

## True Empathy

Excerpts from the Workshop held at the  
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### Part VI

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

**(Paragraph 3 - Sentence 1) Your part is only to remember this; you do not want anything you value to come of a relationship.**

This is talking about what we do in relationships. Basically, in relationships we join with people on the level of the body, either to see them as allies or to see them as enemies. Our part is simply to recognize that we do not know what is best for us. We don't have to know what is best for us, we simply have to know what is not best for us. What we're talking about is a process of undoing.

Right at the beginning we believed we knew what was best for us. We believed identifying with the ego was best for us, and joining with the Holy Spirit was not. From that point we were convinced we were right, and we just went downhill from there. We excluded any other possibility that perhaps what we are doing and perceiving and believing is wrong. Stated another way, the Course's purpose is to have us recognize that we don't know what's in our own best interests. That's an early workbook lesson (W-pl.24). All that I have to know is that I don't know what's best for me in my relationship with you. All that I know is that I don't know that. If I could at least make that beginning, then I'm starting a process where I leave a door open for the fact that there is another possibility. If I don't know what's best for me, then maybe somebody else does. Perhaps it's a fact that my being upset is not because my cat is in pain; maybe there is another cause for it. Maybe the fact that you have walked out on me is not the cause of my pain; maybe it's something else. The something else would gradually lead me to the idea that I'm the one who has chosen to feel unfairly treated, and I'm simply using what you have done, your behavior, as a way of justifying how terrible I feel.

**(Paragraph 3 - Sentences 2-3) You choose neither to hurt it nor to heal it in your own way. You do not know what healing is.**

When someone with whom you are living, whether it's your pet or it's your human pet, is in pain and you want to comfort that person in pain, what Jesus is telling us is that we don't know what comfort is, we don't know what healing is. For us, healing is usually an attempt to help somebody so we won't feel guilty.

Another way of understanding this in greater depth is that, when we are in pain, we are really doing something to manipulate the other person into feeling guilty. It's a veiled statement, sometimes not so veiled, but usually veiled, that says, "You did this to me, and you should feel guilty because I'm upset and hurt, because of this, that, and the other thing. If only you were more attentive and took better care of me, if only you did not abandon me, if only you did not abuse me, if only you did not do this, that, or the other thing, I would not be feeling what I'm feeling today."

The chances are that the person who is not feeling sick—the other person in the relationship—is already coming from an ego point of view, so that person will feel guilty. That person hears in the sickness, not only an attack, but a confirmation of what that person already feels he or she has done. Since deep down we carry within us the idea that our thoughts have attacked God and have caused Him pain—remember, that's what the ego began with—then that's a thought that is always present in us. There's a part of my ego mind that is always looking to prove that I'm guilty and sinful. So I get involved with a person who's looking to blame somebody. That's what we call psychologically a sadomasochistic relationship, where one partner is involved in sadism, which is to attack and punish somebody else, and the other is involved in masochism, which is to want to feel martyred.

So, let's say I'm involved with you, and you get sick. Part of your getting sick is to say I'm responsible for it, so you are the innocent victim. There's a part of me that is looking for you to get sick and to attack me so I can feel guilty. That's how we reinforce each other. Therefore, I want to take care of you and comfort you so I won't feel guilty; not because I care about you, not because I love you, but so I won't feel guilty. My concern is really for you to get over the pain as quickly as possible; not because I care about you, but because your pain is making me feel even more pain, it's making me feel guilty.

What I'm doing, which on the surface seems to be loving and kind and gentle and sensitive and thoughtful, is really purely selfish and self-serving. In other words, I want to help you so I won't feel guilty. This underlies much of what people do in the world in terms of what we call charity or good works. These are, as I mentioned earlier, the do-gooders. It's really an attempt to take care of other people so that I will feel better about myself. So when God comes on the Day of Judgment and looks at me, He won't see me as this miserable sinner, because I can say to God, "Look at how much I've helped other people, look how kind and concerned and good I've been; I've given of myself, I've sacrificed of myself; I'm not the bad one, it's this other person."

If I'm going to pull this off I need to have people in my life who are in trouble and whom I can take care of. When I can take care of you, I'm off the hook. And then I can say to God, "Don't punish me, I'm not the one who's sinful. It's this other person."

That's what we think of as healing, and that's what underlies the empathy of the ego. I think the problem is somehow outside and I want to see the problem as outside so that I can be the one who will fix it. That is exactly what the ego did at the beginning. It said there is a problem and I know how to fix it. The ego does it under the guise of being our friend. In reality of course it just keeps us miserable.

***(Paragraph 3 - Sentences 3-5) You do not know what healing is. All you have learned of empathy is from the past. And there is nothing from the past that you would share, for there is nothing from the past that you would keep.***

All that the ego ever learns is of the past: I know what works. I know that I could feel better if I could dump on you. I know I could feel better if I could join with you and help you out. I know how to manipulate you because this has worked in the past. If I get sick I know that you'll feel guilty and you'll feel sorry and you'll take care of me, which is what I want. Everything the ego has ever done is based on the past. The whole concept of sin is based on the past: I have sinned in the past; I attacked God, I stole from Him, I raped Him, I killed Him, I usurped His role. I did all this in the past, for which I should feel guilty now. I'm now terrified of God's punishment, which will come in the future, unless I do something about it. That's the whole notion of time according to the ego. It's always based on the past: I know I will

be mistreated, I know I will be abandoned, I know people will take advantage of me, because that's what always happens. And I have a whole list of past experiences which support that. What's going to happen today will have to end up in a failure because it always is that way. I just look in the past and I see that. The Holy Spirit only lives in the present, because there is no past. There is no sin. There is no past or future. Everything that I've ever learned in terms of behavior is based on the past. That's why there is nothing from the past that I would share or would keep: because everything in the past has been an attack and a sin.

**(Paragraph 3 - Sentence 6) Do not use empathy to make the past real, and so perpetuate it.**

We use empathy to make the past real by making suffering, sickness, injustice, and victimization real. We've done all that because we made the original injustice, the original judgment, and the original attack real. We believe we did that to God, and we simply relive it over and over again. We each have an investment in reliving it—that's what is really important. Because if I can demonstrate right now that people are unfairly treated, and wounded and hurt and suffering pain, and I can be of help to them, then I'm proving that the ego thought system is real. As long as I identify with the ego, I am going to identify with the need to keep that thought system real, which keeps the Love of God unreal.

**(Paragraph 3 - Sentence 7) Step gently aside, and let healing be done for you.**

This is the same idea as the workbook lesson that says, "I will step back and let Him lead the way" (W-pl.155). In terms of the chart, the "stepping back" is almost literally stepping away from the ego and stepping towards the Holy Spirit. The only problem that has ever existed and will ever exist in the world is that we stepped towards the ego. So the only way of solving any problem is to step away from the ego and towards the Holy Spirit. That's the only way that we can find peace.

We don't have to solve problems in the world because there are no problems in the world, because there is no world. We solve the seeming problems in the world by bringing those problems back to the mind and solving the problem there. And the only problem is that we separated from the Love of God, and so the solution is that we join with it.

We don't have to heal; we let healing be done for us. The section in the text on the unhealed healer says, "A therapist does not heal; *he lets healing be*" (T-9.V.8:1). The healing is done through us. We are not the ones who have to solve problems. The woman is not the one who has to take care of her cat. A parent is not the one who has to take care of his kids. Our job is not to be good parents or good teachers or good therapists or good *A Course in Miracles* teachers or good accountants or good lawyers or good anything. Our job is to rejoin the love of the Holy Spirit in the mind, and that love will automatically come through us. For us to believe we know how to do anything is the height of arrogance. That's what we did right at the beginning. We said to God: "I know how to do it better than you. Your world is boring, I'm going to make a world where there's some excitement, where there's some real pleasure, not this airy-fairy, spiritual stuff."

Someone else talked recently of an experience she had had, when, on a cold and rainy night she began to think of all the stray cats and other animals who are out suffering alone in the cruel weather conditions. This woman said that in the past she would have simply prayed to God to take care of all these poor little animals, but now, as a student of the Course, she couldn't do that. But she wanted to know if she was really experiencing her own concern that she's not going to be taken care of.

This actually represented an advance for her, because in the past she had simply said, well, God will take care of them, so I don't have to deal with that problem. Now she was saying that God is not going to take care of them so she has to deal with the problem, which forced her to look, not so much at the stray cats, but at the stray cat she believed she was, which is a much more painful experience, because there is no magical cloak to put over it. The next step would be realizing that it was not the stray cats whom she was worrying about, or feeling were victimized; it was herself.

The good news is that God is not going to do anything about that. It's good news because that forces us to say: "I'm the one who has chosen to see myself as a victim so I could do something about that. And God will help me change my mind about myself. He won't do anything about the stray cats outside." There aren't any stray cats outside anyway. They're just symbols. Nor will He do anything about the stray cat I believe I am as a physical person, as a body. But He will do something, through the Holy Spirit, with the mind that thought that I'm a stray cat.

The ego gives us the arrogance to believe we know what is best. We know what is best for God, we know what is best for ourselves, and we know what's best for everybody else. And we know this because we know what healing is, we know what help is. The Course helps us to recognize that, from the ego's point of view, help is what will help *me*. And what will help me is what will bury my guilt even further. I'm not interested in looking at my guilt and letting it go, because that's true help. I'm interested in seeing my guilt in you, in what you have done, in terms of your being sick. Then I'll change what you have done by helping you with it, so my guilt will go away. But I'm not interested in looking at the guilt in my mind, I'm not interested in looking at the investment I have in seeing you in pain. All I'm interested in is seeing the symbol of my guilt taken away. It may be taken away on the level of form, but the thought in my mind still stays. True empathy helps me let go of the source of my guilt; false empathy reinforces it.

***(Paragraph 3 - Sentence 8) Keep but one thought in mind and do not lose sight of it, however tempted you may be to judge any situation, and to determine your response by judging it.***

We judge a situation, which always involves separation, difference, judgment, and attack. The situation is that you are in need of help. By my judgment of that, I am now going to determine what my response will be: I will help you, or I will walk away from you because I'll say you deserve to be in pain. Either way, it's opposite sides of the same coin. I'm seeing separation and pain as real.

Here is what we are asked to do:

***(Paragraph 3 - Sentences 9-10) Focus your mind only on this: I am not alone, and I would not intrude the past upon my Guest.***

Let me stop with that. The fundamental ego teaching is that we are alone—we have separated ourselves from God. He is a virtual non-entity in our life and we are on our own. "On our own" doesn't mean we are without the ego. To say that I am not alone means I am not without God. The ego tells me I am alone, which means I am without God, I am without the Holy Spirit, and my only friend is the ego. I project that out into the world. My only friends are other egos or other bodies.

Now, when we say that "I would not intrude the past upon my Guest," my past is always one of sin, and we intrude that sin upon the Holy Spirit—the Holy Spirit obviously is the Guest, that's why it's with a capital "G". Then because I've sinned in the past, I deserve to be punished in the future. My perception

of the Holy Spirit is not of this loving presence of God's Love in my mind. It's of this wrathful presence of God in my mind, because I've projected my sin onto Him. I no longer accept the Holy Spirit as He is, which is the memory of God's Love. I see the Holy Spirit as I want Him to be, and the "I" that wants Him to be this way is the "I" that has become the ego. The ego wants the Holy Spirit to be an angry, wrathful presence. And so that's what I do: I intrude the past upon my Guest.

***(Paragraph 3 - Sentences 11-12) I have invited Him, and He is here. I need do nothing except not to interfere.***

I recognize that I am upset—whether I'm upset because of my suffering and pain, or because of your suffering and pain—because I have disinvited the Holy Spirit. I have therefore alienated myself from Him. I am alone with this thought system which is predicated on aloneness—that's what separation is. And that's the problem. If I recognize that's the problem and I change my mind, that changing my mind is the invitation to the Holy Spirit. Then I recognize that I don't have to do anything with the situation, because nothing has to be done, there is no problem here. All I have to do is to step back and not interfere with that flow of love that is within me. As long as I believe I am here, that love will flow from my mind into the dream, and I will automatically know what I should do.

To use the example of the stray cats—rather than feel sorry for the stray cats or that I am responsible for them, I would realize I am seeing the stray cats in the rainstorm as a problem because I have separated myself from the Holy Spirit or Jesus. If I looked at those cats with Jesus, I would look at the whole thing differently. I would realize that what I am seeing in them is a projection of myself, and that I am not a stray any more than they are. I have given the objective fact of the stray cats within the dream a meaning it doesn't have. The meaning I have given those stray cats is that they are innocent victims of a cold, heartless, cruel world that God doesn't care about. That's the interpretation I have given the situation.

I can give it another interpretation—I can see the stray cats as a mirror of myself. I believe I am a stray and that I am all alone in a world that doesn't care about me, a world that is governed by a God Who doesn't care about me. Once I see it that I am giving it that meaning, then I can change that meaning. I can say: That is how my ego sees things, because that is what my ego is—a belief that I am separated from God and alone. I could just as well join with Jesus or the Holy Spirit and, through joining with Their love, I would then look at myself and the stray cats differently.

This basically is what the whole mind training of the Course is about—I find myself getting caught up with the drama of the world, regardless of the form, whether it's a drama that involves my own body and my own life, or the life of someone I love or someone out in the world whom I don't even know. I know I'm getting caught when I find myself seeing separation and difference, and making judgments. It's not too difficult to begin to train my mind to see that. I don't necessarily have to let go of the belief, but I can recognize when I'm seeing differences. When I feel sorry for someone, obviously I am seeing that person as different from me or from other people. When that begins to happen I can then say a prayer such as these lines, realizing that I am feeling this way because I pushed the Holy Spirit away, and that I can really feel different if I invite Him back in. From that place of love in my mind, from that meeting place that we talked about earlier, I would automatically know the most loving response in terms of form. This requires a lot of discipline, a lot of practice, a lot of mind training. That's why the Course refers to itself as mind training. It's a totally different way of looking at absolutely everything in the world, without exception. Any time I feel myself identifying with anybody's pain or suffering, or joy, it's

because I'm seeing that person as different. I'm seeing through the eyes of the ego and I will never find real peace.