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The Undoing of Guilt

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*What else but sin could be the source of guilt,
demanding punishment and suffering?
And what but sin could be the source of fear, obscuring God's creation;
giving love the attributes of fear and of attack?*

Workbook 259.1:4-5

The moment Adam's eyes are opened and he distinguishes between good and evil, guilt comes into the mind. Now there are two possibilities: one right, one wrong. Now there is division. There is separation. There is judgment. There is guilt. Never wholly present, guilt is always a judgment about a past event. It may have been five minutes ago or five thousand years ago. It is still past. Guilt is self-accusation. It is my experience in the moment and fear is my dread of possible punishment. If I feel guilty, it means *I have sinned* and if I have sinned, it means that I am separate from God—from wholeness. I am isolated and alone and fearful that God will punish me for what I have done.

As the mind is split, there are two possible memories for the mind. I can wallow in my ego's past, a place of error and wrong decisions, and thus, a place of guilt, separation, and division. Or, I can return my mind to the memory of the truth of Being in God; a place in which there is no division, no separation, only love, only God -- only wholeness. Memory is selective. If we did not want the ego; if we did not desire its effect, if we did not want to be separate from God, we would not wander into guilt.

*The world but demonstrates an ancient truth;
you will believe that others do to you
exactly what you think you did to them.
But once deluded into blaming them you will not see the cause of what they do,
because you [want] the guilt to rest on them.
How childish is the petulant device to keep your innocence
by pushing guilt outside yourself, but never letting go!*
Text 27.VIII.8:1-3

The miracle reverses projection. If projection makes perception then I need to look within and see what it is that I am projecting on to the world. Am I complaining, fault-finding, bitching, and griping? Seeing that *projection makes perception*, we place ourselves in a position where we can choose once again—this time from a position of Mindfulness (sanity) instead of mindlessness (insanity). I do not then try to change the world. I choose rather to change my mind about the world. Mindlessness means seeing sin in someone else. Mindfulness means seeing oneness. We see guilt all around us and we don't realize that it is inside us. When I see guilt in a brother, I project that guilt outward from my mind onto my brother. When I condemn my

brother, I condemn myself and I send us both to hell. When I release (forgive) my brother, we are both set free.

Choose once again if you would take your place among the saviors of the world, or would remain in hell, and hold your brothers there.

Text 31.VIII.1:5

Sin is the *belief* in separation or “the idea of evil” (T-19.III.5:1). It is a lack of love. When we read the word *sin* in the Course, we can use the word *separation*. When we read *separation*, we can use the word *sin*. Sin is the belief that it is possible to do something against God.

A man went to church without his wife. When he returned home, she asked him what the preacher talked about. He said, “Sin.” “Well,” said the wife, “what did he have to say about it?” “He’s against it,” said the husband.

Traditional Christianity has always been *against* sin. Sin means taking the ego seriously. Sin is precious to the ego, so much so that the ego seeks out sin to provide testimony to its reality. The word *sin* (*hamartia*), as Jesus uses it in the New Testament, means “missing the mark,” or “missing the point.” Being centered means being in focus. Being ego-centric, we place our focus on *who we think we* are rather than *who we are in truth*.

*Sin is a strictly individual perception,
seen in the other yet believed by each to be within himself.*

Text 22.in.1:4

The more easily I see sin in myself, the more it is projected outward; the more real it seems; the more power it also seems to have over me. “There is,” the ego says, “plenty of sin”—just look around. Sin is sacred to the ego. It is, in fact, the most “holy” concept in the ego’s system (T-19.II.4:2). Believing in sin, good and bad, right and wrong makes judgment necessary.

*Guilt is the psychological experience of the belief
in sin and can be defined as the total of all our
negative thoughts, feelings and beliefs about ourselves.*
Dr. Kenneth and Gloria Wapnick in *Awaken from the Dream*

Guilt is the belief we have sinned. It is the preserver of time. It is any negative thought we have about ourselves. It is a painful feeling, emotion, or thought which arises when we believe we have hurt the whole or oneness including, of course, ourselves. Guilt manifests as contempt of self, incompleteness, failure, indifference, despair, depression, and loneliness. It is the “idea” that we can think apart from God. Without the ego, there would be no guilt. Without guilt, there would be no ego. If I am feeling guilty, I can be sure that the ego is in charge because only the ego can feel guilty (T-4.IV.5:5). The purpose of the ego is to keep us guilty. Guilt is an invention of my own mind which means that guilt and salvation are in the same place – in my mind. Guilt is a “decision” within my mind. Not being guilty means not being invested in the ego.

*Guilt is a sure sign that your thinking is unnatural.
Unnatural thinking will always be attended with guilt,
because it is the belief in sin.*

Text 5.V. 4:8-9

Unconscious Guilt

My mother, Milly, passed on Christmas Day 2001, at the age of eighty-five. We were talking on the phone one day when she was about eighty years old, and she said she felt guilty. I said, "About what, momma?" She was, as far as I knew, the embodiment of innocence and the most loving person I had ever known. She said, "I don't know. It's just a feeling." I think mother's guilt was the anxiety everyone feels about the wrongness of feeling separated and therefore ego-driven. There is no one that has not struggled, or is not now struggling with guilt. We have all lied, been thoughtless, and condemning of others. We have each been selfish, pushy, arrogant, and rude. We have lost our tempers, cheated at a game, and on our taxes; thereby, experiencing separation from the one we cheated on or lied to. We do things "in secret" and pray that no one will find out. We have forgotten who we are. We have misidentified ourselves as abandoned, unloved, unlovable, alone, and vulnerable; and, we see each other as antagonists, adversaries, and enemies.

Guilt is self-attack. When we want to get rid of it, we project it out on to others. It arises as we engage ego defenses—when we lie (denial) or project our attack thoughts out onto the world. Guilt never finds its home in the present. It is always about the past. While there is no hell, the experience of guilt in the now moment is hellish. It keeps me from awareness of wholeness and Heaven. Guilt comes in relationship to our bodies, each other, and time. It is, after all, through the body that I "experience" separation from other bodies. Guilt often arises around indulgence of the body in eating, illness, smoking, sexuality, alcohol, and drugs to name a few.

*It is essential that error be not confused with sin,
and it is this distinction that makes salvation possible.
For error can be corrected, and the wrong made right.
But sin, were it possible, would be irreversible.*

Text 19.II.1:1-2

Mistakes and Misperception

If it really was possible to be separated from God then sin would be real. It is precisely because sin is an illusion that it is not real. It is actually impossible to be separated from God. We just think that we can be and that gives birth to "the dream of sin" (W-193.5:4). Sin is not to be confused with error. Error or mistaken perception calls for correction.

A young woman went to see her priest. "Father," she said, "you must forgive me for I have sinned." "My goodness," said the priest, "what is your sin?" "Well," she said, "I have committed the sin of vanity." "How is that, dear?" asked the priest. "Every day," she answered, "I go and stand in front of the mirror and say, you are so beautiful. You are absolutely gorgeous." "Oh my goodness," said the priest, "That is not a sin. It's just a mistake."

Sin is not real. Though we may be much mistaken, we cannot transgress against God. Our Father has only love for us. Love does not condemn. Love cannot be hurt. The Course says that God is lonely without us. Lonely should be understood metaphorically. *We* are incomplete without God. We are lonely without Him. God does not hate us and he does not punish us. That does not mean we can do any hateful thing we want. If we do, “we” suffer because selfishness is suffering.

In the parable of the Prodigal Son (from the Gospel of Luke), the Father says nothing about where the son went, what he did, or the level of illusion that he got caught in. We all come into the world and then get caught in a variety of illusions. An illusion, is an illusion, is an illusion. Where he went, what he did, the level of illusion *we* get caught in does not matter. The only thing which matters is that we wake up and come Home again. Children are not punished because they sleep and while sleeping, they have bad dreams.

*Son of God, you have not sinned,
but you have been much mistaken.
Yet this can be corrected and God will help you,
knowing that you could not sin against Him.*
Text 10.V.6:1-2

God has not condemned us. Neither need we condemn ourselves. The past was what it was and the best I can do with it is not drag it into the present. The present is where Heaven is. The present is where oneness is. If guilt is in my mind then salvation is there as well. As long as the problem is out there, I don’t have to look inside. My *seeing* your sin is proof that “I am right and you’re wrong.” I have a book with illustrations for use in sermons by Christian ministers. It defines sin as “that abominable thing that God hates.” If God is love, can God hate? Mistakes can be forgiven; error can be corrected; the wrong can be made right.

Fear is a witness to separation and an expectation of punishment (pain) (T-4.I.10:2). Fear is a synonym for ego. Love is a synonym for God. The last sentence of the first paragraph of the Introduction to the Course says, “The opposite of love is fear, but what is all-encompassing can have no opposite.” There is no opposite to God, which is why what is not of God, what is not of Love—does not exist. Think of a time when you were most fearful and you can probably see that you were very much in ego. Think of a time when joy and love filled your heart and you see that you also felt close to God.

*There is no time, no place, no state where God is absent.
There is nothing to be feared. There is no way in which a gap could be conceived of in the
Wholeness that is His.*
Text 29.I.2-3

A Dream of Fear and Love

I had a dream that I was with two other men. We were along a beach and we came upon an amusement park like Coney Island in Brooklyn, New York. At the entrance to the park was a tunnel, like a tunnel of love—only this was the tunnel of fear. One of the young men was particularly anxious to go through the tunnel. The other young man was very resistant about

going through. For some reason, it was decided that the two of them would go through and I would walk around on the outside. When they came out on the other end, the hair of the fellow who had been reluctant to go through had turned white. He fell on the ground in a fit, foaming at the mouth.

After the young man recovered, my companions proceeded further into the park, but I decided to stay behind. I climbed into the top of the tunnel through an attic or loft-like door, much like the one on our barn when I was a boy. It was my intention to expose the inside of this place to show that it was just machinery that had caused my friend to become so fearful.

When I entered the loft, I found that indeed the place was filled with demonic creatures, just as one would see in a book on demonology. I looked at them and proceeded to walk into the room. As I did, they backed away respectfully. I realized that as long as I was unafraid of them they were powerless over me. For some reason, I was not afraid and as I stepped forward, they kept moving back. Finally, I stopped and one of the more human-looking ones approached me and asked me if I would like to meet the devil himself. I said I would, and was led into a side room.

The devil was a little boy sitting in an aluminum lawn chair, with his arms resting regally on the arms of the chair and his head bent down to his chest as though he was pouting about something. I walked over to him, knelt down beside him, put my arms around him and said, “I love you. I love you.” As I said that, he began to shake and he started to scream, “No. No. You can’t say that!” And puff! He disappeared. At that instant, I awoke.

*Fear is not of the present, but only of the past and future,
which do not exist. There is no fear in the present
when each instant stands clear and separated from the past,
without its shadow reaching out into the future.*

Text 15.I.8:2

The ego teaches that hell is in the future. (T-15.I.4:3). “What if,” “what if I get sick; what if I don’t have enough money; what if there is nobody to take care of me; what if I die; what if all these terrible things happen?” Not that these things are happening *now*. Sin calls for punishment and this is frightening. Error calls for correction. Punishment is not correction. Fear arises when I think that I must expiate or pay for my sins by being punished, perhaps by *paying my debt to society*. Living the Course means awaken to the truth of our reality as children of God. No one is punished for sins because the Sons of God are not sinners (T-6.I.16:5).

*How instantly the memory of God arises in the mind
that has no fear to keep the memory away!*

T-28.I.13:1

One of the most difficult ideas in the Course is the first sentence in the first paragraph of the first chapter, Principle Number One, of the Fifty Miracles Principles. “There is no order of difficulty in Miracles. One is not ‘harder’ or ‘bigger’ than another. They are all the same. All expressions of love are maximal” (T-1.I.1). There is no unforgivable sin. Thinking there is makes sin real. Jesus goes to the cross to show us that even the most outrageous assault by one body

onto another does not matter. Jesus was betrayed, abandoned, beaten, torn, and killed because of the projection of others onto him but he did not see it as an attack. (T-6.I.9:1-3). He knew that what was coming his way was coming out of ignorance and there is no need to attack ignorance.

This does not mean that our brother should be permitted to do hurtful things. Those who break society's laws go to jail because we don't know what else to do to stop them. Throughout the 1980s, I taught college classes inside Sing Sing Prison and Bedford Prison for Women, in New York State. There is a sign outside the gate at Sing Sing which says, "Sing Sing, New York State Correctional Institution." Would that it was a place of correction—Sing Sing is a place for punishment. Little in the way of "correction" occurs inside Sing Sing. If we can't correct ourselves, is it likely that we can correct others? As long as we live in time, there will be another moment, another decision, and another opportunity to find out how completely we are willing to let go of sin, guilt, and fear. It all comes down to forgiving myself. I'm the only one who can change my mind.

Forgiving the Self We Think We Made

If there is no ego system to hold on to, then neither is there need for any guilty past or future dread. There is nothing to be expiated for. (T.13.II.9:2). We do not find freedom from guilt by making sin real, and then atoning for it. We do not experience freedom from guilt by beating up on ourselves. King David of the Bible, overwhelmed with guilt, literally covered himself in sackcloth and sat in the temple in ashes. Only by leaving the past in the past do I find freedom. We cannot obtain freedom from guilt by engaging in ritualistic practices. We are called upon to see things the way God does and that can only be done in the present.

Finding Our Way Home

1. Look at It!

Lesson 39 from the Course, "My holiness is my salvation," asks us to search out our unloving thoughts, to take a good look at everything that stands between us and our salvation. We disengage ourselves from guilt by recognizing that what we are experiencing in the world is a reflection of what is inside. Look at judgment. See it without getting into it. I look at my special relationships—and see how I have projected my own fears into what it is I see. Guilt exists only in my mind. Fear exists only in my mind. As I have chosen to see the guilt and fear—so then it is I can turn them over and let them go. This turnaround occurs, as I look at everything and realize I have made something out of nothing.

2. Ask for Help!

We cannot do it on our own. We do not need to do it on our own. Ask the Holy Spirit for help. By myself, I can do nothing. Living the Course, we make asking a habit. Ask again and again.

*Never attempt to overlook your guilt before you ask the Holy Spirit's help.
That is His function. Your part is only to offer Him a little willingness
to let Him remove all fear and hatred, and to be forgiven.*

Text 18.V.2:3-5

Guilt is not fun. It does not “feel” good. If I’m feeling guilty, I can be sure this thought is coming from ego and not the Holy Spirit. If in doubt, choose again. Guilt is a projection within my own mind; it is also something I can change. As ideas leave not their source, the only place guilt can exist is in my mind. This thought is not in someone else’s mind. Only I can change it. No matter how much I would like to rationalize it, guilt comes from my projections onto the world, which ultimately means onto myself.

*See no one, then, as guilty,
and you will affirm the truth of guiltlessness unto yourself.
In every condemnation that you offer the Son of God
lies the conviction of your own guilt.*

Text 13.IX.6:1-2

3. **Stop the Insanity**

One friend describes how when she knows she’s letting her mind be drawn toward some temptation to misperceive; she actually sees a stop sign in her mind. Who is in charge of the mind? It is possible to stop the ego mind’s scheming, maneuverings, and misperceptions. It is possible to stop the process of constant analysis, interpretation, and projection. It is possible to stop the wandering off into guilt. If, however, we don’t realize that we can stop insanity, we’ll go on doing the same thing.

4. **Replace it!**

“I do not like the way this makes me feel.” It is often better to be wrong than right. It is better to be mistaken than to find justification for projection. It is wrong to be right when rightness is righteous indignation. No matter how attracted I am to them, no matter how justified I feel my attack thoughts might be; I can give them up. I can always choose once again. Heaven is a memory. The Holy Instant is a taste of eternity. Accepting the Atonement, we see no guilt in any past of anyone.

*For the Son of God is guiltless now,
and the brightness of his purity
shines untouched forever in God’s Mind*

Text 13.I.5:6

Two Directions for Projection

There are two forms of projection. The first and most obvious is the condemnation I offer the world. The second is the projection I place upon myself. Having removed my projection on to the outside world, I may now turn my projection inward and make myself guilty for either what I think I have done, or failed to do in the past. This can be quite painful and often is. Projection is projection whether it is directed outward or inward. Either way, I am affirming the “seeming” reality of the ego. I cannot then acknowledge the love of God. In order to be free of guilt, there must be *no* judgment either of another or oneself. If there is no judgment – guilt is gone.

*Whenever the pain of guilt seems to attract you,
remember that if you yield to it, you are deciding against your happiness,
and will not learn how to be happy.*

Text 14.III.3:3

You Are Not Guilty

I once went to see Dr. Helen Schucman, struggling with guilt over breaking off a relationship, which had caused the woman in question a great deal of pain. After I broke up with her, she became very upset and started acting out, calling at two and three in the morning just to awaken and annoy me. When the security guard at General Theological Seminary, where I was living, told her I was not in, she threw a cup of coffee in his face. She even physically attacked another woman I was dating at the time. I felt very guilty. Toward the end of my session with her, Helen reached out, lightly touched my knee, and said, “You know you’re not guilty.” I told Helen that I was sorry, but she was wrong. She did not understand. I was guilty. Yet on a deeper level, I understood what she meant. In the truth of who we are as Sons and Daughters of God, we cannot be guilty. I made a mistake. I acted in ignorance. I had to forgive myself and get on with life. This story has a wonderful ending as it never really ended. One night I forgot to take the phone off the hook. The woman in question started calling about two a.m. I got up and answered the phone. We talked until dawn and we worked it out. This “incident” occurred more than thirty-five years ago and she called the other day to wish me happy birthday.

Lesson Number 46 from the Workbook, “God is the Love in which I forgive,” provides the following direction. Say to yourself:

*I cannot be guilty because I am a Son of God
I have already been forgiven.
No fear is possible in a mind beloved of God.
There is no need to attack because love has forgiven me.*

W-46.6:3-6

Giving Love Away

*We have said that without projection there can be no anger,
but it is also true that without extension there can be no love.*

Text 7.VIII.1:1

A pathway out of hell comes in refocusing my mind away from the self to the whole, and thus, to my brother. My brother is the person I’m dealing with right now in the world—my daughter, my employer, the waitress who is serving breakfast. The main thing I can do for them is to let them be and/or to help them be who they are in truth by being love. Thus, Lesson 36 says, “My holiness envelops everything I see.” So it is that as I give, I receive; as I exempt my brother from the projection of guilt, so am I free of guilt myself. This is something I know the Holy Spirit would have me do. Doing God’s will feels good naturally, just as being responsible about my bills or my health feels good naturally. It’s proof of the fact that I am on the right track. Loving (helping) my brother in any way, the memory of love is returned to my mind. Being truly helpful is a road out of hell.

From sin comes guilt as surely as forgiveness takes all guilt away.

Clarification of Terms. 4.5:6

The central teaching of the Course appears five times in the Course in one simple phrase; “God’s Son is guiltless.” We are awakening to the memory of our Truth in God. Everything else, the thought of sin, death, and hell contain no reality. Only what is eternal is real and God’s son IS eternal. Eternal guiltlessness exists within the Mind of God. It cannot be otherwise. Enlightenment is an awakening to the truth that our Being is free from sin, guilt, and fear. Listening to the Holy Spirit is the choice for guiltlessness, happiness, and freedom. We are as we always have been. Our purity shines forever in the Mind of God. Everything else is a dream.

*Being responsible I see
My past was the only one that could be.
I could not have done it differently.
And so from guilt, I am set free.
No nostalgia, no remorse.
There really was no other course.*

*Where there is no guilt
there is a present—clearly seen
beautiful, free, and wholly clean.*

Peace,

Jon