

ACIM Edmonton - Sarah's Reflections



LESSON 138 **Heaven is the decision I must make.**

Sarah's Commentary:

This Lesson is all about the desire of our hearts reflected in what we are choosing in every moment. The choice we make is between hell and Heaven, attack and forgiveness, body and spirit, guilt and innocence, and, ultimately, between illusion and truth. In other words, in every moment, we are making this choice, but if we don't understand the nature of this decision, we won't realize what we are choosing between. **"The choice cannot be made until alternatives are accurately seen and understood."** (W.138.9.2) Until we are able to see the insanity of the ego thought system with clarity and what purpose it serves as a defense against God's love, we won't see the alternatives that are available to us. The choice is made within the mind and is not about anything in the world; yet the ego has kept our focus on the outer world and the forms of this world.

Prior to this teaching, we probably had no awareness of the way the ego has established its domain in our lives. Throughout the Course, Jesus has laid out the ego's plan, which is to keep us mindless of the consequences of its part in our lives. The ego's plan has resulted in pain and suffering in our lives, but we don't always recognize its source. Instead, we blame circumstances outside of ourselves. We keep looking for some hope of happiness but have no idea where to find it as long as we identify with the ego. We keep looking to some future time, always outside ourselves, for happiness where it can't be found. We won't give up the hope of something better in the future until we can clearly see how deceived we have been.

The ego has no power, but we give it power when we align with it. When we recognize that all our pain and suffering comes from our decision to side with the ego, we will be motivated to give it up and realize that only the decision to forgive brings joy. We that there are a thousand choices to be made that confront us daily and this creates a lot of doubt as to what is the right thing to do. Jesus assures us, **"You make but one. And when that one is made, you will perceive it was no choice at all."** (W.138.4.4-5) When the choice is made for God, the ego simply disappears. It is not really a choice because the ego brings us nothing of value. **"For truth is true, and nothing else is true. There is no opposite to choose instead. There is no contradiction to the truth."** (W.138.4.6-8)

Initially, the decision was made outside this dream to choose the ego thought system. When that decision was made, we conveniently forgot that there was any other choice available to us. The ego made a convincing case to the Son of God that He had killed God, Who was now pursuing us. This is the God we are afraid to wake up to. This is the God of the ego that we subconsciously fear. This is the God we defend against with our plans and our sickness. The idea of separation came about because we listened to the ego, made the universe, made the body, took on a separate identity, and made a will separate from God's Will.

With these decisions, made by the mind, came guilt and fear of punishment. All of this is buried in the mind. Until we read and studied this Course, we had no idea of the unconscious programs running in the mind. The guilt in the mind feels overwhelming, but the ego has come up with a clever answer. It tells us, if we project the guilt in our minds that came with the separation and make others responsible for our problems, we will not have to take responsibility for our attack on God. Yet if our guilt is in others, we will fear their attacks; and now we think that we have to defend against those attacks to protect ourselves from them. This makes us feel very vulnerable. It is quite a setup that the ego keeps hidden from us. Its agenda is for us to never make another choice, as there would no longer be an ego if we were to withdraw our allegiance to it. Jesus is helping us to see the cost of following the ego's dictates so we can make the decision for Heaven, which is where our happiness lies.

We are dedicated to listening to the ego and addicted to this life of conflict, as there is an aspect of the struggle that we actually relish. It seems exciting to us to live on the edge in this drama of our lives where we apparently have a thousand choices every day. We can relive all the decisions in our minds and weave stories of adventure, heroism, victimhood, and martyrdom. We tell stories, chapter by chapter, of who did what to whom. We give power to these events, live on fear, and gather guilt like a basketful of goodies. All this does is maintains the ego and maintains our suffering. We invest in the world and in activities that distract us from the only choice to be made---the choice for Heaven. **"Without decision, time is but a waste and effort dissipated."** (W.138.3.3) Yet the world and all our situations and special relationships can serve an important purpose where everything can be used for the goal of peace of mind. Every situation can be used by the Holy Spirit for our healing. If a special relationship attracts us, it is not a bad thing that we must avoid. It can simply be turned over to the Holy Spirit to be used for His purpose. Our lives here are to be enjoyed!

Things seem real to us in the world through their opposites: If there is life, there is death. If there is light, there is dark. If there is good, there is bad, and if there is forgiveness, there is sin. It is a dualistic thought system. Everything is conceived in terms of opposites, but Jesus tells us, **"Creation knows no opposite."** (W.138.2.1) Opposites cannot exist in Oneness even though opposites do seem very real to us. In reality, Heaven is not a choice, as there is nothing to choose between. It is all One.

"Truth cannot come where it could only be perceived with fear." (W.138.2.6) In the presence of truth, our individual separate selves disappear into Eternal Oneness. We fear the undoing of the ego, which is why we defend against the truth and still cling to our specialness. **"Opposition makes the truth unwelcome, and it cannot come."** (W.138.2.8) If truth showed up in the world in its pure form, it would just be another option, which is not possible. **"Yet what is true in God's creation cannot enter here until it is reflected in some form the world can understand."** (W.138.2.5) The nonspecific love of God is translated in the world into specifics that we can understand.

In the world, contrasts are helpful for our learning and are used by the Holy Spirit to teach us the consequences of our decisions. We learn through discernment. We learn to see that when we choose with the ego, our experience is one of pain, suffering, and distress. When we choose a reflected form of God's love, which is forgiveness and healing, we experience the lifting of the burden of guilt and fear; and we experience the peace that comes from forgiving someone, the joy there is in releasing guilt, and the innocence we feel when we see it in our brothers. We feel the lightness of spirit when worry leaves us, and we walk in trust to follow guidance. The nonspecific love of God is now reflected in the specifics of this world. We can experience it with every choice

we make for healing and forgiveness instead of holding onto thoughts of anxiety, attack, depression, fear, and specialness.

I recently listened to an account from a friend whose sister was murdered. After an initial experience of anger, resentment, and bitterness, the Course came into her life and she learned the value of forgiveness. In her account, she discussed the contrast, in her own mind, of holding the grief and bitterness against the release she felt when she saw the "murderer" in her mind and chose forgiveness. She was able to see herself and her "brother" (the murderer) as innocent and felt joy and peace replace the grievances and pain. Seeming catastrophic events like this, which show up in our lives, can be used to help us make this choice. When we turn it over, the Holy Spirit will use anything we will give Him for our healing. When we experience the results of forgiveness and contrast the "gifts" of the ego with those of the Holy Spirit, we will become more and more motivated to choose forgiveness.

I spent about a year in Sedona in 2000, studying the Course. I remember a discussion about what a life of total peace would be like where there would be no stories to tell, no one to side against, and no conflict of any kind to intrude. Some viewed a peaceful life as boring and flat. This is precisely what the ego would have us believe by keeping us focused on the world instead of choosing against it. Our addiction to the dramas of our lives is our addiction to the ego. We actually like our stories and our thoughts and our opinions. As Byron Katie asks, "Who would you be without your stories?" We wonder the same thing.

We made this insanity in which we seem to live. **"In this insanely complicated world, Heaven appears to take the form of choice, rather than merely being what it is."** (W.138.6.1) We think that we like this **"insanely complicated world"** (W.138.6.1) that we made as an alternative to Heaven. We seem to like this world of opposites. We see the good as a contrast to the bad, and we hold conflicting goals that create conflict and distress for us. Yet Jesus says that it gets us nothing. Why would we want to spend effort and time on what brings us nothing of value? We think of these things as accomplishments, but he says that we are wasting our time and dissipating our efforts when we choose the illusion. **"It is spent for nothing in return, and time goes by without results."** (W.138.3.4) There is no sense of gain, for nothing is accomplished and nothing is learned.

Jesus tells us that we are the ones who made this hell, and we have the power within us to choose our release from it. We have made a protective shield for our egos, and with Heaven's help, we can bring it to our awareness so we can truly see that there is only one choice to be made. It requires vigilant mind-watching. When we are dedicated to healing, the world becomes a wonderful classroom, rather than a prison. Everything can now be used for the undoing of the deceived mind that thinks it is a body and separate from every other body. When we use time in this way, everything takes on meaning. I find that everything in my day actually becomes helpful and valuable for undoing the ego. This is all about undoing the way I see things, how I interpret what is happening in my day, why certain events and situations are showing up, and how disturbances can be helpful to looking within at the choices I have made. All of it has value; nothing is good or bad. It just is. It is not necessarily easy, but there is an underlying optimism that tells us we are holding the key to our own happiness. We know the way out of suffering, and we need not worry if we choose not to learn the Lesson, as it will show up for us again. It is such a beautiful way to live life, which is not judging what should or should not be happening but seeing it all as useful to the Holy Spirit.

"Choosing depends on learning." (W.138.5.1) Learning in the world is about correcting wrong perception so we can experience true perception, but it is still perception rather than the

knowledge of Heaven. Jesus is teaching us what the goal is, how to reach it, and what it offers us. When we recognize and accept our deep need for this truth, our motivation increases to do this work. When we learn that when we hurt our brother, we are hurting ourselves, we will choose to stop doing that. Until we recognize this, we won't understand that there is another choice to make when a brother seemingly attacks us.

It is wonderful to be reminded just how simple this choice for truth really is, but it is certainly not the way it looks to us. Inside each seemingly complicated situation in the world, we still have questions: Will I choose Heaven or hell in this situation? Will I choose to love or hate? Will I choose forgiveness or attack? Will I choose the Holy Spirit or the ego? Will I choose truth or illusion? Whatever the situation we seem to be faced with in what Jesus concedes is indeed "**an insanely complicated world,**" (W.138.6.1) there is just this one choice to be made, which is the only purpose for time. We made time for an unholy purpose, but now the Holy Spirit invites us to use it for a holy purpose by making the only choice---the choice for Heaven.

The ego's purpose for time is to demonstrate to us how all our hopes, ultimately, turn to despair and that life must end in death. In this life of opposites, we experience all kinds of conflict, and it does seem to us that "**In death alone are opposites resolved, for ending opposites is to die.**" (W.138.7.3) To the ego, salvation from the conflict of our lives is death. Jesus tells us, "**These mad beliefs can gain unconscious hold of great intensity, and grip the mind with terror and anxiety so strong that it will not relinquish its ideas about its own protection.**" (W.138.8.1) Clearly, we see our own protection as anything that supports our individual existence and keeps us from the love we are. Thus, we hold onto our defenses as a way to maintain our separate self. These include our specialness, judgments, anger, worries, depression, pain, pleasure, sickness, and our special relationships. This is the armor we believe protects us from the truth of who we really are. The truth is a threat to us, and so we feel we need to protect ourselves against it.

What does it mean when we choose Heaven, and exactly what are we choosing? Take a situation where we are very angry with someone. The ego urges us to stay with this anger, arguing that we are justified on the basis of what this person has seemingly done to us. Yet to keep the anger is to deny Heaven; to keep the anger is to stay in hell. The choice for peace can easily be made, yet we often find stubborn resistance and a lack of willingness to make this choice. To the ego, anger is powerful, and choosing peace seems weak and appears to let the "other" off the hook. Yet the alternative is to keep ourselves bound in chains and suffer the consequences of such a choice.

Today, the Lesson is not about learning the truth but about undoing the interferences to it. Our job is to find the resistance in our mind to the truth and to bring our anger, pain, plans, and attacks to the truth by looking at them and being willing to be shown another way. His light is there to shine away the darkness in our mind if we let Him. We must be willing to bring what is buried in our mind into awareness. It takes great honesty and courage. We want to hate, judge, see differences, accuse, blame, react in anger, and fix external problems, all of which seems natural to us in the face of attack or when problems confront us. Instead, we are invited first to look at what we are projecting and see that it all starts in our own minds. "**Projection makes perception.**" (T.21.IN.1.1) (ACIM OE T.21.I.1) When we ask for help and become aware of the choice to be made, we will recognize that one brings us stress and pain and the other release. Which will you choose today? Be vigilant in this. Vigilance is required in watching our thoughts.

Remind yourselves of the choice for Heaven with these words: "**Heaven is a decision I must make. I make it now, and will not change my mind, because it is the only thing I want.**" (W.138.12.5-6) Start the morning with the reminder that this world is a classroom for

undoing the thought system of the ego, and approach the day with the joy of learning what is in store for you today. It won't matter if the Lessons seem painful, as you can be glad they are there to support your goal of awakening. It is all for this one purpose. Turn away from the ego and, instead, choose the Holy Spirit as your Teacher today. Forgiveness is the means to your goal.

You are also invited to turn over your sleep to the Holy Spirit. It comes up in this Lesson when he says, **"Before we close our eyes in sleep tonight, we reaffirm the choice that we have made each hour in between. And now we give the last five minutes of our waking day to the decision with which we awoke."** (W.138.12.1-2)

"Heaven is the decision I must make. I make it now, and will not change my mind, because it is the only thing I want." (W.138.12.5-6)

Notice any despair you are feeling about your life, or any death temptation, as a belief that death will be an end to any conflict you experience. Notice how this belief keeps you from choosing Heaven. Ask for help of the Holy Spirit to stay on purpose with your choice for God. This is all about forgiveness of the thoughts of self-attack in our minds. If we truly are dedicated to making this choice for Heaven, we must use the means provided to us in the Course.

Love and blessings, Sarah
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