

Commentary

ACIM[®] Manual for Teachers

Chapter 8: How Can the Perception of Orders of Difficulty in Healing Be Avoided?

Explanation of underlining, italics and footnote formats can be found at the end of the commentary. See also the note there on the effects of switching from the FIP edition to the Complete and Annotated Edition. Please note that the FIP and CE versions may differ in where paragraph breaks occur.

Overview

The discussion now turns to the belief, shared by nearly everyone in the world, that some diseases are more difficult to heal than others. We hold the same belief regarding disordered relationships or psychological disorders. Healing a snuffle seems easier than healing a heart attack. Forgiving a murderer seems more complicated than forgiving a rude remark. Stopping smoking seems more demanding than giving up watching too much television. Almost no one would question any of those statements. Jesus begins his consideration of this issue by first talking about a more general issue: How human perception works. Perception is based on differences, and our belief in orders of difficulty in healing is just one example of the unreliable nature of our perceptions.

Paragraph 1

The belief in orders of difficulty is the basis for the world's perception. ²It¹ rests on differences: on uneven background and shifting foreground, on unequal heights and diverse sizes, on varying degrees of darkness and light, and thousands of contrasts in which each thing seen competes with every other in order to be recognized. ³A larger object overshadows a smaller one. ⁴A brighter thing draws the attention from another with less intensity of appeal. ⁵And a more threatening idea, or one conceived of as more desirable by the world's standards, completely upsets the mental balance. ⁶What the body's eyes behold is only conflict. ⁷Look not to them for peace and understanding.

¹ "It" refers to "the world's perception."

The entire process of human perception depends on the belief in differences (1:1–2). Distinguishing between background and foreground, differences in height or size, darkness or light, and “thousands of contrasts.” Everything is competing for our attention with everything else (1:2). Big things draw our eyes away from little things (1:3). A bright object stands out from others; shiny objects attract us. Even ideas compete in our minds. Ideas that seem exceedingly desirable can upset our mental balance as much as threatening ideas (1:5).

Nothing the body's eyes see can bring us peace and understanding. They perceive a world of differences, with everything competing with everything else (1:6–7).

Paragraph 2

² Illusions are always illusions of differences. ³How could it be otherwise? ³By definition, an illusion is an attempt to make something real that is regarded as of major importance but is recognized as being untrue. ⁴The mind therefore seeks to make it true out of its intensity of desire to have it for itself. ⁵Illusions are travesties of creation; attempts to bring truth to lies. ⁶Finding truth unacceptable, the mind revolts against truth and gives itself an illusion of victory. ⁷Finding health a burden, it retreats into feverish dreams. ⁸And in these dreams the mind is separate, different from other minds, with different interests of its own, and able to gratify its needs at the expense of others.²

We see all these differences, but the truth is they are all the same—illusions. What is unique in the way the Course speaks of illusions is that they are not imposed on us by some external source, someone or something trying to deceive us like a master magician. Here, we are the illusion maker. We want so strongly that something be true that we attempt to make it true. In the Course, the very definition of “illusion” is “an attempt to make something real that is regarded as being untrue (2:3).

What characterizes the illusions we make is that they are all “illusions of differences” (2:1). Above all else, the ego wants separation, so illusions inevitably consist of differences (2:2). As egos, we want to be special: better than, stronger than, more prosperous than, more brilliant than. So we project differences. Our desire to be separate so we can take from others to gratify our needs gives birth to all our illusions of this world (2:4).

But illusions are lies. Our projection of illusions is a terrible misuse of our creative abilities, trying to make lies into truth (2:5). It is the revolt of our minds against the truth, making an illusion of victory (2:6). We've seen how our resistance to healing reflects a secret attack on God as Creator; this generic description of illusions generalizes that idea. “Finding health a burden, it [the mind] retreats into feverish dreams” (2:7).

² This sentence helps explain the first sentence of the paragraph. “Illusions are always illusions of differences” because the mind first decides to retreat from truth into dreams, and then “in these dreams the mind is separate, different from other minds.”

As a result of the mind's insane illusion-making, we believe we are separate beings with interests that differ from other minds. We can satisfy our individual needs only "at the expense of others" (2:8). Our illusions are always of differences (2:1).

Our belief in separateness accounts for all our perceptions of differences, as listed in the first paragraph: background/foreground, high/low, big/small, dark/light, and thousands of others. A wish for separateness is the "reason" behind space and time: here/there, past/present/future. All are separation devices. All are illusions.

Paragraph 3

3 Where do all these differences come from? 2Certainly they seem to be in the world outside. 3Yet it is surely the mind that judges what the eyes behold. 4It is the mind that interprets the eyes' messages and gives them "meaning." 5And this meaning does not exist in the world outside at all. 6What is seen as "reality" is simply what the mind prefers. 7Its hierarchy of values is projected outward, and it sends the body's eyes to find it. 8The body's eyes will never see except through differences. 9Yet it is not the messages they bring on which perception rests. 10Only the mind evaluates their messages, so only the mind is responsible for seeing. 11It alone decides whether what is seen is real or illusory, desirable or undesirable, pleasurable or painful.

I've just stated the answer to the question in 3:1: "all these differences" come from separation. Inarguably, the differences seem to be real, quite apparent in the world outside our minds (3:2). But what about inside our minds? Our minds judge and interpret what our senses detect. Any seeming meaning the messages of our senses have is assigned to them by our minds (3:3–4). Nothing in the world outside has any inherent meaning (3:5)!

The source of meaning is the subject of several early Workbook lessons, particularly Lessons 1 and 2:

Nothing that I see means anything.

I have given everything I see all the meaning that it has for me.

At the beginning of the Workbook, these lessons show just how fundamental this idea is to the Course's thought system. Our perception of differences comes from our mind. Our mind tells us that one thing is desirable, another is not, that one is real, the other illusion. Our minds even determine what we see and what we overlook. There is a famous YouTube video about ballplayers and selective attention:

<https://tinyurl.com/2p95v99k>

If you have not seen it, give it a watch! It illustrates very well how our minds determine our perception. We see what our minds prefer to see (3:6).

Each of our minds has its own "priority of values," which we project outward. We then "send" our senses to find what we are looking for (3:7). This explains why several people can see the same event and remember it quite differently. We hear evidence of this in the news when some viral video makes the news, and there are many different interpretations of it.

The only way our eyes sort out the world's input is by using our hierarchy of differences (3:8). What's more, our minds then add another layer: Our interpretation of what we are perceiving (3:9). "Only the mind is responsible for seeing" (3:10). It is your mind that "decides whether what is seen is real or illusory, desirable or undesirable, pleasurable or painful" (3:11).

Remember that this discussion is all essential background to understanding the answer to this section's question: How do I avoid seeing orders of difficulty in healing sickness? In the next paragraph, Jesus will summarize this background about how perception works before he begins to apply it all to the way to avoid seeing orders of difficulty in healing.

Paragraph 4

4 It is in the sorting out and categorizing activities of the mind that errors in perception enter. ²And it is here corrections must be made. ³The mind classifies what the body's eyes bring to it according to its preconceived values, judging where each sense datum fits best. ⁴What basis could be faultier than this? ⁵Unrecognized by itself, it has itself asked to be given what will fit into these categories. ⁶And having done so, it concludes the categories must be true. ⁷On this the judgment of all differences rests,³ because it is on this the judgments of the world depend. ⁸Can this confused and senseless "reasoning" be depended on for anything?

Where do errors (such as seeing orders of difficulty in healing) come from? They arise from "the sorting out and categorizing activities of the mind" (4:1). Since the mind is where the errors arise, that mind is where we must make corrections (4:2).

The mind has built this hierarchy of values, deciding what it wants to see. We classify the input from our eyes according to this value scheme (4:3). How could this ever yield truth? The mind is selectively "seeing" what it has predetermined to see, although the mind isn't conscious of doing so (4:4-5). The data the mind receives match these criteria—of course! On that basis, the mind "concludes the categories must be true" (4:6).

This predetermined judgment is the basis of all our perceptions of differences (4:7)! Our ego-clouded minds operate this way because the reality of the external world depends on it. In other words, if our mind stops doing this illogical, unreasonable "reasoning," we will recognize that there is no world.

³ The mind, in other words, comes to the act of perception with its "hierarchy of values" (3:7), a collection of preferred categories that it wants to find examples of in the world. The mind first "sends the body's eyes to find" members of these categories (3:7). Then, as sense data come in, the mind sorts those data *into* these premade categories, even if the data don't fit them. Finally, having "found" examples of these categories in the world, "it concludes the categories must be true" (4:6). In the end, the mind has simply projected its different categories onto a sensory field in which no *real* differences exist. The perceived differences, then, come from the mind, not the world.

In essence, we are saying, “My mind is already made up. Don't confuse me with facts.” With that mindset, we cannot depend on anything we think we know (4:8).

Paragraph 5

5 There can be no order of difficulty in healing merely because all sickness is illusion. ²Is it harder to dispel the belief of the insane in a larger hallucination as opposed to a smaller one? ³Will he agree more quickly to the unreality of a softer voice he hears than to that of a louder one? ⁴Will he dismiss more easily a whispered demand to kill than a shout? ⁵And does the number of pitchforks the devils he sees carrying affect their credibility in his perception? ⁶His mind has categorized them as real, and so they are real to him. ⁷When he realizes they are all illusions, they will disappear. ⁸And so it is with healing. ⁹The properties of illusions which seem to make them different are really irrelevant, for their properties are as illusory as they are.

Earlier in the Manual, we saw that healing must always be certain because all sickness is an illusion. Here (5:1), the Course states it directly. Regardless of what the sickness is, it is an illusion. In healing, we are not altering anything real. We are dispelling belief in an illusion, and it makes no difference whether the illusion is big or small (5:2).

Imagine an insane person who thinks they hear voices telling them to kill somebody. Your job is to persuade them that their mind is playing tricks on them; they hear a voice that isn't there. Do you think it would be harder to convince them of that if they heard a loud voice instead of a whisper (4:3–4)? Of course not!

If a person is hallucinating, seeing devils carrying pitchforks, do you think the number of pitchforks they are carrying makes the hallucination more believable (4:5)? Again, of course not.

The illusions seem real to them because their mind “has categorized them as real” (4:6). When that activity of their mind is changed to realize the hallucinations are illusions, those voices or devils will disappear (4:7).

That is precisely how healing works (4:8). The form and content of the illusion “are really irrelevant,” because the varying properties of the illness “are as illusory as” the illness (4:9).

Paragraph 6

6 The body's eyes will continue to see differences, but the mind which has let itself be healed will no longer acknowledge them. ²There will be those who seem to be "sicker" than others, and the body's eyes will report their changed appearance as before, but the mind will put them all in one category: they are unreal.⁴ ³This is the gift of its Teacher: the understanding that only two categories are meaningful in sorting out the messages the mind receives from what appears to be the outside world, and of these two but one is real.⁵ ⁴Just as reality is wholly real, apart from size and shape and time and place—for differences cannot exist within it—so too are illusions without distinctions. ⁵The one answer to sickness of any kind is healing. ⁶The one answer to all illusions is truth.

Despite this deeper understanding, "the body's eyes will continue to see differences" (6:1). That's reassuring to me. I don't expect to disappear from physical existence any time soon (I'm an optimistic 81-year-old.), and it would be impossible to navigate in this world without any perception of differences!

So, what changes? If my mind has allowed itself to be healed, it won't acknowledge the perceived differences (6:2). Applied to sickness, that will mean that although my eyes will still see some people as "sicker" than others, in my mind, I will firmly know that "they are unreal" (6:3–4).

The ability to put all external forms into the "unreal" category "is the gift of its [the healed mind's] Teacher," that is, the gift of the Holy Spirit (6:5). He gives us the gift of understanding that the only two categories that "are meaningful in sorting out the messages that the mind receives from what appears to be the outside world" are real and illusion (6:5–6). Notice that this applies not only to sicknesses but to everything that appears to be the outside world. There is no world outside of our minds, just something that appears to be outside. (This is one application of the two categories, but I make another possible application below.)

Reality (which does not include the world we see) "is wholly real, apart from size and shape and time and place." It is Oneness, and it is formless. Size, shape, time, and place all presume differences, and "differences cannot exist within" Reality. But here's the shocker: "so too are illusions without distinctions" (6:7). Illusions seem to have sizes,

⁴This is the answer to the opening question: "How can the perception of orders of difficulty in healing be avoided?" This perception arises when the mind projects its categories onto the world, placing sicker bodies into the "harder to heal" category and healthier bodies into the "easier to heal" category. This perception is *avoided* when the mind puts both kinds of bodies into the *same* category: "they are unreal."

⁵The two categories, then, are the real and the unreal. The real, as the next sentence above explains, is a spiritual realm that is "apart from size and shape and time and place—for differences cannot exist within it." The unreal is comprised of the forms of the world, and it too contains no differences, for all of its forms are equally unreal.

shapes, times, and places, but these categories do not apply to illusions any more than they apply to Reality. Only one category applies: unreal; illusion.

There is only one answer to any sickness: healing. And because all sicknesses are illusions, the one answer to them all is truth (6:8–9).

There is a sticking point here in Sentence 6:3. It says only two categories are meaningful in sorting out things of the external world, “and of these two but one is real” (6:3). That implies that some things in our perceptions of this world are real, not illusions! What might they be?

I believe Jesus is referring here to expressions of love:

For grandeur is the right of God's Son, and no illusions can satisfy him or save him from what he is.

“Only his love is real, and he will be content only with his Reality.”

(T-13.III.9:1-10:10 (CE), T-13.III.8:6-7 (FIP))

His love is real. Expressions of love represent what the Course calls “the real world.” The Course admits that the phrase “real world” contains a contradiction because the world isn't real.

“This is the journey's end. We have referred to it as the 'real world.' And yet there is a contradiction here, in that these words imply a limited reality, a partial truth, a segment of the universe made true. This is because knowledge makes no attack upon perception. They are brought together, and only one continues past the gate where Oneness is.” (T-26.III.1:1–5 (FIP, CE))

Perception and knowledge are “brought together.” When perception is exposed to truth, all we see is lovable because God created only lovable things. Our eyes still see differences, but our hearts and minds see only Oneness, and we respond with love.

“In the real world there is no sickness, for there is no separation and no division. Only loving thoughts are recognized, and because no one is without your help, the Help of God goes with you everywhere” (T-11.VIII.10:1-2 (FIP), T-11.IX.11:1-2 (CE)).

“What, then, is the world that awaits your perception when you see? Every loving thought that the Son of God ever had is eternal. Those which his mind perceived in this world are the world's only Reality. They are perceptions, because he still believes that he is separate, yet they are eternal, because they are loving” (T-11.VIII.11:1-4 (CE), T-11.VII.2:1-4 (FIP)).

The Course teaches that loving acts in the world reflect Reality and witness to the truth. It tells us that these are the things our senses should seek for: “The senses then will seek instead for witnesses to what is true” (W-pII.4.2:7). Loving thoughts are the world's only Reality.

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 Foundation for Inner Peace (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. 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.