

Commentary

ACIM CE Text

T-2.VI, The Restoration of the Altar

The underlining, italics, and footnote formats are explained at the end of the commentary. Also see 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

The title of the section, *The Restoration of the Altar*, uses the term “altar” as a symbol, meant to evoke a visual image, of something that is actually invisible. In formal religions an altar is a holy place, something like a table, where worshippers offer their gifts to God. It is kind of a meeting place between God and humankind. between the divine and human realms. In the Course, the altar is something within us, the place in our minds where we meet with God and offer ourselves to God. It was created by God as a holy place, but we have defiled it and turned it into a place devoted to our egos.

The altar needs to be restored to its original holy purpose. The way that restoration can be brought about is the focus of this section.

Paragraph 1

As psychologists know, when defenses are disrupted there is a period of real disorientation, accompanied by fear, guilt, and usually vacillation between anxiety and depression. ²The process discussed here is different only in that defenses are not being disrupted but reinterpreted, even though it may be experienced as the same thing. ¹ ³In the reinterpretation of defenses, they are not disrupted, but their use for attack is lost. ⁴Since this means that they can be used only one way, they become much stronger and also much more dependable. ⁵They no longer oppose the Atonement, but greatly facilitate it.

¹ This means that reinterpretation of defenses “may be experienced” as disruption. The word “may” is important. In the Urtext Helen clarifies (and is backed up by Jesus) that we should not interpret this in a passive way, as if the experience of disorientation is inevitable, but should rather see the disorientation as a result of our own “mis-will.”

Referring once more to psychology, Jesus speaks of how we usually become disoriented, at least for a while, when our psychological defense mechanisms are disrupted (1:1). Maybe we have been using withdrawal in a negative way, cutting ourselves off from social interactions that evoke pain in us, when suddenly our circumstances change, thrusting us into regular contact with other people more than we would like. We feel disoriented, unsure of our direction, how to behave, how to proceed in the new circumstances. The result can take many forms: fear, guilt, and most often by “vacillation between anxiety and depression” (1:1).

In the process of restoring our inner temple, our improper use of defense mechanisms must be addressed, but a bit differently. Jesus does not want to *disrupt* our use of them, but to *reinterpret* them (in the ways he has indicated in Section IV) (1:2). It's likely that we will experience the reinterpretation as a disruption, at least at first, although that isn't inevitable; it's the result of our unwillingness for change. Jesus isn't disrupting our defenses or trying to make us get rid of them; he wants to change the way we use them. He needs us to stop using them as tools of attack (1:3). Re-read Section IV and it will make more sense in this context, I believe.

In the case of the example I used above, using withdrawal negatively, we are projecting the cause of our discomfort onto other people, blaming them for our uncomfortable feelings. We are attacking them. That isn't a proper use of withdrawal, which can be used positively to withdraw from the world system, to enter into the peace of God.

When we eliminate any use of defenses for attack, the only other use is to positively facilitate the Atonement in ourselves and others. They “become *much* stronger and also more dependable” (1:4–5).

Paragraph 2

2 The Atonement can only be accepted within you. ²You may perceive it largely as external, and this will make your experience of it minimal. ³You can be shown the chalice without accepting it for yourself.² ⁴This is due to the improper use of the defense of externalization.³ ⁵Do not fail to appreciate, however, how remarkable your progress can be in this respect. ⁶You may perceive the chalice at first as a vessel of some sort whose purpose is uncertain. ⁷Even then, however, you can notice that the inside is gold, while the outside, though shiny, is silver. ⁸This is a recognition of the fact that the inner part is more precious than the outer side, even though both are resplendent.

The only place you can accept the Atonement is within yourself (2:1). Perhaps you think of it in some external fashion, some visible form of forgiveness of healing. Doing

² This is the chalice of Atonement (see Cameo 3), which is a reference to the Holy Chalice, the cup Jesus used at the Last Supper, often equated with the Holy Grail.

³ In Freudian thought, “externalization” is a defense mechanism whereby we unconsciously project things that are internal to us onto the outside world. In this case, we see the chalice of Atonement, which is really within us, as outside of us, where it appears less accessible and less relevant.

so will minimize your actual *experience* of Atonement (2:2). You may, for instance, think you have gained a clear understanding of Atonement without actually accepting it for yourself (2:3).

Here again, a term from Christianity, or more properly, Christian myth, *chalice*, is used to symbolize a concept: Atonement. Particularly during the Middle Ages, Christians often believed that the cup Jesus used at the Last Supper, the last time he shared wine and bread with his disciples and told them they symbolized his body and blood, which he was sacrificing for them, was a golden chalice. It became associated with the Holy Grail of the Arthurian legends, and sometimes was viewed as having miraculous powers. The Course uses it as a symbol of the Atonement that can restore the holy purpose of the inner altar of our minds. At times, the idea of offering a chalice to another person seemed to represent, for Helen, offering forgiveness or simply extending love.

Our improper use of the defense of *externalization* can cause us to see the chalice as external rather than internal (2:4) (see footnote to 2:4). We can make remarkable progress in shifting from this externalization to recognizing the Atonement and altar as within us, and we should appreciate such progress (2:5). Sentences 6 through 8, I think, speaking of moving from a first, uncertain perception of the chalice of Atonement as some sort of vessel of uncertain purpose, through beginning to realize that the inside is more valuable than the outside, as symbolic of moving from barely recognizing the value of Atonement into a beginning realization that its true value is within us, not out in the world somewhere (although its external manifestations are also valuable, just not as much).

Paragraph 3

3 The reinterpretation of defenses is essential to break open the inner light.² Since the separation, defenses have been used almost entirely to defend yourself *against* the Atonement, and thus maintain your separation. ³You generally see this as a need to protect the body from external intrusion. ⁴Fantasies about the body arise from the erroneous belief that the body can be used as a means for obtaining Atonement.

Perhaps, as you read through Section IV, you were wondering why Jesus was wasting our time on psychological terminology. Well, this is why: Such reinterpretation is *essential* to release the divine inner light within our minds (3:1). While we have been living in separation, believing it constituted our reality, we have been using every kind of defense mechanism to defend ourselves *against* the Atonement, seeking to preserve our separate existence (3:2).

There was a verse to a hymn I learned in my Christian day that said this:

Oh, to be saved from my self, dear Lord!
Oh, to be lost in Thee!
Oh, that it may be no more I,
But Christ who lives in me

That sounds downright scary to a person who believes they are their ego and their body. It's something to defend against! "I don't want to be 'lost' in God! I don't want to be lost at all!" This is why we misuse all these defenses to fend off the Atonement. We don't *want* to be "at-one-ed" (foolishly, I might add). We want to maintain our separation.

Accepting the Atonement is closely connected with breaking open the inner light (1:1–2). You accept Atonement within yourself, which results in breaking open the inner light (1:1). The meaning of the "inner light" is not entirely clear. Lesson 88 in the Workbook refers to "the light within our minds" (W-pI.188.9:4), which is close enough that it must be the same thing. There, it seems to be God's truth in us. I believe the inner light here is identical to the "inner radiance" referred to in T-2.II.11:5 (CE), T-2.I.2:4 (FIP), where it is clearly associated with extension. So, to release the inner light would be to let God's radiance shine out from us or extend healing and miracles to others. Thus, as we accept the Atonement we release this light, and we begin offering miracles. Accepting the Atonement and offering miracles are not cause and effect, but two sides of the same coin; you can't have one without the other.

Generally, we "see this as a need to protect the body from intrusion" (3:3). This may refer to protecting ourselves from germs and such, or it may mean protecting against the intrusion of other people into our environment. Almost nobody in Portland leaves their doors unlocked (and I'm not saying we *should*, but look at what it says about us). It's revealing to look at the ways our identity with our bodies affects our behavior and our fears.

The final line (3:4) seems to be talking about finding union through physical joining as in sex. Again, seeking outside ourselves for wholeness.

Paragraph 4

4 Perceiving the body as the temple is only the first step in correcting this kind of distortion.⁴ Seeing the body as a temple alters part of the misperception, but not all of it. It *does* recognize that the concept of Atonement in physical terms is not appropriate. But the next step is to realize that a temple is not a building at all. Its real holiness lies in the inner altar around which the building is built.

Jesus has said that the inner is more precious than the outer and that the inner light is what must be broken open or released. For that, re-interpreting our defenses is essential. To perceive the body as a temple *means* to recognize that what is inside is more important than what is outside. The Apostle Paul reminds his readers that the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. That perception is merely a step in the right direction, recognizing that conceiving of Atonement in physical terms isn't appropriate (4:2–3). But, as students of the Course, we need to move beyond the idea that the Holy Spirit lives in our bodies to the realization that the "temple" isn't physical at all; it's not anything like a building. The

⁴ 1 Corinthians 6:19 (RSV): "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?"

temple lies in the inner altar (our mind's devotion to God); our bodies are just the building around the inner temple (4:4).

Paragraph 5

5 The inappropriate emphasis which people have put on beautiful church buildings is a sign of their own fear of Atonement, and an unwillingness to reach the altar itself. ²The real beauty of the temple⁵ cannot be seen with the physical eye. ³The spiritual eye, on the other hand, cannot see the building at all, but it perceives the altar within with perfect clarity. ⁴This is because the spiritual eye has perfect vision.

Historically, people have put a huge emphasis on beautiful church buildings, and still do. Many of the cathedrals of Europe took hundreds of years and thousands of laborers to be built. Building Notre Dame in Paris, for instance, took 182 years. Why have we humans put so much time, money, and effort into these buildings? The reason is not a noble one, Jesus says. It is “a sign of their own fear of Atonement, and an unwillingness to reach the altar itself” (5:1).

Our physical eyes cannot see the beauty of the real inner temple, and spiritual vision “cannot see the building at all” (5:2-3). The phrase “spiritual eye” is replaced later in the Course by the phrase “the vision of Christ.” It means the same thing. We all possess a faculty that enables us to “see” past the physical appearance of things to the truth that lies beyond them. Spiritual vision sees the inner altar “with perfect clarity” (5:4). Its perfect vision sees through or past the body to what lies within. The question then becomes, how do we cultivate this spiritual eye? This will be answered later on.

I want to expand on these two paragraphs a bit and hopefully make their message very clear.

The ego's defenses focus on protecting the body in some way; they are actually protecting the ego. Protecting our body seems so natural and necessary. Little do we realize that our underlying reason for doing so is that we are protecting the ego against the Atonement in order to maintain separation (1:2). The mention of “body fantasies” is another reference to an earlier paragraph (3:4), showing an underlying thread of thought that runs through the section. In a mistaken belief that we are bodies, we attempt to find completion in and with our bodies. Such attempts are no more than empty fantasies, and

⁵ NOTE: “Temple” in 5:2 probably refers to more than just the body, and in the context, you may be uncertain of what it *refers* to. We know that “a temple is not a building at all” (4:4), and its real beauty “cannot be seen with the physical eye” (1:10). It must be something greater than a body; something non-physical. In 2:1, Jesus says that Atonement “undoes the separation and restores the wholeness of the mind.” In 2:3, he says that “the separation and the fear are miscreations of the mind that must be undone for the restoration of the temple.” In one sentence, the mind is being restored; in the other, it is the temple. The temple, then, is the mind, and the altar is its place of devotion, its heart. Restoring the temple means restoring the mind's awareness of its undamaged wholeness, and its purpose: to be a dwelling place of God. It is interesting to note that the Course rejects any literal interpretation of restoring the actual temple in Jerusalem, and states that the intended meaning is “the opening of the altar to receive the Atonement”.

the “atonement” they envision does not exist; “Atonement in physical terms is not appropriate” (4:3).

The first step in correcting this distortion (another word repeated from earlier sections) is to perceive the body as a temple (4:1); we can realize we are something more than a body, that there is a spirit within the structure of the body. But this is only a beginning because it does not alter the entire distortion (4:2). It recognizes that “Atonement in physical terms is not appropriate” (4:3); it acknowledges that we are more than physical. It fails, however, to break our identification with the body. The truth is, “the temple is not a building at all” (4:4), or, in more direct terms, “I am not a body at all.”

What we are, the essence of us, cannot be seen with the physical eye (5:2). Conversely, our body (“the building” in 5:3) cannot be seen with spiritual sight. Instead, spiritual sight sees the altar, which is the place of devotion within us. It sees the altar because the true holiness of what we are arises from, and is centered in, our devotion to God.

The mention of “emphasis on beautiful church buildings” seems deliberately ambiguous. The topic of discussion has been bodies as the temple, so this phrase could refer to an emphasis on beautiful bodies, an attempt to find satisfaction and completion through the careful nurture of one’s own body and the acquisition of other beautiful bodies. Here, however, it is a very clear reference to many institutional churches’ emphasis on elaborate and ornate *buildings*. Emphasizing beautiful bodies and emphasizing beautiful buildings are both ways of trying to find salvation through external means; both represent, in reality, a fear of the Atonement, a turning away from that which is drawing us inward into spirit. Neither beautiful bodies nor beautiful buildings are inherently harmful, but an *emphasis* on either one is indicative of a mind that is resisting the call of the Holy Spirit within. Little do we realize that our external attempts to find “atonement” are really a defense against true Atonement.

If I were to attempt to put the message of this paragraph in less symbolic terms, I would say it is this: You cannot find completion in physical terms, either through the body or as a body. You are more than a body; you are not a body at all. What defines you is an inner holiness, a luminous essence that arises from your relationship with God, an essence which must become central in your mind.

Paragraph 6

6 For perfect effectiveness, the chalice of the Atonement belongs at the center of the inner altar, where it undoes the separation and restores the wholeness of the mind. ²Before the separation, the mind was invulnerable to fear, because fear did not exist. ³Both the separation and the fear were miscreations of the mind, which have to be undone. ⁴This is what the Bible means by the restoration of the temple. ⁶It does not mean the restoration of the building, but it does mean the opening of the altar to receive the Atonement. ⁶This heals the separation, and places within you the one defense against all errors which can make you perfectly invulnerable.

"What does it mean to place the chalice of Atonement at the center of the inner altar?"

In T-1.30.1:4, it is suggested that our core essence should be centered on the spirit. Similarly, 6:1 emphasizes the importance of placing the Atonement at the center of the altar, symbolized by a chalice from which we may drink. This means that we should devote our minds to the Atonement. Essentially, this requires us to revise our value system in a radical way.

When the Course talks about realigning the various parts of our being, and putting spirit at the center, it talks about mind becoming the servant of spirit (T-1.33.3:5–6 (CE), T-1.IV.2:10–11 (FIP)), the means by which spirit creates (T-1.43.3:4 (CE), T-1.V.5:4 (FIP)), rather than the mind acting merely as a servant of the body (T-22.VIII.2:1 (CE), T-22.VI.2:1 (FIP)). This “restores the wholeness of the mind” (6:1).

Below is a similar image (9:5) that illustrates the process of bringing the mind into the service of spiritual vision. The image shows the defiled altar and how the mind acts to “cleanse” it by restoring the Atonement to its central place. The mind dedicates itself to applying the idea of Atonement, which is the belief that the separation did not happen, to every instance of ego thinking and fear.

The theme of the mind as servant, either of the spirit (right mind) or of the body (ego), runs all through the Course. We are being asked to look beyond our body and our bodily identity and to recognize the reality of our being as God created us.

Placing the Atonement at the center of altar means that we renounce our devotion to separation, and instead devote ourselves to the truth of our oneness with God. We dedicate ourselves to seek out and to correct every error of thought that opposes that truth. We acknowledge that “all real pleasure comes from doing God’s Will” (T-1.46.3:3 (CE), T-1.VII.1:4 (FIP)), and we refuse to continue to seek outside ourselves for something to fill our illusory emptiness.

The Atonement is our chosen “defense against all errors” (6:6). Notice how the ego wants us to use our minds to defend the body and the ego against things that threaten

⁶ Ezra 6:3 (NKJV): “In the first year of King Cyrus, King Cyrus issued a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem: ‘Let the house be rebuilt, the place where they offered sacrifices; and let the foundations of it be firmly laid.’” John 2:19 (KJV): “Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

them; the Holy Spirit wants us to use our minds to defend themselves against separation thoughts. Prior to the separation fear didn't exist, and the mind was invulnerable (6:2), and under the Atonement, it is again invulnerable (6:6). We misused our creative power to make both fear and separation, which our minds must now undo them (6:3). This undoing process is symbolized in the Bible by the restoration of the temple (6:4).

Accepting the Atonement must become the central purpose of our lives. Only this can undo all thoughts of separation and fear.

Paragraph 7

7 The acceptance of the Atonement by everyone is only a matter of time. ²In fact, both time and matter were made for this purpose. ³This appears to contradict free will, because of the inevitability of the decision. ⁴If you review the idea carefully, however, you will realize that this is not true. ⁵Everything is limited in some way by the manner of its creation. ⁶Free will can temporize and is capable of enormous procrastination. ⁷But it cannot depart entirely from its Creator, Who sets limits on its ability to miscreate by virtue of its own real purpose.

After being instructed to place the Atonement at the center of our inner altar and to *devote* ourselves to using it to defend against thoughts of fear and separation, we may become overwhelmed by the effort required to restore our minds to their pristine purity. We may worry that so few are making the effort, and doubt that we will ever be able to cleanse our minds, let alone that the entire Sonship can do it. This line of thinking can be depressing.

How wonderful that Jesus anticipates just this kind of ego reaction, and says, “The acceptance of the Atonement by everyone is only a matter of time” (7:1). He doesn't argue with us about this. He just says it flat out. He knows. He sees with spiritual vision, and that vision already sees the perfection that lies, untouched, at the heart of every one of us. Our accepting the Atonement is as sure as the emergence of the oak tree from the acorn; it is its nature. It is “as certain as God” (8:7), because God created us like Himself and that cannot change. It is inevitable that we make this final choice (7:3).

I like to remind myself of this when I start worrying about my rate of spiritual progress. I like to remind myself of this when I think of people I have met who seem to be ruining their lives, or even people who have taken their own lives. “The outcome is as certain as God; everyone will accept the Atonement.” The last chapter has not yet been written, the story is not over, and when it is, everyone will be home again! Hallelujah!

The Text states in 7:2, and in a few other places, that both time and matter “were made for this purpose,” that is, the acceptance of the Atonement. This implies that God did make the physical world as a tool to help us find our way home. Later in the Course, it very clearly states that *we* made the world as a separation device, and that the Holy Spirit now can *remake* it as a correction device to help us get home. (See T-31.I.3:1-3; T-31.IV.2:6; T-25.III.3:3-4:1; W-WI.3.2:1-4; and W-WI.3.3:1-4:3.) This latter understanding is repeated far more often than the earlier one. I believe the later teaching, that we

made the world, is the Course's ultimate understanding of how the world came into being. Through the Holy Spirit, God *remakes* the world to become a classroom in which we learn to accept the Atonement.

I pointed out how Jesus anticipated our doubts. Now, he anticipates our reaction to his answer! Maybe this “inevitable” thing in 7:3 sounds worrisome in itself: What happened to our free will? If I have free will, doesn't that mean I have the freedom to choose differently and not to accept the Atonement? Basically, a bit earlier, in Section III.10:7, Jesus answers by saying that when truly free, that will “cannot miscreate.” It can only miscreate while imprisoned. Since that imprisoned state denies the will's true nature, the will cannot remain there indefinitely (7:7). It must break free to find its true expression:

It still remains within you to project as God projected His Own Spirit to you. In reality, this is your only choice, because your free will was made for your own joy in creating the perfect. (T-2.II.15:3–4 (CE), (T-2.I.3:9–10 (FIP))

We are free to choose *when* we accept, not *whether*. We can put it off. We can push farther and farther into miscreation (7:6), but as we do, we encounter more and more pain. Eventually, we reach a limit; the pain becomes intolerable (8:1), and we cannot go any farther. “Eventually everyone begins to recognize, however dimly, that there must be a better way” (T-2.III.3:6 (FIP), (T-2.VI.8:3 (CE)))⁷.

Paragraph 8

8 The misuse of will engenders a situation which, in the extreme, becomes altogether intolerable. ²Pain thresholds can be high, but they are not limitless. ³Eventually, everybody begins to recognize, however dimly, that there *must* be a better way.⁸ ⁴As this recognition is more firmly established, it becomes a perceptual turning point. ⁵This ultimately reawakens the spiritual eye, simultaneously weakening the investment in physical sight. ⁶The alternating investment in the two types or levels of perception is usually experienced as conflict for a long time, and can become very acute. ⁷But the outcome is as certain as God.

The idea here is that your will was given you by God, and it is a will to create. Now your will is imprisoned. And your will won't tolerate being imprisoned forever. Eventually, you have to realize that there must be some way out of this intolerable situation. You will then freely choose to get out, and this is synonymous with choosing to free your will.

⁷ “A better way,” of course, is a reference to the incident that gave birth to the Course, in which Bill Thetford launched into an impassioned speech about the terrible state of the interpersonal relationships at the place where he and Helen Schucman worked, ending with the words, “There must be another way!” Helen responded, saying she agreed and that she would help him find that “better way.” Shortly after, dreams and visions began to come to her, culminating in her beginning to hear the words of the Course. The incident is an example of the “intolerable” pain the Course refers to here, and its outcome is an example of the turning point that awakens spiritual vision.

⁸ This, of course, is a reference to the speech Bill made to Helen that “there must be another way” (or “a better way”), which became the catalyst for the dictation of the Course.

You will not be forced to accept the Atonement, but you will *choose* to because it is the only direction that makes any sense, the only thing that is in accord with your nature. The pain of doing otherwise becomes intolerable (8:1). There is a limit to how much pain a person can endure—thank God (8:2)! An acorn “must” develop into an oak tree, and yet such development is also its freedom.

In the Bible, Jesus says, “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains that and nothing more; but if it dies, it bears a rich harvest.” (John 12:24 REB) Even so, our acceptance of the Atonement and fulfillment of our function of creation is the ultimate expression of our freedom. Yes, we must die to the ego and separation, but that is the choice to accept and extend every fiber of our being fully. We unite with the One and become channels of divine creation.

Paragraph 9

9 The spiritual eye literally cannot see error, and merely looks for Atonement. ²All of the solutions which the physical eyes seek dissolve in its sight. ³The spiritual eye, which looks within, recognizes immediately that the altar has been defiled and needs to be repaired and protected. ⁴Perfectly aware of the right defense, it passes over all others, looking past error to truth. ⁵Because of the real strength of its vision, it pulls the will into its own service and forces the mind to concur.

In the preceding two paragraphs and the next, there is a succinct picture of our spiritual journey,

1. The Imprisoned Will

We begin in prison. Our will is in bondage. We have blocked off its true impulse to freely express itself in creation. Instead, we engage in illusory projections that promise satisfaction but leave us forever wanting. The mind's true power to choose to create has been shackled. In this situation, our pain increases until it finally reaches a level we refuse to tolerate. For some, this seems much higher than for others, but in the end, *everyone* reaches their limit (8:3).

2. A Turning Point

Reaching our limit for pain, we realize something is amiss; there must be a better way. This is a “perceptual turning point” (8:4). We may only dimly realize it, but as this realization becomes firm, our journey away from home has ended; we have turned around, and begun our journey home.

3. A Period of Conflict

The result of turning around and accepting a new goal is, initially, conflict, because both old and new goals are still in our minds—“alternating investment in two levels of perception” (8:6)). Christ's vision has awakened in us, but we still tend to trust in physical sight to teach us what is real and important. The conflict can become “acute” (8:6). The unhappy fact that our journey may begin with acute conflict is stated several

more times in the Course, for instance, T-6.V(A).6:6 (FIP), T-6.VII(A).6:3 (CE). Spiritual vision helps to dissolve the conflict (9:3). It looks within, sees the need for healing, and overlooks (looks beyond) error to see the truth(9:4). This vision draws the mind to choose the Atonement and so moves beyond the conflict (9:5).

4. Vigilance of Mind

Responding favorably to the results of accepting the Atonement, the mind begins to support the process. Its power is re-established as it begins to choose the Atonement more and more consistently. Before, the mind was imprisoned. It didn't know it could exercise its will and choose its way out of pain. It didn't think it had the power to do anything about its unhappy condition. Now, it realizes it has the power (10:1-2). Therefore, when discomfort arises, it becomes “increasingly sensitive to what it would once have regarded as very minor intrusions” (10:3), and thus quicker to turn to the Atonement for relief. The word “increasingly” occurs twice in paragraph 10, showing that this is a *process* of growth. Notice *what* increases: our unwillingness to tolerate delay and our sensitivity to intrusions of discomfort.

It brings to mind the words of a hymn: “Things that once were wild alarms cannot now disturb my rest.” The pain threshold drops. Conversely, instead of brushing off our ego tendencies, our minds become increasingly sensitive to them.

Paragraph 10

10 This reestablishes the true power of the will, and makes it increasingly unable to tolerate delay. ²The mind then realizes, with growing certainty, that delay is only a way of increasing unnecessary pain, which it need not tolerate at all. ³The pain threshold drops accordingly, and the mind becomes increasingly sensitive to what it would once have regarded as very minor intrusions of discomfort.

We become much less tolerant of delay. We realize delay only increases our pain, pain that is needless. We become, as the Course will say later, “vigilant for God and His kingdom.” This is the path we all have to look forward to.

Paragraph 11

11 The children of God are entitled to perfect comfort, which comes from a sense of perfect trust. ²Until they achieve this, they will waste themselves and their true creative powers on useless attempts to make themselves more comfortable by inappropriate means. ³But the real means is already provided, and does not involve any effort on their part at all. ⁴Their egocentricity usually misinterprets this as personally insulting, an interpretation which obviously arises from their misperception of themselves. ⁵Egocentricity and communion cannot coexist. ⁶Even the terms themselves are contradictory.⁹

As you read over this paragraph, recall what has been said previously about the relationship between fear and miracles:

I have asked you to perform miracles, and have made it very clear that these are natural, corrective, healing, and universal. I There is nothing good they cannot do. But they cannot be performed in the spirit of doubt. (T-2.III.3:2–4 (CE), T-2.II.1:2–3 (FIP))

Both the separation and the fear were miscreations of the mind, which have to be undone. This is what the Bible means by the restoration of the temple. I It does not mean the restoration of the building, but it does mean the opening of the altar to receive the Atonement. (T-2.VI.6:3–5 (CE), T-2.III.2:3(FIP))

These early chapters deal extensively with freeing us from fear. Remember that the first stage of the spiritual journey, according to T-1.I.4:3 (CE), T-1.IV.1:2 (FIP), “usually does entail fear.” For us to assume our place as miracle workers, we must be freed from our fears. As was said earlier, “Whenever you are afraid you are deceived, and your mind cannot serve the Holy Spirit” (T-2.III.6:1 (CE), T-2.III.5:9 (FIP)).

And we are “entitled to . . . perfect comfort,” but perfect comfort comes only from “perfect trust” (11:1 (CE), T-2.III.5:1 (FIP)), which is the opposite of fear. Trust is what we are learning; the Manual for Teachers has a section on “The Development of Trust” that comes right at the beginning of its description of the characteristics of a true teacher of God. Trust is foundational.

Until we “achieve this” (11:2 (CE), T-2.III.5:2 (FIP)) perfect trust, we try to find comfort in external things of the world (“inappropriate means”), such as protecting our bodies—basically any means besides accepting the Atonement. The *appropriate* means (the Atonement) is *already* provided and calls for no effort at all on our part (11:3). To be told “You need do nothing,” as the Text puts it in a later chapter, seems “personally insulting” to our egos (11:4). But that is due only to our belief that we *are* egos and our failure to recognize the wonderful truth that is our eternal union with God and the Sonship. To recognize that communion we must abandon egocentricity (11:5). The very

⁹ “Egocentric” means centered on *ego*—Latin for “I,” “me.” “Communion” comes from the Latin *communio*—“mutual participation”—which comes from the Latin *communis*—“common, public.”

words are contradictory (11:6). We are learning to use the world for nothing except healing the separation; that is the only way we can find perfect comfort.

Paragraph 12

12 The Atonement is the only gift which is worthy of being offered to the altar of God. ²This is because of the inestimable value of the altar itself. ³It was created perfect and is entirely worthy of receiving perfection. ⁴God *is* lonely without His Sons, and *they* are lonely without Him. ⁵Remember the poem which begins:

⁶And God stepped out on space,
And he looked around and said,
“I’m lonely—
I’ll make me a world.”¹⁰

⁷The world *was* a way of healing the separation, and the Atonement is the guarantee that the device will ultimately do so.¹¹

We don’t need to offer great sacrifices on God’s altar; in fact, “the Atonement is the only gift that is worthy of being offered” (12:1 (CE), T-2.III.5:4 (FIP)). The altar itself is valuable and “entirely worthy of receiving perfection” (12:2–3 (CE), T.2.III.5:5 (FIP)). If we understand the altar to be our heart, the place in which we hold our treasure, this is saying that our heart is perfect and worthy of God’s perfect gifts; we do not need to expend any effort to make ourselves worthy. We can relax, open the altar to the Atonement, and receive God’s gifts.

Our role as miracle workers is crucial to us, and somehow it is also crucial to God Himself; Jesus says God depends on His creations ((T-2.III.5:2–5 (CE)), T-2.III.5:6–7 (FIP)) and is “lonely without His Sons” (12:4 (CE), T-2.III.5:11 (FIP)). God’s loneliness must be a figure of speech; I cannot imagine God as actually feeling lonely. That does not fit with God’s perfection and completion. But figures of speech, although they should not be taken literally, do symbolize something true. There is some sense in which God experiences our “absence” from Him and responds to it (see, for another instance, T-6.VI.7 (CE), T-6.V.1:5–8 (FIP)). Yet, in the idea that God depends on us, there is a strong element of confidence and faith. God depends on us because He created us perfect, so He knows we can be depended on. We cannot fail in the long run. “The Atonement is the guarantee that they will ultimately succeed” (12:7 (CE), T-2.III.5:13 (FIP)).

As for the lines that seem to imply that God created the world, I’ve covered this earlier. To recap: The ego made the world as an attack on God. The Holy Spirit, as a

¹⁰ “The Creation” by James Weldon Johnson, author of “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” often called “The African-American National Anthem.” In the discussion preceding the quotation, God is lonely because His children have *left* Him, not because, as in the poem, He hasn’t yet created them.

¹¹ See Cameo 13: “God Created Time?”

second maker of the world, made it to be instead “a way of healing the separation” (12:7). It has become our classroom, and “the Atonement is the guarantee that the device will ultimately do so” (12:7).

You can also read Cameo 13 (page 1760) for the CE editor's explanation.

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.