

"I Will Forgive, but Never Forget"

Excerpts from the Academy class held at the
Foundation for A Course in Miracles
Temecula CA

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Part III

Q: Where does the feeling of vulnerability fit into this model?

A: It fits in perfectly. The body was made to be vulnerable. The whole idea of being vulnerable is that there is something out there that can hurt us physically or psychologically, which fits in perfectly with the ego system. The ego wants us to feel vulnerable because that is what ensures the belief that someone out there can hurt us, and above all, that denies the fact that the right mind is truly invulnerable. When we are in our right minds, nothing can hurt us because we know we are not our bodies, and even though our bodies can be hurt and attacked, we would know that that has nothing to do with us. Thus, the idea that we are vulnerable, which really means that we are psychological or physical bodies, is a denial of the true invulnerability of the mind, which fits in very nicely with the ego system.

Q: What intentions could I set to release the feeling of vulnerability? I do not believe yet that I am not a body, so I really believe that someone can harm me. How do I make the reverse of that real?

A: You release it by realizing that being vulnerable does not bring you peace, and that recognizing your invulnerability as a mind will bring you peace. You would look at the situation from a point of strength rather than weakness (see T-31.VIII.2). If you do not yet believe that you are not a body and that therefore you can be harmed, just continue to be honest about that and say to yourself: "The reason I am afraid, anxious, angry, or upset is that I feel that I am vulnerable, but even though I am not ready to accept the fact that I am invulnerable, I am now aware that that is the truth. At least I now know that that is the problem. The problem is not what this terrible person is about to do to me or has done to me. The problem is that I am afraid of getting back to my mind where true invulnerability is." At least then you are being honest. That is a very helpful step forward.

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Q: This is about setting forgiveness in an earthly frame . . . I take it that this is the forgiveness we are used to because it is synonymous with forgiveness-to-destroy. Given that, I probably would never even ask the question which I have asked so many times: How does one forget when forgiveness has ensued? That probably implies that I hardly know what forgiveness means.

A: Probably that is true. You have a lot of company. This is why *The Song of Prayer* pamphlet was taken down and why there is so much in the Course about our misunderstanding of forgiveness. We think of it in the context of a body, and we cannot help that because we think we are bodies. So obviously anything that we think of is going to be colored by our experience of ourselves as bodies. That is why there is that very important line that says, "You cannot even think of God without a body, or in some form you think you recognize" (T-18.VIII.1:7). Since we are bodies, there is no way we can think of God as not having a body too. It may be different from ours, but we definitely think of God as a person. So, because we are bodies, He has to be a body and a person.

Since we think of ourselves and other people as bodies, then we would naturally think forgiveness is a process that occurs between bodies. We think love is something that occurs between bodies. We think attack is something that occurs between bodies. And that misses the whole point, which is that attack and specialness in any of its forms occurs in the mind, not the body. That is where forgiveness is operating. In fact, everything operates in the mind, because there is no body and no world.

What is helpful, again, is to be honest with ourselves and to be aware that we are reading the Course through our own lenses, thinking Jesus is talking to us as bodies and that he is telling my body to forgive someone else's body. That is what the words say, of course, but we are missing the whole point and the whole meaning of the words if we think that way. The words are there because we think we are bodies. The purpose of them, importantly, is to lead us to an experience that is beyond the body. The purpose of *A Course in Miracles* is to lead us from the mindless (the body) to the mindful. So Jesus uses words that pertain to the body because that is where we think we are, the condition we think we are in (T-25.I.7:4), but he uses those words to lead us beyond the body. "Words are but symbols of symbols. They are thus twice removed from reality" (M-21.1:9-10). Thus, the words are symbols that represent concepts that are symbols that denote the reality.

Our true self (not our true Self) is a mind, not a body. That is the reality, and that is the truth. We therefore need a concept of our self, which is "I am an individual." Then we need a concept or a symbol that represents that concept, which is "I am a body." The body, then, symbolizes the concept of the self as an individual, which in turn is a symbol of who we really are. Thus, my self within the dream is not a body. My self within the dream is a dreamer or a decision maker. So the words are symbols of symbols. The word body is a symbol of the symbol of my self-concept as a separated entity, which itself is a symbol of a self that is a decision maker in the mind. We just get further and further away from that identity. The words meet us where we think we are, for the purpose of leading us back to where we truly are: in the decision-making part of our mind, which is the only thing there is.

Once we separated from God, the only true statement that could be made about us—our only real self-concept within the dream—is that we are decision makers. We have the power to choose. When we choose the ego, we abdicate our self-concept as a decision maker and become an ego, "the home of evil, darkness and sin" (W-pl.93.1:1). We project that and then become a body, also "the home of evil, darkness and sin," except we think it is another person's body that is "the home of the evil, darkness and sin," not ours. We are now far, far away from where we began, which is as a decision maker making the wrong choice.

Again, "Rest a while in this; do not attempt to judge forgiveness, nor to set it in an earthly frame" (S-2.III.7:3). What precedes this statement in *The Song of Prayer* is a discussion that basically says the Holy Spirit knows what forgiveness is, and that we should allow Him to teach us. What happens, of course, is that we teach Him instead. So rather than read the Course with an open mind and let Jesus tell us what he is teaching us, we read it with a closed mind that now thinks it is a body. In effect, we tell Jesus what he is telling us. And we are all wrong! *The Song of Prayer* was taken down one year after *A Course in Miracles* was published to correct what was already going wrong in the minds of Course students. Unfortunately, it does not appear to have done a very good job of correcting people, in part because people do not read it. And if they do, they read it the same way they read the Course. So a clear line like this—do not put forgiveness in an earthly frame—is not understood. There is a parallel line in "The Two Pictures" in the text where Jesus says we have tried to put the right picture in the wrong frame (T-17.IV.13:1). In this context, we would say the right picture is forgiveness and the wrong frame is the body. We put the right picture in the wrong frame, the earthly frame. That is why forgiveness here becomes impossible. We do not do it, because we are always holding on to what people have done, and what they have done is always in the past. In the present, we experience the hurt. The future then becomes: we will forgive them, but we will never forget, which means we are silently judging them, not to mention ourselves. Thus, we have taken the process of forgiveness and put it in the earthly frame of linear time, which means we have put it in the wrong mind's frame of sin, guilt, and fear. At that point, there is no forgiveness and no hope.

The idea is to see *A Course in Miracles* as a journey from mind-lessness to mind-fulness, a journey that will take us back to the mind. That is where forgiveness has to be practiced. That is where the problem is. The decision for the ego is the problem, not what you have done to me or I have done to you. That is simply a projection of what our minds have done. So you want to use your experience in a relationship here as the vehicle for getting back to the mind by seeing what you do here as a projection of the mind.

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Q: Our fear of forgiveness is that it will lead us to the Love of God, which would, of course, then spell our annihilation as a self, the disappearance of our self into the Love of God. Is that right? The other side of that is that if we do not forgive, we have the fear of God's punishment. So we put ourselves in a nice little no-win situation.

A: Yes, from the ego's point of view, that is exactly what it does. Its purpose is to have that no-win situation. Realize when you feel damned-if-you-do and damned-if-you-don't, you have chosen the ego, which means there must be another way of looking at it that transcends what is terrible on the left and just as terrible on the right. The answer to that is that you do not disappear into God. As I mentioned earlier, that happens at the very end of the process, at the very top of the ladder. Then you disappear, the ladder disappears, everything disappears. As you make your way up the ladder, however, the ego things that are so painful disappear: anxiety, guilt, fear, depression, anger, and so on. You still retain a sense of self. It is only at the very end that you realize that that very self, too, is an illusion, and then you are at the point where you can say, I don't want this, I don't need this anymore. Then it disappears.

Recall the line, "Fear not that you will be abruptly lifted up and hurled into reality" (T-16.VI.8:1), meaning you are just going to go poof. It does not happen that way.

The ego uses the fear of the future as a way of reinforcing itself. Remember, any time you get involved with time, you know that is the ego: I did something terrible in the past, I feel so awful now; God knows what will happen in the future; there is not going to be enough time for me to learn this course—I am going to have to die, come back again, and start the workbook all over again. Whenever you get involved with time, you know that is the ego. It is a blanket rule of thumb that whenever you are concerned about the past, worried or anxious about the future, that is the ego. At that point, don't even argue with yourself because no matter what you say, you are going to lose. What will help you get beyond that is realizing that this whole thing is your ego. Any anxiety about the future and any self-recrimination about the past are part of the ego's strategy to keep you rooted in time, and if you are rooted in time, then your separated self is real.

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Q: After about 20 years of working with this course, I realize that I am practically always looking with the ego.

A: The difference between looking with the ego and looking with Jesus or the Holy Spirit is that when you look with the ego, you feel even worse. You feel guilty and then you feel fearful, etc. When you look with Jesus, you learn to smile. What looking with him really means is that you recognize what it is you are giving up by holding on to the special hates or the special loves. That is the key element—realizing that holding on to your grievances or holding on to your attraction to nice things is costing you the peace of God. There is nothing wrong with liking nice things, but if you use them as a substitute for the Love of God, after a while they no longer work for you. Again, we have to realize that holding on to specialness in either of its forms is costing us the peace of God, and that we do not want to pay that price anymore. Or, perhaps more honestly, we should say we still want to pay that price. The ego, though, will never let us look at itself and see the cost. When you look with the Holy Spirit, you look at the ego and you realize the cost. That is the difference between the two ways of looking.

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Q: I am so drawn to the Course because it rings true to me; but on the other hand it does not square with how the world thinks.

A: A while ago, I gave a workshop called "When $2 + 2 = 5$." The point of that workshop was to say that the world we live in is a world of $2 + 2 = 4$, which is logical, except it does not work. The world *A Course in Miracles* comes from, and which is what makes it what it is, is a $2 + 2 = 5$ world, which makes no sense here. But when you read the Course, something rings true. That is why people stay with it, as I always like to say, even if they do not understand it. Something rings true and attracts them, and that is because it comes from a $2 + 2 = 5$ world. When you are in the presence of something that rings true, very often it does not make sense in the world's view. But something rings true because in a sense,

whatever it is cuts through everything the world knows. It comes from another place, and it reaches another place in you, what the Course calls the right mind. Basically what it says is that living in a $2 + 2 = 5$ world brings you peace because it brings you a peace that is not contingent upon anything happening here. You could be peaceful regardless of what happens. Living in a $2 + 2 = 4$ world where things seem to fit and make sense does not lead to peace because the world itself does not make sense.

Q: I certainly have experienced that forgiveness of my children and other family members does not work, that I have failed in the real world and as an ego in forgiveness. Is it necessary to have that experience in the process of moving forward to real forgiveness and be aware that obviously something is wrong with where you are coming from as an ego? In other words, is that the bottom rung of the ladder, and to move on to the next rung, you realize something must change? There must be a better way.

A: I think the whole Course is predicated on that premise. In effect, that is how the Course began, as you know. Helen and Bill agreed there must be another way because what they were doing was not working. And I think everyone has that experience, whether they verbalize it consciously or not. They have tried lots of things and they do not work. There is that wonderful section right near the end of the text called "The Real Alternative" (T-31.IV), which talks about how we all try different things in the world, hoping against hope that this time it will work, until finally we recognize nothing here works, and that the only true alternative is to go within because that is where there is a meaningful choice in the mind, between the Holy Spirit and the ego. That is the meaningful choice, and that is the real alternative. The world offers thousands and thousands of alternatives, and none of them works. That awareness is what gets you on the right ladder. It gets you off the ego's ladder, which it seems to want you to climb, but you are always on the same rung. You know, you work and work to climb up the ladder, and you end up still on the bottom because the world's ladder, the ego's ladder, does not take you anywhere. So it is in recognizing that that whole ladder is wrong, that you get on the right ladder. Then you just kind of scoot up.