

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 18, Section VI

Paragraphs 8 to 14

Beyond the Body

Legend:

blue text = Material from ACIM 3rd edition (FIP)

italic blue text = words emphasized in all caps in Urtext

bold sans serif text = alternate or omitted material from the Urtext

light blue text = editorial comments

~~strikethrough blue text~~ = Not in Urtext, in FIP edition

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.

The first 7 paragraphs have presented the ego's insane perception of the body as a prison, separating us from other minds, and as our scapegoat that we use both to carry out our fantasies of attack, and to bear the brunt of punishment for our guilt, in the form of sickness, pain, and death. We feel trapped, yet are unwilling escape if it means we must stop punishing our bodies.

Now, we enter into a new way of understanding the body and its relationship to mind, and we are given a specific practice that will enable us to go beyond the body to union with other minds.

Paragraph 8

8. ¹Yet only thus *can* you escape. ²The home of vengeance is not yours; the place you set aside to house your hate is *not* a prison, but an *illusion of yourself*. ³The body is a limit imposed on the universal communication that is an eternal property of mind. ⁴But the communication is *internal*. ⁵Mind reaches to *itself*. ⁶It is *not* made up of different parts, which reach each other. ⁷It does not go *out*. ⁸Within *itself* it *has* no limits, and there is nothing *outside* it. ⁹It encompasses *everything*. ¹⁰It encompasses you *entirely*; you within it and it within you. ¹¹There *is* nothing else, anywhere or ever.

• Study Question •

1. *The latter part of this paragraph clarifies the discussion of an earlier paragraph. Which paragraph?*

“Only thus” refers to the end of Paragraph 7, which declares that we are hesitant, even unwilling, to escape from our bodies if it means giving up our use of the body as a scapegoat. We don’t want to let it off the hook (“leaving it unharmed”) and free of the guilt we have tried to project onto it (7:7). But the *only way* to escape from the bondage of the body is just that: to remove our projections of guilt, and to stop *punishing* it for that guilt (8:1). Our bodies, which we have seen as homes for our vengeance, are not *our* home. We are not imprisoned in them, because our bodies are only *illusions* of ourselves (8:2).

The body is not a prison, but only an illusion of yourself that seems to limit communication (8:3). Yet communication is “an eternal property of mind.” It does not reach *out* (in which case the body could stop it), but rather *in* (8:4–5), to mind itself (8:5). Communication is internal to the mind because mind is one; it has no “different parts, which reach each other” (8:6). There is no “out” to go to (8:7)! “There is nothing *outside* it. It encompasses *everything*” (8:8–9), and within the mind there are no limits.

You are within mind entirely, and yet, paradoxically, mind is within you (8:10). Mind is *all there is*; “there is nothing else, anywhere or ever” (8:11). As we were told in 1:1: “There is nothing outside you.” If you are within mind, and mind within you, and you must *be* mind, and therefore there is nothing else beside *you*, anywhere or ever. This is what we are learning. The Workbook restates it quite clearly:

What has been given you? The knowledge that you are a mind, in Mind and purely mind, sinless forever, wholly unafraid, because you were created out of Love (W-pl.158.1:1-2).

Ideally there should be perfect communication within the One Mind. The body limits that universal communication, even though it communication is an “eternal property of mind” (8:3). Therefore, we must learn to go *beyond* the body in order to rediscover this universal communication.

Paragraph 9

9. ¹The body is *outside* you, and but *seems* to surround you [it doesn’t really surround you], shutting you off from others and keeping you *apart* from them, and them from you. ²*It is not there.* ³There is no barrier between God and His Son, nor can His Son be separated from Himself except in illusions. ⁴This is *not* his reality, though he believes it is. ⁵Yet this could only *be* if God were wrong. ⁶God would have had to create *differently*, and to have separated *Himself* from His Son to make this possible. ⁷He would have had to create *different* things, and to establish different *orders* of reality, only *some* of which were love. ⁸Yet love must be forever like itself, changeless forever, and forever *without*

alternative. ⁹And so it is. ¹⁰You cannot put a barrier around yourself, because God placed none between *Himself* and you.

• Study Question •

2. *This paragraph describes how God would have had to create if He created the body. It describes several things He would have had to create. Which of the following is not one of these things?*
- A. *He would have had to create differently.*
 - B. *He would have had to separate Himself from His creation.*
 - C. *He would have had to create different things*
 - D. *He would have had to create orders of reality.*
 - E. *He would have had to create only some orders that were love.*
 - F. *He would have had to create time.*

Continuing the same line of thought, Jesus emphasizes that our experience of the body is filled with deception and illusion. “The body... but *seems* to surround you” (9:1), in more informal language, means, “Your experience of the body as outside of you, with you *in* the body, is false. It only *seems* to surround you and separate you from others in their bodies.” The fact that Jesus has said so clearly that there is *nothing* outside of us makes it certain that when he says, in sentence 1, “The body is *outside* you,” he means to indicate that our experience of an external body is only an illusion. The next sentence makes it certain: In reality *the body is not there* (9:2)! Separation in the Sonship, or between God and His Son, is impossible, or possible only in illusions, *no matter what we believe* (9:3–4). That we *believe* we are separate is certain. That we are truly separate is *impossible*.

Now I realize that believing my body isn't there is rather difficult! Jesus knows it, too; in Chapter 27 he says, "No one believes there really was a time when he knew nothing of a body, and could never have conceived this world as real. " (T-27. VIII.5:5). We have produced the perfect illusion, so good that it seems inconceivable that it isn't real. The Course repeatedly insists that we are not bodies, we are not *in* bodies, and that the body simply isn't real. See paragraph 5 in Lesson 72 for instance, or paragraph 4 of Text Chapter 27, Section VI. Jesus is aware that this message can be disturbing and even off-putting. He says, "There is a wariness that is aroused by learning that the body is not real" (T-29. Int.8:6). Yet he insists on it.

I believe we need to hold this lesson lightly. We all must learn it, but there is no rush, no pressure. Eventually, we all *will* learn it. For now, *of course* the body seems real to you, and to me. In fact, in this world it is nearly impossible to truly deny the body's existence, and trying to deny it is a self-defeating strategy:

"The body is merely part of your experience in the physical world. Its abilities can be and frequently are overevaluated. However, it is almost impossible to deny its existence in this world. Those who do so are engaging in a particularly unworthy

form of denial. The term "unworthy" here implies only that it is not necessary to protect the mind by denying the unmindful. If one denies this unfortunate aspect of the mind's power, one is also denying the power itself" (T-2. IV.3:8-13).

The idea here is that attempting to deny the existence of the body in this world results in a denial of the power of our mind, since the body is a projection of the mind. If you deny the body you are denying the power of the mind that made it. So it isn't necessary to arrive at a full and complete acceptance of the body's unreality. What is asked is that we move in that direction. So, let us consider the rest of the paragraph and the logical argument it makes for the unreality of the body.

For the body to be your reality, God would have to be wrong (9:5). It is not clear *what* God would be wrong *about*. I think it probably means what is expressed in the sentences that follow: God Himself would have had to creation separation, separating Himself from His creations (9:6). For the body to be your reality, God would have had to "establish different *orders* of reality, only *some* of which were love" (9:7). In other words, for the body to be real, it must have been created *by God*. The Course explicitly denies this:

God did not make the body, because it is destructible, and therefore not of the Kingdom. The body is the symbol of what you think you are. It is clearly a separation device, and therefore does not exist (T-6. V.2:1-3).

But, for love to be love, it must be unchanging, and *without alternative* (9:8). Love and nothing but love, forever and forever. Think about that for a moment. For love to be love, it must be unchanging. Shakespeare saw this, and in his Sonnet 116, he wrote:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. **Love is not love**
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no; it is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests, and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

If love stopped loving when I made a mistake or wandered, it would not be love at all. The only love that is real is love that is unconditional. “Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds.” And—face it—that isn’t compatible with identifying with your body. The only way to love unconditionally is to identify with eternal, changeless spirit, which *cannot be injured in any way*. If bodies are what we are, and someone destroys another body, how could we ever forgive them and continue to love?

Maybe I’m going too far here; maybe you can’t agree. But this is how it seems to me. I ask you at least to consider it.

The paragraph completes by asserting, “And so it is” (9:9); that is, love *is* “forever like itself, changeless forever, and forever *without* alternative” (9:8). God *did not* create separation by placing some kind of barrier between Himself and you, and it is not possible for you to do so, either (9:10).

Paragraph 10

10. ~~¹You can stretch out your hand~~ **[Your hand can stretch out,]** and reach to Heaven. ~~²You whose hand is joined with your brother's~~ **[You whose hands are joined]** have begun to reach *beyond* the body, but *not* outside yourself **[yourselves]**, to reach your shared Identity *together*. ³Could This **[shared Identity]** be *outside* you? ⁴Where God is not? ⁵Is *He* a body, and did He create

you as He is not, and where He *cannot* be? ⁶You are surrounded *only* by Him.
⁷What limits *can* there be on you whom *He* encompasses?

• **Study Question** •

3. *This paragraph makes a very odd statement, given the previous paragraphs. The first line says, "You can stretch out your hand and reach to Heaven." If God did not create bodies, how can your body's hand reach to Heaven?*
- A. *The word "hand" is used figuratively here. It more or less means "mind."*
 - B. *The Course is being poetic. It really means that Heaven is very close and accessible.*
 - C. *"Hand" does refer to your physical hand. By reaching out your hand to your brother you are reaching to Heaven.*

What *is* possible for you is to stretch your hand out and reach to Heaven (10:1)! Perhaps that sounds even more impossible than believing that the body does not exist, but in fact it is very simple. All that is necessary is to reach out your hand to take the hand of another, that is, to join with another in common purpose. When we unite our minds and hearts (which is what joining hands symbolizes), we have “begun to reach *beyond* the body...to reach your shared Identity *together*” (10:2). Our shared Identity is, of course, the Christ.

Christ is God's Son as He created Him. He is the Self we share, uniting us with one another, and with God as well (W-pII.6.1:1-2).

Notice how Jesus points out that going beyond the body does *not* mean going outside yourself! He asks, rhetorically, “Could This [the shared Identity] be *outside* you? Where God is not?” (10:3–4). To say that our Identity was outside of us would make no sense whatsoever! But the body does, somehow, seem to be outside of our self; to be something we inhabit, like a suit of clothes. The point here, I think, is that *our Identity is not physical* at all. God created us, and He did not create us as bodies. God isn't a body, and cannot be contained in a body (10:5). You are surrounded not by a body, but by God (10:6). God is infinite, and, “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). The body seems to limit us, but limiting what is encompassed *only* by the infinite God simply is not possible (10:7). As the Unity song has it: “I am free. I am unlimited.” Or the Workbook: “I am not a body. I am free” (Workbook Lesson 199 and 46 other places in the Workbook).

Now, then, Jesus is going to explore what it means to “go beyond the body.”

Paragraph 11

11. ¹Everyone has experienced what he would call a sense of being transported *beyond* himself. ²This feeling of liberation *far* exceeds the *dream* of

freedom sometimes hoped for in special relationships. ³It is a sense of *actual* escape from limitations. ⁴If you will consider what this “transportation” *really* entails, you will realize that it is a sudden *unawareness* of the body, and a joining of yourself and *something else* in which your mind *enlarges* to encompass it. ⁵It becomes *part* of you, as you *unite* with it. ⁶And *both* become whole, as *neither* is perceived as separate. ⁷What *really* happens is that you have *given up* the illusion of a *limited* awareness, and lost your fear of union. ⁸The love that *instantly* replaces it *extends* to what has freed you, and *unites* with it. ⁹And while this lasts you are *not* uncertain of your Identity, and would not limit It. ¹⁰You have escaped from fear to peace, asking no questions of reality, but merely *accepting* it. ¹¹You have accepted this *instead* of the body, and have *let* yourself be *one* with something beyond it, simply by *not* letting your mind be limited by it.

• Study Question •

4. Please write a brief paragraph (either true or fictional) in which someone experiences a specific example of the type of experience this paragraph is describing.

Paragraphs 11–13 are a beautiful description of a kind of holy instant, in which you unite with "something else." When he asserts that *everyone* has experienced a sense of being transported *beyond* himself, I believe he is speaking of very common (“everyone”) experiences, moments of liberation from the prison of our tiny self, such as momentarily losing yourself in the beauty of nature or of music, forgetting the present in a wonderful memory, or—something many Course students can relate to—being overwhelmed with wonder at the perfect expression of a holy idea. Those moments can come, as well, in gazing into the eyes of a beloved person: child, parent, or partner. As Stephen Levine puts it in his book, *Embracing the Beloved*, you suddenly see The Beloved in your beloved.

But these moments go far beyond our fantasies of romantic relationships; “It is a sense of *actual* escape from limitations” (11:2–3). It is a moment of love without reservation. Your heart opens completely to what has drawn you out and you feel swallowed up in it, completely without fear. People speak of being “transported” by the music, the art, or the beauty of a flower or of the sunset. Jesus asks us to “consider what this ‘transportation’ *really* entails” (11:4). I invite you, as you read, to do just that. Try to call to mind some moment in your life when you felt transported out of yourself by *something*, no matter what, be it heavenly or mundane, and then allow yourself to analyze that experience for a moment.

Did you notice that, for that moment, you were suddenly *unaware* of your body (11:4)? Your mind seemed to expand, to join with and “encompass” the object of your attraction (11:4). You literally allow it, for that moment, to be experienced as *part of you*; your being reaches out to unite with it (11:5). For that moment you have no sense of

separation between you and what was, a moment ago, “other” (11:6). The fact that everyone has such experiences proves that the mind *can* escape the body, purely by an inward action.

Here's the key point: “What *really* happens is that you have *given up* the illusion of a *limited* awareness, and lost your fear of union” (11:7). Nothing is being added to you, really. There is no actual “joining” with something, because *you are always already one with it*. You simply let go of your belief in your limited self, and lost your fear of joining with something you have perceived as “not me.” When fear is gone, love “*instantly* replaces it” and goes out to the thing that freed you and *unites* with it (11:8). The removal of the artificial barrier allows you to experience the union. As the Introduction to the Text says, you have removed the block to your awareness of love, love that is “your natural inheritance,” always there.

It may happen only for a short time before you fall back into fear and limitation, but “while this lasts you are *not* uncertain of your Identity, and would not limit it” (11:9). Experiencing Oneness with something that is apparently “beyond the body” doesn't feel like you have lost your identity; rather, you are experiencing (in part) your true Identity, which is one with everything. You are merely accepting reality (11:10) instead of accepting your body as your self. You have not allowed yourself to be limited by the body, and have “*let yourself be one* with something beyond it” (11:11).

Paragraph 12

12. ¹This can occur *regardless* of the physical distance that *seems* to be between you and what you join; of your respective positions in space; and of your differences in size and seeming quality. ²Time is not relevant; it can occur with something past, present or anticipated. ³The “something” can be *anything* and *anywhere*; a sound, a sight, a thought, a memory, and even a *general* idea *without* specific reference. ⁴Yet in every case, you join it without *reservation* because you love it, and would *be* with it. ⁵And so you rush to meet it, letting your limits melt away, suspending *all* the “laws” your body obeys and gently *setting them aside*.

• Study Question •

5. *True or false: This something else that you join with has to be something you can see in your physical vicinity right now.*

There are some further lessons to be learned from our common, everyday experiences of going beyond the body. Physical distance does not seem to matter (12:1); you can join with something or someone regardless of where they are, and regardless of size or quality. You can experience oneness with a whale, with the entire planet Earth as seen from space, or with a young person in India posting on Facebook.

“Time is not relevant” either (12:2). I’ve had that sense of oneness with my great grandmother when I was studying genealogical records about her, and saw the amazing way she transformed herself from a farmer’s widow into a school teacher, starting a stream of education that flowed down the generations to me. I’ve had it reflecting on the relationships of Jesus with his disciples, female as well as male. And as Jesus says here, you may even experience this “transportation” while anticipating something still in the future.

And this is not limited to people or to some form of art or to nature: “The ‘something’ can be *anything* and *anywhere*; a sound, a sight, a thought, a memory, and even a *general* idea *without* specific reference” (12:3). For instance, you might become transported with the thought of love, or a principle of quantum physics!

The common factor in every instance is that you join with something without reservation; you love it, and want to *be* with it (12:4). So you *do*. You release all your limits, you forget the supposed “laws” of time, space, size, or differences, and you *join* with that “something” (12:5). When you join with this something else you suspend all the laws the body would obey, as if they didn’t exist, *because they don’t*.

Paragraph 13

13. ¹There is no violence at all in this escape. ²The body is *not* attacked, but simply *properly perceived*. ³It does not limit you, merely because *you* would not have it so. ⁴You are not really “lifted out” of it; it cannot *contain* you. ⁵You go where you would be, *gaining, not* losing, a sense of **Self [self]**. ⁶In these instants of release from physical restrictions, you experience much of what happens in the holy instant; the lifting of the barriers of time and space, the sudden experience of peace and joy, and, above all, the *lack* of awareness of the body, and **[the lack]** of the questioning *whether or not all this is possible*.

• Study Question •

6. *This paragraph says, "In these instants of release... you experience much of what happens in the holy instant...." What do you think--are these instants of release holy instants?*
- A. *Yes.*
 - B. *No--you do not experience everything that happens in the holy instant.*
 - C. *They sound like partial holy instants, in which you experience some but not all of what happens in a full-blown holy instant.*
-

This is not a violent “breaking out” from the body or an attack on the laws of the body. All that is happening is that you are, for this moment, *properly perceiving* the body (13:1–2). Simply because you *do not want* to be limited by the body, *you aren’t* limited (13:3). You have perceived the truth about the body, that it *does not limit you*. You aren’t

actually transported anywhere or “lifted out” of the body. You have just recognized and accepted (for the moment) that the body *cannot contain you* (13:4). So, wherever or whenever you want to go, you just go. Your sense of self is *enlarged* rather than diminished (13:5).

At this point, Jesus relates the kind of experience he has been talking about to the holy instant. These experiences are not exactly what he means by a holy instant, because he said in them, “you experience *much of what happens in the holy instant*” (13:6). Much, but not all. Robert Perry has referred to them as “quasi-holy instants.” The elements they have in common with the holy instant are:

- the lifting of the barriers of time and space
- the sudden experience of peace and joy
- the *lack* of awareness of the body
- the lack of the questioning *whether or not all this is possible*

I don't want to skip a certain two words in that final sentence: “above all.” A lack of awareness of the body is, apparently, the preeminent characteristic of the quasi-holy instant and therefore, presumably, of the holy instant itself. It makes sense, because these instants entail the experience of freedom from bodily limitations, and the breaking of body-identification. Early in the Text, Jesus makes this a prime characteristic of *miracles*:

Miracles praise God through you. They praise Him by honoring His creations, affirming their perfection. They heal because they deny body-identification and affirm spirit-identification (T-1. I.29:1-3).

The holy instant is where miracles live: “The holy instant is the miracle's abiding place” (T-27. V.3:1); naturally, they share similar characteristics. To remember who we truly are it is essential to go beyond the body.

Up until now he had not mentioned that last point about not questioning the possibility of such moments of feeling transported, but if you think about them, it fits, doesn't it? When such moments happen to us, we are not amazed that they happen, and we don't doubt that such moments are possible and will happen again. And if we can have such experiences about sunsets and birds and Beethoven or the Beatles, surely we can have them in regard to God and to the holiness in one another!

Paragraph 14

14. ¹*It is possible because you want it.* ²The sudden *expansion* of awareness that takes place with your *desire* for it is the irresistible appeal the holy instant holds. ³It calls to you to be yourself, within its safe embrace. ⁴There are the laws of limit lifted *for* you, to welcome you to openness of mind and freedom. ⁵Come to this place of refuge, where you can be yourself in peace. ⁶*Not* through destruction, *not* through a ~~breaking out~~ **["breaking out"]**, but merely by a quiet ~~melting in~~ **["melting in"]**. ⁷For peace will join you there, simply because *you* have been willing to let go the limits *you* have placed upon love, and *joined* it where it is and where it led you, in answer to its gentle call to be at peace.

• Study Question •

7. Please summarize this (complex) section in about a paragraph, focusing on two things: the mind using the body as a prison and the mind escaping the body's limits in instants of release.

In fact, experiencing the holy instant “*is possible because you want it*” (14:1). It’s intriguing to realize that “the irresistible appeal” of the holy instant is produced by “the sudden *expansion* of awareness that takes place with your *desire*” for the holy instant (14:2). It is our *desire* that makes the experience possible! In the holy instant we recognize a “call...to be yourself, within its safe embrace” (14:3). We awaken to our own call from within.¹ We experience freedom from the laws of limit. We are at home, our minds open to the fullness of our shared Identity (14:4). Here, at last, *I am myself*, or rather, *I am my Self*.

Paragraph 14 closes the section with a plea to transcend the body’s limits and come to the holy instant (14:5). We come to the holy instant, this “place of refuge,” “Not through destruction, not through a breaking out, but merely by a quiet melting in” (14:6) That is very descriptive of the “meditation technique” given in the Workbook—a kind of sinking down into oneself. There is no striving and struggle here, but a relaxing, a falling back into God’s arms, a kind of letting go.

You don’t have to break out of your body, you simply open your mind.

You allow yourself to join with your brother or your sister; you recognize your oneness. Peace joins with you because you have joined *it* “where it is and where it led you.” “You have been willing to let go of the limits *you* have placed upon love,” and have answered love’s “gentle call to be at peace” (14:7). This expanded awareness, this freedom from limits, this enhanced experience of Self, and this joy and peace *are* what you want! Why not choose them *now*? “*It is possible because you want it*” (14:1).

¹ "You will awaken to your own call, for the Call to awake is within you" (T-11. VI.9:1).

Answer Key

8. Paragraph 1

9. F

10. C

11. Story needs to incorporate ideally:

- --unawareness of the body
- --joining with something else
- --mind enlarging to encompass this something.
- --it becomes part of you
- --both become whole since neither is separate
- --love replaces fear of union
- --certain of Identity
- --not let your mind be limited by body

12. False

13. C

14. *My summary:* In the reality of Heaven there is nothing outside of you. You think the body has caused others to be outside of you. But you are really blaming it for your decision to separate and for the attacks you had it carry out. You go beyond the body by realizing it cannot contain you and by *desiring* the mind-expanding experience of joining with something or someone you at first perceive as “other.”