

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 14, Section IX

The Reflection of Holiness

With Commentary by Allen A. Watson

Paragraph 1

1.¹The Atonement does not make holy. ²You were created holy. ³It merely brings unholiness to holiness; or what you made to what you are. ⁴Bringing illusion to truth, or the ego to God, is the Holy Spirit's only function. ⁵Keep not your making from your Father, for hiding it has cost you knowledge of Him and of yourself. ⁶The knowledge is safe, but where is your safety apart from it? ⁷The making of time to take the place of timelessness lay in the decision to be not as you are [Ur: were]. ⁸Thus truth was made past, and the present was dedicated to illusion. ⁹And the past, too, was changed and interposed between what always was and now. ¹⁰The past that you remember never was, and represents only the denial of what always was.

• Study Question •

1. *1.How is the function of the Holy Spirit related to our problem of hiding or blocking the truth from our awareness?*

- A. His function is to bring illusion to truth*
- B. He translates what we have made into what we are*
- C. He reinterprets our dark thoughts into calls for love*
- D. He undoes our denial of the truth about ourselves*
- E. A and D*
- F. All of the above*

We return now from the image of the holy meeting place to another direct statement about bringing “what you made to what you are” (1:2), that is, bringing the ego into the light of Christ's vision. The paragraph emphasizes that the truth about us has never changed. “The past” in which we imagine we changed “never was” (1:10). Hiding what we think we have made of ourselves has blocked our knowledge of what we are from our minds, although the knowledge is still there. Again, Jesus appeals to us to no longer keep what we made hidden.

The message of the first two sentences seems very important to me: we are not becoming holy beings; we have been holy beings since the moment God created us. In my youth as a fundamentalist Christian, I struggled constantly with the unbearable burden of trying to make myself holy. I felt I was not holy. I was aware of many flaws and shortcomings. I strove constantly to be better, and succeeded only in making myself guilty and full of despair.

“Despair.” I remember reading a tiny poem by Amy Carmichael: “God is a tower without a stair, and His perfection loves despair.” Does that seem to you to be a cruel picture of God? “A tower without a stair”--is God that deliberately frustrating? Does He love to tantalize us? I think not. In fact, I got the exact opposite out of that little poem. God loves despair in us because it is an indication that we have stopped trying to be made holy, and we are ready to learn that He has already made us holy. As long as we have hope of making ourselves holy we will continue to strive and connive and attempt to whip ourselves into shape. Only when we finally give up, and stop trying, can the light dawn upon us.

What the Atonement does, according to the Course, is not to transform a miserable sinner into a saint (as I thought for a long time that the Bible taught, and as many churches teach). Rather, the Atonement takes someone who thinks he is a miserable sinner and shows him his own God-given holiness (1:3). It does not somehow make us one with God, it takes away the illusion that we are separate. As Robert Perry wrote in his book, *A Course Glossary*, “The Atonement releases us from all that stands between us and God--guilt, fear, the past and all illusions--through its realization that all this has never been.” The Holy Spirit is aspect of God that facilitates our acceptance of the Atonement (1:4). We uncover everything that blocks or contradicts our holiness (which can be summed up in the words, “the ego”), and the Holy Spirit holds it up to the truth of our divine purity.

Over and over, Jesus urges us to be unrelenting in our ego-disclosure. We don’t want to look at it. We are ashamed of what we think we are and afraid of what we might discover if we look too closely (see W-pI.93.1), but hiding the ego has hidden God from us as well as hiding our true Self (1:5). Hiding the ego just perpetuates the illusion that the ego is real.

Yet, although we have buried the knowledge of God in illusions, “the knowledge is safe” (1:6). When we abandon the truth about ourselves we cast ourselves adrift on a dangerous sea, with no anchor, no sails, and no rudder. The knowledge of God is our firm foundation. The fact of creation made us what we are, but when we cast loose from that fact we no longer know what we are. We have not destroyed the truth by turning away from it; truth is truth and cannot be uncreated. But we have created for ourselves the illusion that we are dangerously vulnerable.

The Course, in sentence 7, teaches that time itself arose because of our “decision to be not as you are” (1:7). The ego did not arise over the course of millions of years of evolution; time arose out of the ego. It was the Son’s decision to reject God as his creator and to be something other than what God created that precipitated the illusion of time. Time is a great separator. We talk of a place being “three hours away by car,” as though time were a measure of distance--because it is. The ego needs time to construct its framework of guilt. Time allows us to believe that, although the human race may have been created by God, its perfection lies in the past, and in the present there is only sin and guilt (1:8). The past lies as an unbridgeable chasm between us and our holiness (1:9).

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Quite emphatically, the Course tells us that “the past that you remember never was” (1:10). It isn't speaking so much about physical events here (although I think it means that as well) as it is about the meaning we attach to the past. All of the guilt, whether taken in or projected on others, all of the sins, and everything that we imagine has come between us and God, that is what never was. Our memory of the past has been molded by our determination to be something other than what God created (1:10). Nothing has come between God and us. “All the evil that you think you did was never done, ...all your sins are nothing, [and] you are as pure and holy as you were created” (W-pI.93.4:1).

Paragraph 2

2.¹Bringing the ego to God is but to bring error to truth, where it stands corrected because it is the opposite of what it meets. ²It is undone because the contradiction can no longer stand. ³How long can contradiction stand when its impossible nature is clearly revealed? ⁴What disappears in light is not attacked. ⁵It merely vanishes because it is not true. ⁶Different realities are meaningless, for reality must be one. ⁷It cannot change with time or mood or chance. ⁸Its changelessness is what makes it real. ⁹This cannot be undone. ¹⁰Undoing is for unreality. ¹¹And this reality will do for you.

• Study Question •

2. *What makes reality real?*
 - A. *It is the opposite of illusion*
 - B. *It is the only thing that is possible*
 - C. *It cannot change*

The ego is an error, a mistake in self-identification. It contradicts the truth of our creation: if God created us, how could we possibly be egos? When, with the Holy Spirit, we bring it to God, “it is undone” by exposure to the truth (2:2). When we bring the ego to God we see that the ego is impossible (2:3). Teaching us the impossibility of the ego is the central purpose of the entire Course: “The whole purpose of this course is to teach you that the ego is unbelievable and will forever be unbelievable” (T-7.VIII.7:1).

Why do you suppose the Course mentions so often that light does not attack darkness; the darkness “merely vanishes” (2:4–5)? To me, this emphasis indicates the appropriate attitude we need to develop in regard to the ego. We are not meant to fight it; indeed, as Werner Erhard and many spiritual teachers have taught, “What you resist persists.” When ego thoughts or feelings arise, trying to make them go away just strengthens them. Have you ever really tried to stop being angry at someone? The more you try to resist the anger, the stronger it grows, the clearer become all the reasons that seem to justify the anger.

Yet ignoring the anger and trying to brush it under the carpet does not work, either. The anger may remain out of sight for a time, but it is certain to erupt again, suddenly and unpredictably, seemingly made stronger by its hibernation.

What is needed is simply to look at it without guilt. “Oh, how interesting! I am experiencing anger.” With the support of the Holy Spirit, look directly at it, consider it, evaluate it. How does it make you feel? What are the thoughts giving rise to it? Are they true? Are they representative of your true nature as the Son of God? Are the thoughts and the anger something you want, truly? Will they bring you happiness? Will they bring you peace of mind?

You are not fighting against the anger. You are not trying to make it go away, but you are choosing to refuse to be taken over by it. You do not make yourself feel guilty for experiencing anger, but neither do you attempt to justify it. You bring it into the light without fear, without guilt. Pushing it away is just another form of it, anger against the anger. In God’s light, eventually, it will disappear. But making it disappear isn’t the goal; you simply notice it, acknowledge its presence in your mind, and hold it up against the truth.

There can only be one reality (2:6). Think about it! How could there be two different realities? So, either you are holy or you are not; you cannot be both. Furthermore, reality is changeless (2:7). In the Course’s thought system, “its changelessness is what makes it real” (2:8). In the Workbook it puts the same idea in different words:

As God created you, you must remain unchangeable, with transitory states by definition false. And that includes all shifts in feeling, alterations in conditions of the body and the mind; in all awareness and in all response. (W-pI.152.5:1–2)

In other words, the real Self cannot change. The body is not a part of it because the body ages and dies. Moods and emotional ups and downs are not a part of the real Self. God created us holy, and holy we remain. “This cannot be undone” (2:9). Unreal things can be undone, which proves they are unreal (2:10). When we bring the unreal ego into the presence of the ultimate reality of God, “it is undone” (2:11; 2:2). That is the finishing point of the process of juxtaposing the opposites: the undoing of the ego.

Paragraph 3

3.¹Merely by being what it is, does truth release you from everything that it is not.
²The Atonement is so gentle you need but whisper to it, and all its power will rush to your assistance and support. ³You are not frail with God beside you. ⁴Yet without Him you are nothing. ⁵The Atonement offers you God. ⁶The gift that you refused is held by Him in you. ⁷The Holy Spirit holds it there for you. ⁸God has not left His altar, though His worshippers placed other gods upon it. ⁹The temple still is holy, for the Presence that dwells within it is holiness.

• Study Question •

3. *Which other things in the list below are offered to encourage us in this paragraph?*
- A. *God is beside us*
 - B. *He still holds the gift we refused before*
 - C. *The holy meeting place within us is still holy, despite our idolatry*
 - D. *The Presence of holiness still dwells within the temple*
 - E. *All of the above*

The truth does not have to do anything to release us from illusions; it just has to be what it is (3:1). Just as light dispels darkness by its very nature, the truth, by its very nature, dispels the ego. The Atonement stands poised to help us. The most tentative call for help will be instantly and powerfully answered (3:2). I get an image of power steering in a car: just the slightest pressure on the steering wheel can control several tons of metal, because the power steering engine is constantly waiting to lend its power to the movement of your hand. Just so, the Holy Spirit's power is charged up, ready and waiting to flow into us the instant we voice our willingness to bring our darkness to Him for healing.

Sentences 3 and 4 are familiar ground to Bible students: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13, NIV), and "By myself I can do nothing" (John 5:30; see also John 5:19 and John 15:5). The big news is that we are not by ourselves: "The Atonement offers you God" (3:5). We are, as the Bible says, "partakers of the divine nature" (II Peter 1:4, KJV). However, in turning away from our origins and asserting our wish to be self-creating, we rejected that gift. I speak of our rejection in the past tense but it is an on-going state of mind. It is the state of mind that makes and maintains the ego.

As the Course has often assured us, our denial of our true nature has not altered it. "God has not left His altar" (3:8). He still abides in us and we in Him. The Holy Spirit, dwelling in our right mind, has safeguarded our inheritance. The divine nature is still ours, just waiting to be recognized and accepted.

Paragraph 4

4. ¹In the temple, holiness waits quietly for the return of them that love it. ²The Presence knows they will return to purity and to grace. ³The graciousness of God will take them gently in, and cover all their sense of pain and loss with the immortal assurance of their Father's Love. ⁴There, fear of death will be replaced with joy of life. ⁵For God is Life, and they abide in Life. ⁶Life is as holy as the Holiness by Which it was created. ⁷The Presence of holiness lives in everything that lives, for holiness created life, and leaves not what it created holy as itself.

• Study Question •

4. *How is the "Presence" in this temple described? (More than one correct answer)*

A. The Holy Spirit

B. Holiness

C. The graciousness of God

D. As waiting quietly for us

E. An unapproachable Light

The “temple” is another image for the holy meeting place that was the subject of the previous section. As you will recall, I defined the holy meeting place as the place in our minds where God speaks to us through the Holy Spirit. Here, you get an image of a long-abandoned temple. Yet, despite the absence of worshippers, you can sense that an unseen Someone is still there, a grand Presence Whose very silence strikes awe and wonder into your heart as you approach the temple. The Presence somehow seems uncompromisingly pure, and, as you begin to be aware of it, infinitely attractive. You sense that It is waiting for you, waiting to once again bask in your love (4:1–2).

You approach, feeling bedraggled, worn, and beaten down, and the temple beckons you; yet you hesitate, feeling uncertain at first of your welcome. But the Presence enfolds you; you hear words of love that offer you a comfort you never expected to find. Your “sense of pain and loss” simply disappears, swallowed up in joy (4:3–4).

This is the temple in our minds. This is the holy place we carry within us, always accessible whenever we care to turn to it. This is the goal of the Course’s call to us, to bring us here, lost once again in the Father’s Love. For a book that some have called overly intellectual, it certainly knows how to appeal to the heart! The Course’s reputation as “only a mind trip” is surely unmerited.

We share the very Life of God; we live in God (4:5). If God created us by sharing His Life with us--and what other source of life is there?--we must be as holy as He is (4:6–7). The Presence of holiness is in you. The Presence of holiness is in me. The Presence of holiness is “in everything that lives” (4:7). All life comes from God. All life lives in God. Therefore, all life is holy. That is the realization the Course want to give us, and wants us to give to others.

Paragraph 5

5.¹In this world you can become a spotless mirror, in which the holiness of your Creator shines forth from you to all around you. ²You can reflect Heaven here. ³Yet no reflections of the images of other gods must dim the mirror that would hold God’s reflection in it. ⁴Earth can reflect Heaven or hell; God or the ego. ⁵You need but leave the mirror clean and clear of all the images of hidden darkness you have drawn upon it. ⁶God will shine upon it of Himself. ⁷Only the clear reflection of Himself can be perceived upon it.

• Study Question •

5. *In this paragraph, what is this mirror said to reflect?*

A. Heaven

B. The holiness of God to everyone around us

C. God

D. All of the above

Paragraphs 5 through 8 give a wonderful image of a “spotless mirror” (5:1). The mirror is you and me, your mind and my mind (5:1 and 7:1). To achieve its purpose, this mirror must be kept clean, and keeping it clean is our responsibility. What is its purpose? As the section title has it, the purpose of the mirror of our mind is “the reflection of holiness.” We can become a mirror in which other people can perceive their own holiness and recognize the reality of their home in God. “You can reflect Heaven here” (5:2).

For God’s reflection to be clearly seen in the mirror it must be free of other reflections (5:3). If by our worship of some idol we reflect it--for instance the idol of money, the idol of physical beauty, the idol of power, the idol of guilt, or the idol of sickness--the people around us will be unable to behold in us the reflection of God within themselves. What do we want to reflect to other people? What do we want to say to them about themselves?

When we accuse and condemn we do not reflect Heaven. How can people behold their own holiness when we show them their sinfulness?

Notice that we don’t have to do the shining; we are just mirrors. God does the shining if we keep the mirror clean (5:5–6). Keeping the mirror clean means keeping it free of ego reflections, free of ego idolatry. This is another way of saying what the Course says so often, that our job is just to remove the blocks. When we do, the reflection of holiness will shine forth without any effort on our part.

Paragraph 6

6.¹Reflections are seen in light. ²In darkness they are obscure, and their meaning seems to lie only in shifting interpretations, rather than in themselves. ³The reflection of God needs no interpretation. ⁴It is clear [Ur: It is clear]. ⁵Clean but the mirror, and the message that shines forth from what the mirror holds out for everyone to see, no one can [Ur: will] fail to understand. ⁶It is the message that the Holy Spirit is holding to the mirror that is in him. ⁷He recognizes it because he has been taught his need [Ur: need] for it, but knows not where to look to find [Ur: find] it. ⁸Let him, then, see it in you and share it with you.

• Study Question •

6. *What do you think it means to "clean...the mirror" in 6:5?*
- A. To bring our dark thoughts to the Holy Spirit to be lightened*
 - B. To work very hard at keeping dark thoughts out of our minds*
 - C. To think only positive thoughts*
 - D. To make ourselves appear as holy as possible*
 - E. To be brain-washed*

When the Course says that "Reflections are seen in light" (6:1), the contrast (6:2) is with darkness. Holiness is not going to be reflected if we are scurrying into the shadows trying to hide our egos from ourselves and from one another. Denial of the ego's hold on us is not the way to enlightenment but rather the way to spiritual blindness. In an article posted on their website (<http://www.facim.org/acim/h930404.htm>), Ken and Gloria Wapnick wrote:

Students would do well in calling to mind the words Helen heard herself speak one morning as she came out of her sleep: "Never underestimate the power of denial." Jesus "borrowed" that idea later for the Course, where in several places he cautions his students against underestimating the ego's power: the intensity of its drive for vengeance, the extent of its insanity, and our need to be vigilant against it (T-5.V.2:11; T-7. III.3:5; T-11.V.16:1; T-11.VI.5:1; T-14.I.2:6; T-16.VII.3:1).

When we look without fear at our egos and bring those dark thoughts into the light of the Holy Spirit, they evaporate. Jesus says, "Clean but the mirror" (6:5). Notice that word, but. The phrase can be paraphrased as "Just clean the mirror." We do not need to become wise in what God is to reflect Him; His essence is clear. All that is needed is to clean the mirror. Bring our dark thoughts to the Holy Spirit to be shined away. No further effort is necessary. Clean the mirror, and the message of God will shine forth with unmistakable brilliance (6:5); "no one can fail to understand." When we clean the mirror of our minds, people around us will see and understand the message, because they have the same mirror within themselves, waiting for that message (6:6); they already have a need for the message but haven't known where to find it (6:7). But they cannot see it without its reflection in us. Let them see it in you! (6:8)

Paragraph 7

7.¹Could you but realize for a single instant the power of healing that the reflection of God, shining in you, can bring to all the world, you could not wait to make the mirror of your mind clean to receive the image of the holiness that heals the world. ²The image of holiness that shines in your mind is not obscure, and will not change. ³Its meaning to those who look upon it is not obscure, for everyone perceives it as the same. ⁴All bring their different problems to its healing light, and all their problems find but healing there.

• Study Question •

7. *What brings healing to the world through us?*

A. Our learning and experience with a wide variety of problems

B. Cleaning the mirror of our mind so that the reflection of God, which can heal all the different problems, will shine through

C. Becoming very clear about the image of holiness that shines through us

The emphasis here (in 7:1) is delightful to me: It presupposes our innate goodness. It says that if we only knew how much good would flow through us, how great the healing power that would be unleashed into the world through us, we “could not wait to make the mirror of [our] mind clean.” We are the image and likeness of God. Nothing is more desirable and attractive to us than the possibility of unleashing the healing power of God upon the world! If we can become aware of the miracles that can and will flow from us when our minds are clear of ego-crud, we will rush to bring our ego’s madness into the light of the Holy Spirit, so that He can remove it from our minds. We will delight every time we stumble upon a new twist of the ego in our thinking, because it enables us to bring it to Him to get rid of it!

Instead of being distressed when we realize we’re listening to our ego again, we should shout, “Hallelujah!” Because the ego has been exposed, and that means it can be undone for us.

“The image of holiness,” which is the image of God within us, “is not obscure, and will not change” (7:2). Mysticism isn’t mysterious! When God shines through us, nobody can mistake it for anything else, and nobody can misunderstand it if they see it at all (7:3). People who seem to misunderstand the manifestation of Christ in someone aren’t really misunderstanding It; they simply are not even seeing It. Their perception has stopped at the level of body or personality; they are blind to the spiritual level.

Let not the vision of his holiness, the sight of which would show you your forgiveness, be kept from you by what the body's eyes can see. Let your awareness of your brother not be blocked by your perception of his sins and of his body.
(T-22.III.8:2-3)

The Christ in you, reflecting in the mirror of you, can bring healing, and only healing, to any and every problem that may be presented to It (7:4). It is a universal elixir of healing. Doesn’t knowing that make you want to clean that mirror?

Paragraph 8

8.¹The response of holiness to any form of error is always the same. ²There is no contradiction in what holiness calls forth. ³Its one response is healing, without regard for what is brought to it. ⁴Those who have learned to offer only healing, because of the reflection of holiness in them, are ready at last for Heaven. ⁵There, holiness is not a reflection, but rather the actual condition of what was but reflected to them here. ⁶God is no image, and His creations, as part of Him, hold Him in them in truth. ⁷They do not merely reflect truth, for they are truth.

• Study Question •

8. *Does healing respond differently to different problems?*
- A. *Yes, because the solution must be tailored to the form of the problem*
- B. *No, because the only response that heals is love*

•

Christ in you offers only healing to the world, no matter what form of error, evil, or sickness may be presented to It (8:1–3). This is another way of saying what was said in Chapter 12, Section I, “The Judgment of the Holy Spirit”: that everything is either an expression of love or a call for love, and therefore everything deserves love in response.

Only appreciation is an appropriate response to your brother. Gratitude is due him for both his loving thoughts and his appeals for help, for both are capable of bringing love into your awareness if you perceive them truly. (T-12.I.6:1-2)

In a nutshell, this is everything that we are learning: To “offer only healing” (8:4); to “teach only love” (T-6.I.13:2). When we have arrived at the point where we consistently offer only love, no matter what anyone else does or says, we are “ready at last for Heaven” (8:4). We are ready for the realm where we don’t simply reflect holiness, but we are holiness. We do not simply reflect God; we are God. We hold God in us in truth (8:6). “They do not merely reflect truth, for they are truth” (8:7).

Summary

• Study Question •

9. *In this section and the previous two sections, Jesus has identified a number of pairs of “opposites” that he asks us to join together, bring the negative one to the positive one so that the negative can be shined away. Skim back over these three sections and list as many pairs of opposites as you can find, along with the references.*
10. *Summarize the illustration of the spotless mirror.*

Answer Key

1. F
2. C
3. E
4. B, C and D
5. D
6. A
7. B
- 8.
9. Pairs of opposites to be brought together:
 - light, darkness (VII.1.2)
 - knowledge, ignorance (VII.1:2)
 - truth, what interferes with truth (VII.2:1)
 - uncertainty, certainty (VII.3:10)
 - the undesirable, the desirable (VII.4:1)
 - the unwanted, the wanted (VII.4:1)
 - light, darkness (VII.5:1; 6:4)
 - truth, ignorance (VII.5:2)
 - love, fear (VII.5:2)
 - your little offerings, God's gift (VIII.5:5)
 - unholiness, holiness (IX.1:2)
 - what you made, what you are (IX.1:2)
 - illusion, truth (IX.1:4)
 - the ego, God (IX.1:4; IX.2:1)
 - time, timelessness (IX.1:7)
 - the past, what always was (IX.1:10)
 - error, truth (IX.2:1)
 - fear of death, joy of life (IX.4:4)
10. *Summary of mirror.* Our mind is a mirror; it can reflect holiness or reflect the ego. We can choose what the mirror reflects to our brothers and sisters. If the mirror is dirty (our minds are obscured with ego thoughts), it will reflect our brothers' and sisters' egos to them. If it has been cleaned of ego thoughts, it will reflect their holiness to them.

The Magic Mirror

(Based on *A Course in Miracles*, T-14.IX.5–8)

Longer Practice: Visualization Exercise

Someone else can read the following slowly or you can read it for yourself, pausing to close your eyes after each paragraph to follow its instructions.

The Magic Mirror: Imagine you are a mirror, a magic mirror, which can choose what it reflects. Today, you have chosen to reflect only love. Whatever happens in front of your reflective surface, only that which is love will be reflected to those in front of the mirror.

Imagine someone you know, standing in front of your mirror: a friend, a partner in relationship, a parent, or child, or boss, or co-worker. As they look at you, all they see reflected is their innocence, their worthiness. They see the Light that is within them. You judge nothing; you only reflect what is truly there.

Now picture someone else, someone you love, standing there. They see themselves as loving and lovable, reflected in your face, your eyes, your posture, your words...although no words are necessary.

Now let it be someone with whom you have difficulty standing there. As a mirror you have only one desire: to reflect to them who they really are, to reflect their love, their innocence, their true worthiness. The things for which you could condemn them pass right through you, unreflected.

Imagine now your day tomorrow. Imagine yourself going through the day as this magic mirror, reflecting only the love, like a perfect filter, filtering out all the garbage, and reflecting only the loveliness. Slowly, let yourself mentally go through the whole day, starting as you rise in the morning. Who do you meet? Who do you talk with? As you leave the house, begin your work. What are you reflecting? As you do whatever you do during the day, shining back only the love. And as you come back home at night, constantly being that magic mirror, no judgment, showing everyone around you who they are. Not who you are; who they are.

Hourly Practice

For a minute or two recall that you are a mirror that can reflect to your brothers whatever picture you want to reflect. Your true desire is to reflect holiness, guiltlessness, and light to them. Set your purpose for the next hour to do this.