

ACIM Edmonton - Sarah's Reflections



Lesson 16 I have no neutral thoughts.

Sarah's Commentary:

This Lesson dispels the belief that our thoughts have no effects. We read in the Lesson yesterday that our thoughts are images we made. We also learned in Lesson 14, **"What God did not create does not exist. And everything that does exist exists as He created it. The world you see has nothing to do with reality. It is of your own making, and it does not exist."** (W.14.1.2-5) This world and everything we see in it, which God did not create, is therefore of our own making. The thoughts in our minds are projected out, and these thoughts are not neutral because they reflect the ego thought system of sin, guilt, and fear. Sin, guilt, and fear form linear time. Sin is in the past, guilt is the present, and fear is in the future.

Our thoughts are not impotent, contrary to our belief. They have powerful effects. **"Everything you see is the result of your thoughts. There is no exception to this fact."** (W.16.1.2-3) Everything we see starts in our own minds. Our thoughts are very powerful, but there is one thing they can't do. They can't change the truth of who we are as the Son of God. Thus, they also can't change who God is. In other words, we can't change Reality. That is the nature of the Atonement Principle, which says that while we can become oblivious to the truth of our reality, we can't change it. This is a very reassuring thought.

What is the ego thought system and how does it differ from the thought system of the Holy Spirit? The ego thought system is about separation, complexities, differences, loss, lack, guilt, anger, grievances, fear, pain, pleasure, sickness, specialness, bodies, the world, sacrifice, regrets, the past, time, and death. The Holy Spirit's thought system is that of Oneness, reflected in this world as sameness, innocence, worthiness, forgiveness as love's reflection, abundance, simplicity, truth, and changelessness. The Holy Spirit knows there is nothing outside of the mind. We know which thought system we are listening to, depending how we feel. When we listen to the ego we feel rushed, stressed, worried, anxious, depressed, and afraid. When we are with the Holy Spirit, there is a feeling of spaciousness, flow, peace, happiness, and harmony.

Our true thoughts (those that come from the thought system of the Holy Spirit) **"create their own likeness,"** (W.16.1.6) while **"Those that are false make theirs."** (W.16.1.7) What this means is true thoughts are our real thoughts that reflect the Mind of the Creator. This is about the formless, eternal, holy, and timeless, while false thoughts are those that have made this illusory world. All thoughts, whether emanating from ego or Spirit, have an effect. This may frighten us to be told that our minds are so powerful, but it is actually very good news. Why? Because when our thoughts are changed, our experience is changed. No thought is neutral. Every thought produces something. What is that something? It is either peace or war. It is either love or fear.

Therefore, every thought matters. Notice how much we dismiss thoughts as unimportant, trivial, or too small to make a difference. Yet this Lesson counteracts that belief. Every thought brings

peace or war, love or fear, no matter how trivial we believe the thought is. We might tell ourselves a thought is too trivial to bother with. We think a small irritation does not really matter, and we can just overlook it as unimportant. Yet it is important because with each small thought of irritation, we are choosing pain as part of our experience. Such a thought blocks our happiness, our joy, and our peace. Jesus tells us, **"There is no more self-contradictory concept than that of 'idle thoughts'."** (W.16.2.1) This is quite a statement, which says that thoughts always produce effects. We have come to believe that as long as we don't act on our murderous thoughts, for example, no harm is done. This Lesson contradicts those kinds of ideas. It says that all our thoughts have effects. In fact, our wrong minds are responsible for the whole content of the world, so how could our thoughts be said not to have effects?

Watching our thoughts is the entire process of healing our minds. This is because our unwatched thoughts get deposited into our unconscious minds. These unwatched thoughts are like software always running in the background and responsible for our reactions. Our entire unconscious is made up of unwatched thoughts. It is the part of the mind we have closed off in the basement of our being, but it nevertheless rules our lives. Bringing attention to our thoughts brings our hidden thoughts to awareness, which is how healing takes place. Healing requires us to look at our thoughts. Keeping them hidden is how we choose not to heal and how we keep ourselves prisoners to the thought system of the ego.

Thoughts are not big or little, powerful or weak as we think of them. They are not impotent. There are several references in the Course that affirm this. **"If you believe that what you think is ineffectual you may cease to be afraid of it, but you are hardly likely to respect it. There are no idle thoughts."** (T.2.VI.9.12) (ACIM OE T.2.V.91) Yet we mostly believe our thoughts have no effects unless we act on them. Many psychologists will tell you that this is the case. Yes, there are some thoughts we have that we feel guilty about and some we think may even have an effect and result in manifesting something terrible. But mostly, we think our thoughts do not have an effect unless we act on them. This Lesson directly confronts this notion by saying that everything we see is the result of our thoughts.

Equally startling is the statement, **"A neutral result is impossible because a neutral thought is impossible."** (W.16.3.2) Again, every thought will be on the side of peace or on the side of war. While we think so many of our thoughts are simply neutral, Jesus tells us that this is not the case. As we watch our thoughts, we are encouraged to make no exceptions and not to think that certain thoughts we have are unimportant. They are important because of their power. They only come from either one of two thought systems---love or fear. So, when we are not at peace, we can be sure thoughts are coming from the ego.

Mind watching is such an important process for our healing, yet initially, it can be quite difficult. Our minds currently just move from one thought to another, seemingly out of our awareness much of the time. Now we are asked to notice our thoughts, and with each one, tell yourself **"This thought about _____ is not a neutral thought."** (W.16.5.2)

Jesus reminds us, **"There is such a temptation to dismiss fear thoughts as unimportant, trivial and not worth bothering about. . . "** (W.16.3.3) He reminds us that such thoughts are equally destructive, even though still equally unreal. We must be attentive to all our thoughts, recognizing that they destroy our peace of mind and bring about effects. While not real, these thoughts have power because we believe them. We may be tempted to dismiss fear thoughts in the same way that we may dismiss our experience in the world as "just an illusion." While it is indeed all just an illusion, as long as we still believe in the reality of this world, it would be inappropriate to deny our thoughts about it. To dismiss our fears as unimportant is to dismiss

the fact that we have chosen the ego thought system and all the guilt and fear that comes with it. If we dismiss the thoughts of fear, we are also dismissing the choice that we have made for the ego as unimportant. That is the temptation Jesus is talking about. We absolutely need to look at all our fear, including our fear of the Atonement. Jesus reminds us, **"it is essential you recognize them all as equally destructive, but equally unreal."** (W.16.3.3) They are all destructive because they keep us from recognizing ourselves as who we really are. Don't dismiss or deny your ego thoughts but be willing to bring them to awareness. **"No one can escape from illusions unless he looks at them, for not looking is the way they are protected."** (T.11.V.I.1) (ACIM OE T.10.VI.39)

Today, we are asked first to repeat the idea to ourselves with our eyes closed and then search our minds for any thoughts that are present, without making any distinctions among them, especially not overlooking any thoughts that we may consider little or unimportant or neutral.

As each thought comes up say, ***"This thought about _____ is not a neutral thought."*** (W.16.5.2) Our thoughts are not readily noticed at first when we start this practice. It does take some work initially to "catch" the thoughts we think we are thinking, but stay with it. Four or five practice periods are recommended today, as long as there is no strain. Be gentle with yourself. And if some difficulty confronts you today, you can apply the thought to address it as follows: ***"This thought about _____ is not a neutral thought because I have no neutral thoughts."*** (W.16.5.6) Close your eyes and repeat the idea.

In this exercise, we are beginning to recognize that there is no order of difficulty in regard to our problems, just as there is no order of difficulty in miracles. Regardless of the enormity of the difficulties we hold in mind, all problems are the same because they are all equally unreal. Jesus tells us that our problems **"fuse and merge and separate, in shifting and totally meaningless patterns that need not be judged at all. To judge them individually is pointless. Their tiny differences in form are no real differences at all. None of them matters."** (T18.I.7.7-10) (ACIM OE T.18.II.7) He says the only thing our seeming problems have in common is none of them matter. To us, some problems seem bigger than others. Jesus urges us to **"Let them all go, dancing in the wind, dipping and turning till they disappear from sight, far, far outside of you. And turn you to the stately calm within, where in holy stillness dwells the living God you never left, and Who never left you."** (T.18.I.8.1-2) (ACIM OE T.18.II.8) No matter how small and unimportant our thoughts seem to be to us, they still hold a thought system that has brought a state of suffering. We are learning to release it by recognizing all our distress comes from our own minds and not from the situations that seem to be confronting us.

Love and blessings, Sarah
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