

# Study Guide and Commentary

## ACIM® Text, Chapter 26

### Holy Ground

#### Section V

### *The Little Hindrance*

Explanation of underlining, italics and footnote formats can be found at the end of the commentary.

#### Overview of Section V

This section presents a profound consideration of the whole concept of time. Its purpose is to convince us that what seems to be an enormous and overwhelming barrier to forgiveness is really nothing at all, a strange hallucination, and to give us a way to navigate through our mad dream.

The Course insists that its concept of time is crucial to our overall understanding of the Course. In a section about how certain pupils are assigned to every one of God's teachers, Jesus says:

In order to understand the teaching-learning plan of salvation, it is necessary to grasp the concept of time that the course sets forth (M-22.2:1 (FIP)).

Therefore, I will endeavor to give a more expanded commentary on this section than is usual.

#### Paragraph 1

A little hindrance can seem large indeed to those who do not understand that miracles are all the same. <sup>2</sup>But teaching that is what this course is for. <sup>3</sup>That is its only purpose, for only that is all there is to learn. <sup>4</sup>And you can learn it many different ways. <sup>5</sup>All learning is a help or hindrance to the gate of Heaven. <sup>6</sup>Nothing in between is possible. <sup>7</sup>There are two teachers only, who point in different ways. <sup>8</sup>And you will go along the way your chosen teacher leads. <sup>9</sup>There are but two directions you can take while time remains and choice is meaningful. <sup>10</sup>For never will another road be made except the way to Heaven. <sup>11</sup>You but choose whether to go toward Heaven or away to nowhere. <sup>12</sup>There is nothing else to choose.

• **Study Question** •

1. **1:5-12).** *There is only one road, the road to Heaven. But there are two what? Please catalog all the sets of two's that you can find in this paragraph.*

The phrase “little hindrance” refers to the end of the previous paragraph:

*This tiny spot of sin that stands between you still is holding back the happy opening of Heaven's gate. How little is the hindrance which withholds the wealth of Heaven from you! (26.IV.5:7-8)*

It refers to the “tiny spot of sin” that still looms large between you and your partner in your holy relationship. It *seems* large and insurmountable only because we have not realized that “miracles are all the same” (1:1). There are no large sins or small miracles. All sins are nothing but a “tiny spot.” Teaching us that every obstacle can be overcome with equal ease “is what this course is *for*. That is its only purpose, for only that is all there is to learn” (1:2-3).

I think it's encouraging to know this, in two ways. First is the obvious: The solution to every problem of forgiveness is equally easy. Second is less obvious: Learning this apparently very simple lesson is not a simple matter! It takes an entire course with over 1000 pages to assist us in learning it, so we should not be disheartened if learning it seems to be taking a long time. In fact, as we shall see shortly, how long it takes is really irrelevant!

The lesson can be learned “in many different ways” (1:4). As the Text points out early on, we can learn through pain or through joy. We can learn by study and contemplation or through experience. Not all learning is helpful, however. Some things we learn are a “hindrance to the gate of Heaven” (1:5-6), others are a help. Those are the only two options.

There are only two options because there are only two teachers (1:7): the ego or the Holy Spirit. Those two teachers are with us constantly, each offering us a very different interpretation of every event in our lives. We choose which one to listen to (1:8), and that determines whether or not we go “*toward* Heaven or away to nowhere” (1:9-11). There are no other choices (1:12).

In sentence 9 the concept of *time* is introduced: These two choices are the only two “while time remains and choice is meaningful.” We are still talking about the borderland, the real world: “Salvation *is* a borderland where place and time and choice have meaning still, and yet it can be seen that they are temporary, *out* of place, and *every* choice has been *already* made” (T-26.III.3:6).

There is no choice if time is over. Learning to choose correctly is what time is for. The remainder of this section will amplify the relationship of time with our process of learning forgiveness.

*Each day should be devoted to miracles. Time was made so you could use it creatively, and convince yourself of your own ability to create. Time is a teaching device, and a means to an end. It will cease when it is no longer useful in facilitating learning. (T-1.15.1:1-4 (CE), T-1.1.15:1-4 (FIP))*

*As long as both [love and arrogance] appear to you to be desirable, the concept of choice, which is not of God, will remain with you. While this is not true in eternity, it is true in time, so that while time lasts in your mind there will be choices. Time itself was your choice. If you would remember eternity, you must learn to look on only the eternal. (T-10.V.14:4-7 (CE), T-10.V.14:2-5 (FIP))*

Looking only on the eternal is what we do when we forgive. We look past the body and its behavior in time to see the eternal Christ within.

We *seem* to be choosing between two ways, but in reality there is no way except the way to Heaven (1:10). Choice is meaningful in time, but once we look beyond time, choice is no more. And our choice in time is simply one of choosing to go forward “*toward* Heaven or away to nowhere” (1:11). In the end there is nowhere else to go (1:12).

This is a bit difficult to understand while time seems real to us, as it does, of course. The section is going to try to help us understand the truth about time.

## Paragraph 2

<sup>2</sup> Nothing is ever lost but time, which in the end is nothing. <sup>2</sup>It is but a little hindrance to eternity, quite meaningless to the real Teacher of the world. <sup>3</sup>But since you do believe in its reality, why should you waste it going nowhere, when it can be used to reach a goal as high as learning can achieve? <sup>4</sup>Think not the way to Heaven's gate is difficult at all. <sup>5</sup>Nothing you undertake with certain purpose and high resolve and happy confidence, holding each other's hand and keeping step to Heaven's song, is difficult to do. <sup>6</sup>But it is hard indeed to wander off, alone and miserable, down a road which leads to nothing and which has no purpose.

### • Study Question •

2. *These sentences give a subtle teaching about time. Why is wasting time no big deal and yet something you really don't want to do?*

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Learning our lessons does seem to take a lot of time, and in the process we make many mistakes. Those mistakes may bring about significant losses in our lives. And yet, Jesus asserts that “Nothing is ever lost but time, which in the end *is* nothing” (2:1). This echoes the line in the Introduction, “Nothing real can be threatened”; that seems to be something we need to take on faith. As to lost time, realizing that even scientifically time is relative or unreal makes accepting the Course's assertion of its nothingness a bit easier.

Even Einstein once wrote, “For us believing physicists, the distinction between past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion.”

And yet, accepting that time lost is nothing lost is not easy. None of us want to lose time. It's obvious, then, that we do not believe that time is nothing. Because that's where we are, Jesus goes on to address our concerns about wasting time (as we'll see in a moment in 2:3). He speaks to us at the level of our understanding.

In the first paragraph, we spoke of a “little hindrance” that is the sin between us. Now Jesus asserts that *time* itself is also a little hindrance, a “hindrance to eternity” (2:2), although one that is meaningless to the Holy Spirit (and apparently not meaningless to the ego). But since we *do* believe in time's reality, why waste it going nowhere (2:3)?

If we listen to the ego, nowhere is where we go (1:11), and everyone would agree that going nowhere is a waste of time! Listening to the alternative teaching of the Holy Spirit, however, is no waste; until His tutelage, time “*can* be used to reach a goal as high as learning can achieve” (2:3). That makes time into something useful.

The learning goal of the Course is to enable us to distinguish between what is the same and what is different (see T-26.III.5:4-6) so that we can make the choice between truth and illusion. That learning process isn't difficult (2:4), and we are admonished not even to think that it is.

What makes learning easy is doing it *with* someone, “holding each other's hand and keeping step to Heaven's song” (2:5). Finding a companion on the journey removes the difficulty and lets us walk “with certain purpose and high resolve and happy confidence.” Purpose, resolve, and confidence! This is a major benefit of our special function. Without companionship the journey is “hard indeed” (2:6). Being alone is the antithesis of the oneness we all crave, albeit unconsciously. The word “miserable” is a certain companion of the word “alone” (2:6). Being alone “leads to nothing” and “*has* no purpose”.

### Paragraph 3

3 God gave His Teacher to replace the one you made, not to conflict with it. <sup>2</sup>And what He would replace *has been* replaced. <sup>3</sup>Time lasted but an instant in your mind, with no effect upon eternity. <sup>4</sup>And so is *all* time past, and everything exactly as it was before the way to nothingness was made. <sup>5</sup>The tiny tick of time in which the first mistake was made, and all of them within that one mistake, held also the Correction for that one, and all of them that came within the first. <sup>6</sup>And in that tiny instant time was gone, for that was all it ever was. <sup>7</sup>What God gave answer to *is* answered and is gone.

#### • Study Question •

3. (3:5). *The mistake you will make tomorrow has been made already and corrected already. It was originally made or contained in \_\_\_\_\_ and was answered or corrected in \_\_\_\_\_.*

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God gave the Holy Spirit to *replace* the ego as our teacher. It was never His intention to set us up in constant conflict between ego and Holy Spirit, and *replacing* the ego actually removes it from the game. If God wills to replace the ego, the ego *has been* replaced. It's already done (3:1–2).

Already done? This, of course, leads us back to the topic of time. The ego has been replaced? Then what is this alternative voice I keep hearing? Of course, we wonder along those lines. How can it be that the ego has already been replaced when I experience the ego as a very present and annoying problem?

The explanation begins with two words that give away the whole story: “Time lasted” (3:3). The second word is the *past tense* of the verb “to last.” That means that time’s duration is *past*. It’s over. Time flashed into existence and endured only “an instant in your mind” (3:3). As we shall see in a moment, that instant was so small it barely existed at all, and perhaps never even had a chance to exist! It was an impotent blip on consciousness, “with *no* effect upon eternity” (3:3).

“No effect,” meaning that absolutely nothing was changed by this instant of time that is already past. “Everything [is] *exactly* as it was before the way to nothingness was made” (3:4). Why is that? Because that “tiny tick of time” contained not only our mistake, the one mistake that contained all subsequent mistakes, but also God's correction of the one mistake. And since that one contained them all, they were all corrected within that “tiny tick,” so tiny there was never a “tock” (3:5). The error was instantly nullified, so could not have had any possible effects. It's just gone (3:6–7).

One more thing I want to point out: *Where* was time during that tiny tick in which it existed, or seemed to? “In your mind” (3:3). In one of his books, Ken Wilber points out that both the past and the future exist only in our minds; the past is a collection of memories and the future is thoughts of anticipation. They exist in our minds and nowhere else. The only aspect of time that is ever real is the present, which isn't “time” at all, but the eternal now. This may help us understand how it is possible, even reasonable, that time is already over. It was never anything but a mistaken thought!

## Paragraph 4

4 To you who still believe you live in time and know not it is gone, the Holy Spirit still guides you through the infinitely small and senseless maze you still perceive in time, though it has long since gone. <sup>2</sup>You think you live in what is past. <sup>3</sup>Each thing you look upon you saw but for an instant long ago, before its unreality gave way to truth. <sup>4</sup>Not one illusion still remains unanswered in your mind. <sup>5</sup>Uncertainty was brought to certainty so long ago that it is hard indeed to hold it to your heart as if it were before you still. <sup>6</sup>The tiny instant you would keep and make eternal passed away in Heaven too soon for anything to notice it had come.

• **Study Question** •

4. *How many illusions you hold in your mind have not been answered by the Holy Spirit?*

Most of us (if not all of us), however, still believe we live in time, and we do not know that it is “long since gone.” Therefore, the Holy Spirit acts as our guide through the “infinitely small and senseless maze you still perceive in time” (4:1). Here again we see how the Holy Spirit accommodates Himself and His actions to our mistaken beliefs for as long as we continue to hold onto them. As we are told in the Manual for Teachers:

*He seems to be a Voice, for in that form He speaks God's Word to you. He seems to be a Guide through a far country, for you need that form of help. He seems to be whatever meets the needs you think you have. But He is not deceived when you perceive yourself entrapped in needs you do not have. It is from these He would deliver you. It is from these that He would make you safe. (C-5.4:5-10 (CE), C-6.4:5-10 (FIP))*

The world we think we live in is actually *past*. It's over (4:2). All the objects and bodies we see are actually things we “saw but for an instant long ago,” seeming to us to be here and now and real, even though long ago “its unreality gave way to truth” (4:3). We “saw” them long ago in that unholy instant, that tiny tick of time that flashed through our minds, was corrected by God, and was instantly gone. None of them survived God's correction (4:4)! Our uncertainty (about God, about ourselves, about what we desired) was converted to certainty in that instant, and yet, despite its being incredibly difficult, we manage to “hold it to [our] heart as if it were before [us] still” (4:5).

We are trying to hold onto that tiny instant, trying to keep it and make it real, even though it “passed away in Heaven too soon for anything to notice it had come” (4:6). We are living in a flashback hallucination! A world that exists nowhere but in our scrambled minds. The Workbook says:

*For we but see the journey from the point at which it ended, looking back on it, imagining we make it once again, reviewing mentally what has gone by. (W-158.4:5)*

In his book on time, “A Vast Illusion,” Ken Wapnick writes:

*It is not only the initial mistake of our having believed we could separate from God that occurred in that single instant, but everything that followed from that mistake as well. The projection of error outward that made the world, and all the subsequent fragmenting that came from that projection, occurred—over and over again—within that tiny tick of time. However, that “tiny tick of time” also held the Correction for that one mistake, and thus all the expressions of forgiveness that came within that first instant.*

*Even though time is an illusion and the world has never happened, the Holy Spirit's loving presence in our separated minds guides us as if we were hearing*

*Him for the first time, as if we were experiencing forgiveness for the first time, as if we were really here. In other words, He joins the illusions of our minds so He can teach us what reality is. Thus again we can see that even though time is illusory, Jesus speaks to us as if it were real.*

The Course later makes a distinction between what we experience through our bodily senses and what our minds “see” internally. It points out that the bodily senses only see what the mind tells them to see in its mad desire to make that unholy instant, which no longer even exists, real in the present!

*Let not your eyes behold a dream; your ears bear witness to illusion. They were made to look upon a world that is not there; to hear the voices that can make no sound. ... For eyes and ears are senses without sense, and what they see and hear they but report. It is not they that hear and see, but you, who put together every jagged piece, each senseless scrap and shred of evidence, and make a witness to the world you want. ... It is indeed a senseless point of view to hold responsible for sight a thing that cannot see, and blame it for the sounds you do not like, although it cannot hear (T-28.V.5:3-4, 6-7; T-28.VI.2:1).*

From our normal point of reference within our bodies, the world seems undeniably real. The Course asserts that our senses are only reporting what they’ve been programmed to report by our ego minds, minds that cling doggedly to substantiating that tiny tick of time long past.

## Paragraph 5

5 What disappeared too quickly to affect the simple knowledge of the Son of God can hardly still be there for you to choose to be your teacher. <sup>2</sup>Only in the past—an ancient past, too short to make a world in answer to creation—did this world appear to rise. <sup>3</sup>So very long ago, for such a tiny interval of time, that not one note in Heaven’s song was missed. <sup>4</sup>Yet in each unforgiving act or thought, in every judgment, and in all belief in sin is that one instant still called back, as if it could be made again in time. <sup>5</sup>You keep an ancient memory before your eyes. <sup>6</sup>And he who lives in memories alone is unaware of where he is.<sup>1</sup>

### • Study Question •

5. (5:7). *If you are living only in memories, do you know where you are? Do you know what time period you are really in? Are you sane?*

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<sup>1</sup> The image here is of someone, perhaps an elderly person with dementia, who so fully lives in her memories that she is unaware of her actual surroundings. We are being likened to that person, because we see before us a world that was over long ago and are unaware of the Heaven that actually surrounds us.

We are allowing ourselves to be deceived by our own egos. We do not realize that we live and move and have our being in God because our insane egos are projecting a vast illusion for our eyes and ears to see and hear. It's crazy! We're choosing to listen to a teacher who no longer even exists; that tiny tick "disappeared too quickly to affect the simple knowledge of the Son of God," so how can it still be here for us to choose as teacher (5:1)?

Notice how the Course carefully makes it clear that the world we perceive in place of God's true creation *never really happened*; "Only in...an ancient past...did this world *appear* to rise" (5:2). And its apparent existence was "too short to make a world in answer to creation." Have you ever had the experience of seeing something out of the corner of your eye — what seems to be another person or some sort of motion — but when you turn to look directly at it, it isn't there? You imagined it? I think that is what is implied here about the world we think of as physical reality. When the day comes that we wake up from our dream, we will know with deep relief that the world never happened.

This mad dream, this tiny interval of time, was so short and happened "so *very* long ago" "that not one note in Heaven's song was missed" (5:4). I love this image! Imagine all the hosts of Heaven, living in eternal perfection, are singing a song of praise and joy and wonder. A split second later, the song continues unabated. In that split second the universe seemed to happen and then disappeared, but it was so brief a time, so minute an interruption, that nobody even noticed! The song was never interrupted.

That makes it even more ridiculous to think that we continue to out-picture that fleeting instant with our unforgiving acts and thoughts, our judgments, and all our belief in sin, as if, somehow, we could remake that instant in time (5:4). What we think we are seeing is nothing but an ancient memory (5:5)! We think we are living in what is already past (see 4:2). Anyone who lives exclusively in their memories has no awareness at all of where they really are. And where we *are* is in God, in Christ, in Heaven. We are "at home in God, dreaming of exile" (T-10.I.2:1 (FIP), T-10.I.6:3 (CE)).

## Paragraph 6

6 Forgiveness is the great release from time. <sup>2</sup>It is the key to learning that the past is over. <sup>3</sup>Madness speaks no more. <sup>4</sup>There is no other teacher and no other way. <sup>5</sup>For what has been undone no longer is. <sup>6</sup>And who can stand upon a distant shore, and dream himself across an ocean to a place and time that have long since gone by?<sup>2</sup> <sup>7</sup>How real a hindrance can this dreaming be to where he really is? <sup>8</sup>For this is fact, and does not change, whatever dreams he has. <sup>9</sup>Yet can he still *imagine* he is elsewhere and in another time. <sup>10</sup>In the extreme, he can delude himself that this is true, and pass from mere imagining into belief and into madness, quite convinced that where he would prefer to be, he is.

### • Study Question •

6. (6:6). What is this “distant shore” that you are standing on? What is this place where you really are (see 5:6, 6:6, 6:7, 6:10)?

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So, what’s the way out of this mess? Forgiveness. Forgiveness is what will release us from the trap of time (6:1) because it teaches us that the past is over (6:2). We, who are continually living in the past, are freed from the illusion of time when we learn and *know* that the past is over. The mad voice of the past is stilled (6:3). And then, with double emphasis, Jesus declares that, “There *is* no *other* teacher and no *other* way” (6:4). Forgiveness is the *only* way out of the madness. Once we see that the past has been undone, it will cease to exist for us and within us (6:5).

The imagery in the next several lines speaks of a dream in which we see ourselves across an ocean in a distant land, “a place and time that have long since gone by” (6:6). It is phrased as a question. Can you really transport yourself to this distant, past place just by dreaming it so? In fact we are standing on the shore of our homeland. Can this dream have any *real* effect on where we are in truth (6:7)? Of course not! Our location is our location. Dreams of any kind, no matter how real they may seem, do not change that (6:8). Our imagining ourselves still living out that unholy instant may result in terrible dreams, but these dreams have utterly no effect at all on the fact of our union with God.

Oh, we can *imagine* we are someplace else in some other time; of course we can (6:9). We can go so far as to delude ourselves that our nightmare is true, which takes us beyond imagination to madness. We become truly convinced that we are in this

<sup>2</sup> This image likens us to a person who is so engrossed with some romantic time in history that he stands on the beach and imagines that he is really in that long ago and faraway place. As the paragraph later explains, “In the extreme,” this person can actually pass into madness, “quite convinced” that he is living in this other place and time. According to this passage, we are that person; standing in Heaven and dreaming that we live in a distant world that passed away long ago.

impossible situation, simply because that is what we want (6:10). That is actually what we all have done.

## Paragraph 7

7 Is this a hindrance to the place whereon he stands? <sup>2</sup>Is any echo from the past that he may hear a fact in what is there to hear where he is now? <sup>3</sup>And how much can his own delusions about time and place effect a change in where he really is? <sup>4</sup>The unforgiven is a voice that calls from out a past forevermore gone by. <sup>5</sup>And everything that points to it as real is but a wish that what is gone could be made real again and seen as here and now, in place of what is *really* now and here. <sup>6</sup>Is this a hindrance to the truth the past has gone and cannot be returned to you? <sup>7</sup>And do you *want* that fearful instant kept, when Heaven seemed to disappear and God was feared and made a symbol of your hate?

### • Study Question •

7. (7:4–5) *Think of something you have not forgiven in someone, some sin you see in them. Then realize this sin is just “a voice that calls from out a past forevermore gone by,” just an old, scratchy recording of a long dead ghost. But you have so much good, solid evidence for this particular sin. That is why it is so hard to let go of—or so it seems. What is the real nature of your evidence, according to sentence 5?*

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Even this madness does not change the fact of where we are (7:1)! We imagine we are hearing sounds from a distant past that is “forever gone by,” sounds of the unforgiven; can these sounds be anything real here and now where we are (7:2,4)? Of course not. These delusions about time and place are powerless to effect change in our present reality in God (7:3).

Unforgiveness lodges in our lives because we are listening to a voice that is calling out from the past, and that past is “forevermore gone by” (7:4). When we latch on to that voice from the past and respond to it *as if it were real*, it is an expression of our wish that that past moment of insanity “could be made real again and seen as here and now, in place of what is *really* now and here” (7:5). What we see as “here and now” is the world we believe we are in; the “now and here” is the holy instant of the eternal present in God. The thing to notice here is that this fixation on the past is the result of *our wish* that what is past and gone would be resurrected *now*. It is our lingering longing for independence, our aspiration for autonomy, our craving for the specialness we thought we had manifested in that long-lost tiny mad idea. That wish lies behind every unforgiving thought.

But how could such a powerless wish hold back the truth of your being in God? How could your foolish wish bring back the past (7:6)? What’s more, why on earth would you *want* it brought back? When the thought entered your mind and was accepted for an

instant as real, don't you remember how "Heaven seemed to disappear and God was feared and made a symbol of your hate" (7:7)? Don't you remember that *awful, terrifying* moment, that time of terror?

## Paragraph 8

**8** Forget the time of terror that has been so long ago corrected and undone. <sup>2</sup>Can sin withstand the will of God Himself? <sup>3</sup>Can it be up to you to see the past and put it in the present? <sup>4</sup>You cannot go back. <sup>5</sup>And everything that points the way in the direction of the past but sets you on a mission whose accomplishment can only be unreal. <sup>6</sup>Such is the justice your ever loving Father has ensured must come to you. <sup>7</sup>And from your own unfairness unto yourself has He protected you. <sup>8</sup>You cannot lose your way because there is no way but His, and nowhere can you go except to Him. <sup>9</sup>Would He allow His Son to lose his way along a road long since a distant memory of a time gone by?

### • Study Question •

8. (8:5) Remember the image from Paragraph 1 of the road to Heaven, on which you can either travel to Heaven or travel away from Heaven to nowhere? This image is now being combined with the theory of time set forth in this section (notice how the words "way" and "direction" from Paragraph 1 are repeated here). In light of this, when you are traveling away from Heaven, why are you going to a place you can never reach, to nowhere?

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Yes; it was a time of terror. There was no victory, no epiphany, no gratification or sense of freedom, just an unspeakable emptiness, a profound sense of loss, and above all, *terror*. But it is gone. Be thankful for that, and forget it (8:1). God's will cannot be overridden by the insanity of sin (8:2). You cannot resurrect that terrible past (8:3). "You cannot go back" (8:4) — hallelujah!

When your thoughts turn to the past, whether in open lust for ego autonomy or veiled in unforgiveness toward someone else, you are being suckered into a true "mission impossible" (8:5). And that is *good* news!

*The ego's wishes do not mean anything, because the ego wishes for the impossible. You can wish for the impossible, but you can only will with God. This is the ego's weakness and your strength. (T-7.IX.6:7-9 (CE), T-7.X.4:9-11 (FIP))*

God has protected us from our own unfairness. We cannot go back, the ego's wishes are meaningless, and God's will must prevail in the end. That is the justice of God (8:6-7). We cannot get lost; there is only one road and it leads to God. Don't worry about the past. It cannot touch you (8:8-9).

*Only the past can separate, and it is nowhere (T-13.VI.6:7 (CE), T-13.VI.6:8 (FIP))*

## Paragraph 9

9 This course will teach you *only* what is now. <sup>2</sup>A dreadful instant in a distant past, now perfectly corrected, is of no concern or value. <sup>3</sup>Let the dead and gone be peacefully forgotten.<sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup>Resurrection has come to take its place. <sup>5</sup>And now you are a part of resurrection, not of death. <sup>6</sup>No past illusions have the power to keep you in a place of death, a vault God's Son entered an instant to be instantly restored unto His Father's perfect love. <sup>7</sup>And how can he be kept in chains long since removed and gone forever from his mind? <sup>8</sup>The Son that God created is as free as God created him. <sup>9</sup>He was reborn the instant that he chose to die instead of live. <sup>10</sup>And will you not forgive him now because he made an error in a past that God remembers not and is not there?

### • Study Question •

9. (9:6–7). *These two sentences give two images of being apparently entrapped in the world of time. What are these two images?*

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Sentence 9:1 echoes a theme often repeated in the Course: Salvation is in the present, and only there.

*Now is the time for salvation, for now is the release from time. (T-13.VI.8:1)*

*The miracle enables you to see your brother without his past, and so perceive him as born again. His errors are all past, and by perceiving him without them, you are releasing him. And since his past is yours, you share in this release. Let no dark cloud out of your past obscure him from you, for truth lies only in the present, and you will find it if you seek it there. You have looked for it where it is not, and therefore have not found it. Learn, then, to seek it where it is, and it will dawn on eyes that see. Your past was made in anger, and if you use it to attack the present, you will not see the freedom that the present holds. Judgment and condemnation are behind you, and unless you bring them with you, you will see that you are free of them. (T-13.VI.5:1–8 (CE), T-13.VI.5:1-7 (FIP))*

All of our obsession with the past comes out of that one “dreadful instant” which was instantly, “perfectly corrected.” Therefore, everything about the past “is of no concern or value” (9:2). As Robert Perry points out in his footnote in the Complete Edition, 9:3 is almost certainly an allusion to Luke 9:60 in the Bible:

<sup>3</sup> Luke 9:60 (KJV): “Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.” In the above allusion, letting “the dead and gone be peacefully forgotten” means leaving behind the “dreadful instant” of separation from God (which encompasses all of time), since in truth it is already over and done with.

*“To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”” (Luke 9:59–60 ESV)*

Jesus' message in Luke is that following him takes priority over everything else, even primary family obligations. Here in the Course, “the dead” is changed in meaning to all of the past, which is of no concern or value; let it be “peacefully forgotten.” Perry's footnote adds: “letting ‘the dead and gone be peacefully forgotten’ means leaving behind the ‘dreadful instant’ of separation from God (which encompasses all of time), since in truth it is already over and done with.” In our daily lives that means letting go of our grievances, aware that, “The past is over. It can touch me not” (W-289).

In place of the past we have resurrection, new life in place of death. We are a part of resurrection (9:4-5). The illusions of the past cannot drag us down to death. Death is called “a vault God's Son entered an instant to be instantly restored unto His Father's perfect love” (9:6). This could be understood in either of two ways: first, as a reference to Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection and its symbolic significance; second, as a description of our entrance into that unholy instant of death (we are God's Son), only to be met with God's instant answer to our mistake, which nullified it entirely. 9:9 would appear to support this second interpretation, stating that we were reborn the instant we chose to die.

We cannot remain restrained by chains that God long since has removed from our mind (9:7). We've already been reborn, as have our brothers and sisters. As we look on our partners in relationship, we have to realize that God has already wiped out their mistakes; God does not remember them and the mistakes are no longer there. How can we *not* forgive them *now* for their past mistakes when they have already been wiped clean by God? (9:10).

## Paragraph 10

**10** Now you are shifting back and forth between the past and present. <sup>2</sup>Sometimes the past seems real, as if it *were* the present. <sup>3</sup>Voices from the past are heard and then are doubted. <sup>4</sup>You are like to one who still hallucinates, but lacks conviction in what he perceives. <sup>5</sup>This is the borderland between the worlds, the bridge between the past and present. <sup>6</sup>Here the shadow of the past remains, but still a present light is dimly recognized. <sup>7</sup>Once it is seen, this light can never be forgotten. <sup>8</sup>It must draw you from the past into the present, where you really are. <sup>9</sup>The shadow voices do not change the laws of time or of eternity. <sup>10</sup>They come from what is past and gone, and hinder not the true existence of the here and now.

### • Study Question •

10. (10:1) In this context, what does it mean to shift back and forth between the past and the present (the crucial thing here is identifying what is the past and what is the present)?

•

Given our understanding of the Course, as limited as it might be, it's safe to say that none of us lives entirely in the past. We shift back and forth, from past to present to past again (10:1). I think all of us can agree that, at times, "the past seems real, as if it *were* the present" (10:2). We feel the pain of past wrongs as if they were happening now.

But then, as we think about it, we raise doubts about what these voices from the past are telling us (10:3). We've begun to allow the transformation of our minds and our perceptions. In a brilliant analogy, Jesus says, "You are like to one who still hallucinates, but lacks conviction in what he perceives" (10:4). Perhaps you may have seen the wonderful movie, "A Beautiful Mind," starring Russell Crowe. It is the story of John Forbes Nash, Jr., a brilliant mathematician who began to suffer from paranoid schizophrenia and to have hallucinations. He is never fully cured, but he learns to *ignore his hallucinations!* To me, it's the perfect picture of what is being said here. This, says Jesus, is what it is like when we first begin to live in the borderland of the real world, "the bridge between the past and present" (10:5): learning to ignore our hallucinations. We are still troubled by shadows arising from the past, and yet, dimly, we recognize "a present light" (10:6), and often we are able to ignore the dark voices from the past and to follow the present light.

The present light has a powerful magnetic effect. It is so starkly different from the lessons of the past that, even if we try, we can never forget it once we've seen it (10:7). Its powerful attractive force draws us "into the present, where you really *are*" (10:8). We begin to discover that the shadow voices from the past don't really have to have any effect on "the true existence of the here and now" (10:9–10). We can choose, if we wish, to walk in the light.

## Paragraph 11

**11** The real world is the second part of the hallucination time and death are real, and have existence which can be perceived. <sup>2</sup>This terrible illusion was denied in but the time it took for God to give His Answer to illusions for all time and every circumstance. <sup>3</sup>And then it was no more to be experienced as there. <sup>4</sup>Each day, and every minute in each day, and every instant that each minute holds, you but relive that single instant when the time of terror was replaced by love. <sup>5</sup>And so you die each day to live again, until you cross the gap between the past and present, which is not a gap at all.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The idea is that each unit of time—each second, minute, day, and (as the next paragraph says) lifetime—is a reliving of the instant when we made the error of separation and that error was then corrected by the Holy Spirit. That is why time is filled with little and larger deaths (we go to sleep at the end of each day; we die at the end of each lifetime), and why these deaths are always followed by rebirths. The deaths are a reliving of the error of separation, and the rebirths are a reliving of the *correction* of that error. The rebirths affirm that it is God's Correction—not our error—that will always have the last

• **Study Question** •

11. **(11:1)**. *What does it mean that the real world is the second part of the hallucination that time and death are real?*
12. **(11:4–12:2)** *Each unit of time is a repetition of the original dreadful instant. Please comb these four sentences and find all of the units of time listed here that are said to be repetitions of that original instant (I count five).*

•

We begin life subject to the strange hallucination that time and death are real things capable of being perceived. When we begin to enter the real world, this borderland, we do not yet escape from that hallucination, although we have begun to find the way out. It is a second phase of the hallucination (11:1). We still experience time, and death still *seems* real, but part of us *knows* that both are hallucinations, because they have been answered. We can deny their reality. Like John Nash, we slowly learn that we can safely ignore these hallucinations.

The “terrible illusion” of time and death was completely cured the instant God gave “His Answer to illusions for *all* time and *every* circumstance” (11:2). From that moment on, the illusion was totally gone, and no longer needs to be experienced as there (11:3). Gradually, we are coming to accept that freedom in our lives. It’s a slow process.

Our daily lives that seem so real, marching along subject to time, decay, and death, while our higher mind knows our true freedom, are really nothing but our minds *reliving* “that single instant when the time of terror was replaced by love” (11:4)<sup>5</sup>. Every moment of our lives, perceiving ourselves as separated beings, we are reliving that ancient instant. As we are told in the Workbook:

*...time but seems to go in one direction. We but undertake a journey that is over, yet it seems to have a future still unknown to us.*

*Time is a trick, a sleight of hand, a vast illusion in which figures come and go as if by magic. Yet there is a plan behind appearances which does not change. The script is written. When experience will come to end your doubting has been set. For we but see the journey from the point at which it ended, looking back on it, imagining we make it once again, reviewing mentally what has gone by.  
(W-158.3:4-4:5 (CE), W-pI.158.3:6-4:5 (FIP))*

Ken Wilber, in his second book, *No Boundary*, says something very similar:

word.

<sup>5</sup>. Interestingly enough, the FIP version of this sentence closes with the words, “terror took the place of love,” which is the reverse of what the CE has, “terror was replaced by love.” In his comments on the passage in “A Vast Illusion,” Ken Wapnick claims the FIP version corrects a mistake in the original printing. In a way it does not matter, since both are true! We are reliving the time of terror when we buy into the illusion, and reliving its replacement by love when we choose to listen to God’s Voice. The point in both cases is that our “normal” experience of life in this world is really a mental review and reliving of that single, ancient instant.

*”But search as they might in the past, they will never find a satisfactory solution to this first cause [i.e., how the separation happened], and for the sufficient reason that the past doesn't exist. This first cause did not occur yesterday. Rather, it is a present occurrence, a present fact, a present activity. Furthermore, this first cause is not to be ascribed to a God apart from our being, for God is the real self of all that is. The primary boundary, this perpetually active first cause, is our doing in this moment. ...It is occurring now, moment to moment.” (pages 74 and 75)*

*Because man is now identified solely with his organism, the memory traces naturally present in that organism assume a significance out of all proper proportions and become his consuming preoccupation. He clings to his memory as if it were real—which is to say, as if it reported a real past of a real self. He becomes quietly obsessed with his “past”; he identifies with it unconditionally. Because he demands a real future ahead of him, he likes to see a real past behind him, and this he engineers by pretending that memory gives a knowledge of actual past events instead of being part of his present experience. He clings to memory as a promise that he once existed yesterday and therefore will likely exist tomorrow. He thus lives only in memory and expectation, bounding and limiting his present with bittersweet laments of time past and poignant hopes of time to come. He wants something around his present to protect him from death, and so he bounds it with the past and the future. (Page 79)*

When Jesus says we “die each day to live again” (11:5), he isn’t referring to physical death, obviously. Rather, it refers metaphorically to our separation from God in following our ego, because every time we do (which we do tens of thousands of times every day) we acquire guilt for attacking God, for which we fear eventual and just eternal punishment. But in turning to the Holy Spirit for forgiveness, we “live again.” We endlessly repeat this cycle until the day we “cross the gap between past and present,” which we do by realizing the past does not exist and that there *is* no gap, no boundary (11:5); we are *always* in the present and always have been.

## Paragraph 12

**12** Such is each seeming life: the interval from birth to death and on to life again, a repetition of an instant gone by long ago which *cannot* be relived. <sup>2</sup>And all of time is but the mad belief that what is over still is here and now. <sup>3</sup>Forgive the past and let it go, for it *is* gone. <sup>4</sup>You stand no longer on the ground that lies between the worlds. <sup>5</sup>You have gone on and reached the world that lies at Heaven’s gate. <sup>6</sup>There *is* no hindrance to the will of God, nor any need that you repeat again a journey which was over long ago. <sup>7</sup>Look gently on each other, and behold the world in which perception of your hate has been transformed into a world of love.

• **Study Question** •

13. (12:6). *What two things in this section were the potential hindrances to the Will of God (see 1:1, 2:1–2, 6:7, 6:9–7:1, 8:1–3)?*

•

12:1 summarizes this teaching. Our “seeming life” is just this imaginary mental endless repetition of that time of terror that *cannot* in reality be relived. In making this statement, Jesus seems to clearly assume the notion of reincarnation: Each life is “the interval from birth to death and on to life again.”<sup>6</sup> Our entire experience of time (the “vast illusion”) is nothing but an insane “belief that what is over still is here and now” (12:2).

Sure, it’s difficult to accept that our experience of time is not real, that “past” and “future” are nothing but activities within our minds in the eternal present, in which now, in this instant, we are actively creating the illusion of time. We know from modern physics that time is, at the least, flexible—squishy, we might say. We know that when an object is moving very, very fast, it is moving through time more slowly. There appear to be atomic particles that move through time backwards. So, to me, it makes sense and does not seem extraordinary that it is my current, endlessly repeating choice to be a separate being with a past and a future that is manifesting the illusion of time, and that when I break free from that cycle of bad choices, time shall be no more.

How do we break free? By forgiveness. The past is already gone, so forgive it and let it go (12:3)! We are not stranded between worlds, torn between truth and illusions (12:4). We’ve made more progress than that. We have reached the borderland “at Heaven’s gate” (12:5). We are becoming aware of our hallucinations and are willing to ignore them. We can do this!

What about that “little hindrance”? That “little spot of sin” that seems to stand between you and your brother? It’s in the past, and the past is gone. There *is* no hindrance to the will of God” (12:6) All it is is a memory in your mind. Let it go! You do not need to endlessly repeat the same imaginary journey, mentally reviewing what is long gone and imagining you are still making that journey, which is all you are doing when you hold on to unforgiveness.

“Look gently on each other” (12:7). Such a simple statement! I think it could be my new motto: Look gently on each other. When we are willing to do that, the real world will appear, a world in which “an ancient hatred has become a present love” (T-26.IX.6:1 (FIP), T-26.IX.5:4 (CE)).

<sup>6</sup> For more on reincarnation, see the Manual for Teachers, Chapter 24.

**Legend:**

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

The 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 identical to the FIP version, the division into paragraphs is often entirely 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.

## Answer Key

1. Two outcomes for learning (help or hindrance to Heaven).  
Two teachers (ego or Holy Spirit)  
Two ways (toward Heaven or away from it, toward nowhere)  
Two directions (same as two ways)  
Two choices (to go toward Heaven or away to nowhere)
2. Time is quite meaningless and is therefore only a little hindrance to eternity. Therefore, it is no big deal to lose it, to waste it going nowhere. Yet we *believe* in time. Therefore, we should not waste it going nowhere. Only “in the end” (2:1) of time do we see that time is meaningless, so let us go speedily toward that end.
3. It was made in the first mistake and was corrected in the Correction.
4. Not one illusion still remains unanswered in your mind.
5. The answer to all three questions is “no.” We think we are living in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, in the United States, but actually we are at home in God. We are not in time at all, nor anywhere in space. All of this exists only in our minds—a dream.

6. Heaven
7. Your “evidence” is really just your wish that what is gone could be made real again. In wishing this you are someone bent on seeing what is not here and now in place of what is here and now. You are not an objective observer, weighing the evidence, but an insane person, bent on replacing truth with fantasies.
8. Because you are going to a place and time that have long since disappeared. They literally are not there.
9. A *tomb* (which is the meaning of a vault that is a place of death; “a burial chamber” is one of the dictionary definitions for “vault”) and being in chains.
10. Shifting back and forth between the world of time (the past) and the Heaven of eternity (the present).
11. See the next sentence. The real world is the *denial* of this terrible illusion, the *answer* to the illusion, the correction for it. First came the tiny tick. Second came its correction.
12. An instant, a minute, a day, a lifetime, time itself (all of time). What we have, then, is nested repetitions of the tiny tick of time: smaller repetitions contained within larger repetitions contained within still larger ones contained within the overall repetition—time itself.
13. One, the tiny spot of sin that seems to stand between you and your brother; two, the world of time itself. These, however, are not really two things, but one and the same.