

# Study Guide and Commentary

## ACIM<sup>®</sup> Text, Chapter 10, Section III

### The God of Sickness

This section, “The God of Sickness,” applies the lessons of the first two sections to the subject of physical sickness. It is one of the more difficult sections in the Text, in my opinion, so I have devoted more space to it than usual.

We have seen that we are dreaming this world of illusion. We believe we are here because we actively chose to forget God and to forget our true Self. In this illusory world things seem to happen *to us*; we are unaware that our mind is generating the entire experience (just as we are usually unaware, in a dream, that we are dreaming the dream).

In our distress, unwilling to recognize that our own mind is the source of our discomfort, we *invent* external causes or “gods” that are “creating” the distress we are experiencing. One such “god” is sickness.

#### Paragraph 1

1. <sup>1</sup>You have **not** attacked God and you **do** love Him. <sup>2</sup>Can you change your reality? <sup>3</sup>No one can will to destroy himself. <sup>4</sup>When you think you are attacking yourself [*your self*], it is a sure sign that you hate what you *think* you are. <sup>5</sup>And this, and **only** this, can **be** attacked by you. <sup>6</sup>What you **think** you are **can** be very hateful, and what this strange image makes you do can be very destructive. <sup>7</sup>Yet the destruction is no more real than the image, although those who make idols **do** worship them. <sup>8</sup>The idols are nothing, but their worshippers are the Sons of God in sickness. <sup>9</sup>God would have them released from their sickness and returned to His Mind. <sup>10</sup>He will not limit your power to help them, because He has given it **to** you. <sup>11</sup>Do not be afraid of it, because it is your salvation.

#### • Study Question •

1. *In sentence 11, what is the "it" that you are not to be afraid of and that is your salvation?*

The section opens with extremely comforting words: “You have *not* attacked God and you *do* love Him” (1:1). We need words of comfort like this because the previous section has confronted us with the extremely distressing idea that we have deliberately and actively *decided* to forget God and the Self that He created *as* us. That decision can be seen as an attack on God, and our minds realize that. Whether it is conscious or unconscious, all of us believe we have attacked God; that is the source of all our guilt. Earlier sections have made that clear:

Guilt is more than merely not of God. It is the symbol of attack on God (T-5.V.2:9-10).

Listening to the ego's voice means that you believe it is possible to attack God, and that a part of Him has been torn away by you. Fear of retaliation from without

follows, because the severity of the guilt is so acute that it must be projected (T-5.V.3:10-11).

I have repeatedly emphasized that the ego does believe it can attack God, and tries to persuade you that you have done this (T-7.VI.8:1).

The comforting words in 1:1 don't mean much to anyone who has not begun to realize that, in their heart of hearts, they really believe that they *have* attacked God, which seems to prove that they *do not love* God. But to people who have begun to get in touch with their own "decision to forget," these words are like water on a parched tongue. "You have *not* attacked God and you *do* love Him" (1:1, my emphasis). That is what the Holy Spirit says to us when we bring Him all our darkness, when we are willing to look with Him upon our banishment of God from our awareness. All the awful self-doubt we have is swept away in the healing power of those words.

The reassuring message of 1:1 is the message of the Atonement. When you look clearly at the ego, at the very thought of an independent self with an independent will, you will see that the ego is the belief that I *have* attacked God and I *do not* love Him. The Atonement is the correction of that mistaken belief. The ego's thoughts of attack on God and of hatred for God are the very mental activity that the Course keeps telling us to look at, and they are exactly what the ego is terrified of, and will hide from our awareness by any means at its disposal.

An earlier statement, "God is Love and you do want Him" (T-9.I.9.7), was conveying the same comforting message. Apparently the Course considers this something we need to hear. When most people first read this kind of statement in the Course, their ego has a divided reaction.

On the one hand, the "face of innocence" (T-31.V.2:6) reacts. It says, "Of course I haven't attacked God! What a foolish idea! Of course I love God and want Him. Why waste my time telling me what I already know?"

The other side of the ego reacts in a completely opposite way. It totally denies what is said. This is a covert reaction, usually below the level of conscious thought. It says, "You *don't* really believe that. You *don't* love God. And be sure of this: After all you have done to Him God doesn't think you love Him. He'd be a fool to believe you did. You *pretend* to love Him. You like to give the appearance of loving Him. But you are a total hypocrite and you know it. You know what you are *really* like underneath all the nicey-nice stuff."

When the Course starts telling us that we think we have attacked God, the immediate reaction is total denial. "I don't believe that!" The more I stay with the Course, though, the more I see ways in which I really do believe I've attacked God, hurt Him, and offended Him. I've come to accept what the Course says—that underneath it all, *everyone* thinks that they have attacked God and that they no longer love Him. Any apparent love for God that remains we suspect of being forced and phony.

We've made up a "self" that seems to have existence only because (in our imagination) it *did* attack God. It tore its very existence away from God, and is absolutely convinced that God is its enemy.

Self-imposed guilt drives us away from God, and we are convinced He is at war with us. That thought is so terrifying we bury it under a veneer of innocence.

The struggle we go through has three stages:

(1) *giving up* the false innocence;

(2) *going through* the realization of our terrible but imaginary guilt; and then

(3) *going on* beyond that to the unchanging reality of our true innocence.

Until we throw off false innocence and the false guilt it hides, we will go on projecting our imaginary guilt onto everything in the world.

We are not attacking God, nor are we really afraid of Him. We are afraid of what we think we are, afraid of the self we believe we have made. It is *that* vicious, ugly *self* we hate and fear (1:4). We cannot truly attack our true Self (1:3), but we can and *do* attack the self we *think* we are (1:5). It is *that* self we are attacking when we make the ego and the body real in other people. It is that self we are attacking when we become sick. And only by becoming channels of healing to the Sons of God around us (our brothers and sisters) can we begin to release ourselves from the phony guilt from which we suffer (1:9–11). Our ability to help others is what saves *us*.

It is nice to know that you cannot attack yourself; not really. All you can attack is your false self-image. Since the self-image is only an illusion, you can only attack illusion, and any harm you do is no more real than the illusion you are attacking (1:7). The same thing applies to our attacks on other people, and to theirs on us. Nothing real is being harmed.

When I see sickness in my brother or myself I am manifesting my belief in a “god of sickness” although I may not be conscious of doing so (1:8). Where does sickness come from? Some people with a more primitive view of God may think that sickness comes from God. You probably don’t believe that. God did not create sickness. But if not from God, it must come from someplace else, even if sickness is not God’s Will. Therefore, I am granting to evil and disease a power it does not have, because I am unconsciously positing a power that is greater than God, a power that can successfully oppose His Will. And I fear that power. Yet no power other than God exists. In fact, I am afraid of *nothing*. When I realize this fully, I will be healed (1:11).

## Paragraph 2

2. <sup>1</sup>What Comforter can there be for the sick children of God except His power through **you**? <sup>2</sup>Remember that it does not matter where in the Sonship He is accepted. <sup>3</sup>He is **always** accepted for all, and when your mind receives Him the remembrance of Him awakens throughout the Sonship. <sup>4</sup>Heal your brothers simply by accepting God **for** them. <sup>5</sup>Your minds are not separate, and God has only one channel for healing because He has but one Son. <sup>6</sup>God’s remaining communication link with all His children joins them together, and them to Him. <sup>7</sup>To be aware of this is to heal them because it is the awareness that no one is separate, and so no one is sick.

### • Study Question •

2. *Two ways of healing your brothers are given in this paragraph. What are they (note the two uses of the word "heal")?*

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God’s healing power always works *through us* (2:1). Some part of the Sonship—that is, some individual—catches on to the fact that the appearance of sickness is based on the

impossible thought that there is a power greater than God. Becoming aware of that deception, he or she rejects it and is healed.

Not only will *the individual* be healed, *everyone* will be healed! Whatever part of the Sonship accepts God, the benefit accrues to the entire Sonship (2:3). This is how God heals sickness. He works through the changed minds of individuals. The Workbook augments our understanding of how my healing spreads to everyone who is open:

The Holy Spirit will be glad to take five minutes of each hour from your hands, and carry them around this aching world where pain and misery appear to rule. He will not overlook one open mind that will accept the healing gifts they bring, and He will lay them everywhere He knows they will be welcome. And they will increase in healing power each time someone accepts them as his thoughts, and uses them to heal (W-pI.97.5:1-3).

Realizing that *I* am not separate from God is identical to realizing that *no one* is separate. Because of my manufactured guilt about something that never happened, I believe my mind is sick. I believe that my thoughts of attack on God have irreparably twisted my mind, and I believe that is so about everyone else, too. It is this thought of the sick mind that manifests in sick bodies. The Holy Spirit's healing reaches us all simultaneously. When I truly know that separation is an illusion, I will understand that sickness must be an illusion as well (2:7).

Our calling is to bring healing into the world by allowing God to heal our own minds. We can literally accept God *for other people* (2:4). Every mind is linked with every other mind. The apparent separateness of our minds is an illusion and nothing more than that; therefore, when healing enters "one mind" it enters all minds, because all minds *are* one (2:5-6).

In practice I believe this means forgiving one another. The only way one person can judge and condemn another is by perceiving them as separate. When you recognize that another person is not separate from you but part of you, joined with you in God as a part of His only Son, you cannot simultaneously hold a grievance against them. One of the keys to imparting healing, then, is granting forgiveness.

### Paragraph 3

3. <sup>1</sup>To believe that a Son of God can be sick is to believe that **part of God can suffer**. <sup>2</sup>Love **cannot** suffer, because it cannot attack. <sup>3</sup>The remembrance of love therefore brings invulnerability with it. <sup>4</sup>Do not side with sickness in the presence of a Son of God even if **he** believes in it, for **your** acceptance of God in him **acknowledges** the Love of God he has forgotten. <sup>5</sup>Your recognition of him as **part of God** reminds him of the truth about himself, **which he is denying**. <sup>6</sup>Would you **strengthen** his denial of God and thus lose sight of **yourself**? <sup>7</sup>Or would you remind him of his wholeness and remember your Creator **with** him?

#### • Study Question •

3. *Imagine yourself visiting a friend who is sick. According to this paragraph, what should you do in your mind? Try to act this out in your imagination.*

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Notice how this paragraph and the next both begin with the same phrase; they are discussing different aspects of what a belief in sickness implies. Paragraph 3 addresses the false implication “that part of God can suffer” (3:1). Paragraph 4 addresses the belief in idolatry that underlies our belief in sickness.

The basic attitude of the Course towards physical sickness is that it is all part of an illusion. Physical sickness occurs because we believe in our mental sickness. We believe all of us can suffer. If that is so we cannot be part of God, because God cannot suffer. So our belief in sickness is a form taken by our belief in separation from God.

The reverse logic holds the key to our release from sickness. Sickness is surely a form of suffering. If we are indeed part of God, and if “love [God] cannot suffer” (3:2), then *we cannot be sick*. Restoring an awareness of our true identity with the Love of God, therefore, “brings invulnerability with it” (3:3).

Myrtle Fillmore, the co-founder of the Unity movement, proved that this works. One night heard a speaker declare, “I am a child of God; I cannot inherit sickness.” She was profoundly impressed with that idea, adopted it as her daily mantra for about two years, and was totally healed from tuberculosis.

Obviously, the key to healing lies in having the mind completely accept its unity with God. This does not happen overnight. It is not sufficient simply to read in a book about being one with God. Our belief in separation is too deeply ingrained to be whisked away by a gentle breeze. It may take a hurricane to uproot it. Sickness will still appear in our midst until that mental purification has taken place completely.

How are we to react to the appearance of sickness in others and ourselves? The Course gives us the following instruction:

*Do not side with sickness in the presence of a Son of God even if he believes in it, for your acceptance of God in him acknowledges the Love of God he has forgotten. Your recognition of him as part of God reminds him of the truth about himself, which he is denying. (3:4–5)*

I remember in high school being required to read *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. All I remember about it is that in Puritan New England, a woman found guilty of adultery was branded as an adulteress with a scarlet letter “A” sewn to her clothing as a form of public humiliation.

Sickness is a kind of “scarlet letter” which in the ego’s eyes says, “This person is a sick person, someone who attacked God.” The attitude the Course recommends is, basically, to ignore it because it isn’t true. When confronted with someone who is sick, *don’t let it affect your view of the person*. Don’t affirm and reinforce the sickness by agreeing that the person must be denying God. Don’t accept the god of sickness. Instead, accept God in that person. Affirm the person’s true, divine nature. Don’t accept the sickness as evidence that there is something wrong with this person. Remind them of their wholeness by accepting them as whole in your own mind. *This is “Course-based healing.”*

New Age people often do the exact opposite when they meet someone who is sick. The impression they give is, “Honey, you must be doing something wrong or you wouldn’t be sick.” Ken Wilber has called this “new age guilt.” It is really a way we have of attacking people who are sick so that we can feel good about ourselves; it is the ego’s thought system, pure and simple.

Think back to the section in the last chapter that discussed what to do when you see a brother who is seemingly in error (T-9.III). Your job is not to convince the sick person

they are wrong, or to correct them. Your job is to accept them as they are, to reflect their wholeness to them. If you expend a great deal of energy trying to “help” people heal themselves physically, you are making the physical sickness into something real, something very significant. You are giving it a power it does not really have (which is the topic of paragraph 4). Instead, by overlooking the sickness and seeing God in them, you empower the person to recognize the truth about their unity with God (3:5). As others remember themselves because of your reminder, you will remember God with them (3:7).

## Paragraph 4

4. <sup>1</sup>To believe a Son of God is sick is to worship the same idol he does. <sup>2</sup>God created love, **not** idolatry. <sup>3</sup>**All** forms of idolatry are caricatures of creation, taught by sick minds too divided to know that creation **shares** power and **never** usurps it. <sup>4</sup>Sickness is idolatry, because it is the belief that **power can be taken from you**. <sup>5</sup>Yet this is impossible, because you are part of God, Who **is** all power. <sup>6</sup>A sick god **must** be an idol, made in the image of what its maker thinks **he** is. <sup>7</sup>And that is exactly what the ego **does** perceive in a Son of God; a sick god, self-created, self-sufficient, very vicious and very vulnerable. <sup>8</sup>Is this the idol you would worship? <sup>9</sup>Is this the image you would be vigilant to **save**? <sup>10</sup>Are you **really** afraid of losing **this**?

### • Study Question •

4. *How is sickness idolatry? There is a logical argument given for this in sentences 4 through 6. Can you tease it out? (Recall that idolatry is worship of a false god, of a god that is not God.)*

Please try to answer the study question before reading on, and please read my answer to it when you have written your own.

Believing that sickness is real is idolatry. That may seem a shocking thing to say, but the Course makes a very logical argument for it here. Sickness is idolatry, and the idolatry can take a number of different forms (4:3).

When a person is sick, because that person part of God, the sickness must be assuming the existence of some power greater than that of the real God, some being or force that is capable of countermanding God's Will and taking your power away from you (4:4). That being or force is what the Course is terming an *idol*. Likewise, when a brother or sister believes that they are sick and *you also believe that they are sick*, you are worshipping the same idol (4:1). Anything that can take your power from you must be false because, as part of God, your power *cannot* be taken from you (4:5).

Besides assuming a power greater than God's, there are other forms of idolatry hidden in the belief in sickness. Sickness also makes a false image of God Himself (4:6), a god who is too weak to resist sickness or viciously uses sickness to punish those who offend him. Such a “sick god” is nothing more than our own miserable self-image projected onto God (4:7). Is that the kind of God you want to believe in? And is this the image of *yourself* you want to protect? (4:9). “Are you really afraid of losing this?” (4:10).

## Paragraph 5

5. <sup>1</sup>Look calmly at the logical conclusion of the ego's thought system and judge whether its offering is really what you want, for this *is* what it offers you. <sup>2</sup>To obtain **this** you are willing to attack the Divinity of your brothers, and thus lose sight of **yours**. <sup>3</sup>And you are willing to keep it hidden, to protect an idol you think will save you from the dangers for which it stands [*the dangers which the idol itself stands for*], but which do not exist.

### • Study Question •

5. a) *What is it that the ego offers you, and which is referred to as "this" and "it" all through this paragraph?*
- b) *What are the dangers that we think this idol can protect us from? (Hint: Remember all the things that the Course, earlier in this chapter, says that we really fear—II.1:3; 4:4; 6:6; III.1:5–6.)*
- c) *Actually stop and do what this paragraph asks. Look at the ego's offering and decide if it is what you really want.*

Once again the Course admonishes us to examine the ego's thought system carefully and thoughtfully, but without being afraid or agitated about it. It is interesting to note that the Text uses the word "calmly" four times, and in all four instances, it is given as a prescription for the proper state of mind when examining the ego and its thought system (T-10.III.5:1; T-17.VII.5:4; T-23.II.1:4; and T-30.IV.5:9).

Often, it is hard to remain calm when we begin to look on the insanity that lurks within us. Looking at our own egos is one of the hardest things we can do, in my estimation. It's lots easier to look at the egos of *other people!* I find that sometimes I need to make use of the ease with which I can see through the egos of others in order to remind myself of the subtlety of my own ego. In other words, the things that I notice in other people are very likely the things I need to watch for in myself.

I frequently observe that most people seem to be blind to their own insanity. Years ago, I watched a friend, fairly astute in psychology, analyze people around her quite accurately and yet be seemingly blind to the fact that she was doing the very things she criticized in others. She saw quite clearly when other people were projecting their own thoughts onto people around them. She knew immediately, for instance, when I was imagining things about *her*. But she absolutely could not seem to recognize it when *she* was projecting onto others. Even when someone tried to delicately point it out to her. She would be certain that a person did not like her, or had it in for her, when that person bore her no animosity whatsoever. She would take a remark someone made completely out of context and imagine all kinds of devious motives behind it. She was very good at noticing when other people did this, but almost *never* woke up to the fact that she was doing the same thing herself.

As I observe that in my friend, and in many other people including some who are highly regarded as spiritual teachers, it occurs to me that the same thing is probably true about me! I am most blind to my own greatest failings. And so are you to yours. Our egos tend to be invisible to us, no matter how blatant they are to others.

My point is this: When the Course advises us to look at what the ego is offering us, don't take it lightly. Make a real effort to try to do it. Go out of your way to do so. *Set*

*aside time* for it. For instance, I often spend time writing in my journal, particularly when I have been engaged in some interpersonal conflict, just letting my thoughts flow, attempting to do so without self-censorship. Then, a day or so later, I will read back over those thoughts. Often upon re-reading them, the ego influence becomes quite clear!

Try to become aware of just what the “rewards” are that the ego is offering you. Very often it will be possible to see how its offering really consists of a shabby, even ugly, self-image. You are viewing yourself as a victim, or you are viewing yourself as a sinful attacker. You are puffed up in grandiosity or deflated in littleness. Or, you are viewing others in that way, which is the same thing (5:2). As the Course suggests, when you detect such thoughts in your mind, ask yourself if this is something you really want. Are you truly willing to blot awareness of your Divinity from your mind in order to hold on to such a contemptible picture of your brothers or yourself? (5:2–3).

I think it is worth noting here that the Course actually uses the term “Divinity” (with a capital “D”, no less!) about us. I am God, in the sense that God is the one Presence and Power expressing Itself as me, as you, and as everything. I am God at the point of me. You are God at the point of you, God being you. When we read in the Course that we are expressions or extensions of God, it implies that the term “Divinity” belongs to each of us. That is what we are being brought to recognize about ourselves and about one another.

Oddly, we often *do* want to hold on to the self-depreciating image the ego offers because we think it protects us. From what? From dangers which, although imaginary (5:3), seem very real to us. We think that if we acknowledge our relationship to God, God will want to punish us for having denied it for so long! Of course He bears us no grudge; He only wants us to end our self-imposed exile and to return our minds to Him. How could God desire to punish what is only a part of Itself?

## Paragraph 6

6. <sup>1</sup>There are no idolaters in the Kingdom, but there is great appreciation for everything [every Soul] that God created, because of the calm knowledge that each one is part of Him. <sup>2</sup>God's Son knows no idols, but he **does** know his Father. <sup>3</sup>Health in this world is the counterpart of value in Heaven. <sup>4</sup>It is not my merit that I contribute to you\* but my love, for you do not value yourself. <sup>5</sup>When you do not value yourself\* you become sick, but **my** value of you can heal you, \* because the value of God's Son is one. <sup>6</sup>When I said, “My peace I give unto you,” I meant it\*. <sup>7</sup>Peace comes [came] from God through me to **you**\*. <sup>8</sup>It is **for** you although you may not ask for it [It was *for* you\*, but you did not ask].

### • Study Question •

6. a) *What does the word “merit” mean in sentence 4, and why is Jesus' love more important to us than his merit?*
- b) *\* Read sentences 4 through 8 aloud, very slowly, inserting your name at every asterisk, and imagining that Jesus is speaking directly to you.*

When we refuse to look at our own denial of God we are protecting that shabby, contemptible self-image. The ego tricks us into protecting it by getting us to avoid

looking at it. We're afraid to look because we are sure that we will discover a horrible blotch of guilt. The ego assures us we will. But we won't. The ego we will uncover isn't pretty, and it is very messed up, but it is not a cause for guilt. Remember what Jesus told us just a short while ago in the Text:

Son of God, you have not sinned, but you have been much mistaken. Yet this can be corrected and God will help you, knowing that you could not sin against Him. (T-10.V.6:1-2)

In the Kingdom, everything that God created is given appropriate value as a part of God (6:1). The shabby image the ego offers is nowhere to be found; God's Sons are known to have all the worth given them by God. They exist in perfection in Him. In this world, that heavenly perfection is reflected in our perfect health, but only when we perceive ourselves in the same perfection that is known to be ours in the Kingdom (6:3). In other words, as our minds are cured of their self-denigration and learn to accord to themselves the value inherent in our creation by God, our bodies will reflect that mental healing with physical health.

We do not need Jesus, or anyone, to impart anything to us in order to be worthy of God and Heaven. We are *already* worthy. All that we need is to learn to recognize our own worth in God's sight. This is why Jesus says his contribution to us is not his merit but his love (6:4). Our problem—the problem at the root of all sickness—is that we do not properly value ourselves; (6:5). Jesus' love for us can heal us (6:5) because it demonstrates our value. When someone loves me I feel better about myself; that is one of the great things about having a loving relationship. When I recognize the love of Jesus, it evokes a greater sense of self-worth in my mind; that self-worth, in turn, is reflected in physical health.

What can this mean for us? It shows us how we can help someone who is sick: *Value* them. *Love* them. They do not see their true worth, their inestimable value; like Jesus, we can contribute our love to help them remember their own value, and that can heal them.

In sentences 6 through 8, Jesus discusses a saying of his recorded in the Gospel of John (John 14:27): "My peace I give unto you." This could be understood to mean that Jesus promises somehow to transmit his own peace to us, that is, to somehow give us something he has that we do not have. Coming in this paragraph of the Text, however, it is clear what he meant. His peace comes from his recognition of his own value as God's Son, because the nature of that peace is what the first sentence of the paragraph calls "the calm knowledge that each one is part of Him." That peace flows from his mind to our minds (6:7) through his love, which evokes in us a similar recognition of our value. It is a peace that is available to us whether or not we avail ourselves of it; we have to ask for it to receive it (6:8). We must *want* it, which means, as we've seen, that we have to be willing to let go of the protective cover of our ego identity. We already *have* the peace—it lies in simply recognizing our true nature as children of God—so Jesus does not give it to us or transmit it to us; he evokes our awareness of it and elicits our asking for it.

## Paragraph 7

7. <sup>1</sup>When a brother is sick it is because **he is not asking for peace**, and therefore does not know he **has** it. <sup>2</sup>The **acceptance** of peace is the denial of illusion, and sickness *is* an illusion. <sup>3</sup>Yet every Son of God has the power to deny illusions **anywhere** in the Kingdom, merely by denying them completely

in himself. <sup>4</sup>I **can** heal you because I **know** you\*. <sup>5</sup>I know your value **for** you, and it is this value\* that makes you whole. <sup>6</sup>A whole mind is not idolatrous, and does not know of conflicting laws. <sup>7</sup>I will heal you\* merely because I have only **one** message, and it is true. <sup>8</sup>Your faith in it\* will make you whole when you have faith in me.

• **Study Question** •

7. *What do you think it means to have faith in Jesus, as mentioned in 7:8?*

When someone is sick “it is because he is not asking for peace, and therefore does not know he has it” (7:1). This expresses an idea we have already seen: that when we accept peace in our minds, by accepting our value in God’s sight, our bodies follow suit by manifesting physical health. When we fail to accept our own value we are denying peace, and we become sick. When we deny illusion and bring our minds into accord with the truth, our bodies will follow because sickness is part of the illusion we are denying (7:2). We can do this for ourselves and for everyone, just as Jesus has done it for us (7:3–4).

What heals us is the sense of value we derive from Jesus’ valuing of us (7:5–7). Because he no longer has any illusions about himself, he has no illusions about you, and sees your true value. The healing becomes ours when we trust in the value Jesus places on us and sees in us, that is, when we believe what he says about us (7:4). The way we can heal others is to see and affirm our own value so that we can see and affirm *their* value, and their wholeness in God.

If someone we know is sick, then, we are asked to accept peace *for that person*—that is, on his or her behalf. We are to deny the illusion that something is wrong with them. They do not know their own value; therefore, we can heal by knowing their value *for them*. If we, instead of projecting fear or condemnation, can project acceptance and love, we can bring healing to their awareness.

But to do this we must willingly give up our idols, the false gods we have made, which includes anything outside of ourselves to which we attribute a power over us. What the Course is saying, actually, is that we *cherish* these false gods because they give us something to blame for our condition, which we imagine is an awful condition. Going back to the opening lines of the chapter, an idol or false god is someone or something upon which we attempt to project the responsibility for our “sins.”

(With this in mind, re-read those opening lines of the chapter in the Introduction’s first paragraph.)

What is an *idol*? Anything beyond yourself that you believe is causing things to happen to you. That belief is what you must give up in order to heal. Your mind must be healed of these false gods if healing is to come through you to the world.

Let’s pause at this point just to summarize the picture the Course is drawing of the hidden beliefs of the ego that it is urging us to uncover, look at, and let go of.

1. The mind of the Son of God has entertained the idea of separate existence, and has taken it seriously. It has denied God’s eternal creation and instead has believed that it has changed itself and has become separate from Him.
2. Thus, if I exist as a separate being, it is because I attacked God.
3. The guilt of having attacked God is too great to bear, so I deny it, choose to forget it, and project it out onto the world around me. I blame my distress on persons and

things outside of myself. I even project it onto God. I hope by projecting my guilt to get rid of it and make myself a form of innocence, which is totally false.

4. In attacking God, I made Him my enemy. He is now out to destroy me. I believe I have good reason to be afraid of Him. I have projected a false "god," an idol, a god of sickness and depression.

To look at this "calmly" would mean that I see its insanity and unreality, without condemning myself for harboring such insanity and illusion. The ego constantly tries to protect its *façade* of innocence, which is totally false, because it keeps us from looking too closely at the equally false sense of guilt that is hidden beneath that innocent façade. If we ever look closely at the guilt, we will see how utterly ridiculous it is to believe that I could attack God and succeed; therefore, there is no cause for guilt.

## Paragraph 8

8. <sup>1</sup>I do not bring God's message with deception, and you will learn this as you learn that you **always** receive as much as you **accept**. <sup>2</sup>You could accept peace **now** for everyone [**you meet**], and offer them perfect freedom from **all** illusions **because you heard His Voice**. <sup>3</sup>But have no other gods before Him or you will **not** hear. <sup>4</sup>God is not jealous of the gods you make, but **you** are. <sup>5</sup>You would save them and serve them, because you believe that **they made you**. <sup>6</sup>You think they are your father, because you are projecting onto them the fearful fact that **you made them to replace God**. <sup>7</sup>Yet when they seem to speak to you, remember that **nothing** can replace God, and whatever replacements you have attempted **are** nothing.

### • Study Question •

8. *What prevents you from bringing healing to the world?*

Jesus is not offering us false hope. We will see how real that hope is as we learn that the degree of our acceptance determines the measure of what we receive (8:1). As Sondra Ray often said in her books, "How good can you stand it?" How much peace are you willing to endure? We don't have peace because we refuse to accept it, and as a result, we cannot heal as Jesus did (8:2). Notice how what Jesus says about the healing *we* could do if we accepted peace describes perfectly what *he* did when living in the body. He often said that he heard the Father and that the healings he performed were the result:

"I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me. (John 5:30 NRSV)

Jesus also said, "...anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing." (John 14:12, NIV).

When you do not accept God's peace for yourself *and* your brothers, you are having "other gods before Him" (8:3). You believe in powers beyond God and beyond your Self that can take away that peace. In our ego madness, we actually protect these false gods of sickness and depression (8:5). We protect them whenever we deny responsibility for our own experiences. Without some power outside of us that is attacking us, we would have no one to blame for our lack of perfection. This is what the Course means when it says

“you believe that they made you. You think they are your father” (8:5–6). You think that some outside force made you what you are, because you deny that *you* are responsible.

In actuality, “you made them to replace God” (8:6). They didn’t make you; *you made them*. You made up a denial of God in your own mind, believed it true, and then projected that belief outside onto imaginary forces which you made up, all because you do not want to look at your own belief that you denied God.

The truth that can save us is that “nothing can replace God” (8:7). Therefore the false gods we believe in are wholly imaginary; they are *nothing*. Perhaps we believe we are guilty because we have replaced god with our idols; in reality we *cannot* do that, so there is nothing about which to be guilty.

The Holy Spirit teaches only that the “sin” of self-replacement on the throne of God is not a source of guilt. What cannot happen can have no effects to fear (T-14.III.15:3-4).

We think we are afraid of *nothingness*, that is, being annihilated, having our existence taken away from us by a jealous God. “...but you are really afraid of *nothing*” (9:1). In other words, there is nothing to be afraid of. Our fear is unfounded; we are afraid of things that do not exist.

## Paragraph 9

9. <sup>1</sup>Very simply, then, you may **believe** you are afraid of **nothingness**, but you are **really** afraid of **nothing**. <sup>2</sup>And in **that** awareness you **are** healed. <sup>3</sup>You **will** hear the god you listen to. <sup>4</sup>You **made** the god of sickness, and **by** making him you made yourself **able** to hear him. <sup>5</sup>Yet you did **not** create him, because he is **not** the Will of the Father. <sup>6</sup>He is therefore not eternal and will be **unmade** for you the instant you signify your willingness to accept **only** the eternal.

### • Study Question •

9. *What realization will bring healing to your mind?*

I commented on the first sentence in connection to the end of the last paragraph because it seems to fit closely together with that passage. The sentence sums up the message of paragraph 8, which is that God is not angry at us, and our fears of divine retribution for our sins are unfounded; our “sins” never happened so our fears are without cause. Freeing ourselves from our self-imposed guilt is what heals us (9:2).

The longer I study the Course, the more I see the accuracy of its assessment. Guilt is the problem; forgiveness (recognizing the unreality of guilt) is the answer. Many of us are not conscious of any massive guilt, however, so the remedy of forgiveness seems inappropriate. However, if the Course’s assessment of our situation is accurate there *must* be guilt in our minds at some level. If your reality is bound up in oneness with all creation and union with God, and if you think that you are presently *not* united with creation or God, your mind has to carry some sense of guilt about that. If you feel attached to and identified with your ego—as *all of us* do—some part of your mind has to realize that you are choosing to be separate and thus “thwarting” the Will of God for perfect oneness. Either *you* caused or are causing the separation, or you did something awful that caused *God* to cut you off.

You may not think of what you did as “sin.” At times, you may feel justified and even righteous about choosing your separate existence. Yet you *must* know, if God had a different plan for you, that you are opposing Him. That has to generate guilt. In other words, just *being here* in a body, just waking up in the morning, is enough reason for our egos to feel guilty. The Course is telling us that these apparent causes for guilt are not real. They are nothing. They have not happened. We are *not* here; we are *not* in a body; we are *not* separate. None of it ever happened, only in our dreams.

“You *made* the god of sickness” in dreams but “you did not *create* him” (9:4–5, my emphasis). Therefore, his days are numbered: He will crumble into dust the second you decide that your true Creator is the only God you really want (9:6). In other words, the god who is jealous and angry, the god who punishes you with sickness, is the product of your own imagination. Recognize that your “sin” is an illusion (the ego does not exist) and the “god” who is angry because of your sin will disappear as well.

## Paragraph 10

10. <sup>1</sup>If God has but one Son, there is but one God. <sup>2</sup>You share reality with Him, **because** reality is not divided. <sup>3</sup>To accept other gods before Him is to place other images before **yourself**. <sup>4</sup>You do not realize how much you listen to your gods, and how vigilant you are on their behalf. <sup>5</sup>Yet they exist only because you honor them. <sup>6</sup>Place honor where it is due, and peace **will** be yours. <sup>7</sup>It is your inheritance from your **real** Father. <sup>8</sup>You cannot make your Father, and the father you made did **not** make you. <sup>9</sup>Honor is not due to illusions, for to honor them is to honor nothing. <sup>10</sup>Yet fear is not due them either, for nothing cannot be fearful. <sup>11</sup>You have chosen to fear love **because** of its perfect harmlessness, and because of this fear you have been willing to give up your own perfect helpfulness and your own perfect Help.

### • Study Question •

*10. Can you give an example of being vigilant for or listening to your god of sickness?*

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When we hold a false image of ourselves we also hold a false image of God, and vice versa. The two things go together because we share our reality with God Himself (10:1-3). If our view of God is distorted, naturally our view of His creation will be distorted as well. If our view of God's creation is distorted our view of God will be distorted in like manner. When I see beauty in a piece of art, I must attribute that beauty to the creator of the art who was its source. When I see ugliness in the artwork, I inevitably will suspect an ugliness in the character of the person who created it.

*You do not realize how much you listen to your gods, and how vigilant you are on their behalf. Yet they exist only because you honor them. (10:4-5).*

Jesus is relentless in His argument on this point because He knows how stubborn our denial is. It's true; we do not realize the extent of our devotion to our false gods. We have very deliberately and very effectively blinded ourselves. We see a world jam-packed with external things that we believe affect us. The weather affects us. Disease affects us. Government affects us. Family members, bosses, and lunatics in the streets affect us.

All of these things “exist only because you honor them.” How deeply do we believe in false gods? Just look at how much you think things beyond yourself affect you and you will have the answer.

The process the Course prescribes for purifying our minds involves becoming aware of our devotion to false gods and our vigilance to protect our false beliefs, and then, once aware of these things, withdrawing our allegiance from them and giving allegiance only to the truth (10:6–7). We place way too much importance on our own projections! We cannot possibly make anything that can then turn around and “make” us, that is, affect us against our will (10:8).

Anything outside us that seems to affect us is an illusion. These things do not deserve to be honored, nor do they merit fear (10:9–10). In reality there is *nothing* outside of us: "There is nothing outside you. That is what you must ultimately learn" (T-18.VI.1:1-2). And "...nothing cannot be fearful" (10:10). The proper attitude towards illusions is to recognize they are illusions and to disregard them. All of our attachment to these things outside of ourselves is nothing more than a projection of our decision to forget God. We made them up to replace Him.

Sentence 11 summarizes the picture of idolatry this section has been painting, depicting our actions in all their inconsistent insanity. Love is perfectly harmless. As such, it poses a threat to our preferred image of ourselves as daring rebels against a despotic god. If God is a harmless, loving Being it exposes our “rebellion” as a farce, so we *fear* that (true) image of God and reject it in favor of a jealous, vengeful god. By playing off our imagined rebellion against this picture of god, we grant the appearance of reality to our ego existence. Of course, this also cuts us off from both our Self and our Source, but—in our insanity—in theory it seems worth it. In practice, however, our denial produces all the pain and suffering of this world. Like Esau in the Bible story (Genesis 25:29–34), we have sold our eternal birthright for an ephemeral bit of nothing.

## Paragraph 11

11. <sup>1</sup>Only at the altar of God will you find peace. <sup>2</sup>And this altar is in you because God put it there. <sup>3</sup>His Voice still calls you to return, and He will be heard when you place no other gods before Him. <sup>4</sup>You can give up the god of sickness for your brothers; in fact, you would **have** to do so if you give him up for yourself. <sup>5</sup>For if you see the god of sickness anywhere, **you** have accepted him. <sup>6</sup>And if you accept him you **will** bow down and worship him, because **he was made as God's replacement**. <sup>7</sup>He is the belief that **you can choose which god is real**. <sup>8</sup>Although it is clear this has nothing to do with **reality**, it is equally clear that it has **everything** to do with **reality as you perceive it**.

### • Study Question •

*11. Spend some time in quiet attempting to practice what is advocated here, giving up the god of sickness on behalf of your brothers.*

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But we *cannot* truly give up our birthright, any more than we can revise our DNA. (Perhaps, in some sci-fi future, we will be able to revise our physical nature, but we will *never* be able to alter our spiritual DNA.) Our “terrible” denial of Him hasn’t changed a thing! The altar of peace is still in us because God put it there (11:2). We cannot change

what God created. Therefore this “awful” denial of God is nothing to be guilty about. “His Voice still calls you to return” (11:3). We will hear that Voice when we have removed the barriers to hearing that we placed in our minds. Our preference for the ego and its illusions plugs our spiritual ears.

Part of the illusion we cling to, whether or not we realize it, is the sickness of other people. When *anyone* is sick it lends validity to the illusion of our being egos living in bodies. So the ego derives value from seeing people as sick. Seeing sickness anywhere means we are accepting the god of sickness (11:5). If we truly give up this false god for ourselves we must also give it up for the sake of our brothers (11:4). To me, this means that if we are not healing others we have not been healed ourselves.

To believe in the god of sickness means to believe in some power outside of us that can harm us. That is the same as believing that, ignoring the true God and inventing gods of our own, we can “choose which god is real” (11.5–7)—a belief is obviously crazy and completely out of touch with reality, because we cannot decide on the reality of God. Nevertheless, it accurately describes the way *we think* reality works (11:8). The world in which we find ourselves is the proof that *we do believe this*. Sickness is not real, but no one can deny that sickness *appears to be real to us*.

To repeat what I said earlier: Looking calmly at the ego thoughts in our mind and being willing to uncover them, and let them go, is essential to the healing process. If we are not at perfect peace, *something* is keeping us from it. That something is always some form of the ego’s illusion: fear, guilt, self-judgment, attachment to separateness or to specialness, belief in causes outside of the mind, and so on. Until we can bring that blocking thought into awareness and let it go, it will continue to block our pathway home. It is not necessary to *make the thought go away*. Simply recognizing it and asking the Holy Spirit to remove it is enough. It may take time to work out in experience, but His answer is certain.

## Answer Key

1. "It" is the power God has given you to help the Sons of God; this is our salvation, and we should not be afraid of our power.
2. Two ways of healing:
  - a. I can accept God for them (2:4).
  - b. I can be aware, for them, that "no one is separate, and so no one is sick" (2:7).
3. Accept God in him. Recognize that he is part of God and so cannot really be sick. This will remind him of what he is denying, even if you do not say anything audibly. Your mind will communicate with his.
4. The logical progression here appears like this:
  - a. Sickness is the belief that power can be taken from you.
  - b. Power cannot be taken from you because you are part of God, Who is all power.
  - c. Your powerlessness before sickness means that God, of whom you are a part, must be powerless; you are making God in your own image (4:6).
  - d. Therefore, sickness is idolatry, the worship of a false god (or idol) who is powerless against attack.
5. Three sub-questions:
  - a. The ego's offering is a picture of us as "a sick god, self-created, self-sufficient, very vicious and very vulnerable" (3:7).
  - b. We think we need the ego to protect us from what the truth and God will do to us for attacking them, being vigilant against them, and denying them.
  - c. No written answer is expected.
6. "Merit" is used here in the sense of excellence or worth that entitles one to some kind of reward. Often, in some Christian theologies, particularly ones that emphasize our sinful nature, Jesus is said to have earned "merit" with God by his perfect obedience, merit that he can somehow transfer to his followers if they have faith in him. The old gospel hymn, "On Christ, the solid rock," says that our only hope is the righteousness of Jesus. Jesus, here in the *Course*, is saying that he helps us, not by "standing in" for us with God and providing his perfect righteousness in place of our deficient righteousness, but simply by *loving* us! His love for us enables us to value ourselves, and that is what we need in order to be healed.
7. Here, having faith in Jesus seems to mean believing that he really values us, and that he is basing his estimation of our value on the truth about us. One way to put it: We have faith in his faith in us. "Have faith in Him Who has faith in you" (T-16.II.9:8).

8. What keeps us from healing the world is our continued allegiance to the gods we made, gods we worship instead of our Creator. We project onto them our making of them, seeing them as forming us.
9. The realization that will bring healing to your mind is the realization that your guilt and its attendant fear of punishment (annihilation or “nothingness”) is groundless. The “god” you fear does not exist. God is not angry because of your idolatry with imaginary gods (8:4). The guilt and fear come only from yourself.
10. Any way in which you listen to the accusing voice in your mind is an example. Just this morning I was reading a passage in a novel about a female security guard who is the mother of a teenage girl; she is playing music as she drives to quiet her mind. It is a perfect example of listening to our gods:  
  
“...the yammering in her head had been reduced to the usual low buzz of demonic voices conveying the usual neurotic messages, familiar as road signs: you’re wasting your life, you’re making your family miserable, you’re going to end up dead in an alley or in prison; your kids will get shot by a maniac; *bad* mother *baaaad* mother, worthless, worthless, worthless....” — Robert Tannenbaum, *Act of Revenge*
11. No written answer is expected.