

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 17

Forgiveness and the Holy Relationship

Section I

Bringing Fantasy to Truth

Legend:

blue text = Material from ACIM 3rd edition (FIP)

bold blue text = words emphasized in all caps in Urtext

red text = alternate or omitted material from the Urtext

light blue text = editorial comments

~~strikethrough blue text~~ = Not in Urtext, in FIP edition

Overview of the Chapter

We have finished the bulk of the material about special love relationships. Sections III and IV of Chapter 17 return to the subject in depth in Section III and then in a broad overview rich with visual imagery in Section IV, but that is the last of the material on special love relationships. The remainder of the chapter will begin to present *holy relationships*, showing how they begin, what the goal should be in such a relationship, the kind of faith they require, and the penalty of faithlessness.

Overview of the Section

Section I expands on the notion of “Bringing Fantasy to Truth.” This section elaborates the admonition given in T-16.VI.12:1: Whenever we are attracted to the illusion of special love, to bring it to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to release us.

Section I, Bringing Fantasy to Truth

Paragraph 1

1. ¹The betrayal of the Son of God lies **only** in illusions, and **all** his “sins” are but his own imagining. ²His **reality** is forever sinless. ³He need not be forgiven but **awakened**. ⁴In his dreams he **has** betrayed himself, his brothers and his God. ⁵Yet what is done in dreams has not been **really** done. ⁶It is impossible to convince the **dreamer** that this is so, for dreams are what they are *because of*

their illusion of reality. ⁷Only in waking is the full release from them, for only then does it become **perfectly** apparent that they had **no** effect upon reality at all, **and did not change it**. ⁸**Fantasies change reality**. ⁹That is their purpose. ¹⁰They **cannot** do so **in** reality, but they *can* do so in the mind that would **have reality be different**.

• **Study Question** •

1. *When will you truly know that you have not changed your reality one iota?*
 - A. *When you forgive your brothers.*
 - B. *When you finish the Text.*
 - C. *When you completely waken from dreams.*
 - D. *When your ego dreams change to happy dreams.*
 - E. *When the Church canonizes you.*

This paragraph talks about the relationship between illusion and reality. In our dream it looks as if we have betrayed ourselves, our brothers, and God. It looks like we have changed our reality from *sinless* into *sinful*. The Course, here and many other places, insists that “there is no sin” (W-pI.101.5:4; W-pII.4.5:5-6; T-26.VII.10:5). We’ve just *imagined* it (1:1)! There has been no real betrayal, only an *illusion* of betrayal. Our “*reality* is forever *sinless*” (1:2). Our “*sinlessness* is guaranteed by God...Over and over this must be repeated, until it is accepted” (W-pI.93.6:1-2). The Course is *emphatic* about this! Back in Chapter 13, we read:

As you perceive the holy companions who travel with you, you will realize that there is no journey, but only an awakening. The Son of God, who sleepeth not, has kept faith with his Father for you. There is no road to travel on, and no time to travel through. For God waits not for His Son in time, being forever unwilling to be without him. And so it has always been. Let the holiness of God's Son shine away the cloud of guilt that darkens your mind, and by accepting his purity as yours, learn of him that it *is* yours (T-13.I.7:1-6).

We are asked to see our brothers and sisters (“the Son of God”) as “forever *sinless*.” “So it has always been,” we are told. As we accept *sinlessness* in others, we rediscover our own (T-13.I.7:6). No one really needs forgiveness; what they need is to be *awakened* (1:3). Chapter 13 says the Son of God “*sleepeth not*,” and yet here he needs to be awakened. I understand this as referring to our absolute state and our relative state. In the absolute, the Son of God has never slept. What we want to see in others and in ourselves is this absolute Self, this awakened Self. In our relative state, however, we are asleep and dreaming. We need to be awakened, to realize that we are not this sleeping self but the Awake Self.

It is only in our dreams that betrayal has happened, although it seems *very* real. That is the nature of dreams—they *seem* real. As our entire worldly existence has been in this ego dream, unless we wake up we simply cannot believe that all that we’ve experienced

“has not been *really* done” (1:5–6). But when we *do* awaken, the release from dreams is *total*, and it becomes “*perfectly* apparent that they had *no* effect upon reality at all, *and did not change it*” (1:7).

What makes the ego dream so overwhelmingly real? Why does it seem unbelievable that we have *not* changed God’s creation? Only the fact that, in our minds, we *wanted* reality to be different! We wanted to change God’s creation to something we believed would be more to our liking, more satisfying to our desire for specialness (1:8–10).

Paragraph 2

2. ¹It is, then, only your **wish** to change reality that is fearful, because by your wish you think you have **accomplished** what you wish. ²This strange position, in a sense, **acknowledges** your power. ³Yet by **distorting** it and devoting it to “evil,” it also **makes it unreal**. ⁴You cannot be faithful to two masters¹ who ask **of you** conflicting things **of you**. ⁵What you use in fantasy you **deny** to truth. ⁶Yet what you **give** to truth to use **for** you is **safe** from fantasy.

• Study Question •

2. *What does our attempt to change reality look like in daily life (please choose the best answer below)?*
- A. *Atheism, which rejects transcendental reality.*
 - B. *Our attempts to cajole God's favor through religious ritual.*
 - C. *Basically, everything we do within the dream.*



We are not really afraid of the reality of God and our Self; we are afraid of our wish to *change* reality, *which we believe was successful* (2:1). We are frightened by the seeming power of our minds, like a young child who is suddenly at the wheel of a powerful car. This acknowledges our power yet also makes that power unreal by devoting it to unreality (2:2–3). Or, perhaps more to the point, think about young children who are sure *they* are the reason Mommy and Daddy are splitting up. That’s not an exact analogy, because in that case, the *power* of the child is imaginary and the *result* is real; in our case, the *power* is real, but the *result* is only a dream.

The Course has already commented on this ambivalent attitude towards the power of our minds:

It is hard to recognize that thought and belief combine into a power surge that can literally move mountains. It appears at first glance that to believe such power about yourself is arrogant, but that is not the real reason you do not believe it. You

¹ Jesus here gives a new twist to his “two masters” teaching in the Bible (Matthew 6:24, NRSV, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” In its use in the Course, the two masters refer to reality and fantasy.

prefer to believe that your thoughts cannot exert real influence because you are actually afraid of them (T-2.VI.9:8-10).

We are trying to balance our allegiance to the truth and to fantasy, being “faithful to two masters,” masters who have conflicting agendas. It isn’t possible to be faithful to both (2:4). We want the peace of God, yet we want to hold on to at least some of our ego toys—most especially to the ones that make us feel special, like special love relationships.

In 2:5 and 2:6, Jesus is talking about us using something in fantasy or giving something to truth. What is this “something”? I believe it is the power of our minds. If we focus our creative abilities on manifesting the perfect special romantic relationship, that creative power is not available to manifest the truth of our spiritual reality and completion. But if we turn our minds to the truth, we are “safe from fantasy.” As the Bible says, “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you” (Isaiah 26:3 ESV).

Paragraph 3

3. ¹When you maintain that there **must** be an order of difficulty in miracles, all you mean is that there are some things you would **withhold** from truth. ²You believe truth cannot deal with them **only** because **you** would keep them **from** truth. ³Very simply, your lack of faith in the power that heals **all** pain arises from **your** wish to retain some **aspects** of reality **for fantasy**. ⁴If you but realized what this **must** do to your appreciation of the whole! ⁵What you **reserve for unto yourself**, you **take away** from Him Who would release you. ⁶Unless you **give it back**, it is inevitable that **your** perspective on reality be warped and uncorrected.

• Study Question •

3. *Let's say that you have faith that the Holy Spirit can heal your upset over the traffic light turning red, but that you don't think He can heal your deepest grievance toward the person that seemingly hurt you the most. According to this paragraph, why do you lack faith in this area?*

Belief in an order of difficulty in miracles is a prime example of our attempt to serve two masters. We think we have faith in God for miracles, and yet we attribute reality to the illusion of more or less difficulty. The problem isn’t in the problem and its apparent “size”! The problem is in our holding on to it, our unwillingness to let it go (3:1–2). Jesus then states his point so clearly that I see no need for extensive comment:

Very simply, your lack of faith in the power that heals all pain arises from your wish to retain some aspects of reality for fantasy (3:3).

There are “aspects” of reality that we *want* to make part of our fantasy, and that undercuts and emasculates our faith in God’s healing power. I believe “aspects of

reality” probably refers primarily (although not exclusively) to other *persons*. The Course seems to regard each of us as an aspect of the Whole:

Every miracle you offer to the Son of God is but the true perception of one aspect of the whole. Though every aspect *is* the whole, you cannot know this until you see that every aspect is the same, perceived in the same light and therefore one (T-13.VIII.5:2-3).

This is something we should consider, with some inward investigation, when we encounter some problem in our lives that seems to be “too big to heal.” How can we possibly appreciate the true nature of reality if we continue to entrap our brothers or sisters in our fantasies, or usurp any aspect of reality for our own private purposes? (3:4) Recall that we are speaking here of fantasies of *specialness*, of people and things that you want *for yourself alone*. In our attempt to monopolize certain people and things, or *part* of them, for ourselves, we take them away from the Holy Spirit, Who desires to release us (3:5). Jesus warns us that unless we give these aspects back to the Holy Spirit, our “perspective on reality [will] be warped and uncorrected” (3:6).

Paragraph 4

4. ¹As long as you would have ~~it so~~ **this be**, so long will the **illusion** of an order of difficulty in miracles **remain** with you. ²For **you** have established this order in **reality** by giving some of it to one teacher, and some to another. ³And so you learn to deal with **part** of ~~the~~ truth in one way, and in **another** way the **other** part. ⁴To **fragment** truth is to **destroy** it by rendering it meaningless. ⁵**Orders** of reality is a perspective without understanding; a frame of reference **for** reality to which it cannot **really** be compared at all.

• Study Question •

4. *If reality is whole, one, how did we get the idea that it is split, fragmented into camps where some things are harder to heal and some things are easier (according to this paragraph)?*
- A. *The cosmic dream is characterized by duality.*
 - B. *This is due to the two-party political system.*
 - C. *We gave some things to one Teacher and some things to another.*
 - D. *This is due to Protestantism, which gave birth to an endless variety of denominations, each with their own summer camps.*

Thus, the reason for the persistence our belief that some problems are harder to solve than other problems (“the illusion of order of difficulty” (4:1)) is that we want to misappropriate “some aspects of reality for fantasy” (3:3). He says that *we* have established the illusion of order in reality by “giving some of it to one teacher, and some to another” (4:2), that is, we put some of reality under the Kingdom of God or the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and some of it we give over to our ego. In part of our lives,

we live in accord with the truth of unity and wholeness, while in another part of our lives we live in accord with separation and deprivation (4:3). This fragments truth and thus renders it meaningless (4:4). The whole perspective from which we approach reality when we view it as fragmented into “orders” destroys the understanding of reality’s *wholeness* (4:5).

I believe Jesus was teaching this same radical overthrow of “the world order,” the ego’s understanding of reality, when he came preaching, “Repent (change your hearts and lives), because God’s sovereign realm *is here*” (my paraphrase). He told us not to lay up treasures on earth (acquiring aspects of reality for private use), not to take any thought for what we will eat or drink or wear, and not to be anxious about anything because we are under God’s care. It’s clearly a similar message, just different language.

Paragraph 5

5. ¹Think you that you can bring truth to fantasy, and learn what truth **means** from the perspective of illusions? ²Truth *has* no meaning in illusion. ³The frame of reference **for** its meaning **must be itself**. ⁴When you try to bring **truth** to illusions, you are trying to **make illusions** *them real*, and **keep** them by **justifying** your belief in them. ⁵But to give illusions to truth is to enable truth to teach that the **illusions** are unreal, and thus enable you to **escape** from them. ⁶Reserve not one idea aside from truth, or you **establish** orders of reality that **must** imprison you. ⁷There **is** no order in reality, because **everything** there is true.

• Study Question •

5. *What does bringing truth to illusions mean here (there may be more than one right answer)?*
- A. *Trying to make your illusions true in your own mind.*
 - B. *Taking the light you gained in the holy instant and bringing it back to the world of darkness.*
 - C. *Keeping your illusions to yourself, away from the Holy Spirit's healing.*
 - D. *Thinking that your illusions have actually changed reality, truth.*
 - E. *Trying to solve your problems not through the Holy Spirit's healing but through your fantasy-based perspective.*

We imagine that we can “bring truth to fantasy” (5:1), which means somehow turning our illusions into reality, somehow magically transforming our special love relationships into truly fulfilling expressions of love. We imagine that the skeleton upon which we’ve painted rosy lips² will miraculously come to life. It won’t be happening!

² "Can you paint rosy lips upon a skeleton, dress it in loveliness, pet it and pamper it, and make it live" (T-23.II.18:8).

In a dream there is no such thing as “truth.” *Everything* is an illusion in a dream (5:2). You can't perceive truth at all when you insist on retaining fantasies in your mind. Truth can only be perceived when your frame of reference is *truth itself* (5:3).

Bringing truth to illusions is our way of trying to make them real and to keep them (5:4). But the antidote is bringing our illusions to truth, which means bringing your insane thinking to the Holy Spirit to be healed (5:5). It reminds me of a carpenter's level or a plumb line. We may think a floor is level or a door is hanging perfectly vertically, but if we bring it to the truth by setting a level on the floor or dropping a plumb line next to the door, our illusions are dispelled by the truth. In the presence of truth, illusions become painfully, obviously unreal.

It's all or nothing, in a sense. Keeping one idea aside from truth will imprison us in *orders* of reality (5:6). In reality there is no order—that is, nothing that is more true or less true than anything else, more real or less real. “*Everything* there is true” (5:7).

Paragraph 6

6. ¹Be willing, then, to give **all** you have held **outside** the truth to Him Who **knows** the truth, and in Whom all is brought to truth. ²Salvation from separation ~~would~~ **will** be **complete**, or will not be at all. ³Be not concerned with anything except **your willingness to have this be accomplished**. ⁴**He** will accomplish it; not you. ⁵But forget not this: When you become disturbed and lose **your** peace of mind because **another** is attempting to solve his problems through fantasy, you are refusing to **forgive yourself** for just this same attempt. ⁶And you are holding **both** of you **away** from truth and from salvation. ⁷As you **forgive** him, you **restore** to truth what was denied by **both of you**. ⁸And you **will** see forgiveness where **you** have given it.

• Study Question •

6. *Let's say that a close friend has been thrown into a crisis by the Course. For the first time she sees how much guilt she has been carrying around. She decides the solution to this is to stop reading the Course and to pour herself into becoming a success in the corporate world. Now let's say that you are upset with her decision. Why are you upset, according to this paragraph?*
- A. *Because you are seeing how wrong her decision is and you share in the tears of Christ over this tragic mistake.*
 - B. *Because you are refusing to forgive yourself for trying to solve your problems through fantasy.*
 - C. *Because you realize that only her willingness will heal her and that she is refusing to be willing.*
 - D. *Because you, being a Course in Miracles student, are obviously no success in the corporate world.*

So, what's the practical application here? Simply put: Don't hold anything back from the Holy Spirit (6:1). To me, this means things like recognizing my own *unwillingness*, admitting when I have doubts, and not attempting to whitewash my feelings of fear, guilt, or depression. But not stopping with just owning up to my darkness, I must be willing to take that kind of mental state into prayer and meditation, because that is where the Holy Spirit can bring my darkness into light, my illusions to truth.

In 6:2 we have another of Jesus' all-or-nothing statements. Either we'll be completely saved from separation or we won't be saved at all. We can't hold anything back. We can't decide we'll be all-inclusive *except for this bunch of people*, we can't forgive everyone *except so-and-so who really screwed up my life*. Being part of an all-inclusive Oneness, saved from separation, by definition means leaving nothing and nobody outside.

You need *only* be concerned with your willingness (6:3) to have all of our illusions brought to truth, to live no longer from our ego's perspective of separateness, but to live completely from the perspective of Oneness. The Holy Spirit will accomplish this, not you (6:4), *if you are willing for it to happen*.

Then, Jesus throws a curve ball. Our willingness to be freed from separation and specialness has a barometer, something we can use to measure just how willing we are. "When you become disturbed and lose *your* peace of mind because *another* is attempting to solve his problems through fantasy" (6:5), you are resisting being freed from the same exact thing. Maybe you have stopped trying to solve your problems with a special love relationship, but *you have not forgiven yourself for it*, and you are projecting your lack of forgiveness *for yourself* onto the other person, allowing their failure to upset *you*. As a result, you are standing in the way of deliverance for *both* of you (6:6).

So, what you must do is to forgive the other person for their foray into specialness (6:7). Note that it does not say anything here about the other person *changing* what they

are doing, just about *your* forgiving it! As you forgive, you will experience forgiveness as well (6:8).

The Course has a much longer passage in the Manual for Teachers about this same topic: Chapters 17 & 18, "How Is Correction Made?" It has to do with how you, as a teacher of God, should react when another person gives in to "magic thoughts," which is the same thing as what is called here solving "his problems through fantasy." Here are just a few selected thoughts from that chapter:

If he argues with his pupil about a magic thought, attacks it, tries to establish its error or demonstrate its falsity, he is but witnessing to its reality. Depression is then inevitable, for he has "proved," both to his pupil and himself, that it is their task to escape from what is real (M-18.1:2-3).

God's teachers' major lesson is to learn how to react to magic thoughts wholly without anger. Only in this way can they proclaim the truth about themselves (M-18.2:1-2).

In order to heal, it thus becomes essential for the teacher of God to let all his own mistakes be corrected. If he senses even the faintest hint of irritation in himself as he responds to anyone, let him instantly realize that he has made an interpretation that is not true. Then let him turn within to his Eternal Guide, and let Him judge what the response should be. So is he healed, and in his healing is his pupil healed with him (M-18.4:1-4).

Madness but seems terrible. In truth it has no power to make anything. Like the magic which becomes its servant, it neither attacks nor protects. To see it and to recognize its thought system is to look on nothing. Can nothing give rise to anger? Hardly so. Remember, then, teacher of God, that anger recognizes a reality that is not there; yet is the anger certain witness that you do believe in it as fact. Now is escape impossible, until you see you have responded to your own interpretation, which you have projected on an outside world. Let this grim sword be taken from you now" (M-17.9:1-9).

• **Study Question** •

7. *Please give a brief, one paragraph summary of this section. Pay special attention to what bringing truth to illusions really means and to the various effects that this has on our minds.*

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Answer Key

17.I. Bringing Fantasy to Truth

1. C
2. C
3. You lack faith in this area because you wish to retain it and don't want to give it to Him.
4. C
5. A,C,D,E
6. B
7. My summary: Keep not one thing from the Holy Spirit. If you do keep something back, you bring truth to illusions and produce the illusion of an order of difficulty in miracles.