

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM Text, Chapter 29

The Worship of Idols

Section II

The Coming of the Guest

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 II

This section clearly continues where the last left off. The preceding section ended by talking about the negative reactions we have to the message that our brother is our savior, our bodies are not real, and even to the message that “God is Love”—a negative reaction that stems from our fear that we will “find a loss of self in finding God” (T-29.I.9:5 (FIP), T-29.I.8:8 (CE)). Jesus reminds us that there is no loss when we find God; all that happens is “peace eternal” (T-29.I.9:1 (FIP), T-29.I.8:4 (CE)).

The first paragraph of this section follows directly from that, expanding on the same topic: It points out that our resistance comes because we perceive the way to Heaven as the road to hell (T-29.II.1:4). And yet, the section goes on to say, if we have invited God to enter our lives, He has entered, the miracle has occurred, and we are healed—whether we know it or not.

Paragraph 1

Why would you not perceive it as release from suffering to learn that you are free? ²Why would you not acclaim the truth, instead of looking on it as an enemy? ³Why does an easy path, so clearly marked it is impossible to lose the way, seem thorny, rough, and far too difficult for you to follow? ⁴Is it not because you see it as the road to hell, instead of looking on it as a simple way, without a sacrifice or any loss, to find yourself in Heaven and in God? ⁵Until you realize you give up *nothing*, until you understand there is no loss, you will have some regrets about the way that you have chosen. ⁶And you will not see the many gains your choice has offered you.

• Study Question •

1. (1:1–3) *The answer to these three questions is that you think that all of these things are equated with hell and sacrifice. Why do you think that? (Hint: the answer lies in the previous section.) This section words it a bit differently (1:4).*

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The questions that open the paragraph (1:1-3) may seem rhetorical, but it would serve us well to try to answer them, or at least to think about what they imply. Why *do* we look on truth as our enemy? Why is it that so many of us find the Course to be a path that is “thorny, rough, and far too difficult...to follow” (1:3) when—so Jesus tells us—the Course is really “easy...so clearly marked it is impossible to lose the way” (1:3)? If the Course is truly easy, isn’t it odd that so many of us find it hard? If the way is so clearly marked, why do we so often feel lost? Let’s face it: When Jesus says that the Course is “a simple way...to find yourself in Heaven and in God” (1:4), most of us laugh! We don’t believe him. What factor within us is so powerful that we shake off the words of an enlightened master with such blatant disregard?

The answer is simple but shocking: When we look at the path the Course sets out, it appears to us to be “the road to hell” (1:4). It seems to offer great sacrifice and loss, especially the loss of our “self.” In the Gospels, Jesus confronted this issue quite directly, making it clear that his path will *seem* like we are losing our lives, but we will actually experience the opposite outcome:

“Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses *his life* will preserve it.” (Luke 17:33 NAS95S)

Our misperception of the spiritual path as difficult and hard, demanding sacrifice and loss, will continue to corrode our joy and prevent us from experiencing the riches of God as long as we cling to it. Over and over, we will choose God’s way and then experience regret at having done so (1:5). We will forgive and then be resentful at what we stubbornly choose to perceive as loss. Jesus insists that his way is a way “without a sacrifice or any loss” (1:4), that “you give up nothing...there is no loss” (1:5), and until we come to see it that way, we simply “will not see the many gains [our] choice has offered [us]” (1:6).

Paragraph 2

2 Yet though you do not see them, they are there. ²Their cause has been effected, and they must be present where their cause has entered in. ³You have accepted healing's Cause,¹ and so it must be you are healed. ⁴And being healed, the power to heal must *also* now be yours. ⁵The miracle is not a separate thing that happens suddenly, as an effect without a cause, nor is it in itself a cause. ⁶But where its Cause is *must* it be. ⁷Now is it caused, though not as yet perceived. ⁸And its effects are there, though not yet seen. ⁹Look inward now, and you will not behold a reason for regret, but cause indeed for glad rejoicing and for hope of peace.

• Study Question •

2.(2:8). *This is the answer to your doubts and regrets mentioned in the previous paragraph. How so?*

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He immediately goes on to point out that, although we do not *see* the gains, “they are there” (2:1). The cause of healing has been given, so the effects must be present (2:2). This same principle runs all through the Course: We already have everything; we are always already happy; we are safe and healed and whole *now*. We just do not *see* it yet. But in this specific instance, Jesus is speaking of the benefits we have received *as a result of our choice*. What choice? 2:3 tells us, “You have accepted healing’s cause.” If you recall Chapter 28, it spoke a great deal about cause and effect. In one place it said:

Yet must all healing come about because the mind is recognized as not within the body, and its innocence is quite apart from it, and where all healing is. Where, then, is healing? Only where its cause is given its effects. (T-28.II.2:8-10 (FIP), T-28.II.2:7-9 (CE))

Healing comes about when we realize we are not a body, but a mind, an innocent mind as created by God.

The cause of healing is the only Cause of everything. It has but *one* Effect. (T-28.II.3:3-4)

To accept healing’s cause is to accept that we are not the separate self we have imagined, but we are God’s perfect creation. To give cause its effects means to recognize God as our Cause, and ourselves as forever His effects.

¹ “Cause” in this paragraph probably refers to what two holy relationship partners (like Helen and Bill) accept into their minds when they join. They accept the goal of holiness (T-17.V.3:7), the Holy Spirit’s purpose (T-20.II.5:5), the Atonement (T-22.VIII.5:4), and God (T-18.III.5:5). “Cause” in this sentence (“healing’s Cause”) is capitalized (as it is in Helen’s notes) probably because it refers specifically to God, since the previous chapter, referring to God, says that “The cause of healing is the only Cause of everything” (T-28.II.3:3).

Once we have made that choice, which we might characterize as the choice to transcend the ego, the choice to recognize that we are parts of God’s one creation, God’s “only Son,” a whole host of blessings flood into us. Yet, as long as we, like Lot’s wife in the Bible story, keep looking back to see what we have lost in giving up our self, we do not fully benefit from those blessings.

The blessings *must* be present because their cause is present (2:3); they have been “effected.” “Effected” means “produced, or secured.” If our mind has made that fundamental shift, We *have* the blessing. We have the healing; we have the miracle.

Sentence 3 is a reference to Helen and Bill’s decision to join in search of a better way. This was *their* acceptance of healing’s cause. For each student, however, this acceptance may take different forms. Take these two sentences in for yourself. You have in some form accepted healing’s cause, or you would not be studying the Course. Therefore, you are healed. Since you *have been* healed, you have also the “power to heal” (2:4). That, alas, is one of the gifts we’ve been given that we fail to see if we are still regretting our choice for God.

Much of what this paragraph says I’ve already covered in my comments on Paragraph 1: If a cause is present, its effects must also be present. If we have accepted healing’s cause, we have received the miracle, and the effects of the miracle as well. Jesus urges us to “look inward now” to see these effects within us, “cause indeed for glad rejoicing and for hope of peace” (2:9).

(2:5-9). We can understand these sentences in light of previous discussions. When you accept the goal of truth or holiness into your mind, that purpose enters your mind and heals it at some deep level. Now, all healing and all miracles lie in this place in your mind, waiting to be consciously experienced. Even before they manifest in time they can be looked at deep within one’s mind. One of the best passages for clarifying these sentences comes in “The Immediacy of Salvation” in Chapter 26:

⁷The change of purpose the Holy Spirit brought to you in your relationship has in it all effects that you will see. ⁸They can be looked at *now*.² ⁹Why wait till they unfold in time, and fear they may not come, although already there? (T-26.VIII.5:7–9 (CE), T-26.VIII.6:3–5 (FIP))

² This refers to the Course’s teaching that when the two people join in a common goal, the Holy Spirit enters their relationship and heals it at a deep level. On that level, the two have already given forgiveness to each other and joined. And this underlying reality “can be looked at *now*.” They do not have to wait until it manifests on the surface, in their physical interaction.

Paragraph 3

3 It has been hopeless to attempt to find the hope of peace upon a battleground. ²It has been futile to demand escape from sin and pain of what was made to serve the function of *retaining* sin and pain. ³For pain and sin are one illusion, as are hate and fear, attack and guilt but one. ⁴Where they are causeless, their effects are gone, and love must come wherever they are not. ⁵Why are you not rejoicing? ⁶You are free of pain and sickness, misery and loss, and all effects of hatred and attack. ⁷No more is pain your friend and guilt your god, and you should welcome the effects of love.

• Study Question •

3.(3:3). *Have you ever sought escape from pain through some form of sin? Have you ever sought escape from fear through some kind of hate? Have you ever sought escape from guilt through some type of attack? If all these pairs are one illusion, what does that imply about your attempts?*

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What we have within us now truly gives us hope of peace (2:8), something that has been hopelessly out of reach while we lived on a battleground (3:1), which is what this world is when we see ourselves as bodies. The language here is dramatically over-stated: “It has been *hopeless* to [even] *attempt* to find...hope.” Have you ever felt that kind of despair? You have no peace; you have not even the *hope* of peace; and you have no hope of even coming to hope! That’s someone who is totally bottomed out. And Jesus is saying that while we hold onto the mechanism of battle—the body—that’s where we all are; it is “futile” to seek for peace (3:2). Striving for victory in battle will never bring us peace. It isn’t going to happen. The body was made by the ego in order to *retain sin and pain* (3:2); it will never provide a way to escape from them. As long as we hold onto the concept of sin (which is based on a viewpoint of separation), finding it in others or in ourselves, we are also holding onto pain. Sin and pain are inextricably linked, just as fear comes with hate and guilt with attack (3:3).

Notice, however, that these sentences are stated in the past tense: “It *has* been hopeless,” “It *has* been futile.” No longer! The cause behind these things is gone, and love has come to take their place! (3:4) In accepting the cause of healing (the Oneness of God’s creation) we have excluded the cause of sin and pain (the ego as our creator), and where the cause is gone the effects must be gone as well (3:5–7). “Why are you not rejoicing?” (3:5)

Practice suggestion: *Try restating these lines as a positive affirmation about yourself, inserting your own name where appropriate. For instance, “You, [name], are free of pain and sickness...[name], no more is pain your friend and guilt your god...”. Or try stating them in the first person, replacing “you” with “I,” and end by asking yourself, “Why am I not rejoicing?”*

Paragraph 4

4 Your Guest *has* come.³ ²You asked Him and He came. ³You did not hear Him enter, for you did not wholly welcome Him. ⁴And yet His gifts came with Him. ⁵He has laid them at your feet, and asks you now that you will look on them and take them for your own. ⁶He needs your help in giving them to all who walk apart believing they are separate and alone. ⁷They will be healed when you accept your gifts, because your Guest will welcome everyone whose feet have touched the holy ground whereon you stand, and where His gifts for them are laid.⁴

• Study Question •

4. (4:1) *Who do you think the Guest is?*

5. *Having been told that a divine Guest has already come to you, you may be thinking, “Well, He sure didn’t make His arrival obvious!” Why didn’t you hear Him arrive? Was it because He was secretive, or is there another reason?*

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“Your Guest has come” (4:1). The emphasis is significant, and it stresses the point that this is an accomplished fact, not something still in the future or again in progress. The Guest is with you now, in response to your invitation (4:2). The Text has called us “the host of God” several times earlier, so I believe this Guest is God (although it could be the Holy Spirit; see the answer to question #4). Once again, Jesus is depicting a completed, established fact that we only partially recognize because of our half-hearted acceptance. Even though we “did not wholly welcome Him” (4:3), He heard our request, and He came, bringing “His gifts” with Him (4:4). The gifts lay at our feet, waiting for us to take them and share these gifts of peace and joy with “all who walk apart” (4:5–6).

Notice that He, the Guest, God, “needs your help in giving them” to those who still believe they are “separate and alone” (4:6). This is the Course’s constant theme: we receive gifts from God to share them with others. The miracles pass to the world by way of us. These others are no more separate and alone than we are, but they do not know it, and God needs us to help them wake up to the truth of their union with God and one another.

Indeed, their healing depends on us: “They will be healed when you accept your gifts” (4:7). The mention of the “holy ground whereon you stand” is a direct reference to “For They Have Come” in Chapter 26: “The ground whereon you stand is holy ground because of Them Who, standing there with you, have blessed it with Their innocence and peace” (T-26.IX.2:4). In other words, the ground whereon you stand is holy ground

³. “Guest” in this paragraph and the following one probably refers to the Holy Spirit. It may refer to God, yet on balance the language is more characteristic of the Holy Spirit.

⁴. Exodus 3:5 (RSV): “Then [God] said [to Moses], ‘Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.’”

because of the Presence of your Guest. As we invite others to stand with us on this holy ground, God will welcome them all.

Practice Suggestion: Please read this entire paragraph as applying directly to you. You might want to insert your name at points or change it to read in the first person. You might want to make certain sentences more specific; for instance, specify the gifts brought by the Guest, or name some of those “who walk apart.” Also, visualize the gifts laid at your feet. See the ones who walk apart approaching the “holy ground whereon you stand” and happily discovering that the gifts at your feet are intended for them, too.

Paragraph 5

5 You do not see how much you now can give because of everything you have received. ²Yet He Who entered in but waits for you to come where you invited Him to be. ³There is no other place where He can find His host, nor where His host can meet with Him. ⁴And nowhere else His gifts of peace and joy and all the happiness His presence brings can be obtained. ⁵For they are where He is That brought them with Him, that they might be yours. ⁶You cannot see your Guest, but you can see the gifts He brought, and when you look on them you will believe His presence must be there. ⁷For what you now can do could not be done without the love and grace His presence holds.

• Study Question •

6.(5:2-5). These sentences speak repeatedly about the need to join your Guest at the place where He entered in, so that you can meet with Him and obtain His gifts. Where is this place?

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It is as though we are standing at an altar with a pile of gifts at our feet, given to us to distribute to others, and we are ignoring them. In fact, we’ve left the room, and now the Guest we have invited in is waiting for us to come back and join Him! (5:1–2) This holy place seems to be the “quiet center” deep within our minds (T-18.VII.8:1–5 (FIP,CE)), where we can meet with God.

Early in my life, as a young Christian, I was very impressed by a little booklet called *The Quiet Time*, from Inter-Varsity Press. That booklet, and other things I read, created a picture in my mind. I imagined walking into a still garden, sitting on a bench, and having a conversation with Jesus, much as the Christian hymn portrays it:

*I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses,
And the voice I hear, falling on my ear,
The Son of God discloses.
And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own.
And the joy we share as we tarry there*

None other has ever known.

—C. Austin Miles

I believe that kind of meeting, in the inner quiet place, which you may picture as a beach or a mountain meadow or a library rather than a garden, is what is being asked of us here. It is a call to meditation, a call to a daily practice of spending time alone with God in our minds. This is the *only* place we can encounter God and His gifts (5:3–4).

I love the analytical study of the Course, wringing every ounce of meaning from the words, but when I encounter a phrase like this—“all the happiness His Presence brings”—I am drawn into the realm of emotion, feeling, and what the Hindus call *bhakti yoga*: devotion to the deity, or the love of God. There is a simple song, often sung in many churches, that begins with the words, “Surely the Presence of God is in this place.” It never fails to cause my breath to catch, my eyes to water, and my heart to sing.

“All the happiness His Presence brings.” Do you know that happiness? Can you sense that Presence? Because God *is* with you. *Surely* His Presence is in this place *in you*. That is the message of this section: *He has come*. He is within you, waiting to meet with you in your mind whenever you care to turn to Him.

God Himself is not visible (5:6), but His gifts are. When you look within, you find yourself capable of forgiveness, able to overlook the “sins” of your brothers and sisters, and you *know* that you could not do so without the help of God. So you know that the love and grace of His Presence must be in you (5:6–7).

The thought of 5:6–7 is very similar to statements made in T-12.VII.3:1–2 (FIP, CE):

“The Holy Spirit is invisible, but you can see the results of His Presence, and through them you will learn that He is there. What He enables you to do is clearly not of this world, for miracles violate every law of reality as this world judges it.”

Answer Key

1. You think that God’s Love is fearful and will devour your self.
2. When you chose the way to God, the cause of rejoicing and peace was brought into existence (effected). You already have within you the cause for rejoicing and hope, but you must look within to see it there..
3. They were futile.

4. The Guest appears to be God, although a fair case could be made for the Guest being the Holy Spirit. I say He is God for several reasons. The language of a Guest entering could apply equally well to God or the Holy Spirit. However, the phrase in 4:7, “the holy ground whereon you stand,” is a reference to the section “For They Have Come” (T-26.IX.2:4 and 3:7), where “They” referred to “the face of Christ and memory of God” (T-26.IX.2:2), which suggests that the Guest here is God. Further, we are usually (T-15.III.6:7, for instance) said to be the host (see 5:3) of God, not the Holy Spirit. Sentence 6:1 seems to equate the Guest with “the living God.” And, usually, references to the Holy Spirit say something that specifically applies only to Him, not to God.

5. You did not hear Him because you did not wholly welcome Him, as is demonstrated by your failure to rejoice, your perception of His way as sacrifice, and your lingering regret at having made this choice.

6. This appears to be a place deep in your mind, what is often called the right mind, which is where the Holy Spirit dwells (T-5.I.3:3 (FIP), T-5.II.1:1 (CE)). In the commentary, I’ve already referred to T-18.VII.8 concerning the “quiet center.” Chapter 14 contains a section titled “The Holy Meeting Place,” which says much the same thing:

All this is safe within you, where the Holy Spirit shines. He shines not in division, but in the meeting place where God, united with His Son, speaks to His Son through Him. Communication between what cannot be divided cannot cease. The holy meeting place of the unseparated Father and His Son lies in the Holy Spirit and in you (T-14.VIII.2:10–13).

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.