

Our Gratitude to God

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

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Part XII

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

(6:2) And we rejoice that no exceptions ever can be made which would reduce our wholeness, nor impair or change our function to complete the One Who is Himself completion.

The important idea here, and also an important theme of *A Course in Miracles*, is that there are no exceptions to this. If you recall the early workbook lessons, which do not appear to be the profound teaching that they really are, there is an important underlying message in them. One of the crucial instructions in those lessons is to let our thoughts or our eyes wander around, but being sure that we do not exclude anything. When the lesson says, "Nothing I see in this . . . room means anything" (W-pl.1), "These thoughts do not mean anything" (W-pl.4), etc., it does not mean that we must include everything as we do the exercise; it means we should not deliberately choose not to see or think about something.

The idea, which is not only the aim of the Course but of any teacher, is to help the pupil generalize what is being taught. Certainly the goal of psychotherapy is to have the patient learn what the lessons are in the specific context of the problem areas, but then to be able to take those principles and generalize them to all situations. The whole idea of *A Course in Miracles* is to have us practice with this relationship and that relationship, this situation and that situation, until finally we get the idea that the principle of forgiveness holds for everything and everyone, without exception.

When we are tempted to exclude a certain person or situation from our forgiveness—holding out certain things, places, or people to be feared, or an idea that there are certain things that we covet and need, such that if we do not have them we will feel lack and incompleteness—that indicates that there is a spot of darkness in our mind that we are protecting from God's Love. That spot of darkness stays buried in our mind, gets projected out, and takes the form of letting God's Love flow through us with every situation except this one. This particular exception would be an expression or projection of the tiny spot of darkness.

Again, a true experience of gratitude would embrace all people in all situations, even if it may be specific to a particular one. But when you are grateful to God because the circumstance worked out nicely, or because a loved one pulled through a critical operation, then you know you have gotten caught. What that means is if the opposite occurred, you would not be grateful. That is exclusion. In other words, for forgiveness to be complete, pure, and what it is, it must rest upon *every* circumstance, *every* thought, *every* event, every person—without exception. Then become aware that that is not the case. You are not going to do this overnight, so you become aware that you are willing to forgive another for what he or she did here, but not there. Or you will forgive this member of our family, but not that member. Just be aware that that is what you are doing.

When you catch yourself excluding, and can observe yourself withholding God's Love from a particular situation, simply say there is a part of you that is afraid of giving God everything, and that you feel that if you were to give Him everything and hold nothing back, you would disappear. Thus, your holding on to a particular grievance, anxiety, or symptom is your attempt to say to God or to Jesus that you will give Him this much, but not everything. Do not try to change that or force anything upon yourself. Just step back with Jesus next to you and observe yourself doing that. Most importantly, do not try to rationalize, justify, or spiritualize your holding on to the grievance, the anxiety, the anger, or the disappointment. Simply acknowledge, "Of course I feel this way; look what happened to me!" "Of course I still have trouble with this particular area, because look what happened to me at the age of three!" There is nothing wrong with that, but just be aware that it really is an attempt to keep the love of Jesus away from you. What also is implied in this statement is that when you exclude your love from a certain part of the Sonship, you are really excluding that love from a certain part of yourself. You are keeping yourself incomplete and imperfect, which again becomes a denial of the completion and perfection of God.

(6:3) We give thanks for every living thing, for otherwise we offer thanks for nothing, and we fail to recognize the gifts of God to us.

"Living thing," again, should not be taken literally; the phrase refers to what we judge to be living in the world. So when we offer thanks for every living thing, every circumstance, and every person *except . . .*, then the gratitude is not complete, and we are really not thankful for anything, because we are saying God's Love is not perfect, not all-inclusive.

(7:1-3) Then let our brothers lean their tired heads against our shoulders as they rest a while. We offer thanks for them. For if we can direct them to the peace that we would find, the way is opening at last to us.

One helpful way of understanding this passage is to recognize that everything people do that is not loving—whether it is something self-destructive, which we usually feel sorry for, or is clearly an attack upon others—comes from their feelings of despair, hopelessness, weariness, and fear. They are calling out for help.

Despite the seeming magnitude of the anger or the attack, no one would attack who really felt secure in God's Love and peace. If that is true for you, it must also be true for me. I recognize that your call for love is no different from my call for love or my call for help. I am as weary of this world as you are. Therefore, your call for help, your calling out for the Love of God is met by my helping. I simply let the Love of God flow through me. By my response of not attacking and not condemning you, I am really saying that you can rest your tired head on my shoulder. By my doing that for you, I am also doing that for me.

Another way of understanding that even more clearly is to imagine yourself resting your tired head on Jesus' shoulder, who then asks you to let your brother rest his tired head on yours. If you refuse your shoulder to that person who is calling out for help, you are also refusing that same help for yourself, from Jesus. You would do that only because you had judged yourself as unworthy of Jesus' love and/or feel terrified of his love, so that you do not want to get too close to it. By my denying my shoulder, my comfort, and my love to you, what I am really doing is not so much attacking you as attacking me. It is an attempt to keep Jesus' comfort away from me, too. When I do allow you to rest your weary head on my

shoulder and not attack or condemn you—which is what that means—then I am welcoming Jesus in. It really has nothing whatsoever to do with you, even though that is the form in which I would experience it.

There is a wonderful line at the beginning of Chapter 20 in the text, which was written on Palm Sunday in Holy Week. Jesus quotes the famous line from the parable of the last judgment in Matthew's gospel (25:35). He says, "I was a stranger and you took me in, not knowing who I was. Yet for your gift of lilies, you will know" (T-20.1.4:3-4). What Jesus is talking about is that when I welcome you into my heart, and I forgive you for what you have *not* done, then I am also welcoming Jesus in. Even if I am not thinking about him, it does not make any difference, because by letting go of the veils of bitterness and judgment that I placed between you and me, I am letting the Love of the Holy Spirit become real for me. Since Jesus is the manifestation of that Love, then by letting go of the barriers that I placed between you and me, I am also letting go of the barriers I placed between myself and him.

It is very helpful when you find yourself attacking someone, being critical of someone, finding fault with someone, or not being grateful for someone, to remember that what you are really doing is not only excluding this person from your own self and your own love, but you are doing the very same thing to yourself in terms of Jesus. If nothing else, that would at least cause you to stop and ask whether this is really what you want, because by continuing to feel unfairly treated, what you are really doing is keeping the love of Jesus and the Love of God away from yourself. All you have to do in that circumstance is be clear that that is what you are doing. Do not try to change it—simply see yourself in the movie theater with Jesus next to you, watching what you are doing on the screen, without changing it. It is the watching it without judgment that lets it go. It was the not looking at it, being afraid of it, and feeling guilty over it that made it real in the first place. So it is the looking at it that lets it go.

The second and third lines of this paragraph are about offering thanks for our brothers. The thanks and the gratitude are not for what others do for us, but rather for the lessons of forgiveness that we learn in the context of the relationship with them. By my love and my comfort—which really means the absence of judgment—and by my expression of gratitude for the relationship, I direct you to the peace of God that is within you. By my accepting that peace within myself, I remind you of it; which reinforces it with me. That is one of the key principles of this course, that the way we learn the meaning of forgiveness is to teach it. What strengthens my awareness that there is a loving presence of God within my mind is to represent it and manifest it to you. The way I manifest it to you is not by something that I actually do, not by something that is positive. I manifest the Love of God within my mind to you by the undoing of the negative. You do not have to *bring* the Love of Jesus or the Holy Spirit to anyone, because that Love is already within your mind, and minds are joined. It is already within everyone. What you want to do is let go of the barriers to the free flow of that love.

(7:4) An ancient door is swinging free again; a long forgotten Word re-echoes in our memory, and gathers clarity as we are willing once again to hear.

This passage has a series of words and a feeling tone to it that are reminiscent of many other passages in the Course that speak of an "ancient door," a "long forgotten Word," something that re-echoes in our memory, a forgotten song (T-21.1), etc., which is really talking about what appears to be an ancient Presence in our mind, the Holy Spirit. We have sealed it off and have covered it with eons and eons of wearying years, centuries, and millennia all in an attempt to conceal that Presence, that Love from us. The Course frequently talks like this, which suggests an ancient past, because we believe that time is

linear. So in a sense if we count the existence of the world as millions of billions of years, then we are talking about an original instant that does seem buried in an ancient past.

In reality, it is not buried in an ancient past; it is buried within our mind because time is not horizontal: past, present, and future. Time is vertical, so the ancient memory is still within our mind right now. That ancient past is not past in the usual sense; it is simply buried because of our fear. That fear is there because our ego has told us that if we get in touch with God's Love and listen to His Word, we will be destroyed. Whenever you see *Word* of God capitalized, it is almost always a reference to the Atonement principle, the correction of the Holy Spirit, or forgiveness. Our terror of that is so enormous that we just push the whole thing down, and then literally build a world of time and space above it, to keep that ancient Voice silent.

When we can begin to join with another person and begin to not take that person's attacks seriously and personally, we are then learning not to take *our* attack seriously, because God does not take it seriously. In fact, He does not even know about it. We are beginning the process of letting go of our guilt, and if we let go of our guilt, we are also letting go of our fear of God's punishment.

The initial step of that whole insane thought system is the belief in being separate. If I can allow myself to join with you, to feel grateful for your presence in my life—because that presence is a way of reminding me who I am—then what I am doing is undoing or reversing what the ego has told me, namely, that separation is not only real, but is salvation. That is why there is such an emphasis in *A Course in Miracles* on joining with other people and not seeing another person's interests as separate from our own. Again, it is that experience of gratitude that epitomizes the act of joining, and it "gathers clarity as we are willing once again, to hear." In other words, it is something that becomes stronger and stronger as we continue to choose to forgive.

(8:1-2) Walk, then, in gratitude the way of love. For hatred is forgotten when we lay comparisons aside.

Hatred and comparisons are one and the same. Hatred comes from attack as does attack from hatred, and attack is always based on the idea that you have something I do not have, so I have to get it from you. It always comes from making judgments. The word *forgotten* is a commonly used word in the Course, and the idea is that we have remembered to hate. Hatred is not something that has been given to us; it is something we have chosen. We have chosen to remember the hatred and forget God's Love. We then try to reverse that process and remember God's Love and forget the hatred.

(8:3-4) What more remains as obstacles to peace? The fear of God is now undone at last, and we forgive without comparing.

This is a reference to the sections on the obstacles to peace in the text (T-19.IV), and the final obstacle is the fear of God. What holds all the obstacles in our mind as defenses is some aspect of separation, guilt, or pain, some aspect of the belief in death, and certainly some aspect of the fear of God. They are all really different levels of the same basic thought system. What holds that insane thought system together is seeing other people as separate from us, making judgments of other people, seeing opposition as real, making comparisons, and certainly not feeling grateful for the people and the circumstances in our life.

(8:5) Thus we cannot choose to overlook some things, and yet retain some other things still locked away as "sins."

This is the same idea we just saw, that for forgiveness to be complete and to be what it truly is, nothing can be omitted. Until we reach the point when we can make that universal and generalized response, we just practice on individual circumstances and relationships. We do not have to forgive everyone in our life in one fell swoop. We can just start with a particular person or a particular circumstance.

(8:6) When your forgiveness is complete you will have total gratitude, for you will see that everything has earned the right to love by being loving, even as your Self.

The Self of course is Christ. The gratitude at that point is simply an expression of God's Love in this world. The gratitude Jesus felt would not have been gratitude as we would feel it, because he had no ego that had to be let go of; there was no ingratitude in him. Until that point, however, we have to practice gratitude. It has to be something we learn, because we are so ungrateful in our hearts. We feel ingratitude because situations are not working out the way we think they should, or we feel ingratitude towards certain people because they do not treat us the way we think they should. Therefore we have to have a correction for that, just as we first have a grievance and then a miracle; an attack and then a forgiveness; a sickness and then a healing. Likewise, we first feel the lack of gratitude toward someone or a situation, and then we correct it. The basis for the correction is the recognition that if I withhold my gratitude towards you, I am withholding my gratitude toward myself. And if I withhold it toward myself, I also am not seeing Jesus' love as being real and something that I deserve.