

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 22

The Function of the Holy Relationship

Section V

Beyond the Veil

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

Special Note on Edition Differences

The following section of Chapter 22, in the FIP edition, begins with two paragraphs that commence with the words, “When you come to the place where the branch in the road...”. In the Complete and Annotated Edition (CE), Robert Perry has placed these two paragraphs at the end of Chapter 17 as a very short, 2-paragraph section. He explains in the following footnote:

This brief section was originally a personal message to Helen and/or Bill that seems to have come during the dictation of Chapter 28. It does not fit the content of that chapter, but it does share content with this chapter. Like the second half of this chapter, it speaks of something new that has happened on your journey, something that signifies progress, but that for now faces you with a stark and urgent choice between two opposite paths.

Because, when our study group studied Chapter 17, we were using the FIP edition, we did not encounter these two paragraphs. *For the purposes of our study group alone*, I am including them here, where they appear in the FIP edition, although I will put them where they are placed in the CE when we have completed our study in the group. I think they make sense in either place.

Chapter 17.X, “The Branch in the Road” (T-22.IV.1–2 (FIP))

Paragraph 1

When you come to the place where the branch in the road is quite apparent, you cannot go ahead. ²You *must* go one way or the other. ³For now, if you go straight ahead, the way you were going before you came to the branch, you will go nowhere. ⁴The whole purpose of coming this far is to decide which branch you will take from here on. ⁵The way you came no longer matters. ⁶It can no longer serve.

• Study Question •

1. *Which of the following seems to describe what the choice is we are being asked to make, based on your reading of the Course to this point:*
 - A. *Between the “something else” we think we are (the ego) and our true Self (Christ)*
 - B. *Answering the last unanswered question (21.VII.6:11 (21.VII.5:14 (FIP)))*
 - C. *Recognizing that “yes” must mean “not no”*
 - D. *To lift the veil of sin and see the face of Christ in our brother*
 - E. *The separation of you and the ego (22.III.6:1 (22.II.6:1 (FIP)))*
 - F. *The holy relationship versus the unholy relationship*
 - G. *All of the above*

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We’ve already been told that, having begun a holy relationship, and given the understanding of it that has been presented to us, we have arrived at a crucial place in the Course — what is called here “the branch in the road” (1:1). I even mentioned that the very word, “crucial,” used back in Section III, implies a crossroads: a branch in the road. The whole purpose of the early part of the spiritual journey is to bring us to a crisis point of decision. Once you have become aware of this branching in the road, you really cannot proceed any further on your spiritual journey until you decide which path to take (1:1). You have to go one way or the other (1:2).

Some people get stuck for a very long time at this point. The final choice is inevitable; all we can really do is delay our making of it. In my experience, almost no one makes the right choice, the choice for consistent listening to the Holy Spirit, immediately. We dilly-dally around, reluctant to give up the baubles of the ego, and as long as we do we remain stuck at the branch in the road. There are not really two ways to proceed. One way, we will proceed to the end of the journey; the other way is an illusion and, in reality, goes nowhere. It just loops back to the branch (1:3). All we are really doing is putting off the inevitable.

The last three sentences are about how we got here to the branch. In a nutshell, how you got here does not matter. It got you here, and it has served its purpose, but it no longer matters. Now the only thing that matters is deciding which branch to take (1:4–6).

Sometimes, when we meet with other Course students, everyone seems to want to know, “How did you find the Course?” And we take great delight in telling our stories. I know; I’m the same way. Really, it doesn’t matter how you got here, although hearing it may help me know you better. But we need to let go of our stories and confront the decision that keeps coming up over and over again, the “last unanswered question,” the realization that the only thing that works, in the end, is total commitment. That’s why Jesus keeps bringing it up, over and over, in the Text and the Workbook and the Manual.

Paragraph 2

2 No one who reaches this far can make the wrong decision, but he *can* delay. ²And there is no part of the journey that seems more hopeless and futile than standing where the road branches and not deciding which way to go. ³It is only the first few steps along the right way that seem hard, because you *have* chosen, but you still think you can go back and make the other choice. ⁴This is not so. ⁵A choice made with the power of Heaven to uphold it cannot be undone. ⁶Your way *is* decided. ⁷There will be nothing you will not be told, if you acknowledge this.

• Study Question •

2. Which of the following best expresses the situation represented by “the branching of the road”?
 - A. We are being asked to make a momentous decision between Christ and the ego.
 - B. We are being asked to acknowledge that our choice between Christ and the ego has already been made.



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Thankfully, we cannot make the wrong decision, since the alternate path is not really a choice, but just an illusion that brings us back to the same choice point. But we *can* delay. We can keep on looping around, over and over (2:1). We are just wasting time, and time is just an illusion, so no *real* damage is being done. But we are building a sense of hopelessness and futility (2:2).

In a nutshell, we are just keeping ourselves miserable. Stepping out on the right path only *seems* hard, and that is only for the first few steps, before we realize that we *have* chosen, and we can’t go back (2:3)! There *is* no way back. When you make your choice “with the power of Heaven to uphold it,” it “cannot be undone” (2:4–6).

And, in fact, *we have already made the decision!* The invisible reality of our situation is spelled out in the Workbook:

"The time is set already. It appears to be quite arbitrary. Yet there is no step along the road that anyone takes but by chance. It has already been taken by him, although he has not yet embarked on it. For time but seems to go in one direction. We but undertake a journey that is over. Yet it seems to have a future still unknown to us.

Time is a trick, a sleight of hand, a vast illusion in which figures come and go as if by magic. Yet there is a plan behind appearances that does not change. The script is written. When experience will come to end your doubting has been set. For we but see the journey from the point at which it ended, looking back on it, imagining we make it once again; reviewing mentally what has gone by" (W-pI.158.3:1-4:5).

It's not so much that we are being asked to choose a path. It's more that we are being asked to recognize and accept the fact that *only one path exists*, and that we chose it in our moment of creation, and cannot undo that choice. Once we are willing to acknowledge that our way *is* decided, "There will be nothing that you will not be told" (2:7).

Overview of Section V

This section paints a glowing picture of a mature holy relationship, highlighting the loving interaction of the partners and the function of the relationship as the world's saviors, carrying a message of hope and freedom to the world.

Chapter 22.V, "Beyond the Veil"

Paragraph 1 (T-22.IV.3:1-8 (FIP))

And so you stand, here in this holy place, before the veil of sin that hangs between you and the face of Christ.¹ ²Let it be lifted! ³Raise it together, for it is but a veil that stands between you. ⁴Either alone will see it as a solid block², nor realize how thin the drapery that separates you now. ⁵Yes, it *is* almost over in your awareness, and peace has reached you even here, before the veil. ⁶Think what will happen after! ⁷The love of Christ will light your faces,³ and shine from them into a darkened world that needs the light. ⁸And from this holy place, He will return with you, not leaving it nor you.

¹. T-19.IV.D.2:1: "The fourth obstacle to be surmounted hangs like a heavy veil before the face of Christ." See the entire paragraph, and also paragraph 9 in the same section.

² "For the reality of guilt is the illusion that seems to make it heavy and opaque, impenetrable, and a real foundation for the ego's thought system" (T-18.IX.5:2).

³ "Let him be to you the savior from illusions, and look on him with the new vision that looks upon the lilies and brings you joy. We go beyond the veil of fear, lighting each other's way" (T-20.II.9:3-4).

• **Study Question** •

3. *What does it mean to “lift the veil” together?*
 - A. *Praying together*
 - B. *Sharing all our secrets with one another*
 - C. *Forgiving one another’s sins, and seeing the face of Christ*

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This paragraph is filled with references to things mentioned in the past (see footnotes 1 to 3). This veil is the last obstacle to peace (“fourth obstacle” in footnote 1), the fear of God⁴, which can be overcome only together, with a partner in a holy relationship. This is the turning point. Together with our partners, we stand “in this holy place.” What is the holy place? I think it refers to the holy relationship. We stand in one another’s presence, separated by “the veil of sin that hangs between you and the face of Christ” (1:1) From Chapter 19, we know that this “veil of sin” has been identified as the fear of God. How can we overcome that fear? How can we lift the veil to reveal the face of Christ in each other?

There is no way to do it alone: “Either alone will see it as a solid block” (1:4), unable to realize how insubstantial this fear of God is. This makes perfect sense to me. If I am standing by myself, weighed down with both conscious and unconscious, existential guilt⁵, I cannot imagine that my fear is groundless, that God does not need to forgive me because God has never judged me. But if, in a loving relationship with another person, I experience forgiveness from that person — if they are able to gently overlook my errors, instead of making them into sins — then, it becomes possible for me to conceive that perhaps God can do the same thing. I overcome my fear of God because, in another person, I experience God’s love.

Because of our experience in a holy relationship, the fear of God *is* almost over in our awareness; even with the face of Christ still not fully unveiled, we have begun to experience peace (1:5). “Think,” Jesus says, just *imagine* what it will be like when the veil is fully lifted (1:6)! The peace we have already tasted will pale in comparison to what follows. With the veil gone, we will behold the face of Christ in all its glory; we will have direct exposure to the love of Christ, and our faces will be aglow with its light (1:7). From our faces, that love will shine forth into the world around us, a world that so desperately needs it. And as we return from this holy temple, Christ will come with us and will never leave our awareness again (1:8).

I believe this image of “return” is speaking of how we can for some time each day turn away from the outer world, perhaps in meditation, perhaps in a moment of mutual love and forgiveness, and enter into the Presence of Christ and experience that shining

⁴ T-19.VI.D.3:4: “Here is your promise never to allow union to call you out of separation, the great amnesia in which the memory of God seems quite forgotten, the cleavage of your Self from you: *the fear of God*, the final step in your dissociation.

⁵ By “existential guilt” I mean guilt for the simple fact of existing. We fear that our experience of individual, separated existence is proof that we have torn our life away from and apart from God, thus incurring God’s anger.

love. The Course in several places⁶ speaks of this returning to the world of illusion after a holy instant with Christ, and bringing the love and light we found there with us, back to a waiting world. Here, it seems to refer to a mutual holy instant of forgiveness within a relationship.

Paragraph 2 (T-22.IV.3:9–4:7 (FIP))

2 You will become His messengers, returning Him unto Himself.
²Think of the loveliness that you will see, who walk with Him! ³And think how beautiful will each of you look to the other! ⁴How happy you will be to be together, after such a long and lonely journey where you walked alone! ⁵The gates of Heaven, open now for you, will you now open to the sorrowful. ⁶And none who looks upon the Christ in you but will rejoice. ⁷How beautiful the sight you saw beyond the veil, which you will bring to light the tired eyes of those as weary now as once you were. ⁸How thankful they will be to see you come among them, offering Christ's forgiveness to dispel their faith in sin.

• Study Question •

4. *What are the results described here, and in the preceding paragraph, when two people join together in mutual forgiveness, in a holy relationship, and allow the light of Christ's face to shine upon them? (More than one answer is correct.)*
- A. *Our faces will reflect Christ's light to the world*
 - B. *We will have a perfect romantic relationship*
 - C. *Through us, Christ will return to the world, awakening Himself in others.*
 - D. *We will be supremely happy to be together at last, no longer alone*
 - E. *Each of us will become incredibly beautiful to the other*
 - F. *We will become totally wrapped up in one another and ignore the rest of the world*
 - G. *We will open the gates of Heaven to the sorrowful*
 - H. *We will go among the people of the world offering forgiveness*

This is the goal of a holy relationship, and, indeed, ultimately the goal of every one of us: To be messengers of Christ, teaching everyone that they, like you, have Christ within, as their True Self. You bring the message of Christ to the Christ in them (2:1). What greater joy can there be than assisting in the awakening of Spirit in another human being? How lovely the sight will be (2:2)! As the two partners in holy relationship join in this holy midwifery, bringing consciousness of Christ into the world, they will appear more and more beautiful to one another (2:3). Their joy at being together will be unmatched by anything they have experienced previously in their solitude (2:4).

⁶ See T-22.VII.10 (T-18.VII.10 (FIP)) and W-184.10.

Together, this holy pair will have the joy of opening the gates of Heaven to those around them who live in sorrow, because those gates have already opened for *them* (2:5). Everyone who sees the Christ in them will be filled with joy (2:6). With the veil of sin, the fear of God, taken out of the way, they have been blown away with the beauty of God's love shining in the face of Christ. Like the beloved in the Song of Solomon, they have inwardly heard Christ's voice declare, "Behold, you are beautiful, my love; behold, you are beautiful" (Song 1:15). They have experienced His loving Presence: "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love." (Song 2:3–4 KJV)

This is the sight they — and you and I, if we will — can "bring to light the tired eyes of those as weary now as once you were" (2:7). We can only begin to imagine how thankful these will be as we "come among them, offering Christ's forgiveness to dispel their faith in sin" (2:8). We will invite them to "the banqueting house" with us, to come, sit at the table under Christ's banner of love, to hear His voice tell them, "Behold, you are beautiful!"

Paragraph 3 (T-22.IV.5 (FIP))

3 Every mistake you make, the other will gently have corrected *for* you. ²For in his sight, your loveliness is *his* salvation, which he would protect from harm. ³And each will be the other's strong protector from everything that seems to rise between you. ⁴So shall you walk the world with me, whose message has not yet been given everyone. ⁵For you are here to let it be received. ⁶God's offer still is open, yet it waits acceptance. ⁷From you who have accepted it is it received. ⁸Into your joined hands is it safely given, for you who share it have become its willing guardians and protectors.

• Study Question •

5. *In the list below, mark the thing we, as "strong protector" of one another, are protecting by circling it, and mark what we are protecting against by underlining it.*
- A. *Our brother's loveliness or holiness; the vision of him or her as sinless*
 - B. *Our brother's feelings*
 - C. *Everything that seems to rise between our union in holy relationship*
 - D. *The world's attacks on our happiness*

More benefits of the holy relationship are presented, both within the relationship for the two who are part of it, and without, for the world.

In a holy relationship we are each said to become the "strong protector" for one another. Imagine what it might feel like to be in a relationship where, "Every mistake you make, the other will gently have corrected *for* you" (3:1). Isn't this the kind of

relationship you desire? If you say “Yes,” then consider that to have it, you must *give* it. You must become that loving, forgiving presence that gently corrects the errors of your partner *for them*, lifting the burden of guilt before it can even land on them. I don’t think there is any way to receive this without giving it, because the guilt of *not* forgiving will prevent any experience of it.

So, when we read 3:2, we can see in it the flip side: “For in *your* sight, *his* loveliness is *your* salvation, which you would protect from harm.” In a true holy relationship, this forgiveness is reciprocal, going both ways at once. Neither of you will allow anything that “seems to rise between you” to persist for more than a split second (3:3). The relationship becomes a haven of rest instead of a bed of nails.

In this symbiotic love-fest of forgiveness, you walk the world with Jesus, bringing his message to those who have not yet received it (3:4). *That is your purpose*; that is why you are here (3:5). “I am the light of the world. That is my only function. That is why I am here” (W-pI.61.5:3-5). God waits with open arms for everyone to come to the banquet table, but each one of us must *accept* His invitation (3:6). This reminds me of the parable Jesus told (Luke 14:15–24), where a great king invited many guests to a banquet, but they all made excuses, resulting in the king inviting the “poor and maimed and blind” in their stead. The invitation is open, but we must RSVP. We have become the messengers who invite the world to join the party, and we hold God’s offer in our “joined hands” (the holy relationship), guarding it, protecting it, and sharing it with the world (3:6–8).

Paragraph 4 (T-22.IV.6 (FIP))

4 To all who share the love of God, the grace is given to be the givers of what they have received. ²And so they learn that it is theirs forever. ³All barriers disappear before their coming, as every obstacle was finally surmounted that seemed to rise and block their way before. ⁴This veil you lift together opens the way to truth to more than you. ⁵Those who would let illusions be lifted from their minds are this world’s saviors, walking the world with their Redeemer and carrying His message of hope and freedom and release from suffering to everyone who needs a miracle to save him.

• Study Question •

6. *In the following list, circle the things that are said to happen when we willingly accept our function of sharing God’s Love with the world.*
- A. *We learn that God’s Love and forgiveness are ours forever*
 - B. *The way to Heaven is opened not only for us, but for the world*
 - C. *We are recognized as high, spiritual beings*
 - D. *The barriers in others to God’s Love fall away*
 - E. *We become the saviors of the world*
 - F. *We begin to make our living by teaching the Course*

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The first sentence sums up the last two paragraphs: “To all who share the love of God,” that is, to those in holy relationship who mutually offer forgiveness to one another, “the grace is give to be the givers of what they have received,” that is, to lift guilt from the lives of everyone they meet (4:1). It is in the giving of it that we learn that forgiveness is our forever (4:2).

You may find it enlightening to compare this paragraph with T-19.IV.1-5 (T-19.IV.1–3 (FIP)).

In a holy relationship we are those “who share the Love of God,” those who are “givers of what they have received,” and grace is given to us. We join the army of messengers bring Jesus’ message to the world. There no longer is any barrier between us and God, or us and each other (4:3). No appearance of sin can stand before our forgiveness. When we lift the veil that stood between the two of us, it opens the way for more than just the two of us (4:4)! We become miracle workers, “this world’s saviors.” There are people who *need* a miracle to save them, but with illusions lifted from our minds, we can *offer* miracles. We walk with Jesus, “carrying His message of hope and freedom and *release* from suffering” (4:5).

It’s important for us to realize how strongly this message comes across in the Course! It isn’t just about finding personal happiness. It’s about saving the world. It’s about, as Jesus says in Chapter 1, joining His great crusade to undo error. We *join with Him* in this. We become part of his band of disciples. This has been his intention from the start. After his resurrection, when he appeared to his disciples, he said, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” (John 20:21 ESV). As God sent Jesus to bring forgiveness to the world, “so,” in the same way, he sends *us*. We are the light of the world.

Paragraph 5 (T-22.IV.7 (FIP))

5 How easy is it to offer this miracle to everyone! ²No one who has received it for himself could find it difficult. ³For by receiving it, he learned it was not given him alone. ⁴Such is the function of a holy relationship: to receive together, and give as you received. ⁵Standing before the veil, it still seems difficult. ⁶But hold out your joined hands and touch this heavy-seeming block, and you will learn how easily your fingers slip through its nothingness. ⁷It is no solid wall. ⁸And only an illusion stands between you and the holy Self you share.

• Study Question •

7. *What, then, is the function of a holy relationship?*
- A. *Together to receive the gift of forgiveness or holiness, and together to give what we receive to the world.*
 - B. *To be a place where we can experience forgiveness together*
 - C. *Allowing us, by joining together with another person, to pass the veil of sin*
 - D. *All of the above*

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When anyone has truly received forgiveness — not just had someone *offer* forgiveness, but truly *receiving* it so that any guilt is gone — offering it to everyone else becomes easy (5:1–2). That’s because to truly receive forgiveness, you must realize that it is offered to *everyone*. Your forgiveness exists on the basis of total forgiveness for everyone; it isn’t a special case (5:3)! Through the experience of forgiveness in your holy relationship, you have learned that God has never condemned anyone, and that your guilt is a lie because *there is no sin (W-101.6–8); your sinlessness is guaranteed by God (W-93.6–7)*.

Learning of your perfect forgiveness, and giving that gift to others, is the function of a holy relationship (5:4). It should be easy, because there’s really nothing to forgive, but most of us are still standing on the wrong side of the veil of fear, so such total forgiveness *seems* difficult (5:5). Joining with another person and daring to reach out and *touch* that fearsome veil, which seems like a solid block, enables you both to “learn how easily your fingers slip through its nothingness. It is no solid wall” (5:6–7). As was pointed out above, no one person can do this alone. We need one another’s encouragement, one another’s strength, and one another’s love to empower us to approach the veil at all. Together, we can realize that the “wall” is an illusion, and that *nothing* stands between us and the holy Self we share (5:8).

The following visualization exercise has been borrowed from the commentaries by Greg Mackie and Robert Perry:

Application: Bring to mind a brother with whom you are in conflict and do the following visualization:

*See the two of you standing before a solid wall of granite.
This is the wall of sin that seems to block your joining.
But now, the two of you decide to forgive one another.
You join hands and reach out to this heavy-seeming block.
To your surprise, your joined hands slip right through it.
It fades away before your eyes,
and you see the face of Christ shining before you.
This is the holy Self you share.
You have received the miracle of God’s Love.
Now the two of you are free to give the miracle of God’s Love to everyone.
By doing so, you will recognize that it is yours forever.*

Legend:

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

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

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

Answer Key

1. G
2. B
3. C
4. A, C, D, E, G, H
5. **Protecting: A; Against: C**
6. A, B, D, E
7. D