

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 16, Section VII

The End of Illusions

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

This section delves into the relationship of the special relationship to the past. It is a dark and twisted relationship, as you will see. It shows us how to release the past through the present experience of the holy instant, and offers assurance that we can do so. It ends with the Course's version of the Lord's Prayer.

Paragraph 1

1. ¹It is impossible to let the past go **without** relinquishing the special relationship. ²For the special relationship is an attempt to **re-enact** the past **and change it**. ³Imagined slights, remembered pain, past disappointments, perceived injustices and deprivations all enter into the special relationship, which becomes a way in which you seek to restore your wounded **self-esteem**. ⁴What basis would you have for choosing a special partner **without** the past? ⁵**Every** such choice is made because of something "evil" in the past **to which you cling**, and for which must **someone else** atone.

• Study Question •

1. Which of the following ideas is not in this paragraph?
 - A. You can't let the past go without letting go the special relationship.
 - B. The whole point of the special relationship is to restore your wounded self-esteem through re-enacting and changing the past.
 - C. The special relationship is an attempt to use past experience to control the future.
 - D. You choose your special partners as an attempt to find someone to atone for past injustices against you.
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Allen Watson's Commentary on the Text of *A Course in Miracles*

The special relationship is linked inextricably with the past; you cannot let the past go and hold on to the special relationship (1:1), because special relationships are all about re-writing the past (1:2). The way the ego tries to bring the past into the present has been referred to previously, for instance in T-13.V, speaking about “The Two Emotions” of love and fear:

Each one peoples his world with figures from his individual past, and it is because of this that private worlds do differ. Yet the figures that he sees were never real, for they are made up only of his reactions to his brothers, and do not include their reactions to him. Therefore, he does not see he made them, and that they are not whole. For these figures have no witnesses, being perceived in one separate mind only.

It is through these strange and shadowy figures that the insane relate to their insane world. For they see only those who remind them of these images, and it is to them that they relate" (T-13.V.2:1-3:2).

These “shadowy figures” from the past will crop up again in the next chapter, in Section III, which will deal with them in depth.

The idea is that we come into a relationship carrying a lot of negative baggage from our past: “Imagined slights, remembered pain, past disappointments, perceived injustices and deprivations all enter into the special relationship” (1:3). We then attempt to *use* the special relationship to repair the slights, punish the pain, replace the disappointments, redress the injustices, and restore what we have been deprived of (1:3). The problem is that we play out the drama with the *present* partner! The Course says that we even choose our special partners *based on the past* (1:4), based on “something ‘evil’ in the past *to which you cling*” (1:5). This new partner is recruited to play the role of the person who wronged us in the past, but this time (so we hope), to do it right, thus restoring our wounded self-esteem (1:3).

Of course, this is grossly unfair to the new partner! He or she has to pay for ‘sins’ that someone else perpetrated. Part of us knows we are doing this, and that it is a terrible thing to do to someone, and so, perhaps unconsciously, it adds to our burden of guilt.

Paragraph 2

2. ¹The special relationship **takes vengeance on the past**. ²By seeking to remove suffering **in the past**, it **overlooks** the present in its preoccupation with the past and its **total commitment** to it. ³**No special relationship is experienced in the present**. ⁴Shades of the past envelop it, and make it what it is. ⁵It **has** no meaning in the present, and if it means nothing **now**, it cannot have any **real** meaning at all. ⁶How can you change the past **except** in fantasy? ⁷And who can give you what you think **the past** deprived you of? ⁸The past is nothing. ⁹Do not seek to lay the blame for deprivation on it, for the past **is gone**. ¹⁰You cannot **really** not let go what has **already** gone. ¹¹It **must** be, therefore, that **you** are maintaining the illusion that it has **not** gone because you think it serves some purpose that you **want fulfilled**. ¹²And it must also be that this purpose **could not be fulfilled in the present**, but **only** in the past.

• Study Question •

2. *Why, according to this paragraph, has the past not really deprived you?*
- A. *Because in the past you deprived others just as much as they deprived you.*
 - B. *Because the past is gone.*
 - C. *Because the past was really much better than you think it was.*

The central point here, as expressed in 1:1, is that the past is a key component of any ego-based special relationship. It is set up to “take vengeance on the past” (2:1), to somehow cause the current partner to make up for the failure of past partners to give us the love we wanted. The vengeance aspect comes in, I think, when we can mentally address those former partners and say, “Now, see? This is how you *should* have done it!”

These relationships are preoccupied with the past and, as a result, overlook the present (2:2). In fact, in a startling statement, the Course declares that, “*No special relationship is experienced in the present*” (2:3). Somehow we imagine that we are altering the past, which is impossible (2:6). The present is obscured under the dark shadows (“shades”) of the past that give shape to the current relationship. To the ego, it is all about the past and has no meaning in the present, which means, naturally, that “it cannot have any *real* meaning at all” (2:5), which is a depressing thought. But this is all the more reason to *let go* of this kind of relationship.

Notice the words “you think” in 2:7; we only *imagine* that the past has deprived us. The past “is nothing,” it does not exist *now* (2:8). It is *gone*, and something that is gone cannot be depriving me of anything *now* (2:8–9). Sentence 10 has some tricky double negatives: “You cannot *really* not let go of what has *already* gone.” We believe that we are holding on to the past, but we can’t really do that! You cannot hold on to what has already gone. It’s gone!

Therefore, Jesus reasons, we *must* want to fulfill some purpose in holding on to the past, a purpose we believe we can fulfill by maintaining the illusion that it has *not* gone (2:11). We *hold on* to the past because our purpose can't be fulfilled in the present, but only in the past (2:12)! That's crazy, of course, because we can't do *anything* in the past.

Worse yet. You (if you are even aware of it at all) may think you are trying to right the wrongs of the past, but the ego is actually out to *destroy you*! That's the message of the next paragraph.

Paragraph 3

3. ¹Do not underestimate the intensity of the ego's drive for vengeance on the past. ²It is **completely** savage and **completely** insane. ³For the ego remembers everything **you** have done that has offended it, and seeks retribution **of you**. ⁴The fantasies it brings to its chosen relationships in which to act out its hate are fantasies of **your** destruction. ⁵For the ego holds the past **against you**, and in your **escape** from ~~the past~~ **it**, it sees **itself** deprived of the vengeance it believes you so justly merit. ⁶Yet without your **alliance** in your own destruction, the ego could not hold you to the past. ⁷In the special relationship **you are allowing your destruction to be**. *Not in the present, but in the past.*¹ ⁸That this is insane is obvious. ⁹But what is **less** obvious is that the **present** is useless to you while you pursue the ego's goal as its ally.

• Study Question •

3. *The previous paragraphs have stated that the special relationship is a way for you to get vengeance on all those past people that hurt you. This paragraph gives a different, even deeper, purpose for the special relationship. What is it?*
- A. *To kill God so you can live.*
 - B. *To attack your shadow figures.*
 - C. *To defend against the holy instant.*
 - D. *To get vengeance on you.*

When the Course starts a sentence with, "Do not underestimate," it's a warning flag telling us that we are *probably* doing what it advises against. In this case, that is underestimating "the intensity of the ego's drive for vengeance on the past" (3:1). So, whatever you do, don't just dismiss all this dark stuff about special relationships, thinking that it does not apply to you. You would be a rare bird if it didn't apply. You'd probably be a world-renowned spiritual teacher!

The Course often speaks of the ego as if it were a separate entity that is in conflict with you, much in the way that traditional Christians think about the devil. You know the

¹ This sentence is added from the transcribed version of Helen's Notes; it is not even in the Urtext.

phrase, made famous by comedian Flip Wilson, “The devil made me do it!” Well, I’ve heard Course students say, “The ego made me do it,” or close to it. You may have come to the Course with the understanding of the word “ego” that is prevalent in psychology, where it is a central part of our self, the perceptual, intellectual, and executive (choice maker) part of us. To think of the ego as somehow seeking *retribution* from us, as the Course does here (3:3), seems at first peculiar. We need to remember that the Course uses the term “ego” differently. In the Course, “ego” refers to the entire false self, the self we *think* we are, a separate self with separate thoughts and a separate will. This false self is fixedly in opposition to our true Self, which is one with God and with every living thing. And, as Jesus says here, it is “*completely* savage and *completely* insane” (3:2)! You know all those horror movies about the insanely violent madman who is trying to kill you? That’s a good picture of the ego.

What this paragraph says, in a nutshell, is that the ego uses special relationships *to get vengeance on you* (3:3–5). You, the *real* you, have done a lot that has “offended” the ego. You have forgiven people; you have turned away from some of the temptations of the world; you have stepped away from identifying with your body and your ego. It’s kind of like reverse “sin.” To the ego, every loving thought is an offense that merits punishment of some kind. “No kind deed goes unpunished” is indeed a rule the ego follows. And the ego remembers *all* of them (3:3)!

Therefore, in your special relationships, the ego is acting out its hatred *of you* (3:4). It strives to keep past pain fresh in your mind because, if you escape from that past, the ego feels deprived of the vengeance on you that it believes you deserve (3:5). This is why, so often after you make a strong, positive step in the direction of forgiveness, your ego flares up. Of course it does! Think of the anger people feel when a vicious criminal evades punishment, and you will know how your ego feels when you let go of a grievance against your partner and forgive them. “Sensing defeat and angered by it, the ego regards itself as rejected and becomes retaliative” (T-8.V.5:6).

When you hold on to a grievance, however, you are allying yourself with the ego. That is the only way the ego can hold you to the past (3:6). So *you* are “*allowing your destruction to be*” (3:7). Think about it. Your grievance is causing pain *to whom?* To you! You are bringing that past pain into your mind and *choosing to relive it!* “That this is insane is obvious,” Jesus declares (3:8). As long as you continue to do this, you are losing the opportunity for healing in the present (3:9):

Unless you learn that past pain is an illusion, you are choosing a future of illusions and losing the many opportunities you could find for release in the present. The ego would preserve your nightmares, and prevent you from awakening and understanding they are past (T-13.IV.6:5-6).

Paragraph 4

4. ¹The past is gone; seek not to preserve it in the special relationship that binds you to it, and would teach you **salvation** is past and so you must **return** to the past to **find** salvation. ²There is **no** fantasy that does not contain the dream of retribution for the past. ³Would you **act out** the dream, or let it go?

• Study Question •

4. *So you are driving along daydreaming about a good-looking, charming person you just met in the supermarket. You fantasize about having a dynamite first date with this person. According to this paragraph, what are you really trying to do through this fantasy?*
- A. *Escape from the ego's system.*
 - B. *Obtain retribution for the past.*
 - C. *Look for love in all the wrong places.*

“The past is gone” (4:1)! The Course says this sixteen times in the Text and seven more times in the Workbook. It’s no exaggeration to say that this is one of the core teachings of the Course. Letting go of the past, ceasing our efforts “to preserve it in the special relationship that binds you to it,” is key to truly finding salvation *now*. How often do you mull over past offenses? How often do you respond to other people in the light of their past failures? How frequently does what they did *then* color how you see what they are doing *now*? How big a part does the past play in your relationships?

Our egos tell us that we have to go back to the past to find happiness. Every fantasy of the special relationship contains “the dream of retribution for the past” (4:2). We want to “show them,” to “prove them wrong,” and somehow this will make us happy. But until we stop *preserving the pain*, we will never be rid of it. So it comes down to this: “Do you want to *act out* the dream, or let it go?” (4:3) Remember: You may think you are punishing *them*, but the ego knows it is punishing *you*.

Workbook Lesson 69 says it quite clearly: “My grievances hide the light of the world in me.” It tells us, any time we are tempted to hold something against another person, to tell ourselves, “If I hold this grievance the light of the world will be hidden from me,” (W-pI.69.9:8).

Paragraph 5

5. ¹In the special relationship it does not **seem** to be an acting out of vengeance that you seek. ²And even when the hatred and the savagery break briefly through [into awareness], the illusion of love is not profoundly shaken. ³Yet the one thing the ego **never** allows to reach awareness is that the special relationship is the acting out of **vengeance on yourself**. ⁴Yet what else **could** it be? ⁵In seeking the special relationship, you look not for glory **in yourself**. ⁶You have **denied** that it is there, and the relationship becomes your **substitute** for it. ⁷And vengeance becomes **your** substitute for Atonement, and the **escape** from vengeance becomes your **loss**.

• Study Question •

5. *Paragraph 5 continues with the theme of vengeance, speaking of what is conscious and what is unconscious in the special relationship. This paragraph lists three layers of dream in the special relationship. The first layer is the conscious one. The second layer occasionally breaks through to consciousness but still does not really shake the first layer. The third layer never comes to consciousness. Listed below are the three layers. Please list them in order, from most conscious to least conscious.*
- A. *The dream of vengeance on yourself.*
 - B. *The illusion of love.*
 - C. *The dream of vengeance on your partner.*

You may be thinking, “Now wait a minute! I don’t go around all the time seeking vengeance on my partner!” Of course you think that because, to most of us, it *seems* that is so (5:1). To us it seems as though we have a loving relationship. The implication is, despite the appearance of love, that our relationships really *are* acting out vengeance—we simply are not aware of it. Sentence 2 makes that clear when it says that, “even when the hatred and the savagery break briefly through into awareness, the illusion of love is not profoundly shaken” (5:2). Those brief flare-ups of temper? Those cutting words one or the other speaks? They are not anomalies, according to the Course; they are just the tip of the iceberg. Beneath the surface appearance of love there lies a mountain of vengeance.

Yet, although the ego allows the “hatred and savagery” to break through briefly, it never allows us to become aware that we are acting out vengeance *on ourselves* in our relationships (5:3). “Yet what else *could* it be?” (5:4). This is a different layer of vengeance. Once in a while, there is a flare-up between the relationship partners. That, we are willing to admit. We may not be aware that beneath that there is a grievance from our past, for instance, we are upset with our partner because they were behaving just like our mother or father.

But almost no one is aware that, beneath even that, my ego was really taking vengeance on *me*. Yet that’s what is going on, in more ways than one. By perpetuating my

hold on past pain I am reliving that suffering. By trying to get my partner to complete me, I'm holding a low opinion of myself (what the Course calls my littleness), which is virtually an attack on myself, on my wholeness. Rather than looking for the glory that is in myself, as God's creation, I deny that and try to make up for it by my relationship (5:5-6). Instead of salvation by Atonement (realization of Oneness) I am looking for it in vengeance, and I imagine that letting go of my grievances would be a loss (5:7).

Paragraph 6

6. ¹Against the ego's insane notion of salvation the Holy Spirit gently lays the holy instant. ²We said before that the Holy Spirit must teach through comparisons, and uses opposites to point to truth. ³The holy instant is the **opposite** of the ego's fixed belief in salvation through vengeance for the past. ⁴In the holy instant it is ~~understood~~ [accepted] that the past is gone, and **with** its passing the drive for vengeance **has been** uprooted and has disappeared. ⁵The stillness and the peace of *now* enfold you in perfect gentleness. ⁶Everything is gone **except the truth**.

• Study Question •

6. *How does the holy instant remove the drive for vengeance?*
- A. *By showing you your own guilt.*
 - B. *By removing the past from your mind.*
 - C. *By placing the focus on the future, not the past.*

What is the cure for this insanity? The holy instant (6:1). It is the direct *opposite* of the ego's idea of finding happiness in vengeance for the past (6:3). This is how the Holy Spirit teaches: through comparisons, through opposites (6:2). This is an idea we've seen a couple of times previously in the Text:

The Holy Spirit must work through opposites, because He must work with and for a mind that *is* in opposition (T-5.IV.15:1).

You who are steadfastly devoted to misery *must* first recognize that you *are* miserable and *not* happy. The Holy Spirit cannot teach *without* this contrast, for you believe that misery *is* happiness (T-14.II.1:2-3).

How is the holy instant the opposite of seeking salvation in retribution for the past? Simple. In the holy instant you accept that "the past is gone." If the past is gone, the desire for vengeance evaporates with it (6:4). The ego tries to convince us we'll feel really good when we get even; by contrast, in the holy instant we are enfolded "in perfect gentleness" in "the stillness and the peace of *now*" (6:5). "Everything is gone *except the truth*" (6:6). The *contrast* of the tension and clamor of the ego's tempestuous relationships with the stillness and peace that now enfold us teaches us that the experience of the holy instant is what we want.

Paragraph 7

7. ¹For a time you may attempt to bring illusions **into** the holy instant, to hinder your full awareness of the **complete difference**, in **all** respects, between your **experience** of truth and illusion. ²Yet you will not attempt this long. ³In the holy instant the power of the Holy Spirit **will** prevail, **because you joined with² Him**. ⁴The illusions you bring with you will weaken the **experience** of Him for a while, and will prevent you from **keeping** the experience in your mind. ⁵Yet the holy instant **is** eternal, and your illusions of time will **not** prevent the timeless from being what it is, nor you from **experiencing** it as it is.

• Study Question •

7. *Paragraph 7 says some interesting things about the experience of the holy instant. Let's say that you are upset with your father for what he did to you. And in the middle of this upset you try to accept a holy instant. You feel only partially successful and the brief relief soon vanishes from your mind. According to this paragraph, what happened?*
- A. *You just tricked yourself that you had a holy instant.*
 - B. *Since the holy instant fluctuates in intensity, you may have accepted it when it was at one of the troughs in its natural cycle.*
 - C. *You tried to bring illusions of time into the holy instant.*
 - D. *The Holy Spirit was not transmitting at full strength that day.*

Despite experiencing the stillness and peace of the holy instant, we may still try to import some aspects of the special relationship into it. The ego's purpose in this is to blur the distinction between the two experiences, between truth and illusion (7:1). It may try to convince us that we can still have some of the aspects of specialness that we liked without having the parts we did not like. We will soon learn that it doesn't work (7:2). The illusions we try to perpetuate will weaken our experience of the Holy Spirit for a while. We'll find that we can't seem to "hold on" to the deep peace we have experienced (7:4). But "the power of the Holy Spirit *will* prevail" in the end, not because He is so incredibly powerful that He overwhelms us, but because *we "joined with Him"* (7:3). The power lies in the joining. The holy instant is not something that comes and goes, here today and then gone again; it is *eternal and changeless*. It exists now and forever.

In the holy instant nothing happens that has not always been. Only the veil that has been drawn across reality is lifted. Nothing has changed (T-15.VI.6:1-3).

The experience of a holy instant, then, is simply the experience of that changelessness. "It is a picture of timelessness, set in a frame of time" (T-17.IV.11:5). It is what happens when, for a moment, our mind peels away the layers of illusion we have superimposed on reality, and we see the reality that has always been there. We "tap into"

² "with", emphasized, is found in Helen's Notes.

the One Holy Instant. Our dabbling in illusions will only temporarily weaken our experience of it; *it* does not change, and the full experience of it *as it is* will be ours (7:5).

The remainder of this section continues this reassuring line of thought, and ends with our prayer for the full realization of what it promises.

Paragraph 8

8. ¹What God has given you is truly given, **and will be truly received**. ²For God's gifts **have** no reality **apart** from your receiving them. ³**Your** receiving completes **His** giving. ⁴You will receive *because* it is His Will to give. ⁵He gave the holy instant to be given you, and it is impossible that you receive it not *because* He gave it. ⁶When He willed that His Son be free, His Son *was* free. ⁷In the holy instant is His reminder that His Son will **always** be **exactly** as he was created. ⁸And **everything** the Holy Spirit teaches is to remind you that you **have** received what God has given you.

• Study Question •

8. *This paragraph stresses that God has given you the holy instant as the reminder that you will always be as He created you. What does this imply for your receiving of the holy instant?*
- A. *God gave it, but it is up to you if and when you decide to receive it.*
 - B. *You will receive it, because gifts must be received to be gifts and God wills to give.*
 - C. *You will not receive it because you have denied God's gifts.*
 - D. *You might receive it, but only if you diligently follow the Course.*

The fundamental idea here is that God has *already given the gift of the holy instant*, which guarantees that you *have* received it. When God gives something it is *truly given* (8:1); the reception of the gift is part of the giving (8:2–3). It isn't just an *offer*; "you will receive *because* it is His Will to give" (8:4). The Course is messing with our notions of time a bit. It says we *will* receive the holy instant because God *has given* it (8:4–5). Our receiving the gift completes God's giving of it (8:3).

It could be called "predestination," if you want to think in those terms. But really, it isn't anything more objectionable than the fact that water runs downhill. That is its nature subject to the law of gravity. You and I *will* receive the holy instant because it is our nature, subject to the law of God's Being. There is no other possible outcome (8:5). God created us free so freedom is our nature, and in the holy instant, what we are remembering is the truth about ourselves *as God created us* (8:6–7). The entirety of what the Holy Spirit teaches us is contained in this one sentence: "You *have* received what God has given you" (8:8). This is the nature of Reality.

Paragraph 9

9. ¹There is nothing you **can** hold against reality. ²All that must be forgiven are the **illusions** you have held against your brothers. ³Their reality **has** no past, and **only** illusions can **be** forgiven. ⁴God holds nothing against **anyone**, for He is **incapable** of illusions of **any** kind. ⁵Release your brothers from the slavery of **their** illusions by forgiving them for the illusions **you** perceive in them. ⁶Thus will you learn that **you** have been forgiven, for it is **you** who offered **them** illusions. ⁷In the holy instant this is done for you **in time**, to bring you the true condition of Heaven.

• Study Question •

9. *Paragraph 9 speaks of forgiveness. Let's say that you are holding something against a former close friend because he or she betrayed you. What would this paragraph suggest that you do about this (there may be more than one correct answer)?*
- A. *Get back in touch with them and let them know how much they hurt you.*
 - B. *Realize that you are holding illusions against them and forgive them.*
 - C. *Realize that by forgiving them you forgive yourself for holding illusions against them.*
 - D. *Leave your illusions about them behind and enter the holy instant, in which forgiveness becomes accomplished.*
 - E. *Realize that, although they might have hurt you, the past is over and you should move on from it.*
 - F. *Realize that the past is unreal and that their reality has no past.*

You cannot fight reality (9:1)! What is true of you is also true, in Reality, of your brother or sister, and in their reality there is nothing you can hold against them. The only things that we must forgive are “the illusions you have held against your brothers” (9:2). Apparently, their Reality (and ours) *has no past* (9:3). How can something have no past? I’m not sure that is anything we can really understand from our time-based perspective. We may say that our Reality is timeless, or outside of time, but I doubt any of us has any idea of what that means. But if your brother’s or sister’s Reality has no past, then—in Reality—there cannot be anything to forgive, because forgiveness always applies to what someone has said or done in the past! Therefore, “*only* illusions can *be* forgiven” (9:3).

For the same reason, “God holds nothing against *anyone*, for He is *incapable* of illusions of *any* kind” (9:4). This is so completely different from the image of God that most of us learned in traditional religion, and that has permeated our Western culture. You hear people say, jokingly or seriously, “God will get you for that!” People think of God, like Santa Claus, keeping a record of everything they say and do, and marking it down in

the plus or minus column. The idea that God does not condemn *anyone* seems far-fetched, unthinkable, and even blasphemous. How could God *not* condemn Hitler, or mass murderers, or rapists, or child abusers? What? *Their* Reality has no past? It's an extreme position, I admit, but yes, that is what the Course is saying.

But don't get stuck on the seemingly unforgivable people that are not even part of your life. There is no past to the Reality of those persons *you know* whom you think are unforgivable; call these ones to your mind. There is no reality to be forgiven, there are only *illusions* to be forgiven, the illusions that *you* perceive in them (9:5). These illusions, Jesus says were offered to them *by you* (9:6), and as you release them from slavery to those illusions, you will learn of your own forgiveness.

Bear in mind what the Course has said about our Reality: We are not bodies. We are not egos. What we are is spirit, and it *cannot* be harmed. "You dwell not here, but in eternity. You travel but in dreams, while safe at home" (T-13.VII.17:6-7). There is nothing to forgive there. All the rest is illusion. And in the holy instant, for a moment *in time*, we experience "the true condition of Heaven" (9:7).

Paragraph 10

10. ¹Remember that you **always** choose between truth and illusion; between the **real** Atonement that would heal and the ego's "atonement" that would destroy. ²The power of God and all His Love, without limit, will support you as you seek only your place in the plan of Atonement arising from His Love. ³Be an ally of God and **not** the ego in seeking how Atonement can come to you. ⁴His help suffices, for His Messenger understands how to restore the Kingdom **to** you, and to place **all** your investment in salvation in your relationship with Him.

• Study Question •

10. This paragraph contrasts two kinds of Atonement, the Holy Spirit's and the ego's. Based on this section, please briefly characterize how the Holy Spirit sees Atonement and how the ego sees it.



Paragraph 10 mentions two kinds of Atonement, the Holy Spirit's and the ego's, which we must choose between, a choice that is between truth and illusion (10:1). The ego's version of 'atonement' is insuring that the people we believe have wronged us receive the full measure of their punishment, an approach that brings nothing but destruction; the Holy Spirit's version brings the recognition that there is nothing to forgive but illusions, and results in healing and oneness.

Sentence 2 emphasizes that in seeking the real Atonement, we have all the support of God and His Love, and all the help from the Holy Spirit that we need. Jesus appeals to us to ally ourselves with God and *not* the ego in our relationships (10:3). The help God offers us through His Messenger (the Holy Spirit) "suffices," that is, it is enough "to restore the Kingdom *to* you, and to place *all* your investment in salvation in your

relationship with Him” (10:4). That latter phrase, to me, means that the Holy Spirit will assist me in making a *total commitment* to my relationship with God (or with the Messenger; the referent for “Him” is unclear in this case).

To me, this is what rescues our special relationships. When we make them about fulfilling the purposes of the Holy Spirit, rather than meeting our imagined needs, we free that relationship of pain and guilt:

You can place any relationship under His care and be sure that it will not result in pain, if you offer Him your willingness to have it serve no need but His. All the guilt in it arises from your use of it. All the love from His (T-15.V.5:4-6).

Paragraph 11

11. ¹Seek and *find*³ His message in the holy instant, where **all** illusions are forgiven. ²From there the miracle extends to bless everyone and to resolve **all** problems, be they perceived as great or small, possible or impossible. ³There is **nothing** that will not give place to Him and to His majesty. ⁴To join in close relationship with Him is to accept relationships **as real**, and through **their** reality to give over **all** illusions for the reality of your relationship with God. ⁵Praise be to your relationship with Him and to no other. ⁶The truth lies there **and nowhere else**. ⁷You choose this or **nothing**.

• Study Question •

11. Paragraph 11. How, based on this paragraph, do we join in close relationship with the Holy Spirit?

- A. We accept His message.*
- B. We enter the holy instant.*
- C. We speak in tongues.*
- D. We give up all our special relationships.*

Our intention in relationships must be always to connect with the Holy Spirit in a holy instant, rather than trying to exact vengeance for the illusions of wrong (11:1). The miracle of forgiveness “extends to bless everyone and to resolve *all* problems,” no matter what we think of their size or difficulty (11:2). When we connect with the Holy Spirit in a holy instant, *nothing* can withstand the healing power that is unleashed (11:3). Joining in close relationship with the Holy Spirit will cause us to relinquish all illusions about relationship, to accept relationships as real, and to accept the reality of our relationship with God (11:4). Our relationship with God is in fact our only real relationship! This is the one that truly satisfies. “The truth lies there *and nowhere else*” (11:6), certainly not in the shabby substitutes with which we have attempted to replace it.

3 Possible reference to Matthew 7:7, “...seek, and you will find.”

The next paragraph is what most students see as the Course's version of the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9–13).⁴

[Read story from *Absence From Felicity*, pp. 324-325]

We need to consider it, however, not simply as a replacement for the King James version, but in the context in which it is being presented: that of our choice between the ego's 'atonement' by retribution and the Holy Spirit's Atonement by forgiveness.

Paragraph 12

12. ¹*Forgive us our illusions, Father, and help us to accept our true relationship with You, in which there are no illusions, and where none can ever enter.*

²*Our holiness is **Yours**.*

³*What can there be in us that **needs** forgiveness when **Yours** is perfect?*

⁴*The sleep of forgetfulness is only the unwillingness to remember **Your** forgiveness and Your Love.*

⁵*Let us not wander into temptation, for the temptation of the Son of God is **not** Your Will.*

⁶*And let us receive **only** what **You** have given, and accept but this into the minds which You created and which You love.*

⁷*Amen.*

⁴ You may be interested as well in two other modern looks at the Lord's Prayer. (1) *Prayers of the Cosmos*, by Neil Douglas-Klotz, which looks into the Aramaic understanding of the original words, and (2) *The Lord's Prayer Book*, by Wayne Muller. Muller's first chapter covers just one word, "Our," with interesting insights.

• Study Question •

12. Paragraph 12 is the famous Course version of the Lord's prayer. Instead of a summary of this section we are going to do something a little unusual. Select either the first sentence or the sixth sentence. Find the paragraph in this section that the sentence you selected most closely refers to; write that paragraph's number down on your paper. Then, in light of the meaning that that paragraph adds to this sentence, give in your own words the fuller meaning of the sentence. You can take more than one sentence to do this. (One suggestion is that you write the sentence out much as it is, but simply expand on it at certain points. For instance, with the first sentence, expand on the meaning of "illusions" and answer how we "accept our true relationship with You.")

When the prayer begins with the words, “Forgive us our illusions, Father,” it’s clear that the illusions being referred to are those illusions of past pain that we have been hanging onto in our minds, and also our illusions of finding completion and happiness in some special love relationship. Letting go of those illusions, we ask, “Help us to accept our true relationship with You, in which there are *no* illusions, and where none can ever enter” (12:1). The previous paragraph made it quite clear that the choice is between our relationship with God and the “nothing” of all other relationships. This relationship with God is our “daily bread,” a phrase in the biblical prayer that scholars now tell us actually means something like “whatever we need for today.”

When Jesus was on earth, he told us, “I am the living bread that has come down from heaven” (John 6:51, REB). He also said, “I am the bread of life,” and “whoever eats it will never die” (John 6:48–49, REB). This is our true relationship with Christ and with the Father: “There is one life, and that we share with God” (W-167.title).

The nature of our relationship with God can be stated very simply: “Our holiness is *Yours*” (12:2). This does not mean something like, “I am giving you my holiness.” It means the exact opposite: God’s holiness *is* our holiness. We are “partakers of the divine nature” (II Peter 1:4, KJV). Thus, we can say, “What can there be in us that *needs* forgiveness when *Yours* is perfect?” (12:3). The “Yours” here might mean “Your forgiveness,” but its proximity to the preceding line leads me to think that it refers to “Your holiness.” What in me could possibly need forgiveness if my holiness is God’s own holiness? If it does refer to God’s *forgiveness*, that makes sense as well; if we have already been *perfectly forgiven* by God, what could be left to be forgiven? In either case, we are left in a state of total, complete, and perfect innocence.

Our “lost” state is not one of total perdition; rather, it’s merely a “sleep of forgetfulness” that is brought on by our “unwillingness to remember *Your* forgiveness and *Your Love*” (12:4). So we haven’t really *forgotten*, we are just *unwilling to remember*. We experience being asleep, unconscious of the life of God all around us, only because we have blocked God’s perfect forgiveness and love from our minds and have believed that

somehow our sins have banished us from His Presence. We have listened to our egos, which have persuaded us that we *don't want* to remember because it would end the (supposedly) delightful adventure of a separate existence.

The prayer goes on to ask that God not “let us...wander into temptation, for the temptation of the Son of God is *not* Your will” (12:5). Douglas-Klotz (see footnote 4 on page 13) offers a paraphrase of “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” that very much says the same thing as the Course’s version:

*Don't let surface things delude us, But free us from what holds us back (from our true purpose).*⁵

It's clear from this section of the Course that the “temptation” the prayer is referring to is those very “surface things” such as special love relationships that “delude us.” It's the illusions of love we scurry off after, leaving the vastness of God's Love behind. We are praying to be freed from everything that holds us back.

The idea that God deliberately *leads* us into temptation, as the King James Version of the prayer has it, has permeated our cultural thinking about God. It seems out-pictured in the very first story of the Bible, when God plants this luscious tree in the middle of the Garden of Eden and then tells Adam and Eve, “Whatever you do, don't eat that fruit.” Traditionalists try to explain it by saying it is God “testing” us, which is absurd if we also believe that God is omniscient. He knows whether we'll succumb to the temptation, and if He knows we *will* succumb, isn't He guilty of entrapment? This, says the Course, is “*not* Your will.”

Notice the subtle distinction the Course makes here. It does not say, “*Lead* us not into temptation,” it says, “*Let* us not wander into temptation.” I think *The Message*, a modern paraphrase, almost hits the nail on the head: “Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil”; the major gaff there being the belief that there is a literal Devil. The devil is just our alter ego, our little self. We are asking for help in doing just what the Course has been advocating all through the section, help in turning away from our insane substitutes for love, and all things around us that hold us back.

Instead, we ask to receive and accept *only* what God has given us into our minds and our lives. We determine to stop polluting our minds with “adulterous” thoughts that dilute our love for God and delude us into seeking to find completion somewhere, anywhere, else (12:6).

I believe it would do us well to memorize this prayer and to pray it every day. We could make it as ubiquitous as the KJV version of the Lord's Prayer. We'd be doing ourselves (and everyone in relationship with us) a world of good!

⁵ Douglas-Klotz, Neil; Prayers of the Cosmos: Reflections on the Original Meaning of Jesus' Words (p. 34). HarperCollins

Answer Key

1. C
2. B
3. D
4. B
5. 1-B, 2-C, 3-A
6. B
7. C
8. B
9. B,C,D,F
10. Real Atonement: letting go of illusions, forgiveness.
Ego's atonement: Making someone else pay for what was done to you in the past. Also, making you pay for what you did to not obey the ego in the past.
11. B
12. First sentence: 11th paragraph. "Forgive us our illusions of love, of special relationships. And help us to accept our true relationship with You, which we do through joining in close relationship with the Holy Spirit in the holy instant. In our relationship with You our illusions of specialness are non-existent and can never enter."
Sixth sentence: 8th paragraph. "And let us receive only what You have given, which is the holy instant. We must receive this because You gave it to us and we must receive what You have given. You gave it as a reminder that we will always be as you created us. And let us accept only the holy instant into our minds, which You created and which will always remain as You created."