

Study Guide and Commentary ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 8, Section VII

The Body as a Means of Communication

Legend:

blue text = Material from ACIM 3rd edition (FIP)
bold blue text = words emphasized in all caps in Urtext
red text = alternate or omitted material from the Urtext
light blue text = editorial comments
~~strikethrough blue text~~ = Not in Urtext, in FIP edition

This section, “The Body as a Means of Communication,” talks about how the Holy Spirit can use the body even though it is part of our illusion of a separate self. If we identify with the body, rather than recognizing that we are God’s treasure, we will see ourselves as vulnerable and under attack, and will experience depression. Yet this does not mean we disparage or reject the body; rather, we utilize it as a useful tool. We are told not to regard the body as a *limitation*, nor to see the body as our *goal*, but to view it as a means to an end: joining minds and returning mind to spirit. The body can serve the mind’s goal as it reaches beyond the body to spirit.

The following sentences in the section are good indicators of the general message of the section: 2:3–5; 3:2; 9:5; 11:2; and 14:2.

Paragraph 1

1. ¹Attack is **always** physical. ²When attack in **any** form enters your mind you are **equating yourself with a body** [body. This is the ego’s], since this is the ego’s **interpretation** of the body. ³You do not have to **attack** physically to accept this interpretation. ⁴You **are** accepting it simply by the belief that attack can **get you something you want**. ⁵If you did **not** believe this, the **idea** of attack would have no appeal for you. ⁶When you equate yourself with a body you will **always** experience depression. ⁷When a child of God thinks of himself in this way he is belittling himself, and seeing his brothers as similarly belittled. ⁸Since he can find himself **only** in them, he has cut himself off from salvation.

• Study Question •

1. *Try applying the ideas of this paragraph to some situation in your life in which you were mentally attacking someone else, but not physically. In the Course’s view, this attack was physical, even though you did not use your body to attack. How would that be true in your situation?*

Any kind of attack in which I engage—verbal, mental, emotional, or physical—is based on a belief that my body *is* myself. Thus, “attack is always physical” (1:1). The

mere presence in my mind of an attack thought is evidence of the mind's belief that I am a body (1:2).

Often, as students read the *Course* and its message that, "I am not a body" (W-pI.199.Title), they will assume that they already know and accept that lesson. They assume that, because they *understand* the concept of not being a body, they have divested themselves of the belief in bodily identity. They do not realize that this belief can lie buried in their minds, skewing their motivation, even though they have *consciously* rejected it.

If we have thoughts of attack, we still believe we are bodies (1:2). Even if we do not physically attack another person, attack always involves the *thought* of the body (1:3). Any form of attack means that we have equated ourselves with the body. Accepting attack as a valid means of achieving our goals means that we are seeing the body just as the ego sees it (1:2,4).

Attack thoughts produce depression because they involve thinking of our brothers and of ourselves in a belittling way—as mere bodies (1:7). We are *much more* than mere bodies. If we were to see our brothers as the pure spirits they are in truth, it would awaken our recognition of our own true Self. When we see our brothers as bodies, we lose touch with that saving recognition (1:8). This is depressing.

As we will see, this section attributes both depression and physical sickness to a belief that we are bodies. As you read, you should be aware that this is not the *only* cause of sickness mentioned in the *Course*. In fact, according to Robert Perry in *A Course Glossary*, there are at least eleven reasons the ego makes the body sick.¹

Paragraph 2

2. ¹Remember that the Holy Spirit interprets the body **only** as a means of communication. ²Being the communication link between God and His separated Sons, the Holy Spirit interprets everything **you** have ~~made~~ in the light of what **He** is. ³The ego **separates** through the body. ⁴The Holy Spirit reaches **through** it to others. ⁵You do not perceive your brothers as the Holy Spirit does, because you do not regard bodies [*their bodies and yours*] solely as a means of **joining** [*their*] **minds** and uniting them with yours and mine. ⁶This interpretation of the body will change your mind entirely about its value. ⁷Of itself it has **none**.

• Study Question •

2. *This paragraph offers several thoughts about how the Holy Spirit sees the body and uses it. Read 3:6 and 9:4–7 as well, and summarize the way the Holy Spirit sees and uses the body.*



The key thought of the section is that the only valid use for the body is as a “means of communication” (2:1). This thought, mentioned earlier (T-6.V(A).5:5 and T-7.V.1:3), is considerably expanded upon here. The way that the Holy Spirit sees the body reflects His own function as the Communication Link between God and us (2:2). He is a communicator and He is making use of the body; therefore, communication is the purpose He assigns to the body.

Whereas the ego uses the body to separate, the Holy Spirit uses it to unite (2:3–4). This is a key idea. We should not reject our bodies just because the ego made them to separate us from one another and from God. Even though the body has no intrinsic value (2:6–7), the Holy Spirit has a use for it, a vital use: He can use our body to join with the minds of people around us, and to unite those minds with our own and with the mind of Jesus (2:5). He works through our words, our gestures, and our actions to awaken minds everywhere to their pre-existing union with the mind of Christ. As this understanding of the body takes root in our minds, it will transform the way we think of the body's value. "Of itself it has *none*." Its only real value is for bringing minds together in Christ.

Paragraph 3

3. ¹If you use the body for attack, it is harmful to you. ²If you use it **only** to reach the minds of those who believe they **are** bodies, and teach them *through* the body that **this is not so**, you will understand the power of the mind that is in [both of] you. ³If you use the body for this and **only** for this, you **cannot** use it for attack. ⁴In the service of uniting it becomes a beautiful lesson in communion, which has value until communion *is*. ⁵This is God's way of making unlimited what **you** have limited [the mind]. ⁶The Holy Spirit [His Voice] does not see the body as **you** do, because He knows the **only** reality of **anything** [the *only* reality that *anything* can have] is the service it renders [can render] God on behalf of the function He gives it [He has given].

• Study Question •

3. *Suggest several ways in which your body can be used to reach peoples' minds.*

The only proper use of my body is to unite with other minds; that is, reaching the minds of those who *believe* they are bodies, to teach them they are *not* bodies (3:1–2). As we saw earlier, all attack is self-attack (e.g., see commentary on T-6.I.3). If I use my body to attack someone, I am the one who suffers. I was created to create and (in this world) to heal; anything less than that will drag me down. Viewing everyone as bodies, I too will feel limited to a body. If I allow the Holy Spirit to heal other minds through my body, however, I will begin to recognize that I too am much more than a body (3:2).

Attack and healing cannot co-exist in the mind; if my body is being used to join minds together, I "cannot use it for attack" (3:3). Even though I made the body to express limitation, God can use it to *undo* the idea of limitation (3:5). Like most of us, I have experienced times when something someone said or did communicated to me their unity with me. As they perceived me as part of themselves, their words, expressions, or actions "told" me they felt at one with me. That is what all of us are called to do in every encounter. Although our bodies are fundamentally unreal, if we use them in God's service as a means for communicating union, the service that they can perform *is* real (3:6).

Used in this manner, the body becomes a beautiful thing, not something to despise or denigrate. It teaches *communion* "until communion *is*" (3:4). I love the idea that the goal of all this is perfect, all-inclusive communion. The word speaks of connection, of fellowship, closeness, and of intimacy. When you *commune* with another, you experience

a deep emotional and spiritual relationship with them. The body is our learning tool for teaching this kind of communion; it will serve its purpose until the day when communion simply “is;” until it is *all* there is, a mental union so intimate and so profound that bodies will no longer be needed.

Paragraph 4

4. ¹Communication **ends** separation. ²Attack **promotes** it. ³The body is beautiful or ugly, peaceful or savage [**savage or holy**], helpful or harmful, according to the use to which it is put. ⁴And in the body of another you will see the use to which you have put **yours**. ⁵If the body becomes [**for you**] a means you give to the Holy Spirit to use on behalf of [**the**] union of the Sonship, you will not see **anything** physical except as **what it is**. ⁶Use it for truth and you will see it truly. ⁷Misuse it and you **will** misunderstand it, because you have already done so *by* misusing it. ⁸Interpret **anything** apart from the Holy Spirit and you will mistrust it. ⁹This will lead you to hatred and attack and **loss of peace**.

• Study Question •

4. *According to this paragraph, how can we tell when we have misused the body?*

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As you read the *Course*, perhaps you wonder how you can ever see things as they *really* are in the light of the truth—what the *Course* calls “the real world.” Attack and ugliness seem to surround you, and you cannot understand how it would ever be possible to see the world as a place of beauty and safety.

The *Course* explains that the way you see the bodies of others is only a reflection of the way you have used your own (4:3–4). The only way to have a peaceable view of the world is to utilize your own body on behalf of peace. Attackers will always see attack coming at them, and will mistrust those around them (4:8–9); peacemakers and healers will see the world more accurately (4:5–6), as “little more than just a shadow circling round the good” (T-31.VII.3:3). Let us see our bodies as the Holy Spirit does—nothing more than a means for fostering the union of the Sonship (4:5)—and we will perceive the world as it truly is. Misuse our bodies and we will experience hatred, attack, and loss of peace.

Paragraph 5

5. ¹Yet **all** loss comes only from your own misunderstanding. ²Loss of **any** kind is impossible. ³But when you look upon a brother as a physical entity, **his** power and glory are “lost” to you and **so are yours**. ⁴You **have** attacked him, but [**and**] you **must** have attacked yourself first. ⁵Do not see him this way for your **own** salvation, which **must** bring him his. ⁶Do not **allow** him to belittle himself in **your** mind, but give him freedom from his belief in littleness, and thus escape from **yours**. ⁷As part of **you**, **he** is holy. ⁸As part of **me**, **you** are. ⁹To communicate with [**a**] part of God Himself is to reach beyond the Kingdom to its Creator, through His Voice Which He has established as part of **you**.

• Study Question •

5. *Elaborate on what it means to “not allow him to belittle himself in your mind” (5:6).*

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What does the “yet” signify as the first word in this paragraph? It refers us to what came before. The previous paragraph ended by talking about the “loss of peace” that is the ultimate result of our misuse of the body. Is it a *real* loss? Is peace truly gone? No. The apparent loss of peace, like all loss, is only a product of misunderstanding (5:1). “Loss of any kind is impossible” (5:2).

This simple statement is made without further explanation, leaving us, perhaps, wondering how he can possibly mean what he seems to be saying. We suffer what seems to be very real loss all the time: loss of loved ones, loss of property, loss of position, loss of health, limbs, or even of life. How can Jesus say loss is impossible? In a later section, he explains that while this is not true for the solitary self we believe we are, it *is* true of the Self we truly are:

No one can suffer for the Will of God to be fulfilled. Salvation is His Will because you share it. Not for you alone, but for the Self That is the Son of God. He cannot lose, for if he could the loss would be his Father's, and in Him no loss is possible. And this is sane because it is the truth (T-25.VII.13:3-7).

And that is the whole point, isn't it? If we believe we are bodies, we believe we suffer loss; if we realize our true Identity, we come to know that loss is impossible. (See also T-26.II.2–3.)

Seeing a brother or sister as a body demeans them, and by extension, demeans us with them (5:3). The power and glory (There are those words again!) given to both of us by God disappear from view. In fact, our mistaken view of our own self must have come first, and our attack on the other person exists now simply as a reflection of how we see ourselves (5:4).

The themes raised in the Section 8.III, “The Holy Encounter,” reappear vividly here. The way I can restore my vision of my true Self is by correcting my perception of my brothers. As I see them, I see myself. Change how I see them, and how I see myself will change likewise. Therefore, let me choose *not* to view them as bodies, as physical entities that threaten my physical “home” (5:5). Let me decide to refrain from *sharing* their misperceptions of themselves as bodies (5:6). This is something I do within my own mind, and does not necessarily involve my interacting with the parties concerned.

We are all parts of God. Therefore, if we communicate with one another, we *are* communicating with God, but the kind of communication spoken of here is only possible “through His Voice” (5:9), as we join our minds with the Holy Spirit to carry out the communication He intends.

Paragraph 6

6. ¹Rejoice, then, that of yourself you can do nothing. ²You are not *of* yourself. ³[And] He of Whom you **are** has willed your power and glory **for** you, with which you can perfectly accomplish His holy Will for you when you accept it for [when you will it] yourself. ⁴He has not withdrawn His gifts from **you**, but **you** believe you have [Ur: but *you* have] withdrawn them from Him. ⁵Let no Son of God remain hidden for His Name's sake, because His Name is **yours**.

• Study Question •

6. *How do the words, "Rejoice then," connect this paragraph to the preceding one?*

What we are being asked to do—look beyond the physical presence of a person to see the Christ in them, and look beyond their apparent separateness to recognize their union with us—may seem to be impossible. Fortunately, we do not have to do it by ourselves; we have the help of the Holy Spirit. God is our Source, and He has already given us the power and glory we need to accomplish His Will (6:3). The power and glory we obscure when we see one another as bodies is the very power by which we can overthrow that misperception. All we need to do is to accept that power and glory as our own. Let's not make the mistake of believing that God has taken these gifts away from us, or that *we* have wiped them out. The gifts are not absent; only our unbelief blocks them from our awareness (6:4). And what *keeps* them hidden is the way we hold on to our misperceptions of our brothers. If we deliberately set out to uncover the Christ in our brothers and sisters, we will find Him there; and what is more, we will find Him in ourselves.

Paragraph 7

7. ¹The Bible says, "The Word (or thought) was made flesh." ²Strictly speaking this is impossible, since it seems to involve the translation of one order of reality into another. ³Different orders of reality merely appear [*seem*] to exist, just as different orders of miracles do. ⁴Thought cannot be **made** into flesh except by belief, since thought is **not** physical. ⁵Yet thought **is** communication, for which the body can be used. ⁶This is the only **natural** use to which it can be put. ⁷To use the body **unnaturally** is to lose sight of the Holy Spirit's purpose, and thus to confuse the goal of His curriculum.

The paragraph opens with a biblical quotation: "The Word was made flesh" (John 1:14, KJV). As a former student of the Bible, as I thought about the topic of the preceding paragraph—discovering the Christ in others and in myself—I found that quotation springing to my mind even before I read it in the *Text*. Traditionally this is understood to refer to the incarnation of God as the man Jesus. The *Course* is giving it a different meaning: The thoughts of God are being communicated through physical means. Jesus points out that this cannot be taken literally, because thought cannot *literally* become flesh (7:4). That is so, not because thought and flesh exist on different planes, but because

“Different orders of reality merely appear to exist...” (7:3). Reality is not divided up into orders; it is one. This aside is included here, I believe, to point out that the traditional understanding of the biblical quotation is not even possible; God could not “become” a body.

The only way these words can be understood is that, by using our bodies for communication with each other through the Holy Spirit, we can “translate” the thought of unity into physical form.

Paragraph 8

8. ¹There is nothing so frustrating to a learner as [to place him in] a curriculum he cannot learn. ²His sense of adequacy suffers, and he **must** become depressed. ³Being faced with an impossible learning situation [*regardless of why it is impossible*] is the most depressing thing in the world. ⁴In fact, it is ultimately **why** the world ~~itself~~ is depressing. ⁵The Holy Spirit's curriculum is **never** depressing, because it is a curriculum of joy. ⁶Whenever the reaction to learning is depression, it is because the true goal of the curriculum has been lost sight of.

• Study Question •

7. *Here we are told that the ego's curriculum brings depression, while that of the Holy Spirit brings joy. How might we explain the fact that, at times, we get depressed about our spiritual practice?*

The final sentence of paragraph seven seems to tie in with this paragraph. It leads from talking about the Holy Spirit's use of the body to the ego's use of it, and the depression that results when we allow the ego to supply our “curriculum goals.” Have you ever been in a class that was completely over your head, so that the goal of the class was simply out of your reach? I have; it was known as Calculus III in college. I did a mediocre job in Calculus I, an even poorer job in Calculus II, and by the time I got to Calculus III, I was completely lost. That class was *unbearable* to me. No matter what I did, I could not learn the subject matter.

Imagine if you were in a class where the subject matter was not simply too difficult or too poorly taught, but where you were trying to learn something that was simply impossible—like transmuting lead into gold. Talk about frustrating!

That is exactly the situation when we let the ego set our learning goals. We become unutterably depressed (8:1–3). When we choose to use our bodies for attack, or to see our brothers as attackers, we *are* choosing to try to learn an impossible goal; therefore, we are bringing about our own depression. Because the goal of everything we do is unreachable, *everything* seems depressing! (8:4).

As long as we hold the true curriculum goal in mind we will always be joyful. When learning starts to be depressing, we've lost sight of the true goal (8:6). Sometimes, I can get so involved in the minutiae of my spiritual learning that I lose sight of the larger goal. The ego can divert my attention from remembering who I really am and who you really are onto some physical form—trying to do the *Workbook* lessons exactly right to the minute, or losing weight, or avoiding red meat. We are more concerned with things like proper dress, or eating only vegetables, than we are with joining with the minds of our

brothers. When the physical form of my spiritual practice becomes more important than the heart content, when rules take precedence over relationships, I've lost track of the real goal, and depression will soon follow.

Paragraph 9

9. ¹In this [the] world, not even the body is perceived as whole. ²Its purpose is seen as fragmented into many functions with little or no relationship to each other, so that it appears to be ruled by chaos. ³Guided by the ego, it *is*. ⁴Guided by the Holy Spirit, it is **not**. ⁵It becomes [only] a means by which the part of the mind you tried to separate *from* spirit [which you have separated from your Soul] can reach beyond its distortions and return *to* spirit [return to the Soul]. ⁶The ego's temple thus becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit, where devotion to Him replaces devotion to the ego. ⁷In this sense the body **does** become a temple to God; [because] His Voice abides in it by directing the use to which it is put [to which you put it].

• Study Question •

8. *Spend a few minutes meditating on the idea of your body as a temple for the Holy Spirit, a place "where devotion to Him replaces devotion to the ego" (9:6). Compose a prayer in which you offer your body to the Holy Spirit for this purpose.*

The remainder of the section develops the general idea that the Holy Spirit utilizes the body as a *means* to our goal, while avoiding the body as an *end*. The curriculum of the Holy Spirit will bring us only joy if we understand it properly; if, however, we confuse the means and the end, we will easily become depressed.

I can relate to this picture of my body as fragmented and chaotic, with multiple goals running at cross-purposes (9:1–3). Part of me, for instance, wants to go to the health club and exercise. Another part of me wants to eat a half-dozen donuts. Often the bodily goals of pleasure and health seem to be in conflict. It feels very chaotic, and if I listen to my ego, it will always be that way.

When I listen to the Holy Spirit, however, my body can find a unified purpose, no longer pulled in multiple directions. It becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit² (9:5), in the sense that He "lives" in it "by directing the use to which it is put" (9:7). He is a Voice in my mind, calling me back to my true place in God. The body serves my mind, instead of my mind serving it (which is how I often feel when I seem impelled to respond to various bodily wants and needs). The mind uses the body to reach beyond its twisted thoughts of separation and to rediscover spiritual unity (9:5). Through my body, my mind can reconnect with other minds. Such joining becomes its pathway home.

Paragraph 10

10. ¹Healing is the result of using the body **solely** for communication. ²Since this **is** natural it heals by making whole, which is also natural. **3**All mind is whole, and the belief that part of it is physical, or **not mind**, is a fragmented or sick interpretation. ⁴Mind **cannot** be made physical, but it **can** be made

manifest *through* the physical if it uses the body to **go beyond** itself. ⁵By reaching **out**, the mind **extends** itself. ⁶It does not **stop** at the body, for if it does it is blocked in its purpose. ⁷A mind that has been blocked has allowed itself to be vulnerable to attack, because it has **turned against itself**.

• **Study Question** •

9. *Based on this paragraph, explain how the mind can use the body in the plan of the Holy Spirit. Include both what we are to do and what we are not to do.*

Again we are told that the proper use of the body—“solely for communication”—is essential to healing (10:1). Healing entails restoring the natural functioning of something or someone. Since the natural function of the body (in the perception of the Holy Spirit) is communication, using it only for communication is a *form* of healing (10:2). My nose, for instance, is intended to smell things. It is “whole” when that is what it is doing. Similarly, the body is healed when it is serving the Holy Spirit’s purposes.

Believing that I am, or that anyone else for that matter is, a body, is “a sick interpretation” because, just as the word cannot become flesh, “Mind cannot be made physical” (10:3–4). Physical bodies are separate; a mind fragmented into bodies is no longer whole. This is why (as we’ll see in paragraphs to follow) simply believing in our bodily identity leads to sickness! Thinking we are bodies *is* a sickness.

Yet, as has been said several times already, the mind “can be made manifest *through* the physical if it uses the body to go beyond itself” (10:4). We need to let the Spirit of God move out through our minds, and through our bodies, to heal the world. The image of the mind not stopping at the body, but using the body to “go beyond itself” (that is, beyond the mind) is powerful. When my mind uses my body to extend love and forgiveness to others, uniting with other minds, my mind in a sense passes through the body and becomes manifest.

My eyes, my tongue, my hands, my feet today
Have but one purpose; to be given Christ
To use to bless the world with miracles.

(W-pII.353)

Paragraph 11

11. ¹The removal of blocks, then, is the **only** way to guarantee help and healing. ²Help and healing are the normal expressions of a mind that is working **through** the body, but not *in* it. ³If the mind believes the body is its **goal** it **will** distort its perception **of** the body, and by blocking its own extension **beyond** it, will **induce** illness by **fostering separation**. ⁴Perceiving the body **as a separate entity** [an independent entity that exerts power over the mind] cannot **but** foster illness, because it is not true. ⁵A medium of communication loses [will lose] its usefulness if it is used for anything else. ⁶To use a medium of communication as a medium of **attack** is an obvious confusion in purpose.

• Study Question •

10. Read 10:5–7 and 11:1, and try to define what the Course means here by “blocks.”

To be healed, we have to remove anything that is blocking the mind's function of extension (11:1). Perceiving others and ourselves as bodies is one such block, and a primary one. When my mind, or yours, is healthy, it will extend itself, because that is what minds do (11:2). In this world, it will help others, and it will heal. (I say “in this world” because healing isn't needed in Heaven. In this section we are concerned with this world because we have been talking about healing.)

I find it very helpful to think of the “mind...working *through* the body, but not *in* it” (11:2), rather like a puppeteer acting *through* a marionette. The modern computer phenomenon of virtual reality (VR) gives us another more technological example. In virtual reality, you may perceive yourself as a warrior in a hostile universe. Your mind directs your character in the VR world, and expresses your thought, but *you* are not actually in that world or that character's body. Likewise, your mind (in union with the Holy Spirit) directs your body in *this* world and expresses your thought, but *you* are not actually *in* this world, or *in* that body.

One of the things that can block the extension of your mind beyond the body is a belief that the body is the goal instead of just the means to an end. Therefore, the body and its well-being becomes the focus of the mind's plans. One way this manifests is making physical healing our goal, instead of the healing of our minds³. Ironically, this always will “foster illness” instead of working against it (11:4), because it necessitates viewing the body as a separate thing, and the body is not a separate entity. Anything that fosters separation fosters illness.

When we believe the body is our goal, we engage in attack. Conversely, when we attack our brothers, we are making the body our goal, and misusing it. To do so is to lose track of our true purpose (11:6).

Paragraph 12

12. ¹To communicate is to join and to attack is to separate. ²How can you do both simultaneously **with the same thing** and **not** suffer? ³Perception of the body can be unified only by **one purpose**. ⁴This releases the mind from the temptation to see the body in many lights, and gives it over **entirely** to the One Light in Which it can be really understood [at all]. ⁵To confuse a learning device with a curriculum **goal** is a fundamental confusion that blocks the understanding of both [“that blocks the understanding of both” was apparently added by the editors]. [Learning can hardly be meaningfully arrested at its own aids, and hope to understand them *or* its real purpose]. ⁶Learning must lead **beyond** the body to the re-establishment of the power of the mind **in** it. ⁷This can be accomplished **only** if the mind **extends** to other minds, and does not **arrest itself** in its extension. ⁸This arrest [The arrest of the mind's extension] is the cause of all illness, because **only extension is the mind's function**. [Block this, and you have blocked health because you have *blocked the mind's joy*.]

• Study Question •

11. According to this paragraph what is the purpose of the body and how is it accomplished?

We have to be willing to let go of all our attack thoughts. That means letting go of grievances, or forgiving everyone and everything, because unforgiveness is an attack. In our relationships, are we communicating and joining, or are we attacking and separating? (12:1). If we observe ourselves and monitor our thoughts, we will discover that we are in attack mode far more often than we realize.

If I am *simultaneously* joining and separating, drawing someone to myself and pushing them away, of course I will suffer (12:2). I will be divided against myself or, feel as if I am being torn in two. And both of my goals, since they are contradictory, will be frustrated.

Trying to be loving and at the same time holding grievances just does not work. “Love holds no grievances” (W-pI.68.Title; see also W-pI.68.1:1.) There is no way I am going to be able to have true perception of bodies until I adopt a unified purpose: the purpose of joining and healing (12:3). Mixed motives cause me to have mixed interpretations of my brothers and sisters, whereas accepting the single purpose of the Holy Spirit purifies my mind and gives a single focus to my perception (12:4).

When a mind has only light, it knows only light. Its own radiance shines all around it, and extends out into the darkness of other minds, transforming them into majesty. (T-7.XI.5:1-2)

To me, the essence of this section is that mistaking a body for my self is the same thing as making the body my goal. As the *Course* says, everyone is trying to find themselves, to heal themselves, to make themselves whole. If I think I am a body, then my efforts will be focused on the body—that’s evident. If I recognize instead that I am spirit or mind, and not limited to a body, then my efforts will be focused on bringing healing and wholeness to the entire mind, and not focused on the body. If, furthermore, I realize that this mind is a mind I *share* with all of my brothers and sisters, then my efforts at healing and wholeness will extend to all of them as well (12:6–7).

The words “This arrest” (12:8) imply that I am letting my mind stop short of that extension. This not only frustrates my function, it makes me physically ill. *All* illness comes from this kind of blockage. My mind and heart is built to exude love; love is meant to flow out from me constantly. Blocking that outflow is like crimping a garden hose; it puts undue pressure on my mind and causes me pain. Illness is the result of shutting off the outflow of love.

Health is the result of relinquishing all attempts to use the body lovelessly (T-8.VIII.9:9).

Paragraph 13

13. ¹The opposite of joy is depression. ²When your learning promotes depression **instead** of joy, you **cannot** be listening to God's joyous Teacher and [Ur: you *must* be learning amiss.] ~~learning His lessons.~~ ³To see a body as anything **except** a means of communication [means of pure extension] is to limit your mind and to **hurt yourself**. ⁴Health is therefore nothing more than united purpose. ⁵If the body is brought under the purpose of the mind, it becomes whole because the mind's purpose **is** one. ⁶Attack can only be an assumed purpose of the body, because **apart** from the mind the body **has no purpose at all**.

• Study Question •

12. *What relationship must we attribute to the body and the mind in order to experience joy?*

•

When you are seeing a body, any body, as a tool for attack or indeed for any purpose besides spiritual communication (or extension), you are learning the ego's lessons and not the lessons of the Holy Spirit (13:2–3). I do not believe this means that the *Course* frowns on sex. I do think that it implies that even sex should be thought of as an avenue for mind-to-mind communication, the expression of a spiritual union rather than a mechanism for mindless physical pleasure.

When you misuse the body, which means using it for anything besides the purpose given it by the Holy Spirit, it will depress you rather than delight you. It will actually *hurt* you (13:3). By contrast, allowing the Holy Spirit to direct your use of the body will always bring you joy.

A lot is implied in the word “therefore” in the fourth sentence. It seems to be tying physical health to joy, and sickness to depression. Actually, with what modern medicine has been discovering, that is not far-fetched! Often, what someone believes to be a physical problem can be traced to mental depression; the mind is making the body sick. This isn't a new idea; Phineas Quimby, who lived 1802–1866 and whose ideas fed into Christian Science and New Thought churches such as Unity and Religious Science, once wrote, “all disease is in the mind.” He said that our beliefs determined the state of our bodies. When the *Course* says that, “Health is nothing more than united purpose,” it clearly implies that a proper attitude of mind, focused on a purpose of pure extension, will result in a healthy body.

When we accept the single purpose of the Holy Spirit as our own, we begin to live our lives and use our bodies with a goal of joining our mind with the mind of Jesus and the minds of those around us. We “join” in the sense of recognizing an existing unity, not creating one that is not there. With this as our purpose our bodies will be healthy! (13:4–5). This *is* what the *Course* teaches. The implication is that if our health is poor, we still need more work on the purpose our mind is giving to our body. Somewhere, somehow, we are still using our bodies to attack, or viewing other bodies as attacking us, or making the body into the centerpiece of our lives.

If the mind believes the body is its **goal it will distort its perception of the body, and...will induce illness by fostering separation.** (11:3)

Notice that the *Course* denies that the body can *truly* be used for attack, because its purpose comes entirely from the mind, and minds cannot attack (13:6 and T-18.VI.3:5). Any experience of attack, whether we are attacking or being attacked, must therefore be illusory.

Paragraph 14

14. ¹You are **not** limited by the body, and thought **cannot** be made flesh. ²Yet mind can be manifested through the body if it goes beyond it and **does not interpret it as limitation.** ³Whenever you see another as limited **to** or **by** the body, you are imposing this limit **on yourself.** ⁴Are you willing to **accept** this, when your whole purpose for learning should be to escape **from** limitations? ⁵To conceive of the body as a means of attack [**of any kind**] and to believe [**and to entertain even the possibility**] that joy could **possibly** result, is a clear-cut indication of a poor learner. ⁶He has accepted a learning goal in obvious contradiction to the unified purpose of the curriculum, and one that is interfering with his ability to accept its purpose **as his own.**

• Study Question •

13. *Why does seeing another person as limited to their body interfere with my ability to accept the message of the Course for myself?*

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Learning not to see anyone as a body means to see their mind as unlimited by the body (14:1). The mind is what it is, and the state of the body does not affect it. I once knew a quadriplegic man, Alan Greene, who blessed dozens of lives as he lay in bed completely immobile except for his head. He was a student of the *Course* and it showed. He was joyful despite his condition. He had to undergo numerous medical procedures, and once was discussing the *Course* with a surgical nurse while he was being operated on under local anesthetic. Alan helped me to see that the body does not limit the mind.

Instead, mind can manifest itself through the body (14:2). The radiant joy of a mind at peace in God takes on physical form, and is expressed through the body's gestures, expressions, postures, and words. In the *Course*, Jesus is referred to as "the manifestation of the Holy Spirit" (T-12.VII.6:1). That means he plainly demonstrated the Mind of the Holy Spirit in his life. Likewise, we are meant to plainly demonstrate His love, His plan, and His power in our lives. The Holy Spirit "can become compellingly real to you as [His] Presence becomes manifest through you" (T-12.VII.4:5).

The only way that is going to happen, however, is if we remove from our minds the impediment of the body. That is, we must stop believing that our bodies limit us! (14:2-3). We must begin to identify ourselves less as bodies and more as limitless minds. Escaping from the limitations of the physical is one of the *Course's* goals for us. Way back in the first chapter, we were told:

Miracles transcend the body. They are sudden shifts into invisibility, away from the bodily level. That is why they heal. (T-1.I.17:1-3)

The meaning of those words is becoming clearer. We shift from the level of the body into the level of mind and spirit, because that is where miracles happen.

The *Course* repeats the idea here that thinking we can use the body to *get* something, to attack someone in some way, is the same as limiting ourselves to the body. I think that we should be asking ourselves, “Why would I use the body when I have my mind?” Obviously this rules out bullying and physical violence, but it goes further. In fact, any attitude that identifies me with the body interferes with my ability to learn what the *Course* is teaching me (14:6).

Paragraph 15

15. ¹Joy is unified purpose, and unified purpose is **only** God's. ²When yours is unified it **is** His. ³Believe you can interfere with His purpose [**Interfere with His purpose**], and **you need salvation**. ⁴You have condemned yourself, but condemnation is not of God. ⁵Therefore it is not true. ⁶No more are any of its seeming **results**. ⁷When you see a brother as a body, you are condemning him **because** you have condemned yourself. ⁸Yet if **all** condemnation is unreal, and it **must** be unreal since it is a form of attack, then it can *have* no results.

• Study Question •

14. *Why is our tendency to see others as bodies so strong?*

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At first, the topic of this paragraph may appear unrelated to the preceding discussion of our use of the body, but there is a definite connection. This paragraph ties our perception of bodies to the fact that we think God has condemned us. We are therefore projecting that condemnation onto our brothers, trying to rid ourselves of the condemnation by seeing them as bodies (15:7). It emphasizes that condemnation is something that we have made up. God *does not* condemn us (15:4–5, 8).

Our condemnation is very much a part of this picture, because it stems from our belief that we are able to interfere with God's purpose (15:3). Of course, that is impossible. Just a few paragraphs back the *Course* was talking about the fact that there can be no will but God's, despite our belief that we have a will that is different. This paragraph is saying the same thing, but applying it to the condemnation that such a belief brings to our minds, and showing how that guilt distorts our perceptions of our brothers and sisters.

Jesus proves that “condemnation is unreal” by reminding us that “it is a form of attack” (15:8). He is relying on the implied fact that *all attack* is unreal, which is a very important implication for us to notice. (The next paragraph contains a direct statement to this effect: “There is no attack...” (16:6).)

Paragraph 16

16. ¹Do not allow yourself to suffer from **imagined** results of what is not true. ²Free your mind from the belief that this is possible. ³In its complete impossibility [**and your full awareness of its complete impossibility,**] lies your only hope for release. ⁴But what other hope would you want? ⁵Freedom from illusions lies only in not **believing** them. [*Where are they without your belief?*]

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⁶There is no attack, but there *is* unlimited communication and therefore unlimited power and wholeness. ⁷The power of wholeness is **extension**. ⁸Do not arrest your thought in this world, and you will open **your** mind to creation in God.

Belief in bodily limitations is a belief in the reality of separation, condemnation, and attack. To believe I am limited to the body is to believe that the separation is real, that we are condemned, and that the result of that condemnation (sickness) is real. The *Course* says in one place that, “This course will be believed entirely or not at all” (T-22.II.7:4). We might be tempted to think that its emphasis on our not being bodies is tangential, a side issue that can be safely ignored if we find it too difficult, while we can still accept the message that the separation never happened. That simply isn’t true. If we believe in bodily limits we *are* believing that we are separated from God, and therefore we are condemned. The *Course*’s aim is to free us from the very belief that separation and condemnation are possible, or *anything* could result from them (16:2).⁴ If you and I are bodies, then the separation *must* be real. The separation could only be real if we had *really* attacked God and had been cut off from Him and from one another.

Learning that we are not bodies is not an elective subject; it is part of the core curriculum. That is what was meant in 14:6. Learning this holds the “only hope” we have for freedom (16:3).

Why would we want anything different? It is an illusion that we are bodies, an illusion that we are separate from each other, an illusion that we are separate from God. The only way to escape from an illusion is to stop believing in it! (16:5). Attack, and all of its results such as separate bodies, is unreal (16:6). Reality consists of communication, power, and wholeness that have no limits, a state almost inconceivable to us but nevertheless the only thing that is real.

A Course in Miracles is not some trite collection of bromides to simply make us feel better; it is a complete program for profound spiritual transformation. Its curriculum of ego and body transcendence is the antithesis of the bubbly froth of superficial teachings that so often pass for “spiritual.” Such mental pablum generally falls directly into the very orientation towards bodily identity that the *Course* aims to free us from! These pseudo-spiritual teachings focus on greater material wealth, improved physical health, a dream house, better sex, and “having it all.” They “arrest [our] thought in this world” (16:8). These are the very curriculum goals that, according to the *Course*, *interfere* with rediscovering our true Identity. They are goals of having and getting, rather than goals of extending and giving.

There is nothing *wrong* with health or wealth. What hurts us is the shortsightedness of such goals; *arresting* our thoughts there, letting our minds come to a halt with such trifling aims. If we let our minds reach beyond goals like these we will begin to open our minds to the limitless vista of creation in God (16:8).

Answer Key

1. Your answer will differ from mine, of course. I recall mentally attacking a person, and thinking how I would benefit if they should die or become incapacitated in some way. I was not about to actually kill them, but I definitely believed that if I were free to do so, “removing” them from the scene would benefit me. This quite clearly was based on the belief that I am a body, that the other person is a body, and that attack on the body has real effects.
2. To the Holy Spirit, the body’s purpose is communication (2:1). He utilizes the body to communicate with other minds. To Him, the body is a tool He can use to unite my mind and the minds of others around me with the mind of Christ. In this view, the body is real only as it renders service to God, expressing this mental union. The body can be my mind’s way out of illusion. It is, in a limited sense, a temple to God, because the Holy Spirit lives in it by directing how we use it (9:7).
3. Conversation; physically helping others; loving acts of any kind; writing; hugging and touching; physical healing work.
4. We can see how we have used our own body by how we see the body of another person. The other person’s body will be peaceful and helpful to us if we have used our body for peace and help. If we misuse our own body we will misunderstand and mistrust the body of another, which will lead to hatred, attack, and loss of peace.
5. This sentence does not mean that we should try to correct our brother’s actions when he gets down on himself. It isn’t his belittling himself, per se, that is at issue. Instead, it says, “do not allow him to belittle himself *in your mind*” (5:6). My brother may be seeing himself as a body, but I do not need to reinforce that in my own mind. I do not want to *agree* with him mentally. I may say something to him or I may not, but within my own mind I will not accept and support his belittling view of himself.
6. The words “Rejoice then” imply that the preceding paragraph gives a reason for rejoicing that we cannot do anything of ourselves. The idea is that, if we had to carry out this kind of communication with the Christ in one another by ourselves, we’d be in trouble. It can seem impossible for us to do this, but we do not have to do it alone. The good news is that we can’t do *anything* of ourselves because we are *of God*. We are not alone. God made the Holy Spirit part of us so that He is with us in everything we do.
7. The idea that will be developed is that the goal of the Holy Spirit’s curriculum has nothing to do with the body as an end in itself; it involves the body only as a means (see 11:3 and 12:5). When our ego intrudes it can cause us to lose sight of this, and to begin to connect our spiritual goals with the body in some way. When this occurs, depression results. One form of this, I believe, is getting too closely attached to a certain routine of spiritual practice, and then becoming upset when that routine gets disturbed. (See M-16.2:5.)

8. No written answer is expected.
9. We can use the body solely for communication; this heals because it is natural, as is wholeness. Communication makes whole. We can use the body to go beyond the body; through the body, the mind reaches out to connect with "other" minds. We should avoid any idea that part of the mind has become physical. Such an idea implies that the mind can be broken into parts. The mind should not accept the limitations of body for itself or for others, seeking the natural communication of mind to mind, the wholeness of unified mind.
10. The blocks referred to here are various ways in which the mind stops at the body level, rather than reaching out beyond the body and extending itself. A block is anything that hinders the function of extension; for instance, letting our perception of another person, or of ourselves, stop at the level of speech and behavior, rather than seeing beyond to the spirit.
11. The body is a learning device that can be used to achieve a certain learning goal. That goal is to transcend the body and allow the mind to re-establish its power. This goal can be accomplished only if I learn to fearlessly extend my mind to the minds of others, bringing healing and blessing to them, because the power of the mind resides in extension. If I block that extension I risk making myself sick.
12. We must see the body as serving the purpose of the mind. This purpose is united and single, with the goal of empowering the mind and furthering its extension. "Apart from the mind the body has no purpose at all" (13:6).
13. The whole purpose of the *Course's* curriculum is to free me from limitations. The body is such a limitation. Therefore anything that sees anyone as limited to the body is contrary to that purpose. Seeing someone else as a body limits *me* to a body as well. My goal should always be to go beyond the body and to learn that it is not a limitation to my mind.
14. We see others as bodies because we believe we have sinned and that God condemns us as a result. In fact we, not God, are the source of our condemnation. Wanting to deflect God's judgment from ourselves, we project it onto our brothers, which necessitates seeing them as bodies (something that can sin and can be punished). Seeing our brother as a body is a way in which we condemn him. If we did not condemn him we would see the being of light that he truly is.

¹ Notice that the passage we are studying in Chapter 8 is not even referred to in list of references below! Equating ourselves with the body might be a twelfth reason; or, perhaps more accurately, the reasons below give details of *why* equating ourselves the body results in sickness. Robert's *Glossary* says:

"The Course mentions many ways in which sickness serves this purpose: a) The mind punishes the body to mitigate expected punishment from God and so usurp His perceived function (see T-5.V.5:4-9); b) the mind makes the body sick to prove that it is stronger than God Who would heal (see M-5.I.1-2); c) the mind punishes the body as a way of blaming the body for the "sins" the mind had the body act out (see T-18.VI.6:1); d) the

mind punishes the body as a way of punishing itself for its supposed sins; e) the mind made the body out of the sickness of separation and projects this sickness onto the body (see T-19.I.7:7); f) the mind uses sickness to demonstrate that the mind is separate from goodness, health and God (see T-28.V.1:1-5); g) the mind produces sickness to separate us from others (see W-pl.137.1-2); h) the mind makes the body sick to show how another has injured it (see T-27.I.3-4); i) the mind attacks the body because the body has failed to satisfy (see T-19.IV(B).11:6); j) the mind attacks the body to prove that the body is real (see T-29.II.8:1-3), that we are physical beings, not spiritual (see W-pl.136.7-8); k) the mind attacks the body because it suspects the body is not real enough to truly act out its fantasies (see T-18.VI.3:7)." (*A Course Glossary*, The Circle of Atonement, 1996, p. 69)

² A reference to the New Testament, I Corinthians 6:19: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" (NIV). The Course's understanding of what "the temple of the Holy Spirit" means seems to expand as you go through the Text. Here are three references that show the progression:

"Perceiving the body as a temple is only the first step in correcting this distortion, because it alters only part of it. It *does* recognize that Atonement in physical terms is impossible. The next step, however, is to realize that a temple is not a structure at all. Its true holiness lies at the inner altar around which the structure is built" (T-2.III.1:5-8).

"The ego's temple thus becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit, where devotion to Him replaces devotion to the ego. In this sense the body does become a temple to God; His Voice abides in it by directing the use to which it is put" (T-8.VII.9:6-7).

"You cannot make the body the Holy Spirit's temple, and it will never be the seat of love" (T-20.VI.6:1).

"The Holy Spirit's temple is not a body, but a relationship" (T-20.VI.5:1).

³ When the ego tempts you to sickness do not ask the Holy Spirit to heal the body, for this would merely be to accept the ego's belief that the body is the proper aim of healing. Ask, rather, that the Holy Spirit teach you the right *perception* of the body, for perception alone can be distorted (T-8.IX.1:5-6).

⁴ Notice that sentence 2 asks us to refuse the belief that "this" is possible. "This" appears to refer to the preceding sentence, "what is not true" and its results. That in turn is a reference to 15:4-6. Condemnation is not true, nor is anything that seems to result from it, which in this context is sickness. Thus, we are being asked to eliminate our belief that condemnation and sickness are even possible.