

Our Gratitude to God

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Part XXII

"It can be but my gratitude I earn" (W-pl.197)

We return now to the lesson. It was at this point that I stopped and turned to the paragraphs in the text that discussed the idea of sameness (see previous excerpt).

(W-pl.197.3:1-2) 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.

In other words, when I am grateful to you and am releasing you from your prison of guilt, I am doing the same thing for myself. It must be that way. It cannot be that I do it for you and not for myself, or that I do it for myself and not for you.

(W-pl.197.3:3) Your gratitude is all your gifts require, that they be a lasting offering of a thankful heart, released from hell forever.

I do not need the gratitude of the world or the world's acceptance of my gifts, just as Jesus did not need the world's acceptance of his gifts. All that is necessary is that I feel grateful that I can now make another choice. I am grateful that I now know I am not caught in this terrible prison, and there is a loving presence within my mind who reminds me I have another choice. Similarly, when I feel imprisoned by a physical sickness or pain and then the pain stops, there is a part of me that feels so grateful. On a far more important level, it is impossible for me not to feel gratitude if I felt condemned to this prison forever, then suddenly realized I have a choice and can literally be free. It is impossible not to feel a deep sense of gratitude, even though the gratitude is illusory. Remember, forgiveness is an illusion; the miracle is an illusion; the happy dream is an illusion; and the real world is an illusion. Jesus is an illusion. *A Course in Miracles* is an illusion. So your gratitude is in very good company.

It is impossible to go through a lifetime of self-hatred, guilt, misery, and wretchedness and then suddenly have an experience of knowing you are forgiven and that God loves you and is not angry at you without feeling a tremendous sense of gratitude and joy. That is real joy. It is not a joy that comes from getting what you want from someone. It is a joy that comes from knowing you were wrong and that you are not a miserable wretch. You believed that, but that did not make it true. God loves me, and I am His beloved Son. There is no greater experience in this world. Of course you would feel joy and great happiness! You would feel a tremendous sense of gratitude. This is the gratitude that comes from saying, "I prefer to be happy rather than right, because if I am right, then Jesus and the Holy Spirit must be wrong." Remember, the ego thrives on differences. Thus, if I am right and I know that I am right—that this miserable person did this terrible unconscionable thing to me—then it does not matter what this holy book or this holy person says. I am right and they must be wrong!

In a passage I mentioned earlier, Jesus says that if you are guilty he must be guilty, too; it is the same thing (T-19.IV-B.6:4). But we are not aware of that; therefore, if Jesus is wrong, I must be wrong. The gratitude comes from the belief not that I am right, but that I have been wrong and I am happy I am wrong. That means that God is right, and if God and Jesus are right, then it must be that I am right also. When Jesus tells me that I am a Son of God, then not only is he right, but my acceptance of that is saying I am right, also. I am wrong as an ego, but I am right as a Son of God.

(W-pl.197.3:4) is it this you would undo [this thankful heart that knows it is released from hell] by taking back your gifts, because they were not honored?

That is what the temptation is. Here I feel I am so loving, kind, and forgiving; I always take the first step to heal this relationship, but I am not going to do it anymore, because you just do not appreciate me. I am so loving and kind, or I work so hard in this office and you do not appreciate me. Therefore, I am not going to feel happy anymore. Yet in my right mind, if I am working in a business, I am not working for your gratitude or appreciation; I am working because it is something that is loving within me. What you do with that gift of love is your business. I have given that gift of love, which means I have accepted it, and it does not matter what you do with it. If I am in a relationship with you and I love you and am kind and concerned, I am not doing it because I want something back. My ego wants that. I am doing it simply because I know I am a child of love, and a child of love can only extend love. What you do with that love is your business, but if I make it my business, I am caught. Then what I am doing is withdrawing the wonderful gift I had accepted, and at that point I am back in prison, for I am saying that you and I are separate, and you damn well better be grateful and appreciative. If you are not, then I am not going to love you.

(W-pl.197.3:5) It is you who honor them and give them fitting thanks, for it is you who have received the gifts.

In other words, the gifts of love I give to you have nothing whatsoever to do with you. That is why it is really important for both your understanding and practice of the Course that you realize there is no one out there. If there is no one outside me, it makes no sense for me to demand a response from someone who is not there. The love that I experience in the context of a relationship with you is only within my own mind. But you are within my mind, too. It is not something that my body gives to your body and then wants payment. It is something that is within me. I am the one who judges whether my gifts have been appreciated or not. If I accuse you of not appreciating them, it is because I do not appreciate them. I am really not turning my back on you; I am turning my back on God.

The mistake is in believing that relationships are external and that something has to happen-there has to be some exchange between you and me. If you get caught in that, you are making the error real and are right back into specialness. Specialness is always based on the belief that there is a body. The core theme of all specialness is that we are different. Bodies make us different. Our bodies are different; our thought systems are different; and our personalities are different; our needs, expectations, and demands are different. Our minds are one. Our minds are the same, either in terms of fear or in terms of love. There is nothing else.

The gifts I offer you are really offered to me in the context of a relationship with you, because I still believe you are out there. Therefore, I must believe I am having love extend through me to you. That is the illusion- that there is someone out there. The first illusion is that you are out there, and that you are

the enemy out to steal from me and destroy me. Consequently, I need an illusion that undoes that, and that is the illusion that you are my friend, not my enemy. That is a helpful illusion. The ultimate step is to realize you are not my friend; you are *me*. You and I are not separate. Again, first comes the perception of you as an enemy, someone outside me who is going to steal from me, from whom I need protection and defense. The correction for that is to realize that you are not my enemy; you are my friend, my brother. The final step is realizing that you and I are one. That sequence is found in *The Song of Prayer* pamphlet, when Jesus talks about praying for your enemies, realizing that you are praying for this person who is your brother, and ultimately recognizing this person is yourself (S-1.II.-V). That is the culmination.

Reaching that point is what *A Course in Miracles* means by the real world. There is no perception of someone else as separate from you, although there is still the experience within the dream of someone separate from you. When Jesus was talking to people, obviously there was a part of him that felt he was talking to someone else, but there was another part of his mind that knew he was talking to himself. In fact, he was not even doing the talking. It was simply love expressing through his mind to another seemingly separate mind. But that was all one. There was not a sense of Jesus as a self separate or different from others. It was a recognition that within the dream of separateness, we are all one. There was only the presence of one that was being shared equally. Within the dream, it appeared to be shared through the words he taught and the example he showed us, etc. In his mind he knew it was all a dream, and that it was simply the reflection of an abstract love that joined all of us as one. That selflessness is the end of the dream. That is the real world. But before you reach that point, you first must have the illusion of the other person as your friend, because that is the correction of the belief that this person was your enemy.

That is why the Course is so clear in stating that it stops short of Heaven. Its goal is to lead us to the gate of Heaven and help us unlearn what the ego has taught us. It states that it does not aim to teach what is beyond the gate (T-26.III.5). The goal of the Course is to have us just get to the point when we realize that you are not separate from me, that you are not my enemy; you are not even my brother-you are my Self. But until we get to that point we need all the intervening steps that teach us that you are not my enemy, you are my friend. What I am seeing in you is a projection of what is within me. What you want to avoid is the trap of getting caught in the world of form, a world of bodies. It is not my body forgiving your body. It is basically my mind forgiving itself for its perceived sin.