

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 17, Section V.1–7

The Healed Relationship (Part 1)

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 begins the Course's discussion of the *holy* relationship, a discussion that continues from this point into Chapter 23. The Course gives more than twice as much space to the discussion of the holy relationship as it did to the discussion of the special relationship.

It is crucial, at the onset of studying these sections, to understand one central fact about a holy relationship: it consist of an actual relationship between two (or more) people. In the Course, a holy relationship is not something that exists when just one person perceives his or her relationship from a holy state of mind. That is certainly a wonderful thing, a very positive happening, and something that we can achieve on our own, with absolutely no response from the other person. But, as wonderful and desirable as that may be, *that isn't a holy relationship as the Course defines it*. The Course is perfectly and consistently clear that a holy relationship exists when *two people* join together in a holy goal. Unless you bear this in mind you will completely misunderstand everything the Course says about holy relationships.

Paragraph 1

1. ¹The holy relationship is the **expression** of the holy instant in living in this world. ²Like **everything** about salvation, the holy instant is a **practical** device, **witnessed** to by its results. ³The holy instant **never** fails. ⁴The **experience** of it is **always** felt. ⁵Yet without **expression it is not remembered**. ⁶The holy relationship is a constant reminder of the experience in which the relationship became what it is. ⁷And as the **unholy** relationship is a continuing hymn of hate in praise of **its** maker, so is the holy relationship a happy song of praise to the **Redeemer** of relationships.

• Study Question •

1. *Paragraph 1 speaks repeatedly of the "results," "expression" and "reminder" of the holy instant--something that comes out of the holy instant and keeps the experience of it fresh in our minds. What is this result of the holy instant?*

Experiencing a holy instant in a relationship is a wonderful thing, and what comes out of such an experience is a holy relationship (1:6). Just as the rustle of leaves in the trees demonstrates the existence of the wind, a holy relationship demonstrates the existence or reality of a holy instant. It *expresses* the holy instant in visible form (1:1–2).

A holy instant is always effective. No holy instant goes to waste or is without result (1:3), but a holy instant may be *forgotten* if it has no expression in the form of a holy relationship (1:5–6). The ongoing expression of a holy relationship is a constant reminder of the holy instant that launched it on its path. It testifies, not only to the reality of the holy instant, but, just as the ugliness of an unholy relationship reveals the true nature of the ego, so the holy relationship testifies to the character of the Holy Spirit, “the Redeemer of relationships,” who instigated the holy instant that brought two people into an experience of oneness (1:7).

The implication is clear: Without expression, a holy instant will fade and be forgotten. It needs to be planted and grow in a relationship in which it can find expression, just as the holy instant experienced by Helen and Bill flourished and gave birth to the Course.

Paragraph 2

2. ¹The holy relationship, a **major** step toward the perception of the real world, is **learned**. ²It is the old, unholy relationship, transformed and seen anew. ³The holy relationship is a phenomenal teaching accomplishment. ⁴In all its aspects, as it begins, develops and becomes accomplished, it represents the **reversal** of the unholy relationship. ⁵Be comforted in this; the **only** difficult phase is the beginning. ⁶For here, the **goal** of the relationship is abruptly shifted to the **exact opposite** of what it was. ⁷This is the **first** result of **offering** the relationship to the Holy Spirit, to use for **His** purposes.

• **Study Question** •

2. *Paragraph 2 presents several phases or pieces of a holy relationship, showing a definite progression. I will list these pieces below (more or less) in the order they are given in the paragraph and would like you to put them in true chronological order:*

- A. *The old, unholy relationship.*
- B. *The holy relationship develops and becomes accomplished.*
- C. *The difficult beginning phase of the holy relationship.*
- D. *The goal of the relationship is abruptly shifted to its opposite.*
- E. *The relationship (in the holy instant) is offered to the Holy Spirit to use for His purposes.*



The key concept of this paragraph is that a holy relationship “is *learned*” (2:1). It is a process: “it begins, develops, and becomes accomplished” (2:4). It does not spring instantly into perfect manifestation. It starts from the basis of “the old, unholy relationship” which, in the holy instant, is “transformed and seen anew” (2:2). From that initial moment there is a process of gradual development, guided by the teaching of the Holy Spirit (2:3), in which the old relationship patterns are reversed, and new patterns of relationship are learned (2:4). Jesus calls it “a phenomenal teaching accomplishment” (2:3), so obviously it is *not* something that comes easily. As has been said by many teachers, “Growth is messy.” Sometimes a holy relationship does not *look* so holy!

What makes the relationship holy is the mutual goal the two people share together (2:6). That goal, when remembered, acts as a constant course corrector, drawing each of the people out of and above their egos and above the battlefield into a remembrance of their oneness in spirit. They may fight, but then they remember, “I could see peace instead of this.”

At the same time, however, the goal of a relationship that is perceived in a holy instant is “the *exact opposite* of what it was” before (2:6). As a result, it often can throw a relationship into chaos! When two people offer their relationship to the Holy Spirit “to use for *His* purposes” (2:7), most of your habitual patterns of behavior are thrown into doubt. Your “usual” way of thinking just does not fit with the new purpose. It can be quite distressing. Jesus advises us, though, that “the *only* difficult phase is the beginning” (2:5). Emphasis on “only,” so we can derive comfort from knowing that once we get past this initial hurdle, things get easier. “You are severely tempted to abandon Him at the outside ring of fear, but He would lead you safely through and far beyond” (T-18.IX.3:9). He will again underscore both the initial difficulty and the eventual easing up in Paragraph 5:

As this change develops and is finally accomplished, it grows increasingly beneficent and joyous. But at the beginning, the situation is experienced as very precarious (T-17.V.5:3-4).

Paragraph 3

3. ¹This invitation is **accepted immediately**, and the Holy Spirit wastes no time in introducing the practical results of asking Him to enter. ²**At once His goal replaces** yours. ³This is accomplished very rapidly, but it makes the relationship seem disturbed, disjunctive and even quite distressing. ⁴The reason is quite clear. ⁵For the relationship **as it is** is out of line with its own goal, and clearly unsuited to the purpose that has been **accepted** for it. ⁶In its **unholy** condition, *your* goal was all that **seemed** to give it meaning. ⁷Now it seems to make **no** sense. ⁸Many relationships have been broken off at this point, and the pursuit of the old goal re-established in **another** relationship. ⁹For once the unholy relationship has **accepted** the goal of holiness, it can never again be what it was.

• Study Question •

3. *Once we offer the relationship to the Holy Spirit, He immediately responds by replacing our goal with His goal. This makes the relationship--which is relatively unchanged--seem disturbed because it is out of accord with its own (new) goal. Which sentence do you feel best captures the meaning of this paragraph?*
- A. *Sentence 3: This is accomplished very rapidly, but it makes the relationship seem disturbed, disjunctive and even quite distressing.*
 - B. *Sentence 5: For the relationship as it is is out of line with its own goal, and clearly unsuited to the purpose that has been accepted for it.*
 - C. *Sentence 6: In its unholy condition, your goal was all that seemed to give it meaning.*
 - D. *Sentence 9: For once the unholy relationship has accepted the goal of holiness, it can never again be what it was.*

When any two people offer their relationship to the Holy Spirit to use for His purposes, the “invitation is *accepted immediately*” (3:1). He “wastes no time” in readjusting our relationship.

Just a few pages ago, we read of the Holy Spirit’s eagerness to give us salvation: “The eagerness of the Holy Spirit to give you this is so intense He would not wait, although He waits in patience” (T-17.II.8:3). I get the feeling of the Holy Spirit springing into action almost before we’ve completed the thought of offering our relationship to Him. He’s been waiting for this moment! I think it feels like this because, when we decided to turn the purpose of our relationship outward, instead of inward, we have aligned ourselves in concert with the eternal flow of divine energy—outward, extending, giving. It’s like we are now walking *up* the up escalator instead of trying to walk *down* it!

“*At once His goal replaces yours*” (3:2). In T-17.IV.3:3, we read that our purpose in the special relationship is to occupy our mind so completely that you cannot hear the call of Truth. It’s no surprise that *listening* to the inner call of Truth is entirely counter to that ego purpose. The exchange referred to here is the same as that mentioned in Chapter 15:

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. Do not, then, be afraid to let go your imagined needs, which would destroy the relationship. Your only need is His (T-15.V.5:4-8).

Instead of thinking and acting as though our relationship is designed to *meet our needs* (needs that are wholly imaginary), we now see that it is a mechanism for *giving* rather than *getting*, and *we join together in that purpose*. That radical change of focus happens “very rapidly,” but it causes the relationship to suddenly appear “disturbed, disjunctive and even quite distressing” (3:3).

I had to look up the word “disjunctive” to see what it means. Consider the word “junction.” It is a place where two things come together, like a railroad crossing such as “Tuxedo Junction,” the famous Glenn Miller song. And in elementary grammar we learned that words like “and,” “or,” and “but” are called *conjunctions*, because they join things together. So a *disjunction* would be a separation or something that separates, and a disjunctive relationship would be one plagued by, or causing, separation. It speaks of the kind of “relationship” in which, if the two people involved get together, it invariably *increases* the distance between them, rather like trying to bring together opposite poles of a magnet. In concrete terms, when two people decide to give their relationship over to the Holy Spirit, it often seems to *increase* conflict between them.

“The reason,” he says, “is quite clear” (3:4). The form the relationship has taken up to this point is unsuitable for its new, holy purpose (3:5). The relationship was aligned with *your* purpose, meeting your imagined needs, sating subconscious desires for vengeance on the past, or providing a scapegoat for guilt. Now, all that has to change, and the relationship as it was no longer makes any sense (3:6–7). The temptation at this point is to break it off, and to pursue the old goals in a new relationship (3:8). Once the goal of holiness enters in, the relationship has been “spoiled” for the ego (3:9). This can bring about major problems. Viewed from the outside, the solution seems obvious: The *form* of the relationship has to change to conform to its new *purpose*. But to the persons *within* the relationship, that may not be so evident, and even if it is, it may seem impossible.

Paragraph 4

4. ¹The temptation of the ego becomes extremely intense with this shift in goals. ²For the relationship has **not** as yet been changed sufficiently to make its former goal completely **without** attraction, and its structure is “threatened” by the recognition of its inappropriateness for meeting its new purpose. ³The conflict between the goal and the structure of the relationship is **so** apparent that they **cannot** coexist. ⁴Yet now **the goal will not be changed**. ⁵Set firmly in the unholy relationship, there **is** no course except to **change the relationship** to fit the goal. ⁶Until this **happy** solution is seen and accepted as the **only way out** of the [this] conflict, the **relationship** ~~may seem~~ [seems] to be severely strained.

• Study Question •

4. *Paragraph 4 describes a situation in which the "goal" and the "structure" of the relationship are in conflict and the only solution is to change the structure to fit the goal. What the heck are the goal and the structure?*
- A. *The goal is what kind of relationship you want it to be (e.g. romantic, platonic, marriage, work, etc.) and the structure is the kind of relationship it is now.*
 - B. *The goal is the goal of holiness assigned by the Holy Spirit and the structure is the current condition of the relationship, which is primarily unholy.*
 - C. *The goal is what you want to achieve with the relationship (whether that be status, money, security, etc.) and the structure is the way in which you will do that.*
 - D. *The structure is the physical building in which the relationship mainly takes place and the goal is to upgrade that building for the lowest cost per square foot.*

The clash between the new goal—healing and forgiveness—and the relationship’s old structure, designed for exactly the opposite purpose—vengeance—can be “extremely intense” (4:1). It is a shift from inward-direction to outward-direction. The old structure lingers on. In such a situation the ego both pushes and pulls on you: the ego goals still seem attractive to some extent, and the familiar structure of the relationship resists being remolded to fit the new holy purpose of the relationship (4:2). Clearly the new goal and the old structure are incompatible (4:3). Clearly, either the structure must change or the new goal must be abandoned. But once you have accepted the new, holy goal, serving the purposes of the Holy Spirit, you *cannot* reconsider. The new goal isn’t going away (4:4). The only option is “to *change the relationship* to fit the goal” (4:5).

In practical terms, I believe, this means that we must stop using our relationships in the manner we have habitually used them. In short, we’ve used relationships to meet our private goals, and in a holy relationship, we begin to use the relationship to serve the

world. It shifts from inward-directed to outward-directed. Later in this section, this change of orientation is expressed in this way: "With love in you, you have no need except to extend it" (T-15.V.11:3). As long as we refuse to accept this fundamental change in our relationship, the conflict between a holy goal and an unholy structure will continue to cause us serious strain (4:6).

Paragraph 5

5. ¹It would **not** be kinder to shift the goal more slowly, for the **contrast** would be obscured, and the ego given time to reinterpret each slow step according to its liking. ²Only a radical shift in purpose **could** induce a **complete** change of mind about what the whole relationship **is for**. ³As this change develops and is finally accomplished, it grows increasingly beneficent and joyous. ⁴But at the beginning, the situation is experienced as very precarious. ⁵A relationship, undertaken by two individuals for their unholy purposes, suddenly has **holiness** for its goal. ⁶As these two **contemplate** their relationship from the point of view of this new purpose, they are inevitably appalled. ⁷Their perception of the relationship may even become quite disorganized. ⁸And yet, the **former** organization of their perception no longer serves the purpose **they** have agreed to ~~meet~~ [set].

• Study Question •

5. *For the Holy Spirit to shift the goal so quickly and completely has many painful effects, causing the partners to become appalled and disoriented. What is He trying to accomplish with this shift that makes the pain it causes worth it (there may be more than one correct answer)?*
- A. *He is trying to keep the ego from being able to interpret this shift in egoic terms.*
 - B. *He is trying to show you how hopeless the relationship is.*
 - C. *He is trying to bring you face to face with your past sinfulness in the relationship.*
 - D. *He is trying to induce a complete change of mind in you about what the whole relationship is really for.*

We might suppose that it would be easier on us if the Holy Spirit took us through this process, this shift of the goal in our relationship, a bit more gradually. After all, didn't Jesus tell us that we would not be "abruptly lifted up and hurled into reality" (T-16.VI.8:1)? Didn't he promise us that, "Time is kind, and if you use it on behalf of reality, it will keep gentle pace with you in your transition" (T-16.VI.8:2)? Indeed, he did. But this isn't the same thing. The earlier passage was talking about suddenly transporting us to the end of the journey; here, he is talking just about getting us pointed in the right direction at the *start* of the journey. There is still a lot of growth and

development still to come, and that *will* be gradual (5:3). But at the start, he says that if the shift were taken in gradual phases, the ego would have time “to reinterpret each slow step according to its liking” (5:1). The conflict we encounter when the purpose abruptly shifts is *desirable and beneficial*, because the Holy Spirit needs the *contrast* between the character of the new goal and the clearly ego-centered structure of the unholy relationship. It *pushes* us toward “a *complete* change of mind about what the whole relationship *is for*” (5:2).

Let's pause a moment and ask ourselves if we are willing for such a complete change of mind about what our relationships are for. If so, we must be aware that “at the beginning, the situation is experienced as very precarious” (5:4). We have to be ready for that.

When you and your partner dedicate your relationship to the Holy Spirit, and begin to “*contemplate* [your] relationship from the point of view of this new purpose,” you are going to be appalled at what you see, at what you have been doing (5:6). You may even become quite confused about how to carry on the relationship (your “perception of the relationship may even become quite disorganized” (5:7)). This is only logical, because your old way of thinking about the relationship does not fit the new, holy purpose (5:8). Your relationship will probably go through a rough patch before your understanding of what it is, and how it functions, comes into line with the new purpose you've accepted together, before it becomes “increasingly beneficent and joyous” (5:3).

Paragraph 6

6. ¹**This is the time for faith.** ²You **let** this goal be set for you. ³That **was** an act of faith. ⁴Do not **abandon** faith, now that the **rewards** of faith are being introduced. ⁵If you believed the Holy Spirit was **there** to **accept** the relationship, why would you now not **still** believe that He is there [**there,**] to **purify** what He has taken under His guidance? ⁶Have faith in ~~your brother~~ [**each other**] in what but **seems** to be a trying time. ⁷**The goal is set.** ⁸And your relationship has **sanity** as its purpose. ⁹For now you find yourself in an **insane** relationship, **recognized** as such **in the light of its goal.**

• Study Question •

6. *Paragraph 6* says that the answer to this dilemma is faith. This says that you had faith in something and that you now need faith in something else. What is the faith you had and what is the faith you need?
- A. You had faith in your brother before; you need faith in him now.
 - B. You had faith that the Holy Spirit would enter the relationship and give it His goal; you need faith that He can carry it through to the goal's achievement.
 - C. You had faith in your old goal; you need faith in the new goal.
 - D. You had faith that you could enter the holy instant; you need faith that the Holy Spirit can bring both you and your brother into the holy instant.

The rough patch, then, “*is the time for faith*” (6:1). As the Bible defines it, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1 KJV). The benefits and joy are not currently visible, not yet. We must hang in there. We must trust that the Holy Spirit knows what He is doing, that this period of adjustment will be short-lived, and for the meantime, it is *okay* that the relationship seems “disturbed, disjunctive, and distressing.” We must have faith that the goal can be realized. This unholy relationship *can* be transformed into a holy one.

You are already operating on faith. Together with your partner, you brought the relationship to the Holy Spirit, and let Him set the new goal (6:2–3). You are being asked to continue that faith: to believe that both you and your partner have what it takes to carry off a holy relationship. (Note that in 6:6, the Urtext has “have faith in *each other*”! That is *such* a hard thing to do under these circumstances!)¹ You’ve *had* faith; stick around to reap some of the benefits (6:4). You must have sensed the presence of Divine Spirit in order to be moved to turn your relationship over to His guidance; why would that faith change now? (6:5)

The “trying time” is not what it appears to be (6:6); your relationship is making major progress. You’ve allowed a new goal to be set, and “set” it is. *Sanity* is your new purpose (6:7–8), which is going to involve undoing the *insanity* of your existing relationship (6:9).

One thing I can relate this to in my experience, outside of specific relationships, is the shift I went through moving from my fundamentalist thought system into the thought system of the Course. I guess you could call it my special relationship with the Bible! There is such a radical difference between the Course’s view of the Bible, which states

¹ Here, and also in 7:2 and 7:13, the editors of the FACIM version have changed “each other” to “your brother,” which hides the clear-cut mutuality of the holy relationship, that it takes two to “tango.” It’s not just me having faith in my partner, it is a *mutual* faith. This is one of the major flaws in the FACIM version. The same substitution of “your brother” for “each other” occurs dozens of times in the Text.

that in some respects the disciples misunderstood Jesus, and the fundamentalist view, which is that the Bible is completely free from all error. There is the drastic difference in how the two thought systems view human nature (inheriting Adam's sinful nature versus made in the image of God), and how each views Jesus' death on the cross (Jesus as a sacrifice for sin versus the cross as a lesson of love), and so on. When I first read the Course, there was a lot that I really liked, but a lot I simply could not accept. I set aside the Bible and read the Course, but it took more than 2 years before I began to realize that my understanding of human nature, of God, of sin and salvation, had radically changed. But it took another 20 years before I actually began to *fulfill* my relationship with the Bible and to see it, once again, as a tool for spiritual growth .

Now that I look back, I actually *can* see that the way I viewed the Bible was "insane." It made no sense whatsoever. I was blind to many of the Bible's contradictions that indicated human authorship. It took me a long time to begin to acknowledge that.

Paragraph 7

7. ¹Now the ego counsels thus; substitute for this **another** relationship to which your **former** goal was **quite** appropriate. ²You can **escape** from your distress ~~only by getting rid of your brother~~ [*only by getting rid of each other*]. ³You need not part entirely if you choose not to do so. ⁴But you **must** exclude **major areas** of fantasy from your brother, **to save your sanity**. ⁵~~Hear not this now!~~ [*Hear not this now!*] ⁶Have faith in Him Who **answered** you. ⁷He heard. ⁸Has He not been very explicit in His answer? ⁹You are **not** now wholly insane. ¹⁰Can you **deny** that He **has** given you a **most** explicit statement [the Course]? ¹¹Now He asks for faith a little longer, even in bewilderment. ¹²For this will go, and you will see the **justification** for your faith emerge, to bring you shining conviction. ¹³Abandon Him not now, ~~nor your brother~~ [*nor each other*]. ¹⁴This relationship **has been** reborn as holy.

• Study Question •

7. *When you experience a holy instant in your relationship and things shift dramatically to a new level, you may become confused and disturbed about the relationship. In a time like this, what do you need to guard against?*



When I gave up the Bible as my spiritual authority, I *was*, for a time, tempted to find a different authority (a guru) to rely on. Thankfully, I never moved far in that direction. I

would say that, for a time, I tried to substitute the Course as my infallible authority, only to realize that I was making a mistake similar to the one I'd made about the Bible.

In human relationships, when our newly minted holy relationship hits that rough patch, the ego tries to convince us that the relationship is the problem, and we just need to find a new one. We need to dump our partners and find new ones (7:1–2). Or, well, maybe you don't have to be that extreme. Maybe you just need to be less open to each other, get a little more space in the relationship (7:3–4).

Don't listen to your ego, says Jesus (7:5). Have some faith in the Holy Spirit. He heard you when you offered the relationship to Him. He has responded (7:6–8).² We have in the Course a response from the Holy Spirit to the entire world (7:10). We need to honor and acknowledge the activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives, to recognize that when we begin to move in a spiritual direction, *something* kicks in and adds unexpected power and strength to that movement. Call it Holy Spirit, call it the evolutionary impulse, I don't care; it's there, it's real, and we need to have faith in Its power.

When the difficult times come in our relationships, we need to trust that “This, too, shall pass” (“this will go” (7:12)). Our faith will be justified. The seed, though hidden underground right now, will bear fruit. Faith will turn to certainty. The relationship given to the Holy Spirit “*has been* reborn as holy” (7:14).

² Bear in mind that these words were addressed, first of all, to Helen and Bill. They offered their relationship to Him (to find “the better way” of relating), and He responded *with the Course*. The Course is the answer He refers to here. It may be *your* answer about your questions and your purpose, as well.

Answer Key

1. The holy relationship
2. A,E,D,C,B
3. A
4. B
5. A,D
6. B
7. You need to guard against the ego's reaction, which is that your ego will try to convince you to minimize the discomfort by withdrawing from your partner in some way, perhaps ending the relationship, or shutting one another out of major parts of your lives.