

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 19, Section IV(A)i

The Obstacles to Peace

The First Obstacle: Your Desire to Get Rid of It

The Attraction of Guilt

Legend:

Sans serif text = Material from ACIM 3rd edition (FIP)

Italic sans serif text = words emphasized in all caps in Urtext

Sans serif text = alternate or omitted material from the Urtext

Typewriter text = editorial comments

~~sans serif text~~ = Not in Urtext, in FIP edition

Summary of Things So Far

As we move on to the sub-section of the discussion of this first obstacle, let's summarize what we've learned so far.

It starts with two or more people who were engaged in an ego-based relationship, which is dedicated to sin. It is a dumping ground for old guilt and a hot-house that nurtures new guilt. But these people have experienced a holy instant in which they joined together in a common, holy purpose. At that moment, the Holy Spirit entered their relationship, and planted peace at its heart. The belief in sin was uprooted at that time. Instead, peace was planted there, deep in their unconscious mind. Now, this peace seeks to rise to the surface of the relationship, bringing tranquility to the partners in the relationship and then extending beyond them to the entire Sonship.

But there are obstacles. A remnant of their dedication to sin still remains. This interferes with the progress of peace in their relationship. Still being attracted to guilt, they unconsciously attempt to get rid of the peace. One form of this is their tendency to look for sin in the world, something to condemn. This seems to happen more randomly than before, causing them to wonder if their ego is even more in control. But the erratic nature of this judgment is really evidence that the belief in sin that really has been uprooted.

Overview of the Sub-Section

Nevertheless, the habit of looking for sin in the world needs to be dealt with. For this reason, the subsection, titled “The Attraction to Guilt,” sets forth the choice:

Will we look for evidence of sin or evidence of love?

Paragraph 10

10. ¹The attraction of guilt produces fear of love, for love would *never* look on guilt at all. ²It is the *nature* of love to look upon *only* the truth, for there it sees itself, with which it would unite in holy union and completion. ³As love must look past fear, so must fear see love not. ⁴For love contains the *end* of guilt, as surely as fear *depends* on it. ⁵Love is attracted *only* to love. ⁶Overlooking guilt completely, *it sees no fear*. ⁷Being wholly without attack, it *could* not be afraid. ⁸Fear is attracted to what love sees *not*, and each believes that what the other looks upon does not exist. ⁹Fear looks on guilt with just the same devotion that love looks on itself. ¹⁰And each has messengers which it sends forth, and which return to it with messages written in the language in which their going forth was asked.

• Study Question •

1. *Arrange the following phrases into two lists, according to which emotion they describe, fear or love.*
 - A. *Devoted to guilt*
 - B. *Overlooks guilt completely*
 - C. *Sees only love*
 - D. *Cannot see love*
 - E. *Sends forth messengers which return with what was asked for*

It seems strange that we would fear love, or desire to get rid of peace. The reason we do so is that the ego is attracted to guilt (10:1).

When love looks through our eyes, it does not see guilt at all (10:1)! Love sees *only* the truth. When we look with divine love on another person we *see* only love, and love within us wants to unite with that love “in holy union and completion” (10:2).

Love does not see fear, nor does fear see love; they are invisible to one another (10:3). Why? Because fear *depends* on guilt (10:4), and when I am governed by love I cannot perceive another person as sinful and guilty; I see them as innocent. Mistaken, perhaps; calling for love, or needing the correction of the Holy Spirit; but *not* guilty. When I fail to see guilt in someone, I am no longer afraid of them. So love does not see fear.

Likewise, fear cannot see love. If I see love in another person, fear would have no cause! “Love contains the *end* of guilt” (10:4) and therefore the end of fear. Only love

attracts love (10:5). Seeing no guilt, it sees no fear (10:6). A mind filled with love cannot even conceive of attack, and therefore it cannot harbor fear (10:7).

Fear, on the other hand, is drawn to everything that love *does not* see, such as guilt and attack. Fear does not believe that love exists; love does not believe that sin, guilt, or attack exist (10:8).

The ego and fear are identical: “The ego is quite literally a fearful thought” (T-5.V.3:7), and fear depends on guilt (10:4), which is why it is attracted to it. Love overlooks guilt, and contains the end of guilt; since we are attracted to guilt, we therefore fear love.

Both of them send out messengers, looking for what they *want to find* (10:10). Love is looking for love everywhere—and finding it. Fear is looking for fear, sin, guilt, and attack everywhere—and finding them.

Paragraph 11

11. ¹Love's messengers are gently sent, and return with messages of love and gentleness. ²The messengers of fear are harshly ordered to seek out guilt, and cherish every scrap of evil and of sin that they can find, losing none of them on pain of death, and laying them respectfully before their lord and master. ³Perception cannot obey two masters, each asking for messages of different things in different languages. ⁴What fear would feed upon, love overlooks. ⁵What fear *demand*s, love cannot even see. ⁶The fierce attraction that guilt holds for fear is wholly absent from love's gentle perception. ⁷What love would look upon is meaningless to fear, and quite invisible.

• Study Question •

2. (a) *What do fear's messengers look for (three things)?*
- (b) *What does fear do with the guilt that is brought to it?*

The “messengers” appear to be our perceptions (see 11:3), which are given different instructions as to what to look for by what sends them, fear or love. Our loving perceptions look with gentleness on everyone, and show us love and gentleness wherever we look (11:1). Our fearful perceptions are harsh, looking for guilt, evil, and sin. In their harshness, these perception are determined to leave no faults hidden. They bring back these messages to their master, the ego. The phrase, “losing none of them on pain of death” (11:2) to me portrays the terror we have of failing to notice all the faults and “sins” of the people we associate with; we're afraid if we don't we will be in danger of death. Our guard is always up.

Perception cannot possibly “obey two masters” such as these, whose instructions are diametrically opposite to one another (11:3). Perception guided by fear will interpret things one way, while perception guided by love will perceive things completely differently. Fear demands guilt and feeds on it; love overlooks it, and in fact “cannot even

see” it (11:4–5). The love and innocence that love seeks is “meaningless...and quite invisible” to fear (11:6–7).

The two options presented here are polar opposites, but both follow the general rule that you always see what you are looking for, or what you expect to see. Elsewhere, the Course states this rule like this:

"You see what you expect, and you expect what you invite. Your perception is the result of your invitation, coming to you as you sent for it" (T-12.VII.5:1-2).

Perhaps you can think of some examples from your own life where you have seen what you expected to see, and overlooked something you did not expect to see. Sometimes, you see what you expected to see even when what you expected to see was not really there! The course is saying that when we see guilt or attack that’s exactly what is happening; those things do not exist in reality. You may also have experienced the flip side: Someone sees in you something that simply is not there, or fails to see your good will because they are looking for your faults instead.

Paragraph 12

12. ¹Relationships in this world are the result of how the world is seen. ²And this depends on which emotion was called on to send its messengers to look upon it, and return with word of what they saw. ³Fear’s messengers are trained through terror, and they tremble when their master calls on them to serve him. ⁴For fear is merciless even to its friends. ⁵Its messengers steal guiltily away in hungry search of guilt, for they are kept cold and starving and made very vicious by their master, who allows them to feast only upon what they return to him. ⁶No little shred of guilt escapes their hungry eyes. ⁷And in their savage search for sin they pounce on any living thing they see, and carry it screaming to their master, to be devoured.

• Study Question •

3. *Paragraphs 12 and 13. The imagery of fear’s messengers (called “dogs of fear” in 15:6) is carried out with graphic, gruesome detail in these two paragraphs. What kind of relationship will result from seeing the world in this way?*
- A. *One in which we hide from one another.*
 - B. *One in which we pounce on every symptom of guilt and sin in each other.*
 - C. *One in which we are basically afraid of each other.*
 - D. *One in which we are afraid to acknowledge love in the other person.*
 - E. *All of the above.*

The quality of our relationships is determined by how we see the world, and how we see the world depends on whether our perception is governed by fear or by love. What “messengers” are we sending out (12:1–2)?

If you read through this paragraph, you can see in it a picture something like a rich person with hunting dogs. This person is a cruel, vicious master, who mistreats his dogs and trains them with terror. He whips them, beats them, and punishes them until they “tremble when their master calls on them” (12:3). He keeps them cold and starving until they become vicious. The only food they get is what they hunt down and bring to him. They attack “any living thing they see, and carry it screaming to their master” (12:7). The master is even nasty to his own friends! This is an awful person!

Notice the first word in sentence 3, however: “*Fear’s* messengers...”. The master is fear. And the messengers, as we saw in 11:3, are our perceptions. So it is our perceptions that are being compared to these vicious, starving dogs that pounce on anything that moves and carry it screaming back to—to what? To fear, which feeds on what they bring in.

The example doubtless seems extreme to you, but take a moment to consider it. You can probably recognize something in yourself that is like this. We have trained our perceptions well to look for evidence of “sin” in other people. Our eyes and ears are on alert. We’ve become experts at finding fault. When those perceptions of others enter our minds, they feed our fear of others, and we become more self-protective, more shut off, more closed down.

Paragraph 13

13. ¹Send not these savage messengers into the world, to feast upon it and to prey upon reality. ²For they will bring you word of bones and skin and flesh. ³They have been taught to seek for the corruptible, and to return with gorges filled with things decayed and rotted. ⁴To them such things are beautiful, because they seem to allay their savage pangs of hunger. ⁵For they are frantic with the pain of fear, and would avert the punishment of him who sends them forth by offering him what *they* hold dear.

If you think the picture in paragraph 12 was awful, paragraph 13 becomes R-rated for violence.

We need to stop sending our perceptions out cruising the world, looking for guilt. When we do they “prey upon reality” (13:1), which to me means that they attack reality and tear it apart, making something other than reality out of it. Illusions, we might call it then, or better, *delusions*.

Our fear-based perceptions see the world as a horror film, a graveyard full of “bonds and skin and flesh” (13:2). That also, I think, indicates that this way of seeing tends to focus on *bodies*, and to see “proof” of separation and sin everywhere, seeing bodies sinning and misbehaving in ways that nourish our fears. This is what our eyes focus on; this is what rivets our attention. Isn’t it this kind of thing that dominates our newscasts?

So our perceptions, fueled by fear, actually *seek* “the corruptible, and...return with gorges filled with things decayed and rotted” (13:3). Yuk! “To them such things are

beautiful” (13:4)—double yuk! But this is how the pure mind of Jesus sees the sickness of the ego mind. It *is* an ugly, disgusting thing.

Have you ever felt a sense of relief or triumph when you believed you had “caught” someone in doing wrong? “Aha! I just *knew* you were dishonest!” Or whatever terrible thing you believed about them. You suspected, but *now you’ve seen it with your own eyes*. “To them such things are beautiful.” Yes, that’s how our minds work under the ego’s direction.

The messengers, or dogs, are afraid of their master, afraid of not producing what he asks for (13:5). We’re afraid of our own fear. We’re afraid it will punish us if we ignore it! We’re afraid to think ourselves naïve, or fools, or doormats. So we grasp at every evidence of fault in others.

Paragraph 14

14. ¹The Holy Spirit has given you love’s messengers to send *instead* of those *you* trained through fear. ²*They* are as eager to return to you what they hold dear as are the others. ³If you send *them* forth, they will see only the blameless and the beautiful, the gentle and the kind. ⁴They will be as careful to let no little act of charity, no tiny expression of forgiveness, no little breath of love escape their notice. ⁵And they will return with all the happy things they found, to share them lovingly with you. ⁶Be not *afraid* of them. ⁷They offer you salvation. ⁸Theirs are the messages of *safety*, for *they* see the world as kind.

• Study Question •

4. “*The Holy Spirit has given you love’s messengers to send...*” (14:1). *This is not physical sight but a new perception, one of faith. What things (1+) do these messengers seek out and find in our brothers?*
- A. *Only the blameless and the beautiful, the gentle and kind.*
 - B. *Happy things.*
 - C. *Messages of safety.*
 - D. *Improved behavior.*
 - E. *A kind world.*
 - F. *Every little act of charity, every tiny expression of forgiveness, every little breath of love.*
 - G. *All of the above.*

It doesn’t have to be like that. Our perceptions don’t have to be run by fear. The Holy Spirit is given us “love’s messengers” to master our perceptions (14:1). These loving thoughts, personified as messengers, are eager to bring back to us what they find in others. What they find is “only the blameless and the beautiful, the gentle and the kind” (14:2–3). Imagine what your relationships would be like if you were careful to let “no little act of charity, no tiny expression of forgiveness, no little breath of love escape [your] notice” (14:4). This is exactly how the Course wants us to behave in our relationships.

"Dream of your brother's kindnesses instead of dwelling in your dreams on his mistakes. Select his thoughtfulness to dream about instead of counting up the hurts he gave. Forgive him his illusions, and give thanks to him for all the helpfulness he gave. And do not brush aside his many gifts because he is not perfect in your dreams. He represents his Father, Whom you see as offering both life and death to you.

"Brother, He gives but life. Yet what you see as gifts your brother offers represent the gifts you dream your Father gives to you. Let all your brother's gifts be seen in light of charity and kindness offered you. And let no pain disturb your dream of deep appreciation for his gifts to you" (T-27.VII.15:3-16:4).

If we ask the Holy Spirit for a new perception, this is how we will begin to look at the world. When such thoughts arise in us, we may possibly feel a bit mistrustful—"Am I being naïve?" Jesus urges us *not* to be afraid of such thoughts (14:6). These are the thoughts that will save us. Seeing the world as kind is the only safe way to see it (14:7–8). I believe that is so because, when we focus on the *little* acts of love and the *tiny* expressions of forgiveness, we are nourishing them, causing them to grow. We are contributing to the kindness and safety of the world.

Paragraph 15

15. ¹If you send forth *only* the messengers the Holy Spirit gives you, *wanting* no messages but theirs, you will see fear no more. ²The world will be transformed before your sight, cleansed of all guilt and softly brushed with beauty. ³The world contains no fear that you laid not upon it. ⁴And none you cannot ask love's messengers to *remove* from it, and see it still. ⁵The Holy Spirit has given you *His* messengers to send to your brother and return to you with what love sees. ⁶They have been given to *replace* the hungry dogs of fear you sent instead. ⁷And they go forth to signify the *end* of fear.

• Study Question •

5. *How is the ego's attraction to guilt to be dealt with?*
- A. *We should choose to replace it with the greater attraction of love.*
 - B. *We should repress it and be disgusted with ourselves about it.*
 - C. *We should ignore it and accept it as part of what we are*

In addition, if we listen only to love's messengers, we will longer see fear (15:1). A world without fear is a safe world. When we look through eyes of love, the world is transformed. Guilt is gone; everything shines with the luster of beauty (15:2). In the view of the Course, in truth there is no fear in the world apart from what we have projected upon it (15:3). any fear that we do see we can ask the Holy Spirit to remove, and it will be gone, leaving behind a world devoid of fear (15:4).

We *can* send our loving thoughts to our brothers and sisters and have them show us only what love sees (15:5). Let them replace your thoughts of fear. Let them bring an end to fear (15:6–7).

Paragraph 16

16. ¹Love, too, would set a feast before you, on a table covered with a spotless cloth, set in a quiet garden where no sound but singing and a softly joyous whispering is ever heard. ²This is a feast that honors your holy relationship, and at which everyone is welcomed as an honored guest. ³And in a holy instant grace is said by everyone together, as they join in gentleness before the table of communion. ⁴And I will join you there, as long ago I promised and promise still. ⁵For in your new relationship am I made welcome. ⁶And where I am made welcome, there I am.

• Study Question •

6. *If, in our holy relationship, we practice sending forth only love's messengers (faith in our brother; the desire to see him sinless), more will happen than simply welcoming our brother into our lives and hearts. Who else will be welcomed at this feast of love?*
- A. *Jesus*
 - B. *Everyone*
 - C. *The ego*

Just as the dogs of fear wanted to set their disgusting feast in front of us, love wants to give us a feast as well: “a table covered with a spotless cloth, set in a quiet garden where no sound but singing and the softly joyous whispering is ever heard” (16:1). Everyone is welcome at this feast, welcomed “as an honored guest” (16:2). The feast is being held in honor of your holy relationship. I love the imagery of this feast. The only sounds are singing and a soft, joyous whispering. There is no noisy conversation. It is a feast of love, a feast that embraces everyone there with love.

There is a shared holy instant of prayer, with everyone present joining together in holy communion with one another (16:3). Jesus promises to join us at that table, as he promised long ago (16:4):

“And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you....I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.’” (Matthew 26:27, 29 RSV)

“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.” (Matthew 18:20 ESV)

And in our new, holy relationship with one another, we welcome him. Wherever Jesus is made welcome, there *he is* (16:5–6). It makes me think: If I have little sense of God’s Presence (or that of Jesus) in my life, it must indicate that in some way, he (It?) isn’t

welcome. All it takes for Jesus to be with my relationship is to make him welcome. Do that, and he's there. What is there about my life that I would not want to share with Jesus? Interesting question.

Paragraph 17¹

17. ¹I am made welcome in the state of grace [the holy instant], which means *you have at last forgiven me*. ²For I became the symbol of your sin, and so I had to die *instead* of you. ³To the ego sin *means* death, and so atonement *is achieved through murder*. ⁴Salvation is looked upon as a way by which the Son of God was killed instead of *you*. ⁵Yet would I offer you my *body*, you whom I love, *knowing* its littleness? ⁶Or would I teach that bodies cannot keep us apart? ⁷Mine was of no greater value than yours; no better means for *communication* of salvation, but *not* its Source. ⁸No one can die for anyone, and death does not atone for sin. ⁹But you can *live* to show it is not *real*. ¹⁰The body *does* appear to be the symbol of sin while you believe that it can get you what you want. ¹¹While you believe that it can give you pleasure, you will *also* believe that it can bring you pain. ¹²To think you could be satisfied and happy with so little *is* to hurt **yourself, [yourself. And] and** to *limit* the happiness that you would have, *calls* upon pain to fill your meager store and make your life complete. ¹³This *is* completion as the ego sees it. ¹⁴For guilt creeps in where happiness has been removed, and *substitutes* for it. ¹⁵Communion [communion of the mind] is another kind of completion, which goes beyond guilt, *because* it goes beyond the body.

• Study Question •

7. (a) *What is the ego's notion of completion mentioned here?*
- (b) *What is the alternative form of completion offered to us?*

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What makes Jesus welcome? We welcome Jesus when we have finally forgiven him (17:1). Perhaps you were not aware that you had any grievances against Jesus that needed to be forgiven, but we all have had them. He says that he became the symbol of our sin. I believe he is speaking here particularly to those of us who grew up in traditional Christianity, in which we believed that he died *in our place*, suffering God's punishment that we believed was due to *us*. He seems to have in mind the Christian "communion service," in which churches celebrate the sacrifice of Jesus' body for our sins, and Christians join in taking Jesus' flesh and blood into themselves, symbolically at least. His use of the word "communion" in these two paragraphs (16:3, 17:15) is no accident.

¹ It's worth noting that this paragraph, in the First Edition published by the Foundation for Inner Peace (FIP), omitted a great deal of the material dealing specifically with Christian communion. Apparently, someone (Helen or Ken) felt strongly that it was too extreme and would offend Christian readers. Fortunately, in preparing the Second Edition (and later editions), the FIP restored the omitted material.

In a way, we had projected our belief in our sins onto him. His death in our place represented what we believed about ourselves. So forgiving him actually means forgiving ourselves, and if we have accepted our innocence, we have lifted the sentence of death from Jesus.

The ego heartily believes the Bible's terse statement: "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 8:23). In the doctrine of substitutionary atonement, "atonement *is achieved through murder*" with God's Son being killed instead of us (17:3–4).

Murder is a harsh way of putting it, but it is exactly what is taught. Jesus denounces this dark doctrine here more clearly and pointedly than anyplace else in the Course. He says that his human body was of no greater value than yours or mine (17:7), that is, "knowing its littleness" (17:5), almost nothing. How could giving *that* pay the price of universal sin? Like everyone's body, Jesus' body was a great means to communicate salvation, but the body was not the Source of salvation (17:7). What can be clearer than this:

"No one can die for anyone, and death does not atone for sin" (17:8).

Sin isn't counteracted by punishment. Sin is an illusion. It can be counteracted by people like you and me who "*live to show it is not real*" (17:9). Life, real life, is what atones for sin; not death.

Now, then, we get to what this first obstacle has been hiding. The desire to get rid of peace, motivated by our attraction to guilt, has been covering up the second obstacle: The belief that the body is valuable for what it offers. Believing that the body can get us what we want *generates* our belief in sin and guilt (17:10), because it attempts to use the symbol of separation to compete with other bodies, attacking and *taking to get* what we think we lack.

The body is also very fragile and fleeting. If we are depending on the body to give us pleasure, it will inevitably lead to pain (17:11). The body is a huge limitation on what we are, and to think we can be satisfied with so little is in itself a form of self-inflicted pain (17:12). Guilt and pain *have to* come in to fill the vacuum left by the absence of happiness (17:12–14).

But communion, union of minds (not bodies), is the best kind of completion. It bypasses guilt entirely "*because it goes beyond the body*" (17:15). That is the lead-in to the next section on the second obstacle. Belief in and identification with the body gives rise to the whole "me against the world," "attack before they attack me" frame of mind that generates and perpetuates guilt. We have to remove that second obstacle to fully free ourselves from the first obstacle. The second obstacle keeps regenerating that "little remnant of sin" until we deal with it. But we can't really grasp the significance of the second obstacle, and understand why and how we must deal with it, until we have seen through the first one!

Answer Key

1. Fear: A, D, E Love: B, C, E
2. (a) Guilt, evil, sin. (b) Feeds upon it.
3. E
4. A, B, C, E, and F.
5. A
6. A and B
7. (a) Pain offered to us through the body, because of sin and guilt.
(b) Communion, which goes beyond the body and therefore beyond guilt.