

ACIM Edmonton - Sarah's Reflections



LESSON 197

It can be but my gratitude I earn.

Sarah's Commentary:

The Lesson today reminds us once again that gratitude is in our own minds and not dependent on anything outside of us. Gratitude and love go hand in hand because both reflect the Oneness of what we are. Just as attack comes only from the mind, the same is said of gratitude. This Lesson addresses the belief we hold that there can be something outside of the mind that helps us or hurts us.

Gratitude is a gift we give ourselves. If I give anything to anyone and they do not respond as I expect they should, I may withdraw the gift unless, of course, I see that I give only to myself. If I could see that is the case, I would not want to withdraw the gift. When someone does not respond the way I expect them to, with gratitude, appreciation, attention, loyalty, or a gift in return, then I may have a grievance. When this is the case, what I have given is no longer a gift, but an attack. In effect, I am saying, "I did this for you, and I expect something in return." Clearly, this is an affirmation that we are separate because we don't realize we are always only giving to ourselves. There is no one outside of ourselves, so the gift is given or withdrawn from ourselves.

The special relationship is about bargaining, where we give with the expectation or requirement of a gift in return; hopefully, something better than what we have given. If I don't get what I expect from you, I hold a grievance in my mind and no longer want to give. When we see ourselves as doing our part in being generous and do not receive appreciation, love turns to resentment and bitterness but, this is not giving and clearly not love. The conditions we have placed on the gift make it a form of manipulation. If you prove you are not worthy of my gift, I take it back. It is how we relate to God, believing He too wants something from us in return for His gifts, and ultimately, it will cost us our lives. Our misguided perception is that we must sacrifice for His love. Thus, our relationship with God becomes one of bargaining as well.

Putting any conditions on giving is what we think a capricious God does. **"And so you think God's gifts are loans at best; at worst, deceptions which would cheat you of defenses, to ensure that when He strikes He will not fail to kill."** (W.197.1.5) We think God asks something of us, and if we don't give it, He will kill us. We defend against His "love," as we fear our vulnerability. We don't trust love, and in the same way, as we protect ourselves from God, we set up defenses against being hurt in our relationships.

"How easily are God and guilt confused by those who know not what their thoughts can do." (W.197.2.1) Jesus explains this by saying, **"A major source of the ego's off-balanced state is its lack of discrimination between the body and the Thoughts of God. Thoughts of God are unacceptable to the ego, because they clearly point to the**

nonexistence of the ego itself. The ego therefore either distorts them or refuses to accept them. It cannot, however, make them cease to be." (T.4.V.2.1-4) (ACIM OE T.4.VI.70) He goes on to say that what we try to do is conceal our "unacceptable" body impulses as well as our impulse for God's love because both threaten us. Our fear of love is our fear of God, for the ego tells us that to accept His love is to lose ourselves. We are threatened by this because all the ego is concerned with is self-preservation. Nevertheless God's love is always there and the ego has no power to disrupt that love.

Jesus assures us, **"Yet you will never realize His gifts are sure, eternal, changeless, limitless, forever giving out, extending love and adding to your never-ending joy while you forgive but to attack again."** (W.197.5.3) We must be consistent in our forgiveness for if we forgive to attack again we can never know God's consistent love for us. In our attacks, we affirm separation and differences. We must remain vigilant, in our efforts to be helpful and loving, that there is not a subtle hook, where we give in order to get. We may not readily see that this behind our giving. Whenever you see this in yourself, it is important to remember your innocence and not feel guilty but recognize the mistake so it can be corrected. Seeing the error without judgment of ourselves is a necessary condition of forgiveness.

When we deny the strength of God in us, all we have to depend on is the weakness of the ego for our happiness. **"Deny your strength, and weakness must become salvation to you."** (W.197.2.2) We rely on the ego to save us, yet the ego is a sign of weakness accompanied by guilt. To overcome this belief in weakness, we try to get strength from those around us, competing for some form of power. The ego has extracted its strength from the death of God, and now it seems to live off His strength as it has none of its own.

Today, we maintain awareness on how attached we are to the results of our giving. We remember that when we give truly, we earn our own gratitude. Every gift we give is received. Every blessing we give our brother is received, even if it is not apparent to us. **"In his mind there is a part that joins with yours in thanking you."** (W.197.4.2) **"In your gratitude are they accepted universally, and thankfully acknowledged by the Heart of God Himself."** (W.197.4.5) It does not matter whether others express appreciation or not because a part of their mind is grateful, and the gift is acknowledged in the One Mind. What is given is accepted by the One Mind. The light of Christ shines in every mind where the gift is received. The same light shines in us all, as minds are joined. When we come to know all gifts that are given are only given to the Self we are, we realize that to give and to receive are one in truth.

In Oneness, there is only One Self that gives and receives the gift. Whether it is the gift of forgiveness and healing or some other kind of gift, it is all the same. It is all a gift given to ourselves. To be concerned with whether the gift has been received or not is to see others as separate which is an attack. We are One Self, one with each other, and One with God. In the holy instant we experience a moment of sanity and recognize we have not changed ourselves from the glorious beings we are as God's Son.

The core of the gift given our brothers, regardless of the form, is forgiveness. When the gift of forgiveness is given and received, we experience our innocence. When we withdraw the gift, we reinforce the guilt in the mind. Sometimes our giving has subtle hooks attached in the form of expectations that we have of how others should respond. This is giving to get and is not true giving. For example, we may be nice to someone because there is something we want from them. We are kind and helpful because we think we will get love and appreciation in return. This is different than just letting the love of the Holy Spirit come through us, with no concern about the response.

The ego can be subtle and wily and does not want to acknowledge when the motivation for giving is to get in return. We must lean into willingness and be steeped in self-honesty with a dash of courage to look beyond the immediate inclination we have to deny the truth that we want something in return.

"Withdraw the gifts you give, and you will think that what is given you has been withdrawn." (W.197.6.1) Clearly, when I withdraw my gifts, I believe others will do the same to me. It creates suspicion of our brothers that their gifts have strings attached as well. Sometimes, when we receive gifts from them, we wonder what they want and expect of us in return. That is why receiving can be difficult for us. God, too, is constantly giving us His gifts of love and holiness, but we have substituted our own gifts for His. We believe He is has withdrawn His gifts from us though the fact is, we are the ones who have withdrawn our acceptance of His gifts. **"Do not forget, however, that to deny God will inevitably result in projection, and you will believe that others and not yourself have done this to you."** (T.10.V.2.1) (ACIM OE T.9.XI.94) This is where Byron Katie's work is so valuable, where we do the turn around and recognize that what we are seeing in anyone starts in our own minds.

The gifts of love and forgiveness, which are the core of all giving, remind us who we are in truth. When guilt is healed, fear is gone, and we experience the love of God, Who has laid His Heart in our own. **"In your heart the Heart of God is laid."** (W.197.8.5) The memory of God is in our right minds. Jesus says, **"He holds you dear, because you are Himself."** (W.197.8.6) We can only know this when we exclude no one from His Love. Whenever we feel unfairly treated by anyone, we are acknowledging that they are different from us, which reinforces separation and in our minds, we feel justified in our attacks on them.

Today, notice when you want to withhold gratitude from people in your life; when you feel unfairly treated by anyone; when you are tempted to exclude anyone from your life; when you are inclined to hold grievances whenever your expectations are not met; or in any situation where your thoughts and feelings are not peaceful. They are all opportunities to see how you are withholding joy, given you by God, to shine forth and bring healing to the world. Our desire now is to undo the false self and remember who we are.

Today, above all, we can be grateful for this teaching and for this classroom where we have many opportunities to fulfill our function, which is to reflect God's Love in the world through forgiveness. Every brother contains the memory of God's love. Thus, we can **"Give thanks for all the countless channels which extend this Self."** (W.197.9.4) There is no one outside of our own minds. **"It can be but my gratitude I earn."** (W.197)

Love and blessings, Sarah
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