

Turning the Other Cheek

BY JERRY LAZARUS, MA

Return good for evil,
kindness for unkindness,
forgiveness for transgressions—
is that possible without becoming
a victim?

ON A FEW OCCASIONS, I've heard people express concerns about practicing one of Jesus' teachings: "whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also." (Matt. 5:39) Some think that this teaching is too idealistic and impractical. Others ask: "By turning the other cheek, aren't we unwittingly condoning abusive behavior?" I empathize with them and I think it's a valid question.

What did Jesus mean by "turn the other cheek?"

It's the literal interpretation of some teachings that can be confusing, and downright troubling. Hence, it's tempting to reject them and walk away. For example, on one occasion, Jesus said: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you." (John 6:53) At first glance, this can be jarring, and taken literally, quite revolting. On hearing this, some of his followers left him, remarking: "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" Jesus must have been disappointed, for He asked his disciples: "Do you also want to go away?" (John 6:60, 67) The disciples, who were so close to Jesus, repeatedly asked Him to explain His parables and metaphors.

Jesus said: "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life." (John 6:63) Hence, it



behooves us to study them deeply rather than jump to quick conclusions. We are instructed to delight in the law of the Lord and meditate upon it day and night. (Psalm 1:2) Such a thoughtful engagement draws us near to God, and at the same time we gain an understanding of truths.

In a reading for a 65-year-old woman, Cayce said that she had a lifetime during the time of Jesus where she was known as Josie. Although timid by nature, Josie boldly approached the Master and asked: “*Who then is blessed in thy sight? Who can—under the trials, turn the other cheek? Who can give love for hate? And the Master blessed Josie there.*” (1487-1) Standing in contrast to those who walked away, Josie didn’t reach a quick and superficial conclusion. Had they simply asked Jesus, I believe that those who walked away could have received an explanation.

Like Josie and the disciples, anyone can make a passionate inquiry of truth—asking, seeking, and knocking for an understanding. In prayer, Christ is ever-present to those who wish to make these inquiries of Him. By saying, “I can’t understand these teachings; these are impossible to live,” we are closing off our spiritual development. By contrast, we may be blessed, even as Josie was, if we truly seek. Cayce contends that the truths shouldn’t be lived in isolation; they are to be applied “with Him.” Hence, the Christ Spirit will quicken the choice we’ve made to “turn the other cheek.” Consequently, the truths become understandable and livable, not just something we’ve heard and think might be possible.

Return Good for Evil

So, how do we turn the other cheek? Jesus’ own life shows us that this teaching is not to be taken literally. When one of the officers, taking exception to Jesus’ reply to the high priest, struck Jesus on his face, He didn’t strike back. Neither did He turn His head literally to show the other cheek. Rather He asked the officer: “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?” (John 18:19-24).

“Turning the other cheek” means not desiring any calamities to come upon those who treat us harshly or take advantage of us. Instead we return good for

evil, kindness for unkindness, forgiveness for transgressions.

During the time of Prophet Elisha, the Syrian army came to raid Israel, but ended up trapped and vulnerable. The King of Israel took counsel of Elisha and asked: “Shall I kill them?” Elisha answered, “You shall not kill them. Would you kill those whom you have taken captive with your sword and your bow? Set food and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master.” A feast was prepared and set before them. After they ate and drank, they were sent away. That’s turning the other cheek.

When Peter cut off the ear of one of the men who came to arrest Jesus, Jesus restored the man’s ear and told Peter to put his sword away. That’s turning the other cheek.

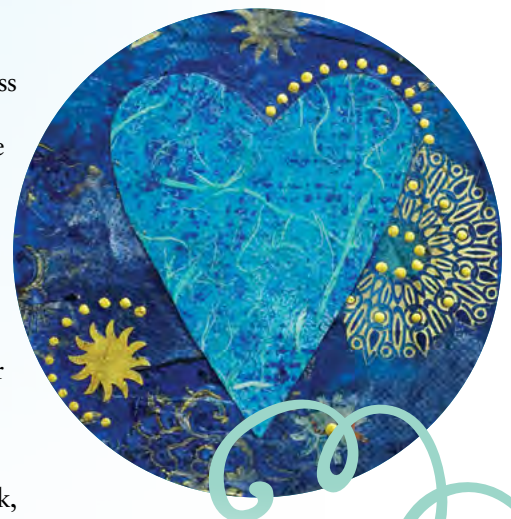
The soldiers mocked and ridiculed Jesus and crucified Him, after which they cast lots for His garments. And through it all, Jesus never condemned them. Instead, He prayed: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” (Luke 23:34) That’s turning the other cheek.

Turning the other cheek brings peace to those who live it, and by extension peace in general. As for the Syrian army, they didn’t return to Israel after being treated kindly. (2 Kings 6:8-23) “Eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” may be appealing to the senses and quickly gratifying, but it’s destructive for self and others.

Anyone can love those who love them, but can we love our enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who spitefully use us? (Matt. 5:38-48) If we do these, we are turning the other cheek. Thus, we become children of God. Jesus likened it to the sun that shines on all and the rain that falls on all. Cayce says that Jesus didn’t give “wealth or fame or fortune,” but “*the fortunes of suffering, the fortunes of service, the fortunes of turning the other cheek.*” And through these teachings, “*to the heart and the soul He brought a light that faileth not, a water that is living, a home that is eternal, a bread that is indeed a staff of life!*” (1152-4)

Love Begets Love

Some have found a way to maintain their composure when facing insults and disagreements, but internally they might



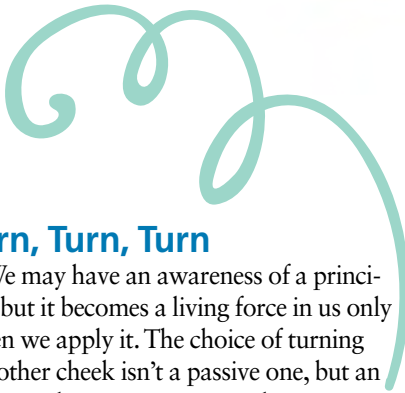
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experience animosity, hold a grudge, or want to get even. Those who turn the other cheek have spiritualized their desire for vengeance, and hence no such feelings arise in them.

Love begets love and kindness begets kindness. What we wish upon others is visited upon us. It’s the Law. When Peter denied Jesus, Jesus didn’t look at him with anger, discontent, or even a frown. Rather he smiled at Peter, which caused Peter to repent and find himself. (3578-1) For kindness and love were not lost even under the heavy burden of trial and denial, scourging, and crucifixion. Jesus was constantly exuding love, irrespective of the waves of external forces that battered Him.

Cayce acknowledged that “turning the other cheek” may seem galling to many, but this is how Jesus met rebuffs. He didn’t wither the hands of those who slapped him, although it was in his power to do so. If he did, “*He could not be, He would not be, thy Christ, thy Savior, thy Lord!*” And, Cayce encouraged, “*Do thou likewise.*” (1440-2, 1402-2)

When a 48-year-old woman had trouble with her brother as well as her husband, Cayce told her not to rail against them—although they were at fault. She was told to advise and counsel, speaking gently “*even when harsh words, harsh means are resorted to... This is what is meant by ‘Turn the other cheek,’ and know the Lord standeth with thee!*” (1000-19)



Turn, Turn, Turn

We may have an awareness of a principle, but it becomes a living force in us only when we apply it. The choice of turning the other cheek isn't a passive one, but an active and constructive attitude. Cayce emphasized this to one person: *"For, if one smite thee on the one cheek, did He say withdraw? No! Rather, turn the other! Be active in thy patience; be active in thy relationships with thy fellow man!"* (815-2)

A 29-year-old woman asked Cayce if she was "justified" in her dislike for the woman who upsets her so much. Cayce told her she wasn't—and to speak gently with those who would do her harm and make discourteous and unkind remarks. When she asked if the woman would "aid or interfere" in her future happiness, Cayce told her that it depended upon how she would react to the other woman's reproofs. If she reacted by turning the other cheek, it would turn to helpfulness. (938-1)

Once Cayce, his wife, and his secretary were falsely accused of fortunetelling. Arrested and jailed in New York, their pictures with provocative language appeared in newspapers. In a reading, the question was asked if legal action should be taken for libelous statements made against them. They were told to turn the other cheek since nothing would be gained other than *"contention and hard feelings."* (254-60)

How can we grow in grace if we hold grudges and animosity? It is better that we are mistreated than to mistreat another. This is what Cayce told a woman who was having marital problems, adding: *"Let the moves and the discourteousness, the unkindness, all come from the other... Kindness, gentleness and prayer have saved many a soul!"* (1183-3) Turning the other cheek is an active state—we consciously choose to turn away from

wanting to retaliate, and choose to forgive and forget.

Be Wise and Harmless

Showing the other cheek is not condoning abuse but standing up to evil with goodwill in our hearts. Jesus spoke out against hypocrisy, false piety, oppression, exploitation, usury, and self-exaltation. He told His disciples to be "wise as serpents, and harmless as doves," as He sent them forth as sheep amidst wolves. (Matt. 10:16)

We must stand up for justice and truth with kindness and mercy—and that stance is a choice we make. Nobody is asked to be a pushover. Take the words of another Bible teaching: "He who is greatest among you shall be your servant." (Matthew 23:11) While this is to be lived, Cayce said that we shouldn't become a "doormat" or "footpad," nor "the butt of others' fun," or subject ourselves to "the whim and fancy" of anyone. For example, Jesus defended the adulterous woman from those who wanted to stone her, while neither condoning nor condemning her. (John 8:1-11) The woman didn't need to undergo humiliation and punishment. Having taken refuge in the Christ, the threatened woman found safety and protection.

By applying the truths "with Him," we'll have Christ's guidance to apply a truth, His quickening spirit, and His protection against those who wish to harm us. "The Lord will stand with thee" is the promise. By claiming that promise, we're able to turn the other cheek without being subjected to or condoning abusive behavior.

Getting along with everyone at the expense of truth isn't the goal. Jesus said: "Woe to you when all men speak well of you..." (Luke 6:26) Standing up for truth, defending victims, and pointing out hypocrisy require no ill will or damning

thoughts of others. It requires no rudeness or condemnation; it can be done without compromising the law of love. It's easier *not* to speak up against untruth, for it ruffles feathers. Jesus wasn't afraid to live the truth just because of what that could cost Him. He had his foes, and whenever they tried to "entangle" or "trick" Him, he stood up to them.

For example, seeing Jesus preaching and healing, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders confronted Him. They wanted to know on what authority He did these things. Jesus countered with a question of His own, and said He'll answer them if they answered Him: "The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?" They conferred among themselves: "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet. So they answered Jesus and said, 'We do not know.' And He said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.'" (Matt. 21:23-27)

Perceiving the ignoble intentions of those who confronted him, Jesus was being wise and harmless. Turning the other cheek shouldn't and mustn't make a victim out of us. We shouldn't step outside of love when others speak harshly or wish harm upon us. Like Jesus, we should aim to constantly exude love. 🙏

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



JERRY LAZARUS is a spiritual teacher and counselor, with a master's degree in religion and meditation. He leads spiritual workshops across the United States. Jerry is the author of, Dreams: Listening to the Voice of God, and Saint John Bosco—Dreams: The Guiding Voice. Jerry invites you to discuss his articles on his blog at jerrylazarus.com.