

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 24

The Dream of Specialness

Section IV

The Shift in Purpose

Explanation of underlining, italics and footnote formats can be found at the end of the commentary.

Overview of Section III

You may expect or even hope that, having shown that forgiveness is the end of specialness, Jesus is done talking about specialness. Sorry to disappoint you! He just can't seem to get enough of hammering it home, showing how our specialness is a devotion to murder and a thirst for guilt. Here, he focuses on its boomerang effect.

The emphasis in this section is on the purpose that the mind gives to the body: to harm, or to heal. Specialness directs the body to attack or harm. The result is not limited to our chosen target because all minds are joined. In attacking at all, we attack ourselves. We are urged once again to shift the mind's purpose, to cease looking for "sins" in others to bolster our specialness, and to recognize that specialness is our enemy and not our friend.

Paragraph 1

Specialness is a lack of trust in anyone except yourself. ²Faith is invested in yourself alone. ³Everything else becomes your enemy; feared and attacked, deadly and dangerous, hated and worthy only of destruction. ⁴Whatever gentleness it offers is but deception, but its hate is real. ⁵In danger of destruction it must kill, and you are drawn to it to kill it first. ⁶And such is guilt's attraction. ⁷Here is death enthroned as savior, crucifixion is now redemption, and salvation can only mean destruction of the world, except yourself.

• **Study Question** •

1. *Specialness makes everyone your enemy. You can't trust anyone, knowing that everyone is out to attack you. How is this what this paragraph describes as "guilt's attraction," as sentence 6 says:*
 - A. *In order to feel innocent, you are attracted to see guilt in your brother.*
 - B. *Specialness makes you drawn to kill your competitors. Yet this attraction is not an attraction to making yourself safe but an attraction to feeling guiltier.*

I especially appreciate the first sentence. It's such a clear picture of what specialness is: "a lack of trust in anyone except yourself" (1:1). Everyone else is suspect. Their acts of kindness have, to our specialness, hidden agendas (1:4); they are meant to manipulate me. This makes so much sense to me. If I am listening to my ego I am always watching out for Number One, and I will believe that everyone else is doing the same thing. I know I am putting me first, and I have faith in myself and no one else (1:2). Everyone and everything else is my enemy, at least potentially. I walk the world with my guard up at all times, expecting attack at any moment (1:3). I am suspicious of any apparent kindness, and feel my dark view of the world is vindicated every time someone actually says or does something harmful (1:3–4). Because I feel constantly in danger, my best strategy seems to be to attack first, to destroy and kill before I am destroyed and killed.

I think it may help to unpack the "its" here. In 1:3, the first subject is "everything else" but yourself. In 1:4, then, the clear referent for the "it" in "whatever gentleness it offers" is "everything else." That meaning carries through sentence 5, so let's unpack it:

Because we suspect the worst of everything and everyone but ourselves, and believe the entire world is like that, everyone in the world is "in danger of destruction" and *must* attack everyone else, including you. Therefore, you are drawn into an imagined need to kill them before they kill you. As the saying goes, "It's a jungle out there."¹

This, then, is the attraction of guilt. That is, this irresistible urge to attack first, to defend our specialness, is the fruit of the ego's thirst for guilt (1:6). We *think* we are acting out of our sense of self-worth and self-protection, but in reality, we are being driven by an attraction to guilt. In the insanity of specialness, we are saved by murder, we are exonerated by crucifying our brothers, and we are ready to wipe out the entire world, except for ourselves (1:7).

¹ Maybe you remember the theme song to the TV show "Monk," written and sung by Randy Newman. I've given the lyrics in an Appendix to this commentary.

Paragraph 2

² What could the purpose of the body be but specialness? ²And it is this that makes it frail and helpless in its own defense. ³It was conceived to make you frail and helpless. ⁴The goal of separation is its curse. ⁵But bodies have no goal. ⁶Purpose is of the mind, and minds can change as they desire. ⁷What they are and all their attributes cannot change. ⁸But what they hold as purpose can be changed, and body states must shift accordingly. ⁹Of itself, the body can do nothing.² ¹⁰See it as means to hurt, and it is hurt. ¹¹See it as means to heal, and it is healed.

• Study Question •

2. *Why, according to this paragraph, is your body weak, vulnerable and prone to sickness (there may be more than one right answer)?*
- A. *The purpose of specialness makes the body frail and helpless, since these are symptoms of separation.*
 - B. *Because weakness and vulnerability make your body less special.*
 - C. *Because you have seen your body as a means to attack others, and this hurts the body.*
 - D. *Because you have not affirmed your radiant physical health often enough.*

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If you think about our bodies, they are clearly designed for specialness. How unlikely is it that every fingerprint is different and unique to a single individual? Even identical twins are not *entirely* identical. Why is everyone's DNA so unique that it is an infallible identifier in criminal cases? There can be no doubt. If we *are* bodies, we are special, and unique. That seems to be the only possible purpose for bodies (2:1). I say "seems to be" quite deliberately, however.

If we are special, we are alone against the world. We can rightly share Monk's and Randy Newman's paranoia (2:2). The very design of the body seems intended "to make you frail and helpless" (2:3). Its very goal is its curse and downfall (2:4).

But, wait a minute! *Bodies* do not have goals (2:5)! Minds do. Minds are what set a goal and form a purpose, and minds can *change* their goal and purpose whenever they choose to do so (2:6). Although a mind cannot change *itself*, in the sense of "what they *are* and all their attributes" (2:7), they *can* change their purpose, what outcome they are seeking. And when the mind changes its purpose, "body states must shift accordingly" (2:8). The state of the body adapts to the purpose being set by the mind. A body does not act autonomously, "of itself" (2:9). The mind sets the purpose, and the body acts to carry out that purpose. Therefore, if you see the body as a means to hurt, a tool for attack, *the body is hurt*. If you see the body as a means to heal, a mechanism of blessing, then *the body is healed* (2:10–11).

². John 5:19 (KJV): "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do."

Paragraph 3

³ *You can but hurt yourself.* ²This has been oft repeated,³ but is difficult to grasp as yet. ³To minds intent on specialness it is impossible. ⁴But to those who wish to heal and not attack it is quite obvious. ⁵The purpose of attack is in the mind, and its effects are felt but where it is. ⁶Nor is mind limited; so must it be that harmful purpose hurts the mind as one. ⁷Nothing could make less sense to specialness. ⁸Nothing could make more sense to miracles. ⁹For miracles are merely change of purpose from hurt to healing.

• Study Question •

3. *Paragraph 3 says that specialness, which entails the purpose of harming others, hurts you, leaving your treasure house empty and vulnerable to everything that would disturb your peace. Why do you think that this is impossible to grasp (3:3) while you are still intent on specialness?*
- A. *Because specialness makes you feel guilty.*
 - B. *Specialness draws a distinction between yourself and others, making you think you can do something to them and not to yourself.*
 - C. *Because you spend too much time looking in the mirror.*

As we have been told many times before, “*You can but hurt yourself*” (3:1). Nevertheless, he mentions it again because “it is difficult to grasp as yet” (3:2). Admit it: It sure seems as if you can hurt other people, and in fact, all of us are still fairly certain that we *have* hurt other people. Why else would we feel any guilt? And most of us have other people who are quite willing to reinforce our certainty by *telling* us just how we’ve hurt them, in great detail, over and over. Furthermore, we are perhaps even more certain that other people have hurt *us*. But the Course says all of that is a huge misperception. If none of us can do other than hurt *ourselves*, it implies that *no one else* has ever hurt *you*, and you have never hurt anyone else. So telling us that we can hurt only ourselves, while not difficult to understand, it certainly “difficult to grasp,” to believe and accept as totally true. It’s hard to believe *at all*. Our minds are “intent on specialness,” so the idea that I can hurt only myself seems “impossible” (3:3).

However, if your mind adopts a different purpose, to heal instead of to attack as specialness does, you easily recognize the obvious truth (3:4). Attack arises in the mind, and has effect only in the mind that conceives it (3:5). Mind, however, is not limited. Therefore, the mind that takes attack as its purpose hurts the whole of mind (3:6). There

³. T-11.III.5:4: “Unless you have hurt yourself, you could never suffer in any way, for that is not God’s will for His Son.” T-20.IV.1:1: “Nothing can hurt you unless you give it the power to do so.”

is no “other” to hurt or to be hurt by. This makes perfect sense to the miracle-minded, but no sense at all to the thought of specialness (3:7–8).

Therefore, the simple act of changing the purpose you pursue “from hurt to healing” makes miracles not only possible, but natural. When I change my mind and decide that, “I am here only to be truly helpful” (T-2.V.18:2 (FIP), T-4.XI.8:2 (CE)), that shift in purpose affects all of mind. In one sense, everyone is affected by both thoughts of healing or of hurt. But the kicker is that everyone is me. Everyone is a part of me, and I am a part of everyone. You only hurt yourself, and you only heal yourself. There is no one else. This is the seemingly implausible reality behind the Course’s assertion: “The secret of salvation is but this: that you are doing this unto yourself” (T=27.XI.1:1 (CE), T-27.VIII.10:1 (FIP)). That realization becomes the motivation to change the purpose of all my thoughts from hurt to healing.

Paragraph 4

4 This shift in purpose does “endanger” specialness, but only in the sense that all illusions are “threatened” by the truth. ²They will not stand before it, yet what comfort has ever been in them that you would keep the gift your Father asks from Him,⁴ and give it there instead? ³Given to Him, the universe is yours. ⁴Offered to them, no gifts can be returned. ⁵What you have given specialness has left you bankrupt and your treasure house barren and empty, with an open door inviting everything that would disturb your peace to enter and destroy.⁵

Specialness will feel such a shift in purpose as “dangerous” because, being an illusion, specialness is “threatened” by the truth (4:1). But the only thing being threatened is an illusion, so the threat is as unreal as the illusion is. Truth will always trump illusions and dissipate them, but the disappearance of specialness should not be a cause for concern. The illusions of specialness have, in the end, brought you nothing but grief. They certainly don’t provide a reason to withhold from God the gift He asks of us, and to offer that gift to specialness (4:2).

It’s reasonable to wonder what the gift is that God asks for, a gift we’ve given to specialness. This is an instance where it helps to look around at the immediate context. In the previous section, we are told that God asks for a couple of things. First, in 24.III.4:6, it seems clear that God wants us to join our will with His and to accept what He wants for us. Then, in III.5:1, it states clearly that “God asks for your forgiveness.” It does not quite fit with what is said here, though; I cannot see any way in which we have given forgiveness to specialness. In III.8:5, it says God is calling from our brother to join His

4. To “keep the gift your Father asks from Him” means to keep from your Father the gift He asks you to give Him.

5. Luke 12:33 (RSV): “Provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.”

will to save us. In III.8:7-9, God asks us to have mercy on (that is, forgive) His Son (our brother) and Himself, asking only “that your will be done.” And in III.8:10–11, he asks us to love our brothers and Himself. To me, it seems that God is asking us to love and forgive both our brothers and Himself. We have given our love to specialness. We have made it our purpose to have specialness rather than to have the Oneness God has given us. We strive to manifest our illusions rather than to manifest our reality. So, to give the gift God asks for is to place our faith in God’s Truth, and to deny the reality of the ego, of specialness. It is to affirm the Truth in everyone.

If we will do that, “the universe is yours” (4:3). Put your faith in specialness and its illusions, and you get back absolutely nothing (4:4)! The universe, or nothing. Not a hard choice. Giving our allegiance to specialness has bankrupted us and left us in poverty, unable even to shut a door to keep all the gremlins from entering, robbing us our peace and destroying everything around us (4:5). What better reason to choose to shift our purpose from attack to love, from hurt to healing?

Paragraph 5

5 Long ago we said consider not the means by which salvation is attained or how to reach it, but do consider, and consider well, whether it be your wish that you might see your brother sinless.⁶ ²To specialness the answer must be no. ³A sinless brother is its enemy, while sin, if it were possible, would be its friend. ⁴Your brother’s “sins” would justify itself and give it meaning that the truth denies. ⁵All that is real proclaims his sinlessness. ⁶All that is false proclaims his sins as real. ⁷If he is sinful, then is your reality not real, but just a dream of specialness which lasts an instant, crumbling into dust.

• Study Question •

4. *Let’s say that your friend has just had a personal tragedy. Please explain, in light of paragraphs 4 and 5, what kind of thoughts your specialness might prompt you to have about your friend’s situation.*

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That first line (5:1) is another way of describing the gift we are asked to give to God and His Son; do you see the connection? Is your *purpose* to see your brother as whole and sinless? Do you want to hurt or to heal? Do you *wish* to affirm the wholeness of your brother? For specialness, the answer is, No (5:2). Specialness looks for and lives on finding fault with others. That is the opposite of wanting to see their sinlessness. Nobody living from their ego claims to be perfect or sinless, and if someone shows up who seems to be sinless, he or she would be a threat to the specialness of any ego. But if I can detect sin in that other person, then, An, my specialness feels validated and is delighted (5:3–4). The Truth proclaims us all sinless; the false condemns us all as sinners (5:6).

⁶ T-20.VII.9:1-2: “Your question should not be ‘How can I see my brother without the body?’ Ask only, ‘Do I *really* wish to see him sinless?’”

If my brother is sinful, so am I. My reality, my True Self, is not actually real. It is only a fleeting illusion (5:7).

Paragraph 6

6 Do not defend this senseless dream, in which God is bereft of what He loves, and you remain beyond salvation. ²Only this is certain in this shifting world which has no meaning in reality: When peace is not with you entirely and when you suffer pain of any kind, you have beheld some sin within your brother and have rejoiced at what you thought was there. ³Your specialness seemed safe because of it. ⁴And thus you saved what you appointed as your holy savior and crucified the one whom God has given you instead. ⁵So are you bound with him, for you are one with him. ⁶And so is specialness his enemy and yours as well.

• Study Question •

5. *Right now while you are reading this question, if you do not find yourself in a state of total and absolute peace, why is that so, according to this paragraph (there may be more than one correct answer)?*
- A. *Because this study guide sucks.*
 - B. *Because you tried to attack God.*
 - C. *Because you tried to feed your specialness at your brother's expense.*
 - D. *Because you rejoiced at your brother's supposed sins.*

What a senseless illusion specialness is! Why do we defend it, when it robs God of His Son and places us beyond reach of salvation (6:1)?

When we are living in the shifting world of specialness there is only one certain thing: Whenever your peace is anything but perfect or you “suffer pain of *any* kind,” you must have seen sin in a brother or sister and *rejoiced* “at what you thought was there” (6:2). It makes your specialness feel safe (6:3).

Ouch!

For most of us there is rarely, if ever, a moment entirely free of any kind of pain and filled with perfect, utter peace. According to this statement, then, we must *almost always* be gleefully seeing sin in one another. That just doesn't fit my ideal self-image! Like other statements in the Course this seems to be almost too absolute to be true.

But wait. Think a bit about what causes us pain and loss of peace. If I do not feel entirely at peace, I must be (perhaps unconsciously) perceiving something as an enemy or a threat. That is a belief in sin. If I am feeling pain I must believe that something is hurting me. That, too, is a belief in sin. The Course is simply saying that the belief in hurt or attack, even potential attack, is not valid. My mind, motivated by specialness, is choosing these beliefs because it makes my specialness feel safe.

What I am doing is saving the specialness I have set up as my savior, and in the process, I'm crucifying the brother or sister *God* appointed as my savior (6:4). And, since I am eternally one with him or her, I'm crucifying myself as well. Specialness is everyone's enemy and no one's friend (6:5–6).

• **Study Question** •

6. *Please summarize the major themes of this section in about a paragraph, emphasizing especially the harmful effects of specialness.*

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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. B

2. A,C

3. B

4. I am glad that my friend is experiencing tragedy. I think she is to blame for it, it is the result of her sins. Her pain and her sinfulness are good from my standpoint, because they make me feel more special.

5. C,D

6. Specialness harms the body, by giving it the purpose of separation and the purpose of hurting others. Specialness hurts you, since the purpose of attack is in the mind and the effects are as well. Specialness leaves your treasure house barren of God's gifts, vulnerable to all that would disturb your peace. Specialness crucifies the savior God gave you, by rejoicing at the sinfulness in him. Whenever you are not at peace or feel any pain, it is because of specialness.