



Lesson 343
I am not asked to make a sacrifice
To find the mercy and the peace of God.

Sarah's Commentary:

Christmas is fast approaching and so is the end of this year of Lessons. It has been wonderful to witness the release from fear, healing, miracles, holy instants, peace, joy, willingness, and readiness to forgive. With each miracle that shows up for anyone, we are all blessed as One Self. **"The new beginning now becomes the focus of the curriculum. The goal is clear, but now you need specific methods for attaining it. The speed by which it can be reached depends on this one thing alone; your willingness to practice every step. Each one will help a little, every time it is attempted. And together will these steps lead you from dreams of judgment to forgiving dreams and out of pain and fear. They are not new to you, but they are more ideas than rules of thought to you as yet. So now we need to practice them awhile, until they are the rules by which you live. We seek to make them habits now, so you will have them ready for whatever need."** (T.30.IN.1-8) (ACIM OE T.30.I.1)

While there is still fear and resistance as we approach the threshold of the gate to Heaven, there is also growing confidence and trust. What is the fear about? This Lesson speaks about fear of loss and the belief we hold that we will have to sacrifice our own self-interests and desires for the peace of God. Jesus assures us that God has given us everything and never takes anything away. He is everything, as are we, and thus, there is nothing to be sacrificed except suffering and lack that are part of the human condition. If He can only give and never take away, sacrifice cannot be required. Yet to us, there is fear that God will take something from us when we decide for Him, and thus we fear that we will lose what we value.

"It takes great learning both to realize and to accept the fact that the world has nothing to give. What can the sacrifice of nothing mean?" (Manual for Teachers.13.2.1-2)

"God's teachers can have no regret on giving up the pleasures of the world. Is it a sacrifice to give up pain? Does an adult resent the giving up of children's toys? Does one whose vision has already glimpsed the face of Christ look back with longing on a slaughterhouse?" (M.13.4.1-3)

He goes on to say that what we sacrifice when we identify with the false self is peace, freedom, hope of Heaven, and remembrance of God's Love. **"Who in his sane mind chooses nothing as a substitute for everything?"** (M.13.4.10)

We believe that to receive we must pay, and then we will suffer. We think we will have to sacrifice perceived pleasures. What we increasingly have come to realize is that these perceived pleasures are the source of pain. The only real joy is to connect to the truth of what we are. When we experience the connection to the Divine within, nothing can substitute for the joy of that experience. Jesus wants us to recognize that we have already given up what has infinite value,

which is our eternal Self. Of course, it is not something that is possible for us to give up, but we became unaware of our reality when we chose to separate and follow the dictates of the ego.

Jesus is helping us to see that the world we have come to is **"a dry and dusty world, where starved and thirsty creatures come to die."** (W.PII.Q13.What is a Miracle?5.1) We blame God for the suffering that we experience in the world where everything ends in death. We cry out to Him as if He were responsible for our condition. We cry out to Him asking why He is putting us through this suffering. We believe that He has something to do with it, like a giant puppeteer in the sky, pulling our strings and bringing us hard lessons for our own good; but Jesus reminds us that it is our choice to be here and everything that seems to happen to us is by our own request. We have set up the drama of our existence here. When we are ready to return to sanity and to know our true Self is our choice to make. This is generally when we come to a place of disillusionment, finding that nothing in this world works to bring a sense of deep contentment. **"An imprisoned will engenders a situation which, in the extreme, becomes altogether intolerable. Tolerance for pain may be high, but it is not without limit."** (T.2.III.3.4-5) (ACIM OE T.2.II.48) We have been given the help we need from outside our own limited thinking to release our imprisoned will. We have been shown the means for undoing all that brings us pain.

Forgiveness and miracles pave the way for the Atonement. God has not put us here. We made the decision to separate, and then we promptly forgot we had anything to do with it, and instead, we blamed God for abandoning us to this world of pain and suffering. Yet He offers us only blessings. He only gives. In the world, we think that God gives but to take away. We say that when we die He takes us home. We think that resurrection comes through death. We think that He is the One that chooses who will continue to live and who will die. We believe that life ends when we die, and now we must pay for what we took from Him when we left our home in Heaven. We see this as part of the Last Judgment and as a terrifying process rather than the blessing, which it is.

To the world, Jesus was seen to have sacrificed his body for everlasting life. Thus, we see everything that comes from God as requiring some kind of sacrifice. Yet, again and again, we are assured, **"Decide for God, and everything is given you at no cost at all. Decide against Him, and you choose nothing at the expense of the awareness of everything."** (M.13.8.2-3) When we attack a brother, we have denied our holiness and no longer feel safe.

There is no death, only eternal life. **"Death is the central dream from which all illusions stem. Is it not madness to think of life as being born, aging, losing vitality, and dying in the end?"** (M. 27.1.1-2) Yet that is how we think. Now we are called to raise it to question. We take it all as the Will of God, but Jesus tells us that no loving Creator would will this. We are called to exhume from our mind all the false notions we hold of who God is and who we are. We can only do that when we investigate our deeply held beliefs and fears. To think of God as holding our **"little life in his hand but by a thread, ready to break it off without regret or care, perhaps today"** (M.27.2.3) is to fear Him.

This Lesson tells us that we have not changed ourselves. **"As I was created I remain."** (W.343.1.8) Because we have the same characteristics as God since we are an extension of Him, we simply can't lose what we have been given. We cannot be incomplete because God is complete. When we feel less than whole, innocent, and peaceful, we know we are listening to untrue thoughts and holding beliefs that are false. Jesus tells us, **"Sacrifice is a notion totally unknown to God. It arises solely from fear, and frightened people can be vicious. Sacrificing in any way is a violation of my injunction that you should be merciful even as your Father in Heaven is merciful."** (T.3.I.4.1-3) (ACIM OE T.3.III.21)

Nelson Mandela recognized this when he said how fearful were his enemies. He saw that, in their fear, they could do nothing but defend and attack. He called for mercy and in return, through the reconciliation commission, mercy was given because he gave it. It was all about healing the past. When the past is healed, **"Miracles fall like drops of healing rain from Heaven on a dry and dusty world, where starved and thirsty creatures come to die."** (W.PII.Q13.5.1) We are called daily to release our judgments and offer mercy to our brothers so we can know ourselves. This is not a sacrifice, but a gift we give ourselves.

We believe we have to suffer when we have made mistakes in our lives and hurt someone, but the miracle **"merely looks on devastation, and reminds the mind that what it sees is false."** (W.PII.Q13.1.3) When we have wronged someone, we believe that we have to do penance rather than choose forgiveness. We demand of ourselves long periods of suffering in order to be sufficiently remorseful. Or, if someone has hurt us, don't we want them to suffer to atone for the sin they have committed against us? Yet this Lesson tells us, **"Salvation has no cost,"** (W.343.2.2) which means that mercy and peace are immediately available. Nothing more is required of us than to accept the Atonement for ourselves; this is to remember who we are. Salvation has no cost. There is nothing to pay. It is not to be reserved for those who are special or deserving. Love is not specific. Love gives all to all. It is universal. It is indifferent. It shines on everyone. No one is more special than anyone else. We are all innocent. We can all choose our innocence now.

Let us today be willing to look at our mistakes as mistakes and be merciful to ourselves and to others. Simply through our Being, we are to be the purveyors of peace in the world. We do this in our willingness to be a communication device for the Holy Spirit so His light can shine through us. God makes no demands on us. He only gives. When we crucify ourselves for our anger, our mistakes, our grievances, our losses, or crucify others for theirs, we keep ourselves in hell. God waits on our decision to take ourselves, and others, off the cross. He welcomes us to come home and remember our true identity. There is no cost. There is no sacrifice. There is no demand for penance of any kind. What I give to you, I receive for myself. What a gift!

Now, we just need to recognize that our desire will return us home. We must release our fear of what we believe will be demanded of us by the wrathful image of the god we made up. This god was made by the ego to keep us in a state of sacrifice and fear. It is a god that gives life and takes it away. It is a god the ego says is justified in taking back the life we stole from Him. It is not the loving God, Who has given us all things and holds us safe in His embrace, forever and ever.

Love and blessings, Sarah
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