

## True Empathy

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

I want to look at another section—the second part of **Lesson 184, "The Name of God is my inheritance.** "This will provide a framework in which to talk about specifics—ways in which we find ourselves getting upset and what we can do about it. When we get to this last part, we will stress the idea of looking at our ego with Jesus. The passage I am going to read is extremely helpful for any Course student or teacher who must deal with questions that imply that the Course or Jesus would ask us not to do things in the world—that things in the world are evil or bad or sinful. This is a wonderful passage to explain how that is a misreading of what the Course is teaching.

**Lesson 184 - "The Name of God is my inheritance."**

**(Paragraph 9 - Sentence 1) It would indeed be strange if you were asked to go beyond all symbols of the world, forgetting them forever; yet were asked to take a teaching function.**

This is Jesus' answer to the claim that he is asking us to go beyond all the symbols of the world and just disappear into the heart of God. He is not saying that. It would be impossible for us to teach if we did not speak the language of the world. It would be impossible for us to learn if our Teacher, meaning the Holy Spirit, or the Course, did not speak to us in our language. Remember, the Course does not have us jump from the ego's dreams of fear back into reality. It has us move from the ego's dreams of fear into the Holy Spirit's happy dreams of forgiveness and peace. The happy dreams are still within the world, within the illusion, but they are now the ego's dreams, transformed in content.

Using Helen's shopping as an example: She made up shopping and used it as a defense against Jesus, and therefore as an attack on him. It was a way to limit his love and to exclude him. In the cosmic context, the Course says that "this world was made as an attack on God . . . and was meant to be a place where God could enter not" (W-III.3.2:1,4). Similarly, we can say shopping was made by Helen as an attack on Jesus and as a place where he could enter not. So what she made up to exclude, he used to include. He used her symbols—the symbols of shopping—to join with her, so the content became shopping with him. He made a joke of it and spoke of his help as the "Higher Shopping Service." Jesus was encouraging Helen to join with him on a level she could accept without fear, because it was very difficult for her to accept joining with him on the level of forgiveness. It was much easier for her to join with him on the level of green panty hose, so that is what she did. So Jesus used her symbol, even though it was a hateful one because its purpose was to exclude him. He just changed the content.

Helen also used the symbols of the Catholic Church—going to Mass and saying rosaries. These were not holy activities for her—they were distraction devices. They seemed a little better because the form seemed better than shopping. But her purpose was still the same. Nevertheless, when we would go to Mass together or say rosaries together, she would invariably have experiences of Jesus—even though

the activity itself was a defense against him. While the symbol initially had an ego meaning for Helen, its meaning was transformed by the Holy Spirit or Jesus. The section in the text, called "The Special Function," explains how the special relationships that we made to harm, the Holy Spirit uses as a means to heal (T-25.VI.4:1). Also the point of the passage I quoted earlier is that the Holy Spirit never takes the special relationship away from us—He transforms it (T-17.IV.2:3). That is what this is talking about. We are not asked to go beyond the symbols of the world.

**(Paragraph 9 - Sentences 2-3) You have need to use the symbols of the world a while. But be you not deceived by them as well.**

In other words, do not confuse form with content. The form—the symbol in and of itself—is meaningless. It is the content that gives it its meaning. And there are only two contents: the content of fear or the content of love; the content of the ego or the content of the Holy Spirit. The symbol itself does not mean anything. That is what Jesus means in telling us: "Be you not deceived by them." We have to use them because we believe that *we* are a symbol. We believe we are the dream. We have forgotten that we are the dreamer of the dream—so we believe we are the dream of a body and a personality, of a past, present, and future. They are symbols. The body is a symbol—all the other things derived from the body and the world are symbols.

We made the body as a symbol of limitation on love and of attack on God. The Holy Spirit can use the body as a communication device—as a means by which, once we join with Him, we can join with each other. The forms of joining do not make any difference. They have no meaning. That is why it is always a mistake to put a hierarchy of meaning or value on the different things of the world. One activity is no better or no holier than any other.

Helen could find Jesus when she went shopping or when she was sitting in a church—it made no difference, even though the world would judge and value shopping as different from being in church.

**(Paragraph 9 - Sentence 4) They [the symbols] do not stand for anything at all, and in your practicing it is this thought that will release you from them.**

In and of themselves, the symbols have no meaning—they do not stand for anything. We have to give them their meaning. And the meaning is to be either a means of separation or a means of joining.

**(Paragraph 9 - Sentence 5) They become but means by which you can communicate in ways the world can understand, but which you recognize is not the unity where true communication can be found.**

Using Jesus and Helen as the example: Jesus knows that shopping means absolutely nothing. He knows that shopping has nothing to do with the Love or the unity of God. But for Helen shopping was an important personal symbol. And so he joined with her and transformed the meaning of the symbol. Even though he knew that the symbol in and of itself meant nothing, and he knew that the symbol as Helen had used it was an attack, his joining with her gave it a different meaning. At that point, a symbol becomes holy—not because it is holy in and of itself, but because the purpose it now serves is holy.

Therefore, visiting a sick friend in a hospital bed and bringing flowers is no different from walking in with *A Course in Miracles* and preaching from it. One form is no different, or more or less holy than any other. What matters is the purpose that is given it—that is extremely important. When I really look at suffering and sickness in the world with Jesus next to me, I transfer the suffering from the body, and

from the dream to the dreamer. At that point I can join with the dreamer, as we read earlier. I identify with the dreamer, with the mind, and I realize that another's suffering and pain is exactly like mine.

The *form* may be very different. You may be dying of cancer and I am not. But our suffering is still the same, because we both believe we are separate from God. And that is what I join with. But I first join with the love of Jesus within me, which then enables me to join with the love of Jesus within you. That love will then take whatever form will be most helpful to you at that point, and I will have no investment in the form in which it comes.

I have now redefined the suffering—the suffering and the pain are not of the body. There may be millions of starving children in Africa; but the suffering does not come from their being starved for food. They are starved for the Love of God. And it is the same starvation that I am experiencing. That is what I join with. From that place of joining, the love will then express itself through me—I may send bushels and bushels of food, or lots of money, or do other things to help. But I will have no investment in whether the help is accepted or not, or whether the children live or die, because I will have already joined with them on the level of the mind. In the end, as we will see later on, this will wind up making me much more compassionate, loving, and sensitive to the needs of others—not less. The other way is false empathy, where we think we are sensitive to the needs of people, but we are only sensitive to the dream, which makes the dream real.

***(Paragraph 10 - Sentence 1)* Thus what you need are intervals each day in which the learning of the world becomes a transitory phase; a prison house from which you go into the sunlight and forget the darkness.**

Let me first explain the context in which this comes. This is in the workbook, and therefore the intervals that are spoken about, literally, are the intervals or structured practice periods we are asked to give to the Holy Spirit every day. But the learning and discipline that we get from the workbook we are asked to generalize to our entire day. So it is also talking about the intervals each day when we are tempted to forget, when we could then go back to that place of love and peace in the mind.

You can use any particular event in your daily life in which this forgetting has happened—and it usually happens at least once a minute! You find yourself all of a sudden getting angry, annoyed, fearful, depressed, guilty, sick, in a rage, etc.—anything of the ego, anything in which you do not feel peaceful, or loved and loving, any particular moment when you do not feel the presence of God, or Jesus, or the Holy Spirit. It would be when you feel yourself in the ego's darkness—you have fallen back into the ego dream, and regardless of the seeming light around it, it is still a dream of darkness. That is the prison house.

The "learning of the world" refers to our feeling this way because we believe the world has done something to us. And of course, the teaching of the world actually is what we taught the world to then teach us, because the world does not exist outside our minds. We have taught the world to mirror back to us the fact that we are victims—that this is a world of separation, pain, sickness, punishment, death, etc.

What happens then is that I am sitting with you, or driving somewhere, or I am at work—whatever I am doing—and I become aware that I am not feeling at peace. Or in the specific context of what we have been talking about during the workshop, I am with you and you are in pain and I feel my heart going out

to you—I feel myself identifying with or empathizing with your suffering and pain. It does not matter whether you are someone close to me, or someone I read about in the newspapers or hear about on the news. If I find myself getting caught in the dream—I want to recognize that what I am experiencing is only part of the learning that I am capable of—that is the learning of the ego that the world mirrors back to us. The idea is that this become a "transitory phase," not something permanent. The ego has taught us that once we have identified with it, its thought system becomes the only reality, and so is permanent. The only question then is who is going to be killed first? There is no question but that somebody is going to be punished, somebody is going to die—and at the hands of an angry, vengeful God.

The goal is to begin to acknowledge this is what I am feeling. I am feeling sorry for you, I am feeling lonely because of the threat of your loss, I am feeling guilty because of your pain, etc.—I recognize that is all my ego's learning, and it is transitory. In other words, I could change it. When I am experiencing anything of my ego, that is the ego's prison, that is the ego's view of the world. It is a prison—a prison in which we are imprisoned by our own thought system, and there is no way out of this prison. The ego tells me that there is a way out: If I kill you off and drag you and deposit you into jail, then I go free. But obviously all that that does, by virtue of my attack, is keep me in my prison even more.

In the midst of where I am, or believe I am, feeling all these awful feelings, from which in the past I would not have known, except to get deeper into the prison—trying to escape from pain through different forms of magic and attack that do not really free me—the Course helps me realize how I can truly escape. When I feel caught in a situation in which I experience myself as a victim, I recognize that the darkness of the world is a mirror of the darkness in my mind. And it is possible for me to retreat from paying attention to the darkness of the external circumstances—whether the external circumstances involve your body or my body does not matter, both are outside my mind—to retreat from the externals back to where the darkness really is, in my mind. And then I turn to Jesus or the Holy Spirit—They represent the sunlight. That is what this is talking about—"the learning of the world becomes a transitory phase; a prison house from which we go into the sunlight and forget the darkness."

Basically we could use this as an exercise all the time—and it does not take very long, not more than a second or two. I recognize that I am never upset for the reason I think (W-pl.5). I am not upset because of the condition *you* are in, I am upset because of the condition I believe I am in. And the condition I believe I am in is the one that I put myself in. So I go back to that decision, away from the darkness—the darkness of the world that I have projected outside and perceive outside me, and the darkness of the guilt in my mind. And now I realize I have a choice.

I withdraw from the dream and go back to the dreamer, because I am no longer the dream. My identity is not this dream, it is not this body that is seemingly being affected or afflicted by you, or by itself. I am the dreamer, I am the mind. And in my mind is not only the darkness of the ego but the light of the Holy Spirit—at that point I must be willing to relinquish my investment in seeing the darkness outside me.

As we said earlier, when we become involved with beaming light into people who have cancer, or into parts of the world that are in conflict, we are seeing darkness outside. We are seeing the world as real, as a prison house in which there is darkness, in which innocent people are trapped, and in which guilty, sinful people are inflicting pain on innocent people. We must be willing to relinquish the investment we have in these beliefs. We cannot do that unless we have some experience of a presence of love and light

in our minds to which we can go. Otherwise we will just go back into our egos and feel even guiltier, as we make more judgments against either ourselves or others.

I have to be able to say: "I am never upset for the reason I think" (W-pl.5). That is an incredible workbook lesson. If we really understood it, we would understand everything. The lesson itself does not explain very much, but the basic idea has everything in it. I am not upset because of what is happening to you.

This also means that we must not succumb to the temptation to do something about the form of darkness we perceive outside ourselves. Going back to the example of the *Course in Miracles* group visiting the dying cancer patient—they focused on the darkness outside them, the darkness of this *Course in Miracles* student who chose to get sick, the darkness of the cancer that was eating up her body. They chose to see the darkness rather than to withdraw from the world of darkness and go to the place of light in their minds. If they had done that first, their reactions would have been totally different.

We have to resist the temptation to act on the problem as we see it and have defined it. You know, the popular idea of counting to ten first is not all that bad. That at least stops us, because our impulses are merely to do something about the darkness outside—whether it is to attack you whom I have judged as attacking me, or to attack my body which I believe is attacking me, or to solve a problem that I believe is causing distress to others. Before I act I first want to think. Remember how we began—we do not think. It is not the brain that thinks. We want to go to the mind that thinks, and we want to change from the ego's way of thinking to the Holy Spirit's way of thinking. We want to share Jesus' vision of the world.

We want to become increasingly sensitive, first of all, to when we are feeling upset or distressed or lacking peace. Then, as quickly as possible, we want to recognize that the lack of peace, or the dis-ease, is not coming from outside—it is coming from within. I am not trapped in the world of darkness outside my mind; I am trapped in the world of darkness in my mind. And I am the entrapper, which means I am the one who can change that. I am the one who holds the key to the jail cell—no one else.

We want to leave the world of darkness and go to the place of light in the mind, and that takes practice and a lot of discipline. It is helpful to discover just how quickly we forget. In a matter of seconds we can find ourselves getting caught up again in the world of the body—my body wants this or that, your body wants this, I want your body, your body is making a demand on my body, or there is something out there I have to do. And I quickly fall back into the darkness and believe it is real.

This does not mean that I am not to take care of all my bodily needs and problems. But before I take care of them, I first want to go back to that place of quiet and peace in my mind. If I go there first and then return my attention to the world, as we will see later on in the passage, then everything that I do will be loving and peaceful—no one will lose and everyone will gain.