

## **Suggested Guidelines for ACIM Groups**

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Miracle Network offers this guide as a resource for study group leaders and participants alike in the hope that it supports the invaluable work that takes place in *A Course in Miracles* study groups throughout the UK. It is a guide, and not meant to be prescriptive. Above all, we would like to encourage you to listen to Inner Guidance, wishing you every blessing for your study of the Course and for all the connections you make in your group.

*A Course in Miracles* is primarily a self-study system, one that we are encouraged to read as though it were written directly for us. However, there is undoubted benefit in sharing our experiences and understanding with others. A study group provides ongoing relationship with fellow students of the Course, which can be a great support as we allow our egos to be undone. Study groups can also provide wonderful opportunities to practice forgiveness, the central practice of ACIM.

In *"Disappearance of the Universe"* by Gary Renard, Arten says to Gary

*"We're also happy you found a study group, although it will be a while before you recognize that study groups are not about joining with individuals on the level of the world, but for the sake of forgiveness that becomes possible through the relationships and the examination of your own ego. In study groups, churches, or anywhere else in this world, it appears that there are multiple teachers and learners. But there is really only one Teacher of the Course and only one student"*

### STRUCTURE

Study groups are often flat-structured in that there is no appointed teacher. There already is a Teacher present in the Course who is available and willing to help us choose and develop right-mindedness, as well as remove the blocks we have to the remembering of Love's Presence. This Teacher is the Holy Spirit. The group facilitator is usually (but not always) the host, and will either direct the discussion or ask others to do so week by week. Sometimes a group will be run by a student-teacher. You don't have to be a Course 'expert' to facilitate/host a group, and we offer all encouragement to anyone who feels guided to start a study group to follow this guidance and have confidence that the Holy Spirit will be holding them and the new group.

### FORMAT

There are no specific formats we recommend but we have offered suggestions at the end of this guide in the hope they are useful starting points for anyone looking for ideas. We do recommend that meetings begin with a group prayer of surrender to the Holy Spirit. This is acknowledging our invitation to the Holy Spirit to be in charge, and then the meeting will be well looked after, no matter what seems to happen. We also recommend that meetings end with a prayer of gratitude to the Holy Spirit.

The prayer of surrender can be taken from the Text or Workbook, and read by a group member. One suggested opening prayer is from the Text, T-2. V.A. 18.

*"I am here only to be truly helpful. I am here to represent Him Who sent me. I do not have to worry about what to say or what to do, because He Who sent me will direct me. I am content to be wherever He wishes, knowing He goes there with me. I will be healed as I let Him teach me to heal"*

One idea is to change the "I" to "we" and end with "Holy Spirit, may you bless this gathering". The opening prayer can be followed by a short meditation of 5-15 minutes, in order to promote a state of inner calm and allow a sense of the Holy Spirit's presence to settle across the group.

## CHARGING MEMBERS

Most study group leaders don't ask for payment from their members, but in some circumstances the leader may be guided to charge, or ask for a donation, particularly if there is a venue hire involved, or a Meetup subscription to pay.

## GUIDELINES FOR RESPECTING OTHERS IN THE GROUP

### Active Listening

There is great value in practicing active listening when others are sharing. Active listening is a skill which involves paying attention not only to what is being shared, but how it is told, the use of language and voice, and how the other person uses his or her body. As a listener we are encouraged to be at least as engaged in the process as the speaker. This is a powerful way to connect to another person, helping us to become entirely present and open to guidance from the Holy Spirit.

### Non-Judgement

We may disagree with what someone else is saying, perhaps even strongly and with feelings of irritation or anger. If we believe the person is wrong and we are right, then we are judging them. This presents an opportunity to remember that the judgment is just our belief and to ask the Holy Spirit to help us release it. We are then free to continue with active listening. This way of working with the Holy Spirit is one of the great gifts of a study group. It is perfectly possible to disagree with someone without judgment.

The following words are written by Ken Wapnick, and capture how, as students, we can try to approach the Course when studying together:

*"I have frequently made the public comment that one of the most important lessons A Course in Miracles student can learn is how to disagree with someone (whether that person be on another spiritual path, or a student of the Course) without it being an attack."*

### Confidentiality

It is important to ask for everyone's verbal agreement to the confidentiality of all that is disclosed within the meeting. If something sensitive is disclosed by a certain member it is not appropriate for other members of the group to refer to the disclosure in the future, or even later in the evening (over tea for instance) without gently asking permission first of the person concerned.

## POSSIBLE GROUP DYNAMICS

Within a group setting roles will inevitably emerge, unconsciously and automatically. This is the ego exercising its nature. Usually in ACIM study groups the ego expresses itself subtly rather than in the glaring technicolor that it may do on the streets or within the more familiar contexts of romantic or parent-child relationships. This is called spiritual ego, the ego that hijacks the spiritual process. It can take many different forms, some of which are outlined below. The single unifying solution within the diversity of problems presented by spiritual ego is to remember to look upon everything that arises as a forgiveness opportunity specifically designed for our own awakening. This is ongoing work, greatly helped by offering silent gratitude to the perceived source of the issue. As with everything, bring it to Holy Spirit for guidance.

Here are some examples of spiritual ego to watch out for, in yourself and others:

### The Holy Instant Experience

Many people who have studied the Course for a number of years will have had a powerful experience of a Holy Instant. This experience can be hijacked by the ego, which thinks it is enlightened and has all the answers, and be disruptive in a group environment. The facilitator can settle the group by acknowledging the dominant speaker and then draw quieter members out by asking them what they think. A talking stick may be usefully employed here.

### Fundamentalism

Some people can come into a group who have very definite ideas about what the Course says and means, whilst unable to accept that another's ideas may be just as valuable. Their lack of ability to appreciate beliefs other than their own may make them overbearing, and sometimes it can lead to group members leaving. It is useful to remember that the ego does not know what anything means, and if a student starts to forcefully press his/her opinions onto others it can be seen as the ego at work. Again, the facilitator can thank the person with strong views for sharing and then ask other members of the group to contribute. It might be appropriate for the facilitator to remind the group that the Course does not say it is the last word in enlightenment.

### Ego Fixing

Some groups focus on individual processing, and 'trying to fix people' can creep in. The Course's teaching, and the interests of the group as a whole, may be lost sight of. Shared facilitation can be helpful in an instance like this. The facilitator can ask the group as a whole "What would the Course say about this?" Again, a 'talking stick' could be helpful.

### Staying Intellectual

Some groups proceed through the Course in a very academic fashion, and members can get stuck in trying to intellectually understand the concepts rather than live the principles of the teaching. In this case, the facilitator could encourage the sharing of personal experiences relating to the practical application of the Course. Meditation may also be very helpful.

## MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

It is possible that your ACIM group may attract a student with mental health issues. Conditions such as bi-polar can sometimes be exacerbated by studying ACIM with the ego rather than Holy Spirit. Very occasionally, a student may become so challenging to the group that the guidance may be to ask them to take a break for a while. Sometimes this is the most loving thing to do. We suggest that the facilitator only takes this step after deep reflection, and offering up the whole situation to the Holy Spirit. If you require help with a specific issue please email the administrator ([admin@miracles.org.uk](mailto:admin@miracles.org.uk)) who will be able to put you in touch with an experienced group facilitator for support and guidance.

## APPENDIX

### Suggested Formats

Format One: 1½ hours:

- Leader, or a group member, reads a prayer or reading as a lead in to 20 minutes silent meditation.
- Members share reflections on the meditation.
- 50 minutes of reading ACIM book round the room with anyone free to comment or query on difficult or interesting passages.
- End with a prayer of gratitude.

Format Two: 1 ½ hours:

- Each person reads a paragraph of the Lesson of the Day.
- Open frame discussion on the main impact points for each individual using Robert Perry's Glossary of Terms to help clarify concepts etc.
- Each randomly takes an Angel Card and an ACIM Wisdom Card - share what is picked.
- Leader leads a meditation emphasising what people shared from the Lesson and suggesting each one quietly place the words on their cards in the context of the Lesson.
- Share individual experiences of the meditation.
- Finish with a prayer in a time of quiet contemplation.

Format Three: 1½ hours – 2 hours:

- Start with a piece of music – ACIM words to music or instrumental – which leads into a five-minute meditation.
- The leader of the day picks a chapter of the text and everyone reads two paragraphs each around the group with anyone free to comment or query on the reading when the two paragraphs have been read.
- The day's Lesson is then read in the same manner around the group and then a silent meditation on this Lesson for 5 – 10 minutes.
- Finish with another piece of music with everyone holding hands and singing along if words are known.
- Have a cuppa and a biscuit together for those who are able to stay.

Format Four: 2 – 2½ hours:

- Informal chat for a few minutes.
- Leader makes a statement about what they have planned for the group to talk about during the evening.
- An opening prayer that the leader has written which has elements connected to the content of the proposed discussion.
- News bulletins about ACIM or related spiritual material, what's on or feedback from what others have been doing.
- Exchange of reading material or ACIM CDs etc.
- Reading and exploration of a few pages or sections of ACIM – usually the Text – take turns reading sentences.
- A meditation for about 15 minutes.
- Closing prayer.

### READING SCHEDULE LINK

For those who like to be able to read all the books contained in the Course in one year, the following link is available for you to download this schedule.

[www.miracles.org.uk/files/ACIM\\_Study\\_Programme.pdf](http://www.miracles.org.uk/files/ACIM_Study_Programme.pdf)