

Commentary

ACIM® Text (CE)

T-2.X, The Real Power of the Mind

The underlining, italics, and footnote formats are explained at the end of the commentary. Also see the note there on the effects of switching from the FIP edition to the Complete and Annotated Edition. Please note that the FIP and CE versions may differ in where paragraph breaks occur.

Overview

This section offers yet another cause for fear: the awesome power of our minds, and the belief we have misused it. We are, at the root of it all, *afraid of our own thoughts* (4:6).

Paragraph 1

Everyone experiences fear, and nobody enjoys it. ²Yet it would take very little right thinking to know why it occurs. ³Very few people appreciate the real power of the mind, and nobody remains fully aware of it all the time. ⁴This is inevitable in this world, because the human being has many things he must do and cannot engage in constant thought-watching. ⁵However, if he hopes to spare himself from fear, there are some things he must realize, and realize fully, at least some of the time.

We all experience fear, some more than others, but nobody enjoys fear (1:1). It's not difficult to realize why fear occurs, if we just take a little time to think about it (1:2). So that's what this section sets out to do. It is expanding on an idea expressed earlier: "All fear is ultimately reducible to the basic misperception that you have the ability to usurp the power of God" (T-2.II.16:1 (CE), T-2.I.4:1 (FIP)). Our minds are unbelievably powerful! "Very few people" really grasp it, and "nobody remains fully aware of it all the time" (1:3). The mind's tremendous power is behind our fears. This occurs in several different ways, which is what this section will explain.

For us as human beings living in this physical world, being unaware of the mind's power is inevitable (1:4). So much demands our attention. We have so many things to do and to take care of that we can't keep watch on our thoughts. We start out to do something, get distracted, and never finish what we began. It goes out of our minds. We

forget appointments. We miss turns when we are driving. The world is quite effective at keeping us from thinking about our thinking.

Still, if we want to be freed from constant fears, we will have to come to a full realization of certain things (I believe he means things about our minds) “at least some of the time” (1:5).

Paragraph 2

² The mind is a very powerful agent, and it never loses its creative force. ²It never sleeps. ³Every instant it is making or creating, and *always* as you will. ⁴Many of your ordinary expressions reflect this. ⁵For example, when you say, “Don’t give it a thought,” you are implying that if you do not think about something, it will have no effect on you. ⁶This is true enough.

The first few lines in this paragraph state some of the “things [we] must realize... fully, at least some of the time” (1:5). First is the extreme power of our minds, a power it never loses, even in sleep (2:1–2). In every instant the mind is either making (illusions) or creating (reality) (2:3). This process is not random or without any internal source; it is driven by what we *will* (2:3).

Jesus then gives an example of a common saying about thinking that indicates some level of understanding what he has just said (2:4). The first one is, “Don’t give it a thought.” When we say it, it implies that “if you do not think about something, it will have no effect on you” (2:5). He says this is “true enough” (2:6), which I understand to mean “true as far as it goes.” I know that if I put something out of my mind (successfully), it at least diminishes the effect of whatever it is, like an impending dental appointment, for instance. On the other hand, if I spend a lot of time thinking about it, I may feel fearful or anxious. So, this saying shows a certain level of awareness of the power of thought.

Paragraph 3

³ On the other hand, many other expressions are clear expressions of the prevailing *lack* of awareness of thought power. ²For example, you say, “just an idle thought,” and mean that the thought has no effect. ³You also speak of some actions as “thoughtless,” implying that if the person *had* thought, he would not have behaved as he did. ⁴You also use phrases like “thought provoking,” which is bland enough, but the term “a provoking thought” means something quite different.¹

¹ In the case of “thought provoking,” something outside has provoked—in the bland sense of “sparked”—the thought. In the case of “a provoking thought,” however, the thought is now the cause, not the effect. And it provokes in the sense of inciting retaliation (by arousing anger). The issue, then, is whether the thought is a mere effect or whether it is a provoking cause.

But there are many sayings that show “the prevailing *lack* of awareness of thought power” (3:1). First, “just an idle thought,” meaning that the thought has no effect (3:2). That simply isn’t true, as we’ll see a bit later. Another word that indicates an unawareness of the power of thought is, “thoughtless,” which we use when we think someone did something they wouldn’t have done if they *had* thought. This usage seems to accord some power to thought, but behavior really can’t occur *without* thought of some kind. I think it falsely assumes the absence of thought.

Then there is “thought provoking” and “a provoking thought.” The first form simply refers to something that evokes a reflective thought (“bland enough,” Jesus remarks), while the latter does envision the power of thoughts to “provoke” an angry response. As the footnote points out, in the first instance thought is the effect, while in the second, it is the cause.

Paragraph 4

⁴ While expressions like “think big” give some recognition to the power of thought, they still come nowhere near the truth. ²You do not expect to grow when you say it, because you really don’t believe it. ³It is hard to recognize that thought and belief combine into a power surge which can literally move mountains.² ⁴It appears at first glance that to believe such power about yourself is merely arrogant. ⁵But that is not the real reason why you don’t believe it. ⁶People prefer to believe that their thoughts cannot exert real control because they are literally afraid of them.

The discussion of common phrases continues with “think big.” Encourage someone to think big, we are encouraging them to have expensive thoughts that will lead to more expensive actions. This does have some recognition of the power of thought, but it comes nowhere near the truth (4:1). You don’t believe that saying “Think big” will cause you to grow bigger, although thought combined with belief could literally move mountains (4:2-3). He says literally so he means literally. This shows how the physical universe is truly affected by our thoughts.

It may seem evident that believing we have such power is arrogant. Who would believe that we could move mountains with only our thoughts? But such a belief is not an overvaluation. In fact, the only reason we don’t believe it is that we are literally afraid of the power of our thoughts. We don’t want to know how far our health, relationships, and circumstances are controlled by our thinking (4:4-6). Moving mountains may be okay, but what about all the idle thoughts that run through my mind all day long? What about those “sweet thoughts of revenge” I have every now and then, knowing they are just “idle thoughts”? They *are* “idle” thoughts, aren’t they?

The truth is that there *are* no “idle thoughts.” *All* thinking produces form at some level. (T-2.X.7:1-2 (CE))

² Matthew 17:20 (RSV): “For truly, I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.”

That's what scares us! That's why we *do not want to believe* that thought and belief combine to produce a mountain-shaking power surge. I'll comment further on this in Paragraph 7.

Paragraph 5

5 Therapists try to help people who are afraid of their own death wishes by depreciating the power of the wish. ²They even attempt to “free” the patient by persuading him that he can think whatever he wants without any real effect at all. ³There is a real dilemma here, which only the truly right-minded can escape. ⁴Death wishes do not kill in the physical sense, but they do kill spiritually.³ ⁵*All* destructive thinking is dangerous. ⁶Given a death wish, a person has no choice except to act upon his thought or behave contrary to it. ⁷He can thus choose only between homicide and fear (see previous notes on will conflicts).⁴

Many psychotherapists think they are helping people suffering from thoughts like a death wish by telling them it's OK, they are “just thoughts.” They try to free the patient from guilt about their thoughts by telling them they don't have “*any* real effect at all” (5:1–2). But “at some level”—body, mind, spirit, conscious or unconscious—they *do* have real effects.

Death wishes, for instance, “do not kill in the physical sense, but they *do* kill spiritually” (5:3–4). As the footnote says, they “kill” our awareness of spirit. They deaden our minds to the Voice for God. Whatever shape it takes in our minds, “*all* destructive thinking is dangerous” (5:5). It takes a state of true right-mindedness to escape from our tendency to misperceive our thoughts as either dangerous or powerless. Stuck in the middle, when a dark thought occurs we seem to have only two choices: act on it, or suppress it and act *contrary* to it (5:6). With a death thought the *only* choices are homicide or fear (5:7)! This is just the kind of “will conflict” discussed in the previous section, Paragraphs 6 to 11. But there is another possibility...

³ Later, the Course will teach that our physical death is the result of unconscious death wishes, stemming from our guilt. When this sentence says that death wishes “kill spiritually,” this must mean that they “kill” our *awareness* of our spirit.

⁴ A secondary meaning of “death wish” is a desire for the death of another person toward whom one harbors unconscious hostility. The phrase “previous notes on will conflicts” refers to the previous section, particularly paragraphs 6-11. This reference shows that fear of one's destructive wishes (which is what is being discussed above) is the same fear discussed in the previous section.

Paragraph 6

6 The other possibility is that he depreciates the power of his thought.⁵ This does allay guilt, but at the cost of rendering thinking impotent. ⁴If you believe that what you think is ineffectual, you may cease to be overly afraid of it, but you are hardly likely to respect it either. ⁵The world is full of endless examples of how people have depreciated themselves because they are afraid of their own thoughts. ⁶In some forms of insanity, thoughts are glorified, but this is only because the underlying depreciation was too effective for tolerance.⁶

Rather than struggling between acting out your dark thought or suppressing it and acting contrary to it, you can just *depreciate* the power of your thoughts (6:1). That is what Freudian analysts usually do (6:2). The benefit of this is that it takes the edge off your guilt, but the drawback is worse than guilt—you suppress belief in the power of your mind (6:3). You may not longer be afraid of your thinking but you lose all respect for it (6:4). Unfortunately, this approach is all too common (6:5). There are some forms of insanity that appear to take the opposite approach, *glorifying* the power of thought, but this only occurs after the attempt to depreciate the power of thought causes intolerable pain (6:6).

Paragraph 7

7 The truth is that there *are* no “idle thoughts.” ²*All* thinking produces form at some level. ³The reason why people are afraid of ESP, and so often react against it, is because they know that thoughts can hurt them. ⁴Their own thoughts have made them vulnerable.⁷

Earlier, in commenting on Paragraph 4, I have already quoted the first two sentences of this paragraph, but they bear repeating. Every thought you have, no matter how “idle” it may seem to be, “produces form at some level” (7:1–2). We simply do not want to recognize how extremely powerful our thoughts are. How would you feel if your thoughts appeared in print on your forehead, or were somehow broadcast on a public address system? Your thoughts can hurt others even if they are never spoken, and the more willing we are to accept that fact, the sooner our thoughts will begin instead to *heal* people. I love these lines from Workbook Lesson 127:

²At least three times an hour think of one who makes the journey with you, and who came to learn what you must learn. ³And as he comes to mind, give him this message from your Self:

⁵ I.e., Freudian.

⁶ In these forms of insanity, in other words, a person will ascribe a grand significance to his thoughts, but only as a cover to compensate for an underlying *depreciation* of thought, a depreciation so effective that he found it intolerable.

⁷ Because our *own* thoughts have made us vulnerable, we now believe in the hurtful power of thoughts, and fear being hurt by the thoughts of others.

*‘I bless you, brother, with the love of God,
which I would share with you. (W-127.11:2–4 (CE))*

This is a practice we can use over and over again. Every time you meet someone or even see them across the street, you can mentally bless them with the love of God. *They will be blessed!* And your mind and spirit will be equally blessed, because giving is receiving.

This fear of the power of thoughts is why many people are afraid of ESP (ExtraSensory Perception). Deep down, they realize they have been hurt by their own thoughts, and therefore they *know* that thoughts can hurt them (7:3–4).

Paragraph 8

8 You who complain about fear still persist in producing it most of the time. ²I told you in the last section that you cannot ask *me* to release you from it, because I know it does not exist.⁸ ³You don’t. ⁴If I merely intervened between your thoughts and their results, I would be tampering with a basic law of cause and effect, in fact the most fundamental one there is in this world. ⁵I would hardly help you if I depreciated the power of your own thinking. ⁶This would be in direct opposition to the purpose of this course.

Jesus wants us to stop being afraid, and to stop using it as an excuse to follow his guidance. We complain about being fearful, yet we go on producing it most of the time (8:1–2). We want him to take away our fear, but he can’t take it away because he *knows* that fear doesn’t exist (8:2). He is saying, “Don’t bother asking *me* to do it! You have to decide to stop producing it by our misguided thinking.” The problem for us is that we *don’t* realize that fear is unreal (8:3). Fear is needless if we are willing to watch our thoughts. It is our insane thinking that causes fear, so it is entirely under our control (see T-2.IX, Paragraphs 1 to 3).

Paragraph 9

9 It is certainly much more useful for me to remind you that you do not guard your thoughts at all carefully, except for a relatively small part of the day, and somewhat inconsistently even then. ²You may feel at this point that it would take a miracle to enable you to do this, which is perfectly true. ³Human beings are not used to miraculous thinking, but they can be trained to think that way.

Jesus now reminds us that we do not guard our thoughts carefully, except perhaps inconsistently in a small part of the day (9:1). It’s just not a habit we’ve developed as yet, and perhaps haven’t ever really *tried* to develop. Keeping our minds completely free of

⁸. T-2.IX.5:1-2: “The correction of fear *is* your responsibility. When you ask for release from fear, you are implying that it isn’t.”

any thoughts that produce fear probably seems impossible except for a miracle, And a miracle is exactly what it *does* take (9:2)! It takes miraculous thinking, which is something none of us are used to. But we can be *trained* to think that way (9:3). That is very much the purpose of the Course. It is a course in mind-training (T-3.I.1:2 (CE)).

“An untrained mind can accomplish nothing. It is the purpose of these [Workbook] exercises to train the mind to think along the lines the course sets forth” (W-In.1:3–4 (CE)).

“The purpose of the workbook is to train the mind in a systematic way to a different perception of everything in the world” (W-In.3:1 (CE)).

“You will find, if you train yourself to look at your thoughts, that they represent such a mixture that, in a sense, none of them can be called “good” or “bad.” This is why they do not mean anything. (W-4.1:6–7 (CE)).

Anyone attempting to study *A Course in Miracles* has to accept at the outset that their mind is full of meaningless thoughts, thoughts that engender fear. In terms of thinking, you are like someone who has been bed-ridden for a year or two, hardly able to stand, starting out to train to enter an iron-man competition. At the outset, it seems like it will take a miracle to achieve such a state—but your trainer assures you that it is possible, if you are willing to do all the required exercises. Way back in Miracle Principle 6 we are assured that “miracles are everyone’s right, but purification is necessary first.” It is talking about the purification of our thinking: “Your ministry begins as all your thoughts are purified” (W-151.15:2 (CE)).

Paragraph 10

10 All miracle workers *have* to be trained that way. ²I have to be able to count on them. ³This means that I cannot allow them to leave their minds unguarded, or they will not be able to help me. ⁴Miracle working entails a full realization of the power of thought and real avoidance of miscreation. ⁵Otherwise, the miracle would be necessary merely to set the mind *itself* straight, a circular process which would hardly foster the time-collapse for which the miracle was intended. ⁶Nor would it induce the healthy respect which every miracle worker must have for true cause and effect.⁹

This is how every miracle worker is trained. It is absolutely necessary (10:1). Jesus wants to be able to count on us (10:2), which is a high bar for us to shoot for. At times I don’t feel like I can depend on *myself*! The key factor that enables him to trust us to help him is that we never leave our minds unguarded (10:3). He is going to deal with our unguarded minds in the next section. There is a sense in which we guard our minds in a negative way, guarding them against the change that is necessary to our awakening, and

⁹ As the context makes clear, this passage is speaking of a miracle setting the mind of the miracle worker straight *without his consent*. Such a thing clearly would not foster a healthy respect for the fact that his own freely chosen thoughts are cause and his emotions are effect.

Jesus is really asking us to allow *him* to become the guardian of our thoughts. We must watch our minds for thoughts that are not under his control, thoughts of fear rather than love, and to give them to him to purify them for us. One of my favorite passages in the Workbook is about just this purification:

“And then we watch our thoughts, appealing silently to Him Who sees the elements of truth in each of them. Let Him evaluate all thoughts that come to mind, remove the elements of dreams, and give them back to you as clean ideas which do not contradict the will of God.”¹⁰

Give Him your thoughts, and He will give them back as miracles which joyously proclaim the wholeness and the happiness God wills His Son, as proof of His eternal love. And as each thought is thus transformed, it takes on healing power from the Mind Which saw the truth in it, and failed to be deceived by what was falsely added. All the threads of fantasy are gone, and what remains is unified into a perfect thought that offers its perfection everywhere.
(W-151.13:3-14:3 (CE)).

The purification involves two aspects: gaining a full realization of just how powerful our thoughts are while, at the same time, avoiding all miscreation (10:4). Unless our mind's thinking meets these criteria, we cannot offer miracles to others because *our own mind* needs a miracle (10:5). Extension would be blocked, and no time-collapse (the whole purpose of miracles) would occur. And if Jesus or the Holy Spirit intervened without our consent to purify our thinking, we would never acquire the necessary “healthy respect” “for true cause and effect” (10:6). By “true cause and effect” I believe he means the causal relationship between thoughts and feelings such as fear: our thinking is the cause of our feelings. This is the reason he refuses to *control* our thinking, although he clearly wishes to *guide* our thinking. He can and will guide our thinking if we consent to his doing so, but controlling our thoughts would violate our free will.

¹⁰. Note that in this practice the Holy Spirit purifies our thoughts, which implies retaining what is true in them and removing what is false. In other words, He does not negate our thoughts and offer true thoughts in their place (as He does elsewhere in the Course). Rather, He sees what is already true in our thoughts (“sees the elements of truth in each of them”) and strips away everything else (“remove the elements of dreams”), so that we receive back thoughts that contain only the truth that was already there (“clean ideas which do not contradict the will of God”). What He does, in other words, is strip away the egoic elements in our thoughts, leaving only the love, kindness, pure intentions, and holy desires that were already present in our thoughts.

Paragraph 11

11 Miracles cannot free the miracle worker from fear.¹¹ ²Both miracles and fear come from his thoughts, and if he were not free to choose one, he would also not be free to choose the other. ³Remember, we said before that when electing one person, you reject another.¹² ⁴It is much the same in electing the miracle. ⁵By so doing, you *have* rejected fear. ⁶Fear cannot assail unless it has been elected.

Jesus cannot work a miracle to free us from fear; as I said above, that would be a violation of our will (11:1). But we can *choose* a miracle, and using our will and mind to do so will produce the required miracle. I say “required” because, as 9:2 made plain, a miracle is exactly what it takes for us to guard our thoughts carefully. But it is our change of thought that brings about the miracle. Jesus has repeatedly referred to cause and effect, and the power of our minds. Our mind is the cause of our experience. We have to realize this and remember it. He points out that our thoughts produce *both* miracles and fear. Taking our fear from us would take away our freedom of choice. To be able to choose miracles we must remain free to choose fear (11:2). To choose a miracle *is* to reject fear (11:3–5). The only way we can experience fear is to *choose* to (11:6).

It may seem paradoxical to say that it takes a miracle for us to guard our thoughts carefully and to maintain as well that the only way to experience a miracle is to use our mind and will to choose it. It seems as though we need a miracle to enable us to choose a miracle. I think, rather, that it simply recognizes that choosing a miracle *is* a miracle, and the choice is up to us. We are not reduced to begging God for miracles; *we can work them ourselves*. Miracles are always there—we are *entitled* to miracles.

"The miracle is always there. Its presence is not caused by your vision; its absence is not the result of your failure to see. It is only your awareness of miracles that is affected. You will see them in the light; you will not see them in the dark.

To you, then, light is crucial. While you remain in darkness, the miracle remains unseen" (W-91.1:4-2:2 (FIP)).

Invoking a miracle is merely a matter of opening our spiritual eyes.

¹¹ In other words, it is up to the miracle worker to elect different thoughts, to elect the miracle. The miracle cannot just barge in, override his thoughts, and remove his fear. That would take away his freedom. He must voluntarily elect the miracle and reject the fear himself.

¹² T-1.43.2:6: “Voting always entails both election *and* rejection.”

Paragraph 12

12 You have been afraid of God, of me, of yourself, and of practically everyone you know at one time or another. ²This can only be because you have miscreated all of us and believe in what you made. ³You would never have done this, if you had not been afraid of your own thoughts.¹³ ⁴The vulnerable are essentially miscreators, because they misperceive creation.

This final paragraph spotlights our fears about God and persons: Jesus, ourselves, and “practically everyone you know” (12:1). It then identifies the *cause* of these fears as our *miscreating* all these beings and believing in our miscreations (12:2). Let’s remind ourselves what it means to miscreate. It’s a synonym for psychological projection, perceiving another person falsely and attributing to them some characteristics in ourselves that we do not want to recognize. The root cause of such projection is that we are “afraid of [our] own thoughts” (12:3). Robert’s footnote expresses it very clearly (please read it now).

This is the way our thoughts cause our fears. This is why we “elect” fear; essentially, we are denying its internal cause and are falsely perceiving the cause of fear as outside of us. This is a central theme in the Course and we need to focus on it and let it sink in.

Sin, guilt, and fear are the unholy trinity. We believe we have sinned. That belief produces guilt, and that guilt produces fear. What we are afraid of is our own thoughts, but accepting that idea is too terrifying. “I’m doing this to myself? OMG!” So our minds *miscreate* external causes for our fears to avoid seeing the cause in ourselves. Workbook Lesson 161 presents a vivid picture of what our projection looks like:

"Who sees a brother as a body sees him as fear's symbol. And he will attack, because what he beholds is his own fear external to himself, poised to attack, and howling to unite with him again. Mistake not the intensity of rage projected fear must spawn. It shrieks in wrath, and claws the air in frantic hope it can reach to its maker and devour him" (W-161.8:1-4 (FIP)).

Even more vivid is the picture in Lesson 196 that describes that OMG moment when we realize that the cause of fear is not outside of us, but within:

"There is an instant in which terror seems to grip your mind so wholly that escape appears quite hopeless. When you realize, once and for all, that it is you you fear, the mind perceives itself as split. And this had been concealed while you believed attack could be directed outward, and returned from outside to within. It seemed to be an enemy outside you had to fear. And thus a god outside yourself became your mortal enemy; the source of fear.

"Now, for an instant, is a murderer perceived within you, eager for your death, intent on plotting punishment for you until the time when it can kill at last. Yet in this instant is the time as well in which salvation comes. For fear of God

¹³ We believe our thoughts have hurt us and made us vulnerable. We then project what our thoughts have done to us onto God, Jesus, and others, making *them* appear to be the destructive agents to which we are vulnerable.

has disappeared. And you can call on Him to save you from illusions by His Love, calling Him Father and yourself His Son. Pray that the instant may be soon, - today. Step back from fear, and make advance to love" (W-196.10:1-11:6 (FIP)).

This is the same fear of looking within that opens Lesson 93: "You think you are the home of evil, darkness and sin" (W-pI.93.1:1 (FIP)). The title of the lesson is the opposite: "Light and joy and peace abide in me." The lesson affirms repeatedly that our sinlessness is guaranteed by God.

Notice again the presence of the words "you think." We are afraid of ourselves. It is our mistaken thoughts that have perceived a terrible cause for fear in ourselves and have projected that cause outside of ourselves, and act that required the miscreation of a world that is separate from us that we could project *onto*. It is our choice to withdraw our investment in the illusion of external causes for fear that enables miracles to flow forth from us.

Legend:

Light underscoring indicates emphasis that appears in the Urtext or shorthand notes.

The Text is taken from the Circle of Atonement's Complete and Annotated Edition (which I refer to as the "CE" for "Complete Edition" or "Circle Edition"). Please be aware that, even when the wording is identical to the FIP version, the division into paragraphs is often entirely different in the CE, which restores the paragraph breaks found in the original notes. This results in different reference numbering as well. I will indicate for each paragraph the corresponding sentences in the Foundation for Inner Peace (FIP) edition. You should be able to locate specific sentences in that edition if you need to, with a minimum of visual clutter in the commentary. References to quotations are from the CE unless another version is being quoted, in which case that version is indicated.

Footnotes by the commentary author are shown in this font and size. Other footnotes come from the Complete Edition itself.

Effects of Differing Editions of the Course

There were significant changes made in the CE, although for the most part there was no alteration in the meaning of the text, and the *Manual for Teachers* had far fewer changes. There are some changes in section and paragraph breaks and sentence structure that result in different numbering in references to the same text in the two editions. When there is a major difference I will indicate it with a footnote.

I have attempted for all references to add a separate FIP reference if it differs from the CE reference, but I may have missed some. If so, I apologize. Please let me know of any referencing problems you find.

I have also tried to edit my commentary so as to reflect any wording changes in the CE. For instance, the CE Text restored the plural use of "you" where the FIP had substituted the phrase "you and your brother." One such instance will illustrate the kind of change, significant in actual words but nearly identical in overall meaning:

FIP: Thus you and your brother but shared a qualified entente, in which a clause of separation was a point you both agreed to keep intact.

CE: You shared a qualified entente, in which a clause of separation was a point which you had both agreed to keep intact.