

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 31

The Final Vision

Section V.1–8

The Concept of the Self (Part 1)

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

Overview of Section V

The previous section spent a lot of time talking about how we have been following all the paths the world offers in the mistaken assumption that they are somehow different from one another, when in reality they all lead to death; they lead us away from the reality of what we are. It assured us that in fact we cannot escape from what we are; a journey away from ourselves does not exist. It asked us to abandon the pathways of the world and to choose a “real alternative.”

This section begins by talking about “the world’s learning” and “the concept of the self,” and showing how they are related to one another. Choosing the alternative to the world’s pathways means choosing a different way of looking at ourselves.

Note: [Adapted from Robert Perry’s booklet, *The Shrouded Vaults of the Mind*]

This section presents an overview of a complex psychology, a map of the human mind. Freud propagated the idea that beneath our conscious minds there lies a mysterious realm we call the unconscious. Ever since Freud, psychology has insisted that the conscious mind is only the tip of the iceberg, and that a multitude of things lurk in the depths below: wild sexual urges, primitive instinctual impulses, self-destructive neuroses, Jungian archetypes, buried traumatic experiences, forgotten childhood memories, perhaps even genetic and racial memories. Spiritual teachings, particularly from Eastern traditions, have indicated that the unconscious may contain past life memories, a connection to all life, to higher realms, and even to God Himself.

What, then, is the unconscious? This section presents a major part of the picture of the unconscious mind drawn by A Course in Miracles, one that underlies everything the Course says about us and our minds throughout the entire Course. The whole map of the mind must be constructed by bringing together many parts of the Course. The key to recognizing the levels is noticing when the Course says one aspect of mind is “below” or “beneath” another part. Robert Perry’s booklet presents the whole picture. I have appended two diagrams and a summary chapter from the booklet, scanned from a copy of the booklet.

Paragraph 1

The learning of the world is built upon a concept of the self adjusted to the world’s reality. ²It fits it well, for this an image is that suits a world of shadows and illusions. ³Here it walks at home, where what it sees is one with it. ⁴The building of a concept of the self is what the learning of the world is for. ⁵This is its purpose: that you come without a self and make one as you go along. ⁶And by the time you reach “maturity,” you have perfected it to meet the world on equal terms, at one with its demands. ⁷A concept of the self is made by you. ⁸It bears no likeness to yourself at all. ⁹It is an idol, made to take the place of your reality as Son of God.

• Study Question •

1. (1:7–9). *Think of how you have typically thought of yourself, and contrast that with what you have learned about the Son of God in the Course. Notice how unlike they are. What are some ways your self-concept is unlike the Son of God, which the Course proclaims to be your reality?*

•

There are three elements mentioned in this sentence, each based on one of the others:

1. the learning of the world, based on #2
2. the concept of the self, that is, our false belief in ourselves as egos living in bodies, with the resulting interaction and competition with other ego-bodies; based on #3
3. the world’s reality, which I believe I believe means “the belief that the world is real,” or “the way the world is understood to be in the illusion.”

So then, the learning of the world is based on our false concept of self. That, in turn, is based on our belief in the reality of the world. However, something isn’t very logical here, as is usually the case with the ego’s reasoning.

The self-concept we have does fit the world quite well because the world is one of shadows and illusions (1:2). That implies, of course, that our concept of the self is full of shadows and illusions. This shadowy, illusory self-concept is quite at home in this world. Both consist of the same nothingness (1:3).

However, “building... a concept of the self is what the learning of the world is *for*” (1:4). That’s not logical. If the self-concept comes from the learning of the world, how can it be that the learning of the world “is built upon a concept of the self”? You can’t have it both ways. If each depends on the other, together they stand for nothing. The circular reasoning of the ego/world illusion was pointed out before, in Chapter 27:

“Thus is all questioning within the world a form of propaganda for itself. Just as the body’s witnesses are but the senses from within itself, so are the answers to the questions of the world contained within the questions.” (T-27.V.5:3–1 (CE))

Sentences 5 and 6 superbly describe the psychological process of ego formation. Babies do not come with fully-formed egos. Instead, through interaction with parents, family, and society, met by choices the individual makes in life situations, they form an ego. Developmental psychologists have long debated how much genetics determines our personality and how much it is a product of our environment. But that the ego develops and takes form during the years from birth to adulthood is unquestioned. We “come *without* a self and *make* one as [we] go along” (1:5). As part of that process, we form a concept of our self, and we “perfect” it to meet the demands of the world in which we find ourselves.

Most of us don’t think a lot about our self-concept. For most of us, it seems like a given, something that developed somehow, partly through self-observation but largely unconsciously. We do not think of it as something we have much control over. Nothing could be further from the truth! “A concept of the self is made by *you*” (1:7). Our self-concept didn’t just “happen” We chose it. We carefully constructed it “to take the place of your reality as Son of God” (1:9), although we are probably not conscious of having done so. And the way we ordinarily think of ourselves, Jesus says, “bears *no* likeness to yourself at all” (1:8)! Our concept of our self is flat-out false. It is the primary idol in our gallery of idols.

I do not think this refers simply to identifying with a body or a separate ego identity, as false as those self-designations may be. What Jesus refers to here is a way of thinking about our ego/body selves, the character or nature of our individuality. As we shall see, we’ve constructed this self-concept to serve two different purposes, one conscious and one unconscious.

Paragraph 1 Summary. The world’s learning and the concept of the self that we have are mutually supportive. Insane in their relationship, in a circular fashion, each one builds on the other. You come to the world “without a self, and make one as you go along,” a self that you have designed to meet the world on equal terms. You allow this world’s learning to support the self-concept that made that learning up. We made up this self-concept to replace our reality as the Son of God, and it is entirely false.

Paragraph 2

2 The concept of the self the world would teach is not the thing that it appears to be. ²For it is made to serve two purposes, but one of which the mind can recognize. ³The first presents the face of innocence, the aspect acted on.¹ ⁴It is this face that smiles and charms and even seems to love. ⁵It searches for companions, and it looks at times with pity on the suffering, and sometimes offers solace. ⁶It believes that it is good within an evil world. ⁷This aspect can grow angry, for the world is wicked, and unable to provide the love and shelter innocence deserves. ⁸And so this face is often wet with tears at the injustices the world accords to those who would be generous and good.

• Study Question •

2. (2:1–2). Note the “for” in sentence 2. Why isn’t the self-concept the world teaches what it appears to be?

•

Your concept of yourself is not what it appears to be; it has a dual purpose, and the mind can recognize only one of the purposes (2:1–2). One is conscious; the other is unconscious. The duality of purpose explains why this self-concept isn’t what we think it is. One of the two purposes it serves is being *deliberately* hidden from our conscious awareness.

The first, surface purpose presents *the face of innocence*, which smiles and charms, even seems to love, searches for companions, feels pity, and sometimes offers solace for the suffering (2:4–5). It sees itself as “good within an evil world” (2:6). The label Jesus puts on it, “the *face* of innocence,” marks this unmistakably as a false front, a mask we wear. It “even seems to love”! But it’s a fraud:

“You make attempts at kindness and forgiveness, yet you turn them to attack again unless you find external gratitude and lavish thanks. Your gifts must be received with honor, lest they be withdrawn” (W-197.1:2–3).

The phrase “the aspect acted *on*” bears closer scrutiny. Its meaning isn’t apparent. In a footnote, Robert Perry says that it means that we “act *on the basis of* this aspect of [our] self-concept.” To me, the emphasis on the word “on” seems to imply a slightly different meaning. This face of innocence is the face we present to the world, with which we interact with the world. We do base our actions on this picture of ourselves, but we also experience the “evil world’ inter-acting with this self-concept.

That reciprocal action between the face of innocence and the world results in what follows. The face of innocence views the world as “wicked, and unable to provide the love and shelter innocence deserves” (1:7). Therefore, “this face” (referring both to our

¹. “Acted on” means that you act *on the basis of* this aspect of your self-concept. This is because this aspect is the conscious side of the self-concept; the other aspect being hidden “in the mists below the face of innocence” (5:5).

physical faces and the “face of innocence”) “is often wet with tears at the injustices the world accords to those who would be generous and good” (2:8), which is how it sees itself. It can “grow angry” (1:7) at this mistreatment and sees that anger as regrettable but justified and inevitable.

Notice how closely this picture of the “face of innocence,” which is “good within an evil world,” fits how you think of yourself! As you reflect on this, remember that this aspect of the self-concept is only half of it; the other half is something your mind cannot recognize. (At least that second half *typically* cannot be recognized. In this section, the Course is attempting to help us recognize its presence.)

Paragraph 3

3 This aspect *never* makes the first attack.² ²But every day a hundred little things make small assaults upon its innocence, provoking it to irritation, and at last to open insult and abuse. ³The face of innocence the concept of the self so proudly wears can tolerate attack in self-defense,³ for is it not a well-known fact the world deals harshly with defenseless innocence? ⁴No one who makes a picture of himself omits this face, for he has need of it. ⁵The other side he does not want to see. ⁶But it is here the learning of the world has set its sights,⁴ for it is here the world's reality is set, to see to it the idol lasts.

• Study Question •

3. (3:3). Do you think that this means that, in reality, attacking in self-defense is not okay? (We read something about this in the last chapter; do you recall?) What about if you are attacked by a mugger?
4. (3:4–6). The world has “set its sights” on teaching us this “other side” of the self-concept; why? Compare with 1:1 for some further help

•

So this face of innocence is a self-concept that tells itself, “Basically, I am a really nice person, doing my best to survive in this wicked world. I have a lot to offer! I do my best to be loving and giving. But I have to be careful because not everyone plays by the same rules. Sometimes people attack me without provocation, and I can only take that for

² This line is an expression of a *belief* held by the face of innocence. Given that this aspect is just a “face,” a mask, none of its beliefs are actually true. Therefore, even though we tell ourselves that we *never* make the first attack, the truth is that we *do* make the first attack. Indeed, since none of our attacks are truly justified, none of them are genuinely provoked.

³ This means that the face of innocence can tolerate *its own attack on others* in the name of self-defense.

⁴ In the phrase “it is here,” “here” refers to the other side of the self-concept, the side beneath the face of innocence.

so long, and then I just have to defend myself. I have to look out for myself or I will just get creamed.”

Do you feel like this at times? The *Manual for Teachers* accurately captures a candid snapshot of us in this passage:

“You who are sometimes sad and sometimes angry, who sometimes feel your just due is not given you and your best efforts meet with lack of appreciation and even with contempt...” (M-15.3:1).

I can't begin to tell you how often I've felt just like that! But that sentence ends after the ellipsis with these words: “give up these foolish thoughts. They are too small and meaningless to occupy your holy mind an instant longer” (M-15.3:1–2). That is the object of all this discussion, to get us to give up such foolish thoughts.

Lest you think that this face of innocence stuff does not apply to you, Jesus makes it clear that everyone “needs” this face and dare not omit it (3:4). “The other side” (that is, the second part of this self-concept we all have) we do not want to see (3:5). He has not told us what that second part is, but he will. It's already evident that it isn't something we care to look at. We have to, though; developing and maintaining this second half is the aim of all the world's learning. “It is here,” in this second half of the self-concept, “the world's reality is set, to see to it the idol lasts” (3:6). The hidden role we play in this part of our mind is what gives reality to the world. Without it, there would be no world. He will explain this more clearly as we go on.

So, what it is that lies hidden below the mask of innocence?

Paragraph 4

4 Beneath the face of innocence there is a lesson that the concept of the self was made to teach. ²It is a lesson in a terrible displacement and a fear so devastating that the face which smiles above it must forever look away lest it perceive the treachery it hides.⁵ ³The lesson teaches this: “I am the thing you made of me, and as you look on me you stand condemned because of what I am.”⁶ ⁴On this conception of the self the world smiles with approval, for it guarantees the pathways of the world are safely kept, and those who walk on them will not escape.

⁵ Pronoun clarification: “the face which smiles above it [the hidden aspect of the self-concept] must forever look away lest it [the face of innocence] perceive the treachery it [the face of innocence] hides.” “Displacement” is a Freudian defense mechanism in which the mind redirects an impulse (such as aggression) from its original target to a substitute target. The specific displacement in the above sentence is probably that we have displaced condemnation from ourselves to our brother.

⁶ This statement, which captures the hidden side of the self-concept, means that I am the mangled, hated “thing” your attacks have turned me into, and for that reason, my ruined identity is the visible proof that you should be condemned.

• **Study Question** •

5. “Displacement” means redirecting an emotion or thought from its original source to something else. What is one sort of lesson that the ego very much wants us to learn, which sounds something like that?

•

This paragraph is complex and meaty. It introduces the concept of levels or aspects of the mind, something Robert has developed at length in his booklet, *Shrouded Vaults of the Mind* (see 5:5 for the source of that phrase). The booklet presents not only the two aspects we have already spoken of—the face of innocence and the “other side” of the concept of self—it even hints at a third, more deeply buried aspect of the mind. Remember as you read that Jesus has already indicated that we don’t want to see the “other side.” So make an effort to overcome that built-in resistance.

(4:1). Note that this “other side” is the “lesson that the concept of the self was made to teach.” The face of innocence is just a mask, just a distraction. The real lesson we are being taught lies beneath it. The face of innocence *masks it* from our awareness, so it is likely unless you’ve studied psychology from a spiritual viewpoint that you are not yet aware of this part of your self-concept. If it has poked into your awareness, you may have pushed it away, denying that it is an essential part of the self you think you are. So be open to seeing yourself differently, even if the experience is not pleasant.

(4:2). You made this hidden concept of yourself to teach yourself a terrible lesson. Jesus calls it “a lesson in terrible displacement.” What do you think that means?

One dictionary definition of the word *displacement* sounds like the definition a psychologist like Helen might have had in mind: displacement is “the redirection of an emotion or impulse from its original object (as an idea or person) to another.” An earlier discussion of displacement occurs in T-13.X.1:1–4:

“You are accustomed to the notion that the mind can see the source of pain where it is not. The doubtful service of displacement is to hide the real source of your guilt, and keep from your awareness the full perception that it is *insane*. Displacement always is maintained by the illusion that the source from which attention is diverted must be true, and must be fearful, or you would not have displaced the guilt onto what you believed to be *less* fearful. You are therefore willing to look upon all sorts of “sources” underneath awareness, provided that they are not the deeper source, to which they bear no real relationship at all. Insane ideas *have* no real relationships, for that is why they are insane.” (T-13.XI.1:1–5 (CE))

Beneath our face of innocence, we harbor the face of a victim. This layer teaches us that the world is our attacker and bears the guilt of what we have become. When we, as innocents, are provoked to attack, it isn’t our fault; “they” made us do it! This projection of guilt is the “terrible displacement.”

Sentence 4:2 also speaks of a “fear so devastating” that we cannot bear to look at this victim consciousness. Taking into account the words that follow about perceiving “the treachery it (the terrible lesson of displacement) hides,” this fear seems to be our fear of actually seeing the vicious *self-attack* that is hiding beneath the face of victimhood. This

sentence hints at still a third layer of the mind that lies below both of the two levels we've discussed so far: the face of innocence and the victim consciousness. We'll learn what that is later.

What, then, is this terrible lesson of displacement? It teaches this: "I am the thing you made of me, and as you look on me you stand condemned because of what I am" (4:3). In a nutshell: "You did it to me; therefore, *you* are guilty." As the Course put it earlier, discussing one instance of such displacement—sickness:

"A sick and suffering you but represents your brother's guilt; the witness which you send lest he forget the injuries he gave, from which you swear he never will escape. This sick and sorry picture *you* accept, if only it can serve to punish him. The sick are merciless to everyone, and in contagion do they seek to kill. Death seems an easy price if they can say, 'Behold me, brother, at your hand I die.' For sickness is the witness to his guilt, and death would prove his errors must be sins." (T-27.I.4:3-7 (CE))

This second layer is, as I've said, victim consciousness. The world "smiles with approval" on this conception of the self. Why? If you think for a moment, you will realize that the entire existence of the world depends on it. Why has our guilt-ridden mind manifested this world external to ourselves? *It "exists" to be a scapegoat*, to be something or someone on whom we can displace our massive guilt.

"The world you see is the delusional system of those made mad by guilt. Look carefully at this world, and you will realize that this is so. For this world is the symbol of punishment, and all the laws which seem to govern it are the laws of death. (T-13.I.2:1-3 (CE))

This victim consciousness "guarantees the pathways of the world are safely kept, and those who walk on them will not escape" (4:4).

Paragraph 4 Summary: The smiling face of innocence looks away from the lesson that lies beneath it. We made the concept of the self to teach that lesson, a lesson in displacement and fear: "I am the thing you made of me, and as you look on me, you stand condemned because of what I am." The world approves this conception of the self because it preserves the world's pathways and keeps you from escaping them.

Paragraph 5

5 Here is the central lesson that ensures your brother is condemned eternally, for what you are has now become his sin. ²For this is no forgiveness possible. ³No longer does it matter what he does, for your accusing finger points to him, unwavering and deadly in its aim. ⁴It points to you as well, but this is kept still deeper in the mists below the face of innocence. ⁵And in these shrouded vaults are all his sins and yours preserved and kept in darkness, where they cannot be perceived as errors, which the light would surely show. ⁶You can be neither *blamed* for what you are, nor can you *change* the things it makes you do. ⁷And you are each the symbol of your sins to one another, silently and yet with ceaseless urgency condemning still your brother for the hated thing you are.

“Here” in 5:1 is the same “here” as in 3:6. It refers to “the other side” of the concept of the self which, as we have seen, is victimhood that projects its guilt outside itself. This victim consciousness lays eternal condemnation on your brother. He (or she or they) are to blame for what *you* are. Any lack or imperfection in your perfect innocence is their fault, their sin. What they have done to you is so awful it is unforgivable (5:2).

It make me wonder: Perhaps this is the origin of the notion of eternity in hell?

His guilt has passed the point of redemption. It doesn't matter anymore what he does because “your accusing finger point to him, unwavering and deadly in its aim” (5:3). The guilt is outside you, certainly not within. Or so you think. So you want to believe. Can you see why this victim consciousness is so vital to the ego? The entire illusory belief system in separation and “physical reality” arises from it and depends on it. To avoid the dark suspicion that the guilt is *yours* the world *has* to exist and be guilty of your pain.

Still, there is that lurking fear that you might be wrong. You remember that when you point one finger at another, there are three pointing back at you! Perish the thought! Push that down deeper out of awareness! Forget that the finger “points to you as well (5:4). Keep that hidden “still deeper in the mists below the face of innocence” (5:4). Don't let the light in that would reveal that all these supposed “sins” are simply errors.

These layers of forgetfulness, these “shrouded vaults” of the mind, are what keep “all his sins and yours preserved and kept in darkness, where they cannot be perceived as errors” (5:5). In his Introduction to his “shrouded vaults” booklet, Robert Perry writes of how psychology has been telling us much the same thing for over a hundred years:

“For a hundred years modern psychology has drummed into us the idea that beneath our conscious minds there lies the mysterious realm of the unconscious. We have been told again and again that the conscious mind is only the tip of the iceberg; and that all kinds of things lurk in the depths below: wild sexual urges, primitive instinctual impulses, self-destructive neuroses, Jungian archetypes, buried traumatic experiences, forgotten childhood memories, perhaps even genetic and

racial memories. Those of us acquainted with Eastern thought and its modern adaptations have encountered even deeper notions of what is contained in the mind's fathoms: past life memories, interconnectedness with all life, realms of higher vibration and even God Himself."

"Like many systems of modern psychology, the Course asserts that most of our mind lies in the "mists" below the conscious mind, buried deep in "shrouded vaults," under "dark clouds" and "dark cornerstones." There lies the key to the forces that motivate our often inexplicable behavior. In fact, the Course ultimately presents a vast and original system of spiritual depth psychology, the depth of which makes Freud look like he barely got his toes wet. For the Course also incorporates insights reminiscent of the ancient East, suggesting that the mind does not end with the unconscious described by modern psychology; it keeps going, into realms that are far more buried than the Freudian id."

In this section on the concept of the self, the Course lays out the first few layers. We've been introduced to two layers, and a third has been hinted at that lies "still deeper in the mists below the face of innocence," a layer that hides the fact that I am pointing the finger of guilt *at myself*. At the end of my commentary on this section I will try to summarize what Robert "digs up" in those mists. It is unfortunate that his booklet is no longer in print, because I highly recommend reading it. I intend to try to make it available once again, if I can.

Conceiving of yourself as victim, you can't possibly be "*blamed* for what you are, nor can you *change* the things it makes you do" (5:6). It's the ultimate "get out of jail free" card. "Yes, I sometimes get a bit surly, but it isn't my fault. It's the fault of everyone who provokes me or attacks me. I can't help lashing out sometimes. Anyone would."

Of course the other person is engaged in exactly the same self-justification! "You are each the symbol of your sins to one another, silently and yet with ceaseless urgency condemning still your brother for the hated thing you are" (5:7)⁷. If you are blaming your brother for what you've become or the pain you endure, he is busily projecting *his* guilt onto you or someone else. That is the purpose of this layer of the self-concept. It deflects any responsibility for your condition to something other than *your mind*. It keeps you from digging deeper and finding the deeper layers, where your accusing finger point directly at *you*: the ego.

If these things were not "preserved and kept in darkness" in these shrouded vaults of your mind—that is, if these things were somehow brought to the surface and to conscious

⁷ There is a significant difference in this sentence between the FIP and CE versions. The FIP editors, for some reason, chose to make what was presented as a reciprocal, two-way interaction into a one-directional action. I think the two-way nature of projection is a key understanding.

FIP has:

"Your brother then is symbol of your sins to you who are but silently, and yet with ceaseless urgency, condemning still your brother for the things you are."

CE has:

"And you are each the symbol of your sins to one another, silently and yet with ceaseless urgency condemning still your brother for the hated thing you are."

awareness—what do you suppose would happen? Perhaps the choice of another alternative might be appealing.

Summary of Paragraph . This is the central lesson that condemns your brother eternally for the unforgivable sin of what you are. Restitution is impossible; your accusing finger points unerringly to him. That it also points to you is kept hidden “still deeper in the mists below the face of innocence,” where all his sins and yours are preserved in darkness. You cannot be blamed for what you are, nor “change the things it makes you do.” What you are is your brother’s fault.

EDITED TO THIS POINT

Paragraph 6

6 Concepts are learned; they are not natural. ²Apart from learning they do not exist. ³They are not given, and they must be made. ⁴Not one of them is true, and many come from feverish imaginations, hot with hatred and distortions born of fear. ⁵What is a concept but a thought to which its maker gives a meaning of his own? ⁶Concepts maintain the world. ⁷But they cannot be used to demonstrate the world is real. ⁸For all of them are made *within* the world; born in its shadow, growing in its ways, and finally “maturing” in its thought. ⁹They are ideas of idols painted with the brushes of the world, which cannot make a single picture representing truth.

• Study Question •

6. *We might think that the idea, “I am as God created me,” is a concept. Does that statement, however, fit what Jesus says here about concepts?*

•

In this paragraph, Jesus turns his discussion from the concept of self to the general notion of concepts. Rather than taking what he says here and applying it to what we think of as “concepts,” try to let it define what the word “concept” means in this context. As used here, a concept is:

- natural
- learned
- non-existent before being formed by learning
- made, not given
- inherently false
- can be imagined out of fear
- a thought with meaning provided by its maker (6:1–5)

I think he wishes to apply what he says to the specific “concept of self” he presents to us. He defines a concept as something that is not inherently obvious or self-evident, something made up and capable of distortion.

(6:6–9). According to this argument, all this world's "concepts" are suspect. Earlier Jesus explained that one cannot prove the body's reality by appealing to evidence provided by the body's senses. The logic behind his assertion here is similar. Both are circular reasoning.

The logic goes like this: Concepts are things that occur within the world. They are born in the world, grow in the world, and "mature" in the world's thought. They are part and parcel of the world, and therefore we cannot use them to demonstrate the world's reality, because that would be circular reasoning. It is like using the Bible verse in II Timothy 3:16, which says, "All scripture is inspired by God," to prove the Bible is inspired. You are trying to *use* the authority of the Bible to *prove* the authority of the Bible: circular reasoning. If the world is not real, then the concepts—which arise in the world—are as unreal as the rest of the world.

(6:8 and 1:6). Twice in this section, Jesus uses the words "maturing" and "maturity" in quotes. He seems to hold a low opinion of what the world calls psychological maturity and the development of a mature self-image. A "mature" concept of the self isn't mature at all. Such concepts are just "ideas of idols," thought up by a world incapable of thinking thoughts of truth (6:9).

Summary of Paragraph 6. Concepts are not natural; they do not exist apart from learning but are a product of the mind. No concept is true; many are gross distortions born of fear. A concept is only a thought given meaning by its maker. Concepts maintain the world, but cannot make it real, because they are part of the world from beginning to end. They are ideas of idols, depicting nothing of the truth.

Paragraph 7

7 A concept of the self is meaningless, for no one here can see what it is for, and therefore cannot picture what it is. ²Yet is all learning that the world directs begun and ended with the single aim of teaching you this concept of yourself, that you will choose to follow this world's laws and never seek to go beyond its roads, nor realize the way you see yourself. ³Now must the Holy Spirit find a way to help you see this concept of the self must be undone if any peace of mind is to be given you. ⁴Nor can it be unlearned except by lessons aimed to teach that you are something else. ⁵For otherwise, you would be asked to make exchange of what you now believe for total loss of self, and greater terror would arise in you.

The concept of the self we hold is meaningless because a significant part of it is concealed and hidden from awareness. We cannot see its true purpose (which is making the world real to us), and therefore we cannot get a complete picture of what the self-concept is (7:1).

Despite our blindness to what our self-concept is and its purpose, all the world's learning is 100% geared towards teaching us this self-concept! It seems like brain-

washing, which drums beliefs into your subconscious, from whence they control your behavior without your ability to know that it is happening. You blindly follow the world's laws. You never try to look anywhere else for completion. You go through life without ever realizing the way you see yourself (7:2).

How can we escape from this mental prison? It takes the help of the Holy Spirit to find a way to open our eyes to our need to undo this concept of the self (7:3). He will help us understand just what the concept is, and what its purpose is. It has to be brought out of the "shrouded vaults of the mind" into daylight and exposed for the lie it is. There is no other way to give us any peace of mind (7:3).

The unlearning or undoing process entails giving us lessons (Notice the plural!), teaching us that we are something else, something other than this self-sabotaging concept (7:4). Again, there is no other way. We must see an attractive alternative. If God asked us to give up our self-concept with nothing to take its place, it would feel as though we were utterly losing ourselves. Instead of escaping from fear, we'd be overwhelmed with terror (7:5).

The Workbook presents the same argument concerning the idea that we are not bodies:

"If you are not a body, what are you? You need to be aware of what the Holy Spirit uses to replace the image of a body in your mind. You need to feel something to put your faith in, as you lift it from the body. You need a real experience of something else, something more solid and more sure; more worthy of your faith, and really there" (W-pl.91.7:1-4 (FIP)).

Summary of Paragraph 7. Although a self-concept is meaningless, because you cannot see its purpose or picture it, all of the world's learning has the single aim of teaching you this concept of yourself, so that you will follow the world's laws, stay on its paths, and never realize how you see yourself. To bring you peace of mind, the Holy Spirit must find a way to help you undo this self-concept by teaching you that you can exchange the concept for something else so that you will not be terrified at what would seem like a total loss of self.

Paragraph 8

8 Thus are the Holy Spirit's lesson plans arranged in easy steps, that though there be some lack of ease at times and some distress, there is no shattering of what was learned, but just a retranslation of what seems to be the evidence on its behalf. ²Let us consider, then, what proof there is that you are what your brother made of you. ³For even though you do not yet perceive that this is what you think, you surely learned by now that you *behave* as if it were.

Because the Holy Spirit has to find some way to undo our deeply embedded self-concept, His lessons come in easy steps. He does not try to force us to go faster. As was said back in Chapter 16:

“Fear not that you will be abruptly lifted up and hurled into reality. Time is kind, and if you use it for reality, it will keep gentle pace with you in your transition. The urgency is only in dislodging your mind from its fixed position here.” (T-16.VI.8:1-3 (CE))

When I realize that Jesus said exactly the same thing 15 chapters ago, it brings home to me just how resistant we are and how patient the Holy Spirit is. Dealing with our implacable learning and dislodging our minds from their fixed position are the same thing. When we are confronted with an entrenched obstacle, a battering ram is not always the best approach. It may be better to chisel away at one part of the barrier, weakening it a little at a time until the structure collapses. So He takes it by “easy steps.”

He adds that we may still experience uneasiness and distress even though the lessons come in easy steps (8:1). That’s inevitable, it seems. But the Holy Spirit does not *shatter* your old learning; He just reinterprets the evidence. He gently suggests that we look at things again, with a willingness

- to see things differently,
- to see the changeless in the heart of change,
- to hear a call for love instead of attack,
- and to see one another as sinless.

He is willing for us to take as long as we need because He knows that it’s just a matter of time, and time is only an illusion. Bit by bit, He exposes the lack of logic in “what seems to be the evidence” for our overlearned lesson. He is about to do just that.

You may wish to spend a little time in prayer, thanking the Holy Spirit for His gentle teaching methods.

Note: The best breaking point for taking this section in two parts comes after sentence 1. Sentence 2, which begins with “Let us consider, then, what proof...,” is the start of a discussion that continues for several paragraphs. Accordingly, I will cover the rest of this paragraph in the next commentary, along with the rest of Section V.

Answer Key

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. <u>SON OF GOD</u> | <u>SELF-CONCEPT</u> |
| Eternal | Transitory |
| Holy and sinless | Sinful and guilty |
| Wholly joyful | Often sorrowful |
| Omnipresent | Locked in a body |
| In Heaven | On earth |
| All powerful | Weak |
| Cannot suffer | Suffers a lot |
2. Because the self-concept is deliberately made to serve two purposes, with one of those purposes being hidden from the mind's conscious awareness.
3. In my own personal belief, "self-defense" does not equate to "attack." But regardless of my own views, the Course is quite clear that attack is never justified, even in self-defense, as we read in the last chapter:

Anger is never justified. Attack has no foundation (T-30.VI.1:1-2).

What to do if a mugger or rapist attacks you is a subject for group discussion. Whether physical resistance might be justified in some cases is a matter of opinion, and, I believe, is not subject to hard and fast rules. I think it is clear that becoming angry and desiring to harm the mugger is not appropriate behavior, according to the Course, no matter what the circumstances.

4. Because the self-concept is deliberately made to serve two purposes, with one of those purposes that is hidden from the mind's conscious awareness.
5. Projection; displacing the blame for our guilt and suffering onto the world, and seeing the world as the source of the attack we are experiencing, when the real source is ourselves.
6. No. "I am as God created me" is a fact. It is not something that comes from learning. It represents something that is natural, and it is true whether or not we learn it! It is the very epitome of something "given" and not "made."

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.

Effects of Switching Editions of the Course

The commentaries on Chapters 29, 30, and 31 were written prior to the publication of the Complete and Annotated Edition (CE) of the Course in 2017. Originally they were based on the edition published by the Foundation for Inner Peace (FIP). The references to other parts of the Course were based on the FIP edition, and the comments themselves were based on the same edition. There were significant changes made in the CE, although for the most part there was no alteration in the meaning of the text, and these final chapters had far fewer changes. There are some changes in section and paragraph breaks and sentence structure that result in different numbering in references to the same text in the two editions.

I have attempted for all references to add a separate CE reference if it differs from the FIP reference, but I may have missed some. If so, I apologize. Please let me know of any referencing problems you find.

I have also tried to edit my commentary so as to reflect any wording changes in the CE. For instance, the CE restored the plural use of "you" where the FIP had substituted the phrase "you and your brother." One such instance will illustrate the kind of change, significant in actual words but nearly identical in overall meaning:

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

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



ADD DIAGRAMS FROM PDF IN iCloud/Preview/