

LESSON 136 • MAY 16

“Sickness is a defense against the truth.”

Practice instructions

Longer: Two times, for fifteen minutes.

- Begin with this healing prayer: “*Sickness is a defense against the truth. I will accept the truth of what I am, and let my mind be wholly healed today.*” With this prayer, you are asking that your mind no longer employ sickness to “prove” to you that you are a body. Instead, you ask for the realization of who you really are, which is spirit.
- After making this invitation, keep your mind silent and alert, poised to receive the answer to your request. Open your mind and let healing flash across it. Let all the purposes that you gave the body be wiped clean, as the truth of who you are dawns upon your clear and open mind.

Remarks: If you practiced well, your body will have no feeling. It will feel neither ill nor well, neither good nor bad. It will have no power to tell the mind how to feel. Only its usefulness will remain. Indeed, its usefulness will increase, for it was the purposes you laid on it that made it weak, vulnerable, and sickly. “As these are laid aside, the strength the body has will always be enough to serve all truly useful purposes” (18:2). You must, however, protect this state with careful watching, responding quickly to any thoughts which imply that you are a body. For these thoughts make the mind sick, and it will then attack the body with sickness.

Response to temptation: Whenever you have attack thoughts, judgments, or make plans.

“Give instant remedy” (20:1) by saying, “*I have forgotten what I really am, for I mistook my body for myself. Sickness is a defense against the truth. But I am not a body. And my mind cannot attack. So I cannot be sick.*” The last lines hearken back to a Text passage, which says that there are two premises necessary for sickness to occur: “that the body is for attack, and that you are a body” (T-8.VIII.5:7). If you can truly accept that you are *unable* to attack, and that you are *not* a body, then “sickness is inconceivable” (T-8.VIII.5:8).

Commentary

This is another of those lessons that will repay careful study; there is a lot of good stuff in here!

The main thought is plainly stated: Sickness is a means we use to defend ourselves against the truth. It is a decision we make, chosen quite deliberately when truth gets too close for comfort, in order to distract ourselves and root ourselves once again in the body. On the bright side, then, when we get sick we can congratulate ourselves that we must have been letting in the truth if the ego is getting this scared of it!

For instance, in 1995 Robert and I gave a weekend intensive on “We Are the Light of the World: Accepting Our Function.” During that weekend I found myself being deeply impressed by the message the Course was conveying to us all. The day after the intensive I got diarrhea. Now, there is little that brings you down to a body level like having to run to the toilet all the time! But I actually found myself being amused by it. “How like my ego!” I thought. “What a predictable reaction!” Instead of having the desired (by the ego) effect, it had the opposite; it served to *remind* me of the truth instead of distracting me from it. And guess what? It very quickly went away. “Defenses that do not work at all are automatically discarded” (T-12.I.9:8).

Most people react to being told that they choose sickness by flatly denying it. This is not something that is easy to discover. The lesson says our choice is “doubly shielded by oblivion” (5:2). We choose first to hide the pesky truth that has been nibbling away at our delusions of separation and of the physical nature of our identity by making ourselves sick; that is the original decision we made. We then choose to forget we did it; the first shield of oblivion. Finally, we forget that we chose to forget, the second shield. All of this happens in a split second (see 3:4; 4:2–5:1). In that split second we are conscious of what we are doing, but the shields are up so quickly that the whole process *seems* to be unconscious (3:3).

We need to remember what we have forgotten, the deliberate forgetting of our choice. We *can* remember if we are willing “to reconsider the decision which is doubly shielded” (5:2), that is, the decision to run away from the truth, the decision that truth is something against which we need to defend ourselves. This is why the exercise for the day is:

Sickness is a defense against the truth. I will accept the truth of what I am, and let my mind be wholly healed today. (15:6–7)

The antidote to the whole process is not attempting to heal the sick body, but to accept the truth about myself, to let my *mind* be healed. Sickness is a side effect of rejecting the truth about myself; the cure is to accept the truth instead, to reconsider the original decision which, although veiled from conscious awareness, *must* be there for sickness to have occurred.

The lesson warns us, in the final paragraph: “Do not be confused about what must be healed” (20:2). It isn’t the body that needs healing; it is the mind. This agrees with the Text, which tells us:

When the ego tempts you to sickness do not ask the Holy Spirit to heal the body, for this would merely be to accept the ego’s belief that the body is the proper aim of healing. Ask, rather, that the Holy Spirit teach you the right perception of the body, for perception alone can be distorted. (T-8.IX.1:5–6)

It is that original decision to reject the truth of what we are, because it seems to threaten what we *think* we are, that must be questioned and reversed.

The lesson says some rather incredible things about the body of a person whose mind is healed, and whose body has been accepted as nothing but a tool to be used to heal the world. The body’s strength “will always be enough to serve all truly useful purposes. The body’s health is fully guaranteed, because it is not limited by time, by weather or fatigue, by food and drink, or any laws you made it serve before” (18:2–3). If a body is not limited by time it does not age. Not limited by weather means it needs no clothing or shelter. Not limited by fatigue, it needs no sleep. Not limited by food or drink, it does not need to eat. Who of us can say this is true of us?

Perhaps we have experienced a few glimmers of such brilliant light, fatigue thrown off, lack of food overlooked for a time. But no one I know is at this stage of perfect trust. We have a way to go, you and I. So I do not think we need be surprised when a cold attacks, or the flu gets us down, or even if something “more serious” happens. We’re still afraid of the truth—big surprise! Rather than thinking, “Oh, why did I do this to myself? What is wrong with me that I am still getting sick?” let me say, “Oops! I made a mistake. I forgot what I really am and mistook my body for myself. Silly me! I just need to remember that I am not a body; this isn’t what I am.” The “sickness” of the body can then become a catalyst for the healing of my mind, instead of a defense against the truth.