

Study Notes

ACIM[®] Text (CE Version)

Chapter 1: *Miracle Principles 20-24*

Pages 12-16

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

In these study notes, the complete text of the Complete and Annotated Edition is reproduced here.

Please note that the FIP and CE versions may differ in where paragraph breaks occur.

Overview

Please be aware that the FIP and CE versions differ radically in the arrangement and numbering of the principles and other text.

Principle 20

20. Miracles rest on the law and order of eternity, not the arch of time.

The image here pictures eternity as a flat line and time as an arch (probably tiny) that seems to pop up somewhere along the line. Miracles are governed by the laws of eternity; they rest firmly on that flat line. They are unaffected by the ever-changing “laws” of time that float above the line.

This means that the laws of time and space, physics, chemistry, and whatever other “natural” laws you can think of simply do not apply to miracles. When a miracle occurs the laws of time are all suspended. The past no longer has any effect on us. Sickness is impossible. There are no differences; everyone is wholly lovable and wholly loving. We are “under no laws but God’s,” as Lesson 76 puts it so clearly. That lesson is an extended explanation of this principle. It’s mind-blowing!

Principle 21

21. A miracle reawakens the awareness that the spirit, and not the body, is the altar of truth. ² This is the recognition that leads to the healing power of the miracle.

2 Your abilities will be very useful when they come under involuntary control rather than involuntary *lack of control*. ²Following the right involuntary Guide will enable you to recognize both physical *and* spiritual dangers, and will provide the means for avoiding each of them in the most efficient way. ³This is a case in which the end *does* justify the means.

3 It is only when means and ends are not of the same order of reality that there is fear. ²This fear arises out of the inescapable awareness, which you were given by God for all time, that only the appropriate means can work for the different kinds of ends you must accomplish before you can achieve your one end. ³This awareness is a built-in check which was necessary if you were to use the temporary expedient of time usefully. ⁴While there is time, communion and bread are both necessary. ⁵Without either, you feel deprived, and you cannot escape this by confusing the two. ⁶All depression and all fear and embarrassment ultimately stem from this confusion.

If you are a spirit, not a body, it changes everything you've ever thought and believed about yourself. A body is subject to a wide variety of limitations. There are large ones like time and space; you can only be in one place and one time. Spirit isn't subject to that kind of limitation. Spirits don't get sick. They don't die. They cannot be threatened by anything in the physical world. Your spirit is already, unchangably perfect, pristine, and pure.

As we progress through the miracle principles, we see again and again that the Course is trying to shift our attention away from happenings in the physical world and towards "invisibility," "the spirit," "the creations of light," "spirit-identification," and "an inner awareness of Christ." Miracles themselves are intended to reawaken our awareness of the invisible spirit. In fact, recognizing the central reality of spirit as opposed to body "is the recognition that leads to the healing power of the miracle." In other words, it is turning our attention *away* from the body that allows the body to be healed! This principle is stated again, very clearly, in the *Manual for Teachers*:

What is the single requisite for this shift in perception? It is simply this; the recognition that sickness is of the mind, and has nothing to do with the body....Herein is the release from guilt and sickness both, for they are one. Yet to accept this release, the insignificance of the body must be an acceptable idea (M-5.II.3:1-2, 11-12).

Why must we de-emphasize the body in order to heal the body? Because healing happens as a result of affirming the primary reality of spirit. What we *are* is spirit; our bodies are simply a physical manifestation of our belief about ourselves. If we can bring our belief about ourselves more in line with our spiritual reality, our bodily condition will reflect the wholeness of spirit.

When we identify with spirit we are guided by involuntary spiritual impulses. They are involuntary in the sense that our individual will isn't choosing what to do and not do. We have connected with our Inner Voice, and it is that will, God's will, that we follow. At times it will seem as if we are being controlled by this invisible force to act against our own "better" judgment. If this results in fear, it is an indication that "means and ends are not of the same order of reality." Either our goals are of the ego, conflicting with Spirit's guidance, or we have spiritual goals but are trying to bring them about by our own egoic means.

I'm unsure what the reference to "communion and bread" in 3:4 means. Possibly, it means that while in this world, we need both spiritual and physical nourishment (the latter includes more than just food; housing, for instance). Yet, while both goals are needed, we should always use appropriate means to achieve each goal. Guided always by Spirit, we will find "the means for [achieving] each of them in the most efficient way."

Principle 22

22. Miracles are natural expressions of total forgiveness. 2 Through miracles, you affirm your acceptance of God's forgiveness by extending it to others.

2 The second step is inherent in the first, because light cannot tolerate darkness. 2 Light, by definition, dispels darkness automatically.

First, we were told that miracles are expressions of love. Now, we are told that they are "natural expressions of forgiveness." Both really say the same thing because you cannot love someone you have not forgiven, nor can you forgive someone you don't love.

Forgiveness is really a single process, but it has two aspects. The two are really simultaneous, but we can consider them separately. In the first aspect, we accept forgiveness from God, allowing its light into ourselves. Light cannot tolerate darkness, so it "automatically" radiates out to dispel any darkness in others. This results in our extending forgiveness to others—the second aspect. This second aspect "is inherent in the first." They comprise a single package. Our extension of forgiveness is thus the affirmation that we have received it. If we don't extend it, we have not received it!

How is it we escape from our inner darkness and receive forgiveness? The next few paragraphs address this. Paragraph 3's first sentences were a separate "principle" in the FIP edition, and other parts of the following sentences became part of a separate section, "The Escape From Darkness," T-1.IV (FIP). Other lines here were omitted from FIP.

3 Miracles are associated with fear only because of the fallacy that darkness can hide. 2 People believe that what they cannot see does not exist, and their physical eyes cannot see in the dark. 3 This is a very primitive solution, and has led to a denial of the spiritual eye, which always depends on light. 4 However, remember the biblical statement "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good."

A miracle liberates us from our darkness, but sometimes we block miracles because we are *afraid* of losing the "protection" darkness provides. It hides our imaginary sins, or

so we believe. But darkness can't hide anything; that is a fallacy when it concerns spiritual things. We think that because our body's eyes can't see in the dark we can make our awareness of guilt disappear by blocking it from our conscious awareness. This denies our spiritual awareness, which does depend on "light," which refers to allowing our belief in our guilt into our minds. What we forget is that spiritual sight ("the eyes of the Lord") always sees the darkness, the bad as well as the good. It has to. We have to become *aware* of our mistaken thoughts and guilt. We must stop trying to hide them before we can dismiss them.

4 There are two stages, one lower and one higher, which are involved in the escape from darkness. 2 The first is the recognition that darkness *cannot* hide. 3 This usually does entail fear. 4 The second is that there is nothing you *want* to hide, even if you could. 5 This brings escape from fear.

The escape from our darkness comes in two stages, two recognitions. First, we have to realize that darkness (stuffing things into our unconscious) can't really hide anything. It just goes underground. The Course asserts that attack in *any* form is an intention to murder, inducing "massive guilt and frantic fear" in us that we attempt to hide.

"Attack in *any* form is *equally* destructive. Its purpose does not change. Its sole intent is murder, and what *form* of murder serves to cover the massive guilt and frantic fear of punishment the murderer must feel" (T-23.IV.1:3-5 (CE))

Most of us are unaware of any murderous thoughts, but they are there. How often have you had quite conscious thoughts like, "I wish she'd just go away," or, "I'd be happier if I didn't have to put up with him"?

I remember when I was shocked to realize I had thoughts of murder. I was quite unhappy in my first marriage. One time, my wife had taken a plane to Taiwan. On the same day, I heard on the radio that a flight to Taiwan had crashed, and I wondered if it was her flight (it wasn't). The thought flashed through my mind, "Well, that would solve my problems!" And I suddenly realized that I was wishing that my wife was dead! It shocked me to the core!

The Course is saying we all have such thoughts, thoughts we bury as deeply as we can in our minds where nobody, including ourselves, can see them. But the spiritual eye *always* sees them. There is a part of us that knows they are there and is terrified of bringing them into the light. Hiding them does us no good and prevents their healing.

The second healing recognition is that there isn't anything we would truly want to hide even if we could! Bringing such dark thoughts into conscious awareness leads only to our healing!

"If you will recognize that all attack which you perceive is in your own mind and *nowhere* else, you will at last have placed its source, and where it began it must end." (T-12.VI.6:4 (CE))

We fear looking at the dark thoughts, but there is no reason to. There is no condemnation in God, no punishment to be feared. In God's mind, "There is no sin. It has no consequence" (W-101.7:5 (CE)).

5 As soon as you have completely entered the second phase you will be not only willing to enter into communion, but will also understand peace and joy. 2 Your commitment is not yet total. 3 That is why you still have more to learn than to teach. 4 When your equilibrium stabilizes, you can teach as much as you learn. 5 This will give you the proper sense of balance. 6 Meanwhile, remember that *no effort is wasted*. 7 Unless you remember this, you cannot avail yourself of *my* efforts, which are limitless.

Notice that we must *completely enter* the second phase, realizing we have nothing to fear from looking within before we become willing to enter into communion, which probably refers to a willing union with God and all our brothers and sisters. It only makes sense. If we hide things from ourselves, we surely aren't sharing them with others. If we are hiding something about ourselves from others, how can we be completely open with them? We still fear God's punishment, so we can't join with God either.

Completely entering the phase of recognizing there is nothing we need to hide also brings us deep peace and joy. What a relief to be free of all guilt! But we aren't there yet. At least Helen wasn't when she took this down, and I think it applies to most of us. Most of us "still have more to learn than to teach" (5:3). There is a balance point at which our needs to learn and our ability to teach equalize, and our experience stabilizes. We still have a lot to learn, but we also have a lot to give or teach.

While we lack that stabilized equilibrium, we need to remember that "*no effort is wasted*" (5:6). If your efforts at accepting forgiveness and learning your freedom from guilt don't seem to be working, *don't stop trying*. There is a way that Jesus's limitless efforts on your behalf can really help you, but if you stop making the effort, that help is out of your reach. Every effort you give makes a difference because his effort is added to it!

6 The biblical teaching that if you are ashamed of me before men I will be ashamed of you before God is interpreted as a threat only as long as you remain at the first stage. 2 What it really means is that if you are ashamed of me (or embarrassed by love), you will project and therefore make it impossible for me to reach you. 3 Make every effort you can not to do this. 4 I will help you as much as you will let me.

In this paragraph, Jesus reinterprets the statement attributed to him in the Bible: "For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels." (Luke 9:26 KJV) That sounds as though, in the last days, Jesus will reject anyone who has been ashamed of him. It sounds like a threat. We hear it that way because we "remain at the first stage," in which we have realized that we cannot hide our faults from God, mistakes we think of as sins. We have not yet realized that there isn't anything we need to hide! Jesus offers us help and healing, not punishment.

The true meaning of his words, he says, is that if we are embarrassed by love, we will project our guilt onto others and thus "make it impossible for me to reach you." In the Text, he addresses the same issue like this:

“In your practice, then, try only to be vigilant against deception, and seek not to protect the thoughts that you would keep unto yourself. Let the Holy Spirit’s purity shine them away, and bring all your awareness to the readiness for purity He offers you. Thus will He make you ready to acknowledge that you are host to God and hostage to no one and to nothing.” (T-12.V.10:1–3 (CE))

He urges us in the final two sentences to make every effort not to be embarrassed by God’s love for us, causing us to pull back from Him and try in vain to keep our dark thoughts secret, which results in our projecting our guilt onto others. If we will let him, he will help us awaken to love.

The notion of being embarrassed by love needs more clarification. Helen felt embarrassed by the love she felt coming to her from Jesus, and hers for him. What the above lines imply is that that feeling stems from our subconscious guilt and feelings of unworthiness. We fear love because we think that if we open completely to another (whether person or God) they will discover all that we’ve been hiding and will despise us. The lines following the next principle help to correct that misperception of ourselves.

23. Miracles make time and tide wait for all men. 2They can heal the sick and raise the dead, because you yourself made death and taxes, and can abolish both. 3(Note that “tax” also means “strain.”)

This principle does not deal with our self-judgment directly. That correction comes in the paragraph that follows. It does deal with it *indirectly* because it shows that miracles can reverse even seeming certainties, like the ideas that “time and tide wait for no man” or “nothing is certain but death and taxes.” The implication is that all these negative things come as a result of our self-judgment.

The note that “tax” can also mean “strain” adds the concept that we make our strain and we can abolish it.

2 You are a miracle. 2 God creates only “that which or one who is of surpassing excellence or merit” (a dictionary definition of miracles). 3 You are capable of this kind of creation too, being in the image and likeness of your own Creator. 4 Anything else is only your own nightmare and does not exist. 5 Only the creations of light are real.

If miracles are expressions of love, how can *you* be a miracle? Because you *are* and expression of Love! God is Love, and you are God’s expression. Therefore, since “miracle” also means something of surpassing excellence or merit, that is what you are.

Any thought of yourself that is less than this cannot be anything more than a nightmare about something that does not exist. Take a deep breath and breathe that in! You are a miracle, God’s surpassingly excellent creation. Nothing else is real. This leads to the lines that follow. I suggest we read these lines aloud together, replacing “you are” and “your” with “I am” and “my.” In the final sentence, replace “I” with “Jesus.”

6 You are wholly lovely, a perfect shaft of pure light.
7 Before your loveliness the stars stand transfixed, and bow to the power of your will.
8 What do children know of their creation except what their Creator tells them?
9 You were created above the angels, because your role involves creation as well as protection.
10 You who are in the image of the Father need bow only to Him, before Whom I kneel with you.

Just a note: Sentence 9 refers to the Bible, Psalms 8:4–5. In the familiar King James version, it says humans were created “a little lower than angels.” The New Revised Standard Version dares to translate it as “a little lower than God.” The Hebrew word there is “Elohim,” which usually refers to God, but those early translators couldn’t quite accept that idea.

24. Miracles are part of an interlocking chain of forgiveness which, when completed, is the Atonement. 2 This process works all the time and in all dimensions of time.

Once again, miracles and forgiveness are equated. Over and throughout time, miracles of forgiveness are happening. The cumulative result is what the Course calls the Atonement. I like to think of Atonement as At-One-ment, our path of return to the One. The “interlocking” aspect suggests to me that our acts of forgiveness toward one another are tied together somehow. My forgiving you affects more than just the two of us. It radiates out, bringing the light of forgiveness to others as well. The Workbook bears this out when it has us declare, “I am not alone in experiencing the effects of my thoughts” (Lesson 19). And not just in the present; it “works...in all dimensions of time.”

2. I am in charge of the process of Atonement, which I undertook to begin. 2 My Atonement was for the canceling out of all sins which you could not otherwise correct. 3 That is what the biblical statement “Underneath are the everlasting arms” means. 4 However, it is clear that when you can atone by miracles, both giver and receiver are atoning. 5 It is better to atone this way because of the mutual benefits involved. 6 “Inasmuch as you do it unto the least of these my brethren” really ends with “you do it unto yourself and me.” 7 The reason why you come before me is because I do not need miracles for my own Atonement, but I stand at the end in case you fail temporarily.

Jesus here declares he is in charge of the entire process of Atonement, the whole interlocking chain of miracles of forgiveness. He also states that he *began* this process. This seems to mean that Jesus was the first to completely forgive the world and all that is in it. What he did canceled out sins that you and I could not correct on our own. We make some mistakes that just seem too big in our minds for us to undo. Jesus is like the backstop behind us, catching the balls that get past us. Later in this chapter, he tells us, “Without me the distance between God and humanity is too great for you to encompass”

(T-1.46.17:7). It reminds me of the hit song by Carrie Underwood, “Jesus, Take the Wheel.” This backup capability is what the Bible means by, “Underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deuteronomy 33:27, KJV).

It’s better, though, if we allow the miracle to flow *through us* because that way, “both giver and receiver are atoning.” When you give a miracle to another, it happens “unto yourself and me” as well. Nevertheless, Jesus stands “at the end in case you fail temporarily.”

3. The word “sin” should really be “absence of love.” 2 Sin is a man-made word with threat connotations he made up himself. 3 No real threat is involved anywhere. 4 Just because “nature abhors a vacuum,” which is true enough, it does not follow that a vacuum is filled with hellfire. 5 Nothing is gained by frightening yourself, and it’s very destructive. 6 Miracles need freedom from fear. 7 Part of their Atonement value involves that very freedom.

The Course here redefines the word “sin” to mean “absence of love.” There is no positive “evil,” just a *lack* of love. That absence asks for nothing but love to fill it up. We need to dismiss all ideas of punishment or hellfire. Frightening ourselves like that leads nowhere; its effects are always destructive. For the miracle of forgiveness to occur, fear must be laid aside. Freedom from fear is one of the most powerful effects of a true miracle.

4. The word “atone” really means “undo.” 2 If you will look up “atonement,” you will find that an obsolete meaning is “to set at one, or reconcile; to agree.” 3 Obviously, before reconciliation or agreement is possible, what is out of accord must be undone. 4 It may seem as if darkness must be dispelled before light can come in, but the truth is that darkness is dispelled by light.

Another re-definition: “atone” really means “undo.” It says that the definition of “atonement” as reconciling or setting at one is “obsolete.” So I stand corrected in what I said earlier, saying it meant at-one-ment. Making all One (or affirming oneness) is the result of atonement, but strictly speaking, that word means *undoing* because, before any reconciliation is possible, “what is out of accord must be undone.” As the Introduction says of love, the manifestation of Oneness requires the removal of blocks to our awareness of its presence. Jesus adds another comparison here that seems at first to minimize the “undoing” part. For light to appear, nothing needs to be done about the darkness because the light simply dispels it. But light can be blocked, can’t it? “Those who seek the light are merely covering their eyes. The light is in you now” (W-188.1:2–3).

The topic of discussion that preceded this was sin, or the absence of love. That is what must be undone. Our fear of judgment is a major block, causing us to be afraid of light, thinking the darkness can hide us. But it can’t. We need to let the light in. It will only reveal our own inherent inner radiance.

5. The next part of the course will place increasing emphasis on Atonement, since changing learning patterns requires undoing the old ones. 2 The real meaning of retroactive inhibition is simply that when two kinds of learning coexist, they interfere with each other. 3 Therefore, when you say, "If you want me to I will," please add "and if you don't want me to I won't." 4 This is the right use of inhibition. 5 There has to be some control over learning for channelizing purposes. 6 Sometimes the new learning is the more important, and has to inhibit the old. 7 It's a form of correction.

Much of the Text and the first half of the Workbook emphasizes the Atonement. Our old way of thinking and seeing the world has to be undone before we can learn a new way of thinking and seeing. Jesus then brings in a psychological concept that would have been familiar to Helen and Bill: retroactive inhibition. Simply put, it means that recently accepted ideas interfere with the recovery of older ideas. We have learned and accepted many things that our egos have taught us, such as the idea that we are separate from one another and from God. This interferes with the earlier idea of Oneness given at creation.

But sometimes, a new idea that the Holy Spirit introduces to us is meant to supersede the older ego idea. It works both ways. This affects how we need to respond to inner guidance. We need to be willing to move in either direction, old idea (oneness) or new idea (which is also oneness!). He tells us, "When you say, 'If you want me to I will,' please add, 'and if you don't want me to I won't.'" We must learn to listen both to positive and negative guidance. As I have said before, do you feel an inward light about doing something, or an inner darkness? Is the feeling bright white or dark brown? Listening to the inhibiting guidance is just as important as responding to the forward impulse. Sometimes the "ancient memory" is what we need; other times, we need "the new learning" which will inhibit our older ego ideas. We must always be open to correction, just as a guided missile is always going toward its target but needs to respond to course-correction if it gets off course.

6. Everything that results in lack of love (which you used to call sin) is the result of inferior learning which, if overlearned, becomes very stable. 2 Miracles are a way of undoing overlearned patterns of love-lack. 3 They bring light into darkness. 4 That is where their Atonement value lies.

Back to the topic of sin as lack of love. Any lack of love in us is the result of "inferior learning" that often has become very stable because we have overlearned it. It has become habitual, unquestioned. Miracles undo that "love-lack." They shine light into our darkened minds, undoing (atoning for) our lack of love. When you experience this, it really does seem miraculous.

"What has been blocked is opened; what was held apart from light is given up, that light may shine on it and leave no space nor distance lingering between the light of Heaven and the world. The holiest of all the spots on earth is where an ancient hatred has become a present love." (T-26.IX.5:2-4)

"7 He will hear plainly that the calls to war he heard before are really calls to peace. He will perceive that where he gave attack is but another altar where he

can, with equal ease and far more happiness, bestow forgiveness. And he will reinterpret all temptation as just another chance to bring him joy. How can a misperception be a sin? Let all your brother's errors be to you nothing except a chance for you to see the workings of the Helper given you to see the world He made instead of yours." (T-25.III.7)

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. 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.

Effects of Differing Editions of the Course

There were significant changes made in the CE, although for the most part there was no alteration in the meaning of the text, and the *Manual for Teachers* had far fewer changes. There are some changes in section and paragraph breaks and sentence structure that result in different numbering in references to the same text in the two editions. When there is a major difference I will indicate it with a footnote.

I have attempted for all references to add a separate FIP reference if it differs from the CE reference, but I may have missed some. If so, I apologize. Please let me know of any referencing problems you find. I have also tried to edit my commentary so as to reflect any wording changes in the CE. For instance, the CE Text restored the plural use of "you" where the FIP had substituted the phrase "you and your brother." One such instance will illustrate the kind of change, significant in actual words but nearly identical in overall meaning:

FIP: Thus you and your brother but shared a qualified entente, in which a clause of separation was a point you both agreed to keep intact.

CE: You shared a qualified entente, in which a clause of separation was a point which you had both agreed to keep intact.