

Commentary

ACIM® Clarification of Terms

6. *The Miracle—the Ego*

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

Just a reminder for students using the FIP version: The CE version has moved what was Chapter 2 in the FIP version of *Clarification of Terms*; It has become Chapter 6. The title remains unchanged: “The Ego - the Miracle.” The paragraphing has also changed, which will alter paragraph-to-sentence reference numbering. This chapter emphasizes that the ego cannot be defined because it is “nothingness...in a form that seems like something.” The term is used only to contrast what *is* with what is *not*. The miracle is the opposite of the ego. The ego was a terrible mistake about ourselves and nothing more. The miracle is a happy dream about ourselves, correcting our terrible mistake.

Paragraph 1

Illusions will not last. ²Their death is sure, and this alone is certain in their world. ³It is the ego's world because of this. ⁴What is the *ego*? ⁵But a dream of what you really are, a thought you are apart from your Creator, and a wish to be what He created not. ⁶It is a thing of madness, not reality at all. ⁷A name for namelessness is all it is. ⁸A symbol of impossibility; a choice for options that do not exist. ⁹We call it that to help us understand that it is nothing but an ancient thought that what is made has immortality.¹ ¹⁰But what could come of this except a dream which, like all dreams, can only die?

The chapter begins by stating that the only thing certain in this world is that it will not last. It consists of illusions, all of which are sure to vanish (1:1–2). The world's illusory, transient nature makes it the ego's world; it shares those qualities with the ego (1:3).

The ego's illusory nature is then described in three ways (1:4–5):

- The ego is a dream of what you are.
- The ego is a thought that you are separate from your Creator.

¹In the Course's system, only what is *created* has immortality. What we make (“make” being a much weaker word than “create”) is by definition illusory and temporary.

- The ego is a wish to be something God did not create.

What is the ego? A dream, a thought, a wish. The ego is merely a symptom of our insanity; it has no reality (1:6). Jesus piles on with more ways of describing that the ego does not exist (1:7–8), The ego is:

- a name for namelessness
- a symbol of impossibility
- a choice for options that do not exist

Again, look at the basic terms used here. The ego is only a name, a symbol, a choice: a dream, a thought, a wish.

How many ways can he say there is no such thing as the ego? Think of a psychotic individual who imagines being attacked by monsters that exist only as delusions in his mind. That's what the ego is: a delusion about ourselves.

Why, then, is the term “ego” used at all? Even giving it a name risks making it sound real. Symbols and names are supposed to stand for real things. The term is valuable because it lets us talk about our “ancient thought that what we made has immortality” (1:9). It's a label for our delusions.

The core delusion we have is that something *we* made, something not created by God, can actually exist and persist in existing. That cannot be true. It can only be a dream, a dream which, “like all dreams, can only die” (1:10). You probably don't think of dreams as “dying.” We think of them as *ending*. But that's the same thing. Nighttime dreams have no effect except on our minds. They exist only in our minds. They vanish when we awake. It takes a lot of effort for most of us to remember what the dream was about, although we can train ourselves to do so. But that's what we've done: trained ourselves to remember every detail of our ego nightmare and to believe what we dreamed about (the ego, an identity separate from God, a mind housed in a body that “dies”) continues ever after, our new (imaginary) reality.

But the ego is only a nightmare, and nightmares must die. They must vanish.

Paragraph 2

² What is the ego? ³Nothingness, but in a form that seems like something. ³In a world of form the ego cannot be denied, for it alone seems real. ⁴How could God's Son as He created him abide in form or in a world of form? ⁵Who asks you to define the ego and explain how it arose can be but he who thinks it real, and seeks by definition to ensure that its illusive nature is concealed behind the words that seem to make it so.

What, then, is the ego? “Nothingness, but in a form that seems like something” (2:1). The ego's “form” is the body, which definitely seems like something to us. In the Text, we were told, “The body is the symbol of the ego, as the ego is the symbol of separation.” (T-15.IX.2:3) If that is so, while we live in a world of bodies that seem absolutely real, how can we fail to believe in the ego? We can't as long as we believe the body and the world are real! How could, or why would, God do this to us? Install us in a form designed

to age, perhaps sicken, and die, living in a world with an expiration date? Would God do that to His Son (2:4)?

I hear such questions posed here and often in Course study groups: “What is the ego? How did the ego come to be?” The problem with such questions is that the question presumes that the ego exists and can be defined (2:5). If we ask such a question, what's really going on is that we are trying to hide the unreality of the ego behind words that make it seem to be real. It's the same as asking, “How did the separation happen?” That presumes that it did happen!

The non-existence of the ego, the separation, the body, and the world are sticking points for so many of us. Our belief in them is the core of our delusion, and our constant questioning about their origin accomplishes nothing but reinforcing our delusion and delaying our awakening.

Robert Perry makes an interesting point about psychology in this context. He wrote (in his comments on this section of the Course):

According to the Course, this is the exact motive behind psychological jargon. The Course says that modern psychology is really “the study of the ego” (T-14.X.8:6 (FIP), (T-14.XI.7:1 (CE)). As such, it is studying meaningless content, though it is “careful to conceal this fact behind impressive sounding words, but which lack any consistent sense when they are put together” (T-14.X.8:9 (FIP), (T-14.XI.7:6 (CE)). In other words, psychological jargon (which we often call psychobabble) is designed to hide the ego's hollow content behind an imposing parade of fancy words. All those words, all those technical terms, all those studies—there must be something real to which it all points. Or so it seems.

Paragraph 3

3 There is no definition for a lie that serves to make it true. ²Nor can there be a truth that lies conceal effectively. ³The ego's unreality is not denied by words. ⁴Nor is its meaning clear because its nature seems to have a form.² ⁵Who can define the undefinable? ⁶And yet there is an answer even here. ⁷We cannot really make a definition for what the ego is, but we *can* say what it is not. ⁸And this is shown to us with perfect clarity. ⁹It is from this that we deduce all that the ego is. ¹⁰Look at its opposite, and you can see the only answer that is meaningful.

So, the bad news: we can't define the ego. No definition for a lie can make it true (3:1). The flip side, however, is good news: No lie can effectively hide the truth of our being (3:2). No matter what words you use or how you use them you cannot hide the unreality of the ego (3:3). Asking those questions over and over or producing detailed

²The idea in sentences 3 and 4 is that clothing the ego in a form (2:2) and defining it in words (2:5) *seems* to make it real, yet it is not real. Defining the ego in words and clothing it in a form, then, does not confirm its reality—or, expressed in negative terms, it does not *deny* its unreality.

academic studies of the nature of the ego, none of it ultimately works to make the ego real. Not even its physical embodiment (the body) can give the ego meaning (3:4). You can't define the undefinable (3:5).

Define the ego? No. Somehow that leaves us feeling cheated. It seems an unsatisfactory answer.

On the one hand, since words and symbols are supposed to point to something real, it might seem we should simply stop using the word "ego" at all. On the other hand, we *do* believe in its reality, so we seem to need help letting that go. That means that there is still a use for the term, and a good purpose for using it (3:6). Although we can't define "ego," we *can* say "what it is not" (3:7), its opposite. We can look at its opposite to learn the truth about ourselves. As the next paragraph shows, the ego's opposite is the miracle. By clarifying what a miracle is, we "can deduce all that the ego is" (3:8–9). If we look at the opposite of the ego, we will see "the only answer that is meaningful" to the question, "What is the ego?" (3:10).

Paragraph 4

4 The ego's opposite in every way—in origin, effect, and consequence—we call a miracle. ²And here we find all that is not the ego in this world. ³Here is the ego's opposite, and here alone we look on what the ego was, for here we see all that it seemed to do, and cause and its effects must still be one.

The Course defines the ego and a miracle as opposites in every way. It mentions three ways they differ 4:1).

1. In Origin
Ego: a dream, a mad thought, a mistaken wish
Miracle: True perception,
2. In Effect
Ego: Pain, guilt, suffering, weakness, death
Miracle: Joy, peace, power, eternal life
3. In consequence
Ego: Nothing
Miracle: Everything

Looking at the miracle, we "find all that is not the ego in this world" (4:2). The next paragraph will list many more ways the miracle shows us what the ego is. But since nothing of the ego is real, I feel it's clearer to say the miracle shows us what the ego *seems to be* instead of what *it is*. That's made more explicit in (4:3). In the miracle, we look at "what the ego *was*" (my emphasis). "We see all that it seemed to do." Notice the past tense. The miracle is the undoing of the ego. By looking at what the miracle uncovered by undoing the ego, we can infer what the ego was before the miracle corrected it. From the ego's effects, we can deduce its cause. The following paragraph continues this line of thought.

Paragraph 5

5 Where there was darkness, now we see the light.³ ²What is the ego?
³What the darkness was. ⁴Where is the ego? ⁵Where the darkness was.
⁶What is it now, and where can it be found? ⁷Nothing and nowhere. ⁸Now
the light has come.⁴ ⁹Its opposite has gone without a trace. ¹⁰Where evil was,
there now is holiness. ¹¹What is the ego? ¹²What the evil was. ¹³Where is the
ego? ¹⁴In an evil dream that but seemed real while you were dreaming it.
¹⁵Where there was crucifixion stands God's Son. ¹⁶What is the ego? ¹⁷Who
has need to ask? ¹⁸Where is the ego? ¹⁹Who has need to seek for an illusion,
now that dreams are gone?

One effect of undoing the ego is that we now see light, whereas before, we did not see light, only darkness (5:1). What does that tell us about the ego? The ego is “what the darkness was” (5:2–3). Notice that it does not say that the ego *was* darkness, which would imply that the darkness was somehow real. It says the ego is *what* the darkness was. If we see the light when the ego is undone, then the ego is nothing more than a state of consciousness in which darkness seems to exist.

Then he asks and answers a question, based on the appearance of light when our ego is undone, “Where is the ego? Where the darkness was” (5:4–5). But the darkness never really existed, so if the darkness is gone, seen as merely the absence of light, the ego must be nothing more than the apparent absence of our true identity.

What is the ego now, and where can we find it (5:6)? The ego is “nothing and nowhere” (5:7). We can say what the ego is *not* by seeing its opposite, the miracle, the vision of Christ, the awareness of the truth of what we are. It has no location and no being. When light comes, darkness disappears without a trace (5:8–9). When our identity as God's creation appears, the ego disappears without a trace.

When the ego is undone, evil disappears, replaced by holiness (5:10). This refers to the forgiveness of others. Where we once saw sin in them, we now see only holiness. What is the ego now, and where can we find it? The ego is what the evil was (a fantasy). Where is the ego? It resides in a nightmare that only seemed real while we were dreaming, and nowhere else (5:11–14).

We now see things from the point of view of resurrection. Instead of crucifixion, we see the risen Christ everywhere. We don't need to ask what the ego is because it is no longer part of the equation (5:16–17). And now that dreams are gone, what need is there to ask where the ego is? It was an illusion, part of a dream that has ended (5:18–19).

When we ask, “What is the ego?” or “Where is the ego?” we are only making the ego seem more real to ourselves.

³ Matthew 4:16 (RSV): “The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light.”

⁴ Isaiah 60:1 (RSV): “Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.”

Paragraph 6

6 What is a *miracle*? ²A dream as well. ³But look at all the aspects of *this* dream and you will never question any more. ⁴Look at the kindly world you see stretch forth before you as you walk in gentleness. ⁵Look at the helpers all along the way you travel, happy in the certainty of Heaven and the surety of peace. ⁶And look an instant, too, on what you left behind at last and finally passed by. ⁷This was the ego: all the cruel hate, the need for vengeance and the cries of pain, the fear of dying and the urge to kill, the brotherless illusion and the self that seemed alone in all the universe.

In contrast to the ego, what is a miracle (6:1)? Look ahead at paragraph 8 for the only complete definition: “The miracle forgives; the ego damns” (8:1–2). The miracle is like the ego in one respect: both are dreams (6:2). Remember, there are no miracles in Heaven because there is no need for them: “The miracle, without a function in Heaven, is needful here” (T-13.IX.13:6 (CE)).T-13.VIII.3:6 (FIP) The Course repeatedly talks of miracles we do *on Earth*, not in Heaven. If the ego is our nightmare, the miracle is our *happy* dream. Both give way eventually to our waking up in God.

Nevertheless, a miracle is profoundly valuable for us here. If we examine all the aspects of *this* dream, we will no longer have any questions (6:3). What we see in the miracle is the truth and nothing but the truth—or at least truth’s reflection. We no longer try to figure out or placate our egos because we realize that's not what we are. The ego was no more than a tragic mistake about ourselves deserving nothing more than to be forgotten.

As we walk in gentleness, in the miracle's field of vision there is nothing but a world entirely forgiven, characterized by kindness (6:4). We find “helpers all along the way” as we travel, sharing with us the happy “certainty of Heaven and the surety of peace” (6:5). I looked up the word “surety” because I thought that in this context it meant that these helpers were *sure* of having peace. However, it does not mean that at all. A synonym is *guarantor*, a person who takes responsibility for another person in some way, as in assuming responsibility for another's debts. So this probably means these helpers are taking (or sharing) responsibility for maintaining our peace! What a wonderful sort of person to have in our lives. We see these forgiven “sinners” as the guarantee that we also are forgiven.

As we view this real world, our happy dream, he asks us to look just for an instant on everything we have left behind and passed by, all that comprised the ego: “all the cruel hate, the need for vengeance and the cries of pain, the fear of dying and the urge to kill, the brotherless illusion and the self that seemed alone in the universe” (6:6–7). What an awful picture! Would you not be glad, profoundly relieved, and grateful to leave all that behind? As MLK shouted, Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, I'm free at last!

All that ugly terror, that is, or was, the ego.

Paragraph 7

7 This terrible mistake about yourself the miracle corrects as gently as a loving mother sings her child to rest.⁵ ²Is not a song like this what you would hear? ³Would it not answer all you thought to ask, and even make the question meaningless? ⁴Your questions have no answer, being made to still God's Voice, Which asks of everyone one question only: "Are you ready yet to help Me save the world?" ⁵Ask this instead of what the ego is, and you will see a sudden brightness cover up the world the ego made. ⁶No miracle is now withheld from anyone. ⁷The world is saved from what you thought it was. ⁸And what it is, is wholly uncondemned and wholly pure.

Above, I anticipated what the Course says now: The ego was nothing but a terrible mistake about yourself. Not a sin; a mistake. The miracle corrects your mistake "as gently as a loving mother sings her child to rest" (7:1). This reminds me of a song I'd like to play for you now: "You Can Relax Now" by Shaina Noll: [You Can Relax Now](#). You can find that song on YouTube. That song is how I think of the song God sings to us! "Is not a song like this what you would hear?" (7:2).

Like the Bible, the Course mostly ignores the idea of the divine feminine. It refers to God repeatedly as Father but never as Mother. Except for the frequent use of the word "father" referring to God, the way the Course talks of God is often not gender-specific. It portrays God as Creator, Spirit, and formlessness. Here, speaking of the miracle correcting our mistaken belief about our Self "as gently as a loving mother" there is a stand-out exception to the lack of references to the feminine. I see another clear example in the last section of the book of Helen's poetry (*The Gifts of God*), a section which was dictated internally to Helen just as the Course was. (The rest of the poems were her creations.)

"Rest could be yours because of what God is. He loves you as a mother loves her child; her only one, the only love she has, her all-in-all, extension of herself, as much a part of her as breath itself."

If you heard God gently singing this song to you (and you *will* indeed hear it if you haven't already), imagine how you would feel. I love the line from Shaina's song, "You can relax now"! I often feel a deep, deep relaxation when I listen to the song. Think how it will feel to hear in the song answers to all the questions you ever had, answers that are so complete, so thorough, so profoundly satisfying, so reassuring that the questions, all of them, become meaningless (7:3). And in another sense you will realize that the questions all had *no* answer, being mental deceits your ego was using to keep you from hearing that soft, gentle Voice of God calling to you to fall into Her loving arms and relax (7:4).

⁵The feminine language here is new for the Course. As the emphasis on gender-inclusive language gathered steam in the 1970s, feminine language began to find its way into Helen's dictation, first in this passage, dictated in 1975, then in *The Song of Prayer*, dictated in 1977 ("Forgiveness is prayer's ally; sister in the plan for your salvation"—S-2.In.1:3), and finally in "The Gifts of God," dictated in 1978 ("He loves you as a mother loves her child").

That Voice asks only one question of you and everyone: “Are you ready yet to help Me save the world?” (7:4). Are you ready to accept the miracles He offers and extend them to the whole world? That is the only question that matters. Are you ready to recognize that “I am among the ministers of God” (Lesson 154)? Ready to join the great crusade to correct error in all the minds God sends to you?

Ask yourself, “Am I ready to help Jesus save the world?”

If that question bothers you and seems to interfere with your comfortable life, *let it bother you!* Give this question some time. Think about it. Write in your journal about it if you have one. Think about the joy of watching others wake up to the truth about themselves. “You are the child of God, His one creation. You are eternal, and that has never changed and will never change.”

If you ask yourself this question and answer “yes” instead of wondering what the ego is and how it came into being, suddenly the world will look much brighter to you, even though the ego made the world (7:5). All miracles are seen to be instantly available to everyone (7:6). *You* will receive the miracle, the answer, not to the questions the ego has you ask about its origins and location, but the answer to the ego itself. When you see that, the light will cover up the world the ego made. The world will be “saved from what you thought it was” (7:7), and you will have the vision of Christ to see the real world—a world “wholly uncondemned and wholly pure” (7:8).

All this will happen for you the moment you answer God's question with a “yes,” the moment you affirm that you *are* ready to help save the world.

Paragraph 8

8 The miracle forgives; the ego damns. ²Neither need be defined except by this. ³Yet could a definition be more sure, or more in line with what salvation asks? ⁴Problem and answer lie together here, and having met at last the choice is clear. ⁵Who chooses hell when it is recognized? ⁶And who would not go on a little while when it is given him to understand the way is short and Heaven is his goal?

The miracle *forgives* the entire world and everyone you ever come in contact with. The ego (and you, if that's what you think you are) *damns* the world (8:1). The ego sees sin and guilt; the miracle sees innocence and holiness. Those are the only definitions those words need: the miracle is forgiveness; the ego is damnation (8:2). No definition of either term could be more accurate and more “in line with what salvation asks” (8:3). Those answers line up perfectly with the question salvation asks of us: our readiness to save the world. Doing that calls for forgiveness and erasing sin and guilt from our minds. We've seen the problem: separation or the ego. We've seen the answer: *no* separation, but our identity as an eternal child of God, wholly innocent. When the problem and the answer lie together, the choice is clear (8:4). Nobody chooses hell when they recognize it (8:5)! And once we understand that Heaven is our goal and the way to it is short, who would not choose to go on (8:6)? All the many pages and words of the Course have had just one purpose: to lead us to make this choice. It will never answer all our questions. It

will deflect and reinterpret them, presenting us with the only real question: Are we ready to start saving the world?

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.