

True Empathy

Excerpts from the Workshop held at the
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Part X

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

(Paragraph 2 - Sentences 1-2) No mind is sick until another mind agrees that they are separate. And thus it is their joint decision to be sick.

Obviously, this has no meaning to anyone who believes that this world is real. This only has meaning when we can step back and rise above the battleground, above the world of the body, and look down from that point in the mind where the love and the truth of Jesus stand with us. We then can realize that sickness has nothing at all to do with the body. Sickness is the decision to be separate. As I have been saying, these lines help us understand and appreciate just how radical this thought system is. All sickness—in fact, everything of the body—is of the mind, because there is nothing in the body.

The temptation always is to join with the person's sickness—we try to make the sickness or the physical pain or the psychological pain go away. This is as insane as sitting in a movie theater watching a movie, when all of a sudden something goes wrong with the film, so that what is on the screen begins going up and down, and everybody runs up to the screen to try to fix the problem on the screen. There is no problem on the screen. There is nothing on the screen. The problem is in the projector or the film. That is where to go to fix what is wrong with what we are seeing outside ourselves. Well, when we run to help each other by trying to fix a physical problem, it is just as insane. Whether it is a problem of the body, or of an emotional response, or of something external, what we are doing is just as insane as rushing up to a movie screen and trying to fix what is wrong.

All we are seeing on the screen is a projection of what is wrong in the film projector or the film. Similarly, what we are seeing in someone's sick body is an out picturing or a projection of what's wrong with the film of guilt that is running through the mind. Basically we are seeing a wrong decision to identify with the ego instead of the Holy Spirit. And yet we continually rush up to the screen to try to soothe and comfort each other and to fix the problem here. We want to put a band-aid on the screen, or on the body, rather than to go back to the source of the problem in the mind.

(Paragraph 2 - Sentence 3) If you withhold agreement and accept the part you play in making sickness real, the other mind cannot project its guilt without your aid in letting it perceive itself as separate and apart from you.

The part we play in making sickness real is in turning to the ego instead of to the Holy Spirit. At the moment we drop the hand of Jesus and join with the ego, we become sick. It must be one or the other—if we drop his hand we take the ego's; if we drop the ego's hand we take his. At the moment we drop his hand, we are sick. Our bodies may not reflect that choice immediately—we are all very good at denying

all the distress that comes from our belief that we are separate from God's Love. The sickness is our believing we are alone and that we can handle things our way.

This does not mean that, from your point of view, you cannot still project guilt onto me. But if I don't take it seriously, if I don't let it affect me or rob me of the Love and peace of God, the projection goes absolutely nowhere. Basically this is what Jesus did for us in the world. Others projected wildly onto him but since he did not take it personally, he did not make their seeming attacks real. He did not let what they did affect his reality and his remembrance of who he was as a child of God. It had no effect.

That basically is the Course's way of describing how forgiveness works—we show each other that the seeming cause has had no effect. When you attack me and I get angry or feel hurt, I am saying to you, "Your sin against me is the cause of my being so upset. And by seeing how upset I am, by seeing how hurt you have made me feel, you should feel guilty about what you have done." In other words, once again, "Behold me brother, at your hand I die" (T-27.I.4:6).

My death—whether it is an actual physical death or the "little death" the Course refers to as sickness (T-27.I.4:8), or even just being mildly upset—is my way of saying to you, "Look at the miserable effects of what you have done. You should feel guilty accordingly."

We are asked to demonstrate to each other that our seeming sins against each other have had no effect at all. No matter what you have done, my love for you is unchanged. No matter what you have done or failed to do, the peace of God within me is still present. You have not taken it away.

At that point then, no matter what you have done—whether you have consciously tried to attack me or not—I show you it has had no effect. This means your projection goes nowhere and I am not reinforcing your thought system. To the contrary—I am showing you that there is another thought system in the mind. By choosing that thought system for myself, I am reinforcing the part of your mind that can make the same choice. Again, Jesus did that for all of us, and he asks us simply to manifest that choice as much as we can, to and for each other.

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(Paragraph 2 - Sentences 4-6) Thus is the body not perceived as sick by both your minds from separate points of view. Uniting with a brother's mind prevents the cause of sickness and perceived effects. Healing is the effect of minds that join, as sickness comes from minds that separate.

This basically is talking about what goes on within the individual mind. The cause of sickness is the perception, or the belief, in being separate. Once we define that as the cause of sickness, then healing—the undoing of sickness—must be joining. If we begin by understanding that sickness comes from separating from the Love of God, then healing comes from joining with the Love of God.

Invariably, when I separate from the Love of God, drop the hand of Jesus, and say he is getting too close, I project the responsibility for that on to you. So I do not experience *myself* as separate from God, I experience you as having taken that Love of God from me. Now I am not only separate from God, I am also separate from you because of what you have done. That is where my attention is, so that is where I have to begin. Forgiveness says that what I thought you did to me you did *not* do to me. I am sick because of a decision I made, not because of something you have done. In my mind, I accept that you and I are brothers or sisters in Christ, that we are not separate. By letting you off the hook—I recognize

that you are not the cause of my distress, / am—I am saying that you and I are no longer separate. Having undone the separation I placed between you and me, what remains is the oneness and the joining that was already there.

Remember, we do not join in an active way, because we are already joined. We remove the belief in separation that keeps that joining separate from our awareness. By saying you are not responsible, I am joining with you. What allows me to do that is that in another part of my mind I have rejoined Jesus or the Holy Spirit—I cannot join with you or forgive you without first joining with them.

Again, the cause of sickness is separating from the Holy Spirit, which gets expressed in my separating from you. The effect of that is my being sick. When the cause is removed by joining, the effect is what we call healing. Most of the time the Course speaks of healing as an effect, which means that I feel different. But the true healing is not of the body; the true healing is of the mind that has been separate.

(Paragraph 3 - Sentence 1) The miracle does nothing just *because* the minds are joined, and cannot separate.

This states clearly that the miracle literally does not do anything because we are already one. We do not have to join with each other. We do not have to join with other groups of people. We do not have to join with the planet. We do not have to do any of these things, because we are already joined. We simply accept the joining that is there. What allows us to accept that is rejoining ourselves with the Love of God. When we identify with that Love within, we automatically remember that we are joined with everyone else. So the miracle simply undoes the block that kept our true joining hidden from us.

(Paragraph 3 - Sentence 2) Yet in the dreaming has this been reversed, and separate minds are seen as bodies, which are separated and which cannot join.

In other words, all of this is a dream. And, of course, the ego has turned everything around. We begin by separating ourselves from God and the Holy Spirit, and we then take those thoughts of separation, project them onto a world, made up to be separate, and we experience everybody else as separate from us. The separate thoughts in the mind, which began with the thought of being separate from God, become "embodied" in a body, and all bodies appear to be separate.

(Paragraph 3 - Sentence 3) Do not allow your brother to be sick, for if he is have you abandoned him to his own dream by sharing it with him.

This does not mean I physically stop you from being sick. It is saying, instead, that I should not allow you to be sick in my mind by making your error real. If you believe that you are sick, and I react to you as if you are sick, which means that in my mind I allow your sickness to disrupt my state of peace, then I become as sick as you are. I am telling you that you are right.

(Paragraph 3 - Sentence 4) He has not seen the cause of sickness where it is, and you have overlooked the gap between you, where the sickness has been bred.

The first part of the sentence states that if you believe you are sick, it is because you have forgotten that the cause of sickness is in your mind. You believe you are sick because of a germ or something that has occurred within your body, forgetting where the sickness really is. The sickness lies in the gap.

The second part talks about the gap, which is an important phrase in this part of the text. The little gap is the gap we perceive between ourselves and God. This little gap is the cause of sickness, because we have made the gap real. We have said there really is a gap; there really is a separation between me and God. That gets expressed secondarily then as a gap between me and the Holy Spirit.

So I first had the "tiny, mad idea" of being separate from God. Then I separated myself from the Holy Spirit's Voice which is the memory of God's Love, saying: "No, that's not what it sounds like. It's not a memory of love; it's really a memory of hate and wrath, and I should be separate from it." It is the perception of a gap that I have made real. So when I project that thought onto a world, I make up a world filled with gaps, such as the gap between your body and my body. That is what bodies do, they separate, and so there are gaps everywhere. The entire cosmos is made up of gaps—the empty space between stars and planets; the gaps made by land and water on planet earth; and most important, the gaps between ourselves. So sickness and bodies maintain our perception that the gap is real.

When I identify with your sickness, I am overlooking the gap in my mind, and instead seeing it in the world. I am saying there is a gap between your body and my body. But the gap is not there at all. The gap is not between bodies because there are no bodies. The gap is in my mind. Yet rather than look at the gap in my mind, I see it between us, which, again, is exactly what the ego wants me to see. The ego does not want me to perceive the separation between myself and God as the problem. It wants me to perceive the problem within my body.

The sickness has not been bred in the body. The sickness is not the cancer or the AIDS virus that is eating away at my body. The sickness is bred in the little gap in my mind. But the ego wants me to get as far away from that gap as possible. If I go back to where the gap is, I will also hear the Voice of the Holy Spirit and realize, finally, that this Voice is my friend, not the enemy. The ego's purpose is to get us as far away from the mind as possible.

(Paragraph 3 - Sentence 5) Thus are you joined in sickness, to preserve the little gap unhealed, where sickness is kept carefully protected, cherished, and upheld by firm belief, lest God should come to bridge the little gap that leads to Him.

This one sentence succinctly expresses the whole thought system of the ego with its purpose of keeping God away. The little gap between ourselves and God that we perceive as so real has already been undone and bridged by the Holy Spirit, the memory of God's Love. If we identify with that Love, we remember it and then the little gap is gone. The ego wants to keep the undoing as far away from us as possible. That is why it invents this whole story, telling us God is angry and wrathful, and we do not want to be anywhere near Him.

To repeat, sickness helps us keep the little gap unhealed, because sickness keeps our attention on the body and away from the mind where the gap is. The gap is perceived between two separate bodies, or within my own body when my body does not work right. The purpose of sickness, like anger or anything else in the world, is to distract us from where the problem really is. We choose it because we do not want God to come.

(Paragraph 3 - Sentence 6) Fight not His coming with illusions, for it is His coming that you want above all things that seem to glisten in the dream.

Jesus is saying, "Stop trying to defend the thought that you are right. Stop trying to convince yourself that I am wrong and you are right. Just listen to what I am telling you—everything you do in this world is an illusion, designed to keep the Love of God away from you. And yet you want the Love of God more than anything in the world. Nothing that glitters or glistens in this world, nothing that attracts you here is worth throwing away the Love of God." The more we can understand that, when we are angry or sick, or when we empathize with people who are sick, we are making a decision to keep God's Love away from us, the less we will do it.

In other words, the whole purpose of the Course is to restore to us the idea that we do have a choice between miracles and murder, as the text says (T-23.IV.5:5-6). We have a clear choice between being miserable and being happy, between being with God in love or being outside Heaven in pain. The problem is we do not know we have a choice. The only choice we believe we have is to kill or be killed (M-17.7:11). The ego allows us to experience only one choice—Do I get killed first or do you get killed first? This ends up, of course, not being much of a choice, because even if I win now, at some point my body is going to die, and God will have the last word. That is the only choice that we believe we have.

The only purpose of the miracle is to restore to us the awareness that we have another choice. It does not matter what my problem is—I may be sick, annoyed, angry, or I may feel myself becoming critical, I may be depressed, or I may be making your problems real, which I would only do because I want to make my problems real. But if I can be clear that I am using my problem to keep the love of Jesus away, then I won't do it anymore. The Course places a strong emphasis, as part of its whole process, on developing a personal relationship with Jesus or the Holy Spirit. I want to be able to say to Jesus, without judging myself or judging somebody else, "You've gotten too close. I have to push you away. And the way I push you away is to get sick, to get angry, to get depressed, to make stupid mistakes, to get people angry at me, to fall on my face, etc. I've done this because you were too close, and I was too afraid of being happy." That is what undoes the seeds of sickness, because the sickness is festering right here in my choice to separate from Jesus and to choose the ego instead. Sickness has nothing to do with the world or the body. It has nothing to do with your body or my body.