

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 17, Section IV.10–16

The Two Pictures (Part 2)

Legend:

- blue text** = Material from ACIM 3rd edition (FIP)
 - bold blue text** = words emphasized in all caps in Urtext
 - red text** = alternate or omitted material from the Urtext
 - light blue text** = editorial comments
 - ~~strikethrough blue text~~ = Not in Urtext, in FIP edition
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Overview of the Section

This section presents imagery that creates a mental image of the relationship between the special relationship and the ego's entire thought system, imagery that is remarkably detailed. The image is then contrasted with an equally detailed image of the holy instant. The section deserves careful study, allowing one's mind to form a clear image of the pictures that it draws, and the meaning of each detail.

Due to the length of the section we will be covering it in two parts. The first part showed us that God's provision of the Holy Spirit as the answer to the separation prompted a counter-attack from the ego in the form of the special relationship, which seems to offer something attractive enough to drown out the call of the Holy Spirit to return home. Jesus employs the analogy of a framed picture, with the picture's tiny, dark content being the reality of what the ego offers—death—surrounded by a glittering, attractive frame, in which the diamonds are tears and the rubies are blood—the special relationship, with all the pain and suffering it can bring.

This second part, which presents the picture of the special relationship and the holy instant, provides a positive contrast to the negative note of the first nine paragraphs. It shows us a picture of the holy instant as the antidote to the ego's form of special relationship.

Paragraph 10

10. ¹That is why the holy instant is so important in the defense of truth. ²The truth itself **needs** no defense, but **you do** need defense against your **acceptance** of the gift of death. ³When you who **are** truth accept an idea so **dangerous** to truth, **you threaten truth with destruction**. ⁴And **your** defense must now be undertaken, **to keep truth whole**. ⁵The power of Heaven, the Love of God, the tears of Christ, and the joy of His eternal Spirit are marshaled to defend you from your own attack. ⁶For you attack **Them**, being **part** of Them, and They must **save** you, for They love Themselves.

• Study Question •

1. *Just as the ego's thought system has a defense which protects it, so truth has a defense which protects you. What is that defense?*

If the special relationship is the ego's counter-attack in response to God's gift of the Holy Spirit, the holy instant is God's answer to that counter-attack. It is "important in the defense of truth" (10:1), even though "truth itself *needs* no defense" (10:2). Truth is simply true, and no matter what attacks are raised against the truth, it still remains true. However, because we accept into our minds ideas that are antithetical to the truth, *we* need to be defended, lest the truth be entirely driven from our minds (10:2–3). I believe when the Course uses a phrase like "you threaten truth with destruction," it does not mean that the truth itself would be destroyed, but that *for us*, being driven from our minds, the truth would (apparently) cease to exist. So, to keep the truth whole (for us), we need to be defended, and that defense is the holy instant (10:1,4).

What is attacking us? "Your own attack" (10:5)! The list of allies in our defense is an impressive list of metaphors:

- *the power of Heaven*—all the resources of the spiritual realm.
- *the Love of God*—God's Love is the only love there is, the only love that is real. In the end it is irresistible. It is ultimately far more attractive and compelling than any illusion of love we might find in a special relationship.
- *the tears of Christ*—This is, for me, an odd member of the powers allied in our defense. It calls to mind two occasions in the gospels when Jesus is said to have wept or lamented. The first was when he wept upon seeing the unbelief of Mary and Martha, or rather their belief in the power of death to hold Lazarus in his grave; the second was when, looking on the city of Jerusalem, whose leaders were about to crucify him, he lamented:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! (Matthew 23:37 NRSV)

It's hard for me to imagine the Christ (who knows that only truth is true) weeping! Perhaps it is meant somewhat in the sense of the phrase from *Star Wars*, "I sense a disturbance in the Force." Or the sense in which the Course says God knows that *something* isn't quite right, that His communication with us has been disturbed (see T-6.V.1:5-8).

- *the joy of His eternal Spirit*—And here I think of one of my favorite Bible verses: “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10). The Spirit’s own joy infuses us with strength, and defends us against the attraction of the special relationship. So this defense is filled with power, love, joy, and a sense of grief at anything that separates us from the truth. This defense is the holy instant. All of these aspects are part of it.

Jesus goes on to say that our attack on ourselves is, in fact, an attack on “Them,” because we are “part of Them” (10:6). What is “Them”? Heaven, God, Christ, and the eternal Spirit! That is the foundation of our defense. That list of allies is what is “marshaled to defend you from your own attack.” And we, you and I, are *part of Them!* Because God, Christ, and the Spirit “love Themselves,” “They must *save* you” (10:6). Bringing you and me to an awareness of the truth of our Being, our divinity, is essential to the preservation of the very nature of God! Because you and I are part of God. As Jesus has said earlier, “There is no chance that Heaven will not be yours, for God is sure, and what He wills is as sure as He is” (T-13.XI.8:9).

Paragraph 11

11. ¹The holy instant is a miniature of Heaven, sent you *from* Heaven. ²It is a picture, too, set in a frame. ³Yet if you accept **this** gift you will not see the frame at all, because the gift can only **be** accepted through your willingness to focus **all** your attention **on the picture**. ⁴The holy instant is a miniature of eternity. ⁵It is a picture of timelessness, set in a frame of time. ⁶If you focus on the picture, you will realize that it was only the frame that made you **think** it was [was] a picture. ⁷**Without** the frame, the picture **is seen as what it represents**. ⁸For as the whole thought system of the ego lies in **its** gifts, so the whole of Heaven lies in this instant, borrowed from eternity and set in time for **you**.

• Study Question •

2. *Paragraph 11 applies the frame/picture metaphor to the holy instant. The holy instant is a defense of truth that offers a miniature version of what it defends. It too gives you a frame and a picture. What are they?*
 - A. *The frame is the outward aspect of the relationship; the picture is the inner reality.*
 - B. *The frame is the body; the picture is the Christ within.*
 - C. *The frame is the Course; the picture is the holy instant.*
 - D. *The frame is the Holy Spirit; the picture is your brother's reality.*
 - E. *The frame is time; the picture is eternity.*

And so God has sent us the holy instant, another picture in another frame (11:2), “a miniature of Heaven” (11:1). That the picture is a miniature does not mean it is tiny. Only in comparison to the vastness of Heaven is it tiny; the holy instant is no small thing. It is

“a miniature of Heaven” (11:1); “a miniature of eternity” (11:4); “a picture of timelessness” (11:5). Heaven, eternity, and timelessness are vast—I hesitate to call them “things” because they are so vast, so without form. Call them *realities* rather than *things*. The holy instant, then, is a miniature, a *smaller version* of those vast realities.

The unusual thing about this picture in a frame, however, is that if you accept the picture, “*you will not see the frame at all*” (11:3, my emphasis). How can that be? Jesus explains that the only way to accept the gift of the holy instant is “to focus *all* your attention *on the picture*” rather than the frame (11:3). The frame is still there; you simply overlook it. You don’t see it. Your attention is wholly captured by the picture that it contains.

What, then, is the frame that we look past? We are told that the holy instant “is a picture of timelessness, set in *a frame of time*” (11:5, my emphasis). Time is the frame. I believe that the word, *time*, here stands for everything that is time-based, everything that is not eternal. It refers, for instance, to all the earthly forms our relationships take (although the relationships themselves are, I believe, eternal¹). The frame, then, is the circumstances or context in which we experience the holy instant. Ultimately, they don’t matter at all!

When we focus intently on the spiritual reality at the core of the relationship, all the temporal aspects of it—whether negative, such as ego actions, complexities, and behavior, neutral, such as bodies, or positive, such as loving acts, the beauty of nature — disappear from our sight. We see only the eternal; we see only love; we see only Christ.

In fact, as we focus only on the picture we realize that *it isn’t a picture at all* (11:6)! It is *the reality*. Rather than seeing a picture of timelessness, *we perceive timelessness itself*. We see eternity. We see Heaven. As some mystics have written, we behold the Beloved. We see God. Jesus said, “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9), and when we truly *see* our relationship partners, we, too, will see God.

In the holy instant, when we lose sight of the frame of time, we encounter the *whole* of Heaven (11:8). That is why we not only see the picture without the frame, we also realize that we are not seeing a picture at all. We are seeing Reality. The imagery of picture and frame is an attempt, imperfect at best, to describe what the Course means when it says we are going to see *everything* differently; in the holy instant we will have “a different perception of everyone and everything in the world” (W-Int.4:1). When we have come to live in the real world, that changed perception will become virtually permanent, and our entire life becomes a holy instant.²

1 "Yet all who meet will someday meet again, for it is the destiny of all relationships to become holy" (M-3.4:6). See all of Section 2 and 3 of the Manual for more along this line.

2 "Your present trust in Him is the defense that promises a future undisturbed, without a trace of sorrow, and with joy that constantly increases, as this life becomes a holy instant, set in time, but heeding only immortality" (W-pI.135.19:1).

Paragraph 12

12. ¹Two gifts are offered you. ²Each is complete, and cannot be partially accepted. ³Each is a picture of all that you can have, **seen very differently**. ⁴You **cannot** compare their value by comparing a picture to a frame. ⁵It **must** be the **pictures only** that you compare, or the comparison is wholly without meaning. ⁶Remember that it is the picture that is the gift. ⁷And **only** on this basis are you **really** free to choose. ⁸**Look at the pictures**. ⁹**Both** of them. ¹⁰One is a tiny picture, hard to see at all beneath the heavy shadows of its enormous and disproportionate enclosure. ¹¹The other is lightly framed and hung in light, lovely to look upon for what it is.

• Study Question •

3. *Paragraph 12 repeats the injunction from paragraph 9 to look at the picture. Only now we are supposed to look at both pictures. What would doing this mean in everyday life?*
- A. *Compare the experience of eternity to the experience of pain and death in (especially the latter stages of) the special relationship, and see which one you want.*
 - B. *Compare the holy instant to the pleasures of the special relationship, and see which you prefer.*
 - C. *Compare linear time to the ego's underlying thought system.*
 - D. *Compare which would go better above that couch of yours with the mauve floral pattern.*

Both the ego and the Holy Spirit are offering a gift to us: “Two gifts are offered you” (12:1). They are mutually exclusive, tightly integrated systems; neither one can be “partially accepted” (12:2). As the Course says elsewhere:

This course will be believed entirely or not at all. For it is wholly true or wholly false, and cannot be but partially believed (T-22.II.7:4-5).

The same principle applies to what we see in our relationships, indeed, in all of our experience. Each way of looking—each picture—contains “all that you can have,” but in the two pictures, that totality is “*seen very differently*” (12:3). The key to making a clear-cut choice between the two pictures is *looking at the pictures*, and not being distracted by the frames. You must compare picture to picture, not picture to frame! (12:4–7) And so often, that is what we are doing. We compare the thrill and excitement of the special love relationship (the frame) with the joy and peace of the holy instant (the picture), and we allow ourselves to be seduced by the ego’s flashy frame. Or, we compare the frames—the sparkle and glitter of the special relationship with all its drama, compared to a plain and simple relationship, without all the histrionics—and often the explosive drama seems more intriguing.

We are asked to look at *only* the pictures and *both* of the pictures (12:8–9). The picture in the ego's frame is tiny and hard to see, surrounded and shadowed as it is by "its enormous and disproportionate enclosure" (the special relationship's "rubies" and "diamonds") (12:10). But it is a picture of *death*. The picture in the Holy Spirit's frame is not obscured by the frame at all; it is "hung in light, lovely to look upon for what it *is*" (12:11). We see the Face of Christ, and the temporal surroundings in which that occurs become irrelevant to the experience.

Paragraph 13

13. ¹You who have tried so hard, and are **still** trying, to fit the better picture into the wrong frame and so combine what cannot **be** combined, accept this and be glad: These pictures are each framed perfectly for what they represent. ²One is **framed** to be out of focus and **not** seen. ³The other is framed for perfect clarity. ⁴The picture of darkness and of death grows less convincing as you search it out amid its wrappings. ⁵As each senseless stone that **seems** to shine from the frame in darkness is **exposed to light**, it becomes dull and lifeless, and ceases to distract you from the picture. ⁶And finally you look upon the **picture itself**, seeing at last that, unprotected by the **frame**, it **has** no meaning.

• Study Question •

4. *Each picture is framed perfectly. The frame on the picture of death is designed to divert attention from it. The frame on the picture of eternity is designed specifically to not draw attention from it. How are you trying to fit one picture into the other picture's frame (see sentence 1)?*
- A. *You are trying to convince yourself that the holy instant will really bring the experience of death.*
 - B. *You are trying to convince yourself that the holy instant will bring you physical pleasure.*
 - C. *You are trying to convince yourself that the special relationship and its pleasures will bring you the experience of eternity.*

Jesus says we have "tried so hard, and are *still* trying, to fit the better picture into the wrong frame" (13:1). We are trying to find true joy and peace in the context of the special love relationship. It won't work! He calls on us, instead, to "accept this and be glad": that each frame is perfectly matched to the picture it contains. The ego's frame is *intended* to make it difficult to see the picture it contains (13:2), so whatever we attempt to put in it, it will be "out of focus and *not* seen." The Holy Spirit's frame is designed to make its contents perfectly clear (13:3). One frame hides; the other reveals.

We can examine the ornate frame carefully (13:4), and if we do, exposing the "gems" in it to the light, we realize they are not gems at all, but "dull and lifeless" pebbles that are unworthy of any of our attention (13:5). The picture contained in the frame begins to

appear, and without the frame, “it *has* no meaning” (13:6). If we consider the flashy aspects of the special relationship that seem to be attractive, we begin to realize they aren't attractive at all. Who wants pain? Who wants conflict? Who wants jealousy, suspicion, and loss? Who really wants to be *needed* by someone else? As we expose the dark core of such relationships, we realize that the picture of death is wholly without meaning, a pitiful scare tactic of the ego.

Paragraph 14

14. ¹The other picture is lightly framed, for time cannot contain eternity. ²There is **no** distraction here. ³The picture of Heaven and eternity grows **more** convincing as you look at it. ⁴And now, by **real** comparison, a **transformation** of both pictures can at last occur. ⁵And each is given its **rightful** place when both are seen **in relation to each other**. ⁶The dark picture, **brought to light**, is **not** perceived as fearful, but the fact that **it is just a picture** is brought home at last. ⁷And what you **see** there **you** will recognize as what it is; a picture of what **you thought was real**, and nothing more. ⁸For beyond [*behind*] this picture **you will see nothing**.

• Study Question •

5. *When you compare both pictures, what do you now see in the picture that is the gift of the special relationship?*
- A. *Death.*
 - B. *Guilt.*
 - C. *Just a picture.*
 - D. *The call for love.*
 - E. *Tears faceted like diamonds.*

The other picture has exactly the opposite effect. Instead of fading into insignificance, it “grows *more* convincing as you look at it” (14:3). The frame of time, the personalities, circumstances, and events that “lightly frame” the holy instant, cannot distract you from the reality of Heaven and eternity that dawns upon you (14:1–3).

As we set aside the massive frame of the ego and also the light frame of the Spirit, we can compare the two pictures. And as we do, “a *transformation* of both pictures can at last occur” (14:4). Seen in relation to one another, each picture can be accurately evaluated and assigned its appropriate value (14:5).

The dark picture, we finally realize, is *just a picture*, a picture of *what we thought was real*, but in fact is only a dark fantasy (14:6–8). It is a picture of something that does not exist. There is no death. Pain is an illusion; joy is reality. The special relationship contains nothing to be afraid of, and certainly nothing to seek after.

Paragraph 15

15. ¹The picture of light, in clear-cut and unmistakable contrast, is transformed into what lies **beyond** the picture. ²As you look on **this**, you realize that **it is not a picture**, but a reality. ³This is no figured **representation** of a thought system, but the Thought itself. ⁴What **it** represents is **there**. ⁵The frame fades gently and God rises to your remembrance, offering you the whole of creation in exchange for your little picture [the picture of the special relationship], wholly without value and entirely deprived of meaning.

• Study Question •

6. *The picture of light is also transformed through this comparison. What do you now see in it (there may be more than one correct answer)?*
- A. *The Thought that is pictured.*
 - B. *More than just a picture.*
 - C. *God*
 - D. *A non-picture with no frame.*
 - E. *Eternity.*

“The picture of light, in clear-cut and unmistakable contrast, is transformed into what lies *beyond* the picture” (15:1). We first *perceive* the Love, the Wholeness, the Oneness, and as we look, perception becomes knowledge, what the Greeks meant by the word *gnosis* (γνῶσις)—direct apprehension, surpassing reason and the intellect, a knowing that suffuses the entire being. We are not seeing something that reflects or symbolizes reality; we are experiencing the Reality, “the Thought itself” (15:2–3). We know, and we know that we know. This is not reading about the New Jerusalem, it is walking its streets. “What *it* (the picture) represents is *there* (here, now, tangibly present)” (15:4). “The frame fades gently,” that is, time and space recede into the background, recognizably unreal, “and God rises to your remembrance” (15:5):

Speak to Him thou for He hears, and Spirit with

Spirit can meet--

Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands

and feet. (Tennyson)

In place of the tiny picture or relationship that we have tried to substitute for our relationship with God, a substitute which we now see as “wholly without value and entirely deprived of meaning,” we are given “the whole of creation” (15:5). We recognize and know that our relationship is with God and with the universe. This is Heaven: “an awareness of perfect oneness, and the knowledge that there is nothing else; nothing outside this oneness, and nothing else within” (T-18.VI.1:6).

Paragraph 16

16. ¹As God ascends into **His** rightful place and you to yours, you will experience again the **meaning** of relationship and know it to be true. ²Let us ascend in peace together to the Father, by giving **Him** ascendance in our minds. ³We will gain **everything** by giving **Him** the power and the glory, and keeping **no** illusions of where they are. ⁴They **are** in us, through **His** ascendance. ⁵What He has given is **His**. ⁶It shines in every part of Him, as in the whole. ⁷The whole reality of your relationship with Him lies in **our** relationship to one another. ⁸The holy instant shines alike on **all** relationships, for in it they *are* one. ⁹For here is only healing, **already** complete and perfect. ¹⁰For here is God, and where **He** is only the perfect and complete **can** be.

• Study Question •

7. *Paragraph 16 is a beautiful conclusion to this powerful section. The first sentence assumes you have been reading carefully. How does God ascend to His rightful place and what is the meaning of relationship that you experience as He does so?*
- A. *God ascends to His place through the holy relationship and the meaning of relationships you experience is to save the world.*
 - B. *God ascends to His place in the holy instant and the meaning of relationships that you experience is "to make happy."*
 - C. *God ascends to His place through the holy instant and the meaning of relationships that you experience is to take vengeance on the past.*

Relationships can give us this experience of the holy instant, if we are willing to stop clutching the garish, tacky frame and look with an open mind at the two pictures side by side. Yes, it involves seeing Christ in another person, but it so much more than that: it is a recognition that our true relationship is with God, with the All in All. We will experience “*meaning of relationship*” (16:1), which is, you will recall, “to make happy” (1:3). It means that *together* we rise into God, “ascend in peace together to the Father,” and we do so “by giving *Him* ascendance in our minds” (16:2). This means the relinquishment of the ego’s attempt at autonomy, at creating itself and being a power separate from God. We give God the power and the glory; that is, we realize and acknowledge that *our* power and glory are derivative of God’s (16:3–5). We are rays of sunlight, but we are not the sun (see T-18.VIII.3:1-6).

Relationships become holy when they become the mirror image of our relationship with God. We *are* related to one another because all of us are related to God (16:7). He is our “father,” our source. His nature “shines in every part of Him, as in the whole” (16:6), that is, God’s nature shines in me, and in you, and in every living thing. In the end, in the holy relationship, all relationships are one (16:8), because all of them exist in God

(16:-9–10). They are all “*already* complete and perfect” (16:9) because, in God, “only the perfect and complete *can* be” (16:10).

• **Study Question** •

8. *Please write a one paragraph summary of the main themes of this sections, or one of the main themes that personally struck you.*

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Answer Key

1. The holy instant.
2. E
3. A
4. C
5. C
6. A,B,C,D,E
7. B
8. The special relationship defends the ego's system by being simply a more attractive version of it, like a massive frame designed to distract you from a picture of death. The holy instant is a piece of eternity, framed lightly in time. Compare the two pictures and you will realize that one is only a picture while the other is reality itself.