

## Commentary

### ACIM® Manual for Teachers

# 4. *What Are the Characteristics of God's Teachers?*

**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

In the last sub-section, we saw how we develop trust—specifically, trust in the Holy Spirit's guidance, resulting in trust in what the world brings us. This development takes six stages. We will probably experience the first three stages as painful or distressing. The fourth stage is a needed rest, a time to consolidate what we've learned to this point. The fifth stage, a period of unsettling, usually seems "hard indeed" (4.I.7:9) and may remain impossible to graduate from for "a long, long time" (4.I.6:7). Graduation occurs when we are totally convinced to listen *only* to the Holy Spirit's voice, transcending our egos. Only in the sixth stage do we achieve real trust.

The remaining nine characteristics of an advanced teacher of God are built on the foundation of this trust. This is stated in so many words in 4.II.1:1 (see below). In addition, seven of the nine remaining stages explicitly mention their connection with trust. We will therefore be looking closely at that connection.

## II. Honesty

All other traits of God's teachers rest on trust. 2Once that has been achieved, the others cannot fail to follow. 3Only the trusting can afford honesty, for only they can see its value. 4Honesty does not apply only to what you say. 5The term actually means consistency. 6There is nothing you say that contradicts what you think or do; no thought opposes any other thought; no act belies your word; and no word lacks agreement with another. 7Such are the truly honest. 8At no level are they in conflict with themselves. 9Therefore it is impossible for them to be in conflict with anyone or anything.

I indicated that the stages of the development of trust are a description of our entire spiritual journey. In a sense, by completing those six stages, you have “arrived” at the real world. That does not mean there is nothing left to learn! The nine remaining characteristics describe what an advanced teacher of God is like, and they need to be cultivated and developed. Trust does not *include* the other nine, but they “rest on trust” (:1), they derive from it, they *follow* it. Once trust is “achieved,” the remaining traits “cannot fail to follow” (1:2). At least one of the additional traits indicates that it develops gradually as trust increases.

These ten characteristics are “what will establish [a teacher] as what [he is].” People can function as teachers without them, but the goal is to be “established” as what you are in truth. The remaining nine characteristics build upon the rock-solid foundation of trust that we have developed (1:1). That trust has to be unshakable, or the qualities layered upon it will not endure. Without first developing trust, we build our house, not on bedrock, but on sand. We may try to develop and cultivate attitudes of honesty, tolerance, gentleness, joy, defenselessness, generosity, patience, faithfulness, and open-mindedness, and we may exhibit them for a while. Still, we will not be *established* unless the foundation of trust is solid. The joy will evaporate, the defenselessness will give way to anger, the open-mindedness to discrimination, and so on. Trust is the essential element in them all.

The following references from the rest of the chapter show the centrality of trust in this process:

*Only the **trusting** can afford honesty.*

*Challenge implies doubt, and the **trust** on which God's teachers rest secure makes doubt impossible.*

*Judgment implies a lack of **trust**, and **trust** remains the bedrock of the teacher of God's thought system.*

*Judgment destroys honesty and shatters **trust**.*

*God's teachers **trust** in Him, and they are sure His Teacher goes before them, making sure no harm can come to them.*

*He learns faster as his **trust** increases.*

*Generosity: Like all the other attributes of God's teachers, this one rests ultimately on **trust**, for without **trust** no one can be generous in the true sense.*

*Patience is natural to those who **trust**.*

*Does he still select some aspects of his life to bring to his learning while keeping others apart? If so, his advancement is limited, and his **trust** not yet firmly established. Faithfulness is the teacher of God's **trust** in the Word of God to set all things right; not some, but all.*

*True faithfulness, however, does not deviate. Being consistent, it is wholly honest. Being unswerving, it is full of **trust**.*

As we discuss the remainder of this chapter over the next two or three weeks, you should keep this emphasis on trust in mind.

T0 SUM UP: the development of honesty and the remaining eight characteristics all rest on trust; trust is the bedrock. If you achieve trust, all the rest will undoubtedly follow (1:2), including honesty. Without trust, you cannot afford to be honest (1:3)! That is so because, without trust, you can't see the value of honesty.

Let's unpack that a bit if we can. How is trust connected to honesty? Why can't we see the value of honesty if we do not trust? The connection is clear enough if you think of trust and honesty in the usual sense. If you do not trust a person, you will be disinclined to be honest with them, particularly about your personal vulnerabilities. There is always a lingering fear that the other person might use it against you if you reveal too much.

However, I think the Manual means something more here. Think for a moment how trust and honesty are defined here. Trust is a lot more than trusting other people. As we learned in the preceding section, trust means trusting in the governance of God. We can trust the world and everything in it because we have learned that only God's laws govern the world. The power of God is what "keeps all things safe" (M-4.I.1:6). That profound level of trust is what makes it possible for us to perceive "a forgiven world," a guiltless world. A guiltless world is a world we can trust. We have stepped back and have chosen to let the Holy Spirit lead the way.

Once we achieve such trust, we can see the value of honesty, so honesty follows trust without effort. Consider now what a profound thing honesty is, according to the Course. If we are honest, it says, "There is nothing you say that contradicts what you think or do; no thought opposes any other thought; no act belies your word; and no word lacks agreement with another" (1:6). Try to imagine how it would feel if this were true of yourself! Your words are utterly consistent with your thoughts. Your thoughts are one hundred percent consistent, with no thought contradicting any other thought. You perform no actions that are out of accord with your words, and nothing you say ever disagrees with anything you ever said before; you say the same thing to everybody. Wow! You do what you say you'll do; you keep your word.

All of the above is why he says "the term [honesty] actually means consistency" (1:5). It means living with total integrity.

Most of us, I would guess, see some value in being a little dishonest or inconsistent. We have good reasons for not always keeping our word. (I know I do, or at least I think I do! I make excuses.) So why does trust in God result in perfect integrity? I don't think I have the complete answer here, but I have some clues. When we have come to absolute trust in the promises of God, we see what great value God's integrity has for us. And we are astounded by God's utter trust *in us*! God sees us as His perfect creations, and He counts on that. Increased identification with our true Self comes with increasing honesty

and consistency. Honesty is the affirmation of our divinity and trustworthiness. Consistency means that I am never in conflict *with myself* at any level (1:8). That results in the absence of conflict “with anyone or anything” (1:9). That statement needs further explanation, and it comes in the following paragraph.

2 The peace of mind which the advanced teachers of God experience is largely due to their perfect honesty. <sup>2</sup>It is only the wish to deceive that makes for war. <sup>3</sup>No one at one with himself can even conceive of conflict. <sup>4</sup>Conflict is the inevitable result of self-deception, and self-deception is dishonesty.<sup>1</sup>

Consistency eliminates all conflict with others because “No one at one with himself [that is, identified with their true Self] can even conceive of conflict” (2:3). If you are at one with your true Self, you are at one with everyone and everything because they are parts of the Self you have identified with.

Why does total honesty, consistency, and integrity bring us perfect peace of mind (2:1)? Because war (conflict) only comes from a wish to deceive (2:2), and that never occurs to a person who is “at one with himself” (2:3). It is self-deception, which is dishonesty, that causes conflict (2:4).

This teaching is really challenging! Conflict seems a part of every life; I know I experience it. Jesus is telling us here that it happens because we are lying to ourselves about something. We need to chew on that. I think what we are deceiving ourselves about is what we are. We think *we* are untrustworthy and as a result we think *everyone* is untrustworthy. We think *we* are separate beings and therefore we think everyone else is separate, rather than a part of us.

One helpful thought I have is to think about the life of Jesus. In one way it seems clear that he experienced conflict, and even seemed to *cause* it. He violated some of the Jewish laws of purity and ran afoul of the Pharisees. Eventually, the Roman governor thought he was enough of a threat that he crucified him. But Jesus never initiated the conflict, and his peace of mind never wavered. He died forgiving the ones driving the nails.

Being at one with myself, then, means I never initiate conflict. Others may react to me with conflict, but my purified perception will see past the apparent conflict to who that person truly is. I will experience it as without conflict. “He will hear plainly that the calls to war he heard before are really calls to peace” (T-25.III.6:6). When my mind is free of inner conflict, I will not see conflict anywhere; I will not give its appearance reality.

The Course is insistent that “I am responsible for what I see. I choose the feelings I experience” (T-21.II.2:3–4). If I see conflict it originates in my thinking. This is probably impossible to understand until we experience it, until we end our *internal* conflict. Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> The picture here seems to be one in which we first wish to deceive ourselves, which implies that one part of us wants to deceive another part. The two parts are thus pitted against each other; we are in a state of inner conflict. And we then reproduce this inner state in our dealings with others: We are in conflict with them and wish to deceive them.

knows. He experienced it, and he has imparted his understanding to the Holy Spirit Who teaches us.

3 There is no challenge to a teacher of God. <sup>2</sup>Challenge implies doubt, and the trust on which God's teachers rest secure makes doubt impossible. <sup>3</sup>Therefore they can only succeed. <sup>4</sup>In this, as in all things, they are honest. <sup>5</sup>They can only succeed because they never do their will alone. <sup>6</sup>They choose for all mankind, for all the world and all things in it, for the unchanging and unchangeable beyond appearances, and for the Son of God and his Creator. <sup>7</sup>How could they not succeed? <sup>8</sup>They choose in perfect honesty, sure of their choice as of themselves.

Absence of conflict means absence of challenges (3:1). There are no obstacles, because “challenge implies doubt,” and our trust in God's governance makes doubt impossible (3:2). “Therefore, they can only succeed” (3:3). That statement is no mistake; it is repeated in 3:5. Our success in all things is guaranteed because we are no longer operating from a separated consciousness. We are not attempting to carry out our individual will, our “will alone” (3:5). We are choosing for all the world. This universal consciousness is part and parcel of our honesty (3:4).

The implication here is that if I launch out on some enterprise whose sole beneficiary is me, it is bound to fail. If my goals are always inclusive, seeking the benefit of everyone, they will always succeed. Jesus succinctly summed it up in Matthew 6:33 as seeking first God's reign. Here are several different translations of the familiar verse:

“But make His Kingdom and righteousness your chief aim, and then these things shall all be given you in addition.” (Matthew 6:33 WEYMTH)

“Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.” (Matthew 6:33 NLT-SE)

“Set your mind on God's kingdom and his justice before everything else, and all the rest will come to you as well.” (Matthew 6:33 REB)

“You are to seek (God's) domain, and His justice first, and all these things will come to you as a bonus.” (Scholar's Version)

“Seek God's Realm and His goodness, and all that will be yours over and above.” (James Moffatt)

“Make your top priority God's kingdom and His way of life, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (N.T. Wright)

A few things of interest in those several translations. First, how “seek first” is rendered: “make [it] your chief aim”; “Set your mind on [it] before everything else”; “make [it] your top priority.” If our minds are set on choosing for all mankind and all the world, for the unchanging and unchangeable.” so that is our chief aim and top priority, we are fulfilling the demands of honesty and consistency.

“Righteousness”: “His justice,” “His goodness,” “His way of life” are to be our ruling principle in all things.

“Kingdom”: “domain,” “Realm.” and “reign” are alternate translations. “Kingdom” may evoke an image of an autocracy, what scholars of history call “a domination society.” That is not the meaning here. We’re not being asked to submit blindly to Daddy-in-the-sky who rules with an iron fist. We are being asked to make a world that is governed by the laws of God, not the laws of the ego. These are laws of love, peace, inclusion, and equal justice for all. To “seek first the Kingdom of God” is to make living out the divine nature of love our primary goal at all times, both in our personal life and in the world at large. That, I think, is what Jesus means here by “choose for all the world.”

The honesty and integrity of God’s teachers includes more than personal consistency. Honesty recognizes that “individual will” is not the truth about them. In recognition of universal Oneness, their choices are “for all mankind, for all the world and all things in it” (3:6). We are choosing “for the unchanging and unchangeable beyond appearances, and for the Son of God and His Creator” (3:6). We “see the changeless in the heart of change” (W-122.13:4). From that perspective success is certain (3:7). We are aligned with the eternal Will of God. We are as consistent in that choosing as we are consistent within our thinking and doing, our self-knowledge (3:8). And *that* is what Jesus means by honesty.

Choosing “for the unchanging and unchangeable beyond appearances” is a striking concept, especially the last two words, “beyond appearances.” The Course asserts that our reality does not change. This changeless reality is what we now choose to see in ourselves and everyone (T-6.VI.5:10 (CE), T-7.IV.11:1–2 (CE))—despite all appearances to the contrary! This applies not only to people, but to “all the world and all things in it.” I remind myself often, “What changes is not me. What changes is not real.” If that is true of me (and it is) it must be true of everyone and everything. Honesty means choosing to see all things in this same light.

### III. Tolerance

God's teachers do not judge. <sup>2</sup>To judge is to be dishonest, for to judge is to assume a position you do not have. <sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup>Judgment without self-deception is impossible. <sup>4</sup>Judgment implies that you have been deceived in your brothers. <sup>5</sup>How then could you not have been deceived in yourself? <sup>3</sup> <sup>6</sup>Judgment implies a lack of trust, and trust remains the bedrock of the teacher of God's whole thought system. <sup>7</sup>Let this be lost and all his learning goes. <sup>8</sup>Without judgment are all things equally acceptable, for who could judge otherwise? <sup>9</sup>Without judgment are all men brothers, for who is there who stands apart? <sup>4</sup> <sup>10</sup>Judgment destroys honesty and shatters trust. <sup>11</sup>No teacher of God can judge and hope to learn.

Tolerance is the third characteristic of God's teachers. Of course, they are tolerant. They "do not judge" because that assumes a position they do not have (1:1-2). Judging others is dishonest! It requires self-deception (1:3).

The reasoning here may be difficult to follow until we understand what the Course means by being "deceived in" someone. There is an excellent footnote at the bottom of page 1581:

" Usually, you are deceived in someone when you are taken in by appearances and see that person as somehow being better than she is. In this case, you are deceived in your brother when you are taken in by appearances and see him as worse than he really is. You see him in light of his unloving thoughts, and thus fail to see him as the Son of God that he is."

When you are intolerant and *judge* another person, one who, like yourself, is the changeless creation of God, you must be "deceived in" them (1:4). The appearance of sin and guilt in them has deceived you; you have failed to see the changeless beyond the

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<sup>2</sup> "To judge is to be dishonest" because somewhere inside we *realize* we are not in a position to judge others, given that we are not all-knowing. Lesson 243 in the Workbook ("Today I will judge nothing that occurs") makes this same connection between judgment and dishonesty, encouraging us to practice self-honesty and thus give up judgment: "I will be honest with myself today. I will not think that I already know what must remain beyond my present grasp. I will not think I understand the whole from bits of my perception, which are all that I can see. Today I recognize that this is so. And so I am relieved of judgments that I cannot make" (W-243.1:1-5).

<sup>3</sup> Normally, to be "deceived in" someone means that you have been taken in by appearances that are more positive than the truth. Here, when you judge someone, you have been taken in by appearances that are *less* positive than the truth: by his appearance of being a lowly ego, which obscures the real truth that he is God's perfect Son. See T-11.IX.7-15 for this usage of "deceived in."

<sup>4</sup> *All Men Are Brothers* is a fourteenth-century Chinese novel (see also T-1.41.1:1 and T-4.VIII.16:3). The reason that "Without judgment are all men brothers" is that judgment requires that you stand apart from and above the one you judge. (See T-24.I.6:2: "judgment...must come from someone 'better,' someone incapable of being like what he condemns, 'above' it, sinless by comparison with it.") If you do not judge, you do not stand apart. And if you do not stand apart, then everyone is your brother.

changing. To do that, you must first have been deceived in *yourself* (1:5). You must have seen yourself as less than perfect to see another that way. This misperception is called dishonesty. Remember that honesty is consistency. To “be honest” means that you apply the same criterion to everyone.

Like all of the characteristics, tolerance rests on trust. It is impossible to trust someone you have judged as unworthy. Intolerance, therefore, is proof that your trust isn't complete yet (1:6). Lose your trust, and “all [your] learning goes” (1:7)!

Think about what it means to live without judgment. If you have done the Workbook, you have practiced Lesson 243, “Today I will judge nothing that occurs.”

How'd you do?

If attempting to practice this lesson does nothing else, it will show how frequently our minds judge. The eventual goal, of course, is to relinquish *all* judgment and allow the Holy Spirit to judge everything for us. Letting go of judgment is a key to transcending the ego: “The ego cannot survive without judgment, and is laid aside accordingly” (T-4.II.10:3). Later in the Manual, we will read that, “The giving up of judgment, the obvious prerequisite for hearing God's Voice, is usually a fairly slow process, not because it is difficult, but because it is apt to be perceived as personally insulting” (M-9.2:4 (FIP)). We believe we can judge correctly. We can't, but our Inner Guide can. We have to get off our high horse and let God be God in us.

If you recall, we saw earlier that trust is essential to developing the remaining characteristics. That's true here. Once trust in God's reign is there, we will cease all judging and constantly ask the Holy Spirit for His judgment instead. There is a spiritual song many of you probably know, which contains these words:

*I release, and I let go. I let Spirit run my life. My heart is open wide, and I only live for God.*

That is precisely the state of mind we must aim for if we want to be effective teachers of God. It's also the only way to know true peace and happiness.

When we have released and let go of judgment, “all things [are] equally acceptable” (1:8). I know, I know—you are probably thinking, “But I don't *want* to accept *everything*! Some things just aren't acceptable!” In Chapter 10 of the Manual, there is an extended discussion about “How is Judgment Relinquished?” I'm going to wait until then to address that question.

Even at this preliminary stage of our learning, where tolerance of all things seems impossible to us, we can understand that “Without judgment are all men brothers, for who is there who stands apart?” (1:9). If you are not judging anyone, there is no reason to remain separate. Your “heart is open wide” to everyone. But when you judge someone, you cannot trust them, and being fully honest with them seems dangerous (1:10).

Judging “destroys honesty and shatters trust.” We *must* learn to let go of all judgment. Holding onto judgment makes our efforts at spiritual learning a futile task. Judge, and you've crippled your spiritual growth (1:11).



## IV. Gentleness

Harm is impossible for God's teachers. <sup>2</sup>They can neither harm nor be harmed. <sup>3</sup>Harm is the outcome of judgment. <sup>4</sup>It is the dishonest act that follows a dishonest thought. <sup>5</sup>It is a verdict of guilt upon a brother, and therefore on oneself. <sup>6</sup>It is the end of peace and the denial of learning. <sup>7</sup>It demonstrates the absence of God's curriculum and its replacement by insanity. <sup>8</sup>No teacher of God but must learn—and fairly early in his training—that harmfulness completely obliterates his function from his awareness. <sup>9</sup>It will make him confused, fearful, angry, and suspicious. <sup>10</sup>It will make the Holy Spirit's lessons impossible to learn. <sup>11</sup>Nor can God's Teacher be heard at all except by those who realize that harm can actually achieve nothing at all. <sup>12</sup>No gain can come from it.

Next is gentleness, which the Manual equates with *harmlessness*. “Gentle” sounds like a positive trait, but few of us want to be considered “harmless.” If, when we voice our opinion in a group, someone says of us, “Just ignore them; they're harmless,” we would bristle, wouldn't we? We often equate harmlessness with being ineffectual. Yet the two are very much the same thing; to be gentle is to be without the ability or desire to harm.

For a teacher of God, harm is simply impossible, either harming others or others harming them (1:1–2). It isn't difficult to understand that a teacher of God has no desire to harm anyone, but saying they can't be harmed requires a little thought. How can that be? Are they *physically* invulnerable, like Superman?

Of course not. A teacher of God's invulnerability is related to the connection between harm and judgment: “Harm is the outcome of judgment” (1:3). If that is so, the question in my mind then becomes, “How can judgment lead to my experience of harm?”

First, realize this implies that if I see myself as harmed by you in some way, I must be judging you! I am judging you to be guilty of harming me. That judgment, says Jesus, “is the dishonest act that follows a dishonest thought” (1:4). Remember that honesty means consistency. I cannot see you as guilty and myself as innocent. That is inconsistent and, therefore, dishonest. If I judge you as guilty, I am making the same judgment about myself, whether or not I realize it (1:5). I perceive a holy child of God as guilty, and that isn't the truth. But that still doesn't explain how and why judgment *causes* harm. It must mean that judgment causes *the perception* of harm. Harm itself is impossible for any of God's creations. “Nothing real can be threatened.”

I think that the judgment involved is a misjudgment about myself. In truth, I *cannot* be harmed. The Course insists that we are *invulnerable*, a word that means incapable of being injured or harmed. “The truly helpful are invulnerable, because they are not protecting their egos and so nothing can hurt them” (T-4.VII.8:3 (FIP), T-4.X.10:3 (CE)). Why can't gentle teachers of God be harmed? Because they aren't protecting their egos! They are not *misidentifying* themselves as the body or the ego. They realize they are not bodies and not egos. Injury to the body or ego is not injury to their true Self.

Lesson 330 connects the experience of harm or injury with such a false judgment of ourselves:

“The mind that is made willing to accept God's gifts has been restored to spirit, and extends its freedom and its joy, as is the Will of God united with its own. The Self Which God created cannot sin, and therefore cannot suffer. Let us choose today that He be our Identity, and thus escape forever from all things the dream of fear appears to offer us.”

If we identify ourselves as mind or spirit rather than ego and body, we cannot harm (sin) nor suffer harm. The lesson continues:

*“Father, Your Son can not be hurt. And if we think we suffer, we but fail to know our one Identity we share with You. We would return to It today, to be made free forever from all our mistakes, and to be saved from what we thought we were.”*

If we give in to judging anyone as guilty of harming us, we have lost sight of our true invulnerability. If we are invulnerable, no one can be guilty of harming us; we cannot *be* harmed. Such a false judgment denies what we are learning, and it brings an end to our peace of mind (1:6). How can you be at peace when you are at war with another person? We have lost track of what God is teaching us (His “curriculum”) and have replaced it with the insanity of separation (1:7).

To see ourselves or others as harmful (rather than God's perfect creations) causes us to be “confused, fearful, angry, and suspicious” (1:9). Those adjectives refer primarily to our response to others due to seeing them as potential dangers to us. We are misjudging them because they cannot ever be a threat to our true Self, nor can we be a threat to theirs.

What's more, our ability to hear the Holy Spirit depends on our realization that “harm can actually achieve nothing at all” (1:11). That undercuts any desire we might have to harm another person. And, as we saw in discussing trust, we must learn to trust the Holy Spirit entirely and to “be taught what [we] really want in every circumstance” (M-4.I.7:8). Choosing harm over gentleness deadens our ability to hear that guidance. We often think that some form of attack (harm) can serve a useful purpose, and we almost always think that it is useful—even necessary—to guard ourselves against harm from others. Learning that “no gain can come from it” is a difficult lesson to learn (1:12).

In following the teachings of Jesus, we often celebrate his willingness to do the will of God even unto death. The prophecy of Isaiah that many Christians apply to Jesus says, “As a sheep before the shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.” He forbade his disciples to draw their swords when the Romans arrested him. He refused to defend himself. And he said, “Take up your cross and follow me.” By his example, he was calling us to this total harmlessness or gentleness that the Course is advocating.

He says that every teacher of God *must* learn gentleness—“and fairly early in his training” (1:8). Harmless gentleness may seem like a very advanced lesson, but it's one of the *early* lessons. It's a lesson that all of us should pay attention to from the beginning. Failure to do so will undercut our ability to learn any further lessons.

**2** Therefore God's teachers are wholly gentle. <sup>2</sup>They need the strength of gentleness, for it is in this that the function of salvation becomes easy. <sup>3</sup>To those who would do harm it is impossible. <sup>4</sup>To those to whom harm has no meaning it is merely natural. <sup>5</sup>What choice but this has meaning to the sane? <sup>6</sup>Who chooses hell when he perceives a way to Heaven? <sup>7</sup>And who would choose the weakness that must come from harm in place of the unfailing, all-encompassing, and limitless strength of gentleness? <sup>8</sup>The might of God's teachers lies in their gentleness, for they have understood their evil thoughts came neither from God's Son nor his Creator. <sup>9</sup>Thus have they joined their thoughts with Him Who is their Source, and so their will, which always was His Own, is free to be itself.

Because gentleness is so fundamental and necessary, God's teachers display a deep gentleness fairly consistently (2:1). That fact seems to rule out professed spiritual teachers who train with harsh discipline, belittling their followers and trying to brow-beat them into holiness. If I think of Gandhi or Mother Teresa, or current teachers like Eckhart Tolle, Gangaji, or Byron Katie, they all display a profound gentleness. They do no harm.

It's a necessary quality. Gentleness is their *strength* (2:2), the oil on the wheels of their spiritual growth. Gentleness makes it easy to give salvation to others. It makes giving salvation to others *natural* (2:4), whereas to people operating from harm, salvation is impossible (2:3). Harm, trying to force change through fear and punishment outwardly, never works. Gentle persuasion and encouragement draw forth healing and wholeness from within. Gentleness is the only meaningful choice to those who are sane (2:5). Sanity, of course, means living in accord with the real world, recognizing our true, divine nature, and realizing we are not our egos nor our bodies. Sanity is living in a way that fosters peace, both outward peace, and peace of mind. Sanity is living in the Realm of God, living life under the reign of God. Who would choose hell "when he perceives a way to Heaven?" (2:6).

To choose to use harm is to choose weakness; to choose gentleness is to choose strength (2:7). Look at all that has come from the practitioners of gentleness like Jesus, St. Francis, Gandhi, MLK, or Thich Nhat Hanh. They have transformed the world, and their thoughts continue to transform it. Gentleness is not weakness; it is true strength—"unfailing, all-encompassing, and limitless strength" (2:7). "The might of God's teachers lies in their gentleness" (2:8). What is it that has fostered the growth of such strength? They are strong because "...they have understood their evil thoughts came neither from God's Son nor his Creator" (2:8). As Workbook Lesson 170 puts it: "There is no cruelty in God, and none in me." Their minds have joined with God's. They think as their Source thinks. Their will, always the same as God's, "is free to be itself" (2:9). God's teachers have learned that God is only love, and therefore, so are they. They can pray the prayer that ends Lesson 170:

*"Father, we are like You. No cruelty abides in us, for there is none in You. Your peace is ours. And we bless the world with what we have received from You alone. We choose again, and make our choice for all our brothers, knowing they are one with us. We bring them Your salvation as we have received it now. And we give thanks for them who render us complete. In them we see Your glory, and in them we find our peace. Holy are*

we because Your holiness has set us free. And we give thanks. Amen." (W-pl.170.13:1-11 (FIP)).

## V. Joy

Joy is the inevitable result of gentleness. <sup>2</sup>Gentleness means that fear is now impossible, and what could come to interfere with joy? <sup>3</sup>The open hands of gentleness are always filled. <sup>4</sup>The gentle have no pain. <sup>5</sup>They cannot suffer. <sup>6</sup>Why would they not be joyous? <sup>7</sup>They are sure they are beloved and must be safe. <sup>8</sup>Joy goes with gentleness as surely as grief attends attack. <sup>9</sup>God's teachers trust in Him, and they are sure His Teacher goes before them, making sure no harm can come to them. <sup>10</sup>They hold His gifts and follow in His way, because God's Voice directs them in all things. <sup>11</sup>Joy is their song of thanks. <sup>12</sup>And Christ looks down on them in thanks as well. <sup>13</sup>His need of them is just as great as theirs of Him. <sup>14</sup>How joyous it is to share the purpose of salvation!

When we have absorbed the lesson of gentleness, joy becomes inevitable (V.1:1). Gentleness erases the possibility of fear, so there is nothing left to prevent joy (1:2). Remember that *gentleness* = *harmlessness*, both the refusal to inflict harm and the realization that as mind or spirit, we are invulnerable. "Harmless" means without harm, given or received. What could provoke fear if we are without harm? And in the absence of fear, joy blossoms.

Our hands are always open to others, and therefore always filled (1:3). We have no pain (1:4). We cannot suffer (1:5). How could we be anything *but* joyful (1:6)? At one point in the Text, Jesus says:

"For pain and sin are one illusion, as are hate and fear, attack and guilt but one. Where they are causeless, their effects are gone, and love must come wherever they are not. Why are you not rejoicing? You are free of pain and sickness, misery and loss, and all effects of hatred and attack. No more is pain your friend and guilt your god, and you should welcome the effects of love." (T-29.II.3:3-7 (CE), T-29.II.3:3-7 (FIP))

Knowing our union with God, we have perfect confidence that we "are beloved and must be safe" (1:7). Joy is the consistent companion of gentleness, just as grief and attack go together (1:8). We trust God. We have the Holy Spirit as our Teacher. He goes before us, leading the way, guiding us away from all harm (1:9). I need to point out that this does not preclude any *appearance* of harm. As I said above, we are not physically invulnerable. Jesus was crucified, after all. Gandhi and MLK were assassinated. We can get derailed here: We perceive the appearance of physical harm as *real*. To do so is just another form of what the Text calls making illusions real. It takes a long time for us to fully accept that our bodies, material possessions, and egos are not real. Only spirit is real.

Earlier, the first section of this chapter told us that things should be accorded reality "only to the extent to which they are helpful."

“It takes great learning to understand that all things, events, encounters and circumstances are helpful. It is only to the extent to which they are helpful that any degree of reality should be accorded them in this world of illusion” (M-4.I.4:5-6).

Logically, then, everything we perceive as “harmful” and not helpful must be unreal. Still, I'm confident that the Holy Spirit will not allow us to endure loss or physical suffering if we can avoid it. Jesus even prayed along those lines when he said, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.” (Luke 22:42 NRSV). The promise of guidance that avoids harm is not new to the Course. Even in the Hebrew prophets, we read hyperbolic promises like this:

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.” (Isaiah 43:2 NRSV)

God's Voice directs us in all things. Learning to follow that guidance was our lesson in trust, the first characteristic of God's teachers. Because we so trust and follow Spirit's guidance, we “hold His gifts and follow in His way” (1:10). (“His way.” The early followers of Jesus were not called “Christians.” The book of Acts calls them “those who belonged to the Way” or “the Way of the Lord” (Acts 9:2; 18:25)). To follow in His Way is to live under the reign of God, to behave as children of light.

As a “Thank You” for the gifts and guidance in the Way, we sing a song of joy (1:11).

The light of joy is so strong that it radiates throughout the Sonship and returns thanks to the Father for radiating His joy upon it. (T-5.I.4:1–2 (CE))

The ego and Holy Spirit are in complete disagreement about what of us is real.

“The Holy Spirit never varies on this point, and so the one mood that He engenders is joy. He protects this by rejecting everything that does not foster joy, and so He alone can keep you wholly joyous” (T-6.VII.2:4–5 (CE))

“The Holy Spirit will direct you only so as to avoid all pain. The undoing of pain must obviously avoid pain. Surely, no one would object to this goal if he recognized it. The problem is not whether what He says is true, but whether or not you want to listen to what He says. You no more recognize what is painful than you know what is joyful, and are in fact very apt to confuse them. The Holy Spirit's main function is to teach you to tell them apart.” (T-7.IX.4:1–6 (CE))

The section ends with a fascinating thought. After stating that just as we sing thanks to God, Christ looks down on us with thanks as well (1:12). Why is He thankful for us? Because He needs us as much as we need Him (1:13)! That is rather astonishing, but it makes sense to me because if we are parts or aspects of the One Son, the Son cannot fulfill His purpose until all the parts function as one. The mutual joy comes from *sharing* “the purpose of salvation” (1:14).

### 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.*