

ACIM Edmonton - Sarah's Reflections



LESSON 297 Forgiveness is the only gift I give.

Sarah's Commentary:

Lessons 295, 296, and 297 all remind us that everything we give we give to ourself. **"This is salvation's simple formula."** (W.297.1.3) We accept the Atonement for ourself, which means that we are accepting the Correction so there can be healing for our false thoughts and beliefs, which is how we are forgiven. Thus, **"Forgiveness is the only gift I give, because it is the only gift I want."** (W.297.1.1) Forgiveness is the recognition that what someone has done has had no effect on you. Through forgiveness, the thoughts we hold that block awareness of our true identity are released. What could we want more than to know who we are, and what could we want more than the gifts that come with this knowledge? They are the gifts of peace, of joy, of abundance, of innocence, and of the love that we are.

In our present state, we carry a lot of guilt. **"The certain outcome of the lesson that God's Son is guilty is the world you see. It is a world of terror and despair. Nor is there hope of happiness in it. There is no plan for safety that you can make that ever will succeed."** (T.31.I.7.4-7) (ACIM OE T.31.I.7) There is not a consistent state of joy or hope in this world that comes from our false self. Yet as we learn to forgive and see only the innocent Son of God in every brother, a world of hope and happiness opens up for us. **"The outcome of the lesson that God's Son is guiltless is a world in which there is no fear, and everything is lit with hope and sparkles with a gentle friendliness."** (T.31.I.8.1) (ACIM OE T.31.I.8)

Forgiveness is such a misunderstood concept. **"Forgiveness recognizes what you thought your brother did to you has not occurred. It does not pardon sins and make them real. It sees there was no sin."** (W.PII.Q1.What Is Forgiveness?1.1) This makes no sense unless we see it in the context that this world is an illusion and so the behaviors that are seen in the dream can have no real effect. Only the interpretation we give to behavior causes us pain. **"It is always an interpretation that gives rise to negative emotions, regardless of their seeming justification by what appears as facts."** (Manual for Teachers.17.4.2) But now we can turn to the Holy Spirit and ask for His help to see our brothers in a new light.

We are given a process to use whenever we are not joyous. It is basically a process of forgiveness described as follows:

"I must have decided wrongly, because I am not at peace." (T.5.VII.6.7) (ACIM OE T.5.IX.96) This means I must have decided to see guilt in my brother that is in my own mind and blame him because I am not feeling peace and joy. **"I made the decision myself, but I can also decide otherwise."** (T.5.VII.6.8) (ACIM OE T.5.IX.96) He is saying to us that we can

choose to change our thoughts. ***"I want to decide otherwise, because I want to be at peace. I do not feel guilty, because the Holy Spirit will undo all the consequences of my wrong decision if I will let Him."*** (T.5.VII.6.9-10) (ACIM OE T.5.IX.96) I can let the Holy Spirit undo my unloving perception of my brother. As I take responsibility for the projection of my guilt onto my brother and look at my mistake with the Holy Spirit, my wrong-minded perception is healed. ***"I choose to let Him, by allowing Him to decide for God for me."*** (T.5.VII.6.11) (ACIM OE T.5.IX.96) I ask Holy Spirit to let me see my brother through His eyes so I can see my brother's innocence and know that I too am innocent.

When we deeply and sincerely choose the Holy Spirit over the ego, we withdraw our investment in guilt by accepting its unreality. To accept the Atonement for ourself is to accept the Correction already in our own mind. The Holy Spirit is the great Corrector. The means offered is through forgiveness, which allows us to see our brothers as they truly are so we can know who we are as the Christ Self. To see our brothers as they truly are requires that we become aware of our own judgments and bring them to the Holy Spirit.

Forgiveness is such a misunderstood concept because, in the traditional definition, we seem to be forgiving someone else for something real that has happened. The Course definition of forgiveness puts the focus on our own mind and requires that we clean up our own act. It is to recognize the guilt, self-judgment, and unworthiness we hold in our own mind and have it healed there. There is no one "else" doing anything to us. All they do is to show us a mirror of what is unhealed in our own mind. We say we want to know the Self we are as love, so we can indeed be grateful to our brothers for helping us to see what is need of healing in the mind. Through their reflection, we now have access to divine transformation. When we get triggered by something someone says or does, it is actually a gift, as we are now provided with an opportunity to see what is unhealed in our own mind. No, we don't always welcome these gifts when they appear as attacks on us. Yet contrary to how the ego sees this, whatever triggers us will bring us closer to the gifts that can be revealed in us if we don't reject what is being revealed.

Recently, my partner had suggested that we spend an evening together at dinner and a movie. Meanwhile, his buddy called to say he had acquired two tickets to the football game. I saw he really wanted to go to the game in spite of his commitment to me. I knew it would be easy to make him feel guilty about the importance of keeping his commitment. Yet would I want this, knowing where he would rather choose to be? In my decision to offer him the freedom and even the blessing to be with his friend, I received the gift of happiness. There was no lingering sense of residual blame or recrimination. It felt very freeing. Yes, there were initially some twinges of resentment, but I chose to simply look at them rather than to act on them. I have had many experiences of using control through guilt in my relationships, which always results in suffering. Yes, we get what we want in behavior, but we lose the love that can only come by extending freedom. Why would we want anyone to be with us when they wish to be elsewhere? Thus, the gift I gave was also to myself. There was no loss but only gain for both.

To forgive is to undo the separate self. It is to undo specialness and all the fear that comes with it. It is about giving up comparisons we make with others, giving up making everything about us, giving up competing with our brothers, and giving up bargaining to get what we think we want and need. It requires daring to look more deeply at what is showing up in our own minds. When we listen to the ego and get triggered, we set up defenses. But when we do that, we unknowingly continue to attract precisely what we don't want. We feel justified in our defense, but the cost to

us is that our guilt remains hidden and the gift of what could be seen and healed is lost. Though the opportunity is missed in the moment, Jesus reminds us, "**Trials are but lessons that you failed to learn, presented once again, so where you made a faulty choice before you now can make a better one, and thus escape all pain that what you chose before has brought you.**" (T.31.VIII.3.1) (ACIM OE T.31.VIII.87)

We believe our identity is of a body, living in the world for a short time, and then we die. We experience all kinds of challenges and conflicts in the world. Try as we might, peace and happiness seem to elude us. We feel alone and separate from other bodies, also wandering in the world, looking for scraps of pleasure and ways to feel special. The world does not seem to have much purpose until we take up our special function, which is to forgive. The backdrop for our function is based on our abilities and talents that we bring to the world. When given over to the Holy Spirit for His purposes, the content of our function, regardless of what it looks like in the world, is forgiveness. The form of our function in the world varies from person to person, but the content is all the same.

We believe that we can give our guilt away and thus escape from it. In truth, when we blame another, we are only hurting ourself by accumulating more guilt, since giving and receiving are the same. The Holy Spirit reminds us that the same principle is reflected in salvation's simple formula in that forgiveness is always for ourself. It may appear that we are forgiving another, but we are forgiving and releasing only our own thoughts about them. And in that release, we are set free from the guilt in our own mind.

We have such an investment in seeing others guilty and ensuring that we hold them bound to punishment for their "crimes and misdemeanors." Yet the Holy Spirit shows us a loving God, Who sees everyone worthy of salvation, regardless of what they appear to have done. We are all innocent. We experience our innocence as we extend forgiveness to our brothers and thus come to know our own innocence. As we extend miracles, we receive miracles. The only reason we don't receive miracles is if we have decided someone else is not deserving of them.

Only our own thoughts are the source of our pain. We are not the victims. We have created our reality. That is the message of the movie, *What the Bleep Do We Know*, which clearly articulates how we become addicted to our emotions (the ego) that leads to our experience and reflects the beliefs we hold. We keep playing out the same scenarios in our lives over and over in various forms until we decide to choose another way. It is a loop we seem to live in where our false beliefs just keep getting reinforced over and over. The loop starts with a belief. For example, I may believe that to feel loved, others have to agree with me. When they don't, I feel betrayed. Now their betrayal affirms my belief in my unworthiness. What I have done is set up rules for my relationships. Instead of freeing my brothers to have their own thoughts and opinions, I have bound them to my rules, based on my beliefs. Thus, my grievances are all based on beliefs that I hold about myself and how others are supposed to be around me. By healing my own mind, I free my brothers and myself. I can only do that when I look at my beliefs. "**But an unrecognized belief is a decision to war in secret, where the result of conflict are kept unknown and never brought to reason, to be considered sensible or not.**" (T.24.I.2.2) (ACIM OE T.24.II.4) In other words, we experience the effects of our hidden thoughts, but we can't change what we don't know.

Jesus tells us, **"No one can be unjust to you, unless you have decided first to be unjust."** (T.25.IX.7.7) (ACIM OE T.25.X.84) Any problems we have are there by our own election, challenging as that is for us to accept. The decision to be unjust means we wanted someone to lose while we benefited from their loss. **"The secret enemies of peace, your least decision to choose attack instead of love, unrecognized and swift to challenge you to combat and to violence far more inclusive than you think, are there by your election."** (T.24.I.2.6) (ACIM OE T.24.II.4) In other words, we attack a brother because that is what we want to do. Then we feel guilty and guilt demands punishment. Now we need to dream punishment into our lives in the form of problems. Because of the guilt coming from our own attacks, we think we deserve to be punished. Thus, guilt is at the core of every problem we have. As we turn our misguided thoughts over to the Holy Spirit and see that there truly is another way to see everything and everyone, we experience the miracle, which shifts our perception from guilt to innocence. Now we experience the happiness and innocence that are always there behind our misguided thoughts and perceptions.

The question is, why don't we choose it? Why do we stubbornly hold onto our perspectives, our grievances, our judgments, our anger, and our worries? Isn't it because we feel it is justified by what someone has seemingly done to us and we refuse to release our perceptions of the situation? Yet in this process, we continue to hurt ourselves. What would our lives be like if we saw clearly what we do to anyone we are doing to ourselves? How would our lives look if we knew in a deep and clear way that to gain at anyone's expense is to hurt ourselves?

Every step we take in forgiveness is a step closer to the recognition of the truth of what we are. **"Father, how certain are Your ways; how sure their final outcome, and how faithfully is every step in my salvation set already, and accomplished by Your grace."** (W.297.2.1) Today, we can be grateful that salvation is available to us through the acceptance of our function of forgiveness as our way back to the Self. We have wandered from our home, but we have not been left without an Answer. We just need to do our part, which is to bring our misperceptions to the Answer and experience the miracle. Our part is only to bring awareness to our thoughts and look calmly without judging ourselves.

"The world is full of miracles. They stand in shining silence next to every dream of pain and suffering, of sin and guilt. They are the dream's alternative, the choice to be the dreamer, rather than deny the active role in making up the dream." (T.28.II.12.1-3) (ACIM OE T.28.III.27)

Love and blessings, Sarah
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