or happiness, bring me peace, or fill my hunger for God.
4. It refers to our desire to be right about where happiness is found—outside ourselves—at the expense of making ourselves miserable, since seeking happiness in things outside ourselves is the source of all pain. A possible rewording: “Would you rather be right that happiness can be found outside yourself, or would you rather actually find happiness?”
5. In ourselves, or perhaps more appropriately, in our Self, which is part of God.
6. That we are denying our completion and then imagining, hoping, and dreaming that there is something outside of ourselves that can complete us. This denial and dream is what has made the illusion of the world.
7. Using the body to acquire things; seeking physical pleasures in an attempt to be made happy; seeking better and better taste sensations; risk-taking (sky diving, skiing, auto racing, and other dangerous sports); seeking physical perfection through working out or plastic surgery. You can probably think of several more.
8. It means believing that he is a separate, little being who is therefore incomplete and lacking when he really is a being in whom resides everything in the universe, given by God in creation.
9. The lingering illusion is that there is something outside of us that can bring us peace and happiness.
10. In seeking idols, we seek to demonstrate our incompleteness and prove we have lacks. Lacks, in turn, prove we are separate from God—and to be incomplete is equated with death, both because to be separate from God Who is Life would be death, and because it is a denial or negation of our true Identity as God's Son. To deny our identity—to believe we can be created as God's Son and then change that—is the same as seeking to kill the Son of God within (3:4). See also T-29.II.6:2 (FIP), T-29.II.1:2 (CE) and 29.VI.5:1 (FIP), T-29.VII.5:1 (CE). The theme of seeking to die was introduced in the previous section (VII) in several places.
11. No. As the Course tells us elsewhere:
“It is noticeable that in all these diversionary tactics, the one question which is never asked by those who pursue them is “What for?” This is the question which you must learn to ask in connection with everything your mind wills to undertake. What is your purpose?” (T-4.VII.16:1–3 (CE)) (T-4.V.6:7-9 (FIP). T-4.VII.16.1–3 (CE)).

The critical thing that turns a goal into seeking death is that the goal is sought primarily for the body's benefit. That implies an identity with the body, and therefore with the idea of separation it represents. It implies a belief that the body is important in and of itself, for what it can get me. It is demonstrating that I need

- something outside of myself to be complete. If I am exercising or dieting because I want to make my body a better tool for catching a mate, that is a kind of death-seeking. If I think I must have a perfect or as-perfect-as-possible body to be happy, that is death-seeking. If I keep my body in shape so it can better serve the purpose of healing and forgiveness in the world, that is another matter.
12. T-29.IV.4:3 (FIP), T-29.V.4:1 (CE) said that dreams seem pleasant if the needs we ascribe to ourselves are met, and unpleasant if they are not met. However, the very idea that needs exist puts fear at the core of every dream.
 13. It implies we believe we can suffer lack, which equates to death, that we are not whole within, that we fear to look at that inner devastation, and because of that fear, we seek outside to find what we are. Thus, the belief in lack or need is one of the ego's core beliefs. It is at the root of all our seeking after idols.
 14. Sadness and suffering.
 15. Yes. I believe that the words "each must fail and crumble and decay" imply the body. I understand the phrase as describing physical aging and death. The body is the symbol of separation and lack, and the Course equates both of those with death. Therefore, the body is also a symbol of death. Also, the phrasing about "a parody of life which, in its lifelessness, is really death, conceived as real and given living form," is very similar to an earlier passage that spoke plainly about the body: "What you have given 'life' is not alive, and symbolizes but your wish to be alive apart from life, alive in death, with death perceived as life, and living, death" (T-29.II.6:2 (FIP), T-29.III.1:2 (CE)).
 16. Sadness and suffering that I perceive are telling me that I have been seeking death; that I have found some idol and attached myself to it; that I have been seeking outside myself for happiness, rather than finding it within myself, in 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. 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.