

Our Gratitude to God

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

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Part IV

Our Gratitude to Each Other

Now we turn to the third of our three themes, our gratitude toward each other. This really is the heart of the entire Course, whose principal message is forgiveness. One way of understanding the importance of gratitude is to understand the dimensions of *ingratitude*. None of us got here in this body and in this world without a fully developed ego thought system; and that means that we cannot but experience ourselves as unfairly treated. That is a crucial part of the ego thought system—that we are innocent victims. The starting point of this thought system is the insane thought that we victimized God—we stole from Him and He is the victim. That insanity gets turned around so that it is now God Who victimizes us, and we are the innocent victims. The entire thought system of the ego arose from those two basic ideas—that I victimized God, and now I am going to be the victim of His victimization. That is why *A Course in Miracles* says, "Beware of the temptation to perceive yourself unfairly treated" (T-26.X.4:1).

In order to escape from the thought of victimization, this world was made, along with the separated fragments of this thought, of which each of us is a part. Each of us carries within our minds that same thought of being an innocent victim, which means we believe the world is out to get us, and that all of our unhappiness and misery are due to forces and persons beyond our control. Every child would feel that way toward his parents: "Don't yell at me! You're the one who brought me here. I didn't ask to be born. It's not my fault that I'm here!" Our experience is that we are here by biological accident, whether planned or not. A part of us feels that we had nothing whatsoever to do with it. It all rests on the premise that I am not responsible for the physical universe on a collective scale, and I am certainly not responsible for my personal universe. *You* are the ones who did it to me. Thus, from the very beginning of our human existence there is the idea that someone else did this to me. I am the product of a physical act of my parents, and that is why I am here. Then, of course, the child coming into the world totally dependent on his or her parents is tailor-made for the reinforcement of this thought system. It is not the world that gives us this thought system of being a victim; *we* are the ones who gave it to the world, and the world simply reflects it back to us. And it certainly does a very good job of reinforcing a thought system that tells me I am what the world has made of me, an innocent victim. Whether you say that heredity is the prime factor in determining behavior, or the environment, or a combination of both does not matter, because every position is wrong. Once you attribute your behavior to a cause outside yourself, you are caught in that trap.

The key principle of our thought system here in this world as separated egos is that we are victims, and people have done terrible things to us. Therefore, it makes very good sense not to feel grateful. Why *should* I feel grateful? I did not want to come here. All of my misery is due to the fact that there are

terrible people who do terrible things to me. My ego may tell me that not everyone is terrible, that there are some good people in the world—these are the special people, the special love objects who take good care of me. Everything is wonderful when that happens; but they do not take good care of me unless I pay them somehow. The heart of all specialness is the bargain. Therefore, why should I be grateful for the good things you do for me? I have to pay you, and I have to be good back to you. There has to be some kind of a giving in order to get here. This is the insanity of the special relationship bargain. Since I believe I am such a despicable worm and so awful, I cannot believe that I deserve people's love, gratitude, or goodness—there is no way I could deserve it. Therefore, my ego tells me that I have to get it, steal it, or take it from you. But that is not going to work if I do it in a flagrant or blatant way. Thus, I have to steal from you but have it look as if something else is going on.

That is what *A Course in Miracles* explains very powerfully—how this insane bargaining goes back and forth. The only way I can get love from you and still have it look good for me—so it does not look like I am taking it or stealing it from you—is to pay you for it. And so I try to seduce you with the gifts I offer so that you will be tempted to take what I am giving you, and then give me what I want. Therefore, there is no reason, my ego would tell me, that I should feel grateful to you. Rather, it should be you who feels gratitude to me because of what I have done for you. Now, much of the time this is not a conscious choice. But whether it is or not, these are the thoughts and feelings we all have. The dominant thought is that we have it coming to us: If you are my special love partner, then I deserve this from you because of what I have had to give up and sacrifice. If you are my special hate partner, then there is no reason for feeling grateful to you because you are such a miserable person—look what you've done to me!

Thus, there is no room for genuine gratitude in the ego's system, unless it is false gratitude—pretending to be grateful. In that case, expressing gratitude to you will stroke your ego, and then you will think that you are really a good person; and since I am also a good person, I will get more from you. If you give me a hundred dollars and I am very gracious, appreciative, and I thank you, in back of that I am thinking I will get another hundred dollars from you. If you are warm and loving towards me, I reinforce that by telling you how appreciative I am. Deep down what I want is to have it happen again. That it is not genuine gratitude or a genuine sense of appreciation. It is something that I say to you so that I will get more from you.

That is where all the guilt comes from in specialness, because there is a part of me that knows I am tricking you. Part of me really wants to kill you and steal from your flesh what you have stolen from me, as the Course explains (T-23.II.9-12; T-24.V.4). I know that I am being false, and therefore, I feel guilty. The more guilty I feel, the worse I feel about myself and the greater my need to deny it, and to keep getting more and more. That is the very vicious circle found in all of our special relationships: I feel guilty and have to defend my guilt by stealing from you; then I feel even guiltier, so I have to keep doing it over and over again. There is no room for gratitude here at all, at least not genuine gratitude—the ego's gratitude is only part of the specialness game.

That is why gratitude is such an important part of the Course's system. That is also why Jesus says that he does not need our gratitude, and that God does not need our gratitude or praise (T-6.I.17:1-2). The reason that is mentioned is that part of us thinks He does need our gratitude; otherwise Jesus would not have mentioned it. Part of us thinks that both God and Jesus have an ego, because that is what is found in the Bible: God gets angry and His feelings are hurt if His children do not praise Him, love Him, express gratitude to Him, and burn things at the altar for Him, etc. Then Jesus, being God's Son, of course, would

be taking after the Old Man, so he would do the same thing. All the insanity that the world put upon God, Jesus naturally inherits.

Again, *ingratitude* would have to go hand in hand with everything else in the ego system. The opposite of that, obviously, would be gratitude. One of the statements that Jesus makes in the workbook lesson "Love is the way I walk in gratitude" is that we should "give thanks for every living thing" (W-pl.195.6:3)—to everything that appears to be alive outside us in the world, because everything is simply a screen onto which we project all our unconscious hatred and guilt. However, because our guilt is unconscious, we do not know about it; and if we do not know about it, we cannot bring it to the light. A *Course in Miracles* teaches us to bring the darkness to the light, the illusions to the truth, the fear to the love. But how can we do that if we do not know about it? It is all so buried. The primary defense of the ego, which in a sense is the most primitive but the most basic of all, is denial. We just blot out whatever we do not want to see—as Lesson 195 explains. There is no way we can heal this or change our mind about it until we become aware of it. That is the purpose of the world, from the Holy Spirit's point of view.

The ego made up the world as a hiding place from God—as a place in which murder becomes the rule, and suffering and pain become the experience. But as seen through the eyes of the Holy Spirit, the world becomes a classroom. The way that works is that I see in you the projection of everything that I had not known was present within me. In this sense, we can liken our lives to being in a movie theater where we look at the screen and see an out picturing of the film that is running through the projector—the projector is really our own mind. However, we do not know what the film is, because the projector is not in our body. One of the major ideas in the Course is that the mind is not in the body—it is outside the body. A common confusion in the world today is that the mind and the brain are somehow the same or are connected. *The mind is not in the brain.*

To understand this, once again think of your physical/psychological self sitting in a movie theater, but what you are seeing on the screen is a film that is outside your body, and yet it is *your* film. The film of guilt and ingratitude that is running through the projector that is our mind casts an image on the screen. But you don't know what is in back of you. It is like the prisoners in Plato's cave—they cannot turn and see the light in back of them outside the cave because they are chained and can only look at the shadows on the wall in front of them. That is the situation all of us are in.

Remember, the body and the brain were made specifically to keep reality away from us. They were also made to keep guilt away from us—because to the ego, guilt is what hides the light of truth in us. Since the ego never wants us to look at that light of truth, it makes up a song-and-dance routine. It says there is no light of truth in your mind—there is only the darkness of guilt, which is so awful that you should never look at it. So we say, "Fine, I'll never look at it; instead, I'll look outside." Again, we sit in the movie theater chained by our fear, so terrified to turn around and look at where the picture is coming from that we forget that there is nothing outside or in front of us except the screen. When we sit in a movie theater engrossed in the movie, we forget that what we are watching is make believe. It seems very real. We get all caught up and identified with the characters and the action—we feel fear, anxiety, relief, love, happiness, sadness, guilt, depression, boredom—the same as we feel in our seeming waking life. Just as when we dream at night, we forget that nothing is happening. If it is a bad dream, we feel anxiety, fear, terror, guilt, depression, loss, etc., because at that moment we forget that it is all a dream. What we call lucid dreamers these days are people who, in the midst of a dream at night, are aware that

they are dreaming. These people can be having a nightmare and suddenly within the dream—they are not awake, they are still within the dream—they say "Oh, this is a dream." Then the terror goes away.

In a sense, the whole purpose of *A Course in Miracles* is to help us become lucid dreamers. Again, it is as if we are sitting in the movie theater and have forgotten that there is nothing happening out there—that it is all literally make believe. What is really happening is nothing more than a projecting of what is happening behind me. The film is running through my mind, but I don't know it is there because my fear is so great that it has chained me so that I can only look forward, not in back of me. That is why no one these days knows that the mind is not in the body. The mind is thought of as somehow trapped in the brain or the body, but that is not the case.

We can come to realize that there is a loving Presence next to us in the theater—Jesus or the Holy Spirit—Who is teaching us how to look at the screen. That loving Presence tells us that what we are seeing out there, what we believe is upsetting and victimizing us, is not out there at all; it is simply something within our own mind—our thoughts. We are seeing what is on the screen only because of our desire to see it. Our Teacher is saying, "You are the one who is putting it out there; it is *your* film. If you are feeling victimized, it is because you have made a choice to see yourself as victimized, and therefore you are the one who can make the choice to see yourself as not victimized. Now at last you know you have a choice." That is where the expression of gratitude is coming from. That is the reason the Course teaches us that we should be grateful for every living thing, and that every encounter is a holy encounter

Until *A Course in Miracles*—and the Course is only one spirituality—I did not know I had a choice. The only choice I believed I had was between murder and murder. It was either that your body or mine would be murdered, which is no real choice. What the Course helps us recognize is that we do have a choice. On the one hand, there is murder; on the other, there is the miracle. On the one hand, there is hatred or fear; on the other, there is forgiveness or love. But I have a choice. I am not asked in the Course at this point to break my chains and turn around, because my fear is still so great. My ego tells me that if I break those chains and turn around, I will be devastated, which is what Jesus is referring to in the section in the text called "The Fear to Look Within." He thus explains, "Loudly the ego tells you not to look inward, for if you do your eyes will light on sin and God will strike you blind" (T-21.IV.2:3). If I break through those chains of fear and turn around and look at the film running through the projector (the guilt in my mind), I will be devastated, because God is there. And this is not a loving God—He is a wrathful, punitive, bloodthirsty God.

The Course at this point is not telling me that I have to turn around and look. It is telling me to just continue to sit in the theater and look at the screen. But now I know there is a presence next to me who will guide me and teach me how to look. He will teach me how to be grateful to everything that I perceive and experience on the screen, which is nothing more than my experiences here in this world. He will tell me that I should be especially grateful for those people who are the biggest pains in the neck; who cause me the greatest grief; who bring me the greatest pain and suffering; who make me feel the most guilty, the most anxious, etc. Those are the people who are showing me, if I look at the screen correctly, what is within my own mind. If they had not come along, I would never know the content of the film, and if I do not know the content of the film, I cannot change my mind about it.

Now, with Jesus sitting next to me, I can look at what you have done to me—my anger, hurt, resentment, my justified murderous thoughts; and as I look, he taps me gently and says, "My brother,

choose again." What he is saying is that I can look at you differently, and now feel grateful, but not for what your ego has done. The Course says of itself that it is simple, but that does not mean simple-minded. It never says I should be grateful because another person's ego has bashed me in the head. What it is saying is that I should feel grateful because what I am accusing your ego of doing is exactly the same as what I am accusing my ego of doing. However, without your having been there, I would not know what my ego was doing. My ego would tell me that when you do this, my choice is between murdering you and letting you murder me. That is the only choice. "Kill or be killed," as the Course says at one point (M-17.7:11). What Jesus helps me recognize is that my choice is not between murder and murder. I choose between murder and the miracle—I either continue to hate and attack you, or I forgive you.

The gratitude the Course is asking us to feel toward each other is not for what you do for me or for the miserable way you have treated me. It is gratitude for being able to see in you a mirror of my own self. And now that I see it in you, I know it is within me, and by changing my mind about you, I am changing my mind about myself. That is the source of the gratitude. I cannot forgive you without this loving presence next to me, however. My gratitude toward you is impossible without my also feeling gratitude toward Jesus or the Holy Spirit. If I believe I can forgive you by myself, I am doing exactly what I did right at the beginning. I am doing it without God. I am saying, "I do not need You; I can make up my own self, my own will; my own world, and I do not need You at all." It is the same idea—simply recognizing that, as the Course says (based on John's gospel [5:19,30]), of myself I can do nothing (e.g., T-8.IV.7:3). The ego interprets that as great weakness, but in truth, it is great strength. It is realizing that I cannot change my mind by myself, because it is my self that got me into this mess, that accuses you; that believes I can do it on my own. And it is my self that will keep me in hell. Thus, it is recognizing not only that I cannot do this without Jesus, but also that I cannot do it without you. You represent a part of my self that I have split off and pushed outside me. And until I recognize that you are not outside me, but are really a part of me, then I will never know the Christ that I am.

My changing my mind about you means recognizing that whatever you have done or not done has had no effect on my reality as God's Child. The love and peace that I can identify as coming from God cannot be taken from me simply because of what you have done, and if I am not feeling that love and peace, I cannot validly say it is because of what you have done. You did not give it to me; it is not your love and concern that is making me feel good. So, too, it is not your hatred that is making me feel terrible. In other words, the love and peace in me is totally independent of what you have or have not done.

To use another example, if I see you as an ungrateful wretch, it is a projection of how I see myself. Remember, though, it is possible to look at someone and say that person is not feeling gratitude, but without attacking or condemning that person. Basically, right from the beginning Jesus is calling us ungrateful wretches, but not as an attack. Why would he talk so much about gratitude if he knew we weren't grateful? Why would he talk so much about peace and love if he did not know that we were murderers? And he tells us that all the time. But it is not an attack. He is simply saying, "Listen to what I am telling you because this will make you feel better. And I am doing this because I love you." In other words, it is possible to observe what someone is doing without attack.

In the biblical stories, Jesus knew people were crucifying him; yet, he explains: "As the world judges these things, but not as God knows them, I was betrayed, abandoned, beaten, torn, and finally killed" (T-6.I.9:2). These are objective statements, without condemnation. He did not experience that as an attack.

But if you accuse someone of attacking you, and if you accuse someone of being an ungrateful wretch, then obviously it is because you first accused yourself of being an ungrateful wretch, which of course all of us are; otherwise, none of us would be here. The idea is to try to become aware of the ungrateful wretches and the insane murderers inside each of us so that we can become comfortable with that idea without feeling guilty about it or afraid of it. The fear of not looking at it was the problem in the first place. But the looking at it is what lets it go.

Again, the Course makes very clear that as we are sitting in this movie theater, we have only two possible choices of whom we are going to sit with: the ego or the Holy Spirit. We cannot sit alone. It is either the thought of fear or the thought of love. And if I am identifying with the thought of fear, I am turning away from the thought of love. And if I identify with the thought of love, I am turning away from the thought of fear. There is no choice in that. My choice is only with which way I am going to go.

Thus, if I am looking at my ego, seeing you as an ungrateful wretch, and then recognize that I am seeing myself as an ungrateful wretch, I must have chosen to look with Jesus or the Holy Spirit, because my ego would never help me see that I am projecting. That is the letting it go. Simply choosing to look at the ego with the Holy Spirit is to let it go. I look at the investment I have in an outcome of something; I look at my hatred and my ingratitude and say, "Yes, there I am, an ungrateful wretch. Of course. If I weren't, I would not be here. The very fact that I believe I am here is saying that I am an ungrateful wretch. But now I can look at it. And now I know that God does not think that way about me. It is just something that I made up." But the way that I know I made it up is to look at it. And the way that I look at it is first to see it in someone else, by accusing that person. Again, that is what the sequence is—I sit in the theater and feel grateful to you because I see you as the screen, what is inside me. I am grateful to Jesus because I am seeing through his eyes, and that gratitude toward you and him enables me to experience my gratitude toward God as my Creator. Simple!