

Commentary

ACIM® Text (CE)

T-3.IV, Innocent Perception

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

This section has basically one message to get across. Innocence is total; it does not come in degrees. When we perceive innocence we see it everywhere, in ourselves and in others, and we see *nothing but innocence*.

Both Section II and Section III have the word *perception* in their titles, as do the titles of the chapter itself, “The Innocent Perception,” and Section VII, “Beyond Perception.” Perception is a prominent subject in this chapter. Our perception is determined by the thought system we hold to be true. If we believe in guilt we will see a guilty world; if we believe in innocence we will see an innocent world. True perception is seeing without judgment because it is seeing things as God created them, and not as we (through projection) have made them.

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This section refers to miracles and true perception as if they are virtually interchangeable terms. We have pointed out in earlier commentaries that true perception is the *result* of the miracle, not *identical* to it. The miracle is the divine touch on our minds that makes a shift in perception possible. Still, to perceive truly is a miracle; to experience a miracle is to perceive truly. “The miracle perceives everything as it is” (3:4).

In the previous section, “Atonement without Sacrifice,” we learned that the Atonement is fundamentally the *perception of innocence* instead of the *perception of guilt*, judgment, and punishment. This perception is true because it is how God sees us. “The innocence of God is the true state of mind of His Son” (T-3.I.8:1). Section IV now applies the principles of Atonement that we have seen in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus to our perception of ourselves and of one another.

Paragraph 1

We have repeatedly stated that the basic concepts referred to throughout this course are not matters of degree.¹ ²Certain fundamental concepts cannot be meaningfully understood in terms of coexisting polarities. ³It is impossible to conceive of light and darkness, or everything and nothing, as joint possibilities. ⁴They are all true or all false.

First we are given a general truth about the basic concepts of the Course: they “are *not* matters of degree” (1:1). One earlier statement of this idea was this:

Two concepts which cannot coexist are nothing and everything. ²To whatever extent one is believed in, the other has been abolished. ³In the conflict, fear is really nothing, and love is really everything. (T-2.XII.4:1–3; (CE))

It is worth repeating that ultimately there is no compromise possible between everything and nothing. ²The purpose of time is essentially to serve as a device by which all compromise in this respect can be abolished. (T-2.XII.6:1–2 (CE)) (See FIP, T-2.VII.5:1–4,10)

This insistence on absolutes without any degree or shading is typical of the whole Course. We may believe that light and darkness are opposites, and that there are thousands of degrees of light and shadow in between, but to the Course, light is light, and it “cannot coexist” with darkness. If light is present, darkness cannot be (1:3). The absolute distinction is a little easier to see with everything and nothing. If you have everything, there is not nothing. If you have nothing, there is not everything. The two are not opposite ends of a continuum, they are mutually exclusive states. If one *is*, the other *is not*.

The basic concepts of the Course are like that: “They are all true *or* all false” (1:4). You cannot subscribe to the truth of what the Course teaches and still believe in some degree of lack or imperfection in yourself. The Course says you are perfect; you cannot be *partly* perfect. Perfect is perfect. You cannot be partly innocent, either you are innocent or you are not. As C. S. Lewis has said, there is no such thing as being *a little pregnant*; either you are, or you are not. There is no in-between; likewise, there are no degrees of innocence or perfection.

¹ T-1.49.1:1: “The miracle makes no distinction among degrees of misperception.” T-2.V.5:3: “But the Sonship itself is a perfect creation, and perfection is not a matter of degree.” T-2.XII.6:1: “It is worth repeating that ultimately there is no compromise possible between everything and nothing.” T-2.XII.8:3: “Any statement which implies degrees of difference in negation is essentially meaningless.”

Paragraph 2

² It is absolutely essential that you understand completely that behavior is erratic until a firm commitment to one or the other is made. ²Yet a firm commitment to darkness or nothingness is impossible. ³Nobody has ever lived who has not experienced some light and some of everything. ⁴This has made everybody genuinely unable to deny truth totally, even if he deceives himself in this connection most of the time. ⁵That is why those who live largely in darkness and emptiness never find any lasting solace.

Jesus wants us to fully understand that we *must commit completely* to one or the other, truth or falsehood, everything or nothing, light or darkness (2:1). As we'll see in a moment, he zeros in on the dichotomy of innocence versus guilt. More of that later.

A firm commitment to the Course's concepts means we absolutely let go of any conflicting concepts. Our acceptance of innocence, our acknowledgment of perfection in ourselves and our sisters and brothers, must be absolute, one hundred percent. There must be absolutely no exceptions. Until we make such a total commitment, our thinking "is erratic" (2:1). Now, of course, we've been talking about being too tolerant of our mind wandering; we've let our thoughts continue to be erratic. And we've been told before that making a clear choice is the way out of confusion.

Jesus wants to be sure we get this point (2:1). We must come to a complete commitment. But, on the other hand, he also wants to encourage us by pointing out that it is *impossible* to make a firm commitment in the wrong direction (2:2). That's good news! We may *think* we can firmly commit ourselves to darkness, but no matter how corrupt a person may be, at some time and in some place, they have experienced some light or something other than nothing! Therefore, they cannot totally commit to the dark or to nothing, which means that nobody can totally deny the truth. So the wonderful fact is that the only possible total commitment is the right one, the one that will bring us complete freedom and liberation.

The inescapable conclusion is that *no one* can deny truth *totally*, even if they fool themselves into thinking so (2:4). As we know from this Course, the truth is spirit, God's nature and His creation. Some people maintain they deny the reality of God and spirit completely. What Jesus says here declares that they are fooling themselves. That kind of thinking, which causes them to "live largely in darkness and emptiness," can never bring them "any lasting solace" (2:5).

Paragraph 3

³ Innocence is also not a partial attribute. ²It is not a real defense until it is total. ³When it is partial, it is characterized by the same erratic nature that holds for other two-edged defenses. ⁴The partly innocent are apt to be quite stupid at times. ⁵It is not until their innocence is a genuine viewpoint which is universal in its application that it becomes wisdom. ⁶Innocent (or true) perception means that you never misperceive and *always* see truly. ⁷More simply, this means that you never see what does not exist in reality.

Like light versus darkness and everything versus nothing, *innocence* cannot be partial (3:1). Only total innocence is a real defense; partial innocence can bite you back. In partial innocence, people naïvely overlook the evil in the world and suffer as a result. They can even be “quite stupid at times,” something often characterized as “wearing rose-colored glasses” (3:4). We may think of ourselves as mostly innocent, yet nearly all of us feel as though we have some fatal flaw. We don’t dare to claim *total* innocence. In fact, if we did, we would probably judge ourselves guilty of arrogance or pride! And while we may think of most other people as innocent, there are probably at least a few people who seem irredeemably guilty to us. (Has it ever occurred to us that these two aspects of imperfect innocence—in ourselves and in others—might be connected somehow?)

Jesus is saying that if this is the only way I have experienced innocence, I have never experienced *real* innocence because innocence isn’t real until it is total (3:2). If I pause to think about it, I know that. If I believe in that fatal flaw in myself, I always try to protect it and cover it up. I always try to pretend it isn’t there and hide it from others. I know that my façade of innocence will crumble if anybody exposes that seamy underside of my life, whatever it might be. So while I may tell myself I am mostly innocent, I never escape the overriding awareness of guilt

Those who conceive themselves as “partly innocent” make foolish mistakes. Their misperception of themselves is projected onto others, and they frequently misperceive the persons and things around them; they often see what does not exist and fail to see what does exist (3:7). This sounds like a pretty good definition of mental instability, doesn’t it? Seeing things that aren’t there is called “hallucinating.” Because we see guilt in ourselves, we see it in others. Because we believe in attack in ourselves, we see others as attacking us, and so on.

But the answer to partial innocence isn’t becoming “wise in the ways of the world” so that we clearly see all the evil and danger confronting us. We think that is smart; the Course affirms it is not. We are making error real, affirming that evil is really evil. Only when we apply innocence *universally* have we become truly wise (3:5). Innocent perception is perception that *never* misperceives (sees evil) and *always* sees truly (sees innocence) (3:6). We see only God’s perfect creation everywhere we look because God’s creation is all that is real, and we do not see the illusions projected by a mind “made mad by guilt” (T-13.Int.2:2 (FIP), T-13.I.2:1 (CE)). We still perceive the ego behavior but we recognize it as what it is, and look past it to the reality of the Christ within.

Paragraph 4

4 Whenever you lack confidence in what someone else will do, you are attesting to your belief that he is not in his right mind. ²This is hardly a miracle-based frame of reference. ³It also has the disastrous effect of denying (incorrect use of denial) the essentially creative power of the miracle. ⁴The miracle perceives everything *as it is*. ⁵If nothing but the truth exists (and this is really redundant in statement, because what is not true *cannot* exist), right-minded seeing cannot see anything but perfection. ⁶We have said many times that only what God creates, and what you create with the same will, has any real existence.² ⁷This, then, is all that the innocent can see. ⁸They do not suffer from the delusions of the separated ones.

Believing in innocence means believing in the right-mindedness of everyone (4:1). Innocence means having confidence in what they will do; if you believe they are not in their right mind, you will lack confidence in them. That frame of mind in you will never effect a miracle (4:2). You are denying the miracle's creative power (4:3).

We know most people are not in their right mind (as the Course defines that term) most of the time; we know that about ourselves, too. Yet we must come to see people right now as if they were advanced far beyond their actual development in time (see T-2.V.10:1 (FIP), (T-2.VIII.11:1 (CE))). We must see past their wrong-mindedness to the truth of their right mind that is in them, and seek to communicate with that mind and awaken their awareness of it. That is what the miracle does. The truth is their perfection, and nothing but the truth exists. Therefore, your right-minded seeing "cannot see *anything but* perfection" (4:5).

If we shut down our awareness of that right mind and respond to them as if their wrong mind defined their identity, we are denying the miracle's power. We are denying that a miracle *can* happen. This person, as objectionable as they may seem, *could be* wholly touched by love right in this moment. The right attitude toward another was described well in the discussion of *charity*: "The charity which is accorded him is both an acknowledgment that he *is* weak and a recognition that he *could be* stronger" (T-2.VIII.11:3 (CE), (T-2.V.10:3 (FIP))).

If a miracle "perceives everything as it is" (4:4), that doesn't just mean calling a spade a spade; "as it is" refers to seeing things *as God created them*, seeing everything as *perfect* (4:5). As has been said many times, only what you and God create in one will has any real existence (4:6). Earlier, the Text spoke about those who are "miracle-minded," or mentally prepared for miracles. We were also told that in order to offer a miracle to another we must be in *our right mind*, however briefly (T-2.VIII.1:6 (CE), (T-2.V.3:5 (FIP))). In this paragraph we get some understanding of what makes a mind miracle-minded: the acceptance of innocence. We also can see that miraculous seeing, right-

² T-1.23.2:3-5: "You are capable of this kind of creation too, being in the image and likeness of your own Creator. Anything else is only your own nightmare and does not exist. Only the creations of light are real." T-1.49.3:4: "While the miscreation is necessarily believed in by its own maker, it does not exist at all at the level of true creation." T-2.VII.11:5: "The miscreations of the mind do not really exist."

minded seeing, and innocent seeing are all pretty much interchangeable terms (compare 3:4, 3:5, and 3:7 (FIP), 4:4, 4:5, and 4:7 (CE). Perceiving our own innocence, and perceiving the perfect innocence in everything as God created it, is what true perception is, and it is the foundation of miracle-working.

Sentence 6 summarizes perfectly what is real and what is not. Only what God creates, or what we create in accord with His Will, has real existence. Our *miscreations* do not, therefore, have real existence: “The miscreations of the mind do not really exist;” “God and the Sons He created remain in surety, and therefore *know* that no miscreation exists”) (for FIP, see T-2.V.1:5; see also, T-3.IV.7:1; for CE, see T-2.VII.11:5 and (T-3.VI.16:1 (CE)). The word “know” is emphasized, meaning we must *know* this fact. This is the foundation on which we work miracles. Innocence is the “miracle-based frame of reference” (4:2). Recognizing the unreality of miscreations, the innocent mind opens the way for those miscreations—which are only illusions—to disappear and be replaced by truth.

We should remember that in the “Atonement without Sacrifice” section, Jesus has just presented us with his own example of the crucifixion. It was in that context that he began to speak of innocence. There, he told us that the innocent mind cannot project (T-3.I.6:2 (FIP), (T-3.III.16:5 (CE))). It cannot see evil in others because it sees no evil in itself. “Innocence is wisdom, because it is unaware of evil, which does not exist” (T-3.I.7:4 (FIP), (T-3.III.7:8 (CE))). This is basically the same line of thought repeated in the current paragraph. When Jesus looked upon the people crucifying him, he was unaware of evil. That is the state of mind being talked about in this section.

Paragraph 5

5 The way to correct all such delusions is to withdraw your faith from them and invest it only in what is true. ²To whatever extent you side with false perception in yourself or others, you are validating a basic misperception.³ ³You cannot validate the invalid. ⁴I would suggest that you voluntarily give up all attempts to do so, because they can be only frantic. ⁵If you are willing to validate what is true in everything you perceive, you will make it true for you.

The first sentence is a good summary: Withdrawing our faith from illusions and investing our faith only in the truth is the corrective process in a nutshell (5:1). That means letting go of our judgments and seeing everyone's innocence. Forgiveness consists of this; all it does is acknowledge the truth. To whatever degree we accept a false perception of wrong-mindedness in others or ourselves, we are “validating a basic misperception,” or at least *trying* to validate it (5:2). We *cannot* “validate the invalid” (6:3); we cannot make the Son of God guilty. Jesus kindly “suggests” that we stop trying! Such attempts are bound to become “frantic” (5:4). And the wonder of the miracle of

³. To “side with false perception” seems to mean to see the perceiver as defined by his false perception, rather than by the perfection God created in him. You are siding, in other words, with the power of the false perception to dictate who the person is.

healing is that when we are willing to accept what is true in everything (the innocence of everything), we let it be true for ourselves (5:5).

Paragraph 6

6 Remember that we said that truth overcomes all error.⁴ ²This means that if you perceive truly, you are canceling out misperceptions in yourself *and* others simultaneously. ³Because you see them as they were really created and can really create, you offer them your own validation of their truth. ⁴This is the real healing which the miracle actively engenders.

As we were told in the last section, the message of the resurrection is, “Nothing can destroy truth.” Here, we echo that same message: “Truth overcomes *all* error” (6:1). It refers to the truth of *innocence* and the error of *guilt*. No amount of twisted thinking and belief in guilt can make us (or others) truly guilty. The innocence given us by God cannot be undone; we cannot “uncreate” what God created.

When we perceive innocence in another person, we are not only canceling out our own mistaken perceptions of that person (in which we saw them as guilty), we are also canceling out their own misperceptions of themselves (again, their guilt). When we see them as innocent, we hold that innocent perception before their eyes and offer it to them for their own acceptance (6:2). This healing of their minds is “the real healing which the miracle actively engenders” (6:4).

Paragraph 7

7 The reason why this section is so short, despite its extreme importance, is because it is not symbolic. ²This means that it is not open to more than one interpretation. ³This means that it is unequivocal. ⁴It also explains the biblical quotation “But this we know, that when He shall appear (or be perceived) we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. ⁵And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.”⁵ ⁶Every man *does* have the hope that he can see correctly, because the ability to do so is in him. ⁷Man’s *only* hope is to see things as they are.

In her notes, Helen asked a question after the preceding paragraph: “Is this all?” This is why Jesus begins by saying here, “The reason why this section is so short...” (7:1). I think we often do something similar. We hear what the Course is saying but we wonder, “Is it really that simple? Just see innocence instead of guilt?” Or we wonder how on earth, with the world the way it is, we can *avoid* seeing it as guilty. The reason Jesus gives for the simplicity of his message is that “it is not symbolic” or “is not open to more than one interpretation” (7:1–2). It’s “unequivocal,” unmistakable, crystal clear; it has

⁴ T-1.35.9:1-2: “Remember that error cannot really threaten truth, which *always* can withstand its assaults. Only the error is really vulnerable.” T-3.III.8:1-2: “The resurrection demonstrated that *nothing* can destroy truth. Good can withstand *any* form of evil, because light abolishes *all* forms of darkness.”

⁵ 1 John 3:2-3 (KJV): “But we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”

only one meaning (7:3). Innocence or guilt; everything or nothing; truth or falsehood. It's that black and white.

Jesus now quotes two more verses from the Bible (I John 3:2–3) with a minor modification: he expands or changes the words “shall appear” to “be perceived” (7:4). The traditional understanding of this Bible verse is that it refers to the physical return of Jesus to the world, to conquer the devil and reign forever as its ruler. Changing the words to “be perceived” lets us apply the verses to here and now, not some future apocalyptic time. Here and now, we can perceive Christ in one another and ourselves, and when we do, we recognize that *we are “like Him,”* like Jesus. We see Christ as he is in one another, and we recognize that we all share the same One Self with Jesus.

Because we have this hope in us (the hope of seeing Christ in each other), we purify ourselves (purify our minds), and we can do it because we have “the *ability* to do so” (7:6). Seeing things as they truly are is our only hope (7:7).

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.