

What Is It For?

Changing the Purpose of Our Relationships

Meeting your own needs vs spiritual awakening

T-15.V.5:1-8

T-15.V.5. The Holy Spirit knows no one is special. 2 Yet He also perceives that you have made special relationships, which He would purify and not let you destroy. 3 However unholy the reason you made them may be, He can translate them into holiness by removing as much fear as you will let Him. 4 You can place any relationship under His care and be sure that it will not result in pain, if you offer Him your willingness to have it serve no need but His. 5 All the guilt in it arises from your use of it. 6 All the love from His. 7 Do not, then, be afraid to let go your imagined needs, which would destroy the relationship. 8 Your only need is His.

One of the misunderstandings of the Course's message, I think, is that we are not supposed to have special relationships. This passage says quite clearly that the Holy Spirit does not want to destroy our special relationships, nor does He want to let *us* destroy them, He simply wants to purify our relationships, to "translate them into holiness." We made special relationships for unholy reasons, but nevertheless, the Holy Spirit can still use them, and will use them.

3 I have said repeatedly that the Holy Spirit would not deprive you of your special relationships, but would transform them. 4 And all that is meant by that is that He will restore to them the function given them by God. (T-17.IV.2:3-4)

After I began to study about special relationships, I went through a period in which I tried to avoid having any special relationships. If I found myself being attracted to someone, I felt guilty for thinking they were special in some way. Some people have even started to feel guilty that they love their children in a special way, a way they don't love everyone else. The Holy Spirit does not want to deprive us of our special relationships! He wants to transform them, and to use them for a purpose different than the one we have given them; that is all. Instead of serving the function we have given to them, which can be summed up in the words "sin," "unholiness," and "insanity," He wants to use them for the purpose given by God to all relationship, which is sanity and holiness.

Unholy Special versus Holy Special Relationships

Often we think the contrast the Course is making is between *special* relationships and *holy* relationships. I don't think that is really the contrast that is meant. To me, the contrast is between *unholy special* relationships and *holy special* relationships. Making a relationship holy does not automatically mean that it is no longer special. In fact, if I have a dozen unholy relationships and one of them becomes a holy relationship, that relationship is special *because* it is holy, and different from all the others. There are a couple of places in which the Course refers to the *same* relationship as both special and holy in the same breath, so to speak. In these passages Jesus clearly says that our relationships *remain special*, and yet can still be used for God's purposes:

T-18.II.6. The Holy Spirit, ever practical in His wisdom, accepts your dreams and uses them as means for waking. 2 You would have used them to remain asleep. 3 I said before that the first change, before dreams disappear, is that your dreams of fear are changed to happy dreams. 4 That is what the Holy Spirit does in the special relationship. 5 He does not destroy it, nor snatch it away from you. 6 But He does use it differently, as a help to make His purpose real to you. 7 **The special relationship will remain, not as a source of pain and guilt, but as a source of joy and freedom.** 8 It will not be for you alone, for therein lay its misery. 9 As its unholiness kept it a thing apart, **its holiness** will become an offering to everyone.

T-18.II.7. Your **special relationship** will be a means for undoing guilt in everyone blessed through your **holy relationship**.

So Jesus is not saying we will not have special relationships. He is saying that the special relationships will become holy. They will be used for a different purpose, "not for you alone."

Our special relationships can be the ego's most potent tool in keeping us out of Heaven and away from God, on the one hand:

The special love relationship is the ego's most boasted gift...the ego's chief weapon for keeping you from Heaven. (T-16.V.3:1, 2:3).

But *those very same relationships*, although they remain special, can be used by the Holy Spirit for the exact opposite purpose, to find our Self and to find salvation:

In this world, God's Son comes closest to himself in a holy relationship. (T-20.V.1:1).

And here [in this world] can he learn **relationships are his salvation**, and not his doom. (T-20.VI.11:9).

That is what changing the purpose of our relationships is all about; transforming them from sources of *doom* into the means of salvation.

The Essential Change of Purpose

Go back now to Chapter 15, fifth section, fifth paragraph.

4 You can place any relationship under His care and be sure that it will not result in pain, if you offer Him your willingness to have it serve no need but His.

This paragraph from Chapter 15 advises us to *place our special relationships under the care of the Holy Spirit*, and to be *willing to have them serve no need but His*.

That is the one thing that will transform our relationships: giving them to the Holy Spirit to be used only for His purpose.

That is the central focus of this workshop. If you get nothing else from this weekend, get this. All the rest is details, and if you make this mental commitment to change the purpose of your relationships, everything else will be given to you, even if you don't pick up on it this weekend.

Place your special relationships under the care of the Holy Spirit, and be willing to have them serve no need but His.

We are told that if we are willing to do this, we can be sure that the relationship will not result in pain. Suppose I published a book about “How to avoid all pain in your relationships”—do you think it might be a best-seller? We all want this, don't we? We've all had multiple experiences of painful relationships, and we'd all like to avoid such pain in the future. Well—here's how! Just give your relationships into His care, to be used only for His purposes, and there will be no more pain.

It tells us that all of the guilt in the relationship comes from *our* use of the relationship, and all the love in the relationship comes from His use of it. So if we want to experience love instead of guilt, what is the obvious solution? Take our hands off the steering wheel, and let Him take over.

What does it mean to take our hands off the steering wheel? It means that we must let go of our “imagined needs.” What we are doing in every special relationship we enter is trying to meet some personal, individual need. We are trying to get the other person, in some way, to fill up some void or lack we sense in ourselves. “The ego establishes special relationships only to get something” (T-15.VII.2:1). We are using the relationship for our own purposes. Exactly that is what we are being asked to give up. The Course says these needs are only “imagined needs,” and not real needs at all. The reality is that we are already complete, and have no such needs as we imagine.

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The inevitable result of our way of using relationships is *guilt*. Because when we do get the other person to meet our needs, now we feel somehow obligated to them. We may have given them something in return, but we always try to get more than we give, and then we feel guilty when we do. Trying to use the relationship to meet our imagined needs will “destroy the relationship.”

Changing the purpose vs changing the form

The point here is that we have all proved to ourselves, over and over, what the Course is saying. We’ve all experienced relationships as a source of pain and a source of guilt. Yet we seem to keep doing the same thing over and over; why?

We assume the purpose is OK and never question it; instead we focus on trying to change the form. We’re trying to meet our imagined needs, using the relationship to get what we want. We think this is the only way to do things, we *assume* this is what relationships are for. And so we fiddle with the form:

- Figure we’ve got the wrong person and look for a better one
- Try to find new techniques for manipulating the other person
- Try to get the other person to change so they meet our needs better
- Attend workshops about how to get what you want out of a relationship
- Attend workshops on how to *be more clear* about what we want

All of these things are making the assumption that the purpose of relationships is to give us what we want, to meet our needs. The Course is saying that *it is the purpose we have given to relationships that is the source of the problem*. We need to change the purpose. We need to realize that meeting our needs *is not what relationships are for*, because our needs are imaginary in the first place.

Place your special relationships under the care of the Holy Spirit, and be willing to have them serve no need but His.

Letting Go Our Imagined Needs

To let go of our imagined needs is no small thing. For example, suppose I find myself romantically attracted to a woman. I’ve been alone for some time. I feel I have certain needs, and I’m looking for a relationship to fill those needs. I need companionship. I need someone with similar interests. I need someone who wants to spend time with me and talk with me. I need sex. I need somebody (at a certain time in our lives, anyhow) who wants to have a family with me. I need

somebody to go into business with me, or play tennis with me, or go to movies with me. You can go on adding to the list.

None of those things are what the relationship is for. The Course is asking me to *let go of* these needs, and to see that the relationship has another purpose entirely. It is reminding me that *meeting my needs is not the purpose of the relationship*. This is a pretty strong demand!

The Course tells us in Workbook Lesson 24 that we don't perceive our own best interests. It is pretty blunt about it: "What you do is determined by your perception of the situation, and that perception is wrong. 4 It is inevitable, then, that you will not serve your own best interests." Our perception of ourselves is wrong, our perception of the other person is wrong, and what we think is needed, what is in *my* best interests or even *our* best interests, is based on that false perception. Therefore it is inevitable that it will be mistaken. *We do not know what we need*.

The problem is that we think we do! We think we know what we need, based on our false evaluation of ourselves, and therefore we pursue the goal of filling those needs. We end up hurting ourselves and others in the process.

Your part is only to remember this; you do not want anything you value to come of a relationship. 2 You choose neither to hurt it nor to heal it in your own way. 3 You do not know what healing is. (T-16.I.3:1-3).

This is from the section on "true empathy," which asks us to "sit quietly by and let the Holy Spirit relate through you" (T-16.I.2:7). It's the same basic idea: we let go of our imagined needs, *even in the process of trying to bring healing into the relationship*. We don't know what healing *is*. The basic idea of the first sentence is that what we *value* isn't what we really want to have come from any relationship, because we don't value the right things. Our values are skewed. We need to leave the purpose of the relationship, and what comes from it, up to the Holy Spirit.

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We Are Not Speaking Here of Holy Relationships

In a holy relationship, as defined by the Course, you have *two people* who have agreed together on a common purpose. This is often spoken about in very similar terms to what we've been talking about—a radical shift in the purpose of the relationship itself, on the part of both people involved. For instance:

T-17.V.5. 2 Only a radical shift in purpose could induce a complete change of mind about what the whole relationship is for. 3 As this change develops and is finally accomplished, it grows increasingly beneficent and joyous. 4 But at the beginning, the

situation is experienced as very precarious. 5 A relationship, undertaken by two individuals for their unholy purposes, suddenly has holiness for its goal. 6 As **these two** contemplate their relationship from the point of view of this new purpose, they are inevitably appalled.

It's clearly something both people have chosen to do, and now together they are contemplating their relationship from a new point of view. Later in the same section it says, "You underook, together, to invite the Holy Spirit into your relationship" (T-17.V.11:1).

What we are talking about is the situation where one person, alone, makes the decision to put the relationship into the care of the Holy Spirit, to let go of his or her own imagined needs, and to let the Holy Spirit use the relationship for His purposes. The other person isn't necessarily doing the same thing. Many people feel that this, too, is a "holy relationship," that it only takes one person doing it. We aren't here today to debate that issue; it's just a matter of definition. Nobody disagrees that there are relationships in which one person, alone, has invited the Holy Spirit into it, and there are others in which the two people, together, have invited Him in, and that the dynamics of these two kinds of relationships, the way we behave in them, and the options that are open to us, are very, very different.

In this workshop we are dealing mainly with the kind of relationships in which one person invites the Holy Spirit into it. We are making no assumptions about whether the other person is or is not cooperating. This has several implications:

- You cannot say you are unable to practice these things by blaming the other person.
- You are not dependent on the other person; you can do this by yourself.
- *Not just special love relationships.* You can put the tools we are going to be talking about into practice in *any* relationship: family members, friends, co-workers, bosses and employees. All our relationships can be given into the care of the Holy Spirit; we can let go of our imagined needs in each one; and we can allow the Holy Spirit to use it only for His purpose, instead of for our own purposes.

Ego's Purposes in Relationship versus the Holy Spirit's Purposes

What *are* the purposes the ego is using special relationships for? When we say we need to give up our imagined needs, stop using the relationship for our purposes or the ego's purposes, and start allowing the Holy Spirit to use them for His purposes, what do we mean?

The Ego's Purposes in Relationships

Beneath the surface of what we think of as our wants and needs in relationship, the ego has some darker purposes at work.

1. To occupy the mind so completely that truth will not be heard. "Every special relationship you have made has, as its fundamental purpose, the aim of occupying your mind so completely that you will not hear the call of truth." (T-17.IV.3:3)

We all certainly know how a relationship can totally occupy our minds, and keep us in such turmoil that we cannot hear the Voice for God. This is the result of using it for our own purposes.

2. Excluding the truth about the other person and excluding your self. "Without exception, these relationships have as their purpose the exclusion of the truth about the other, and of yourself." (T-17.III.2:3)

The ego's purpose is to use the relationship to dazzle us with fantasies and illusions (including visions of the other person's guilt), and so to keep us from seeing Christ.

3. Increasing separation and fragmentation. "Every step taken in the making, the maintaining and the breaking off of the unholy relationship is a move toward further fragmentation and unreality." (T-17.III.3:4)

We deceive ourselves into thinking we are seeking union, but if we are pursuing our own purposes in the relationship, we are really moving towards fragmentation and unreality.

4. The ego is seeking to hurt you. Recall that by using the relationship for our own purposes, we cause ourselves pain and destroy the real relationship. "They [your brothers] were not created to enable you to hurt yourself through them." (T-17.III.10:3)

5. As a defense against the Holy Spirit, to preserve the ego thought system of separation, attack, vengeance, conflict and death. "In a sense, the special relationship was the ego's answer to the creation of the Holy Spirit, Who was God's Answer to the separation. 2 For although the ego did not

understand what had been created, it was aware of threat. 3 The whole defense system the ego evolved to protect the separation from the Holy Spirit was in response to the gift with which God blessed it, and by His blessing enabled it to be healed.” (T-17.IV.4:1–3)

When we find ourselves really drawn into some special relationship and distracted from our spiritual purpose, whether out of attraction or out of anger, what is really going on is that our ego is mounting a defense against the Holy Spirit in our minds.

6. **To be of value in itself.** “Its purpose is to be of value <in <itself,> and to divert your attention from what it encloses. “ (T-17.IV.7:6)

This is taken from the section on “The Two Pictures,” and is referring to the special relationship as a frame around the ego’s picture of death. It says the purpose of the frame is “to be of value in itself.” That characterizes the ego’s special relationships. They seem to be an end in themselves. Their purpose is introverted and ingrown. The constant attention to the form, the glitter of its attraction, and the seeming possibility of our ego’s need at last being met, distract our attention from the thought system of separation, guilt and death it is based on, and which is what we wind up getting. We go for the glitter of the frame, and we wind up receiving death.

The Holy Spirit’s Purposes in Relationships

1. Rather than preserving the separation as the ego desires, the Holy Spirit wants to use our special relationship to undo separation. “The Holy Spirit wants only to make His resolutions complete and perfect, and so He seeks and finds the source of problems where it is, and there undoes it. 4 And with each step in His undoing is the separation more and more undone, and union brought closer. 5 He is not at all confused by any “reasons” for separation. 6 All He perceives in separation is that it must be undone.” (T-17.III.6:3–6)

He works within our relationship to break down the barriers and to show us our oneness, our sameness.

2. **To make happy.** This one is really interesting.

T-17.IV.1. God established His relationship with you to make you happy, and nothing you do that does not share His purpose can be real. 2 The purpose God ascribed to anything is its only function. 3 Because of His reason for creating His relationship with you, the function of relationships became forever “to make happy.” 4 <And nothing else.>

We don’t have much trouble accepting this purpose, do we? We all want to be happy. Indeed, we think that our relationships are supposed to

make us happy. Well, good news; *they are*. The key line here is, “And nothing else.” It reminds me of the line elsewhere asking if we prefer to be right or to be happy. A lot of our relationships are about being right, *in addition* to being happy. Doesn’t work.

Remember that the Course’s definition of happiness is fulfilling our function, given to us by God. Our function is loving in a loveless place, extending forgiveness, and releasing our brothers from their guilt. That is the function we are to be pursuing in our special relationships, and no other. If we are pursuing another function, we are looking for something else from the relationship than just “to make happy.” We are thinking we have our own will that is opposed to, or in competition with, God’s will.

3. Our relationships, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, will reveal our relationship to God to both people in the relationship. “ 7 The whole reality of your relationship with Him lies in our relationship to one another. 8 The holy instant shines alike on all relationships, for in it they <are> one. 9 For here is only healing, already complete and perfect. 10 For here is God, and where He is only the perfect and complete can be.” (T-17.IV.16:7-10).

What if we saw this as the purpose of all our relationships? What if we saw the knowledge of our union with God as what we wanted to get from the relationship, and also what we wanted to give in the relationship?

4. Seeing Christ in our brother or sister; releasing them from guilt. The Holy Spirit wants to use our relationships to uncover what He calls “the hidden spark of beauty” in every relationship. This is a running theme in Chapter 17:

5 Not even what the Son of God made in insanity could be without a hidden spark of beauty that gentleness could release. (T-17.II.5:5)

7 In these loving thoughts is the spark of beauty hidden in the ugliness of the unholy relationship where hatred is remembered; yet there to come alive as the relationship is given to Him Who gives it life and beauty. (T-17.III.5:7)

7 Let Him uncover the hidden spark of beauty in your relationships, and show it to you. 8 Its loveliness will so attract you that you will be unwilling ever to lose the sight of it again. 9 And you will let this spark transform the relationship so you can see it more and more. 10 For you will want it more and more, and become increasingly unwilling to let it be hidden from you. 11 And you will learn to seek for and establish the conditions in which this beauty can be seen. (T-17.III.6:7-11)

It is still up to you to choose to join with truth or with illusion. 2 But remember that to choose one is to let the other go. 3 Which one you choose you will endow with **beauty** and reality, because the choice depends on which you value more. 4 **The spark of beauty or the veil of ugliness**, the real world or the world of guilt and fear, truth or illusion, freedom or slavery--it is all the same. 5 For you can never choose except between God and the ego. (T-17.III.9:1-5)

The whole purpose is in uncovering this hidden spark of beauty, or in looking past the ego to see the loving thoughts behind the ego's mask. *This is what relationship is for.*

Setting the Goal

T-17.VI.2. In any situation in which you are uncertain, the first thing to consider, very simply, is "**What do I want to come of this? 2 What is it <for?>**" 3 The clarification of the goal belongs at the beginning, for it is this which will determine the outcome. 4 In the ego's procedure this is reversed. 5 The situation becomes the determiner of the outcome, which can be anything. 6 The reason for this disorganized approach is evident. 7 The ego does not know what it wants to come of the situation. 8 It is aware of what it does not want, but only that. 9 It has no positive goal at all.

T-17.VI.3. **Without a clear-cut, positive goal, set at the outset, the situation just seems to happen**, and makes no sense until it has already happened. 2 Then you look back at it, and try to piece together what it must have meant. 3 And you will be wrong. 4 Not only is your judgment in the past, but you have no idea what should happen. 5 No goal was set with which to bring the means in line. 6 And now the only judgment left to make is whether or not the ego likes it; is it acceptable, or does it call for vengeance? 7 The absence of a criterion for outcome, set in advance, makes understanding doubtful and evaluation impossible.

T-17.VI.4. **The value of deciding in advance what you want to happen is simply that you will perceive the situation as a means to <make> it happen.** 2 You will therefore make every effort to overlook what interferes with the accomplishment of your objective, and concentrate on everything that helps you meet it. 3 It is quite noticeable that this approach has brought you closer to the Holy Spirit's sorting out of truth and falsity. 4 The true becomes what can be used to meet the goal. 5 The false becomes the useless from this point of view. 6 The situation now has meaning, but only because the goal has made it meaningful.

T-17.VI.5. The goal of truth has further practical advantages. 2 **If the situation is used for truth and sanity, its outcome must be peace.** 3 And this is quite apart from what the outcome <is.> 4 If peace is the condition of truth and sanity, and cannot be without them, where peace is they must be. 5 Truth comes of itself. 6 If you experience peace, it is because the truth has come to you and you will see the outcome truly, for deception cannot prevail against you. 7 You will recognize the outcome <because> you are at peace. 8 Here again you see the opposite of the ego's way of looking, for the ego believes the situation brings the experience. 9 The Holy Spirit knows that **the situation is as the goal determines it, and is experienced according to the goal.**

T-24.VII.6. The test of everything on earth is simply this; "**What is it <for>?"** 2 **The answer makes it what it is for you.** 3 It has no meaning of itself, yet you can give reality to it, according to the purpose that you serve.

- **Exercise:** Use the "What is it for?" Handout on the next page.

Longer Practice Period(s)

Process for

What is this relationship for?

Text, p. 291; T-15.V.5:1–8

This process can be done one or more times for each relationship you wish to process. It should take at least ten to fifteen minutes

1. Ask yourself what purposes you think the relationship is for; what are you wanting to get from it? (Write a list or do it mentally.)

- For each purpose you think of:
- What message about yourself is this purpose based on or teaching you? What imagined need in you are you trying to meet?
- Ask yourself, “Is this a lesson about myself that I want to learn?”
- See if you are willing to let go of this imagined need; if you are, consciously let it go.

2. Remind yourself that all guilt in this relationship arises from your use of it; all the love in it arises from the Holy Spirit’s use of it. Dwell on this thought a while.

3. See if you are willing to place the relationship in His care. If you are, consciously do so. If not, ask help in becoming willing, and ask the Holy Spirit to remove fear and guilt from the relationship.

Hourly Practice

Take one or two minutes each hour on the hour.

Remind yourself that the relationship is in the care of the Holy Spirit, and exists only for His purposes, and not for yours.

OR

If you have not yet placed the relationship into His care, ask the Holy Spirit to continue to remove guilt and fear from the relationship.