

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 15, Section IX

The Holy Instant and the Attraction of God

Legend:

- blue text** = Material from ACIM 3rd edition (FIP)
bold blue text = words emphasized in all caps in Urtext
red text = alternate or omitted material from the Urtext
light blue text = editorial comments
~~striketrough blue text~~ = Not in Urtext, in FIP edition
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Overview of the Section

What it comes down to in this section is our choice between the attraction of guilt and the attraction of God. To make the choice we must fearlessly recognize all the interference exactly as it is. Letting go of guilt entails letting go of the value we place on bodies as a means of getting anything, which frees us from the limitations imposed by the body. In the holy instant we are given a taste of what it means to experience unlimited relationships, to see only the attraction of God, and to lose sight of bodies entirely.

Paragraph 1

1. ¹As the ego would limit your perception of your brothers to the body, so would the Holy Spirit **release** your vision and let you see the Great Rays shining from them, so unlimited that they reach to God. ²It is this shift ~~to~~ **[in]** vision that is accomplished in the holy instant. ³Yet it is needful for you to learn just what this shift entails, so you will become willing to make it permanent. ⁴Given this willingness it will **not** leave you, for it *is* permanent. ⁵**[For,]** Once you have accepted it as the **only perception that you want**, it is translated into knowledge by the part that God Himself plays in the Atonement, for it is the **only** step in it He understands. ⁶Therefore, in this there will be **no** delay when **you** are ready for it. ⁷God is ready **now**, but **you** are not.

• Study Question •

1. *The holy instant gives us an experience of a "shift to vision" (1:2). What is this "shift to vision" as defined here?*
 - A. *A permanent change in perception to seeing our brother as innocent.*
 - B. *A temporary perception of our brother as an extension of the Great Rays of God, rather than as a body.*
 - C. *A change in our thought from seeing attack to seeing a call for love.*

Our egos want us to see each other as nothing more than bodies, thus eliminating any recognition that we are somehow connected to one another, and that all of us are connected in God. By contrast, the Holy Spirit wills that our vision be unrestricted by the physical; He wills to release our vision so that we can perceive "the Great Rays" shining with unlimited radiance that connects us all to God (1:1). The Great Rays have been mentioned once before, in T-10.IV.8, where Jesus tells us that, although the Great Rays have been obscured in us, we can still see the spark of light, and being willing to see that in each other, the greater light will reveal Itself to us. As I said in the commentary on that earlier section, the term "Great Rays," although it appears in other metaphysical writings, is used in a completely independent way in the Course. In the Course, "Great Rays" simply means the full light of Christ in a Son of God, Christ in all his glory. By contrast, the "spark" is all we can see at first, because the greater light is covered over by the debris of the ego. The spark is the remnant of that greater light, "the remaining call of creation" (T-10.IV.8:6).

The Holy Spirit wants to open our blind eyes to behold that greater light. "It is this shift in vision that is accomplished in the holy instant" (1:2). The eventual goal is that this shift in vision will become permanent (1:3), a goal that depends entirely on our willingness. That's why we have to "learn just what this shift entails"; once we truly understand it we will want *only* this perception (1:5), and when that happens, it *will* be permanent because what we are perceiving *is* permanent (1:4). What begins as this perfect *perception* will be "translated into knowledge by" God Himself (1:5) instantly (1:6). God is ready *now* for it to be permanent, but we are not (1:7). So, we still have work to do.

Paragraph 2

2. ¹Our task is but to continue, as fast as possible, the necessary process of looking straight at **all** the interference and seeing it **exactly** as it is. ²For it is impossible to recognize as **wholly** without gratification **what you think you want**. ³The body is the symbol of the ego, as the ego is the symbol of the separation. ⁴And both are nothing more than attempts to **limit** communication, and thereby **to make it impossible**. ⁵For communication **must be unlimited** in order to **have** meaning, and **deprived** of meaning, it will **not** satisfy **you** completely. ⁶Yet it remains the **only** means by which you **can** establish real

relationships. ~~which have no limits, having been established by God.~~

• Study Question •

2. *Both the body and the ego symbolize separation and are attempts to limit communication (this section has a lot to say about communication). They interfere with unlimited communication, which is the only way to have real relationships, and thus find true satisfaction.*

(a) *What is our only task towards bringing this about (2:1)?*

(b) *Why is this our only task (2:2)?*

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Yet again Jesus tells us that the *only* thing we need to be doing is “looking straight at *all* the interference and seeing it *exactly* as it is” (2:1). I stress the word “only” because the way the Course words this may not make that evident. Jesus says, “Our task is *but* to continue...”. “But” means “just” or “only,” as used here. Just continue the necessary process of looking. It seems like every word is significant. “Continue.” It is something we are already doing, something we’ve been doing for some time because it is a fundamental process in Course practice. And it is a “necessary” practice. You cannot do without it. We are to do this “as fast as possible”! It’s not only necessary, it is urgent. And it isn’t a simple, one-time act; it is a *process*. Just keep on with it, Jesus says. Just continue to look straight at all the interference, realizing exactly what it is: *interference!*

What is the interference? In this context it is clearly the body and the ego (2:3–4). What Jesus seems to be saying is that we must come to understand our bodies and our egos as of no intrinsic value except as communication tools. To the ego, “both are nothing more than attempts to *limit* communication” (2:4), and we need to see that exactly as it is. If we think our body or our ego can offer us some private, personal value—something we are not willing to share with all—that thought will block true communication. We have to see how the ego uses our body to make full communication impossible. We have to let go of all separate, personal investment in the body. We need to open up to the possibility, and the desirability, of *unlimited* communication (2:5). Only unlimited communication can establish real relationships (2:6).

Paragraph 3

3. [Real relationships *have* no limits, having been established by God.] ¹In the holy instant, where the Great Rays **replace** the body in awareness, the recognition of relationships **without** limits is given you. ²But in order to **see** this, it is necessary to give up **every** use the ego has for the body, and to accept the fact that the ego has **no** purpose you would **share** with it. ³For the ego would limit everyone **to** a body for **its own** purposes, and while you think it **has** a purpose, you will choose to utilize the means by which **it** tries to turn its purpose into accomplishment. ⁴This will never **be** accomplished. ⁵Yet you have surely recognized that the ego, whose goals are altogether **unattainable**, will strive for

them with all its might, and will do so with the strength that **you** have given it.

• **Study Question** •

3. *The holy instant brings us a temporary experience of unlimited communication—of Oneness, in other words. What is necessary to make this shift of perception permanent?*

I've moved the last phrase of Paragraph 2 into Paragraph 3 as its first sentence; this was a separate sentence in the Urtext, and it seems to be more closely attached to Paragraph 3 than to 2. It begins by describing a key characteristic of real relationships: they have no limits. And this is what a holy instant reveals to us. The holy instant gives us a momentary glimpse of a kind of perception that is impossible in our "normal" state of mind. We see the Great Rays (the radiant shining of the Divine Nature) in each other, and the body simply pales into insignificance. (3:1) In Chapter 31, Jesus describes this experience:

By focusing upon the good in him [**your brother**], the body grows decreasingly persistent in your sight, and will at length be seen as little more than just a shadow circling round the good. And this will be your concept of yourself, when you have reached the world beyond the sight your eyes alone can offer you to see (T-31.VII.3:3-4).

"Just a shadow circling round the good"! That is how we will see the body in the holy instant. And this enables us to recognize relationships without limits. We no longer see one another as encapsulated in a suit of flesh. We realize that we are infinite beings, unlimited by bodies. Early in the Workbook (Review I), the Course makes this startling statement about where we are headed:

"And finally you will learn that there is no limit to where you are, so that your peace is everywhere, as you are" (W-rI.5:2).

"No limit to where you are"! You are *everywhere*. That makes utterly no sense if we think we are enclosed in bodies, does it? This is exactly why we have to realize that our body is a self-imposed, totally imaginary limitation on what we are.

The purpose of the mind-training program of the Course is to so transform our "normal" state of mind that this unlimited awareness, which was only momentary in the holy instant, becomes our permanent perception. What stands in the way? We have to "give up *every* use the ego has for the body" and to detach ourselves completely from the ego's desires (3:2). Can you imagine what it would feel like to see *no purpose for your ego*? As long as we think our ego *has* a purpose, we will continue to make use of our bodies—especially in special relationships—to accomplish that purpose (3:3). That purpose was identified clearly as "ego autonomy" back in Chapter 11: "The ego's goal is quite explicitly ego autonomy" (T-11.V.4:4). And it uses the body to accomplish it: "The illusion of the autonomy of the body and its ability to overcome loneliness is but the

working of the ego's plan to establish its own autonomy" (T-15.VII.12:1). We need to realize that this goal "will never be accomplished" (3:4).

Despite all that, the ego forges on. It keeps on striving with all its might to attain the unattainable, using all the strength that *you* give it (3:5). It will continue to do so until you withdraw that strength, until you stop thinking that its efforts are somehow, some day, going to pay off. They will *never* pay off!

Paragraph 4

4. ¹[Yet] It is impossible to **divide** your strength between Heaven and hell, God and the ego, and **release** your power ~~to~~ [unto] creation, which is the **only** purpose for which it was **given** you. ²Love would *always* give increase [For love would always give increase]. ³Limits are **demand**ed by the ego, and represent its demands [Limits are demanded, representing the ego's demands] to make little and ineffectual. ⁴Limit your sight [vision] of a brother to his body, which you **will** do as long as you would not release him **from** it, and you have denied **his** gift to **you**. ⁵**His body cannot give it**. ⁶And seek it not through **yours**. ⁷Yet your minds are **already** continuous, and **their** union need only be accepted and the loneliness in Heaven is gone.

• Study Question •

4. *Our brothers all have a gift to give to us, the increase of love. How can we find the gift they have to offer us? (There may be more than one correct answer.)*
- A. *Seek the gift in our brother's body, his physical presence.*
 - B. *Accept the union of our minds.*
 - C. *Use my body to find the gift of love.*
 - D. *Release my brother from his body and refuse to see him as limited to the body.*

The ego strives with all its might for its unattainable goals. If we supply it with our strength, even just a part of it, our creative power cannot be released (4:1). Our power was given to us *only* for the purpose of creation, and it cannot be divided between God and the ego (4:1). The two energies are entirely incompatible. Love always gives, and it gives *increase*; the ego always demands (taking instead of giving), and it demands *limits*, the very antithesis of increase (4:2-3). In the ego's special relationships, we try to find companionship through the proximity of another's body without being willing to recognize just how much *more than* a body he or she is, without being willing to see the other expand and increase without limit, choosing instead to limit and restrict them, imprisoning them in our ego's web. By limiting each other to a body we have denied *ourselves* the gift of our True, shared Self, which the union of our minds could give to us, a gift neither their body or our own can give (4:4-6). We have no idea of the joyous

union, sense of completion, and release from loneliness that awaits us when we can recognize that our minds are “*already* continuous,” already united (4:7).

My mind boggles at the notion that *my* mind and *your* mind are “continuous”—*already* continuous. My dictionary defines that word as “forming an unbroken whole; without interruption.” Our minds form an unbroken whole, without interruption. There is nowhere one mind leaves off and the other begins. We are so astonished and delighted when we experience a tiny degree of mind-to-mind communication. Imagine how you would feel if you realized suddenly that your mind and another person’s mind were entirely open to each other, and in fact, *joined as a single whole*. Not two minds in communication but *one mind* communicating to Itself. Listen now to how the Course tries to describe just that kind of singleness of mind:

The body is a limit imposed on the universal communication that is an eternal property of mind. But the communication is internal. Mind reaches to itself. It is *not* made up of different parts, which reach each other. It does not go out. Within itself it has no limits, and there is nothing outside it. It encompasses everything. It encompasses you entirely; you within it and it within you. There is nothing else, anywhere or ever.

The body is outside you, and but seems to surround you, shutting you off from others and keeping you apart from them, and them from you. It is not there. There is no barrier between God and His Son, nor can His Son be separated from Himself except in illusions. This is not his reality, though he believes it is" (T-18.VI.8:3-9:4).

We say glibly, “We are not separate. We are one.” I don’t think we’ve even begun to realize just how profoundly that is true, and how utterly different our existence will become when we truly, deeply, and finally *know* that it is so.

Paragraph 5

5. ¹If you would but let the Holy Spirit tell you of the Love of God for you, and the need your creations have to be with you forever, you would experience the attraction of the eternal. ²No one can hear Him speak of this and long remain willing to linger here. ³For it **is** your will to be in Heaven, where you are complete and quiet, in such sure and loving relationships that ~~any limit is~~ **[any limits are]** impossible. ⁴Would you not exchange your little relationships for this? ⁵For the body *is* little and limited, and only those whom you would see **without** the limits the ego would impose on them can offer **you** the gift of freedom.

• Study Question •

5. *In what ways is the attraction of the eternal expressed in our relationships? (More than one correct answer.)*
- A. *We become willing to experience relationships without limit.*
 - B. *Our relationships transcend the bodily level.*
 - C. *We become willing to see one another without the limits of the ego.*
 - D. *Our relationship partners offer us the gift of freedom.*
 - E. *All of the above.*

We do not realize how profoundly and deeply we are loved. Love comes at us from every direction—from God Who created us, and from the living beings we ourselves have created (5:1) (although we have lost all awareness of them). It is difficult to speak of God or our creations as *loving* us without thinking of them as beings somehow separate from us, distinct from us, rather than as continuous parts of the same One Mind, although that is the truth of the matter. The Eternal Mind of which we are all parts is like an ocean of Love, a vast, swirling current of Love that flows in, through, and around every part of the One Mind. If we are willing to let the Holy Spirit speak to us of this Love, we would at once *feel* Its powerful attraction, the “attraction of the eternal.”

The “attraction of the eternal” (5:1) or “of God” (see section title and 6:2) is the antidote for the attraction of guilt, which causes us to value the body for the guilt it can give us (both internalized guilt and projected guilt). In the holy instant we experience the attraction of the eternal, and it is this that draws us out of the world of guilt (5:2). This is our native realm: “Heaven, where you are complete and quiet, in such sure and loving relationships that *any* limits are impossible” (5:3). This is where we all long to be; this *is* our will (5:3). This kind of relationship and communion makes the paltry offerings of the ego’s special relationships seem empty and without any real value (5:4). This is the kind of experience we can have if we are willing to see our brothers and sisters “without the limits the ego would impose on them” (5:5), that is, to see them as so much more than mere bodies or personalities; to recognize their magnificent divinity. When we see one another as the Christ, then and only then can the Christ bless *us* (5:5).

Paragraph 6

6. ¹You have no conception of the limits you have placed on your perception, and no idea of all the loveliness that you **could** see. ²But this you must remember; the attraction of guilt **opposes** the attraction of God. ³His attraction for you remains unlimited, but because your power, **being** His, is **as great** as His, you can **turn away** from love. ⁴What you invest in guilt you withdraw from God. ⁵And your sight grows weak and dim and limited, for you have attempted to **separate** the Father from the Son, and **limit** their communication. ⁶Seek not Atonement in **further** separation. ⁷And limit not your vision of God’s Son to what **interferes** with his release, and what the Holy Spirit

must **undo** to set him free. ⁸For his belief in limits *has* imprisoned him.

• Study Question •

6. *Which of the following are ways we give in to the attraction of guilt? (More than one answer.)*
- A. *We use our divine power to turn away from love.*
 - B. *We attempt to separate the Father from the Son.*
 - C. *We attempt to limit communication.*
 - D. *We believe in limits.*
 - E. *We seek our salvation in separation.*
 - F. *We limit our vision of one another to the body and the ego.*
 - G. *All of the above.*

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TRUTH is within ourselves; it takes no rise
From outward things, whate'er you may believe.
There is an inmost centre in us all,
Where truth abides in fullness; and around,
Wall upon wall, the gross flesh hems it in,
This perfect, clear perception — which is truth.
A baffling and perverting carnal mesh
Binds it, and makes all error: and, to KNOW,
Rather consists in opening out a way
Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape,
Than in effecting entry for a light
Supposed to be without.
---- (*Paracelsus*, by Robert Browning)

I imagine Jesus, whose eyes have long ago been opened to the “imprisoned splendour” Browning speaks of, is standing with you and me, looking around the room from person to person. He *sees* the “inmost centre in us all,” and his heart sings with the glorious beauty of it all as he says to us, “You have no conception of the limits you have placed on your perception, and no idea of all the loveliness that you *could* see!” (6:1). He *so* wants us to see what he sees! “O my brothers, if you only knew the peace that will envelop you and hold you safe and pure and lovely in the Mind of God” (C-4.8:1), he exclaims. Can you feel it? Can you catch a sense of it?

Why don't we see it? Because "the attraction of guilt *opposes* the attraction of God" (6:2). Remember, we are being asked to look "straight at all the interference" (2:1). In T-15.VII.3 we were told, "The sick attraction of guilt must be recognized for what it is." We are to look at it clearly, withdraw our investment in it, and so learn to let it go. It is not enough to experience the attraction of God; we must withdraw our investment in the attraction of guilt, which is tied to bodies. Our power *is* God's power, and so it is possible for us to "turn away from love" (6:3).

In an unusual financial analogy, Jesus tells us, "What you invest in guilt you withdraw from God" (6:4). This is much the same point as he made in Paragraph 4: "It is impossible to divide your strength between Heaven and hell, God and the ego, and release your power to [unto] creation" (4:1). When we divide our power we vitiate it, we drain its effectiveness. If we give in to the attraction of guilt we lose touch with the attraction of God. Remember that our egos try to deflect our own guilt by projecting it onto others, so one way our attraction to guilt shows up is when we find ourselves judging and blaming others, and seeing *them* as guilty in some way. As the Course says later, "Only the self-accused condemn" (T-31.III.1:1). It expands on that like this:

You never hate your brother for his sins, but only for your own. Whatever form his sins appear to take, it but obscures the fact that you believe them to be yours, and therefore meriting a "just" attack (T-31.III.1:5-6).

So, if you are finding the idea of seeing another person as guilty to be an attractive idea, that is the attraction of guilt at work. In doing that "you have attempted to *separate* the Father from the Son" (6:5), so your spiritual vision is impaired as a result. He asks us, instead of focusing on the flaws or "sins" of others (6:6-7), to look instead past those things to his or her inner beauty. To look past what seems to limit him or her, and see the unlimited instead.

Paragraph 7

7. ¹When the body ceases to attract you, and when you place no value on it as a means of **getting anything**, then there will be **no** interference in communication and your thoughts will be as free as God's. ²As you let the Holy Spirit teach you how to use the body **only** for purposes of communication, and **renounce** its use for separation and attack which the **ego** sees in it, you will learn you have no need of a body at all. ³In the holy instant there **are** no bodies, and you experience **only** the attraction of God. ⁴Accepting it as undivided you join Him wholly, in an instant, for you would place **no** limits on your union **with** Him. ⁵The reality of **this** relationship becomes the only truth that you could ever **want**. ⁶**All** truth *is* here.

• Study Question •

7. *What steps in our learning lead us to learning that we have no need of a body? (There may be more than one correct answer.)*
- A. *Making our thoughts as free as God's.*
 - B. *Learning to use the body only for communication.*
 - C. *Renouncing our use of the body for separation and attack.*
 - D. *Experiencing the attraction of God.*
 - E. *All of the above.*

Meeting the criteria for free communication as set in 7:1 seems like a tall order: letting go of all attraction to the body, and placing no value on the body as a means of getting anything. From where most of us stand as we read this, it seems like a remotely possible goal. Perhaps we can understand intellectually how and why it might be necessary, but how can we achieve such total detachment from our physical selves?

The answer begins in 7:2. We start by allowing the Holy Spirit to teach us how to use our bodies *only* for purposes of communication, and how to turn away from using it “for separation and attack.” This is clearly a gradual process, in which, over the course of time, we come to realize that we do not really need our body at all! It does not happen all at once. We don't have to somehow tear ourselves loose from our bodies. It comes about gradually. We have experiences of refraining from the ego's use of the body, and of allowing the Holy Spirit to use it for communication, and by these experiences we are gradually, gently weaned away from our addiction to our physical nature. We are not called to sacrifice anything; we just stop having any need to hold on.

In the holy instant “you experience *only* the attraction of God” (7:3). Thomas Chalmers was a 19th Century Scottish preacher, famous for his sermon titled, “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection.” He wrote that, “It is seldom that any of our tastes are made to disappear by a mere process of natural extinction,” and “the heart must have something to cling to—and never, by its own voluntary consent, will it so denude itself of all its attachments.” He points out that what the Course calls “the attraction of God” is necessary to “displace worldly affections.”

We are all familiar with this process. Perhaps we are strongly attracted to and attached to a particular area of interest—let's say watching professional football or soap operas on TV—but something else comes along, perhaps we meet an attractive person of the opposite sex, and suddenly our time is taken up in the new relationship, and our interest in sports or melodrama “magically” evaporates. That's “the expulsive power of a new affection.” And that is how the holy instant liberates us from earth-bound ego experience. We do not have to struggle to let go of the body. We experience union with God and, loving it, we “would place no limits on your union with Him” (7:4). “The reality of *this* relationship becomes the only truth you could ever *want*” (7:5).

So, as we've been told, the holy instant becomes the means of our deliverance.

Answer Key

1. B
2. **(a)** Our only task is continuing the process of looking straight at all the interference (all the ways we hold on to the body and the ego) and seeing it exactly as it is (that is, as interference). **(b)** This is the only necessary thing because, as long as we think we want the body and the ego, we will not recognize how valueless they are, and will not let them go.
3. We must give up every use the ego has for the body, and we must accept that the ego has no purpose we want to share.
4. B and D
5. E
6. G
7. B and C