

Study Guide and Commentary

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

Section II

The Treachery of Specialness

Overview of the Section

This section contains one of several attempts the Course makes to answer the infamous question, “How did the separation happen?” As with all such attempts, it does a decent job of explaining *what* happened without really answering *why* or *how* it could have happened. This is so because, in fact, *the separation never happened at all*, and all that can be described is the illusion of it we have formed in our minds.

It also shows us that specialness, which promises us happiness, actually ends up preventing us from recognizing the truth about ourselves, our brothers, and God

Paragraph 1

Comparison *must* be an ego device, for love makes none. ²Specialness *always* makes comparisons. ³It is *established* by a lack seen in another, and maintained by searching for and keeping clear in sight all lacks it can perceive. ⁴This does it seek, and this it looks upon. ⁵And *always* whom it thus diminishes would be your savior, had you not chosen to make of him instead a tiny measure of your specialness. ⁶Against the littleness you see in him, you stand as tall and stately, clean and honest, pure and unsullied by comparison with what you see. ⁷Nor do you understand it is *yourself* that you diminish thus.

• Study Question •

1. *Since we are not truly special—we are all the perfect Son of God, and therefore equally grand and holy—what do our minds do in order to establish and maintain a sense of specialness? (One sentence answer should be enough.)*

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Love makes no comparisons (1:1). Think about that. Comparison *assumes* separateness. It usually sees one as “better” than the other. Comparison is a subtle form of attack, and it forms the basis of specialness. That’s why “specialness *always* makes

comparisons” (1:2). To say someone is special is an *implicit* comparison. What makes one person special *begins* by perceiving some kind of (comparative!) lack in one or more other persons. Specialness is *maintained* by keeping a sharp eye out for every lack that can be found (1:3). So specialness is always looking for lacks in others, and it always sees what it is looking for (1:4).

The tragic thing is that as our specialness attempts to magnify itself by diminishing others, the very people our specialness sees as lacking are the people who *could* be our saviors (1:5). We'll see more about our brother as our savior a bit later.

The Course says we “make of him a tiny measure of your specialness.” A little later, it says we “use him as the gauge for littleness” (2:4). It calls up a picture of holding yourself alongside this other person and comparing certain qualities, looking for any ways in which the “size” or calibre of his quality is less than yours, thus diminishing his overall value and exalting your own. You see littleness in him, and comparing yourself to him, “you stand as tall and stately, clean and honest, pure and unsullied” (1:6).

What we fail to understand when we put down others in order to puff ourselves up is that we are not diminishing our brother at all. We're actually diminishing ourselves (1:7). This isn't a profound or obscure psychological insight, it's actually common knowledge. Often, when we observe another person engaging in this kind of self-aggrandizing comparison, we may observe, “He's being so petty and small-minded!” We recognize quite readily that the person doing the comparison lacks self-esteem and is trying to steal it at the expense of someone else, and our opinion of them is diminished accordingly. Alas! Far too often, however, we fail to recognize the same littleness in ourselves.

Paragraph 2

2 Pursuit of specialness is always at the cost of peace. ²Who can attack his savior and cut him down, and recognize his strong support? ³Who can detract from his omnipotence, and *share* his power? ⁴And who can use him as the gauge for littleness, and be *released* from limits? ⁵You have a function in salvation. ⁶*Its* pursuit will bring you joy. ⁷But the pursuit of specialness *must* bring you pain. ⁸Here is a goal that would *defeat* salvation, and thus run *counter* to the will of God. ⁹To value specialness is to esteem an alien will, to which illusions of yourself *are* dearer than the truth.

• **Study Question** •

2. *Why does the pursuit of specialness bring pain? (See 2:2–4 and 2:8–9; more than one of the following may be correct.)*
- A. *Pursuing specialness is an attempt to defeat salvation and God's Will; since only siding with salvation brings joy, this brings pain.*
 - B. *Pursuing specialness brings us into conflict with our brothers, which can be painful.*
 - C. *Pursuing specialness cuts us off from the support, power and release from limits our brothers can offer to us.*
 - D. *All of the above.*

In the last chapter (T-23.IV.12:5) we were told that a sense of loss of peace is the sure sign you are being tempted by a murderous thought, even if you don't recognize it as a form of murder. With that in mind, when I read this first sentence (2:1) another connection becomes apparent. If a loss of peace is a sure sign of a murderous thought, and the pursuit of specialness always costs us our peace (2:1), then clearly we can conclude: *the pursuit of specialness is a murderous thought*. This discussion of specialness is trying to make us aware that our seeking of specialness, our addiction to comparing differences, is a form of attack and murder that we generally don't recognize as such.

It's a bit distressing to realize how deeply embedded in our culture and in our education comparison and competition are. Sport competitions, and even grades in school, are a form of comparison, a means of attaining specialness. We glorify the sports hero. We award special prizes to academic excellence. People boast of their Nobel and Pulitzer prizes, their Oscars and Tonys and Emmys. It seems that we encourage the pursuit of specialness in our children from an early age, and in many different ways.

We even engage in competition by proxy, arguing with people over which TV show is best, which movie, which pop musician. Always comparing! And we think we somehow gain specialness by association with the best. Witness the celebrations in the cities whose baseball team wins the World Series.

The point here, I feel, is that we need to become more aware of the desire for specialness in many areas of our lives, areas that we have left unexamined, for the most part. We must begin to pay attention to the drop in peace within us when we engage in these things, and be willing to relinquish all specialness.

When we attack anyone, cutting them down to exalt our own feelings of specialness, we lose all hope of that person's strong support (2:2). We cannot accept the support of his strength while at the same time we ridicule the idea of his omnipotence (2:3). We insist on seeing him as smaller than ourselves to support our own superiority, but while we focus on *measuring* ourselves we trap ourselves in limitation (2:4).

We imagine that pursuing specialness will bring us joy; instead, it robs us of peace and brings us pain (2:7). The thing that *will* bring us joy is the pursuit of our function in

salvation (2:5–6). We've had hints before what that might be. For instance, T-18.III.8:1 (CE) tells us that our function is bringing light (that we found within ourselves) to the darkness around us. But our true function is only touched on here and then brushed by, to concentrate first on our *false* goal—what it consists of and why it *won't* bring us joy.

Pursuing specialness will bring us pain because it is, literally, the opposite of true salvation, which is Oneness or union. It runs completely “counter to the will of God” (2:8). If we value specialness, we are declaring that our illusions of ourselves are more true and precious than the truth as God sees it (2:9).

Paragraph 3

3 Specialness is the idea of sin *made* real. ²Sin is impossible even to imagine without this base. ³For sin rose from it out of nothingness, an evil flower with no roots at all. ⁴Here is the self-made savior, the creator which creates *unlike* the Father and which made His Son like to itself, and *not* like unto Him. ⁵His *special* sons are many, *never* one, each one in exile from himself and Him of Whom they are a part. ⁶Nor do they love the Oneness Which created them as one with Him. ⁷They chose their specialness *instead* of Heaven and *instead* of peace, and wrapped it carefully in sin to keep it “safe” from truth.

• Study Question •

3. (a) *How is specialness related to the idea of sin?*

- A. *Specialness is a sin.*
- B. *Specialness is the base, or root, of the idea of sin.*
- C. *Specialness is obtained by seeing sin in others.*

(b) *Optional short essay: Try to explain how the idea of sin arises from specialness.*

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This very important paragraph tells us that specialness is the basis upon which the entire ego thought system of sin, guilt, and fear is built (3:1–2). Without the concept of specialness, sin would be inconceivable. Sin requires differences and separateness, which are key aspects of specialness. If we were all one, all the same, all equally holy aspects of God, there would be no differences, and no separate entities who could attack and steal from other entities. No one would be special, and therefore, the idea of sin would be impossible.

Because the Son of God welcomed the idea of specialness into his mind, the idea of sin took root and grew out of this imaginary soil (3:3). At this point, Jesus begins to speak of specialness as though it were a living thing, a being who is self-made, and who creates “special sons” like itself (3:4-5). In calling specialness a “savior,” he is pointing to our false belief that specialness will save us, or will make us happy. Specialness, he says,

“creates *unlike* the Father.” We know from many statements elsewhere that specialness cannot truly create, but we think or believe it can.

I believe the word “Son” is capitalized in 3:4 because it refers to God’s Son, or the Christ. Specialness made God’s holy Son “like to itself.” The presence of the word “make” rather than “create” shows that the Son now *believes* he is separate, special, and unlike the Father. Specialness does not make just one son, unlike God, Who creates only one Son (T-9.VI.3:5) Specialness always makes many sons, all separate from one another and from God (“of Whom they are a part” (3:5)). This is the process by which the original error, the idea of specialness, has splintered into billions of human beings who all believe they are separate and different from one another.

What’s more, these splintered, special sons do not love the Oneness that actually created them as part of Itself (3:6). They (that is, we) have chosen specialness *instead* of Heaven and peace, and we have clothed specialness with garments of sin, which we in our egos believe will keep our specialness away from God and God’s love (3:7).

Paragraph 4

4 You are *not* special. ²If you think you are and would defend your specialness against the truth of what you *really* are, how can you know the truth? ³What answer that the Holy Spirit gives can reach you, when it is your specialness to which you listen, and which asks *and answers*? ⁴Its tiny answer, soundless in the melody which pours from God to you eternally in loving praise of what you are, is all you listen to. ⁵And that vast song of honor and of love for what you are seems silent and unheard before *its* mightiness. ⁶You strain your ears to hear *its* soundless voice, and yet the call of God Himself is soundless to you.

• Study Question •

4. According to this paragraph, what is keeping us from hearing the Holy Spirit’s message of loving praise for what we are?
- A. We are too sinful to hear Him; we need to purify ourselves first.
 - B. The Call of God is soundless, so we cannot hear it.
 - C. Our minds are preoccupied with the pursuit of specialness.

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We think we are special. We all do. And most of us think we are better than most other people. It is a socially acceptable idea that to be special is a good thing. We send one another greeting cards telling each another how special we are, and we believe we are complimenting each other when we do it. Parents lovingly assure their children that they are special.

When the Course flatly states, “You are *not* special” (4:1), at first it seems like a slap in the face. It runs counter to our deeply ingrained belief in the value of specialness.

Imagine a husband telling his wife that she isn't special. She would probably question his love. Imagine hearing a father tell his children that they are *not* special. You might even think about reporting him for child abuse.

We need to re-examine our views of specialness.

Consider that if you insist on your specialness, you are denying “the truth of what you *really* are” (4:2). How could you ever come to know the truth about yourself if you insist on a diametrically opposite picture of yourself: not a part of the One, but a separate, special individual (4:2)?

In our insanity we ask, “What am I?” The message of our wholeness and holiness is constantly sounding throughout the universe, a “vast song of honor,” “the melody which pours from God to you eternally in loving praise of what you are,” but our ears are tightly tuned in to the “tiny answer” given by our specialness (4:3–5), blocking out the call of God. The voice of specialness is actually soundless, and yet somehow we choose to hear it and render the Voice for God soundless (4:6).

As long as we continue to try to make our separate, special self real, we make ourselves unreachable by the Holy Spirit.

Paragraph 5

5 You can defend your specialness, but never will you hear the Voice for God beside it. ²They speak a different language and they fall on different ears. ³To every special one a different message, and one with different meaning, is the truth. ⁴Yet how can truth be different to each one? ⁵The special messages the special hear convince them they are different and apart; each in his special sins and safe from love, which does not see his specialness at all. ⁶Christ's vision is their enemy, for it sees not what they would look upon, and it would show them that the specialness they think they see is an illusion.

• Study Question •

5. *Why, in our specialness, does Christ's vision seem to be our “enemy”?*
(More than one may be correct.)
- A. *Christ's vision does not see our specialness.*
 - B. *Christ's vision shows us that the specialness we think we see is an illusion.*
 - C. *Christ's vision does not see what we want to see.*
 - D. *All of the above.*

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We try to defend our specialness, and render ourselves deaf to the Voice for God (5:1). It's as if we have set our minds to understand only Ancient Greek, while the message of God is being broadcast in modern English. We just can't understand what is

being said (5:2). This is why it is so imperative for us to abandon the thought of being special in any way.

The First Law of Chaos was that truth is different for everyone, and that is what the message of specialness professes. Each of us is seeking to be special, which requires being different (5:3). But truth is truth. How can it possibly be different for each one of us (5:4)?

When we defend our specialness, we view the truth about us as an enemy, because it simply cannot see any specialness, but sees only Oneness. Specialness is just an illusion to the vision of Christ, and in our specialness we don't want to hear that message (5:5–6).

Paragraph 6

6 What would they see instead? ²The shining radiance of the Son of God, so like his Father that the memory of Him springs instantly to mind. ³And with this memory, the Son remembers his own creations, as like to him as he is to his Father. ⁴And all the world he made, and all his specialness, and all the sins he held in its defense against himself will vanish as his mind accepts the truth about himself, as it returns to take their place. ⁵This is the only “cost” of truth: You will no longer see what never was, nor hear what makes no sound. ⁶Is it a sacrifice to give up nothing and receive the love of God forever?

• Study Question •

6. *If we no longer saw specialness, asks the Text, what would we see? And what two memories would result from that sight? The answers are below; arrange them in the sequence in which they would occur, were we to let go of our specialness.*
- A. *The memory of God.*
 - B. *The radiance of the Son of God.*
 - C. *The memory of our creations.*

What would we see if, for a moment at least, we tore our eyes away from their fixed focus on specialness (6:1)? Freed of illusions, our eyes would see “the shining radiance of the Son of God, so like his Father...” (6:2). We would see this in ourselves as well as in others. What a joy it would be to see this shining radiance *in ourselves*, a radiance so unbelievably like the very light of God Himself! So like it, in fact, that in that it would instantly remind us of God, and we would remember Him. Then, as a natural consequence of recognizing our true Self and our Father, we would remember as well our true creations, which are just as much like our Self as our Self is like to the Father (6:3).

When the reality of our Self, our Father, and our creations returns to our awareness, the *unreality* of our specialness, our sins (which we imagined could defend us from the truth of our holiness), and all the world we made (not created) in which to play out the

drama of separation, simply vanishes because the truth has erased all illusions (6:4). The Truth is without cost; it simply *is*. What seems to be its cost is nothing more than the absence of hallucinations, both visual and auditory (6:5). To think of this “loss” as sacrifice is absurd (6:6)!

Paragraph 7

7 You who have chained your savior to your specialness and given it his place, remember this: He has not lost the power to forgive you all the sins you think you placed between him and the function of salvation given him for you. ²Nor will you change his function, any more than you can change the truth in him and in yourself. ³But be you certain that the truth is just the same in both. ⁴It gives no different messages and has one meaning. ⁵And it is one you both can understand, and one which brings release to both of you. ⁶Here stands your brother with the key to Heaven in his hand, held out to you.¹ ⁷Let not the dream of specialness remain between you. ⁸What is one is joined in truth.

• Study Question •

7. Which of the following things is **not** a term or phrase said to be true of our brother in this paragraph?
- A. He holds out the key to Heaven to you.
 - B. The truth in him is the same as the truth in you.
 - C. He is your savior.
 - D. He has the power to forgive you all your sins.
 - E. His function has been changed because you have chained him to specialness.

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How can we come to see with Christ's Vision, with all the sights it brings of our Self, the memory of God and of our creations? As the Course reminds us repeatedly, we cannot do it alone.² Coming to Christ's Vision involves our “savior,” that is, someone we have a relationship with (7:1). There is a lot packed into this long sentence! You have “chained your savior to your specialness” and have replaced him (or her) with your specialness; that is, you are trying to use your relationship partners to feed your specialness.

Nevertheless, “he” or she “has *not* lost the power to forgive you all the sins you think you placed between him and the function of salvation *given* him for you.” We only *think*

¹ Matthew 16:19 (RSV): “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” In the above passage, our brother is our savior, holding out to us the key to Heaven, but we have refused his gift because we have seen our *specialness* as our savior and him as its enemy.

² T-5.III.8:1, T-7.VIII.7:2 (FIP), T-5.IV.10:1, T-7.VII.8:2 (CE)

we have erected a barrier made of sins, of our belief in the “wrongs” he or she (our savior) has done to us, and those that we have to our savior. We think this barrier prevents our savior from fulfilling the function given to him or her by God, namely, to save us! But it does *not*.

No matter what we think we may have done, or that our savior has done, that function, given to our savior by God, remains unchanged. We cannot change it any more than we can change the truth our ourselves or about our savior (7;2).

You should remember by now that the reason we cannot save ourselves alone is that *we are not alone*. We are one. Therefore, anything true of one is true of the other as well. All of us are inheritors of the divine nature, children of our Father. If our savior’s function to save us is unchanged, likewise *our* function to save our savior is also unchanged (7:3). The Truth is the same for both of us. Truth is *not* different for everyone (7:4). What’s more, the truth is *understandable* by us both, equally so, and brings both of us equal release (7:5). Each of us has the power to forgive the other of all their sins (7:1).

Look at your relationship partners! They are your saviors. They hold the key to Heaven in their hands, and they are offering it *to you* (7:6). Don’t allow your foolish dream of specialness to remain between you, hiding the truth from you both (7:7). You are not separate from one another, different, or special; you are one, and you are joined in truth (7:8).

For us to realize the truth about our Self, and our savior’s Self, we must let go of specialness, we must stop defending it and trying to make it better than or more than someone else’s. We must accept our equality in God.

Paragraph 8

8 Think of the loveliness that you will see within yourself when you have looked on him as on a friend. ²He *is* the enemy of specialness, but only friend to what is real in you. ³Not one attack you thought you made on him has taken from him the gift that God would have him give to you. ⁴His need to give it is as great as yours to have it. ⁵Let him forgive you all your specialness, and make you whole in mind and one with him again. ⁶He waits for your forgiveness only that he may return it unto you. ⁷It is not God Who has condemned His Son, but only you, to save his specialness and kill his Self.

• **Study Question** •

8. *Our brother has a gift God wants him to give to us: He has a need to “forgive all your specialness and make you whole in mind and one with him.” What needs to occur before he can give us this gift of forgiveness?*
- A. *We need to look upon him as a friend and savior.*
 - B. *He waits only for our forgiveness.*
 - C. *God must cease to condemn us and forgive us.*

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When we have learned to look on our relationship partners as true friends, and nothing but friends to our real Self, rather than enemies to our specialness, we will be amazed at the loveliness that we will see within *ourselves* (8:1–2). Because we have stopped focusing on specialness, the sight of our Reality will dawn on us.

You may think you’ve damaged your brother or sister with your attacks, but the gift God gave them to give to you remains untouched, still waiting for you to receive it (7:3). Your savior needs to give the gift as much as you need to receive it (7:4)!

Sentence 5 makes it sound as if we can determine whether or not our savior can forgive us our specialness (7:5). “*Let him forgive you...*” (my emphasis). We must be willing to be forgiven. We must have faith that we deserve to be forgiven. How can we release our savior’s forgiveness toward us? Simple. “He waits for your forgiveness only that he may return it unto you” (7:6). His forgiveness of you is being held up by only one thing: your unforgiveness of him. “Forgive, and you will be forgiven” (Luke 6:37 ESV).³ God does not need to forgive you because He has never condemned you (T-13.I.13:6 (CE), T-13.I.9:4 (FIP)). You have done that to yourself (7:7). God does not suffer from the delusion of sin, which is a uniquely human flaw.

Paragraph 9

9 You have come far along the way of truth; too far to falter now.
²Just one step more and every vestige of the fear of God will melt away in love. ³Your brother’s specialness and yours *are* enemies, and bound in hate to kill each other and deny they are the same. ⁴Yet it is not illusions that have reached this final obstacle that seems to make God and His Heaven so remote that they cannot be reached.⁴ ⁵Here in this holy place does truth stand waiting to receive you both in silent blessing, and in peace so real and so encompassing that *nothing* stands outside it.

³ The Course makes it clear that forgiveness reaches you through your brother.

⁴ “This final obstacle” is “the fear of God” (see second sentence in paragraph). This is the final obstacle to peace (T-19.IV.D). The above paragraph pictures us standing before the final obstacle, with “Just one step more” before we pass beyond it.

• **Study Question** •

9. *The fear of God is the last obstacle to peace (T-19.IV(D)); here, in the holy relationship, we are about to see it “melt away in love” (9:2). The condemnation of our brother, which we see as in God and therefore fear for ourselves, comes not from God but from us. If we have come far along the way of truth, and yet it is not illusions (our specialness) that has reached this point, what is it that has reached this final obstacle?*
- A. *The Holy Spirit.*
 - B. *Our right mind.*
 - C. *The Christ in us.*

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Jesus turns now to some reassurance, reminding us of how far we have already come “along the way of truth” (9:1). It’s a good thing for us all to take inventory once in a while, and to recognize our progress. The ego is quick to remind us of any remaining flaws; we should be as quick to remind ourselves of our accomplishments. Just the fact that you are taking the time to study the Course, making a real effort to understand it and to apply it, is a miracle. You are one of a fairly small percentage of humanity! But we don’t need to compare ourselves to others, which tends to fall into the very trap of specialness that we are trying to avoid! Just compare yourself *now* to where you were ten or fifteen years ago! You *have* “come far”!

But our very progress needs to serve as motivation to go farther, not to falter on the way. “Just one step more” is all that is asked. We are so close to seeing “every vestige of the fear of God...melt away in love” (9:2). The step being asked is not a small one, but neither is it difficult, as we shall see in the next few paragraphs. Take a moment, now, to take stock and to pat yourself on the back, reminding yourself of what you have already done and reassuring yourself that you can take this next step.

Yes, specialness has taken deep roots in you and in your brother, and both of you have engaged in murderous thoughts, aimed at tearing down the other to fortify your own specialness (9:3). Yes, you have stubbornly resisted any notion that you might be (Oh, horror!) *the same*. But it isn’t the specialness in you, or in your brother, that has made all this progress on the spiritual journey (9:4). It isn’t specialness that has brought you to confront this final obstacle, the fear of God. There is something in you both that has constantly impelled you onward. The truth in you stands ready “to receive you both in silent blessing,” waiting to fill your consciousness with the realization that It is the truth of you and of all things (9:5).

In a meditation written for January 2, 2018, Richard Rohr voices the same imperative for seeing beyond our specialness:

Once you can clear away the web of illusion you will be able to see that every created thing is still made in the image of God; every being has the divine DNA or essence. ...contemplation helps us see “beyond the shadow and the disguise” of things (as Thomas Merton reflected) so as to perceive reality at its depths. “Christ

is everything and he is in everything” (Colossians 3:11). To see this is to have “the mind of Christ.” (<https://cac.org/how-can-everything-be-sacred-2018-01-02/>)

Paragraph 10

10 Leave all illusions of yourself outside this place, to which you come in hope and honesty. ²Here is your savior *from* your specialness. ³He is in need of your acceptance of himself as part of you, as you of his. ⁴You are alike to God as God is like to Himself. ⁵He is not special, for He would not keep one part of what He is unto Himself, not given to His Son but kept for Him alone. ⁶And it is this you fear, for if He is not special, then He willed His Son be like Him, and your brother *is* like you—not special, but possessed of everything, *including* you.

• Study Question •

10. (a) “Here is your savior...” Who is being referred to? For help, read the rest of the paragraph, and also 9:3 and 9:5.

- A. Your brother.
- B. Jesus.
- C. The truth.

(b) Your brother and you have a similar need; to accept each other as part of one another. If the final obstacle is the fear of God, and God is not special (10:4), why do we fear this (see 10:5-6)? (More than one answer may be correct.)

- D. We fear God’s lack of specialness because it means that our brother is like us, equally loved by God.
- E. We fear God’s lack of specialness because it means that we are part of our brother, contained in him as he is in us.
- F. We fear God’s lack of specialness because it means that we are not special, being created like God.
- G. All of the above.

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The step we are all being asked to take is to drop all our illusions at the door of the temple, and to enter this holy place of Oneness and truth “in hope and honesty” (10:1). Our brother (or sister) is there already, waiting for us, waiting to save us from our specialness (10:2). We need to accept one another as a part of ourselves (10:3).

When you first look at this it seems like an enormous step, a gigantic revision of our basic sense of self. And it is. This is not being one with somebody in the rather shallow sense of shared goals or values. It means that we literally recognize that the two of us are really not distinct entities at all, but units within a larger, corporate consciousness. It means knowing that what I do to my brother I am doing to myself, as literally as it would be if when I touched his arm with a hot iron, *my* arm would blister. It would mean

complete cessation of all sense of separateness or difference. It means being entirely free of the idea that, according to the Workbook, characterizes our belief in separateness, and stems in fact from our fear of God:

The dreary, hopeless thought that you can make attacks on others and escape yourself has nailed you to the cross. Perhaps it seemed to be salvation. Yet it merely stood for the belief the fear of God is real (W-pI.pI.196.5:1-3).

If we are separate from one another and from God, then I can attack you without injury to myself. However, this also means that God is free to attack me, to punish me for my “sins.” He can keep me from finding happiness and salvation as my separate self.

The fact is that we are “alike to God as God is like to Himself” (10:4), and *God is not special!* God holds back nothing from His Son; He keeps nothing for Himself alone (10:5). What we fear even more than God’s punishment is God’s lack of specialness! Because that means that, if God has created all of us like Himself, then, because God is not special, *I am not special and my brother is not special either* (10:6). My brother is like me. He possesses everything (as I do), which means he possesses *me!* It means the utter end of all specialness.

Paragraph 11

11 Give him but what he has, remembering God gave Himself to *both* of you in equal love, that both might share the universe with Him Who chose that love could never be divided and kept separate from what it is and must forever be. ²You *are* your brother’s; part of love was not denied to him. ³But can it be that you have lost because *he* is complete? ⁴What has been given him makes you complete, as it does him. ⁵God’s love gave you to him and him to you *because* He gave Himself. ⁶What is the same as God is one with Him. ⁷And only specialness could make the truth of God and you as one seem anything but Heaven, and the hope of peace at last in sight.

• Study Question •

11. *Why is our brother’s completion and oneness with God not something that should engender fear or a sense of loss?*
- A. *Because what is the same as God is one with Him.*
 - B. *Because what has been given our brother has been given also to us; we are complete with him.*
 - C. *Because we can trust our brother to share his completion with us.*
-

This, then, is the step we are called upon to take: to recognize that our brothers and sisters, all of them, are equals, and more than our equals, they are part of us, and we of them. God willed that His “love could never be divided and kept separate from what it

is and must forever be” (11:1), which requires that God and God’s love be given to us all equally. It means that you and I must stop trying to be special!

“You *are* your brother’s.” You are a part of love that *had* to be shared with him (or her) and with everyone (11:2). Don’t imagine that being given to your brother means you have lost anything (11:3). He has been given to you just as much as you have been given to him. You and he and all of us are equally parts of divine love, shared equally with every other part, along with God’s very own being (11:4–5). Each of us is part of God, and God gave Himself to each of us. In doing so He gave each of us to everyone else. You and I are the same as God, thus we are one with Him. This oneness is sheer Heaven, it is bliss, it is marvelous and wonderful, bringing with it the peace we have longed for during our entire existence. Only the twisted, skewed insanity of specialness could make this seem like anything less than Heaven (11:6–7).

Paragraph 12

12 Specialness is the seal of treachery upon the gift of love. ²Whatever serves its purpose must be given to kill. ³No gift that bears its seal but offers treachery to giver and receiver. ⁴Not one glance from eyes it veils but looks on sight of death. ⁵Not one believer in its potency but seeks for bargains and for compromise that would establish sin love’s substitute and serve it faithfully. ⁶And no relationship that holds its purpose dear but clings to murder as safety’s weapon and the great defender of all illusions from the “threat” of love.

• Study Question •

12. Which of the following things are said to be true of specialness (the desire to be special) in this paragraph? More than one is true.
- A. Specialness turns all gifts of love into treachery for both the giver and the receiver.
 - B. Anything that serves the purpose of specialness actually has the purpose of killing.
 - C. Certain forms of special love are good and beneficial.
 - D. Specialness attempts to establish sin as the substitute for love.
 - E. A relationship based on specialness will believe that murder is a necessary tool for self-defense and safety.

•

When we exalt specialness, we are betraying the gift of love. We are making something heavenly into something ugly and gross (12:1). To promote specialness is to kill love (12:2). Every gift of specialness is tainted with a fatal poison. It’s like giving a birthday present to a friend which explodes when opened (12:3). It blinds our eyes to love and shows us death instead (12:4). When we believe in the power of specialness, we will always end up putting sin, guilt, judgment, and blame in place of love as the tools for our

imagined self-aggrandizement (12:5). A relationship that continues to value specialness is a relationship dedicated to murder as the best defense against “the ‘threat’ of love” (12:6).

Think for a moment of what this is saying in a practical sense. It is saying that when we pursue relationships based on *special love*, we are really participating in a murderous act. Love is meant to be shared with everyone, not limited to a select few.

Paragraph 13

13 The hope of specialness makes it seem possible God made the body as the prison house which keeps His Son from Him. ²For it demands a special place God cannot enter, and a hiding place where none is welcome but your tiny self. ³Nothing is sacred here but unto you and you alone, apart and separate from all your brothers; safe from all intrusions of sanity upon illusions, safe from God, and safe for conflict everlasting. ⁴Here are the gates of hell you closed upon yourself, to rule in madness and in loneliness your special kingdom, apart from God, away from truth and from salvation.

• Study Question •

13. *What is it that necessitates our having a body?*
- A. *God made the body as a prison house that keeps us from from Him.*
 - B. *We wanted to have a body as a means of experiencing a greater union with the physical world.*
 - C. *Specialness demands the body as a place God cannot enter, where there is nothing but you and you alone.*

Specialness also distorts our experience of our bodies. Possibly, we may even think that “God made the body as the prison house which keeps His Son from Him” (13:1). It is specialness that creates our experience of being alone, inside a body, separate from everyone including God (13:2). Perhaps being trapped in a body is part of our punishment for sin, a condition imposed on us by God when He banished us from the Garden. The Genesis story even attributes our awareness of being naked in our bodies to our supposed “fall.” But it is specialness that made the body, not God, because specialness requires this “special place,” “a hiding place where none is welcome but your tiny self” (13:2). The body is the refuge of the ego, a place where it feels safe from the truth, “safe from God, and safe for conflict everlasting” (13:3).

The body is not a prison made by God, it is “the gates of hell you closed upon yourself.” We have isolated ourselves in pursuit of specialness, “apart from God, away from truth and from salvation” (13:4).

Paragraph 14

14 The key you threw away God gave your brother, whose holy hands would offer it to you when you were ready to accept His plan for your salvation in place of yours. ²How could this readiness be reached save through the sight of all your misery, and the awareness your plan has failed and will forever fail to bring you peace and joy of any kind? ³Through this despair you travel now, yet it is but illusion of despair. ⁴The death of specialness is not your death, but your awaking into life eternal. ⁵You but emerge from an illusion of what you are to the acceptance of yourself as God created you.

• Study Question •

14. *In the spiritual journey we sometimes experience a real sense of despair as we recognize our misery and the failure of all our plans for peace and joy. Why should this kind of despair not discourage us? (Essay answer, one or two sentences.)*

•

We made the prison, put ourselves into it, locked the doors, and threw away the key! In our madness we were determined to become special. But God had a last trick: He gave the key to your brother (14:1)! Your brother will hold on to that key and will offer it to you as soon as you are ready to accept it, that is, “to accept His plan for your salvation,” which is to forgive one another, “in place of yours,” which is to achieve specialness by judging and condemning one another (14:1).

How, he asks, could we ever achieve this readiness to abandon our plan in favor of His? There is no other way than to experience the complete and total failure of our own plan to bring us happiness, and to wallow in the misery and despair of its failure (14:2–3). That isn’t a joyous message on the surface. No way out but through misery and despair? Yuk!

And as we confront the notion of abandoning specialness, we *do* feel miserable, we *do* despair. It seems like we can’t find the way home no matter how hard we try, and the idea of *not trying any more* seems like the loss of all hope. And it is! At least, the loss of all hope that specialness will ever make us happy. But the good news is that the despair we are feeling is “the illusion of despair” (14:3) because the loss we are experiencing is only an illusion of loss, or, as the Course puts it elsewhere, the loss of illusions.⁵ It may seem as if we are dying, but it’s only the death of specialness, which is, at the same time, “your awaking into life eternal” (14:4). Ultimately, in what could be a summary of the whole journey:

You but emerge from an illusion of what you are to the acceptance of yourself as God created you (14:5).

⁵ "He gives up an illusion; or better, he has an illusion of giving up. He has actually merely become more honest" (M-10.2:3-4 (FIP)).

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. No answer
2. A, C
3. (a) B. C is also true, but not something stated or implied in this paragraph.
(b) Seeing another person as lacking in some way leads to the idea of seeing them as sinful, or imperfect. Also, in perceiving others as less than perfect I am attacking God's Will and His creation; I am choosing specialness over Heaven. This makes me feel guilty and sinful as well, since the essence of "sin" is being opposed to God's Will.
4. C
5. D
6. B, A, C
7. E
8. B
9. B
10. (a) A
(b) D
11. B
12. A, B, D, E
13. C
14. The despair we feel is only an illusion of despair caused by the death of specialness, an illusion we have identified with. It is not death; it is the awaking into life eternal, which readies us to receive from our brother the key to acceptance of ourselves as God created us.