

## ACIM Edmonton - Sarah's Reflections



### LESSON 190

### **I choose the joy of God instead of pain.**

#### **Sarah's Commentary:**

Now we shift from the beauty we found in the Lesson yesterday to a much darker perspective, as we look at the whole thought system of the ego and how the guilt in the mind has been projected onto the body. When we are in pain of any kind and experience sickness, we feel removed from peace and joy. At such times, it is hard to realize that we are not our pain and suffering and that pain is a choice. In saying that pain is our responsibility and that we can choose joy instead, the inclination is to feel guilty instead of recognizing that we are responsible for our thoughts. Yet only our thoughts are what cause us pain. (W.190.5.1)

It is easier to see that only our thoughts cause us to suffer if we can look at other aspects of our lives. For example, the rejection of a friend is not what has hurt me, but my thoughts about the experience bring pain to my mind. The rudeness of the woman at the store has not taken away my peace, but only my thoughts about the situation are painful. The person who almost backed into me as I was in the grocery store parking lot has not hurt me, but my thoughts about this person create distress for me. In the same way, if I have some physical pain, my thoughts are the source of the pain and not anything outside of my mind.

When I went through a painful process with dental surgery and a bone transplant procedure and experienced the physical sensation that we call "pain," I reminded myself that the sensation I was feeling did not have to cause suffering. Despite the apparent pain, I could choose peace. We can at least practice reducing the mental suffering that goes along with pain. While the pain may not entirely vanish, the suffering can at least be diminished, if not eliminated, from the mind. It is not necessarily easy to apply this practice in painful situations, but it is effective because, as we hold onto thoughts of distress and feel discouraged, suffering intensifies. My experience with emotional pain is that it has been even more excruciating than any physical pain I have experienced.

Our thoughts can be very obsessive and keep us in hell. This is when it is especially important to do the practice of denying the ability of these thoughts to hurt us and to bring our minds to peace. When I was going through a really difficult time in my life, I held onto the words of the Course like a life raft. I used positive self-talk, reflecting Course Lessons. I inquired deeply as to what was really upsetting about the situation based on what I was believing and valuing. Once we start on this path, it is like swallowing a truth pill that cannot be expelled. In other words, there is no turning back. Yes, we will delay and procrastinate, but once we have experienced the power of our divinity, we can never return to the ego thought system entirely.

It is not easy to accept the thought that we can choose peace when we are suffering or when we see someone in our lives suffering with pain, illness, or frailty of any kind. In fact, the most often stated comments we hear or express are "How could God do this to me or to them?" "A loving God would not allow us to suffer." **"If God is real, there is no pain. If pain is real, there is no God."** (W.190.3.3-4) When we are in pain, we feel abandoned by God (W.190.2.5) and do not experience his eternal Love for us. Instead of feeling guilty when we experience pain, this Lesson asks us to see the foolishness of this thought (W.190.4.1) and to laugh at such insane ideas. (W.190.4.2)

Certainly, we can all attest that when we are in pain, it is hard to choose joy in such circumstances. We become our pain. **"Pain demonstrates the body must be real. It is a loud, obscuring voice whose shrieks would silence what the Holy Spirit says, and keep His words from your awareness."** (T.27.VI.1.1-2) (ACIM OE T.27.VII.54) At times like this, when fear has gripped the mind, medications that mask the symptoms are suggested. Jesus refers to these medications as magic. He acknowledges that they can be helpful, temporary solutions that help to reduce our fear and allow us to work with our thoughts. However, while we alleviate the symptoms with medication, we must recognize that it is not a cure.

Some years ago, I was at a workshop with Dr. Parkin, who is a medical intuitive trained by Carolyn Myss. For every bodily dysfunction she diagnosed, she would prescribe the source of the problem in the mind. For example, a problem in the pancreas was a lack of sweetness in one's life. A pain in the abdomen was anger held in. Back pain was holding back love. Chest problems were a lack of compassion. A sore throat may hold someone back who fears speaking the truth, and so on. Jesus addresses this when he says, **"Sickness takes many forms, and so does unforgiveness. The forms of one but reproduce the forms of the other, for they are the same illusion. So closely is one translated into the other, that a careful study of the form a sickness takes will point quite clearly to the form of unforgiveness that it represents."** (Psychotherapy Pamphlet.2.VI.5.1-3)

The intent here is obviously not to feel guilty for having experiences of sickness, or to make someone else, who is suffering, experience more guilt. Yet if our thoughts are the source of all pain, then we have the power within us to heal those thoughts. While Jesus affirms the relationship between the symptom and the thought it represents, he goes on to say that there is not much point in bothering with this analysis since it will not affect the cure. **"Yet seeing this will not effect a cure. That is achieved by only one recognition; that only forgiveness heals an unforgiveness, and only an unforgiveness can possibly give rise to sickness of any kind."** (P.2.VI.5.4-5)

Pain tells us that we are something we are not. It tells us that our body is our reality. **"Pain is but witness to the Son's mistakes in what he thinks he is."** (W.190.2.3) We have projected onto our bodies the guilt we feel about our belief that we have separated from God, and this guilt is the source of our pain. I have found that I can increasingly connect instances of getting a cold to unforgiving thoughts. Jesus tells us, **"Its purpose is the same as pleasure, for they both are means to make the body real. What shares a common purpose is the same. This is the law of purpose, which unites all those who share in it within itself. Pleasure and pain are equally unreal, because their purpose cannot be achieved. Thus are they means for nothing, for they have a goal without a meaning."** (T.27.VI.1.4-8) (ACIM OE T.27.VII.54) The purpose of pain and pleasure are to attempt to prove that the body is real, but this purpose cannot be achieved. It is impossible to prove that the body is real. The body is nothing and has no meaning except what we give it in the illusion. It is just a dream figure. The

only purpose of pain and pleasure is to try to prove that **"You are here, within this body, and you can be hurt."** (T.27.VI.2.2) (ACIM OE T.27.VII.55)

The truth is, **"Your Self is radiant in this holy joy, unchanged, unchanging and unchangeable, forever and forever."** (W.190.6.5) We use pain as protection to keep us from awareness of that truth. By focusing all our attention on our pain and suffering, it becomes our existence. **"Pain is the ransom you have gladly paid not to be free."** (W.190.8.2) We gladly agree to suffer to prove that we are right about who we say we are---limited beings that exist as bodies and personalities. We gladly suffer to prove that others are responsible for our condition, and thus guilty, while we think we can maintain our innocence at their expense. We hold the mistaken belief that we have to suffer and do penance so we can ultimately receive our reward in Heaven. We believe that our suffering will be sufficient to atone for what the ego has convinced us we have done. Then, we can tell God that He need not punish us, as we have already done it to ourselves.

The only source of pain is our belief in sin. When I am in pain, it is challenging to see that I am responsible, but not guilty. We must learn to look at our own thoughts and take responsibility for them without judging ourselves. Ken Wapnick suggests that we look at the movie of our lives from the theater seat with Jesus next to us, watching the movie of our lives together with us. Instead of trying to make the pain go away on our own, our part is to keep watching our thoughts, turning away from the voice of the ego, and letting go of false beliefs. In other words, we keep doing the forgiveness work so we can learn to experience the joy hidden by pain.

God is pure Love and would never bring suffering. When we realize that we are outside the dream and our identity is not a body, there is no way to experience pain. Pain is the shadow of the thought system that says we have sinned and are now guilty and should fear punishment. We project our self-attack onto God and see Him as the One punishing us. Pain is simply a mistaken thought, coming from the guilt in the mind that came with the separation from God. Our identity, as vulnerable beings who can be hurt and destroyed, comes as a result of the belief in separation.

My experience is that when someone is sick, they immediately judge themselves as not being sufficiently spiritually advanced. We chose the script of our lives from outside of this dream. Indeed, sickness of the body may be something we have chosen for a specific purpose. It is also important to see that this Lesson is not just about the pain of bodily sickness, but about reversing cause and effect. It is about recognizing, **"The world you see does nothing. It has no effects at all."** (W.190.6.1-3) In fact, the world is already over, and nothing that we think is the cause of our "dis-ease" is true. While to us it seems that the world is the cause of our pain, it has no power at all. All power is in our minds. If our idle wishes and **"strange desires"** (W.190.7.6) bring these painful realities into our experience, we can choose to no longer pay this painful ransom by recognizing the truth of who we really are.

I am continually amazed at how a particular Lesson or passage from the text comes up exactly at the time when I am looking for an answer. It arrives perfectly to remind me of the truth. It is as if Jesus were looking over my shoulder and talking to the specific issue that is going on for me. Right now a friend has gone through a hip replacement and is experiencing some pain. Yet clearly, she is not suffering. She is taking the medication for the pain but is totally at peace with herself, and her healing is remarkable. When we stubbornly hold onto suffering, the ego gets juice from it. Others will feel sorry for us, serve us, protect us, and will go out of their way for us. Or, when we are sick, we may try to control someone with our sadness and require them to do something for us. In other words, we may believe our neediness will "make" someone care about us. Clearly,

there is a "prize" for the ego in this kind of victimhood. Through it, we believe we will get the attention and love we seek and experience the control we think we need in order to keep us safe.

We use these kinds of manipulations to induce guilt in others. It is a misuse of our power, but it can all be released with the help of our Source. By looking at our fearful thoughts and admitting our strategies for manipulation and control, we have an opportunity to release the blocks to the love and radiance we really are. Instead of holding on, we can choose to release and let go and find the freedom and joy that await us. Our holding on comes from feelings of worthlessness and valuelessness. Will anyone be there for me just because!? Is that the real question or is it to ask ourselves, "Who am I extending love to, and what am I giving in this moment?" Enlightenment is not a future condition. It is to ask in every moment, not what would Jesus do, but how would Jesus think about this situation. As we give, so shall we receive. It does require trust and a leap of faith, but in it lies our freedom.

How do such transformations take place? Often they occur spontaneously, as Jon Mundy has shown us in his research on mysticism. He found that often people come to this place of awakening through an experience of "crash and burn;" but, for most, long-term transformation comes about through consistent, determined, and ongoing practice. How willing are we to commit to this? How willing are we to look at our blocks in every moment as they come up? Our path is so often marked by personal tragedies and deep pain, but these events can motivate our journey to healing if we see them as opportunities to heal. Yet we could be equally motivated by our experiences of ecstasy that give us a glimpse of the eternal.

Listen to your inner yearning for home, for freedom, for peace, and for love. This is what propels us to look within. Looking for it in the distractions of the world will only take us further into pain. It is not to be found there. **"Lay down your arms, and come without defense into the quiet place where Heaven's peace holds all things still at last. Lay down all thoughts of danger and of fear. Let no attack enter with you. Lay down the cruel sword of judgment that you hold against your throat, and put aside the withering assaults with which you seek to hide your holiness."** (W.190.9.1-4)

Your world **"will change entirely as you elect to change your mind, and choose the joy of God as what you really want."** (W.190.6.4) Our perceptions of the world will change. When the belief in the ego is undone, we can know the Self that we are, as a Thought in God's Mind. We have denied this Self, and instead, we have taken a little corner of our minds and have made it into our entire worldly experience in which there is pain and there is suffering. We have made this place our home. It is what this world is about. **"The world may seem to cause you pain"** (W.190.7.1) because cause and effect have been reversed. We have chosen everything that seems to happen to us as part of our script; therefore, we are not a victim. The world is not the cause of our pain, but only a witness to what is in the mind. Our experience here is illusory and serves one purpose, which is to keep us in the dream; but if our minds are the cause, the answer to all of our suffering is within. We are therefore the ones who can take charge of our own healing and that is empowering. To take charge is to take responsibility for it and to see it all without judgment of ourselves.

The other view presented in this Lesson is that we think God is the cause of our pain. In fact, that is how we see it when we suffer. We ask God, "Why are you doing this to me?" "What did I do to deserve this?" And in this dream, it all seems quite tragic. Yet Jesus says that we can laugh at such insane ideas. **"There is no need to think of them as savage crimes, or secret sins with**

**weighty consequences."** (W.190.4.3) We have done nothing. We have not sinned, as the ego makes us believe. There is no need for guilt. We are still innocent.

The Lesson introduces the idea that pain is a wrong perspective. It implies that God, who is supposed to be loving, is in fact a cruel God. The reasoning goes like this: If God is the cause of everything real, and if pain is real, then God must be the cause of it, making Him a cruel God. It is based on the belief that we have sinned and now God wants revenge on us since we deserve punishment. This is not in our awareness, but it is what Jesus tells us is in the deep recesses of our minds.

It reflects the Garden of Eden story in which all was wonderful until we sinned and got kicked out of the garden to a life of pain and toil. Pain testifies to the apparent truth of this and makes a lie of who we are as changeless and unchanging, unlimited, innocent, holy, and radiant. We experience a world of pain and of death, but it was not created by a God of pure love. It is all a projection from the wrong-minded thought system of sin and death. Love would not cause this to be, and it did not. Jesus tells us that it is foolishness to think this comes from God. It is a wrong perspective that we hold based on the belief in sin. If we are sinful, as we believe we are, then we deserve punishment. This thought system puts the whole thing in motion, and thus the events of our lives deliver the punishment that we think we deserve. Now pain seems to triumph over love.

Our way out of all this is to recognize that the thought that God wants revenge on us is a foolish thought. The judgment we hold against ourselves sets off this whole cycle of pain, but now we can choose to lay aside all our thoughts of attack and defense and experience God's joy instead. Pain is illusion and joy is reality. Pain is the denial of reality, and thus, we can be grateful to be told that the way we have seen it all is not the truth. **"It is your thoughts alone that cause you pain."** (W.190.5.1)

We understand which choice we have made---for God or the ego---by paying attention to how we feel. We are called to notice how we blame something outside of ourselves for how we feel. But no one outside of ourselves can affect us. We must do the healing work in our own minds, rather than try to fix the dream. Nothing in the world can cause anything because the world is causeless. It does not exist, so how could it cause pain?

To illustrate the above paragraph from my own experience, I am currently feeling trapped and limited in my ability to do what I think is in my best interests; and this is because of what I perceive as the demands my mother places on me daily to address both her physical and emotional needs. She is 102 years old, frail and yet mentally sharp and quite capable of pushing my buttons. I have a long-standing pattern of martyrdom in my relationship with her, having been the one who took over the household responsibilities when I was a child. My mother chose not to function in this role because it was "too much for her."

There are moments when I see her as the "cause" of my unhappiness. At such times, resentment comes up. Yet I see that she is in my life to help me to remember that she is not the cause of my distress. My thoughts about this situation alone are the cause of any suffering I experience. **"Nothing external to your mind can hurt or injure you in any way."** (W.190.5.2) There is nothing external to my mind. I am the cause of any feelings of oppression. When I make her responsible for how I feel, I am seeing cause outside of my own mind. Therefore, it is up to me to relinquish my investment in being right about my interpretations. These long-standing patterns seem to carry significant karmic opportunities that go deep into the mind to be undone there.

Today, you are asked to **"Lay down your arms, and come without defense into the quiet place where Heaven's peace holds all things still at last. Lay down all thoughts of danger and of fear. Let no attack enter with you. Lay down the cruel sword of judgment that you hold against your throat, and put aside the withering assaults with which you seek to hide your holiness."** (W.190.9.1-4)

We may appear to judge others, but in the end, we condemn ourselves. Today is a day to remember that we have been wrong about ourselves. We are called to be humble, recognizing that we don't know what we are or what we think we know. Let us watch today for how we actively choose against our peace and joy and how we want to prove that we are right about our perceptions. The only reason we invest in holding onto our perspectives is to prove that we are a separate identity and that this dream figure is our reality.

Love and blessings, Sarah  
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