

# Study Guide and Commentary ACIM<sup>®</sup> Text, Chapter 15, Section I

## The Two Uses of Time

### 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  
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### Overview of the Section

This section, like Section IV of Chapter 13, “The Function of Time,” contrasts the ways in which the ego and the Holy Spirit make use of time. The emphasis in this chapter, however, is on the use of the present to experience a *holy instant*, which is the overall subject of Chapter 15.

### Paragraph 1

1. <sup>1</sup>Can you imagine what it means to have no cares, no worries, no anxieties, but merely to be perfectly calm and quiet all the time? <sup>2</sup>Yet that is what time is for; to learn just that and nothing more. <sup>3</sup>God's Teacher cannot be satisfied with His teaching until it constitutes **all** your learning. <sup>4</sup>He has not fulfilled His teaching function until you have become such a consistent learner **that you learn only of Him**. <sup>5</sup>When this has happened, you will no longer need a teacher or time in which to learn.

### • Study Question •

1. *Paragraph 1. This paragraph discusses the purpose of time, and the goals of the Holy Spirit's teaching within time, which are really the same thing. Which of the following are ways this goal is described?*
  - A. To learn to have no cares, no worries, and no anxieties, but to be perfectly calm and quiet all the time.
  - B. To reach the point where what the Holy Spirit teaches us makes up all our learning.
  - C. To arrive at the point where we learn only from the Holy Spirit, and not from ego.
  - D. All of the above.

As I was saying in my commentary on the preceding section, attaining this tranquil state of mind, where nothing disturbs “the eternal calm of the Son of God” (W-pl.50.3:3), is the goal of the Course for us. The Holy Spirit is the Teacher of Peace, and this is His

lesson. Learning to abide in perfect peace “is what time is for; to learn just that and nothing more” (1:2).

Can you even *imagine* what it means to be “perfectly calm and quiet all the time”? For most of us, if we achieve a *few seconds* of perfect calm and quiet, with “no cares, no worries, no anxieties” (1:1), it’s a miracle. It’s a peak experience that we remember and talk about for maybe the rest of our lives. But to *live* in that state? To be that calm *all the time*?! Mind-boggling. “Yet that is what time is for” (1:2). The Holy Spirit is the Teacher of Peace, and He “cannot be satisfied with His teaching until it constitutes *all* your learning” (1:3). That state of mind is His goal for us—for you. And, believe it or not, He is completely confident that you can learn this lesson. He has perfect faith in you, as we have seen (T-14.XI.14:3–4). He’ll never give up on you, and never stop teaching, until you have relaxed into that perfect peace, permanently.

His function won’t be fulfilled until your mind is filled with His lesson, and only His lesson; everything the ego taught you will be gone (1:4). And when that has occurred, “you will no longer need a teacher or time in which to learn” (1:5).

This is really the central message of the paragraph, following on from the last section: Time itself exists, as far as the Holy Spirit is concerned, for only one reason: to learn the lesson of perfect peace.

## Paragraph 2

2. <sup>1</sup>One source [**One of the sources**] of perceived discouragement from which you ~~may~~ suffer is your belief that **this takes time**, and that the results of the Holy Spirit’s teaching are far in the future. <sup>2</sup>This is not so. <sup>3</sup>For the Holy Spirit **uses** time in His **Own** way, and is **not** bound by it. <sup>4</sup>Time is His friend in teaching. <sup>5</sup>It does not waste Him, as it does you. <sup>6</sup>And all the waste that time seems to bring with it is due but to your identification with the ego, which uses time to support **its** belief in destruction. <sup>7</sup>The ego, like the Holy Spirit, uses time to convince you of the inevitability of the goal and end of teaching. <sup>8</sup>To the ego the goal is death, which *is* its end. <sup>9</sup>But to the Holy Spirit the goal is life, which *has* no end.

### • Study Question •

2. **Paragraph 2.** *The question raised in the first sentence about our discouragement at how much time it will take us to attain such a goal is not really answered until Paragraphs 9–11. All it says here is, “This is not so,” meaning that it does not take a long time. At this point it simply tells us that the Holy Spirit uses time differently, and is not bound by time; this will be expanded on later in the section. Our experience is that something is being “wasted” by the passage of so much time. What ideas does the Course offer in this paragraph in contrast to our thoughts? (Two answers are correct.)*
- A. Time does waste us, but does not waste the Holy Spirit.
  - B. We need much time to become convinced of the goal.
  - C. The apparent waste time brings is due only to our identification with the ego; if we were not identified with the ego, we would not experience time as wasteful.

If attaining such a state of mind seems incredibly far off or even impossible for you, let's remember what we read earlier about being a happy learner (T-14.II.1, T-13.VII.15). If the goal is perfect peace, it's counter-productive to be anxious about learning the lesson! Learning to be calm and quiet about not being calm and quiet all the time is part of the lesson. The less you fret about "not being there," the closer you get to being there. Jesus anticipates our self-doubt here, and addresses it head on. He does not equivocate; he says that we *do suffer* from the "perceived discouragement" that "this takes time, and that the results of the Holy Spirit's teaching are far in the future" (2:1).

Be honest, now. Don't you think that the time when you are totally free from care, worry, and anxiety so that you have become "perfectly calm and quiet all the time" is, indeed, "far in the future"? Don't you? I know it seems that way to me, most of the time. Perhaps there have been brief moments when I knew that state of mind simply IS, now, "closer than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet," as Tennyson put it. But the vast majority of the time, a perfectly calm mind that remains that way "all the time" seems not only far off, but *impossibly* far off.

But, Jesus tells us, "This is not so" (2:2). Learning this does *not* take time, and the result of the Holy Spirit's teaching *is not* far in the future! He "is not bound" by time (2:3). From our perspective, which is locked-in to the framework of time, we simply cannot imagine what it means to be unbound by time.

This chapter and the ones that follow speak a lot about something the Course calls "the *holy instant*." The phrase is used in two primary ways. First, it represents the eternal state of mind of the holy Son of God, the eternal Now, that very same anxiety-free, perfect peace we have been talking about. It is an eternal state that exists outside of time, and that is our native sphere. Second, the holy instant refers to moments *within* time in which we tap into that eternal state and, for a brief instant, experience it consciously. (Sometimes we may also experience a holy instant *unconsciously*, as happened when Helen Schucman and Bill Thetford came together in a common purpose to find "a better way" to relate to their colleagues, which resulted in the reception of *A Course in Miracles*.)

What this paragraph is hinting at is that we can enter that holy instant *at any instant we choose to do so*. "You could live forever in the holy instant, beginning now and reaching to eternity" (T-15.IV.6:3). "All that it [the holy instant] ever held or will ever hold is here right now" (T-20.V.6:3). Paragraphs 9 to 11 will bring this home to us in more detail.

To us, the length of time it seems it will take is debilitating. We feel drained as we consider it. Time seems like an enemy to us, something to dread, stretching out into the distant future. But to the Holy Spirit, "Time is His friend in teaching," and "does not waste Him, as it does you" (2:4-5). The "waste" that we believe we experience with the passage of time is not real; "it is but due to your identification with the ego" (2:6). As time passes without our having attained the goal, we experience it as loss; we feel we have been wasting time, and we feel wasted as a result: "I've wasted most of my life!" We seem to be heading toward destruction instead of toward heaven. But only the ego experiences loss, because spirit cannot lose anything:

To identify with the ego is to attack yourself and make yourself poor. That is why everyone who identifies with the ego feels deprived. (T-12.III.6:1-2)

In any thought of loss there is no meaning. (T-30.VII.6:10)

Rather than bringing us loss, time is bringing us the opportunity, over and over, instant after instant, opportunity of tapping in to the Holy Instant *now*.

Both the ego and the Holy Spirit use time “to convince you of the inevitability of the goal and the end of teaching [or learning]” (2:7). The ego uses time trying to convince us that the end is death. The Holy Spirit uses time to teach us that the end is *life*. It’s that simple a difference, that stark of a difference.

The rest of this section contrasts these two uses of time.

### Paragraph 3

3. <sup>1</sup>The ego is an ally of time, but **not** a friend. <sup>2</sup>For it is as mistrustful of death as it is of life, and what it wants for you **it** cannot tolerate. <sup>3</sup>The ego wants *you* dead, but **not** itself. <sup>4</sup>The outcome of its strange religion **must** therefore be the conviction that it can pursue you **beyond** the grave. <sup>5</sup>And out of its unwillingness for you to find peace even ~~in death~~ [in the death it wants for you], it offers you immortality in hell. <sup>6</sup>It speaks to you of Heaven, but assures you that Heaven is not for you. <sup>7</sup>How can the guilty hope for Heaven?

#### • Study Question •

3. *Paragraph 3. Consider the goals that the ego pursues in time (see also 2:8); which one of the following is not an ego goal for us?*
- A. Death
  - B. For us to die, but not itself
  - C. For us to seek peace in death
  - D. To pursue us beyond the grave in hell

First, we consider how the ego uses time. Notice how, in the preceding paragraph, we were told that time is the friend of the Holy Spirit. Here (3:1), we are told that although the ego is not a *friend* of time, it is time’s *ally*. The word “ally” means a supporter or associate, a person that cooperates with or helps another person, so I think the meaning is that the ego works with time but does not really trust it. Perhaps the sense here is that the ego wants to punish you, to bring you death and suffering, but does not think your lifetime between birth and death is enough to accomplish that goal. And if death were the end, you might find peace in death, seeing it as an escape from an intolerable life (which is how a suicide sees it). The ego does not want anything even *that* “good” for you (3:5). Nor does the ego want to die, although it wants *you* dead (3:3)—an impossible distinction. Even the ego recognizes its impossibility (see 4:14). Therefore, the ego must believe “that it can pursue you *beyond* the grave” (3:4). It tantalizes and tortures you by telling you that Heaven is real, but “Heaven is not for you” (3:6). You, *guilty* you, hope for Heaven? No way! (3:7) You’re bound for hell. Yes, you are immortal, but it will be “immortality in hell.”

The Course calls this the “strange religion” of the ego, but it sounds suspiciously familiar to me. Does it seem that way to you?

Don’t brush this paragraph aside, thinking it doesn’t really apply to you. It does. Your ego, the ego you listen to each day, allowing it to advise you on what to do and how to be

happy, is *this ego that wants you dead* and worse. This is the voice you've been listening to.

## Paragraph 4

4. <sup>1</sup>The belief in hell is inescapable to those who identify with the ego. <sup>2</sup>Their nightmares and their fears are all associated with it. <sup>3</sup>The ego teaches that hell is **in the future**, for this is what **all** its teaching is directed to. <sup>4</sup>**Hell is its goal**. <sup>5</sup>For although the ego aims at death and dissolution as an end, **it** does not believe it. <sup>6</sup>The goal of death, which it craves for you, leaves **it** unsatisfied. <sup>7</sup>No one who follows the ego's teaching is without the **fear** of death. <sup>8</sup>Yet if death were thought of merely as an end to pain, would it be **feared**? <sup>9</sup>We have seen this strange paradox in the ego's thought system before, but never so clearly as here. <sup>10</sup>For the ego must **seem to keep fear from you**, to ~~hold~~ **[keep]** your allegiance. <sup>11</sup>Yet it must **engender** fear in order to maintain **itself**. <sup>12</sup>Again, the ego tries, and all too frequently succeeds, in doing both, by using dissociation for holding its contradictory aims together so that they **seem** to be reconciled. <sup>13</sup>The ego teaches thus: Death is the end as far as hope of Heaven goes. <sup>14</sup>Yet because you and ~~the ego~~ **[itself]** cannot be separated, and because it cannot conceive of its **own** death, it will pursue you still, **because [your] guilt is eternal**. <sup>15</sup>Such is the ego's version of immortality. <sup>16</sup>And it is **this** the ego's version of time supports.

### • Study Question •

4. **Paragraph 4.** *In telling us that our belief in hell is tied to our identification with the ego, this paragraph links itself back to 2:6 and "the waste that time seems to bring with it." Death and hell are the ultimate expression of "waste." Which of the following are true, according to this paragraph?*
- A. The ego holds our allegiance by appearing to keep fear from us.
  - B. The ego has to keep us fearful to maintain itself.
  - C. The ego tells us death is the end of our hope for Heaven.
  - D. The ego tells us that hell is in our future.
  - E. The ego tells us that death is merely the end of pain.
  - F. All of the above.

In 2:6 we were told that the seeming waste that time brings is due solely to our identification with the ego. Here, in 4:1, identification with the ego is linked inextricably with the belief in hell. If you identify with your ego you *do* believe in hell, and time seems like a *ginormous* waste because, when it's all over, you suffer in hell forever. You may struggle and strive and try to do good, but you just can't seem to be *good enough*, and you can't shed your guilt. Perfect peace?! Hah! Fat chance!

You may not dream nightmares about literal hell, but you do dream of painful consequences, of being "found out" for what you really are, or really did, or really think. It's all hell in one form or another (4:2). Hell is the ego's future goal for us (4:3–4), and that is stated with emphasis. "Death and dissolution" may be its interim goal for you, but that does not satisfy it (4:5–6). Hell *has* to follow.

Why else are we afraid of death? We *are*; everyone who listens to the ego fears death (4:7). If death really were the *end* of life, if it really meant shutting off the suffering and pain and guilt, why would we not welcome it? (4:8) We fear death because we are afraid of what follows it: hell. Judgment Day.

The “strange paradox” Jesus refers to here is the way the ego attempts both to alleviate your fears and to keep you fearful (4:9). (The earlier discussion mentioned here—“We have seen this strange paradox...before”—I believe is a reference to T-11.V.7:1-9:3.) The ego teaches you to welcome death as an end to your struggles, but whispers, “Unless, of course, hell is real.” As Chapter 11 said, if we came to realize that listening to the ego is the source of our fear, we’d stop listening. So the ego *seems* to offer advice on how to overcome our fear—for instance, “Do unto others *before* they do unto you,” or, “Don’t trust *anyone*.” But at the same time, it nourishes our guilt and fear of punishment, because its existence depends on our guilty fear (4:11; see also T-13.I.2:5<sup>1</sup>). “All too frequently,” Jesus says, the ego “succeeds in doing both” (4:11). It uses *dissociation*, which was mentioned earlier<sup>2</sup>. If you recall, we were told that, “Dissociation is a distorted process of thinking whereby two systems of belief which cannot coexist are both maintained” (T-14.VII.4:3). Here, the two systems of belief being held simultaneously are, “Death is a welcome end” and “After death comes hell” (4:13–14).

Basically, the way these contradictory ideas both exist in our minds is that we are careful not to think of them at the same time! Or, one belief is conscious, the other is out of sight in the subconscious.

So supporting this “version of immortality” (4:15) is how the ego uses time (4:16). In essence, smothers us in guilt, feeding our fear of punishment after death.

## Paragraph 5

5. <sup>1</sup>The ego teaches that Heaven is here and now because the **future** is hell. <sup>2</sup>Even when it attacks so savagely that it tries to take the life of someone who ~~thinks it is the only voice~~ [hears it temporarily as the *only* voice], it speaks of hell even to him. <sup>3</sup>For it tells him hell is **here as well**, and bids him leap from hell into oblivion. <sup>4</sup>The only time the ego allows anyone to look upon with [some amount of] equanimity is the **past**. <sup>5</sup>And even ~~there~~ [then], its only value is that it is no more.

### • Study Question •

5. *Paragraph 5. In this paragraph we are told that the ego teaches both that “Heaven is here and now” and that “hell is here as well.” Both heaven and hell are here. How can we explain this discrepancy? (One or more answers are correct.)*
- A. The ego is teaching contradictory lessons.
  - B. The ego has a low opinion of what Heaven is like.

<sup>1</sup> "Without guilt the ego has no life, and God's Son *is* without guilt" (T-13.I.2:5).

<sup>2</sup> Dissociation is discussed in T-4.VI.4:2, T-6.II.1:5, T-10.II.1–2, T-12.VII.7:6-11,

<sup>2</sup> Dissociation is discussed in T-4.VI.4:2, T-6.II.1:5, T-10.II.1–2, T-12.VII.7:6-11, and most recently in T-14.VII.4:1-10.



- C. The ego, in its use of time, is trying to focus our attention on the present.
- D. The ego teaches that Heaven is now because it wants us to fear hell in the future; and it teaches that hell is here as well when it wants us to choose death.

Continuing our look at the ego's use of time, we see that the ego uses it inconsistently. No surprise here! At one point it tells us that, "Heaven is here and now" (5:1). In different circumstances, it teaches that now is *hell*.

The ego does not mean "heaven is now" in the sense that Jesus does when he says:

Heaven is here. There is nowhere else. Heaven is now. There is no other time. No teaching that does not lead to this is of concern to God's teachers. (M-24.6:4-8)

In Truth, heaven is a state of consciousness, as Charles Fillmore says in *Unity's Metaphysical Bible Dictionary*: "The kingdom of heaven...is a state of consciousness in which the soul and the body are in harmony with Divine Mind" (MBD, p. 266). The Course says heaven is "the awareness of perfect oneness" (T-18.VI.1:5-6). The oneness is eternal, without beginning or end; it exists always. It is always *now*, and always *here*. It isn't anything we have to achieve, to aspire to, or to wait for. "The Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21, NIV).

The ego doesn't have the same thing in mind when it tells us that, "Heaven is here and now." Its meaning is more like, "This is as good as it gets. All that the future holds is hell, so eat drink and be merry; tomorrow you die" (5:1). But when someone believes that the ego's voice is the *only* voice, the ego switches its message to drive them to suicide. It promotes the second of the two incompatible beliefs: *now* is hell, and death is an escape. (Remember, the ego wants you dead. See 3:3.) Instead of threatening hell in the future, it teaches that hell is now, and the only way out is the annihilation of death (5:2-3).

That's how the ego uses the present and the future. As for the past, the only good the ego lets us see in it is that it's over (5:4-5).

## Paragraph 6

6. <sup>1</sup>How bleak and despairing is the ego's use of time! <sup>2</sup>And how **terrifying!** <sup>3</sup>For underneath its fanatical insistence that the past and future be the same is hidden a far more insidious threat to peace. <sup>4</sup>The ego does not advertise its final threat, for it would have its worshippers still believe that **it** can offer ~~them~~ [the] **escape** from it. <sup>5</sup>But the belief in guilt **must** lead to the **belief in hell**, and **always does**. <sup>6</sup>The only way in which the ego allows the fear of hell to be experienced is to **bring hell here**, but **always** as a foretaste of the future. <sup>7</sup>For no one who considers himself as **deserving** of hell can believe that punishment will end in peace.

### • Study Question •

6. **Paragraph 6.** Why does accepting the ego's thought system always result in a belief in hell? (One correct answer)
- A. If we accept the ego's thought system, we deserve hell.
  - B. Guilt makes us believe we deserve punishment, and nobody really believes that punishment can lead to peace.

C. The belief in hell in the future is inevitable because accepting the ego's thought system produces hell for us now.

To sum up the description of the ego's use of time so far: The ego uses time to foster guilt and to multiply depression and fear, until we are anxious to die. As Jesus remarks, it is a "bleak and despairing" picture—even a *terrifying* one (6:1–2). The ego wants to make your life a living hell, and teaches you to believe that there is nothing after life except *eternal* hell! And yet the ego's threat to peace is "far more insidious" (6:3) because it is hidden in our subconscious.

The ego's drive towards death and hell is hidden from conscious awareness, because it wants us to believe that it can offer us *escape* from hell (6:3–4). But we can't escape from our belief in hell (punishment) as long as we believe in guilt's reality (6:5). However, the ego lets fear of hell leak into our consciousness only as an experience of "hell here and now," in the form of suffering for our guilt. Thus it maintains our fear while seeming to promise some kind of release from fear and guilt through suffering. Although we do not realize this, our present experience of hell and punishment is always "a foretaste of the future" (6:6). Anyone who believes that they deserve to be punished *now* for their guilt must also believe that there is even worse punishment in the future, because no present punishment can ever remove the guilt and bring them peace (6:7).

Think of the very worst time of your life, the time when life seemed like hell. Then, realize that the experience of *present hell* was just a dim foretaste of the state that, unconsciously, we all believe will be our experience for eternity—if we still believe in our own guilt.

## Paragraph 7

7. <sup>1</sup>The Holy Spirit teaches thus: There **is** no hell. <sup>2</sup>Hell is only what the ego has made **of the present**. <sup>3</sup>The **belief** in hell is what **prevents** you from **understanding** the present, because **you are afraid of it**. <sup>4</sup>The Holy Spirit leads as steadily to Heaven as the ego drives to hell. <sup>5</sup>For the Holy Spirit, Who knows **only** the present, uses it to **undo** the fear by which the ego would make the present useless. <sup>6</sup>There is **no escape** from fear in the ego's use of time. <sup>7</sup>For time, according to its teaching, is nothing but a teaching device for **compounding** guilt until it becomes all-encompassing, **demanding** [and **demand**s] vengeance forever.

### • Study Question •

7. *Paragraph 7. Which of the following are true about the present, according to this paragraph?*
- A. The present, if we follow the ego, is hell.
  - B. We cannot understand the present because we think it is hell and are afraid of it.
  - C. The present is all of time that the Holy Spirit knows, and He uses it to lead to Heaven.
  - D. The present, to the ego, is a means of compounding our guilt.
  - E. All of the above.



Paragraphs 5 and 6 presented the ego's teaching (see 5:1). Now, we turn to that of the Holy Spirit.

If the ego teaches that the present is a foretaste of hell, the Holy Spirit teaches that hell does not exist! (7:1) There is no place where the "wicked" go to suffer for eternity. Rather, we are in hell *now*; the experience of fear and guilt that we've been dragged into by our egos has made the present a living hell (7:2), which is why we fail to realize that we could use the present to undo our fear and remember Heaven (7:5); we are afraid that if we focus on the present, truly focus, we'll encounter hell (7:3)<sup>3</sup>. If we are willing to look with the Holy Spirit (7:4–5), we'll remember Heaven. In Chapter 14, Jesus explained the same concept:

Under each cornerstone of fear on which you have erected your insane system of belief, the truth lies hidden. Yet you cannot know this, for by hiding truth in fear, you see no reason to believe that the more you look at fear the less you see it, and the clearer what it conceals becomes. (T-14.VII.2:7-8)

Unless we turn to the Holy Spirit we are trapped in fear; the Urtext emphasizes the words *no escape* in sentence 6. It makes me think of the play about hell by the famous French existentialist, Jean-Paul Sartre: *No Exit*. For the ego, time is just a playground for guilt. The longer we identify with our egos in time the more guilt we accumulate, "until it becomes all-encompassing and demands vengeance forever" (7:7).

## Paragraph 8

8. <sup>1</sup>The Holy Spirit would undo **all** of this *now*. <sup>2</sup>Fear is **not** of the present, but **only** of the past and future, which do not exist. <sup>3</sup>There is no fear in the present when each instant stands clear and separated from the past, without its shadow reaching out into the future. <sup>4</sup>Each instant is a clean, untarnished birth, in which the Son of God emerges **from** the past into the present. <sup>5</sup>And the present **extends forever**. <sup>6</sup>It is so beautiful and so clean and free of guilt that nothing but happiness is there. <sup>7</sup>No darkness is remembered, and immortality and joy are **now**.

### • Study Question •

8. *Looking back at our fear (expressed in Paragraph 2) that "the results of the Holy Spirit's teaching are far in the future," how does this paragraph begin to provide an answer to that fear?*
- A. We can instantly be enlightened completely.
  - B. The results of the Holy Spirit's teaching are available now, in each and every instant.

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<sup>3</sup> "...you are afraid of it." The referent for "it" isn't clear. It could be that we are afraid of *hell*, or that we are afraid of *the present*. In the end it does not matter which choice of referent we make as long as we believe they are the same thing. We don't use the present for our release because we are afraid that the present *is* hell, and we are being punished for our (imagined) sins.

- C. We can experience a state of mind that is free from anxiety, filled with nothing but happiness, in any instant we give to the Holy Spirit.
- D. A and B
- E. B and C



All of “this”—that is, all of the ego’s use of time to bury us in guilt and fear—can be undone *now* by the Holy Spirit (8:1). As was said in Chapter 13, “Now is the time of salvation, for now is the release from time” (T-13.VI.8:1).

His emphasis is therefore on the only aspect of time that can extend to the infinite, for *now* is the closest approximation of eternity that this world offers. 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.7:5-7)

The present is the only time in which we can be free from fear and guilt (8:2). The present is made free of fear by separating it from the past, and the past’s shadow that lies across the present into the future (8:3). Imagine how it would feel if there were *no past at all*. There would be utterly no cause for guilt, and therefore, no cause for fear of punishment. It would be “so beautiful and so clean and free of guilt that nothing but happiness” would be there (8:6). And this is the truth: “There is no past” (T-13.I.3:3). Neither the past nor the future actually exists (8:2); the past is—well, past! And the future isn’t here yet. “The present is the only time there is” (W-pI.164.1:2).

Note the repetition of the word “instant” (8:3–4), which is leading into a discussion of the *holy instant*, the major theme of this chapter. The Holy Spirit does His undoing work now, in *this instant*, in the present, held apart from past and future. Try to feel what it would be like to treat “each instant [as] a clean, untarnished birth, in which the Son of God [your brother or sister] emerges from the past into the present,” a present which “extends forever” (8:4–5). “Use no relationship to hold you to the past, but with each one each day be born again” (T-13.X.5:2).

## Paragraph 9

9. <sup>1</sup>This lesson takes **no** time. <sup>2</sup>For what **is** time **without** a past and future? <sup>3</sup>It **has** taken time to misguide you so completely, but it takes no time at all to **be** what you **are**. <sup>4</sup>Begin to practice the Holy Spirit’s **use** of time as a teaching aid to happiness and peace. <sup>5</sup>Take this very instant, **now**, and think of it as **all there is** of time. <sup>6</sup>Nothing can reach you here out of the past, and it is here that you are **completely** absolved, **completely** free and **wholly** without condemnation. <sup>7</sup>From this holy instant wherein holiness **was** [is] born, **again** you will go forth in time without fear, and with no sense of change **with** time.

### • Study Question •

- 9. *What does this tell us about what we experience within the holy instant?*
  - A. In the holy instant, we are simply removing the blocks to the awareness of what is always true.
  - B. We can become fully enlightened in an instant.

- C. We don't need any kind of spiritual practice because we already are all we need to be.
- D. A and C
- E. B and C

•

If there is no past and no future in the lesson of the Holy Spirit (9:2), all that is left is the present. How then, could any lesson of His take time? (9:1) "It takes no time at all to be what you are" (9:3). Here we have another instance of the Course's insistence that we already *are* all we need to be. Nothing changes: "Enlightenment is but a recognition, not a change at all" (W-pI.188.1:4). We are on "a journey without distance to a goal that has never changed" (T-8.VI.9:7). We already are the thing we have been seeking for (W-pII.318.1:5-6). We remain exactly as God created us (W-pI.110 and many other places). The only lesson we have to learn is that we are *already* whole, *already* complete, *already* one with God. "This places you in a position of needing to learn a lesson that seems contradictory; - you must learn to change your mind about your mind. Only by this can you learn that it *is* changeless" (T-7.V.7:9).

Yes, it has taken time to misguide us, but no time is needed to rediscover the Truth of our Being. It can happen in an instant. It can happen *now*. And we can *practice* that instant—that *holy* instant. (In fact, T-15.I.9:7 is the first time the Course uses the phrase, "holy instant," which is the title and subject of this entire chapter.) This paragraph, clearly, is giving us specific instruction, telling us to "begin to practice" (9:4), and telling us just how to do so. The instructions are brief, but, I believe, they are meant to be applied in extended meditation periods, and they are meant to be used repeatedly, not just once.

In a nutshell, the object of this meditation is to "Take this very instant, now, and think of it as *all there is* of time" (9:5). Let your mind focus on that idea and chew on it, mulling over it, thinking of all that it means. *Now is the only time there is*. Let yourself enter the consciousness of this idea; don't just read the line or repeat it once or twice. Think about it: The past is not here. The future is not here. All there is, is *now*. Nothing from the past or future can touch me or affect me, and nothing from the past or future *is* affecting me. Let ideas from paragraph 8 come to mind: "There is no fear in the present when each instant stands clear and separated from the past." "Each instant is a clean, untarnished birth." "The present extends forever." "It is so free of guilt that nothing but happiness is here." "Immortality and joy are now." Try to *feel* the meaning of these thoughts. Open yourself up to a *direct knowing* that now is the only time there is. Let yourself imagine how you would feel if you knew the truth of these words beyond a shadow of a doubt.

"Nothing can reach you here out of the past, and it is here that you are *completely* absolved, *completely* free and *wholly* without condemnation" (9:6). Sink into the reality of this blessed, holy instant!

We are meant to experience this holy instant over and over. We are encouraged to return to it again and again to refresh and renew ourselves. As we do so, we re-enter the world of time washed clean of fear, realizing that time does not change us in any way: we are eternally safe, eternally pure, eternally whole (9:7). Indeed we are eternally *holy* (10:1).

## Paragraph 10

10. <sup>1</sup>Time is inconceivable without change, ~~yet~~ [and] holiness does **not** change. <sup>2</sup>Learn from this instant more than merely that hell does not exist. <sup>3</sup>**In this redeeming instant lies Heaven.** <sup>4</sup>And Heaven will **not** change, for the birth into the holy present is **salvation** from change. <sup>5</sup>Change is an illusion, taught by those who ~~cannot~~ [could not] see themselves as guiltless. <sup>6</sup>There is no change in Heaven because **there is no change in God.** <sup>7</sup>In the holy instant, in which you see yourself as bright with freedom, you **will** remember God. <sup>8</sup>For remembering Him *is* to remember freedom.

### • Study Question •

10. **Paragraph 10.** *Is any change in us necessary, and if so, in what sense? (There may be more than one correct answer.)*
- A. Yes, in the sense that we must change our fearful thoughts into peaceful thoughts.
  - B. Yes, in the sense that we need to change which voice we listen to, ego or Holy Spirit.
  - C. No, in the sense that we already are everything we have to be.
  - D. No, because our fear and guilt is perfectly normal.
  - E. Yes, but the only change we need is to let go of the illusion that we have changed what God created

We are so accustomed to the changes wrought by time that we cannot conceive of time *without* change (10:1). I moved to Portland from Sedona in 1998, and visited often until 2006; then, I did not return for three years. I was astonished at how much had changed! And yet *not* astonished, because we expect things to change with the passage of time. And “holiness does not change” (10:1). Holiness is not affected by time. “I am the holy Son of God Himself” (W-pI.191.Title). I think this implies that as we begin to grasp the truth that we *are already* holy and *always have been*, we will become more and more free from the concept of time itself. The passage of time as we think of it implies change—“Change is gonna come,” as the song says. If, however, I am *changelessly* holy, I must somehow exist apart from time.

The holy instant frees us from the past and therefore frees us from guilt; we are “*completely* absolved...*wholly* without condemnation” (9:7). And thus it also frees us from future punishment. But it does far more than just teach us that there is no hell. *The holy instant delivers Heaven* (10:2–3). In freeing us from the passage of time, it introduces us to the changeless—and that is Heaven.

The changelessness of Heaven is in you, so deep within that nothing in this world but passes by, unnoticed and unseen. The still infinity of endless peace surrounds you gently in its soft embrace, so strong and quiet, tranquil in the might of its Creator, nothing can intrude upon the sacred Son of God within (T-29.V.2:3-4).

As we recognize, more and more deeply, that we exist only in the present, we realize that we have been saved from change (10:4). “Change is an illusion” (10:5). What a remarkable statement! Fundamentally, the Course teaches that *if it changes it's not real*.

Different realities are meaningless, for reality must be one. It cannot change with time or mood or chance. Its changelessness is what makes it real (T-14.IX.2:6-8). Reality is changeless (T-30.VIII.1:2).

The miracle is proof he is not bound by loss or suffering in any form, because it can so easily be changed. This demonstrates that it was never real, and could not stem from his reality. For that is changeless, and has no effects that anything in Heaven or on earth could ever alter. But appearances are shown to be unreal *because they change* (T-30.VIII.2:6-9).

God created only the changeless (T-6.IV.12:4).

What's more, the whole concept of change is "taught by those who could not see themselves as guiltless" (10:5). That can be understood in two ways. First, in order to *become* guilty, the holy Son of God would have to change, so a belief in change is a prerequisite to a belief in guilt. The separation began with a belief in change: "First, you believe that what God created can be changed by your own mind" (T-2.I.1:9).

The second way to understand the link between change and guilt is that, once we are convinced we are guilty, our only hope of redemption is in the belief that we can somehow change our state—that some miracle can erase our guilt. If I am damned because of my guilt, some drastic change is necessary to save me. That's the basic premise behind the fundamentalist understanding of atonement.

The teaching of the Course is that there never was a "fall," and therefore, there is no need for any kind of propitiatory sacrifice to "purchase" our salvation. Our holiness began at creation and has continued, uninterrupted, ever since. It is timeless and eternal. It does not change. It does not change because our holiness exists *in God*; it is God's own holiness, shared by us, and "*there is no change in God*" (10:6). That is what we are remembering in the holy instant. That is what we are reconnecting with, and that is freedom (10:7–8).

The awareness of our changeless nature integrates into our consciousness slowly, with repetition over time. Nothing is changing except our *awareness of the changeless!* This is why meditation is important. This is why we need daily, frequent, regular excursions into the holy instant:

Thus what you need are intervals each day in which the learning of the world becomes a transitory phase; a prison house from which you go into the sunlight and forget the darkness. Here you understand the Word, the Name Which God has given you; the one Identity Which all things share; the one acknowledgment of what is true. And then step back to darkness, not because you think it real, but only to proclaim its unreality in terms which still have meaning in the world that darkness rules (W-pI.184.10:1-3).

## Paragraph 11

11. <sup>1</sup>If [Whenever] you are tempted to be dispirited by thinking **how long** [Ur: *how long*] it would take to change your mind so completely, ask yourself, "How long is an instant?" <sup>2</sup>Could you not give so **short** a time to the Holy Spirit for your salvation? <sup>3</sup>He asks no more, for He has no need of more. <sup>4</sup>It takes far longer to teach you to be willing to give Him this than for Him to use this tiny instant to offer you the whole of Heaven. <sup>5</sup>In exchange for this instant He stands

ready to give you the remembrance of eternity.

• Study Question •

11. *What do you think the holy instant is, based on what you have read so far in this section? (Choose only one answer.)*
- A. The holy instant is a critical moment in which we are suddenly fully enlightened.
  - B. The holy instant is a moment within time in which our mind, however briefly, switches from faith in the ego to complete trust in the Holy Spirit.
  - C. The holy instant is a long way off for me because I am too unwilling to give an instant to the Holy Spirit.

This paragraph says that we can remember eternity in an instant, and that changing our mind so completely takes only a short time, an instant. The time involved is really in teaching us to be *willing* to give this instant to the Holy Spirit (11:2–4). Interestingly, the original wording of the first sentence began with “Whenever,” not with “If.” Nearly everyone gets dispirited and discouraged by the thought of how long it takes to so completely change our minds, to *really* let go of the past and to enter *fully* in the present moment. The change of mind itself really does not take any time. What stretches it out is the time it takes us to be willing for that change to happen. The instant we are completely willing, it happens. (And if it does not happen, somewhere in our psyche we simply are not willing for it.)

Sometimes I think it is necessary for us to reach a point of utter despair about achieving enlightenment before we completely stop *trying* to achieve it and surrender to God, allowing Him to give it to us by absolute free grace. A poet named Amy Carmichael once wrote, “God is a tower without a stair, and His perfection loves despair.” Another old Christian hymn writer put it like this, in a phrase I’ve never been able to forget: “Cast your deadly doing down.” Until we stop trying to do it ourselves, God cannot do it for us.

## Paragraph 12

12. <sup>1</sup>You will never give this holy instant to the Holy Spirit on behalf of **your** release while you are unwilling to give it to your brothers on behalf of **theirs**. <sup>2</sup>For the instant of holiness is **shared**, and **cannot** be yours alone. <sup>3</sup>Remember, then, when you are tempted to attack a brother, that **his** instant of release is **yours**. <sup>4</sup>Miracles **are** the instants of release you offer, and will **receive**. <sup>5</sup>They attest to **your** willingness to *be* released, and to offer time to the Holy Spirit for **His** use of it.

• Study Question •

12. *Based on this paragraph, what is one good way to receive the holy instant for ourselves?*
- A. When I feel tempted to attack someone, turn within and ask for forgiveness for myself.



- B. When I feel tempted to attack someone, change my mind and offer him a holy instant of release from guilt instead.
- C. Spend a lot of time in silent meditation seeking the holy instant.

Here, perhaps, is the key to understanding the source of our unwillingness. Sometimes when we read statements that tell us that we will be released the instant we are willing, our minds clamor, “But I *am* willing! I want it so *much*! I don’t know how to uncover any unwillingness; I can’t find any.” But ask yourself this: Are you willing to see *your brother* sinless?

But do consider, and consider well, whether it is your wish that you might see your brother sinless. To specialness the answer must be “no.” (T-24.IV.4:2-3).

If you are not willing to grant everyone the same release you are seeking—“*completely* absolved, *completely* free and *wholly* without condemnation”—you will never be willing to “give this holy instant to the Holy Spirit on behalf of *your* release” (12:1). You cannot give it to yourself if you won’t give it to everyone, because it is a *shared* holy instant; it “cannot be yours alone” (12:2).

Do you want to be released? Then release *him*. Release *her*. His or her instant of release is your own (12:3). Offering such an instant of release from guilt—an instant of forgiveness—is what the Course calls a “miracle” (12:4), and what you give, you receive. This is a course in miracles, and therefore, a course in offering instants of release to everyone we encounter. When we offer a miracle of forgiveness, it demonstrates our willingness to be released ourselves (12:5). We show that we are willing to use time as the Holy Spirit desires that it be used.

Therefore, hold no one prisoner. Release instead of bind, for thus are you made free. The way is simple. Every time you feel a stab of anger, realize you hold a sword above your head. And it will fall or be averted as you choose to be condemned or free. Thus does each one who seems to tempt you to be angry represent your savior from the prison house of death. And so you owe him thanks instead of pain (W-pI.192.9:1-7).

## Paragraph 13

13. <sup>1</sup>How long is an instant? <sup>2</sup>It is as short for your brother as it is for you. <sup>3</sup>Practice **giving** this blessed instant of freedom to all who are **enslaved** by time, and thus make time their friend **for** them. <sup>4</sup>The Holy Spirit gives their blessed instant **to** you through your giving it. <sup>5</sup>As you **give** it, He offers it to **you**. <sup>6</sup>Be not unwilling to give what you would receive of Him, for you join **with** Him in giving. <sup>7</sup>In the crystal cleanness of the release you **give** is **your instantaneous** escape from guilt. <sup>8</sup>You **must** be holy if you **offer** holiness.

### • Study Question •

13. *There are several statements in this paragraph about how we receive the holy instant. Which of the following expresses the general thought repeated here?*
- A. We receive the holy instant through diligent practice.
  - B. We receive the holy instant because of our willingness to do so.

C. We receive the holy instant as we give the holy instant of freedom to our brothers.

Note that this paragraph speaks about how *short* an instant is, while the next paragraph speaks of how *long* it is. Later (T-15.II.6:3) we will be told to experience the holy instant as *timeless*. We can experience it, I think, in all three ways: as short, as long, and as timeless. In a holy instant, we are experiencing eternity (which *is* timelessness<sup>4</sup>) for an instant, and it may seem very short, very long, or there may be no awareness of time's passing at all.

Before, we were told to practice *entering* the holy instant, treating the present moment as the only time there is, free from the past. Now, we are given a second thing to "practice" (13:3): "*giving* this blessed instant of freedom to all who are enslaved by time" (13:3). Paragraph 12 explained how crucial this is to finding release for ourselves; now, we are asked to put the teaching into *practice*. Our release from guilt can be "instantaneous" (13:7) when we are willing to offer equal release to a brother or sister.

The Text does not spell out whether or not offering a holy instant involves actions, or words, or merely silent acknowledgement of the other person's innocence. I think it can be any or all of those things, although the fundamental change of mind and willingness to see the other person as sinless must always be present. Beyond that willingness, we need to be alert to the guidance of the Holy Spirit about what to do, or what to say, and to whom.

As we offer forgiveness to another person, we simultaneously receive the same thing. Indeed, it is "through your giving it" that the holy instant is given to you (13:4–5). I like the last line: "You *must* be holy if you *offer* holiness" (13:8). The instant we are willing to give release from guilt to someone, we also *instantaneously* release ourselves, because giving holiness proves we *have* holiness (13:6–8). I've found that time and again: When I extend forgiveness to someone, there is a sudden shock of self-recognition, a glimpse at the holy being God says I am.

## Paragraph 14

14. <sup>1</sup>How long is an instant? <sup>2</sup>As long as it takes to re-establish perfect sanity, perfect peace and perfect love for everyone, for God and for yourself. <sup>3</sup>As long as it takes to remember immortality, and your immortal creations who share it with you. <sup>4</sup>As long as it takes to exchange hell for Heaven. <sup>5</sup>Long enough to transcend **all** of the ego's making, and ascend unto your Father.

### • Study Question •

14. **Paragraph 14.** Which one of the following best summarizes the Course's answer to the question, "How long is an instant?"
- A. It must be extremely long, because it is long enough to re-establish perfect sanity, peace and love for everyone, and to completely transcend the ego.
  - B. Although it is so short as to be no time at all, it is enough to exchange hell for Heaven.

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<sup>4</sup> "It is a joke to think that time can come to circumvent eternity, which *means* there is no time" (T-27.VIII.6:5).

### C. The holy instant will not happen until everyone has remembered God.

We've seen how short a holy instant can be: instantaneous. In this paragraph, at first it seems as though the instant being described here must be very, very long—perhaps immensely long. Surely it must take a long, long time to reach “perfect sanity, perfect peace and perfect love for everyone, for God and for yourself,” “to remember immortality” and our immortal creations, “to exchange hell for Heaven,” to “transcend *all* of the ego's making, and ascend unto your Father.” *All* of that! Wow! You expect to hear trumpets and angelic choirs!

The point, though, isn't that this will take an immensely long time. It means exactly the opposite! *An instant is enough*. All of this can happen in an instant. I believe that most of us, if not all of us, have experienced just this total remembering at least once in our lives, and probably multiple times. I believe it happens *every* time we truly forgive. For a moment, an instant, we have exchanged hell for Heaven; we have transcended our egos; we have experienced perfect love. And then we forget all over again. But each time we remember, we are moved just a little nearer to the time when we won't forget, the time when we will stay in that holy instant forever.

## Paragraph 15

15. <sup>1</sup>Time is your friend, if you leave it to the Holy Spirit to use. <sup>2</sup>He needs but very little to restore God's whole power to you. <sup>3</sup>He Who transcends time **for** you understands what time is **for**. <sup>4</sup>Holiness lies not in time, but in eternity. <sup>5</sup>There never **was** an instant in which God's Son could lose his purity. <sup>6</sup>His changeless state is **beyond** time, for his purity remains forever beyond attack and without variability. <sup>7</sup>Time stands still in his holiness, and changes not. <sup>8</sup>And so it is no longer time at all. <sup>9</sup>For caught in the single instant of the eternal sanctity of God's creation, it is **transformed** into forever. <sup>10</sup>**Give** the eternal instant, that eternity may be remembered **for** you, in that shining instant of perfect release. <sup>11</sup>Offer the miracle of the holy instant **through** the Holy Spirit, and leave His giving it to you to Him.

### • Study Question •

15. **Paragraph 15.** *Essay question: This paragraph again tells us to “Give the holy instant” or to “Offer the miracle of the holy instant.” Give your best understanding of what it means to do this, based on this paragraph and the whole section.*

We get so up tight about wasting time, or about how long we are taking to wake up. We need to lighten up. We've been at this for eons; one lifetime is a drop in the bucket, really. We need to tell ourselves, “Time is my friend” (15:1). Isn't that an uplifting thought? Give your time to the Holy Spirit, and He can use it “to restore God's whole power to you” (15:2); that's what time is for (15:3).

Holiness exists in eternity, not in time, and therefore, it exists *eternally*. Your perfect holiness exists *now*, and there never was a time that it didn't exist (15:4–5). Your reality and mine is “beyond time,” “forever beyond attack and without variability” (15:6). That's

why holiness can be recovered so quickly—instantaneously: because it stands outside of time entirely, eternally existent. What you are *is*. Now. You *are* that.

Saying, “You are that,” reminds me of a prominent Hindu Vedanta teaching. I found this summary on Wikipedia:

**Tat Tvam**, a Sanskrit sentence, translating variously to "Thou art that," "That thou art," "You are that," or "That you are," is one of the [Mahāvākyas](#) (Grand Pronouncements) in [Vedantic Hinduism](#). It originally occurs in the [Chandogya Upanishad](#) 6.8.7, in the dialogue between Uddālaka and his son Śvetaketu; it appears at the end of a section, and is repeated at the end of the subsequent sections as a refrain. The meaning of this saying is that [the Self](#) - in its original, pure, primordial state - is wholly or partially identifiable or identical with the [Ultimate Reality](#) that is the ground and origin of all phenomena. The [knowledge](#) that this is so characterises the experience of [liberation](#) or [salvation](#) that accompanies the [Unio Mystica](#).

It says literally 'That thou art'. In other words that [Brahman](#) which is the common Reality behind everything in the cosmos is the same as the essential Divinity, namely the [Atman](#), within you. It is this identity which is the grand finale of Upanishadic teaching, according to Advaita. The realisation of this arises only by an intuitive experience and is totally different from any objective experience. It cannot be inferred from some other bit of knowledge.

This is very much the teaching of *A Course in Miracles*. It says that Christ is the Self we all share, that ultimately we are all aspects or expressions of God, and that that “pure, primordial” Self is an eternal reality existing outside of time.

Eric Butterworth, the famous Unity minister, put it like this:

You can never be separated from God because you are an expression of God, the very self-livingness of God...You are God expressing Himself *as* you...The true self of you, the Christ, spiritual man, is the individualization of God. You are the Presence of God at the point where you are. (*Discover the Power Within You*, page 33)

The closing lines of this final paragraph really summarize the message of this section. They admonish us:

*Give the eternal instant, that eternity may be remembered for you, in that shining instant of perfect release. Offer the miracle of the holy instant through the Holy Spirit, and leave His giving it to you to Him. (15:10–11).*

We can take away from this section the two practices it has given to us:

1. [For use in our meditation practice]: Begin to practice the Holy Spirit's use of time as a teaching aid to happiness and peace. Take this very instant, now, and think of it as all there is of time.
2. [For use in interactions with others]: Practice giving this blessed instant of freedom to all who are enslaved by time, and thus make time their friend for them.

## Answer Key

1. D
2. A, C
3. C
4. A, B, C and D
5. A and D
6. B
7. E
8. E
9. A
10. A, B, C, and E
11. B (If you answered "C," you might profit from meditating in more depth on paragraph 11. Despite what you may feel, you *do* want the holy instant. Everyone wants peace of mind. Everyone wants to be happy. Everyone wants Heaven. Yes, it takes time to teach us to be willing for it, but the outcome is certain. We *will* choose Heaven.)
12. B
13. C
14. B
15. To "give the holy instant" means to see our brothers as completely free of their past and future, without guilt, thus releasing them from all fear. In a word, forgiveness.