

ACIM Edmonton - Sarah's Reflections



Lesson 24

I do not perceive my own best interests.

Sarah's Commentary:

As I reflect on the Lesson yesterday, it feels so essential to recognize how attack thoughts in the mind keep coming back to us. In that sense it is karma as what I give, I receive. We do unto others as we would have them do unto us, which is the golden rule and is part of every religion as it is in this Course. What is different from other teachings, however, is that Jesus teaches we can't apply the golden rule until we are in the right mind. In other words, we can't know the loving thing to do for our brother but need Holy Spirit's guidance. **"You respond to what you perceive, and as you perceive so shall you behave. The Golden Rule asks you to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. This means that the perception of both must be accurate. The Golden Rule is the rule for appropriate behavior. You cannot behave appropriately unless you perceive correctly. Since you and your neighbor are equal members of one family, as you perceive both so you will do to both. You should look out from the perception of your own holiness to the holiness of others."** (T-1.III.6.1-7) On our own, with the ego as our guide, we can't know how to respond lovingly. This leads to this Lesson that says we don't even know our own best interests, and must in all humility admit we don't know what is best for us, let alone anyone else.

We mostly believe we can take care of our own interests and rely on our own judgments. We trust ourselves in this regard, more than we trust anyone else. We have learned that if we don't take care of our needs, who will? But Jesus says we don't know our own best interests, and **"In no situation that arises do you realize the outcome that would make you happy. Therefore, you have no guide to appropriate action, and no way of judging the result."** (W.24.1.1-2) It seems to us that we know our needs and our problems, but if our only problem is the separation, the problems we think we have are not real. They are just a smokescreen so we won't see the only problem we have which is the guilt in the mind. Our seeming problems are a distraction from our real problem. We spend our time trying to solve things in the world when the source of our problems is in the mind.

The Lesson today says that if our perceptions are wrong, and they always are, how can we know what to do in any situation? **"What you do is determined by your perception of the situation, and that perception is wrong."** (W.24.1.3) Clearly, Jesus is saying that to be on our own means we are listening to the "guidance" of the ego, and that guidance is always based on wrong perception. We think we know what our needs are and how to meet them. We do our best to find solutions for the problems we think we have, and we try to fulfill our needs and desires as we define them. We do the best to take care of ourselves, always staying vigilant on our own behalf and never fully trusting anyone.

The ego **"... is unaware of what you are, and wholly mistrustful of everything it perceives because its perceptions are so shifting. The ego is therefore capable of**

suspiciousness at best and viciousness at worst. That is its range. It cannot exceed it because of its uncertainty. And it can never go beyond it because it can never be certain." (T.9.VII.3.6-10) (ACIM OE T.9.VI.40) That is why Jesus says that we need to **"Resign now as your own teacher."** (T.12.V.8.3) (ACIM OE T.11.VI.51) Clearly, this is challenging for us because we want to be in control. We have learned that the only thing we can depend on is ourselves. We don't trust the world to support us. Yet we live with the uncertainty of never really knowing what the best thing is to do for ourselves, which produces anxiety.

Now we need to be brutally honest in asking ourselves, "How well have I done, being the captain of my own ship?" How do we measure that? The Course would ask us to measure it through the test of truth. What is that test? **"You have one test, as sure as God, by which to recognize if what you learned is true. If you are wholly free of fear of any kind, and if all those who meet or even think of you share in your perfect peace, then you can be sure that you have learned God's lesson, and not your own."** (T.14.XI.5.1-2) (ACIM OE T.14.VII.63) With the ego as our teacher, we are not wholly free of fear but live in a constant state of uncertainty of what to expect.

It takes humility to recognize just how much we don't want the peace of God and how firmly we cling to our belief system with its pursuit of individual interests. In our arrogance, we hold a demeaning image of ourselves, thus denying our true identity. **"Arrogance makes an image of yourself that is not real. It is this image which quails and retreats in terror, as the Voice for God assures you that you have the strength, the wisdom and the holiness to go beyond all images."** (W.186.6.1-2)

The truth is, **"I am as God created me."** (W.94, W.110, W.162) But we have denied our identity, deciding for ourselves who we are. To the ego, to be humble is to look upon ourselves as lowly and unworthy sinners. Jesus teaches the opposite. He says, **"Humility consists of accepting your role in salvation and in taking no other."** (W.61.2.3) He asks us to learn to see ourselves, along with all our brothers and sisters, as worthy of God's Love. It does indeed take humility to look honestly, calmly, and without judgment at the arrogance of the ego, and be amused by it instead of being distressed. When we feel distressed, we believe the ego has power and we feel helpless, but the ego is nothing. It only has the power we give it. To withdraw its power is to be willing to question our thoughts and recognize their meaninglessness. It is to question what we think we know, our point of view, our interpretations, and our definition of ourselves and others, and everything going on in our lives. When we are willing to let go of our interpretations, we open to the interpretation of the Holy Spirit.

It is when we yield our way and ask with humility and willingness to hear His Answer that we defer to His Judgment. Our perceptions are always wrong. We can never be certain on our own of what is in our best interests. We can only be taught when we accept that we do not know what our best interests are. We simply don't know. "How can that be?" you may wonder. Jesus answers that question in Workbook Lesson 47, where he says, **"If you are trusting in your own strength, you have every reason to be apprehensive, anxious and fearful. What can you predict or control? What is there in you that can be counted on? What would give you the ability to be aware of all the facets of any problem, and to resolve them in such a way that only good can come of it? What is there in you that gives you the recognition of the right solution, and the guarantee that it will be accomplished?"** (W.47.1.1-5)

After I returned from my year of study and meditation in Sedona with Robert Perry, I thought it was in my best interests to sell my house, go homeless for a while, and pursue my spiritual goals,

traveling the country, spending time with spiritual masters, and attending various retreats. I put my house up for sale, and the day I got an offer on my home, Don showed up in my life. This threw me into confusion as I thought I had been following guidance to sell the house. I had an offer on the house a few days after I met Don, and now, I did not know what to do. His presence threw my plans into jeopardy because I believed he was here for a reason that I needed to explore. It all felt very orchestrated. So, I took my house off the market, but my mind was in turmoil. This state of turmoil continued for quite some time as the relationship brought all kinds of challenges.

Prior to meeting him, I had assumed I was done with special relationships of this nature. I had been on my own at that time for ten years after the death of my husband. I felt quite complete, having gone through so much healing in that relationship. Now layers of anguish, rage, and hatred were showing up in my new relationship. I was startled by the intensity of these feelings. I made it clear that the goal of our relationship must be based on healing. Since I still owned my home, Don encouraged me to start teaching the Course and the house was perfect for that activity. Soon people started to show up with no advertising on my part. For twenty years or more gatherings were held three times a week and the group expanded to three other locations. The home was perfect to accommodate large groups to include movie nights, potlucks, retreats, and workshops.

Even though I resisted the relationship, looking back I now see the perfection of how everything unfolded. Initially, I was angry, believing my best interests were not being served. Yet increasingly, I see how perfect it has all been for my healing. I saw my interests were truly being served in ways I could not have imagined. Instead of turning to other teachers, I was given an opportunity to connect with my own inner Teacher and learn such deep lessons of forgiveness through the relationship and through facilitating gatherings. My resistance did make some lessons harder than they needed to be particularly in the relationship.

Holding the belief that I needed to move on to serve my best interests resulted in many conflicting goals in my mind. This is always the case when we decide to set our own direction, using the ego as our guide. I would miss my friends here. I would miss the stability of being in one place. I would enjoy the travel but would have no home base. I looked forward to the freedom but would feel the loneliness of not being connected to what I know. It was a mixed bag of conflicting goals, just as this Lesson says. Thus, I was making many demands of this situation with many contradictory goals.

It is all a matter of trust in the Holy Spirit. This required letting go of my ideas of what would make me happy. I needed to let go of my judgments of what is good and what is bad in my life because I don't know. I am always reminded, **"In no situation that arises do you realize the outcome that would make you happy."** (W.24.1.1) When I did not get what I thought I wanted, I was angry and unhappy for a time, and mostly, I was acting like a rebellious child. I did not realize how wrong I was about what I thought would serve my best interests. Unhappiness is the result of setting our own goals by ourselves. By doing this, we can indeed achieve everything we think we want, but peace and happiness will still elude us.

Can you see why manifesting what we think we want can be a problem? We don't know what will make us happy. The only thing of value from manifesting what we think we want is to affirm that the mind has power. And that power is of God because, **"Even in miscreation the mind is still affirming its Source, or it would merely cease to be. This is impossible, because the mind belongs to spirit which God created and which is therefore eternal."** (T.3.IV.5.10-11) (ACIM OE T.3.VI.45)

Five times today, for two minutes with eyes closed, search the mind for unresolved situations you are concerned about. When one comes to mind, name all the goals you hope this situation will end up meaning for you and all the outcomes you want from it. When you have exhausted your list of outcomes, repeat the thought **"I do not perceive my own best interests in this situation."** (W.24.7.2) It will become clear to us, as we do this, that we are making many demands on any situation. Many of our goals are contradictory. We have no unified outcome in mind, and we will be disappointed no matter what the outcome is. Most important, we truly do not perceive our own best interests. Jesus tells us the exercises for today require much more honesty than we are accustomed to. A few subjects, honestly and carefully considered in each of the five practice periods, which should be undertaken today, will be more helpful than a more cursory examination of a large number. Two minutes are suggested for each of the mind searching periods.

"In applying the idea for today, name each situation that occurs to you, and then enumerate carefully as many goals as possible that you would like to be met in its resolution. The form of each application should be roughly as follows:

"In the situation involving_____, I would like_____ to happen, and_____ to happen,

"and so on. Try to cover as many different kinds of outcomes as may honestly occur to you, even if some of them do not appear to be directly related to the situation, or even to be inherent in it at all." (W.24.5.1-4)

Look at some unresolved situation and ask yourself what you want to come of it. We are called to be very honest with ourselves as we may not always want to acknowledge our many conflicting goals. For example, if I am having difficulty with someone, I may have a goal of wanting this person to get what they deserve for being mean to me, but I also want them to like me. I also want to be friends with them. I want them to see how they have hurt me, but I don't want to tell them this. I want them to ask for my forgiveness and acknowledge what they have done, but I don't want to be seen as being unkind. Do you see what I mean by conflicting, non-unified goals? Try to go deep with this exercise and recognize that you need to approach it with unaccustomed honesty. I say unaccustomed because the ego likes to rationalize and cover up our baser thoughts with lovely spiritual thoughts. The only caution is to look at these thoughts with equanimity. The idea is to be honest but not to judge yourself or make yourself guilty. To do so is just another ego ploy. Simply be a detached observer of the process.

Love and blessings, Sarah
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