

February 2023

Hello Friends,

I loved hearing back from so many of you after the January email—appreciation for the Wendell Berry quote, a few watched-it-and-liked-it's about the “Master of Light” documentary, some responses about the psychotherapy and spirituality training in March, and a beautiful email about loneliness. Your responses encouraged me to stay in touch more often. So read on for more about

- the upcoming training
- gathering yourself when you're feeling scattered
- a link to a soulful recording of Maurice Nicoll's “The New Will”

### **ACPE Level 1 Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy (SIP) Training**

This was in last month's newsletter, but the time is drawing nigh. On **March 16-18** – Thursday evening through Saturday afternoon--I'll be leading a workshop in spiritually integrated psychotherapy (Level 1 of ACPE's SIP Training) by Zoom.

Spirituality is at the heart of many people's resource system, motivation system, and sense of themselves and others. This training is designed to deepen knowledge, skills, and way of being for working across the spectrum of spiritual diversity and moving toward this important dimension of people's lives. It's mostly for therapists (and comes with **15 hours of NBCC-approved continuing education credit**). But we've had chaplains, clergy, and music therapists take the training and find it helpful too. I've attached a flyer with more information.

This is a curriculum I wrote four years ago, and I'm grateful it's being offered through ACPE. ACPE has been offering training in spiritual care for over 60 years, mostly for ministers in chaplaincy settings, but three years ago they added this [training for psychotherapists](#). There are now twenty-plus Trainers leading these workshops across the country, and we had our first training in South Korea in January.

Promoting these trainings is not my favorite thing to do. But I'm doing it—and asking you to help if you can--because I know there are many therapists who value spirituality and want to grow their skills in incorporating it in their work, and because I imagine you know some people who are looking for a training like this. So please pass it along to friends or colleagues that might have some interest, and reach back yourself if you'd like to be part of the experience.

### **Gathering Yourself When You're Feeling Scattered**

My last appointment yesterday set me thinking about the nature of “will,” that gathering of clarity, intention, aim, and agency that leads to action.

I was talking with a woman whose life, it's fair to say, is falling apart. She's just left a job and a relationship, both of which were crushing her spirit, so the falling apart is at her initiative and without question a falling-apart-for-the-better. But she has no ready-made landing spot after

either exit, and it's going to be a while till she gets to better. She said she's feeling shaky and scared.

We talked about how it makes sense to be shaky and scared—if someone drops a concrete block on your foot and you feel pain, the pain means you're normal—about what's helping her hold things together, to the extent that she is, and about what she thinks needs to happen now. This last part, what needs to happen, was giving her trouble, which also makes sense. It's hard to see clearly when everything around you is spinning.

So, I said that. "It makes sense you're uncertain what to do right now." And she said, "Any suggestions?" And I said (or maybe something said it through me) something close to this:

"What if you try this and see what happens? Several times a day, ask yourself this question: 'What do I want?' Ask it several times in a row, and then be still and notice what happens. 'What do I want? What do I want for my life? What matters to me enough that I'd want it as an anchor or guide? What's the deep desire of my heart?' Just keep asking, and see what comes back. You might get an answer, or a hint toward an answer, and obviously that would be great. But even if you don't get an answer, the asking itself, and the sincerity of the asking, will build up an energy in you that will begin to organize you and stabilize you."

Time will tell, but I think those words were helpful for her. I know, for me, they were a reminder of how to support the gathering of dispersed and scattered energy into something coherent. I hope they might be for you.

### **A New Will**

Taking this reflection on "will" another step, I'm including a link to a reading, set to music, of a short poetic essay called "The New Will," by Maurice Nicoll. It's a page and half on paper—Nicoll describes a dream and then reflects on it—and it's about our need for a will higher than any we can muster for ourselves. I bet I've read it a dozen times over the last couple years, but a few weeks ago I discovered the set-to-music reading I'm sharing. Feel free to scroll directly to the link below, but here's a short intro if you'd like one.

Maurice Nicoll (1884-1953) was born in Scotland but lived most of his adult life outside London. He was a neurologist and psychiatrist and, early in his life, a student and colleague of Carl Jung. Jung was godparent to Nicoll's and his wife's only child, Jane, and in 1917 Nicoll published a Jung-influenced book called *Dream Psychology*.

In 1921, though, Nicoll met the Fourth Way teachers P.D. Ouspensky and G.I. Gurdjieff, at which point he ended his affiliation with Jung and dedicated the rest of his life to studying, practicing, teaching, and writing about the spiritual psychology he learned from Gurdjieff and Ouspensky.

(It's impossible to summarize an entire psycho-spiritual system in just a few lines, but it's not wildly wrong to say that Fourth Way psychology teaches that humans are born psychologically and spiritually incomplete and "asleep," that we require the help of a Higher Energy to awaken

and become fully human, and that, in order to receive and be changed by that Higher Energy, we must “work” on ourselves. Fourth Way practice is sometimes called “the work,” and “working” includes effort to observe our thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and impulses, and to open ourselves to experience the larger “I” beneath and behind our thinking I’s, feeling I’s, and physical I’s. These three—thoughts, feelings, and bodily experience—constitute the “three ways,” and the integrated, bigger, deeper experience is the Fourth Way.)

Nicoll’s best-known work is the five-volume *Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*—transcripts, essentially, of weekly talks he gave between 1931 and 1953. (All five of the “The Commentaries” are available as free downloads. [Here’s a link to volume 1](#). He also published two books that connect Fourth Way teaching to the teaching of the New Testament: *The New Man* (1951) and *The Mark* (published posthumously in 1954).

“The New Will” is the next-to-last piece in *The Mark*, so, in a sense, it’s the next-to-last thing he ever said. The links that follow are a reading of the essay, over background instrumental music, by an artist named Dennis Massa. If you listen and think it’s not worth six minutes of your time, I’ll refund your money.

[Click here to listen on Spotify](#),  
[here to listen on Apple Music](#),  
and [here to listen on YouTube](#).

### **Be in touch**

I’ll be happy to hear from you—news of your life, questions or suggestions for future blogs on the Psychology Today site, and whatever else might be on your mind. I’m also happy to remove your name if you no longer want to receive these emails. Just let me know.

Thanks for reading.

Russell