

Commentary

ACIM[®] Manual for Teachers

2. *Who Are Their Pupils?*

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

Summary so far

In the Introduction, we saw that teacher and pupil are the same, not separate, that the teacher is giving something to himself and not just to a person separate from himself, and that teaching is a constant process.

In Chapter 1, we saw the answer to two questions: “Who are God's teachers?” and “How are they chosen?”. Anyone who chooses to do so can be a teacher of God. The sole criterion is that, at some point, they have made a deliberate choice *not* to see another person's interests as separate from their own.

As we begin to study Chapter 2 and its question, “Who are their pupils?”, we need to bear in mind that teacher and pupil are the same and that teachers are always teaching themselves. We can expect these principles to affect the answer as to who the pupils are.

The Manual states a principle that one becomes a teacher by choosing to see the interests of another person as one's own. It also affirms that teacher and pupil are the same and not separate. Behind both of these concepts lies the fact of Oneness, namely, that there is only one Life, a Life we all share with God. Despite that, in what follows, Jesus speaks about pupils and teachers as if they are separate. God assigns certain pupils to you. They start looking for you as soon as you answer your Call. And so on. But the Oneness is there, veiled perhaps, but presupposed. Unless all minds were one, how would these pupils know whom to look for or when to start looking? He speaks in the context of our presumed separateness because it makes a kind of sense to us. Yet, unlearning that separateness is the content of the teaching.

Paragraph 1

Certain pupils have been assigned to each of God's teachers, and they will begin to look for him as soon as he has answered the Call. ²They were chosen for him because the form of the universal curriculum that he will teach is best for them in view of their level of understanding.¹ ³His pupils have actually been waiting for him, for his coming is certain. ⁴Again, it is only a matter of time.² ⁵Once he has chosen to fulfill his role, they are ready to fulfill theirs. ⁶Time waits on his choice, but not whom he will serve. ⁷When he is ready to learn, the opportunities to teach will be provided for him.

Once you choose to see another person's interest as identical to your own and come to realize they *are* your own interests, specific individuals will be drawn to you as their teacher (1:1). They have been assigned to you because the particular form of the universal course you are learning is precisely what they need. It is "best for them in view of their level of understanding" (2:2). It's as if your mind sends out a particular energy of vibration that *resonates* with the minds of certain people. Things start arranging themselves to bring you together as your minds subconsciously communicate with one another. You meet a new person, and maybe you begin talking with them about deeply personal spiritual matters, not even knowing why, and it awakens something in them. Or you say or do something that draws them to seek you out for advice. It just happens as a "normal" part of life.

It is striking to think that some people in this world are just waiting for you to wake up! They need you as their teacher. They are here in the world at this time because your advent as a teacher of God "is certain" (1:3). "Again," Jesus says, "it is only a matter of time" (1:4). The following two paragraphs will expand on what this remark about time means. The main point here is that once you choose to fulfill your role as teacher, the pupils assigned to you *are ready* to fulfill their role as pupils (1:5). They are already ready; the teaching/learning process depends entirely on *when* you choose to hear the Call. When you choose does not affect who you will serve as a teacher; it just affects when that process begins in time (1:6).

The final statement recalls the statement of the Introduction that we are always teaching *ourselves*. It says that teaching opportunities will appear *when we are ready to learn* (1:7).

If any of this seems difficult to grasp, I think it is because it runs counter to our habitual way of thinking. Jesus is explaining something transpiring within the Universal

¹ In other words, the reason a pupil is assigned to a particular teacher is that the path that teacher will teach is the right path for that pupil to learn. Given that this is a manual for teachers of *A Course in Miracles* (M-1.4:1), this means there are certain pupils assigned to each of the teachers of the Course, *because* the Course is the right path for those pupils to learn. See M-16.3:7 (plus footnote 115, referenced at the end of that line) for what qualifies one to be a teacher of this course.

² M-1.2:8-9: "But it is all a matter of time. Everyone will answer in the end."

Mind of the Sonship and trying to make as much sense as possible to fragments of that mind who think they are separate individuals. It reminds me of what Richard Feynman supposedly said about quantum mechanics: "If you think you understand quantum mechanics, you don't understand quantum mechanics." The truth of Oneness will always seem paradoxical to us until we have lost the illusion of separate individual identities.

I want to mention here a disagreement I have with Robert Perry about the whole teacher-pupil relationship. He quotes the definition of "pupil" in Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary: "a person, usually young, who is learning under the close supervision of a teacher at school, a private tutor, or the like." Based on that, Robert declares that pupils of a teacher of God learn under the close supervision of the teacher. To me, this implies a kind of formal relationship, a particular activity when a teacher and pupil get together—which I believe is just what Jesus is *not* talking about. To me, the teaching-learning process is more organic. It occurs in the normal process of life.

Robert Perry interprets what the Manual says in a way opposite to how I see it. It is reflected in the footnotes from the CE that are included in this commentary. In a commentary by Robert, published elsewhere, he says:

In the Manual, rather than everyone being teachers of God, we have a minority who are qualified teachers. These qualified teachers teach something far more specific than general qualities like love and patience. Rather, they teach their particular spiritual path. Though they presumably teach the essence of this path in every interaction, they especially teach it in long-term relationships with their pupils, relationships that are formed solely around the teaching and learning of this path. These teachers are therefore trying to teach—they are teaching on purpose—and they are teaching something they have, at least to some degree, learned. True, they are still learning this path, but they have learned it somewhat or their teaching would be an empty display of hypocrisy.

I will leave it to you to decide which interpretation makes the most sense to you.

Paragraph 2

2 In order to understand the teaching-learning plan of salvation, it is necessary to grasp the concept of time which the course sets forth.³ ²Atonement corrects illusions, not the truth. ³Therefore it corrects what never was. ⁴Further, the plan for this correction was established and completed simultaneously, for the will of God is entirely apart from time. ⁵So is all reality, being of Him. ⁶The instant the idea of separation entered the mind of God's Son, in that same instant was God's Answer given. ⁷In time this happened very long ago. ⁸In reality it never happened at all.

Jesus recognizes that what he has told us up till now is hard to grasp. He says that to understand this “teaching-learning plan of salvation,” which is “a matter of time” in which teacher and pupil come together, we must “grasp the concept of time which the course sets forth” (2:1). This may or may not be encouraging advice! The concept of time in the Course is mind-boggling, as we shall see. It's something that was covered in the Text (T-26.V, “The Little Hindrance”). I suggest you read that section over now, or after studying the remainder of this chapter in the Manual. It greatly expands on the Course's concept of time. I could sum it up by saying that time is an illusion we experience by choice, in which we think we are reliving the separation from God we once imagined, in a “tiny instant” before the dawn of time (T-26.5:1), an imagined separation which was instantly corrected by God. Forgiveness releases us from time.

The discussion here proceeds by saying that “Atonement corrects *illusions, not truth*” (2:2). The primary illusion that is corrected is the illusion of separation. When you see someone else's interests as your own, you have allowed the illusion of your separateness to be dispersed. You realize your oneness. You and the other person have *never* been separate! Likewise, you and I are not separate. If I am teaching you something, it is just a part of you that is awake doing the teaching! The Atonement “corrects what never was” (2:3).

What the Course calls a “tiny, mad idea” of separation entered our mind in the timeless instant and was instantly healed. God's correction occurred entirely apart from time (2:4). God replaced and erased our mistaken choice of separation, all without any passage of time because time didn't exist.

Very casually, in the next sentence, Jesus declares the notion that “all reality, being of Him” (God), is *also* “entirely apart from time” (2:5). See if you can wrap your mind around that! It means that our whole experience of living in time is not real. Is it any wonder then that Jesus appears to feel that it does not matter “how long it takes”?

³ The Course's teaching on the nature of time is found especially in T-26.V, “The Little Hindrance,” and also in Workbook Lessons 158 and 169. The essence of this teaching is that the instant of the separation was also the instant of its correction, because in that instant God created the Holy Spirit. That single instant contained all of the events of time, each event being a reflection of either the original error or God's Correction or some combination of both. The events of the present are merely the reliving of the events contained in that ancient instant, events which in a very real sense are past.

Yes, to us, it seems implausible to say that the mad idea came into our minds and was instantly erased, and that nothing really happened. An illusion was erased, but an illusion by definition isn't real, so something that was not real was removed...which means nothing was removed. Still, living in time certainly *seems* real to us. As Shakespeare wrote, it "creeps on in its petty pace from day to day." We spend *years, decades* trying to work our way out of despair into happiness and peace. It seems the struggle never ends. *Can* we ever understand? When will the seeming paradox be resolved? Only when, at last, we allow God to lead us out of time entirely. I think we can, and do, experience foretastes along the way (holy instants), but the unreality of the illusion of time will never entirely cease—until it does!

Paragraph 3

3 The world of time is the world of illusion. ²What happened long ago seems to be happening now. ³Choices made long since appear to be open; yet to be made. ⁴What has been learned and understood and long ago passed by is looked upon as a new thought, a fresh idea, a different approach. ⁵Because your will is free you can accept what has already happened at any time you choose, and only then will you realize that it was always there. ⁶As the course emphasizes, you are not free to choose the curriculum or even the form in which you will learn it. ⁷You are free, however, to decide when you want to learn it. ⁸And as you accept it, it is already learned.⁵

So, this world, which seems to exist in time, is the world of illusion (3:1). That ancient unholy instant of separation "seems to be happening now": we seem to be separate from one another and God (3:2). Long ago (in terms of time's illusion), we chose to join in oneness with God and what, we thought, were aspects of our mind that were separate from us; yet now, *in time*, it seems as if that choice has not yet been made (3:3).

As you and I study the Course or other spiritual books and listen to teachers who appear to understand more than we do, we delight when some "new thought, a fresh idea, a different approach" present themselves to us. We are thrilled. We think we are at last making some progress. Jesus tells us that all of it is stuff we "learned and understood and long ago passed by" (3:4)! We are just re-living the learning experience. It seems rather frustrating, doesn't it?

⁴ In.1:2-5: "It is a required course. Only the time you take it is voluntary. Free will does not mean that you can establish the curriculum. It means only that you can elect what you want to take at a given time." The above reference implies a clarification of the lines from the Course's Introduction, suggesting that the course that is "required" is the *universal* course, and that this particular form of it—*A Course in Miracles*—is required only for those to whom it is assigned.

⁵ Because we are reliving a journey through time that is already over, everything we learned in that journey, even learning that seems at this point to lie in the future, has already been learned by us. In studying *A Course in Miracles*, then, we are not actually learning something new; we are merely *accepting* learning that we acquired long ago.

It doesn't have to. There is another way to look at it. All these tiring and confusing lessons of life you are trying to learn you have already learned! You have free will, so “you can accept what has already happened at any time you choose” (3:5). When you do so choose, you will “realize that it was always there” (3:5). Your learning is always there. It's there *now*. You can relax! It's okay to let go. You can stop trying so hard. The breakthrough comes as you realize “I need do nothing” (T-22.VII.7:1 (CE)).

The words “As the Course emphasizes” point us back to the Introduction to the Text, where it says:

This is a course in miracles. It is a required course. Only the time you take it is voluntary. Free will does not mean that you can establish the curriculum. It means only that you can elect what you want to take at a given time.

We can accept what has already happened at any time we choose, according to 3:5. The Introduction says we can take “the course” at any time we choose. Apparently, “what has already happened” and taking “the course” are the same thing! We learned and understood the lesson of *A Course in Miracles* long ago in that timeless instant! Moreover, we can recall that ancient learning into full awareness at any time we choose. We are free to decide when we want to learn it, and when we do, “*it is already learned*” (3:6–7). You will learn the Course because it is inevitable; you have already learned it. You can't avoid what has already happened.

Paragraph 4

4 Time really, then, goes backward to an instant so ancient that it is beyond all memory and past even the possibility of remembering. ²Yet because it is an instant that is relived again and again and still again, it seems to be now. ³And thus it is that pupil and teacher seem to come together in the present, finding each other as if they had not met before. ⁴The pupil comes at the right time to the right place. ⁵This is inevitable because he made the right choice in that ancient instant which he now relives. ⁶So has the teacher, too, made an inevitable choice out of an ancient past. ⁷God's will in everything but seems to take time in the working out. ⁸What could delay the power of eternity?

Time seems to progress from the past into the future, but that isn't how it works. Jesus calls this “a trick, a sleight of hand, a vast illusion” (W-158.4:1). Albert Einstein seems to have agreed. He said, “The distinction between the past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion.” Time is nothing more than the track of our return to “an instant so ancient that it is beyond all memory” (4:1). Each moment of time is the recall of something from that ancient instant.

⁶ Like the paragraph before it, the paragraph above rests on the Course's concept of time. The original “ancient instant” of time included, as one of its countless aspects, the teacher and pupil meeting each other. This meeting came about through a right choice that both of them made in that instant. Now, since both are merely reliving that ancient instant, it is “inevitable” that they will *also* relive their meeting.

“Each day, and every minute in each day, and every instant that each minute holds, you but relive that single instant when the time of terror was replaced by love.” (T-26.V.11:4 (CE))

“Such is each seeming life: the interval from birth to death and on to life again, a repetition of an instant gone by long ago which cannot be relived.” (T-26.V.12:1 (CE))

Time goes *backward*, not forward but backward to that ancient instant in which total healing occurred. “The time of terror was replaced by love” (4:1). We don't remember that instant. We *cannot* remember that instant (until we choose to accept it altogether); it is “past even the possibility of remembering” (4:1).

And yet “it seems to be now” that we are slowly coming to accept the truth, gradually awakening. It seems to be now because we are reliving it over and over and over (4:2). This explains what is happening with teachers and pupils. We *seem* “to come together in the present, finding each other as if [we] had not met before” (4:3). *As if!* That strongly implies that we *had* met before.

Have you ever met someone and had a strong feeling that you had met somewhere before, although you can't remember where or when? There are songs about it, for goodness' sake!

*It seems we stood and talked like this before
We looked at each other in the same way then
But I can't remember where or when. (Rodgers & Hart)*

*Longer than
There've been fishes in the ocean
Higher than any bird ever flew
Longer than there've been
Stars up in the heavens
I've been in love with you. (Dan Fogelberg)*

I've had that experience multiple times in my life. Some were profound, almost overwhelming. Others simply came and went, leaving me with a slight, puzzled frown, like the time I went to meet a meditation teacher in a living room meeting at a friend's home. As far as I knew, I'd never seen the teacher before. She looked up at me as I entered. Her face broke into a broad smile, and she said, “So nice to meet you again!” I think she meant it.

Helen Schucman remembered several past lives in which she and Bill Thetford were together in various ways.

Jesus seems to be saying here that what we experience in moments like that is a flashback to that ancient instant in which we all knew one another and loved one another with a passion we can only imagine. That is what happens when the right pupil and the right teacher come together in the right place, seemingly in the present. Really, they've met before. Their meeting “is inevitable because he [he, I believe, being the pupil] made the right choice in that ancient instant which he now relives” (4:5). The following sentence says the same is true of the teacher, who “made an inevitable choice out of an ancient past” (4:6). Isn't it great that he says it is “inevitable” for both of them?

I think we understand now why he says we can't understand how this teacher/pupil thing works until we grasp the Course's concept of time! It all just “*seems* to take time in the working-out” (4:7). Don't let the seeming passage of time concern you. Your awakening and every step leading up to it are inevitable. All of it already happened, long, long ago. Nothing can delay the power of eternity (4:8).

Paragraph 5

5 When pupil and teacher come together, a teaching-learning situation begins.⁷ ²For the teacher is not really the one who does the teaching. ³God's Teacher speaks to any two who join for learning purposes. ⁴The relationship is holy because of that purpose, and God has promised to send His Spirit into any holy relationship. ⁵In the teaching-learning situation, each one learns that giving and receiving are the same. ⁶The demarcations they have drawn between their roles, their minds, their bodies, their needs, their interests, and all the differences they thought separated them from one another fade and grow dim and disappear. ⁷Those who would learn the same course share one interest and one goal.⁸ ⁸And thus he who was the learner becomes a teacher of God himself, for he has made the one decision that gave his teacher to him: He has seen in another person the same interests as his own.⁹

Notice that it is a “teaching-learning situation” which begins when teacher and pupil encounter one another (5:1). It isn't just a *teaching* situation. There is something reciprocal going on: learning. Sentence 2 begins with the word “for” for this reason, meaning “because.” It is a “teaching-learning” situation “*because* the teacher is not really the one who does the teaching” (5:2). The real teacher is God's Teacher, the Holy Spirit, who speaks to both participants (“any two who join for learning purposes”) (5:3). Both parties are learners, and I believe the Holy Spirit teaches through both of them. This reciprocity

⁷ The “teaching-learning situation” is the Manual's term for a *situation* in which a *teacher* is teaching a *learner*, a pupil. An ongoing teaching-learning situation, then, could also be called a teacher-pupil relationship (it is explicitly called a “relationship” in the fourth sentence of this paragraph).

⁸ This means that teacher and pupil have joined in the single goal of learning the same form of the universal course—in this case, *A Course in Miracles*. The teacher learns through teaching and the pupil teaches through learning. By joining in a common goal, the two have formed a holy relationship, which has invited God's Teacher (the Holy Spirit) to enter and to teach them (through the teacher).

⁹ M-1:1-2: “A teacher of God is anyone who chooses to be one. His qualifications consist solely in this: Somehow, somewhere he made a deliberate choice in which he did not see his interests as apart from someone else's.” The idea above is that by joining with his teacher in the goal of learning the same course, the pupil has in fact made this “deliberate choice.” He made a choice in which he saw his interests as not apart from his teacher's. He has thus met the qualification for being a teacher himself.

seems to me to rule out the notion of one person with superior knowledge or experience imparting that to the other, as in the typical understanding of a teacher-pupil relationship.

When two people join together for learning purposes, that is what makes a holy relationship (5:4). A holy relationship is not a *really special* special relationship! It isn't necessarily finding your soul mate. Any time two people who are willing to learn from one another interact, that relationship is holy. It may endure only for a short time; it may be life-long (as we shall see in Chapter 3). Whenever two people come together with that shared intent, the Holy Spirit will be there. You could think of this as the fulfillment of Jesus's promise in the Gospel of Matthew: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." (Matthew 18:20 ESV)

In 5:5, Jesus says that both parties learn that giving and receiving are the same. In 5:6, he points out that "all the differences they thought separated them from one another fade and grow dim and disappear." I fail to see how that could happen in a formal learning situation where a "qualified" person is teaching one less qualified. How could that cause the differences between them to vanish? Notice that he calls out especially "the demarcations they have drawn between their roles." To me, that is likely a reference to the Text, Chapter 31, Section II, "Walking with Christ," where he spends a lot of time attempting to pry us free from the notion of different roles: that some of us are leaders and others are followers. That difference is one of the things that disappear in a holy relationship.

And *every* sort of difference vanishes. Separate minds. Separate bodies. Separate needs. Separate interests. These two people come together around one *shared* interest and one goal (5:7). We could describe that goal in many ways, I think:

- Waking up
- Returning to Oneness, freedom from guilt
- Putting on the mind of Christ

However we describe the goal, the two who join together do not need words to know what draws them together. Each of them has found in the other someone who supports and enables them in that pursuit, what A. W. Tozer, the mystic Christian author, called "The Pursuit of God," in his book of that title. He quotes Psalm 42: "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God" (Psalm 42:1 ESV). This Manual clearly states that it is intended for those pursuing this goal via the Course.

They have found in one another someone with the same interests. The learner becomes a teacher, and the teacher is a learner. It's inevitable. When anyone makes "the one decision" to turn their heart to God, they are irresistibly drawn to anyone who shares that interest with them (5:7–8).

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.