

Rules for Decision
(Text - Chapter 30 - Section I)

Excerpts from the Workshop held at the
Foundation for A Course in Miracles
Temecula CA

Kenneth Wapnick, Ph.D.

Part II
Introduction (cont.)

Before we start our line-by-line analysis of this section, let me first situate it for you in terms of where it comes in the text. The preceding section which ends Chapter 29 is called "The Forgiving Dream," which is a wonderful section contrasting the dreams of forgiveness with the dreams of judgment. The dreams of forgiveness obviously would be the Holy Spirit's correction for the ego's dreams of judgment. The last paragraph in that section speaks about "a new beginning," which is when the Son of God begins to turn away from the ego's dreams of judgment—the dreams of specialness, the dreams of attack, the dreams of hatred, etc.—and now begins to move towards the Holy Spirit's dreams of forgiveness.

What becomes very clear right in the introduction to this section, is that this is a process. It is not something that you learn how to do just like that. That is why Jesus speaks about "a new beginning." Those of you who have worked with the Course a while know that Jesus' view of time is decidedly different from ours. So when he says "beginning" he doesn't necessarily mean one day, or one week, or one year. He says in the "For They Have Come" section: "What is a hundred or a thousand years to Them, or tens of thousands?" (T-26.IX.4:1). When you stand outside time as he does, all of time is the same. So to speak of this as "a new beginning" does not necessarily mean that it is over and done with in no time at all. But it *does* certainly mean that it is a beginning—that you have begun to recognize what the ego's dreams of judgment and specialness are. Then you begin to realize what the pay-off has been—that judgment and specialness have not brought you happiness, nor have they brought you peace. All the individuality and specialness that you believe you have won and have striven to maintain is not worth it, because it hasn't worked. Specialness will never bring you happiness. It will never bring you love. It will bring you a momentary good feeling, but it never lasts. And good feelings always have an underside: when you are up, you will then fall and go down. The peace of God has no underside—it is level, it is even, it is constant, and it does not go up and down. It is not dramatic. It is not exhilarating. It is not exciting. It is not passionate. All of which will cause many people to say: "Who wants it! It sounds very boring." But it will last, and it will never fail you.

Jesus is thus assuming at this point in the curriculum—after all this is Chapter 30, so students have been at it for a while—that students have at least begun to recognize what the two choices are, even if they are not yet ready to choose. Remember, the miracle does not *choose* for you; it simply establishes that you do indeed have a choice. Now he is going to urge us in this section to choose with *him* rather than with the ego.

What is especially interesting about this section from a form point of view is that its whole style is remarkably different from the sections and chapters that precede it and those that follow it. This is written in a much simpler style: it is still in blank verse, which makes it even more incredible. But aside from that, it is not written on the same high poetic level as this whole part of the text is. It is almost as if what Jesus is doing in this section is foreshadowing what will come later on with the workbook. Remember that the workbook was taken down by Helen after the text was completed. The style of this section has much more in common with the lessons in the workbook, especially the early lessons. So in terms of form it is almost an anomaly here. It is almost like a breathing space for the reader. It is much easier to read and understand than many other parts, especially the later chapters—that is why this section is a particular favorite of many students of the Course. But from a thematic point of view it fits in perfectly.

Let me also mention as a caution that even though in this section Jesus talks about *seven* rules for decision, he is really giving them to provide you with a sense of the *process* whereby you go about learning to distinguish between what the ego is offering and what the Holy Spirit is offering. They should not be taken literally as steps that everybody must follow exactly. Everybody's process is different—the *form* of the process is different. At the end of the teacher's manual Jesus says that "the curriculum is highly individualized" (M-29.2:6). The *content* is the same for everyone: the idea of looking within one's mind, seeing what the two choices are, looking at what the choice of the ego's specialness has brought, and then finally making another choice. The content is the same for everyone, but the way students will go about it is decidedly different. Therefore, take these seven rules for decision really as a basic guideline to help you realize what the overall process is like. This is similar to what you should do with the stages in the development of trust that come at the beginning of the teacher's manual (M-4-I). There Jesus gives *six* stages. These are not to be taken literally either—that everybody has to go through these six stages just as they are given there. They are provided as a way of giving you an overall view of the general process of getting past the ego and attaining the real world, which is the final stage of those six stages.

In this sense, then, don't take these seven rules as being literally true—that you actually have to say these words exactly as Jesus gives them, and that you must follow this exact sequence. Their purpose really is to provide you with a general framework for understanding what happens when you make the wrong choice. Then you can correct it. This section, thus, is a wonderful example of what Jesus meant at the end of Chapter 1 when he called his Course "a course in mind training" (T-1.VII.4:1). This is a way of helping you train your mind to think along the lines *he* is setting forth rather than the lines that the ego sets forth. It is a way of training our minds not to be taken in by all of the veils and the illusions and distractions that the ego provides for us in the world—we can pierce all that and go back to that place in our mind where choice becomes meaningful. This takes a tremendous amount of work. Over and over again Jesus says how simple his course is—he does not, however, overly emphasize that it is easy. What is simple and easy about it is that it only says one thing all the way through: what is true is true and what is false is false. That's it! So as he says at the end of the text: you couldn't ask for anything that is simpler than that (T-31.I.1). But it takes a tremendous amount of concentration and dedication to really learn what that means, and to be able to use that principle each and every time you find yourself getting angry, getting upset, filled with thoughts of specialness, thoughts of vengeance, thoughts of depression, thoughts of pain, thoughts of suffering, sickness, etc. It takes tremendous discipline and hard work to be

able to realize that our problems are not here in the world but back in our minds. So again, this section makes it clear that we are talking about a *process*.

Let's begin now going through the section. We will start with the Introduction.

(Sentence 3) The speed by which it [our goal] can be reached depends on this one thing alone: your willingness to practice every step. Each one will help a little, every time it is attempted.

This is quite clear. He is talking about many steps, not *one* step. Unfortunately, people often think this is so easy—they think that they are one step away from the real world, if not in the real world itself, simply because they *want* to be in the real world. They are not aware of their strong unconscious identification with their egos and with their specialness, which always act *against* their achieving a true state of peace. This happens because they skip over passages and sections like this. Jesus is talking about the need to practice every step, and every step really means being aware as often as you can throughout the day what you are choosing. Earlier in the text Jesus said to Helen, even though obviously it is meant for everyone: "You are much too tolerant of mind wandering" (T-2.VI.4:6). "Mind wandering" is the mind's wandering from itself through projection and ending up in a world. In other words, you wander away from your mind. Now all of your thoughts are to the world outside of you—and your body is as much outside you as someone else's body is outside you. This is because the "you" that we are speaking about is the mind. Remember, the "you" in the Course is always the Son of God or the decision maker within the mind. So what happens when we "mind wander" is that our thoughts leave their source which is in the mind, and now seem to be outside the mind in the world. But we forget how they got there. Then we find ourselves getting upset about all kinds of things in the world.

The only reason we are afraid is that we chose the ego. We are not afraid because our body has a fatal illness, or because we don't have enough money for next month's mortgage payment, or because a war might break out, or because a wild animal is roaming around. That is an example of mind wandering—thinking we are afraid and upset, or desirous of something that is outside of us. In reality it is all a projection of what is inside of us. This is why we need specific training, and why we have to practice: because we are "much too tolerant of mind wandering." We love our specialness. We love to indulge it—whether it is specialness that makes us happy, or specialness that makes us weep. When our specialness makes us weep, there is a part of us that is secretly glad, because then we can claim to be an innocent victim of what someone else has done to us. So there is a perverse part of our minds that loves to suffer, so that we can point an accusing finger at someone and say: "You did this to me." All of this is an example of mind wandering. This is why we have to practice, and practice, and practice. This is why this is a very difficult Course: because it is so simple! It is uncompromising—it makes no exceptions. There is absolutely nothing in this world that can help us, just as there is absolutely nothing in this world that can hurt us. Absolutely nothing: for the simple reason that there is no world!

One of the goals of any teacher, just as it is the goal of Jesus in his Course, is to help the student generalize—to learn specific examples and then generalize. A simple example of this is how we all learned to add, subtract, multiply, and divide. We learned certain principles and then practiced with specific examples. When we mastered all that, there was not a number in the world that we could not manipulate through addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. We no longer had to practice with every possibility in the world. We learned some basic principles, practiced them until we mastered them, and then generalized, so now we can add, subtract, multiply, and divide any set of numbers in the world.

That is exactly what Jesus is talking about here—that we practice with all the specific things in our daily lives that upset or concern us; with all the things that occur within our special relationships; all the things in our lives that are problems to us—our jobs, our bodies, etc. And as we learn to apply the principles which this section gives us, we will eventually reach a point when we will generalize. Then there will be absolutely nothing in this world that can ever cause us pain or bring us distress. That is the end of the curriculum—when we master the principles and then apply them all the time.

(Sentence 8) We seek to make them habits now, so you will have them ready for whatever need.

These will be as habitual to us as is the ego's thought system to us now. It is really an overly learned habit to get sick, angry, or anxious, or to get upset over anything that occurs outside us. So what Jesus wants us to do is to have the same power of the mind that learned all of these *insane* habits learn his *sane* habit of becoming more and more observant of ourselves. That is what he means when he says we should be very honest with him and hide nothing (T-4.III.8:2). We should become more and more observant and honest with ourselves, so we can begin to see when we have gotten off kilter. Most of the time we realize that when the damage is already done. What we want to do is get back further and further to that choice point in our minds when we first chose against love, against truth, against Jesus—because that is the beginning, the *cause* of what eventually led to the effect: being distressed, upset, angry, depressed, sick, etc. The time between the cause and the effect will grow shorter and shorter as we progress with the Course.

In a wonderful definition of the miracle, Jesus says that its function is to restore to cause its function of causation (T-28.II.9:3). The mind is the cause; the world is the effect. Whenever we have a problem in the world, it is because we have forgotten the cause which is in our minds. What the miracle does is restore to the mind (the cause) its function of being the causative agent of everything that we feel. That is all the Course is training us to do. This is extremely important, because if we don't understand this, we will do a massive guilt trip on ourselves. We will think we are failing this course because we are still choosing our egos.

The function of the miracle is not to have us stop choosing our egos. It is to have us be aware that we are choosing the ego. Again, I can't emphasize this enough. This is what gets almost all *Course in Miracles* students way off the mark. They then will believe that they are choosing the Holy Spirit when they are not doing that at all—because they think that choosing the Holy Spirit is the goal of the Course. The goal of the Course is that you choose the miracle, which means that you finally understand what you are choosing, and then you learn to forgive yourself for continually choosing your specialness. If you do that, what you have done in effect is let Jesus look at your ego with you. Later in the workshop we will elaborate on this when we talk about the meaning of Jesus. But that is what the miracle is: going back to your mind and now with Jesus or the Holy Spirit beside you, looking at your ego and realizing that *you* have chosen it—even though at any given moment, even though at *that* moment, you may not want to let the ego go. You will at least know what you are doing. And so you will end up as a student of this Course realizing how absolutely insane you are—literally—because of how you perversely continually choose your ego and your specialness. But now at least you know that you are doing it, which means you can't blame anybody else for it. You can't blame your environment, you can't blame the person who just raped you, or embezzled money from you, or insulted you. You can't blame your genes, your bad karma—you can't blame anything. Now you will understand that if you are upset right now, it is because you *want* to be upset right now. You *don't* want the peace of God. You want a piece of

the ego's action. You want a piece of your specialness. You don't want God's peace. But at least you know now what you are doing. That is the goal of the Course. You have successfully completed the Course—because once you do that, it is only a matter of time before you realize this doesn't pay you anymore. That step would automatically happen.

This is another way of understanding what Jesus means when he speaks about "a little willingness," your willingness to practice each step. It is the little willingness to simply know what you are doing. You don't need a great deal of willingness, which would imply your choosing against the ego and choosing for God. In simply knowing what you are doing, you would accept full responsibility for your specialness, for your misery, for your pain—whether it is physical or emotional. You would realize no one is responsible for that except you. Then you would learn that it is not sinful; it is not wicked; it is not evil: it is simply silly. And if you can say it is silly, you are beginning to understand what the Holy Spirit told you right at the beginning: The tiny, mad idea is not evil; it is not wicked; it is not sinful: it is silly. This is the meaning of the line I quoted earlier: "Into eternity, where all is one, there crept a tiny, mad idea, at which the Son of God remembered not to laugh" (T-27.VIII.6:2). We look at our specialness, look at our choosing our specialness instead of the love of Jesus, and smile at the silliness of it. Even as we are embracing it; even as we are defending it; even as we luxuriate in its pain, we will at least know what we are doing, and that is the goal of the Course. This takes tremendous practice, because we don't want to accept responsibility—we want to blame someone else.

We can even blame the ego itself—as if there were an ego outside us. People do with the Course exactly what Christians have done for centuries: "The devil made me do it." People sometimes say: "My ego made me do it!"—as if there were an ego person outside you. At one point in the Course Jesus apologizes for speaking about the ego as if it were an entity of some kind acting on its own (T-4.VI.1). He does that for pedagogical reasons, he explains, so that we can externalize the ego and the Holy Spirit thereby more able to understand that we have a choice. In reality, the ego is our own thought—we are choosing the ego. In the same way, the Holy Spirit is our own thought—the thought of God's Love that came with us into the dream. The Holy Spirit is not a separate being, or a separate person, or a separate entity. The Holy Spirit is really the thought that is Who we are and Whom we have separated from. We think of the Holy Spirit as separate because we think of ourselves as separate—just as we think of the ego as separate. In reality the ego is the thought of hatred and separation, and the Holy Spirit is the thought of Love or the thought of the Atonement. Both are within our minds. Both are part of our minds.

What is extremely helpful as you work with this Course is if you have at least some background in psychology, because that will at least help you have a working understanding and a respect for the unconscious. You don't have to be a great student of psychology, but I think the whole notion of the unconscious is extremely important. What that is telling us is there is a part of our minds that we are not in touch with that is choosing against what we consciously want. So just as Freud said that the goal of psychoanalysis was to make the unconscious conscious, Jesus would say the same thing. The goal of his Course is to make our unconscious decisions conscious. And what renders something unconscious is fear. What makes something unconscious is fear, that is all it is. There is some thought that arouses too much anxiety in me—it brings up too much guilt in me. Therefore I will not see it, because to see it makes me very uncomfortable. At that point our fear dictates that we look away, and that is what repression or denial is. The Course will have you recognize that that is what you have done. You still may choose your ego, but now at least you know what you are doing, and that is a big first step.