

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 18, Section V

The Happy 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 |
| striketrough blue | = Not in Urtext, in FIP edition |
| highlighted | = key word in this section |

Overview of the Section

What a section this section is, short as it may be! It tells us the three main means that the Holy Spirit uses to save us. It makes incredible promises about the power of our relationships. It clarifies that a holy relationship is still a special relationship. And it gives us a powerful practice to use when it feels as if our relationship is falling apart.

Paragraph 1

1. ¹Prepare you ~~now~~ [not] for the undoing of what never was. ²If you already understood the difference between truth and illusion, the Atonement would have no meaning. ³The holy instant, ~~the~~ [your] holy relationship, the Holy Spirit's teaching, and all the means by which salvation is accomplished, would have no purpose. ⁴For they are all but aspects of the plan to change your dreams of fear to happy dreams, from which you waken easily to knowledge. ⁵Put yourself not in charge of this, for you cannot distinguish between advance and retreat. ⁶Some of your greatest advances you have judged as failures, and some of your deepest retreats you have evaluated as success.

• Study Question •

- The purpose of God's plan is to change our fearful dreams to happy ones, and to free us from illusions. Based on this, what **two** things does this paragraph tell us are mistaken approaches to the holy instant (or to salvation in general)?*
 - Trying to understand the difference between truth and illusion.*
 - Trying to distinguish between our advances and our retreats.*
 - Thinking we must be in charge of the process of salvation.*



In the first sentence I have indicated a crucial change in a single word—actually, a single *letter*. Rather than saying, “Prepare you *now* for the undoing of what never was,” it reads, “Prepare you *not* for the undoing of what never was.”

The previous section has made abundantly clear that we *need not* and *should not prepare* for the holy instant:

You have been wrong in thinking that it is needful to prepare yourself for Him (18.IV.4:3).

The preparation for the holy instant belongs to Him Who gives it. Release yourself to Him Whose function is release. Do not assume His function for Him (T-18.IV.6:5-7).

The transcript of the shorthand notes on miraclesinactionpress.org¹ shows this correction. None of the published versions reflect it, but it just makes sense to me. Why on earth would Jesus suddenly reverse field and, with great emphasis, command us to *prepare* for the holy instant? That would be a blatant contradiction.

In the last section we were told that:

...the past has gone. It never happened in reality. Only in your mind, which thought it did, is its undoing needful (T-18.IV.8:5-7).

Now, we are reminded again *not* to attempt to prepare ourselves for that undoing (1:1). For us, the past is going to be undone, which is possible because it never happened in reality. Our concern is not to be with the past, nor with the future; our concern is right now. In this moment, desire the holy instant and be willing for it.

There is no need for us to figure out the difference between truth and illusion. If we could do that we would not need the Atonement (1:2). None of this would have any meaning. The entire Course would be superfluous (1:3). All the means the Course provides (which we'll discuss more in a moment) are pieces of God's plan to change our dreams from fearful dreams to happy dreams, which lead easily to waking from perception to knowledge (1:4). It's senseless to think we could direct the process because we can't tell the difference between advancing toward the goal or falling away from it (1:5)! From his perspective of higher knowledge, Jesus can tell us that some things we've considered failures were “some of your greatest advances,” and “some of your deepest retreats you have evaluated as success” (1:6). Perhaps you've had the experience of looking back, from the distance of time elapsed, at some past event in your life and seeing it in a completely new light. Something that at the time seemed like a failure or a big mistake is now understood as having opened the door to a new set of opportunities. Or something that seemed like a great victory now turns out to have harmed more than it healed. If even we can see some things in such different ways, I imagine that there are plenty more aspects of my life that I have mistakenly categorized as successes or as failures.

¹ The full URL is http://www.miraclesinactionpress.com/dthomp74/2008/TOOLBOX/1bNOTES_e-text/1bTEXTNOTES_E-TEXT_ch_1_2_31.pdf, page 1603 (bottom).

The point here, however, is that we need to accept our current level of ignorance and not suppose that we cannot experience the holy instant until we understand things better. Bringing us better understanding and more ability to distinguish between truth and illusion is the purpose of the holy instant, the purpose of the Atonement. We don't need any preparation and, in fact, we are incapable of it.

Paragraph 2

2. ¹Never approach the holy instant after **you** have tried to remove all fear and hatred from your mind. ²That is *its* function. ³Never attempt to overlook your guilt **before** you ask the Holy Spirit's help. ⁴That is *His* function. ⁵Your part is only to offer Him a little willingness to **let** Him remove all fear and hatred, and to **be** forgiven. ⁶On your little faith, joined with His understanding, **He** will build your part in the Atonement and make sure that you fulfill it easily. ⁷And with Him, **you** will build a ladder planted in the solid rock of faith, and rising even to Heaven. ⁸Nor will you use it to ascend to Heaven alone.

• Study Question •

2. *The Holy Spirit and the holy instant have their own functions to fulfill in the salvation process, and we have our part. In two columns, list the items identified here as our part in one column, and as the Holy Spirit's (or holy instant's) part in the second column.*



Just to drive home the point: Don't try to purge your mind of fear and hatred and *then* look for a holy instant. It won't happen that way (2:1). Don't try to free yourself from guilt *before* you ask the Holy Spirit's help" (2:3). Removing fear and hatred and releasing us from guilt is what the *holy instant* does—not you (2:2, 2:4). Your part is just being willing for it to happen (2:5).

Adding His understanding to your faith, the Holy Spirit will guide you in finding your part in the Atonement and ensuring that you *do* your part with ease (2:6). The Holy Spirit builds your part; *you* build *a ladder* that rises up to Heaven (2:7). And as you climb that ladder you will take many others with you (2:8). If this seems far-fetched, just remember who Jesus was speaking to: Helen and Bill. And *you* are one of the millions who have read and been affected and helped by the Course they created (with His help). If it was true of them, it can be true of any of us.

The image of the ladder rising to Heaven comes from the book of Genesis in the Bible, in the story of Jacob (Genesis 28:10–17²). There, Jacob dreams of this ladder

² “Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the LORD stood beside him and said, “I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of

whose top reached to Heaven, with the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. God appears to him then, and promises him the land of Israel, and promises him offspring “like the dust of the earth,” offspring in whom “all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” I think that story is in Jesus’ mind here. Just as that ladder in Genesis was the seed out of which the nation of Israel sprang, so now, in Helen and Bill’s relationship, a new seed is planted that, like the promise to Jacob, will bring blessing to countless thousands down through the years. In us “all the families of the earth” will be blessed.

Paragraph 3

3. ¹Through your holy relationship, reborn and blessed in every holy instant you do not arrange, thousands will rise to Heaven with you. ²Can **you** plan for this? ³Or could you prepare **yourself** [*yourselves*] for such a function? ⁴Yet it is possible, because God wills it. ⁵Nor will He change His Mind about it. ⁶The means and purpose **both** belong to Him. ⁷You have accepted one; the other will be provided. ⁸A purpose such as this, without the means, is inconceivable. ⁹He will provide the means to **anyone** who shares His purpose.

• Study Question •

3. *The purpose is our salvation and that of the world; the means are stated in 1:3: the holy instant, our holy relationship, and the Holy Spirit's teaching. Which of the following statements about purpose and means are true? (More than one is correct.)*
- A. *Both means and purpose are provided by God.*
 - B. *We (in our holy relationship) have accepted the purpose already.*
 - C. *The means we need to fulfill this purpose will be provided.*
 - D. *We may accept the purpose but lack the means to fulfill it.*
 - E. *We need to plan carefully how to fulfill our purpose.*
 - F. *It is inconceivable that God would give us this purpose without also giving us the means.*

He continues to paint that picture of thousands rising up to Heaven with you (3:1). This was true of Helen and Bill’s relationship, and it can be true of yours. Their “ladder” was the Course. What will your ladder be?

Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!” And he was afraid, and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.””

(Genesis 28:10–17 NRSV)

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

Notice, though, that *you* do not arrange the holy instants that bring blessing to your relationship (3:1). We have a lofty function: through our holy relationship, empowered by the holy instants that are arranged by the Holy Spirit, thousands will rise to Heaven with us. We could never prepare ourselves for this, or plan for it; that is His function (3:2–3). Even though you cannot figure it out or know how it will all work out, it still is possible because God wills it and is not about to change His mind (3:4–5). He provides the purpose for your relationship, and the means to accomplish that purpose (3:6).

The “purpose” and “means” mentioned here refers to what was said earlier:

The holy instant, your holy relationship, the Holy Spirit's teaching, and all the means by which salvation is accomplished, would have no purpose (1:3).

The purpose includes both our own salvation and that of the world; the means include, among other things, the holy instant, holy relationship, and guidance. In choosing to give your relationship over to the Holy Spirit, you have chosen the purpose as yours; all the necessary means “will be provided” (3:7). To give us the purpose of saving the world *without* the means to do so would be ridiculous—“inconceivable” (3:8), so God “will provide the means to *anyone* who shares His purpose” (3:9). The means will be holy instants as needed, in the context of your holy relationship, and the constant inner teaching and guidance of the Holy Spirit. It all hinges, as we have seen repeatedly, on our willingness to accept His purpose as our own. “Thy will be done.”

Paragraph 4

4. ¹Happy dreams come true, **not** because they are dreams, but only because they are **happy**. ²And so they must be loving. ³Their message is, “Thy Will be done,” and not, “I want it otherwise.” ⁴The alignment of means and purpose is an undertaking impossible for you to understand. ⁵You do not even realize you **have** accepted the Holy Spirit's purpose as your own, and you would merely bring unholy means to its accomplishment. ⁶The little faith it needed to change the purpose is all that is required to receive the means and **use** them.

• Study Question •

4. *Why should we not be concerned about how we can accomplish the purpose or function the Course says has been assigned to us? (Mark two answers.)*
- A. *It's no big deal.*
 - B. *Trying to become responsible for achieving the purpose, we bring unholy means to its accomplishment.*
 - C. *We are likely to want the purpose to be otherwise (something else).*
 - D. *We cannot understand how the means will be used to accomplish the purpose.*

The Course means something by “happy dream” that differs from what we might think (4:1). A happy dream is not one where we get everything we want; that would be the ego's definition, not God's; it would mean we have screamed, “I want it thus!” and we succeeded. The message of the happy dream, rather, is, “Thy Will be done” (4:3). In the happy dream we align with the Truth. We let God be God. We let love be love (4:2). We accept reality as God created it, not as we would remake it.

We are not in a position to understand how the various means coordinate to bring about the purpose of God (4:5). If we decide on our own to try to achieve God's purpose, we will inevitably try to do so with “unholy means” (4:5). This has happened repeatedly in history. Just think of the Inquisition or the Crusades. Think of trying to achieve purity through puritanical rules of behavior. Over and over we've taken our egos as guides on a journey that is supposed to lead to transcendence of the ego.

The only thing required of us is the little faith we need to change the purpose of our relationship. We will then *receive* the means and know how to use them (4:6).

Paragraph 5

5. ¹It is no dream to love your brother as yourself. ²Nor is your holy relationship a dream. ³All that remains of dreams within it is that it is still a **special** relationship. ⁴Yet it is very useful to the Holy Spirit, Who *has* a special function here. ⁵It will become the happy dream through which He can spread joy to thousands on thousands who believe that love is fear, not happiness. ⁶Let Him fulfill the function that He gave to your relationship by accepting it [the function] **for** you, and nothing will be wanting that would make of it what He would have it be.

• Study Question •

5. *This paragraph clearly says that a holy relationship, although holy, still remains a special relationship, but one useful to the Holy Spirit. It is possible (no dream) to love your brother as yourself. How will the Holy Spirit use such a holy relationship?*
- A. *He will use it to spread joy to thousands on thousands who are still caught in the illusion that love is fear rather than happiness.*
 - B. *He will use it to bring us the bliss of a perfect, totally loving relationship.*
 - C. *He will use it to bring many difficult problems that require us to learn forgiveness.*

A holy relationship is no dream (5:2). Loving your brother as yourself is not some idealistic fantasy (5:1). *These things are practical realities*; they are realistic goals, meant to be actually achieved, not just talked about in the abstract.

Although *our* idea of special relationships *is* a dream, impossible of realization, a holy relationship is possible for everyone, including you. A holy relationship isn't just a *really special* special relationship! Yes, it is still a *special* relationship (5:3). Within the dream, an equal relationship with everyone, with every aspect of the Sonship, isn't possible. So in that sense it is still part of the dream. But it isn't something that is out of our reach, an impossible dream. A holy relationship is really nothing more than loving your brother as yourself. It's something within reach of everyone.

The Holy Spirit finds our special relationships very useful when we accept the function He has given to them. He takes the specific situation of the relationship and uses it to teach love everywhere, to teach that love is happiness, not fear. Literally thousands of people have joyfully learned this lesson from the Course and from those who live by it. If we accept our function, "nothing will be wanting" to use our relationship as an instrument of joy in the world (5:4–6).

Paragraph 6

6. ¹When you feel the holiness of your relationship is threatened by anything, stop instantly and offer the Holy Spirit your willingness, **in spite** of fear, to let Him exchange this instant for the holy one that you would rather have. ²He will never fail in this. ³But forget not that your relationship is one, and so it must be that whatever threatens the peace of one is an equal threat to the other. ⁴The power of joining [**and**] its blessing ~~lies~~ [**lie**] in the fact that it is now impossible ~~for you or your brother~~ [**for either of you**] to experience fear alone, or to attempt to deal with it alone. ⁵Never believe that this is necessary, or even possible. ⁶Yet just as this is impossible, so is it equally impossible that the holy instant come to either of you **without** the other. ⁷And it will come to **both** at the request of either.

• Study Question •

6. What two things are said to be impossible?

As he said in paragraph 3, holy relationships need to be continually “reborn and blessed” through holy instants that the Holy Spirit arranges for us. Here, he gets very practical, and shows how this teaching can show up in our experience.

What are we to do when we find our relationship being disturbed by unholy thoughts and feelings? That certainly happens, so what can we do about it? Precise instructions follow in some detail, but the main points are very simple (6:1):

- Stop instantly.
- Offer your willingness to exchange this instant for a holy instant.

To me, this clearly implies taking a moment to get quiet and pray. The “stop instantly” part is a very general instruction, and I think it applies to absolutely everything. Stop talking. Stop taking action. Stop blaming, manipulating, trying to set boundaries, or *whatever*. Stop trying to solve the problem. Just *stop*, get quiet, and connect with the Holy Spirit. Don’t try to suppress your fear (or any other emotions—remember, no preparation is needed); just stop and pray.

If we do this, Jesus asserts that the Holy Spirit “will never fail in this” (6:2). This practice, then, has Jesus’ written guarantee.

Part of what we are learning in a holy relationship is that our “relationship is one”; therefore, if you feel your peace is being threatened, so does the other person (6:3). When two people join together in common purpose with the Holy Spirit, I believe something happens. There is a joining together in such a way that “it is now impossible for either of you to experience fear alone” (6:4). Not only so, it is also impossible for either of you “to attempt to deal with [fear] alone” (6:4). You never have to be on your own again, and in fact you can’t (6:5). And for the same reason, neither one of you can experience a holy instant without the other (6:6). It does not matter which one of you requests a holy instant from the Holy Spirit, “it will come to *both* at the request of either” (6:7).

Paragraph 7

7. ¹Whoever is saner at the time the threat is perceived should remember how deep is his indebtedness to the other and how much gratitude is due him, and be glad that he can pay his debt by bringing happiness to both. ²Let him remember this, and say:

³I desire this holy instant for myself, that I may share it with my brother, whom I love.

⁴It is not possible that I can have it without him, or he without me.

*⁵Yet it is wholly possible for us to share it **now**.*

*⁶And so I choose this instant as the one to offer to the Holy Spirit, that His blessing may descend on us, and keep us **both** in peace.*

• Study Question •

7. *Paragraphs 6 and 7. Being as brief and concise as possible, summarize what we are asked to do whenever we feel the holiness of our relationship is threatened. Use only one or two sentences to convey only the main points.*



Because the holy instant can come to both at the request of either party, “whoever is saner at the time” should just do it (7:1)! Here, the mutual nature of the holy relationship seems to be bypassed. It is an internal process carried out *by one person*. It works in the context of a holy relationship because of the common purpose that is at the basis of the relationship, as the previous paragraph explained. The parties in the relationship are so joined that they cannot experience fear alone, cannot deal with fear alone, and cannot experience the holy instant alone. It may *seem* as if only one person—the saner of the two—is stopping to pray, but the two are not really “two” any more; they are one.

So now we are given an expanded form of the practice, an affirmative prayer that we can pray when our relationship is troubled in any way. In 2002, Robert Perry presented an entire weekend workshop based on this practice! He put together a wonderful graphic that brings out the rich meaning in every line, and I’d like to share that with you.

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

| THE PRACTICE | ACIM APPROACH | EGO'S APPROACH |
|---|---|--|
| <i>I desire this holy instant for myself,</i> | I rise above the battleground by momentarily <i>forgetting</i> the specific issue and experiencing a holy instant. | I try to solve the conflict on its level, by fixing the outer issue. I stay on the battleground. |
| <i>that I may share it with my brother,</i> | I heal my experience of the conflict as a gift to both of us, out of love for my brother. | I change your mind so that <i>your</i> change can alleviate the conflict between us. |
| <i>whom I love.</i> | I remember that my love for you is more important than this issue, and that my love has the power to heal it. | This current issue becomes, for the time being, more important than the love between us. |
| <i>It is not possible that I can have it without him, or he without me.</i> | I remember that our interests are the same. If either of us are to experience Heaven now, we will have to go there together. | I assume that our interests are in conflict, which means that one or both of us must lose, or that we must somehow accommodate our warring interests. |
| <i>Yet it is wholly possible for us to share it now.</i> | I remember that, even though we seem to be in hell, we truly can unite in Heaven <i>now</i> . I trust that you can do that with me. | I assume that until this outer form is fixed, we have to both stay in hell. Even if I decide to walk to Heaven, I don't trust you to go there with me. |
| <i>And so I choose this instant as the one to offer to the Holy Spirit,</i> | Remembering this, I come to a decision. I don't have to wait for outer resolution. I am not trapped by the issue's past. I can choose a holy instant <i>now</i> . | I am powerless to be at peace now. I have to wait until the outer issue is solved and the past is redressed. |
| <i>that His blessing may descend on us,</i> | Without His help we will be stuck in conflict. With His help, we can share a holy instant. | I can handle this. If I let the Holy Spirit in, He may get in the way of this thing being solved the way it ought to be. |
| <i>and keep us both in peace.</i> | The miracle restores us to a peace that is not dependent on the resolution of this issue, a peace that has an eternal basis. This peace <i>is</i> the solution, for the real problem was thinking that our peace and our unity were tied to this issue. | I would love us to both have peace, but we simply can't until you change and this conflict is resolved. Our peace and our unity are at the mercy of this specific issue. |

Answer Key

1. A and C
2.

| Our Part | His Part |
|--|---|
| Offer a little willingness to let Him remove our fear and hatred | Removing fear and hatred from our mind. |
| To be forgiven | Overlooking our guilt |
| Faith | His understanding |
| Fulfilling our part in the Atonement | Building (planning) our part in Atonement |
3. A, B, C, F
4. B and D
5. A
6. It is impossible to experience fear alone (without our relationship partner), and it is impossible that the holy instant could come to either one without coming to the other.
7. We are asked to stop instantly and offer the Holy Spirit our willingness to experience a mutual holy instant with our brother.