

Study Guide and Commentary ACIM® Text

Preface: What It Says

Ken Wapnick, in *Absence from Felicity*, describes the origin of this passage in the Preface:

In 1977, in response to many requests for a brief introduction to *A Course in Miracles*, Helen wrote/scribed a three-part pamphlet entitled: *A Course in Miracles: How It Came, What It Is, What It Says*. The first two parts, Helen wrote herself, the final part—*What It Says*—was scribed from Jesus.

To say it was “scribed from Jesus” means that it came in a manner similar to the rest of *A Course in Miracles*. It was not simply Helen’s understanding of what the Course was about, or that of any other student. It is *the author’s summary*, and if we accept that Jesus is the author, it is Jesus’ summary. Therefore, the themes he selects out here for inclusion must be the themes that he considers the most important, and the way he describes those topics can give us significant guidance in understanding the entire Course.

Paragraph 1

Nothing real can be threatened.

Nothing unreal exists.

Herein lies the peace of God.

This is how *A Course in Miracles* begins. It makes a fundamental distinction between the real and the unreal; between knowledge and perception. Knowledge is truth, under one law, the law of love or God. Truth is unalterable, eternal and unambiguous. It can be unrecognized, but it cannot be changed. It applies to everything that God created, and only what He created is real. It is beyond learning because it is beyond time and process. It has no opposite; no beginning and no end. It merely is.

• Study Question •

1. *List the various words and phrases that are used to describe or characterize “knowledge.” What two or three words would you use to summarize the list?*

The first principle of the Course that is singled out is its “distinction between the real and the unreal,” reality versus illusion. And yet, although this beginning could easily lead into a metaphysical maze and debate (as so often happens in metaphysical circles), that isn’t the direction taken by the author. He makes it immediately practical. He identifies the “real” with “knowledge” and the “unreal” with “perception.” The rest of the paragraph proceeds to amplify the description of what the real is, what knowledge is. The next paragraph will talk about what is

unreal, that is, perception. Understanding knowledge to be something beyond perception, something that does not utilize perception, is fundamental to the Course.

What is real is what can be *known*, what is *true*. It is unalterable, which means it can't be changed in any way. It is eternal, since if it had a beginning or an ending, that would constitute change. Another word he uses to describe knowledge is *unambiguous*, which means “not open to more than one interpretation”—an interesting characteristic. When you encounter the real, there is no doubt about what it is. When you really know something, you know that you know it. There is no maybe this, maybe that, about it.

Knowledge is not subjective; it is not affected by observation. It is not something we perceive, an object seen by a subject. As used by the Course, knowledge is the direct apprehension of reality.

True perception is the basis for knowledge, but knowing is the affirmation of truth and beyond all perceptions. (T-3.III.1:10)

The nearest analogy I can think of is my knowing that I am alive. I know it *directly*.

You may not *recognize* truth or knowledge, but that does not alter what the truth *is*.

The ego tries to persuade you that it is up to you to decide which voice is true, but the Holy Spirit teaches you that truth was created by God, and your decision cannot change it. (T-6.V.6:3)

Just because you don't know the laws of mathematics does not change the truth that $2 + 2 = 4$. Just because you don't understand how electricity works does not change the fact that you'll get a severe shock if you stick your finger into a live light socket. Truth is “under one law,” which happens to be “the law of love or God.” Nothing in your perception of things, or mine, changes that; it is still true. Several times, the Course sums up its message in the words, “Only the truth is true, and nothing else is true.”

Knowledge, or truth, consists of everything that God created and only what God created; nothing else is real. To me, if you believe in one God at all, you almost have to believe this principle. God is the Source of all that is, and what God creates must be real, right? How could anything else be real, or even exist? There would have to be a second God-like being capable of creating something beside what God creates.

That leads to the last point in the paragraph: “it has no opposite.” Think about it. Here, you have Truth. Over here, you have Truth's opposite, which is a Lie. Right? But what is a lie? The Oxford dictionary calls it “an intentionally false statement.” If you tell a lie, you are making a false statement, which means that whatever you are asserting *is not real and does not exist!* Only the truth exists. But this applies to everything God created: It has no opposite. “It merely is.”

I know, I know; I said we were not going into a metaphysical maze and then that's where I've taken us. I apologize. Taking just this one side of the equation, talking about what is real or true, does sound very metaphysical. But the practicality comes when we contrast knowledge with *perception*, which the next paragraph does, brilliantly.

Paragraph 2

The world of perception, on the other hand, is the world of time, of change, of beginnings and endings. It is based on interpretation, not on facts. It is the world of birth and death, founded on the belief in scarcity, loss, separation and death. It

is learned rather than given, selective in its perceptual emphases, unstable in its functioning, and inaccurate in its interpretations.

• **Study Question** •

2. *List the various words and phrases that are used to describe or characterize "perception." What two or three words would you use to summarize the list?*

As the words "On the other hand" imply, perception is the complete opposite of knowledge. Where knowledge is eternal, perception is subject to time, to change, to beginning and ending. Perception involves a perceiver and the perceived and so it inherently presumes separation and depends on it. Something or someone outside of you must be observed by your senses and that sense data interpreted, decoded and figured out, in order to form a perception. That, to me, is the key aspect: "It is based on interpretation, not on facts." You can never be certain your perception is correct, can you? How often have you perceived something and formed an opinion, only to have that opinion modified or overthrown by later observations? With perception you are not *knowing* the object directly (as is the case with knowledge); all you have are your own imperfect and changing interpretations. Knowledge doesn't change; perception changes constantly.

We cause serious problems for ourselves when we mistake our perceptions for knowledge, our interpretations for facts. Mistaking interpretations for facts is one of the foundations of most TV drama shows. Watch, and see how often the characters in the shows see something, make a false interpretation of what they see, and then blindly, foolishly, act as if their perceptions were facts.

Our perceptions are deeply distorted by our "belief in scarcity, loss, separation and death." Because we believe such things really exist, we perceive them everywhere. Our basic assumptions include scarcity, loss, separation, and death, and so we factor these things in to our interpretations of the events of our lives. Our current job suddenly ends and we call it "losing" our job. It could be interpreted simply as a change of state or a move to a *better* job; it does not have to be a loss. A person's bodily experience ends and we perceive it as "death," rather than as a transition to a new plane of existence. And so on.

The last sentence of Paragraph 2 deeply disparages perception in multiple ways. Perception is:

- **Learned, not given.** We learn how to interpret people and events by accumulating experience over a lifetime, and a lot of what we learn simply isn't accurate. A bad experience with a certain place, a certain food, a certain type of person, is far too easily, and falsely, generalized and applied to similar places, foods, or persons. We accumulate a crowd of what the Course terms "shadow figures from the past" that distort our perceptions of the present.
- **Selective in its perceptual emphases.** Perception picks out what it wants to see or expects to see in the people and things it observes, and is blind to aspects it either does not already understand or does not want to see or considers irrelevant.

Perception selects, and makes the world you see. It literally picks it out as the mind directs. The laws of size and shape and brightness would hold, perhaps, if other things were equal. They are not equal. For what you look for you are far more likely to discover than what you would prefer to overlook. (T-21.V.1:1-5)

- **Unstable in its functioning.** In other words, it is changeable. It cannot be trusted. Perception is likely to shift and pull the carpet out from under you, if you are depending on it. Sometimes it works well; often it does not.
- **Inaccurate in its interpretations.** Finally, perception is all too often simply *wrong*. We see a man kissing a woman not his wife and “perceive” that he must be having an affair. Later, we learn the woman was his sister. And so on.

Paragraph 3

From knowledge and perception respectively, two distinct thought systems arise which are opposite in every respect. In the realm of knowledge no thoughts exist apart from God, because God and His Creation share one Will. The world of perception, however, is made by the belief in opposites and separate wills, in perpetual conflict with each other and with God. What perception sees and hears appears to be real because it permits into awareness only what conforms to the wishes of the perceiver. This leads to a world of illusions, a world which needs constant defense precisely *because* it is not real.

• Study Question •

3. *“Two distinct thought systems arise.” What do they have in common? In what primary respect do they differ?*

•

The reason for the emphasis on knowledge and perception is that two entirely opposite thought systems arise from them, and, in a nutshell, the entire Course is aimed at shifting our minds from a thought system based on perception to a thought system based on knowledge, from illusion to reality.

In reality...or perhaps I should capitalize that: In Reality, in the thought system based on knowledge, “God and His Creation share one Will.” “No thoughts exist apart from God.” That is the Truth of which knowledge is aware. (I use the word *aware* to represent the direct, immediate knowing that makes up *knowledge*, apart from any perception.) There is no Will but God’s; this thought is called the central goal of the Workbook. (See W-pI.74 and W-pII.307.) That is what “oneness” and “unity” mean. Although we appear (in the world of perception) to have many wills in conflict, at least potential conflict, with one another and often with God, in Reality our apparently separate wills are one; they are unified. When our thinking grows out of this basic assumption, our lives in this world reflect the Oneness of Heaven.

Perception’s thought system assumes separateness and the existence of opposites (good/bad, love/fear, life/death). Perception filters the evidence; it sees only what we want to see and choose to see. The result is a “world of illusions,” an unreal world we constantly must defend in order to maintain the illusion that it exists as we perceive it. The ego’s thought system, therefore, becomes a convoluted and complex structure, with many contradictory elements, all focused on proving the reality of separation and conflict. It presupposes conflict, projects conflict, then perceives conflict attacking itself, necessitating protecting itself by means of attack it calls *counter-attack*.

Exercise

The way perception works is that "it permits into awareness only what conforms to the wishes of the perceiver." So look around the room and let your glance fall on one object after another, and with each one tell yourself,

That _____ seems real only because I want it to be real.

That is why I am allowing myself to see it.

Now close your eyes and think of things that upset you today. In relation to each one that comes to mind, tell yourself:

That _____ seemed real only because I wanted it to be real.

That is why I allowed myself to see it.

Paragraph 4

When you have been caught in the world of perception you are caught in a dream. You cannot escape without help, because everything your senses show merely witnesses to the reality of the dream. God has provided the Answer, the only Way out, the true Helper. It is the function of His Voice, His Holy Spirit, to mediate between the two worlds. He can do this because, while on the one hand He knows the truth, on the other He also recognizes our illusions, but without believing in them. It is the Holy Spirit's goal to help us escape from the dream world by teaching us how to reverse our thinking and unlearn our mistakes. Forgiveness is the Holy Spirit's great learning aid in bringing this thought reversal about. However, the Course has its own definition of what forgiveness really is just as it defines the world in its own way.

• Study Question •

4. *Why, in the understanding of the Course, is the Holy Spirit necessary?*

•

Imagine what it is like to be trapped inside a religious cult. The leadership carefully controls (or tries to control) everything you read and hear so that nothing contradicts their special doctrines, and everything is given a spin that reinforces the cult's convictions. Anything conflicting with their teaching is considered dangerous, perhaps even demonic or devilish. I once was in a church that taught that questioning was of the devil; they said, "Look at the question mark! It is shaped like a serpent!" People who have been in a cult have a very difficult time in letting go of the cult mind-set, which is why they often need a deprogrammer to help them when they leave the cult.

The thing is, we are all trapped in a religious cult: the cult of the ego. And the ego does exactly the same thing cult leaders do. "Everything your senses show merely witnesses to the reality of the dream" (4:2). The ego filters your perceptions so that you notice the things that seem to reinforce the ego, you interpret everything in a way that justifies and validates your ego, and you cannot even see the evidence of the Truth of our true Identity. This is why we find it so difficult to make progress on the spiritual path.

In this scenario, the Holy Spirit is our deprogrammer. Without His ability to see things "outside the box," we would be trapped in a closed system of error. He is our way out of the cult

of the ego (4:3). He understands our illusions (without believing in them) but He also knows the Truth (4:5), and he is able to help us transition from our ego illusions to true perception and the real world. He help us “escape from the dream world by teaching us how to reverse our thinking and unlearn our mistakes” (4:6).

“For His answer is the reference point beyond illusions, from which you can look back on them and see them as insane.” (T-13.III.12:9)

“If you will consider what you have taught, and how alien it is to what you thought you knew, you will be compelled to realize that your Teacher came from beyond your thought system. Therefore He could look upon it fairly, and perceive it was untrue. He must have done so from the basis of a very different thought system, and one with nothing in common with yours. For certainly what He has taught, and what you have taught through Him, have nothing in common with what you taught before He came.” (T-16.III.1:3-6)

In my opinion, it's important to realize that, although this emphasis—the idea that we cannot do it alone, but need the help of the Holy Spirit—seems to support a dualistic thought system, it is really nothing more than a simplified learning aid. There is only One. The Holy Spirit seems to be a separate Voice in opposition to the voice of the ego, a Voice that is somehow distinct from our own, but that is only because we have identified with the ego. When that identification has been broken we will realize that the Holy Spirit's voice is, in reality, *our* voice, the voice of our true Self; the ego's voice is an illusion that creates the illusion of duality. And yet, until that identification with the ego *has* been broken, the concept of a Voice that speaks from *outside* the thought system of illusion is not only helpful, but is necessary.

The reversal process is purely mental; it consists of letting go of error thoughts and embracing thoughts aligned with the Truth. And the “great learning aid” that facilitates the reversal of thought is *forgiveness*—forgiveness as the Course defines it, not as it is typically understood (4:7-8). The next paragraph expands on just what that definition of forgiveness is and how it brings about the requisite thought reversal.

Paragraph 5

The world we see merely reflects our own internal frame of reference—the dominant ideas, wishes and emotions in our minds. "Projection makes perception" (Text, p. 445). We look inside first, decide the kind of world we want to see and then project that world outside, making it the truth *as we see it*. We make it true by our interpretations of what it is we are seeing. If we are using perception to justify our own mistakes—our anger, our impulses to attack, our lack of love in whatever form it may take—we will see a world of evil, destruction, malice, envy and despair. All this we must learn to forgive, not because we are being "good" and "charitable," but because what we are seeing is not true. We have distorted the world by our twisted defenses, and are therefore seeing what is not there. As we learn to recognize our perceptual errors, we also learn to look past them or "forgive." At the same time we are forgiving ourselves, looking past our distorted self-concepts to the Self that God created in us and as us.

• Study Question •

5. *True or false: Forgiveness could be defined as looking past our perceptual errors.*

•

As we normally understand forgiveness, we believe that our perceptions are showing us facts. In those perceptions, someone has done us wrong and is, therefore, a “sinner” (although we may not use that word, the thought behind it is there in our minds). When we decide to forgive, we decide to overlook what, to us, is the objective truth (that he is a sinner); we let him off the hook. This, we believe, makes us good and charitable people.

The Course sees it all differently. Our perceptions “merely reflect our own internal frame of reference—the dominant ideas, wishes and emotions in our minds” (5:1). The paragraph then quotes the Text: “Projection makes perception” (T-21.Int.1:1). Both quotes are saying exactly the same thing. The next two lines reinforces the idea, restating it even more clearly: “We look inside first, decide the kind of world we want to see and then project that world outside, making it the truth as we see it. We make it true by our interpretations of what it is we are seeing” (5:3–4).

In other words, the guy who “done us wrong” and is therefore “a sinner” is just a projection of our own dominant ideas. Yes, there are objective facts out there in the world, but the way we are *interpreting* what we see is totally skewed. We are using our perception to justify our ego’s need to attack—“our own mistakes,” as the paragraph calls it (5:5). Robert Perry summarizes this fifth sentence like this: “If we see a world of attack, that is only because we are using perception to justify our own attack.”

Once we realize that the “evil” we are seeing (the thing we need to forgive) is nothing more than our own perceptual error, our own misinterpretation of the person we are looking at, we can let that perception go. And *that* is forgiveness as the Course defines it. We are not forgiving because we are somehow better, “good and charitable” people, but because we were mistaken! What we were seeing was not true (5:6). We were seeing what is not there (5:7). Looking past those mistaken perceptions is what forgiveness is all about (5:8). And as we do so with others we are learning to forgive ourselves in the same way, “looking past our distorted self-concepts to the Self that God created in us and as us” (5:9).

Paragraph 6

Sin is defined as “lack of love” (Text, p. 11). Since love is all there is, sin in the sight of the Holy Spirit is a mistake to be corrected, rather than an evil to be punished. Our sense of inadequacy, weakness and incompleteness comes from the strong investment in the “scarcity principle” that governs the whole world of illusions. From that point of view, we seek in others what we feel is wanting in ourselves. We “love” another in order to get something ourselves. That, in fact, is what passes for love in the dream world. There can be no greater mistake than that, for love is incapable of asking for anything.

• Study Question •

6. *Thoughts for reflection:*

Do you feel lacking inside without someone there who loves you?

Do you believe that someone who loves you is someone who fills your lack?

Do you feel slightly guilty, therefore, about having someone love you, because you are taking something from them in some way?



Think about some of the songs about love you may have heard. “You fill me up.” “I can’t live, if living is without you.” So many of the world’s love songs blatantly state exactly what the Course is saying here: Our concept of love is based on the scarcity principle, a believe in a profound emptiness within ourselves that only “that special one” can fill. We “fall in love” with a person who seems to be the missing piece of the puzzle, someone who can provide just what we need (6:4–5). Next time you listen to a love song on the radio, listen to what it is really saying. I think you’ll be shocked. And, oddly enough, since “love” involves “getting” something from the other person, it induces a feeling of guilt—a feeling of sin.

I remember a person in a workshop in which we were asked to dig down to uncover our personal “fundamental lie” about ourselves who came up with the line, “My love kills.” We were then asked to reverse the thought and walk about the room, greeting one another with, “Hi, I’m Allen, and [insert positive affirmation].” When this woman came up to me and said, “Hi, I’m Rachel, and my love heals,” I could see the tears of joy in her eyes as the truth dawned upon her. Her misperception had become “a mistake to be corrected, rather than an evil to be punished” (6:2).

According to the Course, there is no lack of love, and since sin is a lack of love (6:1), there is no sin. What we see as sin is “a mistake to be corrected, rather than an evil to be punished” (6:2). (The unreality of sin is another whole discussion!) The world’s definition of love involves getting something from the one being loved, but “love is incapable of asking for anything” (6:7). Once again, the apparent appearance of sin and guilt is a false perception based on a false belief in lack.

Paragraph 7

Only minds can really join, and whom God has joined no man can put asunder (Text, p. 356). It is, however, only at the level of Christ Mind that true union is possible, and has, in fact, never been lost. The "little I" seeks to enhance itself by external approval, external possessions and external "love." The Self that God created needs nothing. It is forever complete, safe, loved and loving. It seeks to share rather than to get; to extend rather than project. It has no needs and wants to join with others out of their mutual awareness of abundance.

• Study Question •

7. *Consider your own relationships. To what degree do they come from a sense of scarcity, which leads you to try to get something from the other person to fill yourself? To what degree do they come out of a mutual awareness of abundance?*



Oddly, the reference given (a page number in the First Edition) is not correct. The Course does say those things, but not in that place, and I can't be sure exactly where is being referred to. It does teach that only minds can join: "Minds are joined; bodies are not." (T-18.VI.3:1) And it echoes the Bible when it says what God has joined man cannot "put asunder": "Whom God has joined as one, the ego cannot put asunder." (T-17.III.7:3) As you can see, however, those quotes are from two different chapters.

The point here is that "true union is possible" "only at the level of Christ Mind" (7:2). When the Course refers to minds being joined it is speaking of a union at a spiritual level, not simply a sharing of common ideas. True union, in fact, has never been lost (7:2). This paragraph is explaining what true union is, in contrast to the love based on lack described in the previous paragraph, where we "love" someone we think can fill up our lack. It amplifies that description here: "The 'little I' seeks to enhance itself by external approval, external possessions and external 'love'." (7:3). When we are identified with our true Self, we seek "to share rather than to get; to extend rather than project" (7:6), because our true Self "needs nothing" and "is forever complete, safe, loved, and loving" (7:4-5). This kind of joining with others is not infected with the desperate neediness so often seen in earthly romance. Here, we "join with others out of [our] mutual awareness of abundance" (7:7). This kind of relationship is what the Course calls a "holy relationship."

Paragraph 8

The special relationships of the world are destructive, selfish and childishly egocentric. Yet, if given to the Holy Spirit, these relationships can become the holiest things on earth—the miracles that point the way to the return to Heaven. The world uses its special relationships as a final weapon of exclusion and a demonstration of separateness. The Holy Spirit transforms them into perfect lessons in forgiveness and in awakening from the dream. Each one is an opportunity to let perceptions be healed and errors corrected. Each one is another chance to forgive oneself by forgiving the other. And each one becomes still another invitation to the Holy Spirit and to the remembrance of God.

• Study Question •

8. *What do you generally think of as the holiest things on earth? Can you understand why relationships that have become such holy things might be called "the miracles that point the way to the return to Heaven"?*



"Destructive, selfish and childishly egocentric" (8:1). One only has to watch Dr. Phil to verify that this describes many, if not most, of the relationships of this world. The good news of

A Course in Miracles is that any or all of such relationships can be transformed into one of the holiest things on earth! (8:2). No matter how egocentric the relationships are, they can become “perfect lessons in forgiveness and in awakening from the dream” (8:4). I often say that the best one-line description of the Course that I have been able to come up with is, “It is a course in the healing of relationships through forgiveness.”

Those three negative words in 8:1 all contain the sense of doing harm, in some way, to another person, in order to achieve selfish gain. That is the basic dynamic that has to be transformed. The ego uses our special relationships “as a final weapon of exclusion and a demonstration of separateness” (8:3). What sad words, and yet how true of many relationships! The Course in one place speaks of people in such shattered relationships, “living with their bodies perhaps under a common roof that shelters neither; in the same room and yet a world apart” (T-22.Int.2:8). Truly, such tragedies of common aloneness seem to demonstrate, vividly, just how separate we really are. And yet that is only an illusion; our true union has never been and never will be broken. Those very mockeries of union can become showplaces of forgiveness and joining. Indeed, that is their purpose; that is their destiny. The Course teaches, “It is the destiny of all relationships to become holy” (M-3.4:6). “The holiest of all the spots on earth is where an ancient hatred has become a present love” (T-26.IX.6:1).

Every relationship you have is “another chance to forgive [yourself] by forgiving the other” (8:6). Many people have asked me, “Do you forgive the other person first, or do you forgive yourself first?” The answer is, “Yes,” to both questions. They are one and the same thing. It is a mistake to try to do one without doing the other; it is impossible. The Course teaches, “To perceive truly is to be aware of all reality through the awareness of your own” (T-13.VI.1:1). That is, being aware of your own holiness as God’s perfect creation, you use that as the lens through which you view the world, and see in it just what you see in yourself. “You should look out from the perception of your own holiness to the holiness of others” (T-1.III.6:7). So you cannot see others truly unless you are seeing yourself that way. But the reverse is equally true: You cannot see yourself as whole unless you see *others* as whole.

You understand that you are healed when you give healing. You accept forgiveness as accomplished in yourself when you forgive. You recognize your brother as yourself, and thus do you perceive that you are whole. (W-pI.159.2:1-3)

One by one, relationships are healed, and each one invites you more powerfully to union with the Holy Spirit and the remembrance of God (8:7). As you recognize your holiness and that of others, you begin to recognize the common Source.

Paragraph 9

Perception is a function of the body, and therefore represents a limit on awareness. Perception sees through the body's eyes and hears through the body's ears. It evokes the limited responses which the body makes. The body appears to be largely self-motivated and independent, yet it actually responds only to the intentions of the mind. If the mind wants to use it for attack in any form, it becomes prey to sickness, age and decay. If the mind accepts the Holy Spirit's purpose for it instead, it becomes a useful way of communicating with others, invulnerable as long as it is needed, and to be gently laid by when its use is over. Of itself it is neutral, as is everything in the world of perception. Whether it is

used for the goals of the ego or the Holy Spirit depends entirely on what the mind wants.

• Study Question •

9. *How is the teaching of this paragraph related to physical healing?*

•

This paragraph and the next contrast bodily perception with the vision of Christ, which is non-physical. Perception is tied to the body and its senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste. It is inherently limited (9:1–2). Our identification with the body thus distorts perception and severely limits what we see. Our eyes do not hear everything; our ears do not hear everything. Nor do our minds actually register everything that our eyes and ears *do* sense. And, in response to these limited perceptions, the body acts in similarly limited ways (9:3). We are all limited by our physical abilities: our strength or lack of it, our stature, our stamina. Our reliance on bodily perception lies behind a great deal of what is wrong with our relationships.

The body “appears to be largely self-motivated and independent” (9:4). Much of what the body does appears to be driven by the body itself: we have to eat; we have to sleep; we have to defecate. We breathe; our hearts beat; our stomachs digest our food, all without conscious direction. We crave sexual pleasures. We react instinctively to many things: a sudden noise causes a burst of adrenalin; a threat evokes the fight-or-flight response. An triggers causes a flood of blood to the head and we flush with anger. There seems to be no connection to our conscious, thinking mind. But notice that qualifying word: *appears*. It only seems that way.

Actually, Jesus says, the body “responds only to the intentions of the mind” (9:4). Everything the body does is a response to a thought—even our breathing and our heartbeat. HeartMath® has scientifically demonstrated that deliberately, consciously modifying our thoughts has a nearly immediate effect on our heartbeat (<http://www.heartmath.org/research/science-of-the-heart.html>).

Fundamentally it breaks down to the purpose we attribute to our bodies. It’s the same dichotomy between two thought systems. Is it a tool for attack, or a tool for loving communication? The purpose for which we use the body determines its health. “Health is the result of relinquishing all attempts to use the body lovelessly” (T-8.VIII.9:9). Even age and aging (decay) is attributed by the Course to loveless use of the body; given entirely to the purposes of the Holy Spirit the body is, quite literally, invulnerable “as long as it is needed” (9:6). And when the body is no longer needed, it is “gently laid by” (9:6). This is an only slightly modified form of what Charles Fillmore, one of the founders of Unity, believed: that if the mind were healed, the body would be immortal. The Course implies that it will live as long as the spirit of the person needs it to do whatever work they are called to, but will eventually be “laid by.”

The Song of Prayer pamphlet puts it like this:

Yet there is a kind of seeming death that has a different source. It does not come because of hurtful thoughts and raging anger at the universe. It merely signifies the end has come for usefulness of body functioning. And so it is discarded as a choice, as one lays by a garment now outworn.

This is what death should be; a quiet choice, made joyfully and with a sense of peace, because the body has been kindly used to help the Son of God along the way he goes to God. We thank the body, then, for all the service it has given us. But we are thankful, too, the need is done to walk the world of limits, and to reach

the Christ in hidden forms and clearly seen at most in lovely flashes. Now we can behold Him without blinders, in the light that we have learned to look upon again.

We call it death, but it is liberty. It does not come in forms that seem to be thrust down in pain upon unwilling flesh, but as a gentle welcome to release. If there has been true healing, this can be the form in which death comes when it is time to rest a while from labor gladly done and gladly ended. Now we go in peace to freer air and gentler climate, where it is not hard to see the gifts we gave were saved for us. (S-3.II.1:8-3:4)

“My body is a wholly neutral thing” (W-pII.294). How it is used depends on what our mind wants. It *can* be used as a holy communication device:

The body was not made by love. Yet love does not condemn it and can use it lovingly, respecting what the Son of God has made and using it to save him from illusions. (T-18.VI.4:7-8)

The reversal of thought toward which the Course is aiming requires us to withdraw our total trust and belief in our physical senses, and to turn to a different kind of inner vision and inner hearing.

Paragraph 10

The opposite of seeing through the body's eyes is the vision of Christ, which reflects strength rather than weakness, unity rather than separation, and love rather than fear. The opposite of hearing through the body's ears is communication through the Voice for God, the Holy Spirit, which abides in each of us. His Voice seems distant and difficult to hear because the ego, which speaks for the little, separated self, seems to be much louder. This is actually reversed. The Holy Spirit speaks with unmistakable clarity and overwhelming appeal. No one who does not choose to identify with the body could possibly be deaf to His messages of release and hope, nor could he fail to accept joyously the vision of Christ in glad exchange for his miserable picture of himself.

• Study Question •

10. Why does the voice of the Holy Spirit seem like a “still, small voice,” “distant and difficult to hear”?



Seeing with only our body's eyes, we perceive weakness, separation, and fear. The vision of Christ perceives strength, unity, and love (10:1). A good deal of our spiritual practice, then, is learning not to believe what our eyes tell us! In biblical terms, this is faith, which the Bible defines as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1 NRSV) or, as a looser translation (*God's Word*) puts it, faith “convinces us of the existence of things we cannot see.” We are asked to rely on that higher vision rather than what we see with our eyes (interpreted through the lens of our mistaken thinking). When the Course advises us to affirm, “I want to see things differently,” it isn't asking us to simply consider things from a different point of view, it is asking us to go within to share the perception of the Holy Spirit, to see with the eyes of Christ.

The bulk of the paragraph, however, focuses on listening, not on seeing. Not relying on what we hear with our ears, we are asked to listen for the Voice of the Holy Spirit, “the Voice for God,” a voice that “abides in each of us” (10:2). This is a huge emphasis in the Course, which calls it “the way out of hell for you” (M-29.3:11). Recall what was said in the fourth paragraph, “You cannot escape without help,” and the reason for the emphasis is clear. To break us out of our closed, self-reinforcing thought system of fear, there *must* be another Voice with another message.

Why, then, does it seem so difficult for us to hear that inner voice? Our ego’s voice seems much louder. As the Course admits, “The ego always speaks first” (T-6.IV.1:2), and its voice drowns out the ego. However, it need not be so: “The still, small Voice for God is not drowned out by all the ego’s raucous screams and senseless ravings to those who want to hear It” (T-21.V.1:6). We may object that we *do* want to hear it, but the Course’s position is firm:

If you cannot hear the Voice for God, it is because you do not choose to listen. That you *do* listen to the voice of your ego is demonstrated by your attitudes, your feelings and your behavior. Yet this is what you want. This is what you are fighting to keep, and what you are vigilant to save. Your mind is filled with schemes to save the face of your ego, and you do not seek the face of Christ. (T-4.IV.1:1-5)

Jesus insists that “The Holy Spirit speaks with unmistakable clarity and overwhelming appeal” (10:5). The quotation above says it is because we are fighting to save the face of our egos; here, it says we are deaf to the Spirit because we are choosing to identify with our bodies (10:6), which amounts to the same thing, since “the body is the symbol of the ego” (T-15.IX.2:3). We simply don’t want to wake up. We don’t want to give up our ego identity, which we would have to do if we truly heard the Voice for God telling us the Truth of our divine Identity.

Paragraph 11

Christ's vision is the Holy Spirit's gift, God's alternative to the illusion of separation and to the belief in the reality of sin, guilt and death. It is the one correction for all errors of perception; the reconciliation of the seeming opposites on which this world is based. Its kindly light shows all things from another point of view, reflecting the thought system that arises from knowledge and making return to God not only possible but inevitable. What was regarded as injustices done to one by someone else now becomes a call for help and for union. Sin, sickness and attack are seen as misperceptions calling for remedy through gentleness and love. Defenses are laid down because where there is no attack there is no need for them. Our bothers' needs become our own, because they are taking the journey with us as we go to God. Without us they would lose their way. Without them we could never find our own.

• Study Question •

11. The Course tells us that our real safety lies in being defenseless. What reason is given here that explains why defenses are not necessary?

•

After a brief focus on hearing God's Voice, this summary of the Course's teaching returns to Christ's vision, which receives even greater emphasis in the Course. An amazing array of qualities and benefits is credited to this vision:

- ◆ it corrects all errors of perception
- ◆ it reconciles all seeming opposites
- ◆ it reflects a thought system that arises from knowledge
- ◆ it makes return to God not only possible but inevitable
- ◆ it enables us to look past apparent injustices to see a call for help and union
- ◆ it allows us to see sin, sickness, and attack as misperceptions that call for remedy through gentleness and love
- ◆ it shows us there is no attack, and therefore defenses are not needed
- ◆ the needs of our brothers become our own needs
- ◆ we realize that without one another we could never find the way home

This vision is “the Holy Spirit's gift” (11:1). Students of the Course often miss this point. They seem to think that somehow *they* are supposed to correct their errors of perception, look past injustice, and see the unreality of attack. But that simply isn't possible while we are restricted to our body's perceptions. We need that input from outside of our thought system; we need an injection of divine sight. When our perceptions trigger our fear or our sense of attack, what works is not to *try* to see things differently, but to turn within and *ask* to see things differently. This is calling on the Holy Spirit, or calling on our true Self, in recognition that our “little, separated self” simply cannot do it.

Application (by Robert Perry):

To boil down the thought we can take away from this paragraph: “When you attack me, you are the one in need, not me. Let me attend to your need, and that is how mine will be met.” This is such a beautiful perception. Imagine applying it to someone in your life, someone you see as attacking you. Please choose someone who you have perceived as attacking you recently. Focus on that person and repeat these lines to yourself:

In this situation, I don't need to defend myself or retaliate; I don't need to attend to my own need here.

I don't see [name] as sinning, but as experiencing a lack of sanity that needs to be remedied.

I see [name] as calling for my help, for only my love can remedy his/her lack.

I see [name] in need, and I realize that meeting his/her need is how my own need will be met.

Keeping [name] from losing his/her way is how I will find my own.

Paragraph 12

Forgiveness is unknown in Heaven, where the need for it would be inconceivable. However, in this world, forgiveness is a necessary correction for all the mistakes that we have made. To offer forgiveness is the only way for us to have it, for it reflects the law of Heaven that giving and receiving are the same.

Heaven is the natural state of all the Sons of God as He created them. Such is their reality forever. It has not changed because it has been forgotten.

• **Study Question** •

12. *Consider your own relationships. To what degree do they come from a sense of scarcity, which leads you to try to get something from the other person to fill yourself? To what degree do they come out of a mutual awareness of abundance?*

•

In Heaven (the state of perfect Oneness, “the natural state of all the Sons of God” (12:4)) there is no need for forgiveness (12:1), but in this world, we need it. It is the “correction for all the mistakes that we have made” (12:1), all the mistaken perceptions of sin and guilt that we have projected onto one another. Giving forgiveness to others is the *only* way to have it for ourselves (12:3). The way we described forgiveness at the beginning should make even more sense now:

We were seeing what is not there. Looking past those mistaken perceptions is what forgiveness is all about. And as we do so with others we are learning to forgive ourselves in the same way, “looking past our distorted self-concepts to the Self that God created in us and as us” (5:9)

We are realizing that we are not egos, and neither are those around us. The ego we see is *not* who they really are; they are a Son (or Child) of God, and they remain perfect and holy as He created them (12:4). We are seeing their unchangeable reality, which we had temporarily forgotten (12:5–6).

Paragraph 13

Forgiveness is the means by which we will remember. Through forgiveness the thinking of the world is reversed. The forgiven world becomes the gate of Heaven, because by its mercy we can at last forgive ourselves. Holding no one prisoner to guilt, we become free. Acknowledging Christ in all our brothers, we recognize His Presence in ourselves. Forgetting all our misperceptions, and with nothing from the past to hold us back, we can remember God. Beyond this, learning cannot go. When we are ready, God Himself will take the final step in our return to Him.

• **Study Question** •

14. *How, according to this passage, can you come to recognize the Presence of Christ in yourself?*
- By forgiving yourself*
 - By remembering who you really are*
 - By acknowledging Christ in all your brothers*
 - By remembering God*

What do you suppose forgiveness enables you to remember? (13:1) If we look ahead in the paragraph, the answer seems to be, “we can remember God” (13:6). This is born out by quotes found in the Course:

By healing you learn of wholeness, and by learning of wholeness you learn to remember God. (T-7.IV.4:3)

To perceive the healing of your brother as the healing of yourself is thus the way to remember God. (T-12.II.2:9)

No one who learns to forgive can fail to remember God. Forgiveness, then, is all that need be taught, because it is all that need be learned. (P-2.II.3:1-2)

We’ve seen that the goal of the Course is to reverse the thinking of the world. It should be clear by now that the means for achieving that goal is forgiveness (13:2). When we look upon a world that we have forgiven, it will be filled with mercy, shining back at us, and in the light of that mercy we can, at last, forgive ourselves completely (13:3).

Who are you holding “prisoner to guilt”? Are you willing to set them free? In so doing, you will become free from guilt yourself (13:4).

Who do you refuse to acknowledge as the Christ? Are you willing to acknowledge Christ in them? In so doing, you will recognize the Christ in yourself (13:5).

To do this, you have to forget your misperceptions, no matter how vividly the body’s eyes insist on their reality. You have to forget the past. (“Let me forget my brother’s past today” (W-pII.288).) As you do you will remember God, and isn’t that what we all want? This is the height of learning; there is nothing beyond it (13:7). And when we have reached that point, God will do the rest and “will take the final step in our return to Him” (13:8).

Final Observations

What is particularly interesting about this “author’s summary” of *A Course in Miracles* is that it involves almost no abstruse metaphysics or theology, very little mention of God or Christ. The main emphasis seems to be on our misperceptions and the correction of them by means of forgiveness. It’s all about how we see people and how we treat them. It’s about our transformation from egotistical, attacking people into loving and helpful people.

In closing, I’d like to quote at length from Robert Perry’s excellent summary of this section:

If *What It Says* is indeed a snapshot of how Jesus saw the main currents in his teaching, then it tells us something crucial about the relationship between the metaphysical and ethical dimensions

of the Course. It tells us, quite simply, that *the metaphysical takes a back seat to the ethical*. I think this is quite often reversed in the minds of Course students. The lofty truths about the world being a dream, about the separation, about everything being in my own mind, often eclipse the more down-to-earth truths about whether I am attacking or blessing my brother, about whether I am being selfish or generous. Indeed, those lofty truths often *lead* us to be attacking, or justify our callousness. Yet I believe that the Course intends those metaphysical ideas to merely serve that all-important ethical dimension. Their only purpose is to help us be more loving toward our brother. This section, in my mind, helps us keep those two dimensions in proper perspective.

A list of the major themes in this section

Try reading the following list and imagining that this is a list of the Course's main themes:

- Knowledge
- Perception
- Perception vs. knowledge
- The Holy Spirit
- Forgiveness
- Love (*special relationships*)
- Joining (*special and holy relationships*)
- Holy Relationships
- The Body (*its behavior and its health*)
- Listening to God's Voice
- Christ's vision (*and helping our brothers*)
- Heaven and forgiveness

Answer Key

1. Knowledge is described by all of these words and phrases:

- a. real
- b. truth
- c. under one law
- d. unalterable
- e. eternal
- f. unambiguous
- g. changeless
- h. beyond learning, beyond time, beyond process
- i. no opposite
- j. no beginning nor end

You might summarize this list by saying that knowledge is objective, changeless, and certain.

2. Perception is described by these words and phrases:

- a. time
- b. change
- c. beginnings and endings
- d. interpretation
- e. birth, death
- f. scarcity
- g. loss
- h. separation
- i. learned
- j. selective attention
- k. unstable functioning
- l. inaccurately interpreted

You could summarize this list with the words subjective, changeable, and uncertain.

3. The two thought systems both picture the way in which we, God's creations, relate to God and to one another. The primary difference between the two is that, in perception's picture, we all have separate wills that are in conflict with one another and with God, while in knowledge's picture, there is only one unified will, shared among God and all God's creations.
4. The Holy Spirit is necessary because our minds are trapped in the closed thought system of the ego. Our minds have been trained to perceive everything only in a way that supports the ego system. We need a Voice that speaks from outside that thought system, and is able to communicate the truth to us in a way that gets around our conditioned thinking.
5. True. (5:7)
6. No particular response is expected.
7. No particular response is expected.
8. No particular response is expected.

Allen Watson's Commentary on the Text of *A Course in Miracles*

9. The paragraph teaches that the health of the body depends upon the purpose we, in our minds, have given to it. To the degree it is used for attack, it becomes sick; to the degree it is given to the Holy Spirit's purpose, the body becomes invulnerable.
10. Because the ego's voice *seems* to be much louder, but that is so only because we have chosen to identify with our bodies.
11. Defenses are not necessary because all attack is a misperception.
12. No particular response is expected.
13. c.