

# Study Guide and Commentary

## ACIM Text, Chapter 29

### The Worship of Idols

#### Section III

## *The Body's Nothingness*

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 III

This section, “The Body’s Nothingness,” was part of Section II in the FIP edition of the Course. The editor of the CE edition felt it deserved a separate section since the subject is quite different from the preceding five paragraphs. It focuses entirely on the body and its “nothingness.”

#### Paragraph 1

Such is the promise of the living God: His Son have life, and every living thing be part of him, and nothing else have life. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>Confusion follows on confusion here, for on confusion has this world been based, and there is nothing else it rests upon. <sup>4</sup>Its basis does not change, although it seems to be in constant change. <sup>5</sup>But what is that except the state confusion really means?<sup>1</sup> <sup>6</sup>Stability to those who are confused is meaningless, and shift and change become the law on which they predicate their lives.

<sup>1</sup> Confusion is a state in which your mind, being bewildered or unclear, constantly jumps around from one possibility to the next, because it has no fixed certainty. This continual surface change means that the underlying basis for your mental state—confusion—has *not* changed. Jesus says here that the world itself has this same characteristic—“Its basis does not change, although it seems to be in constant change”—because the world is actually based on confusion, the confusion of life and death.

### • Study Question •

1. **(1:3)**. *What a dramatic statement—this world has been built on confusion. What two things have been confused in the foundation of this world?*

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The things promised by the living God (1:1) seem to be identical to the gifts that the Guest gives us (T-29.II.4:1-3; 5:4-7). Note these other promises of God mentioned in the last chapter:

"You are beloved of Me and I of you forever. Be you perfect as Myself, for you can never be apart from Me" (T-28.VI.6:4-5 (FIP), (T-28.VI.6:2-3 (CE)).

"The promise that there is no gap between Himself and what He is..." (T-28.VII.1:7 (FIP), (CE)).

"God's promise that His Son is safe forever in Himself..." (T-28.VII.7:5 (FIP), (CE)).

In these passages and our current sentence, God's promises seem to relate consistently to eternal oneness, life, and perfection.

**(1:2)**. What we have given "life" is undoubtedly the body, which the Course has often said symbolizes separation (T-26.VII.8:9 (FIP), T-26.VII.8:5 (CE)). You may want to say to yourself, "My body symbolizes my wish to be alive apart from life, alive in death, with death perceived as life, and true living [in Heaven] perceived as death" (1:2). We have confused what is dead with what is alive, and have imagined that life can be found apart from God and that joining with God would mean death. And on that confusion, the world has been based (1:3). Notice how Jesus is still addressing our reluctance to let go of our identification with the body and lose ourselves in God.

Though the world seems to be in constant flux and change, this core confusion never changes (1:4). One aspect of confusion leads to another (1:3). The apparent fluctuation of the world is a demonstration of its confusion (1:5); the very definition of the word is "a chaotic or disordered state." Our entire life becomes an attempt to cope with the chaos (1:6) caused by our insane belief that we are bodies.

## Paragraph 2

<sup>2</sup> The body does not change. <sup>2</sup>It represents the larger dream that change is possible. <sup>3</sup>To change is to attain a state unlike the one in which you found yourself before. <sup>4</sup>There is no change in immortality, and Heaven knows it not. <sup>5</sup>Yet here on earth it has a double purpose, for it can be made to teach opposing things, and they reflect the teacher who is teaching them. <sup>6</sup>The body can appear to change with time, with sickness or with health, and with events that seem to alter it. <sup>7</sup>And this but means the mind remains unchanged in its belief of what the *purpose* of the body is.

## • Study Question •

2. How can we reconcile 2:1 with 2:6? Does the body change or not?

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(2:1-3). Now the previous statements about confusion and change are applied to the body. The body may seem to change, but the changes are superficial; its *basis* is unchanged. It continues to manifest the law of change (1:6), the “larger dream” that you can change your initial state (of eternal life with God). The French have a saying: Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose—the more it changes, the more it is the same thing. The body is a perfect example of that.

We dream that change is possible, but “there is no change in immortality” (2:4). As the Course says earlier: “Immortality is a constant state” (T-4.II.11:9 (FIP), T-4.VIII.4:1 (CE)). The outward changes of the body demonstrate its unchanging purpose: to prove that change is possible.

(2:5-7). Although the body does not change fundamentally, it can “appear to change with time” (2:6), and it can do so for two different reasons, based on whether the ego or the Holy Spirit is presenting the reason (2:5). It can go through regular changes in time, which involve sickness, injury, and aging. These “normal” changes mean that the body’s basis is unchanged. In other words, you still regard its purpose as proving that you have changed your original state.

The second kind of change, I believe, is that miracles can change the body. It can be healed. Miracles prove that the mind has recognized its God-given eternal life, which is changeless, and now uses the body to demonstrate this truth. So when Jesus says the body “can be made to teach opposing things” (2:5), he means that it can either support the lie that change is possible or the truth that change is impossible.

## Paragraphs 3 & 4

3     Sickness is a demand the body be a thing that it is not. <sup>2</sup>Its *nothingness* is guarantee that it cannot be sick. <sup>3</sup>In your demand that it be more than this lies the idea of sickness, for it asks that God be *less* than all He really is. <sup>4</sup>What, then, becomes of you, for it is you of whom the sacrifice is asked? <sup>5</sup>For He is told that part of Him belongs to Him no longer. <sup>6</sup>He must sacrifice your self, and in His sacrifice are you made more,<sup>2</sup> as He is lessened by the loss of you. <sup>7</sup>And what is gone from Him becomes your god, protecting you from being part of Him.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> You are apparently “made more” because you have acquired your own separate, independent identity.

<sup>3</sup> “What is gone from Him becomes your god” seems to refer to both “your self” from the previous sentence and to the body from the following sentence: “The body that is asked to be a god...” In other words, your separate self and the body—the symbol of that self—are bound together. Together they become your god, and together they mean that God has apparently had to undergo “the loss of you.”

4 The body that is asked to be a god will be attacked, because its nothingness has not been recognized, and so it seems to be a thing with power in itself. <sup>2</sup>As something, it can be perceived, and thought to feel and act and hold you in its grasp as prisoner to itself. <sup>3</sup>And it can fail to be what you demanded it to be. <sup>4</sup>And you will hate it for its littleness, unmindful that the failure does not lie in that it is not more than it should be, but only in your failure to perceive that it is nothing.<sup>4</sup>  
<sup>5</sup>Yet its nothingness is your salvation, from which you would flee.

• Study Question •

3. Sentence 3:1 says that sickness is a demand that the body be “a thing that it is not.” What is that thing?

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I advise reading paragraphs 3 and 4 together since the reasoning behind some of what Paragraph 3 teaches does not appear until Paragraph 4. Perhaps the best way to unravel the meaning of these paragraphs is to re-order some of the logic since, as written, it states a conclusion and then goes back through its reasons.

The conclusion is that demanding that the body be something rather than nothing produces a sick body (3:3). Here is the logic behind that.

First, asking the body to be real makes it into a physical barrier around your mind, a wall protecting you from God (3:7); it separates you from other aspects of the Sonship and God, which means that you have been lost to God (3:5–6).

Thus, asking the body to be real demands a sacrifice of God (3:3). He must sacrifice you, and be less than He is (3:5–6) while you seem to gain from His loss; you gain (seeming) autonomy and specialness.

And yet, since you are part of God, “it is you of whom the sacrifice is asked” (3:4). The next paragraph presents the reasoning behind this statement.

You have asked the body to be something, and not just something, but “your god,” keeping you separate from the true God (4:1). In your imagination, you have granted enormous power to the body, and that power seems to act independently of your will; the body seems “to feel and act, and hold you in its grasp as prisoner to itself” (4:2). We’ve all, at times, felt like prisoners of our bodies. But, what is most significant here is that “it can fail to be what you demanded that it be” (4:3). Of course, it fails! How can something that is nothing protect you from anything, much less from God? It fails to do that, and as a result, your mind attacks it (4:1, 4; compare with T-28.VI.5:1, “Sickness is anger taken out upon the body”).

The body is nothing. We ask it to be something to separate us from God, which is impossible, and then hate it and attack it when it fails to do that, and that is why we get sick. But it isn’t the body that has failed; it is we who have failed “to perceive that it is nothing” (4:4). If we could genuinely see that the body is nothing, we would be saved (4:5), but we “flee” from that thought, terrified that we will lose our self in accepting the body’s nothingness.

<sup>4</sup> Hating your body for failing to be what you demanded it to be results in sickness, as is implied in the previous paragraph: “Sickness is a demand the body be a thing that it is not.”

“The body represents the gap between the little bit of mind you call your own and all the rest of what is really yours. You hate it, yet you think it is your self, and that, without it, would your self be lost.” (T-28.VI.4:1-2)

**Question for reflection:** *Have you ever hated your body for:*

- *the things it does, for its passions driving it to do bad things?*
- *the things it feels, feelings you do not want to have?*
- *holding you prisoner to its needs, weaknesses, and most of all to its specialness?*

## Paragraph 5

5 As “something” is the body asked to be God’s enemy, replacing what He is with littleness and limit and despair. <sup>2</sup>It is *His* loss you celebrate when you behold the body as a thing you love or look upon it as a thing you hate. <sup>3</sup>For if He be the sum of everything, then what is not in Him does not exist, and His completion is its nothingness. <sup>4</sup>Your savior is not dead, nor does he dwell in what was built as temple unto death. <sup>5</sup>He lives in God, and it is this that makes him savior unto you, and *only* this. <sup>6</sup>His body’s nothingness releases yours from sickness and from death. <sup>7</sup>For what is yours cannot be less nor more than what is his.

### • Study Question •

4. (5:2) *True or false: The answer to our hatred of the body is to love it.*
5. (5:4) *Who is your savior, and what was “built as temple unto death”?*
6. (5:5) *Your savior lives in God, not the body. True or false: The reason your brother is your savior is because he pushes your ego buttons and gives you an opportunity to see your ego and let it go.*

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Here is yet more thought on the body’s relationship to God. The body seems to have replaced God’s life and grandeur with littleness and despair. Using it to separate yourself from God, you have asked it to be God’s enemy (5:1). Whenever we regard the body as having any significance, regardless of whether we love it or hate it, we are celebrating God’s loss (5:2), often unconsciously, but sometimes even consciously. To “make something” of the body is to steal from God. Why? He is “the Sum of everything.” Therefore what is not in God does not exist (5:3). We perceive our bodies as separate from God. Our bodies are, therefore, nothing because there is nothing separate from God.

The focus of the section’s final sentences shifts from our body in general to our brothers and sisters. They are our saviors.

Like me, my sister does not dwell in her body; she lives in God (5:4–5). That is what makes her my savior. We often hear people refer to others as saviors because the other person’s ego allows them to practice forgiveness. There’s a sense in which we can be grateful to others for giving us the opportunity to love (see T-12.I.6:1–2 (FIP), T-12.I.8:2–3 (CE), but when the Course

speaks of others as our saviors, it does so because of their divinity, not because of their egos. Indeed, it says here that it is “this...and only this” that makes them our saviors (5:5).

**(5:6-7).** In these final two sentences, the section’s message about your body’s nothingness gets applied to your brother’s body. Try saying silently to someone, “You are my savior because your body’s nothingness releases my body from sickness and even death (5:6). For if your body is nothing, then mine must be, too, and nothing cannot get sick. And if you still live in God and not the body, then I must live in God as well.” Life and death. Life, which is of the spirit, has been confused with biological life, which is just flesh in motion; the body does not live at all (T-6.V(A).1:4 (FIP), T-6.VII.1:4 (CE)).

### **Answer Key**

1. Life and death. Life, which is of the spirit, has been confused with biological life, which is just flesh in motion; the body does not live at all (T-6.V(A).1:4).s03
2. The body *appears* to change but does not truly change; it is always part of a dream that symbolizes the “larger dream that change is possible.”
3. Sickness is a demand that the body be *something* rather than *nothing* (“...demand that it be more than this” (3:3), where “this” refers to the word “nothingness.”
4. No specific answer expected.
5. False
6. Your brother is your savior. The body was built as temple unto death. Try affirming this about a specific person: “[Name] is my savior. (S)he is not dead nor does (s)he dwell in the body, which is a temple unto death.”
7. False. He is your savior because he lives 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.*