

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 8, Section III

The Holy Encounter

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

Overview of the Section

This section contains more familiar lines than nearly any other section of the Text. You will probably recognize many of them as you read. If you just skim through the section, pausing to read the lines that seem familiar, the general theme of the section becomes clear. It is a familiar one, beautifully stated: You cannot awaken without your brothers and sisters. Only by including them *can* you awaken to Reality, because your Reality, given go you by God, *includes* them. Every time you interact with anyone, you have another blessed opportunity to teach and learn this lesson.

Paragraph 1

Glory to God in the highest, and to **you** because He has so willed it. Ask and it shall be given you, because it has already *been* given. Ask for light and learn that you *are* light. If you **want** understanding and enlightenment you **will** learn it, because your decision [**will**] to learn it is the [**your**] decision to listen to the Teacher Who **knows** of light, and can therefore **teach it to you**. There is no limit on your learning because there is no limit on your **mind**[s]. There is no limit on His teaching [**will to teach**] because He was created [**by unlimited Will in order**] to teach. Understanding [**Knowing**] His function perfectly He fulfills [**wills to fulfill**] it perfectly, because that is His joy and **yours**.

• Study Question •

1. *Perhaps you have harbored the thought that you will never be able to forgive a certain person or that you will never become enlightened. How does this section help to eradicate such doubts?*

The opening line, “Glory to God...,” is both a quotation from the angels’ song at the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:14) and a reference to the theme about power and glory begun in T-8.II.7:1. In the King James Version of Luke, the angels declared: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” The New International Version renders the latter phrase as, “...peace to men on whom his favour rests” (NIV). The

Course gives its own unique twist to the words: “Glory...to you because He has so willed it” (1:1). The common thread seems to be that God gives us glory (or peace) simply because He chooses to; it is His Will, and therefore, glory is given to us. This leads into an oft-repeated theme of the Course, teaching us that glory is not something we have to earn, because it is gift given to us by God as a pure act of His Will.

The theme of our glory and power runs richly through Section III, as we pointed out the last commentary (see paragraphs 2, 5, 7 and 8). Jesus emphasizes that we already *have* what we are seeking. Prayer based on this fact is always answered because we are asking for something we already have (1:2).

Robert Beatty, a Vipassana Buddhist teacher in Portland, Oregon, often ends meetings with a remembrance of his teacher, Ruth Denison. “May she remember who she is,” he asks. “May we all remember who we are.” This Buddhist blessing expresses the same idea as this paragraph, which is that the spiritual work we are doing does not make us into something we *are not*; rather, it enables us to remember what we *are* (1:3).

The good news is that the only requirement for enlightenment is *wanting* enlightenment. If we want to be enlightened, we do not have to worry about whether or not we can “make it.” We *will* make it, because when we want enlightenment our minds become receptive to the teaching of the Holy Spirit (1:4), Whose job is simply to remind us of what we already are. Enlightenment is not a particularly difficult thing to teach because every student has already passed the exam and graduated. We have an infinitely endowed Teacher, given to us by God, and our ability to learn is as unlimited as His desire to teach (1:5–6). What a set up! There can be no doubt that we will learn enlightenment! Bringing us to enlightenment is the entire purpose for which God created the Holy Spirit. Enlightening us is His job, and He *loves* it! (1:7)

Some thoughts from this paragraph can be turned into affirmations or seed thoughts that can be memorized and repeated throughout the day, just as we are taught to use the ideas from the Workbook. We could remind ourselves:

If I want understanding and enlightenment I will learn it.

There is no limit on my learning because there is no limit on my mind.

Paragraph 2

2. ¹ To fulfill the Will of God perfectly is the only joy and peace that can be fully **known**, because it is the only function that can be **fully experienced**. ² When this is accomplished, then, there **is** no other experience. ³ Yet the **wish** for other experience will block its accomplishment [**this**], because God's Will **cannot** be forced upon you, being an experience of total **willingness**. ⁴ The Holy Spirit understands how to teach this, but **you** do not. ⁵ That is why you need Him, and why God gave Him **to** you. ⁶ Only **His** teaching will release your will to God's, uniting it with His power and glory and establishing them as yours. ⁷ You [**will**] share them as God [**He**] shares them, because this is the natural outcome of their being.

• Study Question •

2. Paragraph 1 taught us that we need only want enlightenment to have it.. To be totally enlightened we must want it totally. What does paragraph 2 add to our understanding of this wanting or willing?

If something is not in accord with your nature you cannot *fully* experience it. For instance, you can get some idea what it's like to be a dog by walking on all fours, barking instead of talking, eating dog food, and letting someone lead you around on a leash. But you can't *fully experience* what being a dog is unless you can actually become a dog, with a dog's nature.

Therefore, you cannot fully experience being an ego! That is because *you are not* an ego; you are a Son of God. You are not separate; you are united. You can't get rid of the Holy Spirit in your mind. The only "function" that you can fully experience is one that is in accord with your nature. Your nature is determined by God's creation; therefore, fulfilling God's Will perfectly is the only joy and peace that can be fully known (2:1). No other experience is real, and when we have joined ourselves wholly to the Will of God, our entire experience will become one of fulfilling that Will. All seeming experience of "another will" will drop away (2:2).

All that it takes to block the experience of total joining with God, however, is a *wish* for some other kind of experience. If we wish for the experience of a separate will we will *have* the experience (2:3). Union with God's Will, in its very essence, means that we have *willingly* joined with Him and given up every vestige of independence; the presence of a wish for independence demonstrates that our willingness is not total. God does not, and indeed *cannot*, force us to do His Will (2:3), because His Will for us consists in our complete freedom of choice. He wants us to give ourselves willingly and cheerfully, as the Bible says:

Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9:7, NIV)

We are all exceedingly fearful that God *wants to* force us to do His Will. Certainly, that is what our egos are telling us. The message that only doing the Will of God is natural, and only doing the Will of God can bring us joy and peace, might seem like heavy-handed coercion. "Do this or suffer my wrath!" But, as Ernest Holmes (founder of Religious Science) once wrote, "There is no punishment, but an inevitable consequence." If we choose not to live in accord with God's Will, we *will* suffer, not because God wants to punish us for our sin but because we have chosen to violate our own nature.

To have complete joy and peace we must become *totally* willing. Have you ever wondered how you go about making yourself totally willing? Nearly everyone has the experience of being partially willing, but with some reservations. We want God, but we're a little unsure about wanting Him *only*. We don't know how to teach ourselves such total willingness, but the Holy Spirit does know (2:4). That's why we need Him (2:5). We don't need to be completely willing to begin with, we just need to be willing to be *made* willing. That is what the Holy Spirit does for us, in ways that are explained in the subsequent paragraphs. Union with God's Will restores our power and glory (there are those words!). Remember that God's Will *contains* all power and glory (T-8.II.7:1); therefore, as we join with His Will we also join with God's power and glory (2:6). The same general idea will be repeated in paragraph 8.

Even as the Course emphasizes the power and glory that belong to us, it makes a point of saying this power and glory is *shared* and not exclusive (2:7). (Note that in the Urtext, the sentence reads, "You will share them as He shares them." In other words, as the Holy Spirit shares His power and glory with us, we will share them with others.) This power and this glory are not things we amass to ourselves exclusively, in contradistinction with the weakness of others. The very nature of this power and glory necessitates our sharing them (2:7). The world thinks of power and glory in contrast to weakness and drabness; to have power means we have power *over* someone; to have glory means we are elevated *over* someone. That isn't how power and glory from God work. The power and glory is *in the sharing*. I have power, not to take from others but to give to them. I have glory, not to exalt myself over others, but to elevate others alongside me. It is a contagious glory.

Paragraph 3

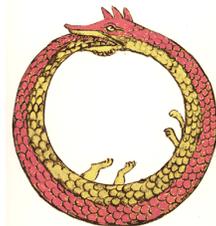
3. ¹ The Will of the Father and of the Son are one [together] by **Their extension**. ² Their extension is the **result** of Their oneness [their Oneness], holding **Their** unity together by extending Their **joint** Will. ³ This is perfect creation by the perfectly created, in union with the Perfect Creator. ⁴ The Father **must** give fatherhood to His Son [Sons], because His Own Fatherhood must be extended outward. ⁵ You who belong in God have the holy function of extending His Fatherhood by placing no limits upon it. ⁶ Let the Holy Spirit teach you **how** to do this, for you can [will] know what it **means** ~~only~~ of God Himself.

• Study Question •

3. *If God called you into His office and said, "(Name), I have elected you to have the holy function of extending My Fatherhood outward so that it is unlimited," what would you feel and say?*

Extension is the mechanism of oneness. Oneness is maintained by incorporating things under the umbrella of God's Will, and the Oneness of the Father and the Son not only produces extension but also results from extension. It is a self-maintaining process. Oneness produces extension; extension increases the oneness; and so it continues, like the Worm Ouroboros, which is an ancient symbol of the continuity of life and the unending infinite cycle of the universe:

The Worm Ouroboros



The concept of an unending infinite cycle is common in esoteric religion, both in the East and the West. In the paragraph we are considering, extension and Oneness are joined in such a way that each seems to cause the other, and each seems to arise from the other. Extension is a result of Oneness, and yet the unity is held together by the extension of the joint Will of Father and Son (3:1–2). Extension and Oneness are different aspects of the same thing, different ways of looking at God's Being, although simply saying they are the same is an over-simplification. They reflect different qualities of God. Extension is something being flung outward, while Oneness is cohesion or holding together. Yet, somehow, the flinging outward is the very thing that holds it all together!

Extension is the very pulse of Life Itself, and taking our place in that pulsating activity of life is what brings us our deepest satisfaction, indeed the only *perfect* satisfaction. The Holy Spirit can teach us how to do this (3:6) even if we cannot understand how to do it or exactly what it means to take part in the extension of God's Fatherhood. In fact, on our own, we *cannot* know what it means! That is something that only God Himself can teach us, through the Holy Spirit (3:6).

This calls for a kind of surrender. Jesus informs us that God has given us a purpose, and has designed us so that we can be truly happy only in fulfilling that purpose. He describes that purpose as “extending His (God's) Fatherhood” (3:5), but beyond that general phrase, he cannot really tell us any more. He asks us to place ourselves in the hands of the Holy Spirit, Who will teach us how to fulfill our function. We will not completely understand, in advance, what that function is. We have to trust the Holy Spirit to show us as we go along.

The nearest this paragraph comes to describing how we can extend God's Fatherhood is in the simple phrase, “by placing no limits on it” (3:5). To me, this implies that we must recognize that God has fathered, or authored, everything that is real. He has authored everyone, and that includes everyone I happen to know, meet, or even think about. How do I extend God's Fatherhood? By *recognizing* His Fatherhood everywhere and in everyone. I extend God's Fatherhood by recognizing *everyone* as a child of God, and by refusing to exclude anyone from the scope of that Fatherhood—that is, to refuse to see them, in my mind, as outside of God's Kingdom. In simple terms, I extend God's Fatherhood by offering perfect forgiveness and full acceptance to everyone. As we've said before, “The lack of exceptions *is* the lesson” (T-7.XI.4:2).

Application: Repeat sentences 5–6 in the first person, inserting your name: “I, [name], belong in God, and have the holy function of extending His Fatherhood by placing no limits on it. I choose to let the Holy Spirit teach me how to do this.”

Paragraph 4

4. ¹ When you meet anyone, remember it is a holy encounter. ² As you see him you will see yourself. ³ As you treat him you will treat yourself. ⁴ As you think of him you will think of yourself. ⁵ Never forget this, for in him you will find yourself or lose [sight of] yourself. ⁶ Whenever two Sons of God meet, they are given another chance at salvation. ⁷ Do not leave anyone without giving salvation **to** him and receiving it yourself. ⁸ For I am always there **with** you, in remembrance of *you*.

• Study Question •

4. *Imagine your next encounter with someone you know who, for you, is difficult to get along with or hard to love (at least some of the time). Mentally speak the words of this paragraph to yourself, substituting the name of that person for "him." Try to imagine what your next meeting would be like if you enter it with these words in your mind.*

This entire paragraph is worth memorizing. That probably seems a very difficult thing to do, if not impossible, but I've found that nearly everyone can memorize things if they just go through a simple process of repetition. I've added an Appendix at the end of this commentary, "Some Help With Memorizing," for anyone who is interested.

The Course places extraordinary emphasis on our relationships. Few spiritual teachings (the *Pathwork* teachings are one exception I am aware of) place as much emphasis on relationships as the Course does. In the paragraph we are studying now, the Course says that we will either find ourselves or lose sight of ourselves in *anyone we meet* (4:1–5).

"In him (your brother) you will find yourself or lose sight of yourself" (4:5). This basic principle applies to *all* relationships, casual or intense, although our normal focus is on our primary relationships, because the principle can be most clearly seen and applied in them.

The Course asks us specifically to *remember* something whenever we meet anyone (4:1). It asks us to remember that such meetings are pregnant with meaning. They are never insignificant; they are "holy." What does that word tell us about the multitude of encounters we have with other people every day?

"Holy" typically identifies something associated with the divine, in the sense of "sacred." We speak of the "Holy Bible," which identifies it as God's book. But there are more generic meanings to the word. "Holy" can identify something set apart for a spiritual purpose, as in a "holy place." It can simply refer to something that deserves special respect or reverence.

I think all these shades of meaning can apply here. Our seemingly chance encounters are actually events we can, and should, associate with God or with divine purpose. We should regard our interaction with other people with respect and even reverence.

Our interaction with other people has *profound* consequences. Jesus said earlier that our brother is our mirror (T-7.VII.3:9) in which we see the image we hold of ourselves. Here, he amplifies that idea. The way we see one another, treat one another, or even *think* of one another, reveals to us (if we are willing to look at it) how we see, treat, and think of ourselves (4:2–4). We imagine that we are seeing separate persons, treating them as we deem appropriate, and thinking of them pretty much however we want to. We imagine we can do this without any effect on ourselves. We believe that we can think of another person as bad, or unloving, or worthless, without in any way damaging ourselves. What the Course tells us, however, is that the way we interact with other people is always a projection of how we see ourselves. If we judge others it is because we judge ourselves. If we did not judge ourselves we *could not* judge others.

This is related to the theme of the first three paragraphs: extending God's Fatherhood by refusing to limit it. This paragraph describes just how we do that. We extend God's Fatherhood by recognizing every encounter as holy, and realizing that the person we are meeting is the holy child of God. Every meeting is thus an opportunity for salvation (4:6). The Holy Spirit will teach us how to fulfill our function, and the *way* He teaches us is by leading us to exchange salvation with everyone we meet. He uses our relationships to train us in universal acceptance. Just think about some of your relationships like that: as training exercises in recognizing God's glory in everyone. It makes a huge difference in how you hold those relationships.

I believe the Course means this quite literally: *Every* encounter can be used to bring us closer to God, and closer to remembering who we really are. The person we speak to in the hallway, the clerk in the grocery store, every telephone call, every family member we stumble past in the morning as we get ready for work, every exchange of electronic mail on the Internet, *all* of it contains spiritual treasures for us if we are willing to look at it. Relationships are the key to our salvation, the pathway to our enlightenment.

What does it mean that in our brother, or sister, we will find ourselves or lose sight of ourselves (4:5)? The paragraphs that follow answer this question.

Paragraph 5

5. ¹ The goal of the curriculum, regardless of the teacher you choose, is "**Know thyself.**" ² There is nothing else to seek [*learn*]. ³ Everyone is looking for himself and for the power and glory he thinks he has lost. ⁴ Whenever you are with anyone [*else*], you have another opportunity to find them. ⁵ Your power and glory are in **him because** they are yours. ⁶ The ego tries to find them in **yourself alone**, because it [*he*] does not know where to look. ⁷ The Holy Spirit teaches you that if you look only at yourself you **cannot** find yourself, because that is **not** what you are. ⁸ Whenever you are with a brother, you are learning what you are because you are **teaching** what you are. ⁹ He will respond either with pain or with joy, depending on which teacher **you** are following. ¹⁰ **He** will be imprisoned or released according to your decision, **and so will you.** ¹¹ Never forget your responsibility to him, because it is your responsibility to **yourself.** ¹² Give him **his** place in the Kingdom and you will have **yours.**

• Study Question •

5. *You have a chance to find your own power and glory whenever you are with someone else. Whatever you teach him about himself you will learn about yourself. Based on this paragraph, what is wrong with trying to find God through meditating alone in a cave for 50 years?*

Our relationships can be our most productive classroom for spiritual growth. The Course is saying quite plainly in this section that everyone is looking for themselves (5:3)—or more exactly, each of us is looking, ultimately, for our Self, a Self shared by us all. Every spiritual teaching is concerned, in the end, with assisting us to know what or who we are (5:1). Nothing else is truly worth looking for because, when it comes down to it, nothing else but our Self actually exists! (5:2).

Why is it that so many religions of the world contain some legend of a “fall” from glory? It seems as if we possess a racial memory of a prior state of grace or happiness, an Eden that we have lost and that we are trying to rediscover. Once, we had “power and glory” (5:3) but we have lost it, or so we think. Whatever form it takes, most spiritual seeking fits into the general framework of looking for our true Self “and for the power and glory (we think we have) lost” (5:3).

There is nothing wrong with this search. The Course is attempting to meet that same need, but its way is quite different from most others, because it says that we cannot find our Self in ourselves alone (5:6). Focusing on finding the Self in the self is an ego trick, a misdirection of our efforts that, despite good motivation, can end up *preventing* us from finding the answer we are looking for.

Looking for salvation in myself alone is the problem, not the answer! It is a mistake to think that we can find our Self by looking *only* at ourselves. The Course says: “...if you look only at yourself you cannot find yourself...” (5:7), and “...you...cannot find yourself alone” (6:1).

The best opportunities for finding our Self are our holy encounters with one another. If you want to find your Self, the Course says, you have to look at your interactions with your brothers and sisters. The goal is always to know yourself, to *find* your Self-with-a-capital-S, but the place to look for that Self, paradoxically, is *in other people*. If you want to find your Self, you must realize that the Self includes your brothers.

You are not “you” as an ego, the individual personality you identify with. You are the *Kingdom*. The Self you think you have lost and that you are trying to find is something much bigger and more extensive than the little piece of identity you call “me.” The ego doesn’t know this! You will *never* learn it from listening to the ego.

Why is it that we cannot find our Self in ourselves alone? The first reason is “...because that is not what you are” (5:7). Your true Self is not *yourself alone*. Your true Self is not a small, isolated self, set apart from billions of other selves and in competition with the universe. You cannot see the ocean by examining a drop of water with a microscope. Your true Self is a shared Self, shared with everyone and everything. You cannot see *that* Self if you are looking only at yourself

Any meeting of two people contains the potential for salvation because every person you meet gives you another opportunity to look beyond the appearance of two separate beings, and to find the common Self you both share.

That, in one sense, is the difference between an unholy relationship and a holy one. In the unholy relationship, you have two separate beings competing with or bargaining with one another for separate personal advantage—hopefully advantage for both, but still the separate advantages of two people. In a holy relationship, you have two individuals who are seeking to look beyond their separation to uncover their fundamental unity.

Each of us is a tiny fragment of the Whole, a fragment that thinks it is a separate whole. We have blinded ourselves to the larger picture. We have hidden our magnificence from ourselves, and we think we have lost our power and glory, so that is what we go looking for. But in looking at ourselves alone, in examining that little drop of water with a microscope, we will never find it.

Each brother and sister we meet serves as a mirror to us. The ego uses the mechanism of *projection* to cast what we do not want to see about ourselves—both the positive things as well as the negative things—outside of us. What we see in our brothers and sisters shows us beliefs about *ourselves* we have cast out of our minds, in order to block

our awareness of them. The Holy Spirit wants to use every relationship to *reveal* these hidden things to us. What I see in my brother is something I have hidden from myself, a thought about *me* that I have thrown away and projected out onto the world.

By looking at my brother and understanding that what I see in him is only the projection of a thought about myself, I can learn about myself. If I look only at myself, I won't see that, because a part of my mind (the part the Course calls *ego*) has deliberately *excluded* that part of the picture from my image of myself. My "self alone" is just a husk; the vast bulk of my thoughts about myself can only be seen outside, in my brothers and sisters. These may be negative thoughts about myself, such as self-hatred or guilt; or they may be the beautiful Truth about my true Self. If I am to find myself, I must begin my search by looking at my brothers and sisters, and recognizing in what I see in them the thoughts about myself that I have been hiding from my awareness.

So I begin by looking at my relationships. How do I see my brother or sister? How do I treat them? How do I think about them? I need to look very honestly at this; it is often a painful process, especially when I began to recognize how vengeful my mind can be, how vicious, and how judgmental.

And then I need to ask myself, "Is this how I want to see *myself*? Is this how I want to treat *myself*? Is this how I want to think about *myself*?" Because that is what I am doing! For instance, if I am thinking of another person and refusing to let go of a grievance against them, if I am refusing to see them as capable of love, capable of change, worthy of my respect and love, that is how I am thinking about myself. What I perceive as being out there, in another person, is just a projection of my own thoughts about myself.

You may say that you are not aware of any such vicious thoughts about yourself. Of course not! That is the whole point. Such self-destructive thoughts are extremely painful, and that is precisely why your mind has denied them and projected them out onto the world. The question to ask yourself is, "Do I have vicious thoughts about *anyone*?" Because if so, they *are* thoughts about yourself. The Holy Spirit wants to use your relationships to make you once again *aware* of these thoughts of self-hatred in your mind. The ego is nothing but this mechanism of self-hatred and self-destruction.

Once we recognize these negative thoughts about *others* as projections of negative thoughts about *ourselves*, we will realize we do not want such thoughts. We will begin to see that in order to maintain positive thoughts about ourselves we must cultivate positive thoughts about others. We must begin to fulfill our function of extending the Fatherhood of God by recognizing everyone as God's offspring, the perfect creation of a loving Father, and by fostering that awareness of divinity in everyone we meet. We will learn what *we* are in God by teaching others what *they* are in God (5:8).

If we listen to the Holy Spirit, we will communicate an awareness of divine citizenship to people, and they will respond with joy. If we listen to the ego, we will communicate a belief in separation and judgment, and people will respond with pain (5:9). Our choice of teachers determines whether we and our brothers will be imprisoned or released (5:10). We have a holy responsibility towards every person we encounter. With each person we meet, we must see them, treat them, and think of them as fellow members of God's Kingdom, fellow participants in the one Self, and as we do so, we will release them and will rediscover our own citizenship in the divine Kingdom (5:12).

Paragraph 6

6. ¹ The Kingdom **cannot** be found alone, and you who **are** the Kingdom cannot find yourself [*yourselves*] alone. ² To achieve the goal of the curriculum, then, you **cannot** listen to the ego, whose purpose is to **defeat its own goal**. ³ The ego does not know this, because it does not know anything. ⁴ But **you** can know it, and you **will** know it if you are willing to look at what the ego would make of you [*has made of you*]. ⁵ This **is** your responsibility, because once you have really looked at it you *will* accept the Atonement for yourself. ⁶ What other choice could you make? ⁷ Having made this choice you will [*begin to learn and*] understand why you ~~one~~ [*have*] believed that, when you met someone else, you [*have*] thought he *was* someone else. ⁸ And every holy encounter in which **you** enter fully will teach you **this is not so**.

• Study Question •

6. *Earlier in the Text we were told that our one responsibility is to accept the Atonement for ourselves (T-2.V.5:1). Here (6:5) we are given a responsibility that, if carried out, will lead to accepting the Atonement. What is that responsibility?*

Not only must we begin to listen to God's Voice telling us the truth, we must stop listening to the ego (6:2). Just like the Holy Spirit, the ego is out to teach us what we are (5:1), but it is trying to teach us that we are separate beings, which is what we are *not*. Therefore, its teaching will *prevent* us from knowing what we really are. The goal of its teaching (which ostensibly is self-knowledge) and its fundamental goal (ego autonomy (T-11.V.4:4)) are mutually exclusive, although it does not know that and is not conscious of it (6:3). Although the ego does not recognize the incompatibility of its purposes, this is something *we* can recognize:

The ego does not know this, because it does not know anything. But *you* can know it, and you *will* know it if you are willing to look at what the ego has made of you. This *is* your responsibility. (6:3–5, Urtext)

What is "your responsibility?" To look at what the ego has made of you. That's all! Just look at it. The ego sees you as "deprived, unloving and vulnerable" (T-7.VII.3.2). Is this a teacher you want to listen to? Is that what you want to learn about yourself? When you see another brother as deprived, or unloving, or vulnerable, stop and consider what this is saying about *you*. As you think of your brother you will think of yourself—are your thoughts about your brother something that you want to learn about yourself?

To "look at what the ego would make of you" (6:4) is your only responsibility. And really, this is saying the exact same thing as the last chapter, "Teach no one that he is what you would not want to be" (T-7.VII.3.8) When you see your brother with the ego's help, you are looking at what the ego would make of you. How you see your brother *is* the image of yourself the ego is trying to teach to you. The Course is asking us to look at this, to make the connection and to realize that how we perceive one another can tell us a great deal about how we *are* perceiving ourselves.

How do you "look at what the ego would make of you"? The answer is, by looking at what *you* are making of your brother and sister, because that is the reflection of your

thoughts about yourself. You look at how you see them, how you treat them, how you think about them, and you ask yourself, “Is this how I want to treat myself?” This kind of honest awareness of our own thoughts is our responsibility; it is something we must do as part of our spiritual program.

If you really look at them honestly, the answer will have to be, “No! I don’t want to see myself as a guilty, miserable person who is not worthy of love and respect.” No other choice is really possible (6:6). Jesus knows that fundamentally you are sane, not insane; if you clearly see the choice you are making you will change your choice! Once you really understand that your attitude and actions towards your brothers, or the way you behave in relationship to others, is just a reflection of how you *are already treating yourself*, you will choose to do otherwise! Faced with the clear evidence of your own self-destructive thoughts, you will inevitably choose to be gentle with yourself instead. You will say to yourself, “It is insane to think of myself this way.” And when that shift begins to occur, the way you treat your brothers will shift as well. That is the process that the Course calls *forgiveness*.

Paragraph 7

7. ¹You can encounter **only** part of yourself because you are part of God, **Who is everything**. ²His power and glory are everywhere, and you **cannot** be excluded from them. ³The ego teaches that your strength is in you **alone**. ⁴The Holy Spirit teaches that **all** strength is in God and *therefore* in you. ⁵God will **no one** suffer. ⁶He does not will **anyone** to suffer for a wrong decision [**you have made**], including **you**. ⁷That is why **He** has given you the means for **undoing** it. ⁸Through His power and glory all your wrong decisions are undone **completely**, releasing you **and** your brother [**brothers**] from **every imprisoning thought any** part of the Sonship holds [**has accepted**]. ⁹Wrong decisions **have** no power, **because** they are not true. ¹⁰The imprisonment they **seem** to produce is no more true than **they** are.

• Study Question •

7. *Think of the worst decision you have ever made, the one that was the most self-destructive and hurtful to others. In the light of 7:5–10 repeat words like these to yourself: “As I think of this awful decision I once made, I remember that God does not will that **anyone** suffer from it. It can be undone completely. It has no power and cannot truly imprison me or anyone else.”*

When you find yourself beginning to judge a brother or sister, you are perceiving a part of yourself (7:1) that you have projected outward and are now attacking, as if it were separate from you. It isn’t separate; it is still a part of you, and you are attacking yourself. When you recognize that, you stop, because it is insane to continue. Self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others occur in the same instant, because they are one and the same.

This is the underlying principle that governs everything the Course says about special relationships. Those whom you perceive as special objects of hatred or of love are the people from whom you can learn the most, by observing your relationship with them and understanding that what you are perceiving is a part of yourself. Your reactions to these

people are your reactions to yourself, projected outward. Considered in this light, relationships are the greatest classroom in which you can find your true Self.

"And here can [you] learn relationships are [your] salvation, and not [your] doom" (T-20.VI.11:9).

God's power and glory are omnipresent; nothing can be excluded from them, and therefore "you cannot be excluded from them" (7:2). Our strength does not lie in ourselves alone; we are strong because we are part of God, in Whom is all strength. We are strong by virtue of our union with Him, not by virtue of our separation from Him (7:3–4).

We made a "wrong decision" (7:6) when we decided to choose separateness, but God does not want to punish us for that. He does not want to punish anyone (7:5). How could anyone conceive of a loving God actually *willing* someone to suffer at all, much less to suffer eternal damnation? It makes so much more sense that, instead, He gives us "the means for undoing" our mistake (7:7). As always, the Course emphasizes that our mistaken choice for separation has done no *real* damage, because separation is not "true"; that is, it cannot really happen (7:9). An imaginary separation can only produce imaginary results (7:10). Therefore, we can be *completely* released from their effects. When we have fully accepted the Atonement, it will be as though the separation never happened—because it never did!

I note that what we are released from is "every imprisoning thought" that we may have accepted about the wrong decision that was made. The outward results of the wrong decision may change or they may not, but we have the means for completely undoing the results upon our thoughts, clearing our minds completely of any unloving thought.

Paragraph 8

8. ¹ Power and glory belong to God alone. ² So do **you**. ³ God gives **whatever** belongs to Him because He gives **of Himself**, and **everything** belongs to Him. ⁴ Giving of ~~yourself~~ [your self] is the function He gave you. ⁵ Fulfilling it perfectly will ~~let you remember~~ [teach you] what ~~you have~~ [you have] of **Him**, and ~~by this you will remember also what you are in Him~~ [and this will teach you what you are in Him]. ⁶ You **cannot** be powerless to do this, because this **is** your power. ⁷ Glory is God's gift to you, because that is what **He** is. ⁸ See this glory everywhere to remember [learn] what **you** are.

• Study Question •

8. *Based on the entire section, how would you say that our function in Heaven, which is extending God's Fatherhood, finds expression while we are here on earth?*

One reason why we find or lose our Self in our brothers is that our Self includes them (we are not ourselves alone, as 5.7 says). A second reason is that our Self, or what we are, is really identical with our *function*, or what we are *for*. We often describe what something *is* by telling what it is intended to *do*. A hammer, for instance, might be described as, "A tool for driving nails into wood or another hard substance."

What is a human being, in that sense? What is our function? The Course says:

Giving of *your* self is the function He gave you. Fulfilling it perfectly will teach you what *you* have of **Him**, and this will teach you what you are *in* Him. (T-8.III.8.4-5)

Our true power and glory is that we are created in God's image (note the recurring emphasis on "power and glory"). Like God, we are pure Love. Love's function is to give of itself. It is in giving of itself that love realizes its full potential. Like God, we are created to give of ourselves (8:3-4). It is in giving of ourselves to our brothers that we remember our true power and glory, which is our loving nature, and in remembering that, we will remember what we *are* (8:5), which is Love, an extension of God.

In relationship with other people, we have the opportunity to give of ourselves. We have the ability to extend love to other people, to look beyond what they have made of themselves (the ego's miscreations) and to see the glory and power of God in those other people. In seeing this in others, we are in fact remembering our Self (8:8). In seeing the glory of God in others, we are *being* the Self that He created us to be.

You cannot fulfill your function as Love, your function of giving of yourself, if you consider yourself as yourself alone. You must be in relationship to another person in order to fulfill your function. (I am *emphatically not* saying you have to have a certain kind of special relationship in order to be Love; this applies to all and every relationship we have. You can fulfill your function of love just in smiling at the mailman or remembering a deceased relative with love.) Love must go beyond the boundaries of my individual self, as I perceive it, and *extend* to others.

You are the glory of God, the outshining of His radiance, the extension of His Love. That *is* what you are. And the way to *remember* this about your Self is to see that glory everywhere, in everyone (8:8).

What you are, your true Self, is Love.

Love is a kind of relationship.

Therefore what *you are* is a relationship. You cannot find your true Self apart from relationships, because Love/relationship is what you are. If I withhold love from others, I am losing my Self. If I extend love to others, I am finding my Self.

Summary

In summary, then, there are two basic principles presented in this section (T.8.III) which govern all our relationships, and which are the reasons why the Course places such emphasis on relationships:

1. My brother is really part of myself. The way I see, treat, and think about my brother shows me how I am seeing, treating, and thinking about myself. By *looking at* this, I can correct any mistakes I am making about myself.
2. My function is to give of myself; therefore, it is in relationships that I can learn to practice my true function as Love.

Another way to state the importance of relationships in these two principles is:

- In relationships I can see the *mistaken* views I have of myself and let them go.
- In relationships I can extend the *true* view the Holy Spirit has of myself, and can know my Self by *being* my Self.

In relationships I can let go of the negative and experience the positive. That is why the Course says that relationships are such a productive classroom. Used by the ego, our

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relationships can become its greatest weapon to keep us from Heaven (T-16.V.2:3); used by the Holy Spirit, they can become the most powerful means of bringing us home (T-20.VI.11:9; P-2.In.4:3).

"The special love relationship is the ego's chief weapon for keeping you from Heaven" (T-16.V.2:3).

"And here can he learn relationships are his salvation, and not his doom" (T-20.VI.11:9).

"Hopefully, both will learn to give up their original goals, for it is only in relationships that salvation can be found" (P-2.I.4:3).

Answer Key

1. It says that if I want enlightenment I will learn it. All I need to do is want to learn. Wanting is enough because, once I want it, I have opened up to the Holy Spirit, and He knows how to teach me.
2. Not only is wanting all that I need to learn enlightenment, it is all that I can contribute, because I do not know how to teach myself to be totally willing.
3. No written answer is expected. Personally, I would (and do) feel overwhelmed by the idea that God has chosen me to extend His Fatherhood. In my early religious training, I never got the idea that anything I could do would be on a par with God's creation. If Heaven were a business, the highest I might have expected was a middle management position, and here The Boss is asking me to head up a whole division! The sense of unworthiness this engenders is enough by itself to convince me that the Course knows what it is talking about when it says that I undervalue myself and have a low image of what I am. On my own I would never have imagined that I have the sort of power and glory the Course tells me is ours.
4. No written answer is expected.
5. If I retreat into a cave (or into my bedroom) and focus purely on my own thoughts and problems, looking within to find my personal divinity, I am trying to find power and glory in myself alone. According to the Course, my power and glory are in my brother, because I am not "me" alone. I am not the individual being I think I am. If I give my brother his place in the Kingdom—and this is my responsibility—I will have my place in the Kingdom.
6. The responsibility that leads to accepting the Atonement is looking at what the ego would make of us. As we look honestly at the picture of us that the ego is promoting (that of a sinful, guilty person, separated from God), we realize we do not want to accept that image of ourselves. We become willing instead to accept the Atonement, which means accepting God's evaluation of us as His holy Son.
7. No written answer is expected.
8. Our heavenly function finds expression earth through our extending the Kingdom on earth, that is, by seeing God's power and glory in our brothers in every holy encounter.

Appendix: Some Help with Memorizing

Many people think that they cannot memorize things, but in my opinion anyone can memorize if they are willing to put in a little effort. Let me offer some suggestions for memorizing longer sections like this. It helps to engage as many of your senses as possible. Therefore, begin with reading the entire thing aloud two or three times. This engages not only your eyes, in reading the words, and your ears, in hearing the words, but also the muscles of your mouth. If you have the time, you can add a fourth set of sensations, and write out the words by hand three times daily, for a week. This will speed the memorization process, but it isn't necessary.

Next, take a short phrase you can remember with a minimum of difficulty. For some people, this might be the whole first sentence; for others, it may be just the first four words. Read that phrase to yourself, aloud, at least three times while looking at the page. Then, look away from the page and repeat the phrase at least three times—again, aloud. Finally, glance back at the page once more and repeat the phrase a final time, checking yourself against the printed words. Make sure you have it exactly right. Do not accept almost right; you want to get it word perfect. It's all right to paraphrase and change the words around after you have memorized it perfectly, but not before; otherwise, you will never remember it exactly right.

This may seem like overkill for memorizing just the first four words or the first sentence. Believe me, it isn't. Memorizing things isn't difficult, but the trick is repetition, repetition, repetition. You remember your own address because you repeat it so much. You may remember the pledge of allegiance to the flag because you repeated it every day in school for twelve years. (Do they still do that?) Repetition is the key, and repeating it over and over after it seems like you have learned it thoroughly is a necessity if you want to retain what you have memorized.

So far I've just talked about the first phrase or sentence. Now, you will add a second phrase, or second sentence. Add only as much as you can repeat without difficulty. This time, looking at the printed words, read aloud both the first phrase and the newly added second phrase. This helps you make a connection in your mind between the first part and the second part. Repeat it, looking at the words, at least three times. Then look away, repeat three more times without looking, and finally look back and check yourself by repeating it once more.

If you make a mistake, do the whole segment over: three times looking, three times looking away, and once more to check yourself. Do this until you get it perfect before moving on.

Now, you add a third phrase. Repeat just the second and third phrases, making that mental connection between them. Again, three times looking, three times not looking, once to check. Continue on through the paragraph like this, adding a new phrase while repeating the phrase that came before it, until you reach the last phrase. When you have reached the end and have repeated the next to last and last phrase three times, repeat that final phrase three times by itself.

Now, just to prove something, without looking, try to repeat the entire paragraph. You will find that parts of it will come to mind, words will get garbled, and you will probably get stuck several times and have to “cheat” by looking. Despite all that repetition, you still have not memorized it! Do not let this discourage you; it is natural. There is still more work to do.

For the final phase of this initial memorization practice, looking at the printed words, read the entire paragraph aloud three more times. Now, look away, and try to recite the whole paragraph from memory. You may find that you are able to do it; you may find you have to look at the words. When a word escapes you, before you look at the page, try repeating the words that come before it a few times. You may find the missing words pop into your mind and you can continue. If they do not, glance at the page just enough to prompt yourself and then look away to continue to the end.

That's enough for the first day. Don't feel discouraged if you were unable to recite the whole thing, or even if you made mistakes in every sentence. One day, and one memorization practice, is not enough. Very few people, if any, can memorize something perfectly in just one session.

As I said, the key is repetition. So it should be no surprise when I tell you that what you must do, if you want to memorize this perfectly, is repeat the entire process above for seven days. Each day you begin as if you were just starting, working through the passage phrase by phrase, repeating each phrase three times, along with the phrase that comes before it, and then repeating the entire paragraph three times. You should find it easier each day, and by the end of the week, you will probably be able to recite the entire paragraph from memory, perfectly, without looking at the book.

You still are not done. If you stop here, within a week or two, or at most within a month, you will have forgotten most of it. What you now need to do, if you really want to cement these words in your mind, is to repeat the paragraph from memory every day. Just once will be enough, and that should take less than half a minute. You may like to recite it silently in your mind as you lay down to sleep at night, or in the morning as you begin to meditate. Just do it once a day for at least three weeks. Once you have done that, the words will be in your mind, word perfect, for years to come.