

ACIM Edmonton - Sarah's Reflections



LESSON 121 **Forgiveness is the key to happiness.**

Sarah's Commentary:

We think that what upsets us is what others are doing or have done to us, the difficult events in our lives, and circumstances that trigger fear, anger, and sadness in us. So the first thing we need to accept when we look at forgiveness is that nothing outside of us is the cause of our upsets. This is one of the hardest concepts in the Course for us to accept. The only cause of our upsets is the guilt in our minds, projected out and now seen in the world. We project the guilt in our minds and judge others for our own secret sins we believe are in us. Jesus goes to some lengths to describe what the unforgiving mind holds. **"The unforgiving mind sees no mistakes, but only sins. It looks upon the world with sightless eyes, and shrieks as it beholds its own projections rising to attack its miserable parody of life."** (W.121.4.1-2)

We are trying to prove that the guilt in our own minds belongs to others. Why would we do that? It is so we can feel innocent and like a victim of what others have done or are doing to us. Startling as it may be to hear, we actually want others to betray us! It comes from our belief that we have betrayed God and now we project the betrayal in our own mind onto others. We don't want to be responsible for the betrayal of God. We want others to betray us so the responsibility can be on them. We want this because it justifies our own anger and attack. The problem is that we now see our projections as poised to attack us, because, as we learned before, what we give we receive. In other words, the world reflects our own state of mind. It is an outer picture of our own inner condition. When our minds are full of anger and attack, we project it onto the world, and it is now seen as a dangerous place. We constantly fear the next thing coming at us.

"The unforgiving mind is full of fear, and offers love no room to be itself; no place where it can spread its wings in peace and soar above the turmoil of the world." (W.121.2.1) We live in fear, believing we need constant defense against the world. We live in a state of doubt, confusion, anger, fear, sadness, misery, pain, despair, and terror. The unforgiving mind sees no hope, is weak and blustering, afraid of every sound, yet more afraid of stillness. It is a mind full of fear, has no peace, is sad, suffers, sees danger everywhere, has no hope, abides in misery, and is confused about itself. It is **"terrified of darkness, yet more terrified at the approach of light."** (W.121.3.1) This mind is angry and has no place to turn for relief. Don't we all identify with this as part of the human condition? No matter what it may look like, everyone who is here experiences the same thing, although for some it is perhaps more hidden than for others. What we don't recognize is that the guilt in our minds produces it all. We don't yet believe forgiveness is the answer to all our problems.

Is it possible that every problem has its source in unforgiveness? Jesus says, **"The secret of salvation [happiness] is but this: that you are doing this unto yourself. No matter what the form of the attack, this still is true. Whoever takes the role of enemy and of attacker, still is this the truth. Whatever seems to be the cause of any pain and**

suffering you feel, this is still true. For you would not react at all to figures in a dream you knew that you were dreaming. Let them be as hateful and as vicious as they may, they could have no effect on you unless you failed to recognize it is your dream." (T.27.VIII.10) (ACIM OE T.27.IX.86)

When we project our guilt onto others, we are covering over our own secret sins. If I hold grievances against you, I am making you responsible for my unhappiness. In actual fact, I am the one who first chose to throw my happiness away, but now I see you as having taken it from me, and I blame you. The mind is full of fear because the hatred we secretly believe is in us we now see outside, poised to attack us. Everything I hold against myself is what I see in the world. It is all self-attack projected out. Because we simply can't exist with all this self-attack and self-hatred in our minds that terrorize us, the ego has given us a solution---project it onto others and see them as the guilty ones. We push our own attack thoughts down and cover them over with our own specialness and false innocence.

The ego set all this up so we could live with the guilt and see it in others instead of ourselves. The ego has convinced us that we are guilty because it tells us we sinned against God by establishing our separate identity. Our individual identity is built on the idea there is something lacking in us. We have a vague feeling that we have done something wrong, a sense of foreboding, and a belief we will have to pay for what we have done. As long as we don't understand the source of these thoughts, they will keep us in the cycle of sin, fear, and guilt, with no way out. Another way to see this is that we are in a never-ending cycle of birth and death.

In this never-ending cycle of a closed system made by the ego, Jesus hands us a key. This key is forgiveness, and it offers us our complete release. We need this kind of help from outside our closed system if we are to escape the matrix. When we chose the ego and chose to believe its lies, the truth became locked away from our awareness. It is in the right mind where the light of the Holy Spirit reigns. He is our inner Teacher. This is where our peace and joy reside within our own minds. Guilt took the place of love when we gave our allegiance to the ego, and now it overshadows the truth within us. With this choice made to separate us from the love of God, our own will was established. The way to find our way back to the peace, love, joy, and innocence within us is to use the key that unlocks the door to the truth within; and that key is forgiveness.

The question is: "Will we choose to use it, now that we know of its power?" We say we want peace and joy, and now we are given the way to achieve what we say we want. We say we want to know eternal life, but Jesus says we hold a wish for death. So why is that? To us, death is equated with peace, since we hold the belief that it brings an end to all our suffering. If our experience of life is as described in this Lesson, who would not want an end to it? Even so, we continue to look for happiness here by doing our best to make our lives as good as possible while all the time hiding and defending our pain. We try against all odds to make a good life for ourselves, but Jesus reminds us continually that we are not at home here and will not find the happiness we seek through our own efforts. The picture he paints for us is pretty bleak. Yes, we can try harder, but he says that no matter how hard we try to find happiness in our material things, in our relationships, or in our accomplishments, it can't be found while we still hold onto guilt, self-attack, and self-condemnation. In the end, there is only death.

No wonder he tells us that there is no hope in this world. No wonder we feel despair. **"The unforgiving mind is in despair, without the prospect of a future which can offer anything but more despair."** (W.121.5.1) Who of us has not reached the point where, no matter how hard we have tried to make life work for us, in the end, relationships break down, our bodies get sick, and we lose our jobs; or no matter how many things we have accomplished, we just feel empty and unfulfilled? And of course, at the end, death awaits us. Most of us adjust, smile

bravely, and just keep going, constantly trying to improve ourselves. When the road we have been traveling comes to an abrupt end, we just try another avenue.

This teaching has now shown up for us because we have heard an inner call. We now have hope that there is a way out of this program of denial and projection. We have mighty help available to save us from the tyranny of the ego thought system. Rather than being powerless puppets of the ego mind, we learn that this is all a dream we have been dreaming. We are actually the script-writers of our lives rather than the victims. We are the ones responsible for everything that seems to happen to us. Those characters that have a role in our drama have been cast by us for the purpose of helping us to heal our minds.

If this were the case, how could we claim to be victims of the stories we tell? How could we say birth was not our choice? How could we continue to believe there is nothing we can do about the inevitability of our situation here? How could we not see our problems are all self-inflicted? The world and its laws could no longer be seen as immutable. **"Miracles enable you to heal the sick and raise the dead because you made sickness and death yourself, and can therefore abolish both. You are a miracle, capable of creating in the likeness of our Creator. Everything else is your own nightmare, and does not exist. Only the creations of light are real."** (T.1.I.24.1-4) (ACIM OE T.1.I.27)

Jesus tells us the real problem is that we don't question our beliefs. **"It does not ask, because it thinks it knows. It does not question, certain it is right."** (W.121.5.4-5) Our certainty covers our doubts and uncertainty. We hang on, we defend, we rigidly hold onto our opinions and perceptions, and we argue for our perspective, unwilling to see that perhaps we are wrong about everything we currently think and believe. The most fundamental of these beliefs is that there is a world outside of us. We are now asked to question the underlying thoughts that have projected this world. To learn forgiveness requires a willingness to question all that we think we know.

Jesus tells us, **"Forgiveness is acquired. It is not inherent in the mind, which cannot sin."** (W.121.6.1-2) He tells us, **"To learn this course requires willingness to question every value that you hold. Not one can be kept hidden and obscure but it will jeopardize your learning."** (T.24.IN.2.1-2) (ACIM OE T.24.I.2) We are now being asked to open our minds to the teaching offered us, to look behind our defenses, and to question what we now believe. Step by step, through these Lessons, we follow a new Teacher. **"Through Him you learn how to forgive the self you think you made, and let it disappear."** (W.121.6.4) To let the image of the self we made disappear is the ultimate goal of forgiveness, as taught by Jesus through the Course. It is the undoing of who we think we are. We need to recognize just how threatening this can be to the concept we hold of ourselves. **"A concept of the self is made by you. It bears no likeness to yourself at all. It is an idol, made to take the place of your reality as Son of God"** (T.31.V.2.1-3) (ACIM OE T.31.V.44) We hold onto this self-concept, which is why we resist these Lessons. We find many distractions to take us away from opening up fully to this teaching.

As long as we think we are the victims of our parents, other people, and the world, we will resist accepting responsibility for this dream. We prefer the way we set it all up because we so much want to be the innocent victims being acted on by others whom we see as guilty. We see the world as responsible for our unhappiness and thus deserving of our anger and condemnation. What if we were completely wrong about all of this? Jesus says we are!

Since we are the ones who set it up this way, we are the ones who have the power to change our minds by being willing to look at our judgments and take responsibility for them. Others are simply a mirror, showing us what is in our own minds. The good news is that now we can do

something about the reflection we see of ourselves. With a willingness to look at the beliefs we hold, we have taken the first step in healing. Jesus says that what we have come to believe about ourselves is not true! It is just a belief we hold that we are guilty because we accepted the ego myth that we destroyed Heaven. The truth is that we did nothing. We simply accepted the tiny mad idea that we could separate ourselves from Love. Now we can look at these thoughts and laugh at their unreality. It is all only a dream. Our reality remains unchanged. **"Thus you return your mind as one to Him Who is your Self, and Who can never sin."** (W.121.6.5)

Now everyone in our lives can become our savior! Everyone we thought of as an enemy, everyone **"who seems to irritate you, or to cause regret in you if you should meet him; one you actively despise, or merely try to overlook"** (W.121.10.1) provides us with opportunities to look at our own anger and guilt projected out. Everyone who gives us a bad time, who frustrates us, or whom we believe has hurt us, is in fact helping us by giving us another opportunity to learn about who we really are in truth. This is the practice that Jesus urges for us when he hands us the key to our happiness. It is to take responsibility for our own projections that we have put onto others and see them in our own minds. It is to recognize how we use others to hurt ourselves and keep ourselves away from the love in our right minds. Forgiveness will undo this self-attack and open us to the love we have blocked from our awareness. It is not something we have to look for. When we release our judgments, the love shines forth.

"Each unforgiving mind presents you with an opportunity to teach your own how to forgive itself." (W.121.7.1) This is why giving and receiving are the same. It is what is meant by, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Through forgiveness, we discover there is only One Self. The "enemies" in our lives are part of our classroom for undoing the ego thought system. The Course calls them our special hate relationships. As we release them from hell, we release ourselves as well. They truly do hold the key to *our* salvation. We are as God created us--- already perfect. We have not sinned, though we have taught ourselves that sin is real. **"As sin is an idea you taught yourself, forgiveness must be learned by you as well, but from a Teacher other than yourself, Who represents the other Self in you."** (W.121.6.3) Thus, the self we think we made must be undone through forgiveness so we can remember who we truly are.

We need the Holy Spirit because He is not part of this cycle of sin, fear, and punishment that reflects our lives. We keep going around and around in this cycle, projecting our guilt onto others, blaming them for our condition, and expecting their wrath and retaliation in return. We don't have to look far to see that this as a condition of this world, whether in our personal lives, in the lives of others, with corporations, or world situations. We justify our fears, anger, and despair by giving "evidence" for it in the mistaken belief that the world is the cause of our problems rather than the knowing that our problems are caused by our own mistaken perceptions. Our mind is the cause of what we see. When we heal our minds through forgiveness, our world will change to a happier dream.

We have been turning to the ego to figure our way through the difficulties in our lives, and it has given us the same answer over and over, which is to look outside ourselves for the cause of our problems. The ego advises us to strategize about what to do when we experience difficulties, but its answers continue to take us farther and farther down the rabbit hole. Its answers only bring more guilt, pain, and attack in the form of problems in different forms. Given over to the Holy Spirit, everything is seen with vision and the miracle behind every problem shows us that the answer is always with us. It is to forgive and we will see everything differently. When you feel attacked or betrayed, you are given another chance since **"Each unforgiving mind presents you with an opportunity to teach your own how to forgive itself."** (W.121.7.1) The process for doing this is beautifully laid out in the practice instructions in this Lesson.

"The unforgiving mind does not believe giving and receiving are the same." (W.121.9.1) Jesus tells us that through forgiveness we will see both our "enemy" and our friend as one. We will learn to see that there are no differences in our brothers. **"And as you learn to see them both as one, we will extend the lesson to yourself, and see that their escape included yours."** (W.121.9.3) This is what forgiveness teaches us---We share the same interest. All there is is perfect Oneness. This world of differences is not real. And we all share the same need for waking up from this dream of death. Only by doing the forgiveness work will we escape from this nightmare.

In choosing someone to forgive, he asks us to think **"of someone you do not like, who seems to irritate you, or to cause regret in you if you should meet him; one you actively despise, or merely try to overlook."** (W.121.10.1) We don't necessarily think of these people as a cause for anger, yet Jesus reminds us that it is all anger, no matter what form it takes. There are no degrees of difficulty or differences in the illusion. All the anger is only within our own minds. We look for convenient places to deposit it in others whom we don't like. Through forgiveness, we are reclaiming it in our own minds and healing it there. Our innocence is always there in the mind and brought back to our own awareness through forgiveness.

The instructions for the longer practice periods are very specific and should be followed as described, with reminders throughout the day on the hour, ***"Forgiveness is the key to happiness. I will awaken from the dream that I am mortal, fallible and full of sin, and know I am the perfect Son of God."*** (W.121.13.6-7) The reason we can awaken is because we are the ones whose dream this is. Now we can choose to awaken by taking responsibility for the dream that we are dreaming and by forgiving those we hold responsible for our state of mind.

Love and blessings, Sarah
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