

Workbook Lesson Support Notes

by Allen Watson

Lesson 332 • November 28

“Fear binds the world. Forgiveness sets it free.”

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: Choose a situation in which you are experiencing fear. Then say:

My fears about [person, situation, or event] bind [people involved].

My forgiveness of [people doing the screwing up] will set [people involved] free,

And will set me free, too.

Commentary

Fear and unforgiveness are very closely related. Our fear, in the Course’s understanding, is rooted in our guilt. Our primal fear is of punishment for what we believe we have done wrong. Our belief in our sin produces guilt, and that guilt produces fear. The fear “binds” us. It is a restrictive emotion. Forgiveness, which undoes guilt, thus sets us free.

The belief in sin is the ego’s foundational illusion. All that the ego makes is illusion (1:1), and not reality. Truth, by its mere presence, evaporates the illusions of the ego (1:2–5). If there is an illusion of a wall in front of us, knowing the truth (in this case, there is no wall) enables us to “walk through” the wall. There is no need to attack the wall to tear it down; we just shine it away with the truth.

The truth about us is that we are guiltless. Forgiveness does not attack sin and guilt. It doesn’t have to. It just shines them away. Forgiveness invites truth to enter the mind “and take its rightful place within the mind” (1:6).

“Without forgiveness is the mind in chains, believing in its own futility” (1:7). When I am entrenched in my own guilt my mind seems impotent, unable to accomplish anything at all. I cannot believe in my own power because I am believing in my own weakness. The power of God, given to me in creation, seems non-existent. I seem to be frail, blown about by circumstances beyond my control. But when I am forgiven, I once again realize the power of my own mind. By owning my guilt and taking responsibility for it (realizing that I made the illusion of guilt and sin), I reawaken to the inherent power of my mind to choose, and I realize that I can choose again. And choose differently, if I wish.

When I *exercise* forgiveness, the realization of my mind’s freedom and power comes even more quickly. When I realize that the picture of sin I am seeing in my brother is of my own making, and that I can choose to see him differently—that this is entirely within my power, and not at all dependent on anything outside of me—I am reclaiming my inheritance as God’s Son. By my forgiveness I release the world from guilt. I have the power to forgive sins! I have the power to free the world from its chains, and

that power is the power of forgiveness.

What Is the Ego?

Part 2: W-pII.12.1:3

The ego is the “proof” that strength is weak and love is fearful, life is really death, and what opposes God alone is true.

To find its illusory independence, the ego simply negates God and everything about God. The strength of innocence, gentleness, and love is seen as “weak” and is shunned. Attack is seen instead as strong. “Standing on your own feet” and being “independent” is seen as maturity and strength, and union with others and dependence on God is seen as weakness. The ultimate image of a mighty ego is a lone individual screaming defiance at the entire universe. The ego cannot see nor understand that this lone, limited, and separated self is the very symbol of weakness.

In speaking of this choice we have made to become egos (a choice we can realize only in dreams, never in reality), the Course says:

Here does the Son of God ask not too much, but far too little. He would sacrifice his own identity with everything, to find a little treasure of his own. (T-26.VII.11:7–8)

To learn to listen to the Voice for God instead of the ego means far more than just listening to the little angel on our right shoulder instead of the devil on our left. That concept of things leaves the “me” who listens unchanged, still the same identity, a separated self. To listen to God instead of the ego means letting go entirely of that “little treasure of [my] own,” which is my entire conception of what I am as something apart from God, and instead affirming my “identity with everything” (T-26.VII.11:8).

I was mistaken when I thought I lived apart from God, a separate entity that moved in isolation, unattached, and housed within a body. Now I know my life is God’s, I have no other home, and I do not exist apart from Him. He has no Thoughts that are not part of me, and I have none but those which are of Him. (W-pII.223.1:1–3)

Lesson 333 • November 29

“Forgiveness ends the dream of conflict here.”

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 a situation in which you are experiencing conflict. Say:

I perceive conflict in this situation.

This is my dream of conflict.

Forgiveness ends the dream of conflict here.

Commentary

This is a magnificent lesson! It states unmistakably, in very certain terms, that we cannot dodge correcting our mistaken thoughts of conflict. Each one must be faced squarely and forgiveness applied. Our thoughts of conflict “must be resolved” (1:1). They will not simply go away. We cannot bury our heads in the sand. Consider the list of defensive tactics that our egos persuade us to use. Conflict is (1:2):

Evaded: We sidestep the issue. When we sense a loss of peace, we watch TV or go shopping. When we become aware of a wall between us and a brother or sister, we walk away, or make ourselves very busy. We avoid facing the conflict in our minds.

Set aside: We shelve the issue “for later consideration,” a later that never seems to come.

Denied: We pretend it isn’t there. “Me, angry? No, I’m fine; no problem.”

Disguised: We blame our upset on a bad mood, hormones, a headache, or a bad day at the office. We paint over our inner rage with “pink paint,” as Marianne Williamson so colorfully puts it (pun intended). We smile and choke down the anger or pain. Whatever we are feeling, it cannot be a thought of murder.

Seen somewhere else: “It’s not my problem! It’s all her fault.” “I wouldn’t be feeling these awful feelings if he wasn’t being so damned selfish.”

Called by another name: We deny that what we are feeling is attack or hatred; perhaps we call it “righteous indignation” or “setting my boundaries” or “standing for the truth.”

If the conflict in our minds is to be resolved, it cannot be “hidden by deceit of any kind” (1:2). That is the summation of all these tactics. We are trying to *hide* the fact that thoughts of hatred, rage, or murder have actually entered our minds. This ingrained habit of hiding our egos, pushing them into the closet when company comes, has to end if the conflict is to be escaped.

This doesn’t mean that, instead of hiding our egos, we should flaunt them and indulge them. The purpose is not to express the ego but to expel it. But we cannot do that if we continue to hide it, and sometimes the process of ripping the mask off the ego will mean that, for a short time at least, we will give vent to the ego instead of covering it up. Sometimes the rage must be expressed before we realize how deep-seated it really is. Yet this is only a transitional phase; there is a healing that we seek.

By contrast with the cover-up, our intent should be:

To see the ego conflict exactly as it is: In other words, to recognize hatred, attack, self-isolation, grandiosity, anger, and the desire to kill for exactly what they are. To stop playing innocent.

Where it is thought to be: This means getting in touch with the situation as your ego sees it. Admitting,

for instance, that you really believe your spouse is sadistic, or that you actually do see yourself as unlovable.

In the reality which has been given it: Here we recognize just exactly what we think the situation is, as egos. We understand that we see ourselves as alone in the universe, clawing our way through life and barely surviving. We admit that the conflict seems *really real* to us. If we are not perfectly peaceful and constantly joyful, there *is* a reason, and the reason is always some aspect of ego we are clinging to, but simultaneously denying. We have to see the reality we have given to it.

With the purpose that the mind accorded it: This one takes real discernment. The conflicts we experience exist for a purpose, a purpose given to them by our minds. The purpose is always to support our own egos, always some form of ego autonomy, some illusion of independent, separate existence. Whatever the conflict, *we* give it its reality, and we do so for some hidden, insane reason of the ego. Here is where we uncover our fear of love, our fear of joining, our addiction to separation. Here is where we discover our hidden belief in guilt and the desire to punish ourselves.

Only when we are willing to go through this kind of ruthless self-examination, taking total responsibility for our own thoughts, will the defenses of the ego be lifted, and the truth be free to shine away the ego. The truth is forgiveness (1:4 and 2:1); it is forgiveness that shines away all conflict and all doubt. When I have uncovered my own ego in this way, forgiving others is the most natural and the easiest thing in the world, because I have admitted that my ego is self-generated, and the other person had nothing to do with it. I have been acting for insane reasons which I no longer accept nor want. But if this is true of me, it must be true of everyone. The conflict has been unreal, illusion fighting illusion, fear reacting to fear. And with that realization, my own guilt melts, and the way of return to God is open.

What Is the Ego?

Part 3: W-pII.12.2:1-3

“The ego is insane” (2:1). To the degree we identify with our egos, we are insane as well, as the Course so often tells us. And we all identify with our egos far more than we realize; indeed, identification with the ego is almost total. The ego is our fundamental assumption, the basis from which we operate all the time. We all see ourselves as limited, separate selves, living in a body, doomed to die with it. This insanity is not our reality, however; our true, shared Self remains sane, and that is our salvation and the ego’s doom.

The ego “stands [in fear] beyond the Everywhere” (2:2). God, and His creation, is all there is. But the ego thinks it is somehow beyond all of that; it rejects God as Creator and tries to imagine itself as something outside of God and His creation. The ego “stands...apart from All” (2:2). How can you be apart from All? All is All. It includes everything. And the ego stands “in separation from the Infinite” (2:2). Same idea. All of these stances are, obviously, wholly imaginary. It is not possible to be separate from the Infinite. But the ego defiantly, and insanely, believes that this is its condition. That is the very definition of the ego. In this light, to believe that one is damned is the height of egoity.

“In its insanity it thinks it has become a victor over God Himself” (2:3). That is what damnation is: it is the assertion, “I have succeeded in thwarting the Will of God.” Guilt is an egoic denial of the power of God’s Love. The thought “I will never learn this Course, I will never become enlightened” is an assertion that your will is more powerful than God’s. If God’s Will is your happiness, then sadness is a proclamation of victory over God.

The Course is telling us that it is insane to think such things are possible. It does not condemn us for thinking them. Rather, it tells us to stop listening to such thoughts. The ego is an impossibility: “The whole purpose of this course is to teach you that the ego is unbelievable and will forever be unbelievable” (T-7.VIII.7:1). God is infinite; He is Everywhere; He is All. If the ego is a thought that stands beyond God, separate and apart, then the ego is unbelievable. Such a thing cannot be.

Lesson 334 • November 30

“Today I claim the gifts forgiveness gives.”

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

“I seek but the eternal” (2:1). This lesson is about deciding not to waste any more time going after the supposed gifts of the ego. “I will not wait another day to find the treasures that my Father offers me” (1:1). The primary use we are making of our free will is to delay our acceptance of our divine inheritance. We are holding on like crazy to our illusion of independence, and denying ourselves the only thing that will ever content us (2:2), like a homeless person stupidly clinging to his rags while being offered brand new clothing.

Let me keep in mind today that nothing in this world is of lasting value. “Illusions are all vain, and dreams are gone even while they are woven out of thoughts that rest on false perceptions” (1:2). This reminds me of the verse in Ecclesiastes that says all our seeking is like trying to hold on to the wind. The illusions of the ego are so evanescent; they can never satisfy a Son of God. Only that which is eternal can satisfy me. A Christian hero of mine, Jim Elliot, once said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Let me remember that what I truly want is God and His peace in my heart. When I think I want something else, Holy Spirit, please help me to translate that desire into what it truly is, a symbol of my longing for the Father and for Home. God’s Voice is offering peace; let that be my only aim, and let everything else fall by the wayside.

“The gifts forgiveness gives”: What has all this got to do with forgiveness? Simply this: Every goal other than peace generates unforgiveness, putting me in competition with someone or something for that thing, whatever it is. Peace comes through forgiveness. If peace is my only goal, I will not judge my brothers because a mind in judgment is not a mind at peace. Only a mind free of lesser goals, free of desire for ephemeral things, can see his brothers as sinless.

Every encounter today offers me a chance at Heaven. There does not need to be any great crisis. All the world is my classroom, and every instant is a moment of choice. Today, let me choose peace.

What Is the Ego? (Part 4)

Part 4: W-pII.12.2:4-5

And in its [the ego’s] terrible autonomy it “sees” the Will of God has been destroyed.
(2:5)

This illusion of separation we call the ego, this “terrible autonomy,” seems to show us that we have

triumphed over God's Will for union. What a terrible thing it would be if this were reality! The ego's very being, if it were real, would be evidence of the most awful guilt imaginable. If I am the ego, then what I am, my very being, is an accusation of murder most foul, for I have wrested my very existence from the destruction of God's Will. And this is just what we believe in identifying with the ego. This is the primal guilt beneath all our vague, uneasy feelings, all our sense of unworthiness.

It dreams of punishment, and trembles at the figures in its dreams; its enemies, who seek to murder it before it can ensure its safety by attacking them. (2:4)

In the "terrible autonomy" of our identification with the ego, we have placed ourselves at odds with God and the universe. Everyone and everything else is a threat to our autonomy. Our dreams are filled with nightmarish punishment for our "crime." The ego state is one of acute paranoia; we are afraid of everything. We expect the executioner's axe to fall at any moment. No one can be trusted. Every figure in our dream is an enemy, and the only option for survival is to kill them before they kill us. The only safety is in attack.

This paranoid frame of mind is inevitable, given the ego's premise of autonomy. We all experience it to greater or lesser degree; some of us merely hide it better than others. When we get down to it, each of us feels unbearably alone, an outsider, crouched in the shadows of the woods while the rest of the world holds hands and sings around the campfire. That is the inescapable result of the premise of ego autonomy. It is the outcome of what we mistakenly presume ourselves to be.

The good news is that this is not what we are; the aloneness is an illusion, an outrageous impossibility. The ego is forever unbelievable. We are no more apart from God and His creation than a cell in my body is apart from the body itself. We live in God; we move and have our being in God. We are, all of us, making this incredible transition from ego autonomy to a transpersonal unity, the recognition of a higher Whole to which we all belong, intrinsically, a Whole which exists in every part—in you, in me. Nothing can stop this transition, because it is simply the recognition of what has always been so.

Lesson 335 • December 1

“I choose to see my brother’s sinlessness.”

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: The practice I will suggest now is a very powerful one, which I have used many times. I recommend using it with a number of people who come to mind. The idea behind it is that we see sinfulness in another *because* that will make us see sinfulness in ourselves, and that, crazily enough, is what we are after, what our ego wants. Just let one person after another come to mind, and apply the following lines to each one:

*I chose to see [name’s] sinfulness
Because I wanted to see my own.
I choose to see [name’s] sinlessness
Because I want to see my own.*

Commentary

This continues the thought from yesterday’s lesson about decision and choice. Yesterday we read about choosing to follow God’s Voice, and beholding our brother as sinless. Today we read:

Forgiveness is a choice. I never see my brother as he is, for this is far beyond perception. What I see in him is merely what I wish to see, because it stands for what I want to be the truth. (1:1–3)

In other words, what we see results from choices we have made about what we want to see. The Text speaks about “the decision for guiltlessness” (T-14.III). It says (see the fourth paragraph in that section) that we need to make the choice to see innocence and not to see guilt. If we make that decision, that is what we will see.

It is startling to be told that we *never* see our brothers as they are (1:2). Seeing, or perception (which is a dualistic form of knowing, requiring a seer separate from what is being seen), simply cannot apprehend the reality of what we are. What we are seeing is always a symbol, an imperfect representation. No wonder it is so easy for perception to be *mis*perception.

Misperception in terms of guilt and innocence happens like this: I see guilt in myself. I want to get rid of it, so I project it onto a brother. I see him as guilty because I want to, I have chosen to. I think this will get rid of my guilt.

Correction of perception happens in reverse: I realize that I am not at peace and therefore I must have decided wrongly. I decide to see my brother as innocent. When I have truly made that choice, I will see his innocence. That is a law: “You see what you believe is there, and you believe it there because you want it there” (T-25.III.1:3). When you want only love, love is all you will see (T-12.VII.8:1).

What we are seeing is always what we *choose* to see because we want to see it. “It is to this alone that I respond, however much I seem to be impelled by outside happenings” (1:4). The Course is obviously

aware that the way it describes perception is definitely not how it seems to us. We are utterly convinced that we are seeing what we are seeing because *that's the way it is*. We believe it is the happenings outside of us that are forcing this perception upon us. When we see someone as guilty, it isn't because we are choosing to see them that way—they *are* guilty! We think we are just seeing what is the truth. The Course hears our objections and replies, “No matter how much it seems that way to you, I am telling you, you are wrong; you are responding *only* to what you want to see, not what is really there.”

“Forgiveness is a choice” (1:1). We can see our brother as guilty, or as innocent, and the choice is one hundred percent up to us; it has nothing to do with what he did or did not do.

My willingness to see my brother as innocent is the harbinger of my willingness to see myself as innocent (1:6–7). When I am ready to choose to see my brother as innocent, it shows that I have begun to let go of the guilt in my mind that caused me to desire to see him as guilty.

Seeing one another as innocent, seeing one another as sinless, restores the memory of God to us (2:1). There is a formula that runs through the Course: First, we see the face of Christ in one another; then we remember God. “In him I find my Self, and in Your Son I find the memory of You as well” (2:3). So if I want to remember God, what can I do? *Make a choice* to see my brother as innocent instead of guilty. We find our way to God through our brothers.

What Is the Ego?

Part 5: W-pII.12.3:1–3

The Son of God is egoless. (3:1)

This begins a contrast between the ego and the Son of God, our true Identity. The Son of God, which is what I really am, has no ego! The ego is the sign of a limited and separated self. The Son of God is not limited or separated from God. The Son is unlimited, and coextensive with the Father; wherever God is, the Son is. They are One. There is no ego; no self that is apart from, and held distinct from, God.

Our true Self does not know the madness of the ego; the concept of the death of God (or victory over Him) is inconceivable because the Son lives (abides) in God (3:2). He lives in eternal joy, and does not know sorrow or suffering.

Insanity, God as enemy, sorrow, and suffering are all consequences of the ego delusion. They are as delusional, and as unreal, as the ego itself. Having been locked in this delusion of a separate self for so long, we can barely begin to imagine a state of mind in which these things simply do not exist. Yet that is where the Course is taking us: beyond the ego, beyond the madness, back into the oneness that has always been and will always be. This is our true state of mind, and it calls to us in our isolation, drawing us to return.

Lesson 336 • December 2

“Forgiveness lets me know that minds are joined.”

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

In the Text, the Course speaks of the idea that minds are joined as something that is experienced in a holy relationship, where two people have joined together in common purpose, what is called in one place “a common state of mind” (T-22.III.9:7). In a healthy holy relationship, the members of that relationship regularly practice forgiveness with one another. The result is stated as follows:

This is the function of your holy relationship. For what one thinks, the other will experience with him. What can this mean except your mind and your brother’s are one? Look not with fear upon this happy fact, and think not that it lays a heavy burden on you. For when you have accepted it with gladness, you will realize that your relationship is a reflection of the union of the Creator and His Son. (T-22.VI.14:1–5)

The idea that forgiveness is somehow connected to the experience of linked minds is not intuitively obvious. Yet a little reflection seems to make it clearer for me. If I am unforgiving toward someone, there is certainly a barrier between our minds. I am mentally rejecting that other person and have no desire whatever to find myself mentally linked to them. My judgment is a strong “no” to that person’s thoughts. When I forgive, my mind opens to them. “Forgiveness *lets me know* that minds are joined” (my emphasis). It opens the way for me to realize that this is true.

Our perceptions tell us, in a myriad of ways, that we are separate beings. Forgiveness opens the way to an experience that takes us beyond perception and shows us the underlying unity that perception cannot see. Forgiveness “opens the hidden altar to the truth” (1:4). Within our minds we find “the dwelling place of God Himself” (1:6). Forgiveness wipes “away my dreams of separation and of sin” (2:1). In the experience of union with another human being, we begin to remember our union with God and all creation.

What Is the Ego?

Part 6: W-pII.12.3:4

In contrast to the ego, our true Self, the Son of God, is surrounded by everlasting peace. Where the ego sees itself at war with the universe, and trembles constantly in fear of attack from every figure in its dreams, the Son of God is “forever conflict-free.” The Son rests forever “undisturbed, in deepest silence and tranquility” (3:4).

When we begin to get in touch with our Self, we experience a taste of that deep, silent tranquility. That is one of the characteristics of the holy instant. There is a peace in the holy instant that beggars description.

There is a silence into which the world can not intrude. There is an ancient peace you carry in your heart and have not lost. There is a sense of holiness in you the thought of sin has never touched. (W-pI.164.4:1-3)

The ego, in isolation from the universe, can never know this peace. It comes only from within our Self, being an attribute of Who we are. It has nothing to do with external circumstance, and is unaffected by any such circumstance. It is part of what we are, together.

Lesson 337 • December 3

“My sinlessness protects me from all harm.”

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: Think of your day yesterday, and in relation to each thing you did, ask yourself, *“Was there an element of ‘If I do this thing right, I’ll redeem myself’?”*

Then, with each “yes” you get, ask yourself, *“What was I trying to redeem myself for?”*

Then focus on simply accepting the awareness from God that you are sinless, that you need do nothing to be redeemed, because “God has already done all things that need be done” (1:5).

Commentary

This is a lesson about simply accepting the Atonement and nothing more. It states that there are really only two steps to the full knowledge of complete happiness (1:4–6):

1. Realize that I need do nothing of myself.
2. Accept what God has already done.

All of the turmoil and discomfort we experience as we begin a spiritual path comes from thinking that we lack something (which is not seeing step 2) and therefore we have to do something to get it (which is not seeing step 1).

We feel unhappy, and therefore we think we lack happiness and set out to seek it. Unhappiness is not a condition of lack. It is a condition of denial. We are actively negating happiness, which is our natural state. We are blocking out the awareness of love’s presence. We are covering over the joy of our created nature, of simply being, with a filthy patina of unfulfillment. We think the solution is to do something; actually the solution is to stop doing something, to put an end to the activity that is obscuring our happiness.

That is one of the values of meditation. When we deliberately bring a stop to our mental activity we often suddenly feel happy. That is because we are always happy, but we are constantly generating unhappiness by our thoughts. Stop the thoughts and the happiness shines through. Clear away the clouds and the sun is always there.

We have taught ourselves that we *are* this constant mental activity. Letting go of that activity is an extreme threat to the ego. If we let it go nothing is left, or so we fear; so the ego tells us. The ego lies!

All we need to do is to stop doing. What we are, without any activity at all, is enough to support perfect, constant happiness.

What Is the Ego?

Part 7: W-pII.12.4:1

To know reality is not to see the ego and its thoughts, its works, its acts, its laws and its beliefs, its dreams, its hopes, its plans for its salvation, and the cost belief in it entails.

Knowing reality consists simply of *not* seeing illusions. Without illusions to conceal it, reality is self-evident. That is why we “need do nothing.” We don’t have to make reality. We don’t have to make ourselves sinless, or happy, or peaceful. We simply have to stop seeing the thing that obscures reality from our sight: the ego, and everything to do with it.

The list of all the aspects of the ego that we are “not to see” is needful for us, because if the lesson simply said that “to know reality is not to see the ego” we would not be sure what was meant. By listing all the things related to the ego—thoughts, works, acts, laws, beliefs, dreams, hopes, plans for salvation, and the cost it demands of us—we are more likely to understand the full import of what not seeing the ego means. Not just the acts of the ego need to be banished from our sight, but all the things that drive those acts.

I am especially struck with “its plans for salvation.” The ego has many plans for getting us out of the mess we think we are in. But we aren’t really in a mess; we have simply covered over reality with illusions, and the reality is still there. We don’t have to do anything to find it. We don’t need to make plans for our salvation. Indeed, making plans for our salvation just digs the ego rut deeper. We need, as Lesson 337 points out, to understand that “I need do nothing of myself, for I need but accept my Self, my sinlessness, created for me, now already mine, to feel God’s Love protecting me from harm” (W-pII.337.1:6).

Lesson 338 • December 4

“I am affected only by my thoughts.”

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

This is a key Course concept, repeated many times in different words:

I am responsible for what I see. I choose the feelings I experience, and I decide upon the goal I would achieve. (T-21.II.2:3–4)

I am never upset for the reason I think. (W-pI.5.Heading)

It is impossible the Son of God be merely driven by events outside of him. It is impossible that happenings that come to him were not his choice. His power of decision is the determiner of every situation in which he seems to find himself by chance or accident. (T-21.II.3:1–3)

Nothing beyond yourself can make you fearful or loving, because nothing *is* beyond you. (T-10.In.1:1)

It is your thoughts alone that cause you pain. Nothing external to your mind can hurt or injure you in any way. There is no cause beyond yourself that can reach down and bring oppression. No one but yourself affects you. There is nothing in the world that has the power to make you ill or sad, or weak or frail. But it is you who have the power to dominate all things you see by merely recognizing what you are. (W-190.5:1–6)

The Course says that accepting this is foundational to our release from our suffering. As long as we think something outside of us is affecting us and causing our pain, we will not look within for the thoughts that are truly at the root of the pain. We will believe ourselves to be innocent victims of forces beyond our control. There are no forces beyond our control; that is the whole point.

It needs but this to let salvation come to all the world. For in this single thought is everyone released at last from fear. (1:1–2)

The realization that there is nothing outside me threatening me in any way is sure to release us from fear. At first it may seem to induce guilt—because if no one else is doing it to me, I must be doing it, and that seems to be a horrendously difficult admission to make. In fact, however, the realization that I am affected only by my own thoughts brings an expansive freedom from fear.

Now has he learned that no one frightens him, and nothing can endanger him. He has no enemies, and he is safe from all external things. (1:3–4)

Let me remind myself of this today. Nothing can endanger me. I have no enemies, and nothing external can threaten me. I do not need to live in anxiety and defensiveness; I am safe.

Yet what about the fact that my own thoughts can hurt me? Isn't that something to be afraid of? It seems especially frightening that I can be affected by thoughts I have but of which I am not conscious. The eerie message of psychology that I am driven by subconscious motives that never surface in my conscious mind has always been frightening, and the Course is very much in line with those psychological theories. It is constantly telling us that we do believe certain things we are not aware of believing, and that we are driven by a subterranean guilt about separation so deeply buried that we perhaps will never, in this world, become aware of it. How can we be free from fear when these hidden enemies lurk beneath the surface of our minds, ready to explode like land mines when we unsuspectingly step on them?

His thoughts can frighten him, but since these thoughts belong to him alone, he has the power to change them and exchange each fear thought for a happy thought of love. He crucified himself. Yet God has planned that His beloved Son will be redeemed. (1:5-7)

The good news is that since our thoughts are our thoughts, we can change them. Even the subconscious ones. That is what the Course is all about. Yes, we have crucified ourselves, but God has planned a way out for us. He has planned that we be redeemed: that is, liberated or released from our self-imposed prison. It is a way of changing our minds, and nothing more than that is needed.

All other plans will fail. (2:2)

They will fail because they are based on an untruth, namely, that the problem is something external, something other than my thoughts. I can try to solve my problems with more money, with medicines or drugs, or by surrounding myself by people who seem to supply what I seem to lack. Being external solutions they will all fail, because the real problem is my own thoughts. No matter how ingenious they are, my plans will fail, because I am solving the wrong problems.

And I will have thoughts that will frighten me, until I learn that You have given me the only Thought that leads me to salvation. Mine alone will fail, and lead me nowhere. But the Thought You gave me promises to lead me home, because it holds Your promise to Your Son. (2:3-5)

Even though I know the truth of this lesson, I will still have frightening thoughts, thoughts that seem to hurt me. That is not anything to be concerned about. When such thoughts surface I can learn to shrug and tell myself, "So I still have an ego. What else is new?" I can bring thoughts that frighten into the presence of the Thought given by God, the Holy Spirit. He is the "Thought that leads me to salvation," the Thought of forgiveness and love. He is a Thought full of promise and certainty, a Thought that tells me I am God's beloved Son, with nothing to fear (as we saw in yesterday's lesson, "My sinlessness protects me from all harm").

Let me today be willing to recognize my fear thoughts when they arise, rather than denying I have them, so that with the help of the Holy Spirit I can change them and exchange them for a happy thought of love.

What Is the Ego?

Part 8: W-pII.12.4:2

In suffering, the price for faith in it [the ego] is so immense that crucifixion of the Son of God is offered daily at its darkened shrine, and blood must flow before the altar where its

sickly followers prepare to die.

This is one of the Course's darkest assessments of our ego. It evokes a picture of a primitive, blood-sacrifice religion such as we read about having existed in Central America, where human beings had their hearts ripped from their bodies still beating, and altars had channels cut into them to drain away the flowing blood. It says that our faith in the ego is the cause of suffering as immense and terrifying as that.

For our faith in the ego's illusion of autonomy, of separated identity, we pay an immense price in suffering. Each day we persist in this insane faith, we crucify the Son of God. For the existence of a separated identity demands the death of our unified Identity. As "sickly followers" of this religion (for religion it is), we are all preparing to die as we watch the sacrifice of the holy Son of God. (Of course, the Son of God cannot die; the sacrifice is illusion. But to our minds it is terribly, terribly real.) Our own death will vindicate our faith; it will prove our separation from God.

Although this suffering is not real in the final sense, it is real to us. And one of the things the Course asks of us, in order to bring about our deliverance from the ego, is that we honestly assess the cost of our belief in it. What does it cost me to hold a grievance? What does it cost me to hate? What does it cost me to insist on being right in an argument? What does it cost me to hold on to my view of myself as a victim? What does it cost me to hold on to my guilt? What does it cost me to hold on to my perception of sin in my brothers and sisters?

We need to count the cost of our belief in the ego. The Course says:

You will not accept the cost of fear if you recognize it. (T-11.V.10:3)

The ego is trying to teach you how to gain the whole world and lose your own soul. The Holy Spirit teaches that you cannot lose your soul and there is no gain in the world, for of itself it profits nothing. To invest without profit is surely to impoverish yourself, and the overhead is high. Not only is there no profit in the investment, but the cost to you is enormous. For this investment costs you the world's reality by denying yours, and gives you nothing in return. (T-12.VI.1:1-5)

You must learn the cost of sleeping, and refuse to pay it. (T-12.VI.5:2)

Belief in sin needs great defense, and at enormous cost. All that the Holy Spirit offers must be defended against and sacrificed. For sin is carved into a block out of your peace, and laid between you and its return. (T-22.V.2:6-8)

We pay an immense price in suffering in order to hold on to our tattered, treasured ego. We lose awareness of our real Identity to hold on to an imagined one that we can never make real. Once we see this, once we recognize the insanity of it, we will no longer be willing to accept it. Once we see what the ego demands of us, we will refuse to pay the price, because we will realize that the ego is not what we really want. But first, very often, we must confront the horror of what we have done. We must look at that altar dripping with blood and realize we have been choosing this.

It is not difficult to relinquish judgment. But it is difficult indeed to try to keep it. The teacher of God lays it down happily the instant he recognizes its cost. All of the ugliness he sees about him is its outcome. All of the pain he looks upon is its result. All of the loneliness and sense of loss; of passing time and growing hopelessness; of sickening despair and fear of death; all these have come of it. And now he knows that these things need not be. Not one is true. For he has given up their cause, and they, which never were but the effects of his mistaken choice, have fallen from him. Teacher of God, this step will bring you peace. Can it be difficult to want but this? (M-10.6:1-11)