

Study Guide and Commentary
ACIM® Text, Chapter 19, Section
IV(D).1-7; IV(D).1.8-9
The Obstacles to Peace
The Fourth Obstacle: The Fear of
God

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

Recap of the Section So Far

A holy relationship has begun; the Holy Spirit has entered, bringing peace, and uprooting the belief in sin. Peace now seeks to extend from deep within to every aspect of the lives of the relationship partners, and to the world beyond. But obstacles to that extension still remain. Peace must flow over these obstacles. Each subsequent obstacle both fuels the one above it and is hidden by it. At first they are hidden in our subconscious.

The **first** obstacle is the desire to get rid of peace, which is fueled by our ego's attraction to sin and guilt. The **second** obstacle is the belief that the body is valuable for what it offers. We (subconsciously) want to get rid of peace because, at some level, we recognize that to have peace, we must relinquish our belief in the value of the body. In sub-section B, we learned that our addiction to the bodily identity and the body as a source of pleasure is actually a disguise for the ego's attraction to pain and suffering, which gives the body its value *to the ego*. We seek pleasure through the body, but what we find is pain.

Then, moving into the **third** obstacle, we learn that what underlies even that attraction to pain, or what is the ultimate expression of it, is the ego's attraction to *death*, which is "unrecognized" by us consciously (4:5). Our love for the perishable body is

covering the ego's death wish, and that death wish is what really fuels our love affair with the body.

In the final sub-section, we will learn what lies at the root of *all* of these obstacles: The **fourth** obstacle: the ego's fear of God. The first part, that we are beginning to study now, will show how the call of Love attracts us and moves us past all these obstacles. It will proceed, in what follows, to explain why, and how, we need one another in order to make this final step successfully.

Paragraph 1

What would you see *without* the fear of death? ²What would you feel and think if death held *no* attraction for you? ³Very simply, *you would remember your Father*. ⁴The Creator of life, the Source of everything that lives, the Father of the universe and of the universe of universes and of everything that lies even *beyond* them, would you remember. ⁵And as this memory rises in your mind, peace must still surmount a final obstacle, *after* which is salvation completed and the Son of God *entirely* restored to sanity. ⁶For here your world *does* end.

• Study Question •

1. *The first two sentences consider the fear of death and the attraction of death as going together. Yet they seem opposite. How do you think fear of death and attraction to death go together?*
 - A. *The attraction comes first. We attract death to ourselves in order to scare ourselves with it, in order to keep us in fear, in order to feed our attraction to fear.*
 - B. *The fear comes first. We are afraid of death, yet what we fear we focus on and therefore "attract" into our lives.*

When you get past the fear of death, and past the attraction to death, something very amazing happens: "You...remember your Father" (1:1–3). With the barriers removed, the memory of God streams into your awareness. "The Creator of life, the Source of everything that lives, the Father of the universe, and of the universe of universes, and of everything that lies even beyond them, would you remember" (1:4)¹

Sounds wonderful, but the immediate reaction for most people, because of the ego, is total panic. We've absorbed the notion, oft repeated in the Bible in various ways, that "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:3, KJV). If you have read the Old Testament, there are many stories of people being killed through exposure to the presence of God. Supposedly, God told Moses, "You cannot see my face,

¹ As an aside, think for a moment what the Course reveals here about the nature of our reality. It speaks of "the universe, ...the universe of universes, and...everything that lies even beyond them." Most of us understand "the universe" to be all there is of physical reality. But modern physics has postulated multiple universes, an infinite number of them. The Course seems to bear that out and to go even further: "everything that lies beyond them."

for man shall not see me and live.” (Exodus 33:20 ESV) When God was believed to be living in the Ark of the Covenant, to move the Ark required that it be lifted by poles slid through rings on the Ark; to touch it was to die. And indeed, when King David chose to move the Ark into Jerusalem, the oxen carrying it stumbled, and a man called Uzzah took hold of the Ark to steady it. According to the Bible, God killed him (2 Samuel 6:6–7).

The idea of a really scary God has a long tradition in Judeo-Christian culture.

The Course teaches that this picture of God stems from the ego’s attraction to fear:

Where does the totally insane belief in gods of vengeance come from? Love has not confused its attributes with those of fear. Yet must the worshippers of fear perceive their own confusion in fear's "enemy"; its cruelty as now a part of love. And what becomes more fearful than the Heart of Love Itself? The blood appears to be upon His Lips; the fire comes from Him. And He is terrible above all else, cruel beyond conception, striking down all who acknowledge Him to be their God (W-pI.170.9:1-10:6).

So there is this remaining, final obstacle. Once peace gets past this, “salvation [is] completed and the Son of God *entirely* restored to sanity” (1:5). Removal of the fear of God literally brings about the end of our world, the world as we have known it (1:6).

So surmounting this final obstacle is vitally important. We may shy away from looking at it. It seems such a negative subject! It probably makes you uncomfortable to even think about it. But consider this: Any *aversion* to the subject of our fear of God is almost certainly *evidence* of our fear of God. As we shall see, the ego tries every trick in the book to keep us from looking at it.

Paragraph 2

2 The fourth obstacle to be surmounted hangs like a heavy veil before the face of Christ. ²Yet as His face rises beyond it, shining with joy because He is in His Father’s love, peace will lightly brush the veil aside and run to meet Him and to *join* with Him at last. ³For this dark veil, which seems to make the face of Christ Himself like to a leper’s, and the bright rays of His Father’s love which light His face with glory appear as streams of blood, fades in the blazing light *beyond* it when the fear of death is gone.

• Study Question •

2. *The fourth obstacle is like a veil in front of Christ's face, making His face appear like a leper's. Is there a situation in daily life in which the face of Christ would look like a leper's?*
 - A. *No.*
 - B. *Any situation in which your brothers look like sinners deserving of corruption and disease.*
 - C. *This passage refers exclusively to an experience we will have right before we complete our spiritual journey.*



This fourth obstacle (still unnamed in the Text, although we already know what it is) is compared to “a heavy veil before the face of Christ” (2:1). Remember that these obstacles are really ideas or thoughts within our minds. Therefore, what this obstacle hides must also be within us. This is the first reference in the Course to the phrase “the face of Christ,” and the veil that covers it.² This imagery is central to much of the rest of the Course, so it will pay us to think about what it means. I’m relying heavily here on what Robert Perry says about it in his glossary of Course terms.

The Christ, we are told, is the true Self in all things, the “Self we share” (WpI.pII.6.1:2). The Christ is the absolute reality of all; the *face* of Christ is the perceptual reflection of that reality. As perception, there is still an implied duality or separation; that will remain until, as the Course puts it, God takes His final step.

To see the face of Christ, then, means to see this common Self in everyone and everything. It does not mean having a vision of a Semitic man with (or without) a beard who lived 2000 years ago; it is an inner experience. The veil is something that blocks this inner awareness, here identified as our fear of God. We are kept from perceiving the holiness in one another, and in ourselves, by our fear of God. The veil (as we shall see) horribly distorts our perception of each other, causing us to perceive something awful and terrifying in one another.

First, however, that face is seen as rising beyond the veil, “shining with joy because He is in His Father’s love” (2:2). When we see this, we are seeing the state of mind that fully knows it is surrounded by the love of God. When we catch a glimpse of it, the peace within us will “lightly brush the veil aside” (2:2). I love it that it says, “lightly.” It shows that the veil we may perceive as dark and heavy is really virtually weightless. We can lightly brush it aside. And it shows that this takes very little effort on our part. It does not necessitate a forceful attack or a carefully planned assault on the obstacle. The obstacle is insubstantial; it is easily brushed aside, like a spider’s web.

The veil distorts the face of Christ so that it looks like a leper’s face. The shining rays of the light of God’s love on his face are transmuted into streams of blood (2:3). The beauty of Christ in our brothers and sisters is twisted into a bloody, horrifying monster, and we see them as sinners on their way to hell.

But as we focus, not on the veil, but on the light *beyond* it, the veil fades away. We recognize the falsity of our fear of God and allow ourselves to be drawn in by His love (2:3).

With the veil gone, peace runs to meet the Christ “and to *join* with Him at last” (2:2). To have the peace that is described as being within us now running to join with Christ may seem to be a muddled image, but to me, peace represents the core of our being.³ The image depicts a profound union of the core of my being with the absolute perfection of God’s Thought of me, a recognition that my inner being and Christ are one and the same.

² There is one earlier reference in the FIP version, T-4:IV.1:5. However, in the Urtext, that sentence read, “Your minds are filled with schemes to save the face of your egos, and you do not seek the Face of God.” For some reason the editors changed it to read, “The Face of Christ.”

³ “There is a place in you where there is perfect peace” (W-pI.47.7:4).

Paragraph 3

3 This is the darkest veil, upheld by the belief in death and protected by its attraction. ²The dedication to death and to its sovereignty is but the solemn vow, the promise made in secret to the ego, never to lift this veil, not to approach it, nor even to *suspect* that it is there. ³This is the secret bargain made with the ego to keep what lies *beyond* the veil forever blotted out and unremembered. ⁴Here is your promise never to allow union to call you *out* of separation, the great amnesia in which the memory of God seems quite forgotten, the cleavage of your Self from you: *the fear of God*, the final step in your dissociation.

• Study Question •

3. *What, according to this paragraph, is the relationship between the third and fourth obstacles (there may be more than one correct answer)?*
- A. *The third obstacle upholds the fourth.*
 - B. *The third obstacle protects the fourth.*
 - C. *The third obstacle is a vow not to lift this veil, approach it or suspect it is there.*
 - D. *The third obstacle is a decoy, which tries to draw your attention to it and away from the fourth obstacle.*

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This fear of God is “the darkest veil,” that is, the one most deeply buried in our subconscious by the deceit of the ego. All three of the other obstacles exist to protect this one and to keep it from our awareness. Because we believe in death, we fear God, and our attraction to death masks that fear (3:1). Because we are attracted to pain and death, we value the body (although we think we value it for what it offers). And because we value the body and believe we are being called to sacrifice what we value, we want to get rid of the peace of God, which would eradicate the guilt that the ego craves.

Our “dedication to death” is evidence that somewhere in the primal depths of our being, we have made a solemn vow to the ego. We have promised our ego “never to lift this veil, not to approach it, nor even to *suspect* that it is there” (3:2). The ego desperately needs to keep this a secret; it is by this fear that the ego has banished the memory of God and God’s Love from our minds (3:3). This is what keeps us from responding to the call of Oneness, keeps us in separation, and keeps us from actually knowing our Self (3:4).

Perhaps your response to all of this is something like mine has been. “I don’t think I’m afraid of God. I love God! I want to be one with God and to know it.”

When that thought enters my consciousness, I remind myself, “Then why are you still separate? Why aren’t you totally enlightened? Why isn’t your mind filled and flooded

with the presence of God Himself?”⁴ And I realize that the answer *must be* that something is preventing me from responding whole-heartedly to God’s calling. A subconscious *fear* of God seems a likely culprit. I think that the ego has done a bang-up job of covering its tracks, and that is just what this paragraph is trying to convey to us.

And at the same time, I realize that I am *not* separate, I *am* totally enlightened, and my mind *is* filled and flooded with the presence of God! It just my *awareness* of those facts that is blocked—not their reality.

Paragraph 4

4 See how the belief in death would seem to “save” you. ²For if this is gone, what can you fear but life? ³It is the attraction of death that makes life seem to be ugly, cruel, and tyrannical. ⁴You are no more afraid of death than of the ego. ⁵These are your chosen *friends*. ⁶For in your secret alliance with them, you have agreed never to let the fear of God be lifted so you could look upon the face of Christ and join Him in His Father.

• Study Question •

4. *The second and third sentences state why you are attracted to death, but in terms that are difficult to understand. Which of the following choices best capture what these two sentences seem to say?*
- A. *Death "saves" us because it makes us think that God is the Author of death, and so is fearful. Thus we think it is Him and the punishment He brings that we fear, and we never suspect that our real fear is the absurd one of fearing His Life.*
 - B. *The fear of death "saves" us because it keeps us on the lookout for potential sources of danger. This distracts us from God so that we never have to reunite with Him.*
 - C. *The death that we fear is the death of the ego. This "saves" us from God because it leads to preserving the ego.*

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How does our belief in death seem to “save” us (4:1)? Jesus explains: If there is no death, yet we are afraid of *something*, what’s left to be afraid of but life (4:2)? We fear *God* because we believe that death is real, and if so, it must have come from God. God, then, is the death-dealer, and rightly to be feared. It’s death that makes life seem to be cruel (4:3). “Goodbye, cruel world!” and “Life is a bitch, and then you die,” are sayings that grow out of this state of mind. The whole mythology of the punishing, vengeful God, stems from this deep-seated belief that death is real.

⁴ Ephesians 3:19, Amplified Bible: [That you may really come] to know [practically, through experience for yourselves] the love of Christ, which far surpasses mere knowledge [without experience]; that you may be filled [through all your being] unto all the fullness of God [may have the richest measure of the divine Presence, and become a body wholly filled and flooded with God Himself]!

But it's a smokescreen. The ego isn't afraid of death and neither are we, not really (4:4). What we are afraid of is what the ego fears: life. God's Life, God's Love, would be the end of the ego. And because we identify with our egos, we share its fear of God.

To the mind entrenched in the ego, the ego and death are its *friends* (4:5), not anything to fear. As we've seen in the previous section, to the ego-dominated mind, death can actually appear to be the way out of an unbearable situation. And we have formed a "secret alliance" with the ego and death, agreed never to let go of the fear of God, insuring that we would never look on the face of Christ and realize the truth of our Oneness with God (4:6). We formed this alliance, swore this solemn vow, and made this fateful promise, and then—to keep it safe and inviolate—we *forgot* that we made it!⁵

The ultimate defense of the ego, it seems to me, is denial. We made this secret vow, we *chose* to be separate egos living in bodies, and then, through denial, we make ourselves believe we had no choice! The whole point of the Course is to get us to stop denying our choice, to recognize it, to own it, and to *choose again*.

Paragraph 5

5 Every obstacle that peace must flow across is surmounted in just the same way: The fear that *raised* it yields to the love beneath, and so the fear is gone. ²And so it is with this. ³The desire to get rid of peace and drive the Holy Spirit *from* you fades in the presence of the quiet recognition that you love Him. ⁴The exaltation of the body is given up in favor of the spirit, which you love as you could *never* love the body. ⁵And the appeal of death is lost forever as love's attraction stirs and calls to you. ⁶From *beyond* each of these *obstacles* to love, love itself has called, and each has been surmounted by the power of the attraction of what lies *beyond*. ⁷Your *wanting* fear *seemed* to be holding them in place. ⁸Yet when you heard the voice of love *beyond* them, you answered and they disappeared.

• Study Question •

5. *Paragraph 5 says that every obstacle to peace was raised by the attraction of fear and that every obstacle is surmounted by the attraction of love that lies on the other side of it. Note that all of the first three obstacles are listed here, slightly reworded. So, based on this paragraph, when you find yourself caught in the belief behind the second obstacle ("the exaltation of the body"), what do you do?*
- A. *You quietly recognize that you love the Holy Spirit.*
 - B. *You feel love's attraction stirring and calling to you.*
 - C. *You give in to your love of the spirit, which you love more than you could ever love the body.*

⁵ Lesson 136, paragraphs 3 through 7, explain how this happens, using as an example our choice of sickness as a defense. The same dynamic exists for all defenses.

The first sentence is like a summary statement that is fleshed out by the rest of the paragraph. Each obstacle is raised by a particular form of fear; each obstacle is surmounted as the fear gives way to the love that lies beneath it (5:1). The fear of God is no different (5:2).

Jesus then runs through the three previous obstacles, showing how love reaches past them to draw us inward. Our desire to “drive the Holy Spirit *from* you” fades away as we realize that we *love* the Holy Spirit; driving Him away (getting rid of peace) is *not* what we truly want (5:3). The attraction of the seeming offerings of the body dwindles before our love for the spirit (5:4). Love overwhelms the insane appeal of death, as well (5:5).

“From *beyond* each of these *obstacles* to love, love itself has called, and each has been surmounted by the power of the attraction of what lies *beyond*” (5:6). For me, the image here is not one of going out from myself to something outside of me, but rather of sinking inward, past the psychological barriers, to recognize the God within.

"Come to this place of refuge, where you can be yourself in peace. Not through destruction, not through a breaking out, but merely by a quiet melting in. For 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" (T-18.VI.14:5-7).

The obstacles appeared to be solid, firmly planted, only because our “*wanting* fear *seemed* to be holding them in place” (5:7). But love called to us from behind the barriers, and when we heard it, we answered, and the barriers disappeared (5:8).

So, we need to listen for love’s call, and to answer it.

"For you could not control your joyous response to the call of love if you heard it, and the whole world you thought you made would vanish. The Holy Spirit, then, seems to be attacking your fortress, for you would shut out God, and He does not will to be excluded" (T-13.III.3:3-4).

"My brother, you are part of God and part of me. When you have at last looked at the ego's foundation without shrinking you will also have looked upon ours. I come to you from our Father to offer you everything again. Do not refuse it in order to keep a dark cornerstone hidden, for its protection will not save you. I give you the lamp and I will go with you. You will not take this journey alone. I will lead you to your true Father, Who hath need of you, as I have. Will you not answer the call of love with joy?" (T-11.Int.4:1-8).

Paragraph 6

6 And now you stand in terror before what you swore never to look upon. ²Your eyes look down, remembering your promise to your “friends.” ³The “loveliness” of sin, the delicate “appeal” of guilt, the “holy” waxen image of death, and the fear of vengeance of the ego you swore in blood not to desert, all rise and bid you *not* to raise your eyes. ⁴For you realize that if you look on *this* and *let* the veil be lifted, *they will be gone forever*. ⁵All of your “friends,” your “protectors,” and your “home” will vanish. ⁶Nothing that you remember *now* will you remember.

• Study Question •

6. *Who are your "friends" mentioned in the second sentence?*
- A. *Your friends in this life, who you believe you would have to leave if you looked upon this final obstacle and left the world.*
 - B. *Sin, guilt, death and the ego.*
 - C. *The three previous obstacles to peace.*

•

From here on to the end of the section, Jesus addresses the holy relationship partners who are standing with averted eyes before the final obstacle, the fear of God. This is it! This is what we have promised with a blood oath to our “friends” (the ego; sin, guilt, and death) never to do. And we are afraid of what will happen, what will be lost, if we do it. We are aware that if we look there will be no going back.

The lovely picture of our homecoming fresh in our minds, we are ready to confront the present seeming reality of our situation: We are scared out of our minds at the prospect of actually confronting God. We *swore never* to do this (6:1), swore a blood oath (6:3)! Far from being blissed out, we are wondering, “What in H am I doing?”

Our eyes drop down (with guilt?) as we realize we are breaking our promises to our “friends” (the ego and death) (6:2). And not just guilt; there is also fear of the ego’s retaliation for our betrayal. All the obstacles rear their ugly heads: sin, guilt, and death, with our insane attraction to them, cling to us, trying to draw us back into familiar patterns (6:3). These inner resistances try to keep us from raising our eyes to actually *look at* our fear of God, because if we do, the veil will be lifted, and they—the “friends”—“*will be gone forever*. That is, sin, guilt, and death will be gone forever (6:4). In listening to our egos, we have believed these things to be our “friends,” our “protectors,” and our “home.” But with the lifting of the veil they will vanish (6:5)! And we will be blessed with benevolent amnesia. All memory of any loss will be gone; we will begin again with a clean slate (6:6).

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Corinthians 5:17 NRSV)

As always in this section, the Course is addressing at least two people who are in holy relationship with one another. We can equally well apply this picture to our individual selves, but the most profound expression of it concerns the holy relationship.

Paragraph 7

7 It seems to you the world will utterly abandon you if you but raise your eyes. ²Yet all that *will* occur is *you* will leave the world forever. ³This is the reestablishment of *your* will. ⁴Look upon it open-eyed, and you will nevermore believe that you are at the mercy of things *beyond* you, forces you *cannot* control, and thoughts that come to you *against* your will. ⁵It is *your will to look on this*. ⁶No mad desire, no trivial impulse to forget again, no stab of fear, nor the cold sweat of seeming death *can* stand against your will. ⁷And what attracts you from *beyond* the veil is also deep *within* you, unseparated from it and *completely* one.

• Study Question •

7. *Why do you think that looking upon your fear of God will mean that you will never again believe that you are at the mercy of things outside your will?*
- A. *Because you will realize that fearful things happened to you out of your own attraction to fear.*
 - B. *Because you will reconnect with your true will, which is to be one with God.*
 - C. *A and B*

The rest of the world, or most of it anyhow, lives by the laws of the ego, and we are afraid that raising our eyes, making that fateful decision, will will cause the world to abandon us, and make us outcasts (7:1). What *will* happen is not that the world will leave us, but *we* will leave the world (7:2). We will be taking the next step in the evolution of humanity, transcending our egos to enter what Spiral Dynamics calls the Second Tier, moving from the pre-personal and personal sphere into the transpersonal sphere. In a way that *will* cut us off from much of the human race (at least for now), but because it involves ego transcendence, the separation will be one-sided. Those rising above the personal ego will transcend *and include* those who are still trapped in ego-based thinking.

We are being drawn to this decision because it will re-establish *our own will* (7:3). It's not being forced upon us. What spurs our fear is really the loss of the ego thought system, which means the loss of our "individual existence," which is only an illusion.

Let's be clear about *what* we are being asked to look at, what we are terrified to look at, what the fear of God is preventing us from looking at. Remember these words from a few paragraphs back: "For in your secret alliance with them [your "friends"], you have agreed never to let the fear of God be lifted so you could look upon the face of Christ and join Him in His Father" (4:6). We are being called to raise our eyes and look upon the

face of Christ, to behold the holy Self we all are. If we look past the fear of God to see this loving Self, we will realize that it was our own choice to listen to the ego that brought us pain and suffering, and that we are affected only by our thoughts, as Lesson 338 instructs us to affirm (7:4). That lesson asserts, as does this paragraph, that the realization that only our own thoughts affect us will release us from all fear (W-pII.338.1:2–3). Our will is sovereign in our lives (7:5–6). The reason that looking at what is beyond the veil has this effect on us is that “what attracts you from *beyond* the veil is also deep *within* you, unseparated from it and *completely* one” (7:7). In seeing the Universal One we are also seeing our Self. I am “I am that I am”; God and I are one.

T-IV(D).1.8-9, The Lifting of the Veil

The following two paragraphs seem, to me, to relate more closely to the preceding 7 paragraphs than to those that follow them, so I am covering them now.

Paragraph 8

8 Forget not that you came this far *together*. ²And it was surely *not* the ego that led you here. ³No obstacle to peace can *be* surmounted through *its* help. ⁴*It* does not open up its secrets and bid you look at them and go *beyond* them. ⁵*It* would not have you see its weakness and learn it has *no* power to *keep* you from the truth. ⁶The Guide Who brought you here *remains* with you, and when you raise your eyes, you *will* be ready to look on terror with no fear at all. ⁷But first, lift up your eyes and look on ~~your brother~~ **[upon each other]** in innocence born of *complete* forgiveness of his **[each other's]** illusions, and through the eyes of faith ~~that sees~~ **[which see]** them not.

• Study Question •

8. *Having come to this place together with your brother, the Course says that you will be ready to look on your fear without fear. Why?*
- A. *Because you will first forgive your brother.*
 - B. *Because the ego will open up its secrets to you.*
 - C. *Because your Guide will remain by your side.*
 - D. *A and B*
 - E. *A and C*

We must keep clearly in mind that the journey to this lifting of the veil was made “*together*” with our brother or sister, not alone (8:1), and definitely not by depending on our ego (8:2)! As we were told previously in the Text, “The lonely journey fails because it has excluded what it would find” (T-14.X.10:7). The ego can’t help us surmount these

obstacles to peace; it *raises* the obstacles (8:3). These are the secrets the ego has carefully hidden from us, so it certainly isn't going to reveal them to us (8:4). The ego is like a good magician, who never reveals his secrets. It would spoil his act! The ego especially does not want us to realize that it is really powerless to keep us from discovering the truth about ourselves and demolishing its lies (8:5). So we need to be careful not to fall back into old habits of trusting our own ego to figure things out.

What *can* we trust? "The Guide Who brought you here" (8:6). The Holy Spirit is always with us. Whether we recognize Him as "the Voice for God" or as the voice of our true Self does not matter; it is the same voice:

"Now hear God speak to you, through *Him Who is His Voice and yours as well*, reminding you that it is not your will to hate and be a prisoner to fear, a slave to death, a little creature with a little life. Your will is boundless; it is not your will that it be bound" (T-30.II.3:3-4, my italics).

Knowing this, hearing this Voice, we can look at the final veil, this fear of God, *without fear* (8:6). That may seem paradoxical, to "look on terror with no fear at all," but to me it simply means that we will look at what *was* our fear of God and realize that it was groundless. How can we arrive at that freedom from fear? Something has to come "first," before we can so cavalierly dismiss our fear of God. We must "look upon each other in innocence born of complete forgiveness of each other's illusions" (8:7). We need to let go of our grievances, any pained remembrance of all the "imagined slights, remembered pain, past disappointments, perceived injustices and deprivations that still stand between us" ("The End of Illusions," T-16.VII.1:3). When our eyes are directed by faith, these things will fade into nothingness, and we will rush to join with the Love we see beyond the veil.

Paragraph 9

9 No one can look upon the fear of God unterrified, unless he has *accepted* the Atonement and learned illusions are not real. ²No one can stand before this obstacle alone, for he could not have *reached* it unless his brother walked beside him. ³And no one would dare to *look* on it without *complete* forgiveness of his brother in his heart. ⁴Stand you here a while and tremble not. ⁵You will be ready. ⁶Let us join together in a holy instant, here in this place where the purpose, *given* in a holy instant, has led you. ⁷And let us join in faith that He Who brought us here together will *offer* you the innocence you need, and that you will *accept* it for my love and His.

• **Study Question** •

9. **Paragraph 9** mentions several things that will allow us to look on the fear of God without fear. It also says that we could never have reached this place unless our brother walked beside us. What does that mean?
- A. It does not mean our brother must literally be with us. It simply means we must realize that our brother is one with us.
 - B. It does mean that our brother must walk beside us, but that is easy to have happen--on any crowded sidewalk someone is bound to be walking beside you.
 - C. It means that we can only have reached this place by journeying with our holy relationship partner.

Paragraph 8 spoke of our being ready “to look on terror with no fear at all” (8:6), but made it clear that forgiveness of each other’s illusions must come first. This next paragraph elaborates on that prerequisite.

First, in 9:1, it says we must have “*accepted* the Atonement.” The emphasis on “accepted” is interesting. It isn’t enough to hear about the Atonement, to read about it, or to intellectually agree with the notion. We must *accept* it, and that means realizing that all of each other’s “sins” and slights and disappointments, the things we have held against one another, were just unreal illusions (9:1).

Second, it says that no one can even get to the point of looking at their fear of God by themselves; it takes someone else to walk beside them (9:2). The experience of a shared holy instant, in which we catch a glimpse of our oneness, is necessary before anyone can penetrate this deeply into the ego’s thought system. The Course really means it when it says relationships are our salvation (T-20.VI.11:9).

Third, we must have “*complete* forgiveness of [our] brother in [our] heart” (9:3). No lingering grievances. No justification for our judgments on one another. We must come to the point *with someone* where we are convinced that forgiveness is *always, completely* justified.

"The real world is achieved when you perceive the basis of forgiveness is quite real and fully justified. " (T-30.VI.3:3).⁶

Without this we would not “dare to *look*” at this final obstacle. Our terror of God would be too great, too overpowering. With unforgiveness still cherished in our hearts, confronting the fear of God would seem to invite thunderbolts of divine judgment.

⁶ "Pardon is *always* justified. It has a sure foundation. You do not forgive the unforgivable, nor overlook a real attack that calls for punishment. Salvation does not lie in being asked to make unnatural responses which are inappropriate to what is real. Instead, it merely asks that you respond appropriately to what is not real by not perceiving what has not occurred. If pardon were unjustified, you would be asked to sacrifice your rights when you return forgiveness for attack. But you are merely asked to see forgiveness as the natural reaction to distress that rests on error, and thus calls for help. Forgiveness is the only sane response" (T-30.VI.2:1-8).

So we are gently encouraged to just stand here awhile, before this final obstacle, without trembling. He tells us that we *will* be ready to look, and offers to join with us in a holy instant (9:4–6). The purpose given to our holy relationship in the holy instant that initiated it has led us to this place (9:6). Now, we can “join in faith” with one another, and with Jesus, that the Holy Spirit Who brought us this far will “*offer* you the innocence you need, and that you will *accept* it for my love and His” (9:7).

There is a similar passage in the Bible where the Apostle Paul prays for his brethren in the church in Phillippi, declaring, “Of this I am confident, that he who started the good work in you will bring it to completion by the day of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 1:6 REB) Jesus is telling us to join him in faith that the Holy Spirit will bring His work to completion. He will offer us “the innocence [we] need.” Why innocence? What else but innocence do we need to stand without trembling in the Presence of God? How could we pass this final obstacle with guilt still in us? So that is what is offered to us, and accepting it is what we must do, as we were told in 9:1.

The bare truth of the matter is that we can never accept our own innocence unless we simultaneously accept the innocence of our brother. It cannot be a gift offered only to some; it must be a universal innocence. We must see that “the basis of forgiveness is quite real and fully justified.”

We are not even halfway through this sub-section yet; it contains 21 paragraphs. It continues with the picture that has been painted, partners in a holy relationship, standing before the final veil that shields them from the Presence of God. We will continue our study of the section in the next commentary, or perhaps the next two.

Answer Key

1. A
2. B
3. A, B, C
4. A
5. C
6. B
7. C
8. E
9. C