

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 19, Section IV(C)

The Third Obstacle: The Attraction of Death & The Incorruptible Body

Legend:

Sans serif text = Material from ACIM 3rd edition (FIP)

Italic sans serif text = words emphasized in all caps in Urtext

Sans serif text = alternate or omitted material from the Urtext

Typewriter text = editorial comments

~~sans serif text~~ = Not in Urtext, in FIP edition

Recap of the Section So Far

Remember that when a holy relationship begins, peace enters, uprooting the belief in sin and replacing it. That peace is now seeking to rise up, fill every aspect of our lives, and spill out into the world. Peace is working from *within* us, trying to get out. To do so, it must flow over these obstacles. The first obstacle is the desire to get rid of peace, which is fueled by our ego's attraction to sin and guilt.

The second obstacle, which we encounter once the first has been (at least in part) bypassed, is the belief that the body is valuable for what it offers. There is a symbiotic relationship between each obstacle and the one "beneath" it. The attraction to guilt and the desire to get rid of peace *hide* the second obstacle, this addiction to the bodily identity, from our consciousness. At the same time, it is that bodily addiction that is the foundation and *generating source* of the first obstacle. We (subconsciously) want to get rid of peace because, at some level, we recognize that to *have* peace, we must relinquish our belief in the value of the body. In the previous section we learned that our addiction to the bodily identity and the body as a source of pleasure is actually a disguise for the ego's attraction to pain and suffering.

Now, moving into the third obstacle, we learn that underlying even that, or the ultimate expression of it, is the ego's attraction to death, which is "unrecognized" by us consciously (4:5). Our love for the perishable body is covering the ego's death wish, and that death wish is what really fuels our love affair with the body.

Paragraph 1

1. ~~1To you and your brother,~~ **[To you,]** ~~in~~ **[into]** whose special relationship the Holy Spirit entered, it *is* given to release and be released from the dedication to death. ²For it [release] was offered you, and you *accepted*. ³~~Yet~~ **[But]** you must learn still more about this strange devotion, for it contains ~~the third obstacle~~ **[the third of the obstacles]** that peace must flow across. ⁴No one can die unless he chooses death. ⁵What seems to be the *fear* of death is really its *attraction*. ⁶Guilt, too, is feared and fearful. ⁷Yet it could have no hold at all except on those who are attracted to it and seek it out. ⁸And so it is with death. ⁹Made by the ego, its dark shadow falls across all living things, because the ego is the “enemy” of life.

• Study Question •

1. “What seems to be the fear of death is really its attraction” (1:5). If that is so, we can learn to recognize apparent fear of death as evidence of the hidden attraction. Which of the following seems to you the best explanation of this “fear=attraction” statement?
 - A. We are not really afraid of death; we are faking our fear.
 - B. Since death cannot come to us unless we choose it, there would be nothing to be afraid of, unless we had already chosen it.
 - C. The dark part of us wants to die; the light part wants to live and fears death.

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As we read in T-19.IV(B).17:1, those who are the ego’s disciples have unconsciously dedicated themselves to death. *We* however, “into whose special relationship the Holy Spirit entered,” have been given the power to release others from their dedication to death, and to be released ourselves (1:1). This is so because we have already accepted God’s offer of release by our realization that there must be a better way, our openness to question the ego’s thought system (1:2).

Yet, even though we have been released, we still need to learn “more about this strange devotion.” It surely is a *strange* devotion, this devotion to death. How could we possibly find death attractive? There is something more here for us to grasp. This *is* the third obstacle to peace (1:3), as unlikely as it may seem that we could ever find death *attractive*. What evidence is there that such an attraction exists?

Well, start with the declaration that, “No one can die unless he chooses death” (1:4). If that is true—and let’s accept that premise as a given for the moment—if it is true, and based on our experience in the world, *everyone* dies eventually, then *everyone* must be *choosing to die*, which is proof that we all find death attractive. So it is a logical conclusion, *if* the premise is true: that no one can die unless they choose to do so. What support is there for that premise? Think back to the way the previous sub-section ended.

It was talking about the way our attraction to the body is linked to the ego's desire for guilt, pain, and death. It said:

Not one but must regard the body as himself, without which he would die, and yet within which is his death equally inevitable (T-19.IV.16:5).

In other words, everyone (“not one but”) is *choosing to identify with their bodies* even though doing so makes death inevitable. Bodies die. Choose to identify yourself as a body, and you are choosing death. If you do not make that choice, but identify with spirit instead, you do not die. This is what Jesus really meant when he spoke of “eternal life”:

“but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (John 4:14 ESV)

So, if we see everyone dying, it means everyone is choosing death. They do so by identifying with their bodies.

True, we all *seem* to *fear* death rather than to be attracted to it, but that apparent fear is really attraction in disguise (1:5). Unless we had already chosen death there would be nothing to be afraid of! It's just the same self-deception that we engage in when we claim to be repelled by guilt. We appear to dislike guilt, yet in reality we are attracted to it and seek it out (1:6–8), as we've seen earlier in this section (T-19.IV(A).i, “The Attraction of Guilt”). We think we are holding on to bodily identity because we value what the body offers, but the ego's secret motivation for holding on to the body is, “It is death!” The ego wants us to die because death is the ultimate proof of separation, the ultimate proof that the ego is real, and has succeeded in rejecting God. Death was “made by the ego,” and death's shadow looms over “all living things, because the ego is the ‘enemy’ of life” (1:9). As William James said, “the evil background is really there to be thought of, and the skull will grin in at the banquet.”

In his book, *The Denial of Death*, Ernest Becker wrote about this shadow of death:

Yet, at the same time, as the Eastern sages also knew, man is a worm and food for worms. This is the paradox: he is out of nature and hopelessly in it; he is dual, up in the stars and yet housed in a heart-pumping, breath-gasping body that once belonged to a fish and still carries the gill-marks to prove it. His body is a material fleshy casing that is alien to him in many ways—the strangest and most repugnant way being that it aches and bleeds and will decay and die. Man is literally split in two: he has an awareness of his own splendid uniqueness in that he sticks out of nature with a towering majesty, and yet he goes back into the ground a few feet in order to blindly and dumbly rot and disappear forever. It is a terrifying dilemma to be in and to have to live with.

Workbook lesson #76 makes some very clear statements about our attraction to the body and to death:

The body is endangered by the mind that hurts itself. The body suffers just in order that the mind will fail to see it is the victim of itself. The body's suffering is

a mask the mind holds up to hide what really suffers. It would not understand it is its own enemy; that it attacks itself and wants to die. It is from this your "laws" would save the body. It is for this you think you are a body (W-pI.76.5:2-7).

The point the Course seems to be making, however, is that living with this shadow is a choice we have made. And it is not necessary. We can choose again.

Paragraph 2

2. ¹And yet a shadow cannot kill. ²What is a shadow to the living? ³They but walk past and it is gone. ⁴But what of those whose dedication is *not* to live; the black-draped "sinners," the ego's mournful chorus, plodding so heavily *away* from life, dragging their chains and marching in the slow procession that honors their grim master, lord of death? ⁵Touch any one of them with the gentle hands [hand] of forgiveness, and watch the chains fall away, along with yours. ⁶See him throw aside the black robe he was wearing to his funeral, and hear him laugh at death. ⁷The sentence sin would lay upon him he can escape through [with] your forgiveness. ⁸This is *no* [not] arrogance. ⁹It is the Will of God. ¹⁰What is impossible to you who chose His Will as yours? ¹¹What is death to you? ¹²Your dedication is *not* to death, nor to its master. ¹³When you accepted the Holy Spirit's purpose in place of the ego's you *renounced* death, exchanging it for life. ¹⁴We know that [the result of] an idea leaves not its source. ¹⁵And death is the result of the thought we call the ego, as surely as life is the result of the Thought of God.

• Study Question •

2. *Death was made by the ego (1:9), "the result of the thought we call the ego" (2:15), and its shadow falls across all living things. Listening to the ego, we believe ourselves condemned to death for our sins.*
- (a) *Who is the "lord of death" (2:4), "its master" (2:12)?*
- A. *The devil*
 - B. *The ego*
 - C. *The mind*
- (b) *What, specifically, is the power we possess that enables us to release others from their dedication to death?*
- A. *Our forgiveness*
 - B. *Our laughter*
 - C. *Our choice of God's Will*

The dark presence of death in the background is only a shadow; it cannot truly kill what is alive (2:1–2). The living just walk by death's shadow and it is gone (2:3). "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil" (Ps. 23:4).

While that is true of anyone who has chosen to identify with life, with love, what of the bulk of humanity, "those who still believe they are enslaved within a body" (W-pI.199.7:2), "the black-draped 'sinners,' the ego's mournful chorus" (2:4)? Those who believe they are bodies are suffering under the illusion that they will die when their body dies. Without realizing it, they are enchained, marching in a slow, mournful parade that honors the ego, "lord of death." It is our task to carry freedom to them as our gift (W-pI.199.7:2). We can "touch any one of them with the gentle hand of forgiveness, and watch the chains fall away, along with" our own chains (2:5). We can see them delirious with joy as they realize they no longer have to end up at their own funeral, see them laughing at death's scary shadow (2:6). This is what it means to extend peace from the holy relationship to the rest of the world.

Notice how the freedom from the fear of death is tied to release from guilt, given by our forgiveness. We liberate others from the sentence of death (2:7). To assert our power to do this "is not arrogance," but rather "the Will of God" (2:8–9). Nothing is impossible to us; we can literally release people from death (2:10–11)! In a holy relationship, we are no longer dedicated to death, nor to the ego (2:12). The choice that initiated a holy relationship, accepting the purpose of the Holy Spirit for our relationship rather than our egos' purposes, *was* our renunciation of death, our choice for life (2:13). Ideas do not leave their source, and neither does the *result* of an idea. Death is the result of the ego's thought, just as life is the result of the Thought of God. Therefore, in rejecting the *ego* we have rejected its result, *death*. (2:14–15).

i. The Incorruptible Body

Paragraph 3

3. ¹From the ego came sin and guilt and death, in *opposition* to life and innocence, and to the *Will* of God Himself. ²Where can such opposition lie but in the sick minds of the insane, dedicated to madness and set *against* the peace of Heaven? ³One thing is sure; God, Who created neither sin nor death, will not that you be bound by them. ⁴He knows of neither sin *nor* its ~~results~~ **[result]** [death]. ⁵The shrouded figures in the funeral procession march not in honor of their Creator, Whose Will it is they *live*. ⁶They are not *following His Will* **[it]**; they are *opposing* it.

• Study Question •

3. *Based on this paragraph, which of the following are mistakes about death? (There may be more than one correct answer.)*
- A. *When someone dies, it is God's Will to take them to be with Himself.*
 - B. *Death is inevitable.*
 - C. *Death is a powerful force which should be honored and respected.*
 - D. *All of the above.*

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When someone dies, have you ever heard someone say something like, “It was God’s will,” or, “It was God’s time.” When a child dies, maybe you’ve heard someone, in a misguided attempt at comfort, say, “God wanted another angel in Heaven.” All these sayings blame God for death. But death, says Jesus, did not come from God at all, nor is it *ever* God’s will; “sin and guilt and death” all came from the ego, “in *opposition*...to the *Will* of God Himself” (3:1). All such beliefs, Jesus says, are part of the insanity of those identified with their egos. Their minds are sick (3:2). The one thing you can be sure of is that God *does not* will us to be bound by sin or by death (3:3). God does not even *know* of sin or the death that results from it (3:4).

This does not mean that God is unaware of the concept of sin, at least I don’t think so. I believe it means that the actual thought of sin does not exist in God’s mind; it is something that does *not exist*, and God knows that. “There is no sin; it has no consequence” (W-pI.101.6:7).

Those who cling to their bodily identity, and thus to death, marching in death’s funeral procession, are not following the Will of God, but opposing it.

Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die?” (Ezekiel 33:11 ESV)

Paragraph 4

4. ¹And what is the black-draped body they would bury? ²A body ~~which~~ they dedicated to death, a symbol of corruption, a sacrifice to sin, *offered* to sin to feed upon and keep *itself* alive; a thing condemned, damned by its maker and lamented by every mourner who looks upon it as himself. ³You who believe you have condemned the Son of God to this *are* arrogant. ⁴But you who would release him are but honoring the Will of his Creator. ⁵The arrogance of sin, the pride of guilt, the sepulchre of separation, all are part of your unrecognized dedication to death. ⁶The glitter of guilt you laid upon the body would *kill* it. ⁷For what the ego loves, it kills for its obedience. ⁸But what obeys it not, it *cannot* kill.

• Study Question •

4. “Arrogance” has been mentioned three times now, in 2:8 and 4:3 and 5. Which of the following best defines the meaning the Course gives to “arrogance?”
- A. Believing that we have the power to deliver people from death.
 - B. The effrontery of acting against God’s Will.
 - C. Believing that by our sin we have condemned the Son of God to death.

What is the body, then (4:1)? The Course paints an ugly picture here, but it is one we need to consider without flinching. We, not God, have dedicated our bodies to death! It

represents our corruption. We believe that death is deserved because of sin (“The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). It sins and brings us guilt, in order that our ego (the thought of sin or separation) can feed on the guilt to keep *itself* alive. To some degree, we all despise our bodies. They are not beautiful enough, strong enough, healthy enough, svelte enough. They betray us. They give out, they age, they weaken, they die. Everyone who believes they are a body *laments* the fact (4:2).

That belief, that you and I, aspects of the Son of God, *are* bodies? *That* is arrogant! (4:3)

Releasing people, freeing them from guilt and the punishment of death, is only doing God’s Will. In doing so we *honor* God (4:4).

The concept of sin is arrogance. To believe we are guilty is hubris (“pride”). To think we have separated ourselves to the point of death (“the sepulcher of separation”) is self-exaltation beyond belief. We cannot overthrow the Will of God. Putting that in non-religious terms, we cannot change our fundamental nature, we cannot be other than what we are: a loving part of the One.

And all of them are “part of your unrecognized dedication to death” (4:5). We’ve believed that our bodies are capable of doing things that thwart the Will of God, which is life, and we therefore condemn the body to death (4:6). This is the way your ego works: what the ego loves, the ego kills *because* it obeys the ego (which has been seeking death all along), and what doesn’t obey it, *it cannot kill* (4:7). If we don’t obey our egos, the ego cannot hurt us. “Nothing real can be threatened” (T-In.2:2).

Paragraph 5

5. ¹You have *another* dedication that would keep the body incorruptible and perfect as long as it is useful for your holy purpose. ²The body no more dies than it can feel. ³*It does nothing.* ⁴Of itself it is neither corruptible nor incorruptible. ⁵~~It is nothing~~ [***It is nothing***]. ⁶It is the result of a tiny, mad *idea* of corruption ~~that can be corrected~~ [*which can be corrected*]. ⁷For God has *answered* this insane idea with His Own; an Answer Which left Him not, and therefore brings the Creator to the awareness of every mind which heard His Answer and *accepted* it.

• Study Question •

5. *Identify the one false statement about the body in the following list, according to this paragraph:*
- A. *The body is nothing.*
 - B. *The body does nothing.*
 - C. *The body cannot feel pain.*
 - D. *The body is all that dies; the spirit lives forever.*
 - E. *The body is not incorruptible.*

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Remember what has been clearly stated before: The purpose for which we use the body determines its condition.

To see a body as anything except a means of communication is to limit your mind and to hurt yourself. Health is therefore nothing more than united purpose. If the body is brought under the purpose of the mind, it becomes whole because the mind's purpose is one (T-8.VII.13:3-5).

Dedication to the ego brings sickness and death; dedication to the purposes of the Holy Spirit brings life. In fact, if we are able to dedicate ourselves *wholly* to this higher purpose (a long-range goal for us all, I'm sure), it will "keep the body incorruptible and perfect as long as it is useful for your holy purpose" (5:1). The Course means this quite literally. In the Workbook it is even more explicit:

"As these [purposes you gave the body] are laid aside, the strength the body has will always be enough to serve all truly useful purposes. The body's health is fully guaranteed, because it is not limited by time, by weather or fatigue, by food and drink, or any laws you made it serve before. You need do nothing now to make it well, for sickness has become impossible" (W-pI.136.18:2-4).

Those are pretty incredible assertions, aren't they? Choose to use the body only as a device with which to communicate love and forgiveness, lifting the burden of guilt from everyone, and it will be whole; it will be incorruptible and perfect; it will have all the strength it needs to fulfill its holy purpose; its health is guaranteed; it isn't limited by time (age), by weather (no need for clothing?) or fatigue (no need for sleep?), by food or drink (no need to eat and drink?); it will not be limited by any of the laws of this world (such as time and space, nutrition, etc.); sickness will be *impossible*. In a nutshell this is the Course's program for perfect health, perfect weight, perfect everything physical. Just give the body its proper purpose.

I believe this operates, as it were, on a sliding scale. The more perfect our dedication to holiness is, the more perfect our body will become.

We've already been told the body in itself does not feel anything; it communicates the feelings asked for by the mind (see T-19.IV.14:1-6). More than this, however: The body, in fact, *does not die* (5:2)! "*It does nothing*" (5:3). By itself it does nothing; it is totally an effect of the mind. It does not decay nor does it resist decay (5:4). "*It is nothing*" (5:5).

The body's origin lies in the "tiny, mad *idea* of corruption," but an idea "*can be corrected*" (5:6). And when the idea is changed, the body changes. God answered the insane idea with an idea of sanity, which, when we hear it and accept it, brings every mind to the awareness of God (5:7). And which makes our body incorruptible as well.

Paragraph 6

¹You who are dedicated to the incorruptible have been given, through *your* acceptance, the power to *release* from corruption. ²What better way to teach the first and fundamental principle in a course on miracles¹ than by showing you the one that *seems* to be the hardest can be accomplished *first*? ³The body can but serve your purpose. ⁴As you look upon it, so will it seem to be. ⁵Death, were it true, would be the final and complete disruption of communication, which *is* the ego's goal.

• Study Question •

6. *According to this paragraph, what miracle, which seems to be the hardest, can be "accomplished first" by us, and what is "the first and fundamental principle in a course in miracles" we will demonstrate by doing so? (Compare with T-1.I.1:1, and T-1.I.24:1.)*

This is a challenging paragraph. By accepting the purpose of the Holy Spirit ("dedicated to the incorruptible"), we have been given "the power to release from corruption" (6:1) which implies the power to free, and to *be* free, from bodily decay and death (which is the "corruption" being referred to). The second sentence contains one of the many references in the Course to "the first and fundamental principle" of miracles, first stated in T-1.I.1:1: "There is no order of difficulty in miracles."² If we are actually able right at the outset to perform a miracle that *seems* to be the most difficult, freedom from death, anything that follows will seem like an anticlimax (6:2). What's curing cancer compared to actually raising the dead?

"Well, sure," you may be thinking, "but the Course doesn't really expect anyone to raise the dead, does it?" I'm not sure how else to interpret this, though, from Chapter 1: "Miracles enable you to heal the sick and raise the dead because you made sickness and death yourself, and can therefore abolish both" (T-1.I.24:1). I think he means it.

Perhaps one day we will evolve to embrace that miracle-working power. Jesus is saying we already have the power to do it. At the very least, we can turn away from the dark negative attraction of death and deny its power over us. We can enthusiastically embrace the purpose for which God created us. We can use the body, not for death, but for life: "As you look upon it, so will it seem to be" (6:4). We can consciously choose to remain in communication with God, we can choose to listen to the Voice for God within ourselves, and to follow Its direction.

¹ T-1.1:1-3: "The first principle of miracles is that there is no order of difficulty among them. One is not 'harder' or 'bigger' than another. They are all the same."

² For some of the references, see T-2.I.5:5, T-5.VII.2:3-4, T-6.V.4:1-5, T-11.VI.10:5, T-19.IV.5:3-4, T-21.Int.1:8-11, M-22.1:2, and T-23.II.3:1. There are many other references.

Paragraph 7

7. ¹Those who fear death see not how often and how loudly they *call* to it, and bid it come to *save* them from communication. ²For death is seen as *safety*, the great dark savior from the light of truth, the answer to the Answer, the silencer of the Voice That speaks for God. ³Yet the retreat to death is *not* the end of conflict. ⁴Only God's *Answer* is its end. ⁵The obstacle of your seeming love for death that peace must flow across *seems* to be very great. ⁶For in it lie hidden all the ego's secrets, all its strange devices for deception, all its sick ideas and weird imaginings. ⁷Here is the final end of union, the triumph of the ego's making over creation, the victory of lifelessness on Life Itself.

• Study Question •

7. *Our attraction to death is mostly unconscious (7:1). What is the main attraction in death, to the ego?*
- A. *Death saves the ego from God's light, and silences God's Voice.*
 - B. *Death is the end of conflict.*
 - C. *Death contains all of the ego's secrets.*
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Do you fear death? (Be honest, now.) I think most of us do, at least to some extent. In fact, we might react to all this talk of being *attracted* to death by insisting, “Not me! I’m *afraid* of it!” Few of us could write, as the Apostle Paul did, in this modern paraphrase:

For living to me means simply “Christ”, and if I die I should merely gain more of him. I realise, of course, that the work which I have started may make it necessary for me to go on living in this world, I should find it very hard to make a choice. I am torn in two directions—on the one hand I long to leave this world and live with Christ, and that is obviously the best thing for me. Yet, on the other hand, it is probably more necessary for you that I should stay here on earth. That is why I feel pretty well convinced that I shall not leave this world yet, but shall be able to stand by you, to help you forward in Christian living and to find increasing joy in your faith. - (Philippians 1:21-25, J. B. Phillips)

If I compare my feelings about death to those lofty sentiments, I have to admit it—I’m still more attached to staying around than to moving on! So, since I *do* fear death, Sentence 7:1 applies to me, and it most likely applies to all of us. We do not see “how often and how loudly [we] *call* to [death], and bid it come to *save* [us] from communication” (7:1). What on earth is he talking about? *Communication?*

From what follows, it’s fairly clear that he is talking about communication from, or with, God. He says that the ego views death as “safety.” Death saves us from “the light of truth,” God’s “Answer” (that is, the Holy Spirit (T-5.II.2:5)), “the Voice That speaks for God” (also the Holy Spirit (T-11.I.11:1-2)) (7:2). So the ego’s real purpose for death is to silence God, to slam our ears shut so we will not hear the Voice that gently calls us home. And we, quite unconsciously, are frequently and loudly *asking for death*, while

consciously believing we are afraid of it. More often than we realize, we think we would welcome death. That does not mean we are suicidal; that would be a *conscious* wish for death. It seems to me that whenever I choose *not to listen* to the inner Voice, I *am* choosing death because I am choosing separation. We view death as “the end of conflict,” a view that is reflected in many common expressions: “Rest in peace,” “Gone to a better world,” and so on. And have you never wished God’s Voice would just “go away and leave me alone”? Can you see how that is an *unconscious* call to death, a desire to avoid the conflict between ego and spirit? But death “is *not* the end of conflict” (7:3). In fact, the Course clearly says that death of the body changes nothing:

When your body and your ego and your dreams are gone, you will know that *you* will last forever. ²Many think that this is accomplished through death, but *nothing* is accomplished through death, because death is nothing. ³*Everything* is accomplished through life, and life is of the mind and in the mind. ⁴The body neither lives nor dies, because it cannot contain you who *are* life. ⁵If we share the same mind, *you can overcome death because I did*. ⁶Death is an attempt to resolve conflict by not willing at all. ⁷Like any other impossible solution which the ego attempts, *it will not work*. (T-6.V.1:1-7)

Notice that next-to-last sentence: “Death is an attempt to resolve conflict by not deciding at all.” That’s what this paragraph has been saying. When we try to avoid deciding for God, we are asking for death. But even actual, physical death will not avoid the conflict, because the conflict is in the mind. It has nothing to do with the body, so ending the body does not end the conflict. There is only one way out of conflict, according to Chapter 6: “The way out of the conflict between two opposing thought systems is clearly to choose one and relinquish the other” (T-6.V(B).5:1). And since the ego’s thought system is insane and delusional, there is really only one choice that ends conflict: The only thing that truly ends conflict is “God’s *Answer*” (7:4).

This business of a hidden love for death buried deep in our subconscious mind, where we are unaware of it but driven by it, is profoundly disturbing. It *seems* like a *huge* problem, and one that will be extremely difficult to get past (7:5). The love for death seems to embody *all* of the ego’s madness, to be the lynchpin of its “sick ideas and weird imaginings” (7:6). The love of death is the black heart of the ego. It incorporates a total break from oneness, demonstrating that what the ego made has supplanted what God created, imposing the absence of life “on Life Itself” (7:7).

But this obstacle only *seems* to be “very great,” as we shall see.

Paragraph 8

8. ¹Under the dusty edge of its distorted world the ego would lay the Son of God, slain by its orders, proof in his decay that God Himself is powerless before the ego's might, unable to protect the life that He created against the ego's savage wish to kill. ²My ~~brother~~ [brothers], ~~child~~ [children] of our Father, this is a *dream* of death. ³There is no funeral, no dark altars, no grim commandments nor twisted rituals of condemnation to which the *body* leads you. ⁴Ask not release of *it*. ⁵But *free* it from the merciless and unrelenting orders you laid upon it, and forgive it what you ordered it to do. ⁶In its exaltation you *commanded* it to die, for only death *could* conquer life. ⁷And what but insanity could look upon the defeat of God, and think it *real*?

• Study Question •

8. *What act, or attitude, towards our bodies is asked of us here?*
- A. *To follow the body where it leads us.*
 - B. *To ask the body to release us from its imprisonment.*
 - C. *To forgive the body what we ordered it to do.*

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What the ego wants to do is to kill God's Son (i.e., you, and me) and bury us. As our body is consumed by worms, the decay of our flesh will prove that God is powerless before the ego, unable to protect His beloved creation from the ego's desire to kill it (8:1). That is what the ego wants, but it is a hopeless *dream* (8:2). We are the children of God! We cannot die. The early Christians saw this quite clearly:

If it is for this life only that Christ has given us hope, we of all people are most to be pitied (1 Corinthians 15:19 REB).

The body, if we identify with it, leads us into that whole litany of death, with all its funerals and bloody altars and "twisted rituals of condemnation" (8:3), but none of it is more than illusion. Asking our bodies to bring us freedom from guilt and fear is pointless (8:4). Rather than laying an impossible task on the body and thus layering our sense of frustration and guilt ever deeper, let us *free* the body from these mad demands and *forgive* it for what it could not do (8:5). We asked our bodies to die in order to conquer life and defeat God. What could embark on such an impossible program but a deeply disturbed mind (8:6–7)? Of course, our bodies could not deliver.

Have you forgiven your body?

Paragraph 9

9. ¹The fear of death will go as its appeal is yielded to love's *real* attraction. ²The end of sin, which nestles quietly in the safety of your relationship, protected by your union ~~with your brother~~, and ready to grow into a mighty force for God is very near. ³The infancy of salvation is carefully guarded by love, preserved from every thought that would attack it, and quietly made ready to fulfill the mighty task for which it was *given* you. ⁴Your newborn purpose is nursed by angels, cherished by the Holy Spirit and protected by God Himself. ⁵It *needs* not your protection; it is *yours*. ⁶For it is deathless, and within it lies the *end* of death.

• Study Question •

9. *We are told that the fear of death will end as we replace it with "love's real attraction." This principle of overcoming the obstacle by the love beyond it applies to every obstacle so far (see T-19.IV(D).5:1). This paragraph seems to equate "love's real attraction" in regard to this obstacle with something else; what? (Compare 9:1 to 9:4-6.)*
- A. *Our union with our brother.*
 - B. *Finding our true soul-mate.*
 - C. *Our newborn purpose in the holy relationship.*

•

The fear of death is vanquished as we find ourselves drawn more and more to the very real attraction of love (9:1). Behind every obstacle, the love of God is calling to us, and we are responding to it.

Every obstacle that peace must flow across is surmounted in just the same way: The fear that raised it yields to the love, and so the fear is gone.
(T-19.IV(D).5:1)

"The end of sin...is very near" (9:2). It's already in the holy relationship, securely guarded by the Union of minds that make up the relationship, and "ready to grow into a mighty force for God" (9:2). Here we see again the basic thesis of this long session: Peace (or the end of sin) has been established in the heart of a holy relationship and lives there much like an infant, similar to the infant Jesus in the manger. The decision that initiated the relationship, joining in a common and holy purpose ("your union"), and the love that is of God and also between the members of the relationship, preserve the divine deposit "from every thought that would attack it" (9:3). Like a baby, this peace, this end of sin, is poised "to grow into a mighty force for God," as it is "quietly made ready to fulfill the mighty task for which it was *given* you" (9:3). It must grow stronger until it overflows the obstacles that linger in its path.

The entire Trinity and host of Heaven³ is involved in the preservation and development of this “holy child” within us (9:4). Far from needing us to protect it, this holy child within us is *our* protection (9:5). It is the Christ-self that is the truth of our being, deathless, and with the potential of ending death *entirely* (9:6).⁴

Paragraph 10

10. ¹What danger can assail the wholly innocent? ²What can attack the guiltless? ³What fear can enter and disturb the peace of sinlessness? ⁴What has been given you, even in its infancy, is in full communication with God *and* you. ⁵In its tiny hands it holds, in perfect safety, every miracle you will perform, held out to *you*. ⁶The miracle of life is ageless, born in time but nourished in eternity. ⁷Behold this infant, to whom you gave a resting place by your forgiveness of ~~your brother~~ **[each other]**, and see in it the Will of God. ⁸Here is the babe of Bethlehem reborn. ⁹And everyone who gives him shelter will follow him, *not* to the cross, but to the resurrection and the life.

• Study Question •

10. *This paragraph speaks of our newborn purpose as an infant. What gave birth (or gave a resting place) to this infant Christ within us?*

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The comparison of our “newborn purpose” continues to be compared to an infant, implying that although it has a lot of growth ahead of it, nevertheless it holds complete salvation in “its tiny hands” (10:5). It cannot be attacked and so cannot fear (10:1–3).

The Course constantly equates innocence with invulnerability. For instance, the entire section I of Chapter 13 is about “Guiltlessness and Invulnerability.” It declares, “You are invulnerable because you are guiltless” (T-13.I.8:1). The logic seems to be that we are vulnerable *only* if we are truly guilty and therefore deserving of punishment. If we are innocent, eternal beings, we cannot be hurt. Being eternal *means* being immortal, and if

³ A word about “angels.” In using this word, the Course does not mean to imply the literal existence of human-shaped being with wings, hovering around us invisibly and taking care of us, although it makes use of that popular imagery. In the Course, angels are symbolic of God’s thoughts:

“Watch with me, angels, watch with me today. Let all God’s holy Thoughts surround me, and be still with me while Heaven’s Son is born. ” (W-pII.303.1:1-2).

Still, at times God’s Thoughts appear to be (as we are) living beings of some kind. Perhaps there are Thoughts of God just like us that have *not* been deceived by the tiny, mad idea of separation, and these “beings” do participate in our spiritual growth, just as we also have a role in one another’s awakening.

“Around you angels hover lovingly, to keep away all darkened thoughts of sin, and keep the light where it has entered in” (T-26.IX.7:1).

“Say His Name, and you invite the angels to surround the ground on which you stand, and sing to you as they spread out their wings to keep you safe, and shelter you from every worldly thought that would intrude upon your holiness” (W-pI.183.2:2).

⁴ The image of the Christ as a holy child within us is developed at length in Lesson 182.

we are immortal we must be always safe. "Nothing real can be threatened," says the Introduction.

"Guiltlessness is invulnerability. Therefore, make your invulnerability manifest to everyone" (T-14.III.7:1-2).

See also T-31.VI.6:1-10.⁵

Therefore, it is by accepting and affirming our identity as spirit, eternal, invulnerable, and forever innocent, that we "protect" the holy child within. These are the thoughts (or angels) that will keep us safe. This "newborn purpose" (9:4) opened, and keeps fully open, the lines of communication to and from God, and to and from our conscious minds (10:4). Its presence in us guarantees that it will grow, mature, and bear miraculous fruit in our lives.

The parallels of our spiritual birth to the biblical story of Jesus' birth continue. We can picture the baby Jesus holding in his hands all the miracles we will ever offer, symbolizing how all of them are contained in the miracle of Atonement we have allowed into our minds and hearts (10:5). In us, the Word has become flesh; the eternal life of God has been born in time yet still receives its nourishment (the Thoughts of God) from the eternal (10:6).

How did this holy Child find its home in us? Through our "forgiveness of *each other*" (10:7). We are asked to "behold" or take a good look at this budding Life within ourselves and to realize that in it is our destiny, "the Will of God" for us (10:7). This is why we are here; this is what we were created for. This, in effect, is Jesus of Nazareth reborn *in us* (10:8). This is God entering into the world. The story of Jesus birth, life, and ministry is being re-lived in you and in me.

"My resurrection comes again each time I lead a brother safely to the place at which the journey ends and is forgot. I am renewed each time a brother learns there is a way from misery and pain. I am reborn each time a brother's mind turns to the light in him and looks for me" (S-Int.7:1-3).

The story in the Bible is not just about Jesus; it is your story, and my story. "And everyone who gives him shelter will follow him, *not* to the cross, but to the resurrection and the life" (10:9).

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever has faith in me shall live, even though he dies; and no one who lives and has faith in me shall ever die." (John 11:25-26 REB)

As the Apostle Paul puts it:

⁵ "Are you invulnerable? Then the world is harmless in your sight. Do you forgive? Then is the world forgiving, for you have forgiven it its trespasses, and so it looks on you with eyes that see as yours. Are you a body? So is all the world perceived as treacherous, and out to kill. Are you a spirit, deathless, and without the promise of corruption and the stain of sin upon you? So the world is seen as stable, fully worthy of your trust; a happy place to rest in for a while, where nothing need be feared, but only loved. Who is unwelcome to the kind in heart? And what could hurt the truly innocent" (T-31.VI.6:1-10).

It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20 NRSV)

In the words of what was Charles Fillmore's favorite Bible verse, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." The whole process of spiritual growth consists of paying attention to this divine life that is waiting to burst forth in visible demonstration of the life of God. Just as all of Jesus' life, teaching, and miracles were there in the baby in the manger, like the tree nascent in the acorn, waiting to come forth, so there is, waiting in all of us, a "mighty force for God" given to us to perform a "mighty task" (9:2 & 3).

Paragraph 11

11. ¹When anything seems to you to be a source of fear, when any situation strikes you with terror and makes your body tremble and the cold sweat of fear comes over it, remember it is *always* for *one* reason; the ego has perceived it as a symbol of fear, a sign of sin and death. ²Remember, then, that neither sign nor symbol should be *confused* with source, for they must *stand for* something *other* than themselves. ³Their meaning *cannot* lie in them, but must be sought in what they *represent*. ⁴And they may thus mean everything or nothing, according to the truth or falsity of the *idea* which they reflect. ⁵Confronted with such seeming uncertainty of meaning, judge it not. ⁶Remember the holy presence of the One *given* to you to be the Source of judgment. ⁷Give it to Him to judge for you, and say:

*Take this from me and look upon it, judging it for me.
Let me not see it as a sign of sin and death, nor use it for destruction.
Teach me how **not** to make of it an obstacle to peace,
But let You use it for me, to facilitate its coming.*

• Study Question •

11. This paragraph gives us a specific practice to follow whenever any form of the fear of death strikes us. Summarize that practice, and memorize the italicized lines at the end.

•

Sentence 1 is remarkable. It tells us that whenever anything seems to cause fear in us, it is never anything more than a *misperception* of the ego. The ego has perceived this thing, whatever it is, "as a symbol of fear, a sign of sin and death" (11:1). We think the *thing* is the "source of fear," but external things only *seem* to be fear's source. The real source is the ego's misperception. The ego is telling us, "This thing represents your sin, your guilt, and therefore your death." In other words, these external things are a visible reflection of our unconscious fear of, and attraction to, death.

Signs and symbols of something are not the source of anything; they only stand for something else (11:2). Ask yourself, "What does this *represent*?" That is the source. They

represent some *idea*, and if the idea is true they mean everything; if the idea is false they mean nothing (11:3–4). The idea of death is totally false, thus, it means nothing.

The meaning of everything we perceive is found in the idea that it symbolizes, and we cannot be certain of making the correct judgment about that. We may not be able to connect our external circumstances to the deeply buried obstacles to peace we've been discussing. So Jesus advises us, "Don't. Don't try to judge it yourself" (11:5). Instead, remember that the Holy Spirit has been given to us "to be the Source of judgment" (11:6). We are asked, then to give to the Holy Spirit anything that *seems* to be a source of fear, allowing Him to be the judge.

We really ought to *memorize* these four lines and use them, "When anything seems to you to be a source of fear, when any situation strikes you with terror and makes your body tremble and the cold sweat of fear comes over it." It really works!

The exercise looks something like this:

1. When you are afraid, remember that the real reason is that your ego is connecting whatever you are afraid of to the idea of fear, sin, and death.

2. Realize that the thing itself means nothing (Workbook Lesson 1); it is *the idea it symbolizes* that is the source of fear. "I have given everything I see all the meaning that it has for me" (Lesson 2). So, it is possible you could see a different meaning in it, one that would not cause fear at all. Perhaps, even a meaning that would bring you *peace*.

3. Open your mind to the Holy Spirit, and pray the prayer given in 11:8–10. (Read it over now.)

Notice that you are asking for help in changing your perception of the thing that seems to be causing your fear. You are asking to *not* make it an obstacle to peace, but rather to allow the Holy Spirit to use this thing to *facilitate* the coming of peace!

Think of some situation that seems to arouse some form of fear in you. Remember, fear has a myriad of forms: "worry, depression, anxiety, anger, hatred, jealousy" (W-pI.5.1:3), "a sense of imposition...foreboding or preoccupation" (W-pI.26.6:2), uneasiness, doubt, lack of trust...the list goes on and on. So pick one situation that arouses such a feeling in you. Identify the perceived source of the feeling, and then allow yourself to imagine that instead of seeing this as a source of any form of *fear*, you could see it as a force for *peace* in your life. Imagine looking on it and being grateful for the peace it brings!

That is the miracle that is being offered us, if we will bring these situations into prayer, asking for that shift in perception. It reminds me of an old gospel song. Once you look past the traditional language it is saying much the same thing:

Have we trials and temptations?

Is there trouble anywhere?

We should never be discouraged,

Take it to the Lord in prayer.

O what peace we often forfeit,

O what needless pain we bear,

All because we do not carry

Everything to God in prayer!

Answer Key

Section I(C): The Third Obstacle: The Attraction of Death

1. B
2. (a) B (b) A

19(C).i, The Incorruptible Body

3. D
4. C
5. D
6. The miracle which seems the hardest, certainly, would be raising the dead, or overcoming death. According to this paragraph, we have the power to accomplish this miracle first, thus proving the truth that “there is no order of difficulty in miracles.”
7. A
8. C
9. C
10. Our forgiveness of our brother.
11. When fear strikes:
 - remember that the fear does not come from the external sign or symbol we see, but from the tiny, mad idea of separation and sin.
 - remember the presence of the Holy Spirit.
 - give the object of fear to Him to judge for us.
 - say: *Take this from me...*