

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM Text, Section 1.VI,

The Illusion of Needs

The basic thought of Section VI is that all experience of need is an illusion. If we are truly whole, as the previous section has said, then needs are impossible. Yet learning is required to recognize the illusory nature of all needs.

Paragraph 1

1. ¹You who want peace can find it only by complete forgiveness. [Ur: You never really *wanted* peace before, so there was no point in knowing how to get it. This is an example of the “need to know” principle, which was established by the Plan of Atonement long before CIA. The need to know is not safely under man’s control at this time. It is MUCH better off under mine. Let’s just leave it at that.] ²No learning is acquired by anyone unless he wants to learn it and believes in some way that he needs [needs] it. [Ur: A psychologist does *not* need a lesson on the hierarchy of needs as such, but like everyone else, he *does* need to understand his own.] ³While lack does not exist in the creation of God, it is very apparent in what you have made. ⁴It is, in fact, the essential difference between them. ⁵Lack implies [Ur: A need implies lack, by definition. It involves the recognition, conscious or unconscious, (and at times, fortunately, superconscious)] that you would be better off in a state somehow different from the one you are in. ⁶Until the “separation,” which is the meaning of [a better term than] the “fall,” nothing was lacking. ⁷There were no needs at all. ⁸Needs arise only when you deprive yourself. [Ur: If {man} had not deprived himself, he would never have experienced them.] ⁹You act according to the particular order of needs you establish. ¹⁰This, in turn, depends on your perception of what you are. [Ur: A man acts according to the particular hierarchy of needs he establishes for himself. His hierarchy, in turn, depends on his perception of what he IS, i.e., what he *lacks*. This establishes his own rules for what he needs to know.]

• Study Question •

1. Make a list, mental or written, of several ways in which you think “you would be better off in a state somehow different from the one you are in.” Recognize that all of these are examples of your belief in “needs” or lack.

2. Why do you suppose the word “separation” is in quotes? What does it mean when an author puts words in quotation marks like this?



The first three sentences seem almost unrelated to one another at first glance. But there is a uniting theme. In different ways, each of the sentences is referring to some awareness of need or sense of lack: "You who want peace," "believes...that he needs it," and "lack...is very apparent in what you have made." It harks back to "the emptiness engendered by fear" referred to in T-1.IV.4:1. It all has to do with lack or need. The connection between them is much clearer when you add the deleted lines from the Urtext.

If we are honest, we all think we have needs. In some way or other, we believe we "would be better off in a state somehow different from the one [we] are in" (5). That is a need, and such need or lack was not part of what God created. In our original state we had no lack, and although we don't realize it, we are still in our original state. The Course often uses this phrase to sum it up: "I am as God created me."

Sensing a need is not entirely a bad thing, even though it may be an illusory need, because if we did not sense our need, we would have no desire to learn anything (2). Notice how, in the Urtext's sentence 5, it points out that "fortunately" the recognition of lack comes from the "superconscious," that is, Christ consciousness. We are whole; "spirit...is already perfect" (T-1.V.5:2). But we think we are not; our minds can be imprisoned through the choice of illusions. That sense of lack is what drives us to desire learning, so that we can fill our emptiness.

Lack does not actually exist in the creation of God, but "it is very apparent in what you have made" (3). The word "apparent" is related to "appear"; in what we have made there is very definitely an appearance of lack, even though lack does not exist. Here once again the Course is making a big distinction between "make" and "create," with making being what we have done and creating being what God does. The "essential difference between them" (4), it says, is that lack appears in what we make, but never in God's creation. God creates only completion and wholeness. There were no needs at all prior to the "separation" (6-7). We have made the appearance of need by depriving ourselves (8).

Notice the logical connection between ideas in the last two sentences, which end up giving the reason behind our normal actions or behavior. It starts from our perception of ourselves. From that perception, we derive a certain order of needs. Then, based on that supposed order of needs, we act. This "order of needs" probably refers to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow proposed a hierarchy that began with bare survival needs, went up through social needs, and finally reached higher levels of self-realization or self-actualization needs.

Such a graduated set of needs depends very much on how we perceive ourselves. If we are spirits living in bodies, and having egos with various emotions, we are going to perceive ourselves as having physical, psychological, and spiritual needs, and then we are going to act to meet those perceived needs. What the Course is saying here is that the whole picture of levels of need is false because our perception of what we are is wrong. We are not in bodies; we are not egos. We do not have the needs we think we have. In fact, as the next paragraphs points out, we have only

one lack.

Paragraph 2

2. ¹A sense of separation from God is the only lack you really need correct. ²This sense of separation would never have arisen if you had not distorted your perception of truth, and had thus perceived yourself as lacking. ³The idea of order of needs [Ur: *any sort of need hierarchy*] arose because, having made this fundamental error, you had already fragmented yourself into levels with different needs. ⁴As you integrate you become one, and your needs become one accordingly. [Only the fragmented can be confused about this. Internal integration within the self will not correct the lack fallacy, but it WILL correct the NEED fallacy.] ⁵Unified needs lead to unified action, because this produces a lack of conflict [Ur: *ambivalence*].

• Study Question •

3. We seem to have many different needs of varying levels, and much of our lives are spent trying to meet those needs. What is the only lack we really need to correct?

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The picture that is presented here of how we came to our present condition, with many divergent and competing needs, is that of a process with several steps:

- We distorted our perception of truth (that we were whole and complete as God created us);
- we perceived ourselves as lacking something;
- we thus appeared to be separate from God's wholeness and completion;
- we fragmented ourselves—or our perception of ourselves, at least—into various levels (such as body, mind, spirit), with each level having different needs.

Basically, then, it was our false sense of separation from God that opened the way to our perception of ourselves as lacking. Then, our fragmented perception of ourselves led to a whole panoply of varying needs. It seems as though we need many different things, and we are in constant conflict because the needs seem to be in conflict. We focus on meeting our physical needs, and our emotional needs and spiritual needs go lacking. If we focus on our social needs, our physical needs seem to suffer. In reality, however, if we correct the original mistake—our sense of separation from God—we will eliminate the source of our sense of need and lack. As we “integrate” (4) our perception of self, and learn to see ourselves as spirit (T-1.III.5:5) and only spirit, our “needs become one accordingly” (4). We see our one need being to recognize our union with God, and everything becomes subordinate to meeting that need. The full truth will finally eliminate even that single sense of lack. We move from a multiplicity of needs, to a single need, to the recognition that we have *no* needs—we lack nothing.

Paragraph 3

3. ¹The idea of orders of need [Ur: need hierarchy], which follows from the original error that one can be separated from God, requires correction at its own level before the error of perceiving levels at all can be corrected. ²You cannot behave effectively while you function on different levels [Ur: split levels]. ³However, while you do, correction must be introduced vertically from the bottom up. ⁴This is because you think you live in space, where concepts such as “up” and “down” are meaningful. ⁵Ultimately, space is as meaningless as time. ⁶Both are merely beliefs.

What needs to be corrected first of all is the idea that there are different orders of need. That is, we need to learn to recognize our one true need in everything, and to see that every seeming need is really a form, perhaps a distorted or disguised form, of our one true need. When we have collapsed all our needs into one, we can begin to undo the illusion that our being is fragmented into various levels. In this world we appear to have many needs of varying degree, some of them in competition with each other. All this apparent lack stems from one root cause: the sense of separation from God. If we are indeed one with God, we have no needs at all; the needs are only an illusion. But before this sense of separation can be healed, we need to learn that all the varying needs we see are really all the same thing; they are all reflections of that root need. The multiplicity of needs must be, so to speak, collapsed into one single need—the “lack” of God—and then that ultimate “lack” can be healed. Before the root error can be corrected we must learn that “there is no order of difficulty in miracles,” because there is only one problem.

The Course calls this approach correcting errors “from the bottom up” (3). The root of the problem is our belief in fear, which cannot exist if perfect love exists. However, attacking that root problem directly is too daunting for us. Therefore, the approach of the Course is to begin by dealing with the effects of fear. As we learn, one by one, that these effects are illusory, we are gently and gradually led to the logical conclusion: If all the effects are illusions, the cause must be illusion as well.

What this means, I think, is that as we begin, we find our specific needs being met by the Holy Spirit. We have one problem after another answered. Over time, we come to recognize that, regardless of what the problem is, the answer is always some form of forgiveness. Because the same thing answers apparently “different” problems, we start to realize that all the problems are really just forms of one problem, and thus we begin to realize that all needs are really just one need, with one answer. That realization leads to the recognition of the unity of our true Self, and that, in turn, leads to the realization of our union with God.

The shocking statement that space and time are both meaningless concepts, merely beliefs, and not something real, is thrown in almost as an aside. If space and time are merely beliefs, it confirms that the Course truly does mean the entire physical universe when it says the world is unreal. Because we believe in space and time, correction has to occur in “levels” from the bottom up.

• Study Question •

4. Reflect about the needs you perceive yourself as having. Make a short list, written or mental, of the five or six greatest needs you think you have. Try to recognize in every one of these needs a form of your one, true need, which is to end your sense of separation from God.

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Paragraph 4

4. ¹The real purpose of this world is to use it to correct your unbelief. [Ur: The physical world exists only because man can use it to correct his *unbelief*, which placed him in it originally. As long as man *knew* he did not need anything, the whole device was unnecessary.] {There is a long discussion of sexual partners here, some seven paragraphs, that was omitted. See Appendix at the end of this study guide.} ²You can never control the effects of fear yourself, because you made fear, and you believe in what you made. ³In attitude, then, though not in content, you resemble your Creator, Who has perfect faith in His creations *because* He created them. [Ur: All creation rests on belief, and] ⁴Belief produces the acceptance of existence [Ur: the belief in the creation produces its existence]. ⁵That is why you can believe what no one else thinks is true. ⁶It is true for you because it was made by you.

Every aspect of fear proceeds from upside-down perception. The TRULY creative devote their efforts to correcting this. The neurotic devotes his to compromise. The psychotic tries to escape by establishing the truth of his own errors. It is most difficult to free him by ordinary means, only because he is more stable in his denial of truth

• Study Question •

5. Have you noticed how often in these opening sections the Course has told us in one way or another that "the real purpose of this world is to use it to correct your unbelief" (1)? What other similar statements can you recall from Sections I through V of this chapter?

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Once again the Course tells us that the only real purpose of this world is correcting our unbelief. Most of us believe, at least to some degree, that the purpose of the world is to meet our needs. We certainly expect it to meet them. We try to manipulate the world to make it meet them. Later in the Text, Jesus tells us that everyone who comes to this world tries to make it fill his imagined lack:

“No one who comes here but must still have hope, some lingering illusion, or some dream that there is something outside of himself that will bring happiness

and peace to him....This is the purpose he bestows upon the body; that it seek for what he lacks, and give him what would make himself complete.” (T-29.VII.2:1,4)

The world does not contain anything that can fill our emptiness; we are looking in the wrong place. The purpose of the world is not to meet our needs; it is for us to learn that our belief in needs is a mistake.

The results of our false belief in fear are the appearances of lack and need in our lives. For most people, they never see past the appearances. They devote their time and energy, indeed their entire lives, to an attempt to meet the apparent needs and to fill the apparent lacks. (This futile search is something Ken Wilber, the prominent transpersonal psychologist and thinker, has called, “The Atman Project,” in his book of that name.)

We could spend the rest of our lives trying to control these “effects of fear,” without ever achieving complete success. Why? Because the source of these lacks and needs is actually our own fear. We made their source, fear, and we believe in what we made (2). We have a “misplaced or misdirected loyalty” to what we have made, as was pointed out previously in T-1.III.5:8. We have faith in our illusions (3)! “It is true for you because it was made by you” (6). So trying to manipulate the circumstances and events of the world to achieve happiness will never work; that is dealing with the effects. What we need to do is take care of the cause, our unbelief, which is the same as our belief in fear. Thus, the only valid use for the world is to correct our unbelief. Correcting our unbelief is the same as restoring us to our original state of completion and wholeness, wholly lovable and wholly loving.

• **Study Question** •

6. Mentally, make a list of a few of the things you think (or have thought) the world is for, such as: finding happiness; having a family and raising children; or making a difference in society. Spend a little time to list the things that have been important to you, personally. And then, with each one, tell yourself, “This is not what the world is for. The only purpose of the world is using it to correct my unbelief.”

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Paragraph 5

5. ¹All aspects of fear are untrue because they do not exist at the creative level, and therefore do not exist at all. ²To whatever extent you are willing to submit your beliefs to this test, to that extent are your perceptions [Ur: healed or] corrected. ³In sorting out the false from the true, the miracle proceeds along these lines:

⁴Perfect love casts out fear

⁵If fear exists,

Then there is not perfect love.

⁶But:

⁷*Only perfect love [Ur: really] exists.*

⁸*[Ur: Therefore,] If there is fear,*

It produces a state that does not exist.

⁹Believe this and you will be free. ¹⁰Only God can establish this solution, and this faith is His gift.

The material in this paragraph originally came after material on two miracle principles (principles #49 and #50 in the published Course).

• **Study Question** •

7. Once again we encounter the word "level," which we also saw in the first two paragraphs of this section. It was used as well in several Miracle Principles in Section I: #12, #17, #23 and #30. The idea of levels disappears from the Text after the first twelve chapters, but it seems important here at the start. What levels have been identified so far? What do you think "the creative level" refers to, at which all aspects of fear "do not exist at all" (1)?

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If we cannot control the effects of fear, we can control fear itself, the source. In other words, we can work with the thoughts in our minds instead of trying to control the things outside of our minds. At the level of spirit, the creative level (1), fear does not exist. How could it, if spirit is eternal? Again I am reminded of the words of the Introduction, "Nothing real can be threatened....Herein lies the peace of God" (T-In.2:2,4).

So when the second sentence talks about my being willing "to submit [my] beliefs to this test" (2), it is talking about "sorting out the false from the true" (3) by allowing my beliefs to be compared with what is real in spirit, and rejecting them if they do not agree with that truth. Am I actually willing to do that? If I have a fearful thought, am I willing in my mind to bring that fearful thought together with the truth of spirit, which is that I am in a state of grace forever, that my reality is only spirit? "To that extent"—to the extent I am willing to bring my illusions to the truth—my perceptions are corrected (2).

The Course makes a big deal out of this mental process of taking my thoughts and laying them alongside the truth as God sees it (according to this Course). It sets great store by what it calls bringing illusions to the truth. It tells us:

"The mind that brings illusions to the truth is really changed." (W-pI.140.7:4)

"But to give illusions to truth is to enable truth to teach that the illusions are unreal, and thus enable you to escape from them." (T-17.I.5:5)

Evidently this is something the Course wants us to learn how to do. We might think that this is no more than mental gymnastics, but the Course encourages us to believe that mentally contrasting our thoughts with the truth can actually teach us the unreality of illusions and enable us to escape from them. To “submit your beliefs to this test,” it says, is to have “your perceptions corrected” (2). In fact, as this paragraph continues, it seems to be saying that this very mundane process of logic and mental comparison is how miracles happen! What it lays out, in sentences 4 through 8, is another pair of logical syllogisms: If A is true, and B is true, then C must be true.

• **Study Question** •

8. Take a piece of paper and write out the “A, B and C” of each of the two logical syllogisms here.

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Consider each of these syllogisms in turn. The first proposition is, “Perfect love casts out fear.” This is actually a quotation from the Bible, I John 4:18. Basically it means that fear and love cannot co-exist. Where perfect love is present, fear cannot be. This makes sense, because if I have perfect love towards you I cannot possibly be afraid of you at the same time. If I am afraid of you, my love for you isn't perfect. So this proposition seems to be true.

The next proposition is hypothetical: “If fear exists.” Its meaning seems to be, “Suppose that fear exists; what then?” And the answer, the conclusion that comes from putting the two propositions together, is, “then there is not perfect love.” That has to be the conclusion. If fear cannot co-exist with perfect love, and fear exists, then perfect love cannot exist.

The “But:” is significant, because it links the second syllogism to the first, and lets us know that what is about to be said is by way of contrast with the first hypothesis. The first syllogism proposed that if fear exists, perfect love does not exist. The reality, however, is that, “Only perfect love exists.” There is nothing else but perfect love. Since that is the truth, then, “If there is fear,” which we could paraphrase as, “If fear seems to exist,” then, “It produces a state that does not exist.” In other words, the fear cannot be real, and any effects it seems to have must be delusions.

I would summarize the logic here as follows: In the presence of perfect love, fear cannot exist; if it did, love would not be perfect. However, only perfect love exists in reality. Therefore, if fear arises in our minds, it must be illusory, and the state of mind it produces is delusional.

Now, all this is very interesting. Great mental gymnastics, right? But remember what the author just told us: This is how the miracle works. This is how our thinking gets corrected. This is how we are set free from our illusions. When we have a fearful thought, and we turn to God and bring it to Him for healing, this is how it gets healed. We find ourselves thinking along these lines. For instance, suppose I am afraid of being alone in the world, perhaps afraid of being abandoned by a particular person. I might think:

“If I can be abandoned, then God’s perfect love cannot exist. But only God’s love exists; therefore, this fear of mine must be unreal, abandonment must not exist.”

As you read through the Course you are going to find this kind of reasoning all over the place. For instance, in the Workbook:

“Pain is a sign illusions reign in place of truth. It demonstrates God is denied, confused with fear, perceived as mad, and seen as traitor to Himself. If God is real, there is no pain. If pain is real, there is no God.” (W-pI.190.3:1–4)

The Course clearly wants to engage our minds in this kind of reasoned thinking. It wants us to reason with ourselves, and to convince ourselves that fear is unjustified. It says, “Believe this and you will be free” (9); that is, believe that everything we see that contradicts the reality of our wholeness, our completeness, our holiness, our lovingness, our loveableness, and our union with God is an illusion.

“That’s all well and good,” you may be thinking, “but believing that is a tall order! I don’t know if I can do that.” Well, you are right; you can’t! “Only God can establish this solution,” it tells us in the next sentence, “and this faith is His gift” (10). At first, it seems like mundane logic, mind magic. Then, when you realize what it is asking—that we believe that all appearance of pain, loss, evil and separation be seen as illusory—it starts to seem like something that is impossible. And that is exactly why this is called a “miracle”! We have to do the work. We have to go through the motions. That is what shows our willingness. And if we do that, God supplies the faith; that is the miracle. We ask the Holy Spirit to give the gift of faith, knowing that alone, we can’t change our belief in what we have made (4:2). That extreme of a change in our thinking is beyond our ability. But God enters into the picture, and the impossible becomes possible. He gives us the faith, and the miracle happens.

Answer Key

1. Some of my personal examples were: 1) Losing weight; 2) Having a newer, faster computer; 3) Having the arthritic aches in my joints go away; 4) Meditating more frequently and longer.

2. Quotation marks around a word or phrase carry the same meaning as the word, "so-called." Thus, these two sentences are equivalent: "Until the 'separation,' nothing was lacking." "Until the so-called separation, nothing was lacking." Another way of interpreting such quotes is to insert "supposed" before the quoted word: "Until the supposed separation, nothing was lacking." Quotation marks also are used when referring to a word as a word; the quotes around "fall" in sentence 6 are an example of this second usage.

3. The only lack we really need to correct is our sense of separation from God. Until that sense of separation arose, nothing was lacking. Therefore, correcting our sense of separation will end all the other apparent needs.

4. As an example: I see myself as needing a "significant other" in my life; a partner, someone with whom to share my life. If I realize that my only real need is to end my sense of separation from God, I can recognize that, first of all, my longing for a partner is really a misdirected desire for union with God. And secondly, if I do pursue such a relationship, I can choose to make use of this relationship, not to try to have the other person fill my sense of lack, but rather to share with that person the purpose of recognizing our completion and wholeness in God. Instead of trying to make the relationship meet my perceived needs, I will allow the Holy Spirit to utilize the relationship to assist me in meeting my only true need.

5. The following passages all say similar things to 1.VI.4:1:

"Each day should be devoted to miracles. The purpose of time is to enable you to learn how to use time constructively." (T-1.I.15:1-2)

"The miracle is much like the body in that both are learning aids for facilitating a state in which they become unnecessary. When spirit's original state of direct communication is reached, neither the body nor the miracle serves any purpose." (T-1.V.1:1-2)

"The basic decision of the miracle-minded is not to wait on time any longer than is necessary." (T-1.V.2:1)

The common idea shared by all these passages is that the only purpose of miracles, time, the body, and the entire world is to wake up, to correct our unbelief, to accept the Atonement.

6. No written answer is expected.

7. To this point, the levels referred to have been primarily the body, the mind, and the spirit. The Course said in the early paragraphs of this section that the division (or fragmentation) of our

being into levels is a false perception. We have been told that our reality is “only spirit” (T-1.III.5:5); therefore we can only presume that body and mind do not really exist, at least not as separate levels distinct from spirit. If only spirit is real, and fear does not exist at all because it does not exist at “the creative level,” then the creative level must be the level of spirit, which is the only level that has reality.

If you recall, Section I told us that, “Miracles reawaken the awareness that the spirit, not the body, is the altar of truth” (T-1.I.20:1).

7. FIRST SYLLOGISM:

- A. If perfect love casts out fear
- B. If fear exists
- C. Then perfect love does not exist.

SECOND SYLLOGISM:

- A. Only perfect love exists (that it casts out fear is understood from the first syllogism)
- B. If fear arises
- C. It produces a state that does not exist.

I understand the logic here to be as follows: In the presence of perfect love, fear cannot exist; if it did, love would not be perfect. However, only perfect love exists in reality. Therefore, if fear arises in our minds, it must be illusory, and the state of mind it produces is delusional.

Appendix

Omitted Discussion of Sexual Partners from the Urtext

(Specific question raised by WT re sex under existing conditions) (HS raised previous question about the past, which has just been answered.)

The other question, however, I am more than willing to answer, because it is appropriate for NOW. You and B. both chose your present sex partners shamefully, and would have to atone for the lack of love which was involved in any case.

You selected them precisely BECAUSE they were NOT suited to gratify your fantasies. This was not because you wanted to abandon or give up the fantasies, but because you were AFRAID of them. You saw in your partners a means of protecting against the fear, but both of you continued to “look around” for chances to indulge the fantasies.

The dream of the “perfect partner” is an attempt to find EXTERNAL integration, while retaining conflicting needs in the self.

B. was somewhat less guilty of this than you, but largely because he was more afraid. He had abandoned the hope (of finding a perfect partner) in a neurotic sense of despair of finding it. You, on the other hand, insisted that the hope was justified. Neither of you, therefore, was in your Right Mind.

As was said before, homosexuality is inherently more risky (or error prone) than heterosexuality, but both can be undertaken on an equally false basis. The falseness of the basis is clear in the accompanying fantasies. Homosexuality ALWAYS involves misperception of the self OR the partner, and generally both. Penetration DOES NOT involve magic, nor DOES ANY form of sexual behavior. It IS a magic belief to engage in ANY form of body image activity at all. You neither created yourselves, nor controlled your creation. By introducing levels into your own perception, you opened the way for body-image distortions.

The lack of love (or faulty need-orientation) which led to your particular person (not OBJECT) choices CAN BE corrected within the existent framework, and would HAVE to be in the larger interest of overall progress. The situation is questionable largely because of its inherent vulnerability to fantasy-gratification. Doing the best you can WITHIN this limitation is probably the best corrective measure at present. Any relationship you have undertaken for whatever reasons becomes a responsibility.

If you shift your own needs, some amount of corresponding shift in the need-orientation of the other person MUST result, This will be beneficial, even if the partner was originally attracted to you BECAUSE of your disrespect. Teaching devices which are totally alien to a learner's perceptual system are usually merely disruptive. Transfer depends on SOME common elements in the new situation which are understandable in terms of the old.