

Study Guide and Commentary ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 14 Introduction & Section I The Conditions of Learning

Introduction

Legend:

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

Paragraph 1

1. ¹Yes, you are blessed indeed. ²Yet in this world you do not know it. ³But you have the means for **learning** it and **seeing** it quite clearly. ⁴The Holy Spirit uses logic as easily and as well as does the ego, except that **His** conclusions are **not** insane. ⁵They take a direction **exactly** opposite, pointing as clearly to Heaven as the ego points to darkness and to death. ⁶We have followed much of the ego's logic, and have seen its logical conclusions. ⁷And **having** seen them, we have realized that they cannot [*can not*] be seen except in illusions [*delusions*], for there alone their **seeming** clearness **seems to be clearly seen**. ⁸Let us now turn **away** from them, and follow the simple logic by which the Holy Spirit teaches [*you*] the simple conclusions that speak for truth, and **only** truth.

• Study Question •

1. *The Holy Spirit and the ego both use logic, but they obtain opposite results from their use of it. Please list the results of the Holy Spirit's simple logic given in this paragraph.*

•

When a paragraph begins with the word “yes,” a good student will ask herself, “Yes, *what?* Was there something that preceded this the author is referring to, and if so, what?”

You will recall that Chapter 13 ended with Section XI, which repeatedly and in no uncertain terms stressed the fact that our ultimate salvation is certain, no matter what obstacles appear to stand in our way. In fact, our salvation has already been accomplished and always has been in Heaven, which is our state in truth (T-13.XI.11:7–8). That certainty of salvation is, I believe, what this “yes”

refers to.

Having spent an entire section underscoring the solid foundation of eternal truth on which our certainty stands, Jesus returns to the realm of our current experience of separation, where truth is but dimly perceived (1:2). We hear Jesus tell us that we are blessed and we understand the words but we retain considerable doubt of their validity. Despite our alienation from the truth, or perhaps because of it, the Holy Spirit provides us with “the means for learning it and seeing it quite clearly” (1:3). The Course itself is that means: its words and the instructions for practice that it contains are designed to lead us out of doubt and into a firm assurance that we are the blessed Son of God Himself.¹

In the chapters preceding this one, Jesus has often exposed the ego's reasoning to us. For instance, in the last chapter, he spoke of how the ego tries to displace our guilt about our separation from God onto our brothers and sisters, projecting blame for our unhappiness onto them, and using our relationships as the means for discharging our burden of guilt. Given its premises the ego is logical, but since the premises are figments of the ego's insane imagination, the results of its reasoning are equally insane and wholly undesirable. The Course has made this point repeatedly.² The separation has no real result because it has no real existence (1:7). As the previous section pointedly asked, “How can you remember what was never true?” (T-13.XI.11:7). What the Course is teaching us is that our experience in this world is no more than a bad dream, something that never really happened. It is a false memory being replayed in consciousness. It must be that, because the “reasons” for its existence do not exist.

The means offered by the Course for returning us to knowledge is a means based on reason and logic, not blind faith (1:4). This chapter is going to delve into “the simple logic by which the Holy Spirit teaches...only truth” (1:8). The first section, which follows, deals with what we might call the prerequisites for those who undertake the Holy Spirit's curriculum.

¹ “I am blessed as a Son of God.” (W.pI.40.Title)

“For your five-minute practice periods, begin with this quotation from the text:

I am as God created me. His Son can
suffer nothing. And I am His Son.

Then, with this statement firmly in your mind, try to discover in your mind the Self Who is the holy Son of God Himself.

Seek Him within you who is Christ in you, the Son of God and brother to the world; the Savior Who has been forever saved, with power to save whoever touches Him, however lightly, asking for the Word that tells him he is brother unto Him” (W-pI.110.6:1-8:1).

² “The Kingdom is the result of premises, just as this world is. You may have carried the ego's reasoning to its logical conclusion, which is total confusion about everything. If you really saw this result you could not want it. The only reason you could possibly want any part of it is because you do not see the whole of it. You are willing to look at the ego's premises, but not at their logical outcome” (T-7.X.1:1-5). See also: T-4.V.3-4; T-5.V:1-3; T-7.VI.3-5; T-7.X.1:1-5; T-10.II.6; T-10.III.4:7-5:1; T-13.X.6).

Section I

Paragraph 1

1. ¹If you are blessed and do not know it, you need to learn it **must** be so. ²The **knowledge** is not taught, but its conditions **must** be acquired for it is **they** that have been thrown away. ³You **can learn** to bless, and **cannot give what you have not**. ⁴If, then, you **offer** blessing, it **must** have come **first to yourself**. ⁵And you must also have **accepted it as yours**, for how else could you **give it away**? ⁶That is **why** miracles offer *you* the testimony that **you** are blessed. ⁷If what you offer **is** complete forgiveness you **must** have **let guilt go**, accepting the Atonement for yourself and learning you **are** guiltless. ⁸How could you learn what has been done for you, unknown to you [*but which you do not know*], unless you do what you would **have** to do if it *had been* done for you?

• Study Question •

2. *Blessing others is how you prove to yourself that you are blessed. This paragraph is an example of the Holy Spirit's simple logic. How does this argument relate to the common wisdom that you must bless yourself first before you can bless others? Does it agree, disagree, or does it hold elements of both sides?*

With the emphasis on reason and logic in the introductory paragraph it is clear that the stress in sentence 1 must lie with the word “must”; that is, we have to be convinced that it is wholly logical and reasonable to believe that we are blessed. When we actively doubt our eternal union with God, our greatest need is to be *convinced* of its truth. We have rejected the knowledge of God we had when we were created, so we need, not to *learn* that knowledge but to rewire our minds so that they can *accept* that knowledge.

The Holy Spirit leads us through an indirect process, teaching us through a kind of object lesson rather than by direct instruction (1:2). He guides us through certain practices and behaviors, and then reasons with us based on the results of our actions. A few years ago, I watched a film called “Music of the Heart,” with Meryl Streep playing the role of a violin teacher in East Harlem; it was a very moving story. She had phenomenal success at teaching hundreds of children to play the violin. I noticed that one aspect of her teaching was taking the child’s hand and stroking the bow across the string with them. “You are just a puppet,” she told them; “let me move the bow.” She guided their hand movement so that the child had the experience of evoking pleasant music from the violin (as opposed to the screeches so often produced by beginning violin players).

The Holy Spirit guides us in a very similar way. He guides us to bless others (1:3) and to offer forgiveness (1:7), and then points out that in order to do so we must have been blessed and forgiven. “You...cannot give what you have not” (1:3). He is saying, in effect, “Look at what you are capable of. What does that tell you about *yourself*? Don’t you see that, to do these things, you must be a child of

God?” As we learn to extend blessing to others we learn what must be true about us. The miracles we give are evidence of the Christ that we are (1:6).

This is the basic teaching method of the Course. The Holy Spirit leads us to forgive and to bless others because that is what we *would* do if we had been blessed and forgiven (1:8). Then, after we have done it, he turns around and teaches us that we must be blessed and forgiven ourselves because we could not have given such gifts unless we already possessed them. It's as though he is tricking us into exposing our true nature.

And yet, if you think about it, this is really a scientific method. In science, you propose a theory that might explain certain things about nature. Then, you perform experiments to see if the results are what you would expect if the theory is true. If the results are consistent with the theory, then you have proven the theory's truth. Here, the theory is that we are still the holy beings that were originally created by God. The experiment is our offering miracles to our brothers. When the results are positive, they show us that the theory is true: “You are as God created you” (W.pI.93.7:1).

Paragraph 2

2. ¹**Indirect** proof of truth is needed in a world made of denial and without direction. ²You will perceive the need for this if you realize that to **deny** is the decision **not** to know. ³The logic of the world **must** therefore lead to nothing, for its **goal** is nothing. ⁴If you decide to have and give and **be** nothing except a dream, you **must** direct your thoughts unto oblivion. ⁵And if you have and give and are **everything**, and **all this has been denied**, your thought system is closed off and wholly separated from the truth. ⁶This is an insane world, and do not underestimate the [actual] extent of its insanity. ⁷There is no area of your perception that it has not touched, and your dream is sacred to you. ⁸That is why God placed the Holy Spirit **in** you, where **you** placed the dream.

• Study Question •

3. *What do you think is meant here by “indirect proof”?*

If we set out to *directly* prove that we are the holy Son of God, it would not work in this world, because the entire world is based on the denial of that fact. That is why the Holy Spirit has to do an end run around our denial (2:1). Denial “is the decision not to know” (2:2). Nothing based on that decision, as the world is based, can lead to knowledge (2:3). Something has to come along that demonstrates that what we believe about ourselves simply cannot be true, and that is what miracles do. When God's Love flows out through us to touch someone it proves that we are not the filthy sinners we thought we were. It proves that the Love of God is in us. *Giving* God's Love proves that we must *have* God's Love.

If we remain within the parameters on which the world is based—parameters consisting of a denial of our true Identity and replacing it with the hallucinatory

identity of the ego—our logic must lead straight to hell and “oblivion” (2:4). The premises on which we are basing our thought system are entirely false; therefore, no amount of logic that proceeds from such premises can lead us to the truth, and all such efforts are basically a waste of time (2:5–6). From within the ego thought system there is no way out. Like the punch line in the joke about the country bumpkin trying to give directions and finally giving up, saying, “You can’t get there from heah.”

Something has to break in from outside that thought system. Something has to demonstrate that what the ego thought system is telling us and indeed its very foundations *cannot* be true. Miracles offered by us and through us to others do that. “God placed the Holy Spirit in you” in order to enable that kind of conceptual breakthrough (2:8); His goal is to trigger the meltdown of the ego thought system by proving to us, through our own extension of miracles, that we *must be* more than egos.

Paragraph 3

3. ¹Seeing is **always** outward. ²Were your thoughts wholly of **you**, the thought system **you** made **would** be forever dark. ³The thoughts the mind of God’s Son projects or extends **have** all the power that he gives to them. ⁴The thoughts he shares with God are **beyond** his belief, but those **he** made *are* his beliefs. ⁵And it is **these**, and **not** the truth, that he has chosen to defend and love. ⁶They will not be taken from him. ⁷But they **can** be given up *by* him, for the Source of their undoing is **in** him. ⁸There is **nothing** in the world to teach him that the logic of the world is totally insane and leads to nothing. ⁹Yet in him who **made** this insane logic there is One Who **knows** it leads to nothing, for He knows **everything**.

• Study Question •

4. *All we see reflects our insane thoughts. Thus, unless the Holy Spirit is inside us, helping us undo our insanity, we would not have a chance. This paragraph says that there is nothing in the world that can teach us how insane our logic is. What about the beauty, wisdom and harmony of nature? Can't nature teach us how insane our human thought-patterns are?*

We typically reinforce our thought systems and our beliefs by reference to what we see. We think that we are being objective, and that what we believe is determined by what we perceive. But the truth of the matter, according to the Course, is the opposite: our thoughts determine what we see. That, to me, is what sentence 1 means. Seeing does not occur from the outside in, with an external object initiating and stimulating a response from the mind; rather, the mind projects its beliefs outward, and thus produces its own perception of the world.

If all we had were the thoughts of the ego we’d be trapped, because even these dark thoughts are empowered by the mind given to us by God (3:2–3). Our minds have, at some point in our past, decided to espouse and defend the ego’s beliefs (3:5). A direct assault on those beliefs would very likely have the reverse of the

sought-after effect: we would dig in even deeper. So the Holy Spirit does not even attempt that (3:6). Instead, He uses miracles to indirectly convince us to reverse our decision, with His aid (3:7). Nothing in the world can save us, but Someone in us can (3:8–9).

Paragraph 4

4. ¹Any direction that would lead you where the Holy Spirit leads you **not**, goes nowhere. ²Anything you deny that He knows to be true you have denied **yourself**³, and He must therefore teach you **not** to deny it. ³Undoing is indirect, as **doing** is. ⁴You were created **only** to create, neither to see **nor** do. ⁵These are but **indirect** expressions of the will to live, which has been blocked by the capricious and unholy whim of death and murder that your Father does not share with [shared not with] you. ⁶You have set yourself the task of sharing what cannot [can not] be shared. ⁷And while you think it possible to **learn** to do this, you will **not** believe all that is possible to learn to do.

• Study Question •

5. *What is your real will? What are you really capable of? What is it that you should really be about, as opposed to seeing and doing? (Pick one.)*
- A. *You should really be using the power of your mind, not your hands, to manifest all the good things that you truly deserve.*
 - B. *You should really be producing beautiful artistic creations that come out of your true creative impulse.*
 - C. *You should really be creating formless spirit in Heaven.*

When we reject what the Holy Spirit knows to be true, we have deprived ourselves of that truth. Thus, while it is still true that we are the holy Son of God Himself, if we deny or reject that idea, we deprive ourselves of the experience of it (4:2).

To the Course, everything in this world misses the mark and fails the test of reality. Life in this world is not true life; it is an *indirect expression* of the will to live that is inherent in God's creation (4:4,5). All perception and all behavior or doing are the efforts of our minds to force life out of "the capricious and unholy whim of death and murder" that produced this world (4:5). We are denying what is true about us; we are trying insanely to make the ego's madness into something real, which by definition means something shared (4:6). Yet the ego is inherently unshareable. It is our adherence to this insane goal that prevents us from believing in the goals God sets before us, goals that include sharing with Him the creation of the universe (4:4,7).⁴

³ That is, when we reject what the Holy Spirit knows to be true, we have deprived ourselves of that truth. Thus, while it is still true that we are the holy Son of God Himself, if we deny or reject that idea, we deprive ourselves of the experience of it.

⁴ "God wants only His Son because His Son is His only treasure. You want your creations as He wants His. Your creations are your gift to the Holy Trinity, created in gratitude for your

The Holy Spirit has the job of undoing our denial of truth, or rather of teaching us to undo it (4:2). By demonstrating to us the truth about us, He teaches us that our denial of that truth is unfounded and untenable. When I forgive, I prove myself to be a loving and merciful being, and thus *disprove* or undo my denial of that fact.

Paragraph 5

5. ¹The Holy Spirit, therefore, must begin His teaching by showing you what you can **never** learn. ²His **message** is not indirect, but He must introduce the simple truth into a thought system which has become so twisted and so complex you **cannot see** that it means nothing. ³**He** merely looks at its foundation and **dismisses** it. ⁴But **you**, who **cannot** undo what you have made, nor escape the heavy burden of its dullness that lies upon your mind, cannot see **through** it. ⁵It **deceives** you, because you chose to deceive **yourself**. ⁶Those who choose to **be** deceived will merely **attack** direct approaches, because they seem to **encroach** upon deception and strike at it.

• Study Question •

6. *Looking back over the previous few paragraphs, what is it that you as an ego are trying to learn?*

•

It is impossible to convince someone of something when they *want* to be deceived. I think of the example of a husband or wife who, upon being confronted with evidence of their partner's infidelity, refuses to believe it. The mind's entanglement with the ego is similar to that, but even more "twisted and complex" (5:2). Before we are willing to listen to the truth, we have to become convinced of the impossibility of our current beliefs (5:1). We have to stop wanting and defending the ego. The ego thought system poses no challenge to the Holy Spirit; to Him its insanity is obvious (5:3). But to us, who have deliberately blinded ourselves to the truth, the ego remains powerfully persuasive (5:5). As long as we continue to want the ego, we will resist all attempts to dislodge it (5:6). The roadblock of our desire for the ego must be removed before we can begin to learn the truth of what we really are. Therefore, our lessons begin with learning that our favored goal of ego autonomy⁵ is ill conceived and unattainable (5:1). We must learn that what we think we want is not something we want after all.

creation. They do not leave you any more than you left your Creator, but they extend your creation as God extended Himself to you. Can the creations of God Himself take joy in what is not real?" (T-8.VI.5:1-5).

⁵ "The ego's goal is quite explicitly ego autonomy" (T-11.V.4:4).

Answer Key

1. The Holy Spirit's logic:
 - teaches you how blessed you are
 - generates sane conclusions
 - teaches opposite conclusions from ego
 - points to Heaven
 - yields simple conclusions
 - speaks for truth and only truth
2. In one sense, it agrees with the idea that you must bless yourself first, since before you bless others you must have chosen to receive blessing yourself. To give something, you must first have it. In another sense, it disagrees, since you will not really *know* you are blessed until you give it away. If you wait to give it away until you really know you are blessed, you will never know.
3. It means using your giving of blessing to prove that you have blessing.
4. No, nature cannot teach us how insane we are, because it was made by our insanity and thus reflects it.
5. C
6. See the following passages:
 - "...the ego points to darkness and to death." (T-14.In.1:5)
 - "If you decide to have and give and be nothing except a dream, you must direct your thoughts unto oblivion" (T-14.I.2:4).
 - "These are but indirect expressions of the will to live, which has been blocked by the capricious and unholy whim of death and murder that your Father does not share with you. You have set yourself the task of sharing what cannot be shared" (T-14.I.4:5-6).
7. My summary: You have everything, yet you see only your faith in nothing. To compensate for this lack is why the Holy Spirit is inside you. He teaches indirectly, teaching learning through unlearning and having through giving.