

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 22

The Function of the Holy Relationship

Sections I & II

The Undoing of Differences Christ Reborn into His Ancient Home

Legend:

Light underscoring indicates emphasis that appears in the Urtext or shorthand notes.

Text is taken from the Circle of Atonement's Complete and Annotated Edition (which I refer to as the "CE" for "Complete Edition" or "Circle Edition"). Please be aware that, even when the wording is exactly the same as the FIP version, the division into paragraphs is often quite different in the CE, which restores the paragraph breaks found in the original notes. This results in different reference numbering as well. I will indicate for each paragraph the corresponding sentences in the FIP edition. You should be able to locate specific sentences in that edition if you need to, with a minimum of visual clutter in the commentary. Passages that lie outside the current section will continue to have footnoted references. References to quotations are from the CE unless another version is being quoted, in which case that version is indicated.

Footnotes by the commentary author are shown in this font and size. Other footnotes come from the Complete Edition itself.

Overview of Section I

This section was labelled "Introduction" in the FIP edition; the CE has given it its own section number. The paragraph breaks are all the same.

This short section, following on the extended discussion in Chapter 21 about seeing a world without sin, and seeing one another as sinless, shows now the importance of the holy relationship as a powerful force in undoing all differences, first within the relationship, and then—inevitably—extending out from the relationship to embrace the world. The benefits of a holy relationship are expanded on throughout all of Chapter 22.

Paragraph 1

Take pity on yourselves, so long enslaved. ²Rejoice whom God hath joined have come together and need no longer look on sin apart. ¹ ³No two can look on sin together, for they could never see it in the same place and time. ⁴Sin is a strictly individual perception, seen in the other yet believed by each to be within himself. ⁵And each one seems to make a different error, and one the other cannot understand. ⁶Brothers, it is the same, made by the same, and forgiven for its maker in the same way. ⁷The holiness of your relationship forgives you both, undoing the effects of what you both believed *and* saw. ⁸And with their going is the need for sin gone with them.

• Study Question •

1. *What is one major positive effect of a holy relationship which is discussed in this paragraph?*
 - A. *In a holy relationship we experience forgiveness.*
 - B. *In a holy relationship we cannot look on sin together.*
 - C. *In a holy relationship we are able to look on sin together, and so forgive it.*

The remark about “yourselves, so long enslaved,” is a reference to T-20.III.10², which referred to the participants in a relationship as “prisoners bound with heavy chains for years.” Jesus is appealing to us to be merciful to ourselves, to release ourselves from the self-imposed slavery we have been suffering. The slavery is our bondage to mutual condemnation and judgment. We see sin in one another, believing we are irreparably different and separate; we “look on sin *apart*” (1:2). It’s not possible to “look on sin *together*” (1:3); I see sin in you, and think, “I would never do anything like that.” But you see sin in me. We “never see it in the same place and time.” We judge one another and see ourselves as different.

The way projection works, however, is that when I see sin in you or anyone, I secretly *do* believe it is in me (1:4). I think what you have done is incomprehensible to me (1:5), and yet, I suspect myself of being just as guilty as I think you are. Maybe not in the same way, but I cannot help judging myself when I judge you, because in reality we are one. And in fact “it is the same, *made* by the same, and forgiven for its maker in the *same* way” (1:6).

¹ Matthew 19:6 (KJV): “Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” The above reference turns this verse about marriage into a statement about the nature of any true joining, and adds that such a union allows the two to see past the apparent reality of sin, since (as the paragraph later explains) “Sin is a strictly individual perception.”

² T-20.III.9 (FIP)

When two people join in a holy relationship, we see that we are the same. Difference is gone. Forgiveness for one is forgiveness for the other. We believed we saw sin in one another, and that we had somehow been damaged by it, but now, the effects of what we *thought* we saw have been undone (1:7). We realize that we still remain as God created us, unaffected by the so-called “sin.” With the effects gone, we no longer have any need to perceive sin as their supposed cause (1:8).

To me this is an important understanding, that the effects go first, allowing our perception of “sin” to be changed. What shifts first is our awareness of our wholeness. The true Self—that is, the spiritual essence of us—has not been injured. When I recognize this about myself, I realize there is nothing to forgive! The Course emphasizes this idea that we have not been injured, which forms the basis for forgiveness, more than once. For instance:

The way to teach this simple lesson is merely this: Guiltlessness *is* invulnerability. ⁴Therefore, make your invulnerability manifest to everyone you meet, and teach him that, whatever he may try to do to you, your perfect freedom from the belief that you can be harmed shows him he is guiltless. ³He can do nothing that can hurt you, and by refusing to allow him to think he can, you teach him that the Atonement, which you have accepted, is also his.

7 There is nothing to forgive. ²No one can hurt the Son of God. ³His guilt is wholly without cause, and being without cause, cannot exist. (T-14.III.6:3–7:3³).

Another example, from later in the Text:

Are you invulnerable? Then the world is harmless in your sight. Do you forgive? Then is the world forgiving, for you have forgiven it its trespasses, and so it looks on you with eyes that see as yours. Are you a body? So is all the world perceived as treacherous and out to kill. Are you a spirit, deathless and without the promise of corruption and the stain of sin upon you? So the world is seen as stable, fully worthy of your trust; a happy place to rest in for a while, where nothing need be feared but only loved (T-31.VI.6:1–8).

And from early in the Text: “The truly helpful are invulnerable, because they are not protecting their egos, so that nothing can hurt them” (T-4.X.10:3⁴). The idea seems to be that, if you are not protecting your ego, and you realize you are a deathless, incorruptible, unstained spirit and not a body, you *cannot be hurt*. Nothing your brother does can hurt you (T-14.III.6:5). Therefore, “there is nothing to forgive.” The effects of “sin” is gone, and something with zero effects does not exist, so there is no sin to be seen.

³ T-14.III.7:1–7 (FIP)

⁴ T-4.VII.8:3 (FIP)

Paragraph 2

2 Who has a need for sin? ²Only the lonely and alone, who see their brothers different from themselves. ³It is this difference, seen but not real, that makes the need for sin, not real but seen, seem justified. ⁴And all this *would* be real if sin were so. ⁵For an unholy relationship is based on differences, where each one thinks the other has what he has not. ⁶They come together, each to complete himself and rob the other. ⁷They stay until they think there's nothing left to steal, and then move on. ⁸And so they wander through a world of strangers unlike themselves, living with their bodies perhaps beneath a common roof that shelters neither, in the same room and yet a world apart.

• Study Question •

2. (a) *We see sin in one another because we mistakenly believe that we need to see it. The need for sin is not real. Why, then, do we seem to need this mistaken perception of one another?*
- A. *Because we see ourselves as lonely, alone, and lacking what our brother or sister has.*
 - B. *Because we see each other as different from ourselves.*
 - C. *Because we see ourselves as incomplete.*
 - D. *All of the above*
- (b) *What primary characteristic of an unholy relationship is emphasized here?*
- A. *It is a relationship of sin.*
 - B. *It is a relationship in which our goal is to take all we can from one another.*
 - C. *It is a relationship based on differences.*

Why do we seem to *need* to see sin in one another? It happens because we believe that we are “lonely and alone” and different from everyone else (2:1–2). Living as separate egos in separate bodies, we see a need for sin. It’s the *difference* that makes the need for sin seem justified (2:3). But the difference, although we see it, is not real; therefore the sin we think we see is equally unreal (2:3). You can’t have sin without separation and differences. If there is only One—if you and I are one and not different—I cannot possibly see *you* as offending *me*. If sin actually exists then we *must* be separate and different (2:4)—and we are *not!*

What follows is perhaps the clearest description in the Course of the difference between unholy and holy relationships.

This perception of sin justified by belief in differences is how unholy relationships function. They are “based on differences.” In an unholy relationship, I think that we are different. I am incomplete, and you have something I don’t have, so I “join” with you to somehow take what you have to complete myself (2:5–6). And once I think I’ve got what I needed, or realize that I’m *not* going to get it (which is more frequently the case, I

think), I drop you and find someone else to “join” with (2:7). But I never *really* join with anyone. The world, to me, seems to be full of “strangers unlike” me. Maybe I even live together with another person, beneath a common roof (a roof that does nothing to truly shelter me), but although you and I are in the same room, in any experience of togetherness, we are “a world apart” (2:8). I think we all know what this is describing. We’ve all been there, to some extent.

Paragraph 3

3 A holy relationship starts from a different premise. ²Each one has looked within and seen no lack. ³Accepting his completion, he would extend it by joining with another, whole as himself. ⁴He sees no differences between these selves, for differences are only of the body. ⁵Therefore, he looks on nothing he would take. ⁶He denies not his own reality *because* it is the truth. ⁷And he unites, because unless he does, the truth would *not* be true. ⁸Just under Heaven does he stand, but close enough not to return to earth. ⁹For this relationship has Heaven’s holiness. ¹⁰How far from home can a relationship so like to Heaven be?

• Study Question •

3. (a) *What is the distinguishing premise behind a holy relationship?*
- A. A. *It is a joining with another person in a common goal.*
 - B. B. *It is based on a vision of our own completion.*
 - C. C. *It is not based on the body.*
- (b) *In a sentence or two, how does the discussion of this section relate to the way we answer the "last unanswered question" in T-21.VII.6:11⁵?*

Now, he describes the holy relationship, contrasting it with the unholy one. The whole premise on which relationship is based is different (3:1). Instead of starting from a sense of lack, of a need to rob something from the other to complete oneself, the holy relationship begins with partners who have “looked within and seen no lack” (3:2). As I said above, what shifts first is our awareness of our wholeness. From that starting point, the reason for joining with another person is also completely different. You see yourself as complete, and want to *extend* that completion by joining with another person who likewise sees themselves as complete and whole (3:3). You do not see the other person as different from yourself, possessing some things you do not; you are equals. “Differences are only of the body” (3:4), and you know that you are spirits, not bodies. So there is no motivation to *take* anything from the other (3:5).

You have ceased denying your own reality *because* now you know it is the truth (3:6). You are *compelled* to unite with others because you *already are united*, and to *fail* to unite would be a denial of the truth (3:7).

⁵ T-21.VII.5:14 (FIP)

Persons in a relationship like this stand “just under Heaven...but close enough not to return to earth” (3:8). This is a relationship that “*has* Heaven’s holiness” (3:9). This is a relationship that radiates Heaven’s holiness and is saturated with it. It is *almost* like Heaven itself, so like Heaven that you know it cannot be far from home (3:10).

Clearly, Jesus is speaking here of a *mature* holy relationship, not one like a newborn infant, just beginning to grow, as our relationships are described in T-22.II.8:1–3.⁶ This description of what a holy relationship looks like when it is all grown up gives us something to grow into. As we live in our relationships we should, from time to time, look at ourselves to see what our premises are. Do I see myself as lacking or whole? Do I see you as possessing something I don’t have, but want, or do I see you as whole as myself? Am I trying to get something from you, or do I want to join with you in extending and celebrating our wholeness?

Paragraph 4

4 Think what a holy relationship can teach! ²Here is *belief* in differences undone. ³Here is the *faith* in differences shifted to sameness. ⁴And here is *sight* of differences transformed to vision. ⁵And reason now can lead you to the logical conclusion of your union: *It* must extend, as you extended when you joined. ⁶It must reach out beyond itself, as you reached out beyond the body to let yourselves be joined. ⁷And now the sameness which you saw extends, and finally removes all sense of differences, so that the sameness that lies beneath them all becomes apparent. ⁸Here is the golden circle where you recognize the Son of God. ⁷ ⁹For what is born into a holy relationship can never end.

• Study Question •

4. Which of the following things (more than one) are said (in this paragraph) to occur within the context of a holy relationship?
- A. Our sight of differences is transformed to vision.
 - B. Our belief in differences is undone.
 - C. We and our partner can now be led by reason.
 - D. Our faith in differences is shifted to faith in sameness.
 - E. We experience mutual holy relationships.
 - F. The relationship extends beyond itself.
 - G. Together we do not look on sin.
 - H. Together we recognize the Son of God.
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⁶ T-22.I.7:1-3 (FIP)

⁷ T-21.I.10:1, 11:1: “Beyond the body, beyond the sun and stars, past everything you see and yet somehow familiar, is an arc of golden light that stretches as you look into a great and shining circle.... This is the vision of the Son of God, whom you know well.” (T-21.I.8:1, 9:1 (FIP))

These are some of the things we can learn in a holy relationship (4:1). (Watch for it! Here comes, “belief, faith, and vision” again. Here comes *reason*.) We can learn to divest ourselves of any *belief* in differences (4:2). We shift from *faith* in differences to *faith* in sameness (4:3). Our *sight* of differences is transformed to *vision* (4:4). And with faith, belief, and vision all aligned to oneness and sameness, *reason* can enter in to lead us even further, “to the logical conclusion of your union: *It* must extend, as *you* extended when you joined” (4:5). Thus, the holy relationship itself will now extend and include more and more. By its very nature, it has to extend (4:6). The sameness that the partners in relationship have seen in one another becomes something they see in everyone, everywhere. All sense of differences is removed, and “the sameness that lies beneath them all becomes apparent” (4:7). The mystical vision described back in Chapter 21, the vision of “an arc of golden light that stretches...into a great and shining circle...the vision of the Son of God” (see footnote 7, previous page) now becomes *apparent* to us (4:8–9) as our relationship expands to embrace the world—and beyond! “For what is born into a holy relationship can *never* end” (4:10). That seems to me like a hint that the expansion goes on forever.

Overview of Section II, Christ Reborn into His Ancient Home

Section I ended with the Son of God being born into a holy relationship and, in a natural outgrowth, that golden circle of oneness extending to the world. This section picks up on that image and expands on it. Notice again the recurring use of *faith*, *belief*, and *vision*, and the appeal to *reason* to accept a new vision *because* it is the truth. We are encouraged to value the holy relationship for what it can bring to us, and to actively, consciously give ourselves over to learning what such a relationship is intended to teach us.

Paragraph 1 (¶1 (FIP))

Let reason take another step. ²If you attack whom God would heal and hate the one He loves, then you and your Creator have different wills. ³Yet if you *are* His will, what you must then believe is that you are not yourself. ⁴You can indeed believe this, and you do. ⁵And you have faith in this, and see much evidence on its behalf. ⁶And from where, you wonder, does your strange uneasiness, your sense of being disconnected, and your haunting fear of lack of meaning in yourself arise? ⁷It is as though you wandered in without a plan of any kind except to wander off, for only that seems certain.

• **Study Question** •

5. (a) Which of the following represents the reason and logic of the Holy Spirit in this paragraph?
- A. God loves His Son and wants to heal him. You attack the Son and hate him. Therefore, your will and God's Will must be different.
 - B. You are God's Will and God's Son. Yet you believe you are attacking and hating God's Son. Therefore, you must believe that you are not yourself.
- (b) What one word best identifies this other thing that we think we are?
- A. ego
 - B. sinful
 - C. different

Reason has already taken us one step (in this chapter): To realize that our holy relationship, by its very nature (absence of differences, sameness), *must* extend beyond itself. Now, we follow reason in a second step: If, instead of joining in the holy relationship, we attack and hate our brother or sister (judge them, see them as sinful, use them in order to take what we believe we lack), when God, their Creator, loves them and wills to heal them—then, reason would tell us, we have a will that is different from God's (1:1–2).

The problem with that conclusion is that we *are* His will. Therefore, if we believe we have a will different from God's, we must believe we are something other than our true Self (1:3). God created us as A with a will like His, but now we have a different will, so we are no longer the being God created. We are no longer ourselves. That may seem crazy and even impossible, but that *is* exactly what we do believe (1:4)! We *believe* it, we have *faith* in it, and our *sight* shows us “much evidence on its behalf” (1:4–5).

No *wonder* we feel uneasy and disconnected! No wonder we are haunted by fears that our existence is meaningless (1:6). With this distorted and impossible loss of self-identity, we feel as though we've just “wandered in without a plan of any kind except to wander off” (1:7). As the popular saying goes, “Life is a bitch, and then you die.” Our physical senses seem to confirm that we are not “spiritual beings,” but short-lived, vulnerable bodies. The annual toll of all the celebrities that died in the past year seems to prove how insubstantial we are; everyone dies, even the famous. What more proof do we need? the ego asks.

Paragraph 2 (2:1–10 (FIP))

2 Yet we have heard a very similar description earlier,⁸ but it was not of you. ²And yet this strange idea, which it does accurately describe, you think *is* you. ³Reason would tell you that the world you see through eyes that are not yours must make no sense to you. ⁴To whom would vision such as this send back its messages? ⁵Surely not you, whose sight is wholly independent of the eyes which look upon the world. ⁶If this is not your vision, what can it show to you? ⁷The brain cannot interpret what your vision sees. ⁸This *you* would understand. ⁹The brain interprets to the body, of which it is a part. ¹⁰But what it says, you cannot understand.

• Study Question •

6. Several statements are listed below. Arrange them into two groups, one of which is true of our bodily perceptions, and one of which is true of real vision.
- A. The world seen with this makes no sense to us.
 - B. Its messages are addressed to our true Self.
 - C. Its eyes are not our eyes.
 - D. Its sight is independent of physical eyes.
 - E. This is not our vision.
 - F. The brain cannot interpret it.
 - G. Our true self understands it.
 - H. Its messages are directed to the body.
 - I. Our true self cannot understand it.

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The “very similar description” (2:1), similar to 1:7, occurred in T-20.III.7:4⁹; you may want to re-read that description in context now (see footnote 8). We think we are this “stranger,” the ego (2:2). Jesus was also pointing out the same thing back in 21.VII.2:2¹⁰.

Remember, too, the principle that our perception (what we see) only witnesses to what we believe we are (T-21.V.2:1–4¹¹). This paragraph and the next describe why what we see in the world cannot be true, and cannot be trusted. Once again Jesus appeals to reason. Reason speaks thus: You see the world through the body’s eyes, but you are not the body, and these are not really *your* eyes. Therefore, it’s reasonable that the world makes no sense to you (2:3).

⁸ T-20.III.7:4: “There is a stranger in him, who wandered carelessly into the home of truth and who will wander off.” This is a description of the ego, the strange idea that is not you, but that you think is you.

⁹ T-20.III.7:2 (FIP)

¹⁰ Workbook lesson 160 also declares, “I am at home. Fear is the stranger here,” and uses the same kind of imagery about the stranger.

¹¹ T-21.V.1:7–10 (FIP)

Who is the recipient of the perceptions of our body's eyes? (2:4) Clearly, *not you*; your vision is completely independent of physical sight (2:5). So, if the perceptions of the body are not *your* perceptions, how can it possibly show *you* anything (2:6)?

The brain, being part of the body, cannot interpret true (i.e. spiritual) vision (2:7); only *you* can understand it (2:8). The brain interprets the perceptions of the body *to* the body (2:9). Its messages are incomprehensible to your spiritual Self (2:10).

Summing up:

The world seems incomprehensible because the perceptions of our physical self cannot communicate anything to our spiritual Self. Neither can our physical self understand anything communicated by spiritual vision.

Paragraph 3 (2:11–12, 3:1-6 (FIP))

3 Yet you have listened to it, and long and hard you tried to understand its messages. ²You did not realize it is impossible to understand what fails entirely to reach you. ³You have received no messages at all you understood, for you have listened to what can never communicate at all. ⁴Think, then, what happened. ⁵Denying what you are, and firm in faith that you are something else, this something else, which you had made to be yourself, became your sight. ⁶Yet it must be the “something else” which sees and, as *not you*, explains its sight *to* you.

• Study Question •

7. Which of the following best summarizes the message of this paragraph?
- A. Because our true eyes are closed, we are wholly dependent upon the ego to see the world for us, and to explain it to us.
 - B. The world we seem to see is being explained to us by the ego, which is why we don't understand it.
 - C. The world seems to be a miserable place, but God has a purpose behind it all which will be explained at the end of our journey.

Despite our inability to make sense of what the body shows us, we *listen* to it! We continue to give credence to the messages conveyed to us by our eyes, ears, touch, nose, and taste. “Long and hard you tried to understand” what your senses have been telling you (3:1). The Course wants to save you a lot of trouble. Stop trying to understand the world; it's impossible (3:2)! As we have just seen, the messages of your senses do not reach your spirit; they are meant only for the physical realm (3:2–3). It's as if you have been listening to static on a radio, trying to make sense of it. There *is* no sense to it.

So, what happened as a result of this? With another appeal to our reason, Jesus asks us to think about what we have done (3:4). We've denied our true Identity. We have a firm faith that we are something else (a something with a body), something *we made* to be our new identity. This something that we made then became our sight. We imagine that when the body sees something, *we* are seeing it. But it cannot be true because we are

not the thing we made. It must be that the “something else” sees, and then, as something that is “*not you*,” explains to you what *it* has seen (3:5–6). This is truly the blind leading the blind! The body, which cannot perceive the spiritual realm, is attempting to explain reality to us. We have closed our true eyes and asked a blind “thing” to lead us (4:2).

Paragraph 4 (3:7–11 (FIP))

4 Your vision would, of course, render this quite unnecessary. ²But if your eyes are closed and you have called upon this thing to lead you, asking it to explain to you the world it sees, you have no reason not to listen, nor to suspect that what it tells you is not true. ³Reason would tell you that it can't be true *because* you do not understand it. ⁴*God has no secrets*. ⁵He does not lead you through a world of misery, waiting to tell you at the journey's end why He did this to you.

• Study Question •

8. *The world seems mysterious; things happen that seem to have no reasonable explanation. Why should this tell us that what we see cannot be true?*

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If we just opened our spiritual eyes, of course, none of this insane arrangement would be necessary (4:1). But, with our eyes closed and the ego/body as our guide, we “have no reason not to listen, nor to suspect that what it tells you is not true” (4:2). We have shut down our spiritual sight, so that we don't have anything with which to compare the data our senses bring us. But even without a reliable source to fact-check our egos and our senses, if we just listened to *reason*, we would realize that what we are hearing and seeing does not make sense; it can't be true *for the very reason that* we don't understand it (4:3).

Why is that so? Simply this: Truth comes from God, and, “*God has no secrets*” (4:4). Isn't it strange that anyone who believes in God settles for a world that makes no sense? Some Christian song-writer even wrote a song about how we cannot understand all the painful things that happen to us, but, “It will be worth it all when we see Jesus.” Another hymn writer affirms, “I know not what the future holds, but I know Who holds the future.” That's a little closer to something I can accept. Even the Apostle Paul wrote, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.” (Romans 8:18 NRSV) The idea there presupposes that there is no reason to complain about senseless suffering, because the world to come holds such glory as to make nothing of the suffering. Some day, then, we'll understand. We'll think the mess and confusion were worthwhile.

But why would God subject us to this kind of thing in the first place? The Course quite plainly states that God did not create the world we see:

"The world you see is an illusion of a world. God did not create it, for what He creates must be eternal as Himself" (C-4.1:1-2).

Course students have argued for decades over whether this means that God did not create the physical world, or that God did not create the world *as we see it*. Is the physical world unreal, or is our *perception* of it unreal? Let's be clear that, in either case, our perception of the world is in need of correction. Either we are seeing something incorrectly, or we are seeing something that does not even exist. There are lines that seem to imply that the world, or the earth, is something real, created by God, but something we perceive incorrectly:

“The world as you perceive it cannot have been created by the Father, for the world is not as you see it.” (T-11.VIII.1:1, T-11.VII.1:1 (FIP)) This implies there *is* a world created by God, but we don't see it.

“Think not that you made the world. Illusions, yes, but what is true in earth and Heaven is beyond your naming.” (W-184.8:1) This establishes that there is something “true in earth” as well as Heaven, but we don't see it.

My own understanding is that the reality God created is not physical at all. But then what *is* this physical stuff? We have two options: It is the evolutionary manifestation of God's invisible creation (and therefore an extension of God as we are), or it is the fabrication of the ego thought within our Mind. I tend to hold the latter to be the best understanding, especially because the Course explicitly says that the ego made the body, and therefore, by extension, all things physical, but your mileage may vary. To me it makes no great difference.

Whatever we think about the reality or unreality of the physical world, or its source, we still need to concern ourselves primarily with the content of our minds. How we *treat* the physical world should not be affected. My thought is that the world is the outside expression of our inward condition. It is the laboratory in which we exist to demonstrate the Truth. The Bible says, “Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they *have* seen, cannot love God whom they have *not* seen” (1 John 4:20 NRSV, my emphasis). How we treat the world we see should reflect the invisible truth we have not seen with our eyes, and that applies not only to people, but to animals, plants, and the planet itself. Ecological concern (for example) is not just practical, it stems from an unselfish heart that recognizes its oneness with all that is. I cannot truly know my Christ-nature if I am behaving outwardly in an un-Christlike way.

All that aside, the point here is that God would not subject His beloved sons and daughters to the insanity of an incomprehensible world filled with pain, suffering, and death, “waiting to tell you at the journey's end why He *did* this to you” (4:5). Putting it in stark terms, God is not a sadist. This is the central message of Lesson 14: “God did not create a meaningless world.” There, it says that, “The world you see has nothing to do with reality. It is of your own making, and it does not exist.” It speaks of wars, airplane crashes, illness, and disasters, and asserts:

"This is your personal repertory of horrors at which you are looking. These things are part of the world you see. Some of them are shared illusions, and others are part of your personal hell. It does not matter. What God did not create can

only be in your own mind apart from His. Therefore, it has no meaning" (W-pI.14.6:1-6).

We just can't understand these crazy things. The point is this: Instead of wailing, "Why does God allow these terrible things to occur?" we should realize that God had *nothing to do* with these terrible things! He would not do that. Therefore, the inexplicable horrors of the world that we cannot explain, because they are not anything God created, *cannot be real*.

Not the main point here (again), but notice the phrase, "shared illusions" in that quote above. It has interesting implications.

Paragraph 5 (¶4 (FIP))

5 What could be secret from His will? ²Yet you believe that you have secrets. ³What could your secrets be except another will that is your own apart from His? ⁴Reason would tell you that this is no secret that need be hidden as a sin. ⁵But a *mistake* indeed! ⁶Let not your fear of sin protect it from correction, for the attraction of guilt is only fear. ¹² ⁷Here is the one emotion that you made, whatever it may seem to be. ⁸And it *is* the emotion of secrecy, of private thoughts, and of the body. ⁹This is the one emotion that opposes love and always leads to sight of differences and loss of sense of sameness. ¹⁰Here is the one emotion that keeps you blind, dependent on the self you think you made to lead you through the world it made for you.

• Study Question •

9. *What is the "one emotion" we made, and what, in this paragraph, are said to be its effects?*

•

God has no secrets. We are in God; we are the will of God. Believing that we have "secret thoughts" merely demonstrates that we think we have a will that is distinct and separate from God's (5:1-3). That isn't a terrible sin, just a giant mistake (5:4-5). You do not need to hide it from God (which isn't even possible) out of fear that it is a "sin" that will incur God's wrath. Thinking your will is distinct from God's does not make it so, and God knows that. Let yourself bring this mistake to God for correction (5:6).

Fear is the only emotion that you have made, regardless of the myriad of forms in which it seems to show up. It's all fear (5:7). The desire to keep things secret or private is driven by fear, typically, fear of being judged and condemned.

¹². The point of this sentence seems to be that our fear of sin shouldn't impel us to hide it, for this protects it from correction. Something in us *wants* to protect sin, because we are attracted to the guilt it induces, but the "reward" we are counting on guilt to bring us "is only fear." So the very fear that leads us to hide sin is actually the only payoff that sin delivers. Why, then, protect it from correction?

Fear is also the emotion “*of the body*” (5:8). He emphasizes that, so it bears looking at. He goes on to talk about “sight of differences and loss of sense of sameness,” which are clearly things that go hand-in-hand with separate bodies. He also refers to our being kept in blindness, dependent on the physical senses to lead us through the world our ego has made (5:9–10). What he seems to me to be saying here is that the reason we have identified with our bodies so strongly is *our fear of being found guilty*. It isn’t enough to suppose our thoughts are separate. We made bodies that are clearly separate to prove to ourselves that we are safe from God, hidden in our fleshly prisons. But, “The body does *not* separate you from your brother, and if you think it does, you *are* insane!” (T-21.VI.5:1).

Reason would tell us that our imagined “other will” is just a stupid mistake. Being separate from God simply isn’t possible! There is no reason to be afraid.

Paragraph 6 (¶5 (FIP))

6 Your sight was given you, along with everything that you can understand. ²You will perceive no difficulty in understanding what this vision shows you. ³For everyone sees only what he thinks he is, and what your sight will show, you will understand *because* it is the truth. ⁴Only *your* vision can convey to you what *you* can see. ⁵It reaches you directly, without a need to be interpreted to you. ⁶What needs interpretation must be alien. ⁷Nor will it ever be made understandable by an interpreter you cannot understand.

• Study Question •

10. The “sight” of sentence 1 refers to our true vision (sentence 2). In the list of characteristics below, identify which are true of vision, and which are true of the ego’s kind of sight.
- A. We will have no difficulty in understanding it.
 - B. It shows us the truth.
 - C. It needs interpretation.
 - D. What it shows us is alien to us.
 - E. What it shows us is natural to us.
 - F. It needs no interpretation.
 - G. It cannot ever be understood.
 - H. It conveys what we cannot see by ourselves.
 - I. It conveys what we can see by ourselves.

Back in 4:1, Jesus assures us that our spiritual vision would render our dependence on the body completely unnecessary. He returns to that idea now, telling us that sight has been *given* to us, and the ability to *understand* everything it shows to us. This is in stark contrast to our *inability to understand* the world we see with the body’s eyes (6:1–2).

With vision, it is a gift from God. With physical sight, we must struggle to make sense of what we see.

Sentence 2 declares that the ease of understanding what vision tells us comes *because* “everyone sees *only* what he thinks he *is*” (6:2). Why does seeing what we think we are make it easy to understand, when we see with vision? When we see with vision, we are seeing the *truth* of what we are. It is a *direct* kind of perception that requires no intermediate step of interpretation. It’s an intuitive *knowing*. Our bodily sight of the world always requires interpretation; we have to figure out what it means, what it is telling us. After millenia of study, scientists are still making new discoveries about how the body functions, and our understanding of the mind-body connection is still in its infancy. Spiritual knowing isn’t like that. When, with spiritual sight, we perceive the truth about ourselves, we know it completely. Nothing needs interpretation (6:3–5).

The difference should inform us of something: “What *needs* interpretation *must* be alien” (6:6). One kind of sight you understand completely without the help of an interpreter; the other kind, you never quite grasp the meaning of, no matter how much your ego tries to interpret for you (6:7). That must be because one is the truth, and the other is something totally foreign to your true nature.

Paragraph 7 (¶6 (FIP))

7 Of all the messages you have received and failed to understand, this course alone is open to your understanding and can be understood. ²This *is* your language. ³You do not understand it yet only because your whole communication skill is like a baby’s. ⁴The sounds a baby makes and what he hears are highly unreliable, meaning different things to him at different times. ⁵Neither the sounds he hears nor sights he sees are stable yet. ⁶Yet what he hears and does not understand will be his native tongue, through which he will communicate with those around him, and they with him. ⁷And the strange, shifting ones he sees about him will become to him his comforters, and he will recognize his home and see them there with him.

• Study Question •

11. *If the Course is speaking the truth, why does it seem so hard to understand?*

- A. *It is speaking of very high things and we are still little children.*
- B. *Our communication is not stable as yet, but it will be.*
- C. *We need parent figures to interpret it for us.*

•

Having difficulty understanding the Course? Be assured: You *will* understand it! This is your language, your native tongue. In fact, among all the constant flow of information that has been coming at you all your life, *this is the only thing* you can and will understand (7:1–2). Why, then, does it seem so difficult for us at times to understand it? The answer is, according to the Course, that our “whole communication skill is like a

baby's" (7:3). There are two ways I understand that. First, our ability to understand is in its infancy, and so it must, and will, grow and increase over time. But, secondly, spiritual understanding is like a baby's ability to understand spoken language. It's an innate skill that human babies seem to have. I've always marveled at the rapid and seemingly effortless way babies learn to talk. As an adult, learning another language is an incredibly formidable task. But for most babies, it just "happens." How reassuring to hear that our spiritual understanding works in just the same way!

At first, when a baby hears its parents talking and sees them gesturing, it's all gibberish. None of it makes any sense, and often the baby may assign the wrong meaning to something. You make a "funny face" to amuse her, and she bursts into tears, frightened. But, before long, something gels, and she begins to understand and even to be able to communicate with her own words. What was once strange and inconsistent now becomes a source of comfort, and the place, the parents, and their words are recognized as "home" (7:4–7).

Just like that, one day, the message of the Course will be as clear and as comforting as the loving words of a parent, and its thought system will feel like home to us.

Paragraph 8 (¶7 (FIP))

8 So in each holy relationship is the ability to communicate instead of separate reborn. ²Yet a holy relationship, so recently reborn itself from an unholy relationship and yet more ancient than the old illusion that it has replaced, is like a baby now in its rebirth. ³Yet in this infant is your vision returned to you, and he will speak the language both of you can understand. ⁴He is not nurtured by the "something else" you thought was you. ⁵He was not given there, nor was received by anything except yourself. ⁶For no two people can unite except through Christ, Whose vision sees them one.

• Study Question •

12. In the previous paragraph the "baby" was you; here, the image shifts to seeing the holy relationship as the baby, learning its language. A holy relationship returns vision to us, and allows it to grow. What will nurture this infant relationship?

- A. Continuing to listen to the voice of the ego.
- B. The Holy Spirit.
- C. Our true Self, the Christ.

The process of learning the Course's "language" and being able to communicate takes place in a holy relationship (8:1). At the start, when it is first born, the holy relationship is like that baby (8:2). We may have been in relationship in an *unholy* way for a long time, and we have learned a lot of bad habits of communication (or lack thereof). These need to be *unlearned*. The reassuring thing to realize is that our *holy* relationship has actually been in existence much longer than the *unholy* one! It is "more ancient than the old

illusion that it has replaced” (8:2). We are not *creating* a holy relationship as much as we are *re-discovering* it.

This infant relationship will nourish both its members, and restore their (temporarily) impaired vision. The ego self of the partners will not nurture this infant holy relationship; only “yourself,” the real you, has opened to its birth. It is the Christ in each of you that has sought and awakened to your union (8:3–6). So the relationship feeds the Christ in you both, fostering your union, and the Christ in you welcomes and supports the holy relationship. Your egos are left out of the picture.

Paragraph 9 (¶8 (FIP))

9 Think what is given you, my holy brothers. ²This child will teach you what you do not understand and make it plain, for his will be no alien tongue. ³He will need no interpreter to you, for it was you who taught him what he knows, *because* you knew it. ⁴He could not come to anything *but* you, never to something else. ⁵Where Christ has entered no one is alone, for never could He find a home in separate ones. ⁶Yet must He be reborn into His ancient home, so seeming new and yet as old as He—a tiny newcomer, dependent on the holiness of your relationship to let Him live.

• Study Question •

13. *Who taught this child what he is teaching us, and what has really come into our lives when we join in a holy relationship?*
- A. *Our true, shared Self, the Christ*
 - B. *The Holy Spirit*
 - C. *The baby Jesus*

Compare 9:1 to T-22.I.4:1 (T-22.Int.4:1 (FIP)); both are asking us to think about what a holy relationship can teach us. The holy relationship can teach us what we do not understand, and make it plain (8:2). The language the Course is speaking is our native language. (We are not talking about languages like English, Spanish, or Chinese, although the Course has been translated into many such languages. Rather, I believe *language* here refers to the Course’s *thought system*.) This is something we already know, and have always known. Here, the Course personifies the relationship, as though it were a separate entity that can communicate with us. Our relationship learned the language of spirit from *us*, and is now bringing it to our consciousness (9:2–3).

Here, in my opinion, the imagery gets a little muddled. I’m not certain what 9:4 means: “He could not come to anything *but* you, never to something else.” The only “he” so far mentioned is “this child,” which is the infant holy relationship. The “anything *but* you” appears to refer to the false identities, our egos, while the “you” is our true Selves. That would mean, then, that the holy relationship could not communicate with our egos, but only with the Christ Self we are. If that *is* the meaning, I’m still not sure of its

significance. And frankly, I'm not sure how a relationship can come to us and teach us; it's a fuzzy image for me. Perhaps as you read, some clearer picture emerges for you.

The next sentence, however, refers to Christ entering our relationship, or our lives. The "He" in 9:5 is capitalized, referring to Christ. The sentence indicates that Christ cannot fully enter into a separate individual, but only into a union, because, "never could He find a home in separate ones." Christ is born into *your relationship*, which is "His ancient home" (9:6).

The relationship is "seeming new and yet as old as He." In the Gospel of John we read, "In the beginning was the Word [i.e. Christ], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Christ is as old as old can be, and therefore, so is your holy relationship! The Course speaks of "eternity, where all is one" (T-27.X.6:1; T-27.VIII.6:2 (FIP)). All is one in eternity, so you and I *are* one in eternity, and always have been. When we form a holy relationship in this world we are really resuming, or reawakening, a relationship that has existed forever. Dan Fogelberg wrote a song in which he said, "Longer than there've been fishes in the ocean, I've been in love with you." I think he was right!

You might think of Helen and Bill in their relationship as symbols of Mary and Joseph, with God's Son, Christ, being born into their relationship.

Paragraph 10 (¶9 (FIP))

10 Be certain that God does not entrust His Son to the unworthy. ²Nothing but what is part of Him is worthy of being joined. ³Nor is it possible that anything not part of Him *can* join. ⁴Communication must have been restored to those that join, for this they could not do through bodies. ⁵What, then, *has* joined them? ⁶Reason will tell you that they must have seen each other through a vision not of the body, and communicated in a language the body does not speak. ⁷Nor could it be a fearful sight or sound that drew them gently into one. ⁸Rather, in each the other saw a perfect shelter, where his Self could be reborn in safety and in peace. ⁹Such did his reason tell him; such he believed *because* it is the truth.

• Study Question •

14. *The holy Christ has been entrusted, as a child, to each holy relationship. And God does not make mistakes. Take the relationship of Helen and Bill as an example. What qualified them to be entrusted with the gift of Christ?*
- A. *In the instant their holy relationship was born, they each saw in the other a shelter where their Self could be reborn; this must have entailed spiritual vision, for they could not have joined otherwise.*
 - B. *Helen and Bill were unique individuals with special spiritual gifts.*
 - C. *They were specially chosen of God, Whose Will cannot be denied.*

If the Son of God is being born in a holy relationship, it means that God holds such a relationship in high regard, and deems it worthy of that ultimate honor. God would not

“entrust His Son to the unworthy” (10:1). His Son would be joined only to what is also part of God, and such is the holy relationship (10:2). In fact, real *joining* is possible only to things that are aspects of the One, that is, of God (10:3). Joining can’t happen between things unable to truly communicate with one another, spirit to spirit, because bodies cannot really join.¹³

If there has been true joining for two or more persons, “communication must have been restored” (10:4) because communication is how joining occurs—not through the body. So (“reason will tell you”), they must have used the vision that is spiritual, not physical, to see one another; their minds must have “communicated in a language the body does not speak” (10:6). And what spiritual vision sees and spiritual hearing hears is not fearful; it draws us “gently into one” (10:7). This is the sight and hearing Jesus longs for us to experience. It is available to us all.

What does this vision see? The next sentence paints a lovely picture of what draws us gently into one in a holy relationship. We see each other as “a perfect shelter”, where our Self can “be reborn in safety and in peace” (10:8). Let a sense of what that is like wash over you. Picture your partner(s), and gently remind yourself, “You, [name], are a perfect shelter where my true Self can be reborn in safety and in peace.” Let yourself imagine (or remember, if you’ve already experience it) exactly what that *feels* like.

Our reason will tell us this is the truth, and in opening to a holy relationship, we will believe it *because* it is the truth (10:9).

Paragraph 11 (¶10 (FIP))

11 Here is the first direct perception that you have made. ²You made it through awareness older than perception and yet reborn in just an instant. ³For what is time to what was always so? ⁴Think what that instant brought: the recognition that the “something else” you thought was you is an *illusion*. ⁵And truth came instantly to show you where your Self must be. ⁶It is denial of illusions that calls on truth, for to deny illusions is to recognize that fear is meaningless. ⁷Into the holy home where fear is powerless, love enters thankfully, grateful that it is one with you who joined to let it enter.

¹³ Two bodies can “join” sexually, but they remain separate, they do not become one. “For faithlessness is the perception of a brother as a body, and the body cannot be used for purposes of union. If, then, you see your brother as a body, you have established a condition in which uniting with him becomes impossible” (T-19.I.4:2-3(FIP)). The Course also speaks of our mistaken attempts to find union through physical joining.

• **Study Question** •

15. Which of the following does not describe the uniqueness of what happens when a holy relationship is born?
- A. We have our first experience of direct perception, unmediated by the ego.
 - B. We recognize that our separate, ego self is an illusion.
 - C. We experience a completely new awareness of Self.
 - D. Truth enters instantly because we have denied illusions.

This sight of one another and this hearing of one another is our first experience of “direct perception” (11:1). It is perception that bypasses the physical senses entirely, using an “awareness older than perception” that was never gone, but simply waiting to be reborn in a holy instant (11:2). In this direct perception, you have accessed spiritual vision of what has always been so (11:3). In the holy instant you experience eternity.¹⁴

That holy instant exposed the ego as a fraud, blowing away your prior self-concept and replacing it with a dramatically expanded awareness of Self, vastly transcending the ego (11:4–5). The walls of your “little garden” dissolve, and there is no division between you and the other. You can't tell where one leaves off and the other begins. This is all presented in the past tense because it is speaking primarily to Helen and Bill, who had experienced just such a holy instant at the birth of their holy relationship. Some of you who read this have had similar experiences, and know what it is speaking of. For others, this description gives you a preview of coming attractions. Since it is the destiny of all relationships to become holy, everyone will experience this explosion of Self awareness (M-3.4:6), an experience *now* of “what was *always* so” (11:3).

What brings this on is “denial of *illusions*” (11:6), that is, looking past the outward, the body, the words, the behavior, and knowing, even if just for a moment, that none of those things are the real person. This “calls on truth.” It invites the vision of the holiness of your sister or brother. You know that, because these things are not real, “fear is meaningless,” and you let down the walls you have constructed to keep deep insight out. With fear disabled, love can enter thankfully, knowing you are the same as It is, and you let it enter (11:7). It is that drop of water, you, opening again to the ocean without fearing the loss of your identity.

“Think what a holy relationship can teach!” (T-22.I.4:1; T-22.Int.4:1 (FIP)).

¹⁴ “The holy instant is a miniature of eternity. It is a picture of timelessness, set in a frame of time.” (T-17.IV.11:4-5)

Paragraph 12 (§11 (FIP))

12 Christ comes to what is like Himself; the same, not different. ²For He is always drawn unto Himself. ³What is as like Him as a holy relationship? ⁴And what draws you together draws *Him* to you. ⁵Here is His sweetness and His gentle innocence protected from attack. ⁶And here can He return in confidence, for faith in one another is always faith in Him. ⁷You were indeed correct in looking on each other as His chosen home, for here you willed with Him and with His Father. ⁸This is your Father's will for you, and yours *with* Him. ⁹And who is drawn to Christ is drawn to God, as surely as Both are drawn to every holy relationship, the home prepared for Them as earth is turned to Heaven.

• Study Question •

16. *The holy relationship is the place in which Christ can be reborn on earth, and turn earth to Heaven. In the following list, identify all of the things which are said to be basically the same thing, or are said to have the same quality about them.*

- A. Christ
- B. The holy relationship
- C. What draws two people together
- D. What draws Christ to us
- E. What draws God to us
- F. Faith in another person
- G. Faith in Christ
- H. My true will
- I. My brother's true will
- J. God's will
- K. All of the above

Love entering (11:7) and Christ entering (12:1) refer to the same event. Christ is love. And, as he “comes to what is like Himself,” the holy relationship itself must be love as well (12:3). The undivided Self is love. *You* are like Himself; you also are love.¹⁵ Christ is drawn to His own likeness, and what has drawn the partners in holy relationship together is the vision of that likeness in one another (12:4).

Only in a relationship where this likeness has been recognized can the “sweetness and ...gentle innocence” of Christ be “protected from attack” (12:5). He knows that “faith in one another is always faith in Him” (12:6). Do you remember that mathematical axiom they taught in high school math: “Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other”? That’s what all this amounts to: you and your partner, your holy relationship,

¹⁵ “*You* are the work of God, and His work is wholly lovable and wholly loving. This is how you must think of yourself in your heart, because this is what you *are*.” (T-1.27.5:1-2; T-1.III.2:3-4 (FIP)). “Teach only love, for that is what you *are*” (T-6.I.20:2; T-6.I.13:2 (FIP)).

Christ, and God the Father are all the same, all equal to love and therefore to one another (12:7–9). When you chose to see your partner sinless, you willed with God, and His Will is love. A holy relationship is the home of God and Christ, and in it, you are filled with God, as the Apostle Paul prayed:

[that you may come] to know [practically, through personal experience] the love of Christ which far surpasses [mere] knowledge [without experience], that you may be filled up [throughout your being] to all the fullness of God [so that you may have the richest experience of God's presence in your lives, completely filled and flooded with God Himself]. (Ephesian 3:19, Amplified Bible)

Answer Key

1. B
2. (a) D (b) C
3. (a) B (b) When we begin to answer that last question affirmatively, we are in a place to truly enter into a holy relationship. That stance, that refusal to deny the reality of my own completion in Christ, is the premise on which a holy relationship is founded.
4. A, B, C, D, F, and H
5. (a) B (b) A
6. **Bodily perception:** A, C, E, H, I. **Real vision:** B, D, F, G
7. B
8. “God has no secrets.” He would not place us in a miserable world, ignorant of why we are here, clueless about why He is doing this to us. Therefore, any view of the world that implies that scenario cannot be correct or real.
9. Fear is "the one emotion that you made...the emotion of secrecy, of private thoughts and of the body" (4:7–8). Fear is what is behind our resistance to love, and what leads to the sight of differences and loss of sameness. Fear keeps us blind and at the mercy of our egos, dependent on them to lead us through the world. Our guilt over our imagined sin, then, is what is at the root of unholy relationships, what causes us to see one another as different, and to attack each other, trying to take what the other has.
10. **Vision:** A, B, E, F, I. **Ego sight:** C, D, G, H.
11. B
12. C
13. A
14. A
15. C
16. K