

ACIM Edmonton - Sarah's Reflections



LESSON 105 **God's peace and joy are mine.**

Sarah's Commentary:

We know we have received the gifts of God when we give them. We can't know what we have and what we are until we give. This is a central thought in the Course. In fact, Jesus says that reversing our view of giving is a **"major learning goal this course has set."** (W.105.3.1) What is your idea of giving? So often it is about what we can get in return. In the world's perspective, to give is to lose, and when we give, we usually expect some kind of reciprocity. We generally expect to get something back in return for what we have given. If I am kind and generous to you, I might expect gratitude, kindness, or generosity in return. When we really understand that there is no need for reciprocity, because we are only giving to ourselves, then we can experience true giving where there are no expectations.

"God's peace and joy are yours. Today we will accept them, knowing they belong to us. And we will try to understand these gifts increase as we receive them." (W.105.1.1-3) How do we accept God's peace and joy? We recognize that they are in us now and belong to us. Now everyone must share in our peace and joy. These attributes are already in everyone because they have been given to all by God. We all share in the Oneness of God. The ego would have us believe that if we have peace and joy, we must have gained at someone's expense. It is the belief in one or the other. If I am happy, I have won my happiness at someone's expense, and they have therefore lost what I have gained. This is why we feel guilty when we feel very happy, and why we believe happiness can't last. We feel that we don't deserve to be happy. We tell ourselves that there are people suffering in the world and that we should feel guilty if we are happy.

A friend recently gave me some items in her garage sale for which I paid what she asked. Later, I noticed there was a small item I had picked up that I had not paid for. I assumed it would perhaps be worth about three to five dollars. When I phoned her and told her I wanted to pay for this item, she told me I could pay for the lunch we had scheduled the following week. Lunch would be in the neighborhood of twenty dollars. All of a sudden I felt as though I had lost in this transaction. The bargain was not in my favor. It was another opportunity to look at my idea of value and a sense of having lost. But to the spirit, nothing can be lost. We are only giving to ourselves all the time. The gifts we give truly have no strings attached, and then we truly receive. **"The truly given gift entails no loss."** (W.105.1.6)

The thought that there are winners and losers originated in the mind with the belief that we stole our identity from God. Now we have our individual self at His expense because there can't be both God and me in Oneness. If I exist, then He cannot. It is a thought of "one or the other," meaning that if I win, someone must lose. It is how we function in the illusory world. But with this thought comes the belief that we have done something terribly wrong, so we feel guilty. It is not a conscious thought in us, but don't we all carry a vague feeling that we are wrong, although we are not sure

why? When we hold onto this belief, then any happiness we feel is tinged with guilt, because we feel someone must have lost if we have gained. For example, when I am happy in my relationship, it is because my needs have been met. My expectations have been met, and you have sacrificed on my behalf. Now I feel loved and supported by you. I have received what I want from you. Yet with such a bargain in a relationship, any happiness I experience is tinged with guilt. It is because, if we got what we wanted, then we feel that at some level we must have stolen it. It is a reflection of the belief that we stole God's gifts and hid them in the world to escape His wrath. So it seems like peace and joy can't be ours without being accompanied by the feeling that we don't really deserve to have them. If we have peace and joy, there is a feeling that someone else must be deprived.

This idea is really developed in Chapter 16 where Jesus talks about our special relationships. These are what he calls the **"bargains made with guilt."** (W.105.1.5) They are bargains made with guilt because in our special relationships, we give our gifts in exchange for what we expect to receive from the other. Yet we want something better than what we gave. Our special relationships are about trying to extract from the other gifts of greater value than the ones we gave. We each want to give as little as possible to get as much as possible. All the conflict we experience in our relationships is based on this premise. We are constantly trying to extract from the other what will best meet our needs. In the end, it is the basis for our misery and suffering because now we live in a state of guilt. Healing requires this be looked at with great honesty. Otherwise, we exempt ourselves from this process, seeing ourselves as innocent while others are the guilty ones, withholding from us what we are trying to extract from them.

"Each partner tries to sacrifice the self he does not want for one he thinks he would prefer. And he feels guilty for the 'sin' of taking, and of giving nothing of value in return. How much value can he place upon a self that he would give away to get a 'better' one?" (T.16.V.7.5-7) (ACIM OE T.16.VI.49) We can't stand to be happy for long because our guilt says that we don't deserve it. With each bargain that we make in our special relationships, our guilt is reinforced because we are constantly making bargains to serve our needs at the expense of our brothers and exchanging our gifts of little worth for ones where we hope to gain with each exchange.

The belief that God has lost because I have taken His love and joy for myself is the basis for what I have carried into the thought system I hold in the world. It is such a foundational belief in our lives and so deeply defended against, which makes it very challenging to see, yet it is the foundation of everyone's lives here. In order to recognize this pattern in our lives, we must stay very vigilant about our motivations and intentions so we can bring them to awareness. We can't heal what we don't see. To see it, we must look behind our defenses and be willing to be very honest with ourselves without judging ourselves.

Applying these Lessons in our daily lives and staying very vigilant in watching our thoughts is important if we are to make progress in undoing this thought system. **"This strange distortion of what giving means pervades all levels of the world you see. It strips all meaning from the gifts you give, and leaves you nothing in the ones you take."** (W.105.2.3-4)

The ego constantly wants to prove to us that it is the source of our love and our life, not God. While we invest in its thought system, we will feel guilty when we experience peace and joy, because these "gifts" come at someone's expense. Yet true giving entails no loss. **"God's gifts will never lessen when they are given away. They but increase thereby."** (W.105.3.4-5) This is an authentic kind of giving because we give, and we know that in this giving, we can't lose. We then won't feel guilty in receiving the gifts we give and receive. We are undoing the idea of giving to get. We are learning, increasingly, through the application of the thought system Jesus is teaching

that all we give is given to ourselves, as Lesson 126 reminds us. Every time we bring our specialness to awareness and are willing to experience healing, we receive the miracle. Specialness tells us we are number one. It is all about me.

Now Jesus tells us, **"For giving has become a source of fear, and so you would avoid the only means by which you can receive. Accept God's peace and joy, and you will learn a different way of looking at a gift. God's gifts will never lessen when they are given away. They but increase thereby."** (W.105.3.2-5) Ultimately, our fear is that we will be punished for what we have stolen from God and are taking from our brothers in the self-serving bargains we try to make with everyone. Now we are called to bring the guilt, specialness, hate, and fear in our minds to the altar of truth, so we can experience the gifts of peace given us by God, Whose infinite love for us is boundless.

"As Heaven's peace and joy intensify when you accept them as God's gift to you, so does the joy of your Creator grow when you accept His joy and peace as yours." (W.105.4.1) Jesus is saying that God's completion depends on our acceptance of His gift to us. This is not a statement to be taken literally, as God's joy is complete now. Nothing is lacking in Him. It is just an expression of how much we should take to heart the importance for ourselves of accepting the fullness of God's love for us. With the acceptance of the truth about ourselves comes gratitude for the joy we are and the joy we receive in giving with no expectations of anything in return, because the gift is received by us as it is given.

Today, we are asked to choose someone we think of as an enemy to whom we have denied peace and joy. We have forgotten that they are the same as us and **"under the equal laws of God."** (W.105.6.2) In seeing differences with our brother, we have denied ourselves the peace and joy in us both. Now we can claim the peace and joy we have denied ourselves by seeing our brother as innocent. **"And here you must return to claim them as your own."** (W.105.6.4) The peace and joy we give our brother are what we receive for ourselves, as we are one with every brother. Any attack we make on another is an attack on ourselves. Now we learn that how we see our brother is how we see ourselves. We are all the same in our divinity. This sameness is a reflection of the one Self we are. We all hold the same thought system that came with the separation, and we also all hold the same healing light of the Holy Spirit within our minds. Here there are no differences despite appearances in the world of form.

When we become willing to take responsibility for our guilt by seeing that it is only ourselves we are attacking, we can bring the guilt back to our own minds and choose to give it over to Spirit. By bringing our projections to the Holy Spirit, they are released. **"Now are you ready to accept the gift of peace and joy God has given you. Now are you ready to experience the joy and peace you have denied yourself."** (W.105.7.4-5) Only by silencing the ego's voice of specialness will we hear the Voice of the Holy Spirit. In order to hear His Voice, we need to look at all the ways we interfere. We do this when we express impatience, irritation, think unkindly of others, gossip about them, get frustrated, and all the other ways we throw our peace away. When any brother tempts us to throw away our peace and joy, it is because we actually want them to betray us so we can blame them for taking our joy from us. We have actually chosen to throw away our peace and project onto them the choice we have made, making them responsible for our lack of peace. No one can take our peace unless we give them the power to do so. By choosing to take responsibility for everything that seems to happen to me, I increasingly come to recognize that I truly am not a victim of the world I see.

Today, we choose to release our misperceptions and offer blessings instead, so we can receive the blessings for ourselves. Every one of our brothers deserves to receive this blessing from us with no exceptions. It is **"their right under the equal laws of God."** (W.105.6.2)

Today, we are called to look at who we are withholding blessings from and recognize that when we do, we are only withholding them from ourselves. By cutting someone off from my love, I am separating myself from love. When I open my heart to my so-called "enemies" by seeing their call for love and understanding, rather than focusing on their behavior, I am opening up to the gift of peace and joy God is holding out for me. Thus, I am opening myself to receive these gifts. It is not something we receive first and then give, but in fact, we give in order to know we have received. The gifts of peace and joy are already in us. We practice this Lesson, not just by affirming God's peace and joy are ours, but by letting go of the barriers we have against recognizing these gifts already in us.

Our "enemies" are not really outside of us but reflect our own inner self-hatred, which we project onto our brothers. The self-hatred must be seen for what it is if we are to heal our minds. To accept the gifts of God, we must take the self-hatred that we hold in our minds and project onto our brothers, and take responsibility for it. As we turn it over to the Holy Spirit, He reminds us that it is not the truth about ourselves, nor our brothers. Our brothers are innocent, just as we are. We are the same. When we see others as different from ourselves, we are always trying to get, bargain, and see ourselves as the special ones who deserve more than what others get. It is important to look at our motivations and be very, very honest in recognizing the guilt these relationships entail. We are worth the effort that it takes to remain vigilant in watching our minds. What we don't see can't be healed.

Love and blessings, Sarah
huemmert@shaw.ca

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