

True Empathy

Excerpts from the Workshop held at the
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Part IV

Commentary on the Section "True Empathy" (T-16.I)

We will turn now to the section called "**True Empathy**" (T-16.I). This section, incidentally, was not originally part of the Course. It came as a special message to Helen, but it came at this time in the dictation, and obviously fit in very nicely with what was being talked about, so it was left in, virtually the way it was dictated to her.

It is interesting that the passage at the bottom of this page, which we will read later, talks about how I need do nothing except not to interfere. Another section later on in the text called "I Need Do Nothing," was also a special message for Helen. This was an important theme that Jesus was trying to get Helen to accept: that she did not have to do anything. That is probably the most important theme in the Course—that we don't have to do anything. We simply have to accept truth and reality for what they are. In the context of this workshop, this means we do not have to do anything about people's problems. We do not have to feel bad for people and try to solve their problems, because it is always the ego that wants to do something. We can see how nicely this fits into the whole ego trap. Right at the beginning the ego told us that we have to do something. A real problem exists in the mind, which has been transformed into a battleground. The real problem is God's wrath and vengeance, and we must do something about it. The "doing" took the form of having a defense against that fear, and the world became that fortress.

When in the Course Jesus says we need do nothing, he means there is nothing that has to be done because there is no problem that has to be solved. All we need do is accept the Holy Spirit's Atonement message. Right at the beginning the Holy Spirit said, "All you need to do is accept what I am telling you." The ego said, "What you have to do is accept what I am telling you and do something about it." That was our mistake: We turned to the ego. We accepted its truth that the separation had occurred and that we had to do something to defend against God's expected punishment.

You know you are involved with false empathy rather than true empathy when you feel impelled to do something: You *have* to comfort somebody; you *have* to solve the problem; you *have* to remedy the situation; you *have* to relieve the pain; you *have* to do something. What we are talking about is not what you do on a behavioral level, but the impetus that you feel within you, the *need* that you have to do something. In true empathy you do not do anything. The Love of God simply does it through you, but you do not have a *need* to help anybody else. We'll talk more about this as we go on.

(Paragraph 1 - Sentence 1) To empathize does not mean to join in suffering, for that is what you must refuse to understand.

When we become the ego, we make up a world that teaches us what we have already taught the world: that it is a good thing to help people. When the Course talks about joining, it doesn't mean joining with

people on the level of the body or the level of form. It doesn't mean joining together in *Course in Miracles* groups or with other groups to do things. It is talking about joining with the Holy Spirit, which means learning to accept the fact that we are already joined. When we say, "I have to join with you," what we are saying is "I believe we are not joined and now I must do something about it." That is why the Course teaches us that forgiveness means that we forgive what has *not* been done, not what *has* been done. When Jesus talks about joining *truly*, he means letting go of the interferences we have placed within the mind to the oneness that is already there. All that we do is remove the interferences to the awareness of that presence of oneness in the mind. At the beginning of the text, Jesus says that the Course does not aim at teaching the meaning of love because that is beyond what can be taught (T-in.1:6); instead we are taught to remove the interferences to the awareness of the presence of love. We don't join with each other, because we are already joined. We join with the Holy Spirit, Who then becomes the reminder and the witness and the proof that we are already one with God. In false empathy we feel we actually have to join with someone. True empathy means joining with the strength of the Holy Spirit in the mind, and that means we will automatically join with the strength in each other, because the strength of Christ is already fully joined in us and fully one. There is nothing that we have to do.

The ego wants us, as we see repeatedly, to make the body real, and to make sickness and suffering real. When I see you as suffering and in pain and I want to do something about it, what am I really saying to you? I am saying that you and I are different; you and I are separate; you are in pain and I am not in pain. We are beginning with the four statements that the ego has made into its bible. 1) We see separation. 2) There is now a difference: you're in pain, I'm not. 3) I make a judgment that I have something you don't have, and I am going to give it to you because I'm such a wonderful person. 4) And that basically constitutes an attack, because saying that I have something you do not have means I am better off than you. The truth is that we are both one in Christ, and we both have exactly the same love, the same spiritual identity, and the same peace. There is no difference. When I make your suffering real, I am making the body real and am seeing us as different, which is exactly what the ego wants.

That's why, as I mentioned earlier, you have to be careful of those who always want to help, because they are not coming from a place of love. They are coming from a place of seeing differences: You need help and I am the one who can help you. Remember, we are not talking about behavior. We are talking about the *need* to be a helper, the *need* to be a do-gooder, the *need* to be a healer, the *need* to be a teacher, the *need* to be anything in a relationship where we are different from the other person.

One of the ways of recognizing the difference between a special relationship and a holy one is that the special relationship always involves differences. We are different, and you have something that I want. It could be something that my body judges as pleasurable to me and essential to my sense of well-being. Or my ego tells me you have what I don't have: you're innocent, I'm guilty, and I'm going to get your innocence by giving you my guilt. That is what attack is, or what the Course refers to as special hate. You have the innocence of Christ and I do not have it, so I am going to take it from you by proving that you're a bad person. And then I get angry. Sometimes it takes the form of wanting to prove that I am a bad person, so I will do something specifically to make you angry. Either way works. Whether I see myself as the bad person, or I see you as the bad person does not matter. Either way, I am seeing separation and differences. I am making a judgment whether I'm judging against you or judging against myself. And that constitutes an attack because the truth is we are all one in Christ. But the ego always sees differences.

False empathy is always coming from a perception of differences. Suffering is one very clever and effective way the ego makes the body and differences real. We all are suffering. Simply being in a body is the height of suffering. Simply being in this world is suffering, because this world is not our home. We are all suffering. The forms differ, but the forms don't make any difference. The content is what is important. Simply being in this body, in this world, is suffering. And we all share in that. True empathy begins with the idea that we are all suffering—that we all share the same problem. But just as we all share the same problem, namely, that we chose the ego instead of the Holy Spirit, we all share the same solution, the same strength, and the same source of strength.

However, if I see someone in pain and feel that I can relate to that person because I once experienced the same pain, that would be making the error real. I'm saying, "I can relate to you in pain, because I was there once. But I'm not there now." It's not any different. Whenever I have something that you don't have, and I make that real, then I'm caught in the ego trap. I'm going to give you something that you lack, which I have. That's the ego's way of saying, "Look how good I am."

(Paragraph 1 - Sentence 2) That is the ego's interpretation of empathy [which is to join in suffering] and is always used to form a special relationship in which the suffering is shared.

It becomes: "I feel your pain. I really understand where you're coming from, because I was there myself. I can really feel for you and I can empathize with you." What I'm really saying is that your suffering is real, and I know it's real because I have suffered, too.

There is an underlying problem here, which is even worse when you consider what it fosters. When we feel sorry for someone and feel that person's pain, what we are implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, saying to that person is, "You poor dear, look at the terrible things that have happened to you. It's not your fault that you have this terrible pain or this terrible thing has happened, and I really feel for you." We are saying, "You have no power over your life and no power over your mind; in fact, you are mindless. Things are done to you beyond your control, and you are not responsible for them."

We are reinforcing exactly what the ego wants to be strengthened: the idea that the mind does not exist and that things beyond our control happen to the body. Because the ego has caused the veil of denial to fall across our minds, we are not aware that we are the ones who have chosen to be upset and victimized. When we feel sorry for someone, the underlying idea is: "This is a terrible thing that has happened to you. You need my help." What we are doing is driving the ego's knife in even further. The real help comes from reminding you that you have chosen to be in pain because you have separated yourself from the love of Jesus, and you can pick up his hand again and join with him and your pain will be gone.

So again: When I feel sorry for you I am really saying that I feel bad because of what has happened to you. I am identifying with your experience of yourself as a victim, and am joining in with your defense which says: "I am not a mind, I am not responsible. The world does things to me, and I am powerless before the mercilessness of other people, of the body, of the world, and even of God."

The way that we do help each other is to remind ourselves that we have another choice. In one of the earlier passages in the text which describes the Holy Spirit, Jesus says the Holy Spirit doesn't do anything except remind (T-5.II.7:4). His purpose is to remind us that we have made a faulty choice and we can now make a better choice.

In the manual, a section on healing and the function of the teacher of God as a healer says that what heals is not the hands that are laid on another person nor the words that a person says. What heals is that the healer is the reminder—the healer stands for the Alternative (M-5.III) that reminds the person who is sick that he has made a faulty choice by joining with the ego, and can make a correct choice, which is joining with the Holy Spirit. That's what we do. That's true empathy. We remind each other of the choice for the strength of Christ that is in the mind, as opposed to the weakness of the ego that always separates and divides.

When we feel sorry for someone, it really is an attack, because we are saying to that person: "You have successfully excluded the Love of God from your mind. You will never get it back, because you are no longer a mind. You are now a body; you are now a brain, and are at the mercy of forces beyond your control." At that point there is no hope for either you or me, because we have formed an alliance against God by joining with the ego and the body. But we have put on a pretty costume, which is what special love is. We say: "I'm concerned, and I'm filled with pity, sympathy, and kindness, because I feel for you." That doesn't help. What really helps is our reminding each other through our own peace and love that the pain, suffering, and sickness are coming from having chosen wrongly. Anything that allows us to get in touch with the power of the mind is helpful. Anything that serves to deny the power of the mind and shield it even further from our access is harmful.

True empathy reminds us of the strength that is within us. False empathy reinforces the belief that there is no strength in us. There is only a sick, weak, and suffering body, and we feel sorry for it. We do not feel sorry, generally, for people who have gotten themselves into messes. Our hearts usually go out to people whom we identify as victims, but almost never to people who are victimizers.

(Paragraph 1 - Sentence 3) The capacity to empathize is very useful to the Holy Spirit, provided you let Him use it in His way.

Empathizing really means joining. The Holy Spirit uses the power of our minds to join. We have used the power of our minds to join with the ego. The power of our minds to join is really the power of our minds to decide or choose. We have used it to join with the ego, to join with a limited, separated self, which automatically leads to joining in the world with other limited and separated selves who are judged to be bodies. That same power of our minds to empathize or to choose the ego can be turned around so that it serves the Holy Spirit. We join with Him and with His Love, and through that joining we join with everyone else.

(Paragraph 1 - Sentences 4-5) His way is very different. He does not understand suffering, and would have you teach it is not understandable.

That He does not understand suffering, an idea which is expressed other places in the Course, means that suffering, or anything of the ego, is not understandable, because it makes no sense—it's insane. It does not mean that, on another level, we do not understand the ego. A good part of the Course is spent in teaching us to understand the ego and how it functions, not by analyzing it, but simply by having us recognize that the ego represents a decision to separate ourselves from the Love of God. This we can understand. Because we can understand that we chose the ego, we can understand that we can make another choice. Suffering makes no sense because suffering upholds a thought system that does not exist. That is what is meant by saying suffering cannot be understood.

On another level, if we extrapolate from these principles, Jesus means that it makes no sense to try to understand how the world functions. I mentioned this briefly earlier, that it makes no sense to spend all of our time and energy trying to understand the physical world whether we are talking about the cosmos, the world of the body, or the world of the psychological body, namely, our psyches. Its whole purpose was to preclude our understanding, because true understanding only comes from the Holy Spirit. So suffering makes no sense, unless we understand that suffering comes from an ego decision we make to keep the truth away from us—*that* we can understand. Otherwise suffering makes no sense. Suffering does not occur because of a germ or a disease, or because a person has abandoned or rejected or hurt us. Suffering comes simply because we turned the wrong way.

(Paragraph 1 - Sentences 6-7) When He relates through you, He does not relate through your ego to another ego. He does not join in pain, understanding that healing pain is not accomplished by delusional attempts to enter into it, and lighten it by sharing the delusion.

The Holy Spirit does not have us relate to someone else's body, because if we relate from one ego to another, we are relating from one separated thought to another separated thought.

"Joining in pain" is something that we all do. In fact, there is a popular expression: "Misery loves company." When we are feeling terrible or feeling sorry for ourselves, we all experience it as a great comfort when other people join with us in that, so we do not feel we are alone. It does feel good, but what feels good is really the ego comforting itself. Generally what we experience as a comfort is other people telling us we are correct in feeling unfairly treated. What we call loving and helpful, very, very often is joining with each other on the level of misery and suffering, reinforcing the belief that yes, we are justified in feeling unfairly treated.

Now I am not talking about *behavior*. Many times the most loving thing I can do for you is to "join" with you on the level that you are on. But that does not mean in my mind and in my heart that I am joining with your pain. In other words, I join with you to lead you to a different place. We will discuss this more later on.

Remember, the ego made up the world as a distraction and a smokescreen and made up problems in the world to reinforce that. So our attention is then diverted away from our minds and rather is here in the world. When I join with you and make your pain and suffering real and help you to assume no responsibility for what you are feeling, I am doing exactly what the ego wants. I am making the smokescreen very real. I am saying the problem is here.

The miracle—and true empathy—help us move our attention away from the body, back to the mind. We recognize that, regardless of what you may or may not have done to me, the reason I am upset is that I made a decision to be upset. Even in the midst of what the world judges a terrible attack, I can still be peaceful. That, of course, is what Jesus taught us from the cross. No matter what was done, no matter how unfair the attack on him was, his peace and the Love of God within him was totally unaffected. The world indulged in false empathy and identified with what was perceived to be his pain and suffering, so that Christianity made a god out of the suffering, victimized Jesus. That is a wonderful example of false empathy.

Jesus was really teaching true empathy. He was asking us to join with the strength of Christ that was in him. When we identify with that strength, there can be no pain, no suffering, and no tears, because all

suffering and pain come from identifying with the weakness of the ego. Suffering and pain have nothing whatsoever to do with the body. Remember, we said earlier that the body doesn't feel anything. The brain doesn't think. The eyes don't see. Pain doesn't come from the body. Pain comes from the guilt in the mind. There are no exceptions to that.

What the world did with Jesus on the cross was empathize with what was perceived to be his pain and suffering. If pain and suffering are real, the smokescreen is intact, and the true Love of God is hidden in the mind. The lesson of the cross was that we should choose true empathy by not judging based on what appeared to be the weakness of Jesus, his dying body, but rather by identifying with the strength of the love that was in his mind. That is what we are asked to do with each other.