1. Somebody asked Antony, 'What shall I do in order to please God?' He replied, 'Do what I tell you, which is this: wherever you go, keep God in mind; wherever you go, keep God in mind; wherever you go, keep God in mind; wherever you are, stay there and do not move away in a hurry. If you keep to these guide-lines, you will be saved.'

2. Pambo said to Antony, 'What shall I do?' Antony said, 'Do not trust in your own righteousness. Do not go on sorrowing over a deed that is past. Keep your tongue and your belly under control.'

3. Gregory said, 'God asks three things of anyone who is baptized: to keep the true faith with all his soul and all his might; to control his tongue; to be chaste in his body.'

4. Evagrius said, 'Some of our predecessors used to say that a dry and regular diet combined with love will soon bring a monk to the harbour where the storms of passion do not enter.'

5. He also said, 'A monk was told that his father had died. He said to the messenger, 'Do not blaspheme. My Father cannot die.''

6. Macarius said to Zacharias, 'Tell me, what makes a monk?' He said, 'Isn't it wrong for you to be asking me?' Macarius said to him, 'I am sure I should ask you, Zacharias my son. There is something that urges me to ask you.' Zacharias said to him, 'As
far as I can tell, abba, I think anyone who controls himself and makes himself content with just what he needs and no more, is indeed a monk.'

7. They used to say about Theodore of Pherme that he kept these three rules before all others: poverty, abstinence, and avoiding the company of other people.

8. John the Short said, 'I will invent a man composed of all the virtues. He would rise at dawn every morning, take up the beginning of each virtue, and keep God’s commandments. He would live in great patience, in fear, in long-suffering, in the love of God; with a firm purpose of soul and body; in deep humility, in patience, in trouble of heart and earnestness of practice. He would pray often, with sorrow of heart, keeping his speech pure, his eyes controlled. He would suffer injury without anger, remaining peaceful, and not rendering evil for evil, not looking out for the faults of others, nor puffing himself up, meekly subject to every creature, renouncing material property and everything of the flesh. He would live as though crucified, in struggle, in lowliness of spirit, in good will and spiritual abstinence, in fasting, in penitence, in weeping. He would fight against evil, be wise and discreet in judgement and chaste in mind. He would receive good treatment with tranquillity, working with his own hands, watching at night, enduring hunger and thirst, cold and nakedness and labour. He would live as though buried in a tomb and already dead, every day feeling death to be near him.'

9. Joseph of Thebes said, 'Three things are seen to be honourable by God. The first is when temptations come on someone who is weak, and are accepted thankfully. The second is when every action is pure before God, mixed with no human motive. The third is when a disciple remains obedient to a spiritual father, and gives up all his self-will.'

10. Cassian told this story about John, who was the father of a community because he was great in his way of life. When he was dying, he was cheerful, and his mind was set upon the Lord; his brothers stood around him and asked for a sentence that would sum up the way to salvation, which he could give them as a legacy by which they might rise to the perfection that is in Christ. With a sigh he said 'I have never obeyed my own will, and I never taught anyone to do anything which I did not do myself first.'

11. A brother asked a hermit, 'Tell me something good that I may do it and live by it.' The hermit said, 'God alone knows what is good. But I have heard that one of the hermits asked the great Nesteros, who was a friend of Antony, 'What good work shall I do?' and he replied, 'Surely all works please God equally? Scripture says, Abraham was hospitable and God was with him; Elijah loved quiet and God was with him; David was humble and God was with him.' So whatever you find you are drawn to in following God's will, do it and let your heart be at peace.'

12. Poemen said, 'To be on guard, to meditate within, to judge with discernment: these are the three works of the soul.'

13. A brother asked him, 'How ought we to live?' Poemen replied, 'We have seen the example of Daniel. They accused him of nothing except that he served his God.'

14. The same hermit said, 'Poverty, suffering and wise discernment are the three parts of a hermit's life. It is written that there were these three, Noah, Job and Daniel. Noah is the type of those who own nothing, Job of those who are suffering, Daniel of those who judge wisely. Where there are these three qualities, there God dwells.'

15. Poemen said, 'If a monk hates two things, he can be free of this world.' A brother inquired, 'What are they?' He said, 'Bodily comfort and conceit.'

16. They used to say of Pambo that in the hour of his death he said to the holy men standing round, 'From the time that I came
into this solitude, and built my cell and lived in it, I do not remember having eaten anything I have not worked for. I have not said anything that I regretted saying. But still I go to the Lord, as one who has not yet made a beginning in the service of God.'

17. Sisoi said, 'Be despised; put your self-will behind your back; be free of worldly concerns, and you will have peace.'

18. When Chame was dying, he said to his sons, 'Do not live with heretics. Do not take any notice of judges. Do not open your hands to get, but let them be stretched out to give.'

19. A brother said to a hermit, 'How does the fear of God come into the soul?' He said, 'If there is humility and poverty, and no judgement of others, the fear of God will be present there.'

20. A hermit said, 'Let fear and humility, fasting, and weeping, take root in you.'

21. Some of the hermits used to say, 'Whatever you hate for yourself, do not do it to someone else. If you hate being spoken evil of, do not speak evil of another. If you hate being slandered, do not slander another. If you hate him who tries to make you despised, or wrongs you, or takes away what is yours, or anything like that, do not do such things to others. To keep this is enough for salvation.'

22. A hermit said, 'This is the life of a monk: work, obedience, meditation, not to judge others, not to speak evil, not to murmur. For it is written, 'You who love God, hate the thing that is evil' (Ps. 97:10). This is monastic life: not to live with the wicked, not to see evil, not to be inquisitive, not to be curious, not to listen to gossip, not to use the hands for taking, but for giving; not to be proud in heart or bad in thought, not to fill the belly, in everything to judge wisely. That is the life of the true monk.'

23. A hermit said, 'Ask God to give you inner grief of heart and humility. Always look at your own sins, and do not judge another's. Be the servant of all. Do not make friends with a woman, or a boy or a heretic. Do not be self-confident. Control your tongue and appetite, and do not drink wine. If anyone speaks to you on a controversial matter, do not argue with him. If he speaks well, say, 'Yes.' If he speaks ill, say, 'I don't know anything about that.' Don't argue with what he has said, and then your mind will be at peace.'
1. Antony said, 'Fish die if they stay on dry land, and in the same way monks who stay outside their cell or remain with secular people fall away from their vow of quiet. As a fish must return to the sea, so must we to our cell, in case by staying outside, we forget to watch inside.'

2. Antony said, 'He who sits alone and is quiet has escaped from three wars: hearing, speaking, seeing: but there is one thing against which he must continually fight: that is, his own heart.'

3. Arsenius when he was still in the palace, prayed to God, saying, 'Lord, show me the way of salvation.' A voice came to him saying, 'Arsenius, flee from men, and you will be saved.' As he left for the monastic life, he prayed again, saying the same words; and he heard a voice saying to him, 'Arsenius, flee, be silent, pray always, for these are the roots of sinlessness.'

4. Archbishop Theophilus of blessed memory once came with a certain judge to see Arsenius. The archbishop questioned Arsenius, wanting to hear some wisdom from him. For a while the hermit was silent, and then he replied, 'If I tell you something, will you do it?' They promised that they would. So he said to them, 'Wherever you hear Arsenius is, do not go there.' Another time the archbishop wanted to see him, and sent a message first to ask if he would open the door to him. He sent a message back saying, 'If you come here, I will open the door to you. But if I have opened the door to you, I must open it to all, and then I shall no longer be able to live here.' When he heard this, the archbishop said, 'Since my visit upsets him, I will not go to see the holy man again.'

5. Once Arsenius came to a place where there was a bed of reeds shaken by the wind. He said to the brothers, 'What is this rustling noise?' They said, 'It is the reeds.' He said to them, 'If a man sits in silence and hears the voice of a bird, he does not have quiet in his heart; how much more difficult is it for you, who hear the sound of these reeds?'

6. They also said of him that his cell was thirty miles away, and that he did not leave it readily, but others did his errands. But when the monks were driven out of the place called Scetis, he went away weeping, saying, 'The world destroyed Rome, and the monks Scetis.'

7. Once when Arsenius was living in Canopus, a virgin, a very rich lady, and one that feared God, came from Rome hoping to see him. Theophilus the archbishop received her. She asked him to arrange with Arsenius for him to meet her. Theophilus went to Arsenius and said, 'A lady has come from Rome and she wants to see you.' Arsenius refused to receive her. When the lady heard this she gave orders for her camels to be saddled and said, 'I believe that with the help of God I will see him. In my city of Rome there are many people to see but I have come here in order to see saints.' When she reached the hermit's cell by the providence of God he was standing outside it. When the lady saw him she fell at his feet. He helped her up with indignation and looking directly at her said, 'If you want to see my face, look closely; here it is.' But she was too ashamed to raise her eyes. Arsenius said to her, 'Haven't you heard about my way of life? That is what you should be trying to see. Why have you dared to come all this way across the sea; you are a woman and ought not to be going about at all. Have you done this so that you can to back to Rome and say to the other women, "I have seen Arsenius"? In that way you will turn the sea into a highway with women coming to see me.' She said, 'If by God's will I return to Rome, I will not let any other women come here. But
pray for me, and remember me always.’ He replied, ‘I pray God that He will blot the memory of you from my heart.’ When she heard that, she went away in distress. When she got back to Alexandria, she began in her sorrow to be ill of a fever. The archbishop was told that she was ill, and came to comfort her. He asked her what was the matter. She said, ‘I wish I had never come here. I said to Arsenius, “remember me” and he said, “I pray God that your memory may be blotted from my heart”, and now I am dying of sorrow.’ The archbishop said to her, ‘Do you not realize that you are a woman, and the enemy uses women to attack holy men? That is why he said what he did. He prays for your soul all the time.’ So her worry was resolved, and she returned contentedly to her home.

8. Evagrius said, ‘Cut the desire for many things out of your heart and so prevent your mind being dispersed and your stillness lost.’

9. In Scetis a brother went to Moses to ask for advice. He said to him, ‘Go and sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.’

10. Moses said, ‘One who avoids others is like a ripe grape. One who stays in company is like a sour grape.’

11. Nilus said, ‘The arrows of the enemy cannot touch someone who loves quiet. But those who wander about among crowds will often be wounded by them.’

12. Poemen said, ‘The beginning of evil is to diversify the mind.’ He said also, ‘It is good to flee from the things of the body. When a man is engaged in conflict about the body, he is like a man standing on the very edge of a deep pool, into which his enemy can knock him the moment he sees him. But when he has put aside bodily things, he is like a man standing a long way from the pool, where, if the enemy drags him along to throw him in, God will help him while he is being dragged there.’

13. Once Abraham, the disciple of Sisois, said to him, ‘Abba, you are now old. Let us go into the world for a short time.’ Sisois said to him: ‘Yes, provided that we go where there are no women.’ The disciple said, ‘Where is there a place that is without women except the desert?’ Sisois said, ‘Then let me stay in the desert.’

14. Matrona said, ‘Many solitary living in the desert have been lost because they lived like people in the world. It is better to live in a crowd and want to live a solitary life than to live in solitude and be longing all the time for company.’

15. A hermit said, ‘A monk should buy himself quiet and therefore be able to despise any bodily expense that may occur.’

16. This story was told: There were three friends, serious men, who became monks. One of them chose to make peace between men who were at odds, as it is written, ‘Blessed are the peacemakers’ (Matt. 5:9). The second chose to visit the sick. The third chose to go away to be quiet in solitude. Now the first, toiling among contentions, was not able to settle all quarrels and overcome with weariness, he went to him who tended the sick, and found him also failing in spirit and unable to carry out his purpose. So the two went away to see him who had withdrawn into the desert, and they told him their troubles. They asked him to tell them how he himself had fared. He was silent for a while, and then poured water into a vessel and said, ‘Look at the water,’ and it was murky. After a little while he said again, ‘See now, how clear the water has become.’ As they looked into the water they saw their own faces, as in a mirror. Then he said to them, ‘So it is with anyone who lives in a crowd; because of the turbulence, he does not see his sins: but when he has been quiet, above all in solitude, then he recognizes his own faults.’
3

COMPUNCION

1. It was said about Arsenius that whenever he was doing manual work he kept a cloth at his chest because of the tears that streamed from his eyes.

2. A brother asked Ammon, ‘Speak a word to me.’ He said to him, ‘Go and meditate like the criminals in prison. They keep asking, where is the judge, when will he come? and because they are waiting for him they dread their punishment. The monk should always be waiting for his trial, chiding his soul, saying: “Alas, how shall I stand before the judgement seat of Christ? How shall I give an account of my actions?” If you always meditate like this, you will be saved.’

3. Evagrius said, ‘While you sit in your cell, recall your attention, and remember the day of your death and you will see that your body is decaying. Think about the loss, feel the pain. Shrink from the vanity of the world outside. Be retiring, and be careful to keep your vow of quiet, and you will not weaken. Remember the souls in hell. Meditate on their condition, the bitter silence and the moaning, the fear and the strife, the waiting and the pain without relief, the tears that cannot cease to flow. Remember too the day of resurrection, imagine God’s terrible and awful judgement. Bring into your sight the confusion of sinners before God and His Christ, before angels and archangels and powers, and all the human race, punishment, everlasting fire, the worm that never dies, the darkness of Tartarus – and above them all the sound of the gnashing of teeth, dread and torments. Bring before your eyes the good laid up for the righteous, their confidence before God the Father and Christ His Son, before angels and archangels and the powers, and all the people in the kingdom of heaven and its gifts, joy and peace. Remember all this. Weep and lament for the judgement of sinners, keep alert to the grief they suffer; be afraid that you are hurrying towards the same condemnation. Rejoice and exult at the good laid up for the righteous. Aim at enjoying the one, and being far from the other. Do not forget this, whether you are in your cell or outside it. Keep these memories in your mind and so cast out of it the sordid thoughts that harm you.’

4. Elias said, ‘I fear three things: the first, the time before my soul leaves my body; the second, the time before I meet God face to face; the third, the time before he pronounces his sentence upon me.’

5. When Archbishop Theophilus of holy memory was dying, he said, ‘Arsenius, you are blessed of God, because you have always kept this moment before your eyes.’

6. There was a story that once when some brothers were eating together at a love-feast, one of the brothers at the table laughed. When John saw it, he wept, and said, ‘What do you think that brother has in his heart, that he could laugh when he ought to weep because he is dining on charity?’

7. Jacob said, ‘Like a lantern giving light in a dark little room, so the fear of God comes into a man’s heart and enlightens it, and teaches him all that is good and all the commandments of God.’

8. Some of the monks asked Macarius of Egypt, ‘Why is your body dry, whether you eat or fast?’ He said to them, ‘A wooden poker which turns over and over the brushwood in the fire is itself being slowly burnt away. So if a man cleanses his mind in the fear of God, the fear of God also consumes his body.’
9. Once some monks of Mount Nitria sent a message to Scetis, to ask Macarius the Great to come to see them. They said that if he could not come to them, the whole crowd of them would go to him, since they wanted to see him before he passed on to the Lord. When Macarius arrived in Nitria, the whole congregation gathered in his presence. The elders asked him to speak a word to the brothers. But he shed tears and said, ‘Let us pray and weep, my brothers, before we go hence to the place where our tears consume our bodies.’ They all wept; and fell on their faces, saying, ‘Abba, pray for us.’

10. In Egypt once when Poemen was going somewhere he saw a woman sitting by a grave and weeping bitterly. He said, ‘If all the delights of this world should come to her, they would not bring her out of sorrow. Just so should the monk always be weeping in his heart.’

11. Another time, he went with Anub to the country of Diolcos. Walking past the tombs they saw a woman beating her breast and weeping bitterly. They paused to see her. When they had gone a little further, they met a man and Poemen asked him, ‘What is the matter with the woman over there, that she weeps so bitterly?’ He said, ‘Her husband is dead, and her son, and her brother.’ Poemen said to Anub, ‘I tell you that unless a man mortifies all his self-will and has this kind of grief, he cannot be a monk. The whole life and attention of that woman is wrapped up in grief.’

12. Poemen said also, ‘Grief is twofold: it creates good and it keeps away evil.’

13. A brother asked him, ‘What should I do?’ He said, ‘When Abraham entered the land of promise, he built himself a grave, and bought the land as a burying place for his posterity.’ The brother said to him, ‘What is this burying place?’ Poemen said, ‘A place of weeping and sorrowing.’

14. Athanasius of holy memory asked Pambo to come down from the desert to Alexandria. When he arrived, he saw a woman that was an actress, and he wept. The bystanders asked him why he wept. He said, ‘Two things grieved me. The first was her condemnation; the second, that I take less trouble about pleasing God than she takes about pleasing the worst of mankind.’

15. When Silvanus was sitting one day among the brethren, he was taken up into a rapture, and fell on his face. After a while he got up and wept. The brothers asked him, ‘What is the matter, abba?’ But he was silent, weeping. When they pressed him for an answer, he said to them, ‘I was taken before the judgement seat, and I saw many of our kind going down to torment, and many from the world going into the kingdom.’ Silvanus grieved and after that he would not leave his cell; and if he was forced to go out, he covered his face with his shawl and said, ‘Why should I see the light of this world, where nothing is any use to me?’

16. Synclética said, ‘All must endure great travail and conflict when they are first converted to the Lord but later they have unspeakable joy. They are like people trying to light a fire, the smoke gets in their eyes, their eyes begin to water, but they succeed in what they want. It is written, “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29), and so we must kindle divine fire with tears and trouble.’

17. Hyperichius said, ‘The watchful monk works night and day to pray continually: but if his heart is broken and lets tears flow, that calls God down from heaven to have mercy.’

18. The brothers went to Felix, who had with him some secular visitors, and they asked him to give them a word. But he said nothing. When they went on asking, he said to them, ‘Do you want to hear a word?’ They replied, ‘Yes, abba.’ So he said, ‘I have no word for you now. When an elder is asked to speak, and the brothers do what he tells them, God gives the elder something to say. But now there are brothers who ask for a word, but do not obey the word they hear and then God takes
away His grace from the elder, and he has nothing to say, for He who gives it is not there.’ When the brothers heard this, they groaned and said, ‘Pray for us, abba.’

19. It was said of Hor and Theodore, that they were once putting a goatskin over a cell: and they said to each other, ‘If God visits us now, what shall we do?’ Much upset, they left the place in a hurry and went back to their own cells.

20. A hermit told this story. A brother wanted to become a monk, and his mother forbade him. But he did not give up his purpose, saying, ‘I want my soul to be saved.’ She opposed him for a long time but when she found that she could not stop him, at last she let him go. He went and became a monk, but he lived that life carelessly. It happened that his mother died, and a short time after he became very ill. He thought he was taken before the judgement seat, and there he found his mother among the people being judged. When she saw him she was horrified and said, ‘Why are you here, my son? Are you condemned like me to this place? What about the words you used to say, “I want my soul to be saved”?’ He was ashamed at her words and, being made stupid by sorrow, he stood there unable to say a word to her. But after this vision, he recovered by God’s mercy from his dangerous illness and was restored to health. He meditated on God’s purpose in visiting him. He went away by himself, cut himself off from all company, considered his own salvation, and lamented his earlier neglect in penitence. His purpose was so fixed that many people asked him to spare himself a little, for he might hurt himself by these immoderate lamentations. But he would not be consoled and said, ‘If I was made ashamed by my mother’s taunts, what sort of shame shall I have when Christ and his holy angels look on me in the day of judgement to condemn me?’

21. A hermit said, ‘If it were possible to die of fear, all the world would perish with terror remembering the coming of God after the resurrection. What will it be like, to see the heavens opened, and God revealed in wrath and fury, and innumerable companies of angels gazing on the whole human race gathered together? Therefore we ought to live our lives as those who must give account of each action to God.’

22. A brother asked a hermit, ‘Why is my heart hard, and why do I not fear God?’ He said to him, ‘I think that if you have reproach in your heart, you will know fear.’ The brother said to him, ‘What is this reproach?’ The hermit said, ‘To reprove your soul in all things, saying to it, “Remember that you have to meet God.” Say also to your soul, “What do I want with people?” I think that if anyone tries to do this, the fear of God will come to him.’

23. A hermit saw someone laughing, and said to him, ‘We have to render an account of our whole life before heaven and earth, and you can laugh?’

24. A hermit said, ‘As the shadow goes everywhere with the body, so we ought to carry penitence and weeping with us everywhere we go.’

25. A brother asked a hermit, ‘Abba, speak a word to me.’ He said to him: ‘When God struck Egypt there was not a house that did not mourn.’

26. A brother asked another hermit, ‘What must I do?’ He said to him, ‘We ought to lament always.’ Once one of the senior monks died, and after several hours recovered consciousness. We asked him, ‘What did you see, abba?’ He told us with sorrow, ‘I heard a voice of sadness saying over and over again, “Woe is me, woe is me.” That is what we should always be saying.’

27. A brother asked a hermit, ‘I hear the hermits weeping, and my soul longs for tears, but they do not come, and I am worried about it.’ He replied, ‘The children of Israel entered the promised
land after forty years in the wilderness. Tears are the promised land. When you reach them you will no longer be afraid of the conflict. For it is the will of God that we should be afflicted, so we may always be longing to enter that country.'

1. Some brothers from Scetis wanted to visit Antony, and set out in a ship to go there. On board they met an old man who also wanted to go to Antony, but he did not belong to their party. During the voyage they talked about the sayings of the fathers, and the Scriptures, and then the manual work that they did, but the old man said nothing at all. When they came to the landing-place, they realized that the old man also was going to see Antony. When they arrived, Antony said to them, ‘You found good company on your journey in this old man.’ He said to the old man, ‘You found good companions in these brothers.’ The old man said, ‘Yes, they are good, but their house has no door. Anyone who wants to goes into the stable and steals the donkey.’ He said this because they had said the first thing that came into their heads.

2. Daniel said about Arsenius that he used to keep vigil all night. He would stay awake all night, and about dawn when nature seemed to force him to sleep, he would say to sleep, ‘Come, you bad servant,’ and he would snatch a little sleep sitting down, but very soon he would get up again.

3. Arsenius said, ‘One hour’s sleep is enough for a monk if he is a fighter.’

4. Daniel said of him, ‘All the years he lived near us, we gave him the minimum amount of food to last each year, and every time we went to visit him, he shared it with us.’