

# Study Guide and Commentary ACIM<sup>®</sup> Text, Chapter 8, Section VIII

## The Body as Means or End

### 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  
~~striketrough blue text~~ = Not in Urtext, in FIP edition

### Overview of the Section

The final two sections of Chapter 8 continue the theme begun in 8.VII: the place of the body in the curriculum of the Holy Spirit. In this section (“The Body as Means or End”) there is a continued emphasis on the purpose of the body. This section elaborates on the reasons why making the body our goal or our end is a mistake. The body can be a *means* to our healing, a useful learning tool, but it is not the goal or *end* of our healing. Healing in the *Course* is not about healing the *body*; it is about healing the sick mind that shows up as a sick body. *Sometimes* the body *is* healed as a result of healing the mind. This might occur if there are useful lessons yet to be learned with a healthy body. Sometimes, however, the mind is healed but the body is not. In this case, it may be that a healthy body isn’t needed for further learning. Healing the body was never the end in the first place. The body will eventually grow old and die. It is not a necessary part of you; in fact, according to the *Course*, the body isn’t really *part of you* at all! (T-6.IV.4:5; T-6.V(A).3:3). It is a *temporary learning device* and nothing more, no more part of you than a chalkboard in a schoolroom.

The final section of the chapter will continue the idea that the body is not the end of healing, and will point us to the healing of our minds as a more appropriate goal.

### Paragraph 1

1. <sup>1</sup>Attitudes toward the body are attitudes toward **attack**. <sup>2</sup>The ego’s definitions of **anything** are childish, and are **always** based on what it believes the thing is *for*. <sup>3</sup>This is because it is incapable of true generalizations, and equates what it sees with the function **it** ascribes to it. <sup>4</sup>It does **not** equate it with what it *is*. <sup>5</sup>To the ego the body **is to attack with**. <sup>6</sup>Equating **you** with the body, it teaches that *you* are to attack with [because *this is what it believes*]. <sup>7</sup>The body, then, is not the source of its own health. <sup>8</sup>The body’s condition lies solely in your interpretation of its function. [The reasons why definitions by function are inferior is merely because they may well be inaccurate.] <sup>9</sup>Functions are part of

being since they arise **from** it, but the relationship is **not** reciprocal. <sup>10</sup>The whole does define the part, but the part does **not** define the whole. [This is as true of knowledge as it is of perception.] <sup>11</sup>Yet [The reason why] to **know** in part is to know entirely [is merely] because of the fundamental difference between knowledge and perception. <sup>12</sup>In perception the whole is built up of parts that can separate and reassemble in different constellations. <sup>13</sup>But knowledge never changes, so its constellation is permanent. <sup>14</sup>The idea of part-whole relationships has meaning only at the level of perception, where change is possible. <sup>15</sup>Otherwise, there is no difference between the part and whole. [14-15 in Ur: The only areas in which part-whole relationships have any meaning are those in which change is possible. There *is* no difference between the whole and the part where change is impossible.]

• Study Question •

1. What are the ego's two premises about the body, and what is its viewpoint of your very identity and function that results from those premises?



The statement of the opening line is explained in the rest of the paragraph: In a mind that is controlled by the ego, the body and attack are virtually synonymous. This isn't anything deeply mysterious; the human mind often equates a thing with its function. To some people, guns mean murder and nothing more. That is not all that a gun is good for, of course, but in some people's minds guns are so closely identified with killing people that they are as repelled by the sight of a gun as they would be by an actual act of violence.

The ego equates the body with attack; therefore, until the Holy Spirit has retrained us, we will respond to the body *as if it were attack* (1:1). We react to other embodied individuals as if they were attacking us; we despise our own body as if it were good for nothing but attacking others and ourselves.

The reason why the ego equates the body with attack is simple: To the ego, that is its only function, and what it is *for* defines what it *is* (1:2-5). The *Course* calls this kind of simple equation "childish" (1:2) because it is the way children sometimes think. It is characteristic of an unsophisticated mind; one often sees it in animals as well. If the only time you have ever taken your dog in a car, you went to the veterinarian where the dog has the unpleasant experience of getting shots, your dog will probably equate your car with that unpleasant experience. It can't generalize well and realize that the car might have other functions; it equates the car with the only function it knows. Since the ego knows no function for the body but attack, it equates the body with attack.

The ego goes even further: Because it also equates *you* with the body, it sees you as having no function but that of attack (1:6).

The ego is confusing *function* with *being*. Function and being are in a part-to-whole relationship; that is, being is the whole, and function is a part. Although being defines function, function does not define being; the relationship between them is not reciprocal (1:9). The function of a gun arises from the nature of a gun, but the nature of the gun does not arise from its function. In more concrete terms, just because you can use a gun to kill someone does not make the gun inherently evil. Just because power can corrupt does not

make it a bad thing to have power. Just because fire can char flesh and destroy homes does not make fire a bad thing. In like manner, simply because the body *can* be used to attack and used as the object of attack, it does not make the body a bad thing.

Perception can be subdivided into parts and rearranged in different constellations; knowledge cannot be subdivided, and therefore “its constellation is permanent” (1:12–13). The idea that, in perception, there are many parts that can assume many different relationships, is one that occurred in the previous section (see T-8.VII.9:1–3). In the ego’s perception the body can have many different functions, each conflicting with all the others. In the perception of the Holy Spirit, which is in line with knowledge, there is only one unified function for the body. The Holy Spirit *knows* our being to be God’s creation. Therefore, the body’s function cannot truly be anything *but* an expression of our being.

## Paragraph 2

2. <sup>1</sup>The body exists in a world that seems to contain two voices fighting for its possession. <sup>2</sup>In this perceived constellation the body is seen as capable of shifting its allegiance [control] from one to the other, making the concepts of both health and sickness meaningful. <sup>3</sup>The ego makes a fundamental confusion between means and end as it always does. <sup>4</sup>Regarding the body as an end, the ego has no real use for it [at all] because it is *not* an end. <sup>5</sup>You must have noticed an outstanding characteristic of every end that the ego has accepted as its own. <sup>6</sup>When you have achieved it, *it has not satisfied you*. <sup>7</sup>This is why the ego is forced to shift ceaselessly from one goal to another [shift from one end to another without ceasing], so that **you** will continue to hope it can ~~yet~~ offer you something.

### • Study Question •

2. *In all the ego’s goals, whether they involve the body directly or not, why does the ego “shift ceaselessly from one goal to another”?* (2:7).

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In discussing the last paragraph I did not emphasize the effect on our bodies of the function we assign to it. In 1:7–8, Jesus informs us that what we term “physical health” does not have physical origins. The health of the body is determined by the mind, which assigns a function to the body. That assertion is left hanging, its meaning not fully clear, while Jesus fills in some necessary background information about functions in general (they grow out of being and are, in reality, permanent, although in our perception the function of a thing can seem to change). In this second paragraph he returns to the original line of thought about the connection between function and the body’s health.

The body’s true function is determined by the nature of our being. What we *are* determines what we are meant to *do*. We are spirit. We are love. We are an extension of God, created to create. The body’s function *must* grow out of that nature, which is given to us by God. It *seems* as though “two voices [are] fighting for its possession” (2:1) with contrasting purposes, so that the precise nature of the body’s function is up for debate. But that is not an entirely accurate picture. It surely seems that way in this world: Our body can be used for attack or for healing, depending on whether we are listening to the

voice of the ego, or the voice of the Holy Spirit (2:2). Based on that perception, if the health of the body is determined by the function we give to it, both health and sickness are meaningful possibilities for the body. *But since the function of the body is not in reality debatable*, sickness is simply not meaningful! If we use the body for attack, it will get sick. But if, as we have been told, mind cannot attack and attack is not real, then sickness cannot be real either. We cannot *in truth* change the function of the body. We can only *seem to* change it. The relationship between attack and sickness is merely a “perceived constellation” (2:2) as opposed to the permanent constellation that exists in knowledge (see 1:12).

The ego's thoughts about the body are more confused than meaningful. The ego is focused on what it can achieve with and for the body itself, rather than seeing it as a means to a higher end (2:3–4). In doing so, it is trying to make the body into something the body is not—an end (2:4). The ego does not really see the body as a useful means (because it sees no end beyond the body itself), and therefore it cannot figure out any real purpose for the body!

We've all noticed that the ego's goals are curiously unsatisfying (2:5–6). In order to keep us occupied, the ego has to constantly invent new goals for us. We keep hoping that the next relationship will do it for us, or that the next job will be the one we've really been looking for. Maybe what we are seeking is a better climate. A bigger home. Living in the city, or living in the country. Nicer people to work with. A job that contributes to society. A job that will make us a pile of money. A new computer. A *newer* computer. (You can tell what's important to *me!*) Better movies. Learning to cook. Working out and getting in shape. Plastic surgery. Learning to play guitar or piano. Learning a foreign language. Traveling.

The root cause behind all this frenetic activity is the simple fact that the ego has been trying to make an end out of the means, and has lost sight of both means and goal in the process. It is trying to show us how to be satisfied in and as a body, and that is simply impossible.

### Paragraph 3

3. <sup>1</sup>It has been particularly difficult to overcome the ego's belief in the body as an end, because it is synonymous with ~~the belief in~~ **attack as an end**. <sup>2</sup>The ego has a profound [**real**] **investment in sickness**. <sup>3</sup>If you are sick, how can you object to the ego's firm belief that you are **not** invulnerable? <sup>4</sup>This is an [**a particularly**] appealing argument from the ego's point of view, because it obscures the obvious attack that underlies the sickness. <sup>5</sup>If you recognized [**accepted**] **this** and also decided **against** attack, you could not give this false witness to the ego's stand.

• Study Question •

3. *Why does the ego actually want us to be sick? What value does the ego see in sickness?*

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As the first paragraph stated, attack and the body are nearly synonymous. The ego's entire thought system is based on attack ("The ego believes in atonement through attack, being fully committed to the insane notion that attack is salvation" (T-13.I.10:3)). Our stubborn "belief in the body as an end" is tightly coupled with the ego's tenacious "belief in attack as an end" (3:1). As long as we value attack, we will value our identity as bodies.

The ego is pleased when our bodies get sick because a sick body "proves" that we are vulnerable, and cannot, therefore, be children of God (3:2-3). A sick body supports the mind's belief in the ego and in the ego's successful attack on God. What we fail to see is that sickness is a kind of *self-attack*. We think that we are sick because we deserve it: God is making us sick because we are so sinful. What we need to recognize is that *we* are the ones making ourselves sick through our allegiance to attack, and if we had not chosen to attack, we would not be making ourselves sick (3:5). The "false witness" mentioned here is the sickness of the body; it seems to witness to the ego's contention that we can be hurt. The overall meaning is thus quite clear: If we renounce our allegiance to attack entirely, we would be entirely free of sickness (3:6). Sickness, therefore, does not demonstrate that we are vulnerable; it is merely the result of *our own attack*.

## Paragraph 4

4. <sup>1</sup>It is hard to perceive sickness as a false witness, because you do not realize that it **is** entirely out of keeping with what **you** want. <sup>2</sup>This witness, then, appears to be innocent and trustworthy because **you** have not seriously cross-examined him. <sup>3</sup>If you had, you would not consider sickness such a strong witness on behalf of the ego's views. <sup>4</sup>A more honest statement would be that those who **want** the ego are predisposed to defend it. <sup>5</sup>Therefore, their choice of witnesses should be suspect from the beginning. <sup>6</sup>The ego does not call upon witnesses who would [**might**] disagree with its case, **nor does the Holy Spirit**. <sup>7</sup>I have said that judgment **is** the function of the Holy Spirit, and one He is perfectly equipped to fulfill. <sup>8</sup>The ego as a judge gives anything **but** an impartial judgment [**trial (judgment)**]. <sup>9</sup>When the ego calls on a witness, it has **already made the witness an ally**.

• Study Question •

4. *Try to recall how you felt and the kind of thoughts you had the last time you were sick. Do those thoughts confirm what the Course is saying here about sickness as a witness, or do they conflict with it?*

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Jesus is quite aware that seeing sickness in this way, as "a false witness" (4:1), is extremely difficult for us. He does not, however, see that as an excuse for continuing to trust its testimony. Our difficulty, according to him, is not because what he is teaching us

is inherently difficult. The *subject matter* is not difficult, but the *students* are stubborn and unwilling to learn. We have a hard time believing in the falsity of the body's testimony because we *do not want* to relinquish our belief in attack. We do not realize that sickness is not something we really want! (4:1).

If we seriously cross-examined the body we would realize it is a flawed and corrupt witness. Trusting its testimony in these matters is a bit like expecting an actor's agent to give a fair review of his client's performance. The body was *designed* to demonstrate separation; of course its testimony will support that belief system. Of course the ego will select witnesses who testify that we are separate from God (4:6); any witness the ego calls has been pre-selected to make the ego's case (4:9). But we overlook the unreliability of the witness because we *want* to believe its testimony. We want to believe that we are egos, weak, frail, and separate from God (4:4).

As I write that, I find myself mentally cringing—for the very reasons the *Course* is talking about here. I don't like thinking about these things. I may tell myself that I don't like it because it makes me feel guilty for being sick, or because I get uncomfortable, but I think the real reason is that my ego does not want to let me go. It does not want me to listen to these ideas and take them seriously; it wants me to brush lightly past them and forget them as soon as I can.

I need to be reminded constantly that all the "witnesses" I take so seriously, particularly my own illness or that of others, are suborned witnesses. They are heavily prejudiced on the ego's side. Bodies are going to uphold the idea of attack in any way they can because individual bodily existence *is* an attack on Unity. If my mind wants clarity it will refuse to listen to such witnesses.

The ego is presenting us with slanted evidence. It is trying to prove its case that:

- we are the body;
- therefore we are vulnerable;
- therefore we must be separated from God.

The only way we are going to disprove its case is by questioning its witnesses, which means questioning the meaning we have assigned to sickness, and probing beneath that apparent meaning to see the self-attack that it represents.

## Paragraph 5

5. <sup>1</sup>It is still true that the body has no function of itself, because it is **not** an end. <sup>2</sup>The ego, however, establishes it as an end because, as such, its true function is obscured [Ur: *as such, it will lose its true function*]. <sup>3</sup>This is the purpose of everything the ego does. <sup>4</sup>Its sole aim is to lose sight of the function of everything. <sup>5</sup>A sick body does not make any sense. <sup>6</sup>It could not make sense because sickness is not what the body is for. <sup>7</sup>Sickness is meaningful only if the two basic premises on which the ego's interpretation of the body rests are true; that the body is for attack, and that you are a body. <sup>8</sup>Without these premises sickness is [**completely**] inconceivable.

### • Study Question •

5. *In the ego's view, sickness has a valid purpose in punishing us for our sins. Refer again to the ego's two premises (5:7), which seem to make this*

*a valid conclusion. Why is sickness meaningful only if these premises are true?*

The true function of the body is as a means to an end (carrying out the function given us by God). The ego wants to obscure that fact, so it centers our attention on the body in and of itself: what it can do for us, the pleasure it can bring us, making it beautiful, or preserving it from attack. If we saw the true function of the body, we would be done with the ego.

Let us look, then, at the *true* meaning of sickness. Everything the ego does is done to lose sight of or forget the true function of things (5:4). Sickness, then, is a way in which the ego tries to distract us from using the body for its intended purpose. That purpose, as the previous section showed, is communication, with the body acting as a means by which mind can extend to mind. Sickness focuses our attention on preserving the body and caring for it, instead of on *using* the body to communicate.

When we are sick, the body seems to us to become an end in itself. All we can think about is making the body well again. Physical health becomes our goal, our end. If we have any glimmering of the body's true function, we probably forget all about it when we feel sick.

Now the ego can fool us by getting us to try to decipher the *meaning of sickness*. In the view of the *Course*, sickness does not mean *anything* (5:5–6), a point that will be expanded on in the next paragraph (6:6). Sickness has meaning only in the context of the ego's thought system. If we throw out the ego's premises, sickness has no meaning (5:7–8).

If I am a body, then sickness is meaningful: I may interpret it as a punishment from God, or I may use it to support an image of myself as a victim, blaming my illness on someone or something else. If I am not a body, sickness has no more meaning than a flat tire in a car: It is just a malfunction of a tool. If, as the ego believes, the body's purpose is attack, then sickness demonstrates that I am weak and therefore I *need to attack in order to defend my weakness*. If the body's purpose is *not* attack, then sickness is irrelevant or meaningless. Sickness does not mean what the ego wants us to think sickness means.

## Paragraph 6

6. <sup>1</sup>Sickness is a way of demonstrating that you can be hurt. <sup>2</sup>It is a witness to your frailty, your vulnerability, and your extreme need to depend on external guidance. <sup>3</sup>The ego uses this as its best argument for your need for *its* guidance. <sup>4</sup>It dictates endless prescriptions for avoiding catastrophic outcomes [Ur: this catastrophic outcome {sickness}]. <sup>5</sup>The Holy Spirit, perfectly aware of the same situation [Ur: data], does not bother to analyze it at all. <sup>6</sup>If data are meaningless there is no point in analyzing them. <sup>7</sup>The function of truth is to collect information that is [Ur: data which are] **true**. [There is no point in trying to make sense out of meaningless data.] <sup>8</sup>*Any* way you handle error [Ur: *Any way they are handled*] results in nothing. <sup>9</sup>The more complicated the results become the harder it may be to recognize their nothingness, but it is not necessary to examine **all** possible outcomes to which premises give rise in order to judge

them [the premises] truly.

• Study Question •

6. *Bring to mind a recent time of sickness (yours or that of a close friend). How did your ego analyze the situation, and what actions did it recommend? If you listened to the Holy Spirit during that illness, what did you hear Him saying? If did not listen at the time, what do you think you would you have heard Him saying about it had you listened?*

The ego tries to get you to analyze the meaning of sickness; the Holy Spirit knows that it is meaningless. The body isn't your teacher, it is just a learning device; it can't tell you how you feel. It can only tell you that you've chosen the wrong teacher. The only answer to sickness is to recognize we've been listening to the wrong teacher, and to start listening to the right one. As we will be plainly told a few pages later in the Text, the goal isn't to make the body well; the goal is to give our minds to the Holy Spirit as well as our body, to use for the purpose of communication.

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).

The first two sentences of this paragraph should be understood to be the ego's arguments. It is not Jesus but the ego that is saying that sickness proves we are vulnerable. The ego uses sickness to prove that we are frail, vulnerable, and in extreme need of its protection and guidance. Sickness or bodily frailty seems to prove that we need defenses and ego-based plans to protect us from catastrophe (6:2-4). We need to watch out for Number One. In simple terms, we need to *attack*, because the best defense is a good offense.

According to Lesson 136 in the *Workbook*, "Sickness is a defense against the truth." When we start getting too close to the truth, the ego pulls out sickness. We actually choose sickness to prevent our minds from being healed, because sickness distracts us from the mind to the body. I recommend you carefully **read W-pl.136.8:1-4**. It shows very clearly how our mind, identified with the ego, uses sickness to "ground" us in our bodily identity and to block rising awareness of an identity that is far greater.

The Holy Spirit, however, sees sickness in a completely different way (6:5-8). The computer phrase "garbage in, garbage out," comes to mind. "If the original data are meaningless, no amount of processing or analysis will yield any meaningful results. The point is that *sickness is meaningless*. It does not mean that you have sinned. It does not mean that you have failed in faith. It does not mean that you are a body. It does not mean anything at all. Therefore, there is absolutely no purpose in analyzing sickness, no purpose at all (6:5). Sickness is a mistake to begin with, so any way you look at it will only lead you into further mistakes.

I truly believe that one of the most fruitless and destructive products of the New Age movement has been the insane notion that when we become sick, the most important thing we can do is to figure out *why* we got sick. What is our body telling us? What does



this sickness mean? *It means nothing!* We do not need to do a detailed analysis (6:9). We need only to realize that sickness has no meaning, and that it occurs based on the premises that the body is for attack, and that I am a body. In other words, *letting go of our attack thoughts* is all we ever need to do in response to sickness.

## Paragraph 7

7. <sup>1</sup>A learning **device [the body]** is **not** a teacher. <sup>2</sup>**It** cannot tell you how you feel. <sup>3</sup>**You** do not **know** how you feel because **you have accepted the ego's confusion**, and **you** therefore believe [**you think**] that **a learning device can tell you how you feel**. <sup>4</sup>Sickness is merely another example of your insistence on asking guidance of a teacher who **does not know the answer**. <sup>5</sup>The ego is **incapable** of knowing how you feel. <sup>6</sup>When I said that the ego **does not know anything**, I said the one thing about the ego that is wholly true. <sup>7</sup>But there is a corollary; if only knowledge has being and the ego has no knowledge, then the ego **has no being**.

### • Study Question •

7. *Discuss the pros and cons of this idea: "We should listen to what our bodies are telling us."*

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I remember well one morning several years ago when I woke up feeling as if I were coming down with the flu. I felt slightly nauseous and experienced some definite discomfort in the abdominal area. To me, nausea is one of the worst feelings in the world, and I was mentally writing off the rest of the morning—if not the whole day. I happened to be reading this very section of the *Text*, and when I saw sentence 2, it lit up like a Christmas tree in my mind. "My body can't tell me how to feel," I thought with amazement!

I realized that I was letting it do exactly that, however. My *body* was feeling miserable, so therefore *I* felt miserable. Right? "That doesn't follow," the *Course* was saying. I did not have to be miserable because my body was miserable. I could be joyous. I could be happy. I could be at peace—even *if my body went on feeling miserable!* That was a revelation to me. I am not identical with my body; *it* can be miserable and *I* can be happy at the same time.

The *instant* my mind accepted that fact, *I was happy*. There was no delay; it was immediate. I sat back in my chair and grinned. I offered a brief prayer of thanksgiving and went on reading. Within a half hour or so, all the symptoms my body had been exhibiting were gone. No more stomach upset; no more nausea.

The body does not always heal itself quite so quickly. There have been numerous times when I have applied the same "technique," choosing happiness instead of misery despite the condition of my body, and have found that the condition of the body did not change. If I realize that healing the body is not the goal—the body is not the end but just a means—then that does not matter to me. The point is that I can choose to be happy whenever I want to; the body cannot tell me how to feel.

There are still many occasions when I forget to apply this lesson at all. Just a few days ago I had a shoulder injury of some kind. I'm not sure what it was: a bruise, a pulled muscle, a knot, a pinched nerve—Who knows? It hurt like the dickens, that much I do know. For the better part of two days I let the pain in my body make *me* miserable. I didn't need to do that, and I am grateful to be writing this now, reminding myself as well as you that we are not bodies.

From the way Jesus talks here, it is evident that when we ask our bodies how we feel we are really asking our egos (7:2,4–5). Our asking makes the body as important as the ego thinks it is. We forget that the body is a learning device, akin to a calculator or a blackboard. We are asking the wrong teacher again, as we saw back in Sections 7.I & II. Jesus reminds us that the ego does not know *anything*, as he pointed out already in T-6.IV.3:1. Since a sick body is communicating the ego's messages, and the ego knows nothing, it follows that sickness means nothing as well.

A very interesting “corollary,” according to Jesus, is that “the ego has no being” (7:7). The word he uses has a specific meaning in logic, according to my American Heritage Dictionary. It means: “a proposition that follows with little or no proof required from one already proven.” The ego's lack of knowledge means it cannot tell us anything about how we feel. It *also* means that the ego does not really exist! (7:7; compare with 8:1). Why? Because “only knowledge has being” (7:7; our being *is* the knowledge of God, according to T-7.VI.10:1). The only “part” of us that is real is the part that shares knowledge with the Holy Spirit.

## Paragraph 8

8. <sup>1</sup>You might well ask how the voice of something that does not exist can be so insistent. <sup>2</sup>Have you thought about [seriously considered] the distorting power of something you want, even if it is not real [true]? <sup>3</sup>There are [You have had] many instances of how what you want distorts perception [can distort what you see and hear]. <sup>4</sup>No one can doubt the ego's skill in building up false cases. <sup>5</sup>Nor can anyone doubt your willingness to listen until you choose not to accept [will not to tolerate] anything except truth. <sup>6</sup>When you lay the ego aside, it will be gone. <sup>7</sup>The Holy Spirit's Voice is as loud as your willingness to listen. <sup>8</sup>It cannot be louder without violating your freedom of choice [your will], which the Holy Spirit seeks to restore, never to undermine [seeks to free but never to command].

### • Study Question •

8. *Which of the following is the most important factor in our success or failure at dispelling the ego?*
- The amount of time we spend in meditation.*
  - The degree to which we still want the ego.*
  - How loud our ego's voice is.*
  - Getting the Holy Spirit to speak up.*

It is the voice of the ego that we hear speaking through our sick bodies, but “the ego has no being” (7:7). The voice is the “voice of something that does not exist” (8:1). Jesus

then addresses a question that often comes up: If the ego does not exist, why does it seem so real? Why does sickness seem to speak so powerfully?

He explains that when you want something strongly enough—even if what you want is not real—it can cause you to see things inaccurately (8:2). If a person becomes obsessed with having some other person love them, for instance, like a stalker who becomes obsessed with a celebrity, they may come to believe that they have an actual relationship with the celebrity, that the movie star loves them, and so on. They may perceive a generic smile to a fan as a special signal from their lover.

By *wanting* separation, we have made it *seem* real to us. We have also made the ego seem real to us. Therefore we have made the body and sickness, which support the illusion of the ego, seem real to us. But *none* of it is real.

The ego excels at “building up false cases” (8:4), and we are overly willing—“predisposed” was the word used in paragraph 4—to listen to the false evidence. We listen because we want it to be true and for no other reason. When we choose to no longer see the ego, it won’t be there (8:6).

“Still,” we complain, “the ego’s voice seems so loud, and the Voice of the Holy Spirit so weak.” His voice is not really weak:

The Holy Spirit’s Voice is as loud as your willingness to listen. It cannot be louder without violating your freedom of will, which the Holy Spirit seeks to free but never to command. (8:7–8, Urtext)

We keep trying to throw off the responsibility for our predicament onto something or someone else, and Jesus keeps throwing it right back onto us. Why does the ego’s voice seem so strong and the Holy Spirit’s Voice so weak? It all depends on what voice we *want* to hear. It depends on our willingness. He will never violate our freedom of choice; He only desires to *free* it (8:8). The same thought was expressed earlier, in chapter 2:

If I intervened between your thoughts and their results, I would be tampering with a basic law of cause and effect; the most fundamental law there is. I would hardly help you if I depreciated the power of your own thinking. This would be in direct opposition to the purpose of this course. (T-2.VII.1:4-6).

The way out being shown to us by the Course is one that we must take on our own; no one can do it for us, but we cannot do it *alone*. We escape from hell by utilizing the same power of mind that, we believe, created the hell we are in. We have disowned our mind’s power because we think it destroyed Heaven. We must learn that the power of our mind that we fear is the only thing that can save us. The Holy Spirit supports that realization (8:8). His Voice is as loud as it can possibly be while still allowing us to make the final choice.

## Paragraph 9

9. <sup>1</sup>The Holy Spirit teaches you to use your body only to reach your brothers, so He can teach His message through you. <sup>2</sup>This will heal them and therefore heal you. <sup>3</sup>Everything used in accordance with its function as **the Holy Spirit** sees it cannot be sick. <sup>4</sup>Everything used otherwise is. <sup>5</sup>Do not allow the body to be a mirror of a split mind. <sup>6</sup>Do not let it be an image of your own perception of littleness. <sup>7</sup>Do not let it reflect your decision [*will*] to attack. <sup>8</sup>Health is ~~seen as~~

the natural state of everything when [anything whose] interpretation is left to the Holy Spirit, Who perceives no attack on anything. <sup>9</sup>Health is the result of relinquishing all attempts to use the body lovelessly. <sup>10</sup>Health is the beginning of the proper perspective on life under the guidance of the one Teacher Who knows what life is, being the Voice for Life Itself.

• Study Question •

9. *In this paragraph, what three things are we told not to do with our bodies?*

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The focus is not on healing the body; the focus is on what we use the body for. To the Holy Spirit, the only purpose of the body is to reach our brothers with His message (9:1). If we allow Him to use our bodies for His purpose, it will heal our brothers and therefore will also heal us (9:2). Health is the result of letting our body be used “in accordance with its function as the Holy Spirit sees it” (9:3). “Everything used otherwise is [sick]” (9:4). Whether we are speaking of the body or anything else, if we use it for God it produces health; if we use it for the ego’s ends it brings about sickness.

In sentences 5 to 7 we are advised against the uses to which the ego puts the body: separation, frailty, and attack. Jesus says emphatically, “Do not let,” “Do not allow,” “Do not let.” It is a matter of controlling the way we think about and use our bodies. Our mind can choose to use the body differently, and it must do so. Giving the body its true function and denying the ego’s use of the body is the way to perfect health. What needs to change is *how we see the body and the purpose for which we use it*. We have to leave the interpretation of the body, sickness, and everything up to the Holy Spirit (9:8); this will result in health, which is “the natural state of everything” given over to Him.

“Health is the result of relinquishing all attempts to use the body lovelessly” (9:9). Think about that one for a while! As I write this, we are approaching the season known in Christian churches as Lent, which is a time for renunciation or relinquishment. How about setting aside some time to focus on letting go of all loveless uses of the body?

The issue once again comes around to which voice we listen to, and whose purpose we assign to the body. In the *Course*’s view, health depends on letting go of the ego’s purposes for the body and surrendering it to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

## Answer Key

1. The ego believes that the body is to attack with, and that we are equated with our bodies. Therefore, it believes *we* are to attack with (1:5–7).
2. The ego has nothing truly satisfying to offer us, so it has to keep coming up with new things to tantalize us, to prevent us from looking elsewhere.
3. The ego values sickness because sickness appears to prove that we are not invulnerable, and thus not an eternal part of God.
4. No written answer is expected. Personally, when I am sick, I *definitely* have more thoughts about my vulnerability and wonder about the reality of my spiritual commitment. My sickness seems to be telling me I *am* vulnerable, and that I am *not* very advanced spiritually.
5. Sickness as a punishment for sin makes sense only if we are bodies, if the body's purpose is actually attack, and if we have actually attacked with it. If we are not bodies, or if bodies cannot truly attack, then sickness has no purpose because there is no sin to be punished.
6. No written answer is expected. Personal answers vary. In general, when we are sick the ego tries to convince us that we are weak and frail. It tells us we are in danger and that we need “external guidance” (6:2). Our minds go into high gear trying to figure out what caused the illness and trying to think of all the things we can, should, or must do in order to avoid serious consequences. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit virtually ignores illness because it is meaningless. If He were to speak to us, we might hear, “Peace, be still,” or, “There is nothing to fear.”
7. We are programmed to believe the messages our body sends us, but since it is only a learning device, it cannot teach us anything. Sickness has no guidance to offer us.

On the other hand, I do not think this means we completely ignore pain or malfunction in our bodies, any more than we would ignore, for instance, a screeching fan belt in our automobile. We fix the belt because the car is a useful transportation device and we want it to continue to serve its purpose well. We change the oil regularly to keep the engine running. Likewise, when our bodies malfunction, we take steps to “repair” them, and we do the things that serve to keep our bodies “running” well. We do all this while reminding ourselves that a disease in the body does not define us (nor does health, M-12.6:9); it does not say anything bad about us. It has no more meaning than the screeching fan belt.
8. The answer is “b.” Our wanting dispels the ego when we choose not to accept anything except truth. Once we stop *wanting* the ego, we stop *generating* it.
9. Three things we should not do with our bodies:
  - a. allow the body to mirror a split mind

- b. let the body show the smallness of our self-perception
- c. let the body reflect our decision to attack

Each of those things is a way that we permit the thought system of the ego to be projected out and to take physical form in our bodies.