

## ACIM Edmonton - Sarah's Reflections



### Lesson 338

#### **I am affected only by my thoughts.**

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

I am reflecting today on all the things in my life that I think affect me. It is immensely empowering to realize that none of them have any real effect on me at all. The only reason anything outside of my mind affects me is because I am giving meaning to what has no meaning. Only my thoughts about what is happening around me affect me. Yet, although my thoughts can frighten me, I have the power to **"exchange each fear thought for a happy thought of love."** (W.338.1.5) My mood is established entirely by me, according to the nature of my thoughts and beliefs. While this is the truth for all of us, clearly, it is not yet our experience, but it is certainly a powerful goal worth pursuing.

Events come and go in our lives. We are plagued by problems, people, and situations that are difficult and can be extremely aggravating. We may feel hijacked by an unexpected conversation, an email, or a phone call that triggers a defensive emotional reaction. At such times, we seem to lose our emotional center. We may feel angry, which is the ego's idea of "self-protection." It is a defense that we turn to in the belief that it will keep us from being dominated or controlled; but whether we react outwardly or have inward conflict, it is the same. Our lesson is to come to the place where, **"no one frightens him, and nothing can endanger him. He has no enemies, and he is safe from all external things."** (W.338.1.3-4) No matter what the situation is, or how I might react to it, this is still the truth to be accepted. Nothing outside my mind is the cause of my grief.

I can choose not to give these events any power. They only affect me if I have a story around them where I see myself as victimized and justify a defensive or attacking response. Any pain these events seem to create for me is an opportunity to do self-inquiry about what purpose is served by what I tell myself about any situation. What payoff do I get from my story? When I keep the story, it serves the ego and seems to get me something I want, whether it is my idea of love, attention, sympathy, revenge, power, independence, control, cleverness, or domination. We get a secret pleasure from being victimized, which means that now we can hold the other as the guilty party while we maintain a pseudo-innocence. **"And while you think that suffering and sin will bring you joy, so long will they be there for you to see."** (T.25.IV.2.2) (ACIM OE T.25.V.33) In other words, we gladly suffer at their hands so they can be accused of our sin as we proclaim, **"Behold me, brother, by your hand I die."** (T.27.I.IV.4.6) (ACIM OE T.27.II.4) What this means is that we can point a finger at whomever we see as responsible for our suffering and pain.

The ego uses many strategies to deal with fear. We may try to gain in a number of ways at our brother's expense through power struggles, right-fighting, sacrificing, projecting guilt, and maximizing opportunities. Ultimately, they are all strategies to keep us from the love we are and to

keep us invested in the illusion. The dream becomes all important as does our part in it. We are making it real. Bringing awareness to our motivation to hold onto our story can assist in uncovering the choices we are making that conspire against our happiness and, ultimately, against remembering who we really are.

The lack of peace we feel points to the thoughts we stubbornly hold onto. If we allow ourselves to connect deeply with the pain rather than avoiding, justifying, spiritualizing, or denying it, we can surrender it by looking at it with Jesus. When we look with him, we are looking without judgment because he shines his love on our illusions and shows us their unreality. All our strategies are lies that we tell ourselves to support the thoughts we hold in the mind. We see what we choose to see. **"You will rejoice at what you see because you see it to rejoice."** (T.25.IV.2.1) (ACIM OE T.25.V.33) This is the law of perception. It all starts in our own mind and is projected out. Our stories reflect our view of the world and our concepts about ourselves.

When we stop investing in our beliefs that the way we see things is the way they are, we can start to question our thoughts, our beliefs, and our values. When we experience the holy instant, then the events of our lives that we previously defined as problems and aggravations may still be there, but the suffering we experienced as a result of these events is no longer felt. To experience emotions around any situation, we have to want to play with the emotions. We have to want to hold onto our story about the situation. If there is suffering for you, you can be assured you are holding onto your story and the thoughts and beliefs it reflects. The story becomes more important than peace. It takes willingness, courage, and honesty to look at our motivation, which is always a choice that we are making of what it is we want.

To realize that nothing outside ourselves can threaten us is our release from suffering, and yet this is not an intellectual process but an experience. It requires a willingness to face our own self-betrayal. When we do the forgiveness work, space is opened for the truth in our right minds to come through so we can experience the connection with the love we are. As Jesus says, **"Now has he learned that no one frightens him, and nothing can endanger him. He has no enemies, and he is safe from all external things."** (W.338.1.3-4)

What wonderful freedom there is in that thought! We have spent so much of our lives protecting ourselves from perceived harm. Why? We have learned from an early age that it is dangerous to be open and vulnerable, so we put up all kinds of defenses. We have felt deceived and betrayed by our experiences in the world, starting with our parents, who turned out not to be perfect. Thus, we started to feel unsafe and became afraid to receive; but the mind wants to feel innocent and therefore dodges the pain and numbs it, avoids it, or offers elaborate justifications for it. When our seeming vulnerability has been abused, fear arises, and we try to protect ourselves and shut down our capacity to receive. We become hypervigilant in staying alert to threat and developing strategies to keep us safe, yet we have a profound yearning for innocence. Our only safety is to let go of our defenses. We are reminded that the way we have defined ourselves, as a body and personal self that needs protection, is not who we are. We are safe and always have been.

Our thoughts can indeed frighten us, **"but since these thoughts belong to him alone, he has the power to change them and exchange each fear thought for a happy thought of love."** (W.338.1.5) We only crucify ourselves, but now we see that we have the power to change our thoughts. Our problems are never external, so they can't be solved with anything external. To find peace from the pain and suffering we experience, we must see that nothing that comes to us from outside is the cause of suffering. It all comes from our own thoughts and the interpretations we give

to situations we encounter. It all comes from the separation, where the decision was made to leave God and make our own way. From this thought came a sense of abandonment, which is triggered when someone leaves us and we feel crushed, or we leave before we can be abandoned to protect ourselves from potential pain. All that is happening is that we are seeing ourselves as victims of outside events. When we can see that we have not been abandoned by God, but chose to do the abandoning, and when we take responsibility for that, we can bring our sadness, loneliness, and sense of loss to the Holy Spirit. We see that it was of our own choosing, and now, we can choose again. Now, all relationships are valuable for what we can learn from them about our fears. We are no longer victims, living in fear of abandonment. Relationships provide us with a valuable classroom for looking at our thoughts.

***"Your plan is sure, my Father,---only Yours. All other plans will fail. And I will have thoughts that will frighten me, until I learn that You have given me the only Thought that leads me to salvation. Mine alone will fail, and lead me nowhere. But the Thought You gave me promises to lead me home, because it holds Your promise to Your Son."*** (W.338.2.1-5)

The plan our Father assures us of is the plan of Atonement. By accepting healing for ourselves offered through forgiveness, we remember who we are. We have been given a way to return home. His plan is the undoing of all our mistaken thoughts by returning the problem back to the mind, which is the only place it can be undone. This is very hopeful because now it is entirely up to us. Nothing outside of us has any power to hurt us or harm us and nothing outside of us will save us. It is all up to us. It is our dream, so we can do something about it in alliance with the power of the Holy Spirit in our right minds.

**"I am never upset for the reason I think,"** (W.5) reminds us that while we think events outside our own minds are the cause of our upsets, the cause is always in how we think about a situation. As Jesus reminds us, **"I am responsible for what I see. I choose the feelings I would experience, and I decide upon the goal I would achieve."** (T.21.II.2.3-4) (ACIM OE T.21.III.15)

**"It is impossible the Son of God be merely driven by events outside of him. It is impossible that happenings that come to him were not his choice. His power of decision is the determiner of every situation in which he seems to find himself by chance or accident."** (T.21.II.3.1-3) (ACIM OE T.21.III.17)

In the Workbook, Lesson 190 tells us: **"It is your thoughts alone that cause you pain. Nothing external to your mind can hurt or injure you in any way. There is no cause beyond yourself that can reach down and bring oppression. No one but yourself affects you. There is nothing in the world that has the power to make you ill or sad or weak or frail. But it is you who have the power to dominate all things you see by merely recognizing what you are."** (W.190.5.1-6)

Love and blessings, Sarah  
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