

Study Guide and Commentary ACIM Text, Section 2.IV

Healing as Release from Fear

The main point of Section IV seems to be quite simple: “All healing is essentially the release from fear” (1:7). Therefore, healing never asks us to go any faster than we can go without fear. Healing does not add something to us; it undoes error, it releases from fear. Healing works at the level of mind, but it does not deny our experience of bodies.

Paragraph 1

1. ¹Our emphasis is now on healing. [Ur: The new emphasis will now be on healing.] ²The miracle is the means, the Atonement is the principle, and healing is the result. ³To speak of “a miracle of healing” is to combine two orders of reality inappropriately. ⁴Healing is not [not] a miracle. ⁵The Atonement, or the final miracle, is a remedy and [a remedy. It is purely a means, while] any type of healing is a result. ⁶The kind [order] of error to which Atonement is applied is irrelevant. ⁷All [Essentially, all] healing is essentially the release from fear. ⁸To undertake this you cannot be fearful yourself. ⁹You do not understand healing because of your own fear. [Ur: I have been hinting throughout (and once stated very directly, because you were unfearful at the time) that you *must* heal others. The reason is that their healing merely witnesses or attests to yours.]

• Study Question •

1. *In T-1.I.28:1 we read: “Miracles are a way of earning release from fear.” Here we are told that healing is release from fear, and results from miracles (1:2 and 1:4, 1:7). Examine some things in your life that you feel need healing. How would “release from fear” constitute healing for you in these areas ?*

“Our emphasis is now on healing” (1:1). This is referring to the emphasis of this section of the Text. It is not saying that the overall emphasis of the Course is on healing, just that this is the emphasis *right now*. We need to “learn to look upon the world as a means of healing” (T-2.III.5:12).

In the next section, he says that discomfort is not the “final outcome” of looking on the defiled altar (T-2.V.7:4). He points out that the fear and discomfort make us aware that we need healing or correction (T-2.V.7:8); that is their only value. And in T-2.VII.5:8, he points out that recognizing that there is a problem is only a temporary “initial corrective procedure” that must lead to “immediate correction” of the error through accepting the Atonement. I believe all of these lines must be saying very much the same thing: We do need to become aware of the defilement of the inner altar, but our emphasis, our focus, is not on digging up the ego’s junk, but on healing it.

Sentence 2 presents a sequence: the Atonement principle exists; it is expressed through the means of miracles; and the result of miracles is healing (which is “essentially the release from fear” (1:7), though it may result in physical healing as well). To grasp what this really describes we need to look at this in the context of interpersonal miracles, miracle giver giving to miracle receiver, that has been prevalent in recent sections. Consider how each of the last three sections has ended:

Inner peace...enables you to remain unshaken by lack of love from without and capable, through your acceptance of miracles, of correcting the conditions proceeding from lack of love in others. (T-2.I.5:11–12)

The miracle turns the defense of Atonement to your real protection, and as you become more and more secure you assume your natural talent of protecting others, knowing yourself as both a brother and a Son. (T-2.II.7:8)

He gave them His peace so they could not be shaken and could not be deceived. Whenever you are afraid you *are* deceived, and your mind cannot serve the Holy Spirit. (T-2.III.5:8–9)

While the quote from Section III isn't the final sentences, it comes very near the end of the section. At the end of each section Jesus speaks of serving the Holy Spirit, protecting others, and correcting the conditions in others that proceed from lack of love. He has told us that we were created to create or extend; he reminds us that he has asked us to perform miracles, but that we cannot do so if we are fearful. He has been explaining how we can deal with our fears so as to free ourselves to be miracle workers. He repeats that thought in sentences 7 through 9 of this paragraph.

In other words, the Atonement principle is expressed in my reception of a miracle for myself. That releases me from my fear, and allows me to extend that miracle to others. Healing of the miracle receivers, releasing them from their fear, is the result.

Sentences 3, 4 and 5 discuss the phrase “a miracle of healing,” saying it inappropriately combines “two orders of reality.” I think the two orders of reality are *actual* reality, which exists only in spirit (T-1.III.5:5), and the physical “reality” of this world, which we experience as real because we believe in it, but which is, in fact, only a dream. Healing is a change that happens to something in the dream. The miracle, on the other hand, though it is something that reaches us within the dream, is a glimpse of actual reality. Thus, “Healing is not a miracle” (1:4); healing *results from* a miracle. Jesus here makes a fuss over this phrase, but it isn't really a major issue, because much later in the Text, he actually uses it himself several times! (See T-19.I.14:5, T-27.II.5:2, T-27.V.1:3, T-28.IV.10:9.) This is one place where his use of words, if not his thoughts, seems inconsistent.

Paragraph 2

2. ¹A major step in the Atonement plan is to undo error at all [*all*] levels. ²Sickness or “not-right-mindedness” is the result of level confusion, because it always entails the belief [*misbelief*] that what is amiss on one level can adversely affect another. ³We have [*constantly*] referred to miracles as the means of correcting level confusion, for all

mistakes must be corrected at the level on which they occur. ⁴Only the mind is capable of error. ⁵The body can act wrongly only when it is responding to misthought. ⁶The body cannot create, and the belief that it can, a fundamental error [responsible for most of the fallacies already referred to,], produces all physical symptoms. ⁷[All] Physical illness represents a belief in magic. ⁸The whole distortion that made magic rests on the belief that there is a creative ability in matter which the mind cannot control [Ur: which can control the mind]. ⁹This error can take two forms; it can be believed that the mind can miscreate in the body, or that the body can miscreate in the mind. ¹⁰When it is understood that the mind, the only level of creation, cannot create beyond itself, neither type of confusion need occur.

• Study Question •

2. The “levels” spoken of in paragraph 2 are, primarily, the **body** level, the **mind** level, and the **spirit** level. Other passages which discuss these three levels include 2.IV.3:1, 2.V.1:8–11 and 2.V.6:1–6. Which is the only level that needs correction, and why?

The message of this paragraph, basically, is that only the mind can make errors, and its errors cannot have *real* effects on either the level of the spirit or of the body; nor can the body actually impose suffering on the mind. One level cannot affect another. Only the mind is capable of error, and therefore only the mind needs correction.

This paragraph speaks of sickness both as a mental state (2:2) and a physical condition (2:7). In either case, it is a result of confusing the levels of mind and body—that is, of believing one level *can* affect another. Neither level “can adversely affect another” (2:2). Although misbehavior and physical illness may seem like the mind is adversely affecting the body, this is not actually so.

To understand this, consider what we think happens when the mind makes the body sick. Even if we acknowledge that the mind started the problem, once that problem moves to the body, once the body becomes sick, we now see the body as being in charge. The body has power to make us suffer. The body seems to be exerting control over the mind. The mistake we make is in believing that the mind’s miscreations in the body are *independently* real, so that they exist apart from the mind, and are capable of turning back and miscreating (causing pain) in the mind. And that is a confusion of the levels

What seems to be at the root of things here is the Course’s underlying conviction that the mind cannot *actually create* beyond itself. It tells us that the solution to the fundamental error (believing the body can create) is realizing that the mind cannot create beyond itself. (This comes up again as a definition of accepting the Atonement in T-2.V.5:1–4.) Therefore, the apparent effects—bodily misbehavior or illness—are not real; they are illusions. Because the conditions in the body are not real, they cannot actually create suffering in the mind.

The Course’s shorthand phrase for this whole concept is, “Ideas leave not their source.” It does not occur until much later in the Text, but let me quote its first occurrence. I think it states the same concepts as this paragraph, but much more plainly:

Ideas leave not their source, and their effects but seem to be apart from them. Ideas are of the mind. What is projected out, and seems to be external to the mind, is not outside at all, but an effect of what is in, and has not left its source. (T-26.VII.4:7-9)

The basic principle of *magic* is that “there is a creative principle in matter which the mind cannot control” (2:8), or, as it is worded in the Urtext, “which can control the mind,” a belief that is even more damaging. Thus, by this definition, taking pills to cure a disease is magic because of the belief that both the disease and its solution are purely physical. To excuse unloving behavior because we have a headache or the flu is a belief in magic, because it says the body can miscreate in and control the mind.

It is fairly easy to understand how the belief that the body can miscreate in the mind is a form of belief in a creative ability of matter that mind cannot control, but how is the belief that *the mind can miscreate in the body* a form of that same idea? (2:9) I think our discussion above covers this point: When we believe the mind’s miscreations in the body are real, we end up believing that those physical miscreations have the power, independent of the mind, to injure or cause pain to the mind. Thus: belief that mind can miscreate in the body equals belief that matter has creative ability independent of the mind.

Sickness, then, is level confusion because we think the body acts independently by getting sick, causing us to be ill against our will, whereas only the mind creates, and only within itself. We are told here that the belief that the body can create “produces all physical symptoms,” which is a rather sweeping statement! Furthermore, we believe that a sick body can have an adverse effect on our mind, which once again is confusing levels, believing that what happens on one level can affect the others.

Paragraph 3

3. ¹Only the mind can create because spirit has already been created, and the body is a learning device for the mind. ²Learning devices are not lessons in themselves. ³Their purpose is merely to facilitate learning [Ur: to facilitate the *thinking of the learner*]. ⁴The worst a faulty use of a learning device can do is to fail to facilitate learning [“learning” omitted in Urtext]. ⁵It has no power in itself to introduce actual learning errors. ⁶The body, if properly understood, shares the invulnerability of the Atonement to two-edged application. ⁷This is not because the body is a miracle, but because it is not inherently open to misinterpretation. ⁸The body is merely part of your experience in the physical world [The body is merely a fact]. ⁹Its abilities can be and frequently are overevaluated. ¹⁰However, it is almost impossible to deny its existence in this world [“in this world” omitted in Urtext]. ¹¹Those who do so are engaging in a particularly unworthy form of denial. ¹²The term “unworthy” here implies only that it is not necessary to protect the mind by denying the unmindful. [Ur: There is little doubt that the mind can miscreate.] ¹³If one denies this unfortunate aspect of the mind’s power, one is also denying the power itself.

• **Study Question** •

3. *Why is the following NOT a valid application of the Course's teaching that we are not our bodies: "I am not a body. I do not experience physical tiredness, sickness, pain, or pleasure. I pay no attention whatsoever to my body. My body does not exist."*

If the body is merely a learning device for the mind, a tool the mind uses, it cannot create of itself any more than a hammer and saw can build a house. All the body does is facilitate the mind's learning; it serves the purposes of the mind, and that is all. The worst it can do is to fail to help; it cannot do harm or "induce learning errors" (3:5).

The Course is making a big point of this: "The body cannot damage the mind; there is no creative ability in matter which cannot be controlled by the mind." It says this error—the belief that the body can create, and can affect the mind—is the foundation for "the whole distortion that made magic" (2:8). How come? Do we really believe the opposite? Do I believe my body can injure my mind, or that it has some creative ability I cannot control?

Well, when I have a bad case of the flu, it's pretty obvious I do believe these things. I am convinced that it is my body, and its malfunction, that is making me miserable. Or perhaps when I have a bad headache, I think it justifies my snappy, curt words spoken to people around me. My body is damaging my mind. My sickness is convincing me that my body is very real, or so I think. It never occurs to me that because a part of my mind wants to believe I am a body, I have manufactured the evidence to convince myself that I really am a body.

If I believe what the Course is telling me, my mind can control the body. I need to begin learning not to overevaluate the abilities of the body (3:9). My body cannot tell my mind what to do or what to feel, as it says in a later section: "Nor could it [the body] tell a part of God Himself what it should feel and what its function is" (T-27.VI.4:5). I remember waking up one morning. My body felt nauseous. I was accepting its message and thinking, "I feel nauseous." Then, I read that the above line in Chapter 27, and I thought, "Hey! I don't have to feel lousy just because my body does. I am not the body." So I decided that, whatever my body felt, I could still feel happy and peaceful. And I did. What's more, about a half hour later, my body stopped feeling lousy. Unfortunately, I haven't learned this lesson well enough to do that every time, but I do believe that changing my mind is what caused my body to be healed.

We should not over-evaluate the body. On the other hand, we should not under-evaluate it either; we should not attempt to deny that, in this world, it exists! That is almost impossible to accomplish (3:10), and is "a particularly unworthy form of denial" (3:11). Jesus says that what he means by "unworthy" is that we are foolishly trying "to protect the mind by denying the unmindful" (3:12). We erroneously think that, in order to honor and recognize the mind's purity and holiness, we need to deny that its miscreations do exist—in this world, at least (as the omitted line from the Urtext between sentences 12 and 13 makes clear). In the dream, bodies are a fact. And I do experience myself as being within a body, and being affected by it. I cannot and should not deny that "the body is...part of [my] experience in the physical world" (3:8). I can and must deny its ultimate reality, but I need to acknowledge that, for me, for now, it is still a part of my experience.

Some forms that such unworthy denial takes include: Attempting to suppress one's sexual appetites and desires, claiming to be above them; abusing the body by not taking proper care of it because it isn't real; pretending that cruel behavior does not matter because the body isn't real, so what it does or what is done to it means nothing.

Jesus will tell us that "the miscreations of the mind do not really exist" (T-2.V.1:5), and, "The body does not exist except as a learning device for the mind" (T-2.V.1:9). That is the same basic idea—that little "except." The Course walks a fine line between the body's unreality and its usefulness as a learning device. On the one hand, it teaches that the physical world, including bodies, does not really exist. On the other hand, it insists that while we experience the body as real, we need to make use of it as a learning device for the mind. By using the body to express the mind's thoughts in terms of behavior, we will eventually learn that the body is unnecessary and ultimately unreal.

If we deny the body (and the world) even this shred of reality, we are actually denying the power of the mind that has projected the world. We are trying to bury our guilt by pretending the products of our mis-thought have no existence whatsoever, even in our experience. Since we are here, walking around in bodies and limited by them, it is obvious we *do* experience the body as real. Therefore, such denial is a lie to ourselves, and betrays a fear of the power of our own mind. It is a form of the false denial discussed in Section II. It is a denial that attempts to conceal, rather than to correct.

Paragraph 4

4. ¹All material means that you accept as remedies for bodily ills are restatements of magic principles. ²This is the first step in believing that the body makes its own illness. ³It is a second misstep to attempt to heal it through non-creative agents. ⁴It does not follow, however, that the use of such agents for corrective purposes [Ur: the application of these very weak corrective devices] is evil. ⁵Sometimes the illness has a sufficiently strong hold over the mind to render a person temporarily inaccessible to the Atonement. ⁶In this case it may be wise to utilize a compromise approach to mind and body, in which something from the outside is temporarily given healing belief. ⁷This is because the last thing that can help the non-right-minded, or the sick, is an increase in fear. ⁸They are already in a fear-weakened state. ⁹If they are prematurely [Ur: inappropriately] exposed to a [Ur: straight and undiluted] miracle, they may be precipitated into panic. ¹⁰This is likely to occur when upside-down perception has induced the belief that miracles are frightening.

Urtext version of 4:1-3: All material means which man accepts as remedies for bodily ills are simply restatements of magic principles. It was the first level of the error to believe that the body created its own illness. Thereafter, it is a second mis-step to attempt to heal it through non-creative agents.

• Study Question •

4. *Back in our study of "Principles of Miracles" in Chapter 1, I defined magic like this: "Magic is the uncreative use of mind; it is 'making' instead of 'creating.' Thus, as is explained later in the Course, it can be thought of as any attempt to solve problems or seek satisfaction in separation, by ourselves and apart from God." In 1.V we saw it as anything physical we try to use to find satisfaction. Re-read 2:7–9 and 4:1. What does this section add to your understanding of magic, especially in its relation to what the Course calls "level-confusion"?*

Both Robert Perry and I feel there was a "scribal error" or transcription error here in the first three sentences. The way it reads is very confusing. Obviously, to accept material means as remedies for bodily ills (4:1) is the same thing as healing the body through non-creative agents (4:3). Yet the way it is worded, the words "this is the first step" (4:2) refer to the former, and "it is a second misstep" refer to the latter. That makes the second step the same as the first step, which is plainly incorrect. The way it is worded in the Urtext is much, much clearer.

One magic principle is, "The body makes its own illness." A second magic principle is, "You can heal the body with non-creative [non-mental] agents." What, then, would a "creative agent" be? I think we can see the answer in 2:10, 3:1 and 2.V.1:7—something operating at the mind level. Thus, using *anything* besides the mind to heal the body is magic, in Course terms. That includes not only traditional medicine, but massage, crystals, mega-vitamins, all kinds of diet, chiropractic and osteopathy—anything besides simply accepting the Atonement!

The Course does not go to the extreme of making such magic "evil," however, or "sinful." Be very clear: The Course does not teach that we should stop using any kind of physical remedy for bodily ills. It simply asks us to realize they are no more than magic spells, placebos whose effectiveness is completely dependent on our belief in them, because all healing comes from the mind. In fact there are times when the "compromise approach" of using magic is *preferable* to an attempt to rely on mind alone. When illness has such a hold on the mind that the person cannot access the Atonement (4:5); a compromise approach is advisable. Healing without a visible means might seem like walking a tightrope without a safety net; it might increase the person's fear level. Healing, however, is always release from fear. Anything that increases fear is thus ruled out; "the last thing that can help [them]... is an increase in fear" (4:7). Giving them a physical means to believe in, although the healer may know it is completely unnecessary, will be a help in this case.

Notice that the whole context here seems to be that of one person, the miracle giver, offering a healing to another person, the miracle receiver. The giver seems to have a higher level of understanding; the receiver is often trapped in fear. The advice here is primarily to the miracle worker, in answer to the question: Should I attempt to heal this person by purely miraculous means, or should I use (or recommend the use of) some physical medicine? The latter compromise approach is preferred when the receiver's ability to receive the Atonement is blocked by fear, or when a miracle might even be found frightening, but the miracle worker needs to remember that it is a compromise (the medicine has no intrinsic healing powers), and is used only "for corrective purposes" (4:4).

Paragraph 5

5. ¹The value of the Atonement does not lie in the manner in which it is expressed. ²In fact, if it is used truly, it will inevitably be expressed in whatever way is most helpful to the receiver [Ur: not the giver]. ³This means that a miracle, to attain its full efficacy, must be expressed in a language that the recipient can understand without fear. ⁴This does not necessarily mean that this is the highest level of communication of which he is capable. ⁵It does mean, however, that it is the highest level of communication of which he is capable *now*. ⁶The whole aim of the miracle is to raise the level of communication, not to lower it by increasing fear.

• Study Question •

5. *Healing can come to us in many different forms, and the form that is best for us may not be the "highest form." What seems to determine the form in which healing comes to any particular person?*

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The first sentence means, in simple terms, that the *form* a healing takes does not matter. If you are truly expressing the Atonement, that is what matters. That is what heals. The form in which you express the Atonement may be prayer or it may be performing (or recommending) a quadruple bypass operation. What is important is that we are expressing the Atonement, not that we express it in a particularly spiritual-looking form. This means we can express a true miraculous impulse in our mind through handing someone a pill.

The best form is whatever form is "most helpful to the receiver." The Urtext adds the words, "not the giver." If I am functioning in a healing capacity, let me remember this criterion! The best form is not what I think it is or what it "ought" to be, nor what medical science says it is, nor what my very pure and holy spiritual teaching says it is. The best form is whatever helps the sick person. The miracle has to be expressed in a language the recipient understands without fear. If I am trying to be helpful to my ailing Grandfather who has never heard the word "metaphysics" and who is deeply comforted by holding his rosary, then let me bring him his rosary. Whatever reduces his fear level. *The aim of the miracle is never metaphysical correctness.* The aim of the miracle is always raising the level of communication and opening the heart to love.

• Study Question •

6. *6. (a) How would you apply the thoughts of this section to your thinking about things like use of traditional medicine or surgery? Diet, vegetarianism, taking vitamins? Physical exercise? Use of acupuncture, homeopathy, crystal healing, and other alternative therapies?*
(b) How would you apply these thoughts to a situation where you are attempting to bring healing to a sick friend or relative?

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Answer Key

1. Your answers will concern your own healing needs, but as an example: Suppose I have on onset of some physical disease; I perceive a need of physical healing. However, that disease results from misthought, according to the Course, and primarily from thoughts of fear, which stem from guilt. I fear God's punishment, therefore I punish myself by becoming sick. To release my mind from fear will also release my body from its illness. There are many other examples: Most relationship problems can be reduced to some form of fear in one or both parties. The Course teaches that we are capable of only two emotions, love and fear, and that only love is real. Releasing us from fear thus always releases us to love.
2. The mind is the only level that needs correction because it is the only level capable of originating errors. Spirit is perfect, and does not need correction; the body acts wrongly only in response to misthoughts of the mind.

The following summarizes what the various passages say about each of the three levels:

Body: Learning device for the mind. Does not exist otherwise. Not subject to errors of its own because it cannot create. Does not learn. If falsely endowed with self-initiative, becomes a serious obstacle to learning. It is not the learner. Can align with the mind that has learned to look beyond the body to the light. Too dense for illumination.

Mind: Only the mind can create. Inducing mind to give up its miscreations is "the only application of creative ability that is truly meaningful." Only mind is capable of illumination. Can bring illumination to the body.

Spirit: Already created. Already perfect; does not require correction. Already illuminated.

3. We are not to deny that we experience ourselves as bodies, but we are to deny that this is a valid representation of the truth. "I experience myself as a body, but know that this is not the truth about me." If we deny the bodily experience that our mind is projecting, we are actually denying the power of the mind itself.
4. Physical illness is a belief in magic. And all material means I accept as remedies for bodily ills "are restatements of magic principles." Magic seems to be one form of level confusion. Physical illness represents a belief that the body has a creative ability that cannot be controlled by the mind; it can make itself sick and the mind can't do anything about it. Using material means as remedies are "restatements" of the same principle because they say that there is creative ability in medicine which the mind cannot control.
5. The form in which healing can reach us most effectively is a form that we can understand without fear, or whatever way is most helpful. Therefore, our ability to receive (or communicate) without fear determines the form of our healing, and the healing is adapted to whatever form will most effectively reduce our fear, and thus raise our level of communication.
6. Answer depends on each student's experiences.