

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 27

Healing the Ancient Dream

Section V

The Quiet Answer

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

Overview of Section V

This section is really about the holy instant. We've seen in the prior section that we are not meant to correct errors in our brothers and sisters, but rather to give them (the persons and their errors) to the Holy Spirit. The state of mind in which we learn to do so is a quiet mind, a still mind, a mind that has entered (however briefly) the holy instant.

Paragraph 1

In quietness are all things answered and is every problem quietly resolved. ²In conflict there can be no answer and no resolution, for its purpose is to make no resolution possible, and to ensure no answer will be plain. ³A problem set in conflict has no answer, for it is seen in different ways, and what would be an answer from one point of view is not an answer in another light. ⁴You are in conflict. ⁵Thus it must be clear you cannot answer anything at all, for conflict has no limited effects. ⁶Yet if God gave an answer, there must be a way in which your problems are resolved, for what He wills already has been done.

The point of this paragraph is to alert us to the fact that our ordinary state of mind is actually a block to any resolution of problems we face. As Einstein is reputed to have said, "No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it."

What is required for solving any problem is *quietness* (1:1). If that state of consciousness can be achieved, "all things are answered and every problem [is] quietly resolved." (This sentence is worth memorizing!) Quietness is the equivalent of *peace*. "Peace to my mind, let all my thoughts be still" (W-221) is the instruction to give yourself when you are seeking internal quietness.

The opposite of quietness is conflict, with the mind being pulled in two or more directions. When our minds approach a problem as a conflict we have the unconscious

purpose of making resolution impossible (1:2). We don't want a clear answer; we want it to be muddy. We view the problem from differing perspectives, and an answer in one of them is not an answer in the other (1:3).

Remember that in the previous section we were talking about a mind divided, part wanting to forgive, another part deathly afraid of its threat to the illusory existence of that part's separated identity. We are facing a problem with another person, someone we believe has harmed us or hurt us. And we cannot resolve that problem while our mind remains in conflict.

When we approach a problem, we should try to become aware of whether or not we are in conflict. If you are in conflict, "you cannot answer anything at all" (1:4–5). The conflict in your mind affects everything. So, what can be done? God has *already* given an answer to the problem, so resolution is possible (1:6). What God wills has already been done, but how are our conflicted minds to claim the answer? How can we learn to truly forgive?

Paragraph 2

2 Thus it must be that time is not involved, and every problem can be answered now. ²Yet it must also be that in your state of mind, solution is impossible. ³Therefore, God must have given you a way of reaching to *another* state of mind in which the answer is already there. ⁴Such is the holy instant. ⁵It is here that all your problems should be brought and left. ⁶Here they belong, for here their answer is. ⁷And where its answer is, a problem must be simple and be easily resolved. ⁸It must be pointless to attempt to solve a problem where the answer cannot be. ⁹Yet just as surely, it must be resolved if it is brought to where the answer *is*.

One thing is certain: There is no need for a long time to resolve the issue; in fact no need for time at all. The answer is here already because it is the will of God, and "what He wills already has been done" (1:6–2:1). In your divided state of mind, however, "solution is impossible" (2:2). That is also true.

Therefore, because it is true that every problem can be answered *now* despite the fact that solution is impossible to a divided mind, there *has to be* "a way of reaching to another state of mind in which the answer is already there"; God must have already given that gift to you (2:3)! In that situation in which forgiveness seems impossible, it is *now* possible for you to reach a state of mind in which forgiveness is already done. That's the miracle. It isn't a problem you have to work through over a long period. In fact the longer unforgiveness lingers the harder it seems to dislodge it. You do not gradually climb out of it; you *leap* to higher ground.

For a moment, thank back to the opening two sentences that spoke of quietness and conflict. Conflict describes our typical state of mind; the other state of mind "in which the answer is already there" is summed up in the word "quietness." That's what it said in 1:1, if I read it carefully and in light of paragraph 2: "In quietness are all things answered and

is every problem quietly resolved.” “The answer is already there” it says in 2:3; “In quietness are all things answered” in 1:1. “*Are all things answered,*” that is, the answer is already there in quietness. Attaining a quiet mind is finding the way to another state of mind, and we do not need to resolve our problem before we can become quiet. In becoming quiet we discover that no problem exists! It has already been quietly resolved, without struggle or analysis.

That moment out of time when your mind leaps into a completely new perception in which there is nothing left to forgive or resolve is called a “holy instant” (2:4). We’ve been told about this instant beyond time before, particularly in Chapter 15, Section III. This is the third paragraph of that section:

Time is your friend if you leave it to the Holy Spirit to use. 2. He needs but very little to restore God’s whole power to you. 3. He Who transcends time for you understands what it is for. 4. Holiness lies not in time, but in eternity. 5. There never was an instant in which God’s Son could lose his purity. 6. His changeless state is beyond time, for his purity remains forever beyond attack and without variability. 7. Time stands still in his holiness and changes not. 8. And so it is no longer time at all, for caught in the single instant of the eternal sanctity of God’s creation, it is transformed into forever.

This instant — eternal, single, holy — is where we need to bring all of our problems, and leave them there (2:5). This is where their answer lies (2:6). I think that answer is the vision of the purity of God’s Son, his changeless state, his eternal sanctity, beyond attack and without variability. When we see the answer, the problem vanishes (2:7). It’s pointless to attempt to solve the problem in our divided state; we need to enter that holy instant where the answer already exists, and always has existed (2:8). Reaching that state of mind, that unified consciousness, quiet and free of conflict, is the only sure way to resolve the problem — or rather to discover it has already been resolved — the only sure way to attain complete forgiveness of our brother or sister (2:9).

Paragraph 3

3 Attempt to solve no problems but within the holy instant's surety.
2For there the problem *will* be answered and resolved. 3Outside, there will be no solution, for there is no answer there that could be found. 4Nowhere outside a single simple question is ever asked.¹ 5The world can only ask a double question with many answers, none of which will do. 6It does not ask a question to *be* answered, but only to restate its point of view. 7All questions asked within this world are but a way of looking, not a question asked. 8A question asked in hate cannot be answered, because it is an answer in itself. 9A double question asks and answers, both attesting the same thing in different form.

Jesus continues to hammer home the same point, urging us to not even *attempt* to solve any problems on our own, but only “within the holy instant’s surety” (3:1). The word “surety” means “the state of being sure or certain of something.” What is the certainty of the holy instant? As it says in 2:9, our problem is “just as surely...resolved” there. Bring the problem to the holy instant and we discover the problem has vanished because it has already been resolved (3:2).

Outside of the holy instant, “no solution” (3:3). There is no answer there. We don’t approach the problem with a single mind; we don’t ask a simple question. with our mind embedded in the world we always “ask a double question with many answers, none of which will do” (3:4–5). We don’t simply ask ourselves, “Who is my brother, really?” We also ask, “How can I overlook what he has done?”, or “How can I get him to admit his guilt?”, or “What do I need to do to correct him?” We’re listening to our egos, so we ask questions that are not meant to be answered but rather to state our existing point of view: “He is guilty” (3:6). They are not true questions, they are a way of looking at the situation (3:7). Underlying most of them is what the Course does not hesitate to call “hate.” These questions contain their own answer. The question and the answer are simply statements of the ego’s perspective (3:8–9).

¹ This means that nowhere outside *the holy instant* is a single simple question ever asked. A “simple question” is purely a question; it “asks for something that you do not know” (5:6). This is in contrast to a “double question,” which includes the answer in the question. An example of a simple question would be “Where can I go for protection?” (T-4.VII.6:1).

Paragraph 4

4 The world asks but one question. ²It is this: “Of these illusions, which of them are true? ³Which ones establish peace and offer joy? ⁴And which can bring escape from all the pain of which the world is made?” ⁵Whatever form the question takes, its purpose is the same. ⁶It asks but to establish sin is real, and answers in the form of preference: “Which sin do you prefer? ⁷That is the one that you should choose. ⁸The others are not true. ⁹What can the body get that you would want the most of all? ¹⁰It is your servant and your friend. ¹¹But tell it what you want, and it will serve you lovingly and well.” ¹²And this is not a question, for it *tells* you what you want, and where to go to ask for it. ¹³It leaves no room to question its beliefs, except that what it states takes question’s form.

This paragraph offers even more detail on why the world’s questions in response to a problem can never work. (And by “problem,” I am understanding a *forgiveness* problem.) All of them are really the same question (4:1), which Jesus then restates for us in three different forms (4:2–4):

Of these illusions, which of them are true?

Which ones establish peace and offer joy?

Which can bring escape from all the pain of which the world is made?

The form does not matter; the purpose of the questions is all the same (4:5): to establish that sin is real. The answer always then comes in the form, “Which sin do you prefer?” (4:6)

Look at the three forms; how do they ask this same question? The first asks which illusion is true. We might be looking at the supposed sin of another; is it real? Is my pain real? The second asks which illusion will give me peace and joy. That might be seeking relief in some pleasures of the world.² The third asks which illusion offers me escape from pain. Whatever illusion springs to mind in response to these questions, the ego tells us, is the one that we should choose (4:7). Forget the others; they are not true, only this one is true (4:8).

What it devolves down to is utilizing our bodies somehow to meet our imagined need. The body is “your servant and friend,” or so the ego tells us. How can you use it to get what you want? Just tell your body to go get it, and all will be well (4:9–11).

Guess what? That a statement of belief, not a question at all. “It tells you what you want, and where to go to ask for it” (4:12). There’s no room to question those ego beliefs. The ego is just stating its beliefs in the form of questions (4:13)!

² In Hebrews 11:25 (NRSV), the Bible speaks of “the fleeting pleasures of sin.”

Paragraph 5

5 A pseudo-question has no answer. ²It dictates the answer even as it asks. ³Thus is all questioning within the world a form of propaganda for itself. ⁴Just as the body's witnesses are but the senses from within itself,³ so are the answers to the questions of the world contained within the questions. ⁵Where answers represent the questions, they add nothing new, and nothing has been learned. ⁶An *honest* question is a learning tool which asks for something that you do not know. ⁷It does not set conditions for response, but merely asks what the response should be. ⁸And no one in a conflict state is free to ask this question, for he does not *want* an honest answer where the conflict ends.

Whatever the form, it is a “pseudo-question,” a fake question, a statement of belief in disguise; no answer is possible (5:1). The question is dictating its own answer (5:2). Jesus calls all the questioning of the world “a form of propaganda for itself” (5:3). It's similar to the false idea that the sense of the body show us something real, when those senses are part of the very illusion that is the body; the answers are contained in the questions (5:4). Jesus has repeated that thought so many times! It must be really important that we grasp it and use it to examine our own thinking: “The answers are contained within the questions.” When we make use of such questions we are not gaining anything or learning anything (5:5).

By contrast, an honest question is meant to teach us something. It “asks for something that you do not know” (5:6). It presupposes nothing and is open to everything, ready to receive the response whatever it might be (5:7). But if you are in “a conflict state” you cannot even ask such a question because you don't really want the answer! You don't want an answer that ends the conflict; you (your ego) wants to keep the conflict going (5:8). So you have to reach to that other state of mind, beyond conflict; to quietness.

In quietness you are open to whatever the Holy Spirit has to say. You are ready to recognize your responsibility for your ego, for what you see, for the feelings you are having. You are open to the idea that your brother is guiltless, sinless. You have released any attachment to your skewed perceptions and are willing to see things differently.

³ T-24.VII.10:3-4: “[The body] *gives* the eyes with which you look on it, the hands that feel it, and the ears with which you listen to the sounds it makes. *It proves its own reality to you.*”

Paragraph 6

6 Only within the holy instant can an honest question honestly be asked. ²And from the meaning of the *question* does the meaningfulness of the answer come. ³Here is it possible to separate your wishes from the answer, so it can be given you and also be received. ⁴The answer is provided everywhere, but it is only here it can be *heard*. ⁵An honest answer asks no sacrifice, because it answers questions truly asked. ⁶The questions of the world but ask of whom is sacrifice demanded, asking not if sacrifice is meaningful at all. ⁷And so, unless the answer tells “of whom,” it will remain unrecognized, unheard, and thus the question is preserved intact, because it gave the answer to itself.

Quietness, that is, the holy instant, is the only place an honest question can honestly be asked (6:1). The alternative to quietness is conflict, and because that state of mind is attempting to hold on to two or more opposing thoughts, any question that gets generated already has prejudgments about what the answer should be. What's needed is a blank slate, a mind wholly open to a new answer rather than an answer predetermined by the question. Any question we may ask in that frame of mind has the answer imbedded it because of the presuppositions or mindset that spawned the question (6:2). But in quietness, it's “possible to separate your wishes from the answer,” so that the answer can come from another state of mind, another Mind, and be received (6:3).

The Holy Spirit always gives His answer to any question you ask, but only in quietness can you actually *hear* it (6:4). And the answer the Holy Spirit gives will never ask you to sacrifice anything, which is what any answer *you* come up with in trying to solve the problem will do. If a friend is gossiping about you and you find out, your question is likely to be something like, “How can I get even with them?” It's based on a victim consciousness, that sees you as a victim of the world. You might come up with some way of paying them back, and the cost to you might be the sacrifice of that friendship. The answers of the Holy Spirit never entail any loss for either party

Be certain any answer to a problem the Holy Spirit solves will always be one in which no one loses. (T-25.X.3:1 (CE), T-25.IX.3:1 (FIP)).

When a question is asked from a split mind the split usually reflects the imagined separation between yourself and the other person. Therefore, the question becomes one of who loses, you or them (6:6). That someone has to sacrifice, someone has to lose, is never questioned. The real answer excludes sacrifice entirely, knowing it is meaningless (6:6). And because the question is “Who must sacrifice?”, and the true answer fails to tell who has to sacrifice, the answer cannot be heard at all (6:7), and the question becomes its own answer, “Someone must sacrifice. Someone must lose.”

Paragraph 7

7 The holy instant is the interval in which the mind is still enough to hear an answer that is not entailed within the question asked. ²It offers something new and different from the question. ³How could it be answered if it but repeats itself? ⁴Therefore, attempt to solve no problems in a world from which the answer has been barred, but bring the problems to the only place which holds the answer lovingly for you. ⁵Here are the answers which will solve your problems, because they stand apart from them and see what can be answered; what the question is. ⁶Within the world the answers merely raise another question, though they leave the first unanswered. ⁷In the holy instant you can bring the question to the answer, and receive the answer that was made for you.

The key is getting still; quieting the mind. Workbook Lesson 106, “Let me be still and listen to the truth,” is all about this, as is Lesson 125, “In quiet I receive God’s Word today.” In a quiet, holy instant, “the mind is still enough to hear an answer that is not entailed within the question asked” (7:1). As the Workbook makes plain, we need to *practice* in our daily meditation, listening to the Truth. We need to pause when tempted to express judgmental thought, take a few breaths, and tell ourselves, “I will be still and listen to the Truth.” I think if we can learn to do this, our perception of ourselves and others will gradually begin to change. The whole, year-long program of daily Workbook practice is explicitly designed to do just this transformation of our minds, shifting us to “another state of mind in which the answer is already there” (2:3):

”The purpose of the workbook is *to train your mind in a systematic way to a different perception of everyone and everything in the world*. The exercises are planned to help you generalize the lessons, so that you will understand that each of them is equally applicable to everyone and everything you see.

”Transfer of training in true perception does not proceed as does transfer of the training of the world. *If true perception has been achieved in connection with any person, situation or event, total transfer to everyone and everything is certain*. On the other hand, one exception held apart from true perception makes its accomplishments anywhere impossible” (W-Int.4:1-5:3 (FIP), my emphasis).

The line I highlighted in the second paragraph is really striking. Achieve true perception “with any person, situation or event,” and it is “certain” that the new perception will transfer to “everyone and everything.” This is why it is so important, and so effective, to discipline ourselves to be still and listen to the Truth whenever we can.

The Truth we hear, the answer that isn’t part of the question, brings to our minds something *new* (7:2–3). We are no longer thinking along the lines of who has to sacrifice, who has to lose; we are open to a solution in which everyone *gains*. Trying to solve problems on our own, from the mindset of the world and the ego, is futile. That mindset is firmly locked away from the true Answer. Rather, we must learn to consistently bring

our problems and conflicts to the place of stillness and quietness, “the only place which holds the answer lovingly for you” (7:4).

This is where we can hear the “still, small voice” of God. This is the other state of mind “in which the answer is already there”; “Here are the answers which will solve your problems” (7:5). These answers are outside of the mindset in which the problem exists. These answers “see...what the question is,” that is, the *real* question, the *real* problem.

Lesson 79 in the Workbook is titled, “Let me recognize the problem so it can be solved.” It tells us right out that the only problem is the problem of separation, which has already been solved. Lesson 80 continues in the same vein, being titled, “Let me recognize my problems have been solved.” This is what we find when we enter the holy instant of quietness.

When we listen to the world’s questions and try to solve them, it just raises another, different question in our minds without solving the first question (7:6). But in the holy instant, the answer is already there. We bring our question to that answer, and we receive it in just the form “that was made for you” (7:7). We recognize our supposed problems are based on separation, and that there *is* no separation. We recognize our oneness with one another, our sameness, our sinlessness and innocence. All of us remain as God created us. All of us are in Him. We gladly release our desire to correct one another, choosing to leave it to the Holy Spirit, Who knows when and how to do it.

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.

An Exercise in Applying “The Quiet Answer”

by Robert Perry

Application: Try to think of a “normal” problem in your life, a problem with your job life, or your money, or your living situation, or your love life.

Now realize that in contemplating this problem and what its solution might be, you are in conflict within yourself. You are pulled in the direction of God and in the opposite direction, that of your ego. Realize also that you see your interests in conflict with the interests of others. You see yourself on the battleground. And realize that even your own preferences are in conflict with each other.

Realize that no solution can satisfy all the sides of this conflict in your mind, for each side will see the solution from its own vantage point. There is no solution that will satisfy them all.

In fact, the mind does not want the conflict to end. It wants to stay in conflict. It assumes that the only answer is battle, war, hate. It therefore only wants an option *within* this answer.

And so it does not ask an honest question. It asks a question that assumes the validity of the conflict and then favors one of the options within the conflict.

The question always takes this form: “What illusion out here in the world will make me happy?” Can you see your mind asking a question like this in the context of your problem? Any question that seeks an external solution as the way to peace is a form of this question.

This question really amounts to: “Which sin do I prefer? Which one is true?”

The sin that you prefer always asks someone else to sacrifice (which is what makes it a “sin”). The question, then, amounts to: “Who will have to make a sacrifice so that I can be happy? Who needs to pay in order to balance the scales of justice and solve this problem?” Can you see this element in your question? Can you see yourself contemplating solutions that will ask for sacrifice from someone else?

These questions are really questions asked in hate—they are about gaining from someone else’s loss. And hate is not a question, but a point of view. These questions assume the validity of war. Another way to look at it is that these questions affirm that sin is real. That again is a statement, not a question.

Can you see how the questions that have come out of your problem are really “a form of propaganda” (5:3) for the world?

This section says that the answer lies in a state of mind that is beyond the conflict, a state of mind that has reached to quietness. In this state the answer lies waiting for you. In this state your mind is quiet enough to ask an honest question, and to hear an answer that is not just a repeat of the assumptions behind the question.

This state is the holy instant. To enter this state, quiet your mind.

Forget about the past, forget about the future.

Remember that this instant is the only time there is.

Try to drop all of your preconceptions about the situation.

Go through various aspects of it and realize that you don't know what they mean.

You don't know what your best interests are.

You don't know what anything in the situation is for.

Set aside all of your beliefs about what the problem really is and what the solution must be.

Now you are ready to ask an honest question, a simple question,

one that asks for an answer that is truly new and different.

Ask, "How do You want me to find happiness in this situation?"

"How do You want me to give happiness in this situation?"

"How can I leave the battleground, and take everyone with me?"