



LESSON 170

There is no cruelty in God and none in me.

Sarah's Commentary:

Putting this Lesson in context is helpful so we can see how the ego set up its system of defense to keep us from changing our minds about the original decision to choose separation. As always, I rely heavily on Ken Wapnick's clarification of the separation and how the ego operates.

The choice that was made for the ego was a decision to run away from God. We believe we stole our individuality and established a self separate from God. This required that we annihilate God in order to become independent of Him and responsible for our own lives. Thus, we have come to believe we are authors of our own lives and have made ourselves.

The ego convinced us that we committed a terrible sin against God and carry a load of guilt, and now must fear Him and His impending punishment once He catches up with us. None of this is conscious, but it is what we unconsciously defend against. This defense is what constitutes the making of the body and the world to hide from God's punishment we think we have coming to us. God is seen as cruel, and we believe He is determined to find us and punish us. We hide from Him in the body and the world as a protection from His wrath. The way the Bible portrays God reflects the projection we hold about who He is. We believe we successfully attacked God, and this offered us what we want which is our independence and autonomy. Now we believe that attack has value. We project the attack in the mind on the world and now see the world attacking us. The attack we think we see in the world is actually our own attack thoughts that originate in our own minds.

But we don't want to see ourselves as the attackers and have become convinced we attack only in self-defense. We see others as attacking us first, and we tell ourselves that we have no choice but to defend ourselves. This is how we protect our image as innocent bystanders who would never initiate an attack. However, this is just a myth because ideas do not leave their source and the source of every attack always starts in our own minds. Jesus exposes this whole thought system so the ego can be seen for what it is—simply a belief in the mind we have given power. Without this understanding, we would not see the origin of our attack thoughts and their consequences. We would stay caught in the myth of false innocence and belief in victimhood, while never seeing the source of the problem and therefore never addressing it where it is. The ego has us focus on seeing our problems originating in the world where they can never be solved. The answer is in our own minds and released by bringing awareness to our thoughts and giving them over to the Holy Spirit. When we take responsibility for our attacks, they can be healed. When we blame others, we remain helpless victims of circumstances.

"It is impossible the Son of God be merely driven by events outside of him. It is impossible that happenings that come to him were not his choice. His power of decision is the determiner of every situation in which he seems to find himself by chance or accident. No accident nor chance is possible within the universe as God

created it, outside of which is nothing. Suffer, and you decided sin was your goal. Be happy, and you gave the power of decision to Him Who must decide for God for you." (T.21.II.3.1-6) (ACIM OE T.21.III.17)

When we chose our separate identity, we chose self-interest as our primary goal. Meeting our needs at the expense of others underlies all our actions. However, we want to appear like the well-intentioned good guy, doing the best we can in an ill-intentioned world. While acting in a civilized way, we do it to ultimately get our way, which is to win at someone's expense. Our real motives are kept hidden, even from ourselves. They are well defended and camouflaged by the image that we hide behind, which Jesus calls our "face of innocence." By wanting to appear innocent, we hide the enraged victim who wants to attack. This is the shadow that we turn away from but must be willing to acknowledge if we are to heal.

Jesus shows us that with each attack we make, we reinforce fear. Why? It is because when we attack, we fear retaliation. While we see the purpose of attack as a way to defend and protect ourselves and to get what we want, in reality, all we do with this strategy is to keep the fear firmly ensconced in our minds. While we tell ourselves that we attack to keep ourselves safe from fear, our attack is how we keep the fear, rather than escape from it.

We protect our image of innocence by holding beliefs like: "I didn't mean to hurt." "I would never attack if they had not done that to me." "If I do not defend myself, I will be taken advantage of." Yet Jesus says that this is all just a 'cover-up'. When we attack, he says, we mean to hurt, and there are no exceptions to this. **"No one attacks without intent to hurt."** (W.170.1.1) Even in self-defense, where we think we are trying to make ourselves safe, we are basically saying that our safety comes from cruelty. We think we can free ourselves, get our needs met, and gratify our desires through attack.

Jesus exposes the "face of innocence" so we can see how it has all been set up and how we become motivated to heal so we can know our true innocence. The belief we hold that we had no choice but to attack is seen as a ruse for our desire to attack. We think that if we don't defend, which is the same as attack, then we will be attacked by others; however, in perfect Oneness, there can be no attack. How can One Mind which we are, attack itself?

Attack and defense are all about putting our needs ahead of others and trying to justify our position that we had no choice but to do what we do. There is no way to paint our attacks as pretty. Attack is the cornerstone of the whole ego thought system, all of which started with the belief that attack got us something we wanted. This thought system originated in the belief that we won the battle with God, gaining our independence at His expense, and now we think we are free from Him. We have taken His place on the throne, and now we believe we hold the position of ruler of our kingdom.

This Lesson reminds me of Lesson 160, **"I am at home. Fear is the stranger here."** (W.160) In both Lessons, it is clear we are asked to remember who we are as a reflection of God, which is Love. What we have made of ourselves is what we have come to believe we are, but it is not the truth. Our true Self is not fearful nor is it cruel. We have been created in the image of God, which is pure love. As long as we think of ourselves as bodies and personalities, we live in a state of fear and believe we need to defend ourselves from all the evils of the world. Defense thus becomes our way of trying to stay safe, yet we can never find our freedom by hurting another with our attacks.

Our attacks are motivated by fear. If we felt perfectly safe and not lacking anything, we would not attack. We have come to believe that to hurt someone frees us and protects us. We justify the need

to do this because of what we perceive someone has done to us. We retaliate in many ways, including through anger, withdrawal, irritation, resistance, suspicion, seduction, provocation, demands, impulsiveness, jealousy, manipulation, whining and any number of strategies that we believe will get us what we want. **"For the god of cruelty takes many forms."** (W.170.8.6)

What is helpful is to consider our own preferred ways of attacking and defending. It is helpful to look at how this plays out in our lives. When we bring our thought system to awareness, we can make another choice. When we are willing to see that we are all the same and that we all share the same thought system both ego and the Holy Spirit, we see everything expressed in this world as either love or a call for love. The call for love may come in some rather grotesque forms, yet Jesus reminds us that love is the only natural response, regardless of the form of the call. This is obviously quite a challenge for the mind, which is why it cannot be done on our own. We need the help of the Holy Spirit.

My initial reaction to this Lesson reflected my self-concept that "I'm not cruel." Yet, when I was willing to take a closer look behind my image of goodness and benign kindness and past my defenses, I could see that there are many ways I use to hurt those around me; and they are all, in fact, forms of cruelty. The dictionary defines cruel as liking to inflict pain and suffering. The Course is uncompromising in calling our hatred what it is and not covering it up with niceties. It describes irritation akin to murder, which may seem far-fetched to us, yet it is the same thing because it is all coming from attack thoughts in the mind.

Whatever the form of the attack and however we might justify that it was deserved, Jesus tells us that we could never free ourselves if we hurt anyone else. This is because we only hurt ourselves when we hurt others. Mind is cause, and the world is effect. Everything must be brought back to the mind. If we knew we were only hurting ourselves when we attack, we would not do it. We ultimately cannot have freedom when we hurt another. All attack does is to further reinforce fear. If we felt perfectly safe, we would not attack. We judge attacks on us as **"unreasonable and insane,"** (W.170.6.4) while we are always **"merciful and just."** (W.170.6.4) We think there is power in attack, but if we look at it dispassionately, we find this **"cruel god"** (W.170.7.1) is nothing and is, in fact, powerless.

"Ideas leave not their source," (W.156.1.3) means attack cannot come from anything outside of us. I know this is a hard thing to accept because we see attack coming at us seemingly independent of our own thoughts. The ego has set it up this way. The world seems to be the cause and we seem to be at its mercy. Yet the truth is that everything starts in our own minds. The world is just a reflection of the mind. We have turned cause and effect around, seeing the world as cause, and we are its effect. It is not so. While this may seem disconcerting, it is also empowering because it means that all change starts in our own minds. It is the only place where change can be made.

As long as we are in the process of learning to undo fear, we will manifest opportunities in the world to learn this. We will have people in our lives teach us what is unhealed in our minds, and instead of attacking them and seeing them as enemies, we can learn to use all the situations, people, and events as opportunities to forgive. Our immediate concern is that we will then become "doormats" for abuse. The god of cruelty in our minds tells us that we must be foolish to listen to what Jesus tells us and that we are naive if we refrain from attacking to protect ourselves. It is this cruel god who mocks us for being some kind of spiritual hero. There is no question that we can and must take certain actions in the world to respond to people and situations that put us in danger. We must do what is necessary, but we can do it while still focusing our attention on our purpose, which is to heal our minds of attack thoughts through forgiveness. The world thus becomes a valuable backdrop for this purpose and becomes a witness to our decision to forgive.

Our only real safety and protection is love. There are many beautiful examples of love as protection in autobiographies I have read, including the story of Peace Pilgrim who responded to attacks with love and in doing so experienced divine protection. She tells of one incident where she was picked up by someone whose intention was to rape her. Yet when he saw how she felt totally safe in his presence, curled up asleep next to him in the car and totally trusting him, he confessed later that her trust in him made it impossible for him to do anything to hurt her. Until we have had an experience of this kind of innocent perception, we have a hard time believing in its power. This is why the Lesson says, **"This moment can be terrible. But it can also be the time of your release from abject slavery."** (W.170.8.1-2) To think about giving up the things we think protect us can be a terrifying moment. It is a moment when we feel very vulnerable when we choose trust instead of attack, yet we need to realize love is our only real protection. It holds all the power we have given to fear.

The moment of terror is when there is a realization the enemy is not outside but within. We may be horrified at this, but **"Today we look upon this cruel god dispassionately."** (W.170.7.1) Looking at the ego is what forgiveness is all about. Looking dispassionately means looking without emotion and without guilt. We simply become curious about what we are thinking and feeling and learn to investigate what is going on in us. We may even smile at the silliness of the ego, which has no power. It is indeed a cruel god, keeping us in bondage but only if we still give it belief. When we see it for what it is, we can laugh at it.

We have invested much in our defenses, and we will continue to do so as long as we believe they protect us. To believe we can throw away our sword and shield, which is what love tells us to do, sounds dangerous. We don't see safety in our vulnerability. We think vulnerability is weak. Yet we are reminded, **"If I defend myself I am attacked."** (W.135) It is a matter of trust, and to get to this place, we go through the stages in the development of trust as described in the Manual for Teachers. Several of these stages seem to be painful yet this is only because we resist the lesson in front of us. As we are released from bondage of the ego through forgiveness, we see more and more how our attacks hurt us. When Jesus says, **"Next, are the attributes of love bestowed upon its 'enemy',"** (W.170.5.1) he is saying we turn to our specialness for safety instead of relying on the protection of God. Love is our only sure safety and protection, but we give the attributes of love to fear, which is our propensity when we try to control everything in our lives.

We can never find solace in the ego. It is not our friend. It wants us dead while it wants to maintain its own "life." When we are upset, we turn to the ego for comfort, and it is happy to offer us no end of distractions. Whether it be food, television, sex, shopping, special love, or fantasies, it is all the same and all intended to keep us rooted in the illusion. While love is our true solace, it is now endowed with the attributes of fear.

Love feels like fear because it asks us to lay down our defenses, and now we feel weak and defenseless. Jesus says that cruelty then becomes our god because we think our protection and safety lie in attack and cruelty. Since we see it as a god, we don't question it. We simply follow its dictates. We need to be attentive to which voice we listen when we believe in our vulnerability. When we tell ourselves not to get too close to someone, as we may get hurt, it is a form of protection. When we punish others for hurting us, we are keeping ourselves separate. When we justify our demands of others, we are listening to the voice of the ego.

Today, let us look at the belief that fear can protect us and question this belief. The truth is we are invulnerable and cannot be hurt. We are as God created us. There is no death. I am not a body I am free—an eternal being of light and love. That is the foundation for letting go of our attacks and

increasingly coming to accept, **"There is no cruelty in God and none in me."** (W.170) To come to this realization requires watching our minds and bringing our fear thoughts and thoughts of attack to the Holy Spirit, rather than defending them, covering them over, and pretending that they are not there. We must not crucify ourselves for holding these thoughts, as healing comes when we are willing to look at them without judgment. The Holy Spirit can then bring the miracle.

When we perceive ourselves as cruel and others as cruel, we are saying that God is cruel. Ideas leave not their source, and we are still an idea in the Mind of God. This is what Jesus reminds us of in the final prayer. ***"Father, we are like You. No cruelty abides in us, for there is none in You. Your peace is ours. And we bless the world with what we have received from You alone."*** (W.170.13.1-4)

Jesus reminds us that we can choose again, and when we do, we make this choice for all our brothers because they are One with us. Today is a day of gratitude for our brothers, for it is in them that we find our completion. Our closeness to God is our closeness to our brothers. It is here that our healing takes place, as we take responsibility for the attacks we have projected on our brothers. Thus, we can see their innocence and know our own.

Love and blessings, Sarah
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