

True Empathy

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

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Part XX

T-2.IV.5

The context of the final paragraph of the section "Healing as Release from Fear" is the idea of translating the content into whatever form is most helpful.

The value of the Atonement does not lie in the manner in which it is expressed. In fact, if it is used truly, it will inevitably be expressed in whatever way is most helpful to the receiver.

The value of the Atonement is the *content*, its *meaning*, not the form in which it is expressed. As an example, I would like to relate a situation that occurred many years ago in a Course group in New York City. One of the members of the group had cancer and was in the hospital and was dying. Some of the members of the group went to visit her and were very upset. They went into the hospital room armed with their *Course in Miracles*. They told her, "Don't you know sickness is a defense against the truth? If you really believed in this, which you said you did, then you'd get up out of your bed and leave the hospital with us and the cancer would disappear." And it went downhill after that. Needless to say, the poor lady in her bed did not find this very comforting or helpful, got very angry, and I think asked them to leave.

That is a wonderful example of the confusion of form and content. What they were teaching her was absolutely correct on the level of form—sickness is a defense against the truth, etc.—but it was not very loving. The problem was that they confused the form with the content. They thought the problem was the cancer in her body. The problem was that she believed she was separate. Well, once we understand that the problem is that the other person believes that he or she is separate from God, and therefore from all the different aspects and fragments of Christ, then the solution is to join. Those people did not come to the hospital room to join with the dying woman—they came to her room to teach her. If they had realized that the problem was separation, then the answer would have been obvious—join. And if we first join with Jesus before we go into the hospital room, then the expression of that joining will be loving. We will join in whatever way will be helpful to the one who is sick, which obviously at that point would be to do what normal people do. I comfort you if you are sick. I bring flowers, I bring a book, I do whatever I can to make you feel physically and psychologically comfortable—I join with you on the level of form that you can accept.

In effect, the woman in the hospital bed was saying, "I believe I am separate from God, and the fear of that is overwhelming. The only way that I can accept love and forgiveness for what I have accused myself of doing is to have people be nice to me and to comfort my sick body and my sick brain, in terms of all the distress I am feeling." In other words, simply by the fact that she is sick and in pain, she was

saying, "This is the form in which I will accept love; this is the *only* form that I can accept love in at this time." The people coming in to see her would hear that, if they were coming without an investment.

In *The Song of Prayer*, near the end, Jesus asks us to say to our brother, "What can I do for you, God's holy Son?" This woman's friends could have walked into the hospital room with that question in mind—not that they would have verbalized the question. But if their ears were open to hearing what Jesus was asking them to hear and not what the ego was asking them to hear, it would have been very obvious that the woman was asking to be physically and psychologically comforted. That is the form in which she could accept joining. The *content* of the Atonement is the joining. The *means* in which it is expressed would be comforting her physically and psychologically—not teaching or preaching to her, which obviously is an attack.

There is another level to get to in order to understand what happened with the woman. The lesson then can be generalized to all other kinds of circumstances. The people visiting her did not first pay attention to what was in their own minds. If they had, they would have been aware that they were upset by her dream of fear. Her dream of fear was that she was dying of cancer and that upset them. But they were not paying attention to that. If they had been, they would have first brought the dream of fear back to their own minds and realized the problem was not the woman's dream of fear—it was *their* dream of fear. Then they would have realized what they were really upset about: namely, that if this person got cancer, someone who had been a student of the Course and a member of their group for a number of years, that must mean the Course does not work. If it did not work for her, then it will not work for them either—that is the fear. They did not pay attention to what was inside their minds. They decided what the problem was—this friend was dying of cancer, that was a terrible thing, and the answer was to hit her over the head with *A Course in Miracles*. They were wrong right from the beginning. The problem was not that she was dying of cancer. The problem was that she separated from the Love of God. And the answer to that is to express the Love of God to her in whatever form would be most helpful. That is true empathy.

False empathy could come in either form—either in feeling sorry for the person, or in getting angry at the person, as this group did. But it does not matter. They are opposite forms of the same mistake, because they make the problem real. They share in the illusion that the dream of fear is a reality. Her group forgot that the problem was not the dream of cancer—the problem was the dreamer who believed she could separate from God's Love.

This means that a miracle, to attain its full efficacy, must be expressed in a language that the recipient can understand without fear.

Very often, if a person has chosen to be sick, that person already is afraid of the Course's language and teachings—to use the Course as a specific example here. What we have to do, again, is to express the Course's love and Jesus' love in whatever form would be helpful, a form that the person can accept without fear. This is extremely simple to do once we have no investment in the form, or in the outcome, or in the dream—because then we realize it does not make any difference.

This does not necessarily mean that this is the highest level of communication of which he is capable. It does mean, however, that it is the highest level of communication of which he is capable *now*. The whole aim of the miracle is to raise the level of communication, not to lower it by increasing fear.

We may be aware that this is not the highest level this person can understand or relate to, but it is where that person is now. Who are we to judge where people are and what they need? This is no problem once we are able to be with a person or hear about a situation without an investment in the outcome, without a need to see separation, difference, judgment, or attack.

Another good example of this—of really loving people in the form they can accept, even though it is not the highest level of communication or understanding of which they are capable—is the way Helen experienced Jesus with her over the years. Let me give one specific example:

One way Helen kept the love of Jesus at arms' length was by becoming preoccupied with her body, as we all are—specifically, in clothing her body. She loved to shop. Her two areas of weakness were jewelry and shoes. In the years that I knew her, she had set aside the jewelry part—she was no longer very much into that—but she was still into shoes. That was a wonderful way of distracting herself from Jesus. She was always buying shoes that did not fit, which meant that she would have to go back the next week to exchange them, and this went on and on. The distraction purpose of this was obvious—Helen was a master at it. Her experience was that Jesus went shopping with her. In fact, at one point in the early weeks of dictating the Course to her, he urged her to ask him to join her. He referred to himself as a part of the Higher Shopping Service, and he asked her to avail herself of this service. And she did. He would tell her where to go to buy what she needed. Sometimes it would be at stores that she would never have gone to otherwise, but she would find exactly what she wanted. She would go to buy a dress—perhaps she needed a size 10—and she would be told to look in the size 14 racks, and there would be a size 10. The times that I was with her to see her do this were very impressive.

But the important thing was that her experience was that Jesus went with her. Even though what she was doing was obvious to her—she was a very wise woman—she never felt Jesus telling her not to do it. In other words, he expressed the Atonement, which was his love, in a form which she could accept without fear. It was very difficult for her to accept his help to forgive someone, and she very rarely asked his help in that regard. But she did ask his help for these minor things, because that was the only level on which she could experience his presence without a lot of fear—the Course being a big exception naturally.

One day—a few years after I had gotten to know Helen—we had left the Medical Center in the afternoon, and it was a nice day. Typically, we would have then stopped off at either Lord and Taylor or Altmans, or made our way down Fifth Avenue and cut across 34th Street to all the shoe stores. That would have killed the rest of the day. This day, as we were leaving the Medical Center, I said, "Where do you want to go today?" And Helen said, "Jesus told me I should not go shopping anymore because it would hurt me." She was able to say that without any anger, without any feeling of sacrifice or deprivation. And she never used shopping as a distraction after that. She would shop for necessities, but she did not do the kind of shopping that we used to do.

I think that example is extremely helpful. During all those years, her fear of Jesus was great and her need to shop was important as a defense. This is no different from the need to have cancer or AIDS, or the anxieties and worries that we all have—it does not make any difference. There is no order of difficulty in defenses. They are all the same. Helen's need for her defense was so great that Jesus did not try to take it away or break it down. He joined with her. Now this is the same person who dictated *A Course in Miracles*, and who tells us to be aware of all the trinkets that we put upon our body to "bait another

fish." And yet he was helping her do the very same thing. Jesus was joining with Helen in the illusion, until the time when her fear had lessened enough that she could let go of the defense. She could then experience his saying to her, "Don't go shopping anymore," and it was not a problem. If she had heard that ten years earlier, it would have driven her up a wall—and she would have shopped with even more of a vengeance than she already had done.

The example is very helpful to remember as well when we find ourselves tempted to tell people the "truth" and hit them over the head with it. Rather, what we want to do is love them. We do not want to hit them over the head with the "truth," which is always form. Love is never form. Truth is never form—it is content. It is expressed in form, but the form is not the love. Whether I am teaching you directly what *A Course in Miracles* is saying or I am going shopping with you, knowing full well what the meaning of the shopping is for you, if love is in my heart, that is the message that you will receive. And that is the message that I will be offering. I can only do that if I first join with love in my own mind. This always brings us back to the same issue, over and over again, that before we do anything we should try to be as clear as possible that we are taking Jesus' hand instead of the ego's. The hand of Jesus will always leave us peaceful. The hand of the ego will always leave us on a battleground, with the issue being the so-called truth of *A Course in Miracles* instead of the cancer or some form of suffering.

These ideas are similar to parts of the Course where Jesus asks us to take his hand and allow him to lead us through the world. But he can not take our fear away from us. As he says,

The correction of fear *is* your responsibility. When you ask for release from fear, you are implying it is not. You should ask instead for help in the conditions that have brought the fear about. These conditions always entail a willingness to be separate (T-2.VI.4:1-4).

Jesus is saying, "Ask me to join with you," which really means that we join with him. And that undoes the willingness to be separate—that is the undoing of fear. Helen's feeling that Jesus was shopping with her was her experience of his being with her—that was the healing. That is why we do not pray for physical healing from Jesus, although our experience of Jesus could be some form of healing. That would be our experience. But it would not be Jesus healing us—it would be what we can accept at that point in time.

Referring to *The Song of Prayer* again, which really is the best statement of this, Jesus says that what we want is the song. "It is the song that is the gift. Along with it come the overtones, the harmonics, the echoes, but these are secondary" (S-1.I.3:2-3). In other words, we want the abstract—we want the Love of God. We do not want the forms in which that love comes. The pamphlet, especially the early pages, was originally written for Helen. Jesus was telling her in effect—although he was not referring to the shopping as such—that it was not his shopping with her that she wanted. It was his love for her and her love for him that she wanted. We all start at the bottom of the ladder, and the bottom of the ladder is where we ask for things. The idea is not to stay there, however, but rather simply to use that as a way of getting over our fear of Jesus, so that we can begin to realize that what we want are not the things—not the parking spaces or the shoes or the healing of cancer. What we want is the Love of God.