

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 18, Section II

The Basis of the Dream

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 an amazingly detailed comparison of nighttime dreams to our “waking dream” of the world. The first five paragraphs deal mostly with nighttime dreams and what they represent, while the final four paragraphs show how this theory of dreams relates to our special relationships.

Paragraph 1

1. ¹Does not a world that seems quite real arise in dreams? ²Yet think what this world is. ³It is clearly **not** the world you saw **before** you slept. ⁴Rather it is a **distortion** of the world, planned solely around what you would have **preferred**. ⁵Here, you are “free” to make over whatever **seemed** to attack you, and **change** it into a **tribute** to your ego, which was outraged by the “attack.” ⁶This would not be **your** wish unless you saw yourself **as one** with the ego, which **always** looks upon itself, and therefore on you, as **under** attack and highly **vulnerable** to it.

• Study Question •

1. *What is the theory of nighttime dreams that is presented in this paragraph?*
 - A. *Dreams are guidance from the Divine.*
 - B. *Dreams are disguised sexual impulses.*
 - C. *Dreams are answers from your deeper self.*
 - D. *Dreams are revenge on your daytime experience.*

The opening rhetorical question (1:1) is one to which everyone will surely answer, “Yes.” When I am dreaming, the dream seems to be real. Only rarely does anyone realize, *while dreaming*, that they are experiencing a dream. Usually that realization comes only upon awaking.

Jesus then asks us to consider the implications of that simple fact, that universal experience. We do not dream about something that we actually experienced before falling asleep (1:2–3)—or, if we do carry something from our waking life into the dream, it will be modified in some way. The world we dream of is a distorted form of waking reality, usually changed so that it is something preferable to the actual waking experience (1:4). (Nightmares are another case, considered later.) In dreams, we have that wonderful romantic relationship; we can fly; we win that coveted job. If someone has somehow “attacked” us in life, we can re-make the experience in our dreams so that we win the battle (1:5). Our egos control the dreams because we identify with them (1:6).

Paragraph 2

2. ¹Dreams are chaotic **because** they are governed by your conflicting wishes, and therefore they have **no** concern with what is true. ²They are the best example you could have of how perception can be utilized to substitute illusions for truth. ³You do not take them seriously on awaking because the fact that reality is so **outrageously** violated in them becomes apparent. ⁴Yet they **are** a way of **looking** at the world, and **changing it to suit the ego better**. ⁵They provide **striking** examples, both of the ego's **inability** to tolerate reality, and of your willingness to **change** reality on its behalf.

• Study Question •

2. *Dreams are an example of ideas that the Course wants us to understand. Which of the following is not one of those ideas? Dreams are an example of:*
- A. *How our perception can substitute illusions for truth.*
 - B. *How we change the world to suit the ego.*
 - C. *How we are always trading one illusion for another.*
 - D. *How the ego cannot tolerate reality.*
 - E. *How willing we are to change reality on the ego's behalf.*

As we all know, impossible things and inconsistent things can happen in dreams. Oddly, most of us while dreaming do not notice the inconsistencies. We are in one place and suddenly in another. We are talking to one person and suddenly they are replaced by someone else. This chaotic activity occurs, the Course says, because our conflicting wishes are in control of the dreams (2:1). Clearly, our minds are quite able to accept illusions as real (2:2). When we wake, the dreams are often so obviously false that we easily dismiss them, but they demonstrate our ego's desire to change the world to suit itself (2:3–4). They expose both the ego's dissatisfaction with reality and our “willingness to change reality on its behalf” (2:5).

Paragraph 3

3. ¹You do not find the differences between what you see in sleep and on awaking disturbing. ²You recognize that what you see on waking is blotted out in dreams. ³Yet on awakening, you do **not** expect it to be gone. ⁴In dreams *you* arrange everything. ⁵People **become** what you would have them be, and what they do **you** order. ⁶No limits on substitution are laid upon you. ⁷For a time it seems as if the world were **given** you, to make it what you **wish** [will]. ⁸You do **not** realize **you** are **attacking** it, trying to triumph over it and **make** it serve you.

• Study Question •

3. *Paragraph 3 continues to use dreams as an analogy for something else.*
- a) *What are dreams seen as a symbol for here?*
 - b) *What is our waking experience intended as a symbol for here?*

Despite the bizarre nature of some of our dreams, we don't find their divergence from waking reality to be disturbing (3:1). We know they are not real (3:2). Still, sometimes we are quite surprised to find that what we dreamed about did not really happen! And conversely, although the dream may differ radically from waking reality, we know that the waking reality is not actually changed by the dream (3:3).

In dreams, everything and everyone is acting out the desires of our minds. We are the puppet masters. We rule the worlds of our dreams (3:4–7). But we fail to recognize that this desire to change everything and mold it to our will, as evidenced by our dreams, is an attack on the world as it is, wishing we could whip it into shape (3:8).

Paragraph 4

4. ¹Dreams are perceptual temper tantrums, in which you literally scream, "I want it **thus!**" ²And thus it seems to be. ³And yet the dream can **not** escape its origin. ⁴Anger and fear pervade it, and in an instant the illusion of satisfaction is invaded by the illusion of terror. ⁵For the dream of your ability to **control** reality by substituting a world that you prefer *is* terrifying. ⁶Your attempts to **blot out** reality are **very** fearful, but **this** you are **not** willing to accept. ⁷And so you **substitute** the fantasy that **reality** is fearful, **not** what you would **do** to it. ⁸And thus is guilt **made real**.

• Study Question •

4. *How can dreams both be wish-fulfillment and yet be frightening, according to this paragraph?*
- A. *We can only control the world of dreams so far, thus there is a limit to our ability to produce non-frightening dreams.*
 - B. *Our attempt to control reality to fulfill our wishes is itself frightening and so produces frightening dreams.*
 - C. *Some of our wishes are to experience fear.*

In the first three paragraphs, dreams have been portrayed as wish-fulfillment, in which we take our waking experience and make it over to suit our egos. Yet not all dreams seem like they are fulfilling our wishes; many dreams are frightening. This fourth paragraph explains why dreams can be wish-fulfillment yet also be frightening.

I love the phrase “perceptual temper tantrums” (4:1). It makes me think of a small child who has spied the lollipops in the grocery store and grabs one, only to have it taken away by his mother; he then falls down on the ground, screaming, “I want a lollipop!” Our dreams are like that. In our dreams we get the lollipop (4:2).

But the origin of dreams is the ego’s “temper,” its anger and fear. As a result, the dream of satisfaction can suddenly switch to one of terror. The longed-for embrace from the fantasy lover suddenly becomes the death-grip of a bear or a corpse (4:3–4). Terror is at the root of dreams, because seemingly having the ability to control reality, to change the world, is in itself terrifying (4:5), just as a child who is granted his every wish actually becomes afraid, while a child whose parents are in charge feels more secure and safe.

Though still speaking of dreams there are hints here of where Jesus is heading. Our “attempts to blot out reality are *very* fearful” (4:6), and that is true not only in dreams but also in waking consciousness. But we are not willing to recognize where the fear comes from. So in the dream, we make the “dream reality” fearful, to hide the source of fear from ourselves (4:7). We project our fear into our dreams, just as in waking life we project it onto the world around us. We use the dream, and the waking world, to punish ourselves for attacking the world to make it over after our own wishes—which, in *both* cases, is only a dream! But because we refuse to acknowledge our belief that we have destroyed reality, our *guilt* appears to be real (4:8).

Paragraph 5

5. ¹Dreams show you that you **have** the power to make a world as you would have it be, and that **because** you **want** it you **see** it. ²And **while** you see it you do **not** doubt that it is real. ³Yet here is a world, clearly **within** your mind, that **seems** to be outside. ⁴You do **not** respond to it as though you made it, nor do you realize that the emotions the dream produces **must** come from you. ⁵It is the **figures** in the dream and what **they** do that seem to **make the dream**. ⁶You do

not realize that you are making them act out **for** you, for if you did the guilt would not be theirs, and the illusion of satisfaction would be gone. ⁷In dreams these features are not obscure. ⁸You seem to waken, and the dream is gone. ⁹Yet what you fail to recognize is that what **caused** the dream has **not** gone with it. ¹⁰Your **wish** to make another world that is **not** real **remains** with you. ¹¹And what you seem to **waken** to is but another **form** of this same world you see in dreams. ¹²All your time is spent in dreaming. ¹³Your sleeping and your waking dreams have different forms, and that is all. ¹⁴**Their content is the same.** ¹⁵They are your protest **against** reality, and [**represent**]¹ your fixed and insane ~~idea that you can~~ [**wish to**] **change** it. ¹⁶In your **waking** dreams, the special relationship has a special place. ¹⁷It is the means by which you try to make your **sleeping** dreams **come true.** ¹⁸From this, you do not waken. ¹⁹The special relationship is your **determination** to keep your hold on unreality, and to **prevent** yourself from waking. ²⁰And while you see more **value** in sleeping than in waking, you will **not** let go of it.

• **Study Question** •

5. *How does the special relationship symbolize sleeping dreams (there may be more than one right answer)?*
- A. *The special relationship is our attempt to make our dreams come true.*
 - B. *We often dream about our romantic partners.*
 - C. *The special relationship, like dreams, is an attempt to make the world obey our wishes.*
 - D. *The special relationship, like dreams, is a constructive lesson sent from a deeper aspect of our own being.*

We know from personal experience that, in dreams, we can make the world be any way we like, and that simply because we want it, we see it (5:1). While dreaming we are totally convinced that what we are seeing is real (5:2). This dream world, without a doubt, does not exist *outside* of us but *within* our mind, and nowhere else, and yet we experience it as outside of us. We operate as characters in the dream. The other people who populate the dream seem to interact with us. They do and say things that take us by surprise, although everything they do is being generated *by our own minds* (5:3). We dialog with them. We have a variety of emotional reactions to them, without ever realizing that “the emotions the dream produces *must* come from” ourselves (5:4). In the dream, it is the dream figures, and what *they* do, that seem to *make the dream* (5:5). Whatever feelings you experience, you can blame on *them* rather than on yourself.

It's worth taking a moment or two to consider that. Think about a time you dreamed about some person, and something that person did or said made you happy, or angry, or

¹ Added in shorthand notes, not the Urtext.

made you laugh. And then, realize that *you* generated that emotion. You manifested the dream, and imagined those dream people doing or saying certain things, in order to create that feeling in yourself (5:6). It's kind of spooky, isn't it?

When you consider dreams, it's fairly obvious that they come from within yourself. When you wake up the dreams are gone; they never existed outside of your mind. But you rarely, if ever, stop to think that "what *caused* the dream has *not* gone with it" (5:7-9). Dreams betray the mind's desire to remake the world (5:10). And that desire, says the Course, is the same desire that makes what we think of as "the real world" (5:11). The world we see when "awake" is just another form of dream, but with the same content (5:13-14).

"All your time is spent in dreaming" (5:12).

That really sums it up. It means that the world we have grown up in thinking it is real is just another form of dream, a dream from which we have yet to awaken. There *is* no world outside of your mind; it only *seems* to be outside, just as the world in dreams does (5:3).

"What is projected out, and seems to be external to the mind, is not outside at all, but an effect of what is in, and has not left its source" (T-26.VII.4:9).

"The world you see is what you gave it, nothing more than that. But though it is no more than that, it is not less. Therefore, to you it is important. It is the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition" (T-21.Int.1:2-5).

"He always perceives this world as outside himself, for this is crucial to his adjustment. He does not realize that he makes this world, for there is no world outside of him" (T-12.III.6:6-7).

If this seems weird to you, I feel it is important to point out that the Course actually falls in the stream of philosophical Idealism, which was clearly expressed by Plato (428 BCE to 348 BCE),² and was repeated and expanded upon by numerous philosophers such as Berkeley, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and Schopenhauer. Idealism is also found even earlier than Plato in Pythagoras, the Kabala, and the Hindu Vedas. One 17th century

2 Eric Butterworth summarized Plato's ideas as follows, in a talk on the Antecedants of the New Insight in Truth:

- The fundamental concept of idealism which holds that the universe, as a whole and throughout, is an embodiment of mind.
- That reality is to be found only in mind. And that the only reality in the external world consists in its perceptibility. In other words, a thing exists as you see it, and it exists because you see it (in an outer sense).
- That it has its real existence in that which is transcendent to the material world. Plato held that reality inherent in the idea of the thing and not in the thing itself. And so there is no reality in the individual, the tree, the stone or the man, but reality is found in the "idea" of these things, which existed on the ideal plane alone.

dictionary of philosophy defined idealism like this: "Idealism, in antithesis to realism, is that philosophical system which maintains not only that the spiritual or ideal is the original, but that it is the sole actuality ; so that we can concede to the objects of the senses no more than the character of a phenomenal (or apparent) world, educed by ideal activities." (Real Encyclopaedie, Eleventh Ed., 1866.) In another place, Brockhaus defines idealism to be "that philosophical view which regards what is thought as alone the actually existent." (As quoted by Warren Felt Evans, "The Spiritual Writings of Warren Felt Evans.") In my own words, the only real thing is thought, which exists in mind. That is what the Course is teaching.

Both our sleeping dreams and our waking dreams are "your protest against reality," expressive of our wish to *change* reality (5:15). Our nighttime dreams are our protest against, and desire to change, the daytime dream, while the waking dream is our protest against True Reality.

More to the point, in this discussion which is, after all, about our relationships, the special relationship has a special place in our waking dream. They are an attempt to make our sleeping dreams "come true" in the waking dream (5:16–17). In that sense they are, quite literally, the mind's attempt to never wake up from its dream (5:18–19)!

Paragraph 6

6. ¹The Holy Spirit, ever practical in His wisdom, **accepts** your dreams and uses them as means for **waking**. ²**You** would have used them to remain **asleep**. ³~~I said before~~ [We once said] that the first change, before dreams disappear, is that your dreams of fear are changed to **happy** dreams. ⁴That is what the Holy Spirit does in the special relationship. ⁵He does **not** destroy it, nor snatch it away from you. ⁶But He does use it differently, as a help to make **His** purpose **real** to you. ⁷The special relationship will remain, **not** as a source of pain and guilt, but as a source of joy and freedom. ⁸It will **not** be for you alone, for therein lay its misery. ⁹As its **unholiness** kept it a thing apart, its **holiness** will become an offering to everyone.

• Study Question •

6. *What does this paragraph mean when it says that the Holy Spirit takes the dreams that you would have used to stay asleep and instead makes them into means for waking?*
- A. *He takes your nighttime dreams and makes them into sources of guidance and insight.*
 - B. *He takes your "hopes and dreams" and redirects them towards the goal of salvation.*
 - C. *He changes your special relationships into holy relationships.*

Although the ego's intent in manifesting this waking dream, and especially in our special relationships, is to prevent us from waking up to Reality, if we are willing to give the Holy Spirit access to our relationships and to the rest of our lives, He (being very practical) will accept them and use them "as means for *waking*" (6:1-2). Our dreams of fear are changed to *happy* dreams (6:3), as has been pointed out earlier.³ We are still dreaming this world, but it takes a different form, a reflection of heaven rather than a projection of our guilt and fear.

So, as a central component of our waking dreams, our special relationships are transformed into holy relationships. From a dream based on fear it becomes a dream based on love. We *retain* our special relationships, and while they continue to be special in form, their content becomes increasingly holy (6:4-5). It will bring us joy and freedom rather than pain and guilt (6:6-7). The pain and guilt and misery arose from our special relationships because we were trying to use them to meet our imagined private needs, shutting out the rest of the world (6:8). Now, under His guidance, they will "become an offering to everyone" (6:9). They change from being inward-directed to being outward-directed. Rather than contraction, they are characterized by expansion and extension, a center of giving rather than a mechanism of getting what we want.

Paragraph 7

7. ¹Your special relationship will be a means for **undoing** guilt in everyone blessed through your holy relationship. ²It will be a happy dream, and one which you will **share** with all who come within your sight. ³Through it, the blessing the Holy Spirit has laid upon it will be **extended**. ⁴Think not that He has forgotten anyone in the purpose He has given you. ⁵And think not that He has forgotten **you** to whom He **gave** this gift. ⁶He uses everyone who calls on Him as means for the salvation of everyone. ⁷And He will waken everyone through you who offered your relationship to Him. ⁸If you but recognized His gratitude [**to you!**]
⁹Or mine through His! ¹⁰For we are joined ~~as in one~~ [**as one in**] purpose, being of

³ "You will first dream of peace, and then awaken to it. Your first exchange of what you made for what you want is the exchange of nightmares for the happy dreams of love" (T-13.VII.9:1-2).

one mind with Him.

• Study Question •

7. Which of the following statements would most accurately reflect this paragraph?
- A. The purpose of your holy relationship is not merely to save the two of you. It is to save the entire Sonship through the two of you.
 - B. The purpose of your holy relationship is not to focus on everyone else, but merely to accept the Atonement for yourselves. That is your sole responsibility.

7:1 is, to me, one of the most intriguing sentences in the Course because of what it shows about special relationships and holy relationships. *Both* terms are used in the same sentence to refer to *the same relationship*. Special relationships and holy relationships are not opposite things, mutually exclusive. In fact, a holy relationship is just a special relationship that has been given a new, holy purpose. The Course does not want us to *give up* our special relationships, it wants us to *give them over* to the Holy Spirit, to use for His purpose. He wants to use them “for undoing guilt in everyone blessed through your holy relationship” (7:1).

Given to the Holy Spirit, our special relationship can become a happy dream, not only for those directly involved in the relationship, but a dream that will be shared with everyone touched by the relationship (7:2). The Holy Spirit blesses the relationship, and that blessing will be *extended* through the relationship, reaching everyone because He always keeps *everyone* in His mind (7:3–4). It isn't that we start living *only* for others; we, in the relationship, are not forgotten. We are equal recipients of the gifts (7:5). The salvation of the Holy Spirit is for everyone, and everyone who receives it is used by Him to bring it to everyone else (7:6).

The Holy Spirit will use us to waken others (7:7). Jesus is not out just to “save” any one of us; he wants to enlist us as co-workers in his great crusade:

When you have been restored to the recognition of your original state, you naturally become part of the Atonement yourself. As you share my unwillingness to accept error in yourself and others, you must join the great crusade to correct it; listen to my voice, learn to undo error and act to correct it. The power to work miracles belongs to you. I will provide the opportunities to do them, but you must be ready and willing (T-1.III.1:5-8).

Jesus expresses his wish that we would become aware of just how grateful to us both he and the Holy Spirit are (7:8–9). I think if I got a clear sense of that gratitude, it would have a profoundly deep effect on my motivation to allow them to work through me, and would encourage me to offer more of my time and energy to that end. What a holy calling, joined as one with the Holy Spirit and with Jesus, united in a single purpose with a single, shared mind (7:10)!

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My eyes, my tongue, my hands, my feet today have but one purpose; to be given Christ to use to bless the world with miracles.

Father, I give all that is mine today to Christ, to use in any way that best will serve the purpose that I share with Him. Nothing is mine alone, for He and I have joined in purpose. Thus has learning come almost to its appointed end. A while I work with Him to serve His purpose. Then I lose myself in my Identity, and recognize that Christ is but my Self. (W-pII.353)

Paragraph 8

8. ¹Let not the dream take hold to close your eyes. ²It is not strange that dreams can make a world that is unreal. ³~~It is the wish to make it that is incredible~~ [The wish to make it is incredible]. ⁴~~Your relationship with your brother has now~~ [Your relationship has] become one in which the wish has been **removed**, because its purpose has been changed from one of dreams to one of truth. ⁵You are not sure of this because you think it may be **this** that is the dream. ⁶You are so used to choosing ~~among~~ [between] dreams you do not see that you have made, at last, the choice between the truth and *all* **illusions**.

• Study Question •

8. *Your special relationship has been transformed into a means of awakening (this specifically refers to Helen and Bill). How does this paragraph characterize this transformation?*
- A. *It has been changed from a nightmare to a happy dream.*
 - B. *In it the wish to change the world to suit your ego has been removed*
 - C. *Its goal has been changed from sin to holiness.*

As we embark on a path as new and different as a holy relationship, it is always tempting to let the dream of specialness take hold again. Have you ever had the experience of waking some morning while in the midst of a pleasant dream? You know you need to get up to go to work, or to prepare breakfast for others, or (in my case) to feed the dogs and let them out. But the dream beckons to you. You want to close your eyes and fall gently back to sleep, to experience that wonderful dream. Jesus pleads with us *not* to do that now (8:1).

“Dreams can make a world that is unreal”—that is clearly so, and the ability of the mind to do that is not strange (8:2). What *is* incredible is that we should *want* to make an unreal world (8:3). The terrific news is that, in a holy relationship, that wish has been excised. It’s gone! Dreams are no longer the purpose of the relationship; truth is (8:4).

If you have given a relationship to the Holy Spirit, this is true of you and your relationship. You may doubt that the wish for dreams is gone. In fact, you may think that you are only *dreaming* that the wish is gone (8:5)! You find it hard to believe that love is the only reality, that all minds are one, that the world you see is a projection of your mind. "Maybe I'm making all this up!" (The ego loves to use the truth to teach a lie! "... the ego, under what it sees as threat, is quick to cite the truth to save its lies. " (W-pI.196.2:2).) When we first choose the truth, we may not fully realize that our one choice has, in fact, undone *all* illusions (8:6).

Paragraph 9

9. ¹Yet Heaven **is** sure. ²**This is no dream.** ³Its coming means that you have chosen truth, and it has come because you have been willing to let your special relationship meet its conditions. ⁴In your relationship the Holy Spirit has gently laid the real world; the world of happy dreams, from which awaking is so easy and so natural. ⁵For as your sleeping and your waking dreams represent the same wishes in **your** mind, so do the real world and the truth of Heaven join in the Will of God. ⁶The dream of waking is easily transferred to its reality. ⁷For this dream reflects your will **joined** with the Will of God. ⁸And what **this** Will would **have** accomplished has never *not* been done.

• Study Question •

9. *Just as nighttime dreams reflect the same wish as daytime dreams, so _____ reflects the truth of Heaven, and has been laid in your special relationship. (Fill the blank with one of the following phrases.)*
- A. *The real world.*
 - B. *The Will of God.*
 - C. *The golden circle.*
 - D. *The forgotten song.*

Heaven *is not a dream* (9:1–2)! When we choose truth and are willing to allow our relationship to meet Heaven's conditions (being used for no purpose but God's), Heaven has arrived (9:3). It begins with an experience of the real world⁴, which is the world of happy dreams. Easily and naturally, this leads before long to waking up (9:4). Heaven and the real world grow out of the same will in God's mind, in much the same way that sleeping and waking dreams arise from the same insane wishes in *your* mind for making an unreal world to replace the real one (9:5). So where one is, the other must follow. When we begin to dream about waking up, *really* waking up is only a step away (9:6).

⁴ "The real world is the state of mind in which the only purpose of the world is seen to be forgiveness" (T-30.V.1:1).

"The real world is attained simply by the complete forgiveness of the old, the world you see without forgiveness" (T-17.II.5:1).

Allen Watson's Commentary on the Text of *A Course in Miracles*

Our happy dream is a reflection of God's eternal will, and shows that our will has joined with the Will of God, a Will whose desires have "never *not* been done" (9:8). What God wills is so, and always has been so.

I have often said that *A Course in Miracles* is about healing relationships through forgiveness. Letting go of our ego's cravings and belief that it is our partner's duty and purpose to meet our needs entails profound forgiveness. We have to forgive one another for failing to meet those needs, and we have to release one another from any such obligation. This, the Course is telling us, is the pathway to Heaven.

• Study Question •

10. Please do your best to summarize first what is said about nighttime dreams (paragraphs 1-5) and then how that relates to special relationships (paragraphs 5-9).

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Answer Key

1. D
2. C
3. a. The world.
b. True reality.
4. B
5. A,C
6. C
7. A
8. B
9. A
10. Nighttime dreams are a world we make, based on our desire to remake and triumph over the insults of our daytime experience. The special relationship is a daydream, which has the same purpose as a night dream. Thus its purpose is to keep us asleep. Yet the Holy Spirit will transform the special relationship, removing the wish to make our own world. He will place in it the happy dream, the dream of awakening, and make it a means for the awakening of ourselves and everyone else.