

## Commentary

### ACIM® Manual for Teachers

# 4. *What Are the Characteristics of God's Teachers?*

**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

This chapter, the longest one in the Manual, describes the characteristics or traits that develop over time in those who choose to be teachers of God. The final section of the Text discussed this choice. The phrase “savior of the world” in T-31.IX refers to the same thing as “teacher of God” in the Manual. A teacher’s journey begins with that first choice to join rather than separate and to see another person with Christ’s vision.

One way of looking at this section is as a description of the spiritual journey as a whole. It deals with the development of trust, yet, as is evident in Paragraph 8, the final stage of developing trust, we’ve arrived at the gates of Heaven; in fact, Heaven is already here, and our peace of mind is complete.

## Paragraph 1

The surface traits of God's teachers are not at all alike. <sup>2</sup>They do not look alike to the body's eyes, they come from vastly different backgrounds, their experiences of the world vary greatly, and their superficial "personalities" are quite distinct. <sup>3</sup>Nor at the beginning stages of their functioning as teachers of God have they yet acquired the deeper characteristics that will establish them as what they are. <sup>4</sup>God gives special gifts to His teachers because they have a special role in His plan for Atonement. <sup>5</sup>Their specialness is, of course, only temporary; set in time as a means of leading out of time. <sup>6</sup>These special gifts, born in the holy relationship toward which the teaching-learning situation is geared, become characteristic of all teachers of God who have advanced in their own learning.<sup>1</sup> <sup>7</sup>In this respect they are all alike.

The external personality and appearance of teachers of God differ widely from person to person (1:1). Think of the various types seen in the Enneagram or the Myers-Briggs types. Teachers come in every variety: introvert or extrovert;

- very intellectual or dominated by emotions;
- tall or short;
- fat or skinny;
- any race;
- any religion or none.

Their physical appearance differs. Their social status differs. They have vastly different experiences and backgrounds.

At the beginning of their functioning as teachers, they still lack many of the deep, spiritual qualities we might expect of God's teachers (1:2). Anyone you encounter might be a teacher of God, even though they look and behave nothing like what you would expect from a teacher. Eventually, they will acquire "the deeper characteristics that will establish them as what they are" (1:3), but their lack won't prevent them from functioning as teachers. Even you might take that role, even now.

Different teachers have different gifts given them by God to fulfill a particular role in His plan for Atonement (1:4). Some will give wise one-on-one counsel. Some will have a gift of explaining the truth. Others may excel at helping with relationships. Some may be healers. These unique gifts or differences are, "of course, only temporary." They are characteristics "set in time as a means of leading out of time" (1:5). The different gifts of the teachers will meet the different needs of their pupils. You may not need verbal explanations or help; maybe you just need to feel loved and accepted by someone. Spiritual guidance will match us up with the right people who can teach us and with suitable pupils.

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<sup>1</sup>. The "special gifts" are the ten characteristics—the ten character traits—described in this section. That they are "born in the holy relationship" between teacher and pupil means that this relationship transforms the teacher into an advanced teacher, just as it transforms the pupil into a teacher (see M-2.5:8).

Our unique gifts are born when we engage in a holy relationship that blossoms into a teaching-learning situation. In a way, the students make the teacher. The student's needs elicit specific responses from their relationship partner, which grow into special teaching abilities. As teachers advance in their learning, their characteristic gifts take shape (1:6). In this general way, then, all teachers are alike (1:7). They all go through the process of gradual development of their gifts.

## Paragraph 2

2 All differences among the Sons of God are temporary. Nevertheless, in time it can be said that the advanced teachers of God have the following characteristics:

After discussing the many temporary differences among “the Sons of God,” Jesus begins a lengthy discussion of the general characteristics all “advanced teachers of God” have in common during their growth in time (2:1,2). I find it interesting that he uses the phrase “Sons of God” in 2:1 rather than “teachers of God.” I think he uses the more general term, “Sons,” because that sentence deals with the temporary differences that belong to everyone. In contrast, in 2:2, he is referring to the similar characteristics of “advanced teachers.” However, I believe the ten characteristics that follow describe the spiritual journey for everyone. All of us are teachers of God in training. We are all destined for holy relationships. Holy relationships consist of teaching-learning situations that train us to be teachers.

What follows in this commentary are my thoughts just on the first of the ten characteristics. It begins with a general description of trust and its effects, followed by a long, detailed description of how we develop trust.

As a preview, here is a list of the various stages we must go through:

1. A period of undoing
2. A period of sorting out
3. A period of relinquishment
4. A period of settling down
5. A period of unsettling
6. A period of achievement

The list may be daunting at first glance. Four of the periods appear to be quite negative: undoing, sorting out, relinquishment, and unsettling. Only two are positive: settling down and achievement. Overall, the list reminds me of the saying of Jesus in the gospels:

“And He was saying to them all, ‘If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.’” (Luke 9:23)

Jesus doesn't pussyfoot around. He does not pull his punches! He also said once that the way that leads to life is narrow. In the Course, he tells us it isn't easy: “It is possible even in this world to hear only [God's ] Voice and no other. It takes effort and great willingness to learn.” (T-5.II.11:1–2 (CE), T-5.II.3:9–10 (FIP)) These are not lessons learned overnight. Such an

overview of the journey has benefits. It prepares us for what's coming and offers the prospect of a positive outcome.

As we look at this, let's recall that this describes only the development of trust, the first of the ten characteristics of God's teachers.

## I. Trust

### Paragraph 1

This is the foundation on which their ability to fulfill their function rests. <sup>2</sup>Perception is the result of learning. <sup>3</sup>In fact, perception is learning, because cause and effect are never separate. <sup>4</sup>The teachers of God have trust in the world because they have learned that it is not governed by the laws the world made up. <sup>5</sup>It is governed by a Power That is in them but not of them.<sup>2</sup> <sup>6</sup>It is this Power That keeps all things safe. <sup>7</sup>It is through this Power that the teachers of God look on a forgiven world.

The foundational characteristic of a teacher of God is trust. Our entire ability to fulfill our function of forgiveness rests on it (1:1). The trust under consideration is trust that the world is “governed by a Power That is in them but not of them” (1:5), in other words, the Power of God. Such trust produces a different way of looking at the world, a different perception of the world as worthy of our trust.

Remember that this is about teaching and learning, and this talk of perception will make sense. We aim for a different way of perceiving the world, and “perception is the result of learning” (1:2). “In fact, perception is learning” (1:3)! Learning is simply a change of perception. For instance, suppose someone spends a lot of effort learning about the early history of America. They then may remark, “I see slavery in a completely different way now.” They learned about slavery, and their perception changed. Learning is a cause, and altered perception is its effect.

When we learn that divine Power governs the world, Power that belongs to God yet is in us (1:5), we will see the world differently. We no longer will see the world as a dangerous, untrustworthy, and unpredictable jungle, governed by the laws of the jungle (1:4); laws like “To give is to lose” and “Might makes right.” We see the world as governed by a Power That keeps all things safe (1:6).

This learning, this transformation of our perception from fear to trust, is what makes it possible for us to forgive (1:7). The Text gives a detailed description of this transformed perception:

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<sup>2</sup> This “Power” appears to be the Holy Spirit. His governance of the world and of the teacher's life is what the teacher eventually learns to trust. That this Power is “in them but not of them” is an adaptation of the popular injunction to be “in the world but not of the world,” which is based on verses from the Gospel of John, such as John 17:14-15 (RSV): “The world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one.”

“And when he chooses to avail himself of what is given him, then will he see each situation that he thought before was means to justify his anger turned to an event which justifies his love. He will hear plainly that the calls to war he heard before are really calls to peace. He will perceive that where he gave attack is but another altar where he can, with equal ease and far more happiness, bestow forgiveness. And he will reinterpret all temptation as just another chance to bring him joy.” (T-25.III.5:5-8 (FIP), T-25.III.6:5–7:3 (CE)).

Our goal is to develop our trust so that forgiveness becomes possible for us in every situation. As long as we do not have this profound trust in the world, our forgiveness will be, at best, incomplete.

As we continue through this discussion of the development of trust, keep in mind that, in this context, “trust” means a settled, confident acceptance of God's governance of the world. It means a total conviction that, as Unity often affirms, “There is one Presence and one Power in the universe, God, the Good, omnipotent.” There are no exceptions. There is no opposing power. Trust means relying on God for everything, rather than on yourself or any human agency.

## Paragraph 2

2 When this Power has once been experienced, it is impossible to trust one's own petty strength again. <sup>2</sup>Who would attempt to fly with the tiny strength of a sparrow when the mighty wings of an eagle have been given him? <sup>3</sup>And who would place his faith in the shabby offerings of the ego when the gifts of God are laid before him? <sup>4</sup>What is it that induces them to make the shift?

This paragraph contrasts trust in God's Power to trust in “one's own petty strength” (2:1). Misplaced trust in our personal strength can take two primary forms: trust in our strength to accomplish some desired goal and trust in our strength to oppose God. When the Course instructs us to repeat, “I am as God created me, and not what I made of myself,” we must not trust in our ability to alter God's creation. Likewise, in looking at another person, we must make the same choice to not trust in their ability to change themselves from the holy creation of God into a sinner. We need to trust only in God.

Once we have experienced this divine Power, we can no longer trust in our own power, either for good or bad (2:1). Consider this: What does it mean to experience this Power? The quote above from Chapter 25 gives us some idea: we now perceive a situation that seemed to merit anger as justifying love; we see seeming calls to war as calls to peace; someone we wanted to attack we now want only to forgive. An ancient hatred has transformed into a present love (T-26.IX.5:4 (CE), T-26.IX.6:1 (FIP)). These things come from trust in that Power, a realization that “temptations” can be seen as chances to bring us joy. It can happen in our perception of a single person: “this he learns when first he looks upon one brother as he looks upon himself, and sees the mirror of himself in him” (T-31.VIII.2:4 (CE), T-31.VII.8:4 (FIP)). That kind of transformed perception can only occur when we have learned to trust in God's Power alone. Once experienced, we learn to apply it everywhere.

How, then, is that kind of trust developed?

### Paragraph 3

<sup>3</sup> First, they must go through what might be called a “period of undoing.”  
<sup>2</sup>This need not be painful, but it usually is so experienced. <sup>3</sup>It seems as if things are being taken away, and it is rarely understood initially that their lack of value is merely being recognized. <sup>4</sup>How can lack of value be perceived unless the perceiver is in a position where he must see things in a different light? <sup>5</sup>He is not yet at a point at which he can make the shift entirely internally. <sup>6</sup>And so the plan will sometimes call for changes in what seem to be external circumstances.<sup>3</sup> <sup>7</sup>These changes are always helpful. <sup>8</sup>When the teacher of God has learned that much, he goes on to the second stage.

The first stage is a period of undoing (3:1). “Undoing what?” we may ask. This stage involves what seems to be the loss of things we value. At least we think we value them! Because we attribute value to things not worthy of it, their loss is “usually” experienced as painful, but only because we cling to them (3:2). The experience seems to be one of losing things, although “their lack of value is merely being recognized” (3:3). That reminds me of a line in a Christian book written in French that I read while in France in 1961. I’ve never forgotten the line: “Lâche quelque chose, et voie si ça tire!” “Let go of something, and see if it sticks!” We may not think we are clinging to things, so to recognize their lack of value, things need to be taken away to help us see how attached we are. We need to be put “in a position where [we] must see things in a different light” (3:4). Something external has to occur because we cannot yet “make the shift entirely internally” (3:5). So, things change (3:6).

These external, unexpected changes that seem painful at first “are always helpful” (3:7). The helpfulness of such changes is what we must learn before we can advance to the next stage (3:8).

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<sup>3</sup>. The essence of this first period seems to be that the newly qualified teacher of God is beginning to realize the lack of value of external things, yet to make this realization complete he will need to experience external things seemingly being taken from him. This will leave him in a position where he is forced to either suffer over their loss or free himself by recognizing they never had value in the first place.

## Paragraph 4

4 Next, the teacher of God must go through a “period of sorting out.” <sup>2</sup>This is always somewhat difficult because, having learned that the changes in his life are always helpful, he now must divide all things on the basis of whether they increase the helpfulness or hamper it. <sup>3</sup>He will find that many if not most of the things he valued before will merely hinder his ability to transfer what he has learned to new situations as they arise. <sup>4</sup>Because he has valued what is really valueless, he will not generalize the lesson for fear of loss and sacrifice. <sup>5</sup>It takes great learning to understand that all things, events, encounters, and circumstances are helpful. <sup>6</sup>It is only to the extent to which they are helpful that any degree of reality should be accorded them in this world of illusion. <sup>7</sup>The word “value” can apply to nothing else.

Next comes “a period of sorting out” (4:1). Again, this can be a difficult stage (4:2). Now that we have learned that changes in our lives are always helpful, we must sort out the things in our lives based on “whether they increase the helpfulness or hamper it” (4:2). We begin to discover that many things we have been valuing have become hindrances. They hinder our ability to apply what we have learned to new situations (4:3). They are like weights on our backs, slowing us down. Delays can occur with material possessions, relationships, jobs, career choices, or even certain beliefs. I'm thinking here especially of adherence to outmoded religious beliefs. The desired goal is to generalize our learning about what is or isn't valuable, applying it to these things. But sometimes, we hold back “for fear of loss and sacrifice” (4:4). Perhaps we lose a job for reasons that seem out of our control. I think back to my first programming job that came to an end that totally shocked me at the time. The company laid me off as part of a downsizing move. I was stunned! It hurt to be fired without warning or any real reason. But it led me in new directions that I would never have taken otherwise.

This stage isn't easy to get through. I suspect many of us are stuck here. Jesus seems to agree. He points out that “It takes great learning to understand that all things, events, encounters, and circumstances are helpful” (4:5). Great learning? No kidding! All events and circumstances are helpful? Really? Consider the level of trust it takes to accept that! I'm sure that most of us, if not all, can think of more than one thing, event, encounter, or circumstance that seemed to be anything but helpful in our estimation.

We get a hint of how this can work out for us in the following two sentences (4:6–7). Suppose we rate the helpfulness of things on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being 0% helpful and 10 being 100% helpful. Pretty much everything falls somewhere in between. Say we rate some event as a 4 on the scale of helpfulness. That would be somewhat unhelpful, but with some degree of helpfulness that we can see. What we must do, according to sentence 4:6, is to realize

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<sup>4</sup> The “things” the teacher of God is sorting out appear to be *the things in his life*. In the first period, some of these things were taken away and through this he discovered they had really been valueless all along. Now, based on this lesson, he has to divide all the things in his life into those that are valuable and those that are valueless.

that whatever degree of unhelpfulness we see is unreal, and “only to the extent to which they are helpful” should things be accorded reality. Only the helpfulness is real.

Remember those opening lines in the Introduction to the Text: “Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists.” We may think we see a loss in some circumstances, but Jesus teaches us that “Loss is not loss when properly perceived” (W-248.1:1). The old folk aphorism may be fitting: “Look for the silver lining.” According to the Course, nothing in the world deserves to be valued for anything but its helpfulness (4:7).

There is no clear “graduation” point that indicates the end of the period of sorting out. I would say that the sorting is gradual; as we begin to separate what is valuable from what isn't and accept that only the helpful is real and valuable, we become ready to start applying the lesson. The sorting leads to the next stage, in which the obvious action, based on sorting out, becomes our choice. We begin to let go of what is not valuable.

## Paragraph 5

5 The third stage through which the teachers of God must go can be called a “period of relinquishment.”<sup>2</sup> If this is interpreted as giving up the desirable it will engender enormous conflict.<sup>3</sup> Few teachers of God escape this distress entirely.<sup>4</sup> There is, however, no point in sorting out the valuable from the valueless unless the next obvious step is taken.<sup>5</sup> The third step is rarely if ever begun until the second is complete.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the period of overlap is apt to be one in which the teacher of God feels called upon to sacrifice his own best interests on behalf of truth.<sup>7</sup> He has not realized as yet how wholly impossible such a demand would be.<sup>8</sup> He can learn this only as he actually does give up the valueless.<sup>9</sup> Through this he learns that where he anticipated grief he finds a happy lightheartedness instead; where he thought something was asked of him he finds a gift bestowed on him.

The third stage in the development of trust “can be called 'a period of relinquishment.'” In Stage 2, we learned the criteria to use in sorting things out. Now, we apply the criteria.

Workbook Lesson 133 is titled, “I will not value what is valueless.” It addresses the learning we must go through in this third stage: relinquishing things with no value and retaining only things with actual value. Lesson 133 gives the criteria for sorting things by their value or lack of

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<sup>5</sup>. “The period of overlap” suggests a time in which the teacher is partly in *both* the second and third periods, yet the previous sentence says that the third period is usually not “begun until the second is complete.” The resolution may be this: While the teacher is nearing the end of the second period, he realizes that sorting out the valuable from the valueless (second period) logically leads to *relinquishing* the valueless (third period). He thus feels the pressure to carry out this relinquishing, which means he is beginning to enter the third period. Yet he holds back in fear, because he still thinks the valueless has some value, and therefore relinquishing it seems like a sacrifice. It is only when the second period is complete and he realizes that the valueless truly *is* valueless that he actually *begins* the relinquishing process. In other words, only at this point does he *truly* begin the third period. When he does, he finds that relinquishing turns out to be a relief, not a sacrifice.

it in considerable detail. I recommend reading through it, paying particular attention to paragraphs 6 to 12.

To sum up the criteria Lesson 133 gives for sorting out given in the lesson, here is a brief list:

The laws that govern choice are two:

1. There are only two alternatives: everything or nothing.
2. There is no compromise; there is no in-between.

In other words, a thing is valuable and desirable, or it is not.

The criteria for judging what is worth desiring are:

1. Will it last forever? (If not, it is nothing.)
2. Is it a choice in which no one loses? (If not, you lose everything.)
3. Is the purpose free of the ego's goals? (If not, there is compromise.)
4. Is the choice free of all guilt? (If not, you have obscured the real alternatives.)

Relinquishment should not be about giving up desirable things. Trying to give up things we desire creates enormous internal conflict (5:2). The previous stage, you recall, was a period of sorting out. During that stage, you should have sorted out what has value and what does not. Very few of us deal with everything in that stage. As a result, we fall into some of that enormous conflict (5:3). You probably can think of examples in your own life when you tried to let go of something that still held lingering value to you. You try to let go of it, but it sticks! That's why we need that time to sort things out. One rarely enters this third stage before stage 2 has been completed (5:5). The anticipation of pain from letting go of something you love drives you back to further work on sorting out.

Look again at those criteria for judging value. The first one rules out literally everything material. It rules out physical relationships, by which I mean relationships between two physical beings. Bodies don't last forever! Relationships per se are valuable, of course, but we should be able to let go of their physical presence when someone leaves, moves, or dies.

The second criterion rules out theft or trickery and eliminates things like prestige or position gained at another's expense.

The third criterion is even more general: Is your ego somehow being served by whatever it is?

And lastly, is there any guilt attached to it? These are very demanding criteria! No wonder it takes time to graduate from Stage 2.

If you have determined that something is “valueless” to you according to the criteria in Lesson 133, there is no point in holding onto it. That should be obvious (5:4). But you will probably experience a “period of overlap” between Stage 2 and Stage 3. Most of us respond to the internal conflict of that overlap by feeling “called upon to sacrifice [our] own best interests on behalf of truth” (5:6). I think of it as the feeling that “I know I should (or shouldn't) do this, but it means giving up X.”

All that feeling of being called to sacrifice means is that we have not “realized as yet how wholly impossible such a demand would be” (5:7). Sacrifice is impossible, I think, because sacrifice means giving up something valuable—and things that don't meet the criteria of Lesson 133 don't have any value! Lesson 323 makes this abundantly clear:

### ***I gladly make the "sacrifice" of fear.***

W-p11.323.1. "Here is the only "sacrifice" You ask of Your beloved Son; You ask him to give up all suffering, all sense of loss and sadness, all anxiety and doubt, and freely let Your Love come streaming in to his awareness, healing him of pain, and giving him Your Own eternal joy. Such is the "sacrifice" You ask of me, and one I gladly make; the only "cost" of restoration of Your memory to me, for the salvation of the world."

W-p11.323.2. "And as we pay the debt we owe to truth,--a debt that merely is the letting go of self-deceptions and of images we worshipped falsely--truth returns to us in wholeness and in joy. We are deceived no longer. Love has now returned to our awareness. And we are at peace again, for fear has gone and only love remains."

We learn that sacrifice is impossible by actually giving up what has no value (5:8). Instead of pain, we find truth, wholeness, joy, love, and peace. Instead of grief, we find "a happy lightheartedness instead." We expected loss, but instead, we find a gift (5:9)!

Once we've settled into Stage 3's relinquishment, a period of relative peace and repose follows, "a 'period of settling down'" (6:1).

## **Paragraph 6**

6 Now comes a "period of settling down." <sup>2</sup>This is a quiet time, in which the teacher of God rests a while in reasonable peace. <sup>3</sup>Now he consolidates his learning. <sup>4</sup>Now he begins to see the transfer value of what he has learned. <sup>5</sup>Its potential is literally staggering, and the teacher of God is now at the point in his progress at which he can see in it his whole way out. <sup>6</sup>"Give up what you do not want, and keep what you do." <sup>7</sup>How simple is the obvious! <sup>8</sup>And how easy to do! <sup>9</sup>The teacher of God needs this period of respite. <sup>10</sup>He has not yet come as far as he thinks. <sup>11</sup>Yet when he is ready to go on, he goes with mighty companions beside him. <sup>6</sup> <sup>12</sup>Now he rests a while and gathers them before going on. <sup>13</sup>He will not go on from here alone.

"Finally!" we may think. "At last, a quiet time of rest and peace" (6:2). And it is that, but it isn't final. Frankly, I think I'm stuck in that period of overlap between Stages 2 and 3, so anything I say from here on is not based on personal experience; it's just interpreting the words of the Manual.

So, Stage 4 is a "period of settling down" (6:1) in which we get to "rest a while in reasonable peace" (6:2). The use of the word "reasonable" implies that the peace here isn't total, although, by comparison of what we've been through until now, it's noticeably more peaceful. The contrast is probably enough that we may think we've arrived. We haven't.

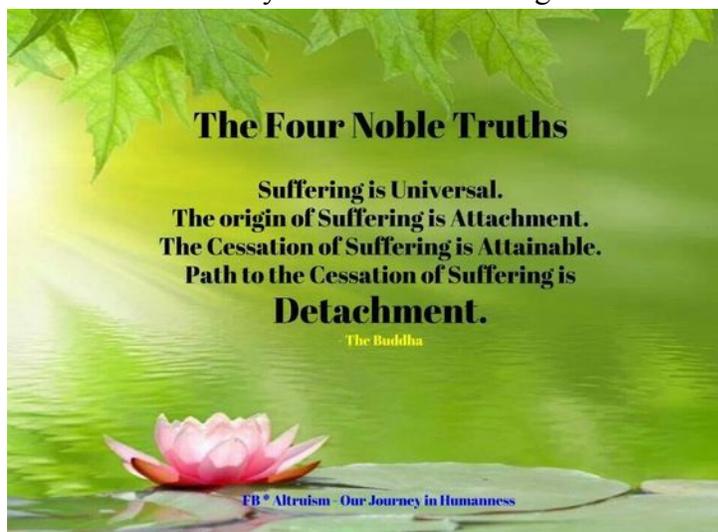
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<sup>6</sup> The "mighty companions" may be the teacher's pupils, but this is not specified. What is clear is that they are on the same basic journey that the teacher is on. The fact that the teacher now has companions means that he is no longer alone on the journey. The fact that they are "mighty" implies that they can lend him strong support. Along these lines, the Text calls our holy relationship partner our "strong companion" (T-20.III.10:4).

In this period, we integrate and absorb all we've learned (6:3) in the first three stages: what things are not truly valuable; that changes are always helpful; that all things, events, encounters, and circumstances are helpful; how to divide things based on their helpfulness; that things are real only to the extent that they are helpful; that sacrifice is impossible; that letting go of valueless things produces lightness of heart.

As we consolidate our lessons, we begin to understand their transfer value," that is, how useful these lessons can become when applied to more and more of our lives (6:4). It isn't just about a specific job, a particular relationship, or material possessions. All these lessons apply to everything! It's mind-blowing (6:5). The lessons we've learned about what is real and what isn't can be our "whole way out" (6:5). Out of what? Out of pain, suffering, disappointment, and lack. Out of every problem imaginable.

When I recall that this is just one form of the universal course, I think of Buddhism's Four Noble Truths that say much the same thing:



The way out is simple: "Give up what you do not want, and keep what you do" (6:6). That is relinquishment, the Fourth Noble Truth. Put like that it does seem "simple" and "obvious," doesn't it (6:7)? We are inclined to respond, "Simple, yes, but not easy." Yet Jesus immediately adds, "And how easy to do!" (6:8) The ease, I see as I write, depends on the first three steps. Once I have learned how to tell apart the valuable from the valueless, it is simple to let go of what I don't want! Non-attachment is simple and easy when I realize I do not want to be attached to things with no value.

That is why I think we need "this period of respite" (6:9). We need a time of relative quiet to let the lessons sink in and to realize how universally they apply. We've come a long way but not as far as we think (6:10). We've climbed a long way up the mountain, but we have not reached the summit. There is something else we need before we continue our journey to absolute trust in the world. We need companions.

When we have fully integrated the profound simplicity of what we've learned, we need to "rest a while" and gather the "mighty companions" who are to go with us (6:12). Stage Four is as far as we can get alone (6:13).

Along these lines, the Text calls our holy relationship partner our “strong companion” (T-20.III.10:4). I see this as a relationship in which there is no leader or follower, but two people teaching one another and learning from one another. That is how I understand the teacher-pupil relationship. I believe the “mighty companions” here refer to multiple holy relationships. Once we have arrived at Stage 4, we have the time and inclination to develop such supportive relationships. I believe we will need the help of such mighty companions to survive the next stage, which is another difficult one. They are a significant part of the heavy reinforcements referred to in 7:9.

## Paragraph 7

7 The next stage is indeed a “period of unsettling.”<sup>2</sup> Now must the teacher of God understand that he did not really know what was valuable and what was valueless.<sup>3</sup> All that he really learned so far was that he did not want the valueless and that he did want the valuable.<sup>4</sup> Yet his own sorting out was meaningless in teaching him the difference.<sup>5</sup> The idea of sacrifice, so central to his own thought system, had made it impossible for him to judge.<sup>6</sup> He thought he had learned willingness, but now he sees that he does not know what the willingness is for.<sup>7</sup> And now he must attain a state that may remain impossible for a long, long time.<sup>8</sup> He must learn to lay all judgment aside and ask only that he be taught what he really wants in every circumstance.<sup>7</sup> Were not each step in this direction so heavily reinforced, it would be hard indeed!

Ironically, the period of settling down is followed by a period of unsettling (7:1)! The breakthroughs and seemingly profound insights acquired in the first four stages, which led to a sense of rest and accomplishment, are now perceived as inadequate. We believed we had learned to tell apart the valuable and the valueless. Now, we have become aware we did not know how! Yes, we learned we only wanted what was valuable, but sorting things out on our own simply did not work (7:2–4). Our belief in and aversion toward sacrifice blocked our way and clouded our judgment (7:5).

We thought we were willing to relinquish, but it has dawned on us that we have no idea why we are relinquishing! We don't know what our willingness is for (7:6). What is the purpose of all this “letting go”?

We've seemingly hit a brick wall! Attaining the next state, Jesus says, “may remain impossible for a long, long time” (7:7). To move on, he says, we “must learn to lay all judgment aside and ask only that [we] be taught what [we] really want in every circumstance” (7:8). As I read this, the difficulty for us, the thing that impedes and delays our progress to the final stage, is giving up all judgment of our own—in effect, giving up self-reliance, abandoning control of our

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<sup>7</sup> “Ask only that he be taught” means *by the Holy Spirit*. The teacher's earlier shortcoming was that he was the one sorting out the valuable from the valueless. Now he remedies that by asking the Holy Spirit to do the sorting out for him. He is finally learning, in other words, to *trust* the Holy Spirit's governance of his life, which is the very goal he is trying to reach as he goes through this succession of different periods of development.

lives to an outside ruler: the Holy Spirit. At least His guidance seems to come from outside; that's how it feels at first.

What this next-to-last stage asks of us is the total transcendence of our egos. To the ego, it feels like death. It's not death, but it feels like it. Look at what we are “giving up” to: “what [we] really want in every circumstance” (7:8). We are “giving up” to our true Self. We are surrendering to our divine nature as a part of the One. Is that difficult for us? Yes. Is it impossible? No, it's inevitable.

First, we had to get past the idea of sacrifice to be capable of judging. Now, we have to lay aside all judgment and ask the Holy Spirit what to do! It will probably take most of us a long, long time. There is good news, however. Each step in that direction is “heavily reinforced” (7:9), enabling us to make that choice at last. As I said while discussing the previous paragraph, our “mighty companions” are a significant portion of those reinforcements. Another large part is the deep peace and sense of safety that comes when we “let go and let God.”

I remind you once again that learning to always ask for and follow the direction of the Holy Spirit was the last lesson that Jesus learned (T-5.II.3:9–11 (FIP), T-5.II.12:1–3 (CE)). But he says that because he learned it, he can teach it to us (T-4.II.7:5 (CE), T-4.I.3:4 (FIP)).

## Paragraph 8

**8** And finally, there is a “period of achievement.”<sup>2</sup> It is here that learning is consolidated. <sup>3</sup> Now what was seen as merely shadows before become solid gains, to be counted on in all “emergencies” as well as tranquil times. <sup>4</sup> Indeed, the tranquility is their result; the outcome of honest learning, consistency of thought, and full transfer. <sup>5</sup> This is the stage of real peace, for here is Heaven's state fully reflected. <sup>6</sup> From here the way to Heaven is open and easy. <sup>7</sup> In fact, it is here.<sup>8</sup> <sup>8</sup> Who would “go” anywhere if peace of mind is already complete? <sup>9</sup> And who would seek to change tranquility for something more desirable? <sup>10</sup> What could be more desirable than this?

So we finally arrive at the “period of achievement” (8:1). We land here when we've fully appropriated that final lesson, having learned to give up all our ego preferences and to follow the Holy Spirit's guidance. One way to tell whether or not we're “hearing” Him is to ask ourselves, “If I do or say this, is it a win-win for everyone involved?” The Text says:

“The miracle that you receive you give. Each one becomes an illustration of the law on which salvation rests: that justice must be done to all, if anyone is to be healed. No one can lose and everyone must benefit”. (T-25.X.9:1–3 (CE), T-25.IX.10:1-3 (FIP))

Our learning is “consolidated” in this final period (8:2). The Collins dictionary defines “consolidated” as “brought together into a single whole” or “having become solid, firm, or coherent.” This period is one of consolidation. That implies an evolving process that brings the many lessons we learned together into a single whole. Our many lessons become one, generalized to apply to everything. Before, some of the benefits of following the Spirit seemed

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<sup>8</sup>. “It is here” seems to mean that *Heaven* is here.

shadowy and ephemeral; now, they have become “solid gains” we can count on, not just in normal times but in seeming emergencies (8:3). We have become consistent in our thinking and consistent in our application of what we have learned.

What's more, Jesus says, the times of tranquility are the result of our more consistent dependence on the Spirit. When the many lessons transfer to all aspects of our lives, we begin to experience “real peace,” a part of the heavy reinforcement (8:4–5). Our lives have become a reflection of Heaven (8:5).

As we settle into this way of life, allowing Heaven's laws to hold in all we do, “the way to Heaven is open and easy” (8:6). No, more than that: Heaven “is here” (8:7). We have complete peace of mind; what else is that but Heaven? Who needs to “go” anywhere when we are already at peace (8:8)? Why change anything; perfect tranquility is the most desirable state we could imagine, and nothing is worth trading for it (8:9). Nothing is more desirable (8:10).

As I said as I began to discuss this section, it describes the entire spiritual journey. I do not personally know anyone (including myself) who has moved through the stages to the final stage of complete peace of mind and tranquility. I've experienced non-tranquility multiple times today! So, don't judge yourself for not being at the spiritual peak. These stages are a map of the journey, just a map. It's helpful to know that all those intervening periods are natural and necessary. As I repeat so often, we need to be “happy learners,” content with healing (T-13.IX.7:1 (CE), T-13.VIII.7.1 (FIP)). All we can lose is time, and time is just an illusion.

### 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 Foundation for Inner Peace (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. 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 smaller size. Other footnotes come from the Complete Edition itself.

### Effects of Differing Editions of the Course

There were significant changes made in the CE, although for the most part there was no alteration in the meaning of the text, and the *Manual for Teachers* 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. When there is a major difference I will indicate it with a footnote.

I have attempted for all references to add a separate FIP reference if it differs from the CE 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 Text 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.*