

A Course in Miracles:
A Hope-filled Spirituality

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Part II

Let us look at a lesson that is a nice way of saying all this: Lesson 284 "I can elect to change all thoughts that hurt." What this implies is that it is not the world that hurts us; it is not our job or our boss that hurts us; it is not our special relationship that hurts us; it is not the body that hurts us. It is our thoughts that hurt us, which is what Lessons 5 and 34 tell us: "I am never upset for the reason I think." "I could see peace instead of this." Here is what Lesson 284 says:

(W-pII.284.1:1) Loss is not loss when properly perceived.

The world always judges loss in terms of the body: I am losing my health, my vitality, my youth, my happiness, my job, my money, my loved one, my house. There is always loss that is externalized. When we properly perceive loss, we realize we cannot lose anything out there. There is nothing out there, and any perception of loss comes from our mind's belief in it, which we can change: "I can elect to change all thoughts that hurt."

(W-pII.284.1:2-4) Pain is impossible. There is no grief with any cause at all. And suffering of any kind is nothing but a dream.

In other words, the world does not make us suffer. Suffering is part of the ego's dream. Now comes a very important passage to keep in mind, because it helps us remember this is a process:

(W-pII.284.1:5-6) This is the truth [i.e., everything here is an illusion; pleasure and pain are illusory], **at first to be but said and then repeated many times** [probably many, many, many times, but that would screw up the meter so there is only one "many"—I am sure Helen heard "many, many, many times"]; **and next to be accepted as but partly true, with many reservations. Then to be considered seriously more and more, and finally accepted as the truth.**

This is a very clear statement of the process that every student of *A Course in Miracles* goes through. We read the words and we say they are nice, maybe even pretty, and we would like to believe them, but we have reservations: We can see this working in some cases, but not others, in some relationships or illnesses, but not others: with a headache but not with cancer. We object: "But I have a mortgage payment due!" So then we say the words over and

over again. We keep reading them and listening to them. Then we accept them partially, still with a lot of reservations. Then we begin to think about them more and more seriously. Then finally we accept them as the truth. What convinces us to accept them as the truth is not the words. What convinces us is our own experience. We begin to see on the level of form that what we are going through may be horrendous, but we can still be peaceful. Thus, someone may have said something very unkind to me, but I don't have to take it personally. We begin to practice that more and more, and see it more and more. "Frightened people can be vicious" (T-3.I.4:2). People act viciously toward us, but they are as frightened as we are. We need to ask ourselves "Why do I have to be part of their dream?"

There is an important section in Chapter 28 called "The Agreement to Join" (T-28.III). The context is sickness and Jesus tells us not to accept our brother's dream of sickness (T-28.III.3:3), which does not mean that we become insensitive to someone else's suffering; we do not laugh it off or become unkind. It means we do not lose our peace, which actually will make us much more caring and considerate because there will be no conflict, guilt, or fear to interfere with our being a free expression of love.

This is something we can practice. When someone says something unkind, we do not have to be part of that person's dream. But if we get upset we are saying, "Yes, you're right. The dream of separation is real and it is peopled with victims and victimizers; I feel sorry for the victims and I hate the victimizers." We could step back from that and recall that if we are all the same, then victimizers deep down believe they have been victims and the only way they can deal with their pain is to go on the offensive. Again, "Frightened people can be vicious." Every victim is a silent victimizer pointing an accusing finger that says, "Behold me, brother, at your hand I die" (T-27.I.4:6).

Later, the text says, "And in your suffering of any kind you see your own concealed desire to kill" (T-31.V.15:10). I have always said that that is the most difficult passage in the whole book for people to really look at. "And in your suffering of any kind, you see your own concealed desire to kill." We want to suffer so someone else will be held accountable. We exist but it is not our fault, and God will punish and destroy the other person. An earlier parallel passage says that our brother's sins are "writ in Heaven . . . and go before him . . ." (T-27.I.3:2). Our suffering tells God to look at that person's sins, which are writ in Heaven and go before him, meaning they lead him down to hell where he will be punished. And since it is *one or the other*, if you are in hell, I must be in Heaven.

Understanding this gives us something to call on when we are in the midst of situations that are painful or horrific, which we all are in almost all the time. We can say and *mean*, "I could see peace instead of this." To restate this important point, this does not mean that we excuse people's unkind behavior or cruelty. It just means that we do not attack it. They are frightened people, but everyone is frightened and therefore everyone has vicious thoughts

and feelings, and acts viciously. Most of us would not rob banks, or rape, or kill innocent people, or drop bombs on villages and be glad about it: "Oh, this is a good day. I killed a hundred and fifty people and most of them were women and children—they had it coming to them!" Most of us would not do that, but we all would do it on some level. We may not do it in form, but when we are glad that the local rapist has been caught and severely punished, if not killed, we are no different from the rapist. We are saying that someone else's suffering is my pleasure. Well, isn't that what a rapist does? The rapist is saying, "I don't care about you. I just want my pleasure." Well, we want the pleasure of knowing the guilty bastard is getting killed and not us. We derive great pleasure from that, as we all know. Just observe a family whose child has been killed; observe them outside the courtroom when the verdict has been given and the one who killed their child or raped and killed their daughter is going behind bars and will never get out. They are so ecstatic. Justice has been done! Hell, *in*justice has been done because there is no love there! Love does not punish. Love may place a limit on people's ability to miscreate, but it would never be done in a spirit of punishment.

We are all silently glad when the victimizer gets caught. That makes us no better than the victimizer. That is what we must see. *Do not confuse symbol with source*. On the level of the symbol, we are all very, very different. On the level of the source, which is the separated mind, we are all the same. We are all secret Hitlers and Stalins. We are all killers. We are all secret Jesus's or Buddhas because we all have right minds. We are all the same. Everyone has a right mind—everyone. If we exclude one person, we are excluding the whole Sonship, because what makes the Sonship the Sonship is that it is unified. *We are all one*. That is a very sobering thought.

I frequently say that if you want to see how far you have come with this course, just look at a judgment that you make and ask yourself whether you would make this judgment about everyone in the Sonship. Take any unkind thought that you have of anyone and ask whether you would extend it to embrace everyone, including Jesus and the people here that you love. The chances are that you would say "No. Jesus never raped anyone. He never built a bomb and dropped it on innocent people in a village." By judging and thinking unkindly of others, what we are doing is differentiating and fragmenting the Sonship. We are saying that there is a hierarchy of illusions, which as we have seen, is the first law of chaos (T-23.II.2:1-2). We are saying there are people here who are different from other people.

People are different on the level of form, but not on the level of mind. *Do not confuse symbol with source*. Symbols are differentiated, unless we make them right-minded symbols, which then embrace everyone. Thus, if you have a wonderful, beatific experience in the presence of a great work of art or a great nature scene and you will not allow that love to embrace everyone, then you are negating the beauty of that experience. You are saying that you can have a wonderful experience of God's Love in whatever form it may take, but you cannot take

it home with you because you have all these screaming kids interrupting your peace; or you cannot take it into the workplace; or you cannot take it with you when you watch the news.

When we think like that, we are taking the experience of love and limiting it, which means it is no longer love. Having an unkind thought or doing an unkind thing does not make us sinners, but it does say that we still value, affirm, and witness to the reality of the separation, the reality of the fragmentation, which is saying there is a hierarchy of illusions—that there are good and bad people in this world. It is true that there are people we judge as good who do good things in our estimation, and people we call bad who do bad things in our estimation. Yet not everyone would agree with our evaluation, which means it is not universal, and if it is not universal, it is not real.