

# Course Companions Sample Commentary

## Volume II – Workbook for Students

### LESSON 121 – Forgiveness is the key to happiness.

We enter the twenty lessons following Review 3 with one of the more powerful lessons in the Workbook. It features the central teaching of the Course—forgiveness—and provides us with one of our most important forgiveness exercises in the Course.

I remember when I first came across this lesson, in my first pass through the Workbook back in 1981. It struck me as so strange. How could forgiveness be the key to happiness? When we think of finding happiness, we normally think of doing, accomplishing, and acquiring. We think of *adding* to what we have. What seemed so odd to me about this lesson is that it pictured happiness as coming from letting go, from releasing our brothers and ourselves. In this view, rather than happiness coming from addition, it comes from *subtraction*. How could that be?

As I read it now, what strikes me is the penetrating description of the unforgiving mind. I encourage you to reread paragraphs 2-5. With each sentence, ask yourself if you can see it as a description of your mind, either now or at some other time. I find it remarkable just how many of these sentences apply to my mind at one time or another. What is even more remarkable is that all of this comes from unforgiveness. Look at the list of symptoms: fear, sadness, hopelessness and despair, misery, blindness, doubt, confusion, anger, weakness, sense of sinfulness and damnation, judgment and projection, sense of being unable to change. Can it really be that all of these come from the simple unwillingness to forgive? And if unforgiveness makes us this miserable, then of course forgiveness is what makes us happy.

Given that the human condition stems from unforgiveness, real forgiveness must not come easily to us. And that is exactly what this lesson implies: “As sin was an idea you taught yourself, forgiveness must be learned by you as well, but from a Teacher other than yourself Who represents the other Self in you” (6:3). We cannot teach ourselves forgiveness. It is too alien to our current framework. We need to learn it from a Teacher other than ourselves. In learning it, we need to be students, not teachers; followers, not leaders.

What does that look like? It looks like following the practice instructions for today. How do we do that? The instructions are pretty clear, but I will draw out some of their elements.

First, we select an “enemy” by thinking of someone who arouses one of various forms of anger in us: someone you don’t like, are irritated by, would regret running into, actively despise, or “merely try to overlook” (10:1). That’s right—all of these are *forms of anger*.

Second, we look for a “spark of brightness” (11:3) in our picture of this person. I’m convinced that this is the same as the “spark of beauty” in the Text (T-17.III.7:6), which consists of loving thoughts. So what we are looking for, then, are loving thoughts, acts, or qualities of this person.

Third, seeing this spark expand until it covers our whole picture of this person means seeing him only in light of this one spark of love. It means seeing that spark as the only meaningful statement of who he is. If we saw even our worst enemy this way, in light of *only* his most loving thought or act or quality, then he would see him as having a halo just as bright as any saint of old.

Fourth, we then transfer this radiant aura to a friend, who is revealed now to be so much more, to be our shining savior. And then we see both our friend and “enemy” unite in giving us the gift we gave them. Having extended to them the gift of purity, we now see it coming back to us, and as a result feel just as pure as they are. That is how we forgive ourselves—by giving the gift away and letting it come back to us. Is that how we have seen the way we forgive ourselves?

Finally, I want to draw out the meaning of the final lines, the ones we practice frequently throughout the day. Their meaning is that *through forgiveness* I will awaken from the dream of being mortal, fallible, and full of sin and know I am the perfect Son of God. My forgiveness, in other words, reveals to me a different view of myself. I always think of this in terms of the famous Alexander Pope quote. If to err is human and to forgive divine, then if I do forgive I *must* be divine.

### **Practice instructions**

Purpose: to learn to give forgiveness and see that, when you do, you receive forgiveness.

Morning/evening practice: 2 times, for 10 minutes

- Identify someone to forgive. Think of someone you dislike or despise or find irritable or want to avoid. The one that has already come to your mind will do.

- Close your eyes and see him in your mind, and look at him a while. Try to find some little spark of light in your picture of him. You are looking for some loving or true quality in him, or perhaps some kind thought or caring gesture of his—some distant reflection of the light of God in him. Everything hinges on this, so take your time. Once you find something, see it symbolized as a tiny spark of light somewhere in your dark picture of him. Then see this tiny spark slowly expand until it completely covers your picture of him, replacing all the darkness with light. In other words, see him *only* in light of this one loving quality or act. See this as the only clue to who he really is. If you succeed, he will seem to be a holy person, without a single flaw, radiating light. You might even imagine great rays shining out from him. Now look at this changed picture a while. Appreciate how lovely and spotless it is.
- Now think of someone you consider a friend. Try to transfer the light you saw around your “enemy” to this friend. This makes the friend seem to be much more than a friend. He is revealed to be your savior, with power to enlighten you with just one glance of his holy eyes.
- Now let your savior offer you the light you gave to him. Then let your former enemy unite with him, so that they both offer you this light. Why wouldn’t they give this holy gift to you, when you gave it to them, and revealed your holiness in the process? See rays of forgiveness pouring off of them and onto you, absolving you of your “sins,” causing you to radiate the same great rays that they do. See yourself at one with them, united in the holy light of forgiveness that you have given and received. “Now have you been forgiven by yourself” (13:3).

**Frequent reminders:** every hour—do not forget

Repeat, *“Forgiveness is the key to happiness. I will awaken from the dream that I am mortal, fallible and full of sin, and know I am the perfect Son of God.”* To understand these lines, it helps to insert “through forgiveness” at the beginning of the second sentence. One more point: If you are really going to say these lines every hour, you’ll need to either spend time memorizing them or have them written down on a card.

*This commentary was written by Robert Perry, editor of the Complete and Annotated Edition of A Course in Miracles, for the Course Companions online learning program. Course Companions is offered by the Circle of Atonement and can be found online at [coursecompanions.com](http://coursecompanions.com).*