

Healing the Dream of Sickness

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Part XII

"The Cause of Sickness"

Before continuing with our discussion of "How Is Healing Accomplished?" from the manual, let me address two questions that are frequently raised.

1) How do you get to the experience from the intellectual part of learning? My answer is that there is no real formula, because this is not something you do. The text is written on a very high intellectual level and requires a lot of hard reading, more so than the workbook and manual. The very process of struggling with understanding what the words are saying becomes part of the experience of learning it. That is part of the pedagogy of the Course. People complain that the text is too difficult to understand, but it really is *not* difficult to understand. A lot of the passages I have read are very clear and straightforward. The reason the meaning is not so immediately apparent is not the difficulty of the language; it is our fear and resistance that make the meaning elusive or obscure. It is as if our ego does not want us to understand what is written. Therefore a message is given to our brain not to understand what we are reading, and so we do not understand. The process of learning to intellectually master the material is really not an intellectual one, but rather a process of *letting go of our resistance*, and that just happens. It is much better if it happens without our trying to make it happen.

In a sense, the one-year training program of the workbook is a way of beginning the process of integrating what we understand with our brains with what we understand from within. The training program of the workbook has as its focus applying the principles of the lesson, which are based on the text, to our everyday life. We are asked to think of God every hour, every half-hour, or six times an hour, and to think of or use the lesson during the day whenever we are tempted to be upset. So there is an integration of what seems to be the intellectual understanding of the theory with the practical application. In reality, it is not really that clear-cut. The struggle of learning what the text says carries within it the inherent process of *becoming* what the text says. Again, the words are not that difficult. It is our fear and resistance that prevent us from really understanding what we are reading. Our study and practice of it over a period of many years is a reflection of our desire to learn and *become* what it says.

2) If you are stepping on my toe and I forgive you, does that mean it won't hurt? I could tell you many experiences that I had growing up in New York City riding the subways, which often would be very crowded, making it nearly impossible not to be jostled or have your feet stepped on. New Yorkers, somewhat deservedly, have the reputation of not really caring, although that is not always the case. But if someone steps on your foot and then quickly turns to you and apologizes, I guarantee you will feel less pain than if they not only stepped on your foot, but pushed you down to rush out the exit door.

When you go to your right mind and truly forgive, the experience in this holy instant is that you would not take personally what appears to be an attack, even though it may be meant as an attack by the other person. In that moment, you are a "healed healer"—until you get frightened and then go back again and become an "unhealed healer." In the context of psychotherapy, an unhealed healer would be someone in a healing profession who does not see the purpose as for his or her own healing. Thus, unhealed healers are those who try to be helpful to other people but do not see themselves as part of the process.

Let me just elaborate a little on the idea of not taking an attack personally. What it means to forgive, is that you do not make the connection that the ego would have you make—between the other person's attack, whether verbal or physical, and yourself. Helen had a number of experiences which I recorded in my book, *Absence from Felicity*. The classic one, which might have occurred before the Course started, happened when she lived in an apartment building in New York City. The bedroom in the apartment above hers was directly over her bedroom. The woman in that apartment had a very annoying habit from Helen's point of view. Around midnight, she would start walking around her bedroom in her high heels on the wood floor. Now Helen went to bed at a reasonable hour because she had to wake up early to get to the Medical Center, and she would be storming and stewing in her mind, really furious at this woman for being so insensitive, and thinking about all kinds of things she would do. At some point in the midst of her internal raging, she said to herself, the problem really is that I think there is a cord that connects her high heels to my head, so that I think she is stomping on my *head*. If that is the case, all I have to do is cut the cord. Being a very visual as well as an auditory person, Helen took out a scissors in her mind, cut the cord, and then went right to sleep.

The stories are not always so simple and clear-cut, nor do they all have a happy ending as that one did, but the principle is very clear. The problem was the *interpretation* she made; and what was really galling here, was not so much the sound of the heels on the floor, but the idea that this woman would be so insensitive, unthinking, and uncaring. That is what did it. It is the same thing in the example I gave about the crowded subway. If someone steps on your foot but apologizes quickly, it does not hurt as much as if the person were very callous and blamed you for it. In a sense, that is what forgiveness is all about—you restore the appropriate causal connection. The reason I am upset and am tossing and turning in my bed is not what the woman is doing or what this person did, or said, or anything else. It is that I am making a connection, a false causal connection, between that person and me. That is an interpretation, not a fact. The Course emphasizes that *perception is an interpretation*, not a fact (see T-21.V.1; W-pII.304.1:3; M-17.4:1-7). The interpretation is that she is doing this to me. If I change my perception, then I no longer see the cause of my distress as being her high heels or something outside me, but rather my own interpretation of what she is doing. Then there will not be a problem.

This is a good paradigm for what the process is like. You do not deny what the other person does. If a doctor says, "I am very sorry but that lump in your breast is cancer," you do not make believe and say it is all illusion and the breast was over long ago (T-28.I.1:6). That is silly. But you can look at it differently. You do not have to take it as a personal attack, either by the doctor, by something that you ate, by a pill you should not have taken, by your own body, by God, or whatever. In a sense, it is just another event in the world. The choice then is do I look at it through the eyes of my ego, which are the eyes of blame, hate, and fear, or do I look at it through the eyes of the Holy Spirit, Who will help me see this as another opportunity to learn that I am not my body, without denying the fact there is a problem that I have to take care of medically. That is how you walk through life. You do not try to change the external world.

You change your *mind* about the external world. The beginning of Chapter 21 says, "...seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world" (T-21.in.1:7). The idea, again, is that you do not take what other people do or say personally. The ego would always have you take it personally.

Getting back to what we were talking about earlier, the purpose of the world's dream is for us to have one experience after another of justifiably blaming others, that someone else did it to me; and therefore, my immediate reaction would be, why did you do this to me!—how unkind, unthinking, unloving, uncaring, mean, vicious, cruel, murderous, etc. Instead, you realize that that is the ego's reaction, because that is why the world was made—so we could always blame someone and something else. Remember that very important principle, *perception is an interpretation, not a fact*. My physical eyes see perceptual or objective facts in the world, but my brain interprets those seeming facts, and the brain's interpretation is a direct reflection of the mind's decision. If I want to find people to blame I will find them without any problem. But I could just as easily see the attack, as the Course says, as an expression of fear, which is a call for the love that has been denied and that I do not feel I deserve, or that others do not feel they deserve. So the focus is never on what is outside, but is always on what is inside. Most of the time, I have no power over the world or the other people in the world. The only thing I have power over is my own mind. I will interpret the world either through my ego's eyes, which will always be in terms of winners and losers, victims and victimizers, or I will interpret it through Jesus' eyes, which will see us all as sharing the same interests, the same need, and the same goal.