

# Study Guide and Commentary

## ACIM<sup>®</sup> Text, Chapter 13

### Section VI

## Finding the Present

Again, let's remember the context within the chapter. The whole chapter is about guiltlessness, and about seeing a guiltless world. Two sections back we began to focus in on the role time plays in our perception of this world, and how, as egos, we use time: We hold our imperfect and incomplete memories of the past in our minds and project them onto the present. The result is that we don't really see the present; we see an illusion of the past superimposed on the present. That results in a future that looks like the past.

The previous section discussed the two emotions of love and fear. It showed how this projection takes place because of a fundamental *fear* in us. It is a fear about what we are, a fear that we have changed ourselves by our futile desire to be separate from God—in a word, guilt. Because we believe we have changed ourselves, we believe others to be as we think we are. We fear our selves, and project that fear onto the world. We recall fearful images from the past and see them everywhere in the present.

This section, "Finding the Present," discusses how we can break out of that destructive pattern. To be free of guilt we must be free from time, because "You are not guiltless in time, but in eternity" (T-13.I.1:2). This section teaches us that we escape from time by finding the present, and we find the present by being willing to let go of the past.

### Paragraph 1

1. <sup>1</sup>To perceive truly is to be aware of **all** reality through the awareness of your own. <sup>2</sup>But for this **no** illusions can rise to meet your sight, for [*all*] reality leaves no room for **any** error. <sup>3</sup>This means that you perceive a brother only **as you see him now**. <sup>4</sup>His past has **no** reality in the present, so you **cannot** see it. <sup>5</sup>Your past reactions **to** him are also **not there**, and if it is to them that you react [*now*], you see but an image of him that you made and cherish **instead** of him. <sup>6</sup>In your questioning of illusions [see IV.3:4], ask yourself if it is **really** sane to perceive what was as now [*what was now*]. <sup>7</sup>If you remember the **past** as you look upon your brother, you will be unable to perceive the reality that is **now**.

#### • Study Question •

1. *How is seeing the reality of others through our own related to the false images of other people our minds have built up from the past?*

To perceive truly is to be aware of *all* reality through the awareness of your own. (1:1)

*True perception*, which is what the Course is teaching us, consists in seeing perfection and innocence in everything because you see it in yourself. It is seeing “the guiltless world” which is the theme of this chapter. In true perception you have learned that you do not need to fear yourself; instead, you can love yourself. The Holy Spirit loves what He sees in you (T-13.V.9:6), and therefore you can also. Since God created you, you have remained unaltered; the futile wish to be an ego, separate from God, has changed nothing. “You have not lost your innocence” (W-pI.182.12:1). You have done nothing to merit guilt and punishment. You have not sinned.

Changing how you see yourself literally changes the world for you! Your reality, when perceived, acts like a lens to correct your vision of the world. Because your own reality is beautiful, all that you see is beautiful.

All of us, all the time, see the world through a filter of the way we see ourselves. The problem is that we think our own reality is something dark, twisted, and spoiled by our egos. So we see the world as dark, twisted and spoiled. Remember, the world you see is always an outward reflection of an inward condition (T-21.In.1:1–5). As you see yourself, you see the world. Therefore, how you see the world can reveal how you see yourself. What you are encountering in the world is always, in some way, a reflection of some part of you. If you are seeing your true holiness, you will see that holiness in whatever you encounter: “The Holy Spirit teaches that you always meet yourself, and the encounter is holy because you are” (T-13.IV.6:9).

For true perception to occur you must be willing to lose all your illusions, because “Reality leaves no room for any error” (1:2) All of the *error*, all the false perception, has to be dropped. The whole purpose of any illusion is to hide reality from you; therefore, to perceive reality, you must drop the illusions. This is one of the major themes of the Course, stated first in the Introduction to the Text (T-In.1:7). The illusions, the false perceptions, are the blocks; love’s presence is the reality they hide.

A primary source of illusion, in the context of this chapter, is the *past* and the way we use it. We have seen how we make the past real in the present and superimpose it over present vision. We relate to shadow images from the past instead of to what is so *now*, in the present. Since we must let go of all such illusions to have true perception, the Course describes true perception of a person as seeing them only as they are *now*, rather than seeing them through a filter of their past (1:3–4). When we perceive truly, we forget any reactions we may have had to the person in the past, and we react only to what is before us in that moment (1:5). How often, instead of this clear perception, have we allowed our reactions to a person to be, not to who they really are, but to who we *think* they are, based on past experience?

When the Course speaks in sentence 3 of “now,” and all through this section, it is referring, not to what we might call the “sensory present,” but to the eternal present. That is, to perceive what is so “now” means to perceive what is eternal; for instance, the Christ in each other rather than our bodies and egos (see 3:2). Being in the present, to the Course, does not mean being hyper-aware of what all our physical senses are perceiving in this instant: the sights, the sounds, the body sensations, and so on. Some spiritual teachings emphasize such focused awareness of the physical present; that isn’t what the Course means by it. The present shows us reality, freedom, light and truth (see 6:2–3).

We might say that when the Course speaks of the present, it really means eternity<sup>1</sup>, and the seeing or vision we use to see in the present is not our eyes, but our inner vision<sup>2</sup>.

“The one wholly true thought one can hold about the past is that it is not here” (W.p.I.8.2:1). If it isn’t here, if the past does not *now* exist, then how can we say it is real? What is not here and does not presently exist is not real! When we view someone through his past actions and our reactions to them, we are not in relationship with the person himself, but rather to a private image of him. So we are relating to an illusion and not to reality.

In true perception, we simply don’t do that. To experience true perception, we have to be willing to let go of these illusions about our brothers and sisters. Because we identify with the ego, we value these false images. They serve our ego’s need to project guilt. This keeps us holding on to them so that they continue to block true sight.

Jesus teaches us to question all our illusions. One good question is, “Is it sane to perceive what *was*, in the past, as if it were here *now*?” (1:6). Suppose you remodeled your house and removed a wall, opening two rooms into one. Would it be sane to continue to walk around the wall as if it were still there? If someone did that you would think they were nuts! But that is exactly what we are doing in our relationships. Is that sane? We need to stop reacting to the past as if it were here now.

The past can completely block out a true perception of present reality (1:7).

You are not being asked to do the impossible. The Course does not mean that you must give up all memory of the past. You cannot do that; you could not function in this world if you did. If every time I met you I asked your name and acted as if I had no memory of you, that would be just as insane as the ego’s use of the past we are discussing here. It is, to be specific, *the ego’s use of the past* that we are being asked to give up. “Forgiveness is a selective remembering, based not on your selection” (T-17.III.1:3)<sup>3</sup>. The Course is advocating a memory of what is the present reality, rather than a memory of the past (T-28.Int.4:2). These images of our brothers and sisters that we carry around in our minds, calling them memories, are not the whole picture. They are not even a true or accurate *part* of the picture. It is insane to use these distorted pictures from the past to judge the present.

## Paragraph 2

2. <sup>1</sup>You consider it “natural” to use your **past** experience as the reference point from which to **judge** the present. <sup>2</sup>Yet this is *unnatural* because it is delusional. <sup>3</sup>When you have learned to look on everyone with **no reference at all** to the past, either his **or** yours as you perceived it, you will be able to learn **from what**

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<sup>1</sup> "The present is before time was, and will be when time is no more. In it are all

<sup>2</sup> "Do not seek vision through your eyes, for you made your way of seeing that you might see in darkness, and in this you are deceived. Beyond this darkness, and yet still within you, is the vision of Christ, Who looks on all in light" (T-13.V.9:1-2).

<sup>3</sup> "To forgive is merely to remember only the loving thoughts you gave in the past, and those that were given you. All the rest must be forgotten. Forgiveness is a selective remembering, based not on your selection. For the shadow figures you would make immortal are "enemies" of reality" (T-17.III.1:1-4).

**you see now.** <sup>4</sup>For the past can cast no shadow to darken the present, *unless you are afraid of light.* <sup>5</sup>And **only** if you are would you choose to bring darkness **with** you, and by holding it in your mind, see it as a dark cloud that shrouds your brothers and conceals their reality from your sight.

• **Study Question** •

2. *What is the only thing that can cause the shadows of the past to darken the present?*

The first two sentences present a clear statement of what we are being told to stop doing: using our past experience as the reference point from which to judge the present (2:1–2). Based on past experience, we think we know who this person is and what they are like. We have already formed a judgment about them. We think we know them. In fact, we do not know who they are, or what they are like. Because of the false images based on the past, we have no room for the judgment of the Holy Spirit in the present, which is always that our brother is guiltless and innocent, always that he is either expressing love or calling for love.

We are being asked to forget what we think the past has taught us about our brother—not to forget his name, or the fun times we had together, or what he did to us, or the things we did to him, but to forget the *meaning* we gave to those things, to forget the mental description of this person that we have built up. Even more specifically, we need to forget any guilt we attached to these past events. Only if we do that will we be able to learn from what we see now, in the present (2:3). If we hold on to the past and to the mental description we have made for ourselves of this person, everything they do now will fall into the same patterns, patterns that exist only in our minds. The patterns act like filters or invisible grids, so that everything we see is forced into the same pattern. We can't see our brothers as they are *now*.

The *holy instant*, in the Course, is described as a moment of timelessness (T-16.VII.7:5). It is a moment in which we drop all the past and experience one another *right now*. All the meanings we have given the past, all the fear, all the guilt we have seen associated with the other or with ourselves, is gone. When you see only the present, in all its truth, you see only love. All we see is our sameness, our oneness, and our common purpose.

Granted, this is not easy! The Course is talking about undoing a mental habit that is so ingrained that we think it is *natural* (2:1), a part of our nature so fundamental to thought and relationship that there is no other way to do it.

*There is another way.* That is the whole point of the Course: to show you that there is another way, and that you have a choice in the matter. To undo this habit pattern takes constant vigilance. It is something you can practice at any time, with any person. Start to notice how you use the past to judge the present, how habitually you see someone and automatically fit them into a mold in your mind. Notice, and tell the Holy Spirit that you are willing to see them differently.

Suddenly, in 2:4–5, the Course returns to the *reason* that we are addicted to seeing the present through the past. In T-13.V.9:1, Jesus told us: “You made your way of seeing that you might see in darkness.” In other words, we see this way because we *choose* to see

this way. The Course brings us back, with a jolt, to confront the fact that we are afraid of light, afraid of love, afraid of God. Why would we *choose* to see darkness, why would we drag the darkness of the past into the present and use it to obscure reality, unless we are afraid of the light (2:4)? We do not want to recognize the light ourselves. The ego does not want us to recognize it because if we did we would immediately prefer the light to the ego. The darkness we hold on to conceals the light in our brothers behind a “dark cloud” of guilt (2:5).

### Paragraph 3

3. <sup>1</sup>*This darkness is in you.* <sup>2</sup>The Christ as revealed to you **now** has no past, for He is changeless, **and in His changelessness lies your release.** <sup>3</sup>For if He is as He was created, there is no guilt in Him. <sup>4</sup>No cloud of guilt has risen to obscure Him, and He stands revealed in everyone you meet because you see Him through **Himself.** <sup>5</sup>To be born again is to let the **past** go, and **look without condemnation upon the present.** <sup>6</sup>The cloud that obscures God’s Son to you *is* the past, and if you would have it **past and gone**, you must **not see it now.** <sup>7</sup>If you see it now in your illusions [delusions], it has **not** gone from you, although it is not there.

#### • Study Question •

3. a) *We seem to see darkness in our brothers. Where does the darkness really reside?*
- b) *What does it mean in the Course to be born again?*

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This darkness is in you (3:1).

The very darkness you think you are seeing in your brother or your sister is in your mind *and nowhere else*; that is the only place it exists, and it doesn’t really exist there because it is just an illusion you’ve made up: “Its only reality is in your own mind” (T-13.V.3:8). This is what the Course means when, later in the Text, it tells us: “You never hate your brother for his sins, but only for your own.” (T-31.III.1:5).

Some of us get very frightened by thoughts like these. If you find these thoughts disturbing or even frightening, I want to speak specifically to you.

It is normal to become frightened when we bring this all back within our own mind. We don’t want to see that the darkness is in our own minds. We want so very badly that it be “out there,” or “in him and not me.” “No!” we scream. “It isn’t in me! He did it to me, she betrayed me, I was so innocent and loving and I got victimized and used and abused.”

If you find the phrase “This darkness is in you” frightening as you read it, if it strikes terror in your heart, that’s okay. Just notice the terror. Notice how you want the darkness to be “out there” rather than “in here.” Notice that you *are* afraid of something here. You think you are afraid of the darkness, and that’s what the ego wants you to think. But remember what we learned in Section III: Maybe it isn’t the darkness you fear at all; maybe it is the light.

Just consider that you might be reacting involuntarily, in a kind of programmed response. Be willing to think about that reaction. Notice how automatic it is. You didn’t

have to think about it; it is as if the reaction is something you learned a long time ago and have forgotten the reason why. It is a strong reaction, visceral and instinctual. Consider that anything so removed from thought and conscious awareness is probably suspect. At the very least, you ought to want to understand it. So very simply, ask for understanding.

I want to remind you of what we discussed in earlier sections. The terror you feel is not about you. Looking at the ego's dark foundations *will not hurt you*. It will liberate you. We are not saying here that you *are* that darkness, just that the darkness is *in your mind* and nowhere else. We're saying it is an illusion that you need not frighten you. It is in your mind, but it is an illusion; it really isn't there at all (3:7)!

When the Course says the darkness is in you, there is no *blame* attached, no *guilt*. On the contrary, the entire chapter is about being without guilt and how to experience being without guilt. It's saying that in reality all that is in you is *innocence*. You see the guilt in others *because* you are afraid to see it in yourself, but it doesn't exist in *either place*. You are the cause of the darkness, yes, but what you are causing, the picture of guilt outside or inside, is all an illusion that you've made up.

Take the hand of Jesus and look with him at your mind. Postpone your terror a moment. Look at what is within you, look at your brother, and what you will see is the changeless Christ, both in yourself and in your brothers (3:2-4).

You will see someone without a past because He is changeless (3:2). When for a moment you accept the idea that all those dark projections of sin and guilt you see on your brother exist only in your own mind, you will see his innocence. You will see the Christ. You won't have to effort at it. You will be able to see that he is your brother, a mind joined to you, and separated only by illusions (see T-28.IV.3:3-7<sup>4</sup>).

Yes, he still has illusions. Yes, there seems to be a gap between you. And perhaps your brother still believes those illusions and is manifesting attack toward you. He is still afraid of love, and so are you. But your reality, which you share, is love, and only that is real. There is no guilt in what he does, nor guilt from the past; it was all the same, all a cry for love and completion, distorted by the illusions in your minds. None of that changed the reality, nor ever will.

To be aware of all reality through the awareness of your own is to see Christ in your brother through the Christ in yourself. It is to say to your brother, "We are both innocent here. No one is guilty, no one ever was. We made mistakes, that's all."

This kind of letting go of the past is what it really means to be born again (3:5). We can be born again each moment, as we allow our brother to be born again to us. We can look without condemnation on the present if we are willing to let go of the past—all the resentments, big and little; all the cherished injuries; all the disappointments; all the failed expectations. Drop them. Let them go. Let them go completely. They didn't mean what you thought they meant. In your memory of your brother there is a lot of darkness. Like a fleck of dust in a movie projector that throws shadows on the screen, the darkness is in your mind, not in him. Let it go. Let him be born again to you, and *you* will be born

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<sup>4</sup> "Think, rather, of him as a mind in which illusions still persist, but as a mind which brother is to you. He is not brother made by what he dreams, nor is his body, "hero" of the dream, your brother. It is his reality that is your brother, as is yours to him. Your mind and his are joined in brotherhood. His body and his dreams but seem to make a little gap, where yours have joined with his" (T-28.IV.3:3-7).

again.

The experience we have is that the past is not gone. It seems very real to us. But in reality, the past *is* gone. That's obvious to anyone who thinks about it. But "it has not gone from you" (3:7). If the past has reality to me, if the past still has power to block love and corrupt my relationships in the present, I am the only one who is giving that power to the past! The past isn't *there*, it isn't *here*, but *to me it is*. That is what must change for me to know love's reality in the present.

## Paragraph 4

4. <sup>1</sup>Time can release as well as imprison, depending on whose interpretation of it you use. <sup>2</sup>Past, present and future are not continuous, **unless you force continuity on them**. <sup>3</sup>You can **perceive** them as continuous, and make them so **for you**. <sup>4</sup>But do not be deceived, and then believe that this is how it **is**. <sup>5</sup>For to believe reality is what you would **have** it be according to **your** use for it *is* delusional. <sup>6</sup>You would **destroy** time's continuity by breaking it into past, present and future **for your own purposes**. <sup>7</sup>You would anticipate the future on the basis of your **past** experience, and plan for it accordingly. <sup>8</sup>Yet by doing so you are **aligning** past and future, and not allowing the miracle, which could intervene **between** them, to free you to be born again.

### • Study Question •

4. a) *How are we asked to think about time?*
- b) *When we attempt to anticipate the future on the basis of the past, what effect does that have on our readiness to receive miracles?*

Will you use the ego's interpretation of time or the Holy Spirit's interpretation? One imprisons, the other releases (4:1). The choice is yours. This is a clear reference to Section IV, which discussed time's function.

Let us recall what that section said. The way we see our own function determines how we see time's function. The ego says we are guilty and that our purpose in this world is to pay for that guilt—to be attacked, to be sick, to be punished. This will prove our separation from God. The Holy Spirit teaches that we are innocent and that our purpose in this world is to heal—through recognition of God's innocent Son in our brother we are here to demonstrate that we are not an ego, and that we are one with our brothers and with God. The most important aspect of time for the ego, therefore, is the past, because guilt lies in the past. To the Holy Spirit, the function of time is the same as our function: healing. He sees the present as time's most important aspect, overlooking the past, since the present is the only time in which healing can occur.

The ego uses time to make guilty. The Holy Spirit uses time to heal. How do you see your function in time: to heal, or to make guilty? Those are the only options. Do you want to release your brother and so release yourself, or do you want to imprison your brother in guilt? If you imprison him, you imprison yourself as well. Are you willing to make the choice that "Salvation [forgiveness] is my only function here"? (W-pI.99>Title, 1:1).

The emphasis here is that you are the one who forces continuity on past, present and

future (4:2). You want to see them as tied together, past causing present causing future, and so you see them that way and “make them so for you” (4:3). We all have done that. But don’t be fooled! (4:4). Just because you see it that way, just because you’ve made it so for yourself, does not make it so in reality. The situation only seems the way *you* have made it, but that is not the way it is. And the secret of salvation lies just here, in seeing things as they really are, and not as we have set them up (“All that is needed is you look upon the problem as it is, and not the way that you have set it up” (T-27.VII.2:2).).

Our delusion is in believing that what we see is reality. We see only what we want to see. To think *that* is reality is truly delusional (4:5). The present is not the past! People are not the way we see them. We’re setting it up that way! We’re seeing our own guilt in everyone else.

“Time’s continuity” is the eternal *now*. Now is the only time there is (W-pI.164.1:2). The idea of a past or future is imposed on reality only by the human mind. There is only one instant, and it is now; it is this holy instant. *Now* continues forever. The only reason we see time as consisting of past, present and future is because we want to see it that way for our own purposes (4:6). Those purposes are the purposes of destruction, the purposes of the ego, the purpose of establishing and maintaining sin, guilt and fear.

What is our purpose for the *past*? We hold on to the past because, without the past, we would have no grounds for judging anything, and we want to judge. We want to place responsibility for our lack of peace on something outside ourselves. In the next paragraph it says we “use it to attack the present” (T-13.IV.5:7). Our purposes for the past are guilt and attack.

What is our purpose for the *future*? We hold on to the future because, without the future, we would have nowhere to place punishment, which we think is necessary to right the wrongs we see in the past. The future gives us a place to locate fear. The future also provides a place for us to locate all the good things we are avoiding in the present, things like love, or joy, or peace. If we expect to be healed tomorrow, it means we don’t have to be healed now. But now is the only time there is. Our purpose for the future is *punishment, fear and avoidance*.

Who can deny that this is how we use time in this world? We “anticipate the future on the basis of past experience, and plan for it accordingly” (4:7). Doing so is natural to us, or so we think. We plan for the future based on the past; of course we do! We do it all the time. We do it without thinking about it. That is exactly why the Course talks about it. Jesus wants us to *think about it*, to become aware of what we are doing. He does not want to make us guilty about it. He just wants us to become aware of what we are doing.

As always, the method of the Course is consistent. It insists the truth is obvious and does not need to be sought for. The way to find the truth is to become aware of the illusions and lies we are making up. The way to find the Christ in ourselves is to look at the ego; the way to find love is to look at our fears. We “find” the positive by exposing the negative that is obscuring the positive and blocking it from our awareness. The title of this section is “Finding the Present.” The way to find the present (which is all there is) is to become aware of the illusions of past and future that block it from our awareness.

There is a better way to look at time. There is an alternative; there is a choice. The way we use time is based on our purpose for time, and the purpose we see for time is based on the purpose we see for ourselves. We see ourselves as sinful and unworthy; that vision of self is fundamental to the ego identity. The ego wants to find guilt and fear

everywhere to continue its own existence, so its purpose for time is guilt and fear. That is why it concentrates on the past and the future, because the past establishes guilt and the future supports fear. We use the past to determine the future because our intention is to make guilt real.

By treating time in this way, the ego in us very effectively does not allow the miracle to intervene and free us from time (4:8). We *don't allow* the miracle. Through our belief in the reality of past and future, we shut out our present salvation.

## Paragraph 5

5. <sup>1</sup>The miracle enables you to see your brother **without** his past, and so perceive him as born again. <sup>2</sup>His errors **are** all past, and by perceiving him **without** them you are **releasing** him. <sup>3</sup>And since his past is yours, you **share** in this release. <sup>4</sup>Let no dark cloud out of **your** past obscure him from you, for truth lies **only** in the present, and you **will** find it if you seek it there. <sup>5</sup>You have looked for it where it is **not**, and therefore have not found it. <sup>6</sup>Learn, then, to seek it where it **is**, and it **will** dawn on eyes that see. <sup>7</sup>Your past was made in anger, and if you use it to **attack** the present, you will **not see** the freedom that the present holds.

### • Study Question •

5. *Where have we been looking for truth, and where is it sure to be found?*

If you see a person as if they had no past you are seeing them without guilt. The Course isn't telling us to forget the facts about our brother's past; that would not be a very practical way to live in this world. It is telling us, rather, to forget our *interpretation* of the past, to forget our grievances and judgments about one another. It is the *ego's use* of the past we are supposed to let go of, the ego's *purpose* of guilt regarding the past and fear regarding the future.

To see someone without their past means that you recognize all the errors the person has made in the past are *past*, and therefore not here now. Because the errors are not here now, they can have no effect on the present unless you deliberately bring them along and pretend they are present. Remember what was said on in Section IV:

The shadowy figures from the past are...not real, and have no hold over you unless you bring them with you. (T-13.IV.6:1-2)

And you will receive messages from him out of your own past because, by making it real in the present, you are forbidding yourself to let it go. You thus deny yourself the message of release that every brother offers you *now*. (T-13.IV.5:6-7)

When you are judging someone because of their past, you are choosing to make the past real in the present. You are giving the past power over you by bringing the past with you into the present, giving it reality in your mind, and saying that it has a hold over you in the present. That is a choice you are making, and not a fact.

I repeat, the Course isn't trying to make you guilty about this. We *all* do it. We do it almost all the time. Jesus isn't asking you to stop doing this. He isn't asking you to fight

it, to try to change it. All that Jesus is asking of you is to *notice* when you do it, and to notice it without judging yourself for it. Our failure to notice the ego is what gives it its apparent power; we follow the ego unconsciously. Becoming conscious of the ego undermines its power. We see how silly it is. We can smile at it. And when we can look at it without judging it, it disappears.

The only way to look without judging is to look with Jesus or the Holy Spirit. That can take many forms: it doesn't have to involve the words 'Jesus' or 'Holy Spirit.' For me, the form it takes is that I talk to Jesus about myself. I say something like, "Oh, I see what I am doing here, Jesus. I'm dredging up the past and using it to attack my brother." Sometimes I just mentally say, "Help!"

When you see a brother without his past, you can "perceive him as born again" (5:1). This results in both you and your brother being born again. If you recall, being born again in the Course's vocabulary means to be freed from your past, without any guilt (3:5). The past paragraph said that by allowing the *miracle* in the present, which is just seeing your brother without his guilty past, *you* will be reborn (4:8). This sentence says that you will see *him* as reborn. Your perception of him as innocent frees him from his guilt and his past (5:2). Since you share the same past, you share the same release (5:3). The Course teaches us that what we give to another we give to ourselves. So when you release a brother, when you shift your perception to see him as born again, without a past, you are also freeing *yourself*. Letting go of the past in your relationships is how to be born again "Use no relationship to hold you to the past, but with each one each day be born again" (T-13.X.5:2).

Think for a moment the effect it has on someone when you let go of your condemnation and judgment, and see them without their past. What a liberating feeling that is, to know that nothing from the past is held against you! It is part of the reason why people "tire" of one relationship and move on to another—they want a relationship without any past. Forgiveness offers you a fresh, new relationship without the pain of breaking up, and without the loss of your shared growth.

When you see your brother without his past, you *release* him. Release him from what? From the implied threat of punishment, from the prison you have erected around him. I think this is what Jesus meant when, in the Bible, he told his disciples that we have the power to forgive sins. What an incredible power that is! What incredible effects it can have on people when you tell them, by action if not in word, "I do not condemn you." It's like being born again.

To let go of his past you have to let go of your own. If he is free, so are you. If nothing from the past condemns him, nothing from the past condemns you either. "The holy light you saw outside yourself, in every miracle you offered to your brothers, will be returned to you" (T-13.VIII.8:4).

To see your brother as he is—to perceive the truth, the Christ in him—you must become aware of the clouds from the past that you are holding in your mind, obscuring the present, and let them go. This is how to seek the truth in the present (5:4). You just have to notice the barriers you have put up to obscure the truth. Without the clouds of the past, what your brother is in truth is obvious. The vision of Christ in your brother lies only in the present; the vision of Christ in yourself lies only in the present. If you are looking at the past, you won't see that vision! It isn't there! When you were trying to determine who your brother is by analyzing the past, you've been looking for the truth

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where the truth is not (5:5).

There is a story about a man walking down a street at night who came upon another fellow under a lamppost, looking for something on the ground.

“What are you looking for?” asked the first guy.

“My car keys,” replied the second man.

Wanting to help look, the first man asked, “Where were you when you dropped them?”

“In that alley,” said the fellow doing the looking, pointing over his shoulder to a dark alley.

“If you dropped them over there, why are you looking here?”

And the guy answered, “Because there is more light here.”

The man was behaving in a very irrational way, wasn't he? You can't find the keys by looking where they are not. But Jesus is pointing out that we are just that irrational when we look for truth in the past, when truth can exist only in the present. That's what we are doing when we try to evaluate our brother in the present on the basis of his past. The truth about us or about our brothers is only in the present, so let's learn to look there.

In the past we were living from our egos, at least most of the time. We can't deny that. Therefore, almost all of the past that we remember is based on ego thinking, and therefore “made in anger” (5:7). Because the ego is irrational, its memory of the past is meaningless information. In the analogy of a court case, it is excluded as evidence. When a thought of the past comes up as an attack on a brother in the present, you can act as judge and say, “The jury will disregard that remark.” (You, of course, are the jury, the one who decides which witness to listen to.)

If you allow thoughts of the past to intrude on your mind and attack the present, they block out the freedom and release that exists only in the present (5:7). Your way out of prison is always present, but “you will not see” it even if you try to see it, as long as the past is allowed a place in your considerations.

## Paragraph 6

6. <sup>1</sup>Judgment and condemnation are **behind** you, and unless you bring them **with** you, you **will** see that you are free of them. <sup>2</sup>Look lovingly upon the present, for it holds the **only** things that are forever true. <sup>3</sup>All healing lies within it because **its** continuity is real. <sup>4</sup>It extends to **all** aspects of the Sonship [of **consciousness**] at the same time, and thus enables them to **reach each other**. <sup>5</sup>The present is before time **was**, and **will be** when time is no more. <sup>6</sup>In it are all things that are eternal, and they **are** one. <sup>7</sup>**Their** continuity is timeless and their communication is unbroken, for they are **not separated** by the past. <sup>8</sup>Only the past **can** separate, and **it** is nowhere.

### • Study Question •

6. *The only aspect of time we ever experience is the present. Based on this paragraph, explain why awareness of the present unifies, while awareness of the past separates.*

The first sentence expresses the same thought we saw earlier in T-13.IV.6:2. The

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Course emphasizes our need to become conscious of the causative role we play in the way we experience time. We think it is “natural” to bring the past into the present, something we cannot help doing. The Course says it is not natural; in fact, it is insane, like looking for the car keys in a place they cannot possibly be. It says that we make a *conscious choice* to bring the past into the present, and we don’t have to do that if we don’t want to. If it is a choice and not an inherent part of our nature, then we obviously must *want* to do it because we *are doing* it. The Course encourages us to look at our reasons for dredging up the past. It shows us that we choose to hold onto the past because we see our purpose incorrectly; we see our purpose incorrectly because we see ourselves incorrectly. We hold onto the past because we believe in sin, guilt and fear, and ultimately, that the separation is real. Thus, the way we treat time is nothing more than the ego trying to hold on to its identity (T-13.I.8:6). We don’t have to bring judgment and condemnation with us. When we realize that we have a choice in the matter, we are free of them (6:1).

The present holds love. The present holds joy. The present holds peace. Things such as these are “the only things that are forever true” (6:2). Time does not affect them. There is no joy, no love, and no peace in the past or future. They can only be a present experience. Even looking at a joyful experience in the past may bring a sense of loss in the present. Watch where you are looking! The Course wants us to focus our attention on the present.

All healing lies within the present. Elsewhere in this chapter, the Course several times reiterates the same idea in other words, so we know this is an important concept.<sup>5</sup> Healing lies in the present because the *continuity* of the present is real (6:3). Continuity means “uninterrupted existence” or “unbroken succession.” The present is continuous. It exists without interruption, in an unbroken succession of instances of now. There is never a moment when you are not in the present. The Holy Spirit’s idea of continuity is *now* and only *now*. Now is the only time you ever exist; you never exist in the past or future. How can you be healed when you are not there?

You are always in the present—and so is everyone else. So *now* “extends to all aspects of the Sonship at the same time” (6:4). (The Course often uses the term “aspects of the Sonship” to refer to our individual identities. This is just one of many instances in which the Course recognizes some form of plurality in the unity of the Sonship.) That is why when you are healed you are not healed alone (W-pI.137). Everyone is there in the present with you. Healing is available *now* and only *now*. It is as available to you as it is to me.

And *now* is the only time we can communicate, or “reach each other” (6:4). If I am in the past, or I am seeing you in the past, I can’t reach you and you can’t reach me. *Now* is the only time that can happen. In the past we are always separate. A few lines down, it says this clearly: “Only the past can separate, and it is nowhere” (6:8). When you let go

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<sup>5</sup> "All healing is release from the past" (T-13.VIII.1:1). "Now is the time of salvation, for now is the release from time" (T-13.VI.8:1). "It is in the reality of "now," without past or future, that the beginning of the appreciation of eternity lies. For only "now" is here, and only "now" presents the opportunities for the holy encounters in which salvation can be found" (T-13.IV.7:6-7).

T-13.VIII.1:1, T-13.VI.8:1, and T-13.I.1:2–3

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of the past, you let go of everything that separates you from your brothers—which is exactly why the ego so insistently holds onto it!

Sentence 5 states what we observed earlier about the continuity of the present; it always *is*. In this sense, it is the closest thing in this world to eternity (T-13.IV.7:5). Jesus lived in the present all the time, which is why He could say, in the Bible, “Before Abraham was, I am.” He was saying in another way, “The present is before time was” (6:5). If you try to think of existence without time—of eternity, in other words—the one thing that has to continue is the sense of *now*. Before time, or after time, *now* must continue.

This discussion may seem quite abstract. Where it becomes practical is in the realization that separation is always in the past and never *now*. If only the past separates, and now never ends, then separation is never now! And *now* is forever! Therefore, there is no separation.

Our experience seems to contradict this, but our entire experience of a separate life is just a constant reliving of an instant that is past, the instant we believed in separation. There is an interesting discussion of this idea later in Chapter 26:

Each day, and every minute in each day, and every instant that each minute holds, you but relive the single instant when the time of terror took the place of love. And so you die each day to live again, until you cross the gap between the past and present, which is not a gap at all. Such is each life; a seeming interval from birth to death and on to life again, a repetition of an instant gone by long ago that cannot be relived. And all of time is but the mad belief that what is over is still here and now.

Forgive the past and let it go, for it *is* gone. (T-26.V.13:1-14:1).

“Forgive the past and let it go” (T-26.V.14:1); that is the practical application of all this, the way it looks in our lives. Each time we forgive the past and let it go, we come a little closer to ultimate forgiveness of that primordial instant. Each time, when just for an instant we forget the past and love without attack, we have undone a little more of the past and come a little closer to forgiving the thought of separation itself. And when that is forgiven, all is forgiven, and time will be no more.

In the present are all things that are eternal (6:6): love, joy, peace, truth, and also our true Self. In the past, nothing exists. In the future, nothing exists. Everything that exists, exists in the present. In the present, you find eternity. The present is the only place you can experience the truth stated in the Text’s Introduction: “Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists” (T-In.2:2–3).

In a sense, I think you can understand the phrase “all things that are eternal” in 6:6 as pointing to “aspects of the Sonship” in 6:4. The true Sonship, in all its aspects, exists only in the present, and all its aspects “are one. Their continuity is timeless and their communication is unbroken” (6:6–7). The Course is always saying, in one way or another, that Oneness already *is*; the Atonement is already complete. It all already exists in the present. We are not aware of it because we live in the past! We “aspects” are all already in perfect, unbroken communication, but we don’t know it because we are “separated by the past” (6:7), a past that exists only in our minds, and that only because we bring it with us by conscious choice. By holding onto the past we are holding open this imaginary gap between us “which is not a gap at all” (T-26.V.13:2).

The past “is nowhere,” it doesn’t exist! (6:7). Oneness already is. We are already one. We are not separated. We only *imagine* we are separate because we hold the barrier of the past in our minds. When we let go of the past, oneness or sameness becomes immediately apparent. That is a holy instant, an instant of forgiveness, an instant of loving without attack. We use an imaginary past that doesn’t exist to attack each other. When we let go of the past we let go of attack thoughts (because there is no reason for attack), and when we let go of attack, all that is left is love. That’s how we discover that love is what we really are.

Using the past to evaluate the present is not natural. Nor is attack natural. Love is natural. Joining is natural. Oneness is natural. Communication is natural. When we let go of the unnatural, the natural appears.

It is not something you do; it is an *undoing*. You don’t find the present by looking for it. You find the present by looking for the illusions of the past in your mind and letting them go, that is, looking at them without judgment, counting them as of no importance, or just a silly idea. As you do that, the present appears in its eternal reality.

This undoing of the past is what defines the *miracle*. Nothing changes except the content of our minds.

The miracle does nothing. All it does is to undo. And thus it cancels out the interference to what has been done (T-28.Int.1:1-3).

The past is over and gone, but we *keep it in memory* so that it *appears to have* effects in the present. It *interferes* with our awareness of Present Love. The miracle *undoes* that interference; it removes the past from our awareness so we can see what it has been hiding from us.

So one description of a miracle might be: In a miracle, the past is forgotten, and we realize we are no longer affected by it.

We will continue this section next time.

## Answer Key

1. If we see our own selves truly, as an extension of God's love, we will not see the false images of our brothers and sisters as attackers. We will see them as the love they are.
2. The only thing that can lead us to bring the darkness of the past with us into the present is our fear of the light.
3. a) The darkness is in us, in our minds. If we see it, it is in us.  
b) "To be born again is to let the past go, and look without condemnation upon the present" (2:5).
4. a) We are asked not to be deceived by the linear appearance of time, thinking that because we see it this way, this is its reality.  
b) We let the ego's view of time control us, thus preventing the miracle from freeing us.
5. We have been looking in the past, where truth is not (because the past was made in anger); truth is to be found in the present.
6. The separating attitude of condemnation is always based on the past; thus, "only the past can separate" (6:8). Being in the present enables us to reach one another (6:4) because it contains reality and eternity; in the present there is no past to separate us.