

Our Gratitude to God

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Part X

"Love is the way I walk in gratitude" (cont.)

The next paragraph talks about the other side: what gratitude and love really are.

(W-pl.195.4:1) You do not offer God your gratitude because your brother is more slave than you, nor could you sanely be enraged if he seems freer.

It makes no sense to thank God because we are better off than someone else or that someone else is better off than we are. The crucial point in all of this is the role of comparisons in the ego thought system. Comparisons always come from differences, and that is where the problem is. The ego always wants us to perceive differences, and to have us believe that we are on the short end of the stick because someone else has done this to us. What we really thank God for in truth is that we are all the same, because that is how He created us, as we will be discussing shortly.

(4:2-3) Love makes no comparisons. And gratitude can only be sincere if it be joined to love.

What joins God and Christ is Love. In *The Song of Prayer* this joining is called "the song of prayer," a song of love and thanksgiving that the Father sings to the Son and the Son sings to the Father (S-1.in.1). It is only when the Son believed he was separate from God that he began the comparison, that God is the Creator and I am not, and that is not fair. At that point, love is out the window and taking its place are jealousy, envy, guilt, fear, sin, attack, and loss.

True love does not make comparisons (see also, T-4.II.11:12; T-24.II.1:1), which means I can be truly grateful to you only if I perceive you as one with me; I can be truly grateful for a situation only when I perceive it as an opportunity to learn that I am one with you and one with God. It is impossible to be grateful to someone who has something you do not have, or who has given you something that you now have and that person no longer has. What you can be grateful for is someone extending love to you, which really mirrors your extension of love to that person; or you can be grateful because someone is calling for love. As *A Course in Miracles* explains, what the world judges as an attack is really an expression of fear, and fear is a call for the love that has been denied or rejected, and that underlies the fear (see, for example, T-12.I.9-10). Thus, when I *perceive* you as attacking me and can remember what the Course calls the judgment of the Holy Spirit (that your attack is really a call for love), I recognize that it is also mirrors my call for love. Both of us are now joined, in that we are yearning for the same love we believe we have thrown away. Our joining—and it does not have to be on a physical level; it certainly can occur in my own mind—is how I experience gratitude to you, because you are reminding me of the lesson I want to learn. In that experience of gratitude is where the memory of love is found.

If it is truly love, then there are no comparisons. I do not see you as better or worse than I am. What I do recognize is that there are different forms in this world that express that love or that call for love; but the different forms do not mean anything. What is important is that they share the same content. Gratitude cannot be sincere if it is an expression of an unequal to an unequal. It is sincere only when it is an expression of equality. That is what it means to say that gratitude is joined to love.

(4:4-6) We offer thanks to God our Father that in us all things will find their freedom. It will never be that some are loosed while others still are bound. For who can bargain in the name of love?

The idea that "some are loosed while others still are bound" is from the statement in the gospel that says we have the power to bind or to loose (free) people from their sins (Matthew 16:19b; John 20:23). Our thanks to God is that through His presence in our mind, through His Voice, the Holy Spirit, we recognize that we are all one. As the workbook says elsewhere, "When I am healed, I am not healed alone" (W-pl.137.h). When my mind is healed, every mind is healed. When I free myself from the prison of my ego thought system, every mind is freed. Other minds may choose not to accept that freedom, but within my mind and experience, *everyone* is free. It cannot be the case that I am free and you are imprisoned, or that you are free and I am imprisoned. That is extremely important to understand, not only in our practical life, but also in terms of what *A Course in Miracles* is teaching. It must be the case that we are both the same, if love is true.

The ego will always tell us we are different. Thus, Jesus asks us to consider "who can bargain in the name of love?" That is what the ego is always doing, and that is what specialness is. It is a bargain because we perceive another as having something we do not have and that we want. We therefore have to get it from the other person. As the Course explains, the ego's wish or preference would always be to get it through outright attack (T-15.VII.6:3-4). You have something I want, so I am just going to kill you and get it from you. But that does not go over well in our society; therefore, rather than killing outright, the ego has to delay its gratification somewhat, so it kills you slowly, psychologically. That is what special love is—I kill you at the bargaining table, which is really the ego's altar to death and guilt. Then I take from you what I want; but it does not look as if that is what I am doing.

A student shared an experience that was helpful in processing these dynamics. She noticed she was becoming more and more irritated when the minister in her church, whom she admired and respected, would always respond with "Great!" or "Fantastic!" when she asked him how he was doing. After a while she thought, "All right, so he is a minister. But dammit, doesn't he ever have a bad day? I do not want him feeling good all the time!" Then it occurred to her that if he were feeling so great, where did he get it from? He must have stolen it from her—and she said that really annoyed her.

It is always helpful to have an experience like that. The ego's misperception is always there whether we know it or not. That is what jealousy is all about. It all stems from the idea that God had something we did not have. As I have said many other times, you can understand why the Course keeps saying how simple it is, because everything is always the same. Things are always expressions of the fundamental difference that the ego makes real, or they are expressions of the fundamental unity that the Holy Spirit makes real. It is one or the other.

(5) Therefore give thanks, but in sincerity. And let your gratitude make room for all who will escape with you; the sick, the weak, the needy and afraid, and those who mourn a seeming loss or feel apparent pain, who suffer cold or hunger, or who walk the way of hatred and the path of death. All these go with you. Let us not compare ourselves with them, for thus we split them off from our awareness of the unity we share with them, as they must share with us.

That is a very clear statement. It is similar to the discussion of true empathy in the text (T-16.I), which talks about why it is not loving to empathize or sympathize with people who are in pain or are suffering. The Course calls that *false empathy*, because what we are really doing is identifying with and strengthening the other person's weakness. True empathy identifies with the strength of Christ in someone. Therefore, to judge other people as being in pain, being needy, suffering, etc., appears to be loving and is certainly a feeling the world condones, but in doing so, all we are really doing is saying, "Isn't this a terrible thing that happened to you!" The part of us saying that is also saying, "I'm really glad it happened to you, because that means it did not happen to me." That indicates why we always are so involved in other people's suffering, and why we feel so sorry for them. We want to save the weak, the sick, the dying—all suffering people in the world—because we want to see them that way. And we want to see them that way because if they are in pain, it means we are not in pain. Moreover, they are in pain because God is punishing them, because God is the source of all pain; He is punishing them because they are the sinful ones who stole from Him. He found them out, and He is punishing them. If He found them out, caught them, and punished them, then we are off the hook. But the way that we stay off the hook is to keep finding people who are either sinful, evil, wicked, and/or sick, weak, and in pain; people who are starving to death, who have lost their homes in an earthquake, etc., etc. We become fascinated with other people's pain and suffering.

A week ago a freak tornado hit this area (upstate New York), and eight or nine children were killed in a schoolhouse. Then that is all we would hear about on the news. Day after day after day it was all about the mourning of the people, the funerals, the interviews with the surviving children, the teachers, and the families. It became maudlin after awhile, and the fascination with it, once again, was that everyone's hearts went out to these families. Obviously, it is a very difficult lesson; but what is going on is that we want to see them as suffering. Everyone, whether they say it or not, is thinking "I'm so glad it was their children who were killed and not mine." Obviously, those are not thoughts that we would allow into our awareness, but why would we be so preoccupied with other people's pain? That is the question we have to answer. Why would we be so preoccupied with other people's pain and loss if we did not make it real? If there is no pain, no loss, and no body out there, but we are seeing it out there, it must be because we want to see it all out there. In a movie theatre everyone knows there aren't any real people on the screen; but there is an illusion of real people. If we find ourselves getting upset or feeling happy or sad about a movie, the reason is that we are identifying with what is going on. Everyone knows nothing is going on on the screen; it is going on in the mind. If we identify with it; we make it real.

Well, it is exactly the same with the movies we perceive every day in our waking life. If we are preoccupied with other people's pain and suffering, mourning and loss, it must be because we want to be preoccupied with that. Why?-so that we can feel grateful to God that He punished them and not us: It was not my children who were killed in that school; it was not my daughter who was killed in the fire in the amusement park. It was someone else's. And I thank God because He spared them.

What Jesus is teaching us is that there is no love or gratitude there, because all we are seeing is separation. But if we are seeing it there, it is because we *want* to see it there and do not want the pain to be in ourselves. If it is not going to be experienced in me, which my ego tells me is the only way I can be safe, then it has to be some place. I therefore take it from within me and dump it onto you. Then it happens and I hold on to it, because I want to keep it in you. I want to keep the loss in you so it is not in me.

Elaborating on the idea of true empathy, you do not empathize with the weakness in the other person, the ego, but with the strength of Christ. This is not about form—it is not about the world of form; but in no way does that mean that you turn your back on others. The Course is not saying that. What it is saying is that you recognize that the pain from the lack of heat or the lack of food or from this or that, is coming from the belief in being separate from God. That is not usually what you say to someone who is starving to death. You join with that person on the level he or she can accept, which normally is to give that person food or warmth or whatever. But in your mind, you are aware that what you are really doing is joining. And it is that joining that appears to be on the level of the body that is really done on the level of the mind. That is what undoes the source of pain.

If you just give someone food because the person is starving to death, you have taken care of the immediate physical problem as it has been perceived. But you have accomplished nothing if your mind has not changed, because you haven't done anything with the real cause, which is the belief that the person has been separate from God. By simply feeling sorry for you, I am reinforcing the fact that, yes, indeed, there is something wrong with you; and I have something you do not have, and I am going to give it to you. Now on the level of form, that is true—I have something you do not have. But what I really want to give you is what I have and you have, which is the Love of God. I do not say that in words, necessarily, if your mind is not focused on that. But in my mind, that is what I am doing. It is love sharing with love. It has nothing to do with giving something that you have and I do not have, or I have and you do not have, because then all we are doing is trading off and stealing back and forth from each other.

The world always judges what problems are going to be sympathized with and remedied, and what problems are not going to be. Just look at what goes on in Washington with all the different lobbies. Every lobby represents an interest group that says our problem is the worst one; we want you to take care of our problem. There are emotional lobbies, and everyone who either suffers from or identifies with a particular disease or circumstance is lobbying at the heartstrings of the American people or the world at large and saying, Help my cause! And there are certain causes that bring out more sympathy than others, obviously. A little child who dies brings out great sympathy. But when a vagrant on the street dies, we look the other way and dismiss it, because "it happens all the time."

We always pick and choose. That is a giveaway of course, because that shows us that we are not seeing everyone as the same. We are saying some people are more worthy of our love, sympathy, and money than other people. That does not mean that in the world of form you have to pay attention to every single suffering person and group. With the limitations of the world and the body as we made them, that is not possible. But when you find yourself giving to a particular person, whether you are giving materially or simply as an expression of love, be aware that that does not necessarily exclude anyone else. It is just that we all have particular lessons and classrooms, and so those are the forms in which we have to demonstrate the fact that giving and receiving are the same, and that we are not different. But when you find yourself joining with or identifying with a particular group or a particular person who is

suffering, and that becomes a real thing for you, then know that it is the ego you are listening to and not the Holy Spirit.

The real cause of our getting so upset at other people's suffering and pain is our secret delight that it was they and not us: "There but for the grace of God go I"—we thank God because we were spared. There is no love in that. What that also does, which gets us a little away from our topic, but it is important, is that by identifying with others' weaknesses and feeling sorry for them, we are really denigrating the power of their mind that chose this particular form of classroom in which they could learn a lesson. What we are really saying is that their pain is causing *us* intense pain, and we want them to stop their pain. We will try to stop their pain, not because we care about them, but because their pain reminds us of our own pain: I cannot bear to see your pain because it reminds me of my pain that I cannot bear to experience. Whenever you have an investment in stopping someone else's pain, it is never loving. It is always because you *want* to see pain in that person and to *do* something about it in that person, not for his or her benefit, but for yours. Again, you depreciate or denigrate the power of the person's mind that has chosen this.

The way Jesus loves us in the Course, which is the only real love, is that he does not change the effects. He does not take away our fear. He reminds us that we are the ones who made fear, and that by joining with his love, we can take away our fear. That is what he means when he says, "I do not come between your thoughts and their results because that would be tampering with a basic law of cause and effect . . ." (T-2.VII.1:4). That would be depreciating the power of your mind and would go directly against the purpose of this Course, which is to get you back in touch with the power of your mind. We have all abdicated that center seat, the part of our mind where we make decisions. We sit in the left-hand side which is the ego, and then we become that ego: we believe we are the innocent victims of forces and powers beyond our control. Then we have to make the best of a situation that is already pretty bad.

What is healing and truly loving is for us to become part of a process that reminds us there is a center chair that we abdicated. Since we are the ones who moved off it, we are the ones who can move back onto it. That is the purpose of *A Course in Miracles*. It is not to take away the pain that we experience within this body, but to remind us that the pain is coming from our denial of the power of our mind and our misuse of that power. Where in the past we made the faulty choice of sitting with our ego instead of with the Holy Spirit, we can now go back to that choice point and make another choice.

What a loving person helps us do, is realize that we are responsible for the situation we are in. That does not mean that you preach this idea to someone who is in a lot of pain, but it does mean that you are aware of it. When you join with others, when you help them on the physical or psychological level on which they experience the need, what you are really doing is joining with them in your mind. That undoes the basic message of the ego system; namely, that we are separate. That is what we feel grateful for. By reminding others of who they are as a child of God, we are reminding ourselves of that same identity. That is what is loving; that is the real source of gratitude. I am grateful that you have reminded me, through our relationship, that you and I are not different. My ego will keep telling me that we are different. But, now, through listening to the Voice of the Holy Spirit, I am aware that you and I are the same. That is the source of my gratitude.