

Part II Practice instructions

Purpose: The introduction to Part II talks as if, in the remaining part of this year, we are trying to reach the end of our spiritual journey: “This year has brought us to eternity” (10:8). However, the Manual, in Section 16 (“How Should the Teacher of God Spend His Day?”) implies a more modest goal: to reach a place where we practice because of our own motivation and inspiration, rather than because a book is telling us to. This would transform our practicing from a special assignment into a way of life. Part II of the Workbook, with its absence of daily practice instructions, is an important step in this direction. If here, in the relatively formless landscape of Part II, your practice can blossom, rather than wither, you are close to graduating from the Workbook.

I think we need to combine these two goals: We should aim for eternity, realizing that by aiming high we will carry ourselves farther than if we didn’t, even though we may only get as far as weaning ourselves from the Workbook’s support. In other words, we should aim to graduate from time and space, *so that* we can reach the more realistic goal of graduating from the Workbook.

Reading the lesson: The lessons in Part II take a very different form than in Part I. After the day’s idea, we find just two paragraphs, both worded in the first person, which expand and comment on the idea. This makes the Part II lessons look much like what we see in most of the reviews, where the idea for the day is followed by a series of “related comments” (W-pI.rI.In.2:3; 3:3) which are worded in the first person and expand on the idea. In the reviews, these related comments become part of the exercises. We read them over several times, we think about them, we repeat them to ourselves, we savor each word. We make them our own, which is why they are worded *as if* they are our own. We so fully engage them that reading them becomes more like a practice than a simple act of reading.

It makes sense that we should use the comments in the Part II lessons in the same way that we used the comments in the reviews, simply because the two are so similar. And the introduction hints at this. For it speaks of our reading of those paragraphs as an “exercise” (2:1) that is meant to induct us (1:4) into “the periods of wordless, deep experience which should come afterwards” (11:2). Let’s look at how we can turn the reading of those two paragraphs into a genuine exercise.

First, the *commentary paragraphs* (the nonitalicized paragraphs). I recommend that you read these over slowly, perhaps several times, and imagine that these really are your own thoughts (which is how they are worded). To facilitate this, you may want to emphasize words like “I,” “me,” “my,” and “mine.”

Second, the *prayers*. These read as if you yourself are praying them to God, and I recommend doing just that. Fix one sentence at a time in your mind and then close your eyes and say that sentence to God. Try to really mean it and expect Him to hear you. These appear to be designed to carry you into the meditative state, and many of them virtually say that. Lesson 307 says of its prayer, “And with this prayer we enter silently into a state where conflict cannot come” (W-pII.307.2:1). To enhance this effect, you may want to pray the prayer several times.

Morning/evening quiet time: As long as you need for the effect you want.

The longer practice periods are meant to consist of Open Mind Meditation. Begin by repeating the idea for the day, but in a special way: as an invitation to God to come to you. “We say the words of invitation that His Voice suggests, and then we wait for Him to come to us” (4:6). After repeating these words, go into a time of expectant, wordless waiting (the word “wait” here occurs six times). To wait normally means to stay physically still in anticipation of some event. Here it means to stay *mentally* still in anticipation of a wondrous event: the dawning of God on your mind. Wait as if holding your breath for this event. Wait with an attitude that “the memory of

God is shimmering across the wide horizons of our minds” (9:5). Your waiting, then, though motionless, should be very much alive. It should be filled with expectancy: “We...expect our Father to reveal Himself, as He has promised” (3:3). The basis for your expectancy, in other words, is your trust that God will keep His promises. He promised to come to you when you asked. You are asking; He will come. Hold this state without the aid of repeating words. However, whenever your mind wanders, you should use words—repeat the idea to draw yourself back to this nonverbal waiting. “We will use that thought...to calm our minds at need” (3:1).

If you find Open Mind Meditation either too challenging or too unrewarding, I would recommend using either of the other two methods the Workbook has taught: Down-and-Inward Meditation or Name of God Meditation. In fact, Lesson 222 clearly instructs you to use Name of God Meditation: “*Father, we have no words except Your Name upon our lips and in our minds, as we come quietly into Your Presence now*” (W-pII.222.2:1).

Hourly remembrance: One or two minutes as the hour strikes (reduce if circumstances do not permit).

Do a miniature version of the morning practice. Repeat the idea as an invitation to God, and then wait in wordless silence for Him to come to you.

Frequent reminder: As often as possible within each hour.

“Repeat [the idea], and allow your mind to rest a little time in silence and in peace” (W-pI.rIII.In.10:5).

Response to temptation: When you are tempted to let upset cause you to forget your goal.

Repeat the idea as a way of calling on God to dispel your upset (see 2:9 and 10:2).

Reading the “What Is” section: Before one of the day’s practice periods (not necessarily the morning one), read the relevant “What Is” section. Don’t just read it casually. Read it slowly and think about it “a little while” (11:4).

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LET US PRAY

What are we supposed to do with the prayers in Part II of the Workbook for *A Course in Miracles*? There are 140 of them, one for each lesson. This has puzzled many a Course student who, upon reaching Part II, finds himself confronted each day with an italicized prayer directed at God. Is this prayer offered by the author of the Course on our behalf? Do we simply read it? Do we actually pray it? If so, why?

Actually, I am only *assuming* that this issue has puzzled Course students. I have never really heard much discussion about these prayers. They sit there on the page, staring at us every day for five straight months, but we don’t seem to talk much about them. The only perspective I recall hearing is that they must be metaphorical because God can’t hear our prayers.

Having done the Workbook several times, I too didn’t know what to do with these prayers. Yet, to be honest, I hadn’t really confronted the question. I would just dutifully open my book and read the prayer attached to that day’s lesson. The prayers generally struck me as being a kind of Course word salad: a series of typical Course words—Christ, peace, joy, Heaven, etc.—tossed together as one would toss a salad.

Then one day a few years ago, all that changed for me. I was on a short retreat and, for some reason, the first thing I did was sit down and try to discover what the Course wants us to do with its prayers. Having spent many years studying the Workbook’s practice instructions, I had learned that virtually all our questions about practice are answered right in the Workbook, if we pay careful attention. Now, for the first time, it occurred to me that this ought to be true for those prayers; we should expect there to be instructions for what to do with them.

The logical place for those instructions was the introduction to Part II, since that is where we find the practice instructions for the entirety of Part II, where the prayers are found. Within minutes I found two sentences that ended my search and changed my relationship with the Course and with God. Here they are:

We say some simple words of welcome, and expect our Father to reveal Himself, as He has promised. (W_pII.In.3:3)

We say the words of invitation that His Voice suggests, and then we wait for Him to come to us. (W_pII.In.4:6)

From these sentences and the paragraphs around them I obtained the following picture:

The Course has given us words (from the Holy Spirit) which we are to say to God as words of invitation and welcome. Once we invite Him with these words, we sit in a state of silent expectancy, waiting for Him to come and reveal Himself to us in direct wordless experience.

What are these “words”? In this context, they are definitely the thought for the day, the lesson title. But are they confined to that? Don’t these “simple words of welcome” also sound like they could be the prayers? After all, like these words, the prayers are words given us by the Course which are written as if we are saying them to God.

So I turned the page and looked at the first prayers in Part II. They resoundingly confirmed what I was thinking. This is how the first prayer begins:

Father, I come to You today to seek the peace that You alone can give. I come in silence. (W-pII.221.1:1-2)

Just as the introduction described, in this prayer we state our intention to have an encounter with God in the silence of our minds. The comments that follow this prayer continue along the same lines: “Now [that we have said this prayer] do we wait in quiet...We wait with one intent...[for God] to reveal Himself unto His Son” (W-pII.221.2:1, 6). Here is exactly what the introduction said: Once we say these words of welcome, we wait in silence for God to reveal Himself to us.

The next prayer was very similar. In it we state our intention to silently enter into an experience of God’s Presence:

Father, we have no words except Your Name upon our lips and in our minds, as we come quietly into Your Presence now, and ask to rest with You in peace a while. (W-pII.222.2:1)

This was a very intellectual process of detective work, but its results were extremely practical: At last I felt I knew what to do with those prayers! I am to say them directly to God as preparation for a direct wordless encounter with Him.

So I immediately tried this out. I spent the next hour or so going through the first twenty prayers in Part II, praying them as I had just discovered I should. I will never forget that time. It was a pivotal moment in my journey with the Course. Until that moment, I had no idea how much richness was in those prayers. What seemed like word salad when read as information became a wealth of emotional experience when repeated as prayer, when spoken to God.

I was astonished by the sense of loving intimacy with God that shone through these prayers. I had never realized that *this* was how the Course wanted me to think about God. God came across not as a remote metaphysical abstraction, an impersonal essence that is completely unaware of us. Instead, He came across as near and dear, as the most attentive, loving Father one could possibly imagine, always there, always listening, always answering, wanting only to lavish all of His Love

upon us. “He covers me with kindness and with care” (W-pII.222.1:4), one of the lessons said. And that is exactly how I felt, blanketed in His kindness and care.

Since that day, these prayers have become a staple in my daily life. There are few things I enjoy doing more than sitting down and spending time with them. They have literally transformed my relationship with God. My sense of God before was somewhat remote and abstract. Yet increasingly these prayers have implanted in me *their* sense of God, so that my feeling for Him has become a deep well of sustenance and comfort that I draw from daily.

As time went on, I fell into the habit of using these prayers before my meditation time, because I found them to be the ideal way to prepare my mind for seeking God in meditation. They gathered the scattered and chaotic threads of my thought into a single desire to be with God. After I had been using them in this way for some time, I remembered something: *This is exactly what they are for*. This is what the instructions in the Workbook say is their purpose. We are to use the words of these prayers to prepare our minds for a direct, wordless encounter with God. I can attest to the fact that they serve their intended purpose very well indeed.

I therefore encourage every student of the Course to avail him- or herself of the great benefit of these prayers. Try them out and see if you are not drawn to return to them. Here are some tips for getting the most out of them:

1. *Focus on one line at a time*. Dwell on each line and let it sink in before going on to the next.
2. *Say it directly to God*. When the prayer says “Father,” have a sense of speaking directly to God, and of Him in some sense hearing you.
3. *Make it from you*. When the prayer says “I” or “me,” have a sense of you being the one saying the prayer.
4. *Mean it*, as much as you can. Try to make it the prayer of your own heart.
5. *Make it specific*. For instance, when the prayer we will use below says “a something I have called by many names,” list some of the names you have given what you seek.
6. *Feel free to elaborate* on the prayer as it evokes additional thoughts and feelings in you.

To try out this method of using these prayers, I would like to utilize the following prayer from Lesson 231, “Father, I will but to remember You.” My suggestion is for you to repeat each line slowly, with concentration and sincerity. Try to see the fullness of meaning contained in each line. Try also to go through the prayer twice or more.

1. *What can I seek for, Father, but Your Love?*
2. *Perhaps I think I seek for something else; a something I have called by many names.*
3. *Yet is Your Love the only thing I seek, or ever sought.*
4. *For there is nothing else that I could ever really want to find.*
5. *Let me remember You.*
6. *What else could I desire but the truth about myself?*

What was your experience in repeating these lines? Was it an experience you want more of? I sincerely hope that the prayers in the Workbook will become the blessing in your life that they continue to be in mine.