

Study Guide and Commentary

ACIM® Text, Chapter 21, Section IV

The Fear to Look Within

Special Note:

As of this commentary, the Text material I will use is that from the Complete and Annotated Edition, recently announced and soon to be published by the Circle of Atonement. Faint underlining is used to indicate the emphasis that was present in the original notes. Section titles may have been changed, and the breaks between paragraphs and sections have been altered. For instance, this section has 8 paragraphs in the FIP version, but only 7 paragraphs in the Complete Edition. Sentence numbering (very faint superscripted numbers) is completely new as well, so the references do not match the FIP version. Where possible, until most students have a copy of the new edition, where necessary (mostly the Text), I will attempt to cross-reference to the FIP version in giving references.

Overview of the Section

The section title sums up its message very well: “The Fear to Look Within.” It speaks of what we *think* we are afraid of finding, and exposes the *real* reason behind our reluctance to look without blinking at our innermost thoughts.

Paragraph 1

The Holy Spirit will *never* teach you that you are sinful. ²Errors He will correct, but this makes no one fearful. ³You are indeed afraid to look within and see the sin you think is there. ⁴This you would not be fearful to admit. ⁵Fear in association with sin the ego deems quite appropriate, and smiles approvingly. ⁶It has no fear to let you feel ashamed. ⁷It doubts not your belief and faith in sin. ⁸Its temples do not shake because of this. ⁹Your faith that sin is there but witnesses to your desire that it *be* there to see. ¹⁰This merely seems to be the source of fear. ¹¹Remember that the ego is not alone. ¹²Its rule is tempered. ¹³And its unknown “Enemy,” Whom it cannot even see, it *fears*.

• Study Question •

1. *Paragraph 1* talks about the idea of being afraid to see sin in ourselves. It says an interesting thing: that we seem afraid to look within because we

believe sin is there, yet that we believe sin is within because we want it to be there. This fact that we want it there is reflected in a few psychological observations this paragraph makes. What are they?

- A. *The ego tells us that we want sin to be within us.*
- B. *We are not fearful to admit our fear of seeing sin within ourselves.*
- C. *We are not afraid of feeling ashamed.*
- D. *Our egos are not seriously threatened by our feelings of shame. Those feelings, in other words, do not topple our reality as we know it.*

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Recall that the over-riding theme for some time has been *seeing your brother as sinless*. Jesus is asking us to look within ourselves, and within our brothers and sisters, and, using the Holy Spirit's gift of vision, to perceive *no sin*. That is how the Holy Spirit Himself perceives everyone: He "will *never* teach you that you are sinful" (1:1). Nor should *we* teach ourselves, or one another, that we are sinful.

This does not mean, however, that the Holy Spirit is blind to our mistakes. He sees our *errors*, and wishes to correct them, but having our errors pointed out *and corrected* does not make anyone afraid (1:2). Why, then, do we seem to be afraid to look within ourselves? Because we *are* afraid. We are afraid that if we look too closely we *will* find sin (1:3). We fear what we *think* we will find. The Workbook reiterates this thought about our fear in two lessons, pointing out that it is based on a lie about ourselves:

"I fear to look within because I think I made another will that is not true, and made it real. Yet it has no effects. Within me is the holiness of God. Within me is the memory of Him" (W-pII.309.1:5-8).

"You think you are the home of evil, darkness and sin. You think if anyone could see the truth about you he would be repelled, recoiling from you as if from a poisonous snake. You think if what is true about you were revealed to you, you would be struck with horror so intense that you would rush to death by your own hand, living on after seeing this being impossible.

These are beliefs so firmly fixed that it is difficult to help you see that they are based on nothing" (W-pI.93.1:1-2:1).

A bit paradoxically, we are *not* afraid to admit that we are fearful to look within, or that we are afraid of discovering "evil, darkness and sin" within ourselves (1:4). It seems quite appropriate to be fearful about sin; indeed, our egos "smile approvingly" when we experience such fears (1:5). The ego isn't afraid for us to feel ashamed of ourselves (1:6). It does not question our belief in our sinfulness or our faith in it¹; in fact, the ego is quite comfortable with all of this (1:7). Believing in our sinfulness is no threat to the ego (1:8); in fact, it is the opposite. The ego *fosters* it.

¹ Note the recurrence of the terms "faith" and "belief" here. As I've pointed out, they will continue to crop up frequently from now on. Our belief and faith in our sinfulness is just another example of our misuse of these capabilities.

Remember that our faith is sourced by our desire. Faith in sin demonstrates that some part of our minds *wants* “that it *be* there to see” (1:9). In our identification with the ego, we actually desire to find sin in ourselves because it “proves” that we are, indeed, separated from God—belief in that separateness *is* the ego thought. That desire generates faith and belief in sin’s reality, and results in our *seeing* it.

So we are not *really* afraid of finding sin when we look within; “This merely *seems* to be the source of fear” (1:10). The Truth is that we are more than egos; the ego isn’t alone (1:11). The Course says, “Its rule *is* tempered” (1:12). “Tempered” means moderated, reduced, or weakened. The ego has competition for its control over us. There is another “part” of us, a part that in fact *is* us, all of us, the truth of our being. “Within me is the holiness of God. Within me is the memory of Him” (W-pII.309.1:7–8). *That* is what the ego truly fears! The ego cannot even *see* our Reality. It just senses that it has an “unknown ‘Enemy’” (1:13). And it is terrified that, if we look within ourselves with an open mind, we will become *conscious* of that Enemy and shift our faith and belief from sin to holiness.

Paragraph 2

2 Loudly the ego tells you not to look inward, for if you do, your eyes will light on sin and God will strike you blind.² ²This you believe, and so you do not look. ³Yet this is not the ego’s hidden fear, nor yours who serve it. ⁴Loudly indeed the ego claims it is—too loudly and too often. ⁵For underneath this constant shout and frantic proclamation, the ego is not certain it is so. ⁶Beneath your fear to look within because of sin is yet another fear, and one which makes the ego tremble: What if you looked within and saw *no* sin? ⁷This “fearful” question is one the ego never asks. ⁸And you who ask it now are threatening the ego’s whole defensive system too seriously for it to bother to pretend it is your friend.

• Study Question •

2. ***True or false?*** *When you shy away from looking at some ugly aspect of yourself, some trait you do not like, something bad you have done, you do so because ultimately it is painful to think that there is something wrong with you.*

Because *it* is fearful, the ego tells us “not to look inward.” It insists that, if we do, will discover such ugliness and evil that God will strike us blind, or, failing that, that we will be so disgusted with ourselves that we will commit suicide (2:1; W-pI.93.1:3). We

². 2 Kings 6:18 (RSV): “And when the Syrians came down against him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, and said, ‘Strike this people, I pray thee, with blindness.’ So he [the LORD] struck them with blindness in accordance with the prayer of Elisha.” Deuteronomy 28:28-29 (RSV) “The LORD will smite you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind; and you shall grope at noonday, as the blind grope in darkness, and you shall not prosper in your ways; and you shall be only oppressed and robbed continually, and there shall be no one to help you.”

would not be able to stand the truth about our inner darkness. Unfortunately, we *believe* what our egos tell us, and do not look (2:2).

But as we've already seen, fear of finding horror within is not the *real* fear, no matter how insistently the ego claims it is. While we serve the ego, we do believe its lies, but share its secret fear (2:2–3). This fear of finding something awful is the hidden fear that so often causes people to avoid deep meditation. When the Course, here, talks of “this constant shout and frantic proclamation” (2:5), it reminds me of the frantic chatter of our minds when we begin to meditate. The ego over-compensates (2:4). It's like the line in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, “The lady doth protest too much, methinks.” The ego's panic about inner investigation betrays the fact that it is trying to hide its uncertainty that what it screams at us is true (2:5). Hiding beneath our fear of finding sin in ourselves is “*another* fear” that scares the living bejesus out of the ego: “What if you looked within and saw *no* sin?” (2:6). This is the real source of our fear to look within.

The ego *never* asks that question! It's too afraid that it might be true, and that, on discovering its truth, we'll abandon the ego entirely (2:7). We (through identifying with the ego) are afraid that there *is no sin*. But we now have begun to question this fear, question our belief in sin, and are even somewhat willing to look within and see *no* sin. So, when we begin to even *consider* the question, we *are* seriously “threatening the ego's whole defensive system” (2:8). This is when the ego takes off the velvet gloves and gets vicious (2:8).

This explains our difficulties in establishing a regular practice of silent meditation. We come up with all kinds of ways to avoid just sitting in silence. We don't have the time. Our mind is too noisy and we insist that meditation doesn't work for us. We substitute guided meditations, or listening to music, or walking in nature, anything but sitting in silence. All of these are excuses. The real reason is that we are still identifying with our ego, and share the ego's fear of discovering there is no sin in there. We're afraid of upsetting the apple cart and finding out that we aren't who we think we are.

Paragraph 3

3 Those who have joined their brothers have detached themselves from the belief that their identity lies in the ego. ²A holy relationship is one in which you join with what is part of you in truth. ³Your belief in sin has been already shaken, nor are you now entirely unwilling to look within and see it not. ⁴Your liberation still is only partial; still limited and incomplete, yet born within you. ⁵Not wholly mad, you have been willing to look on much of your insanity and recognize its madness. ⁶Your faith is moving inward, past insanity and on to reason. ⁷And what your reason tells you now the ego would not hear.

• **Study Question** •

3. *According to this paragraph, we have begun to question our fear to look within, and have become somewhat willing to look within. What, according to this paragraph, is the source of this newfound questioning and willingness?*
- A. *We have joined with a brother.*
 - B. *The ego has stopped pretending it is our friend.*
 - C. *We have established a holy relationship.*
 - D. *A and C*
 - E. *All of the above.*

This is why relationships are such an effective tool in awakening. When we join another in a holy relationship, choosing to see one another as sinless, we are actually detaching ourselves from the belief that our “identity lies in the ego” (3:1). This loosens us up and diminishes the fear of looking within. We have joined with what is part of ourselves in the other person (3:2). The realization of this loosens our belief in our inherent sinfulness, and we now have at least some little willingness to “look within and see it [sin] not” (3:3). We’re not out of the woods entirely, as yet. We’ve started to move in the right direction, but our liberation is still “only partial; still limited and incomplete” (3:4). The important thing is that something has come alive *within us* (3:4). To successfully join with another, we have had to look our separation insanity in the face and to *recognize* it as insane; we could not have joined together, otherwise (3:5). We’ve begun the inward journey, and our faith is moving past belief in insanity to the rational realization of unity (3:6). What our reason is telling us about the truth is exactly what the ego does not want to hear (3:7).

Paragraph 4

4 The Holy Spirit’s purpose was accepted by the part of your mind the ego knows not of. ²No more did you. ³And yet this part, with which you now identify, is *not* afraid to look upon itself. ⁴It knows that it is sinless. ⁵How otherwise could it have been willing to see the Holy Spirit’s purpose as its own? ⁶This part has seen your brother and recognized him perfectly since time began. ⁷And it desired nothing but to join with him and to be free again, as once it was. ⁸It has been waiting for the birth of freedom; the acceptance of release to come to you. ⁹And now you recognize that it was not the ego that joined the Holy Spirit’s purpose, and so there must be something else.³

³. This other “part of your mind” seems to be the same thing that is referred to as the “Soul” in the early parts of the original dictation, a deeper part of your mind that remains pure yet that feels imprisoned by the ego’s thought system. See, for instance, this comment to Bill: “*His slip was an expression of a Soul gaining enough strength to request freedom from prison. It will ultimately demand it.*” This is reminiscent of the comment above that “it desired nothing but...to be free again, as once it was.”

• Study Question •

4. *Paragraphs 3 and 4 say that you are no longer wholly mad because you are beginning to identify with another part of your mind that lies past the ego. Please list the various things these paragraphs say about this other part of your mind.*

This something that has been “born within you” is, in fact, a “part of your mind.” It isn’t the *whole* of our mind because, clearly, there is another part of us that has been completely ignorant of this newly awakened part (4:2), just as the ego is also unaware of it (4:1). But, having awakened within us, this part is now very much known to us, and we have realized that this “part” we formerly did not know is, in fact, our true Identity (4:3)! It is the part of us that has been willing to join with the Holy Spirit’s purpose for your relationship: holiness. Unlike the “self” we thought we were, identified with the ego, this other part “is *not* afraid to look upon itself” (4:3).

Why should it be afraid? “It *knows* that it is sinless” (4:4). This isn’t mere intellectual knowledge. It is utter certainty. This part knows its sinlessness as profoundly and unequivocally as we all know that we exist. As Descartes observed, everyone can know that, “I think; therefore, I am.” This part of us can say, “I come from God; therefore, I am holy,” and just *know* it beyond any doubt. It is *incapable* of believing in sin within itself. Without that unshakeable knowledge, it could never have been willing to join together with the Holy Spirit’s pursuit of holiness in the relationship (4:5).

Indeed, this part of our mind has already, and always, seen the holiness in our brothers and sisters, and in particular, in our relationship partners. It has *recognized* the reality of your brother “perfectly since time began” (4:6). Smothered beneath your ego, this part of your mind has, eternally, longed to reunite with the missing parts of itself it sees in all your relationships, free to be what it was created to be (4:7). It has been waiting for this, waiting for your consciousness mind to accept your own release from bondage, which would liberate this hidden part of you once again (4:8). Your ego could *never* have made this leap of faith, so there *must* be something else (4:9)!

Think about that. Your ego would never have brought you to this point, studying this course that exposes and undercuts the ego, urging you and cajoling you to learn to see your brothers sinless. *There must be something else in you.* And there is! We need to *believe* in that something else, to have *faith* in that something else, and to accept the *vision* that this something else can give us.

Paragraph 5

5 Think not that this is madness. ²For this your *reason* tells you, and it follows perfectly from what you have already learned. ³There is no inconsistency in what the Holy Spirit teaches. ⁴This is the reasoning of the sane. ⁵You have perceived the ego's madness and not been made afraid, because you did not choose to share in it. ⁶At times it still deceives you. ⁷Yet in your saner moments, its rantings strike no terror in your heart. ⁸For you have realized that all the gifts it would withdraw from you in rage at your “presumptuous” wish to look within, you do not want. ⁹A few remaining trinkets still seem to shine and catch your eye, yet you would not “sell” Heaven to have them.

• Study Question •

5. *How (based on this paragraph and previous paragraphs in these sections) does the ego try to keep you from looking within (there may be more than one correct answer)?*
- A. *It rants at you.*
 - B. *It threatens to withdraw gifts from you.*
 - C. *It says you will lose the trinkets of this world.*
 - D. *It says the Holy Spirit will make you give up things for your good.*
 - E. *It says you will look on sin and God will strike you blind.*

Don't allow yourself to think you are going crazy, or losing your mind, or being naïve (5:1). It's completely reasonable to awaken to a part of yourself you've been unaware of. It makes sense, and is the logical continuation of everything you have *already* learned (5:2). It's completely consistent with all that the Course has to say (5:3). The ego's arguments seem logical once you have accepted its false premises, but the Course's totally logical reasoning is based on the eternal Truth of Who you are. “This is the reasoning of the *sane*” (5:4).

The Course is speaking here to people who have absorbed and put into practice at least the basics of its message. It addresses those of us who have dared to look our own egos in the face, without fear or judgment because we have made the choice *not* to share in its madness (5:5). Sometimes we stop paying attention and the ego sucks us in, but when we come to our senses, the crazy rantings of the ego don't upset us. We know them for the nothing that they are (5:6). All the vaunted “gifts” of the ego have lost their allure for us. We don't want the tawdry trinkets it threatens to take away from us if we continue to look within (5:7–8). We have learned to realize that the ego cannot deliver the happiness it promises, and have chosen a better way. *The* better way. We have found Heaven, and we are not willing to barter it away for the ego's empty offerings (5:9).

Paragraph 6

6 And now the ego *is* afraid. ²But what it hears in terror, the other part hears as the sweetest music; the song it longed to hear since first the ego came into your mind. ³The ego's weakness is its strength. ⁴The song of freedom, which sings the praises of another world, brings to it hope of peace. ⁵For it remembers Heaven, and now it sees that Heaven has come to earth at last, from which the ego's rule has kept it out so long. ⁶Heaven has come because it found a home in your relationship on earth. ⁷And earth can hold no longer what has been given Heaven as its own.

• Study Question •

6. *What has your holy relationship caused the other part of your mind to do?*
- A. *Begin to use reason.*
 - B. *Become terrified at the ego's reprisals.*
 - C. *Hear the forgotten song.*
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Our new-found ability to look within without fear terrifies the ego, because it sounds the ego's death-knell (6:1). But what the ego hears as a dirge, the *other* part of us, the only part that is real, "hears as the sweetest music; the song it longed to hear since first the ego came into your mind" (6:2). That longing, that yearning, which at times seems almost painful, is something we need to nurture and cultivate. Because it is the response of our hearts to Heaven, the homesickness that magnetizes us in the right direction and re-connects us with our home. It is a yearning that is answered by that "song of freedom" from the ego (6:4), that "forgotten song" (T-21.I). What diminishes the ego energizes that "other part" (6:3). It awakens in us "the hope of peace" (6:4).

That other part—which, as I say, is the only part of us that is real⁴—remembers Heaven, remembers the song that resonates there through all things, and recognizes the heavenly melody in the thoughts that now ring in your mind. It "sees that Heaven *has* come to earth at last" (6:5), and it rejoices in the knowing of it. The union of hearts in your holy relationship has given Heaven a home *here*, and has guaranteed that you can no longer exist as an earth-bound being. You have been freed from earth, and belong to Heaven (6:6–7).

⁴ "The part that is listening to the Voice for God is calm, always at rest and wholly certain. It is really the only part there is" (W-pI.49.2:1-2). "The only part of your mind that has reality is the part that links you still with God" (T-14.V.1:1).

Paragraph 7

7 Look gently on each other, and remember the ego's weakness is revealed in both your sight. ²What it would keep apart has met and joined, and looks upon the ego unafraid. ³Little children, innocent of sin, follow in gladness the way to certainty. ⁴Be not held back by fear's insane insistence that sureness lies in doubt.⁵ ⁵This has no meaning. ⁶What matters it to you how loudly it is proclaimed? ⁷The senseless is not made meaningful by repetition and by clamor.⁶ ⁸The quiet way is open. ⁹Follow it happily, and question not what must be so.

• Study Question •

• Study Question •

7. *What does this paragraph mean by "fear's insane insistence that sureness lies in doubt"?*
- A. *The idea of fear's repeated, loud insistence is a reference to the ego's loud insistence not to look within and see your holiness. So it must mean that fear is insisting that you will find certainty by doubting your holiness.*
 - B. *The contradiction of finding sureness in doubt hearkens back to the contradiction (in the last section) of combining good and deprivation, sun and moon. So fear's insistence that you will find sureness in doubt is really fear's insistence that you will find good in deprivation.*
 - C. *Fear's insistence would hold you back from the new way you are on. Instead, you are to question not—doubt not—this new, quiet way. So doubt must be about this new way, whether or not it will work. Fear must be insisting that you will find certainty by doubting the new road you are on.*
 - D. *A and B*
 - E. *A and C*
 - F. *All of the above.*

Remember this as you look on your partner in relationship. Remember that *both* of you have caught a glimpse of Heaven and responded to the appeal of that Heavenly song. Both of you have awakened to the ego's inherent weakness (7:1). Your egos would keep you apart, but that "other part" of you has "met and joined" the "other part" of your partner. You have recognized your common Source, your common, shared Life (7:2). Neither of you is afraid any longer to look at your own ego, or that of the other person.

⁵. The ego, in other words, insists that true certainty lies in doubting your innocence.

⁶. This appears to be an expansion of Souder's Law: Repetition does not establish validity. Onto "repetition" the Course adds "clamor."

This willingness to overlook the ego wherever it is seen, and to see instead the face of Christ, is the way, with the simplicity of children, that we can find certainty (7:3). Our egos shriek loudly that the only certainty is our sinfulness, our imperfection, our separateness; the only reasonable thing is to *doubt* your brother's holiness and your own. Don't allow that scurrilous argument to hold you back from embracing Heaven (7:4). "Sureness lies in doubt"? What a meaningless, senseless idea! It cannot be true no matter how often it is repeated (7:5–7). Instead, Jesus calls us to follow "the quiet way" that has opened to us, quiet in contrast to the shouts of the ego. Don't allow yourself to question your own holiness or that of your partner, a holiness that "must be so" if you are God's creation (7:8–9). You are well on your way. Don't linger any longer. Give yourself to the inner urging of Spirit, and surrender to your Self.

• **Study Question** •

8. *Summary: Please summarize the main themes of this section, or the themes that struck you most, in a paragraph.*

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Answer Key

1. B,C,D
2. False.
3. D
4. Contains reason (which the ego would not hear).
This part accepted the Holy Spirit's purpose.
The ego does not know of this part; we didn't either.
This part is not afraid to look on itself.
It knows no sin (which is why it could accept holiness as its goal).
It has seen and recognized your brother since time began.
Its only desire is to join with your brother and be free.
5. A,B,C,D,E
6. C
7. E
8. **My summary:** Your real fear is to look within and see sinlessness, not sin. Yet joining with your brother has made you willing to look within. This makes the ego afraid.