

# Commentary

## ACIM<sup>®</sup> Manual for Teachers

### *Chapter 21: What is the Role of Words in Healing?*

**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

This section speaks about the part words play in any healing (paragraphs 1–3), specifically in healing a “patient’s” physical problems. When helping another person, we may suppose that what we say and how we say it is supremely important, something we must carefully choose. We would be mistaken. We must learn not to concern ourselves with choosing the right words but rather listen within for the words given by the Holy Spirit.

#### Paragraph 1

Strictly speaking, words play no part at all in healing.<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>The motivating factor is prayer, or asking. <sup>3</sup>What you ask for you receive.<sup>2</sup> <sup>4</sup>But this refers to the prayer of the heart,<sup>3</sup> not to the words you use in praying. <sup>5</sup>Sometimes the words and the prayer are contradictory; sometimes they agree. <sup>6</sup>It does not matter. <sup>7</sup>God does not understand words, for they were made by separated minds to keep them in the illusion of separation. <sup>8</sup>Words can be useful, particularly for the beginner, in helping concentration and facilitating the exclusion, or at least control, of extraneous thoughts.<sup>4</sup> <sup>9</sup>Let us not forget, however, that words are but symbols of symbols. <sup>10</sup>They are thus twice removed from reality.

<sup>1</sup> Healing, in this section, refers to the teacher of God offering prayer healing to a patient. This section therefore continues the discussion of the healing of patients that begins in Sections 5-8.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 21:22 (RSV): “And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.”

<sup>3</sup> The “prayer of the heart” is whatever we are actually desiring, regardless of the words we use in prayer. For this reason, the prayer of the heart is not necessarily positive. As the section later says, the heart can ask “for illusions” (3:4), “for things of this world” (3:1).

<sup>4</sup> In other words, using words in prayer can help in concentrating the mind on what is being prayed for and minimizing thoughts about other things.

Words don't have anything to do with effectuating healing—"strictly speaking" (1:1). Words are to healing like a grocery list is to shopping. The list does not accomplish any shopping; you can shop without a list if you want. Healing can happen without words.

What effectuates healing is *prayer* (1:2). Prayer in this context consists of "asking," because you receive healing if that is what you *ask for* (1:3). The words you use have nothing to do with it; what matters is "the prayer of the heart" (1:4). Your words may sometimes contradict the heart's prayer, and may sometimes express it clearly. It doesn't matter if the prayer of the heart is pure (1:5–6). You need not concern yourself with getting the words "just right." If, in your heart, you have a pure desire for healing, you will be healed. Yet, even so, the healing may not show up exactly as you expect it to. For instance, consider these words from early in the Text:

"When the ego tempts you to sickness, do not ask the Holy Spirit to heal the body, for this would merely be to accept the ego's belief that the body is the proper aim for healing. Ask, rather, that the Holy Spirit teach you the right perception of the body, for perception alone can be distorted. Only perception can be sick, because only perception can be wrong" (T-8.VIII.2:1-3 (CE), T-8.IX.1:5-7 (FIP)).

That passage says quite clearly that our prayer for healing should *not* ask for healing of the body! It is the mind that needs healing; specifically, the mind's perception of the body.

The body cannot heal, because it cannot make itself sick. It needs no healing. Its health or sickness depends entirely on how the mind perceives it, and the purpose that the mind would use it for. (T-19.I.3:1–4(CE))

We can conclude, then, that a true prayer of the heart for healing is the earnest desire to use our bodies only for God's purposes.

When Jesus says that "God does not understand words" (1:7), we may be startled. Perhaps you think, "I understand words; how can God fail to understand them?" The Manual says that our separated minds made words to keep us in the illusion of separation. We have a word for one thing, "dog," perhaps, and another for something else, perhaps "child." The words establish that these two things are separate and distinct. In reality, they are not separate nor different; all things are part of the One. Everyone has a different name, but everyone is a part of me, and I a part of them. The words help the illusion of separation to persist.

You live by symbols. You have made up names for everything you see. Each one becomes a separate entity, identified by its own name. By this you carve it out of unity. By this you designate its special attributes, and set it off from other things by emphasizing space surrounding it. This space you lay between all things to which you give a different name, all happenings in terms of place and time, all bodies which are greeted with a name.

This space you see as setting off all things from one another is the means by which the world's perception is achieved. You see something where nothing is, and see as well nothing where there is unity; a space between all things, and

between all things and you. Thus do you think that you are given life in separation. By this split you think you are established as a unity which functions with an independent will. (W-184.1:1-2:4 (CE)).

Despite their origin in the ego, words can be helpful in prayer. Using words that align with the truth can help us concentrate and avoid “extraneous” thoughts (1:8). We don’t need to *avoid* the use of words; that would not be a productive practice if it is even possible for most people. So use words, but use them carefully, without worrying about getting the words “just right.” Words are just symbols of concepts or ideas, and our concepts and ideas are, in turn, symbols of invisible realities (1:9–10). The following paragraph will expand on this thought and clarify it for us. For now, just remember that this refers to the use of words in prayer.

One thing these last two sentences do *not* mean is that we don’t have to pay close attention to the words of the Course because “they are just symbols of symbols.” This paragraph has talked about the words *we speak*, not the words we read or listen to. We need to pay *very* close attention to the words of the Course, and we should try to the best of our ability to understand exactly and completely what they say. That’s what my commentaries are all about. It isn’t enough just to “let the words wash over you” and let your feelings tell you what they mean. Many mistaken interpretations have resulted from that kind of reading. You need to stop and think about the words. Notice their context and how often the meaning of puzzling words can become clear by noticing what came just before or just after. We are about to do just that as we move on to Paragraph 2. The context of this section is our prayers, not study, and a looser use of words is proper when interpreting. Although this chapter focuses on healing prayers, this section’s observations apply to all prayers, not just prayers for healing.

## Paragraph 2

2 As symbols, words have quite specific references. 2Even when they seem most abstract, the picture which comes to mind is apt to be very concrete. 3Unless a specific referent does occur to the mind in conjunction with a word, the word has little or no practical meaning and thus cannot help the healing process. 4The prayer of the heart does not really ask for concrete things. 5It always requests some kind of experience, the specific things asked for being the bringers of the desired experiences in the judgment of the asker. 6The words, then, are symbols for the things asked for, but the things themselves but stand for the experiences which are hoped for.<sup>5</sup>

Recall that now that we are speaking about words *you use* in prayer, not the words of the Course. When it speaks here of “specific references” that words have (2:1), it refers to what comes to your mind as you speak a word. When you ask for healing, for example, you have a *mental picture* of what healing means for you. It might be a picture of a

<sup>5</sup>This seems to be the explanation of the first paragraph’s statement that “words are but symbols of symbols.” First, words symbolize the *thing* asked for (in prayer). Second, the thing asked for symbolizes the *experience* that one hopes it will bring.

functioning limb, ease of breathing, or absence of pain, but there is always some specific, concrete thing related to the words you use, even when the word seems quite abstract (2:2). For instance, “prosperity” is a very general, abstract term, yet if we pray for prosperity, we almost always have something specific in mind. It might be having all your bills paid up to date. It could be a new car or computer. And so on.

Having specific referents is not a bad thing; in fact, they are good and useful. Jesus says that without them, “the word has little or no practical meaning and thus cannot help the healing process” (2:3). Teachers who speak about the power of the mind often emphasize that having a clear mental picture of what you want helps manifest it.

Yet, the Manual goes on to say, “The prayer of the heart does not ask for concrete things” (2:4). This can be confusing. The prayer of the heart is what matters, yet words are helpful. They always refer to concrete things, but that’s not what the heart’s prayer asks for. The heart always asks for “some kind of experience” (2:5).

What good are the words that refer to concrete things, then? They can focus our prayers. The objects we pray for are, in reality, just symbols to us for the experience we crave (2:5). So we can expand the “symbols of symbols” line in the last paragraph like this: Words are symbols of tangible things, but those tangible things are not what we want; they symbolize the *experience* we want (2:6). The experience is the reality we crave—rightly or wrongly. The experience we seek is desirable *in our opinion* (2:5). We can misdirect even this deeper desire. We need assistance in our prayers.

### Paragraph 3

**3** The prayer for things of this world will bring experiences of this world. <sup>2</sup>If the prayer of the heart asks for this, this will be given because this will be received. <sup>3</sup>It is impossible that the prayer of the heart remain unanswered in the perception of the one who asks. <sup>4</sup>If he asks for the impossible, if he wants what does not exist or seeks for illusions in his heart, all this becomes his own. <sup>5</sup>The power of his decision offers it to him as he requests. <sup>6</sup>Herein lie hell and Heaven. <sup>7</sup>The sleeping Son of God has but this power left to him. <sup>8</sup>It is enough. <sup>9</sup>His words do not matter. <sup>10</sup>Only the Word of God has any meaning, because it symbolizes that which has no human symbols at all. <sup>11</sup>The Holy Spirit alone understands what this Word stands for. <sup>12</sup>And this, too, is enough.

If we pray for things of this world, we will get *experiences* of this world (3:1). Prayers arising from such limited vision still work! If the experiences of the world are what you want in your heart, that’s what you will get (3:2). Prayers of the heart are always answered (3:3). When what you ask for does not exist, you will receive illusions because you ask for illusions (3:4). Your decision has the power to deliver to you whatever you request (3:5). It can bring you Heaven, or it can bring you hell (3:6). Our problem isn’t unanswered prayer. Our problem is that we’ve been praying for the wrong things. Our hearts desire all kinds of possession, situations, or events here in the world. Perhaps without realizing it, we are asking for something that does not exist. We’re

asking for a world that makes us happy, and the world will never do that. We've been longing for an illusion.

The power of decision is the only power left to us, asleep in our dream (3:7). As we've been using it, it brings us hell. Yet this same "power of decision" can bring us Heaven. When Jesus says our power of decision is enough (3:8), that's what he means: It can give us Heaven, even if we do not understand what Heaven is. The words we use in deciding for Heaven "do not matter" (3:9). What matters is the Word of the Holy Spirit, for which He alone understands what it symbolizes—which I understand is a reference to the Ultimate Reality, the spiritual realm for which we have no referent. His Word means nothing to us because we do not know what it refers to (3:10-11). We must allow the Holy Spirit to decide for God for us (T-5.VII.6:10-11 (FIP)). That is all we need; it is enough (3:12).

## Paragraph 4

**4** Is the teacher of God then to avoid the use of words in his teaching?<sup>6</sup>  
<sup>2</sup>No indeed. <sup>3</sup>There are many who must be reached through words, being as yet unable to hear in silence. <sup>4</sup>The teacher of God must, however, learn to use words in a new way. <sup>5</sup>Gradually he learns how to let his words be chosen for him by ceasing to decide for himself what he will say. <sup>6</sup>This process is merely a special case of the lesson in the workbook which says, "I will step back and let Him lead the way."<sup>7</sup> <sup>7</sup>The teacher of God accepts the words which are offered him and gives as he receives. <sup>8</sup>He does not control the direction of his speaking. <sup>9</sup>He listens and hears and speaks.

So, should we avoid using words when communicating with a pupil? Is that even possible? (The answer to my skeptical question is "Yes," as we'll see.) So, avoid words? Of course not! **(4:1-2)** Some people may already be able to "hear in silence," but many people can only be reached through words **(4:3)**.

Before we go on to hear how we can "learn to use words in a new way" **(4:4)**, let's speculate a bit about how anyone can hear in silence. I've had a couple of experiences that give me some clues. Both of them involved one-on-one meditation. The first experience was one I've written about more than once. It was a rebirthing session with a trained rebirther, one of my first such times. As I understand it, while a person attempts to open hidden areas of their subconscious, the rebirther attempts to impart a sense of peace and safety to them. The hidden memories may include things as far back as experiences

<sup>6</sup> It may seem that the topic of the section has switched here, from using words to pray for *healing* for someone to using words to *teach* someone. The "teaching" referred to here, however, is in response to someone's "presented problem" (5:3). A *presenting problem* is the initial symptom for which a person seeks help from a doctor or therapist. The overall situation in this section, therefore, seems to be this: Someone is seeking healing from a teacher of God for a particular problem (probably a health issue), and to help the patient heal this problem, the teacher prays for healing and/or offers teaching.

<sup>7</sup> This is Lesson 155.

in the womb or during birth (hence the name of the process). The process usually begins with a few words of instruction about breathing but continues for nearly an hour in silence. During such a time of silence, I had one of the most memorable spiritual experiences of my life, that of losing awareness of any separation between myself and the rebirther. It was an awareness of Oneness, of our reality as Love, and the eternal Now of it all.

The second experience was not so deep but just as dramatic for me. It consisted of one person simply lying down (face up or down, or on their side), closing their eyes, and relaxing or meditating. The other person puts one hand on the other's abdomen or back and, sensing the other person's breathing through that hand, tries to synchronize their breathing to that of the other person. It sounds simple, but it's not. It takes a great deal of focus on the other person. When you achieve synchronization of the breath, something similar to my experience in rebirthing happens. Some of the sense of separation from the other person, or all of it, falls away. I was doing this with my spiritual partner and girlfriend, Lynne. For me, the experience also included a profound feeling of love for her.

I don't think I was particularly advanced spiritually at the time. Both exercises were *designed* to produce an experience, and I underwent them *expecting* a special experience of some kind, so it's no surprise that I had one. The synchronized breathing was presented at a weekend workshop on death with Stephen and Ondrea Levine, experienced and profound meditation teachers. I imagine they developed or chose it precisely because it works with many people. If you can find a loving partner to try it with, I recommend it.

As I said, those two exercises can give clues about the kind of silent communication Jesus refers to here. The Course teaches that the natural state of our minds is one of perfect communication with one another, mind to mind. Only our desire to keep our thoughts to ourselves prevents it. (See **T-15.IV.6-8**.)

So, then, we as teachers of God have to learn to use words in a new way (**4:4**). In a sense, using words is a second-class method of communication, while hearing in silence offers the most profound and effective type of communication. Most people, however, are not ready for that. Words are necessary, but healing calls for a higher level of verbal communication. We must learn to stop deciding for ourselves what we will say (**4:5**)! Instead, we learn to allow the words to be chosen for us by the Holy Spirit. Learning this is a gradual process, so if we attempt to impart healing or spiritual teaching, we can expect to mess things up fairly often at first.

I am reminded of the lesson in the Workbook that says, "I will step back and let Him lead the way." Learning to let the Holy Spirit choose our words is just a special instance of that general practice of stepping back and opening to inner guidance, a practice meant to characterize our entire lives. (**4:6**). We learn to first listen until we hear, and *then* speak (**4:9**). We are willing to give up our control of the direction our words take (**4:8**). We accept the words given inwardly and give only what we receive (**4:7**). This is not an easy lesson to learn, nor an easy skill to develop. Jesus told us that hearing *only* this Voice was the final lesson he learned (**T-5.II.3:9-11 (FIP)**, **T-5.II.12:1-3 (CE)**). Even so, it's something we should all be paying attention to. It means consciously giving up the idea

that we are in control of our speaking (4:8). Before we speak, we listen until we hear something—inwardly, not with our ears, of course (4:9).

The following quotation from Joel Goldsmith, author of *The Infinite Way* and many other spiritual books, gives his account of what it means to listen, hear, and speak:

The safest course for an Infinite Way student to follow is to admit freely that he does not know how to pray, how to go out or come in, or what to pray for, and then open himself in receptivity to that still small Voice which is within, closer than breathing, and let It pray through him, let It utter Its voice, let It have Its way. If you are praying for someone else, let It inform you, let It inform your patient or your student.

Do not try to be Omniscience yourself in your praying, because you can be Omniscience only when you are completely absent from the personal sense of self, when you are absent from any knowledge, when you have attained that place of unknowing in which you definitely know that you do not know, and do not even want to know, but are willing and open to receive spiritual wisdom, spiritual guidance, spiritual strength.

When you are praying or meditating for someone else, do not try to transfer thoughts to him, do not try to know what is right for him or best for him, but sit in a state of complete receptivity, and then let the Father function as your consciousness. You may not receive any message for your patient or student, but you do not need any. He will receive it, and he will receive it not from you, but from the Source of you. Your consciousness acts only as the instrument of contact, and you yourself may never know what the message is, or even whether any message has been received.

(Joel Goldsmith, *The Art of Spiritual Healing*)

I think that expresses it just perfectly!

## Paragraph 5

5 A major hindrance in this aspect of his learning is the teacher's fear about the validity of what he hears. <sup>2</sup>And what he hears may indeed be quite startling. <sup>3</sup>It may also seem to be quite irrelevant to the presented problem as he perceives it, and may, in fact, confront the teacher with a situation that appears to be very embarrassing to him. <sup>4</sup>All these are judgments which have no value. <sup>5</sup>They are his own, coming from a shabby self-perception which he would leave behind. <sup>6</sup>Judge not the words that come to you,<sup>8</sup> but offer them in confidence. <sup>7</sup>They are far wiser than your own. <sup>8</sup>God's teachers have God's Word behind their symbols. <sup>9</sup>And He Himself gives to the words they use the power of His Spirit, raising them from meaningless symbols to the call of Heaven itself.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 7:1 (KJV): "Judge not, that ye be not judged."

Jesus seems to know that we will have difficulty with “this aspect of [our] learning.” He warns us that we will be afraid about the validity of what we hear **(5:1)**. What we hear “may indeed be quite startling” **(5:2)** and even “quite irrelevant to the presented problem as [we perceive] it” **(5:3)**. We may even feel led to say something that would be personally embarrassing! What we “hear” may seem to be completely off-topic. That’s because we do not have access to all the information the Holy Spirit can access. Remember what we read in Chapter 10:

”In order to judge anything rightly, one would have to be fully aware of an inconceivably wide range of things; past, present, and to come. One would have to recognize in advance all the effects of his judgments on everyone and everything involved in them in any way. And one would have to be certain there is no distortion in his perception, so that his judgment would be wholly fair to everyone on whom it rests now and in the future. Who is in a position to do this? Who except in grandiose fantasies would claim this for himself” **(M-10:3-7 (FIP))**.

All that is what the Holy Spirit *does* have access to! His expanded access is why the words He gives often appear to us out of context. Our context is severely limited; His context is infinite. So be prepared to be surprised sometimes by what you hear when you begin to listen to His Voice.

Lesson 275 has some interesting advice from our brother Jesus about why we need to listen:

“Join me in hearing. For the Voice for God tells us of things we cannot understand alone, nor learn apart. It is in this that all things are protected. And in this the healing of the Voice for God is found” **(W-275.1:3-6)**.

Being startled by what we hear, judging the words as irrelevant, or fearing embarrassment if we speak them “are all judgments which have no value” **(5:4)**. They are based on your concept of yourself as an ego and are coming from the ego you want to leave behind **(5:5)**.

What sort of things might we hear? Quoting Lesson 275 again:

“For Your Voice will tell me what to do and where to go; to whom to speak and what to say to him, what thoughts to think, what words to give the world” **(W-275.2:3)** .

So, do your best not to judge the words that come to you. “Offer them in confidence” **(5:6)**. The Holy Spirit is much wiser than you are **(5:7)**, so trust Him. When you use the words the Holy Spirit gives you, what they symbolize is divine Reality **(5:8)**. They are not just words. They are the Word of God. They are more than mere “symbols of symbols.” God Himself empowers them with all the power of His Spirit so that they are not meaningless symbols but “the call of Heaven itself” **(5:9)**. They have the power to awaken others to Heaven’s Reality. As Goldsmith points out, you may never know what God’s Word was, nor do you *need* to know.



## 22. *How Are Healing and Atonement Related?*

### Overview

Healing and Atonement are *identical*. Forgiveness *is* healing. Healing is not about changing the condition of a body; it is about changing *minds*. It means seeing ourselves and others as the perfect creations of a perfect God. The world and everything in it, including our bodies, is “the outside picture of an inward condition” (T-21.I.1:4 (CE), T-21.Int.1:5 (FIP)). Our reality is something quite different from the world of bodies. The section really concerns the relationship between *extending* healing and *accepting* the Atonement. To offer healing to another, we must accept Atonement for ourselves.

### Paragraph 1

Healing and Atonement are not related; they are identical. <sup>2</sup>There is no order of difficulty in miracles because there are no degrees of Atonement. <sup>3</sup>It is the one complete concept possible in this world, because it is the source of a wholly unified perception. <sup>4</sup>Partial Atonement is a meaningless idea, just as special areas of hell in Heaven are inconceivable. <sup>5</sup>Accept Atonement and you are healed. <sup>6</sup>Atonement is the Word of God. <sup>7</sup>Accept His Word, and what remains to make sickness possible? <sup>8</sup>Accept His Word, and every miracle has been accomplished. <sup>9</sup>To forgive is to heal. <sup>10</sup>The teacher of God has taken accepting the Atonement for himself as his only function. <sup>9</sup> <sup>11</sup>What is there, then, he cannot heal? <sup>12</sup>What miracle can be withheld from him?

We begin with the complete answer to the question this chapter deals with: Healing and Atonement are *identical* (1:1). Everything that follows explains in detail what that means and why it is so. Referring to healings as miracles, he tells us there is no order of difficulty in healing miracles because there are no degrees of Atonement (1:2). How could there be if Atonement means being *at one* with God? Either you and God are one, or you are two. Either you and God are joined, or you're not. There are no degrees of oneness; All is One:

“You are God's Son, one Self, with one Creator and one goal; to bring awareness of this oneness to all minds, that true creation may extend the Allness and the Unity of God” (W-pl.95.12:2 (FIP)).

<sup>9</sup> T-2.VIII.5:1: “The sole responsibility of the miracle worker is to accept Atonement himself.” This entire section can be seen as a reaffirmation of and expansion on this statement from the Text.

“Let me remember I am one with God, at one with all my brothers and my Self, in everlasting holiness and peace” (**W-pl.124.12:2 (FIP)**).

“If you believe that all of the minds that God created are His Sons, and if you also believe that the Sonship is one, then every mind must be a Son of God, or an integral part of the Sonship” (**T-2.XII.7:2 (CE)**).

“God has but one Son, knowing them all as one” (**T-9.VI.3:5 (CE)**).

“There is one miracle, as there is one reality. And every miracle you do contains them all, as every aspect of reality you see blends quietly into the one reality of God” (**T-13.IX.13:3-4 (CE)**).

This is the gist of the Word of God we hear and must accept. Lesson 276 gives a reasonably clear definition:

What is the Word of God? “My Son is pure and holy as Myself.” And thus did God become the Father of the Son He loves, for thus was he created. This the Word His Son did not create with Him, because in this His Son was born. Let us accept His Fatherhood, and all is given us. Deny we were created in His Love and we deny our Self, to be unsure of who we are, of Who our Father is, and for what purpose we have come. And yet, we need but to acknowledge Him Who gave His Word to us in our creation, to remember Him and so recall our Self.

*Father, Your Word is mine. And it is this that I would speak to all my brothers, who are given me to cherish as my own, as I am loved and blessed and saved by You.”*  
(**W-276.2:1-2** ).

The words we hear will express that truth in some form. As has been said, we may be surprised, shocked, or embarrassed by the specific words He gives us to speak, but the message they will always communicate to the other person is that because they are a child of God, they are as pure and holy as God Himself. They will affirm our mutual Oneness with one another and with God.

There is only one of us here! There is only one miracle! That is At-one-ment. So how could any healing be more difficult than any other? They are all one and consist in our recognition of our Oneness with “the one reality of God.” Atonement is “the source of a wholly unified perception,” perceiving that all is Oneness. Atonement is “the one complete concept possible in this world” because it brings this unified perception (**1:3**).

“Partial Atonement is a meaningless idea” (**1:4**). As I said above, either all is One, or it isn't; nothing in between is possible. It's as meaningless as the notion that Heaven contains special areas of hell (**1:4**). Therefore, if you accept Atonement, you are healed (**1:5**). Period. Only what God creates is real, and God did not create sickness. Myrtle Fillmore, diagnosed with tuberculosis and given a prediction of impending death, repeatedly declared, “I am a child of God. I cannot inherit sickness.” And she was healed. There is no sickness in the Oneness, so if you accept the Oneness, you are healed.

The Word of God (that which He speaks to our quiet mind, and to those who come to us for help and healing) is Atonement, the truth that we are one with God (**1:6**). Accept

that, and you have excluded everything that makes sickness seem possible (1:7). *Every* miracle happens in that act of acceptance (1:8)!

## Paragraph 2

<sup>2</sup> The progress of the teacher may be slow or rapid, depending on whether he recognizes the Atonement's inclusiveness or for a time excludes some problem areas from it. <sup>2</sup>In some cases, there is a sudden and complete awareness of the perfect applicability of the lesson of the Atonement to all situations, but this is comparatively rare. <sup>3</sup>The teacher of God may have accepted the function God has given him long before he has learned all that his acceptance holds out to him. <sup>4</sup>It is only the end that is certain. <sup>5</sup>Anywhere along the way the necessary realization of inclusiveness may reach him. <sup>6</sup>If the way seems long, let him be content. <sup>7</sup>He has decided on the direction he wants to take. <sup>8</sup>What more was asked of him? <sup>9</sup>And having done what was required of him, would God withhold the rest?

As our collective experiences demonstrate, our acceptance of the Atonement can be only partial, slowing our progress and probably delaying our healing. We may not recognize how all-inclusive the Atonement is, or we may deliberately or unintentionally “exclude some problem areas from it” (2:1). The more complete our acceptance, the more rapid our progress. A few rare individuals may become aware of how perfectly the Atonement applies to all situations and experience total enlightenment and healing (2:2). But such total acceptance is unusual. I've been aware of people who seem to have experienced instant healing or an amazingly clear revelation of truth but have not seen Atonement's applicability to their interpersonal relationships or other major areas of life. Such blind spots are more common than we would wish.

Jesus singles out teachers of God as a prominent example of partial acceptance (2:3). We may realize He has called us to be teachers and yet not realize how applicable the Atonement is to all areas of our lives. Generalizing the Atonement to *everything* may take a long time. The speed of our progress varies greatly; “Only the end—is certain” (2:4). The realization “of inclusiveness” can occur anywhere along our journey (2:5). It can come early in life or late in life. If for you, it seems to be taking a very long time to “happen” for you, “be content” (2:6). Remember what the Text said about being a “happy learner” (see T-14.II and the following):

“Be you content with healing” (T-13.IX.7:1 (CE), T-13.VIII.7:1 (FIP)).

All that the Course asks of you is to choose the direction you want to take: toward God, toward Heaven (2:7–8). “God is the only goal I have today” (W-256). If you've made that choice, it doesn't matter how long it takes. Time is just an illusion. You are engaged in the learning process, and that's enough! Be content that healing is happening. No way will God withhold the final reward if you've made that choice (2:9). And the outcome is as certain as God (T-2.III.3:10 (FIP), T-2.VI.8:7 (CE)).

## Paragraph 3

**3** That forgiveness is healing needs to be understood if the teacher of God is to make progress. <sup>2</sup>The idea that a body can be sick is a central concept in the ego's thought system.<sup>10</sup> <sup>3</sup>This thought gives the body autonomy, separates it from the mind, and keeps the idea of attack inviolate.<sup>11</sup> <sup>4</sup>If the body could be sick, Atonement would be impossible. <sup>5</sup>A body that can order a mind to do as it sees fit could merely take the place of God and prove salvation is impossible. <sup>6</sup>What then is left to heal? <sup>7</sup>The body has become lord of the mind. <sup>8</sup>How could the mind be returned to the Holy Spirit unless the body is killed? <sup>9</sup>And who would want salvation at such a price?

Look back at 1:1: Healing and Atonement are identical. Now we are told that “forgiveness is healing” **(3:1)**. So we could diagram it like this:

Healing = Atonement = Forgiveness

All three words are symbols pointing ultimately to the same thing! I was recently struck by how forgiveness and Atonement are the same as I read over the commentary on Lesson 265 that I wrote years ago. (You can find it on my website or the Circle of Atonement's site.) In that commentary, I cited a passage from the Song of Prayer that makes a clear connection between forgiveness and the recognition of our Oneness, i.e., the Atonement.

It is impossible to forgive another, for it is only your own sins you see in him. You want to see them there, and not in you. That is why the forgiveness of another is an illusion....Only in someone else can you forgive yourself, for you have called him guilty of your sins, and in him must your innocence now be found. Who but the sinful need to be forgiven? And do not ever think you can see sin in anyone except yourself” **(S-2.1.4:2-8)**.

The line, “Only in someone else can you forgive yourself,” is particularly striking, as is, “Do not ever think that you can see sin in anyone except yourself.” To experience forgiveness, we must recognize that we are not separate beings; we are the One Son of God and must forgive the Son of God as One.

But I digress! The emphasis here is on the equivalence between forgiveness and *healing*. We must recognize that equivalence to make any progress as teachers of God attempting to experience healing or offer healing. **(3:1)**. Let's recall that in the context of this chapter, “progress” refers to progressively recognizing that the Atonement applies to

<sup>10</sup> This means “the idea that a body can be sick” *on its own*, as a result of physical causes, rather than as a projection of the mind's sickness.

<sup>11</sup> If the body is seen as getting sick entirely on its own, independent of the mind, then the *real* cause of sickness—our attack on others (which leads us to attack ourselves with sickness)—becomes a nonissue. Our attack thus becomes safe from challenge—“inviolable.”

all situations (2:1–2). So what is being discussed here is how Atonement applies to the sickness of the body. To forgive is to heal. That's what we must understand.

The belief that sickness belongs to the body is a core component in the ego's thought system. (3:2). It is another aspect of our belief in separateness rather than Oneness. It separates the body from the mind., and it is the mind that is ultimately responsible for sickness (3:3). We project our self-attack (our unforgiveness of ourselves) onto our bodies, seeing them as attacking and controlling us. Healing comes only from forgiving ourselves completely. The Text made this point very strongly:

“When the ego tempts you to sickness do not ask the Holy Spirit to heal the body, for this would merely be to accept the ego's belief that the body is the proper aim of healing. Ask, rather, that the Holy Spirit teach you the right perception of the body, for perception alone can be distorted. Only perception can be sick, because only perception can be wrong.”  
(T-8.IX.1:5–7 (FIP), T-8.VIII.2:–3 (CE))

“The body needs no healing. But the mind that thinks it is a body is sick indeed!” (T-25.Int.3:1–3 (FIP), T-25.I.3:1 (CE))

If the body could be sick apart from the mind—getting sick on its own—the Course says Atonement would be impossible. Why? Because it means the body is in control, not the mind. But the body does not think it is separate; the mind thinks that. It is the mind that needs Atonement, but if a sick body can order the mind to suffer (3:5); the body is “lord of the mind” (3:7). It has taken the place of God (3:6). If that were the situation, how could the mind ever be healed? How could you be “saved” from separation? (3:6). You would need to split your mind off from your body—which means you have to *kill* your body (3:8). That would make salvation highly undesirable (3:9). I suspect that is precisely the ego's plan!

The Course asks us to accept that the mind is in control, not the body. That must mean that the mind is *choosing* to be sick! Ouch! Seems like bad news, guilt-inducing news. But it's not; it means the mind is in charge and can choose differently. It can accept the Atonement for itself.

## Paragraph 4

4 Certainly sickness does not appear to be a decision. <sup>2</sup>Nor would anyone actually believe he wants to be sick. <sup>3</sup>Perhaps he can accept the idea in theory, but it is rarely if ever consistently applied to all specific forms of sickness both in the individual's perception of himself and of all others as well. <sup>4</sup>Nor is it at this level that the teacher of God calls forth the miracle of healing.<sup>12</sup> <sup>5</sup>He overlooks the mind *and* body, seeing only the face of Christ shining in front of him, correcting all mistakes and healing all perception.<sup>13</sup> <sup>6</sup>Healing is the result of the recognition by God's teacher of Who it is that is in need of healing.<sup>14</sup> <sup>7</sup>This recognition has no special reference. <sup>8</sup>It is true of all things that God created. <sup>9</sup>In it are all illusions healed.

So, it doesn't seem apparent that sickness is a decision (4:1). Sickness *seems* to come upon us whether or not we want it. We are at the mercy of the body, or so it seems. We find it difficult to believe that we *want* to be sick (4:2) Face it! What the Course is saying here is darn hard for us to believe. Maybe we can follow its logic and "accept the idea in theory," but we get sick anyway, and we still see others getting sick, helpless to control their bodies. We continue to see a world of separation. and attack (4:3). We can neither accept nor give the miracle of healing.

As we saw in the quote from Chapter 8, we aren't supposed to ask the Holy Spirit to heal the *body*. That's not the level to operate on if we want to call forth healing (4:4)! Instead, we must "overlook the mind *and* the body, seeing only the face of Christ shining in front of [us]" (4:5). Let's unpack that a bit because it boils down to a few words the mental process of extending healing to someone .

We must "overlook" both the mind and the body of the person presenting us with the appearance of sickness. *Both*. If we look past the condition of their body but retain a judgmental thought about their thinking, wondering, "What is wrong with their thinking that is causing this illness?" we have not fulfilled the requirements for giving healing. To overlook something is not to see it, not to notice it. We don't notice the condition of their body. We don't notice what they may think, which is often revealed to us by what they are *saying*. We overlook that as well. We pay no attention to it. It is irrelevant to us. We overlook their "sin," their mind's decision to be sick, and the result in their body that seems to prove that "sin" is real. We deny the reality of both. Instead, we see the face of Christ shining in front of us, radiating from this person. We forgive the patient for being sick, and we forgive ourselves for judging them for it. Forgiveness enables us to see their

<sup>12</sup> In other words, realizing that your patient has made a *decision* to be sick, however true that is, is not what calls forth the miracle that heals him.

<sup>13</sup> In other words, the teacher of God overlooks the patient's sick body *and* sick mind. He sees past both to Who the patient really is: the Christ. The image of the face of Christ "shining" originally appears in "The Obstacles to Peace," where His face is described as "shining with joy because He is in His Father's love" and beaming with "the bright rays of His Father's love which light His face with glory" (T-19.IV.D.2:2-3).

<sup>14</sup> This seems to mean that healing results from seeing Who the patient (the one "in need of healing") *really* is. He is the Christ, in Whom all healing lies. The next two sentences above explain that this exalted identity is not limited to the patient, but is "true of all things that God created."

true Identity as Christ. We realize that the Person who needs healing is the Son of God, and in that recognition, healing happens (4:6).

Recognizing Christ isn't related to anything about the people to whom we bring healing. It has "no special reference," as all words do, because "It is true of all things that God created" (4:7). The recognition that we perceive the Son of God heals *all* illusions (4:8). This universal applicability is what the Course was talking about back in Chapter 1 of the Text when it said miracles were "impersonal":

"The impersonal nature of miracles is because the Atonement itself is one, uniting all creations with their Creator" (T-I.III.7:3 (FIP)). "The impersonal nature of miracles is because the Atonement itself is one. By being one, it unites all creations with their Creator" (T-I.44:1-2 (CE)).

We may be working with a particular individual, but the healing comes in overlooking the separate individual to perceive the Universal Christ.

## Paragraph 5

5 When a teacher of God fails to heal, it is because he has forgotten Who he is.<sup>15</sup> <sup>2</sup>Another's sickness thus becomes his own. <sup>3</sup>In allowing this to happen, he has identified with another's ego and has thus confused him with a body. <sup>4</sup>In so doing, he has refused to accept Atonement for himself, and can hardly offer it to his brother in Christ's Name. <sup>5</sup>He will, in fact, be unable to recognize his brother at all, for his Father did not create bodies, and so he is seeing in his brother only the unreal. <sup>6</sup>Mistakes do not correct mistakes, and distorted perception does not heal. <sup>7</sup>Step back now, teacher of God. <sup>8</sup>You have been wrong. <sup>9</sup>Lead not the way, for you have lost it. <sup>10</sup>Turn quickly to your Teacher and let yourself be healed.

What may seem surprising at first is that failure to heal results from the healer forgetting who *he or she* is, not in forgetting who the *patient* is (5:1). The Universal Christ is our shared Identity. We cannot perceive It in anyone without perceiving It in everyone. Forgetting who we are allows the patient's sickness to become *our* sickness (5:2). We identify with the ego of the other person and confuse them with their body instead of identifying with them as Christ (5:3). Doing so is to refuse to accept Atonement for ourselves, making it impossible to offer Atonement to the other (5:4). We are equating ourselves and the other person with our egos and bodies instead of recognizing our mutual union with the One. The Course says our only responsibility is to accept the Atonement for ourselves. That brings healing to everyone because accepting Atonement for ourselves *includes* accepting it for everyone. Accepting Atonement is to accept the One Christ as all there is, all that is real.

When we fail to accept the Atonement for ourselves, we cannot recognize the truth in our brother, sister, or anyone else. We will see separate bodies instead of the One Self. We

<sup>15</sup> Based on the rest of this paragraph, the cause-and-effect sequence seems to be this: The teacher first forgets that he is the Christ, identifying instead with his body and ego. This then leads him to identify with his patient's body and ego ("Another's sickness thus becomes his own"). As a result, he fails to recognize that the *patient* is the Christ and is thus unable to bring healing to him.

will see what is not real because “the Father did not create bodies” (5:5). We cannot correct a mistake in another’s thought by making a mistake of our own (5:6).

When we catch ourselves in such a mistake we need to “step back” (5:7). Do not try to “lead...the way”; we have *lost* our way and need to heal ourselves before we can go any further (5:9-10).

As always, the solution is to pay attention to our own minds. The Manual emphasizes this: When something isn’t going right in offering a miracle, look to *your* mind for the cause, not to something in the other person or the circumstances. All we *ever* need to do is accept the Atonement for ourselves. It’s our “sole responsibility.”

## Paragraph 6

6 The offer of Atonement is universal. <sup>2</sup>It is equally applicable to all individuals in all circumstances. <sup>3</sup>And in it is the power to heal all individuals of all forms of sickness. <sup>4</sup>Not to believe this is to be unfair to God, and thus unfaithful to Him. <sup>5</sup>A sick person perceives himself as separate from God. <sup>6</sup>Would you see him as separate from you? <sup>7</sup>It is your task to heal the sense of separation that has made him sick. <sup>8</sup>It is your function to recognize for him that what he believes about himself is not the truth. <sup>9</sup>It is your forgiveness that must show him this. <sup>10</sup>Healing is very simple. <sup>11</sup>Atonement is received and offered. <sup>12</sup>Having been received, it must be offered and accepted. <sup>13</sup>It is in the receiving, then, that healing lies. <sup>14</sup>All else must follow from this single purpose.<sup>16</sup>

“The offer of Atonement is universal” (6:1). Quite openly, the Course teaches universal salvation. God offers Atonement to everyone, “all individuals in all circumstances” (4:2) without regard to anything like acceptance of certain beliefs about Jesus or adherence to certain rules of behavior. (Remember that Atonement = forgiveness = healing.) If Atonement is offered universally, it means that forgiveness and healing are also offered universally. Universal healing means that all individuals can be healed of “all forms of sickness” (6:3).

Atonement, at-one-ment, means that we are one with God, pure and holy as Himself, and we usually don’t realize there is more in it. How can the message that you are one with God bring about universal healing? The message heals because “A sick person perceives himself as separate from God” (6:5). Consider: If you are one with God, how could you possibly be sick? (Now, don’t understand this in reverse and tell yourself, “I’m sick so I cannot be one with God.” No, no! You are one with God and cannot, therefore, be sick!)

<sup>16</sup> With this paragraph, we have a fuller answer to this section’s opening question (“How are healing and Atonement related?”). By accepting Atonement, you receive “the power to heal all individuals of all forms of sickness” (6:3). Once you receive this power, you *will* offer it to others. And once you offer it to them, they will accept it, which means they *will* be healed. The crucial part, then, is the first part—to receive Atonement yourself—for once that occurs, the rest will inevitably follow. In short, once you *accept* Atonement, you will *give* healing.



So, when we encounter a sick person, we should realize they are sick because they believe they are separate from God. They are not; they are one with God. So are you. How can you see the sick person as separate from you if you are both one with God? **(6:6)**. The healer's job is to "heal the sense of separation that has made him sick" **(6:7)**. How can we do that? On the other person's behalf, recognize that his sense of separation is not the truth **(6:8)**. The means for showing the other person that they are still one with God is *our forgiveness of them* **(6:9)**. This is what makes healing "simple" **(6:10)**. (Do you see here how Atonement, forgiveness, and healing are operative all together?) We do not judge the other person as somehow flawed because they are sick. We accept their oneness with God and with us. We accept it *for them*.

When we are ministering to a sick person, therefore, our task is "to heal the sense of separation that has made him sick" **(6:7)**. We do when we recognize the truth of their Identity in Christ, their oneness with God and with us, and their total innocence. We do not judge them or condemn them in any way. We forgive them. We see them as a part of ourselves. To do this requires us to forgive ourselves simultaneously, see *our Oneness with God*, and so on. As the Text, Chapter 8 told us:

"As you see him you will see yourself. As you treat him you will treat yourself. As you think of him you will think of yourself. Never forget this, for in him you will find yourself or lose yourself. Whenever two Sons of God meet, they are given another chance at salvation. Do not leave anyone without giving salvation to him and receiving it yourself. For I am always there with you, in remembrance of you." **(T-8.III.4:2-8)**.

The Text then told us to practice this whenever we encountered anyone. So this isn't limited to a special healing session; it's something we are meant to do all day, every day! Jesus must have done this because as he walked around Galilee, people were getting healed left and right. It's what he expected his disciples to do as well:

*"Luke 9:1 Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, Luke 9:2 and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal."* (Luke 9:1-2 [NRSV](#))

*"They departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere."* (Luke 9:6 [NRSV](#))

So, we receive healing and we offer it **(6:11)**. If we accept Atonement for ourselves, it is inevitable that we offer it and that they accept it **(6:12)**. I think it's safe to say that, even when accepted, it may not be welcomed and recognized. Even Jesus could not heal those lacking in faith. But it *has* been accepted and *will* manifest, eventually. Then, there is this telling line: "It is in the receiving, then, that healing lies" **(6:13)**. Whose receiving? In Sentence 12, it is clear that *our* receiving brings about the healing, not theirs. The final line of the paragraph, "All else must follow from this single purpose," is just another way of saying what we've been told several times: "The sole responsibility of the miracle worker is to accept the Atonement for himself." Do you want to bring healing to others? Do you want to heal sickness? All you must do is accept the Atonement for yourself. Your

reception of the Atonement (=healing=forgiveness) guarantees that you will offer it to everyone you meet! We just go about like the disciples, spreading the good news!

## Paragraph 7

7 Who can limit the power of God Himself? <sup>2</sup>Who then can say who can be healed of what, and what must remain beyond God's power to forgive? <sup>3</sup>This is insanity indeed. <sup>4</sup>It is not up to God's teachers to set limits upon Him, because it is not up to them to judge His Son, and to judge His Son is to limit his Father. <sup>5</sup>Both are equally meaningless. <sup>6</sup>Yet this will not be understood until God's teacher recognizes that they are the same mistake. <sup>7</sup>Herein does he receive Atonement, for he withdraws his judgment from the Son of God, accepting him as God created him. <sup>8</sup>No longer does he stand apart from God, determining where healing should be given and where it should be withheld. <sup>9</sup>Now can he say with God, "This is my beloved Son,<sup>17</sup> created perfect and forever so."

Why are we being reminded that God's power cannot be limited (7:1)? Because that's what we have done when we fail to bring healing to every situation. We look at the other person, whether sick in body or mind, and we judge them for it. We think no healing is possible for this person. They are too sick, or too screwed up, or too guilty (7:2). Do you realize that's what you are doing when you doubt healing can happen? Limiting God in your mind? To believe that God can't heal or won't is insane (7:3). When you judge the Son of God in front of you, you are judging God (7:4). Both such judgments are "meaningless" (7:5). But they won't seem meaningless to us until we realize they are the same thing (7:6)!

It's easy to understand that we cannot tie God's hands. God is omnipotent, right? No way we can overpower God! Yet it still seems to make sense that some "awful" or "terribly sick" person is beyond God's reach. We have to realize that when we do this, we are implying that God cannot forgive them and cannot heal them, and that is just as insane as thinking we can overpower God. That recognition, that cessation of our judgment of another, is synonymous with accepting the Atonement for ourselves (7:7). Remember, as you see the other, you will see yourself. Both happen at once and, in fact, are the same thing: withdrawing judgment from the Son of God and accepting him as God created him applies at once to yourself and the other. Instead of standing back in separation from your brother or sister, you join with God in praise of His "beloved Son, created perfect and forever so" (7:8-9).

When healing of body, mind, or soul seems blocked, check your own mind. Are you judging them in some way? Are you seeing them as outside the reach of the Atonement? Are you perhaps seeing yourself in that way? Wherever judgment lies, let it go, and accept yourself and the other as the forever perfect Son of God.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 3:17 (KJV): "And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." In the above passage, this statement is no longer limited to God saying it about Jesus. Now the teacher *joins* with God in saying it about a brother (a patient) whom the teacher had formerly judged.

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase “power of decision” occurs eleven times in the Course. The words “decide” and “decision” occur a total of 387 times! The use of our power of decision is a key concept in the Course, Jesus says, “It was only my decision that gave me all power in Heaven and earth. My only gift to you is to help you make the same decision for yourself” (T-5.III.8:2-3 (CE)). “The power of decision is your one remaining freedom as a prisoner of this world. You can decide to see it right” (T-12.VII.9:1-2 (FIP)).

### 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.*