

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 24, *The Dream of Specialness*

Section I, *The Hidden Belief of Specialness*

You can find the explanation of underlining, italics and footnote formats at the end of the commentary.

Overview of the Section

This section links to the previous section and chapter in several ways. It begins by expanding on an idea from the last section: that the loss of peace is the sign “above all” that indicates the presence of some thought of attack or conflict, conscious or unconscious. It points out that attaining and keeping peace is the central motivation of the entire course. Much of the section then focuses on the notion of unrecognized beliefs and the power they exercise over our lives, showing how they are the source of many of our conflicts.

The focus of the section is on the topic of our belief in *specialness*, which will become the theme of this entire chapter, and a recurring topic in the chapters that follow. It once more refers to the previous section, “Above the Battleground,” when in the final paragraph it asserts that our unrecognized beliefs in specialness provide the *ground of all our battles* with one another.

Paragraph 1 (Introduction 1 (FIP))

Forget not that the motivation for this course is the attainment and the keeping of the state of peace.¹ ²Given this state the mind is quiet, and the condition in which God is remembered is attained. ³It is not necessary to tell Him what to do. ⁴He will not fail. ⁵Where He can enter, there He is already. ⁶And can it be He *cannot* enter where He wills to be? ⁷Peace will be yours because it is His will. ⁸Can you believe a shadow can hold back the will that holds the universe secure? ⁹God does not wait upon illusions to let Him be Himself; no more His Son. ¹⁰They *are*. ¹¹And what illusion that idly seems to drift between Them has power to defeat what is Their will?

¹. T-8.I.1:5-6: “Knowledge is not the motivation for learning this course. *Peace* is.”

• **Study Question** •

1. *Paragraph 1 opens by saying that the motivation for learning this course is peace, and that once we attain this peace we will remember God—we will awaken in Heaven. So all we need do is reach a state of perfect peace. This seems like a very tall order. Can you find some kind of reassurance for that in this paragraph?*
 - A. *We will find peace because it is the Will of God.*
 - B. *We will reach peace because we are so motivated (see sentence 1).*
 - C. *No shadow, no idle illusion, can prevent God's Will for peace for you.*
 - D. *We will find peace because we have experienced so much non-peace that the pain will eventually turn us toward peace.*
 - E. *A and C.*
 - F. *B and D.*

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The first sentence refers to a statement made back in Chapter 8 (see Footnote 1). Attaining and keeping peace is the motivation for this course, not knowledge. It's important to realize that the meaning of the word "knowledge" in the Course isn't just intellectual understanding; it carries the meaning of direct knowing, unitive awareness of being one with the truth. Knowledge is what the Course means in 1:2 by God being remembered.

The state of peace brings with it the ability to remember God, the ability to know directly and intuitively that we and God are One. The goal of the Course isn't that final revelation. Its goal is simply to help us get to the point where that final revelation is possible, and that means attaining and *keeping* the state of peace. If we will do that, the rest will follow of itself. We aren't responsible for anything but the goal of peace. It's inconceivable that we have to tell God what to do for us (1:3–4).

Likewise, it is inconceivable that God would not be able to enter your memory, if that is His will. In fact, since He wills it He is already there (1:5–6)! You *will* attain and keep the peace of God "because it is His will" (1:7). God's will is the power that secures the universe. Nothing can possibly stand in its way; certainly not a shadow or illusion (1:8–9). Furthermore, what is true of God is also true of His Son, that is, of you (1:9). Nothing outside of you can prevent you from *being* you. Like God, you just *are*. There is a striking parallel here to the biblical account in which God reveals His name to Moses: "I AM that I AM" (Exodus 3:14). God's name is "I AM." And YOU ARE. You share in the beingness of God, and no shadow, no illusion can hold you back from simply *being* you, in all your glory.

This is another instance where the Course is saying, in effect, you already *are* the thing you are seeking (W-318.1:5–6). Anything that says otherwise or seems to stand in the way of your "becoming" the perfect Son of God is merely a shadow or illusion with no substance to it. You do not need to *become* it, you *are* it, and the whole process of

spiritual “growth” is just clearing away the shadows and illusions that are hiding that fact from your awareness. Nothing can keep you and God from being One (1:11).

Paragraph 2 (Introduction 2 (FIP))

2 To learn this course requires willingness to question every value that you hold. ²Not one can be kept hidden and obscure but will jeopardize your learning. ³No belief is neutral; every one has power to dictate each decision you make. ⁴For a decision is a conclusion based on everything that you believe. ⁵It is the outcome of belief, and follows it as surely as does suffering follow guilt and freedom sinlessness. ⁶There is no substitute for peace. ⁷What God creates has no alternative. ⁸The truth arises from what He knows. ⁹And your decisions come from your beliefs as certainly as all creation rose in His Mind *because* of what He knows.

• Study Question •

2. *Paragraph 2 talks about the power of each belief—each one affects every decision that you make, for decision follows belief. How does the discussion in this paragraph relate to the previous paragraph?*
 - A. *It doesn't. It is a new thought.*
 - B. *It is essential that we believe (paragraph 2) that our ego cannot stop God's Will for peace for us (paragraph 1).*
 - C. *We learn this course, attain the Course's goal of peace, by being willing to question every value/belief that we hold.*

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Given that you are God simply *are*, what is required of us to learn the curriculum of the Course? This is perhaps the thing that gets in our way most often: Radical willingness “to question every value that you hold” (2:1). *Question every value!* That is a stringent and challenging requirement. It's what we need to clear the shadows and illusions away. We take far too much for granted about our thinking and our values. We think, “This is just the way it is,” or “This is just the way I am.” We have to re-evaluate our basic assumptions. We need to question it all. Yes, all of it. It all has to be brought up to the surface. Every value we hide or do not uncover risks blocking our learning process (2:2). As I have often said in teaching classes on spiritual topics, “This class may not answer all your questions, but I hope it gets you to question all your answers.” That isn't just a clever saying, it's an absolute necessity!

Some of the things we value are leading us into conflicts, conflicts that the course characterizes as “war” and “murder.” Always remember, “What is not love is murder” (T-23.IV.8:4 (CE), T-23.IV.1:10 (FIP)). The problem is exacerbated by the fact that many of these values are taken for granted and have never been questioned. Some of them we don't even see as “values,” but as “facts.” An obvious example in the Course is the way we value our bodies; when we first encounter the Course's insistence that we are

not bodies, and that the body is simply “not there”,² we freak out. It seems absurd, because we have never questioned the reality of our bodies, and neither has anyone we’ve ever known. There are many such deeply embedded beliefs and values. They should all be questioned. As we’ll see in this section, many of these are related to the basic concept of specialness.

The reason our values and beliefs are so important is simple: “No belief is neutral; every one has power to dictate each decision you make” (2:3). Another way of saying the same thing is: “All thinking produces form at some level” (T-2.VI.9:14 (FIP), T-2.X.7:2 (CE). We have no idea how many of our decisions are dictated by subconscious beliefs and values! Decisions are “based on everything that you believe” (2:4). There is an inescapable connection between beliefs and decisions (2:5). You will never decide *against* any belief you hold unless it is dictated by an even stronger belief that overrides the first one. For example, perhaps you have a strong belief in the value of sexual attractiveness, but your value of self-preservation causes you to refrain from acting on every sexual impulse.

Jesus compares the connection between beliefs and decisions to that between suffering and guilt, or freedom and sinlessness. To him (if not in our minds as yet), those are rock-solid, one hundred percent connections. But he makes an even more powerful comparison. In the latter part of the paragraph.

At first, there are some thoughts that seem like a diversion, starting with, “There is no substitute for peace” (2:6). This is reminiscent of the discussion of the final law of chaos, that there is a substitute for love, so at first it seems as if he is harking back to that. But I don’t think so. He’s giving an example of an unbreakable connection, and is pointing out that “What God creates has no alternative” (2:7). That’s why there is no substitute for peace; there is no *alternative* to peace. This is so because, “The truth arises from what He knows” (2:8). And then, in 2:9 he tells us, “Your decisions come from your beliefs as certainly as all creation rose in His Mind because of what He knows.” That’s how tight the connection is between our beliefs and decisions! Air-tight. There is no alternative, just as there is no alternative in God’s creative thought. Your decisions come from your beliefs as surely as all creation comes from what God knows.

Paragraph 3 (T-24.I.1 (FIP))

3 Love is extension. ²To withhold the smallest gift is not to know love’s purpose. ³Love offers everything forever. ⁴Hold back but *one* belief, *one* offering, and love is gone, because you asked a substitute to take its place. ⁵And now must war, the substitute for peace, come with the one alternative that you can choose for love. ⁶Your choosing it has given it all the reality it seems to have.

² (T-18.VI.9:10–10:1 (CE), T-18.VI.9:1-2 (FIP))

• **Study Question** •

3. *Let's say that you have given your child everything you have to give all of his or her life. But let's also say that one day you decide to withhold something from someone else's child. What are the results of this, according to this paragraph (there may be more than one right answer)?*
- A. *You will not know what love, what its purpose is, for love offers everything always.*
 - B. *Love will be gone.*
 - C. *War will come to take the place of love and peace.*

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Like God, we are love, because we are the extension of God. And love is extension (3:1). God's purpose for us is that we behave according to our divine nature and *extend*. That is why any hint of withholding, even the smallest gift, is proof that we don't understand love's purpose, which is *our* purpose because love is what we are (3:2). The withheld gift that has been under consideration in the ongoing message of the Course is, I believe, forgiveness. In the previous section we read these words:

Forgiveness cannot be withheld a little. Nor is it possible to attack for this and love for that and understand forgiveness. (T-23.IV.4:5-6 (CE), T-23.III.4:5-6 (FIP))

If we withhold forgiveness in any way, even the smallest way, we are not acting in accord with love. "Love offers everything forever" (3:3). We are clinging to our belief in attack in some way, instead of offering it to the Holy Spirit. We are substituting something that we value other than love — but there is no substitute for love! We're believing in that final law of chaos (3:4).

When we choose to withhold, rather than to "offer everything forever," we are choosing a substitute for love. The unavoidable result is that we get a substitute for *peace* as well: war (3:5). And war seems horribly real to us because whether we realize it or not, *we chose it* (3:6).

Paragraph 4 (I.2 (FIP))

4 Beliefs will never openly attack each other, because conflicting outcomes are impossible. ²But an *unrecognized* belief is a decision to war in secret, where the results of conflict are kept unknown and never brought to reason to be considered sensible or not.³ ³And many senseless outcomes *have* been reached, and meaningless decisions have been made and then kept hidden, to become beliefs now given power to direct all subsequent decisions. ⁴Mistake you not the power of these hidden warriors to disrupt your peace, for it is at their mercy while you decide to leave it there. ⁵The secret enemies of peace, your least decisions to choose attack instead of love, unrecognized and swift to challenge you to combat and to violence far more inclusive than you think, are there by your election. ⁶Do not deny their presence, nor their terrible results. ⁷All that can be denied is their reality, but *not* their outcome.

• Study Question •

4. *Let's say that you are a generally mild, gentle person. Yet one day, after taking it for years, you snap, and you punch out the clerk at the convenience store. What is the cause of this violence, according to this paragraph?*
- A. *Unrecognized beliefs.*
 - B. *Hidden decisions.*
 - C. *The secret enemies of peace.*
 - D. *The hidden warriors.*
 - E. *A and B.*
 - F. *All of the above.*

This paragraph attempts to explain what happens when we hold conflicting beliefs, such as a belief in peace and a belief in attack (war), and why one or the other such belief will always become unconscious. Beliefs always dictate our decisions, and our decisions lead directly to certain outcomes. A belief in war leads to decisions that result in war; a belief in peace will lead to decisions that result in peace. We cannot possibly be *simultaneously* at war and at peace. The beliefs never come into open conflict because only one of the outcomes is possible (4:1), so the other must retreat into the subconscious.

³. The second paragraph identifies the outcome (or result) as the *decision* that results from a *belief*. Given that, the meaning of this sentence seems to be that an unrecognized belief leads to unrecognized conflict between beliefs, and this state of contradiction then leads to senseless decisions. These decisions, in turn, cannot be evaluated with reason because their foundation is unseen.

This is how our belief in war drops out of our awareness, yet continues to have effects in our lives even though consciously we hold a belief in peace. It also explains why some people who openly espouse conflict and attack sometimes make decisions that lead to peace! All of us, at our core, believe in peace and want peace ⁴ But that belief goes underground if a person consciously chooses war.

When belief in war goes underground, unrecognized, our minds “secretly” make decisions that lead to war. We don’t have the opportunity to think reasonably about our reactions to things and to consider whether they are “sensible or not” (4:2). We just act. We lash out, and only afterward wonder, “Why did I do that?” These “meaningless decisions,” in turn, become additional subconscious beliefs that are “now *given* power to direct all subsequent decisions” (4:3). Unless we uproot them, they will spread like mental weeds in our garden of thought. They will continue to disrupt our peace as long as we decide to leave our peace in their power. Jesus admonishes us not to underestimate the power of these unconscious beliefs to undermine our peace (4:4). He calls them “hidden warriors.” They operate in secret, but they are there because, at some point, on some level, we have chosen to hold these beliefs. As long as we deny that we have them, and fail to take responsibility for them *and for their results*, they will continue to lead us into “combat and... violence for more inclusive than you think” (4:5–6). We will have no peace, and won’t know why.

If we looked at all this honestly and objectively, our basically sane minds would let go of the whole cycle. We’d own up to our belief in murder and let it go, every time we ran into it. If we applied the lesson from the last section about minding our feelings and watching our thoughts, when we noticed a drop in peace we would look for one of these “hidden warriors” and negate it, reject it.

When you encounter a thought of attack or murder, do not attempt to deny the presence of the thought in your mind, or your responsibility for its outcome in your life or in others’ lives. But *do* deny that this thought of murder is *really your will*. Remember that the Course insists that your will and God’s are one. This is why you may deny the reality of such thoughts (4:7).

⁴ "Do you not think the world needs peace as much as you do? Do you not want to give it to the world as much as you want to receive it? For unless you do, you will not receive it. If you will to have it of me, you must give it" (T-8.IV.4:1-4 (FIP), T-8.III.6:1-4 (CE)).

Paragraph 5 (I.3 (FIP))

5 All that is ever cherished as a hidden belief to be defended though unrecognized is faith in specialness.² This takes many forms, but always clashes with the reality of God's creation and with the grandeur which He gave His Son. ³What else could justify attack? ⁴For who could hate someone whose Self is his and Which he knows? ⁵Only the special could have enemies, for they are different and not the same. ⁶And difference of any kind imposes orders of reality, and a need to judge that cannot be escaped.⁵

• Study Question •

5. *Let's take another shot at the previous question. Why, according to this paragraph, did you punch out the clerk (there may be more than one right answer)?*
- A. *Because you innately recognized your Self in the clerk, and you have an unconscious wish to murder your Self.*
 - B. *Because the clerk seemed different from you, and this difference required you to judge him.*
 - C. *Because you thought that the grandeur God gave His Son only belonged to the clerk, not you.*
 - D. *Because your specialness seemed to need defending and this seemed like a good way to do it.*

Here, Jesus introduces a very important topic: specialness (5:1). It has been mentioned before, but at this point it becomes a dominant theme.⁶ Jesus tells us that *all* of our hidden beliefs, which we cherish and defend even when we do not recognize them, are “faith in *specialness*” (5:1). All of them! In other words, whatever our hidden warriors are that disrupt our peace, whatever form they may take, all of it boils down to a faith in specialness.

It will help to get a fairly clear idea of what the Course means by specialness. It will become even clearer as we continue to read about it, but at its simplest, the meaning is fairly obvious: It means the desire to be “special,” in contrast to others. Why is this such a pernicious idea? Simple. To be special, you must be separate! At its core, specialness is the denial of Oneness. In Robert Perry's glossary of Course terms, the entry for specialness begins with these words: “The idea of being set apart from others and set above others. Having more or being more than others.” To be special is to be different (“better”), other, set apart, separate. The assertion of the Course is that every thought of

⁵. “Orders of reality” means there is a hierarchy in reality, so that some minds are on a higher level and some are on a lower. That is why the need for judgment now cannot be escaped, because we have to judge who is higher and who is lower.

⁶ The word “specialness” occurs in the Text only nine times through Chapter 23, but it occurs 105 times in the remaining eight chapters!

attack or conflict has its roots in our desire to be special. As we shall discover in this chapter and the next, “sin rose from [specialness] out of nothingness” (T-24.II.3:3), and that “the tiny, mad desire to be separate, different, and special” is the whole root of separation (T-25.I.8:4 (CE), T-25.I.5:5 (FIP)).

So, then, every unloving thought or belief, conscious or unconscious, is rooted in specialness. It shows up in all sorts of shapes and sizes, some of them that seem quite attractive, but a bit of examination will show that, whatever the form, specialness “always clashes with the reality of God’s creation and with the grandeur which He gave His Son” (5:2). Our grandeur lies in our union with God and one another, not in separateness. Jesus undoes the whole idea of specialness by saying we are all special (in this sense!):

The specialness of God's Sons does not stem from exclusion but from inclusion. All my brothers are special" (T-1.V.3:5-6 (FIP), T-1.41.2:2-3 (CE)).

A moment’s reflection will show you that in order to justify attack of any kind, you must view what you are attacking as separate from yourself (5:3). Hating and attacking a being who shares a Self with you, the Self you know to be *you*, would be unthinkable (5:4). A person who is the same as yourself cannot conceivably be your enemy. Enemies by definition are *different* (5:5)! Once you admit “differences” into your picture of the universe, arranging the different categories in some order of relative value naturally follows. That forces us into “a need to judge that cannot be escaped” (5:6).

Paragraph 6 (I.4 (FIP))

6 What God created cannot be attacked, for there is nothing in the universe unlike itself. ²But what is different calls for judgment, and this must come from someone “better,” someone incapable of being like what he condemns, “above” it, sinless by comparison with it. ³And thus does specialness become a means and end at once. ⁴For specialness not only sets apart, but serves as grounds from which attack on those who seem “beneath” the special one is “natural” and “just.”⁷ ⁵The special ones feel weak and frail because of differences, for what would make them special *is* their enemy. ⁶And yet they protect its enmity and call it “friend.” ⁷On its behalf they fight the universe, for nothing in the world they value more.

⁷. The latter part of the sentence clarifies what it means to say that specialness has “become a means.” By elevating you above others, making you their superior, specialness provides you with a basis for judging and attacking them. Specialness, then, is a means of *attack*, for it puts you in a position in which attack on those “lower” than you seems entirely natural and appropriate.

• **Study Question** •

6. *How does feeling different from someone automatically lead to you feeling special?*
- A. *Because, being different, you must judge him. And to judge him you must be above him, better than him.*
 - B. *Because you work it around in your mind so that in whatever way you are different, your way is better, superior.*
 - C. *Because being special automatically means that you are different, since that is part of the meaning of the word “special.”*
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God created all that is, and all of it is equally a glorious extension of His Being. Nothing else, nothing *unlike* God, exists. Therefore, nothing exists that can attack God's creation (6:1).

If, however, some parts of creation, some people for instance, are different, then the need to judge arises (5:6, 6:2). The one who judges, clearly, has to be “someone ‘better,’ someone incapable of being like what he condemns, ‘above’ it, sinless by comparison with it” (6:2). Think about a time when you have judged another person and condemned them, in your mind, for what they had done. Did that experience not include the feeling that what the other person had done was something you were incapable of? “I don't understand how he could do that. I never could do anything like that.” The thought of being special is part and parcel of being judgmental, whether or not we are aware of thinking we are special.

“And thus does specialness become a means and end at once” (6:3). It is a means in the sense that you enable yourself to judge another by believing you are somehow special, different, better than them. It is the grounds for justifiable attack (6:4). And it is an end because, as you judge, you diminish the other person in your mind, and thus you generate more sense of specialness in yourself.

By increasing your sense of specialness you think you have benefited, but actually, you have *weakened* yourself because, in making yourself special, you have also made others into enemies (6:5). Yet we continue to protect our specialness, and call it “friend” (6:6). Most people, including ourselves, would fight the universe to protect our specialness (6:7).

I must say that this line of teaching in the Course has ruined an entire class of greeting cards for me:

“For someone special”

“To a special friend on his/her birthday”

“You make me feel so special”

“Happy birthday to the best mother in the world.”

And so on.

Paragraph 7 (I.5 (FIP))

7 Specialness is the great dictator of wrong decisions.⁸ ²Here is the grand illusion of what you are and what your brother is.⁹ ³And here is what must make the body dear and worth preserving. ⁴Specialness *must* be defended. ⁵Illusions can attack it and they do. ⁶For what your brother must become to keep your specialness *is* an illusion. ⁷He who is “worse” than you must be attacked, so that your specialness can live on his defeat. ⁸For specialness is triumph, and its victory is his defeat and shame. ⁹How can he live, with all your sins upon him? ¹⁰And who must be his conqueror but you?

• Study Question •

7. *Paragraph 7 is a very confrontative paragraph. It says that specialness is the great hidden belief and that it leads to attack and defense. Specialness is produced by attacking your brother, triumphing over him and making him look worse than you. What does this have to do with the common idea that I attack others because I am projecting my guilt onto them?*
- A. *Attacking to gain specialness and attacking to dump guilt are slightly different processes, even though part of the same overall ego thought system.*
 - B. *The two ideas are intimately connected, for I project my sins onto my brother (sentence 9) so that I can make him look worse and make me feel special.*

Specialness is like a *dictator*? Yes. Recall what was said earlier about the way *beliefs* have “power to *dictate* each decision you make” (2:3). And at the root of every false belief lies specialness. Therefore, specialness is “the great dictator of wrong decisions” (7:1). Until we let go of specialness, it will drive our decisions consistently in the wrong direction.

For instance, think how it affects your relationship with your brother or sister, that is, with anyone with whom you are in relationship. Your perception of yourself and your brother or sister becomes a sick illusion because of your valuing of specialness (7:2).

⁸. *The Great Dictator* is a 1940 film by Charlie Chaplin which is a satirical condemnation of Adolf Hitler. The above passage applies this parody to specialness, implying that specialness acts as a Hitler-like dictator.

⁹. *Grand Illusion* is the English title of a 1937 French film in which the grand illusion is the usefulness of war. Here, of course, it is specialness. The first reference to this film is in T-19.II.2:6: “Sin is the ‘grand illusion’ underlying all the ego’s grandiosity.” The Course, then, calls both specialness and sin “the grand illusion,” implying a close link between the two concepts. In the next section we are told that “sin rose from” the base of specialness (T-24.II.3:3).

Thinking that each of you is special (which means, probably, that you specially good and the other person specially bad, or at least not so good) makes your bodies seem real and worth preserving (7:3).

Hmmm. So, what makes the body *worth preserving* is *specialness*? The seeming implication is that if specialness were not driving our decisions and perceptions, we would realize that the body *is not* worth preserving. The Course speaks of the body losing its value and virtually disappearing:

"The Great Rays would establish the total lack of value of the special relationship, if they were seen. For in seeing them the body would disappear, because its value would be lost. And so your whole investment in seeing it would be withdrawn from it" (T-16.VI.4:5-7).

Thus, it would seem the Course thinks the body is entirely without value. But maybe not. Elsewhere, the Course speaks of other ways of seeing the value of the body:

"Remember that the Holy Spirit interprets the body only as a means of communication. Being the communication link between God and His separated Sons, He interprets everything you have in the light of what He is. The ego separates through the body. The Holy Spirit reaches through it to others. You do not perceive your brothers as the Holy Spirit does, because you do not interpret their bodies and yours solely as a means of joining their minds and uniting them with yours and mine.

"This interpretation of the body will change your mind entirely about its value. Of itself it has none. If you use it for attack, it is harmful to you. But if you use it only to reach the minds of those who believe they are bodies, and teach them through the body that this is not so, you will begin to understand the power of the mind that is in both them and you. If you use the body for this and only for this, you cannot use it for attack. In the service of uniting, it becomes a beautiful lesson in communion, which has value until communion is" (T-8.VI.2-3 (CE), T-8.VII.2:1-3:4 (FIP)).

"Once you have crossed the bridge, the value of the body is so diminished in your sight that you will see no need at all to magnify it. For you will realize that the only value the body has is to enable you to bring your brothers to the bridge with you, and to be released together there" (T-16.VI.6:4-5).

"The body, valueless and hardly worth the least defense, need merely be perceived as quite apart from you, and it becomes a healthy, serviceable instrument through which the mind can operate until its usefulness is over" (W-pI.135.8:2 (FIP) W-135.9:2 (CE)).

To me, all this makes it clear that the body's value depends on the purpose given to it. Used to foster separateness and specialness, it is harmful, and it loses that kind of value entirely once we see one another as the Holy Spirit does, with the Great Rays shining

forth from within. But it gains a different value when seen as “a healthy, serviceable instrument,” “a beautiful lesson in communion,” and “a means of communication.”

When we read that specialness is what makes the body “dear and worth preserving,” then, we are talking about the ego’s view of the body. This is what makes it valuable *to the ego*.

At first, specialness feels good. “I feel so *special*!” But alas, once we’ve become special we have to *defend* our specialness (7:4). It’s only an illusion, subject to attack from other illusions (7:5). And the “enemies” we have made out of our brothers and sisters *are* illusions, not their reality (O7:6); those illusions can and will attack our illusion of specialness.

This all sounds very theoretical and abstract. Think of it in terms of commonplace competitiveness, for instance. One house puts up “the best Christmas lights on the block.” Next year, another home outdoes them, so the first person must “defend his specialness” by improving the light show. People strive to be listed in the Guinness Book of World Records for the strangest thing. Competition to be “best” or at least “better” in some way is everywhere. Once you’ve won the title of best anything, you now must defend your title! And one “good” way to do that is by attacking those “below” you who might threaten your specialness (7:7). When you compete and win, you find specialness in the triumph (7:8).

Often, our competition or attack takes the form of projecting our own imagined sins onto the other person. We incur feelings of guilt because we are attempting to exalt our ego above others, but we suppress or deny that guilt and then project it onto the other, now perceiving *them* as being self-centered and selfish, presumptuous, perhaps guilty of trying to steal our specialness (just like we are trying to steal *theirs*). Such a low-life deserves to die (7:9)! It’s up to us to prove what a loser he or she really is (7:10).

Paragraph 8 (I.6 (FIP))

8 Would it be *possible* for you to hate your brother if you were like him? ²Could you attack him if you realized you journey with him to a goal that is the same? ³Would you not help him reach it in every way you could if his attainment of it were yours? ⁴You *are* his enemy in specialness; his friend in a shared purpose. ⁵Specialness can never share, for it depends on goals that you alone can reach. ⁶And he must never reach them, or your goal is jeopardized. ⁷Can love have meaning where the goal is triumph? ⁸And what decision can be made for this that will not hurt you?

• Study Question •

8. This paragraph says three things that, if true, mean that you would not see your brother as enemy. What are these three things—each one begins with “if”?

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Now there is a change of focus. Having portrayed the cycle of insanity that is the result of belief in specialness, Jesus asks us to consider what our thinking and acting would be like if, instead of being special, we recognized that we were the same, that we were “like him” (8:1). How could we hate anyone who is like us? What would justify attack if we realized we shared a common journey to a common goal (8:2)? If it were true (and it is) that their reaching the goal means we have reached it also, we would naturally do all we could do to help them attain it (8:3). The entire temptation to attack or compete would be totally wiped away.

Do you begin to see how belief in specialness dictates our every decision in our relationships? When you look at how things would change if we didn’t believe in specialness, it becomes quite obvious that we have to be harboring that belief. Our thinking and behavior with and without a belief in specialness are like day and night: “You *are* his enemy in specialness; his friend in a shared purpose (8:4).

If you are to reach the goal of specialness, there are goals that you *and only you* must reach. If others can share them with you, you would not be special (8:5–6). Specialness requires you to *triumph* over the competition, to be more than, better than, greater than. Can you even imagine loving the people you are competing with (8:7)? If specialness is your aim, you will make decisions that support it and move you toward it, and that has to hurt you in the end (8:8). You will engage in some form of attack, with resulting guilt. It will seem that the end justifies the means. Our human drama is filled with people who lie, cheat, steal, injure, and even murder in the attempt to become special. That’s what specialness does.

Exercise: Think of someone with whom you are in some degree of conflict or competition, or someone you judge in some way. It can be someone you know personally or perhaps a public figure. Then, try for at least a moment to see that person as your equal, as someone just like yourself, someone who shares with you the same goal of self-realization. Notice how you feel as you attempt this. Does it seem difficult? Impossible? Unfair to yourself? Dangerous? Does attempting to view this person as an equal make you feel, in some way, threatened or diminished? Can you actually view this person as a friend, even for an instant?

Paragraph 9 (I.7 (FIP))

9 Your brother is your friend *because* his Father created him like you. ²There is no difference. ³You have been given to each other that love might be extended, not cut off from one another. ⁴What you keep is lost to you. ⁵God gave you both Himself, and to remember this is now the only purpose that you share. ⁶And so it is the only one you *have*. ⁷Could you attack each other if you chose to see no specialness of any kind between you? ⁸Look fairly at whatever makes you give each other partial welcome, or would let you think that you are better off apart. ⁹Is it not always your belief your specialness is limited by your relationship? ¹⁰And is not *this* the enemy that makes you both illusions to each other?

• **Study Question** •

9. *Which ones of the following are reasons why you would attack your brother, or give him partial welcome, based on this paragraph?*
- A. *You think your brother might be more special than you are.*
 - B. *Your brother humiliated you in the eyes of others, made you look less special.*
 - C. *You think your brother is inferior, and that being associated with him takes your status down.*

Why must we assume that everyone is our equal and our friend? Because our “Father created him like you” (9:1). That person, whoever he or she is, was created by God just as you were and remains still as God created them, just as you do. “There is no difference” (9:2). That is the truth, and the whole of our spiritual growth is simply re-aligning ourselves with Truth.

Why do we so continually encounter people who rub us the wrong way, people who challenge our commitment to forgiveness? Why? To learn to love them! To learn to see the truth about them (9:3). We are supposed to extend love, not withhold it, not cut one another off. “What you keep is lost to you” (9:4). If we attempt to construct a hard shell around our hearts to safeguard our precious self, we lose it. Only in opening, in sharing, in loving, will we find who and what we truly are.

I believe this is what Jesus actually meant when, in the gospels, he taught: “Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it.” (Luke 17:33 ESV) I like the translation in the Scholar’s Version (the Jesus Seminar) even more: “Whoever tries to hang on to life will lose it, but whoever loses it will preserve it.” We are learning not to hang on to our separateness, but to “lose” it, let it go, and to extend ourselves in love, recognizing the same Self in everyone we encounter.

What is the purpose we share with this brother or sister? Indeed, we share a purpose with everyone, and *only* this one purpose: To remember that God gave Himself to us all. And since this is the only purpose that is *shared*, it is actually the only purpose any of us *have* (9:5–6). That is based on the truth: We are one. Therefore, an unshared purpose cannot exist, and if we believe we have a purpose that is independent of our brother or sister, we are deluded. The only purpose we have is to remember our union with God and all His creation.

As we saw earlier, we could not attack one another if we chose not to see any specialness (9:7). He asks us here (9:8) to look at two ways we may be engaging in specialness:

1. Giving only “partial welcome” to another person. This includes any way we limit or qualify our acceptance of the other. We should not only identify any such partiality but should also attempt to determine what it is that causes us to do so with this person. Is it something they said or did? Is it anything physical (skin color, appearance, race)?

2. Any way in which you think you would be better off staying away from this person. Again, try to identify the cause; why do you feel this way about them?

He asks us to look “fairly,” which I think includes the idea of looking without any prior assumptions, to look honestly and openly. Try to evaluate your thoughts impartially, without making excuses for yourself.

Then, he suggests what the cause of our partiality might be: Isn't it always some way in which you believe your specialness is being limited by the relationship? (9:9) It all comes down to specialness. By limiting our acceptance of another, or avoiding them entirely, we are attempting to protect our specialness. Our efforts to maintain specialness are the real “enemy” that blinds both of us to our shared Self and deceives us with illusions of one another as enemies (9:10).

Paragraph 10 (I.8:1–9 (FIP))

10 The fear of God and of each other comes from each unrecognized belief in specialness. ²For each demands the other bow to it against his will, and God Himself must honor it or suffer vengeance. ³Every twinge of malice or stab of hate or wish to separate arises here. ⁴For here the purpose that you share becomes obscured from both of you. ⁵You would oppose this course because it teaches you you are *alike*. ⁶You have no purpose that is not the same, and none your Father does not share with you. ⁷For your relationship has been made clean of special goals. ⁸And would you now defeat the goal of holiness that Heaven gave it?

• Study Question •

10. Which of the following things do you feel are attacking you and your specialness, according to this paragraph?
- A. God
 - B. Each other.
 - C. The Course.
 - D. Every judgment on yourself.
 - E. Every seeming blow and each slight.

There it is again: it is the unrecognized beliefs in specialness, the “hidden warriors,” the “secret enemies” that generate our fear of God and of each other (10:1). The unrecognized beliefs in specialness are what cause us to perceive one another as threats, our illusion of the other seeming to threaten our illusion of ourself. The emphasis on “unrecognized” and “hidden” and “secret” is unmistakable. And the message is very clear: *Specialness is our enemy* (6:5; 9:10).

We do not realize the extent to which we are committed to a belief in our separateness, our uniqueness, our specialness. We are constantly attempting to get other people to acknowledge our specialness (“bow to it”) against their own will (which wants *us* to bow to *their* specialness). We even dare to insist that *God* has to honor our specialness “or suffer vengeance” (10:2). Our egos want the entire created universe, including God, to recognize just how wonderful and amazing they are! The ego’s arrogance really breaks cover here with the thought that it, or we, could in some manner wreak vengeance upon God!

When you read 10:3, does it seem familiar somehow? A “twinge” of malice, a “stab” of hate...very recently those modifiers were attached to other nouns, when the Course was telling us how we can detect unconscious thoughts of murder:

Even in forms you do not recognize, the signs you know. There is a stab of pain, a twinge of guilt, and above all, a loss of peace. (T-23.IV.6:2–3)

It is that “twinge of malice” that evokes the corresponding “twinge of guilt.” It is the “stab of hate” that evokes the “stab of pain.” It is the “wish to separate” that brings on the “loss of peace.” A belief in separateness is a thought of murder.

Our unrecognized beliefs in specialness causes us to lose sight of our common purpose (10:4). It lies behind our stubborn resistance to the message of the Course: Our egos simply cannot tolerate the idea so central to the Course that we are *alike*, not special (10:5).

"Though every aspect is the whole, you cannot know this until you see that every aspect is the same, perceived in the same light and therefore one ... Help Him to give His gift of light to all who think they wander in the darkness, and let Him gather them into His quiet sight that makes them one.

They are all the same; all beautiful and equal in their holiness" (T-13.VIII.5:3,6–6:1 (FIP), T-13.IX.5:3,6–6:1 (CE)).

In a holy relationship, both individuals have the same purpose, and have no separate purposes. All their purposes are shared with one another and with God. There are no special goals, differing for different individuals. To resurrect special goals would be to undermine “the goal of holiness that Heaven gave it” (10:6–8).

Paragraph 11 (I.8:10–I.9 (FIP))

11 What perspective can the special have that does not change with every seeming blow, each slight or fancied judgment on itself? ²Those who are special must defend illusions against the truth. ³For what is specialness but an attack upon the will of God? ⁴You love your brother not while it is this you would defend against him. ⁵This is what he attacks and you protect. ⁶Here is the ground of battles which you wage against him.¹⁰ ⁷Here must he be your enemy and not your friend. ⁸Never can there be peace among the different. ⁹He is your friend *because you are the same.*

• Study Question •

11. *Why is specialness an attack on the will of God?*

- A. *It is based on illusions that must be defended against the truth..*
- B. *Our specialness is a challenge to God's specialness..*
- C. *It keeps us from loving one another, which is God's will..*

•

That first sentence really catches the image of a bruised ego, doesn't it? Notice that it speaks of a *seeming* blow, a *fancied* judgment on itself. The wounds our egos experience are so very often things we make up or imagine. Someone passes us without smiling at us and we are sure

¹⁰. This is clearly a reference to the recent section “Above the Battleground” (T-23.IV). The point of this reference is that the desire for specialness is the root cause of our battles with our brothers.

they are angry with us, and we feel annoyed or even a bit angry at them for holding some unknown grudge against us. We see slights everywhere, often without any real evidence.

When a person is viewing reality through the skewed lens of their ego, nothing they see or say can be trusted. They are at the mercy of all the imagined attacks, changing with every shift of the wind (11:1). They not only have to defend against illusions, they must also defend against the truth (11:2). Specialness attacks the Oneness that is the will of God, so Truth is its ultimate enemy (11:3). When we think our brother is attacking us, threatening our specialness, we are defending our own attack on God's Will. It's impossible to genuinely love another person while that is our state of mind (11:4).

The imagery of the battle returns again, confirming that Jesus has had this in mind all along. The "ground of battles" is our belief in specialness. We protect our specialness, and that is what our brothers seem to attack (11:5–6). Earlier it was said, "You are his enemy in specialness; his friend in a shared purpose" (6:4). Now it is virtually repeated: "Here [in specialness] must he be your enemy and not your friend" (11:7).

If you believe in specialness (and you do, though in unrecognized forms), *everyone* must be your enemy. "Specialness *must* be defended" (7:4). Two persons who are different can never be perfectly at peace. But your brother isn't different, he is the same; *therefore*, he is your friend (11:8–9).

A holy relationship is about learning this lesson with a single person so that it can then be extended to the world.

• Study Question •

12. *Summary: As a way of summarizing this section, please gather a list of the negative effects of specialness (you should get quite a number, ten at the very least).*

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Legend:

Light underscoring indicates emphasis that appears in the Urtext or shorthand notes.

The Text is taken from the Circle of Atonement's Complete and Annotated Edition (which I refer to as the "CE" for "Complete Edition" or "Circle Edition"). Please be aware that, even when the wording is identical to the FIP version, the division into paragraphs is often entirely different in the CE, which restores the paragraph breaks found in the original notes. This results in different reference numbering as well. I will indicate for each paragraph the corresponding sentences in the FIP edition. You should be able to locate specific sentences in that edition if you need to, with a minimum of visual clutter in the commentary. Passages that lie outside the current section will continue to have footnoted references. References to quotations are from the CE unless another version is being quoted, in which case that version is indicated.

Footnotes by the commentary author are shown in this font and size. Other footnotes come from the Complete Edition itself.

Answer Key

1. E
2. C.
3. A,B,C
4. E
5. B,D
6. A
7. B
8. If you were like him; if your journeyed with him to the same goal; if his attainment of the goal were perceived as yours.
9. A,B,C
10. A,B,C,D,E
11. A and C
12. is a hidden belief, that, unrecognized, causes you to decide for war (3:1)
causes decisions that hurt you (6)
clashes with the grandeur God gave His Son (3:2)
justifies attack, causes enemies, demands judgment, sets apart (4)
makes attack and judgment on the inferior ones seem natural and just (4)
makes you feel weak and frail (4)
grand illusion of what you and your brother are; makes you both illusions (5)
must be defended against illusions (5)
demands your brother's defeat and shame (5)
demands that your sins are put on him (5)
can never share (6)
makes love meaningless (6)

what you keep is lost to you (7)

makes you attack brother, give him partial welcome (7)

causes fear of God and of each other (8)

causes every twinge of hate, stab of malice, wish to separate (8)

makes you oppose course (8)

makes your perspective change with each slight,blow and self-judgment (8)

makes you defend illusion against the truth (9)

is an attack on God's Will (9)

this is battleground with your brother, can never be at peace (9)