

Workbook Lesson Support Notes

by Allen Watson

LESSON 46

God is the Love in which I forgive.

This thought emphasizes that we have great help in practicing forgiveness. Our forgiveness does not depend on our ability to love; God, as Love, forgives through us.

Since God never condemns, God does not have to forgive. Forgiveness is necessary only when condemnation has occurred (1:2). Yet, interacting with our condemning minds, God's Love enables us to forgive. Since condemnation and guilt are illusions, forgiveness "is the means by which illusions disappear" (2:5). Forgiveness is at the core of the Course. As we read elsewhere in the Course, "Forgiveness is the central theme that runs throughout salvation" (W-pl.169.12:1).

Today is the first time you specifically practice forgiving. It will crop up over and over again.

This lesson's practice emphasizes "adding related ideas"; that is, restating the idea for the day or extending and expanding on the idea. You are apparently free to be quite inventive. Several of the variations suggested wander quite far from the original! For example:

Original: God is the Love in which I forgive.

Variation: There is no need to attack because love has forgiven me.

So, feel free in personalizing the lesson and applying it in any way you see fit.

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LESSON 47

God is the strength in which I trust.

When I believe that I am on my own in whatever I am doing, I usually do feel anxious and fearful (1:1). I remember when I first got a job as a manager of a computer systems department. I had five people reporting to me and six computer systems I was responsible for. I was terrified!

It all worked out, but it would have been less traumatic if, at the time, I'd learned today's lesson (I didn't discover the Course for another five years). How can you or I, as individuals, "be aware of all the facets of any problem, and...resolve them in such a way that only good

can come of it" (1:4)? We can't. But God can. I love these lines from the Manual for Teachers:

When this Power has once been experienced, it is impossible to trust one's own petty strength again. Who would attempt to fly with the tiny wings of a sparrow when the mighty power of an eagle has been given him? And who would place his faith in the shabby offerings of the ego when the gifts of God are laid before him? (M-4.I.2:1-3)

Notice that the practice for today is another session of deep meditation. The description of letting go "all the trivial things that churn and bubble on the surface of your mind" (7:3) evokes an image of wind-tossed waves on the open sea, which are only on the surface of a profoundly deep ocean which, at its depths, is totally calm and quiet. This paragraph contains some of my favorite words in all the Course:

There is a place in you where there is perfect peace. There is a place in you where nothing is impossible. There is a place in you where the strength of God abides. (7:4-6)

That is the place we are trying to reach in today's meditations, of which there are at least four five-minute sessions. That is the "necessary" minimum, "and longer and more frequent ones are urged" (4:2). Make a real effort to do at least the minimum four. You won't regret it.

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LESSON 48

There is nothing to fear.

A line in today's lesson is clearly based on the previous lesson: "The presence of fear is a sure sign that you are trusting in your own strength" (3:1). If we trust in our own strength, which we instinctively know is inadequate, we will experience apprehension, anxiety, and fear (W-pl.47.1:1). Therefore, the presence of such feelings should be a red flag! They should alert us that our trust is in the wrong place; fear should prompt us to turn to God and to affirm our trust in God.

That is what we are doing in today's practice: affirming our trust in God. "There is nothing to fear" because God is the Strength in which we trust.

You are really just reminding yourself of something that, in a deep, unrecognized part of your mind, you have already know: "You have remembered God, and let His strength take the place of your weakness" (3:2).

Rather than the longer periods of deep meditation, today we switch back to briefly repeating the thought for the day "as often as possible" (2:2), with an emphasis on doing so "immediately, should anything disturb your peace of mind" (2:5). These are the "frequent reminders" and "response to temptation" aspects of Workbook Practice.

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LESSON 49

God's Voice speaks to me all through the day.

More meditation! Again, at least four five-minute periods “and more if possible” (3:1).

There is another reference here to “the part of your mind in which truth abides” which is “in constant communication with God, whether you are aware of it or not” (1:2). This part of your mind was mentioned previously in Lesson 47 as “a place in you where there is perfect peace” (W-pl.47.7:4). The Course teaches that we all have what it calls a “right mind,” a part of us that knows and remembers God. As long ago as 400 BC, Plato taught that all learning is recollection; we are merely remembering what we already know. Again, we “go past” our surface thoughts and “sink deep into the peace” within ourselves (4:3–4). The goal is to connect with God. Like a radio station, the Voice for God is always broadcasting, but we have to learn to tune in. “The Holy Spirit's Voice is as loud as your willingness to listen” (T-8.VIII.8:7).

In addition to the minimum four meditations (“more if possible”), we also are asked to practice frequent reminders of today’s idea; with eyes open if necessary, but whenever we can, to do so sitting quietly with our eyes closed (5:2–3).

Jesus, speaking in the Course, says, “The Holy Spirit is in you in a very literal sense. His is the Voice That calls you back to where you were before and will be again. It is possible even in this world to hear only that Voice and no other. It takes effort and great willingness to learn. It is the final lesson that I learned, and God's Sons are as equal as learners as they are as sons” (T-5.II.3:7-11). If it was the final lesson that Jesus learned, we should not be discouraged if hearing God’s Voice seems to come slowly for us. Apparently it came slowly for Jesus, too! Let today’s practice be the beginning of a life-long habit of listening to God’s Voice.

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LESSON 50--February 19

I am sustained by the Love of God.

What sustains me? What do I turn to when I feel empty or depleted? God--my eternal Source? Or something else? I have to admit that often it is to something else that I turn for renewal. What would it be like to have a habit of turning to the Love of God? What would it be like to come to rely fully on something so utterly and absolutely dependable?

The list of items in the first paragraph of the lesson contains something that fits nearly every one of us. Whatever my personal preference for “sustainer,” the whole bunch of them is just “an endless list of forms of nothingness that [we] endow with magical powers” (1:3).

When we turn to them, something in us knows that these things are not really solving anything; they are nothing but palliatives, placebos that may dull the symptoms for a while but in the end cure nothing.

I think it was Saint Augustine who said that every one of us is born with a God-shaped blank in our heart. We may try to fill it with all sorts of things, but nothing fits the blank but the Love of God. We "cherish" the other things because we are trying to preserve our imagined, independent identity as an ego in a body. We are cherishing nothingness to preserve a nothing. Wholeness comes only from union with our Source.

The Love of God can "transport you into a state of mind that nothing can threaten, nothing can disturb, and where nothing can intrude upon the eternal calm of the Son of God" (3:3). [Note: a few early printings of the Second Edition had a typographical error, substituting the word "claim" for "calm."] I want a state of mind like that. I want that kind of inner stability, that serenity of consciousness. What else could bring it to me except knowing that I am connected to an unending supply of bottomless benevolence?

The Psalmist said it well in the first Psalm. The "godly," those who know they are sustained by God's Love, "shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper" (Ps. 1:3). When you become inwardly aware of God's Love sustaining you, it is like being a tree planted by a river, its roots constantly supplied by the water that is always there, always being renewed. Or from the Twenty-third Psalm: "The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want....My cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" (Ps. 23:1,5-6).

"Put all your faith in the Love of God within you; eternal, changeless and forever unfailing. This is the answer to whatever confronts you today" (4:3-4).

Again the practice instructions tell us to "sink deep into your consciousness" (5:1). (Notice that it is for a ten-minute period, morning and evening; the periods of meditation are getting longer.) We are to "allow peace to flow over [us] like a blanket of protection and surety" (5:2). Often I find it helps me establish that sense by visualizing something--being bathed in golden light, being embraced by my spiritual guide, or sinking into a warm jacuzzi. I can let it be a time of rest, ten minutes in which I simply let go, physically and mentally, and allow myself to experience peace. I tell myself: "I am okay. I am safe. I am at home in God. His Love surrounds me and protects me. His Love nourishes me and makes me what I am."

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REVIEW / INTRODUCTION

Today, we begin ten days in which we will review the first fifty lessons of the Workbook, five lessons a day. Apart from simply reinforcing the lessons, the purpose of the review is to see how interrelated they are, and how cohesive is the thought system they present. To that

end, I strongly recommend reading each day's review aloud, once in the morning and again in the evening. Doing so will help you follow the connections between the lessons.

Beside those morning and evening sessions, each day of review calls for at least five other periods of practice, and more if possible. A reasonable schedule might be once every hour. In each of these additional periods, pick one of the five lessons (in no particular order) and read it over, along with the accompanying comments. You might try reading those comments aloud, inserting your own name frequently: "The reason this is so is that I, Allen, see nothing...". Do each of the five lessons at least once. If one of the lessons appeals to you strongly, you can repeat it as often as you like.

STAGES OF PRACTICE

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, moved 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.

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Lesson 51 (Review of 1 to 5)

In these first five lessons I am being asked to let go of:

1. What I see
2. My judgments
3. My understanding
4. My thoughts
5. My thought system

What we "see" in the normal sense is nothing; we need to realize it is meaningless and let it go, so that vision may take its place. We are not actually seeing things; rather, we are seeing our judgments on them. If we want vision, we have to realize our judgments are invalid, and cease letting them govern our sight. If we have misjudged, surely we have also misunderstood. Our "understanding" of things is based, not on reality, but on our own projections. But we can choose to exchange our misunderstandings for real understanding, based on love rather than judgment.

Like what we see, our conscious thoughts are without any real meaning; we need to let them go, along with judgment-based perceptions. They are thoughts of anger and attack, seeing all things as our enemies. These thoughts which are apart from God require constant

justification, and our upset is no more than an attempt to justify our anger with the world and our attacks upon it.

As we read over this review, which is written in the first person, we may want to try reading it aloud, and seeing how we resonate with it. <Am> I really willing to let go of what I see, my judgments and my understanding of everything, my thoughts, and my very thought system? Can I say, "I am willing to let it go"?

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LESSON 52--February 21

REVIEW OF LESSONS 6 TO 10

Remember that the general practice for these reviews is to read all five thoughts and comments twice daily, morning and evening, and to spend at least one two-minute period with each of the five ideas during the day.

The thoughts are thick in these reviews, so I offer only a few observations on things that stand out for me.

"Reality is never frightening" (1:2). Reality is, of course, what God created. When I feel frightened, I find it useful to remind myself that I must be seeing something that isn't really there.

I am the one who makes up frightening illusions. How reassuring to be told that, "Nothing in God's creation is affected in any way by this confusion of mine" (1:7). That is the basis for letting go of guilt. I may be confused, mistaken, deceived, and deceiving, but none of it affects what is real. What's real is real no matter what I do. The sun doesn't go out when I cover my eyes. So all that I have done has had zero real effects! I have nothing about which to feel guilty.

"If I see nothing as it is now, it can truly be said that I see nothing" (4:2). A thing is as it is now. It isn't as it was yesterday; it isn't as it will be tomorrow. Things exist NOW. That is the only way I can see them. That is how they are. If I am seeing the past, I'm not seeing anything. The past isn't here.

"I have no private thoughts" (5:2). What if everyone in the world could see right into your mind? What if the way you thought about your boss affected the war in some country on the other side of the world? Guess what? They can. It does. And yet, "they mean nothing" (5:5). If you think thoughts you believe to be private, they are meaningless. They have effects within the illusion, but they affect nothing real. Only thoughts that are shared have real effects, and the only thoughts that can be truly shared are the thoughts you think with God.