

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 27

Healing the Ancient Dream

Section XI

The Secret of Salvation

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

Overview of Section XI

This short section, only four paragraphs, was not separate in the FIP edition of the Course, but appeared as part of the preceding section. Robert Perry, in his editing of the current edition, noticed that in Helen's original notes, there was a break before these four paragraphs. He felt it deserved to be seen as a separate section.

I think it deserves it, too. After all, it purports to tell us “the secret of salvation”! The word “secret” occurs six times in the four paragraphs. Don't *you* want to know the secret of salvation? Doesn't everyone wish they knew? Well, here it is! You may not like it. You probably won't! But it is simple, easy to understand, if not to accept. It's right there in the first sentence, and it is repeated in various forms several more times in the short section.

Paragraph 1

The secret of salvation is but this: that you are doing this *unto yourself*. ²No matter what the form of the attack, this still is true. ³Whoever takes the role of enemy and of attacker, still is this the truth. ⁴Whatever seems to be the cause of any pain and suffering you feel, this is *still* true. ⁵For you would not react at all to figures in a dream you knew that you were dreaming. ⁶Let them be as hateful and as vicious as they may, they could have no effect on you unless you failed to recognize it is your dream. ⁷This single lesson learned will set you free from suffering, *whatever* form it takes.

“You are doing this to yourself.” That's it. That's the secret, all of it (1:1). (“The secret of salvation is *but* this.” “But” is often used in the Course in the sense of “only” or “no more than”).

We are probably used to the idea that our response to any outside stimulus is up to us. For instance, no one can “make” us angry; we have to choose to feel anger. But this section takes our responsibility to another level, one that is more difficult to accept for

most people. It says that the form of the attack doesn't matter; it's still you doing it to yourself (1:2). It does not matter *who* is doing the attacking, it is still you doing it to yourself (1:3). It's you who is the cause of the attack, no matter what "seems to be the cause of any pain and suffering you feel" (1:4).

The Course has made this point before, sometimes clearly, sometimes not quite so pointedly. Salvation is a purely mental thing, and must happen in our minds:

Salvation is for the mind, and it is attained through peace. This is the only thing that can be saved, and the only way to save it. Any response other than love arises from a confusion about both the what and the how of salvation. And this is the only answer. Never lose sight of this, and never allow yourself to believe, even for an instant, that there is another answer. (T-12.IV.5:1-5 (CE), T-12.III.5:1-4 (FIP))

We've discussed the idea that many things are caused by "the collective consciousness" of mankind, things like global warming, for instance. Yet if we are all one Mind, then it's still us doing it, isn't it? And when it concerns the part of the dream in which you (or your body) is the star, surely it must be you dreaming that part; right?

Remember that the Course says flatly, "There is no world" (W-132.6:2). The passage from Chapter 12 quoted above is followed immediately by lines that say the same thing: there is no world outside of us; it's within our mind.

Even if he [any person identified with the ego-body] is fully aware of anxiety, he does not perceive its source as his own ego-identification, and he always tries to handle it by making some sort of insane "arrangement" with the world. He always perceives this world as outside himself, for this is crucial to his adjustment. He does not realize that he makes this world, for there is no world outside him. (T-12.V.1:5-7 (CE), T-12.III.6:5-7 (FIP))

In Chapter 21 it got just as plain and direct as it does here:

This is the only thing that you need do for vision, happiness, release from pain, and the complete escape from sin *all* to be given you. ²Say only this, but mean it with no reservations, for here the power of salvation lies:

³*I am responsible for what I see.*

⁴*I chose the feelings I experience,*

And I decided on the goal I would achieve.

⁵*And everything that seems to happen to me I asked for and received as I had asked.*

⁶Deceive yourself no longer that you are helpless in the face of what is done to you. ⁷Acknowledge but that you have been mistaken, and all effects of your mistakes will disappear.

3 It is impossible the Son of God be merely driven by events outside him. ²It is impossible that the happenings that come to him were not his choice. ³His power of decision is the determiner of every situation in

which he seems to find himself by chance or accident. ⁴No accident or chance is possible within the universe as God created it, outside of which is nothing. ⁵Suffer, and you decided sin was your goal. ⁶Be happy, and you gave the power of decision to Him Who must decide for God for you. ⁷This is the little gift you offer to the Holy Spirit, and even this He gave to you to give yourself. ⁸For by this gift is given you the power to release your savior, that he may give salvation unto you.

(T-21.II.2:1-3:8 (CE) & (FIP))

And then there was this:

What if you recognized this world is a hallucination? ²What if you *really* understood you made it up? ³What if you realized that those who seem to walk about in it, to sin and die, attack and murder and destroy themselves, are wholly unreal? (T-20.VIII.5:1-3 (CE), T-20.VIII.7:3-5 (FIP))

The world is a dream, nothing more. Whatever happens to you in your part of the dream, you are doing it to yourself. It is your mind's belief in your sin and the guilt it engenders, its belief in God's wrath, and its belief that the separation really happened, that are the cause of the attacks on yourself that you have dreamed up.

It's hard to get angry at someone who is only playing a role in your dream that you have assigned to him!

As I've said before, when we first consider the idea that we might be doing it to ourselves, that we dreamed up all the things we believe are causing us pain and suffering, we react with guilt. "What kind of a sick, perverted creature am I?" we wonder.

But wait! Suppose you have a nightmare in which some awful calamity befalls you, or some goal you want to achieve seems to be eternally out of reach. When you wake up, do you feel guilty for having the dream? Of course not! So if we really *get* that this whole world, with all its pleasure and pain, is just a dream, how can we be guilty for imagining it? "For you would not react at all to figures in a dream you knew that you were dreaming" (1:5). If you *know* you are dreaming the whole thing, "they could have no effect on you," no matter how hateful and vicious they might seem to be (1:6).

This is the one and only lesson that "will set you free from suffering, *whatever* form it takes" (1:7). It may be hard to imagine that you can learn not to react at all to any form of suffering, but that is what the Course is promising. I believe that the vision of the real world, or the vision of Christ, will be so overwhelming that our dream illusion will seem like nothing in comparison. When we shift our focus we see a different world:

By focusing upon the good in him, the body grows decreasingly persistent in your sight, and will at length be seen as little more than just a shadow circling round the good.

4 And this will be your concept of yourself when you have reached the world beyond the sight your eyes alone can offer you to see. For you will not interpret what you see without the Aid that God has given you, and in His sight there is another world. You live in that world just as much as

this, for both are concepts of yourself, which can be interchanged but never jointly held. (T-31.VII.3:6-4:3 (CE), T-31.VII.3:3-4:2 (FIP))

Paragraph 2

2 The Holy Spirit will repeat this one inclusive lesson of deliverance until it has been learned, regardless of the form of suffering that brings you pain. ²Whatever hurt you bring to Him, He will make answer with this very simple truth. ³For this one answer takes away the cause of every form of sorrow and of pain. ⁴The form affects His answer not at all, for He would teach you but the single cause of all of them, no matter what their form. ⁵And you will understand that miracles reflect the simple statement “I have done this thing, and it is this I would undo.”

We will go through life encountering one problem or form of suffering after another, each one seeming to present a unique situation requiring a unique solution. The Holy Spirit, however, will respond to every one of them with “this one inclusive lesson of deliverance,” namely, “You are doing this to yourself.” He will patiently repeat it again and again “until it has been learned” (2:1). His answer to every form of hurt will be the same “very simple truth” (2:2).

It’s not as if He lacks originality or fails to see the particulars of every situation. He gives the same answer every time because *it works* every time, it addresses the fundamental *cause* “of every form of sorrow and of pain” (2:3). That cause, as we’ve seen, is our primal guilt over the separation, guilt over something that never happened. We see a hostile world because we are attacking ourselves and projecting that attack onto the world. There is no other cause; this is the cause of every form of suffering and pain. So He has only this one answer (2:4).

Eventually, hearing the same lesson over and over, we will come to understand that “the simple statement, ‘I have done this thing, and it is this I would undo’” is the key that unlocks miracles (2:5). We will experience it first in one particular way, and then in another, and then another, and it will dawn on us that this is the answer to everything. This is the secret of salvation.

We need to take this thought with us today and every day. Whenever some problem, some perceived cause for anger or hurt or suffering arises, to meet it with the thought: “I have done this thing, and it is this I would undo.”

Paragraph 3

3 Bring, then, all forms of suffering to Him Who knows that every one is like the rest. ²He sees no differences where none exist, and He will teach you how each one is caused. ³None has a different cause from all the rest, and *all* of them are easily undone by but a single lesson truly learned. ⁴Salvation is a secret you have kept but from yourself. ⁵The universe proclaims it so. ⁶But to its witnesses you pay no heed at all, for they attest the thing you do not *want* to know. ⁷They seem to keep it secret from you. ⁸Yet you need but learn you chose but not to listen, not to see.

To call this “simple statement” to mind in response to “all forms of suffering” is what we need to do. Bring it to the Holy Spirit Who already knows that it is just another form like all the others, and who reminds us that we are the cause (3:1). He won’t see non-existent differences. He will show us how each one is linked to the same cause (3:2). That similarity means that they can *all* be “easily undone but by a single lesson truly learned” (3:3). This really is the key to everything, the key to a happy life, a happy dream. This is the secret.

Actually, the only reason it can be called a secret is that we have been keeping it from ourselves (3:4). The ego is desperate to keep the secret cause hidden:

In the calm light of truth, let us recognize that you believe you have crucified God’s Son. You have not admitted this “terrible” secret, because you still wish to crucify him if you could find him. But the wish has hidden him from you because it is very fearful, and you are afraid to find him. You have handled this wish to kill yourself by not knowing who you are, and identifying with something else. You have projected guilt blindly and indiscriminately, but you have not uncovered its source. (T-13.II.5:1-5 (CE), T-13.II.5:1-5 (FIP))

It really is no secret! “The universe proclaims it so” (3:5) and is full of witnesses to its truth, witnesses we choose to ignore because they are trying to tell us “the thing you do not *want* to know” (3:6). We have become convinced that the world outside us is providing us with ample evidence that there are many causes of our suffering out there, making it impossible for us to pin down any way of escape (3:7). We must learn to recognize that this is not so; we are just choosing not to listen and not to see the truth: We are doing it to ourselves (3:8).

I don’t want to overlook the implication of 3:5-6: The very things we blame for our suffering are, in fact, trying to let us know that *we* are the cause of our suffering. If they are attesting to the “secret” we don’t want to know, they are in some way *proclaiming* this “secret” that is not a secret at all, but in plain sight. How that is so isn’t obvious to us due to our ingrained resistance. But if we will bring each instance to the Holy Spirit He will show us its true cause (3:2).

Do you recall the words from the Introduction to the Workbook that tell us, “The purpose of the workbook is to train your mind in a systematic way to a different perception of everyone and everything in the world” (W-Int.4:1). That’s talking about the

same thing, a dramatic flip-flop from seeing the world as cause and ourselves as effect to the total opposite, ourselves as cause and the world as our effect.

Paragraph 4

⁴ How differently will you perceive the world when this is recognized!
²When you forgive the world your guilt, you will be free of it. ³Its innocence does not demand your guilt, nor does your guiltlessness rest on *its* sins.
⁴This is the obvious, a secret kept from no one but yourself. ⁵And it is this that has maintained you separate from the world, and kept your brother separate from you. ⁶Now need you but to learn that both of you are innocent *or* guilty. ⁷The one thing that is impossible is that you be unlike each other; that they *both* be true. ⁸That is the only secret yet to learn. ⁹And it will be no secret you are healed.

Our entire perception of the world will change dramatically once we recognize the secret of salvation (4:1). The shift we are being asked to make is to stop projecting *our* guilt onto the world. Once we do *we* will be free of that guilt (4:2). It won't rebound on us as we fear; it will disappear, because we will realize our guilt has been made up by us. We've been doing it to ourselves. Seeing the world as innocent does not mean we must now see ourselves as guilty any more than seeing ourselves as innocent necessitates seeing the world as guilty of sin (4:3). We must learn that seeing either one as innocent means *both* are innocent. The same applies to guilt (4:6).

That should be obvious because we are One, created as One by God and one *with* God, but it's part of the secret we've been keeping from ourselves (4:4). Thinking we could see one as innocent, the other as guilty, is what has maintained our separation from the world and from our brothers (4:5). We *cannot* be different. It's impossible! (4:6) We are either all guilty or all innocent. That is part of the secret we've maintained, and which we have yet to learn. Learn it, "And it will be no secret you are healed" (4:9). "No secret"! It will be impossible to miss, and it will shine forth for the healing of the world. As the prophet Isaiah predicted:

Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. (Isaiah 58:8 ESV)

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.

Addendum: Spiritual Bypass

Spiritual Bypass is defined as using spiritual language to avoid having to confront psychological or emotional issues. An example might be, when someone is sick, saying something to them like, "Remember: You are doing this to yourself." Or telling a person suffering spousal abuse that it's their fault, they chose to be abused. We engage in spiritual bypass because another person's sickness or pain is making us uncomfortable, and we are not willing to sit with that discomfort and to extend ourselves in love to the one suffering.

The teaching we've studied in this section, "The Secret of Salvation," is in danger of being mis-applied as spiritual bypass. The same is true of the teaching that, whatever happens to you, "You asked for, and received as you have asked."

I am not sure how to reconcile this teaching with a situation, for example, of spousal abuse or some kind of birth defect. Some go so far as to say that such things are the result of past karma; that the abused person entered this life *choosing to be abused*. This tends to make the abuser innocent and the abused person guilty of causing their own suffering. In the gospels, Jesus actually seems to disagree with this idea:

“As he went on his way Jesus saw a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, why was this man born blind? Who sinned, this man or his parents?’ ‘It is not that he or his parents sinned,’ Jesus answered; ‘he was born blind so that God’s power might be displayed in curing him. While daylight lasts we must carry on the work of him who sent me; night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world I am the light of the world.’

With these words he spat on the ground and made a paste with the spittle; he spread it on the man’s eyes, and said to him, ‘Go and wash in the pool of Siloam.’ (The name means ‘Sent’.) The man went off and washed, and came back able to see.” (John 9:1–7 REB)

So, it’s not bad karma or inherited guilt. It seems that this blind birth was arranged by God to provide a positive example by his healing. It does not appear, however, that Jesus says the man brought this upon himself by self-attack or guilt.

Perhaps, ultimately, we do choose all that happens to us. That, I think, is for every individual to decide for themselves. It is definitely *not* our responsibility to apply this kind of thinking to anyone else. When I have spoken with an abused person, for example, rather than *blaming them* for their situation, I have tried to feel their pain, and to advise them (usually) to get out of the abusive relationship as soon as possible. In at least one instance, I physically helped them to do so.

The Bible actually has a short passage that addresses a simple example of spiritual bypass:

“What good is it, my friends, for someone to say he has faith when his actions do nothing to show it? Can that faith save him? Suppose a Fellow-Christian, whether man or woman, is in rags with not enough food for the day, and one of you says, ‘Goodbye, keep warm, and have a good meal,’ but does nothing to supply their bodily needs, what good is that? So with faith; if it does not lead to action, it is by itself a lifeless thing.

But someone may say: ‘One chooses faith, another action.’ To which I reply: ‘Show me this faith you speak of with no actions to prove it, while I by my actions will prove to you my faith.’”

(James 2:14–18 REB)

If I am experiencing what seems to be attack from another person, I may remind myself that I chose to come into this illusory world in order to have just such experiences. I can remind myself that the seeming attacker is just as innocent as I am, just as much a child of God as I am. I can forgive, overlooking their words or actions and at least *trying* to see the Christ in them. That’s what I mean by applying this teaching *to myself* but not to others. Remember the words of the Course that we read recently: “The Holy Spirit speaks to *you*. He does not speak to someone else.”

As we saw in those earlier sections, it isn’t our job to correct other people or to apply the lessons we learn from the Holy Spirit to them. That is between them and God.

