

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 31

The Final Vision

Section II

The Passing of an Ancient Learning

Explanation of underlining, italics and footnote formats can be found at the end of the commentary. See also the note there on the effects of switching from the FIP edition to the Complete and Annotated Edition.

Please note that the FIP and CE versions may differ in where paragraph breaks occur.

Overview of Section II

First, be aware that what were the final two paragraphs of Section I in the FIP edition have been merged to become the first paragraph of Section II in the CE edition. The paragraph breaks and sentence numbers are very different between the two versions. The sentence references I give will all be based on the CE. However, there are no substantial differences in the words of the section.

¹This section addresses the problem of what it calls “an ancient lesson,” by which it means the firm belief that we are separate from one another.

Paragraph 1

Let us be still an instant, and forget all things we ever learned, all thoughts we had, and every preconception that we hold of what things mean and what their purpose is. ²Let us remember not our own ideas of what the world is for. ³We do not know. ⁴Let every image held of anyone be loosened from our minds and swept away. ⁵Be innocent of judgment, unaware of any thoughts of evil or of good that ever crossed your mind of anyone. ⁶Now do you know him not. ⁷But you are free to learn of him, and learn of him anew. ⁸Now is he born again to you, and you are born again to him, without the past that sentenced him to die, and you with him. ⁹Now is he free to live, as you are free, because an ancient learning passed away and left a place for truth to be reborn.

This is a beautiful paragraph, and even more beautiful when we can appreciate it in the context of the whole section. When it speaks of “all things we ever learned,” “every preconcep-

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tion that we hold of what things mean and what their purpose is,” and asks us to forget them all, it is referring to that false lesson we have striven to learn since time immemorial: God’s Son is guilty. That lesson has colored every thought and so distorted our perception of the meaning and purpose of things that we have come to believe things that are flatly impossible: that our will is not our own; that our thoughts do not belong to us; and that we are not ourselves. It is referring to this vastly overlearned lesson, and telling us—at least for an instant—to *forget* it (1:1). It is asking us to put all of that out of our minds, and to recognize that we don’t know what the world is for (1:2–3). It is asking that we let go of “every image held of everyone” (perhaps image=idol?), allowing them to be “loosened from our minds and swept away” (1:4).

Consider what it would be like for you to become “*unaware* of any thoughts of evil or good that ever crossed your mind of anyone” (1:5). Apply this to several people that may come to mind. Notice that it goes both ways, evil or good. Let go of every judgment, every opinion you ever had of anyone! Let there be a fresh, clean slate, with *no* preconception, *no* evaluation. It’s as if you never met him: “Now do you know him not” (1:6). “Now is he born again to you, and you are born again to him” (1:8).

Now, you are free to “learn of him anew,” to see him without any past (1:7–8), to see the Christ in your brother, to hear his call for love that sings behind every appearance. The “ancient learning” (of guilt) has “passed away, and left a place for truth to be reborn” (1:9).

Such a poetic passage, but what a radical adjustment in thinking it calls for! To truly and completely let go of all past judgments, good or evil, and allow your brother or sister to be “born again to you,” is no small challenge. But we can do it! We begin simply by being “still an instant.” Allow your mind to shift into that space, however briefly. Try it on for size. Don’t worry about how long you can maintain this state of mind. As the Workbook tells us about such practice:

A major hazard to success has been involvement with your past and future goals. You have been quite preoccupied with how extremely different the goals this course is advocating are from those you held before. And you have also been dismayed by the depressing and restricting thought that, even if you should succeed, you will inevitably lose your way again.

How could this matter? For the past is gone; the future but imagined. These concerns are but defenses against present change of focus in perception. Nothing more. We lay these pointless limitations by a little while. We do not look to past beliefs, and what we will believe will not intrude upon us now. We enter in the time of practicing with one intent; to look upon the sinlessness within.

We recognize that we have lost this goal if anger blocks our way in any form. And if a brother’s sins occur to us, our narrowed focus will restrict our sight, and turn our eyes upon our own mistakes, which we will magnify and call our “sins.” So, for a little while, without regard to past or future, should such blocks arise we will transcend them with instructions to our minds to change their focus, as we say:

It is not this that I would look upon.
I trust my brothers, who are one with me. (W-pl.181.4:1-6:5)

Paragraph 2

² An ancient lesson is not overcome by the opposing of the new and old. ²It is not vanquished that the truth be known, or fought against to lose to truth's appeal. ³There is no battle which must be prepared, no time to be expended, and no plan that need be laid for bringing in the new. ⁴There is an ancient battle being waged against the truth, but truth does not respond. ⁵Who could be hurt in such a war unless he hurts himself? ⁶He has no enemy in truth. ⁷And can he be assailed by dreams? ⁸Let us review again what seems to stand between you and the truth of what you are, for there are steps in its relinquishment. ⁹The first is a decision which you make. ¹⁰But afterwards, the truth is given you.

• Study Question •

1. What is the "ancient lesson" referred to in 1:1?
2. (1:1-3). These opening three sentences actually explain the last two paragraphs of the preceding section. They say that your ancient lesson is not overcome by fighting against it. Instead (based on the preceding two paragraphs at the end of Section I), it is overcome how?
3. (1:5-7). In the battle of illusions against truth, why can you not be hurt unless you hurt yourself?
4. (1:8-10). There are steps in the relinquishment of your ancient lesson. How many steps are listed here and what are they?

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Here we are told that the ancient lesson, the ego's lesson of guilt that we have *overlearned*, is not undone by force. We don't counteract our overlearning by opposing the old lesson with the new one: "God's Son is not guilty! God's Son is innocent!" We don't have to *vanquish* the old lesson. We don't have to fight against the old lesson. We don't have to prepare for some mental battle. It does not even take any time! (2:1-3).

We might wonder, "What then does it take? How is the ancient lesson undone?" If we recall the context, the answer should be apparent: All we need to do is to be still an instant and forget those ancient lessons (T-31.II.1:1 (CE), T-31.I.12:1 (FIP)). In the original typescript of the Course (the UR Text), the dictation for June 24, 1968, ended with the eleventh paragraph of Section I. The final two paragraphs of Section I were the first part of the next dictation segment on July 1, 1968, more than a week later! (This is no doubt why the CE edition chose to make them part of the next paragraph.) There was no break between them and what is now Section II.

The idea is that by our repeated practice of holy instants in which we choose to forget the ancient lesson for a moment, the Holy Spirit can gradually undo the errors in our minds. This practice of holy instants is precisely what the Workbook lessons instruct us to do for at least one year. Many lessons guide us to consider a particular person and lay aside our judgments to see the Christ in them. This shift in perception will not come about through struggling and trying to *force* it to happen. We must be still, relax, and let go.

Yes, there *is* a battle going on. The ego is viciously attacking our right minds. Truth need not fight back (2:4). Just as sunlight enters a room when the shutters are thrown open, the truth

shines in our minds when we set aside the ego's false perception, even for an instant. The light of Truth is always shining. When we remove the barriers of our false belief in guilt, it comes blazing in. "Look with peace upon your brothers, and God will come rushing into your heart in gratitude for your gift to Him." (T-10.V.7:7 (CE), (FIP)).

The battle of the ego is a mock battle. Do you remember the saying of the 1960s, "What if they gave a war and nobody came?" The Truth does not fight, and our only enemies are illusions. We can't be hurt unless we hurt ourselves (2:4–7).

(2:8). This section says it will once again examine what stands between our awareness and our true Identity. The review is necessary because it is essential to understand thoroughly what prevents us from being fully aware of our divine Identity. We may read over and over that "I am as God created me" or "I am the holy Son of God Himself." But as long as we do not address "what seems to **stand between**" that "truth of what you are" and our conscious awareness, it will continue to dampen our awareness of that truth or to prevent us entirely from accepting it as truth. The shutters will remain closed, blocking out the light no matter how brightly it may shine.

Past chapters have talked about that barrier as the gap filled with idols. The last section portrayed it as the ancient lesson that God's Son is guilty. This discussion will put a new slant on what stands between, one that centers on your perception of your brother's guilt (the ancient lesson from Section I) and how that perception arises.

You will recall that back in Chapter 29, Section IV, Jesus said that "attack is a response to function unfulfilled as you perceive the function" (T-29.IV.3:1 (FIP), T-29.V.3:1 (CE)). (You might want to re-read the 3rd and 4th paragraphs of that section now.) That section spoke of how we assign roles to people, lay expectations on them, and then cover them with guilt and blame when they fail to fill the assigned function. We could paraphrase the above thought, then, as, "Seeing guilt in God's Son is a response to function unfulfilled as you perceive the function." What follows now, in Chapter 31, is a discussion of one general way in which we assign roles to each other and then assign guilt when our brothers fail to play their roles properly (as we define "properly").

There are two simple steps in relinquishing the veil that seems to block our awareness of the Christ within (2:8). The first step is active: we have to *decide* to relinquish that barrier; a choice must be made (2:9). The second step is passive: "the truth is *given* you" (2:10). Those steps are so simple; it seems we could never go wrong! But we do. We make it far more complex.

Paragraph 3

3 You would establish truth. ²And by your wish you set two choices to be made each time you think you must decide on anything. ³Neither is true, nor are they different. ⁴Yet must we see them both before we can look past them to the one alternative that *is* a different choice. ⁵But not in dreams you made, that this might be obscured to you. ⁶What you would choose between is not a choice and gives but the illusion it is free, for it will have *one* outcome either way. ⁷Thus is it really not a choice at all. ⁸The leader and the follower emerge as separate roles, each seeming to possess advantages you would not want to lose.² ⁹So in their fusion there appears to be the hope of satisfaction and of peace.

• Study Question •

5. *Before we see past the two false choices to their alternative, what must we do?*
6. *Jesus here surprises us with his definition of our two false alternatives. What are the two false alternatives we see, the pseudo-choice we think we must make in each interaction with our brothers and sisters?*
7. **(3:8).** *Now we are told the two choices that are really the same choice: The leader and the follower. Can you identify areas of your life where you like to lead, and areas where you like to follow? For what reasons do you like one or the other? What advantages do you think might be associated with each of these roles?*

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We don't want to accept the Truth from God passively; we want to actively *establish* truth (3:1). So, we complicate the simple decision between guilt and innocence. We change what we are deciding about; we make it into a decision between *two other things* (3:2). What *those two things* are isn't made clear until a bit later, but for now, just get in mind that every time we are about to make a decision, instead of deciding between guilt and innocence, we think the decision is between two other things entirely. Of those two things, *neither one* is true (3:3); in fact, they are the same thing (3:3)!

To see past the false choices to the actual alternative, we must examine what the false choices are. And we must examine these false choices in the full light of day, not in the obfuscating dreams we have manufactured to *hide* “the *one* alternative that *is* a different choice” (3:4–5). I believe these statements are here to urge us to focus our attention on what is about to be said. Don't gloss over what follows. Allow yourself to see clearly what you have been doing that has established and maintained that ancient lesson of guilt in your mind.

² This is apparently an ego-based version of the roles of leader and follower, in which we see each role primarily in terms of a specific ego advantage that it confers. Perhaps we are attracted to the leader role because of the power it gives us and are attracted to the follower role because of its freedom from responsibility. Elsewhere, however, the Course does speak of a holy version of these roles, in which *we* follow truth and then our *brothers* follow us as we lead the way to truth. For example: “And let us be the leaders of our many brothers who are seeking for the way, but find it not” (W-FL.2:6).

This discussion of switched choices reminds me of a sales gimmick once used by some door-to-door salesmen to gain entrance to a house. It went something like this: “I am offering you a free gift just for looking at our product. You can have a bottle of Chanel No. 5 or a bottle of Taboo. Which would you prefer?” It didn’t matter what you chose; the result was the same. You’d just admitted the salesman to your house and agreed to look at his product. It was a false choice that diverted your attention from the hidden choice you were making. The ego does the same thing. It distracts us with a false choice: trying to decide whether we want to be a leader, and the other person the follower, or vice versa. Whichever we choose, the result is the same: we’ve chosen guilt (3:6–7).

As you read this paragraph, you were probably surprised by the introduction of the leader-follower theme here. When Jesus began to speak about “two choices to be made, each time you think you must decide on anything” (3:2), you probably thought he was referring to the choice between ego and spirit or something like that. But he said, “Neither is true” (3:3), which was a clue that he was not talking about an actual choice and a false choice, but two false choices, either of which amounts to choosing the ego.

When we play the follow-the-leader game, seeing each as a separate role, both roles seem to possess valuable advantages (3:8). The advantages of being a leader are, for instance, that we get to be in control. We make the choices and get credit when we make the right ones. The advantages to being a follower are the flip side: We don’t have the responsibility of being in charge of making choices; we can lay the blame on someone else when things go wrong. We want to somehow play *both* roles, and the only way we can do that is by using other people. We need some way to fuse both roles, which means that we need someone else to play leader to our follower, or follower to our leader; actually, someone who can be whatever we want him or her to be at the moment! (3:8–9, 4:1).

Paragraph 4

4 You see yourself divided into both these roles, forever split between the two. ²And every friend or enemy becomes a means to help you save yourself from this. ³Perhaps you call it love. ⁴Perhaps you think that it is murder justified at last. ⁵You hate the one you gave the leader’s role when you would have it, and you hate as well his *not* assuming it at times you want to let the follower in you arise, and give away the role of leadership. ⁶And this is what you made your brother for, and learned to think that this his purpose is. ⁷Unless he serves it, he has not fulfilled the function that was given him by you. ⁸And thus he merits death, because he has no purpose and no usefulness to you.

• Study Question •

8. *Whoa! Love, or murder? What is Jesus talking about here? First of all, what are you calling “love”? (Refer to the last paragraph to help you understand.) And second, what do you see as “murder justified at last”?*
9. *How does all this fit into the “ancient lesson” that God’s Son is guilty?*

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We go through life alternating between being leader or follower in all our relationships (4:1). We feel split between the two. We can’t make up which we are, at our core, so when we meet someone who becomes a friend, we are willing to play follower, or if we meet an enemy, we decide we must be a leader (4:2). The latter role often results in judgment and attempts at correcting the perceived enemy. We may call what we do “love.” We may decide that “murder” (or at least vicious attack) is justified instead. Our vacillation between love and hate is closely related to our vacillation between the roles of leader or follower (4:3–4). The paragraph now explains lines 4:1–2, which speak of how the other person saves you from being split between the two roles. You expect them to take the role opposite to the role you want: to be the leader to your follower or the follower to your leader. The ego bases its version of love or hate on how well the other person does this (4:3–4).

Notice that the Course does not condemn the roles of leader or follower *per se*. Jesus refers with an apparent endorsement to his asking us, in the Gospels, to leave all and *follow* him (T-12.III.1:1 (FIP), T-12.IV.1:1 (CE)). He calls us, as his disciples, *followers* (T-6.I.8:6-7 (FIP), T-6.I.15:4–5 (CE)). And he calls us to be leaders to our brothers: “Let us together follow in the way that truth points out to us. And let us be the leaders of our many brothers who are seeking for the way, but find it not” (W.Fl.In.2:5-6). In these approved cases, the main difference is that God, or the Holy Spirit, chooses the roles for us. In contrast, in the situation Jesus is talking about here, we are choosing the roles ourselves for the ego’s purposes.

The ego loves people while they are dancing in step to its self-concept of the moment, allowing you to be a leader when you want to, and stepping into the leader role when you want to play follower. And it *hates* people who dance out of step (4:5)! Think about some of your relationships; isn’t this true? Aren’t there times when you feel angry with your partner or friend for taking the lead when *you* wanted it? And aren’t there times when you are equally angry with them for *not* taking the lead when you would rather not be responsible for the results? Have you ever thought about just how impossible it is to maintain a dance like this without making a misstep?

This—this role-switching that is destined for failure is *intended* for failure—it “is what you made your brother *for*, and learned to think that this his purpose *is*” (4:6). You and your brother were one—no, you *are* one. But you “made” your brother, chose to see him as a being separate from yourself, for a reason. You set him up! You placed him (or her) in an impossible position *because* you wanted to find cause to condemn him and cover him with guilt. You needed a convenient screen on which to project your guilt. It’s impossible for him to fulfill this role-switching function you gave him (4:7), so it gives you a reason to lay the guilt on him. His “failure” renders him useless to you, deserving of death. You invented an impossible game that cannot be won and then made the price of losing it *death* (4:8).

Paragraph 5

5 And what of him? ²What does he want of you? ³What *could* he want but what you want of him? ⁴Herein is life as easily as death, for what you choose you choose as well for him. ⁵Two calls you make to him, as he to you. ⁶Between these two *is* choice, because from them there *is* a different outcome. ⁷If he be the leader or the follower to you it matters not, for you have chosen death. ⁸But if he calls for death or calls for life, for hate or for forgiveness and for help, is *not* the same in outcome. ⁹Hear the one, and you are separate from him and are lost. ¹⁰But hear the other, and you join with him, and in your answer is salvation found.

• Study Question •

10. (5:5-8). *The last section mentioned the idea of two calls that we make (T-31.I.8:2-6, 9:1, 10:3-5, 11:3-7) : the call for death and the deeper call for life. Which call includes wanting your brother to be the leader? Which call includes wanting him to be the follower?*
11. (5:9-10). *If assigning either role to our brother is a call for death, how do we call for life?*

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Guess what? If you are playing this game of “murder justified” in your mind, what do you think your brother or sister is doing? *The same damn thing!* (5:1-3). He wants you to be the follower when he wants the role of leader and to be the leader when he wants the role of follower. What are the odds that your wants and his, in this regard, will exactly coincide? How long can two people keep up such a game? It’s like watching a long volley in ping pong or tennis: You know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that before long, one person or the other will miss the ball.

Now comes the big switch! The same principle that leads to death for us both can also lead to life. If my brother wants the same thing from me that I want from him (5:3), then changing what I choose can change what *he* chooses (5:4)! Each of us is making *two very different calls* to the other (5:5), one a call for death (the whole leader/follower thing), the other a call for life (“for forgiveness and help” (5:8)). While the choice between leader or follower is not a choice at all, resulting in death whatever you choose, the choice between that and the call for life is very real. Choosing death or life produces diametrically opposite outcomes. It is literally a life-or-death decision (5:5-8).

How do I *choose* to perceive my brother? Do I see him calling for death? Do I see him asking me to be a follower or leader? Or do I perceive, behind that ancient call for guilt, his actual call for love, forgiveness, and help? If I hear the first call, I am “separate from him and [am] lost” (5:9). If I hear the other, I “will join with him” and, as I answer *that* call instead of the other, we find salvation together (5:10).

Paragraph 6

6 The voice you hear in him is but your own. ²What does he ask of you? ³And listen well. ⁴For he is asking what will come to you, because you see an image of yourself and hear your voice requesting what you want. ⁵Before you answer, pause to think of this:

⁶The answer that I give my brother is what I am asking for. ⁷And what I learn of him is what I learn about myself.

⁸Then let us wait an instant and be still, forgetting everything we thought we heard; remembering how much we do not know.

• Study Question •

12. "Before you answer" what (6:5)?

13. (6:8). What recent paragraphs does this sentence remind you of?

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What you hear your brother asking for is what *you* are asking for (6:1–3). What you see in your brother is only a projection of yourself; the voice you hear from him is "your voice requesting what you want" (6:4). So, "listen well!" (6:3). You can *choose* which of the two calls you hear from him, and thereby you choose which of the two calls you will answer for yourself.

In the preceding paragraph, Jesus asked us what our brother is asking us for: "for death or ... for life; for hate, or for forgiveness and for help" (5:8). Now, he urges us to stop before we answer and consider (6:5) that my answer (about what he is asking for) "is what I am asking for" (6:6). And if I hear him asking to be leader or follower, I *am* hearing him asking for death. The conclusions that I reach about my brother are what I am learning about myself (6:7). If I perceive him as separate from me and in competition with me for leadership in the relationship, or if I am seeing him as asking me to be a leader but failing to be a good follower, I am learning that I am that same competitive incompetent type of person.

"When you meet anyone, remember it is a holy encounter. As you see him, you will see yourself. As you treat him, you will treat yourself. As you think of him, you will think of yourself. Never forget this, for in him you will find yourself or lose sight of yourself." (T-8.II.6:1–5 (CE), T-8.III.4:1–5 (FIP))

Jesus then resumes his appeal to us to still our minds and to forget what we *think* we know about our brother or sister. We must forget what we *think* we have heard them asking for and remember just how much we don't know (6:8). He made the same appeal back in the first paragraph of this section, T-31.II.1:1-3. As you will recall, there he was talking about our temptation to make the wrong decision on which lesson we want to learn: "The Son of God is guilty" or "The Son of God is innocent." One is the call of death, the other the call of life. It's up to us to decide which we want to hear. The nearly identical language here is a clue that Jesus is still talking about the same thing. He's still trying to get us to set aside our preconceptions about

other people and to *decide* that we *want* to learn of their innocence, and we *want* to hear the call for help rather than what looks like a call to war.

In what follows in the next paragraph (7:1–5), notice the contrast between separateness and joining.

Paragraph 7

7 This brother neither leads nor follows us, but walks beside us on the selfsame road. ²He is like us, as near or far away from what we want as we will let him be. ³We make no gains he does not make with us, and we fall back if he does not advance. ⁴Take not his hand in anger but in love, for in his progress do you count your own, and we go separately along the way unless you keep him safely by your side. ⁵Because he is your equal in God's love will you be saved from all appearances, and answer to the Christ Who calls to you.

• Study Questions •

14. In 7:1 we read of “the Christ Who calls to you.” Where do we hear that call: from the Course, from our brother, or from within ourselves? (See also T-31.I.10:4.)
15. (7:2). Be still and listen to what?
16. (7:3). Think not ancient thoughts about what?
17. (7:4). Who is “He” in this sentence?

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There is an emphasis here on separating versus joining. If we are playing the follower-leader game, there must be separate persons. You play two distinct roles. You don't walk together; one walks ahead, the other follows behind. In reality, you and your brother walk side by side on the same road (7:1). Neither one is the leader, and neither one is the follower. You are the same (7:2). You may think he has different goals than you do, but that isn't so. If you realize how closely your goals align, it will *be* as you see them. To the degree that you will allow it into your awareness, he wants precisely what you want (7:2). You stand or fall together, not separately (7:3). His gains are yours (7:4). And if you separate yourself from him, you separate yourself from Christ (7:4, see Footnote 2).

When I acknowledge my brothers as my “equal in God's Love,” I find my salvation “from all appearances” (7:5) such as sickness, lack, or death, or any idols that I have made. To be saved from appearances means we experience miracles: “The miracle attests salvation from appearances by showing they can change” (T-30.VIII.2:2 (FIP), T-30.IX.1:11 (CE)). Appearances change; only reality is changeless, so to be saved from appearances means to be saved from *everything that changes*. It means we become connected to reality; we are, as Ralph Waldo Trine phrased it, “in tune with the Infinite.”

³. “We” in this sentence seems to refer to Jesus and you, in which case the sentence would mean “And we [Jesus and you] go separately along the way unless you keep him [your brother] safely by your side.”

To be saved from all appearances refers not only to *my* liberation from appearances, but it also means I will be liberated from *my brother's* appearances. He may be manifesting what looks like a call to war, but I will not see that appearance. I will see past it, and I will hear, and I will “answer to the Christ Who calls to” me (7:5). I won't answer his ego; I will answer the Christ in him.

Practice Suggestion: *Think of a person with whom you have recently had some friction or conflict. Then, using that person's name, repeat this paraphrase of the preceding material, using their name where indicated:*

The voice I hear in [name] is simply my own voice. Let me ask myself, “What is s/he asking for?” I want to listen carefully because [name] is asking for what will come to me. After all, in [name], I see an image of myself and hear my voice requesting what I want.

Before I answer the question of what [name] is asking for, let me pause and remember that the answer I give [name] is what I am asking for. What I learn about him/her is what I learn about myself.

Now, let me be still. I set aside any memory of what I thought [name] was asking for. I realize how much I do not know. [Name] is not asking to be leader or follower; s/he walks beside me on the road to God. S/he is like me. We gain or fall back together. I take [name] 's hand in love, not in anger. Her/his progress is my progress. In walking with him/her, I walk with Christ; if I do not keep him/her by my side, I walk apart from Christ. Let me listen anew to the call coming from deep within him/her.

Paragraph 8

8 Be still and listen. ²Think not ancient thoughts. ³Forget the dismal lessons that you learned about this Son of God who calls to you. ⁴Christ calls to all with equal tenderness, seeing no leaders and no followers, and hearing but one answer from them all. ⁵Because He hears one Voice, He cannot hear a different answer from the one He gave when God appointed Him His only Son.

To arrive at this state of mind, I need to quiet myself. I need to be still. I think we can take this quite literally. When a challenging situation confronts me, get alone, get quiet, and be still for a little while. Perhaps I may count to ten(!) “and listen” (8:1). I will try to hear the Christ Who calls to me *in my brother*. I will reject all appearances of any other call emanating from him (8:2–3); the Voice of Christ is all I want to hear.

”Christ's hand holds all His brothers in Himself. He gives them vision for their sightless eyes, and sings to them of Heaven, that their ears may hear no more the sounds of battle and of death. He reaches through them, holding out His hand, that everyone may bless all living things and see their holiness.

“ (T-24.V.7:2–4 (CE), (T-24.V.7:2–4 (FIP))

Christ calls to all of us ”with *equal* tenderness“ (8:4). No one leading, no one following: equal. He calls to us equally, and He hears an equal, identical answer from each of us (8:4). He

hears us answering His call to live and to love with the same answer He gave God in His creation (8:5):

"In his creation did his Father say, "You are beloved of Me and I of you forever. Be you perfect as Myself, for you can never be apart from Me'. His Son...replied 'I will.'" (T-28.VI.6:4-6 (FIP), T-28.VI.6:2-4 (CE))

Just as the Father called to the Son, the Christ calls to each of us, "Be you perfect," and He hears us all replying, "I will." He is asking us to hear that answer from each of our brothers and sisters.

Paragraph 9

9 Be very still an instant. ²Come without all thought of what you ever learned before, and put aside all images you made. ³The old will fall away before the new, without your opposition or intent. ⁴There will be no attack upon the things you thought were precious and in need of care. ⁵There will be no assault upon your wish to hear a call that never has been made. ⁶Nothing will hurt you in this holy place to which you come to listen silently to learn the truth of what you really want. ⁷No more than this will you be asked to learn. ⁸But as you hear it, you will understand you need but come away without the thoughts you did not want and that were never true.

• Study Question •

18. *What do you think is meant by "the things you thought were precious and in need of care" (9:4)?*

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For yet a third time in as many pages, the Course asks us to be still, "very still," for an instant (9:1). Our minds often react to the truth like a scared cat, darting one way, then another, then another, frantic to escape from the inescapable truth. I don't hear this as a command; it is more like a calming, reassuring voice.:

"Shhh. Be still, be calm. It's all right. Don't be afraid. Don't be frightened. I'm not going to attack your precious idols. I won't reprimand you for your wish to find your brothers guilty. Nothing is going to hurt you. I'm just going to help you discover what you really want. That's all that will happen. And when you learn that, the idols and attacking thoughts will just melt away because you never really wanted them, and always knew they were not true. We won't have to fight them. You won't even have to intend to give up the old things. Just be here with Me a while in this holy place."

Thomas Chalmers, a mathematician, theologian, and social reformer in early 19th Century England, once published a now-famous sermon entitled "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection." In it, he declared that you cannot put an end to a love for the material world simply by proving the world to be worthless, which would only lead to despair; instead, you must replace the old "affection" with a newer, more powerful one: in this case, a love for God. I think that is what Jesus is saying here.

We don't drive out our addiction to the world by force (9:3). There is nothing to fight against ("without your opposition," 9:3). You don't even need any particular intention to have the old fall away (9:3). Nothing in spirit *attacks* your existing thought system or challenges "the things you thought were precious or in need of care" (9:4). There isn't even any force deployed against your insanely dumb wish to hear some non-existent call (9:5). Why would God fight against something that has absolutely no power? There is nothing in this divine transaction, this spiritual mind-cleansing process, that *hurts*. The metaphysical bath is totally gentle.

Instead, we learn what we *really want* (9:6–7), which is God, and all that is in God. When we have found that, the old desires and attachments will just fall off, just as dead leaves fall off the tree in the springtime as the sap rises and fresh leaves burst forth (9:8). To me, the expulsive power of a new affection is why the approach the Hindus refer to as *bhakti yoga*, the spiritual practice of fostering loving devotion to God, works to awaken us. It draws the heart to God and naturally releases the illusion of the world.

Paragraph 10

10 Forgive your brother all appearances, which are but ancient lessons that you taught yourself about the sinfulness in you. ²Hear but his call for mercy and release from all the fearful images he holds of what *he* is and of what *you* must be. ³He is afraid to walk with you, and thinks perhaps a bit behind, a bit ahead would be a safer place for him to be. ⁴Can you make progress if you think the same, advancing only as he would step back and falling back as he would go ahead? ⁵For so do you forget the journey's goal, which is but to decide to walk *with* him, so neither leads or follows. ⁶Thus it is a way you go together, not alone. ⁷And in this choice is learning's outcome changed, for Christ has been reborn to both of you.

• Study Question •

19. (10:1). *What reason is given here why we should forgive our brothers all appearances?*

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When Jesus says "*all* appearance," he emphasizes the word "all" (10:1). All the supposed sins, all the personality traits, the bodily appearance, everything. Forgive them all, and why? Because they are all projections of your own judgment on yourself, the lesson you have taught yourself of your own sin and guilt:

"The world you see is but a judgment on yourself. It is not there at all. But judgment lays a sentence on it, justifies it, and makes it real. Such is the world you see: a judgment on yourself, and made by you. This sickly picture of yourself is carefully preserved by the ego, whose image it is and which it loves, and placed outside you in the world."
(T-20.III.5:3–7 (CE), T-20.III.5:2-6 (FIP))

If that's true of you, it's also true of your brother. He holds "fearful images...of what he is" (10:2), and he projects them on you, which is why he judges and attacks you. He is terrified of what he believes you are because he believes that is what *he* is. Jesus asks us to hear his "call for

mercy and release” from his ghastly mental illness—to hear *only* that call and to disregard the apparent call for war (“Hear *but* his call”, 10:2).

Your brother “is afraid to walk with you” (10:3). Somehow, that really brings it home to me. He, or she, is afraid to walk with me! How sad! She thinks it might be safer to be a little ahead (a leader) or a bit behind (a follower). Being next to me, holding my hand, does not seem like a safe place to her because she is projecting her imagined guilt on *me*.

Sometimes I’ve heard certain persons described as “a safe place to land.” I’ve always thought that was a wonderful thing to say about a person. I have hoped that someone thinks that way about me. How disheartening it is to think that someone I know thinks precisely the opposite: that I’m *not* a safe place to land; that it isn’t safe to be around me. Best be a bit ahead or behind. Well, Jesus is saying that pretty much *everyone* I know thinks of me as unsafe and that I think of everyone else that way! And I think that he is saying that, in reality, everyone *is* a safe place to land because we all are extensions of God’s Love.

So when he steps forward, you step back. When he steps back, you step forward. Nobody goes anywhere! How can you possibly make any progress if you are continually shuttling back and forth, frantically trying *not* to walk beside your brother, with him doing the same thing (10:4)? You can’t make progress at all because the *goal* of the entire journey is to get to the point where you decide to walk *with* him (10:5), with nobody leading or following. The only way to make progress is to do it *together* (10:6). Making that choice to walk together is the turning point. It changes the whole outcome of your learning. In that decision to join together (in a holy relationship), “Christ has been reborn to both of you” (10:7).

Paragraph 11

11 An instant spent without your old ideas of who your great companion is and what he should be asking for will be enough to let this happen. ²And you will perceive his purpose is the same as yours. ³He asks for what you want, and needs the same as you. ⁴It takes, perhaps, a different form in him, but it is *not* a form you answer to. ⁵He asks and *you* receive, for you have come with but one purpose: that you both may learn you love each other with a brother’s love, and as a brother must his Father be the same as yours, as he is like yourself. ⁶Together is your joint inheritance remembered and accepted by you both. ⁷Alone it is denied to both of you.

• Study Question •

20. (11:1). *What is meant by your old idea of what your brother should be asking for?*

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All it takes is “an instant spent without your old ideas of who your great companion is and what he *should* be asking for” (11:1). Just an instant! You think he is there to play the other half of the leader-follower game, but that’s not who he is at all. He is part of you, your equal brother, meant to walk beside you and join with you. If, just for an instant, you can forget the old ideas and see him this way, “this” will “happen.” That is, deciding to walk *with* him so that Christ is reborn to both of you. That’s what happened in the holy instant in which the Course was born

when Helen Schucman and Bill Thetford joined together, figuratively took one another's hand, as Bill said, "There must be another way," and Helen replied, "You're right, and I'll help you find it."

At that moment, Helen and Bill saw that the other's purpose was the same as theirs (11:2). They saw that they were both asking for peace and had the same needs (11:3). And that's what happens for us when we join with a brother or sister. We see that we have the same wants and needs. We're both here for the same purpose: "that you may learn you love your brother with a brother's love," and both have God as Father (11:5–6). We may express these wants and needs differently, but we respond to the reality behind the form, not to the form (11:4).

Have you ever thought of anyone in your life as your "great companion"? (11:1). I thank God I have had at least one such relationship, in which we both recognized one another as having identical wants and needs and shared the purpose of learning to love. I have many relationships in which that conception of the relationship is often present, but it waxes and wanes in most. It needs to become a constant in our lives. Let yourself try those words on with certain people in your mind. Say to them, "You are my great companion. We are here learning to love each other with a brother's love, children of the same Father" (based on 11:5).

Paragraph 12

12 Is it not clear that while you still insist on leading or on following, you think you walk alone, with no one by your side? ²This is the road to nowhere, for the light cannot be given while you walk alone, and so you cannot see which way you go. ³And so there is confusion and a sense of endless doubting, as you stagger back and forward in the darkness and alone. ⁴Yet are these but appearances of what the journey is and how it must be made. ⁵For next to you is one who holds the light before you, so that every step is made in certainty and sureness of the road. ⁶A blindfold can indeed obscure your sight, but cannot make the way itself grow dark. ⁷And he who travels with you *has* the light.⁴

⁴ Based on the context, "he who travels with you," along with the earlier "one who holds the light before you," would have to be your brother, since he is the only one who is described as traveling with you in this section. However, we should probably add to this that Christ, your true Self, is walking with you *in the person of* your brother. We say this because in the Notes the relevant phrases were capitalized ("He Who travels with you," "One Who holds the light before you"), and Helen's capitalization, while inconsistent, is usually reflective of the intended meaning; and also because earlier in this section and in the preceding one, Christ is calling to you *through* your brother's call (see the implied identity between "the Christ Who calls to you" in paragraph 7 and "this Son of God who calls to you" in paragraph 8; see also T-31.I.10:4-7). This would mean that through your brother walking with you Christ is also walking with you.

For an interesting note on how this passage can be reconciled with other parts of the Course that advocate some kind of leader-follower relationship, see this footnote by Robert Perry.⁵

• **Study Question** •

21. **(12:1–2)**. *Does this mean that you must have a relationship with some “significant other” in order to attain enlightenment?*

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What’s very clear here is that “rehabilitation is a collaborative venture.” (T-8.III.6:8 (CE)). It comes about through joining with others. If the whole goal of the journey is to learn to walk beside a brother as equals, knowing that his progress is my progress, loving him as a brother, knowing him as the son of the same Father as myself, how can I possibly achieve that *alone*? When I am with someone, I may remain aloof and separate. I may view him as a separate individual whose purpose is to play leader to my follower or follower to my leader. I may judge him if he fails to play the role as I wish him to. When I do these things, I deny the goal to us both. That much seems clear (12:1–3).

What’s worse, when we do this, we are blindfolding ourselves (12:3). But the darkness and solitude are only appearances (12:4). The light is with us; Christ Himself walks with us, holding the light (12:5), but we stumble about in darkness because we refuse to see Him. Nevertheless, this picture is nothing but a picture, an appearance. We are not really in darkness, and any time we care to be still a moment, open our eyes, remove the blindfold (12:6) of our preconceptions and judgments, and recognize Who walks with us, the road will open up clearly and simply before our eyes (12:7).

⁵ **(12:1-3)**. This section presents a difficulty in that the rest of the Course talks frequently about leading your brothers and walking ahead of them. Such an image is implicit in the Course’s discussions of miracle workers, teachers of God, healers, messengers of God, etc. For instance, here is a quote from Psychotherapy: “The psychotherapist is a leader in the sense that he walks slightly ahead of the patient, and helps him to avoid a few of the pitfalls along the road by seeing them first” (P-2.III.1:1). How do we resolve the apparent conflict between this section and the rest of the Course?

I think that the key lies in the difference between the normal view of leaders and followers (which, I think, is addressed in this section) and the view the Course puts forth (outside of this section). The normal view is that the role and the person are one, so that being a leader means that you are truly superior to others. This idea, I think, is implicitly referred to in this paragraph, when it says that assuming roles of leader and follower means you walk alone. The roles are seen as real and therefore differences in role mean separation.

Answer Key

1. The ancient lesson is, “God’s Son is guilty”—see T-31.I, sentences 7:4, .4:6, and 10:1, and also 31.II.1:9..
2. The ancient lesson is overcome by being still an instant (that is, for a short time) and suspending all the thoughts in our mind that make up the ancient lesson we learned.
3. Neither side in the battle can hurt you. For truth is not your enemy and so *will not* hurt you, and illusions are not real and so *cannot* hurt you. If you are hurt you are doing it to yourself.
4. Two steps: One, you decide to let the lesson go. Two, truth is given you.
5. We must first look straight at the false choices. We will begin doing this in the next paragraph.
6. The false alternatives are the roles of leader and follower.
7. Your personal answers are all that is expected here.
8. You “love” the person who helps you save yourself from being split between the two roles. He does this by being leader when you want to be the follower, and follower when you want to be the leader. You feel justified in murdering (figuratively or even literally) the person who takes the role when *you* want it, refuses to take the right role at the right time (“right” by your definition), or who takes it and then blows it (4:3–6).
9. The judgments we make against one another and the guilt we see in one another is largely based on everyone’s failure to play the roles we want them to when we want them to. Assigning the other the role of leader or follower when you do not want it gives you two reasons to murder them. If they do not accept the role, you want to kill them. If they accept the role but carry it out in a way we don’t like, we want to kill them. This is how this concept of two roles ties into the ancient lesson that God’s Son is guilty.
10. Wanting your brother to be leader *and* wanting him to be follower are both calls for death. Both give you a reason to condemn him when he fails.
11. We can call for life by hearing our brother’s call for life. We refuse to hear his call for death, asking us to be leader or to be follower. Instead, behind that, we *choose* to hear his call for life and love, for forgiveness and help, and we respond in kind.
12. Before you answer the question, “What does he ask for you?” (5:12).
13. Paragraphs 1 and 2 of this section (T-31.II.1–2). This similarity shows that we are still talking about the same issue. We are still talking about forgetting the call for death we thought we heard our brother make.
14. Christ makes the call to life through your brother. You have mistaken your brother’s call as a call to war, a call to death. You are being asked to be still, to set aside what you believe you have heard, and to listen again, carefully, until you hear Christ’s “call that echoes past each seeming call to death...and pleads that love restore the dying world” (T-31.I.10:4).

15. Listen to Christ in your brother, calling for forgiveness, life, and love.
16. Think not ancient thoughts about your brother's guilt, about the lesson that God's Son is guilty.
17. Christ, Who is the subject of sentence 5.
18. This probably refers to things such as material possessions, ego values, and so on. In other words, our idols. God isn't going to *attack* our idols; they will simply fall away.
19. We should forgive all appearances in our brothers because the appearances "are but ancient lessons you have taught yourself about the sinfulness in *you*." We convinced ourselves of our own sinfulness, and then we projected that onto our brothers. We are seeing our own judgment upon ourselves.
20. You think he should be asking you to take the lead. Or, you think he should be asking you to be the follower.
21. No. The principles are applicable to *every* relationship you have, "significant other" or not. As was quoted earlier in this commentary, "When you meet anyone, remember it is a holy encounter" (T-8.III.4:1). Anyone! With each person you meet, if you remain separate, you deny your inheritance to both of you. If you join, if you recognize the call of Christ in them, you both can remember and accept your inheritance.