

ACIM Edmonton - Sarah's Reflections



Lesson 23

I can escape from the world I see by giving up attack thoughts.

Sarah's Commentary:

Jesus kicks off this Lesson with a truly powerful statement: The idea of giving up attack thoughts is ". . . **the only way out of fear that will ever succeed. Nothing else will work; everything else is meaningless.**" (W.23.1.1-2) Everything else we do to try to diminish or mitigate our fears is totally meaningless. That certainly gets my attention! What have you tried to do to reduce your fear? I have tried to build my confidence and self-esteem, develop good management skills, become an effective strategist, build up my material resources, have a close circle of friends, become effective in managing the challenges of my life, find pleasurable outlets, in addition to avoiding, repressing and denying my fears. Jesus says that we will never overcome our fear by anything we try to do in the world. None of our strategies will work because fear is still in the mind. This keeps us living in a state of anxiety. Only by changing the cause of the fear, which comes from our own attack thoughts, will we be free of it. Everything we try to do with all our plans and strategies to attempt to diminish fear, will not free us. The only way out of fear is to give up our attack thoughts and "**this way cannot fail.**" (W.23.1.3)

If we want to heal, we must look at our attack thoughts. "**It is with your thoughts, then, that we must work, if your perception of the world is to be changed.**" (W.23.1.5) To deny them is to decide to keep them. Attack thoughts are not what they seem. Our attack thoughts reflect our need to be right about the way we see things. For us, this justifies our attacks and counterattacks in the name of our safety and security. It is all a defense against the truth. Attack thoughts show up in many different forms, which may look like hate, pride, shame, frustration, anxiety, irritation, specialness, control, comparison, and anger. We can even conceal our attack thoughts to look like caring, worry, concern, and sympathy. With these thoughts, we join in someone's pain and forget that they are whole and complete. Instead, we identify with their weakness and their vulnerability.

We believe that if we could somehow manage the externals in our lives better, we could live a better, happier life. This just keeps us in the cycle of the ego, where we try to manage effects rather than look to the cause, which is the thought system of sin, guilt, and fear in our wrong minds. Jesus is showing us that there is a way out; not by doing anything in the world, not by lamenting the world, but by changing the way we see the world. When we look at the world, we see destruction, violence, sickness, pain, and suffering.

In our efforts to manage things in the world, some of what we do does succeed for a time, but it does not last. Eventually, we become disillusioned. Until then, we continue to think that if we could get other people to do or not do things that anger us, if we could manage to get into shape, get the kids to behave, have the job we want, make more money, control our home environment, enhance our self-esteem, find the right partner, or learn better coping mechanisms, then life would be good and we would be happy.

We constantly work to fix things in the world by controlling, manipulating, managing, or trying to make our lives better through a variety of strategies. This is like addressing a symptom while the underlying problem still remains unchanged. Thus, the problems and the anxiety we feel will simply arise again in another form. This is because the thought system in our minds of sin, guilt, and fear is reflected on the screen of this world. If the world is just crystallized images of the thoughts in our minds reflected back at us, then to try to change the screen changes nothing. Our minds are the cause and the world is the effect. Our own attack thoughts make up the world we see.

We lament so much about the world. We work hard to try to change things in the world. Doesn't it feel like a losing battle? Well, this Lesson would tell us, indeed it is! If the world is just the effect of our thoughts and our thoughts are the cause, then to try to change the effect is like trying to change the image on a movie screen instead of changing the mind that is projecting the image. When we change the cause (our minds), the effect changes automatically. When we become willing to watch our thoughts like a hawk and take responsibility for our projections, we begin the process of healing. We begin to accept the power within and see that we are the image-makers.

"You see the world that you have made, but you do not see yourself as the image maker. You cannot be saved from the world, but you can escape from its cause. This is what salvation means, for where is the world you see when its cause is gone?" (W.23.4.1-3) What we are saved from is the belief system of the ego that says we deserve punishment for stealing our identity from God and making a world apart from Him. We now seem to have our own separate identity, our own separate existence, our self that is unique and seemingly housed in a body, but at the expense of knowing who we really are. The ego says we have committed a terrible crime, and now, we feel guilty. The guilt is too much for the mind, and so it is projected onto this world of bodies.

If all of this is real, God is not. He must then be just an illusion. Either we are real, or God is. Both can't be true. Either Oneness is true, or the world of duality is a fact. Jesus assures us, our experience here is not real. He tells us that there is no external reality outside of our minds. If this is so, we must be hallucinating. The mechanisms to affirm the reality of the world, made by the ego, are the eyes, ears, senses and the brain to interpret what we perceive. When we start to recognize our mind as the cause of what we experience, we then have the power to change our minds and bring a new interpretation to how we see the world. When we increasingly recognize that the world is a reflection of our inward condition, the purpose of everything we experience is only for our healing.

Jesus is not saying that we should not attend to what must be done to sustain ourselves while we seem to be here. He recognizes that since we believe in this reality, we need to look after our bodies and take care of our lives in responsible ways. He does not ask us to deny what we believe, only to change our thoughts from attack to forgiveness. The world can become a wonderful classroom for undoing our ego thought system. Thus, the body and the world now serve another purpose as a means for undoing the guilt in our minds.

Our role in this process is essential. We may think we can turn to Jesus or the Holy Spirit and ask that they take away our fear, but Jesus says that we are the ones who made it, and we have the power to release ourselves from it. We have kept it mostly hidden from our awareness. We have been in denial about the origin of this fear, which was the choice to separate from Love. Now, with willingness to look at our fearful thoughts, we can start the process of bringing them to the light. Our spiritual awakening takes us through the darkness to the light. This means we must look at

our thoughts. There is no spiritual bypass that can be undertaken to the truth. We must go through the undoing process, but we are not alone in this. Jesus invites us to take his hand so he can light the way for us.

In Chapter 2 of the text, Jesus says, "**The correction of fear is your responsibility. When you ask for release from fear, you are implying that it is not. You should ask, instead, for help in the conditions that have brought the fear about. These conditions always entail a willingness to be separate.**" (T.2.VI.4.1-5) (ACIM OE T.2.IV.75) Later in this section, he says, "**You may still complain about fear, but you nevertheless persist in making yourself fearful. I have already indicated that you cannot ask me to release you from fear. I know it does not exist, but you do not. If I intervened between your thoughts and their results, I would be tampering with a basic law of cause and effect; the most fundamental law there is. I would hardly help you if I depreciated the power of your own thinking.**" (T.2.VII.1.1-5) (ACIM OE T.2.V.93)

To give up our attack thoughts, we must first look at them. Mind watching is such an important part of the process of healing. This requires that we first recognize our minds are the cause of what we see. Then, we must let go of the cause by deciding that we no longer want to hold onto attack thoughts. It is not a matter of willpower but a matter of willingness. We must then give the Holy Spirit permission to replace the images we have made, and it is done immediately upon our invitation. The Holy Spirit needs our cooperation in this process only in the first part. Our part is to be very honest with ourselves, take responsibility for our thoughts, and agree that they no longer serve us.

When we stubbornly hold onto our grievances and our attack thoughts and resist letting them go, healing cannot happen. When we nourish our concerns, our anxieties, and our stories, and continue to feel victimized, we will see a world of attack. "**Each of your perceptions of 'external reality' is a pictorial representation of your own attack thoughts.**" (W.23.3.2) The mind is the cause, and the world is just an effect. There is no external world. The world is just a reflection of what is in our own minds. As Jesus reminds us, "**It is the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition.**" (T.21.IN.1.5) (ACIM OE T.21.I.1) This concept is obviously difficult for us, but it is important because it is the key to our healing. Otherwise, we put all our attention on the externals, hoping that if they could be changed, then we would be happy. Jesus is making it clear that this is an impossible goal.

The ego is invested in holding onto grievances. Because of this investment in being right about the way we see things, it takes a lot of determination just to keep doing this work. It takes even more determination when we see we are ". . . **to include both your thoughts of attacking and of being attacked. Their effects are exactly the same because they are exactly the same.**" (W.23.7.1-2) This is not readily recognized, as Jesus acknowledges, but we don't have to understand this in order to do the practice as prescribed here. We just need to take responsibility for our fearful, attacking thoughts. This is our escape from the world we see. Because minds are joined, whether we see ourselves as a victim or victimizer makes no difference. Attack is attack. As victims, we point our finger at the ones we see as responsible for our condition and therefore we see them as guilty. This is the basis for the stories we love to tell of what others have done to us. We want them to be guilty and suffer punishment for their sins, yet we will always be the ones who suffer until we give up our belief in victimhood.

Our "escape" from this world results in peace, confidence, invulnerability, safety, and a deep sense of knowing we are One with all there is. Our perfection is guaranteed. We need not seek it. Under all our fears, grievances, anger, and frustration is the truth of who we are as beautiful, sparkling,

clear lights. The only reason we don't experience this as the truth about ourselves is because we listen to the voice of the ego berating us for never doing anything right. We are now undoing the fear thoughts that block the truth about ourselves. We may be feeling very much alone in our pain and suffering, but Jesus reminds us that it is the same for everyone who comes here. In our separation from God, we all feel alone and lacking.

The Power of the Holy Spirit is always available to shine away the darkness once we bring our dark thoughts forward for healing. He waits patiently for us to do our part. He waits patiently for us to identify our defenses that we hold like armor against the truth. While we see these defenses as our protection, they are, in fact, our fear-based thoughts held like a shield against the light **"The idea for today introduces the thought that you are not trapped in the world you see, because its cause can be changed. This change requires, first, that the cause be identified and then let go, so that it can be replaced. The first two steps in this process require your cooperation. The final one does not. Your images have already been replaced. By taking the first two steps, you will see that this is so."** (W.23.5.1-6)

Today, throughout the day, whenever we are feeling out of peace, we remember, **"I can escape from the world I see by giving up attack thoughts."** (W.23) For five practice periods in the day, look about you, repeat the idea slowly to yourself first, then close your eyes and devote about a minute to searching your mind for your attack thoughts (meaning fear, worry, sadness, anger, anxiety, depression, grievances, concerns, frustrations, expectations, jealousy, etc.) Mind searching is required because we defend against our own attack thoughts and are not aware of what we keep hidden from ourselves.

"As each one crosses your mind say:

"I can escape from the world I see by giving up attack thoughts about_____.

"Hold each attack thought in mind as you say this, and then dismiss that thought and go on to the next." (W.23.6.3-5)

Remember to include both your thoughts of attacking and of being attacked. They are the same. We think we are angry because someone caused us pain, but just as the Lesson yesterday affirmed, everything coming at us from outside is just a counterattack for our own attack thoughts. We may feel like a victim of someone's attack, but, in fact, the victim is actually a powerful victimizer.

I experienced this clearly in a workshop years ago where I was asked to be a victim and lie on the floor while someone was given the responsibility for getting me back on my feet. Of course, it was impossible for anyone to do that. My "helper" was soon victimized by me in their defeat. Thus, the victim became the victimizer. This is very much like what is being illustrated here, where the victim holds all the power.

Love and blessings, Sarah
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