

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 27

Healing the Ancient Dream

Section IV

Power Unopposed

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

Overview of Section IV

This section begins with a brief discussion of “unopposed power,” as an abstract example of what ultimate reality (God, Christ, our True Self) really is. At first, it seems as if Jesus has skewed off on some theoretical philosophic concept that has no relationship whatsoever to the discussion so far in the chapter. That concept, however, is actually relevant.

Unopposed power is what God is. Jesus is attempting to help us conceptualize what “non-dual” means. He then applies the example to the picture we hold in our minds of our brothers and sisters, showing that those pictures are as meaningless and empty as the idea of a “weak power.” He also explains that, just as God’s reality cannot be pictured, neither can the reality of a brother or sister, but forgiveness, although it cannot picture the total reality of a brother, does not include any contradiction of that reality, and so serves as a transitional state enabling God to, at last, take the last step to reunite us into non-dual reality.

Paragraph 1

Power cannot oppose. ²For opposition would *weaken* it, and weakened power is a contradiction in ideas. ³Weak strength is meaningless, and power used to weaken is employed to limit. ⁴Thus it must be limited and weak, because that is its purpose. ⁵Power is *unopposed* to be itself.¹ ⁶No weakness can intrude upon it without changing what it is to something it is not. ⁷To weaken is to limit, and impose an opposite that contradicts the concept it attacks. ⁸And by its contradiction does it join to the idea a something it is not, and make it unintelligible. ⁹Who can understand a double concept such as “weakened power” or as “hateful love”?

The section begins with this discussion of “power unopposed,” focusing on what is true of it and what is *not* true. He states that “power cannot oppose.” Any opposition only weakens power, and a weak power “a contradiction in ideas” (1:1–2). What he’s getting at is a more abstract statement of something he said in the Introduction to the Text:

The course does not aim at teaching the meaning of love, for that is beyond what can be taught. It does aim, however, at removing the blocks to the awareness of love’s presence, which is your natural inheritance. The opposite of love is fear, but what is all-encompassing can have no opposite.

This course can therefore be summed up very simply in this way: Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists. Herein lies the peace of God. (T-In.1:6–2:3 (CE))

Love has no opposite. It is an unopposed power. When he states that “the opposite of love is fear,” he immediately negates that notion by saying, “but what is all-encompassing can have no opposite.” This is the same concept as “power cannot oppose.” If there were any real opposition, the power, or love, would no longer be all-encompassing. Something besides power or love would exist, and power, or love, would no longer be all that is.

Our minds are programmed to think in terms of duality, of opposites. To us, light is meaningless without dark; up is meaningless without a matching down. Everything exists as one of a pair of opposites: hot/cold, good/bad, love/hate, hard/soft, power/weakness. We simply cannot truly conceive of love without its opposite, or power without an opposite.

The Course, like every manifestation of the perennial philosophy, is teaching *non-duality*. It is affirming that God is all there is, and there is nothing outside of God that opposes Its Being in any way. The tricky thing about non-duality is that you cannot really talk about It or label It or even think about It, because the second you do so, you have

¹ There seem to be two ways in which a power that opposes leads to the contradiction of a “weakened power.” First, for power to oppose something else would weaken it, thus making it a weakened power. Second, power that has the purpose of weakening and limiting something else must itself be weak and limited, for its purpose must be an extension of what it is.

made it an object, with you as the observer or subject. You have presupposed a duality. This is why you cannot *know* reality, you can only *be* it. Jesus says something like this in the Workbook:

Oneness is simply the idea God is. And in His being He encompasses all things. No mind holds anything but Him. We say “God is,” and then we cease to speak, for in that knowledge words are meaningless. There are no lips to speak them, and no part of mind sufficiently distinct to feel that it is now aware of something not itself. It has united with its Source, and like the Source Itself, it merely is.

We cannot speak nor write nor even think of this at all. (W-169.5:1-6:6 (CE))

The point of all this, as we’ll see in the following paragraphs, is that our own reality and that of every brother and sister is this same unthinkable, unspeakable, unknowable Oneness. We cannot simply leap into an awareness of that, but forgiveness, letting go of our false pictures of one another, clears the way to God and allows Him to welcome us into that Reality.

To really be itself, power must be unopposed; no opposite. Any opposition that weakens power would make the power into something other than power (1:3-6). You cannot understand the idea of an omnipotent God if you think some opposing power exists. Some power would not be God’s (1:5–6). That would render God NOT *omnipotent* (1:7-9).

Paragraph 2

² You have decided that your brother *is* a symbol for a “hateful love,” a “weakened power,” and above all, a “living death.” ²And so he has no meaning to you, for he stands for what is meaningless. ³He represents a double thought where half is canceled out by the remaining half, yet even this is quickly contradicted by the half it canceled out, and so they both are gone. ⁴And now he stands for nothing. ⁵Symbols which but represent ideas which cannot be must stand for empty space and nothingness. ⁶Yet nothingness and empty space cannot be interference. ⁷What *can* interfere with the awareness of reality is the belief that there is something there.

Despite the unintelligible character of something like “weakened power” or “hateful love,” that *is* how we have come to see our brothers and sisters (2:1)². How often have you heard the catch-phrase, “Can’t live with ‘em, can’t live without ‘em”? We often think along these lines: “I love him, *but* I hate the way he ...”.

Because we see a person in this contradictory fashion, standing for something without real meaning, we have failed to see any meaning in the person themselves (2:2). We cannot really hate them because we love them, but we cannot truly love them because we hate part of what we see in them. It ends up with neither aspect surviving, so that the

² I can’t quite grasp how we see one another as a “living death.” Perhaps you have a way of understanding that?

person stands for *nothing* (2:3–4). They have become symbols of nothingness, of things which cannot exist.

If they symbolize nothing, that's actually good news, because reality cannot be affected in any way by *nothing* (2:6)! What *does* interfere with our experience of reality is our belief that the nothing is something (2:7). We actually believe that this being of pure love is somehow mixed with hate, or that innocence is diluted by guilt. As the Workbook has us declare, "My grievances hide the light of the world in me" (W-69).

My grievances hide the light of the world in me.

I cannot see what I have hidden.

Yet I want to let it be revealed to me,

for my salvation and the salvation of the world. (W-69.9:4–6)

Paragraph 3

³ The picture of your brother that you see means nothing. ²There is nothing to attack or to deny, to love or hate, or to endow with power or to see as weak. ³The picture has been wholly canceled out, because it symbolized a contradiction which canceled out the thought it represents. ⁴And thus the picture has no cause at all. ⁵Who can perceive effect without a cause? ⁶What can the causeless be but nothingness? ⁷The picture of your brother that you see is wholly absent and has never been. ⁸Let, then, the empty space it occupies be *recognized* as vacant, and the time devoted to its seeing be perceived as idly spent, a time unoccupied.

When we think we see sin worthy of guilt in a brother or sister, we need to remind ourselves, "This means *nothing*" (3:1). None of the dualistic label pairs apply because they are labels attached to nothingness (3:2). This is as true of "love" as it is of "hate," when love is something understood to have an opposite, or of "strong" as opposed to "weak." The dualistic characteristics have cancelled out each other, leaving nothing; thus the picture we see of one another "has no cause at all" (3:3–4).

If the image you hold of a brother has no cause, it cannot possibly have any *effects* (3:4–5); therefore, you cannot be hurt or diminished by it. Anything that has no cause does not exist (3:6); therefore, "The picture of your brother that you see...has never been" (3:7). You have imagined it, invented it, made it up out of nothing.

I've had some direct experiences of this. A brother did something or said something that I completely misunderstood and misinterpreted, so that I formed a picture of him that was completely false, but which I allowed to control my interactions with him and to stain our relationship. Fortunately, before long I was able to recognize my mistaken understanding and to let it go. This isn't always so simple, however. The ego forms pictures of our brothers and sisters that are rock-solid, made up out of nothing, unsupported even by a misunderstanding. The ego does this because it wants to see sin in others to mask its belief in its own.

Healing begins when we are willing to recognize and admit that our mental image of our brother or sister is completely fabricated by us and is totally unrelated to who they really are (3:8). As the Workbook tells us to affirm, “I see nothing as it is now” (W-9) and “I do not know what anything is for (W-25). Any time spent to dwelling on these pictures of nothingness is “idly spent, a time unoccupied.” When we can disengage from them and recognize their emptiness, we’ve cleared the space for a *true* picture to replace them.

Paragraph 4

4 An empty space that is not seen as filled, an unused interval of time not seen as spent and fully occupied, become a silent invitation to the truth to enter and to make itself at home. ²No preparations can be made that would enhance the invitation’s real appeal. ³For what you leave as vacant God will fill, and where He is there must the truth abide. ⁴Unweakened power, with no opposite, is what creation is. ⁵For this there are no symbols. ⁶Nothing points beyond the truth, and what can stand for more than everything? ⁷Yet true undoing must be kind, and so the first replacement for your picture is another picture of another kind.

When we let go of our false pictures and realize we’ve been wasting time looking at them, we have passively invited “truth to enter and to make itself at home” (4:1). We have to let go of the old picture before a new one can form. The truth cannot force its way into our awareness, pushing out the mirages that fill our minds. We must recognize the mirages as emptiness before truth can enter to fill the emptiness. Like John Nash in “A Beautiful Mind,” we have to learn to ignore our hallucinations³.

The interesting thing is that we don’t have to do anything to attract that truer perception beyond letting go of the old one. We cannot *prepare* for the truth (4:2). Nothing we do can add anything to the appeal of our invitation to truth. God’s truth is already poised, chafing at the bit as it were, to come to us the moment we crack open the door. There is a well-known saying, a fact: “Nature abhors a vacuum.” If we recognize the non-existence of our ego’s picture of our brother, it creates a vacant space that “God will fill” (4:3), and truth lives wherever God is.

Why the abstract discussion of “unweakened power”? Because that’s what creation is: power that has no opposition (4:4). Creation is the truth with no opposite. Love is its unlimited power. It cannot be reduced to words or pictures, which can only hint at its reality (4:5). It is all that is; there is nothing outside it to symbolize it; it contains everything (4:6).

I think the implication of sentence 7 is that if all of the truth of the loving power of creation that is the very nature of our existence, and the reality of our brothers and sisters as well, were to suddenly dawn upon us the moment we let go of our false perception of our brother and sisters, it would produce a short circuit in our minds. It would be so mind-blowing it would hurt.. And that’s the last thing God wants to do. God is never

³ See commentary on T-20.VIII, page 9, for info on John Nash.

unkind! "... so the first replacement for your picture is another picture of another kind" (4:7).

God is going to give us another picture of our brothers. Still a picture, and no picture can fully communicate the Truth. But the picture He gives has nothing that contradicts the Truth in the way the ego's picture does. This picture does not obscure the Truth; it *reflects* the Truth. This interim picture is God's mercy for us because we are not yet in a state to advance to knowledge:

Fear not that you will be abruptly lifted up and hurled into reality. Time is kind, and if you use it for reality, it will keep gentle pace with you in your transition. The urgency is only in dislodging your mind from its fixed position here. This will not leave you homeless and without a frame of reference. The period of disorientation which precedes the actual transition is far shorter than the time it took to fix your mind so firmly on illusions. Delay will hurt you now more than before, only because you realize it is delay, and that escape from pain is really possible. (T-16.VI.8:1-6 (CE)(FIP))

Paragraph 5

5 As nothingness cannot be pictured, so there is no symbol for totality. ²Reality is ultimately known without a form, unpictured and unseen. ³Forgiveness is not yet a power known as wholly free of limits. ⁴Yet it sets no limits *you* have chosen to impose. ⁵Forgiveness is the means by which the truth is represented temporarily. ⁶It lets the Holy Spirit make exchange of pictures possible, until the time when aids are meaningless and learning done. ⁷No learning aid has use which can extend beyond the goal of learning. ⁸When its aim has been accomplished, it is functionless. ⁹Yet in the learning interval it *has* a use which now you fear, but yet will love.

Just as picturing nothing is impossible, totality cannot be pictured or symbolized either (5:1). "The tao that can be named is not the eternal Tao," as Lao Tzu put it. In *Perennial Wisdom*, Rami Shapiro writes:

Of course "God" is only a word, another label, no more applicable than any other. The true "I" is without labels. It is very difficult for us to speak without falling into the trap of making an object of the eternal Subject. That is the limitation of language, and we will run into it over and over again. But we can use words to point beyond themselves toward the ineffable, and that is what you must do.

As the Course said in Chapter 18:

"This course will lead to knowledge, but knowledge itself is still beyond the scope of our curriculum. Nor is there any need for us to try to speak of what must forever lie beyond words. We need remember only that whoever attains the real world, beyond which learning cannot go, will go beyond it, but in a different way. Where learning ends there God begins, for learning ends before Him Who is complete where He begins, and where there <is> no end. It is not for us to dwell

on what cannot be attained. There is too much to learn. The readiness for knowledge still must be attained" (T-18.IX.11:1-7 (FIP)).

Shapiro also writes this:

God, the Absolute, the Real, is the "I" that cannot be made into an object. Because it cannot be made into an object, it cannot be named.

And this!

To name the eternal "I" is to make it an object. To make it an object is to lose it altogether. Yet we must speak, and when we do, we need names. So we call the Unnamed "Tao," "Allah," "God," "Brahman," "Great Spirit," "YHVH," but the name is never the named. The problem with so much religion is that it mistakes the named for the Unnameable; it makes a fetish of the word rather than surrendering to the silence in which the Unnamed is realized. The spiritually independent use names lightly, knowing that no name can express the Nameless.

As 5:2 puts it: "Reality is ultimately known without a form, unpictured and unseen." Be aware that, in saying these things about God being unnamed or unpictured, we are also talking about you, because God is your true Self; God is the truth of you. That's why being given "just" another picture of a brother seems to fall short of the ultimate goal of seeing him as he is in truth. But as Shapiro says, that is what we must do. We must use pictures, words, symbols that point to the Truth, because the Truth cannot be named, or spoken, or seen. This is, as the Course puts it, a "journey beyond words." The only way you can see your own face is to use a mirror, or to look at a photograph. That is exactly why we need a picture that reflects reality. Reality cannot be perceived directly because you cannot look at your own face! You can't see It. You can only *be* It.

Forgiveness is the process of seeing a reflection of truth in another person. It isn't an unlimited power (5:3). But it does not set any artificial limits on the other person, limits imposed by *you* (5:4) — your judgements, your standards that your brother must measure up to or be condemned. Forgiveness represents the Truth—*temporarily* (5:5). It is a learning device, much like repetition is a learning device to attain memorization. You use it over and over until one day you no longer need it; you *know* what you've been trying to learn. Once you have fully forgiven, you no longer need forgiveness (5:6–8). You no longer see any sin that needs forgiving. You see only perfect innocence.

This is the day when vain imaginings part like a curtain, to reveal what lies beyond them. Now is what is really there made visible, while all the shadows which appeared to hide it merely sink away. Now is the balance righted, and the scale of judgment left to Him Who judges true. And in His judgment will a world unfold in perfect innocence before your eyes. Now will you see it with the eyes of Christ. Now is its transformation clear to you. (W-164.5).

Prior to that day of revelation we still need the learning tool of forgiveness. We still fear forgiveness, afraid it won't pay off, that we are abdicating our rightful claim for

vengeance or punishment. But as we continue to practice forgiveness, we will come to love it (5:9), eventually realizing that “Forgiveness offers everything I want” (W-122).

Paragraph 6

6 The picture of your brother given you to occupy the space so lately left unoccupied and vacant will not need defense of any kind. ²For you will give it *overwhelming* preference, nor delay an instant in deciding that it is the only one you want. ³It does not stand for double concepts. ⁴Though it is but half a picture and *is* incomplete, within itself it is the same. ⁵The other half of what it represents remains unknown, but is not canceled out. ⁶And thus is God left free to take the final step Himself. ⁷For *this* you need no pictures and no learning aids. ⁸And what will ultimately take the place of every learning aid will merely *be*.

When we’ve really cleared away the ego picture, the new picture that dawns on us just fits. We know it’s right. We love it and want no other way of seeing. Our preference for it is *overwhelming*; no other competing picture stands a chance (6:1–2). This radical and overwhelming shift in perception is the miracle the Course is all about.

This new picture is internally consistent. There is no part of it that disagrees with any other part. We no longer perceive the other as (perhaps) mostly good but just a little guilty, or the reverse, or anything like that. We see perfect innocence. It isn’t yet the complete picture, but what’s there is the same within itself (6:3–4). Whole, consistent. We may not know what the missing half is, but what *is* there does not “cancel out” that other half.

That leaves room for God to take the final step. That’s entirely in His hands, so you don’t need any pictures or learning aids (6:7). Ultimately, knowledge, when it comes, is not learned; it just *is* (6:8).

Paragraph 7

7 Forgiveness vanishes and symbols fade, and nothing that the eyes have ever seen or ears have heard remains to be perceived.⁴ ²A Power wholly limitless has come, not to destroy, but to receive Its Own. ³There is no choice of function anywhere. ⁴The choice you fear to lose you never had. ⁵Yet only this appears to interfere with power unlimited and *single* thoughts, complete and happy, without opposite. ⁶You do not know the peace of power which opposes nothing. ⁷Yet no other kind can be at all. ⁸Give welcome to the Power beyond forgiveness and beyond the world of symbols and of limitations. ⁹He would merely be, and so He merely *is*.

Forgiveness, which is just a learning aid, will vanish in the advent of knowledge. Symbols, too, are no longer necessary. Who needs pictures of someone when you have

⁴ 1 Corinthians 2:9 (RSV): “But, as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him...’”

the real someone with you? In fact, all perceptions disappear when knowledge dawns (7:1)! (See T-3.V.8–10 (FIP); T-3.VII.14-17 (CE))

When Jesus refers to “a Power wholly limitless” he is clearly referring to what we normally call God. The Power is even referred to as “He” in the final sentence of the section (7:9). It comes “to receive Its own,” that is, us and all of creation. Unlike the traditional image of an avenging God coming to destroy all the sinners and torture them in hell, casting the devil into the fiery pit, this Power comes to *receive* us, to welcome us into and as the Kingdom (7:2).

We find our true function as co-creators with God. We don’t “choose” it, it is just our natural place in the Kingdom. We thought we were afraid of losing our choice, our “free will,” but we never really had it in the first place. At home in God, we just fall into what we were created for, joyfully and without reservation (7:3–4). There is no longer in us any opposition to the One Power. Our imagined independent will and thoughts only appeared to interfere with unlimited power; our thoughts and God’s are now “*single* thoughts, complete and happy, without opposite” (7:5).

We do not yet know and cannot imagine the peace of being part of God’s unopposed power, and yet that One Power is really the only Power there is (7:6–7). We are learning to welcome that “Power beyond forgiveness and beyond the world of symbols and of limitations” (7:8). It means what many spiritual traditions call “surrender,” but it is not a giving up of anything. We are giving up the illusion of having something to give up. We are surrendering to our True Self, to what we are as God created us, and leaving behind our pictures of ourselves and of others as something in opposition to that Oneness.

God, in the Bible, is referred to as “I AM that I AM.” The Course puts it like this: “He would merely be, and so He merely *is* (7:9). And so are we, too, part of that endless Being.

Oneness is simply the idea God is. And in His Being, He encompasses all things. No mind holds anything but Him. We say “God is,” and then we cease to speak, for in that knowledge words are meaningless. There are no lips to speak them, and no part of mind sufficiently distinct to feel that it is now aware of something not itself. It has united with its Source. And like its Source Itself, it merely is.

We cannot speak nor write nor even think of this at all. It comes to every mind when total recognition that its will is God’s has been completely given and received completely. It returns the mind into the endless present, where the past and future cannot be conceived. It lies beyond salvation; past all thought of time, forgiveness, and the holy face of Christ. The Son of God has merely disappeared into his Father, as his Father has in him. The world has never been at all. Eternity remains a constant state. (W-169.5:1-6:7)

For more about the meaning of the phrase, “God is,” read Cameo 132 in the CE.

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.