

Allen Watson's Post-Workbook Advice

WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

Congratulations! You have finished the entire Workbook. If you are new to the Course in this last year, you may not realize how many students begin the Workbook and don't finish it, so finishing is no minor accomplishment. It really deserves congratulations.

Having completed a pass through the Workbook, there are two questions that might occur to you now:

- Should I repeat the Workbook lessons, or is one time through enough?
- If I feel I am done with the lessons, what should I do now to continue my work with *A Course in Miracles*?

Should I repeat the Workbook?

I believe the answer to this question is very much up to you. Yet, in a general way, I can give you an answer. This answer is my opinion, but it is based on some objective observations about the Workbook and its training goal, and some common sense.

The common sense portion is this: How do you determine whether or not to repeat *anyclass*, in any subject? You ask yourself, "Have I learned what the course was intended to teach?" If you have, you don't need to repeat it. If you haven't, you could very likely profit from repeating the class.

When I was in high school I took three years of French. The last two of those years were from an absolutely *awful* teacher. When I entered college, I took a placement test in French to answer the question "How much French did the high school classes teach me?" The answer turned out to be "Almost none." I placed in French 1 at the college level; I started all over. There was no shame in that. It did not mean I was an incompetent French student. In fact, I ended up majoring in French, spending a year living in France, and being mistaken for French by a French student at the university!

We don't happen to have a simple, written test you can take to determine if you have learned what the Workbook set out to teach you. There is no shame if you haven't learned it yet. I would say, to be perfectly honest, that I do not know one single person who has ever really gotten all there is to get out of the Workbook in just one year. My personal opinion—and there is absolutely no support for this in the words of the Course itself—is that everyone could benefit from doing the Workbook two, three, four, or even more times.

The key piece of information you need to answer the question "Have I learned what the Workbook was intended to teach me?" is: What does the Workbook try to teach us? What is its main goal for us? If you know the answer to that question, it is fairly easy to determine whether or not you have learned it, whether or not the purpose of the Workbook has been achieved in your case.

If you have been reading these commentaries and Robert's practice instructions with understanding, you already know the answers. Whereas the ultimate goal of the spiritual practice given to us by the Workbook is to train our minds to look on everyone and everything in the world differently, to always think with God, to listen always to the Voice for God, and to forgive the entire world, the immediate goal of the Workbook is much more attainable and practical.

That immediate goal is to train us in daily spiritual practice, to establish in our lives the *habit* of spending time every morning and evening to meet with God and to set our minds on His truth, the *habit* of turning our minds within to God every hour or so for a minute or two, the *habit* of thinking frequently of God or of spiritual thoughts in between those hourly remembrances, and the *habit* responding immediately to temptation with some thought of God, some tool from the problem-solving repertoire that we have developed over the year of our Workbook practice.

So the answer to "Should I repeat the Workbook?" is: If you have established these habits of daily spiritual practice to the degree that you can and will carry them on, daily, without the continuing support of the Workbook, then you do not need to repeat the Workbook. You may still *choose* to repeat it, but you do not need to. If, however, you *have not* established these daily habits of spiritual practice, then you should re-enroll yourself in the program that is designed to help you form such habits—the Workbook!

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You probably can fairly easily answer the question for yourself about how strongly you have formed the habits of spiritual practice. If you are still missing your quiet time lots of mornings or evenings; if you rarely remember the lesson every hour, and even more rarely remember it between the hours; if your ego often rises up and seizes control of your mind without being challenged by your right mind, refusing to listen to the ego; then you surely can benefit from doing the Workbook again.

If, on the other hand, you *have* formed strong habits of spiritual practice—not necessarily perfect habits, but real habits, fairly consistent—then you may be ready to set the Workbook aside. Just like when you have been using training wheels to learn to ride a bicycle, the only way to know for sure if you are ready is to try it without the training wheels. The first time I tried continuing my spiritual practice without the Workbook, it was a dismal failure, the equivalent on a bicycle of falling over within one hundred feet. I'd read through the Workbook about six times by then, too! (I had not really tried to follow the practice instructions, however, so it is no wonder that I hadn't formed good habits of practice.) Within a few weeks, I wasn't doing any spiritual practice at all! I realized that I wasn't yet ready to set aside the "training wheels," and I resumed doing the Workbook lessons.

What do I do after the Workbook?

The Manual for Teachers offers very clear instructions for continuing our daily spiritual practice after we have completed the Workbook, in a section titled "How Should the Teacher of God Spend His Day?" (M-16). If you think you are ready to move on without the Workbook, this is where to find your instructions. And if you are wondering whether or not you are ready, reading over these instructions and asking yourself, "Am I ready to do this?" will help you make up your mind.

The section begins by talking about an *advanced* teacher of God. It says, basically, that an advanced spiritual teacher does not need any structure or program; the question of how to spend his day is meaningless, because the advanced teacher lives in constant contact with the Holy Spirit, and simply follows His guidance moment to moment.

However, it goes on to say, the *ordinary* teacher of God—for instance, someone who has just completed the Workbook (and completing the Workbook is a prerequisite to bearing the title "teacher of God")—still *does* need structure. Not as much structure as someone doing the Workbook, but not as little as an advanced teacher. Something in between. This person is not yet ready to live without structure; she or he is still in training, still learning to listen to the Holy Spirit in every moment. The Manual then goes on to tell us what that structure should be, in some detail.

As we have pointed out in our introduction to Part II of the Workbook, and also in "Preliminary Notes on Workbook Practice" in *A Workbook Companion, Volume I*, the instructions given here in the Manual sound remarkably like the fully matured pattern of practice established toward the end of Part I in the Workbook, and carried on through all of Part II. Here they are, as I presented them in Volume I:

The post-Workbook practice, in simple outline, is this:

1. Begin the day right, as soon as possible after waking. "As soon as possible after waking take your quiet time, continuing a minute or two after you begin to find it difficult" (M-16.4:7). The goal in this time is to "join with God." We should spend as long as it takes to do that until it becomes difficult; the length of time is not a major concern (4:4–8).
2. Repeat the "same procedures" at night; just before sleeping if possible (5:1).
3. Remember God all through the day (6:1–14).
4. Turn to the Holy Spirit with all your problems (7:4–5).
5. Respond to all temptations by reminding yourself of the truth (8:1–3; 10:8; 11:9).

It would be good to read over all of Section 16 of the Manual if you are considering post-Workbook practice, and to spend some time carefully studying what it has to say in detail. The outline I have given here just gives the general ideas. It may be enough to let you decide whether you feel ready for carrying out this program.

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Are you ready to spend as much time as it takes to join with God every morning and evening? It might be just a few minutes; it might be an hour. Do you feel confident you know what to do in that time, without the Workbook at hand to give you some specific practice instruction? Are you comfortable enough with the basics of Course meditation to undertake it on your own?

Do you feel you have a habit of remembering God all through the day, and will be able to do that without having a specific thought from the lesson for the day to call to mind? (You may pick some thought for yourself from the Text or Workbook, to use like a lesson thought.)

Have you begun to turn to the Holy Spirit with all your problems as a matter of course, as a habit?

Are you able to respond to temptation with the truth on your own? Or would it still be more helpful to you to have a Workbook lesson that gives you some suggestions about doing that?

If your answers to these questions are mostly positive, then you are ready to leave the Workbook behind. If you find yourself mostly answering "No," then you can probably benefit from repeating the Workbook.

Hints for post-Workbook practice

Let me offer some practical hints, if you have decided to move on to post-Workbook practice. I have found it helpful to make a list of useful thoughts from the Course (not just the Workbook), thoughts that I have found effective in responding to temptation, or thoughts that have helped me, in meditation, to move more quickly into that "quiet center." Some people have begun to compile a notebook containing such thoughts or passages from the Course. You may want to categorize these, for instance, passages useful in working on forgiveness; passages useful when in fear; and so on.

If you look through the Text you will find a number of passages that are in italic type. These passages are nearly all different forms of suggested spiritual practices. They will all say something like this: Whenever you feel troubled by anything, say to yourself...and then comes the part in italics. You may want to make a collection of these passages and then spend several days working with each of them.

You may be studying the Text and be struck by something you are reading, seeing how it applies to a situation in your life. Take that passage and turn it into your own, personalized spiritual practice. Use it to lead in to your meditations; use it for hourly remembrance and for response to temptation.

Speaking of studying the Text, by all means, do study it! Don't just read it, study it. Give yourself plenty of time for such study. I don't really think you can carefully study the entire Text in much less than three years of daily reading and study. I once *read* the entire Text in about two months, but it has taken me the last four years to *carefully study* every chapter.

Just because you are not going through the Workbook lessons day after day, don't think that you can't do a lesson every now and then. Sometimes, a particular lesson from the Workbook will come to mind; follow your instinct, and do the lesson.

Do you remember a few lessons, as you went through the Workbook, that seemed particularly effective or powerful for you, so that, perhaps, you wanted to stop and spend a week or two on just one of them? Well, now you can do that! You can set your own program. The point now is to maintain a habit of consistent, daily practice, but you, in conjunction with the Holy Spirit, are now setting your own individualized curriculum.

One of the techniques we practice with in the Workbook is coming up with related thoughts. Often, the thought you choose to practice with may be one of those related thoughts, rather than words that come directly out of the book.

Some days, you may not have any particular words at all to practice with; you may simply use the day to practice constantly seeking and finding the peace of God.

The basic idea for post-Workbook practice is that you can use any of the techniques and practices given anywhere in the Course, and you can focus on whatever you feel you most need, or whatever works best for you.

And remember, the point is to continue with such practices indefinitely until, like the Workbook itself, you no longer need them. Your life will be a continuous holy instant. It may seem impossible, but the

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Course promises that God will make it possible for you:

In time, with practice, you will never cease to think of Him, and hear His loving Voice guiding your footsteps into quiet ways, where you will walk in true defenselessness. For you will know that Heaven goes with you. Nor would you keep your mind away from Him a moment, even though your time is spent in offering salvation to the world. Think you He will not make this possible, for you who chose to carry out His plan for the salvation of the world and yours? (W-pI.153.18:1-4)