

## Our Gratitude to God

Excerpts from the Workshop held at the  
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### Part III

#### Gratitude to Jesus (conclusion)

Let us now look at the section in the teachers manual that answers the question, "Does Jesus Have a Special Place in Healing?"

**(M-23.4:1-2) The name of Jesus Christ as such is but a symbol. But it stands for love that is not of this world.**

To say that Jesus is a symbol does not mean that he is unreal, at least certainly not in this world. We are also symbols—of fear, separation, and guilt. Jesus, however, not having an ego, now becomes a symbol of love. So to speak of Jesus as a symbol is not to say that he is any less real than we are. None of us is real on one level, obviously. But since we believe that the world is real and that our physical/psychological self is real, then within that reality, within that dream, we *and* Jesus are real. The difference is that we are a symbol of fear, guilt, and attack, and he is a symbol of love, forgiveness, and peace.

**(M-23.4:3) It is a symbol that is safely used as a replacement for the many names of all the gods to which you pray.**

The word *gods* is lowercase; and the gods to which we pray are all of our experiences of specialness—all the idols. These idols can be abstract, like fame and power; or tangible, like money; or even more specific, like people—all the things and people that we believe we need to save us. These are the little gods that we have made. The dictionary defines *idol* as "anything that is a substitute for God." Thus, all of our specialness is nothing more than a substitute for the Love of God. It is the egos way of saying to God, "You cannot meet my need; You cannot make me happy or peaceful, but this special person can." If this special person loves me, then that is all that I need—getting that special persons love is Heaven. I do not need anyone else, and I certainly do not need God or Jesus. But this also works with specialness things that are not positive such as addictions. Thus, alcoholics would feel that the only way they can cope with the extreme anxiety and pain in their lives is to drink, because neither God nor Jesus will do anything to help; but this bottle, this drug, or whatever the substance, will. These are all the gods to which we pray. What Jesus is saying is that we can safely use his name as a replacement for all of that.

**(M-23.4:4-5) It becomes the shining symbol for the Word of God, so close to what it stands for that the little space between the two is lost, the moment that the name is called to mind. Remembering the name of Jesus Christ is to give thanks for all the gifts that God has given you.**

Jesus is not referring to the Christian practice of using the name of Jesus Christ in a magical way—that you just invoke his name and then everything is suddenly fine. People have exorcised the devil in the

name of Jesus Christ—as if the name itself has magical power. The name has no power. As the Course says, "words are but symbols of symbols. They are thus twice removed from reality" (M-21.1:9-10). However, the name of Jesus could work powerfully for a person if it symbolizes the Love of God, and by remembering it, that person identifies with that Love in his or her mind. In fact, the only power in this world is the power of Gods Love in our mind. Therefore, using the name or the person of Jesus or any other symbol that represents the Love of God becomes a way to remember our true Identity.

One of the big mistakes the Church made at the beginning was to say that Jesus was different from us—that he was the Son of God incarnate; the *only* perfect, sinless, loving one. Therefore, right off the bat, the ego played its only game: making differences real. But what Jesus taught was exactly the opposite. What he would have said to all of us then was: "Experience the love that you feel inside me as nothing other than a mirror of the love that is inside you. The only difference between us is that I know that, and you have forgotten it. That same presence of love, that same light of Christ shines just as brightly in you as it does in me. We are not different." That is the context of this passage. By recalling his love in his name, what we are really doing is remembering that that same love is within us. He becomes the symbol that helps us remember the gifts of God within us, the gifts of His Love, His peace, His Self. We are mistaken when we think of him as an older brother who will magically make everything turn out okay. He is a symbol for us of who we are. That is why he makes such a big point in the Course, to repeat, that we not see him as different from us. He is different in time, because he is an older brother, but he is not different from us in eternity. The way we can remember God and our gratitude to God is through remembering Jesus.

We will see later, when we talk about feeling grateful to each other, that Jesus says that he stands in the midst of the holy relationship. Learning to forgive you and feel grateful to you for being in my life removes the barrier of separation and guilt. Jesus presence then becomes manifest, because his presence of love is always there in us. Our guilt and fear keep it away, and therefore when I let that guilt and fear go and truly join with you, his love has not come to me—it was always there—but now I have come to his love. In this sense, one can say that first I forgive you, then I forgive Jesus, and then I forgive God. Or alternatively, I learn how to feel grateful to you; I therefore learn how to feel grateful to Jesus; and then I learn how to feel grateful to God.

**(M-23.4:6) And gratitude to God becomes the way in which He is remembered, for love cannot be far behind a grateful heart and thankful mind.**

If ingratitude can be seen as one of the cornerstones of the ego system and basically goes hand in hand with judgment, attack, fear, and guilt, then when we undo that ingratitude and allow ourselves to feel grateful to each other, to Jesus, and to God, then love must come, because love has been hidden behind ingratitude. Ingratitude is like a veil, and therefore, when the veil is gone, the Love of God can be experienced.

**(M-23.4:7) God enters easily, for these are the true conditions for your homecoming.**

In this context the conditions for our homecoming would be gratitude. There is a wonderful workbook lesson called "Love is the way we walk in gratitude" (W-pl.195). We can say, then, that one way to awaken from the dream of hatred and return home is to truly know the meaning of gratitude and appreciation; and the way we do that is to become aware of the depth of the *ingratitude* within us. We simply recognize that, yes, there is a part of me that is deeply ungrateful and unappreciative of what is

around me. I realize that that is my ego, but I do not have to do anything with those feelings except learn not to be afraid of them. I need only be aware of how difficult it is to feel truly grateful—not just to say the words "thank you," but to feel them. I need to realize that the ingratitude I feel is a way of saying I do not want to feel gratitude to God because I do not want to return to Him. My ego tells me that if I return to Him, I will be destroyed. Therefore, the only way I can maintain my independence, sanity, and existence is to keep God away; and I do that by being ungrateful. Therefore, if Jesus is the symbol of God, then one of the ways I keep him away is to be ungrateful. If my brothers become a symbol of Jesus and God, then the way I keep them away is to be ungrateful.

All you have to do is simply look at all of those feelings in yourself and acknowledge that you are not allowing yourself to say thank you or admit that you need help because you do not want to return home. Just be aware that that is what you are doing.

**(M-23.5:1-2) Jesus has led the way. Why would you not be grateful to him?**

That is a very good question, especially if Jesus is the way, or certainly within this dream, the symbol of how one returns home. In other words, if he represents how we learn to be selfless and totally loving in the presence of what the world judges as extreme hatred, anger, and attack, why would we not be grateful to him? He symbolizes for us who we are; why would we not be grateful to him?

**(M-23.5:3) He has asked for love, but only that he might give it to you.**

Jesus is not asking for love because he has an ego that sucks up all the love we give him; he asks for love because that is the only way he can give it to us.

**(M-23.5:4-11) You do not love yourself. But in his eyes your loveliness is so complete and flawless that he sees in it an image of his Father. You become the symbol of his Father here on earth. To you he looks for hope, because in you he sees no limit and no stain to mar your beautiful perfection. In his eyes Christ's vision shines in perfect constancy. He has remained with you. Would you not learn the lesson of salvation through his learning? Why would you choose to start again, when he has made the journey for you?**

The reason we are not grateful to Jesus and that part of us hates him can be found in what he is saying here: he sees what we do not want to see in us. The ego does not want to recognize that the light of Christ's Love shines in us. It does not want us to realize that we are an image of God, an expression and extension of His Love. Therefore, to our egos, he represents a tremendous threat, because he sees in us the end of the ego. The part of our mind that identifies with the ego thought system then says that if I let this Love become real inside me, there will be no room for hate. There is a line from John's letter that is quoted often in the Course: "Perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). The ego thus warns that if I let this love in and let this light shine in me, there will be no room for hatred, fear, or darkness, which means there will be no room for *me*, as an ego.

It is my ego that hates Jesus, and this hatred can take many different forms: direct hatred, indifference, and denial of his presence. It can also take the form of changing him around, so that he is the one who points a finger at me and says, "You are a guilty sinner; but if you suffer and sacrifice, you will become purified." This ego version of Jesus does not see me as love and light, or as one with no limit or stain that mars the beautiful perfection in me. This ego Jesus sees me as sinful. That is what Christianity has taught. As an integral part of the Catholic Mass, for example, every Catholic must say just prior to

receiving Communion, which is the body and blood of Jesus: "Lord I am not worthy to receive you." That is not the way Jesus would want us to talk to him. That is why the world has to hate him and why the world changed around what he said. He taught us the exact opposite. This is a good reason not to pay any attention to him, as long as we have an investment in staying in this world this way.

One further thought about unworthiness and the egos use of defenses: Unworthiness is sometimes a disguise for anger, which itself can be a disguise for unworthiness. This is not a circle as much as it is a layering of defenses. In other words, the basic unworthiness is that we are guilty because of the terrible thing we did, and so we are really not worthy of Gods Love. We tried to steal His Love, and actually believe we did, so that makes us very guilty, very sinful, and most unworthy. To defend against the horror and pain of this unworthiness, we project the guilt and judge someone else as unworthy, instead of ourselves. We then get angry, but just as quickly say that anger is bad, and nice boys and girls are not supposed to get angry. Therefore we feel guilty because we are angry, which makes us feel unworthy—and then we just push the whole thing down. It can also take the form of feeling that I am not worthy to stand on my own two feet and tell you what I think I am. If I do, you will squash me like a bug, which is what I believe God will do. I dont do that, but then I get even angrier, and at that point it becomes a vicious circle. The ego just layers its defenses one on top of the other, so that we get further and further away from the original problem: namely, that we believe we are unworthy because of what we did to God. We never stop to look at that, along with the fact that we really never did anything to God. All of our experiences of unworthiness and anger are simply ways of defending against looking within ourselves.

Thus, the gratitude we would feel toward Jesus is that despite all the crazy stuff that goes on inside us, there is a part of us that knows he truly loves us, and that by accepting his love, we can accept the love that we are.

Before moving on to the next theme, our gratitude toward each other, I want to underscore the importance of relating to Jesus as a personal presence. He asks us in a number of places in the text to take him as our model for learning (e.g., T-5.II.12; T-6.in.2:1). The idea, however, is not to emulate him in terms of his earthly life, but to emulate his *mind*, a mind that can only love. There is a wonderful poem of Helens that I often read at workshops called "The Jesus Prayer"—I will read it in its entirety later (*The Gifts of God*, p. 82). This is really a prayer we would say to him, that he help us become like him, which means to be loving and defenseless; meeting seeming attacks with love, and not taking peoples attacks personally; learning to live in this world without forgetting that we are not of the world. That is the value of Jesus, and that is why he fills such a prominent place in *A Course in Miracles*. One of the specific ways in which he can be a helpful model is when we are tempted to see ourselves as unfairly treated, the innocent victims of what the world has done to us, and therefore feel justified in our anger. At that point we can remember Jesus and his life, where, in the eyes of the world, he would certainly have been justified in feeling unfairly treated. Yet, he did not feel that way. We thus can call upon him to help us learn the same lesson he exemplifies for us.

Finally, a few words about how to get beyond the mere saying of the words of gratitude to the experience of gratitude.

There is a workbook lesson entitled "I want the peace of God," and it begins with the statement, "To say these words is nothing. But to mean these words is everything" (W-pl.185.1:1-2). I know of no other way to get from the words to the meaning or the feeling other than to just do it—to let yourself become part

of the Course process. This is more than just studying the text, doing the workbook lessons, and reading the teachers manual. It is really letting the thought system of the Course slowly become part of your thought system, until finally there is no difference. Your thought system becomes the Courses and vice versa. You begin by just saying the words, and recognizing, at least on an intellectual level, that there is a part of you that does want to feel grateful—to a particular person as your brother, to Jesus as your older brother, and to God as your Source and Creator. Even though you are aware that you do not totally feel it, you are at least aware enough to take this first step.

This is the same idea as at the end of the Introduction to the workbook (W-in.8,9), where Jesus urges us to just do what the lessons say-dont believe them if you dont want to; dont fight against them, because that does not make sense; just do what each lesson says. Eventually it will become part of you, because there is a part of all of us that longs for what it says, and that longs to go home. Even if we deny him, hate him, yell at him, or feel indifferent toward him, there is a part of us that is deeply grateful to him for his help and for his presence, because he is the symbol of who we are. This is the part of us that we have blocked off, and which we believe we will never get back. His presence, then, is a reminder that what we believe we killed, we have not killed.

The first step is at least being aware of the importance of gratitude. Then be aware of how strongly you resist that experience of gratitude. That is one of *the* important themes in the Course—to become aware of and to look within at all the ego thoughts in our minds. You do not have to focus on the positive or even try to instill a sense of gratitude in yourself. What you want to do is become aware of the *ingratitude* in yourself. As you become more aware of it and can look at it without fear, you will eventually let it go. Be aware that there is a part of you that does not want to feel grateful to God as your Source, or to Jesus and the Holy Spirit as your inner Teacher, or to all the other people in this world who symbolize them for you. Just be aware that there is a part of you that does not want to say thank you, and know that is not a sin.