

True Empathy

Excerpts from the Workshop held at the
Foundation for A Course in Miracles
Temecula CA

Kenneth Wapnick, Ph.D.

Part IX

Commentary on the Section "The Agreement to Join" (T-28.III)

We are going to turn now to the section "The Agreement to Join" (T-28.III). Let me say a few words first, before we start this. The three sections, "The Agreement to Join," "The Greater Joining," and "The Alternate to Dreams of Fear" in Chapter 28, directly follow a section called "Reversing Effect and Cause." The basic theme of this part of the text is cause and effect. These sections, which focus largely on sickness and what it means to join and what it means not to join, are all based on this treatment and understanding of cause and effect. I would like to start by summarizing that a little, which will make it easier for us when we go into these sections.

Understanding the Course's view of cause and effect is just another way of understanding the whole thought system and why Jesus repeatedly tells us how very simple his Course is. It is simple because it sees every problem as having the same cause. That is why the first principle of miracles, that there is no order of difficulty among them (T-1.I.1:1), is so essential. There is no order of difficulty among miracles because every one is the same.

The basic cause of everything in this world is the belief in our being separate. To state it even more clearly: The basic cause of everything in this world is our choosing to identify with the ego instead of with the Holy Spirit. This means that the cause, or the problem, is not the separation; it is the *belief* in the separation. There is a big difference, because the separation itself never truly happened. So how could it be a problem? It is the *belief* in the separation that is the problem. In other words, everything within the ego thought system is unreal, and it would have no effect unless we chose to identify with it. The cause is the decision maker choosing to listen to the voice of the ego instead of the Holy Spirit. That's the basic cause of everything. As we've seen, once we identify with the ego thought system, we also identify with its fear of God, which causes us to defend against that fear by making up a world in which this thought system simply gets played out over and over again. So the way to solve any problem in the world is not to attempt to solve it on the level of its expression—the level of the body or the world—but simply to bring it back to its source, which is in the mind's decision to identify with the ego. That's the cause of every problem.

Thus, when the Course talks about cause and effect, it is talking about the cause as the belief in the reality of that "tiny, mad idea." This belief, the cause, then leads to the effect of the physical world and all the different expressions of the ego thought system in the physical world. So there is no order of difficulty in miracles because all that the miracle does is say the problem is not here in the body or in the world or in what this person is doing to me. The problem is simply that I made the wrong choice. The miracle brings the problem back to where it is in the mind.

.....

To state it simply, as we will see in these sections, the cause of every sickness, of every pain, of every problem, is the belief in separation. Once we define the cause that clearly, it's obvious that the solution is to rejoin the Holy Spirit. If the problem is that I separated from the Holy Spirit in the first place and moved towards the ego, then the solution is simply to undo what I have done. I return my mind to the place where I made the choice. This is the part of my mind that can choose, which is where the power of my mind lies. And then I make another choice. That is why Jesus says his Course is so simple. Every problem arises because we have dropped his hand and moved away from his love and his thought system and have identified with the ego. The solution is simply to pick up his hand again.

In this section we are going to see the idea that I've mentioned briefly already, that it takes two people to make a sickness. That is why, from Jesus' point of view—but not from the world's—no one here is sick. It takes two people to make a sickness, just as it takes two people to make a battle, to wage a war. The ego begins with its belief that it is at war against God. But that belief is totally within its own system; God doesn't even know about it. The Holy Spirit is not at war with the ego. It's the ego's version or projection of the Holy Spirit that is at war with the ego. There is no war. The whole thing is totally made up.

Similarly, if the cause of our sickness is our being separate from God, but God doesn't even know that we are separate from Him, then we are not separate from Him. If God knew about the separation, if God indeed called what we had done "sin," then sin would be real, and we would have indeed separated from Him. The whole point of the Course is that, since God doesn't know about the separation, it never happened, and therefore there is nothing to atone for. That is one definition that Jesus gives for the Atonement. He contrasts it with the traditional Christian view, which holds that God does know that we have separated from Him. God does know that we have sinned against Him, and therefore the sin is real. We now have to atone for it, which is where the whole idea that suffering and sacrifice have a value comes from.

In the Course's view, God doesn't know about the separation. Therefore, the whole thing is simply made up. The Atonement then is simply the correction for our mistake—turning away from the Holy Spirit and turning to the ego. So the Atonement, or the correction, is simply to turn back to the Holy Spirit. The miracle then is the means whereby we do that. We will see how this is explained as we review the section.

We can see from our discussion earlier that when I get upset because you are sick, I am as sick as you are. Obviously if I'm upset by your sickness, I'm making your sickness very real. It takes two of us to make a sickness—you to decide you are separate and sick, and me to decide and agree with you. At that point, I am acting just like the ego, because that's what the ego does—it makes the error real, it makes sin, separation, and sickness real.

We are asked instead to think like the Holy Spirit, and to reflect His alternative in the mind. This means I do not make the error real—on a practical level, I do not deny that you are manifesting physical symptoms, but I deny that those physical symptoms have an effect on me. If I feel guilty because of what you have done or are doing, if I feel anxious or depressed or angry about it, then obviously I'm making it real. At that point healing is impossible. Clearly, if I'm making your sickness real, I'm making separation, the body, judgment, and differences all real.

The way out of this problem is to leave the battlefield, as the Course says, to raise myself above the battleground (T-23.IV). I leave the battleground and go back to that place in the mind where Jesus is. That is what the Course calls the holy instant—when I choose to go back into the mind with him, look at all this, and then see it differently. I see that your sickness or distress is your call for help, which mirrors my same call for help.

Let's start looking now at "The Agreement to Join" (T-28.III).

(Paragraph 1 - Sentence 1) What waits in perfect certainty beyond salvation is not our concern.

The purpose of the Course is not to help us reach Heaven—it is not to teach us what love is. The purpose of the Course is to undo what the ego has done.

(Paragraph 1 - Sentence 2) For you have barely started to allow your first, uncertain steps to be directed up the ladder separation led you down.

This is Jesus' way of telling us that we are right at the beginning of the journey. We are already well into the text, in Chapter 28, and he is telling us that we are just at the beginning. This is the same idea as we find expressed in the workbook at the very end, where he says, "This Course is a beginning, not an end" (W-pII.ep.1:1).

These sentences and passages that are throughout the books are extremely helpful so we don't get caught in the idea that since we have been working with the Course for three months or three years or three decades (which hasn't quite happened yet), we should be healed already. It does not happen all that quickly. Within the illusion of time where we believe we are, our investment in the ego thought system is immense.

If we stop to consider that the guilt in the mind is what we have made real, that this guilt literally made up this world, and nourishes and sustains it, we begin to have an appreciation of the hold that we have on the ego. We don't want to let it go. We would gladly suffer all the pain and discomfort and hurt that is involved in being in a body, rather than leave it all behind and leap into our Father's Arms. That, to us, is an even worse fate. Statements like this one are helpful to keep us humble.

Jesus is saying that the separation or the ego thought system is like a ladder, and we have gone all the way down to the bottom of the ladder. The bottom rungs of the ladder consist of believing that our experiences in this world are very real—our bodies are very real, our thought system is very real, guilt is real, fear is real. And all of our feelings are justified—guilt, fear, annoyance, etc. This is why the Course is such a powerful tool. It meets each of us where we are at all different levels of the ladder—whether we're right at the bottom or walking with others as they make their ascent. And basically, to ascend the ladder means to recognize more and more what the ego is up to. What enables us to get our feet off the ground and up the first couple rungs is recognizing what the ego thought system is and how identified we are with it. Not that we necessarily have to let it go—that comes later—but we recognize what we are doing. So we can begin to understand, even if it's difficult to put it into practice, what Jesus really means when he says that concern over other people is really attack (M-7.4). Obviously, Jesus does not feel that way. Feeling sorry for my ailing cat, one of the examples we've been working with, does not seem to be a hateful thought. But when we understand it in the context of our discussion—that it makes separation, pain, and differences real—then we can understand how it is also a vicious attack.

So the beginning of the process is simply recognizing what the ego is doing, and beginning to develop a very healthy respect for our fear of God's Love. That fear is so enormous that we would gladly rush to the ego's side every time, embracing its "friends"—guilt, pain, annoyance, depression, sickness, anger, etc.

(Paragraph 1 - Sentences 3-4) The miracle alone is your concern at present. Here is where we must begin.

And so the miracle has nothing whatsoever to do with God or truth. The miracle is the undoing of illusion. It brings our attention back from the world and the problems of our bodies to the mind, where the problem is.

We recognize increasingly as we work with this material over time that we cannot do without the Holy Spirit's help. In fact, doing it without His help is what got us into trouble in the first place. What we are asked to do, which is a point I'll come back to over and over, is simply to look at the investment we have in making sickness and judgment real. And we are asked to look at it with Jesus or the Holy Spirit next to us, which means that we look without judgment. When the Course says that we should look, it does not mean looking through the eyes of judgment. That's what the ego does. The idea is to look without judgment, realizing that if I have done something wrong, it's my call for love. If you have done something wrong, it's your call for love. And what we do with calls for love is answer them. We don't hit people over the head—whether it's a call for love from somebody who is sweet and innocent or somebody who is a vicious murderer. We can make no distinctions. A call for love is a call for love, regardless of its form.

(Paragraph 1 - Sentence 5) And having started, will the way be made serene and simple in the rising up to waking and the ending of the dream.

"Having started" refers to this process of stepping back and looking at our egos in action, and watching how vicious and murderous they become. And we are just at the bottom level of the ladder. The top of the ladder is the awakening, the attainment of the real world, and the awakening from the dream of death. This is the same image, by the way, that you find in *The Song of Prayer* pamphlet, where prayer is talked about as a ladder (S-1.II.7:1; 8:3; III.2:1). The top of the ladder is the song of prayer, which is abstract (it does not have a melody or notes), and which the Father sings to the Son and the Son sings to the Father.

(Paragraph 1 - Sentences 6-8) When you accept a miracle, you do not add your dream of fear to one that is already being dreamed. Without support, the dream will fade away without effects. For it is your support that strengthens it.

We are getting now to the important part of this whole idea. Being sick or in pain already is an expression of your dream of fear. No one in his right mind, no one aware of the Love of God within him, would ever choose to be sick. Sickness is a call for help. Sickness is how the ego takes the guilt and the conflict in our minds and projects them on to the body, so that the body is now sick. We become preoccupied with the pains of the body, whether it is my body or your body. As long as I am concerned about and focused on my body, I am in the world. My mind is not looking where the guilt really is.

Sickness is my choosing to be separate from the Holy Spirit. I choose to identify with the ego and its guilt and sin. Then I place that thought system outside my mind, onto the body. Now I say, "It's not my mind

that is sick; in fact, I don't even have a mind. It's my body that is sick, and I am the innocent victim of something from the outside that has come in and invaded me. That's what sickness is." Sickness, like everything else, is an attempt to deny responsibility for having separated ourselves from the Love of God.

But the ego does not stop at just taking the guilt from my mind and projecting it onto my body. It takes it one step further and says, "The reason I am sick is *you*." So in sickness the ego gets us twice. It projects the guilt onto my body, so I am sick and in pain, and then it compounds the guilt by projecting responsibility for my sickness onto you. As the Course explains elsewhere, whenever we choose to suffer pain or to be sick, we are really saying to someone—whether that person is physically present, has died, or is just not in our immediate vicinity—"Behold me, brother, at your hand I die" (T-27.1.4:6). Getting sick is my way of saying to you, "You should feel guilty because of what you've done." If I can get you to feel guilty—at least this is what I believe about you—whether you feel guilty or not, then I'm not guilty. The sin then rests on you and not on me. Sickness, therefore, is a crazy—but everything of the ego is crazy—way to escape from the burden of our guilt by punishing our bodies, and then making somebody else responsible for it. Sickness is a way of avoiding our fear of looking within. In back of the fear of looking within is the image of a wrathful, vengeful God Who would destroy us.

Sickness can also be understood in relation to another of the ego's dictums: that God is going to punish us. Of course, if God is going to punish us, it means we will be destroyed. So the ego basically has us tell God back: "Don't you punish me. I will take care of it myself. Yes, I stole from You and, yes, I stole Your creative power and, yes, I hid it in my body—but look what I'm doing to my body! I'm punishing it. I'm wracked with pain and suffering—all so You don't have to punish me." Sickness, in this context therefore, is a crazy, insane way of mitigating the wrath of God. Everything about sickness is a reflection of fear—fear of God's wrath and fear of looking at our own guilt. It is an attempt to avoid the inevitable by projecting the guilt outside ourselves and blaming somebody else for it.

When you are sick, I know that you have already done the same thing, because sickness is a witness to that. When I get upset because of your sickness, I am making the same mistake you are, except I'm just changing the form. Instead of seeing *myself* as sick, I am now seeing *you* as sick. By seeing *you* as sick, once again I am seeing separation, difference, judgment, and attack all as real. I'm seeing you and me as different, and I'm seeing sin as real, because whenever I make the body's sickness real I am saying that someone is being punished; and I say this because we all have interpreted anything that goes wrong with the body as an expression of God's punishment.

That is why the Adam and Eve story is such a powerful myth—it is an expression of the ego. When God catches up with them, He punishes them. We experience all suffering and pain, including our death, as God's punishment. The psychological principle involved in this is that guilt always demands punishment. If I feel guilty over my sin against God and my separation from Him, I deserve to be punished. Even though I may have totally repressed God's wrath in my mind so that I am not conscious of it, there's a part of me that still believes that anything that happens to me is God's doing. He's getting even with me. If I make your sickness real, I am making the punishment from God real as well, and I am reinforcing your dream of fear. My mind is telling your mind: Yes, indeed, we are correct in being fearful, guilty, and sinful, and feeling that there is nothing we can do to stave off the inevitable wrath and punishment of God. At that point, I am as sick as you are. We form an alliance against the Love of God because we have both witnessed to the wrath of God by making sickness and pain real.

This, again, is the ego's false empathy, the false joining where I join with you in suffering. I join with you by telling you that the thought system of the ego is absolutely correct. If I don't agree with you and don't support your dream—we are talking about a thought in the mind, not what we do on a behavioral level—if I don't allow myself to be anxious and guilty and angry because you're sick, if I'm clear that the Love and the peace of God within me is totally safe, independent of what your ego may do, then I'm giving you a clear message that there is another way of looking at this. There is another thought system present in the mind. There is something else besides the guilt, fear, attack, separation, sickness, and pain of the ego. And that is the Love of God. By my being loving and peaceful and not buying into your dream, I am giving you that message. That is what is meant by "without support, the dream will fade away without effects. For it is your support that strengthens it." I am not responsible for your thought system. I am only responsible for mine. But if I am as afraid as you are, then I am telling you your thought system is correct.