

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 20, The Vision of Holiness

Section VI, *The Temple of the Holy Spirit*

Legend:

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

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

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

Typewriter text = editorial comments

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Overview of the Section

This section begins to explain to us why God is so confident that we can save the world, and to indicate what we need to learn to share His confidence.

Meditation reading: W-pII.5. 5. What is the Body? and Workbook Lesson 294.

Paragraph 1

1. ¹The meaning of the Son of God lies solely in his relationship with his Creator. ²If it were elsewhere it *would* rest on contingency, but there *is* nothing else. ³And this is wholly loving and forever. ⁴Yet has the Son of God invented an unholy relationship between him and his Father. ⁵His *real* relationship is one of perfect union and unbroken continuity. ⁶The one he made is partial, self-centered, broken into fragments and full of fear. ⁷The one created by his Father is wholly self-encompassing and self-*extending*. ⁸The one he made is wholly self-*destructive* and self-limiting.

• Study Question •

1. *Paragraph 1* contrasts our real relationship with God with the one that we made. Please make two lists, one of all the things that this paragraph says about our real relationship with God, the other of all the things it says about the relationship with God that we made.

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As we ended the previous section's comments, I wrote:

[God] put the universe in our hands *because* He knows we are deserving of His trust and confidence.

Well, then; what do we have to learn in order to *share* our Father's confidence in us (8:3)? What *are* we, to be the recipients of such unshakeable divine confidence and faith (8:4)? We do not see ourselves as God does (8:5). But God's confidence cannot possibly be misplaced (8:6)! What we think about ourselves *must* be wrong. How can that be corrected?

That is what Jesus intends to reveal in this section. He begins by reviewing the idea that our meaning is entirely defined by our relationship with God, our Creator (1:1). We are God's extension. If God is certain of our purpose then *that* is our purpose, our meaning. We remain as God created us, and we are not what we think we have made of ourselves (W-pI.93.7:1); in fact, nothing besides what God created exists. Therefore, our meaning cannot be *contingent* on something besides God and our relation to Him because there *is* nothing else (1:2). This is what he was driving at in the final paragraph of Section IV when he said:

God's guarantee will hold against all obstacles, for it rests on certainty and not contingency. It rests on you. And what can be more certain than the Son of God?

The relationship with have with God "is wholly loving and forever" (1:3). It may seem to you to be more complicated than that, but the complexity is only apparent. It seems to exist only because *we* have "invented an unholy relationship" with our Creator (1:4). The whole picture presented in traditional views of the rebellious child, the angry Father, the terrible estrangement that somehow demands that we be punished, the need to be rescued or "saved," the horrifying notion that God demands the bloody human sacrifice of His Only Son to somehow, magically, rescue at least a small portion of His creation—all of this depends on the imaginary "unholy relationship" between us and God. We made it all up. Our "*real* relationship [with God] is one of perfect union and unbroken continuity" (1:5).

We can say goodbye to relating to God with fear, with feeling only *partly* or *partially* right with God, with believing that the sonship is fragmented, with some (maybe only 144,000¹) salvaged while the rest roast in hell—the whole notion fosters the "us versus them" mentality and thus promotes, rather than transcends, self-centeredness (1:6). Rather than bearing the seeds of its own destruction as does our imagined unholy relationship (1:8), our true relationship with God includes all, and its very nature is one of expansion and growth (1:7).

¹ Some fundamentalist teachers believe that only 144,000 people will eventually be saved, or perhaps admitted to God's "inner circle" (as if such a thing could exist), based on the mention of this number in Revelation 14: "And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth." (Revelation 14:1–3 KJV)

Paragraph 2

2. ¹Nothing can show the contrast better than the experience of both a holy and an unholy relationship. ²The first is based on love, and rests on it serene and undisturbed. ³*The body does not intrude upon it.* ⁴Any relationship in which the body enters is based *not* on love, but on idolatry. ⁵Love wishes to be known, completely understood and shared. ⁶*It has no secrets*; nothing that it would keep apart and hide. ⁷It walks in sunlight, open-eyed and calm, in smiling welcome and in sincerity so simple and so obvious it cannot *be* misunderstood.

• Study Question •

2. *Most of the paragraph describes the character of the holy relationship based on a very evocative description of the nature of love. Which of the following statements is not true, based on this description of love?*
- A. *Love wishes to be shared.*
 - B. *Love has no mysteries.*
 - C. *Love, being so radical, can easily be misunderstood.*
 - D. *There is no difference between what love feels and what it expresses.*

Paragraph 2 explains that this contrast between the two pictures of our relationship with God is best illustrated by the contrast between the two kinds of interpersonal relationships: holy and unholy (2:1).

A *holy* relationship is based on love. With love as its sure foundation, the relationship is inherently peaceful and stable (2:2). The holy relationship is not based on bodies (2:3). As we have seen earlier, the Course considers bodies to be idols²—things we use to replace God as the source of our happiness and wholeness. Back in 20.V.5, we saw that as long as we continue to see one another as bodies, we have not realized the goal of the holy relationship.

One aspect of that goal is perfect communication. In a holy relationship, we want “to be known and completely understood,” and we want to share our love with everyone (2:5). There are no secrets or things we need to hide from one another (2:6). We “walk in sunlight” (2:7) with complete transparency, “in sincerity so simple and so obvious it cannot *be* misunderstood” (2:7). There is no need for defensiveness. To me, this describes the kind of relationship that everyone is looking for, but that most of us are not willing to have! We want total openness and trust, but we seem incapable of *giving* it.

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another” (1 John 1:7 ESV)

² It is important to recall that the word “idol” in the Course refers to anything *outside* yourself that you look upon to bring you happiness and completion. See T-29.VII.

Paragraph 3

3. ¹But idols do not share. ²Idols *accept*, but never make return. ³They can *be* loved, but cannot love. ⁴They do not understand what they are offered, and any relationship in which they enter has *lost* its meaning. ⁵The love of *them* has *made* love meaningless. ⁶They live in secrecy, hating the sunlight and happy in the body's darkness, where they can hide and keep their secrets hidden along with them. ⁷And they have *no* relationships, for no one else is welcome there. ⁸They smile on no one, and those who smile on them they do not see.

• Study Question •

3. *This discussion of idols draws upon ancient religions and envisions the idols as little figurines that are worshipped. These little figurines would be placed in some kind of temple. In this paragraph, what is the temple they are placed in?*
- A. *The unholy relationship.*
 - B. *The darkness.*
 - C. *The ego.*
 - D. *The body.*

Paragraph 3 gives us the contrast, describing the relationship based on idols rather than on love. It contrasts idols with love, saying that idols are the opposite of love. This is an interesting comparison. “Love” is a quality; “idols” are specific things or persons. How can they be compared?

I think what is being compared, essentially, is the central characteristic of the two things.

Love goes out; it gives and shares.

Idols draw in; they demand, they ask for sacrifices.

To begin with, idols do not share (3:1). They take, they “*accept*, but never make return” (3:2). You can love an idol, but an idol never loves you (3:3). You might feel a huge attraction to another person’s body, for instance, but their body isn’t going to respond in like manner. Idols have no understanding (3:4). When speaking of a literal idol, the Bible says,

“What use is an idol once its maker has shaped it— a cast image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in what has been made, though the product is only an idol that cannot speak! Alas for you who say to the wood, “Wake up!” to silent stone, “Rouse yourself!” Can it teach? See, it is gold and silver plated, and there is no breath in it at all.” (Habakkuk 2:18–19 NRSV)

The Course is drawing on this image (no pun intended) when it speaks of the body as a senseless idol that cannot respond to the gifts you offer to it. Looked at like this, it is exceedingly foolish to base a relationship on something like physical attraction. Not that

there is anything wrong with physical attraction; it just makes a lousy foundation for a stable relationship.

In a play on words, the Course declares that the love of *idols* has *made* love meaningless (3:5). Love, to be love, has to be reciprocal. But the body cannot reciprocate. To love the body, or to love any idol, any dead substitute for God, therefore makes love meaningless.

The next sentence reaches beyond the material body to something that “can hide” “in the body’s darkness” (3:6). This is probably referring to thoughts or beliefs that we hold in support of separation and of the ego, ideas such as, “I am a victim,” or “You owe me,” or “You are the cause of my pain and suffering,” or “I can’t live unless I have you.” These are the ego’s ideas that live in the temple of your body. Where these thoughts live, no one else is ever welcome (3:7). This is the part of our thought system that is constantly looking out for “Number One.” As the characters sang, in “Sound of Music,”

[He]

That all absorbing character.

[She]

That fascinating creature.

[Other He]

That super special feature,

[All]

Me!

The Sound Of Music - No Way To Stop It Lyrics

When we relate as egos, we do not truly relate at all (3:7; see also 6:5, 8:3–4, and T-22.Int.2:8³). The “other,” whoever that might be, is unwelcome, and the ego’s face is unsmiling, the smiles of others going unnoticed (3:8).

Paragraph 4

4. ¹Love has no darkened temples where mysteries are kept obscure and hidden from the sun. ²*It does not seek for power, but for relationships.* ³The body is the ego’s chosen weapon for seeking power *through* relationships. ⁴And its relationships *must* be unholy, for what they *are* it does not even *see*. ⁵It wants them solely for the offerings on which its idols thrive. ⁶The rest it merely throws away, for all that *it* could offer is seen as valueless. ⁷Homeless, the ego seeks as many bodies as it can collect to place its idols in, and so establish them as temples to itself.

³ "And so they wander through a world of strangers, unlike themselves, living with their bodies perhaps under a common roof that shelters neither; in the same room and yet a world apart" (T-22.Int.2:8).

• **Study Question** •

4. *Based on this paragraph, what is an offering on which the ego's idols thrive?*
- A. *Darkened temples.*
 - B. *Mysteries.*
 - C. *Power*
 - D. *The sun and its life-giving warmth.*

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After a brief reminder of what a loving, holy relationship is like, and how unlike it is to an unholy relationship, Paragraph 4 gives a short account of the ego's approach to relationships. It says that the ego wants relationships, not for themselves, but "solely for the offerings on which its idols thrive."

None of what was said in Paragraph 3 applies to the relationship based on love. This kind of relationship is not characterized by dark shadows and secret, mysterious corners; it is open to the sunshine.

But the ego wants *power*. It wants control. It wants to possess and dominate. It uses the body as a weapon, and sees relationships as the means through which it can obtain this power (4:3). To the ego, the relationship is just a means of obtaining power (4:5); to love, the relationship *is the goal*, valuable in itself (4:2). The ego simply "does not even see" what a relationship really is, so its relationship an inevitably holy (4:4). It only sees what it can *take* in the relationship, and discards the rest, which is where the true value lies (4:5–6).

When the ego suckers someone into an unholy relationship, their body becomes, as it were, a trophy case ("temples to itself"), a proof that the ego's values and concepts are right (4:7). Unholy relationships are all about building up the ego.

Paragraph 5

5. ¹The Holy Spirit's temple is *not* a body, but a *relationship*. ²The body is an isolated speck of darkness; a hidden secret room, a tiny spot of senseless mystery, a meaningless enclosure carefully protected, yet hiding nothing. ³Here the unholy relationship escapes reality, and seeks for crumbs to keep itself alive. ⁴Here it would drag its brothers, holding them here in its idolatry. ⁵Here it is "safe," for here love *cannot* enter. ⁶The Holy Spirit does not build His temples where love can never be. ⁷Would He Who *sees* the face of Christ choose as His home the only place in all the universe where it can *not* be seen?

• **Study Question** •

5. *Please name one bodily practice in our culture which, in essence, says, "Behind these temple walls lies wonderful, hidden mysteries."*

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Paragraph 5 contains some very extreme words about the body. It's as though the writer is trying out one analogy after another to capture the sense of how empty of meaning the body really is.

It begins by declaring that the body is not the Holy Spirit's temple, which is a bit of a shock to people familiar with the Bible⁴. The body was made by the ego to house *idols*, not the Holy Spirit. He lives in something invisible yet very tangible: a relationship.

The second sentence uses four phrases to describe the body. The qualities suggested by these images make a darkly depressing list: isolation; insignificance; darkness; paranoia ("hidden," "carefully protected"); constriction; lack of meaning; without content; obscurity. The phrase "senseless mystery" implies, for me, something that acts as if it contains something important and wonderful when, in fact, it is utterly without substance. Jesus referred to the Pharisees in the Bible as "whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth." (Matthew 23:27 NRSV). I think that description applies equally well to the Course's view of the body (5:2).

The next several sentences all contain the word "here," which refers to the body. The unholy relationship "escapes reality" in the body, and tries to sustain itself with the empty rewards the body offers (5:3). The unholy relationship tries to lure others by tying them to the body in some way and, like a mind-control cult, imprisoning them in body-worship (5:4). The body becomes a fortress for the unholy relationship, keeping it "safe" from love (5:5). In the body-based relationship, remember, the goal is what one person can *get* from another, rather than what they can *give*. For this reason, love cannot enter into such an atmosphere (5:5), and the Holy Spirit does not go where love is not welcome (5:6).

In an unholy relationship, no one sees the face of Christ in their partners; this is "the only place in all the universe where it can *not* be seen" (5:7). For the Holy Spirit, "He Who *sees* the face of Christ," it's the last place He wants to be.

Paragraph 6

6. ¹You *cannot* make the body the Holy Spirit's temple, and it will *never* be the seat of love. ²It is the home of the idolater, and of love's *condemnation*. ³For here is love made fearful and hope abandoned. ⁴Even the idols that are worshipped here are shrouded in mystery, and kept *apart* from those who worship them. ⁵This is the temple dedicated to no relationships and no return. ⁶Here is the "mystery" of separation perceived in awe and held in reverence. ⁷What God would have *not* be is here kept "safe" from Him. ⁸But what you do *not* realize is what you fear within your brother, and would not *see* in *him*, is what makes God seem fearful to you, and kept unknown.

⁴ Despite the Bible's assertion otherwise: "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you?" (1 Corinthians 6:19 NRSV). The Course addresses the concept of the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit in several places, beginning with a somewhat positive statement that seeing the body as a temple of Spirit is a good start, but moving well past that to what we read here. See T-2.III.1:4-8 and T-8.VII.9:1-7.

• **Study Question** •

6. *Do you see anything in this paragraph that could be naming what these idols are?*
- A. *False hope.*
 - B. *The “mystery” of separation.*
 - C. *The idolater—the ego.*
 - D. *What you fear within your brother.*

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So *forget* trying to make the body into something holy, a temple of the Holy Spirit. It'll never happen; it can “*never be the seat of love*” (6:1).

I remind you here that the Course proclaims that the body is not evil, nor is it good. “My body is a wholly neutral thing” (W-pII.294). That lesson goes on to give us this prayer:

Let me not see it more than this today; of service for a while and fit to serve, to keep its usefulness while it can serve, and then to be replaced for greater good (W-pII.294.1:10).

Our problem is that we are *way* overbalanced on the side of making the body holy, good, important, and wonderful. The Course isn't trying to say it is unholy, bad, useless, and awful. It's trying to get us back to center, to a middle ground of *neutrality*.⁵

Bodies are temples for *idols*, replacements for God (6:2). They are symbols of the ego, which is a symbol of separation (T-15.IX.2:3; T-19.I.7:7). Far from serving the cause of love, they oppose it. As symbols of separation, they foster a fear of love⁶ (which is a medium of *joining*) and a loss of hope (6:3). I think 6:4 is conveying the notion that the aspects of your ego that are “worshipped” or adored by others are kept under wraps by us, and we privately enjoy the pleasure of having our egos stroked. The body is a “temple dedicated to no relationships and no return” (6:5). We accept the strokes others give our egos without any desire to give anything in return; we accept them as our due.

What we are worshipping is “the ‘mystery’ of separation” (6:6), that “super special feature—me!” The unholy relationship, founded on bodily identities, is the means of *preserving separation* (6:7).

The final line of the paragraph is profound; I'd like to analyze it with you. “What you fear within your brother, and would not *see in him*” (refers to his Christ nature, the Self you share with him and with everyone. You fear it because seeing it and acknowledging its reality would be the end of your ego, and you still believe the ego is you. “What you do not realize” is the fact that your fear of Christ in your brother “is what makes God seem fearful to you, and kept unknown” (6:8). In a nutshell, you fear God because you fear seeing your brother as the Christ. Once again the Course makes it clear that the way to God is through forgiveness of your brother; the way to know your oneness with God is to affirm and recognize *your brother's* oneness with God.

⁵ As an aside, notice that what the Course says about the body being “replaced for greater good” indicates that any kind of bodily resurrection at the end of time is not in the cards.

⁶ For more on the fear of love, see *Your Fear of Love*, by M. B. Hodge, available used.

Paragraph 7

7. ¹Idolaters will *always* be afraid of love, for nothing so severely threatens them as love's approach. ²Let love draw near them and *overlook* the body, as it will surely do, and they retreat in fear, feeling the seeming firm foundation of their temple begin to shake and loosen. ³Brother, you tremble with them. ⁴Yet what you fear is but the herald of escape. ⁵This place of darkness is *not* your home. ⁶Your temple is *not* threatened. ⁷You are an idolater no longer. ⁸The Holy Spirit's purpose lies safe in your *relationship*, and *not* your body. ⁹You have *escaped* the body. ¹⁰Where you are the *body* cannot enter, for the Holy Spirit has set *His* temple there.

• Study Question •

7. *It is important to get in touch with what Jesus is saying here. So, if you will, please list or check off which of the following things you can remember experiencing at some point in the past.*
- A. *Feeling fear when the Course overlooks the body—talks about how unreal it is and how adorning and pleasuring it brings absolutely nothing.*
 - B. *Feeling fear when you feel yourself in the presence of pure love.*
 - C. *Retreating in fear from the blindingly radiant love of these divine homework questions.*

As we've seen, idols are anything outside yourself that you believe will bring you happiness. The underlying purpose of idols is to make our separation from God successful, to validate it and prove that we can be happy and whole without God. When we go after idols, we “will *always* be afraid of love, for nothing so severely threatens them as love's approach” (7:1).

The body is one of our primary idols. If real love attempts to approach us it will surely “*overlook* the body.” It won't pander to our separated identity as egos in bodies; it will seek to unite with our inner, true Self. This shakes the “seeming firm foundation” of our idolatrous temple, and so we “retreat in fear” (7:2). Have you ever shrunk away from someone seeking to connect with you in a deeper way? Have you even had someone else shrink away from you when you were offering only love? What the Course is saying here isn't far-fetched or abstract. People do this all the time. “Brother, you tremble with them” (7:3).

Paradoxically, the thing you are afraid of is the very thing that can deliver you from your darkness (7:4–5). None of us belong in isolated darkness. The holy relationship is our true temple, and love does not threaten *it* (7:6). If we have opened to a holy relationship, we are no longer idolaters (7:7). We are safe in that holy temple, along with the purpose given us by the Holy Spirit (7:8). We have realized that we are not now, and never have been, limited to the littleness of the body; we've escaped (7:9)! Love cannot

enter the temple of the body (5:5), but now we dwell in the holy relationship where “the *body* cannot enter” (7:10), because this is the dwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Paragraph 8

8. ¹There is no order in relationships. ²They either *are* or not. ³An unholy relationship is *no* relationship. ⁴It is a state of isolation, which *seems* to be what it is *not*. ⁵No more than that. ⁶The instant that the mad idea of making your relationship with God unholy seemed to be possible, *all* your relationships were made meaningless. ⁷In that unholy instant time was born, and bodies made to house the mad idea and give it the *illusion* of reality. ⁸And so it *seemed* to have a home that held together for a little while in time, and vanished. ⁹For what could house this mad idea *against* reality but for an instant?

• Study Question •

8. *This paragraph tells a brief story of the separation. In this story, bodies were “made to house the mad idea and give it the illusion of reality.” What is this “mad idea” in this context?*
- A. *The tiny mad idea that we forgot to laugh.*
 - B. *The mad idea of making our relationship with God unholy.*
 - C. *The mad idea of time.*
 - D. *The mad idea of the reality of the body.*

Being in a relationship is like pregnancy: You either are or you are not. There is no “little” pregnancy, and there is no “partly holy” relationship. And, “An unholy relationship is *no* relationship” (8:1–3). Therefore, the only relationship that actually *is* a relationship is a *holy* relationship. All the rest are various forms of “a state of isolation, which *seems* to be what it is *not*. No more than that” (8:4–5).

These may seem to be startling, even extreme, ideas, but they are the logical conclusion of what’s already been said. If I am in a “relationship” in which the ego is merely trying to take from the other whatever feeds it, that isn’t a relationship at all. The ego does not and cannot even *see* what relationship is (4:4); how *could* such egocentric interaction be mistaken for a relationship?

All of our relationships were spoiled and became meaningless in “the instant that the mad idea of making your relationship with God unholy seemed to be possible” (8:6). This is a reference back to Paragraph 1, which said, “the Son of God invented an unholy relationship between him and his Father” (1:4).

The invention of an impossibility is called a “mad idea.” That is another way of referencing that initial moment before time when the entire illusion of separation began. There are several mentions of the “mad idea” in the Course:

Even the **mad idea** of separation had to be shared before it could form the basis of the world I see (W-pl.r.I.54.3:3).

It [the body] is the result of a tiny, **mad idea** of corruption that can be corrected (T-19.IV.5:6).

All that the ego is, is an idea that it is possible that things could happen to the Son of God without his will; and thus without the Will of his Creator, Whose Will cannot be separate from his own. This is the Son of God's replacement for his will, a mad revolt against what must forever be. This is the statement that he has the power to make God powerless and so to take it for himself, and leave himself without what God has willed for him. This is the **mad idea** you have enshrined upon your altars, and which you worship (T-21.II.6:4-7).

Into eternity, where all is one, there crept a tiny, **mad idea**, at which the Son of God remembered not to laugh. In his forgetting did the thought become a serious idea, and possible of both accomplishment and real effects (T-27.VIII.6:2-3).

It was an idea of *separation* from God. An idea of “corruption,” which I think means a belief that what God created perfect can become imperfect, and that we have caused it to do so. It is the idea of a will other than God’s. It is the ego. And it is an idea we forgot to laugh at because *it is impossible*. This mad idea *imagined* that we could sever our relationship with God, making it unholy, so that we could *take* from God what we wanted, and take it *for ourselves alone*. We could become *special*.

When our mind first erected its walls and staked out its claim to an autonomous kingdom, it cut itself off not only from God, but also from every other part of the mind of the Sonship. Thus, all its relationships became unholy. This was the birth of time and the origin of our physical bodies, which were “made to house the mad idea and give it the *illusion of reality*” (8:7). Why was *time* born in that unholy instant? Because the body could only exist “for a little while in time” before it vanishes. This is the “corruption” part of the mad idea mentioned in T-19.IV.5:6 above. That passage is about the body. The body simply cannot exist indefinitely, because “what could house this mad idea *against* reality but for an instant?” (8:9).

I’ve been reflecting a bit on the notion, one of the fundamental teachings of traditional Christianity, of “the Fall.” In essence, this teaching posits an initial state of perfection and claims that humankind, somehow, has fallen from that state and lost that initial perfection, which now must somehow be recovered or restored. At first glance, it may seem that the Course is saying much the same thing here, but there is a key difference: We only *imagined* that it happened. We only *imagined* our perfection was lost and that we need redemption. It never happened, and therefore, it has no effects.

It’s fascinating how the Course ties all its themes together. Here we are talking about relationships, about the give and take we so often experience in them, and about the necessity of forgiveness, and suddenly we are transported back before time began and shown the origin of our unholy relationships in that unholy instant outside of time. Our relationships with one another are just the reflection of our relationship with God, and that is precisely why healing these relationships through forgiveness is our way *back* to

God—or rather, our way to *remember* God and our the divine life we still share with Him.

So, just to reiterate that startling, pithy statement that began the paragraph: Relationships either *are* or not. It makes me think of a different way of looking at the question that so often comes up: How do I find my holy relationship partner? It isn't a matter of finding “the one.” “The one” is just the first person with whom an unholy relationship becomes holy, the first person in whom I allow myself to see the Christ, the first person whose sin and guilt I learn to overlook, the first person with whom our *relationship* becomes more important than any way they feed or offend my ego, the first person where *love* rather than bodies is the foundation of our joining. It can be anyone, any time, anywhere. It can be *now*. And it can be this one, and then this one, and then that one, until there *is* only One. “It is the destiny of all relationships to become holy” (M-3.4:6).

Paragraph 9

9. ¹Idols *must* disappear, and leave no trace behind their going. ²The unholy instant of their seeming power is frail as is a snowflake, but without its loveliness. ³Is this the substitute you *want* for the eternal blessing of the holy instant and its unlimited beneficence? ⁴Is the malevolence of the unholy relationship, so seeming powerful and so bitterly misunderstood and so invested in a *false* attraction your preference to the holy instant, which offers you peace and understanding? [He expects your answer to be no.] ⁵Then lay aside the body and quietly *transcend* it, rising to welcome what you *really* want. ⁶And from His holy temple, look you not back [like Lot's wife⁷] on what you have awakened *from*. ⁷For no illusions *can* attract the mind that has *transcended* them, and left them far behind.

• Study Question •

9. *This paragraph speaks about an important choice we must make. It says that we must choose between **what**?*
- A. *The holy instant and the unholy instant.*
 - B. *The body and what we really want.*
 - C. *Illusions and God's holy temple.*
 - D. *Idols and the holy instant.*
 - E. *The unholy relationship and the holy instant.*
 - F. *All of the above.*

Idols originated in that unholy instant before time was. Since that unholy instant was nothing more than a mad idea we forgot to laugh at, and had no real effects, “idols *must* disappear, and leave no trace in their going” (9:1).

⁷ Genesis 19:26.

Where truth has entered errors disappear. They merely vanish, leaving not a trace by which to be remembered. They are gone because, without belief, they have no life. And so they disappear to nothingness, returning whence they came. From dust to dust they come and go, for only truth remains (W-pI.107.1:3-7).

The unholy instant has no real power, only *seeming* power; therefore, any product of that unholy instant shares its ephemeral nature (9:2). Jesus then asks a few rhetorical questions, expecting us to answer, “No.”

Do we really prefer the gifts the ego can give through attack, theft, and manipulation, which are so short-lived and transient, to the “*eternal* blessing of the *holy* instant” (my emphasis), with “its unlimited beneficence”? (9:3).⁸

Do we prefer the unholy relationship’s “malevolence,” where we coerce our partners into feeding our egos, to the holy instant’s “peace and understanding”? (9:4)

Then, assuming we have replied “No” to both questions, he calls on us to “lay aside the body and quietly *transcend* it” (9:5). What might it mean to transcend the body? The word *transcend* means to go beyond the range or limits of something, so this means going beyond the range and limits of the body. It means recognizing that, “. . .you are a mind, in Mind and purely mind, sinless forever, wholly unafraid, because you were created out of Love” (W-pI.158.1:2). It means relating to another as mind to mind, rather than body to body. We transcend the body and rise “to welcome what you *really* want” (9:5). What we really want are the things *opposed* to that to which we said “no”: the eternal blessing of the holy instant, with its unlimited beneficence, peace and understanding. We choose to forgive. We choose to join. We choose to love.

Once we have tasted the blessings of the holy instant and have entered the temple of the Holy Spirit (the holy relationship), we must never look back on what we left behind, as the Israelites in the wilderness looked back on the onions and garlic of Egypt (Numbers 11:5), or like Lot’s wife looked back on her life in Sodom (Genesis 19:26). If we have really transcended the body and awakened from the addiction to its idols, leaving them far behind, those illusions will no longer attract us.

Paragraph 10

10. ¹The holy relationship reflects the *true* relationship the Son of God has with his Father in reality. ²The Holy Spirit rests within it in the certainty it will endure forever. ³Its firm foundation is eternally upheld by truth, and love shines on it with the gentle smile and tender blessing it offers to its own. ⁴Here the unholy instant is exchanged in gladness for the holy one of safe return. ⁵Here is the way to true relationships held gently open, through which you and your brother walk together, leaving the body thankfully behind and resting in the Everlasting Arms. ⁶Love’s arms are open to receive you, and give you peace forever.

⁸ This reminds me of the praise given to the patriarch, Abraham, in the book of Hebrews, where it says he preferred serving God over “the pleasures of sin for a season” (Hebrews 11:25, KJV).

• **Study Question** •

10. The words “it” and “its” occur a few times in this paragraph. Understanding their meaning is crucial to the whole discussion. In the second sentence: “The Holy Spirit rests within **it** in the certainty **it**....” In the third sentence: “**Its** firm foundation...love shines on **it**...” What do these “its” refer to?
- A. The holy relationship.
 - B. The true relationship the Son of God has with his Father.
 - C. Both A and B.
 - D. The first three refer to the holy relationship. The last one refers to “truth” which upholds the holy relationship’s firm foundation.

I said above that our relationships are just the reflection of our relationship with God. That anticipated what Jesus says here: “The holy relationship reflects the true relationship the Son of God has with his Father in reality” (10:1). In this paragraph, Jesus presents a glowing picture of such a relationship, hoping to entice us to choose them in our lives.

This is the home of the Holy Spirit. He “rests” in the holy relationship, without any anxiety because He is certain “it will endure forever” (10:2). The relationship rests on a solid foundation of eternal truth. It is illumined with the gentle smile and tender blessing of love (10:3). We gladly share holy instants with one another, entering that ark two by two, returning to the heart of God (10:4). This is *true* relationship, and we enter together. We are glad, even *thankful*, to leave the body behind, with its separateness, its limitations, and its pains, and to rest in the Everlasting Arms⁹ (10:5).

God doesn’t have arms, of course, nor any body at all, although we continue to think of God that way¹⁰. The Everlasting Arms are symbolic of the sense of strong support and security that comes with a sure sense of unity with Infinite Spirit.

⁹ Deuteronomy 33:27 (KJV): “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”

¹⁰ “You cannot even think of God without a body, or in some form you think you recognize” (T-18.VIII.1:7).

Paragraph 11

11. ¹The body is the ego's idol; the belief in sin made flesh and then projected outward. ²This produces what *seems* to be a wall of flesh *around* the mind, keeping it [the mind] prisoner in a tiny spot of space and time, beholden unto death, and given but an instant in which to sigh and grieve and die in honor of its master [the ego]. ³And this unholy instant *seems* to be life; an instant of despair, a tiny island of dry sand, bereft of water and set uncertainly upon oblivion. ⁴Here does the Son of God stop briefly by, to offer his devotion to death's idols and then pass on. ⁵And here he is more dead than living. ⁶Yet it is also here he makes his choice again between idolatry and love. ⁷Here it is given him to choose to spend this instant paying tribute to the body, or *let* himself be given freedom from it. ⁸Here he can *accept* the holy instant, offered him to *replace* the unholy one he chose before. ⁹And here can he learn relationships are his *salvation*, and *not* his doom.

• Study Question •

11. *This paragraph deals with the unholy instant (11:8), but what is the unholy instant? Please base your answer strictly on this paragraph, as opposed to on your understanding of the Course's thought system as a whole.*

- A. *The tiny tick of time in which the original mad idea occurred.*
- B. *The present moment.*
- C. *The totality of time, from the separation to the final step.*
- D. *The lifespan of the body.*

•

The choice before us is spelled out here with uncompromising clarity. After a unsparing, dark description of what we call life in the world, it portrays this world and this life, not as the hopeless march toward death it seems to be, but as the opportunity to choose freedom.

The opening line declares that the body, which is “the ego’s idol,” is “the belief in sin made flesh and then projected outward” (11:1). In John Chapter 1, Jesus is said to be “the Word” that “became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). He was the thought of God’s holiness taking form in the world. Here, it is the thought of *sin* that takes form, becoming our bodies. It hems us in, containing our mind within a wall of flesh. It imprisons us “in a tiny spot of space and time¹¹.” We have such a short span of life, much of it spent in sighing and grieving, knowing that every day death is nearer, every day death could come (11:2).

Our entire life, or what *seems* to be life, is characterized as an “unholy instant.” It is filled with despair. In our bodies, we are like a tiny desert island, waterless, floating not

¹¹ I'm fascinated with the implications of this statement. It seems to imply that, in our true nature, we are *not* limited by space *or* by time. What are the possibilities? Traveling from one place to another instantaneously? Time travel? Could be.

on the sea but on oblivion (11:3). We pay only a brief visit to this arid island, make a few offerings to the idols of death, and then “pass on” (11:4). Even while we are here, we are “more dead than living” (11:5).

What a depressing picture! And yet, not an uncommon view of our lives. As Shakespeare wrote in *Macbeth*, Act 5, Scene 5:

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing.

But life is more than this! Here, in this seeming wall of flesh around our mind, we can make the choice between idolatry and love (11:6). We can choose to be freed from the prison of our body, instead of worshipping at its altar (11:7). We *chose* this unholy instant before the dawn of time, but here, now, in every present moment, we can choose the holy instant instead, and so “learn relationships are [our] salvation, and *not* [our] doom” (11:8–9). We can find that when we join with another we are not lost, but found. We do not lose, we increase. We are not trapped, but freed.

Relationships are our way home.

Paragraph 12

12. ¹You who *are* learning this may still be fearful, but you are *not* immobilized. ²The holy instant *is* of greater value now to you than its unholy seeming counterpart, and you *have* learned you *really* want but one. ³This is no time for sadness. ⁴Perhaps confusion, but hardly discouragement. ⁵*You have a real relationship*, and it *has* meaning. ⁶It is as like your real relationship with God as equal things are like unto each other. ⁷Idolatry is past and meaningless. ⁸Perhaps you fear ~~your brother~~ **[each other]** a little yet; perhaps a shadow of the fear of God remains with you. ⁹Yet what is that to those who have been given one *true* relationship *beyond* the body? ¹⁰Can they be long held back from looking on the face of Christ? ¹¹And can they long withhold the memory of their relationship with their Father *from* themselves, and keep remembrance of His Love *apart* from their awareness?

• **Study Question** •

12. *True or false: the reader being addressed in this section has many holy relationships.*

- A. *True, because all relationships are holy.*
- B. *False, because he has only one—his holy relationship with his Father.*
- C. *False, because it says he has one true relationship beyond the body—one holy relationship in this world.*
- D. *True, because anyone on the spiritual path will have several holy relationships.*

•

Paragraph 12 is clearly addressed, first of all, to Helen and Bill. “You *have* learned you *really* want but one” instant, the holy instant; “*You have a real relationship*”; “Perhaps you fear each other a little yet”; and you “have been given one *true* relationship *beyond* the body”—these are statements that clearly are speaking to persons who are fully engaged in a holy relationship. Nevertheless, there is much all of us can learn from all of this. Either we already *are* in a holy relationship at some level, or we will be. So it applies to us as well as to Helen and Bill.

Coming after the last paragraph’s depressing view of life on earth, this paragraph brings a closing note of encouragement, such as is often found at the end of a section. It begins by acknowledging that, even to those who have launched into a holy relationship, fears still may arise, but they will not be *paralyzing* fears (12:1). They’ve come too far for that. Although the relationship has not yet grown to full maturity, the partners have come to value the holy instant more than anything the unholy instant (a.k.a. ordinary human life) can offer (12:2). They have recognized what they *really* want, even if they have not yet brought it to fruition. When we realize that we “aren’t there yet” in whatever measure, it’s tempting to feel sad or discouraged, but sadness and discouragement are *not* appropriate reactions, although if we feel *confused*, that’s okay (12:3–4). Confusion can be a positive sign, an indication that we’ve begun to question the old thought processes that have held us back, but have not yet completely clarified and accepted the new thought processes.

In this transitional state of confusion we need reassurances. That’s why Jesus says, with great emphasis: “*You have a real relationship, and it has meaning*” (12:5). In the initial stages of a holy relationship there is the risk that we will question it and doubt its reality and significance: “Can I *really* trust this other person? Maybe I should keep my guard up *just a little*? Is this too good to be true? Is the holy purpose I see in this relationship just my imagination?” Yes, No, No, and No! The relationship is *real*, and so is its *meaning*. It is *exactly* like your real relationship with God; in a sense it *is* your relationship with God (12:6)¹²! This relationship really is your way out of hell.

¹² This is a reference to Euclid’s first common notion: “Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other.” In other words, if A=C and B=C, then logically, A must be equal to B. Jesus applies it to tell us that our holy relationships are *equal to* our relationship with God. They are identical, the same thing!

Now that you have entered a holy relationship, “idolatry is past and meaningless” (12:7). Your *holy relationship* has meaning; idolatry does not. You are no longer seeking satisfaction and meaning in things outside yourself. Instead, you have found meaning *in your relationship*. Oh, there are still a few lingering fears between you and your partner, just as there may be a “shadow of the fear of God”—even in this, the relationships mirror one another (12:8). But you “have been given one *true* relationship *beyond* the body” (the body being the home of idolatry), so the fears cannot hold you back for long from lifting the veil of the body to behold the face of Christ (12:10). It’s going to happen; you will surmount these lingering fears and find full union with one another. And as your *human* relationship transcends the fears to find union, so will your relationship with God do the same: The memory of your true relationship with the Father will return to you, as will your full awareness of His Love (12:11). Through the holy relationship, the aim of the Course will be accomplished:

The course does not aim at teaching the meaning of love, for that is beyond what can be taught. It does aim, however, at removing the blocks to the awareness of love's presence, which is your natural inheritance (T.Int.1:6-7).

At the end of the preceding section, Jesus said there was something we had to learn in order to share God’s confidence in us, a confidence that allows Him to place the universe in our hands “and *know* it rests in safety” (T-20.VI.8:3–4). And we have just been shown what that something is: Our very being depends on our relationship with Him, and we can come to share that confidence through experiencing the *mirror* of that relationship here on earth—our holy relationship with another person.

• **Study Question** •

13. **Summary:** *Do your best to summarize this section’s major themes, or at least those that struck you the most, in a paragraph. Include at least the contrast between, on the one side, the unholy relationship, body, idols and unholy instant, and, on the other side, the holy relationship, love and the holy instant.*

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Answer Key

1. REAL RELATIONSHIP:

ONE WE MADE:

our meaning depends on it	unholy
there is nothing else	our invention
it is not contingency	partial
wholly loving	self-centered
forever	broken into fragments
perfect union	full of fear
unbroken continuity	self-destructive
wholly self-encompassing	self-limiting
wholly self-extending	

2. C

3. D

4. C

5. Fashion

6. B

7. any answer will do.

8. B

9. F

10. A

11. D

12. C

13. An unholy relationship reflects your unholy relationship with God. It is based on the body, the ego's temple of idolatry and secrecy. The Holy Spirit's temple is the holy relationship, based on love and openness. It opens the way to, and mirrors, your holy relationship with God.