

Our Gratitude to God

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Part XIX

"It Can Be But My Gratitude I Earn" (W-pl.197)

Let us now turn to Lesson 197, "It can be but my gratitude I earn" (W-pl.197). This is the second of a two-part lesson, the first being "It can be but myself I crucify" (W-pl.196).

(W-pl.197.1:1) Here is the second step we take to free your mind from the belief in outside force pitted against your own.

The first step was teaching us that it is not really you I crucify, but myself. When I appear to be attacking you, it is really myself that I am attacking. Here is the same idea, but now the content is different. The third paragraph gives the explanation:

(3:1-2) The world must thank you when you offer it release from your illusions. Yet your thanks belong to you as well, for its release can only mirror yours.

Basically, when I am grateful to you, I am really accepting gratitude for myself. Since there is no one out there, when I crucify you, it is really myself I am crucifying—when I attack you, it is myself I am attacking. At the same time, when I am truly grateful to you, it is really myself to whom I am truly grateful, because nothing that appears outside me is really outside. It is just a projection of what is inside. The principle that underlies both Lesson 196 as well as this one is that what appears to be outside is a projection of my own thoughts. What I believe I am doing to someone outside, whether it is hateful or loving, is really a gift that I am giving to myself. In the section "Holy Week," Jesus says that we stand before our brother with lilies in one hand and thorns in the other (T-20.I.2:6), which represent our gift of either forgiveness or attack; but it is really a gift we are giving to ourselves. That is what is being said here.

Now the lesson talks about false gratitude, or the ego's version of what goes on.

(1:2-3) You make attempts at kindness and forgiveness. Yet you turn them to attack again, unless you find external gratitude and lavish thanks.

In other words, I am kind and forgiving toward you, but only for what I can get from you. If I get what I want from you, which is when special love appears to work, then of course I am grateful. If you do not give me what I want, or if you gave me what I wanted yesterday but you do not give me what I want today, then my gratitude turns into attack.

This same idea is expressed in the text (T-16.IV.1-5). When you do not give me what our bargain calls for, then my love for you turns to what it always was: hate. Hate was always there, lurking in the wings, just waiting for the opportunity to come on stage and overtly attack. And when you fail to do what you

promised you would do for me, at least from my point of view, then I feel justified in getting angry at you. Of course, all of this is based on everything being external to me: I need something, and when I get it from you I am grateful.

(1:4) Your gifts must be received with honor, lest they be withdrawn.

The ego's gifts, the gifts that I feel I am giving you, always have a string attached. I will do all these wonderful things for you, but only on condition that I get something back. There is always a condition, whether what I get back is material, such as money, or psychological, in terms of your affection, attention, gratitude, etc. If the condition is not met, then of course I withdraw my gift. And if this is what I do with you, then it must be that this is exactly what I do with God, because there is no difference in my perception of you, myself, or God. It is all the same. It cannot be that I do for one without doing for the other. Thus, if I am doing this with you, it is because I have done it with God.

(1:5) And so you think God's gifts are loans at best; at worst, deceptions which would cheat you of defenses, to ensure that when He strikes He will not fail to kill.

This is the basic ego fear—that when God makes up His Mind and gets around to me, I am finished. I am always trying to stave off this attack that will end with my certain death. What this also means is that having all these murderous thoughts toward Him, I simply cannot believe He would be loving and kind to me. At best, when He appears to be loving and kind to me, it is only a loan, which at some point He is going to call back. If things go well with me today, I am sure that at some point they are going to go terrible. If I make a brilliant business deal and make a lot of money, I am sure at some point I am going to lose it all. Or if I get you to love me and pay attention to me, in no way do I think this is going to sustain itself and work, because I am not worthy of it.

What I originally do with God in my mind is exactly what I do with everyone else. And what I do with everyone else is exactly what I believe I have done with God, except that I am not aware of what I have done with Him. I can be taught to become aware of what I have done with you, however. That is why *A Course in Miracles* talks so much about our special relationships—that is a way of pointing out to us the horrible bargains we make and the horrible things we do.

Given all the premises of the ego system, no perception or attitude of gratitude would ever be justified. Why should I be grateful to you if you are going to murder me or steal from me? What comes from this whole thing with God is that I cannot trust Him; I cannot trust what He says. The real reason I cannot trust what God says is that I really cannot trust myself, because I know who I am. I know that I am a deceiver, a betrayer, a cheat, a thief, and a murderer. Therefore why should anyone, especially God, want to love me? Not being able to deal with the horrifying guilt of who I really am, I deny it in myself and project it onto God so that He becomes the One Who is the deceiver and betrayer. That means God is going to destroy me. I cannot deal with that pain and anxiety, so I push it down and project it out. Then it becomes that everyone in the world is a deceiver and a betrayer, and no one can be trusted.

(2:1) How easily are God and guilt confused by those who know not what their thoughts can do.

What the ego has always done is to confuse God and guilt. God then becomes a symbol of our sin for which we feel guilty, and our sin and guilt deserve to be punished. We know not what our thoughts can do. Our real thoughts are part of God, and our thoughts can save us. It was our wrong thought, our

mistaken thought that caused us to identify with the ego in the first place, but we can change our mind about that. This is talking about the power of our mind, and we all have split off that power of our mind.

Let me elaborate on that. One of the ways the ego has managed to keep its thought system alive and powerful in our mind is that it has made us mindless by causing us to be identified with the body. The ego's motivation for that is very clear. It is the Holy Spirit's presence in our mind that is the greatest threat. The ego knows if we get back in our mind, at some point we are going to focus our attention on the Holy Spirit, and that means the ego is done for. Therefore the ego tells us that love is really not in our mind; hatred and fear are there, and that is the reality. Once we believe that, it takes a second step and teaches us that this hatred is something we can never get near and that we should be afraid of it because in back of our self-hatred is God's hatred of us. That is what is in our mind, says the ego. It then tells us that the way out of the pain of all this hatred and fear is to go out of our mind—which is the definition of insanity—go into the world, and make up a body, a brain, and a world in which we can hide. This world is literally mindless, and we as egos—physical, psychological selves—are also mindless. This means there is no power in our mind, which means we have no further choice.

That is what happens when we abdicate the middle chair, which is the decision maker, and sit in the ego's chair, get glued to it, become part of that chair—in fact, *become* that chair, *become* that ego. What we have really done is throw away the power of our mind. That is the meaning of the second sentence:

(2:2) Deny your strength, and weakness must become salvation to you.

I deny the strength of Christ in me, the strength of my mind to choose Christ instead of the ego, and now the weakness of my mind becomes what will save me. The weakness of my mind is my denying that there is anything in my mind. I deny that the Love of God is in my mind; I deny that the guilt of my ego is in my mind, and I deny that I am a mind at all. I have blotted all of that out, taken away any remembrance of the power of my mind to choose, and instead believe I am now trapped in this body and brain, and that is who I am and where I am. There is nothing I can do about it. This ends up having us all become helpless victims.

Again, our gratitude is for the help that gets us back into the part of our mind that can choose. That is the source of the deep experience of gratitude and thanksgiving. Indeed, we are not trapped as a helpless prisoners in this world, in a prison we did not make. *We* are the ones who made it, and therefore, we are the ones who can change our mind about it. That is another way of understanding the purpose of *A Course in Miracles*: to help us regain the power of our mind and identify with it.

Let me go back over a few lines from the section "Cause and Effect" in Chapter 2 of the text that I quoted earlier:

(T-2.VII.1:1) You may still complain about fear, but you nevertheless persist in making yourself fearful.

There is a previous discussion (T-2.VI.4) in which Jesus was basically telling Helen, but obviously all of us as well, "Do not to ask me to take your fear away because you made your fear. But by joining with me, we can remove the conditions that led to the fear, which is the belief in being separate." He is saying we are ones who make ourselves fearful.

(T-2.VII.1:2-4) I have already indicated that you cannot ask me to release you from fear [T-2.VI.4]. I know it does not exist, but you do not. If I intervened between your thoughts and their results, I would be tampering with a basic law of cause and effect; the most fundamental law there is.

The mind is the cause of all the pain, suffering, and discomfort we experience; which are the effects. Jesus is saying that if he took away the effects and the mind remained unchanged, then our mind is mindless also, because he has to do it for us.

(T-2.VII.1:5-6) I would hardly help you if I depreciated the power of your own thinking [the power of our mind]. This would be in direct opposition to the purpose of this course.

This was a very clear message for Helen and Bill right at the beginning of the scribing about the purpose of this course: to help them recognize the power of their own minds, the power to choose. Since what got me into trouble as I was sitting in the middle chair was my choice to move to the left chair (the ego), then it can only be by going back to that middle chair, which means going back to my mind to choose, that I can be saved. Jesus cannot save me; the Holy Spirit cannot save me. They can simply remind me of the power in my mind that does save me. I was the one who chose to go in the wrong chair, not Jesus. Therefore, I am the only one who can change my mind. His presence and his function is to be the reminder that I do have another choice. That is what the whole purpose of the Course is: to have us remember that there is a choice.

Thus, going back to the workbook, when Jesus says that we do not know what our thoughts can do, and that is the confusion of God and guilt, he is saying we have denied the power of our minds, the power of our thoughts. That is what the early workbook lesson means when it says that we have no neutral thoughts (W-pl.16). Our thoughts have tremendous power. They do not have any power with God or against God, but they certainly have power within the dream, because the thoughts make up the dream. Our thoughts of guilt, attack, separation, judgment, and ingratitude certainly have very powerful effects in terms of making us unhappy and miserable, or causing suffering and pain. Changing our mind and choosing the Holy Spirit's thought system of gratitude, forgiveness, and joining has tremendous effects, too: it is the way out of pain and suffering.