

# Commentary

## ACIM® Manual for Teachers

### 26. *Can God Be Reached Directly?*

### 27. *What Is Death?*

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

This section deals with what might be called mystical experiences that consist of an experience of direct union with God, particularly a *permanent* union. The issue is, is such an experience something we should seek in this world?

## Paragraph 1

God can indeed be reached directly, for there is no distance between Him and His Son. <sup>2</sup>His awareness is in everyone's memory, and His Word is written on everyone's heart. <sup>3</sup>Yet this awareness and this memory can arise across the threshold of the unconscious only where all barriers to truth have been removed. <sup>4</sup>In how many is this the case? <sup>5</sup>Here, then, is the role of God's teachers. <sup>6</sup>They too have not attained the necessary understanding as yet, but they have joined with others. <sup>7</sup>This is what sets them apart from the world, and it is this that enables others to leave the world with them. <sup>8</sup>Alone they are nothing, but in their joining is the power of God.

The short answer to the question in the title is "Yes." We should make the first two lines personal (**1:1-2**): *I can reach God directly because there is no distance between Him and me. Awareness of God is in my memory, and His Word is written on my heart.* Reflect on that!

To reach God directly means to connect with God with nothing in between. Each of us needs to remind ourselves of their truth frequently. If you read about mystical experiences of union with God or oneness with all things, do you ever feel such experiences are out of your reach? *They aren't!* They are within reach for everyone. The Course calls

them “holy instants” and encourages us to seek them. Our morning Quiet Times with the Workbook lessons are intended to facilitate such experiences.

For instance, read over W-pI.169.12:3-13:4 (FIP), W-pI.157.6:2-7:1 (FIP), W-pI.157.2:1-3:1 (FIP), and W-pI.184.10:1-3 (FIP).

As you can see in all these passages, the idea is that we “leave the world” for a holy instant and then return to the world to bring to it the blessings we received. We *need* to return to bring our brothers and sisters with us.

I confess that I find deep holy instants few and far between. I suspect I need to learn to meditate more deeply or follow the lessons’ practice instructions with more diligence. But I have had such experiences! I know they are possible for you and me.

For that direct awareness of Truth to come to us, all the barriers to it in our minds must be removed (**1:3**). Very few people have reached that unfettered level of mind (**1:4**). We may experience such momentary lifting of the veil. Still, the veil returns as long as we haven’t permanently dealt with the blocks. That’s what our lives should be all about. We suppress those barriers briefly in a holy instant, and the light dawns. The more we apply ourselves to *remove* the barriers, the more often those holy instants will occur. Eventually, “this life becomes a holy instant” (**W-135.20:1**).

That’s where God’s teachers come in (**1:5**). The teachers themselves haven’t arrived at living in a continual holy instant, but “they have joined with others” (**1:6**). That joining with others is the key! “This is what sets them apart from the world” (**1:7**). That’s fascinating. *Joining together* is the key.

That is another way of saying what the Text says: In the holy instant, the Son of God can learn that relationships are his salvation, not his doom (**T-20.VII.12:5**).

“The ark of peace is entered two by two, yet the beginning of another world goes with them. Each holy relationship must enter here, to learn its special function in the Holy Spirit’s plan, now that it shares His purpose.” (**T-20.IV.7:3–4 (CE)**).

We find our salvation *in a relationship*, or relationships, plural. We enter peace two by two, not alone. “The Kingdom cannot be found alone, and you who are the Kingdom cannot find yourself alone” (T-8.II.8:1–6 (CE)). The Kingdom we find is our Oneness with one another, and there is no way to find oneness *alone*. Joining with others also allows those others to leave the world with us (**1:7**). To be alone is to be separate, and separation is an illusion; it is nothing. We are finding the Reality in which there is no such thing as “alone.” When we join, we have plugged into the power of God (**1:8**).

## Paragraph 2

<sup>2</sup> There are those who have reached God directly, retaining no trace of worldly limits and remembering their own identity perfectly. <sup>2</sup>These might be called the teachers of teachers because, although they are no longer visible, their image can yet be called upon. <sup>3</sup>And they will appear when and where it is helpful for them to do so.<sup>1</sup> <sup>4</sup>To those to whom such appearances would be frightening, they give their ideas. <sup>5</sup>No one can call on them in vain, nor is there anyone of whom they are unaware. <sup>6</sup>All needs are known to them, and all mistakes are recognized and overlooked by them. <sup>7</sup>The time will come when this is understood. <sup>8</sup>And meanwhile they give all their gifts to the teachers of God who look to them for help, asking all things in their name and in no other.

Some people have already done, already experienced God directly and perfectly (2:1). They have dropped every thought of separation. The world no longer limits them in any way. Limits would include both time and space, I imagine. They have perfectly remembered their identity, the one Son of God.

Back in the Introduction to the Manual, these persons we described in this way:

“This is a manual for the teachers of God. They are not perfect, or they would not be here. Yet 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. And then they are seen no more, although their thoughts remain a source of strength and truth forever” (M-In.4:1–4 (CE)).

Such persons have literally left the world, not in death, but in enlightenment, in oneness with God. They’ve left behind time and space and body, no longer a part of the illusion of separation. They are “seen no more” (M-In.5:7); they are invisible. And yet, “their image can yet be called upon” (2:2). In this sense they can function as “teachers of teachers,” communicating their thoughts and wisdom to those of us still in the teacher training program we live in. Jesus is such a person.

If their image can be called upon it implies that we may see them in some sense “when and where it is helpful” (2:3). Most likely this means in a vision, although the biblical post-resurrection accounts of Jesus imply physical manifestation. And the *Psychotherapy Pamphlet* uses the word “image” to talk about beings who have chosen to stave off their final realization and stay on earth: “Their image remains because they have chosen that it be so” (P-3.II.7:9).

For many people—most, perhaps—if Jesus or some other figure we know as a spiritual master appeared to us, it would scare us half to death. So only their ideas are shared (2:4). Even the clear communication of words that came to Helen Schucman frightened her at first. She told Bill Thetford she thought she was losing her mind. I suspect Jesus, or others, often share their ideas with us anonymously, so to speak; just

<sup>1</sup> This reference to teachers of teachers appearing visibly in a way that some would find “frightening” (2:4) would seem to encompass both physical appearances and visionary appearances.

quietly planting their thoughts in our minds. If we ask, they will answer in whatever way is most fitting for us; they know everyone's needs **(2:5–6)**. A book “jumps off the shelf” at us. A casual remark by another person triggers the germination of a thought in us. Or perhaps we are ready for a vision.

And, like Jesus, they are incredibly patient and forgiving **(2:6)**. In the Text, Jesus tells us:

“If you want to be like me, I will help you, knowing that we are alike. If you want to be different, I will wait until you change your mind. I can teach you, but only you can choose to listen to my teaching. (T-8.III.10:1–3 (CE))

“Ask me truly, and I will come. Do not ask me truly, and I will wait. I will never forsake you, any more than God will. But I must wait as long as you will to forsake yourself. Because I wait in love and not in impatience, you will surely ask me truly. I will come gladly in response to a single unequivocal call.” (T-4.V.14:3–10 (CE))

2:7 seems to mean that eventually *everyone* will understand about teachers of teachers who have perfectly remembered their identity, and everyone will have learned to access the help of such invisible teachers on their own. But before that idyllic era, these teachers of teachers “give their gifts to the teacher of God [like you and me] who look to them for help, asking all things in their name and no other” **(2:8)**. Recall what we said about the meaning of asking in Jesus' name back in Chapter 23. It means asking in gratitude for all the gifts of God, asking in the nature of love itself, without ego involvement. That is how a teacher of God asks for anything from their teacher of teachers.

As I understand it, then, until *everyone* is listening to a teacher of teachers, a realized being, we, the teachers of God, serve the function of listening on behalf of those who have not yet learned to do so.

At this point, I'd like to read Cameo 33 from the Appendix to the CE, “Was There a Physical Resurrection?” It clarifies for me what the image of these unseen masters means.

## Paragraph 3

**3** Sometimes a teacher of God may have a brief experience of a direct union with God.<sup>2</sup> <sup>2</sup>In this world it is almost impossible that this endure. <sup>3</sup>It can perhaps be won after much devotion and dedication, and then be maintained for most of the time on earth, but this is so rare that it cannot be considered a realistic goal. <sup>4</sup>If it happens, so be it. <sup>5</sup>If it does not happen, so be it as well. <sup>6</sup>All worldly states must be illusory.<sup>3</sup> <sup>7</sup>If God were reached directly in sustained awareness, the body would not be long maintained. <sup>8</sup>Those who have laid the body down merely to extend their helpfulness to those remaining behind are few indeed. <sup>9</sup>And they need helpers who are still in bondage and still asleep, so that by their awakening can God's Voice be heard.<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes you or I “may have a brief experience of a direct union with God” **(3:1)** Holy instants may be partial, with some barriers to awareness removed but not yet all. Experience of direct union with God, as we learned earlier, means that *all* barriers of truth have been removed. From the writings of mystics I've read, I'd say they experienced such direct union. But even they were not able to maintain it in this world **(3:2)**. It may be possible to be sufficiently devoted and dedicated to retain the experience “for most of the time on earth,” but it is extremely rare. It isn't a realistic goal for most people **(2:3)**.

This is very helpful advice. Trying to attain perfect union is likely to be ego-driven. “If it happens, so be it. If it does not happen, so be it as well” **(3:4–5)**.

Everything in this world, and any way we are part of the world, is an illusion **(3:6)**. If one achieved sustained awareness of oneness with God, he or she would not be able to remain in the body for long; the illusion of body would not last **(3:7)**. I am not quite sure how to interpret this. Would the body just disappear? Would it appear to die? Hard to say. In one way or another, someone with sustained awareness of oneness with God will “not be long for this world.”

“Those who have laid the body down” would seem to be somewhat different from those who “would not be able to remain in the body long” **(3:8; 3:7)**. The former have chosen to depart; the latter seem to have no choice in the matter. The teacher who chooses to leave the body behind is choosing to become unlimited by it in order to more freely serve those who remain behind, trapped in the dream of limits.

This level of awakening seems to be the more rare of the two. But those who have made this transition still need helpers who are still asleep, who by their process of awakening can communicate God's Voice to those stuck in the belief that they are bodies.

<sup>2</sup> This experience is called “revelation” in the Text and is called the “mystical experience” in normal terminology.

<sup>3</sup> This means that even experiences in this world of direct union with God are ultimately illusory. As the next sentence above implies, if while in this world we had an experience that was fully real, we would soon no longer *be* in this world.

<sup>4</sup> “Their awakening” seems to refer to the awakening of the helpers.

I find it remarkable that ascended masters, free of all limits, still need people like us, not yet fully awake! This is the foundation of “the plan of the teachers.” It’s very encouraging, isn’t it?

## Paragraph 4

**4** Do not despair, then, because of limitations. <sup>2</sup>It is your function to escape from them, but not to be without them. <sup>3</sup>If you would be heard by those who suffer, you must speak their language. <sup>4</sup>If you would be a savior, you must understand what needs to be escaped. <sup>5</sup>Salvation is not theoretical. <sup>6</sup>Behold the problem, ask for the answer, and then accept the answer when it comes. <sup>7</sup>Nor will its coming be long delayed. <sup>8</sup>All the help you can accept will be provided, and not one need you have will not be met. <sup>9</sup>Let us not, then, be too concerned with goals for which you are not ready. <sup>10</sup>God takes you where you are and welcomes you. <sup>11</sup>What more could you desire when this is all you need?

So what if we are still limited! The teachers of teachers *need us* (4:1). Yes, our function in this world is to learn to escape the limits, but having limits and learning to surpass them is exactly what makes us useful in God’s plan (4:2). Having and escaping limits *is our function*.

The reason for such a function is that teachers of God have to speak the language of “those who suffer” (4:3). In this respect, they resemble God Himself; Psalms 103:14 describes Him like this: “For He knows what we are made of; *He knows our frame is frail*, and He remembers we came from dust” (The Voice Bible). To help others find salvation, we “must understand what needs to be escaped” (4:4). The fact that we still have limitations can make us better teachers! (Boy! I’m glad to hear that!)

We can’t find salvation (the whole process the Course is leading us through) in some philosophical theory (4:5). It is something learned by *practice*. It begins with becoming aware of a problem in ourselves. For example, we may believe that our pain comes from something outside us. Once we identify the problem, the next step is to ask the Holy Spirit for the answer to the problem (which won’t be long coming (4:7)). Finally, we “must accept the answer when it comes” (4:6). As we go through this process, over and over, we can understand the problems of others and help them find the answer as we did.

The Holy Spirit will provide all the help we can accept (4:8). Notice that the limiting factor is what we can accept at the time. Sometimes it may seem to us that the answer to some problem is taking a long time to come, but what slows it down is our inability to accept the answer. It may be a long time, for instance, before we can accept the idea that there is no world. But we will accept it eventually: “...not one need you have will not be met” (4:8).

The advice Jesus has for us is, “Don’t be too concerned about things you aren’t ready for” (4:9) such as our struggle to accept that the world is an illusion, and does not exist outside of our minds (T-12.V.1:6–2:1). God accepts us and welcomes us just as we are (4:10)! And God’s acceptance is the only thing we need. What more than this could we

possibly want (4:11)? That's worth meditating on: "God accepts me just as I am right now." And by the way: If God accepts everyone just as they are, who do I think I am to do anything differently?

## 27. *What Is Death?*

### Overview

Jesus here returns to the question he addressed back in M-17:6–9 and M-19:5. Those passages foreshadow this section, but this section hits our belief in death head on.

### Paragraph 1

Death is the central dream from which all illusions stem. <sup>2</sup>Is it not madness to think of life as being born, aging, losing vitality, and dying in the end? <sup>3</sup>We have asked this question before, but now we need to consider it still more carefully. <sup>4</sup>It is the one fixed, unchangeable belief of the world that all things in it are born only to die. <sup>5</sup>This is regarded as "the way of nature," not to be raised to question, but to be accepted as the "natural" law of life. <sup>6</sup>The cyclical, the changing and unsure; the undependable and the unsteady, waxing and waning in a certain way upon a certain path—all this is taken as the will of God. <sup>7</sup>And no one asks if a benign Creator could will this.

"Death," he says, "is the central dream from which all illusions stem" (1:1). That's worth some mental effort to unpack. Years ago, I read a book titled *The Denial of Death* by Ernest Becker. The author argues most human action is taken to ignore or avoid the inevitability of death. In other words, our *belief* in death's reality drives everything else we think and do! Jesus will show us in what follows just some of the main ways our dream of death controls us.

First, though, he points out just how illogical the idea of death is. We think we are alive in this world, but how can something that culminates in death be *life*? We are born and immediately begin to grow older. As we age, we gradually lose vitality (life energy, liveliness) and eventually disappear into death. How is that life? To think it is, is "madness" (1:2). The earlier discussions about the madness of death were not enough; "now we need to consider it still more carefully" (1:3).

Perhaps our desire to fulfill our function as God's teachers motivates this return to the discussion of death. If our belief in death is the "central dream" behind all illusions, it has to be dealt with if we are to be successful teachers of God. We gain little good if we always deal with secondary illusions and never address the big illusion behind them all.



Death is certainly a universally accepted belief in this world. “Nothing is inevitable but death and taxes,” so the saying goes. Comparing taxes to death is supposed to be amusing, saying they are equally inevitable. The clear assumption, assumed as fact, is that death is inevitable. It’s not just human beings who die; “all things in (the world) are born only to die” **(1:4)**. It’s taken for granted. After billions of years, science tells us, the sun will “die” and take everything on Earth along with it. It’s “the way of nature.” To question it seems crazy. A “sane” person accepts death as “the ‘natural’ law of life” **(1:5)**.

This is supposedly how God has willed it to be **(1:6)**. It’s “the circle of life,” according to *The Lion King*. Changing, unsure, undependable, unsteady, waxing and waning along the never-to-be-questioned path toward death—“all this is taken as the will of God” **(1:6)**.

“No one asks if a benign Creator could will this” **(1:7)**!

Have you ever questioned how a loving Creator could allow death to be part of His creation? If so, you belong to a small minority of the human race. Until we do question death’s reality, we will always be dealing with death’s effects and never with the underlying cause.

## Paragraph 2

**2** In this perception of the universe as God created it, it would not be possible to think of Him as loving. <sup>2</sup>For who has decreed that all things pass away, ending in dust and disappointment and despair, can but be feared. <sup>3</sup>He holds your little life in His hand but by a thread, ready to break it off without regret or care, perhaps today.<sup>5</sup> <sup>4</sup>Or if He waits, yet is the ending certain. <sup>5</sup>Who loves such a god knows not of love, because he has denied that life is real. <sup>6</sup>Death has become life’s symbol. <sup>7</sup>His world is now a battleground, where contradiction reigns and opposites make endless war. <sup>8</sup>Where there is death is peace impossible.

Haven’t you wondered at times why or how God could have dumped us into such a place of inevitable loss after years of pretending it wasn’t going to happen to us? It’s probably the reason many people have abandoned any belief in God, and certainly not a God of love **(2:1)**. It’s an eternal struggle for believers in God to reconcile a belief that God is love with the loss we feel when loved ones, parents, friends, lovers, children, and even pets are taken from us in death. In the face of death joy seems impossible. If God has decreed that the disappointment

<sup>5</sup>. This appears to be a reference to Jonathan Edwards’s famous 1741 sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”: “O Sinner! Consider the fearful Danger you are in: ’Tis a great Furnace of Wrath, a wide and bottomless Pit, full of the Fire of Wrath, that you are held over in the Hand of that God, whose Wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you as against many of the Damned in Hell: You hang by a slender Thread, with the Flames of divine Wrath flashing about it, and ready every Moment to singe it, and burn it asunder.”



and despair of death comes to everything we have no reason to love Him, only to fear Him **(2:2)**.



In 2:3, Jesus makes a reference to a famous sermon by Jonathan Edwards, the Puritan evangelist who tried to scare people into faith by his gruesome sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” **(2:3)**. (See Robert’s footnote in the CE.) He points out how we must see God if we believe in death: God holds your life on a thread, dangling over hell. He is just waiting for the moment to end your life, and end it “without regret or care, perhaps today” **(2:3)**, If not today, death is certain at some future time **(2:4)**.

If we strive to love such a god we don’t know what love is! We are denying that life is real **(2:5)**. What picture of God are we painting when we greet someone’s death with sayings like, “It was God’s will,” “She had a good, long

life,” or even “God took her home”? How can anyone love a god like that? Seeing death as God’s will determines how we see this world as well. Death becomes the symbol of life **(2:6)**. So we perceive the world as a battleground between life and death, full of contradictions, like a supposedly loving god condemning countless millions to hell **(2:7)**. How can we be at peace when death is possible **(2:8)**?

### Paragraph 3

<sup>3</sup> Death is the symbol of the fear of God. <sup>2</sup>His love is blotted out in the idea, which holds it from awareness like a shield held to obscure the sun. <sup>3</sup>The grimness of this symbol is enough to show it cannot coexist with God. <sup>4</sup>It holds an image of the Son of God in which he is “laid to rest” in devastation’s arms, where worms await to greet him and to last a little while by his destruction. <sup>5</sup>Yet the worms as well are doomed to be destroyed as certainly. <sup>6</sup>And so do all things live because of death. <sup>7</sup>Devouring is nature’s “law of life.” <sup>8</sup>God is insane and fear alone is real.

Death does not symbolize life! It symbolizes the fear of God **(3:1)**. Because it makes God seem fearful, the idea of death blots out awareness of God’s love, blocking love from our awareness like a shield we hold to block the Sun’s light **(3:2)**. I still remember with a sense of approval the first line of an evangelistic formula I heard back in my evangelical days: “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” The idea that God loves you can be a revelation to many people. One favorite hymn I used to sing

began, “The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell.” (Many later lines of the song contain concepts I’ve left behind, though.)

That God loves us is like the thought in 26.4:10, that God accepts us just as we are. I find that thinking of God purely as an impersonal force or energy makes it hard to include the idea that God loves us just as we are. That’s why I personally believe that while God is not a Person (a being apart from me), God includes personhood. How could God create us with emotions like love unless they are part of God’s makeup? The Course certainly includes the idea of God’s love.

Death is such a dark, hopeless concept that it just cannot coexist with God (3:3). In death, what we are is devastated and ceases to exist. Our bodies are burned, or if “laid to rest” in the ground they are buried, where worms are waiting to greet us and support their wormy lives by eating our bodies. But even that minimal extension of some form of life is equally “doomed to be destroyed as certainly” (3:4–5). These sentences are intentionally grotesque to underscore the grimness of death. How could this be the end of God’s creation of His Son?

Just as worms eat our bodies, *all living things* live by inflicting death on some other form of life (3:6). Robert Perry renamed the circle of life as “the circle of lunch.” “Devouring is nature’s ‘law of life’” (3:7). How can this be a creation of God? If so, the only conclusion has to be “God is insane and fear alone is real” (3:8). While we don’t think about this much and try consciously and unconsciously to forget about it (see *The Denial of Death*), it is always gnawing at its mental cage, trying to get at us to remind us that we all die in the end.

The philosopher William James<sup>6</sup> wrote:

“This sadness lies at the heart of every merely positivistic, agnostic, or naturalistic scheme of philosophy. Let sanguine healthy-mindedness do its best with its strange power of living in the moment and ignoring and forgetting, still the evil background is really there to be thought of, and the skull will grin in at the banquet.”

This cannot be right!

<sup>6</sup>. Author of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

## Paragraph 4

4 The curious belief that there is part of dying things that may go on apart from what will die<sup>7</sup> does not proclaim a loving God, nor reestablish any grounds for trust. <sup>2</sup>If death is real for anything, there is no life. <sup>3</sup>Death denies life, but if there is reality in life, death is denied. <sup>4</sup>No compromise in this is possible. <sup>5</sup>There is either a god of fear or One of love. <sup>6</sup>The world attempts a thousand compromises, and will attempt a thousand more. <sup>7</sup>Not one can be acceptable to God's teachers because not one could be acceptable to God. <sup>8</sup>He did not make death because He did not make fear. <sup>9</sup>Both are equally meaningless to Him.

“Well,” you may think, “at least our soul does not die, but lives on.” But this “does not proclaim a loving God, nor reestablish any grounds for trust” (4:1). The continuation of the soul does not get around the fact that *something* dies. Your body dies. The life you have spent a lifetime living just ends and becomes little more than a memory in a few people's minds. Our belief that the soul somehow survives the body's death is little more than a compromise we make with death, trying to hide from its horror.

“If death is real for anything, there is no life” (4:2). How uncompromising! The Course refuses to let us mix death into life in any way. The mixture is not life. Life is life and nothing more; there can be no death in it. Lesson 163 says it even more clearly:

“It is impossible to worship death in any form, and still select a few you would not cherish and would yet avoid, while still believing in the rest. For death is total. Either all things die, or else they live and cannot die. No compromise is possible. For here again we see an obvious position, which we must accept if we be sane; what contradicts one thought entirely can not be true, unless its opposite is proven false (W-pl.163.6)”

In other words, life can't be true unless death is proven entirely false. “But bodies die, that's for sure.” No; the Course declares that bodies do not die *because they never lived* (T-6.VA.1:4 (FIP), T-6.VII.1:4 (CE)). That same section openly states that God did not make the body. Bodies are projections of our minds, illusions, like all such projections. “I am not a body” (W-199).

“I am in the likeness of my Creator. I cannot suffer; I cannot experience loss and I cannot die. I am not a body” (W-84.2:1-4).

The converse of 4:2 is also true: If life is real, there is no death (4:3). No compromise is possible (4:4). “There is either a god of fear or One of love” (4:5). There are thousands of ways people have tried to reconcile physical death with life. There will still be more. If we are teachers of God, we must avoid them all. “There is no death” is what we must teach (4:7, see W-163). If God is not love, we have every reason to fear Him. God does

<sup>7</sup> This, of course, refers to the belief that the *soul* will go on after the *body* dies. To deny this, however, is not to imply that the body does *not* die (in the ordinary sense). The Course teaches that, being an illusion, the body was never alive in the first place: “The body neither lives nor dies, because it cannot contain you who *are* life” (T-6.VII.1:4).

not compromise with death, nor should we (4:7). Fear and death are meaningless to God and should be so for us as well (4:8). That may seem like a stance out of reach for some of us, but I say, Hang in there! You'll get there. As was said earlier, don't fret yourself about things that seem out of your reach. Just stick with the program, and follow your Inner Guide. He knows how to change our minds!

## Paragraph 5

5 The "reality" of death is firmly rooted in the belief that God's Son is a body. <sup>2</sup>And if God created bodies, death would indeed be real. <sup>3</sup>But God would not be loving. <sup>4</sup>There is no point at which the contrast between the perception of the real world and that of the world of illusions becomes more sharply evident. <sup>5</sup>Death is indeed the death of God, if He is love.<sup>8</sup> <sup>6</sup>And now His Own creation must stand in fear of Him. <sup>7</sup>He is not Father but destroyer. <sup>8</sup>He is not Creator but avenger.<sup>9</sup> <sup>9</sup>Terrible His thoughts and fearful His image. <sup>10</sup>To look on His creations is to die.<sup>10</sup>

Death seems so real to us because we firmly believe that we are bodies (5:1). I pointed out already how the two beliefs are tied together. That's why it is so important to the Course's thought system that God didn't create our bodies. If He did, death would be real (5:2). But that would make God an unloving god (4:3). Think how many billions of bodies have died! That's God's fault, if He made bodies. He is the ultimate genocidal killer. He didn't just slaughter the Jews, like Hitler; He slaughters everyone.

The Course speaks a lot about the real world in contrast to the world of illusions we think we live in. This issue—belief in the reality of the body and death—is the sharpest point of contrast between the two (5:4). To see the real world we will have to abandon our belief in the body's reality, or that God created it. We must accept that there is no death. Death is the end of life. God is life. To accept death is to accept the death of God (5:5). This God of ours is love, we declare, but if death is real we must fear Him. He created death, so how can we truly belief in His love (5:6–7)? He is the Destroyer, the Avenger. Why do we all die? Because God wills it? What a horrible thought! But if He created the body, He created death (5:7–10).

<sup>8</sup> This seems to be another reference to the "Death of God" theological movement that was current at the time this was dictated (for an earlier reference, see W-163.5:3). The point above is that if "God is love" (1 John 4:8, RSV) and yet death is real, then God must be dead.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:6 (RSV): "that no man transgress, and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we solemnly forewarned you."

<sup>10</sup> Exodus 33:20 (RSV): "'But,' he [God] said, 'you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live.'" In the above reference, you cannot even look on God's *creations* and live. Perhaps this is because you see their doomed existence as proof that their Creator must be a "destroyer" and an "avenger," which obviously implies that you are doomed as well.

## Paragraph 6

**6** “And the last to be overcome will be death.”<sup>11</sup> <sup>2</sup>Of course! <sup>3</sup>Without the idea of death there is no world. <sup>4</sup>All dreams will end with this one. <sup>5</sup>This is salvation’s final goal; the end of all illusions. <sup>6</sup>And in death are all illusions born. <sup>7</sup>What can be born of death and still have life? <sup>8</sup>But what is born of God and still can die? <sup>9</sup>The inconsistencies, the compromises, and the rituals which the world fosters in its vain attempts to cling to death and yet to think love real are mindless magic, ineffectual and meaningless. <sup>10</sup>God is, and in Him all created things must be eternal. <sup>11</sup>Do you not see that otherwise He has an opposite, and fear would be as real as love?

The final illusion to be overcome will be death **(6:1)**. “Of course!” **(6:2)**. Remember, he said earlier that all illusions stem from the central dream of death **(1:1)**. He declares, “in death are all illusions born,” a few sentences into this paragraph **(6:6)**. Therefore, if we retain any illusions, we must retain the illusion of death. If death goes, so do all the rest of the illusions **(6:4)**, including the illusion of the world **(6:3)**. Overcoming the illusion of death is “salvation’s final goal” **(6:5)**. It is the end of all illusions. The illusion of death cannot lead to life in any form **(6:7)**. And how could anything born of God die **(6:8)**?

Jesus calls all our attempts to reconcile death with a loving God “inconsistencies...compromises...rituals...vain attempts to cling to death and yet to think love real...mindless magic...ineffectual and meaningless” **(6:9)**. In our discussion of this chapter, we’ve seen some of the inconsistencies and compromises we may make, but what might some of the “rituals” be that we use to try to believe in love while still believing in death? For instance, I think of many things we do at funerals. Calling a funeral a “celebration of life” is certainly one evasion of the apparent reality of death. We affirm the deceased “lives in our memories.” Can you think of other rituals? The point here is that we’re putting lipstick on a corpse. Death is death. We avoid thinking about it in many different ways.

“God is” **(6:10)**. That was the message Helen saw on the center of the scroll in her vision. She chose to make that central in her thinking. God is *Being*. There is no trace of death in God, so anything God creates “must be eternal” **(6:10)**. Jesus appeals to us to see that this must be true. Otherwise, if death exists, God, Who is Life, must have an opposite, which would make fear as real as love **(6:11)**.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:26 (GNT): “The last enemy to be defeated will be death.”



## Paragraph 7

7 Teacher of God, your one assignment could be stated thus: Accept no compromise in which death plays a part.<sup>12</sup> <sup>2</sup>Do not believe in cruelty, nor let attack conceal the truth from you. <sup>3</sup>What seems to die has but been misperceived and carried to illusion. <sup>4</sup>Now it becomes your task to let the illusion be carried to the truth. <sup>5</sup>Be steadfast but in this: Be not deceived by the “reality” of any changing form. <sup>6</sup>Truth neither moves nor wavers nor sinks down to death and dissolution. <sup>7</sup>And what is the end of death? <sup>8</sup>Nothing but this: the realization that the Son of God is guiltless now and forever. <sup>9</sup>Nothing but this. <sup>10</sup>But do not let yourself forget it is not less than this.

Given that God is Life, “your one assignment” as a Teacher of God “could be stated thus: Accept no compromise in which death plays a part” (7:1). Think back to what the Workbook says in Lesson 163:

“Death is a thought that takes on many forms, often unrecognized. It may appear as sadness, fear, anxiety or doubt; as anger, faithlessness and lack of trust; concern for bodies, envy, and all forms in which the wish to be as you are not may come to tempt you.” (W-163.1:1-2 (FIP)).

What, then, might be a “compromise in which death plays a part”? Feeling sad or anxious. Doubting. Being angry or untrusting. Being concerned about your body. Envy. Any wish to be something you are not.

Yikes! So, our assignment is to learn not to accept any of these things in our lives. Since death is the core illusion that gives birth to all the others, another way to express our assignment is that we must learn to see through all illusions. The key point in W-163:1–2 is that the forms death takes in our lives and our thinking is “often unrecognized.” To complete our assignment, we must recognize all these things as forms of death.

In (7:2), he zeros in on two other forms of death: belief in cruelty and attacking or perceiving yourself as being attacked, elsewhere summed up as attack thoughts: “I can escape from the world I see by giving up attack thoughts.” (W-23). If the call is to accept no compromise with death in all its forms, think of it this way: All the instructions concerning attack thoughts, seeing differently, forgiving, and so on are different aspects of this uncompromising approach, different examples of forms death can take. It’s asking no more here than in all the rest of the Course. That’s not to minimize the effort and the enormous transformation of our consciousness that the Course aims at. I just don’t want anyone to be frightened off by the all-inclusiveness of “accept no compromise.” We can work on them one at a time.

<sup>12</sup> A “compromise in which death plays a part” would be a compromise between the two opposite views that life is the total reality and that death is the total reality. It would mean in some way affirming the “reality” of death—such as believing in attack or in the reality of some perishable form—while still trying to maintain that life is eternal and that God is love.



Any appearance of death means that we are misperceiving something, seeing an illusion **(7:3)**. Realize the truth of that, and ask to see things differently. Let your illusion be “carried to the truth” **(7:4)**. Let truth replace illusions. Don’t allow the illusion of change to fool you; don’t imagine change is real **(7:5)**. For instance, the body changes and “dies,” so it cannot be real. Learn to “see the changeless in the heart of change; the light of truth behind appearances” **(W-122.13:4)**. Truth does not change. Truth does not die **(7:6)**. But death *does* end. What is death’s end? “Nothing but this: the realization that the Son of God is guiltless now and forever” **(7:7–8)**. He then repeats, “Nothing but this” **(7:9)**, and also nothing less than this **(7:10)**, so we need to sit up and take notice. The Manual’s first chapter told us that the guiltlessness of God’s Son is the “central theme” of the universal course. Forgiveness.

Forgiveness may not seem like the end of death, but it is. God created you as pure and innocent and eternal, and nothing you do can change that. Therefore there is no death! That’s all that is needed to end death in our minds and lives. Why is death the central illusion all others spring from? Because “the wages of sin is death.” If we don’t believe in guiltlessness, we think we, and others, deserve to die. We think we *have* changed. If we know that “the Son of God is guiltless,” we know we cannot change. We know we cannot die.

**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.*