

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 16, Section V.1–8

The Choice for Completion (Part 1)

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
~~struckthrough blue text~~ = Not in Urtext, in FIP edition
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Overview of the Section

I am going to quote Robert Perry's introduction to this section because I think it says exactly what needs to be said:

This is the first half of an extremely important section. This section presents the rotten core of the special relationship. It is very dark, as well as very hard to follow. Every paragraph or two Jesus gives us a new piece of a larger picture he is assembling. It is essential, therefore, to see each new piece not by itself, but as part of the emerging puzzle. And it is even more important to not keep the puzzle's picture at arm's length, but to be willing to see it at work in our own lives.

He says the section is "very dark." To give you an idea of just how dark, Robert has suggested that the title of this section ought to be, "The Ritual of the Death of God." So take a deep breath. Here we go.

Paragraph 1

1. ¹In looking at the special relationship, it is necessary first to realize that it involves a great amount of pain. ²Anxiety, despair, guilt and attack all enter into it, **broken into** by periods in which they **seem** to be gone. ³All these must be understood for what they **are**. ⁴Whatever form they take, they are always an attack on the self **to make the other guilty**. ⁵I have spoken of this before¹, but there are some aspects of what is **really** being attempted that have not been touched upon.

¹ This peculiar dynamic of attacking the self to make the other person in the relationship guilty was discussed at some length in T-15.VII. See paragraphs 5 & 10 in particular. Also, see T-27.I.2–4 and T-15.X.5:8–9.

• Study Question •

1. *So, you are living with someone and suddenly descend into a bout of terrible depression. According to this (and only this) paragraph, why are you depressed?*
 - A. *Because you finally realize that the special relationship will just never work.*
 - B. *Because you are attacking yourself with depression in order to show your partner all that he/she has done to hurt you.*
 - C. *Because your partner is not fulfilling your perceived needs.*

Special relationships are painful (1:1)! That probably does not come as a surprise. But what is new here is that the pain is really a form of self-attack, with a hidden motive. The topic of this paragraph is one that, as Jesus points out, he has mentioned before (1:5): the way we make some kind of sacrifice in order to evoke a compensating sacrifice from our relationship partner. In other words, “my sacrifice obligates you to sacrifice.” That is the “pain” referred to here, the pain of sacrifice. What kind of sacrifice? “Anxiety, despair, guilt and attack” (1:2). In relationships, we become *anxious* about getting what we believe we need from our partner; we *despair* of getting them to behave as we think they ought to; we feel *guilty* because we are always demanding of our partners; and we *attack* their failure to make us happy.

“All these must be understood for what they *are*,” says Jesus (1:3). “

What? Isn't it obvious that I feel anxious, despairing, guilty, and angry *because of my partner*? Clearly, it is her (or his) fault!”

That may be what those feelings *appear* to be, but it isn't “what they *are*.” What they are, “whatever form they take,” is “always an attack on the self” (1:4). They are self-sacrifice. They are my own ego *attacking* myself. In other words, those feelings are *not* being caused by my partner, they are being caused *by me*!

“Why on earth would I do that?” you may wonder. Jesus answers, “*to make the other guilty*” (1:4). What we are doing is sacrificing our own peace and blaming it on the partner in order to force him or her to sacrifice in return, to give us what we so blindly crave. This was the theme set forth in some detail back in T-15.VII, “The Needless Sacrifice.” In a later chapter, Jesus portrays the idea quite starkly:

Whenever you consent to suffer pain, to be deprived, unfairly treated or in need of anything, you but accuse your brother of attack upon God's Son. You hold a picture of your crucifixion before his eyes, that he may see his sins are writ in Heaven in your blood and death, and go before him, closing off the gate and damning him to hell (T-27.I.3:1-2).

We cause ourselves to be anxious, despairing, guilty, or angry, so that our partner, seeing it, will feel guilty for making us feel this way and will act more lovingly (as we define it) toward us. Admittedly, this is a hard pill to swallow. But the Course is asking us to consider it—to try the idea on for size and see if it fits.

Having said that he has spoken of this deeply hidden ego motivation before, Jesus alerts us to expect something even deeper: “Some aspects of what is *really* being attempted...have not been touched upon” (1:5). That is what is about to be presented.

Paragraph 2

2. ¹Very simply, the attempt to make guilty is **always** directed against God. ²For the ego would have you see Him, **and Him alone**, as guilty, leaving the Sonship **open** to attack and unprotected from it. ³The special love relationship is the ego's chief weapon for keeping you from Heaven. ⁴It does not **appear** to be a weapon, but if you consider **how** you **value** it **and why**, you will realize what it **must** be.

• Study Question •

2. *Let's take the same situation from the last question: You are living with someone and fall into a bout of depression. Why, according to this (and only this) paragraph, are you depressed?*
- A. *Because you have made your partner a false god and false gods will be attacked.*
 - B. *Because you are attacking yourself with depression in order to show God all that He has done to hurt you.*
 - C. *Because somewhere inside you realize that the relationship is defeating your true desire to be in Heaven.*
 - D. *All of the above.*

Even deeper than the notion that my anxiety and despair are self-generated in an attempt to make my partner feel guilty, Jesus goes on to say that the one we are *really* trying to blame isn't our partner. It's God! (2:1)

To our egos it is *God's* fault that we are so “*open* to attack and unprotected from it” (2:2). How many times have you had the thought, maybe spoken the words, “Why me, God?” We seethe with anger at a God Who would lead us into such an unfulfilling relationship! We may not want to acknowledge the repressed anger, we may be afraid to give it voice, and probably *are* too afraid to do so. So we sublimate it, we redirect it to our partners, unaware that *we* are its source, not them. And we contract our souls away from this untrustworthy God. And that is the point.

That is the ego's *purpose* in engaging in special love relationships. They are “the ego's chief weapon for keeping you from Heaven” (2:3)! The ego is trying to convince us that it's all God's fault, and that the ego, in the earthly bliss of the special relationship, can give us more than God. Jesus is asking us, as we move further in the chapter, to “consider *how* you *value* it [the special relationship] *and why*” (2:4).

Paragraph 3

3. ¹The special love relationship is the ego's most boasted gift, and one which has the most appeal to those unwilling to relinquish guilt. ²The "dynamics" of the ego are clearest here, for counting on the attraction of this offering, the fantasies ~~that center around it are often quite overt~~ [which center around this, are often quite open]. ³Here they are usually judged to be acceptable and even **natural**. ⁴No one considers it bizarre to love and hate together, and even those who believe that hate is "sin" merely feel guilty, but do **not** correct it. ⁵This **is** the "natural" condition of the separation, and those who learn that it is **not** natural at all seem to be the **unnatural** ones. ⁶For this world *is* the opposite of Heaven, being made to **be** its opposite, and **everything** here takes a direction **exactly** opposite of what is true. ⁷In Heaven, where the meaning of love is known, love is the same as **union**. ⁸Here, where the **illusion** of love is accepted ~~in love's place~~ [*in its place*], love is perceived as separation and **exclusion**.

• Study Question •

3. *How do our love fantasies reveal the ego's true colors (pay special attention to sentences 2-4)?*
- A. *Our fantasies reveal our desire for love, and the ego's real content is the call for love.*
 - B. *Our fantasies are full of things that society considers bizarre and unnatural, and the ego truly is bizarre and unnatural.*
 - C. *Our fantasies quite often include overt hate, separation and exclusion, and these are the ego's true colors.*
 - D. *Our fantasies reveal the ego's true nature because the ego is actually made of whipped cream.*

Special love relationships are held up as the most wonderful thing in the world, "the ego's boasted gift," possibly the one thing that can make life worth living. Think of all the love songs: "You made me so very happy." "What would I do without you?" "Love is a many-splendored thing." "I can't live, if living is without you." "You and me against the world." And I stumbled on these lyrics on the Internet. They sound like a song that ought to be directed to God!

You're the breath that I breathe, you're the sight when I see
You're everything good that lies within me
I need you, I need you, I do
You're the thoughts that I think, you're the love that I feel
You're the hope in my heart that makes everything real
I need you, I need you, I do.

It's very appealing, especially (the Course says) "to those unwilling to relinquish guilt" (3:1). Remember how the Course talked about "the attraction of guilt" back in T-15.VII? It spoke there of the attraction our egos have to using guilt to get love: "For the ego really believes that it can get and keep *by making guilty*." (T-15.VII.2:5). If you are not willing to "relinquish" that tool in your relationship, the special love relationship will continue to attract you, and continue to keep you separate from Heaven.

There are a lot of rather strange fantasies built around special love relationships—some stranger than others, but even the "nice" fantasies are included here—but, counting on the strength of our attraction to special love, the ego can be quite blatant in promoting these fantasies (3:2). Even things like stealing partners, trouncing our competitors for the desirable partner, or dominance games can seem "acceptable and even *natural*" (3:3). And within the relationship, such things as having a "love-hate relationship" are not thought to be bizarre. Couples caught in what saner society calls an abusive relationship often do not think their painful interactions are abnormal. We often wonder why abused partners stay in the relationship. It is a testimony to the power of the attraction of special love. As it says here, even if the abuser recognizes his or her hate as "sin" and feels guilty about it, they don't change their behavior (3:4).

The sickness of the special love relationship is what the world thinks is natural, just part of living as separate beings in the universe, struggling to get along somehow. When someone begins to wake up and to question, to think, "There must be a better way to relate to one another," *they* are the ones considered to be abnormal (3:5)! This is why the Course asserts that the whole world is upside down (T-18.I.6:4); the ego made it that way on purpose as an replacement for Heaven, as unlike Heaven as possible (3:6).

Real love is *union*, but in the ego's eyes, love is "separation and *exclusion*" (3:7–8). A special love relationship, by definition, leaves out everyone else. I will love *you* and *only you*, and I expect you to love *me* and *only me*. This line of thought will be developed further as the section continues.

Paragraph 4

4. ¹It is in the special relationship, born of the hidden wish for special love from God, that the ego's hatred triumphs. ²For the special relationship is **the renunciation of the Love of God**, and the attempt to secure for the self the specialness that He denied. ³[And] It is essential to the preservation of the ego that you believe this specialness is **not** hell, but **Heaven**. ⁴For the ego would never have you see that separation could **only be loss**, being the one condition in which Heaven ~~could not~~ [*cannot*] be.

• Study Question •

4. *When you are incredibly attracted to that babe or hunk, what two of the following things are you really hoping to accomplish (according to this paragraph)?*
- A. *You want to reject God's Love.*
 - B. *You want to escape from the ego's pain through great sex.*
 - C. *You want to gain the special love that God would not give you.*
 - D. *You want love and union.*

According to what we were told back in Chapter 13.III.10-12:

You were at peace until you asked for special favor. And God did not give it for the request was alien to Him, and you could not ask this of a Father Who truly loved His Son (T-13.III.10:2-3).

We asked for special love from God (4:1), and He refused to give it to us, because singling us out would have brought us separation and loneliness (4:2 and T-13.III.12:1-2)! So the ego offers us a human relationship, finding “love” in exclusiveness, in which we can obtain the special love God would not give, and thus we renounce the Love of God and “the ego’s hatred triumphs” (4:1).

The ego will fight tooth and nail to keep us from recognizing that this specialness *is hell* (4:3). Separation can *only be loss* (4:4). The ego *is* separateness, and cannot exist in the union of Heaven, nor can Heaven exist in separation. Remember in the previous section² where we realized that “love’s one condition” was union. Here is the inverse of that: separation is “the one condition in which Heaven *cannot be*” (4:4). Practically speaking what this means to us is that real Love *cannot exist in a special love relationship*. “Special love” is an oxymoron!

Paragraph 5

5. ¹To everyone Heaven is completion. ²There **can** be no disagreement on this, because both the ego **and** the Holy Spirit accept it. ³They are, however, in complete **disagreement** on what completion **is**, and **how** it is accomplished. ⁴The Holy Spirit knows that [self] completion lies first in union, and then in the **extension** of union. ⁵To the ego completion lies in triumph, and in the extension of the “victory” even to the final triumph over God. ⁶In **this** it sees the ultimate **freedom** of the self, for nothing would remain to interfere with ~~the ego~~ [with it]. ⁷This **is** its idea of Heaven. ⁸~~And therefore~~ [From this it follows that] union, which is a condition in which the **ego** cannot interfere, **must be hell**.

² "Recognize this, for it is true, and truth must be recognized if it is to be distinguished from illusion: The special love relationship is an attempt to bring love into separation. And, as such, it is nothing more than an attempt to bring love into fear, and make it real in fear. In fundamental violation of **love's one condition**, the special love relationship would accomplish the impossible" (T-16.IV.7:1-3).

• **Study Question** •

5. *The ego thinks that completion is triumph over God, so that God can no longer threaten the ego's "existence." How does the ego accomplish this triumph (in the context of the previous paragraphs)? There may be more than one correct answer.*
- A. *By finding a babe or hunk who will make us feel special.*
 - B. *By getting people to doubt that Christ really died for our sins.*
 - C. *Rock 'n' roll music.*
 - D. *By attacking ourselves with anxiety, despair and anger in order to make our partner feel guilty.*
 - E. *By martyring the saints.*

Everyone accepts the notion that “Heaven is completion.” Even the Holy Spirit and the ego agree on this (5:1–2). To be complete is to lack nothing—or, to put it in positive terms that we often use to indicate bliss, “to have it all.” The distinction between the ego and Holy Spirit in this understanding, however, is how you define completion and how you obtain it (5:3). The two understandings are pictured in 5:4 and 5:5. Imagine these attitudes being acted out. Imagine yourself first joining with one person, and then *extending* that union to include more and more, until it includes everyone and everything (5:4). Then, imagine yourself instead *defeating* or *conquering* one person, then another and another, until (like Alexander the Great) you have conquered the world, and finally, you have conquered God (5:5). What a stark contrast! And how lonely would you be in the end if you followed the second path! As the saying goes, “It’s lonely at the top.”

The ego’s idea of completion and Heaven is eliminating all of the competition, including God, thus granting unlimited freedom to itself (5:6–7). And to the ego, therefore, union (with all its myriad ties) must be hell (5:8).

Paragraph 6

6. ¹The special relationship is a strange and unnatural ego device for joining hell and Heaven, and making them indistinguishable. ²And the attempt to find the imagined “best” of **both** worlds has merely led to **fantasies** of both, and to the inability to perceive either **as it is**. ³The special relationship is the triumph of this confusion. ⁴It is a kind of union from which **union is excluded**, and the **basis** for the **attempt** at union **rests** on exclusion. ⁵What better example could there be of the ego’s maxim, “Seek ~~but~~ **[and]** do **not** find?”

• Study Question •

6. *How, according to this paragraph, do we mix hell and Heaven in the special relationship?*
- A. *By entering into a supposed union in which we do not really unite with the other person.*
 - B. *By having too many fantasies.*
 - C. *By trying to unite with one person while excluding other people.*
 - D. *By mixing seeking with not finding.*
 - E. *By using anxiety, despair and guilt with love.*
 - F. *A and C.*
 - G. *All of the above.*

A special relationship is an exclusive relationship in which we supposedly are seeking union. Union (Heaven) and exclusion (hell) are opposites, but we are seeking union *in* exclusion! Do you see how this is an “unnatural...device for joining hell and Heaven” (6:1)? We end up so confusing ourselves that we are left with nothing but fantasies of hell and Heaven, unable to see either *as it is* (6:2).

I love the definition of a special relationship that suggests itself here: The special relationship is “a kind of union from which *union is excluded*” or “an attempt at union [based] on exclusion” (6:3–4). Talk about a confusing definition! No wonder Jesus says we are attempting the impossible (“In fundamental violation of love's one condition, the special love relationship would accomplish the impossible” (T-16.IV.7:3)). Clearly, this is the ego at work, the best example of its motto: “Seek and do not find” (6:5)

Paragraph 7

7. ¹Most curious of all is the concept of the self which the ego fosters in the special relationship. ²This “self” **seeks** the relationship to **make itself complete**. ³Yet when it **finds** the special relationship in which it thinks it can **accomplish** this **it gives itself away**, and tries to **trade** itself for the self of another. ⁴This is **not** union, for there is **no** increase and **no** extension. ⁵Each partner tries to sacrifice the self he does **not** want for one he thinks he would **prefer**. ⁶And he feels guilty for the “sin” of **taking**, and of giving nothing of value in return. ⁷How much value **can** he place upon a self that he would **give away** to get a “**better**” one?

• Study Question •

7. *How do you think we actually give someone else our special "self"? There may be more than one correct answer.*
- A. *We sacrifice ourselves for their sake.*
 - B. *We let them know that they own us.*
 - C. *We grant them all the special favors they want.*
 - D. *We spend our lives with them.*
 - E. *We let the world know that our partner now possesses all of the status and favor--all of the specialness--we have accumulated.*

If you think *that* was strange, wait until you see what is next! The “most curious” thing is the ego’s promotion of the effect the special relationship has on how we think about ourselves; our self-concept.

This “self”³ thinks of itself as incomplete, and tries to complete itself in the special relationship (7:2). And yet, although it is seeking to complete itself, when it finds a special relationship where it thinks it can *find* that completion, “*it gives itself away* and tries to *trade* its self for the self of another” (7:3). That is not only counter-intuitive, it is self-defeating (pun unintentional).

What does it mean here to give your self away? I think it lies hidden in plain sight in the language of special love relationships. “I am yours.” “See the pyramids along the Nile...Just remember, darling, all the while, you belong to me.” You *own* me, and I *own* you. That’s the trade, the self exchange. We are literally giving up our self in order to obtain the other person’s preferred, very special self, which we think will make us complete (7:5).

We think of this as union, but it’s not union. “There is *no* increase and *no* extension” (7:4). At best it’s a trade; at worst, it’s a dead loss, with our self subsumed in the other. And, because we devalue our own “self,” we feel guilty for the unfair trade of our shabby self for the wonderful, golden self we imagine the other has. How could you *not* feel guilty? “How much value *can* be placed upon a self that” you are willing to “*give away* to get a ‘better’ one?” (7:7)

³ The quotation marks around words in this paragraph were not in the Urtext and have been added by the editors. In this case, I think they made a wise, clarifying choice.

Paragraph 8

8. ¹The “better” self the ego seeks is **always** one that is **more** special. ²And whoever **seems** to possess a special self is “loved” **for what can be taken from him**. ³Where both partners see this special self **in each other**, the ego sees “a union made in Heaven.” ⁴For **neither one** will recognize that **he has asked for hell**, and so he will **not** interfere with the ego’s **illusion** of Heaven, which it offered him **to interfere with Heaven**. ⁵Yet if **all** illusions are of fear, and they **can** be of nothing else, the illusion of Heaven is nothing more than an “**attractive**” form of fear, in which the guilt is buried deep and rises in the form of “love.”

• Study Question •

8. *This paragraph says some extreme things about relationships that seem to work in this world. Which of the following does it **not** say about this world's pleasant relationships?*
- A. *"Marriages made in Heaven" are the one case where the ego actually provides some satisfaction, but this satisfaction is still not as joyous as Heaven.*
 - B. *Marriages made in Heaven are simply cases where both partners (rather than just one) think the other has a more special self.*
 - C. *In such relationships, neither partner will realize he has asked for hell.*
 - D. *Neither partner will interfere with the ego's pseudo-Heaven, which blocks him from the real Heaven.*
 - E. *These marriages made in Heaven are really just cases in which guilt is buried deep and produces a disguised form of fear, a form that we find attractive and think is love.*

In a special love relationship, you don't really *love* the other person. You see their self as better than yours and you want to dupe them into trading with you! (8:1–2) This is why finding the right mate seems so difficult: Each partner has to be deluded into believing that the other's self is better than their own. When that happens, the ego thinks it is a match “made in Heaven” (8:3). Because both of them think they are getting the better part of the bargain, “neither one will realize that *he has asked for hell*” (8:4). They will take the bait and swallow the hook, clutching the ego's illusion of Heaven while the Real Thing disappears from their sight.

But “all illusions are of fear, and they *can* be of nothing else,” because what isn't love is fear. Therefore, despite the apparent attractiveness of special love, “it is nothing more than an *attractive*” form of fear.

I happen to be writing this on the day of Halloween, and that may be why a bizarre image the Course uses popped into my mind that seems to fit this situation, this

Allen Watson's Commentary on the Text of *A Course in Miracles*

“attractive” form of fear, very well (8:5). The words apply themselves very well to the special love relationship with just one minor addition of the word “in”:

Yet you believe [in] them *for* the form they take, and do not recognize the content. It never changes. Can you paint rosy lips upon a skeleton, dress it in loveliness, pet it and pamper it, and make it live? And can you be content with an illusion that you are living" (T-23.II.18:6-9).

The last phrase is chilling when you think of it in regard to your own relationships: “In them [in the illusions of special love] the guilt is buried deep and rises in the form of ‘love’ (8:5). We go on, enduring the current of anxiety, despair, pain and guilt when guilt rises to the surface, thinking that ”the brief periods in which they *seem* to be gone” make it all worthwhile, and using guilt to bind the other to us, living in a pseudo-Heaven that is really hell.

We will cover the remaining nine paragraphs of this section in the next commentary.

Answer Key

1. B
2. B
3. C
4. A and C
5. A,D
6. F
7. A,B,C,D,E
8. A