

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 28

The Little Gap

Section III

The Feast of Plenty

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

Overview of Section III

The concept of the little gap takes center stage here. The word *gap* occurs twelve times in this section. See if you can get a clear understanding of what it means.

The section begins with a look at our progress in re-climbing the ladder of salvation, moves into an in-depth discussion of how sickness is related to our separation from one another, and ends with a view of the “feast” to which we have all been invited at the end of the journey.

Paragraph 1

What waits in perfect certainty beyond salvation is not our concern, for you have barely started to allow your first, uncertain steps to be directed up the ladder separation led you down. ²The miracle alone is your concern at present. ³Here is where we must begin. ⁴And having started, will the way be made serene and simple in the rising up to waking and the ending of the dream. ⁵When you accept a miracle, you do not add your dream of fear to one that is already being dreamed. ⁶Without support the dream will fade away without effects, for it is your support that strengthens it.

The preceding section ended with this sentence: “Beginning here, salvation will proceed to change the course of every step in the descent to separation, until all the steps have been retraced, the ladder gone, and *all* the dreaming of the world undone” (T-28.II.12:7). The imagery of the ladder and steps down and back occur again in this section. But it is the last phrase I want to zero in on first: “*all* the dreaming of the world undone.” It’s difficult for any of us to imagine what that can mean. Does the physical world vanish? Where are we when we are no longer separate? And so our minds jabber with questions.

The first sentence of Section III, therefore, is referring to that final state beyond dreaming when it says, “What waits in perfect certainty beyond salvation is not our concern” (1:1). That final state is important, of course, but the point is that we do not need to be concerned about it. We don’t have to understand it to make it happen; it already *is*. This concern is something more immediate, something within our grasp. There’s no way we can understand the final state anyhow! We “have barely started to allow your first, uncertain steps to be directed up the ladder separation led [us] down” (1:1). Those first, uncertain steps are about recognizing and accepting our place as the dreamer who is causing the dream. They are about receiving the miracle of transformed perception, over and over.

At first perhaps it may seem like a put-down to be told we’ve “barely started,” not even to begin climbing the ladder, but barely started even to *allow* ourselves to move in that direction. It’s almost insulting. But I’m quite certain Jesus does not mean it that way. Consider that he said, in the beginning of the same sentence, that the end of the journey “waits in perfect certainty.” He isn’t questioning our ability or doubting that we’ll make it up the ladder. No. I think that when he says we’ve “barely started to allow your first, uncertain steps to be directed up the ladder,” that he means to reassure us! We are probably looking at this return journey with self-doubt and skepticism. *We* are the ones questioning our ability and doubting that we can make it, so he tells us that, even though we’ve barely begun, he is perfectly certain of the outcome.

The acceptance of the Atonement by everyone is only a matter of time. ...But the outcome is as certain as God. (T-2.VI.7:1, 8:7 (CE))

Don’t focus on the length of the journey; focus your attention on the miracle, triggered by our recognition of ourselves as cause. That’s where we must begin (1:2–3). Once we’ve started back up the ladder, the rest, all the way back to “the ending of the dream,” will be “made serene and simple” (1:4). Accepting a miracle causes our dream of fear to “fade away without effects” rather than making the dream worse by adding the burden of a difficult journey (1:5–6). It is our *support* of the dream than strengthens it; recognizing our part in causing it, and choosing to choose differently, has the opposite effect.

Paragraph 2

² No mind is sick until another mind agrees that they are separate. ²And thus it is their *joint* decision to be sick. ³If you withhold agreement and accept the part you play in making sickness real, the other mind cannot project its guilt without your aid in letting it perceive itself as separate and apart from you. ⁴Thus is the body not perceived as sick by both your minds from separate points of view. ⁵Uniting with a brother's mind prevents the cause of sickness and perceived effects. ⁶Healing is the effect of minds that join, as sickness comes from minds that separate. ⁷The miracle does nothing just because the minds *are* joined and *cannot* separate. ⁸Yet in the dreaming has this been reversed, and separate minds are seen as bodies, which are separated and which cannot *join*.

Jesus now launches into a deep consideration of the part we play in making sickness real. He has just said that our support is what gives the dream its strength, but here, he expands on that: to hold to our belief in sickness requires at least one other mind to agree with us in that belief (2:1–2). It's ironic. We need another mind to *join* with ours in our belief that we are *separate*! Sickness comes from the belief in separation, but to maintain a belief in separation we need another mind to join with us in that belief!

That isn't a requirement which is difficult to fulfill. We're surrounded by people who believe in separation. Nearly all of us do. But what if someone close to us *refuses* to agree with us about separateness? From what Jesus says here, without that support of another mind, we will not be able to maintain our belief in our separateness. We will be healed of our sickness (2:3–4). "Uniting with a brother's mind prevents the cause of sickness and perceived effects" (2:5).

This is how healing happens. It is "the effect of minds that join" (2:6). When a brother is sick, what is called for in us is to refuse to share his belief in separation that is causing the sickness, but rather to join with his mind in the belief in wholeness. Even that does not call for doing anything since "minds *are* joined and *cannot* separate" (2:7). We are just acknowledging what is always, already so. In our dreams, we've reversed that, seeing mind as *not* joined but *forced* to be separate because they are locked into bodies (2:8).

Paragraph 3

3 Do not allow your brother to be sick, for if he is have you abandoned him to his own dream by sharing it with him. ²He has not seen the cause of sickness where it is, and you have overlooked the **gap** between you where the sickness has been bred.¹ ³Thus are you *joined* in sickness, to preserve the little **gap** unhealed where sickness is kept carefully protected, cherished, and upheld by firm belief lest God should come to bridge the little **gap** that leads to Him. ⁴Fight not His coming with illusions, for it is His coming that you *want* above all things that seem to glisten in the dream. ⁵The end of dreaming is the end of fear, and love was never in the world of dreams.

We are being asked not to *allow* one another to be sick (3:1). To accept another's sickness, according to this, is to share their dream of sickness, and thus abandon them to their own dream. This seems to be another aspect of taking responsibility as cause of the dream. The brother or sister has not recognized his or her mind as the cause of the sickness, and *you* have overlooked (in the sense of *ignored*) the **gap** between you that has allowed the sickness to take root and grow (3:2).

Here comes the word **gap**: It is shorthand for the presumed space between you and everyone else. When we “overlook” the gap, it means we are ignoring our presumption of separateness, which is something we need to eradicate from our minds. If we will divest ourselves of our belief in separation, it will deprive sickness of its breeding place.

When we ignore the **gap**, however, and allow it to continue, we have *joined* our brother or sister in their sickness. We are preserving the **gap**. That's where sickness is “protected, cherished, and upheld by firm belief.” We are blocking God from bridging the **gap** and leading us home to Him (3:3). We are using the illusion of sickness and separation to fight His coming. We have to realize that “it is His coming that you *want* above” all the shiny trinkets that sparkle and attract us to the dream. That refers to all the many different things that seem to give us reason to keep the dream going, hoping they will bring us fulfillment and happiness. They never do (3:4). When dreams end, fear ends. We never will find real love in the dream (3:5). We must affirm, instead: “My only goal is God” (W-258, “Let me remember that my goal is God”).

A hymn I learned in my Christian days pops into my mind. Some of those folks knew what they were talking about:

*My goal is God Himself, not joy, nor peace,
Nor even blessing, but Himself, my God;
'Tis His to lead me there—not mine, but His—
At any cost, dear Lord, by any road.*

¹ “Overlooked” here means “not recognized.” Both of you, in other words, have failed to recognize that the cause of your brother's sickness is your joint belief that there is a **gap** between you. Yet the “**gap**” (a central term in this chapter) is not a real space of separation, but merely “a wish to keep apart and not to join” (4:1).

2

*So faith bounds forward to its goal in God,
And love can trust her Lord to lead her there;
Upheld by Him, my soul is following hard
Till God hath full fulfilled my deepest prayer.*

3

*No matter if the way be sometimes dark,
No matter though the cost be oft-times great,
He knoweth how I best shall reach the mark,
The way that leads to Him must needs be strait.*

4

*One thing I know, I cannot say Him nay;
One thing I do, I press towards my Lord;
My God my glory here, from day to day,
And in the glory there my great Reward.*

(Frances Brook)

Paragraph 4

4 The **gap** is little. ²Yet it holds the seeds of pestilence and every form of ill, because it is a wish to keep apart and not to join. ³And thus it seems to give a cause to sickness which is *not* its cause. ⁴The purpose of the **gap** is all the cause that sickness has, for it was made to keep you separated, in a body which you see as if it were the cause of pain. ⁵The cause of pain is separation, not the body, which is only its effect.² ⁶Yet separation is but empty space—enclosing nothing, doing nothing, and as unsubstantial as the vacant place between the ripples that a ship has made in passing by. ⁷And covered just as fast, as water rushes in to close the **gap**, and as the waves in joining cover it.

We've been talking about the **gap**, the seeming separation between us. It seems at time to be so great. We see that especially in times such as June, 2020, in the midst of a pandemic with social distancing, "Black lives matter" protests, and a few months away from a crucial presidential election. We have been experiencing literal enforced separation due to the disease. We are more than ever aware of the separation between races, although at the same time we are being made aware of our unity. And the political divide looms large. To many, God seems more distant than ever. So Jesus assures us, "The **gap** is little" (4:1). It's really not an unbridgeable gulf. As was said a while ago,

² "Which is only its effect" means that the *body* is merely an effect of *separation*.

God hasn't stranded us on a distant shore with no way to reach the other shore. The **gap** is *so* little, in fact, that it does not really exist. It is a **gap** with no distance.³

Still, despite all that, the **gap** remains the source of all our ills. The **gap** is our “wish to keep apart and not to join” (4:2), and “every form of ill” arises from that. When he goes on to say that our wish to separate “seems to give a cause to sickness which is *not* its cause” (4:3), he is referring to all the things we normally think are the cause of sickness, such as germs, viruses, poor nutrition, pollution, our bodies, and other external causes. They, he asserts with emphasis, are *not* the cause. The *only* cause of sickness is “the purpose of the **gap**” (4:4), which is (as he plainly states in 4:5) separation. We made the **gap** to keep us separated. We see ourselves as in bodies, and we think our bodies are the cause of our pain (4:4). But the body is nothing more than the effect of separation, and separation is the true cause of pain (4:5).

But what is separation? It's *empty space*! It does not enclose anything, it does nothing. He uses a great analogy. He says separation is as unsubstantial as the spaces “between the ripples that a ship has made in passing by” (4:6). Those spaces appear and disappear just as fast “as water rushes in to close the **gap**,” covered as the waves join over them (4:7).

Paragraph 5

5 Where is the **gap** between the waves when they have joined and covered up the **gap** which seemed to keep them separate for a little while? ²Where is the grounds for sickness when the minds have joined to close the little **gap** between them where the seeds of sickness seemed to grow? ³God builds the bridge, but only in the space left clean and vacant by the miracle. ⁴The weeds of sickness⁴ and the shame of sin He cannot bridge, for He cannot destroy the alien will that He created not. ⁵Let its effects be gone, and clutch them not with eager hands to keep them for yourself. ⁶The miracle will brush them all aside, and thus make room for Him Who wills to come and bridge His Son's returning to Himself.

Where does the **gap** go when the waves cover it? Nowhere, because it was nothing to begin with, just emptiness (5:1). Similarly, when two minds close the little **gap** between them, the **gap** that seemed to harbor the seeds of sickness, where does the cause of the sickness go? Nowhere. It is and always was *causelessness* and not a true cause (5:2).

We must accept that miracle, that recognition of the **gap** as the source of our problems, that willingness to join with another mind rather than remain aloof and separate, before the bridge that spans the **gap** can be built. There must be a “clean and

³ The journey to God is merely the reawakening of the knowledge of where you are always and what you are forever. It is a journey without distance to a goal that has never changed. (T-8.V.12:6–7 (CE), T-8.VI.9:6-7 (FIP))

⁴ The “weeds of sickness” are apparently the result of when “the seeds of sickness seemed to grow.”

vacant” space to hold the bridge (5:3). We must take that first step up the ladder. As long as we maintain “the weeds of sickness and the shame of sin” that keep us apart, God cannot build the bridge. “He cannot destroy the alien will that He created not” (5:4). How could He destroy something He did not create? God is the only Cause, so what He does not create does not exist. But our wish for that alien will can delay the bridging of the **gap**, because God will never *force* His Will on us. Jesus has explained earlier how our wish for an independent will can block our experience of His Will:

To fulfill the will of God perfectly is the only joy and peace that can be fully known, because it is the only function that can be fully experienced. When this is accomplished, then, there is no other experience. But the wish for other experience will block this, because God’s will cannot be forced upon you, being an experience of total willingness. (T-8.II.4:1–3 (CE), T-8.III.2:1-3 (FIP))

A wish for an alien will is a wish for separation, and that is the root of all we call evil. We are asked to let go of the effects — sickness, the shame of sin — and to stop “clutching” them to ourselves (5:5). When we let them go “the miracle will brush them all aside,” opening the way for God to become the bridge for our return to Him (5:6).

It’s important, I think, to remind ourselves that this “letting go” of the effects is the same thing as what Jesus calls “the secret of salvation”: the recognition that “I am doing this to myself.” These are just different ways of describing that identical first step back up the ladder.

Paragraph 6

6 Count, then, the silver miracles and golden dreams of happiness as all the treasures you would keep within the storehouse of the world. ²The door is open, not to thieves, but to your starving brothers, who mistook for gold a shining pebble and who stored away a heap of snow that shone like silver.⁵ ³They have nothing left behind the open door. ⁴What is the world except a little **gap** perceived to tear eternity apart and break it into days and months and years? ⁵And what are you who live within the world except a picture of the Son of God in broken pieces, each concealed within a separate and uncertain bit of clay?

We want to find value in the world somehow. Of course we do. So Jesus advises us to focus on collecting “the silver miracles and golden dreams of happiness” into our storehouse of the world, and to forget about holding onto anything else (6:1). Miracles and happy dreams are the things worth seeking for and collecting. But we don’t *hoard* these things. The doors to the storehouse are open. We gladly share our miracles and dreams with our “starving brothers,” people who have mistaken the shining pebbles and heaps of snow of the material world for true gold and silver (6:2). Their worldly storehouse is empty (6:3; see the CE footnote to 6:2).

Now, Jesus presents an expanded definition of “the little **gap**”: Yes, it is the seeming separation between us, but more than that, it is *the whole world*. This world we live in is splintered into a zillion separate pieces by space and time. Time we think of as broken up “into days and months and years,” all of which are gaps between us and the past and future (6:4). And in this broken world are billions of bodies, “a picture of the Son of God in broken pieces, each concealed within a separate and uncertain bit of clay” (6:5). What seem to be treasures in this world are simply not worth the effort to collect and hoard. Moth and rust consume them, thieves break in and steal. The treasures of Heaven are all that we truly want and need.

⁵ Matthew 6:19-20 (RSV): “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.” Like the biblical passage, the above passage also contrasts two different treasures, housed in two different places. The first treasure house is a conventional one, where silver and gold are stored and where thieves can break in and steal. The real emptiness of the treasure house, however, comes from the inherent emptiness of the treasure itself: the gold is likened to “a shining pebble” and the silver to “a heap of snow.” The second treasure house is the real one. It contains a different kind of treasure—“silver miracles and golden dreams of happiness”—and its door is open in welcome, so that the starving brothers who treasured conventional gold and silver can come in and “enjoy the feast of plenty set before them there” (7:6).

Paragraph 7

7 Be not afraid, but let your world be lit with miracles.⁶ ²And where the **gap** was seen to stand *between* you, join your brother there, and sickness will be seen *without* a cause. ³The dream of healing in forgiveness lies, and gently shows you you have never sinned. ⁴The miracle would leave no proof of guilt to bring you witness to what never was. ⁵And in your storehouse it will make a place of welcome for your Father and your Self. ⁶The door is open, that all those may come who would no longer starve, and would enjoy the feast of plenty set before them there. ⁷And they will meet with your invited Guests the miracle has asked to come to you.⁷

Jesus says, “Be not afraid.” How often in the gospels he says that! He recognizes that all this talk about letting go of the treasures of the world can scare the daylights out of us. “Go ahead,” he urges us. “It’s safe. Really, it is. ‘Let your world be lit with miracles’. You won’t regret it” (7:1). Go ahead! Instead of allowing that **gap** to *separate* you from your brother, “*join* your brother there” (7:2, my emphasis)! What a concept! Step into that empty space and recognize your oneness with her or him. When you join with one another, “sickness will be seen *without* a cause,” because the **gap** is no more.

This is a course in forgiveness. And yes, what we are talking about is forgiveness. The “weeds of sickness and the shame of sin” are part and parcel of the same thing. Recognizing that “I am doing this to myself,” joining with our brother, treasuring the miracle and the happy dream, and forgiveness are all the same thing. We are refusing to allow our delusion of sin and guilt to stand between us any longer. And in this “dream of healing” is where forgiveness happens. In forgiving the other, we realize we have never sinned (7:3). The miracle has eradicated the false evidence of guilt, and we realize for ourselves and for everyone that sin never was. It never existed as a barrier between us, one another, and God (7:4).

The miracle of forgiveness, a.k.a. the happy dream, makes room in our storehouse for “a place of welcome for your Father and your Self” (7:5). Perhaps that is the true treasure: God and our Christ Self. We’re throwing open the doors and inviting all the neighbors, and even the starving strangers on the road, to this wonderful feast (7:6). This is *so* much like what Jesus taught in the Bible:

“And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son,” (Matthew 22:1–2 ESV)

⁶ “Be not afraid” is a phrase found throughout the King James Bible. For example: “But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid” (Matthew 14:27).

⁷ The Guests are “your Father and your Self.”

“Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good.” (Matthew 22:9–10 ESV)

And a gospel hymn from my past comes to mind here as well:

*Jesus has a table spread
Where the saints of God are fed,
He invites His chosen people, "Come and dine";
With His manna He doth feed
And supplies our every need:
Oh, 'tis sweet to sup with Jesus all the time!*
Refrain:
*"Come and dine, " the Master calleth, "Come and dine";
You may feast at Jesus' table all the time;
He Who fed the multitude, turned the water into wine,
To the hungry calleth now, "Come and dine.*

He’s calling us to invite as many as we can find to the feast. We really don’t have to go looking for them because “the miracle has asked [them] to come to you” (7:7)! Many times the Course makes this point, that certain ones have been assigned to us. [If there is time, read through the opening section of the Manual for Teachers.]

Certain pupils have been assigned to each of God’s teachers, and they will begin to look for him as soon as he has answered the Call. They were chosen for him because the form of the universal curriculum that he will teach is best for them in view of their level of understanding. His pupils have actually been waiting for him, for his coming is certain. Again, it is only a matter of time. Once he has chosen to fulfill his role, they are ready to fulfill theirs. Time waits on his choice, but not whom he will serve. When he is ready to learn, the opportunities to teach will be provided for him. (M-2.1:1–7 (CE))

Paragraph 8

8 This is a feast unlike indeed to those the dreaming of the world has shown. ²For here, the more that anyone receives, the more is left for all the rest to share.⁸ ³The Guests have brought unlimited supply with Them, and no one is deprived or can deprive. ⁴Here is a feast the Father lays before His Son, and shares it equally with him. ⁵And in Their sharing there can be no **gap** in which abundance falters and grows thin. ⁶Here can the lean years enter not,⁹ for time waits not upon this feast, which has no end. ⁷For love has set its table in the space that seemed to keep your Guests apart from you.

This feast is very different from any feast in this material world. The distinguishing feature of the feast Jesus has invited us to is that, “the more anyone receives, the more is left for all the rest to share” (8:1–2). Our receiving, our “eating” of the Bread of Life, actually multiplies it. In this celestial potluck, “the Guests have brought unlimited supply with Them.” Lack is impossible for anyone (8:3). I confess to being a bit puzzled at first by the capitalization of “Guests” and “Them.” Capitalizing those words makes them refer to God. The guests to the feast would seem to be us, and those we invite. Surely God isn’t one of the guests; God is the host. It would make a lot of sense if it were each of us who come with unlimited supply. I think the intent here is to emphasize our union with God, our divinity. We *are* divine, and that is why our supply is unlimited.

And that seems confirmed by the next sentence. It always pays to read the context: “Here is a feast the Father lays before His Son, and shares it equally with him” (8:4). We share the abundance of God Himself.

*And all Your attributes abide in me,
because it is Your will to have a Son
so like his Cause that Cause and Its effect
are indistinguishable. (W-326.2:5 (CE))*

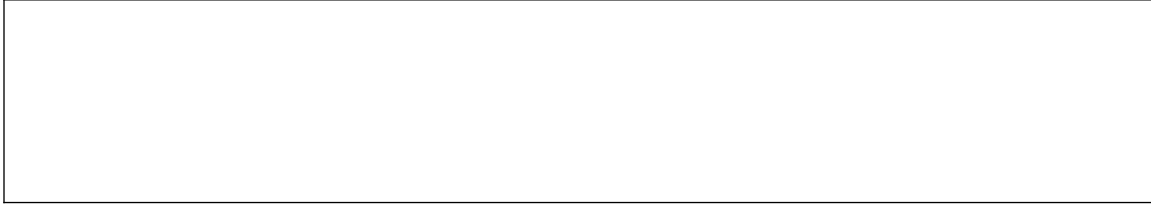
The **gap** is gone. There is nothing to separate us from God’s abundance (8:5). This is an unending feast, with ever-increasing supply (8:6). When Joseph went down to Egypt, he predicted seven lean years, seven years of famine, and won favor with Pharaoh because he set up a famine-preparedness plan that kept Egypt in food during the draught. Joseph’s father and brothers came down to profit from Egypt’s foresight, not realizing it

⁸. This seems to be an allusion to the feeding of the five thousand and the four thousand in the gospels (Matthew 14:13-21, Matthew 15:32-38), in which Jesus uses a few loaves and fishes to feed a great multitude, after which his disciples collect as many as twelve baskets of fragments.

⁹. This draws on the biblical story of Joseph, who interprets part of Pharaoh’s dream to mean that there would be seven years of famine in Egypt: “The seven lean and gaunt cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven empty ears [of grain] blighted by the east wind are also seven years of famine” (Genesis 41:27 [RSV]).

was their own brother who had engineered it. Jesus says that in this feast, no lean years are even possible because there is no passage of time, no need to wait for a future moment, no chance the supply will run out.

And in the final line is the clarification of why *Guests* was capitalized. It *does* refer to God the Father and His Son, and (correcting my earlier remark) *we* (each of us) are the host (8:7). We clear the space in the gap of the debris we've put there to keep us apart, thus "inviting" God and His Son (all the rest of creation) into that formerly empty **gap**, which has become the site of the celestial feast.



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.