

What It Means to Be a Teacher of God

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Part XIV

How Should the Teacher of God Spend His Day? (M-16)

We will look now at the section, "How Should the Teacher of God Spend His Day?" (M-16); and we will focus on the latter part of this section, which talks specifically about magic. But first I want to summarize the earlier part, which discusses how a teacher of God should spend his day. It says that, to an advanced teacher of God, the question makes no sense, because the advanced teacher would simply spend the day the way the Holy Spirit guides him or her. What is being addressed here is the idea of rituals, and so I would like to spend some time on that theme.

Most people who have grown up in the Western world, whether as Jews or as Christians, have grown up in a religion of rituals. As *A Course in Miracles* discusses in the context of special relationships, this is a confusion of form with content. We believe that the acts of obeying certain laws, following certain rituals, and praying in certain ways will, in and of themselves, find pleasure with God, and therefore be salvation for us. By believing this, we are basically saying that we do not have to change our minds—we just need to change our behavior. We ritualize our lives, control our behavior, and do all the things we are supposed to do. And we believe that if we do all this, at some point God will forgive us and welcome us back into His Kingdom. What happens all too often, of course, is that the rituals themselves become substitutes for God. They become substitutes for the experience and for the process of changing our minds. They become idols. That is why Jesus says that "formal religion has no place in psychotherapy, but it also has no real place in religion" (P-2.II.2:1)—that is the point.

The workbook, however, is extremely organized with highly structured exercises. We are told exactly how much time each day we should spend thinking about God, when and how we should do so, what words we should use, etc. It is important to keep in mind that the workbook is a one-year training program, and that it begins with the premise that all of us are spiritually very immature—that our minds are undisciplined. Statements like these are made in the workbook itself (e.g., W-pl.20.2:6; W-pl.44.3:3-5). We need discipline. The workbook teaches us how to develop a certain amount of discipline that allows our minds to think differently—to think along the lines that the Course sets forth, rather than the lines that the ego sets forth. An essential part of that mind-training process is to shift our belief system from seeing the Holy Spirit as Someone Who will punish us and Whom we cannot trust, to seeing the Holy Spirit as Someone Whom we do trust.

The starting point of the one-year training program of the workbook is to have us realize that we do have control over our minds, that our minds are not simply running wild, obeying a power outside us. In other words, we are the ones who are controlling our minds, and it is really possible to change how we think. Teaching us that is one of the purposes of the workbook. And so, in order to do that, the

workbook provides us very structured practice periods. As workbook Lesson 95 explains—and this is the only lesson that really does this—despite the fact that it is set up this way, the workbook is not meant to be a series of rituals that have to be done exactly as it says to do them (W-pl.95.4-9). So if we do not do the lessons as we are "supposed to"—for example, if we do not think of God six times an hour, every waking hour of my day—Jesus is not up there in Heaven with a score card marking down all of our failures, intending at some point to hurl down a thunder bolt and destroy us for our sins. The purpose of the workbook is to train our minds to *want* to think along the lines of the workbook—we want our minds to think of God all day long.

Quite clearly Jesus is not expecting us to do that because he has given us three hundred and sixty-five lessons, not just one lesson. It is true that if we do any one lesson perfectly, we have done them all, because, as he says, "each [lesson] contains the whole curriculum" (W-pl.rVI.in.2:2). But, again, clearly he does not expect us to do that. And at the end of this one-year training program, he says that "this Course is a beginning, not an end" (W-plI.ep.1:1).

So structure is extremely helpful for most people, because it is a way of helping us begin to discipline our minds so that we can begin to get in touch with our thoughts of wanting to attack God, ourselves, and each other. But there is a built-in danger in structure, which is why Jesus says what he does about it in workbook Lesson 95. And he cautions us further in this section of the manual that "routines as such are dangerous, because they easily become gods in their own right, threatening the very goals for which they were set up" (M-16.2:5). He is saying that we should use all the structured practice periods and other routines that he gives us as a means to achieve an end, but we should not mistake them for the end itself. The purpose of the structured periods is to lead us beyond all need to have structure. Then our whole day is simply placed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We then no longer believe that the only way we can feel peace, the only way we can change our minds from attack to love, is to sit quietly by ourselves at a certain time of the day, in a certain posture, reading a certain thing, etc. Doing that is helpful at the beginning stages of the correction process, but it is not helpful if the "routines... become gods in their own right."

A Course in Miracles repeatedly says that its purpose is to be practical. And it is not very practical if I can only find peace by sitting quietly in a corner. What do I do if I am in the middle of a traffic jam on the highway? Or what do I do as a therapist if I am with a patient and I suddenly become very anxious, very guilty, very fearful, or very upset? I can't excuse myself for fifteen minutes and go off into another room and meditate. So the purpose of the Course is to help us train our minds so that, no matter where we are, we can quickly go back to the presence of the Holy Spirit in our minds and ask for help. Physically, nothing changes. I am still perfectly present to you, but a part of my mind goes back to that place of peace and says, "Help. I must have chosen against You because I am not feeling peaceful. I am feeling guilty, anxious, and fearful."

In order for me to reach the point where I can do that very quickly all the time, I need a period of structured learning, just as I would not sit down at the piano for the first time and play a Bach fugue perfectly. I would have to practice for many long hours—very structured practicing—until I am able to sit down and freely play a Bach fugue or a Beethoven sonata. We need structured practice periods. As an artist, my goal would be to reach the point when I no longer would be bound to the structure or to the form. The inspiration, then, would just come through me. My playing, then, becomes more than just

keeping metronome markings—I can play with the same kind of freedom and love that went into the composing of the music.

The same thing is true of living daily, minute by minute, with the Holy Spirit. We do not want to be bound by the rigidity of structure. We want His Love to flow freely through us. That is why this section says that an *advanced teacher of God* does not have a set structure (M-16.1). Yet we do not want to fall into the trap of thinking, "Well, I'm an advanced teacher because I just spent one year with the workbook. Therefore, I don't have to meditate, I don't have to practice, etc." There is nothing wrong with having structured periods. We just don't want to make them into gods in their own right. The real goal of the Course is to have our entire twenty-four-hour day be a meditation and a prayer. So no matter where I am, no matter whom I am with, there is a part of my mind that always remembers that it is in touch with the Holy Spirit or with Jesus. Then when I get upset, I can go back to that quiet place in my mind

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When we are tied to ritual, the notion of a punishing God can often become more prominent in our thinking. So then we need to remind ourselves that God does not care about form. God is formless. He does not know about form. Love is formless. But because we have so trained our minds to deny the formless and to make form into reality, we need to begin with form. Not because form is real, but because form can now serve a different content. And that content is the Holy Spirit's pathway, which leads us through form, beyond form, and into formlessness. In contrast, the ego's use of form roots us further into form.

A line in the Course says that we "cannot even think of God without a body" (T-18.VIII.1:7), which we would realize is true if we paid attention to our thoughts about God. All of our notions of God—even most of the notions expressed in the Course about God as a loving Father—are rooted in a concept of the body. Because we cannot even think of God without a body or some form, we need a form and a concept of God as a body, which at least begins the process of undoing the ego's use of God as a body—as a vengeful Father, for example.

So if I go a few days without reading the Course and then begin to feel a little out of sorts and blame it on my not reading the material, I could be denying that living Presence within my mind. On the other hand, it could also be that my decision not to read the Course was coming from a prior thought in my mind that said, "I'm not going to remember God. I'm going to attack myself." In that context, reading the Course might be helpful, because I am now using the form for a different purpose. We always have to be careful because we cannot evaluate every situation in the same way. The thought is always what gives meaning to the action or the form. The purpose gives it its meaning, not the thing itself.