

ACIM Edmonton - Sarah's Reflections



Lesson 322

I can give up but what was never real.

Sarah's Commentary:

While to God "***all sacrifice remains forever inconceivable,***" (W.322.2.1) to us, surrender feels like we are giving up something we still value. We don't see that all we give up is fear. We fear giving up control and the identity we have established for ourselves. Since the ego has convinced us that we stole our individuality by killing God, our fear is that it will now be payback time. He will rise up and make demands of us that will hurt us, and so, we set up defenses to protect ourselves from what we have made of Him---an angry God.

A core aspect of the ego thought system is based on the notion that for me to get what I want, sacrifice is required. The origin of the thought system of sacrifice came with the belief that for our individual self to exist, God had to be sacrificed because individuality and Oneness can't both exist. It is a case of "one or the other;" God or me. This thought system is now in the mind and played out in the world of form where for us to get what we want, someone must lose. Thus, a world of competition was set up where our gain is someone's loss, and this shows up in our relationships, which are ones of bargaining. I give you something, but I expect something back, and if you don't give it to me, I will hold you guilty and you deserve to die as punishment for your sin.

This may sound drastic but this is how much we value our specialness. "**Always attacked and always furious, with anger always fully justified, you have pursued this goal with vigilance you never thought to yield, and effort that you never thought to cease. And all this grim determination was for this; you wanted specialness to be the truth.**" (T.24.VI.11.4-5) (ACIM T.24.VII.59)

To surrender to God, we fear we will have to sacrifice everything we hold as important in our lives. Our fear is that we will have to give up our pleasures, our special relationships, our money, our comforts, and everything else we value. Jesus assures us, we give up nothing of value because what we put value on brings suffering. What we struggle to hold onto are the things that keep us imprisoned and in pain. Holding onto what has no value is the source of all our pain. Do we want to forgo "**a resting place so still no sound except a hymn to Heaven rises up to gladden God the Father and the Son?**" (T.29.V.1.3) (ACIM OE T.29.VI.31) Is there anything more valuable than this kind of peace that can only come from giving up what was never real, so we can remember we are God's Son?

Our fear in following this path is related to the idea of renunciation, which shows up in many religious traditions. Traditional religion is all about sacrifice where suffering proves that we are

worthy of God's love. We know of stories of great spiritual beings who have sacrificed for an anticipated reward in Heaven. Helen Schucman had this to say about renunciation: "You are not asked to sacrifice the good or the desirable in any way. You are asked only to renounce all things that destroy your peace. For God is Love. Center your thoughts on Him, and you will see He gives you everything, with neither more nor less conceivable from this time forth, and on to the eternal. Sorrow is inaccurate perception; pain is but a sad mistake. Renounce but this, and you call unto Christ to pardon and renew."

"Many have chosen to renounce the world while still believing its reality. And they have suffered from a sense of loss, and have not been released accordingly. Others have chosen nothing but the world, and they have suffered from a sense of loss still deeper, which they did not understand." (W.155.4.2-4)

"Between these paths there is another road that leads away from loss of every kind, for sacrifice and deprivation both are quickly left behind. This is the way appointed for you now. You walk this path as others walk, nor do you seem to be distinct from them, although you are indeed. Thus can you serve them while you serve yourself, and set their footsteps on the way that God has opened up to you, and them through you. (W.155.5.1-4)

"Illusion still appears to cling to you, that you may reach them. Yet it has stepped back. And it is not illusion that they hear you speak of, nor illusion that you bring their eyes to look on and their minds to grasp. Nor can the truth, which walks ahead of you, speak to them through illusions, for the road leads past illusion now, while on the way you call to them, that they may follow you." (W.155.6.1-4)

"All roads will lead to this one in the end. For sacrifice and deprivation are paths that lead nowhere, choices for defeat, and aims that will remain impossible. All this steps back as truth comes forth in you, to lead your brothers from the ways of death, and set them on the way to happiness." (W.155.7.1-3)

I remember asking my boss, a minister in the legislative assembly, what he liked about his job. He said it was the adrenaline high he got from it. The world's "pleasures" are like that. They give us a thrill, another conquest, another momentary gain, another accomplishment, and an adrenaline rush, but how long does it last and how deeply satisfying is it? That is what we are asked to look at when we look at the idea of sacrifice.

As you go about your day today, ask yourself: What do I really want? Will it bring me the deep peace I say I desire? If we ask this in everything, we will start to see what is important to us. We can investigate what we are holding onto as important and to question its value to us. Does it bring me the freedom I am looking for? Is it deeply satisfying? Will going out to shop for another piece of clothing bring me a deep sense of peace and joy? Is that vacation in the sun the answer to my need for peace and happiness?

Are we called to give it all up for God? No, that would feel like sacrifice as long as we still want it and still believe it has value for us. We are being asked to recognize real value, which is to know the Self we are, as created by God. This illusory world is where we came to forget our reality and to hide from the truth. **"And every dream serves only to conceal the Self Which is God's only Son, the likeness of Himself, the Holy One Who still abides in Him forever, as**

He still abides in me." (W.322.1.4) Jesus tells us, in giving up our investment in illusion, we are sacrificing nothing but the fearful thoughts we hold in mind. When we recognize this, there is no sacrifice. What is valueless simply falls away.

"And as illusions go I find the gifts illusions tried to hide, awaiting me in shining welcome, and in readiness to give God's ancient messages to me." (W.322.1.2) Jesus is helping us to see that the spiritual life is not about someone taking our toys away or requiring us to give up what we still find valuable and what we think will make us happy. He is, instead, helping us to see that these things will never make us happy and only bring a deeper sense of loss. When we truly see that our attachments to them bring only suffering and loss, we will no longer look to them for our happiness. Everything can be put to a holy purpose. The question to ask ourselves in everything is, "What is it for?" It is either to wake us up to what we are or to keep us invested in the illusory world.

We are being asked to look at our world honestly and to look at our experience in it and evaluate it truly. In Chapter 19, **"The Obstacles to Peace,"** we are reminded, **"It is impossible to seek pleasure through the body and not find pain."** (T.19.IVB.12.1) (ACIM OE T.19.Vb.71)

In Chapter 27 VI, **"The Witnesses to Sin,"** (ACIM OE 27 VII) pain and pleasure are shown to have only one purpose---to make the body real. Even those things we think will give us pleasure in the world just give us temporary relief or a temporary "high," which fades quickly, and we soon start looking for the next "fix." We talk of these "pleasurable" events as "good memories." Sometimes, I revisit pictures of family gatherings, vacations I have taken, events I have enjoyed, and situations I have excelled at only to note them as momentary satisfaction with no real staying power. In other words, these so-called pleasures quickly fade from our experience, and when we think about them honestly, we see that all pleasures are tinged with pain because what seemed to give us pleasure is transitory. The ego continually seeks but never finds. It is like the thrill seeker who needs bigger and bigger thrills to get the "kick" he is looking for.

Now, Jesus contrasts these "substitutes" with the real thing--- the experience of God's Love and the experience of His peace and joy. He keeps assuring us that we give up nothing when we give up our illusions. When we look honestly at our lives, which is what he asks us to do, we will see that **"Each thing you value here is but a chain that binds you to the world, and it will serve no other end but this. For everything must serve the purpose you have given it, until you see a different purpose there. The only purpose worthy of your mind this world contains is that you pass it by, without delaying to perceive some hope where there is none."** (W.128.2.1-3) Only what is eternal has value and anything that is not eternal is valueless and brings us more pain and guilt.

Jesus asks us to **"Be speeded on your way by honesty, and let not your experiences here deceive in retrospect. They were not free from bitter cost and joyless consequence."** (T.30.V.9.11-12) (ACIM OE T.30.VI.65)

"Do not look back except in honesty. And when an idol tempts you, think of this: There never was a time an idol brought you anything except the 'gift' of guilt. Not one was bought except at cost of pain, nor was it ever paid by you alone." (T.30.V.10.1-4) (ACIM OE T.30.VI.66-67)

Nothing will be taken away from us. Nothing happens against our will. We are only invited to contrast what the eternal gifts are with those the world offers. There is nothing we need to give up. In fact, we can give them over for a different purpose. For example, our home, which I once referred to as a gilded cage after my year-long retreat in Sedona, is now being used by the Holy Spirit for His purposes. My computer is being used to communicate His messages. My body can be used by Him to give love, as can my car, my money, and everything else I think of as mine. The question is always, "What is it for?" Increasingly, I simply find things of no interest that I once found pleasurable. I no longer find shopping "fun." I don't have the interest I once had in traveling to exotic places. I have lost my interest in concerts and plays, for the most part, and movies and books are no longer used as a distraction, but only for watching the mind with Holy Spirit.

I no longer want to depend on myself to solve problems. I trust what is given to me by the Holy Spirit when I turn to Him for answers. My trust in His answers has grown considerably. Are we being asked to give up what we still think we want? Should we feel guilty if we look for an escape in the movies? Absolutely not. It is not helpful to deny ourselves what we still think we want and to feel guilty when we indulge in our worldly "pleasures." Eventually, we will see, **"It is the price that must be paid for the denial of truth."** (Manual for Teachers.13.5.3) In other words, we pay the price in fear and lack of peace when we deny the truth of what we are. It is the sacrifice of love, **"which must be paid by fear."** (T.15.X.6.8) (ACIM OE T.15.X.98)

There is a wonderful passage in the Manual for Teachers, Section 13, **"What is the Real Meaning of Sacrifice?"** In this Section, Jesus acknowledges, **"It takes great learning both to realize and to accept the fact that the world has nothing to give."** (M.13.2.1) Every time we make a decision for anything in the world, we sacrifice our real joy. The joy is always there, waiting for us to accept it, but it requires that we see it as the only thing we truly desire. **"And as illusions go I find the gifts illusions tried to hide, awaiting me in shining welcome, and in readiness to give God's ancient messages to me."** (W.322.1.2) Until we experience this, we will question the truth of it. Jesus continually reminds us how beautiful this experience of joy is, and tells us, **"I am leading you to a new kind of experience that you will become less and less willing to deny."** (T.11.VI.6) (ACIM OE T.10.VII.61)

When we step outside the dream and look with the Holy Spirit, we see that what we hold onto is hurtful to us. We hold onto an image of the self that does not even exist. We hold onto a world that is not "out there," but only in our own mind. We don't give up the forms of this world, but we use them now for the Holy Spirit's purpose.

Love and blessings, Sarah
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