

True Empathy

Excerpts from the Workshop held at the
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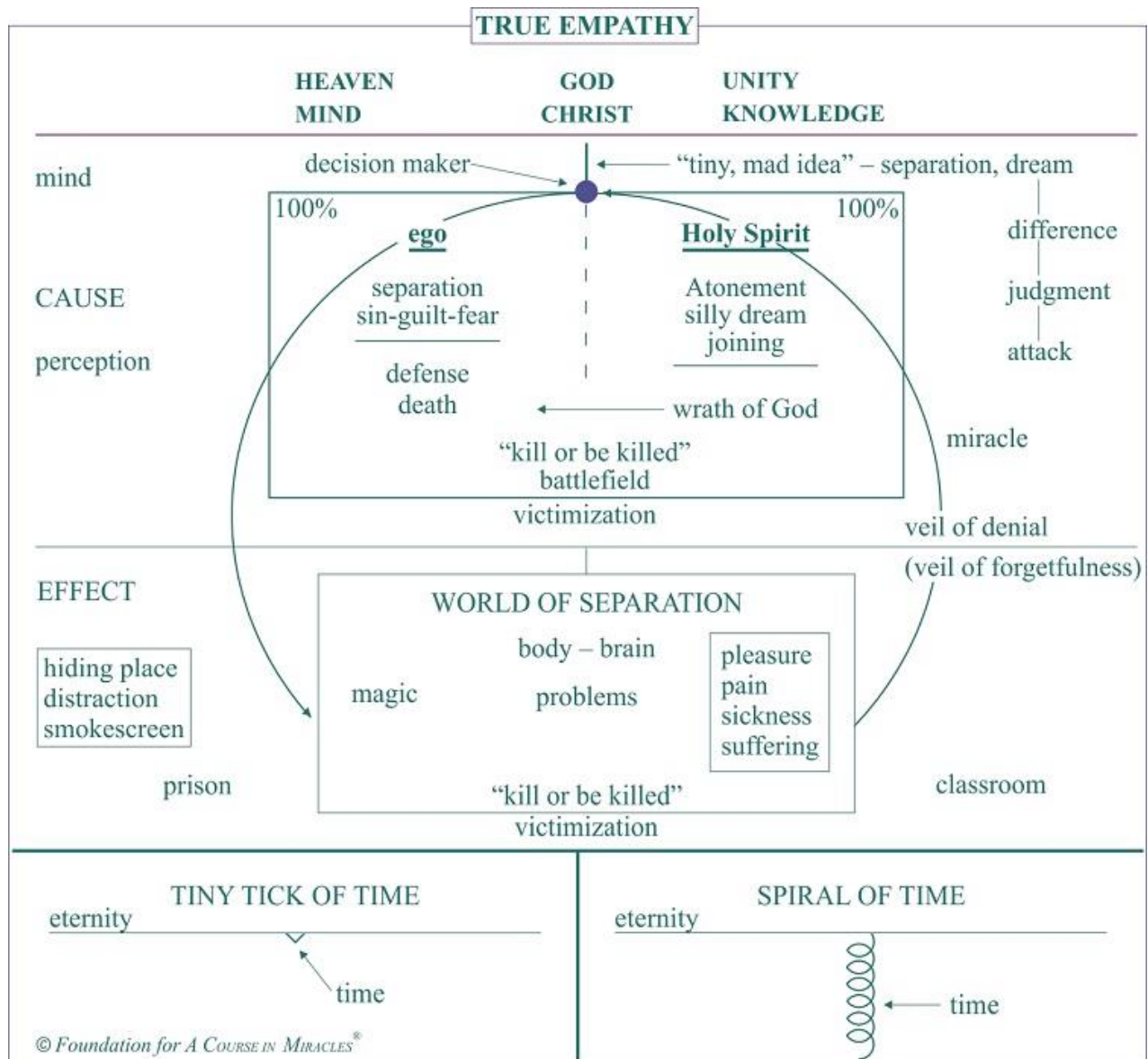
Part I

The Metaphysical Background of Empathy

The theme of this workshop, True Empathy, is one of several subjects that allow us to see the tremendous power and depth of the Course's teachings. Specifically, it allows us to recognize a little more deeply the importance of the Course's metaphysics for understanding what forgiveness means. If you take away the Course's metaphysical teachings—namely, that the whole world is an illusion, and, in fact, that the world was made as a defense against God and a distraction against the Holy Spirit's presence in our minds—then, basically, everything that the Course teaches on forgiveness falls apart. So in this workshop we will begin by looking at the purpose of the world and the body, and then the purpose of problems and sickness. We will spend a great deal of time talking about the difference between true empathy and false empathy—the Holy Spirit's joining, which really is the Greater Joining, versus what the ego calls joining, which is what the world calls concern, pity, sympathy, compassion, and love.

We'll look at several sections, including the obvious one, "True Empathy" (T-16.I), and a series of three sections in Chapter 28: "The Agreement to Join," "The Greater Joining," and "The Alternate to Dreams of Fear" (T-28.III,IV,V). These sections describe sickness and healing—specifically in terms of separation and joining—contrasting what the ego calls joining with what the Holy Spirit or Jesus see as true joining.

I'll start first by going through the chart (included below) which I'll do relatively quickly. We'll begin with God and Christ, Whose perfect unity and Oneness is what the Course refers to as "Heaven." The key word here is "unity." In a sense, our joining with each other here through the Holy Spirit is a reflection of the Greater Joining, which is between God and Christ. And that joining is so complete and total, as the workbook reminds us at one point, that there is no place where the Father ends and the Son begins (W-pl.132.12:4). So there is no differentiation at all. And then, as the Course explains, "Into eternity, where all is one, there crept a tiny, mad idea, at which the Son of God remembered not to laugh" (T-27.VIII.6:2). And that mad idea is the separation, which is very often described in the Course as a dream. In reality, of course, this never happened at all, but we believed it happened. This then becomes the first expression of separation, or the first split, because now the Son of God believes that there are two minds: there is the Mind of Christ, or the Mind of God, that has been separated from; and there is what we could think of as the little "m" mind which is split off from the capital "M" Mind. Of these two, only one is true: the Mind of Christ. The little "m" mind, which we almost always refer to as the ego, is illusory and never really happened. That's the first split.



What follows hard upon that is the second split, whereby the split mind now appears to be split as well into the part that constitutes the voice of the ego and the part that constitutes the Voice of the Holy Spirit. And then there is the part of the split mind that we'll call the decision maker. That's the part of the Son of God's mind that has to choose between these two voices—the voice of the ego and the Voice of the Holy Spirit. The voice of the ego speaks for the seeming reality of the dream, that the separation from God has truly happened. The Holy Spirit speaks for the unreality of the dream, which is what the Course refers to as the principle of the Atonement, which says that the separation never truly happened. We could amplify that and say that the thought of being separate from God is nothing more than a silly dream and not one to be taken seriously at all. The ego, on the other hand, takes all this very seriously, because the ego is literally the thought of the dream, the thought of the separation. And the decision maker, or the Son of God, now must choose between these two voices, which make two antithetical statements.

Continuing with this as if it were a myth or a story, we see the ego now has a serious problem on its hands. The problem is that if the Son of God turns to the Holy Spirit and listens to His Voice and realizes this is nothing but a dream—that the "tiny, mad idea" is simply that, a mad (meaning insane) idea that has no effect at all—then the Son will waken from the dream and the ego will disappear, as the Course explains, back into the nothingness from which it came (M-13.1:2). So the ego now has to come up with a plan to convince the Son of God not to listen to the Holy Spirit but rather to listen to itself.

The ego's plan basically is to tell the Son of God a story that has three parts to it, which we can denote by the words "sin," "guilt," and "fear." The purpose of the story, as we'll see, is to convince him not to listen to the Holy Spirit. And so the story begins with the ego telling the Son of God that he has committed a sin; he has done a terrible thing. He has taken the Love of his Father, the Love of his Creator, and turned his back on it, saying to God, in effect, "What you have given me is not enough, and I want something more than everything." The ego tells the Son, "You have hurt your Father's feelings. By separating from your Source you have ruptured the unity of Heaven. Where there was only perfect Oneness between God and His Son, now there is a division; there is now a split. Something terrible has happened." And that terrible thing is what we call "sin."

From sin comes the inevitable experience of guilt, whereby the ego tells the Son, "You should really feel guilty; you should really feel terrible because of what you've done, because you have stolen from your Creator and your Source. What He had, you now have, and He no longer has it." In its most extreme form this is our belief that we have literally killed God. We have shattered Heaven, and so Heaven no longer exists. What now exists is the ego and its thought system and, soon to be, as we'll see, its world.

The ego continues its story, telling the Son, "What you have done to God was so awful and so terrible that God is angry, and He is not going to take this stuff lying down. In fact, God wants to punish you and take back from you what you stole from Him." The ego culminates its story by telling the Son of God: "The presence of love and light and Atonement in your mind that you call the Holy Spirit—don't believe it. Yes, indeed, that is God's Voice, but it is not a voice that speaks of love and dreaming. It's a voice that speaks of vengeance and wrath." This is the origin of all the "wrath of God" passages that we find in the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments. They have their birth, not in the consciousness of the writers of these books, but in that original instant.

Again, the belief is that the Holy Spirit now is no longer our friend; rather, He is the enemy. In effect, the ego changes the Holy Spirit from the presence of the Love of God to the epitome of the wrath of God. The ego cautions the Son of God, saying, "If you take the Holy Spirit's hand, He will not lead you from the dream back to Heaven. He will lead you from the dream into an even worse dream, which will be God's fury and God's wrath and God's vengeance; and you will be destroyed." The Son of God now has a choice to make between listening to the ego or the Holy Spirit. If he listens to the Holy Spirit, he trusts Him and believes in the reality of love, and that love cannot be rejected, abandoned, betrayed, or killed. If he listens to the voice of the ego, he believes just the opposite: that love *can* be abandoned, betrayed and killed, but love will have its vengeance. In an important theme which becomes central to the whole Course teaching, the ego tells the Son of God that love crucifies, love persecutes, love pursues, love punishes, and love, above all, kills.

As we all know—because otherwise none of us would be here today—the Son of God makes the wrong choice and, as the Bible says, listens to the lies of the serpent, which really are the lies of the ego, and believes what the ego has told him. The Son of God buys the ego's story, lock, stock, and barrel. And of

course each of us in our seemingly fragmented or separated state is a segment or a fragment of that original Son of God. We began as one mind, and eventually that mind fragments over and over and over again. As the Course explains at one point, the mind subdivides over and over (T-18.I.4:3), similar, actually, to what happens in what we call mitosis, or cell division, where organisms begin as one cell, become two cells and four cells and eight cells, etc., multiplying over and over again. That is a replication, or reflection, of what originally happened in the mind: that one thought of the ego, which the Son of God believes in and becomes, fragments over and over again. So each of us carries around with us that original thought. We'll see in the course of the workshop how central this idea is for understanding why we do the kinds of things we do; why we feel sorry for people and feel compassion and concern for people.

So the Son of God turns towards the ego; we turn our back on the Love of the Holy Spirit, because we now believe the Holy Spirit is the enemy. We listen to the ego; and now that the ego has won us over, it continues its plan. The ego tells the Son of God, "We have a real problem on our hands, the problem being this presence in the mind of the Holy Spirit, Who obviously will not go away. If we go near Him, He will drag us back to God, and we'll be destroyed. And so we have to do something about the wrath of God." What the ego has very cleverly done is to turn the Love of God into its opposite, into the wrath of God, which we are taught we should be afraid of. In truth, the ego is really afraid of God's Love, because there is no wrath or vengeance in God, and in the presence of God's Love the ego would disappear. But the ego doesn't tell us that. Instead it tells us God is not Love, God is vengeance and fury and hatred and insanity, etc.

And so we believe the ego, and then we have a problem. The problem is: What, now, do we do in order to survive? To the ego, and to the Son of God who now identifies with the ego, the mind has become a battleground in which we believe that we are at war with God. In reality, of course, God doesn't even know about this. Everything below the first line at the top of the chart is outside His Mind, and therefore does not exist. But within the dream we do believe that God knows about the separation and is very angry.

We then in effect go to the ego and say: "Okay, I believed your story, but now what do I do? You know, this doesn't help me all that much because I still have this maniacal presence of vengeance in my mind. Help!" And the ego says, "I have a wonderful idea." The ego explains to the Son of God that there is no way we can defeat God or the Holy Spirit, because, after all, this is God, and we're outmatched totally on this battleground. But we can leave the battleground, we can leave the mind, and we can hide. The ego explains to the Son of God that when we leave the mind and hide, God will never find us. So we say: "That sounds like a great idea. When do we start?" And the ego says, "Well, there's no time like the present." So we do it immediately. Basically the ego is telling the Son of God how to defend himself against God's wrath. And the ego's answer is to leave the mind. The psychological term that we give to this dynamic of taking something within the mind and placing it outside the mind is "projection." And, therefore, when it is the thought of separation being projected from the mind, it gives rise to a world of separation. This becomes the ego's way of defending against the wrath of God.

That's why the Course explains in one passage that the world—by which the Course means the entire physical universe, not just this planet, not just the awful things in the world, but the entire physical universe—was made as an attack on God (W-pl.3.2:1). And further down in the same paragraph: "The world was made to be a place where God could enter not" (2:4). Remember, that's the ego's plan: to

make a place where we can hide and God will never find us. If we remain in the mind, the ego tells us, the Holy Spirit will get us, and we will be destroyed. So the mind, then, becomes a very dangerous place.

In effect, the ego takes its thought system, which is a thought system of sin, guilt, and fear, a thought system of separation, death, defense, and attack, and literally transfers it into the world, so that the world becomes simply the reflection, or the out-picturing, of what is in the mind. It's an image that we'll use in the course of the workshop: What we perceive on a movie screen when we sit in a movie theater is nothing more than the projection of the film that is running through the film projector. The film projector is representative of the mind, and the film running through the projector is the film of the ego—the ego's story of sin, guilt, and fear.

Therefore, what is running through the projector is exactly what we perceive on the screen. What we perceive on the screen is exactly, no more and no less than what is in the film. Everything we believe we perceive outside in the world, is nothing more than the out-picturing, or projection of what is within the mind.

The ego now takes steps to ensure that its plan will work. The very fact that this world seems to have gone on for billions of years and will probably go on for an even longer period of time, along with the fact that we all believe we are here and take our being in the body extremely seriously, are proof of what a clever plan this is, and how cleverly the ego has protected it. And now we'll see exactly how the ego has done this.

First, once the world is made up, which means once the thought has been projected from the mind, the ego causes a veil to fall across the mind so that we forget what we've done—we'll call that the veil of denial or forgetfulness. We now literally forget what we have made, which means we forget where the world came from. We forget that the world is nothing more than a projection of what is in the mind, no more real than the characters that we perceive on the movie screen. We all know, when we are not identified with or really a part of the film that we're watching, that there are no live people on the screen. We know that it's all make-believe; it's an illusion. It's all done with lights and shadows, etc. Similarly, this entire world is that way. However, once we forget where the world came from because of this veil of denial, the world now appears to be independent and external to the mind which made it and projected it out. So, as the Course explains in several passages, especially when it discusses guilt, we believe that what we have projected out is outside (T-20.VIII.9:6; T-26.VII.4:9;12:2). But what is projected never leaves the mind, as the Course explains in a very important principle: Ideas do not leave their source (T-26.VII.4:7; W-pl.132.5:3;156.1:3;167.3:6). The world is an idea, and it has never left its source which is in the mind, just as Christ is an Idea in the Mind of God, and Christ has never left His Source in the Mind. But, because of this veil, the world now appears as if it is separate from the mind.

The crowning achievement of the ego thought system is that it makes a body. The body, which is regulated by the brain—we'll talk a little more later about the brain—now becomes what we believe we are. It is the body, which has been instructed, conditioned, trained and programmed by the mind, which tells us there is indeed a world outside us. The reason we are so sure there is a world in which we feel and touch, and in which we study, a world into which we were born and which we will leave when we die, the reason we believe all this is the body. The body is operated by a brain which gives messages to our sensory apparatus which brings back to the brain the messages the mind has asked for which speak of the world as being real. The brain then interprets it for us, and we believe that all this is exactly what reality is. We'll look a little later at some passages which talk about this specifically. Again, keep in mind

always what the ego's fundamental purpose is—to escape from the Love of God. The Love of God is the real threat. The Love of God can also be understood—and this will become important for the theme of this workshop—as analogous to that joining of God and Christ, because the Atonement says that the perfect Oneness of God and Christ has never been separated or divided.

There is a wonderful passage in the text that refers to time as "a tiny tick" (T-26.V.3:5). It says that tick of time was so tiny and insignificant that "not one note in Heaven's song was missed" (T-26.V.5:4). Everything that has seemed to happen since that tiny, mad idea has had no effect whatsoever on Heaven. Heaven doesn't even know about it. "Not one note in Heaven's song was missed." The perfect unity and Oneness of God and Christ has never been shattered. We have never left our Father's house. The "song of prayer" that the pamphlet speaks about, that the Father sings to the Son and the Son sings to the Father (S-1.In.1:2), has never been interrupted and has never changed. So we can put in the word "joining" here (see chart: Holy Spirit). The Holy Spirit, then, becomes the reminder, or the reflection, of the joining of God and Christ, the Father and the Son, that has never, never, ever stopped, that has never been severed or disturbed.

The ego is the thought—put the word "separation" here (see chart: ego)—that the joining has indeed been disrupted, in fact, not only disrupted, it has been destroyed—and that the Father and the Son will be forever separated and forever at odds with one another. Another way of understanding the original separation, which is the core of this thought system is that once the Son of God believed that he was separate from God, he perceived a difference. In other words, God and Christ were no longer a perfect unity; now there was the Father and the Son, and there was a difference between them.

Now, in reality there is always a difference, because God is the Creator and the Source, and Christ, His Son, is the created or the Effect. God is the First Cause and His Effect is the Son. However, in the state of Heaven, Christ does not have a separated consciousness that can step back and experience Himself as separate from the consciousness of His Creator. In other words, They are perfectly one. There is no place where the Father ends and the Son begins, to repeat a passage quoted earlier (W-pl.132.12:4). There is no state of duality consciousness in Heaven. There is only the perfect oneness of God and Christ, and so there is no sense of being separate and therefore no consciousness that could observe a difference.

It is only when the dream begins and the separation thought has begun to weave its magic and its poison has infiltrated the mind, that the separation becomes real, which automatically leads to the idea that there is a difference between God and His Son. God is the Creator, the Prime Creator, the First Cause, the Source; and Christ, or the Son, is a second-class citizen, the Effect. That leads to the idea of judgment, because the Son looks at the difference, makes a judgment about it, and says, "What God has is good, and what I have is bad. God is first and I am second, and that's not fair." These three terms really are basically one and the same. I'm talking about them as if they were sequenced, but obviously they are all part of the same phenomenon. So the separation leads to the idea that there is a difference. The difference is immediately judged, and the Son now believes that he has been unfairly treated. "It's not fair that God is the Authority, that God is the Cause, that God is in charge. I want to be in charge. I could do a better job than God." This is the judgment which forms the core of the authority problem (T-3.VI)—that's another workshop. But it's the idea that we're in competition with our Creator, which in this world automatically leads to competition with our parents, our older siblings, our teachers, our therapists, our bosses, our friends, our spouses, our children, and on and on and on. It all comes from

the judgment, "I could do it better; what God has done is not fair." And that justifies, from the ego's point of view, taking from God what the ego, or the separated Son, believes was always his. In other words, in the arrogance and insanity of the Son of God's mind, he believes that he began as top dog; he began as God. But God stole from him, and so now he is justified in stealing back from God. That judgment automatically leads to the final idea, which is attack. We're talking here about the ego's judgments, not the Holy Spirit's judgment that everything is an expression of love or a call for it—that's a totally different idea. The ego always judges in terms of someone being better or worse than another.

We'll see later on in the workshop that one of the most vicious ways the ego judges and attacks, under the guise of being loving, involves the idea of sickness: Someone is sick and I am not; someone is in trouble and I am not; someone is oppressed and I am not, and I'm going to do something about it. We'll see that what the world calls love, concern, pity, and compassion is just the opposite. There is a line in the text that says "What is not love is murder" (T-23.IV.1:10). The Course explains that none of what we call caring and sympathy and concern is loving. And therefore it is a concealed desire to kill. We'll get back to this later. This is just a little of the coming attractions.

So once we perceive separation we are seeing differences. Differences automatically lead to judgment, and judgment is always attack. The Son of God viewing God as different from him and having something he doesn't have constitutes an attack. There is anger: "I have not been treated fairly." What then automatically follows is the behavior of attack. In our story, in the original myth, the Son now believes he can steal from God what he feels justified in taking because it was originally his. Sin, then, is equated ultimately with attack. We can see, just by thinking briefly about it, that our entire world here becomes the expression in form of separation, difference, judgment, and attack. Every single thing we do here is an expression of separation, difference, judgment, and attack. We'll see later on how sickness falls very, very nicely into that. In fact, that's why the ego made sickness.

We're back to the culmination of the ego's plot, which basically is a plot or war against God, in which the ego believes it can do an end-run around Him, because there's no way that it can defeat God and go right up the middle. Instead, the ego sneaks around so God hopefully will never find it, and makes up a world projected outside the mind in which it can hide, because the Holy Spirit is in the mind, not in the body and the world.

The ego has persuaded the Son of God to identify with a thought system of sin, guilt, and fear that culminates in sheer terror at the thought of confronting the Love of God, which leads the Son of God very quickly to become the ego. It's no longer that the Son of God has simply listened to the voice of the ego. He now has identified totally with the voice of the ego, which means, for all intents and purposes, the Holy Spirit has been obliterated from his mind. As the Course explains, the Love of God can never really be obliterated from the mind, but it certainly can be hidden, and that's what this thought system and the world do. That's why we speak of the world as "a hiding place." It becomes a distraction or a smokescreen, its purpose being to distract the Son of God's attention from where the problem is. The ego tells him the problem is in the mind, the problem being the Holy Spirit. What the ego, of course, never tells the Son of God is that the problem is not the Holy Spirit; the problem is with the decision-making part of his mind. The moment that he turns back towards the Holy Spirit the problem ends. Rather than have that happen, because if it happens the ego is finished, the ego again tells its story and persuades the Son of God to distract himself. (That's what the arrow in the chart represents.). His attention now leaves his mind and goes into the world.

This is one way of understanding the line early in the text where Jesus says that "you are much too tolerant of mind wandering" (T-2.VI.4:6). Basically, in the ultimate sense, our attention has wandered from the mind out into the world. Once that has happened, we forget where we came from. That's why the veil of denial is so important; it causes us to forget where we came from. Now we actually believe we are a body with a brain. For all intents and purposes we have become mindless, which is the ego's ultimate purpose. In response, the ultimate purpose of the Course is to have us rediscover the power of the mind, because only within the mind can we find salvation. Salvation does not lie with the Holy Spirit; salvation does not lie with God. Salvation lies with the power of the mind to choose the Holy Spirit. The power of choice is the central teaching of the Course. The ego has taught us that we have no choice, that we have become the ego and there is no longer any alternative.

That's the meaning of the section, "The Alternate to Dreams of Fear," that we'll look at later on in the workshop. It says at one point, "God is the Alternate to dreams of fear" (T-28.V.1:6). The ego has told us there is no alternate to the dream of fear. We *are* the dream of fear. The ego has then transferred the dream of fear from the mind to the body. Again, as I mentioned earlier in terms of the film and what we see projected on the screen, what was in the mind which has now been split off becomes deposited in the body. And so the thought system of sin, guilt, and fear—the thoughts of separation, difference, judgment, and attack—all have become part of the programming of the brain and the body in fact, of the whole world. So the world is an exact mirror of what is within the mind, except we have forgotten that it is simply the reflection, and we've taken the reflection for the reality.

You might say the Course is asking us to question the most basic experience that I am a subject and that objects outside me affect me through my sensory organs. The ego has been so skillful in this that some of the most brilliant brains throughout history have speculated and theorized, theologized, philosophized, and meditated on the body, the senses, the brain and the world, what we perceive and what we don't perceive, having no idea that none of this is real, that everything is a projection of the mind. It's like a dog chasing its own tail it never ends anywhere, which is why nobody understands anything. The world was made not to be understood. The only thing that's understandable about the world is that there's no way it can be understood. The entire physical universe everything about the body and the brain—was literally made up by the ego to distract us from the real problem, that we made the wrong choice.

The ego made up the sensory world and it made up a brain and a body which perceive and interpret the sensory world and react to it as if it were really there. Lesson 92 in the workbook makes this point very clearly—we'll be going through this lesson in a little while, as it serves as an introduction to what we will be covering in this workshop.

The brain is what the ego tells us we really are. The brain is within the body, very much a part of the physical world. The functioning of the brain is what most people today refer to as the mind. All this has absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with the mind itself. A good analogy is a puppeteer and the puppets, with the puppeteer above the stage. Let's say that the puppets are marionettes, which means that they have strings, and the puppeteer is on top of the stage—he's not visible. He pulls the strings of these lifeless pieces of wood that have been painted and dressed up to be puppets. The puppets have no life to them—they cannot see; they cannot hear; they cannot taste; they cannot feel; they cannot live; they cannot die. But if the puppet show is a good one and the puppeteer is skillful, he can fool

people, especially young people—little children. But the puppeteer is not in the puppet; the puppet is totally separate from the mind.

Another analogy is a computer, which is totally lifeless, totally dumb. It cannot think. But once the computer has been programmed by a programmer who writes a program and tells the computer how to think, then the computer does all kinds of very impressive things. The programmer is not in the computer. The mind is not in the brain. The mind, as we'll see in just a minute, tells the body and the brain what to do. And what does it tell the body and brain to do? It tells them to make the world real.

Remember, the mind, or the decision maker, which has now become totally identified with the ego, tells the body to follow the ego's purpose, which is to have a world that will distract us and defend us against God. The ego convinces us that we are this body and this world is our home. It is the mind that has programmed the body and the brain to believe that there is indeed a body and a brain, and that there are other bodies outside itself. So the world is the reflection, or the out-picturing, of this thought system that the ego has told the Son of God is reality. We have sinned against God and we are guilty. We are terrified of God's wrath, and this terror can only be appeased by running away from it, by hiding and making up a world. In other words, we agreed with the ego and vowed and promised the ego that we would never look at what is in the mind. We agreed to let the world be a distraction and so the world then became the cover, and we forgot that we made it up. We certainly have forgotten why we made up the world. All we know is the world and the body.

Once the ego has us where it wants us, believing the separation is real, feelings of guilt and terror over God's punishment automatically follow. These inevitably lead to the need to have a defense in order to keep ourselves alive. The world becomes that defense and the body becomes our individual experience of the world; and the separated, sinful, guilty, fearful, limited self becomes ensconced in the body. And so the body becomes limited, separated, fragmented, sinful, guilty, fearful, etc.

The ultimate thought of the ego is death, which means that's the ultimate fate of everyone here in the world. The ego's idea, which the Course at one point summarizes as "kill or be killed" (M-17.7:11), has its origin in the ego's battle against God. It's one or the other; either I live or God lives. But we both cannot live simultaneously, because at this point we represent mutually exclusive ideas. God is the thought of perfect Oneness; the ego is the thought of perfect separation. They can't co-exist, so it's one or the other. Since death is the ultimate purpose of the ego that wants to triumph over God and destroy Him, the ultimate consequence to those of us who believe we are in this world is death.

In anticipation of what we will discuss more in depth later, I will just briefly mention here that it is the *miracle* that leads us out of the ego thought system and undoes the whole plan of the ego. The miracle represents the dynamic of returning our attention to the mind. The ego projected itself from the mind and put the problem of the mind, which is the problem of separation from God, into the world. The miracle brings us back to the mind. The miracle—forgiveness is the same thing—says the problem is not in the world; the problem is back within the mind. We'll get back to that later.

Once the ego has made up the world and a body, its plan is to distract us continually, so we will continue to believe that the world and the body are real. One of the ego's favorite ways to do this is to make up problems. And problems will always involve the body, whether we're talking about the physical body or the psychological body. Our entire experience in this world, in the body, consists of solving problems. There are the very basic problems inherent to being in a body: I have to feed the body; I have to protect

it against the elements; I have to rest it; I always have to see to it that I have oxygen so I can breathe. These are problems that every living thing, or what we call living, has to cope with and solve. These are the kinds of generalized problems everyone has.

And then we all have our individual expressions of these, all the little things that are problems to us: we're not happy unless we have a certain color clothes, or live in a certain place, or have a certain kind of food to eat, or can be with certain kinds of people, etc. The ego makes up problems that all have to do with the body, and then we have to solve them. They basically all fall under the category of special relationships, all the different ways that we solve our problems. When we feel a problem has been solved, we call that pleasure. When we feel a problem has not been solved, we call that pain. That's why at one point Jesus tells us in the Course that we really believe there is a difference between pleasure and pain (T-27.VIII.1:8). For example, if I have a problem of loneliness and then I find somebody to share my space with me, physically or psychologically, I'm no longer lonely and I call that pleasurable. If my body demands a certain kind of gratification or sensation and I get it, that's pleasure. The absence of this of course would be pain. We could go on and on, but I think you have the central point.

One of the specific ways that the ego deals with problems and pain is sickness, which we'll spend a lot of time discussing. The important workbook lesson, "Sickness is a defense against the truth," discusses how the ego, when it becomes afraid of truth, seeks to defend itself against it by choosing sickness and suffering. If truth is some aspect of spirit, if love is some aspect of spirit, if healing is some aspect of spirit, etc., and that's what the ego is afraid of, then it causes us to rush right back into the body. Sickness and suffering of course do that very effectively. Sickness works just as effectively whether I believe I'm the one who's sick, or I believe someone else is sick. Dynamically, they are exactly the same, whether I identify with your pain and suffering, or I feel it in myself. It doesn't matter, because either way the body and suffering have been made real, which the ego interprets as punishment from God. All suffering that the body experiences, whether we personally experience it or other people experience it and we identify with it, the ego interprets as proof that God has broken through our defenses, found us out and is now going to take back what we stole from Him. Ultimately what we stole from Him is the ability to "create" life, to be alive. What we stole from God He lacks and we have, and we have hidden it in the body, as "The Laws of Chaos" section explains (T-23.II). We believe that we have usurped God's place as Creator, placing ourselves upon His throne and that we now create life. What in us "creates" life? It's the body. So the body becomes the symbol of God. That's why everyone has conflicts around sex, because sex ultimately for us is the thought: I have done it; I have stolen from God and I can create with what I stole from Him. What I stole from God is in my body, and I believe God is going to break through the fortress, which is the world and the body, and steal from me what I took from Him. If He steals life from my body, what does that mean? It means that I die, because now He has life and I don't. And if I don't have life, well, that's the definition of death!

The Adam and Eve myth gives a wonderful account of this, which is why that myth is so important in Western thought. In the myth, when God catches up with Adam and Eve in the Garden and confronts them with their sin against Him, He punishes them, which is exactly what the ego tells us He will do. And the punishment that God gives to Adam and Eve is that they will be born in pain, suffer all of their lives, and then die. That's the ultimate proof that our defenses against God have not worked. Our death proves that in the end God is going to get back what we took from Him. He will end up having life and we will die.

That's why people are so crazy about trying to prolong life: so that we will live longer and longer. Certain New Age systems teach that life is eternal, and that it's possible to stay in the body forever. That's the ego talking: "What I've taken from God He'll never get back from me. We'll find the fountain of youth. We'll live in such a way that we will stay here." From the point of view of the Course, that's absolute insanity. Who would ever want to stay in this world or this body? Our home is not here. Our home is in Heaven. It's the ego that's insane, that actually believes it's better off by being alive in the body. If the ego convinces us that we live in the body, then the ego's real life, which is the thought in the mind, never gets looked at. If it never gets looked at, then it never gets changed. But that's what we all do. The ego makes up problems of sickness, suffering, and death, and then we try to solve the problems of sickness, suffering, and death. We feel sorry for people who are sick or dying. As a society, we expend tremendous effort and large sums of money, trying to find the causes of diseases. And no sooner do we solve one disease than another one comes up. Then we solve that one and another one comes up. It just keeps going on and on and on. That's exactly what the ego does. And we never stop to think that maybe this whole thing is a charade. Maybe this whole thing is made up.

That's why, to get a little ahead of ourselves, when we identify with people who are sick (what the Course regards as *false empathy*), and want to help them, what we are really doing is falling into the ego's trap. There is no one who is sick, just as a puppet on a stage is not sick. All the puppet does is act out what the puppeteer has it do. What is sick is the decision maker who believed the ego was telling the truth and the Holy Spirit was a liar. That is what is sick. In fact, that is the *only* sickness—that we made the wrong choice. As we'll see later in the workshop, the miracle enables us to reconsider the decision. The miracle tells us there is indeed another choice. It's not that there is only one choice—the ego—and that's it. We're now able to see there really is another choice—there's another thought system. There is another presence in the mind that we can choose. Because we have forgotten that the Holy Spirit is in the mind, the whole purpose of the miracle is to remind us.

Jesus' whole purpose in coming into the world was to tell us there is another alternative. God is not wrathful; God is not angry. God is loving. Because Jesus represented the alternative to the dream of fear, what did the figures in this dream have to do? They had to kill him. He was the representative in this dream-world of what it means to be a totally living and loving presence of God. So the figures in this dream of fear had to swallow him up and destroy him, because he meant the end of the dream. Not only did Jesus have to be killed, but his teaching and his message had to be killed as well. That's why in the Course we get another chance to look at what Jesus really taught.