

True Empathy

Excerpts from the Workshop held at the
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Part XXII

Commentary on Lesson 184 "The Name of God is my inheritance" (paragraph 10, continued)

To consider a different kind of example of how we see problems outside ourselves, students in classes here sometimes report sadness or anxiety as programs are coming to an end and the time to leave the Foundation approaches. If this happens to you, it means that you believe the peace and the love that you are feeling when you are here are not in you. You feel it is here at the Foundation, and you have gotten it from this place. Then when you leave, you believe you are leaving the peace behind, because it is not in you. What you want to do—and this would be a good example of how to work with this—you would then be aware: Oh, I am anxious about leaving because I believe my happiness and peace and love are based here at the Foundation and are not within me—obviously I do not feel worthy.

Now this means that you believe the Foundation has something you do not have—the Foundation has the love of Jesus and you do not have it because you are not worthy to have it. That is not a very nice statement to make about yourself, nor is it a very nice statement to make about the Foundation, because if we have it and you do not, where did we get it? You then feel the only way to get it back is to cannibalize the Foundation. So you may say, "I have to be here all the time so that I can have this love, because I do not have it any other way." That is when your relationship to the Foundation would be one of using and manipulating—basically, cannibalism.

You then want to say, "Yes, that is what I am doing," and then say to Jesus, "I do not feel that I am worthy of you." You are really saying, "I do believe that you are with me and I am frightened." You are limiting his love, just as Helen did with her shopping, by telling Jesus, "I can experience your love when I am here, because I am not here all the time—that is as much love as I can take—but I do not want your love with me when I go back home, back into the world."

What you are really telling Jesus is that you are afraid of his love. That is the bottom line, a point I am going to get into later. You recognize that your being upset or angry, your empathizing with someone's suffering, your feeling anxious or upset because you are going to leave this wonderful holy place and go back to the ugly profane world—any of those feelings, in any form, is coming because you are afraid of the love that you know really is with you. And so you use external circumstances as a way of pushing that love away. If you could experience yourself saying to Jesus, or whomever else symbolizes that love for you, "You have gotten too close and I have to push you away," then you have already done all you need to do. You are finished, because if you could say that to Jesus without judgment, then you are already joining with him. There is a part of you which is learning that you do not have to be so afraid of him. And you do not have to be so ashamed of your hatred or fear of him, or the ways you use others to keep him away. And that is all you do.

The point of all this again is that we should strive to recognize the disquiet within us as quickly as we can, try not to blame it on what is outside us, and instead go back to that place of sunlight in our minds. But, again, this means that we must accept the premise that we do not know what we are doing.

There is a wonderful passage right near the end of the text that beautifully expresses this:

There is no statement that the world is more afraid to hear than this: *I do not know the thing I am, and therefore do not know what I am doing, where I am, or how to look upon the world or on myself.* [Now, that is a real blow to the egos in all of us.] Yet in this learning [in accepting this] is salvation born. And What you are will tell you of Itself (T-31.V.17:6-9).

So the Self that we are will tell us Who we are through the Holy Spirit. Salvation comes from this because it is the statement that my ego has been wrong. This means I now leave that little gap in my mind free and clear and empty and vacant, and that allows the Love of the Holy Spirit to teach me. But I must be able to say, "The problem is not what I thought it was." In other words, I must go back into my mind.

To consider another way of understanding all this: When I feel I am helping you, I believe I am giving you a gift. You are in tremendous need and tremendous pain and suffering, and I am the giver of the gift—I am going to give you something. I am going to relieve you of your pain. Once again, this means that I have something that you do not have. So I am seeing separation and difference. I am making a judgment that really is an attack—seemingly an expression of love and concern, but it is really an attack. I believe I am giving you the gift. Once I feel that way, I have made the mistake—how could I give you the gift when I do not know who I am, let alone what I am doing, or what the problem is? I have to recognize—and I can only do this by going back in my mind and joining with Jesus—that I am not the gift as a separated ego, as a personality that I identify with. The gift that I am is the gift of Christ, the gift of God's Love. That is the gift I am. But not only am *I* that gift, *you* are that gift as well. Basically, all I am is love sharing with love. Not love giving to another person, but love sharing with itself. I am not the gift. I am not the giver of the gift. I am nothing, because that is what the ego is. But within me is everything.

There is a workbook lesson that ends with a wonderful line: "Let me remember that myself is nothing and that my Self is all" (W-pII.358.1:7). The arrogance of the ego is evident in the thought that I have this wonderful gift that I am going to give to you. And I am giving you something because I do not believe you have it. And if I do not believe you have it, and I believe I have it, then there is a part of me that does not want to give it to you. So the gift I am giving to you has a hook to it—I am going to give you this gift so I can get an even greater gift back. I am going to give you the gift so that you, or everybody else in the world will think I am so wonderful, and I really want God to think I am so wonderful, so He will let me off the hook and punish somebody else. It is not love if I give you a gift that I do not believe you already have. Seeing differences is always judgment.

The gift that I give is not mine; it is given through me. It is a gift that simply mirrors and shares with the one who is receiving it. It is an exchange in which nothing is given, nothing is gained, and nothing is lost. Love is simply acknowledged and accepted. It comes in a form in which I give something and another person receives it. That is the form. That is the symbol. If someone is sick and I relieve that person of pain, I have given that person something on the level of form.

But, remember, the form does not mean anything. To the ego it is a symbol of my giving and losing, and your gaining. It is a symbol of separation, difference, judgment, and attack. It is not love. It is not giving. When it is Jesus giving through me, the form, or the symbol, is the reflection of that love. And my experience is that I am simply letting love extend through me, which means I have no demand that anything be given back to me. I have no demand that my gifts be accepted. I have no demand that you be healed of your physical symptom. I have no demand that you be grateful to me. I have no expectation, no need. It is love simply being given through me.

Now, obviously, this is the ideal—it is not easy. But the idea is at least to be aware of what the ideal is and then to be aware when you fall short of it. I will go into that shortly. The idea is to realize that I am not the giver of the gift. When I go back to the place of light in my mind, which we will see as we read on, then I realize what the gift is and Who the Giver of the gift is. I am simply an expression of that gift—and an expression and a fragment of the Giver, as is everyone else. It is simply, again, an exchange of love with love.

And when we do that here is what happens:

(Paragraph 10 - Sentence 2) Here you understand the Word, the Name which God has given you; the one Identity which all things share; the one acknowledgment of what is true.

The "here" that starts this sentence refers again to our going back to that part of our minds where we had made the wrong choice. We are faced with the same choice, but now know that we *have* a choice—between the ego and the Holy Spirit—and we also see that we have turned away from the ego and towards Jesus. This is another way of understanding the concept discussed earlier: that when I separate myself from my dream and from your dream, and go back to the idea that we are both dreamers, I recognize in that idea that we are all one. That is the key teaching here: "the one Identity which all things share." We are all part of the separated Sonship. We are all part of that diseased, sick, insane mind that believed we would be happier outside Heaven than in Heaven.

Thus, I go beyond the darkness of the world—whether this is someone who has physically or verbally attacked me, or someone who is seriously ill, or in some dire form of distress. If I identify with that, I am making the dream real. I want to go back to that place in my mind where the dreamer is—I as the dreamer, and my friend as the dreamer—and then realize that we are the same. The forms of our mistake differ, but the content of the mistake is the same. We all turned away from Heaven as one, we all turned away from the Holy Spirit as one. And now, within our seemingly fragmented and individual minds, we have all also turned away from Jesus—not as one in form, but we all have turned away from that presence of love. We know we all have done it because everybody in this world gets angry, annoyed, sick, depressed, guilty, etc. All of these are conscious choices we make to turn away from the Love of God. We are all in the same boat. And so when we leave the world of darkness, if only for a split second, and go back to our mind, that split second is what the Course refers to as "the holy instant." The holy instant lifts us outside time, because when we join with the Love of God, we remember that that Love is eternal.

So, to go over this one final time: I find myself in a situation in which I am beginning to get upset. I am feeling sorry for you because of the condition that you are in and I want to do something about it—or I am angry over something you have done and I want to do something about it. Then I catch myself, I realize what the problem is, I go back to that place of light in my mind, and all of a sudden everything

looks different. I realize that whatever you are going through is a choice that you have made. Your distress is not the pain in your body. The distress is the pain in your mind that separated from God, which mirrors mine. At that point we become one, and my concern about you, my investment in helping you, my empathy, my sympathy, my compassion for you, all disappear in that instant. For they arise only from the ego's point of view.

(Paragraph 10 - Sentence 3) And then step back to darkness, not because you think it real, but only to proclaim its unreality in terms which still have meaning in the world that darkness rules.

Once my mind has been healed, I can go back into the world—this whole process, once again, does not have to take more than a second or two. But now I am not fooled by the symbols. I know that your sickness and your pain came from your call for the Love of God, which is the echo of my call for the Love of God. I am not taken in by the dream anymore. It is not the dream I want to help, it is the call for the Love of God that I want to answer. And I understand that by answering your call for the Love of God, I am also answering my own. Now that I am not taken in by the symbols of the world, I can use them for a totally different purpose.

Applying this again to the situation of my visiting you in the hospital, and you are in a lot of pain—in the past I would have walked into the room and gotten upset. So I do this little exercise: I go back into my mind, I realize now I could walk into that room with Jesus next to me instead of walking in all by myself. I realize you have chosen sickness as your way of defending against God's Love, so you have defined the form of the classroom. Because I am now in a state of mind in which I recognize that you and I are both one, and we are one in the Love of God, I let that Love of God come through me. I use the symbols that you have made, but with a different content. You used those symbols as a way of excluding God, of attacking yourself, and of making me feel guilty. I now use those same symbols as an expression of the Love of God that says no matter what you have done, it has had no effect on my love for you. And so I will do what most normal people would do—I will say words of sympathy, of encouragement, and of comfort. I will bring you flowers or candy. I will call the doctor for you. I will do everything that everyone else does, but the purpose will be totally different, because I will not be doing it as a way of empathizing with your dream. I will be doing it as a vehicle for expressing the Love of God that I realize we both share and we both are.

At this point I would look just like any other person, but the meaning of what is going on would be totally different. That is what is meant by the statement earlier in the workbook that says that we are to look like everyone else, but smile more frequently (W-pl.155.1:2). In other words, there is a peace inside that is not susceptible to being taken away because of someone else's dream.

That principle can be applied to absolutely every situation in which I find myself—whether I am angry at you, angry at myself, or I feel empathic with you because of your suffering and distress. It does not mean I do not do things to help others. It simply means that I now realize that I am not the "doer." I am not the giver of the gift. I am not the one who is going to bring peace to the world or find the cure to all the sickness in the world, because I realize that all of that is just another part of the dream. So I allow myself to be part of the dream, knowing that I am the dreamer and not the dream.

This sentence therefore is so vitally important: "Then step back to darkness, not because you think it real." Not because I think sending flowers means anything, or taking an aspirin means anything, but I do it simply "to proclaim the unreality of the darkness in terms which still have meaning in the world that

darkness rules." I do not let the forms be any hindrance to the love that is within me. That is what love in this world really means.

Again, it does not mean I turn my back on others' suffering, or on injustice in the world, or on anything else. I simply redefine them so that I realize the suffering and injustice come from within your mind just as they come from within my mind. When I recognize that, I join with you as the dreamer, not as the dream.

(Paragraph 11 - Sentence 1) Use all the little names and symbols which delineate the world of darkness.

A good example of this is *A Course in Miracles* itself. In the Course, Jesus uses the words and symbols of the western world, a Christian world and a psychological world—not because those words are true. He uses words, as we know, that Christians have used for centuries, but he totally redefines them. That is what he means when he says that the Course comes "within the ego framework" (C-in.3:1). But he changes the content. So "Son of God" has a meaning totally different from that of the past two thousand years. "Christ" has a totally different meaning. "Atonement" has a totally different meaning. "Salvation" has a totally different meaning. The "miracle" is something totally different. "Forgiveness" is totally different. He uses the exact same words: "the Second Coming," "the Last Judgment"—words emotionally loaded with specialness, with special love, with special hate and judgment. He turns them around and they now become vehicles for teaching a lesson which is universal and embraces all people as one. And he himself becomes the perfect example of that reversal of content. So again:

(Paragraph 11 - Sentences 1-2) Use all the names and symbols which delineate the world of darkness. Yet accept them not as your reality.

Do not be taken in by the dream. You are not the dream. Thus, for example, I can give you medication if I am a doctor, or I can take you to a doctor who will give you medication. This does not mean that I am making the error real. Likewise, I can bring you flowers because you are sick; but again, this does not mean that I am empathizing with you falsely. It means that I am joining with you in the symbols which are meaningful for you and for me, but I am not forgetting that we have a meaning that is beyond all the symbols.

That is why, from the Course's perspective, there is no right or wrong way of doing anything in this world, as Hamlet proclaimed in his wonderful statement: "There is nothing right or wrong but thinking makes it so." There is absolutely no behavior in this world that is right, and none that is wrong. There is no right way or wrong way of doing therapy with the Course—there is no technique. There is no right way or wrong way of doing the Course. All there is is a right way of thinking in our mind—and a wrong way of thinking. There is the right Teacher we should identify with and the wrong teacher. To say right or wrong is not a judgment based upon morality—it is a judgment that says that if I choose the ego I will not be happy, if I choose the Holy Spirit I will be happy. "By their fruits you shall know them"—that is how we evaluate, not according to right or wrong in terms of behavior.

(Paragraph 11 - Sentence 3) The Holy Spirit uses all of them [the words and symbols of the world] but He does not forget creation has one Name, one Meaning, and a single Source which unifies all things within Itself.

That is why it is so terribly important, as I said right at the beginning of the workshop, that we recognize what the Course's metaphysics is really teaching. The entire world is an illusion, which means nothing here is real. That means the whole perception of differences in this world is made up. What unifies everything in this world is that it comes from one source—guilt. And guilt comes from one source—it is a defense against God's Love. Everything here is an expression either of the ego's guilt or of the Holy Spirit's Love. We are all one, we are not different; we only have the illusion of being different. Sickness, suffering, and pain are wonderful devices the ego uses to keep us separate. You are suffering, I am not suffering. So we are separate, we are different, and in this is an inherent judgment made—a judgment that is an attack.

I do not have to experience everybody as one—that is not possible for a human brain. It is possible, however, for me to understand that we all share the same purpose. We are all different in form, but we all share the same purpose—that is what is important—that is what unifies. So we do not deny what our eyes see. There is an important passage in the teacher's manual which is extremely helpful. If you find yourself or those in your *Course in Miracles* circle saying, "I am not sick, you are not sick, we are all one, and I do not see your body I just see a white light," you are either in denial or you are on the verge of a psychosis if that is what you see. We are not asked to deny what we see. This passage is a wonderful way of describing that.