

True Empathy

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

Kenneth Wapnick, Ph.D.

Part XIII

Commentary on the Section "The Greater Joining" (T-28.IV)

Let us turn now to the section called "**The Greater Joining**." The "Greater Joining" is our joining with the Holy Spirit, which reflects our joining with God. As we know, it is not a joining in the sense of our doing anything. It is an acceptance of the joining or the oneness that is already there. The section starts with ideas we are familiar with.

(Paragraph 1 - Sentence 1) Accepting the Atonement for yourself...

This, to be sure, is the central responsibility of all of us. It is one of the recurring themes in the Course: Our sole responsibility is to accept the Atonement for ourselves.

Let me comment a little more on this, because this is crucial for understanding what we do in the presence of suffering and pain in the world. The world says our responsibility, our function, is to alleviate pain here—in our own bodies and in others' bodies. People in the world whom we call saints, or seek to emulate, or give great honor to, are those who help other people. Basically, what makes Mother Theresa who she is, is not the *work* that she does—it is her devotion and dedication to and unity with Jesus' love. That is what makes her unique. It is not the work that she is doing—that is simply an outgrowth of that love inside her. But in the world we usually look at what people *do*—how many thousands of people they feed; how many marches they go on; how many millions of dollars they give to a charity—all the work done on behalf of alleviating pain and suffering in the world.

Our one responsibility according to the Course, to accept the Atonement for ourselves, has nothing to do with alleviating pain—it bypasses all this, because the world is nothing but a smokescreen. Our one responsibility is simply to turn away from the ego and back to the Holy Spirit. Taking the hand of Jesus represents accepting the Atonement. The Atonement principle states that the separation never happened—we are not separate from God; we are not separate from the Holy Spirit; we are not separate from each other. Bodies are irrelevant to this joining or oneness. Our one responsibility is to move our attention away from the world where the ego has put it and back to the mind where we can rejoin the Holy Spirit Whom we have separated from. That is the acceptance of the Atonement. When we do that totally and perfectly, the Atonement is complete. And that is the attainment of the real world.

What we all tend to do, as we know, is go back and forth. But, again, my one responsibility is to accept the Atonement for myself, which means to have my mind be healed. "Seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world" (T-21.in.1:7). The problem is not *what* I perceive out here, the problem is the fact that I perceive it a particular way. The problem is not *what* I believe is out here,

but what I have made real in my mind. So recognizing that the problem is in my mind is what acceptance of the Atonement is.

(Paragraph 1 - Sentence 1) Accepting the Atonement for yourself means not to give support to someone's dream of sickness and of death.

When Jesus says not to give support to it, he is not talking about behavioral expression. Later on, we will talk more specifically about what we are supposed to do in the presence of expressions of pain and suffering. He is talking about, within our minds, not supporting another's dream of sickness or of death by making it real. On a very practical level, not making it real, as I have been saying, means that I do not give what you are doing, or what you are choosing, or what your body looks like to me, the power to take away my peace and my love. The love and the peace of God in my mind are not affected at all by the choices that you make, by the appearance that your body has.

That is what is meant by not to give support to someone's dream of sickness and of death. I do not give it the power or the reality to affect me in any way. If my love and my peace can be affected by you, I am saying a separation thought does have power over love. And then I am reinforcing and reflecting back the ego's original statement that its thought has power over God's Love, and that the unity of Christ can be shattered by this tiny, mad idea. Your choosing to be sick, then, is an expression of the tiny, mad idea. And my letting your choice affect my sense of oneness with you and the love and peace inside me is saying that the tiny, mad idea has an effect. I am simply re-enacting the original separation.

(Paragraph 1 - Sentence 2) It means that you share not his wish to separate, and let him turn illusions on himself.

In other words, you are perfectly free to choose to identify with the ego, but I do not have to join you with that choice. If I do, I become as sick as you are. If I do not, then in that instant I become the same manifestation of the Holy Spirit that Jesus has become, because I represent to you another choice. That moment I am in the holy instant, we are all healed.

(Paragraph 1 - Sentence 3) Nor do you wish that they be turned, instead, on you.

If you make a choice to be sick, which is to make the separation real and to attack yourself, and I join with you in that, I am letting the same thought have an effect on me. A minute ago I was feeling happy and loving and peaceful, and now I am feeling angry, anxious, and guilty. So the separation thought is now turned on me. I will then believe it is your thought that has done it. I will say I was feeling wonderful until you were there. If I say, for example, "I cannot visit sick people in hospitals because it upsets me too much," I am really saying, "I am feeling happy and loving and peaceful, but if I visit you in the hospital I will get upset." So I am attributing my lack of peace to something external to me. But what has taken away my peace is not *your* separation thought—it is *my* separation thought. We all try to put the blame onto something outside of us.

(Paragraph 1 - Sentences 4-5) Thus have they no effects. And you are free of dreams of pain because you let him be.

Let me explain the first part: Thus have they no effects. Referring to the principle of cause and effect, all our experiences of pain and suffering, both on the physical level and the psychological level are effects. The cause of these effects is the decision to turn away from the Holy Spirit and towards the ego—the

decision to be separate. When you make such a decision, and you are in pain and agony, the reason is not only to punish yourself for your sin against God, but also to abdicate responsibility for such a decision and project it onto me to make me feel guilty. You are saying that I am the one who made you sick; I am the one who made you unhappy; because of me your life is a shambles, etc., etc.

If I join with you in that and get upset because you are sick, I am saying your sin has an effect—on me. But by demonstrating to you that your seeming sin—what you have judged to be a sin and its form in terms of your own pain and suffering—has no effect on me, I am saying to you your sin has had no effect. If it has had no effect, then it can not be a cause. As the Course explains elsewhere, if something is not a cause it does not exist (T-28.II.11:1-3). That, basically, is how Jesus forgave sins, to use the biblical term. He forgave sins because he demonstrated they had no effect. No matter what the world believed it had done to him, it did not change his love, it did not destroy him. That becomes the manifestation in form within the dream of the original Atonement thought that our sins against God likewise have had no effect. In other words, his love and our unity with him have not been changed. That, then, becomes our purpose as well.

By not joining with your dreams of fear, by not giving them a reality, by showing that they have had no effect, I am free as well. That is one of the crucial ideas in the Course—as I teach healing, I learn healing. As I forgive you, I am forgiven. If I can forgive you your attack and your sin and your faulty choice—since you are nothing more than a projection of what is inside me—I am forgiving myself for the same thing. What I am accusing you of here, on the movie screen, is nothing more than what I have accused myself of inside my mind. By letting it go out here, I must be letting it go in my mind.

(Paragraph 1 - Sentence 6) Unless you help him, you will suffer pain with him because that is your wish.

Passages are written like this in the Course because this is our experience—we do something in the world and it has a corresponding effect inside. In reality, inner and outer are one and the same. Cause and effect are simultaneous. There is no time gap in between. But because we believe there is, Jesus talks like that—if I forgive you out here, I will be forgiven inside. In reality, it happens simultaneously. Since there is no one out there anyway, I am really forgiving myself, I am letting go of my investment in being separate and being right. Rejoining with the Holy Spirit automatically, inevitably, and simultaneously affects everything in my perception and experience. Because we experience things in terms of time, often in the Course Jesus talks about a sequence: I do it out there and I am doing it inside; I free you and I free myself; I condemn you, I condemn myself. In reality, it all happens at once, but he does not talk or write that way, because our experience is so rooted in time.

This means, then—and this is extremely important—that if I choose to make your sickness real, if I choose to make your sins real by attacking you for them, it is because I am choosing to be in pain. It does not seem that way. In other words, if I visit you in a hospital, and you are sick and in pain, it does not appear as if it has been my choice to be in pain. My choice seems to be to visit someone I care about who is sick, to be loving and caring and comforting. It just happens that I get upset because of you. In reality, I am the one who chooses to be in pain, but I abdicate all responsibility for it and blame you.

When I attack you and see you as separate from me, it is because I first have had a wish that I be in pain. I first make a choice to keep myself separate from love. That is the source and the cause of my pain. Then, rather than look within to change that, the ego teaches me to hold on to that separation. The way

I hold on to it is that I do not deal with it in my mind—instead I project the separation and deal with it outside. I forget the cause and effect relationship because of the veil of denial in my mind, and it now appears as if I am upset and in pain because of something outside me. I was feeling wonderful and happy and good until you walked through the door into my life, until you got sick—now I am so uncomfortable. The fact is that I am choosing to see you in that way, because I first had a wish that I be in pain—which means I had a wish that I be separate.

(Paragraph 1 - Sentence 7) And you become a figure in his dream of pain, as he in yours.

We mutually reinforce this insanity, which is based upon the belief that we are both separate. And we are both separate because we are both bodies. One body is sick and in pain, and the other body reacts to it as if it were real, and as if the sickness has an effect on love and peace. At this point, we both share in an illusion of joining, whether it is an illusion of our joining on a battleground where we hate each other, or an illusion where we seem to love and comfort each other.

(Paragraph 1 - Sentence 8) So do you and your brother both become illusions, and without identity.

We lose our true Identity as Christ, which the joining with the Holy Spirit would remind us of. Instead we become something that we are not—a limited, separated, fragmented, sick, guilty, depressed, miserable self. That is not who we are, but that is what we now identify with. Whenever we identify with our bodies as who we really are, we become an illusion of our Self. Our true Identity as Christ is hidden from us.

This thought is elaborated on now:

(Paragraph 1 - Sentences 9-10) You could be anyone or anything, depending on whose evil dream you share. You can be sure of just one thing; that you are evil, for you share in dreams of fear.

The *form* of my upset does not matter, nor does the form of my emotional state, or of my body. Once I make myself an effect of your sin, I basically put myself at your mercy. And what you have become, I now become. I have traded off this wonderful Self of Christ, which is filled with love, peace, and light, for this miserable, dark, wicked, evil, sinful, separated self. And I escape all responsibility for that by saying you are the one who has done this to me.

This is a major theme that is repeated in the Course in many different forms—how we throw away our true Identity and substitute for it the shabby self of the ego. As I mentioned earlier, the Course refers to the body as a parody (T-24.VII.1:11) or travesty (T-24.VII.10:9) of the Self that God has created. But that is what we do when we let ourselves be affected by what happens outside us. The world calls this "love" and holds it up as something to be idealized. Really, it is a way of making the error real, making the body real, and letting our happiness and peace be dependent on what happens to other people.