

# Study Guide and Commentary

## ACIM<sup>®</sup> Text, Chapter 27

### Healing the Ancient Dream

#### Section VIII

## *The Cause of Suffering*

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

### Overview of Section VIII

This section and the next (“The Dreamer of the Dream”) both center on the idea that we, and we alone, are responsible for what we see, hear, feel, and experience. In my opinion, they contain several of the most memorable and significant lines in the Text. I’ll identify those lines with a footnote saying “Key line” as we go.

### Paragraph 1

Suffering is an emphasis upon all that the world has done to injure you. <sup>2</sup>Here is the world’s demented version of salvation clearly shown. <sup>3</sup>Like to a dream of punishment, in which the dreamer is unconscious of what brought on the attack against himself, he sees himself attacked unjustly, and by something *not* himself. <sup>4</sup>He is the victim of this “something else,” a thing outside himself for which he has no reason to be held responsible. <sup>5</sup>He must be innocent because he knows not what he does,<sup>1</sup> but what is done *to* him. <sup>6</sup>Yet is his own attack upon himself apparent still, for it is he who bears the suffering. <sup>7</sup>And he cannot escape, because its source is seen outside himself.

“The Cause of Suffering”! What a relevant topic for us all! If you know the cause of something, you have at least a fighting chance of preventing that something by eliminating the cause, if that is possible. Is it possible to identify the cause of suffering, cancel it out, and thus *end suffering*? The Course’s answer is “yes”; it sets out straightway to make that identification. But it begins by defining or describing just what suffering is.

<sup>1</sup> Luke 23:34 (KJV): “Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

We suffer when we focus our attention on “all that the world has done to injure you” (1:1). And it certainly seems to us that the world is often a dangerous and unfriendly place. The COVID-19 virus pandemic is just the most recent manifestation, one that has brought injury to the entire world in many ways, even to the majority who have *not* fallen sick. We in Oregon and most of the USA are all currently suffering from social isolation, being cut off from most human contact, forced to “meet” virtually online. Millions are out of work. Businesses have been destroyed. And we can all testify that, when we emphasize all these things, we suffer.

But even before such an egregious example, we’ve all suffered as we’ve seen ourselves “attacked unjustly” by something outside of us (1:3). It could be something harsh and open; it could be a collection of little things that just drive us up the wall. It may be some particular person or group that seems to have it in for us, or it may be something we can’t identify specifically, like a run of bad luck. Focus on these things and you will experience what the Course is calling suffering.

Jesus declares that suffering, emphasizing all the things the world has done to injure you, clearly shows “the world’s demented version of salvation” (1:2). The idea behind this statement is that our egos are trying to deflect all our guilt onto the world around us, thus “saving” us from the guilt. As has been pointed out many times already, this does not really work (hence “demented version”); the guilt just goes underground into our subconscious and surreptitiously pollutes our minds with guilt that seems to have no source.<sup>2</sup>

It’s like “a dream of punishment” in which you have no idea what brought on the attack (1:3). Most of us have had a dream or two like that, I’m sure. Perhaps you dream of camping in the woods when, suddenly, you are being attacked by a vicious bear. You start awake, probably with your heart beating a mile a minute from fear, only to realize it was just a dream. But wait! Where was all that drama occurring? In your mind. It had absolutely no outward cause (except maybe the sound of a snoring partner got transformed into the snarl of the bear). *You* invented the bear, and psychology will inform you that you are the one attacking yourself.

So, how is all our suffering like that? The parallel is almost exact. We all think that we are victims of “something not [myself]”(1:3). We think we are the victims of this “something else,” victims of something or someone outside of us. We never dream that *we* might be responsible for the perceived attack (1:4). We don’t know that we are doing it to ourselves. We believe that “it,” whatever “it” is, is being done *to us*, not *by us*, so we must be completely innocent. As long as we can pin the blame on something that is not ourselves, something outside, we think that this will prove our innocence. That’s the ego’s demented version of salvation.

But the fact that we are still suffering shows that we are attacking ourselves (1:6). From within this mind-set escape is impossible because we are projecting the source of the problem outside ourselves, where we have no control over it (1:7).

<sup>2</sup> You may want to read over Lessons 70, 71, and 72 in the Workbook for an in-depth presentation of what the ego’s plan for salvation is, contrasted with God’s plan. See also Lesson 161, paragraphs 6 through 9.

## Paragraph 2

<sup>2</sup> Now you are being shown you *can* escape. <sup>2</sup>All that is needed is you look upon the problem as it is, and not the way that you have set it up. <sup>3</sup>How could there be another way to solve a problem which is very simple, but has been obscured by heavy clouds of complication which were made to keep the problem unresolved? <sup>4</sup>Without the clouds, the problem will emerge in all its primitive simplicity. <sup>5</sup>The choice will not be difficult, because the problem is absurd when clearly seen. <sup>6</sup>No one has difficulty making up his mind to let a simple problem be resolved if it is seen as hurting him and also very easily removed.

With the source of our suffering seen as outside of us there is no way to escape it. But the Course is trying to show us another way, a way in which we *can* escape (2:1)

All that is needed is you look upon the problem as it is, and not the way that you have set it up.

In my opinion that is one of the most important sentences in the Course.<sup>3</sup> Ken Wapnick used to expand on the idea of looking at the problem by saying, “All you need to do is to look at the ego with the Holy Spirit, without fear.”

The way we’ve “set it up,” the cause of suffering is outside of us. The “way it is,” however, is that the source is within us. And “*all that is needed*” is to realize that and act upon it. We’ve surrounded the problem with “clouds of complication” that make it insoluble (2:3). The causes of our suffering seem to be so many and so diffuse. It’s other people. It’s climate change. It’s the Republicans or the Democrats. It’s all corrupt politicians. It’s the virus. It’s your family background. It’s your DNA. It’s bad luck. It’s all of the above. Stave off the attack on one quarter and it blasts through from a dozen other areas. That complicated picture is *designed* to keep the problem insoluble.

We have to give up that picture. We have to realize our suffering has not *many* causes, but *one*. One simple cause to what is really a simple problem. Take away the clouds of complexity and the “primitive simplicity” will be clearly seen (2:4). More than simple; it’s *absurd* (2:5). The choice necessary to solve the problem, to remove the suffering, “will not be difficult” (2:5), because once we see how uncomplicated the problem is, and see how we are hurting ourselves, it will be easy to make up our minds to resolve it (2:6).

<sup>3</sup> Key line

### Paragraph 3

3 The “reasoning” by which the world is made, on which it rests, by which it is maintained, is simply this: “You are the cause of what I do. <sup>2</sup>Your presence justified my wrath, and you exist and think apart from me. <sup>3</sup>While you attack, I must be innocent. <sup>4</sup>And what I suffer from *is* your attack.” <sup>5</sup>No one who looks upon this “reasoning” exactly as it is could fail to see it does not follow and it makes no sense.<sup>4</sup> <sup>6</sup>Yet it seems sensible, because it looks as if the world *is* hurting you. <sup>7</sup>And so it seems as if there is no need to go beyond the obvious in terms of cause.

Jesus now zeros in for a more detailed look at the “reasoning” of the ego, exposing its unreasonableness while explaining why, despite its making no sense, we hold on to it. The basic premise is that what I do is caused by you (3:1). You exist and think entirely apart from me, and what you do totally justifies my anger with you (3:2). Thus we believe, “You make me angry.” When you attack me it proves my innocence — the innocent victim. And that is where my suffering comes from — you, and your attack (3:4).

This really does not make any sense! How can what you think or do *cause* what I do? How can you *make* me angry? In what way does your attacking me prove that I am innocent? You are not in charge of my thinking and feeling. Oh, we may get to feel innocent if we can place the blame for all our troubles outside of ourselves, but we really can't do that. *We* choose our feelings; *we* choose our thoughts. I am the only one here in charge of me.

But, we may object, it really does seem as if the world is hurting me. It's obvious! I didn't ask for this suffering! You say it isn't sensible to blame the world, but it sure seems sensible to me. I don't need to go searching somewhere else for the cause of my suffering (3:6–7). The response follows...

<sup>4</sup> The “reasoning” that governs the world says that others are entirely separate from us, and from their position outside of us they completely determine what we feel, what we do, and even what we are (innocent or guilty). Even from a normal point of view, most of this makes no sense. How can someone outside of us have such complete control over our feelings, our actions, and even our nature?

## Paragraph 4

4 There is *indeed* a need. <sup>2</sup>The world's escape from condemnation is a need which those within the world are joined in sharing. <sup>3</sup>Yet they do not recognize their common need, for each one thinks that if he does his part, the condemnation of the world will rest on him. <sup>4</sup>And it is this that he perceives to *be* his part in its deliverance.<sup>5</sup> <sup>5</sup>Vengeance must have a focus. <sup>6</sup>Otherwise is the avenger's knife in his own hand, and pointed to himself. <sup>7</sup>And he must see it in *another* hand if he would be a victim of attack he did not choose. <sup>8</sup>And thus he suffers from the wounds a knife he does not hold has made upon himself.

“There is *indeed* a need,” Jesus responds to our objection. The world is seeking to be free of condemnation just like you are; all the world is joined in sharing that need (4:1–2). Surely we can understand that, and can realize that as long as we are blaming the world for our woes, the world's need for innocence cannot be met. We are afraid, however, that if we admit we are the cause of our suffering, we'll be letting the world off the hook. And the world needs us to point out where they've gone wrong. Plus, we will be admitting to such profound guilt, we'll be at risk of suicide (4:3-4). As Lesson 93 puts it:

”You think if what is true about you were revealed to you, you would be struck with horror so intense that you would rush to death by your own hand, living on after seeing this being impossible” (W-pl.93.1:3).

“Vengeance must have a focus” (4:5). The punishment for sin must go *somewhere*, and if I absolve the world, the focus will be me! I will hold the knife of vengeance in my own hand, and it will be pointing at *me* (4:6)! So the knife has to be in someone else's hand if I am to be innocent (4:7). So I see myself suffering from the wounds from a knife held in hands that are in no way my own (4:8).

And everyone else in the world is playing the same senseless game, pushing guilt away from themselves and onto others (4:3).

<sup>5</sup> In other words, we think that doing our part in delivering the world from guilt is becoming the world's scapegoat, the one everyone can point to, saying, “Look, the knife is in *his* hand!”

## Paragraph 5

5 This is the purpose of the world he sees. <sup>2</sup>And looked at thus, the world provides the means by which this purpose seems to be fulfilled.<sup>6</sup> <sup>3</sup>The means attest the purpose but are *not* themselves a cause. <sup>4</sup>Nor will the cause be changed by seeing it apart from its effects. <sup>5</sup>The cause produces the effects, which then bear witness to the cause and not themselves. <sup>6</sup>Look, then, beyond effects. <sup>7</sup>It is not here the cause of suffering and sin must lie. <sup>8</sup>And dwell not on the suffering and sin, for they are but reflections of their cause. <sup>9</sup>The part you play in salvaging the world from condemnation is your own escape.

So to my ego, the purpose of the world is to be my scapegoat, the dumping ground for my guilt (5:1).<sup>7</sup> In the way we've set it up, the world seems to be perfectly designed for fulfilling that purpose (5:2). The "means" (the suffering that seems to be coming from the world) demonstrate ("attest") the purpose which has been given to the world by the ego, but by themselves the means of suffering are definitely not the cause of suffering that we want them to be (5:3). Shutting our eyes to the cause and seeing only the effects does not change things: the cause is still the cause (5:4). The cause produces its effects. The effects then point straight back to the cause; they do not exist in isolation from it (5:5).

Therefore, we have to look beyond the effects, all the forms of suffering that show up in our lives (5:6). They are not their own cause, and they are not causeless. There must be a cause, and the cause must be somewhere else (5:7). Don't focus on the suffering and sin you perceive. All they are is reflections of their cause (5:8). You need to see the cause. And that is "the part you play" in healing the world: seeing the cause of suffering and escaping from it for yourself (5:9).

<sup>6</sup> This paragraph will be clearer if we keep in mind that 1) the means/effects are the outer *appearances* of the world (the forms, events, and situations), which seem to prove that we suffer from a knife that someone else is wielding, and 2) the purpose/cause is our underlying *motive* for making the world: that it serve as this very proof. Thus, rather than being taken in by outer effects and seeing them as solid proof, we need to look beyond them to the cause that put them there. Then we will see that the supposed proof has been fabricated. And then we can also change the cause, which is the only action that can bring about a real change.

<sup>7</sup> The term "scapegoat" comes from the practice for The Day of Atonement described in the Hebrew Bible in Leviticus 16:20–22:

When he has finished atoning for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. 21 Then Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and sending it away into the wilderness by means of someone designated for the task. 22 The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a barren region; and the goat shall be set free in the wilderness."

The sole responsibility of the miracle worker is to accept the Atonement for himself. (T-2.V.5:1 (FIP), T-2.VIII.5:1 (CE))

Not that you come to see yourself as responsible for all the ills of the world! Rather, that you come to realize the mistake you've been making and choose to accept forgiveness for it and let it go, correcting your mistake. You realize your own innocence in it all, and in so doing realize the same innocence in everyone else. That new perception of innocence will communicate itself to those around you and even those you may never meet, or rather the Holy Spirit will communicate it through you, using the medium of our shared Mind.

## Paragraph 6

6 Forget not that the witness to the world of evil cannot speak except for what has seen a *need* for evil in the world. <sup>2</sup>And this is where your guilt was first beheld. <sup>3</sup>In separation from your brother was the first attack upon yourself begun, and it is this the world bears witness to. <sup>4</sup>Seek not another cause, nor look among the mighty legions of its witnesses for its undoing. <sup>5</sup>They support its claim on your allegiance. <sup>6</sup>What conceals the truth is not where you should look to *find* the truth. <sup>7</sup>The witnesses to sin all stand within one little space. <sup>8</sup>And it is *here* you find the cause of your perspective on the world.

This is one paragraph where I see the Course referring to what I've called our "existential guilt" or "primal guilt," a profound guilt simply for having a separate existence, a guilt that is deeply buried in our unconscious, from where it infects everything we see because we project that guilt onto everything.

Sentence 1 seems to be saying that we first must see "a *need* for evil in the world" before we begin to *perceive* witnesses "to the world of evil" (6:1). As we've been often told, we only see what we wish to see. We see evil in the world because something in us *needs to see it there*. Our self-imposed sense of guilt first came about because we chose to believe we could be separate from our brothers and sisters, and from God. We chose independence, separation. That choice was "the first attack upon yourself," where "yourself" could be written "your Self."<sup>8</sup> We "attacked" our union with Christ, with Oneness; we wanted autonomy (6:2–3).<sup>9</sup> We could not tolerate the intensity of guilt we felt so we made up the world and projected our guilt onto it. The world "bears witness to" that first self-attack and the guilt it has induced ever since. The world simultaneously

<sup>8</sup> Key line.

<sup>9</sup> The ego's goal quite explicitly is ego autonomy.<sup>1</sup> From the beginning, then, its purpose is to be separate, sufficient unto itself, and independent of any power except its own. (T-11.V.4:4-5 (FIP), T-11.V.4:1-2 (CE))

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1 "Ego autonomy," as used here, is where the ego is independent of the external world, able to govern itself, free of the influence of external circumstances, and, importantly, free of the authority of God's will.

hides our guilt from us and serves as the perfect punishment *for* that guilt, seemingly confirming its reality.

The good news, which will be presented powerfully in the next section, is that all this primal guilt is unnecessary. God does not condemn us, and all we need to do is to accept that fact, forgive ourselves for our insane choice for separation, and claim our innocence.

That primal guilt for our attack on our Self is the cause of all the suffering we see. Don't look anywhere else for the cause; this is it (6:4). Don't look at anything in the world ("the mighty legions of its (sin's) witnesses") trying to find a way to undo that guilt. Everything you perceive in this world *supports* guilt's claim on you (6:5). You won't find the truth by looking at what is *hiding* truth from you (6:6)! The witnesses to sin may seem to be legion but really they are like legions of angels (or demons?) on the head of a pin, all standing together on a single misapprehension we have made (6:7). If we are willing to look at it, this is where we will discover the cause for "your perspective on the world" (6:8).

The next section continues on the second part of this theme, in which we recognize the cause and let it go.



**Legend:**

Light underscoring indicates emphasis that appears in the Urtext or shorthand notes.

The Text is taken from the Circle of Atonement's Complete and Annotated Edition (which I refer to as the "CE" for "Complete Edition" or "Circle Edition"). Please be aware that, even when the wording is identical to the FIP version, the division into paragraphs is often entirely different in the CE, which restores the paragraph breaks found in the original notes. This results in different reference numbering as well. I will indicate for each paragraph the corresponding sentences in the FIP edition. You should be able to locate specific sentences in that edition if you need to, with a minimum of visual clutter in the commentary. Passages that lie outside the current section will continue to have footnoted references. References to quotations are from the CE unless another version is being quoted, in which case that version is indicated.

Footnotes by the commentary author are shown in this font and size. Other footnotes come from the Complete Edition itself.