

Commentary

ACIM[®] Manual for Teachers

Introduction

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.

As we begin studying this Manual, pay particular attention to the basic principles this Introduction sets forth. They define the intent behind its writing and describe the basics of what it means by teaching and learning.

Paragraph 1

The role of teaching and learning is actually reversed in the thinking of the world. ²The reversal is characteristic. ³It seems as if the teacher and the learner are separated, the teacher giving something to the learner rather than to himself. ⁴Further, the act of teaching is regarded as a special activity, in which one engages only a relatively small proportion of one's time. ⁵The course, on the other hand, emphasizes that to teach is to learn, so that teacher and learner are the same. ⁶It also emphasizes that teaching is a constant process; it goes on every moment of the day and continues into sleeping thoughts as well.

As the Course often does, it sets out to correct our mistaken understanding of things before going into in-depth teaching. It says that the typical way the world understands teaching and learning is the opposite of the truth (1:1). This reversal is "characteristic" (1:2). The world's thinking is characteristically the opposite of the truth. For example, we think of visible matter as real, and the spiritual world seems either less real or not real at all. We believe we are bodies containing a mind rather than minds projecting the illusion of bodies. Both understandings are the reverse of the truth. All the thinking of the world is like this. The Text called the world's thinking "upside down" (T-18.I.6:4 (CE) and T-6.I.21:1–2 (CE)) for instance).

In what way is our understanding of teaching and learning upside down and confused?
1:3–4 identify three ways:

1. It seems as if the teacher and learner are separated, not the same.
2. It seems as if the teacher gives something to the learner rather than to himself.

3. Teaching seems to be a special activity that occupies "only a relatively small portion of one's time" instead of a constant process.

These points are crucial to our ability to understand the rest of the Manual. If we look at the Manual without clearing these false presuppositions out of our minds, we will misunderstand it entirely. The Manual expands on these ideas in the rest of the Introduction, but it will be helpful, I think, to consider each of those points on our own to get a clear grasp of them.

Teacher and pupil are the same, not separate (1:5). The Course emphasizes that teaching and learning are the same thing; "to teach *is* to learn" (1:5). When you teach, you learn. You are always teaching yourself, which implies that a teacher isn't a special kind of person. We are *all* both teachers and learners. We could also deduce the identity of teacher and learner from the much-emphasized teaching in the Course that we all share our identity as the one Son of God. We are not separate individuals as we seem to be in the world.

The teacher is giving something to himself, not just to a learner who is separate from him. This is quite different from our "normal" view of teaching. It is a theme that often recurs in the Course. "As you teach so shall you learn" (T-5.IV.6:4 (FIP), T-5.V.13:2 (CE)).

"To give is how to recognize you have received. It is the proof that what you have is yours.

You understand that you are healed when you give healing. You accept forgiveness as accomplished in yourself when you forgive. You recognize your brother as yourself, and thus do you perceive that you are whole. There is no miracle you cannot give, for all are given you. Receive them now by opening the storehouse of your mind, where they are laid, and giving them away." (W-159.1:6–2:5)

For instance, some people refer to me as a teacher of *A Course in Miracles* because I have a knack for understanding what the Course says and explaining it so that other people understand it. But that is what the world means by teaching, but it isn't the Course's idea. To Jesus, teaching is not about imparting intellectual understanding or transmitting some kind of divine energy. As we'll see below, teaching demonstrates our belief in the Holy Spirit's thought system. The Text begins with the idea that this is a course in working miracles, which means (in part) expressing love and practicing forgiveness. In that sense, I think the terms "teacher" and "miracle worker" are synonymous.

Think about what Jesus did. Yes, his words were beautiful and helpful, but what he *did* formed the heart of his teaching. He demonstrated the unreality of sickness, the unreality of death, the unreality of separation, and the unreality of sin. Jesus demonstrated union with God.

Teaching is a constant process, not a some-time thing (1:6). Again, this eliminates our typical understanding of teaching and learning. Teaching is not limited to times when a teacher presents a lesson to a pupil or group in a classroom setting. Teaching is *always* happening. Classroom teaching isn't teaching at all, in the sense the Course gives the word. The Course says that it isn't attempting to impart some kind of knowledge to us; its goal is *peace* (T-8.I.1:5–6 (CE)). Teaching *is* happening in a classroom situation because teaching is always happening, but the impartation of information isn't the teaching. The teacher is teaching; so are the pupils. They are teaching by demonstrating their thought systems.

The last few words of 1:6 make it clear that teaching is not what we think it is. It not only "goes on every moment of the day," but is something that "continues into sleeping thoughts as well." You and I are teaching and learning right now in the way the Course understands it. Since teaching continues in sleeping thoughts, we can deduce that it does not even require more than one person's physical presence! (I believe that our thoughts are interacting with other minds even when we sleep.) Teaching must be essentially an activity of the mind!

Paragraph 2

2 To teach is to demonstrate. 2There are only two thought systems, and you demonstrate that you believe one or the other is true all the time. 3From your demonstrations others learn and so do you. 4The question is not whether you will teach, for in that there is no choice. 5The purpose of the course might be said to be to provide you with a means of choosing what you want to teach on the basis of what you want to learn. 6You cannot give to someone else, but only to yourself. 7And this you learn through teaching. 8Teaching is but a call to witnesses to attest to what you believe. 9It is a method of conversion. 10This is not done by words alone. 11Any situation must be to you a chance to teach others what you are and what they are to you. 12No more than that, but also never less.

To teach isn't to instruct. "To teach is to demonstrate" (2:1). We demonstrate the ego's thought system (attack, fear, guilt, death) or the Holy Spirit's thought system (love, giving, unity, life). Those are the only two thought systems that exist, and we demonstrate one or the other all the time (2:2). Whichever thought system we demonstrate, we and those around us learn (2:3). "We teach with how we act, with our demeanor, with the feelings and attitudes we convey, with how we live, with the example we set" (Robert Perry).

Teaching is done in many ways: by formal means, by guidance, and above all by example. If you will to learn, you must will to teach. Teaching is therapy because it means the sharing of ideas, and the awareness that to share them is to strengthen them. (T-5.V.11:1–3 (CE))

You don't have any choice about whether or not to teach, only about *what* to teach (2:4). We are all teachers and all pupils all the time. Given that fact, we could say that the Course's purpose is to give us "a means of choosing what you want to teach on the basis of what you want to learn" (2:5). Do you want to learn, for instance, that you can't "give to someone else, but only to yourself" (2:6)? When you are interacting with what seems to be another person, do you want to learn that, whatever you extend to that apparent other, you are extending it to yourself? If so, *teach* that. *Demonstrate* that. As the Text puts it:

When you meet anyone, remember it is a holy encounter. As you see him, you will see yourself. As you treat him, you will treat yourself. As you think of him, you will think of yourself. Never forget this, for in him you will find yourself or lose sight of yourself. Whenever two Sons of God meet, they are given another chance at salvation. Do not leave anyone without giving salvation to him and receiving it yourself (T-8.II.6:1-7 (CE)).

You learn about love by giving it. You learn oneness by demonstrating it. When you "teach," you simply ask others to back up or give credence to what you believe (2:8).

Teaching, he says, "is a method of conversion" (2:9). Yes. That's right! We are trying to convert everyone—convert them to love. When we demonstrate love, we invite them to bear witness to the truth of love, and when they do, we have taught ourselves because our thoughts are confirmed.

Essentially, he says, what we teach boils down to the answer to two questions: 1. What am I? and 2. What are you to me? (2:11) You never need to teach any more than those two things, but *you should never teach any less!* (2:12). He expands on those two questions in what follows.

Paragraph 3

³ The curriculum that you set up is therefore determined exclusively by what you think you are and what you believe the relationship of others is to you. ² In the formal teaching situation, these questions may be totally unrelated to what you think you are teaching. ³ Yet it is impossible not to use the content of any situation on behalf of what you really teach and therefore learn. ⁴ To this the verbal content of your teaching is quite irrelevant. ⁵ It may coincide with it or it may not. ⁶ It is the teaching underlying what you say that teaches you. ⁷ Teaching but reinforces what you believe about yourself. ⁸ Its fundamental purpose is to diminish self-doubt. ⁹ This does not mean that the self you are trying to protect is real. ¹⁰ But it does mean that the self you think is real is what you teach.

The two factors that determine what you set out to learn ("The curriculum that you set up") are "what you think you are and what you believe the relationship of others is to

you" (3:1). What this boils down to, it seems to me, is one single thing: Am I a being separate and independent from other beings, or are we all one? If I believe in separateness, other beings are competition. If I believe in oneness, they are part of me. As Valerie Kaur, in her book, *See No Stranger*, writes: "We can look upon the face of anyone or anything around us and say—as a moral declaration and a spiritual, cosmological, and biological fact: You are a part of me I do not yet know."

Jesus then contrasts his concept of teaching with "formal teaching" (3:2), which is how we typically think of teaching. In such situations, the two questions he identifies as pivotal to actual teaching "may be totally unrelated to what you think you are teaching."

Perhaps you are formally teaching a class, let's say in math. Or you are teaching a small child how to tie their shoes or training a new employee in their job duties. You *think* you are teaching math, shoe tying, or office tasks. But, underneath your words and outer actions, what you are *really* teaching is who you think you are and what the other person or persons are to you. Your fundamental beliefs about what you are and what others are to you are the meaningful subject matter that you are communicating to the minds of other people *and to yourself*.

Everyone is doing this all of the time, whether in a formal teaching situation or just in casual conversation. Even in sleep. It is "impossible," Jesus says, *not* to teach these concepts of self and other, no matter what the situation may be (3:3). We usually think that our words contain what we are teaching (or should), but words are a small part of what you actually teach and learn (3:4). Oh, sometimes your words may coincide with your actual teaching; most of the time, not (3:5). "It is the teaching underlying what you say that teaches you" (3:6).

Everyone, all the time, is reinforcing what they believe about themselves by their subliminal teaching (3:7). As egos, we are trying to minimize our doubts about ourselves (3:8). In our most lucid moments, some of us teach the truth of our divine, shared Self. Most of the time, we are protecting our egos, vainly trying to bolster our belief in ourselves as separate, innocent, exceptional beings, trying to perpetuate an illusion of ourselves and teaching others they are egos as well (3:9). This self is not who we are. Nevertheless, the self we *think* is real is what we teach (3:10).

Paragraph 4

⁴This is inevitable. ²There is no escape from it. ³How could it be otherwise?
⁴Everyone who follows the world's curriculum—and everyone here does
follow it until he changes his mind—teaches solely to convince himself that
he is what he is not. ⁵Herein is the purpose of the world. ⁶What else, then,
would its curriculum be?

So here we are, all of us teaching ourselves and others that we are egos. Sadly, "this is inevitable. There is no escape from it" (4:1–2). Demonstrating the reality of the ego, Jesus tells us, "is the purpose of the world" (4:5). Given that we set up the world as the perfect classroom for teaching that we are egos, what else could you expect (4:3)? Ego is "the world's curriculum," and everyone in the world follows that curriculum, teaching "solely to convince himself that he is what he is not" (4:4). All the behavior in the world (with rare exceptions) in our relationships, wars, art, social conventions, and government is part of our self-made curriculum to teach ourselves and the world that we are egos and not the Son of God. Given the purpose of the world, "What else...would its curriculum be" (4:5–6)?

Paragraph 5

¹ Into this hopeless and closed learning situation, which teaches nothing but despair and death, God sends His teachers. ² And as they teach His lessons of joy and hope, their learning finally becomes complete. ³ Except for God's teachers there would be no hope of salvation, for the world of sin would be forever "real." ⁴ The self-deceiving must deceive, for they must teach deception. ⁵ And what else is hell?

The way we've set up the world's closed learning curriculum, full of despair and death, it seems hopeless that we could ever learn anything else (5:1). Learning the lie is the whole purpose of the world! How can we ever escape? How can the lie be eradicated? If we look at human history, we are likely to feel despair. If we look at the world as it is today, we likely feel the same thing. The world's wisdom declares that history is doomed to repeat itself, and the facts seem to bear it out.

Yet this is the "mission field" to which God is sending us. Yes, us, you and me. We are to be or to become God's teachers. This is why the Course, echoing Jesus's statement in the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 5:14), declares that we are the light of the world (Lesson 61), that salvation of the world depends upon us (Lesson 70.10:4; Lesson 186). Instead of death and despair, we teach joy and hope, and as we teach, we learn, and finally, our learning becomes complete (5:2). Without those who teach God's lessons, "there would be no hope of salvation." The world of sin would seemingly become everlastingly "real" (5:4). Something must come from outside this closed system to disrupt it. God's Spirit in us and through us has entered the world to wake us all up.

The Course says that everyone who comes to this world comes *intending* to learn its lessons. We enter the world already deceived, and so we must deceive others. We are teaching deception. We are teaching the big lie. A place where everyone is teaching lies has to be hell (5:5). This world needs God's teachers!

Paragraph 6

6 This is a manual for the teachers of God. 2They are not perfect, or they would not be here. 3Yet it is their mission to become perfect here, and so they teach perfection over and over in many, many ways until they have learned it. 4And then they are seen no more, although their thoughts remain a source of strength and truth forever. 5Who are they? 6How are they chosen? 7What do they do? 8How can they work out their own salvation and the salvation of the world? 9This manual attempts to answer these questions.

That is who this Manual is for: the teachers of God (6:1). You and me. How in hell (and that is where we are!) can we possibly become such teachers?

No teacher of God is perfect; not one, "or they would not be here" (6:2). As I said, we come to this world *intending* to learn the ego's lessons. None of us are perfect. The good part of that is that we can stop worrying that we are not good enough. Nobody is. If we were already good enough, we wouldn't be here! However, as God's teachers, our mission is "to become perfect here" (6:3). Jesus said as much when he was here on earth: "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48 ESV). Perfection is indeed the goal, but you don't need to be perfect to be a teacher of God. Teaching perfection "over and over in many, many ways" is how you become perfect; as you teach, you learn (6:3). That may be the whole point of the Manual and, indeed, of the entire Course. God wants miracle workers. He wants teachers of salvation. The purpose of the Course is to assist us in joining God's crusade to correct the ego error. We can become perfect by teaching perfection, by imparting to others that they are perfect creations of God. In doing so, we perfect our acceptance of our own perfection. It isn't hypocritical, therefore, to teach perfection even though I'm imperfect. We shouldn't shirk our mission to teach perfection because we feel less than perfect. We are here to say, "I teach perfection because that is what I aspire to learn."

When a teacher of God actualizes perfection, he leaves the world. They are "seen no more," which makes sense if the whole purpose of being here is to learn the ego lie. Later in the Workbook, Jesus speaks of such perfected teachers:

"There are those who have reached God directly, retaining no trace of worldly limits and remembering their own Identity perfectly. These might be called the Teachers of teachers because, although they are no longer visible, their image can yet be called upon. And they will appear when and where it is helpful for them to do so. To those to whom such appearances would be frightening, they give their ideas" (M-26.2:1-4)

As he says here, the thoughts of these perfected teachers remain in the world as a "source of strength and truth forever" (6:4). Jesus was one such teacher, and there have been others, as there will be many more. You will become one, as shall I. Attaining that perfection is our goal.

So: Who are these teachers of God, he asks rhetorically (6:5). "How are they chosen? What do they do? How can they work out their own salvation and the salvation of the world? (6:6–8)

This Manual, he says, "attempts to answer these questions" (6:9).

Are we ready to enter this school for teachers of God? I think so. I doubt you'd be reading this if you weren't. It isn't an easy school. We have to teach this lesson "over and over, in many, many ways" until we learn it. I find it helpful to realize that this is the typical path of progress. Sometimes I forget. It seems that I've "been this way" so many times before that learning seems hopelessly out of reach. We need to remind ourselves (I certainly do) that the endless repetition and endless variety of the lessons *is normal*. I can relax and let myself be a happy learner, learning by teaching. And so can you.

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 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.