Healing the Dream of Sickness

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Kenneth Wapnick, Ph.D.

Part VII
"The Process of Illness" (conclusion)

(6:1) Illness of any kind may be defined as the result of a view of the self as weak, vulnerable, evil and endangered, and thus in need of constant defense.

Again, this broadens our understanding of illness. Students of A Course in Miracles love to point an accusing finger at other Course students who get sick, saying, "You are not doing the Course correctly; don't you know that 'Sickness is a defense against the truth' (W-pI.136)!"—and on and on and on. Jesus is not just talking about a symptom, but he is saying illness is any experience in the body. When you are hungry, that is an illness. When your lungs are empty and you have to take a breath of oxygen, that is an illness. Anything that is wrong with the body, whether it is oxygen loss, food loss, or what we call a disease is illness. And illness demands a magical solution. Loneliness is a sickness, and wanting another person with you is a magical solution. Everything here is a sickness, and there is no hierarchy of illusions—contrary to the ego's first law of chaos. So be kind and gentle to your friends and to yourself.

"Illness of any kind may be defined as the result" means illness is the effect and the cause is the perception of oneself as "weak, vulnerable, evil and endangered." This is the perception of sin, guilt, and fear—we believe we are "the home of evil, darkness and sin" (W-pl.93.1:1), and that is the cause of our feeling so vulnerable and naked next to a wrathful God Who is about to descend upon us and destroy us. That vulnerable self needs a defense, which is the world, and the world then becomes a defense against our guilt and our perception of ourself as "weak, vulnerable, evil, and endangered." This perception of our self is in turn a defense against the glorious Self that God created, of which the Atonement principle is a reminder.

The entire thought system of the ego is encapsulated in this one sentence—and understanding that thought system is the ego's undoing. Implicit in the wrong-minded view is the right-minded correction, because when we really look at what the ego is doing, it will disappear. That is why you have to read each sentence very carefully.

(6:2) Yet if such were really the self, defense would be impossible.

Which, of course, it is. The world does not work. Look at how clever the ego is and how insane we are in believing it. The ego convinces us that our self in the mind is weak, vulnerable, evil, and endangered, and needs the protection of the world and the body. So we make a body, but it, too, is weak and vulnerable. If someone looks at your body in a funny way, you are decimated. This just shows how weak and fragile your perception of yourself is. And if you are hit by a car while crossing the street, you are
decimated in another way. As we have seen over and over again, the body was born to die. From the moment of birth, cells start dying and eventually we all die. So how does this work as a defense?

There is a wonderful passage early in the text where Jesus explains the ego's insanity and how its defense does not work (T-4.V.4). Jesus has us confront the ego with a question that is basically: "What gives? You told me to make up a body because I needed help and protection, and now my body needs help and protection. No matter what kind of help it gets, it is still going to die in the end. What kind of help is this?" Jesus says the ego responds by obliterating the question—it causes a veil to fall across our mind that obliterates any memory of what all this is about. We are no longer aware that the ego's defense—the body—does not work because we are no longer aware of what it was a defense against in the first place, which was the pain in our minds. We forget that being born in a body is a defense and now think it is a reality—we think it is God's gift.

That is why we need a course that exposes the ego for what it is. Jesus lifts the veil and says, "Let me help you look at what you have been covering up. You will want to turn away from the stench and grotesque shapes that you see in your mind, but I will stay there with you and help you look. Then you will realize that the whole thing was literally a fantasy, an hallucination, a delusion, and then it will disappear. But you will not know that until you look at your mind." Jesus is helping us understand that if we want to see what is in the mind, we should look at the world as it really is. It is not a place of life; it is a place of death. That is why Jesus says in the workbook, "The world was made as an attack on God. . . . [it] was meant to be a place where God could enter not . . ." (W-pl.111.3:1,4).

(6:3) Therefore, the defenses sought for must be magical.

They are magical because they do not solve anything. In our everyday world, magic is associated with illusion—we think we see things that have not really happened. Well, the world has not happened, and sickness is just one of the defenses or forms of magic the ego uses to protect us from the real sickness, which is in our minds. That is the whole point of Lesson 136, "Sickness is a defense against the truth" (W-pl.136), where Jesus describes sickness as a defense the ego uses to keep us from awakening to the truth that our reality is spirit. Jesus specifically describes the defensive strategy of the ego, pointing out that it is not something that just happens. We are not innocent victims of forces or pathogens beyond our control. It is our dream and it serves a mighty purpose from the ego's point of view: namely, to fulfill the wish of keeping our separation, but blaming someone else for it.

(6:4-5) They [defenses] must overcome all limits perceived in the self, at the same time making a new self-concept into which the old one cannot return. In a word, error is accepted as real and dealt with by illusions.

This idea of trying to build a different concept of the self has been prominent in our world since the second world war. There is a branch of psychological theory called "self theory," with Rogers, Allport, and Maslow among the more famous self theorists. This theory is about making a new self-concept that is stronger, less vulnerable, and that feels better—without having to deal with the ego's underlying concept that we are "weak, vulnerable, evil and endangered." Instead of looking within at this self-concept, we just put another veil or cover over it by making a better self—a better physical and psychological body in the world. We do not realize that we are just making shadows, seemingly loving and light-filled selves that are bigger, better, and more beautiful, but still shadows that we use to cover over the darkness that is our horrifying belief about ourselves.
(6:6) Truth being brought to illusions, reality now becomes a threat and is perceived as evil.

That is what the ego does. The true God is now perceived as a threat, and those who believe in Him are seen as evil heretics, pagans, and non-believers because they do not subscribe to the ego thought system that makes the world, the body, the individual, the ego's God, and the ego itself real. Again, this is why no one likes this course. Most Course students would not call it evil, but they shun what it says as if it were the devil, all the while thinking they are practicing the Course when they are actually covering it over. They think it is about making a more forgiving, more loving, more peaceful and kinder self here. My ego tells me that if I do the Course "right," I will never get sick, because what I want is a better, healthier self here. This mistake is exactly what Jesus is referring to here.

(6:7) Love becomes feared because reality is love.

The reason love is feared is that real, true love is total oneness and total inclusiveness, but not on the level of form. This is not saying that you should make love to the whole world, but on the level of the mind, your love for someone should not exclude anyone else. It does not choose sides; it does not say one or the other. Your love is a love that embraces the entire Sonship as one because the Sonship is one. The ego would have us believe it is fragmented and therefore we have to heal all the separated fragments. You only have to heal the one fragment that you believe you are. When your mind is totally healed, you will know the Sonship is one.

(6:8) Thus is the circle closed against the "in-roads" of salvation.

When you bring the Course's truth and Jesus the teacher of truth into the world's illusion, you have built a barricade against real salvation, which is in the mind.

(7:1) Illness is therefore a mistake and needs correction.

In the Course, "mistake" and "correction" apply only to the mind. You want to correct the mistaken choice for the ego, the mistaken belief that you could do this on your own. This idea is discussed further in paragraph 5, which I have not included in my commentary here.

(7:2) And as we have already emphasized, correction cannot be achieved by first establishing the "rightness" of the mistake and then overlooking it.

In The Song of Prayer pamphlet, Jesus refers to "forgiveness to destroy" and in effect "praying to destroy" and "healing to destroy," all of which are expressions of this same idea. These are ways of making the problem real and then seeking to solve it by either saying this person has sinned against me and others but I forgive him anyway, or by praying to Jesus to help solve my problem with you in the world, or by healing a body which I say is sick.

(7:3-4) If illness is real it cannot be overlooked in truth, for to overlook reality is insanity. Yet that is magic's purpose; to make illusions true through false perception.

That is what magic does. My sick body is a magical solution to my guilt; but then my symptoms require their own magical solution, whether it is something medical or something we think of as spiritual, such as prayer or this course. This is not a course in alleviating sickness or symptoms; it is a course in removing the cause of the sickness or symptoms. This is a course in changing your mind and not the
behavior, as expressed in that very important line in the text, "This is a course in cause and not effect" (T-21.VII.7:8).

**7:5-6** This [magic] cannot heal, for it opposes truth. Perhaps an illusion of health is substituted for a little while, but not for long.

We all do this. We have an illusion of physical health after we have had a period of illness, or an illusion of emotional health after a period of emotional turmoil or distress. But it does not last. Remember, the body was obviously made to break down; it cannot function perfectly because ideas leave not their source. Only spirit functions perfectly. The body comes from a separation thought that is already a disease, a deformity that does not work. Beware of the temptation to make the body real by trying to make it better physically or psychologically. Use the body merely as a classroom in which you see it as the screen onto which you project your own "secret sins and hidden hates" (T-31.VIII.9:2). You can then recall what you have projected out and bring it back inside, allowing yourself to realize that the separation thought was your decision. Now you can forgive yourself for it by making another choice.

**7:7-8** Fear cannot long be hidden by illusions, for it is part of them. It will escape and take another form, being the source of all illusions.

Freud was the first to talk about "symptom substitution." This is the idea that you cannot undo the symptom without undoing the cause, because if you do, the cause—our unconscious guilt—will automatically continue to project out and make new symptoms. Here Jesus is also saying that if you fix the sick body or psyche without undoing your belief in the reality of guilt—that guilt is good because separation is good—the guilt will just continue to generate more problems. Guilt is like a pump in the mind that constantly pumps out the filth of its own ugliness. It will continue to project out and make more and more shadows until we cleanse the mind by making another choice. Until then guilt, or fear (Jesus often uses sin, guilt, and fear synonymously), will always escape and take another form.

Again, the point of this discussion is to make it very clear that the body is not the problem or the solution. Once we say there must be another way or another teacher, the body's only purpose is to be a vehicle enabling us to get back into our minds, where the work has to be done. It cannot be done on the level of the body.