

Commentary on *What is the World?*

By Allen Watson

Paragraph 1

The world is false perception. It is born of error, and it has not left its source. It will remain no longer than the thought that gave it birth is cherished. When the thought of separation has been changed to one of true forgiveness, will the world be seen in quite another light; and one which leads to truth, where all the world must disappear and all its errors vanish. Now its source has gone, and its effects are gone as well. W-pII.3.1:1-5

The first sentence answers the question: “The world is false perception” (1:1). The rest of the page is the explanation of this summary statement. Some of us, on first reading the Course, think that perhaps the Course is not saying that the world is unreal, but that our perception of it is false. Yet here, quite clearly, Jesus is saying that the world and false perception are the same thing. The world is a hallucination; we are perceiving something that isn’t there.

In my perception, “I” am inside my head, looking out at a world that is not me. Separate. And that is simply not the truth. There is no world outside my mind (see T-18.VI.1:1 and T-12.III.6:7). “What is projected out, and seems to be external to the mind, is not outside at all” (T-26.VII.4:9).

The world was “born of error” and it has not left our minds which sourced it (1:2). As the Course so often says, ideas leave not their source. The world is the mistaken idea of separation in our minds (1:4), and it has never left our minds. When our mind (the one mind we all share) no longer cherishes the idea of separation, the world which represents that idea will simply disappear.

Many who were raised in a religious tradition which taught that God created the world have gone through a lot of distress and confusion, wondering how God could ever have created such a mess! If He was responsible for this, we weren’t sure we wanted to know Him. What a relief it is to realize that He did *not* create it; it was born of the error of our mind, from our mistakenly entertaining the idea of separation. The misery of this world only reflects the misery brought to our mind by the thought of separation. It is as if we wondered, “What if we were separate?” and were instantly given a virtual reality tour of what would result.

An early lesson said, “I can escape from this world by giving up attack thoughts” (W-pI.55.3:1, reviewing Lesson 23). The thought is the same. Heal the attack thoughts, the thoughts of separation which I still cherish, and I can leave the world behind. The Course is helping us to do just that; to let our attack thoughts go, and solve the problems of the world at their source.

If the world is simply the effect of the thought of separation in my mind, then obviously it is true that

when the thought of separation has been changed to one of true forgiveness, will the world be seen in quite another light, and one which leads to truth. (1:4)

The antidote for the thought of separation is true forgiveness. If the Course is a course in changing our thoughts, the thoughts that are being changed are separation thoughts, and they are being changed into thoughts of true forgiveness. The “wall” that keeps us separate is our unforgiveness, our grievances, our judgment upon one another as undeserving of love. The result of changing those thoughts to thoughts of forgiveness is that we see the world very differently. Instead of a world of judgment we see the real world. Instead of enemies we see brothers. And the

vision of this real world “leads to truth,” beyond perception to knowledge; beyond the real world to Heaven.

This light “leads to truth, where all the world must disappear and all its errors vanish” (1:4). In other words, as we’ve already seen, the progression is from “the world” (the result of the thought of separation) to “the real world” (the result of the thought of forgiveness) and then to “Heaven” (the truth), where there is no world at all.

The process we are going through in the world is the healing of our thoughts of separation. As those thoughts are healed, we begin to see the real world more and more, a world in which only love is reflected. But when the thought of separation is *entirely* healed in every part of every fragment of the mind, the world will not simply be seen differently; it will disappear. “Now its source [the thought of separation] has gone, and its effects [the world and all its errors] are gone as well” (1:5).

Paragraph 2

The world was made as an attack on God. It symbolises fear. And what is fear except love’s absence? Thus the world was meant to be a place where God could enter not, and where His Son could be apart from Him. Here was perception born, for knowledge could not cause such insane thoughts. But eyes deceive, and ears hear falsely. Now mistakes become quite possible, for certainty has gone. W-II.3.2:1-7

“The world was made as an attack on God” (2:1). That is probably one of the most shocking statements in *A Course in Miracles*. It puts to bed any idea that perhaps the world was, at least partly, created by God; God would not create an attack on Himself. The world is the ego’s attempt to replace and displace God, and to provide us with an alternative satisfaction.

In Chapter 23, Section II, the Text speaks of “The Laws of Chaos,” the ego’s laws. It tells us that these laws are what make the world real; it says, “These *are* the principles which make the ground beneath your feet seem solid” (T-23.II.13:5). The ego’s laws are what made the world.

What of the world’s beauty? What of the glitter of the stars, the fragile beauty of a flower, the majesty of an eagle in flight? Nothing but glitter, a shiny surface hiding the death-rot underneath. “Kill or be killed” is the law of this world. Beneath the lovely, glittering surface of the ocean lies a world of sharp teeth, cruel deception, and constant warfare, where life consists of eating some things and avoiding being eaten by others.

“Can you paint rosy lips upon a skeleton, dress it in loveliness, pet it and pamper it, and make it live?” (T-23.II.18:8). “There is no life outside of Heaven” (T-23.II.19:1).

The world symbolizes fear, which is the absence of love. “Thus, the world was meant to be a place where God could enter not, and where His Son could be apart from Him” (2:4). The ego made the world as a place to hide out from God, to get away from Him. Yes, we can find symbols of God in nature, and we should; true perception sees nothing but love in all things. But that means we see Him in tornadoes and earthquakes as well as in flowers and birds. It means we see Him in everything because He is in our minds. But at its root, this world is a place where God is not. That is why the ego made it. That is our purpose in coming here, as egos. And we egos did a pretty good job; people have been trying to “prove” the existence of God within the context of this world for millennia, and nobody has ever done so except, perhaps, to the satisfaction of a few who were already inclined to believe. Finding God *in* the world is quite a stretch. The world does a far better job of hiding God than it does of demonstrating Him.

What is the message in all of this for us? Remember, “The world is false perception” (1:1). It is not the truth. The picture of the world, symbolizing fear and attack, is the picture of the ego’s thoughts. “It is born of error” (1:2). This world is not what we want. We cannot attempt to cling

to its “better” parts and forget about the horror all around us. We take it whole or let it all go. And so, we can learn to look upon the world with love—all of it. Loving it gives it the only value it has (see T-12.VI.3:1–3). With forgiveness, we look past the messages of hate and fear it constantly tries to give us, and see there, as well as in the more “pleasing” aspects, the universal call for love.

You do not want the world. The only thing of value in it is whatever part of it you look upon with love. This gives it the only reality it will ever have. Its value is not in itself, but yours is in you. As self-value comes from self-extension, so does the perception of self-value come from the extension of loving thoughts outward. Make the world real unto yourself, for the real world is the gift of the Holy Spirit, and so it belongs to you. (T-12.VI.3:1–6)

The world is where perception was born (2:5). It was born because *knowledge* could not give birth to thoughts of fear; knowledge knows only the peace of God. Knowledge, in the Course, always speaks of Heaven and its oneness; perception, on the other hand, is the only means of “knowing” in this world. The two are often contrasted in the Text. Perception is inherently unreliable: “Eyes deceive, and ears hear falsely” (2:6). We all know this to be true. One has only to engage in one marital argument about what was seen and said the evening before to demonstrate it to ourselves. (Of course it is always the other person who seems to be perceiving falsely!)

Has it ever occurred to me, in all the times my senses have deceived me, that they were made deliberately to do so? “They were made to look upon a world that is not there; to hear the voices that can make no sound” (T-28.V.5:4; the rest of the paragraph is relevant also).

The body’s eyes see only form. They cannot see beyond what they were made to see. And they were made to look on error and not see past it. (T-22.III.5:3–6)

With our dependence on our eyes and ears, we have made ourselves very vulnerable to error: “Now mistakes become quite possible, for certainty has gone” (2:7).

Unreliable and deceptive perception enables the ego to make this world seem real. Perception shows us the sight of a world full of danger, demanding defensiveness and constant vigilance against attack. “The world *is* false perception” (1:1, my emphasis). Only the vision of Christ, which sees the light of God, can reveal anything different.

The purpose of the world you see is to obscure your function of forgiveness, and provide you with a justification for forgetting it. It is the temptation to abandon God and His Son by taking on a physical appearance. It is this the body’s eyes look upon.

Nothing the body’s eyes seem to see can be anything but a form of temptation, since this was the purpose of the body itself. Yet we have learned that the Holy Spirit has another use for all the illusions you have made, and therefore He sees another purpose in them. To the Holy Spirit, the world is a place where you learn to forgive yourself what you think of as your sins. In this perception, the physical appearance of temptation becomes the spiritual recognition of salvation. (W-pI.64.1:2–2:4)

Paragraph 3

The mechanisms of illusion have been born instead. And now they go to find what has been given them to seek. Their aim is to fulfil the purpose which the world was made to witness and make real. They see in its illusions but a solid

base where truth exists, upheld apart from lies. Yet everything that they report is but illusion which is kept apart from truth. W-pII.3.3:1-5

“The mechanisms of illusion have been born instead” (3:1), instead of certainty (2:7). The mechanisms of illusion include not only our eyes and ears, our physical perceptive organs, but also the mechanisms of the mind that interpret and adjust what is perceived to fit the patterns being looked for. We see what we expect to see, what we want to see. I was discussing, just last night, the very strange “blind spot” in our eyes. All of us have it. There is a place on the retina (where the optic nerve attaches to it) that does not pick up the light shining through the lens. The very strange thing is this: the mind “fills in” the blind spot with what “ought” to be there. None of us see a blank spot at the side of our vision, but it is there; the mind simply makes up what it thinks should be there! This is a “mechanism of illusion” indeed! And our mind “makes up” what “ought” to be there far more often than we realize.

The whole process of perception is a process of illusion. Our mind sends out its information gatherers “to find what has been given them to seek” (3:2). The mind tells them, “Find evidence of guilt,” and Lo! They find it. “Find evidence of attack.” They bring it back. “Find evidence of separation.” They produce it. The ego sees only what it wants to see. And the ego’s purpose in perception is to witness and make real the absence of love, to demonstrate that God is not here, and that we *are* here, apart from Him.

The “mechanisms of illusion” are what make this world seem so real. They include even our eyes and ears, and all our physical senses:

The body’s eyes see only form. They cannot see beyond what they were made to see.
And they were made to look on error and not see past it. (T-22.III.5:3–5)

When we view things with the ego’s perception, illusions seem solid; the separation of the ego seems to be nothing but the truth (3:4). To see with the vision of Christ, to see the oneness instead of the separation, we need to be willing to discount what our eyes are showing us, because “they were made to look on error.” “Everything that they report is but illusion which is kept apart from truth” (3:5). The miracle enables us to see what eyes see not; it lifts our perception into the realm of the spiritual, away from the physical (see T-1.I.22 and T-1.I.32).

We need to be willing to question what our senses seem to make real, and to be willing to perceive, with a different kind of vision, something else entirely. We have been victims of a very clever and very successful propaganda campaign, conducted by the master of disinformation—the ego. We need to realize that nothing we have believed to be true and counted upon as solid reality can be trusted; everything must be called to question. We have been surrounded by a conspiracy of lies, emanating from within our own mind. We have misdirected our senses until we became unconscious of what we were doing, but we can, today, redirect them. We can choose to look for evidence of love, instead of hate; for peace instead of attack. We can say:

Above all else I want to see things differently. (W-pI.28.Heading)

Paragraph 4

As sight was made to lead away from truth, it can be redirected. Sounds become the call of God, and all perception can be given a new purpose by the One Whom God appointed Saviour to the world. Follow His Light, and see the world as He beholds it. Hear His Voice alone in all that speaks to you. And let Him give you peace and certainty, which you have thrown away, but Heaven has preserved for you in Him. W-pII.3.4:1-5

Though our sight was made to lead away from truth, “it can be redirected” (4:1). The ego’s purpose for perception can be replaced with a new purpose, that of the Holy Spirit. “Yet we have learned that the Holy Spirit has another use for all the illusions you have made, and therefore He sees another purpose in them” (W-pI.64.2:2). “The Holy Spirit teaches you to use what the ego has made, to teach the opposite of what the ego has ‘learned’” (T-7.IV.3:3). So the Holy Spirit teaches us to use our eyes and ears not to see separation and the absence of God, but to see oneness and His Presence in everything.

Sounds become the call for God, and all perception can be given a new purpose by the One Whom God appointed Savior to the world. (4:2)

The preceding discussion might make us think that, since our eyes were made to see error, they are now useless. But the Holy Spirit will use everything the ego has made. He uses our bodies as communication devices. He uses our special relationships to teach us forgiveness and love and union. He uses our learning ability (made to learn error) to teach us the truth. He uses the whole world as a classroom of forgiveness and a mirror of Heaven. There is nothing the ego has done that cannot be used by the Holy Spirit. So in the end, there is no loss whatsoever, because all the ego’s energies have been “recycled” by the Holy Spirit for His own purposes.

So, then, rather than following the evidence of our senses, the “proof” the ego wants us to see that we are alone and separate, we can turn to “Follow His Light, and see the world as He beholds it” (4:3). I find that this is most often, especially at the beginning, a case of first seeing as the ego sees, realizing it is an illusion, and then asking the Holy Spirit to help me see differently. Some event occurs—for instance someone close to me criticizes something I am doing—and at first I see it through the ego’s eyes. I see attack. I feel hurt. I feel angry. But God’s Voice speaks to me, and reminds me that “I am never upset for the reason I think” (W-pI.5.Heading). And so I turn to Him and say, “Okay, Holy Spirit.” And I add:

I do not know what anything, including this, means. And so I do not know how to respond to it. And I will not use my own past learning as the light to guide me now.
(T-14.XI.6:7–9)

I ask Him to show me how He sees it. And He always sees everything as either an expression of love or a call for love, both of which can be answered only with love. If I truly open my mind to Him, and *let go* of how I am seeing the situation, His vision will replace my seeing.

“Hear His voice alone in all that speaks to you” (4:4). The Holy Spirit is speaking to us all the time; He is speaking to us through our brothers and sisters, and through the events of our lives. The call for help in our brothers is the Voice of the Holy Spirit calling to us to be ourselves, to be the love that we are. Behind every illusion is the Voice for God, constantly calling us to reclaim our Identity and to respond as the saviors of the world that we are.

He will give us peace and certainty (4:5). We threw them away, but He kept them safe for us and will return them to us whenever we are willing to have them again. Our peace and certainty will not come from the world; they never have come from the world and never will. They will come from His vision of the world, however. “When you want only love, you will see nothing else” (T-12.VII.8:1). If we disregard all the ego’s evidence, and let the Holy Spirit interpret all we see, we will see an entirely different world than the one we have been seeing. And this world, the real world, will fill us with peace and certainty.

Paragraph 5

Let us not rest content until the world has joined our changed perception. Let us not be satisfied until forgiveness has been made complete. And let us not attempt

to change our function. We must save the world. For we who made it must behold it through the eyes of Christ, that what was made to die can be restored to everlasting life. W-pII.3.5:1-5

Although the Course says, “The world is false perception” (1:1), the Course does not disdain the world. On the contrary, Jesus calls to us: “Let us not rest content until the world has joined our changed perception” (5:1). We do not just turn our backs on the world, shake its dust off our feet, and walk away. Indeed, we cannot do that even if we want to, because the world is a part of ourselves, our guilt, the pieces of ourselves we have rejected, projected out and given form. If I am to be saved, the world must be saved, because the world is myself.

Salvation, to be salvation, must be complete. Nothing can be left out. “Let us not be satisfied until forgiveness has been made complete” (5:2). We are asked not to rest content, not to be satisfied with our individual salvation. “Individual salvation” is an oxymoron; an impossibility. Separation is hell; salvation is oneness. How can I, apart from you, be saved, if salvation is the end of separateness?

There is a tendency among Course students, especially with the emphasis on its supposedly being a “self-study course,” to become introverted and occupied with one’s own spiritual development, and pretty much unconcerned with bringing the rest of the world to join our changed perception. The idea that we are called to save the world, which is a *major emphasis* throughout the Course, seems somehow to get lost in the shuffle. “Oh, isn’t that making the illusion real? Isn’t saying that our calling is to bring light to the darkness some kind of betrayal of the Course’s nondualistic teaching? Don’t we bring our darkness to the light?” Jesus doesn’t seem to think the one excludes the other. Read these two sentences again. Or hear these words from the Text:

Over and over, the Course points out that we cannot become certain, we cannot fully recognize the truth in ourselves, until we share it with others. “To give is how to recognize you have received” (W-pI.159.1:7). To turn our backs on the world is to leave the unforgiveness in our minds unhealed. Our task is not to preach to the world, nor to argue it into agreement with us, nor to “convert” everyone. Our task is to forgive the world, to open our hearts to the world in love. It is to erase guilt from every mind through our forgiveness. It is, in thought, in word, and in deed, to communicate the message which the Course says is central to its aim: “The Son of God is guiltless” (T-13.I.5:1; M-1.3:5; M-27.7:8).

There is no conflict in this curriculum, which has one aim however it is taught. Each effort made on its behalf is offered for the single purpose of release from guilt, to the eternal glory of God and His creation. And every teaching that points to this points straight to Heaven, and the peace of God. (T-14.V.6:3–5)

And we are called not to be satisfied, not to rest content, until forgiveness is complete, and guilt has been lifted from every troubled mind.

We are not to rest or to be satisfied until forgiveness has been made complete, and all the world has joined our changed perception. And in addition:

Let us not attempt to change our function. We must save the world. (5:3–4)

Have you noticed how often the Course talks about our function or our purpose? The word “purpose” occurs 666 times in the Course; the word “function,” 460 times. Some of those occurrences, of course, refer to other things, such as the function of the Holy Spirit, but a vast majority of them are referring to *our* function:

I am the light of the world. That is my only function. That is why I am here. (W-

pI.61.5:3-5)

There is no other reason for being in this world, except to be its light. There is no other reason to live on earth except to save the world, and to bring forgiveness to every mind. In fulfilling my function I find my happiness: “My happiness and my function are one” (W-pI.66.Heading). In fulfilling my function I discover the light within myself: “It is through accepting my function that I will see the light in me” (W-pI.81.3:2). Fulfilling our function is an integral and key part of the Course’s program for our own enlightenment.

Why would we “attempt to change” our function? What are the ways we do that? We attempt to change our function when we try to find some other purpose for living in the world, whether it be career, family, pleasure, power, or anything that is “of” the world. And we do so in an insane attempt to make this world a substitute for God, to make the illusion real and thus substantiate our ego identity. “We must save the world.” This is our only function; this is the only purpose for the world itself and for me in it. “The healing of God’s Son is all the world is for” (T-24.VI.4:1).

This does not mean that everyone must enter a recognized “healing profession,” although some of us may indeed do so. (The Manual says that immediate changes in life situations are asked of only a small minority; see Section 9.) Rather, it means we must learn to translate every profession into a healing profession (“The Atonement...is the natural profession of the children of God,” T-1.III.1:10). As Marianne Williamson says, every job can become a front for a church. Our first priority is the healing of our minds and attitudes, especially in our relationships, right where we are.

Our function is to behold the world through the eyes of Christ (5:5). We made the world. We made it to die. It is our responsibility now to restore it to everlasting life (5:5).