

# Study Guide and Commentary ACIM<sup>®</sup> Text, Chapter 8, Section I

## The Journey Back: The Direction of the Curriculum

### Legend:

blue text = Material from ACIM 3rd edition (FIP)  
**bold blue text** = words emphasized in all caps in Urtext  
red text = alternate or omitted material from the Urtext  
light blue text = editorial comments  
~~striketrough blue text~~ = Not in Urtext, in FIP edition

### A Look at the Chapter

The title of the chapter, “The Journey Back,” tells us that this chapter is about the journey we seem to be on — out of conflict into peace, out of sadness into joy, out of sickness into health, out of the ego into God, out of fear and into love.

In a certain sense you could say this chapter is a summary of the three preceding chapters, which presented an overview of the alternative to the ego, which is the Holy Spirit and His thought system.

**Chapter 5** focused on the Teacher, the Holy Spirit.

**Chapter 6** focused on the *lessons* of the Holy Spirit and the stages of growth we go through in learning those lessons: I cannot be attacked; attack cannot be justified; and I am responsible for what I believe. Or in other terms, “To have, give all to all;” “To have peace, teach peace to learn it;” and “Be vigilant only for God and His Kingdom.”

**Chapter 7** then focused on showing how this apparent process of growth is actually the remembering of a state of grace that has always been ours, and how it is remembered through *healing*, which is recognizing the wholeness in others. We choose how we want to see ourselves, and then practice by seeing others that way.

As you will see, this chapter begins by talking about the goal of our learning process, and moves on to discussing the relative merits of the available instructors: the ego and the Holy Spirit. It reiterates some of the themes of the preceding chapters and expands on them. This will occur again and again as we progress through the Text. The Course comes back to cover the same ground over and over again, each time spiraling to a higher level and a deeper understanding, each time broadening the application of its ideas, and each time weaving the various themes more and more into a unified, cohesive thought system.

By now the Course has stated most of its basic themes. The chapters from here on out will be, for the most part, expanding on these themes and applying them to specific issues, such as our general attitude toward our bodies (Chapter 8), forgiveness (Chapter 9), and sickness (Chapter 10).

The main theme in Chapter 8, to me, is that what we need is a fundamental shift in direction, a change from the ego to the Holy Spirit. There must be a willing reversal of our thought patterns, and a desire to *move away* from the “split mind” condition that most of us find within ourselves, part loving and accepting, and another part fearing and judging, and to *move into* a single-minded devotion to be the Christ that we are.

We all want love; we all want peace. Our problem is that we don't want *only* love and *only* peace. We still have a strong mental allegiance to thoughts of fear and conflict. “The journey back” is primarily one of clearing out all these thoughts that are in opposition to love and peace within us.

## Note on the Section as a Whole

In the Urtext, this section is actually divided about in the middle into an Introduction and a very short section. The dividing line isn't clear because the dictation was a bit sporadic here, with a five-day break between what is now the fourth and fifth paragraphs. In my opinion (which none of the versions seem to share!), the Introduction ran through the sentence which ends with “you cannot understand the state which prevails within it,” and the section on the Direction of the Curriculum begins with the line, “Your past learning...”. The latter line seems, to me, to begin the focus on the curriculum, while what precedes it mainly sets the staged

## Paragraph 1

1. [Ur: You are hampered in your progress by your demands to know what you do not know. This is actually a way of hanging on to deprivation. You cannot reasonably object to following instructions in a course *for* knowing, on the grounds that you do not know. The need for the course is implicit in your objection.] <sup>1</sup>Knowledge is not the motivation for learning this course. **2Peace** is. [As the *prerequisite* for knowledge, peace *must* be learned.] <sup>3</sup>This is the prerequisite for knowledge [. This is] **only** because those who are in conflict are not peaceful, and peace is the **condition** of knowledge because it is the condition of the Kingdom. <sup>4</sup>Knowledge can be restored only when **you** meet its conditions. <sup>5</sup>This is not a bargain made by God, Who makes no bargains [at all]. <sup>6</sup>It is merely the result of your misuse of His laws on behalf of an imaginary will that is not His. <sup>7</sup>Knowledge *is* His Will. <sup>8</sup>If you are **opposing** His Will, how **can** you have knowledge? <sup>9</sup>I have told you what knowledge **offers** you, but ~~perhaps~~ [it is clear that] you do **not yet** regard this as wholly desirable. <sup>10</sup>If you did you would not be so ready [would hardly be willing] to throw it away [so readily] when the ego asks for your allegiance.

• Study Question •

1. *What is the prerequisite for knowledge (the condition of Heaven), and why?*<sup>1</sup>

If we are setting out on a journey it makes sense to first establish the direction in which we are travelling. Likewise, in setting up a course of study, you begin by establishing the goals of the Course. What is the desired outcome? Why are you pursuing this course of study, and what do you expect to get out of it?

We might expect that the goal of our study in this Course is knowledge. After all, the acquisition of knowledge, in the sense of facts, ideas and skills, is the goal of most study we do in school. It would be reasonable to think that acquiring such knowledge is the goal of *A Course in Miracles*—facts and ideas about God and about our true nature, and various skills to be used in living a spiritual life. It would be reasonable, but it would be wrong.

As we embark on our spiritual journey, typically we are filled with a huge thirst for knowledge. We want to know everything! We want to know why the separation happened. We want to know how the ego came into being. We want to know what will happen to the ego. We want to know why people suffer, why sickness occurs, and how healing can happen. We want to know what God is like, what happens after death, what we will do in Heaven. (We tend to think it will be incredibly boring to do nothing, or to have no problems to solve, for instance.)

Actually, this “craving to know” is another ego ploy, a way of keeping us feeling deprived. The ego gets us asking ourselves: Why doesn't God just tell me what I want to know? Why is He keeping this from me? This apparent lack creates a deep unrest within us, and that is precisely the ego's purpose.

Knowledge, in the sense that the Course uses it, is—as we have said several times previously—something that belongs in Heaven, and not in this world. Robert Perry, in his book, *A Course Glossary*, defines knowledge as, “The heavenly condition of knowing reality through direct and total union with it, unmediated by physical senses or mental interpretation.” Over and over the Course tells us that we cannot truly know God or those things related to God and Heaven through mere mental apprehension or through our senses, but only by direct and total union with God and His creation. Our attempts to know these things apart from such experiential union are really distractions that keep us from such union. Think about it: Doesn't the craving to know things destroy your peace of mind?

The goal of the Course for us is peace of mind, and not knowledge, in either sense of the word: neither head knowledge nor experiential knowledge is its goal. Mere information is useless to us because we can acquire information without transformation. What good does it do me to “know” that we are all one in God, as a bit of factual fluff?

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<sup>1</sup> We need to remember that “knowledge” in the Course does not refer to an accumulation of information but a direct knowing that comes from identification. It is a term the Course uses almost exclusively of the heavenly state. Knowledge is impossible in this world (T-13.VIII.1:3–4). The purpose of our learning in this world is not this knowledge; it is the state of peace, which is the prerequisite to knowledge.

And yet, to know by direct experience that we are one in God and one with God surely is our *ultimate* goal. Why, then, does the Course tell us that knowledge is not its goal? (1:1).

The answer is that knowledge in this sense is not possible for a mind that is not at peace. *Peace must come first*, and the Course takes that preliminary step as its goal. It desires, not to impart knowledge to us, but to *prepare* us for knowledge. It aims to make knowledge possible. There is a play on words 1:3, with two senses of the word “condition”: “Peace is the condition of knowledge because it is the condition of the Kingdom” (1:3). “Condition” can mean both “a prerequisite” and “a state of being.” The condition (as a state of being) of the Kingdom is peace; therefore, to be at peace is the condition (as a prerequisite) of knowing the Kingdom.

Sometimes when something is put forward as a prerequisite to something else, it is done in an arbitrary manner, or in the form of a test. “You must pass Philosophy 101 before you can take the course in ‘Idealism.’” Or, you have to get a Learner’s Permit and use it for at least two weeks before you can apply for a Driver’s License. If God is putting peace as a prerequisite to knowledge in that sense, we might feel put upon by God. “Attaining peace is tough; I think it would help me to be peaceful if I could just know a few more things first!” It’s as if God were bargaining with us, saying, “I’ll give you the knowledge when you have achieved inner peace.”

Jesus tells us that this is no bargain, because God does not bargain (1:5). Peace is not an arbitrary prerequisite set by God; it *must* come first because of the way we have misused God’s laws. By using our power to create or to extend as a way of projecting “an imaginary will that is not His” (1:6) we have produced conflict in our minds between God’s Will and our imagined contrary will. Knowledge, however, is part of God’s Will for us! (1:7). Therefore, if we choose conflict, and reject His Will, we have rejected knowledge; how could we possibly reject knowledge and at the same time have it? (1:8). Thus, we must regain peace within our minds in order to regain knowledge. We must free our minds of the imagined conflict by recognizing once more that our will and God’s Will are one. That is how the Course defines peace of mind. It is the union of our will with God’s, the absence of any conflict of will. The Course puts it succinctly in Chapter 8; you can easily substitute “peace” for “joy” in the following quote:

Joy is unified purpose, and unified purpose is only God's. When yours is unified it is His. (T-8.VII.15:1-2)

Jesus reminds us (1:9) that he has told us how beneficial knowledge is for us, no doubt seeking to motivate us to seek the peace that is its prerequisite. He spent a fair amount of time back in Chapters 3 and 4 talking about how knowledge brings certainty, how it is the result of revelation and goes beyond perception, and has used the term as the general equivalent of enlightenment: “Knowledge preceded both perception and time, and will ultimately replace them” (T-3.III.6:4). He has spoken highly of knowledge, but he recognizes that our desire for it may still be imperfect. Our failure to attach sufficient value to knowledge is evident from the ease with which we “throw it away” by listening to the ego’s enticements (1:9–10). Our allegiance to the goal is divided.

This section will address the issue of our motivation. What is the goal of our learning program, and how undivided is our allegiance to that goal?

## Paragraph 2

2. <sup>1</sup>The distractions of the ego may **seem** to interfere with your learning, but the ego **has** no power to distract you unless you **give** it the power ~~to do so~~. <sup>2</sup>The ego's voice is an hallucination. <sup>3</sup>You cannot expect it [the ego] to say "I am not real." [Hallucinations *are inaccurate perceptions of reality.*] <sup>4</sup>Yet you are **not** asked to dispel your hallucinations alone. <sup>5</sup>You are merely asked to evaluate them in terms of their results **to you**. <sup>6</sup>If you **do not want them** on the basis of **loss of peace**, they will be removed from your mind **for** you.

### • Study Question •

2. *What, specifically, are we asked to do with the ego thoughts that arise?*

Our mind at the outset is still filled with the ego's illusions and hallucinations. Nearly everyone who begins the Course finds that their ego throws up all kinds of interference. It takes many forms: doubts and fears ("I'm being sucked into a bizarre religious cult." "I am going to drive myself crazy by trying to examine my twisted thoughts."); threat of sacrifice ("I may have to give up my special love relationship."); or temptations of various kinds. Just trying to read the Text or Workbook, you find your mind wandering off to dozens of other things. Distractions, distractions of the ego.

These things actually have no power to distract us from our goal of inner peace unless we empower them by our belief (2:1). We tend to think of the ego as a malevolent power that is working against us, and we are afraid that it is stronger than we are, but the truth is that the ego has absolutely no inherent power. The only power it has is the power we grant it. Its apparent power to distract us is nothing but an illusion, an illusion *we* have conveniently created to justify our wandering away from our goal. Whatever the misdeed, we can blame it on the ego.

Of course, the ego isn't going to blow its cover without a battle. It isn't going to walk up to us and say, "Hi! I'm your ego and I'm an illusion, so don't believe anything else I say" (2:3). It is going to do everything in its power to convince us that it real, and not only real, but invincible. It will bluster and befuddle us, dazzling us with one flashy illusion after another.

We are not powerless against the ego, but neither are we expected to dispel our hallucinations alone (2:4). We have the Holy Spirit to help us. The instructions about what we should do with the ego's illusions are quite specific, and very simple. It begins evaluating them, which is another way of saying judging them. As we have already seen in Chapter 4, the Course is not entirely disapproving of judgment. There is a kind of judgment that is encouraged and in fact *prescribed* for us, as it is here. Jesus said in our favorite passage on mental vigilance about things that interfere with our goal:

Watch your mind carefully for any beliefs that hinder its accomplishment, and step away from them. Judge how well you have done this by your own feelings, for this is the one right use of judgment. (T-4.IV.8:5-6)

In the current passage he elaborates a bit more about the way we can evaluate the ego's beliefs: What are their results? Do we *like* the results? Do these beliefs further our goal of peace, or do they interfere with that goal? When we identify a belief (or an

illusion) that causes us to lose our peace, and we decide that we no longer want it, then if we ask the Holy Spirit to remove it from our mind, He will (2:5–6).

When anything seems to you to be a source of fear... Remember the holy Presence of the One given to you to be the Source of judgment. Give it to Him to judge for you, and say:

Take this from me and look upon it, judging it for me. (T-19.IV(C).11:1, 6-8)

The Course repeatedly recommends this practice of turning things over to the Holy Spirit. We saw the advice previously in regard to vengeance (T-5.IV.7:3) and to our errors in general (T-5.VII.6:5). The basis for deciding to ask His help is the same, too—loss of peace: “I must have decided wrongly, because I am not at peace” (T-5.VII.6:7). If we will simply look with honesty on what the ego’s beliefs and illusions have produced in our lives, we won’t want them any longer, and that is all it takes to get rid of them. If we no longer want them, the Holy Spirit will remove them. What keeps them, lingering in our minds, is that we have not *entirely* let go of them; we have not *completely* stopped wanting them. Just as the last section (T-7.XI) asked us to judge the world we made in terms of its results, now we are being instructed to evaluate *everything* the ego tells us based on the results we experience. There seems to be no question in Jesus’ mind that if we just examine the results, we’ll let go of the illusions.

Notice that we are evaluating things in terms of the goal of our curriculum. The goal is peace. When we notice that something causes a loss of peace, if we are clear about our goal we will discard that something. Think about some of your own thought patterns, or your attitudes and habitual responses to situations. Are they peace *inducing* or peace *reducing*? Do they expand your peace or expend it? Do they uplift you or upset you? If your thoughts demolish your peace, why are you still holding on to them?

One other thing about this is very reassuring to me. If I am to evaluate the ego’s hallucinations on the basis of their results, that must mean that I will *buy into* those illusions, at least for a time. I will actually listen to the ego and follow its advice. That must be so, if I am to experience the *results* of its advice. Therefore, Jesus must be expecting me to be fooled by the ego, and he is not particularly upset about it. All he wants is that I evaluate the results of my decision honestly in the light of my goal, and if I do not like those results, ask the Holy Spirit to remove the ego illusion that caused the results. In other words, the Course’s program has room built in for making mistakes! In fact, making mistakes is part of the program, and changing my mind based on the results of my mistakes is how I grow.

### Paragraph 3

3. <sup>1</sup>Every response to the ego is a call to war, and war **does** deprive you of peace. <sup>2</sup>Yet in this war **there is no opponent**. **3**This is the reinterpretation of reality that you must make to secure peace, and the **only** one you need ever make. <sup>4</sup>Those whom you **perceive** as opponents are **part** of your peace, which **you** are giving up by attacking them. <sup>5</sup>How can you have what **you** give up? <sup>6</sup>You **share** to have, but you do **not** give it up yourself. <sup>7</sup>When you give up [**give up**] peace, you are **excluding** yourself **from** it. <sup>8</sup>This is a condition so **alien** to the Kingdom that you **cannot** understand the state that prevails **within** it.

• Study Question •

3. *What is said to be the one and only reinterpretation of reality that we need to bring us peace?*

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The ego has a monotonic way of responding to things. It perceives everyone as an enemy (at least potentially). Every situation is thus perceived as a call to war (3:1), and the ego responds with attack. It isn't surprising that a call to war takes away your peace! When you perceive some brother or sister as attacking you, how could you feel peaceful? Thoughts of attack will always destroy your peace. As the Workbook says, it does not really matter whether they are thoughts of attacking others or thoughts of *being* attacked (W-pI.23.7:1–2); either one implies the other, and either one will cause you to lose your peace.

The odd part is that *there are no enemies* (3:2). No one is really attacking you; *no one*. A Unity minister, Gary Simmons, has written a book and gives workshops all about this idea, titled, *The Art of Living with Nothing and No One Against You*. Although his book is very Course-like, Gary says he wasn't familiar with the Course when he wrote it.

According to the Course, every perception of attack is a mistake based on projection (T-6.II.3:5–6). Attack does not exist, except in your own mind (T-12.III.10:1). In order to restore peace to our minds, we have to reinterpret reality so as to support this premise (3:3): *There is no attack except in my own mind*.

Such a reinterpretation of reality is radical! The concept is simplicity itself. If there are no enemies and no attack, I can be at total and absolute peace. Of course, that is obvious. Our egos respond, "But *there are* enemies; *there is* attack." The Course is asking us to choose *not* to believe that, because believing that enemies and attack exist causes the loss of peace. Therefore, we need to choose to reinterpret the situation so that, somehow, we no longer perceive any attack or see any enemies. If we can do that, we will have peace.

Perhaps now you can see why we need help from God in doing this! To perceive the world as free of all attack and free of all enemies seems impossible, doesn't it? It seems like there really are some people who try to hurt you! Who can deny it? How, then, is peace possible in such a world?

The *Manual for Teachers* poses that very question in Chapter 11; you might want to read that entire chapter now (it is just four paragraphs). It says exactly what this section is saying.

Peace is impossible to those who look on war. Peace is inevitable to those who offer peace. How easily, then, is your judgment of the world escaped! It is not the world that makes peace seem impossible. It is the world you see that is impossible. (M-11.4:1-5)

If the world we see makes peace seem impossible, one of two things is true: Either *peace* is impossible, or *our perception of the world* is impossible. If God has created peace, then our perception of the world as full of attack *has to be mistaken*. And that is what has to change for us to find peace once again.

You may ask, "But how can I see a person who is trying to do me physical harm, or to steal from me, or to destroy my reputation, as anything but an enemy? How can I see their actions as anything except attack?" That is a question you need to ask the Holy

Spirit. How did Jesus see his crucifiers as part of his peace (3:4) instead of as enemies, and how did he see their actions as something other than attack? Because he did; we know that. He forgave them. He sought to bless them even as they sought to kill his body. How can we imitate him in that? If we ask, the Holy Spirit will show us.

When we perceive someone as an opponent we are *giving up peace* (3:4) and choosing instead to attack. Never mind the perception that they attacked you first! (“Mommy, Bobby hit me!” And Bobby says, “She hit me first!”) How you perceive their actions is completely up to you; you can (with the help of the Holy Spirit) see their action as a call for help instead of an attack; you can respond from a place of peace instead of from a call to war.

Once you give up peace, it follows that you no longer have it (3:5). *Giving up peace* is very different from *giving peace*! You can give peace, or share it, and you not only still have it, you increase it. That isn't giving it up. Giving up peace means excluding not only the other person, but also yourself, from peace (3:6–7). Such a mental stance skews your interpretation of the entire universe, including the Kingdom of Heaven (3:8).

This explains why, as the opening lines of the chapter say, you cannot *know* Heaven until you return to peace. When we exclude ourselves from peace, our minds become something contrary to the Kingdom of God, where only peace prevails, and thus we can no longer understand it (3:8).

• **Application** •

4. *Think of someone you see as an opponent of some sort. Be honest—the Course says that we see everyone as an opponent to some degree. Now ask yourself, “Does seeing this person as my opponent affect my peace?” And then repeat the following to yourself:*

- *This person is not my opponent; I have no opponent.*
- *This person is **part** of my peace.*
- *By attacking him/her, I am giving up my peace.*

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## Paragraph 4

This paragraph is the point where I believe the division comes between an Introduction to the chapter and the first section, about the direction of the curriculum.

4. <sup>1</sup>Your past learning **must** have taught you the wrong things, simply because it has not made you happy. <sup>2</sup>On this basis alone its value should be questioned. <sup>3</sup>If learning aims at **change**, and that is **always** its purpose, are you satisfied with the changes **your** learning has brought you? <sup>4</sup>Dissatisfaction with learning outcomes is [*must be*] a sign of learning failure, since it means that you did **not** get what you **wanted**.

• Study Question •

5. *Apply this paragraph to your own life. Can you identify some things (thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, habits) your learning has taught you, but things that have not made you happy? Try to list a few of them for yourself.*

Just as in the final section of Chapter 7, Jesus suggested that we look at the kingdom we have made and evaluate it or judge it (T-7.XI.3), so here he suggests that we evaluate the changes brought to us by our past learning (4:1,3). We won't be satisfied with what we find. We will discover that what we've learned hasn't made us happy and didn't give us what we wanted (4:1,4). "On this basis alone," he says, "its value should be questioned" (4:2).

This is a frequent pattern in the Course's teaching. It asks us to look with honesty on the ego and its works, and to evaluate it or judge it. In particular, Jesus asks us to look at the results or the outcome of following the ego's advice or holding its beliefs. He believes, and rightly so, that if we look honestly at the results of listening to the ego, we will gladly and willingly give it up. If you consider the Course as a whole, this is the primary content of the entire curriculum! "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).

The trick, however, is getting us to actually *look*. The meaning of this short paragraph (and the next) is not obscure. Their message is easily understood: Look at the results of your past learning, judge those results, and throw out the learning if the results don't satisfy you. The question is, *do we do what it suggests?* Do we actually look at the ego and assess the results of listening to its teaching? Do we see the deficiency of our past learning clearly enough that we *seriously* question its value? Simply reading these lines isn't enough; we have to become engaged; we have to *do what it says*. The ego will do everything in its power to keep us from this kind of honest self-examination.

## Paragraph 5 & 6

5. <sup>1</sup>The curriculum of the Atonement is [Ur: *is*] the opposite of the curriculum you have established for yourself, but so is its outcome. <sup>2</sup>If the outcome of yours has made you unhappy, and if you want a different one, a change in the curriculum is obviously necessary. <sup>3</sup>The first change to be introduced is a change in direction. <sup>4</sup>A meaningful curriculum cannot be inconsistent. <sup>5</sup>If it is planned by two teachers, each believing in diametrically opposed ideas, it cannot be integrated. <sup>6</sup>If it is carried out by these two teachers simultaneously, each one merely interferes with the other. <sup>7</sup>This leads to fluctuation, but not to change. <sup>8</sup>The volatile have no direction. <sup>9</sup>They cannot choose one because they cannot relinquish the other [Ur: *others*], even if it does [Ur: *the others do*] not exist. <sup>10</sup>Their conflicted curriculum teaches them that *all* directions exist, and gives them no rationale for choice.

6. <sup>1</sup>The total senselessness of such a curriculum must be fully recognized before a real change in direction becomes possible. <sup>2</sup>You cannot learn simultaneously from two teachers who are in total disagreement about everything. <sup>3</sup>Their joint

curriculum presents an impossible learning task. <sup>4</sup>They are teaching you entirely different things in entirely different ways, which might be possible except that both are teaching you about yourself. <sup>5</sup>Your reality is unaffected by both, but if you listen to both, your mind will be split about what your reality is.

• **Study Question** •

6. *This paragraph talks about making a decisive, single-minded change of direction in our learning program. Clearly, it refers to resolutely letting go of the ego and choosing to follow the Holy Spirit. In your opinion, is this choice something that comes quickly, or is it a process that you work out over time? (This question asks your opinion; there is no “right” answer.)*

Any attempt to simultaneously achieve two mutually exclusive goals is going to end in frustration. Every move toward one goal is a move away from the other (5:6). If there is a lot of energy pulling in both directions you will either bounce back and forth like a manic ping pong ball, or you will feel as though you are being torn apart. “The curriculum of the Atonement is the opposite of” the ego’s curriculum (5:1). The reason we are not wholly joyous is because we are listening to two teachers at the same time, who are “in total disagreement about everything” (6:2) and yet are teaching the identical subject—what you are (6:4). This *has* to be confusing!

Because we are the students, the ones who lack knowledge, how can we evaluate the contents of the two curriculums in order to determine which is right? We cannot. Fortunately, the *results* of the two curriculums are also totally different (5:1), and we *can* judge these results. We can evaluate the very negative results of listening to the ego and decide that we need “a change in the curriculum” (5:2).

Think back to the three lesson of the Holy Spirit, presented in Chapter 6. They encapsulate the whole spiritual journey, and that journey culminated in the third lesson, “Be vigilant only for God and His Kingdom” (T-6.V(C)). We keep coming back to *vigilance*, don’t we? We also keep coming back to the idea of that little word, “only.” In discussing the third lesson, Jesus said that the only way out of conflict (the only way, therefore, to peace of mind) was to make an absolute decision to abandon one path and to follow the other. The same thing is being said here. We have to abandon the ego and listen to the Holy Spirit; that is the only way we are going to find peace.

If we are going to make any progress at all, at the very start there has to be “a change in direction” (5:3). We have to reverse our course. We have to stop listening to the ego. Without that change, no amount of reform will help, no amount of spiritual reading will help, no number of weekend retreats will help. Every step forward in spirit will be countered by the ego with a step backward. As the Course says, “This leads to fluctuation, but not to change” (5:7). Pulled in two directions, you may have a lot of movement but still go nowhere. The word “volatile” (in sentence 8) here is used in the sense of inconsistent or fickle, like volatile stocks in the stock market that go up, down, up, down, and never settle on a consistent direction. That is what we are like until we firmly relinquish the ego. We will not do that until we really *look at* the ego to see what results from following it, and find those results wanting.

Even more to the point, we have to realize how utterly futile it is to try to follow two teachers who are in total disagreement! If the ego is really going to make us happy, then let's follow the ego with all our hearts! Let's get selfish! Let's forget about loving and being loved. Let's forget about giving entirely. Let's become totally amoral. None of us actually want to do that, do we? The Course actually says that it is *impossible* to follow the ego one hundred percent (T-3.II.1:6–8).

So, if following the ego completely is impossible, and if the results of every attempt to follow the ego bring us misery and pain, can we do both? Follow the ego a little, and follow God a little? Won't that be better somehow than following just the ego?

Surprisingly, no, it won't. It may even be worse! Trying to live with one foot in the boat and one on shore means you go nowhere, get split in half, or fall in the lake. A lot of people who have set out on a spiritual path casually, trying to add a little light to a generally dreary life, find out fairly soon that they are not any happier than before, and in fact are often even more miserable! Elsewhere in the Course Jesus refers to this as standing at the branching in the road: "...there is no part of the journey that seems more hopeless and futile than standing where the road branches, and not deciding on which way to go" (T-22.IV.1:8).

Ram Dass used to talk about how some people, when they first begin half-heartedly following a spiritual path, get caught up in a "phony holy" stage, in which they are pretending to be more spiritual than they really are. He says that when people find that makes them pretty miserable, they often try to go back to the world. This results in what Ram Dass calls the "phony unholy" stage, because in this stage, people are trying to be more *unholy* than they really are! You can't follow two teachers and be happy, and you can't follow just the ego. Therefore there is only one way out, one way to be happy: Follow the Holy Spirit with all your heart.

If your mind feels split about what you are—if sometimes you feel like a saint and sometimes like a devil—you are probably still trying to listen to both teachers. Notice the last sentence of the section: "Your reality is unaffected by both..." (6:5). What the ego says about you does not change the reality of what you are; and what the Holy Spirit says about you does not change the reality of what you are. *Nothing* can change the reality of what you are! As we've said so often, the whole separation, the whole journey back, the whole process of forgiveness and healing is all an illusion. We never left Heaven at all; it's nothing but a bad dream. Yet, as long as we continue to listen to both voices, our mind will be split, and we will be unhappy. Our reality will be unchanged but we will not know it; we will not believe it.

Our best bet, then, is to learn to evaluate the results of listening to the two teachers. Verify that listening to both does not work. Verify that listening to the ego brings results we do not like. This gives us a clear "rationale for choice" (5:10) between the two. In the next section, we will begin a more detailed examination of the rationale for choosing between the two teachers (see T-8.II.1:1).

## Answer Key

1. Peace is the prerequisite for knowledge. The condition (state) of Heaven is knowledge and peace. Therefore the condition (prerequisite) for Heaven is also peace. You have to be in peace in order to enter the place of peace, which is where knowledge exists
2. We are asked to evaluate them by their results in our lives. If we see that they cause the loss of peace (and they always do) we will not want them; when we no longer want them the Holy Spirit will remove them from our minds.
3. The one and only reinterpretation of reality that we need to bring us peace is that we do not have any enemies. When we lose peace it is because we think we are in a conflict; to be in a conflict, you must have an opponent. If we realize that our brothers are not enemies, but a part of our peace, we will *be* at peace.
4. No written answer is expected.
5. No written answer is expected.
6. In my opinion, the change of direction is a process worked out over time, although it *could* happen in a moment. Some people may experience a dramatic, sudden change, but for most of us it can take a long time to fully recognize that the ego is getting us nowhere, and that the results of following its advice are consistently unpleasant. Until we do, we will not fully let it go.