

A Course in Miracles:
A Hope-filled Spirituality

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Part XI
Guilt vs. Remorse

I have recently started to make a distinction between guilt and remorse. The problem with guilt is that once you are guilty, you are inevitably going to continue to do whatever it is that made you guilty. Guilt says I have done something terrible in the past, I am a terrible person in the present, and I deserve to be treated like a terrible person in the future. Guilt therefore retains the "sin." Remember, guilt does not exist, so the most devastating thing about guilt is not the guilt itself, but what happens when we *believe* we are guilty. Guilt says this is so horrific, I cannot even look at it. We are so overwhelmed with self-hatred that we repress it, and whatever we repress, we project. Again, guilt ensures that we will continue to do what made us guilty in the first place. That is what Freud called *repetition compulsion*.

Remorse, the way I am using the term, recognizes that I did something that was a mistake, not something that was sinful—it probably hurt other people, it certainly hurt me, and I don't want to do it again. We can call it "healthy guilt" when you look at something you have done, and rather than feel guilty and drive it underground because you are such a reprehensible worm, you say, "This was a mistake, and I understand now why I did it. I don't want to do this again because it causes too much pain for others and for me." At that point, it is not guilt. It is simply saying you made a mistake and don't want to do it again. That is what I would call *remorse*. Guilt, on the other hand, ensures that you will continue to do it. The whole idea of looking with Jesus is to change the ego's perception of guilt to his perception of remorse.

The entire Course, from cover to cover, is simply telling us over and over again: "You have made a mistake. I am not judging you for it. You are not evil, sinful people, but you have made a mistake, and I will explain to you why you made the mistake: It is because you are afraid of love. I will show you all the different forms in which the mistake has been made—all your defenses and all the forms of specialness. I am showing these to you so that you can look at them with me without judgment." That's remorse. It's not the mistake in form. Guilt always attaches to specifics and then represses the guilt. Remorse says this was a mistake in content: I chose the wrong teacher, and that's why I did and said all these things, but I don't want to

do that anymore, because I now see the consequences of choosing my ego. I see what it costs me. I don't feel the peace of God. I don't feel His Love, and that's what I want. I now use my mistakes as a classroom where I can grow and learn so I don't repeat them. Guilt keeps me imprisoned in itself.

Again, once you feel guilt, you must repress it, and whatever you repress, you will project. It will find its way out. You want to look at your mistake and not call it a sin. Simply say, "This is not something I want to do again." Practice what it says at the beginning of Chapter 18. This section, "The Substitute Reality," starts by talking about the original error. The next paragraph talks about all the forms the original error has taken, all our forms of specialness, but now the context is the original error. We want to apply this to all the specific forms of the original error of separating from Love.

"Call it not sin but madness, for such it was and so it still remains. Invest it not with guilt, for guilt implies it was accomplished in reality. And above all, *be not afraid of it*" (T-18.1.6:7-9).

That is the definition of remorse. I say this was insanity; this never could have happened, and I don't have to be afraid of it anymore. This will ensure that I never repeat it. If I call what I did sinful and feel guilty, I will have to be afraid of it, and am then setting the stage for it to continually recur, not necessarily in the same form, but that underlying self-hatred will find its way out through what I say and do.

Thus, the idea is to look at your mistakes and recognize they are mistakes. *Call it not sin but madness. Invest it not with guilt. . . . And above all, be not afraid of it.* As I go through my day and become aware of all the different ways that I reflect my belief in the reality of the *tiny, mad idea*—all the times I get angry, mildly annoyed, anxious, fearful, forgetful, am insensitive to someone, all the different ways I am unloving—I can look at that in myself and not judge it. I don't call myself dirty Course names: you're guilty, you're defending against the truth, etc. I am unlearning the mistake I and everyone else made in that original instant when we looked at the *tiny, mad idea*, were horrified by it, called it sinful, and took it seriously. The minute we took it seriously, it was as if this tiny wisp of nothing became enmeshed in concrete—it became real and solid and sinister. We therefore had to run like hell from it, and we made up a hell to run to, which is the world and the body. All of this was to escape from a thought of sin that never happened, all because we took the *tiny, mad idea* seriously.

Again, the problem was not the thought of being separated, because that never happened. How could what did not happen and could never happen be taken seriously? That was the problem—that we took it seriously. That gets transformed into our world by all the different ways we are unloving and unkind, whether to ourselves or other people. Being right-minded means being wrong-minded and recognizing our wrong-minded decisions, but *not feeling guilty* about them. I don't judge myself for choosing my ego, I don't justify it, I don't indulge it, and I don't rationalize it. I say, "This is what I did, and I don't want to do it again." That is the

distinction between guilt and remorse. Guilt roots you in the world of sin that ensures you will continue to be unloving and unkind. Remorse says, "I made a mistake. That's all it was." That is remembering to laugh. I just made a mistake!