

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 26

Holy Ground

Section I

The Sacrifice of Oneness

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

Overview of Section I

When we limit our perception of each other to our bodies, and focus on our faults and guilt, we are sacrificing the truth of our Being, our Oneness. In our special function, we are called to look beyond the physical, beyond time, to the eternal creation of God that we all are. We are here to open the door of prison for everyone, to recognize our union and to make every instant a moment of release and utter joy both for ourselves and for one another.

Paragraph 1

In the “dynamics” of attack is sacrifice a key idea. ²It is the pivot upon which *all* compromise, *all* desperate attempts to strike a bargain, and all conflicts achieve a seeming balance.¹ ³It is the symbol of the central theme that *somebody must lose*. ⁴Its focus on the *body* is apparent, for it is *always* an attempt to *limit loss*.² ⁵The body is *itself* a sacrifice; a giving up of power in the name of saving just a little for yourself. ⁶To see a brother in *another* body, *separate* from yours, is the expression of a wish to see a little *part* of him and sacrifice the rest. ⁷Look at the world, and you will see nothing attached to *anything* beyond itself. ⁸All seeming entities can come a little nearer or can go a little farther off, but *cannot* join.

• Study Question •

1. (1:4). How is sacrifice an attempt to limit loss?

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The topic here is *sacrifice*.(1:1) The paragraph gives us a barrage of declarations about what sacrifice is and what it does. Sacrifice, it tells us,

- makes compromise appear possible and fair (1:2)
- makes bargaining seems reasonable (1:2)
- makes conflicts appear to have a solution (1:2)
- symbolizes the idea that someone must lose (1:3)
- focuses on the body (1:4)
- is an attempt to limit loss (1:4)
- is the very nature of a body, because choosing a body means giving up our true power (1:5)

It tells us we are sacrificing the most important aspect of a person when we see only his or her body (1:6). When we look at the world we cannot see how everything is connected. Bodies that seem to be separate entities may be close or far apart but never join (1:7–8).

¹ This seems to mean that we sacrifice in order to make compromises, strike bargains, and resolve conflicts, for it is only when both sides have made an equal sacrifice that the situation has achieved a balance and the conflict has been resolved. Sacrificing on our part, then, seems to give us the right to exact sacrifice from someone else. This explains why sacrifice is a key idea in the “dynamics” of attack. By supposedly granting us a right to attack (exact sacrifice from), our sacrifices are a force that generates our attacks.

² Pronoun clarification: “Its [sacrifice’s] focus on the *body* is apparent, for it [sacrifice] is *always* an attempt to *limit loss*.” Sacrificing seems to limit our loss because by giving something up—and thus letting the other person gain—we seem to gain the right to keep something for ourselves.

The first three points are all tied together. Compromise, bargaining, and conflicts all seem to be negative things. But sacrifice is a pivot that turns them into something else, or at least seems too. My ego can make a compromise or bargaining seem noble if I think of it as a sacrifice that I am making the sake of peace. I think that may also explain the idea that sacrifice somehow seems to limit loss. It turns it into something that seems virtuous. In fact, it is the very symbol of the idea that in order for us to get along someone has to lose.

Paragraph 2

² The world you see is based on *sacrifice* of oneness. ²It is a picture of *complete disunity* and total *lack* of joining. ³Around each entity is built a wall so seeming solid that it looks as if what is inside can never reach without, and what is out can never reach and join with what is locked away within the wall. ⁴Each part must *sacrifice* the other part to keep itself complete. ⁵For if they joined, each one would *lose* its own identity, and *by* their separation are their selves maintained. ⁶The little that the body fences off *becomes* the self, preserved through sacrifice of all the rest. ⁷And all the rest must *lose* this little part, remaining incomplete to keep its own identity intact.

• Study Question •

2. (2:5). *This sentence gives the crucial clue to this question: Why did we feel we had to give up oneness in order to keep everything from being taken from us?*

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The elemental sacrifice is the sacrifice of oneness, which is the very foundation of the world (2:1). Everything in the world seems to testify *against* oneness. We are billions of individuals, all with unique fingerprints and retinal patterns. We are scattered over the surface of the planet, widely separate from one another. We are separated from our ancestors and descendants by time as well as space. The distances of separation on Earth fade into insignificance when we begin to consider the distances of space, which seem beyond comprehension. The universe around us “is a picture of *complete disunity* and total *lack* of joining” (2:2). It is the very inverse of oneness.

Consider each of us as individual persons. We seem to be locked away within ourselves. Haven't you felt at times as if no one has *ever* really and completely understood you? How often have you been certain that you completely understood anyone else? The experience of being alone is nearly universal, while the experience of being One with anyone (let alone everyone!) is extremely rare (2:3).

We do not realize that we have chosen this aloneness, that in order to be unique and distinct our egos have deliberately sacrificed our union with the other parts of the Whole. If we actually joined with another person, or more than one other, we fear that we would lose our identity (2:4–5)—and we *would* lose our ego identities, in the sense that we could no longer deceive ourselves that this little part is all we have. As we have been

reading over and over, nothing is really *lost*. Instead, we *gain* the rest of reality. What thought it was just a drop discovers it belongs to the ocean.

Separateness is what maintains our ego selves (2:5). We sacrifice the ocean to remain a drop, and all the other drops in the ocean must also lose the drop that is us in order to remain in their incomplete identities (2:6–7).

This elemental sacrifice of oneness underlies every instance of sacrifice. We hold on to the idea that someone must lose for anyone to gain because our very ego's existence depends on the necessity of losing the rest of the Whole. To gain our imaginary independence, the universe must lose us, and we must lose the universe. Our bodies are the visible symbols of separation.

Paragraph 3

3 In *this* perception of your self, the *body's* loss would be a sacrifice indeed. ²And sight of bodies becomes the sign that sacrifice *is* limited and something still remains for you alone. ³And *for* this little to belong to you are limits placed on *everything* outside, just as they are on everything you think is *yours*. ⁴For giving and receiving *are* the same. ⁵And to *accept* the limits of a body is to *impose* these limits on each brother that you see, for you *must* see him as you see yourself. ⁶The body *is* a loss, and *can* be made to sacrifice. ⁷And while you see your brother as a body, *apart* from you and separate in his cell, you are demanding sacrifice of him *and* you.

• Study Question •

3. (3:1–2). Why, according to “*this perception of yourself*,” would the body’s loss be a major sacrifice (Notice the word “*for*” in the next sentence)?

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Because our bodies are so enmeshed with our sense of a separate self, to lose the body would be a *huge* sacrifice (3:1). As long as your body remains (remains in your sight, the focus of attention), it signals that there is a limit on the sacrifice you have been called to make; “something still remains for you alone” (3:2). It’s so true that it has entered our library of common phrases: “the ultimate sacrifice” is instantly understood to mean the sacrifice of the body’s life.

This “something” that remains isn’t very much. Jesus calls it “this little” (3:3). But to hold onto it, we place limits on *everything* that is not us (the body with an ego), just as we have done on what we think *is* us (3:3). We see everyone else as egos living in bodies, limited as we are.

This is a negative example of the law that giving and receiving are the same thing (3:4). When you *accept* the limits of a body for yourself, you *impose* the same limits on every single person you see. As you see yourself you *must* see him or her (3:5).

“The body *is* a loss, and *can* be made to sacrifice” (3:6). We have become so accustomed to believing we are separate entities housed in bodies that to be told “the body is a loss” seems shocking. We can scarcely imagine what a huge loss it is! What

vastness of Being we are giving up, sacrificing in the mad attempt to be special! Seeing one another as bodies separate in our “cells” (the body into which we are locked, 2:3) is to demand sacrifice of ourselves and everyone else (3:7).

Paragraph 4

4 What greater sacrifice could be demanded than that God's Son perceive himself without his Father, and his Father be without His Son?
2Yet *every* sacrifice demands that They be separate and without the Other.
3The memory of God *must* be denied if *any* sacrifice is asked of *anyone*.
4What witness to the wholeness of God's Son is seen within a world of separate bodies, however much he witnesses to truth? 5He is *invisible* in such a world, nor can his song of union and of joy be heard at all. 6Yet is it given him to make the world recede before his song, and sight of him *replace* the body's eyes.

• Study Question •

4. (4:1). *Who is God's Son here? Be as specific as you can, given the context.*

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Lest we question the idea that seeing ourselves as housed in bodies is a sacrifice, Jesus asks us to consider what we are doing: We are demanding that we, God's Sons (offspring), perceive ourselves as apart from our Father, and our Father apart from us (4:1). God is All There Is, and to be apart from God is to be apart from All, virtually nonexistent. There could be no greater sacrifice. Yet this is exactly what *every* sacrifice demands (4:2)!

If I am a body, sacrifice seems possible (3:6). How, though, could any sacrifice be possible for me if I am One with the All? To ask sacrifice of *anyone* I have to forget God, forget that we are one with God (4:3).

The visible world is one of separateness everywhere. Our billions of separate bodies scream separation, and no matter how loudly anyone proclaims oneness, no one can see it or hear it (4:4). The Son of God is “*invisible* in such a world,” and his “song of union and of joy” is inaudible (4:5). And yet...and yet!

“Yet is it given him to make the world recede before his song, and sight of him *replace* the body's eyes” (4:6). How? How can that be?

The answer is in your special function.

Paragraph 5

5 Those who would see the witnesses to truth *instead* of to illusion merely ask that they might see a *purpose* in the world that gives it sense and makes it meaningful. ²*Without* your special function *has* this world no meaning for you. ³Yet it can become a treasure house as rich and limitless as Heaven itself. ⁴No instant passes here in which your brother's holiness *cannot* be seen, to add a limitless supply to every meager scrap and tiny crumb of happiness that you allot yourself. ⁵You *can* lose sight of oneness, but *cannot* make sacrifice of its reality. ⁶Nor can you *lose* what you would sacrifice, nor keep the Holy Spirit from His task of showing you that it has *not* been lost.

• Study Question •

5. (5:2). This sentence says that your special function actually makes the world sensible and meaningful for you. How does your special function do that (see Sentences 1 and 4)?

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How can we make the dark vision of the world, seen through the ego's eyes, recede before the song of union and joy sung by the Son of God? How can the world become a witness to the wholeness of God's Son? (See 4:4–6)

The answer is for us to choose to “see the witnesses to truth *instead* of to illusion” (5:1). It's what a person does when they desire to “see a *purpose* in the world that gives it sense and makes it meaningful” (5:1). The answer is what we've been reading about all through Chapter 25, and indeed all through the Text: Our special function, which is to forgive the world, to choose to find wholeness in one another instead of to find fault. It is our special function that gives the world any meaning at all; if there is no forgiveness, the world is meaningless (5:2).

Jesus tells us that the world can become a treasure house comparable only to Heaven itself, “rich and limitless” (5:3). It's hard even to imagine seeing the world that way, isn't it? But if every encounter is a holy encounter capable of enriching all its participants with blessing, if every perceived attack hides an opportunity to transform our perception, if every flare of anger has the potential for me to give and receive forgiveness, and if I really knew all that in my heart of hearts, how then would I see the world? I could skip through my days welcoming everything that happened, taking childish delight in unwrapping its present to me.

And, indeed, “No instant passes here in which your brother's holiness *cannot* be seen, to add a limitless supply to every meager scrap and tiny crumb of happiness you allot yourself” (5:4). *Every single instant* is pregnant with potential blessing and happiness. *Limitless* happiness!³

³. Please read the entire section on “The Beauty of the Real World,” T-17.II. (Called “The Forgiven World” in FIP.)

Yes, sadly, it is possible to lose sight of oneness, but losing sight of it does not diminish its reality one iota (5:5). You can't give it up, and even wanting to do so does not cause you to lose it. Nor does it prevent the Holy Spirit "from His task of showing you that it has *not* been lost" (5:6).

What are miracles about? Just this uncovering of what we have lost *sight* of, but have never really lost: Oneness. We are meant to go through all our days here seeking to peel away the veil that is hiding the Son of God everywhere, in everyone.

Paragraph 6

6 Hear, then, the song your brother sings to you, and *let* the world recede, and *take* the rest his witness offers on behalf of peace. ²But judge him not,⁴ or you will hear no song of liberation for yourself, nor see what it is given him to witness to that *you* may see it and rejoice *with* him. ³Make not his holiness a sacrifice to your belief in sin. ⁴You sacrifice *your* innocence with his, and die each time you see in him a sin deserving death. ⁵Yet every instant can you be reborn and given life again. ⁶His holiness gives life to you, who *cannot* die *because* his sinlessness is known to God and can no more be sacrificed by you than can the light in you be blotted out because he sees it not.

• Study Question •

6. (6:6). *Who cannot die? Whose sinlessness is known to God?*

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When I read this paragraph in preparation for writing this commentary, it brought tears to my eyes. How poignant is the thought that all my brothers and sisters are, somewhere in their consciousness, singing me a song of joy, love, and union (6:1)! How sad that I so seldom *hear* it! How touching is Jesus' appeal to us to "hear...the song...and let the world recede, and *take* the rest his witness offers on behalf of peace" (6:1)! Let us look into one another's eyes and believe and remember that this person is singing me that forgotten song of loving union; let us ask and desire to hear it!

If we judge one another we won't hear the song of liberation. We won't see the unity the song celebrates, that everyone knows in their heart of hearts to be the truth of us. We won't be able to share that joy (6:2). When we judge, we are sacrificing another's holiness to *our* belief in sin: Let's not do that (6:3)! To do so is to sacrifice *our own innocence*. When we see sin in someone and wish they would die, *we die* (6:4). Jesus says it so succinctly in the Bible: "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matthew 7:1, KJV).

It just isn't necessary. We don't have to die over and over through our own judging. *Every instant* we can be born again and given life again (6:5). This reminds me of the words of Moses: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your

⁴ Matthew 7:1 (KJV): "Judge not, that ye be not judged."

descendants may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19 NRSV). We can receive death, or life.
Choose life!

And how? “His holiness gives life to you” (6:6). Choose to see that and you will experience resurrection. Truly, you *cannot* die in truth because your brother’s holiness “is known to God,” *known*, as an eternal fact that can never in truth be sacrificed by you or anyone. The light is in us all, and that is true whether or not anyone sees it (6:6).

Jesus told us that, “You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). He didn’t say we should strive to become the light; he said we *are* the light. He spoke those words to a huge crowd that included Jews, non-Jews, disciples, skeptics, prostitutes, beggars, and nobody, not even Jesus, was a Christian. They were a cross-section of the world, and he told *them* “*YOU* are the light of the world.”

In his book, *Integral Christianity*, Paul R. Smith closes by commenting on that verse from Matthew. He says:

The mystical poet Hafiz grasped this and experienced it. Therefore, he could write: “I wish I could show you when you are lonely or in darkness the astonishing light of your own being.”

*That light is already inside of us. It is always inside of us. It has never left and will never leave. You don’t need to get it. It’s already there. You can’t earn it. It’s already there as the real you. You can’t lose it, because it’s the real you which is part of God. And God never loses any part of herself anytime or anywhere. This is “the astonishing light of your own being.”*⁵

Paragraph 7

7 You who would make a sacrifice of life, and make your eyes and ears bear witness to the death of God and of his holy Son, think not that you have power to make of Them what God willed not They be. ²In Heaven God’s Son is *not* imprisoned in a body, nor is sacrificed in solitude to sin. ³And as he is in Heaven, so *must* he be eternally and everywhere. ⁶ ⁴He is the same forever; ⁷ born again each instant, ⁸ untouched by time, and *far* beyond the reach of *any* sacrifice of life *or* death. ⁵For neither did he make, and only *one* was given him, by One Who *knows* His gifts can *never* suffer sacrifice and loss.

⁵ Smith, Paul R.. *Integral Christianity: The Spirit's Call to Evolve* . Paragon House.

⁶ Matthew 6:10 (RSV): “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.” In the Course’s allusion, rather than God’s will being done on earth as it is in Heaven, God’s *Son*—particularly, our brother—has the same unlimited nature on earth as he does in Heaven.

⁷ Hebrews 13:8 (RSV): “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.” The Course applies this to our brother, given that he is God’s Son.

⁸ John 3:3 (KJV): “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

• **Study Question** •

7. (7:1). *How do you make your eyes and ears bear witness to the death of God and of His Son?*

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So we need to give up the ego's stupid game of death, judging one another and attempting to make them into something God never created, something they can never truly be. We do not have that power! (7:1)

Our reality is in Heaven, in spirit, invisible to the body's eyes. We are not "imprisoned in a body," not "sacrificed in solitude to sin" (7:2). That's just not what we are, and we are just that free, just that sinless, "*eternally and everywhere*" (7:3).

What we are in the moment of God's creation is what we are *now*. "I am as God created me." We are sinless forever, light forever (7:4). We are "born again each instant." We think of creation as something that happened long, long ago, but it's not; creation is happening *now*. Every instant God is creating you, every instant the divine energy of spirit is manifesting Itself as you, and as everyone. Time does not touch what you are! No sacrifice of life or of death has any effect on what you are.

The Apostle Paul said it long ago:

"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38–39 NRSV)

Neither death nor life can change what you are and your union with God. You didn't make life or death, and God only gave you *one* of them: life. God's gifts can never suffer sacrifice or loss (7:5). To quote the Bible yet again:

"the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." (Romans 11:29 NRSV)

Paragraph 8

8 God's justice rests in gentleness upon His Son, and keeps him safe from all injustices the world would lay upon him. ²Could it be that you could make his sins reality, and sacrifice His Father's will for him? ³Condemn him not by seeing him within the rotting prison where he sees himself. ⁴It is your special function to ensure the door be opened, that he may come forth to shine on you and give you back the gift of freedom by receiving it of you.⁹ ⁵What is the Holy Spirit's special function but to release the holy Son of God from the imprisonment he made to keep himself from justice? ⁶Could *your* function be a task apart and separate from His Own?

• Study Question •

8. (8:3). *If a court sentences someone to prison, it has condemned him. How do we condemn our brothers to prison?*

Tying this back to the last chapter: This, then, is God's justice. We are all God's offspring, whole, complete, and holy, forever and forever. All we are asked to do is to be purveyors of God's justice to the world. The reality of you is "safe from *all* injustices the world would lay upon" you (8:1). He cannot be speaking of your body, nor even of your experience in time. In this world we all experience injustice. The point is, none of this has any real effect on your true essence, your true self.

Can any of us imagine that, given that this is the will of God our Creator, we could somehow make sin real and overthrow God's will for His Son (8:2)? Of course not! So put an end to seeing each other as imprisoned in a body, or as Jesus graphically puts it, "within the rotting prison where he sees himself" (8:3).

That may seem a harsh image, but I think it reflects reality. That's what happens to bodies. They decay, they slow down, they wither, they weaken, and when physical life ends, they rot. Ugh, yes. One branch of Buddhism used to train its monks to sit and watch a corpse decay to drive home the reality that this is not what they are.

Your special function (and yes, we're still talking about that) is to make sure that the prison door is open for everyone, for each person you meet, so that the *real* person "may come forth to shine on you and give you back the gift of freedom by receiving it of you" (8:4). And how do we open that door? By not judging. By forgiving.

⁹ John 11:41, 43-44 (KJV): "Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me....And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go." In the biblical story, Lazarus is sealed in the prison of the tomb, his body is rotting (11:39 says, "by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days"), and then Jesus, after ensuring that the door of the tomb is opened, raises him by saying, "Lazarus, come forth." In the Course version, our special function is, in essence, to do for our brother what Jesus did for Lazarus: to "ensure the door be opened," so that from "within the rotting prison where he sees himself" our brother can "come forth." Only in this case, the tomb from which our brother comes forth is the body.

That's your special function and it is the special function of the Holy Spirit as well. His aim is to set you free from prison, released by the holy justice of God, not merely pardoned but acquitted of all guilt (8:5). If that is His function, what else could *yours* be (8:6).

Let's finish with a short lesson from the Workbook that applies these thoughts:

LESSON 266

My holy Self abides in you, God's Son.

1 Father, You gave me all Your Sons, to be my saviors and my counselors in sight; the bearers of Your holy Voice to me. 2 In them are You reflected, and in them does Christ look back upon me from my Self. 3 Let not Your Son forget Your holy Name. 4 Let not Your Son forget his holy Source. 5 Let not Your Son forget his name is Yours.

1 This day we enter into paradise, calling upon God's Name and on our own, acknowledging our Self in each of us; united in the holy Love of God. 2 How many saviors God has given us! 3 How can we lose the way to Him, when He has filled the world with those who point to Him, and given us the sight to look on them?

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. When in a situation of conflict, you give up something as payment to stop the other person from taking everything from you, so that you can keep something for yourself.
2. Because oneness itself would take away our identity, or so we thought.
3. Because it is all there is to you, the last little bit, which you gave up everything else in order to keep.
4. Myself and the brother I am seeing in a body.
5. Sentence 1: To see the truth here you must simply ask to see a purpose that makes the world make sense. Your special function is the special form in which you serve the Holy Spirit's purpose here. Sentence 4: Through your special function you can always see your brother's holiness and this makes the world a treasure house.
6. You. Your brother. In other words, you cannot die because your brother's holiness is known to God, because his holiness gives life to you.
7. This refers back to 3:7–4:2. By seeing your brother as a body, you demand that God and His Son be apart from each other, sacrifice each other. Yet, as this sentence says, you would have to overpower God's Will to really accomplish this, and you cannot.
8. By seeing them within the body, which is a prison, and a rotting one to boot.