

ACIM Edmonton - Sarah's Reflections



Lesson 8

My mind is preoccupied with past thoughts.

Sarah's Commentary:

This Lesson is an explanation for why we see only the past. It is because our minds are preoccupied with past thoughts. If this is the case, **"No one really sees anything."** (W.8.1.2) What we are seeing is ". . . **only his [our] thoughts projected outward.**" (W.8.1.3) It is amazing how we live in past thoughts. How different is this from someone we label as senile who lives in the past. It turns out, we are doing exactly the same thing! In fact, Jesus often reminds us of our insanity, albeit very gently. He tells us we do not see beyond the forms of this world, and thus, we don't understand anything.

So how can we trust anything as true? **"The one wholly true thought one can hold about the past is that it is not here."** (W.8.2.1.) It is absolutely astounding to realize our minds are either in the past or in the future and that **"The mind is actually blank when it does this, because it is not really thinking about anything."** (W.8.2.4) What we are doing is projecting a world that does not exist. It is an illusion. Everything "out there" is simply a reflection of the content of the mind, which is preoccupied with past thoughts. Thus, our physical sight is a product of our mental activity. We project what is in the mind onto the screen of the world and now watch it like a movie. We believe in the reality of what we are seeing when all we are actually seeing is the content of our thoughts. Our thoughts are like a projector in a movie theater. What we see comes from what we hold as thoughts in the mind and given form in the world. These thoughts are all based on beliefs we hold in the mind.

We saw in the earlier Lessons that what is in the mind is meaningless because the only meaning is what lies behind our meaningless thoughts, which block the truth. The truth we block with our thoughts is our reality as eternal beings of light and love. The truth is in the right mind and contains the love, peace, and holiness that is the truth of our Being. Separation from our Being is not a happy state of mind. The Lessons, when practiced and applied, help us let go of this make-believe world of separation. If there is only reality and nothing else, the world of duality can't be true.

I find it encouraging to be told that my upsets are simply blocking the joy and peace already in me. It means there really is nothing to seek as we already have what we are seeking. Yet we don't experience peace as a constant state because we hold onto thoughts that are not true. Our experiences in the world seem real, and the world itself feels solid. Thus, we are deceived about what is true. When we come to realize the stories of our lives and all our sufferings are made up by the thoughts we hold onto, we can make another choice. Are we willing to bring healing to our mistaken thoughts about everything by seeing them for what they are? And what they are is false.

Jesus says, **"The mind's preoccupation with the past is the cause of the misconception about time from which your seeing suffers. Your mind cannot grasp the present,**

which is the only time there is. It therefore cannot understand time, and cannot, in fact, understand anything." (W.8.1.4-6) While this can be understood in terms of our preoccupation with memories of the past, how does this create a misconception about time? In the Text, Jesus explains that time is based on sin, guilt, and fear. Sin is what we took into our thought system at the time of the decision to separate from God. We accepted the belief that we had done something terribly wrong and had committed a sin. As a result, we experience guilt, and with guilt comes fear. What we fear are the consequences of the decision made to separate from God. Guilt demands punishment, which is what the world grants us through all our problems, sickness, suffering, and death. The thought system of sin in the past, guilt in the present, and fear of the future, is projected onto the world and makes up the concept of linear time. Our existence preceded all of this which is why in response to a heated debate over his identity, Jesus declares: "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58).

In the eternal holy instant, which is a moment out of linear time, there is no body and there is no world. It is a moment outside of this dream of sin, guilt, and fear. In the world of time, the mind cannot grasp the present because it brings with it all of the memories of the past feelings of guilt and shame. We not only feel we have done wrong but that we are bad. We may feel like something is missing but we can't quite grasp what it is. It is a feeling of not quite getting how to do life in spite of our best efforts. This uncertainty brings with it our need to be right about everything. When we feel this sense of wrongness or guilt, we live in fear of consequences. Even when we are happy, we believe it can't last. There is never the ease that Jesus is leading us to on this path. We believe we need to resolve our guilt at some point in the future. In other words, we believe we need to atone for past sins so we will feel better about ourselves. The truth is we are innocent now. We are not responsible for the error but only for the Correction, and it can be accepted now. We need not wait.

"The one wholly true thought one can hold about the past is that it is not here. To think about it at all is therefore to think about illusions." (W.8.2.1-2) That is exactly what we do when we hold onto memories of what others have done to us in the past, what we ourselves have done, or what we have omitted to do. We call these the sins of commission or omission. These are all our unresolved issues, which we carry like a heavy burden of guilt, shame, and anger over past hurts. Jesus is clear that when we hold these upsetting thoughts, what we are doing is not thinking about anything because the past is actually nothing except thoughts we hold in this moment. These unhappy thoughts occupy the space where true happiness lies. We take these thoughts and weave them together out of bits of this and that and make up a story. We become a character in this story and actually believe it is the truth. Everything in this story revolves around our perceptions, which we reinforce over and over as we relate our stories. Of course, I am always the central character in my story while others play their supporting roles in which I have cast them.

"The body is the central figure in the dreaming of the world. There is no dream without it, nor does it exist without the dream in which it acts as if it were a person to be seen and be believed. It takes the central place in every dream, which tells the story of how it was made by other bodies, born into the world outside the body, lives a little while and dies, to be united in the dust with other bodies dying like itself." (T.27.VIII.1.1-3) (ACIM OE T.27.IX.1)

How can we know ourselves or see anyone truly when our minds are preoccupied with past thoughts? To really see someone as they truly are, as the Christ, requires that we see past the story and the body to the truth in them. This kind of seeing depends on vision. It is not something our eyes show us. To see with vision is to see the Christ in our brother and to know it for ourselves.

Our self-concept has been developed in our mistaken notions that what others have said and done and how we have responded has formed who we think we are. We think our eyes see, yet they only make images of the thoughts, beliefs, and judgments in the mind. Anyone who has had an out of body experience and has seen his own body, knows it is not the eyes that see. So, what is doing the looking?

Vision is blocked when we project our memories, needs, and grievances onto others. **"Projection makes perception. The world you see is what you gave it, nothing more than that."** (T.21.IN.1.1-2) (ACIM OE T.21.I.1) **"It is the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition."** (T.21.IN.1.5) (ACIM OE T.21.I.1) Forgiveness undoes the illusory thoughts we hold that block our real thoughts. That is why mind-watching is so important. We need to see what is in the mind because it is the only way healing can happen when it is brought to the Holy Spirit. We need to do our part, which is to watch our thoughts and be willing to turn them over to the Holy Spirit.

Only through forgiveness can those whom we have been holding bound to our grievances be released from the prison we put them in. When we release what we imagined was done to us, our perceptions of the past actually change as well. There was a time when I thought I was neglected by my parents and felt I was unloved. I held a lot of grievances toward my family. I believed I had been mistreated and misunderstood and overall felt that I had been a victim of their actions. Today, I see it was absolutely the perfect family I had chosen for my learning. Someone asked me recently whether I resented the fact that I had to be the family caregiver at such a young age, as I basically forfeited my childhood. The question surprised me a bit because I realized there was a time I did carry a lot of resentment and anger, but those feelings are now completely gone. I now see it was all perfectly orchestrated for my healing and learning. I see that I chose this and every other experience of the past for my awakening.

We chose our families at a soul level for our spiritual growth and development. The problem arises when we forget that we came to help our families, who are those very same parents who need what we can give them because of the lacks they were experiencing. All seeming lacks are a call for love. We forget this because of our own neediness as children. We see ourselves as victims, and so the drama begins! We keep playing out our story in our memories, which may sometimes continue for a lifetime or even other lifetimes. We see ourselves as both a victim and a survivor. It may be a story of the savior of the family, or the martyr, or a rescuer. There are so many ways to tell the story of our lives from so very many perspectives. They all illustrate how perception can shift, and thus, none of it is true. We can make it up from any point of view we choose. When we see this, it is very liberating.

Ken Wapnick explains that we have two imagined books. In one, we write all the sins of those who hurt us, and in the other, we write how hard we tried and how good we were in the face of attack and neglect. The purpose of these two books is to turn over to God at some point and to explain why the guilty ones should be punished, rather than ourselves, and why we are the innocent victims of what others have done to us. It is a way of avoiding responsibility for the separation and buying our false innocence at the expense of others.

We are now given a road-map to reconnect to our inherent divinity. We are learning to let go of these past thoughts and connect with our true innocence. **"The purpose of the exercise for today is to begin to train your mind to recognize when it is not really thinking at all."** (W.8.3.1) We can only do that when we notice how the mind is preoccupied with past thoughts. It is not about trying to force thoughts out of the mind that we think we are thinking but to take the time to bring our attention to what we are thinking and looking at the thoughts without making

ourselves guilty for them. We become an observer of these thoughts, looking at them without judgment from outside of the dream where the Holy Spirit looks with us. As we become observers of our thoughts, we remove ourselves from them and no longer believe them. They are not real thoughts nor are they really our thoughts as we are not the ego. They are not important thoughts. They are just passing thoughts with no real meaning.

These are also beginning steps to forgiveness. If we made it all up, we can also let it all go. There is nothing to let go except our own past thoughts. Thoughts of the future are also rooted in thoughts of the past. Remember, the purpose of holding these thoughts is to block the truth. You may wonder why we would want to do that? Because we still value our separate self. It is why we keep the truth away, so we can hold onto our separate identity. This is what keeps us addicted to our thoughts.

When we seem to be thinking about a person, an object, or experiencing an emotion, the mind is preoccupied with past thoughts. No matter how vividly we may picture a thought Jesus tells us we are actually not seeing anything. So we are asked to search the mind for a minute or so with as little investment as possible note the thoughts that are there. Name each one by the central figure or theme it contains. Jesus tells us, this "**. . . is the first step to opening the way to vision.**" (W.8.3.3)

Love and blessings, Sarah
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