



LESSON 135

If I defend myself, I am attacked.

Sarah's Commentary:

We all have our favorite Lessons that seem to resonate more deeply at different times in our lives. For me, this one has been very meaningful recently. What really resonates with me in this Lesson are the words, **"What could you not accept, if you but knew that everything that happens, all events, past, present and to come, are gently planned by One Whose only purpose is your good?"** (W.135.18.1) What could we not accept? What would we be concerned about? What would we worry about? What need would there be to plan? All our plans are there to keep us from imaginary threats.

Initially, I thought this was saying that the Holy Spirit has specific plans for us as individuals, but this is not the case. The only plan He has is for my mind to accept healing. It is the plan for our acceptance of the Atonement that we might use every experience in this world and everything that happens, has happened, or is about to happen for awakening from this dream. Thus, everything is perfectly orchestrated as a classroom for the undoing of the ego. This is the only purpose for the world. The ego's plan is to keep us invested in sin and guilt and to see it as real. Everything we have made, everything we attract, and all the events of our lives, can be used by the Holy Spirit to correct the ego's plan for our salvation. Thus, everything in our world can be used for the purpose of forgiveness and for the acceptance of the Holy Spirit's plan for our happiness and healing.

This is another one of the **"giant stride"** (W.135.26.4) Lessons, meaning, it is a very important one where we can make tremendous gains if we commit to the practice. The ego's plan is to project the guilt in our minds that came with the separation from God. It is where we made up a body and a world to escape from His perceived punishment and make up problems requiring us to devise plans and defenses to protect ourselves. This keeps us from recognizing that there is only one problem---the belief we have sinned and are now guilty. Thus, the answer to every problem is the same, which is to bring the guilt we see in others back to our own minds and ask to see the situation from a healed perspective.

We spend much of our time planning our days and strategizing how to deal with situations, events, and people in our lives, motivated by the belief that we need to protect ourselves and defend our "interests." It is all predicated on the belief that we are bodies, and thus, we see ourselves as physically and psychologically vulnerable. This is the way of the world. We seem to have all kinds of problems, and then we design plans or defenses to protect ourselves from the problems we believe are outside ourselves. If we think we need a defense, it means we are actually living in a state of fear, believing we are under attack. Yet it is all self-attack where we see ourselves as limited, lacking, and vulnerable. In our belief that we are alone, separate, and vulnerable, we live in a state of fear. **"A sense of threat is an acknowledgment of an inherent weakness; a**

belief that there is danger which has power to call on you to make appropriate defense." (W.135.2.2) The fact is, we are invulnerable spiritual beings.

Whenever we are unwilling to look at our guilt, it can't be healed because there is a refusal to acknowledge the guilt in ourselves. We prefer to blame others and see our guilt in them; but whenever we project the guilt in our minds onto others, it brings up fear in us. Because of our fear, we feel we need to create a defense against those we believe are guilty and will attack us. The defenses and plans we make to keep ourselves safe are all about fixing something in the world, but this makes no sense since the problem is only in our own minds. If the problem is only in our minds and not in the world, this is where the correction must be made.

Jesus reminds us, "***If I defend myself I am attacked. But in defenselessness I will be strong, and I will learn what my defenses hide.***" (W.135.22.4-5) What we are defending against is the truth of what we are as innocent. As we bring our misperceptions to the light of the Holy Spirit to be corrected, the truth is revealed. We deny this truth about ourselves when we attack and defend. To the extent that we want to know the truth about ourselves as innocent, we will be motivated to do the healing of our own minds.

We live in a world that continually reminds us of our vulnerability. Threat is everywhere, whether it is war, disease, mold, fleas, terrorists, courts, home invasions, rules, ethics, taxes, drought, poverty, politics, religion, and on and on. Everything in the world seems to remind us of the continual threat we are under. The world reinforces the fear that we have accepted into our minds. We turn on the TV and see nothing but disaster. We live in terror and are reminded of this every time we lock the door, every time we put on our seat-belts, each time we take a vitamin pill, every bill we pay, and yes, every plan we make.

We may wonder how setting up defenses and planning are the same as self-attack. When we set up a defense, we believe it will save us and protect us. When we develop a plan, we are trying to mitigate against future threat in the belief that we can control and manage future contingencies. Yet the only threat is the belief in our vulnerability. While the purpose of defenses is to protect us from fear, all they do is reinforce our sense of vulnerability, which justifies, in our minds, the need for them. As Jesus says in the Course, "***It is essential to realize that all defenses do what they would defend.***" (T.17.IV.7.1) (ACIM OE T.17.V.33) In other words, defenses keep us in fear.

Are we to just stop buying insurance, locking our doors, putting on our seat-belts, taking our vitamins, taking medicine when we are sick, enjoying our comforts, and engaging in planning? Clearly, no. That would just be changing forms (behaviors) while we continue to believe in guilt and attack. In that case, we would elicit even more fear. The idea is to shift the content of our minds that is the cause of the guilt and fear and not to simply change things in form.

To us, the world is a threatening place because we identify with our bodies and our personalities, and we still see the world as real. We see it acting on us and believe we need protection. Thus, we see the world, rather than the content of our minds, as the cause of our fear, and now we see ourselves as an effect or victim of the world. The truth is, we made the world for exactly this purpose. We made it so we could run away from our guilt and see our own secret self-accusation in someone else. Until the undoing of our mistaken identity is undertaken through true forgiveness, we will feel a need to defend and protect ourselves.

The idea is not to give up all forms of self-protection and planning in which we engage but to use these situations as opportunities to watch our minds and learn to turn away from the ego. We do

that by looking at our fearful thoughts, connecting with our feelings, and bringing them to the truth within. All our efforts at self-protection and all our defenses will never bring us the peace of God nor true consistent happiness.

The guilt is buried in our minds so we are not conscious of it and have no memory of the original terror. It came about as a result of our decision to choose the ego and separate from God. All we see is what our eyes show us and our brains interpret. Whenever we feel threatened and vulnerable, we are being called to go back into the mind and bring our sense of vulnerability and our fears to the Holy Spirit. We look at them with Him so we can release the illusory self we have made, which is our false self and not who we are.

We are learning through the Course about the thought system of the ego and how it operates in our lives. As we do this, we increasingly recognize it has no reality in truth. Jesus is reminding us over and over that we are mistaken about who we think we are. The mistake is that we think we are bodies, living in the world. Everyone here is making the same mistake, which means we are all living with the terror of what we believe we have done. We believe we have attacked God and destroyed our holy home. Now we feel like outcasts in the world and entirely on our own. Of course, this is only a belief in our minds, as we have done nothing wrong. The guilt is all a made-up belief. We continue to be innocent, but we no longer believe this about ourselves. We no longer believe we are whole, complete, innocent, and still at home in God. The Atonement Principle assures us---we absolutely can't leave God no matter how bad we feel about ourselves, and He has not left us. We are still One with Him.

Our reality is still Spirit. Our experience here is of a false self. Jesus calls it a parody of our Glorious Self. He is helping us to see how we set all this up and now he is patiently waiting for our decision to change our minds about who we are. This requires that we do the work necessary to undo the beliefs we now hold. To do this, we must look at all the values and beliefs we hold and question every one of them. As we apply these Lessons to our daily lives, we engage in this process of undoing our false beliefs. When we begin to understand why we chose to identify with this false self and look at how we try to protect this image, which is a caricature of our true Self, we can start to question it.

Jesus tells us, "**The body is in need of no defense.**" (W.135.7.1) The body will be healthy and strong if it is not abused by the mind. The mind abuses the body by, "**... assigning it to roles it cannot fill, to purposes beyond its scope, and to exalted aims which it cannot accomplish. Such attempts, ridiculous yet deeply cherished, are the sources for the many mad attacks you make upon it. For it seems to fail your hopes, your needs, your values and your dreams.**" (W.135.7.3-5) In other words, we assign the body the responsibility to have it meet our needs and to undertake what we assign it to do. We give it tasks we consider important and valuable in achieving what we think we want and need. The body can't carry the burden assigned to it and will fail, thus inviting the mind to attack it for its shortcomings. Jesus tells us that if this were not the case, the body would be strong and healthy.

The body lets us down by not delivering the things we want, and thus, we attack it. What we are doing is equating the mind with the body, and we suffer and feel vulnerable as a result. The body will grow old and deteriorate. We identify with it and think it is what we are, but Jesus reminds us that we need to see it as apart from us. Though we identify ourselves as a body with a personal identity, it is not what we are. When we see this, the body can be used by the mind as a "healthy, serviceable instrument" until it has no more use. For the time being, it is a useful communication device whose only real purpose is to bring messages of love to our brothers and sisters by first receiving the messages for ourselves.

As we heal our minds and live in a state of forgiveness, peace can permeate our experience here. The reality is that the mind is actually outside the body. We equate the mind with the brain, which is not the case. As long as we think we are a body, defenses will be required, but these defenses just protect the nothingness of the body. As long as we identify ourselves as a body, it will seem real to us. As we forgive the guilt and fear in the mind that is projected onto the body, the body will serve its function perfectly as a communication device. When we choose sanity, the nothingness of guilt and fear dissolve. When we are upset, miserable, and angry, our bodies suffer the consequences of those thoughts and feelings. Thus, there is a cost to us of holding onto the ego thought system. It will eventually make the body sick. When we feel separate from others and hold painful thoughts, we "**... impose upon the body all the pain that comes from the conception of the mind as limited and fragile, and apart from other minds and separate from its Source.**" (W.135.9.4) These are the thoughts that require healing if the body is to respond with health.

Only the mind is misguided, having assigned roles and functions to the body it can't fulfill. Once again, we are reminded that we must heal our minds by withdrawing our identification with the body. We don't do this by denying the body but only by watching our mistaken thoughts about it. We have given the body purposes it can't achieve, but it can now be put to a different purpose of extending love.

Purpose is everything! We only have two choices. We can put the body in the service of the ego or of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the body is a useful instrument to be used for a time, and when it is no longer of use, "**Who would want to keep it when its usefulness is done?**" (W.135.8.3) The body is valueless and needs no defense when we realize it is simply a tool for the mind to learn that we are not these bodies. We are asked to let the body be used in the service of the Holy Spirit's plan, which is established for the good of everyone. When we do this, we are assured that the body will function flawlessly. Yes, in our script, the body may be sick, but the form no longer matters. What matters is where the mind is. Every situation in our lives can be used by the Holy Spirit for forgiveness. With forgiveness, we step back and look on the ego thought system with the Holy Spirit. This means that we look at our judgments without judging ourselves, our hate without hating ourselves, and our anger without being angry with ourselves. It is a gradual process of bringing our attention to the thoughts of sin and guilt, not judging ourselves for them, and not trying to fix anything but, simply, putting them on the inner altar. Jesus asks us to be patient with ourselves in this process. Allow yourself to step back from your mistakes and smile at yourself without berating yourself for your perception of lack of progress.

While we seem to be in this world, there are plans to be made. We can make them with the ego or the Holy Spirit. Jesus is telling us that just because "**A healed mind does not plan,**" (W.135.11.1) it does not mean a healed mind does not "follow" a plan. We are here to practice learning how to follow the Holy Spirit's plan of forgiveness. Through mind-watching and releasing our misperceptions to the Holy Spirit, our minds are being cleared of the obstacles to love. This allows us to listen more clearly to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and follow His plan in everything we do. It takes practice, but it is of tremendous value to us to take the time to release our attachment to our planning and trust in His plan for us. "**For you can not conceive of all the happiness that comes to you without your planning.**" (W.135.26.2) This is the goal of the Course, and it is quite an advanced state---to no longer be turning to the ego for direction but to ask Holy Spirit in everything: "**What would You have me do? Where would You have me go? What would You have me say, and to whom?**" (W.71 9.3-5)

Some of us may complain that we do not hear guidance. Yet we do get prompts when we stop long enough to connect with our intuition and get out of our own way. We've all had these experiences where we are prompted to call someone, go somewhere, or say something to someone, only to see that we were exactly where we needed to be and doing exactly what we needed to be doing. Connecting with our prompts and trusting that all is exactly as it needs to be for our healing, relieves all suffering. Sometimes, when we turn to the Holy Spirit and ask for help with a problem that we have already decided for ourselves, we are limiting the scope of His answer. It is arrogant to even think we know what the problem is. For example, I may be asking for healing for my body and assume that I know that this is what I need. It may be more valuable, with any perceived problem, to ask to see the situation differently or to ask for help to bring my mind to peace in this situation. As Jesus reminds us, a healed mind knows nothing and is grateful this is so. **"A healed mind is relieved of the belief that it must plan, although it cannot know the outcome which is best, the means by which it is achieved, nor how to recognize the problem that the plan is made to solve."** (W.135.12.1) In other words, we come to a place where the mind is no longer employed to solve our own problems. The mind that thinks it knows is no longer helpful.

When we learn to accept everything and forgive, we live in the flow of our Divine Being, knowing everything is for our highest good, and yes, even those things that don't feel good to the ego. The thing the ego resists most is change. Our plans are actually a defense against change. We are defending ourselves against our changeless reality. **"The mind engaged in planning for itself is occupied in setting up control of future happenings."** (W.135.15.1) Thus, we overlook the present, which is where our reality is and what we are so afraid of. All our planning is to affirm our identity as bodies. **"For it is your reality that is the 'threat' which your defenses would attack, obscure, and take apart and crucify."** (W.135.17.4) All our planning is to keep our identity as a body in place, to keep change away from ourselves and thus to keep the truth about ourselves at bay. The undoing of the ego thought system takes time because we defend against the powerful pull for God that we have within us.

As our trust and confidence in the Holy Spirit expand, our fear of the direction we are going diminishes. We become more willing to listen and follow. When we do this, our lives become divinely inspired, and we inspire others by lighting the way for them. We walk in trust and confidence that everything will be provided and, increasingly, we **". . . realize that our defenselessness is all that is required for the truth to dawn upon our minds with certainty."** (W.135.21.3)

Sometimes, when I feel my progress is slow, and I start getting discouraged, comparing myself to others who seem to be more evolved, I look back on my life, and I do see tremendous progress has been made. I have taken my hands off the steering wheel of my own life and have turned more and more away from the ego and toward the Holy Spirit for His interpretation of events. I listen for prompts and try to act on them. I no longer judge the situations that show up in my life as good or bad. In my saner moments, which are more frequent now, I see everything as an opportunity for forgiveness. More and more, I let go of my way and allow guidance to show me His plan for Atonement. He simply reminds me over and over that truth is true and all illusion is false. He invites me to see the false as false and not to take it all so seriously. Nothing real has happened. I am simply dreaming.

In the Manual for Teachers, in the section **"Development of Trust,"** the process of undoing is laid out as going through stages until we come to a **"period of achievement"** (M.4.I.A.8.1) where learning is consolidated. On the way there, we go through a lot of undoing, sorting out, relinquishing, conflict, and unsettling times. It can seem painful at times, but it is all helpful. The

world is governed by a power that keeps all things safe, and "**When this power has once been experienced, it is impossible to trust one's own petty strength again.**" (M.4.I.2.1) (ACIM OE M.4.4) We relax into the flow of His Love and know we can count on Him in all so-called emergencies, as well as tranquil times.

Today, let us step back and let Him lead the way, and "**Try not to shape this day as you believe would benefit you most.**" (W.135.26.1) Our happiness can only come from remembering the truth about ourselves and opening to His plan where the body is simply an instrument to carry it out. Thus, its health is guaranteed.

There is so much in this Lesson and it is impossible to comment on all of it, but it is encouraging in so many respects. It is reminding us that we are not bodies, and we cannot die. "**Now is the light of hope reborn in you, for now you come without defense, to learn the part for you within the plan of God.**" (W.135.25.5) We realize the truth about ourselves as eternal beings. We have an important function in offering healing to the world through our own healing, and with it comes happiness.

"Throughout the day, as foolish little things appear to raise defensiveness in you and tempt you to engage in weaving plans, remind yourself this is a special day for learning, and acknowledge it with this:

This is my Easter time. [My resurrection] And I would keep it holy. I will not defend myself, because the Son of God needs no defense against the truth of his reality. (W.135.26.5-8)

Love and blessings, Sarah
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