

LESSON 161

June 10

“Give me your blessing, Holy Son of God.”

PRACTICE SUMMARY

Purpose: To take a stand against our anger, that our fears may be removed and replaced by love.

Morning/Evening Quiet Time: 5 minutes—at least; 10—better; 15 even better; 30 or more—best

- Select one brother as a specific symbol for all brothers.
- Picture him as clearly as you can. See his face, hands, feet, clothing. Watch him smile and make his familiar gestures.
- Then realize that what you are seeing blocks the vision of your savior, the Christ in him, who can forgive all your sins and free you from crucifixion.
- Ask him to set you free. Say: “Give me your blessing, holy son of God. I would behold you with the eyes of Christ, and see my perfect sinlessness in you.”
- The Christ in him will answer you, for He will hear God’s Voice in you calling on Him. Look on him whom you have seen as a specific body, a symbol of fear, and realize that Christ has come to you.

Hourly Remembrance: as the hour strikes, for more than 1 minute (reduce if circumstances do not permit)

Sit quietly and wait on God. Thank Him for His gifts in the previous hour. And let His Voice tell you what He wants you to do in the coming hour.

Remarks: At times the business of the world will allow you only a minute or less, or no time at all. At other times you will forget. Yet whenever you can, do your hourly remembrance.

Frequent Reminder: Repeat idea.

Remarks: These words are the Holy Spirit’s answer. They have power to bring salvation, carry you past the world and onto Heaven.

Response To Temptation: Use the idea *instantly*, whenever you are tempted to perceive a brother as a symbol of your fear, justifying your anger and attack. And he will be instantly transformed from seeming devil into the Christ.

Overall Remarks: Your practice will begin to be infused with the earnestness of love, keeping your mind from wandering. Do not be afraid, you will reach your goal. God’s Love and strength will make sure of it, for you are His minister.

COMMENTARY

[Today’s comments are something I wrote several years back while I was working as a computer consultant in New York City. On this particular day, I had expected to be able to work from home, via modem, but my client had insisted I come into the office. This threw off my plans for a long “quiet time.” The comments that follow were what came to me as I read over the lesson.]

“Today we...take a stand against our anger, that our fears may disappear and offer room to love” (1:1). How ‘coincidental’ that I begin this lesson with flares of anger at having to rush off to work! When a brother or a circumstance seems to cause anger in me, instead of listening to the

ego and agreeing that the brother or circumstance is the cause of my anger, let me see that the brother is giving me a blessing by revealing to me that I am angry, that I have dropped the hand of Jesus.

Think about it logically for a moment. If I am totally connected to the love of God in my heart, nothing will be able to disturb my peace. If something comes along that does (seemingly) disturb my peace, something must have happened beforehand. I must have disconnected from God's love first, in order to react as I do. That something, then, instead of causing my upset, is merely revealing it to me. I can therefore see my brother's action, or the circumstance, as a blessing, a message from God, a lesson God would have me learn.

"Complete abstraction is the natural condition of the mind" (2:1). Abstraction is the concern with content rather than form. It separates the inherent qualities or properties of something from the actual physical object to which they belong (American Heritage Dictionary). The natural state of mind considers content "apart from concrete existence" (dictionary again).

Part of the mind, says Jesus here, has become concrete and specific rather than abstract. It sees fragments of the whole, rather than the whole. This is the only way we could see "the world." "The purpose of all seeing is to show you what you wish to see" (2:5). If I am seeing something that 'makes me' angry or upset, it is because I wish to see it. The mind, dealing in the abstract, has already separated from the love of God (or thinks it has, or wishes to, since that separation is inherently impossible). Therefore, it splinters reality, sees specific forms that seem to justify its separation, upset and anger. It creates illusions that seemingly give valid reasons for being upset. It accomplishes this only by seeing fragments instead of the Whole. If I could see the whole picture, as God does, including things I cannot even imagine from my limited perspective, I would never be upset. I have made up those specifics. Since I have made them up, and am immersed in specifics that were made for the purpose of justifying my separation from God, "now it is specifics we must use in practicing" (3:1-2). The Holy Spirit will take the specific circumstances I have made as an attack on God and use them to bring me back. How? "We give them to the Holy Spirit, that He may employ them for a purpose which is different from the one we gave to them. Yet He can use but what we made..." (3:3-4)—in other words, all we've got to work with is the specifics we've made up, so He will use them—"to teach us from a different point of view, so we can see a different use in everything" (3:4).

"The mind that taught itself to think specifically can no longer grasp abstraction in that sense that it is all-encompassing" (4:7). Ideas like "All minds are joined" and "One brother is every brother" mean absolutely nothing to us! We cannot grasp them. These abstract statements simply don't help us, immersed in the illusion as we are.

We cling to the specifics, to symbols like the body, because our egos want fear, and that is the only way fear can seem real. There is no reality to fear itself, but the symbol of fear can seem very real. So we focus on the symbols, the specifics, the body. We feel limited by our own body, and by other bodies; we see bodies as attacking us.

What I see, when I see a brother as a body attacking me, is my own fear external to myself, poised to attack (paragraph 8). We tend to think that when we project fear, we see people who are afraid; not so, what we see is people who seem to be *making us* afraid. We see a monster that "shrieks in wrath, and claws the air in frantic hope it can reach to its maker and devour him" (8:4). When I am upset and angry at my client for 'forcing me' to come to in to the office, that external

specific is actually revealing to me my own fear of God's love! It is giving me the opportunity to see beyond the apparent attack and to ask him for a blessing, to show me my own perfect sinlessness.

If I allow the Holy Spirit to show me my brother as he is, instead of how my fear has made him, what I see will be so awesome that I will hardly be able to keep from kneeling at his feet in adoration (9:3). And yet what he is, I am, and so I will, instead of kneeling, take his hand (9:4). I call upon the Christ in him [my client] to bless me. I am seeing only a symbol of my own fear of God. I bring that fear to the Holy Spirit now. And as I do, I begin to feel a spark of true gratitude to my brother for offering me this salvation from fear. I feel the resentment about having to commute into the city melting away. This, too, is a lesson, and a very good one. Thank You, Jesus, for this lesson. And thank you, my brother.

LESSON 162

June 11

“I am as God created me.”

PRACTICE SUMMARY

Purpose: To accept the perfect holiness that is your right, to recognize the Son of God. And through doing so to bring this acceptance and recognition to everyone.

Morning/Evening Quiet Time: for 5 minutes—at least; 10—better; 15 even better; 30 or more—best

You need no other words to guide your practicing than today’s idea. For these words are mighty and by themselves can change your mind into a treasure house where God’s gifts are stored and from which they are given to the world.

Hourly Remembrance: as the hour strikes, for more than 1 minute (reduce if circumstances do not permit)

Sit quietly and wait on God. Thank Him for His gifts in the previous hour. And let His Voice tell you what He wants you to do in the coming hour.

Frequent Reminder: Recall these words throughout the day.

Response To Temptation: There is no thought of sin, no illusion, these mighty words will not dispel.

COMMENTARY

For the third time we encounter as the main thought of a lesson what may be the single most repeated thought in the Course. (The first two lessons were 94 and 110; the idea was featured in Lesson 93 as well.) The phrase “as God created” occurs 105 times in the Course. We will see it as a focus of our Workbook review period in another twenty lessons, 201–220.

Why is this idea so important and repeated so often? “This single thought, held firmly in the mind, would save the world” (1:1). In the Text, our entire spiritual journey is characterized in terms of this idea: “You but emerge from an illusion of what you are to the acceptance of yourself as God created you” (T-24.II.14:5). If these statements are true, it is reason enough to memorize this idea and repeat it over and over until it becomes part of our pattern of thought. We might say that the entire Course is aimed at nothing more, and nothing less, than bringing us to the point where we hold this thought firmly in our minds.

In paragraph 4 our practice for the day is described as a very simple practice. All we need are the words of the main idea; “they need no thoughts beyond themselves to change the mind of him who uses them” (4:2). The change of mind the Course aims at is simply the acceptance of ourselves as God created us. By focusing on this thought, meditating on it, repeating it, and chewing it over in our minds, we accelerate this change of mind. “And thus you learn to think with God. Christ’s vision has restored your sight by salvaging your mind” (4:4–5).

In Lesson 93, there was a useful addition to the words that help clarify their meaning for me: “Salvation requires the acceptance of but one thought;— you are as God created you, not what you made of yourself. Whatever evil you may think you did, you are as God created you. Whatever mistakes you made, the truth about you is unchanged. Creation is eternal and

unalterable” (W-pI.93.7:1–4). We are not what we made of ourselves. Our mistakes have not changed the truth about us. That is what accepting this idea means— the recognition that nothing we have done has been able to alter our relationship to God in the slightest, nor to change our nature, given us by God in creation. Our most shameful acts, the thoughts we would never want exposed to the world, have, none of them, changed God’s creation in the slightest. There is no reason for guilt, no cause to shrink from God in fear; our imagined “sins” have had no effect. We are still safe, and complete, and healed, and whole.

How are we to use this thought? “Holy indeed is he who makes these words his own; arising with them in his mind, recalling them throughout the day, at night bringing them with him as he goes to sleep” (3:1). It reminds me of the words written about the words of God in the Old Testament: “And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deuteronomy 6:7). In other words, make them a part of your entire life, especially on rising in the morning and when going to bed.

To acknowledge that, “I am as God created me,” is to recognize the Son of God. It is to be free of guilt. It is to know the innocence of every living thing. It is to acknowledge God as perfect Creator. It is to release the past. It is to forgive the world. In these words is everything we need: “I am as God created me.”

LESSON 163

June 12

“There is no death. The Son of God is free.”

PRACTICE SUMMARY

Purpose: To make no compromise with death; to take a stand against every form of it; to look past it and see the life beyond. And thus to release its worshippers by showing them that death is an illusion.

Morning/Evening Quiet Time: for 5 minutes—at least; 10—better; 15 even better; 30 or more—best

Begin with the prayer, in which you ask to receive Christ’s vision, and affirm that you abide in Heaven at one with God, and accept His Thought and His Will as yours.

Hourly Remembrance: as the hour strikes, for more than 1 minute (reduce if circumstances do not permit)

Sit quietly and wait on God. Thank Him for His gifts in the previous hour. And let His Voice tell you what He wants you to do in the coming hour.

Frequent Reminder: Repeat idea.

Response To Temptation: Whenever you are tempted to feel sadness, fear, anxiety, doubt, anger, faithlessness, lack of trust, concern for bodies, etc., repeat idea.

COMMENTARY

When the Course says “there is no death,” it is not talking about the death of the body. In fact, elsewhere it states that the body does not die, for the simple reason that it never has lived (T-28.VI.2:4; T-6.V(A).1:4). To talk of physical immortality and to base it on ACIM is foolishness. How could what never lives live forever?

“Death” says the lesson “is a thought” (1:1). Not an event in the physical world, but a thought. In its simplest form it is the thought, “Life ends.” It is from this root thought that many different forms spring forth. Sadness is the thought of death. Fear is the thought of death. Anxiety is the thought of death. Lack of trust is the thought of death. Concern for the body is the thought of death. Even “all forms in which the wish to be as you are not” manifests are really variants on the thought of death (1:2). My concern with my body and wishing to lose weight is a veiled form of death thought. Part of the motivation to avoid overweight is to “live longer.” But if the body is not alive at all, what are we talking about?

Even the apparently spiritual thought of desiring to leave the body behind and to be free of it is a way of seeing physical death as some sort of salvation. “The body is a wholly neutral thing” (W-pII.294). It is neither a holy thing, destined to exist forever if we become sufficiently spiritual, nor is it a trap, prison, or real limitation on spirit. Being in a body does not keep me from being completely spiritual. Being in a body does not make me an ego. Rather, it is being an ego that makes the body!

In the world’s way of thinking, death is the only certainty. Everything else is “too quickly lost however hard to gain” (3:1). As the Preacher of Ecclesiastes cries, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity, emptiness and chasing after wind.” Wealth, luxury, family, friends, nothing satisfies, and

nothing lasts forever. Death takes them all in the end. Death never fails to triumph over life.

The Course says that to accept this thought system—which we all do to greater or lesser degree, and far more extensively than any of us recognize—is to proclaim the opposite of God (Death) “as lord of all creation, stronger than God’s Will for life” (4:3). Each apparent triumph of death is a witness that God is dead (5:1–3). He Whose Will is life could not stop this death, so He must be dead. And as we watch the deadly drama, we “whisper fearfully that it is so” (5:4).

We may respond by saying we don’t want to believe it. We don’t want to worship death; we don’t want to die; we want to believe in God and believe in life. In fact, however, we do want to believe in death, at least in certain forms of it. We’ve already pointed out that anger is a death thought. In anger, we want something or someone to “go away” or “not be,” which in its essence means we want them to die. We actually hold on to guilt because we think guilt is useful; we are afraid that without guilt everything would be chaos. Guilt or condemnation is a judgment that some certain aspect of things does not deserve to exist. It is a wish for death, death of part of ourselves or of another. And certainly we hold on tenaciously to “the wish to be as you are not” (1:2).

We try to compromise. We want to hold on to certain death thoughts while letting others go. The lesson says this is impossible. You can’t “select a few [forms of the death thought] you would not cherish and avoid, while still believing in the rest” (6:1). Why? Because “death is total. Either all things die, or else they live and cannot die. No compromise is possible” (6:2–4).

If death exists at all, it totally contradicts life. It is life’s opposite; surely that is clear. The lesson says, “what contradicts one thought entirely can not be true, unless its opposite is proven false” (6:5). In concrete terms we could paraphrase these words in this way: Death contradicts life entirely, and cannot be true unless life is proven false. The reverse is also true: Life contradicts death entirely, and cannot be true, unless death is proven false.

If God is the Will to life, how can death exist? Something must be there contradicting His Will, something more powerful than God. Anything more powerful than what we call God must actually be God, the real God. So if we are saying death is real in any form—physical death, or anger, or envy, or fear—we are saying Death is God, and the God of Life is dead.

Here again we find an echo of the profound words from the Text’s Introduction: “Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists.” Life cannot be threatened. Death does not exist.

“The idea of the death of God is so preposterous that even the insane have difficulty in believing it” (7:1). It is absurd to believe that God died! Yet, the point the Course is making here is that this is what we *must* believe if we believe in death in any form.

“Death’s worshippers may be afraid” (8:1). He’s speaking about us, about you and me. We are afraid of death, let’s be honest about that. “And yet, can thoughts like these be fearful? “If they saw that it is only this which they believe, they would be instantly released” (8:2). In other words, can the thought that God died be fearful? It is so patently absurd, so utterly ridiculous, so absolutely, obviously untrue. If we saw that this is what we are believing, when we believe in death in any of its myriad forms, we would be instantly released. We would laugh at ourselves! Belief in death is just another form of the “tiny, mad idea” at which “the Son of God remembered not [i.e. forgot] to laugh” (T-27.VIII.6:2). If we truly saw that worry about physical death, sadness, anger, envy, anxiety, fear, doubt, mistrust, concern for bodies, and the desire for change are all just forms of the idea, “God is dead,” we would laugh at them! We would see that all of

this is no big deal, all of it is just a silly idea that is downright impossible and therefore nothing to worry about at all.

And so, “There is no death, and we renounce it now in every form, for their salvation [those around us who believe in death] and our own as well. God made not death. Whatever form it takes must therefore be illusion. This is the stand we take today. And it is given us to look past death, and see the life beyond” (8:5–9).

No one is saying this is easy. In the illusion of time it does not happen overnight. In practice, it takes countless repetitions, constant vigilance of the mind until we learn to uproot and deny all the forms that denial of truth has taken in our minds. To believe in death in any form is to deny life and thus deny truth. Our function here is “to deny the denial of truth” (T-12.II.1:5). It is to recognize the thoughts based on death and see they are simply silly and meaningless.

When I find myself being worried, anxious or sad, I can ask myself, “Is God dead?” Somehow I find that helps me see the absurdity of it all. I lift a bag of groceries and the bottom falls out, spilling food all over the floor, and I am flushed with anger and deep sadness, in the form of feeling sorry for myself. Suppose in that moment I ask myself, “Is God dead?” For that is what my anger and sadness is proclaiming: God is dead. It suddenly seems so absurd for me to leap from spilled groceries to the death of God, so absurd I can laugh. And pick up the groceries. More seriously, perhaps I experience “a great loss.” My loved one dies, or perhaps I go through a wrenching divorce. The sorrow seems unending, and I feel as if life is over. “Is God dead?” In contrast to the magnitude of God my personal [and illusory] loss is as nothing. Do I really believe that what happens in my little life can destroy the reality of God? Of course not.

Especially if what I believe happened isn’t even real.

Naturally in such profoundly disturbing circumstances I don’t recover as quickly as I might over a bag of spilled groceries. Yet the same thoughts suggested by this lesson can be of immense comfort. Nothing dies. Nothing real can be threatened. Whatever form death takes must be illusion. When a body “dies” nothing really dies. When a divorce rips a beloved body out of my experience, nothing has truly been lost. I’ve been attached to an illusion, but God is still alive. The pain and agony of loss through death or divorce can continue for months. Denying what I feel is simply not healthy, and I do not mean to suggest that we should attempt to stuff our grief with idealistic affirmations that “Death isn’t real” and “Nothing has been lost.” Rather, as the Course so often suggests, I can simply look at what I am thinking and feeling and recognize that, however real it feels, it is based on a denial of the truth. I can remind myself, “I’m believing that death is real, and loss is real. I’m believing that God is dead, and that’s just a foolish notion. This pain, which I am indeed feeling, is therefore not real and is nothing to be concerned about. I’m OK, and God is still alive.”

You might call it lucid living, similar to lucid dreaming. Although the experience you are going through seems terribly real, and the grief and sadness are real in proportion to your belief in the reality of the loss, there is still a part of you that is aware that you are dreaming, that you are being fooled by an illusion. You are fooled by the illusion, you do suffer the grief and sadness, but part of you knows it isn’t really real.

That’s all the Course is asking us to do. We’re not being asked to abruptly jettison our feelings and our mis-thoughts. All the Course asks is that we recognize that they are based on a lie, that really they are proclaiming God is dead, and that simply isn’t true. If we do that, the Holy Spirit

will do the rest. Bit by bit, gradually (so it seems to us), the shadows of illusion will begin to lift from our minds. The form of “life beyond” the death we see will begin to take on definition and shape in our minds, and the illusion will become more and more shadowy. Our belief in death’s many forms will weaken, and our belief in life will strengthen. The events of the illusion will have less and less effect on us, and we will experience the second phrase of this lesson’s title: “The Son of God is free.” We will know that we are eternally alive, and always have been, and there is nothing to fear.

LESSON 164

June 13

“Now are we one with Him Who is our Source.”

PRACTICE SUMMARY

Morning/Evening Quiet Time: 5 minutes—at least; 10—better; 15 even better; 30 or more—best

Let go all the things you think you want. Put away your trifling treasures and clear an open space in your mind. Let Christ come into this space and give you His treasure: salvation. Spend some quiet time with Him beyond the world, and you will remember the ancient peace, silence and holiness that you carry in your heart, the place in you the world of sin can never touch.

Hourly Remembrance: as the hour strikes, for more than 1 minute (reduce if circumstances do not permit)

Sit quietly and wait on God. Thank Him for His gifts in the previous hour. And let His Voice tell you what He wants you to do in the coming hour.

Remarks: At times the business of the world will allow you only a minute or less, or no time at all. At other times you will forget. Yet whenever you can, do your hourly remembrance.

Frequent Reminder: Repeat idea.

Remarks: In time you will never cease to think of God, not even for a moment, not even while busy giving salvation to the world.

COMMENTARY

To anyone who has done the Workbook lessons to this point, it is clear that the recent lessons are reaching for some new kind of level. There is a consistent emphasis on what the Course calls the holy instant, although many of the lessons do not use the term. But when a lesson, as this one, speaks of “this instant, now” as the time in which we come “to look upon what is forever there,” or of the time we give to spend in quiet “with Him, beyond the world,” it is clearly indicating times in which we enter the holy instant, a moment of eternity within time.

The practice being asked of us (since Lesson 153), day after day, is to set aside times of no less than five minutes, and as much as a half hour or more, morning and evening, to exercise our spiritual sight and hearing. We are being asked to listen to “the song of Heaven” (1:6) that is continually sounding beyond all the sounds of this world. This “melody from far beyond the world” (2:3) is the song of love, the call of our hearts to Him, and of His to ours.

These times are periods in which we forget all our sins and sorrows (3:3), and remember the gifts of God to us (3:4). We practice setting aside the sights and sounds of the world that constantly witness to us of the ego’s message of fear, and we listen to the song of Heaven. We quiet ourselves, still our minds, and try to get in touch with the “silence into which the world can not intrude” (4:1), the “ancient peace you carry in your heart and have not lost” (4:2), and the “sense of holiness in you the thought of sin has never touched” (4:3). All of this, as the first paragraph said, “is forever there; not in our sight, but in the eyes of Christ” (1:3). We are not creating it; we are not making it happen; we are brushing away everything within our minds that veils it from our sight. “Now is what is really there made visible, while all the shadows which appeared to

hide it merely sink away” (5:2).

Such practicing puts our minds in a state in which we feel pure joy. Joy is the word that comes to my mind to describe what a holy instant “feels like.” There is a sense of contentment, an assurance that, despite all evidence to the contrary, all is well. There is a peaceful relaxation into the mind of God. Our minds naturally reach out in love to all the world from within this holy place, blessing rather than judging.

It may be difficult for us at this juncture to fully understand how such quiet practice, something that takes place completely within our own minds, can “save the world” (6:3). The lesson states in no uncertain terms that, by means of this practice, “We can change the world” (9:2). How can that be? It is so because all minds are joined, and while we may understand the concept, our sense of its reality may be very weak. That is normal; the effect on the world proceeds whether we are aware of it or not. We can, for the time being, focus on the personal benefit: “But this you can surely want; you can exchange all suffering for joy this very day” (9:4).

If you are like me, the reality and importance of this practice grows slowly. There are many days we let “slip by” without taking the time to do the work on our minds the Workbook calls for. The details of life, the press of business, the daily crises shriek for our attention, drawing us away, as they are meant to do. It takes some determination to put this “quiet time” with God first, above all else. But when we do so, an amazing thing happens. As Lesson 286 puts it: “Father, how still today! How quietly do all things fall in place!” I recall, long ago, reading how Martin Luther once wrote, “I have so many things to do today, I must spend three hours in prayer to prepare myself.” There was a man who understood, within his own context, that preparing his mind with God was the most important thing, and that the more pressing the world seemed, the more he needed that quiet time in God’s presence.

LESSON 165

June 14

“Let not my mind deny the thought of God.”

PRACTICE SUMMARY

Purpose: To stop denying that the Thought of God, which created you, is your Source, your safety, your resting place. To experience it and then abandon all else as worthless in comparison.

Morning/Evening Quiet Time: 5 minutes—at least; 10—better; 15 even better; 30 or more—best

Ask with desire for Heaven. Deny it no longer. Practice this asking in the manner that God’s Word directs.

Comments: You need not be certain that this is the only thing you want. But when you receive it, you will be sure. Conviction lies in the experience. It will take you past all your doubts to God’s certainty.

Hourly Remembrance: as the hour strikes, for more than 1 minute (reduce if circumstances do not permit)

Practice as God’s Word directs.

Frequent Reminder: Repeat idea. Practice as God’s Word directs.

Response To Temptation: Whenever you feel tempted, respond as God’s Word directs.

Overall Remarks: Practice in hope, for hope is justified. Your doubts mean nothing in the face of God’s certainty.

COMMENTARY

Today’s lesson, tomorrow’s, and those just before and after are a strong encouragement to move forward. The Course, in these days, is trying to draw us past the point of hesitation and into a firm commitment.

“What makes this world seem real except your own denial of the truth that lies beyond?...What could keep from you what you already have except your choice to see it not, denying it is there?” (1:1, 4)

Ken Wilber, the author of many books on transpersonal psychology and spiritual growth, points out that, viewed as evolution, spiritual growth proceeds to the degree we are willing to die to the lower level of life in order to transcend it and remember (or re-member) the higher level. The fact that our experience is on an ego-level is not because the higher is not already here, it is because we have chosen the lower as a substitute for the higher, and we do so in every instant. It is not until the lower level is lived out, tried to the fullest, in a sense, and found lacking, that motivation exists to move us higher.

We need to become disillusioned with the ego to the point that we begin to see through its illusions. The degree to which the ego seems real to us is the measure of our denial of “the truth that lies beyond” (1:1). We can’t see the real world because *we don’t want to*. We are actively denying it. The reality of the real world, if perceived and accepted, will mean the end of reality as we now know it. Heaven appears to us as a threat to our imagined comfort on the ego level. Jesus appeals to us: “Deny not Heaven. It is yours today, but for the asking. Nor need you

perceive how great the gift, how changed your mind will be before it comes to you. Ask to receive, and it is given you. Conviction lies within it. Till you welcome it as yours, uncertainty remains. Yet God is fair. Sureness is not required to receive what only your acceptance can bestow.” (4:1–8)

You don’t have to be sure before asking for Heaven. You don’t have to be certain. “Sureness is not required” (4:8). In fact, you cannot be sure or certain before asking because “Conviction lies within it” (4:5), that is, you don’t find the conviction, the sureness, the certainty until you have Heaven, and you can’t know you have it until you ask.

As we live thinking we are egos, considering moving forward, considering leaving the ego behind, the ego fights for its own existence. “You don’t know what you are getting into here,” it tells us. “How can you be sure you’d like it? You better make sure before you make a move.” Certainty, sureness and conviction come from experience. When you have experienced the real world, even a glimpse, you will know you want it, you will know it is what you want and what you have mistakenly been seeking in the shadow world of the ego’s illusions. So ask for Heaven. Another comfort is that we don’t have to understand all that Heaven, or the real world, is, before we experience it. You don’t have to have a clear idea of what you’re asking for, of “how changed your mind will be” (4:3). That change of mind does not precede the decision to ask, it follows it. It is the desire that allows it to come.

You don’t even need to be sure that Heaven is the only thing you want!

“You need not be sure that you request the only thing you want. But when you have received, you will be sure you have the treasure you have always sought” (5:2–3).

It’s all right to go into this with reservations, such as, “Maybe I can have the real world and still hold onto my special relationships. Or maybe I can have inner peace and still enjoy my little pleasures.” Those reservations will vanish once you taste the real thing. A very poor analogy, but one that makes the point: “How can you keep them down on the farm after they’ve see Paris?” Once you taste “the treasure you have always sought” why would you go back to lesser things? We already have the certainty within ourselves, in reality. That’s part of what we’ve covered over with ego illusions. When we find the Self, we find it complete with certainty. The process of the Course, of “removing blocks to the awareness of Love’s presence,” is re-stated here in terms of that inner certainty:

“This course removes all doubts which you have interposed between Him and your certainty of Him” (7:6).

The process consists of becoming aware of our doubts, owning them, acknowledging them, and then not taking them seriously. This is exactly the same process we go through with other such blocks, like anger and sadness and pain. See them clearly so you can see that the doubts, too, are part of the illusion. They are “meaningless, for God is certain” (7:3). “His sureness lies beyond our every doubt” (8:3).

Certainty is not something we can generate ourselves. “We count on God, and not upon ourselves, to give us certainty” (8:1). For that to happen, we must be willing to move forward, to be willing to “die” to the level of life we know now and to ask for something more, a different way of seeing, a different kind of vision. We need to be willing to ask that “the Thought of God” enter our minds and displace the distorted thinking we have been doing. We need to “follow the instructions,” so to speak, given in the Course; if we do, certainty is sure to come to us.

LESSON 166

June 15

“I am entrusted with the gifts of God.”

PRACTICE SUMMARY

Purpose: To give the gifts of God to those who still walk the lonely road you have escaped. To demonstrate through your happiness what it is to receive the gifts of God.

Morning/Evening Quiet Time: 5 minutes—at least; 10—better; 15 even better; 30 or more—best

Hourly Remembrance: as the hour strikes, for more than 1 minute (reduce if circumstances do not permit)

Sit quietly and wait on God. Thank Him for His gifts in the previous hour. And let His Voice tell you how He wants you to give His gifts in the coming hour.

Frequent Reminder: Repeat idea.

Response To Temptation: Whenever you are tempted to be sorrowful, tearful, sick or fearful, repeat the idea. For these feelings will betray your trust, your mission. Whenever you are afraid, let Christ reply with: “It is not so.” When you feel poor, let Him point out His gifts to you. When you feel lonely, let Him speak of His companionship.

COMMENTARY

This lesson carries on the general tone of the previous one, attempting to persuade us to keep moving forward, past the illusion of ourselves we have been content to live with. It opens with the idea that God trusts us so much He has given everything to us. Everything. He knows His Son, and just because He knows you, He gives you everything without exception. His trust in you and in me is limitless. We doubt our own certainty, but God’s we can depend on.

I trust God’s trust in me.

What we fear is that trust in God is “treachery” to myself (3:2). We are attached to this world we made. To admit it is not real is to betray myself. If I have progressed beyond the point of believing that I can create like God, that I can make a world that is perfect somehow, at least I want to cling to the notion that I can unmake what God made, that I can destroy the world and shatter its perfection. To be told my actions, my sins, my denials, my doubts, and all their like are without effect is demeaning to my ego self. So I contradict the truth of Heaven to preserve what I have made.

There is a part of each of us that wants to be “a tragic figure,” like some hero or heroine in an opera (6:1ff). We want to be able to say, “Behold how nobly I withstand the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.” We think, all unconsciously, that without the “outrageous fortune” our nobility would be lost.

When I listen to my ego, this is how I want to see myself. Such a tragic figure! Poor thing, so weary and worn. Look at his threadbare clothing! How he must have been deprived! And his feet—Oh! Poor thing! they are bleeding.

We can all identify with this figure. “Everyone who comes here [to this world] has pursued the path he follows, and has felt defeat and hopelessness as he is feeling them” (6:2). You know what

this is talking about. You've been there, maybe you are there now. You know what "defeat and hopelessness" means, you've felt it too.

"Yet is he really tragic, when you see that he is following the way he chose, and need but realize Who walks with him and open up his treasures to be free?" (6:3)

Is "he," the tragic hero [who is you and me], really tragic? Or is he just foolish? Is he just making a silly mistake? When you see that he is *choosing* his path and could choose otherwise, can you consider his suffering tragic?

"This is your chosen self, the one you made as a replacement for reality" (7:1).

This, folks, is the ego self we have chosen to be. It's how we've seen ourselves. This is the self we are defending. This is the person we have become, and we resist all the evidence and witnesses that prove that this is not us.

Jesus calls on us to drop the victim act and recognize, "I am not the victim of the world I see" (W-pI.31), that "I am responsible for what I see, I choose the feelings I experience, and I decide upon the goal I would achieve. And everything that seems to happen to me, I ask for and receive as I have asked" (T-21.II.2:3,4). You see yourself as this tragic figure, but Jesus' response is:

"He would make you laugh at this perception of yourself" (8:3).

I'd like to meditate on that a while. Jesus wants to make me laugh! Jesus is a frustrated comedian. Well, maybe not frustrated; look at what he accomplishes through Marianne Williamson. He wants us to laugh at our egos! He wants me to see the humor of my position, pleading tragedy when I've deliberately chosen to be what I am.

"Where is self-pity then? And what becomes of all the tragedy you sought to make for him whom God intended only joy?" (8:4,5)

The self-pity and the tragedy just disappear, that's what happens. When you laugh at the "sorry figure" of the ego, the tragedy vanishes.

The next paragraph describes very well where some of us are right now, just starting to realize that we are not the ego. This lesson is written on many levels, addressing first, as we've seen, the person hiding in the ego illusion of tragedy; then, in these next sentences, the person who has begun to realize that the miserable ego is not his true Identity; and finally, in paragraph 11 on, the person who has clearly seen and accepted that "you are not what you pretend to be" (11:2).

In paragraph 9 we see the person in the middle—feeling torn, afraid, almost under attack by God, Whom he has habitually avoided all his life. Let's listen in to our responses as Jesus tries to make us laugh, and see alongside it the humorous truth.

First, we sense the presence of God, Whom we have been hiding from: "Your ancient fear has come upon you now, and justice has caught up with you at last" (9:1).

Our reaction: *Oh, shit! It's God! Now I'm going to get it.*

Jesus: It's silly to be afraid of God, silly to think He is your Enemy and wants to hurt you. What a laughable idea, to be afraid of God!

The lesson: "Christ's hand has touched your shoulder..." (9:2)

Our reaction: *What was that really weird feeling? Oh, Christ—was it Christ? Is that His Voice in my mind? I must be losing it.*

Jesus: It is your Brother, and he wants to bring you home. How foolish to fear him!

The lesson: "...and you feel that you are not alone." (9:2)

Our reaction: *And I'm not sure I like the idea of someone always with me, looking over my shoulder.*

Jesus: What a funny reaction! I am your Comforter and Teacher, not your Judge. It's silly to think you prefer being alone.

The lesson: "You even think the miserable self you thought was you may not be your Identity. Perhaps God's Word is truer than your own." (9:3,4)

Our reaction: *I can't believe I've started to doubt these things I've believed all my life! I must be insane!*

Jesus: On the other hand, who has more chance of being right: you, or God? Be real!

The lesson: "Perhaps His gifts to you are real." (9:5)

Our reaction: *Yeah, and maybe it's just my imagination.*

Jesus: But what if they really are real, these gifts? Isn't it foolish not to find out?

The lesson: "Perhaps He has not wholly been outwitted by your plan to keep His Son in deep oblivion, and go the way you chose without your Self." (9:6)

Our reaction: *Yeah, and maybe He has. Maybe I've screwed it up so bad that even God can't fix it.*

Jesus: Now that's truly funny! You, outwitting God? Right, sure, that's really brilliant thinking. God decides He wants something and you are going to keep it from happening?

Our reaction: *But if I didn't outwit Him, then I must still be what He made me to be. I'm not sure I want to give up believing in what I've always thought I am. I feel threatened.*

Jesus: So, OK. Hold on to the picture of yourself you've always had; I'm sure you've really enjoyed being you, that way. Right? God isn't fighting it.

The lesson: "God's Will does not oppose. It merely is." (10:1,2)

You're not fighting with God, and He is not fighting with you. He doesn't fight, He doesn't oppose. He merely is. What you are fighting (and this is fall-down, bust-a-gut funny) is reality itself. Thinking you are separate from God is about as smart as a drop of water deciding it's not in the ocean any more. It's like a lion deciding it wants to be a mouse. You're trying to be what you are not; that's what causes all the strain, when it should cause nothing but laughter. The fight is all on your side against an imagined enemy. You are the Answer to all your own questions.

There is nothing to be afraid of here. The truth about yourself is wonderful, not frightening.

In the remainder of the lesson, Jesus talks of three things we need to know. First, all the gifts that God has given us, that is, the real Self that we are, whole, healed and abundant. Second, His Presence with us, our Companion on the journey. And third, that the gifts we have are made for giving away; we have a purpose here, to give these gifts to "all who chose the lonely road you have escaped" (13:1).

In a sense those are the three main thrusts of *A Course In Miracles*. First, learning the true nature of Self, the holiness and joy of our own being. Second, and equally important until we leave this world, is the sure knowledge of His Companionship on the way, the help we need to make it through. And finally, that the nature we have realized is that of Giver and Lover; to know we have the gift, we must give it. We must teach the world by showing it "the happiness that comes to those who feel the touch of Christ" (13:5).

Our mission is just that: to be happy. "Your change of mind becomes the proof that who accepts

God's gifts can never suffer anything" (14:5). We are here to "become the living proof of what Christ's touch can offer everyone...Be witness in your happiness to how transformed the mind becomes which chooses to accept His gifts, and feel the touch of Christ. Such is your mission now" (15:2-5).

Recognize His gifts. Feel His touch. And share them with the world through our happiness (not through beating them over the head with it). Those are the three stages of moving forward. Another way to put it: drop the victim act and take responsibility as the source of your life. Choose Heaven instead of hell, ask your Companion for His help. And be the proof of Heaven's reality by your radiant joy and refusal to suffer anything.

LESSON 167

June 16

“There is one life, and that I share with God.”

PRACTICE SUMMARY

Purpose: To be children of God and accept that the life He gave us has no opposite, cannot change, cannot die and cannot sleep. To strive to keep His holy home as He created it, to let Him be Lord of our thoughts today.

Morning/Evening Quiet Time: 5 minutes—at least; 10—better; 15 even better; 30 or more—best

Hourly Remembrance: as the hour strikes, for more than 1 minute (reduce if circumstances do not permit)

Sit quietly and wait on God. Thank Him for His gifts in the previous hour. And let His Voice tell you what He wants you to do in the coming hour.

Frequent Reminder: Repeat idea.

Response To Temptation: Whenever you feel tempted to ask for death in any form—as sorrow, anxiety, weariness, discomfort, etc.—repeat idea.

COMMENTARY

There is a repetition here, or perhaps a statement that I anticipated when, in writing about Lesson 163, I said that “Belief in death is just another form of the ‘tiny, mad idea’ at which ‘the Son of God remembered not [i.e. forgot] to laugh’.” This lesson says that “death...is but an idea, irrelevant to what is seen as physical” (3:1–2). Later it says, “Death is the thought that you are separate from your Creator” (4:1). That is the essence of the idea of death: separation from Life. This is why we can say, “There is no death.” It is simply impossible. God is Life, and what He creates must be living. To cease living would be to separate from God, to become His opposite. Since God has no opposite, there is no death.

There is no death because what God created shares His Life. There is no death because an opposite to God does not exist. There is no death because the Father and the Son are one (1:5–7).

“Ideas leave not their source” (3:6). That idea is central to the Course. Ideas exist only in the Mind that thinks them. Ideas do not exude out from mind, take on an independent existence, become self-sustaining, and become capable of opposition to the mind that created them. They simply don’t do that.

I am an idea in God’s Mind. I am the thought of “me.” I cannot depart from God’s Mind, live independently of Him, dependent only on myself, capable of a will that opposes God’s. I simply cannot do it. I can only imagine I am doing it.

[Death] is the fixed belief ideas can leave their source, and take on qualities the source does not contain, becoming different from their own origin, apart from it in kind as well as distance, time and form (4:3).

I cannot do that; I cannot leave my Source and take on qualities not contained in that Source. Therefore, I cannot die.

We need to see that, as Lesson 163 (paragraph 1) said, death takes many forms. The “attraction of death” spoken of in the Obstacles to Peace section (T-19.IV) reflects all those forms. This lesson lists a few more:

Yet we have learned that the idea of death takes many forms. It is the one idea which underlies all feelings that are not supremely happy. It is the alarm to which you give response of any kind that is not perfect joy. All sorrow, loss, anxiety and suffering and pain, even a little sigh of weariness, a slight discomfort or the merest frown, acknowledge death. And thus deny you live (2:3–7).

What is death? Any feeling that is not supremely happy. Any response to anything in our life that is not perfect joy. Can we see how anything less than supreme happiness and perfect joy is a denial of life and an affirmation of death? To be less than perfectly joyful is to assert there is something other than God, other than Life, other than Love; something “other” that dilutes the radiant Being of God.

I am not advocating becoming a bliss idiot, walking around in total denial of the pain and suffering of our lives and of those around us, frantically asserting, “Everything is perfect. None of this is real. It’s all illusion, ignore it. Only God exists.”

Rather, I am encouraging the exact opposite. I am suggesting that we need to start noticing just how much the idea of death influences us. We need to notice those little sighs of weariness, those twinges of anxiety, and recognize that the idea of death underlies them all, the idea that separation from God is real, that something other than God exists, opposing and nullifying His radiance. We need to notice how we believe we are that “something other,” or at least part of it. Notice, and say to God, “I’m believing in death again. I’m feeling separated from You. And I know, therefore, this feeling doesn’t mean anything, because there is one Life, and I share it with You.”

It is only when you recognize that you are responsible for those death thoughts that you can truly understand they have no reality except in your own mind. To affirm they have no reality without first taking responsibility for them is unhealthy denial. It leaves them without a source, and they must have a source. So your mind supplies an imagined source in God or somewhere outside yourself, and you are back to the separation thought again, because there is nothing outside God nor outside you. By screaming “It’s all illusion!” without truly knowing that you are the illusionist, you make the idea of death into something real, something to be fought against and repressed.

To recognize death thoughts as illusion does not require that you do violence to your mind. Seeing beyond illusion is the most natural thing in the world when it happens naturally, as the result of taking responsibility for the illusion. To see the world as illusion does not require concerted and sustained effort. It is not something you can try to do. If you are trying, you’re doing it backwards.

The same principle operates when people say “I’m trying to see the Christ in him.” You can’t try to see Christ in a person; you either do or you don’t. When your eyes are open and nothing is in the way you don’t have to try to see! You just see.

Spiritual vision is the same. Christ is there, in every person, and you are quite capable of seeing Him there. The problem is, you’ve erected many barriers, many screens, that block your sight. You’re seeing the reflection of your own ideas instead of seeing who the person really is, which

is Christ.

The way to spiritual sight, the way to see Christ in a brother, therefore, is to become aware of all the screens you are throwing up, all the illusions you are projecting from your own mind, blocking true vision. Paradoxically, you don't see Christ in a brother by looking at him, squinting and trying to pretend he is a loving being; you see Christ in him by looking at your own mind, your own thoughts, which are the barrier to vision.

Perhaps you are afraid of the person in some way. He appears to you as a threat of some sort, perhaps prone to attack you physically, or to take your money. Instead of trying to see through that picture of him as a bad person, a threat to yourself, look at that picture itself and ask where it came from. With the Holy Spirit's help, you will see that it originated entirely in your own mind. It is the sum of your own judgments solidified into an opinion. It is how you have taught yourself to see your brother. And that is all.

You know, or you should, that you are not capable of judgment. You cannot possibly have all the evidence. So you can turn to the Holy Spirit and say, "I recognize that my opinion of my brother is my own creation. It is based on the idea of death, of something separate from and other than God. As such, I know it is only a bad dream. It has no meaning. My brother is not what I think he is, and I am not a bad person for having this thought; I'm just making a mistake. I am willing to let go of it, and since I am its only source, I can let go of it."

You may go on feeling afraid. The key difference is not whether or not the fear disappears, as it sometimes will. The key difference is that, if the fear (or whatever feeling or judgment it may be) is present, you are aware that you are making it up and it isn't real. This opens the way for a different vision to dawn on you. If what you have been seeing is illusion, there must be something else, some other way of seeing, that is real.

The vision of Christ, which is what the Course calls this different way of seeing, may not burst on your sight after one application of this mental process. It probably won't. We've got lots and lots of barriers to that vision, and you may have recognized only one of many things preventing you from seeing Christ in your brother. That's OK. You've understood that this particular barrier is an illusion, and affirmed there is another way of seeing your brother. That's all you have to do. You don't have to try to find the other way! When you are ready, when the barriers are recognized as something you make up, the vision will just be there.

It will "just be there" because it is already there. The Christ in you already recognizes Himself in your brother. The process is similar to tuning out static in a radio with electronic filters. There is a signal you want to hear, but too much noise and static prevents its being heard. You identify the static, isolate it, electronically "instruct" your equipment to ignore it, and eventually, the clear signal comes through.

What you are doing in the process the Course recommends—looking at the ego and its thoughts of death, identifying them, and deciding to ignore them because they come from an undependable source—is tuning out the static. Keep doing that, and the clear signal of Christ's vision will come through. It is there, in you, right now. You just can't "hear" it for all the noise the ego is making.