

Class #107

Study Guide and Commentary ACIM[®] Text, Chapter 13, Section VII Paragraphs 1 to 9

This section deals with attaining the real world. It tells how we move from sporadic holy instants, flashes of awareness of the real world, into a steady state of *living* in that real world. And it will tell us that one very large part of that process consists in learning to *let go of the world we see*.

Before we launch into the section, let me briefly review the meaning given by the Course to the phrase *real world*.

First, the real world is what we see when our minds are filled with love rather than fear (the section on “The Two Emotions” made this point). It is not *Heaven*, which is a state of absolute oneness or complete non-duality. In the real world, we still see duality. We still see separate bodies; we still see space and distance between us; we still experience the passage of time. But we see all of it in a completely different way. Everything we see witnesses to the reality of Love, rather than to the reality of Fear; it shows us the truth of Unity rather than reaffirming the reality of separation.

To live in the real world means to consistently dwell in that state of mind. In holy instants we *visit* the real world, but the goal of the Course is for us to live in it all the time. It is referred to as a “borderland” between our life in the physical world and Heaven (see T-26.III.2:1 and 3:1).

The borderland or “real” world is real only in the sense that it perfectly *reflects* Heaven. Heaven is the reality while the real world is only its reflection, and therefore not “real” in the same sense, any more than my image in the mirror is the real me. In the Course’s terms, nothing can be called truly real that is not eternal. That rules out absolutely everything that happens in the context of time. The real world is not eternal since it exists within time. But it is a state of mind in which the temporary nature of what our eyes see is perfectly clear (T-26.III.3:6).

On the one hand, a mind in the real world sees the physical world but interprets everything as symbols of loving thoughts. On the other hand, such a mind sees *through* the physical world to a non-physical reality, that is, Heaven, or the face of Christ, which symbolizes the holiness of all things in God.

Paragraph 1

• Study Question •

1. *The real world has none of the physical forms that this world has. If you*

see the real world while you are still here in this world, and the real world is just another way of looking at this world, how can it be that it has no stores or streets?

The section opens with a rather dramatic exercise in contrasting the real world to the world we see now. The purpose of this exercise, I think, is to confront us with just how attached to *this* world we all are. You may want to read it now, slowly (T-13.VII.1).

Really try this exercise. Do exactly what it says. Sit quietly, look around you, and then read this paragraph aloud. Notice what thoughts come to your mind as you read. Notice what you feel as you read.

One thing you will feel, in all likelihood, is a sense of *unreality*. What you are saying does not seem real to you, does it? Perhaps conceptually we are convinced by what the Course teaches, but there is a very strong part of us that rears up and says, “I don’t really believe this! No buildings? No stores? No day? Nonsense; all this stuff is *very real* to me!”

Of course it is. That’s just the point. If it were not very real to you, you would be at Heaven’s Gate, ready to enter in. Jesus is helping us to realize that we are not so far along as we might think; we have a long way to go. It reminds me of something Marianne Williamson said once about a problem people have in doing the workbook lessons. They read a lesson that makes a strong positive statement about our true nature and they say, “I feel like a hypocrite doing this; I don’t believe what I am saying.” Marianne’s reply was, “Of course you don’t! If you already believed it, you would not need to be doing the lesson, you’d be writing your own workbook! The fact that you *don’t* believe it is exactly why you need to do it.”

The same applies here. We could all profit from doing the exercise on this page over and over again, day after day. We need to break our firm conviction that the world we see is real—that this is all there is to reality. It is our firm belief in the reality of what our senses show us that is blocking out the sight of the real world, which is what the Course proceeds to tell us.

Paragraph 2

• Study Question •

2. *What determines the degree to which each of the two worlds seems real to us? Why does this mean that the real world is more powerful (and thus ultimately more real)?*

There are four key concepts presented in sentences 1 to 3:

1. We must view the physical world as unreal.
2. When one world is real to us, the other is not.
3. Which world we see depends on what we value.
4. You see one world by *denying* the other.

This section will expand on these themes, but let's think about them a little on our own.

We must view the physical world as unreal (2:1)

The exercise in the first paragraph was an exercise in just such denial. It consists in reminding ourselves that the real world is not physical at all! It is a world of thought, of mind, of spirit. Our denial should include everything, not just the things we deem 'bad.' For instance, the exercise has us denying the reality of the cycle of daylight (1:5). Who could call a sunrise and sunset 'bad?' Yet they are included in the denial. When we look on sickness or suffering, we may find it easy to say, "This is not the real world," but for the most part we don't even *think* to say that when we are looking at something we *like*. Sight of this world, good or bad, is costing us a different kind of vision (2:1). Most people find such a blanket denial of the physical world to be profoundly disturbing. We are far more attached to the world than we realize.

Notice that it does not say you should deny that you see these things, nor that you believe they are real. All you are doing is affirming that "the real world is not like this" (1:1). "This" refers to what you are seeing, so you don't deny that you see it. You don't deny that it *seems* real to you, but you do deny that it *is* real. What you are saying, in effect, is—to use a sunset as a neutral example—"I see a sunset and I think it is real, but this is not the real world; the real world has no sunrise nor sunset." By doing this kind of exercise you are undermining your fixed belief that what your eyes see is something real. (Lessons 9 and 14 in the Workbook are similar exercises.)

When one world is real to us, the other is not (2:2)

We see the physical world with our physical senses. We see the spiritual world with a completely different set of senses, spiritual senses. Imagine listening to a symphony with your eyes, or trying to view a painting with your taste, and you will get the picture the Course is trying to give us. Or, in a more technological analogy, it is like trying to watch a program on Channel 2 by tuning in to Channel 7. Your TV set only receives one channel at a time. If you are "tuned in" to the physical universe, paying full attention to what your physical senses are showing you, you cannot see the real world. And when you are tuned in to your spiritual senses, the real world is all you will see.

Today we have TV sets that can receive more than one channel at a time: a main one on the full screen, and another channel appearing, without sound, in a little inset in the corner. I like to think of living in the real world as tuning in to the real, spiritual world on the main screen and having the physical world there in the little inset. The reverse analogy, tuning in to the world of the senses on the main screen with the real world as an inset, could illustrate the state in which we usually live, with a focus on physical 'reality' and a dim awareness of another world up there in the corner of our minds. The *holy instant* then would be times in which we suddenly invert the channels, and for a brief moment see the world of spirit as the primary reality and the physical world as a dim background.

You can only have one world; you can't have both. Many of us get trapped in wanting *both* worlds, or at least in thinking we do. We want God, we want to be spiritual, and at the same time we want to hold on to the things we value in this world. Actually, to want one is to deny the other, since they are mutually exclusive. To have both worlds is as impossible as to be dead and alive at the same time, or to be tall and short, or to have both light and dark. The world we have made is the exact opposite of the real world, and we can experience only one of them at a time.

Which world we see depends on what we value (2:2,4)

Cherish is a strong word. It means “to hold or treat as dear, feel love for,” or “to cling fondly or inveterately to.” Which world do you cherish? Which world do you *see*? Answer either question and you have answered other. If you see *this* world, and we all do, it proves that you are clinging fondly to this world, holding it dear, and loving it. To switch channels, you must switch what you want to see. You must let go of your attachment to the physical world and nurture your attachment to the world of spirit.

You see one world by denying the other (2:3)

If I see (primarily) the physical world (a world of separation, differences, judgment and attack), I must be actively *denying* the other world (the real world of unity, identity, love and joining). Conversely, to see the real world, I must learn to deny the world of judgment and attack. This is the flip side of *cherishing*. If I cherish one vision of the world, I must be denying its opposite. I experience myself being in *this* world because I am now denying the real world. To exit from this world and enter the real world, I must stop denying it. To say “yes” to the real world means I must stop saying “no” to its reality, and that means to stop saying “yes” to its opposite, which is the world I see now. To begin to see the real world I must deny the world I see now. (See also W, 306.1, “What makes this world seem real...”)

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Neither the physical world nor the “real” world is actually real (2:4). In terms of the dream, the real world is still a dream, but a happy one; I am not yet awake. As we said earlier, the real world is only a reflection of reality. In the real world I still experience others and myself as separate individuals, but I know the separation is not real. I *see* with spiritual vision that we are all joined, all the same, all part of one whole in the real world. In the real world our unity and sameness is *more real* to me than the apparent separation. Although I am in the world I am reflecting the truth of Heaven's oneness.

It is a question of what seems real. The ‘normal’ world is one in which differences, separation, judgment, and attack seems real to me. The ‘real’ world is one in which sameness, unity, love, and joining are what seem real, while the other view of things fades from my awareness. If saying things like “My body is not real” seems too extreme to you at first, try saying, “My body is not as real as my spirit or mind” or “My body is only a reflection of my mind.”

The reflection analogy is good to illustrate another point, mentioned already. You can't get anywhere by trying to change the world (the reflection of your mind); the way

to go is to change your mind (which is the ‘real’ thing) about the world. If you look in the mirror and see your hair is out of place, you don’t try to change the image in the mirror (the reflection). You go to work on your ‘real’ hair, and the reflection follows suit.

How real one world or the other seems to you depends entirely on “the amount to which you hold it dear” (2:4) There is really only one real world, and nothing in the physical world is real in the same sense. Yet we experience *degrees* of reality, with one seeming *more* real than the other. Clearly, for most of us the physical world seems *more* real than the world of spirit; the aim of the Course is to change that. The physical world seems most real to you because you value it, or *cherish* it, more than the real world. In the sentences that follow, Jesus is going to challenge our values.

Suppose I were to point to a nearby doorway. In it you see a shimmering curtain of light. You cannot see past the curtain. And suppose I said to you, “Walk through that curtain and you will be instantly in the real world. This world will vanish for you, including your body, your ego identity, everything. And you can’t return.” How many of us would go through? Be honest now!

The truthful answer is, none of us would go. If we were truly willing to do that, we would not be here in this world, experiencing it as more real than God’s Creation. What stops us? A lot of things. Speaking for myself, I realize that I’m not sure I want to leave this body yet! I am not sure I am willing to never eat another meal, never have sex again, or never enjoy a massage. Then too, there is a lot of unfinished business, things I want to do. I want to visit France, Switzerland, and Hawaii again with my wife. I want to see my grandchildren who are living in England. I want to finish these commentaries. I want to see the rest of “The Lord of the Rings” movie trilogy. I am very attached to this world, and so are we all.

Buddha taught that the cause of pain and suffering is *desire*. What holds us here is our *desires* to have things we don’t have, to hold on to what we do have and like, and to avoid all we don’t like. All those things have to be let go of if we are to see the real world. This means a giving up in content, or in spirit, not in form. It doesn’t mean, necessarily, that you must lose your job, lose your family, lose your relationship, lose your money, and lose your bodily life. It means you have to stop *holding on* to them. Stop *cherishing* them. Stop thinking that *any part of it* is necessary to find real happiness. Ken Keyes (author of *Handbook to Higher Consciousness*) describes the difference as that between an *addiction* and a *preference*.

“Both” worlds “are not true,” both are dreams or illusions, mere reflections of our state of mind. Yet the power of their attraction for us is not equal (2:5). What a welcome message *this* is! Which world has the most attraction for us? It would seem, on the surface of it, that *this* world has the most attraction. We’re here, after all, and we’re here because being here seemed attractive to us. As I’ve pointed out, every one of us would hesitate to walk through that curtain of light into the real world because of the attraction this world holds for us. So it would seem that this world holds the most powerful attraction for us. If that’s what we think—we are wrong! It is the *real world* that holds the greatest attraction for us, and Jesus goes on to prove it.

Paragraph 3

• Study Question •

3. *What do you think it means in sentence 7 when it says that we cannot find any road in this world that can lead to the real world?*

Think about the statement in sentence 1. Has anything in this world failed to disappoint you? Has anything actually lived up to its promise? That relationship, that at one time seemed all you needed to be happy—has it made you happy, or has it become perhaps as much of a problem as a solution? We think having children will make us happy, and then we have to clean diapers, pay the bills, deal with rebellious little egos, suffer when they hurt themselves, and on and on. All the travel you've done may be great, but then it's over. All the money you've made, the home you thought would be your nest that demands constant attention, time, and money—nothing really satisfies. "Since time began" (3:1) these things have disappointed us, over and over and over. Yet, idiotically, we continue to think that maybe the next thing will be "it," maybe the next thing will do it for us. If you look honestly at the world, you do not really want it. You only think you do.

A home may have sheltered *your body* but it has never sheltered *you* (3:2). You, the real you, has still been burned and frozen out; your parade has been rained on time and again; the winds of change have buffeted you; comfort and security have eluded you. Your physical house, however grand, never kept you from all that! All it ever gave was a pale shadow of what you really wanted.

With all the wonderful roads that exist, where have you gone, really? (3:3). Have the roads led you to *arrive*? No matter how many roads you travel, you always come back to your self, which feels displaced, far from home, and discontent. Nor have the cities we've built lasted. Historically there have been cities that lasted for hundreds of years, but every one has crumbled into dust.

It's all going to end, it's all going to die (3:4). Nothing lasts. Everything you make in this life will disappear. You can't keep any of it. It really can be quite depressing to think of all this, and yet who can deny it? The writer of *Ecclesiastes* in the Old Testament had it right: "Vanity of vanities!" he said. "I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind" (Eccl.1:14). Attach to this and you have doomed yourself to suffering and loss, because none of it lasts. Attach to *any form of anything* and you will know pain, first the pain of anticipated loss, then the actual loss itself, and forever after the memory of loss. Therefore, "hold it not dear" (3:5). Don't get attached to all the forms of things.

Once again, I want to point out that we are talking about attachment to *forms*, and not to *content*. If you had a relationship and lost it—perhaps the person moved away, or died—what was *real*, what was of true value to you, was not the form of relationship, but the content: the love you experienced, the joy you felt, the peace you enjoyed. *That* is what you really wanted heading into it, that is all that was ever *real* about it, and those things

are changeless and eternal. *You still have them.* You lost the *form* of the relationship, but not the *content*. “Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists” (T-In.2:2–3). The Text stated this same thought earlier; see T-12.VI.3. What you love becomes real to you.

In this world things come and things go. None of that has the power to touch the real world at all (3:6). A form in this world coming into your life cannot bring you happiness, and a form in this world leaving your life cannot take happiness away. Reality is changeless and eternal, and it is not attached to forms. You cannot make anything that can affect the real world (3:6). Do you see what good news that is? If you could make something in this world that actually gave you happiness, then you would have made something that could take it away.

We may feel sadness as we turn away from the world. That’s normal; we all love the things we made, and we made this world, so we do love it in a way and feel sadness that it can’t fulfill its promise. But there is no road *in* this world that leads *out* of it. Everything in this world just leads back to the world. Nothing leads out to the real world, nothing at all.

What Jesus is really saying here, in very simple terms, is that *nothing in this world will ever make you happy*. Absolutely nothing. (See also W-pI.128.1–5.) If you know that and believe that about the world, you know that you don’t want it! What you want is not the various *forms* you thought would give you happiness and love; what you want is the *content*, the happiness itself, the love itself. All your desires, that you think are for things, for forms, for something in this world, are actually *calls for love and happiness*. That leads to what Jesus tells us in the next paragraph.

Paragraph 4

• Study Question •

4. *What two ways are given to obtain the real world?*

Sentence 1 stands in contrast (“Yet”) to the previous statement in 3:6. The physical world, the world of illusion, cannot touch the real world, but the real world can touch *you* even though you think you are in the physical one. Why? “Because you love it” (4:1). Deep within you, as an essential part of you—in fact the only part of you that is real—there lies the memory of Heaven, the memory of love. You can’t forget it. You are always seeking for it. Even in all your seeking in the world, this is what you are *really* seeking! Every ego action in yourself that you would so judge and condemn is actually a call for love, a reaching out for the real world.

What you are calling, really, through all of your desires for things of the world, is the real world. You are calling it with love and it will come to you (4:2). *Your real desire* is for *the real world*. You don’t really want this world, or anything in it. You want the content it seems to represent, and that exists only in the real world. What you want is changeless love, changeless happiness, changeless peace, and those things do not exist in

this world; they exist only in the real world. Your real desire, your strongest attraction, is now and always has been for the real world. That is *exactly* why you find this world so often frustrating! It cannot meet your real needs.

Your love for the real world and Heaven (even as muffled as it is) is the reason that the Course can so confidently declare that “the outcome is as certain as God” (T-2.III.3:10), or that “Our success in transcending the ego is guaranteed by God” (T-8.V.4:4). Guaranteed! We think about that door with the curtain of light and we doubt that we will ever go through it. Jesus knows we will because what is on the other side of that door is what we really love. The way things are set up, we cannot help calling out for love because love is our true nature, and God’s Love cannot help answering our every call for help. Eventually, inevitably, we will all find our way home.

All that you need to give this world away in glad exchange for what you did
not make is willingness to learn the one you made is false. (4:4)

There’s that word again—willingness. Note carefully that Jesus does *not* say that to enter the real world you must learn the one that you made is false. You just have to be *willing* to learn. Learning that is not an easy task! Of course, he knows that if you are willing, you *will* learn that the world you made is false. But he does not ask you to learn it; he only asks that you be willing to learn it.

The main obstacle to our seeing the real world is that we are not willing to let go of the old, miserable world we think we have. We don’t want it to be false. When I am angry at someone, I don’t want to hear that they are innocent. I don’t want to hear that there is another way to look at the situation, that I could see it differently, or that I could see peace instead. I’ve seen something I can condemn in my brother and I don’t want to let it go, I don’t want to hear it isn’t real.

It seems to take a while, in this world, for people to become willing to learn that the world is false. People seem to come into this world wanting it to be real, wanting it to be true, wanting to believe that this world can bring happiness, and it takes time before they start to be willing to let it all go. I think that is why you don’t see a lot of very young people doing the Course—most young people have not been disappointed enough yet.

If you are not willing to be shown that the world you made, this entire physical universe, is false, then—I dare to say—*A Course in Miracles* is not your path; you may be happier if you go find something else. The Workbook declares, “There is no world! This is the central thought the course attempts to teach” (W-pI.132.6:2–3). So if you are not even willing to learn the central thought the Course is teaching, why waste your time studying it? At best, it will be difficult to continually reinterpret what you are reading, ignoring its plain meaning.

I don’t mean to say that if you don’t *believe* the world is false you should not bother to read the Course. Nobody I know of believes that the world is an illusion when they start reading, and not many of those who have been studying it for years *really* believe it yet—myself included. But you must be willing to listen to the idea, to consider it, to apply the lessons the Course gives you and to see for yourself. Your mind must be open to the idea that this world is not real, because this is the path to the real world.

There is another passage later in the Course which conveys the same idea, but in reverse (see T-26.VI.1:1–2). It says that if we value something in this world, something we think worth striving for, and if we make it real and not an illusion, we can be hurt by it. The principle is to hold things lightly, and to go after things as preferences rather than as addictive demands. If I go to a restaurant thinking I'd like to have fried chicken, but discover when I get there that they do not have fried chicken, then if fried chicken was just a preference, I will say, "OK, what else looks good?" I won't be affected by not getting what I wanted. If it is an addictive demand, if I have decided that fried chicken has some kind of special value for me and I need it tonight to be happy, then I will be very upset and want to go to another restaurant. I won't be happy until I get my fried chicken.

Another example: if I am single but prefer to have a loving relationship with a person of the opposite sex, such as a marriage, it's best that I hold that as a preference, not a demand. I should not believe that only marriage contains the *reality* of love and happiness, and that I cannot be happy without being married. I can attach to the real content—love, companionship, happiness—but I should not attach to any particular form of that content in this world.

To attach to a particular form or physical manifestation is to make the illusion real, which always leads to pain of some kind. Pain is an illusion. Yet if you make the 'good' illusions real you have to take the 'bad' ones with it. Make one illusion real and you've made them all real. If you believe the illusions of this world have the power to give you happiness or peace, you also must believe they have the power to take it away, or cause pain. (Workbook lessons 128, 129, 130, and 132 expand on these ideas.)

Paragraph 5

• Study Question •

5. *Try to explain this idea: We resist seeing the things we judge to be false.*

Why are we so determined to believe in the world we made? Because we want to believe that the *self* we made is real (5:1). Years ago I read a book by Jess Lair, a book whose title seems to me to exactly fit the way we think about our ego selves: *I Ain't Much, Baby, But I'm All I've Got*. (Actually Lair's book was very good, and not an ego-oriented book at all.) We may not think much of ourselves, but "I'm all I've got," or so we think. And that is the misjudgment we have made, because "I" *isn't* all I've got. I have a larger Self that I have been wholly unaware of.

We referred to the statement in 5:1 when we were discussing the sentence, "Projection makes perception," back in T-13.V.3:5. In that context I pointed out that because we judge ourselves as guilty for separating from God, and because we cannot stand that guilt, we deny the guilt within ourselves and project it outward, seeing it on the world instead. This idea is often repeated in the Course. For instance, "The world you see is but a judgment on yourself" (T-20.III.5:2; see also T-12.VII.12:4).

Because we have misjudged ourselves, and found ourselves guilty, we *must* be wrong about the world (5:1)! We cannot help projecting our guilt outward and seeing it there, seeing a guilty world, an ugly world, a world that never lives up to our expectations—because that is what we think of ourselves.

If we start with seeing ourselves as guilty and separate, we are bound to be wrong about the world. We start from a “twisted reference point” (5:2). In the mad attempt to become an ego—an attempt we are all involved in—we have had to judge eternal love as false. If God is eternal love how could He ever allow me to separate from Him? He could not. Therefore, if I believe that I am separate, I must believe that God is not eternal love, or that eternal love is not real. And so, having judged that love false, I don’t see it anywhere. I cannot see what I do not believe is real.

I have judged the Christ in me as false. I read the statements in the Course about being totally lovable and loving, and I would *like* to believe they are true of me, but I really don’t believe it. I know myself too well, or so I think; I am far too aware of all my flaws. The self I have made is far more real to me than the Self God created, and I don’t believe in that Self. Because I don’t see Christ in myself, I cannot see Him in others.

I’ve seen this played out in relationships around me. One person may be truly loving and expressing love to another, and yet the other person simply can’t see it. He didn’t love himself, and so it was impossible for him to believe that another person loved him! He could not see what he did not believe in, what he had judged as false within himself (5:4).

In sentence 5, the Course uses “would” in the sense of “want to.” It means, “You who want to judge reality cannot see it.” And we *do* want to judge reality because we are not willing to accept responsibility for what we have made of ourselves; we want to find scapegoats, someone else to blame. We want to project guilt out of our mind onto other people and things outside of us.

Why can’t we see the real world? Because the real world is *guiltless*, and we don’t want to see that. We want to see a world we can judge, because that lets us off the hook, or so we believe. Yet we would not feel any need to be “let off the hook” if we had not put ourselves on the hook in the first place. We judge the world because we have judged ourselves, and both judgments are *misjudgments*.

“Whenever judgment enters”—judgment of any kind, against ourselves, against another person, it does not matter—“reality has slipped away” (5:5). *Judgment* and *reality* are mutually incompatible. If you find yourself judging (in the sense of condemning) you know you are off base.

If you put love out of your mind, so that to your mind it does not exist, you will not see it even if you are surrounded by it (5:6). If, to your mind, there is no such thing as an innocent human being, you will never see one. You simply won’t recognize love when you see it. Love is present literally everywhere, all the time. Why don’t we see it more often? Because we have blocked it out of our mind, because we have made a secret decision that love isn’t real. When you live in the real world, everything will demonstrate love to you. When you live as an ego, *nothing* demonstrates love to you, because the ego is an assertion that the love-bond between you and God has been broken, and love is no

longer real.

Why am I not more aware of the Christ in myself? He is still there (5:7), although I don't recognize Him. He has never left. I do not recognize Him because I have put Him out of my mind, because I have rejected the idea of my perfect Self, and I have done that because that vision of myself threatens the self I think I am. The same is true of why I find it difficult to see Christ in others. If I don't believe it is possible that *my* true self is Christ, how will I ever believe it about someone else?

But, what's true is true, whether or not I recognize it (5:8). Facts are not changed by our denial. That's why "I am as God created me" is true whether or not I believe it. That's why I am innocent, and the whole world is innocent, whether or not I believe it. The fact is, Christ is in each of us, waiting for us to let go of the past and wake up to the real world (5:9).

There is a reference here to the earlier parts of the chapter, about leaving the past behind and entering into the present. "The quiet present": I like that phrase. The past is full of conflict, but the present is calm. All judgment is based on the past. "Only the past can separate" (T-13.VI.6:8). Leave judgment and separation behind; leave behind this world that was made only as a platform for separation and judgment, and you will enter the real world. Within us all lives the Christ, a constant reminder of the real world we do not see because we have put it out of our minds. He, who is our true Self, waits quietly, patiently, for us to recognize the insanity of the games we play, to become willing to learn they are all false. He lovingly offers us the real world. We can enter in any moment we choose to do so. We can enter *now*.

Paragraph 6

• Study Question •

6. *Based on this paragraph, has the rottenest person you ever met had glimpses of the real world? What about dictators, terrorists, or mass murderers?*

To paraphrase, eliminating the double negative, what 6:1 says is, "Everyone in this world has seen glimpses of the real world." There is no one who has *not* had such glimpses. Despite all the barriers, blocks, and protections the ego has erected, despite its denials and projections, the real world *always* leaks through to us because it reflects the truth. We've all had moments in which we experienced real love, or complete peace. At times we've all seen through the mists of our illusions to what lies behind them. The universal drive toward some kind of religion proves that human beings possess an inherent spiritual awareness.

Despite that built-in awareness, as long as we cherish some aspect of the world we have made, we will deny those glimpses of eternity. We will call them wishful thinking, idealistic dreams, or remnants of childhood conditioning. Some psychologists may even classify all mystical experience as a form of schizophrenia. We find some way to "explain

away” those glimpses, and we will re-dedicate ourselves to the things in this world we think we love (but which we do not really love). We will refuse to follow the road pointed out by those glimpses of love (6:2). This is a universal experience; everyone does this.

Suddenly *love*, an abstract principle, is personified. “Love leads so gladly! As you follow *Him...*” (6:3–4, my italics). Obviously we are meant to understand that the presence of love within us is what the Course calls the Holy Spirit, or Jesus. When, instead of denying those visions of the real world and the love that extends them to us, and instead of refusing to follow them, we choose to believe that they are real and to follow their direction, we will rejoice to have found *His* company; that is, we experience the abstract presence of love within us as another person, a loving presence that leads us gladly. In the Western world, Jesus is the symbol *par excellence* of love. The Course does not require you to relate to the particular symbol of Jesus, but for most of us Jesus is already a powerful symbol, and when that is so, the Course wants to use that symbol with us and to reinterpret it. (If you prefer relating to the Holy Spirit, that’s fine; the Course seems to offer us a choice in this.)

This is something we should welcome and get comfortable with, because in our very confused state of mind we need a Guide to lead us home. The Course is quite clear that we cannot do this alone; we need a Guide. Heaven is completely abstract. In Heaven there are no forms; for instance, love is said to be without form in Heaven (W-pI.186.14:2). This world, by contrast, is all forms, all concrete, nothing abstract at all. And in our experience we seem to be part of this world of forms. So when love appears here, it seems to take a form we can relate to, because we cannot truly relate to an abstract principle. Accordingly, in our journey to this “borderland” between the world and Heaven, this “real world,” we need a Guide. (See the Manual, C-5.1.)

Developing a relationship with Jesus, or with the Holy Spirit, is an *extremely valuable* part of doing the Course; you may benefit from the Course without doing so, but entering into a personal relationship with Jesus can be a tremendous help (see C-5.6:1–7). If you experience a noticeable resistance to relating to Jesus it is probably because He symbolizes something *other than* love to you. You probably need, as the Course suggests several times, to forgive Him (C-5.5:7–8). The resistance you may feel is a good indicator that you need to work on your relationship with Him.

Relating to Jesus should take concrete forms in your daily life. Regular prayer is one such form. Consciously listening to His Voice in meditation is another. Mentally speaking to Him, inviting Him along with you in your daily activities, bringing your dark, ego thoughts to Him and asking to see things differently is yet another. One practice I enjoy a lot, as a writer, is writing out my questions to Him. Then I listen and try to sense the loving presence within myself, and I write out what I imagine He might say in answer to me. I don’t think of what I do as channeling, although I suppose it may be related. What I write is personal; I rarely share it with anyone. But it serves to somehow link my mind with another point of view. It has begun to develop a confidence in me that even in my darkest moments, that Other Voice is always there, and I am aware that I have a choice of which voice to listen to. As the Course says in these sentences, I *rejoice* that I have found His company!

Sentences 5 to 7, for me, sum up the section to this point. We think we want this world. We need to consider the possibility that we may have been mistaken about what we really want! In fact, we don't want this world at all; we don't want the forms, we want the *content*. What we really want is to "give this sad world over and exchange your errors for the peace of God" (6:6). All that we're waiting for, really, is ourselves (6:5)! We're waiting for ourselves to recognize what we really want, what we have *always* really wanted. We're waiting for ourselves to stop making the mistake of thinking that what we want lies in this world, in any form. A few paragraphs later, in 9:7, Jesus echos the same thought, saying that when we experience the real world we are not experiencing anything new; we are merely welcoming "what always was." All that love is waiting for is our "yes."

We tend to think that God's Will is something different from our own will. We think we want this world, and a message telling us that God wills us to let go of the world entirely seems like some kind of imposition from without. It feels like Someone is placing a very heavy demand on us. There is no demand here. Jesus is saying, in effect, "Just thought you'd like to know: what you *really* want is the real world. You think you know what you want, but you don't; you are mistaken." He is saying that you share God's Will with Him (6:7). You want the same thing for yourself as He does. The "little willingness" the Course asks for is just the realization that your will and God's are the same, that you want what He wants for you. It is the willingness to recognize that you have been mistaken about what you wanted, to recognize that the world you made is false, and you don't really want it. That willingness is the doorway to the real world.

Paragraph 7

• Study Question •

7. *True or false: The world holds really great, intense happiness and fulfillment, but we are supposed to choose the real world instead, because it is the right thing to do.*

Try reading through paragraph in its entirety, viewing it as a beautiful expression of what it is like to live in the real world. Try substituting "me" and "I" in place of "His Son," "him," and "he," to give it personal application. You'll find it an amazing experience!

One of the images I use at times in meditation, visualizing love, is that of Jesus embracing me in His loving arms. When I am feeling low, defeated, or dispirited, nothing restores me like this image. My tight little knot of self-contraction feels itself surrounded by love, and the knot begins to melt, and a sense of peace steals over me. When I cannot love myself, I am revived by the awareness that His love is unchanging.

When you are living in the real world nothing touches you except God (7:1). The world of forms is seen as effect and not cause; nothing in the world of forms can affect you, in your true essence as mind or spirit, in any way. The "bad" things of the world

cannot harm who you really are. The “good” things of the world do not distract you from your true desire for the love of God.

You see love everywhere because you are in God (not in a place), completely surrounded by love (7:3). Nothing disturbs your peace (7:4). You see love all around you, and all within yourself (7:5). You know you are perfectly safe. You look on the world and recognize that it is one with you (7:7).

This reality is what you really want. If you allow yourself to think that such a state of being is possible, you know that you want it. If you knew you were in the real world, what happened in the world of forms would not matter in any real sense, because you know it cannot touch you. The psalmist knew of the real world, which is in God, when he wrote in Psalm 46:

God is our refuge and strength,
A very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
And though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea;
Though its waters roar and foam,
Though the mountains quake at its swelling pride.

(Ps. 46:1–3, New American Standard Bible)

To be unshaken and without fear in the middle of an earthquake, so devastating that mountains are sliding into the ocean—now *that* is real equanimity! My peace seems to be shaken when the gravy slides off my mashed potatoes! What if the very ground you stood upon was sliding into the ocean?

And yet this state of being, the real world, is simply the recognition of the truth, the acceptance of something that has always been present. Nothing in this world has ever affected your True Self, and an experience of unshakeable peace awaits only your welcome, only your letting go of the little self you try so vainly to protect and your recognition of Who and What you really are.

Paragraph 8

• Study Question •

8. *The real world leads you to remember the one thing that is wholly real and wholly true. What is this one thing?*

The archaic word form in the reference to peace that “passeth” understanding alerts us that this is an allusion to the King James Version of the New Testament, specifically, Phillipians 4:7, “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” Some people have understood that Bible verse to mean that the peace of God cannot be understood at all. Jesus here is correcting that idea. Modern scholars agree; one modern Bible translation uses the word “transcends” instead of “passeth.” In the original Greek, the word *understanding* is **NOUS** (nous), usually translated as *mind*; it refers to reflective consciousness, or the rational mind. The

Bible verse is teaching that peace cannot be comprehended by rational thought based upon perception. The knowledge of peace is arrived at, not by deduction, but by experience.

In the first sentence, Jesus says that peace transcends our understanding “only in the past” (8:1). We cannot look at the past, which is filled with all our false perceptions, and understand how peace is possible, much less how it can be possible to exist unshaken, in perfect peace. But we can find peace *now* and we can understand it *now* (8:2), in the light of the real world, because we can experience it. We can look past the illusions in the present moment and see the love or the call for love that is there within everyone.

Peace lies in discovering our Identity as God’s Son. We might say that the real world is a state of mind in which you know both Who you are, and that this Identity is the one thing that cannot be taken from you (8:4,6).

“The one thing that is wholly true and wholly yours” (8:4) is your Identity as the Son of God, given to you by God (8:6). *That* cannot be shaken. Everything else—your body, your personality, your job, your relationships, your possessions, and everything about your experience in this world—is something “you have lent yourself in time, and it will fade” (8:5). *All of it* will wither and die. Only by letting go of what is by nature temporary and holding to what is eternal can you find eternal peace. A Christian missionary I admired greatly, Jim Elliot, expressed it beautifully: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Jesus said much the same thing in the Gospels: “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36). By “soul,” I believe Jesus meant our true Identity, the only thing we truly possess completely. When we attach ourselves to things in this world we *forfeit* our true Identity. The Course refers to this Bible verse in T12.VI.1:1–7, which concludes by saying::

You will not know [your soul] while you perceive something else as more
valuable. (T-12.VI.1:7)

Put in that light, letting go of this world to attain the real world seems the only sensible thing to do, doesn’t it?

Everything except this Self is something “you have lent yourself in time” (8:5). The word “lent” tells us that the things of the world do not belong to us permanently. Adding the words “in time” doubles the idea of impermanence. If you saw your relationship, your job, your friends, and even your money as something that was simply loaned to you for a certain time, you would not get attached to them. You would not begin to think of them as “mine.” And that thought is where the danger lies. That is why, two paragraphs later, Jesus tells us, “Ownership is a dangerous concept if it is left to you” (10:10).

The things of this world are not our *possessions*. They never are. They are loans. Whatever it is, “it will fade” Everything physical will fade. Our entire lifetime on Planet Earth is a loan. You can’t keep any of it. How foolish, then, to get permanently attached to what is not permanent! It is a guarantee of pain for ourselves. Everything good, everything that attracts you, everything that draws you to want to possess it, is nothing more than a temporary reflection, in this world, of something eternal in the real world.

Let your attachment, then, be to the real thing behind the temporary reflection, and not to the reflection.

The things that attract you and please you in this world are simply reflections of “your one reality” (8:7). They are reflections of your Self, the Christ, Who is the one Self we all share (T-15.V.10:9). Even the “you” that you experience as living in this world is just a reflection of that Self, and not the Self Itself. When a person knows that, he or she can let this body go and let this “life” go without regrets, because what seems to die is only a reflection, not the real thing.

I am not what I think I am; I am as God created me. And “the real world is not like this” (1:2) can be understood as well to mean “the real Me is not like this”; it is not like what I see, a separated existence within a body, doomed to age and die. That is not who I really am. Who I really am is mine forever. It is the gift of God to His Son (8:6). To that True Identity I can cling with assurance that it will *never, never* be taken from me. This is my reality, and nothing else.

Paragraph 9

• Study Question •

9. *If love waits only on your welcome, why can you not go directly from nightmares to knowledge by just welcoming knowledge?*

To “dream of peace” is to live in the real world; to “awaken to it” is to return in awareness to where we really are, which is in Heaven (9:1). We are “at home in God, dreaming of exile” (T-10.I.2:1). The goal the Course sets for us is not awaking to Heaven—not yet—for that would frighten us too much if we went directly from the nightmare to being awake. We need an interim state, a dream of peace, the “happy dreams of love” (9:2). That happy dream is the real world. It is a dream in which we have learned to have a right perception of the world (9:3), a perception given by the Holy Spirit in which everything is either love or a call for love. The real world, the world perceived rightly, is a necessary middle ground between the world we see and Heaven, in which we experience true perception, which is just short of true knowledge.

Although necessary, the real world is “a temporary expedient” or “a stepping-stone” on the way to Heaven (see T-4.II.11:1–3). “Misperception is a block to knowledge” (T4.II.11:2), that is, the sight of the world as we see it blocks out awareness of the truth; corrected perception lets that awareness through. When our perception has been transformed to accurately reflect only the reality of Heaven, we are ready to let go of all reflections and turn to the reality Itself.

Teaching us to shift our perception of the world is the Holy Spirit’s way of reassuring us we are safe, and training us to recognize the difference between the dream and the reality (see T-6.V.2). That is the best you can do with spiritual children like us. When we have learned those lessons, we will be nearer adulthood and able to accept that the dreams simply are not real.

Sometimes it seems the Course is pushing us too hard. When that happens to me, I always remind myself of this gentle reassurance: “Fear not that you will be abruptly lifted up and hurled into reality” (T16.VI.8:1). He teaches us gently, bringing us first to the happy dream of the real world before we wake up to Heaven.

In sentences 3 through 6, we see again a contrast between *perception*, which is always an interpretation and not a fact, and *knowledge*, which is direct experience of the truth. *Knowledge* in the Course refers to Heaven, while *true perception* refers to the real world or the happy dream that precedes knowledge. “The Holy Spirit corrects the world of dreams” (9:3). He does not attempt to remove us from the dream; He gives us a more truthful dream. Because we learn to perceive nothing fearful in the world, we are able to offer *welcome* to knowledge (9:6), while fearful dreams cause us to react to knowledge (Heaven, or love) with resistance.

True perception of the world is a necessary prerequisite to my offering welcome to love. I must be willing to learn that the world I have made is false (4:4), and to see the world through the eyes of Christ, cleansed of all fear. My fear is that I have lost my innocence; my awakening is the realization that it was never lost. In fear that my own innocence is gone, I see a guilty world; in realization that I am forever innocent, I see a guiltless world.

This is the shift that true perception brings: What was projected out is seen
within, and there forgiveness lets it disappear. (C-4.6:1)

Answer Key

1. The real world has none of the forms of this world because it is made up of the non-physical light of holiness. It is something that is perceived with senses other than physical sight, and consists of non-physical realities.
2. The degree of reality we attribute to the real world and to the physical world is determined by the strength of our attraction to them. The real world will ultimately seem more real because our true attraction to it is stronger.
3. I think it means the physical world contains no path (in the sense of a means to an end) that leads to the real world. There is no salvation in any form; that is, in any physical behavior or thing, as the paragraph makes clear. The road to the real world is an inner road.
4. You obtain the real world by calling to it in love (4:2), and being willing to learn that your world is false (4:4).
5. What you judge as false you claim is non-existent, and so you don't perceive it to exist. If you believe it isn't there, you don't see it even when it is staring you in the face. You are predisposed to overlook it.
6. Yes (6:1). Them, too.
7. False. The real world is happy, the world is painful.
8. The one thing that is wholly real and wholly true is the fact that God loves you forever and you return His Love forever (8:3–6).
9. You cannot go directly to knowledge by welcoming it, bypassing the happy dream, because accepting the happy dream is how you welcome knowledge.