

Study Guide and Commentary ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 10, Section II

The Decision to Forget

The preceding section, you will recall, spoke of the fact that we are dreaming this world of illusion, and we have forgotten what it was like to be awake in Heaven. This section presents the reason why we have forgotten Heaven: *We chose to*. Our choice is clearly implied in the section title, “The Decision to Forget.” As the Introduction to the chapter pointed out, all of this is occurring within our mind, and is not caused by anything outside of our mind. Our mind alone determines what happens to us (T-10.In.2:6).

Paragraph 1

1. ¹Unless you ~~first~~ **know** something you **cannot** dissociate it. ²Knowledge must precede [*therefore precedes*] dissociation, so that dissociation is nothing more than a **decision to forget**. ³What has been **forgotten** then appears to be fearful, but **only** because the dissociation is [*was*] an **attack on truth**. ⁴You are fearful *because you have forgotten*. ⁵And you have **replaced** your knowledge by an awareness of dreams **because you are afraid of your dissociation, not** of what you have dissociated. ⁶When what you have dissociated is accepted, it ceases to be fearful. [*Even in this world's therapy, when dissociated material is accepted, it ceases to be fearful, for the laws of mind always hold.*]

• Study Question •

1. Look up “dissociation” in an encyclopedia or comprehensive dictionary. (Examples given in Appendix.)

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Dissociation and *denial* are related terms. *Dissociation* can be defined as: “The separation of a group of normally connected mental processes, for example, emotion and understanding, from the rest of the mind as a defense mechanism” (*Encarta® World English Dictionary*). The same dictionary defines *denial* in this way: “An inability or a refusal to admit that something exists.” We can dissociate ourselves from certain knowledge by means of denial; that is, we simply refuse to admit that it exists. When we deny the fact of our anger, for instance, part of our mind is unaware of the anger, but anger is still at work in the unconscious mind. Our emotion is still affecting us, but our understanding refuses to take it into account.

The Text defines dissociation as a kind of denial: “Dissociation is nothing more than a decision to forget” (1:2): We *had* spiritual knowledge, but we threw it away. But dissociation has a backhanded positive side: If you have dissociated something, at some

point it must have been present in your mind (1:1). In that sense, dissociation of something constitutes a kind of proof that the “something” really exists.

Denial is unbelievably powerful. The current popular concern about childhood abuse has made it common knowledge that denial can literally and completely block memories from your mind. Women who were sexually abused by their fathers may have no memory of it. A person involved in a tragic automobile accident may have blocked the memory from their mind. Even when people are confronted with irrefutable evidence of what they have forgotten, they at first simply don't believe it. At some traumatic point in their lives they made a decision to forget (1:2), and the mind is so powerful that it really *does* forget! It forgets, and then it forgets its own decision to forget. According to the Course, this is something we *all* do, and a lot more frequently than we'd like to believe:

Who but yourself evaluates a threat, decides escape is necessary, and sets up a series of defenses to reduce the threat that has been judged as real? All this cannot be done unconsciously. But afterwards, your plan requires that you must forget you made it, so it seems to be external to your own intent; a happening beyond your state of mind, an outcome with a real effect on you, instead of one effected by yourself.

It is this quick forgetting of the part you play in making your "reality" that makes defenses seem to be beyond your own control (W-pI.136.4:1-5:1).

One symptom of dissociation and denial is irrational fear or aversion. If, for instance, a certain fragrance of cologne was associated with an abusive father, a woman may find herself detesting that fragrance without knowing why. If a loud sound in the night threatens to stir up memories of drunken fights between your parents when you were young, as an adult you may find yourself unreasonably terrified by such loud noises. It isn't really the loud noise that terrifies you; you are afraid of losing your protective forgetfulness.

Psychotherapists know that the only way to conquer such irrational fears is to confront the memory you have been hiding from yourself. The memory, although unpleasant, is the truth. Our minds are uneasy because on some level they know they have substituted a lie for the truth, and they are trying to live life on the basis of self-deception. We can only find true mental peace when we stop denying and face things exactly as they are. Jesus says here, “When what you have dissociated is accepted, it ceases to be fearful” (1:6). Lesson 333 in the Workbook makes this very point with startling clarity. It tells us that all conflict must be stripped of every disguise before it can be resolved:

Conflict must be resolved. It cannot be evaded, set aside, denied, disguised, seen somewhere else, called by another name, or hidden by deceit of any kind, if it would be escaped. It must be seen exactly as it is, where it is thought to be, in the reality which has been given it, and with the purpose that the mind accorded it. For only then are its defenses lifted, and the truth can shine upon it as it disappears (W-pII.333.1:1-4).

The Course says that we decided to deny God, to dissociate ourselves from our knowledge of Him. We made a conscious choice to forget our own reality as His creation, in favor of an imaginary existence that is independent of Him. We succeeded in

doing so because our mind is so powerful. Now, when it seems like we might be approaching God, or our one Self, we may feel terror. But what really frightens us is not God Himself, nor our one Self, but our own deliberate decision to forget Him (1:3–5).

There is something perturbing in the very idea of dissociation. It is profoundly unsettling to think that our minds can play such an underhanded trick on us. It is even more unsettling to think that we *deliberately* did this to ourselves. We like to believe that our memory is reliable. The simple fact is: It isn't. We resist this lesson, tenaciously holding on to our illusions, *not* because we are truly afraid of God or of Who we are, but because we are afraid of admitting our own self-deception. It seems akin to acknowledging that we gave ourselves a frontal lobotomy or electro-shock therapy to purge certain memories from our minds.

And yet, as 1:1 points out, our denial of God and of our own reality is actually a kind of proof that they exist. Our very denial of God, when translated by the Holy Spirit, can help us remember what we have forgotten. Dissociation and forgetting can drive awareness of something from our minds but it cannot strip the mind of its reality.

Paragraph 2

2. ¹Yet to give up the dissociation of **reality** brings more than merely lack of fear. ²In **this** decision lie joy and peace and the glory of creation. ³Offer the Holy Spirit only your willingness [**will**] to remember, for He retains the knowledge of God and of yourself **for** you, waiting for your acceptance. ⁴Give up gladly **everything** that would stand in the way of your remembering, for God is in your memory. ⁵[**and**] His Voice will tell you that you are part of Him when you are willing to remember Him and know your own reality again. ⁶Let nothing in this world delay your remembering of Him, for in this remembering is the knowledge of **yourself**.

• Study Question •

2. *Earlier, in T-10.I.4:1, we were told that remembering requires a desire to remember that has been purified of all counter-desires. Now we are given two more specific conditions that enhance our understanding of what it means to desire wholly to remember. What are they?*

When we end dissociation, we bring an end to fear, because the fear was really about the dissociation itself, and not about the things that we dissociated. More than that, ending dissociation brings us some very positive psychological results such as joy and peace, states of mind associated with our condition when originally created by God (2:2). This makes sense because what we are dissociating ourselves *from* is our created state, which is characterized by peace and joy.

One of the functions the Holy Spirit serves is to preserve that original created state for us, or rather to preserve the knowledge of it (2:3). He acts as a repository or archival memory for all of us who have dissociated ourselves from the knowledge of our one Self. Workbook Lesson 96 echoes the same idea: “The Holy Spirit holds salvation in your mind, and offers it the way to peace” (see W-pI.96.7:2). The existence of the Holy Spirit is our guarantee that our knowledge is not permanently lost simply because *we* have

forgotten it. Although absent from our awareness, the knowledge of our identity remains safe with Him.

In order to remember our original state, all we need to do is remove the obstacles to such a memory (2:4). In other words, the memory is there within us (2:4); it is just buried under a bunch of mental rubbish. As the Text says later, “Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all of the barriers within yourself that you have built against it” (T-16.IV.6:1). Within our mind is the Voice for God Who holds the memory for us, and Who will transmit it to us when we have cleared the blockage out of the way (2:5).

This is a key principle in the Course, one that is repeated over and over. It has two aspects: First, that nothing has been lost, and nothing has to be attained or won back because we already possess the knowledge of God and our own reality; second, that without divine intervention in the form of the Holy Spirit, we would be unable to find our way back (see for instance W-pI.47.2, 4, 6; T-5.III.1:2–3; and T-12.VIII.3:8). We cannot infer, as some try to, that just because nothing has been lost, nothing needs to be done. We have the knowledge within us, held for us by the Holy Spirit, but we *have* forgotten it, and He cannot release it to us unless we first actively remove the barriers against knowledge that we have carefully constructed. This is why the Course says that the way to deeper knowledge consists not so much in the acquisition of new knowledge but in the relinquishment of false knowledge—not *learning* but *unlearning*:

Properly speaking it is unlearning that [God’s teachers] bring, for that is "true learning" in the world (M-4.X.3:7).

Unless we are willing to do the work of removing the barriers, our remembering can be delayed. Unfortunately, those barriers often consist of things of this world that seem attractive and valuable to us. We make the mistake of accepting goals within the world of time that we think will make us happy, and we are reluctant to relinquish those goals. Often, especially in the early stages of our spiritual journey, it seems as though, in order to remember God and our one Self, we have to sacrifice something. In a section in the *Manual for Teachers*, Jesus explains that things are not really being taken away; rather, we are simply beginning to recognize their comparative lack of true value.

It is only to the extent to which [our worldly goals] are helpful [in reaching our true goal of remembering God] that any degree of reality should be accorded them in this world of illusion. (M-4.I(A).4:6)

Paragraph 3

3. ¹To remember is merely to restore to your mind *what is already there*. ²You do not make what you remember; you merely accept again what is already there, but was rejected [**accept again what has been made and rejected**]. ³The ability to **accept** truth in this world is the perceptual counterpart of creating in the Kingdom. ⁴God **will** do His part if you will do yours, and **His** return in exchange for yours **is** the exchange of knowledge for perception. ⁵**Nothing** is beyond His Will for you. ⁶But signify your will to remember Him, and behold! ⁷He will give you everything but for the asking.

• Study Question •

3. *What is the earthly counterpart of extending truth in Heaven?*

Jesus continues to emphasize the need for our willingness to remember (3:4–7). He gives a more detailed statement of the key principle I mentioned in discussing the preceding paragraph, that is, that knowledge remains in our mind although we have rejected it, and all we must do is to “accept again what is already there” (3:1–2). There is no need to “make” anything; we already have everything we need, and God will return us to knowledge as soon as we single-mindedly will to have it (3:4, 6).

A song written by Donna Carey is titled *I'm Willing To Open My Eyes*. Let that be your prayer every day; repeat it often, and “God will do His part if you will do yours” (3.4). You might say that this is the Course's version of the well-known folk saying (attributed to Benjamin Franklin, not to the Bible), “God helps those who help themselves.” Our part is simply to be willing.

I'd like to point out a statement here that has helped me understand some of what the Course says about extending truth to others and accepting my function of creating. “The ability to accept truth in this world is the perceptual counterpart of creating in the Kingdom” (3:3). To paraphrase, when we accept the truth about something, in perceptual terms this is equivalent to creating the thing. Thus, to accept the reality of Christ in my brother, or to accept Christ as his reality, is to affirm my brother's creation by God. It is to join my will with God's in creation. This accepting of the reality of things is the nearest I can come, in this world, to creating. The same is true about myself: When I accept the truth about my Self, I am coming into line with the creative power of God.

That act of accepting truth is how we do our part in remembering God and His creation. In order to accept our true nature, however, I have to let go of all the false pictures of myself that I have constructed. To do *that* with any degree of success, I must also give up the images I have made of my brothers and sisters. Once again, we are being told that the way to remember the truth about ourselves is to recognize that truth in others. If we realize that this is the subtle but unmistakable message of this paragraph, the transition to the next paragraph will not seem so abrupt.

Paragraph 4

4. ¹When you attack, you are denying **yourself**. ²You are specifically teaching yourself that you are **not** what you are. ³**Your** denial of reality precludes the **acceptance** of God's gift, **because you have accepted something else in its place**. ⁴If you understand that this is always [If you understand that the misuse of defenses {in this case, the defense of dissociation} always constitutes] an attack on truth, and truth is God, you will realize why it is **always** fearful. ⁵If you further recognize that you are **part** of God, you will understand why it is that **you always attack yourself first**.

• Study Question •

4. *When we attack another person, we deny the truth rather than accept it. This attack on another person is also an attack on three other things. Please list these things in order.*

To be willing to remember means to be willing in every moment to recognize your own denial of God and of your Self. It is to say to yourself, “Oh! I’m denying God again; but I’m willing to see this is my dream and to remember what is real.” And one way we deny ourselves is to attack our brothers. This denies our reality because it contradicts the truth about what we are (4:1–2).

My reality is that my mind is all-powerful; nothing that comes from outside my own mind can touch me. When I attack someone else, I am trying to make him guilty for what he did to me. I am affirming that something outside my mind has injured me; therefore, I am specifically denying the reality of my invulnerable Self. When I say, “You hurt me,” I am denying that I can only be affected by my thoughts (W-pII.338.Title). By attacking, I am also declaring myself to be an attacker, that is, an unloving person. God has created me as a giving, loving being, but when I choose to see myself as an attacker, I am blocking my mind from receiving God’s picture of me (4:3). I have made up a false self-image, one that can be hurt and that can hurt in return, and that image blocks out awareness of my true Self. This is as much idolatry as it was when Israel’s enemies destroyed the temple and set up altars to heathen gods within its walls.

Therefore my apparent attack on another person is really an attack on myself (4:4–5). Follow the logic here:

- The first premise is that any attack “is always an attack on truth” because it is a denial of the truth of my own being (4:4). Denial of a thing is an attack on that thing.
- The second premise is that “truth is God” (4:4); that is, God has created everything that is true as part of Himself, so to attack truth is to *attack God!*
- The conclusion based on those premises is that any attack on another person is a veiled attack on God. No wonder “it is always fearful” (4:4).
- The third premise is that “you are part of God” (4:5). Therefore, any attack on another person is actually a veiled attack *on yourself* as well as an attack on God.

No wonder we are afraid, not of the knowledge we have dissociated, but of our *act* of dissociating it. To dissociate knowledge is to attack truth, which is to attack God, which is to attack *ourselves* because we are part of God.

We imagine that our attack is limited in its extent. We are singling out a particular individual and we are attacking that individual and that individual *only*, no doubt sincerely believing that the person deserves to be so attacked. But there is no such thing as limited attack. Every attack is an attack on ourselves and an attack on God because we are attacking the truth, and we and God and the truth are all one.

A Workbook lesson states this principle graphically: “It can be but myself I crucify” (W-pI.196.Title). “The dreary, hopeless thought that you can make attacks on others and escape yourself has nailed you to the cross” (W-pI.196.5:1).

Paragraph 5

5. ¹All attack is self attack. ²It cannot be anything else. ³Arising from your own decision **not** to be what you are, **it is an attack on your identification.** ⁴Attack is thus the way in which your identification is lost, because when you attack, you **must** have forgotten what you are. ⁵And if your reality is God's, when you attack you are not remembering **Him.** ⁶This is not because He is gone, but because you are actively choosing not to remember Him [*actively willing not to remember Him*].

• Study Question •

5. *Call someone to mind whom you have recently attacked. Perhaps the attack was something such as speaking against them behind their back. Perhaps it was no more than accusing and unloving thoughts. Get the person and the situation clearly in your mind, and then tell yourself: "My attack on [name] is the expression of my own attack on myself. My image of him [or her] as ungodly expresses my wish to dissociate myself from God. I choose now to remember God and to forget attack."*

The fifth paragraph in this section is one that was accidentally omitted from the original edition of the Text, and it is very important in the context of what is being discussed. The first sentence encapsulates the implication of the preceding paragraph: My apparent attack on another person is really an attack on myself: *All attack is self attack.* If I accepted my true self—which is invulnerable to external attack—I could not possibly desire to attack anyone else. Therefore, to attack another person I must *attack myself first!* Before I can choose to attack another, I must break away from my true Identity or dissociate from my true Self, or decide “not to be what [I am]” (5:3–4).

Further, as the previous paragraph pointed out, there is only One. There is nothing outside of you:

His Kingdom has no limits and no end, and there is nothing in Him that is not perfect and eternal. All this is you, and nothing outside of this is you (T-16.III.7:7-8).

There is nothing outside you. That is what you must ultimately learn, for it is the realization that the Kingdom of Heaven is restored to you (T-18.VI.1:1-2).

Before I can attack, I have to decide to forget my true nature as God's creation. That decision is the true cause of my attack, as much as I want to believe the attack was caused by something outside of me. In other words, I do not attack you because of anything you did; I attack you because I am trying to lose track of my divine Identity! I am trying to forget God (5:5). Acting contrary to my loving nature is just my way of trying to prove I cannot be God's creation. I am actively choosing not to remember God (5:6).

This is the awful thing we are not willing to look at: *We are trying to forget God.* When we get angry or annoyed at someone, or when we feel depressed or upset with the way things are in the world, what's actually going on is that we are trying to block the memory of God from our minds (5:6). We are attacking ourselves, and attacking God.

It is not a passive choice. It is an active choosing. The Course is asking us to take responsibility for that choice, that is all. It is asking us to recognize what it is we have been doing all these years and to stop denying responsibility for it. It tells us to forget the past, which exists only in our minds anyhow, and in each present moment to observe ourselves making this insane choice to forget God. And when we clearly see the choice we are making, and see its terrible results, we will simply stop making it!

As long as we deny that we are making this choice, or deny responsibility for it, we can't change it. This choice is our problem and our only problem. We have to recognize the problem before it can be solved (W-pI.79.Title).

One corollary of this teaching is that when the situation is reversed and someone else is attacking me, the same thing applies. He isn't really attacking *me* at all; the attack really has nothing to do with me, or with anything I said or did. It is simply an expression of his insane desire to forget God and to escape from His identity as God's Son. Therefore, I do not need to feel offended or attacked in any way; I was just an innocent bystander, caught in the backlash of his metaphysical madness. I can extend love to him, and do whatever I can to help him remember his true Identity. He does not merit my anger; he deserves my love and my help.

Paragraph 6

6. ¹If you realized the complete havoc this makes of your peace of mind you **could** not make such an insane decision. ²You make it only because you still believe it can **get you something you want**. ³It follows, then, that you want something **other** than peace of mind, but you have not considered what it must be. ⁴Yet the logical outcome of your decision is perfectly clear, if you will only **look** at it. ⁵By deciding **against** your reality, you have made yourself vigilant *against* God and His Kingdom. ⁶And it is **this** vigilance that makes you afraid to remember Him.

• Study Question •

6. *This paragraph gives a clue as to how we can stop attacking. Read it carefully to see if you can pick up this clue.*

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When we take full responsibility for our decision to attack another person as a way of forgetting God and our Identity, we will automatically make a different decision; we will decide to remember God and our true Self (6:1). We do not realize how devastating our decision to forget is to our mental tranquility. The choice to forget God is so odious and wicked in our perception that we immediately invent several layers of camouflage to hide it from our awareness. Nevertheless, we cannot escape our leaden guilt and our stark terror of God's retaliation (which is wholly imaginary, of course). We may hide the guilt and fear from our awareness, but we suffer every moment from their effects. These hidden assassins destroy our peace of mind. If we realized this, Jesus says,

“[we] could not make such an insane decision. [We] make it only because [we] still believe it can get [us] something [we] want.” (6:1–2)

Since peace of mind comes only from remembering God, and deciding to forget God destroys our peace of mind, unless we have perfect peace we evidently must want something besides peace, although we don't know what (6.3). What could possibly be more desirable than peace of mind? Jesus asks us to look squarely at our decision and its results in our lives: the pain, the suffering, the conflict, and the fear. Is *this* what we want?

I remember one time hearing Diane Berke, a Course teacher in New York, share her realization that in one particular situation in her life she really *did not* want peace. She was angry with someone and did not want to let go of the anger. Being upset seemed necessary in order to bring about a change in the situation. The realization that she did not want peace shook her. It also evoked the same realization in me.

There are some situations in which, if we are honest, we will realize that if we were offered unconditional peace right in that instant, we would not take it. I think of some of the times I've been mad at someone. In the middle of those arguments, when I was full of outrage at the insensitivity and stupidity and stubbornness of the other person, if the Holy Spirit offered me complete peace (with nothing changing in the external circumstances), I would have refused. I wanted something to change, and I wasn't willing to be at peace until it did! If I were peaceful, it would send the wrong message. It would appear that I was accepting or approving of a very unsatisfactory situation. Or so I have thought.

I think that is part of what is being talked about here. There are things we want more than peace, and it is those things we must be willing to let go of before peace can return to our minds. They are, if we are willing to admit it, tightly tied to our desire to have an identity other than the one given us by God. They are tied to individual existence and not to our universal, shared Identity with God.

Sentence 4 emphasizes once again that we must *look* at our mistaken decision: "...the logical outcome of your decision is perfectly clear, *if you will only look at it*" (6.4, my emphasis). We are so afraid to do this. Our minds skate off on one tangent after another. We shy away, we turn our eyes, and we say we can't do it. We make any excuse to *avoid* looking. It isn't God we are afraid of, we are fearful of exposing our vigilance against Him. Our active choice to forget Him frightens us. We're convinced that deliberate denial of God must be the unpardonable sin.

Yet—even though we have denied our unity with God, deliberately chosen to banish Him from our minds, and mounted a never-ending campaign to block Him from our awareness—He is still there. He is still in our mind. The Course calls this decision to forget our "terrible secret" (T-13.II.5:2). It is something we are so ashamed of that we believe we cannot bear to look at it. And yet it has changed nothing. God has not changed His mind about you (T-10.In.3:9–11).

If we take Jesus' hand, he will help us look at our dark decision. He will walk with us through the cloud of fear that arises, and he promises he can take us through it to the other side. He promises that going through will not hurt us; instead, it will heal us (see W-pI.69.6 and W-pI.70.9; also T-18.IX.3:7–9.) Honest looking at the mind's secret rejection of God is really all that is necessary to bring on enlightenment (T-27.VII.2:2).

Seeing with clarity our own decision to forget is what enables us to remember.

Answer Key

1. Here is part of the definition from the Concise Oxford Dictionary:
 - a. v. tr. & intr. (usually followed by from) disconnect or become disconnected; separate (dissociated her from their guilt).
 - b. tr. Psychol. cause (a person's mind) to develop more than one centre of consciousness.
 - c. dissociated personality: Psychology.
 - d. the pathological coexistence of two or more distinct personalities in the same person.
2. Two conditions for remembering are:
 - a. expressing your desire to the Holy Spirit;
 - b. eliminating everything that blocks remembering.
3. Accepting the truth (3:3).
4. When you attack another person you are also attacking the truth, and therefore God, and therefore yourself.
5. No written answer is expected.
6. We will stop attacking when we recognize and reject the consequences of attack.

Appendix

Definitions of “dissociation”:

Psychiatry . the splitting off of a group of mental processes from the main body of consciousness, as in amnesia or certain forms of hysteria. (dictionary.com)

Dissociation: In psychology and psychiatry, a perceived detachment of the mind from the emotional state or even from the body. Dissociation is characterized by a sense of the world as a dreamlike or unreal place and may be accompanied by poor memory of specific events. (medicineNet.com)