

Workbook Lesson Support Notes

by Allen Watson

Lesson 248 • September 5 “Whatever suffers is not part of me.”

Practice instructions

See complete instructions on page XXX. A short summary:

- **Read** the commentary paragraph slowly and personally.
- **Pray** the prayer, perhaps several times.
- **Morning and evening:** Repeat the idea and then spend time in Open Mind Meditation.
- **Hourly remembrance:** Repeat the idea and then spend a quiet moment in meditation.
- **Frequent reminders:** Repeat the idea often within each hour.
- **Response to temptation:** Repeat the idea whenever upset, to restore peace.
- **Read the “What Is” section** slowly and thoughtfully once during the day.

Practice suggestion: As a response to temptation, notice something that is upsetting you, and repeat the idea, specifying the emotion you are feeling: “*Whatever worries [or grieves, or is afraid, or is angry, etc.] is not part of me.*”

Commentary

The title of this lesson is interesting to me because I have just finished writing an article about our mistaken identity, and the need the Course speaks of for us to *separate* from our egos. (No, the Course does not always put a negative spin on the world “separation”; see, for instance, T-22.II.6:1.) The lesson affirms that whatever suffers is not really a part of me at all. This *must* be true if I am the Son of God, and the Son of God “cannot suffer” (W-pII.244.1:3). What I really am cannot suffer; therefore, “whatever suffers is not part of me.”

Now, be honest. If we think for only a moment about the suffering, of various kinds, that we have experienced in our lives, one thing is pretty certain: We were quite sure *we* were suffering. Not some thing that isn’t even part of ourselves, but *us*. To take a mild example, when I get the flu, *I* feel miserable. It isn’t somebody else being miserable; it isn’t anything I can even conceive of separating from (although I certainly have wished that I could!). That is how it seems. Is this proof that the Course is wrong? Or is it evidence of how completely we are still identified with our egos and our bodies?

The lesson is asking us to begin to learn to disengage ourselves from our egos and our bodies. “I have disowned the truth. Now let me be as faithful in disowning falsity” (1:1–2).

Then follows a series of statements in which we deliberately distinguish our Self from that which experiences various things the Course sees as illusion: suffering, grief, pain, and death. The statement about death is particularly strong: “What dies was never living in reality, and did but mock the truth about myself” (1:6).

It is especially difficult to practice this kind of lesson when we are “in the frying pan.” Yet if we are willing, it can be curiously comforting. For instance, if I am going through grief, and I am able to say, “What grieves is not myself” (1:4) it can be helpful. Notice: this is not denial in the negative sense. I am not saying, “I do not really feel grief.” I am saying, “What grieves” (and there is the acknowledgement of the grief) “is not myself.” I am not denying the grief; I am denying that grief is me. I am recognizing that the thing that is feeling grief is not really who I am; it is a false image of myself, an illusion of myself I have identified with, but it is not truly myself. When grief feels as if it would swallow me whole, and

engulf me so that I disappear into it, the realization that “what grieves is not myself” can be reassuring. And certainly in facing physical death, to know that what dies is not myself can be comforting.

This disowning of falsity, disowning “self-concepts and deceits and lies about the holy Son of God” (1:7), prepares us to welcome back our true Self. As I realize that none of these dark things affects Who I really am, “my ancient love for [God] returns” (2:1). That love is blocked and suppressed when I believe that what suffers *is* me; I blame God for my suffering, consciously or unconsciously, and cannot find it in myself to truly love Him. Down below the level of consciousness, every little bit of suffering, grief, and pain we experience in this world is laid at God’s feet, and we point an accusing finger in His direction. We think He wanted this for us. When we begin to disengage ourselves from our bodies and egos, when we begin to realize that our Self is not suffering, we can remember God’s Love, and love Him in return. “I am as You created me” (2:2); nothing has been damaged. Nothing has been lost. God has never been angry. And we can reunite our love with God’s, and understand that they are one (2:4).

What Is the World?

Part 8: W-pII.3.4:3–5

So, then, rather than following the evidence of our senses, the “proof” the ego wants us to see that we are alone and separate, we can turn to “Follow His Light, and see the world as He beholds it” (4:3). I find that this is most often, especially at the beginning, a case of first seeing as the ego sees, realizing it is an illusion, and then asking the Holy Spirit to help me see differently. Some event occurs—for instance someone close to me criticizes something I am doing—and at first I see it through the ego’s eyes. I see attack. I feel hurt. I feel angry. But God’s Voice speaks to me, and reminds me that “I am never upset for the reason I think” (W-pI.5.Heading). And so I turn to Him and say, “Okay, Holy Spirit.” And I add:

I do not know what anything, including this, means. And so I do not know how to respond to it. And I will not use my own past learning as the light to guide me now. (T-14.XI.6:7–9)

I ask Him to show me how He sees it. And He always sees everything as either an expression of love or a call for love, both of which can be answered only with love. If I truly open my mind to Him, and *let go* of how I am seeing the situation, His vision will replace my seeing.

“Hear His voice alone in all that speaks to you” (4:4). The Holy Spirit is speaking to us all the time; He is speaking to us through our brothers and sisters, and through the events of our lives. The call for help in our brothers is the Voice of the Holy Spirit calling to us to be ourselves, to be the love that we are. Behind every illusion is the Voice for God, constantly calling us to reclaim our Identity and to respond as the saviors of the world that we are.

He will give us peace and certainty (4:5). We threw them away, but He kept them safe for us and will return them to us whenever we are willing to have them again. Our peace and certainty will not come from the world; they never have come from the world and never will. They will come from His vision of the world, however. “When you want only love, you will see nothing else” (T-12.VII.8:1). If we disregard all the ego’s evidence, and let the Holy Spirit interpret all we see, we will see an entirely different world than the one we have been seeing. And this world, the real world, will fill us with peace and certainty.

Lesson 249 • September 6

“Forgiveness ends all suffering and loss.”

Practice instructions

See complete instructions on page XXX. A short summary:

- **Read** the commentary paragraph slowly and personally.
- **Pray** the prayer, perhaps several times.
- **Morning and evening:** Repeat the idea and then spend time in Open Mind Meditation.
- **Hourly remembrance:** Repeat the idea and then spend a quiet moment in meditation.
- **Frequent reminders:** Repeat the idea often within each hour.
- **Response to temptation:** Repeat the idea whenever upset, to restore peace.
- **Read the “What Is” section** slowly and thoughtfully once during the day.

Practice suggestion: Again I would recommend applying the idea specifically. Pick a person in your life and say, “*My forgiveness of [name] ends all suffering and loss.*”

Commentary

Unforgiveness is painful. There is a tightening, a hardening, an armoring of the heart. It hurts to shut someone out of my heart. Forgiveness ends that suffering, that pain, that loss, that aloneness.

To believe that forgiveness ends *all* suffering and loss is not that easy. It still seems that some of my pain is not related to unforgiveness; yet it is, all of it:

Certain it is that all distress does not appear to be but unforgiveness. Yet that is the content underneath the form. (W-pI.193.4:1–2)

If I do not suffer and have no loss, if I forgive in the sense the Course speaks of so that I see that there was no sin, that I was not hurt, and that I lost nothing, then “anger makes no sense” (1:1). If there is no anger, there is no attack. If forgiveness were accepted by the minds of all of us—forgiveness received as well as given—there would be no more suffering, no more loss.

The world becomes a place of joy, abundance, charity and endless giving. (1:5)

This is how I will see the world when I look with the eyes of Christ. Jesus, even when he was being crucified, saw the world in this way, and his heart held nothing but “charity and endless giving” for those who condemned him and drove in the nails.

To see the “real world” does not mean that suddenly everyone around us becomes transformed into angelic beings. Jesus saw the real world and he was crucified. But he did not suffer, nor did he lose! He was no longer identified with his body; he knew that the body could not die because it was never alive, so he was not losing his life. Likewise for us, attaining the real world through forgiveness does not mean that all our life becomes a flower-strewn pathway to glory. There may be resistance. There may be those who attempt to harm us. Our bodies may still become sick. Loved ones will still die, cars will still be stolen, houses will still burn down, jobs will still be lost. The healed mind will not see loss, nor experience suffering, knowing that “nothing real can be threatened” (T-In.2:2).

I do believe that as more and more minds embrace forgiveness, the physical reflection of those minds will transform as well, becoming more peaceful, more loving, more abundant, more full of kindness and charity. The transformation of the physical reflection, however, is a side-benefit, not the goal. It is our *minds* that we return to God.

When our minds have reached this height of true perception, Heaven is very near. The world will quickly be “transformed into the light that it reflects” (1:6).

Let me, then, return my mind to God today. Let me release myself from the vise of bitterness, and ease my mind of its fear of violence and death. Let me rest myself in God today. Let me forgive all things that seem to wish me harm, and in so doing, free myself from suffering. May I be free of suffering today. May I be at peace.

What Is the World?

Part 9: W-pII.3.5:1-2

Although the Course says, “The world is false perception” (1:1), the Course does not disdain the world. On the contrary, Jesus calls to us: “Let us not rest content until the world has joined our changed perception” (5:1). We do not just turn our backs on the world, shake its dust off our feet, and walk away. Indeed, we cannot do that even if we want to, because the world is a part of ourselves, our guilt, the pieces of ourselves we have rejected, projected out and given form. If I am to be saved, the world must be saved, because the world is myself.

Salvation, to be salvation, must be complete. Nothing can be left out. “Let us not be satisfied until forgiveness has been made complete” (5:2). We are asked not to rest content, not to be satisfied with our individual salvation. “Individual salvation” is an oxymoron; an impossibility. Separation is hell; salvation is oneness. How can I, apart from you, be saved, if salvation is the end of separateness?

There is a tendency among Course students, especially with the emphasis on its supposedly being a “self-study course,” to become introverted and occupied with one’s own spiritual development, and pretty much unconcerned with bringing the rest of the world to join our changed perception. The idea that we are called to save the world, which is a *major emphasis* throughout the Course, seems somehow to get lost in the shuffle. “Oh, isn’t that making the illusion real? Isn’t saying that our calling is to bring light to the darkness some kind of betrayal of the Course’s nondualistic teaching? Don’t we bring our darkness to the light?” Jesus doesn’t seem to think the one excludes the other. Read these two sentences again. Or hear these words from the Text:

You who are now the bringer of salvation have the function of bringing light to darkness.
The darkness in you has been brought to light. Carry it back to darkness, from the holy instant to which you brought it. (T-18.III.7:1-3)

Over and over, the Course points out that we cannot become certain, we cannot fully recognize the truth in ourselves, until we share it with others. “To give is how to recognize you have received” (W-pI.159.1:7). To turn our backs on the world is to leave the unforgiveness in our minds unhealed. Our task is not to preach to the world, nor to argue it into agreement with us, nor to “convert” everyone. Our task is to forgive the world, to open our hearts to the world in love. It is to erase guilt from every mind through our forgiveness. It is, in thought, in word, and in deed, to communicate the message which the Course says is central to its aim: “The Son of God is guiltless” (T-13.I.5:1; M-1.3:5; M-27.7:8).

There is no conflict in this curriculum, which has one aim however it is taught. Each effort made on its behalf is offered for the single purpose of release from guilt, to the eternal glory of God and His creation. And every teaching that points to this points straight to Heaven, and the peace of God. (T-14.V.6:3-5)

And we are called not to be satisfied, not to rest content, until forgiveness is complete, and guilt has been lifted from every troubled mind.

Lesson 250 • September 7

“Let me not see myself as limited.”

Practice instructions

See complete instructions on page XXX. A short summary:

- **Read** the commentary paragraph slowly and personally.
- **Pray** the prayer, perhaps several times.
- **Morning and evening:** Repeat the idea and then spend time in Open Mind Meditation.
- **Hourly remembrance:** Repeat the idea and then spend a quiet moment in meditation.
- **Frequent reminders:** Repeat the idea often within each hour.
- **Response to temptation:** Repeat the idea whenever upset, to restore peace.
- **Read the “What Is” section** slowly and thoughtfully once during the day.

Practice suggestion: You may want to try this active exercise before you enter meditation.

Choose someone in your life, and apply the following lines to that person:

Let me behold the Son of God in [name].

Let me witness his glory.

Let me see his holy light and not my darkness.

Let me see his strength and not his frailty.

Let me see his sovereignty and not attack it with lacks that I perceive.

Let me behold his gentleness and not the illusion of harmfulness I laid on him.

For by seeing him as limitless, I will see myself as limitless.

Commentary

There is really nothing to see but myself. If I see those around me as limited, I am seeing myself that way, for “as I see him so I see myself” (2:3). The lesson is not talking so much about the kind of limitlessness that is touted in self-help seminars (“I can do anything I set my mind to—I can achieve all my goals”) as it is talking about the limitations we place on holiness, goodness, and love when we view others and ourselves. Do I see my brothers and sisters today as the Son of God in glory? Or do I see them with “strength diminished and reduced to frailty” (1:2)? Do I see the holy light (1:2) shining in all those around me, or is it obscured by the darkness I have projected onto them? Do I behold the sovereignty of God’s Son, or do I continue to attack that majesty by perceiving lacks where there are none?

If I am honest with myself, I will be aware of how consistently I perceive lack in everyone, or almost everyone, I meet. Nobody quite lives up to my high standards. My mind is constantly comparing myself to others as well, and perceiving lacks in me. The perception of lack is one: as I see myself I see others; as I see others I see myself. Does the problem perhaps lie in the perceiver, and not in what is being perceived?

Yet I can choose a different perception; I can choose to see with the vision of Christ. I can choose to see light, to see love, to see gentleness. Let this be my choice today, Father. When I become aware that I am perceiving your Son as less than You created him to be (in others or myself), let me recognize those thoughts as illusions born of fear, and bring them to Your Love. I choose today to watch my mind for these scraps of fear, and to ask Your Spirit to step around them to reveal what they have been hiding from my sight (see T-4.III.7:4–5).

Today I would see truly, that this day I may at last identify with him. (2:4)

What Is the World?

Part 10: W-pII.3.5:3-5

We are not to rest or to be satisfied until forgiveness has been made complete, and all the world has joined our changed perception. And in addition:

Let us not attempt to change our function. We must save the world. (5:3-4)

Have you noticed how often the Course talks about our function or our purpose? The word “purpose” occurs 666 times in the Course; the word “function,” 460 times. Some of those occurrences, of course, refer to other things, such as the function of the Holy Spirit, but a vast majority of them are referring to *our* function:

I am the light of the world. That is my only function. That is why I am here. (W -
pI.61.5:3-5)

There is no other reason for being in this world, except to be its light. There is no other reason to live on earth except to save the world, and to bring forgiveness to every mind. In fulfilling my function I find my happiness: “My happiness and my function are one” (W-pI.66.Heading). In fulfilling my function I discover the light within myself: “It is through accepting my function that I will see the light in me” (W-pI.81.3:2). Fulfilling our function is an integral and key part of the Course’s program for our own enlightenment.

Why would we “attempt to change” our function? What are the ways we do that? We attempt to change our function when we try to find some other purpose for living in the world, whether it be career, family, pleasure, power, or anything that is “of” the world. And we do so in an insane attempt to make this world a substitute for God, to make the illusion real and thus substantiate our ego identity. “We must save the world.” This is our only function; this is the only purpose for the world itself and for me in it. “The healing of God’s Son is all the world is for” (T-24.VI.4:1).

This does not mean that everyone must enter a recognized “healing profession,” although some of us may indeed do so. (The Manual says that immediate changes in life situations are asked of only a small minority; see Section 9.) Rather, it means we must learn to translate every profession into a healing profession (“The Atonement...is the natural profession of the children of God,” T-1.III.1:10). As Marianne Williamson says, every job can become a front for a church. Our first priority is the healing of our minds and attitudes, especially in our relationships, right where we are.

Our function is to behold the world through the eyes of Christ (5:5). We made the world. We made it to die. It is our responsibility now to restore it to everlasting life (5:5).

Lesson 251 • September 8

“I am in need of nothing but the truth.”

Practice instructions

See complete instructions on page XXX. A short summary:

- **Read** the commentary paragraph slowly and personally.
- **Pray** the prayer, perhaps several times.
- **Morning and evening:** Repeat the idea and then spend time in Open Mind Meditation.
- **Hourly remembrance:** Repeat the idea and then spend a quiet moment in meditation.
- **Frequent reminders:** Repeat the idea often within each hour.
- **Response to temptation:** Repeat the idea whenever upset, to restore peace.
- **Read the “What Is” section** slowly and thoughtfully once during the day.

Practice suggestions: The first paragraph of this lesson is one of my favorites in the entire Course. I have memorized it and enjoy repeating it to myself from time to time. You may want to do the same (if memorizing it would be too much, you can write it out on a card and carry it with you).

For response to temptation, I suggest identifying the unmet need that is behind your upset and saying, *“I think I need [specify the need], but I am in need of nothing but the truth.”*

Commentary

Any one of us could, if asked, sit down right now and write a fairly long list of things we think we need. Even if we restrict ourselves to things we don’t presently have, the list would be fairly extensive. For instance, I need more memory on my computer (what computer owner doesn’t?); I need new pajamas; I need some dental work; I need a new bookcase; I need a new mattress and box spring; I need a new pair of jeans; I need a better guitar.

At various times in my life, I’ve believed that I needed to be married, or needed to be divorced. I needed a better job. I needed a brand new car, one that would not break down all the time. I needed to move. “I sought for many things, and found despair” (1:1). I got most of what I was looking for (never got quite all the money I wanted), but none of it made me happy. And I know, with all the lists I can make of things I now “need,” none of them will make me happy, either.

Happiness is a choice I make. Nothing more, nothing less.

I think the reason why the Course appeals to me so much is that I can relate to things like this lesson so well. Oh, I still make the mistake of thinking something I “need” will bring happiness, but when I find myself thinking that way, at least now I know I’m just kidding myself. I can honestly say, when I pause to reflect, “Now do I seek but one, for in that one is all I need, and only what I need” (1:2). I wander from that single direction sometimes, I get suckered into going after something else, but I keep on coming back to this one, central need, which is really the *only* need I have: the truth. The truth about myself, about God, about the universe. That which is real and everlasting.

Some of the things I sought before “I needed not, and did not even want” (1:3). I usually found that out after I had them. I recall one night, several years ago, when I was sitting home, alone, watching TV. I got the munchies, so I got up to get something. I looked at the ice cream in the fridge and thought, “No, that’s not what I want.” I looked at fruit, at crackers and cheese, at popcorn, and with each one found myself saying, “No, that’s not what I want.” Finally, literally scratching my head, I stood in the middle of the kitchen and said aloud, “What is it I really want?” And it hit me like a ton of bricks. What I really wanted was God. I was feeling some kind of emptiness inside, and my little mind was translating that into physical craving of some sort, trying to find a way to fill the emptiness by means of my body. I actually laughed out loud! I suddenly realized that all my “needs” and “wants” were substitutes for that one thing I

really needed, which was something I always had, only waiting for me to choose to recognize it.

How can we ever be at peace when all our lives are filled with an endless list of cravings? Can we not begin to see that the craving itself is a form of unhappiness? That each thing I think I need that I do not have is a burden, a nagging pain in the back of my mind, keeping me from peace? What I really want is the peace. What I really want is to be at peace within myself, content with Who I am. I want fulfillment. I want completion. And these things are *instantly* available, whenever I choose them. They are granted or withheld not by anything external, but only by my own choice.

And now at last I find myself at peace.

And for that peace, our Father, we give thanks. What we denied ourselves You have restored, and only that is what we really want. (1:9–2:2)

What is Sin?

Part 1: W-pII.4.1:1–3

“Sin” is the belief that I am evil, corrupted somehow by the mistakes I have made, and forever disfigured by my misguided thoughts. “Sin” is the belief that the perfect creation of a perfect God can somehow become imperfect, warped and twisted and unworthy of its Creator. “Sin is insanity” (1:1).

Out of this belief comes guilt, which drives us mad, and leads us to seek for illusions to take the place of truth (1:2). This is the source of the world we see: “The world you see is the delusional system of those made mad by guilt” (T-13.In.2:2). This is the cause behind the illusion. Because of guilt we are afraid of the truth, afraid of God, afraid of our Self. We believe we have forfeited Heaven, and so we must make up another place where we can, or at least can hope we can, find satisfaction. Such is this world. Because of sin we believe we cannot have Heaven, so we make a substitute.

Because of the madness induced by sin and guilt, we see “illusions where the truth should be, and where it really is” (1:3). We hallucinate. We see attack in love. We see love in attack. We seek satisfaction in mirages. We seek eternal happiness in things that wither and die.

Our healing begins when we begin to recognize illusions as illusions. This can be a time of great despair, when everything we thought we could trust in turns to dust. Yet it is the beginning of wisdom, the start of a great awakening.

The thoughts you hold are mighty, and illusions are as strong in their effects as is the truth. A madman thinks the world he sees is real, and does not doubt it. Nor can he be swayed by questioning his thoughts’ effects. It is but when their source is raised to question that the hope of freedom comes to him at last. (W-pI.132.1:4–7)

We are surrounded by illusions, the effects of our thoughts. We do not truly doubt the reality of those effects. Only when their source “is raised to question,” only when we begin to question the thought of sin that induces our madness, will “the hope of freedom” begin to arise.

Lesson 252 • September 9

“The Son of God is my Identity.”

Practice instructions

See complete instructions on page XXX. A short summary:

- **Read** the commentary paragraph slowly and personally.
- **Pray** the prayer, perhaps several times.
- **Morning and evening:** Repeat the idea and then spend time in Open Mind Meditation.
- **Hourly remembrance:** Repeat the idea and then spend a quiet moment in meditation.
- **Frequent reminders:** Repeat the idea often within each hour.
- **Response to temptation:** Repeat the idea whenever upset, to restore peace.
- **Read the “What Is” section** slowly and thoughtfully once during the day.

Commentary

We don’t know Who we are.

“My Self” is so much greater and higher than I can even imagine. The first paragraph extols the holiness, the purity, the love, and the strength of my Self. I am reminded of something I heard in an “est” weekend many years ago. It spoke of becoming aware of the self I present to the world, my “mask” (the Course calls it “the face of innocence” [T-31.V.2:6]); then, discovering the self I am *afraid* that I am (the ego); and finally, discovering who I really am, “which is magnificent” (the Son of God).¹ Think about that, my soul; let yourself hear it with acceptance: “I am magnificent.”

I am aware today that, no matter how high my thoughts go, I have only scratched the surface of What and Who I really am. “My Self is holy beyond all the thoughts of holiness of which I now conceive” (1:1). Let me sit and dream thoughts of holiness, let me stretch my mind to its limits to understand what holiness is; the reality of my holiness is “beyond all the thoughts” I can conceive of. The Course says that if we could realize how holy our brothers and sisters are, we could “scarce refrain from kneeling at [their] feet” (W-pI.161.9:3). Yet we will take their hand instead, because we are their equals. “They are all the same; all beautiful and equal in their holiness” (T-13.VIII.6:1).

To realize that I am the holy Son of God entails the parallel realization that you are the same. You are so beautiful, my friends; so ineffably holy! You are the expression of God, the outshining of His Being, the glory of His creation. How can I do anything but love you?

My Self, and yours, has a “shimmering and perfect purity” that is “far more brilliant than any light that I have ever looked upon” (1:2). Have you ever seen that in another being? Have you ever seen it *in yourself*? Ah, that is what we all are seeking! It is what we are praying for: “Reveal It now to me who am Your Son” (2:2). Imagine seeing and knowing such perfect purity in your Self. Imagine it, and ask to have it revealed, for such you are.

And the *love* of this Self! It “is limitless, with an intensity that holds all things within it, in the calm of quiet certainty” (1:3). Oh, to know that this love is my Self! Oh, to know that this is what I am, forever and forever! Can I, dare I, believe this about myself? My love, holding the whole world, floating like a bubble in the ocean of my love. My love, without limits of any kind. My love, the very Love of God Itself. Let me dwell on it, let me consider it, let me give expression to it now, sending my love to the whole world, to every being who longs for it. How intense it is, this love! How perfect, how unquestioning, how overpowering!

¹. For a detailed and very inspiring discussion of the several layers of our false self-concept, see *Shrouded Vaults of the Mind*, by Robert Perry. For a less detailed but still illuminating discussion, see Robert’s book *Path of Light: Stepping into Peace with ‘A Course in Miracles.’* Both books are published by Circle Publishing.

The *strength* of my Self “comes not from burning impulses which move the world, but from the boundless Love of God Himself” (1:4). What I am is this Love, God’s own Love. It is not a “burning” thing, a violence, an anger; it is a quiet, calm, certain Love. It knows the reality of what It beholds. It has perfect faith in every child of God, because of what they are. It uplifts, it encourages, it believes in all that it beholds. Vast is Its mercy; infinite Its understanding. Softly It embraces, gently It comforts, Its power coming from the calm sureness of the inevitability of Love Itself.

How far beyond this world my Self must be, and yet how near to me and close to God!
(1:5)

Father, You know that this is Who I am, for You created me to be It. I long to know this reality of my Self. I feel so much less than this, so unloving at times. Reveal my Self to me. Show me that this is Who I am. Help me to know my Self as Love. To know my Self as Love is Heaven; to know my Self as Love is peace.

What is Sin?

Part 2: W-pII.4.1:4–9

Our very eyes are the product of sin: “Sin gave the body eyes” (1:4). Or as the next paragraph says, “The body is the instrument the mind made in its efforts to deceive itself” (2:1). Perception itself is the result of sin, “for what is there the sinless would behold?” (1:4). Our true Self is beyond perception entirely. Perception is inherently dualistic; “I” over here perceive some object over there. It implies a separation. The sinless, evidently, would have no desire for anything to perceive because nothing would be separate. The desire to separate, to be apart and “objective” to something else, is part and parcel of the concept of sin and guilt. The sinless being, in the Course’s view, would experience all things as part of itself. It would “know” them rather than “perceive” them.

The sinless would have no need of sight or sound or touch because everything would be part of itself; known, but not perceived. Perception is so limited. So incomplete and imperfect. The sinless Self has no need of sense at all, for everything is known to it. “To sense is not to know” (1:8). The purpose of perception is *not to know*. Or better yet, the purpose of perception is *to not know*. Perception is a separating, a standing off, a being apart from. The consciousness of sin is what causes that withdrawal, that contracting inward, away from unity.

Truth, by contrast, “can be but filled with knowledge, and with nothing else” (1:9). Truth does not sense things; truth *knows* things. It knows them by being one with them. I do not know you through perception. Perception deceives me; that is its intent. Perception prevents me from knowing you. I can only know you as I experience that I *am* you. This is what happens in the holy instant, for the holy instant is an experience of minds as one. Such an experience can be truly disorienting for a mind habituated to its aloneness; the seeming identity we have grown used to for all of our lives is suddenly gone, I am no longer certain whether I am me or you. I realize for a moment that the “me” I thought I was may not, in fact, truly exist. As it does not, in fact.

The consciousness of sin and guilt is what stands in the way of this joining of minds. I hold myself apart from you in fear. I constrict my love, I doubt yours. The Course is bringing us to the point where that fear dissolves, and union, always there, is once again known for what it is.

Lesson 253 • September 10

“My Self is ruler of the universe.”

Practice instructions

See complete instructions on page XXX. A short summary:

- **Read** the commentary paragraph slowly and personally.
- **Pray** the prayer, perhaps several times.
- **Morning and evening:** Repeat the idea and then spend time in Open Mind Meditation.
- **Hourly remembrance:** Repeat the idea and then spend a quiet moment in meditation.
- **Frequent reminders:** Repeat the idea often within each hour.
- **Response to temptation:** Repeat the idea whenever upset, to restore peace.
- **Read the “What Is” section** slowly and thoughtfully once during the day.

Practice suggestion: Pick an event where you felt powerless. Then say the following lines to yourself:

What happened is what I desired, on some level.

Even in this world, it is I who rule my destiny.

For in Heaven, my Self is ruler of the universe.

Commentary

Today’s lesson is perhaps the most “outrageous” in the ego’s eyes. There is an odd paradox about the ego. Wanting to be ruler of the universe, it views the actual assertion of that function to be the height of blasphemy. Asserting that I am the ruler of the universe actually cuts the legs out from under the ego, and destroys everything it stands on. The whole idea of projection, or of finding blame for what is wrong outside myself, is done away with.

Nothing comes to me that I have not asked for. “It is impossible” (1:1). That seems a harsh truth. Lest we try to water it down, the lesson immediately adds, “Even in this world, it is I who rule my destiny” (1:2). Our fear of this truth is that it seems to make us incredibly guilty. The Course is always asking that we take one hundred percent responsibility with zero percent guilt.

What happens is what I desire. What does not occur is what I do not want to happen.
(1:3–4)

There is just no way to squirm out of what the Course is saying here. The ego tells us that it makes us very guilty if we do this. In reality, it gives us complete power over our lives. Consider what the alternative is to these statements: “Things can happen no matter what I want. What does not happen is not under my control.” This belief system, which we all live by, leaves us powerless, hopeless victims of things beyond our control. It is the belief system of guilt, the attempt to avoid the reality of our Self, which is all-powerful. It is the voice of the ego trying to place the blame elsewhere, anywhere but within our own minds.

“My Self is ruler of the universe.” This way lies freedom. “This must I accept” (1:5). Please note that this does not speak of our “individual self,” the illusion of ourselves we all have made. It speaks of the “Self” with a capital “S,” the Self we share with all creation. It is our collective Mind we speak of, the Mind of all of us. It is the individual responsibility of each one of us to choose differently, to reverse the trend within the Mind of the Sonship. In this view there is no one but Me, the one Son of God. Each of us is responsible for the whole. Each of us *is* the whole, for the whole is in every part.

We *must* accept the truth of today’s lesson; it is the only way out of hell. Anything less is the denial of our divinity, the assertion of the reality of separation. Only in accepting this truth can we be “led past this world to [our] creations” (1:6).

In the closing prayer, spoken to God, we say, “You are the Self Whom You created Son, creating like Yourself and one with You” (2:1). God Himself is our Self. We are His extension, more of Him, like Him, one with Him. My true Self is simply my will in perfect union with God’s, assenting to God’s own extension in me and through me (2:2). If God is my Self, and God is ruler of the universe, so am I.

What does this mean in a practical sense? It means that I have to begin to accept that I am responsible for everything I see, choosing my feelings, asking for what happens to me (see T-21.II.2:3–5). It means that I see, in every moment, it is up to me to choose to either suffer, or to be happy. It means that I begin to deny the power of all things outside of me to affect me. It means I accept my role as ruler of my own mind, first of all. I begin to acknowledge the power of my wanting, and to know that “what is strong enough to make a world can let it go” (see T-21.II.2–4).

What is Sin?

Part 3: W-pII.4.2:1–4

As we have seen already, “The body is the instrument the mind made in its efforts to deceive itself” (2:1). The purpose of the body, as seen by the ego, is “to strive” (2:2). To be in conflict and competition with other bodies, often for other bodies. The body struggles, it carves out its existence from the world through the sweat of its brow and through attack on other bodies. Its law is the law of the jungle, “Kill or be killed” (M-17.7:11).

Does this mean that the body is a hateful, evil thing, to be despised and subdued? No. The *goal* of the body’s striving can change (2:3). Given to the ego, the goal is strife itself, with no real end. Strife keeps the ego going. But given to the Holy Spirit, our striving can take on the goal of truth, instead of lies.

The Holy Spirit can use everything the ego made to undo the purposes of the ego. He can use our special relationships, our words and thoughts, the world itself, and our bodies, all to serve the purposes of the truth. The key lies in the changing of the goal, the purpose which the body, and everything associated with it, serves. A special relationship becomes holy when its purpose is changed from sin to holiness, from trying to find a completion we think is lacking to striving to remember a completion we already have.

In the words of an old Christian hymn by Frances Ridley Havergill, we can pray:

Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days;
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my lips, and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee.
Take my voice, and let me sing
Ever, only, of my King.

Lesson 254 • September 11

“Let every voice but God’s be still in me.”

Practice instructions

See complete instructions on page XXX. A short summary:

- **Read** the commentary paragraph slowly and personally.
- **Pray** the prayer, perhaps several times.
- **Morning and evening:** Repeat the idea and then spend time in Open Mind Meditation.
- **Hourly remembrance:** Repeat the idea and then spend a quiet moment in meditation.
- **Frequent reminders:** Repeat the idea often within each hour.
- **Response to temptation:** Repeat the idea whenever upset, to restore peace.
- **Read the “What Is” section** slowly and thoughtfully once during the day.

Practice comments: The prayer for this lesson is simply beautiful. It is one of those prayers which, as in Lesson 221, announces an intention to come in mental silence before God, asking to experience only the truth. I suggest praying it many times as a way of entering into that state of quiet meditation.

Notice the response to temptation instructions in paragraph 2. Throughout the day, whenever you notice an ego thought, quietly step back and look at it. Then let it go by declaring, “*Let every voice but God’s be still in me.*” You don’t want the effects of this thought, and so you choose to let it go. With thoughts like this out of the way, you can then enter into silence, where God speaks to you and tells you what you *really* want.

Commentary

Silence. Inner silence as well as outer silence is something most of us are not used to. When I lived in New Jersey, one of the things I used to notice when I visited a rural area was the silence, particularly in the morning around dawn. I was not aware of how continual the noise was where I lived until it was absent. Trucks passing on a nearby highway, dogs barking, televisions playing, boom boxes, sirens. Even the constant hum of air conditioning or refrigerators. I was used to having a TV or radio or stereo playing most of the time.

Even more difficult to tune out is the constant inner chatter of the mind.

The Course is constantly engaging us in the practice of silence. “In deepest silence I would come to You” (1:2). Mental silence is an acquired habit; it takes a great deal of practice, at least in my experience. Even when I meditate my inclination is to use some words; perhaps to repeat a thought from a lesson; or to invent some kind of mental instruction for myself, such as “Breathing in love, breathing out forgiveness.” My mind wants to engage in a running commentary on my “silent” meditation. Lately, however, I have found myself beginning with a simple instruction to myself, such as “Now let me be silent,” or “Peace to my mind. Let all my thoughts be still.” And then just sitting for fifteen minutes or so, attempting to be completely still and silent.

In silence, the lesson says, we can hear God’s Voice and receive His Word. If I seldom seem to receive anything concrete, the odds are that it is because my attempts at silence are not yet terribly successful. But I am practicing.

The lesson contains some specific instructions that seem to me to apply to the question “What do I do with the thoughts that arise while I am meditating?” The instructions are quite simple: “step back and look at them, and then...let them go” (2:2). In mentally “stepping back” from my thoughts, I am holding my awareness still in the silence. I am watching the thoughts rather than engaging with them. This practice of *disengaging* ourselves from our egos is a key practice. The thoughts arise. Rather than identifying with them and playing with them, I step back. Rather than fighting against them and resisting

them, I simply step back. I recognize that I

do not want what they would bring with them. And so [I] do not choose to keep them.
(2:3–4)

“They are silent now” (2:5). When you simply disengage from the thoughts, not condemning them or approving them, simply noting them as of no consequence, as something unwanted at the moment, they really do begin to fall silent. I discover that I am really in charge of my own mind (who else would be?). As the thoughts fall away, “in the stillness, hallowed by His Love, God speaks to us and tells us of our will, as we have chosen to remember Him” (2:6).

One final note. As we begin to learn this practice of silence, it starts to spill over into our lives during the day. We discover that we are able, in the throes of some disturbing situation, to “step back” from the reactive thoughts of our minds, note the reactions, and simply choose, with His help, to let them go. The place of silence we have found in our special times of quiet comes with us into our day. “This quiet center, in which you do nothing, will remain with you, giving you rest in the midst of every busy doing on which you are sent” (T-18.VII.8:3).

What is Sin?

Part 4: W-pII.4.2:4–7

When we have changed the goal of our striving, and set a new purpose for our body with its senses, it begins to “serve a different aim” (2:4). The aim now is holiness rather than sin; forgiveness rather than guilt. Our minds were trying, through the body and the senses, to deceive themselves (2:5; 2:1). Our minds were trying to make their illusions of separation real. Now our aim is to rediscover the truth. When our mind selects a new goal, the body follows. The body serves the mind, and not vice versa (see T-31.III.4). It always does what the mind directs. So when we consciously select a new goal, the body begins to serve that goal (see T-31.III.6:2–3).

“The senses then will seek instead for witnesses to what is true” (2:7). Simply put, we will start to see things differently. The Text explains in some detail how this works (see T-11.VIII.9–14 and T-19.IV(A). 10–11). We begin to look for our brothers’ loving thoughts instead of their sins. We are seeking to learn of their reality (which is the Christ) instead of trying to discover their guilt. We look past their egos, their “variable perception” of themselves (T-11.VIII.11:1), and past their offenses. We ask the Holy Spirit to help us see their reality, and He shows it to us. “When you want only love, you will see nothing else” (T-12.VII.8:1).

What we see depends on what we *choose*, in our minds, to look for. Choose love, and the body will become the instrument of a new perception.