

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 16, Section V.9–17

The Choice for Completion (Part 2)

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

~~striketrough-blue text~~ = Not in Urtext, in FIP edition

Review of Part 1 (first 8 paragraphs)

In the first part of this section, Jesus spoke about the necessity of looking honestly, without fear, at the pain and futility of the ego's attempt to substitute for union with God: the special love relationship. He emphasized that what seems like love is actually a veiled attack, trying to make the other person guilty, and that—buried even deeper—it is the ego's attempt to make us see *God* as guilty. We wanted special love from God, and (secretly, unconsciously) the ego is trying to make God guilty enough to give us special love. It is “the ego's chief weapon for keeping you from Heaven” (2:3). It is an impossible attempt to find love in separation (specialness) rather than in union, singling out a particular person or persons for our love and excluding everyone else. It is our ego's attempt to find the specialness that God—in His unconditional, universal love—has denied to us. To the ego, completion lies in triumph, instead of in union and the extension of union.

Most peculiar of all, in the special relationship the ego leads us to give away our despised self in trade for the self of another, sacrificing our selves to cause the partner to give their “more special” selves to us. We give up our peace and endure pain to make our partner feel guilty, so he or she will sacrifice in return. We do not realize that, in seeking the “heaven” of the special relationship, we have really asked for hell.

Paragraph 9

9. ¹The appeal of hell lies **only** in the terrible attraction of guilt, which the ego holds out to those who place their faith in littleness. ²The conviction of littleness lies in **every** special relationship, for only the deprived **could** value specialness. ³The “**demand**” for specialness, and the perception of the **giving** of specialness **as an act of love**, would **make love hateful**. ⁴[And] The **real** purpose of the special relationship, in strict accordance with the ego's goals, is to **destroy** reality and **substitute illusion**. ⁵For the ego is **itself** an illusion, and **only** illusions can **be** the witnesses to its “reality.”

• Study Question •

1. *This paragraph mentions several things about what really drives the special love relationship. Which of the following is not one of those things?*
 - A. *We are attracted to guilt.*
 - B. *We want to reinforce our faith that we are little and deprived.*
 - C. *We want to destroy reality and substitute illusion.*
 - D. *We are attracted to God and know that going through the difficult lesson of a relationship will lead us to Him.*
 - E. *We want to use illusions to make the ego--an illusion--seem real.*
 - F. *We find hell appealing.*

Because we believe that we are “less than” or “little,” not good enough, we find special love attractive; it seems to offer a way for the pathetic self we think we are to somehow feel special and lovable (9:1). Our very guilt over being not good enough can become a “weapon” we can use to get someone else to give us what we lack, and to somehow complete us.

Think about it a bit. If you knew with absolute assurance that you were whole and complete *just as you are*, being seen as somehow “special” would have no attraction to you. You would not *need* to be someone’s special object of their affection. “Only the deprived *could* value specialness” (9:2). If love really meant demanding to *be* special and making someone *else* special, love itself would be a hateful thing (9:3)! To be special is to be *separate*, to be set apart from the crowd, and to ask for that and to give that is a terrible, unloving thing—which is exactly why God refuses to give any of us special love (T-13.III.10:2–3).

We think our special relationship’s purpose is to complete us and make us happy. Its *real* purpose “is to *destroy* reality and *substitute illusion*,” thus carrying out the ego’s wishes (9:4). That must be so, because the special relationship, based on separation and exclusion, seems to confirm the ego’s reality. And since “the ego is *itself* an illusion, and *only* illusions can *be* the witnesses to its ‘reality’ (9:5), we must conclude that destroying reality and making illusion seem real is, in fact, the true purpose of special relationships.

Paragraph 10

10. ¹If you perceived the special relationship as a triumph over God, **would you want it?** ²Let us not think of its fearful nature, nor of the guilt it **must** entail, nor of the sadness and the loneliness. ³For these are only **attributes** of the whole religion of separation, and of [Ur: and the] the total context in which it is thought to occur. ⁴The central theme in its litany [a series of sung or spoken liturgical prayers] to sacrifice is that **God must die so you can live**. ⁵And it is this theme that is acted out in the special relationship. ⁶Through the death of **your** self you think you can **attack** another self, and snatch it **from** the other to

replace the self that you despise. ⁷And you despise it **because you do not think it offers the specialness that you demand.** ⁸And **hating it you** have made it little and unworthy, **because you are afraid of it** [of its true magnitude].

• Study Question •

2. *This paragraph recaps the previous discussions saying that we try to kill our self and so snatch from another a more special self. In what two ways (from previous paragraphs) do we try to kill ourselves?*
- A. *By attacking our body with guilt.*
 - B. *By attacking ourselves with pain to make another guilty.*
 - C. *By giving our "self" away as an expression of how much we despise it.*
 - D. *By forming relationships that just do not work.*
 - E. *By trying to perpetuate the ego, which is an attack on us.*

As was pointed out in paragraphs 5 and 6, “To the ego completion lies in triumph, and in the extensions of the ‘victory’ even to the final triumph over God” (5:5). It may begin simply by beating out the competition for the attentions of a particular person, but the ego’s ultimate aim is to eliminate *all* the competition—even God. That’s what we are doing in validating the ‘reality’ of the ego.

Probably the idea that you were somehow eliminating God has never entered your mind. Jesus asks, however, “If you realized that was what your special relationship was, *would you want it?*” (10:1). He seems to be expecting a “No” answer. To me, this implies that Jesus realizes that this dark motivation to murder God is *not* in accord with our true nature. It is an ego strategy that survives in us only because it is kept secret *even from ourselves*. If we even begin to suspect it is there we shove it down again, out of awareness. The fear it arouses (“Attacking God! Are you crazy?”), the guilt of it, the sadness and the loneliness of abandonment by the Infinite, are too much to bear, so we suppress it again (10:2). And again. And again. And thus it survives.

Fear, guilt, sadness, and loneliness “are only *attributes*” of the whole religion of separation” (10:3); they are just the tip of the iceberg. The “central theme,” he tells us, is “that God must die so you can live” (10:4), a devilish affirmation that has become a “litany” to the ego, chanting it over and over, and *acting it out* in special relationships (10:5).

Slow down and read that again: The central theme of special love relationships is that *God must die* so you can live. Harsh words, difficult to credit. If you resist them, try not to argue. Just sit with them and allow yourself to at least consider that what the Course is saying here may be true.

It is as if Jesus is viewing our special relationships as a kind of *ritual* that signifies something much deeper and, in this case, much darker. This paragraph begins to spell out the analogy, but it will take another few paragraphs to complete the picture, so suspend

your skepticism for now, and just watch as the divine artist fills in the lines and the image takes full shape.

To begin, he said that we believe that by sacrificing ourselves—giving up our freedom, accepting the “bond” (bondage?) of marriage, and all the little sacrifices we make to prove our love—we are going to compel our partner to give us *their* self (which we perceive as being better than our own) in return, replacing *our* self that falls so far short of completion. It’s a kind of ritual suicide, by which you win the favor of that special person, so that *you* feel special. You bask in the light of their specialness. (10:5–7)

Why do we so despise our own self (10:6, 8), which is the foundation for this whole, insane ritual sacrifice? Because we are actually *afraid of it* (10:8). Afraid of our self? Yes; we are *afraid to acknowledge its magnificence*. That becomes clear in the next paragraph.

Paragraph 11

11. ¹How can you grant unlimited power to what [the self] you think you have **attacked** [by making it little and unworthy]? ²So fearful has the truth [of who you are] become to you that **unless** it is weak and little, and unworthy of value, you would not dare to look upon it. ³You think it safer to endow the little self **you** made [in contrast to your glorious true Self] with power you **wrested from** truth, triumphing over it and leaving **it** helpless. ⁴See how **exactly** is this ritual enacted in the special relationship. ⁵An altar is erected **in between** two separate people, on which each seeks to kill his self, and on his body raise another self ~~to take its power from his death~~ [*that takes his power from its death*]. ⁶Over and over and over this ritual is enacted. ⁷And it is **never** completed, nor ever will **be** completed. ⁸[For] The **ritual** of completion **cannot** complete, ~~for~~ [and] life arises not from death, nor Heaven from hell.

• Study Question •

3. *This paragraph actually explains the special relationship process twice (1-3 and 4-5). In both cases, there is something perceived as outside of you that you try to attack and disempower, in order to steal power from it and give that power to yourself. What are the two things in this paragraph that you try to attack and steal power from?*

We cannot acknowledge the “unlimited power” and the magnificence of our true Self because it would mean we are not the “self” that *we* have made (11:0–2). We think we have “attacked” the Self God created by denying God and by choosing to be independent of God, so we choose instead of take the power we think we have robbed from God (and our Self) and “endow the little self *you* made with power” (11:3). Thus we “triumph” over our God-created Self and “leave *it* helpless” (11:3).

Now, says Jesus, notice “how *exactly* is this ritual enacted in the special relationship” (11:4). By attacking my true Self I imagine that somehow I am augmenting

the power of my ego self. I am attacking one self and substituting another in its place. That is exactly what I try to do in a special love relationship. The two of us erect (symbolically) an altar between us, and each of us sacrifices our self for the other, and raises another self that derives its power from the death of our two selves (11:5). We do this “over and over and over” (11:6), and no matter how many times we do it, “it is *never* completed, nor ever will *be* completed” (11:7). It is an empty *ritual* of completion that has nothing to do with the reality of completion. “Life arises not from death, nor Heaven from hell” (11:8). So our special relationships, where the ritual of sacrificial death is constantly re-enacted, will never bring us the life and the Heaven we want.

But there is yet more going on here. This has been just the first level of symbolism. We have yet to delve into how all this acts out the central theme of the ego, that “God must die so you can live.” As we shall see, just as we are replacing our non-special (and therefore, to us, undesirable) self with the special self of the other, so too we are trying to replace the Self that God gave us (which is non-special in a *positive* sense) with the *special* self we get from our special love partner. And, since our Self *is part of God*, to accomplish that, God must die.

The next paragraph completes the picture.

Paragraph 12

12. ¹Whenever **any** form of special relationship tempts you to seek for love in ritual, remember love is **content**, and **not** form of **any** kind. ²The special relationship is a **ritual of form**, aimed at **the raising of** the form to take the place of God at the **expense** of content. ³There **is** no meaning in the form, **and there will never be**. ⁴The special relationship **must** be recognized for what it is; a senseless ritual in which strength is extracted from the death of God, and invested in His killer as the sign that form has triumphed over content, and love has **lost** its meaning. ⁵Would you **want** this to be possible, even **apart** from its evident impossibility? ⁶If it **were** possible, you would have made **yourself** helpless. ⁷God is not angry. ⁸He merely could not let this happen. ⁹You **cannot** change His Mind. ¹⁰No rituals that you have set up in which the dance of death delights you can bring death to the eternal. ¹¹Nor can your chosen substitute for the Wholeness of God have **any** influence at all upon it.

• Study Question •

4. *According to this paragraph, what is happening when two people enter into a special love arrangement—for example, when two people exchange wedding vows? There may be more than one correct answer.*
- A. *They are conducting a ritual that seeks to use form to triumph over content.*
 - B. *They are using the relationship to try to kill God and endow their little selves with strength they extracted from Him.*
 - C. *They are attempting the impossible, for the eternal cannot die.*
 - D. *They are really embarrassed.*
 - E. *They are using the ancient avenue of ritual and ceremony to draw closer to the Divine.*
 - F. *They are wondering what the hell they have gotten themselves into.*

Remember, in love (as in most everything) what matters is *content*, not *form* (12:1). And “the special relationship is a *ritual of form*” (12:2). It is an outward form, a set of actions we carry out hoping to replace the reality of God’s love (the content) with that form of specialness (12:2). It is about as meaningless as the voodoo priest sticking a needle into a doll, hoping to injure the person the doll represents. We are acting out a transaction that symbolizes what we (in our egos) want to do with God. We sacrifice our “worthless” self in exchange for the self of our partner, who represents God in the transaction. We hope, and the ego somehow believes, that this transaction with the partner will make the same thing true in regard to God: We sacrifice our worthless self and God will give us His special self, and we will have the special love from God we always wanted. Of course it’s ridiculous (12:3). God is totally unaffected by it all.

Of course it’s impossible that we could effect such an exchange of selves with God. But even if it *were* possible—*would you really want it?* Would you truly want to sacrifice yourself in this way?

God is unmoved by it all. He isn’t angry because you have tried to stage a coup (12:7), as we have been told before:

The Holy Spirit teaches only that the "sin" of self-replacement on the throne of God is not a source of guilt (T-14.III.15:3).

“He merely could not let this happen” (12:8). The ritual is a fraud, an empty ceremony that has absolutely no effect (12:10). Nothing we do can deflect the love of God (12:9)! As the Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans:

I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Romans 8:38–39 ESV)

Paragraph 13

13. ¹See in the special relationship nothing more than a meaningless attempt to raise other gods before Him¹, and by worshipping them to obscure **their** littleness **and His greatness**. ²In the name of **your** completion you do not **want** this. ³For every idol that you raise to place **before** Him stands before *you*, in place of what **you** are.

• Study Question •

5. *Why do you think that this section uses so much religious imagery (rituals, altars, idols, litanies) to speak about the special relationship? There may be more than one correct answer.*
- A. *Because, like a ritual, it is really a symbolic act. In other words, its goal lies not in the interaction between the two people, but in what they think they are symbolically accomplishing by that interaction.*
 - B. *Because it is really intended to be a symbolic transaction with God, just like a religious ritual.*
 - C. *Because the Course is implying that all religion is necessarily of the ego.*
 - D. *Because so much of human religion is really inspired by the principles of the special love relationship.*
 - E. *Because the special love relationship is an expression of the ego's religion--its total dedication to certain ultimate goals and principles.*
 - F. *Because the special relationship is only possible when one is a believer in conventional religion, especially Catholicism.*

Yes, the ritual of the special love relationship is idolatry, just like the Israelites in the wilderness who worshipped a golden calf when they thought Moses had died up on Mount Sinai. But our “idolatry” and that of Israel were both equally “meaningless” attempts to place another god before the true God. They were just attempts to cover up our littleness and God’s greatness (13:1), and if we ever hope to realize our own completion we must see that *we do not want to do this* (13:2)! We don’t want to imprison another person and bind them to us by guilt. When we realize that is what we’ve been doing, how could we possibly *want* to do that? Because in running after idols we are blinding ourselves to the magnificence of *what we are*, as God created us (13:3).

¹ A reference to the first of the Ten Commandments, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3, KJV). Our substitution of a special relationship for love and union with God is an attempt at idolatry, as blatant as Aaron’s creation of the golden calf (Exodus 32:4).

Paragraph 14

14. ¹Salvation lies in the simple fact that illusions are **not** fearful **because they are not true**. ²They but **seem** to be fearful to the extent to which you fail to recognize them **for what they are**; and you **will** fail to do this to the extent to which you *want* them to be true. ³And to the same extent you are **denying** truth, and so are **failing** [**making yourself unable**] to make the simple choice between truth and illusion; God and fantasy. ⁴Remember this, and you will have no difficulty in perceiving the decision as just what it **is**, and nothing more.

• Study Question •

6. *What do you think sentence 4 means?*
- A. *Remember that when you are denying truth you will not recognize your decision as what it really is: a denial of truth.*
 - B. *If you remember that denying truth causes you to not choose truth over illusion, you will recognize your denial for what it is.*
 - C. *Remember that only your wanting of illusions makes you deny truth and fear illusions, and you will realize that the decision you must make is an easy one--being between truth and God on the one side, and illusions and fantasy on the other.*

Perhaps we've been afraid to recognize the sickness hiding in our relationships, afraid that these dark rituals are dangerous and have real effects. Salvation, Jesus says, lies in realizing that these illusions are not fearful because they are not true—they are just foolish fantasies (14:1). Nothing has really been harmed. What makes them fearful is failing to see their emptiness (14:2), and we only fail “to the extent to which you *want* them to be true” (14:2). We want to cling to the fantasy; we don't want to be disillusioned of our illusions! We insanely cling to the hope that this special relationship is really, this time, going to make us happy.

To the extent that we cling, we are denying the truth—the truth about ourselves, the truth of what truly completes us and makes us happy. This clinging clouds our minds and prevents us from making the simple choice between truth and illusion, God and fantasy (14:3). If we remember that our wish that the illusion be real (our wish that the special relationship can really fulfill us) causes us to lose the reality of our Being, our Christ nature, we will realize that the choice we have to make is an easy one:

Do I want a fantasy, or do I want God?

Paragraph 15

15. ¹The core of the separation **illusion** [**delusion**] lies simply in the fantasy **of destruction** of love's meaning. ²And unless love's meaning is **restored** to you, you **cannot** know yourself who **share** its meaning. ³Separation is only the decision *not* to know yourself. ⁴~~This~~ [**Its**] whole thought system is a carefully

contrived learning experience, designed to lead **away** from truth and into fantasy. ⁵Yet for every learning that would hurt you, God offers you correction and **complete** escape from **all** its consequences.

• **Study Question** •

7. *The separation is based on the attempt to not know yourself by destroying love's meaning. How is love's meaning (apparently) destroyed, according to this section? There may be more than one right answer.*
- A. *By trying make love a matter of form--a physical interaction--when love is actually content (12:1-2).*
 - B. *By trying to obscure love's true meaning by mixing it with hate and separation (3:8, 6:2).*
 - C. *By trying to substitute special love for real love.*
 - D. *By trying to kill God, who is true Love.*
 - E. *By getting comfortable in the relationship and letting yourself go so that you get those nasty "love handles."*

This paragraph begins by talking about “the core of the separation delusion” (15:1). We need to pay attention here; this is crucial stuff. What is it that is the *core* of our delusion of separation? “The fantasy destruction of love’s meaning.” I think what is meant here is that we are trying to make love be *special*, to make it something that belongs just to a tiny *part* of the Sonship, to one other individual. We are trying to prop up our separateness and prove that, even in isolation, we can have love. And that is a fantasy; it cannot happen. What we are trying to create *is not love*. We’ve lost what love *means*.

And unless we have love’s meaning restored to us we cannot know *ourselves*, because *we are love*, we share its meaning (15:2). To be a separate self “is only the decision *not* to know yourself” (15:3). Love is one. Love is All. Love does not exclude *anything*. The whole thought system of the ego, of separation, is “a carefully contrived learning experience, designed to lead *away* from truth and into fantasy” (15:4).

How many millions of people have been hurt and injured by special relationships they thought would make them happy? Most of the drama of the world revolves around the pain of special relationships. And “yet, for every learning that would hurt you, God offers you correction and *complete* escape from *all* its consequences” (15:5). Surely, as he says, this should be an *easy* choice!

Paragraph 16

16. ¹The decision whether or not to listen to this course and follow it is but the choice between truth and illusion. ²For here **is** truth, **separated** from illusion and **not** confused with it at all. ³How simple does this choice become when it is perceived as **only** what it is. ⁴For **only** fantasies make confusion in choosing

possible, and they are totally **unreal**.

• **Study Question** •

8. *Paragraph 16* claims that the Course has separated illusion completely from truth, making the decision between them very easy. What has been this section's main example of our attempt to mix truth and illusion?

How we respond to this course all comes down to that choice, between truth and illusion, between fantasy (which promises joy and brings so much pain) and God (16:1). This course *is* the truth, plain and simple, with illusion exposed and laid bare as meaningless and completely unsatisfying (16:2). When we are able to see the choice clearly in this way, it becomes simple (16:3).

Paragraph 17

17. ¹This year is thus the time to make the **easiest** decision that ever confronted you, and also the **only** one. ²You will cross the bridge into reality simply because you will recognize that God is on the other side, **and nothing at all is here**. ³It is impossible **not** to make the natural decision as this is realized.

• **Study Question** •

9. *What is the "easiest" and "natural" decision we can make this year (according to this section)?*
- A. *The decision for the holy instant.*
 - B. *The decision between truth and illusion.*
 - C. *The decision to marry that special someone.*
 - D. *The decision to kill our special self and gain power from truth.*

Because the choice is so easy, it's time *now* to make it. This year—this day—is the time (17:1). "Now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).² It is an easy choice, and indeed, it is the *only* choice that ever confronts us. On the one hand, the One Truth; on the other hand, a thousand forms of illusion. On one side of the bridge, God; on the other side, *nothing at all* (17:2). When our eyes are opened to see the situation that way, the way it truly is, we "will cross the bridge into reality" (17:2). It will be evident there is no alternative choice. It will be a done deal. It will be *impossible not* to make the natural decision (17:3).

Think about it: God, or nothing? Which shall I choose?

10. *Summary: Please give a one paragraph summary of this section's main message, or at least that portion of its message that most affected you.*

² "Now is the time of salvation, for now is the release from time" (T-13.VI.8:1).

Answer Key

1. D
2. B and C
3. Truth and the self of another.
4. A,B,C
5. A,B,D,E
6. C
7. A,B,C,D
8. Special love relationships.
9. B
10. My summary: In the special love relationship you sacrifice your self to another so that he will feel guilty and give his more special self to you. This is really a ritual whereby the ego tries to defeat God by making Him guilty, taking the specialness He denied and replacing His real Love with fake love. Do you want this?