

True Empathy

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

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Part VIII

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

(Paragraph 5 - Sentence 1) The triumph of weakness is not what you would offer to a brother.

The word "triumph" here is important and is central later on when the Course talks about special relationships. Basically, when I feel sorry for you, am concerned for you, want to help you, and am empathizing with you from the ego's point of view, I'm really joining with you in an alliance against God.

Lesson 190 "I choose the joy of God instead of pain" states: "If God is real, there is no pain. If pain is real, there is no God" (3:3-4). They are mutually exclusive states. If one is true, the other is not true. If I choose to identify with my ego there is no Holy Spirit in my mind at that moment. If I choose to identify with the Holy Spirit, the ego disappears.

Pain is an inherent part of the ego system. There is the original pain of feeling separated from our Source and cut off from our Home, which gets translated by the ego into sin, guilt, and fear of punishment—all of which end up in the body. There's either the pain of the ego or the Love of God—it is one or the other. I'm the one who chooses. If I choose pain, it's because I feel God is the enemy. Pain then becomes a way of keeping God away from me. Choosing God, choosing to identify with the Holy Spirit, is a way of keeping the ego away. But it is one or the other.

When I choose to identify with you and with your pain, weakness, and littleness, I'm joining with you in our war against God, because I'm saying pain is real. Even more to the point, what I'm saying is Jesus won't help you, but I will. This is a reflection of the original ego thought that says to me: "The Holy Spirit won't help you; I will help you. If you join with the Holy Spirit, He will destroy you. If you join with me, I will hide with you away from the wrath of God, and we'll be safe."

That's the original ego thought: God won't help you—He is angry; I will help you. In this world, that translates to: Jesus won't help you, I will help you. Jesus won't help you because either he's angry at you, or he's too busy, he's too indifferent or too insensitive, or he doesn't even know about this; but I will help you. I am using you as a way of triumphing over him. I'm using you as a way of proving, again, that I am greater than God. I am more loving than God; I am more concerned than God, etc. That is what all of this is about.

(Paragraph 5 - Sentence 2) And yet you recognize no triumph but this.

We don't know how to be in this world except through specialness. That's what the world is, that's what the ego is—a belief in specialness. I am more special than God, and I have to make a bargain with Him so that He won't be angry with me. The whole world is based on that. We are all very good at that. We are all very good at knowing how to manipulate other people so we get what we want.

As infants we learn very quickly that if we want to be fed we make a racket—we start crying. If we want to be changed, we cry, and it almost always works. We know that if we want our parents' attention, we smile, because parents love little babies who smile at them. Then our parents won't feel guilty for what they believe they've done in usurping God's power to create—because babies are a symbol of what we've done against God. We learn that the way we can get what we want is to make other people feel good. So we learn very quickly what will make other people feel good, and then we give it to them so we will get what we want. That's specialness, that's triumphing, and that's what we all know about. We don't know about the other way. The ego says: "If you don't do such and such a thing, then you're not going to get what you want. This person won't pay any attention to you, or this person will not pay you unless you sell something. And if you don't get what you want, how will you exist?" The only way we can exist and survive is through specialness. And we're all very, very good at that. We don't know about the other way. Recognizing that helps us understand why this takes time. We begin step by step. I realize I could really be happy in a relationship with this person without having to sell my soul for it. I don't have to keep on indulging in these weird bargains of the ego.

(Paragraph 5 - Sentence 3) This is not knowledge [in other words, this kind of joining is not of God or the Holy Spirit], **and the form of empathy which would bring this about is so distorted that it would imprison what it would release.**

We want to believe that by joining with people through feeling sorry for them, we are really joining and expressing love. There's the magical hope that by joining with another body I will undo the tremendous guilt that came from my separating. Rather than undo the thought in my mind, I try to undo it where the thought is not. I believe that by being a good person here, by being concerned and loving and kind and thoughtful, by doing good in the world and making people feel happy, I can go to God and say: "I am not a bad person. I am not this sinful person. I am really a good person. I am this loving person; look at how many people I've saved today."

We want to join through the body without realizing that that is not going to release us from our guilt. Rather it imprisons us still further in our guilt. The real source of guilt in my mind, the thought of having separated from the Love of God, stays put. We have the magical hope we have taken care of the problem when we haven't done anything with it at all. The problem still stays in my mind; we have just solved it over here. That is what the Course means when it says, "The ego's maxim [is] 'Seek but do not find'" (T-16.V.6:5). We are always seeking the solution to problems that do not exist. And we think we solve them here.

So I save you today, and I feel wonderful. But I have to do the same damn thing again tomorrow. I have to save you again tomorrow, or save another person tomorrow, because my guilt is always there. There's always that need to join with other people's misery, to help them and to save them. That's the big temptation of people who do psychotherapy. Because of the very nature of psychotherapy, the therapist is dealing with people who have problems and the therapist knows the answer.

(Paragraph 5 - Sentences 4-5) The unredeemed cannot redeem, yet they have a Redeemer [the Holy Spirit]. **Attempt to teach Him not.**

In other words, as long as I believe that I am separate from love, how can I possibly love? As long as I believe that I have not joined with the Love of God within me, how can I possibly be an instrument of joining with anybody else? By the way, in earlier editions, "Him" was not capitalized—it should be a

capital "H". This is saying that we shouldn't try to teach the Holy Spirit. But that's what we are always doing; we are trying to teach the Holy Spirit how He should love, how He should help people. This is the whole insane idea of praying to God for other people. The underlying premise is that if we don't tell God to help this sick person, He isn't going to know about this person. So we pray to God that He will intercede for this person who is sick, or for this problem in the world, or that He will help us find a cure for cancer, etc.

In other words, we have to teach the Holy Spirit how to do His job. Of course, that is another example of the arrogance of the ego. We should all be very glad and grateful that the Holy Spirit doesn't pay one bit of attention to what we say to Him, because if He did He would be as insane as we are. The Holy Spirit knows that the answer to our prayers lies in our coming with Him and to Him in the mind. The problem is not the person who is dying of cancer. The problem is my *concern* over the person who is dying of cancer. I don't ask the Holy Spirit to intercede to fix a body. I ask the Holy Spirit—which really means I ask myself to join with the Holy Spirit—to fix my mind that thinks there's a problem.

A passage later in the text says that the miracle teaches us it is not the body that is sick; it is the mind that is sick that thinks the body is sick (T-28.II.11:6-7). That is where the sickness is. We don't ask the Holy Spirit what to do; we don't have to teach Him how to pay attention to a world that He doesn't even recognize. We have to join with Him so we can share His vision and realize the problem is not out here. I don't want to join with the sickness. I want to join with the love in my mind that is the end of the sickness.

(Paragraph 5 - Sentence 6) You are the learner; He the Teacher.

Of course that's another thing that the ego does not like, because this really is another way of saying that God is the Creator, we are the created. We don't like that, because we don't like to be in second place. So that is exactly where we place the Holy Spirit. But if we are good students of the Course, we cannot let it look like that, so we are always asking the Holy Spirit what to do. However, we are always asking Him what to do about a specific thing, which means we structure what the problem is and then ask His help to solve that problem—and we get angry when He does not solve it for us.

We are the ones who have to learn that we do not understand anything. That is what these paragraphs have been saying. We understand absolutely nothing. We especially do not understand what the problems are, because we think the problems all have to do with the body. We think the problems have to do with the people who are homeless, or the people who have AIDS, or the people who are addicts, or the people who make war on other countries. We think we know what the problems are. None of these is the problem. We think that the problem is the budget and the scarcity in the United States Treasury. That is not the problem. The problem is the scarcity that is in our minds. We are always asking the Holy Spirit to help us with the problems of the world.

"You are the learner, He the Teacher" means that we should not presume to know or to understand what has to be done. What we want to learn from Him is to recognize where the problem really is: in the mind. We want to understand that joining is not of one body with another; joining is with Him.

(Paragraph 5 - Sentence 7) Do not confuse your role with His, for this will never bring peace to anyone.

This is also a major theme which comes up later in the text, in the section called "The Little Willingness" (T-18.VIII). We are always confusing our role with His. Someone who is a do-gooder is someone who is usurping God's role.

Everybody does this—parents, teachers, friends—we all do it. We all confuse our role. In fact, that is one of the important themes in the *Psychotherapy* pamphlet, which says that there is one basic error the advanced therapist never makes—he never confuses his role with God's. Feeling we have an answer that someone else does not have is what this is talking about.

This does not mean on the level of form. If I am a teacher in a school, and I am teaching children how to read and write and how to understand things, obviously I have a lot of answers they do not have on the level of form. That is not what this is talking about. I do *not* have the answer to the peace of God. It does not mean that a therapist does not give advice to a patient or help a person with the expertise the therapist has that the patient lacks. It means that the therapist does not make that difference into a big deal. If I know how to fix something or I have a piece of information you do not have, it means I do not let the information or the knowledge that you lack make any difference in terms of our both being one in God. The fact that I have information you lack does not justify a judgment against you that keeps me believing that we are separate because I am better.

When Jesus says, "Do not confuse your role with His [the Holy Spirit's]," he means don't presume that we know what the problem is, and therefore that we know what the solution is. Our job is not to solve problems. Our responsibility is simply to bring all the seeming problems to him. Our responsibility is simply to undo our belief that we are right and God is wrong. This is not a course in doing—it is a course in *undoing*. It is a course in looking at the ego thought system and saying, "I made a mistake." In that important line Jesus asks, "Do you prefer that you be right or happy?" (T-29.VII.1:9). We all want to be right, because that is what proves that we were right in the beginning when we chose the ego over the Holy Spirit.

When we feel that we are right in understanding a person's problem, or a social problem that needs a solution, then we know that we are wrong. Now, we may have a certain idea about the problem, but when we become invested in the idea and identified with the thought, for example, that we know what's wrong and those stupid people in Washington don't know what is wrong, then we realize we are into separation, difference, judgment, and attack. At that point, everybody is wrong.

Now this does not mean that I am indifferent to the plight of others, although it depends on what I mean by "indifference." With the indifference of the ego, which really is a subtle form of attack, I turn my back on your suffering. And if I am *A Course in Miracles'* student, I could use the Course to justify that. In contrast, the indifference that the Course would talk about in a positive way is indifference to any specific *form* of suffering, but not indifference on the level of *content*, because I am aware that the suffering on the level of form is not the problem. Suffering on the level of content is that you are suffering because you believe you are separated from God. I am suffering from the same problem. By ministering to you on the level of form and joining with you, what I am really doing, if I am doing this right, is joining with myself. The indifference of the Holy Spirit is indifference to the *form* but not to the *content*. The ego is really indifferent to both. Doing the Course right, as we will see as we continue,

does not mean that I turn my back on people's suffering, or that I do not do something for the homeless or the people with AIDS or addicts, or sick cats, or whatever. It does not mean that I turn my back at all. It means that I can be more fully present to you, because I am indifferent to the *form* of suffering. I realize that the form is simply a cover for the underlying content that everyone shares. Because we all share the same content, there's no separating out one group from another.

Often these days, people with AIDS have become the saints for many New Age groups, and even people involved with the Course. These are the people, it is said, who give everybody a wonderful chance to learn how we are not victims, as *they* learn *they* are not victims. But it is as if there is something almost special about them. Similarly, many years ago, when R. D. Laing did his work with schizophrenics, it became a temptation for people to think the schizophrenics were the saints because they were closer in touch with what was true. That's absurd! The idea is you form special groups, so now those with AIDS are everybody's darlings. The thought seems to be that we are really going to advance spiritually because we are going to give our lives to those who have AIDS. There is nothing wrong with that, but how about the people who have stubbed toes or ingrown toe nails? They believe that they are bodies, too. If my mind is healed, I am indifferent to the *forms* that suffering takes, because I realize the underlying *content*—just being in this world is suffering.

(Paragraph 5 - Sentences 8-9) Offer your empathy to Him [the Holy Spirit] for it *His* perception and *His* strength that you would share. And let Him offer you His strength and His perception, to be shared through you.

We do not want the perception of the ego, the perception of weakness, of people in pain and in trouble; rather, we want the Holy Spirit's perception, His Love and His strength. I first want to share my perception with Him, so I join with Him, and then, inevitably and automatically, that joining with the Love and strength of the Holy Spirit in my mind will extend to everyone else.

The Course explains that a fundamental characteristic of the mind is that whatever is within it must be projected outside. If I join with the ego, I join with separation, littleness, weakness, and guilt. They must then be projected out, giving rise to a world of littleness, weakness, and guilt. If I join with the Love of the Holy Spirit or Jesus in my mind, then that love will automatically extend through my mind.

Projection and extension are the exact same dynamic. The difference is that projection begins with guilt and extension begins with love. But the process is the same. I look within and what I see within is what I will experience without. If I look within and see guilt, separation, and weakness, that is what I will experience outside. If I look within and see the love, peace, and strength of Christ, that is what I will experience outside.