

True Empathy

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Part XVIII

Commentary on the Section "The Greater Joining" (T-28.IV.10)

Join not your brother's dreams but join with him [his mind, not his body or his dreams], and where you join His Son the Father is.

The real importance of this statement can be grasped by probing it more deeply. If it is true, as this says, that when I join with you I will find God—and yet it is God that I am so afraid of, because my ego has told me I do not want to come face to face with Him at all because His wrath and His vengeance will destroy me—then the way that I keep Him away is to keep *you* away. That is why we all have so much trouble truly joining, which means truly letting go of all the barriers that separate us. And that is why we have such a tremendously strong and deep investment in special relationships—they keep the Love of God away.

Similarly, the Course says that "the memory of God comes to the quiet mind" (T-23.I.1:1). If I do not want to go anywhere near the memory of God, because that—as I have come to believe—is the memory of my sin and the awesome nature of my guilt, not to mention God's fury, then all I have to do is keep my mind busy, so that it is no longer quiet. It is always going, always thinking, always making what the Course refers to as "raucous shrieks" (W-pl.49.4:3). We are terrified, if our mind is quiet, that God will rush in, which, of course, is true.

It is the same idea as that of the ego filling in the little gap with all its seeds of pestilence, sin, guilt, and sickness. If the gap is wiped clean, the ego tells us, God will come in, which, again, is true. If I am afraid of God, which the ego has taught me to believe I should be (we all believed right at the beginning that He is to be feared), then the way to keep Him away is to keep ourselves angry, to keep the mind noisy, to keep ourselves preoccupied with everything that means nothing at all. And so we keep ourselves sick, worried, concerned, guilty, etc.—their value is to keep God away.

That is why, the Course says, we are attracted to guilt, pain, and death (T-19.IV-A,B,C). We think we are afraid of them. In reality, we are attracted to them, because they keep the Love of God—which the ego has told us is not love at all but wrath—away from us.

However, if we are serious about wanting to go back home and could experience the yearning to hear that forgotten song again—to know God's Love, to take Jesus' hand and to walk back with him—then we would demonstrate our seriousness by letting go of all the grievances that we hold against each other. We would let go of our investment in joining with others' dreams, whether they be dreams of alliances against others or against God, or alliances to prove that sickness and pain are real, or above all, alliances to prove that we are not responsible for what we think or feel or what happens to us—someone else is

responsible. If we truly want to know God and to come back home, we have to come back to where we originally left, the mind.

That is the home we return to first, our home away from home. It is in that place in the mind where we chose against the Holy Spirit that we can now choose for Him. That then is really our home away from home, because that is our home with the Holy Spirit—the real world. We get there by letting go of all our investments in being right about how we have judged the world and everything in it, especially ourselves, realizing that we are not the innocent victims. That is what false empathy fosters—the idea that people are victimized—these poor, poor people who suffer in the world. That kind of an attitude is not loving.

Who seeks for substitutes when he perceives he has lost nothing?

This is a reference to special relationships, which begin with the idea that we have lost the innocence of Christ. We believe there is something missing in us, something is lacking. We do not believe God is going to give it to us—and the reason God has it is that He stole it from us in the first place. So we have to get it from other people, and that is specialness.

One of the key words that the Course uses, as it does here, as a synonym for special relationships, is "substitute." We substitute somebody or something in the world for the Love and the peace of God. This includes both people as well as addictions, for example. I feel this great hole of anxiety in my stomach and I cannot function. God's peace is not going to do; I do not want God's peace because I believe it will destroy me. So I take some substance which will dull the pain, whether it is aspirin, alcohol, food, cocaine, or whatever. I take something that will dull the pain and cut into all that anxiety and terror—that becomes a substitute for God. Or I feel lonely. I do not want to look at the cause of my loneliness, which is that I have separated from God and have left home. So I take in other bodies,—I attract other bodies who will keep me from being lonely. That is the meaning of this passage—I seek for substitutes because I feel something is missing in me. When I rejoin Jesus or the Holy Spirit in my mind, then I remember that I have everything, because I already have the Love and the peace of God. I do not have to seek for anything else as a substitute.

Who would want to have the "benefits" of sickness when he has received the simple happiness of health?

"Benefits" is put in quotes because, obviously, the benefits are not real. Health really means the peace of God. Near the beginning of the text, Jesus says that "health is inner peace" (T-2.I.5:4). This is an important idea that can be extremely helpful. When we are sick and in pain—whether we are talking about physical pain or emotional pain—it helps us to realize that we have chosen it. If we have chosen it, there is a reason we chose it. We chose it because we wanted to keep the Love of God away from us.

The question Jesus is asking us is: Is this really what you want? Do you really want what you are getting from being sick and unhappy and feeling unfairly treated and victimized, when instead you could have the health that comes from inner peace? The answer that we would have to give if we are honest is: Yes, I do want to be miserable, and I do not want to be happy. I prefer to be right in my misery than to be happy and to say that I was wrong, that God is not my enemy, God is my friend.

This, basically, is another way of boiling the Course down to a very simple idea. Whenever we are feeling unhappy, whatever the reason, whatever the form, it is because we have said: I do not value God's

Love—I value anger, I value being right, I value victimization, I value pain. All we have to do at that point is recognize that that is what we have chosen. We do not have to try to make another choice, or force ourselves to change. We simply have to be aware and to look at the fact that if I am angry, upset, or anxious, it is because I have chosen it—at that particular point in my insanity, I value that more than I value the love of Jesus. I would much rather be with another body, in pain or in specialness, than to be with him. We simply have to say: Yes, that is what I have chosen—and then be able to look at that choice without judgment, either of ourselves or of anyone else.

The very fact that we are all here in this world—or believe that we are here in this world—is telling us what we all have chosen. We all have said we prefer to be in this world, in a body, than to be without a body and to be home in Heaven. Since no one has the power to do anything to us or for us except ourselves, the fact that we are all here is saying we have all answered that we prefer to be right rather than happy. Because it is a fact within the dream that we are all here, it follows that everything else we do will represent the same choice, until we change our minds.

The idea is to be able to accept full responsibility for what we are feeling and experiencing. That is why my joining with you in empathy for your pain and suffering does not help—it reinforces what you have chosen and says: Yes, indeed, you are right. You have made the decision not to be happy, and now I am going along with it, too. We both now believe that we are even more right than before, because we have reinforced that decision. And then, of course, we want to find many other people who agree. That is why you see in the world at large how quickly everybody gets on the bandwagon to identify with the innocent victims. For example, there was a young girl trapped in a well a couple of years ago—everyone wanted to canonize her. She did nothing except fall into a well. But people were going to make her into a little saint. Falling into the well was her mind's choice, so it is not helpful to identify with her as the victim. But that is how insane everyone in the world is.

What God has given cannot be a loss, and what is not of Him has no effects.

What is not of Him is everything of the ego. And if it has had no effects, then it cannot be a cause; and if it is not a cause it does not exist. So absolutely everything that is not of God has no effects at all. Even the form of the Holy Spirit—Whom the Course occasionally speaks of as being given by God—is an illusion in our minds. The Clarification of Terms says that the Voice of the Holy Spirit is not Who He is (C-6.1:4-5). So even the effects of the Holy Spirit's presence—the happy dreams—are not real and in the end disappear.

What, then, would you perceive within the gap? The seeds of sickness come from the belief that there is joy in separation, and its giving up would be a sacrifice.

The "seeds of sickness" are what we have made real within the gap. We have all chosen the joy of the ego instead of the joy of God. Jesus says we really think there is a difference between pleasure and pain in this world, because we want to prove that the body is real. What we call pleasure or joy is exactly the same as pain—it is just its flip side. Both are predicated on the belief in the reality of the body—its satisfactions or its aversions, so both make the body real. Since within the dream we have identified with the dream and have become the dream, and therefore have become this limited, suffering, and sacrificial self, we believe that to give up the gap of separation would be a sacrifice, because it would mean the end of our identity as an ego self. That is why we cling so much to always being right, to being angry and justifying our anger, and to justifying our being in a body, making the body real, and being

preoccupied with it. We cling to our bodily identification because that is what we believe we are, and that is why we then fight—whether we do it actively or subtly—against forgiving, against letting go of grievances, against letting go of our investment in sickness, in fact, against letting go of our belief in the reality of sickness.

That is also why people have so much trouble with the idea in the Course that God did not create the world. If that is true—that He did not create the world—it means that He had nothing to do with the body. And if God had nothing to do with any of this, that means it does not exist. And if it does not exist, it means that I do not exist. And so, rather than give up this false self that I believe is my identity, I cling to it even more. That is why the ego says it is a sacrifice to give up the notion that the seeds of sickness—sin and guilt—in this little gap are real.

But miracles are the result when you do not insist on seeing in the gap what is not there.

The miracle helps us take our attention from the world where we believe the effects of sickness—the seeds of sickness—are, and go back into the mind where we can now look. Thus, we go back to the mind and look at what we have chosen. The ego, as we know, never lets us look at what we have chosen. But now we look at it and say: This is insane; I do not want this anymore. At this point we can start the process of making another choice. But we first have to look at what the ego's gifts have been. We do not look within the mind as long as we believe that the world is real and that dreams and sickness and victimization are real. And our investment in victimization is enormous. In fact, it is the same as our investment in the entirety of the ego thought system.

Your willingness to let illusions go is all the Healer of God's Son requires.

This is another of those important themes of the Course—the little willingness that the Holy Spirit asks of us. He does not ask a great willingness, and the little willingness that he asks of us is simply to begin the process of questioning the validity of what we have made real—the dream and our identifying the dreamer with the dream. That is the little willingness. We are not asked to let all illusions go. We are simply asked to have the willingness to let them go. And the willingness means we are willing simply to look.

If I can look at my dream and my reactions to you, the "I" that is looking cannot be the dream. It must be the dreamer of the dream. And if I look at the dream without judgment, anger, and guilt, then obviously I am not looking with my ego, which automatically means I am looking with Jesus or the Holy Spirit. And if I am looking with them, I have already begun the process of undoing the separation, which was the cause of the problem in the first place.

So the willingness is simply the willingness to say that, just perhaps, I was wrong. Therefore, when I am involved with you and you get upset or sick, and I find myself having a reaction to you—feeling annoyed or guilty or anxious or fearful because of you—whatever the form of my reaction, anything that is not peaceful—then all I have to do is recognize "I am never upset for the reason I think" (W-pl.5.heading). I am not upset because of you. I am upset because of what I have chosen, and I am simply using your situation as a scapegoat, so that I do not have to look at my own responsibility for how I feel.

That is how I begin to move away from identifying with your dream and to show you, as well as myself, that your dream has had no effect on me. That is what helps me get back to the decision maker in my

mind that chose to be upset in the first place—which means I am now identifying with the dreamer in my mind. And that is how I help heal you, because I become the reminder of the dreamer that is in you.

He will place the seeds of healing where the seeds of sickness were. And there will be no loss, but only gain.

Basically what we are doing is transferring, or shifting, from the nightmare dreams of the ego to the happy dreams of the Holy Spirit—from the nightmare dreams of sickness to the happy dreams of healing. Since the ego has told us that to accept healing, to accept the undoing of the ego, to accept the Atonement will be a loss—a loss of myself—we are taught here that there will not be any loss at all, but there will be gain. In other words, the Holy Spirit is our friend and not our enemy.

We can see how the Christian world projected its unconscious ego on to Jesus. The lesson of the cross and the message of the Churches has always been that God wants us to give up things. There is that line in John's Gospel, which, obviously, Jesus never could have said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13). There is no love in that. That is sacrifice. That statement clearly implies that there is a loss. And so the great love that Jesus had for the world was that he laid down his life. But he could not lay down a life that he never had in the first place, because "there is no life outside of Heaven" (T-23.II.19:1).

The world, which is nothing more than one specific form of the ego thought system, put into the mouth of Jesus, or the mouth of God, is the idea that God demands loss. If we want to reap the benefits of His Kingdom and to be welcomed back into His House, we have to let go of things. We have to lose. So this line is a correction for the idea that God demands loss.

There is no loss at all. God does not ask us to give up anything at all, except our belief in the reality of guilt. That is all we are asked to give up. He is not asking us to give up anything in the dream, because that would be absurd. If God or the Holy Spirit asked us to give up anything in the dream, there would have to be a dream. We are not asked to give up anything in the dream. We are simply asked to give up our investment in there being something in the dream.

That is another way of saying that the Holy Spirit does not take the special relationship away from us—He transforms it (T-17.IV.2:3). We are not asked to give up anything in the world. We are simply asked to transform our thinking about it, by looking through the eyes of the Holy Spirit rather than the eyes of the ego.