

Our Gratitude to God

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Part V

"Love is the way I walk in gratitude"

The passage from the teacher's manual that we saw earlier spoke about love following from a grateful heart (M-23.4:6). In expressing our gratitude to Jesus, we remember the Love of God. Likewise, as we will see now in the context of Lesson 195 "Love is the way I walk in gratitude," it is through expressing our gratitude for our world and all the situations, circumstances, and especially the relationships in the world that we are able to let go of our ingratitude. That ingratitude is born of our feeling that we have been cheated, that God is not our Creator, the Source of our being, and that we can function on our own. Thus, not only do we *not* feel grateful, but we do not even believe there is a call for our gratitude. It is that basic thought that we keep buried and deeply hidden in our minds. Then we project it and feel the same lack of gratitude and appreciation for everyone else. As long as we hold on to that, what we are really doing—as we will see in this lesson—is keeping ourselves separate. Gratitude is just another way of expressing our joining with each other, and that then becomes the way of undoing our belief that we are separate, not only from each other, but from our Creator.

Now Lesson 195:

(W-pl.195.1:1) Gratitude is a lesson hard to learn for those who look upon the world amiss.

As long as we feel unfairly treated and justified in being innocent, we will believe that the world has victimized us, and done us an injustice and a disservice. And, obviously, as long as we have that belief, gratitude will make no sense at all. Ingratitude is a perfectly logical, reasonable effect of everything in the ego thought system. Why should I feel grateful to a God Who I believe has stolen from me and is arrogantly pretending He is a Creator? Why should I feel grateful to someone who I believe is trying to steal from me just the way God did? Why should I feel grateful to a Jesus who thinks that he is better than I am? Obviously they do not think that way, but within a thought system that begins with a belief in separation and differences—which means we would feel sinful, guilty, and fearful—we feel attack is justified, and therefore gratitude would make no sense. And since we all identify with that ego thought system—otherwise, none of us would be here - then it also makes no sense for us to feel appreciative of where we are, of the people whom we are with, or of the world that furnishes us with a classroom.

It certainly makes perfect sense *not* to feel grateful to the loving Presence of God, or to the Holy Spirit or Jesus who takes us back home. And it certainly makes no sense to feel grateful to a God Who believes that He created us, when we really know that we are the ones who created ourselves. That is what Jesus means in saying, "Gratitude is a lesson hard to learn for those who look upon the world amiss." And there is no one in this world who does not look on this world amiss. If we looked on this world correctly,

we wouldn't be here anymore. In a sense, the whole purpose of *A Course in Miracles* is to help us look at this world differently. Gratitude, then, enables us to do just that.

(W-pl.195.1:2-3) The most that they can do is see themselves as better off than others. And they try to be content because another seems to suffer more than they.

What most people feel grateful for is that they are doing well in life, and that they are better off than many other people—we feel grateful that we have enough food on our plates while there are starving people all over the world; or we feel grateful that we are warm, while there are people freezing and without adequate heating in other places. We may be grateful that we live on the East Coast and not the West Coast where they have all the earthquakes. There is that perfectly insane line that people so often say: "There but for the grace of God go I." Well, that is not very loving. When I was a kid, I was a big basketball fan and I remember watching some of the college games, especially the Catholic colleges like St. John's, St. Peter's, and Seton Hall. When one of their players would be at the foul line, he would make the sign of the cross before shooting the foul shot. Sometimes, too, when you see a touchdown pass during a football game, the receiver kneels and crosses himself, or says thank you, pointing to the heavens. This is fine, if God is on your side [Laughter], which is what we think. But the gratitude is always based on your having gotten what you wanted, and you do not think about the fact that the other guy didn't get what he wanted.

Gloria's brother and sister-in-law are born-again Christians. A number of years ago, their daughter, who at that point was 17 or so, went on a school trip to the Great Adventure Amusement Park in New Jersey. There was a bad fire at the park that day, and a number of children were killed. Their daughter was on her way there that morning, but the bus broke down and so they got there hours after the fire had been put out. I remember Gloria's sister-in-law saying to us afterwards, "God was really good to us because He saved our daughter." Well, you can understand how she felt, but then what about the parents of the children who were not as fortunate? That is what this is talking about—that we feel grateful because we are better off than others. Implicit in that is the idea that somehow God has favored me and has not favored other people. The arrogance of that is that God is favoring me because I am a good person—you know, I have been a good Christian, or a good Jew, or a good Muslim, or I have been a good this and a good that—and someone else obviously has not been as good, because he or she has not fared as well.

For many people it seems so automatic to thank God when good things happen. But you should really think about the implications of that way of thinking. The only good thing in this world is whatever offers us a means of healing our minds, which means that everything in this world has a potential for good. There is a line from *Hamlet* that you may have heard me quote other times that really expresses this same idea—that there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so. *A Course in Miracles* would say the same thing. The Course says that the body and the world are neutral (W-pl.294), and that the purpose we give them is all the meaning they have. So something that the world would judge as a catastrophe, if I look at it right, then offers me an opportunity to learn—for example, that the Son of God cannot be hurt; the Son of God cannot be taken from; or the Son of God cannot hurt anyone. That is the end of guilt. Thus, what makes something right or wrong or good or bad has nothing to do with the thing itself or the circumstance itself. It has to do with our perception of it.

The belief that my life has been spared or that I have done well in my life, and that God has rewarded me, is a way of saying He has rewarded me and has not rewarded someone else, so I am better off and God loves *me*. But what that really is, is a defense against the underlying thought that is exactly the

opposite: namely, that I do not deserve anything. None of us believes we deserve happiness and peace in this world, because we believe we have stolen them. Anything that we believe is good in this world we believe originally came from God and that we took it; and at some point God is going to catch up with us. Thus, none of us in this world really believes we deserve good fortune, whatever we judge that to be. And so when we do appear to have good fortune, and then say that God has been good to me, we are really reacting against what we truly believe: that we do not deserve this. But rather than deal with the fact that I am so sinful, guilty, and rotten, and do not deserve anything, what I do is say that I am the good one, and this other person is the rotten one. Now I have the proof, because this person was killed in this accident while I was spared; or this person died in this earthquake, or lost his home in the earthquake, and I am fine. Thus I can prove that I am the innocent one because God has found the guilty one; and it is not me, it is that person, and God has punished that person.

Now, most of the time, these thoughts are not conscious, because the guilt involved would be overwhelming. But the thoughts are there nonetheless. And that is why we say such strange things as, "There but for the grace of God go I," and we try to ascribe to God motivations that have nothing to do with God but only with us. God does not have any motivation—He would have to have an ego to be motivated. God's Love simply *is*, and it does not pick or choose or sleep late in the morning so bad things happen on that day. God's Love is constant and consistent. But *we*, as good healthy egos, are very split and we have lots of motives. Again, what we do is project those motives onto God and then believe that our gratitude is dependent upon what happens outside us. Therefore, we will not be grateful if something bad happens; we will be grateful only when something good happens. We thank God for the good things and do not thank Him for the bad things.

Part of the reason for not thanking God for the bad things is that we think that He caused them—and He caused them as a way of punishing us. There are times actually - this is also expressed in this lesson - where people do thank God for the bad things. We believe that God's Love causes us to suffer and to sacrifice, and that that is His way of purifying us of all our bad thoughts. That is the insanity we have all grown up with—that somehow God demands that we sacrifice and suffer so that we can be purified.

From another point of view, saying "God loves me" implies that He also can *not* love me, and so what seems to be a pure kind of prayer is actually a defeating kind of prayer, too. Thus, God loves me today because I have been a good boy; but tomorrow I may not be; and, furthermore, He knows all those bad thoughts in my mind anyway, and so at some point He is going to pay attention to them, and then I am finished. Once you have a thought that God loves you, and obviously He does not love everyone else, then you are saying that His love is conditional. That is another wonderful way of seeing how this has nothing whatsoever to do with God, but is simply a projection of what is inside us, because it is *our* love that is conditional; and that, of course, is what special love is.

(W-pl.195.1:4-6) How pitiful and deprecating are such thoughts! For who has cause for thanks while others have less cause? And who could suffer less because he sees another suffer more?

This is the insanity of our thought system, which obviously everyone here shares—that somehow I feel better if other people suffer. Of course that is not the case if the people who are suffering are those with whom I identify. Because then I feel I am suffering.

The more people who suffer and die, the more I am off the hook. The more sinful, guilty, suffering people that I can find in the world, the greater is my chance that God will forget about me and focus

only on those people out there. *Everyone* shares in this kind of insanity. The problem is, of course, that we do not look at it and acknowledge it in ourselves. Then, when someone we judge as bad, sinful, and deserving of punishment gets it, we feel better. Years ago a rapist-murderer was executed in Florida. Many people were just rooting for him to get it—the whole country, it seemed, celebrated as if it were a major holiday when he was executed. Now at last we found out who the real sinner was, the one who was responsible for the whole separation. Psychologically, of course, that is true, because we all feel guilty of having raped God and stolen from Him. And therefore what we call rape in this world is just a specific form of that much larger rape. But we finally found the guy who did it, and he looked to be so healthy and normal and innocent and wonderful, which of course is exactly what we do. We are the face of innocence that conceals the fact that we are really vicious rapists. Again, what enables us to get off the hook is finding the guilty one. That is why so many people in the country were so glad that he finally got it. What we are saying to God is that we are not the ones who did it; we are not the miserable rapists; *here he is!* Everyone acknowledged him to be the greatest sinner in the world, and therefore he deserved to be punished. Now that he is punished, I magically hope that God will forget about me. It never works that way; but that is the insanity of our thought—that we believe we can be happy and "suffer less" because we see someone else suffering more. At that point, of course, our gratitude is that someone else got it, and we didn't.