

LESSON 24 • JANUARY 24

“I do not perceive my own best interests.”

Practice instructions

Exercise: Five times, for two minutes.

- Repeat the idea.
- With eyes closed, search your mind for unresolved situations that you’ve been concerned about. When you find one, name all the goals you hope this situation will end up meeting for you, all the outcomes you are desiring, at least all that you can find. Say, “*In the situation involving _____, I would like _____ to happen, and _____ to happen....*” Once you cannot find any more, say, “*I do not perceive my own best interests in this situation.*” This line should simply articulate what you have already observed in uncovering your goals. You should see that many of them cannot be met together, by the *same* situation, and that others cannot be met by *this* situation.
- After saying that line, repeat the whole procedure with a new situation, and so on until the time is up.

Remarks: The important thing in these exercises is to be honest with yourself. It can be humiliating to admit just how many impossible and contradictory hopes you have crammed into a single situation. But admitting that is the whole point of this exercise. That is what will show you that today’s idea really is true for you. So be unusually honest, as well as careful and patient, in uncovering all the goals you have stuffed into the pockets of this situation.

Commentary

Our actions in any situation are determined by our perception of the situation, and as we have been seeing for the last twenty-three lessons, our perceptions are, to put it mildly, unreliable. The lesson says it more bluntly: our perceptions are “wrong” (1:3). There is no way, then, that we can possibly know what our own best interests are in any situation.

The exercises for today are designed to bring four things to our attention (Paragraph 6):

- We are making a large number of demands on the situation that have nothing to do with it.
- Many of our goals are contradictory.
- We have no unified outcome in mind.
- We must be disappointed in regard to some of our goals no matter what the outcome is.

We have all experienced this, particularly in making major decisions. Suppose I receive a fabulous job offer that pays me more money than I ever dreamed of and involves doing something I like. Sounds good at first. Then I realize I will have to relocate to a part of the country I don’t like, I’ll have to be willing to travel extensively, and I will frequently be required to work long hours and weekends. My mind suddenly becomes filled with all the conflicting goals. I may find I am expecting the job to make me happy, somehow. Perhaps I am thinking the job should provide me with spiritual companions. I’ll have to leave my friends behind. And so on, and so on...

The more I have worked with the Course, the more I realize that this is not just a beginning lesson; it is something that applies to nearly every situation I get into. I am constantly reminding myself that I don’t know what my own best interests are in one situation after another. I find it most important to do so when things seem to be relatively clear, when I think I *do* know what I

want and need. If I think I know my best interests, I cannot be taught what they really are. The best mental state I can maintain, then, is “I don’t know.”

I can acknowledge my preferences, I can admit that I think I would like certain things to happen, but I need to learn to add, “I’m not certain this is the best.” If I pray for something, I can add, “Let X happen, or something better.” I remain open-minded, ready to accept that what I think about the situation may not cover all the bases, and probably does not. That is the intent behind today’s idea: to open our minds to the possibility that we may not know, and may need assistance.