

Commentary

ACIM® CE Text

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.

Miracle Principle 43 T-1.23

43. A major contribution of miracles is their strength in releasing a person from his misplaced sense of isolation, deprivation, and lack. ²They are affirmations of Sonship, which is a state of completion and abundance.

Principle 42 said that the perceptual content of a miracle is *wholeness*. It went on to say that any form of self-debasement is a fundamental perceptual distortion. Principle 41 pointed out that we *must* heal our minds of any thought that we are less than whole, or somehow outside the reach of Atonement. This principle again stresses the way that miracles release us from any “misplaced sense of isolation, deprivation, [or] lack” (1:1). Miracles affirm our Sonship, “which is a state of completion and abundance,” as opposed to deprivation and lack.

We need this! The depth of our need can be deduced from the fact that it takes a *miracle* to release us from it! Don't just shrug this off, thinking, “Oh, yeah. I know this already; the Course says it over and over. Enough, already!” The Course *cannot* over-emphasize our deeply entrenched belief that we are *not* whole, but that we are isolated and separate from one another, deprived and lacking in a myriad of ways. Being whole does not just mean that I am the best Allen Watson I can be (and I'm not even that!). It means that God has given me *everything*. As a separate individual, I have no doubt that there are many people better than me in many ways. I can't win a chess championship. I can't calculate a moon shot. I can't out-paint Picasso or Van Gogh. But being whole does not mean being *better than* anyone. It means being *part of them*. It means that they are me and I am them. It means we are one. It means we are all part of the Sonship (1:2).

² The emphasis on changing your mind needs further clarification. ³Whatever is true and real is eternal, and cannot change or be changed. ⁴The spirit is therefore unalterable because it is already perfect. ⁵But the mind can elect the level it chooses to serve. ⁶The only limit which is put on its choice is that it *cannot* serve two masters. ⁷While the ballot itself is a secret one, and the right to vote is fully protected, voting always entails both election *and* rejection. ⁸If two candidates are voted for for the same position, the machine cancels the ballot automatically. ⁹This is necessary because a split vote does not represent any *real* allegiance.

The Course talks a lot about changing our minds, but that can seem to imply there is something about me that needs to change; in other words, I'm imperfect; I'm lacking something. I need to change. But no! This is why Jesus says the emphasis on changing our minds needs to be clarified (2:1). We are probably misunderstanding how it works. He points out that whatever is real and true *cannot* change; it is eternal (2:2). So, then, what we are, the essence of our being, is not mind but *spirit*. Spirit is "unalterable" and "already perfect" (2:3).

Mind, however, can change; it can "elect the level it chooses to serve" (2:4). "Level" here probably refers to the "spirit/body" levels as well as to the "ego/Christ" levels of the subconscious. The mind can serve the body and ego, or it can serve our spirit and Christ. *That* is the change it must make. Mind is free to choose either way but it cannot choose *both* (2:5). We have the right to make the choice, and the choice is completely free of any form of outside coercion, but the nature of the choice is immutable: we must choose one or the other, ego or Christ (2:6). Even political voting works like this. If you mark two choices for the same office, neither vote is counted (2:7). You may think you are choosing spirit over body in many ways, but if you are splitting your vote, it doesn't really count! "A split vote does not represent any *real* allegiance" (2:8). That's a disturbing thought to me. Jesus is telling me, "It's all or nothing, bro. Ninety percent isn't good enough." Our minds are the decision-makers. They can change. They *must* change and make the right decision. We *must* heal our minds of every thought of lack about ourselves.

³ Free will is the attribute of the mind, not the spirit. ²The spirit always remains changeless, because it never leaves the sight of God. ³The creation of the spirit is already fully accomplished. ⁴The mind, if it votes to do so, becomes a medium by which the spirit can create along the lines of its own creation. ⁵If it does not freely elect to do so, it retains this creative ability, but places itself under tyrannous rather than authoritative control. ⁶As a result, what it makes is imprisonment, because such are the dictates of tyrants.

Spirit does not have free will; only mind does (3:1). Spirit is changeless, and that is the truth about you (3:2). God created your spirit whole and complete; there is nothing left to be done, nothing more that can be added (3:3). The mind, however, has a vote: it can choose to be "a medium by which the spirit can create along the lines of its own creation" by God, or it can choose to misuse its creative power to make (not create) imprisonment under the tyrannical control of the ego (3:4–6).

As we observe the world around us, we can see that tyrants always lead to imprisonment. However, we often fail to realize that we are doing the same thing when we listen to our egos. Although our imprisonments may be less significant than those caused by known tyrants, they are still derived from the same source and made of the same substance.

4 To change your mind means to place it at the disposal of true authority. ²The miracle is thus a sign that the mind has elected to be guided by Christ in His service. ³The abundance of Christ is the natural result of choosing to follow Him.

What does the Course mean by “change your mind”? It means to place your mind at the disposal of true authority, the Christ within you, your spirit, your True Self (4:1). The Course often speaks of this as listening to the Holy Spirit, the Voice for God within us, and tells us that doing so “is the way out of hell for you” (M-1.3:10–11 (CE)). The reason behind such a powerful statement is clear when we realize it is the choice between being our Self or being anguished subjects of our egos.

For something to be a “sign” of something else means that the “something” is evidence that the “something else” has occurred. So a miracle is evidence that the mind has made a choice “to be guided by Christ in His service” (4:2). That choice is what is being asked of us. Miracles are “the natural result of choosing to follow Him” (4:3). Once again, we can see the central place the Course gives to paying attention to the Voice within and to following its guidance. Abundance is the result of our obedience to that loving inner Presence.

At this point, the discussion under Principle 43 seems to veer off again into “the question of sex” (5:1). It’s not really a digression. The issue in question is: Are we listening to our spirit (following that inner Guide) or to our bodies? Jesus points out in more detail how miracle impulses arising from the deepest level of our subconscious can be mistaken for sexual impulses from our bodies. Miracle impulses push us toward the joining of minds and spirits; sexual impulses try to achieve closeness through the body, and it doesn’t work.

5 The following is in relation to the question of sex. ²You are involved with unconscious distortions which are producing a dense cover over miracle impulses, making it hard for them to reach consciousness. ³Sex and miracles are both *ways of relating*. ⁴The nature of any interpersonal relationship is limited or defined by what you want it to do, which is *why* you want it in the first place. ⁵Relating is a way of achieving an outcome.

We are receiving miracle impulses all the time. Still, something is “making it hard for them to reach consciousness” (5:2). We are unconsciously distorting miracle impulses into sexual impulses, producing a “dense cover” over them. You may have heard that men have sexual thoughts every seven seconds. That’s a myth. “...research in college-age participants suggests that while men do think about sex more often than women, the subject crosses their mind an average of only about 19 times per day, compared to 10 times per day for women” (News-Medical.net). A lot less, but still, would you have guessed that you have ten to nineteen *miracle* impulses per day? If most of what we think are sexual impulses are really distorted miracle impulses, we’re having a lot more than we think.

Why do we confuse these impulses? Because they are “both *ways of relating*” (5:3). Any relationship we engage in, we engage in it with a purpose, and that relationship “is limited or defined by what you want it to do.” You desire a relationship because of what you want as the outcome (5:4). Relating is the means for achieving that desired outcome (5:5).

So, let's examine our purpose for relating. In general, it is a desire to join with another person. If we think of ourselves primarily as bodies, we will tend to think of *physical* joining—sex. If we realize we are non-physical beings, minds or spirits, we will seek joining on those levels.

6 Indiscriminate sexual impulses result in body-image misperceptions. ²This is an expression of an indiscriminate attempt to reach communion through the body. ³This involves not only improper self-identification, but also disrespect for the individuality of others. ⁴Self-control is *not* the whole answer to this problem, though I am by no means discouraging its use. ⁵It must be understood, however, that the underlying mechanism must be uprooted (a word you should understand well enough by now not to regard it as frightening).

It's important here to notice the word “indiscriminate” (6:1). The word means nonselective or done without careful consideration or judgment. So Jesus is not talking about *all* sexual impulses, just ones we do not carefully consider or judge. Such careful consideration might reveal an underlying miracle impulse that our ego is trying to cover up. Some sexual impulses, then, are okay—no surprise there, but it needs to be said.

If we do not discriminate it will “result in body-image misperceptions” (6:1). In what follows, this seems to refer to mis-identifying ourselves and others as bodies. Our purpose may be joining and communicating with a person (6:2), but if the means we choose to do so is sex it will reinforce our perception of one another as nothing more than bodies (6:3).

What do you mean by joining with another person? Are you trying to join bodies or minds? Allowing ourselves to be driven by indiscriminate sexual impulses results in perceiving ourselves and others as bodies, not minds or spirits. To see another person mostly as a body is disrespectful! Women are the targets of this more often than men. If they find men giving a “wolf whistle” as they walk by they often feel demeaned, and rightly so. But it goes the other way as well sometimes. And yet some men as well as women *seek* that kind of response. They like it when they can turn heads as they walk by. If you think about it, you can easily see their “improper self-identification.”

What, then, is the answer to indiscriminate sexual impulses? Self-control can help, although it isn't the full answer (6:4). There is an “underlying mechanism” that has been brought to the light and “uprooted” (6:5). From what follows, that underlying mechanism is our confusion of the body and spirit levels. That confusion is what leads us to mistake miracle impulses for sexual ones, and that mistake only further reinforces the level confusion, strengthening our mis-identification of ourselves and others as bodies.

7 All shallow roots have to be uprooted, because they are not deep enough to sustain you. ²The illusion that shallow roots can be deepened and thus made to hold is one of the corollaries on which the reversal of the Golden Rule, referred to twice before, is balanced. ³As these false underpinnings are uprooted (or given up), equilibrium is experienced as unstable. ⁴But the fact is that *nothing* is less stable than an orientation which is upside down. ⁵Anything that holds it that way is hardly conducive to greater stability. ⁶The whole danger of defenses lies in their propensity to hold misperceptions rigidly in place. ⁷This is why rigidity is regarded as stability by those who are off the mark. ⁸A rigid orientation can be extremely reliable, even if it is upside down. ⁹In fact, the more consistently upside down it is, the more reliable it is.

Consider what Jesus means by the image of “shallow roots.” The image, of course, is to plants such as trees. Psalm 1 in the Bible has this to say about a man who delights in God’s law and meditates on it day and night:

“He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.”

(Psa. 1:3 ESV)

This is a person who is listening to the highest authority and not to his ego or the ways of the world. Like a tree planted by streams of water, he has deep roots. He flourishes in life. In terms of the Course, miracles flow from him and to him.

What are the roots of your thought system and the way you approach life? Is God’s truth your roots, or do your roots consist of the shallow roots of bodily identity? Such shallow roots “have to be uprooted” (7:1). Unlike that tree planted by water, your roots won’t sustain you.

Many people think you can somehow “deepen” these shallow roots so that “they can hold.” The reverse of the Golden Rule, projection and giving to others what you do *not* want while taking from them what you *do* want, is based on our attempts to deepen body identification (7:2). We believe that giving is loss and taking is gain because we are thinking in purely physical terms.

When we first attempt to let go of this false identification we experience instability (7:3). We may think we are experiencing true loss. Our lives are being turned upside down, but in a good way, because we’ve been upside down all along and we’re only righting ourselves. We are abandoning what is an inherently unstable way of being; “*nothing* is less stable than an orientation which is upside down” (7:4), and anything that is trying to maintain that upside-down state (indiscriminate sexual impulses) cannot possibly help our stability (7:5).

Often, if we fear the uprooting process, we raise various defenses against it. Any kind of defense contributes to the problem; they have a propensity to reinforce our misperceptions (7:6). One example is *rigidity* of behavior, an unwillingness to change or adaptation. For instance, perhaps the way I leave my shoes around the house irritates my wife. The loving thing for me might be to change my behavior and put my shoes on the shoe rack

by the door. In my ego, I might see this as some kind of judgment or attack. If I am unwilling to change my habits, thinking, "This is just the way I do it," that will reinforce my misperception of her reasonable request as an attack.

The rigidity can seem to a rigid person as something stable, something they can rely on (7:7–8). The problem is that it is upside down! Particularly in relationships, it can be quite unloving. The final sentence (7:9) could reasonably be reworded as, "The more consistently *unloving* it is, the more reliable it is." This is borne out in abusive relationships. The more abusive a person is, the more likely the behavior is to be repeated.

8 One of the more horrible examples of inverted or upside-down thinking (and history is full of horrible examples of this) was the Nazis' "Final Solution." ²I shed many tears over this, but it is by no means the only time I said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

The Nazis' "Final Solution," their attempt to eradicate every Jew, is a prime example of what he is saying about upside-down thinking. It was a theory that was literally based on bodies. The Nazi regime was trying to unite the world by force under a dictatorship. Jesus says that he "shed many tears over this." This should tell us that no tragedy in the world should be brushed aside just because "it's only a dream." Yes, it's a dream and never really happened, but the pain, suffering, and loss were terrible and unnecessary. None of us should ever have to go through such things, and it is appropriate to weep about it and to try to prevent or change it. But, like Jesus, we have to learn to ask for the forgiveness of the perpetrators, "for they know not what they do."

9 All actions which stem from reversed thinking are literally the behavioral expressions of those who know not what they do. ²Actually, Jeanne Dixon was right in her emphasis on "feet on the ground and fingertips in Heaven." ³Although she was too literal for some, many people knew exactly what she meant, so her statement was the right miracle for them. ⁴I submit that if a mind is in valid relationship with God, it can't be upside down.

What I just said applies to every action that stems from reversed thinking. We can and should abhor such unloving actions, great or small, but we should simultaneously pray for the forgiveness of those who do them. Jeanne Dixon's saying means we should have a sensible, practical, realistic, and loving attitude toward everything. At the same time, we reach toward Heaven, striving for the greatest expression of love possible in the world. Jesus calls her simple statement a miracle! It was an expression of love that called forth that love in those who heard it. Miracles do not have to be spectacular to be miraculous. It was the fruit of a "mind...in valid relationship with God."

10 Many have lost sight of the end and are concentrating on the means. ²Remember the story about the artist who kept devoting himself to inventing better and better ways of sharpening pencils. ³He never created anything, but he had the sharpest pencil in town. ⁴The sexual language here is intentional. ⁵Sex is often utilized on behalf of very similar errors. ⁶Hostility, triumph, vengeance, self-debasement, and all sorts of expressions of the lack of love are often *very* clearly seen in the accompanying fantasies. ⁷But it is a profound error to imagine that because these fantasies are so frequent (or occur so reliably), this implies validity. ⁸You can be wholly reliable and *entirely* wrong.

What do you think he means here about losing sight of the end and concentrating on the means? What's the end, and what's the means?

We were told earlier that we engage in relationships to achieve a certain outcome. That outcome is communication or joining with another person. So, that is the “end.” The means can be expressions of love (miracles) or, if our minds are upside down, sex and fantasies of sex.

Before going into further detail, he uses an analogy of an artist who keeps sharpening his pencils but never draws anything. All he achieved was the town's best collection of sharp pencils. Then he seems to say that “the sharpest pencil in town” is somehow “sexual language.” Based on what immediately follows I think he is using those sharp pencils as illustrative of “hostility, triumph, vengeance, self-debasement, and all sorts of expressions of the lack of love,” things are often show up in sexual fantasies. They are (for some) a fine collection of tools, but they never produce any “art,” the joining and communication that is the true goal. Sadly, this sort of sexual fantasy is all too common, but their abundance does not imply their validity. “You can be wholly reliable and *entirely* wrong.” The fact that so many people have dark sexual fantasies does not validate them.

11 Intellect may be a “displacement upward,” but sex can be a “displacement outward.” ²How can you “come close” to others through the parts of you which are really invisible? ³The word “invisible” means “cannot be seen or perceived.” ⁴What cannot be perceived is hardly the right means for improving perception.

Displacement is a term that describes what happens when we transfer attention or blame from where it should be focused onto something else. In a relationship, an example of upward displacement to intellect might be getting caught up in intellectual analysis when what is called for is a heart response to the situation. All head and no heart. Sex can be a downward displacement because we make closeness into something outward, the joining of two bodies. Closeness is properly a matter of the heart and mind—mind in the sense of shared thought, not necessarily intellectual agreement.

Jesus argues that we can't really become close to others through our bodies because they are “really invisible” (11:2). He goes on to say they cannot be seen or perceived, and

things that can't be perceived aren't the right means for improving perception. This probably doesn't make sense to you at first. It certainly didn't to me.

On reflection, I believe he is thinking about the fact that, in the end, our bodies (and all things physical) are illusions. They don't exist except as images in our minds. Perception is a faculty that exists only while we live in the illusion. Yet we have learned that *true perception* is the pathway to knowledge. In Chapter 13 of the Text, Section IX, paragraph 5, we are told that a miracle is the true perception of *one aspect of the whole*. True perception, then, must be seeing *past or through* the illusion of the body to the reality of the person. Bodies cannot help with that kind of perception.

12 The confusion of miracle impulse with sexual impulse is a major source of perceptual distortion, because it *induces* rather than straightens out the basic level confusion which underlies all those who seek happiness with the instruments of the world. ²A desert is a desert is a desert. ³You can do anything you want in it, but you *cannot* change it from what it is. ⁴It still lacks water, which is why it *is* a desert. ⁵The thing to do with a desert is to leave.

When we mistake a miracle impulse for a sexual impulse, we reinforce the very level confusion that leads us to look for happiness through things this world. We are seeking happiness in the wrong way and in the wrong place, like searching for water in the desert. All you're going to find in the desert is sand, sand, and more sand. Process the sand however you want, but it won't ever become water. Do whatever you want with the things of the world, but you won't find happiness there. "The thing to do with a desert is to leave." He isn't urging us to leave the world in the sense of physical death. Leaving means to stop looking for love in all the wrong places. Stop expecting to find closeness and union with others and God through sex or any physical means. Ask for the vision of Christ. Ask to seek past bodies to the reality of spirit.

Read over the basic Miracle Principle that led to this discussion. It speaks of how miracles can free us from our "sense of isolation, deprivation, and lack." Closeness, fullness, and abundance come from affirming the Sonship of one another, forgiving, looking past body and ego to see the truth of what we are.

Legend:

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

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

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

Effects of Differing Editions of the Course

There were significant changes made in the CE, although for the most part there was no alteration in the meaning of the text, and the *Manual for Teachers* had far fewer changes. There are some changes in section and paragraph breaks and sentence structure that result in different numbering in references to the same text in the two editions. When there is a major difference I will indicate it with a footnote.

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

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

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

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