

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 17, Section III

Shadows of the Past

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

Overview of the Section

In this section, the Course examines shadow figures—our images from the past of people who have caused us pain in some way—more deeply than in any other part of the Course. It goes on to focus on how the Holy Spirit can reveal to us the “hidden spark of beauty” in every relationship.

Paragraph 1

1. ¹To forgive is merely to remember **only** the **loving** thoughts you gave in the past, and those that were given you. ²**All** the rest must be forgotten. ³Forgiveness is a selective remembering, based **not** on **your** selection. ⁴For the shadow figures **you** would make immortal **are** “enemies” of reality. ⁵Be willing to forgive the Son of God for what he did **not** do. ⁶The shadow figures are the witnesses you bring **with** you to demonstrate he **did** what he **did not**. ⁷**Because** you bring [**brought**] them, **you will hear them**. ⁸And you who ~~keep~~ [**kept**] them **by your own selection do not** understand how they came into your mind, and what their purpose is. ⁹**They represent the evil that you think was done to you**. ¹⁰You bring them with you **only** that you may return evil **for** evil, hoping that **their** witness will enable you to think guiltily of another and **not** harm yourself. ¹¹They speak so clearly for the separation that no one **not** obsessed with **keeping** separation **could** hear them. ¹²They offer you the “reasons” why you should enter into unholy alliances to support the ego’s goals, and make your relationships the witness to **its** power.

• Study Question •

1. Give a one-sentence definition of forgiveness based on this paragraph, and include in it how shadow figures are related to forgiveness.

This paragraph gives a very important definition of forgiveness, and then relates this definition to the “shadow figures” from our past, a term introduced in Chapter 13. We have previously seen passages about the past that seem to imply that *everything* about the past is unreal, and to be simply let go of. For instance, we read this:

The past is gone; seek not to preserve it in the special relationship that binds you to it (T-16.VII.4:1).

Yet here, forgiveness is defined as remembering *only the loving thoughts* that you gave, or that were given to you, in the past. “All the rest must be forgotten” (1:1–2). This makes it very clear that forgiveness, in considering the past, rejects some of it and retains the rest. This is done under the guidance of the Holy Spirit: “Forgiveness is a selective remembering, based *not* on *your* selection” (1:3).

What *we* are prone to hold onto, rather than the loving thoughts, are the shadow figures, which distort and destroy any perception of reality (1:4). If you will recall, shadow figures are mental images of people we have from the past, that we superimpose on the present in such a way that our perception of the present is filtered through the past. “They represent the evil that you think was done to you” (1:9). We use them to justify attacking people in the present. What we really need to forgive is not what people actually did, but “what he did *not* do” (1:5), which, to me, speaks of all the meaning that we have projected onto the actual words or actions of the other person—the story we have made up about what these words and actions tell us about the other person. For instance, that they are evil, that they are unworthy of love, that they deserve to suffer for what they have done. What has to be forgiven is whatever we have invented as a reason to exclude them from our hearts.

The shadow figures are our *interpretations* of reality that “demonstrate he *did* what he *did not*” (1:6). They are the distorting lenses through which the mistakes of the other person, which are real, become *sins* in our perception. Forgiveness brings us to the point where we can say, with Jesus, “Son of God, you have not sinned, but you have been much mistaken” (T-10.V.6:1). Because we have chosen to retain the shadow figures, when we encounter the present, what we hear are the voices of those shadow figures from the past (1:7). We do not realize that we have *chosen* to retain these memories of past hurt, “the evil that you think was done to you” (1:8–9).

Jesus says we don’t realize how the shadow figures came or what their purpose is (1:8), and then he proceeds to tell us that their purpose is to justify our anger and our perception of guilt in other people (1:10). We hope they will make it possible to lay guilt on others without any guilt attaching to us, something which is simply impossible. This is an issue that is addressed at some length in Workbook Lesson 196, “It can be but myself I

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crucify.” It says, "The dreary, hopeless thought that you can make attacks on others and escape yourself has nailed you to the cross" (W-pI.196.5:1).

The shadow figures fuel our special relationships, which become “alliances to support the ego’s goals” and witnesses to the ego’s power (1:12). The shadow figures are clear witnesses *in favor of separation*, and only someone who is “*not* obsessed with *keeping* separation *could* hear them” (1:11). That clearly implies that when we listen to these witnesses of past pain, the reason is that we are identifying with our egos and that we *are* *obsessed* with keeping separation.

Paragraph 2

2. ¹It is these shadow figures that would **make the ego** holy in your sight, and teach you what you do to keep **it** safe is really **love**. ²The shadow figures **always** speak for vengeance, and **all** relationships into which they enter are totally insane. ³**Without exception**, these relationships have **as their purpose** the **exclusion** of the truth about the other, **and of yourself**. ⁴This is why you see **in both** what is not there, and **make** of both the slaves of vengeance. ⁵~~And why whatever reminds you of your past grievances attracts you, and seems to go by the name of love, no matter how distorted the associations by which you arrive at the connection may be~~ [And why whatever reminds you of your *past* grievances, no matter how distorted the associations by which you *arrive* at the remembrance may be, *attracts* you, and seems to you to go by the name of love]. ⁶And finally, why all such relationships become ~~attempts~~ [the attempt] at union **through the body**, for **only** bodies **can** be seen as means for vengeance. ⁷That bodies are central to all unholy relationships is evident. ⁸Your **own** experience has taught you this. ⁹But what you ~~may not~~ [do not] realize are **all** the reasons that go to **make** the relationship unholy. ¹⁰For **unholiness** seeks to **reinforce** itself, as holiness does, by gathering **to** itself what it perceives as **like** itself.

• Study Question •

2. *Several things are said to characterize all relationships (i.e. unholy relationships) into which shadow figures are allowed to enter. Which of the following are included in that list of things? (More than one.)*
- A. *The illusion of love in them comes (at least in part) from the shadow figures.*
 - B. *They are totally insane.*
 - C. *They are always sexual relationships.*
 - D. *Their purpose is to exclude the truth about each other.*
 - E. *They are all attempts to unite by means of the body.*
 - F. *They are always made up of people who share common interests.*

So the shadowy witnesses exalt the ego, so that we come to believe that our actions in defense of our egos are really *love*! (2:1) But the actions the ego dictates are acts of vengeance. When we bring the shadow figures from our past into our present relationships, the result is insanity (2:2). The Course is emphatic when it says that the purpose of any relationship affected by your images of past pain is to *exclude* the truth about the other person *and* about yourself; it says this is true “without exception” (2:3). In this kind of relationship, the purpose is not to relate to the actual other person, but to have them play the role of the original figure, and to give us the love that the original figure never gave us. So we see “wrongs” in the other person that are not there, and we see flaws in ourselves that are not there either, flaws we believe were seen in us by the figure

from the past. We *both* end up playing roles that are not our true selves, serving the purpose of vengeance (2:4).

I believe sentence 5 is the Course's way of explaining why people are attracted to "the wrong people," people who end up hurting them. Their egos are literally attracted by the reminders of past grievances, attracted by people who remind them of persons in their past who are remembered as sources of pain. They *think* they are falling in love when they are really drawn into the ego's vengeance game.

Excluding the truth about the other is the purpose behind it all. This also explains why "all such relationships become the attempt at union *through the body*" (2:6). When another person is seen as a body we are failing to perceive their reality as spirit. And vengeance has to take some physical form to be "satisfying" to the ego. The body becomes a pawn, a tool of vengeance: held at a distance as punishment; used to dominate or control; used for physical violence; or used to find a missing wholeness (2:7-8).

Unholy relationships reinforce themselves by gathering other unholy elements. Egos attract egos, in a multitude of ways (2:9-10).

Paragraph 3

3. ¹In the unholy relationship, it is **not** the body of the **other** with which union is attempted, but the bodies of those **who are not there**. ²For even the **body** of the other, **already** a severely limited perception of him, is **not** the central focus as it is, or in entirety. ³What can be used for fantasies of vengeance, and what can be most readily associated with those on whom vengeance is **really** sought, is centered on and **separated off** as being the only parts **of value**. ⁴Every step taken in the making, the maintaining and the breaking off of the unholy relationship is a move toward further fragmentation and unreality. ⁵The shadow figures enter more and more, and the one in whom they **seem** to be **decreases** in importance.

• Study Question •

3. *In unholy relationships we are really relating, not to the other person, but to our shadow figures (3:1, 3, 5). What is the consistent direction in the process of an unholy relationship?*
- A. *Towards fragmentation and unreality*
 - B. *Towards focus on the body*
 - C. *Towards focus on the past*

But in attempting to use the body to attain union, even here we are deceiving ourselves. Not only are you limiting who or what the other person is by seeing them as a body...remember the shadow figures? Remember that the other person is (whether or not we are conscious of it, and usually we are *not* conscious of it) playing the role of that shadow figure. So if you are having sex to find union, you may well be trying to unite with the body of someone else from your past! (3:1) In fact, the ego tends to focus on the *parts* of the other person's body that are most easily associated with the person from the past on whom you are seeking vengeance (3:2–3). Kinda kinky, and very Freudian! Ken Wapnick has said, "Without Freud there would be no Course in Miracles." I think what he meant was that many of Freud's concepts run through the Course, and understanding him—which I make no claim to do—may assist greatly in understanding the Course.

The deeper you go into the relationship, the more fragmented and unreal you and the other person become, whether you are *forming* the special relationship, *maintaining* it, or even *breaking it off* (3:4)! More and more you are each spending time sparring with unreal images of one another, and less and less time actually seeing and relating to one another (3:5).

Paragraph 4

4. ¹Time is indeed unkind to the unholy relationship. ²For time *is* cruel in the ego's hands, as it is kind when used for gentleness. ³The attraction of the unholy relationship begins to fade and to be questioned almost at once. ⁴Once it is formed, doubt **must** enter in, because its purpose **is** impossible. [The only such relationships which *retain* the fantasies which center on them, are those which have been *dreamed* of, but have *not* been made at all. Where *no* reality has entered, there is *nothing* to intrude upon the *dream* of happiness. But consider what this means; the more *reality* that enters into the unholy relationship, the *less satisfying* it becomes. And the more the *fantasies* can encompass, the greater the satisfaction seems to be.] ⁵The "ideal" of the unholy relationship thus becomes one in which the **reality** of the other does not **enter at all** to "spoil" the dream. ⁶And the **less** the other **really** brings to the relationship, the "better" it becomes. ⁷Thus, the attempt at union becomes a way of **excluding** even the one with whom the union was sought. ⁸For it was **formed to get him out of it**, and join with fantasies in uninterrupted "bliss."

• Study Question •

4. Sentence 4 mentions the "purpose" of an unholy relationship. Which of the following (there may be more than one) are part of the actual purpose of such relationships?
- A. Really joining with one other person to stand against the attack of the world.
 - B. Excluding the reality of yourself and the other person.
 - C. Joining with fantasies of vengeance against shadow figures from the past.
 - D. Satisfaction of physical sexual urges.

In an unholy relationship, time just makes things worse (4:1). That's because cruelty is how the ego uses time, just as the Holy Spirit uses time for healing (4:2). We see evidence of the erosion of unholy relationships over time all around us and, certainly, in our own lives. It does not take long for the glitter to disappear from an unholy relationship; our minds start to question "almost at once" (4:3). Questions *have to* arise because the purpose the ego has in such relationships is impossible, and something in us knows it (4:4). How can punishing this person make things right with the person who hurt us in the past? How is that fair to the person in the present? How can getting love from this person really make up for *not* getting love from someone else in the past? And so on.

In a passage that, for some reason, was dropped from the edition of the Course published by *The Foundation for A Course in Miracles*, Jesus goes on to say that the only unholy relationships that manage to maintain the fantasies about righting past wrongs are

The following sentences from this section may be helpful in answering this question: 2:3; 3:1; 3:3; 4:8.

the ones that never were actually formed, and that exist only in someone's dreams or imagination. Since it is all happening in someone's dream, no reality is there to disturb the fantasy. You can sit and fantasize and imagine yourself happy in such a relationship only because you never actually *achieve* the relationship! The implication for relationships that we *do* actually enter into, though, is mind-boggling: "the more *reality* that enters into the unholy relationship, the *less satisfying* it becomes." The more you get to know your partner, the more unhappy you become. Conversely, "the more the *fantasies* can encompass [the more of the relationship that is taken over by fantasy], the greater the satisfaction seems to be." Perhaps we've run into people who *think* they are happy in their relationship, when to us, it is evident they are living in a fantasy world. That's what this passage is saying. But it applies to any unholy relationships *we* may be part of, as well.

The omitted passage causes the next sentence to make sense, and gives a reasonable referent for its "thus": "The 'ideal' of the unholy relationship thus becomes one in which the reality of the other does not enter at all to 'spoil' the dream" (4:5). The less the other person is really there, the "better" it seems (4:6). Since the whole purpose is separation and exclusion, even the alleged attempt at union with the other becomes the actual way of excluding the other (4:7)! The other person was never the real object; the ego's intent was always to "join with fantasies in uninterrupted 'bliss'" (4:8).

Paragraph 5

5. ¹How can the Holy Spirit bring **His** interpretation of the body as a means of communication into relationships whose **only** purpose is **separation** from reality? ²What forgiveness *is* enables Him to do so. ³If all but loving thoughts have been forgotten, what remains **is** eternal. ⁴And the **transformed** past is made **like the present**. ⁵No longer does the past **conflict** with *now*. ⁶**This** continuity **extends** the present by increasing its reality **and its value** in your perception of it. ⁷In these loving thoughts is the spark of beauty hidden in the ugliness of the unholy relationship where **hatred** is remembered; yet there to **come alive** as the relationship is given to Him Who **gives** it life and beauty. ⁸That is why Atonement centers **on the past**, which is the **source** of separation, and where it must be undone. ⁹For separation must be corrected **where it was made**.

• Study Question •

5. *Sentences 1 and 2 explain that what forgiveness is enables the Holy Spirit to reinterpret our bodies as means of communication instead of means of vengeance. In the light of paragraph 1 (and your answer to question 9), as well as the rest of paragraph 5, explain why this is true.*

The Holy Spirit has a daunting job ahead of Him, doesn't He? He is attempting to teach us to use our bodies only as means of communication in relationships that, unholy as they are at the start, have only one purpose: *separation* from reality (5:1). We have been using the bodies in our relationships to further fragmentation, separation, and exclusion; He is teaching us to use them for the exactly opposite purpose. The very nature of true forgiveness is perfectly designed to let this happen (5:2).

How is that so? Well, we've been told that, "To forgive is merely to remember only the loving thoughts you gave in the past, and those that were given you" (1:1). If we allow forgiveness to enter our relationships, everything except loving thoughts is gone, and those loving thoughts that remain are eternal (5:3). The past pain is gone. Both the past and the present are alike: filled with loving thoughts, free of guilt, beautiful and clean (5:4–5). The present love is truly seen as real, and because we value it, we extend it into the future (5:6).

These loving thoughts we have allowed to fill our minds show us the spark of beauty in one another. We look into the other's eyes and we see the Beloved. We see love. We see God. And we give our relationship over to that love, over to God (5:7)

Atonement, or forgiveness, must focus on the past because the past is the source of separation (5:8–9). The past must be re-perceived, the pain looked past, the loving thoughts unhidden. And when it is, there is true union. This is the work we have to do in our relationships. This is why, "Forgiveness is the only function here" (T-26.VII.8:5).

Paragraph 6

6. ¹The **ego** seeks to “resolve” **its** problems, **not** at their source, but where they were **not** made. ²And thus it seeks to guarantee there **will** be no solution. ³The Holy Spirit **wants** [**wills**] only to make **His** resolutions complete and perfect, and so He seeks and **finds** the source of problems **where it is**, and there **undoes** it. ⁴And with each step in **His** undoing is the **separation** more and more undone, and **union** brought closer. ⁵**He** is not at all confused by **any** “reasons” for separation. ⁶**All** He perceives in separation is that it **must be undone**. ⁷Let Him uncover the hidden spark of beauty in your relationships, and **show** it to you. ⁸Its loveliness will so attract you that you will be unwilling ever to lose the sight of it again. ⁹And you will **let** this spark transform the relationship so you can see it more and more. ¹⁰For you will **want** it more and more, and become increasingly unwilling to **let** it be hidden from you. ¹¹And you will learn to seek for and **establish** the conditions in which this beauty **can** be seen.

• Study Question •

6. *If we allow the Holy Spirit to uncover the hidden spark of beauty in our relationships, several results will follow. Put these results into the order in which they will occur (list the letters in the proper sequence).*
- A. *We will learn to seek for and establish conditions in which the spark can be seen.*
 - B. *We will become increasingly unwilling to let the spark be hidden.*
 - C. *We will allow the spark to transform the relationship*
 - D. *We will want to see more and more of the spark.*

The ego tries to “resolve” its problems in the present fantasy, instead of forgiving the past. It does so to *keep* the problems (6:1–2). The Holy Spirit’s solution is to undo separation by uncovering the hidden spark of beauty in our relationships, and showing it to us. He locates the source of the problem in our thoughts about the past, and undoes the problem there (6:3). Each time we forgive, “the separation is more and more undone” (6:4). Nothing is allowed to stand in the way of union. The Holy Spirit simply does not recognize any of our imagined reasons for keeping the other at a distance (6:5); His only response to separation is to undo it.

We are being called to allow the Holy Spirit to “uncover the hidden spark of beauty in your relationships, and *show* it to” us (6:7). We are not called to abandon our special relationships. We are not called to judge them good or bad, holy or unholy. Whatever the relationship, whatever its state, the goal is to have our eyes opened to the spark of beauty in one another, and in embracing one another, embrace the Beloved. Karen Drucker’s wonderful little song says it all for me:

You are the Face of God.

I hold you in my heart.

You are a part of me.

You are the Face of God.

When you see that spark of God in another person, it is infinitely attractive, and you never want to lose sight of it. Oh, you *will* lose sight of it. At least that's true in my experience. But the memory of it never leaves you; you know what is there, hidden under the garbage projections of your ego, and you are irresistibly drawn to uncover it again. And again. And again (6:8–11). You will learn what must be done, what must be said, to allow this beauty to be seen again, and in the long run, to be held forever in your sight.

I cannot begin to tell you how I long for this! I have seen the Face of God in more than one person, and I *know* how beautiful it is. Quite honestly, it is what I live for, when I look deep within myself. Too often I don't do that; I look on and from the surface of myself, and when I do, there seem to be reasons for being separate, for being defensive. So I must continually remind myself. I do Workbook lessons. I sing Karen's song. I meditate and remember how beautiful is the sight of Christ in another being. I memorize and repeat the words of the Course:

The sight of Christ is all there is to see.

The song of Christ is all there is to hear.

The hand of Christ is all there is to hold.

There is no journey but to walk with Him

— (T-24.V.7:7-10).

Paragraph 7

7. ¹All this you will do gladly, if you but let Him hold the spark before you, to light your way and make it **clear** to you. ²God's Son is one. ³Whom God has **joined** as one, the ego **cannot** ~~put asunder~~ [**break apart**]¹. ⁴The spark of holiness **must** be safe, however hidden it may be, in **every** relationship. ⁵For the Creator of the one relationship has **left** no part of it without **Himself**. ⁶**This** is the only part of the relationship the Holy Spirit sees, because He knows that **only** this is true. ⁷**You** have made the relationship unreal, and **therefore** unholy, by seeing it **where** it is not and as it **is** not. ⁸Give the past to Him Who can change **your** mind about it **for** you. ⁹But first, be **sure** you fully realize what **you** have made the past to **represent**, and why.

• Study Question •

7. *What must we do in order to allow the Holy Spirit to show this spark to us?*
- A. *Recognize that God has created us as one.*
 - B. *See our relationship where it is and as it is.*
 - C. *Give the past to the Holy Spirit so He can change our mind about it.*

“All this you will do gladly” (7:1)—all *what*? The last several sentences of the previous paragraph tell us:

- *You will* be unwilling to ever again lose sight of the spark.
- *You will* let this spark transform the relationship.
- *You will* want it more and more.
- *You will* become increasingly unwilling to let it be hidden.
- *You will* learn to seek for and establish the conditions in which the spark can be seen.

All this *you will do*—IF. Big “if.” “...if you but let Him hold the spark before you, to light your way and make it *clear* to you” (7:1), or as it was put in 6:7, “Let Him uncover the hidden spark of beauty in your relationships, and *show* it to you.” We must be willing to allow the Holy Spirit to show us beauty where now we see only ugliness. There is a marvelous passage that describes the transformation in our perception when we allow this:

[Need to locate this passage]

Sentence 2 gives a clear statement of a basic fact, fundamental to the Course's understanding: “God's Son is one” (7:2). This “one” is not Jesus, it is all of God's creation. It includes you and me.

¹ A clear reference to Matthew 19:6 (KJV): “Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” The Bible reference refers to the joining of two individuals, while the Course's use of it refers to the entire Sonship.

This sets the context for the next sentence, which reinterprets or reapplies the aphorism from the Bible, “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matt. 9:6). In the Bible, this refers to marriage; in the Course, it refers to the oneness of the Sonship. And instead of being stated as an admonition (“Do not do this”) it is stated as a fact: “Whom God has *joined* as one, the ego *cannot* break apart” (7:3). According to this paragraph the spark of beauty is hidden in *every* relationship (7:4). We are joined as one because we are in God’s Son, who is one. The spark is the only real part of the relationship. There is only one relationship (7:5)! It is the relationship of the Son and the Father, of creation and Creator. And there is no part of it left without God! That is the spark, the Great Rays: God within us. Put in less poetic terms, it means that God is in everyone I see, that God is the reality of everyone I know. *Everyone*. All of us are joined as one in God. And that is all that the Holy Spirit sees in every relationship, because “only this is true” (7:6).

You and I have made our relationships unholy by making them unreal. We have tried to transport “relationship” from where it truly exists—in Spirit, in God—to the material realm, to bodies and to personalities (egos) trying to join together (7:7). The solution is to give our past to the Holy Spirit, so that He can change our minds about it for us (7:8). When dark thoughts or unhealthy memories of the past arise, cry out for help. "Give Him your thoughts, and He will give them back as miracles" (W-pI.151.14:1).

Before you do so, however, the Course advises us to be clear about just what we have made the past to represent, and why (7:9). He proceeds to remind us what that is in the next paragraph.

Paragraph 8

8. ¹~~The past becomes the~~ [In brief, the past is *now* your] justification for entering into a continuing, unholy alliance with the ego **against the present**. ²For the present *is* forgiveness. ³Therefore, the relationships the unholy alliance dictates are not perceived **nor felt** as *now*. ⁴Yet the frame of reference to which the present is **referred** for meaning is an *illusion* of the past, in which those elements that **fit** the purpose of the unholy alliance are retained, and **all the rest let go**. ⁵And what is thus let go is all the truth the past could ever **offer** to the present as witnesses for **its** reality. ⁶[, *while*] what is **kept** but witnesses to the reality of dreams.

• Study Question •

8. *The previous paragraph ends by saying that before we give the past to the Holy Spirit, we must first realize “what you have made the past to represent, and why” (7:9). This paragraph expands on that idea. What have we made the past to represent, and why?*



In sum, we have made the past to represent our justification for continuing attack in the present (8:1). Our memories of the past are really an illusion of the past, retaining only the elements that justify our present attacks, and keep us from immediate and direct experience of the present. The ego hates the present because “the present *is* forgiveness” (8:2); in the present there is no past, and therefore nothing to forgive. That’s forgiveness in the Course. So unholy relationships are “not perceived *nor felt* as *now*” (8:3). We are constantly interpreting the present from a past frame of reference; we see it through distorted lenses. But we are not really interpreting the present in the light of the past; we are interpreting the present in the light of *an illusion* of the past, an illusion that consists *only* of the elements that support the ego’s destructive goals, and lets go of (forgets) everything else (8:4). In that letting go, we are losing “all the truth the past could ever *offer* to the present as witnesses for *its* reality, while what is *kept* but witnesses to the reality of dreams” (8:5–6). In other words, there *are* aspects of the past (the loving thoughts) that can witness to the reality of the present. Those reveal the hidden spark of beauty. Those thoughts are what we want to remember.

Paragraph 9

9. ¹It is still up to you to choose [to be willing] to join with truth or with illusion. ²But remember that to choose **one** is to **let the other go**. ³Which one you choose **you** will endow with beauty and reality, because the choice **depends** on which you value more. ⁴The spark of beauty or the veil of ugliness, the real world or the world of guilt and fear, truth or illusion, freedom or slavery - it is all the same. ⁵For you can **never** choose **except** between God and the ego. ⁶Thought systems are but true or false, and all their **attributes** come simply from what they **are**. ⁷Only the Thoughts of God **are** true. ⁸And all that follows **from** them **comes from** what they are, and is as true as is the holy Source from Which they came.

• Study Question •

9. *The theme sentence in this paragraph is the first: "It is still up to you to choose to join with truth or with illusion." Which of the following pairs are not among the ways our choice is represented in this paragraph? (More than one)*
- A. *God or the ego*
 - B. *Happiness or sadness*
 - C. *The spark of beauty or the veil of ugliness*
 - D. *Enjoyable or dull*
 - E. *True or false*
 - F. *The real world or the world of guilt and fear*
 - G. *Truth or illusion*
 - H. *Freedom or slavery*

So, the choice is up to us: join with truth (the loving thoughts) or with illusion (the past pain)? To choose one is to eliminate the other (9:1–2). If we are clear how the ego uses the past, we will be motivated to choose the truth. What do you want? “The spark of beauty or the veil of ugliness, the real world or the world of guilt and fear, truth or illusion, freedom or slavery—it is all the same” (9:4). This is the choice we make from moment to moment, one step at a time: God or the ego (9:5)? There is no gray here, no halfway; it is very black or white. If thoughts and the effects of thoughts come from God, they are true. Everything else is false. When we realize this, our choice is easily made.

Paragraph 10

10. ¹My holy brother [brothers], I would enter into all your relationships, and step between you and your fantasies. ²Let my relationship to you be real to you, and let me bring reality to your perception of your brothers. ³They were not created to enable you to hurt yourself through them. ⁴They were created to create with you. ⁵This is the truth that I would interpose between you and your goal of madness. ⁶Be not separate from me, and let not the holy purpose of Atonement be lost to you in dreams of vengeance. ⁷Relationships in which such dreams are cherished have excluded me. ⁸Let me enter in the Name of God and bring you peace, that you may offer peace to me.

• Study Question •

10. Explain in your own words, as practically as you can, what Jesus means in sentences 1, 2 and 8. In other words, just what is it that Jesus wants to do for our relationships, based upon this entire section?



Now, Jesus speaks to us, and he seems to be taking on the very function that he has attributed to the Holy Spirit: entering our relationships and stepping between us and our fantasies. Sometimes, in the Course, Jesus and the Holy Spirit kind of blur together. I believe that can easily be understood, because Jesus tells us, "I am the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, and when you see me it will be because you have invited Him" (T-12.VII.6:1). So he calls us his "holy brothers," and expresses his desire to be part of all of our relationships (10:1). Are we willing to invite him in? Are we willing to let his relationship to us be real to us, and to allow him to bring "reality to [our] perception of [our] brothers" (10:2)?

Our brothers were not created as foils for our self-flagellation, punishing ourselves through them for our guilt. They were created to create with us (10:3–4). This truth is what Jesus wants to put in place of our mad fantasies (10:5). What does it mean for another person to create with us?

...all creation lies in the thoughts I think with God (W-pI.rI.51.4:8).

The ability to accept truth in this world is the perceptual counterpart of creating in the Kingdom (T-10.II.3:3).

Creation cannot even be conceived of in the world. It has no meaning here. Forgiveness is the closest it can come to earth (W-pI.192.3:1-3).

As I understand it, then, to create with a brother or sister, at least in this world, means a shared practice of forgiveness, in which we "think with God" and "accept the truth" about one another. In heaven, in the spiritual realm, I cannot even imagine what the combined power of our purified thoughts will be able to accomplish! The Course tells us that we will extend the Kingdom, that our thoughts will extend outward as new creations even as we are the extension of God's Thought. We cannot know, from where we stand, what that is truly like, only that it is wonderful.

An analogy: Suppose I have a painting that was created by a great master artist, but which has been covered with grit and grime, or perhaps even painted over by an inferior artist—like me! If I now proceed to clean and restore the masterpiece, I am not actually creating it, but I am restoring it, I am bringing it back into view so that it can be seen by the world. To me, that is what I am doing in forgiving another person—restoring the visibility of the image of God within them. That is why forgiveness is the closest thing to creation in the world. In heaven, perhaps, we are transformed into master artists, capable of painting great masterpieces as we join with our brothers and with God.

So Jesus appeals to us not to be separate from him (10:6). Perhaps in prayer you may choose to invite him into your relationship, asking him to show you the hidden spark of beauty in your partner, asking him to interpose that vision between you and your fantasies of vengeance. Let us all choose to let go of our grievances which are our dreams of vengeance; we *exclude Jesus* when we hold on to them. Let him bring you peace, so that you can offer peace to him in return (10:6–8).

This section begins to offer us a “way out” of our special love relationships, a way that isn’t really “out,” but which transforms them into something holy. The next section will give us a profound and beautiful image of that process, and as we continue, there will be more and more positive and encouraging sections about how our relationships can serve our true spiritual purpose, rather than the purposes of our egos.

Answer Key

1. Forgiveness is to selectively remember only the loving thoughts I have given and received, letting go of all perception and memory of any evil I think was done to me, and any “shadow figures” representing my desire for vengeance on the past.
2. A, B, D, E
3. A
4. B and C
5. Shadow figures, symbols of the evil we think was done to us in the past, are what twist the unholy relationship into a seeking of vengeance on the past through our partner’s body. By forgiving, we release the past and let go of the shadow figures, and we remember only the spark of beauty in one another; this enables us to see the spark of beauty *now* without hindrance. Sharing that spark of beauty *is* communication.
6. D-B-C-A (B-D-C-A also OK).
7. C
8. We have made the past to represent our justification for continuing attack in the present. Our memories of the past are really an illusion of the past, retaining only the elements that justify our present attacks.
9. B, D
10. Jesus wants to become a part of all of our relationships. He wants me to make my relationship to him real, and to allow him to make my relationships with my brothers real by freeing them from fantasies of vengeance based upon the past. He will do so, through the Holy Spirit, by helping me to change my mind about the past, to let go of my illusions of what evil was done to me, and to recall only the loving thoughts that I gave and that I received, which are the hidden spark of beauty, the only reality of the relationship. This is forgiveness.