

LESSON 190 • JULY 9

“I choose the joy of God instead of pain.”

Practice instructions

Purpose: To realize that pain is deceptive illusion, and that joy is reality and truth. To go past pain and experience the joy that lies beyond it. This will help “your scattered goals blend into one intent” (W-pI.In.181-200.1:1).

Morning/evening quiet time: At least five minutes; ideally, thirty or more.

This is a meditation in which you set aside all thought of attack and defense, all judgment and all assault. These are simply attempts to hide your holiness. Lay down these thoughts of war and sink into the stillness of Heaven’s peace. In this holy place, you will feel the joy of God arise in you. Here, you will realize that pain, not joy, is the naive illusion. You will understand that joy is reality, it is awakening, and it is truth.

Hourly remembrance: One or two minutes as the hour strikes (reduce if circumstances do not permit).

Do a short version of the morning/evening exercise. Close by asking for God’s guidance for the coming hour and thanking Him for His gifts in the past hour.

Response to temptation: (Suggestion) when tempted to think that the world causes your pain.

Realize this is a judgment, and that this judgment is a sword you hold against your throat. Then repeat the idea; choose the joy of God instead of pain.

Commentary

This is a tough lesson. It confronts us with another of those blocks we’ve been talking about: the apparent reality of pain. As the lesson very clearly states, pain seems to bear witness to “a nightmare of abandonment by an Eternal Love” (2:5). “It witnesses to God the Father’s hatred of His Son” (1:7).

Anyone who has experienced serious pain knows what this is talking about. Anyone who has had a loved one endure deep, constant pain knows the questions it raises in the mind. “How could God allow this to happen, if He is love?” Even the milder forms of pain tell the same story, raise the same questions.

I am not going to pretend that I have entirely succeeded in removing this block from my mind. I find it hard to write about this lesson because I recognize that a very present part of me still sees pain as real, rather than illusion. Yet, I do believe that what the lesson says is true. I choose to believe it, and I want to believe it. So I do not see myself as being in conflict over this issue. I am learning, more and more, to look my fears straight in the face, and to recognize that I still do believe, in large measure, that pain is real. And if this lesson is true, this must mean that part of me believes there is no God (3:3–4), that the impossible has happened, and Eternal Love has abandoned me. If I have been reading the Text with any discernment, this is not news to me.

What then? Do I need to wallow in guilt because my mind has not yet been entirely renewed? Of course not:

The time has come to laugh at such insane ideas. There is no need to think of them as savage crimes, or secret sins with weighty consequence. (4:2–3)

If the way to remember the Love of God is to look without judgment on my denial of Him, then seeing these “insane ideas” in my mind is a necessary part of the process, and an indication of progress, not regression. And the cure is not guilt, but laughter!

Basically, we have two choices in regard to pain. Either it is caused by something outside of us, which means ultimately that we are innocents suffering at the hands of an angry God (or that there is no God and we are subject to blind fate), or it is caused by myself, my own thoughts. If the former is true I have no hope of escape. If the latter is true, I *can* escape by changing my thoughts. I prefer to believe the latter! Even if I am wrong, what have I got to lose?

The Course’s position is crystal clear:

It is your thoughts alone that cause you pain. Nothing external to your mind can hurt or injure you in any way.... No one but yourself affects you. (5:1–2, 4)

It takes some practice to learn to use these thoughts without any guilt. We are responsible, but not guilty; the Course is very clear on that as well. It also takes practice, perhaps even more, to use these thoughts when interacting with someone else who is in pain. May God forbid that we should ever use this line of reasoning to make someone guilty for their pain! The Course is equally clear that if we are unable as yet to fully accept this, if our level of fear is still too high to rely solely upon the mind to relieve pain, a compromise approach is necessary. To attempt to forgo medication, for instance, when to do so increases our fear, is counterproductive (see T-2.IV.3–5 and T-2.V.2). Healing is the release from fear; what increases fear cannot be healing.

Let me, then, learn to increasingly apply this lesson in ways that my level of fear can tolerate. Let me realize, for instance, that the person who cuts me off in traffic has not hurt me; only my thoughts about it hurt me. Let me realize that the person who seems to reject my love has not brought me any pain; only my thoughts about it cause me pain. Let me practice with physical pain as well as I can; if I have a headache, upset stomach, or cold, let me realize that my thoughts are the source, not anything outside of my mind. Let me realize that if I take medication I am masking the symptom, not curing the problem, and let me give equal attention to the healing of my mind. If I experience more severe or chronic pain, let me deny what it seems to witness to (God’s anger or nonexistence), laugh at the idea that God is angry, and realize that the pain is only showing me that my mind is mistaken in what I think I am (2:3). Let me not focus on making the pain go away, but on healing the thinking that causes it. Using “magic” (physical means) to alleviate the pain while I devote myself to retraining my mind simply makes sense, and frees my mind to do what it needs to do.

And let me take frequent holy instants, to “come without defense into the quiet place where Heaven’s peace holds all things still at last” (9:1). Let me feel the Love of God within me, and set aside my unmerciful self-judgment (9:4), even if I can do so only momentarily. I can testify to having experienced this, at least; I have seen pain disappear during the holy instant, both in myself and in a friend who was in chronic pain. These holy instants can train us to experience deeper and more lasting release from all pain, and liberate the joy that has been smothered by our pain.

Pain is illusion; joy, reality. Pain is but sleep; joy is awakening. Pain is deception; joy alone is truth. (10:4–6)