

Our Gratitude to God

Excerpts from the Workshop held at the
Foundation for A Course in Miracles
Temecula CA

Kenneth Wapnick, Ph.D.

Part XI

"Love is the way I walk in gratitude" (cont.)

(W-pl.195.5:4) Let us not compare ourselves with them [the ones who seem to be worse off than we are], for thus we split them off from our awareness of the unity we share with them, as they must share with us.

That is a very clear statement. When we feel sorry for the homeless or the drunks on the street, people who are suffering and dying from AIDS, or the people's families who were destroyed by this or that occurrence, we are splitting ourselves off from them. Then our gratitude is only of the ego: it was you, not me. The real gratitude would come from this type of awareness: you believe you suffered a loss, and I was tempted to identify with your suffering, but I can realize now that you have not suffered a loss anymore than I have.

Loss is only of the body, only of the ego. Christ has never lost; God has never lost. Using Jesus as an example, he did not lose his life on the cross. The life that seemed to be taken from him was not there in the first place. What made him different from all of us is that he knew he was not his body, so what was done to his body was totally irrelevant.

These principles can be applied to any situation where loss is perceived. Students have asked, for example, how they can be of help to mothers who feel intense anger toward God because their sons have died of AIDS. My response is that basically there is nothing in A Course in Miracles that would tell you how to behave with these parents or what to say to them; but what you want to do is be aware within yourself of the part of you that tends to identify with their loss, their pain, or their anger at God. So before you would worry about what to say, you should first be aware of the part of you that is tempted to join with them on the level of their pain—to make their pain, loss, and their anger at God real. If you truly want to be helpful to them, which also means to be truly helpful to yourself, then what you want to do is help them get in touch with their feelings and not do or say anything that would make them squelch their feelings or push them down. You want to help them get in touch with their anger and their guilt. A part of their guilt would have to involve their feeling that "my son died and I didn't." But that is exactly what they wanted - that he die and they not die, which would result in their feeling even more guilty, because their wish became fact. Thus, you want to help them deal with their guilt, whatever the anger is, whatever the feeling of loss is.

Then at some point you comfort them, not so much by your words, but simply by your actions—the message that you love them. You do not have to try to change their thought system for them. All you want to do is be a presence that does not judge them, anyone else, or their sons. Simply love them. That is all you do. It is very simple. Then whatever words are to be said will just be said; and it will not matter.

What you want is to be that loving presence. That is what heals. It is a reminder that their thought system is not real. You want to be for them what Jesus is for all of us.

It makes living in this world much easier and much simpler when you can recognize that every problem is the same, and that you do not have to pay attention to what is going on on the screen—because nothing is going on on the screen. You do not have to pay attention to what you are hearing about on television or reading about in the newspapers, or what is going on in your own personal world. Pay attention, though, to what is going on in your mind, because there is nothing else. There is nothing outside you. When you can, change your film from the ego's one of victimization, pain, suffering, and fear, to the Holy Spirit's, which is one of unity, love, and real gratitude. That is all you do. That film will automatically come through your projector, and you will automatically say the loving and helpful thing. Thus, it is always our mind that we pay attention to. That is where the gratitude comes in. We see an outpicturing of what is in our mind in terms of how we perceive another person.

Going back to the story of the school that was hit by the tornado . . . If you are feeling angry or guilty about it, or if you are feeling sorry or even glad about it, just be aware of that. Then you will be grateful, because it will become another opportunity to learn what is within your own mind. You will be grateful to the loving presence of Jesus or the Holy Spirit next to you Who helps you look at it that way.

In interacting with people who have strong feelings about situations involving great suffering—the starving children in Africa, for example—it is helpful to recognize that having such an investment is an important part of their defensive system. As we have been discussing, because of our identification with the ego, we need to find people "out there" who are suffering, to demonstrate that we are not the ones suffering. Thus, if I have an investment in doing something about the starving children, and you do not validate the tragedy I perceive, you are really threatening my defensive system. I would then be angry at you, because you are not supporting a thought system that I desperately need for self-protection. Your not supporting me in that then becomes the beginning of a questioning that can go on in my mind, which, if I were to follow through on it, would mean the end of my ego. Thus, my ego would not like it one bit if you were not upset with what I am upset about.

That is basically the same discussion Jesus makes in the text when he talks about his own life, about why people hated him and killed him (T-6.V-B.1). It was because he did not support their thought system. A being of love and peace has no place in this world, which is a place of hatred and attack. Therefore, someone who comes in and represents and manifests God's Love is seen as an enemy. That presence of love is a direct attack, from our point of view, on our thought system, because it does not validate it. That loving presence is now the problem, and the solution is to get rid of it. That is what the world tried to do; the world not only tried to get rid of him personally, but then it took his teaching message and got rid of that, too.

We see the same dynamic occurring sometimes with sickness. If, for instance, I am involved in a relationship with you, I never believe I get enough love from you, because in the ego system, there is never enough love. So I come up with a way to get more love from you: I will get sick, and then you will have to take care of me and be attentive to me. That is one of the reasons we get sick. It is called secondary gain. Now, if I perceive that you are not playing the game, I will become quite uncomfortable. The reason I invested so much pain and suffering in my sickness is to get your love and attention, but now you are not giving me the love and attention the way I want, because the way I want the love and attention is through guilt, not genuine love. Who wants genuine love? That does not mean anything to

me. So don't give me that stuff. I want some good, solid guilt-love. I then get angry, and when it does not work, I get even sicker. Then I will top it off by dying on you. Then I will show you. Then you will really feel guilty.

There is a wonderful line that says just that in the section called "The Picture of Crucifixion," one of the most powerful sections dealing with the insanity of our choosing to suffer and to be sick so that we get someone else. Here is the line: "Death seems an easy price, if they can say, 'Behold me, brother, at your hand I die.'" (T-27.I.4:6). I will gladly die. That is a meager sacrifice if I can really get you for that. If I can get you to really feel good and guilty and sinful, then boy, I will die all the time—because then when I die and God is about to punish me in hell, I will say, "Wait a minute. I'm not the one—she is." And so that is an easy price! I got a good deal!

That is the insanity of this thought system. Everyone does it. That is why it is really clear that there is no place for gratitude in this world. Why would you be grateful for someone who is literally seen as your enemy - who wants to kill you just as quickly as you want to kill him or her? Insanity!

.....

Now we come to a wonderful line that is a nice summary of our discussion thus far.

(W-pl.195.6:1) We thank our Father for one thing alone; that we are separate from no living thing, and therefore one with Him.

We do not thank God for the wonderful things that have happened to us, or because He killed off another family, not our own. We do not thank God for anything like that. What we thank God for is the simple fact of Who He is, because that tells us who we are. God is perfect Oneness, perfect unity, perfect Love. Since we are part of God, an extension of His Love, we are also an extension of that Oneness and unity, and so is everyone and everything else. We thank God not for a gift He has given us, as if there is a subject and an object, a God Who gives something to another. We thank God for His gift, which is simply the gift of His own Being, which is our own as well.

Sometimes you can have the experience of something coming through you—when you are writing something or composing music, for example; you know that it is not you, that your ego self is not the source. The gratitude you would feel then, for it to be genuine gratitude, would have to be based on the awareness that what came through you also comes through everyone else, so you are not separate from any living thing. If it turns into gratitude for the "wonderful gift" God gave you, then you get caught because it is based on some kind of specialness. In other words, a great composer, painter, poet, or a great anything is no different from anyone else. It is just that we experience love through them in a specific form. Since we live in a world of multiplicity, we have to have that love come in different forms, because we do not recognize it all the time. But the trap is in identifying it with the form or the specific person. Thus, if you are grateful to someone for having brought something into the world—e.g., Mozart for his music—it would be because his music would awaken in you a sense of the love that embraces everyone.

Let me make a comment now on the phrase "all living things," which can be very confusing when it is put side by side with the statement, "There is no life outside of Heaven" (T-23.II.19.1:1), and many others that say essentially the same thing—that nothing here is alive. The Course says that the body

does not live; it does not die; it does not get sick; it does not get well. The body literally does not do anything. And yet it uses this phrase "all living things" from time to time. That is another example of how Jesus in *A Course in Miracles* is not strictly consistent with his language. Very often he uses words, not because they represent something that is true for him, but because they represent something that we believe in.

In Lesson 184, actually in this same series of lessons, Jesus talks about how the Holy Spirit uses all the forms and symbols of the world, not because they are real, but because we believe they are real and that is how we can communicate with each other. Jesus therefore is really talking with us on the level of our own experience. Since we believe things here are alive and that they victimize us, he is talking about an attitude of gratitude for all living things, which really means all the objects we perceive on our screen. It should not be taken as literally true, because then you would have a terrible problem with all the other passages that say nothing here is alive—just as he says in a number of places about time, as if there were a past and there is a future. The preceding lesson is "I place the future in the Hands of God." Well, how can there be a future? God does not know of time. But because we believe in time, Jesus talks about it as if it were real. It is the same thing here in terms of gratitude for "all living things."

In the context of a question that comes up frequently, this applies to both animate and inanimate beings because there is no animate or inanimate. How can you have an illusion that is real and another illusion that is not real? That makes no sense. So Jesus is saying that we should be grateful for all the things that we perceive outside us and believe to be real, because they offer us the opportunity of recognizing we are all the same. No one object is greater or less than another, more alive or less alive, more sick or more healthy, richer or poorer than another, etc. All of the comparisons we make outside in terms of the way we view and judge our world are nothing more than projections of the original judgment and comparison we made when we compared ourselves to God and did not like what we saw.

Once again, the only gratitude we should feel is not for anything that God or Jesus do for us, or that anyone in the world does for us. The ultimate source of our gratitude is that God is Who He is. And because He is Who He is, then nothing that exists, nothing that is outside His Mind exists at all, which means everything else is simply an illusion—that this is not a world that is here. Separation is simply a silly idea that had no consequences or effects, and that we have never left our Father's house. As the Course says at one point, we are at home in God, yet dreaming of exile (T-10.I.2:1), and that all the pain and suffering that any of us has ever felt or will feel is simply part of that dream, and the dream has had no effect upon reality; namely, that we have never left home. Since we have never left home and our home in Heaven is a place of perfect unity - not really a place, of course - then we are united with everything, and everything that appears to be separate and fragmented from us here in this world is part of the same single mind that we are. That is what our gratitude is for.

In this context, a person was wondering whether his gratitude was authentic when he thanked God after doing a good job at work. His gratitude seemed to come from a feeling connected with something internal as well as with other people. Now, you know it is authentic gratitude, as opposed to the ego's form, when it does not separate you from other people or from God. If the feeling of gratitude is the sense of union with Him and His Love as well as with everyone else, then you know it is the real thing. That would basically be the correction, the undoing, or the reversal of what the ego would have us teach, which is basically specialness, which is always based on differences and comparisons. In this world such gratitude would certainly be appropriate, and that is why the Course talks so much about it.

There are many passages in *A Course in Miracles*, especially in the text, where the basic teaching stops and Jesus suddenly addresses God and thanks Him (see for example, T-28.IV.9). The gratitude that Jesus is expressing to God is on our behalf, a gratitude for our being as Christ. In this world, when we feel His Love and His peace flowing through us, I think the most appropriate reaction would be one of gratitude.