

Study Guide and Commentary ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 11, Section V.1–9

The “Dynamics” of the Ego

We come now to one of the most important sections in the Text. In this new section, “The ‘Dynamics’ of the Ego,” we turn to look very closely at the ego—what it believes and how it works. Jesus has told us that we *must* look, that looking is *crucial*. Now, we’re going to do it. As this is a long section, we will be studying it in two parts. In this chapter we will cover paragraphs 1 to 9; in the next chapter we will cover paragraphs 10 to 18.

Having ended the previous section with the wonderful, reassuring message that God totally accepts us and knows us as blameless, and that he (Jesus) is waiting to welcome us home, Jesus returns to His central theme: our need to look at the ego and to unmask its denial of the truth. In the last section, he told us that it is *crucial* to our reawakening to realize that only we can deprive ourselves, a fact we deny in every way we can. As a consequence, we must rigorously root out all the many forms taken by our denial (T-11.IV.4:1–4), that is, all the ways in which we perceive ourselves as being deprived by someone or something beside ourselves.

Jesus says, “We must look first at this to see beyond it, since you have made it real” (1:5). We don’t need to be afraid of looking at the ego because the ego is *not* real; in fact the phrase “ego dynamics” is self-contradictory (3:1–2), which is why the word “dynamics” is enclosed in quotation marks. Nevertheless, we have *made* the ego real to ourselves (1:5). We have to look at it so that we can recognize and oppose all its thoughts. If we don’t recognize our thoughts as being motivated by the ego, we won’t choose to change them.

In the discussion of this section, I’d like to depart from my usual pattern in the commentaries, which has been to discuss things strictly paragraph by paragraph. While I will cover the paragraphs in order for the most part, I will organize my discussion more topically than usual. Therefore, I will not insert headings for each paragraph, but instead will cover them in two chunks: 1–2, and 3–9. The study questions will be interspersed as seems appropriate, not necessarily at the start of each paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 & 2

1. ¹No one can escape from illusions unless he looks at them, for not looking is the way they are **protected**. ²There is no need to shrink from illusions, for they cannot be dangerous. ³We are ready to look more closely at the ego’s thought system because together we have the lamp that will dispel it, and since you realize you do not **want** it, you **must** be ready. ⁴Let us be very calm in doing this, for we are merely looking honestly for truth. ⁵The “dynamics” of the ego will be our lesson for a while, for we must look first at this to see beyond it,

since you **have** made it real. ⁶We will **undo** this error quietly together, and then look beyond it to truth.

2. ¹What is healing but the removal of all that **stands in the way** of knowledge?

²And how else can one dispel illusions **except** by looking at them directly, **without** protecting them? ³Be not afraid, therefore, for what you will be looking at **is** the source of fear, and you are beginning to learn [**but you have learned surely by now,**] that **fear is not real**. ⁴You are also learning [**We have accepted the fact already**] that its **effects** can be dispelled merely by denying **their** reality.

⁵The next step is obviously to recognize that **what has no effects does not exist**.

⁶Laws do not operate in a vacuum, and what leads to nothing **has not happened**.

⁷If reality is recognized **by its extension**, what leads [**extends**] to nothing could not [**cannot**] be real. ⁸Do not be afraid, then, to look upon fear, for it cannot **be** seen. ⁹Clarity undoes confusion by definition, and to look upon darkness through light **must** dispel it.

• Study Question •

1. *List several reasons given in these paragraphs that tell why looking at the ego is so essential, and why we should not fear doing so. ([Go to Answer 01](#))*



Why We Should Look

The opening paragraphs of this very important section of the *Text*, more than any other passage in the *Course*, thoroughly explain why it is necessary to look at the ego without judgment, and why this alone is enough to initiate our healing.

Not looking at illusions is the way illusions are protected; looking at them is the way to dispel them (1:1; 2:2). A professional magician knows this very well. A magician is constantly using what is called “misdirection.” Whenever a magician needs to do something he does not want the audience to see, he very subtly “misdirects” the attention of the audience to something else. If he is slipping a card from the bottom of the deck to the top, for instance, he will choose that moment to look directly at you and ask a question such as, “Was your card a *red* card?” This draws your eyes to his and away from his hands.

The ego works by misdirection also to support its illusions. It is constantly directing our attention to something else other than the real problem, that is, away from our mind and its choosing power. Sickness is a form of misdirection. Blaming others is another form of misdirection. Seeing the cause of any upset as something other than mind is still another form misdirection. All of them direct our attention away from the mind as cause.

You can't see through the illusion unless you look directly at it. If you look away, you cannot break through the illusion. “How else...except by looking at them?” (2:2).

Jesus begins with an enumeration of *reasons* why we no longer *need to avoid* looking at the ego.

1. *Illusions cannot be dangerous* (1:2). The ego is an illusion. Illusions are things that do not exist. Something that does not exist cannot possibly harm us.

2. We have the lamp to dispel illusions (1:3). Of course the lamp is the Holy Spirit and the truth He brings us about ourselves. The decrepit picture of us as befouled egos dissolves in the light of the truth of who we are—the holy Son of God. We don't need to be afraid of looking at this disintegrating image; in fact, the harder we look, the more it evaporates!
3. We have begun to realize we don't *want* the ego's thought system, so we are ready to look (1:3). As long as we want the ego, we will be afraid to look too closely at it, because we know, even if unconsciously, that looking will make it disappear. Once we recognize the ego as something undesirable, our resistance to looking dwindles.
4. Truth cannot be frightening, and truth is all we are looking for (1:4). It is far more frightening either to be ignorant of the truth, or to believe a lie! Finding the truth should alleviate our fear, not increase it.
5. Even though it is not real, we have to look at the ego because we have made it real to ourselves (1:5).
6. Jesus will look with us (1:6). With his companionship, we can be confident.

How We Should Look

Note the words used about *how* we are to look. He tells us not to be afraid (2:3; 2:8). He asks us to look *calmly* and *quietly* (1:4,6). *We will feel fear* as we do this; that's why we need all the reassurances. We need to think calm thoughts, to soothe our minds, to quell our apprehensions. If we look at the ego, fear is inevitable because the ego is nothing but a fearful thought (T-5.V.3:7). Looking at the ego means looking at fear.

The ego is like the evil wizard in a fantasy story who puts a spell of fear around his castle. Anyone approaching the castle begins to feel an unreasoning fear. Our minds have been conditioned to pull back from looking directly at the ego. The ego *has* to protect itself in this way because it cannot survive direct inspection.

Why We Should Not Be Afraid of Looking

In sentence 2:3 and what follows, Jesus is patting us on the back. He is stating what He thinks we have learned by now, having read 200 pages of the Text. He says we have learned, or at least we have begun to learn, two things, which lead logically to a third fact, a conclusion. These three things give us good reason not to be afraid of looking at our fear:

1. "Fear is not real" (2:3).
2. Fear's "effects can be dispelled merely by denying their reality" (2:4).
3. The conclusion is: "What has no effects does not exist" (2:5).

Let's look briefly at each of these three things.

1. Fear is not real.

All our fear is based on the belief in sin and guilt. We "sinned" because we usurped God's power and tried to become the creator in His place. (See T-2.I.4.1 and T-4.I.9.1–3.)

We honestly believe that we have managed somehow to wrest God's creative power out of His hands and appropriate it for ourselves. The *Course* makes this point repeatedly. We may not believe it consciously; we may never think of it in those terms. But if we

believe that, somehow, we are what we have made of ourselves and no longer what God created us to be, then we *must* believe that we have stolen God's ability to create us, and have re-created ourselves in a manner unlike God's creation.

Given that basic belief in our successful "coup," we imagine that we are guilty of a terrible sin. Like Prometheus in the Greek myth, we have stolen the fire of the gods. We are afraid of God's punishment. But what if we are wrong? What if God is *not* punishing us? What if we never succeeded in our supposed crime? Then, there is nothing to be afraid of.

We've seen over and over that the fear is something *we made up*. Fear follows from our choice to be separate. And correctly interpreted, our fear is really a call for help or a call for love, and not the negative thing it seems to be. Franklin Roosevelt said, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself," but according to the *Course*, we need not fear fear. "The more you look at fear the less you see it" (T-14.VII.2:8).

2. Fear's effects can be erased by denying their reality.

The "effects" of fear are things such as attack thoughts or conflict of some kind. By skillful examination, we can banish such thoughts from our minds. This works in dealing with all kinds of problems, because every problem and every conflict is some form of fear. Recognizing fear as the root cause is the first step we need to take, as we were told back in Chapter 2:

The first corrective step in undoing the error is to know first that the conflict is an expression of fear. (T-2.VI.7.1)

We can reason with ourselves like this: If fear itself is not real, then fear's *effects* must be unreal as well. Sin, depression, anxiety, sickness, anger, violence, and hatred, just to name a few, are all expressions of fear. None of them can be real if their *cause*, which is fear, is not real. Things that are not real cannot have any effect. Therefore, these things cannot affect us.

It may be too much for us at the start to simply declare that these things are not real. When all of our thinking takes place in the realm of conventional reality—the physical universe of time and space—then sin, depression, anxiety, sickness, anger, violence, and hatred *seem* very real.

In my commentaries on T-7.I and T-10.V.8–14, I described two different aspects or levels of reality, which I call *relative reality* and *absolute reality*. I said:

Absolute reality consists only of what God created, as God created it; it exists in eternity or in Heaven. Relative reality consists of things as we perceive them, what seems to be real to us; it is what exists (apparently) in this world and in time. In absolute reality, we can't be sick or die. In relative reality, no one can deny that we do get sick and die. These things are not real, yet they are real to us.

I had the privilege of listening to a lecture by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, during his visit to Portland, Oregon, in May 2001. In it he presented a virtually identical summary of two kinds of reality or truth, which he called *conventional truth* and *ultimate truth*. This twofold picture is fundamental to Tibetan Buddhism. In conventional truth, things,

events, and persons all appear to be discrete, having independent reality. In the view of ultimate truth, however, the world is constituted by relationship. Everything is relative to everything else. Past and future are defined in terms of the present, yet if you try to pinpoint the present moment you never can locate it; there *is* no solid instant in time called the present. It is like a point on a line, which has zero area. So in that sense there is no such thing as the present; yet without the present, you cannot define past or future. What is true of time is true of everything; all of it is defined in relationship to something else. There is no fixed reference point. So, in ultimate reality, all things are devoid of intrinsic, independent existence. All that exists is the Whole, with a myriad of related parts each defined in terms of its relationships with the other parts.

Thus, in conventional reality, we have bodies, which get sick and die. Sickness and death clearly affect us. But in ultimate reality, nothing has happened. The body is just a temporary structure, a transitory arrangement of component parts. The Whole continues unchanged. The reality of our shared Self continues unchanged. The body comes, the body goes, the Self continues.

If I look directly at the sickness and try to tell myself, "This isn't real," that probably will not work for me. However, if I spend some time meditating on the nature of ultimate reality, I can begin to loose my mind from the things I have considered to be real. I can remind myself that I am not a body. I can think about the fact that my body has no intrinsic, independent existence, and therefore anything about it is equally unreal. What happens to my body need not have any effect on what happens to *me*. My body may be sick, but *I* am not sick. I am safe, complete, and serene.

Charles Fillmore, co-founder of Unity, wrote similar instructions about these two realities:

Blinded by sense appearances, man has let his reason be overridden; in his folly he has declared that certain things exist which are not in harmony with *Spirit and good*. He has been influenced by the shifting character of matter, and...has allowed his senses to delude him into the belief that appearances are real...But in the study of Truth you are not under any circumstances to listen to the testimony of your external senses.

We have begun to learn, by some small experiences, that when we deny the reality of these things, or deny their power to affect us, we can be free of them. If I can manage to see your anger at me, for instance, as an effect of your fear, the anger will have no effect on me. It will not take away the peace of God, nor will it affect my love for you.

3. The conclusion is: What has no effects does not exist.

If a thing exists, it has effects of some kind. The way we know that something exists is by its effects. We can't see the wind, but we know it exists because we see its effects. If something has no effects—it does not reflect light, does not reflect sound, does not smell, and so on—it does not exist. It is just an hallucination.

If fear has no effects, it does not exist. We can prove this is true for ourselves by denying the reality of some of fear's effects and finding that they disappear. In other words, we expose their illusory nature; we unmask them and show them to be unreal. If the effects are not there, then the cause is not there either.

For example, if I can discover that my anger towards you is just a disguise adopted by my fear that you do not love me, I can realize that the anger isn't really anger at all. It does not exist. If the anger, which is the effect, isn't real, then perhaps the cause isn't real either!

Perhaps I fear death. But if I can begin to see that nothing real actually dies—that the pieces of reality are rearranged in a new constellation, that is all, yet everything that existed before continues to exist—then I can see that I am fearing nothing. The fear vanishes, and its cause vanishes with it.

If I can make the effect disappear simply by recognizing that it isn't real, then the apparent cause behind that effect must not be there either.

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The point of all this, remember, is to explain why we do not have to be afraid to look at our fear. There is one simple reason: Fear is not real. We can know this to be true by our own experience. We can make fear's effects vanish by denying them, so that fear has no effects; and since fear has no effects it does not exist. It "has not happened...[and] could not be real" (2:6-7).

Since it is unreal, it cannot be terrifying. We can look at our fear calmly, and when we do, it will become transparent. Its flimsy nature will be exposed. Just as turning on the light in a room banishes the darkness from the room, so looking directly at fear in the clear light of reason makes the fear vanish (2:8-9).

Franklin Roosevelt once said, during WW II, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." Jesus would amend that, saying, "Fear is nothing, so we need not be afraid of it." When you look with clarity and with light—that is, with the vision of the Holy Spirit—at your fear, there is nothing there. Just an insubstantial hallucination. Just something you imagined, as a child imagines a monster when the curtain blows in the wind (T-11.VIII.13).

So if it seems frightening to look within, to uncover the ego's hidden belief that you are responsible for all the misery of the world, remember: There is nothing there. Look with Jesus and it will disappear.

The reason for these two paragraphs of strong encouragement to look upon our fear is that we are scared witless of looking. The ego has eons of time invested in developing reasons not to look, and we have listened to all of the ego's reasons. We need this reassurance that looking is safe, and indeed more than safe. Looking is the way to bring an end to the illusions. Looking calmly at the "conventional" thinking of the ego, its belief in the reality of transitory things like bodies and the independent self, is the way to end our suffering.

Paragraphs 3 to 9

3. ¹Let us begin this lesson in "ego dynamics" by understanding that the term itself does not mean anything. ²[In fact,] It contains the very contradiction [exactly the contradiction] in terms that **makes** it meaningless. ³"Dynamics" implies the power to **do** something, and the whole separation fallacy lies in the belief that the ego *has* the power to do **anything**. ⁴The ego is fearful ~~to you~~ **because** you believe this. ⁵Yet the truth is very simple:

⁶*All power is of God.*

⁷*What is not of Him has no power to do anything.*

4. ¹When we look at the ego, then, we are **not** considering dynamics but delusions. ²You can surely regard a delusional system without fear, for it cannot have any effects if its source is not real. ³Fear becomes more obviously inappropriate if you recognize the ego's **goal**, which is so clearly senseless that any effort on its behalf is **necessarily** expended on nothing. ⁴The ego's goal is quite explicitly **ego autonomy**. ⁵From the beginning, then, its **purpose** is to be separate, sufficient unto itself and independent of any power **except its own**. ⁶This is **why** it is the symbol of separation.

5. ¹Every idea has a purpose, and its purpose is always the natural outcome [extension] of what it **is**. ²Everything that stems from the ego is the natural outcome of its central belief, and the way to undo its **results** is merely to recognize that their **source** is **not** natural, being out of accord with your **true** nature. ³I said before [7.X.4:9-10] that to will contrary to God is wishful thinking and not real willing. ⁴His Will is one *because* [because] the extension of His Will **cannot** be unlike **itself**. ⁵The real conflict you experience, then, is between the ego's idle wishes and the Will of God, **which you share**. ⁶Can this be a real conflict?

6. ¹Yours is the independence of creation, **not** of autonomy. ²Your whole creative function lies in your complete dependence on God, Whose function He shares **with** you. ³By **His** willingness to share it, He became as dependent on you as you are on **Him**. ⁴Do not ascribe the ego's arrogance to Him Who wills **not** to be independent of **you**. ⁵He has included **you** in **His** Autonomy. ⁶Can **you** believe that autonomy is meaningful **apart** from Him? ⁷The belief in **ego** autonomy is costing you the knowledge of your dependence on God, **in which your freedom lies**. ⁸The ego sees **all** dependency as threatening, and has twisted even your longing for God into a means of establishing **itself**. ⁹But do not be deceived by **its** interpretation of your conflict.

7. ¹The ego **always** attacks on behalf of separation. ²Believing it **has** the power to do this it does nothing else, because its goal of autonomy *is* nothing else. ³The ego is totally confused about reality, **but it does not lose sight of its goal**. ⁴It is much more vigilant than **you** are, **because** it is perfectly certain of its purpose. **5You** are confused because you do **not** recognize [know] **yours**.

8. ¹You must recognize [What you must learn to recognize is] that the **last** thing the ego wishes you to realize is **that you are afraid of it**. ²For if the ego could give rise [gives rise] to fear, it would diminish [it is *diminishing*] your independence and weaken [*weakening*] your power. ³Yet its one claim to your allegiance is that it can **give** power to you. ⁴Without **this** belief you would not listen to it at all. ⁵How, then, can its existence continue if you realize that, by

accepting it, you **are** belittling yourself and **depriving** yourself of power?

9. ¹The ego can and does allow you to regard yourself as supercilious, unbelieving, “light-hearted,” distant, emotionally shallow, callous, uninvolved and even desperate, **but not really afraid**. ²**Minimizing** fear, but **not** its undoing, is the ego's constant effort, and is indeed a [the] skill at which it is **very** ingenious. ³How can it preach separation **without** upholding it through fear, and would you listen to it if you recognized this **is** what it is doing?

• **Study Question** •

2. *What belief empowers the entire separation fallacy? ([Go to answer.](#))*

Jesus goes on now to add one more encouraging word: The ego has no power to do anything (3:7). It cannot hurt you.

He says that the term “ego dynamics” is meaningless, an oxymoron (3:1). The ego *doesn't have* any dynamics because it has no power, and *dynamics* implies the power to do something:

The whole separation fallacy lies in the belief that the ego *has* the power to do anything. The ego is fearful to you because you believe this. (3.6–7)

This is the crux of the matter: We think the ego has power, when in fact it has none. God is the ultimate and *only* source of power (3:6)—One Presence, One Power, as the formula goes in New Thought circles. He did not create the ego; therefore the ego has no power (3:7).

We're not looking at *dynamics*, Jesus says; we're looking at *delusions* (4:1). If the source of the delusion isn't real (and the separation is *not* real), the delusion (the ego) can't be real, so there is nothing to be afraid of.

• **Study Question** •

3. *What is the ego's senseless goal (4:4–6)? Note the ego's goal well; it is referred to frequently in the rest of this section. ([Go to Answer.](#))*

The Ego's Goal: Autonomy

Jesus now executes a neat segue: from *urging* us to look without fear, right into actually *looking* at the ego with us. He starts with describing what the ego's *goal* is, and uses that goal as yet another reason why we should not be afraid to look.

The goal of the ego is so ridiculous that all the effort of the ego to achieve cannot possibly have any effect—so what is there to be afraid of? (4:5). It's like being afraid of a man whose intent is to split the earth with a ball peen hammer. You might see him out there in his back yard pounding at the ground with his hammer, but the sight would hardly evoke fear. Laughter, perhaps!

What is this senseless goal that is so obviously impossible that it makes fearing the ego inappropriate?

The ego's goal is quite explicitly *ego autonomy*. (4.4)

He explains what *autonomy* means. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines the word as, “acting independently or having the freedom to do so.” That is what the ego wants: independence from God. It wants to be self-sufficient (4:5). This is the utterly ridiculous goal. Remember how Jesus asked us, “Can you exclude yourself from the universe, or from God Who *is* the universe?” (T-11.I.2:4). How can anything be separate from what is infinite, omnipresent, and all encompassing? The idea of autonomy is truly *senseless* and *impossible*. God *is* existence; to be apart from Him is to not exist.

If what the ego is trying to do is impossible, what is there to be afraid of?

Its goal of autonomy makes the ego “the symbol of separation” (4:6). The desire to be independent of any power except its own is why the ego is so opposed to the thought that God is our only Creator. If God is our Creator, we are totally dependent on God for our existence, our nature, and our being. The thought is anathema to the ego.

• **Study Question** •

4. *How does recognizing the ego's goal help us undo everything that stems from the ego? ([Go to Answer.](#))*

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Yet autonomy is the ego's completely ludicrous goal, and *everything the ego does is based on this idea of autonomy* (5:2). So there is no reason to be afraid of anything the ego does! When your ego flares up, all you need to do is to remind yourself that the *source* of the ego—the idea of existing independently of God—is an impossibility, something that does not accord with the very nature of reality (5:2). If the source cannot exist, the effect cannot exist. If you cannot be separate from God, the ego cannot affect you! Don't let your ego throw you for a loop. It doesn't mean anything and is powerless to harm you.

This chapter, you will recall, focuses on the power of our mind to choose, and on the one central choice we must make: between God and the Ego. We are looking at the ego's thought system so we can see clearly how utterly senseless and impossible to accomplish it really is. The goal of the ego—to be autonomous or independent—is “wishful thinking” (5:3); it is a supremely unrealistic goal. Jesus says, then, that our choice is really “between the ego's idle wishes and the Will of God” (5:5). When you really look at it, *is there a real choice here?* Why would you agonize over choosing between what is clearly impossible and what is clearly inevitable? And just in case you think that by choosing God over the ego you are going to lose your *independence*, He goes on to address that worry as well.

• **Study Question** •

5. *Examine your own feeling about being dependent upon God, and about having your function determined by His Will in creating you. Do you notice any twinge of annoyance, any wish that you could be autonomous? ([Go to answer.](#))*

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Jesus says that we *are* free, but only within the context of our reality, which is shared with God. Our reality is not autonomous; it is shared. We exist because God has shared His Being with us. We are free to create precisely *because* we are not autonomous; we share God's own creative function, and we are included in *His* Autonomy. It is only in

dependence on God that we can know this freedom. We are not independent in the sense of being autonomous or separate from God. We are independent in the sense of being free to participate in creation *with* God, sharing His own function as part of Himself (6:1–2,5–7).

By attempting to become separate from God, which is the ego's idea of independence, we have actually lost our freedom and become enslaved. This is the same idea that was addressed in Chapter 8, Section II, "The Difference Between Imprisonment and Freedom," where the Course pointed out that we have confused the two things. What the ego considers to be freedom is really imprisonment, and what it considers to be imprisonment (dependence on God) is actually our true freedom.

Think, if you will, of the freedom of childhood, especially if you had a fairly good childhood, with loving parents. Were you ever more *free* than when you were a child? You could play all day! You could lie in bed on a summer morning as long as you wanted to. Life consisted of finding new ways to have fun. That freedom came about as a result of your total dependence on your parents. They provided everything you needed: food, clothing, shelter, and a loving environment. Your freedom lay in your dependence on your parents.

When you grew up, you thought that being adult meant becoming *independent*. That was the ego teaching you. Children are not meant to grow from dependence on their parents into independence; they are meant to grow from dependence on their parents to dependence on God. That is *real* freedom.

The Ego's Methods

In paragraphs 7 through 18, we will delve more specifically into the ego's *methods*. In this commentary we will look at just the first two of the ego's methods; next time, in the remainder of the section, we will continue the discussion.

All of these methods are based on the ego's insane and impossible goal: ego autonomy, to become completely independent of any power except its own. No matter what the method, they all have the same source. They are therefore equally insane, and equally harmless.

• Study Question •

6. *The ego always attacks on behalf of its purpose. What is its purpose? ([Go to answer.](#))*

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The Ego's Primary Method: Attack

Everything the ego does is an attack: "*it does nothing else*"(7:2). The machinations of the ego take on many appearances, but, whatever they look like, their substance is attack. As we will see, it hides itself, it uses intellectual analysis, it encourages independence from God, it points out errors, and it makes heavy use of projection. Every method it uses is just a tributary to the mainstream method of the ego, which is attack.

The purpose of the attack is always to further separation, because the ego is always seeking autonomy, which is identical to separation, and it never loses sight of that goal (7:2–3). You often have goals that you pursue sometimes and forget at other times, but the ego never forgets its goal (7:3–4). Sometimes, the ego will pretend that it has other

goals. For instance, the ego may say that its goal is obtaining love, and will try to convince you that “love can be gained by attack” (12.9), but its *real* purpose is always separation, and never love.

You know you have been thinking along with your ego...

when there is a flavor of attacking or being attacked

when you sense that you are losing something

when you sense you are gaining something at someone else's expense

when you realize you are manipulating someone else to get what you want

whenever a thought or action increases your sense of being on your own, lonely, or cut off in some way.

All of those are clues that your ego has been at work.

We need to realize that the ego is tireless in its pursuit of its goal. Ego attacks are not things that crop up only a few times each week; the ego is at work *constantly*. This is why our minds wander off so readily if we don't watch them! In a way the ego is like gravity, always ready to pull you down if you are not doing something to prevent it. We need to train ourselves to be vigilant because the ego already *is* vigilant. We need to refine and purify our purpose of oneness because the ego is already entirely dedicated to autonomy.

• Study Question •

7. *The ego promises to empower you; therefore, it must hide from you the fact that it makes you afraid. In what way does fear conflict with the idea of being empowered? ([Go to answer](#))*

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It Minimizes Your Fear of It

We *are* afraid of the ego. That is why we do not look at it and don't want to look at it. A lack of fear when looking at the ego must be a good thing, because Jesus has just urged us not to be afraid of the ego and has proved there is nothing to be afraid of. Our problem is that we are afraid *but don't know it*. The ego wants us to fear it, because as long as we are afraid we won't look at it closely enough to recognize its lack of substance. It wants above all else to keep us from even realizing that we *are* afraid of it (8:1), because if we realized that listening to the ego causes us to be afraid, we would stop listening! No one wants to be afraid.

The one thing that makes the ego attractive to us is its claim that it can make us powerful (8:3). It seems desirable to be powerful. If we caught on to the truth that the ego makes us fearful instead of powerful, its one selling point would be gone. It would have nothing to offer us. The ego has a real dilemma on its hands here! (8:5) To keep us from looking to closely, it has to keep us afraid of it. Yet, to keep us listening, it has to convince us that it can make us powerful, which it cannot do by terrifying us. Its solution is quite clever, as we will see later in the section: It makes us afraid, and then blames the fear on something else! We call this *projection*. It terrifies us, identifies something or someone else as the cause of the terror, and then offers to empower us to combat the “enemy.”

• Study Question •

8. *Look at the list of negative qualities in paragraph 9.*
 - a. *Which of them do you identify with the most? That is, which of them are things your ego accuses you of?*
 - b. *Try to summarize all of the qualities in a word or short phrase. ([Go to answer](#))*

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It helps, I think, to contrast the different approaches to our fear taken by the ego and by the Holy Spirit. The situation is this: we *are* afraid of the ego, but we have denied the fear and buried it, so we are unaware of it.

The ego wants us to go on being afraid. Fear keeps us separate. The ego realizes, however, that if we are *aware* of the fear we will take action or make a choice to get rid of the fear. Therefore, the ego *hides* or *minimizes* the fear in order to keep the fear intact.

The Holy Spirit does not want us to continue in fear. Therefore, He tries to make us *aware* of the fear so that we can look at it and let it go.

The ego *minimizes* the fear to keep it (9.2); the Holy Spirit *exposes* the fear to undo it.

The Holy Spirit is trying to teach us, over and over and over, to *look at* the fear, to recognize the fear that is behind all the other symptoms enumerated in 9.1. All of those are disguises for fear. Our work with the Course is teaching us to see that all these things, which seem very different, are really the same thing: fear.

We will continue to look at the ego's methods in the next commentary.

Answer Key

1. We must look at the ego's illusions because:
 - a. Not looking is how the illusions are protected; we cannot escape from them if we do not look.
 - b. Illusions are not dangerous.
 - c. We have the "lamp" (the understanding of the Holy Spirit) to dispel them, and we are ready to do so because we realize we don't want them.
 - d. We must look at it first in order to see beyond it, because we have made it real.
 - e. The only way to dispel illusions is to look at them directly
 - f. Illusions are not real.
 - g. We have begun to learn that we can dispel them simply by denying their reality; they have no effects and do not exist.¹
 - h. Looking upon darkness through light dispels the darkness. ([Go to Question 1](#))
2. "The belief that the ego has the power to do anything" (3:3). ([Go to Question 2.](#))
3. "Ego autonomy" (4:4). To be separate, sufficient unto itself and independent of any power accept its own. ([Go to Question 3.](#))
4. Everything stemming from the ego depends on this central belief in ego autonomy. All of the ego's effects can be undone by recognizing that their source, the belief in autonomy, is out of accord with our true nature. The apparent conflict between the ego's idle wishes and the Will of God cannot be a real conflict; therefore anything stemming from that must also be unreal. ([Go to Question 4.](#))
5. No written answer is expected. ([Go to Question 5.](#))
6. The ego's purpose is autonomy, or separation. ([Go to Question 6.](#))
7. Fear means that you are vulnerable (otherwise, why fear?). If you are vulnerable, you must be small and weak, not powerful. ([Go to Question 7](#))
8. Regarding the list of negative qualities:
 - a. No written answer is expected.
 - b. They could be summarized as "separated or disconnected." ([Go to Question 8](#))

¹ In paragraph 2, the Course again uses its favored argument that "what has no effects does not exist" (2:5). We have begun to discover through experience that fear is not real. As we notice that simply by denying the reality of fear's effects, they are dispelled, we come to realize that fear itself does not exist. If the effects are unreal, so must be the cause. "If reality is recognized by its extension [the cause by its effects], what leads to nothing could not be real" (2:7). This is the primary reason given why we should not be afraid to look upon the fear in our minds: It cannot be seen. Looking directly at it, we realize it is nothing.