

Workbook Lesson Support Notes

by Allen Watson

LESSON 121 • MAY 1

“Forgiveness is the key to happiness.”

Practice instructions

Purpose: To learn to give forgiveness and see that, when you do, you receive forgiveness.

Morning/evening practice: Two times, for ten minutes.

- Identify someone to forgive. Think of someone you dislike or despise or find irritable or want to avoid. The one that has already come to your mind will do.
- Close your eyes and see him in your mind, and look at him a while. Try to find some little spark of light in your picture of him. You are looking for some loving or true quality in him, or perhaps some kind thought or caring gesture of his—some distant reflection of the light of God in him. Everything hinges on this, so take your time. Once you find something, see it symbolized as a tiny spark of light somewhere in your dark picture of him. Then see this tiny spark slowly expand until it completely covers your picture of him, replacing all the darkness with light. In other words, see him *only* in light of this one loving quality or act. See this as the only clue to who he really is. If you succeed, he will seem to be a holy person, without a single flaw, radiating light. You might even imagine Great Rays shining out from him. Now look at this changed picture a while. Appreciate how lovely and spotless it is.
- Now think of someone you consider a friend. Try to transfer the light you saw around your “enemy” to this friend. This makes the friend seem to be much more than a friend. He is revealed to be your savior, with power to enlighten you with just one glance of his holy eyes.
- Now let your savior offer you the light you gave to him. Then let your former enemy unite with him, so that they both offer you this light. Why wouldn’t they give this holy gift to you, when you gave it to them, and revealed your holiness in the process? See rays of forgiveness pouring off of them and onto you, absolving you of your “sins,” causing you to radiate the same Great Rays that they do. See yourself at one with them, united in the holy light of forgiveness that you have given and received. “Now have you been forgiven by yourself” (13:3).

Frequent reminders: Every hour—do not forget.

Repeat, “*Forgiveness is the key to happiness. I will awaken from the dream that I am mortal, fallible and full of sin, and know I am the perfect Son of God.*” To understand these lines, it helps to insert “through forgiveness” at the beginning of the second sentence. Remember the old adage “To err is human, to forgive divine”? Forgiveness is what proves to us that we are more than human, that we are divine.

One more point: If you are really going to say these lines every hour, you’ll need to either spend time memorizing them or have them written down on a card.

Commentary

The longer I study the Course the more this lesson makes sense. When I first read it, it seemed unlikely to me that forgiveness was *the* key to happiness. I could see it being *a* key but not *the* key. As the Course’s explanation of the root of our problems began to sink in, however, I began

to see that in one way or another, unforgiveness was behind every problem. Then it began to make sense that forgiveness would solve them all.

Look at the litany of ills that comprise this description of “the unforgiving mind” (2:1–5:5):

- Fear
- A cramped, constricted mindset that offers no room for love to grow and thrive
- Sadness, suffering, doubt, confusion, anger
- The pairs of conflicting fears; the one that speaks to me most eloquently is “afraid of every sound, yet more afraid of stillness” (3:1)
- The distortion of perception that results from unforgiveness, making us unable to see mistakes as what they are, and perceiving sins instead
- Babbling terror of our own projections (4:2)

I recognize myself, or at least memories of myself, in so many of these phrases: “It wants to live, yet wishes it were dead. It wants forgiveness, yet it sees no hope” (4:3–4). I’ve felt like that. These paragraphs describe us all. I think that if someone does not recognize themselves somewhere in here, they are not being honest with themselves. And the most awful thought of all is this one: “It thinks it cannot change” (5:3). Hasn’t that fear struck at your own heart at one time or another? I know it has struck at mine.

When we admit to ourselves that these descriptions fit us, that we find ourselves in one or another of these states of mind, the very word “forgiveness” sounds like an oasis in the Sahara. Cool, soothing and refreshing. As we were told in Lesson 79, we have to recognize the problem before we realize what the solution really is.

“Forgiveness is acquired. It is not inherent in the mind” (6:1–2). This states a fundamental principle that explains much of the methodology of the Course, and explains why some sort of transition is necessary between where we think we are and where we already are in truth. If we are already perfect, as God created us, why do we have to learn anything at all? Because the solution to the problem of guilt is forgiveness, and forgiveness was *not* part of our mind as God created it. There was no need for it. Without a thought of sin the concept of forgiveness is meaningless. Because we taught ourselves the idea of sin, now we must be taught the antidote, forgiveness. Forgiveness has to be *acquired*.

But the unforgiving mind cannot teach itself forgiveness. It believes in the reality of sin, and with that as a basis, forgiveness is impossible. Everything it perceives in the world proves that “all its sins are real” (3:3). Caught in unforgiveness, we are convinced of the correctness of our perception of things. We do not question it. From that perspective there is no way our minds can even conceive of true forgiveness. This is why we need the Holy Spirit: “a Teacher other than yourself, Who represents the other Self in you” (6:3). There has to be a “higher Power” Who represents a different frame of mind. The source of our redemption has to be outside of the ego mindset, apart from it, untainted by it. And so He is.

He teaches us to forgive, and through forgiveness, our mind is returned to our Self, “Who can never sin” (6:5). Each person “outside” of us, each representative of that unforgiving mind crowd, “presents you with an opportunity to teach your own [mind] how to forgive itself” (7:1). Our brothers and sisters, manifesting their egos, full of the fear, pain, turmoil, and confusion of the world, snapping at us in their terror, are our saviors. In forgiving them we forgive ourselves in proxy. As we teach salvation we learn it. As we release others from hell, we release ourselves. As we give, we receive.

This is what the Course is all about. As we practice today, let’s realize that we are engaging in the central exercise of the Course; we are learning “the key to happiness.” And let’s not think we already know forgiveness; let us come with humility, ready to be taught by One Who knows.

LESSON 122 • MAY 2

“Forgiveness offers everything I want.”

Practice instructions

Purpose: “To feel the peace forgiveness offers, and the joy the lifting of the veil holds out to you” (11:2).

Morning/evening practice: Two times, for fifteen minutes.

Sink into the place in your mind where the gifts of forgiveness abide. Try to experience the happiness, peace, and joy that forgiveness offers you. Seek that place in you earnestly, and with gladness and hope. This practice seems to be an example of Workbook meditation. It seems very similar to the practice in the early 100s, where you quieted your mind and tried to experience the happiness and joy that God has placed deep within you. Based on past lessons, you probably should begin by repeating the idea for the day, and then use that idea from time to time to pull your mind back from wandering.

Remarks: Approach these practice periods filled with hope, because you have reached a crucial turning point in your journey. After this, the road will be much smoother and easier. Practice “earnestly and gladly” (9:2), with confidence that today salvation can be yours.

Frequent reminders: Every fifteen minutes, for at least one minute.

Say, “*Forgiveness offers everything I want. Today I have accepted this as true. Today I have received the gifts of God.*”

Remarks: These shorter practice periods are obviously extremely important. Practicing at least a minute four times an hour is no small feat for most of us. The purpose of these shorter practice periods is to keep in our minds the gifts we accepted in the morning practice. Those gifts will fade away unless we renew them throughout each hour. I suggest repeating these lines as a genuine, heartfelt dedication to accepting the truth of today’s idea. When repeating these lines you may want to make them specific: “*Forgiving [name] offers everything I want [happiness, peace, safety]. Today [day of week] I have accepted this as true. Today [date] I have received the gifts of God.*”

Commentary

There is a phrase near the end of this lesson that never fails to stand out to me. It speaks of how forgiveness enables me to “see the changeless in the heart of change” (13:4). For me, this phrase has become a whole other way to look at what forgiveness is.

Behind every appearance lies something that does not change. Appearances change, and rapidly. This is true both physically and in more subtle perceptions. But the spirit within us does not change, having been created by the eternal. Forgiveness is a way of looking past the appearances to the unchanging reality. It disregards the temporary picture of the ego’s mistakes and sees the Son of God. As Mother Teresa said of each one she helped, we see “Christ, in his distressing disguises.”

Forgiveness lets the veil be lifted up that hides the face of Christ from those who look with unforgiving eyes upon the world. (3:1)

Forgiveness is giving up all the reasons we have built up for withholding love. The veil of all our judgments is lifted, and we behold something marvelous, something wonderful, something indescribable. “What you will remember then can never be described” (8:4). (So I won’t try!)

When forgiveness has removed the blocks to our awareness of love's presence, we see love everywhere. Love is unchanging and unchangeable. There is no wonder, then, that forgiveness offers everything we want, bringing peace, happiness, quietness, certainty, and "a sense of worth and beauty that transcends the world" (1:4). When you see the changeless in the heart of change, distress drains right out of your heart because there is no reason for it.

Why are our moods and feelings such a problem to us? Because we identify with them, because as the moods and feelings change we believe we have changed. The Course is teaching us to learn to identify with something beyond change, with the Mind of Christ within ourselves that never changes and never will. Here is a very simple rule of thumb: *What changes is not me*. My Self is "unchanged, unchanging and unchangeable" (W-pI.190.6:5).

This is starting to take better shape in my mind as I began to see that forgiveness is simply to see the changeless in the heart of change. It is to recognize that the only thing that needs to be changed is the thought that it is possible to change the Mind of the Son of God. It is to realize that all my ego "thoughts" have changed nothing, and all my brother's ego "thoughts" also change nothing. It is to realize that what is changeable is not me; to cease to identify with that which changes, and to cease to believe that my brother *is* my changing perceptions of him. Forgiveness means looking beyond what is changeable to that which is changeless.

Our pain comes from identifying with the ephemeral. Our peace comes from identifying with the eternal. Nothing that changes is created by God. Nothing that changes is really me. What is changeable is threatened by change, and "nothing real can be threatened" (T-In.2:2). Therefore, nothing that changes is real.

All that changes is nothing but a passing landmark on the journey to the eternal. It is nothing to be held on to. Think of a line of stones by which you cross a creek; you do not cling to each stone as you pass it. You appreciate its value in moving you toward the other side, but you do not lament its passing. Your goal is the other side. That is the only value of things in this world, things which include our own bodies and the bodies of our loved ones as well as material things, or even concepts in our thought system. Changing things are to be valued only as stepping stones to that which is eternal, to be gently released as we take the next step toward the changeless, which is always with us, always the reality of our being, even as we appear to journey towards it.

LESSON 123 • MAY 3

“I thank my Father for His gifts to me.”

Practice instructions

Purpose: The Workbook is assuming you have made some real progress on your journey to God, with the result that your journey will now be smoother because much of your resistance has subsided. You are to devote today to giving thanks for these gains. You do not realize their full extent. Only by giving thanks for them will you appreciate how great they really are.

Morning/evening practice: Two times, for fifteen minutes.

You spend these fifteen minutes giving thanks to God and receiving His thanks to you. What exactly are the things for which you give thanks? I detect three classes of things. First, God’s gifts to you in Heaven: His eternal Love for you; the fact that He created you changeless, so that none of your mistakes can taint your Identity. Second, His gifts to you on earth: that He has not abandoned you but is always with you, speaking His saving Word to you; that He has given you a special function in His plan. Third, the gains you have made as a result of His gifts: the fact that the Holy Spirit is gradually saving you from your ego.

You also spend time receiving God’s thanks to you. What exactly is He thanking you for? He is thanking you for hearing His message, applying it, and speaking it to others. He is thanking you for healing others through your demonstration of greater sanity, health and security. He, in other words, is thanking you for your application of His truths, just as you are thanking Him for this same thing. Take time to open your mind to the idea that God is not judging you, but thanking you, wholeheartedly and with total sincerity, and that His thanks to you and yours to Him join as one.

Remarks: God will take your gift of thanks to Him, multiply it hundreds of thousands of times, and return it as His immeasurable thanks to you. This multiplication of your gift will give it vastly increased power to save you and the world. Each second that you give will be returned to you in the form of years of progress, enabling you to take eons off the world’s journey to God.

Frequent reminders: Every hour, for an unspecified time.

Repeat the idea and spend some time thanking God for all His gifts to you.

Commentary

Today’s lesson causes me to reflect on all my Father’s gifts to me, personally. I think that is what it is intended to do for each of us, sort of a day to count your blessings. So bear with me as I share some of my personal reflections with you, and take it as inspiration to do the same for yourself.

I think I’ve been on a spiritual journey most of my life, perhaps all of it. I can remember certain incidents as a very young boy that seemed to say my direction was already set, way back then. I wrote a poem once for my babysitter; I think I was in second grade at the time. I can still recall the words:

Thank Thee for the sun and fields,
Thank Thee for the bush and tree,
Thank Thee for the things we eat.
Thank Thee, Lord, Thank Thee.

I remember one Monday after school, when I was about ten, gathering three of my friends around me on a street corner and trying to explain to them why I was so impressed with the Sunday School lesson I'd heard the day before. It was a lesson on Ecclesiastes 11:1, "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days." I was so struck by the principle involved, that what you give comes back to you, and that our wealth could be measured by how much we give, rather than what we acquire. It is a message that I heard again, very clearly, many years later in the Course.

I had a deep spiritual hunger and desire for God all through childhood, although I veered off in other directions for some time, getting into trouble for youthful pranks, even police trouble, and being horribly embarrassed at being caught shoplifting by a store owner who had offered me a summer job (which of course I did not get). I had experiences of what I would now call a holy instant several times, a sense of the nearness of God, and yet I couldn't seem to find Him most of the time.

At sixteen I had a "born again" experience, and I became, for the next twenty-two years, a fundamentalist Christian, although never firmly aligned with any religious denomination. Something kept me breaking out of all the molds people tried to cast me into. I read the mystics, I read the heretics, as well as the Bible. I didn't want anyone to draw me a map of the New Jerusalem; I wanted to walk its streets for myself. I spent years in a typical Western religious pattern, "fighting against sin" as Jesus calls it in the Course (T-18.VII.4:7). As he says in that sentence, "It is extremely difficult to reach Atonement" that way!

All through those twenty-two years, I hungered for God. All through those twenty-two years, I was miserable most of the time, disgusted with myself. All through those twenty-two years, I wondered if I would ever "make it." Finally, at the end of those years, I gave up. I laid aside my Bible and let it gather dust. I decided that Christianity was, for me, a dead end. I despaired of ever "crossing Jordan" and "entering the promised land." I decided I was just going to have to accept life as it was, and learn to live with it.

About six years went by. I was still seeking something, but no longer seeking anything spiritual. Or so I told myself. My relationship with God was in a holding pattern, and we weren't talking. I read psychology. I did the est training. I read Zen books and tried meditating a bit. I studied Science of Mind. I also enjoyed the world thoroughly, as I'd never allowed myself to do before, including some great sex, and making more money than I'd ever had in my life. I began to realize that the things which spoke to me in the psychology, secular philosophies, and Eastern religious writings that I was studying were all exactly the same things that had really spoken to me in Christianity. There was a "perennial philosophy," as Aldous Huxley called it, that ran through everything, a central core of truths that everyone who ever "made it," regardless of their religious background or lack of one, seemed to agree on. And the more I got clear about it, the more I realized it was all stuff I'd always known somehow. Like "cast your bread upon the waters."

Then, in January 1985, I found *A Course in Miracles*. Ever since, I've been reading and studying these books, and practicing as best I can what they say. And as I look at my life today, I can see that somewhere along the line my life underwent a major shift. I moved from a gloomy certainty that I would never find real happiness to a steady conviction that I *have* found it.

So as I read today's lesson, a deep sense of gratitude washed over me. As I read the first paragraph, I felt I could honestly say it applied to me very well:

There is no thought of turning back, and no implacable resistance to the truth. A bit of wavering remains, some small objections and a little hesitance, but you can well be grateful for your gains, which are far greater than you realize. (W-p1.123.1:3-4)

A few days ago (in 1995) a friend of ours, Allan Greene, passed away at 51. He was a quadriplegic who moved to Sedona just over a year ago to take part in the ACIM classes and support groups of the Circle of Atonement. Our support group met in his home, since he was

almost completely immobile. He could move nothing but his head and his shoulders, the latter just slightly. Within the last two years, a leg and a hand had to be amputated. He used to say that he was giving up his identification with his body piece by piece. Allan was a long-time student of the Course, one of the very few I know who actually knew the Course's scribe, Helen Schucman. He argued with it for a long time, but had settled in to a steady determination to realize all that it taught. Under adversity far greater than most of us can imagine, Allan maintained an amazing sense of humor and a joyful determination to heal his mind, whatever happened to his body. Miracles happened around him regularly; he took them as a matter of course. Last month, when he was having his gall bladder removed, he took no anesthesia because he had no feeling in his lower body at all, but a nurse held a screen during the operation so he would not have to watch himself being cut open. During the whole operation, Allan was conversing with the nurse about *A Course in Miracles*!

Last night (May 2, 1995) we had a memorial meeting for Allan. A very large number of people attended, and one after another shared how Allan had touched their lives, including a half dozen or so of the professional caretakers who had administered to him over the last year. It became evident that Allan's life had impacted scores and scores of people. I am sure *his* gains were, as our lesson tells us, far greater than he realized. I know Allan did not think of himself as particularly advanced. He lamented almost to the end about what a slow learner he was. He often argued with his caretakers, and had one or two walk out on him in a rage. He had his doubts. But from the evidence tonight in people whom he loved and people who loved him, he had advanced much farther than he thought.

I hope that is true of me; I believe it is true of all of us. We cannot know now, although I'm sure we shall at some point, all the positive impacts we have had on those around us with things as little as a smile, a small act of kindness, or a gentle, loving touch at the right moment. Perhaps, as it often was with Allan, nothing more than our laughter, or making someone else laugh. Last Thursday, when Allan was in the hospital, we paused in our ACIM evening class and had a few minutes of silence for him. The next day, the day before he died, one of our students phoned him in the hospital and told him about our minutes of silence. Allan said, "It would have been more appropriate if you'd had a few minutes of telling jokes."

Let me then, today, take time to express my gratitude to God for all His gifts to me. I thank Him for this Course, which has become my certain way home. I thank Him for the relief from all those years of quiet desperation. I thank Him that, when I wandered off, He never deserted me. I am so grateful for His Spirit within me, my Guide and Teacher, and for all the loving friends and companions on the journey He has brought my way (especially, tonight, for Allan). I am so grateful for all of *you*, and for the opportunity He has given me to share with you all, and to receive from all of you. I thank Him that I am beginning to remember my Self. I thank Him for the steadily increasing assurance that I will find my way all the way home.

I thank my Father for His gifts to me!

LESSON 124 • MAY 4

“Let me remember I am one with God.”

Practice instructions

Purpose: To practice and experience the idea that you are one with God, and to thereby lay hold of your own peace and also free the world. Today is a turning point in the Workbook, your first half hour practice time, and also your first longer practice in which you are given no instructions and are left to fly on your own—a preview of things to come. The practice is deepening—getting longer as well as less structured.

Longer: One—whenever it seems best, for thirty minutes.

There are no specific words or guidelines for this meditation. You are simply meant to devote the practice period to today’s idea, to abiding in oneness with God, to trying to experience that oneness, and to letting His Voice direct your practicing. Jesus is clearly trusting that you have learned enough from the lessons thus far to spend this quiet time profitably, without getting hopelessly lost in mind wandering. You therefore should draw upon all the training you have received up until now, and should also be open to the Holy Spirit’s promptings during this time.

Encouragement to practice: Paragraphs 9-11 are there to provide incentives to really do the practice and to appreciate how important it is. They teach us to see this half hour as a mirror, surrounded by a golden frame, set with thirty diamonds, one for each minute. During this half hour we will look into this mirror and see our face transfigured into holy the face of Christ—our true Self, Who is at one with God. In this mirror, we will recognize ourselves as Who we really are. Even if nothing of the kind seems to happen during this time, we can be confident that sometime, “perhaps today, perhaps tomorrow” (10:1, 11:1, 3), this experience will come to us as a result of this half hour.

Frequent reminders: Hourly.

Repeat, “*Let me remember I am one with God, at one with all my brothers and my Self, in everlasting holiness and peace.*” Doing so will add yet more diamonds to the frame around the mirror in which you see your true Self. I suggest either memorizing this sentence (which is composed of three lines of iambic pentameter) or writing it down on a note card. I also recommend that, while repeating it, you try to feel each kind of oneness individually—first oneness with God, then oneness with your brothers, then oneness with your true Self.

Commentary

This lesson holds forth a very high view; it comes from an elevated state of mind. Basically, in the first part of the lesson it seems to assume we are enlightened already. And, of course, from the perspective of this state of mind, we are. “Enlightenment is but a recognition, not a change at all” (W-pI.188.1:4). If it is not a change, then enlightenment must mean recognizing what is always so. This lesson, then, is simply stating the truth about us, the truth that we have been hiding from ourselves.

To pray, to give thanks for the truth as God sees it, the truth *about us* as He sees us, can be a very profitable exercise. Try taking a paragraph of this lesson (or the whole lesson) and turning it into thanksgiving, verbalizing your thanks as you read. For example, from the second paragraph, I might say:

Thank You for the holiness of our minds! Thank You that everything I see reflects the holiness of my mind, which is at one with You, and at one with itself.

Thank You for being my Companion as I walk this world; for the privilege of leaving behind shining footprints that point the way to truth for those who follow me.

This indeed *is* our calling; it is why we are here. Perhaps most of the time we don't remember our Identity in God. All the more reason to set aside a day given to remembering, for reminding ourselves. We could understand this lesson as a portrait of an advanced teacher of God. Everywhere she walks, light is left behind to illuminate the way for others. The teacher walks in constant awareness of God's Presence. She feels God within. God's thoughts fill her mind, and she perceives only the loving and the lovable. This teacher of God heals people in the past, the present, and the future, at any distance.

Slip into that mindset for a while today, my heart. Be the Christ; let all the obstacles to it that your mind throws up be brushed aside. *Practice* awareness of oneness with God.

In the latter part of the lesson it is clear that the author hasn't flipped out and isn't living in a dream world. He knows very well that we might sit for our half hour and get up thinking that nothing happened. He knows that, for most of us, what he is talking about is so far from our conscious awareness that we might devote thirty minutes to trying to recognize it and not find a glimmer of it. He doesn't care. He doesn't care because, from where *he* sits and how *he* sees, he knows with total certainty that what he is saying about us is the truth. And he tells us not to let it bother us:

You may not be ready to accept the gain today. Yet sometime, somewhere, it will come to you, nor will you fail to recognize it when it dawns with certainty upon your mind.
(9:2-3)

Even though we experience nothing, he tells us that "no time was ever better spent" (10:3).

The practice for today of a single half hour given to remembering oneness is unusual in the Workbook. The routine goes back to two fifteen-minute periods, or three ten-minute periods, in the coming days. But what is more significant, actually, is the lack of "rules [and] special words to guide your meditation" (8:4). He's leaving us on our own today. If we have been doing the exercises all along, we should have a pretty good idea of some of the "techniques" we might want to use, and we can use any of them, or anything that comes to us. Actually he isn't leaving us "on our own"; he's leaving us in the hands of "God's Voice," our inner Guide. Ask how to spend this half hour of meditation, and listen to what comes to you.

Abide with Him this half an hour. He will do the rest. (8:6-7)

You can be sure someday, perhaps today, perhaps tomorrow, you will understand and comprehend and see. (11:3)

LESSON 125 • MAY 5

“In quiet I receive God’s Word today.”

Practice instructions

Purpose: To hear God speak to you, to receive His Word.

Longer: Three times (at times best suited to silence), for ten minutes.

Yesterday we were told that we needed no special instructions for our longer practice period. In keeping with this, we are told today that all we need is to still our minds. “You will need no rule but this” (9:2). The lesson, however, does tell us a little more than this. We can arrange its instructions into three steps.

1. Still your mind. Still your chaotic thoughts, meaningless desires, and all your judgments.
2. Go to that deep, “quiet place within the mind where He abides forever” (4:3), the throne of God within your mind, the quiet center.
3. Wait and listen. Once you reach that place of stillness in your mind, your task is over. You merely wait and listen, in confidence that your Father will come to you and speak His Word to you. Hearing this Word, of course, can take many different forms, from hearing actual words to receiving ideas, pictures, or just feelings.

During this time, you will need to frequently clear your mind of all those petty thoughts and desires that try to intrude. For this purpose, I suggest using today’s idea, or picking a phrase, such as “only be still and listen” (9:3). As usual, begin the practice time with a slow repeating of the idea.

Frequent reminders: Hourly, for a moment.

Repeat the idea. Realize that by doing so you are reminding yourself of today’s special purpose—to receive God’s Word. Then spend some time listening in stillness.

Commentary

All we are being asked to do today is to be quiet for ten minutes, three times during the day and for a moment each hour. Just to be quiet. “Only be quiet. You will need no rule but this” (9:1–2). “Only be still and listen” (9:3). “His Voice awaits your silence, for His Word can not be heard until your mind is quiet for a while, and meaningless desires have been stilled” (6:2).

Isn’t it amazing how much practice it takes to learn to be quiet? I can’t tell you how many times I’ve sat down to meditate and be quiet only to find myself, sometimes only a few minutes later, so distracted by some passing thought that I open my eyes and start to get up to “do something” before I’ve even realized what I’m doing. I plop back down in my chair muttering “Good grief!” to myself at the distractedness of my mind. Draw a deep breath, think to myself, “Quiet, Allen. Quiet. Peace, be still.”

The difficulties I have with being quiet, rather than standing as an insurmountable obstacle to me, have simply become indicators of how much I need this practice. Clearly, the Course is teaching us that a quiet mind is essential. “The memory of God comes to the quiet mind” (T-23.I.1:1). We can’t hear His Voice until we are quiet for a while.

The Course describes the voice of the ego in various colorful phrases: “senseless shrieks,” “raucous shrieks,” “loud discordant shrieks,” “the senseless noise of sounds that have no meaning,” “frantic, riotous thoughts,” “raucous screams and senseless ravings,” “a loud, obscuring voice,” “a frantic rush of thoughts that made no sense.”¹

¹ References for the above descriptions of the ego’s voice: T-25.V.3:5; W-p1.49.4:3; P-2.VI.2:6; T-31.I.6:1; W-p1.49.4:4; T-21.V.1:6; T-27.VI.1:2; W-p1.198.11:2.

Our ego is a constant noise machine trying to cover up the Voice for God; we need to learn to still our mind, to cease to pay attention to the ego's loudness. The ego is noise; the Spirit is quiet. There is merit, then, simply in being quiet, even if nothing else seems to happen. Let me, then, remember to take this time to be quiet, to be still, and to listen.

LESSON 126 • MAY 6

“All that I give is given to myself.”

Practice instructions

Purpose: To understand the idea that giving is not loss, but receiving.

Longer: Two times, for fifteen minutes.

Today’s idea is so alien to our normal way of thinking that we need inner help from the Holy Spirit to really understand it. It cannot be done with the intellect alone. To seek this help, “close your eyes...and seek sanctuary in the quiet place” (10:1) where you go in meditation. Once you reach that place, “repeat today’s idea, and ask for help in understanding what it really means” (10:2). Be willing to lay aside your false belief that giving is loss, and to gain a whole new understanding, in which you realize that giving is a gift to yourself. See the Holy Spirit as present in your practice period, and be prepared to repeat your request for true understanding until you receive that understanding.

Remarks: If you “only catch a tiny glimpse” (8:5) of the idea, of the real meaning of giving, it is a glorious day for you and for the world. For this idea would make forgiveness no longer a strain, but something you would be naturally compelled to give all the time, as a way of giving to yourself.

Frequent reminders: As often as you can (do not forget for long), for a moment.

Repeat, “*All that I give is given to myself. The Help I need to learn that this is true is with me now. And I will trust in Him.*” Then do a miniature version of the longer practice period: quiet your mind and open it to the Holy Spirit, allowing Him to replace your false beliefs about giving with the truth. Through these practice periods, you can keep the sense alive all day long that your goal today is of great importance.

Commentary

This is a lesson that clearly aims at thought reversal (1:1). It begins with the presumption that we have false ideas about forgiveness: “You do not understand forgiveness” (6:1). In the sixth paragraph it explains that our false understanding of forgiveness is the reason we cannot understand how forgiveness brings us peace, how it is a means for our release, nor how forgiveness can restore our awareness of unity with our brothers. Our misunderstanding of forgiveness is the reason that we may have had trouble really entering in to Lessons 121 and 122, which told us that forgiveness is the key to happiness and offers us everything we want.

The idea that “all that I give is given to myself” is crucial to reversing our thought; understanding it would make forgiveness effortless. Paragraph 2 goes through a list of “what you do believe, in place of this idea” (2:1). So, let’s practice some thought reversal, and reverse the meaning of this paragraph to see what is implied by this key idea for the day.

If we understood that everything we give is given to ourselves, we would realize that other people are not apart from us. Their behavior does have bearing on our thoughts, and our behavior has bearing on their thoughts. Our attitudes affect other people. Their appeals for help are intimately related to our own. They cannot be seen as “sinners” without affecting our perception of ourselves. We cannot condemn their sin without condemning ourselves and losing our peace of mind.

If we understood all this and believed it, forgiveness would happen naturally. We would realize that judging someone as sinful causes our own guilt and loss of peace, and we would not choose to do it. We would realize that how we see the other person is how we see ourselves, and

we would not want to see ourselves that way. We would learn very quickly to perceive that their ego actions are not sins but calls for help, closely tied to our own calls for help, and we would respond accordingly. We would know that our judgmental attitude has an adverse effect on the behavior of others, and would choose to change our attitude. We would adjust our thoughts so as to have a beneficial effect on their behavior instead of a detrimental effect. We would recognize that we are not separate and apart, but share in the same struggle with fears and doubts, as well as sharing in the release from those things.

Given all this, we could understand how forgiveness is the key to happiness. We would see that if judging causes loss of peace, then forgiveness could bring us to peace again. We would understand how forgiveness restores our awareness of unity with one another. We could see how forgiveness can release us from what *seems* to be a problem with someone else.

The practice today is really a kind of thinking meditation. We are asked to come to the Holy Spirit with today's idea, "All that I give is given to myself," and to open ourselves to His help in learning that it is true, "opening your mind to His correction and His love" (11:6). We are asking for help in understanding what today's idea means (10:2), and what forgiveness really means. We are reflecting on the ideas with His assistance, asking for new insights, new understandings.

Our behavior, our attitudes, and our painful experiences in this world are all evidence that we do need to have our thoughts corrected. If we truly believed what today's idea says, we would not be having these painful experiences. We must have false ideas still lodged in our minds, and we need to be healed. Perhaps we think we understand what is being said, and no doubt there is a part of us that resonates with them or we would not be studying these lessons. It is the other part we are concerned about, the hidden warriors, the contrary beliefs we have dissociated and even hidden from conscious awareness.

If we ask for help sincerely, help will be given (8:3). Today will bring new understanding. Perhaps it will come in the form of new insights as we meditate. Perhaps it will come in the laboratory of life, as circumstances shock us into awareness of how we still believe one or another of the ideas this lesson mentions in describing what we do believe in place of today's idea. But it will come.

The help I need to learn that this is true is with me now. And I will trust in Him.
(11:4-5)

LESSON 127 • MAY 7

“There is no love but God’s.”

Practice instructions

Purpose: This is an extremely significant lesson, for it asks you to “take the largest single step this course requests in your advance towards its established goal” (6:5). You take this step by releasing your beliefs that limit love and opening your mind to God so that He can teach you love’s true meaning.

Longer: Two times, for fifteen minutes.

This exercise is very similar to yesterday’s, in which you went to the quiet center in your mind and asked God’s Voice to correct your false beliefs about giving. Today, you do the same, only asking God to correct your false beliefs about love.

Repeat the idea and then “open your mind and rest” (8:2). Now let go of your beliefs—one after another—in the laws and limits of this world, for all of them justify limited and changing love. Let go of your beliefs in partial love, selective love, and changing love. As you give up each such belief, God will replace it with “a spark of truth” (9:3), an understanding of what love really means. Call to Him and ask Him to illuminate your mind on the true meaning of love. That is the essence of this practice period: to open your mind, let go of your beliefs that limit love, and ask God to teach you the real meaning of love, which is far greater and more sublime than your mind alone could ever understand.

Remarks: Gladly give this time. It is the best use of time you could ever make. For if you gain the tiniest glimpse of love’s real meaning, you truly have taken a giant stride. You have gone forward in your journey countless years and have brought freedom to everyone who comes here.

Frequent reminders: Three times per hour, at least.

Think of someone you know and silently repeat to him these lines: “*I bless you, brother, with the Love of God, which I would share with you. For I would learn the joyous lesson that there is no love but God’s and yours and mine and everyone’s.*” Like the longer practice, this is a powerful technique for opening your mind to the real meaning of love.

Commentary

“Perhaps you think that different kinds of love are possible” (1:1). To my mind there is no “perhaps” about it; we all think that there are different kinds of love, varying from friend to family to children to lover, from person to animal to thing. The lesson asserts that there is only one Love—God’s Love. To think that love changes depending upon its object, says the lesson, is to miss the meaning of love entirely (2:1).

“It [love] never alters with a person or a circumstance” (1:6). To us, this can seem to be a very intimidating description of love, because what we call love does not fit this picture. Our “love” comes and goes, waxes and wanes, varying with the person or the circumstance like a thermometer to the temperature. Love, as described in this lesson, is wholly unaffected by anything outside itself. This is truly unconditional love.

I am uplifted today by the idea that, if this is God’s Love, and this is the only love there is, then His Love for me never alters, and has “no divergencies and no distinctions” (1:4). Nothing I do, or do not do, modifies His Love for me in the slightest. God’s Love just *is*, eternally, endlessly. It has no opposite (3:7). It is the glue that holds everything together (3:8). It is the substance of the universe.

It can be comforting when we think of God's Love for us being like this. It can be intimidating, however, when we realize that we are being asked to love one another in the same way. It seems beyond us, and if we are judged on whether or not we match up to this love, it would appear that we all "come short of the glory of God," as the Bible says in Romans 3:23. The lesson, however, meets this fear in us head on, and meets it with an incredible assertion:

"No course whose purpose is to teach you to remember what you really are could fail to emphasize that there can never be a difference in what you really are and what love is" (4:1). In short sentences, this is telling us: "Love is eternal, unconditional, and unalterable. You are that love." You know this love we're talking about, that seems so foreign to us, so beyond our capabilities? Well, this is what you really are! It is the other image of yourself, incapable of such love, shifting and changing with every circumstance, that is the lie. This love—this is the truth, this is you. There is absolutely no difference between this love and what we are!

What you are is what He is. There is no love but His, and what He is, is everything there is. (4:3-4)

We aren't going to see this about ourselves by looking at the world (6:1). It isn't something that can be seen with the body's eyes; yet it is perfectly apparent to the eyes and ears that see and hear love (what is called elsewhere the vision of Christ). That is the goal of today's lesson: to see that love in ourselves, to catch even "the faintest glimmering of what love means" (7:1), to "understand the truth of love" (9:4). This attempt to quiet our minds, to free our minds of all the laws we think we must obey, all the limits we have placed on ourselves, and all the changes we believe we have made in ourselves, and to find our Self, Who is Love—this attempt is called "the largest single step this course requests in your advance towards its established goal" (6:5). If we succeed, we will "have advanced in distance without measure and in time beyond the count of years to your release" (7:1). This is no small thing! To be able, even in a very small degree, to perceive ourselves as this love; to catch a hint of the fact that love is everything there is, including ourselves. This is a quantum leap indeed! To spend a little time for this purpose is worth it. "There is no better use for time than this" (7:2).

As we begin to realize that love is all there is, that this love is everything including ourselves, we will realize that it includes everyone else as well. The only way love can be everything is if it includes everyone! So we begin to see not only ourselves, but the world, in a new way:

The world in infancy is newly born.(11:1)

Now are they all made free, along with us. Now are they all our brothers in God's Love. (11:3-4)

We cannot leave a part of us outside our love if we would know our Self. (12:1)

And so, three times an hour, we are asked to remember a brother or sister who is making this journey with us, and to mentally send them this message, as I now send it to you:

*I bless you, brother, with the Love of God,
Which I would share with you. For I would learn
The joyous lesson that there is no love
But God's and yours and mine and everyone's. (12:4-5)*