

ACIM Edmonton - Sarah's Reflections



LESSON 289

The past is over. It can touch me not.

Sarah's Commentary:

We have seen and read over and over again that only our thoughts cause us distress. Nothing that seems to be happening to us and nothing that we seem to have done has any real effects. However, our reactions to the seeming events in our lives, based on our interpretations, create distress for us. Yet these are exactly the perfect opportunities for healing. They are invitations to bring our distressing thoughts to awareness. The truth is already in our right minds and has always been there. When we are upset about anything, we can use these upsets to look at the self-attacking thoughts that we are using to block the love we are. When we no longer wish to defend our perceptions and instead look at them honestly with courage and no judgment of ourselves, healing happens. We are not the healers. The Holy Spirit is. Trust Him in this process, knowing that everything is released in His light.

Jesus tells us, "**The escape from darkness involves two stages: First, the recognition that darkness cannot hide. This step usually entails fear. Second, the recognition that there is nothing you want to hide even if you could. This step brings escape from fear. When you have become willing to hide nothing, you will not only be willing to enter into communion but will also understand peace and joy.**" (T.1.IV.1) (ACIM OE T.1.I.22)

We think we can hide the dark thoughts we hold by putting on a "face of innocence" and a role of goodness and kindness. But our thoughts always have effects. The idea that there are no private thoughts brings up fear because we want to protect the image we have carefully cultivated. We are afraid of having our dark thoughts exposed. We hide under the "face of innocence," which is the carefully cultivated image of who we think we are. It is the *nice* persona that is a cover for the hateful, judgmental thoughts in the wrong mind. The idea that this image is not who we are brings fear. To expose and reveal the guilt and shame in the mind may seem terrifying and makes us feel very exposed and vulnerable. Yet when we see that there is nothing we want to hide, this is the escape from fear and liberates us from the bondage of the ego. Eventually, we come to a place where we welcome the hateful and judgmental thoughts because we recognize that, by seeing them and bringing them to the light, we are freed and come to see our magnificence.

There is a voice in you constantly talking, but you don't need to give it any power. You are the one observing this voice. You are not this voice. The voice is the stranger that has walked into your pristine home and made himself at home. If this voice was not in your mind, speaking to you all the time, but was someone outside of your mind talking to you, telling you what to worry about, who to judge and hate, who to dislike, and how to see your world, you would simply tell it to go away and leave you alone. In the same way, we can simply lose interest in the inner chatter so we can connect with the peace that is in us.

We do not see anything as it is. Everything we see is a projection of the thoughts in our mind, all coming from the past! Anything that seems to be happening that creates distress in us is an upset seen through the association with issues from the past. These issues started in the original moment when we chose the ego thought system and seemed to have left God. Now we believe we have done something irreparable. We have this overwhelming feeling that we have done something terribly wrong, but we don't have any conscious awareness of what that might be. As a result, we feel wrong and bad and we believe that there is something about us that needs to be fixed. We are overwhelmed by the guilt of this "sin," which is too much for us to bear.

The ego made this world of seeming differences where we can project guilt onto others in the belief that we are then getting rid of it in ourselves. What the ego never lets us know is that this is how we keep the guilt! We will only know the purity of our innocence, love, and light when we have healed the guilt in our mind by recognizing how the ego set all this up. It requires that we look at the unconscious mind. The ego's existence depends on us not looking at the guilt in the mind, but holding onto it, which we do when we keep it in the dark and see it in others rather than ourselves.

The only cause of any problem that we seem to have is not what is happening "out there," but the commotion created in our own minds. Now we are being called to recognize that our reactions are simply being triggered by an outside source, but the real source of our distress is coming from our own minds. We have given an interpretation to neutral events. We now have an opportunity to look more deeply at what we are thinking and believing. As long as we project the guilt, we keep it. When we see that this is how we keep hurting ourselves, we are motivated to choose forgiveness by recognizing that we are the observer of the voice and not the voice itself. We are not the ego, but the one observing the ego. When we do so without judging ourselves, we recognize that we have taken on a mistaken identity and have forgotten the truth about ourselves---that we are the Son of God.

How willing are you to let go of the pain of the past? This is all we are called to do. It is not necessarily an easy process, but the opportunities that show up in the people and situations in our lives are perfect for our healing, and through forgiveness, all the interference to the truth are undone. Through the process of forgiveness, we learn of our own true innocence. When we project guilt, we are trying to achieve innocence by seeing the guilt in our brothers. We want them to be punished for their sins and see them as the bad guys, while we see ourselves, by comparison, as superior and innocent. As long as we keep projecting guilt "out there," we are simply perpetuating the illusion.

When we learn that it is only ourselves that we hurt when we attack our brothers, we become more willing to give up our attacks. We cannot be innocent while seeing another guilty. When we see our brother's innocence, we know it is in us as well. This is the law of perception as described in Chapter 25, **"You see what you believe is there, and you believe it is there because you want it there."** (T.25.III.1.3) (ACIM OE T.25.IV.23) Now we ask, "How much do I want to see my brother's innocence so I can know my own? Or would I rather hold onto my stories and my grievances?" This is the choice I make in each situation I encounter.

A few years ago, I was at a *Psychology of Vision* workshop where we picked those in the group who reminded us of people in our families: an aunt, sister, cousin, parent, grandparent, or any significant person in our lives. Then, we looked at what we saw in them and who they reminded us of. For example, I saw in one man the characteristics of my father. It was a valuable process in helping me to appreciate how often "shadow figures" from the past are projected onto people

currently in my life. With each "shadow figure," I had an association, which was either of special love or special hate. The extent of the feelings aroused was the extent of the grievances from the past that I was still holding onto. These were all unresolved emotions triggered by people from the past. My strongest reaction was to the person I picked as the father figure. Through this exercise, I realized how much was still unresolved in my feelings toward him. The person who was a shadow figure for my father was a perfect mirror for me to see my unresolved judgments from the past all coming from my own mind. It was a powerful opportunity to be released from the chains that kept me imprisoned to these past associations where I was still holding my father responsible for my unhappiness.

To forgive is to give up the wish that the past could be different. We forgive our brother's past so we can forgive our own. **"The past is the ego's chief learning device, for it is in the past that you learned to define your own needs and acquired methods for meeting them on your own terms."** (T.15.V.2.1) (ACIM OE T.15.VI.46) Thus, we developed strategies for having our needs met by using everyone in the present to support our specialness. Fortunately, we can undo any of these past associations and decisions we have made based on faulty perceptions. They are all faulty! Thus, it is never too late to have a happy childhood! We can release painful past memories through forgiveness any time we choose. This Lesson clearly states that if I am seeing the past, I am seeing what is not there and, in fact, never was. All there is of the past are only my thoughts based on faulty perceptions. I can elect to change those thoughts with the help of the Holy Spirit.

I recently received an email from a Course student that illustrates the power of forgiveness. It goes as follows:

"I don't know what happened last night for me but as I drove away from your home I suddenly began to feel and experience all the love that my family had given me over my life. It was so overpowering that I wept deeply while I drove. I realized that I had been looking all my life at the ego side of everyone and had not recognized the love that flowed freely from them. I find myself seeing the love in everyone I see and meet today instead of projecting all my judgments on them. I feel no stress just total acceptance of everyone by seeing their love rather than my anger. These words do not do justice to describing the experience I am having but I did want to share this with you. My only hope is to remain in this transformed state of love and peace."

Chances are we won't remain in this transformed state of peace and love, but that does not matter as long as we stay committed to continuing to watch our thoughts and do the forgiveness work so that we can remember, **"In every difficulty, all distress, and each perplexity Christ calls to you and gently says, 'My brother, choose again.'"** (T.31. VIII.3.2) (ACIM OE T.31.VIII.87) We keep making this choice until there is only one Voice that we listen to and there is nothing more to choose between. As the song says, "Even if you broke your vow a thousand times, all are welcome here."

The truth is that only our thoughts can hurt us---nothing else. As Jesus says over and over in the Course, nothing is outside of us. **"He does not realize that he makes this world, for there is no world outside of him."** (T.12.III.6.7) (ACIM OE T.11.IV.29) **"If only the loving thoughts of God's Son are the world's reality, the real world must be in his mind."** (T.12.III.7.1) (ACIM OE T.11.IV.30) **"That is why you must realize that your hatred is in your mind and not outside it before you can get rid of it; and why you must get rid of it before you can perceive the world as it really is."** (T.12.III.7.10) (ACIM OE T.11.IV.31)

Yes, we are only hurt by our own thoughts. **"You have chosen a sleep in which you have had bad dreams, but the sleep is not real and God calls you to awake."** (T.6.IV.6.3) (ACIM OE T.6.V.50) We must not believe our own thoughts. Suffering comes from believing in what we are thinking.

Today, let us **"Determine, then, to be not as we were. Use no relationship to hold us to the past, but with each one each day be born again."** (T.13.X.5.1-2) (ACIM OE.T.13.IV.24) I love that. In each brother or sister that we encounter today, instead of seeing in them our past associations, we can take responsibility for our projections, turn them over to the Holy Spirit, and choose again. It is our determination not to use our brothers and sisters to keep us from the love we are and in that, we are born again. In that, we affirm the past is over. It can touch me not.

Love and blessings, Sarah
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