

## LESSON 121 • MAY 1

### “Forgiveness is the key to happiness.”

#### Practice instructions

**Purpose:** To learn to give forgiveness and see that, when you do, you receive forgiveness.

**Morning/evening practice:** Two times, for ten minutes.

- Identify someone to forgive. Think of someone you dislike or despise or find irritable or want to avoid. The one that has already come to your mind will do.
- Close your eyes and see him in your mind, and look at him a while. Try to find some little spark of light in your picture of him. You are looking for some loving or true quality in him, or perhaps some kind thought or caring gesture of his—some distant reflection of the light of God in him. Everything hinges on this, so take your time. Once you find something, see it symbolized as a tiny spark of light somewhere in your dark picture of him. Then see this tiny spark slowly expand until it completely covers your picture of him, replacing all the darkness with light. In other words, see him *only* in light of this one loving quality or act. See this as the only clue to who he really is. If you succeed, he will seem to be a holy person, without a single flaw, radiating light. You might even imagine Great Rays shining out from him. Now look at this changed picture a while. Appreciate how lovely and spotless it is.
- Now think of someone you consider a friend. Try to transfer the light you saw around your “enemy” to this friend. This makes the friend seem to be much more than a friend. He is revealed to be your savior, with power to enlighten you with just one glance of his holy eyes.
- Now let your savior offer you the light you gave to him. Then let your former enemy unite with him, so that they both offer you this light. Why wouldn’t they give this holy gift to you, when you gave it to them, and revealed your holiness in the process? See rays of forgiveness pouring off of them and onto you, absolving you of your “sins,” causing you to radiate the same Great Rays that they do. See yourself at one with them, united in the holy light of forgiveness that you have given and received. “Now have you been forgiven by yourself” (13:3).

**Frequent reminders:** Every hour—do not forget.

Repeat, “*Forgiveness is the key to happiness. I will awaken from the dream that I am mortal, fallible and full of sin, and know I am the perfect Son of God.*” To understand these lines, it helps to insert “through forgiveness” at the beginning of the second sentence. Remember the old adage “To err is human, to forgive divine”? Forgiveness is what proves to us that we are more than human, that we are divine.

One more point: If you are really going to say these lines every hour, you’ll need to either spend time memorizing them or have them written down on a card.

#### Commentary

The longer I study the Course the more this lesson makes sense. When I first read it, it seemed unlikely to me that forgiveness was *the* key to happiness. I could see it being *a* key but not *the* key. As the Course’s explanation of the root of our problems began to sink in, however, I began to see that in one way or another, unforgiveness was behind every problem. Then it began to make sense that forgiveness would solve them all.

Look at the litany of ills that comprise this description of “the unforgiving mind” (2:1–5:5):

- Fear

- A cramped, constricted mindset that offers no room for love to grow and thrive
- Sadness, suffering, doubt, confusion, anger
- The pairs of conflicting fears; the one that speaks to me most eloquently is “afraid of every sound, yet more afraid of stillness” (3:1)
- The distortion of perception that results from unforgiveness, making us unable to see mistakes as what they are, and perceiving sins instead
- Babbling terror of our own projections (4:2)

I recognize myself, or at least memories of myself, in so many of these phrases: “It wants to live, yet wishes it were dead. It wants forgiveness, yet it sees no hope” (4:3–4). I’ve felt like that. These paragraphs describe us all. I think that if someone does not recognize themselves somewhere in here, they are not being honest with themselves. And the most awful thought of all is this one: “It thinks it cannot change” (5:3). Hasn’t that fear struck at your own heart at one time or another? I know it has struck at mine.

When we admit to ourselves that these descriptions fit us, that we find ourselves in one or another of these states of mind, the very word “forgiveness” sounds like an oasis in the Sahara. Cool, soothing and refreshing. As we were told in Lesson 79, we have to recognize the problem before we realize what the solution really is.

“Forgiveness is acquired. It is not inherent in the mind” (6:1–2). This states a fundamental principle that explains much of the methodology of the Course, and explains why some sort of transition is necessary between where we think we are and where we already are in truth. If we are already perfect, as God created us, why do we have to learn anything at all? Because the solution to the problem of guilt is forgiveness, and forgiveness was *not* part of our mind as God created it. There was no need for it. Without a thought of sin the concept of forgiveness is meaningless. Because we taught ourselves the idea of sin, now we must be taught the antidote, forgiveness. Forgiveness has to be *acquired*.

But the unforgiving mind cannot teach itself forgiveness. It believes in the reality of sin, and with that as a basis, forgiveness is impossible. Everything it perceives in the world proves that “all its sins are real” (3:3). Caught in unforgiveness, we are convinced of the correctness of our perception of things. We do not question it. From that perspective there is no way our minds can even conceive of true forgiveness. This is why we need the Holy Spirit: “a Teacher other than yourself, Who represents the other Self in you” (6:3). There has to be a “higher Power” Who represents a different frame of mind. The source of our redemption has to be outside of the ego mindset, apart from it, untainted by it. And so He is.

He teaches us to forgive, and through forgiveness, our mind is returned to our Self, “Who can never sin” (6:5). Each person “outside” of us, each representative of that unforgiving mind crowd, “presents you with an opportunity to teach your own [mind] how to forgive itself” (7:1). Our brothers and sisters, manifesting their egos, full of the fear, pain, turmoil, and confusion of the world, snapping at us in their terror, are our saviors. In forgiving them we forgive ourselves in proxy. As we teach salvation we learn it. As we release others from hell, we release ourselves. As we give, we receive.

This is what the Course is all about. As we practice today, let’s realize that we are engaging in the central exercise of the Course; we are learning “the key to happiness.” And let’s not think we already know forgiveness; let us come with humility, ready to be taught by One Who knows.