

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 28

The Little Gap

Section V

Share Not Evil Dreams

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

Overview of Section V

This section repeats much of what has gone before, summing it all up. We empower sickness when we are willing to share in one another's dreams of sin and guilt. Forgiveness entails the choice to *not* share in them, and it sets us free from our own suffering as well.

Paragraph 1

What is a sense of sickness but a sense of limitation? ²Of a *splitting off* and separating *from*? ³A **gap** perceived between ourselves and what is seen as health? ⁴The good is seen outside; the evil in. ⁵And thus is sickness separating off the self from good, and keeping evil there. ⁶God is the alternate to dreams of fear. ⁷Who shares in them can never share in Him, but who withdraws his mind from sharing them *is* sharing Him. ⁸There is no other choice. ⁹Except you share it, nothing can exist, and *you* exist because God shared His will with you, that His creation might create.

A sense of sickness is a sense of limitation. That's an interesting observation, and if you think about it, it is obvious. An upset stomach limits your ability to digest and probably puts limits on your activities. Any sickness imposes restrictions of different kinds on what you can and cannot do (1:1).

Sickness is also a sense "of *splitting off* and separating *from*" (1:2). When you are sick, you feel separate from and different from everyone else. You are sick; others are not. And there seems to be a **gap** between yourself and health in general (1:3). That's inescapable: you are not healthy. You and health are separated. Health, which is a good thing, is *outside* you. Sickness, the "evil" thing, is *in* you (1:4).

The point here, I think, is that sickness and separation go hand in hand. Sickness is a way that our egos use to make goodness appear to be separate from the self while keeping the appearance of evil within the self (1:5). It is symbolic of our supposed guilt.

These are the dreams of fear, and “God is the *alternate*” to them (1:6). They are mutually exclusive. If you share these dreams of fear, specifically dreams of sickness, you can never share in God (1:7). But since only the two alternatives exist (“There *is* no other choice” (1:8)), if you *withdraw* your mind from sharing the dreams, you are automatically sharing God! Sharing in God is the inward direction of sharing. You are taking part in God, as opposed to sharing in the out-going sense, which would be to share God *with* someone or something else. Sharing in God is automatic when you let go of the dreams because you are always, already sharing in God; the dreams do nothing but mask the fact from your awareness—the fact that you *are* the universe!

If you who hold Him and whom He holds are the universe, all else must be outside, where nothing is. (T-16.III.6:4 (CE), T-16.III.6:3 (FIP))

Nothing can exist unless you share it, “and *you* exist because God shared His will with you, that His creation might create” (1:9). Sharing, it would seem, *is* existence, and existence is sharing. If we did not share in God, we would not exist; we exist *because* God shared His will with us.

Almost as an aside, Jesus throws in the last phrase of the paragraph: God shared His will with us in order “that His creation might create.” God’s motivation in sharing Himself with us, we might say, was to enable us to create as He creates. We’ve seen the importance of the idea of creation back in Section II, and the Addendum I pulled together. We were created to create.

Paragraph 2

² It is the *sharing* of the evil dreams of hate and malice, bitterness and death, of sin and suffering, of pain and loss, that makes them real. ²Unshared they are perceived as meaningless. ³The fear is gone from them because you did not give them your support. ⁴Where fear has gone, there love must come, because there are but these alternatives. ⁵Where one appears the other disappears. ⁶And which you share becomes the only one you have. ⁷You have the one which you accept, because it is the only one you wish to have. ⁸You share no evil dreams if you forgive the dreamer and perceive that he is not the dream he made. ⁹And so he cannot be a part of yours, from which you both are free. ¹⁰Forgiveness separates the dreamer from the evil dream, and thus releases him.

Just as sharing is what makes us real in the first place, sharing is what makes all our dreams of hate, bitterness, death, sin, suffering, pain, and loss *seem* real (2:1). If we do not share them, they become meaningless to us, unreal (2:2). If we do not support the dreams, they are stripped of their power to induce fear in us (2:3). It seems to me that, in

this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, we, as Course students, need to look carefully at our part in empowering it. The choice is between fear and love, which are the only alternatives (2:4). What is your response to this world-wide sickness: fear? Or love? How do you respond to people who see things differently and react differently? Fear, or love? If we are willing to let go of the fear, “there love *must* come” (2:4). Fear and love are mutually exclusive, and either one can drive out the other (2:5).

So the question we must ask ourselves is, “Which am I sharing? Fear, or love?” Because whichever one I share becomes the only one I have (2:6). I have it because I *want* it, which is why I share it with others (2:7). Fear is what keeps the separation going, after all. Fear and love are like the opposite poles on a magnet. Positive love draws together; negative fear pushes apart. And there is no “neutral.”

How, then, do I *not* share fear? In a word, forgiveness. As we’ve seen several times already, to “share *no* evil dreams” means to “forgive the dreamer and perceive that he is *not* the dream he made” (2:8). This section is titled “Share Not Evil Dreams.” It could equally well be named “Forgive.” It helps a lot, I think, to see the two aspects of forgiveness: forgiving and loving the person doing the dreaming and recognizing that they are not the dream being projected and played out in their lives. I can look at that problematic person and remind myself, “She’s not her ego. This persona that I’m seeing is not who she is!”

When I’ve forgiven in this way, I come to realize that this person, who is not their evil dream, is also not any part of *my* dream. We are *both* free of our dreams (2:9). That’s what forgiveness does: It “*separates* the dreamer from the evil dream, and thus releases him” (2:10).

Paragraph 3

3 Remember, if you share an evil dream, you will believe you *are* the dream you share.¹ ²And fearing it, you will not want to know your own identity, because you think that *it* is fearful. ³And you will deny your Self, and walk upon an alien ground which your Creator did not make and where you seem to be a something you are not. ⁴You will make war upon your Self, which seems to be your enemy, and will attack your brother as a part of what you hate. ⁵There is no compromise. ⁶You are your Self or an illusion. ⁷What can be between illusion and the truth? ⁸A middle ground, where you can be a thing that is not you, *must* be a dream and cannot be the truth.

Jesus told us back in T-28.IV.1:8-9 and T-28.IV.5:2 that we must believe we are the dream we share. A moment ago, he said to us that perceiving the other person is not the dream they made also means they cannot be part of my dream. The point, I think, is that

¹ T-28.IV.1:8-9: “You could be anyone or anything, depending on whose evil dreams you share. You can be sure of just one thing: that you are evil, for you share in dreams of fear.” T-28.IV.5:2: “Who shares a dream must *be* the dream he shares, because by sharing is a cause produced.”

sharing a dream goes both ways. When I *share* someone's evil dream (believing they are the evil person they dream they are), I will also believe that I am that same evil dream (3:1). Then, because I am afraid of his dream self, I will think *my* self is equally fearful, and I *won't want* to know my own identity (3:2). This shared fear explains what was said earlier, in 28.IV.2:1–3, that if we share someone's evil dreams we lose *our* identity!

I think the key to understanding this back-and-forth nature of mistaken identity lies in the fact of our forgotten Oneness. If I believe the other person is evil, I end up believing that about myself. But it's equally true that I see the other person as evil or sinful because I already believe that about myself, and I am projecting that belief onto the other person. The fact is that *there is no other person*; just the one Son of God.

“Having made this choice, you will begin to learn and understand why, when you have met someone else, you have thought he *was* someone else. And every holy encounter in which you enter fully will teach you that this is not so. You can encounter only part of yourself because you are part of God, Who is everything.” (T-8.II.10:1–3 (CE), T-8.III.6:7-7:1 (FIP))

Whatever we think we are doing to another, we are doing to ourselves. Period. So if you deny the Self of another, you *will* deny your Self, with the result being that you think you are something you are not, living in this world God did not create (3:3). Thinking you are this ego-self in a body, you will view your *true* Self as your enemy and “make war” on It. Since anyone you think of as “someone else” is part of that One Self, you will attack that other person (3:4). The whole cycle of separation stems from our denial of Oneness.

“There is no compromise” (3:5). You experience yourself only in one of two ways: your True Self, or an illusion (3:6). How could anything be something other than one of these two things? Either you are the truth of your Self, or you are *not* the truth, which is an illusion of yourself (3:7). To be something that is *not* you “*must* be a dream, and *cannot* be the truth (3:8).

Thus, any hint that you are something other than your ego-body seems like a threat to your identity.

Paragraph 4

4 You have conceived a little **gap** between illusions and the truth to be the place where all your safety lies, and where your Self is safely hidden by what you have made. ²Here is a world established that is sick, and this the world the body's eyes perceive. ³Here are the sounds it hears, the voices which its ears were made to hear. ⁴Yet sights and sounds the body can perceive are meaningless. ⁵It cannot see nor hear. ⁶It does not know what seeing is; what listening is for. ⁷It is as little able to perceive as it can judge or understand or know. ⁸Its eyes are blind, its ears are deaf. ⁹It cannot think, and so it cannot have effects.

We've tried to imagine that some middle ground exists, some “**gap** between illusions and the truth” (4:1). We *want* this **gap** to exist because we still identify with our illusory self, so we think we can be “safe” as this false self and continue to hide our true Self beneath the illusion. But this imaginary **gap** is where the world of sickness comes from, and appears before our body's eyes (4:2). This imaginary **gap**, which *cannot* exist, contains all the sights our eyes see and all the sounds our ears hear; these physical senses were *made* to see and hear illusions (4:3). All of them “are meaningless” (4:4) because the body “*cannot see nor hear*” (4:5, my emphasis).

Pause a minute and let yourself absorb just how radical this teaching is! Your body's eyes can't see! Your body's ears can't hear! It flies in the face of everything we've experienced and learned since birth into our bodies. Everything you see or hear is *meaningless*. The thought is so far-reaching; it calls everything you know into question. I doubt anyone can just instantly accept this as accurate. It seems as unbelievable as the most egregious conspiracy theory. The report of your eyes and ears is all “fake news”? Hard to believe.

So, allow yourself to doubt. Be honest with yourself, both about what the Course says, and your difficulty in accepting it. Just be open to what it is saying.

It says the body does not even know what seeing *is* or what listening is *for* (4:6). It implies an entirely different realm of senses—non-physical senses. It is a kind of seeing and hearing of which the body is incapable. It's easy to understand that that body cannot “judge or understand or know” anything; the mind does those things, not the body. There must be another kind of seeing and hearing, another set of sense organs that the body does not possess (4:7-8). Perhaps these other sense organs are mental, like the ability to judge, understand, and know. And because the body can't *think*, it can have no effects (4:9). That implies that thoughts are the cause of all things and that our physical senses are incapable of perceiving our thoughts' full effect.

Paragraph 5

5 What is there God created can be sick? ²And what that He created not can *be*? ³Let not your eyes behold a dream; your ears bear witness to illusion. ⁴They were made to look upon a world that is not there; to hear the voices that can make no sound. ⁵Yet are there other sounds and other sights which can be seen and heard and understood. ⁶For eyes and ears are senses without sense, and what they see and hear they but report. ⁷It is not they that hear and see, but *you* who put together every jagged piece, each senseless scrap and shred of evidence, and make a witness to the world you want.

God is not physical. Even the Bible implies that creation came from thought: from God's Word, God's Wisdom, from the *logos*. Surely, if God is God, His creations can't be sick (5:1)! Furthermore, nothing God did not create even *exists* (5:2). Therefore, sickness itself does not exist, and anything that *appears* to be sick must be an illusion. Jesus calls

on us to not allow our eyes and ears to deceive us, to “behold a dream” or “bear witness to illusion” (5:3).

He states clearly that our eyes and ears were made (by the ego) to see illusions and to hear non-existent sounds — to see and hear the very things we commonly think of as reality (5:4). The purpose of our senses are to demonstrate to us that illusions are real.

And “Yet are there other sounds and other sights,” not audible to the ears, not visible to the eyes, but which, nevertheless, “can be seen and heard *and understood*” (5:5). Again, the implication is that some other means of seeing and hearing, some *true* means, must exist, and we must possess that means. The emphasis on the words “*and understood*” suggests that this means is an aspect of our mind.

The final two sentences offer us an intriguing explanation of how our physical senses work to construct illusions. They are “senses without sense”; they don’t hear or see anything! They just pass on what the mind tells them to report. Who tells them what to report? *You do*. Your mind assembles all the random bits of data, “each senseless scrap and shred of evidence,” to “*make a witness to the world you want*” (5:6–7). Jesus has given us this same information in summary before:

“Perception selects, and makes the world you see. It literally picks it out as mind directs it.... For what you look for you are far more likely to discover, regardless of its color, shape, or size, than what you would prefer to overlook.... Perception is a choice and not a fact.” (T-21.V.1:1-2:2 (CE), T-21.V.1:1-7 (FIP))

When the Course tells us that we perceive what we *want* to perceive, we might want to add the words “think we” in there: “we perceive what we *think we* want to perceive”.

Paragraph 6

6 Let not the body’s ears and eyes perceive these countless fragments seen within the **gap** that you imagined and let them persuade their maker his imaginings were real. ²Creation proves reality because it shares the function all creation shares. ³It is not made of little bits of glass, a piece of wood, a thread or two perhaps, and put together to attest its truth. ⁴Reality does not depend on this. ⁵There is no **gap** which separates the truth from dreams and from illusions. ⁶Truth has left no room for them in any time or place, for it fills every place and every time, and makes them wholly indivisible.

We have a choice: whether or not to allow our eyes and ears to perceive all the fragmentation the world holds, and to let those fragments persuade us that the separation we’ve imagined is real (6:1). Choosing *not* to allow that is the crucial thing we must do. Our senses see separation. We must decide not to believe that what we are seeing is real. There is no separation, no **gap**.

Typically, we use our senses to try to figure out what is true, what is real. Lately, I’ve been re-reading some of Agatha Christie’s mystery novels about the master detective,

Hercule Poirot. As you proceed through the book, you encounter bits and pieces of evidence, much like the “little bits of glass, a piece of wood, a thread or two perhaps” (6:3), and over and over Poirot’s friend, Hastings, tries to piece them together to “solve the mystery.” And over and over, he is wrong. What Jesus says about how we try to understand reality reminds me of that mistaken process! We are trying to evaluate reality based on incomplete and misunderstood evidence.

“Creation proves reality because it *shares* the function *all* creation shares” (6:2), which is, I believe, extending love, extending God’s own Being. (It’s somewhat like Poirot, who always manages to see the entire picture of the mystery as a whole.) The emphasis on the word “shares” makes it clear that this refers to Oneness. All creation shares in that Oneness. Reality doesn’t depend on the flawed process of trying to assemble the puzzle from all its separate parts (6:4). There *are* no separate parts! There is no **gap** (6:5). Thus, there is “no room for” dreams and illusions “in *any* time or place.” Creation “fills every place and every time, and makes them wholly indivisible” (6:6).

Seeing from the perspective of Oneness is how we “share not evil dreams.” We don’t accept the picture we construct about others from the little bits we see. We look with spiritual eyes at every part of *creation*, seeking to see them as God created them.

Paragraph 7

7 You who believe there is a little **gap** between you do not understand that it is here that you are kept as prisoners in a world perceived to be existing here. ²The world you see does not exist because the place where you perceive it is not real. ³The **gap** is carefully concealed in fog, and misty pictures rise to cover it with vague, uncertain forms and changing shapes, forever unsubstantial and unsure. ⁴Yet in the **gap** is *nothing*. ⁵And there are no awesome secrets and no darkened tombs where terror rises from the bones of death. ⁶Look at the little **gap**, and you behold the innocence and emptiness of sin that you will see within yourself when you have lost the fear of recognizing love.

When we accept the existence of “a little **gap** between” one another, we imprison ourselves in the world of separation that we seem to see (7:1). That prison world *does not exist* because the separation isn’t real (7:2). We are only dimly aware of this **gap**; it seems hidden in a fog. It’s all very unclear. Like a mirage in a desert, there seem to be pictures formed upon the mist, but they are uncertain, changing, unsubstantial shapes (7:3). Sometimes we look at a person and see them as sick and deserving of our sympathy. Other times we might see the same person as a religious hypocrite, a racist, a saintly do-gooder, an insubstantial nebbish, or a malignant narcissist. Those pictures are the ones we form from the shifting and changing evidence shown us by our physical senses. None of them are true. The **gap** holds *nothing* (7:4). There are “no awesome secrets and no darkened tombs where terror rises from the bones of death” (7:5).

Gosh! Sounds like an Indiana Jones or Tomb Raider movie, doesn't it? Or the soil from which conspiracy theories arise claiming to have discovered the "awesome secret" that explains everything. Somehow it helps me to put my ego's delusions in the same category as the fantasies we find in motion pictures or, alas, sometimes in real life. They are just that far removed from reality.

If we are willing to "look at the little **gap**," we will see "the innocence and emptiness of sin that you will see within yourself." We'll see that there is nothing negative there; nothing to fear. We'll see that same pristine innocence in our brothers and sisters when we have "lost the fear of recognizing love" in them, and simultaneously, we'll find that innocence in ourselves (7:6).²

² I've just begun reading Mary Trump's book about her uncle Donald. It goes into the horrific family background he grew up in that warped his personality so severely, and it comes close to helping me see past his blatant ego to the hurt child that is calling for love. Viewing Donald Trump as "wholly lovable and wholly loving" still triggers some fear in me. I've not entirely made the full shift of perspective there, but this book helps me move in that direction.

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.