

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM Text, Section 3.II

Miracles as True Perception

Both Section II and Section III have the word *perception* in their titles, as do the titles of the chapter itself, “The Innocent Perception,” and Section V, “Beyond Perception.” Perception is a prominent subject in this chapter. Our perception is determined by the thought system we hold to be true. If we believe in guilt we will see a guilty world; if we believe in innocence we will see an innocent world. True perception is seeing without judgment because it is seeing things as God created them, and not as we (through projection) have made them.



This section refers to miracles and true perception as if they are virtually interchangeable terms. We have pointed out in earlier commentaries that true perception is the *result* of the miracle, not *identical* to it. The miracle is the divine touch on our minds that makes a shift in perception possible. Still, to perceive truly is a miracle; to experience a miracle is to perceive truly. “The miracle perceives everything as it is” (3:4).

In the previous section, “Atonement without Sacrifice,” we learned that the Atonement is fundamentally the *perception of innocence* instead of the *perception of guilt*, judgment, and punishment. This perception is true because it is how God sees us. “The innocence of God is the true state of mind of His Son” (T-3.I.8:1). Section II now applies the principles of Atonement that we have seen in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus to our perception of ourselves and of one another.

Paragraph 1

1. I have stated that the basic concepts referred to in this course are not matters of degree. ²Certain fundamental concepts cannot be understood in terms of opposites [Ur: co-existing polarities]. ³It is impossible to conceive of light and darkness or everything and nothing as joint possibilities. ⁴They are all true or all false. ⁵It is [Ur: absolutely] essential that you realize [Ur: understand completely that] your thinking [Ur: behavior] will be erratic until a firm commitment to one or the other is made. ⁶A firm commitment to darkness or nothingness, however, is impossible. ⁷No one has ever lived who has not experienced *some* light and *some* thing [Ur: some of everything]. ⁸No one, therefore, is able to deny truth totally, even if he thinks he can [Ur: even if he deceives himself in this connection most of the time. That is why those who live largely in darkness and emptiness never find any lasting solace. (This really answers Bill's question about whether people return {reincarnate} voluntarily.)].

• Study Question •

1. Do you feel that you have made “a firm commitment” to light or to “everything” (1:3–5), and have released all attachment to darkness or to “nothing”? If you answer “no,” are you willing to work towards such a commitment? If you answer “yes,” are you still willing to recognize “erratic thinking” as evidence that there is still some lingering hold on darkness?

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Whenever we see a statement like 1:1, that contains something like the words, “I have stated,” it is usually worthwhile to look back and find the earlier mention of the topic referred to. In this case, the reference may not be immediately clear. In T-2.II.5:7, Jesus told us “perfection is not a matter of degree,” which is the only actual reference using the word “degree” in this way. But most likely, since he mentions “light and darkness or everything and nothing” (1:3), he is referring here to this passage just a few sections earlier:

Nothing and everything cannot coexist. To believe in one is to deny the other. Fear is really nothing and love is everything. Whenever light enters darkness, the darkness is abolished... It should be emphasized, however, that ultimately no compromise is possible between everything and nothing. (T-2.VII.5:1–4,10)

This insistence on absolutes without any degree or shading is typical of the whole Course. We may believe that light and darkness are opposites, and that there are thousands of degrees of light and shadow in between, but to the Course, light is light, and it “cannot coexist” with darkness. If light is present, darkness cannot be (1:3). The absolute distinction is a little easier to see with everything and nothing. If you have everything, there is not nothing. If you have nothing, there is not everything. The two are not opposite ends of a continuum, they are mutually exclusive states. If one *is*, the other *is not*.

You cannot subscribe to the truth of what the Course teaches and still believe in some degree of lack or imperfection in yourself. The Course says you are perfect; you cannot be *partly* perfect. Perfect is perfect. You cannot be partly innocent, either you are innocent or you are not. As C. S. Lewis has said, there is no such thing as being *a little pregnant*; either you are, or you are not. There is no in-between; likewise, there are no *degrees* of innocence or perfection.

A firm commitment to the concepts of the Course means that we absolutely let go of any conflicting concepts. Our acceptance of innocence, our acknowledgment of perfection in ourselves and in our sisters and brothers, must be absolute, one hundred percent. There must be absolutely no exceptions. Until we make such a total commitment, our thinking “will be erratic” (1:4). Now of course, we’ve been talking about being too tolerant of our mind wandering; we’ve let our thoughts continue to be erratic. And we’ve been told before that the way out of confusion is making a clear

choice. In fact, one such passage even used the same word—"erratic"—but in regard to behavior:

Whenever there is fear, it is because you have not made up your mind.
Your mind is therefore split, and your behavior inevitably becomes erratic.
... This can be corrected only by accepting a unified goal. (T-2.VI.5:8–9,
6:9)

Jesus wants to be sure we get this point (1:5). We must come to a complete commitment. But, on the other hand, he also wants to encourage us by pointing out that it is *impossible* to make a firm commitment in the wrong direction. That's good news! We may *think* we are capable of firmly committing ourselves to darkness, but no matter how corrupt a person may seem to be, at some time and in some place they have experienced *some* light, or some thing other than nothing! Therefore, they cannot totally commit to dark or to nothing, which means, in application, that nobody can totally deny the truth. So the wonderful fact is that the only possible total commitment is the right one, the one that will bring us complete freedom and liberation.

The sentence from the Urtext about reincarnation implies that people reincarnate because they have not made a total commitment to love, or to everything. The "return" to another lifetime may not be voluntary, in the sense that the person may not consciously choose it; however, it is voluntary in the sense that it is ultimately based upon the person's choices during their lifetime.

Paragraph 2

2. ¹Innocence is [Ur: also] not a partial attribute. ²It is not real [Ur: a real defense] *until* it is total. [Ur: When it is partial, it is characterized by the same erratic nature that holds for other two-edged defenses.] ³The partly innocent are apt to be quite foolish [Ur: stupid] at times. ⁴It is not until their innocence becomes a viewpoint with universal [Ur: which is universal in its] application that it becomes wisdom. ⁵Innocent or true perception means that you never [*never*] misperceive and always [*always*] see truly. ⁶More simply, it means that you never see what does not exist [in reality.], ~~and always see what does.~~

• Study Question •

2. According to this paragraph, what does innocent or true perception see, and what does it not see? (See also 3:5-7 for additional material.)

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Innocence is absolute, not partial (2:1), just as light and everything are absolute. There are no degrees of innocence; the only real innocence is *total* innocence (2:2). We may think of ourselves as mostly innocent, yet nearly all of us feel as though we have some fatal flaw. We don't dare to claim *total* innocence. In fact, if we did, we would probably judge ourselves guilty of arrogance or pride! And while we may think of most

other people as innocent, there are probably at least a few people that seem irredeemably guilty to us. (Has it ever occurred to us that these two aspects of imperfect innocence—in ourselves and in others—might be connected somehow?)

Jesus is saying that if this is the only way I have experienced innocence, I have never experienced *real* innocence, because innocence isn't real until it is total (2:2). I know that, if I pause to think about it. If I believe in that fatal flaw in myself, I am always trying to protect it and cover it up. I am always trying to pretend it isn't there, and to hide it from others. I know that my façade of innocence will crumble if anybody exposes that seamy underside of my life, whatever it might be. So while I may tell myself I am mostly innocent, I never escape the overriding awareness of guilt.

As the Urtext makes clear, total innocence can be “a real *defense*” (2.2, Urtext); we become invulnerable. But not until our perception of innocence is total! So often it seems to us that being innocent and seeing innocence in others makes us vulnerable, easy targets of the unethical. We blindly trust people who end up screwing us over. Jesus is saying that isn't true of total innocence, although the “partly innocent are apt to be quite foolish,” or even “stupid,” as the original states (2:3).

Those who conceive of themselves as “partly innocent” make very foolish mistakes. Their misperception of themselves is projected onto others, and they frequently misperceive the persons and things around them; they often see what does not exist, and fail to see what does exist (2:5–6). This sounds like a pretty good definition of mental instability, doesn't it? Seeing things that aren't there is called “hallucinating.” Because we see guilt in ourselves, we see it in others. Because we believe in attack in ourselves, we see others as attacking us, and so on.

Total innocence, on the other hand, “becomes wisdom” because it “becomes a viewpoint with universal application” (2:4). In other words, we see ourselves *and everyone else* as totally, one hundred percent, innocent. No compromise. No exceptions. No degrees. That is wisdom because it leads to complete right perception. We see only God's perfect creation everywhere we look because God's creation is all that is real, and we do not see the illusions projected by a mind “made mad by guilt” (T-13.Int.2:2). We still perceive the ego behavior but we recognize it as what it is, and look past it to the reality of the Christ within.

Paragraph 3

3. ¹When you lack confidence in what someone will do, you are attesting to your belief that he is not in his right mind. ²This is hardly a miracle-based frame of reference. ³It also has the disastrous effect of denying the [Ur: *essentially creative*] power of the miracle. ⁴The miracle perceives everything as it is [*as it is*]. ⁵If nothing but the truth exists [Ur (*and this is really redundant in statement, because what is not true cannot exist*)], right-minded seeing cannot see anything but [*anything but*] perfection. ⁶I have said [*many times*] that only [*only*] what God creates or what you create with the same Will has any real existence. ⁷This, then, is all the innocent can see. ⁸They do not suffer from

distorted perception [Ur: from the delusions of the Separated ones].

• Study Question •

3. How does lack of confidence in what someone will do deny the power of the miracle (3:1–3)? Do you think this means we should blindly trust everyone?

Believing in innocence means believing in the right-mindedness of everyone. Innocence means having confidence in what they will do. We know most people are not in their right mind (as the Course defines that term) most of the time; we know that about ourselves, too. Yet we must come to see people right now as if they were advanced far beyond their actual development in time (T-2.V.10:1). We must see past their wrong-mindedness to the right mind that is in them, and seek to communicate with that mind and awaken their awareness of it. That is what the miracle does. If we shut down our awareness of that right mind and respond to them as if their wrong mind defined their identity, we are denying the miracle's power. We are denying that a miracle *can* happen. This person, as objectionable as they may seem, *could be* wholly touched by love right in this moment. The right attitude toward another was described well in the discussion of *charity*: “The charity that is accorded him is both an acknowledgment that he needs help, and a recognition that he will accept it” (T-2.V.10:3).

If a miracle “perceives everything as it is” (3:4), that doesn't just mean calling a spade a spade; “as it is” refers to seeing things *as God created them*, seeing everything as *perfect* (3:5). Earlier, the Text spoke about those who are “miracle-minded,” or mentally prepared for miracles. We were also told that in order to offer a miracle to another we must be in our *right mind*, however briefly (T-2.V.3:5). In this paragraph we get some understanding of what makes a mind miracle-minded: the acceptance of innocence. We also can see that miraculous seeing, right-minded seeing, and innocent seeing are all pretty much interchangeable terms (compare 3:4, 3:5 and 3:7). Perceiving our own innocence, and perceiving the perfect innocence in everything as God created it, is what true perception is, and it is the foundation of miracle-working.

Sentence 6 is a key summary sentence about what is real and what is not. Only what God creates, or what we create in accord with His Will, has real existence. Our *miscreations* do not, therefore, have real existence: “The miscreations of the mind do not really exist” (T-2.V.1:5; see also, T-3.IV.7:1). This is the foundation on which we work miracles. Innocence is the “miracle-based frame of reference” (3:2). Recognizing the unreality of miscreations, the innocent mind opens the way for those miscreations to disappear and be replaced by truth.

We should keep in mind that in Section I, Jesus has just presented us with his own example of the crucifixion. It was in that context that he began to speak of innocence. There, he told us that the innocent mind cannot project (T-3.I.6:2). It cannot see evil in others because it sees no evil in itself. “Innocence is wisdom because it is unaware of evil, and evil does not exist” (T-3.I.7:4), which is basically the same line of thought repeated in the current paragraph. When Jesus looked upon the people crucifying him he

was unaware of evil. That is the state of mind being talked about in this section. In the next two paragraphs (4 and 5) he draws our minds upward in an attempt to communicate a bit more fully what right-mindedness is like.

Paragraph 4

4. ¹You are afraid of God's Will because you have used your own mind [Ur: will], which He created in the likeness of His Own, to miscreate. ²[Ur: What you do *not* realize is that] The mind can miscreate only when it believes it is not free. ³An "imprisoned" mind is not free [Ur: by definition.] because it is possessed, or held back, by itself. ⁴It [Ur: Its will] is therefore limited, and the will is not free to assert itself. ⁵To be one is to be [Ur: the real meaning of "are of one kind {a reference to Jesus' earlier statement that "I and the Father are one" was originally "are of one kind"} is] of one mind or will. ⁶When the Will of the Sonship and the Father are one, their perfect accord is Heaven.

• Study Question •

4. Take a personal inventory, looking for any ways in which you believe in the reality of your own miscreations. Do you also notice a corresponding fear of God's Will as it seems to conflict with yours? Pray, asking for a fuller awareness that your will and God's Will are one.

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Actually, Paragraphs 4 and 5 are inserted from elsewhere in the text. Paragraph 4 is drawn from entirely different pages of the Urtext, with sentences 1 to 4 coming from 35 pages earlier, and sentences 6 and 7 from fifteen pages before *that!* Paragraph 5 originally followed Paragraph 7 of the previous section, T-3.I! It's a mystery to me why things were moved around quite so much. Paragraph 6 of this section originally directly followed Paragraph 3. The thoughts contained in these two paragraphs, however, *do apply* to the topic at hand.

As you read this paragraph, recall that the only things that have real existence are God's creations and what we have created with the same Will (3:6)—that is, God's Will. Our fear of God's Will occurs because we have forgotten this. We have used our minds to miscreate, and we think our *miscreations*—things we have made *apart from* God's Will—have real existence. For me, what this boils down to is thinking we have done something or created something God did not want done or created. We are afraid of God's Will because we think *it isn't ours*. We want one thing; God wants something else, and therefore His Will represents a threat to us. Likewise, believing our miscreations to be real, we think they pose a real threat to God and therefore have evoked His wrath.

Miscreation can only occur when the mind believes it is not free (4:2). The only thing "imprisoning" our mind is our own self-limitation (4:3). Our will is cramped because we are holding it back due to our fear of offending God (4:4). But if a mind knows itself and its will to be one with God and His Will, there is no fear, and the will is unrestricted in its activity. It creates freely, with perfect confidence, and *that* is Heaven (4:5–6).

The solution to our imagined imprisonment, as the first sentence of paragraph 5 will make clear, is to commend our spirit into the Hands of God, as Jesus did on the cross.

Paragraph 5

5. ¹Nothing can prevail against a Son of God who commends his spirit into the Hands of his Father. ²By doing this the mind awakens from its sleep and remembers its Creator. ³All sense of separation disappears [Ur and level confusion vanishes]. ⁴The Son of God is [is] part of the Holy Trinity, but the Trinity Itself is one. ⁵There is no confusion within Its Levels, because They are of one Mind and one Will. ⁶This single purpose creates perfect integration and establishes the peace of God. ⁷Yet this vision can be perceived only by the truly innocent. ⁸Because their hearts are pure, the innocent defend true perception instead of defending themselves against [against] it. ⁹Understanding the lesson of the Atonement they are without the wish to attack, and therefore they see truly. ¹⁰This is what the Bible means when it says, "When He shall appear (or be perceived) we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is [as He is]." [I John 3:2]

• Study Question •

5. Given the discussion of perfect accord with the Will of God in the preceding paragraph, what do you think it means to commend your spirit into God's Hands?



The first sentence contains a reference to the words of Jesus while on the cross: "And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46, KJV). This makes a clear connection between this current section and the discussion of Jesus' crucifixion in the preceding section, and shows that Jesus' behavior is being held up as the model of true perception. Jesus is talking here from personal experience, not in theory.

If I place myself in your hands, it means I am yielding entirely to your will. Given the context of the preceding paragraphs, to commend my spirit into God's Hands basically means to trust in His Will, to give up the illusion of a separate will, and to recognize the oneness of my will with God's. It is to be right-minded; to accept only what God creates as real, and therefore to perceive only the innocent. That is what Jesus did during his crucifixion.

Try actually saying it and see how it feels, and the sense of it becomes quite clear: "God, I place myself into Your Hands." When the mind commends itself to God's Hands, it "awakens from its sleep and remembers its Creator" (5:2) and realizes its oneness with God (5:3). The message to us here seems to be continuing a theme sounded several times already in the Text, that of willingly accepting God's guidance (usually in the form of Jesus or the Holy Spirit) and relinquishing our stubborn wish for an independent will. This yielding ourselves up to the Will of God is the gateway to awakening. Nothing can

prevail against anyone who does this (5:1). It is an experience of unlimited power, which is about as far away from being “imprisoned” as you can get.

The sentences about the “Holy Trinity” and its oneness (5:4–6) are difficult for us to completely understand, probably due more to the lack of clarity in our *minds* than to any lack of clarity in the words. The paragraph explains that, “This vision can be perceived only by the truly innocent” (5:7), those whose “hearts are pure” (5:8). But the gist of it, I think, is that when the mind awakens it realizes it is a part of the one Sonship. That Son of God is, in turn, “part of the Holy Trinity,” but that does not negate the fact that “all sense of separation disappears” (5:3). Although there seem to be “levels” within the Trinity, they are not levels that contradict oneness. The levels do not conflict in any way; they share one Will. When a mind joins wholeheartedly with God’s Will it becomes integrated, not only in itself, but with the other parts of the Trinity: the Father and the Holy Spirit. This singleness of purpose brings incredible clarity (“no confusion” (5:5)) and perfect peace (5:6).

The emphasis is still on our acceptance of innocence, which is an aspect of the state in which we were created by God. “The innocence of God is the true state of the mind of His Son” (T3.I.8:1). This theme has been consistently part of the discussion since the beginning of the chapter. Remember, the entire chapter is titled, “The Innocent Perception.”

A mind that is innocent has no need to defend against perceiving the truth. It has nothing to hide, nothing to fear in what might be seen. Therefore, the innocent mind defends true perception (5:8). It has no desire to attack because it understands “the lesson of the Atonement” (5:9). What lesson is that? It is a fairly clear reference to the previous section, which spoke of the “wholly benign lesson” of the Atonement (T3.I.6:11), which we decided last time was this: Nothing can destroy the truth. Good can withstand any form of evil. If you understand that lesson, how could you have any desire to attack? And knowing the truth, you will perceive truly (5:9).

Sentence 10 refers to a line in the New Testament. In the New International Version, it is translated, “When he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (I John 3:2). Traditionally, it is understood to speak of the return of Jesus Christ to the world; the idea is that at the end of the world we will all receive “spiritual bodies” like that of Christ (compare with I Corinthians 15:49–53). Here it is given a very different interpretation: Its real meaning is said to be the same innocent perception this paragraph has been discussing. When we see the innocence of Christ in our brothers (that is, in the entire Sonship, not just in Jesus) as it truly is, we will *be* the Christ, we will know that innocence as our own. What a completely different interpretation of that Bible verse!

Paragraph 6

6. ¹The way to correct distortions [Ur: all such delusions {the “delusions of the Separated ones” referred to at the end of paragraph 3}] is to withdraw your faith in them and invest it only in what is true. [Ur: To whatever extent you side with false perception in yourself or others, you are validating a basic

misperception. You *cannot* validate the invalid.] ²You cannot make untruth true. [Ur: I would suggest that you voluntarily give up all attempts to do so, because they can be only frantic.] ³If you are willing to accept [Ur: validate] what is true in everything you perceive, you let it be true for you. ⁴Truth overcomes all error, and those who live in error and emptiness can never find lasting solace. ⁵If you perceive truly you are cancelling out misperceptions in yourself and in others simultaneously. ⁶Because you see them as they are [Ur: as they were really created and can create], you offer them your acceptance [Ur: validation] of their truth so they can accept it for themselves. ⁷This is the healing that the miracle induces. [Ur: (Reply to HS {Helen Schucman} question: Is this all? The reason why this is so short, despite its extreme importance, is because it is not symbolic. This means that it is not open to more than one interpretation. This means that it is unequivocal. It also explains the quotation which you have never gotten correctly in complete form before: "But this we know, that when He shall appear (or be perceived) we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as He is pure." Every man *does* have the hope that he can see correctly, because the ability to do so is *in* him. Man's *only* hope *is* to see things as they are).]

• Study Question •

6. *How does your true perception of others bring healing to them?*

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Here, once again, there is a great deal of material re-inserted from the Urtext; I have not tried to comment on all of it.

The first sentence is a good summary: Withdrawing our faith from illusions and investing our faith only in the truth is what the corrective process consists of (6:1). And that means letting go of our judgments and seeing the innocence of everyone. Forgiveness consists in this; all it does is to acknowledge the truth. We cannot "make untruth true" (6:2); we cannot make the Son of God guilty.

And the wonder of healing in the miracle is that when we are willing to accept what is true in everything (the innocence of everything), we let it be true for ourselves (6:2–3). The message of the resurrection, as we were told in the last section, is, "Nothing can destroy truth." Here, we echo that same message: "Truth overcomes all error" (6:4). It is talking about the truth of innocence and the error of guilt. No amount of twisted thinking and belief in guilt can make us truly guilty. The innocence given us by God cannot be undone; we cannot "uncreate" what God created.

When we perceive innocence in another person, we are not only cancelling out our own mistaken perceptions of that person (in which we saw them as guilty), we are also cancelling out their own misperceptions of themselves (again, their guilt). When we see them as innocent, we hold that innocent perception before their eyes and offer it to them for their own acceptance.

Allen Watson's Commentary on the Text of *A Course in Miracles*

Although Helen asked, “Is this all?” it isn’t as mysterious as it may sound. I think most of us have experienced something like it. Have you ever been feeling stupid or down on yourself about something, and had a friend come along and help you see things from a different perspective, in which you were not quite so stupid or guilty? Your friend sees you as more innocent than you see yourself, and when your friend shares that perception with you in some way, it gives you an alternative way of seeing yourself.

This exchange of innocent perception “is the healing that the miracle induces” (6:7). This is the fruit borne by the whole process. This is how the miracle heals. We heal others by perceiving them as innocent and sharing that perception.

Answer Key

1. No written answer is expected.
2. True perception sees what exists and sees truly. It does not see what does not exist, and never misperceives what does exist. True perception sees only perfection; it sees only what God creates or what we create with the same Will (3:5–7).
3. When we lack confidence in someone, we attribute reality to their wrong-mindedness, and deny the power of their mind to change. This doesn't mean we should blindly trust everyone; it means that while we see their insanity we also see and *believe in* their innate innocence, and their ability to correct their errors. We may know, for instance, that given the chance, a certain person will steal from us. Therefore, we will not foolishly tempt them with opportunities. Yet we will still trust in their innate innocence and believe that, given the right encouragement and help, they can correct the mis-thinking that leads to their misbehavior.
4. No written answer is expected.
5. To trust that our will and His are one; to commit our spirit to Him for safe-keeping, according no reality to the apparent results of miscreation that appear to threaten us.
6. By our true perception of others, we cancel out misperceptions in ourselves and others simultaneously. We offer others our acceptance of the truth, so that they can receive it for themselves.