

What It Means to Be a Teacher of God

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Part VII

What Are the Characteristics of God's Teachers?

Joy (M-4.V)

The next trait is *joy*. When the Course talks about joy, as with everything else, it is not talking about the world's meaning of joy. Joy in this world is how we feel when we get what we want. From the Course's point of view, joy would be the denial of the negative. So the only real joy in this world is when we truly experience the reality of our being forgiven—that is joy. We are all laboring under this tremendous burden of self-hatred and guilt, believing that we do not deserve to be forgiven, that we do not deserve to be children of God, if there is a God. We all carry that tremendous burden with us.

When we truly recognize that we literally made all that up, that God has never stopped loving us, and that we are forgiven for what we never did, that is joy. It is the total denial and absence and undoing of the ego's thought system of guilt, attack, blame, etc. That is joy—it has nothing to do with anything external.

(1:1-2) Joy is the inevitable result of gentleness. Gentleness means that fear is now impossible, and what could come to interfere with joy?

Joy, then, is the natural state of our minds, equated with the presence of God's Love in us. If there is no harm and no attack in my mind, there is no guilt. And there is no need to feel that I have to be punished. Once I let go of attack, the gentleness of the Holy Spirit remains. And my acceptance of that gentleness allows me to feel His joy.

The Course helps us distinguish between pain and joy, because we confuse the two (T-7.X). And part of our confusion arises from our belief that pleasure is different from pain. Jesus is trying to teach us that pleasure and pain are the same illusion (T-19.IV-B.12). But on another level, the Course says that "all real pleasure comes from doing God's Will" (T-1.VII.1:4). In the first statement, where pleasure and pain are opposite sides of the same illusion, Jesus is speaking of the pleasure and pain that are associated with the body: Thus, I experience pleasure when my body gets what it wants and pain when it doesn't. And the world's definition of joy is the same as pleasure: Joy refers to getting what I want, and pain to not getting it. On that level, both pain and joy are the same illusion.

In contrast, "real pleasure" has nothing to do with the ego's pleasure and pain. It refers to the pleasure of accepting God's Will, which is really the undoing of the ego. And this pleasure is the same as the joy we are discussing here—the joy of getting beyond the bondage of pleasure and pain, or joy and pain, on the ego's level. In other words, real joy, real pleasure, has nothing to do with getting what I want, or

avoiding what I don't want in the world. Joy refers to the state of my mind in that instant when it knows it has been absolved of all guilt and guilt just disappears.

This does not mean we should not enjoy things in the world. It just means that when we enjoy them, we would not make a big deal about them. If we do, we are stuck, because they won't last. For example, everybody enjoys a beautiful day—the Course would never say it is sinful to enjoy a beautiful day. But what do I do if it rains for five days in a row? Does that mean that I am stuck without the peace of God, absolutely miserable? That is a trap. What we want to do is to enjoy it, but not become attached to it, believing that salvation consists of having beautiful weather. That would be to set ourselves up.

We should not feel guilty because we enjoy certain things or do not enjoy other things, such as certain foods. The point, again, is not to make a big deal about it. Eat what you like and don't eat what you don't like. Live in a climate that makes you happy and avoid a climate that doesn't make you happy. Just don't make it into a big deal. Once we make it into a big deal, we are believing that something in this world is our salvation or damnation. Then we are making it real and we are stuck. Again,

(1:2) Gentleness means that fear is now impossible, and what could come to interfere with joy?

In other words, the interferences have been removed. Attack, harm, guilt, etc., are the interferences to joy. When I have chosen the gentleness of the Holy Spirit, I cannot be afraid. If I am with the Holy Spirit's Love, then I cannot be afraid of His Love. I have accepted His Love, so that fear now is impossible—there are no more barriers that would interfere with this joy.

(1:3) The open hands of gentleness are always filled.

This is an important line. Its "opposite" would be that the hands of harmfulness are closed. The ego has told us that our minds are filled with darkness, evil, sin, and guilt. And we are horrified. So when the ego tells me my hands hold evil, darkness, and sin, I quickly close them up, saying that I will nevermore look at this, because if I do, I'll be struck dead by the wrathful, vengeful God I have attacked. And if my hands are closed, how can I take the hand of Jesus or the Holy Spirit? My hands are closed to protect my self-hatred, my hatred of God, my judgment of everyone, and my fear. That is the harmfulness.

The Course helps us realize that we are protecting absolutely nothing. When we finally reach the point where we can open our hands, we realize there is absolutely nothing in there—the whole thing was made up. I first close my hands on the guilt, self-hatred, and murder. I believe that I have murdered God and Christ, and then say that I will never open them again because if I do I will be destroyed. Then I build a world like a fortress around this locked vault so that I will not get anywhere near it. My ego tells me if I do I will be destroyed. My ego doesn't tell me that if I ever look within, I will find nothing.

An extremely important section in the text, called "The Fear to Look Within" (T-21.IV), describes how the ego counsels us not to look within our minds, because if we do, our eyes will light on sin and we will be struck blind—a mild way of saying that God will destroy us. So we all say, "Oh my God. I don't want to do that." And we quickly close up and don't look within so we don't have to see the horror that is there. But in the next paragraph the Course asks, "What if you looked within and saw no sin?" (T-21.IV.3:1) or, in other words, what if we opened our hands and saw that there is no sin. That is the ego's fear. The ego knows that if we look within and realize there is nothing there, we will no longer believe in the ego. We will listen to the Holy Spirit; we will awaken from the dream, and the ego will be gone. So striving to protect itself, the ego makes up this big story—which we all believe—that there is something awful in

our minds. As a result, we have to lock our minds tight, like a closed or locked vault, or a "darkened tomb" (T-28.V.7:5). Then, so we will not go anywhere near it, we build a fortress around it: the world and the body.

What enables me to begin the process of letting it go is to begin to question the validity of my ego thought system. The ego has never allowed me to do that, and if I identify with my ego, I never will question it. Instead, I say that, yes, it is absolutely true—I am a wretched, despicable, awful person and God is a wrathful, vengeful Creator. I am not going to touch any of this with a ten-foot pole. And from that point on, I never do. I close my fist tight and I never look at it. I make up a world to distract me from my closed fist, and then I make all my problems in the world very real. And I never question it, yet the whole thing is made up.

Forgiveness, then, is the process whereby we begin to question what the ego has told us we must never question. Some of the premises that we begin to question in our everyday lives are that attack is justified, that pain and loss are real, that problems and their solutions are real in the world, etc. So the Course is presenting us with this immense thought system that ends up being incredibly simple. It says, "What is false is false, and what is true has never changed" (W-pII.10.1:1). The truth that has never changed is God's Love, and what is false is the ego's thought system. As I begin to change my perceptions about you, no longer seeing you as this terrible villain, I am slowly beginning to change my perceptions of myself, because the way I perceive you is the way I perceive myself. And that is how forgiveness slowly begins to undo the ego thought system.

So again, that is what this line, "The open hands of gentleness are always filled," means. And what my hands are filled with when I open them up is the Love of God. When they are filled with His Love, there can be no fear, no guilt, no attack, no harm. And there can be no pain, only joy.

(1:4-7) The gentle have no pain. They cannot suffer. Why would they not be joyous? They are sure they are beloved and must be safe.

All pain comes from the belief that I deserve to suffer and to be in pain, which means all pain comes from guilt or from unforgiveness. That is all it is. So as long as my hands are clenched tight, the source of pain will always be there. The source of pain is what I believe is within my mind—the unforgiveness that comes from believing I have attacked God.

When I open up my fist and the darkness disappears—it was never there in the first place, it was just hidden from the light—then there is no more source of pain, because there is no more guilt or unforgiveness that demands punishment. And so the whole thing is gone.

(1:8) Joy goes with gentleness as surely as grief attends attack.

Grief must attend attack because, when I attack, I must believe you are going to attack me back, and therefore I am going to be frightened. When I attack, it can only be because I am trying to protect this thought system of being separate from God. One of the best ways of seeing to it that I never open this closed fist—this locked vault in my mind—is to attack. When I attack you I am saying that I am upset because of what you have done to me and not because of what I am protecting in my fist, in my mind. So I am holding this thought system intact in my mind and I never question it. I never let it go.

Within this thought system, where there is this terrible sense of sinfulness, self-hatred, and fear, lies the core thought that I am sinful, guilty, and fearful because I have attacked God and thrown Heaven away. That is my grief. A line in the "Psychotherapy" pamphlet says, "And who could weep but for his innocence?" (P-2.IV.1:7). The only source of true sadness and grief in this world is the belief that we have thrown away the innocence of Christ, the innocence of Who we are, and we will never get it back. That is why all of us are sad. That is what depression is—what grief is—what loneliness is—what sorrow is—what mourning is. That is where everything negative in this world is coming from.

If I can just open up my hand and look within, I will see I did nothing. I have not thrown away the innocence of Heaven. The Holy Spirit has simply held it for me in my memory. The whole idea of lost innocence was just a made-up story. And so if I look within, the ego thought system "will disappear into the nothingness out of which... [it] was made" (T-10.IV.1:9). But if I don't look at it, I will continue to believe it is in there and it is real, and the door to my mind will remain locked. That is where the grief and pain are coming from.

The whole purpose of the Course is to have us realize that we are protecting nothing—literally nothing. And forgiveness is that gentle, step-by-step process of helping us realize it. But once I get caught in the world, believing that anything in the world means something, I am saying that there is a fortress that is real that is necessary to protect me from this fear in my mind. A line in the section on the anti-Christ (T-29.VIII)—which of course is the ego or an idol—speaks of the anti-Christ as "the strange idea there is a power past omnipotence" (T-29.VIII.6:2). It is the thought that there is another power in this world beyond the omnipotence of God. And that is the devil or the anti-Christ or an idol. From the Course's perspective, the ego is attempting to glorify itself by saying that there is a reality outside God. And in truth, the devil is nothing more than the ego thought projected outward so we don't have to look within our closed minds. The mind is still kept tightly shut inside because we insist that the evil is outside. So we never have to look at the evil that we believe is really within ourselves.

(1:9-10) God's teachers trust in Him. And they are sure His Teacher [the Holy Spirit] goes before them, making sure no harm can come to them.

There are a number of passages throughout the Course itself that seem to suggest that the Holy Spirit *does* things for us in the world. One passage in the text, based on the famous verse in Isaiah about making straight our path, seems to suggest that the Holy Spirit removes the obstacles in the world from our path so that our way is easy (T-20.IV.8:4-8). That is not literally what the Course is saying—it is just a metaphor.

The Holy Spirit cannot remove obstacles in the world from our path because there is no world, let alone any obstacles in it! He removes the obstacles of guilt and fear in our minds—the obstacles to peace. And even that He does not do in an active way. His presence in our minds is like a lighthouse that simply shines out a beacon of love that doesn't do anything. When we bring the darkness of our own guilt and fear to Him by opening up our clenched minds, His light automatically shines it away.

In other words, when I close my fist, when I close my mind, imprisoning what my ego tells me is my guilt and fear in there, the Holy Spirit's light is all around me because His light is in my mind. So when I open up my mind and I look at it—which is what it means to bring the darkness to the light or the illusion to the truth—then the light simply shines away what was never there in the first place.

And so the effects of that guilt will disappear as well. But it will have nothing to do with any intervention by the Holy Spirit. So, for example, if I were about to have an accident and the thought in back of the accident was guilt or harmfulness, if I turned to the Holy Spirit and released my guilt to Him, I would experience no harm. There is a danger, however, in judging everything by form. Perhaps something might happen to me when I get into an accident that would be a wonderful way of teaching and learning. For example, Jesus had a "very bad accident": his crucifixion. But the "accident" was not caused by his harmful thoughts. It was caused by his love as a way of providing us a teaching lesson.

In principle, if the cause of an accident or of a sickness is guilt or attack, and there is no guilt or attack in my mind, then I cannot have an accident and I cannot have a sickness. But it is possible—even though the Course does not address this because its focus is on the ego causes of sickness—that a form that the world would judge to be negative really may be caused by a loving thought because of its teaching and learning example.

So, again, the Holy Spirit does not remove the obstacles—He doesn't do anything. His light is just there. I remove my obstacles by bringing them to Him. Now our experience in the world is that He takes them from us, which is why the Course speaks to us that way. As we said earlier, Jesus talks to us on the pre-nursery-school level because that is where we are. He addresses us at the level of our experience. And our experience is that the Holy Spirit does things to me or for me—He takes something away or He gives me something. That is how we experience it, being little children. But in reality, He doesn't do anything. He simply is.

The Course says, "We say 'God is,' and then we cease to speak" (W-pl.169.5:4). Well, the Holy Spirit is the presence of God's Love in our split mind. And He simply is—He doesn't do anything. We are the ones who *do*, because we are the ones who *did* in the first place—we ran away from Heaven. Heaven simply stands there. And so we have to return to Heaven—we are the ones who do all that.

His Love, again, is like a lighthouse, shining out on a dark ocean, showing us a place of refuge and of safety, saying, "I am here." We will see as we continue that, similarly, the teacher of God does nothing. He simply says, not necessarily by his words, but by his loving presence, "I am here." And the "I" is no longer the personal "I" of the teacher of God. It is the "I" of God's Love speaking through him. So that is all a teacher of God does, and that is all the Holy Spirit does.

But our experience is that the Holy Spirit takes things away, just as our experience is that the sun rises and sets. We all see the sun rise and set but everybody knows intellectually that the sun is not really moving across the sky. The earth is moving—rotating. But our experience is that the sun rises and sets, which is a wonderful way of showing how the body's eyes lie. Similarly, it appears as if the world is flat, but we know that it is not.

So the body's eyes lie. In fact, the body in general lies. The brain lies because it is given its false messages by the ego, which is inherently a lie. That is the dishonest thought. So, by the same token, our experience is that the Holy Spirit moves around us—He does things for us. In reality, we are the ones who move. We are the ones who bring our illusions to His truth so that His truth can shine them away.

(1:11-15) They hold His gifts and follow in His way, because God's Voice directs them in all things. Joy is their song of thanks. And Christ looks down on them in thanks as well. His need of them is just as great as theirs of Him. How joyous it is to share the purpose of salvation!

This speaks of Christ's need. Christ's need of us is certainly not on the same level as our need. This really is talking about Christ's need that we simply extend His Love. It has nothing to do with any human need. As we discussed earlier, when the Course speaks of God as weeping (T-5.VII.4:5) and as incomplete without us (T-9.VII.8:2; T-9.VIII.9:8), it is simply using metaphors for His Love for us. So, likewise, when the Course talks here about Christ's need for us, it is simply saying that, in order for salvation to be complete, we all have to accept Christ's truth—it is not that Christ has a personal need.