

Commentary

ACIM[®] Manual for Teachers

14. How Will the World End?

15. Is Each One to Be Judged in the End?

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.

14. How Will the World End?

Overview

This chapter deals with the questions we often have about the end of the world. Will there be a Last Judgment? Will sins be punished? Will Earth actually disappear? As usual, the answers given are unexpected, flying in the face of what most people believe or fear. As usual, the change is in our minds, not anything outward. And again as usual, at the center of everything is forgiveness.

Paragraph 1

Can what has no beginning really end? ²The world will end in an illusion, as it began. ³Yet will its ending be in an illusion of mercy. ⁴The illusion of forgiveness—complete, excluding no one, limitless in gentleness—will cover it, hiding all evil, covering all sin, and ending guilt forever. ⁵So ends the world that guilt had made, for now it has no purpose and is gone. ⁶The father of illusions is the belief that they have a purpose; that they serve a need or gratify a want. ⁷Perceived as purposeless, they are no longer seen. ⁸Their uselessness is recognized, and they are gone. ⁹How but in this way are all illusions ended? ¹⁰They have been brought to truth, and truth has seen them not. ¹¹It has merely overlooked the meaningless.

Down through the centuries there has been endless speculation on how and when the world will end. History records that there was widespread anxiety as the year 1000 approached, fearing the end would come. Christian groups of many kinds have predicted the end over and over again. The Seventh Day Adventist Church was founded by a group

that believed the end would arrive with the return of Jesus sometime in 1843-1844. Of course, Jesus didn't show up. Other dates have been chosen by other groups. One I was aware of as a young Christian, "born again" in 1957, was the prediction of the Worldwide Church of God, headed by Herbert W. Armstrong, who published a booklet titled "*1975 in Prophecy*," naming that year as the time of the end. The resurrection of the nation of Israel in 1947 triggered many such speculations about biblical prophecy. In 1970, Hal Lindsey wrote a book called "*The Late, Great Planet Earth*," in which he predicted the onset of the end times in the 1980s, about one generation after the rebirth of Israel. It had huge sales (best-seller nonfiction of the year, according to the NY Times), spawned a TV special viewed by over 17 million people, and was adapted into a 1978 film narrated by Orson Welles. Today, many scientists and environmentalists warn of the possible end of human civilization (if not all life on Earth) due to humanity's interference with nature. So, the question of how the world will end (and when) has been a concern of many for a long, long time.

The Course, as usual, has a unique take on the issue. Based on its premise that the world is an illusion and began in illusion, it reasons that the world can't really have an end because it never had a beginning (1:1). It can only end in an illusion of an ending (1:2). But this is a different kind of illusion: "an illusion of mercy." This is the illusion that corrects all our other illusions.

"Illusion makes illusion. Except one. Forgiveness is illusion that is answer to the rest" (W-pl.198.2:8-10 (FIP)).

Forgiveness is illusion because there is nothing to forgive. There is no sin. While we believe we perceive sin, however, we need the illusion of forgiveness to dispel the illusion of sin. Eventually we will experience *complete* forgiveness, which will include everyone without limit on its extent. Complete forgiveness will cover all sin, hide all evil, and will end guilt forever (1:4). When that occurs it will bring about the end of the world because the world was made by guilt (T-13.I.2:1 (CE), T-13.Int.2:2 (FIP)). You have taught yourself that you, and everyone, are guilty. That self-judgment made the world:

"Such is the world you see: a judgment on yourself, and made by you" (T-20.III.20:6 (FIP), T-20.III.5:5 (FIP)).

When we no longer need the world to "prove" our guilt, the world is simply gone (1:5). The world is an illusion. Illusions exist because we have a belief that they have a purpose, serve a need we imagine, or gratify our desires in some way (1:6). Once we see through the purpose of the world, the illusion of the world disappears (1:7). To bring about the end of the world is up to us. We need to come to the realization that the world serves no purpose, meets no need we have, and we have no desires it can gratify. We must come to see the world as *useless*; then, it will disappear (1:8). We must accept Atonement and realize our guiltlessness. Until we do, we will continue to live in the world because we believe we need it to sustain our illusion of guilt. There is no other way to end any illusion (1:9). We confront the illusion with truth, and in truth we no longer see the illusion. We simply overlook the world as meaningless (1:10).

I want to refer once again to the early lessons in the Workbook, this time lessons that deal with “a meaningless world,” Lessons 11, 12, 13, and 14. In the Manual it is apparent that it is a desirable thing to see the world as meaningless. It means we have forgiven it, and forgiven ourselves. The world is made by guilt; its purpose is to give guilt the appearance of reality. When we see the truth of innocence, the world ceases to have any reason to exist.

In those four Workbook lessons it is not immediately apparent that seeing the world as meaningless is a good thing. We may read that “God did not create a meaningless world,” and think that we are wrong to see the world as meaningless, and ought to see it full of true meaning. Try reading over those lessons with the understanding that comes from this chapter in the Manual, and I think you may gain a new understanding of what they are trying to teach us. The real thought there, I believe, is that we see the world as meaningless, but God did not create a meaningless world. What God did not create does not exist; therefore, the world does not exist.

Paragraph 2

² Until forgiveness is complete, the world does have a purpose. ²It becomes the home in which forgiveness is born, and where it grows and becomes stronger and more all-embracing. ³Here it is nourished, for here it is needed—a gentle Savior, born where sin was made and guilt seems real. ⁴Here is His home, for here there is need of Him indeed.¹ ⁵He brings the ending of the world with Him. ⁶It is His Call God's teachers answer, turning to Him in silence to receive His Word. ⁷The world will end when all things in it have been rightly judged by His Judgment. ⁸The world will end with the benediction of holiness upon it. ⁹When not one thought of sin remains, the world is over. ¹⁰It will not be destroyed nor attacked nor even touched. ¹¹It will merely cease to seem to be.

In one sense, and only in this sense, the world does have a real purpose: teaching us forgiveness. As long as our forgiveness is incomplete we need the world to provide the fodder that lets our forgiveness be born, grow, “and become stronger and more all-embracing” (2:1–2). Notice the implication here of an ongoing process of gradually stronger forgiveness, forgiveness that is extended to more and more people and things until it embraces the world. This growth requires the world because the world needs forgiveness. Forgiveness becomes “a gentle Savior, born where sin was made and guilt seems real” (2:3).

¹ The references to “His,” “Him,” and “He” in this paragraph are very likely to God, since “Call” (2:6), “Word” (2:6), and “Judgment” (2:7) usually refer to God's Call (see M-13.6:6-7), God's Word, and, at least in these sections, God's Judgment (references to God's Judgment are found in Sections 11, 12, 15, 19, and 28). However, it is very unusual for the Course to speak of God in this way, for He is also being equated here with forgiveness, which is the “Savior” (2:3) Whose home is in this world and Who “brings the ending of the world with Him” (2:5)—language more typically associated with the Holy Spirit or Christ.

The following sentences are somewhat confusing because they seem to refer to the abstract concept of forgiveness with personal pronouns, capitalized, that normally refer to God or the Holy Spirit: “His,” “Him,” and “He.” Robert Perry’s footnote to Sentence 4 on this topic is helpful in pointing out the confusion. He offers the opinion that the pronouns refer “very likely to God” because things like “Call” and “Word” are generally associated with God. He does not really explain the fact that, here, they seem to refer to forgiveness, the “gentle Savior.” The way I understand it is that forgiveness is being personified. I think the pronouns refer to the Holy Spirit as the personification of forgiveness. Plug in “forgiveness” in place of the pronouns and it all makes sense. This world is the home of forgiveness because the world needs forgiveness (2:4). It is forgiveness that will bring about the ending of the world (2:5). God’s teachers answer the Call of forgiveness, and turn to it in silence to receive the Word of forgiveness (2:6). The world will end when all things in it have been rightly judged by the Judgment of forgiveness (2:7).

I love 2:8: “The world will end with the benediction of holiness upon it.” What a contrast with the typical Christian view that it will end with a cataclysmic punishment, the Battle of Armageddon, with things like “hail and fire mixed with blood” (Revelation 8:7) or “blood...as high as a horse’s bridle, for 1,600 stadia.” (Revelation 14:20 (ESV))” Instead of an outpouring of the wrath of God, the world ends with a gracious blessing, one of complete forgiveness! Not one thought of sin will remain, and when that occurs, “the world is over” (2:9). Nothing terrible will happen to the world. No great punishment, no attack, no destruction—not even a touch. The world will “merely cease to seem to be” (2:11). It is a mirage, dispelled by the gentle breeze of forgiveness.

Paragraph 3

3 Certainly this seems to be a long, long while away. ²“When not one thought of sin remains” appears to be a long-range goal indeed. ³But time stands still and waits on the goals of God’s teachers. ⁴Not one sin will remain the instant any one of them accepts the Atonement for himself. ⁵It is no easier to forgive one sin than to forgive all of them. ⁶The illusion of orders of difficulty is an obstacle the teacher of God must learn to pass by and leave behind. ⁷One sin perfectly forgiven by one teacher of God can make salvation complete.² ⁸Can you understand this? ⁹No, it is meaningless to anyone here. ¹⁰Yet it is the final lesson in which unity is restored. ¹¹It goes against all the thinking of the world, but so does Heaven.

Jesus then admits that for us that “not one thought of sin remains” seems to be a vastly distant goal (3:1–2). Not one thought of sin remaining? I cannot even imagine what that will be like. Can you? It seems beyond our reach. Then he offers a consoling thought. “Tut time stands still and waits on the goals of God’s teachers” (3:3). At first glance, that does not seem so consoling. It says the timing of the end is *up to us!* The next sentence makes the idea more appealing, because it says it takes *only one of us* to accept

² To “make salvation complete” means to save the entire world. In other words, “One sin perfectly forgiven by one teacher of God” will mean that “not one thought of sin remains” in the whole world, and as a result “the world is over” (2:9).

the Atonement for themselves (3:4). He told us as much back in Chapter 12, particularly in the first two paragraphs. The whole point of that chapter was that it takes only one teacher of God to save the world. In fact, any one of us could bring the end of the world (3:7). It's a corollary of the first principle of miracles, that there is no order of difficulty in miracles, an essential lesson for us (3:6). Once you learn that principle and accept it, you will know that forgiving all the sins of the world is no more difficult than forgiving just one "minor" sin. Once any one of us achieves this, the world will end because all minds are joined, all minds are one.

If you don't understand that, join the crowd. Neither do I. In fact, the Course tells us that we *cannot* understand it. He says flat out that "it is meaningless to anyone here" (3:8–9). So, if you think you understand, you're wrong. In discussing the implications of all minds being one in Lesson 161, he says the same thing:

"Every mind contains all minds, for every mind is one... What can these words seem to be but empty sounds: pretty, perhaps, correct in sentiment, yet fundamentally not understood nor understandable (W-161.4:2,6)"

If it cannot be understood, why talk about it? Because "it is the final lesson in which unity is restored" (3:10). It's incomprehensible because "it goes against all the thinking of the world" (3:11). It is understandable only to one awake in Heaven. But that is precisely why you cannot understand it as long as you are in the world. Once grasped, it will end the world.

Yet, though we cannot understand it yet, there is a purpose in talking about it. We have a part to play in making it understandable, and that is discussed in the next paragraph.

Paragraph 4

4 The world will end when its thought system has been completely reversed. ²Until then, bits and pieces of its thinking will still seem sensible. ³The final lesson which brings the ending of the world cannot be grasped by those not yet prepared to leave the world and go beyond its tiny grasp. ⁴What, then, is the function of the teacher of God in this concluding lesson? ⁵He need merely learn how to approach it; to be willing to go in its direction. ⁶He need merely trust that if God's Voice tells him it is a lesson he can learn, he can learn it. ⁷He does not judge it either as hard or easy. ⁸His Teacher points to it, and he trusts that He will show him how to learn it.

So, does this mean there will be some physical event in which the world ends? No. The world isn't a physical reality. It is the projection of the ego thought system. When that thought system ends, the world will "cease to seem to be" (4:1; 2:10). Any one of us could do it at any time, but the ego thought system has not been "completely reversed" in us. "...bits and pieces of its thinking still seem sensible" to us all (4:2). None of us are

³The "concluding lesson" (also called the "final lesson"—see 3:10 and 4:3) is that "One sin perfectly forgiven by one teacher of God can make salvation complete" (3:7).

quite ready to leave the world entirely behind, so we cannot grasp that final lesson. The world still holds us in its grasp (4:3).

So, again I ask: If you can't understand it because you are enmeshed in the ego thought system, why bring it up? How can we contribute to the goal of reaching this final lesson (4:4)? The answer is very reassuring to me: Just be willing to approach the idea of total forgiveness. Just be willing *to move in that direction* (4:5). Don't despair that your forgiveness is imperfect and incomplete. So is everyone's! If any one of us completely accepted the Atonement, the final lesson would be flash-communicated to all of our minds. We'd suddenly awake. "Oh, my God! Now I get it! Now I totally see it!" And after an instant of seeing a sinless world, a world without any further purpose, it would vanish. This is how Jesus puts it in the tenth "What is" section (after Lesson 310):

"The Final Judgment on the world contains no condemnation. For it sees the world as totally forgiven, without sin and wholly purposeless. Without a cause, and now without a function in Christ's sight, it merely slips away to nothingness. There it was born, and there it ends as well. And all the figures in the dream in which the world began go with it. Bodies now are useless, and will therefore fade away, because the Son of God is limitless" (W-p11.10.2:1-6 (FIP)).

If this final lesson seems out of your reach, realize that the Holy Spirit is telling us we *can* learn it (4:6). If He says we can, we can! We need to trust Him in that. Don't judge it as hard or as easy (4:7). Our Teacher is pointing to that final lesson for us. A teacher of God trusts Him to show us how (4:8).

Paragraph 5

5 The world will end in joy, because it is a place of sorrow. ²When joy has come, the purpose of the world has gone. ³The world will end in peace, because it is a place of war. ⁴When peace has come, what is the purpose of the world? ⁵The world will end in laughter, because it is a place of tears. ⁶Where there is laughter, who can longer weep? ⁷And only complete forgiveness brings all this to bless the world. ⁸In blessing it departs,⁴ for it will not end as it began. ⁹To turn hell into Heaven is the function of God's teachers, for what they teach are lessons in which Heaven is reflected. ¹⁰And now sit down in true humility and realize that all God would have you do, you can do. ¹¹Do not be arrogant and say you cannot learn His Own curriculum. ¹²His Word says otherwise. ¹³His will be done.⁵ ¹⁴It cannot be otherwise. ¹⁵And be you thankful it is so.

What will the end of the world be like? No apocalypse. No cataclysm. No Armageddon. No! This place of sorrow will end in joy! When we are engulfed in joy, the world

⁴."It" refers to the world. In other words, the world will depart in blessing.

⁵.Matthew 6:10 (RSV): "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven." In this context, God's will is that you learn the final lesson ("One sin perfectly forgiven by one teacher of God can make salvation complete" [3:7]), bring forgiveness to the world, and thus bring "the ending of the world" (4:3).

has no more purpose, since its purpose was sorrow. The world of war will end in peace. War was its purpose, so when peace comes, the world has no purpose. The “veil of tears” will end in laughter! Who then needs to weep? So, no more world (5:1–6)..

Joy, peace, laughter...only complete forgiveness can bring these things (5:7). Forgiveness blesses the world, and being blessed, it departs (5:8). The physical universe began, so science tells us, with a Big Bang. But this is the way the world ends; not with a bang, but a blessing, a rejoicing, a laugh.

This is the function of God's teachers—you and me: to turn hell into Heaven (5:9). This world is hell sometimes; indeed, much of the time. But we teach “teach lessons in which Heaven is reflected” (5:9). We bring reflections of Heaven into the world, and as we bring more and more, the world shifts from a hellish place to a heavenly one. Slowly, but it shifts.

Let us then “sit down in true humility,” knowing that if God has called us to do something we can do it (5:10). It is not arrogant to think that we can transform hell into Heaven. It is true humility, no longer pretending that we know better than God. To say we can't do it, we can't learn His lesson, *that* is arrogant (5:11). God's Word says otherwise (5:12). We so often pray, “Thy will be done.” Do we mean it? How could it be otherwise (5:13–14)? Instead of resisting that will, be thankful that it must be done; it cannot be otherwise (5:15).

“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you” (2 Peter 5:6–7).

15. Is Each One to Be Judged in the End?

Paragraph 1

Indeed, yes! ²No one can escape God's Final Judgment. ³Who could flee forever from the truth? ⁴But the Final Judgment will not come until it is no longer associated with fear. ⁵One day each one will welcome it, and on that very day it will be given him. ⁶He will hear his sinlessness proclaimed around and around the world, setting it free as God's Final Judgment on him is received. ⁷This is the Judgment in which salvation lies. ⁸This is the Judgment that will set him free. ⁹This is the Judgment in which all things are freed with him. ¹⁰Time pauses as eternity comes near, and silence lies across the world that everyone may hear this Judgment of the Son of God:

¹¹Holy are you, eternal, free, and whole,
at peace forever in the heart of God.

¹²Where is the world, and where is sorrow now?

I expected the answer to this question to be “No.” “Of course, God does not judge us,” I thought, knowing the Course's insistence on our innocence. I was wrong! Jesus replies with an emphatic, “Indeed, yes!” (1:1) He goes on to say that no one can escape His Final Judgment (1:2)! Nobody can run from the truth forever (1:3).

Sounds a bit scary, doesn't it? Jesus is playing with us here. He deliberately shocks us to get our full attention. These lines, when addressed to minds that still believe to some degree in sin and guilt, could strike terror in our hearts. That's the point, I think. It shocks us into realizing that we still think we are guilty. Jesus quickly staves off our misunderstanding by saying that there will be no Final Judgment "until it is no longer associated with fear" (1:4). In other words, if the idea of God's Final Judgment arouses fear in you, you haven't yet understood it. You are still harboring a belief in sin and guilt. Fear will always be your response until you realize that the judgment Jesus is speaking of here is not one of punishment, but of approbation, innocence, praise, and approval. Moreover, the Final Judgment isn't possible until our forgiveness is complete, as we've seen in the previous chapter.

So *yes*, everyone will be judged in the end. When we are ready to welcome that Final Judgment (and all of us will be) it will be given to us (1:5). And not only to *us*; it will be proclaimed "around and around the world," as if one time around the world is not sufficient to celebrate the great event (1:6)! The proclamation of our innocence will set the entire world free.⁶ This Judgment does not punish; it saves us (1:7). It does not imprison us; it sets us free, and "all things" with us (1:8–9). As Paul suggests (see footnote 6), "the creative universe is waiting with eager expectation for God's sons to be revealed," time pauses, silence lies across the world as everyone and everything waits to hear this glorious, delightfully amazing Judgment (1:10). The content of the Final Judgment follows.

**"Holy are you, eternal, free, and whole, at peace forever in the heart of God"
(1:11).**

Imagine how it will feel to hear these words spoken to *you* by God Himself! God declares you holy. He says you are free from all the luggage of the past you've been dragging around. You are whole, not one scar, nothing missing from your being. And God tells you that you are at peace forever in His heart! Hearing that, you will realize that the world has disappeared along with your need of it, and sorrow has ceased to be even possible (1:12). You are not alone in hearing this. The whole world hears it, and everyone realizes they share it with you. Again, this echoes Paul's words: "the universe itself is to

⁶ In Paul's Epistle to the Romans in the Bible, he speaks in the same way of the liberation of the world when we are all joined in the Sonship at the Final Judgment. He also states that we now eagerly wait for this event, yet with patience.

"For I reckon that the sufferings we now endure bear no comparison with the glory, as yet unrevealed, which is in store for us. The created universe is waiting with eager expectation for God's sons to be revealed. It was made subject to frustration, not of its own choice but by the will of him who subjected it, yet with the hope that the universe itself is to be freed from the shackles of mortality and is to enter upon the glorious liberty of the children of God. Up to the present, as we know, the whole created universe in all its parts groans as if in the pangs of childbirth. What is more, we also, to whom the Spirit is given as the firstfruits of the harvest to come, are groaning inwardly while we look forward eagerly to our adoption, our liberation from mortality. It was with this hope that we were saved. Now to see something is no longer to hope: why hope for what is already seen? But if we hope for something we do not yet see, then we look forward to it eagerly and with patience." (Romans 8:18–25)

be freed from the shackles of mortality and is to enter upon the glorious liberty of the children of God.” All this, because you have welcomed God’s Judgment without fear.

Paragraph 2

2 Is this your judgment on yourself, teacher of God? 2Do you believe that this is wholly true? 3No—not yet, not yet. 4But this is still your goal; why you are here. 5It is your function to prepare yourself to hear this Judgment and to recognize that it is true. 6One instant of complete belief in this and you will go beyond belief to certainty. 7One instant out of time can bring time’s end. 8Judge not, for you but judge yourself and thus delay this Final Judgment. 9What is your judgment on the world, O teacher of God? 10Have you yet learned to stand aside and hear the Voice of Judgment in yourself? 11Or do you still attempt to take His role from Him? 12Learn to be quiet, for His Voice is heard in stillness. 13And His Judgment comes to all who stand aside in quiet listening and wait for Him.

“Do you judge yourself this way?” Jesus asks us (2:1). Maybe partly, but “Do you believe that this is wholly true?” (2:2). Of course not, not yet (2:3). Not *yet*, but you will. Coming to this grand conclusion is why you are here. It is your goal (2:4):

“Forget not that the healing of God’s Son is all the world is for. That is the only purpose the Holy Spirit sees in it, and thus the only one it has. Until you see the healing of the Son as all you wish to be accomplished by the world, by time, and all appearances, you will not know the Father or yourself.” (T-24.VI.4:1–3 (CE), T-24.VI.4:1-3 (FIP))

Our entire purpose in this world is to prepare ourselves to hear God’s Judgment without fear, and to know that it is true (2:5). Our aim is to affirm with God, “I am the holy Son of God Himself” (W-191), and to believe with all our being that it is so. When the last vestige of doubt or disbelief is gone even for an instant, in that *one instant* certainty will be born, and mere belief will be left behind (2:6). Time will end, because in that one instant you have stepped out of time into the realization of the Truth of eternity (2:7).

Once again our spiritual growth is tied to leaving judgment behind. When you or I judge, we inevitably do it so as to find fault, either with ourselves or someone else who is really a reflection of us, a part of us seen as separate. When we judge in this way, we delay God’s Final Judgment (2:8). The footnote in the CE to 2:8 points out that the Course says that when you judge others, you cannot avoid judging yourself.

We’ve looked at God’s judgment of the world; what is *your* judgment (2:9). Have you begun to learn how to ignore your ego’s judgment and accept God’s judgment in its place (2:10)? The divine judgment is in your mind, if you will be still and listen (2:12). If you

⁷Matthew 7:1 (KJV): “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” The reinterpretation implied in the above allusion is essentially the same as that found in T-3.X.1:4: “When the Bible says, ‘Judge not, that ye be not judged,’ it merely means that if you judge the reality of others at all, you will be unable to avoid judging your own.”

are still relying on your own judgment you are continuing to “attempt to take His role from Him” (2:11). If we are willing to “stand aside in quiet listening,” waiting for His Voice to speak, His Judgment will come to us (2:13).

This takes practice, something the Workbook gives us when we try to follow its instructions to the letter. Far too often, we read the lesson of the day as a kind of inspirational uplift in the morning and then forget about it. That's not “doing” the Workbook. It does us no more good spiritually than reading about physical exercise does for our bodies. You have to really do the exercises.

But the Workbook isn't life; it's just practice. We need to be still and listen in meditation, true, but that is supposed to help us be still and listen all during the day, in every situation. Lesson 284 in the Workbook spells it out in what I call “The process of changing thoughts.” I wrote two articles, one based on Lesson 284, one on Review 1 of the Workbook, which I will attach as Appendices to this commentary. Here is a bullet-point summary of the steps:

1. Listening just to the ego; thinking peace depends on outer conditions.
2. Repeating the words of truth; engaging in structured meditation, creating periods of peace at specific times in a dedicated space, in quiet, with eyes closed.
3. Increasing repetition of the truth; meditating at many times during the day, finding peace without need for any special setting.
4. Accepting the truth with reservations; starting to bring peace with us into our stressful life situations.
5. Increasingly serious consideration of the truth; recognizing peace as part of us and not based on outward conditions, spreading peace around us.
6. Full acceptance of the truth; peace now seen everywhere.

The idea is that at first we need to manufacture peace, so to speak: get alone, do deep breathing, close our eyes and quiet our minds. As our acceptance of God's Word increases, we have less and less need for any outward props to find peace, gradually realizing we *are* the peace and can bring it with us into every situation. Finally, we see the real world We see peace everywhere.

Paragraph 3

3 You who are sometimes sad and sometimes angry, who sometimes feel your just due is not given you and your best efforts meet with lack of appreciation and even with contempt—give up these foolish thoughts.
²They are too small and meaningless to occupy your holy mind an instant longer. ³God's Judgment waits for you, to set you free. ⁴What can the world hold out to you, regardless of your judgments on its gifts, that you would rather have? ⁵You will be judged, and judged in fairness and in honesty. ⁶There is no deceit in God. ⁷His promises are sure. ⁸Only remember that. ⁹His promises have guaranteed His Judgment, and His alone, will be accepted in the end. ¹⁰It is your function to make that end be soon. ¹¹It is your function to hold His Judgment in your heart and offer it to all the world to keep it safe.⁸

This final paragraph always delights me in the way it starts. It's like Jesus slapping us "upside the head," as the saying goes, to wake us up. It starts out sounding so sympathetic and understanding. We think, "Yes, Jesus; I do sometimes feel sad and sometimes angry. And not getting my just due, not being appreciated for my best efforts, yeah! I sure feel that way sometimes." Then come the slap: he says, "Give up these foolish thoughts!" (3:1). He clearly means to shock us. It's meant to wake us up.

It isn't that we are so dumb or stupid to think this way. He says in effect, "You are better than this." These thoughts are "too small and meaningless to occupy your holy mind an instant longer" (3:2). You are capable of much grander and meaningful thinking if you would just be still and listen to the Truth. The highest thought of all, God's Judgment, is just waiting in your mind for you to notice it and allow it to set you free (3:3). No one with any sense would choose the world's gifts over this (3:4).

So, yes, you will be judged in the end "in fairness and in honesty," concluding that you are holy, eternal, free, and whole (3:5; 1:11). God promises it is so, and He does not engage in fraud (3:6). He means what He says; when He makes a promise, you can count on it (3:7). It's sad that we need to be reminded of this over and over, but face it, we *do* mistrust God and doubt His Word. So Jesus has to urge us to "remember that," remember that God's promises are sure (3:8). And he says it yet again: "His promises have guaranteed His Judgment, and His alone, will be accepted in the end" (3:9). No matter how often you may feel guilty, imperfect, and very much less than holy, God's Judgment remains unshaken. In the end, that's all that matters.

Our job as God's teachers is to hasten that end, to make it be soon. We have it in our power to do that! How? By constantly reminding ourselves of God's Judgment, holding it in our hearts, and offering it to all the world. As the Course so often puts it, accepting Atonement for ourselves and offering forgiveness to all the world. That is our function.

⁸ "It" refers to His Judgment. Your function, then, is to hold His Judgment in your heart and offer His Judgment to all the world, in order to keep His Judgment safe (safely held in your heart).

Reading over Lesson 62 would be appropriate here:

Forgiveness is my function as the light of the world.

It is your forgiveness that will bring the world of darkness to the light. ²It is your forgiveness that lets you recognize the light in which you see. ³Forgiveness is the demonstration that you are the light of the world. ⁴Through your forgiveness does the truth about yourself return to your memory. ⁵Therefore in your forgiveness lies your salvation.

2 Illusions about yourself and the world are one. ²That is why all forgiveness is a gift to yourself. ³Your goal is to find out who you are, having denied your identity by attacking creation and its Creator. ⁴Now you are learning how to remember the truth. ⁵For this, attack must be replaced by forgiveness, so that thoughts of life may replace thoughts of death.

3 Remember that in every attack you call upon your own weakness, while each time you forgive you call upon the strength of Christ in you.⁹ ²Do you not then begin to understand what forgiveness will do for you? ³It will remove all sense of weakness, strain, and fatigue from your mind. ⁴It will remove all fear and guilt and pain. ⁵It will restore the invulnerability and power God gave His Son to your awareness.

4 Let us be glad to begin and end this day by practicing today's idea, and to use it as frequently as possible throughout. ²It will help to make the day as happy for you as God wants it to be. ³And it will help those around you, as well as those who seem to be far away in space and time, to share this happiness with you.

5 As often as you can, closing your eyes if possible, say to yourself:

²Forgiveness is my function as the light of the world.

³I would fulfill my function, that I may be happy.

⁴Then devote a minute or two to considering your function, and the happiness and release it will bring you.

6 Let related thoughts come freely, for your heart will recognize these words, and in your mind is the awareness that they are true. ²Should your attention wander, repeat the idea and add:

³I would remember this because I want to be happy.

⁹ T-31.IX.2:3: "You always choose between *your* weakness and the strength of Christ in you."

Appendices

THE PROCESS OF CHANGING THOUGHTS

Frequent repetition of an idea is necessary to our learning that idea, particularly if the idea is directly contrary to something we have previously accepted as true. Since the thought system of the Holy Spirit is diametrically opposite to the ego's thought system--which all of us have accepted, as is demonstrated by our presence in this world of separation--frequent repetition of the ideas of the Course is basic to our learning the Course.

All through the Text and Workbook, the same ideas are repeated and restated, over and over. In the lessons of the Workbook we are urged to repeat the idea for the day every hour, and in Part I each idea is reviewed so that we spend two days with it, at the least. Jesus recognizes that replacing the ego's thoughts with God's thoughts is a slow, gradual process, and there is no guilt in recognizing that while I may conceptually understand some idea from the Course (such as "Loss is not loss when properly perceived") I am still far from total acceptance of it. If I recognize my imperfect acceptance of the ideas of the Course, continued repetition of the idea and continued application of it in varied situations is the prescribed remedy.

Five Stages in the Process of Thought Change

Lesson 284 in the Workbook speaks directly of this process by which our thoughts are changed. Its title is, "I can elect to change all thoughts that hurt." This is how it describes the process of thought change:

This is the truth

at first to be but said

and then repeated many times;

and next to be accepted as but partly true, with many reservations.

Then to be considered seriously more and more,

and finally accepted as the truth.

There are clearly five stages in the process of thought change. Preceding all these stages is a state in which we believe the exact opposite, or have no opinion on the subject. For most of us, this Zero State is our condition when we first begin to read the Course.

Take, for instance, the simple statement: "Loss is not loss when properly perceived." Most of us open the Course firmly convinced that loss is loss, and it is very real; our

belief in the reality of loss is unquestioned. In the Course we encounter very clear statements that tell us we are wrong, that loss does not really exist except as a mistaken belief in our minds. In working with that idea, we will slowly move through these five stages of thought change.

1. Verbal Belief - "at first to be but said"

Change of thought begins with what is really no more than lip service to an idea. At this beginning stage we are really saying no more than, "I think this idea is true and I would like to believe it." With many ideas in the Course, the Verbal Belief stage is even less than that: it is coming to the place of saying, "This <may> be true and I am willing to believe it." If we are honest with ourselves we will realize that with many of the Course's ideas, we have progressed no farther than this. With some of the ideas of the Course, such as the teaching that God did not create the world, it took me nearly three years to even reach this stage of being willing to consider the idea as true.

2. Mental Belief - "and then repeated many times"

Having decided to admit the new idea into our thought system (Stage 1) does not do much; it isn't any more than cracking open the door to let it in. The next stage is where frequent repetition comes in. We repeat the idea over and over, perhaps aloud, perhaps silently. We buy cassette tapes of readings from the Course and listen to them over and over. We actually do the workbook lessons. (I am convinced that the reason most of us "fail" in our practice of the workbook lessons, "forgetting" to do the frequent repetitions, is that in truth we have not even reached Stage 1 with the idea in question; we are not willing to let it in.) We read the Text over and over. During this stage we still don't actually believe the idea; we are trying to convince our minds it is true. With most of the ideas of the Course, most students are still working in this Second Stage. I am sure that is true of myself.

3. Partial Belief - "next to be accepted as but partly true, with many reservations"

The frequent repetition of the idea brings us into situations where we find specific experiences that validate the truth of the idea for us. We have a holy instant, or a moment of forgiveness in one relationship, and we recognize the truth of something the Course has been telling us. This is the "Aha!" experience, the realization of "Now I know what the Course means by this!" Perhaps we experience a shift in perception with one person and see their innocence, see that there was no sin and therefore nothing to forgive. We now can see the truth of the Course in this situation. But we still have difficulty applying it to someone who deeply abused us, or to someone like Hitler, or to mass murderers. We are still perceiving orders of difficulty in miracles. We accept the idea but "with many reservations." Some of us, with some of the ideas of the Course, have reached Stage 3.

4. Increasing Belief - "Then to be considered seriously more and more"

Stage 4 is what the Course refers to as generalization. Once we have seen the truth of one of the Course's ideas in one situation, we begin to experience it more and more, in

situation after situation. Here, in this stage, is where serious Course students will spend most of their lives. If Stage 1 was mental acceptance and Stage 2 was mental repetition of the idea, then Stage 3 is experiential acceptance and Stage 4 is experiential repetition of the idea. We realize that if the idea was proved to be true in this situation, then perhaps we can apply it to that situation, and another, and another. Over and over, again and again, we must validate the idea in one experience after another.

Even in this late stage, we have not arrived at total acceptance of what the Course is saying. I believe that is what Helen Schucman meant in her frequently quoted statement to the effect that she knew the Course was true, but she didn't believe it. She was perfectly aware that she still had many reservations, and was in the process of considering the ideas seriously, more and more, but she had not yet arrived at final acceptance. We find her statement a little shocking or disturbing only because Helen was more honest than the rest of us. Very few have moved beyond this stage.

5. Total Belief - "finally accepted as the truth"

This final stage is our goal in this world; it is the end of the journey. Here, the idea which started out as a mental concept, won a fuller place in our minds through frequent repetition, began to be applied in experience and gradually grew to encompass more and more of our lives, has finally been completely generalized. We now see the idea as completely true, applying to everything equally. There is no more order of difficulty in miracles, and there are no more reservations and no more exceptions. As I said above, few, if any, have reached this stage with more than a few of the Course's concepts.

It is like learning a foreign language. At the start the sounds of the foreign language are incomprehensible (we all have probably had that experience with the Course!). You choose to take in the language. You apply yourself through frequent repetition. You begin to be comfortable with the language in limited situations, gradually extending your experience with the new language to more and more aspects of your life until one day, if you are diligent, what you take, takes you. The language becomes your own; it becomes part of you and you part of it. It now seems to come naturally to you, without effort. But it took a great deal of effort to reach the state of effortlessness.

Learning to play a musical instrument proceeds through exactly the same stages; struggling with the strings of a guitar, feeling unnatural and uncomfortable; learning chord after chord, song after song, playing scales, repeating things over and over and over. Then, one day, you find that you don't even have to think about it; it just happens. What you take, takes you.

This stage is the final goal, the end result. If you expect simply to leap into effortlessness without any effort, you will never get there. With the ideas of the Course, we are in the learning process, somewhere in those first four stages. That is the purpose of our being in the world--learning, healing, changing our thoughts.

Being a Happy Learner

The Course advises us, "Be you content with healing" (T-13.VIII.7.1). While we are in the world, we are healing, learning, going through these stages with one aspect of truth

after another. When learning is over there will be no more need to be here, so we should expect no more than this learning process as long as we stay here. We need not be guilty because we have not yet arrived at the goal.

In “The Happy Learner” (T-14.II) and the section that follows, Jesus offers us this advice about the process we are in:

1. Learn to be a happy learner.

“The happy learner cannot feel guilty about learning. This is so essential to learning that it should never be forgotten” (T-14.III.1:1-2).

2. “Learning is living here” (T-14.III.3:2). And living here is learning. That is all that living here is: being in the process and not being guilty about it. “Be you content with healing.”

REVIEW I INTRODUCTION

In Review I, the third and fourth paragraphs present a theory of practice that is useful in understanding why the Workbook is structured as it is. In fact, the paragraphs imply a lot about the importance of structure itself, which changes as we progress in our practice. Five degrees of structure are indicated here, moving from highly structured to almost none.

1. Highly Structured with Formal Setting

In the beginning of our study, the Course recommends quite highly structured practice, with attention to certain forms. The earlier lessons in the Workbook all go to great lengths spelling out the specific details concerning how the lesson should be practiced. In this review, for instance, we are told that we do not need to review the comments after each of the five daily thoughts in any great detail (3:1). Rather, we are to focus on the central point and think about that, allowing related ideas to come to us as we have been doing in recent lessons.

In addition we are told that “the exercises should be done with your eyes closed and when you are alone in a quiet place, if possible” (3:3). This is what I mean when I say it pays attention to form. It deals with *where* we should be (in a quiet place) and specifically *what* we should do with our eyes. It adds that this kind of instruction is “emphasized for practice periods at your stage of learning” (4:1), which is obviously understood to be the beginning stage.

The idea behind this sort of instruction seems to be that, at the beginning stage, we need structure, and we need physical solitude and quietness. We need to close our eyes to shut out distractions because our minds have not been sufficiently trained to ignore the distractions without doing so. We are training ourselves to have inner peace, and at the beginning it is helpful to encourage that state of mind by arranging our environment.

2. No Special Setting

As we advance, it will become necessary to give up the formal setting and structure, so that we can “learn to require no special settings in which to apply what you have learned” (4:2). Initially, to find peace of mind, we need a quiet place, we need to close our eyes. But as we go on, the intent is that we begin to apply our learning in situations that appear to be upsetting. After all, when is peace most needed? Obviously, it is needed when something happens that seems to upset us (4:3).

We have begun to advance when we learn to generalize, when we are able to take what we have learned in the “laboratory” of quiet practice and apply it in distressing situations. This will

happen almost without conscious volition. Suddenly we will notice that things that used to instantly upset us no longer do so. Or we will find ourselves reacting with love instead of anger.

The Workbook practice encourages this “spread” of the lessons into our lives by asking us to remember the thought for the day whenever something happens that upsets us. This takes the lesson out of the laboratory and into our lives. This kind of expanded practice, or “response to temptation,” as it is called, is vital if the Course is going to make a noticeable difference in our lives.

3. Bringing Peace with Us

As our practice of the first sort continues, and as we begin to respond to upsets by choosing to experience peace instead of the upset, we begin to move into a third stage: we start to bring peace with us into every situation (4:4). In the second stage we are reacting to a situation and choosing peace; here, we are proactively bringing peace with us into distress and turmoil, healing the situations we find. Our quiet practice has established a certain level of peace within our minds, and now we bring the quiet with us as we move through our days. “This is not done by avoiding [distress and turmoil] and seeking a haven of isolation for yourself” (4:5).

At this level of development we have ended any attempt at monastic isolation and we are reaching out into the world, bringing healing to it. We may still withdraw periodically to “recharge,” as it were, but we are no longer fearful of distress and turmoil; we even begin to actively seek out situations in which our healed mind can bring healing to others.

4. Recognizing Peace Is Part of Us

At a higher level still, we begin to realize that peace is not some quality or condition that comes and goes; rather, it is an inherent part of our being (5:1). Here we have realized that peace is not conditional. It does not depend on conditions. It is inherent in our nature; it is what we are. We have become identified with peace so that, simply by being there, we bring peace into every situation in which we find ourselves. We no longer need to get alone or shut our eyes to feel peaceful; we *are* the peace. Conditions around us do not affect our peace; instead, our peace affects the conditions.

5. Peace Seen Everywhere

At the highest level, we will realize that our physical presence is not required to affect any situation. We realize that “there is no limit to where you are, so that your peace is everywhere, as you are” (5:2). This is the state of mind of the advanced teacher of God, or what, in some circles, might be called a realized master. This state of mind will not long abide in a body, because it has transcended bodily limitations.

This broad overview of where the Course is taking us can be very encouraging as we struggle with the elementary level. Look at the scope of the Course's program. Starting with a level at which our peace is so vulnerable that we must close our eyes and shut out the world, it moves to transcend the world entirely. We may long to be at the highest level right away; it doesn't work that way. You can't skip steps, as Ken Wapnick often points out. Don't get caught in the trap of thinking, “I ought to be able to experience peace anywhere,” and because of that refuse yourself the support of being alone, quiet, and shutting your eyes. At the beginning those props are necessary and even, in the Course's curriculum, *emphasized*. Don't think you are being untrue to your highest understanding by setting up a formal structure for yourself, perhaps setting an alarm to remember your practice times, writing the lesson on cards and carrying it around, or asking a friend to remind you and check up on you. At the beginning, almost anything that helps you remember is useful.

The structure won't last, and should not last. But you need the structure at the start in order to get to where being unstructured will work for you. Try to skip immediately to unstructured practice and you'll end up not practicing at all. Use structure, but don't get attached to it. Don't make an idol of it. The structure is like training wheels on a bicycle: necessary and useful as you are learning, but to be discarded as soon as you have learned to keep upright on your own.

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.